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**AUTHORITY AND APOSTASY:
THE BARCELONA DISPUTATION
IN THE CONTEXT OF THIRTEENTH-
CENTURY JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil výhradně citovaných pramenů.

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SUMMARY

The present work examines the Barcelona disputation of 1263 between Naḥmanides and Friar Paul Christian in the context of Jewish-Christian thirteenth-century polemics. The text considers far-reaching changes in Christian „hermeneutical image“ of a Jew in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and attempts to connect them with the deteriorating situation of western Jewry in that period. Analyzing the Barcelona disputation itself, this work concentrates on two most distinctive traits of thirteenth-century polemics: the activity of apostates and questioning the legitimacy of Jewish post-biblical textual and communal authorities. Looking closely at the ways these questions were addressed by the participants, it is suggested that internal Jewish issues, such as the quest for correct interpretation of Talmudic aggadah or power struggles for authority influenced, through the mediation of apostates like Paul Christian, the polemical methodology and anti-Jewish imagery of medieval Christians in that period. It also suggests that Naḥmanides, on the other hand, was in his polemical narrative not only refuting Christian claims, but trying to offer a commentary on contemporary Jewish questions as well.

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This work is dedicated to my mother on her birthday.

Prague, 18 July 2009.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHR	The American Historical Review
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JMH	Journal of Medieval History
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
PAAJR	Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. Migne
REJ	Revue des études juives
ST	Summa theologiae, ed. Leonis XIII

INTRODUCTION

The Barcelona disputation has for many centuries tantalized faithful Jews, Christians, historians, and scholars of religion alike. When in 1263 one of the most illustrious rabbis of western Christendom, Moshe ben Naḥman (ca 1195–1270),¹ had to stand before the King James I of Aragon and refute the arguments of an apostate Paul Christian, it was but one sign of the deteriorating conditions of Jewish life in Western Europe. From the twelfth century onwards, Jews faced a growing mistrust from Christian intellectuals and accusations of all sorts of violent attacks against their host population. In an attempt to create a universally Christian society, the Church grew more and more aware of the threat that a Jewish presence posed to efforts to attain this objective. In the course of the thirteenth century these negative trends activated themselves in some unprecedented ways.

As the title suggests, it is not the ambition of this work to offer a historical analysis of the Barcelona disputation or a commentary to one of its records. Rather, the intention of this writing is to examine the place of the disputation in the development of Christian anti-Jewish polemics during the period in discussion. Therefore, the presentation of the disputation forms only a minor part of this work. Chapter one will present an overview of the development of Christian anti-Jewish polemics, focusing on its main traits as identified in previous scholarship, offering a summary of various existing explanations. Chapter two will further discuss important aspects of the Jewish-Christian debate in the thirteenth century such as the involvement of apostates² and the preoccupation with questions of legitimate exegetical and juridical authority. It is these two aspects of the thirteenth-century polemic that will be the focus of the second half of this thesis, dedicated to the Barcelona disputation itself. After close consideration and discussion of the primary sources, as well as the evaluation of the event itself within the secondary literature described in chapter three, chapter four will present an examination of the role that apostasy and opposition to rabbinic authority played in the disputation, and of the ways these occurrences were reflected in the sources. This work seeks to show how Paul Christian's polemical stance towards Judaism stemmed from his condition as an apostate, and how, through the mediation of the apostates, internal Jewish issues such as the interpretation of aggadah or struggle for authority were incorporated into Christian anti-Jewish polemics and influenced Christian perceptions of Jews.

In concentrating on two aspects of the debate, this work intends to discern a connection between the event and its broader social and intellectual context. Rather than offering an exhaustive description of the disputation itself, it tries to construct a scheme of Jewish-Christian

1 Henceforth referred to as Naḥmanides. For his biography see for example the informative, although at times slightly overdramatized, study of Chaim Dov Chavel, *Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman: His Life, Times and Works* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1973).

2 Since the neutral term “convert” in conjunction with an adjective does not make it sufficiently clear, whence and in what direction the conversion was carried out, the unambiguous term “apostate” is preferred throughout this work, and used without any negative associations.

relations, in which the disputation as it were *makes sense*. Concentrating only on certain aspects of these relations, the picture presented in this work is surely incomplete and in no sense exclusive. It is therefore only a small contribution to a much larger undertaking: the understanding of the nature and dynamics of Jewish-Christian interaction in the Middle Ages.

In many instances, more thorough analysis of biblical and Talmudic texts adduced in Barcelona has been omitted, because it would be of very little relevance for the purposes of this study. Wherever descriptions of the debate become vague, the reader is invited to consult the original Hebrew or Latin text, systematically referred to in the footnotes, or some of their numerous translations.

All translations from languages other than English are the author's, except where noted. Hebrew is transliterated according to the general system used in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, Second Edition*.³

³ *Encyclopaedia Judaica, Second Edition*, ed. by Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum et al., 22 vols (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007), I, 197.

1. CHANGES IN THE PATTERNS OF MEDIEVAL JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMIC

1.1. The nature and early phases of Christian anti-Jewish polemic

Jewish-Christian relations have been inherently polemical from their very beginnings. Christianity emerged as a Jewish messianic movement and as such was deeply rooted in Jewish thought.⁴ Yet very quickly it changed its focus and concentrated its missionary efforts on Gentile inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin. St. Paul played a central role in this reorientation, his letters laying the groundwork for Christian polemic with Judaism. On the one hand, he vigorously denied that observance of Mosaic law could play any role in attaining salvation. He also minimized the importance of Abrahamic descent for inclusion in God's covenant.⁵ On the other hand, he assigned to the Jews a very important role in the history of religious salvation: their rejection of Jesus opened the gates of God's covenant to the Gentiles. Moreover, inclusion of the Gentiles did not entail rejection of a chosen people; rather it served as a pedagogical tool, aimed at inducing feelings of envy that would ultimately reconcile the Jewish people with God at the end of days.⁶

This ambiguity in Pauline construction of Judaism remained characteristic of later stages of Christian anti-Jewish polemics as well. In order to safeguard its identity, Christianity could never dissociate itself completely from its Jewish origins. Yet, for the same reason it was necessary to draw a very distinct line between the "old" and the "new" covenant, between the "carnal" and "verus Israel". As a result, Christianity's self-definition depends to a great extent on polemical images of Judaism that preclude any further changes in post-incarnational Jewish history: Judaism is something obsolete and left behind, yet perpetually present as an important challenge in the construction of Christian self, both individual and collective.⁷ However, it should not be forgotten that this challenge articulated itself not only in internal categories of Christian theology (Judaism being merely an antithesis of Christianity), but also in the form of close social and cultural interaction of early Christians with lively Jewish communities.⁸ Thus, however stationary might the internally constructed "image of a Jew" in Christian theology ever become, early Church Fathers could never lose from sight this real, flesh-and-blood counterpart. It is perhaps this tension arising from the dual presence of the Jew in Christian consciousness – real and constructed – that accounts for the dynamics of Christian anti-Jewish polemics in late

4 See David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988) and idem, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), transl. by John Glucker.

5 Galatians 2:15-16, 3:26-29.

6 Romans 9-11.

7 Steven F. Kruger, "(De)Stabilized Identities in Medieval Jewish-Christian Disputations on Talmud", in *Making Contact: Maps, Identity and Travel*, ed. by Glenn Burger et al. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003), pp. 63-86 (p. 63).

8 On social and cultural interaction of early Christians and Jews see Paula Fredriksen and Judith Lieu, "Christian Theology and Judaism", in *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church*, ed. by Gillian Rosemary Evans (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 85-104.

antiquity.

The institutionalization of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century awakened the need for a new theory considering a continued Jewish presence in an increasingly Christian society. Augustine's doctrine of the Jewish witness offered a solution that was, as Jeremy Cohen evinced quite convincingly, deeply rooted in Augustine's thought, but had little to do with actual Jews.⁹ Augustine's famous interpretation of Psalm 59:12 "Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law" confirmed the function of the Jews in Christian society. Continued observance of Jewish law according to literal meaning of Hebrew scriptures is valuable because it serves Christian missionary purposes.¹⁰ God dispersed the Jews all over the world so that they could be omnipresent like the Church. They must live among Christians in perpetual servitude, but their physical liquidation or liquidation *qua* Jews comes not into question. However, this doctrine turned out to be a double-edged sword, for it secured a place in the society only for the Jews who, in Cohen's words, "remained stationary in useless antiquity".¹¹ The justification for a Jewish presence among Christians lied not in its essence, but in its function. This function was a theological construct predisposed to questioning. This became increasingly evident over time as perspectives on how a Christian society should look changed.¹²

Much like Augustine's theory of Jewish witness, his theory of anti-Jewish polemic was only loosely connected to actual Jews. Its aim was in his opinion not necessarily the conversion of the Jews, but rather the buttressing of Christian faith. Jewish arguments against Christianity should be, following the examples of Church Fathers such as Cyprian or Melito of Sardis, tackled on common ground by presenting various "testimonies" of the Hebrew Bible that witness the truth of Christian faith.¹³ Later polemicists arranged these testimonies in large collections, gradually becoming monotonous and repetitive.¹⁴

From the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards, medieval debate concerning Judaism acquired new forms and assumed new aims. Growing Jewish presence in Christian society began to be perceived as a threat to order, and stimulated significant growth of literary polemical activity using new types of reasoning. In the course of the thirteenth century, different internal developments influenced the way Christians approached anti-Jewish polemic. Segregation of the

9 Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 23-65.

10 Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos* 58.1.22, *PL* 36, cols. 705-706.

11 Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 64.

12 See Cohen's discussion of Augustine's followers, Gregory the Great, Agobard of Lyons, and Isidore of Seville in *Living Letters*, pp. 67-145. In short, Cohen claims that with the further development of Christian thought and society, these thinkers "found themselves heirs to a Jewish policy that did not quite comport with their medieval conceptual framework" and, consequently, "placed considerably less emphasis on the positive role of the Jew in their midst; instead, they aspired to a world where that Jew would no longer be necessary." (p. 70)

13 Augustine, *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.2, *PL* 42, col. 52.

14 For an overview of some of the literary collections of "testimonia" see Gilbert Dahan, *The Christian Polemics against the Jews in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. 42-52, transl. by Jody Gladding.

Jews in conjunction with intensified missionary activity started to be applied as main defensive tactics. Forced disputations led by their former co-religionists, of which Barcelona disputation is probably the most well known, were imposed on Jews.

At this juncture, an analysis of the main traits of medieval anti-Jewish debate and factors that contributed to its dramatic transformation are valuable for this discussion.

1.2. Deterioration of Jewish status in Christian society

The Early Middle Ages have been often portrayed as a period of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Jews.¹⁵ This of course did not preclude mutual rivalry or missionary competition, resulting in occasional outbursts of anti-Jewish violence. However, systematic, large-scale persecution of Jews remained rare.¹⁶ The most precarious point of Jewish-Christian relations occurred in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. At that time, Christian society stood on the threshold of a new era. It underwent far-reaching changes in all conceivable directions. It was expanding geographically, economically, culturally, and bureaucratically on both the ecclesiastical and secular levels. It became more mobile, more diversified and more daring. Both ancient and new knowledge was studied at recently developed cathedral schools located in urban centres and the thriving intellectual life these institutions harboured was appropriately dubbed the “twelfth-century renaissance”.¹⁷

Conditions of Jewish life in Christendom experienced a similar transformation.¹⁸ From the tenth century onwards, growing numbers of Jews started to settle in the rapidly developing areas of northern Europe, such as England, France, Germany. Their economic activity in commerce and later in money lending provided an important stimulus for local economies. Political authorities in northern Europe quickly recognized the import of Jewish presence and committed themselves to its protection. In Christian Spain as well, rulers understood that the Jewish population had an important role to play in the process of conserving and transmitting material and cultural achievements of the preceding Muslim civilization, although the Reconquest movement aroused some violence against non-Christians that targeted the Jews as well. Jews in this instance were offered protection and favourable tax conditions in exchange for loyalty.¹⁹ The relatively good economic conditions in this period stimulated Jewish intellectual

15 See for example Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental 430-1096* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), pp. 1-64.

16 The fiercely anti-Jewish legislation of the Toledo councils and King Sisebut's edict of 613 forcing the Jews of Visigothic Spain to convert are rather an exception. See Blumenkranz, pp. 105-134, 373-374.

17 The term was introduced by Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927). On urban character of this renaissance see Jacques Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp. 9-10.

18 For a recent overview of the history of the Jews in this period see Robert Chazan, “The Jews in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin”, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History IV c.1024-c.1198*, ed. by David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), I, 623-657; idem, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

19 Chazan, “The Jews in Europe”, pp. 633-635.

life on the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, as well as in newly developed centres of Talmudic learning in northern France.

However, the effect of these dramatic changes on the position of Jews in Christian society and in Christian consciousness was ambivalent. From the eleventh century onwards, Jews were perceived as hostile agents and associated with real or imaginary enemies of Christendom, such as Saracens or the Devil.²⁰ Accusations of the murders of young boys and later, of host desecration, started to emerge. Feelings of intense hatred against Christians and various demonic practices were attributed to Jews. Thus, close social contact such as the sharing of food and sexual relations started to be associated with impurity, and measures were taken to prevent this.²¹ The deterioration of the favourable conditions Jews enjoyed within Christian societies culminated in their expulsion from England in 1290, France, and forced conversion in Spain in 1391.

1.3. Changes of argumentational patterns in the polemic

Simultaneously, more Christians started to feel an urgent need to defend their faith against real or anticipated Jewish attacks and to prove the truth of their faith to the Jews in their midst. In Jaroslav Pelikan's often-cited words, the twelfth century "seems to have produced more treatises of Jewish-Christian disputation than any preceding century of the Middle Ages, perhaps as many as all those centuries combined".²² Here will not be a thorough exploration of these treatises, but rather a discussion of the main traits of their development.²³

In his influential article on changes of patterns in Christian anti-Jewish polemic, Amos Funkenstein presented a fourfold classification of Christian polemical works.²⁴ The older type of polemic, collections of *testimonia* adducing Biblical verses proving the truth of Christianity presented either as a list or in the form of mostly fictional dialogue, was in the course of the twelfth century combined with growing interest in anti-Jewish polemic supported by rational reasoning. Anselm's attempt in his *Cur Deus homo* to expose necessary rational reasons for Christ's incarnation to support existing faith, although likely not composed with anti-Jewish

20 In one of the first instances of this association, the Jews of Orléans have been accused of instigating sultan Hakim to destroy the church of Holy Sepulchre in 1009. See Blumenkranz, pp. 380-381. Regarding the association with the Devil, cf. Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 234.

21 The decrees of the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils, held in 1179 and 1215, respectively, aimed to prevent social contact with Jews or Muslims – they were forbidden to own Christian slaves or housekeepers, ordered to wear distinct clothing to diminish the possibility of sexual relations with Christians.

22 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), III (1978), 246.

23 For a more detailed overview see Dahan, *passim*; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 167-389.

24 Amos Funkenstein, "Changes in the Patterns of Christian anti-Jewish Polemic in the Twelfth Century" [Hebrew]. *Zion* 33 (1968), 125-144.

polemic in mind,²⁵ greatly influenced his successors, such as Gilbert of Crispin,²⁶ Odo of Cambrai,²⁷ Guibert of Nogent,²⁸ Pseudo-William of Champeaux,²⁹ and Peter Abelard.³⁰ Ultimately, Peter Alfonsi, a Jewish convert from Huesca, presented in a literary re-enactment of his own conversion an image of Christianity as the sole rational religion.³¹

Increasing Christian interest in anti-Jewish polemic is reflected also in the growing involvement of Jewish writers in anti-Christian polemic. Until this point, they had mostly contented themselves with referencing the refutation of Christian exegesis or religious beliefs in the wider framework of Biblical commentaries, liturgical poetry, philosophical treatises or even folklore.³² However, by the end of the twelfth century, Jews began to produce works wholly dedicated to the refutation of Christian doctrine.³³ Almost simultaneously, around 1170, Jacob ben Reuben³⁴ and Joseph Kimḥi³⁵ composed their treatises in the culturally vibrant regions of

25 See Funkenstein, p. 129; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 175-179.

26 Crispin's *Disputatio Iudaei et Christiani* is an example of classical argument on scriptural basis. His *Disputatio Christiani cum gentili de fide Christi* uses rational reasoning. Both texts were composed prior to the completion of *Cur Deus homo*, but bear signs of Anselmian influence. For original texts with a translation see *Religionsgespräche mit einem Juden und einem Heiden: lateinisch – deutsch*, transl. and introd. by Karl Werner Wilhelm and Gerhard Wilhelmi (Freiburg i. B.: Herder, 2005). See also Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 180-185.

27 *Disputatio contra Iudaeum Leonem nomine de adventu Christi filii Dei*, *PL* 160, cols. 1103-1112. See also Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 186-192; Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 83-85, 108-110.

28 *Tractatus de incarnatione contra Iudaeos*, *PL* 156, cols. 489-528. See also Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 192-201; Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, pp. 110-113.

29 *Dialogus inter Christianum et Iudaeum de fide catholica*, *PL* 163, cols. 1045-1072. This work had been incorrectly attributed to William of Champeaux. See also Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Jewish-Christian disputations and the twelfth-century renaissance", *JMH* 15 (1989), 105-125.

30 *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*, *PL* 178, cols. 1609-1684. See also Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 275-289.

31 *Dialogi Petri and Moysi Iudaei*, *PL* 157, cols. 535-672. See also "Introduction" in *Dialogue against the Jews*, transl. by Irven M. Resnick (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp. 3-36; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 201-218.

32 On anti-Christian polemic in medieval commentaries see Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries", *JJS* 11 (1960), 115-135; Frank Talmage, "R. David Kimḥi as Polemicist", *HUCA* 38 (1967), 213-235; on its influence on the development of Jewish exegesis see Esra Shereshevsky, "Rashi's and Christian Interpretations", *JQR* 61 (1970/71), 76-86; Abraham Grossman, "The Jewish-Christian Polemic and Jewish Bible Exegesis in Twelfth-Century France" [Hebrew], *Zion* 51 (1986), 29-60. On derogatory *Toledot Yeshu* see Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Cavalry, 1902).

33 For an overview of Jewish anti-Christian polemics see Daniel J. Lasker, "Medieval Jewish Debates with Christianity", in *The Encyclopedia of Judaism Second Edition*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, 4 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2005), I, 397-411; idem, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), pp. 13-23; David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), pp. 3-37; Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), transl. by James Manley; Jeremy Cohen, "Towards a Functional Classification of Jewish anti-Christian Polemic in the High Middle Ages", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. by Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1992), pp. 93-114; Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 91-121.

34 *Sefer millḥamot ha-Shem*, ed. by Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963).

35 *Sefer ha-berit*, ed. by Frank (Efraim) Talmage (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1974). For an English translation see

Provence and Aragon. Both works reflected the new polemical style adopted by the Christians, particularly rational reasoning.³⁶ In northern Europe, the thirteenth-century works *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekanneh*³⁷ by Joseph ben Nathan Official and anonymous *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*³⁸ reflect a more popular level of polemics, concentrating on the exegesis of problematic biblical passages and attacks on Christian morals.

According to Funkenstein, the Christian scholars' growing awareness of post-biblical Jewish literature contributed to the emergence of the third type of Christian literary polemic: attacks on Talmud on charges of its irrationality and blasphemies against Christianity.³⁹ Not incidentally, it was Peter Alfonsi, a former insider, who first attacked Jewish post-biblical literature for alleged blasphemies and irrationalities that incapacitated Jewish rational reasoning.⁴⁰ Cluniac abbot Peter Venerable in his *Tractatus adversus Iudaeorum inveteratam duritiem*⁴¹ also identified Talmud as the main source of Jewish obstinacy, although he likely did not have a first-hand knowledge of the text. According to Peter, Jewish reason had been blinded by anthropomorphic Talmudic stories depicting God as laughing or weeping to such extent that Jews become incapable of reading the Scriptures spiritually and are thus imprisoned in their carnality.⁴² Rabbinic doctrines of faith distanced Jews from truth and diminished their human qualities.⁴³ All this lead Peter to wonder: "I know not whether a Jew is a man because he does not cede to human reason, nor does he acquiesce to the divine authorities which are his own."⁴⁴ According to some scholars, this mental dehumanization of Jews in the twelfth century, Peter Venerable being one of the most illustrious examples, paved the way for first blood libels and

Talmage's *The Book of the Covenant of Joseph Kimhi* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1972).

- 36 Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point: Jewish Evidence from the Twelfth Century", *HTR* 89 (1996), 161-173; Carlos del Valle, "Las guerras del Señor, de Jacob ben Ruben de Huesca", in *La controversia judeocristiana en España (Desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIII)*, *Homenaje a Domingo Muñoz León*, ed. by Carlos del Valle Rodríguez (Madrid: CSIC, 1998), pp. 223-233; idem, "El libro de la Alianza de Yosef Qimhi", in idem, *La controversia judeocristiana*, pp. 235-242. Del Valle claims that Jacob ben Reuben was acquainted with the work of Peter Alfonsi and used it in his own polemic (p. 233), Lasker is more cautious (p. 172). Del Valle further suggests that Kimhi's work is later and may be dependent on Jacob's treatise (p. 242). However, cf. Chazan, *Fashioning*, p. 94. On Jacob's translations of passages from Gilbert Crispin's work see David Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in Transmission of Medieval Polemic," *Speculum* 49 (1974), 34-47.
- 37 *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekanneh*, ed. by Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1970); Zadoc Kahn, "Étude sur Le livre de Joseph le Zélateur: Recueil de controverses religieuses du Moyen Age", *REJ* 1 (1880), 222-246; 2 (1881), 1-38.
- 38 *Sefer Nizzahon Vetus*, ed. by David Berger (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979).
- 39 Funkenstein, pp. 137-141. On Christian attitudes towards Talmud see especially Chen Merchavia, *The Church Versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500-1248)* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970).
- 40 Merchavia, pp. 93-128.
- 41 *PL* 189, cols. 507-650. Merchavia, pp. 128-152.
- 42 Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, pp. 116-117.
- 43 Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 245-270 (esp. pp. 261-264). Cohen argues contra Funkenstein (p. 140) that the description of Talmud as another, different law ("nova lex"), i.e. heresy, emerged only some hundred years after Peter, during the 1230s and 1240s.
- 44 "Nescio plane utrum Iudaeus homo sit, qui nec rationi humanae cedit, nec auctoritatibus divinis et propriis acquiescit." *PL* 189, col. 551. Translation by Anna Sapir Abulafia (*Christians and Jews*, p. 116).

accusations of demonic attacks on Christian polity, following shortly thereafter.⁴⁵

The last phase of the development of Jewish-Christian disputations presented, according to Funkenstein, attempts to use the Talmudic text, especially the aggadah,⁴⁶ to prove the truth of Christianity.⁴⁷ Although this tactic had been occasionally used already in the twelfth century by Peter Alfonsi⁴⁸ and Alan of Lille,⁴⁹ its most notable promoters were thirteenth-century Dominican friars Paul Christian⁵⁰ and Raymond Martin.⁵¹ Unlike Paul, who apparently left behind no works of his own, Martin composed, or at least played a prominent role in the composition of, two important proselytizing manuals that concentrated on the utilization of rabbinic aggadah for proofs of Christian truth: earlier and more rudimentary *Capistrum Iudaeorum*,⁵² and an elaborate handbook *Pugio fidei*.⁵³ Whereas in *Capistrum* Martin quoted his sources in Latin, in *Pugio* he laid great emphasis on citing Talmudic dicta in their original Hebrew and strived for most accurate Latin translations, apparently in order to prevent potential Jewish objections. He drew the material from his extensive knowledge of rabbinic literature, which he obtained while working as an inspector and censor of Hebrew books from 1264 onwards. It is unclear whether he was present at the Barcelona disputation⁵⁴ where a similar tactic was used by Friar Paul Christian. However, his works attest to familiarity with the main

45 Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, p. 135; Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 263.

46 In Mark Saperstein words, “[a]ggadah is best defined negatively as the nonlegal component of rabbinic discourse. Among its characteristics are the frequent use of hyperbole and other forms of figurative language...” *Decoding the Rabbis: a Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 213, n. 1.

47 Funkenstein, pp. 141-142.

48 Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 205-206, 309.

49 Funkenstein, p. 142. See also Merchavia, pp. 214-216; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 305-312. Alan of Lille composed his treatise *De fide catholica* (PL 210, cols. 305-430) in order to tackle the objections of heretics, Waldensians, Jews, and pagans against Catholic faith. In its third book, dedicated wholly to polemic with the Jews over traditional issues, Alan mentions a Talmudic dictum to prove that the Messiah had already come: “Videmus etiam apud Iudaeos in magna parte cessare quae ad legem pertinent, [...] in maxima parte abolita est lex; videtur ergo quo lex locum non habeat. In Sehale etiam loquitur Elias, quod mundus duraturus est per sex millia annorum, et duo millia fuisse vanitatis, quod refertur ad tempus quod fuit ante legem Mosaicam, duo vero millia legis Mosaicae, sequentia duo millia, Messiae. Sed manifestum est, plus quam quator annorum millia transiisse; ergo manifestum est legem transiisse, et Messiam venisse.” *Ibid.*, col. 410. The meaning of the word Sehalé is unclear. On Alan’s dependence on Gilbert Crispin’s *Disputatio Iudaei et Christiani* see Berger, “Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben.”

50 For Friar Paul’s biography see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 108, n. 13 ; *idem*, “The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani”, in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. by Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), pp. 20-47; Ursula Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation von Paris 1269* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 24-42.

51 On Raymond see Cohen, *Friars*, pp. 129-156; *idem*, *Living Letters*, pp. 342-358; Robert Chazan, “From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond: The Development of Innovative Missionizing Argumentation”, *HTR* 76 (1983), 289-306; *idem*, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 115-136.

52 *Capistrum Iudaeorum*, ed. by Adolfo Robles Sierra, 2 vols (Würzburg: Echter, 1990-1993).

53 *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* (Paris: Henault, 1651; Leipzig: Lenckisch, 1687). Both editions are available in On-line Judaica collection of Frankfurt am Main University Library (<http://judaica-frankfurt.de/>, Last accessed: 30 May 2009).

54 See Cohen, *Friars*, p. 130, n. 2.

tenets of both Paul's arguments and Nahmanides' reaction.⁵⁵

1.4. Explaining the changes

The development of Christian anti-Jewish polemic in Western society during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, with many agents present. The dramatic change of social conditions undoubtedly stimulated Christian polemical activity and anti-Jewish imagery. It is not surprising that a growing immigrant population with close ties to political authority and special juridical status, increasingly employed in problematic economical activities such as money lending, aroused feelings of animosity that might to an extent explain the deterioration of their perception both in popular and ecclesiastical circles. Further, David Berger suggests that medieval inter-religious debates were often initiated by the Jews and their aggression might have led the Christian majority to intensify their polemical efforts.⁵⁶

However, most students of this period assume that the most important changes happened on a hermeneutical level: the assessment of what a Jew and his presence in the midst of Christendom *meant* underwent a substantial evolution in the course of the late Middle Ages and this shift was deeply rooted in the way Christians perceived *themselves*, the universe they lived in, and the challenges they faced in it.

Jacques Le Goff named the need for reassurance as one of the principal needs of a medieval mind.⁵⁷ Some scholars argue that medieval Christians tried to deal with their internal fears and anxieties by projecting them onto the Jews. As Kenneth Stow put it:

By the later Middle Ages, the Jew whom persons at all social levels envisioned was a mirror image. He reflected – by embodying them – personal inadequacies and society's irremediable flaws; he represented the failure to achieve that which medievals themselves called 'harmony from dissonance', whether on the intellectual plane, the political plane, or the everyday plane of physical existence. It only remained, therefore, to reenact the crucifixion, via the ritual-murder libel, and then mythically to repair the social fabric by publicly – indeed, civically – punishing that (ancient) event's *as yet* unpunished perpetrator, the Jew.⁵⁸

Recent research indeed shows that popular anti-Jewish violence often had a cyclical and ritualized nature, thus incurring an important stabilizing effect on the society.⁵⁹ But did this

⁵⁵ Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 118-128, 135-136.

⁵⁶ David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages", *AHR* 92 (1986), 576-591.

⁵⁷ Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization, 400-1500* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988), p. 325, transl. by Julia Barrow.

⁵⁸ Stow, *Alienated Minority*, pp. 238-239. Original emphasis.

⁵⁹ See especially David Nirenberg's treatment of Holy Week riots in Christian Spain in his *Communities of*

projection mechanism really operate at all social levels? One might also ask what made Jews such a suitable embodiment of the “irremediable flaws” of the individual and society? Were there simply suitable social conditions for full activation of perpetually latent traditional Christian anti-Jewish imagery?⁶⁰ Or, did this imagery undergo some sort of a transformation in the period discussed? And if it did, why?

As obvious from his discussion of this period, Funkenstein identifies two key factors in the process of the deterioration of the image of the Jews in the twelfth century: the rationalization of anti-Jewish discourse and growing Christian awareness of Jewish post-Biblical literature.⁶¹ Anna Sapir Abulafia in her careful analysis of twelfth-century rationalism showed that the “christianization of reason” contributed greatly to the dehumanization and “carnalization” of the image of the Jews, creating “a broad framework which seemed to invite and justify all kinds of accusations against Jews”.⁶²

Jeremy Cohen refined Funkenstein’s second argument, advocating both in his *Friars and the Jews* and *Living Letters of the Law* that Christian familiarity with Talmudic literature and the resulting awareness of disparity between the role of the hermeneutical and contemporary Jew in Christian society to a great extent contributed to the definitive divorce of Christian thought with the Augustinian doctrine of “Jewish witness” in the thirteenth century.⁶³ By adopting a new, i.e. rabbinic, law, Jews betrayed the task assigned to them by God in Christian society and thus were no longer worthy of the privileged position in its midst. Moreover, a more thorough assessment of several twelfth-century Christian thinkers led Cohen to acknowledge the importance of yet another dimension of medieval thought: the expansion of the Christian category of “other.” As Christian thinkers became more and more concerned with the delineation of orthodoxy, the Jews ceased to function as the sole “other” in Christian society. Their having been subsumed into a larger category of “nonbelievers”, “heretics” and “enemies of Christ” severely subverted the privileged position they had enjoyed since Augustine.⁶⁴

The notion of otherness in medieval Christian thought had been addressed by

Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 200-230.

60 This is what Stow seems to suggest, cf. *Alienated Minority*, pp. 238-240. For a similar view see Chazan, “The Jews in Europe”, pp. 635-636; idem, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, pp. 240-241.

61 Funkenstein, p. 129. Other factors adduced by Funkenstein include: population growth, social differentiation, the Investiture Controversy and new religious movements, both orthodox and heterodox, including the Crusading movements.

62 Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, p. 139. Of special interest are chapters eight (“Bodies and Money”) and nine (“Inclusiveness and Exclusion”), pp. 107-136.

63 Cohen, *Friars*; idem, *Living Letters*, pp. 313-363. In his earlier work, Cohen formulated the matter quite radically and claimed that the “Dominicans and Franciscans developed, refined, and sought to implement a new Christian ideology with regard to the Jews, one that allotted the Jews no legitimate right to exist in European society.” (*Friars*, p. 14) In his more recent book, reflecting the latest scholarship, he stressed out the gradual nature of the change in Christian imagery of Jews and reduced the role of mendicant orders in it (*Living Letters*, pp. 358-360). For a different assessment of the Augustinian doctrine and mendicants’ attitude to it, cf. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 170-177.

64 Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 156-159.

R. I. Moore from an anthropological point of view. In his *Formation of a Persecuting Society* he claimed that the twelfth and thirteenth-century preoccupation with heretics, lepers, Jews, prostitutes, and other marginal groups was not a result of popular hostility to them, but rather a device employed by the emerging classes of literates, especially clerics and courtiers, in order to create a social hierarchy they could control and govern.⁶⁵ This persecution of marginal groups, claims Moore, became instrumental in the creation of modern Western society.⁶⁶

Through various approaches this discussion attempts to show that in a theory of medieval anti-Jewish polemic, one must take into account diverse aspects of the dynamics of religious imagery. Christianity surely offers Jews a powerful set of symbolic roles, these are however subject to development and various influences. Just like the “real Jew”, whose place in Christian consciousness he at times seems to completely take over, “the hermeneutical Jew” of a Christian polemicist is also moulded by a very complex set of determinants. These could often include personal predilections, specific socio-cultural conditions, different historical contexts, and regional peculiarities. In analyzing the broader tendencies of Christian perceptions of Jews, one should not underestimate the intricacy of many of them.

The next chapter will offer an analysis of two emblematic aspects of Jewish-Christian polemics in the thirteenth century that have so far not been addressed: the “institutionalization of the debate” rooted in a reevaluation of the threat that Talmud allegedly posed to both Jews and Christians, and growing involvement of Jewish converts in new forms of debate.

65 R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Christendom 950-1250*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 117-143. Cf. Stow, *Alienated Minority*, p. 234; Chazan, *The Jews in Western Christendom*, p. 306, n. 18.

66 As Moore put it, the creation of a persecuting society was “one aspect [...] of some of the most profound and spectacular innovations which made this period a turning point in European history, the period when, for better and for worse, the continuous history of modern European society and achievement begins.” Moore, p. 171.

2. AUTHORITY AND APOSTASY IN MEDIEVAL POLEMIC

2.1. New assessment of the threat: question of authority

Christian anti-Jewish polemic was in its earlier phases directed mainly towards Christian audiences. A Jew served only as literary figure that presented “seemingly” plausible arguments against Christian faith. Typically, these literary debates ended with the conversion of the Jewish interlocutor. The fictional character of course does not mean that religious debates did not take place. Gilbert Crispin for instance presented in his *Disputatio Iudaei et Christiani* a credible picture of close contacts between an abbot and an educated Jew that comprised business cooperation as well as close personal friendship. It did not seem to have been anything unusual for notable Christians to publicly discuss matters of faith, in an amicable atmosphere.⁶⁷ Odo of Cambrai too records a polite discussion he had with a Jew named Leo regarding the advent of Christ.⁶⁸ However, from the thirteenth century onwards, a new type of “interreligious” discussion emerged: organized disputes. These debates were no longer held in private in a friendly atmosphere: they were organized by secular or ecclesiastical authorities and participation in them was imposed on Jews. It was no longer Christian faith that was being discussed, but rather Jewish beliefs and writings. Intellectual exercises transformed into inquisitorial trials.

This turn towards organized and imposed dispute was closely connected with the reevaluation of rabbinic tradition and the dangers it presented, which emerged in ecclesiastical circles in the thirteenth century and which must be seen in the context of their fight against heresies, especially Catharism.⁶⁹ For both twelfth-century Peters, Alfonsi and the Venerable, the Talmud was a pernicious doctrine, a principal source of Jewish obstinacy precluding them from attaining salvation, which can be found in Christian faith only. Yet it did not present an explicit threat to Christian society. Since the 1230s however, the Church showed growing interest in internal Jewish affairs and eagerly tried to step out against “heresies” in Jewish circles that deemed to threaten not only the Jews but Christians as well. In addition, another issue raised was the justification of the very existence of “non-Biblical” Jewish law. The exegetical and legal authority assumed by Talmud in Christian perspectives opposed that of the Bible, and even more so its proclaimed divine origin did not fit into the image of “stationary” biblical Jews. Moreover, the notion of an “alternative authority” suggested even more strongly a connection with Christian heretics. As R. I. Moore’s put it, “heresy [...] can exist only in context of the assertion of authority [...] and is therefore by definition a political matter.”⁷⁰ It is obvious that in both

⁶⁷ *Disputatio Iudaei et Christiani*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ *PL* 160, col. 1103.

⁶⁹ For a history of medieval heretical movements see Malcolm D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁷⁰ Moore, p. 64.

cases, the question of authority distinguishing the true and tolerable form of Judaism from its distorted image was crucial. As soon as the Church assumed the authority to protect *both* Christians and Jews from illegitimate teachings, there arose question of the legitimacy of non-Biblical authority in Judaism. As we will see, the Church dealt with this issue by the very same means by which it dealt with similar questions of alternative authority in its midst: inquisitorial inspections and the expurgation of objectionable teachings.

2.1.1. Maimonidean controversy

First indication of new attitudes to Jewish tradition was Dominican involvement in the so called Maimonidean controversy in southern France.⁷¹ Although not directly connected with Talmud, it drew the attention of the Church, especially mendicant friars, to contemporary Jewish issues and awakened their tendency to view these issues as relevant for their own battles as well.

At the beginning of the 1230s, a group of scholars lead by Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier called for a ban on the popular study of Maimonidean philosophical doctrines because they contained “non-traditional teachings” which “tear down the tradition and [...] spin allegories out of the narrative of the Written and Oral Law,” thus provoking scepticism and religious laxity.⁷² Unsuccessful in the south, Rabbi Solomon turned to rabbis in northern France, who readily issued a universal ban on study of philosophical works, to the great outrage of Provençal scholars, who immediately issued a counter-ban. In 1232 or 1233, in a sudden turn, Rambam’s *Guide of the Perplexed* and *Book of Knowledge* were publicly burnt in Montpellier by the Dominicans. According to several pro-Maimonist sources, this happened as a result of instigation from Rabbi Solomon or one of his followers.⁷³ Ecclesiastical interference in internal Jewish affairs shocked both sides of the conflict so deeply that this turbulence passed very quickly and did not reappear for several decades.

Unfortunately, there is no Christian account of the burning, so the motivations of Dominicans remain open to speculation. Some scholars have expressed doubt that the Inquisition acted on the incitement of a Jewish informer.⁷⁴ In the context of ongoing battles against various Christian heresies in southern France, it makes perfect sense that the friars would independently intervene against a suspicious innovative philosophical exegesis of Biblical text that contravened what they saw as the traditional interpretation of the Bible. In their

71 On the controversy see Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180-1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 148-198; Cohen, *Friars*, pp. 52-60; Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community, and Messianism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 19-51.

72 Silver, p. 151.

73 Cohen, *Friars*, pp. 54-56.

74 Silver, pp. 153-156; Cohen, *Friars*, pp. 56-58. Silver further speculates that “[s]omeone, possibly some converted Jew aware of the roiling controversy, denounced *Moreh* and *Mada* to a papal mission investigating heresy, or perhaps a mission minded clergy simply heard of the boiling argument and thought to make the most of it.” (p. 156)

fight against heretics rebelling against the authority of the Church, the Dominicans might have easily felt obliged to protect the Jews against similar threats as well. There might have also been a connection with an ongoing investigation of Aristotle's works, which had already been banned in 1210 in Paris.⁷⁵ While it is true that "never before had the Church presumed to interfere with current rabbinic theology, enforcing one doctrinal opinion as opposed to another,"⁷⁶ it is also true that never before had the fears and aims of both Jewish and Christian "guardians of tradition" been so close to each other, as clearly stated in one of the Hebrew sources.⁷⁷

2.1.2 Talmud trial in Paris ("Paris disputation")

The attention of the Church turned to Talmud and its legitimacy only few years after this incident. A Jewish apostate, Nicholas Donin of La Rochelle,⁷⁸ shortly after his conversion to Christianity around 1236, pressed charges against the Talmud to pope Gregory IX. According to Nicholas, the Talmud claims greater authority than the Bible, it blasphemes against God, Jesus and Mary, and contains laws and stories that are outrageous and plainly stupid.⁷⁹ In June 1239, the pope issued a bull calling all Christian rulers to inspect Jewish writings on the first Sabbath of Lent 1240. His call fell on deaf ears everywhere except Paris, where king Louis IX, directly influenced by Nicholas, who delivered the bull in person, confiscated rabbinic texts and summoned leading French rabbis to defend the Talmud against charges brought up by Donin.⁸⁰ In 1242, the Talmud was condemned as blasphemous regarding these charges and several cartloads of Talmudic manuscripts were burned. Gregory's successor, Innocent IV, first renewed the decrees of his predecessor in 1244. However, after protests from the Jews, he ordered king Louis IX to refrain from further action. Jews argued that they were unable to understand the Bible and the commandments of their Law without Talmud. Innocent claimed he did not want to unjustly deprive the Jews of books necessary to keep biblical law, so he appointed the chancellor of the university in Paris Eudes of Chateauroux to inspect the Talmud once again in order to

75 Cohen, *Friars*, p. 52, 59.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

77 "Behold, most of our people are unbelievers and heretics, for they were led astray by the words of Rabbi Moses of Egypt, who wrote heretical books. Now, while you are exterminating the heretics among you, exterminate our heresies as well..." Thus pictured David Kimḥi rabbi Solomon's plea to the Dominicans in a letter to Judah Alfakar, cited by Cohen, *Friars*, p. 54.

78 On possible locations see Merchavia, p. 230.

79 Isidore Loeb, "La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud", *REJ* 1 (1880), 247-261, 2 (1881), 248-270, 3 (1881), 39-57; Yitzhak Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yehiel of Paris and Nahmanides" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 2 (1930/31), 172-187 (pp. 172-177); Cohen, *Friars*, pp. 60-76; *idem*, *Living Letters*, pp. 317-334; Robert Chazan, "The Condemnation of the Talmud Reconsidered (1239-1248)", *PAAJR* 55 (1988), 11-30; Merchavia, pp. 227-248; Joel E. Rembaum, "The Talmud and the Popes: Reflections on the Talmud trials of the 1240s", *Viator* 13 (1982), 203-223; Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, pp. 43-48.

80 For Donin's thirty-five charges and short Latin record of the proceeding see Loeb, "La controverse de 1240", pp. 252-270, 39-57. For longer and more elaborate Hebrew account see *Vikuaḥ rabenu Yehi'el*, ed. by Re'uven Margulies (Lwow, 1925?, repr. 1975). For an English paraphrase see Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*, (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1983, pb. edn 1993), pp. 153-162.

determine whether it presented a real threat to Christian faith, further suggesting that harmless Jewish books should be preserved.⁸¹ Eudes, along with twenty other Parisian scholars, condemned the Talmud once again and proclaimed it to be intolerable in Christian society.⁸² However, this condemnation did not incite further action.

The reasons for vigorous support of royal and local ecclesiastical authorities for Donin's campaign and papal ambivalence towards it are of particular interest.⁸³ Kenneth Stow points to an ongoing controversy between the curia and Parisian scholars regarding papal authority:

The University of Paris had traditionally argued for the supremacy of the Sacred Page as the arbiter of Church doctrine. [...] The thirteenth-century attack on the Talmud as an invalid, extra-scriptural font of Jewish authority, originating as it did at Paris, may hence have been a disguised critique of the papacy itself, and perhaps an indirect challenge. [...] [T]oday's assault on rabbinic *halachah* law might presage a similar one tomorrow on the now papally and no longer scripturally based body of ecclesiastical canons.⁸⁴

Harvey Hames and Jeremy Cohen viewed the condemnation of Talmud as a part of an attempt to defend the literal understanding of Scripture, thus strengthening Christian identity in the face of new intellectual challenges.⁸⁵ Saadia R. Eisenberg suggested as well that Donin aptly used the growing concern of the Church with control of textual communities to draw papal attention to post-biblical literature and to Jewish failure to meet the expectations of the Augustinian doctrine of witness.⁸⁶

It is clear that Christian reevaluation of Talmudic authority emerged in the context of heightened sensitivity to questions of legal and exegetical control during times when the Western Church was undergoing a far-reaching structural reform initiated by the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils. However, the initial impulse for this type of discourse stemmed from circles of Jewish converts to Christianity. From the twelfth century onward, this group would shape debates between Christianity and their former co-religionists. It is to this distinctive trait

81 Letter of Innocent IV to King Louis of France (12 August 1247), cited by Merchavia, p. 449.

82 "Quia eos [= libros, qui Talmud appellantur] invenimus errores innumerabiles, abusiones, blasphemias et nefaria continere, [...] pronuntiamus predictos libros tolerandos non esse, nec magistris Iudaeorum restituti debere, et ipsos sententialiter condemnamus." *Sententia Odonis*, 15 May 1248, cited by Merchavia, pp. 451-452. The condemnation contains, among others, a signature of "frater Albertus Theutonicus", i.e. Albert the Great.

83 On possible influence of local Marian cult see William Chester Jordan, "Marian Devotion and the Talmud Trial of 1240," in *Religionsgespräche in Mittelalter*, ed. by Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 61-76.

84 "The Church and the Jews", in *The New Cambridge Medieval History vol. 5, c. 1198-c.1300*, ed. by David Abulafia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 204-219 (p. 212).

85 Harvey Hames, "Reason and Faith: Inter-religious Polemic and Christian Identity in the Thirteenth Century", in *Religious Apologetics – Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. by Yossef Schwartz and Volkhard Krech (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 267-284; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 321-324.

86 "Reading Medieval Religious Disputation: The 1240 'Debate' Between Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and Friar Nicholas Donin" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008).

of the new type of polemic that this work will now turn.

2.2. Apostasy and its role in Jewish-Christian polemic

In order to elucidate the role of converts in Jewish-Christian polemic, it is important to understand their motives and their place in medieval society.

It is difficult to estimate the scope of medieval Jewish conversion. Proponents of the “lachrymose conception”⁸⁷ of Jewish history assumed that cases of voluntary apostasy had been rather rare and isolated. Further, they held that the majority of converts had been forced to accept baptism during violent attacks, assuming that as soon as the danger passed, converts did all they could to rejoin the faith of their ancestors.⁸⁸ However, it has been recently suggested by David Malkiel that the distinction between coerced and voluntary conversion had not always been clear in Ashkenazic rabbinic literature. The sources affirm that the reversion of many coerced converts was not always immediate and that voluntary conversion for venial reasons seems to have been far more common.⁸⁹ Malkiel offers an insightful analysis of the historiographical bias behind the assumption that after conversion, apostates virtually disappeared from Jewish society. The preponderance of halakhic debates concerning apostates seems to prove the opposite: close social and intellectual contacts between apostates and their former co-religionists had been a matter of course rather than an exception.⁹⁰ The engagement of converts in the polemic should therefore be nothing of a surprise.

When looking at two important converts active in Jewish-Christian polemic in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Peter Alfonsi and Nicholas Donin, the complexity and ambiguity of their motivations appear very clearly. Peter Alfonsi, the first notable convert-polemist, wrote his polemical treatise *Dialogi Petri and Moysi Iudaei* to defend the sincerity of his conversion against Jewish attacks.⁹¹ He is trying to prove that he accepted Christianity not for venial reasons, but because it is in complete harmony with both Mosaic law and reason. He pictures his own conversion as a voluntary and calculated process. More than anything else, it was intellectual disenchantment that brought Alfonsi to the baptismal font. Both before and after his conversion, Alfonsi saw himself primarily as a scientist and philosopher, and tried to remain

87 The term was introduced by Salo W. Baron. Baron’s critique of this conception correlated with his inspiring conviction that Jewish history should be studied within its broader social and intellectual context, presupposing “interactive forces of mutual influences.” Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 346-353.

88 See Blumenkranz, pp. 138-158; Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 67-81.

89 David Malkiel, “Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe – Boundaries Real and Imagined”, *Past and Present* 194 (2007), 3-34.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.

91 *PL* 157, col. 538. Composed in Latin, this apology was addressed to a Christian audience. It is probable that Alfonsi’s sincerity was impugned by Jews in Christian presence, possibly damaging his credibility in new environments. Cf. *Dialogue against the Jews*, p. 15.

faithful to this vocation.⁹²

Nicholas Donin, who first drew the attention of the Church structures to Talmud, remains an enigmatic figure.⁹³ The circumstances of his conversion are not clear. According to a Hebrew account of the Paris disputation, Donin had been excommunicated for heresy around 1225, some fifteen years before the disputation. The text pictures rabbi Yehi'el saying of Donin: "He denied our sages and believed only in what is written in the Torah of Moses, without interpretation. But you know that everything needs an explanation, and therefore he had been condemned and excommunicated. Since then until now he had plotted evil against us [and sought] to uproot everything."⁹⁴

On the basis of this description it had been supposed that Donin was a Karaite.⁹⁵ Merchavia has shown that this claim is unsubstantiated as there was no Karaite presence in France at the time and speculates about the philosophical roots of Donin's heresy.⁹⁶ Is it possible that philosophy led Donin astray? A closer look at his charges against Talmud reveals that the matter is more complicated. Donin's charges against the Talmud as reflected in both Hebrew and Latin documents can be divided into five categories: 1) Talmud and the rabbis claim greater authority than the Bible, 2) Talmud contains blasphemies against Jesus and Mary, 3) it contains blasphemies on Christianity and it is hostile to Christians, 4) it contains blasphemies against God, and 5) numerous other absurdities.⁹⁷

According to Alfonsi, who was strongly influenced by Arabic philosophy, the greatest error of the Jews lies in their misinterpretation of Scripture. It is their carnal and literal hermeneutics that eventually misled them to accept anthropomorphism in the aggadah and the idea that literal observance of Mosaic law pleases God.⁹⁸ In Donin's accusation there is no hint of philosophical argumentation. Rather, it is the authority assumed by Talmud that is problematic. Jewish assumption that Talmud is of divine origin, that it had been placed into their minds, handed down orally and eventually written down by the "sages and scribes" served to effectively undermine scriptural authority. According to Donin, the rabbis claimed that they should be honoured more than the prophets, that they could change the words of the Scripture, and that one should believe them "even if they said that the right is left and left is right" and those who did not obey them were worthy of death; they even prohibited teaching the Bible to children – from his perspective, this was not a consequence of deficient hermeneutics, but an outright act of trampling over Biblical revelation.⁹⁹ According to Donin, the rabbis deliberately

⁹² *Dialogue against the Jews*, p. 13; Cohen, "Mentality", pp. 26-29.

⁹³ See Merchavia, pp. 229-238; Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 45.

⁹⁴ *Vikuaḥ rabenu Yehi'el*, p. 13.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Maccoby, p. 20.

⁹⁶ "It is almost certain that in the years of his [spiritual] confusion he was in close contact with non-Jewish books, including philosophical literature. The peek into philosophical paradise did him harm and he became angry on Jews for their relation to philosophy (e.g. in the matter of books of Rambam)." Merchavia, pp. 232-233.

⁹⁷ Loeb, "La controverse de 1240", pp. 251-252; Chazan, "The Condemnation of the Talmud", p. 16.

⁹⁸ *PL* 157, col. 540; Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 213-214.

⁹⁹ Loeb, "La controverse de 1240", pp. 253-263.

denigrated the role of the Old Testament and replaced it by a fabricated text that channeled their immorality and hostility towards non-Jews, thus forsaking their Augustinian role of witnesses.

Donin's accusations offer an insight into the internal matters of medieval Jewish communities. According to the Hebrew account, Donin's apostasy was motivated by the very same concerns that lead him several years later to bring to the pope accusations of blasphemy regarding the Talmud. Given the absence of Karaism in France, his opposition to religious authority and leanings to "sola scriptura" principles points to the possible influence of some popular Christian heresy, e.g. Waldensians. Until further evidence that would shed light on Donin's background is unearthed, it is impossible to prove that he was acquainted with Christian heresy. However, a reference to Donin in an early-1260s letter of Rabbi Jacob ben Elijah to Paul Christian seems to support this hypothesis.¹⁰⁰ Rabbi Jacob reminds Paul of his predecessor, "Doni [sic], a heretic that replaced Lord's precepts and laws [i.e. converted], but didn't believe even in Roman religion, and our holy teacher, rav Yehi'el, for glory of God of heaven suppressed him with both his hands..."¹⁰¹ Did the writer possibly allude to Christian heretical influences?¹⁰² Or was such a high degree of discrimination beyond the reach of a medieval Jew? The question also remains open because the historical trustworthiness of Jacob's description of Donin has not been accepted unanimously.¹⁰³ The scope of opposition against Talmudic authority in medieval Ashkenazic regions remains unknown, mainly because the vast majority of literary sources available were written by a rabbinic elite. Is it possible that popular dissent expressed itself in the form of apostasy? Was Donin's campaign actually a campaign against Talmudic learning, as would suggest the fact that the most illustrious French tosafists were convoked to attend the debate? Despite the provocative nature of the matter, the answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this work. Research concentrated on contacts between Jewish and Christian heretical and alternative movements could shed more light on the Paris disputation as well.

In Donin's case, the questions of authority and apostasy have been closely connected. The central part of this thesis will now examine the Barcelona disputation and the role of authority and apostasy in this debate. However, it is essential to delineate first the most important data available on the event, including recent scholarship, and proceed then to analyze the important focal points of authority and apostasy.

100 The letter ("Iggeret") has been published by Joseph Kobak in *Jeschurun* 6 (1868), 1-34. On the datation of the letter and Jacob ben Elijah's identity see Robert Chazan, "The Letter of R. Jacob ben Elijah to Friar Paul", *Jewish History* 6 (1992), 51-63; Jacob Mann, "La lettre polémique de Jacob b. Elie à Pablo Christiani", *REJ* 82 (1926), 363-377 (pp. 364-366), and below, p. 44. Mann and Chazan both suggest that the author is Jacob de Lattès of Carcassonne, who settled down in Valencia.

101 "Iggeret", p. 29.

102 Cf. Merchavia, p. 233.

103 Jacob ben Elijah associated Donin with blood libels: "[T]his heretic went to king of kings and spoke falsehood and plotted with his words that on the nights of Pesah we slaughter young boys [...] eat their flesh and drink their blood [...], but the king in innocence of his heart and cleanliness of his lips did not listen to his words..." ("Iggeret", p. 30) Merchavia doubts the historicity of this account (p. 236), Shatzmiller advocates it [cited by Norman Roth, "Blood Libel", in *Medieval Jewish Civilisation: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Norman Roth (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 119-121, here p. 121].

3. THE BARCELONA DISPUTATION

In July 1263,¹⁰⁴ King James I. commanded Moshe ben Naḥman, a renowned Jewish scholar from Gerona, to attend a disputation in royal palace in Barcelona. Many courtiers and ecclesiastical dignitaries were also present, including former Dominican master general and renowned canonist Raymond of Peñafort. Naḥmanides' adversary in the debate was the Jewish apostate and Dominican friar Paul Christian, who tried to argue on the basis of authoritative Jewish texts – both biblical and Talmudic – that the Messiah awaited by Jews had already come, that he was both God and man, that he suffered and died for human salvation and that after his coming, Jewish religious precepts lost their validity.

The proceedings lasted several days and were interrupted prematurely, before the last one of Friar Paul's claims was addressed. A week later, the King, accompanied by the Dominicans, decided to personally deliver a sermon in Barcelona's synagogue. Further, in late August, he issued three orders concerning subsequent Dominican missionary campaigns among the Jews.

Two years later, in April 1265, Paul Christian and Raymond of Peñafort delivered a complaint to the King, in which they accused Naḥmanides of blasphemy committed in a report of the disputation, which he composed and offered to the bishop of Gerona. The King sentenced Naḥmanides to a punishment of two years of exile and the burning of his book. However, the Dominicans were not content with such lenient punishment. The King therefore suspended the punishment for the time being and postponed further proceedings, inciting protests from the pope Clement IV.¹⁰⁵ Naḥmanides put an end to the controversy in 1267 when he immigrated to Palestine.¹⁰⁶

Though many scholars examining the discussion differ in their assessment of its causes, reliability of the sources used to reconstruct the event and its outcome, the powerful symbolism and significance of this event in the context of medieval Jewish-Christian relations has generally not been disputed.¹⁰⁷ In the following chapters, discussion shall focus on available Latin and Hebrew sources on the disputation, the most significant scholarly treatments of both sources, the event itself, and lastly a discussion of two focal points of this work, authority and apostasy, and their roles in the disputation.

3.1. Primary sources

104 According to Cecil Roth the sessions took place on July 20, 23, 26, 27. See "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)", *HTR* 43 (1950), 117-144.

105 Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 And Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 94-99.

106 The connection of his emmigration with Dominican persecution is unclear, see *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

107 Chazan (*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3) pointed out that writers with such divergent opinions on the Barcelona disputation such as Denifle, Roth, and Maccoby, all unanimously embraced the view that the Barcelona disputation was of highest interest of all medieval Jewish-Christian disputations.

There are two independent and disparate reports on the Barcelona disputation, one anonymous Latin report written from a Christian perspective, the other written in Hebrew allegedly by Nahmanides himself.

3.1.1. Latin account

The Latin account of the Barcelona disputation has been preserved in two manuscripts: one from the royal registry in Barcelona¹⁰⁸ and the other from an ecclesiastical archive in Gerona.¹⁰⁹ The text is written in an impersonal style and is far more cursory than its Hebrew counterpart. It seems as though the text from the royal registry was not meant for wide circulation and its intended use was for bureaucratic purposes.

According to the Latin version, the disputation was convoked by the King on instigation of Dominican friars. Nahmanides attended the debate, which took place in the royal palace, accompanied by a delegation of fellow elite scholars. Friar Paul claimed he would prove on the basis of authoritative Jewish texts that 1) the Messiah whom the Jews expect had already come; 2) he was necessarily both God and man; 3) he suffered and died for the salvation of mankind; 4) ceremonial precepts of the Jewish law ceased after the coming of the Messiah. The truth of Christian faith was not to be addressed at all, because its veracity was beyond any doubt.

In the course of the debate as pictured by the Latin report, the Jewish participant had serious difficulties dealing with Friar Paul's argumentation. "By his very own [i.e. Jewish] authoritative texts" Nahmanides was forced to admit that he shouldn't be called "rabbi", that according to the Talmud the Messiah had already come, and that this Messiah had to be Jesus Christ, whose passion was foretold by prophet Isaiah.¹¹⁰ In despair, he denied all textual authorities adduced against him, claiming they were "sermons, in which [Jewish] scholars often lied in order to exhort the people".¹¹¹ Facing the scorn of both Jews and Christians present and unable to defend his erroneous creed, Nahmanides tried to discontinue the debate. When he did not succeed in this effort, he secretly fled the town during the King's absence.

3.1.2. Hebrew account

The Hebrew account is a longer and more eloquent first-person narrative, purportedly written by Nahmanides himself.¹¹² The validity of this attribution is presently acknowledged by most

108 Published by P. Heinrich Denifle, "Quellen zur Disputation Pablos Christiani mit Mose Nachmani zu Barcelona 1263", *Historisches Jahrbuch des Görres-Gesellschaft* 8 (1887), 225-244 (pp. 231-234). For French translation see *La dispute de Barcelone*, transl. by Éric Smilévitch and Luc Ferrer (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1984), pp. 83-86.

109 Baer, "Disputations", pp. 185-187. For English translation of this version see Maccoby, pp. 147-150.

110 Baer, "Disputations", pp. 185-187, l. 22-72.

111 Ibid., p. 187, l. 75-76.

112 An exhausting overview of the account's textual history was recently presented by Ursula Ragacs, "Edieren

scholars.¹¹³ Likely completed a short time after the disputation, the record spread quickly throughout the Jewish diaspora.¹¹⁴ Over twenty manuscripts of the text are presently listed in the electronic catalogue of the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.¹¹⁵

The account was first published in 1681 by Johann Christoph Wagenseil¹¹⁶ from a Strasbourg manuscript that is now lost.¹¹⁷ The edition is considered unreliable by most scholars,¹¹⁸ however Berger argued that, at least in the case of *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, Wagenseil's edition "represents the Strasbourg manuscript rather faithfully".¹¹⁹ For the second time, the text was edited from an unknown manuscript and published in *Milhemet hovah* (Constantinople, 1710), pp. 1a-13a.¹²⁰ It was on this printing that Moses Steinschneider based

oder nicht edieren ... ? Überlegungen zu einer Neuedition des hebräischen Berichtes über die Disputation von Barcelona 1263", *Judaica* 62 (2006), 157-170.

113 The authorship of the text has been questioned by Jaume Riera i Sans, "Les Fonts Històriques de la disputa de Barcelona", in *Disputa de Barcelona de 1263 entre Mestre Mossé de Girona i fra Paul Cristià*, transl. and comment. by Eduard Feliu (Barcelona: Columna, 1985), pp. ix-xv. His argumentation leaned heavily on the fact that the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew account date from the late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century: "The fictional elements of the Hebrew narrative throw doubt on the whole text, and make it more appropriate to a Renaissance man than to an intellectual thirteenth-century rabbi." (p. xiv) According to Riera i Sans, the Hebrew text is a heavily idealized picture of the debate produced by a late fifteenth-century writer. However, the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem lists in its electronic catalogue four manuscripts dating from late-fourteenth or early fifteenth-century: Add. 1224.2 (Cambridge, probably late fourteenth century), X 893 Al 32 (Columbia University, New York, fourteenth/fifteenth century), Heb. 334 (Paris, fourteenth/fifteenth century), and Cod. Parm. 2437 (Biblioteca Palatina, Parma, fourteenth century). MS Cambridge and MS Paris are of Byzantine origin, MS New York is Sephardic, MS Parma Italian. For further objections to Riera i Sans' theory see Caputo, p. 103. Recently, Norman Roth dismissed the Hebrew text as inauthentic without adducing any reasons, "Disputations, religious" in *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by E. Michael Gerli (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 286.

114 In 1286, during a public disputation in Mallorca, then belonging to the Crown of Aragon, a Christian merchant Inghetto Contardo asked Jews to provide him with the written account of the recent Barcelona disputation. The Jews admitted that they had the record and that they even helped to disseminate it. However they refused to provide it, because it would be of no avail for a Christian reader: "Bene habemus et per universum mundum eam misimus nostris Iudaeis... Non decet nos de tam obscuris verbis tecum locui, quia non intellegeres." Ora Limor, *Die Disputationen zu Ceuta (1179) und Mallorca (1286): Zwei antijüdische Schriften aus dem mittelalterlichen Genua* (München: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1994), pp. 229-231. Another proof of the wide dissemination of the text is the fact that one of the oldest manuscripts, MS Cambridge Add. 1224.2, was probably written in Byzantine Mistra. It was purchased in 1875 together with three other manuscripts containing different ethical and halakhic texts, probably written by the same scribe. One of them (Add.1224.1) contains a colophon, identifying the scribe as Solomon ben Moses Pangalo of Mistra and informing that the manuscript was completed on 17 Sivan 5147 [4 June 1387]. I examined the manuscript and it contains no substantial differences from the published text. See also Stephen C. Reif et al., *Hebrew manuscripts at Cambridge University Library: A description and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 410.

115 http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b&local_base=nnlmss (Last accessed: 25 June 2009).

116 "Disputatio R. Mosis Nachmanidis cum Fratre Paulo", in *Tela ignea Satanae* (Altdorf, 1681), II, 24-60.

117 The manuscript was probably destroyed by fire in 1870. Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, p. 374, n. 2.

118 Grätz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1873), VII, 131, n. 1; Hans-Georg Mutius, *Die christlich-jüdische Zwangsdisputation zu Barcelona* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), p. 9; Maccoby, p. 76; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, p. 213, n. 9. But cf. Norman Roth, "Disputations, Jewish-Christian", in *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, pp. 212-218 (p. 215).

119 Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, p. 374.

120 A scan of this book is available on the website of Jewish National and University Library: <http://aleph500.huji.ac.il/nnl/dig/books/bk001076001.html> (Last accessed: 14 May 2009).

his first critical edition in 1860.¹²¹ Steinschneider incorporated into the text of *Milḥemet ḥovah* variant readings from two additional manuscripts, fifteenth/sixteenth-century MS Leiden¹²² and MS Saraval from the collection of Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. The latter manuscript is presently lost.¹²³ Ursula Ragacs showed that unfortunately, Steinschneider was unsuccessful in systematically marking his reductions or additions to the text of *Milḥemet ḥovah*, making it difficult to discern which reading belongs to what manuscript.¹²⁴

Further, the Steinschneider edition has been chosen by J. D. Eisenstein for his own printing,¹²⁵ which is however very defective and full of deliberate additions.¹²⁶ Due to its many shortcomings, it is rarely used or referenced.¹²⁷ The Steinschneider edition has also been reprinted by Re'uvem Margulies.¹²⁸ The edition most commonly used is that of Chaim Dov Chavel.¹²⁹ Chavel divided Steinschneider's text into numbered paragraphs and added his own notes with commentary, frequently referring to variant readings from Eisenstein's edition. Unfortunately, he omitted many of Steinschneider's textual comments.¹³⁰

Recently, Ursula Ragacs opened the debate on the necessity of a new, critical edition, based on twenty-two other available manuscripts. Unfortunately, from all of the manuscripts used for previous printed editions, all except MS Leiden are now lost.¹³¹ According to her personal website, she is currently working on such an edition.¹³² The Hebrew account has been translated into several languages.¹³³

121 *Nachmanidis disputatio publica pro fide Judaica (a. 1263) e Codd. MSS recognita addita ejusdem expositione in Jesaiaam LIII* (Berlin/Stettin: A. Asher, 1860).

122 Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Cod. Or. 4802/3.

123 Ragacs, "Edieren oder nicht edieren ... ?", p. 167.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

125 *Ozar wikuḥim*, 2 vols (New York: author, 1928), I, 86-94.

126 Mutius, p. 10, and p. 60, n. 10. It is an interesting fact that Eisenstein cited in his bibliography (p. 24) a manuscript of the disputation entitled "The great polemic and dispute of Barcelona along with a fine Commentary on Isaiah 52,13-53,12" from the collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem lists only one New York manuscript with a similar title (Ms. 2218) and it happens to be one of the two manuscripts that Mutius consulted for his translation and commentary (Mutius, p. 10). Unfortunately, neither Mutius nor the catalogue mention the commentary on Isaiah as a part of the manuscript, so it is unclear whether the manuscript mentioned by Eisenstein is identical to Ms 2218. Even if it were, the question remains whether Eisenstein really incorporated at least some of the manuscript's variant readings into his text. Mutius, who sometimes refers to Ms 2218 variants in his commentary, seems to be absolutely positive that all changes in Eisenstein's edition are fabrications (see Mutius, p. 60, n. 10). Eisenstein's superficial attitude towards his sources – he for example identified Pablo Christus [sic!] with Raymond of Peñafort, see *Ozar wikuḥim*, p. 86 – also supports this view.

127 An exception is Smilévitch's French translation of the Hebrew narrative, which used Eisenstein edition as a complementary source. However, it is unclear to what extent. *La dispute de Barcelone*, p. 23

128 Lwow, no date [1928/29?].

129 *Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Naḥman*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1962/63), I, 297-320. Throughout this work, this edition is referred to as "Chavel", with the number of respective paragraphs and page number (e.g. Chavel, § 1, p. 302).

130 Ragacs, "Edieren oder nicht edieren ... ?", p. 168.

131 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

132 <http://www.univie.ac.at/Judaistik/pers/ragacs.html> (Last accessed: 15 May 2009).

133 For the purposes of this work, the following translations were consulted: English translation by Maccoby, pp. 97-146; German translation by Mutius, and French translation by Smilévitch (*La dispute de Barcelone*, pp. 25-62). A sufficiently accurate but not very elegant Czech translation has been published serially by rabbi Daniel

The description of the debate presented in the Hebrew text is considerably different from the Latin report. According to the Hebrew text, the debate took place over four sessions in the royal palace and in a monastery. Naḥmanides obtained freedom of speech from both King James and Friar Raymond of Peñafort, provided that he would not speak offensively.¹³⁴ The agenda which the participants agreed to address is similar to that handed down in the Latin text: 1) whether or not the Messiah had come; 2) whether he is supposed to be both God and man or man only; 3) which community claims the true Torah. However, the roles of the two main participants in the debate became completely inversed: it was Paul Christian who was unable to refute the objections of his opponent, while Naḥmanides constantly held the upper hand, easily dealing with Paul's misinterpretations of Talmudic aggadah, expounding on its true meaning and demonstrating his opponent's insufficient familiarity with the sources he was citing.¹³⁵

In the Hebrew text, Naḥmanides plays a much more active role than in the Latin report. He pictures himself having an equal share in determining the theme of the debate.¹³⁶ His responses are exhaustive and eloquent. On several occasions he even uses the stage to attack Christian doctrine and morals,¹³⁷ especially Friar Paul's competence.¹³⁸ Finally, he describes how the King acknowledged his argumentative skills and gave him three hundred dinars.¹³⁹

The disparity of the sources at hand calls for a closer examination. Existing research differently interprets the two reports as well as the actual event. It is worthwhile at this juncture to examine how these sources and the event itself were evaluated in previous scholarly literature.

3.2. Secondary literature

As previously mentioned, the Barcelona disputation has been a subject of very animated research since the second half of the 19th century. Many outstanding scholars have confronted their opinions on the event and its accounts in the course of the last 150 years, making it quite difficult for anyone, who wishes to summarize the previous research, to do so in a few paragraphs. This undertaking, although certainly interesting and enlightening, would exceed the limits of this work. Moreover, an exhaustive bibliography as well as a detailed analysis of historiographical methods and biases of earlier scholarship have already been offered elsewhere and there is no reason to overwhelm the reader with unnecessary bibliographical data.¹⁴⁰ Further,

Mayer in "Nachmanidova disputace", *Maskil* 4 (2004/2005), nos. 4-13.

134 Chavel, § 2-4, pp. 302-303.

135 For an illustration of Paul's dilettantish utilization of his sources see *Ibid.*, § 70, § 74, p. 315.

136 Chavel, § 5-6, p. 303. Cf. Mutius, p. 30.

137 Chavel, § 24, p. 306; § 43-47, p. 310; § 85, p. 316. Cf. Chazan, *Barcelona*, p. 124.

138 Chavel, § 8, p. 303-304; § 14, p. 305; § 55, p. 312; § 91, p. 317.

139 *Ibid.*, § 102, p. 319; § 108, p. 320. The lease of this sum from a Jewish merchant is attested in royal archives, see Cecil Roth, "The Disputation", p. 139.

140 Robert Chazan offers a discussion of the most important works in older scholarship in his *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 4-12. The book also has an exhaustive bibliography (pp. 243-251). Nina Caputo discusses the

since the 1980s, research on both medieval Jewish-Christian polemics in general and the Barcelona disputation in particular has seen a considerable blooming, stimulated by discoveries of hitherto unknown texts, and various paradigm-shifts in both medieval and Jewish historiography. The study of Jewish history in Medieval Spain has also recently undergone substantial reassessment.¹⁴¹ This work shall therefore concentrate on the more recent research and offer only a cursory glance at its relevant precursors.

3.2.1. The evaluation of sources

The fact that there are two disparate descriptions of the outline and outcome of the Barcelona disputation sets the agenda for research at least in its earlier phases. While still maintaining partisan positions regarding the evaluation of medieval Jewish-Christian relations, scholars found it extremely difficult to view the outcome of religious debates as anything other than gains or losses, and their depictions as truths or forgeries. Thus arose the initial dilemma of authors Grätz and Denifle, which dominated scholarship on the disputation for quite some time.¹⁴² Partisan attitudes on both sides were gradually replaced by growing awareness of the specific character of each source and the need for more nuanced questioning. Yitzhak Baer was one of the first to acknowledge that both sources were written for propagandistic purposes and therefore neither faithfully represented the actual discourse.¹⁴³ However, he still advocated for the superiority of the Hebrew text to the Latin one, which had been corrupted by the one-sidedness and miscomprehensions of its author.¹⁴⁴

In his commented translation of the Hebrew account into German, Hans-Georg von Mutius ascribed to both reports historical value while at the same time emphasizing that they transmit “only conditional reality distorted by polemical and propagandistic intentions.”¹⁴⁵ In his

previous historiography with regard to its different “narrative concerns” in Caputo, pp. 95-107. She also provides a short bibliographical note (p. 224, n. 24). A well-arranged commented bibliography was put together by Mutius, pp. 8-15. Jeremy Cohen also presents a short bibliography in his *Friars*, p. 110, n. 16.

141 This reevaluation can be best represented by the work of Mark Meyerson or David Nirenberg. For an overview see Alex Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain: An Historiographic Enigma”, *Medieval Encounters* 11 (2005), 7-36.

142 See Grätz, *Geschichte*, VII, 130-138; Denifle; Isidore Loeb, “La controverse de 1263 à Barcelone entre Paulus Christiani et Moïse ben Nahman”, *REJ* 15 (1887), 1-18. Last representative of this partisan attitude towards the sources was Hyam Maccoby (pp. 56-57), who was convinced of the complete inferiority of Latin account, calling it “a travesty of the disputation.” However, he did not claim that Nahmanides had won the disputation (as Chazan thinks he did, *Barcelona*, p. 11).

143 “Disputations”, p. 184. According to Baer, this fact does not diminish Nahmanides’ moral qualities: “Both Ramban and Peñafort were children of their time. The most important for them was to seal up the mouths of their adversaries, and Ramban didn’t fight only for his religion, but also for the existence of his folk.” It seems that this description stems more from Baer’s antagonistic notion of medieval Jewish-Christian relations and his “lachrymose” view of Jewish history, in which every interreligious confrontation represents another battle in the historical war for Jewish survival, than from a reasoned evaluation of the event itself.

144 Baer, “Disputations”, p. 184; idem, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961-66), I, 152. The “obvious bias” of Nahmanides, cautiously admitted in his earlier papier, remained unaddressed in Baer’s *History*.

145 Mutius, p. 17.

opinion, both texts suffer from similar shortcomings, and the only advantage of Nahmanides' account is its more detailed description.¹⁴⁶

This direction of research was brought further by Robert Chazan, who wrote extensively on the Barcelona disputation.¹⁴⁷ He too stepped out against blanket condemnation of the reliability of either source. In his opinion, both accounts contain distortions and embellishments, because they were written for different purposes and from different perspectives. Whereas the Latin report was written as an archival summary statement that would serve to justify royal orders for ongoing Christian missionary campaigns, the Hebrew polemical narrative was intended to buttress Jewish faith by pointing to inevitable future redemption and convince its readers of the futility of Christian proselytism.¹⁴⁸ One should try “on the basis of the shared and divergent perspectives of the two surviving sources to reconstruct, within the limits of the possible, the outlines of the historic confrontation in Barcelona.”¹⁴⁹ This might sound like an obvious statement. However, it was Chazan's work that paved the way for an evaluation of sources respectful to the specifics of their literary genres and upholding consciousness of the authors' intentions.

Recently, Nina Caputo discussed the Barcelona disputation in the broader context of Nahmanides' work and public activity.¹⁵⁰ She indicates that Nahmanides used his narrative not only to refute new Christian missionary argumentation, but to hand down to his contemporaries images of ideal and undesirable ways of acting in a Christian environment. She analyzed literary devices such as references to Talmudic texts and personal remarks he used to point to threats of apostasy and to present himself as an ideal type of Jewish leader.¹⁵¹ Caputo's analysis enables a broader evaluation of the importance of the Hebrew narrative not only as a manual for potential Jewish-Christian confrontation, but also as an outline of Jewish-Christian coexistence and of Jewish intra-communal relations.

3.2.2 The evaluation of the event: understanding the context

This work now turns to the evaluation of the disputation itself in scholarship: where do scholars look for its efficient causes, what were in their opinions the motivations of its participants, what

146 Throughout his work, Mutius carefully compared both sources and their description of the debate only to reach the conclusion that Nahmanides in his tractate distorted some arguments of his opponent, concealed his own shortcomings and added remarks he wouldn't dare to utter. From a literary perspective, his work seems to Mutius a “not particularly elaborated piece of casual writing.” (Mutius, p. 296.) The writer of the Latin account was in his opinion strongly influenced by *adversus Iudaeos* genre and thus moulded his work more according to literary conventions than actual reality. (Ibid., pp. 299-300.)

147 Apart from his substantial *Barcelona and Beyond* see his earlier “The Barcelona ‘Disputation’ of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response,” *Speculum* 52 (1977), 824-842; *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 71-114; and later *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, passim.

148 *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 40-41, 138-140.

149 Ibid., p. 45. For a reconstruction of the disputation according to this methodology see Ibid., pp. 50-79.

150 Caputo, pp. 91-127.

151 Ibid., pp. 107-118.

was its broader context?

Jeremy Cohen, in his seminal and influential work, *The Friars and the Jews*, saw the Barcelona disputation as a manifestation of so-called “mendicant anti-Judaism”, a novel theological approach to contemporary Judaism that emerged in the thirteenth century during an evolutionary period of Christian self-consciousness. This approach was based on the assumption that Jews have forsaken the mission ascribed to them by Augustine and that rabbinic Judaism is a heresy with no legitimate place in Christian society.¹⁵²

Robert Chazan disputed Cohen’s assumption that mendicant friars abandoned the Augustinian doctrine safeguarding Jewish existence in Western Christendom.¹⁵³ He argued that there is no evidence of a new ideological view of Judaism and the Jews. Rather, socio-cultural changes activated latently present Christian missionary urges, which in the course of the thirteenth century developed into ecclesiastical missionary campaigns led by mendicant friars. It was this campaign that subsequently “contributed to the increasingly negative perception of the Jews that developed in thirteenth-century western Christendom,” not vice versa.¹⁵⁴ The Barcelona disputation was in Chazan’s opinion a testing ground for innovative tactics developed by Friar Paul for this campaign.¹⁵⁵

Other scholars tried to look at the disputation in the context of thirteenth-century scholarly culture. Harvey Hames argued that the disputation “can be viewed, although not in the formalistic sense, as an example of a scholastic *disputatio* or the application of the *quodlibetales* to the field of inter-religious polemic”.¹⁵⁶ Alex Novikoff recently suggested that the Barcelona disputation was a part of a larger cultural and intellectual development he called a “culture of disputation”, of which the Dominicans were eminent representatives.¹⁵⁷ Thomas F. Glick tried to show that the Barcelona disputation was a continuation of the tradition of informal inter-religious scholarly interaction but with different performance rules. Structured in the image of a literary genre of medieval debate, it adopted a tendency of steering the outcome of the debate towards the expected result by means of public staging.¹⁵⁸

152 *Friars*, passim. In his more recent *Living Letters of the Law*, Cohen carefully revised his earlier theory, see above, n. 63.

153 *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 170-177.

154 “As a more-mature, self-confident, and aggressive Christian society emerged in thirteenth-century western Christendom and as that society began to reach out and address its message more and more intensely to its own membership and to its major monotheistic rival, the world of Islam, it is not at all surprising that part of this new energy should be directed at the older monotheistic sister community, the Jews. To the extent that the mendicant orders bore primary responsibility for the preaching effort in general, it was inevitable that they should shoulder the burden of missionizing among the Jews specifically. Again, no theory is called for; the old Augustinian view made ample provision for such proselytizing efforts.” *Ibid.*, p. 177.

155 *Ibid.*, p. 14; *idem*, *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 55-56.

156 Hames, “Reason and Faith”, p. 272.

157 Alex Novikoff, “Dialogue and Disputation in Medieval Thought and Society, 1050-1350” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2007). I was not able to consult the dissertation, but Alex Novikoff was kind enough to present to me his theory via e-mail (3 December 2008 and 19 January 2009).

158 Thomas F. Glick, “‘My Master, the Jew’: Observations on Interfaith Scholarly Interaction in the Middle Ages”, in *Jews, Muslims, and Christians In and Around the Crown of Aragon: Essays in Honour of Professor Elena Lourie*, ed. by Harvey J. Hames (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 157-182.

4. AUTHORITY AND APOSTASY IN THE BARCELONA DISPUTATION

4.1. Apostasy: an additional dimension of the polemic

Whether looking for possible causes in local social, intellectual, or cultural milieu, the theories brought up by the scholars have hitherto underestimated the “Jewish dimension” of the event. Captivated by the image of the disputation as an embodiment of Jewish-Christian confrontation *par excellence*, most scholars have marginalized the possibility that the actual confrontation might have been taking place on multiple levels.

It was only Nina Caputo, who recently suggested that “[t]he Hebrew disputation account engages in a multi-layered commentary on the condition of contemporary Jewish society.”¹⁵⁹ By closely examining Nahmanides’ presentation of the debate’s participants, it is evident that it is not bipolar at all. For the Jewish side, Nahmanides presents himself as the single voice of Judaism, with no alternative opinions heard.¹⁶⁰ He clearly embodies the ideal form of Judaism. On the Christian side, the King, whose favour was vitally important for the Jewish community and for Nahmanides himself, is presented as a strikingly sympathetic character. According to the Hebrew narrative, the King cannot be blamed for being a Christian, because he was born as such and has since childhood been accustomed to irrational Christian doctrine.¹⁶¹ The Christian clerics, who were also present, occasionally expressed what Nahmanides’ perceived as an approval of his arguments. However, their fear of the King prevented them from fully attesting to their adversary’s truth.¹⁶² Moreover, their role in the Hebrew narrative is fairly marginal – they too are certainly not its arch-villains.

This role is attributed to Paul Christian, who throughout the narrative is presented as the complete antithesis of Nahmanides. The Talmudic story Nahmanides used to introduce his narrative¹⁶³ presents an insight to Paul’s symbolic role in this text:

Jesus of Nazareth had five students: Matai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni, and Todah. When Matai was brought forward, he asked: Should Matai be killed? It is written, ‘When (*matai*) I will come and see the face of God.’ (Ps 42:3) They replied: No, Matai must be killed, as it is written ‘when (*matai*) will he die and perish?’ (Ps 41:6). When Nakai was brought forward, he asked: Should Nakai die? For it is written, ‘the innocent (*naki*) and righteous shall not kill you’ (Ex 23:7). They said to him: This is

¹⁵⁹ Caputo, p. 118.

¹⁶⁰ Unlike in the Latin account, cf. Baer, “Disputations”, p. 187, l. 79-81.

¹⁶¹ Chavel, § 47, pp. 310-311. However, one should be more cautious than Caputo in assuming that Nahmanides “seems to suggest that contemporary Christians were not idolaters because they did not purposefully betray their covenant with God.” (Caputo, p. 117)

¹⁶² Chavel, § 15-17, p. 305; § 67, p. 314.

¹⁶³ Hyam Maccoby vigorously denied the authenticity of this introduction (pp. 98-101). Cf. Caputo, p. 109. The Talmudic text is also present, although in an abridged form, in late-fourteenth-century MS Cambridge, Add. 1224.2. It is therefore highly probable that it formed an integral part of the narrative.

not so, Nakai should be killed, as it is written ‘in secret places he slays the innocent (*naki*)’ (Ps 10:8). When Nezer came forward he said: Shall he be killed? It is written ‘and a shoot (*nezer*) will grow from his roots’ (Is 11:1). They responded: This is not so, Nezer will be killed, as it is written ‘and you are cast out of your grave like a despised offshoot (*nezer*)’ (Is 14:19). When Buni came forward, he said: Shall he be killed? For the scripture says: ‘Israel, my son (*beni*), my firstborn’ (Ex 4:22). They said: No, Buni will be killed, it is written: ‘Behold, I kill your son (*binkha*), your firstborn’ (Ex 4:23). When Todah came forward, he said: Shall Todah be killed? For the Scripture says: ‘A song of thanksgiving (*todah*)’ (Ps 100:1). They said to him: This is not so, Todah will be killed, as it is written, ‘whoever offers sacrifice of thanksgiving (*todah*) offers me’ (Ps 50:23). And rabbi Solomon [i.e. Rashi] wrote that they [i.e. the apostles] were close to the government, and thus they [the Rabbis] needed to answer all their vain arguments.¹⁶⁴

According to Caputo, by introducing his narrative with this text Nahmanides tried to draw attention to the actual problem of apostasy and to connect his own record of the debate with similar encounters in the Jewish history, thus offering an essentially traditional instruction in dealing with the apostates.¹⁶⁵

While this is undeniably true, the typological image of Paul Christian that Nahmanides tried to create by means of this Talmudic text stemmed from a sensitive reflection of the challenge presented by Friar Paul’s methodology. Similar to the Talmudic text, Nahmanides pictures his debate not only as a polemic between a Jew and a Christian, but primarily as an encounter between a qualified scholar and a rebel, between a competent exegete and a dilettante, thus addressing the issues of exegetical authority as well. Paul, on the other hand, by engaging in a debate with Nahmanides, not only followed current Christian intellectual developments but also tried to offer to the Jews a solution to their contemporary questions as well, thus making his effort possibly even more efficient. This work shall now examine the way Paul addressed these issues in the debate with Nahmanides and elsewhere.

4.2. Understanding the aggadah: Paul’s attitude to rabbinic literature

Paul’s attitude towards post-biblical literature in the disputation differed substantially from the approach applied during the Maimonidean controversy or Talmud trial in Paris. It is a distinctive trait of the Barcelona disputation that Talmudic authority was not disputed as illegitimate or irrational but accepted by both parties as a common ground for the disputation. In fact, the acceptance of Talmudic authority was a cornerstone of Friar Paul’s argumentation. According to

¹⁶⁴ Chavel, § 1, p. 302; bSanh 43a. The translation of Nina Caputo (Caputo, pp. 108-109) is used with minor corrections.

¹⁶⁵ Caputo, p. 110, 118.

the Hebrew narrative: “Friar Paul claimed that he would prove from our Talmud that the Messiah attested by the prophets had come already.”¹⁶⁶ Similarly, according to the Latin report, he “proposed to the named Jewish teacher that he would with God’s help prove from common Scriptures [deemed] authoritative among the Jews the following...”¹⁶⁷

The Talmudic sources Friar Paul used to prove that that the Messiah had already come, that he is of godly origin, and that he was supposed to die for the salvation of mankind, can be divided into two categories, aggadic narrative¹⁶⁸ and rabbinic exegesis of the Bible. According to the Hebrew account, Paul not only adduced several Biblical *loci classici* of Jewish-Christian disputation,¹⁶⁹ but accompanied them with rabbinic interpretation, often drawn from midrashic compilations, supporting their messianic reading.¹⁷⁰ He also cited several aggadic stories which, when interpreted literally, suggest that the Messiah had been already born,¹⁷¹ that he was divine,¹⁷² or that he had to suffer in order to bring about the resurrection of the dead.¹⁷³

According to Chazan, who attempted to put the disputation into the context of mendicant missionary campaigns, Paul’s tactic was designed “to make any Jewish attack on Christian truth and thus any embarrassment to the Christian initiators of the discussion impossible.”¹⁷⁴ The utilization of Talmud ensured that an eventual defeat of Friar Paul would have no implications to the truth of Christianity. Simultaneously, the argumentation on the basis of authoritative Jewish texts could prove more efficient in bringing Jews to the baptismal font.

Although the advantages of this attitude are undeniable, reducing the rationale for using Talmud as common ground for the debate to mere utilitarianism would overshadow some interesting aspects of the debate. There is no reason to presume that Paul Christian’s tactic was *devised*, that he only *pretended* to believe the truth of Christianity could be proven from rabbinic texts. On the contrary, Nahmanides in his narrative seems to suggest that this conviction was authentic and one of the causes of Friar Paul’s conversion:

I turned to Friar Paul and told him: “Are *you* supposed to be a Jewish scholar (*hakham*), who found a new interpretation [of Psalm 110:1] and apostatised because of it? And *you* [dared to] ask the King to gather for you [other] Jewish

166 Chavel, § 7, p. 303.

167 Baer, “Disputations”, p.185, l. 11-14.

168 On the definition of aggadah see above, n. 46.

169 Gn 49:10, Dan 9:24-25 to prove that the Messiah had come (Chavel, § 11, p. 304; § 56, p. 312); Is 52:13, Ps 110:1, Lv 26:12, Gn 1:2 to prove that he is both God and man (§ 52, p. 311; § 89, p. 317; § 97, p. 318; § 99, p. 319), Is 52:13-53:12 to prove that he had to suffer (§ 25, p. 307).

170 Chavel, § 25-28, p. 307; § 52, p. 311.

171 jBer 17:2/*Lamentations Rabbah* 1:51 (Chavel, § 19, p. 306); bSanh 98a (§ 29, p. 307); *Derekh Erez Zuta*, chapter 1 (§ 69, p. 315). According to the Sanhedrin text the Messiah dwells in Rome – for Paul Christian a clear allusion to Roman (i.e. Catholic) religion.

172 *Yalkut Tehillim* § 869 (Chavel, § 94, p. 318).

173 *Yalkut Shimoni* on Isaiah, § 499, or *Pesikta rabbati*, chapter 36 (Chavel, § 54, p. 313; cf. Mutius, pp. 177-179). According to this aggadah, the suffering Messiah asks God to forgive Israel their sins. For Paul Christian, this might have been an allusion to Jesus Christ’s call on the cross (Luke 23:34).

174 Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 52.

scholars in order to dispute with them about the new interpretations you invented? Have we not heard all this before? Is there a single young cleric,¹⁷⁵ who would not raise this question to the Jews? This question is indeed very old.¹⁷⁶

In the Hebrew narrative we find no allegations of malevolence or venality so common in polemical literature. Throughout his account, Naḥmanides is very careful to present his adversary not as a villain, but as a complete dilettante, whose insufficient learning lead his exegesis astray: “Let me inform you that our sages of blessed memory did not intend to explain this verse [Gn 49:10] as referring to anything else, but a real kingship. But you do not understand the Law and *halakhah*, only a few *aggadot*, in which you have trained yourself.”¹⁷⁷

The plurality and occasional dissonance of interpretations is of course a fairly common phenomenon in Jewish exegesis. Naḥmanides himself in his Torah commentary engages in a creative dialogue with his great predecessors Rashi and Ibn Ezra and does not shy from addressing to them some harsh words.¹⁷⁸ However, Paul’s exegesis was not only faulty, but pernicious, because it inevitably lead to apostasy.

In Naḥmanides’ perspective, Paul was assuming the authority to interpret the Talmud, but for this task he lacked proper skills. Naḥmanides’ counter-arguments relied predominantly on pointing to Paul’s insufficient knowledge of Talmudic chronology and post-biblical history. He repeatedly pointed out that the biblical verses and *aggadot* cited by Friar Paul, even if interpreted literally, could not possibly refer to historical Jesus.¹⁷⁹ It should be noted that the correct use of historical chronology was of the utmost importance for Naḥmanides both in his Torah commentary¹⁸⁰ and messianic calculations.¹⁸¹

In one instance, Naḥmanides also implied that Friar Paul was unable to apply suitable exegetical methods on rabbinic texts, because he was not well versed in esoteric teaching. After Paul quoted a text from *Bereshit rabbah* (2:4) : “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gn 1:2) – this [refers to] the spirit of the anointed king [i.e. Messiah]”, claiming that the

175 Chavel’s edition has slightly unclear wording “*galah ve-tinok*” [a monk and/or a child]. The text was amended according to MS Cambridge, Add. 1224.2 (fol. 21r), which reads “*tinok galah*” [a tonsured child, i.e. young cleric].

176 Chavel, § 91, p. 317. Mutius speculates, without much evidence, that this particular Biblical text “could have substantially contributed to Paul Christian’s conversion.” (p. 242)

177 Chavel, § 14, p. 305.

178 See for example *Commentary* on Gn 9:18 (against Ibn Ezra), Gn 6:3, 19:24 (against Rashi). On Naḥmanides’ approach to his predecessors see Bernard Septimus, “ ‘Open Rebuke and Concealed Love’: Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition”, in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 11-34.

179 Chavel, § 28, p. 307; § 52, p. 312; § 98, p. 318

180 See Binyamin Singer, *Ramban: Classic Themes in Nachmanides’ Chumash Commentary*, 2 vols (Southfield, MI: Targum Press, 2005), I, 119-124.

181 “In [Naḥmanides’ messianic work] *Sefer ha-Geulah* historical data provide the basis for conclusions about symmetry, direction, and simultaneity of events in history. [...] Even simple chronology forces events into an order replete with meaning endowed by the mere fact of arrangement. Events must be arranged in the proper sequence before a meaningful story can be extracted from apparently random or unrelated details.” Caputo, p. 142.

Messiah therefore must be divine, the rabbi replied:

“Woe to him who knows nothing and thinks that he is a scholar and an expert. There is also written: ‘And the Spirit of God was hovering [over the waters] – this [refers to] the spirit of the First Man.’¹⁸² Does it mean that he was a God, too? He who does not know what is above and what is below¹⁸³ turns the words of living God in books upside down.”¹⁸⁴

Nahmanides’ point here is not that one should read a Talmudic passage in its proper context, because the cited dicta are not to be found next to each other. Rather, using a Mishnaic allusion to Kabbalistic inquiry, he claims that only esoteric, more precisely, Kabbalistic exegesis, can furnish a correct understanding of this particular aggadic text.

As showed by Elliot Wolfson, aggadic interpretation played a crucial role in Nahmanides’ understanding of Kabbalah.¹⁸⁵ Although certainly not a universally applicable approach to aggadah,¹⁸⁶ the Kabbalah presents a hermeneutical tool by means of which a scholar is able to distinguish between correct and incorrect interpretation strategies. A self-proclaimed expert therefore cannot do otherwise than deform the true meaning of the passage.

This conviction of the eminent role of Kabbalah in aggadic hermeneutic is also underlying Nahmanides’ well known dismissal of a story of the Messiah being born on the day of the destruction of the Temple, on the grounds that “this aggadah is either not true [according to its plain meaning], or it has a different esoteric meaning (*perush aher mi-sitrei ha-hakhamim*).”¹⁸⁷ Here, the plain meaning is repudiated because it contradicts Nahmanides’ strong conviction that the Messiah had not come, which to him was not only self-evident, but also had some Kabbalistic background.¹⁸⁸ It is now not important whether Nahmanides admitted the possibility of an alternative esoteric interpretation of this aggadah in a live debate with an apostate in the presence of many Christians, or whether he only dared to deny its literal meaning, as the Latin account suggests.¹⁸⁹ The message he tried to convey to his readership was

182 The dictum is not to be found in *Bereshit rabbah*. Chavel’s reference to 2:4 is misguided, the text referred to by Maccoby and Mutius (8:1) identifies God’s spirit with the Messiah, not with Adam. The closest match would be a mention in *Midrash Tehillim* 138:5. Cf. Mutius’ suggestion (pp. 273-274) that the edition of *Bereshit rabbah* Nahmanides used might have been structured according to *Yalkut Shimoni*, § 4.

183 Cf. mḤag 2:1. “Everyone, who speculates (*mistakel*) about these four things – what is above, what is below, what is before, what is after – it would be better if he were not born.”

184 Chavel, § 100, p. 319. Chavel’s text (“he who does not know what is above and what is below in books”) was amended according to MS Cambridge Add. 1224.2 (fol. 23r).

185 Elliot R. Wolfson, “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides’ Kabbalistic Hermeneutic”, *AJS Review* 14 (1982), 103-178 (p. 176).

186 Septimus, “Open Rebuke”, p. 19.

187 Chavel, § 22, p. 306. See Wolfson, pp. 169-171. Wolfson cites Sholem’s interesting suggestion that the esoteric meaning meant by Nahmanides was the secret of metempsychosis. See also Mutius, pp. 75-77.

188 Robert Chazan, “The Messianic Calculations of Nahmanides”, in *Rashi, 1040–1990: Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach*, ed. by Gabrielle Sed-Rajana (Paris: Cerf, 1993), pp. 631-637 (esp. pp. 636-637).

189 Baer, “Disputations”, p. 186, l. 40-42.

clear: only someone unaware of the esoteric teaching could interpret this aggadah according to its plain sense.

It is interesting to observe how in Friar Paul's approach to aggadah, the figure of the Christian Messiah occupies the role of Kabbalah in Nahmanides' hermeneutical system. Paraphrasing Wolfson, Paul Christian obviously did not think he could impose Christological exegesis on every aggadah. However, aggadah interpretation played eminent role in his understanding of Christianity and perhaps in his conversion too. The use of aggadah as a medium for the introduction of innovative ideas into an essentially conservative system has been characteristic for medieval Jewish philosophers and Kabbalists alike.¹⁹⁰ Just as early southern French Kabbalists strived to "interpret the aggadah in such a way as to make it into a mouthpiece for the fundamental truths of a new system of thought",¹⁹¹ Paul Christian turned to aggadah in his search for proofs of Christian truth. More precisely, Christianity offered him a powerful hermeneutical device to resolve a burning exegetical issue that Jewish communities in southern France had to face precisely at the time of his conversion.¹⁹² As already mentioned, the correct interpretation of aggadic narratives played an important role in the Maimonidean controversy.¹⁹³

The conviction that the person of Jesus is key to the proper understanding of the rabbinic canon is reflected in a Hebrew report of a disputation or disputations of Friar Paul with rabbis in Paris in early 1270s.¹⁹⁴ In this debate, the form and contents of which strongly resemble its Barcelona counterpart,¹⁹⁵ Paul Christian used a rabbinic aggadah to prove that the Messiah was a "man who had everything in him (*ish she-hakol bo*), i.e. Mishnah, Talmud, halakhot, and aggadot."¹⁹⁶ Jesus knew the entire rabbinic canon – he remains its interpreter *par excellence*.¹⁹⁷

It is within this internal Jewish exegetical context where one should search for the roots of Paul's innovative tactics. Jeremy Cohen speculated that while still a Jew, Friar Paul took part in the Maimonidean controversy "at the radical extreme of anti-Maimonist camp."¹⁹⁸ His approach to rabbinic literature was highly literalist, making him more sensitive to possible Christological interpretations of aggadah, and ultimately leading to his apostasy.¹⁹⁹ This hypothesis is indeed plausible. Paul was originally from Montpellier, where the Maimonidean

190 Frank Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism", in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible to the Middle Ages*, ed. by Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 313-355.

191 Saperstein, p. 15.

192 On the importance of aggadic exegesis in medieval Jewish thought see Saperstein, pp. 6-20.

193 See above, chapter 2.1.1. On the role of esoteric interpretations of aggadah in the controversy see Talmage, "Apples of Gold", p. 336.

194 For a thorough treatment of the disputation and its background see Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*.

195 On the similarity of the Barcelona and Paris debates see Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 337-338; Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, pp. 70-99.

196 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:62. See Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 338; Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 214.

197 It is interesting to observe that Raymond Martin in his *Capistrum Iudaeorum* used this aggadic text primarily to prove that the Messiah is both God and man (Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 215).

198 Cohen, "Mentality", p. 39.

199 Ibid.

controversy broke out for the first time.²⁰⁰ His literalist attitude to aggadah is not only attested to in his arguments but is also criticized in an already mentioned letter of Rabbi Jacob ben Elijah.²⁰¹

However, Paul was not exclusively a literalist. In his search for the Christological interpretations of the aggadah, he occasionally expounded it allegorically as well.²⁰² His polemical method was rooted in a conviction that proper interpretation of aggadah, both literal and allegorical, can reveal hidden truths. This would point rather to some philosophical or early kabbalistic background.²⁰³ Describing the philosophical attitude to aggadah, Marc Saperstein wrote:

[M]aimonides, the medieval religious philosopher, is able to speak through the words of the sages, and the aggadic utterances, appropriately reinterpreted, become expressions of a world view that the rabbis would hardly have recognized as their own. It is impressive how easily this appears to be done, how naturally the aggadah is mustered for the service of the philosopher, how pliant it becomes in the hands of the master dialectician. Maimonides showed, how the aggadah could serve as an effective weapon for the allegiance of Jewish minds.²⁰⁴

It is surprising to what extent these words apply to Friar Paul's use of aggadah as well, when replacing all mentions of "philosophy" with "Christianity". Paul's methodology reveals deeper consonance with rationalist attitudes to aggadah than with anti-rationalist attitudes. It is more likely that Provençal rationalism triggered Paul's pursuit of some alternative hermeneutical keys to aggadic material, which he ultimately found in Christianity. As aptly put by Nina Caputo:

[F]riar Paul claimed to possess the key necessary for unlocking the secrets of Jewish tradition and interpretation contained in the Talmud, both of which, he suggested, had been controlled and concealed since the time of the Talmud by rabbis and Jewish teachers. His conversion to the truth, his unquestioning acceptance of Christian dogma as the proper interpretative apparatus enabled him – at least in the eyes of his fellow Christians – to wrestle interpretive authority away from Nahmanides.²⁰⁵

200 See above, chapter 2.1.1.

201 "Iggeret", pp. 3-5.

202 Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmudisputation*, p. 197.

203 It is also doubtful, whether an "extreme anti-Maimonist" would try to buttress his arguments by referring to "a greatest [Jewish] scholar in the last four hundred years, mestre Moses of Egypt [i.e. Maimonides]", Chavel, § 72, p. 315. However, it is also possible that Nahmanides presents in his narrative a distorted version of Paul's argumentation.

204 Saperstein, p. 20.

205 Caputo, p. 125.

In this paragraph, Caputo not only correctly describes Friar Paul's methodology of interpretation of rabbinic scriptures, but connects it with another important aspect of his activity: questioning the authority of the rabbis with whom he debated. The last chapter shall therefore examine how Paul's exegetical methodology influenced the way he perceived rabbinic authority.

4.3. Rabbis as heretics: Paul's attitude to rabbinic authority

In the course of the thirteenth century, the Church grew increasingly sensitive to issues of legitimate juridical and exegetical authority. This sensitivity extended itself to include post-biblical literature and Jewish internal disputes as well. The Talmud and its exegetical methods were perceived as threats to the primacy of Biblical law and its literal, or carnal, exegesis, the two main pillars upon which the Augustinian policy of Jewish toleration stood. Moreover, its irrational contents were blinding Jewish reason, thus making the Jews unable to accept rational proofs of Christian faith.

Paul's image of rabbinic literature differed. In his opinion, the Talmud, and especially the aggadah, could convey Christian truth as well. He utilized Christological interpretation as a hermeneutical tool to neutralize problematic aggadah. However, in his attempts to convince the Jews of the fact that their own texts can convey Christian truth, Paul had to overcome one crucial objection. According to the Hebrew narrative, Nahmanides articulated this objection at the very beginning of the debate, in his opening speech:

And if these [i.e. Talmudic] sages believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was the truth and his religion was true, and if it is possible to prove it from what they wrote, as Friar Paul claims, how come they persisted in Jewish religion and their former rite? Because they were Jews, they remained Jews for their whole lives, and died Jews, them, their sons and their students, who listened to the words coming out of their mouths. [...] And if they did believe in Jesus, how come they did not [apostatise] like Friar Paul, who obviously understands their words better than they did themselves?²⁰⁶

Although Friar Paul's claim that he would prove the advent of the Messiah did not specifically mention Jesus,²⁰⁷ the structure of his argument made clear that his aim was to eventually prove that this Messiah was Jesus Christ. Nahmanides' objection was therefore relevant: how was it possible that the rabbis knew about the advent of the Messiah and remained Jews nevertheless? How come their followers ignored their messianic sayings and exegesis? Under such circumstances, is it acceptable to view Talmudic texts through the prism of Christianity?

²⁰⁶ Chavel, § 8, p. 303.

²⁰⁷ This was precisely the objection of royal judge mestre Guillem when Nahmanides tried to prove the inapplicability of the Talmudic sayings to historical Jesus. See Chavel, § 23, p. 306.

According to the Hebrew record, Paul Christian did not directly address this objection. However, he did not ignore it. On the contrary, the solution of this question lay at the core of his argument. Explaining the persistence of the Jewish elite in their former religion as a heresy, he answered it by attacking the legitimacy of rabbinic authority.

At the very beginning of the debate, Paul Christian made an important proclamation designed to prepare the ground for his claims. According to the Latin account, Paul proved to Naḥmanides, “that he should not be called *magister*, because since the time of Christ’s passion, no Jew ought to be called by this title. He [i.e. Naḥmanides] admitted that this had been true at least for the last eight hundred years.”²⁰⁸ Similar argument can be found in the Hebrew account, where it is incorporated into a discussion of verse Gn 49:10. According to this record, Paul claimed that after the disappearance of Talmudic *semikhah*, Jews lost all form of authority, or *memshalah*. Therefore, no one should use the title “mestre”, i.e. *rabbi*. Naḥmanides tried to evade the challenge by claiming that “mestre” is an equivalent of a different title, *rav*, and added, “by way of courtesy”, that he does not even consider himself to be a good student.²⁰⁹

It has been generally assumed that the writer of the Latin account took the argument out of its proper context, i.e. the interpretation of Gn 49:10. However, it is more likely that the Latin report offers an interesting insight into Paul’s tactics, which was overshadowed in the Hebrew text. The dismissal of his opponent’s title played an important role in Paul’s argumentation. It was its imminent presupposition. Paul was not only trying to show that Talmud had to be interpreted Christologically. He also wanted to use it to prove that the contemporary rabbinic elite was no longer a legitimate source of authority. Using the current Christian terminology, it was a heretical deviation from original Judaism.

The nature of Paul’s opposition to “heretical” rabbinic leadership is reflected clearly in a Hebrew record of a disputation he held later in Paris.

In the year 33 of the sixth millenium [i.e. 1272-73]²¹⁰ the heretic Paul came and summoned all the rabbis, and thus did he address them before the masses of Paris and the chief clerics assembled there: Hear me, ‘house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel’. (Jer 2:4) Know that if you do not obey and repent and leave your faith for superior beliefs that I shall demonstrate to you, I will not desist until I demonstrate my vengeance upon you, and I will exact the very blood of your lives. For I wish to prove to you that you are without faith, a people called Bougres, heretics, worthy of being burned. I will pronounce the questions – on the basis of each of which you deserve to be put to death. Now, take counsel and summon all of your great sages and respond to me without delay; for so I

208 Baer, “Disputations”, p. 185 l. 21-24.

209 Chavel, § 13-14, pp. 314-315.

210 On the unclear datation see Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, pp. 134-135.

have been commanded by the king to bring you to redemption and to perfection.²¹¹

If it is obvious from rabbinic scriptures that the Messiah had already come and that after his coming the Jews would no longer have authority, their persistence in Jewish faith must be seen as an act of rebellion. In Friar Paul's perspective, the rabbis and their students up until his time must have either consciously or out of ignorance concealed the interpretation of their own scriptures in order to usurp authority that did not belong to them. In one instance, Paul reproached the Jewish scholar: "For how long are you going to mislead the whole world and read as if you had some knowledge? You don't even know what is coming out of your mouth, you are a complete ignorant."²¹²

We can see that Paul's successor Raymond Martin, who curiously might have been present at the disputations in Paris,²¹³ adopted similar view of Jewish authority. Summarizing Martin's *Capistrum Iudaeorum*, Cohen wrote:

As opposed to the rabbis of the Talmud, who occasionally did acknowledge the messianic import of Christological testimonies in the Scripture, "modern" Jews, led by the great medieval Jewish exegete "Rabbi Solomon [ben Isaac of Troyes, or Rashi] and all of his successors," have deliberately obscured and perverted their correct interpretation. This they have done "more out of wickedness than out of ignorance."²¹⁴

In his *Pugio fidei*, Martin also used Paul's distinction between rabbis of the Talmud and Jewish sages of his time. In Cohen's words:

[According to Martin, the contemporary rabbis] maintain the heretical error and satanic loyalties of the classical rabbis, and compound them. With deliberate malice they falsely deny or deceptively remove all vestiges of Christian truth from their literature, and their current religious observances have no value for the church. Rather, they pose a clear and present danger to Christians and Christendom...²¹⁵

It is possible that Paul's opposition to rabbinic leadership is also reflected in the writings of

211 Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 337; Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 144. Cohen's translation is used here.

212 Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 186.

213 Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 352.

214 *Ibid.*, p. 351.

215 *Ibid.*, p. 358.

Thomas Aquinas, who resided in Paris at the time of Paul's activity.²¹⁶ In a famous response to the question in his *Summa theologiae* "whether the persecutors of Christ recognized him", Thomas wrote:

Among the Jews some were elders [*maiores*] and some were uneducated [*minores*]. The elders, who were called rulers [*principes*], knew [...] that he [i.e. Jesus] was the Messiah promised in the Law; for they saw in him those signs which the prophets had predicted for the future. Yet they were ignorant of the mystery of his divinity... But their ignorance did not excuse them from crime, because it was, as it were, voluntary ignorance [*ignorantia affectata*]. For they saw manifest signs of his divinity; yet they perverted them out of hatred and envy of Christ; neither would they believe His words, when he proclaimed that he was the Son of God... But the uneducated, namely the common folk, who had not understood the mysteries of the Scriptures, did not fully comprehend that he was the Christ or the Son of God. For although some of them believed in him, the multitude did not. And if they doubted sometimes, [...] they were deceived afterwards by their rulers, so that they did not believe in him to be the Son of God or Christ.²¹⁷

Analyzing Thomas' distinction between educated and uneducated Jews and his emphasis on the role of intentionality in the appraisal of their actions, Cohen notes "how close the Thomistic understanding of the crucifixion comes to identifying the educated Jews of Jesus' days as heretics..."²¹⁸ This is undeniably true and this remark applies as well to Paul's understanding of rabbinic exegesis and his perception of the educated Jews of his own days.

In the course of the debate in Paris, Paul too dealt with the Jewish role in the "deicide". According to the Hebrew record, he adduced a hitherto unidentified midrash to prove that the Jews killed God consciously.²¹⁹ This was the last step in the shift from the original Augustinian doctrine of Jewish ignorance of Jesus' messianic title and divinity through Lombard's and Aquinas' belief that Jews recognized Jesus as their Messiah, but were unaware of his divinity, to Duns Scotus' claim that Jews consciously committed deicide.²²⁰ Unsurprisingly, Cohen claimed that "professors at the University of Paris, and Dominican and Franciscan friars in particular, had, in effect, overturned the Augustinian tradition of Jewish ignorance."²²¹ It seems that Friar Paul's arguments presented in Paris might have played an important role in this development. It

²¹⁶ Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 339-340.

²¹⁷ *ST IIIa* q. 47 a. 5.

²¹⁸ Cohen, *Living Letters*, p. 373.

²¹⁹ Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, p. 228.

²²⁰ Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 81-82.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

is, after all, an inevitable consequence of the view of the rabbis, or Jewish elders, as a heretical power-thirsty elite determined to preserve their supremacy at all costs.

Examining Paul's challenge to rabbinic authority, it was necessary to temporarily turn away from the Barcelona disputation and its records and investigate some later sources of Paul's activity. Neither record of the Barcelona disputation attests to such straightforward condemnation of the rabbinic authority as heretical as the one presented in Paris. It is presumable that specific traits of Paul's argumentation underwent some development between the early 1260s and the early 1270s. But the future direction of Paul's argument is clearly visible in his reproach of Naḥmanides recorded only in the Latin text: "A Talmudic authority²²² was adduced [by Friar Paul against Naḥmanides] which clearly said [the Messiah] would come even today if they would listen to his voice and not harden their hearts, as it is written in the Psalm [94:7-8]..."²²³ From Paul's perspective, this Talmudic narrative proves that Jewish redemption is an ever-present possibility, but the conscious obstinacy of the rabbis effectively hinders its fulfilment.

It should not be surprising that Naḥmanides in his narrative may have tried to minimize the challenge presented by Friar Paul to his authority. In fact, he did all he could to present himself as the *ultimate* Jewish authority. Numerous remarks on Paul's insufficient learning support the impression that it was extremely important for Naḥmanides to address Paul's challenge to his authority as subtly as possible. By presenting himself as a scholar *par excellence* and his opponent as an ignoramus, he not only identified the roots of Paul's apostasy, but also tried to defend his own interpretative authority.

The roots of Friar Paul's challenge to rabbinic authority remain open to discussion. That it had its background in contemporary Christian developments is undeniable. The gradual shift from the Augustinian doctrine of Jewish witness to the perception of the Jews as rebellious heretics has been already described and various explanations offered.²²⁴ The medieval Christian imagery formed Paul's worldview and its influence on his activity had already been carefully considered. In his negative appreciation of rabbinic Judaism, Paul surely followed the Christian trends of his time.

However, it is important to note that the notion of heretical nature within Jewish post-biblical traditions was for the first time explicitly underscored by apostates. Although Nicholas Donin and Paul Christian used different tactics and their attitudes to rabbinic literature differed substantially, they both shared the opposition to the perceived illegitimate authority of the rabbis. This fact should stimulate further research on the connection between apostasy and

²²² This is the second part of the narrative in bSanh 98a Friar Paul used to prove that the Messiah had already come: "[Rabbi Joshua ben Levi asked the Messiah he met in front of the gates of Rome:] 'When will you come, Master?' [The Messiah] answered: 'Today.' [Rabbi Joshua] returned to Elijah, who asked him: 'What did he say to you?' [...] [Rabbi Joshua answered:] 'He spoke falsely to me, he said that he would come today, but has not.' [Elijah] answered him, 'In fact, he said: Today, if you will hear his voice [Ps 94:7].'"

²²³ Baer, "Disputations", p. 186, l. 45-47.

²²⁴ See above, chapter one.

internal conflicts in medieval Jewish society. If apostasy is regarded not only as a sign of weakness, a symptom of inability to sustain the pressure of majority society and its foreign influences, or simply an “easy way out” of inferior conditions, which it was not necessarily, but also as an extreme way of dealing with individual and communal problems, there might necessarily emerge a further dimension of Jewish intra-communal relations that could effectively shed more light on the development of Christian anti-Jewish polemics as well.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence available regarding Friar Paul’s biography before his baptism. Obviously, when speculating over possible personal motivations, one is always on shaky grounds. However, it is possible to propose on the basis of available material that in the story of Paul’s life and activity, apostasy and opposition to rabbinic authority went hand in hand.

The most specific and reliable information regarding Paul’s Jewish background can be found in the previously mentioned letter of Rabbi Jacob ben Elijah. Addressing the circumstances of Paul’s apostasy, he first mentions his distinguished origin and then proceeds to describe the roots of his alienation from the community:

Behold, sir, you are Saul, you were borrowed [*sha’ul*] from the Lord. You were created with a clear, untainted soul, born in holiness and purity. The soul of your father which did not instill impurity; and your mother, who followed a path of meticulous observance; and your numerous honoured relatives – wise [*hakhamim*], sagacious, compassionate, faithful and Godfearing – who would have believed that a formidable enemy, a stone men strike and stumble over, would have risen from among them? It was the sin of our youth, secretly hating their brothers, speaking peace but intending malice, when the fire of stormy controversy raged among them and the creditor came to collect both property and souls, that prevented us from finding peace. The slanderers were brood of sinful men, they assumed leadership and caused division between brothers. They beheld false and fraudulent visions, espoused a foreign faith, and enkindled the fire; children spoke impudently, and the lowly with harshness to the venerable. Accordingly, this affliction befell us. When I too was there, I joined them as one of them. And so words fail me; for I am ashamed and reproach myself for the sins of my youth.²²⁵

It is almost certain that Jacob ben Elijah describes here the Maimonidean controversy in early 1230s. In his description, Rabbi Jacob points to an important social dimension of this controversy, the conflict between the aristocratic rationalist elite and younger anti-rationalists of lower pedigree “speaking harshly to the venerable” and “assuming leadership”. Most of the Provençal, Aragonian, and Catalan aristocracy, among them families using the title *nasi*, pl.

²²⁵ “Iggeret”, p. 21. Translated by Jeremy Cohen (“Mentality”, p. 38).

nesi'im, sided with the rationalists. Maimonides and his works represented their cultural and educational ideal.²²⁶ Their opponents on the other hand, although not of noble descent, assumed authority, because they felt that philosophical leanings of the aristocratic elite would gradually lead to the abandonment of Judaism.²²⁷ Septimus noted how deeply the controversy was intertwined with the socio-communal struggle between the *nesi'im* and anti-aristocratic rabbinic leadership.²²⁸ Especially in Barcelona, the power of local aristocrats, such as the Ibn H̄izdai brothers, was at the same period challenged by an essentially anti-rationalist group “which combined impressive spiritual authority and politico-economic influence,” led by Naḥmanides and Samuel ha-Sardi.²²⁹ The lower status of leading anti-rationalists had therefore been repeatedly brought into the debate by the rationalists. This included attacks on the legitimacy of Naḥmanides’ cousin Jonah Gerondi.²³⁰ Rabbi Jacob in his letter regrets the anti-rationalist leanings of his youth.²³¹ However he does not mention on which side Friar Paul, then Saul, stood. But he made sufficiently clear that this conflict played an important role in Paul’s subsequent anti-Jewish activity.

The relationship between Paul and his former co-religionists from the local community remained complicated for a long time after his conversion. Rabbi Jacob mentions several types of Paul’s attacks on Montpellier Jews. He reproaches him for an attack on Jewish prayer,²³² involvement in forced missionary sermons,²³³ and in exhumations of Jewish corpses.²³⁴ Joseph Shatzmiller tried to connect the last activity with Inquisitorial investigations regarding apostasy of baptized Jews.²³⁵ However, this rather reflects Paul’s involvement in the purchase of a Jewish cemetery in Montpellier by local monastery in 1263. In the same year when the Barcelona disputation took place, King James gave the old Jewish cemetery to a monastery and the monastery paid the Jews to transfer the bodies to a different location.²³⁶ It is very probable that this is the “moving of the dead from their places” mentioned in the letter.²³⁷ It might also not be

²²⁶ Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 63, 72.

²²⁷ In Castile, the situation was different and the *nesi'im* were more inclined to the anti-rationalist cause. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70; Saperstein, pp. 170-172.

²²⁹ Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, p. 65.

²³⁰ For Naḥmanides’ apology of rabbi Jonah see Chavel, *Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Naḥman*, I, 353-364.

²³¹ The sincerity of his repentance is showed by the fact that he later wrote a commentary on *Moreh nevukhim*. Cohen, “Mentality”, p. 39.

²³² According to Ragacs, Jacob could have meant Paul’s accusation that Jews move their head to form a cross during prayer, pronounced during the debate in Paris (*Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, pp. 191-192). I think that Paul’s attack was aimed rather at the vanity of post-biblical Jewish religious life as such: “[You said] that in our prayer we do not raise our voice to our God and that he would not listen to our lips praising [him] and singing psalms...” “Iggeret”, pp. 17-18.

²³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²³⁵ “Paulus Christiani, un aspect de son activité anti-juive”, in *Hommage à Georges Vajda: études d’histoire et de pensée juives*, ed. by Gérard Nahon and Charles Touati (Leuven: Peeters, 1980), pp. 203-217.

²³⁶ Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), p. 234.

²³⁷ This would of course mean that 1263 is a *terminus a quo* for composition of the letter.

a coincidence that in 1271, when Paul was active in Paris, the local faculty promulgated a decree forbidding Jews to practice medicine among Catholics. This ban had a great impact on the Jews in Montpellier, which was a famous centre of medical studies and many local rabbis were also active as professors of medicine and physicians.²³⁸ It is worth mentioning that medicine was also Nahmanides' occupation and it is possible that he had practised it in Montpellier as well, along with Jonah Gerondi.²³⁹

In the case of Paul's opposition to rabbinic authority, acknowledging some influences of the aristocratic-rationalist group on Paul would be sensible.²⁴⁰ His attitude to aggadah was similar to that of the rationalists. If during the controversy Paul stood closer to the side of the aristocrats and rationalists, his later challenge to Nahmanides' authority would not be surprising at all. If, during the controversy, the questions of exegesis and legitimacy were used in a struggle for power, it would not be surprising if this struggle were later transposed by an apostate into the anti-Jewish polemics and exploited in order to increase its efficacy. And if Paul continued to interfere with the affairs of Montpellier Jews even long after his conversion, he probably would be in some way influenced by the conflicts of the past.

Identifying the roots and examining the development of Paul's polemical tactics enables an understanding of not only the changes of patterns in medieval Christian anti-Jewish debate, but also some traits of Jewish response to Christian polemic as well. By engaging in a debate with an apostate, the Jewish disputants were dealing with a challenge of which Christianity was only one part. Nahmanides used Talmudic texts as well as spontaneous remarks to address issues brought into the debate by Paul, such as the correct interpretation of Talmudic aggadah, the legitimacy of rabbinic exegesis and authority, and the reasons for apostasy. He used his narrative not only to provide answers to Christian missionary arguments but also to buttress a correct understanding of the Jewish faith and communal affairs among his readership.

²³⁸ Isaac Alteras, "Jewish Physicians in Southern France during the 13th and 14th Centuries", *JQR* 68 (1978), 209-223 (pp. 218-219).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218; Silver, p. 152, n. 1. It is worth noticing that when Paul during the Paris debate tried to prove the existence of prophecy at the time of Second Temple, he used the same arguments as Jonah Gerondi in his *Commentary to Pirkei Avot* (Ragacs, *Die zweite Talmuddisputation*, pp. 169-170).

²⁴⁰ Saperstein noted that some rabbis and Talmudists were subjected to harsh critique from the adherents of philosophy, who accused them of intellectual narrowness and excessive materialism: "Various historical developments – the emergence of a professional rabbinical class, royal policies that placed significant economic opportunities within the reach of men recognized by their communities as religious leaders, the generally increasing economic pressure which impelled men to take advantage of these opportunities – seem to have created a group of rabbinic leaders who aroused powerful resentment in sensitive souls." Saperstein, pp. 178-179.

5. CONCLUSION

What does the Barcelona disputation indicate about the Jewish-Christian confrontation in thirteenth-century Europe? Where lies its import and the import of its study for an understanding of this dramatic period of Jewish-Christian relations?

The engagement of apostates and assumption of public format brought the debate once and for all behind the walls of the academy. From the thirteenth century onward, the disputations became a public affair and for that reason, much more than the mere exchange of thoughts was at stake. We have seen that the missionary argumentation developed by Friar Paul was probably marked by his “pre-conversion” attempts to find an explanation of problematic rabbinic aggadah. His stance to rabbinic authority might have on the other hand been influenced by the socio-communal conflict in Montpellier connected with the Maimonidean controversy. For his opponents it was therefore crucial to tackle Paul’s arguments not only in order to hinder Christian proselytizing attempts but also to deal with internal disputes as well. Although one sometimes has to look for this “internal” dimension behind the lines of their polemical treatises, it is important to bear in mind that in Jewish-Christian polemics the apostates served as channels for articulation of significant Jewish issues as well.

Furthermore, the reception of Paul’s notion of rabbinic authority and its “heretical” nature in the works of later Christian polemicists and thinkers such as Raymond Martin or Thomas Aquinas indicate that the ideas developed by Paul in the dialogue with his Jewish past left a lasting imprint on later forms of Christian anti-Jewish polemics as well. This would suggest that in the evolution of Christian anti-Jewish imagery, the Jews were not only passive objects, but that their internal debates and quarrels brought into the polemical arena by the apostates influenced the way Christians perceived them and approached them with their missionary message. It is clear that this would certainly not be possible if they were completely dissimilar to issues that drew the attention of Christians of that period. It was precisely this compatibility with the anti-Jewish imagery that developed in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that enabled their re-interpretation and incorporation into the system of Christian polemic. Although certainly not influencing its main direction, the “Jewish” import of the apostates shaped the structure of anti-Jewish polemics to a considerable extent. It would therefore be desirable to examine the role of later apostates, such as Joshua Lorki or Abner of Burgos, in the development of anti-Jewish polemics in order to determine their relation to its preceding stages and the evolution of their thought with regard to contemporary Jewish social and religious issues.

The Barcelona disputation marks a new, more sophisticated and dangerous stage of Jewish-Christian polemics. But its complexity also proves that this polemic was formed by a network of various influences that defies simplistic explanations. Hopefully, this thesis provides an insight into at least some of its aspects.

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