

Anonymus. *Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem thematicum*. Edited by Ulisse Cecini, Óscar de la Cruz Palma, Alexander Fidora, and Isaac Lampurlanés Farré. *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 291A. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021. lix + 442 p. ISBN: 9782503594934. Hardback: € 295

Reviewed by YOSI YISRAELI
Bar-Ilan University
yosi.yisraeli@biu.ac.il

The trial and the burning of the Talmud in Paris of the 1240s is among the most famous and tragic episodes in the medieval drama of Jewish-Christian relations. Yet, as historians are aware, this complicated affair amounts to much more than a set of anti-Jewish policies and prejudices. In fact, the Christian struggle with the Talmud captures much of the dynamics through which Jewish and Christian orthodoxies evolved together – and often against each other – in the late middle age. In the process, it invigorated one of the most sophisticated and ambitious projects of medieval cultural transmission, the translation of portions of the Talmud into Latin. The invaluable edition at hand presents a key part of this enterprise, the *Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem thematicum* – a massive collection of approximately eighteen-hundred Talmudic passages, carefully and soberly translated from Hebrew and Aramaic into Latin, organised into thirteen topics, and supplemented by a set of “critical” annotations, references, glossaries, and transcriptions of Hebrew words with their interpretation. A tangled mirror maze of multi-linguistic and inter-religious reflections.

As the title betrays, the text is a revision of an older sibling, the *Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, published in the previous volume of this series (*Corpus christianorum continuatio mediavalis* 291). Both are the fruits of the “Latin-Talmud” project that assembled a remarkable group of scholars at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Deciphering and annotating such convoluted texts, the contribution of these editions to the field can hardly be overstated. Allowing a wide audience to explore momentous sources that were previously accessible only to very few committed specialists, they will surely invite historians to rethink this episode and its wide-ranging effects. To be a little bit more specific about the promises that these editions hold, a few words on the affair and its codicological history are due.

In 1239 a Jewish convert named Nicholas Donin, who had a long bitter dispute with his former Jewish community, sent pope Gregory IX a letter containing thirty-five accusations against the Talmud – stretching from the stupidity and insanity of the Talmud's fables that attribute God human qualities; through the rebellious and heretical presumption of its sages to put themselves above the Law of Moses; and up to its blasphemies and hostilities against Jesus, Mary and the Church. Following these allegations, Gregory IX appealed to rulers across the continent, urging them to confiscate the books of the Talmud from their Jewish subjects and conduct a thorough inquiry. King Louis IX was the most enthused monarch to

comply, and thus an inquisitorial procedure against the Talmud was set in motion in Paris, which resulted in the condemnation of the Talmud and its public burning in 1241/1242. The Jews of France, who dreaded the devastating consequences of this new policy, tried to appeal. In 1244 their complaints found a more sympathetic ear with the new pope, Innocent IV, who instructed his legate to the region, Odo of Châteauroux, to review the case. It was as part of this long review – which ended in 1248 with another condemnation of the Talmud – that a massive translation and organisation of Jewish-rabbinic materials was undertaken, producing among other texts the two versions of the *Extractiones de Talmud*. One, sequential, that presented the translations by the sequence of their appearance in the Talmud, and a later, thematic, that reorganised the materials by the following thirteen topics: i) The authority of the Talmud. ii) The sages and *magistri* of the Talmud. iii) Blasphemies against Christ and the Virgin Mary. iv) Blasphemies against God. v) Assaults against Christians. vi) The errors of the Talmud. vii) Sorcery. viii) Dreams. ix) The world to come and the afterlife. x) The Messiah. xi) The stupidities of the Talmud. xii) Vileness and impurity. xiii) Fables. As the editors of the volume carefully show, the thematic *Extractiones* was not a mere rearrangement of the sequential version. Its authors made conscious and purposeful changes. They reworked some of the translations, added passages (utilising the other Latin sources that were composed during those years), and wrote a new prologue.

At some point, all the materials concerning the case – Donin’s thirty-five accusations, other Latin translations of Talmudic materials that he made, translation of Rashi’s biblical commentaries, translations of Hebrew liturgy, correspondence of the papal curia, confessions of the rabbis who came to testify, the formal condemnations, and the two *Extractiones* – were edited together in special “dossiers” dedicated to the affair. One of them, ms. Paris BNF Lat. 16558, that survived most completely, became the main source for historians. It offered scholars such as Chen Merchavia a firm ground upon which they could begin the enormous task of mapping and assessing the complicated and unique set of texts that comprised the Paris affair. But the dossier also granted the materials an integrative, harmonised, and unifying framework, that they did not necessarily have in their original form.

The editions of the *Extractiones* (together with other publications by members of the “Latin-Talmud” project) go a long way to amend this unconscious bias. The careful introductions, indexes and critical apparati serve as a constant reminder that the products of the affair were not univocal. They were composed separately, and each had its own manuscript tradition. Accordingly, they may have a much richer and varied plethora of stories to tell. The editors already make this case as they glean new details through the differences they find between the texts. And most significantly, they even propose a historical framework that would account for the production of the two competing *Extractiones*.

The thematic *Extractiones*, as the editors point out, channelled the abundance of newly translated materials into polemical categories that supported the final condemnation of the Talmud in 1248. As they compellingly suggest, this effort was required precisely because the

outcome of the review process was uncertain. Forces within the Church (perhaps including Innocent IV) expected it to conclude with a moderation or even complete retraction of the initial condemnation. Thus, the production of the thematic *Extractiones* was “the outcome of this tug-of-war” between the hardliners, who wanted to maintain the strident policy against the Talmud, and those willing to take a more tolerant approach (p. xii).

The implications of this narrative go beyond the Paris affair, for it opens new paths for investigating the intellectual heteroglossia behind the ecclesiastical interest in the Talmud. A few years after the Talmud was condemned and burned in Paris, rabbinic materials were cast to play a very different role on the ecclesiastical stage. Not as subject to condemnation, but as a source of Christian truths. As demonstrated most famously in the Barcelona disputation of 1263, some Christian theologians now argued that Talmudic teachings contained Christological testimonies – a sensational claim that would feed the fervour of Christian Hebraism in the centuries to come. Yet, allegedly, this new interest in rabbinic traditions stood in stark contrast to the anti-Talmudic campaign in Paris. How could these two conflicting trajectories of Christian reading in the Talmud emerge in such a close vicinity to each other and in overlapping circles? To this point, we do not have good answers. But if the two *Extractiones* already embody different Christian approaches or priorities toward rabbinic traditions, they may provide us some good leads. Is it possible that the sequential *Extractiones* already reflects a much more ambitious and curious incentive than a mere castigation of the Talmud as heretical tractate, in the lines suggested by Donin’s accusations? There are plenty of materials within the *Extractiones* that may support such a hypothesis. And if we keep in mind that it did not circulate only as a part of an anti-Talmudic dossier, it may not seem so farfetched. We are now in a new position to pursue such questions, as we can read the two *Extractiones* against other Latin texts that applied rabbinic materials for various purposes.

Yet this is but one example of what historians can do with these editions at their disposal. In other venues of research, the *Extractiones* could be read against Hebrew texts as well. For instance, while it has been suggested that the Christian campaign against the Talmud contributed to the new Jewish efforts to formulate the theological and hermeneutical status of Talmudic Aggadah in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the scope and details of this effect have hardly been explored. Comparing the thematic *Extractiones* to the Jewish compilations and systematic commentaries of Aggadah, which began to appear not much later, could change what we know about the inter-religious background of this new Jewish genre.

The production of the *Extractiones* set a landmark in the medieval Christian study of the Talmud. The publication of its critical editions may very well set a landmark in the modern study of Jewish-Christian intellectual relations.