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**ANTHROPOMORPHIC ASPECTS OF THE RABBINIC TRADITION  
IN THIRTEENTH CENTURY JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

Budapest



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by

Dora Lantos

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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# ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the anthropomorphic aspects of the rabbinic tradition in thirteenth century Jewish-Christian controversy, and aim to answer the question what was the reason the Christian party attacked the anthropomorphic God, though it also used anthropomorphism excessively. For this research I study the texts of the two Talmud disputations (Paris, 1240; Barcelona, 1263), and the polemical handbook *Pugio fidei* by the Dominican friar Raymond Martí. I study the passages where the anthropomorphic rabbinic passages occur and show that the difference lies in the reaction the two parties gave to the challenge of rationalist philosophy; both Judaism and Christianity wanted to present their rational character, but whereas Judaism could only renounce the authority of its tradition where anthropomorphic descriptions occur, and claim that the intention of those passages was to provide lay people with the basic principles of the religion, Christians could designate the different qualities to the different persons in the Holy Trinity, therefore they were able to have a suffering anthropomorphic God, Christ, and the perfect God of the philosophers, God Father. Unfortunately by attacking the concept of God of the Jews the Christian party in the debate also undermined the legitimacy of Jewish existence, which led to mockery at least, but to intolerance at worst.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present thesis is to determine why the anthropomorphism of the rabbinic tradition—that is, the representation of God with human features—provoked vehement condemnations by Christian theologians in thirteenth-century France and Spain, though these humanised Jewish images of God had not disturbed Christians before that time and Christianity itself excessively used anthropomorphism in its own tradition.

Anthropomorphism was a frequently discussed topic in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> I will demonstrate that the reason of the outrage Jewish anthropomorphism caused is the doctrinal difference between these two religions, which was emphasised in the thirteenth century. At that time, we see a tripartite controversy between Aristotelian philosophy, Christian theology, and the rabbinic tradition. Whereas in the Muslim countries the anthropomorphic aspects of the rabbinic tradition invoked mockery at most, or were thought of as statements for lay people, in the Christian territories they shocked the audience and played a significant part of the condemnation of the Talmud as a heretical writing. Indeed, the content of it — together with the anthropomorphic description of God — was contradicting the foundations of Christianity, but most importantly the Jewish description of God was immature, illogical, and irrational in the eyes of Christian scholastics, therefore Judaism could not be seen as a true religion.

My aim is to point out the differences between Christianity and Judaism concerning the use of anthropomorphism and to show how each of these two religions reacted to the challenge of Aristotelian philosophy, a school of thought that was transmitted to them by way of a third religion, Islam. The platform of anthropomorphism served as a battle-field for these two religions, through which they could refute the truth of one another while strengthening their own identity and developing their system. This is also the first time when Christianity undertakes a global mission to

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<sup>1</sup> Tamás Visi, “On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century”, PhD diss., Palacky University, Olomouc, 2001, 6.

prove the validity of Christian doctrines, not only on the basis of the revealed texts, but also from other sources demonstrating the rational nature of its belief.

## **Primary Literature**

For this research I will use the accounts of the two Talmud disputations, held in Paris (1240), and in Barcelona (1263), and the polemical handbook of the Dominican friar Raymond Martí, the *Pugio fidei* (1278). For the disputations I will use the translations of Hyam Maccoby from his book *Judaism on Trial*,<sup>2</sup> where he published both the Hebrew and the Latin accounts of the Paris, Barcelona, and Tortosa disputations. The quotations from the *Pugio fidei*<sup>3</sup> are my translations based on Benedict Carpzov's edition from 1687. The rabbinic texts are from [sefaria.org](http://sefaria.org), and the English translations are mine, whereas for the Biblical quotations I use the King James Bible.

On the basis of these texts I will examine what the Christian party said about the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic description of God. By anthropomorphism I mean the assignment of human body parts or corporeality to the deity, and by anthropopathism I mean the description of God with human emotions.

I aim to demonstrate the difference in the reaction of both religions to the challenge of philosophy through the motif of anthropomorphism. I will argue that both religions have it as part of their tradition and use it excessively, but they use different methods to adjust their religion with philosophy. Christianity could distinguish the qualities of an anthropomorphic and a perfect God with the help of the Trinitarian doctrine; this way God Father became the immutable, impassible, and spiritual God, whereas Christ attained all the qualities connected to corporeality, suffering and

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<sup>2</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputation in the Middle Ages* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1982)

<sup>3</sup> Raymundus Martini, *Ordinis Praedicatorum Pugio Fidei Adversus Mauros et Judaeos cum observationibus Josephi de Viosin, et introductione Jo. Benedicti Carpzovi, Qui simul appendicis loco Hermanni Judaei opusculum de sua conversione...*(Leipzig: Friedrich Lanckis, 1687)

passions. Judaism did not have this possibility to designate different persons to different qualities, therefore they came up with another solution: they differentiated between the different levels of the meaning of the text, and made a distinction between two scriptural messages: one meant for the philosophers and the other meant to lay people.

In this thesis I will deal only with the mainstream rabbinic tradition, and will not examine the field of *kabbalah*, since it leads to another dimension when it comes to mysticism.

### **Reviewing Sources from the Secondary Literature**

There are two main areas for the choice of secondary literature related to my topic. For the philosophical background of the problem of anthropomorphism in the Jewish tradition, I used Yair Lorberbaum's *In God's Image*. Lorberbaum examines some anthropomorphic aspects of the rabbinic texts, particularly the question of the Image of God among the *tannaim* and the *amoraim*, but he brings some medieval reflections to the problem too.<sup>4</sup> My other source for the discussion of anthropomorphism was Jacob Neusner's *The Incarnation of God*, where he presents the idea of Incarnation already in the Jewish sources, and argues that anthropomorphism is especially present in the *Talmud Bavli* and is decreasing in the *Yerushalmi* due to the increasing polemical activity against Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

For the historical background I used Jeremy Cohen's *The Friars and the Jews*,<sup>6</sup> where Cohen gives an excellent overview of the monastic movement of France and Spain, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. He argues that attitude of Christianity toward the Jews changed with the activity of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, when a scholarly group appeared who dealt excessively with Jewish and other oriental sources in order to disprove any other religion than

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<sup>4</sup> Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image. Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God. The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982)

Christianity, and also in order to show the truth of the Christian dogma that was thought to be present everywhere, even in rabbinic sources. He indicates that the Talmud disputations were a result of this new effort. Robert Chazan in *Daggers of Faiths* also deals with the Dominican activity in thirteenth century Spain and argues that the thirteenth century was a newly aggressive period in Church history.<sup>7</sup>

Anna Saphir Abulafia sees the turning point in the twelfth century, when under the relatively peaceful circumstances — lack of external threat — Christianity fought against its internal enemies and for its doctrinal unity, institutional system and for a strong, centralised Church. According to her, this vital intellectual quest brought about the examination of non-Christian sources. She argues that for this reason, Anselm of Canterbury, Petrus Alfonsi, and Peter the Venerable were the first to turn to the rabbinic sources and refute the Jewish point.<sup>8</sup>

## Roadmap

In the thesis I will study the problem of anthropomorphism in the thirteenth century from three aspects: in Chapter I, I will study the question of anthropomorphism inside the Jewish tradition and show the philosophical aspect of the problem. I will demonstrate that both the spiritual and the corporeal descriptions of God are present already in the Hebrew Bible that the rabbinic tradition inherits, and present the different interpretations of the school of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael. Subsequently, I will deal with the challenge Islamic philosophy posed on the Jewish tradition and show how two significant authorities - Saadyah Gaon and Hai Gaon — reacted to this problem. Then I will turn to Maimonides and the question of philosophy in Judaism and point to the differences between Ashkenaz and Sepharad. I will argue that whereas Sephardi thinkers embraced the allegorical, philosophical interpretation of the anthropomorphic passages, the more

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith. Thirteenth-Century Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press)

<sup>8</sup> Anna Saphir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth Century Renaissance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995),

“chauvinistic” Ashkenazim kept the literal reading of the same sentences. Ashkenazic conservatism was not only caused by the conscience of the Ashkenazic Jewry, but also the expression of their opposition to the religious beliefs of their Christian neighbours.

In the Chapter II I will present the historical circumstances under which these questions were debated. I will start by presenting the Church’s rising attention to the rabbinic texts and show the innovation of Petrus Alfonsi, who as a converted Jew was familiar with the Jewish tradition, and quoted the Talmud in order to prove the invalidity of the Jewish faith. I will demonstrate how Petrus Alfonsi with his *Dialogue against the Jews* became part of the mainstream, and was followed by others, among them Peter the Venerable. Subsequently I turn to the emerging mendicant orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans, and present their mission to convert the infidels. I will discuss the Christian Talmud debates and show the changing attitude toward the rabbinic tradition: firstly in Paris even the Talmud’s connection to the Bible was questionable, then in the Barcelona disputation the rabbinic texts became a source from which both parties aimed to prove their religious truth. I will close the chapter by studying the activity of the school of Raymond de Penyafort, and the works of his most talented student Raymond Martí, and his *Pugio fidei*, the handbook of polemics.

In the last chapter, closely focusing on the texts of these disputations and the *Pugio fidei*, I will present the rabbinic quotations with anthropomorphic content and study their reception. I aim to answer the question why especially those sentences caused outrage among Christian readers. I will argue that the reason is that those rabbinic statements contradict the foundations of the Christian faith, the Incarnation of Christ, the Trinitarian doctrine, and the perfection of God Father.

## I. The Question of Anthropomorphism in the Jewish Tradition

### Introduction

Before I discuss the much debated anthropomorphic content of the rabbinic texts and the Jewish-Christian controversy of the thirteenth century, in this chapter I intend to show that the challenge the corporeal description of God poses on Judaism is not the novelty of the Middle Ages, in fact it is not even an issue provoked by an external agent, but it had long been an inside problem for the Jews when they encountered certain philosophical trends, and wanted to synchronise them with their own tradition.

The Hebrew Bible contains an abundance of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic statements on God that challenged Jewish exegetes. “By anthropomorphism I mean any theology that conceives God in terms of those characteristics which are distinctively human...Such a God is appropriately (and literally) described in the language of personal pronouns and transitive verbs, such as ‘possess’, ‘love’, judge’, ‘promise’, ‘forgive’ and the like.”<sup>9</sup> Already the Targum Onkelos<sup>10</sup> as early as the first century attempts to purge the Bible from these statements, but in the other *targumim*<sup>11</sup> we do not see this effort, and the corporeal concept of God remains predominant. The

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<sup>9</sup> E. LaB. Cherbonnier, “The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 187-206.

<sup>10</sup> The Targum Onkelos is the most authoritative and literal Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. See: Bernard Grossfeld, S. David Sperling, “Translations. Ancient Versions,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 3 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 588-595.

<sup>11</sup> The *targumim* mean literally “translation”, but in the Rabbinic corpus they mean exclusively the Aramaic biblical texts (the Aramaic adaptation of the Hebrew Bible)  
See: Ibid.



sages of the Talmud inherit this tradition and speak of God excessively in these terms, especially the *tannaim*<sup>12</sup> and the *amoraim*<sup>13</sup> of Babylon.

Subsequently in the *geonic* period, Jews living under Muslim rule felt compelled by Islamic philosophy and the *karaim*,<sup>14</sup> tried to explain away the anthropomorphic content of the Jewish tradition. The argument of the *geonim*<sup>15</sup> was that these description were not the true meaning of the revelation, and the revelation was written in a human language, therefore it uses metaphors that everyone understands. The *geonim* argued that God is entirely transcendent, therefore the corporeal descriptions of God found in the religious text are not to be taken literally.

The battle over God's emotions and his corporeality culminated in the thirteenth century, when not only the Christian challenge caused a huge controversy, but the works of Maimonides also divided the Jewish audience. Beside this the two major groups of Judaism — Sephardim and Ashkenazim — had also differing opinions on the problem. Two kind of attitudes were predominant: either the problematic passages were regarded as folk-tales that are not to be taken seriously, that were addressed only to the laic people, and were neglected by the rabbinic elite. According to the other understanding this way of depicting God indicates something mystical, esoteric, hidden from the masses. Both solutions respond to a dilemma concerning religious

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<sup>12</sup> *Tannaim* (Aram. *teni*, “to hand down orally”, “study, teach”) are the sages from the period of Hillel to the compilation of the Mishnah (third century).

See: Daniel Sperber, “Tanna, Tannaim,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 19 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 505-6. (reprint of the 1972 edition)

<sup>13</sup> *Amoraim* (Aram. *amora*: “sayer”, “spokesman”) are the sages who succeeded the *tannaim*. Their activity was centred around the interpretation of the Mishnah both in the Land of Israel and in Babylonia from the third till the seventh century.

See: Alyssa M. Gray, “Amoraim,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 2 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 89-95.

<sup>14</sup> *Karaim* or Karaites are the Jews belonging to the sect that rejected the rabbinic-talmudic tradition. The sect was particularly wide-spread in the ninth century in Babylon, but even today some small Karaite groups exist in Turkey, Russia, Egypt and in the US.

See: Leon Nemoy, “Karaites,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 11 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 785-800. (reprint of the 1972 edition)

<sup>15</sup> *Geonim* were the heads of the Babylonian schools of Sura and Pumbedita from the sixth century to the eleventh.

See: Simha Assaf, David Derovan, “Gaon,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol 11 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), pp. 380-386.

language: in one hand it is worthy to describe something powerful, transcendental and divine according to human fashion, and attribute to it human emotions, eyes and limbs. But on the other hand one cannot say anything about God, because he is beyond perception. However this way one does not only lose the personal relationship with God, but the relevance of God itself becomes questionable.

## 1. Antiquity

The Hebrew Bible contains an “amalgamation of anthropomorphic and transcendental tendencies”,<sup>16</sup> which means that God is described in “human forms or modes and having human feelings or moods”.<sup>17</sup> Naturally this is not a specifically Jewish phenomenon:<sup>18</sup> we can detect it among other nations in the Antiquity,<sup>19</sup> since Israel stood in “linguistic, cultural, and religious continuity with her neighbours in the Levant”.<sup>20</sup>

In the Genesis we find that man was made according to the image of God (Gen 1:26–28, Gen 9:6), then he goes for a walk in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), he eats with Abraham (Gen. 18:8). At the same time we can find transcendental descriptions of God in the prophets, for example at Hosea 11:9: “ For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst”, or the texts substitutes

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<sup>16</sup> Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian, and Islamic Traditions. Representing the Unrepresentable* (London: The International Institution of Islamic Thought, 2012), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Ginzberg, “Anthropomorphism,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1901), 621–625.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Esther J. Hamori, “When Gods Were Men” *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 269-288.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley Williams, “A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, (2009): 20.

God with his ‘*Sh’mo*’ (name)<sup>21</sup>: “My name shall be there.” (II Kings 23:27) or his ‘*Kavod*’ (glory): “And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord” (Ex. 16:7). We can see that even in the Bible both the transcendent and the immanent descriptions of God are present, but the anthropomorphic statements significantly outnumber the transcendental representations.<sup>22</sup>

We can detect an early attempt to explain away God’s corporeality from the Biblical text by Philo of Alexandria. As a Hellenistic author Philo tried to synchronise Hellenistic philosophy with the Biblical tradition, therefore he understood the anthropomorphic statements metaphorically as part of his allegorical exegesis.<sup>23</sup>

The anthropomorphic representation of God was problematic to the exegetes of the Hebrew Bible even in antiquity. The best example to illustrate the difficult nature of this kind of description are the *targumim*. The *targumim* are the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, which are at the same time also its explanations. The *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Yerushalmi* — the earliest of all *targumim* from the *tannaitic* period that predate the Christianity — puts serious efforts to avoid everything that relates to the human-like nature of God, and uses rather the ‘*Memra* of God’, or substitutes the verbs concerning God to an impersonal phrase (e.g.: instead of “God knew” he uses the expression “it was revealed before God”). Zwi Werblowski notes that the effort is clear in the case of the actions of God, but nonetheless Onkelos has no problem with attributing human

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<sup>21</sup> The current liturgical practice supports this thesis, that it is God’s Name that should be worshipped and not his body, since he is invisible. When the congregation in the synagogue recites the *Sh’ma* everyone has to cover his eyes, as a symbol that there is nothing to see.

Previously, in the Middle Ages the Kabbala made serious efforts to make people close their eyes during the Amidah, the most important prayer.

See: Gábor Roskó, Tamás Turán, *Képfogyatkozás* [Diminishment of the Image] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2004), 87.

<sup>22</sup> Yair Lorberbaum, “Anthropomorphisms in Early Rabbinic Literature: Maimonides and Modern Scholarship,” in Carlos Fraenkel, (ed.) *Tradition of Maimonideanism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 313.

<sup>23</sup> Mehanem Kister, “Allegorical Interpretations of Biblical Narratives in Rabbinic Literature, Philo, and Origen: Some Case Studies,” In Gary A. Anderson, Ruth A. Clements, David Satran, (eds.) *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple Period and in Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 133-135.

emotions to God, such as hatred or love. Werbowsky observes that Maimonides too pointed out the inconsistency of the *Targum Onkelos*. The other *targumim* try to follow this trend.<sup>24</sup>

The Talmud and the *Midrashim* inherited this tradition from the Bible, and the sages also made anthropomorphic and anthropopathic statements implying that God has human body parts and human emotions, even expanded its usage in the *aggadic* parts mostly in the forms of parables<sup>25</sup> causing a “shockingly undivine” picture of God, who weeps, laughs, prays, studies, swears by his right hand...*etc.*<sup>26</sup> Certainly, in the rabbinic literature the opposite is to be found too: “The prophets show great daring in likening the Creator to the form “ says the *Genesis Rabbah*.<sup>27</sup> Beside these two concepts of God — transcendent and immanent — there is an in-between image of God too: Talmud agrees with that Biblical text that God cannot be seen. The most prominent prophet, Moses saw God only from behind through a clear mirror, but other prophets, minor to Moses, saw God only through a blurred mirror, meaning that nobody, even the greatest among Israel have seen God face to face.<sup>28</sup> The talmudic sages follow this tradition and describe God too as invisible: even if

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<sup>24</sup> Zwi Werblowsky, “Anthropomorphism,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 189. (reprint of the 1972 edition)

<sup>25</sup> For more on the parables and their usage see: Glenn Edward Witmer, “Creating God in Our Image. A Case Study of Anthropomorphic Language in Rabbinic Literature” Master’s thesis, University of Toronto, 2001

<sup>26</sup> David Stern, “Imitatio Hominis: Anthropomorphism and Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature,” in *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 151-174.

<sup>27</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* 21:7

From: Yair Lorberbaum, *In God’s Image. Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Yev* 49b, *Lev. Rabbah* 1:14, but even the New Testament supports this concept (1 Cor 13:12) From: Tamás Turán, *Diminishment of the Image*, 87.

one looks at it, cannot see it. R. Yoshua ben Hananyah, when talking about the invisible nature of God, uses the sun as the example.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that wherever tradition distinguished the halakhic and the aggadic parts of the rabbinic corpus, the anthropomorphic statements came to be placed in the latter one, which is the “narrative, exegetical, or hortatory discourse concerning norms of belief”.<sup>30</sup> The easiest way to distinguish between *halakha*<sup>31</sup> and *aggadah* in the Talmud is to say that everything that is not a legal discourse is *aggadah*. But defining the exact nature of *aggadah* is “notoriously difficult” even according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.<sup>32</sup>

The question what the rabbis of the *Talmudim* believed in, whether they believed that God had a body deserves little attention in the Jewish context according to Alon Goshen Gottstein, and the question we have to ask concerning the anthropomorphic God of the rabbinic literature is how the rabbis interpreted the texts, what they read into them.<sup>33</sup>

According to these two opinions — the corporeal and the abstract views — Arthur Marmorstein in his book on *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* assigns the two concepts to two different schools: Rabbi Akiva’s and Rabbi Yose haGelili’s (Rabbi Ishmael’s). He brings an example: in Genesis Rabbah the two scholars disagree on the meaning of the verb נסה (*nasah*) from

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<sup>29</sup> Hulin 59b-60a.

א"ל יומא דחד משמשי דקיימי קמי דקודשא בריך הוא אמרת לא מצינא לאיסתכלא ביה שכינה לא כל שכן

‘He told him: if there is a servant that attend the Holy One, blessed be He, you cannot see, so how could you see the Sh’khina?’

See: From: Gábor Roskó, Tamás Turán, *Diminishment of the Image*, 88-89.

<sup>30</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism’s Story of Creation. Scripture, Halakha, Aggadah* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vii.

<sup>31</sup> The legal side of Judaism.

See: Louis Jacobs, “Halakha,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol 8 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA with the Keter Publishing House, 2007), 251-258.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen G. Wald, „Aggadah/Haggadah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 1. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Publishing House, 2007.), 454. (reprint of the 1972 edition)

<sup>33</sup> Alon Goshen Gottstein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” in *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171-195.

Genesis 22:1. Rabbi Akiva says that it means that God tested Abraham, whereas Rabbi Yose haGelili thinks that it means that God elevated him. From this statement Marmorstein arrives at the conclusion that the consequence of Akiva's interpretation, namely that if God had to test Abraham, would revoke his omniscient nature. This did not trouble Akiva's school, therefore the school of Rabbi Akiva believes in a corporeal God.<sup>34</sup>

Marmorstein brings examples from the *midrashim* and shows that in fact we can speak about two different "theological schools" in rabbinic literature before the Bar Kochba- period. The roots go back to Rabbi Yoshua ben Hananyah, who came up with the concept of the suffering God and spread it among the people of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Marmorstein argues that from that period on, the anthropomorphic view became widespread and eventually gained prevalence in the *amoraic* period, whereas the allegorical concept remained marginal.<sup>36</sup>

As David Stern points out, this alignment of the two opposing schools is not the most accurate. Marmorstein examines some particular examples of disagreements between the schools, where the result is that one party opts for the anthropomorphic, whereas the other for the transcendental solution. The general question between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael is about the literal or the allegorical reading of the Bible, which leads to different conclusions. Rabbi Akiva's school represents the party who prefer the literal, whereas Rabbi Ishmael's the allegorical interpretation.<sup>37</sup> Moshe Idel challenges the opposition of corporeality to spirituality, and argues that the relationship between these two kind of descriptions are more complex. According to him the

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<sup>34</sup>Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God. II. Essays in Anthropomorphism* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1937), 34-36.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

<sup>37</sup> David Stern, 155.

corporeal statements refer to the external qualities, while spiritual characteristics are used on an internal level.<sup>38</sup>

Meir Bar-Ilan, when discussing the Talmudic concept of God's hand disagrees with those scholars who argue that the rabbis of the Talmud did not believe in God's corporeality.<sup>39</sup> He brings the *Sefer Shiur Qomah*<sup>40</sup> as evidence that rabbis in the Talmudic period had no problem with the anthropomorphic God. Jacob Neusner agrees with Marmorstein and sees a gradual increase in the popularity of the doctrine of the corporeality of God culminating in the Babylonian Talmud, where God does not only have limbs and a face, but acquires a whole personality with mental, emotional, and physical traits. As he puts it: "God figures in the canon of the Judaism of the dual Torah, as premise, presence, person, and at the end, a personality".<sup>41</sup>

It is noteworthy to highlight another hypothesis from Neusner's book: when comparing the two *Talmudim*, the *Yerushalmi* and the *Bavli*, Neusner arrives at the conclusion that the *Bavli* contains significantly more anthropomorphic expressions. He hypothesises that the rabbis who lived in Palestine had to compete with Christianity, and therefore they were more conscious of the usage of anthropomorphic statements, whereas in Babylon this meant no problem. "Documents from the Land of Israel did not follow the inner logic of the idea expressed here and produce concrete allusions to, and stories about, the incarnation of God derives from the specific character of the

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<sup>38</sup> Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 62-3.

<sup>39</sup> Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Hand of God. A Chapter in Rabbinic Anthropomorphisms" in G. Sed-Rajna (ed.), *Rashi 1040-1990: Hommage a Ephraim E. Urbach*, Congres européen des Études juives, (Paris: CERF, 1993), 321-335.

<sup>40</sup>The *Sefer Shiur Qomah* (*Measures of the Divine Stature*, the seventh century) is unique in the Jewish tradition, but it never became part of the canon. Bar-Ilan argues that the reason of this is that the Muslim influence on Jewish philosophy was so strong that it led to an inner censorship that edited out the anthropomorphisms in rabbinic literature and the negligence of the *Sefer Shiur Qomah*. This is certainly the extreme concerning the corporeality of God, it attributes human form to God, and even measures it, therefore most of the authorities rejected it. Saadya Gaon claimed that it should be burn, and Maimonides was convinced that it was a Byzantine forgery.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God. The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 19.

Christian challenge”.<sup>42</sup> I certainly cannot prove or disprove this statement in this thesis, but the fact that Neusner suspected Christian concurrency and pressure as early as the *amoraic* period tells us that there is a real tension between the excessive usage of the anthropomorphic terms of the rabbinic literature and Christianity. Dov Weiss, when examining the anthropomorphic statements of the rabbinic tradition arrives at a similar conclusion and argues that the rabbis humanised the image of God, because they wanted to express their opposition to the Greek philosophical tradition and to Christianity that synchronised its God with the Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>43</sup>

In this subchapter I showed that both descriptions of God: the corporeal and the abstract are present, as Ephraim Urbach puts it: the Talmud contains “insistence on the purity of the monotheistic idea on one side, and on the vitality of faith on the other”.<sup>44</sup>

## **2. The Challenge of the Arabophone Jewish Philosophy**

The anthropomorphic statements of the Jewish tradition caused huge controversy inside the Jewish circles as early as the *geonic* period due to the challenge Islamic philosophy posed on them, when Islam became the state religion in the East, the borderline between philosophy and theology blurred, and it made a significant impact on “Jewish theology” too.<sup>45</sup> This was the second time that Jews tried to synchronise their religious thought with Hellenistic philosophy.<sup>46</sup> Previously we saw the attempt on behalf of Philo of Alexandria, but it never entered the mainstream of rabbinic Judaism.

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<sup>42</sup> Neusner, *The Incarnation of God*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> Dov Weiss, “The Humanization of God” In *The Pious Irreverence. Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 149-160.

<sup>44</sup> Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: At the Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1975), 38.

<sup>45</sup> Meir Bar-Ilan, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 621-625.



There were three solutions to this problem: 1) one could understand them as pure allegories, 2) stick to the “teaching” of the Talmud, and perceive it in the literal sense, or 3) regard it as a mystical hint to the person of God.<sup>47</sup> The anthropomorphic representation clearly bothered the *geonic* Jewish elite, and tried to eliminate it from their literature.

The change in the perception of anthropomorphism happened both due to internal and external reasons. The internal cause was the Karaite schism,<sup>48</sup> whereas the external was the aforementioned Islamic influence and Muslim critique.<sup>49</sup> Karaite Jews rejected the rabbinic tradition and excessively criticised it also for its abundant statements on an anthropomorphic God.<sup>50</sup>

Saadyah Gaon (882-942) is famous for combating this group and eventually defeating them, and thanks to him the Karaim remained a minority. He wrote against them a number of polemical treatises, among them the *Kitab al-Rudd*<sup>51</sup> where he argues against the literal understanding of the anthropomorphic language of the aggadic passages, and states that God is omnipotent and omnipresent.<sup>52</sup>

This was also the period when the aggadic parts of the Talmud became secondary to the halakhic parts: alongside the shrinking of the authority of the *aggadah* the war against its literal understanding began. Hai Gaon (939-1038) argued that the aggadic parts of the Talmud are to be understood metaphorically. He states that since the rabbis cannot rely on the *aggadah* (*rabanan lo*

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<sup>47</sup> Werblowsky, 190.

<sup>48</sup> Karaite Jews refused the Rabbinic literature and criticised its anthropomorphic representations of God in particular.  
See: Meir Bar-Ilan, 1993.

<sup>49</sup> Lorberbaum, *In God's Image*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Meir Bar-Ilan, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Samuel Poznański, “The Anti-Karaite Writings of Saadiah Gaon” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 10 (1898): 238-258.

<sup>52</sup> Wilhelm Bacher, “SAADIA B. JOSEPH (Sa'id al-Fayyumi)” in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1901), 579-584.

*samkhin al divre agadah*),<sup>53</sup> therefore they cannot believe that God is similar to any creature, that he can laugh or cry...etc. This means that with the diminishing authority of the *aggadah*, the *geonim* also undermined the validity of the anthropomorphic statements of the Jewish tradition.

Beside undercutting the importance of the *aggadah*, the *geonim* followed Rabbi Ishmael's school and opted for the allegorical interpretation of the Torah. This hermeneutical trend became prevalent in the Sephardic world and was adopted even at some place of the Ashkenazic, but there it did not become as common as in the Muslim territories.<sup>54</sup> Rabbi Ishmael said: "The Torah speaks in the language of man",<sup>55</sup> by which he meant that the Torah must be explained logically and one has to seek for the ordinary meaning of the text.<sup>56</sup>

### 3. Thirteenth Century Reception of Anthropomorphism

By the thirteenth it became widespread among Jewish philosophers that talking about God in a manner that represents him as a human-like figure is a mistake, yet they kept anthropomorphic statements and descriptions of God in the Jewish tradition. Even though they thought of it as something useful for the lay people, they certainly did not eliminate the problematic parts of the tradition, because they accepted that those passages too are part of the Oral tradition, and have a

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<sup>53</sup> *Otsar haGeonim*, B. M. Levine, ed., (Jerusalem-Haifa, 1928–1944), *Berakhot* 59A

“האי מלתא אגתא האי ובאה ובכל דדמי לה אמרו רבנן אין סומכין על דברי אגדה. ארחה בפרושא לברורי תחילה דבין משיקול הדעת ובין מדברי חכמים לית ספק שהקב"ה אין לדמותו לשום בריה ואין לפניו לא שחוק ולא בכי ולא אנחה ולא דמעות ולא דוחקי.”

<sup>54</sup> Werblowsky, 191.

<sup>55</sup> Sifre Num. 112, “דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם”

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Newman, *Halachic Sources: From the Beginning to the Ninth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 29.

secret, esoteric meaning.<sup>57</sup> The Jewish tradition was “the apple of gold encased in silver filigree” (Proverbs 25:11).<sup>58</sup>

Maimonides brought the most significant change to the attitude toward the anthropomorphism of the Bible and of the rabbinic literature. His opinion is considered to be the orthodox today. His approach to the question is described as “violent” in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Maimonides goes as far as to state that whoever accepts the corporeal depiction of God is an idolater.<sup>59</sup> In this sense Maimonides went much further than his predecessors, who opposed the usage of anthropomorphism on the basis of its illogical and unreasonable nature.<sup>60</sup> He writes:

“»The Torah speaks according to the language of man,« that is to say, expressions, which can easily be comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator. Hence the description of God by attributes implying corporeality, in order to express his existence; because the multitude of people do not easily conceive existence unless in connection with a body, and that which is not a body not connected with a body has for them no existence.”<sup>61</sup>

The opposition to the anthropomorphic concept of God is found in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, but the idea is present in most of his works. Maimonides is one of the most controversial figures in Judaism, and his *Guide* caused a number of disagreements. This book divided the Jews in Provence in 1233, and they needed the intervention of the Inquisition in order to calm down the congregation.

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<sup>57</sup> Tamás Visi, “On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century”, PhD diss., Palacky University, Olomouc, 2001, 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture. Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Werblowsky, 190.

<sup>60</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 621-625.

<sup>61</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, transl. by M Friedlander (New York: E. P. Dutton Company, 1901), 35.

This dubious nature is true concerning his personality too: some say that he was a pure rationalist, whereas others claim that he was a secret mystic.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas philosophy flourished in Sepharad, it did not take root in Ashkenaz: these two subcultures of the Jewish civilisation have always been in touch with one another, we know about a number of cases of mutual cultural borrowing, but even though the medieval Hebrew grammars entered the Ashkenazic culture — which is a Sephardic product — Jewish rationalism and philosophy did not appear in an Ashkenazic milieu till the sixteenth century.<sup>63</sup>

David Berger hypothesises that the reason why Ashkenazic Jewry did not embrace the rationalist philosophy was the opposition to the nonliteral reading of their Christian neighbours. In the Ashkenazic milieu Jews and Christians were battling over the interpretations of the same texts, therefore Berger sees a polemical reason.<sup>64</sup> Hyam Soloveitchik sees the cause of this difference elsewhere: according to him Ashkenazic self-consciousness was so strong that they could not incorporate another system into their own. As he puts it “the Franco-German community was permeated by a sense of its own religiosity of the rightness of its traditions”.<sup>65</sup>

There is one significant difference in the case of anthropomorphism between Ashkenaz and Sepharad: whereas in Sepharad the Jewish tradition met the Islamic philosophy, in Ashkenaz we do not talk only about the encounter of rationalist philosophy with the Jewish religious corpus, but the confrontation of Christian theology with the Jewish God. The statements found in rabbinic literature

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<sup>62</sup> One can indeed read Maimondes’ writings as mystical texts, and Maimonides had a significant impact on medieval Jewish mysticism  
Moshe Idel, “Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed and the Kabbalah,” in *Jewish History*, 18 (2004): 197-226.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph M. Davis, “Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism: The Evidence of »Sefer Hadrat Qodesh«,” in *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 18 (1993): 195-222.

<sup>64</sup> David Berger, “Judaism and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times,” in Jacob J.Schacter, (ed), *Judaism’s Encounter with Other Cultures. Rejection or Integration?* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 119.

<sup>65</sup> Haym Soloveitchik, “Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example,” in *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 12 (1987): 205-221.

were not just ridiculous to Christian scholars, but outrageous. In case of the Ashkenazic Jewry we do see only a tension between a religious tradition and a philosophical trend, but the dominating power justifies its doctrines based on the same text that the Jews use, and tries to force its dogmas on the Jews, who — as an act of self-defence — stick to their tradition even more. We shall examine this question in detail in Chapter III.

Natan Slifkin brings a number of examples from twelfth-thirteenth century Ashkenazic scholars who spoke about God's corporeality: Rabbi Moshe Taku (1250-1290), a Tosafist<sup>66</sup> argues against Maimonides and claims that the opposite is true: denying that God has some human form is heretical. Rabbi Isaac ben Moses (1200-1270) and Rabbi Abraham ben David (1125-1198) also agree on the corporeality of God. Slifkin argues that the most important commentator, Rashi, remained a believer in the corporeality of God. He brings several examples from his commentary in order to prove his statement: on Ex 7:4,<sup>67</sup> Rashi explains the hand of God by saying that it actually smites the hosts of the Egyptians. Rashi's explanation on the creation of man<sup>68</sup> also supports his claim that Rashi was a corporealist: he describes man as designed according to the physical form of God.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tosafists are the scholars who wrote the Tosafot, the explanatory glosses on the Talmud. The first Tosafist were Rashi's son-in-laws and grandsons in the twelfth century.  
from: Joseph Jacobs, M. Selisogn, "Tosafot," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (New York and London, 1901), 202-207.

<sup>67</sup> את יד יד ממש להכות בהם  
My hand. To smite with it.

<sup>68</sup> נעשה אדם ענותנותו של הקב"ה למדנו מכאן שאדם הוא בדמות המלאכים ויתקנאו לפיכך נמלך בהם  
Let us make man. Modesty of the Holy One Blessed be he, we learn from here : because man is like the angels and they envied him, therefore He consulted them. (Rashi on Gen 1:26)

<sup>69</sup> Nathan Silfkin, "Was Rashi a Corporealist?," in *Hakirah, The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 9 (2010): 81-105.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the anthropomorphic statements about God are present in the Jewish tradition from its very beginning, yet even as early as the late antiquity they caused problems for the more philosophical Jews. We have seen the allegorical solutions of Philo, then studied the predominantly anthropomorphic concept of the rabbinic *aggadah*. We briefly examined the two different schools of rabbinic exegesis, and concluded that according to that corpus both concepts of God — the corporeal and the abstract — are part of the tradition.

Then we have turned to the challenge of Islamic philosophy and the Karaite schism, and have seen the fusion of rationalist philosophy and the Jewish tradition. We have studied how popular and widespread it became in the Sephardic work culminating in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, where he refuted the anthropomorphic description of God describing it as metaphors for the lay people.

We have closed our chapter by scrutinising the difference between the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic world and made the observation that whereas on the Muslim territories the Islamic philosophy compelled Jewish philosophers to synthesise their tradition with rationalism, in the Ashkenazic world under Christian dominion the parties were combatting over the same texts with serious consequences (forced conversions, Talmud-burnings), because the tension lay not only between philosophy and the Jewish tradition, but between Christian theology and rabbinic “doctrines”.

## II. The Christian Study of Rabbinics in the High Middle Ages — The Sources

### Introduction

Before we turn to the Christian critique of the anthropomorphic statements of the Jewish tradition, we have to briefly summarise the sources we will be dealing with. In this chapter I will present three sources: the accounts of the Paris and Barcelona disputation, and Raymond Martí's *Pugio fidei*.

I intend not only to present the sources, but also to place them into historical context; we are dealing with a territory and a historical period of a tripartite controversy: the rationalist philosophy coming from the Islamic circles makes its impact on both Christianity and Islam causing different results and a number of controversies between the parties.

In this chapter I will briefly sum up the proceedings of the Christian study of the Talmud, and also the mendicant orders' involvement in Christian Hebraic studies, then I will examine the growing Christian occupation with rabbinic literature culminating in the Talmud-debates and the change of its attitude: we will see that Christian counterpart was not only attacking the Talmud for polemical reasons, but was using it in order to prove its truths from for apologetic purposes.

### 1. Background

Before the High Middle Ages, the Jewish faith was regarded as an imperfect continuation of the Old Testament. Jews did not hearken to the words of Jesus, they did not convert to Christianity, but they had a significant value to us as the possessors of the first revelation of God, and therefore still a somehow legitimate religion, since Judaism was regarded as based on the word of God. The fact that the Jews have an older revelation has challenged Christianity from its origins up to this day.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>“The problem of the relations between Jews and Christians concerns the Church as such, since it is in »searching into its own mystery« that it comes upon the mystery of Israel. These relations touch therefore upon the Christian conscience and Christian life in all its aspects (liturgy, catechesis, preaching, etc.) in all countries where the Church is established, and only where it is in contact with Jews” from: Introduction to the discussions of the Plenary Session of bishop members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome, 1969.

in: Helga Croner, *Stepping-Stones to further Jewish-Christian Relations* (London and New York: Stimulus Books, 1977), 3.

The Church, which follows a younger revelation, cannot disregard Judaism or repudiate the Jewish tradition, since she recognises it as her predecessor,<sup>71</sup> and also bases her validity claims on the text of the Old Testament. Hence the correct Christian attitude toward contemporary Judaism has always been debated. One can claim that Jews have relevance to Christianity only insofar as they adhere to the Hebrew Bible, and even then it may be asked whether Judaism has any authority to interpret the biblical text. Thus the existence of the Jewish religion after the coming of Christ causes problems inside Christianity, because the latter can neither ignore Judaism, nor accept it as a valid religion. Therefore tolerance and intolerance, appreciation and rejection of the Jewish religion have always been present in the Church at the same time. It is not by coincidence that Christianity did not have theological debates with pagans. The question how a Christian person should relate to Judaism and to Jewish antiquities has always been complicated, and perhaps even disturbing,

In the Middle Ages the Church's attitude toward the Jews was mostly dominated by the Augustinian teaching; Jews were of high importance to the Church, because Jesus himself fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, yet he replaced the Synagogue with the Church, refused rabbinic law, and made the Church *Verus Israel* instead of the Jews. Augustine offered a solution to the problem of the revelations: the Old Testament had only prefigurative significance and could be interpreted only by the New Testament. Therefore Jews lost the legitimacy of their tradition, which was regarded only as a byproduct of their corrupted nature after the crucifixion of the Messiah. In this sense, Christianity has an ahistorical view on Judaism: it imagined Jews as the witnesses of the Christian truth, who saw the crucifixion with their own eyes, who were not subjected to historical changes, who lived still the same way as described in the Gospels, as they were a fossil of the biblical times. Certainly their most important role was to carry the text of the Hebrew Bible. As Judah Rosenthal writes, they were seen as “the masters of the Scriptures”.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “The Church therefore cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant... The Church mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews” — states the *Nostra Aetate*

<sup>72</sup> Judah M. Rosenthal, “The Talmud on Trial: The Disputation at Paris in the Year 1240” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 47 (1956): 58–76, 145–169.



a) *Early Interest in the Jewish Religion*

The situation between the Church and the Synagogue got even more antithetical in the thirteenth century, when the Church encountered the Talmud for the first time.<sup>73</sup> This period was the “turning point of Jewish history”.<sup>74</sup> Except for the intermezzo of Visigothic Spain and the violence of the First Crusade, Jews had so far lived under relatively safe circumstances. Anti-Jewish polemics were addressed mostly to Christian audiences, and their function was to prevent judaizing and intermingling with Jews. In the High Middle Ages this changed, and the *adversus Iudaeos* literature was directed against Judaism as a tool of proselytism.<sup>75</sup> Its language became more violent and aggressive, addressing particular issues within Judaism that did not concord with the Christian dogmas. Most Christian polemicists now attacked the symbolic ‘book’ that contained everything that Christian dogma was not: the Talmud. This change in the Christian interest happened in the early twelfth century, and reached its peak in the thirteenth century with the missionary activity of the mendicant orders in Southern France and Spain.<sup>76</sup>

Jeremy Cohen argues that the reason of this change was to be found in theology. According to him, Anselm of Canterbury drew attention to Jewish teaching when aiming to prove the truth of Christianity as part of his all-inclusive rational inquiry. Even though Anselm himself was tolerant of the Jewish writings, his followers and students tried to find Christian truths in Jewish sources, and

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<sup>73</sup> Stating that this was the very first time that the Church learned about the existence of the Talmud would be an exaggeration. Already in the twelfth century Peter Alfonsi, a Jewish convert writes on the Talmud in his *Dialogus contra iudeos*. Therefore some scholars disagree that the change happened in the thirteenth century, and argue that it was the twelfth century. (e.g.: Anna Abulafia argues that the change happened in the twelfth century due to the intellectual shift and the emergence of the reason in Christian scholarship, or Robert Chazan who states that the turning point was the late eleventh century with the Crusades.)

<sup>74</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1982), 12.

<sup>75</sup> David Berger, “Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages,” in *The American Historical Review* 91 (1989): 576-591.

<sup>76</sup> The most important scholars who contributed to the polemical literature against the Jews are: Peter Damian, Gilbert Crispin, Petrus Alfonsi, Rupert of Deutz, Peter the Venerable, "William of Champeaux," Peter of Blois, Walter of Chatillon, Alan of Lille .  
See: David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages. A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 16.

as a consequence the age of violent anti-Jewish literature began in the twelfth century. Peter Alfonsi (1062-1110) belonged to this circle of Christian philosophers who engaged with the Talmud and claimed the irrational nature of Judaism based on certain Talmudic quotes.<sup>77</sup> Peter the Venerable (d. 1156) made similar statements on the Talmud: according to him, the Talmud is so absurd that he questions the human nature of Jews.

### **3. Forerunners of the Latin Talmud Study in the Twelfth Century: Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable**

The Talmud-accusations and the Mendicant Orders' occupation with the Talmud are strongly connected to the works of two distinct Christian scholars: to Petrus Alfonsi's and to Peter the Venerable's, because both of them used Talmudic quotations in their polemical treatises.

Peter Alfonsi was a Jewish convert who immersed himself in polemical activities against his native religion. In his *Dialogue against the Jews*<sup>78</sup> (written between 1109-1110) he uses his knowledge of the Jewish tradition against them. Alfonsi wrote this book in the form of a dialogue, which is very popular for polemical content,<sup>79</sup> which we saw already at Anselm of Canterbury. In Alfonsi's work a Jew (Moses) and a Christian (Petrus) — his former and his present self — engage in a conversation about religious truths. We can already detect in Alfonsi's work the shaping Christian understanding (or misunderstanding) of the Talmudic discourse, and the increasing importance of the "doctrina". As a consequence of this change, Alfonsi argues with the absurdity of

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<sup>77</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23-24.

<sup>78</sup> It seems that Alfonsi's work became widespread and popular in the Middle Ages, as 70 surviving manuscripts testifies it. From: Jessie Sherwood, *Thibaut de Sézanne and the Disputation of the Jews against the Christians*. (unpublished essay, 2016)

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Lasker *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), xix.

the Jewish belief, and as a part of his rationalist rhetoric he brings the question of anthropomorphism to Moses, and refutes them.

Alfonsi, as a converted Jew, was familiar with the Talmud, and his *Dialogue against the Jews* is the first Christian polemical work that uses talmudic sources in order to disprove the Jewish religion. This work was so successful that the talmudic passages that he used became mainstream in polemical literature as it will be discussed in Chapter III. Christian scholars used a limited number of talmudic statements, most of them are found already in Alfonsi's book. Exactly the same passages occur in Raymond Martí's *Pugio Fidei*, although he goes into great detail concerning these statements. Moisés Orfali collected all of the Talmudic citations from the *Extractiones de Talmud* (13th century), *Pugio Fidei* (13th century) and the *De Iudaicis erroribus* (15th century), and the total number of Talmudic passages is below 70, which is a relatively small number compared to the whole Talmudic corpus.<sup>80</sup>

Petrus Alfonsi quotes the statements of the Talmud already in the first part of the *Dialogue*. “Quod Iudei verba prophetarum carnaliter intelligunt et ea falso exponunt” (That the Jews understand the words of the prophets according to the flesh). Although he disproves the Jewish concepts, he does it on a discursive tone in order to educate the non believers. After the refutation of Judaism Alfonsi deals with Islam, and repudiates its doctrines too. After discrediting these two religions he introduces the reader the foundations of Christianity.<sup>81</sup>

About a generation later Peter the Venerable made another contribution to the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature and examined the same passages as Alfonsi, but unlike Alfonsi who wrote in a patronising voice to the Jews, Peter the Venerable's language in his *Tractate* is of a “ranging demagogue”, because he “mocks them, insults them, reviles them, heaps upon them torrents of

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<sup>80</sup> Moisés Orfali Levi, *Talmud y cristianismo: Historia y causas de un conflicto* (Barcelona: Riopiedras, 1998), 104-105.

<sup>81</sup> See: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, trans. by Irven M. Resnick (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006)

scorn and abuse”.<sup>82</sup> Peter the Venerable’s argument is different in other respects too: whereas Alfonsi tried to show that the argument of the Jews was irrational and incompatible with the laws of the nature, Peter the Venerable accused the Jews of rejecting allegorical interpretations and metaphors “in favour of their killing letter”. This is the reason according to him why Jews cannot properly understand the Bible.<sup>83</sup>

Peter the Venerable sees the reason of the backward and absurd mentality in the Talmud: from that book Jews learn nothing but bestiality and blasphemies against God. He argued that Jews do not know the language of allegories and read the whole talmudic corpus literally, therefore they are incapable of perceiving the true meaning of the Bible. In order to demonstrate this Peter too pointed to the anthropomorphic statements of the Talmud.<sup>84</sup>

In both of the cases we see that these two authors used the Talmud against Jews in order to prove the invalidity of their religion. Both scholars sacrificed a considerable amount of their works to show that the Jewish perception of God is absurd, if not stupid, but certainly irrational.<sup>85</sup>

### **3. The Mendicant Orders and Their Preoccupation with Jews**

Before we turn to the Jewish-Christian controversy of the thirteenth century we have to study briefly the appearance and the role of the Mendicant Orders (Dominicans and Franciscans) in the dispute, since in all of the remaining three cases (the Paris and the Barcelona disputation and the *Pugio Fidei*) the Christian party belonged to one of these orders.

Jeremy Cohen argues that the thirteenth century was a formative period in the Church’s life, especially in regard to the development of its missionary activity as seen previously in Chapter II.

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<sup>82</sup> Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis. A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>83</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 97.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 116-117.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 118.

He states that the Church reform of Innocent III (1198-1216) strengthened the position and the respect of the Catholic Church. This was the time when “the Church reached the height of its development and power”.<sup>86</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg also sees a major change in this period: “the thirteenth century saw the formal beginning of the crusade against heresy and sorcery and the official equation of the two by the spokesmen of the Church”.<sup>87</sup> Jeremy Cohen brings three reasons why the twelfth and thirteenth centuries meant such a big change in Jewish-Christian relations: 1) the advance of Christian scholarship and theology, 2) Christian Hebraic scholarship, 3) an increasingly hostile attitude from the Christian side toward the Jews.<sup>88</sup>

Christianity faced several problems in the twelfth and thirteenth century: Saracens in the Holy Land and in Spain, undereducated secular clergy, Cathari and Waldesians, the rise of apocalyptic evangelical movements, which all threatened the authority of the Church. We can detect the militant behaviour of the Church in her increasing missionary, polemical, and proto-inquisitional efforts, and the establishment of the two most significant mendicant orders to this thesis: the Franciscans and the Dominicans.<sup>89</sup> Dennis E. Showalter argues that Innocent III asked the Cistercian Order for preachers against Albigensians, but they were reluctant to fulfil his wish. Only a few Cistercian friars were willing to combat heresy, and they were not efficient. The Church needed the mendicant orders in order to protect the Catholic unity.<sup>90</sup>

The mendicant orders are those religious groups in the Catholic Church, who renunciate of all possession: common and individual alike. Their name is coming from the Latin *mendicare* — to beg. They made the opposition the already rich and elitist monastic orders. Their mission was to

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<sup>86</sup> Rosenthal, 58.

<sup>87</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews. The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), 216.

<sup>88</sup> Jeremy Cohen, “Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evaluation of Judaism in European Christendom,” in *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 592-613.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 34-36.

<sup>90</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, “The Business of Salvation: Authority and Representation in the Thirteenth-Century Dominican Order,” in *The Catholic Historical Review* (1973): 556-574.

bring the Gospel to everyone, therefore they took the road to spread the correct teachings and eradicate heresy.<sup>91</sup>

The Dominican Order was established in 1217 in order to combat the heretics — especially Albigensian — fight false theological teachings and spread Christianity among the infidels. Edward T. Brett claims that this was the first order to set intense studying as its main goal, and thus bring the salvation to the people. According to Brett the curriculum of Dominican studies was formulated between 1216 and 1220.<sup>92</sup> The Order's constitution has preserved this educational ordinance, which is the first religious code to set a specific study-material. Brett states that “no covent was to be found without a doctor of theology”.<sup>93</sup>

The Franciscans (1208) were different; their endeavour and freshness was the reason of their prominent position; they were not teachers or protectors of the Catholic unity, yet many of their members were university professors, preachers and inquisitors like the Dominicans. There were other similarities between these two orders: their devotion to Rome and their interest in the preservation of Christian unity.<sup>94</sup>

Dominicans and Franciscans were those members of the Church who dominated the Church's relation with Jews. We cannot state that these orders were harmful to the Jews overall; for example Dominicans protected Jews during the time of the blood libel of 1255 in Lincoln. Despite their occasional help, the activity of these orders was very aggressive. Staying with the example of England, the Dominicans came to Oxford in 1211, where they settled in the Great Jewry, built a school and named it after St. Edward. This is not a coincidence: here, too, the aim was to convert

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<sup>91</sup> J.L. Phelan, “Mendicant Orders” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol IX (San Francisco, Toronto, London, Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 648-649.

<sup>92</sup> Edward T. Brett, “The Dominican Library in the Thirteenth Century,” *The Journal of Library History* 15 (1974-1987): 303-308.

<sup>93</sup> Jeremy Cohen *The Friars and the Jews*, 38-39.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

the Jews, and the missionaries could be more effective living in their neighbourhood.<sup>95</sup> The Franciscans came to Oxford for the same purpose. The order in Cambridge was given the synagogue, but in Oxford they did not move to the Jewry, but resided at the city walls in St. Ebbe's parish. This indicates that these orders established a House of the Converts<sup>96</sup> in St. Aldate's parish, where converted Jews were provided with food and accommodation. Fifty years later Dominicans too moved to St. Ebbe's and closed their school in the Great Jewry.<sup>97</sup> Robert Grosseteste, the bishop of Lincoln, and a friend of both the Franciscans and the Dominicans, became a lecturer at the Franciscan Order of Oxford. He was among the first Christians in England to learn Hebrew. Maybe he learned it in the Jewry.<sup>98</sup>

The most controversial institution initiated by the mendicant orders was the Inquisition, which occasionally interfered even in internal Jewish affairs. The writings of Maimonides caused a number of debates, in some communities they were banned. Rosenthal reports that the Jews of Provence could not agree on the admissibility of the Maimonidean texts. Hence the opposition led against them by Solomon ben Avraham of Montpellier turned to the Dominicans, saying that the followers of Maimonides were heretics. The Church gladly joined the fight against them; and the Dominicans eventually burned the writings of Maimonides.<sup>99</sup> The goal of the Inquisition was to purge out all heresies in its realm, but the Church had no jurisdiction over the Jews, because Judaism, unlike Paganism, was tolerated in Christian society.<sup>100</sup> Jews were tolerated as long as they

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<sup>95</sup> Sarah Cohen, "The Oxford Jewry in the Thirteenth Century," *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society in England)* 13 (1932): 293-322.

<sup>96</sup> The House of the Converts or the *Domus Conversorum* is an English institution invented by Henry III in 1232, as an expression of his piety. Henry was eager to aid the conversion of the Jews, he was even present in person at some baptisms.

See: Lauren Fogle, "The *Domus Conversorum*: the Personal Interest of Henry III." *Jewish Historical Studies* 41, (2007): 1-7.

<sup>97</sup> Sarah Cohen, 296.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 297-98.

<sup>99</sup> Rosenthal, 61.

<sup>100</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 47.

were practicing their religion according to the Church's idea.<sup>101</sup> Solomon Grayzel in his book on the relationship between the Church and the Jews states that the other reason why Christians were attacking the Talmud was a self-defence against the blasphemies of the Jews.<sup>102</sup>

In order to detect and repress the anti-Christian teachings, or any doctrines that were not in accordance with the Christian truth, Christian theologians had to study the rabbinic tradition. Jeremy Cohen argues that this was not the only reason. He sees a general increase of interest toward the Jewish texts, after the place of learning shifted from monasteries to the urban schools. He links this to the intellectual renaissance of the twelfth century. Cohen argues that it served as a historical and religious source to Christian scholars, but it was also a threat that could undermine the status of the Jews in Christianity.<sup>103</sup>

Raymond de Penyafort is the person responsible for the mendicant orders' engagement with Hebrew and Arabic literature, since he was to a great extent involved in the Dominican mission. He realised that it was easier to convince Jewish and Muslim people of the Christian truth if it could be shown in their own texts. Therefore Raymond de Penyafort introduced these languages to the Dominican *studia*.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross. The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>102</sup> Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century. A Study of Their Relations during the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Lettres and the Conciliar Degrees of that Period* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1933), 29.

<sup>103</sup> Jeremy Cohen, "Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy": 592.

<sup>104</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 103-108.



#### 4. The Paris Disputation, 1240

The Paris Disputation in 1240 is of great historical significance and can be seen as the consequence or the continuation of the Christian study of the Talmud and the changing regulations.<sup>105</sup> Rosenthal argues that this disputation was induced by the Fourth Lateran Council that in its 68th canon obligated the secular authorities to protect Jesus and Mary from the blasphemies.<sup>106</sup> Robert Chazan and Solomon Grayzel see another reason why the accusations happened that time, which is connected to Rosenthal's argument: there was a fear of Jewish harm in Christian society, and in certain passages of the Talmud that speaks against *noztrim* or *goyim*, they saw their concerns justified.<sup>107</sup>

##### a) *The Accounts of the Paris Disputation*

We have both Hebrew and Latin accounts of the event. The Latin accounts are to be found in the Paris Bibliotheque Nationale de France MS. 16558, among them we find the *Extractiones de Talmud*, the confessions of the rabbis and the correspondence of the Christian party.<sup>108</sup> These accounts were studied by Isidore Loeb.<sup>109</sup> These accounts were written after the disputation, and contain a huge collection of problematic Talmudic passages with some commentaries of Rashi. The collection is called *Extractiones de Talmud* and its authorship is debated. It was accepted generally

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. amongst others Alexander Kisch, *Papst Gregor des Neunten Anklageartikel gegen den Talmud und dessen Vertheidigung durch Rabbi Jachiel ben Josef und Rabbi Juda ben David vor Ludwig dem Heiligen in Paris*. (Leipzig 1874)

<sup>106</sup> Rosenthal, 68.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Chazan, *The Daggers of Faith. Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 31-32., Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century. A Study of Their Relations during the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Lettres and the Conciliar Degrees of that Period*. (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1933), 29.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Shipley, "Peter Alfonsi and the Trial of the Talmud", MA thesis, University of Cambridge, 2015, 6-8.

<sup>109</sup> Isidore Loeb, *La controverse sur le Talmud sous Saint Louis*. (Paris 1881)

that Nicholas Donin was the translator of the passages, but Gilbert Dahan<sup>110</sup> scrutinised the text and arrived at the conclusion that the author was not Donin, but another Jewish convert from the Dominican Order: Thibaud de Sézanne. Alexander Fidora, after conducting a philological research agrees with Dahan on the authorship of the *Extractiones*, because the Latin translations in the *Extractiones* and in Thibaud de Sézanne's polemical work *Pharetra fidei* indicate that they were written by the same hand. Fidora points to the fact that the misconception that the *Extractiones* was written by Donin could be originated from its dependence on the 35 accusations that Donin compelled in his letter to the pope in 1239.<sup>111</sup> According to Rosenthal too, the author of the *Extractiones* was Thibaud, who was ordered by Odo of Chateauroux to compile that work, but he was helped by two other converts, and one of them was Donin.<sup>112</sup>

The Hebrew account in this event is attributed to Rabbi Joseph ben Nathan Official (Yosef haMekane), which was studied by Grünbaum<sup>113</sup> based on BnF hebr. ms. 712. This is the Rabbi Yehiel version that was regarded as the standard version. Judah Golinsky turned to another two newly discovered<sup>114</sup> Hebrew accounts:<sup>115</sup> he agrees with Yitzhak Baer<sup>116</sup> on the purpose of the Rabbi Yehiel version of the *Vikkuah*, namely that we cannot consider it as a historical text, but rather as an educational material that aims to teach Jews how to behave in a situation like this debate, therefore he states that the Latin accounts are closer to the actual happenings, yet he maintains that

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<sup>110</sup> Gilbert Dahan, "Les Traductions latines de Thibaud de Sézanne," in *Le brulement de Talmud a Paris 1242-1244* (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 95-120.

<sup>111</sup> Alexander Fidora, "The Latin Talmud and its Translators. Thibaud de Sézanne vs. Nicholas Donin?," in *Henoch* 37 (2015): 17-28.

<sup>112</sup> Rosenthal, 75.

<sup>113</sup> S. Grünbaum, *Sefer Vikkuah R. Yehiel* (Thorn, 1873)

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris: Un chapitre dans la polémique entre chrétiens et juifs au Moyen âge* (Paris: Édition E. Peeters, 1994)

<sup>115</sup> Moscow-Guenzburg 1390

<sup>116</sup> Yitzhak Baer, "לביקורת הוויקוהים של רבי יחיאל מפרז ומשה בן נחמן." [On the Disputations of Rabbi Yehiel from Paris and Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman] in *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 175.

from the Hebrew versions he considers the Joseph ben Nathan version the most authentic, because he was a student of Rabbi Yehiel, therefore he had direct access to the information.<sup>117</sup>

*b) The Event of the Disputation of Paris*

After summarising our sources let us turn to the unfortunate events: Nicholas Donin,<sup>118</sup> a Jewish convert<sup>119</sup> who joined the Franciscan Order informed Pope Gregory IX that the Talmud was dangerous to Christianity. He collected his charges in 35 points also preserved in ms.16885. We should see those points that are connected to the anthropomorphic content in Chapter III. As a consequence in 1239 the pope sent a letter to the bishops, archbishops and rulers of France, England, Aragon Navarre, Castile, Leon and Portugal ordering them to inquire the content of the Talmud, because it contains blasphemies against God, Jesus and Mary.<sup>120</sup> Another reason was that the Christian party was stunned that Jews were not frozen under the circumstances of the New Testament, but changed in significant aspects; most importantly they were living according to the Talmud, which for them meant that they rejected the Hebrew Bible and supplanted it with the Talmud.<sup>121</sup>

Almost every recipient disregarded this order, but king Louis IX of France assembled a committee to investigate the question and ordered the confiscation of all of the Talmudim. Subsequently the debate was held with William of Auverge, bishop of Paris, Walter, the archbishop

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<sup>117</sup>Judah Golinsky, “The Different Hebrew Versions of the »Talmud Trial« of 1240 in Paris,” in Elisheva Carlebach, Jacob J. Schacter (eds.), *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations. In Honor of David Berger* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 109-141.

<sup>118</sup> Hyam Maccoby presents Nicholas Donin as a Jew, a Karaite who was dissatisfied with the Talmud, and suspects that this animosity against the Talmud brought him to Christianity and to the Franciscan Order.

<sup>119</sup> According to Rosenthal and Robert Chazan since there was a new emerging group of Jewish converts, also in the Paris disputation there could have been more converts involved than just Nicholas Donin. See: Rosenthal, 69., Chazan, *The Daggers of Faith*, 14-15.

<sup>120</sup> Jessie Sherwood, *Thibaut de Sézanne and the Disputation of the Jews against the Christians*. (unpublished essay, 2016), 2.

<sup>121</sup> Gilbert Dahan, *The Christian Polemic Against the Jews in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 34.

of Sens, Geoffrey of Belleville, the Chaplain to the King, Adam de Chambly, Bishop of Sensils, and most likely Odo of Chateauroux in June 1240. The King was not presiding, instead of him the Queen Mother, Blanche of Castile occupied this position. The Jewish counterpart constituted of Rabbi Yehiel. Judah ben David of Melun, Samuel ben Solomon of Chateau Thierry, and Moses Coucy, the author of the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*.<sup>122</sup>

The process is not clear either from the Hebrew or the Latin accounts. We do not know if the French clergymen followed the inquisitional order of the Church that early, but the opinions are divided. The Latin account does not give any detail on the process, and the Hebrew's goal is to present the glorious victory of Rabbi Yehiel in the defence of the Talmud. Judah Rosenthal accept the process described in the Hebrew account, whereas Yitzhak Baer — as stated above — sees the Hebrew version as a literal construction, therefore not reliable. Hyam Maccobi does not decide in this question, but states that what can be sure of is that the rabbis were interrogated separately, and agrees with Rosenthal that this accusation was not a debate but a trial with little possibilities for the defence.<sup>123</sup>

### *3.The Questions of the Disputation of Paris*

Unfortunately neither the Hebrew nor the Latin accounts preserved the original accusations. We can learn about the charges against the Talmud only from the appendix of the aforementioned *Extractiones*. Nicholas Donin accused the Jews of supplanting the Bible with the Talmud, that the Talmud contains blasphemies against God, Jesus, and Christians, that the Talmud is an erroneous book that teaches magic, that misinforms concerning the afterlife and it is full of stupid, absurd, and incredible stories. Certainly we will be interested in the blasphemies against God that we shall examine in detail in chapter Chapter III.

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<sup>122</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1982), 20-22.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

The novelty of this accusation is that Nicholas Donin and the clergymen of the dispute see the Talmud not as the interpretation of the Bible, but something alien from it, even the corruption of the teaching of the Bible. As discussed earlier, Christians had little interest in the rabbinic tradition before the High Middle Ages; Jews were thought of as the warped successors of the Old Testament, and Christians paid little attention to the internal issues of Judaism. Hence, when Christians first encountered the Talmud, they thought that it was a book that claimed the authority of a revealed text, which meant that in the Christian eyes the Talmud, a man-made corpus, replaced the Hebrew Bible, which for them was the only text Judaism had to deal with. This had a serious consequence: if Jews are not occupied with the Old Testament, but changed it to the Talmud, it means that their duty did not derive from God anymore, and from a tolerated group their position shifted to that of heretics.<sup>124</sup>

We can also detect in the questions the dominant notion of ‘reason’ of that period. It was thought that humans are capable of perceiving the truth by their intellect, let that be the secrets of the universe, the laws of nature or theological doctrines. Abulafia calls reason “the intellectual renewal”, that helped to improve education, strengthened the concept of Christian wholeness, and reformed the hierarchy of the Church.<sup>125</sup>

### **5. The Barcelona Disputation, 1263**

In the Barcelona disputation we find a friendlier environment: the earlier period for the Jews in Spain is called “the Golden Age” for the Jews, where both Jewish culture and literature flourished, and Jews played an important role in the life of the state of Aragon, especially in the wars against the Moors.<sup>126</sup> The outcome of the dispute was more fortunate too: although Rabbi Moshe ben

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<sup>124</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23-24.

<sup>125</sup> Abulafia, 55-57.

<sup>126</sup> Maccoby, 39-40.

Nahman had to flee Barcelona — because he was accused by a friar — we do not know about any violent act that originated from this disputation.<sup>127</sup>

The perception of the Talmud changed. As opposed to the Paris disputation, where the Talmud was seen as the book of the Jewish “doctrina”, and deriving from the unacceptable content of the Talmud as the opposite of Christianity, as the barrier that keeps Jews away from converting and threatens Christianity, in Barcelona the Talmud becomes a tool by which Christian truth can be proven and Jewish conversion can be facilitated.

a) *The Sources of the Barcelona Disputation*

J. C. Wagenseil published firstly the Hebrew version of the disputation and included its Latin translations in it in 1681, in the compilation called *Tela Ignae Satanae* (Fiery Darts of Satan). The subtitle points to the motivation of the editor: *Arcani et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum et Christianam religionem libri* (The secret and horrifying book of the Jews against the divine Christ and the Christian religion). Maccoby states that this was a very imperfect edition and gave seed-bed to a number of misinterpretations. Another version that is much better is the Constantinople edition from 1710 by an anonymous author in the compilation of *Milhemet Hovah* (War of Duty) beside the texts of other disputation. The Constantinople edition was used eventually by Steinschneider,<sup>128</sup> whose book is mostly consulted.<sup>129</sup>

Unfortunately the authorship even according to the best versions of the text is questionable. We know that Nahmanides wrote a work for the request of the bishop of Gerona, but Maccoby doubts that he would have done it in Hebrew. He argues that the text should have been either in Latin or in Spanish-Catalan. Maybe it was translated to Hebrew, but even the Hebrew version

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>128</sup> M. Steinschneider, (ed), *Nachmanidis disputatio. Publico pro fide Judaica (a.1263)* (Berlin: Vendunt A. Asher, 1860)

<sup>129</sup> Maccoby, 76-77.

cannot be dated earlier than the fifteenth century.<sup>130</sup> The Latin account is a very brief anonymous text that survived in two manuscripts.<sup>131</sup>

*b) The Event of the Barcelona Disputation*

In this flamboyant period of the thirteenth century the importance of the papal court increased, leadership developed, universities were established. In this shaping environment of Latin Christianity, especially in Southern-France and Spain these events also brought about a strong effort for Christian unification, yet at the same time thanks to the intellectual bloom we can see raising awareness of the Christian elites of their differing environment (e.g.: Muslims and Jews). As a consequence of the new importance of Christian unity and the aggression<sup>132</sup> that came with the power a new group of clerics emerged who dealt excessively with this unity.<sup>133</sup>

Their goal was to spread the pure doctrine of the Church and to eradicate heresy. We saw already in this chapter that the Christian understanding of the Talmud put it to the category of a heretical book, therefore it was to be burnt. Alongside with their Talmud Jews similarly drifted to a heretic-like situation — I do not claim that they were seen by the Church as heretics, since Jews were not even baptised, but their situation in many respect resembled that of the heretics — they became the target of the missionising activity of these orders. As a consequence of this new zeal the Jews of Southern-France and Spain a new group of converts appeared who stimulated and fed these missions with informations.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> see Y. Baer, ‘On the Disputation of Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman,’ (Hebrew), in *Tarbiz* 2 (1930-31): 185-187.; Cecil Roth, “The Disputation of Barcelona (1263),” in *The Harvard Theological Review* 43 (1950): 117-8.

<sup>132</sup> In the Barcelona disputation Nahmanides says the King: “The Jewish community here is large, and they have all sought to prevent me and begged me to desist, for they are very much afraid of these men, the Preaching Friars, who cast fear on the world.”  
See: Maccoby, 133.

<sup>133</sup> Chazan, 25-26.

<sup>134</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 78-80.

In the Paris disputation these persons were Nicholas Donin and Thibaud de Sézanne, and in case of the Barcelona disputation this person is Paul Christian. Unlike the aforementioned two friars we do not have anything written by Friar Paul, but a number of accounts describe his activity: he had great influence in the court of Aragon and also bear the support of Pope Clement IV.<sup>135</sup>

In this zealous new atmosphere King James I of Aragon — due to the pressure of the Dominican Order<sup>136</sup> — ordered a dispute in July 1263 and called for Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman, or Nahmanides (1194-1270) to participate in it.<sup>137</sup> Although this dispute was friendlier, we cannot say that it happened on equal terms: clearly the Christian side organised the dispute and conducted it according to its interest. Robert Chazan sees this dispute as a test of the new method of missionising: if Jews convert after hearing the Christian truth deducted from their accepted literature, then they win, if Jews do not convert, nothing happens, since the Talmud is not a Christian text that could be disproved.<sup>138</sup>

### *c) The Disputed Questions*

Paul Christian and Nahmanides discussed entirely new questions: unlike in the Paris debate, where the issue was the very nature of the Talmud, in Barcelona the subject of the dispute was not the Talmud, it was just the tool disputant used to prove their statements with. Since Christian truths could not be questioned, there was very limited space for Nahmanides to dispute.

The debate was mostly on the person of the Messiah, whether he already came and his nature. In Nahmanides' account we read: "Then Friar Paul opened and said that he would show from our Talmud that the Messiah about who the prophets testified has already come".<sup>139</sup> Although both Nahmanides and Paul Christian cite a number of rabbinic passages, the question in dispute is

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<sup>135</sup> Chazan, 70.

<sup>136</sup> For more on the Order's relationship to the Crown see: Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and the Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>137</sup> Maccoby, 39-42.

<sup>138</sup> Chazan, 74.

<sup>139</sup> Maccoby, 103.



the correct interpretation of the long-debated Old Testament sentences (e.g.: Gen 49:10) with the help of the Talmud, and to show that the Christian interpretation can be deduced even from Jewish sources.<sup>140</sup>

This debate indicates that the Mendicant Orders became familiar with the rabbinic tradition, and their goal was not to question the validity or the content of this corpus, but rather to use it for their own interest to convert Jews. The paranoia that we saw at the Paris accusation has significantly diminished in the Barcelona disputation thanks to the growing knowledge on Jewish texts. As Christian scholars became more familiar with them, the paranoia was not as strong as in the case of the documents of the Paris disputation.

## **6. The *Pugio Fidei* by Raymond Martí**

Our third case for this study is not a text from a Talmud debate, but in fact a manual for the friars that were written with the intention to teach the members of the order to debate with the Jews on philosophical, scriptural and rational matters using Jewish sources. This is the *Pugio Fidei* by Raymond Martí,<sup>141</sup> the opus magnum of the missionising activities of the thirteenth century.

Raymond Marty was an outstanding student of Raymond de Penyafort, who continued the tradition of the Christian study of Oriental texts together with Pablo Christiani. Whereas Pablo was active in the disputation of Barcelona in practice as seen in Chapter II, Raymond excelled in theory; he wrote the *Pugio Fidei* in 1278, a remarkable example of polemical literature. Martí's work contains an outstanding amount of rabbinic text. He does not only quote Talmud and the *Midrashim*, but he is familiar with the commentary of Rashi and David Kimhi. It is quite possible that Martí had access to a larger corpus of rabbinics than we have, because he quotes passages that

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>141</sup> Ursula Ragacs, "Ein Leben im Dienst der Mission: Raimund Martini OP," in *Dominicans and Jews: Personalities, Conflicts, and Perspectives from the 13th to the 20th Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 87-114.

did not survive elsewhere.<sup>142</sup> Some suspect that those sentences did not belong to a lost corpus, but they were Martí's forgery.<sup>143</sup>

Not only the quantity, but also the quality of the work is exceptional: Friar Raymond introduces a new methodology and uses rabbinic texts as a basis to his arguments on the truth of Christianity. As Robert Chazan puts it: "What is sharply different in the *Pugio Fidei* is the quantity and quality of the redefinition."<sup>144</sup>

Friar Raymond excelled in Hebrew Studies: he was responsible for censoring Jewish books and he was the supervisor of the *studium hebraicum* in Barcelona. The *Pugio Fidei* was not his only work. When he studied Arabic in Tunis he wrote *Explanatio simboli apostolorum*, also a polemic work that is built around the Apostles' Creed. Later he compiled a lexicon, the *Vocabulista in arabico* and a Muslim polemical work, the *Quadruplex reprobatio*.<sup>145</sup>

Friar Raymond was a prolific author on Jewish topics too: before the *Pugio* he wrote the *Capistrum Iudeorum*, a work that aimed to prove the Jews that the Messiah has already come. Due to its similarities to the *Summa contra gentiles* some suspect that Raymond's book could have been the inspiration of Aquinas.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the *Capistrum* was not an effective tool to convert the Jews, mainly because the sources were cited in Latin, therefore Raymond wrote a new book which would facilitate proselytisation:<sup>147</sup> the aforementioned *Pugio Fidei*<sup>148</sup> that contained all of the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>143</sup> See: Yitzhak Baer, "The Forged Midrashim of Raymund Martini, and Their Role in Medieval Religious Polemics," in *Memorial Volume to Asher Gulak and S.Klein* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press Association, 1942); Adolf Neubauer, "Jewish Controversy and the *Pugio Fidei*," in *The Expositor* 7 (1888): 81-106, 179-197.

<sup>144</sup> Robert Chazan, "Genesis 49:10 In Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing," in Elisheva Carlebach, Jacob J. Schacter (eds.), *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations. In Honor of David Berger* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 105.

<sup>145</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 131-132.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Luis G. a. Getino, *La Summa contra Gentes y el Pugio Fidei* (Vergara, 1905)

<sup>147</sup> Harvey Hames, "Approaches to Conversion in the Late 13th-Century Church," in *Studia Lulliana* 35 (1995): 75-84.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

sources in Hebrew-Aramaic in order to enable the friars to use the weapon of the Jews against them. Not only shows the *Pugio* great expertise in Jewish religious literature, but even the New Testament quotes are translated into Hebrew.<sup>149</sup>

Raymond quotes different types of Jewish sources: naturally he relies on the Hebrew Bible, he is familiar with the *Talmudim* and *Midrashim*, but interestingly he even quotes Maimonides and certain pagan philosophers in order to achieve his goal. Raymond used a new method in the *Pugio Fidei*. Before, in the *Capistrum Iudeorum* he was looking for Jewish objections of the Christian doctrines, then he argued against them. In the *Pugio* he worked the other way around: he searched for the possible Christian content of the Jewish texts.

The *Pugio* discusses the classical issues of the Christian faith, I would say that it is a Catechism deduced by Jewish sources opposing the erroneous Jewish teachings. It consists of three independent parts: the first collects the most important Christian doctrines (soul, creation, knowledge of God...*etc.*), the second part mostly deals with the Messiah, then the third part is subdivided into three smaller sections: 1. the unity of God, 2. the creation, 3, the redemption.<sup>150</sup>

The *Pugio fidei* was edited by a number of Christian Hebraists in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, most notably by Joseph the Voisin in 1651.<sup>151</sup> This work is mostly available in Benedict Carpzov's reprint from 1687.<sup>152</sup> (this is what is quoted in this thesis). The text is far from perfect; it was preserved in ten manuscripts and one fragment, and all of them contain a different

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<sup>149</sup> Ryan Szpiech, "The Aura of an Alphabet: Interpreting the Hebrew Gospels in Ramon Martí's Dagger of Faith (1278)," in *Numen*, 61 (2014): 334-363.

<sup>150</sup> Görg K. Hasselhoff, "Self-definition, Apology, and the Jew Moses Maimonides: Thomas Aquinas, Raymundus Martini, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Lyra," in Yossef Schwartz, Volkhard Krech, eds., *Religious Apologetics — philosophical Argumentation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 289-290.

<sup>151</sup> Görg K. Hasselhoff, "Towards an Edition of Ramon Martí's *Pugio fidei*," in *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 55 (2014): 45-66.

<sup>152</sup> Raymundus Martini, *Ordinis Praedicatorum Pugio Fidei Adversus Mauros et Judaeos cum observationibus Josephi de Viosin, et introductione Jo. Benedicti Carpzovi, Qui simul appendicis loco Hermanni Judaei opusculum de sua conversione...*(Leipzig: Friedrich Lanckis, 1687)

version from the text, but a critical edition is on the way as part of the series *Bibliotheca Philosophorum Medii Aevi Cataloniae*.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined our primary sources that we will use for our research on the problem of anthropomorphism in the thirteenth-century Jewish-Christian polemics. We saw that the corpus that was criticised the most was the Talmud, and especially its aggadic parts, which basically was understood as the whole of rabbinic doctrines and as the Jewish faith itself.

We have studied the changing attitude toward the Talmud: we have seen that at the Paris disputation even its very nature was questionable, whether it had to do anything with the Bible, then 23 years later at the Barcelona disputation the Talmud was no longer the subject of the discussion, but the tool by which the disputants tried to prove their religious truth. Then we closed our chapter by the discussion of the increasing occupation with Jewish and Oriental texts of the Mendicant Orders, and took a closer look at Raymond Martí's *Pugio fidei* as the opus magnum of this activity. In the next chapter we shall examine what these sources say on the problem of anthropomorphism, and study them in great detail.

### III. Controversy over the Anthropomorphic and Anthropopathic God of the Rabbinic

#### Literature

##### Introduction

In this chapter I present the disputed Talmudic passages that contain the anthropomorphic statements. In my study, I aim to show that the reason why Christian readers singled out those sentences of the Talmud as outrageous was the doctrinal and theological challenge they perceived in them. I attempt to demonstrate that those passages did not contain only foolish or childish, generally backward and illogical statements on God, but heretical from a Christian point of view.

The question of God's corporeality and his emotions serves as a battlefield between Judaism and Christianity, which in a sense predates even Christianity:<sup>153</sup> already in the New Testament Christ becomes the true image of God, and earthly man loses its divine image due to the original sin.<sup>154</sup> The Christian concept of the image of God shifts to the spiritual realm, and even God becomes a perfect non-corporeal and impassible entity, whereas — as we saw in Chapter I — the God of Judaism becomes even more human-like, possibly as a result to the growing tension between Jews and Christians.

Since we are dealing with an era — the twelfth and the thirteenth century — where Christianity fought for its doctrinal and institutional unity and against heretics,<sup>155</sup> it should not surprise us that its reaction to the encounter with the Jewish tradition was sensitive, because the anthropomorphic passages showed a system that was completely different from the fundamental doctrines by which the Church used to connect and separate divine and human nature: the embodiment of Christ, the Incarnation, the virgin birth, and the mystical body of Christ, the

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<sup>153</sup> Gilbert Dahan, *The Christian Polemic Against the Jews in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) translated by Jody Gladding from the 1991 book, 19.

<sup>154</sup> Alexander Altmann, "»Homo Imago Dei« in Jewish and Christian Theology" in *The Journal of Religion*, 48 (1968): 235-259.

<sup>155</sup> Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart. Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 64-74.

*communitas Christi*. These doctrines were the cornerstone of Christianity, made part of its identity, therefore the passages that contradicted these teaching meant a serious threat, especially considering that these opposing concepts of God came from a concurrent religion that shared a significant part of the Christian canonic scriptures.

The Christian party eagerly tried to convince Jews of the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, and convert them. But in the Age of Reason the truth of Christianity should have been proven firstly by reason, and only from the revelation.<sup>156</sup> Thus, Christian scholars did not only attempt to discuss with the Jews the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, but also argued that the truth of Christianity are to be found in the Jewish texts too.

In this chapter I aim to show also that the anthropomorphic Talmudic passages were not only used for polemical purposes, but also for apologetical aims, since Christianity did not eliminate the corporeal and emotional aspects of God, but shifted them from God Father to the God Son. Therefore some rabbinic anthropomorphic passages could have been interpreted as alluding to the Incarnation.

## **1. General Considerations**

### *a. Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable*

The foundations of the tradition of attacking the Talmud were set in the twelfth century by Petrus Alfonsi in his *Dialogue against the Jews*. He collected the problematic talmudic places, although He does not speak of the "Talmud" yet, but he distinguishes the Torah as "lex" from the rabbinic texts as "doctrina" (and the rabbis are the "Doctores"). Peter the Venerable is 1146 the first Christian author to use the concept "Talmud" (described as "nefanda scriptura", a sort of an anti-Bible) These quotations will be repeated in the thirteenth century in the Talmud disputations and also finally collected in the *Pugio fidei*. Petrus Alfonsi wrote:

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<sup>156</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate," in Constance Hoffman Berman, (ed.), *Medieval Religion. New Approaches*. Rewriting Histories Series (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 320.

“Tell me, O Moses, when God prays, I ask whom does he worship — himself, or another? If another, then the one he worships is more powerful than he. If he worships himself, either he has power over that from which he prays, or he is impotent. If he is impotent, he worships himself in vain. Whereas if he has power, either he wills that for which he prays or he does not will it. If he does not will it, he prays for nothing. If, however, he wills it, then it is necessary to pray. You see then, O Moses, how this people is altogether estranged from divine knowledge. Therefore, if it is true that God cries for you, that roars like a lion, strikes the heaven with [his] feet, laments like a dove, moves his head, calls out »woe to me« on account of too much grief, and that in addition he rubs [his] feet together and claps [his] hands together and prays each day to have mercy on you what then prevents you from being freed from your captivity?”<sup>157</sup>

Peter the Venerable about a generation later repeats Alfonsi’s charges. In Chapter V, subtitled “On the ridiculous and very foolish fables of the Jews,” where he argues that the Old Testament should be interpreted allegorically, and Jews cannot, he writes:

“For although I do not remember having read in the Old Testament of divine weeping, although I do not ever remember having read that God moans like a dove, Nonetheless I do read that God roars, I do read that God grieves, I do read that God cries out, and what may be more surprising if a sound understanding is lacking, I read that God whispers, I read that God screeches... If any of these or those like them — for many like these are found that are attributed to God in the sacred texts — if, plainly, in any of these the Jewish meaning should be in harmony with the Christian or, if they abhor that, in harmony with a rational understanding, let me reply again to the Jews, as I did before, that I do not disdain to speak with them concerning such things. But when the Jews are unwilling to accept either metaphor or allegory or any of the common and multiple modes of speaking by means

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<sup>157</sup> Petrus Alfonsi, *Diálogo contra los judíos*, ed. John Tolan (Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1996), 26-27: “Dic, o Moyses, cum deus orat, quem, queso, adorat, se ipsum an alium? Si alium, is, quem adorat, potentior est illo. Si se ipsum adorat, aut potens est eius, propter quod orat aut impotens. Si impotens est, frustra se adorat. Si vero potens, aut vult id, pro quo orat, aut non vult. Si non vult, pro nichilo orat. Si autem vult, non est necesse orare. Vides ergo, o Moyses, quam omnino sit gens haec aliena a cognitione divina. Si ergo verum est deum pro vobis plorare, ut leonem rugire, celum pedibus pulsare, more columbae gemere, caput movere et pro nimio dolore heu michi clamare, ipsum preterea pedes collidere, manibus plaudere et cotidie, ut vestri misereatur, orare, quid ergo vestram ne liberemini impedit captivitatem?”

Translation: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, trans. by Irven M. Resnick (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 68.

of which all of these are appropriately adapted by God, but understand them instead only according to the letter that kills, what shall I say?"<sup>158</sup>

*b. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (Romans 7: 14)*

The carnal concept of the Jews by Christian plays an important role in the polemics. Already Augustine wrote that the Jews cannot interpret the Bible according to its true meaning, to the reading of the spirit. Not only were the Jews seen as carnal beings, but in Pauline theology Jews themselves remained the physical body of the old law, whereas Christians became the new, spiritual chosen people.<sup>159</sup>

Carnal Israel became an integral part of Christian theology prefiguring the true Israel, a stage in salvific history.<sup>160</sup> Abulafia presents Pseudo-William's *Dialogue* (1123-48) and shows that Pseudo-William wrote that the Jews not only keep the commandment of God incorrectly, but by states that this carnal behaviour destroys the Law.<sup>161</sup> Peter the Venerable is especially loud on this questions, and says that the reason of the false Jewish interpretation of the Bible is their carnal nature, because they stuck to the letter of the Scriptures instead of reading them spiritually. He goes as far that he writes that due to this carnal behaviour Jews are like animals.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Petrus Venerabilis, *Adversus Judaeorum inveteratam duritiam*. in: *Patrologia Latina*, 189, col. 623-624.: "Nusquam in veteri Scriptura me legisse recorder, lego tamen rugientem, lego dolentem, lego vociferantem: et quod magis mirum esset, si sanus intellectus deesset, lego sibilantem, lego stridentem... Si in aliquo horum vel similium (nam multa similia in sacris Litteris de Deo dicta inveniuntur) si plane in aliquo horum Judaicus sensus Christiano, vel si hoc abhorrent, rationabili intellectu consonaret, responderem adhuc, ut prius feci Judaeis, nec cum ipsis loqui de talibus dedignarer. Sed, cum nec metaphoram, nec allegoriam, nec aliquem de usitatis et multis loquendi modis, per quos omnia ista digne Deo adaptantur, Judaei suscipere velint, sed solam in his litteram occidentem intelligant, quid loquerer?"

Translation: Peter the Venerable, *Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews*, trans. by Irven Resnick (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 244-45.

<sup>159</sup> Daniel Boyarin, "Circumcision and the »Carnal Israel«: Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel," in *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 474-505.

<sup>160</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, "The Intellectual and Spiritual Quest for Christi and Central Medieval Persecution of Jews" in *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews. Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 61-85.

<sup>161</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth Century Renaissance*, 102.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 116.



c. (Mis)Understanding the Talmud

It was thought that humans are capable of perceiving the truth by their intellect, let that be the secrets of the universe, the laws of nature or theological doctrines. Anna Saphir Abulafia calls reason “the intellectual renewal”,<sup>163</sup> that helped to improve education, strengthened the concept of Christian wholeness, and reformed the hierarchy of the Church.<sup>164</sup> Rational theologians stated that the Talmud is full of *stultitiae*, both on the halakhic and on the aggadic side. The halakhic parts are useless in general, since they do not discuss any important issue, and are more like intellectual exercises that end up being ridiculously complicated debates over marginal details, and generally they are irrelevant after the abolition of the Mosaic law. The aggadic parts could be more pleasing to Christian eyes, but they were absurd to the Christian readers, since they contained doctrines that contradicted the Christian truth, at least in its philosophical formulation.<sup>165</sup>

The content and the function of the *aggadah* became a question of the Paris disputation, where had to answer the Christian inquiry what Judaism thought of it. Rabbi Yehiel saw no other way than to renounce the authority of the *aggadah*: “...The Talmud also contains *aggadah*, that is, figurative, poetic passages to appeal to men’s hearts.”<sup>166</sup> As discussed in Chapter I the *geonim* already stated that Jews do not rely on *aggadah*, because it had another purpose, to educate the masses about the basic principles of the religion. At the same time the statement that they do not rely on *aggadah* is not entirely true in the Ashkenazic milieu, because Jews under Christian dominion consciously maintained the literal interpretations, perhaps exactly in order to express their opposition to the Christian doctrines. We examined the commentary of Rashi in Chapter I and concluded that he preferred to explain the texts according to the literal meaning instead of the

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<sup>163</sup> Anna Saphir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth Century Renaissance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 51.

<sup>164</sup> Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 55-57.

<sup>165</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23-24.

<sup>166</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial, Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1982), 154.

allegorical, and in a number of cases he used anthropomorphic sentences.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless Rabbi Yehiel defended not the Ashkenazi, but the Maimonidean understanding of the importance and role of the *aggadah*, supposedly because this interpretation was easier to maintain in the face of Christian objections.

Part of the controversy over God's corporeality and his emotions was caused by the Christian (mis)understanding of the dual discourse of the Talmud; from Peter the Venerable onwards, they understood the Talmud as the new authoritative book of the Jews that supplanted the Biblical text, as a new revelation. In contradiction to the Bible, which had a divine origin, the Talmud was written by the Jews themselves, and the corrupted nature of the Jews was mirrored in the corrupted text. As Raymond Martí writes: "Because this way it is not feasible to say that they really possess a law... Therefore the Jews do not believe in the law of Moses, and do not believe that assigned time of the Messiah has come".<sup>168</sup> Thus, this new law contained a new, false image of God.

It is not only Friar Raymond who claims that the Jews invented a new God. In fact this accusation occurs earlier too. Both Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable deal with the objection that the biblical and rabbinic anthropomorphism are at first sight very similar. They argue that both cases are nevertheless fundamentally different: the former demand an allegorical interpretation, while the latter exclude it explicitly and manifest that the Jews on purpose follow the carnal misunderstanding of the biblical texts. The Talmud is not seen in these polemics as a fully fledged new book, but has references to the Bible, and therefore interprets the text of the same God, but in a completely erroneous, illogical way. According to Alfonsi, Peter the Venerable and Friar Raymond,

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<sup>167</sup> Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz. The Case of Anthropomorphism" In Daniel Frank, Matt Goldish, (eds.), *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics. Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 117-159.

<sup>168</sup> "Sic quoque potest non parum congruè dici illos legem veraciter non habere... Cum igitur Judaei non crediderint legi Moysis; neque credant quare tempus adventus Messiae determinavit." See: Raymundus Martini, *Ordinis Praedicatorum Pugio Fidei Adversus Mauros et Judaeos cum observationibus Josephi de Viosin, et intruductione Jo. Benedicti Carpzovi, Qui simul appendicis loco Hermanni Judaei opusculum de sua conversione...* (Leipzig: Friedrich Lanckis, 1687), 474.

Jews are unable to read the Bible according to its true, allegorical meaning, but their understanding is closed, fixed on the literal meaning.

## 2. Polemics — Differing Concepts

### a. God's Body

According to the Pauline theology Jesus is the “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1:15), who is “in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6). From these passages one can observe that for Christianity Jesus alone is the the image of God, as Paul calls him the “last Adam” (I Cor 15:45) or the “coming Adam” (Rom. 5:14). Alexander Altmann argues that these sentences together with Col 3:9-10 allude to the doctrine that the old man, the old Adam will be replaced by the new, celestial man, which is the real image of God.<sup>169</sup>

There is a new category here in the New Testament: “And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor 15:49), the heavenly man. According to the Christian doctrine the “old man” will be replaced by the “new man”, which is the real image of God, which means that a material nature will be replaced by an immaterial body.<sup>170</sup> Origen writes:

“The Only-begotten of God [Christ], therefore, through whom, as the previous course of the discussion has shown, all things were made, visible and invisible, according to the view of Scripture, both made all things, and loves what He made.”<sup>171</sup>

This distinction between earthly and heavenly image is crucial and points to some important differences: in Jewish religious thought the monistic view on the body and soul is predominant. “The soul was understood by the *tannaim* as the animating principle of the body, not as a separate,

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<sup>169</sup> Altmann, 244-245.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Origen, De principiis II, 6, 3.

non-corporeal entity”,<sup>172</sup> whereas here we see an opposition between the earthly (body) and heavenly (soul) substances. We read in the New Testament:

“The first man is of the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven, As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” (1 Cor 15:47-50)

The second difference is caused by the doctrine of the original sin which is not shared by the Jewish tradition. It is relevant in our case because in Christian theology man is created in the image of God, but after Adam’s sin he loses this divine image, and Jesus becomes the one who can restore this heavenly image in man. This fact seems undisputed in Christianity, which is shared by scholastics and protestants alike.<sup>173</sup>

Raymond Martí also writes on the creation and on the image of God, and argues for the Christian interpretation of it, namely that God’s image should not be understood as a corporeal similarity, but as the Scripture talks about spiritual similarity. Martí argues with the help of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* and shows that even according to this Jewish thinker, the Christian interpretation is correct: man shares the likeness of God only in an intellectual sense. He writes:

“On this issue Rabbi Moses ben Maimon in the *Guide of the Perplexed*... Concerning that God said »Let us make man according to our image« it led humans, *i.e.* Jews to believe that God is a corporeal [being], and just as humans he has a body, a soul, with all of the tendons and human limbs. On this [issue] he said, and it was good [that he did so], that human was not created in the image of his creator according to the body, but according to his intellect.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Yair Lorberbaum, *In God’s Image. Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>173</sup> Altmann, 246-7.

<sup>174</sup> “De has quoque materia loquitur R. Moses filius Maimon in Moreh hanebouchim... Quod hoc, quod Deus dixit, Faciamus hominem ad imaginem nostram, Gen. I.V. 26. perduxit homines, id est Judaeos, ad credendum, Deum esse corporeum, et velut hominem ipsum habere corpus simul et spiritum cum omnibus lineamentis, et membris humanis. Quo reprobato dicit, et bene, quod non quantum ad corpus homo factus est ad imaginem sui conditoris, sed quantum ad intellectum.” Martini, 555-556.

Maimonides is presented as a philosophical authority in Marti's works, not only in the *Pugio*, but also in the *Capistrum Judaeorum*.<sup>175</sup> Maimonides's opinion quadrates with the general opinion of the Scholastics in the thirteenth century, namely that the image of God is to be understood in the spiritual sense, because it would be absurd to think that God has a body.

The difference between the Jewish concept on the *Image of God* and the Christian understanding can be best shown in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, where he discusses this question in great detail. Aquinas states that all creatures are made in the image of God, but only man was made truly in that image, since only he has intellectual capacity on earth.<sup>176</sup> Aquinas writes: "Man's excellence consists in the fact that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellectual soul, which raises him above the beasts of the field. Therefore things without intellect are not made to God's".<sup>177</sup>

Aquinas develops this concepts, and claims that angels resemble more to God, because they are pure intellects.<sup>178</sup> We have another difference here, because in the Jewish tradition angels were not created according to God's image (although some are very similar to him, e.g.: Metatron, who got his name from God, and was called "*YHWH Katan*"<sup>179</sup>). Conversely, man is an image of God in his appearance and not in his essence: According to the *Genesis Rabbah*<sup>180</sup> the ministering angels

<sup>175</sup> Gorge K. Hasselhoff, "Some Remarks on Raymond Martini' (c. 1215/30-c. 1284/94) Use of Maimonides." in *Trumah* 3 (2002): 133-148.

<sup>176</sup> Molly C. Haslam, "Imago Dei as Rationality or Relationality: History and Construction." In *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 92-115.

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Question 93. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Second and Revised Edition, 1920)

<sup>178</sup> Haslam, 98.

<sup>179</sup> Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), Chapter XII. 5., 33.

<sup>180</sup> Genesis Rabbah 8:10

אמר רבי הושעיא, בשעה שברא הקב"ה אדם הראשון טעו מלאכי השרת ובקשו לומר לפניו קדוש. In the moment when God created the first man the ministering angels mistook him [for being God], and asked him to say "Holy" before him.

mistook Adam for God.<sup>181</sup> The story continues that God demonstrated the difference between himself and Adam, by putting Adam into deep sleep, into *tardemah*. Neusner argues that this *tardemah* is in fact death, and hence, according to the Midrash, the difference between man and God is that God is immortal.<sup>182</sup> This shows that in the Jewish tradition sometimes human resembles God more than the angels, but certainly only humans share the image, unlike in Aquinas' writing, where every creature is part of divine likeness to a certain degree.

In scholastic theology God is omnipotent and perfect, divine and transcendent, and does not have to do anything, therefore he does not have to incarnate, suffer and die on earth. The reason why this perfect God *chose* to incarnate is that this is the only way God can be atoned for the original sin: through a human being. As discussed above, Christianity has a different concept of *Imago Dei*. Whereas in Judaism this means humans' likeness to God, in Christianity this is true for Adam only till the moment of the original sin. With that act Adam lost his divine likeness, therefore he needed someone to restore it for him, and in Christianity this person is Jesus, the true image of God. Only by the Incarnation can God save his people.<sup>183</sup>

#### *b. Impassibility<sup>184</sup> – God's Emotions*

Jewish concept on divine suffering is considerably different that both the Paul Christian and Raymond Martí present as ridiculous, as a new God who has nothing to with the God of the Bible. The different concept of God caused a number of controversies, we read in the Hebrew account of the Paris disputation paraphrasing a Christian article:

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<sup>181</sup> Yair Loberbaum, *In God's Image. Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>182</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Is the God of Judaism Incarnate?" in *Religious Studies* 24 (1988):213-238

<sup>183</sup> Brian Leftow, "Anselm on the Necessity of the Incarnation." in *Religious Studies* 31 (1995): 167-185

<sup>184</sup> I accept the definition of Marcel Sarot, and by impassibility I mean the "immutability with regard to one's feelings, or the quality of one's inner life" See: Marcel Sarot, "Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God. Some Historical and Systematic Considerations." in *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 363-375.

“The Talmud says that God, after the destruction of the Temple has only four square cubits of the Law in the world belonging to him. Also, that God weeps for the Temple three times every night. Also, the Talmud contains ridiculous stories about the gigantic stature of Og, king of Bashan, and gigantic animals and birds; and about the Messianic feast, and about Adam having intercourse with all the animals, and about Abraham giving three tongues with mustard to the angels, and about God wearing phylacteries.”<sup>185</sup>

Raymund Martí brings the same talmudic passages in the second part of his book in the fifteenth chapter, as said earlier, there is a limited number of Talmudic passages that Christian scholars work with concerning anthropomorphism. After citing the Talmudic passage of Berakhot 3A and translating it to Latin, Martí concludes:

“From here and from a number of other passages from the Talmud, that I omit for the sake of their cumbersome length, it clearly appears that the Jews do not have a true God today. Nowadays nonetheless the Jews [have] a God who suffers and is sad because of the exile of his [people], one should choose from the two: either he wants to liberate the Jews, and cannot, or he does not want it at all. If one chooses the first, one has to be insane to believe in such ambiguity, because such is said in about God in Psalm 135: »Everything God wanted to do in heavens and on earth, in the seas and in the depths he did.”<sup>186</sup>

In the *Pugio* Friar Raymond explicitly quotes from the rabbinic sources, unfortunately the Christian (and ancient Greek and Latin sources) are only implicitly referred to in the text. The Jewish sources are extremely diverse and lengthy.<sup>187</sup> In this place too on the whole page, Martí quotes long passages from tractate *Berakhot*, and shows the impossible and illogical concepts of the Jews from their own literature. The way Martí presents the questions follows the scholastic fashion: he present the question, in this case the concept of God of the Jews, then he presents the Jewish position, subsequently he assumes that there are two possible solutions to the problem, either the God of the

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<sup>185</sup> Maccoby, 161.

<sup>186</sup> “Ex istis et multis aliis his similibus de Talmud, quae fastidio prolixitatis abjeci, liquet aperte Judaeos non habere hodie verum Deum. De moderno enim Judaeorum Deo qui taliter dolet, et tristis est propter captivitatem ipsorum, oportet concendere alterum e duobus, videlicet, vel quod ipse vult liberare Judaeos, sed non potest quidem sed minime vult. Si primum dederint, talem non esse verum Deum nulli sani capitis poterit esse ambiguum; de Deo etenim vero taliter scriptum est in Psalmo centesimo tricesimo quinto, v. 6: כל אשר חפץ ה' עשה בשמים ובארץ בימים ובכל תהומות Omnia quae volui Deus fecit in caelis, et in terra, et in maribus, et in omnibus abyssis.” Martini, 473.

<sup>187</sup> Philippe Bobichon, “The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean.” in Javier del Barco, (ed.), *Hebrew Manuscripts and Incunabula in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 266-291.

Jews is a true God, who cannot save them, or the God of the Jews is their own invention, and not the God of Abraham, since he is perfect, impassible and omnipotent.

The teaching on the impassibility of God<sup>188</sup> is axiomatic since the Church Fathers. As Thomas Weinandy puts it “the static, self-sufficient, immutable and and impassible God of Platonic thought hijacked, via Philo and the early church Fathers, the living, personal, active and passible God of the Bible”.<sup>189</sup> In Platonic philosophy God possesses the attribute of impassibility (*apatheia*), therefore he cannot suffer, because if he suffers, he would become subjected to pain, which is not acceptable on behalf of a perfect divine being.<sup>190</sup> To be sure, there is a scriptural foundation to the concept of the suffering God, but this was accounted for by the theological dogma of the Incarnation.<sup>191</sup>

John Kelly in his book on the early Christian doctrine writes that before the Church councils there was a consensus concerning the oneness and the omnipotence of God. He argues that this doctrine comes from latter-day Judaism and in most of the cases not from contemporary philosophy. However, already in the second century, in Justin’s theology, Kelly detects the language of Platonising Stocism. Justin characterises God as everlasting, ineffable, without a name, changeless and impassible.<sup>192</sup>

As early as in Late Antiquity there is a significant difference: according to the Christian doctrine God Father cannot suffer. The Church condemned Noetus of Smyrna (third century), who pronounced the idea of Patripassianism, claiming that God Father also suffered on the cross, because Christ was God. Gregory of Nyssa thought otherwise: he wrote that Christ indeed

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<sup>188</sup> After Auschwitz the doctrine on divine impassibility dramatically changed, and currently more theologians argue that God does suffer.

See: Mark S. M. Scott, “Cruciform Theodicy Divine Solidarity through the Cross.” *Pathways in Theodicy. An Introduction to the Problem of Evil* (Augsburg: Fortress, 2015), 145-172.

<sup>189</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd., 2000), 19.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> E.g.: Judg, 10:16, Hos 11:8

<sup>192</sup> John Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), 83-84.



underwent the suffering on the Cross, but it was not his divine part that experienced the pain, but his human body,<sup>193</sup> or as Gregory of Nazianzus argued “Christ is God made passible for our sake against sin”<sup>194</sup>

This fusion between Greek speculative theology and the concept of God of Late Antique Jewry to this very day causes a number of controversies, because “the mind of the early Fathers, according to this commonly accepted view, was held captive to the Greek philosophical concept of divine impassibility and simply failed to recognise that it stands in stark contradiction to the Christian revelation”, since God almost without exception is described in the Bible as having intense emotions, showing loving kindness or anger to his children.<sup>195</sup>

The Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon also accepted the doctrine of the impassibility of God Father as a consequence of divine immutability,<sup>196</sup> and the person of the Trinity who was considered as able to suffer was only the human Christ.<sup>197</sup>

In Scholastic theology too, God is immutable and impassible. According to Aquinas even humans in their original state before their sin are immutable. In his understanding ‘*passio*’ derives from *pati*, to suffer, which means that the subject of the pain is removed from its natural disposition. Aquinas uses *passio* in a broader sense: in his system it generally refers to change itself. “*passio* refers to any sort of change, including those changes that are part of the »perfecting process« of nature, such as understanding and sensation. In this sense, humans are »passible« (*passibilis*) both

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<sup>193</sup> Kelly, 298-9.

<sup>194</sup> Christopher A. Beeley, “Cyrill, Leo, and Chalcedon (451).” in *The Unity of Christ. Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2012), 256-284.

<sup>195</sup> Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible. The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>196</sup> Divine immutability has also some Biblical foundations, although significantly less than the passages where God gets angry. (Cf.: Ps 102:27, Is 40:10, Mal 3:6 Js 1:17)

<sup>197</sup> Margaret B. Adam, “A Thomistic Grammar of Hope.” in *Our Only Hope. More than We can Ask or Imagine* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2013), 112-166.

in body and soul”. All creatures are subjected to passions in this understanding, except for God, since he is perfect and immutable.<sup>198</sup>

This conception culminates in Aquinas’ work, where God becomes the pure act, but this way God loses his loving and merciful nature. Aquinas adopts the God of Aristotle, which is the first cause, “the highest and the noblest” of all causes.<sup>199</sup> This concept of God is very impersonal, and hence the experience of divine intimacy is lost. But since God is good itself, and every good thing is originating from him, the creatures too are participating in the creation, and hence there is link between creator and creation that remains.<sup>200</sup>

More importantly this God is not only disconnected from its creation while enjoying his own being, but this concept contradicts a number of scriptural verses, where a merciful God, upon hearing his people crying, brings them out of the land of slavery, remembers their name, etc. Aquinas’s solution to the problem is very similar to that of Maimonides: he understands these Biblical verses metaphorically.<sup>201</sup>

The problem with the quoted talmudic sentence that God is weeping over the exiles of his people caused indignation among the Christian readers, because claiming that God Father — which in this case is the subject of that statement, the God of the Jews — is suffering is a heresy, since it rejects the doctrine of God’s perfection and his immutability. As discussed above, Christianity does work with anthropopathic concepts, most importantly with Christ’s suffering on the cross, but God Father in this system is the perfect Aristotelian God, who enjoys himself without pain. Since Judaism does not believe in the Incarnation, in the Trinitarian doctrine or in a perfect God — especially in Ashkenaz as discussed in Chapter I — all of these features befall to one person, who is

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<sup>198</sup> Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love. Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 11-12.

<sup>199</sup> Steven A. Long, “On Natural Knowledge of God: Aquinas’s Debt to Aristotle.” in Matthew L. Lamb, (ed.), *Theology Needs Philosophy* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 74-88.

<sup>200</sup> Margaret B. Adam, 119.

<sup>201</sup> Susan Reynolds, “»I AM has sent me to you«: Impassibility and Compassion in Aquinas’ Treatment of the Divine Names.” in *Lumen et Vita* 3 (2013): 1-11.

in some places of the rabbinic tradition a perfect God, and in other places, such as in this quotation, shows vulnerability and compassion.

In the Paris disputation among the thirty-five charges we find the quotation of *Baba Metzia* 59A-B, the story of Akhnai that ends with God laughing and saying “my children have defeated me”.<sup>202</sup> There God recognises good legal arguments, but again, this statement is a blasphemy to the Christians, since God is a perfect being who can never be defeated. The question of God’s fatherhood has challenged Christianity too, and Christians also refer to God as Father.

### 3. Apologetics

#### *a. Incarnation*

As said in the introduction it would not be true to claim that Christianity rejected all anthropomorphism, it only discarded those of them that were used for God Father, who — as discussed above — is perfect, spiritual, and does not have a body. But concerning Christ, his prefiguration, his incarnation, and his body even the Christian party used them abundantly.

The person and role of Christ caused controversies not only in the question of divine impassibility or whether the Messiah has already come, but the very body of this Messiah raised a number of questions: how can a divine being have a human body? Since the divinity of Jesus is one of the major line of demarcations between these two religions, and beside this is the essence of Christianity, therefore the demonstration of Jesus’ divinity is of utmost importance. In the thirteenth century under the universal project of the Church, Christian scholars were eager to show that Christian truths — in this case the Incarnation — are logical and rational, and can be deduced from everywhere, since these are universal truths.

Concerning the body of the deity “Christians were at great pains to explain among themselves”.<sup>203</sup> Because in the High Middle Ages Christian scholars did not only want to prove

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<sup>202</sup> Maccoby. 167

<sup>203</sup> Abulafia, “Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate.”, 320.

their religious truths by revelation, but also by reason, therefore they reconsidered the old doctrines with the help of the pagan, classical philosophy.<sup>204</sup>

We saw in Chapter II.3. Anselm of Canterbury and his refutation of the Jewish religion in his *Dialogue against the Jews*, but here another inter-religious work of his is important, the *Cur Deus Homo*, where he explains the doctrine of the Incarnation to the infidels. Half of this work is dealing with the teaching of this doctrine to the unbelievers.<sup>205</sup>

Peter the Venerable, in *Against the Jews*, argued that Jews cannot believe in the Incarnation because of their animal-like spirit. Jews approached the question of the Incarnation in the wrong manner, they were too carnal, and hence unable to embrace the spiritual meaning of this doctrine. Peter wrote that God did not only become human, but by becoming human he could fully retain his divine nature. This dogma that God becomes man goes beyond human perception, therefore those who only work with their bodily side are incapable of perceiving this spiritual truth. This view was shared by Odo of Cambria (d. 1113) and Guibert, abbot of Nogent (d.c. 1125) too, who also contributed to the polemical literature against the Jews.<sup>206</sup>

The novelty of the Dominican and the Franciscan school in the second part of the thirteenth century was that they did not only denounce the Talmud and condemn the irrational teachings in it, but they also found passages that could be used to prove basic Christian doctrines, such as the Incarnation. We read in the *Vikuah Ramban*:

“Fray Paul resumed and brought a proof from a Midrash in which it is said »and I will walk among you«: they told a parable about this verse. What is it like? It is like a king who went out to take a walk with his tenant in his garden, and the tenant sought to hide himself from him. Said the king to him »Why do you hide yourself? I am like you« So in the future the Holy One Blessed be he will walk... since God said, »I am like you« *he must have become a man like them.*”<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> F.B.A Asiedu, “Anselm and the Unbelievers: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the *Cur Deus Homo*.” in *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 530-548.

<sup>206</sup> Abulafia, “Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate”, 321-4.

<sup>207</sup> Maccoby, 138-139.

Raymond Martí:

“In the future the Holy One, Blessed be he, walks with his righteous in the time to come in the Paradise, or in the delightful garden, and the righteous tremble when they see him, and the Holy One Blessed be he says: why do you tremble before me? I am similarly formed like you: and I am like you, I am similar to you: Did I not tell you that I am like you? Would it be possible that I did not respect you? It teaches that for this it is said: »and I will be your God, and you will be my people.« If you do not believe me on account of these things, believe me, because »I am the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt«”<sup>208</sup>

This passage from the *Sifra*<sup>209</sup> gives an excellent opportunity to Paul Christian and Friar Raymond to point out to the Jews that even according to their own accepted tradition God will walk among humans, and will be like them. The friars interpreted this passage as alluding to the Incarnation, since the king in the parable, who is God, said that he will become just like one of his subjects.

In his response, Nahmanides claims that this *midrash* is talking about the future, and second, that it is not talking about the regular world, but about Paradise, and secondly that this parable teaches about the way God speaks to his people, but it does not literally mean that he will become like one of them.

Nonetheless, the verse that Friar Raymond cites, and even what Nahmanides answers (“but in the time to come, the souls of the righteous will be purified of all sin and all ugliness and they

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<sup>208</sup> “Sic futurus est Deus sanctus benedictus ad deambulandum cum justis in tempore venturo in Paradiso, sive horto voluptatis justis autem videntes eum contremiscent a facie ipsius, dicetque illis Deus sanctus benedictus, quare contremiscentis a facie mea? Ecce enim ego conformis sum vobis, et talis sum quales vos, et simul vobis sum: Numquid autem quia dixit vobis, Ecce talis sum quales vos, possibile erit, ut non sit reverentia mea super vos? Docet quid sit as hoc dicendum quod sequitur »Et ero vobis as Deum, et vos eritis mihi ad populom.« Si vero non creditis mihi ex omnibus verbis istis, credatis mihi, quia ego sum Dominus Deus vester qui eduxi vos de terra Aegypti.”

Martini, 732-3.

<sup>209</sup> *Sifra*, Leviticus 26:12 (*Parashat Behukotay*)

והתהלכתי בתוכם. משלו למה הדבר דומה למלך שיצא לטייל עם אריסו בפרדס והיה אותו אריס מיטמר מלפניו אמר לו המלך לאותו אריס "מה לך מיטמר מלפני! הריני כיוצא בך!". כך עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא מטייל עם הצדיקים בגן עדן לעתיד לבאו צדיקים רואים אותו ומזדעזים מלפניו ואומר להם "הריני יוצא בכם!"

And I walked amongst you. What is it like? it is similar to a king goes out for a walk in the Paradise with his tenant, but the tenant his himself from the king, and the king told to the tenant: why are you hiding? I am like you. In the same way the Holy One Blessed be He will walk with the righteous in the Garden of Eden in the future, and they will be shaken before him, and he will tell them I am like you.

will have permission to gaze through a bright glass”),<sup>210</sup> clearly allude to the world to come. In fact, this sentence that the souls will see God in the Messianic future has a New Testamental parallel, where Paul states that in the world to come the righteous will see God face to face.<sup>211</sup>

Contrary to common persuasion, the teaching of the Incarnation is not alien to the Jewish tradition, and Friar Raymond is not mistaken where he points to this midrashic passage as the proof of it. Jacob Neusner argues that there is a small, but critical corpus of passages where the rabbinic tradition talks about incarnation, although the details of it are not clear. According to him the incarnation of God is present especially in the *Talmud Bavli*. He argues that the characteristics that are assigned to the Torah are the characteristics of the incarnate God, for example: the Torah is sent to the people on earth, the Torah helps against evil, is a weapon against death, is “the union between humanity and divinity”.<sup>212</sup>

## Conclusion

To the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic traditions of both Christianity and Judaism philosophy posed a serious challenge. The effects can well be detected in the polemics of these two religions against one another. Since these groups shared a significant part of their tradition that both of them

<sup>210</sup> Maccoby, 139

ראיתי בני עלייה והן מועטין אם אלף הן בני מהן אם מאה הם בני מהן אם שנים הן בני מהן ומי זוטרי כולי האי והא אמראמר רבא תמני סרי אלפי דרא הוה דקמיה קודשא בריך הוא שנאמר: סביב שמנה עשר אלף ל"ק הא דמסתכלי באספקלריא המאירה הא דלא מסתכלי באספקלריא המאירה

“I saw the members of the Highness, of the caste of the spiritually prominent, who are truly righteous, and they are few. If they are one thousand, me and my son will be among them. If they are one hundred, me and my son will be among them; and if they are two, then me and me son will be them. The Gemara asks: Are they so few? Have not Rava said?!: There are eighteen thousand righteous queeuing before the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is stated: Surrounded by eighteen thousand. Apparently, the righteous are numerous. The Gemara answers: This is not a difficulty. This saying of Rabbi Shimon ba Yohai said Rabbah said this is referring to the very few who saw the Divine Presence through a bright mirror while that statement of Rava is referring to those who do not view the Divine Presence through a bright mirror.”

Nahmanides is referring also to the Talmud. (Sukkah 45 b, Sanh. 97b)

<sup>211</sup> (1 Cor 13:12) “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

See: Gábor Roskó, Tamás Turán, *Képfogyatkozás* [Diminishment of the Image] (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2004), 87.

<sup>212</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Is the God of Judaism Incarnate?*, 229-230

recognised as authoritative, it was important to show that the other was mistaken and illogical. In case of Christianity demonstrating that the Jews invented a new God for themselves caused mockery at least, but intolerance at worst, since it undermined the Jewish position as “an incorrect but still acceptable” form of Christianity.

Secondly, in both of the cases the impact of rationalism is crucial; both parties claimed that their truth can be deduced not only from the revealed texts, but from everywhere, since they were seeking for a universal truth. As part of this global project, Christianity turned to the Jewish sources and aimed to find their doctrines — in this concept the truth — there too.

The problem arose when Christian scholars saw not only a backward, carnal system in the Jewish texts, but blasphemies against God, Jesus, and the Trinity. The content of the rabbinic tradition was outrageous to the Christian readers, since it presented the anthropomorphic God in a way that contradicted reason and logic. Both Christianity and Judaism depicted God in an anthropomorphic way and used anthropomorphism excessively, but in a very different way. The difference is caused by the Christian dogma, namely the trinitarian doctrine.

With the trinitarian doctrine Christianity can keep the anthropomorphic statements on God, because all corporeal descriptions, and emotion can be assigned to Christ, and God Father becomes the God of the philosophers, the perfect, immutable, impassible, and transcendent God. At the same time thanks to the Trinitarian doctrine divine intimacy is not lost, because Christ is a composite mediator between the divine and human realms, who suffered and died on the cross. In Judaism nevertheless there is no such option as to designate three different persons for these qualities, therefore only one person should bear all of these characteristics, God. God is understood by Christianity as God Father, and hence he cannot have all the features the Son has, namely the corporeal and emotional traits.

The controversy is mainly caused by the Trinitarian doctrine: in Judaism sometimes the Torah is incarnate, whereas in Christianity it is Christ. Christ is the one to suffer, to have

compassion, love and human flesh, whereas God can remain immutable and spiritual. Another important difference is the doctrine of the original sin that is non-existent in mainstream Judaism, whereas it is one of the most basic Christian doctrines. Because of this original sin dogma the concepts of the Imago Dei differ: in Christianity Adam lost his divine image after the original sin, and so did humanity. From that moment on it exists in Christ only, who has the true image of God, and who can restore it with his atonement. In Judaism Adam's sin was his individual action, and hence it does not effect humanity as gravely as in the Christian doctrine, and humans can keep their divine image.<sup>213</sup>

Even though these two solutions appeared as an answer to the challenge of philosophy, in the writings of Rashi or Moshe Taku the anthropomorphic tradition survived and was used excessively, because the Ashkenazic culture did not embrace philosophy.

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<sup>213</sup> Although the teaching that human has a divine image derives from an aggadic source, this is one of the few cases when an aggadic statement has halakhic consequences. e.g.: murder is called in rabbinic terminology the “diminishment of the image of God”. This terminology demonstrates that humans are seen in Judaism constantly as the image of God.

See: Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image. Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 197-206



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have presented the controversy over the anthropomorphic aspects of the Rabbinic Literature in the thirteenth century, and shown that even though Christianity also excessively uses anthropomorphism in its system, and it is a crucial part of its foundations — God Incarnate — Christian theologians chose to attack the Jewish use of it.

These philosophical polemics against anthropomorphism served as a perfect battlefield for Christianity, where it could show the childish, backward, and carnal imagination of Jews and at the same time strengthen its doctrinal unity by demonstrating that Christianity is the most logical, rational and mature religion of all. It is noteworthy to remark that during this controversy on the true nature of the Jewish religion, Jews themselves seemed to be embarrassed about their tradition. When Rabbi Yehiel is asked about the role and the authority of the *aggadah*, he renounces its importance and presents the geonic/Maimonidean opinion on its lack of authority instead of explaining to the juridical court that Jewish tradition does opt for the anthropomorphic explanation (as seen in the case of Rashi and Moshe Taku). Rabbi Yehiel does not risk to be seen as irrational, but presents the Jewish faith as a religion that is in perfect harmony with philosophy.

I have demonstrated that even though Sephardi religious philosophy opts for the synchronisation of the Jewish tradition with rational philosophy, this does not happen in Ashkenaz in the thirteenth century, and Jews under Christian dominion preserve the anthropomorphic image of God. This image was criticised by Christian scholars, because the Jewish God wept, swore to his right hand, let himself to be defeated by men, got angry, laughed, prayed and studied in heaven, which in the eyes of Christians seemed outrageous, and at the same time ridiculous.

Yet the anthropomorphic God is very important to Christianity, because Christ is true God and true human in the same person. Christians turned to a theological solution when they

encountered rationalist philosophy: they designated the different qualities to different persons, hence they could keep their anthropomorphic view of God and still claim to be philosophers. Christ became the human who suffered, had a body, was compassionate and experienced human conditions, whereas God Father could be identified with the God of Aristotle, the perfect being who is entirely spiritual and transcendental. Under the influence of this rationalist zeal and being conscious about the logical structure of their own religion, rationalist Christian scholars turned to the Rabbinic tradition, not only to refute the Jewish God, but also to show the superiority of Christianity that can find support even in the Jewish texts. Therefore they did not only use rabbinic literature for polemical purposes, but also for apologetics, in order to present the perfect harmony of logic and Christianity. One has to note that apologetic use of rabbinic literature, which goes back to the Barcelona disputation and the *Pugio fidei*, also contributed a counter-argument allowing its preservation and study by Christians.

Unfortunately this all-inclusive inquiry led to the mockery of Jews at least, but since this attempt to disprove the validity of the Jewish God also brought about the abrogation of the legitimacy of Jewish existence, it caused intolerance.

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