

Talmudic Quotations in Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla Literalis*

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Abstract

The *Postilla literalis super totam Bibliam*, written by Nicholas of Lyra (France, 1270-1349) is remarkable for the extensive use of texts and oral traditions of Jewish origin made by its author. This paper deals with the place of the Talmud among the Jewish sources cited in the *Postilla*. For Nicholas the Talmud was a new doctrine invented by the Jews sometime in their past but believed to be divine and to be given to Moses in Sinai. When reading Nicholas' *Postilla*, one finds many citations from medieval Jewish sources, but very few excerpts from the Talmud except as polemic with the purpose of ridiculing and disproving them. It appears that Nicholas avoided direct Talmudic citations within the *Postilla*, likely due to the hostile attitudes prevalent specifically toward the Talmud within the Christian world he inhabited.

The Franciscan scholar Nicholas of Lyra is considered to have been one of the most important Christian exegetes of the Bible. Nicholas was born in 1270 and worked as a Christian scholar in Paris during the first half of the fourteenth century until his death in 1349. He composed several works in various fields, one of which was his most famous work *Postilla literalis super totam Bibliam*, his commentary on the entire Bible.¹ There are several aspects that make the *Postilla* unique; first and foremost, its strikingly literal approach to the text in contrast to the dominant Christian exegesis.² Equally remarkable was Nicholas' exceptional and extensive reliance on the Hebrew text of the Bible in his commentary along with Jewish interpretations, especially those of Rashi.³

1. On Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla literalis* see Philip D. W. KREY/Lesley SMITH (Eds.), *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture*, Leiden, 2000; Henri DE LUBAC, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 2nd part, vol. 2, Paris, 1961, pp. 344-358. Quotations from Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla Literalis* are taken from *Biblia sacra cum glossis interlineari et ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani postilla et moralitatibus, Burgensis additionibus et Thoringi replicis*, vol. 1, Lyon, 1545. Quotations from other editions will be cited *in situ*.
2. On different aspects of literal exegesis in the *Postilla*, see Frans VAN LIERE, "The Literal Sense of the Books of Samuel and Kings: from Andrew of St. Victor to Nicholas of Lyra", in: Krey/Smith (Eds.), *Nicholas of Lyra* (as in note 1), pp. 59-82; Mary DOVE, "Literal Senses in the Song of Songs", in: *ibid.*, pp. 129-146.
3. The most comprehensive study thus far about Nicholas and his Jewish sources is that by Herman HAILPERIN, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, Pittsburgh, PA, 1963, pp. 137-358. Other studies are: Deena C. KLEPPER, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, PA, 2007; Ari GEIGER, "A Student and an Opponent: Nicholas of Lyra

In this article I will examine the place of the Talmud among the Jewish sources Nicholas used in the *Postilla*. I will begin by discussing his interpretation of the term *Talmud* – determining Nicholas’ understanding of its composition and rabbinic literary content, followed by an investigation into the nature of this compilation, whether theological, legal (*halakhic*) or perhaps something else. Then I will examine Nicholas’ attitude toward the Talmud, by comparing his references to Talmudic quotations with his citations from other Jewish sources.⁴

The contrast in Nicholas’ time between the central function of the Talmud in the Jewish world and the antipathy that developed toward it among Christians necessitates examination of the status of the Talmud in the *Postilla*. The Talmud was the most frequently studied text among Jews, particularly those in ashkenazic academies (*yeshivot*) in Germany and those that still remained in France in Nicholas’ time.⁵ It was also the most important literary source of the critical and fundamental basis underlying responses to various queries for *halakhic* determination necessary for daily Jewish practice. Coincidentally and to some extent consequently, a strong antipathy in the forms of polemical writings and confiscations of the Talmud developed among members of the Church.⁶ This contrast must have presented a dilemma for

and his Jewish Sources”, in: Gilbert Dahan (Ed.), *Nicolas de Lyre, franciscain du XIVe siècle, exégète et théologien*, Turnhout, 2011, pp. 167-203.

4. This article is based on comprehensive research conducted on the *Postilla* on the books Genesis–Deuteronomy and examinations of Jewish quotations from other books of the Bible in the *Postilla* which appear in Wolfgang BUNTE, *Rabbinische Traditionen bei Nikolaus von Lyra: ein Beitrag zur Schriftauslegung des Spätmittelalters*, Frankfurt am Main, 1994. Bunte collected only part of the quotations from Jewish sources, but in light of the significant results of this study, these were sufficient to complete the impression obtained from the in-depth study of the Pentateuch.
5. See Talya FISHMAN, *Becoming the People of the Talmud. Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, Philadelphia, PA, 2011, pp. 7-8. Fishman’s entire book is devoted to the process of the canonization of the Talmud and its becoming central in halakhic determination for medieval Jews. For a summary of the book see *ibid.*, pp. 10-19. On the central place held by the Talmud over Bible study in medieval Jewish academies, see Frank TALMAGE, “Keep Your Sons from Scripture: The Bible in Medieval Jewish Scholarship and Spirituality”, in: Thome Clemens/Michael Wyshogrod (Eds.), *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, New York, 1987; Ephraim KANARFOGEL, “On the Role of Bible Study in Medieval Ashkenaz”, in: Barry Walfish (Ed.), *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, vol. 1, Haifa, 1993, pp. 151-166. An expression of the centrality of the Talmud in Jewish religious life can be found in the Jews’ appeal to Pope Innocent IV requesting the return of their confiscated books of the Talmud. Innocent writes, in a letter from 1247, that, according to the Jews, without the Talmud they are unable to comprehend the Bible and their laws. See Shlomo SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See and the Jews. Vol. 1: Documents, 492-1404*, Toronto, 1988, pp. 196-197; Solomon GRAYZEL, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, vol. 1, New York, 1966, pp. 274-275.
6. The struggle against rabbinic literature focused on Talmud, a term with diverse meanings among Christians. The conflict was expressed through anti-Talmudic polemic in the twelfth century, and by confiscation and prohibition of its possession by the Inquisition beginning in the mid-thirteenth-century. Different accusations were raised by the Church against the Talmud, as being a new doctrine preventing Jews from accepting Christianity; containing heresy against God, contempt of Christian saints and utter nonsense; inciting hatred of Christians by Jews. On this see Jeremy COHEN, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jews in Medieval Christianity*, Berkeley, 1999, pp. 317-363; *Id.*, *The Friars and the Jews: the Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*, Ithaca, 1982, pp. 57-76, 78-81, 91-98, 122-128, 147-150, 165-168; John FRIED-

Nicholas of Lyra, pitting his loyalty to the dictates of the Church leaders against his need to use as many Jewish sources as possible, particularly one as central as the Talmud in writing the *Postilla*.

Nicholas of Lyra's perception of the term *Talmud*

How did Nicholas of Lyra understand the term *Talmud*? What did he know about it and the circumstances of its composition?

A passage from one of Nicholas' works might provide some insight into this issue. At the beginning of *Quaestio de Adventu Christi*, a polemical essay he wrote against the Jews,⁷ Nicholas presents the body of rabbinic literary knowledge necessary to successfully argue against Jews. And this is how he describes the Talmud:

Preter Scripturas canonicas sunt alie scripture a Iudeis recepte tanquam autenticate, scilicet Thalamud, quia, secundum ipsos, Scriptura ista non differet a Scripturis canonicis, nisi sicut lex dato verbo a lege data in scripto, quia ista fuit Moysi revelata a Domino sicut et illa que sunt scripta in libris Moysi.⁸

This citation indicates that, for Nicholas, the term 'Talmud' represents a new doctrine believed by the Jews to have been given to Moses on Mount Sinai, preserved and transmitted orally through the generations. This is in contrast to the Jewish perception that 'Talmud' refers to the compiled commentary on the Mishna, based on hundreds of years of discussion by Talmudic sages.⁹

Nicholas further explains the reasons why the Talmud remained in oral form for so many years and describes the process of its transmission throughout its history until it was written.¹⁰ He then goes on to describe another type of rabbinic literature:

MAN/Jean CONNELL HOFF/Robert CHAZAN, *The Trial of the Talmud, Paris, 1240*, Toronto, 2012; Gilbert DAHAN/Elie NICOLAS (Eds.), *Le brûlement du Talmud a Paris 1242-1244*, Paris, 1999.

7. On this work see Deana C. KLEPPER, *Nicholas of Lyra's Quaestio de adventu Christi and the Franciscan Encounter with Jewish Tradition in the Late Middle Ages*, PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1995; *Ead.*, "The Dating of Nicholas of Lyra's *Quaestio de adventu Christi*", in: *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 86 (1993), pp. 297-312.
8. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 13781, fol. 56r.
9. In the introduction to the anthology *Extractiones de Talmud* (compiled in the mid-thirteenth century as part of the Talmudic disputation), the Talmud is indeed described as a body of work belonging to a certain period and ascribed to Rav 'Aši (one of its compilers). However it is only according to one of the manuscript versions that the author showed awareness of the time gap between the editing of the Mishna by R. Judah haNaši and Rav 'Aši's compiling of the Talmud. See Chen MERCHAVIA, *The Church Versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500-1248)*, Jerusalem, 1970 [Hebrew], p. 322.
10. This description is parallel in part to one which appears in Mish. Ab I, 1. Nicholas cites only the first links in the chain of transmission listed in Tractate Aboth (Moses, Joshua, the elders and after them *auctores posteriores* who wrote the Talmud).

Similiter dicta doctorum Hebraicorum qui glossaverunt Vetus Testamentum sunt autentica apud eos multo magis quam apud nos dicta Augustinus et aliorum catholicorum doctorum, et hoc accipiunt ex hoc quod habetur Deut. 17, “non declinabis ad dextram neque ad sinistram”, ubi loquitur Scriptura de sacerdotibus et doctoribus ad quos precipit Scriptura in dubiis recurrere, et eorum sententiam indiscusse tenere.¹¹

In this paragraph, Nicholas refers to post-Talmudic Jewish exegesis on the Old Testament, most likely medieval Jewish commentaries.¹² He emphasizes that although they are more recent, these sources have no less authority than the Talmud, just as the Church fathers are accorded relatively high authority even though they are subsequent to the New Testament.

It appears from his descriptions in these two paragraphs, that in contrast to the Jewish belief Nicholas himself views the Talmud as a new doctrine invented by the Jews sometime in their past. This may be a reflection of the Christian perspective that just as Jesus brought the world a New Testament interpreting the Old Testament in an innovative way, the same is true of the Jewish perception of the Talmud. Nicholas presents post-Talmudic Jewish literature as parallel to patristic literature from the perspective of the authority each one holds among believers in their respective religions. However, there are at least two other possible explanations for this parallel. Each of these corpora constitutes the literary period following their respective “new” Testaments, and they both regard scriptural interpretation as being of central importance in each of these religions.

This approach to the Talmud is consistent with that which was commonly held in late Medieval Christianity. The list of charges against the Talmud sent in 1239 by Nicholas Donin to Pope Gregory IX indicates familiarity with the Jewish belief

11. BnF, Ms. lat. 13781 (as in note 8), fol. 56r. This principle of Sages’ authority based on the verse in Dt 17, 11 appears in Nicholas Donin’s indictment against the Talmud (paragraph 7). See Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 16558, fol. 213ra; Isidore LOEB, “La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud”, in: *Revue des études juives* 2 (1881), p. 261. Nicholas indicates here the exposition on Dt 17, 11 in the Sifra Dt 154; the application of this exposition appears in a number of places in the Talmud, for example: Ber 19b; Sab 23a; Men 38a.
12. So it seems, though Nicholas does not write it explicitly. This was also the understanding of Gilbert DAHAN (*The Christian Polemic against the Jews in the Middle Age*, Notre Dame, 1998, pp. 95-96) and Deena KLEPPER (*The Insight of Unbelievers* [as in note 3], p. 92). Ramon Martí, in his introduction to *Pugio fidei*, also speaks of three parts of Jewish literature: “illis testamenti ueteris, quos iudei recipiunt libris, necnon et de talmud ac reliquis scriptis suis apud eos autenticis” (Raymundus MARTINI, *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos*, Leipzig, 1687 [repr. Farnborough Eng., 1967], *praefatio*, p. 2. Nicholas was aware of the developments and changes in Judaism. He mentions *Hebrei Moderni* in a number of places (Ex 16, 15, Hbr 2, 11). Jeremy Cohen (*Living Letters* [as in note 6], pp. 356-358) shows that in Ramon Martí’s view there were significant differences between the new Jews and those from the time of the Sages. In Cohen’s opinion a change occurred in the Christian perception of Judaism, viewing it as heresy because it had ceased to be the Old Testament Judaism, as discussed by Augustine in formulating his Doctrine of the Jewish Witness. For a summary of this opinion see: *ibid.*, pp. 358-363. Other scholars do not accept Cohen’s opinion on this issue (*ibid.*, p. 359).

in the Divine source of the Talmud (that is the oral Law).¹³ Ramon Martí's *Pugio fidei* mentions this belief as well.¹⁴ Both Donin and Martí also refer to the belief that the Talmud was only put in writing many years after it was transmitted to Moses.¹⁵ There are early and mid-thirteenth-century documents relating to the struggle against the Talmud, which argue that the Talmud was the Jewish alternative to, and in competition with, the New Testament.¹⁶

This perception of the Talmud as the Jewish New Testament gives us a glimpse into the ways Christians characterized this text. The most widely used Latin term in Christian literature for the Hebrew *Talmud* is *Doctrina*,¹⁷ typical of the way they translate Hebrew terms literally¹⁸ in the sense that *limmud* לִימֵד, which is the root

13. Paragraphs 1-2. BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 (as in note 11), fol. 211ra-b; LOEB, "Controverse" (as in note 11), pp. 253-255.
14. He presents this perception of Judaism in the introduction to the treatise (MARTINI, *Pugio fidei*, 1687 [as in note 12, p. 3]), and later refutes it (Pars 2, Cap. 14, Art. 8; p. 450).
15. Paragraphs 3-4. BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 (as in note 11), fol. 211vb-212rb; LOEB, "Controverse" (as in note 11), pp. 255-257; MARTINI, *Pugio fidei*, 1687 (as in note 12), *Praefatio*, p. 3.
16. One of the reasons given for the Talmud disputation was that it prevented Jews from seeing the truth of the Christian faith, as Innocent IV wrote to the King of France in May 1244. See SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See* (as in note 5), pp. 180-181; GRAYZEL, *Church* (as in note 5), pp. 250-252. The words of Petrus Venerabilis also indicate this as being one of the problems of the Jewish Talmud. See PETRUS VENERABILIS, *Adversus Iudeorum inveteratam duritiem*. Ed. Yvonne Friedman, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 58, Turnhout, 1985, p. 186, ll. 2180-2182; 187, ll. 2193-2198. It is noteworthy that Nicholas does not reproach the Jews here with the widespread accusation that the Talmud replaced the Old Testament in their eyes, despite the fact that this would be a direct inference from the perception of the Talmud as a Jewish parallel to the New Testament. For references to this accusation see for example in Clement IV's request to Jaume I [1267] (SIMONSOHN, *Holy See* [as in note 5], pp. 235-236; Solomon GRAYZEL, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, vol. 2, New York, 1989, pp. 99-102) and in the edict of Honorius IV to the archbishop of Canterbury [1286] (SIMONSOHN, *Holy See*, pp. 262-263; GRAYZEL, *ibid.*, p. 157). This also seems to be the case for Petrus Venerabilis whose fifth chapter of his polemic against the Jews is devoted to the Talmud, where he views the Talmud as the Jews' central authority. See for example PETRUS VENERABILIS, *Adversus Iudeorum*, 1985, pp. 125-126, ll. 30-38; 139, ll. 515-534.
17. Thus in the polemic of PETRUS ALFONSI, *Dialogue against the Jews*. Ed. Irvén M. Resnick, Washington, DC, 2006, p. 32, as well as in PETRUS VENERABILIS, *Adversus Iudeorum*, 1985 (as in note 16), pp. 125-126, ll. 32-35; 186, ll. 2178-2180. Identification of the Talmud with *Doctrina* also continued in the thirteenth century. For example, in Gregory IX' edict to the archbishops of France (June 1939). See GRAYZEL, *Church* (as in note 5), pp. 240-241. In addition, in the report Odo of Châteauroux wrote on the Talmud in August 1247. See GRAYZEL, *ibid.*, p. 276, n. 3, and also in some of the indictments against the Talmud (LOEB, "Controverse" [as in note 11], pp. 262-263; BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 [as in note 11], fol. 213rb) and in the *Extractiones* (*ibid.*, fol. 97rb). In addition, we continue to find the term *Doctrina* used in conjunction with *Talmud* later than Nicholas. For example in Paul of Burgos' (c. 1351-1435) *Additiones* to Nicholas' *Postilla* on Za 5, 1.
18. There are multiple examples of this. Donin's indictment contains the translated term Oral Law (תורה שבעל פה): *lex super os* or *verba super os* (LOEB, "Controverse", [as in note 11], paragraphs 2, 3, pp. 254-256; BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 [as in note 11], fols. 211vb-212ra). This can be seen in Nicholas of Lyra's writing as well. He brings an interpretation in one of his polemics from "libro... qui dicitur *ceder olam*, id est ordo seculi" (NICOLAUS DE LYRA, *Tractatulus contra quondam Iudaeum ex verbis Evangelii, Christum & eius doctrinam impugnantem*, in: *Bibliorum Sacrorum cum Glossa Ordinaria...*, vol. 6, Venice, 1601, p. 1728E).

word of *Talmud* תלמוד, means ‘study’. It is impossible however to ignore the fact that *Doctrina* has a very specific meaning for Christians, that is a collection of binding principles of faith on various subjects. In addition, the New Testament brought by Jesus contains no laws but rather a collection of beliefs brought to replace the laws in the Old Testament. Therefore the “new Jewish Testament”, that is the Talmud, was generally considered a system of (heretical) beliefs invented and written by the Jews long after the closing of the Bible, despite the fact that it actually deals primarily with law (*halakha*) and not theology.¹⁹

Indeed there are examples of Christian scholars with exceptional expertise (usually guided by Jewish converts) in the structure of the Talmud and the *halakhic* material it contains, the most prominent of whom is the author of the collection *Extractiones de Talmud*.²⁰ However, we do not find evidence of this type of expertise in Nicholas of Lyra’s work.

As we saw above in his polemic, Nicholas made clear his belief that Jewish Biblical exegesis is not part of the Talmud and was written after it. If so, what is found in the Talmud? According to Nicholas it contains theology and *dogma* but not Biblical interpretation. Nicholas was mistaken on this point as well, since the Talmud is full of interpretations of the Old Testament, though it contains neither sequential nor systematic interpretation of the Biblical text.

Nicholas’ distinction between the theological character of the Talmud and the interpretive nature of the later Jewish literature becomes apparent in light of the picture presented below of the uses made by Nicholas of Talmudic sources, or more precisely his references to the Jewish citations he brought in the *Postilla*.

Talmudic citations in Nicholas of Lyra’s *Postilla Literalis*

1. Quotations attributed to Mishnaic and Talmudic sages

Which Jewish sources did Nicholas use and how many of them were taken from the Talmud? An attempt to identify the Jewish sources used by Nicholas of Lyra in the *Postilla Literalis* demonstrates that a very large number come from Rashi

19. Thus for example, in the chapter devoted to an attack on the Talmud from his polemical treatise against the Jews, Petrus Venerabilis writes: “Ea si ut a me expressa sunt uera sunt, immo quia sunt, falsum est quod dixistis Iosue uestrum uidisse Christianos in inferno, quia credunt in Filium Mariae et non obseruant legem Moysi et quia non *credunt Thalmuth*” (PETRUS VENERABILIS, *Adversus Iudeorum*, 1985 [as in note 16], p. 169, ll. 1555-1558). Petrus uses the word *credunt*, a verb that applies to a system of beliefs and not a legal text.

20. The *praeformatio* to the *Extractiones* contains a description of the Talmudic structure. It shows a good, if incomplete acquaintance of the author with the Talmud, including the distinction between Mishna and Talmud and the division into *Sedarim* (Orders) and tractates (BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 [as in note 11], fol. 97rb, quoted in Ulisse CECINI/Óscar DE LA CRUZ/Eulàlia VERNET, “Observacions sobre la traducció llatina del Talmud (París, mitjan segle XIII)”, in: *Tamid* 11 (2015), pp. 73-97 [esp. pp. 79-80]).

on the Bible (eleventh century, France).²¹ The remainder of the quotations we find come from other Jewish commentators (R. Moshe HaDarshan, R. Sh^muel ben Meir (Rashbam), R. Joseph Qara – are all eleventh-twelfth century French commentators), as well as Maimonides (twelfth century, Spain and Egypt), but are not attributed to them.

Did Nicholas use earlier sources, from the Mishna and the Talmud (first-fifth centuries)? Materials from earlier sources are found in the *Postilla*, but it is unlikely that they were gleaned directly from their original texts. There are few citations by Nicholas of Mishnaic and Talmudic sages.²² But there are almost no instances where Nicholas attributes these sages (or their statements) as deriving from the Mishna (a term I have not thus far found in Nicholas' writings) or the Talmud (which also contains those same quotations by Mishnaic sages).²³ Because the Mishna was well known to Jews of his time and many sections were cited in medieval writings, Nicholas would have had ample opportunity to gather these sources from contemporary Jewish literature, such as Rashi's commentary on the Bible. It is interesting to note that although many of the comments attributed to the sages from the Mishnaic period appear in Rashi's commentary on the Bible (Nicholas' primary source for learning Jewish interpretations), Nicholas attributes them to one of those sages and not to Rashi. For example, Nicholas' interpretation of the sin of Nadav and Avihu (Lv 10):

| Rashi, Leviticus 10, 2 | <i>Postilla</i> on Leviticus 10, 1 |
|--|---|
| <p>Rabbi Eliezer said: the sons of Aaron died only because they gave decisions of religious matters in the presence of their teacher, Moses. Rabbi Yishma'el said: they died because they entered the Sanctuary intoxicated by wine. You may know [that this is so] because after their death he admonished those who survived that they should not enter when intoxicated by wine.²⁴</p> | <p>dicit R. Simeon quod causa mortis Nadab et Abiu fuit eo, quod potati etiam plus debito intraverunt ad ministrandum, et pro tali irreverentia mortui sunt. Et hoc videtur ex litera praecedenti, cum dicit "arreptisque Nadab et Abiu" etc., ex quo videtur quod impetuose, et sine directione ex calefactione vini ingresserunt se ad ministrandum. Hoc etiam videtur ex litera consequenti, quia, immediate post factum istud, Dominus dixit ipsi Aaron: "Vinum & omne quod inebriare potest, non biberis tu & filii tui" etc.²⁵</p> |

21. This refers to interpretations ascribed to Rashi, those more generally to the "Jews", or those unasccribed to any prior source. See HAILPERIN, *Rashi* (as in note 3), pp. 137-246; GEIGER, "A Student and an Opponent" (as in note 3), pp. 177-187.
22. For example: R. Shim'on (Lv 10, 1); R. 'Aqiva (Nm 11, 22), R. Nathan (Nm 24, 17); R. Berehia (Ps 109, 3).
23. I found no incidences in the *Postilla* on the Pentateuch where Nicholas quoted sages from the Mishna or Talmud and ascribed them to these works. I did find two such sources quoted in the *Postilla* on other books of the Bible. See *Postilla* on Amos 9, 11; Agg 2, 8. Unlike Nicholas who appears to not have been aware of the distinction between Mishna and Talmud, the editors of the *Extractiones* were aware. See: CECINI *et al.*, "Observacions" (as in note 20), p. 75.
24. Translation from *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*. Ed. Morris Rosenbaum/Abraham M. Silbermann, Jerusalem, 1973, p. 38.
25. Page 231C.

Comparison with Rashi's citation on this section shows similarities which suggest that Rashi may have been the source. Rashi brings the same explanation as that of Nicholas ("they entered drunk"), although in the name of R. Yishma'el (not R. Shim'on).²⁶ If it is true that Rashi also adds the opinion of R. 'Eli'ezer that Aaron's children were conveying their decisions of religious matters in the presence of their teacher (a sign of disrespect), this is not an argument against the hypothesis that Nicholas used Rashi. Nicholas may have just chosen to discard this part of the commentary. It is also common to find Nicholas attributing citations simply to Rashi without further noting that Rashi himself attributed these sources to Mishnaic or Talmudic sages.²⁷

These phenomena point to the likelihood that Nicholas did not learn Rashi's words by reading his commentary, but rather by oral study from someone of Jewish origin, who taught him from memory but who did not know Rashi's primary sources.²⁸ In other (far fewer) cases, like the one discussed here, he remembered that the commentary he was transmitting was attributable to a Mishnaic sage (whether he remembered it directly or mediated through Rashi) and shared it with Nicholas in the sage's name, in which case Nicholas attributed them to that particular Mishnaic sage. It is because Nicholas perceived the Talmud as a theological composition comprising a complete belief system, as distinguished from the later Biblical commentaries, that he mentioned these sages only by name, failing to identify them as Mishnaic or Talmudic sages. Apparently, for him these sages were Jewish exegetes rather than Talmudic sages, thus reflecting his flawed knowledge of the history of rabbinic literature and Jewish sages.

2. *Attributed Talmudic citations*

It is extremely rare to find interpretations attributed to the Talmud in the *Postilla*. Here is one example of the few:

Dicunt Hebraei quod habetur in Talmud, quod iste hircus qui offerebatur in neomenia erat pro expiatione ipsius Dei, eo quod minoravit lunam.²⁹

Even when citing Talmudic excerpts Nicholas usually does not mention the word *Talmud*, but rather the tractate in which they appear (which he refers to as *liber*), for example:

26. Both versions appear in different textual versions of *Leviticus Rabbah*. See *Leviticus Rabbah*. Ed. Mordechai Margalio, New York, ²1993 [¹1956-1958], p. 255.

27. For example, *Postilla* on Nm 11, 1; 27, 3 (cf. Rashi on the same verses).

28. See GEIGER, "A Student and an Opponent" (as in note 3), pp. 179-187.

29. *Postilla* on Nm 28, 15, p. 315G. Nicholas presents the legend of the moon being reduced in size as punishment for the moon's complaint that it was not feasible that the moon and the sun remain equally large and rule together over the heavens (Hul 60b).

dicitur in quodam libro qui apud Iudaeos dicitur 'liber benedictionum', vel 'benedictiones'...³⁰

This is also the case when he cites and attributes to the Palestinian Talmud.³¹

sciendum quod in Zenhedrin Ierosolymitano (qui apud hebraeos est liber autenticus) dicitur...³²

Nicholas did not invent this method of citing the tractate rather than the Talmud.³³ It is found in earlier Christian sources. Ramon Martí commonly used this style in his *Pugio fidei*. An example of this can be seen when Martí brings a parallel to a narrative brought by Nicholas from Tractate Berakhot (cited above). He then references: "libro Berachot, distinctione *Haroeh makom*" (meaning tractate Berakhot, chapter named 'haroeh makom').³⁴ This narrative is also mentioned in mid-thirteenth-century documents written concerning the Talmud disputation, and cited either by tractate and chapter names or only by the name of a sage who is said to have stated it rather than referenced using the term Talmud.³⁵ It is not surprising that Nicholas uses this method to cite Talmudic material, since most of his Talmudic citations also appear in earlier Christian texts and it is likely that these were his source.³⁶

We cannot know with certainty whether Nicholas was aware that these *libri* (meaning the tractates he referenced) were part of the Talmud. We do not find statements by Nicholas saying that they are. However, it is difficult to accept the possibility of this having been well known to Ramon Martí yet unknown to Nicholas.

30. *Postilla* on Nm 21, 33, p. 301. Here Nicholas brings the legend from Ber 54b, telling of Og, king of the Bashan, wanting to destroy the camp of Israel.

31. The acquaintance of Ashkenazi sages with material from the Palestinian Talmud was usually second-hand, as it was a relatively unknown corpus in the medieval Jewish world. On this see Baruch M. Bokser, "An Annotated Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Palestinian Talmud", in: Wolfgang Haase (Ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 19/2, Berlin/New York, 1979, pp. 139-256, especially 235-237; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists: their History, Writings and Methods*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1986 [Hebrew], pp. 703-712. Given this, the question of how Nicholas became familiar with and where he acquired citations from the Palestinian Talmud deserves special attention and research, issues I am unable to discuss in this article.

32. Prologue to Is 35. *Biblia Sacra cum glossis, interlineari et ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani postilla, ac moralitatibus, Burgensis additionibus, et Thoringi replicis*, vol. 4, Venice, 1588, p. 64F. See also quotation from Palestinian Sanhedrin in I Mcc 6, 49.

33. For additional examples in the *Postilla* see II Rg 21, 16 (quotation from Yeb); Am 9, 11 (San); Agg 2, 8 (San).

34. MARTINI, *Pugio fidei*, 1687 (as in note 12), 3.3.22.27, p. 939. Even in the example I brought in which Nicholas refers to the Talmud, Martí explicitly cites the tractate and chapter names in the title: "In libro Cholin, distinctione *illu tarphoth behema*" (that is tractate Hullin, chapter 'Elu terefot). See: MARTINI, *Pugio fidei*, 3.3.22.13, p. 931.

35. See Alexander Fidora, "The Latin Talmud and its Translators. Thibaud de Sézanne vs. Nicholas Donin?", in: *Henoch* 37 (2015), p. 23.

36. See pp. 171-172.

It is not surprising that in most cases Nicholas' Talmudic citations are theological rather than exegetical,³⁷ given his perception of the Talmud as theological. For comparison, when he elaborates on *halakhic* issues, he references them to 'the Jews' (for example: *dicunt Hebraei*) or to Rashi rather than the Talmud, despite its actually being the most primary Jewish source for such matters.³⁸

Nicholas of Lyra's attitude to Talmudic citations

Nicholas writes in his introduction to the *Postilla*:

Intendo non solum dicta doctorum catholicorum, sed etiam Hebraicorum, maxime Rabbi Salomonis, qui inter doctores Hebraeos locutus est rationabilius declarationem sensus litteralis inducere. Aliqua etiam dicta Hebraeorum valde absurda aliquando, licet valde raro, interponam, non ad tenendum ea, vel sequendum; sed ut per haec appareat quanta cecitas contigerit in Israel, secundum dicta Pauli apostoli ad Romanos undecimo: propter quod etiam dictis Hebraeorum non est inhaerendum, nisi quantum rationi consonant et litterae veritati.³⁹

Study of the *Postilla* reveals that in the majority of cases Nicholas accepts most of the Jewish sources he includes, arguing only about those chapters or verses of distinctive Christological character and to a lesser extent about other theological issues in debate with Judaism.⁴⁰ In addition there are a relatively small number of places where he includes exegetical critique (unrelated to religious dispute) of the Jewish interpretation.⁴¹ Thus it can be asserted that Nicholas generally agreed with the interpretations by the medieval Jewish exegetes (primarily Rashi) along with those of the Mishnaic and Talmudic sages, whom he perceived as Biblical commentators.

37. The Talmudic interpretation cited on Nm 28, 15 refers to the atonement by men for God's sin. Nicholas and other Christian scholars rejected this on theological grounds. In Am 9, 11, Agg 2, 8 and in the prologue to Is 35, Talmudic interpretations are brought in the framework of an exchange regarding the Messiah, that is Jesus, usually as proof of his Messianism. Talmudic discourse regarding God's weeping at the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people of Israel (brought on Is 22, 5) is related to the theological question of the identity of the chosen people and the feasibility of Israel's redemption after the advent of Jesus.

38. For example, in the *Postilla* on Ex 12, 12-23 where Nicholas is deeply preoccupied with *Halakhic* details in light of the Rabbinic literature. Similarly in other places in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

39. Page 3H.

40. See GEIGER, "A Student and an Opponent" (as in note 3), pp. 193-202. On the anti-Jewish polemic in the *Postilla* see also KLEPPER, *Insight of Unbelievers* (as in note 3), pp. 82-108; HAILPERIN, *Rashi* (as in note 3), pp. 148-149, 151-153, 157-184; COHEN, *Friars* (as in note 6), pp. 170-191; Gilbert DAHAN, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1990, pp. 415 and 441-446.

41. On this see GEIGER, "A Student and an Opponent" (as in note 3), pp. 195-199; *Id.*, "Exegetical Critique against Jewish Interpretations in Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Commentary" [Hebrew], in: *Shenaton, An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near East Studies* 18 (2008), pp. 225-245.

However the picture changes when we encounter Talmudic quotations (whether cited as deriving from the Talmud or by specific tractate). These almost always appear in a polemical context.⁴² Some of these texts are narratives that Nicholas either negates completely or attempts to prove as illogical. Regarding the narrative that he brings as derived from the Talmud (Nicholas' reference of it is cited above), where it is stated that God bid the people of Israel to atone at every new moon for His having reduced the moon's size, he writes:

...Ex quo patet Iudaeorum caecitas, imo insania, qui credunt deum indiguisse expiatione, et peccasse.⁴³

In the *Postilla* Nicholas refers twice to the narrative quoted from tractate Berakhot regarding the death of Og, king of Bashan (Nicholas' reference is cited above). First in his interpretation of Nm 21, 33 he writes:

Sed quia hoc est ita absurdum, quod non indiget alia improbatione, ideo hoc posui in hoc loco, ut videatur quanta caecitas est in Iudaeis, qui credunt hoc esse verum ad literam.⁴⁴

Nicholas brings it again in his interpretation of Dt 3, 11, where he elaborates, at great length with much technical detail along with mathematical calculations, to explain why according to logic and the words of the Bible this narrative makes no sense.

It seems therefore, that Nicholas' decision to include theological statements or narratives that appear in the Talmud in his commentary was part of his declared goal of including a few Jewish interpretations which he rejected, alongside many others which he adopted. He could have easily found most of the unacceptable Jewish interpretations in that repository of Rabbinic literature, the Jewish exegetical texts where he got most of his Jewish material. It was however the Talmudic legends, infamously known as absurd and especially presumptuous, that he found to be particularly good examples to illustrate the Jews' blindness.

There is another characteristic of Nicholas' Talmudic citations in the *Postilla*. In contrast to most of the Jewish interpretations he cited, which he learned directly from the Jews (the majority of which were not yet known in the Christian world), most of Nicholas' Talmudic quotations can be further characterized as having been taken from earlier polemical writings.⁴⁵ Nicholas does not appear to have invested

42. See n. 38. In addition to those that appear there, an example from Nicholas' polemical essay he cites from Tractate Shabbat can be added: "libro qui dicitur Sabath qui apud Hebraeos autentico dicitur" (NICOLAUS DE LYRA, *Tractatulus contra quondam Iudaeum* [as in note 18], p. 1719B).

43. *Postilla* on Nm 28, 15, p. 315H.

44. Page 301F.

45. The legend of Og, king of the Bashan, from Ber 54b appears in Petrus Alfonsi, Petrus Venerabilis, *Extractiones de Talmud* and Ramon Marti. The wording in the *Postilla* is close to that which appears in Marti.

much effort in seeking sources for the purposes of Talmudic denunciation, choosing rather to reuse sources brought by his predecessors. It seems that in this way Nicholas managed to fulfill his obligation to the Church and remind his Christian readers that he remained devout despite the many Jewish sources he brought in his commentary.

Summary and conclusions

The two corpora referred to as Talmud, Babylonian and Palestinian, are written compilations of discourse including exegetical discussions on the Mishna which took place over hundreds of years beginning in the third century. Each was edited at different points in time into its own corpus comprising various tractates based on the order of the Mishna. It became widespread throughout the Jewish world in the early medieval period (sixth-tenth centuries). As it became the most studied literary compilation in the Jewish world and the most important for Jewish *halakhic* determination, it came to the attention of Christian scholars, some of whom began investigating it and its contents. In this process, they began to express their developing hostility toward it in the forms of polemical essays against the Jews beginning in the twelfth century and persecution of the Talmud beginning in the thirteenth century.⁴⁶

Only a few in the Christian world had a reasonable (though incomplete) understanding of the Talmud, knowledge of its essence (a commentary on the Mishna), of the period and method of its evolution (compilation of extracted discussions from Jewish academies) and its content (primarily *halakhic* in nature). Many others had vague and erroneous concepts of the nature of the Talmud, largely due to influences of Christianity and Christian concepts. Nicholas of Lyra was one of these. He perceived the Talmud as *Doctrina*, a false set of beliefs that Jews erroneously considered to have been given to them by Moses at Sinai and then transmitted orally before being set down in writing. This is despite the truth (in Nicholas' view) that it was invented long after Sinai. He perceived the Talmud as a new doctrine, a type of "Jewish New Testament" the authority of which is equivalent to (and perhaps greater than) that of the Old Testament. Regarding the extent of Nicholas' familiarity with the Talmud, there is no evidence in the sections of the *Postilla* studied for this research that Nicholas had any understanding that the Talmud was a composition with the fundamental purpose of interpreting a previous body of literature (the Mishna), nor does he mention the Mishna itself. Nicholas was equally oblivious to

See Ari GEIGER, *The Commentary of Nicholas of Lyra on Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*, PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2006 [Hebrew], pp. 61-62; MERCHAVIA, *Church versus Talmud* (as in note 9), p. 371. The legend from Hul 60b is found in the *Extractiones* and in Martí, see GEIGER, *ibid.*, p. 64. The legend from Ber 59a (appears in the *Postilla* on Is 22, 5) is found in ALFONSI, *Dialogue* (as in note 17), p. 67-68; PETRUS VENERABILIS, *Adversus Iudeorum* (as in note 16), pp. 150-151, ll. 919-936; BnF, Ms. lat. 16558 (as in note 11), fols. 14vb, 99rb, 121ra, 214ra; MARTINI, *Pugio fidei*, 1687 (as in note 12), p. 473.

46. FISHMAN, *Becoming the People of the Talmud* (as in note 5), pp. 169-176.

the clear emphasis in the Talmud to matters of *halakha*. In addition, according to his description, later Jewish sages began to write Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament, which were considered to be authoritative in the Jewish world.

In writing his literal commentary on the Bible, many of the sources Nicholas used came from the second type of Rabbinic literature, medieval Jewish commentaries (primarily that of Rashi) which he had likely learned orally from people of Jewish origin. When dealing with theologically oriented Biblical texts, Nicholas quotes from Maimonides' theology,⁴⁷ yet another type of Jewish literature. In contrast, in the *Postilla* Nicholas cites very few quotations as having originated from the Mishna or Talmud. He attributes most of those he does quote to the sages cited as having made them, but in general there is no evidence that he was even aware of the origins of these statements in the Mishna or Talmud. The few quotations that are attributed to the Talmud are usually cited by referring to a specific tractate, rather than by using the word 'Talmud'. Nicholas gives no indication that he knew from earlier Christian sources that these tractates were part of the Talmud, despite the possibility that he might have. Most of the Talmudic materials he includes are narratives that appear in earlier Christian writings and in most cases these seem to be his sources. Indeed, he uses these texts for the purposes of polemic just as they were used in the sources from which he takes them.

It is clear therefore that the distinction Nicholas makes between the Talmud and Jewish Biblical interpretations reflects his differing attitudes toward the two types of Rabbinic literature. He views the Talmud as a system of false beliefs and foolish narratives, while the Jewish commentaries provide a source that aid in understanding the Bible and solving the challenges of its interpretation.⁴⁸ Understandably then, most of the Jewish sources he cites derive from Bible commentaries rather than the Talmud.

However, there is another more prosaic explanation for the relative absence of Talmudic sources. Since the *Postilla* is itself an exegetical composition, it was necessary to find exegetical rather than theological materials among the Rabbinic literary sources, which according to Nicholas were to be found in Biblical commentaries rather than Talmudic sources. Furthermore, literal Jewish commentary is obviously less threatening to Christians, as it deals with the more technical aspects of the Biblical text (philology, history etc.), rather than the theological aspects dealt with (according to Nicholas) in the Talmud.

However this explanation is insufficient since the Talmud is actually full of Biblical interpretations. Indeed many of these were used in the very interpretations Nicholas did quote. It is difficult to assume that Nicholas was completely unaware of the connection between the Talmud and the Bible commentators in the period

47. See for example, *Postilla* on Ier 23, 6; prologue to Ez 40; Prv 25, 11.

48. At this point I need to note another type of Rabbinic literature – Aramaic translations, which despite their having been written in the period of the Jewish sages, were favored by Nicholas, who used them to demonstrate that they too interpreted the Christological sections of the Bible as Messianic. See HAILPERIN, *Rashi* (as in note 3), pp. 158-160, 167-174, 183, 243.

that followed it. There were Christians who predated Nicholas who added Rashi's commentaries to their reservoir of rejected Rabbinic literature they referred to as Talmud.⁴⁹ How then to explain the fact that he avoided adopting Talmudic interpretations and only used them in negative contexts in the *Postilla*, and yet chose to include so many of Rashi's interpretations which did originate in the Talmud?

It is possible that Nicholas was unaware of the number of Rashi's interpretations that actually came from Talmudic literature (the Talmud and Midrashic collections). Given that his source for these was most likely an oral transmission from converts, who most likely did not have enough expertise in Jewish sources to know Rashi's sources or had managed over time to forget them and only to remember the interpretations themselves. It is possible that occasionally they were able to remember and inform Nicholas of a Talmudic source for one or another interpretation, but probably could not have done so for the majority of them.

In addition, since before his time Christians had rarely engaged in literal exegesis, there was a dearth of previous literal Christian interpretations that might have constrained Nicholas to use Jewish sources. To this end Nicholas was forced to surrender his principles and occasionally use Talmudic sources. Thus perhaps, it was their later quotation by other Judaic commentaries that allowed him to camouflage their more ancient source and disguise the fact that he was adopting Talmudic interpretations, even if he had knowledge of their Talmudic origin.

Alternatively it might be suggested that Nicholas might be among those who did not feel the entire Talmud should be condemned. It must be remembered that prevailing attitudes by the Christian world toward the Talmud were diverse. Alongside those who wished to confiscate the entire Talmud, there were those who felt that it was possible to excise forbidden parts leaving those which were not considered defective. Innocent IV and his successors held this opinion during the second wave of Talmudic confiscations in the 1240s and later on.⁵⁰ Ramon Martí explained that even if part of the Talmud contained heresies and stupidities, other sections were not only valid but were actually worthy for use in arguing for Christianity,⁵¹ an opinion we find echoed in Nicholas of Lyra's polemical treatise.⁵²

From all this it emerges that Nicholas was circumspect in his use of materials from the Talmud. An expert in Jewish sources could identify Talmudic sources in the *Postilla*, but the Christian reader would have had no way of discerning this.

49. See Gilbert DAHAN, "Rashi, sujet de la controverse de 1240. Édition partielle du ms. Paris, BN lat. 16558", in: *Archives juives* 14 (1978), pp. 43-54; *Id.*, "Un dossier latin de textes de Rashi autour de la controverse de 1240", in: *Revue des études juives* 151 (1992), pp. 321-336; BERNARD GUI, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*. Ed. Guillaume Mollat, vol. 2, Paris, 1927 [repr. 1964], pp. 13-19.

50. For a discussion of the approach of Innocent IV and his followers to the Talmud see COHEN, *Living Letters* (as in note 6), pp. 325-334. For a slightly different approach see FRIEDMAN *et al.*, *The Trial of the Talmud* (as in note 6), pp. 22-30, 52-59.

51. See COHEN, *Living Letters* (as in note 6), pp. 349-356; Robert CHAZAN, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 96-100; COHEN, *Friars* (as in note 6), pp. 137-139.

52. BnF, Ms. lat. 13781 (as in note 8), fol. 56r.

Indeed Nicholas' explicit words about the Talmud would have led the Christian reader specifically to the flawed elements it contains. In this way Nicholas was able to enjoy the many Talmudic interpretations of the Bible (in many cases perhaps without his knowledge) while remaining aligned with the generally hostile attitudes held toward the Talmud by the Church.