

Looking for Polemical Argument: A Closer Look into the Latin Translation of the Talmud, *Extractiones de Talmud* (c. 1244-45)*

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Abstract

This chapter reveals the polemic attitude behind the apparent literality of the *Extractiones de Talmud*. After showing that good knowledge of the source languages and of Jewish culture characterises the translation, I show through examples taken from the tractate Sanhedrin how these features – in connection with the extrapolation of the chosen passages from their context and the literal but not context-oriented vocabulary used in the translation – are mechanisms that serve a will to bring forth textual evidence for the condemnation of the Talmud.

1. Introduction

In the years 1239-1248 CE the ecclesiastical authorities investigated the Talmud and produced a Latin translation of a large selection of almost 2000 Talmudic passages, a work which constitutes what we now call the *Extractiones de Talmud*.¹ The

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1. Seminal studies about this work are Isidore LOEB, “La controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud”, in: *Revue des études juives* 1 (1880), pp. 247-261; *ibid.* 2 (1881), pp. 248-270; *ibid.* 3 (1881), pp. 39-57; Solomon GRAYZEL, “The Talmud and the Medieval Papacy”, in: Walter Jacob *et al.* (Eds.), *Essays in Honor of Solomon B. Freehof*, Pittsburg, 1964, pp. 220-245 (esp. pp. 224-229); Chenmelech MERCHAVIA, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic literature (500–1248)*, Jerusalem, 1970 [Hebrew]; Gilbert DAHAN/Élie NICOLAS (Eds.), *Le brûlement du Talmud à Paris 1242-1244*, Paris, 1999. For the latest developments and a general reassessment of the question, see Ulisse CECINI/Óscar DE LA CRUZ/Eulàlia VERNET, “Observacions sobre la traducció llatina del Talmud (Paris, mitjan segle XIII)”, in: *Tamid* 11 (2015), pp. 73-97; Alexander FIDORA, “The Latin Talmud and its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemic”, in: *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 1/2 (2014), pp. 337-342; *Id.* “The Latin Talmud and its Translators: Thibaud de Sézanne vs. Nicholas Donin?”, in: *Henoch* 37/1 (2015), pp. 17-28; *Id.*, “Textual Rearrangement and Thwarted Intentions. The Two Versions of the Latin Talmud”, in: *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 2/1 (2015), pp. 63-78; Eulàlia VERNET, “On the Latin Transcription of Hebrew and Aramaic Proper Names in the Latin Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin). Phonetic Features of the Translation”, in: *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 2/2 (2015), pp. 197-219; John FRIEDMAN/Jean CONNELL HOFF/Robert CHAZAN, *The Trial of the Talmud, Paris, 1240*, Toronto, 2012; Paul Lawrence ROSE, “When Was the Talmud Burnt at Paris? A Critical Examination of the Christian and Jewish Sources and a New Dating. June 1241”, in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62 (2011), pp. 324-339. Further bibliography is to be found in this volume esp. in the contributions by Óscar DE LA CRUZ, Alexander FIDORA and Eulàlia VERNET. For future publications on the Latin Talmud by of the research project “The Latin Talmud and its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemic”, consult the website <http://pagines.uab.cat/lattal>.

Talmud had in fact been accused of blasphemy against the Christian religion by the French Jewish convert Nicholas Donin in the year 1239. This led to a trial against the Talmud, which took place in Paris and thus regarded mainly the French Jewish community. The trial articulated itself in different phases. At first, a public dispute was organised in Paris between Christian theologians and a selected number of Jewish Rabbis, on the basis of thirty-five articles of accusation brought forth by Donin to Pope Gregory IX.² Concluding this phase, a first condemnation and public burning of the Talmud took place between 1240 and 1242. Around the year 1244 the new Pope Innocent IV, after a request by the French Jewish community, demanded of the Apostolic Legate in France Odo of Châteauroux that the case be revised, leading to a second condemnation in the year 1248. It was for this revision that a larger selection of Talmudic passages was translated into Latin, constituting what we now call the *Extractiones de Talmud*.

The present study will offer a closer look into the Latin translation of a few selected passages from the Talmudic tractate Sanhedrin, taken from the *Extractiones de Talmud*, highlighting their polemical perspective and showing the *modus operandi* of the translator.³ Even if in the past scholars such as Gilbert Dahan stated that the translation maintains a high degree of literality and that there is “neither falsification nor distortion of the texts”,⁴ it will be shown that the selection of the passages, the extrapolation from their context and their evaluation were indeed informed by a polemical attitude and by the purpose of finding evidence to condemn the Talmud. This will be done by comparing the Latin translations and the message

2. For an alternative perspective, which questions the historicity of a public disputation in favor of an “inquisitorial-like procedure before a specially appointed commission made up of senior clergymen [...] during which Rabbi Yehiel [of Paris] and another rabbi, Judah ben David of Melun, were asked a series of questions” based on Donin’s thirty-five articles of accusation, which “they responded with short, succinct replies”, see Harvey J. Hames, “Reconstructing Thirteenth-Century Jewish-Christian Polemic. From Paris 1240 to Barcelona 1263 and Back Again”, in: Ryan Szpiech (Ed.), *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference. Commentary, Conflict and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, New York, 2015, pp. 115-127 (notes on pp. 241-246), esp. pp. 115-116.
3. As it is not the issue of this paper, it will spoken generally about a single “translator”, but the *Extractiones* are probably the result of a team work of translators and redactors. As it was shown in Alexander FIDORA/Ulisse CECINI, “Nicholas Donin’s Thirty-Five Articles Against the Talmud. A Case of Collaborative Translation in Jewish-Christian Polemic”, in: Charles Burnett/Pedro Mantas-España (Eds.), *‘Ex Oriente Lux’. Translating Words, Scripts and Styles in Medieval Mediterranean Society*, Cordova/London, 2016, pp. 187-199, this was also the case of Nicholas Donin’s thirty-five articles in Latin against the Talmud, the first step of the Talmud trial and one of the documents attached to the *Extractiones* in the dossier portrayed by manuscript Paris, BnF, Lat. 16558 (henceforth P, on which see Óscar de la Cruz’ article in this volume). On Donin’s thirty-five articles and their relation to the *Extractiones*, see FIDORA, “Textual Rearrangement” (as in note 1); *Id.*, “The Latin Talmud and its Translators” (as in note 1); The different stages of the translation of the *Extractiones* and its redactions are visible e.g. through different textual evidence contained in the manuscripts. I show this in my article: “The *Extractiones de Talmud* and their relationship to the Hebrew Talmud manuscripts of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence (MS Magl. coll. II.I.7, 8 and 9)”, in: *Sefarad* 77/1 (2017), pp. 91-115.
4. Gilbert DAHAN, “Les traductions latines de Thibaud de Sézanne”, in: Dahan/Nicolas (Eds.), *Le brûlement* (as in note 1), pp. 95-120, at p. 115: “Il n’y a ni falsification ni gauchissement des textes”.

which they convey with the original text, taking into consideration the context which surrounded it.

2. Looking for polemical argument

If we look at Odo of Châteauroux's answer to the request of Pope Innocent IV, this already makes clear that the *Extractiones* are the product of something which purported to be a "revision", whose actual aim was to look for further material to confirm the first condemnation. Odo's words to the Pope are in fact the following:

In it [i.e. the Talmud] are contained so many falsities and offensive things that they are a source of shame to those who repeat them and horror to those who hear them [...]. And, furthermore, when a diligent examination was subsequently made [he is talking about the first trial], it was found that the said books were full of errors, and a veil has been placed over their hearts to such an extent that these works turn the Jews away not only from a spiritual understanding but even from a literal one and toward fables and fictions. Hence it is obvious that the masters of the Jews of the kingdom of France recently uttered a falsehood to Your Holiness and the venerable fathers, the lord cardinals, [here is the request of the Jews we mentioned before] when they said that they are unable to understand the Bible and other provisions of their Law according to their faith without those books that are called in Hebrew the Talmud. Indeed when the aforesaid examination was made and all the masters of theology and canon law as well as many others deliberated, in accordance with the apostolic mandate all the aforesaid books that could be found at that time were then burned in a bonfire. [And now comes Odo's opinion about the revision process] It would be no small scandal as well as an eternal reproach to the Apostolic See if the books, so solemnly and justly burned in the presence of all the scholars and the clergy and people of Paris, were tolerated by apostolic mandate or even returned to the masters of the Jews, for this tolerance would be seen as a kind of approval. [...] Thus, although the aforesaid books contain some good things, although few and far between, they must be utterly condemned.⁵

5. Edition of the Latin Text from the manuscript *P*, fols. 232va-233vb, in MERCHAVIA, *The Church* (as in note 1), pp. 450-451 (with some orthographic normalization on my part): "In qua [sc. lege alia, i.e. Talmud, *Cecini*] tot abusiones et tot nefaria continentur, quod pudori referentibus et audientibus sunt horrore [...]. Facta etiam postea diligenti examinatione inventum est quod dicti libri erroribus erant pleni, et est velamen positum super corda ipsorum in tantum, ut non solum ab intellectu spirituali Iudaeos avertant, immo etiam a litterali, et ad fabulas et quaedam fictitia convertant. Unde manifestum est magistros Iudaeorum regni Franciae nuper falsitatem Sanctitatis Vestrae, et venerabilibus patribus dominis cardinalibus suggestisse, dicentes quod sine illis libris, qui hebraice Talmud dicuntur, Bibliam et alia instituta suae legis secundum fidem ipsorum intelligere nequeunt. Facta vero praedicta examinatione, omnium magistrorum theologiae et iuris canonici, et aliorum multorum habito consilio, iuxta mandatum apostolicum omnes praedicti libri, qui tunc haberi potuerunt incendio fuerunt tunc cremati. Et esset scandalum non minimum, et sedis apostolicae sempiternum obprobrium, si libri coram universitate scholarium et clero et populo Parisiensi

I will now show how this attitude reveals itself in the translation. The first observation that we can make about the *Extractiones de Talmud* is that, as a translation, they respect the literal meaning of the text and that the translation was made by people who were well versed in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, in Jewish culture and in the Talmudic commentary literature. Some examples will now prove this statement.

We can find in the *Extractiones* words which are not translated, but left in Hebrew and then explained. This happens with simple words as well as with complex expressions. As far as the simple words are concerned, we can mention examples such as the word *avozazara*, rendition of *'abôdâ zarâ* (אֲבוּדָה זָרָה), literally 'foreign service' or 'foreign cult'. This is sometimes explained literally as *servitium peregrinum* (e.g. in San 63b: "Omnia vilia verba et polluta prohibita sunt, praeter quam super *avozazara* –servitium peregrinum– quia ibi concessa sunt [...]"),⁶ but is mostly rendered in its actual meaning of (idolatric) non-Jewish cult, through the word *idolatria* (e.g. in San 7a: "[...] Melius est quod dimittam eos servire *avozazara* –id est⁷ idolatriae–, quia forte paenitebunt [...]").⁸ Sometimes we can also find explanations which are not completely neutral, but instead have already a polemical connotation, like the explanation of the word *goy*, the non-Jew. Despite a few explanations of the term as *gentilis* (e.g. in San 55a (*gentilis*): "*Goy* –gentilis scilicet vel Christianus– si coit cum iumento, lapidabitur iumentum? In Isrehelita est ibi offendiculum et vilitas et propter hoc debet lapidari iumentum cum quo coit"⁹ or San 101a (*gens*): "Lex enim accingit se cilicio et stat coram Deo et dicit: Domine saeculi, filii tui ita faciunt mihi sicut cythara in qua cantant *goyim* –gentes–"),¹⁰ this word is mostly explained as *christianus*¹¹ (e.g. in the very same San 55a).¹²

As far as the more complex expressions are concerned, we can offer the examples of the exegetical procedures *qal wa-ḥomer* and *g^ezêrâ šavâ*, as in the following

tam solemniter et tam iuste concremati, mandato apostolico tolerarentur, vel etiam magistris Iudaeorum redderentur, haec enim tolerantia, quaedam approbatio videretur. [...] Sic quamvis praedicti libri aliqua bona contineant, licet rara, nihilominus sunt damnandi" (Edition also in Jacques ÉCHARD/Jacques QUÉTIF, *Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum recensiti, notisque historicis et criticis illustrati*, vol. 1, Paris, 1719, p.128-129 (partial edition) and Solomon GRAYZEL, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, Philadelphia, PA, 1933, pp. 275-277, note 3, also with English translation). The English translation quoted here is from Jean CONNELL HOFF, "The Christian Evidence", in: Friedman *et al.*, *The Trial of the Talmud* (as in note 1), pp. 93-125: here pp. 98-100 (the explanations in square brackets are mine).

6. P fol. 159vb. For the phonetic transcription of Hebrew words into Latin, according to Ashkenazi pronunciation, see Vernet, "On the Latin Transcription" (as in note 1).
7. id est *supra lineam P*.
8. P fol. 146va.
9. P fol. 157vb.
10. P fol. 176rb.
11. Concerning this, we find also a general statement in the prologue of the *Extractiones* (P fol. 97vb): "*Goy* idem est quod 'gens', et *goyim* quod 'gentes', sed ad christianos usus [other mss. usu] restringitur" (*Goy* is the same as 'nation [=non-Jew]', and *goyim* as 'nations', but their use is [or in their use they are] limited to the Christians).
12. In the manuscript: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. coll. II.I.9 (Henceforth *F₉*), p. 189, we interestingly find only "christianus si coit cum iumento", without "*Goy* –gentilis scilicet vel".

passage from San 99a. In it we find a comment on the Biblical verse Numbers 15, 31: “For he despised the word of the Lord and has violated his commandment”.¹³ The Talmudic text affirms that this verse applies to someone who says that the Torah is not from heaven. And even if he says that the entire Torah is indeed from heaven, except some passages which Moses said by himself, or some subtlety or this or that exegetical argument (including the two we mentioned), he still has violated the commandment of the Lord, because he has excluded something from the Divine origin of the Torah. The text of the *Extractiones* reads as follows:¹⁴

[San 99a] “verbum Domini contempsit et pactum eius fecit inritum etc.” [Nm 15, 31] Hic est qui dicit: Tota lex [= Torah] est de caelo praeter quam illud verbum quod Moyses dixit a semetipso. Et quamvis diceret: Tota lex est de caelo [...] praeterquam istud *calvahomer* –Praeter aliquod leve et grave id est aliquod argumentum a maiori vel a minori– vel praeter istam *gzerasava* –id est decisionem aequalem ut quando aliqua dictio est in duobus locis et utrobique accipitur pro eodem–. Hoc est quod scriptum est: “verbum Domini contempsit et pactum eius fecit inritum”.

I have highlighted the glosses by writing them in a smaller character and putting them between dashes. The “*calvahomer*” is explained as “something ‘light and heavy’ [literal translations of the words *qal* and *homer*], that is some kind of argument *a maiori* or *a minori*”. The *qal wa-homer*, lit. “light and heavy”, is in fact an argument *a minori ad maius* or *a maiori ad minus* – that is to say, when something applies in a lenient case then it surely also applies in a more serious situation, or the reverse of that: that is to say from a more serious to a more lenient situation. The “*gzerasava*” is explained as an “‘equal decision’ [again a literal translation], like when an expression is in two different passages and in both of them it is interpreted with the same meaning”. The *gezērā šavā*, literally “similar verdict”, is a procedure based on analogy and applies laws of one Biblical passage to another one, which is actually unrelated but contains a similar word or phrase as the first one.

An example of good knowledge not only of Hebrew itself, but also regarding a subtle explanation given using the numerical value of the Hebrew letters, can be found in the following example from San 100a:¹⁵

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ק עמוד א
 דאמר ר' שמעון בן לקוניו בר' יוחנן: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא ליתן לכל צדיק וצדיק שלש מאות
 ועשרה עולמות, שנאמר להנחיל אהבי יש ואצרתיהם אמצא - יש בגימטריא תלת מאה ועשרה הוי.

13. BH Nm 15, 31: דבר יקוץ בזה ואת מצותו הפר: 13.

14. P fols. 174vb-175ra.

15. Text and translation are quoted from *Talmud Bavli. The Schottenstein Edition*. Ed. Hersch Goldwurm, Brooklyn, NY, 1990-. The tractate Sanhedrin is in the volumes 47-49.

[San 100a]: For they say in the West [heb. *ma'arāḇā*] in the name of Rava bar Mari: In the future the Holy One, Blessed is He, will give to every righteous person three hundred and ten worlds, as it is stated: *That I may grant to those who love me substance, and that I may fill their treasures*. The numerical value [heb. *gēmaṭrîā*] of *yesh* is three hundred and ten.

The Latin translation reads as follows:¹⁶

Dicitur in *mareva* ex nomine Rava: Sanctus, benedictus sit ipse, daturus est cuilibet iusto trecenta et decem saecula, sicut scriptum est: “ut ditem diligentes me et thesauros eorum repleam” [Prv 8, 21] –in hebraeo est sic:– “ad haereditando diligentes me est” –est latine, is hebraice, quod valet trecenta et decem, quia *iod* valet decem et *syn* trecenta–.

It is told in the *mareva* [cfr. heb. *ma'arāḇā*, i.e. the West], in the name of Rava: The Holy One, may He be blessed, will give to each righteous person three hundred and ten worlds, as it is written: That I may enrich those who love me and fill their treasures [this is a quotation from the Latin *Vulgata*]. In Hebrew [explains the translator] it is [literally] so: to inherit [for] those who love me it is. The Latin “est” [it is] is in Hebrew “is” [heb. *yēš*]. Now this is worth three hundred and ten, as the *yôd* is worth ten and the *šîn* three hundred.

The translator understands perfectly the Talmudic explanation and, after having quoted the Biblical verse from Proverbs 8, 21 according to the *Vulgata* of St. Jerome, gives a very literal translation of the first part of Biblical quotation to make the Latin reader understand the point, explaining the value of the single letters in an extra gloss. So the Hebrew *le-hanḥîl 'ohabay yēš we-'osrotêhem 'amallē* (which is translated in the King James Version as “that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance”) is translated as follows: *le-hanḥîl*, which is composed of the preposition *le*+ the construct infinitive of the causative modus (i.e. the *hif'il*) of the verb *naḥal* (‘to inherit’), to convey the function of a final sentence (English “that I may cause to inherit”), is translated using the Latin periphrasis *ad* + gerund (*ad haereditando*). *'Ohabay*, the present participle plural of the verb *'ahab* (engl. ‘to love’, hence ‘those who love’) with the suffix object of the first person singular (‘those who love me’), is literally translated, as happens in the *Vulgata*, as *diligentes me* (here, too, present participle + pronoun object first person singular. The *yēš* (which is the whole point of the question), is translated as *est* (‘it is’ or ‘there is’), because if it is true that it means ‘being’, ‘existence’ or ‘substance’¹⁷ and in this last acception

16. P fols. 175vb-176ra.

17. See Francis BROWN/S. R. DRIVER/Charles A. BRIGGS, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic. Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Peabody, MA, 2003 [¹1906, Boston, MA], s.v. *שׁ*, p. 441.

is used here, usually it is used in Hebrew to express the existence of something, i.e. with the meaning of ‘there is’. This *yēš*, which does not appear in the translation of the Vulgata and is fundamental to understanding the explanation containing the number three-hundred and ten, is put as the “est” in the new literal translation and explained in the gloss.

All this shows very clearly how the translator is acquainted with the language and the hermeneutics of the Talmud. Hence, when we find omissions or misinterpretations in the translation, we should ask ourselves if they were made on purpose, with polemical intent.

We will see now, in fact, that the translation, though being literal and in a way accurate, uses extrapolation from the context and misinterpretation to provide a selection of Talmudic passages that could support the polemic against the Talmud. The deliberate misinterpretation is achieved by focussing on a single aspect without relating it to the more complex discourse it lies within. Sometimes the polemical potential of the chosen passage is rather obvious, and we will see some examples of this kind of passage; elsewhere, however, the extrapolation is made in a manner which is so extreme that it is difficult to understand what point is actually at stake. Indeed, this too could be a polemical strategy. By extrapolating the sentence from its context in such a way that the reader does not understand the point of the sentence, the translator intends the reader to think how silly, unreasonable or unlogic Talmudic reflections are. Let us begin with a couple of fairly obvious examples:

The first example focuses on a word which could be translated as “prostitute”. The passage is contained in Sanhedrin 39b:¹⁸

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף לט עמוד ב
והזנות רחצו וגו' - אמר רבי אליעזר [אלעזר] למרק שמי הזינות - אחת של מיכיהו ואחת של אליהו.
במיכיהו קתיב אם שוב תשוב בשלום לא דבר ה' בי, באליהו קתיב במקום אשר לקחו הכלבים את דם
נבות. רבא אמר: זונות ממש, אחאב איש מצונן היה ועשתה לו איזבל שמי צורי זונות במרכבתו, כדי
שיראה אותן ויתחמם.

The beginning is a Biblical quotation which needs to be explained, taken from the middle of 1 Kings 22, 38 (*we-ha-zonôt rāḥāšû*).¹⁹ The King James Version translates it as: “and they washed his armour”, where “his armour” is the translation for *ha-zonôt*. The point is that the word which here is translated with armour, *zonâ*, here in the plural *zonôt*, could also mean “prostitute”. In the continuation of the passage, the Talmud explains the term as follows:

18. Text from *The Schottenstein Edition* (as in note 15).

19. The whole verse, which relates what happened after Ahab was killed, reads (KJV): “And *one* washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake”.

(וישטף את-הרכב עלו ברכת שמרון וילקו הכלבים את-דמו והזנות רחצו כדבר יהוה אשר דבר: BH I Rg 22, 38:)

Rabbi Eleazar said: to clarify two visions [Heb. *ḥezyônôt*]. One by Michaiah and one by Elijah. In Michaiah's [vision], [Scripture] writes: *If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me*. [1Kings 22, 28 KJV]. In Elijah's [vision], [Scripture] writes: *In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth [shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine]*. [1Kings 21,19 KJV]

According to the rules of exegetical interpretation the letters *hē* (ה) and *hêt* (ה) are interchangeable.²⁰ So, the word *ha-zonôt* could be read as *ḥezyônôt* (prophetical visions) and the verse "they washed *ha-zonôt*" is interpreted to mean: "they clarified the prophetical visions". Which prophetical visions? The two by Michaia and Elijah.

The Talmudic text, however, continues:²¹

Rava said: [*ha-zonôt* means] actual prostitutes. Ahab was a cold man, and Jezebel [his wife] made two pictures of prostitutes on his chariot for him, so that he would see them and become aroused [thus, the verse means: The chariot became drenched with Ahab's blood and this washed away the pictures].

The Latin translation of this passage reads as follows:²²

[San 39b] "Laverunt currum"²³ [III Rg 22, 38] –hebraeus: laverunt *zonot* id est meretrices– Dicit rby Eliezer: Et haec fuerunt prophetiae Heliae et Micheae, quae fuerunt declaratae. Rava dicit quod Acab fuit homo frigidus et Iezabel uxor sua fecit ei duas imagines mulieris in curru, ut videndo eas calefaceret et hoc est quod scriptum est "Laverunt *zonoz*".

They washed the chariot –Hebrew: they washed the *zonot* i.e. the prostitutes–. Rabbi Eliezer says: And these were the prophecies by Elijah and Michaia, which were made clear. Rava said that Ahab was a cold man and Jezabel his wife made two women-like images on the chariot, so that he will become aroused by seeing them, and this is what is meant by Scripture: "they washed the *zonot*".

So, if we compare the Latin with the Hebrew, we could say that it is literally translated. However, we can spot a few significant differences. We can see that the first explanation, which does not interpret the word as meaning actual prostitutes, is offered in a very summary and unclear way. Even though the translator – as we saw

20. See *The Schottenstein Edition* (as in note 15), San 39b², note 19.

21. Translation from *The Schottenstein Edition* (as in note 15).

22. *P* fol. 155ra.

23. Actually we would expect here "habenas laverunt" as the Hebrew word *ha-zonôt* is in the second part of the verse (see above, note 19). The full text of this verse from the Vulgata is: "et laverunt currum in piscina Samariae et linxerunt canes sanguinem eius et habenas laverunt iuxta verbum Domini quod locutus fuerat".

before – would be capable of doing so, no explanation is given as to how a word which should mean prostitutes has come to be interpreted as prophecy. Nor are the two prophecies at stake quoted, as it happens in the original Talmudic text. The translator is simply not interested in this explanation. The translation is very literal and correct, but it is just put there without any context and language explanation. The Latin Christian reader, who does not know the original text, would not understand this explanation. On the other hand, the other explanation, which understands the word as actual prostitutes, is reported in full detail, creating in the reader the impression that the Talmud insists on an interpretation that is inappropriate for the Christian audience.

The next example is even more obvious. A passage of San 98b recites:²⁴

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף צח עמוד ב
לאפוקי מדרבי הילל דאמר: אין משיח לישראל, ששכר אכלוהו בימי חזקיה

[A previous teaching serves] to exclude [the opinion] of Rabbi Hillel, who said: there will be no Messiah for the Jewish people, because they already enjoyed him in the days of Ezechias [i.e. Rabbi Hillel is convinced that Ezechias was the Messiah].

The Latin translation reads as follows:²⁵

[San 98b] Rby Hylel dicit: Non erit ultra Messias Israheli, quia comederunt illum in tempore Ezechiae.²⁶

Rabbi Hillel says: There will be no further Messiah for Israel, because they ate him at the time of Ezechias.

Before looking at the content of the translation, we would like to say incidentally at this point that this passage exemplifies very well how the *Extractiones* are structured. What is quoted here is all the information the reader obtains about this passage. In the *Extractiones* you find one passage translated after another, juxtaposed without any contextualization or explanation as to why it was chosen.

Now to the content: the people of Israel, according to the Latin translation of the Talmud, ate the Messiah. As a matter of fact, if we look at the original text we find *'akalû-hû* (אכלוהו), i.e. the verb *'ākal* in the third person plural in the perfect tense and the suffix of third person singular. The verb *'ākal* means 'to eat'. As a consequence the text means 'they ate him', in Latin 'comederunt eum'. Therefore, the Latin translation is a literal translation. However, is it also a correct translation?

24. Text and translation from *The Schottenstein Edition* (as in note 15).

25. *P* fol. 174ra-b.

26. Normalised orthography according to the *Vulgata*. Manuscripts have *Sedechyae/Sedechiae*.

If we look into the Sokoloff and Jastrow dictionaries, we find of course that the first meaning of *'ākal* is 'to eat', or 'to devour', but then we also find meanings like 'to consume', or 'to enjoy the usufruct'. We also find more disparate meanings: in the appropriate context this verb could mean 'to irritate', 'to earn a fee', 'to inform on someone', 'to enjoy usury', or even 'to sleep with'.²⁷ In this case the meanings 'to consume', or 'to enjoy' are the most probable: the Messiah will not come because the Israelites already consumed his presence: already enjoyed his presence at the time of Ezechias. However, the translator goes straight for the most horrifying, although literal, meaning.²⁸

We have seen that the translator has the tools to understand the context properly and to explain the Hebrew when it is not clear. In this case, however, the translator just puts the sentence there, without any context or explanation. This is in fact the strategy. The translator has shown elsewhere through detailed explanation a deep knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish culture, and thus has gained the trust of the reader. So, when an explanation is left out and a translation like this one is made, the reader has no doubt that this translation must be correct, because such a translator, who has demonstrated such a competence elsewhere, would have been able to distinguish between different meanings and to underline the correct interpretation with a gloss if it were necessary. So, the translator chooses either the detailed explanation when this serves the polemic – as in the case of *ha-zonôt* – or the absence of any explanation and the most literal translation without context when *this* is the best way to serve the polemic, as in the example I have just shown.

As the last example from very many that could be presented, I have chosen an extreme instance of extrapolation from context. This time I will begin with the Latin translation of it:²⁹

[San 4b] “Tribus vicibus per annum apparebit omne masculinum in conspectu Domini Dei tui” [Dt 16, 16; cf. Ex 23, 17; Ex 34, 23]. Dicit Rby Huza: Ab hac lege immunis est monoculus.

27. See Michael SOKOLOFF, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, Ramat-Gan/Baltimore, MD, 2002, s.v. 1# אכל, pp. 129-131; Marcus JASTROW, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, New York, 1996, s.v. אכל, p. 63.

28. If it is true that the image of eating the Messiah could evoke the Eucharist, I do not think that this is what motivated the translator to choose this passage and to translate in such a way. The purpose of the Talmud trial and therefore of this translation is to show how the Talmud misinterprets the message of the Bible, or how it is full of “falsities and offensive things” which “are a source of shame to those who repeat them and horror to those who hear them”, to recall Odo of Châteauroux’s words. There would be a turn in the Christian attitude towards the Talmud towards looking for Christian contents and interpretation in it, in order to prove to the Jews that *their* books confirm the Christian interpretation of scripture. However, this was a later development, whose first steps would be traced in the dispute of Barcelona of 1263 (the key figures of which were the Dominican Ramon de Penyafort and the Jewish convert Pau Cristià) and in the work of the Dominican friar Ramon Martí, also in the second half of the 13th century (on this see e.g. Jeremy COHEN, *The Friars and the Jews. The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*, London, 1982, esp. pp.103-169).

29. P fol. 146va.

Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord thy God. [Quotation from Dt 16, 16; cf. Ex 23, 17; Ex 34, 23] Rabbi Huza says: The one-eyed person is immune from this rule.

This is the passage that opens the translation of Sanhedrin: as usual without any context or explanation. What does this passage mean? Why did the translator select it? We have a rule and a seemingly arbitrary exemption from the rule. The total absence of any context makes this rule sound silly and arbitrary. It appears as though the Talmud interprets the Scripture without any rationality, that it plays with it and makes rules that have no sense: it appears to be a truly absurd book. The passage can be recognised as a translation of a few lines from Sanhedrin 4b. Before showing it as it appears in the Talmud, I introduce briefly the matter at stake in this section of the tractate. The fragment translated into Latin is in fact part of a larger discussion about the pre-eminence of written or pronounced text at the time of making rules. In fact, Hebrew writings traditionally only record the consonantal text, as the consonants are the bearers of the meaning of a word.

Moreover, the structure of Hebrew grammar as well as the context often guide the reader to vocalise the text in the correct way. Indeed, there are cases in which for a given combination of consonants only one correct vocalisation is possible. However, it is also possible that a given combination of consonants could be vocalised in different ways. In this case, tradition comes to the reader's aid, and through the use of diacritical signs placed below or above the letter, suggests a vocalised reading. Nevertheless, there are also cases in which the vocalised reading proposed by the tradition clashes with the "natural" vocalisation one would expect, given the consonantal scheme one has to vocalise. As I said before, usually a certain consonantal scheme already suffices to determine the correct vocalisation. However, when the proposed traditional vocalisation collides with the expected "natural" vocalisation for a given consonantal scheme, one should determine what has pre-eminence at the time of defining a rule: the written or the pronounced form of a word. In the section we are handling, the text of the Talmud gives a series of examples to show that the pronounced form of a word (i.e. the reading suggested by the tradition) has pre-eminence over the written form. However, the Talmudic discussion reaches a point where the following problem is analysed: what was discussed until now is valid when you have the simple alternative between a "natural" reading, proceeding from the consonantal scheme which is written, and a traditional reading, which clashes with the immediate reading for the given consonantal scheme: i.e. the word should be written in another way, to be read in the way that the traditional reading suggests. What happens, however, when for a given consonantal scheme, the two vocalisation possibilities – the "natural" and the traditional – were both completely acceptable? The Talmud offers here the case of the following Biblical precept, which in occurs in Ex 23, 17, Ex 34, 23 and Dt 16,16:

שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה בְּלִיזְכוּרָה אֶל־פָּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה:³⁰

Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God.

Now, the word that is the object of reflection in our Talmudic Passage is the verb *yērā'ē* (יֵרָאֶה). It comes from the verb *rā'ā* (רָאָה), which means 'to see', and in this vocalisation it is a niph'al (a stem which we could define as (medio-)passive), third person singular, imperfect conjugation, so it means 'he shall be seen or appear'. However, if we isolate this verb, in this consonantal scheme, the most obvious and common vocalisation will be that of the active, that is to say *yir'ē* (יִרְאֶה), i.e. 'he shall see'. Both vocalisations are theoretically acceptable for this consonantal scheme. So how could a preference be given to one of them? The Talmud brings this verse as an example for a ruling determined on the basis of both vocalizations. Let us now read it:³¹

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ד עמוד ב
 דתנא יוחנן בן דהבאי אומר משום רבי יהודה בן תימא: הסומא באתת מעיניו - פטור מן הראיה.
 שנאמר יראה יראה - בדרך שבא לראות כך בא לראות. מה לראות בשתי עיניו - אף לראות בשתי עיניו!

For it was taught: Yohanan ben Dahavay says in the name of Rabbi Yehudah ben Tema: A person who is blind in one eye is exempt from appearing (at the holy temple during the pilgrimage festivals), for it is stated: (every male) shall see (and also) (every male) shall be seen. [The Talmud does not quote the entire verse, but just the two possible vocalisations] (This teaches that) In the manner that (God) comes (to the holy temple) to see (the pilgrims, as implied by the traditional pronounced form), so does he come (to the temple for His Divine Presence) to be seen (by the pilgrims, as implied by the "natural" vocalisation). Just as (God comes) to see with his two eyes, so too must he be seen with two eyes.

So this was the point of this ruling and the reason why a one-eyed person is exempt from appearing in the temple. The Latin translator chose not to show all this, but just isolated the ruling to underline an apparently absurd regulation, even if for example the point could have been made that here there is an anthropomorphical

30. In the three occurrences the Hebrew text is basically the same, except for slight variants in the final mention of God. Ex 23, 17 has *אל־פָּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה*, Ex 34, 23 has *יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* and Dt 16, 16 has *אל־פָּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ*, the preceding text is identical. The Latin *Vulgata* text, however, translates the sentences in a different way every time. The wording which we find in the *Extractiones* is the one of Dt 16, 16. We quoted here the Hebrew text from Ex 23, 17, as it is the first occurrence of the precept in the Bible and in modern Talmud editions (e.g. *Der babylonische Talmud*. Ed. Lazarus Goldschmidt, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, vol. 8, p. 479, note 93) it is the verse which is usually associated with this Talmudic passage. In any case, the ending of the sentence does not play a role in the argumentation of the Talmudic passage.

31. Text and translation from *The Schottenstein Edition* (as in note 15).

description of God (a topic of anti-Talmudic polemics) as it is said that God has two eyes. However, the translator merely wishes to point out that there is a commandment from the Bible to which the Talmud seemingly makes an arbitrary exception. We have shown that this exemption is in fact far from arbitrary, but it is not in the interest of the translator to show the rational process leading to the exemption.

3. Conclusion

The Latin translator – or, more correctly, the team behind the translation – of the Talmud was well versed in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and in Jewish culture. They had the cultural tools to understand the Talmud and show this through glosses of Hebrew technical terms and new translations of Biblical passages which are more literal and therefore enable the reader to understand the discussion. However, this knowledge is displayed in order to trick the reader into trusting the translation. The literal translation is used in precisely the same way. It is used to create aberrant translations and to extrapolate words or phrases from their context, thus guiding the interpretation of the reader in the desired direction. This shows that there is more to a good and truthful translation than just to respect words alone, and that knowledge of a language and a culture is not a guarantee of impartiality or objectivity.