

DE GRUYTER

*Constanza Cordoni, Gerhard Langer (Eds.)*

**“LET THE WISE LISTEN  
AND ADD TO THEIR  
LEARNING” (PROV 1:5)**

FESTSCHRIFT FOR GÜNTER STEMBERGER  
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 75TH BIRTHDAY

STUDIA JUDAICA

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**“Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning” (Prov 1:5)**

# **Studia Judaica**

## **Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums**

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Alexander Samely

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# **“Let the Wise Listen and Add to Their Learning” (Prov 1:5)**



Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion  
of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Edited by  
Constanza Cordoni and Gerhard Langer

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Piero Capelli

# Dating the Talmud in the Middle Ages

## 1 Introduction

The Paris trial of 1240 against the Talmud marked the beginning of a deeper knowledge of rabbinic literature on the part of Christian authorities and scholars. In his bull *Si vera sunt* (9 June 1239), Pope Gregory IX prompted the Christian kings of Western Europe to investigate the Talmud, and stated that the assumption that the Talmud had been transmitted from God to Moses was false, that the Talmud contained unbearable derogatory expressions against Christians and their religion, and that it was “the main reason that kept the stubborn Jews in their unbelief.”<sup>1</sup> Louis IX of France was the only king who followed the pope’s exhortation. According to the Hebrew literary account of the ensuing trial (*Wikkuah Rabbenu Yeḥiel*), the Christian and the Jewish sides were represented by the convert Nicolas Donin and by Rabbi Yeḥiel of Paris. In the *Wikkuah*, Donin denounces the authoritativeness granted to the Talmud in rabbinic Judaism as excessive, groundless and potentially heretical.<sup>2</sup> One of the main reasons for this authoritativeness was the purportedly great antiquity of the Talmud. Accordingly, the discussion between Donin and Yeḥiel about precisely this topic is granted considerable space and relevance in the *Wikkuah*. In the various textual witnesses of this latter work, though, the discussion on the dating of the Talmud is organized in different ways, and Donin and Yeḥiel date it to very different ages. The divergences in these sources reveal the development of a historical awareness of the antiquity of the Talmud.

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<sup>1</sup> Chen Merchavia, *Ha-Talmud bi-re’i ha-naṣrut* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 447 (*causa precipua, que iudeos in sua tenet perfidia obstinatos*).

<sup>2</sup> For a classification of Donin’s charges against the Talmud see Robert Chazan, “Trial, Condemnation, and Censorship: The Talmud in Medieval Europe,” in *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, ed. John Friedman, Jean Connell Hoff, and Robert Chazan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 46.

## 2 The Paris Manuscript (P)

The oldest extant textual witness of the *Wikkuah* is MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Hébr. 712 (P), from the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> According to P, the dating of the Talmud was the very first argument raised by Donin in the debate against Yeḥiel.

### P fol. 44r–v<sup>4</sup>

וילבש צור אמונים גבורה, ויאמר אל המין על מה תריבני, ומה זה תשאלי? ויאמר המין על דבר ישן אשאלך כי בזה לא אכפור כי התלמוד מד' מאות שנה. ויאמר הרב יותר מט"ו מאות שנה. ויאמר אל המלכה אנא אדונתי אל נא תכריחני לענות לדבריו אחרי כי הודה אשר הוא ישן נושן. ועד הלום אין דובר עליו דבר והנה קד' יריומא הגלח ידע כל תורתינו התלמוד והכל כאשר נודע לכל הגלחות, ואם היה בו דופי לא היה מניחו עד כה, ועוד הכי עד הלום לא היו גלחים ומשומדים חשובים כאלה, ואין אומר ואין דברים בלי נשמע קולם זה ט"ו מאות שנה, ומה מצאתם בנו להביאנו עד פה לעמוד על נפשינו להלחם על תורתינו, לחוטא הלו אשר כפר בדברי חכמים, זה ט"ו שנה ולא היה מאמין רק בכתוב בתורת משה בלא פתרון. ואתם ידעתם כי לכל דבר צריך פשר, ועל כן הבדלנוהו וגדינוהו.

The Rock of the faithful girded himself with strength and said to the apostate: “Why do you want to dispute with me? And about what are you planning to interrogate me?” The apostate replied: “I will interrogate you about an ancient question:<sup>5</sup> in this respect, you cannot

<sup>3</sup> Thus Hermann Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits hébreux et samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1866), 115 (end thirteenth–beginning fourteenth cent.); Michel Garel, *D'une main forte: Manuscrits hébreux des collections françaises* (Paris: Seuil; Bibliothèque Nationale, 1991), 87 (between 1270 and 1280); Philippe Bobichon, *Manuscrits en caractères hébreux conservés dans les bibliothèques de France*, vol. IV, *Bibliothèque nationale de France: Manuscrits de théologie n° 704–733* (Turnhout: Brepols, in print); Bobichon, *Controverse judéo-chrétienne en Ashkenaz (XIIIes.): Deux florilèges polémiques; hébreu, latin, ancien français* (Paris, BNF Hébreu 712, ff. 56v–57v et 66v–68v); *Édition, traduction, commentaires* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École pratique des Hautes études-Sciences religieuses, in print). My thanks are due to Philippe Bobichon for letting me know the results of his work before its publication.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the transcriptions, punctuations, translations and emphases from and in the manuscripts are mine.

<sup>5</sup> The reading in P is uncertain between דבר ישן, “an issue of antiquity,” and דבר ישו, “the question of Jesus.” The first alternative is fostered by the ensuing discussion on the dating on the Talmud. Also, it finds a precise correspondence in the fragment about the Paris trial contained in MS Vatican Ebr. 324, fols. 277v–278r (Northern France, late fourteenth cent.; see Benjamin Richler, Malachi Beit-Arié, and Nurit Pasternak, eds., *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library. Catalogue* [Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008], 277): here it is stated that in the debate Yeḥiel was asked “old questions from days of yore” (שאלות ישנות מימי קדם) and Judah Galinsky, “The Different Hebrew Versions of the ‘Talmud Trial’ of 1240 in Paris,” in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations. In Honor of David Berger*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter [Leiden, Boston: Brill,

deny<sup>6</sup> that *the Talmud dates from four hundred years ago.*” The rabbi said: “*From more than one thousand and five hundred years ago!*” Then, turning to the Queen: “I pray you, my Lady, do not force me to respond to his words, since he himself admitted that the Talmud is extremely ancient. And until now, no one has found anything to say against it. Indeed, Saint Jerome the priest<sup>7</sup> was acquainted with our entire Torah, that is, the Talmud, as all the clergy knows: had there been anything blameworthy in it, [t]he[y] would not have let it alone thus far. Furthermore, haven’t there existed prior to now priests and apostates as important as these here?<sup>8</sup> [Yet] *for one thousand and five hundred years*, not a sentence or even a single word has been heard [against the Talmud]. What did you find against us, that you brought us here to defend our lives and fight for our Torah against that sinner, who already fifteen years ago ceased to believe in *the words of the Sages – according to whom the Talmud is one thousand and five hundred years old* – and believed only in what is written in the Torah of Moses without interpretation? You know that every word needs commentary. This is why we separated him from ourselves and sentenced him.

There are various possible explanations for Donin’s dating the Talmud to four hundred years before the Paris trial, that is, to the beginning of the ninth century. Solomon Grayzel suggested that Donin was dating “the establishment of Talmudic authority to a generation after Anan,” who died ca. 795.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Israel Ta-Shma stated that Donin’s dating does not mean that he did not know tannaitic and amoraic chronology,<sup>10</sup> but that for him the Talmud actually dated from the middle of the ninth century, “an era presumed – or traditionally acknowledged – for the arrival of the Talmud in Christian Europe.”<sup>11</sup> It is seductive, if speculative, to think that Donin could have been referring to the diffusion of rabbinic tradition in Europe – including Ashkenaz – that came about after Palṭoy bar Abbaye, head of the academy of Pumbeditha from 842 to 857, sent a responsum to an Iberian Jewish community against the use of *halakot qeṭu’ot* (“decided laws”

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2012], 134). MS O (see further) has דבר ישן. On the other hand, MSS H and W (see further) clearly have ישן (W דברי) דבר, and according to both the Latin sources and the *Wikkuah* itself, Talmudic traditions on Jesus had a crucial relevance in the Paris trial.

6 I read תכפור (W) instead of איכפור “I will not deny” (P, H and O).

7 קד’ ריומא (superlinear correction by the scribe for קד’ ויאמא), a calque on Old French *Jérôme*.

8 That is, the jury.

9 Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIII<sup>th</sup> Century: A Study of Their Relations during the Years 1198–1254* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1933), 340.

10 As stated, e.g., by Adolf Lewin, “Die Religionsdisputation des R. Jechiel von Paris 1240 am Hofe Ludwigs des Heiligen, ihre Veranlassung und ihre Folge,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 18 [1869]: 101, n. 1), and Merchavia, *Ha-Talmud*, 232.

11 Israel-Moses Ta-Shma, “Rabbi Yéhiel de Paris: l’homme et l’œuvre, religion et société (XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle),” *Annuaire – Ecole pratique des hautes études, Section-sciences religieuses* 99 (1991): 217.

or “fragmentary *halakot*”) along with a copy of the Talmud.<sup>12</sup> Donin might also have been referring to the emergence of what Talya Fishman has described as the *textualization* of the Talmud, its canonization both as a written corpus and as a central pedagogical text, and its adoption as a normative source for applied law – a process that culminated in northern France between the eleventh and the thirteenth century through the works of Rashi and the Tosafists.<sup>13</sup> I think it likely that it was with this chronology (or maybe even this very passage of the *Wikkuah*) in mind that the convert Pablo Christiani, in the Barcelona disputation of 1263, described Maimonides as “a great sage of theirs, of whom there has been no equal in the last four hundred years.”<sup>14</sup> Or rather, again, Donin might have been referring to the end – once again in the mid-ninth century – of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, an age when the production of false documents proliferated;<sup>15</sup> were this the case, here Donin would also be denouncing the Talmud itself as a fraud.

As for Yeḥiel’s unlikely dating of the Talmud to one thousand and five hundred years earlier (that is, the third century B.C.E.), Grayzel suggested that the rabbi was referring to the otherwise mysterious beginning of the rabbinic

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**12** See Naḥman Danzig, “*Mi-Talmud ‘al-peh le-Talmud bi-ktav*,” *Bar-Ilan: Sefer ha-šanan le-mad-da’e ha-yahadut we-ha-ruaḥ šel Universitat Bar-Ilan* 30–31 (2006): 49–112; Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 230–232.

**13** See especially Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), chaps. 4–5. Also Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia*, 156–161: the Talmud remained into the category of oral study throughout the Geonic period (as Sherira Ga’on’s epistle has it) and “the traditions concerning the earliest written texts [of the Talmud] attribute their production to the needs of communities remote from Babylonia” (157, n. 7).

**14** I translate from Steinschneider’s inadequate edition (*Sefer Wikkuah ha-RaMBaṆ*, ed. Moritz Steinschneider (Berlin: Asher, 1860), 16: מאות שנה ד’ מאות היום ד’ היה להם כמותו היום ד’ מאות שנה). A new edition of this work is being prepared by Ursula Ragacs: see her “Edieren oder nicht Edieren...? Überlegungen zu einer Neuedition des hebräischen Berichtes über die Disputation von Barcelona 1263,” *Judaica* 62, no. 2 (2006): 157–170; Ragacs, “Edieren oder nicht Edieren...? Überlegungen zu einer Neuedition des hebräischen Berichtes über die Disputation von Barcelona 1263. Teil 2: Die Handschriften,” *Judaica* 65, no. 3 (2009): 239–258; Ragacs, “Geordnete Verhältnisse. Zur vermuteten Interdependenz der hebräischen Manuskripte der Disputation von Barcelona 1263,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 36 (2010): 85–94; Ragacs, “Lost and Found: One of Steinschneider’s Manuscripts of Nachmanides’ Wikkuah,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 37 (2011–2012): 137–145.

**15** My thanks are due to Heather Stein for this interpretive suggestion. For some examples and a discussion see Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 109–113.



“chain of tradition” listed in *Pirke Avot* 1.1 (the “men of the great synagogue”).<sup>16</sup> One is left speculating that this might have been a traditional dating among the Jews of northern France and the Rhineland.

### 3 The Strassburg and Hamburg Manuscripts (W and H)

Both these very same datings of the Talmud by Donin and Yeḥiel were attested in another manuscript of the *Wikkuah* from the Bibliothèque Municipale of Strassburg (W). This manuscript was destroyed in a fire during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, but had been transcribed by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in his careful *editio princeps* of the *Wikkuah*, published in his *Tela ignea Satanae* (Altdorfi Noricorum: Schönnerstadt, 1681).

Another textual witness from the same family as P and W (following precisely their succession of events and contents) is MS Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Hebr. 187 (Steinschneider) (H), fols. 71b–78a, a miscellany copied in Germany by Natan ben Yehudah around 1300.<sup>17</sup> In H, Donin’s dating is the same as in P, whereas in Yeḥiel’s dating there are two discrepancies. In the first occurrence (“The rabbi said: ‘From more than one thousand and five hundred years ago!’”), the manuscript has a *tet* with an overdot, the dating of the Talmud being thus to “more than *nine hundred years ago*.” In the second occurrence (“That sinner, who already fifteen years ago ceased to believe in the words of the Sages – according to whom the Talmud is one thousand and five hundred years old”), the manuscript has a *tet* plus a *waw* both with overdot, meaning “one thousand and five hundred years ago,” but the *waw* was subsequently erased, in keeping with Yeḥiel’s dating in the first occurrence.

In one instance out of two, thus, the copyist of H perceived that the “one thousand and five hundred years” were mistaken and needed correction. Such an error might have been determined by the anticipation of the expression  $\eta\tau$  [שנה] ט"ו, found in the manuscript only three lines below, and referring to Donin’s expulsion from the Jewish community. But whatever the case, it corresponds to the reading in both P and W. It is thus possible that the antigraph (i.e., the manuscript from which H was copied) had the same dating of the Talmud as in P (or, for what we know, that it was P itself), and that in the first oc-

<sup>16</sup> Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 340.

<sup>17</sup> Description in Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalog der hebräischen Handschriften in der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg*, (Hamburg, 1878; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), 69–73.

currence the copyist corrected the dating while copying the text, whereas in the second occurrence he copied it faithfully as it was in the antigraph and corrected it only later when revising the text.

In order to make sense of the dating of the Talmud to “more than nine hundred years ago” it is useful to compare it with the chronology of rabbinic tradition as explained by Nahmanides to Pablo Christiani in his account of the Barcelona disputation of 1263:<sup>18</sup>

הלא דבר ידוע הוא באמת כי ענין ישו היה בבית שני וקודם חרבן הבית נולד ונהרג. וחכמי התלמוד היו אחר החרבן, כגון ר' עקיבא וחביריו. ואותם ששנו המשנה ר' ור' נתן, היו ימים רבים אחר החרבן, וכול שכן רב אשי שחבר התלמוד וכתבו, שהיה אחר החרבן כד' מאות שנה.

Isn't it a really well-known fact that the issue of Jesus happened in the Second Temple period, and that he was born and put to death before the destruction of the Temple? Whereas the Sages of the Talmud lived after the destruction, as in the case of Rabbi Aqiva and his fellows. And those who taught the *Mishnah*, Rabbi and Rabbi Nathan, lived long after the destruction. All the more so Rav Ashi, who compiled the Talmud and committed it to writing – which happened around four hundred years after the destruction.

Nahmanides recovers the Talmudic datum of bBM 86a, רבי ור' נתן סוף משנה רב אשי, “Rabbi [Judah the Patriarch] and Rabbi Natan were the conclusion of the *Mishnah*, Rav Ashi and Ravina were the conclusion of the ‘instruction’.” Nahmanides understands the ambiguous term *hora'ah* as referring to the Talmud itself as a whole, whose redaction would thus have been concluded by the fifth century (“around four hundred years after the destruction”), that is, seven centuries before the Paris trial. Speculation about numbers is quite risky in historical disciplines: yet, the “nine hundred years” found in H are likely to be either a reference to the beginning of Talmudic tradition (*hora'ah*) immediately following the closing of the *Mishnah*, or (with an approximation of a couple of centuries) to its conclusion in Rav Ashi's (and Ravina's) times.

## 4 The Moscow Manuscript (M)

Let us go back to Yehiel's incongruous dating of the Talmud to one thousand and five hundred years earlier as found in P, W, and in the second occurrence in H before the correction. Such dating also appears in the second most important textual witness of the *Wikkuah*, MS Moscow, National Library of Russia, Günzburg 1390 (M), copied in the Byzantine region by Binyamin ben Shemaryah Sal-

<sup>18</sup> *Sefer Wikkuah ha-RaMBaN*, ed. Steinschneider, 6.

onicao in the second half of the fourteenth century (according to Colette Sirat)<sup>19</sup> or in the fifteenth (according to Tamar Leiter).<sup>20</sup> Here, the question of the dating of the Talmud is even more developed than in P's textual family, but it is placed in a different part of the discussion.

First, Yeḥiel introduces the question after (not before, as in P) the discussion about his obligation to take a judicial oath:

**M fol. 87r<sup>21</sup>**

ויען הרב שמעני אדונתי המלכה הנה זה הנבל מתגולל עלינו לעמוד על נפשתינו ולהלחם על תורתינו הנכונה אשר עבר ט"ו מאות שנה שהעתיקה רבינא ורב אשי למען כי כ"ב<sup>22</sup> בימיהם נטמעטו הלבבות ולא היו יכולין לקיימה על פה כבראשונה. וזה הטמא כבר עבר ט"ו שנה שלא האמין רק בתורה שבכתב תורה שבה בלא פתרון ויתרון ובעת הבינו בו רבותי נדנוהו והבדלנוהו מעל עדת ישראל.

The rabbi replied: "Listen to me, o Queen, my Lady! Look, this scoundrel is provoking us to fighting for our lives and to waging war for the sake of our true Torah. *One thousand and five hundred years have passed since Ravina and Rav Ashi had it committed to writing*, because in their ages the intellects had lessened and were no longer capable to retain the Torah orally as earlier. Yet, it has been fifteen years since this impure man has trusted only the written Torah, the Torah that has no interpretation nor expansion: and once our rabbis realized who he truly was, we sentenced him and separated him from the community of Israel."

Yeḥiel's dating of the Talmud to one thousand and five hundred years earlier is the same as in P and its textual family. But in M – copied at least one century after P – it is related to the activity of the Talmudic sages Ravina and Rav Ashi. As in Nahmanides, the reference here is to the dating found in bBM 86a, but here the mention of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (d. 217 ca.) and Rabbi Natan (second century) is omitted, and only the more recent Ravina I (d. 421) and Rav Ashi (d. 427) are connected to the writing of the Talmud. The scribe of M was recovering the datum of the Talmud and of Nahmanides about Ravina and Rav Ashi as the "authors" of the Talmud, but did not correct accordingly Yeḥiel's incongruous dating to one thousand and five hundred years before 1240. The scribe thus placed Ravina's and Rav Ashi's activity in the third century B.C.E. – which was recognized as a blatant anachronism already at the time when M was copied.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Joseph Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris: Un chapitre dans la polémique entre chrétiens et juifs au Moyen Age* (Paris, Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Galinsky, "The Different Hebrew Versions," 113, n. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Transcription, translation and emphasis mine.

<sup>22</sup> The dittography is in the MS.

Further in M, the question becomes even more complicated. While criticizing some *aggadot* for being ridiculous, Donin maintains (fol. 98r–v) that the Talmud was burnt in Vespasian's time because it was a worthless document that deserved to be destroyed. This tradition is completely absent from P and its family. I think that Donin's point in making such a statement would have been to institute a precedent in civil law legitimating the new persecution that he was prompting against the Talmud:

### M fol. 98r–v

על כל אלה ועל כיוצא באלה ישום וישרק השומע הזה | יאחזו חכם דרכו ונבון דבר יוסיף ערכו, כי בכל אלה הבינתי וענתה בי צדקתי, כי כל דבריהם דברי רוח וראויים לישרף, כי פעם אחת עשו כן בימי אספסיינוס קיסר ושרף התורה, ובימי ר' יהודה בן בבא גזרו כל הסומך יהרג וכל הנסמך יהרג, ועיר שסומכין בה תחרב ותחום שסומכין בו תעקר, והלך ר' יהודה בן בבא וסמך ה' זקנים ודקרוהו בלונביא של ברזל ועשו כל גופו ככברה וגם שרפו את ר' חנינא בן תרדיון עם התורה.

About this all and the like, those who hear this *will be horrified and will hiss* (Jer 19:8; 49:17; 50:13); [but] the wise *will hold to their way* (Job 17:9) and the clever will add convenient words to it, since I understood<sup>23</sup> this all and *my justice will answer for me* (Gen 30:33), as all their words are made of wind and worth burning. They once did the same in the times of Vespasian Caesar, who burnt the Torah; and in the times of Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava it was decreed to put to death anyone who imparted a rabbinic ordination, to put to death anyone who was ordained rabbi, to destroy any city where rabbinic ordinations were imparted, and to annihilate any district where rabbinic ordinations were imparted. Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava went and ordained five elders, and they pierced him with an iron spear and made his whole body a sieve. And along with the Torah they also burned Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon.

Yeḥiel reply to Donin's point is found further in M's text (fol. 101r, line 6): In Vespasian's time the Talmud was not burnt as such (לְבַדִּי), because it was not written until much later, in Ravina's and Rav Ashi's times; what was burnt under Vespasian was the written Torah alone. Donin's purported juridical precedent could therefore not be admitted by judges in Christian kingdoms, since the Torah is sacred for Christians too:

### M fol. 101r

ועל אשר אמרת ששרפו התורה בימי אספסיינוס קיסר לא התלמוד לבדו שרפו אלא כל התורה שרפו שהיא עדיין לא נכתב התלמוד עד לאחר כמה שנים בימי רבינא ורב אשי ואתם מודים בתורת משה שהיא טובה והתלמוד הוא הפי' שאלמלא התלמוד לא היה אדם יודע שום מצוה לבא עד תכונתה.

<sup>23</sup> Reading הבינתי instead of הבינתי of the MS.

On the fact that you stated that the Torah was burnt in the times of Vespasian Caesar: it was not the Talmud as such that they burnt, but rather the whole [written] Torah, as the Talmud was not written until some years later, in the times of Ravina and Rav Ashi. You [i.e. the jury] acknowledge that the Torah of Moses is good, and that the Talmud is its commentary; and were it not for the Talmud, it would be impossible to understand even one commandment so as to follow it according to its proper meaning.

Last, right at the end of the debate (M fol. 101v line 1), Yeḥiel finally makes the same point that, according to P and its family, he had rather made at the beginning: the Talmud had never been criticized until then, even though it was *more than one thousand* (not precisely one thousand and five hundred) *years old*:<sup>24</sup>

### M fol. 101r–v

באתי להתחנן שלא תשמעו אל דברי המין הזה כי כל שאלותיו על התלמוד תשובותיו בצדו כאשר דנתי לפניכם, ואם יקש לנו עוד דבר ישאל מיד לפני ואל יכה ספרינו בסתר כי התלמוד ישן נושן מיותר מאלף שנים ועד עתה | לא דבר עליו שום אדם דבר רע ואף הגלח דרומא יודע כל התלמוד שלנו ודרש וחקר הכל וכמהו גלחים הרבה מופלאי וחכמי יותר מן הרע הזה, אלף פעמים ידע כל התלמוד כאשר ידוע ולא מצאו בו דפי שאלו לא היה כן לא היה מניחו עד כה, ואף כי עד עתה בכל דור ודור היו משומדי חשובים ונכבדים מזה הצורך.

I have come to implore that you do not listen to the words of this apostate. All his questions on [passages of] the Talmud find their answers in some nearby passage, as I have argued before you. If he wants to ensnare us further, he should expose his questions directly in front of me instead of attacking our books furtively. The Talmud is extremely ancient, *more than one thousand years old*, and until now, no one has said anything bad against it. Even the priest from Rome<sup>25</sup> knew all our Talmud and studied and investigated it. And like him, many priests – a thousand times more eminent and learned than this evil man – knew all the Talmud, as is well known, nor did they find anything blameworthy in it; had this not been the case, [the] would not have let it alone thus far – though until now in every generation there have been more distinguished and respected converts than this hateful being.

Yeḥiel's datings of the Talmud as formulated in M are quite inconsistent. Its antiquity oscillates between "one thousand and five hundred years," "more than one thousand years," and "some years" after Vespasian's times. It is more relevant, though, that in two instances Yeḥiel states that the Talmud was written by Ravina and Rav Ashi. Though the chronology of the two rabbis fluctuates in M (one time "one thousand and five hundred years" earlier, another time "some years" after Vespasian), there is no doubt that, in the opinion of the copyist of

<sup>24</sup> Galinsky, "The Different Hebrew Versions," 115.

<sup>25</sup> (Or: from the South) Misunderstanding of קד ירומא "Saint Jerome" (Old French *Jérôme*) found in P (see above, n. 7). The French is misunderstood also in H (קדמון מרומא, "the Ancient from Rome") and O (קדוש דרומא, "the Saint from Rome [or: from the South]").

M, Yeḥiel assuredly thought that Ravina and Rav Ashi had been the compilers or authors of the Talmud. This corresponds to the dating of the Talmud in H after the correction (“nine hundred years ago”), and also to Nahmanides’ dating based on bBM 86a. Neither Ravina or Rav Ashi nor Vespasian are ever mentioned in P and its textual family; furthermore, in P it is Donin himself who begins the discussion attacking Yeḥiel about the falsehood of the traditional rabbinic dating of the Talmud, whereas in M it is Yeḥiel who introduces this question anew.

Much as the *tet + waw* corrected the solitary *tet* in H, the inconsistencies in M seem to attest to the progressive emergence and acceptance of Nahmanides’ dating of the Talmud to Ravina’s and Rav Ashi’s times, “nine hundred years” before the thirteenth century. The older, perhaps traditional dating before Jesus, “one thousand and five hundred years” ago (as in P’s textual family and in one point in M, but here in blatant contradiction with the rest of the manuscript), was no longer tenable. The “older than one thousand years” in M seems to be a correction made under way during the production or transcription of the manuscript.

## 5 The Oxford Manuscript (O)

The most recent witness of the *Wikkuah*<sup>26</sup> is MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Mich. 121 (Neubauer 2149), fols. 1r–17r (O), copied by the Moravian rabbi Avraham Shemuel Bacharach (d. 1615), who carefully registered variant readings from other manuscripts in the margins (instead of incorporating them into the text) and also contributed many long notes to the text. In the main, O follows the same text and succession of events as in P and its family. Here Donin dates the Talmud back to “*more than* four hundred years” (התלמוד ישן יותר מד’ (שנה), and Yeḥiel to “more than one thousand and five hundred years” earlier. All the datings thus correspond to the ones in P. In the first occurrence of Yeḥiel’s dating, however, our scribe adds in brackets the following note: נ”ל מיט וצ”ל יותר מ”ו מאות שנה, “It apparently means [more] than nine [hundred years]’ but must mean ‘more than six hundred years’” – thus correcting the anachronism in P’s family with a modern, historically aware dating of the redaction of the Talmud to the fifth or sixth century.

<sup>26</sup> With the exception of MS Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, X 191 sup. (Luzzatto 66) (Italy, end eighteenth–early nineteenth century), a transcript of W.

## 6 Further Hebrew and Latin Evidence

According to the Hebrew account of the second disputation held in Paris in 1269 (also transcribed in M by the same copyist as the *Wikkuah*), the Jewish spokesman, Rabbi Avraham ben Shemuel, still replied to his Christian rival – once again Pablo Christiani – with the same argument made by Yeḥiel thirty years earlier (according to P): The Talmud was authoritative because it was “older than twelve centuries” and no one but Donin had doubted it ever since:

### M fol. 102v<sup>27</sup>

ויאמר הר" אברהם: ... תורתינו, והלא היא קדומה יותר מ"ב מאות שנה ולא הרהר עליה אדם כלל, רק מין אחד אשר היה בימי הר" יחיאל כבר עבר כמו כ' שנה ....

Rabbi Avraham said: “... our Torah; isn't it *older than twelve centuries*? And no one at all doubted it, except for an apostate who lived in the days of Rabbi Yeḥiel, around twenty years ago ...”

On the other hand, Nahmanides' attribution of the Talmud to Rav Ashi is attested in other sources from the second half of the thirteenth century. MS Or. 53 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome (a miscellany of Jewish anti-Christian polemics written in German cursive script at the beginning of the fifteenth century)<sup>28</sup> includes (fol. 21r–v) a short abstract – bearing the same date of 1269 – of Nahmanides' account of the Barcelona disputation. At the beginning, the anonymous author resumes Nahmanides' argument that, had Jesus been the real messiah, the sages of the Talmud would not have remained faithful to Judaism. Here Nahmanides' dating of the Talmud is still based on bBM 86a, but its chronology is much less precise than in his own authorial account of the Barcelona disputation, since Rabbi Natan (second century C.E.) and Rav Ashi (d. 427) as the redactors of the Talmud are mistakenly said to have been contemporaries, apparently even together with Aqiva (early second century C.E.) and Sherira Ga'on (tenth century):

<sup>27</sup> Edition in Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse*, 45 (transl. 59).

<sup>28</sup> Ephraim Urbach, “Etudes sur la littérature polémique au moyen-âge,” *Revue des études juives* 99 (1935): 52.

**Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Or. 53, fol. 21r<sup>29</sup>**

וענה הרב מיד: והלא ביאת ישו בבית שני קודם חורבן, וחכמי התלמוד כגון ר' עקיבא וחבריו, ור' נתן ורב אשי שחברו התלמוד ורב שריירא גאון היו ד' מאות שנה אחר חורבן, והיה זה ה' מאות שנה אחר ישו...

And the rabbi immediately answered: “Did not Jesus come in the times of the Second Temple, before its destruction? And did not the Sages of the Talmud – like Rabbi ‘Aqiva and his companions, *Rabbi Natan and Rav Ashi who composed [pl.] the Talmud*, and Rav Sherira Ga’on – live four hundred years after the destruction, that is, five hundred years after Jesus?”

This dating of the Talmud is also attested in the Latin Christian sources related to the Paris Talmud trial that are contained in MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 16558, from the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The bulk of the manuscript consists of the *Extractiones de Talmut*, a large anthology of passages from the Talmud translated into Latin and classified as evidence of Talmudic doctrines that should be repressed or censored by Christian authorities.<sup>31</sup> In the prologue to the *Extractiones* we read as follows:

**Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Lat. 16558, fol. 99rb.<sup>32</sup>**

Interpretatur autem Brakot benedictiones, et ideo Brakot uocatur hec macecta, quia tanguntur aliqua de .xviii. benedictionibus, quasi ad usus diuersos, iudei friuole confixerunt; et in primis fit quarundam horarum distinctio; in quibus secundum suas traditiones ad quasdam lecciones et oraciones tenentur. Igitur rab Asse <qui ducentis annis uel circiter iam elapsis> singulas iudeorum stulticias et errores, tempore Anthoninot imperatoris, ut

<sup>29</sup> Edition in Shatzmiller, *La deuxième disputation*, 36–39, 37 and 40. On MS Or. 53 see further Urbach, “Etudes sur la littérature”; Judah Rosenthal, “*Wikkuaḥ dati ben ḥakam be-šem Menaḥem u-ven ha-mumar ve-ha-nazir ha-dominiqani Pablo Christiani*,” in *Hagut ‘Ivrit ba-Amerikah: Studies on Jewish Themes by Contemporary American Scholars*, ed. Menahem Zohori, Arie Tartakover, and Haim Ormian, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1973), 61–74; Robert Chazan, “A Medieval Hebrew Polemical Mélange,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 51 (1980): 89–110; Joel E. Rembaum, “A Reevaluation of a Medieval Polemical Manuscript,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 81–99.

<sup>30</sup> The *terminus a quo* for the manuscript is 1248 (as it contains Odo of Châteauroux’s sentence of condemnation of the Talmud from that year), and the *terminus ad quem* is 1306 (as it once belonged to Pierre of Limoges, who died in that year). My thanks are due to Alexander Fidora for granting me this information.

<sup>31</sup> On the authorship of the *Extractiones* see Alexander Fidora, “The Latin Talmud and Its Translators: Thibaud de Sézanne vd. Nicholas Donin?,” *Henoch* 37 (2015): 17–28. The *Extractiones* are being investigated and edited within the research project on *The Latin Talmud and its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemics* (ERC Consolidator Grant 2013) directed by Alexander Fidora.

<sup>32</sup> The passage in angle brackets is integrated from the first occurrence of the passage in the same manuscript (fol. 3vb). My thanks are due to Alexander Fidora for bringing this passage to my knowledge and discussing its content with me.



infra legitur a rbi collectos, in sex predictis uoluminibus ridiculose composuit et compegit a macecta Brakot, que est prima pars libri Moed, incipiens.

Thus, Rav Ashi – two hundred years or so later – ridiculously compiled and put together in the six aforementioned books (starting from tractate *Berakot*, which is the first part of the order of *Mo'ed*) each of the mistaken or absurd statements of the Jews that – as can be read below – had been collected by Rabbi in the age of emperor Antoninus.

The author of the *Extractiones* – be he Donin himself or Thibaut de Sézanne – states here that the *Mishnah* was redacted by Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch under “emperor Antoninus.” This can be a reference to either emperor Antoninus Pius (who reigned from 138 to 161) or, more loosely, to the age of the Antonine dynasty (138–192). The author further ascribes the compilation of the six orders of the Talmud to Rav Ashi and dates it to “two hundred years or so” after the redaction of the *Mishnah* – that is, to the fourth century.

Similarly, the Talmud is dated to the fifth century in the *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut* (*About Jewish errors from the Talmud*), compiled by the Spanish convert Gerónimo de Santa Fe (Yehoshua' ha-Lorqi) as a preparatory dossier for the public catechesis to converted Jews that was to be held in Tortosa and San Mateo between 1413 and 1414. Here Gerónimo stated that the Talmud “was written down by some rabbis, namely, Rabbenu and Rab Ashi, 435 years after the passion of Jesus Christ” ([*lex*] *quaeque per manus quorundam Rabinorum descripta est, videlicet Rabbenu et Rab-Ase, per annos 435 post Iesu Christi passionem*).<sup>33</sup> “Rabbenu” (usually Rabbenu ha-Qadosh, “our saintly Rabbi”) was a common appellation of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (d. 217), though the rabbi meant here is more probably Ravina I (d. 421).

## 7 Conclusions

According to the *Wikkuah Rabbenu Yeḥiel*, the date of the Talmud was a relevant point of disagreement during the Talmud trial of 1240 in Paris. In the different manuscripts of the *Wikkuah*, Nicolas Donin is quoted as stating that the Talmud was written “four hundred years” before the trial (with the exception of M, where he apparently thinks that the Talmud already existed in the age of Vespasian). Yeḥiel strived to defend the authoritativeness of the Talmud by stressing its an-

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<sup>33</sup> In *Maxima Bibliotheca veterum Patrum, et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum*, ed. Marguerin de la Bigne, vol. 26 (Lugduni: apud Anissonios, 1677), 545–554 (here 545). Cf. Moisés Orfalí, *El tratado “De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut” de Jerónimo de Santa Fe* (Madrid: Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Hebraicos y Sefardíes, 1987), 23.

tiquity; his early dating to “more than one thousand and five hundred years [earlier]” represents the point of view of the author of the *Wikkuah*, and of the copyists of P and W as well. This dating is not consistent in the manuscripts (“more than one thousand and five hundred years,” “more than nine hundred years,” “more than one thousand years,” “some years” after Vespasian); but it appears in the form “one thousand and five hundred years [earlier]” both in P (along with W, H before the correction, and O apart from the copyist’s note) and once in M (which is representative of a different branch of the textual tradition). This dating is therefore extremely likely to be the original one – of the *Wikkuah* if not of Yeḥiel himself. The more recent the manuscripts, the more historically accurate the rendition of Yeḥiel’s dating of the Talmud: in the manuscripts copied in the fourteenth century it is corrected to “more than nine hundred years ago” (H) or dated to the age and activity of Ravina I and Rav Ashi (M). The copyist of O, in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, ultimately suggested in a note that Yeḥiel’s dating should be corrected to “more than six hundred years ago.”

Just as the fourteenth-, or maybe fifteenth-century copyist of M did, Nahmanides, in his account of the Barcelona disputation of 1263, also ascribed the redaction of the Talmud into writing to Rav Ashi, on the basis of bBM 86a. This dating and attribution are also attested in the second half of the thirteenth century in the *Extractiones de Talmud* related to the Paris trial of 1240 and in one of the texts contained in MS Rome, Or. 53. Gerónimo de Santa Fe (early fifteenth century) was also of the opinion that Rav Ashi, along with “Rabbenu,” had been the editor of the Talmud (though in the fifth century).

The comparative analysis of variant readings in the manuscript tradition of the *Wikkuah Rabbenu Yeḥiel* has thus yielded the result that it was not until the second half of the thirteenth century – in the aftermath of the Talmud trial and of the second disputation held in Paris in 1269 – that rabbinic Jews of Northern France adopted the dating of the Talmud to the age of Ravina and especially Rav Ashi (early fifth century), recounted by Nahmanides in Barcelona.

This evolution in the dating of the Talmud around the Paris trial and the related textual tradition provides us with an unexpected insight into how the Jews of Northern France in the late Middle Ages, as well as Jewish scribes from other regions of Europe between the Middle Ages and the early modern period, remembered, reconstructed and narrated their past and the emergence of rabbinic tradition, starting from the time at which the textualization of the Talmud as the foundational source of rabbinic culture was reaching its completion in Northern France.