

EDITORIAL

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The study of cross-cultural exchanges during the Middle Ages has received growing scholarly attention over the past decades. Among the various facets of this process, translations of scientific texts deserve a special place, as the wealth of astronomical, medical and philosophical works translated from Arabic into Latin impressively shows.

No less important than the translations of scientific texts are those of religious works, which not only include the Qur'ān – translated more than once during the Middle Ages – but also foundational Jewish books, such as the Talmud. While polemic translations of Jewish religious books have been known for centuries, intense research on the subject is a fairly recent development in cross-cultural studies. We are therefore pleased to offer in this issue of *Henoch* a dossier on polemic translations of Jewish texts during the Middle Ages, at the centre of which are the *Extractiones de Talmud*.

This thirteenth-century translation of 1,922 passages from the Babylonian Talmud is a landmark in the long history of Christian-Jewish polemic, since it is the first serious engagement with the Talmud by the Christian world. In 1239 Pope Gregory IX wrote to kings and bishops across Europe urging them to seize and examine the manuscripts of the Talmud – the *alia lex*, as the pope called it –, as a result of which a trial against the Talmud took place in Paris in 1240. Though the Talmud went up in flames at the Place de la Grève in 1241/42, the controversy surrounding it continued over the following years, as Pope Innocent IV called for a revision of its condemnation. The textual basis for this revision is the *Extractiones de Talmud*, which were prepared around the year 1245 for Odo of Châteauroux, the papal legate in France, who issued the final condemnation of the Talmud in May 1248.

Dealing with this and other medieval translations of religious texts is a delicate issue, not only because of the various versions in which some of the Latin translations have come down to us, but also, and foremost, because they can hardly be regarded as self-confined texts. Rather, one is continuously confronted with the question of the extent to which the original must be taken into account in order to assess the fidelity of the translation and to reconstruct any polemic bias, without eclipsing its proper textual physiognomy. Such a comparison is further complicated by a practice found in

many medieval translations of Jewish and Islamic religious texts, in that they display a high degree of philological accuracy, being very literal renderings, whose polemic bias is often not the result of the way the passages were translated, but rather the way they were (de-)contextualized.

A conspicuous example of this complex textual situation is discussed in Federico Dal Bo's (Barcelona) paper, which focuses on several passages from the Talmudic tractate *Gittin* in the *Extractiones de Talmud* that deal with Jesus's fortune in hell. After briefly presenting the historical background of the 13th-century Latin translation of the Babylonian Talmud, the author elaborates on the larger context of the references to Jesus in *Gittin* from which he proceeds to a careful analysis of the translated texts in comparison with the original versions. While he can confirm that the translation is faithful to the original, he is able to show how, nonetheless, certain glosses in the *Extractiones* (explanatory additions by the translator) reveal his theological agenda. Ulisse Cecini (Barcelona) analyses in detail a set of glosses from the *Extractiones de Talmud* and shows how the *Extractiones*, and in particular their glosses, sometimes preserve Jewish (exegetical) material which has been suppressed in the transmission of the Talmud due to censorship and other vicissitudes. One such otherwise unknown gloss that Cecini unearths from the Latin translation is particularly interesting from a theological standpoint, as it establishes an identity between the expression "Dominus meus" and the Talmud itself, thus serving very well the polemical intentions of the translator.

The third paper of the dossier, by Federico Dal Bo and Alexander Fidora (Barcelona), discovers traces of another Jewish text within the *Extractiones de Talmud*, namely the *Toledot Yeshu*, that is, the famous Jewish parody of Jesus's life. While the Catalan Dominican Ramon Martí is generally credited with being the first Christian author to have read and translated the *Toledot Yeshu*, they can show that some forty years earlier the translator of the *Extractiones de Talmud* was familiar with this booklet and used it in his translation. The Latin translator of the Talmud not only conceived of this book in terms of a blasphemous attack on Jesus Christ, but also established a direct link with the purported Talmudic incitation of anti-Christian attitudes and behaviour, and thus presented the text as an imminent threat to social peace. The importance of the *Toledot Yeshu* in the history of polemic translations of Jewish religious texts is underscored by Daniel Barbu (Paris) and Yann Dahhaoui (Lausanne) in an article that offers the very first edition of an Old French translation of the *Toledot Yeshu*, which seems to be based on a Hebrew text from the same family as the text used by the translator of the *Extractiones*. In his detailed introduction, Barbu reconstructs the historical circumstances of this translation and in particular its relation to the inquisitorial procedure against the Jews of Trévoux in the year 1429.

Taken together, the papers of the dossier give important insights into the hermeneutic challenges of approaching religious translations, which operate simultaneously on multiple textual levels, using various semantic and pragmatic devices in order to reconcile their claim of providing authentic information about the 'other' with their inbuilt polemic intention.