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# "Spokesmen for Judaism": Medieval Jewish Polemicists and their Christian Readers in the Reformation Era

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# »Spokesmen for Judaism«: Medieval Jewish Polemicists and their Christian Readers in the Reformation Era

STEPHEN G. BURNETT

Johannes Reuchlin was outraged when he read *Sefer Nizzahon*. He filled the margins of his copy of the book with comments such as, »you lie Jew! ... very clear falsehoods ... this is an error ... foolish people.«<sup>1</sup> Reuchlin judged the work to be blasphemous, an affront not only to the laws of God, but forbidden under Roman and imperial German law as well. *Nizzahon* and *Toledot Yesu* were the only two Jewish books that Reuchlin considered completely unacceptable in his famous legal opinion on Jewish books.<sup>2</sup> His furious response to *Sefer Nizzahon* was not surprising. While he may have been one of the first Renaissance or Reformation-era Christian Hebraists to experience the shock of reading a Jewish polemicist's attack on his religion, he was certainly not the last to do so. In 1628 Wilhelm Schickard wrote that he had »never read a worse book« than the »execrable manuscript book *Nizzahon*.«<sup>3</sup>

The accolade of »worst enemy« of the Christian faith was similarly a matter of dispute among Christian readers in the early modern period. Hugo Grotius' choice was David Kimhi, whom he termed »the great adversary of the Christians.«<sup>4</sup> In his 1687 introduction to *Pugio fidei*, Johann Benedikt Carpzov identified Isaac Abrabanel as the »greatest Christian antagonist.«<sup>5</sup> The visceral reaction of these readers to polemical works written by Jews is the best evidence that they were known and read by both expert Hebrew scholars and by others, although these were the kind of books that Jewish owners went to great lengths to hide. In this essay I will discuss the three kinds of Jewish polemical books, which Christian Hebraists made publicly available in one form or another during the Reformation era (1500–1650), and the ways that they gained access to them. I will then consider the Hebrew scholars involved in this process of transmission. Finally, I will discuss the response of other, non-expert readers such as Luther and Calvin.

Samuel Krauss and William Horbury, in their survey of medieval Jewish polemical writers and the books that they wrote against Christianity, mention no fewer than forty seven

1 »Du lügst Jud! ... mendacia apertissima ... error est ... gens stulta.« Karl PREISENDANZ, »Eine neue Handschrift aus Johann Reuchlins Bibliothek,« in: *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher* (1936), p. 110. The manuscript was unfortunately destroyed during the Second World War.

2 Johannes REUCHLIN, *Gutachten über das Jüdische Schrifttum*, hg. Antoine Leinz-von Dessauer Stuttgart 1965 (Pforzheimer Reuchlinschriften 2), S. 32. In the new critical edition, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Widu-Wolfgang EHLERS, Hans-Gert ROLOFF and Peter SCHÄFER, Band IV: *Schriften zum Bücherstreit*, Teil 1: *Reuchlins Schriften*, Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt, 1999, pp. 54, 5–6.

3 Quoted by William HORBURY, »The Basle Nizzahon,« in: IDEM, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy*, Edinburgh 1998, p. 248.

4 Quoted by Samuel KRAUSS and William HORBURY, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the earliest times to 1789*, vol. 1: *History*, Tübingen 1995, p. 220.

5 P. T. VAN ROODEN, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship and Rabbinical Studies in the Seventeenth Century: Constantijn L'Empereur (1591–1648) Professor of Hebrew and Theology at Leiden*, Studies in the History of Leiden University, vol. 6, Leiden 1989, p. 169.

סודרה על לידת ישו ועל שבאו  
 כולם לגיהנום:

HOC EST

NUMERUS IIX

Spectans cap. 2. Genes. xl. 17.

Arcani libri NITZACHON,

*Typis Academicis nuper exscripti,*

Quo

RABBI LIPMAN

Fidem Christianam de Jesu Salvatoris nostri  
 secundum carnem nscivitate, potissimum verò,  
 quem Pontificii appellant, lim-  
 bum Patrum.,

*Sub annum, ut habet subscriptio circa finem ad-  
 dita Judaicum 5159. Christianum verò 1399. impugnavit.*

Eum.

PL. REVER. ATQ; EXCELLENTISSIMO

VIRO

DN. JOHAN. MICHAELI  
 DILHERRO

Inscriptum.

*Servato, quantum licuit, idiotismo latini-  
 tate donavit*

SEBALDUS SNELLIUS Norimb.

ALTDORPHI

TYPIS SCHEFFIANIS.

ANNO 1643.

Rabbi Yomtov Lipmann,  
*Setira al-Ledat Yeshu  
 we-al she-ba'u kulam  
 le-Gebinnom* («Wider-  
 spruch in Bezug auf die  
 Geburt Jesu und darauf-  
 hin, dass alle in die Hölle  
 kommen»), das sogenann-  
 te *Sefer Nizzahon*, Alt-  
 dorf: Scherff, 1643, Titel-  
 blatt. VK-Nr. 80/6;  
 Universitätsbibliothek  
 Erlangen-Nürnberg, aus:  
 Sammlung Wagenseil.  
 Katalog auf CD-ROM,  
 © 1996 by Harald Fischer  
 Verlag, Erlangen.

writers and sixty five polemical works written in Hebrew (or translated into Hebrew) before 1520. These books range from commentaries on the Bible and other books, to letters and to works of incidental polemics, such as Isaac Nathan's response to R. Samuel of Morocco included in his Hebrew Bible concordance.<sup>6</sup> Their list of polemical works does not include the biblical commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Rashi, although these works contain a good deal of implicit or incidental polemical argument against traditional Christian interpretations of specific passages.<sup>7</sup> A comparison of Krauss and Horbury's list of authors and works with those polemical books that Christian Hebraists of the Reformation era read and made publicly known, however, reveals that these scholars had access to only a few of these works. Apart from biblical commentaries, they were familiar with perhaps a dozen or so Jewish polemical books. I will discuss these polemical works by genre rather than by individual title, since they were acquired and published with varying degrees of difficulty.

6 KRAUSS and HORBURY, *Controversy*, vol. 1, pp. 201–249.

7 ERWIN I. J. ROSENTHAL, »Jüdische Antwort,« in: *Kirche und Synagoge: Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden. Darstellung mit Quellen*, ed. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf and Siegfried von Kortzfleisch, 2 vols, Stuttgart 1968, vol. 1, pp. 312–318.

Christian Hebraists utilized three different kinds of Jewish polemical works during the Reformation era: Jewish commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, Jewish translations of the Gospels, and finally, polemical treatises. Of these three types, biblical commentaries were most widely available, since they were printed in the Bomberg rabbinical Bibles which appeared in 1517, 1524–25, 1546, and 1568. Bomberg's rabbinical Bibles, which contained the biblical commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimhi, and selected others, were widely circulated in Germany and were readily available for scholars who wished to use them. In Wittenberg, for example, Melancthon, Caspar Cruciger, and possibly Luther himself owned copies of the first or second printing. Martin Bucer in Strasbourg owned a 1517 *Biblia rabbinica*, and Sebastian Münster in Basel owned copies of both the first and second printings. David Kimhi's Psalms commentary, however, was printed only in the first edition of the *Biblia rabbinica* and did not appear in any of the later ones (though his commentaries on the prophets continued to be printed), almost certainly because of his wide-ranging polemical comments.<sup>8</sup> Paul Fagius reprinted Kimhi's entire Psalms commentary without a Latin translation in 1541, and the first ten Psalms with a Latin translation in 1544.<sup>9</sup> Isaac Abarbanel's Daniel commentary was also openly published in the early sixteenth century, although not often reprinted. When Johannes Mueller tried to buy a copy of the work in 1641, he sought in vain. He complained in a letter to Johannes Buxtorf the younger:

»The rabbis of the Spanish synagogues here, R. Abraham de Fonseca, and R. David Cohen de Lara, have very often spoken with me about the Christian Religion, and urged against me, when I spoke of the abolition of the sacrifices, the authority of a Jew who is called Isaac Abarbanel. They boast of him excessively, and say that in his commentary on Daniel he has an answer to all the Christian arguments separately. I searched everywhere in Germany and Holland, even in Spain, for this author with letters and money, but was unable to get hold of the commentary in Daniel, I found in the book of Menasseh ben Israel, *de termino vitae*, as I understood from a statement of Constantijn L'Empereur, that you have translated the book of Abarbanel into Latin.«<sup>10</sup>

In the end, Johannes Buxtorf the younger gave him a copy of his unpublished translation of the commentary.<sup>11</sup>

While biblical commentaries were relatively easy to acquire, other kinds of polemical books were much more difficult to find. Returning to Reuchlin's *Opinion on Jewish books*, he pointed out that Jews (like Christians) were forbidden under imperial law to own defamatory works.

»Should a Jew knowingly keep any book which explicitly and clearly insults, defames and dishonors our divine Lord Jesus, his praiseworthy mother, the saints, or the Christian

8 ROSENTHAL, »Jüdische Antwort,« in: *Kirche und Synagoge*, 1, pp. 318–232.

9 *Perush Radak 'al Sefer ha-Tehillim*, Isny: Fagius, 1541, VD 16 B 3105 (exemplaria: Muenchen BSB; Oxford: Bodleian; Basel UB); *Pirush. Commentarium hebraicum Rabbi David Kimhii in Decem Primos Psalmos Davidicos. Cum Versione Latina*, ed. and trans. Paul Fagius, Konstanz: n. p., 1544 (exemplarium: Bern Staatsbibliothek Sig. Bong I 429).

10 VAN ROODEN, *Theology*, p. 170.

11 VAN ROODEN, *Theology*, p. 170. Jean Calvin referred to Abrabanel's Daniel commentary in his remarks on Dan. 2:44–45, 4:10–16, 7:27, and 9:24–25. Jean CALVIN, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 1863–1900 (Reprint: New York 1964), 40, pp. 604, 658, and 41, pp. 168, 171, 174, 186.

order, such a book should be confiscated by imperial order and burned, and the Jew involved should be punished, since he did not himself tear up, burn or destroy the book.«<sup>12</sup>

The two kinds of books that had to be hidden from Christian eyes were Jewish versions of the Gospel narrative in Hebrew (including the *Toledot Yesu*), and polemical treatises, including the *Nizzahon Vetus* (and related works such as the Basel *Nizzahon* manuscript), Lipman Muelhausen's *Nizzahon*, and R. Matthiah b. Moses ha-Yizhari's *Ahitw ve-Zalman*.<sup>13</sup> The only Jewish polemical books that were printed first by Jews in Hebrew before they were reprinted by Christians with apologetic responses were David Kimhi's *Answer to the Christians* and the chapter of Joseph Albo's *Principles of Faith* where he set out to refute Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

Although Christian Hebraists did not always relate how they acquired copies of these polemical books, some accounts have been preserved. Police raids on Jewish homes were one way that these books became available. Reuchlin's copy of *Sefer Nizzahon* was seized in a raid on the house of the Jew Johel in Mainz on October 13, 1478. Reuchlin probably was given the book by Bishop Johann Dalberg in 1487.<sup>15</sup> Reuchlin, in turn, allowed Sebastian Münster to make his own copy of it, probably between 1511 and 1514, when he lived in Tübingen.<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew version of Matthew published in 1555 by Bishop Jean de Tillet and Jean Mercier was seized in Rome, probably because of the Papal decree of 1553. The book, wrote du Tillet, which had recently been taken from the Jews in Rome, was »hidden in their cellars and is now at last brought forth from the midst of their inner chambers and from darkness.«<sup>17</sup> Other books were passed on from one Christian Hebraist to another. Andreas Osiander owned a copy of *Ahitw ve-Zalman*, which he received from Johannes Boeschentain. His grandson Lukas Osiander inherited the manuscript and lent it to his Tübingen colleague Wilhelm Schickard, who ultimately published it.<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Tremellius brought his own copy of *Sefer Nizzahon* with him when he fled Italy in 1542. Johannes Buxtorf the elder ultimately acquired the book in 1623, and he promptly lent it to Wilhelm Schickard who wished to read it. Theodor Hackspann frankly admitted that he stole the Vorlage of Lipman Mühlhausen's *Nizzahon* from a rabbi in Schneittach, and then had it quickly copied by his students.<sup>19</sup> Other authors, such as Sebastian Münster, could be notably reticent about just how they found copies of the books they discussed, and their contacts with Jews generally. In some way or other Münster gained access to copies of both the

12 REUCHLIN, *Sämtliche Schriften*, 4/1, 29, pp. 14–21.

13 KRAUSS and HORBURY, *Controversy*, 1, pp. 248, 246–247, 223–225, 226–227.

14 *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 206, 220–221.

15 PREISENDANZ, »Handschrift,« pp. 104–105.

16 Stephen G. BURNETT, »Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor: Christian Hebraism and Anti-Jewish Polemics during the Reformation,« in: *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 55 (1993), p. 117.

17 William HORBURY, »The Hebrew Matthew and Hebrew Study,« in: *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, ed. William Horbury, Edinburgh 1999, p. 125.

18 W. SCHICKARD, ed., *Nissahon bli nāsah sive Triumphator Vapulans: Hoc est, Refutatio blasphemii et maledicentissimi cuiusdam Libri Hebraici, ultra trecentos annos inter Judeos clam habitii, nunc in apicium producti. A Wilhelmo Schickardo, Sac[rae] L[inguæ] apud Tubingenses Professore publico. Ad cuius Primam hanc sectionem respondebit Ioachimus Heinatius*, Tübingen: Theodoricus Werlin, 1623 (Göttingen: Staats und Universitätsbibliothek Sig. 8 RAB 342/5). See W. W. Müller, »Hebräische und Chaldäische Studien,« in: Friedrich SECK, *Wilhelm Schickard, 1592–1635: Astronom, Geograph, Orientalist, Erfinder d. Rechenmaschine*, Tübingen 1978, pp. 76–78.

19 KRAUSS and HORBURY, *Controversy*, 1, p. 224.

*Disputation* of Rabbi Yehiel of Paris, first printed in the nineteenth century, and also the *Disputation* of Nahmanides, first printed by Wagenseil, though he only quoted from the books in *Messiahs of the Christians and Jews* (1529, 1539), never giving their titles.<sup>20</sup>

The Christian Hebraists who read and transmitted these books, in various forms to the non-expert reading public were a small group of mostly German Protestant Hebraists. They were among the most prolific Hebrew writers of the era: Paul Fagius, Sebastian Münster, Theodor Hacksplan, Wilhelm Schickard, and Johannes Buxtorf the elder. The only important Catholic Hebraists who worked with Jewish polemical writings were Gilbert Genebrard and Jean Mercier, though the latter was probably a secret Protestant. They transmitted these polemical works in three different ways: through *censored imprints in the original language*, through *translation*, and through publishing *excerpts* in their own works. While there were many little-known censors involved in the task of preparing Jewish books for the press, some of them are known to scholarship. Johannes Buxtorf the elder was one of most famous, and one of his best-known works was his edition of the rabbinical Bible of 1618–19. Buxtorf wanted his students to be able to purchase their own copies of the rabbinical Bible and expressed this concern in his appeal to the Basel city council for permission to print the Bible edition. In Buxtorf's day copies of the old Bomberg rabbinical Bible cost between 30 and 50 Reichstaler, the latter figure about a quarter of Buxtorf's annual salary. It was high time to reprint the rabbinical Bible for a new generation of Hebrew scholars.<sup>21</sup> According to both Basel city ordinance and the laws of the Holy Roman Empire, which governed printing, the work would have to be thoroughly censored, a task for which Buxtorf took responsibility. The Jewish commentaries printed in Buxtorf's Vorlage, the Bomberg rabbinical Bible of 1546 had already been censored, as a comparison with the critical edition of David Kimhi's commentary on Isaiah chaps. 1–35 reveals. For example, the words »Christians,« »heretics,« and »Jesus« occur eleven times in the critical edition, while in the Venice 1546 printing ten of the eleven were removed.<sup>22</sup> The censors also made some attempt to remove all references to Rome; the critical edition contains twelve references to Rome and Romans, but there are only five occurrences in the Venice printing.<sup>23</sup> In some

20 Stephen G. BURNETT, »Dialogue of the Deaf: Hebrew Pedagogy and Anti-Jewish Polemic in Sebastian Münster's *Messiahs of the Christians and the Jews* (1529/39),« in: *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 91 (2000), p. 178 n. 49, p. 179 n. 52.

21 Beck and Buxtorf reported that rabbinical Bibles cost between 30 and 50 *Reichsthaler*, a sum far beyond the reach of most scholars. They argued that the Bible should be published, »das auch solche Bibel in ihren ursprünglichen Sprachen, zu mehrere fortpflanzung, erkundigung und erhaltung Göttliches worts, zu erbawung der in Gottswort studierenden und diser Sprachen liebhabenden Jugend, auch zu mehrer unterrichtung aller deren gelehrten so Gottes wort in seinen Original und ursprünglichen Sprachen...lehren und erklehren....« Sebastian Beck and Johannes Buxtorf, *Bericht uber das Biblisch Truck, so man jetzt und zu trucken begehret*, September 5, 1617, Basel SA, Handel und Gewerbe, JJJ 1.

22 *Nozrim* occurs six times (2:19, 2:21 (2x), 2:23, 11:14 and 34:1), *minim* occurs twice, both times in 7:15, and *goy* occurs three times in 2:19, 2:21 and 7:15. *Nozrim* was retained in Isa. 11:1 because it was not used pejoratively. In addition to Buxtorf's *Biblia rabbinica*, I used *The Commentary of David Kimhi on Isaiah*, ed. Louis Finkelstein, Columbia University Oriental Studies, vol. 19 (New York 1926), and *Miqraot Gedolot*, 4 vols, Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1546–1548 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, Opp. fol. 7).

23 In the critical edition *romi* occurs twelve times in 21:12, 24:16, 25:2, 26:5, 30:6, 34:1 (4x), 9 (2x), and verse 16, while the Venice 1546 printing has it only in 21:2, 24:16, 25:2, 30:6 and 34:9. In 34:1 and 34:9 the word *Edom* was substituted for *Romi*. Replacing offensive words with more innocuous ones was a fairly common censorial practice in Italy and one which Buxtorf himself used quite frequently. See POPPER, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, pp. 57–59, 79–80.

cases, such as Kimhi's discussion of the young woman (*almah*) in Isa 7:14, they removed whole sentences at a time.<sup>24</sup>

Buxtorf removed many words and phrases from Kimhi's Isaiah commentary, which had escaped the attention of earlier censors. Where the editors of the Venice 1546 Bible had left five occurrences of »Rome,« Buxtorf reduced them to one, in Isa. 30:6, sometimes changing the word »Rome« to »Edom,« »Samaria,« or »Babylon.«<sup>25</sup> He made other less obvious, but no less tendentious, textual changes as well. Where Kimhi stated in his comment on Isa. 35:8 that the nations (*goyim*) would not walk on the highway of holiness, Buxtorf substituted the word »wicked,« (*reshaim*), forcing Kimhi to follow Isaiah's wording.<sup>26</sup> Buxtorf clearly made an effort to edit out what he considered to be obvious instances of blasphemy or derogatory remarks about the Christian faith.

Buxtorf considered the Jewish Bible commentaries that were to be printed in the margins of the *Biblia rabbinica* to be works both useful and dangerous for Christian readers. They were indispensable for any interpreter who wished to find the literal sense of many biblical passages, because the commentators were such excellent grammarians. The commentaries also contained »perverse and false« interpretations, particularly in those passages, which discussed the messiah. Surprisingly Buxtorf let these passages stand without censoring them because, he claimed, they stood as a testimony to the unbelief of the Jews, and hence were a fulfillment of what Moses and the prophets had predicted.<sup>27</sup>

Direct translations of Jewish polemical works with only minimal censorship were quite rare in the Reformation era. Both Fagius and Münster produced censored diglot printings of Kimhi's commentaries on the Psalms (1–10 only) and Isaiah for the use of students.<sup>28</sup> Two of the most outstanding examples were printed in Paris during the 1550's and 1560's: the Hebrew Gospel edition of du Tillet and Mercier and Gilbert Genebrard's translation of the polemical essay of Joseph Albo, David Kimhi's *Answer to the Christians*, and to the 23 objections to Christianity of an anonymous Jew. The Hebrew translation of Matthew published by du Tillet and Mercier represents one of seven known Hebrew renderings of the Gospel.<sup>29</sup> It was not the first such publication: Sebastian Münster printed a version of the

24 For the sake of convenience I will identify the excised material in 7:14 by page and line number in KIMHI, *Commentary*, 49. The censors removed about three lines beginning with the end of line 15 and picking up Kimhi's discussion about half way through line 19. Other places where Kimhi's commentary was »abridged« include Isa. 7:15 and 34:1.

25 BUXTORF used *Edom* in Isa. 21:2, *Cutha* in 24:16, *Babel* in 25:2, and deleted it entirely in 39:4.

26 The Venice 1546 text of Kimhi's commentary contained *goyim*.

27 »Est in iis mel, est in iis fel. Melleum, quod ad linguæ Hebraicæ proprietatem melius explicandam, quodque ad literalem Grammaticumque Scripturæ sensum genuinæ illustrandum facit commodumque est, suscipimus, quod & omnes alii viri docti, quotquot accuratiorem & perfectiorem linguæ Hebraicæ cognitionem inter Christianos assecuti sunt, hactenus fecerunt. Felleum, quod in rerum tractatione perversa aut falsa occurrit, & maxime in iis locis qui de promisso Messia, ejusque persona & officio agunt, id totum ipsis relinquimus, ut sit contra eos loco testis perpetui, ut Moses loquitur Deut. 31:26, quod caecitate percussi sint, ut idem praedixerat Deut 28:28.« Johannes BUXTORF, introduction to the *Biblia rabbinica*, f. (1)v.

28 Paul FAGIUS, ed. and trans. *Pirush*, Konstanz: n. p., 1544; Sebastian MÜNSTER, ed. and trans. [*Yeshayah*] *Isaias Propheta, Hebraice, Graece, et Latine. Addita est autem Duplex Latina interpretatio, Hieronymi & Munsteri. Accessit & succincta difficiliorum Hebraicorum vocabulorum expositio, collecta ... Davidis Kimhi commentario*, Basel: H. Petri, 1542? (VD16 M6667 Prijs 64).

29 William L. PETERSEN, »The Vorlage of Shem-Tob's »Hebrew Matthew,« in: *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), p. 491.

Gospel in 1537, written in very poor Hebrew, which he provided with an introduction in Hebrew and Latin and with extensive notes.<sup>30</sup> His Hebrew Gospel was reprinted in twice in Basel over the course of the sixteenth century (1557, 1582). It also appeared once in Paris (1551), edited by Mercier's colleague Jean Cinqarbres. Jean Mercier, professor of Hebrew at the College de France, edited and translated a new Hebrew Gospel text provided by Bishop du Tillet. He included a list of 23 objections to Christianity, written in poor Latin, at the end of the work, which du Tillet described in his introduction as a demonstration of the waywardness of the Jews. Any Christian, he asserted, could easily answer them.<sup>31</sup> What he could not have guessed is that these 23 questions would become one of the best-known examples of Jewish polemic in the early modern period.

The first scholar to respond to these 23 questions was Gilbert Genebrard in his *Arguments of Joseph Albo, David Kimhi, and a certain anonymous Jew, which oppose articles of the Christian Faith with an interpretation and response* (Paris, 1566).<sup>32</sup> Publishing Jewish polemical treatises was far more challenging than preparing either commentaries or translations of the Gospel for the press. To justify his approach, Genebrard compared it with Augustine's refutation of Arius, in that he, like the church father, first printed the words of his opponent, and then refuted them.<sup>33</sup> Also like Augustine, Genebrard felt that he was answering the charges of Christian heretics: he mentioned in both the fine print of the book's title and in his introduction that he was writing to oppose anti-Trinitarian thinkers in Poland and Lithuania as well as the Jews.<sup>34</sup> He translated both Joseph Albo's treatise and Kimhi's *Answer to the Christians* with relatively few omissions, though without any clear indication of which Vorlage Genebrard used, it is not clear whether he was his own censor or used a previously censored text.<sup>35</sup> In each of these three treatises a Jewish spokesman »addresses« Christian readers in Latin, a language they could understand. By contrast, when Hackspann published Lipman Mühlhausen's *Sefer Nizzahon* in 1644 it was the Hebrew text only, providing only his refutation in Latin.<sup>36</sup>

30 JOSEPH PRIJS, *Die Basler hebräischen Drucke 1492–1866*, ed. Bernhard Prijs, Freiburg/Br. and Olten 1964, pp. 82–83.

31 HORBURY, »Hebrew Matthew,« pp. 125–126.

32 *Josephi Albonis, ... Davidis Kimhi, et alius cuiusdam Hebraei anonymi Argumenta, quibus nonnullos fidei christianae articulos oppugnant, G. Genebrardo ... interprete, ad eorum singulas disputationes eiusdem interpretis responsa, in quibus multa de Deo, de Tribus divinitatis*, Paris: Le Jeune, 1566 (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek, Sig. De 2940).

33 The latter part of Genebrard's title reads, *Liber vel illo solo utilis, quod multa, adversus recans Trinitariorum dogma, hoc infoelicis aevo, in Lithania & Polonia de tribus divines essentiis atque diis excitatum declarat*. See also fol. a iir.

34 »In his autem refellendis seculus sum Augustini in quaedam contra Arrianos disputatione, methodum. Adiunxi enim sermonem adversarii a capite responsionis meae & adhibui ad singula numeros, quibus inspectis, quid cuique loco responderim ...« GENEBRARD, *Albonis*, fol. aiir. For a recent treatment of Genebrard's response to Albo's polemic, see SINA RAUSCHENBACH, *Josef Albo (um 1380–1444): jüdische Philosophie und christliche Kontroverstheologie in der frühen Neuzeit*, Leiden 2002, pp. 182–195.

35 I compared the Latin translation of ALBO, *Ikkarim*, Book 3, chap. 25 with the text printed in JUDAH D. EISENSTEIN, *Ozsar wikkuahim*, 2 vols, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 111–115, and DAVID KIMHI's *Answer* with the text printed in Ephraim TALMAGE, ed., *Sefer ha-Berit; Wikkuhe Rabbi Dawid Qimhi*, Jerusalem 1974. ROSENTHAL summarized Albo's argument in »Jüdische Antwort,« pp. 330–349. For a fuller text and English translation of Albo, see JOSEPH ALBO, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim Book of Principles*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Isaac Husik, Philadelphia 1946, pp. 217–245.

36 VAN ROODEN, *Theology*, p. 171.



Sebastian Münster is perhaps the best example of a Christian Hebraist who used *excerpts* of Jewish polemical texts, most notably from Jewish biblical commentaries and from *Sefer Nizzahon Vetus*, to »represent« Jewish opinion. Three of his works, *Messiahs of the Christians and Jews* (1529, 1539), his editing of the Gospel of Matthew, and most importantly his *Biblia Hebraea* (1534/35 and 1546), which contained the Hebrew Bible text with facing Latin translation and his extensive annotations, contain quotations from, or references to *Sefer Nizzahon*. Münster quoted no fewer than 65 times from *Nizzahon*, and referred at other times to the book without quoting the text, usually to demonstrate Jewish hostility to the Christian message.<sup>37</sup> In his *Messiahs of the Christians and Jews*, a disputation in the form of a dialogue, Münster places these words into the Jew's mouth:

»Moreover, if [Jesus] is God, why did he cover himself with flesh and why did he not appear publicly to renew his Torah and give it openly so that the people of that generation would not err and the people of the world would not be misled? He should, on the contrary, have done his deeds openly and in a clearly recognizable fashion so that all would believe in him.«<sup>38</sup>

For the Jew to question God's will and to criticize his plan of salvation horrified Münster's Christian, who responded: »You do not know what you are saying. Did he not show by his deeds and words, such miracles as no one else has done, that he was the Messiah and savior of the world?«<sup>39</sup> Münster's Jew, using an authentic quotation from *Nizzahon*, confirmed Christian belief that Jews were hostile to the Gospel, contemptuous of God and Christ, and in the absence of inhibitions would say as much to a Christian questioner.

Münster's use of Jewish biblical commentators in *Messiahs* and in his biblical annotations reflected his praise for them as Hebrew scholars, and his blame for their foolish inability to read and understand the plain sense of the Hebrew text. Over a third of the lines spoken by the Jew in *Messiahs* (477 of 1402 lines) are quotations from David Kimhi's biblical commentaries, mostly focusing on the messiah and the world to come. For example, Münster quotes Kimhi's description of the signs that will accompany the ingathering of the diaspora in the Land of Israel from his comments on Isaiah 26 and Malachi 3, his discussion of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38, and the sensitive question of whether the Messiah would marry and have children (Psalm 45).<sup>40</sup> In his biblical annotations, by contrast, Münster usually cites Jewish biblical commentators as guides to the grammar or overall interpretation of specific passages.<sup>41</sup>

The Christian Hebraists who found, studied and transmitted (in whole or in part) what they learned in Jewish polemics were not the only readers who responded to the searching

37 David BERGER, ed., *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of Nizzahon Vetus*, Nordvale, NJ, 1996, p. 377. Münster also quoted from paragraphs 6, 9, 205, 232, and 238 of *Nizzahon* in *Messias*. See BURNETT, »Dialogue of the Deaf,« pp. 187–188.

38 BERGER, *Nizzahon*, para. 6; and MÜNSTER, *Messias* (Hebrew) Tet 3a; (Latin), pp. 140–141; (English), p. 224.

39 *Messias* (Hebrew) Tet 3a; (Latin) 142; (English) p. 225.

40 BURNETT, »Dialogue,« pp. 187–188.

41 On occasion, however, Münster could be quite critical of even Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Kimhi. When discussing Genesis 27:36–28:10 he characterized the opinions of his Jewish guides: »Haec annotare libuit lector, ut videas, quam apertis mendaciis doctrines Iudaei simpliciores decipiant.« *Biblia Hebraea*, Basel: Bebel, 1534–35, fol. 26a (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Sig. 4<sup>o</sup> Bl 3276–1R).

questions and harsh tone of their authors. By making a selection of Jewish polemical texts available, albeit in a filtered form, Christian Hebraists added a provocative new element to the Reformation-era discussion of Jews and Judaism. Martin Luther, for example, assiduously read Münster's biblical annotations from 1536 until his death in 1546.<sup>42</sup> He found Münster's work infuriating in many ways. Apart from passages where Münster criticized Luther's poor translations for grammatical reasons, Luther also found Münster too ready to accept interpretive approaches from Jewish Bible commentaries, even when the resulting interpretation was theologically unsound or silly.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Luther criticized Münster and Sanctes Pagninus by name at the end of the second of his anti-Jewish treatises, *On the Ineffable Name* (1543).

»[T] he two fine men, Sanctes [Pagninus] and Münster have translated the Bible with incredible zeal and matchless (inimitabili) diligence, accomplishing much good. But the rabbis were sometimes too powerful for them, so that they chipped away at the analogy of faith, and were too dependent upon the rabbinical glosses.«<sup>44</sup>

Thanks to Münster, Luther also had an encounter, at second hand, with *Sefer Nizzahon*. Luther reported in *On the Jews and their Lies* that »a certain Jewish author« quoted by Münster in his Hebrew Bible, referred to the Virgin Mary as »Haria«, that is excrement, as one example of the way »the Jews« insult and dishonor Christ and his mother. This was typically the way she was referred to in *Nizzahon*.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the *Nizzahon* reference was one more fact that Luther used to support a position he already held.

An even better example of a non-professional Hebraists's response to Jewish polemic was John Calvin's *Response to questions and objections of a certain Jew*.<sup>46</sup> Calvin read the twenty-three questions printed at the end of du Tillet and Mercier's Gospel of Matthew, and prepared his own unpublished response to them.<sup>47</sup> Calvin sought to discredit his opponent and the Jews in general by denigrating their spiritual and intellectual capacities and ridiculing their objections to Christianity. He characterized the Jews as »blind, stupid and foolish.« The objections themselves Calvin branded as »stinking cavils, ridiculous, nonsensical and frivolous.« His (anonymous) opponent Calvin branded as »impudent and arrogant« since he expected God to behave not according to his sovereign will, but as the questioner expected.<sup>48</sup> Calvin's characterization of his Jewish »opponent« is theologically conventional, but was elicited by a virtual dialogue with a Jewish author.

42 Hans Ulrich DELIUS, *Die Quellen von Martin Luthers Genesis Vorlesung*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie, Band 111, München 1992, pp. 42–46 notes Luther's extensive quotes from Münster's biblical annotations.

43 See Stephen G. BURNETT, »Reassessing the »Basel-Wittenberg Conflict«: Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship,« in: *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Allison COUDERT and Jeffrey SHOULSON, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 181–201.

44 Martin LUTHER, *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, WA 53: 647, pp. 27–31.

45 BURNETT, »Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor,« p. 121.

46 Jean CALVIN, *Ad quaestiones et obiecta Judaei cuiusdam responsio*, in: *Opera*, 9, pp. 657–674.

47 Achim DETMERS, *Reformation und Judentum: Israel-Lehren und Einstellungen zum Judentum von Luther bis zum frühen Calvin*, Band 7, Stuttgart 2001 (*Judentum und Christentum* 7), pp. 294–296.

48 BURNETT, »Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor,« p. 121.

Had Calvin's *Response* remained unpublished it would primarily be of interest to Calvin scholars. However, it was published first in Calvin's correspondence, and then as an anonymous appendix to Johannes Buxtorf the elder's *Juden Schul* (Basel, 1603). Buxtorf's book would be translated into Latin, Dutch, and English and printed 13 times during the seventeenth century alone. Of all of the Jewish polemics, the twenty-three questions posed by an anonymous Jew would travel farther and was almost certainly more widely read than any Jewish polemical work published by a Christian Hebraist.

The reactions of Luther and Calvin to the taunts and arguments of Jewish polemicists are rather predictable. Their responses also provide the most important reason why the publication of such polemics was acceptable in Reformation-era Europe: arguments used by anti-Jewish polemicists and would-be missionaries to the Jews were much the same as those employed by Christian polemicists and preachers in late medieval Spain. Sebastian Münster, in the introduction to his Hebrew Gospel of Matthew identifies his work as a continuation of what Porschetus, Paul of Burgos and Petrus Galatinus had written before him.<sup>49</sup> His work *Messiahs of the Christians and Jews* (1529/1539) is a literary disputation in Hebrew which shows strong affinities with both Jewish and Christian works from late medieval Spain. Raymond Martin's *Pugio fidei*, was first edited by Joseph Voisin in Paris in 1651, and then by Carpov in Leipzig, 1687. As Christian polemicists continued to find *Pugio fidei* and other medieval Christian books useful for their efforts, so they considered the publication of Jewish polemical works, in appropriate form, to be valuable as well. The fact that these polemical texts were written by Jews for Jews, and were supposed to be kept hidden from the eyes of Christian readers added to the interest of these readers. These texts revealed what Jews ›really thought‹ about Christianity and Christians in their most confidential books.<sup>50</sup>

When Christian Hebraists reprinted Jewish polemical works they served as ›Spokesmen for Judaism‹ in two different ways. While it is true that Christian Hebraists did report authentically Jewish opinion when they published Jewish polemical texts or excerpts from them, they did so in ways, which reflected Christian standards and expectations. All of the scholars who served as editors and translators of medieval Jewish polemics were university professors, who were obligated by law, oath and conscience to defend the Christian confession of the state, which supported their university. They were sometimes required to enforce the censorship ordinance of their locality as well. An improperly censored book could result in political embarrassment for the state in question, and unpleasant consequences for the censor, particularly where Jewish books were concerned.<sup>51</sup> The frequent reprinting of the twenty-three questions demonstrates that Hebraists were allowed to publish fairly abrasive comments by Jewish authors, provided that a refutation followed them. However, as P. T. van Rooden has pointed out, the publication of some texts, notably the *Nizzahon* of R. Lipmann Mülhausen, was unacceptable in Latin or another language that Christian

49 *Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum in Lingua Hebraica cum versione Latina atque succinctis annotationibus*, ed. and trans. Sebastian MÜNSTER, Basel: Petri, 1537, p. 23 (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek, Sig. Bib. Diez Fol. 40).

50 On this theme generally, see Elisheva CARLEBACH, ›Attributions of Secrecy and Perceptions of Judaism,‹ in: *Jewish Social Studies* 2/3 (1996), pp. 116–136.

51 See Stephen G. BURNETT, ›The Regulation of Hebrew Printing in Germany, 1555–1630: Confessional Politics and the Limits of Jewish Toleration,‹ in *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder, and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture*, ed. Max REINHART and Thomas ROBISHEAUX. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, no. 40, Kirksville 1998, pp. 329–348.

readers could readily understand. In the mid-seventeenth century, Hackspann, and his contemporaries Constantijn L'Empereur and Johannes Buxtorf the Younger worried, with good reason, that Christian radicals might make use of Latin translations of Jewish polemical texts.<sup>52</sup>

The reception of Jewish medieval polemical texts by Reformation era Christian Hebraists is indicative of several overall trends within Christian Hebraism as an intellectual movement. Only a relatively small number of Hebraists were capable of reading and understanding Hebrew texts apart from the Bible or medieval biblical commentaries, much less to translate such texts into Latin. This handful of Christian Hebraists formed an elite group, which stands out from the roughly 350 authors, editors and translators of Hebraica who published Hebraica books during this period. As with the Christian Hebraists who studied and responded to Jewish polemical works, only a relatively small group of Christian Hebraists was responsible for mediating Jewish linguistic and biblical scholarship, kabbalistic texts, historical books, and philosophical works for a primarily Latin reading audience. One of the most urgent tasks in the study of Christian Hebraism is to analyze their role as »mediators of Jewish learning.« The texts that they sought to make available to Christian readers were carefully selected and supported Christian interests. If these Christian Hebraists were »spokesmen for Judaism,« it was only to the extent that their Jewish texts contributed in some way to Christian needs.

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