

# Hieronymus de Sancta Fide and His Use of Sanhedrin

Moisés Orfali  
Bar-Ilan University

## Introduction

A new opposition to the Talmud, promoted by the Jewish apostate Hieronymus de Sancta Fide (former Rabbi Joshua of Lorca, ? – 1419), arose in the Kingdom of Aragon in the second decade of the fifteenth century. Hieronymus was a very important Christian polemicist whose treatises contain the basic material which was used for the discussions on the Talmud in the Catechesis of Tortosa (7 February 1413 – 13 November 1414).<sup>1</sup> This was the most significant, longest-standing Judeo-Christian disputation in the Middle Ages, which lasted two years. According to the *Actas* of the Catechesis, it resulted in the conversion of a considerable number of Jews (three thousand) to Christianity. Benedict XIII's papal edict comprises further evidence for this.<sup>2</sup>

Hieronymus's *Ad convincendum perfidiam Iudaeorum* (1412) and *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut* [*sic!*] (1413) are treatises that continued the proselytising tradition of Christianity during the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> Many treatises involving religious medieval polemics sought to instruct the Jews in the Christian faith. Others were intended to discredit the Talmud's teachings, since these were considered to be the main obstacle for the conversion of the Jews. The treatises written by Hieronymus de Sancta Fide fulfilled both of these purposes. He used innumerable extracts from the Talmud in *Ad convincendum perfidiam Iudaeorum* and in the Catechesis of Tortosa (up to session 62) in order to demonstrate that the Messiah had already come. However, in his treatise entitled *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut* and in the second part of the Catechesis of Tortosa (sessions 63-68), he turned against the Talmud, and remarked that it contained statements against the Law, against the prophets, and against the Messiah. At that point Hieronymus changed his tactics. He no longer used the Talmud in favour of the Christian faith. Rather, he attacked Jewish positions by discrediting the Talmud.<sup>4</sup> The procedure used by Hieronymus was therefore

1. I prefer to use the term 'Catechesis' rather than 'Disputation', since the form in which the events occurred, both in time and duration, are not characteristic of a 'Disputation'. I wish to point out that the Dispute of R. Yehiel in Paris (1240) or the one of R. Moses Ben Nachman in Barcelona (1263), occurred during a rather restricted period.
2. See *Actas*, and the testimony of the Papal Edict of which they are part, in Pacios, *La Disputa de Tortosa*, vol. 2, session 67, p. 591 and session 69, p. 598.
3. The quotations from both treatises are taken from the edition of La Bigne, ed., *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum*, tomus XXVI, pp. 545-554 (henceforth: MBVP, XXVI).
4. The 'Discussion about the errors of the Talmud', despite its importance in the polemic, was the subject matter of only five sessions of the Catechesis of Tortosa. The discussion lasted over six months, between

consistent both in the treatises and in the Catechesis of Tortosa. First, he attempted to prove to the representatives of the Jews that the Gospel was confirmed by the Talmudic literature. Later, he turned against the Talmud.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper I shall discuss Hieronymus de Sancta Fide's use of the fourth of the ten Talmudic treatises of the Neziqin (Damages) order, the Sanhedrin (from the Greek *synhedrion*, 'court of justice'<sup>6</sup>) tractate. This tractate refers mainly to legal matters and may seem less capable of being subject to religious polemic than the tractates of Berakhot and 'Abodah Zarah, however Hieronymus managed to extract several passages that only he, as a former rabbi, could easily identify, in order to meet the aims proposed in his treatises and in the Catechesis of Tortosa, namely informing the Jews that the Messiah had already come and that the Talmud was not revealed scripture.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. Demonstration that the Messiah Had Come and that the Messiah Was Jesus of Nazareth

The method used by Hieronymus to prove this argument was to provide texts from the Scriptures, following the interpretation of Jewish exegetes, but particularly by employing the Talmud and Midrashic literature: 'Through authorities and glosses made by the rabbis and doctors of the Talmud, whose words no Jew would dare to deny'. He attempted to prove that Jesus appeared at the time prophesied for the coming of the Messiah, and that all conditions that were established for the Messiah

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April and December 1414. Nevertheless, by studying Hieronymus's treatise about the Jewish errors drawn from the Talmud and the sessions which dealt with this issue, it can be concluded that this was the most thoroughly prepared topic of discussion.

5. Hieronymus himself stated the sources and the method of these arguments in his inaugural harangue: 'quas [i.e. the 24 conditions of the Messiah] ... ex mandato tamen prefati Domini nostri Pape, nedum per dicta prophetarum, necnon per expositiones et glosas latinas, verum eciam per glosas hebraicas et auctoritates rabinorum Talmut et traslaciones caldaicas in lege mosaica per Anquilam, et in propheciis per Ionathan, filium Uziel, quos magne censetis auctoritatis, ut probabitur factas, intendo, favente Iesu Salvatore nostro, elucidare [...]', Pacios, *Actas*, vol. 2, session I, p. 23.
6. It deals with courts of three judges; the Lesser Sanhedrin with 23 members; the Great Sanhedrin with 71 members; appointment of judges; witnesses' testimonies; those who cannot be judges or witnesses; differences between civil and criminal procedures; types of capital punishment; the case of the rebellious son (Dt. 21:18ff); the thief; the persistent offender; execution without trial; those who have no part in the future world; the rebellious elder (*zaqen mamre*) and the false prophet.
7. Precisely the same *Actas* (vol. 2, session I, p. 19) confirm why Benedict XIII entrusted Hieronymus with this task: 'Et licet in dicta Curia prefati domini Pape, sin quamplurimi sacre theologie magistri et doctores sapientia, scientia et discrecione non modica prefulgentes, placuit dicto domino nostro Pape in conclusionibus supra dictis, discretum virum et honorabilem magistrum Jeronimum de Sancta Fide, sue beatissime persone medicus, ad iudeorum informacionem ese specialiter deputatum, velut in Veteris Testamenti Biblia, glosis quoque eiusdem, necnon Talmut cunctisque tractatibus iudeorum, per quorum dicta et auctoritates, sicut dicti domini nostri Pape propositi est dictos iudeos in eisdem informari, copiose fundatum'.

were fulfilled by Jesus.<sup>8</sup> This led to the inevitable conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah. Let us look at some of the most representative examples excerpted from the Sanhedrin tractate:

- 1) Hieronymus alleged that the coming of the Messiah occurred shortly before the destruction of the second Temple of Jerusalem, and presented the *midrash* quoted in Sanhedrin 91a as evidence: ‘The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era’.<sup>9</sup> He then posited the calculation that the world would endure no less than 85 jubilees, and that the son of David would come in the last one. He added the comment made by Rashi, *ad loc.*, in which it was explained that 85 jubilees are 4250 years: ‘The world shall exist not less than eighty-five jubilees, and in the last jubilee the son of David will come’ (Sanhedrin 97b). Hieronymus concluded that the death of the Messiah occurred near the time when four thousand years had elapsed since the creation of the world.<sup>10</sup>
- 2) Hieronymus used the closed *mem*<sup>11</sup> in the term *le-marbe* (Isaiah 9:7) as the basis for Mary’s virginity, and the numerical value of that same word (600) in order to argue that the passion of Christ had to take place in the year 600 from the date on which the prophecy was made (fourth year of Ahaz’s reign). Hieronymus also extracted the following from Sanhedrin 94a, pretending to demonstrate that this *mem clausa* certainly holds a divine secret: ‘Rabbi Tanhu[m] said: Why is every *mem* in the middle of a word open, whilst this is closed? — The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, whereupon the Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! If Thou didst not

8. See above, note 4. In *Actas*, vol. 2, session 58, p. 497 he formulates this argument in the syllogism form: ‘Ille homo cui convenient omnes prophetic et condiciones dicte de Messia, est Messias. In homine vocato Iesu Nazareno concurrent vel convenient, etc.’.
9. That is, the Messiah will come within that period. MBVP, XXVI, p. 533B. Hieronymus also referred to ‘*Abodah Zarah* 9a.
10. MBVP, XXVI, p. 533B. According to the calculations made in the *midrash Debe Eliyyahu*, the messianic period would take place during the last two millennia of the first six thousand years (4001-6000). According to the calculation of the jubilees, the Messiah would come at the end of the eighty-fifth jubilee, that is, around 4250. According to the calculation of the creation era, Jesus was born in 3750, and therefore Jesus’s birth date was underestimated with respect to the first calculation, and even more so with respect to the second one. Hieronymus justified this discrepancy by indicating that there were other chronological references in the Scripture without an accurate mathematical match. Hieronymus calculated that the death of Jesus took place approximately in the year 3793 since the creation.
11. The word *le-marbe* (‘whom it increases or multiplies’) certainly has a strange graphic form, and should be written with an open *mem* instead of a closed one. The numerical value of this closed *mem* is indeed 600. However, it is a great leap from this statement to the conclusion that this letter *mem* is closed in order to signify that number of years. This is why Raymundus Martini, in his *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et iudaeos*, I-III, 9, pp. 532-33, linked the year 600 to the birth of Christ and not to the passion. Cf. Pacios, *Actas*, vol. 2, pp. 136-37.

make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before Thee, wilt Thou appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not hymn Thee in spite of all these miracles which Thou wroughtest for him?' Therefore the *mem* was closed. Then a heavenly Voice cried out: 'It is my secret, it is my secret. Woe is me'.<sup>12</sup>

- 3) Hieronymus indicated that the Messiah should appear after the Exilarchate in Babylon and the Patriarchate in Palestine, extracting the following from Sanhedrin 38a: 'The Son of David cannot appear ere the two ruling houses in Israel shall have come to an end, viz., the Exilarchate in Babylon and the Patriarchate in Israel'. Hieronymus probably referred to the interpretation of the text from Isaiah and the quote from the Sanhedrin treatise by the great Catalan theologian and missionary Raymundus Martini (ca. 1220-1284), that once the heads of Babylon (Zerubbabel) and Israel (Mattathias) were destroyed, the Messiah would come.<sup>13</sup> He explained, as did Martini, that the wording 'Sanctify the Lord of the Hosts'<sup>14</sup> at the beginning of the prophecy referred to the Messiah, whom the Jews and the Scripture called the Son of David.
- 4) Hieronymus explained that it could clearly be seen how the passion of Christ occurred forty years before the destruction of the Temple, as the signs of God's favour to the Temple ceased and it lost its holy status. Not only did those miracles cease, but Judah's sceptre departed, as prophesied by Jacob,<sup>15</sup> and the Sanhedrin lost the power to hear trials which might involve capital punishment. He supported these allegations with the following quote from Sanhedrin 41a: 'It has been taught: Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin were exiled<sup>16</sup> and took up residence in Hanuth'.<sup>17</sup> Hi-

12. MBVP, XXVI, 532G. In the Talmudic text, instead of 'Woe is me', it is written: To which the prophet rejoined, 'Woe is me, woe is me: How long [must we wait]?' Rashi, in his commentary, remarked: '[...] until the Messiah comes' (Sanhedrin 94a). Hieronymus included this *haggadah* and discussed it in the Catechesis of Tortosa, see Pacios, *Actas*, vol. 2, session 18, p. 126, session 20, p. 138. Cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, I-III, 9, p. 531.
13. For it is written in Isaiah 8:14: 'And he shall be for a Sanctuary, for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both houses of Israel'; cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, II, 5, pp. 343-344 and other considerations made by Raymundus Martini in this regard.
14. MBVP, XXVI, p. 537F: 'Sanctify the Lord of the Hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem' (Isaiah 8:13-14).
15. Genesis 49:10. The basic argument in this *locus classicus* of polemic is that when Jesus came, the Kingdom of Judah ceased. See Posnanski, *Schiloh: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Messiaslehre*, pp. 288-449; Zimmels, 'Zur Geschichte der Exegese über den Vers Genesis 49:10'; Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental 430-1096*, pp. 227-237, and more recently Chazan, 'Genesis 49:10 in Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing'.
16. From the 'Hall of Hewn Stones'. On this traditional meeting place of the Great Sanhedrin when it functioned as a court with full sovereign powers, see Sanhedrin 88b.
17. A place on the Temple Mount outside the hewn chamber where they had temporary residence. Cf. the comment of Rashi brought by Hieronymus *ad loc.*

- eronymus highlights his argument by reference to the same item in *'Abodah Zarah* and inserting the complementary explanation: 'R. Isaac b. Abdimi said: From that time onward they did not deal with capital cases, because those could be dealt only inside the Hall of Hewn Stones' (*'Abodah Zarah* 8b). Those who are not blind in heart, said Hieronymus, can clearly see that it follows from all these authorities that the Messiah was to come at that time.<sup>18</sup>
- 5) Hieronymus concluded that the Messiah had already been born; that his seat was Rome; and that while his first coming took place 1412 years earlier, he came to those who converted to him and his doctrine every day. To argue his point, he extracted those passages from Sanhedrin 98a relating to the narration of the coming of the Messiah:<sup>19</sup> 'R. Joshua ben Levi met Elijah and R. Simeon bar Yohay standing by the entrance of paradise. He asked him: "Have I a portion in the world to come?" He replied: "If this Master desires it".<sup>20</sup> R. Joshua ben Levi said: "I saw two men, but heard the voice of a third". He then asked him: "When will the Messiah come?" — "Go and ask him himself", was his reply. "Where is he sitting?" — "At the entrance of Rome". "And by what sign may I recognise him?" — He is sitting among the poor lepers, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness, as it has been said by Isaiah in chapter 53 [4]: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted".<sup>21</sup> So he went to him and greeted him, saying: "When wilt thou come Master?" asked he, "To-day", was his answer. After some days returning to Elijah, the latter enquired: "The Messiah spoke falsely to me", he rejoined, "stating that he would come to-day, but has not". He [Elijah] answered him, this is what he said to thee: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice".<sup>22</sup>
- 6) Hieronymus tried to show that Jesus was more than a prophet by using the obligation to obey the prophets, except when they ordered the worship of idols, based on the extract of Sanhedrin 90a: 'R. Johanna[n] said: In every matter, if a prophet tells you to transgress [the commands of the Torah], obey him,<sup>23</sup> with the exception of idolatry; should he even cause the sun to stand still in the middle of the heavens for you [as proof of Divine inspiration], do not hearken to him'. Hieronymus resorted to this authority to prove that the Messiah could grant all things given in the old Law, because he was undoubtedly a prophet and more than a prophet, as Isaiah (52:13) had said

18. MBVP, XXVI, p. 534D-E. Cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, II, 4, p. 314.

19. MBVP, XXVI, p. 543A-B. Cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, II, 6, p. 351.

20. Rashi *ad loc.*, inserted by Hieronymus into the Talmudic text, explains that he referred to the Shekhinah, which was with them.

21. These verses on the account of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:4-9 are also a *locus classicus* of Jewish-Christian polemic. Hieronymus follows the traditional Christian exegesis explaining: 'Certainly, he himself suffered our sickness and bore our grieves and was considered as leper and pursued by God'.

22. Psalms 95:7.

23. For example, in the case of Elijah, who ordered sacrifices to be offered on Mount Carmel.

of him: ‘See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high’, And the Talmud said that he was more ‘exalted’ than Abraham and more ‘sublime’ than the angels.<sup>24</sup> According to this, a man held in such high regard should always be believed.

Hieronymus made other references to the Messiah which might have been appropriate in the atmosphere in which they were made in his treatises or in the Catechesis of Tortosa, but which are less reliable as evidence that he could be Jesus of Nazareth. One of these is the argument that the knowledge of the coming of the Messiah was so widespread that ‘Bar Koziba who reigned [two and half years] then said to the rabbis: “I am the Messiah”. Also R. Akiva every time when he saw him saluted him as the King Messiah’. Hieronymus erroneously refers to Sanhedrin 93b, although the source is found in other tractates and in the Midrash.<sup>25</sup> He also used texts which did not specify the exact time for the coming of the Messiah, but supposedly clearly showed that he would be presented in the period of the second Temple, thus like giving more glory to it than to the old one. Consequently, the Messiah must have come before the Temple was destroyed. Hieronymus acknowledged that the texts cited as evidence for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple referred largely to the time of the Messiah. However, he did not understand this in a material sense, but rather in a spiritual sense, and stated that the rabbis themselves often conferred a spiritual meaning to the words ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Temple’. He referred, among other texts, to Sanhedrin 97b:

Raba says: The Temple building which is before our Lord God consists of eighteen thousand parasang, for it is written in Ezekiel [48:35]: ‘It shall be round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there’.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Accusations against the Talmud

These accusations appeared, as I mentioned before, in his treatise *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut*,<sup>27</sup> and later in the Catechesis of Tortosa (1413-1414). In this

24. MBVP, XXVI, p. 541D-E. *Tanhumah*, Toledot, siman 14. Cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, II, 11, p. 413.

25. MBVP, XXVI, p. 534F. Cf. Tj Ta’anit 4.5 (24a); *Lamentations Rabbah* II.2 § 4. Initially he was known by the messianic title of Bar Kohba (‘son of the star’), because R. Akiva recognised in him the star that would come from Jacob, according to the oracle of Balaam (Numbers 24:17). When it was verified that the messianic expectations had not been realised in him, he came to be named Ben Kosiba/Koziba (‘the son of deceit’). See Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*, vol. 2, p. 82; Marks, *The Image of Bar Kohba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero*.

26. MBVP, XXXVI, p. 535E-F. Cf. Sukkah 45b; Rashi cited by Hieronymus *ad loc.* attributes these exceptional measures of the Temple to heavenly Jerusalem, as was written at the end of Ezekiel.

27. *Hieronymi a Sancta Fide contra Iudaeos, Liber Secundus, De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut*. This is how it is called in MS 738 of the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome and in the edition of the MBVP, XXVI, pp. 545-554.

Catechesis, the allegations against the Talmud appear for the first time in session 54, when Hieronymus referred to the importance of the Talmud in the life of the Jewish people.<sup>28</sup> When Astruch ha-Levi of Alcañiz wanted to stress the importance of the Talmud only with regard to the *halakhah*, Hieronymus again insisted on the priority that the Jews give to the Talmud over the Bible.<sup>29</sup>

In session 63 of that Catechesis (held on 15 June, 1414), Hieronymus presented ten passages of the Talmud, which were previously mentioned in his *De Iudaicis erroribus*, in order to prove that the Talmud contained statements against the Law itself, and also against the Prophets and the Messiah. According to him, these extracts were merely an example of the multiple abominations included in the Talmud.<sup>30</sup>

In session 65 (20 September, 1414), Hieronymus began the discussions about the Talmud, as ordered by Benedict XIII, in order to study whether it was to be permitted or censored, based on its content. To do so, he mentioned the detailed study of the Talmud conducted by his collaborators, Sancho Porta and Andrés Bertrán, who concluded that the Talmud contains ‘plures vanitates, cavillationes, deceptiones, haereses, turpitudines et errores innumeri’ (many vain things, derision, deception, heresies, ugly things and uncountable errors). These errors were classified into six different types which, as will be discussed later, were practically a perfect match with the themes discussed in the six chapters of the treatise *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut*.

In these chapters, Hieronymus tried to oppose Judaism by fully challenging the Talmud, and accumulating accusations related to its supposed spiritual immorality, the insufferable arrogance of Talmudic scholars and the constant profanation of God. The treatise did not argue whether or not the Messiah had arrived, whether or not the precepts of Mosaic Law had been abolished, or whether or not the people of Israel remained a chosen people. Nor did Hieronymus argue in favour of the new Christian religion or convey his views on the Jewish religion. His efforts were focused entirely on condemning Judaism at its roots by disqualifying its oral Law (the Talmud) in order to present his former co-religionists as a people with no morals and no spirituality.

The treatise written by Hieronymus was thus not a theoretical work made up of concepts, hypotheses, studies and conclusions. It was essentially a broad compilation of *midrashim*, *haggadot* and other passages of the Talmud, interspersed with the commentaries of Rashi and Maimonides,<sup>31</sup> and liturgical extracts. All of this

28. The discussions about the Talmud, based on the treatise submitted by Hieronymus to Benedict XIII as early as August 1413 were postponed nearly until the end of the Catechesis. See Pacios, *Actas*, vol. 2, sessions 63-67, pp. 561-593.

29. In these discussions, a particular idea was repeated in different forms: ‘Is qui credit quod Talmud est lex oris maiorem fidem debet ei prestare quam mosayce legi’, *Actas*, vol. 2, session 54, p. 454.

30. Contrary to the previous sessions, these later ones which dealt with the Talmud were not intended to discuss the arguments of the Christian religion, but to attack Judaism by using the Talmud.

31. The authority of these commentators, albeit somewhat diminished nowadays, was for the Jews at the time

material was systematised and classified in order to prove certain prejudices against the Talmud, the Sages, and Judaism in general.

The treatise was composed of six chapters, which according to the table of contents provided by the author, referred to:<sup>32</sup>

- 1) Things contrary to charity, humanity and natural law.
- 2) Things contrary to the service of God and His perfections.
- 3) Things contrary to Mosaic Law and to the law of the Prophets.
- 4) Absurdities, prejudices and immoralities found in the Talmud.
- 5) Intolerable things against the Catholic faith and Our Saviour Jesus Christ.
- 6) Things in the Talmud which appear prejudicial to Christians living together with the Jews.

This division is coherent and corresponds to the contents found in each chapter. The extracts of Talmudic literature and post-biblical quotations in the treatise were presented homogeneously and systematically, and were chosen with a concrete purpose. They comprise a compilation of carefully selected rabbinical texts which were translated into Latin in a way that achieved a biased representation of the essence of the Talmud, based mostly on different passages of the *midrash* and the *haggadah*,<sup>33</sup> whose literary and illustrative purpose is well known. In this matter, the rabbis themselves had already clearly stated in Tortosa that these texts had no obligatory value: from beginning to end, following the example of R. Moses ben Nahman, in a former disputation (Barcelona 1263), they adopted a rigid position in everything referring to the *haggadah*.<sup>34</sup>

In the Catechesis of Tortosa, Hieronymus again selected the passages that were most vulnerable due to their theological or moral content, as well as alleged allusions against Jesus of Nazareth and assertions which were presumably offensive to idolaters, Cutheans, Canaanites and Gentiles mentioned in the Talmud. All these

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similar to the authority of Saint Hieronymus among the Christians. This is why their opinions, while not being compulsory, were taken into account and had a strong influence on the Catechesis of Tortosa.

32. The edition of the *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum*, unlike MS 738 of the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome (both sources which have been constantly compared), includes detailed descriptions of the chapter, themes to be discussed and subdivisions in the margins. These are usually preceded by capital letters in alphabetical order. Some of the quoted biblical sources also appear in the margin. The rabbinic sources and the Talmud are quoted directly by the author in his work.
33. On their legal value, see Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore*; Williams, *Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*, pp. 417-418, stated with regard to the use of haggadic arguments: 'Jews never attributed to such midrashic and haggadic methods the force of proof in the strict sense. Interpretations derived by Midrash and Haggada had, no doubt, their own benefit for devout souls, but could not possibly serve as proofs to establish a doctrine'.
34. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2, p. 332; and in his 'Die Disputation von Tortosa', p. 311: 'The Jews said that the haggadot were not compulsory. This was the crucial point which the Jews, since the times of Moses ben Nahman (1263), had regularly used in their public disputations with the Christians. Even those supporting the obligatory status of the haggadot denied it in the Disputation'.



were designations which Hieronymus asserted were systematically used to refer to the Christians.<sup>35</sup>

Some of these ‘errors of the Talmud’ which were extracted from the Sanhedrin treatise and were detailed by Hieronymus in his *De iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut*, and later in the Catechesis of Tortosa, are discussed in what follows:

1. Hieronymus illustrated the arguments related to things contrary to human charity and natural law in the Talmud by alleging that the Sages of the Talmud supposedly grant power to man to curse, swear against, and even strike his father and his mother without having to bear the burden of sin,<sup>36</sup> as it is written: ‘He who strikes his father or his mother is liable only if he wounds them’ (Sanhedrin 85b; Tj Sanhedrin 10.1)<sup>37</sup>; and ‘The blasphemous<sup>38</sup> is only punished when pronouncing the Tetragrammaton’ (Sanhedrin 85b).

Another curious example is the quotation from a sentence issued by a Sanhedrin in which, if all the judges unanimously condemned the accused at the beginning of the trial, he was free. According to Hieronymus, this promoted crime.<sup>39</sup> There was also another case of acquittal of a person who had bound someone, who then died (for whatever reason): ‘If someone bound the hands and feet of his neighbour and he dies of starvation, he is not liable to execution. If he bound him in the sun or in a place of cold and he died, he is liable.<sup>40</sup> If he bound him before a lion, he is not liable.<sup>41</sup> If he bound

35. He systematically translated: עובד כוכבים ומזלות, עובד כוכבים, נוצרי, כנעני, נוצרי, עכו"ם, as ‘Christian’ in order to promote hatred between Jews and Christians. This was the system created in France by the Jewish apostate Nicholas Donin (1240) 172 years before the treatise under study here. Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500-1248)*, pp. 330-334, 457.

36. ‘He who smites his father or his mother shall be surely put to death’, according to Exodus 21:15. If it is someone else, he shall only indemnify them for the ‘five damages’, as specified in the Talmud, Baba Qamah 83b. According to the testimony of R. Shlomo ben Simeon Duran (*Millhemet Miswah*, apud Eisenstein, ed., *Otzar Vikkuhim*, p. 138), in Castile people were sentenced to death for committing less irreverent acts against their parents.

37. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546G. Hieronymus intentionally omitted the wording that followed: ‘In this respect, cursing is more stringent than smiting, for, he who curses [his parents] after death is liable, whilst he who smites them after death is not’. Cf. Sanhedrin 50a; 84a.

38. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546G. Blasphemous in general. Hieronymus deliberately tried to link it to the cursing of parents, also punished with the death penalty by the Torah (Leviticus 20:9) and to the cursing of God, deliberately omitting what the rabbis, following Leviticus 24:15, taught in Sanhedrin 56b: that any man that curseth his God shall bear his sin.

39. Cf. Maimonides, *Séfer Shoštim, Hilekhot Sanhedrin*, chapter IX. The Sanhedrin must investigate the case and give the accused the opportunity to defend himself.

40. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546D. That is, he is liable only if the place was already exposed to heat or cold. But if it was merely destined to become hot, the sun not yet having risen, he is not liable. In the first case, he is regarded as a direct murderer, in the second, as an indirect cause. That is the general reason for the exemptions taught in this passage.

41. Because he could not have saved himself in any case. Raba probably refers to a prisoner thrown into an arena to be torn by lions.

him before mosquitoes [who stung him to death], he is<sup>42</sup> (Sanhedrin 77a).<sup>43</sup> ‘Someone who kills a person in agony (*terifá*<sup>44</sup>) is not liable’. They all agree that he should be acquitted if there are no life signs, since he is considered to be already dead (Sanhedrin 78a, Rashi, *ad loc.*). ‘If ten men smote a man with ten staves, whether simultaneously or successively, and he died, they are exempt’<sup>45</sup> (Sanhedrin 88a). Moreover, ‘they encourage kidnapping and slavery as they would learn from Sanhedrin, in chapter (11) *those are suffocated*, where they say [if] a man be found stealing any child or a teacher any of his pupils and sell him he is exempted’ (Sanhedrin 85b-86a).<sup>46</sup>

2. As examples of things contrary to the service of God and His perfections, Hieronymus cited that it was not a sin to cause one’s child or a relative to pass through the fire before Moloch,<sup>47</sup> as it is said: ‘He who gives of his seed to Moloch incurs no punishment unless he delivers it to Moloch and causes it to pass through the fire. If he gave it to Moloch but did not cause it to pass through the fire, or the reverse, he incurs no penalty, unless he does both’ (Sanhedrin 64b). Hieronymus used this argument from Sanhedrin against the Talmud and the Sages of the Talmud whom, as can be inferred from the *Actas*, he accused of idolatry because they permitted the worship of Moloch and because they had invoked spirits.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, in the same tractate it was taught: ‘If one engages in idolatry through love or fear,<sup>49</sup> he is free from a penalty’ (Sanhedrin 61b). Hieronymus omitted all of the discussions there between the sages: Abaye said, he is liable to punishment; but Raba said, he is free from a penalty. Abaye ruled that he is liable, since he worshipped it; but Raba said that he is free: only if he accepts it as a god is he liable, but not otherwise’.

42. R. Ashi said: Even before mosquitoes, he is not liable, because these go and other come. That is, the mosquitoes before which the prisoner was bound do not kill him entirely, as there is a continuous coming and going. Hence it is similar to binding one in a place where the sun will appear, but has not yet done so.
43. According to the logic of Rabba, he was acquitted because his neighbour did not die as a result of being bound, but of starvation. He would not have been saved if he had been in front of a lion, even if he had been unbound, whereas he would have escaped death from mosquitoes (that may have stung him to death).
44. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546D. When used of a person, it means that he was suffering from fatal organic disease, from which recovery is impossible.
45. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546D-E. The reason adduced in the text (which is omitted by Hieronymus) was that the identity of the man who inflicted the mortal blow was unknown.
46. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546E.
47. A Phoenician/Canaanite God in whose honour children were sacrificed by making them ‘pass through fire’ in the valley of Ben-Hinon, near Jerusalem, before and after Josiah (2 Kings 23:10ff; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35).
48. MBVP, XXVI, p. 546H-547A. *Actas*, vol. 2, session 66, p. 582: ‘Item peccarunt in ydolatria, sicut dant causam et modum adorandi Meloch, et quam plures diabolorum invocationes et sortilegia in dicto Talmud contenta, ut latius fuit superius dictum per Referendum Dominum Elemosinarium. Quae omnia sunt vera ydolatria’. When using the term *Elemosinarium* he referred to his collaborator in the Catechesis, Andrés Bertrán, who was the almoner for Antipope Benedict XIII.
49. MBVP, XXVI, p. 547A. Out of fear of man, but actually not accepting the divinity of the idol.

He quoted the following *midrash haggadah* in order to prove that the Sages of the Talmud failed to respect the divine essence and perfection, since they regarded God as corporeal and unclean:

Rabba Ioanna[n] said:<sup>50</sup> Your God is a priest, since it is written in Exodus [25:2]: ‘Speak to the children of Israel<sup>51</sup> that they bring me an offering’,<sup>52</sup> those wave offerings which, as a rule, were given to priests. Also, they prove that He has been contaminated, as it is written in Deuteronomy [34:6], that He had buried Moses, and as a priest after contact with the corpse, God was polluted. And they are satisfied saying that he washed and was clean; asking wherein did He bathe? In water it could not be, because it is written in Isaiah [40:12]: ‘Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?’ And the Rabbi is satisfied saying: ‘He bathed in fire’ for it is written: ‘Behold the Lord will come in fire’ [Isaiah 46:15] (Sanhedrin 39a).

3. Hieronymus adduced an *haggadah* from Sanhedrin as an example of things contrary to Mosaic Law and the law of the Prophets, presumably against Noah, of whom the Scripture said that he was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and who walked faithfully with God (Genesis 6:9). However, in Sanhedrin 70a it was said about him:

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.<sup>53</sup> They asked: What did his younger son? Rab said that he castrated him, whilst Samuel says that he sexually abused him. Each one of these rabbis brought reasons for his opinion and argued against the other one.<sup>54</sup> The conclusion of the Talmudic sages is that both rabbis spoke truth and that both indignities were perpetrated.<sup>55</sup>

Hieronymus also said that the Talmudic Sages spoke badly about King David of whom we read that when he was very old, he could not keep warm even

50. MBVP, XXVI, p. 548D-E. The Talmudic text reads: ‘A certain Min said to R. Abbahu’. Hieronymus’s reference to the extract is Baba Mezia [*sic*]. Actually, it is a response of R. Abbahu to a certain heretic who asked him whether God was a priest. The answer was a rejection: If there is not any possibility of impurity in God, neither purification.

51. That is, the leaders.

52. Exodus 25:2. Wave offerings were, as a rule, given to priests.

53. Genesis 9:20-24. In this passage, the conversive *waw* occurs thirteen times, in each case followed by the *yod* of the imperfect. The combination *waw yod* means ‘woe’ in Hebrew. Thirteen woes: so great are the sorrows caused by drunkenness.

54. He who maintains that he castrated him [reasons thus]. Since he cursed him by his fourth son [Genesis 9:25], he must have injured him with respect to a fourth son. But he who says that he sexually abused him, draws an analogy between ‘and he saw’ written twice. Here it is written: ‘And Ham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father’; whilst elsewhere it is written: ‘And when Shechem the son of Hamor saw her’ [he took her and lay with her and defiled her, Genesis 34:2]. Now, on the view that he emasculated him, it is right that he cursed him by his fourth son; but on the view that he abused him, why did he curse his fourth son; he should have cursed himself?

55. MBVP, XXVI, p. 549D-E. That is, he both castrated and abused his father.

when they put covers over him. So his attendants said to him: ‘Let us look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm’. Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The woman was very beautiful. She took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no sexual relations with her [1 Kings 1:1-4]. But the sages in Sanhedrin 22a said that ‘David had intercourse with her in the presence of Bat-Sheba twelve times in an hour and Bat-Sheba dried herself thirteen towels’.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, they contradicted the biblical text concerning the patriarch Abraham, a most holy man, who is presented as teaching unholy knowledge when explaining the written ‘And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts [Genesis 25:5-6]’. In Sanhedrin 91a they asked: ‘What gifts [did he give them]? They responded: He imparted to them [the secrets of] the unhallowed arts’.<sup>57</sup>

Hieronymus also adduced the Talmudic doctrine in Sanhedrin 107a attributed to King David, namely that he wanted to practise idolatry, as they say: ‘David wished to worship idols at the end of his days’.<sup>58</sup> The Talmudic text actually does not mean to say that David believed in idolatry or wanted to practise it, but wished to commit a public transgression in order to justify the attempt on his life perpetrated by his son Absalom. For then it would be said that Absalom had slain him because of his idolatry, which would justify him and his supporters.<sup>59</sup>

4. Hieronymus used different types of vanities, absurdities and vices contained in the Talmud in his arguments. The legend in Sanhedrin 82b referred to the affair in Numbers [25:6-15] when prince Zimri cohabited with the Midianite Kozbi right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. The sages said that ‘He cohabited with her four hundred and twenty-four times’<sup>60</sup> in

56. MBVP, XXVI, p. 549, F-G. Hieronymus exclaims: ‘Look at the sordid thoughts of these most impure men, who are only capable of conceiving of the coarsest lust, and through their desires and actions not only opposed to and contradicted the text, but also the truth, How far is God, who is the truth, from them, as they are immersed in blindness!’

57. MBVP, XXVI, p. 549 E-F. That is, the knowledge of sorcery, demons, etc.

58. MBVP, XXVI, p. 550B.

59. The text in Sanhedrin 107a reads: ‘Rab Judah also said in Rab’s name: David wished to worship idols at the end of his day, as it is written: “And it came to pass, that when David was come to the head, where he worshipped God” [2 Samuel 15:32]. Now rosh [‘head’] can only refer to idols, as it is written: “This image’s head was of fine gold” [Daniel 2:32] [But] Behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head [2 Samuel 15:32]. He remonstrated with David: “Shall people say, A king like thee has worshipped idols!” He replied: “And shall a king like myself be slain by his son! Let me worship idols rather than that the Divine Name be publicly profaned!”’.

60. The numerical value of *zarzir* (424), whilst cohabitation is understood from ‘loins’.

that short time, and Pinehas<sup>61</sup> waited at the entrance with a spear in his hand till he entered and killed them. They [also] tell things about the genitals [of Zimri and Kozbi] in such proportions that it is embarrassing to say or write them'.<sup>62</sup> Another obscene description is the one in Sanhedrin 108b relating to what happened with the three who committed a sin of lust in Noah's ark, and how they were punished: '[Our Rabbis taught:] Three copulated in the ark of Noah, and they were all punished – the dog, the raven, and Ham, son of Noah. The dog was doomed to be tied, the raven expectorates [his seed into his mate's mouth] and Ham was smitten in his skin'.<sup>63</sup>

5. No texts from the Sanhedrin tractate were provided to support Hieronymus's accusations in chapter 5 of the tractate and in the Catechesis of Tortosa relating to intolerable things against the Catholic faith and the Saviour Jesus Christ.
6. Having presented his thesis about the various errors of the Jews derived from the Talmud, Hieronymus ended his arguments by dealing with the way the Gentiles were treated in the Talmud. His conclusion was that the Talmud is a typical anti-Christian work. He reached this conclusion after deliberately translating terms such as 'Canaanites', 'Cutheans or Cuthites', 'idolaters', 'Noachides' and 'gentiles' as 'christianus'. For example, in his quotations about the penalty to which a 'Christian' who smites a Jew should be sentenced, the Talmudic text respectfully reads 'an idolater' but Hieronymus translates: 'If a Christian smites a Jew, he is worthy of death'<sup>64</sup> (Sanhedrin 58b). Likewise, concerning the 'idolater' who observes the Sabbath and his punishment, Hieronymus intentionally translates the Talmudic text: 'A Christian who observes the Sabbath, deserves death even if he sabbatizes in another day of the week' (Sanhedrin 58b).<sup>65</sup> He translates the 'idolater' who studies the Torah who should also be punished as: 'If a Christian is intruded in the study of the Law of God he deserves death, for the Law was given [as inheritance] only to the congregation of Jacob'<sup>66</sup> (Sanhedrin 59b). Finally,

61. Son of Eleazar, and grandson of Aaron, the priest.

62. MBVP, XXVI, p. 551B. Cf. Martini, *Pugio fidei*, p. 932.

63. That is, from him descended Cush, who is black-skinned. MBVP, XXVI, p. 551C.

64. By the hand of God. MBVP, XXVI, p. 553G. Cf. Maimonides, *Yad hazaka, Hilekhot Melakhim* I, 6.

65. MBVP, XXVI, p. 553G. Eisenstein, 'Gentile', p. 623, suggests that this may have been directed against the Christian Jews, who disregarded the Mosaic laws and yet at that time kept up the observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Hieronymus points out that 'deserves death' expresses strong indignation, and that it is not to be taken literally, but omits the open and favourable opinion in rabbinic literature concerning the idolater who really observes the Sabbath, see Shabbat 118b; *Midrash Psalms* 92.2 and *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* 18.4 following Isaiah 56, 2: 'Happy is the man that does this and the son of man that lays hold on it; that keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil'.

66. MBVP, XXVI, p. 553H. It is possible that R. Johanan's objection was to the studying of Oral Law by Jewish Christians, since the possession of the Oral Law was held to be the distinguishing mark of the Jews.

also from Sanhedrin, he brought what R. Jacob bar Aha found written in a *Book of Haggadetah*<sup>67</sup> of the scholars of Rav, namely that Noachides could be sentenced to the capital punishment by a single judge and on the testimony of a single witness. Hieronymus translates: 'A Christian is executed on the ruling of one judge, on the testimony of one witness' (Sanhedrin 57b). Again, he used this source to illustrate rabbinic discrimination against Christians such that if a Christian committed a crime, the testimony of a single witness would be sufficient for that Christian to be sentenced to death.

A comparison between these accusations which Hieronymus took from the treatise of Sanhedrin and analogous works such as the *Extractiones de Talmud* and the *Pugio fidei* of Martini shows that Hieronymus's Latin translations are not merely a copy from the *Extractiones de Talmud* or the *Pugio fidei*, in spite of the fact that they all have similar polemic intentions. Although *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmud* contains many quotations from Sanhedrin integrated also in the *Extractiones de Talmud*,<sup>68</sup> it is not possible to show with certainty that the latter served as the source for the recompilation of Hieronymus, due to the different Latin translation of the Talmud texts as well as other excerpts of Hieronymus that are not found in this work. Hieronymus may have used certain manuscripts encompassing 'errors' of the Talmud. There were two works of this genre: *Talmud obiectiones* (H15229) and *Errores* (H6678) which were common in Europe at that time.<sup>69</sup> Further texts contain references and allusions to the Talmud: Petrus Alphonsi, 'Dialogue against the Jews', the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, 'Against the Inveterate Obstinacy of the Jews' etc. It is likely that these works would have reached the hands of Hieronymus.

Did Hieronymus use the *Pugio fidei* for his citations from Sanhedrin in *De Iudaicis erroribus*? The answer is negative: only six of Hieronymus's twenty-one quotes from Sanhedrin appear in Martini's work. Moreover, there are significant textual variants, constant differences of translation, and even differences in the names of the rabbis mentioned in the two texts.<sup>70</sup>

In conclusion, Hieronymus's works were a biased depiction of the Talmud, particularly of the *haggadah* and the *midrash*. As can be seen in the case study of the

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It is significant that it was R. Johanan who also said that God's covenant with Israel was only for the sake of the Oral Law (cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 47).

67. MBVP, XXVI, p. 554B. Hence it is possible that the reference is to a collection of laws relating to Gentiles, and in order to distinguish it from specifically Jewish laws, it was called the *Book of Haggadetah*.

68. See the recent edition: *Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, pp. 226-400. For a useful concordance of the Talmudic quotations in *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmud* as compared to the *Extractiones* and the *Pugio*, see Orfali, *Talmud y Cristianismo. Historia y causas de un conflicto*, pp. 104-105.

69. On the echo of the *Extractiones de Talmud* in Spain, cf. Millás Vallicrosa, 'Extractos del Talmud y alusiones polémicas en un manuscrito de la Catedral de Gerona'.

70. Cf. Williams, *Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*, p. 261, n. 4. The same occurrence we observe in Hieronymus's *Ad convincendum perfidiam iudaeorum*: of the ten quotations from Sanhedrin, seven also appear in the *Extractiones* and only five in the *Pugio* with the above-mentioned differences.

Sanhedrin treatise, a number of Talmudic passages, most of which were brief and were extracted from nearly every treatise, were presented to the Christian world in a prejudiced manner, relying on the commentaries of Rashi (1040-1105) and Maimonides (1138-1204). This was yet another attempt by Hieronymus de Sancta Fide to provide a systematic elaboration of the legendary part of the Talmud and the *midrashim*: a series of anthologies divided into several chapters, as in the presentation discussed here.

It seems that this attempt was very successful in terms of the missionary aspirations of the Catholic Church leadership, if we take into account not only the great number of Jews who converted to Christianity during and after the catechesis at Tortosa and in the aftermath of the Papal Bull *Etsi doctoris gentium* issued by Benedict XIII,<sup>71</sup> but also the fact that the first Archbishop and Grand Inquisitor of Goa, Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira (Lagos ? – Goa 1576),<sup>72</sup> decided to publish a singular edition of Hieronymus de Sancta Fide's writings<sup>73</sup> in Portuguese (1565) so that it would be accessible to Old Christians, New Christians and Jews in Goa.<sup>74</sup> His edition is unique in that the archbishop prefaced it with his own Shepherd's Epistle, aimed at the People of Israel (*o povo de Israel*) in the broadest sense of the term, with no distinction between Jews and New Christians 'who returned to their fold' and kept the Law of Moses secretly or within Jewish communities in Goa and Portuguese Asia.<sup>75</sup> In the Epistle, Dom Gaspar de Leão cites from Sanhedrin without adding or changing the contents of the writings of Hieronymus de Sancta Fide.<sup>76</sup> This was undoubtedly due to his fervour to succeed in his Metropolitan Archdiocese encompassing all Portuguese possessions in the Orient, just as Hieronymus succeeded in the Kingdom of Aragon during the Catechesis of Tortosa and afterwards when thousands of Jews converted to Christianity.

71. In contradistinction to the thirteenth-century bulls which speak of conversion of the Jews only as an afterthought, the fifteenth-century bull *Etsi doctoris gentium* announces its conversionary intent in its prooemium. On the actions taken *vis-à-vis* the Talmud by Benedict XIII, directed towards the promotion of conversion and the mitigation of his bull, see Vendrell de Millás, 'En torno a la confirmación real, en Aragón, de la Pragmática de Benedicto XIII'.

72. On Dom Gaspar's life and pastoral mission, see Orfali, 'Gaspar de Leão Pereira'.

73. Orfali, ed., *Tratado que fez mestre Jerónimo, médico do Papa Bento XIII, contra os Judeus em que prova o Messias da lei ser vindo*, Impresso em Goa por João de Endem, aos 29 dias do mês de setembro de 1565.

74. On writing theological works in Portuguese instead of Latin, see Machado, *Espelho de Cristãos Novos*, fols 1v and 64v; de Barros, *Diálogo evangélico sobre os artigos da fé contra o Talmud dos judeus*, pp. LXXVII, 6-7; Glaser, 'Portuguese Sermons at Autos-da-Fe: Introduction and Bibliography', p. 58; Talmage, 'To Sabbatize in Peace: Jews and New Christians in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese Polemics', p. 275, n. 16.

75. *Carta do primeiro Arcebispo de Goa a o pouo de Israel seguidor ainda da ley de Moises, & do Talmud, por engano & malicia do seus Rabis*. The letter has sixteen unnumbered pages, followed by the treatises of Hieronymus containing seventy-five numbered pages, Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Res 411-12 P. See Orfali, ed., *Tratado que fez mestre Jerónimo*, pp. 47-63 [Carta do Arcebispo].

76. Orfali, ed., *Tratado que fez mestre Jerónimo*, p. 63: 'O Cabedal que pus neste liuro foi traslado de uma linguagem noutra, não mudando um cabelo da substância, e ainda guardei as frases e maneira de falar. O motiuo que tive foi o mesmo zelo do Autor, e compaixão de vossos enganos, e também a obrigação de Prelado, como disse no principio'.

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