

# Textualizing, De-Textualizing, and Re-Textualizing the Talmud

## The Dimension of Text in the *Extractiones de Talmud*\*

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### 1. Re-Casting Augustine's Paradigm on the Jews

When during the thirteenth century Christians became increasingly aware of Jewish post-biblical literature, their primary interest was directed at the Talmud. Nicholas Donin's accusations against the Talmud – submitted to Pope Gregory IX between 1238-1239 – triggered a trial against the Talmud that resulted in its condemnation (1240) and its burning (1241). Yet this trial eventually suggested the necessity to document Christians on the actual nature of the Talmud. Therefore, a large anthology from the Babylonian Talmud – commonly known as the *Extractiones de Talmud* – was redacted in connection with the 1240 Paris disputation against the Talmud. The text offers a representative selection of textual material that has been extracted from the Babylonian Talmud. This was the first substantial documentation on the Talmud delivered to Christian authorities after centuries of lacking or fragmentary information.<sup>1</sup>

Although the *Extractiones* are part of the legal procedure against the Talmud of the 1240s, it should be emphasized that the translation probably reflects a 'more lenient climate in the mid-1240s under Innocent IV'.<sup>2</sup> The relatively positive nature of this anthology can be appreciated both from the good quality of the translation itself and from the textual arrangement of the text. On the one hand, the anthology text offers a reasonably accurate translation of the text together with most of the commentary of the famous Jewish French scholar Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki (Rashi), despite the ideological question at stake – whether the Talmud actually manifested an anti-Christian nature. On the other hand, the anthology tends to present the Talmudic material in diachronic order, as it occurs according to what is in the Babylonian Talmud before it was printed – provided some historical differences between the *Vorlage* of the Latin text and the common edition based on the Vilna text.

The main purpose of the *Extractiones de Talmud* was to provide Christian authorities with the necessary documentation to evaluate the spiritual and cultural condition of Jews in the midst of the thirteenth century. Therefore, two kinds of

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1. Fidora, 'The Latin Talmud and Its Influence' and 'The Latin Talmud and Its Translators'.  
2. Fidora, 'Textual Rearrangement', p. 67.

translation were presented: a sequential one, following the textual order of the Talmud, and a thematic one, re-arranging most of the previous material according to key concepts. Regardless of the definitive presentation of the textual material, either in sequential or anthological order, the *Extractiones de Talmud* present only portions of Talmudic units. In this sense, it is crucial to emphasize that the historical event of providing a Latin translation of the Talmud has also deeply affected the texture of the Talmudic passages themselves. While undergoing the translation process, the Talmud has been almost ‘de-textualized’, in this precise sense: Talmudic texts mostly appear in fragmentary form or in single, shorter units.

The discovery of the Talmud during the thirteenth century required revising Augustine’s paradigm of the Jews that had guided the Christian understanding of Judaism for centuries. The Christian understanding of the Jews in the Middle Ages was still dictated for centuries by Augustine’s notion of the Hebrew Bible: the Jews were unable both to understand Scripture correctly and to produce new knowledge. In other terms, they were a sort of relic of the past. It should also be emphasized that the Babylonian Talmud underwent a historically complex dissemination from Mesopotamia, through North Africa, up to the Iberian Peninsula and finally to France. Therefore, Christian authorities had been unaware of the existence of a parallel, extremely large corpus of religious texts for centuries and had received only fragmentary, often unreliable hints from Jewish converts. Augustine’s words were notoriously harsh. The Jews would have been unable to understand the very books that they had still been transmitting – as ‘tradition’ – since Christian revelation and their role was downgraded to the one of servants:

omnes ipsae Litterae quibus Christus prophetatus est, apud Iudaeos sunt, omnes ipsas Litteras habent Iudaei. Proferimus Codices ab inimicis, ut confundamus alios inimicos. In quali ergo opprobrio sunt Iudaei? Codicem portat Iudaeus, unde credit Christianus. Librarii nostri facti sunt, quomodo solent servi post dominos codices ferre, ut illi portando deficiant, illi legendo proficiant.

(Augustinus, *Enarratio in Psalmum 56*, §9)

All the texts (*litterae*) in which Christ is prophesized are among the Jews. The Jews have all these works. We bring our books (*codices*) from the enemies so that we may confute other enemies. In what sort of disgrace do the Jews find themselves? A Jew carries the book that is the foundation of faith for a Christian. Jews act as book-bearers for us, like the slaves who are accustomed to walk behind their masters carrying their books, so that while the slaves sink under the weight, the masters make great strides through reading.

This passage was quite cleverly arranged. It presupposed the Jews’ inability of interpreting Scripture in a spiritual sense, so that their socially and politically marginal role, as ‘servants’ in a Christian society, would be justified theologically. There was a deep connection between life and hermeneutics: just as the Jews were unable to understand Scripture, so would they persist in leading a carnal life. Such

a carnal life would also lead to dissolution – both in the sense of leading a dissolute life and in the sense of being scattered in the world.

## 2. The ‘Chain of Tradition’ and Its Discontents

The Babylonian Talmud – formally an Aramaic commentary on the Hebrew text-book of the Mishnah – is not only the reference work for Jewish Law but also the most iconic representation of the dimension of text in Jewish literature. Even the less experienced reader can easily become aware that the Talmud reports a ‘protocol’ of series of legal and judicial opinions between generations of scholars – in the form of an uninterrupted ‘dialogue’ beyond differences in language, social setting, and personal theological convictions. Jewish Orthodoxy is typically built on the supposition that different generations of Jewish scholars are connected in an uninterrupted sequence of texts, studies, and commentaries that is commonly designated as ‘chain of tradition’.

This ‘chain’ constitutes the central pillar of Jewish Orthodoxy. Yet it is neither linear nor specifically homogeneous, when examined from a strictly historical point of view. Oral and written traditions are bridged into an allegedly uninterrupted, continuous tradition that seems to overcome differences in text, language, and theology.

Some Rabbinic texts claim that Talmudic tradition should be dated back to the time of God’s Revelation on Mount Sinai, with the clear intent of normalizing this magmatic collection of sources under a coherent – or allegedly coherent – tradition. The most famous description of this ‘chain of tradition’ – opening Tractate *Avot*, a later text that imitates the language of the Mishnah – offers an almost linear chain of transmission from the Sinai that can virtually be extended to the present generation of scholars:<sup>3</sup>

משה קיבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושוע, ויהושוע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה.

Moses received Scripture from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua and Joshua to the Elders and the Elders to the Prophets and the Prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Assembly  
(mAv 1:1)

When examined in more detail, the ‘chain of tradition’ is more articulate. It traditionally begins in Hebrew with the ‘pairs’ of the early Palestinian masters (*zugot*), develops into the two leading exegetical schools of Shammai and Hillel, and contin-

3. Modern scholarship has reached no consensus on the historical assessment of Tractate *Avot*. A later, possibly post-Mishnaic redaction of Tractate *Avot* is maintained especially by Stemmerger. See: Stemmerger, ‘Mischna Avot’ and Neusner, *Oral Tradition in Judaism*, p. 152. For a detailed bibliographical note on the development of Tractate *Avot*, see: Tropper, ‘Tractate *Avot*’, p. 160, n. 3.

ues with the masters of the Mishnah (*tannaim*). This legal tradition then passes into Aramaic and includes the early masters of the Talmud (*amoraim*), the late masters of the Talmud (*savoraim*), and finally the later anonymous redactors of the Talmud (*stammaim*). As the Talmud text was fixed in written form, the ‘chain of tradition’ already included a large number of later interpreters: the Babylonian commentators on the Talmud (*geonim*), the ‘first’ commentators on the Talmud (*rishonim*), and the ‘latest’ commentators on the Talmud (*aharonim*). This almost millenary tradition includes scholars from early and later generations, genuine innovators and compilers, original authors and unoriginal commentators. Despite the obvious linguistic, cultural, and theological differences, this ‘chain’ still offers a strong sense of continuity that has been transmitted between generations because of a specific ideological assumption – each commentary would belong to the uninterrupted tradition of the commentary on the word of God and would then express a deep continuity between generations, despite local and historical differences.

Yet the composition of a ‘chain of tradition’ has hardly been so linear. On the contrary, the process of *centralizing* the Talmudic tradition required several hundred years and went through a series of regressive and progressive steps. In a recently well-acclaimed and yet controversial text, Talya Fishman has shown how the process of ‘textualizing’ the Babylonian Talmud required a difficult negotiation between oral and written traditions as well as how this process implied different notions of authorship and authority – especially between East and West. She has appropriately emphasized how ‘textualization’ should be accounted for as something much more complex than simply ‘putting in words’ (*Verschriftlichung*) oral traditions.<sup>4</sup> It cannot be denied that the process of ‘putting into words’ – here intended to offer practical help for memorizing the increasing mass of Talmudic scholarship – also implied a theological-political dispute on the role of the Rabbinic elite. The ultimate purpose of ‘textualizing’ the Talmud was not simply to make a huge number of traditions available in written form, possibly still subject to the undisputed authority of oral traditions. It also supported a long process that culminated with assessing the Babylonian Talmud as the *central pillar* in Jewish religious life. While describing this long process of textualization, Fishman has importantly emphasized the subtle dialectics that involved members from different Eastern and Western Jewish communities. The former ones would be more inclined to rely on oral traditions supported by written material; the latter ones would progressively be more inclined to accept the written text of the Talmud as the normative reference for European Jewish life. A specific moment in the process of textualization was reached when medieval Christian authorities eventually became aware of the existence of the Talmud and of its importance for contemporaneous Jewish life.

The discovery that Jewish scholars had produced an immense, still totally unknown collection of legal, philosophical, and theological texts had a tremendous

4. For the oral transmission of oral matters, especially in Geonic culture, see Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*, pp. 32-39.

impact on the Jewish-Christian relationships at the time. Christians had to face the unprecedented matter of fact that Jews had not simply stuck to the literal, carnal sense of Scripture, as Augustine would have claimed. On the contrary, they had actually produced an immense text – the Talmud – whose existence was both fascinating and threatening at the same time.

The Latin translation of the Talmud has a documentary relevance for the history of the Talmud and also offers an ‘outer perspective’ on Judaism, especially from the point of view of Christian and Ecclesiastical authorities. The Latin anthology translated from the Talmud – known as *Extractiones de Talmud* – has also had a substantial impact on the millenary ‘textualization’ of this text. The Latin translation of the Talmud has foremost reflected the Christian ‘discontents’ with respect to the traditional assumption that Judaism would be outdated and long gone, as claimed by Augustine several centuries earlier.

The historical and theological role of emerging Rabbinic literature in medieval Christianity can hardly be underestimated. Before discovering the existence of the Talmud in the twelfth century, quite ironically by means of some diligent Jewish converts, Christians had usually conformed to Augustine’s traditional assumption. Accordingly, they had maintained that the Jews were unable to understand the ‘spiritual’ sense of Scripture; therefore, the Jews would somehow be condemned to be segregated into a culturally and historically passive role; their existence would have been a sort of live example of religious outdatedness – the theological symbol of obsolescence. Accordingly, the Jews could only work as a sort of ‘cultural servants’ for Christians. Augustine had expressed the Jews’ submissive role with a powerful metaphor and had described them as ‘librarians’ (*librarii*) unable to understand the very sense of the ‘books’ that they were still delivering over space and time, for the Christians’ sake.

One should appreciate the psychological dimension in this specific vision of intellectual history. In so doing, one will better understand how the discovery of the Talmud by Christian authorities rapidly culminated into burning and banishment, in little more than a century. Augustine’s traditional assumption was surely ungenerous: he secluded the Jews in the passive role of transmitting texts that they could not really understand. Nevertheless, this was especially reassuring for the Christians who would have nothing to fear, theologically speaking, from the obstinate people who had once rejected Christ. The Jews would be only blinded ‘librarians’, stuck in their Hebrew Bible and prophetically unable of discovering the Christian truth.

Yet this view could no longer be held. On the eve of the twelfth century, Christianity encountered the unprecedented news that the Jews had neither stuck with the Hebrew Bible nor been inactive. For instance, in his *Dialogi contra Judaeos* (1110), the twelfth-century Jewish convert Peter Alfonsi maintains that the Jews are following an ‘outdated’ version of the Law.<sup>5</sup> In similar terms, the twelfth-cen-

5. Peter Alfonsi appears to argue that the Jews are following an ‘outdated’ version of the Law especially

tury abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, argues the same in his *Tractatus adversus Judaeorum inveteratam duritiam* (1142-1143), possibly based on Peter Alfonsi's work and, possibly, on some indirect translations of the Talmud to be found in the French version of the Hebrew satirical text *Alpha Beitha de-Ben Sira* (*The Alphabet of Ben Sira*).<sup>6</sup> This scattered evidence could already show that the Jews had not been culturally inactive for centuries. On the contrary, they had amassed an immense number of texts, mostly unknown to Christians. Suddenly the Jews had appeared to be much more creative and tenacious, than one would expect. The mere existence of the Talmud and its textualization would posit an existential threat to the Christians who would simply rely on Augustine's outdated notions. A revision of this traditional view was indeed necessary. Following the 1240 first Paris disputation and the 1241/2 burning of the Talmud, the *Extractiones de Talmud* – extant in both a chronological and thematic arrangement of the texts – emerged in 1245 as a sort of *emotional reaction* to this unprecedented discovery. The need of having a faithful version of selected material from the Talmud fulfilled the purpose of making it simultaneously accessible and vulnerable to Christian authorities. On the one hand, the Talmud could be studied with an objective, reliable Latin translation of the text; on the other hand, it could be exposed what it actually was. In the eyes of Christian authorities, there was no real contradiction between delivering a 'faithful' translation and providing a tendentious *anthology* of the Talmud. Both these assumptions were simultaneously true and consistent. Indeed, they intended to realign the religious life of the Jews to the traditional assumption that they were still infidel and non-believers. The quality of the Latin translation was the necessary linguistic presupposition for the theological claim that the Talmud would contain blasphemies against Christianity.

The editors of the dossier containing the *Extractiones de Talmud* and other materials frequently insist on the impeccable quality of their documentation. The editors were aware that the translation process was itself trans-cultural and tended to assure the reader on the liability of their sources. Thus, in the prologue to the *Extractiones* they explain:

Deus autem duos sibi providit interpretes catholicos in hebraea lingua quam plurimum eruditos. Hoc autem fidelitatis eorum infallibile mihi praestitit argumentum: quod, cum multa magna et notabilia de praedictis libris diversis temporibus, posteriore ignorante quae vel qualiter ab ore prioris interpretis transtuleram, etsi, propter

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on this account: everybody, he argues, is 'unclean' with respect of the ritual requirements of the Old Testament, and the Jewish Law promulgated by the Rabbis cannot remediate this condition of impurity (*Dialogi contra Judaeos*, 8). This argument seems to reflect some anti-Talmudic attitude of Spanish Jews, possibly under the influence of some residual Karaites. On the Jewish education of Peter Alfonsi, see also: Hasselhoff, 'Petrus Alfonsi'. See also: Tolán, *Petrus Alfonsi*.

6. On these topics, see: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, trans. by Resnick; see Resnick, 'Humoralism and Adam's Body. Twelfth-Century Debates and Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus contra Judaeos*', pp. 181-189; see also: Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*.

difficultatem et obscuritatem hebraici, quandoque variaverint verba, eandem tamen sententiam et sensum tenuerunt.

(*Praefatio in Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 4)

God sent two Catholic translators who were very learned in the Hebrew language. It was an unquestionable proof of their reliability for me that, having translated some time before from the mouth of the first translator (ab ore prioris interpretis transtuleram) many important and remarkable passages from the aforesaid books, this translation, as well as that of the second translator, who did not know what I had translated previously and how it had been rendered, both expressed the same opinions and yielded the same sense, though they sometimes used different words because of the difficulty and obscurity of the Hebrew language.

Recent scholarship has shown how the translation was the product of a teamwork and involved at least three phases. In the first phase, an unknown translator, probably Nicholas Donin, made a first selection of the relevant materials and translated them into Latin. In the second phase, another translator redacted a second translation, possibly a larger one, closer to the text now extant in the *Extractiones*. Only with a third editorial phase, was all this material collected, discussed, and redacted, resulting into the anthology now known as the *Extractiones de Talmud*. It cannot be excluded that there were also some intermediary phases, when French was prevalently used with respect to Latin, as it happened, for instance, with Donin's redaction of his notorious thirty-fives articles. If this did actually take place while redacting the thirty-five theses, all the more is it reasonable that it took place also while redacting a significantly larger selection of passages. In any case, it has been established that this complex interaction resulted into a very accurate rendering of the Talmud into Latin that would have served the goal of documenting its content in front to a Christian public.<sup>7</sup>

It should not be surprising if these precautionary remarks were maintained a second time, in the *Prologue* to the second part of the dossier which contains Nicholas Donin's Thirty-Five Articles against the Talmud and other materials. Again, the Latin editor proudly claims for the uncontroversial quality of the Latin translation. Interestingly enough, it refers to the famous commonplace of several translators who have translated independently and yet in very same way:

Quoniam 'in ore duorum vel trium testium stat omne verbum' ad maiorem praecedentium firmitatem et certitudinem, quaedam repetere, quaedam superaddere utile iudicavi quae ex ore alterius interpretis sunt translata quinque vel sex annis prius, licet hic ponantur posterius.

(*Prologue* to the second part of MS Paris, BnF, lat. 16558, fol. 211rb)

7. de la Cruz, 'El estadio textual' and Cecini, 'The *Extractiones de Talmud*'.

‘Since every matter is established in the mouth of two or three witnesses’, in order to increase the firmness and certainty of what had been said, I thought it useful to repeat and to add some passages which were translated from the mouth of the other translator some five or six years before, even though here they are given afterwards.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the wish to produce a reliable Latin translation is not intrinsically a sign of integrity. The Christian sentiment towards the emergence of Talmudic literature is indeed potentially negative and posits an epistemological problem: the mere existence of a large corpus of post-Biblical texts obviously contradicted the traditional notion of the Jews’ intellectual inertia. It is then not surprising that a linguistically impeccable translation of the Talmud has nevertheless produced an ideologically tendentious text, whose main purpose is exposing the Jews’ theological ‘stubbornness’ and their inability to convert to Christianity. This ideological assessment of the Latin translation is reflected in both the selection and arrangement of the textual material. In this respect, the Latin translation represents a sort of ‘de-textualization’ of the tractates of the Talmud as it has affected the ‘textual integrity’ of the source text.

Yet this process has also provoked a second, more subtle ‘textualization’ or, better put, a process of ‘re-textualization’ – namely, a further emphasis on the centrality of the Talmud in Jewish life, albeit described in negative terms. In short, the translation of the Talmud in a Latin anthology has probably compromised its original textual unity (‘de-textualization’) but has also induced the Latin translator to emphasize once more the authoritative nature of the Talmud and to claim for its centrality in Jewish life.

### 3. Textualizing Oral Traditions: the Dimension of Text and Speech in the Talmud

Modern scholarship has disputed on the nature of Talmudic discussions.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, some scholars have assumed that the assessment of Talmudic discussions within an argumentative frame would have the main purpose of presenting scholarly material as a coherent ‘unity’ (*sugya*); this general systematization apparently suggests that the Talmud would exhibit a conclusive nature and reproduce an argumentative flow – eventually leading to specific, binding juridical conclusions. On the other hand, other scholars like Talya Fishman have insisted on the temporary character of these Talmudic discussions and specifically on their prominently oral nature.<sup>10</sup> The juridical material produced by the Babylonian academies would exhibit a normative value and yet still be subject to a subtle dynamics between orality

8. Text and translation quoted from Fidora and Cecini, ‘Nicholas Donin’s Thirty-Five Articles Against the Talmud’, p. 190.

9. Modern scholarship on the nature of Talmud discussions is extensive and cannot be treated properly in the present context. Most recent studies include: Boyarin, *Sparks of the Logos* and Dolgopolsky, ‘Sense in Making.’

10. Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*.

and writing. In other terms, the leaders of these Babylonian academies, the *Geonim*, would have put their discussion into writing only reluctantly, mostly for a practical reason – offering a transparent ‘protocol’ of their scholarly discussions, with the implicit purpose of being controlled, supervised, and corrected by later generations.

As was anticipated, the spread of the Babylonian Talmud from East to West – following the expansion of the Islam Empire from Babylon to Andalusia and finally to Northern France and Germany – has also had a significant impact on the ‘textualization’ of the Talmud. The progressive passage from East to West also provoked a sensible change in the relationships between orality and writing. Early Talmudic schools in Islamic countries – led by the *Geonim* – insisted on the supplementary role of ‘writing’ only for the sake of memorizing oral material and still conceived of Talmudic discussion in term of a living, oral dispute. In distinction, Western Jewish communities spreading from North Africa to Spain and ultimately to France progressively assimilated the Talmud as a normative *written* text, similar to Scripture. This change in the relationship between orality and writing has had a clear consequence – assessing the centrality of the Talmud as a ‘handbook’ for any legal dispute in Jewish life, regardless of its original oral nature. At the time of its penetration in contemporary medieval Northern Europe, the Talmud gained a specific normative prominence, especially due to the French commentators – known as *Tosafists*. It is at this point that Christian authorities would have reacted to the emerging of this impressive collection of Jewish Law and tried to contrast its ‘textualization’.

The scholarly dispute – whether the Talmud exhibits a conclusive or temporary nature – hardly affects the assumption that the Talmudic discussions exhibit a prominent ‘oral character’. Regardless of their specific juridical nature, these Talmudic discussions manifestly belong to a prominent dimension of speech. This is indeed evidenced by a number of linguistic marks: the segmentation of the Talmudic discussion in specific minor argumentative units; the large use of verbs of speech for introducing objections and rebutting them; the use of idioms that ultimately reflect a dimension of orality; the use of specific patterns that continuously connect objections, counter-objections, and rebuttals. A Talmudic discussion is usually occasioned by a comment on a specific sentence from the Mishnah; the specific linguistic and ritual nature of the passage may require specific linguistic and expressive remarks as well as the quotation of supplementary material – either from Scripture, the Mishnah, other Hebrew legal texts, or parallel passages from the Talmud. The circulation of these argumentative materials is usually encouraged by the dialogical nature of the discussion – built on a series of objections, counter-objections, and rebuttals, as just mentioned – that allows imparting a number of new references about the topic under discussion.

A Talmudic text usually follows a specific organization of the diverse textual material employed in the analysis – Mishnaic texts, Biblical sources, and additional legal texts. While a formalization of a Talmudic discussion cannot answer to the immense diversity of the Talmud, it is nevertheless possible to reduce the Talmudic discussion to specific patterns or, better put, to formalize it according to a recurring pattern:

- i. A quotation from the Mishnah;
- ii. Some basic annotations on it that might involve linguistic, semantic, or cultural explanation of the original text;
- iii. A first disagreement, typically expressed by one individual who simply makes a statement or asks a question either for polemical purposes or simply for disagreeing with the previous basic annotation;
- iv. If the first disagreement has polemical purposes and has been received as such, the Talmudic discussion usually witnesses a rebuttal to this attack that leads to a longer discussion and further chains of annotating and rejecting;
- v. If the first disagreement has no polemical purposes and, on the contrary, convinces the interlocutor, then the Talmudic discussion can include a sort of general agreement with the objection and then lead to conclusion;
- vi. The conclusion may be framed into a conclusive, anonymous statement.

This stereotypical formalization clearly shows that Talmudic discussions are built on a distinctive dimension of speech that is somehow reproduced in written form – as ‘transcription’ – with linguistic marks, idioms, and particles that signalize the direction of hermeneutical struggle.

These linguistic marks include the profuse use of verbs of speech (‘saying’, ‘telling’, ‘asking’, ‘objecting’, ‘answering’ and so on), the use of interjections that orient the discussion in a specific direction (‘it is obvious!’, ‘it is difficult!’, ‘we cannot agree on this’ and so on), the use of technical terms for introducing additional material (‘it is said’, ‘it is written’, ‘it is taught’, ‘our masters say’ and so on) as well as the use of additional quotations from Scripture and other Jewish books. These linguistic and expressive features are seldom treated as such, especially because they are spontaneously assimilated in the process of becoming conversant with the Talmudic text. It should be emphasized even more clearly that traditional teaching of the Talmud has usually focused on the reception of this increasingly authoritative text and its theological features – without necessarily addressing the *structure* of the discussion itself. The reason for this may hardly be negligence but rather caused by the assimilation of the basic features of Talmudic discussion at a relatively early age while acquiring literacy in Jewish literature.

The *formalization* of a Talmudic discussion obviously presents a number of linguistic difficulties. For instance, the Hebrew-Aramaic bilingual nature of these texts may lead to semantic and expressive *friction* between them and make it difficult to reproduce the dialogical flow at a formal level. Besides, the antiquity of these texts has a clear impact on our ability to understand their original idiomatic setting. Moreover, the written character of these texts clearly contrasts with their alleged original ‘oral nature’, raising a number of issues that have traditionally affected the study of ancient philosophy in general and Platonic dialogues in particular. Finally, the Talmudic text traditionally published as a large column of text that occupies the central section of the page and localizes its commentary on the margins somehow makes it difficult to fully appreciate the dialogical dimension of the Talmud.

The most notable attempt of *segmenting* Talmudic discussions according to their dialogical features has recently been undertaken by Jacob Neusner, who has edited a formalized English translation of both the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmud. It should be emphasized that Neusner's translations of rabbinic texts and especially of the two Talmuds have encountered negative reviews from prominent scholars; therefore, they should not be regarded as a model for linguistic accuracy. Nevertheless, Neusner's practice of *segmenting* the Talmudic text according to its main oral features has surely had an impact on modern scholarship and represents a useful way of addressing these classical texts. One can refer, for example, to the very beginning of the Talmud – commenting on the first instructions from Tractate *Berakhot* of the Mishnah:<sup>11</sup>

1:1

- [A] From what time do [people] recite the *Shema* ' in the evening?
- [B] From [after the sunset, that is] the hours that the priests enter [the Temple court] to eat their heave-offering,
- [C] '[They may recite the *Shema* ' at any time thereafter up to three hours into the night, that is] until the end of the first watch [in the Temple]',
- [D] the words of R. Eliezer

It is obvious how Neusner rejects the traditional paging of the Talmud. Instead of providing the traditional numeration of a Talmud page (Tractate *Berakhot* 2b), he begins with reporting the pertinent numeration from the Mishnah (Tractate *Berakhot* 1:1) and segments it in a number of minor units, using alphabetical notation. The resulting translation provides the reader with a clear indication of the argumentative flow – namely, an initial question (A), a first answer (B), a second answer (C) to be ascribed to Rabbi Eliezer (D).

In the present case, it is important to show how Neusner's translation intended to supersede the traditional paging of the Talmud, typically based on the pagination of the Bomberg (and later Vilna) edition, and to offer a text divided into discrete units that show the discursive flow. The question over the quality of Neusner's translation is hardly pertinent in the present case, whereas his innovative approach to the Talmudic text is much more relevant here. Neusner's effort of formalizing the Talmudic text reflects the deep need of providing a clear, transparent illustration of a Talmudic dispute – especially when translating it into a Western language. Otherwise, the Talmudic text would appear quite obscure if not bizarre.

11. Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, Vol. 1 – Tractate *Berakhot*, p. 1.

#### 4. De-Textualizing the Talmud: the *Extractiones de Talmud* and the Babylonian Talmud

Recent scholarship, as already anticipated, has emphasized how the *Extractiones* were redacted in a generally lenient atmosphere, supported by Innocent IV. Yet this could not prevent some collateral effects from taking place, both during the redaction of the anthology and with the later thematic arrangement of the collected material, as discussed further. The impossibility of translating the whole text of the Babylonian Talmud made it necessary to proceed with a *selection* of texts and pertinent passages. The ‘pertinence’ of these passages should be measured with respect of the anti-Jewish stereotypes that guided the entire process of translation, as candidly admitted in the *Prologue* that illustrates quite well the expectations of the Latin translator:

Ad iudaicae perfidiae et malitiae necnon incredibilis excaecationis cordium suorum, secundum inprecationem propheticam, quin potius alienationis mentis ipsorum vel amentiae denudationem, de mandato venerabilis patris Othonis Tusculani episcopi sedis apostolicae legati, pauca de innumeris erroribus, haeresibus, blasphemis et fabulis, quibus libri iudaici sunt contexti tamque pleni, ut quasi nihil veritatis et minus utilitatis contineant, nunc verbum ex verbo, nunc sensum ex sensu, ut expressius potui, transtuli diligenter.

(*Praefatio in Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 4)

In order to uncover the Jewish perfidy and malice as well as the incredible blindness of their hearts, according to a prophetic curse, and moreover their mental alienation or rather manifest insanity, commissioned by the venerable Father Odo, Bishop of Tusculum, apostolic legate, I have carefully translated sometimes word for word, sometimes sense by sense, as it could best be expressed, few of countless mistakes, heresies, blasphemies and fables, of which Jewish books are made up and full of, so that they contain no truth and less utility.

Some question about authorship – whom Odo, the Bishop of Tusculum had commissioned for this translation – have not been answered yet but one thing is quite clear: this Latin translation could have posed an issue both to the translators and to the readers. While its basic structure was quite fairly described in the *Prologue* to the Latin translation, the Talmud still exhibited a complex, mysterious if not confused structure. The Latin translator was unable to provide the readers with a clear representation of the selected Talmudic passages. The selection of Talmudic passages has usually undergone specific costs in terms of textual and conceptual coherence. With the notable exception of few narratives on Jesus, the *Extractiones de Talmud* mostly report fragments of Talmudic units and rarely bother to describe the hermeneutical dynamics. Most of the Talmudic discussions (*sugyot*) appear to be isolated in minor, often shorter textual units that escape a clear formalization. This segmentation of the Talmud had also another notable consequence – compromising

the structure of a single Talmudic unit. A paradox would then emerge: the selection of textual material would appear to be respectful of the structure of the original text but it would indeed separate many Talmudic remarks from its original setting and would then reinforce the assumption that the Talmud would manifest a confusing nature.

Yet it would be hard if not preposterous to argue that this specific arrangement had the covert finality of derogating the text of the Babylonian Talmud to the eyes of Christians. This hypothesis in fact contrasts with the general excellent quality of the Latin translation – that would often pass the standards of modern translations. The problem of addressing the structure of a Talmudic text seems rather to affect any transmission outside the perimeter of its original linguistic and cultural setting or, in other words, any case of translating the Talmud into a Western language. In the present case, the question of structure was even more relevant, as the text had to be translated by individuals who would have shown much less sympathy for Jewish cultural idiosyncrasies. Internal issues commonly pertaining to translating a text – finding proper expressive equivalents, addressing cultural differences, and negotiating between the ideology of the source text and the one of the target text – had to suffer from an additional burden: providing the reader with a clear structure of the text.

One should more accurately conclude that the Latin translator intended to deliver an exact translation into Latin but encountered difficulties in managing the complex material of the Babylonian Talmud – whose large employment of ‘non-legal narratives’ (*aggadot*) would pose a challenge for a more systematic, ‘Western-oriented’ mind. There is a clear cultural difference in arranging theological material between the redactors of the Talmud and the Latin translator’s intention of showing the anti-Christian nature of the Talmud. Notably this apparent difference did not awake any sentiment of sympathy towards the ‘Oriental’ character of the Babylonian Talmud. It is probable that the assumption that Talmud literature would only be a collection of fables, blasphemies, and fantasies was the consequence of a ‘Western mind’ unable of appreciating the cultural diversity of the Babylonian Talmud – given for sure his discriminatory stereotypes towards the Jews, described both as cursed by the Prophets and also incapable of properly thinking. Moreover, the necessity of providing the Christian readers with ‘few of the countless mistakes, heresies, blasphemies, and fables’ from Jewish literature made it necessary to produce an *anthology* rather than a comprehensive translation of the Talmud. The segmentation in minor units fundamentally followed the main structure of the Talmud and possibly reflected a lenient if not positive appreciation of the source text. Yet this clearly showed not only the inability of coming to terms with the hermeneutical dimension of the Talmud but also the impossibility of appreciating cultural diversity – especially when suffering from the same important stereotypes that culminated in the burning of the Talmud in 1240. The most apparent consequence of it obviously is the deformation of textual material and its assimilation through the same stereotypes.

This tendentious treatment of the material collected in the *Extractiones de Talmud* is particularly evident when taking into account the second text redacted in

connection with the Paris process against the Talmud – a *thematic* arrangement of the selected Talmudic material. After a first, decent translation of Talmudic material according to its diachronic order, the material published in the *Extractiones* underwent a specific re-organization that produced a *thematic* collection of this material: ‘in this sense, little or no progress was achieved in the Christian reassessment of the Talmud; instead, the argument against the Talmud became circular’.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the segmentation in the Latin translation – serving the ideological purposes of exposing its anti-Christian tendencies – is followed by a symmetrical and contrary process of ‘re-textualization’. This process takes place in two different respects: assimilating the glosses into the main text and making specific translation choices.

### 5. The Text and the Commentary: On the Talmud and Its Interpreters

The process of ‘re-textualization’ takes place covertly as an internal, idiosyncratic phenomenon of the *Extractiones de Talmud*. While it is difficult to determine whether it is a deliberate or inadvertent process suggested by single individuals, it cannot be denied that this process of ‘re-textualization’ reflects well a number of theological presuppositions that inspired, guided, and directed the Latin translation of the Talmud. On the one hand, Christian doctrine establishes a prophetic truth: the Jews would intrinsically have been unable to produce anything theologically remarkable since their rejection of Christ, as maintained by Augustine. On the other hand, the discovery of the Talmud thanks to the reports of Jewish converts in the twelfth century has actually shown that this diagnosis was wrong, at least from a strictly empirical point of view. In fact, the Jews had produced an impressive number of texts that seem to contradict this harsh, definitive judgment. The emerging theological dilemma – what the intellectual condition of the Jews after the rejection of Christ ultimately is – has only two possible solutions: either the Talmud *necessarily* contains blasphemy, foolishness, and heresy, or it evokes the same Christian truth anticipated in the Old Testament and equally inaccessible to the carnal Jews. Any other suggestion would immediately imply that the Talmud contradicts Augustine’s judgment on the Jews and disqualify his theology of history. The assumption that the Talmud could somehow anticipate Christian truth would still follow the assumption that it appears, at first, to be foolish and heretical; in the end, it was mostly a question of correct exegesis of the text. When read appropriately with Christian eyes, even the apparently foolish Talmud would necessarily reflect Christian truth.

Yet the *Extractiones de Talmud* would demonstrate, at first, how the Talmud would prove Augustine’s historical and theological correctness. This strong theological presupposition would also imply that the Talmud would somehow *exemplify*, in its monumentality, the Jews’ blindness to Christian truth. As a consequence, the Talmud could not simply be the product of blasphemous individuals who gathered

12. Fidora, ‘Textual Rearrangement’, p. 74.

materials for centuries and produced this huge work. Nevertheless, this impossibility had a theological – not empirical – nature. The Talmud emerged as a prominent concurrent to Christian truth along the path to conversion of the Jews; therefore, it *had to* appear also as a substantial piece of work – whose authorship could be wrong and ungodly but still not inessential – or lacking any theological substance. Not surprisingly would the Talmud somehow manifest a specific theological, albeit negative prominence among the Jews and posit itself as the ultimate sourcebook for contemporaneous Jewish life.

It is then not contradictory that the Talmud emerged as the main ‘adversary’ to Christian truth especially in light of the same cultural centralization supported by its French commentators – the *Tosafists*. On the contrary, one should share Talya Fishman’s judgment on the Talmud and conclude that Christian authorities engaged in a theological-political confrontation against it, especially because of its prominence in the Askhenazi world. The Talmud’s cultural prestige among the Jews would exactly imply that it *necessarily* had to manifest a prominently textual nature and *necessarily* claim for Christian control and censorship over it. Had it simply been a ‘straw book’ – from which anyone would easily distance himself – no theological-political intervention by the Church would even be possible. As a consequence of these presuppositions, the *Extractiones de Talmud* would virtually have offered a formidable historical opportunity: contributing to both deconstruct and reconstruct the textual dimension of this pillar in Jewish medieval life. On the one hand, the Talmudic dialectical units were to be reduced to its blasphemous single, simple nature; on the other hand, its textual prominence was still to be held in order to justify the theological-political intervention by Christian authorities. Therefore, a process of ‘re-textualization’ would reflect the Christian claim for a *sola veritas* – by establishing a formidable ‘adversary’ to Christian faith. Although the *Extractiones* probably had no known Christian reader who might then have wanted to rephrase, they did still have an impact on Augustine’s traditional paradigm, mentioned above. While it is only a *theoretical* supposition that some Christian scholar may have changed his opinion on the Jews because of *actually reading* this anthology from the Talmud, there is no doubt that a new paradigm had risen in connection with the *Extractiones*. The Jews were no longer passive witnesses of Christian faith but actual heretics that forged blasphemous literature. These newly discovered Jewish texts had then become true enemies of Christianity.

The process of ‘re-textualization’ of the Talmud takes place as an internal, idiosyncratic phenomenon – that would emerge only when confronting the Latin translation with its original Hebrew-Aramaic text. An examination of the *Extractiones de Talmud* from a Translation Studies perspective involves the assumption that any translation undergoes a process of revision, adaptation, and transmission of textual material, either due to linguistic or cultural necessity. The ideological setting of the Latin translation and especially the theological need of identifying the Talmud as the prominent obstruction to the conversion of the Jews seem to be reflected in two typical traits of the *Extractiones de Talmud*: the assimilation of glosses within the main text and the emphasis on the textual nature of the Talmud. The assimilation

of glosses took place in two distinct ways: either including the gloss directly *within* the main body of the text, without allowing the reader to be aware of the addition or including the gloss *within* the text with a number of graphical marks in order to emphasize the inclusion of a commentary on the text. Thus the Latin translator included the glosses in the text sometimes mentioning this, sometimes not mentioning this, also under the unexpressed presupposition that the text of the Talmud had no really discrete parts – the Mishnah, its Aramaic commentary (Gemara), the commentary on the Talmud and so on – but rather represented a colossal piece of sinister, blasphemous literature.

When Christian authorities became aware of the dimensions of rabbinic literature, they were also informed of the tireless activity of the most prominent Jewish commentator on Scripture and the Talmud – the famous French scholar Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaqi, commonly known as Rashi. The historical and theological prominence of Rashi is explicitly acknowledged in the *Preface* to the *Extractiones de Talmud*:

De glossis vero Salomonis Trecensis super Vetus Testamentum paene nihil transtuli, licet sint ibi mirabilia infinita, et de Talmud magnam contineant partem; et quamvis taliter totum glossaverit Vetus Testamentum, quod nihil ibi penitus relinquat incorruptum, ita quod nec litteralem nec spiritualem intelligentiam seu sensum derelinquat, sed totum pervertat et convertat ad fabulas, iudaei tamen quicquid dixit auctoritatem reputant, ac si de ore Domini fuerit eis dictum. Huius glossae super Talmud frequenter in sequentibus inveniuntur insertae. Sepultum est corpus eius honorifice Trecis et anima in inferni novissimo.

(*Praefatio in Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 10)

From the glosses of Salomon of Troyes on the Old Testament, however, I have translated almost nothing, even though [they contain] infinite fantasies<sup>13</sup> and a great part of the Talmud. Although [he] has glossed the whole Old Testament in such a manner that he has left nothing entirely uncorrupted, so that he has left behind neither a literal nor a spiritual intelligence or sense but has perverted everything and converted [it] to fables: the Jews nonetheless believe that whatever [he] says has authority, as if it was told to them by the mouth of the Lord. His glosses on the Talmud will frequently be found inserted in the following [pages]. His body has honourably been buried in Troyes and [his] soul is in the outmost hell.

This explicit mention of Rashi under the sobriquet *Salomon Trecensis* is important, as it provides the theological dimensions under which his intellectual activity was judged by Christian authorities. The author of the *Preface* distinguishes between Rashi's commentary on Scripture and on the Talmud but appears to address directly and negatively only the former one. He emphatically disqualifies Rashi's intellectual efforts and explicitly maintains that they are incapable of providing

13. Literally: 'infinite marvelous things'. Yet the context is clearly negative.

either a literal or a spiritual ‘interpretation’ (*intelligentiam seu sensum*) of the text. Interestingly enough, it seems that Rashi’s commentary on Scripture is unsubstantial especially because it escapes the implicit Pauline alternative between a ‘sense of the body’ and a ‘sense of the spirit’. In other words, Rashi’s commentary could hardly be classified, as it would be neither literal nor allegorical. Consequently, Rashi would appear to reduce Scripture to a sort of an infantile literature – full of ‘fables’ and incapable of any theological truth.

Yet there is apparently a substantial difference in treating Rashi’s glosses on Scripture and on the Talmud. On the one hand, Rashi’s examination of Scripture is believed to be too unsubstantial to be reported in full; on the other hand, Rashi’s examination on the Talmud has ‘frequently’ (*frequenter*) been included in the Latin translation of the Talmud. This differential treatment would hardly pertain to the intrinsic quality of Rashi’s commentary but rather to the text that is addressed in this improper manner. It is particularly clear that the author of the *Preface* has already assumed that Scripture has to be preserved from any corruption and intrinsically requires either a literal or an allegorical interpretation. On the contrary, the Talmud is neither Scripture nor appears to possess any theological dignity. As it does not need to be preserved from intellectual corruption, the Talmud can be reported together with Rashi’s insubstantial glosses that are integrated into the text and that corroborate the Christian assumption that it contains only falsities and blasphemies.

## 6. Re-Textualizing the Babylonian Talmud: Glosses and Other Remedies

The mention that Rashi’s glosses on the Talmud are integrated in the text is particularly important on account of the aforementioned process of re-textualizing. Most of the glosses reported in the *Extractiones de Talmud* are highlighted in a number of ways: by underlining or marking the text. Yet some glosses from Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud are not singled out but seamlessly integrated into the main text, especially when they clarify specific difficult passages. Some examples will suffice to manifest the practical function of integrating Rashi’s glosses into the text. One can read, for instance, a short passage from Tractate *Berakhot* detailing on the consumption of an extract from asparagus that is believed to have medicamental qualities:

Sex dicuntur de *idpergoz*: non bibitur nisi purum; nec nisi pleno scypho; et sumendum est manu dextra et bibendum sinistra.

(*Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 72, Ber 51a [3]).

Six [things] are said about the *idpergoz*: it is not drunk if not pure, nor [is it drunk] if not with a full cup; and it has to be taken with the right hand and to be drunk with the left [one]

Apart from the use of the term *idpergoz* – either an Old French term for ‘asparagus’ or a idiosyncratic transcription of the Hebrew term *asparagos*, ‘asparagus’

– the Latin text appears to be linear and comprehensible.<sup>14</sup> Yet a closer examination of the text shows well that the Latin translation slightly differs from its Hebrew-Aramaic original. The original text is particularly representative of Rashi's glosses that are typically short, local, and pedagogical. Differently from later commentators on the Talmud, Rashi intended to provide a local explanation of terms, idioms, and sentences that posited difficulties to his students. Therefore, a lexical, expressive, and conceptual explanation had a main pedagogical function: facilitating the study of the Talmud. In the present case, a greater difficulty was caused by the Hebrew idiom that literally reads 'drinking something alive'. Rashi therefore explains the idiomatic expression as follows:

<p>תנו רבנן ששה דברים נאמרו באספרגוס אין שותין  אותרו אלא כשהוא חי ומלא מקבלו בימין ושותהו  בשמאל</p>	<p>Our Masters taught: Six things were said with regard to <i>asparagus</i>: no one drinks it unless when it is alive and full. One receives it in right [hand] and drinks it with [his] left hand  (bBer 51a)</p>
<p>אלא חי - יין חי שאינו מוזג</p>	<p><i>Unless when it is alive</i>: alive wine which is not mixed  (Rashi on bBer 51a)</p>

This short example clearly shows that the inclusion or assimilation of glosses within the main text is an idiosyncratic phenomenon of the *Extractiones de Talmud*. In truth, Rashi appears not to describe exactly what *asparagus* is or rather he holds it as unproblematic and therefore indulges in describing how much one should take of it – a cup. Yet the Latin translator is clearly assimilating only a specific part of this gloss: while Rashi explains in detail that one should drink 'alive wine which is not mixed' the Latin translator simply specified that one should drink this beverage 'pure'. Nevertheless, the gloss cannot be detected without comparing the Latin translation with its original Hebrew-Aramaic text and Rashi's commentary thereon and would possibly go unnoticed to any inexperienced reader. Yet the impact of this assimilation on the quality of reading the text is remarkable: the Talmud's typical brachylogy is expanded into longer sentences. While the selected passage may sound bizarre or absurd, its superficial content is accessible and transparent even to a Christian reader who would hardly be able to read any line from the Talmud without assistance. It is then clear that the assimilation of these glosses has eminent educational purposes, just like it was Rashi's primitive intention: the text has to be readable and comprehensible.

14. Linguistic evidence is not conclusive on the origin of the term *idpergoz* occurring in the *Extractiones*. On the one hand, the term *idpergoz* seems to reflect a reading from Old French that in turn was borrowed from the medieval Latin term *asparagus* (or *sparagus*). On the other hand, it is also possible that the term derives from the Hebrew אישפרגוס, provided that the sibilant consonant *samekh* is phonetically transcribed as voiced dental *d* and *z*. On this topic, see: Vernet i Pons, 'Index Verborum Gallicorum'. For brevity's sake, I will assume that this term is a 'transcription'.

When examined from a formal perspective, Rashi's commentary had the primary function of reinforcing the texture of the Talmud: it had to fill the expressive and semantic gaps. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the Talmud would appear to be more 'reasonable' also to an alien reader – say, a Christian scholar who was already persuaded of the heretic nature of these texts. As emphasized, Rashi wanted to provide his students with a local clarification of any textual and semantical difficulty but it is disputed whether the assimilation of Rashi's glosses into the main text would still respond to primitive assumption. Infringing the argumentative flow of argumentative units (*sugyot*) had an impact on every component of the Talmud – included its commentaries. In other words, that the Latin translator scattered the argumentative flow of Talmudic units with the obvious consequence of affecting also the commentaries thereon. Since the texture of the main text had been compromised, also the commentaries on the main text could only sound absurd and void of theological sense, as explicitly maintained in the *Preface*.

One should pay attention to two simultaneous yet contradicting effects of this tendentious treatment of the Talmud. On the one hand, the Latin translator compromised the textual integrity of the Talmud, while scattering the argumentative units into a series of 'fables', possibly void of any internal coherence. On the other hand, he systematically assimilated Rashi's *pedagogical* glosses into the main text but this had a paradoxical effect: rather than helping the reader, these glosses resulted to emphasize the inner, inherent absurd nature of the Talmud, especially because the Latin translation would ultimately make it impossible to understand the argumentative logic of the text and therefore Rashi's subtle relationship to it. The intricate law concerning the consumption of *asparagus* – rendered as *idpergoz* in the Latin text – would prove the case. The almost unnoticed assimilation of Rashi's glosses would hardly correspond to a sort of spontaneous reception of his commentary on the Talmud. In much more subtle terms, it would reflect the controversial assumption that this monumental *Jewish* text undoubtedly *has to* correspond to specific expectations by the Christian side – being inherently infantile and folkloristic just as folkloristic and infantile would be the claim that the Talmud has spoken the word of God. The author of the *Preface* has surely overemphasized the importance of Rashi's commentary, when assuming that the Jews would believe that he were as authoritative as the word of God. Yet this sarcastic exaggeration – by which Rashi would be condemned to hell – would anyhow reflect the Jewish assumption that the Talmud would be Oral Law and, as such, reflect the same Scripture given on Mount Sinai.

It is probably in light of this remark that one should understand another typical phenomenon in the Latin translation of the Talmud – the emphasis on its textual over its primitive oral nature. As mentioned above, modern scholarship has evidenced the subtle dialectics between orality and writing in the development of the Talmud. This text has fundamentally emerged as an oral clarification of a Hebrew textbook – the Mishnah – whose authority has been acknowledged by early generations of Jewish scholars and not infrequently described in terms of absolute beauty and perfection by some Babylonian Jewish authorities that were clearly influenced by the Islamic praise for the Quran. Only in time and especially only when reaching Northern

France in the eleventh century after its earlier dissemination in Northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula would the Talmud progressively have been received as a *written text* – whose intrinsic nature would be textual. More specifically, Fishman has emphasized how the Jewish approach to the Talmud deeply changed in time, especially when moving from the Gaonic to the Tosafistic culture – from a reception of the Talmud in strong connection to oral teachings to its reception mostly as a *written text*. The dissemination of the Talmud in Northern Africa and in the Iberian Peninsula historically played an intermediary role, often producing some first legal compilations. These compilations would neither require strong emphasis on oral teaching as in Gaonic culture, nor would they allow a reception of the Talmud as an autonomous written text, as it would later happen with the Tosafists.<sup>15</sup> For his part, the Latin translator has subtly manipulated some communicative patterns of the Talmud and transformed dialogical features into textual ones. The *Extractiones de Talmud* manifest two very characteristic readings of Hebrew-Aramaic idioms: the insistence on the fact that *the Talmud speaks* to its fellow Jews and on the fact that *one can read* specific teachings *from the Rabbis*.

The assumption that the Talmud actually speaks to the Jews is clearly expressed by a recurring expression: *dicit Dominus meus – scilicet Talmud* (‘says my Lord – namely the Talmud’). One example will be sufficient to describe this interesting rendering of the text with respect to the Hebrew-Aramaic original:

nonne dicit Dominus meus –Talmud scilicet–: Rogavit Moyses quod non requiesceret Spiritus Dei super gentes saeculi.

(*Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 193, bBB 15b [4]).

והא אמ' מר משה ביקש שלא תשרה שכ"נה על אומות העולם

(bBB 15b, MS Escorial G-I-3)

But doesn't my Lord – that is to say, the Talmud – say: Moses asked that the Spirit of God won't rest on the nations of the world?

But doesn't the Master say: Moses requested that the [Divine] Presence will not rest on the nations of the world<sup>16</sup>?

This Latin expression recurs extremely frequently and apparently translates the unproblematic Aramaic sentence: *we-amar Mar* (‘and said Mar’). The original Aramaic sentence would report the authoritative opinion of a Babylonian master who is typically quoting a Palestinian external source (*baraita*). The Aramaic term *Mar* (‘master’) would either designate an individual called Mar or a Master and the Latin rendering as *Dominus meus* would either reflect a conjectural variant reading *Mari* (‘my master’) in the original text, as occasionally reflected in some manuscripts, or

15. Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud*, pp. 65-90. For a philosophical treatment of these issues, see Dal Bo, *Deconstructing the Talmud*.

16. The Vilna edition carefully reads: עבדי כוכבים (‘star worshippers’).

simply be justified as an idiomatic rendering in Latin. What is particularly important is the specification of the nature of this ‘master’. The Latin translator unequivocally maintains that this ‘master’ is not an individual but rather a book – the Talmud itself. In so doing, the Latin translator imposes a notable transformation on the dialogical setting of the Talmud and transforms it into a textual universe in which the Talmud itself addresses his interlocutors and speak to them. In other terms, the Talmud has become the main actor in the communicative act between God and the Jews. It is the Talmud *itself* that speaks to the Jews and imparts them their instructions, in force of a double process of generalization and textualization. At first, the Latin translator intended to contextualize the Aramaic expression *we-amar Mar* (‘and said Mar’) that usually points to some previous passage in the Talmud; accordingly, he disambiguated this expression and explicitly stated that the Talmud itself says so and so.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, while providing both a literal and metaphorical translation of this expression, the Latin translator amplifies this technical term and projects it in a deeper theological perspective: the Oral Law is not simply a book but a sort of ‘speaking master’, whose authority is believed to be more important than the Old Testament itself.

This emphasis on the Talmud as main connector between God and the Jews does not seem surprising, at first, and is frequent in Rabbinic literature. Not uncommonly do the Rabbis employ the Aramaic term *Rahmana* (‘the Merciful One’) either to designate Scripture or God Himself. In so doing, they would simultaneously imply that both God and Scripture share a common trait – being ‘merciful’. This common designation would suggest that God and Scripture are interconnected, when not interdependent realities. The assumption emerging from the Latin translation – the Talmud would directly speak to its Jewish fellows – exactly resonates with this second, slightly forced interpretation of God and Scripture as the ‘Merciful One’. The Latin translation would only emphasize an unexpressed theological appreciation of God as a sort of textual reality – God would recursively be embedded in the same divine text that He has delivered to His people.

Deeply coherent with this theological presupposition is then the thesis that the Rabbis themselves do not simply ‘teach’ but rather ‘we read’ them, as if they too were textual realities and not historical individuals. This further transition to a textual dimension takes place in a second typical, idiosyncratic rendering of the text in the *Extractiones*. In several passages from the Latin translation it is particularly evident how the common Aramaic expression *tanya* (‘it is taught’) – usually introducing an external source (*baraita*) in the discussion – is constantly and coherently rendered in the whole Latin text with the Latin expression *legimus* (‘we read’). One can read this Latin passage and compare it with the Hebrew-Aramaic original:

17. I owe this remark to Ari Geiger (Bar-Ilan University) who kindly drew my attention to the technical nature of this expression.

Et Bar Kapara dixit ei: Bene de nihilo consolatus est te pater tuus; legimus nam quod mundus non potest esse sine masculino et femina, sed beatus est cuius pueri sunt masculi et vae illi cuius pueri sunt feminae.

(*Extractiones de Talmud per ordinem sequentialem*, p. 199, bBB 16b [5]).

And Bar Kappara said to him: Your father has consoled you with nothing; indeed we read that the world cannot be without male and female, but blessed is he whose children are males and woe to him whose children are females.

אמר ליה בר קפרא תנחומין של הבל ניחמך אבוך  
[דתניא] אי אפשר לעולם בלא זכרים ובלא נקבות אלא  
אשרי למי שבניו זכרים אוי לו למי שבניו נקבות  
(bBB 16b)

Bar Kappara said to him: Your father has consoled you with vanity,<sup>18</sup> as it is taught: It is impossible for the world [to exist] without males and females, but fortunate is he whose children are males and woe to him whose children are females.

Whereas the original Hebrew-Aramaic text has the main purpose of embedding external sources within the ‘chain of tradition’, the Latin translation tries to harmonize the conflicting interpretation with the theological presupposition that the Talmud has a textual active existence and directly addresses its Jewish fellows. Coherently with this presupposition, the Rabbis themselves are transformed into a sort of textual entity – with a main, appreciable ontological consequence: they no longer ‘teach’ but rather they ‘are read’ by their interpreters.

In light of these two idiosyncratic renderings of the text, one can conclude that the Latin translator of the Talmud has succeeded in reflecting the very textual and theological prominence that his coeval Jewish scholars – the *Tosafists* – were ascribing to it. In addition to this, it is clear that the ideological orientation of the *Extractiones de Talmud* prevents the Christian reader from attributing a positive nature to the Talmud that still rests on foolishness, heresies, and fables. The *Extractiones* eventually succeed in re-textualizing the Talmud after deconstructing its argumentative and dialogical texture. In the end, the Talmud no longer appears as an oral product that comments on an authoritative Hebrew textbook – the Mishnah – but rather a sort of ‘textualized divinity’ that is yet unable of expressing any valuable theological truth.

18. The semantics of the Hebrew term *hevel* is particularly complex. I here refer to the King James Version that renders it as ‘vanity’.

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