Thibaut de Sezanne &

The Disputation of the Jews against the Christians

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Very few texts by or about Jewish converts survive from the Middle Ages. Yet, despite considerable interest in both converts and Jewish-Christian relations, some of these works remain unedited, unpublished, untranslated, and, thus, out of reach for most medievalists, historians of Jewish-Christian relations, and students of the Middle Ages.¹ The writings of Thibaut de Sezanne, a French Dominican and Jewish convert, have remained largely ignored, generally overshadowed by the more inflammatory antics of his contemporaries Nicholas Donin and Pablo Christiani. Yet, Thibaut was a player in a significant shift in Christians’ perceptions of and relations with Jews, and the ways in which Jewish converts chose to interact with their new and old communities. His ‘Errors of the Jews, extracted from the Talmud’ was widely circulated. Among Jewish converts, his works are rivalled only by those of Petrus Alfonsi.² In an effort to begin filling this lacuna, I have embarked on a translation of a short text attributed to Thibaut, the ‘Disputation of the Jews against the Christians.’

Context and Text

In 1239, Pope Gregory IX sent a letter to the bishops, archbishops, and kings of France, England, Aragon, Navarre, Castile, Leon, and Portugal, in which he asked them to investigate books belonging to the Jews. A Jewish convert, Nicholas Donin, had informed him that Jewish books, namely the Talmud, blasphemed Christ and Christianity.³ Europe’s crowned heads generally ignored this mandate, but France’s Louis IX ordered an inquiry, which was held in June 1240. Presided over by Blanche of Castile, the queen mother, a panel of churchmen, including William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, the archbishop of Sens, the King’s Chaplain, and the

¹ Petrus Alfonsi’s Dialogus contra Iudaeos and Disciplina clericalis and Herman-Judah’s Opusculum de conversione sua have been edited and translated into English; Guillaume de Bourges’ Liber bellorum domini has been edited and translated into French; Guillaume de Flaix’s commentary on Judges has been edited, but the rest of his sermons and biblical commentaries are only available in manuscripts; Alfonso de Valledolid or Abner of Burgos’s Mostrador de justicia has been edited.
² Alfonsi’s ‘Dialogue’ survives in 70 copies, and was widely copied and imitated among Christian polemists throughout the Middle Ages. John Tolan, Petrus Alfonsi (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 12-13, 44-53, 95-131, 182-98; Amos Funkstein, “Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages,” Viator 2 (1971): 373-382. The surviving numbers of Thibaut’s text(s) are less certain.

2 (Sherwood)
Bishop of Senlis, questioned Jewish rabbis about the contents of the Talmud, most notably passages that appeared to be critical of Jesus and Christians, or to conflict with Christian theology.⁴ The Talmud was condemned, and in 1242 over forty cartloads of books were burnt.

In the aftermath of the Paris disputation, numerous letters were exchanged among the Jewish communities, the ecclesiastical authorities of France, and the papacy concerning the Talmud, its use, and its destruction. The chief disputants also left accounts of, or, more accurately, responses to this debate. Rabbi Yehiel ben Joseph who was, or at least has become in the historiography, the chief Jewish protagonist left the *Vikuah Rabbenu Yehiel mi-Pariz*, an account of his responses to the questions put to him by Nicholas Donin, Blanche of Castile, and the other Christian judges.⁵ Nicholas Donin left no such *apologia*. However, Thibaut de Sezanne with, it seems, two other converts compiled the Christian documentation against the Talmud. Extant only at the Bibliotheque national de France, MS lat. 16 558, often referred to as the *Extractiones or Extracts de Talmut*. This texts includes translated excerpts from sections of the Talmud deemed blasphemous or contrary to Christian belief, letters relating to the condemnation of the Talmud, and the statements or “confessions” made by two of the rabbis, including Rabbi Yehiel.⁶ While this may the most important and complete Christian documentation of the trial, it was not the most popular. Thibaut also compiled an ‘Excerpta de erroribus iudeorum in thalmut’ or ‘Errors of the Jews excerpted from the Talmud’, which survives in many copies. Unfortunately, the textual history of the Thibaut’s ‘Excerpts’ is confused and confusing, largely because it has yet to be undertaken in a coherent and consistent fashion. Without further research, it is impossible to determine

just many copies have survived and where they all happen to be.\(^3\) Complicating matters, Thibaut’s ‘Excerpts’ are regularly accompanied by another text that has also been attributed to him, the ‘Pharetra Fidei’ or ‘Quiver (as in quiver of arrows) of Faith,’ which was published several times in the late fifteenth-century under the name Theobaldus de Saxonia or Sexannia.\(^4\)

**Manuscript**

A copy of the ‘Excerpts’ unequivocally attributed to Thibaut survives in MS 1530, at the Universitätsbibliothek Graz. It is fourteenth-century codex, comprised of 114 folios. It is a collection of texts, including a tract on the virtues and the vices, miracles of the Virgin Mary, sermons, biblical commentaries, and the ‘Excerpta.’ In this copy, the text as it has been compiled by the scribe consists of:

- Excerpta de erroribus iudeorum in thalmut (Errors of the Jews excerpted from the Talmud)
  - fol. 57r
- Quid sit opus et per diem et noctem (What is the work through day and night)
  - fol. 57r
- De ordo in christum et christianos (On the order in Christ and the Christians)
  - fol. 58r
- De ascensione moysi cum angelis (On the ascension of Moses with the angels)
  - fol. 59r
- Conclusio premissorum et sequentium (Conclusio of the forgoing and following)
  - fol. 59v
- Quod propter mortem christi desolati sunt iudei (That the Jews were forsaken because of Christ’s death)
  - fol. 60r
- Errores sunt excepta de erroribus talmut de quodam iudeo baptizate (Errors [excerpted] from the errors of the Talmud by a certain baptized Jew)
  - fol. 60v
- De erroribus iudeorum circa opus prime creacionis et aliis cognitibus (On the errors of the Jews concerning the work of first creation, and their other contrivances)
  - fol. 61r
- Qualiter inprecatur christianis (How they are invoked by Christians)
  - fol. 62r
- Blasphemia iudeorum contra ecclesiam et sacramentum (Blasphemies of the Jews against the Church and the sacraments)
  - fol. 62v
- Opinio iudeorum de angelis (The belief of the Jews about angels)
  - fol. 62v
- Iudei dicunt omnes animas ab inicio esse creatas (The Jews say that all souls are created from the beginning)
  - fol. 63r
- Pascalis de Roma tractatus (The tractate of Paschal of Rome)
  - fol. 64r
- Disputatio iudeorum contra christianos (The disputation of the Jews against the Christians)


\(^4\) Copies were published by Arnold von Köhn in 1494, by Heinrich Quentell in 1494, by Melchiorem Lotter in 1499, Conrad Kachelofen in 1495, and Peter Attendorn in 1493.

\(4\) (Sherwood)
The text concludes with the colophon — ‘Explicit iste liber sit scriptor de crimine liber’ — suggesting that at least as far as the scribe was concerned all of these texts were of a piece. Yet, in the absence of a coherent textual history, it is difficult to discern which texts are the work of Thibaut, and which are the work of other authors or other converts. The text itself is complicated: it could be the product of a collaboration between friars and converts, and some sections are undoubtedly translations, from Hebrew to Latin, and possibly from Hebrew to the vernacular to Latin.9

The penultimate ‘Disputation of the Jews against the Christians’ is in itself a curiosity. It is a comparatively staid treatise, employing largely unoriginal arguments regarding the coming of the Messiah. However, it does contain a few notable oddities. It is, most unusually, a disputation against the Christians written in Latin, and it makes limited use of Hebrew. The latter was chiefly, although not exclusively, the provenance of Jewish converts. The former is almost unheard of after the demise of Julian the Apostate (d. 363 C.E.).10 Although it ostensibly recounts Jews arguments against Christians, this text is undeniably a Christian text. The Christian responses swamp the Jewish objections to Christianity, and in the end, the Jews are confounded by Christian argumentation, and decide to convert. Yet, as most of the Jews’ objections are consistent with arguments made within contemporary Hebrew polemics,11 this text could incorporate a translation or a summation of Jewish arguments into its Christian treatise.

Author

Thibaut of Sezanne, like many of his fellow converts, is a shadowy figure. He was a subprior, and a

11 For an overview of these arguments see: Daniel Lasker, Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977).
Dominican friar in Paris. Judging from his extant texts, he was well-versed in Hebrew and the Talmud, and a reasonably competent Latinist. We know nothing about his origins, the occasion for his conversion, his career, or his death, and can only guess that he became involved in the Talmud projects because he happened to be a Jewish convert in Paris around 1240, and even that is uncertain.

**Edition and Translation**

For this translation, I have prepared a working edition of the ‘Disputation of the Jews against the Christians,’ based on a transcription of Graz 1530. Without a genealogy of texts, or history of transmission, a definitive or critical edition of the text is, of course, an impossibility. Instead, I have produced a polished transcription rather than a finished edition. I have, contrary to standard editing practice for medieval Latin texts, retained line breaks (indicated by a single back-slash, page breaks (indicated by a double back-slash), original punctuation, and formatting, which included paraph marks but no paragraphs. Otherwise, I have chosen to adhere as much as possible to the editorial practices of the Toronto Medieval Latin Texts: I have not corrected or normalized or classicized the orthography, although I have left a note where the spelling seems to be unusually confusing or glaringly mistaken. I have italicized obvious biblical quotations (not subtle biblical allusions), and expanded abbreviations without comment. In addition, I have made note of scribal corrections, lacunae, and textual oddities in the marginalia.

A translation faces the transcription, a desideratum for most medieval and classical translation given the hurdles to producing an adequate translation. Latin is terse and concentrated in comparison with English, and medieval texts are the product of entirely different kinds of authors, intentions, languages, literary traditions and

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12 MS 1530, fol. 57r.

6 (Sherwood)
social contexts. A perfect, unequivocally correct translation is an impossibility, as is carrying over this text’s social and cultural context intact. Rather than attempting to clothe the ‘Disputation’ in modern garb and discarding the original text, I have left explanatory notes in the margin to orient the reader in medieval and polemical rhetoric. Since this text can be syntactically and semantically awkward, using the enclitic conjunction -que as a stand-alone word for example, my translation is consciously ungainly in places. It is not, of course, always awkward where the text is awkward, or peculiar in the ways that the text is peculiar. Most of the text’s oddities are unique to Latin and cannot be reproduced in a language without, for example, an infinitive with subject-accusative clause. I hope that the occasionally alien and unwieldy phrasing will provide readers with a feel for the text, without tedious and long-winded commentaries on its peculiarities. Where necessary for comprehension or coherence, I have supplied words in [ ] brackets. I have elected not to correct biblical citations in keeping with modern translations of the Bible, as editors sometimes and translator often do. I have, however, noted where the author strays the furtherest from what is familiar to modern ears, and attempted to render the quotations so that they are not wholly alien. Modern readers cannot, of course, experience biblical references as a medieval friar, steeped in the language of the liturgy and scriptures. Yet, biblical allusions and language are ingrained within western literary traditions, so wherever possible I have tried to retain these intertextual echoes.

Manuscripts consulted

Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 1530 (courtesy of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, St. John’s University, Collegeville, Minn.)

Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France, MS lat. 16 558.

17 Infinitive with the subject infinitive are commonly used for indirect discourse in Latin, and simply do not exist in English. ‘Dixit eam cessare’, which in a word-for-word translation is ‘He said her to stop’ and translates to ‘He said that she stopped.’ See Allen and Greenough’s Shorter Latin Grammar (Boston and London: Ginn and Co. Publishers, 1896), 227-28.
Select Bibliography


Disputatio iudeorum contra christianos

Ivdei dixerunt et nos exspectamus nostrum christum venturum iudeum. / et de iudeis dauid filium . qui legem nostram nullomodo despiciet / sed servabit eam et renouabit sacrificia et gentem nostram , / christianus dixit. Speratis vos quod ipse legem vestram sequatur / et statuat. ¶ Iudei dixerunt speramus credimus et afferamus[ . . . ]1 / / 2 ¶ Christianus dixit videte que dixitis qm’ futurus est christus vester iu/ deus erit et sacrificia Moysyaca renouabit, et quoniam non adhuc venturus / Audite ergo diligenter sicut dicitis . christus vester adhuc venturus / est et iudeus erit . ipse3 ac ea que legis

1. More likely, “afferamus” or “affirmamus” were meant, and some statement was to have followed.
2. There is a note about the devil and Christ at the top of the page in a different hand, which is partially illegible.
3. Corrected for ‘ipsa’ by the scribe.

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Disputation of the Jews against the Christians

The Jews said that ‘We also await our Christ, who will come, a Jew and the son of David from the Jews. He will not despise our law, but he will observe it, and he will restore the sacrifices and our nation.’

The Christian said, ‘You hope that he will follow your law and bolster it.’

The Jew said, ‘We hope, we believe, and we affirm [. . .]’

The Christian said, ‘See here, you said that your Christ will be, that he will be a Jew, and that he will restore the Mosaic sacrifices, and that he is yet to come. Thus, listen carefully, since you say that your Christ is still to come, and he will be a Jew, and he will preserve those

Whether the Messiah had come or not was one of the primary points of contention in Christian and Jewish polemics.

9 (Sherwood)
vestre sunt seruabit / Quomodo daniel dicit vsque ad christum ducem. ebdomades 70. anno/rum erunt et auferre sacrificium et et libanum et ungere sanctus sanctorum. Ostendi/te michi quis christus venit scuterio santorum. post 70 annos licet 4cc. ccccccc et / lxxi et ccccOs. annos et sublata sacrifice et libanuma templi. aut ergo / mentinum. dicentes que non venit christus sed veniet post cccc.0s annos. Dani/el rursus mentinum. Quod sacrificia legalia debet facere / christus vester. quare daniel dicit. Quod sacrificia christo veniente deberet cessare / Ecce nos sicut vos dictis nouum christi testamentum tenentes transgressores. / sumus. Et christus vester

things which belong to your law. Daniel says that until Christ the prince there will be seventy weeks of years both to obtain the sacrifices and libations, and to anoint the saint of saints. Show me which Christ comes to the saint of saints after seventy years, but four-hundred, seven-hundred and seventy-one years and four hundred years, the sacrifices and libations of the temple endured, or were they telling lies and the Messiah is not come, but will come after four-hundred years. Again, is Daniel telling lies? If your Christ should make the legal sacrifices, why does Daniel say, that “the sacrifices ought to end with the Messiah’s coming.” Behold, you say that we are transgressors, keeping the new testament of Christ. You claim that your Christ will reform and observe your law.

4. The scribe has written 70 in arabic numerals in the text, and has added ‘lxx’ in the margin.

5. Presumably, “sanctus” was meant.

6. It is probable that mentientium was intended.

7. In reference the 70 weeks of Daniel 9.22-27. Very complicated mathematics were regularly employed on this passage, in order to demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. The weeks, Christian polemicists generally argued, signified “weeks of years”. This allusion to these calculations, because it does not fully articulate the exegesis, is a bit abrupt and confusin. For commentaries on Daniel, see Dahan, Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs, 495-96.

8. Daniel 9.27.
and that we do not seek that testament. Through Jeremiah the Lord says, concerning this, “behold, the days are coming, and I shall arrange a new testament for the house of Judah, not according to the testament that I arranged for the sons of Israel when I led them out of Egypt.”

‘After this law was given to you on Mount Zion, God said through Isaiah, “the law will come out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,” and so when Christ came, he brought forth a new law, and devoured the old testament.’

The Jew said, ‘Why don’t you blush? You trust in a hanged and condemned man.’

The Christian answered, ‘What is valuable in the house of God: the man or the bronze serpent which you worshipped?’
et no/lite subuertere scripturas. sensum vestrum quoniam de fide est sermo iste., / Dicite mihi crucifixistis christum an non . . ¶ Iude responderunt utique / crucifiximus eum. christianus dicit propter quam causam. Iudei responde/ runt quoniam transgressor erat, legem soluebat et subuertit § christianus / dixit fratres audite. Moyses et prophete christum futurum in fine temporum / predicauerunt et quod vendi debebat . et duci ad mortem et ligari / et felle et acceto poterai.12 et lancea perforari. et quod celum obscu/raretur. et cum iniquis deputaretur et pedes eius et manus crucifigerentur. / clausis ad inpossible est quod verba moysi . et

Nevertheless, listen to me carefully, and do not try to subvert the scriptures and your understanding, since this discussion is about faith. Tell me, did you crucify Christ or not?’

The Jews answered, ‘Assuredly, we crucified him.’

The Christian says, ‘For what reason?’

The Jews answered, ‘He was a transgressor, and he was undoing and subverting the law.’

The Christian said, ‘Brothers, listen to me. Moses and the prophets foretold that Christ would be at the end of days,13 and he should be sold, and led to his death, and bound, and made to drink bile and vinegar, and pierced by a lance, and heaven was to be obscured, and he was to be counted among the iniquitous, and his feet and his hands crucified by nails. It is impossible that the words of Moses

12 Presumably, potari, or poterari were intended.

13 The coming of the Messiah, prophesied in the Hebrew Bible is, apparently, being elided with the second coming of Christ at the end of time as prophesied in the New Testament, which was the subject of much discussion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The reference to Jews as ‘brothers’ is highly unusually for a polemical text.

12 (Sherwood)

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and the prophets were not to be fulfilled. Do you say that these things are to be fulfilled in your Christ, or do you say that they were fulfilled in ours. If, however, these things are not to be [fulfilled] in either our Christ or yours, then the prophets are altogether lying.’

Hemmed in, the Jew answered, ‘We know that our fathers crucified your Christ, and condemned a violator of the law to a most shameful death.’

The Christian answered, ‘Now, let us employ the prophets for the common good, and let us see whether [the Messiah] should be crucified or cursed by us. Yet, tell me: What earthly man is without sin, except God alone?’

The Jews said, ‘No one is without sin, except God alone.’

The Christian says, ‘Undoubtedly, what you have asserted is true. Now, therefore, listen to what Isaiah says

13 (Sherwood)

about [Christ’s] suffering: “Like the sheep led to the slaughter, and the lamb before the butcher, he is silent.”

He is led by wicked people to the peak, “and the malicious were given for his burial, and the rich for his death, since he did not commit a sin nor was deceit found in his mouth.” Behold, how your divine prophet makes a public disgrace of you. Because [Jesus] did not sin, and you called him a sinner. You say that no one but God alone is without sin. Accordingly, the true God, who was crucified, did not sin, nor was deceit to be found in his mouth. Let us see once more: what did [the prophets] say about the subsequent passion? They vouched for a crime or a God, so that, by chance, you do not prefer killing the multitude of prophets and injuring Christ and Christians in succession.

Behold, concerning the sale, the prophets Zachariah and Jeremiah say, “And they received

Isaiah 53.7, 9-10. Shifting the active verb to the passive has, of course, altered the meaning of this passage.

Christian exegetes and polemicists regularly charged Jews with having murdered Christ and the prophets.

14 (Sherwood)
zacharias et Ieremias prophete dicunt. / Et susceperunt xxx\(^a\) argenteos precium apreciati hominis. et dederunt in / agrumfiguli.\(^{21}\) Ecce apreciarum et apreciandum est sine peccato. Vt / vos male putatis prophete christum vocant. § Iterum de obscuracione / soli. qui crucifixione facta est. et de voce qua clamauit et de terre mo/tu tunc facto. Audite prophetam Osee. dicentem sol. et luna. obscurabitur. et stelle exstrguunt lumen suum dominus cum de syon clamabit. / commouebitur que celum et terra. Ecce ipsum dominum nominat crucifixum. / ¶ Moyses iterum causam domini nostri ihesu christi, crucifixionem quam vestram / infidelitatem anunciat . dicens sic. videbitis vitam vestram / pendantem. et non credetis. vitam nominat eum qui ligno crucifixus / fuit. Noli inquam

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thirty silver pieces, the price of a worshiped man, and surrendered him in the potter’s field.”\(^{22}\) Behold, the worshipped and worshipful is without sin. So, you wickedly recognized the one whom the prophets called the Christ. Regarding the darkness of the sun, which was caused by the crucifixion, and the voice which shouted and the earthquake which happened at the time, listen to the prophet Hosea when he says, ‘the sun and the moon will be darkened, the stars will extinguish their light, since the Lord will cry out from Zion, and heaven and earth will shake.’\(^{23}\) Behold, he names the Lord himself the crucified one.

‘Again, Moses proclaims the reason for the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is your unfaithfulness, saying thus, “You will see your life hanging” on wood, “and you will not believe.”\(^{24}\) He calls the one who was crucified on

\(^{21}\)Corrected by the scribe for ‘vi’.

\(^{22}\)Matthew 27.10.

\(^{23}\)cf. Matthew 24.29; Ecclesiastes 12.2-3; Joel 2.10-11.

\(^{24}\)cf. Deuteronomy 28.66.
dicere quod de eneo serpente dicitis. sed in christo / qui vera vita est credidistis. et iterum zacharias propheta de obscura / / coe25 dicit abstabit dominus meus et omnes angeli eius cum eo. / die illa non erit lux et ad vesperum erit lux. Ab hora enim / sexa usque ad oram nonam tenebre facte sunt. Et zacharias / crucifixum dominum et deum vocat. Neque dicatis quod hec de / vestro dyablo sint. quoniam si asseritis de eo ista esse. dicta necesse / est vt credatis que vos in hominem crucifixum et condempnatum./ speratis. ¶ Cum autem iudei contra hoc dicere non possent surrexerunt / et turbati sunt, confusi sunt veriti sunt. obmutuerunt discesserunt dicen/tes adonay. adonay erramus. devicti26 summus wood life. Do not say that you are speaking27 of the bronze serpent, but you believed in Christ, who is the true life. And, again, the prophet Zachariah says about the darkness: My Lord will stand upright and all his angels with him, “on that day there will be no light, and the light will be there will be light toward evening.”28 For, “there was darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth hour.”29 And, Zachariah calls the Lord and God crucified. Nor, did you say that these things are about your devil, since if you claim that it is necessary for such things to be said about him, you await [him], so you believe in a condemned and crucified man.’

And, since the Jews could not speak against this, they rose up, and were confounded, bewildered, and apprehensive; they were silenced. They gave up, saying ‘Adonay, Adonay29 we are in error. We are overcome.26 What will we do?’

25 ‘Obscuracione’ was likely intended here.

26 This was likely a scribal error. ‘Devincti’ rather than ‘devicti’ seems to be more probable in this context.

27 It is possible that dicit, not dicitis was intended, and thus that “Do not say that he (Moses) speaks of the bronze serpent . . .” was originally intended.


29 Matthew 28.45.

29 Hebrew for “Lord, Lord.”

26 Bound (devicti) is also a possibility, but overcome (devincti) seems more likely in this context.
Thus, many of them, after faithfully relinquishing their error, were baptized believing in Christ, confessing Christ as true God and man, together with the father and the holy spirit, whose glory and power are eternal, amen. Ameres.