THE DIFFERENT HEBREW VERSIONS OF THE “TALMUD TRIAL” OF 1240 IN PARIS

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In the year 1236, Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert to Christianity, denounced the Talmud in a letter to Pope Gregory IX. Three years later the pontiff issued a number of condemnatory bulls to various rulers of Christian Europe ordering them to take possession of the Talmud and other writings and to submit them to ecclesiastic authorities for inspection. Only Louis IX of France heeded this request. In the year 1240 he appointed an ecclesiastical commission and ordered a number of leading rabbis to participate in the legal proceedings. The commission condemned the copies of the Talmud to be burned, and the decree was implemented circa 1242.¹

The historical events that led to the burning of the Talmud in 1242 in Paris and various texts in Latin and Hebrew that record the event have been analyzed by scholars at length. My purpose is to introduce into the discussion two additional Hebrew texts that are still in manuscript. These texts are related to the well-known Vikkuah (i.e., disputation) of R. Jehiel of Paris published by Grünbaum² but the precise nature of this relationship still needs to be clarified. Such a clarification will allow for a better understanding of the literary effort and

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¹ In writing this summary I have made use of Jeremy Cohen’s recapitulation of the events as found in his Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), 319–320. For the basic modern studies of the event see p. 318, n. 2.
² S. Grünbaum, Sefer Vikkuah R. Yehi‘el (Thorn, 1873). This edition was based primarily upon Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, hebr. ms. 712, which is dated approximately to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

* This essay is presented to my teacher and mentor Prof. David Berger, who introduced me to the fascinating field of Christian-Jewish relations and Christian-Jewish polemics during the High Middle Ages. His wisdom, advice, and humor have been constant sources of guidance and inspiration. May God grant him many more fruitful years of activity in pursuing his scholarly interests and communal endeavors.

I would like to thank Elisheva Baumgarten, Amram Tropper, and the editors and readers of this study for their astute and helpful comments and suggestions, which have improved both its style and content. This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant no. 1342/07).
polemical agenda of the author of the *Vikkuah*, Joseph b. Nathan Official, R. Jehiel’s student and a scholar well known for his polemical work *Yosef ha-mekanne* (= *Joseph the Zealous*). Moreover it will allow for a more nuanced discussion on the relationship between the Hebrew and Latin descriptions of the events that took place in Paris in the year 1240.

The first text was discovered in the Moscow National Library by Joseph Shatzmiller in the 1980s and was described briefly by the late Israel Ta-Shma, but has not received much attention since. The second text, actually a mere fragment, consists of just ten lines and is found in a manuscript in the Vatican Library. It was brought to my attention by Simcha Emanuel a number of years ago and has yet to be mentioned in the literature dealing with the events of 1240 in Paris. The two primary questions that we will be attempting to resolve are the following: Which of the two versions of the *Vikkuah*, the standard Grünbaum one or that of the Moscow manuscript, is more original? What is the relationship between the three Hebrew versions of the events of 1240 and the Latin one?

Before proceeding to these texts, I will begin with a review of Yitzhak Baer’s classic 1931 study where he critically analyzed the *Vikkuah*. In addition, I will note some of the more recent scholarly developments.

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7 See, however, the survey of manuscripts in Piero Capelli, “Il processo di Parigi del 1240 contro il Talmud: Verso un’edizione critica del testo ebraico,” *Materia Giudaica* 6 (2001): 85–90, esp. 89. In an earlier study on the events of 1240 I used this manuscript extensively. See Judah D. Galinsky, “Mishpat ha-Talmud bi-shenat 1240 be-Paris: *Vikkuah R. Yehiel* ve-*Sefer ha-mitzvot* shel R. Mosheh mi-Couçy,” *Shenaton ha-mishpat ha-*Ivri* 22 (2001–2003): 45–69. See, more recently, Saadiah Eisenberg, “Reading Medieval Religious Disputation: The 1240 ‘Debate’ between Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and Friar Nicholas Donin” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008), esp. 30–70. However, since Ta-Shma’s initial study no attempt has been made to clarify the relationship between the Moscow version and the standard one.