

POLEMICAL VARIETIES: RELIGIOUS DISPUTATIONS IN 13TH CENTURY SPAIN*

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In recent decades, various typologies have been suggested to classify inter-faith polemics. The first and best known was proposed by Amos Funkenstein in 1968. Funkenstein divided Christian polemical literature into four basic patterns: the older pattern of polemics—a stereotypical repetition of biblical arguments for the truth of Christianity; rationalistic polemics—attempting a deduction of the Christian dogma and a demonstration of its philosophical superiority; the attack against the Talmud, or, to be precise, against the whole corpus of post-biblical Jewish literature; and polemics based on the Talmud, in an attempt to demonstrate the veracity of Christianity on the basis of Jewish post-biblical literature¹. More recently, Jeremy Cohen formulated guidelines for a parallel typology from the Jewish standpoint, based on four categories that classify polemics on functional grounds². Funkenstein's proposal, which has gained acceptance in the scholarly world, classifies polemics according to the literature upon which the disputants rely and with which they contend—the Bible, post-biblical literature, philosophical proofs³. Polemical works written in the wake of polemical events, that is, disputations that “actually” took place are also treated in accordance with this typology. The disputation of Yehiel of Paris reflects Funkenstein's third type—anti-Talmudic polemics; whereas Nahmanides' disputation in Barcelona represents the fourth type—the attempt to prove the truth of Christianity by means of post-biblical literature. Both types reflect Christian acknowledgment of the fact that the Judaism

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¹ Amos Funkenstein, “Changes in the Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the 12th Century”, *Zion*, 33 (1968), pp. 125-144 (in Hebrew); Amos Funkenstein, “Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages”, *Viator*, 2 (1971), pp. 373-382. However, Jeremy Cohen, in *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti Judaism* (Ithaca and London, 1982), shifts the dividing line with reference to the Jews, which Funkenstein draws in the 12th century, to the 13th century, attributing the change to the polemical and missionary activity of the new mendicant orders. See also Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jews in Medieval Christianity* (Los Angeles, 1999), pp. 313-363. For a birds' eye view of polemical literature, it is still worth consulting A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Iudaeos. A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1935). See also Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish response* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1989).

² Jeremy Cohen, “Toward a Functional Classification of Jewish anti-Christian Polemic in the High Middle-Ages”, *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner, *Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien* 4 (Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 93-114.

³ For philosophical arguments, see Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977).

of the present is not the same as that of the past, and that argumentation with Jews requires familiarity with their literature, which is what directs their life in the present. Such acknowledgment required special study. It implied that a Christian disputant had to know Hebrew and Aramaic; in addition, he had to be capable of studying and understanding the ins and outs of Rabbinic literature. As a result, anti-Jewish polemics was no longer the business of educated clergymen, but of a small group of scholars who specialized in the subject. Anti-Jewish polemics thus became a profession to be studied, and those who practiced it had to acquire expertise in the field. At first, these professionals were mostly converts from Judaism, who drew on their Jewish knowledge in order to defend their new faith and attack their old one⁴. Yet, not only converts were in charge of polemical activity. In the 13th century, the Dominicans initiated schools (*Studia*) for oriental languages (Hebrew and Arabic) to help preachers and missionaries to acquire the language and understand the literature of their religious rivals. Dominicans seeking to dispute formally with Jews or Moslems in Spain required a special license from the *Studia*⁵. A great Christian scholar of Jewish literature at the time was the Spanish Dominican Raimundus Martini (Ramon Marti), author of the *opus magnum* entitled *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos* (1278)⁶. On a larger scale, beginning in the 15th century, converts were joined by the Christian Hebraists, scholars who had acquired a knowledge of Hebrew and of Jewish literature. These Hebraists of the early modern era are generally seen as a group quite distinct from the medieval polemicists, despite the links and continuity between the two groups, in respect to both subject matter and purpose⁷.

The above classification is based exclusively on the literature underlying the polemics. On this basis the adjectives “old” and “new” have been tacked on to the different types of polemics — “old” for polemical works based on the Bible, “New” for those based on the Talmud— automatically declaring those polemics not concerned with Rabbinic literature as less interesting, for the sole reason that they were less innovative. In recent years, scholarly work has concentrated mainly on anti-Talmudic polemics, although the “old” polemics have not been entirely neglected⁸.

⁴ The dual role that the apostates took upon themselves is well illustrated in the Dialogue of Petrus Alfonsi, in which the speakers are Moses, a Jew, and Peter, a Christian—Petrus’s names before and after his conversion. See Petrus Alphonsi, *Dialogus Petri cognomento Alphonsi ex Iudeo Christiani et Moyysi Iudaei*, PL 157, cols. 535-672; Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, Translated by Irvn M. Resnick (The Fathers of the Church, Medieval Continuation, vol. 8) (Washington, DC, 2006); John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers* (Gainesville, 1993).

⁵ Marc D. Johnston, “Ramon Llull and the Compulsory Evangelization of Jews and Muslims”, in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages. Studies in Honor of Robert I. Burns S.J.*, ed. Larry J. Simon (Leiden, 1995), pp. 5-37 (especially pp. 6-7); Ram Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages”, *AJS Review* 27 (2003), pp. 23-71.

⁶ On the *Pugio fidei*, see below.

⁷ On the link between polemics and Hebraism, see Ora Limor and Israel I. Yuval, “Scepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians and Doubters in Sefer ha-Nizzahon”, in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 159-180.

⁸ Ch. Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500-1248)* (Jerusalem, 1971) (in Hebrew). For the “old” polemics, see, e.g., Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*,

In what follows, I would like to look closely at two 13th-century polemical works, *The Disputation of Barcelona*, or, in its Hebrew title, *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban* (= *Disputation of Nahmanides*), and *The Disputation of Majorca*. These works stand on two different sides of the divide: The first was written by a Jew, in Hebrew, and the second, by a Christian, in Latin. Both works document disputations that actually occurred—at least, they purport to represent such events; hence, they represent both senses of the term “polemics”: a literary work presenting religious arguments, and a report of a historical or ostensibly historical event. According to Funkenstein’s now accepted typology, moreover, the two works represent different types of religious polemics, and two different branches in the genre of polemical literature: The first is a disputation “of the new type”, the second, “of the old type”. The debates described in both took place in the second half of the 13th century, one in Barcelona in 1263; the other, in Majorca in 1286. The two locations belonged broadly to the same political entity—they were part of what historians have labeled “the Aragonese-Catalan Empire”⁹; and were part of the same cultural and economic sphere. The Barcelona disputation was a major polemical event, of major cultural and political significance, which cast a shadow over the life of Spanish Jewry in the second half of the 13th century. It has become a central juncture, an organizing event in the scholarly discussion of interfaith relations in the Middle Ages. The Majorca disputation, however, belongs to the social, cultural and literary periphery, and has received scant mention in this field of research, despite the undoubted fascination it offers.

As against these differences, there is much that is similar in the two disputations. Both reflect a religious spectacle with a plot, scenery, *dramatis personae*, and an audience. *The Disputation of Barcelona* describes a great drama; so does *The Disputation of Majorca*. But while the drama of Barcelona was acted out in royal palaces, in a major center of church and government, the Majorca event was a street show, performed in the marketplace and the harbor. The comparison between the two disputations helps to round out our picture of Jewish-Christian polemics, and to expand our knowledge of interfaith discourse in the Middle Ages. The analysis also adds new parameters to scholarly discussions of religious disputations and polemical literature, thereby possibly improving attempts to classify them by expanding and refining existing classifications, as will be demonstrated below.

in *The Works of Gilbert Crispin*, ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia and G. R. Evans (London, 1986), pp. 1-61; Daniel J. Lasker, “Major Themes of the Jewish-Christian Debate: God, Humanity, Messiah”, *The Solomon Goldman Lectures*, vol. VII (Chicago, 1999), pp. 107-129; Ora Limor, “Judaism Examines Christianity: The Polemic of Nestor the Priest and Sefer Toledot Yeshu”, *Pe’amim, Studies in Oriental Jewry*, 75 (1998), pp. 109-128 (in Hebrew).

⁹ David Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium: The Catalan Kingdom of Majorca*, Cambridge 1994; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250-1500*, 2 vols., Oxford 1975-78.

Barcelona

The Barcelona disputation is one of the most famous religious dramas of the Middle Ages¹⁰. As in any great drama, it involved some fascinating characters and a stormy and tension-filled plot. It has occupied the attention of scholars, receiving new interpretations and evaluations, sometimes quite contradictory. In the last quarter of the 20th century, it was intensively discussed in at least five books, two of which were exclusively devoted to it¹¹.

The details of the plot are well known: For four days, in July 1263, in the Royal Palace and Cloister at Barcelona, Nahmanides and Paulus Christiani (Pau Cristià) argued the question of the coming of the messiah and his nature, as well as the path of true faith. Paulus Christiani was a converted Jew who had become a Dominican friar, well known in the second half of the 13th century for his missionizing and polemical activities, which began before the Barcelona event and continued long after it¹². While his personality and scholarship were no match for Nahmanides, he had the support of learned scholars of the young Dominican order, headed by Raimundus de Peñaforte (Ramon de Penyafort), a great scholar of canon law¹³. The disputation took place under the aegis of King Jaume I of Aragon (1213-1276), who hosted the encounter and was involved in the whole scenario, both in the actual disputation and in the events that followed.

However, the importance of the Barcelona disputation does not lie solely in its *dramatis personae*, but in its function as a battlefield where both sides tested new weaponry. The Christian disputants, led by Paulus Christiani, developed and refined a new strategy of religious disputation, whose basic idea was the attempt to prove the truth of Christianity on the basis of post-biblical Jewish literature. This innovation also affected the Jewish counter-arguments:

¹⁰ There are several editions of Nahmanides' account of the disputation. For this article, I used *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban in Kivei Rabbenu Moshe ben Naḥman*, ed. Chaim Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1971), 1: 302-320; There are also several English translations. The citations in this article are from Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London, 1982), pp. 102-146.

¹¹ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*; Hans Georg von Mutius, *Die Christlich-Jüdische Zwangsdisputation zu Barcelona* (Frankfurt and Bern, 1982); Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), who also provides a comprehensive bibliography.

¹² Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alphonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Paulus Christiani", in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York, 1987), pp. 20-47; J. Shatzmiller (ed.), *La deuxième controverse de Paris: Un chapitre dans la polémique entre Chrétiens et Juifs au Moyen Age*, *Collection de la Revue des études juives*, 15 (Paris 1994); Jeremy Cohen, "The Second Disputation of Paris and its Place in Thirteenth-Century Jewish-Christian Polemic", *Tarbiz*, 68 (1999), pp. 558-579 (in Hebrew). See also the reference to Paulus Christiani's previous disputation with Nahmanides at Gerona, before the more famous Barcelona debate: *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban*, p. 320; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 26-27; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Paulus Christianus: un aspect de son activité anti-juive", in *Homage à George Vajda*, eds. G. Nahon and Ch. Touati (Louvain, 1980), pp. 203-217; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 203-217; On Paulus' missionary activity in Provence, see Ram Ben-Shalom, *Facing Christian Culture: Historical Consciousness and Images of the past among the Jews of Spain and Southern France during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem 2006), pp. 213-214 (in Hebrew).

¹³ It has been argued that Raimundus Martini, author of the *Pugio Fidei*, took part; but this suggestion probably has no basis in fact. For a discussion of the question, see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 129-130, n. 2.

Nahmanides' responses to the new Christian assault became classics of the polemical genre, a kind of inventory from which later Jewish polemicists could pick suitable answers. Yitzhak Baer wrote that the Jewish scholars who took part in the great dispute at Tortosa in 1413-1414 "adhered closely to the fundamental lines" laid by Nahmanides. "On a number of points they copied his statements almost word by word"¹⁴.

Majorca

Toward the end of the 13th century, about a generation after the disputation of Barcelona, an anonymous author in Genoa, Italy, wrote an untitled work describing a religious debate that had taken place in Majorca in 1286¹⁵. Written in Latin, the 20,000-word work has come down to us in eighteen manuscripts, most from the 14th and 15th centuries, and in two early printed editions¹⁶. The hero of the work is a Genoese merchant, Inghetto Contardo by name, who conducted a series of debates with Jews in Majorca in May 1286. As this text is much less known than the *Disputation of Barcelona*, I will summarize its contents briefly. In the opening pages, the author describes how, on May 1, 1286, the saints' day of Sts. Philip and James (Philippus et Iacobus), a Jew referred to only as "Rabbi" came to the merchants in the Genoese *loggia* of Majorca and taunted them, accusing them of eating anything they pleased without considering the commandments of the Torah.¹⁷ The bewildered merchants had no ready answer, but told him that he was so bold as to address them in this way only because Inghetto Contardo was not there; he had once debated Inghetto and been defeated. While they were speaking, Inghetto came along, and the debate began in earnest. Inghetto first argued with the "Rabbi" about the interpretation of the Pentateuchal commandments concerning forbidden foods. After he won the argument, the dispute continued in the home of a Jewish "Magister" named Moses David (at the end of the work it turns out that the Magister was a physician¹⁸).

¹⁴ Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 195.

¹⁵ *Die Disputationen zu Ceuta (1179) und Mallorca (1286). Zwei antijüdische Schriften aus dem mittelalterlichen Genua*, ed. Ora Limor (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters; München, 1994). Majorca and Genoa were also central locations of the missionizing and polemical activity of Ramon Llull. While we have found no evidence of any connections between his activities and works and the polemical works written in Genoa and discussed here, both are similar aspects of Mediterranean polemics at the time. See Ora Limor, "Religious Disputations in Mediterranean Ports", *Pe'amim, Studies in Oriental Jewry*, 45 (1990), pp. 32-44 (in Hebrew); On Ramon Llull's polemical activity and his links with Genoa, see Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden, 2000), esp. pp. 115-116.

¹⁶ For the manuscripts and printed editions, see *Die Disputationen*, pp. 39-125.

¹⁷ The fact that the Jew is described as initiating the disputation should not surprise us. Jews preferred private, non-institutionalized, arguments, to official, public, disputations, which might have endangered them. Ram Ben-Shalom recently reviewed evidence of private Jewish-Christian debates, that is, non-official and non-institutionalized ones. Most of his evidence is provided by Jewish sources, and the debates he discusses are largely among scholars, many of them held in private homes. None of them, however, is a "street debate" as in Majorca. See Ram Ben Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute".

¹⁸ *Die Disputationen*, 287. It is worthwhile mentioning that in the disputation of Barcelona, Paulus questions the legitimacy of the present use of the titles "Rabbi" and "Magister": "And there is no

The subject now debated was whether Jerusalem would be rebuilt by the Jews. After Inghetto prevailed over the Jews in this act of the drama as well, the Jews decided to discontinue the debate and forbid any Jew to argue with Inghetto. Shortly afterwards, a learned Jew of Catalonia, Astruc Isaiah by name, came to Majorca. Upon hearing of Inghetto's polemical talent, he asked to hold a debate with him. The argument between Inghetto and Astruc took place in the harbor of Majorca, the subject being the reason for the many exiles of the Jews and the question of when the present exile would end. Once Inghetto answered all of Astruc's arguments, the debate reached its dramatic climax: Astruc told Inghetto that he was convinced and wished to be baptized. Thereupon, Inghetto himself taught Astruc the tenets of the Christian faith; Astruc was duly baptized in the Church of the Blessed Mary of Majorca and renamed Philip. Inghetto held several other brief debates with Jews in Majorca, with the help of the newly converted Philip; he was invariably victorious.

Inghetto Contardo was until lately an unknown name in polemical history. It is worth noting therefore, that notarial and diplomatic documents in the state archives of Genoa record the activities of a Genoese merchant of that name in the last quarter of the 13th century. The notarial documents attest to his business dealings in Mediterranean ports, and one diplomatic document shows that in 1282 he was the consul of the Genoese merchants in the city of Nîmes, and was involved in a furious dispute with Tuscan merchants in that city. Inghetto's last will and testament, drawn up in 1316, has also survived. Thus, the disputation is ascribed to a fairly well known merchant of Genoa, scion of a family of that city's mercantile nobility. Inghetto is in fact mentioned in the genealogy of the Contardo family as one of its most illustrious sons¹⁹.

We cannot tell who wrote *The Disputation of Majorca*. The reader's impression is that the author was from Genoa and that he was closely associated with the local merchants. The Genoese origin of the work is clear not only from the praises that the author heaps on his hero, and through him on Genoese merchant as such, but also from a literary analysis of the work. It turns out that the author made use of an earlier, shorter work, also devoted to a debate between a Genoese merchant and Jews. The earlier disputation took place in 1179 in the port city of Ceuta on the western coast of Morocco, and its hero was a merchant named Guglielmo Alfachino. Apart from some similarity in the literary frameworks of the two works, some of the arguments presented in the Ceuta disputation recur in Majorca, and two long passages are copied *verbatim*²⁰. The immediate conclusion from these findings is that the author of *The Disputation of Majorca* did not describe the events "as they happened", but reworked the story, edited it and even added elements from written sources. However, from the point of view of general interest

one among you today who can rightly be called "Rabbi". As for the fact that you (=Nahmanides) are called "Maestro", that is a mistake, and it is dishonest of you to use that name." Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, p. 106.

¹⁹ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 16-27.

²⁰ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 30-34.

and sophistication, the Majorca work is much superior to the Ceuta work, and there is no doubt as to the author's talent. Moreover, the fact that the author copied some passages *verbatim* from the earlier work does not detract from the historical value of the Majorca disputation. Most of the debate is not copied from the earlier work or from any other known work. The polemical motifs in the Majorca work are firmly anchored in the cultural environment in which they were supposedly presented; the historical events occasionally mentioned in the debate reinforce the authentic dimension of the text; and the correlation between the narrative framework describing the circumstances of the debate on one hand, and the content and nature of the arguments on the other, is particularly convincing²¹.

Hence, since the intriguing question regarding the historical truth of the events must remain unanswered, one should rather replace it with another question, which may lead to a more fruitful discussion, one more useful to our subject in general: What is the historical reality that emerges from the pages of *The Disputation of Majorca*, and what does the work tell us about the polemical world of its time and place? The answers to these questions are accessible from the work itself, irrespective of the historicity of one detail or another in the text, or of the correlation between the written text and the events it claims to describe.

Echoes of the Disputation of Barcelona in Majorca

The connection between the disputations of Barcelona and Majorca is not merely a question of similar genres. In one of the most fascinating passages of *The Disputation of Majorca*, the Jews refer directly to the Barcelona disputation, in a way that makes it obvious that they were fully aware of the difference between the famous public disputation and their own private debate. Inghetto claims that he will prove to his Jewish interlocutors, on the basis of the books of the Prophets, when the Messiah should have come. In order to shake his confidence, the Jews tell him of a famous disputation held shortly before, during the reign of "Jacob the Good", that is, King Jaume I of Aragon:

Said the Jews:

We are very eager to know [the time of the Messiah's coming]. But even if there were [here] together all the clerics, the Friars Preachers [= Dominicans] and the Friars Minor [= Franciscans], the scholars and wise men of the Christians, they could not do so. And you, a merchant, believe that you can? You are misleading yourself! But it is fitting that you are adept in deception and more impudent than the Friars Preachers and the Friars Minor.

²¹ Even Astruch's conversion, apart from being a literary *topos* of Christian polemical literature, may also reflect historical reality, as conversion from Judaism to Christianity wasn't a rare phenomenon at that time. See, for example, the case of the young Jew from Majorca who converted to Christianity before getting married: *Responsa of the Rashba* (Bnei Brak, 1958), vol. 1, n. 1180 (in Hebrew). It was preserved by the Ritba: *Responsa of the Ritba*, ed. Y. Kappah (Jerusalem, 1959), n. 69 (also in the Responsa Project, Bar-Ilan University); see also Johnston, "Ramon Llull", p. 8.

But we wish to tell you and to confirm that in the days of the lord Jacob the Good, king of Aragon, father of the lord Peter and grandfather of the now regnant lord Alfonso²², there were at Gerona Friars Preachers and Minor, and Friar Paul, who had been a Jew, and many other Christian experts and many doctors of the Law, and they argued with our Jews. As to the end [of that debate], ask those who were present and you shall know if the end was good for the Christians or not.

Replied Inghetto:

I have never heard a word of that. But I beg you earnestly that, if you have that debate in writing, you bring me a copy, for I am most eager to have a copy thereof.

Said the Jews:

Indeed we have it, and we have sent it to our Jews all over the world.

Inghetto said to them:

So why do you not avail yourselves of it? And why do you not argue those things that were argued against the Christians, as you say, from which it appears that the Christians were left defeated, as you say? That is something I do not believe, since Friar Paul was there.

Said the Jews:

It is not proper for us to speak with you of such obscure matters, for you will not understand them.

Replied Inghetto:

Until now I have been unable to get an answer from you concerning any of the things that I have argued against you. Therefore, if indeed the facts were as you claim, you answered well. But since you are defeated and you cannot contradict [that], if you wish to admit the truth, I do not believe anything you are saying, with all due respect! You are ashamed to be defeated and vanquished by a simple person and a merchant. For see what you might have done if there were here some person learned in Scripture!

Said the Jews:

Because of your words, the truth about what happened has not changed. Reply to us as to what we have argued with you, and then you shall know if we are defeated or vanquished²³.

The Jews thus invoke the memory of the Barcelona disputation in order to discourage Inghetto Contardo. If the apostate Paulus and the other scholars who joined him could not vanquish the Jews, how could he, a simple merchant, do so? For the Jews, the merchant's polemical pretensions merely prove that he is a fraud, even more insolent than the mendicant friars. A negative perception of merchants is mobilized here for polemical purposes, for the convention assigning negative attributes to merchants will be overturned once

²² Jaume I (1213-1276); Pedro III (1276-1285); Alfonso I (1285-1291).

²³ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 229-232.

Inghetto overcomes the Jews, and his talents as a disputant earn universal praise, from Christians and Jews.

The proof of their victory, say the Jews, may be found in the book written about the disputation, which they are circulating “all over the world”. Therefore, if Inghetto does not believe them, he may read the book and learn the truth. Despite the claim that the disputation was held in Gerona (“*apud Gironam*”), the other details that the Jews provide point to the disputation of Barcelona: The disputation was held during the reign of Jaume I; among the participants was Paul, “who was a Jew” (“*qui fuit Iudeus*”), who is none other than Paulus Christiani; at his side were Dominican and Franciscan scholars; and the disputation was recounted in a book that the Jews circulated among their communities and of which they were proud. Perhaps the root of the erroneous location of the disputation was the fact that Nahmanides lived in Gerona and wrote his book in Gerona at the request of the Bishop of that city²⁴. Moreover, Nahmanides refers in the book to a disputation that he had with Paul at Gerona, before the Barcelona affair²⁵, and this too may explain the confusion of the two cities in this polemical context.

As far as the Majorcan Jews are concerned, the outcome of that disputation was so well known that they saw no need to present it in detail, merely alluding to it rather haughtily: “As to the end [of that debate], ask those who were present...” Their answer to Inghetto’s query as to why they do not refer to arguments adduced at that disputation also stands to reason. Those who disputed at Barcelona were scholars; they discussed *midrashim*, *aggadot* and other “obscure” matters, things that are too complex for an amateur in religious polemics.

The last document known to the scholarly world dealing with the Barcelona disputation, written in 1266 (or 1267), is a letter from Pope Clement IV to the king of Aragon. The pope urges the king to punish Nahmanides for his “insolence” and in particular to act against the book about the disputation, which the Jews were sending to different countries²⁶. The Christian complaints advanced in Clement’s letter are very similar to what the Jews say in the Majorca disputation, and both sources attest to the fame achieved by the disputation of Barcelona and, in particular, the wide circulation of the book written in its wake. During the years following the disputation, Nahmanides was not attacked for the things he actually said at the event, but for what he had written in his book. Inghetto’s reply to the Jews also makes the debate at Majorca a kind of remote response to the Barcelona disputation, arguing *a fortiori*: If a simple merchant could defeat the Jews, how much more so great scholars?! The Jews’ argument is thus turned against them and their weakness in Majorca casts a pall over their alleged victory at Barcelona.

The exchange between Inghetto and the Jews concerning what happened at Barcelona combines the two polemical occasions into one: two religious

²⁴ Heinrich Denifle, “Quellen zur Disputation Paulus Christiani mit Mose Nachmani zu Barcelona 1263”, *Historisches Jahrbuch des Görres-Gesellschaft*, 8 (1887), pp. 240-243; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 97-98.

²⁵ *Vikkuah ha-Ramban*, 320; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, p. 144.

²⁶ Denifle, “Qellen”; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, p. 93.

disputations that took place in the same cultural sphere, in the same general period and at nearby locations. At the same time, the two disputations are nevertheless clearly set apart and contrasted with one another—a scholarly disputation versus an argument among ordinary people. It would therefore be of interest to consider the differences between the two disputations and to see in what respects a scholarly disputation differs from an “unlearned” one. Should the disputation at Majorca be regarded as a kind of pale reproduction of the Barcelona debate, or does it have its own characteristics, perhaps pointing to a different category of interfaith polemic or discourse? In an attempt to answer these questions, I shall compare the disputations at Barcelona and Majorca, based on the following criteria: Participants; agenda; literature discussed; arguments and methods of disputation; locations. This comparison will hopefully contribute to a new typology of inter-faith disputations, based not only on the type of literature appealed to but also on other parameters²⁷.

The Participants

At several points in the disputation, Inghetto emphasizes that he is nothing but a simple merchant. On one occasion, the Jews tell him:

You are a good preacher, for you know well how to say things and embellish them. But in God’s name, tell us if you were once a Friar Minor [Franciscan] or Preacher [Dominican] or a cleric, and whence do you know these things that you have said and that you tell us?

Replied Inghetto:

No cleric am I, nor have I been, and neither have I ever been any sort of monk. A merchant am I...²⁸

This exchange clearly contrasts the conventional disputant with the exception to the rule. Inghetto’s rhetorical talents and knowledge prompt the suggestion that he is simply a covert mendicant friar or at least a clergyman. From the 13th century on, the Dominicans and Franciscans took the lead in missionizing and polemicizing against Judaism and Islam. Jeremy Cohen, in his *The Friars and the Jews*, renders a comprehensive account of the new missionary ideology and the sophisticated methods of disputation and missionizing that the mendicants evolved to achieve their goal of converting the world to Christianity²⁹. The mendicant friars developed preaching into a real

²⁷ A certain caveat is in order here: not all the parameters are always applicable, and they are not valid for every polemical work. Many of these works are primarily literary works that afford the historian little access to the real dimensions of religious debates. We may therefore apply parameters relating to polemical content, the literature appealed to, arguments and methods of argumentation, and even such elements as tone of speech (or writing) and ferocity of the attack; however, not parameters that presume them to have been actual events, occurring at a certain time and in a certain place.

²⁸ “Bonus predicator esses, quia bene scires ponere verba et deaurare ea. Sed, per deum, dic nobis, si fuisti frater Minor vel Predicator, vel si clericus es, et unde tibi hec que nobis dixisti et dicis!” Ingetus respondit: “Nec clericus sum neque fui, nec alicuius religionis umquam fui. Ymmo mercator sum...” (*Die Disputationen*, 254).

²⁹ Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*. Cohen has recently somewhat moderated his original position, but has not changed his basic argument about the mendicants: Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*,

art, and some of them learned Arabic and Hebrew in order to read the rival faith's literature³⁰. The disputation of Barcelona was a kind of playing field in which the mendicants' new missionary tactics could be tested—hence its pivotal position in the history of interfaith polemics. Nahmanides for the Jews and the mendicant scholars for the Christians (several of them mentioned by name in Nahmanides' book) were the most able fighters that could be mobilized at the time for an interfaith debate.

The disputation at Majorca, in contrast, is between a Christian layman, a merchant, and a group of anonymous Jews. While the author describes the latter as great scholars, the names he gives are not known to us from any other source, and they were, presumably, also merchants who had business interests in common with Inghetto. The passage quoted above referring to the Barcelona event, and the question that the Jews ask Inghetto ("tell us if you were a Friar..."), may imply that the *Disputation of Majorca* aimed to reinforce the convention that learned friars were superior to simple merchants. It should therefore be pointed out from the outset that the attitude to the mendicant orders, as manifested in this text, is complex and by no means uncritical. The Jews attack the Franciscans and Dominicans twice during the debate. They have two grievances, one, that they "preach and lead people astray", the other, that they commit adultery and live evil, thieving lives³¹.

There is nothing new in the second grievance, for the Jews had always deplored what they perceived to be the double ethical standards of the clergy; compare, for example, the Jews' accusation in *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*: "even if they (the priests) do not engage in reproduction legally and publicly, they wallow in licentiousness in secret." Or, in a different chapter: "'Woe unto them that join house to house' (Isa. 5:8). You can explain this passage too as a reference to the worshipers of Jesus: These are the priests who have taken all the land for themselves, who join house to house and lay field to field until they have no place remaining... 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink' (Isa. 5:11): This verse refers to the priests..."³²

While such accusations were commonplace, deploring mendicant preaching is new, and should be understood as a direct reaction to the aggressive missionizing efforts of the mendicant orders at that time. These grievances may be added to a series of complaints voiced by Jewish writers against the mendicant orders and their missionary methods, including the practice of compelling Jews to attend their sermons³³. The enforced sermons were delivered

pp. 313-363; see also Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*. On the mendicant mission, see also Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984); C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London and New York, 1994).

³⁰ B. Bischoff, "The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages", *Speculum*, 36 (1961), pp. 209-224; J. M. Coll, "Escuelas de lenguas orientales en los siglos XIII y XIV", *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensis*, 17 (1944), pp. 115-138; 18 (1945), pp. 59-89; 19 (1946), pp. 217-240. See also note 5 above.

³¹ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 186-187; pp. 256-257.

³² David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages, A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia, 1979), ch. 42, 81. See also ch. 236 and notes on pp. 257-258, 339.

³³ Jean Régéné, *History of the Jews in Aragon, Regesta and Documents, 1213-1327*, ed. Y. Assis and A. Gruzman (Jerusalem, 1978), Index, s.v. "sermons of Christians to Jews"; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 38-48. Jews were already aware of the danger of the

in synagogues on Sabbaths, sometimes combined with violence at the hands of a Christian mob. While the rulers tried to protect the Jews, they apparently did not always succeed. Nahmanides, in his book about the disputation, writes that he refused to continue the disputation on the fourth day, because “of these men Preaching, the Friars, who cast fear on the world”³⁴. It is in this context that one should understand the Majorcan Jews’ complaint that the Franciscans and Dominicans “preach and lead people astray.” This is an expression of Jewish protest against the mendicants’ “soul-hunting” efforts at the time. Unlike the usual allegation that monks lived dissolute lives, this complaint refers to the most prominent aspect of the friars’ activity, which impinged most strongly on the Jews.

One is struck here by the weakness of the Christian defense in the face of the powerful Jewish onslaught. Inghetto’s response concerning the friars is quite flimsy, the direct and concrete attacks are answered only on a general plane. The mere fact that the author included the Jewish criticism in his work, with such a feeble, unfocused defense, raises suspicions that an opportunity was seized to criticize the mendicant orders, implying that their missionizing methods aroused objections in Christian circles as well³⁵. Thus, through the Jewish voices one also hears disapproving Christian voices criticizing the mendicant orders’ aggressive tactics. While the identity of the author of *The Disputation of Majorca* is not known, it seems obvious that it was not composed in mendicant circles. This conclusion is further reinforced by the repeated emphasis of the fact that Inghetto is a merchant, not a Franciscan or a Dominican, and the praise he earns from the Jews. Magister Moses David, admitting his defeat, contrasts the merchant with the learned clergymen:

I marvel at your wisdom, for I do not believe that if all the clerics of Majorca were (here) together they could have said, or would have known how to say, the things that you say and that you have said, and to respond to the things presented to you with allegories. Verily, I know not and I cannot contradict you³⁶.

The merchant, whose response is superior to that of all the clergymen together, is portrayed as an alternative to the learned friars. He can do everything they can do-but better. Besides the repeated emphasis on the merchant’s

mendicant activity in the debate over Maimonides’ works. See Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 52-60; Ram Ben-Shalom, “A Minority Looks at the Mendicants: Isaac Nathan the Jew and Thomas Connecte the Carmelite”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 30 (2004), pp. 213-243. On the mendicants’ sermons in general, see David L. D’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars. Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, 1985); Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (New York and Oxford, 1992).

³⁴ *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban*, 316; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 133.

³⁵ Such criticism was not rare. See R. Szittyá, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 1986); Ben Shalom, “A Minority Looks at the Mendicants”, pp. 237-238; Ram Ben-Shalom, “The Perception of Monks and Mendicants by West European Jews in the Middle Ages: A Complex Image” (forthcoming).

³⁶ *Miror de prudencia vestra, quia non credo quod si omnes clerici de Maiorica simul essent, possent neque scirent dicere ea que dixistis et dixistis, et tam allegorice responderere ad ea que vobis opposita fuerunt. Et pro firmo non scio vobis contradicere, neque possem* (*Die Disputationen*, 263).

superiority to the clergy, the reference to the Barcelona disputation is also significant. On the first, overt level, Inghetto is anxious to defend the Christians and expresses disbelief in the Jewish victory at Barcelona, pointing out that Paulus Christiani, the apostate Dominican friar, was there. But on a second, covert, perhaps even subversive level, this passage, seemingly intending to cast doubt on the Jews' success at Barcelona, reemphasizes and reconfirms the merchant's victory. In the final analysis, Inghetto the merchant succeeds where the learned convert failed.

Such a reading assumes that the polemical work is a complex one, operating on several different layers of meaning. The Jews' arguments, after all, were committed to writing by a Christian writer, who could easily have omitted them—which he obviously did not wish to do. Here, too, there is an interesting difference between the majority literature and the minority literature. While *The Disputation of Majorca* speaks in several voices, betraying hidden levels of intra-Christian discourse, *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban* is more coherent and it clearly had no intention of providing an opportunity for self-criticism of the Jews. Quite naturally, minority societies are much more sensitive to the exposure of internal dissension to foreign eyes and take greater care to present a united, uniform front and conceal cracks³⁷.

The Disputation of Majorca was written in Genoa toward the end of the 13th century, and it attests to the social and cultural environment in which it was composed and which it reflects. At that time, the Italian city had built up considerable political, economic and cultural momentum, and its leaders were merchants. The merchants' drive and self-confidence also found expression in a variety of cultural activities; not surprisingly, they also thought themselves to be good Christians, capable of defending their faith no less, and perhaps more, than friars and clergymen³⁸. Inghetto is portrayed as a kind of popular preacher. As a devout Christian educated in the city, he had been born into the controversy with the other religion. He culled his arguments from sermons he had heard from priests at church, from tales of saints, from pictures and statues, and from religious drama acted out in the city square.

It should further be added that the very suggestion that a merchant might prevail in a disputation, and that he would do so better than a clergyman, is a subversive argument, presenting a challenge to the recurrent attempts of the ecclesiastical establishment to silence laymen³⁹. Magister Moses David

³⁷ In this connection, note the account of the disputation at Tortosa in *Shevet Yehudah*, which reveals internal dissension in the Jewish camp in relation to the disputation: Shlomo ben Virga, *Sepher Shevet Yehuda*, ed. Azriel Shohat (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 94-101.

³⁸ For the mercantile world, see, e.g., Robert S. Lopez, "The Culture of the Medieval Merchant", *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 8 (1979), pp. 52-73; Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Merchants in Crisis: Genoese and Venetian Men of Affairs and the Fourteenth Century Depression* (New Haven and London, 1976); Georges Jehel, "Januensis ergo mercator, ou le petit monde d'un homme d'affaires génois, le juge Guarmerius (1210-1221)", *Journal of Medieval History*, 4 (1978), pp. 243-266; Ora Limor, "Missionary Merchants: Three Medieval Anti-Jewish Works from Genoa", *Journal of Medieval History*, 17 (1991), pp. 35-51.

³⁹ That arguments among laymen and street arguments were common may be inferred mainly from negative evidence, such as the many regulations issued by the Church against such private arguments: Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), Index, s.v. "Disputations, religious"; Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, vol. II,

tells Inghetto that he does not believe “that if all the clergymen of Majorca were here together they could have said, or would have known how to say, the things that you say and that you have said.” These words, while praising one heroic merchant, also contrast the clergy with lay believers, with obvious preference for the latter. They present an alternative to the usual professional polemicists, opening up a window of bold, innovative, religious argumentation.

The Agenda

At the start of his book describing the Barcelona dispute, Naḥmanides says to the Christians:

There is dispute between Gentiles and Jews on many points of religious practice in the two religions which are not essential for religious belief. In this honoured court I wish to dispute only on matters which are fundamental to the argument⁴⁰.

According to Naḥmanides’ testimony, once this declaration had been agreed upon by all present, the agenda of the disputation was determined. As presented in the Hebrew work, the agenda consisted of three items: (i) Has the messiah already come, as Christians believe, or is he yet to come, as Jews believe? (ii) Is the messiah divine or human? (iii) Do the Jews adhere to the true law, or do the Christians practice it?⁴¹ Throughout the four days of the disputation, the participants constantly debated the question of the messiah; the third —practical observance— was never discussed.

The order of the disputation at Majorca and its course were quite different. The debate began without any planning, provoked by the Jew referred to as “Rabbi”, who taunted the Christians for eating whatever they wished. The first topic, which is dealt with at considerable length, is thus the question of forbidden foods, which is simply part of the more general topic of practical observance —the last subject on the agenda of the Barcelona encounter, which was never actually discussed. This opening section already attests to the difference between the two disputations: one planned and structured, with a rigid, well-defined agenda; the other spontaneous, random, lacking a definite agenda. At Majorca, the debate flows freely from one topic to another:

pp. 1254-1314, ed. K. R. Stow (New York, 1993), Index, s.v. “Disputations.” For Jewish scholarly disapproval of arguments with Christians, see Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute”; Limor, “Religious Disputations in Mediterranean Ports”; Ora Limor, *Jews and Christians in Western Europe: Encounter between Cultures in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 5 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1993-1998), 3: 148-170 (in Hebrew).

⁴⁰ *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban*, 303; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 102.

⁴¹ *Loc. cit.* The Latin document formulates these topics slightly differently, adding another topic concerning the messiah: (i) The messiah has already come; (ii) the messiah must be god and man simultaneously; (iii) he suffered and died for the salvation of the human race; (iv) the practical commandments are no longer valid, having been invalidated by his coming. See Yitzhak Baer, “The Disputations of R. Yehiel of Paris and Nahmanides”, *Tarbiz*, 2 (1931), 185 (in Hebrew); Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 39-79.

forbidden foods, exile and redemption, circumcision versus baptism, Jesus as messiah, virgin birth, the Trinity, calculation of the time of the messiah's advent. The disputants switch subjects in a random, associative manner, so that some topics are even discussed twice, others three times, while some very weighty questions are entirely ignored. The clarity and conciseness characteristic of the Barcelona disputation are replaced at Majorca by an unsystematic flow of ideas. The discussion is sometimes short and incomplete, sometimes protracted, sometimes obscure.

The long discussion of forbidden foods at the beginning of the debate draws attention to a characteristic feature that crops up again later, namely, a preoccupation with visible practices, with customs and lifestyles. What sets Jews apart from Christians? Why do Jews eat different foods? Are there any cases in which Jews are permitted to eat forbidden foods? Why do Christians baptize their children but not circumcise them, and why is baptism preferable to circumcision? Why are Christian churches full of crosses and images? Do the Christians really believe in those crosses and images—are these not tantamount to idolatry? These and similar topics had no place at Barcelona; had they been discussed in the context of the subject of the commandments as a whole—which was planned but never came up—the discussion would surely have been on a purely theoretical level. While more theoretical subjects, requiring some theological understanding, are indeed debated at Majorca, such as the essence of the Trinity and the figure of the messiah, the special character of the disputation lies not in such questions but rather in the more concrete, practical aspects, of relevance to a believer's life; it is the centrality of such topics that also reveals the bourgeois mentality of the participants⁴².

Literature

According to Nahmanides, Paulus Christiani began the disputation at Barcelona with the declaration that he would “show from our Talmud that the messiah about whom the prophets testified had already come”⁴³. This very statement clearly defines the novelty of the new polemical method. The Old Testament is shared by Jews and Christians, and Christians who wanted to debate Jews on the basis of the Bible could do so without any specialized study. The Talmud, however, was “our Talmud”, as Nahmanides put it, the Jews' Talmud, inaccessible to the Christians. This explains the crucial role of converts like Paulus in anti-Talmud propaganda. In the late 13th century, however, an event occurred in Aragon which virtually revolutionized the accessibility of Jewish knowledge to Christians: The “mendicant school” gave the Christian world the huge tome entitled *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos*, that is, *The Dagger of the Faith against the Moors and the Jews*, which has already been mentioned. The author, the Spanish Dominican scholar Raimundus Martini,

⁴² For the bourgeois mentality of Spanish Jewry, see Eleazar Gutwirth, “Widows, Artisans, and the Issues of Life: Hispano-Jewish Bourgeois Ideology”, in *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews between Cultures*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Newark and London, 1998), pp. 143-173.

⁴³ *Vikkuah ha-Ramban*, 303; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 103.

was indeed an exception to the rule among contemporary Christian intellectuals as far as his subject and the breadth of his knowledge were concerned, as well as the language of his sources, which were culled from various genres of post-biblical literature. For many centuries, Christian scholars cited the *Pugio Fidei* whenever they had occasion to consult—or to attack—Jewish literature. It is surely no exaggeration to say that in the Christian world, the role that Jerome fulfilled for biblical literature, Raimundus Martini fulfilled for post-biblical literature. His monumental work, completed fifteen years after the Barcelona disputation, may be regarded as a development, improvement and exhaustive exploitation of the new principles of disputation for which the Barcelona encounter had served as an experimental battlefield⁴⁴.

The Majorca disputation provides an utterly different picture. Inghetto debates the Jews on the basis of Scripture alone; the word “Talmud” is not even mentioned. His knowledge of Bible is impressive for a layman and merchant, but less impressive in comparison with the knowledge of learned clergymen. He does not cite special or innovative interpretations, and most, though not all, of the verses he quotes were common in this kind of debate. The Jews at Barcelona had to contend with a school of professional, expert polemicists while the disputant at Majorca was an amateur. Nevertheless, amateur as he was, classifying the debate as being of the “old” type is by no means straightforward, as we shall see.

Argumentation

Although the two works discussed here describe very different polemical events, both reflect, and in a similar way, some of the basic features of the genre since its very beginnings. In each work, one side expands at considerable length, while the other side’s contribution is limited to brief arguments or questions, which are merely excuses for the writer to present his position. As a result, one gains the impression of an imbalanced and, only naturally, tendentious dialogue⁴⁵. Moreover, both works reveal Jewish self-confidence and self-awareness, characteristic of Jewish life in the Spanish world of the time. Nahmanides requests, and is granted, freedom of speech, and not infrequently takes advantage of it to attack his opponents. The Jews in Majorca take the initiative at all stages of the debate⁴⁶. Even the information we have on coercive Christian preaching in synagogues seems to suggest that Jews were not totally passive listeners and were able to answer and argue with the preachers. Moreover, royal legislation implies that forced proselytizing had little success⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ On Raimundus Martini, see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 126-169; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 115-136; Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 342-363.

⁴⁵ Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute”.

⁴⁶ In this context, it is again worth mentioning Ramon Llull, and especially his early work, *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* (1274-1276), which presents an open debate among scholars of all three monotheistic religions, which is also “open-ended”: Ramon Llull, *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis*, ed. Anthony Bonner, Nova Edició de les Obres de Ramon Llull (Palma, 1993).

⁴⁷ See Johnston, “Ramon Llull”, esp. pp. 5-15, 35-36; H. Hames, “Discourse in the Synagogue: Ramon Llull and his Dialogue with the Jews”, *Constantes y fragmentos del pensamiento luliano, Actas*

From the performative aspect, both texts bring out the representative element of the game or duel. A victory for the disputant is a victory for his entire camp, and the game has definite rules, which do not detract, however, from the elements of tension and surprise at what occurs. But alongside this primary similarity, there are discernible differences, dictated by the different framework and the character of the protagonists. The Barcelona disputation was an institutionalized debate, an official, scholarly event, in which both sides argued general principles, adducing arguments that later became standard in religious disputations. The disputation at Majorca, in contrast, was unofficial and non-scholarly. Most of the arguments were routine and familiar, though there are some unusual ones, unique to this particular work. Moreover, the Majorca debate is less violent than other disputations described in this genre, and while it obeys the rules of the genre and culminates in the Jew's conversion, the goal is accomplished in a somewhat gentle way. The Barcelona event, however, is more violent and tense, and while it was "open-ended", the course of events it describes reflects the balance of power between the majority and the minority. While Nahmanides, by virtue of his personality, was able to block the Christian victory, the Christian tension, pressure to achieve a victory and fear of defeat, are clearly expressed throughout the debate⁴⁸.

The goals of the participants in the two disputations were identical to those of participants in most medieval religious disputations. The Christians strove to prove to the Jews that the messiah promised by the prophets had already come, and that Jesus was that messiah; the Jews, for their part, tried to refute that argument, sometimes on the basis of the very same sources. Not surprisingly, therefore, the messiah was a central subject in both Barcelona and Majorca, and similar arguments and similar proofs were adduced to prove its point. Thus, for example, the Jews usually met the Christian argument that Jesus had been the messiah by saying that he had not fulfilled the conditions for the advent of the messiah. As Nahmanides argued:

The prophet says: [...]: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares...: Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4). Yet from the days of Jesus until now, the whole world has been full of violence and plundering, and the Christians are greater spillers of blood than all the rest of the peoples, and they are also practicers of adultery and incest. And how hard it would be for you, my lord King, and for your knights, if they were not to learn war any more!⁴⁹.

The Jews in Majorca offer a similar argument:

Is it not true that in the time of the messiah "they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation

del simposio sobre Ramon Llull en Trujillo, 17-20 septiembre 1994 (Tübingen, 1996), pp. 101-102, 107; Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute", esp. pp. 37-38.

⁴⁸ See David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1996), esp. chap. 7.

⁴⁹ *Vikkuah ha-Ramban*, 311; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 121.

shall not take up sword against nation"? But now, how is it that the whole world is at war, and especially your country Genoa with the Pisans, and almost all the kings and rulers of the world are fighting one another, even the Roman church! We do not believe that you know among the Christians a country or province that is at peace. How, then, has the messiah come, for you say that he has, and you make of your Christ a messiah?⁵⁰

Isaiah's prophecy was frequently raised to refute the Christian assertion that the messiah had already come; in that respect there is nothing new here.⁵¹ But when one juxtaposes Nahmanides' argument with that of the Jews in Majorca, the intriguing point is not the similarity of the argument *per se* but the similar use of the scriptural verse, that is, the polemical tactics focusing the argument on the political situation in the present, especially on the current state of the immediate partners to the debate —the king of Aragon in Barcelona, the Genoese in Majorca. Nahmanides directly addresses the king, who was known for his prowess in battle, while the Jews in Majorca reminded Inghetto of his city's frequent wars. The facts, say the Jews in both places, are at odds with the Christian argument. The Christian messiah has not met the crucial test —the test of reality.

Indeed, these and similar arguments belong to the classical inventory of polemical literature and had surely been heard in many places in Jewish-Christian confrontations. Yet, the critical place that the Barcelona disputation acquired in the history of Jewish-Christian polemics may imply that similar arguments voiced by Jews in subsequent disputations, even if they repeated old arguments, echo that event. The old arguments were reformulated in the Barcelona debate, which later generations saw as a critical point in polemical history or, at least, as a kind of laboratory whose results transformed the subject.

Both disputations make use of verses from the book of Daniel (12: 11-12): "From the time the regular offering is abolished, and an appalling abomination is set up —it will be a thousand two hundred and ninety days..." On the third day of the Barcelona encounter, the disputants debated the time of the messiah's coming. As against the conventional Christian reckoning cited by Paulus Christiani on the basis of Daniel chapter 9, in order to prove that Jesus came at the precise moment predicted by the prophet, Nahmanides cites the above verse from chapter 12, from which he concludes that the messiah will come 1.290 years after the destruction of the Temple, that is, in 1358.⁵² Christiani rejects this calculation, arguing that Daniel was speaking in terms of days, not years.

At Majorca, the discussion of these verses from Daniel and the calculations based on them become the central point of the debate. The subject comes up for discussion three times, each time at some length⁵³. The first time, once the Jews' arguments are refuted, they deny that Daniel was a prophet,

⁵⁰ *Die Disputationen*, 198.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*, 17, 21; see also Meir b. Shimshon of Narbonne, *Milhemet miṣvah*, Ms. Parma 2749, fol. 104r.

⁵² *Vikkuah ha-Ramban*, pp. 312-314; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, p. 127.

⁵³ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 236-241; 268-274; 287-288.

thereby enraging Inghetto. On the second occasion, during the argument in the harbor, these verses from Daniel become the crucial proof-text, so much so that Astruc Isaiah decides to convert. He entreats Inghetto to tell him when the Jews' protracted exile will come to an end and to explain Daniel's reference to "a thousand two hundred and ninety days." He is thus expressing the expectations of redemption entertained by the Jews at the time, centering on the year 1290, four years after the disputation⁵⁴. Astruc is finally convinced by Inghetto's argument that the Jews' expectations are pointless, since the messiah has already come, and he therefore decides to convert to Christianity. Later, Magister Moses David also begs Inghetto to explain the verses to him, and he too seems to be won over, though he does not immediately draw the expected conclusion.

The central topic of the disputation at Majorca is the end of exile, and the possibility that Jerusalem would be rebuilt by the Jews. Inghetto tells the Jews, "If you can show me that Jerusalem must be built by the Jews I shall become a Jew and circumcise myself"⁵⁵. From then on, the debate revolves around that point, in the argument with both Magister Moses David and Astruc Isaiah. One can hardly exaggerate the power of the exile argument and its relevance for Inghetto's contemporaries. As far as the Christians were concerned, it was conclusive proof of the Jews' error⁵⁶. The emphasis placed on this subject in the disputation at Majorca is quite in line with the polemical thrust of the times. In this respect, it is very similar to another famous work, written a few decades later, the *Epistle of Rabbi Samuel of Morocco*⁵⁷. As far as the literature on which it was based is concerned, the *Epistle*, like the Majorca debate, reflects an "old-style" disputation. At the same time, it is extraordinarily powerful relative to the genre of polemical literature, which probably explains why the work was copied and recopied hundreds of times, translated into many languages, and is found in so many libraries in the Christian world⁵⁸. The Majorca debate did not have such an illustrious career, though it too was repeatedly copied, as indicated by the eighteen surviving manuscripts, the two early printed editions, and the translation into Italian⁵⁹. This success was due, among other things, to the sense of urgency aroused by the insistent discussion of the question of exile and the rebuilding of Jewish Jerusalem. The insistence on this issue by the Christian disputant indicates that the merchant, thanks to his frequent contacts with Jews, had pinpointed a particularly painful motif of contemporary Jewish life, realizing the intense anguish of life in exile, and

⁵⁴ Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculations in Israel* (Boston, 1959), pp. 81-101.

⁵⁵ "Si tu poteris michi monstrare, quod Ierusalem debeat edificari per Iudeos, ego Iudeus efficiar et circumcidar" (*Die Disputationen*, 179). See also *ibid.*, pp. 180, 257, 265, 268, 270.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., *Nizzahon Vetus*, chap. 242 and notes.

⁵⁷ Rabbi Samuel Marochianus, *De adventu messiae praeterito liber*, PL 149, cols. 333-368; Ora Limor, "The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel of Morocco: A Best-Seller in the World of Polemics", *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (Tübingen, 1996), pp. 177-194. In eleven of the eighteen codices containing *The Disputation of Majorca*, it is bound together with Rabbi Samuel's Epistle; see *Die Disputationen*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁸ Limor, "The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel of Morocco", pp. 177-183.

⁵⁹ *Die Disputationen*, 12. For the number of manuscripts as a measure of a work's "success", see Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'occident médiéval* (Paris, 1980).

the unsatisfied yearning for redemption. In this respect his argument faithfully reflects the mentality and atmosphere of his times⁶⁰.

Besides the arguments used, the methods of persuasion used at Majorca also show the influence of Barcelona. When Paulus Christiani quotes a legend purporting to show that the sages of the Talmud believed that the messiah had already been born, Nahmanides retorts that he does not believe in the legend. On the next day, he begins with a declaration of principle, explaining to his audience the different categories of Jewish literature. Legends, he argues, are not binding; some believe them, while others do not. The Christian side claims that this argument is evasive and, moreover blasphemous, an attempt to challenge the authority of canonical literature. Paulus Christiani says, "See, how he denies the writings of the Jews!"⁶¹. The Latin document summarizing the disputation also presents Nahmanides' statement as an evasion, since he had been unable to explain the legends⁶². At Majorca, when the Jews are unable to refute the Christological interpretation of Daniel 9, they declare that Daniel was not a prophet, that is, they deny the validity of the proof-text⁶³. As at Barcelona, here too the Jews' denial of Daniel arouses the ire of the Christian disputant, who interprets their argument as a forced, unfair argument, a kind of desperate attempt to launch a counter-attack when the battle has clearly been lost.

The most noteworthy feature in the Barcelona disputation is the originality of the approach, both in the questions and in the answers; whereas the outstanding feature of the Majorca debate is its assemblage of many old, familiar arguments, reworked so as to be readily comprehensible and effective. Not only is the Talmud absent at Majorca, even the biblical proofs are phrased in a popular style, though the presentation is nevertheless lively and indicative of rhetorical talent. Nevertheless, alongside the popularization of familiar arguments, the Majorca debate also presents some original, even unusual, arguments, rarely encountered in other known disputations. The most striking example is Inghetto's argument about the role of crosses and images in churches. The Jews voice the usual argument that the Christians are idolaters, since they venerate images and statues in their churches⁶⁴. Inghetto first gives the usual answer, explaining the educational purpose of images, but then goes on to say something that seemingly disputes their very sanctity.

The Jews began and said to Inghetto:

I wonder at you Christians, that you make idols and statues (*ydola et symulacra*) that neither feel nor hear, and you venerate them and work against God...

⁶⁰ For attempts to deal with the length of the exile in Jewish literature, see, e.g., the work *Mahazik Emunah* by Mordechai ben Joseph of Avignon, written in 1275 (Ms. Vatican 271). The relevant passage was excerpted in Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 197-198. See also Chazan's discussion *ibid.*, pp. 103-114, and his discussion of the problem of the exile, *ibid.*, pp. 61-64, 153-156.

⁶¹ *Vikkuaḥ ha-Ramban*, 306; Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 110.

⁶² Baer, "The Disputations", 187; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 142-157.

⁶³ *Die Disputationen*, 241. It should be noted however that in the Jewish Bible, Daniel belongs to the Hagiographa (*Ketuvim*) and not to the Prophets, and this could be the source of the Jewish claim.

⁶⁴ On the impression that icons and images made on a Jewish observer, see *Hermannus quondam Iudaeus opusculum de conversione sua*, ed. Gerlinde Niemeyer (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters; Weimar 1963), 75, pp. 78-79.

Replied Inghetto:

I do not see nor am I acquainted with any Christian who makes idols or statues or venerates them.

Said the Jew:

How can you say so? Are not your churches all full of idols and statues, and you make candles for them and venerate them?

Replied Inghetto:

We do not venerate idols and images (*ymagines*), but we venerate the God of heaven, the Father, and His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ... And these images that you see in churches are not venerated by us, but our Mother the Holy Church has placed them there as mirrors, and when the eyes of the flesh see them, the eyes of the heart also see them and recollect Christ's passion that he suffered for our salvation and for the redemption of mankind...

And indeed I say to you that if I had a wooden cross or image, and I had nothing with which to heat water for my Christian brother or my Jewish friend were they to fall sick, I would put the cross and the image in the fire and burn them [...]⁶⁵.

Inghetto's argument here is bold, even unorthodox and quite contrary to the usual attitude to the cross in contemporary Christian literature; they in fact sound somewhat heretical. Since the overall thrust of the debate betrays no connection whatever with heretical circles, they should be understood as a rather unusual means of persuasion, intended to bridge the gap between Inghetto and his interlocutors, obscuring the disagreement between them. As a shrewd merchant and a skilled negotiator, Inghetto knows that a good transaction sometimes cannot be concluded unless some steps are taken toward the opposing party. He applies this principle to the debate as well. While his talk of burning crosses is not the only unconventional element in his arguments at Majorca, it is certainly the boldest and most extreme, indicating just how far a Christian disputant was willing to go toward his opponents in order to convince them. Moreover, like Nahmanides' avowed disbelief in legend, Inghetto's attitude to crosses and images is an example of statements made "outwardly" as a precaution against attack or a persuasive stratagem, which ultimately become an "inwardly" acceptable position.

Locale

The two polemical texts, with which we are concerned, unlike protocols or official documents, and unlike most polemical works, place the arguments and proofs cited within a narrative framework, which takes place in a definite place, at a definite time, against a colorful background. It is the place, time and background that give these polemical stories their reliability, enhance their "reality" and their drama.

⁶⁵ "Sed bene dico vobis, quod si haberem crucem seu ymaginem aliquam ligneam, et non haberem de quo possem calefacere aquam fratri meo Christiano seu aliquo amico meo ludeo si infirmarentur, ego ipsam crucem et ymaginem in ignem ponerem et comburerem." (*Die Disputationen*, pp. 289-291).

The Barcelona disputation took place during four days in July 1263, in the royal palace and the cloister. On the Sabbath following the disputation, the king and two important Christian scholars —Paulus Christiani and Raimundus de Penyaforte— came to preach to the Jews in their synagogue. Nahmanides remained in Barcelona in order to attend and to give “a worthy and fitting reply”⁶⁶. Palace, Cloister and Synagogue, these are the locations of the Barcelona events.

The debate at Majorca lasted a few days in May 1286 in Majorca. Since this debate took place by chance, its locales were also random. It begins in the Genoese *loggia* of Majorca, continuing in the home of the Magister Moses David. The argument with Astruc Isaiah takes place in Majorca harbor, with all the other merchants sitting around, listening to Inghetto’s arguments and cheering him on⁶⁷. Inghetto has another argument with the Magister on the road, which continues in a spice shop in the city after the Jew complains that it is not good to talk on the road⁶⁸, and a last argument is held in Inghetto’s own home, at the Jew’s instigation⁶⁹. We are also told incidentally of other arguments that Inghetto conducted, one on a sea voyage to Porto Pi on the Majorca coast, others in Provence and in Alexandria⁷⁰. Thus, some of these debates took place in private spaces (private homes), others in public spaces (market, harbor), but none were in “official” space. The locale of the debate also affects the content of the arguments and the mutual relations among the participants. The Majorca exchange begins in an almost friendly atmosphere, which was surely characteristic of many street debates and private arguments⁷¹. Moreover, *The Disputation of Majorca* does not describe the Jewish disputants as hateful demons, but at most as rather confused, helpless, individuals. Of course, they earn considerable sympathy once they decide to convert. Thus, the palace disputation at Barcelona and the market debate in Majorca provide us with a window to the medieval world and the Jewish-Christian relationships in that world. Each window overlooks a different part of the landscape, and these different landscapes overlap only partly.

Event and Text

Nahmanides’ work is autobiographical, written in the first person, with the author himself in the principal role. The author of *The Disputation of Majorca*, in contrast, is concealed, anonymous; his voice is heard very seldom. His unknown identity makes it difficult to categorize his work. While the Latin language and religious topic point to a cleric, the praises heaped on the merchant are more suggestive of the educated merchants in the city. The

⁶⁶ Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, pp. 142-146; Chazan, *Barcelona and beyond*, pp. 117-118.

⁶⁷ *Die Disputationen*, p. 268.

⁶⁸ *Die Disputationen*, p. 285, 287.

⁶⁹ *Die Disputationen*, p. 289.

⁷⁰ *Die Disputationen*, p. 235, 255; Limor, “Religious Disputations in Mediterranean Ports”.

⁷¹ For the atmosphere in private arguments, see Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute”, especially in relation to the arguments of Joseph ibn Kaspi and Isaac Arama.

author was very probably a resident of Genoa, perhaps even a member of the Contardo family, eager to sing his family's praises⁷².

The written evidence of both disputations is an edited, refined account, and it is doubtful how much they really reflect events "as they happened." In both, the language of the literary versions is not the language in which the disputations themselves were held—both were presumably in Catalan, the local vernacular. The transition to a written language—Hebrew in Barcelona, Latin in Majorca—surely caused some changes of wording, tone, and perhaps also of content⁷³. As far as the case of Majorca is concerned, the written version is presumably couched in more learned language, with more plentiful quotations, all verses being checked and adapted to the Vulgate. On the other hand, the text probably lost much of the spontaneity and vitality of the oral debate. A merchant, holding forth in the presence of an audience of his peers, must have exercised all his rhetorical skill in order to get their attention and make his intentions clear, through his tone of speech, use of humor and wit, repetition and explanation, manipulation of his voice, and body language. Such elements are largely lost when a debate is committed to writing⁷⁴. Thus, the Latin text, while indeed documenting the event and preserving it for future generations, also reworks and transforms it, and to an extent detracts from its uniqueness⁷⁵.

The transition from one language to another also changes the identity of those to whom the debate is addressed. A debate held in harbors and markets was meant for the ears of merchants and longshoremen, chance listeners, both men and women. The written text was accessible only to educated persons—mainly men—including clergymen and more educated townspeople.

The Latin language of the text makes it difficult to define the Majorca debate; but the difficulty is consistent with the elusive nature of popular culture⁷⁶. The transition from a merchant speaking in the Majorca harbor to a written work is an example of the barriers, or perhaps veils, behind which popular culture hides from attempts to study it. The mobile, mixed nature of popular culture is well demonstrated in this disputation, which displays a good deal of scholarship alongside a measure of deviation. Comparison of the Majorca debate with the Barcelona event also provides a clear instance of mutual interplay, of the flow of influence "from above" to "below" and vice

⁷² A possible implication of the notarial documentation is that Inghetto had a brother serving in the Church (*Die Disputationen*, 24), and he might have had other relatives who chose an ecclesiastical career.

⁷³ Chava Turniansky has pointed out a similar phenomenon in the Jewish world of the early modern era: "Rabbis, as well as merchants, spoke in Yiddish of matters about which they corresponded in the holy tongue [Hebrew]". Even halakhic discussions were held in Yiddish, but the conclusions were written down in Hebrew: Chava Turniansky, "Oral and Written Sermons as Mediating between Canonical Culture and the Public", in *Studies in the History of Popular Culture*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar (Jerusalem, 1996), 185 (in Hebrew). In this connection, see also Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800. An Anthology* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 39.

⁷⁴ Turniansky, "Oral and Written Sermons", pp. 186-187.

⁷⁵ It should nevertheless be remembered that language switches were quite common in the mercantile world of the Middle Ages. Merchants negotiated in the vernacular, but their contracts and agreements were written in Latin.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Z. Kedar (ed.), *Studies in the History of Popular Culture*, Introduction, pp. 7-11.

versa. Ideas, arguments, and interpretations were transmitted from the scholarly sector to other social levels mainly in sermons, and they were rephrased in popular language, universally accessible and effective. The finished work, on the other hand, despite its bourgeois, non-scholarly origin, was copied and recopied, finding its way into monastic libraries, where it was sometimes bound together with more learned works⁷⁷.

The manuscripts and printed editions of *The Disputation of Majorca* are evidence of the interest it once aroused. Perhaps it evaded scholarly study because of its classification as a disputation of the “old type”, but also because of its intermediate position. It does not fall into conventional literary categories. It cannot be defined as a learned or innovative theological work, but neither is it truly popular literature; it is something between the two, containing elements from both ends of the spectrum⁷⁸.

Center and Periphery

One can hardly imagine Paulus Christiani or the other Christian participants in the Barcelona disputation arguing that danger to life—and to Jewish life, at that—justified burning crosses. Nor can one imagine them suggesting to Nahmanides that he join them in prayer, as Inghetto suggests to the Jews in Majorca⁷⁹. In addition to the knowledge they exhibit, the Christian scholars in Barcelona never fell into lapses like those of Inghetto Contardo, if they were indeed lapses.

The relationship between the two disputations is largely one of center and periphery⁸⁰. The disputation at Barcelona was an official, public, central, and scholarly event. The debate at Majorca was a private, spontaneous affair, which took place at the periphery. At the same time, it is important to reiterate that, even if we do not find innovative theology or scholarship in the Majorca debate, it does present some original argumentation, a fresh approach, and, in particular, it is sensitive to contemporary moods, to the troubling issues of the time, and faithfully represents them. While it does not appeal to the Talmud, it does contain lively rhetoric and persuasive arguments, and its immediate, direct message is that passion is more important than scholarship in matters of faith. That such arguments took place wherever Jews, Christians, and Muslims met to do business needs no proof⁸¹. This article was written on the assumption that the existing documentation about non-institutional disputations like the debate at Majorca and the earlier disputation at Ceuta are merely the tip of an iceberg, representatives of a broader phenomenon that has generally

⁷⁷ Cf. the contents of the codices in which *The Disputation of Majorca* is bound: *Die Disputationen*, pp. 39-106.

⁷⁸ The aforementioned Epistle of Samuel of Morocco, which at first aroused tremendous interest but then disappeared from the public eye, should also be included in this same undefined category.

⁷⁹ *Die Disputationen*, pp. 232-233; 277.

⁸⁰ Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery. Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago and London, 1975).

⁸¹ In this connection one should recall Boccaccio's story in the *Decameron* (First Day, Second Novel), about the argument between the merchants Jehannot de Chevigny and Abraham the Jew. See Limor, *Jews and Christians in Western Europe*, vol. 3, pp. 148-170.

escaped documentation. These works have given us rare, rich evidence of episodes in the life of a medieval Mediterranean city which presumably were not uncommon—but which, for that very reason, were not put into writing. *The Disputation of Majorca*, besides showing us the kind of arguments put forward in spontaneous debates of its sort, also represents the unique complexity of polemical works, which, while attacking members of the rival faith, also present a mirror to members of their own faith, showing them a reflection which is not necessarily pleasant or complimentary.

If the learned disputations were the influential, one might say canonical, ones, the private-spontaneous ones were more common, and they tell us something of interfaith encounters in a social environment that is generally inaccessible to us. The contribution of *The Disputation of Majorca* is therefore a dual one: it throws new light on the earlier *Disputation of Barcelona*, confirming its position at the summit of the classical Jewish-Christian dialogue literature; and it shows us interfaith discourse of a hitherto unknown kind, a new way of arguing about religion, and a new way for us ourselves, as modern scholars, to view it.

