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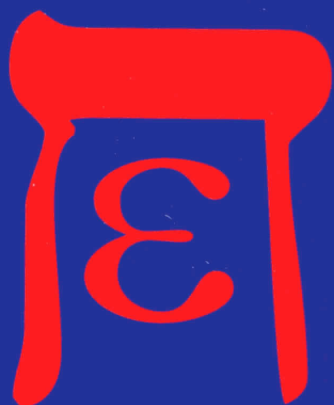
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Jewish-Christian/Christian-Jewish Polemics in the Middle Ages

*Polemiche giudaico-cristiane e cristiano-giudaiche in epoca
medievale*

Piero Capelli - Ursula Ragacs (eds.)

MORCELLIANA



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EDITING THIRTEENTH-CENTURY POLEMICAL TEXTS
*Questions of Method and the Status Quaestionis
in Three Polemical Works*

PIERO CAPELLI, *Ca' Foscari University of Venice*

Having been trained as a classical scholar, I was struck already as an undergraduate by the dearth of properly critical editions of Jewish literature when compared to the (in some cases even excessive) abundance of editions of Greek and Latin classical or post-classical authors. I was all the more surprised when, at a later stage in my career, I shifted from research on the late antique Jewish pseudepigrapha to medieval Hebrew literature, and specifically to Jewish anti-Christian polemics and Christian polemics against the Talmud (especially by converts from Judaism). I then realized the true extent of our lack of critical editions, even though some of these texts are widely read, quoted, translated and used as historical sources.

In this essay I would like to survey three well-known texts in these genres to show, first, that no matter how important they are, our knowledge about them rests on extremely old *and actually* outdated editions, which in some cases had been methodologically superseded even at the time of their publication. Then I will try to show how we would benefit from new work on their textual history and new critical editions.

The working definition of “critical edition” that I will use is this: an edition that takes into account all the extant witnesses of the text, both direct and indirect, and attempts to reconstruct the relationship among them, to account for their genealogy (and even traditional stemmatology, when indicative errors can be found in the text’s transmission), and to reconstruct the text in a justified way, even if the reconstruction is different from any of the forms in which the text is now attested.

This method is not universally accepted in the field of medieval Hebrew literature today. In part, the distrust of this method comes from the correct recognition that texts were often transmitted either orally or very freely, with little attempt to produce a faithful copy of the original. But we ought not to forget that textual historians in medieval European philology (starting from Michele Barbi’s and Gianfranco Contini’s work on medieval Italian authors in the 1930s and 1970s respectively) have long accepted that “what is reconstructed is truer than what is attested.”¹ In other words, publishing a text

¹ G. Contini, s.v. “Filologia,” in *Enciclopedia del Novecento* (1977) (I quote from the online edition, <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filologia_\(Enciclopedia-del-Novecento\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filologia_(Enciclopedia-del-Novecento))>). Cp. M. Barbi, “Introduction” (1938) in Id., *La nuova filologia e l’edizione dei nostri scrittori*

simply by reproducing its oldest or purportedly “best” witness means putting forward just one of several working hypotheses – certainly the most conservative of all, and not even necessarily the most convincing.

* * *

The first case I will discuss is one of the classics of medieval Hebrew literature: Nahmanides’ *Wikkuaḥ*, the account of his public disputation against the convert Pablo Christiani in Barcelona in 1263. Everything I am going to say is based on the work of Ursula Ragacs, who is working on a new critical edition of the *Wikkuaḥ* and has published some of the preliminary results of her research. I want to thank her publicly for sharing with me her results, in many cases before they were published.²

The most widespread and translated edition of the *Wikkuaḥ* is still the one by Chaim Dov Chavel (1963).³ It reproduces Moritz Steinschneider’s edition of the text from 1860.⁴

The criteria of Steinschneider’s edition are the following:

1. The printed text is taken from the *Milḥemet ḥovah*, a collection of anti-Christian literature published in Constantinople in 1710. Steinschneider also refers to the first printed edition of the *Wikkuaḥ*, by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in 1681.⁵ Steinschneider registers some variant readings from this first printed edition, but it is completely unclear why only certain ones among dozens of others.
2. Steinschneider’s edition uses two manuscripts of the *Wikkuaḥ*, one in Leiden, the other from the collection of Leon Vita Saraval; the Saraval MS can no longer be traced.
3. Steinschneider put the parts of the *Milḥemet ḥovah* text that were missing in both the Leiden and Saraval MS in square brackets without distinguishing the two manuscripts. Conversely, whatever the Leiden and Saraval MSS added to the *Milḥemet ḥovah* he put between round brackets, once again without distinguishing the two manuscripts.

da Dante al Manzoni (Firenze: Sansoni, 1977³), p. XXIV: “we need not fear the subjective, which is not necessarily the arbitrary”.

² U. Ragacs, “Edieren oder nicht Edieren...? Überlegungen zu einer Neuedition des hebräischen Berichtes über die Disputation von Barcelona 1263,” *Judaica* 62, no. 2 (2006), pp. 157-170; Ead., “Edieren oder nicht Edieren...? Überlegungen zu einer Neuedition des hebräischen Berichtes über die Disputation von Barcelona 1263. Teil 2: Die Handschriften,” *Judaica* 65, no. 3 (2009), pp. 239-258; Ead., “Geordnete Verhältnisse. Zur vermuteten Interdependenz der hebräischen Manuskripte der Disputation von Barcelona 1263,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 36 (2010), pp. 85-94; Ead., “Lost and Found: One of Steinschneider’s Manuscripts of Nachmanides’ *Wikkuaḥ*,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 37 (2011/2012), pp. 137-145.

³ Ch.D. Chavel (ed.), *Kitve Rabbenu Mošeh ben Naḥman* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963), I, pp. 301-320.

⁴ M. Steinschneider (ed.), *Sefer wikkuaḥ ha-RaMBaN* (Berlin: Asher, 1860).

⁵ J.Ch. Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Altdorfi Noricorum: Schonnerstädt, 1681).

Some other variants were simply recorded in the footnotes with the abbreviations *lamed* for Leiden and *samekh* for Saraval.

In other words: Steinschneider's edition is flawed not only from the point of view of 21st-century textual scholarship but from the point of view of 19th-century textual scholarship itself. The lack of a proper critical apparatus or distinction between the manuscripts means it is impossible to reconstruct the text of each witness for each variant. Second, Steinschneider makes no attempt to establish the relationship among the textual witnesses. His edition is eclectic (which to some extent is good), but it is also unmethodical. The only way in which it conforms to modern scholarly standards is in Steinschneider's interventions into his base-text (the *Milḥemet ḥovah*) with variant readings (between brackets) taken from the other manuscripts. But Steinschneider never suggests conjectural emendations of his own. Doing so is one of the most important (if difficult) tasks for the philologist, and one that Wagenseil had already dared to undertake (quite brilliantly in some cases, as in the *Wikkuah Rabbenu Yeḥi'el*). The shortcomings of Steinschneider's edition are even more surprising given that it was published in Berlin in 1860, in the same city, the very same period, and the same positivistic intellectual climate in which Karl Lachmann was publishing his methodologically seminal editions of the *Nibelungenlied* (1840), the New Testament (1842-1850²), and Lucretius (1850, 1860³). Steinschneider's work thus challenged the very idea and purpose of critical editions according to the standards of mid-19th century German philology. There was still a long way to go for the new emancipated Jewish scholars to fill the gap between the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and German positivistic, Humboldtian academic ideals.

That is the first problem with the extant edition of the Barcelona account. The second is that Steinschneider's edition is based in the first place on only three witnesses (or four, if we include Wagenseil). Ursula Ragacs has located no fewer than twenty-one witnesses, including one manuscript from St. Petersburg which she has quite convincingly demonstrated to be a copy from the lost Saraval MS.⁶

Ragacs has attempted a preliminary classification of these twenty-one manuscripts based on both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Here is an example of Ragacs' method and its implications. In § 58 of Steinschneider-Chavel's edition,⁷ Pablo Christiani explains the *mašiah nagid* of the prophecy in *Daniel* 9:25 Christologically as follows: *hu' mašiah hu' nagid we-hu' Yešu*. This is the text found in the *Milḥemet ḥovah*, that is, an early 18th-century textual witness, though it certainly relied on some earlier manuscript.⁸ A group of manuscripts, all of Italian or Sephardic provenance, have a different text: they read *hu' duqa* instead of *hu' nagid*: *duqa* (*duca*) is an Italian vernacular

⁶ It is relevant that, in order to demonstrate this point, Ragacs resorted to such a keenly Lachmannian and neo-Lachmannian principle (nowadays too often neglected) as the presence in both manuscripts of specific, non trivial errors ("Lost and Found," p. 144, § 8).

⁷ Steinschneider p. 14, Chavel § 58.

⁸ It apparently represents a late *Mischtext* (Ragacs, "Geordnete Verhältnisse," pp. 93-94).

translation of the Biblical term *nagid* – not an intrinsically difficult term (it means “duke” but mainly “leader,” from Lat. *duco*, and it is the term Dante uses to describe Vergil); but certainly the term would be hard to understand for a Jewish scribe who didn’t know Romance languages. It therefore constitutes a *lectio difficilior* undoubtedly preferable to Steinschneider’s reading *nagid*. It generated what Gianfranco Contini defines as “diffraction,” a proliferation of more trivial variants, such as one reading *ben David*, one theologically charged reading *ruah*, or even the variant *davqa*’ (which is simply a fuller spelling for *duqa*).⁹ Yet another manuscript reads *duq*, which Ragacs explains is medieval Catalan for the Italian *duca*, and is even closer to the translation of *nagid* in the Vulgate: *dux*. True, *duq* is a single reading, but it is also attested in the oldest extant manuscript, Parma 2749, originally from Sefarad and copied around 1300. We thus have a confluence of intrinsic elements (a *lectio difficilior* which also agrees with Christiani’s known proclivity to translate key terms from Hebrew to Latin or Catalan) and extrinsic elements (attestation in the oldest extant witness) that enable us to discard the *hu’ nagid* that we find in Steinschneider’s text as a late trivialization and to reconstruct what was in all likelihood the original reading: *duq*. It may not alter the meaning that much, but it is clear that Steinschneider’s text is just plain wrong if one wants to know what was in Nahmanides’s text.

Last but not least, Chavel’s edition is a mere reprint of Steinschneider’s text with all its parentheses but without the footnotes. It therefore represents a further step back from an already methodologically poor work. The only reason for us to go on studying the *Wikkuaḥ ha-RaMBaḥ* on Steinschneider-Chavel’s edition is that the new one by Ursula Ragacs is still in the making.

* * *

The second case I will discuss is that of the *Wikkuaḥ Rabbenu Yeḥi’el*, the Hebrew account of the Talmud trial held in Paris in 1240. Here, too, for almost 150 years, scholars have been relying on an edition that was inadequate from the moment it was published. In the introduction to his edition of 1873, Samuel Grünbaum claimed to have personally transcribed the text of two manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and duly gave their shelfmarks.¹⁰ The problem is that both shelfmarks belong to one and the same manuscript, the Hébr. 712 in Munk and Zotenberg’s catalogue.¹¹ That already suggests he may not have seen the manuscript. And indeed, not only did Grünbaum *not* transcribe the manuscript in person; the person who did it for

⁹ Cp. Y. Gomez Gane, *Dizionario della terminologia filologica* (Torino: aAccademia University Press, 2013), pp. 115-116.

¹⁰ S. Grünbaum (Grynboym) (ed.), *Sefer wikkuaḥ Rabbenu Yeḥi’el mi-Paris* (Thorn: Dombrowski, 1873).

¹¹ [S. Munk - H. Zotenberg,] *Catalogue des manuscrits hébreux et samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale* ([Paris:] Imprimerie impériale, 1866), pp. 114-115.

him made several transcription errors, and even censored some parts, as I will explain shortly. To make matters worse, Re'uvén Margaliot's edition of 1922 is merely a reproduction of Grünbaum's text with some minor corrections but also with many further transcription errors.¹² A new, proper critical edition is therefore needed. That is my present research project, which I hope to be able to complete within some months.

Fortunately, the tools exist for a new critical edition of the *Wikkuaḥ Rabbenu Yeḥi'el*. There is not just one extant witness; there are seven. Some display conspicuous variations in order, content, and single readings. Judah Galinsky has recently dedicated a detailed analysis to three of them (Paris, Moscow, Vatican);¹³ his work is excellent and groundbreaking, since it is the first attempt to classify some of the witnesses according to the principles of both textual criticism and redaction history. Galinsky and I do not reconstruct the textual tradition of the *Wikkuaḥ* in exactly the same way, but it is certainly better to have two slightly diverging reconstructions than to have none. In my edition I am taking into account all the manuscripts I have located, and classifying them into three distinct branches of the tradition: i) the Paris and Hamburg (Staats- u. Universitätsbibliothek, Hebr. 187) MSS, along with the transcription that Wagenseil made of the now lost Strassburg MS, ii) the Moscow MS (Russian State Library, Günzburg 1390), and iii) the Oxford MS (Bodleian, Mich. 121). That's only five of seven; the Vatican MS (Vat. ebr. 324) is a short account containing only ten lines that, in Galinsky's view, might be "the opening section of an independent Hebrew version of the events" and "perhaps even more original and historically accurate" than the versions in the other mss.¹⁴ The seventh manuscript (Milan, Ambrosiana, X 191 sup) is just a transcription of Wagenseil's text.

Now, interestingly enough, having just criticized Steinschneider for having ignored Lachmannian principles in his edition, I have had to decide to resign them in mine, though for different reasons. I have arrived instead at the same conclusions Peter Schäfer did in reconstructing the textual tradition of the *Hekhalot*, that a synoptic edition is the only feasible solution when one is faced with a text with neither clear nor prestigious authorship, because its wording was not stabilized at an early stage of its history, but rather transmitted in an "open" fashion and continually reworked and recreated by almost every copyist to serve as an ever-growing repertoire of passages and commentaries for anti-Christian polemics and pro-Talmudic apologetics. The advantage of a synoptic edition is that it makes more transparent the state of the text in the historical contexts it was copied to serve.¹⁵

¹² R. Margaliot (ed.), *Wikkuaḥ Rabbenu Yeḥi'el mi-Paris mi-ba 'ale ha-Tosafot* (Lwów: at the editor's expenses, 1922; repr. [Brooklyn]: Ateres, 1977/1978).

¹³ J. Galinsky, "The Different Hebrew Versions of the 'Talmud Trial' of 1240 in Paris," in E. Carlebach - J.J. Schacter (eds.), *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations. In Honor of David Berger* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 109-140.

¹⁴ Thus Galinsky, "The Different Hebrew Versions," p. 133.

¹⁵ P. Schäfer, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," in Id., *Hekhalot-Studien*

Let me now give some examples of the historical payoff this new edition of the *Wikkuaḥ Rabbenu Yeḥi'el* has yielded.

1. In the *incipit* in the Moscow MS we read that Donin “was ultimately killed in his church,” a mysterious statement that suggests that he converted to Christianity, but possibly also that he was tried for heresy and convicted of it. This corresponds to a piece of information found in another text, Ya‘aqov ben Eliyyah’s letter to Pablo Christiani: that “Donin the apostate (...) became a convert from the laws of God and his Torah, and did not even believe in the Roman Religion.”¹⁶ The *incipit* of the Moscow MS thus grants important confirmation to the possibility that Donin remained an outsider or possibly a heretic even in his new religious community.
2. According to the Paris MS of the *Wikkuaḥ*, during the disputation Donin mentioned the use made in the Babylonian Talmud (*Megillah* 25b) of the passage in *Isaiah* 46:1-2 where the Babylonian gods are depicted as bowing down at the triumph of the God of Israel. The Talmud understands the passage as mocking the Babylonian gods for being caught by an attack of *shilshul* – an instance of halakhically legitimate mockery of pagan religion. Donin also quotes Rashi’s commentary on those verses, where Rashi makes the Talmudic interpretation even more explicit by translating the Biblical *gores Nevo* (“Nebo bows down”) with the French *conkia soy*, a *la‘az* (duly transcribed with Tiberian vocalization) whose meaning is “Nebo soiled himself” (modern French *se conchier*). Donin’s point here is to blame both the Talmud and Rashi for being obscene, thus ridiculing the prestige that Jews granted the Talmud and Rashi’s commentary. This little passage is relevant in many ways. First, it is hilarious. Second, the variants of *conkia soy* in the other manuscripts constitute another – if slightly less variegated – case of diffraction, and so may have the same relevance for classifying the manuscripts as the word *duq* and its variants in the *Wikkuaḥ ha-RaMBaN*. And last but not least, the passage is also further evidence that the Christian attack against the Talmud in Paris also involved Rashi’s commentary as part of the whole literary canon of rabbinic Judaism. Yet, notwithstanding such manifest textual relevance, whoever transcribed the Paris MS for Grünbaum’s

(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), pp. 8-16. For a strikingly similar methodological suggestion about medieval anti-Christian literature see the recent R. Leicht, “Johannes Reuchlin’s Lost Polemical Manuscript and the Archetype of the *Nizzahon Vetus*: A Reconstruction,” in R. Boustan - K. Herrmann - R. Leicht - A.Y. Reed - G. Veltri (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 1289-308 (here 1308).

¹⁶ Transl. by S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century: A Study of Their Relations during the Years 1198-1254* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1933), p. 339.

edition skipped this passage (that is, censored it).¹⁷ Consequently, you cannot find it, or any discussion of it, in John Freedman's recent translation, which is based not on the manuscripts themselves, but on Grünbaum's faulty edition.

The version of the *Wikkuaḥ* contained in the Oxford MS is much longer than the other witnesses and still awaits proper evaluation. It was copied by the Moravian rabbi Abraham Shemu'el Bacharach (d. 1615), who also collated in the margins several variant readings from other witnesses, duly labeling them as found elsewhere (*masa' ti be-s[efer] a[ḥer]*); he also added textual observations of his own that were not part of the text itself, signing them with his own initials. So, as early as the end of the 16th century or at the beginning of the 17th the *Wikkuaḥ* was an object of philological enquiry as a testimony from the Jewish past. Johann Christoph Wagenseil, too, intervened critically in the text of the Strassburg MS that he transcribed by adding in the margins his own (sometimes very brilliant) conjectural emendations. We can conclude that the art of critically editing Hebrew texts apparently did not make any significant progress, or rather suffered some setbacks, in the passage between late Humanism and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

* * *

Just a brief remark about my last case: Ya'aqov ben Eliyyah's letter to Pablo Christiani. The letter is a much debated document in recent scholarly literature (Kenneth Stow, Joseph Shatzmiller, Robert Chazan, and Jeremy Cohen). It is also a crucial testimony about the personal and intellectual biographies of both Nicolas Donin and Pablo Christiani and about the whole history of the Maimonidean controversy. Yet, it is still studied based on Joseph Kobak's edition of 1868 (published in Kobak's journal, *Jeschurun*).¹⁸ Kobak reproduced the text of a Munich manuscript that Abraham Berliner and Steinschneider had transcribed for him, and in the footnotes, he added the variant readings that his friend Salomon Zalman Hayyim Halberstamm transcribed for him from a manuscript in his personal collection. Kobak added clarifications and conjectures of his own, signed with his initial in Hebrew, *qoph*. While it obviously was not ideal that he hadn't personally seen the manuscripts (certainly not an easy task in the 19th century), Kobak's method as an editor was certainly sounder than Steinschneider's, and useful even by today's standards. But 21st-century scholars only have to check the online catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (now merged into the new Merhav catalogue of the National Library of Israel) to real-

¹⁷ The passage should be found at p. 9 of Grünbaum's edition.

¹⁸ *Iggeret (wikkuaḥ) R. Ya'aqov mi-Weneš'i'ah*, ed. by J. Kobak, *Jeschurun* 8 (1868), pp. 1-34 (based on MSS Munich 210 and Halberstamm). Repr. in J. Kobak, *Ginse Nistaroth. Handschriftliche Editionen aus der jüdischen Literatur* (Bamberg: at the editor's expenses, 1868).

ize that there are actually five manuscripts of the *Iggeret* (if we include the now lost Halberstamm MS as it can be reconstructed from Kobak's notes), and that the oldest (if incomplete) witness, the Parma MS (Palatina, 2233), has never even been taken into consideration. Kobak's edition of the *Iggeret* should therefore be honorably laid to rest and replaced by a new, fuller one, and that is my next project, assuming I finish my edition of the *Wikkuah*.

* * *

In conclusion, I do not mean to sound unfair in my criticism of previous editions. Even in the specific domain of medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemics, many important texts have been published in excellent critical editions, including David Berger's seminal edition of the *Sefer Niṣṣaḥon Yašan* (1979) and Daniel Lasker's and Sarah Stroumsa's edition of the *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (1996).¹⁹ Nevertheless, in many other important cases – as I have tried to demonstrate – we have been satisfied with working on extremely old and unfeasible editions; or else, we have limited ourselves to observing the amount of “variance”²⁰ among the witnesses from a mere quantitative perspective, but relying lazily on the so-called “best manuscript,” the *bon manuscrit* that Joseph Bédier provocatively proposed in 1928 as the best method for editing very contaminated traditions in medieval Romance literatures.²¹ Bédier's “best” manuscript was either the oldest one or the supposedly most reliable one linguistically, and this was, for instance, Eduard Yehezkel Kutscher's same approach to the textual tradition of the Mishnah,²² but it was methodologically questionable even if it was very influential; the antiquity and linguistic garb of a single manuscript are ultimately extrinsic arguments that do not necessarily have to do with the intrinsic meaning and structure of the text – which includes its “variance,” too. Both the resort to one “best” manuscript and the synoptic edition of several manuscripts are methodologically conservative and slightly defeatist attitudes to the editing of an ancient or medieval text. They can of course be justified, but only after

¹⁹ D. Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizṣaḥon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); D.J. Lasker - S. Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest. Qiṣṣat Muḥādalat Al-Uṣṣuf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996).

²⁰ The term was introduced by B. Cerquiglini, *Eloge de la variante. Histoire critique de la philology* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989); Engl. transl. by B. Wing, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology* (Baltimore - London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 37-38.

²¹ J. Bédier, “La tradition manuscrite du *Lai de l'Ombre*. Réflexions sur l'art d'éditer les anciens textes,” *Romania* 54 (1928), pp. 161-96, 321-56 (repr. Paris: Champion, 1970).

²² E.Y. Kutscher, “Mishnaic [Hebrew],” s.v. “Hebrew Language,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16 (*Supplementary Entries*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), cols. 1590-1607, 1659-1660. Cp. Y.N. Epstein, *Mavo le-nussaḥ ha-Miṣnah*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1948).

thorough examination of all the witnesses, and after all other possible editorial solutions have been tried out and proven ineffective in light of either excessive contamination among different branches of the tradition or extensive rewriting of the text in the different manuscripts. It was fully justified, for instance, in Peter Schäfer's extremely important edition of the *Hekhalot* literature (1981),²³ and a similar working hypothesis is being feasibly maintained in the current Princeton projects (founded by Schäfer himself) on the *Toledot Yešu* (now co-run by Michael Meerson) and on the *Sefer ḥasidim*.²⁴

It is my contention that Hebrew philology at large has almost entirely skipped a stage in the development of textual scholarship, and that in research about other traditions, both ancient and medieval, this kind of scholarship has yielded indispensable results for no fewer than 150 years. Along with the bath water of the crisis of the Lachmannian and neo-Lachmannian models in the reconstruction of textual histories, the philologists of Hebrew literature have thrown away the baby of the potential results that approach has yielded in other realms of textual investigation. Thus, we still lack a comprehensive typological map of the transmission of Jewish texts from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages down to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. We still owe a great deal of textual scholarship to the *Wissenschaftler*, but not always of a kind that would have been acceptable even to the scholars who, in the same age and intellectual climate, were attempting to find genealogical working hypotheses for Greek, Latin, and medieval vernacular literatures. Lately, there has rightly been a lot of discussion about the impasse of philology as a historical discipline (no longer or not always meant as sheer textual criticism), especially Sheldon Pollock's brilliant article of 2009 on "Future Philology?,"²⁵ and the very name and presuppositions of the program on *Zukunftsphilologie* at the Freie Universität Berlin.²⁶ Yet, it is my conviction that the field of medieval Hebrew philology can still derive a lot of benefit from a more extensive application of philological methods from a not too distant past.

ABSTRACT

Many Hebrew literary sources for both the history and the intellectual history of the Jews in the Middle Ages are still utilized, translated and interpreted based on 19th-century editions. In most cases, these are methodologically outdated and based on incomplete surveys of the manuscript evidence.

²³ P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

²⁴ <<http://www.princeton.edu/judaic/special-projects/toledot-yeshu/>>; <http://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim/index.php?a=about>. For the *Toledot* see now M. Meerson – P. Schäfer (eds., with Y. Deutsch, D. Grossberg, A. Manekin and A. Yoffie), *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus. Two Volumes and Database* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

²⁵ Sh. Pollock, "Future Philology?," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), pp. 931-961.

²⁶ <<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/en/friedrichschlegel/fsgs/kooperationen/Zukunftsphilologie/index.html>>

This mars our understanding of the fortune and reuse of such literary documents by the Jews themselves during the late Middle Ages and throughout the modern era; it also prevents a full appreciation of the interpretive prisms through which the Jews read key historical events in their immediate aftermath. This essay will discuss three cases from the thirteenth century: Nahmanides' account of the Barcelona disputation of 1263, the Hebrew account of the Paris trial against the Talmud of 1240, and the letter of Ya'aqov ben Eliyyah to the convert Pablo Christiani.