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Before the 12th century, Christian knowledge of rabbinic sources was very limited. While early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Jerome showed familiarity with Jewish postbiblical traditions (broadly named *deuterosis*) (Kamesar: 21, 35), Augustine displayed virtually none. A similar ignorance predominated in Latin Europe for centuries. Bishop Agobard of Lyon (d. 840) was the first medieval writer to suggest any awareness of rabbinic traditions, demonstrating second-hand familiarity with an Aramaic version of the *Toledot Yeshu* as well as ideas from midrashic texts such as *Shī ur qomah*, the *Alphabet of Rabbi Aqiva*, and others (Merchavia 1970: 71–84).

In the early 12th century, the polemical *Dialogue against the Jews* (*Dialogus contra Iudaei*) by converted Jew Petrus Alfonsi showed the first direct familiarity with midrash in medieval sources (Merchavia 1970: 93–127). Nevertheless, his references to the “teaching” (*doctrina*) of “your sages” (*doctorem vestrorum*) are limited to aggadic lore and ignore halakhic midrashim. A few decades later, Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156) repeated many of Petrus’s references and intensified his attack on post-biblical traditions, similarly ignoring legal material (Cohen 1999: 263–64). At the end of the century, Alain of Lille (d. ca 1202) was perhaps the first to suggest that oral traditions of the rabbis might support Christian dogmas about Jesus (Funkenstein: 381).

In the 1240s, the Talmud was burned in Paris for alleged attacks on Christianity. Nevertheless, in subsequent years some mendicant friars repeated Alan’s innovative suggestion, citing postbiblical literature as an authoritative proof-text. At the 1263 Disputation of Barcelona between Friar Paul Christian and Catalan rabbi Naḥmanides, the former proffered talmudic passages (e.g., *bSan* 98a), and midrashim (from *BerR* 2:4, *EkhR* 1:51, *MidTeh* 2:3, and numerous others, including from anthologies such as *Yalqut Shim’oni* and *Yalqut ha-Makhiiri*) that, he claimed, proved that Jesus was the Messiah. Naḥmanides countered that the friar relied too much on aggadic midrashim, which were like to “sermons” that do not offer legal commandments and are therefore not authoritative (Chazan: 97). Friar Ramon Martí (d. after 1287) subsequently wrote *The Dagger of Faith* (*Pugio fidei*), in which he cited – both in Hebrew and in Latin translation – scores of talmudic passages and aggadot, as well as halakhic midrashim (such as *SifBem*, *SifDev*, *Sifra*, and *MekhY*) (Merchavia 1988: 209–10).

In the 1320s, the convert Alfonso of Valladolid (d. ca. 1248), writing entirely in Hebrew, made the same arguments as Martí, with a similarly broad source base (Szpiech: 148). His contemporary in France, the Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra, wrote extensive commentaries on the Bible in which he incorporated Jewish exegesis (especially by Rashi) as well as midrashic aggadot (Klepper: 52). In 1413–14, the convert Hieronymus de Sancta Fide (d. before 1419) cited a wide variety of midrashim at the Disputation of Tortosa, which he repeated in subsequent polemical works (Orfali: 165–66). His older colleague, the convert Paulus de Sancta Maria (d. 1434), elaborated these arguments in his popular Latin treatise *The Scrutiny of Scriptures* (*Scrutinium scripturarum*). His exegetical *Additiones*, appended to Lyra’s commentary and including much of the same material from the *The Scrutiny*, were printed in many Bibles and widely disseminated across Europe (Klepper: 124–25). Through sources like these, medieval polemicists introduced early modern Christian readers such as Reuchlin and Luther to midrashim and rabbinic exegesis.

From the moment Petrus Alfonsi made the existence of Jewish post-biblical writings known to Christian readers in the early 12th century, those traditions were roundly criticized. Petrus himself denounces talmudic traditions as “absurd” (*absurdus*; Petrus Alfonsi: 88) and “ridiculous,” (*ridiculus*; 95, 96), venting particular ire towards aggadic passages expressing anthropomorphic conceptions of God. This attack was even more vehement in Peter the Venerable, who saw rabbinical interpretations as not only irrational but positively diabolical (*diabolicus*; Cohen 1999: 260). Such condemnation of rabbinical lore reached a feverish pitch in the writing of Ramon Martí, who bewailed the “countless evil and the most impudent lies” (*nefanda et impudentissima mendacia*) of rabbinical aggadot about God’s nature and actions (Cohen 1982: 149). Those aggadot that did seem to support Christian belief were extracted “like pearls out of a very great dungheap” (*margaritas...de maximo fimario*; 137) and cited as Christian proof-texts. Later writers like Alfonso de Valladolid, Nicholas of Lyra, and Paulus de Sancta Maria—although they condemned many aggadot as false or even blasphemous—offered a mixed opinion, finding more material that seemed praiseworthy for its potential Christological implications. Although this ambivalent characterization of midrash was circulated in early modern Bible commentaries (Klepper: 32), it was soon drowned out by more vitriolic rhetoric, such as Luther’s condemnation of the “devilish supplement” (*teufelischen Zusatz*) of rabbinical tradition (Martin Luther: 470).

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