

Judaism and Medieval Interreligious Polemics

Mendicants and Thirteenth-
Century Public Disputations

26/04/2023





St Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226)

Giotto
*St Francis Preaching to
the Birds*



St Dominic Guzmán (c. 1170–1221)

El Greco,
St Dominic in
Prayer
(1605–10)



Dominicans (The Order of Preachers, OP)

- established in 1215
- fight against Christian heresies
 - Cathars/Albigensians (dualism)
 - Albigensian Crusade in Southern France (1209-1229)
- inquisition
 - judicial procedure and later an institution established to investigate and try “heretical depravity”
- preaching ministry
- theological expertise
- external mission

External mission

- Franciscan precedent, later more strongly regulated because of its problematic nature (martyrdom/suicide)



St Francis and the Sultan

External mission

- Franciscan precedent, later more strongly regulated because of its problematic nature (martyrdom/suicide)
- never explicitly articulated as part of the order's agenda by St Dominic
- conservative theological approach
 - external mission is potentially beneficial, yet also complicated and dangerous
 - the aim is primarily defensive
- new emphasis on external mission in the 1230s-1260s
 - different factors, also a consequence of the conflict with secular clergy: looking for uncontested territories for activity
- 1255: encyclical letter of master-general calling to preach the gospel “to the perfidious Jews, the Saracens” as well
- late 13th c.: Barcelona briefly as a “centre” of Dominican oriental studies
 - affected a small number of friars; Hebrew instruction sporadic and rare

New trends in the thirteenth century

- deeper Christian knowledge of post-biblical Jewish literature
- employment of this knowledge in Jewish-Christian polemic
 - new polemical methods
- shifts in perceptions of the Jews
- public confrontations between Christian clerics and prominent Jewish scholars

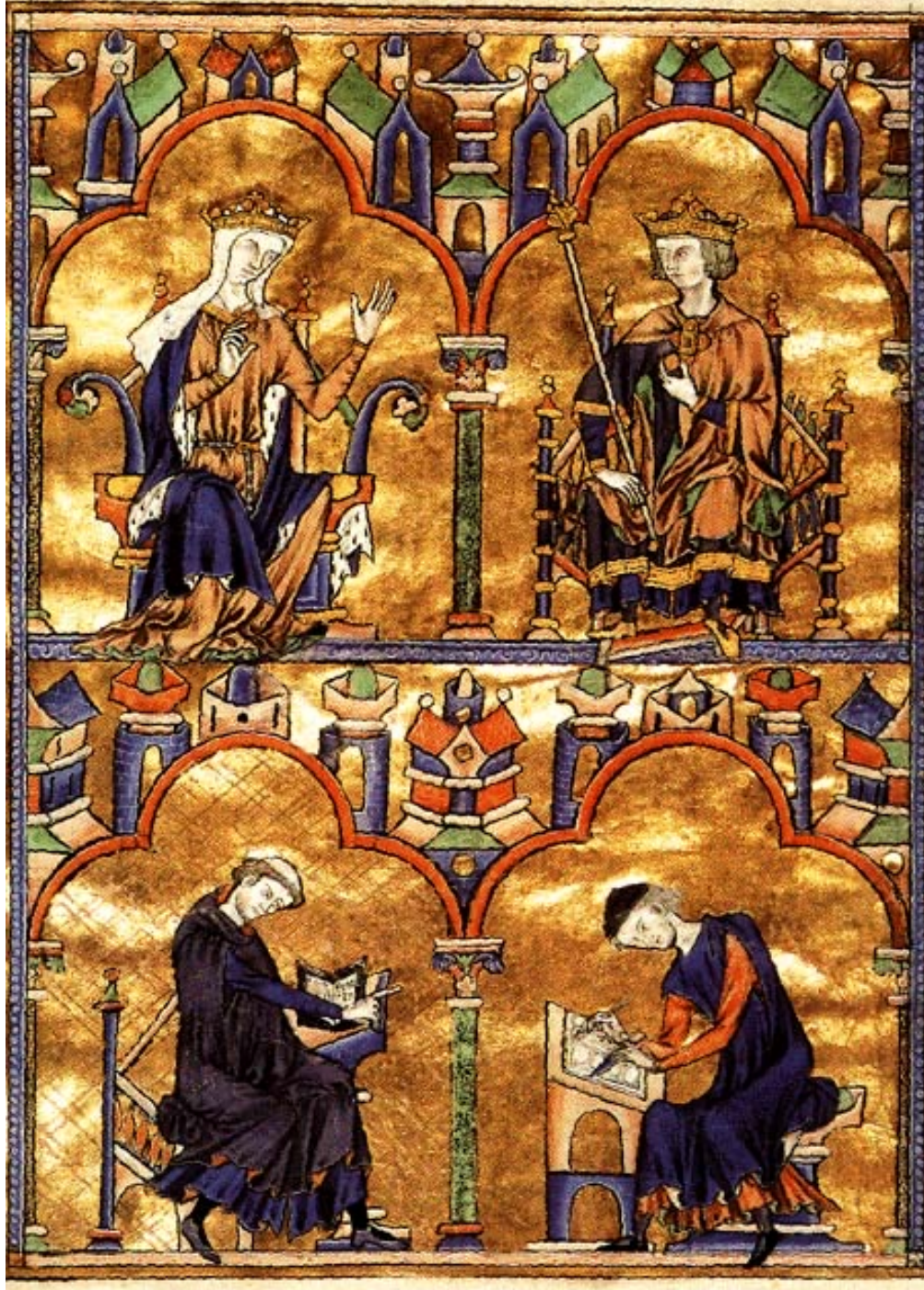
Talmud Trial in Paris

- **events**

- around 1236: **Nicholas Donin** sends a list of 35 accusations to Pope Gregory IX
- March 1240: confiscation of Talmudic mss.
- June 1240: public disputation between Donin and Jewish rabbis (**Yehiel of Paris** and R. Judah of Melun) before **Blanche of Castile**, mother of king Louis IX
- debate followed by ecclesiastical inspection
- 1241-1243: burning of Talmud in Paris
- Talmud officially condemned in 1248 by the chancellor of the university of Paris, **Odo of Chateauroux**; more burning or censorship likely

- **sources**

- collection of documents and translations from the Talmud (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 16558)
 - Latin protocols of the debate (“confessions“ of R. Yehiel and R. Judah)
- two versions of a Hebrew account written by Yosef ben Nathan Official
 - *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane* (The Book of Joseph the Zealot)



Pedro Berruguete,
*St Dominic and the
Albigensians* (1493–
1499)



Blanche of Castile and
King Louis IX of France.
Moralized Bible, MS
New York, Morgan
Library, M.240, f. 8.

The Jews assert that the Lord gave the law which is called Talmud.
They say that [this law] was given orally,
And they lie to the effect that it was implanted in their minds.
They say that it was preserved for a long time without being written
down, until there arrived those whom they call sages and scribes, who
reduced it to writing so that it not be forgotten from people's minds.
Its written version exceeds the text of the Bible in size.
Among other absurdities, in it is contained [the belief] that the said sages
and scribes are greater than the prophets.
They [these sages] could do away with the words of the written law.
One must believe them [the sages] if they should call the left the right or,
on the contrary, they should turn the right into the left.
One who does not observe what they teach deserves to die.
They prohibit children from using the Bible because, as they say, it is not
fit for instruction, but, preferring the doctrine of the Talmud, they have
given various commandments of their own accord. . . .
Whoever studies the aforementioned [talmudic] doctrine in the present
will be secure in the future life.⁶

Talmud Trial in Paris

- **arguments**

- Talmud is offensive, blasphemous and irrational
- reference to Toledot Yeshu
 - “They are not afraid to claim about Christ that his mother conceived him in adultery by a certain man whom they commonly call Pandera. And [they claim] that the same Jesus suffers in hell in hot excrement because he mocked the words of the afore-mentioned sages [i.e., the rabbis].”

Talmud Trial in Paris

- **arguments**

- Talmud advocates discrimination against non-Jews
- Talmud claims authority that belongs to Scripture only
- Talmud steers the Jews away from literal observance of the Mosaic law
 - „[The Talmud is] like a veil placed over the hearts of the Jews to such an extent that they turn away not only from the spiritual understanding [of the Scripture], but even from the literal [understanding] and they turn to all sorts of fables and fictional stories.“ (The letter by Odo of Chateauroux to Pope Innocent IV)
- Talmud cannot be tolerated and must be suppressed

Talmud Trial in Paris

- **Yehiel's replies**

- Talmudic stories do not refer to Jesus Christ:
 - Latin account: "He says however that this was a different man from our Jesus (but he could not say who else he was, whence it is sufficiently clear that he was lying)."
 - Hebrew account: "All those born in Paris who are named Louis are called by the name of Paris. So too there were many Jesuses in the city of Nazareth, for it is the name of a city, [and] he is caked Jesus the Nazarene, because of the city."
- the Gentiles of the Talmud are not Christians, but pagans
- Talmud has been known to earlier Christian scholars, such as Jerome
- Talmud is necessary to understand the Bible
 - "Where Biblical law is brief and scattered as in the laws of the Sabbath, the Talmud gives full explanations, gathered into one tractate; otherwise, it would be impossible to understand the law."

Barcelona Disputation

- **events**

- ordered by king **James I of Aragon**, the rabbi of Girona **Nachmanides** (1195–1270) debated with the convert **Paul Christian** (Paulus Christiani) in Barcelona in July 1263 in presence of **Raymond of Peñafort, OP**
- the result inconclusive, royal visit in synagogue
- Paul Christian received royal permission “to preach to the Jews and debate with them”

- **sources**

- brief Latin report
- Hebrew narrative written by Nachmanides for the bishop of Girona (?)

- **agenda**

- whether the Messiah had come
- whether he is God and man
- [whether he died for human salvation]
- whether the Law is still valid after his coming



Barcelona Disputation

- **method**

- It is possible to prove from the Talmud that the Messiah had already come
 - *aggadah* mentions that the Messiah had come and lives in Rome

That man resumed, and said, 'In the Talmud it is explained [b Sanh., 98a] that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi asked Elijah, "When will the Messiah come?" To which he replied, "Ask the Messiah himself." Said he, "Where is he?" Said Elijah, "At the gate of Rome among the sick people." He went there and found him and asked him certain questions. If so, he has come, and he is in Rome; that is, he is Jesus, who rules in Rome.'

- Messiah is described as being more noble than the angels = must be God

Said Fray Paul, 'Your Sages have said about the Messiah that he is more honoured than the angels, and this is impossible unless it refers to Jesus, who was both Messiah and God Himself.' Then he cited what is said in an Aggadah: [Yalkut Isaiah, 476]: ' "My servant shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high" [Isaiah, 52: 13]: this means exalted above Abraham, lifted up above Moses, and higher than the ministering angels.'

as Christians think? Is it not a well-known thing in truth that the affair of Jesus took place in the time of the Second Temple, and he was born and killed before the destruction of the Temple, while the Sages of the Talmud, such as Rabbi Akiva and his associates, were after the Destruction? And those who composed the Mishnah, Rabbi and Rabbi Nathan,* were many years after the Destruction, and all the more so Rav Ashi, who composed the Talmud and wrote it down, for he lived about 400 years after the Destruction.* And if these Sages believed in the Messiahship of Jesus and that he and his faith and religion were true, and if they wrote the things from which Fray Paul says he will prove this, if so how did they remain in the original religion and practice of Judaism? For they were Jews and remained in the Jewish religion all their lives and died as Jews, they and their sons and their pupils who listened to all their words from their own mouths. Why did they not become converted to Christianity, as Fray Paul did when he understood from their sayings that Christianity is the true faith, and he went and became converted according to their words? Yet they and their pupils who took instruction from their mouths lived and died as Jews like us today. And they were the very ones who taught us the religion of Moses and of the Jews, for everything we do today is according to the Talmud, and according to the custom and practice which we have observed in the Sages of the Talmud from the day it was composed until now. For the whole purpose of the Talmud is only to teach us the practice of the Torah, and how our Fathers practised it in the time of the Temple* from the mouth of the prophets and from the mouth of Moses our teacher, on him be peace. And if they believed in Jesus and his religion, why did they

Fray Paul now resumed, and argued that it is stated in the Talmud that the Messiah has already come. He cited the Aggadah* in the Midrash of *Lamentations* [II: 57]:* ‘A certain man was ploughing and his cow lowed. An Arab passed by and said to him, “Jew, Jew, untie your cow, untie your plough, untie your coulter, for the Temple has been destroyed.” He untied his cow, he untied his plough, he untied his coulter. The cow lowed a second time. The Arab said to him, “Tie up your cow, tie up your plough, tie up your coulter, for your Messiah has been born.”’

I replied, ‘I do not believe in this Aggadah,* but in any case, it supports my words.’

Then that man cried out, ‘See how he denies the writings of the Jews!’

I said, ‘In truth, I do not believe that the Messiah was born on the day of the Destruction, and this Aggadah is either not true, or has some other interpretation derived from the secrets of the Sages. Nevertheless, I will accept it in its literal meaning just as you quoted it, for it gives support to my argument. See, it says that on

Maestro Guillaume,* the King's justiciary, spoke up and said, 'The argument at present does not concern Jesus.* The question is whether the Messiah has come or not. You said that he has not come, but this book of yours says that he has come.'

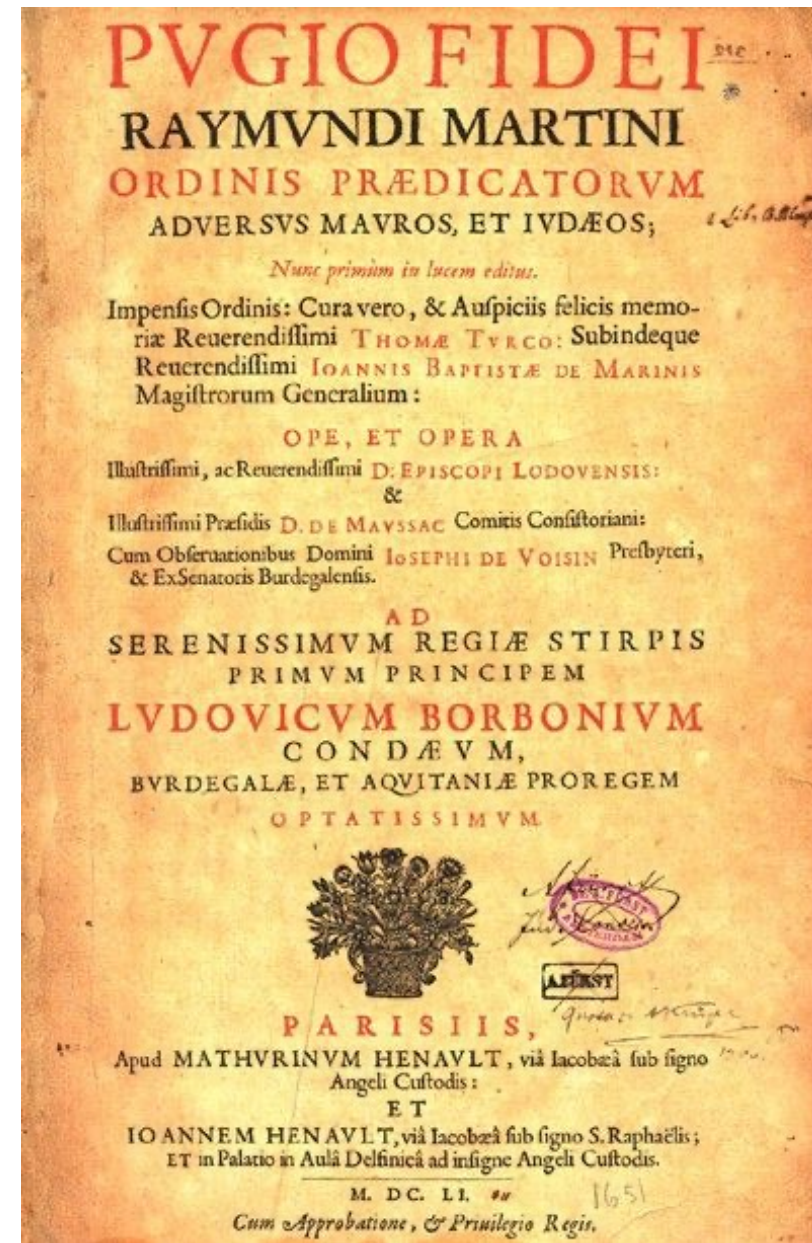
I said to him, 'You choose to reply, as is the custom of you lawyers, with sophistical logical arguments; nevertheless, I shall answer you all in this matter. The Sages did not say that the Messiah had *come*, but that he had been *born*.* On the day that Moses, our teacher, on him be peace, was born, he had not yet *come*, and he was not yet a saviour; it was not until he came to Pharaoh by the command of God and said to him, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go" [Exodus, 8: 1] that he had *come*. And so with the Messiah; when he comes to the Pope, and says to him by the command of God, "Let my people go," then he will have *come*. But so far, he has not come, and further, he is not yet the "Messiah" at all. For King David, on the day that he was born, was not yet a Messiah, but when Samuel anointed him, then he became a Messiah. And on the day that Elijah anoints the Messiah by God's command, he will be called "Messiah", and not before. And on the day that he comes, after that, to the Pope, to redeem us, then he will rightly be called one who has *come*.'

Raymond Martini (Ramon Martí, 1220–1285)

- Dominican at St Catherine's convent in Barcelona
- probably educated in Paris before assigned there in 1250, a protégé of Raymond of Peñafort
- became proficient in Hebrew and taught it
- *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (*The Muzzle of the Jews*)
- *Pugio fidei* (*The Dagger of the Faith*, c. 1280)
 - Paris 1651
 - Leipzig 1687



„It has been enjoined upon me, that from those books of the Old Testament which the Jews accept and even from the Talmud and the rest of their writings authoritative among them, I compose such a work as might be available like a dagger (*pugio*) for preachers and guardians of the Christian faith – at some times for feeding to the Jews the bread of the divine word in sermons; at other times for confronting their impiety and perfidy, and for destroying their pertinacity against Christ and their impudent insanity.“





RAYMUNDI MARTINI
ORDINIS PRÆDicatorum
PUGIO FIDEI
ADVERSUS
MAUROS
ET
JUDÆOS,

CUM
OBSERVATIONIBUS
JOSEPHI DE VOISIN,
ET INTRODUCTIONE
JO. BENEDICTI CARPZOVI,
Qui simul appendicis loco
HERMANNI JUDÆI OPUSCULUM
DE SUA CONVERSIONE
ex MSCto Bibliothecæ Paulinæ Academiæ
Lipſienſis recenſuit.



LIPSIÆ,
Sumptibus Hæredum FRIDERICI LANCKISL,
Typis Viduæ JOHANNIS WITTIGAV,
Anno clō Idc LXXXVII.

Jud.
8

The substance of this *Pugio*, especially inasmuch as it pertains to the Jews, is twofold: first and foremost, the authority of the law, of the prophets, and of the entire Old Testament; second, certain traditions, which I found in the Talmud and midrashim—that is, glosses—and traditions of the ancient Jews which I gladly raised up like pearls out of an enormous dung heap. . . .

These traditions, which they call “the oral law [*torah shebbe-‘al peh*],” they believe and state that God gave to Moses along with the law on Mount Sinai. Then Moses, they say, transmitted them to his disciple Joshua, Joshua to his successors, and so on, until they were committed to writing by the ancient rabbis. Yet it seems that to believe this, that God gave Moses all that is in the Talmud, should be deemed—on account of the absurdities which it contains—nothing other than the insanity of a ruined mind.

Certain [traditions], however, which know the truth and in every way reveal the doctrine of the prophets and holy fathers, wondrously and incredibly bespeak the Christian faith too, as will become obvious in this book. They destroy and confound the perfidy of modern Jews [*modernorum . . . Judaeorum perfidiam*], and I do not think that one should doubt that they managed to make their way successively from Moses and the prophets and the other holy fathers to those who recorded them. For in no other way than from the prophets and fathers do we think that such things descended, since traditions of this sort are entirely contrary to those regarding the messiah and so many other matters which the Jews have believed from the time of Christ even until now.

“We therefore do not reject such traditions but embrace them both for those reasons already mentioned and because there is nothing so capable of confuting the impudence of the Jews, there is found nothing so effective for overcoming their evil. Finally, what would be more joyous for a Christian than if he could most easily twist the sword of his enemy from his hand and then cut off the head of the infidel with his own blade or just like Judith butcher [the infidel] with his own stolen dagger?”

Martini's *Pugio fidei*

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- three-tiered understanding of history
 - Biblical Jews
 - rabbis at the time of Jesus who concealed the truth of Christianity
 - modern Jews who continue to walk away from the truth

Summary

- „The rabbis of the Talmud forsook the biblical religion of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament for the diabolical fabrications of the oral law. Though they could not completely expunge all evidence of the Bible’s Christological truth from their literature, their religion after the coming of Jesus ceased to be what God had intended Judaism to be before Jesus. [...] [C]ontemporary Jews maintain the heretical error and satanic loyalties of the classical rabbis, and they compound them.“

Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 358.

Further reading

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