On Some Unique Kabbalistic Manuscripts in the Vatican Library and Their Contribution to the Scholarship of Kabbalah in Jerusalem

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I. The Beginnings of Christian Kabbalah and the Vatican Library

In the summer of 1280, Abraham Abulafia (1240- c. 1291), a Kabbalist who founded the special prophetic or ecstatic version of the Kabbalah, attempted to meet Pope Nicholas III in Rome. This special effort came as the result of a revelation he had ten years earlier in Barcelona, which presumably consisted in a command to go to Rome at the eve of the Jewish New Year, in a mission reminiscent of Moses’ encounter with Pharaoh: namely to discuss issues related to
redemption. From the scant information we have, it seems that though Abulafia was not shy to compare himself to Moses, he was more interested in discussing his belief about the nature of authentic Judaism with the Pope, than in the national rescue of the Jews from the burden of Christendom, or in an attempt to convert the Pope, as some scholars have claimed. He believed Judaism to be a mystical religiosity based on pronouncing divine names in order to reach a mystical experience, understood in spiritual redemptive terms. He took a spiritualized Judaism – constituted by inner experiences which are achieved by a mystical technique – to be a higher form of religion than any of the three monotheistic religions. The Pope was reluctant to see the Kabbalist and retreated for a rest to the beautiful family castle of Soriano nel Cimini, north of Rome. The stubborn Abulafia, who was informed he would be burned if he insisted on following the Pope, nevertheless arrived at the castle, only to learn that the Pope had died of apoplexy that same day. This non-encounter of a Kabbalist actually eager to see the Pope, and a Pope who otherwise took a keen interest in the spiritual Franciscan faction known as the Minorites, is however not the end of this story. After two weeks of arrest in the house of the Minorites in Rome, Abulafia was released and made his way to Messina, Sicily, then part of the kingdom of Aragon. There he remained active for more than a decade, writing a variety of Kabbalistic books and teaching several Jewish intellectuals, and probably also some Christians, his Kabbalah. This openness by a Kabbalist, who deliberately ignored the interdiction against revealing the Kabbalah even to most Jews, is an important development that should be taken seriously when discussing Jewish esotericism and its vicissitudes. The prophetic Kabbalistic trend remained part and parcel of the Jewish mystical literature in Italy, and a significant component of the nascent Christian Kabbalah in late 15th century Florence. The translation of some of Abulafia’s writings from Hebrew to Latin by Flavius Mithridates was one of the most important factors in the
impact of ecstatic Kabbalah on the Italian Renaissance. Mithridates, who called himself inter alia also Guillelmus Raimundo Moncada, was a convert to Christianity, who delivered a lecture in the presence of Pope Sixtus IV. Of Sicilian extraction, Mithridates, the son of a Syrian Jew called Nissim Abul- Faraj, presumably studied Abulafia’s Kabbalah in his youth in the island. The special place the ecstatic Kabbalah enjoys in his Latin translations must have something to do with his ability to fathom the rather difficult Hebrew treatises he so skillfully translated. However, his concentration on Latin translations of books of Kabbalah started in a later period of his life – in 1486 in Florence, years after he left Rome – and after his visit to the Holy See. Those translations are the fountainhead of the first most important piece of Christian Kabbalah, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Conclusiones, which include dozens of theses based on Kabbalistic views. Those 900 Conclusiones were condemned immediately by the Pope, and the young count had to flee Italy. He returned to Florence only when the next Pope, related to the Medici family, was elected. However, most of Flavius Mithridates’s Latin manuscripts, which played such an important role in the emergence of Christian Kabbalah, and thus Abulafia’s Kabbalistic treatises (in Latin and in a slightly Christianized form) have found their way to the Vatican Library, arriving more than two centuries after their composition. Today they are catalogued as MSS 189-191, together with the Hebrew manuscripts, and a fourth one, as Vatican, Cod. Chigi A. VI.190. Those are unique manuscripts, autographs of Mithridates. They testify to his sophisticated translations, mistranslations and deliberate glosses and interventions which sometimes change the intention of the Hebrew original, in order to look closer at Christian tenets. They remained there for more than four centuries, before a serious study of their content and an analysis of their impact on Giovanni Pico was undertaken by Prof. Chaim Wirszubski, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His groundbreaking inquiry, Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with
Jewish Mysticism (Harvard University Press 1987), opens the way for a much more profound understanding of the precise sources of some important aspects of Pico’s thought. Wirszubski’s fine scholarship (done in Jerusalem under the auspices of the Israeli Academy for Sciences and Humanities) brought some of Abulafia’s Kabbalistic visions as mediated by Mitridathes to the attention of the scholarly community. In fact he discovered in the Latin translation an Abulafia work, that had been preserved only in a poor and quite fragmentary form in the original Hebrew. Let me point out that in addition to the rich material belonging to Mithridates’s Latin translations from Abraham Abulafia and his circle, the Vatican collection contains several important treatises of this Kabbalist in their original Hebrew (e.g., Sefer ‘Or ha-Sekhel, Sefer ha-’Ot, Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’). Even more importantly, the collection houses the lengthiest extant part of one of Abulafia’s earliest books, Sefer Mafteah ha-Re‘ayon, (Heb. 291), a book not found in this form in any other manuscript. This fragment, written originally in 1273, is quite important for understanding the earliest phase of the thought of this ecstatic Kabbalist. In this sense it is similar to the above-mentioned Latin translation that preserved another book of Abulafia’s written in the same year. If we add to the presence of these manuscripts in the Vatican Library the fact that Abulafia’s prophetic books, (some containing quite enigmatic forms of spiritual apocalypses, found in very few manuscripts) are found in the Angelica library – which is outside the scope of Benjamin Richler, ed., Hebrew Manuscripts of the Vatican Library (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008) – it seems that the written voice of Abulafia’s Kabbalah found its way to the Vatican libraries in quite an impressive manner. The recent project of a critical edition of those translations, undertaken by Giulio Busi and Saverio Campanini among others, brings scholarly attention to the basic sources of early Christian Kabbalah.

II. Vatican MS Heb. 202 and the Beginning of Jewish
Kabbalah

The Vatican collection contains an important and unique manuscript compiled sometime in the 14th century and copied in a Spanish hand. This manuscript contains a variety of Kabbalistic material stemming from several schools: Provencal, Catalan, and Castilian forms of Kabbalah. Some of the traditions found there are related to the beginnings of some historical phases of Kabbalah (especially in early decades of the thirteenth century) and served as building stones for the scholarly edifice regarding this period by Prof. Gershom Scholem of the Hebrew University, the famed pioneer of the study of Kabbalah. In this codex Scholem discovered quite early in his career an epistle that was the most important single document supporting his reconstruction of the relations between the Provencal school as represented by Rabbi Isaac Sagi-Nahor, the so-called “father of Kabbalah,” and two important younger Rabbis, active in the Catalan city of Gerona, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) and his cousin Rabbi Jonah Gerondi. The exchanges between these rabbis concern the disclosure of Kabbalistic issues by other Kabbalists; and the scant data found in the epistle are indispensable testimonies in any attempt to describe the dissemination of Kabbalah from Provence to Catalonia and from there to Castile. This epistle exists in a unique manuscript, and since its publication by Scholem in the thirties and its more detailed analyses in the forties and sixties — especially in his Origins of the Kabbalah, trans. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton University Press, 1989) — no other similar manuscript of this epistle has been identified. As in the case of the beginning of Christian Kabbalah, here too our understanding of the beginning of the Jewish Kabbalah owes much to unique Vatican manuscripts.

III. Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Hebrew Translations of the Zohar

The most important documents of Kabbalistic literature are indubitably the Zoharic literature. The Zoharic literature, which was written between the late seventies of the 13th century and the early decades of the 14th century in Castile, mostly in Aramaic, was immediately canonized and
became the cornerstone for a variety of Kabbalistic schools, especially the mid-16th century Kabbalists who were active in Safed. The processes involved in the emergence of this literature, its authors, its canonization and its various kinds of reception still need extensive research. The Hebrew manuscripts found in the Vatican library may help illuminate some aspects of those processes. Let me offer a major example in this direction. Two anonymous manuscripts in the Vatican collection, Heb. 62 and 168, contain a Hebrew translation of some Aramaic parts of the Zoharic commentaries on the Pentateuch. Though similar in many ways, each the two manuscripts is also unique. An analysis of the style of the translation and a comparison to segments of other Hebrew translations of Zoharic passages found in the Hebrew writings of Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, led me to identify the anonymous translator as this Kabbalist. A late 13th or early 14th century Kabbalist, Rabbi David may well be not only one of the first commentators on this book, but quite plausibly its first translator ever. This means that these two codices can aid us to conjecture about the Aramaic versions underlying the translation. We thus have here the earliest extensive testimonies about the nature of the text of the third most important book in Judaism. Moreover, in some cases in those two manuscripts, the version of the Hebrew translation is accompanied by lengthy Aramaic passages, which may constitute the earliest extensive excerpts from the Zoharic literature to have reached us in the original language. Though some short quotes from this Hebrew translation are found in 16th century Kabbalists, it is only in the two above-mentioned manuscripts that dozens of pages are found. However, let me point out that there are also other codices in the Vatican collection which may turn into a mine of important information related to the history of the text of the Zohar. Two examples are the anonymous Hebrew translation of the Zohar in Heb. 226 and the texts found in the first part of MS Heb. 203. Both of these deserve special attention by the scholars of the Zohar.

IV. The Byzantine Kabbalah in the Vatican Library
We mentioned above the main Kabbalistic codices in the Vatican that represent developments that in Sicily, Italy, and the Western Europe. However, several important manuscripts found in this library, may contribute to a future history of a rather neglected center of Kabbalistic literature, the Byzantine one. Compared to the Provencal and the Spanish centers, the Byzantine Empire was a relatively late center; and, from the mid-14th century a different form of Kabbalah emerged there. Its precise conceptual contours, as well as the treatises that were written there, slowly emerge as the scholarship of Kabbalah is advancing. It has become more and more plausible in the last decades that important Kabbalistic treatises were written in the Empire, rather than in Spain or Italy as scholars previously believed. This is the case of some classics of Kabbalah like Sefer ha-Temunah, Sefer ha-Peliyah and Sefer ha-Qanah but there is a plethora of related smaller treatises that were also written in the Byzantine Empire. The Vatican holds several important manuscripts that may fruitfully serve as the starting point for a study of this Kabbalistic center. MSS Heb. 188, 194, 195, 218, 220, 223, are outstanding examples of the arrival of all the major pieces of Byzantine Kabbalah to Italy and the impact this arrival on the nature of Italian Kabbalah during the late 15th century, and also of the Christian Kabbalah since the beginning of the 16th century. In this context, let me mention two other unique Kabbalistic manuscripts. These relate to a dispute regarding the belief in metempsychosis that took place in the city of Candia, in Crete in the second part of the 15th century. Two lengthy codices, MSS 105 and 254, contain the documents listing the pros and cons of this belief and against it, as reflecting the views of, respectively, Rabbi Michael ha-Kohen Balbo and Rabbi Moshe Ashkenazi. The vast majority of the arguments in this sharp controversy are unknown from any other manuscript. Thus only the Vatican manuscripts may enable a reconstruction of the various debates related to this important type of Kabbalistic belief. This reconstruction was done by a third important Hebrew University scholar, Prof.
Efraim Gottlieb. It has been continued more recently in a Ph. D. thesis of Dr. Brian Ogren at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We may conclude that the variety of the various manuscripts found in the Vatican collections reflects the variety of Kabbalistic literature since its inception up to its peak in the mid-16th century. In short, I offered above several examples for the indisputable contributions the Kabbalistic manuscripts found in the Vatican collection did contribute in the past for understanding major phases in the history of Kabbalah. The present Catalogue, an excellent example of what a catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts should be, will certainly facilitate the study of additional manuscripts and will enrich our understanding of the evolution of the various forms of this vast literature. We may hope, in an era less interested in philological studies than earlier, that the tradition of close reading of manuscripts in a serious manner, which was a vital part of scholarship at the Hebrew University, will remain a vital component of the future studies of Kabbalah; and the Vatican codices will continue to yield new findings for a better understanding of a vital aspect of medieval Judaism.

V. Thanks for the Free Access

Let me turn to another dimension of the Vatican collection, which is not related to the content of manuscripts but with the politics of access to the Hebrew manuscripts found in this library. When the Institute of Hebrew Manuscripts — whose researchers were the main contributors to the Catalogue that is celebrated here — was founded at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, many libraries over the world agreed to have their manuscripts microfilmed and consulted free by scholars. However, most of them required researchers to request permission in writing before allowing their manuscripts to be copies or published. Only three libraries out of dozens — the Vatican in Rome, the Escorial in Spain, and the Cambridge University Library in England — were ready to give scholars free automatic permission to microfilm, photocopy or publish their manuscripts. For persons acquainted with the inevitable
vicissitudes involved in correspondence with libraries in general, (including to be sure the Italian ones), this automatic permission constituted a special act of encouragement to engage these manuscripts. This kind renouncement of the legitimate rights of these libraries facilitated a much easier access to some Kabbalistic manuscripts. That in turn was especially helpful for scholars who – like myself in the initial stages of my study of Kabbalistic manuscripts – did not live in Jerusalem. This explains why in some of my writings I relied upon Vatican manuscripts, even when there are also other manuscripts containing a certain Kabbalistic treatise. Abulafia’s major treatise Sefer ‘Or ha-Sekhel, found in the Vatican Library Heb. 233 is one case in point. I take this opportunity to thank the Vatican Library, late as these thanks may be, for the generosity that contributed not only my modest studies of the Kabbalistic material, but also of many other scholars, who also benefited from the liberal approach of the directors of the that Library.

Tu be-Shevat Sabbatianism

See here for our earlier post discussing the potential linkage between Tu be-Shevat (or Tu B’Shevat) customs and Sabbatianism. See here, here, and here for other customs that may have similar linkages. And, finally, see here for a collection of articles on Sabbatianism generally.
R. Flensberg, Donkeys, Antelopes and Frogs

Recently, a book, *Aggadata de-Ve Rav*, Machon Limud Aggadah, Ashdod, 2010, pp. 50, 176, 56, collecting various works attempting to explain the difficult and, on their face, rather odd stories (aggadot) that appear in Baba Batra (73a-74) many of which involve odd animals do odd things. In addition to these passages, there is another odd passage in Bechorot (7b) which also involves an animal, a donkey also engaging in odd behavior. This passage was too was also the subject of many works attempting to explain it. This new book reprints four of the many works attempting to decipher the stories in Baba Batra, R. Elyakim Getz, *Redfunei be-Tapuchim*, R. Zev Wolfe Boskowitz, *Le-Binyamin Amar*, R. Eliyahu Guttmacher, *Tzafnat Panach*, and the fourth is *Aggadot Soferim*, which a collection of materials on the topic from Ritva, Gra, and R. Efrayim Lunschutz (author of *Kli Yakar*, among other works). While three editions of *Redfunei be-Tapuchim* are available on Hebrewbooks (here, here and here) *Le-Binyamin Amar* and *Tzafnat Panach* are not. The book also provides biographical details about these authors (56 pp.). Additionally, a list of others books devoted to the Baba Batra stories which are not reprinted herein are included. The list provides over 25 such works devoted to the stories in Baba Batra. Regarding the donkey of Bechorot there are almost as many books on that topic. We have found 23 such works. One of those discussing the donkey of Berchorot is an important, little-known and recently reprinted book on that topic. Specifically, R. Hayyim Yirmiyahu Flensberg’s *Nezer ha-Nitzhon*, Vilna, 1883 (reprinted Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron, Israel, 2001).* Amongst the many who praised Flensberg’s book, was his teacher, the Netziv. And, it was not only the Netziv, but Flensberg received a request from his alma mater, Volozhin, that his book was so popular could he please send ten additional copies. Thus, in light of this book discussing, what is arguable similar *aggadot*, we provide background on this little-known Lithuanian rabbi, his works and children.
Flensberg was born in 1842. And, as many great rabbis, there are both miraculous stories told of his conception and birth as well as how bright he was. Indeed, it is said that he knew 300 pages of Talmud, with Tosefot, at his bar-mitzvah. While those stories are not unusual, what is unusual was the bar-mitzvah gift he received from his rebbi, R. Ya’akov Tuvia Goldberg, a copy of Avraham Mapu’s *Ahavat Tzion*, perhaps the first Hebrew novel. As his rebbi saw that Flensberg expressed an interest in studying Hebrew, his rebbi decided this book would be appropriate. Apparently, this gift was so important,
that in the biography of Flensberg, written by his son Yitzhak Yeshayahu Flensberg, some seventy years later, records this. It is worth noting that, although this biography appears at the beginning of the second volume of Flensberg’s Torah commentary which was reprinted in 2000 by the Lakewood publisher, Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron, this fact remains in this edition.

It should also be noted that, while on its face, it is questionable how much one can read into a single bar-mitzvah gift, Shaul Stampfer views this gift as highly significant. Stampfer writes, that although the policy of the Volozhin rabbinic administration was to prohibit haskalah literature, Flensberg is used as an example to prove that “not all the students viewed reading haskalah literature as conflicting with torah study.” Shaul Stampfer, The Lithuanian Yeshiva, Jerusalem, 2005, 171. Stampfer cites the story of the bar-mitzvah gift and notes that although Flensberg received this gift “he still went to study in Volozhin.” Id. at 172. Indeed, it is even more questionable to use the bar-mitzvah gift to understand the Volozhin students’ views on haskalah literature when one considers the timing. Flensberg didn’t go to Volozhin immediately after his bar-mitzvah, rather it would be over a year and a half before he went to Volozhin. [1] During that time, Flensberg stopped studying with R. Goldberg, the bar-mitzvah gift, giver and began studying with R. Leib Charif (eventual Chief-Rabbi of Tytvenai and Rietavas Lithuania). (Also relevant for our purposes is that R. Leib authored a book on the donkey Gemara in Bechorot called Eizot Yehoshua.) Thus, there are two significant factors that may sever any ties between Flensberg’s bar-mitzvah gift and his ultimate decision to go to Volozhin.

In all events, Flensberg thrived at Volozhin. He studied in the Netziv’s group and was close to the Netziv. Additionally, he was selected for the highly prestigious position at the Volozhin Yeshiva as the Purim Rav of Volozhin. His appointment to this position took place sometime before he left Volozhin in 1859, making this the earliest, and perhaps
one of the only, recorded mention of this custom from Volozhin.[2] In fact, there are those who doubt the existence of the custom of Purim Rav at Volozhin.[3] This appears to undermine that position. Additionally, the description of the Purim Rav position is of interest. According to Flensberg, the position was fairly innocuous. For the two days of Purim, the Netziv would cede his position to the best student. The student would wear the Netziv’s hat and use the Netziv’s walking stick. All the students would give the Purim Rav great deference. They would also pepper him with questions both about Purim and more comical questions. The Purim Rav would answer in the Purim spirit. Nowhere is there any mention of lack of respect or, seemingly anything that is objectionable.

After leaving Volozhin, he married Itta, whose father was R. Mendel Katz, who would eventually become a rabbi in Radin. After his marriage he went to study in a bet midrash in Kovno. Although some refer to this place as “the Kovno Kollel,” it cannot be referring to the famous Kovno Kollel as that did not begin until 1877 long after R. Flensberg left Kovno and entered the rabbinate. During his time in Kovno Flensberg became friendly with R. Yitzhak Elchonon Spektor. After leaving Kovno in 1869 to his first rabbinic position, and, in 1889, after a few other employment changes, Flensberg ended up in Shaki as the chief rabbi.

Flensberg found the rabbinate a good fit and focused on derash and philosophy. But, before publishing any of his books, he penned a number of important articles in various newspapers including Ha-Levonon, Ha-Melitz, and Ha-Maggid. In general, he took a rather novel views towards newspapers. At the time, many viewed newspapers as a threat to Orthodox Judaism as it exposed people to different views that they otherwise wouldn’t be exposed to. Thus, many took the position that reading a newspaper was prohibited. Flensberg, however, recognized that merely ignoring the problem is ineffective. Instead, he proposed that the Orthodox start their own newspaper so that their views will be available to all. This view echos that of R. Yaakov Ettlinger, who started the Orthodox journal Shomer Tzion ha-Ne’eman. (And, it appears, the same debate is happening, again, today with regard to the internet and
related technologies.) In addition, Flensberg also penned a series titled Moreh Neukei ha-Zeman he-Hadash, which some view an indirect attack against Nachman Krochmal’s similarly titled work. Flensberg wrote this essay during a time that he was suffering from headache and prohibited from Torah study. Thus, turned his focused to producing essays for newspapers.

After his wife died in 1882, he published his first work, Nezer ha-Nitzhon. As mentioned above, this book contains a lengthy explanation of the talmudic story regarding the famous donkey. Additionally, he includes two derashot at the end. In the introduction, he credits his wife for the publication and explains that this book is in her memory. In 1897, he published his next books, She’alot Hayyim, Divrei Yirmiyahu in Vilna. The first titled portion is comprised of responsa and the second titled portion is comprised of dershōt. The second part also contains a lengthy introduction regarding Flensberg’s view on derush, and a eulogy for R. Yitzhak Elchonon Spektor and the Godol of Minsk.

It appears that not everyone, including those who normally are very well-read, were familiar with R. Flensberg’s works. Katzman explains that R. Zevin, in Ishim ve-Shetot (p. 71), confuses R. Hayyim Flensberg with another R. Hayyim – R. Hayyim Soloveitchik. The statement R. Zevin attributes to a child R. Hayyim Soloveitchik, and which R. Zevin himself doubts it comports with what we know about R. Hayyim Soloveitchik’s manner of deciding law, actually appears in R. Hayyim Flensberg’s She’alot Hayyim, no. 14.[4]

In 1905,[5] he published his commentary on Hasdai Cerscas’ Ohr Adonay.[6] This is one of the very few commentaries on this very difficult work. Flensberg prefaces the book with an in-depth introduction regarding the work and its author. R. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg wrote a glowing review of the book. Weinberg expressed surprise that no one else, with one exception, had seen fit to review such a worthy book. Weinberg notes that to write such a commentary requires not only “an ish ma’adai” but also one must be a “rav ve-goan talmudi.”[7] Flensberg includes a few pages of comments on Moreh Nevukim at the end of the book, and there are two
letters one from Abraham Harkavey and the other from R. Dr. Abraham Berliner, at times, taking issue with some of Flensberg’s conclusions. This was intended to be the first part of two of Flensberg’s commentary on Crescas. According to Flensberg’s son, in 1909 the second portion was published but languished at the printer. And, after World War I broke out in 1914, the Flensberg’s were under the impression all the copies were lost. In 1925, they learned that Ester Rubinstein, Flensberg’s daughter, had saved the plates as well as other manuscripts. It is unclear if the second portion was ever actually reprinted. The JNUL appears to only have a few leaves from the second volume.

In 1910, Flensberg published his commentary on Shir ha-Shirim, Merkevot Ami. And, that same year, he also published his first volume of commentary on the Torah, Divrei Yirmiyahu, covering Genesis.

In 1914, Flensberg died, his full epitaph is included in his son’s biography which appeared in the second volume of Flensberg’s Torah commentary which was published posthumously in 1927. This version of the epitaph is the only complete one as the one on his headstone accidentally left out a line “for some [unnamed] reason.”

He was survived by his son, Yitzhak Yishayahu, and his daughter, [Haaya] Ester Rubinstein. Yitzhak Yishayahu lived in Pilwishki the town where R. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg served as Rabbi. When Weinberg describes the learned people in Pilwishki, one of the ones he singles out is Yitzhak Yishayahu.[8] Flensberg’s daughter, however, was more well-known than his son. She married Yitzhak Rubinstein, who subsequently became Chief Rabbi of Vilna – the first in over 200 years – and she was heavily involved in Vilna community affairs and was an ardent Zionist. This is in contrast to her father who compared Zionists to “the Berlin group . . . of maskilim.”[9] She was also very learned and R. Weinberg provides that when her father couldn’t remember a source, he would ask Ester who could always provide it.

Ester was also involved in woman’s issues. She started a girls school in Vilna and wrote why woman’s suffrage is
allowed under Jewish law.[10]

Ester died young, at age 43, in 1924. A Sefer Zikhron was published in her honor and, among others, R. Weinberg wrote a beautiful article describing Ester in the most honorific terms. An English translation was published by Dr. Leiman. Additionally, a memorial service was held in the Great Synagogue of Vilna, according to Leiman, “this was the only woman ever accorded this honor.”

Yitzhak, after Ester died, was involved in a bitter fight for the Vilna rabbinate that pitted him against R. Hayyim Ozer Grodzenski, and the Mizrachi versus the Agudah. In the end, Rubinstein was elected by a majority of the vote. This was viewed as untenable, and the chief rabbi position was split between the halakhic and administrative, giving both Rubinstein and Grodzenski positions.[11] This controversy was memorialized by Chaim Grade in his Rabbis and Wives, where he “resurrects” the dead Ester and imagines her as the driving force in her husband’s push for the Rabbinate. This part is untrue. However, Grade’s story of how Rubinstein was almost shouted down during his first speech (and his supporters forcibly ejected the shouters) after his election is true.
ODEZWA WYBORCZA

18 18

AHL HOLECZER UND HILLER-HEMEN
AM 19-HOLCZER-SHABA FEIN VORANGFORM
AHL ROBITSHMER UN WORK-VERNEH!!

YIDNEAER UND TOBER!!

KURM AYINZINER URNITSH SHETYMEL MER UER
LISMEL VOF DEE FARBENVORM, ROBITSHMER!!

1900

Dr. J. Wykowska Brzezin.
Odezwa wyborcza
wyd: Ogólny Żyd. Blok Narodowy w Będzinie

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18
Red. odp. S. Berger, Będzin, Kollataja.

Druk M. Zajdner, Będzin.
Two Broadsides Attacking Rubinstein and Urging Voters to Pick Number 18, R. Hayyim Ozer’s Number
These may have been penned by the Hazon Ish as he was heavily involved in the campaign to elect Grodzenski.

From a private collection.

Yitzhak would leave Europe to the United States to teach in Yeshiva University in 1941. On May 23, 1944, the day Belkin is inaugurated president of Yeshiva University, Rubinstein received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Yeshiva University. See also, N.Y. Times, May 23, 1944 p. 21. Rubinstein died on Oct. 30, 1945 [23 Marchesvan 5706] and is buried in Mt. Carmel cemetery in Queens.
In conclusion, R. Flensberg’s books from the one, Nezer ha-Nizhon, on the odd donkey passage to his more run of the mill responsa to his philosophy and derush are all of interest. Additionally, his children were no slouches either.

Notes
[1] Katzman asserts that Flensberg didn’t go to Volozhin until he was 16 or 17, which makes any connection between a bar-mitzvah gift and Flensberg’s entrance into Volozhin even more tenuous. See Eliezer Katzman, “A Biography of the Rav from Shaki – The Goan Rabbi Hayyim Yirmiyahu Flensberg ZT’L,” in Hayyim Yirmiayahu Flensberg, She’elot Haayim, Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron, Israel, 2001, 1. Katzman, however, provides no citation in support of his dates. We rely upon Flensberg’s son’s biography for our chronology. See Yitzhak Flensberg, “In Place of an Introduction,” in Hayyim Yirmiayahu Flensberg, Divrei Yermiyahu al ha-Torah, Vilna, 1927, vol. 2, V-VI.
[2] This has been noted by Katzman, “Biography” p. 2 n.2. It is odd that in Stampfer’s discussion of the Purim Rav in Volozhin, he fails to note Flensberg’s importance in establishing the existence of this custom even though the source is the same biography that contains the bar-mitzvah gift story. Cf. The Lithuanian Yeshiva at 165-68. Indeed, it is on the very next page after the bar-mitzvah gift. See “In Place of an Introduction” at VI.
[3] See this excellent article by Yehoshua Mondshein which demonstrates that the most well-known story regarding the
institution of Purim Rav is likely more legend than fact. Additionally, Mondshein collects those who doubt the existence of the Purim Rav custom. But see Stampfer, at 168 where he provides that the Purim Rav custom was abolished at Volozhin because of the Netziv’s second marriage after his first wife died. At the time of the marriage the Netziv was in his sixties, and his new wife was in her twenties. (The exact age difference is unclear, Stampfer’s source, Meir Berlin, *Rabban shel Yisrael*, pp. 124-31 states that the Netziv was 50 and that there was “only” a thirty year age difference and not forty.) She was a divorcee who had divorced her first husband because she felt he wasn’t a world class “*lamdan*.” And, she was extremely protective of her husband’s honor. It appears that she or the Netziv or both became the butt of jokes and she insisted that the Purim Rav custom end. Based upon her insistence, the custom died. For additional sources regarding the Purim Rav, see Mondshein’s article cited above and Eliezer’s post in note 23. See also R. Nosson Kamenetsky, *Making of a Godol*, Jerusalem, 2002, vol. 2, p. 1062 regarding Netziv and Purim Rav.


[5] It should be noted that there is some confusion regarding the publication date. According to the title page that appears on the soft outer cover, the book was published in Elul 5,667 [Sept./Oct. 1906], according to the two virtually similar title pages that follow the soft cover, the book was published in 5665 [1904/1905]. In Weinberg’s review, he first refers to a 1901 publishing date which appears to be a typographical error and then, later, mentions that he was writing his review over four years after Flensberg’s commentary was published. Weinberg’s review was written in 1912 and if he was being exact, that would give it a publication date of 1908. We have used the 1905 date as it is the date given by Flensberg’s son in his biography. It is clear, that whichever year it was published, Flensberg’s commentary was not composed that year as Flensberg had been working on this commentary for some twenty years. See “In
Place of an Introduction” at VII-VIII.

[6] Regarding the propriety of using of god’s name in titles see R. Hezkiyah Medini, Be’ari ba-Sadeh in his Sedei Hemed. Medeni was forced to defend the title of his magnum opus, Sedei Hemed, even though he didn’t use god’s name, only a word, that in this context refers to god only if read incorrectly. See also Ya’akov Shmuel Speigiel, Amudim be-Toldot Sefer ha-Ivri: Ketivah ve-Hatakah, Bar Ilan Univ. Ramat Gan, 2007, pp. 608-10; R. Moshe Hagiz, Halachot Ketanot, Jerusalem, 1981, no. 314 (sedi).


* In 2001, Machon Mishnas Rabbi Aaron republished all of R. Flensberg’s works with the exception of R. Flensberg’s commentary on Crescas.
Review: Or Hayyim Commentary

In recent years - the past few years at least - I have been following

[1]

The most recent edition of Mosaik Press, in the month of Nisan, I saw that a new Messianist with an Or Hayyim Commentary was published. Until Nisan, I had received the commentaries for the Messianic volumes of Genesis, Exod, Deut. Having decided to start studying the Or Hayyim Commentary for the beginning of the year, I decided to purchase the books in the hope that before Nisan next year, the last two volumes would be published. (For more details about the commentary, see my earlier article) After re-reading the first volume and analyzing the commentaries, I found that the commentary was well-organized and informative. The commentary was published according to the first edition, with additional comments and footnotes by Rabbi Israel Joseph Friedman (as mentioned on the front page). Besides the editor, Rabbi Israel Joseph Friedman, the authors signed their names on the volumes: Rabbi Samuel Nathan Halevi, Rabbi Mordechai Lib Kastenboung, Rabbi Eliezer Tork and Rabbi Nathan Viper. When I purchased the book, I did not check first that it was a good book, as I trusted the publisher Mosaik Press and their previous publications in the field of interpretation, such as the Messianic "Tzohar Hayyim" and "Tohar Hayyim" Megillat Esther, Tzohar Hayyim, Pirkei Avot "Meshan Reuben" and others, which I really enjoyed. Thus, I thought that the same applied here. I imagined that the purpose of the additional comments and footnotes was to explain the commentary better to the reader. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Instead of receiving a precise and clear commentary based on the words of the Or Hayyim Commentary, in this book we can find comments and interpretations that are not related to the words of the Or Hayyim Commentary. We can give several examples. The first two examples are of complete misunderstanding and lack of understanding of the words of the Or Hayyim Commentary. The first example, perhaps the most striking example I encountered, is the following: "Therefore, he called his name Amon" (Genesis 40:19). This means "Amon called his name Amon", and the reason is not to mention the name Amon twice, but because he went to die and his left name died in his name, as it is said: "Thus did God call his name Yaakov" (Genesis 32:28). The editor here leaves and adds something that is not mentioned anywhere: "And God called his name Amon because his name is Amon... and see the wisdom of the ancients... and according to our interpretation, the name Amon was called Amon because he called his name Amon. ... But when the Torah tells us how to call the name Amon, it is not because of the name Amon, but because Amon has a special meaning..."
התוספות? הדוגמה הבאה היא גם כן חוסר הבנה מוחלט של דברי האור
החיים. את הפסוק "יוסף היה רועה את אחיו בצאן" (בראשית לז ב)
מפרש האור החיים: אכן כוונת הכתוב היא על זה הדרך 'היה רועה את
אחיו' בעניין הצאן, פירוש בדרך אכילת הצאן. ברור מהמשך דברי האור
החיים שהכוונה היא שיוסף היה משגיח על אחיו בעניין הדרך שבו הם
היו אוכלים צאן – הוא חשד בהם על אברמן החי, שכן כך כותב האור
החיים רק מספר שורות לאחר מכן: "ומ выход דבר אתה למד מאומרו 'רועה
את אחיו' בדין הצאן, הא למדת שנחשדו אצלו בפרט זה אך למהדיר היתה
הברכה של ממש: בדרך אכילת צאן- אפשר כוונתו על דרך שאמרו
[ילקוט שמעוני תהלים רמז תתכג]
במדרש הממכלאות צאן. רבי יהושע הכהן בשם רבי חנינא בר יצחק מהו ממכלאות
צאן היה דוד כולא אלו מפני אלו מוציא הגדיים ומאכילן ראשי
עשבים, מוציא את התישים ומאכילן אמצען של עשבים, מוציא את הזקנות
ומאכילן עיקרן של עשבים". וזה יורה על הכשרתו למלכות כמו שאמרו
שם" על דוד שאמר הקב"ה "הואיל ויודע לרעות את הצאן יבוא וירעה
צאני". כלומר, המהדיר הבין שהאור חיים כתב שיוסף היה משגיח
בעניין הרגלי האכילה של הצאן. זה בודאי לא מה התכוון האור-
החיים.עוד דוגמא למה שבעיני היא טעות בהבנה מופיעה בפרשת בראשית
(בראשית ב ג), שם כותב האור החיים: "ויברך אלקים וגו'" – צריך
dעת מה היא הברכה… והנכון במשמעות הכתוב הוא כי להיות שהעולם
הזה צריך הוא לשפע המקיים היא בחינת האכילה והשתיה וצורכי האדם,
ocלון מושגים על ידי טורח ויגיעה הגשמית וחולין היא, וה' כשרצה
לקדש יום השביעי קדם וברכו שלא יחסר בו דבר, הגם שאין טובת העולם
השפל מושגת מהפרישות והקדושה אלא מעסק חול, אף על פי כן ברכו שלא
יחסר טוב, עוד לו הוא יתר על שאר הימים לחם משנה שלש סעודות
.כלומר, מכיוון
והוא דבר הפך הסדר
ותענוגים יתירים, וזו היא ברכתו
שהשבת היא "שבת לה'" היינו מצפים שיידרש מן האדם להינזר מכל
הנאות העולם הזה הגשמיות הם ענייני חול, ויעסוק רק בעניינים
רוחניים – כמין יום כיפור של פעם בשבוע. אך במקום זאת אנו מוצאים
שדווקא בשבת האדם יותר נהנה מענייני העולם הזה מאשר בימות השבוע
– הוא אוכל שלש סעודות במקום רק שתיים, הוא אוכל לחם משנה, ישן
יותר וכד'. זהו הברכה שברך אלקים את היום השביעי – על אף שזה יום
שאנו פורשים מעסקי החול, יום השבת לא רק שאיננו חסר בהנאות
הגשמיות אלא יש בו יותר הנאות גשמיות מיום רגיל. על המילים
האחרונות "והוא דבר הפך הסדר" מעיר המהדיר: כי הסדר הטבעי הוא שאם
אינו מתעסק במלאכתו ביום השבת יהיה חסר ויפסיד מממונו חלק השביעי
בכל שבוע, ואעפי"כ נתברך יום השביעי שלא יהיה חסר מאומה,万元以上
מכך שמרבים בו בתענוגים וכמ"ש חז"ל 'לוו עלי ואני פורע'.אך האמת
היא שהאור חיים סך הכל מתמודד עם השאלה הפרשנית מדוע נכתב
"ויברך… את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו" – לכאורה היה נכון יותר לומר
שמברכים את היום לאחר שהוא כבר קדוש, tức "ויקדש… את יום
השביעי ויברך אותו". "היפך הסדר" הוא שהקב"ה קודם ברך ואחר כך קידש את יום השביעי. עוד מקום שהמהדיר טעה בו, לדעתי, זה בתחילת פרשת וישלח. שם כותב האור החיים: "ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו" פירוש נכנס בגדר להרוג או ליהרג,ذي כנגד 'ליהרג' ירא מאד, וכנגד 'להרוג' וייצר לו, ולזה לא אמר הכתוב 'מאד' אחר 'וייצר'. עוד ירצה כי לצד שהודיעוהו כי עשו מערים להראות אחוה והוא שונא, ירא יעקב שלא להכין עצמו למלחמה שמא עשו יהרגו ואין בידו של יעקב כלי קרב, והכין עצמו בכלי קרב "ויצר לו", כי אפשר שלא יעשה עשו רע, וכי arschאהו מוכן בכלי קרב יאמר עشو הלא יעקב הוא דרשות רעה ובלזה יחזר שנאתו, ולזה נתחכם "ויחץ וגו'" פירוש חיצה העם, חצי העם מראים פני אהבה וחיבה כאח לאחיו וחצי מחנהו מוכן ומזוין. כך מסביר המהדיר את החלק הראשון של דברי האור-החיים:"לא אמר הכתוב 'מאד' אחר וייצר" וכמו שאמרו חז"ל "בתורתו של רבי מאיר מצאו כתוב והנה טוב מאד והנה טוב מות" כי לצדיקים טוב הוא המות שהם מזומנים לקבל שכרם, אך מכל מקום היה יעקב ירא כי חשש שנתמעטו זכויותיו בשביל הנסים שנעשו לו, וכמו שאמר "קטנתי מכל החסדים", וכמו שפירש רש"י שם, אבל היה מיצר על שיהרג עשו, וכמש"כ רש"י היה מיצר שמא יהרג ושמא יהרוג הוא את עשו. זאת, כאשר ברור שכוונת האור החיים לומר שליהרג יעקב פחד 'מאד' ולהרוג הוא לא פחד 'מאד' והשלום לומר "כי לצדיקים טוב הוא המות". על חלקו השני של דברי אוה"ח המהדיר כותב כך:ויצר לו – יו"ד שויצ"ר דגושה כאילו נכתב וייצר וכמש"כ רבינו, וזה על דרך מה שנאמר לעיל "וייצר ה"א את האדם" ואמרו חז"ל "וייצר שתי יצירות" אף כאן שני צרות היו לו אם עשו בא לחם עמו הרי אין לו כלי קרב, ואם יכין כלי קרב והוא בא לשלום תתעורר אצלו השנאה בראותו יעקב מכין עצמו למלחמה. זאת, כאשר דברי האור החיים מסובים על הכפל של "וירא" ו"ויצר" – ולא על הדגש בי"ד של "ויצר" Natürlich (ובודאי שאין קשר ל"וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם"(. עוד דוגמא מהסגנון הזה ניתן להביא מחלה פרשת נח (בראשית ו' ט'), שם דן האור החיים בשאלה על המילה "נח" בפסוק "אלה תולדות נח, נח איש צדיק". האורحياة מסביר כך: " עוד יתרבוח כל הכתוב על זה הדרך, "אלה תולדות נח וגו'" פירוש אלה סדר תולדותיו מה שהוליד מטובותיו, אחד 'נח', הוא על דרך אומרם ז"ל: '...ריש לקיש אמר: קודם נח היו המים עולים ומציפין אותם מקבריהן כיון שבא נח ננוחו וכו' ע"כ. זה הוא שמונה בסדר תולדותיו באומרו "נח" פעם שנית. כלומר האורحياة מפרש את הפסוק כך: "אלה צדיק איש נח – שהאנשים נינוחו. " אלה תולדות נח" – פירוש ש'נח' הוא מעשה טוב שעשה נח. ואיך הבין המהדיר? כך:"מה שהוליד מטובותיו" פי' מה שחידש נח טובה לבאי עולם באומרו "נח" פעם שנית, כי תיבת 'נח' האראשונה תורה על המנוחה שאלו שמותו ויהיו בקבריהן נינוחו. כמובן שהאורحياة למד שנינוחו ממילת 'נח' השניה, ולא הראשונה. פירוש
דברי האוה"ח "מה שהוליד הטובות באמצעותו" זה פשוט הסבר למילים " אלה תולדות נח" שעיקר תולדותיהם של צדיקים מעשים טובים, והפירוט מה הם המעשים הטובים הוא: נח, איש, צדיק, תמים וכו' כפי שהסברנו לעיל, ו Assertions שווים הם מוטעים לחלוטין.  לעומת מקומות שבו המהדיר טעה באופן מוחלט בהבנה, פעמים שהם ספקולציות חסרות כל בסיס וחסרות כל קשר לדברי האור החיים. לדוגמה, האור המלך תמלוך עלינו אם משול תמשול בנו"

החיים מסביר את הפסוק "בראשית לז ח" באופן הבא: טעם כפל "המלוך" "אם משול" להיות כי יש בפירוש החלום שני דרכים, האחד מלכות ממש, והשני ממשלה. והנה המלכות היא בגדר ספק בפתרון אבל הממשלה בגדר מוחלט… ולזה תרגם אונקלוס במלכות-את מדמי, ובממשלה-את סביר. המהדיר מנסה להסביר מה ההבדל בין מלכות לבין ממשלה:בקול אליהו כתיב שמלך הוא מי שהעם ממליך אותו מרצונו, ומושל הוא זה מי שמושל מעצמו בכח, ואפשר שלזה נתכוין רבינו בדרך הראשונה שההוא מלכות ממש דהיינו שהעם ממנים אותו, ודבר זה הוא בגדר ספק כי לפי שנואם אותו ודאי לא ימליכוהו מרצונם, והדרך שני הוא החלטי-ודאי כי זאת הדרך היחידה שיטיל ממשלתו עליהם בכח הזרוע. בהמשך מביא המהדיר גם את דעת הרמב"ן ש"המלוכה והממשלה שניהם ענין אחד, רק שה ghếמה דרגה נמוכה מהמלוכה". אעפ"כ הוא מ持续推进 את דברי העថה-החיים בדרך הגר"א והאבן-עזרא שהוא הביא בתחילה, בדבריו בהסבר הראיה מترجم אונקלוס:במלכות את מדמי- 'מדמי' פירושו מדמה בנפשו. ועל המלכותşe ספק אמרו לו הוא מדמה בנפשו, כי ודאי אין הדבר יתכן, הם ימנוהו למלך עליהם מרצונם. ובממשלה את סביר- 'Sizer' פירושו שכך אתה סבור ומוחלט הדבר בדעתך שתהיה למושל עלינו. יש להדגיש שבשום מקום באור החיים אין ראיה או סיבה להסביר כך את דעתו על החלוקה בין מלוכה לממשלה, ודווקא מזה הוא כתב "מלכות ממש" משמע הוא סובר כרמב"ן ש"המלוכה והממשלה שניהם ענין אחד, רק שהchestra דרגה נמוכה מהמלוכה". דוגמה נוספת מעניין זה מופיעה בתחילת פרשת לך-לך )בראשית י"ב א'(, שם שואל האור החיים את:שדיבר אליו ה' קודם הראות לו מה שלא עשה כן בכל הנבראים. but the question renders more than

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שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג, הציץ עליו הקב"ה ואמר לו אני הוא בעל העולם'. "בהתחכmithו" …ששאל 'וכי יש בירה בלא מנהיג'. אבל משום מה המדיר בחר להוסיף עוד משפט. על סוף דברי האור החיים "לזה לא הוצרך להגלות אליו", כותב המדיר:ובאמת במדרש אמרו שנגלה אליו ואמר לו 'אני בעל הבירה'. מה ראה המדיר לכתוב משפט זה? מה הוא רצה ללמד בזה? לי אין תשובה. הדוגמה האחרונה מהסגנון הזה שבחרתי להביא הוא מדברי האור החיים על הפסוק "ויאמר ה' לא ידון רוחי באדם לעולם" (בראשית ו' ג'), שם כותב האור חיים:ומשחרב המעון נשתם חזון ונשארה בחינת רוח הקודש, וכשנסתתמו עיני ישראל אין אתנו משיג ריח הקודש ואני צריך לומר רוח הקודש, וזו היא צרת בית ישראל ואין למעלה ממנה הצמאים להריח ריח אבינו שבשמים ותחי רוחינו. כאן מעיר המדיר כך:עי' שו"ת דברי חיים לגה"ק ר' חיים מצאנז (ח"ב יו"ד סי' רה) שאלה אודות אחד שפגע בכבוד רבינו האוה"ח הקדוש ואמר שלא עשה ספרו ברוח הקודש, ומסיים שם את תשובתו שודאי רבינו האוה"ח הקיקא חיבר את ספרו ברוח הקודש, ולפי"ז מ"ש כאן הוא רק מחמת ענתנותו (סימן提供商). קשה לומר שזה פשט דברי האור החיים,وكשה עוד יותר לומר שניתן לפרש כך את דבריו כאן. אמנם, בודאי שיש מקום להזכיר את דבריו של הדברי-חיים, אך התוספת של המדיר על דיבריו רק גורע. בהקדמה לספר, המדיר בחר שלא לכתוב שום דבר על תולדותיו של רבי חיים בן עטר, בעל האור החיים מלבד זה הוא יליד מרוקו. כמו כן, הוא גם לא מצא לנכון לכתוב משהו על שיטת פרשנותו, מלבד פיסקה אחת:חיבור ה"אור החיים" על התורה אינו ספר רופף, עיקרו הוא ביאור על התורה בדרך הפשט, חדירה לעומק השיתין של פשטי הכתובים, עמידה על קוצו של יוד בביאורי הכתובים ובשונות הלשונות התורה נוקטת בהם, אף סדרי הכתובים גם הם מוצאים בביטויים בהבנתו החודרת של רבינו, כשהוא חוקר ודורש למשמעותן של המאורעות וסדרי הכתובים ותוך כדי דבריו אנו מוצאים בהם פירושים מחודשים וביאורים מתוקים מדבש לאמיתה של תורה. לא נכתב שום מילה על הזמן בו נכתב הספר, על האופן בו נכתב הספר או שום דבר אחר בסגנון זה. המדיר גם לא שטח בפני הלומד באילו ספרים הוא ניעץ במהלך עבודתו. מוסד הרב קוק הם בעלי הזכויות על חלק גדול מכתביו "וכו ציוני המקורות ונל"ם(במקום "נל"ם"). לנקודות שהфессל שבי"ת לפסוקים ולמאמרי חז"ל שבדברי אור החיים וכדרכו בקודש הוא מעיר ומפרש ביטויים קשים בדברי האורحياة (ראוי לציין כאן גם לעובדה שהרב מרגליות גם כתב ספר תולדות האור החיים). את העבודה הרבה שהעשה הרב מרגליות בזמנו בעזרת מוחו החריף, היום קל מאד לבצע בעזרת חיפושים פשוטים במחשב, כך שבהחלט ניתן对我说 שהמ مدير לא השתמש בציוני המקורות שכתב הרב מרגליות. אך חלק מההערות הקצרות שהעיר הרב מרגליות בתוך דבריו הועתקו כלשונם לתוך דברי המדיר בתוספת "נל"ם(במקום "נל"ם"). אדם שאיננו מכיר את ספרו של הרב מרגליות, נרלמאור, אין שום דרך לדעת מה זה נל"ם. יש ספרים נוספים שהמדיר
לפני כמה שנים, לפני ש多了 למלא את פירושם על חומש האור החיים לחומש במדבר ודברים. מעניין לציין שהmahדר בהיותו הרב פרידמן, בהוצאתו, התווסף בהרחבה המהדיר של מוסד הרב קוק, והוחלף באופן מלא. אין לי דרך לדעת אם שינויים אלה התרחשו בעקבות טיב העבודה שהודגמה עליי מחד, או אם שינויים אלה שיפורו במשהו את איכות העבודה על במדבר ודברים מאידך. כך או כך פניתי働きי ב組織 מוסד הרב קוק על ספר זה ו,start תרשים בפניהם את טענאותי עליו טיבו הירוד של הספר, ובקשתי שיחזירו לי כספי שהוצאתי בטעות מחשבה שמדובר בספר איכותי. בהודעה无线电 של ראשי הנהלת מוסד הרב קוק, הרב יהודה רפאל,븡ו הוא שפירוש "אור החיים" בהוצאתינו התקבל בברכה ובשמחה רבה על שולחנם של גדולי ישראל. מותר לך לחלוק על תודעותיו של המahדר ולהפרשים את דבריו האור החיים בצורה אחרת. אין מושג שמאלים מקבלים כסף בחזרה מסיבה זו שאינך מרוצה מפירושו של המahדר. دائم copyrighted by达尔, אני מתכון איך אנשים מכובדים ומוכנים להעליל על גדולי ישראל שהם נותנים את ידם לכל מיני שטויות, תוך שהם מתנסים באופן שמשתמע כאילו הם מוכבים את אותם גדולי ישראל, אך בפועל הם בעצם מבזים תודעותיו. 

ברצונתי להודות למו"ח פרופ' דניאל י. לסקר проGroupName עזר בהערותיו להכנת המאמר לפרסום.
I. A Censored Text in Berachos 3a

The Vilna Edition of Berachos 3a states as follows:

אמר רב יצחק בר שמואל מسمي' דרב ג' משמרות הוי הלילה ועל כל משמר אוי לבנים שבעונותיהם החרבתי
ומשמר יושב הקב"ה ושואג כארי ואומר את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים ואומות העולם

The identical statement is cited by R. Yose in a Braisa that follows the above-cited section. The Braisa records the story of R. Yose’s visit to a ruin in Jerusalem to pray and his subsequent conversation with Eliyahu HaNavi upon leaving the ruin. At the end of the conversation, Eliyahu haNavi asks R. Yose whether he heard a “kol” in the ruin. R. Yose responds as follows:

אוי לבנים ואמרתי לו שמעתי בת קול שמנהמת כיונה ואומרת שבעונותיהם החרבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים ואומות העולם

The meaning of the statement reported by R. Yitzchak bar Shmuel and R. Yose seems straightforward: God is expressing the magnitude of the Jewish people’s loss. And, by attributing this loss to the nation’s own sins and repeating this statement on a regular, thrice-nightly, basis, the statement serves as a constant reminder to the nation that their loss is their own fault.[1] While an element of rebuke is not explicit in the statement, it dwells right beneath the surface.

However, as noted in Dikdukei Soferim, the version of the statement appearing in the Vilna edition is incorrect. The version of the sugya that appears in all extant manuscripts (at least those available on the JNUL online repository),[2] the earliest printings of the Talmud and various Rishonim who cite it, does not include the phrase “לבנים שבעונותיהם החרבתי”. Thus, in the Munich and the Firenze manuscripts and in citations to the sugya in the Menoras Hamaor (which is cited in the Dikdukei Soferim), and the Kuzari,[3] the statement reads:

Woe Is Unto Whom? Christian Censorship of a Sugya in Berachos 3a
(or What Was Bothering the Censor II)

By: David Zilberberg
Early Talmud printings (e.g., Soncino, Bomberg), the Rosh, Rav Hai Gaon and Rabbenu Chananel have it slightly differently:

The Paris manuscript follows the Munich and Firenze version ("אז בעל אלי והגליתים" in the story of R. Yose and follows the Soncino version ("אז בעל אלי" in the statement of Rav. Similarly, the Tosafist R’ Moshe Taku, in Kesav Tamim, cites both versions.

Either alternative has a profoundly different meaning than the Vilna version.[4] A statement casting blame at the nation for their exile becomes a statement of divine mourning or regret. Dikdukei Soferim explains the change as follows:

Thus, the original text was changed in the notorious Basel edition of the Talmud at the behest of the Christian censors, and this change was retained in subsequent versions.[5]

Why was this statement censored? What did the censors find objectionable about the original version?

II. Overview of Christian Censorship of the Talmud and the Basel Edition

To answer this question, it would be useful to briefly outline the history of censorship of the Talmud by the Church. According to William Popper’s The Censorship of Hebrew Books, from the time it was first committed to writing until the High Middle Ages, the text of the Talmud survived in manuscript form relatively undisturbed by outside scrutiny. The first significant efforts against the Talmud occurred in 13th Century France. These efforts, spearheaded by Jewish apostates, culminated in the burning of thousands of volumes of Hebrew books in the 1230s and 1240s. Similar but less extreme efforts were taken against the Talmud in Spain as well.

The Golden Age of Hebrew printing that developed in Italy in the late 15th century was abruptly ended by a “golden age” of censorship. Within years of the invention of the printing press, Italy quickly became the center of Hebrew printing. In 1483, Gershom Soncino set up a printing press, and only a year later published Masekhes Berachos. While this volume was not
the first printed Talmud, it established the classic tzuras hadaf that has become synonymous with Talmud study until today. During the first half of the 16th century, other Italian printers published volumes of the Talmud, including Daniel Bomberg, who published multiple editions of the Talmud including at least one complete set. These early printed editions encountered little interference by the Christian authorities. In fact, the Bomberg edition was printed with the permission of Pope Leo X (this is not to say that the printers did not engage in self-censorship).

Starting in the end of 15th century, the Church, concerned about the ease with which the written word could now be disseminated unimpeded throughout the Christian world, began to take measures to regulate the publishing industry. The focus of these efforts was initially on books designed for Christian readers. However, as these measures became stricter, they ultimately focused on Hebrew books. In 1550, the events of 13th Century France began to replay themselves in Italy. Accusations against the Talmud by several apostates led to a renewal of anti-Talmud sentiment and ultimately to decrees directing the burning of the Talmud and prohibitions against possessing it. The Talmud benefitted from a reprieve in 1563, when the Council of Trent modified the ban against the Talmud to allow its printing as long as it was renamed (to Gemara) and the “calumnies and insults to the Christian religion” were removed. However, this limited dispensation was not exploited for many years, most likely because the risk of printing even an expurgated Talmud was deemed too great to justify the financial investment. Finally, in 1578, a printer in Basel, Switzerland decided to print a version of the Talmud that would be acceptable to the Church and hired two well known figures with solid censorship credentials — Marco Marino, the papal inquisitor of Venice, and Pierre Chevallier of Geneva — for the task.[6] The Talmud that produced in Basel was a thoroughly butchered work that was considered an utter abomination by the Jewish community. In the words of R. Rabinowitz in Ma’amar al Hadpasas Hatalmud:

Certain words were systematically replaced, sections were
removed or changed and “explanatory” notes were added. The entirety of Maseches Avodah Zara was omitted. Most shocking were the notes added to Maseches Bava Metzia. An example is the following amud:

The marginal note in the lower left hand corner is a comment on a derasha regarding the purity of a person upon entry into this world. Although difficult to read in the image posted above, Ma’amar cites the text of the note as follows:

There you have it— the Christian doctrine of Original Sin on
a blatt Gemara. As unconscionable as these notes are, any harm they did was short term. These changes were both clearly gratuitous and easy enough for printers to spot. Accordingly they were removed (for the most part) in later printings. The changes to the text of the Talmud itself were more pernicious because not only were they harder for printers to identify, printers of the 17th and 18th century were content with sticking with a text that passed muster rather than risking problems with the censors by reverting to the pre-Basel text.

III. Explaining the Work of the Censors

Our original questions remains: what did the censors find objectionable about our sugya? It should be noted at the outset that it is impossible to determine definitively the reasoning of the censors. The censors left no detailed notes explaining the basis for their decisions. In addition, the censorship of the Basel Talmud, and Hebrew books more generally, was not systematic or consistent. Many have pointed out the almost comical examples of censorship revealing the utter incompetence of certain censors, who for example, indiscriminately replaced certain “buzzwords” such as “גוי” or “אדום” without regard to context. In addition, identical or near identical texts that appeared in multiple places received different treatment by the Basel censors for no apparent reason other then lack of diligence (or perhaps due to the use of two censors).[7] Thus, any attempt to divine why a particular change was made involves a bit of guesswork.

A. Anthropomorphism

Some scholars have suggested that the censors objected to the anthropomorphic nature of the original version’s portrayal of a sorrowful or regretful God, as it were.[8] However, this reason appears to be incomplete. The first Chapter of Berakhos is replete of anthropomorphic statements. God wears Tefillin, God davens and God asks for a blessing from the Kohen Gadol. All of these statements escaped the scrutiny of the censors. Anthropomorphism, it would seem, didn’t always bother them. While it might be argued that expressions of regret or sorrow by God was a form of anthropomorphism more troubling to the censor then other “garden variety” forms of anthropomorphism, I find this reasoning unsatisfactory.[9]
B. Supersessionsism
A hint at what I believe is the true reason for the change in our text is found in a book called *Sefer HaZikuk*. This book was printed in different versions at various times but its purpose was the same: to provide the censors with Hebrew language guidance (which, because the censors were apostates, for the most part, was the only language they could read) as to what kind of passages were considered contrary to Church doctrine.

A. M. Haberman quotes a number of the guidelines printed in one of the versions of the book.[10] Among these guidelines is:

כָּל מָשֶׂג ‑ אוֹ בֵּית אוֹ שֵׁם אוֹ שֵׁם א”נָא , שֶׁהוּא יָהְבָה ב

The censored passage in Berachos 3a fits this guideline precisely.

Note that this book was not used by the censors of the Basel Talmud – it was written after the printing of the Basel Talmud. However, Haberman states that this book was based on the censorship standards used for the Basel Talmud. Accordingly, it provides a strong hint as to the kind of concern this passage likely raised with the Church and why it was changed.

While the *Sefer Hazikuk* doesn’t answer our original question, it certainly points us in the right direction. Why would an expression of divine “pain” over the Churban be objectionable? The answer would appear to be supersessionism. Supersessionism is (or at least was) a central tenet of Church doctrine. It aims to explain the status of various Divine promises to and covenants with the Jewish people contained in Tanach in light of the New Testament. The basic idea is that these promises were superseded by a new covenant with the followers of the Christian faith because the Jews failed to live up to their obligations. Thus, the destruction of the Temple and the exile and persecution of the Jewish people is a fulfillment of Church teachings.

The notion of Divine lament or pain over these events is therefore a direct affront to this brand of Christian theology – if God “replaced” the Jews due to their failures with a new people and a new covenant why would he lament or feel pain over the rejection of the Jews or the destruction of the Temple that facilitated His relationship with them?
Supersessionism not only explains the “offensiveness” of the original text, but the rationale for the revised text as well.[11] While many cases of censorship merely show the ignorance of the censor, the censorship of the passage before us should actually deepen our understanding of it. What set off alarms in the minds of Medieval Church officials should likewise signal to us that the sugya is not merely a puzzling anthropomorphic statement attributing emotions to God but, but an implicit affirmation of God’s relationship with the Jewish people.[12] In fact, this is the precisely the interpretation offered by R. Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook in his commentary on our sugya in Ayn Ayah:
III. A Note Regarding Recent Talmud Printings

It’s troubling enough that censored passages continued to be
retained in nearly all printings of the Talmud over the several hundred years after the Basel Talmud. But what is completely unconscionable is that many of the “Mifuar” reprintings of the Talmud in recent years have retained these passages as well, including certain editions that boast of teams of editors exerting painstaking effort to fix the text. Most puzzling is the English Schottenstein edition of Berachos which not only retains the censored text and fails to note the correct original text, but includes a note providing a commentary on the censored text:

Accordingly, the statement “Woe to the children because of whose sins I destroyed My Temple…” may be meant to convey that since it is only because of our sins that the Temple was destroyed and our people were scattered among the nations, it is only because of our failure to repent them that the Temple continues to lie in ruins and we remain scattered among the nations. God, however, yearns for our repentance and if only we will cry out to Him in anguish and repent over our sins and return to Him, He will surely restore us to our land and rebuild the Holy Temple.

While the notion that we can extract important lessons from texts written by medieval Christian censors is somewhat peculiar, it is ironic that the explanation somehow manages to retain the hopeful message of the original uncensored text. Thankfully, the Hebrew Schottenstein edition, as well as the Oz v’Hadar and Steinsaltz editions, include the original texts in footnotes.

We are blessed to live in a society where we benefit from nearly absolute freedom of religion. All sorts of expression—even the most vile, hateful and offensive sorts—receive broad protection under law. Why do we continue to print and study editions of the Talmud marred by the fingerprints of the 16th Century Catholic Church?

Notes
[1] The statement is echoed a third time later in the sugya but with somewhat different wording. This post does not directly address this statement, although much of what is said here may apply to it.
[3] Saul Lieberman notes that this version of the text also appears in several anti-Talmud polemical texts by Christians and Karaites. *Shki’in* at 69-70. Lieberman demonstrates that (contra other scholars) these polemic works are valuable and trustworthy sources of Hebrew texts.
[5] Notably, the Firenze manuscript itself reflects the work of the censor. Here is the relevant portion of our sugya below.
As you can see, a censor sought to remove the text under review and a later scribe apparently sought to reinsert it. According to this, this manuscript was censored in Florence in 1472. See below for another example of the expurgation of the passage:
This is an image of an expurgated version of the first page of *Ein Yaakov* (renamed “Ein Yisrael” due to the listing of *Ein Yaakov* on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*) taken from the Printing the Talmud website.


[7] Although not quite a parallel text, Chagiga 5b includes identical themes to the uncensored version of our sugya, namely, God mourning, as it were, over the persecution of the
Jews and nonetheless appears in the Basel edition unscathed.


[9] While I am no expert on Christian censorship or Christian theology, I don’t understand why the Catholic Church would find expressions of anthropomorphism a basis for censorship. In fact, the use of the uncensored version of this passage and others like it in anti-Talmud polemical texts discussed by Lieberman would seem inconsistent with this argument. Presumably, these texts sought to ridicule and belittle the Talmud based on the anthropomorphism of the passage. Why would anthropomorphism become a reason for Christians to censor these passages a few centuries later?


[11] Credit for this insight goes to my clinical psychologist wife Penina whose prowess apparently extends to long dead church officials.

[12] Significantly, the Rosh and Rabenu Chananel, both of whom had the version of the sugya without the word “לי”, interpret the expression of woe as applying to the wicked (i.e., that due to the their misdeeds, God is compelled, as it were, to punish the Jewish nation) rather than God Himself. This less radically anthropomorphic interpretation brings the original version of the text (at least the version that the Rosh and the Rabenu Chananel had) closer in line to the Basel text. One can speculate that this line of interpretation provided a rabbinic basis for retaining the Basel text. However, this understanding cannot explain the version of the sugya in the extant manuscripts, which employ the word “לי”, thereby clearly attributing the expression of woe to God Himself.

It should be noted that Lieberman asserts that the “correct” version of the text includes “לי” based on the prevalence of this version in the manuscripts and in anti-Talmud polemical tracts. He speculates that the removal of the word “לי” is an example of Jewish self-censorship resulting from discomfort with the radical anthropomorphism of the original text. *Shki’in* at 70.
What Was Bothering the Censor?

WHAT WAS BOTHERING THE CENSOR?

by Eli Genauer

The invention of the printing press in the 15th century was a great boon for Torah study. Manuscripts which had to be laboriously copied one by one could now be set to type and hundreds could be produced at one time. One of the earliest Jewish treasures to be set to print was the Talmud. Scattered volumes of it were printed in the late 15th century and early sixteenth century, but the first complete set was printed from 1519-1523 in Venice by Daniel Bomberg. He followed this with printing two more sets, and was joined by Marco Antonio Justinian who printed a complete set from 1546-1551.

The competition between Justinian and another gentile printer named Bragadini, led to one of them denouncing the other to the Pope for printing items which were against the Church. This led to the public burning of the Talmud throughout most of Italy starting in 1553.[1] The Talmud was listed in the Church’s first Index Librorum Prohibitorum in 1559.
There still was a possibility to print the Talmud but only under the watchful eye of a censor who would excise all offending passages. The consequences of having to deal with
censored texts, both from the outside and from self-censorship, is one of the tragic outcomes of our *Galus*.

The first attempt to print the Talmud under the Papal ban was in 1578-1581 in Basel by the printer Ambrosius Froben who was allowed to print the Talmud under the lead censorship of Father Marco Marino.

Regarding the censorship efforts, Marvin J. Heller notes this
was the most censored edition ever printed. Stories about the founder of Christianity were deleted, and many references to anything remotely connected to Christianity were changed. When it came to Aggadic material, Raphael Nathan Nata Rabinowitz in *מאמר על הדפסת התלמוד* writes that regarding material which was either a bit strange or against the Christian concepts of reward and punishment, the censor would print a short explanation about it on the page.

I would like to focus on one piece of the printed Talmud which is Aggadic in nature, the comment that was made on it by one of the classic Jewish Meforshim, and the comment made on that comment by the censor. I am vexed by the following question, “what was bothering the censor?”

The piece in question is in *מסכת אבות- פרק ו'-משנה י*:

There is a commentary on Avos in many of the early printed editions of Mishnayos and of the Talmud. This commentary is attributed to the Rambam in the Soncino Napoli edition of the Mishnayos, in the Bomberg editions, in the Basel edition, and in the 1721 Frankfurt edition amongst others. It turns out that the commentary on the sixth chapter of Avos was not written by the Rambam as noted by the Romm 1880 edition of the Talmud, which attributes it to Rashi.

Be that as it may, this Peirush as printed in the Mishnayos by Yehoshua Shlomo Soncino, Napoli 1492, states the following:

The creation of the Torah preceded the creation of the world,
because when Hashem imagined creating the world, He said that the world should exist because of the Torah

This is what it looks like there: (from JNUL digitized books)

In the Bomberg Edition of 1521, it looks like this (from JNUL Digitized Books)

In the Basel edition of 1580, (from JNUL)
The censor seems to have a problem with the comment and put in a "ה"ע on the side of the text which looks like this: (Also from JNUL)
“This thing is very difficult to understand and needs an explanation what it means when it says that ‘the Torah preceded the world’”

Rabinowitz states that this גניא of the censor found its’ way into the Benveniste Amsterdam Shas of 1644-46 , (which I saw
recently in the JTS Library) and from there, it was mistakenly included in many editions afterwards.[5]

I have an edition of the Talmud printed in Frankfurt in 1721, which is the model for almost all editions that followed. [6]

In the volume which contains Maseches Avodas Kochavim U’Mazalos, we find Maseches Avos at the very end. Not only is this comment included in it, but it now made its’ way from being on the side of the page, to being right in the text of the Peirush (albeit in parentheses).

Here is what it looked like in 1721:

I saw the censor’s comment in the Sulzbach 1755 edition and the Amsterdam 1763 edition. It appears as late as the Czernowitz edition of 1843, 200 years after being mistakenly included in the Benveniste Amsterdam edition.

By the time we get to the Romm Vilna edition of 1880, thankfully the comment is gone.
The censor does not seem to have a problem with the idea that the world was created in the merit of the Torah, rather that the Torah preceded the creation of the world. Rabinowitz had stated that the censor commented on Aggadic material if it was either strange or against Christianity. The comment of the Peirush did not seem at all strange (especially when compared with other Aggadic statements) so I was curious to find out if there was anything in it that was against Christianity.

Whom to ask? I turned to a real expert, someone who wears a big black Yarmulkah, sports a Rabbinic beard, and learns Mishnayos every morning at 6:30 AM with our neighborhood hematologist/oncologist. His name is Dr. Martin Jaffee, a professor of comparative religion at the University of Washington in Seattle, and until recently, the co-editor of AJS Review. He is so good at explaining Christian theology, that one of his students once remarked to him “I wish my minister were able to explain out beliefs as well as you did”

Here were his comments:

What bothered the censor is the parallel of the primordial Torah and the Primordial Logos (Word)—Gospel of John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with G-d, and the Logos was G-d.” Your censor was probably upset by the parallel. He probably wasn’t a classicist, though, or he’d have known that this Neo-Platonic idea was all over the Mediterranean and had been for several centuries. In fact, Chazal’s idea of the Torah that precedes Creation is an example of their own exploitation of Neo-Platonism in service of Torah. Surely you know the Medrash about HaKadosh Baruch Hu looking into the Torah for instructions for creating the
world, “like an architect consults a plan?

That seemed simple enough. The Christian censor’s comment then made its’ way into many editions of the Talmud, to be perused by many, and discussed by some, without realizing its’ origin. I imagine a scholar in the mid 18th century who acquires a set of the Frankfurt Talmud and studies this expensive edition to his library from cover to come. He learns Maseches Avos which he finds in the back of the volume which contains מסכת עבודה זarah ומזלות and is happy to have the Peirush on Perek Vav which is ascribed to the Rambam. He is quite curious about a הג”ה he finds in parentheses within one of the Rambam’s comments. Who wrote this comment and what exactly was his problem? He should only know.

Notes:

[1] I have simplified this quite a bit to what most consider the immediate cause for the burning of the Talmud at that time. For a more complete discussion of this matter, I would suggest reading chapters XI and XII in Marvin J. Heller’s Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud (Brooklyn 1992 ).

[2] Id. at p. 255


On that same page Rabinowitz writes about the Basel edition: “The Jews looked with broken hearts on what had been done to their Talmud which had been trampled upon by the censor” (my paraphrase).

[4] In the Vilna Shas, this comment appears at the beginning of Perek Vav of Maseches Avos on Daf 15A. Maseches Avos can be found in the volume that contains Avodah Zarah. I have also seen that this commentary is attributed to the Beis Medrash of Rashi.


[6] Id. at p. 111