Latin and Vernacular Translations of Hebrew Texts in the 12th and 13th Century

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The workshop „Latin and Vernacular Translations of Hebrew Texts in the 12th and 13th Century" organised by Görge Hasselhoff, Potsdam University, and Elisabeth Hollender, Frankfurt University, took place on 20th-21st September at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg in Bochum.[1] It brought together scholars from two different but connected fields: Medieval Christian translations of Jewish – and therefore Hebrew – texts, and Jewish writing in vernacular languages, such as Old French, Provençal and Castilian. The common use of Romance languages into which Jewish texts were translated facilitated Christian access to Jewish traditions, since Jewish informants often knew vernacular versions of texts and did not need to translate them for the purpose of oral communication to Christians. Mainly during the 13th century, however, Christians acquired enough knowledge of Hebrew to translate and interpret Hebrew texts by themselves – first with the help of converts, later through their own study of the language. The workshop showcased some examples from Jewish and Christian traditions and thus allowed for comparisons and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of translations. The focus was on exegetical texts, since the Jews and Christians compete with regard to Biblical exegesis, often using similar methods, but reaching different results.

The workshop began with three lectures on inner-Jewish use of translations into different vernacular languages: SUSAN EINBINDER (Cincinnati) analysed one of the few Judeo-French translations of 7th-century Hebrew liturgical poetry. The text is transmitted on *membra disiecta* from a codex that probably contained a full prayer book, used as pastedowns in a Latin manuscript. Susan Einbinder studied the translation technique employed, since the Hebrew text is very dense and full of allusions to the Hebrew-Aramaic textual universe. Turning a non-narrative text into a narrative, focussing on the messianic message and leaving out the martyrological elements were some of the techniques she identified, in addition to parallels to Hebrew commentaries on the text composed at about the same time.

JUDITH KOGEL (Paris) used the Provençal glosses in the biblical exegesis of Joseph Seniri to discuss the existence of a Jewish translation of the Bible into vernacular languages that might have been orally transmitted. Both the linguistic form of the glosses and medieval texts about teaching suggest that such a translation was transmitted through several generations. Its use extended from the classroom to the synagogue, where the vernacular text could substitute for the Aramaic repetition of the weekly Torah reading.

ESPERANZA ALFONSO (Madrid) presented a 13th-century Bible commentary with a multitude of Castilian glosses and discussed the relation of these glosses to Castilian and Judaeo-Castilian Bible translations before and after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. The anonymous author sought to reconcile the tradition inherited from the grammarians and exegetes active in 11th-century al-Andalus and in 12th-/13th-century Provence with a wide range of midrashic materials he drew from Rashi's works. The vernacular used in the glosses, as well as the Andalusi Jewish tradition to which the author is indebted, make the collection unmistakably Castilian. The commentary is an example of the connexions of different Jewish communities, and can prove the existence of an oral Jewish tradition of vernacular Bible translation.

A bridge from the inner-Jewish use of the vernacular to the Latin translations was built by ELISABETH HOLLENDER's (Frankfurt am Main) talk. She presented the few known translations of Jewish liturgy into Latin extant today. Those particular translations might

[1] Cf. <www.khk.ceres.ruhr-universitaet-bochum.de> (13.12.2011).

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have been provided by a convert translator. The main source is a 13th-century manuscript produced in the aftermath of the 1240 Talmud disputation in Paris that transmits translations of several benedictions, including the so called *Birkat ha-Minim* („Benediction of the Heretics") that was cited in the 1240 disputation and reappeared in anti-Jewish texts in the 15th and 16th century. The manuscript also contains translations of Hebrew liturgical poetry that can better be described as paraphrases, solving the riddles of the Hebrew texts and producing a simple narrative that is accessible for non-Jewish readers as well.

The second half of the workshop was devoted to Christian knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish texts. RALF STAMBERGER (St. Georgen) showed how the Bible commentary of Rashi was known to and used by several scholars at the Augustinian abbey of St Victor in Paris during the 12th century. Most of the knowledge was transmitted orally from learned Jews with whom the Victorines engaged in discussions. It is unlikely that they read medieval Hebrew and owned Hebrew manuscripts. Most of the Victorines considered the Jewish exegesis to be only „according to the word" and they often confronted it with Christian exegesis „according to the spirit".

GÖRGE HASSELHOFF (Potsdam) discussed the relation between the translations of passages from the Talmud and Rashi's commentaries that resulted from the 1240 disputation and the Latin translations of Maimonides' „Guide of the Perplexed". Nonetheless those translations leave out most of Maimonides' halakhic discussions. Hasselhoff suggested that both the polemic extracts from the „traditional" Jewish texts and the (Aristotelian) philosophical writings were prepared at roughly the same time in the Dominican Convent of St Jacques in Paris. While the excerpts tend to reduce the Talmud and Rashi's commentary to the ridiculous and blasphemous parts, the philosophical text is considered useful as an example of a „new" and Christian-acceptable Judaism.

JUDITH OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER (Paris) analysed an important part of MS Longlead House 21, a 13th century trilingual dictionary (mainly of the Hebrew Bible) prepared by Christian scholars in Ramsey Abbey. It seems possible to reconstruct the process that led to creating that lexicon as well as an accompanying treatise on Hebrew grammar and an interlinear annotation of Rashi's Bible commentaries – an act that made the Christian scholars who engaged in the literal exegesis of the Bible independent of Jewish informants.

DEEANA KLEPPER (Boston) demonstrated how Nicholas of Lyra had adapted Rashi's commentary on the Song of Songs for his own purpose, criticising Rashi, but also adapting him to fit the Christian purpose. She compared Nicholas of Lyra's commentary with that of his student Poncio Carbonell and an anonymous rendering of Rashi's original commentary into Latin.

In summary it might be stated that the translation activities formed an indispensable part of religious contact of „Judaism" and „Christianity" in the 12th and 13th century in Western Europe. By translating and adopting the vernacular into the inner-Jewish discourse Jewish exegetes had the opportunity to broaden the perspective on religious texts. Within the Christian community the translations of Jewish texts gave the opportunity to a deeper understanding of their own traditions (especially with regard to bible exegesis). Additionally, although mainly misused within the religious debate, the existence of Latin translations of Jewish texts led to a partial rethinking of theological topoi.

Conference Overview:

Susan Einbinder (Cincinnati), On French Translations of Hebrew Piyyutim

Judith Kogel (Paris), Joseph Seniri's Exegesis as Evidence for the Existence of a Provençal Vulgate

Esperanza Alfonso (Madrid), Le'azim in 13th-Century Castile

Elisabeth Hollender (Frankfurt am Main), Latin Translations of Jewish Liturgy

Ralf Stammberger (St. Georgen), Rashi in the School of St Victor

Görge Hasselhoff (Potsdam), The Paris Talmud Trials of 1240 and the Accompanying Translation Activities (Talmud, Rashi, Maimonides)

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Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (Paris), The Use of Rashi in the Trilingual Dictionary from Medieval England, MS Longleat House 21

Deeana Klepper (Boston), Rashi's Son of Songs Commentary in the Work of Nicholas of Lyra, Poncio Carbonell, and the Anonymous Expositio Historica Canticum Canticorum

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