

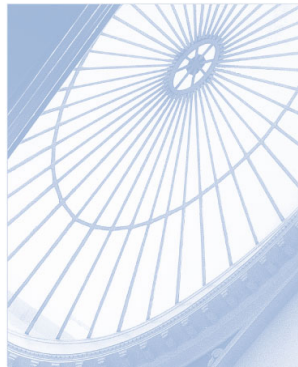
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JOSEPH ISAAC LIFSHITZ, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg and the Foundation of Jewish Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), viii + 266 pp. ISBN 978 1 107 00824 3. US\$99.99. £64.99

Throughout the tenth century the Babylonian Talmud was introduced, step by step, into Europe. Soon several centres of rabbinical learning emerged at a number of places in Europe. With R. Shlomo ben Yitzhaq (better known as Rashi, c.1040–1105) the process of textualizing rabbinical knowledge reached its first climax and the Talmud became the standard written reference work for Jewish learning and jurisdiction. Soon copies of the Talmud with Rashi's comments were circulated. The next generation of scholars, the so-called Tosafists, added their own explanations to the Talmud and to Rashi's comments. One of the last authorities of these Tosafists was Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg (also known as MaHaRaM). R. Meir was born around or after 1220 in Worms, which at that time was still one of the centres of Jewish learning in Ashkenas (that is, the areas of German-speaking Judaism). In his writings he mentions twelve of his ancestors who were also rabbis. R. Meir studied Talmudic law and philosophy in the tradition of Moses Maimonides in Würzburg, Mainz, and Paris. It is quite likely that R. Meir was an eyewitness to the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242; at least he wrote a poem (*piyyut*) about this incident which, to the present day, forms part of the synagogical liturgy of the Tenth Av (the date on which the two Temples were destroyed in 587 BCE and 70 CE). In it he expressed grief for the loss and raised the question of God's will. After his return to Germany R. Meir founded his own school at Rothenburg ob der Tauber. He became one of the leading rabbinical authorities of his time and his comments on some Talmudic treatises became part of the Tosafists' comments on the Talmud. He also wrote more than 1,500 *halakhic responsa* (juridical decisions) which he or his students collected and transmitted as one collection. In 1286 R. Meir fled from Germany, but was arrested and imprisoned by the German king Rudolf I. On 27 April 1293 he died as the king's prisoner in Wasserburg am Inn. After payment of a hefty ransom in 1307, his bones were transferred to Mainz, where his tombstone is still visible today.

The author of the present study, which was submitted as a Ph.D. thesis at Tel Aviv University and originally written in Hebrew, is less

interested in biographical information than in R. Meir's teachings and the underlying theo-philosophical system, or, to be more precise, the political theory connected with R. Meir's legal theory (p. 19). He therefore proceeds in three steps. After introducing the historical context of R. Meir's teachings and identifying his authentic writings, he scrutinizes his political theory, which comprises two major aspects. First, he demonstrates that for R. Meir the Jewish congregation was a community of individual partnership, but also a sacred community (*qahal qaddosh*). Second, he expounds R. Meir's theological understanding of that community: every violation of a law regarding the community is also a violation of God's unity. Although the research hypothesis is not new and has been mentioned by several scholars of R. Meir, Lifshitz provides a careful and in-depth analysis. His book will be the standard reference for R. Meir's political philosophy.

This notwithstanding, some points of criticism have to be mentioned. First, in the Hebrew version Lifshitz used the vocalized text of the earlier editions as well as of the manuscripts. The English translation, however, does not quote the Hebrew texts. Confusingly for the reader, information concerning the Hebrew used in the original version is left in the translated text (pp. 22–3). Here and in similar cases more careful editing would have been desirable. This also applies to the transcription of Hebrew words and terms, for example, '*agadah*' (p. 23) vs. '*aggada*' (p. 24), '*agudah ehat*' (throughout the book) instead of the correct '*agguda ehad*', and so on. Second, not all titles mentioned in the footnotes appear in the bibliography (for example, p. 15 n. 34). The bibliography itself contains many mistakes. For example, the primary sources are divided into Hebrew and English sources, but the English sources are not, in fact, originally written in English, but English translations of Greek sources (p. 251). Among the Hebrew secondary literature, translations from the French and from the English are mentioned (for example, Graetz and Le Goff). Among the English secondary literature, German titles are listed (Germania Judaica; Güdemann; Zimmels), although there is a separate heading for German secondary sources. Throughout the text and the bibliography German place names in particular, but also book titles and names of authors are given incorrectly (for example, on p. 36 'Bohn' and 'Meersburg' instead of 'Bonn' and 'Merseburg'). Careful copy-editing by the publisher would have been indispensable.

BOOK REVIEWS

GÖRGE K. HASSELHOFF is a *Privatdozent* at the Technische Universität Dortmund. He is working on Christian–Jewish relations throughout the ages, focusing mainly on the Middle Ages and on Latin translations of Jewish writings (Talmud, Rashi, Maimonides, etc.). Recent publications include *Ramon Martí's 'Pugio fidei': Texts and Studies* (ed. with Alexander Fidora, 2017) and *Religio licita? Rom und die Juden* (ed. with Meret Strothmann, 2017).