

# Solomon Schechter and medieval European rabbinic literature

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Solomon Schechter's contributions to our knowledge of the rabbinic texts in the Cairo Genizah are legendary. But Schechter also expressed a wide variety of important ideas and theories about rabbinic literature and thought from other locales and periods. Several broad examples of these interests will suffice. At the plenary session of the World Congress of Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem in 1997 – marking the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Cairo Genizah and Schechter's role in that discovery – Ya'akov Sussman noted that at this point in his academic career, Schechter had been deeply interested in a series of talmudic works such as the *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, and in rabbinic theology as well.<sup>1</sup> Moshe Idel, in an article that appeared in the centenary volume of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* in 2010, highlights how much Schechter had to say about Nahmanides and the disciplines that he represented, including and perhaps especially Kabbalah.<sup>2</sup> And recently, Elliot Wolfson has re-assessed Schechter's trenchant analysis of the mystical traditions in sixteenth-century Safed.<sup>3</sup>

The present study sets its sights on another area of rabbinic creativity in the medieval world – rabbinic writings from Christian Europe – where Schechter's work has gone relatively unnoticed and unremarked. In a brief period during the 1890s, from his vantage point at Cambridge, Schechter published a series of articles that present some of the rabbinic materials that he encountered in manuscripts held at Cambridge and in other European libraries as well. What strikes me as special about these studies is not only the great breadth of knowledge and the suggestive comparisons and associations that Schechter offers, but also the extent and quality of

1 See Ya'akov Sussman, "Schechter ha-Hoqer", *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 38 (1998): 213–30.

2 See Moshe Idel, "On Solomon Schechter in the Pages of JQR," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100 (2010): 551–5.

3 See Elliot Wolfson, "Asceticism, Mysticism, and Messianism: A Reappraisal of Schechter's Portrait of Sixteenth-Century Safed", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106 (2016): 165–77.

his “eye” and his intuition, which enabled him to see and to highlight rabbinic figures and texts that in many instances proved to be crucial to our overall understanding of medieval European rabbinic literature – even as modern scholarship did not fully realize the significance of these works until much later.

Our focus will be Schechter’s treatment of five manuscripts from the libraries at Cambridge, the Palatina in Parma, and the Vatican. As we shall see, each of these works has an element of mixed geographic contexts and circumstances, just as they represent different rabbinic genres. Thus, these are all crossroad texts (*parashat ha-derakhim*), both geographically and intellectually, which I suspect is what attracted Schechter’s attention to them in the first place. Nonetheless, Schechter’s ability to put his finger on these particular texts, in talmudic commentary and Halakhah, *piyyut* (liturgical poetry), liturgy more broadly, and biblical interpretation – which were composed in Germany, northern and southern France, Spain, and Italy – and to grasp their significance is at times astonishing, especially given the lack of supporting texts and other relevant bibliographic data.

# I

The memorial volume for Alexander Kohut, which appeared in 1897, contains a description by Schechter of the opening composition (of more than 100 folios) in a Parma (Palatina) manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Schechter indicates that he had already published texts of *Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim* and *Sefer 'Olam Zuta* from this same manuscript. He immediately establishes that the present composition is a commentary to the Torah produced by thirteenth-century Tosafists and that its compiler is R. Nethaniel, a student of R. Yehi'el b. Joseph of Paris, as two passages in the work confirm.

Schechter reproduces citations and interpretations from nearly twenty Tosafists and rabbinic figures, mainly from northern France but also several from Germany, and provides correlations to Leopold Zunz’s *Zur Geschichte*

4 See Solomon Schechter, “Notes on a Hebrew Commentary to the Pentateuch in a Parma Manuscript”, *Semitic Studies in Memory of Alexander Kohut*, ed. G. A. Kohut (Berlin: Calvary, 1897), 485–94. The commentary is found in Ms. Parma de Rossi 541 (Palatina 2342), which was written in an Ashkenazi hand during the thirteenth or fourteenth century (in film #13218, Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts [hereafter, IMHM], Jewish National Library, Jerusalem), fols. 1–107. The commentary is entitled *Nimmuqei Humash* just as the talmudic commentaries of both Rashi and Rabbenu Hanan’el of Kariwan, for example, are referred to (by Tosafists) as *nimmuqim*. On the connotations of this title, see Y. S. Spiegel, *'Ammudim be-Toledot ha-Sefer ha-'Ivri: Ketivah ve-Ha'ataqah* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2005), 455–8.

und Literatur and to other published Tosafist Torah commentaries including *Da'at Zeqenim*, *Hadar Zeqenim*, and *Pa'aneah Raza* (as well as to *Tosafot* texts on the Talmud). Indeed, Schechter concludes that this work is quite similar to those other three Tosafist Torah compilations. Like those collections, this Torah commentary contains “a certain quantity of *peshat* [the literal or simple meaning of the Scripture], diluted by a great deal of *Midrash*.” Schechter then proceeds to list the *midrashim* that are cited by this work and continues – over the entire second half of this “Note” – with a series of lengthy citations that come “from *Midrashic Collections* which are now lost to us.” While Schechter’s sympathies were apparently with the (undiluted) *peshat* interpretations that this commentary offered, he felt it important nonetheless to begin to catalogue the many *midrashic* interpretations found therein that came from sources which had not yet been identified.

Samuel Poznanski discusses this Parma manuscript in a paragraph in his classic introduction to the biblical exegetes of northern French that appeared in Warsaw in 1913. He notes that the Parma commentary appears to be one of the earliest of these collections, based on the particular Tosafists and rabbinic figures that it mentions and cites. Indeed, R. Yehi'el of Paris died around 1260, not long after the earliest such collection, *Sefer ha-Gan*, was compiled. Poznanski gives credit to Schechter at the end of the paragraph for much if not all of his information.<sup>5</sup> Poznanski also writes, with much less nuance than Schechter, that this work contains “for the most part *derash* (homiletics) and a little bit of *peshat*”, although it does not appear that Poznanski discussed this manuscript with Schechter as part of their fairly extensive correspondence, which was apparently limited to the literature of the geonic period – especially *Sa'adyana* – and *Karaitica*.<sup>6</sup>

Here is where Schechter’s intuition becomes evident. It was not until the 1990s that Sara Japhet demonstrated that many of the so-called Tosafist Torah commentaries do not turn their backs on *peshat*, precisely as Schechter had remarked. Moreover, in my own recent work on the

5 See Samuel A. Poznanski, *Mavo al Hakhmei Zarefat Mefarshei ha-Miqra* (Warsaw: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1913), civ. Although he notes earlier in this introduction (xciv) that the compiler of the collection of comments to the Torah found in Ms. Bodl. 2343 (R. Isaac b. Hayyim) identifies himself as a student of R. Yehi'el of Paris, Poznanski does not make the connection between this development and Ms. Parma 541. Indeed, additional manuscripts further demonstrate R. Yehi'el's interest in *parshanut ha-miqra*. See my *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 336–42; see also n. 24 below.

6 See *Igrot Shneur Zalman Schechter 'el Shmu'el Avraham Poznanski*, ed. A. Yaari (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1943), 9–52.

presence of *peshat* in the Torah commentaries of the Tosafists during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, beyond the better-known twelfth-century commentaries of Rashbam and Yosef b. Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans (who was a talmudic student of Rashbam's brother, Rabbenu Tam), I uncovered, based on extensive manuscript research, a series of five or six Tosafists who consistently offered *peshat* interpretations during the ensuing period. The earliest of these figures, from the late twelfth century, are two other students of Rabbenu Tam, Jacob b. Solomon of Orleans and Yom Tov b. Isaac of Joigny. Although Schechter makes no specific mention of this development – and I did not get the idea initially from him – I was nonetheless quite impressed to see that Schechter had noticed comments by both of these figures in this Parma manuscript, one of which, by Jacob of Orleans, was a *peshat* question (and answer) concerning a comment by Rashi, as Jacob was wont to do.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, I found that R. Judah the Pious's Torah commentary, which he transmitted to his son R. Zal(t)man at the end of his life, is cited frequently in northern French Tosafist Torah compilations – and it too presents dimensions of *peshat* – a somewhat surprising finding given the perceived tension between Judah the Pious and the Tosafists of northern France. Here too, Schechter made note of three comments by Judah the Pious that are found in the Parma manuscript. Moreover, an interpretation attributed by the Parma manuscript (as noted by Schechter) to R. Judah b. Nathan (ostensibly Rashi's son-in-law, known also by the acronym Riban) appears verbatim in Judah the Pious's commentary, suggesting that the name of Judah's father, Samuel, somehow became confused in the Parma passage.<sup>8</sup> In any case, Schechter's sense of Tosafist biblical exegesis, beyond the group of the classical twelfth-century *pashtanim* (exegetes who interpreted according to *sensus literalis*), was exceptionally keen, and has been borne out by some recent research.<sup>9</sup>

7 See Sara Japhet, "Perush ha-Hizzequni la-Torah: Li-Demuto shel ha-Hibbur ule-Matrato", *Sefer ha-Yovel le-Rav Mordekhai Breuer*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992), vol. 1, 91–111; Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 165, 171, 177, 179; on the interpretation by R. Yom Tov of Joigny found in the Parma Ms., see 184 n. 202.

8 See Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 112–13 n. 5; compare 333.

9 Schechter also noticed in Ms. Parma 541 a comment of Halakhic exegesis by Jacob b. Solomon of Courson. Little was known about this Tosafist, and Schechter refers to a lone note about him in Gross's *Gallia Judaica*. In his *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1984), Ephraim E. Urbach makes only a handful of references to him (as listed in the index, vol. 2, 779), although he was able to identify Jacob as a student of R. Samson of Sens, who apparently lived for a time in Nurnberg. Jacob also compiled a no longer

## II

In 1891, Schechter wrote about a Cambridge manuscript of nearly 210 folios (copied in different Byzantine or Spanish hands), that consists of two unequal parts. The second part, running to some 25 folios, is a collection of 81 geonic responsa from nearly ten different *geonim* (in addition to a number that remain unattributed), to which Schechter devoted the last page of his study.<sup>10</sup>

Schechter's article is devoted mainly to the lion's share of this manuscript (of more than 180 folios), which contains a total of 114 responsa by the Italian rabbinic authority, R. Isaiah b. Mali (the elder) of Trani (d. ca. 1240), known by the acronym RiD. As Schechter indicates, various passages among these responsa refer to or dovetail with other writings of the extremely prolific R. Isaiah, including his *Tosafot ha-RiD* (which he wrote and re-wrote in several recensions) and his *Sefer ha-Makhriah* (literally, "the book which decides"), and others are consistent with material by R. Isaiah as cited by his contemporaries including Isaac b. Moses Or Zarua' of Vienna (d. ca. 1250), and by his students and followers, such as Zedekiah b. Abraham *ha-Rofe* (d. ca. 1260), the author of the Italian Halakhic compendium *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*.

Schechter sensed that the significance that he attributed to RiD's responsa material, which is both complex and extensive, might not be shared by all. He thus writes somewhat wryly, "The fact that the manuscript is unique, and further that there is little hope that it will soon find an editor, will justify us in giving here some fuller extracts from it." In this instance as in others, Schechter accurately predicted that a long interval would elapse until the manuscript was published. It was not until 1967 that A. Y. Wertheimer edited these responsa in Jerusalem, under the auspices of the Rav Herzog Foundation. They were reissued in 1975, along with an ongoing series of volumes of additional rulings by Isaiah di Trani, all of which succeeded in bringing the name

extant collection of responsa (*liqqutim*) of earlier Tosafists, sections of which have been identified more recently by Simcha Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), 254–61, 271–2.

<sup>10</sup> See Solomon Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew Mss. in the University Library at Cambridge I", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1891): 90–101. The manuscript is identified as Ms. Add. 474 (currently 474, 1), IMHM #16774, and it was copied in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It is labelled on its binding as *Teshuvot ha-Geonim*. Compare S. Z. Havlin, "Al Ketav Yad Ehad she-Nehlaq: Gilgulei Qovez Teshuvot ha-Geonim u-Teshuvot RiD ha-Zaqen", *'Aleí Sefer* 1 (1975), 81–90; 2 (1976), 65–78.

and teachings of this seminal Italian scholar to modern students of the Talmud and Jewish law.<sup>11</sup>

Schechter grasped that even as Isaiah di Trani cites a wide variety of authoritative post-talmudic predecessors (of whom Schechter mentions nearly twenty), RiD did not feel bound to accept their interpretation of underlying talmudic passages that were relevant to the matter of Jewish law at hand. Thus RiD exclaims at one point that “we ought not to rely on these words, to put aside the words of the Talmud and to take up instead the words of the Geonim; for in a number of instances they rule strictly or leniently in ways that are not accepted by all.” Similarly, with regard to Rashi, to whom RiD respectfully refers as the teacher par excellence, *ha-moreh*, throughout his writings, RiD asserts that “I have found that these words by the teacher, Rashi, are not worthy of response from a sensitive soul. For although he is the leading scholar of the generations and we ‘drink from his waters’ only the Almighty is free from error.”

In another responsum, RiD explains that he does not simply agree with Rashi in this instance while disagreeing with other authorities who ruled against him. Rather, RiD will always verify the interpretation that he prefers against the texts of the talmudic corpus and he will never withhold his view, just as the later Amoraim did not hesitate to argue with their predecessors. All is determined by the correct interpretation of the underlying talmudic texts, rather than by the reputations of the various post-talmudic authorities involved. Schechter later notes a close parallel to this passage in another responsum, in which RiD explains that he allowed himself to argue against his predecessors not because he considered himself to be greater than they, in either wisdom or piety. Rather, in accordance with the parable that he heard from the philosophers (*mashal ha-philosophim*) that he proceeds to describe, RiD sees himself as a “midget standing on the shoulders of giants”. This reference by RiD (who, as we shall see, also studied for a time in the Rhineland) to the parable first put forward by Fulbert of Chartres and his student William of Conches, and later by John of Salisbury and Philip of Blois – and well-known throughout medieval Europe, depicted even in the stained-glass windows of the cathedral school at Chartres – is rather striking.<sup>12</sup>

11 See *Teshuvot ha-RiD*, ed. S. A. Wertheimer (Jerusalem: Machon ha-Talmud ha-Yisra'eli ha-Shalem, 1975), and the more than fifteen volumes of *Pisqei ha-Rid* that have been published by the same publishers over the past half-century.

12 See Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 106–7 and my “Progress and Tradition in Medieval Ashkenaz”, *Jewish History* 14 (2000): 288–90, 303–5.

Schechter suggests (albeit without decisive evidence, as we shall see) that the view of a noteworthy R. Isaac with which R. Isaiah argued in this instance refers to a position expressed by R. Isaac of Siponto, and he then lists a series of Italian and Greek rabbinic authors whose work Isaiah di Trani cites, just as Schechter notes that RiD addressed responsa to R. Isaac of Romania (*Romaniyyot*), in the western part of the Byzantine Empire. Schechter deduces from his many responsa that Isaiah di Trani travelled to Palestine and back, although he links one of these journeys to a rabbinic pilgrimage from southern France in 1210, which is highly unlikely. He notes that Isaiah's responsa contain references not only to the customs of Jews of Italy, but also to those of Greek Jewry, or *kehillot Roumaniah* as RiD refers to them. In one such instance, Schechter thanks Professor Robertson Smith of Cambridge for suggesting to him that a difficult word in Isaiah's responsum was a Hebrew transcription of the Greek word for nuptials, literally "the crowning of the bride and bridegroom".

RiD complains bitterly in a responsum that virtually all these *Romaniyyot* Jews—among whom he seems to have lived for a time—performed the ritual immersion that was required of a married post-menstruant in standard baths, rather than in properly constructed ritual baths. Schechter makes the interesting suggestion, which cannot be demonstrated conclusively, that this laxity may have stemmed from Karaite influences, whose presence in Byzantium at that time can be documented; indeed, Maimonides had a similar kind of issue with this Karaite position in the east.

Unbeknown to Schechter—since the manuscripts and texts that support these findings became available only long after his article appeared—was that Isaiah di Trani also reached the Rhineland in his youth, where he studied for a time with the leading German Tosafist, Simhah of Speyer. It was in the Rhineland that Isaiah learned a great deal not only about Rashi's teachings, but also about those of his northern French Tosafist grandson Rabbenu Tam, with much of this material coming from Rabbenu Tam's German students when they returned to their native land. This development easily explains the references in RiD's responsa not only to the *Tosafot* of Rabbenu Tam but also to those of his early Tosafist colleague, Joseph b. Moses Porat of Troyes, which were noted (but unremarked) by Schechter. Moreover, this development helps to explain not only RiD's correspondence with Isaac Or Zarua' of Vienna, who had been a fellow student at the home of R. Simhah in Speyer, but also Isaiah's awareness of a number of other northern European rabbinic authorities, whose views he tested and rejected. The noteworthy Rabbi Isaac, whose

crucial view was contested by RiD, is not Isaac of Siponto – who is cited by his full name elsewhere in RiD’s responsa – as Schechter had suggested. It is most likely to have been Rabbenu Tam’s leading Tosafist student, R. Isaac b. Samuel (Ri) of Dampierre (d. 1189).

However, nothing about the Rhineland phase of RiD’s studies and activities was known until the important work of Israel Ta-Shma in the last decades of the twentieth century, which established Isaiah’s presence in Germany primarily on the basis of manuscript texts. In addition, a leading Spanish talmudist, Yom Tov b. Abraham ibn Ishvili (Ritva, d. ca. 1325), who was himself quite familiar with a wide range of Tosafist materials, characterizes RiD as “Isaiah of Ashkenaz”, and the existence and composition of the so-called *Tosafot ha-RiD* are now also better understood. Ta-Shma was able to identify a Torah commentary that Isaiah composed in his youth, either within or just after he left the Rhineland, of which several manuscripts are extant. Ta-Shma built on the travel pattern noticed already by Schechter, and he was able to trace R. Isaiah’s many journeys throughout his life, and to establish the complete sequence of these journeys.<sup>13</sup>

RiD emerges from all this not simply as an innovative rabbinic scholar with strongly held opinions but, perhaps even more significant, as a bridge between Italy and Germany and beyond – as Schechter had clearly sensed, but was unable to demonstrate fully. In addition, the importance of those responsa written later in R. Isaiah’s life for the Jews of Byzantium, as a means of tracing and understanding the *Romaniyyot* communities during the thirteenth century, cannot be overstated.<sup>14</sup> As we have seen, however, Schechter was in on all this at the very beginning of the story.

### III

Another literary bridge – and another Cambridge manuscript of nearly 220 folios representing an entirely different discipline, presented by Schechter in the following year, 1892 – is the commentary to the prayers and blessings by R. Judah b. Yaqar.<sup>15</sup> Schechter notes, with his characteristic breadth of

13 See I. M. Ta-Shma, *Knesset Mehqarim*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2005), 9–48. RiD’s Torah commentary was initially published by C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1972), on the basis of a single Ms., although Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (Hida, d. 1806) apparently had additional Mss. of this commentary. Compare Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 238–40.

14 Compare Steven Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204–1453* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985).

15 See Solomon Schechter, “Notes on Hebrew Manuscripts in the University Library at Cambridge II”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892), 245–55; this is IMHM #16322, identified as



view, that this work was not widely cited in Halakhic literature – pointing to only three references in Spanish and Provencal Halakhic compendia – but he indicates that Spanish kabbalists did cite it with greater frequency. Indeed, Schechter also notes that R. Judah reproduced earlier mystical material in his prayer commentary – from *Hekhalot* literature and *Sefer Yezirah* – and occasionally mentions references or hints within the prayers to the *sefirot*. Nonetheless, R. Judah's fealty to talmudic and rabbinic literature is equally clear, and Schechter demonstrates, for example, how he rejects the approach that it is appropriate to pray to angels as intercessory agents, a view supported by an array of medieval mystics and kabbalists.

However, the centrepiece of Schechter's discussion in this article is that Judah b. Ya'qar was a teacher of Nahmanides, and it is therefore not surprising to find some decidedly mystical interpretations in Judah's prayer commentary as well. At the same time, Schechter detects that R. Judah was also Nahmanides's teacher in Halakhic matters, citing a passage from Nahmanides's talmudic *hiddushim* (novellae) at the end of tractate *Pesahim* and comparing it to a piece in the manuscript before him. This passage describes what R. Judah taught Nahmanides about the proper blessing(s) for the recitation of Hallel on Passover night, based on what Judah had learned from "R. Isaac b. Abraham [Rizba] the Frenchman (*ha-Zarefati*)."<sup>16</sup> Schechter notes that this approach is also preserved in thirteenth-century Ashkenazi (and Italian) rabbinic literature, including Isaac of Vienna's *Sefer Or Zarua'*, *Sefer Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, and the writings of R. Avigdor b. Elijah Katz of Vienna.

Indeed, on the basis of this passage, Schechter proceeds to consider Judah b. Ya'qar's country of origin. A number of customs and practices contained in the prayer commentary reflect a French setting, while others suggest that Judah hailed from Spain. Schechter concludes that the origins of the author of this rich commentary "must therefore be placed in some of the provinces, the north of Spain or the south of France, the rituals of which were a rather mixed nature." Schechter's suggestion is plausible: the social and political histories of these regions and even the religious observances (within both Jewish and Christian societies) are often related if not intertwined,<sup>16</sup> although Schechter then adduces two

Ms. Cambridge Add. 434 (1, 2), and copied in a Spanish hand in southern France during the fifteenth century.

<sup>16</sup> See now Pinchas Roth, "Regional Boundaries and Medieval Halakhah: Rabbinic Responsa from Catalonia to Southern France in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth

additional passages which he admits “are strongly in favour of northern France.”

As was the case with the responsa of Isaiah di Trani, Schechter manages once again to highlight here the work of a transitional, multinational figure of the first rank, a teacher of Nahmanides, and to raise issues about him that would take modern scholarship a long time fully to discern. The commentary of Judah b. Yaqar was published in 1968, on the basis of this Cambridge manuscript and two other British manuscripts (from the Bodleian and Montefiore collections). From the even more recent work of Israel Ta-Shma and Shalem Yahalom, we learn that Judah b. Yaqar in fact circulated (ca. 1200) between the extremely productive talmudic centres in Provence, the Catalonia region of northern Spain, and northern France (along with other rabbinic scholars such as Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel, the author of *Sefer ha-Manhig*), bringing material from the north to the south (in many cases for the first time), and even bringing some Spanish material northwards.<sup>17</sup>

Judah b. Yaqar studied for a period with the aforementioned R. Isaac b. Abraham (Rizba) of Dampierre, the brother of R. Samson of Sens and himself a leading student of R. Isaac (Ri) of Dampierre. And so Judah’s exposure to the teachings of northern French Tosafists (and to their practices) was quite extensive and it is he – along with Nahmanides’s other major teacher, Nathan b. Meir of Trinquetaille, whose biographic details are similar to those of Judah – who brought the Tosafist materials to their student Nahmanides in Gerona, which then appear extensively in Nahmanides’s talmudic *hiddushim*. Writing about Nahmanides’s Torah commentary and its mystical dimensions, Elliot Wolfson has reiterated the notion that Judah b. Yaqar was Nahmanides’s teacher not only in talmudic studies but also in esoteric matters (*torat ha-sod*),<sup>18</sup> and I have been able to show that Judah’s mystical teachings also have an Ashkenazi layer, especially in his use and citation of *Hekhalot* literature and its conceptions.<sup>19</sup>

Centuries,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105 (2015): 72–98.

17 See Ta-Shma, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 2000), 30–31; Ta-Shma, *Kneset Mehqarim*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2004), 118–20; Shalem Yahalom, *Bein Geronah le-Narbonah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2013), 5–6 (and the studies cited in n. 29), 192–4, 283–5.

18 See Elliot Wolfson, “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides’ Kabbalistic Hermeneutic,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 14 (1989): 103–78.

19 See my *Peering through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 197–200. Compare Oded Israeli, “Mequbbal Be-’al Korho: R. Yehudah b. Yaqar – Bein Demut le-Dimmui,” *Kabbalah* 31 (2014): 281–309.

In any case, Judah b. Yaqar was an intellectual bridge between the north and the south via Provence, which had important ramifications for European rabbinic culture during the thirteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Although it was not possible for Schechter to reach definitive conclusions, he was aware of much if not all of this, and was able to formulate many of the key questions and issues – especially as they involved the nexus between talmudic studies and mysticism – well before subsequent scholarship caught up.

#### IV

At the end of 1892, Schechter published a two-page note on another Cambridge manuscript of 155 folios, which is described on its flyleaf as a Narbonese talmudic commentary (*shitah le-hakhmei Narbonna*; in the margin of several of the leaves, it is characterized as a *perush hakhmei Narbonna*). The commentary is to tractate *Mo'ed Qatan*, and Schechter characterizes it as “unique; it is probably the fullest and most important commentary that we possess to this tractate.” Although the author is unidentified, he mentions R. Yehi'el prominently as his teacher, suggesting that R. Yehi'el (b. Joseph of Paris, in Schechter's view) composed a kind of *Tosafot* (known as a *shitah*) to this tractate as well. Also mentioned is R. Meir, whom Schechter tentatively (and correctly) assumes was R. Meir of Rothenburg (d. 1293), who had studied with R. Yehi'el in Paris and with R. Samuel b. Shne'ur (d. ca. 1250), to whom the author also refers in lofty terms: *וּשְׁמַעְתִּי מִפִּי מוֹרֵי הַחֲסִיד ה"ר שְׁמוּאֵל ב"ר שְׁנִיאוֹר* (*Ve-shamati mipi mori he-hasid ha-r, Shemu'el b'r. Shne'ur*; and I heard this from the mouth of my pious teacher, R. Samuel b. Shne'ur).

As such, Schechter rightly concludes that the author flourished in the period after the middle of the thirteenth century. In addition, the author refers on several occasions to earlier *Tosafists* such as R. Isaac b. Mordekhai (Rivam), a senior student of Rabbenu Tam (d. 1171) who also studied with R. Isaac b. Asher (Riba) ha-Levi of Speyer (d. 1133), and a colleague of Rabbenu Tam (and talmudic student of Rashbam), R. Joseph b. Moses Porat of Troyes (referred to earlier). Also mentioned are R. Samson b. Samson (better known as *Ha-Sar mi-Coucy*, one of *Ri of Dampierre's*

20 See also Moshe Idel, “Ha-Tefillah be-Qabbalat Provence”, *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 265–86; Moshe Idel, “Al Kavvanat Shemoneh 'Esreh Ezel R. Yizhaq Sagi Nahor”, in *Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Thought in Memory of Ephraim Gottlieb*, ed. A. Goldreich and M. Oron (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 25–52.

youngest students), and Rabbenu Netan'el ha-Qadosh of Chinon, who was a colleague and contemporary of R. Yehi'el of Paris and R. Samuel b. Shne'ur of Evreux, although Schechter appears to have been largely unaware of the connections between the last three of these Tosafists.

Finally, Schechter notes that Maimonides is cited once, while the commentary of R. Abraham b. David (Rabad) of Posquieres is cited quite often. Indeed, Schechter concludes, "the main importance of the manuscript seems to consist in the fact that it gives us so many fragments of the *Novellae* and *Commentaries* of the [so-called] Earlier Authorities (= the *Rishonim*)", whose works are no longer extant. Although Schechter does not specify, it seems that he attributes the frequent citation of Rabad of Posquieres to the fact that this commentary came from Narbonne in southern France (as indicated on the flyleaf and in the margins), even as it managed to incorporate quite a bit of northern French Tosafist material as well.<sup>21</sup>

In this case, it did not take so long for the text highlighted by Schechter to appear in print. The Harry Fischel Institute in Israel published it (in three parts) in 1937, under the title *Shitah 'al Mo'ed Qatan le-Talmido shel R. Yehi'el mi-Paris*, along with several introductory sections. The editors assumed that this was a kind of *Tosafot* composition from northern France during the mid-thirteenth century in which R. Yehi'el of Paris plays a significant role, and the student of R. Yehi'el who compiled the largest share of this commentary was identified as R. Yedidiah b. Israel of Nuremberg. Indeed, Ritva cites passages from this commentary as "the *Tosafot* of R. Yedidiah to *Mo'ed Qatan*."<sup>22</sup> Like Maharam of Rothenburg, Yedidiah was a native German who came to Paris to study with R. Yehi'el. And like Maharam, Yedidiah also studied with R. Samuel b. Shne'ur of Evreux.<sup>23</sup>

Although R. Yehi'el b. Joseph remains best known for his role at the trial

21 See Solomon Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew Mss. in the University Library at Cambridge III", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892): 626–7; the Ms. is Add. 426 (IMHM #16776), copied in the fifteenth or sixteenth century in a Spanish hand.

22 See *Shitah 'al Mo'ed Qatan le-Talmido shel R. Yehi'el mi-Paris*, ed. S. Eliezeri et al. (Jerusalem: Harry Fischel Institute, 1937), and M. Y. L. Sacks's introduction to the second part, 5–11. The commentary was reissued in 2010, with brief excerpts from Sacks's introduction. Compare Ta-Shma, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2, 110–11.

23 See Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, vol. 2, 566–70; I. A. Agus, *Teshuvot Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1954), 233–48; my "Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad: Tosafist Teachings in the Talmudic Commentaries of Ritva", in *Between Rashi and Maimonides*, ed. Ephraim Kanarfogel and M. Sokolow (New York: Ktav, 2010), 254–6; my "From Germany to Northern France and Back Again: A Tale of Two Tosafist Centers," *Regional Identities and Cultures of Medieval Jews*, ed. J. Castano et al. (London: Littman Library, 2018).

of the Talmud in Paris in 1240, some fairly recent manuscript discoveries have shown that he was also a prolific Tosafist and rabbinic decisor, in addition to the role that he played in various exegetical compilations on the Torah (as noted earlier). He composed a series of talmudic commentaries and issued many rulings in a wide range of Halakhic areas. We have also learned a good deal more in recent years about the writings of R. Samuel of Evreux and R. Netan'el of Chinon, and their close scholarly connections with R. Yehi'el.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the only rabbinic figures mentioned in this commentary not identified with R. Yehi'el's circle of northern French colleagues – or with the roster of his Tosafist predecessors – are Maimonides and Rabad of Posquieres. As a point of comparison, Maimonides's name is mentioned only twice in the standard *Tosafot* to the Babylonian Talmud (the vast majority of which were produced in northern France) and the name of Rabad of Posquieres a mere four or five times, although his commentary to *Mo'ed Qatan* was cited with greater frequency by northern European rabbinic works, precisely because there were so few commentaries available on this tractate or to the laws of mourning.<sup>25</sup>

In this case, Schechter seems to have missed the key direction in the composition of this commentary, which is understandable given the large amount of data on the Tosafists in northern France during the mid-thirteenth century that was not yet available to him. Nonetheless, his sense about the importance of this commentary and its range of citations was exactly right, and these observations in all likelihood contributed to the publication of this work in a relatively short period of time.<sup>26</sup> Once

24 See, e.g., A. Grossman, "R. Netan'el me-Qinon: Mi-Gedolei Ba'alei ha-Tosafot be-Zarefar ba-Me'ah ha-Yod Gimmel", *Mehqerei Talmud*, vol. 3, ed. Ya'akov Sussman and David Rosenthal (1995), 174–89; Emanuel, *Shivrei Luhot*, 185–98; Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 328–9, 340, 434–45, 478; my "Returning Apostates and their Marital Partners in Medieval Ashkenaz", in *Contesting Inter-Religious Conversion in the Medieval World*, ed. Y. Fox and Y. Yisraeli (London: Routledge, 2017), 167–8.

25 On the paucity of citations of Rambam in the writings of the Tosafists generally, see, e.g., Avraham Grossman, "Me-Andalusia le-Eiropah: Yahasam shel Hakhmei Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat ba-Me'ot ha-12–13 'el Sifrei ha-Halakhah shel ha-Rif voha-Rambam", *Pe'amim* 80 (1999): 14–32. For Rabad, see Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquieres* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980), 53–4, esp. n. 42; Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, vol. 1, 297, 355, vol. 2, 595–6, 654 n. 46; compare Yahalom, *Bein Geronah le-Narbonah*, 47–9 n. 174, on the citation of Rabad's commentary on *Mo'ed Qatan*.

26 See Sacks's introduction to *Shitah 'al Mo'ed Qatan*, 5, which presents a brief synopsis of Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew Mss. III", noting that "this manuscript was available to the scholar (he-hakham) Schechter", and he describes it as "the fourth volume of the old series

again, Schechter chose in his study to focus on an outstanding and unique work, which he sensed had important implications for understanding the literature of the *rishonim*. He was absolutely correct about that.

## V

Finally, Schechter contributed a piece titled simply “A Hebrew Elegy” to the first volume of the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*.<sup>27</sup> The *qinah* (elegy, pl. *qinot*) begins, “Woe unto me for a moment of great loss has come [or, according to some versions, “has been seen”]: אֶלְלִי לִי רַגַע אֶלְמוֹן וְשָׁכֹל כִּי בָא [ראו] רַגַע אֶלְמוֹן וְשָׁכֹל.” Schechter notes that although this elegy was referred to by Zunz and was published by Abraham Berliner in a collection of studies under the auspices of *Mekitse Nirdamim*, “it has not yet received the attention it deserves.” This elegy appears in three manuscripts from Parma and the Vatican (and in codices found in Rome, Turin, and Cambridge with which Schechter made comparisons), but Schechter chose to focus on the version found in Ms. Vatican Ebr. 312, a *mahzor* for the ninth of Av according to the Ashkenazi rite.<sup>28</sup> The *qinah* is listed in the manuscript as having been composed by “our master, R. Menahem, to be chanted using the tune of *Eikhah yashvah havatselet* [a well-known elegy for the ninth of Av composed by Eleazar Kallir], for the martyrs of Boppard in the month of Elul, 1179, and also for those who were burned, and [at the end of the elegy] for the martyrs of the Isles of the Sea [referring specifically to York] in 1190.”

Before publishing the text of the last third of this elegy (the final ten stanzas, which deal directly with English Jewry and its history), and providing a full English translation along with a series of literary comments and notes, Schechter supplies a brief biography of the author, whose fuller name seems to have been R. Menahem b. Jacob b. Solomon b. Menahem. Schechter assumes that R. Menahem b. Jacob flourished during the second half of the twelfth century – and was thus a contemporary of the martyrs whom he mourns – based on his epitaph that was found in the

of the English journal [*ha-zofeh ha-angli*, i.e. *Jewish Quarterly Review*], concluding, “*ad kan divrei Schechter* [until here, the words of Schechter].”

27 Solomon Schechter, “A Hebrew Elegy”, *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 1 (1893–94): 8–14.

28 See fols. 72r–73r. Vat. Ebr. 312 (IMHM #362) was copied in an Ashkenazi hand during the fifteenth century. The other two versions were both copied in Ashkenaz during the fourteenth century: Ms. Parma de Rossi 586 (Palatina 3005), fol. 171v (IMHM #13729); Ms. Vat. Ebr. 319, sec. 46 (IMHM #369).

Worms cemetery, which establishes R. Menachem's death in the month of Iyar, 1203. Indeed, Schechter hypothesizes that the news of the demise of the Jews in York was brought to the Rhineland by the rabble mentioned in the memorial account (*Sefer Zekhirah*) composed by Ephraim of Bonn (d. 1197). These marauders plundered gold and silver from there, "as well as books which were not to be equalled for beauty, and brought them to Cologne where they sold them to the Jews."

Schechter further notes that R. Menahem b. Jacob's epitaph characterizes him as "Tanna, *doresh u-payyetan* [rabbinic scholar, preacher, and liturgical poet]." However, Schechter notes that "since the halakhic pieces left to us by R. Menahem are rather few, we must conclude that his main activity consisted of composing synagogal hymns." Here, Schechter digresses a little to rail about the difficult circumstances during the twelfth century (and the period of the Crusades generally), "when Europe went religion-mad and could only be tamed by Saracenic devils or unwashed saints." He also notes that in his study of those documents which refer to and describe Jewish suffering and sacrifice during this period, he was struck by the fact "that the women proved themselves even more heroic than the men, and at many a critical moment it was the despairing courage and the tender conscience of women which decided in favour of martyrdom."

Schechter returns to his discussion of the elegy itself by concluding that in composing their *qinot* (elegies) and *selihot* (penitential poems), "the Jewish poets of the crusading period gave vent to the feelings which they dared betray only to the God . . . Such a poet was also our Menachem, and there is a long list of his prayers and lamentations, probably to be augmented by some which escaped Zunz's attention." Israel Davidson mentions Schechter's study of this *qinah* in his authoritative thesaurus of *piyyut* literature, and A. M. Habermann chose the same Vatican manuscript as Schechter from which to publish this elegy in his collection of *piyyutim* that commemorated persecutions in northern Europe during the medieval period.<sup>29</sup>

A large collection of newly identified *selihot* and *qinot* published only a decade ago has added more than five hitherto unknown compositions by Menahem (especially those found in a Bodleian manuscript that

29 See Israel Davidson, *Ozar ha-Shirah ve-ha-Piyyut*, 4 vols (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1924), vol. 1, 237 [5154]; A. M. Habermann, *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat* (Jerusalem: Sifrei Tarshish, 1945), 147–51 (see also notes on p. 260). Compare *The Authorised Kinot for the Ninth of Av*, trans. and annot. A. Rosenfeld (London: Labworth, 1st ed. 1965, 1970), 171–2.

had somehow escaped proper identification). Complicating these identifications was the fact that some of Menahem's compositions were signed not with an acrostic that contains his own first name but rather the Hebrew word or name *נמץ* (literally, 'a plant') – a hopeful term which in hindsight makes good sense, since this name equals that of Menahem in *gematria* (the numerical equivalent of the letters of his name). As such, Schechter's remark about the existence of additional *piyyutim* by R. Menachem that probably had "escaped Zunz's attention" (and the attention of other scholars) turned out to be accurate.<sup>30</sup>

A good deal more about R. Menahem b. Jacob of Worms has been learned in recent years. Urbach barely refers to R. Menahem in his study of the *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* – or in the introduction to his edition of the voluminous thirteenth-century *piyyut* commentary, *Arugat ha-Bosem* – ostensibly because Menahem did not quite fit the Tosafist mould or the role of *piyyut* commentator in these contexts. We now know, however, that R. Menahem was an uncle or a great uncle of R. Eleazar of Worms, and that he was the senior member of the rabbinical court in Worms until his death in 1203. We also know from several Halakhic treatises still in manuscript that R. Menahem was adept at teaching Jewish law, and apparently taught groups of senior students for whom he may even have composed a collection of his rulings. Thus, the appellation "Tanna" on Menahem's epitaph – which Schechter sought to underplay in his day – turns out to be fully justified. In addition, R. Menahem, like his nephew Eleazar, was also familiar with mystical teachings.<sup>31</sup>

R. Menahem composed more than thirty *piyyutim*. A number were intended as addenda for the liturgy of the festivals, or for more personal festive occasions such as a *Shabbat hatan* (the Sabbath before a wedding). The majority, however, are penitential compositions and elegies (*selihot ve-qinot*), including a *pizmon* (refrain) for the eve of Rosh Hashanah modelled after the *Zekhor Brit pizmon* composed by Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz (d. 1028). As is the case for other leading German *payyetanim* in his day, Menahem's liturgical poems often employ forms of Spanish metre. Ezra Fleischer, in an extensive study of prayer and *piyyut* in the Worms *mahzor* that appeared three decades ago, links the liturgical compositions of R. Menahem to those of his better-known twelfth-century predecessor,

30 See D. Goldschmidt and A. Fraenkel, eds., *Leqet Piyyuei Selihot me-et Payyentanei Ashkenaz ve-Zarefat*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1993), vol. 1, 406–23 (based esp. on Ms. Bodl. 1154); see also vol. 2, 813.

31 See Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History*, 25, 40–41, 50, 74, 461–4.



R. Eliezer b. Nathan (Raban) of Mainz, in terms of their structure and significance, suggesting that R. Menahem's compositions are most deserving of a critical edition and close literary treatment – which unfortunately has still not occurred.<sup>32</sup>

In Menahem's elegy for the martyrs of Boppard (which was not discussed in any detail by Schechter), the martyrs are compared on the one hand to the sons of Aaron the High Priest, Nadav and Avihu, who had to give their lives up because they were so truly holy; and to Hananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah on the other hand, whose lives were miraculously spared because they were prepared to give up their lives in sanctification of the Divine Name. Although both these biblical episodes involve burning, as did a number of the killings in Boppard (as the manuscript description of this elegy notes, "for those who were burned"), many of those killed in Boppard were drowned in the Rhine. From the Christian perspective, these were thought to represent the ordeals of both fire and water. There are phrases found in this elegy such as "to the river were thrown the injured and the suffering", as well as, "we entered fire and water and flame", although Menahem's poetics and descriptions were clearly intended to rebut that claim.<sup>33</sup>

One of Menahem b. Jacob of Worms's three elegies composed for the destruction of the Temple on the ninth of Av (which begins with phrase, *מעוני שמים שחקים יזבלוך*) is included in the standard Ashkenazi qinot rite for that day. Once again, Schechter managed to put his finger on a lesser known, yet highly respected and talented rabbinic author, whose full liturgical (and Halakhic) corpus has still not been fully appreciated. Indeed, in all the examples presented here, we have seen more than ample evidence for Schechter's outstanding erudition, fine eye, and remarkable intuition regarding the wide array of rabbinic literature that was produced in medieval Europe.

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32 For a description of Menahem's liturgical poems and Fleischer's assessment, see *ibid.*, 423–6.

33 Compare Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 54–5; Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 29–30, 55–8.

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