Kush”. The next item in this delightful treasure-chest is a concordance of motifs and themes in the various sources studied in the book. Apart from the Hebrew, these are the Latin text of Prester John’s letter to the Emperor Manuel Comnenus, and the Old French and Italian versions of the letter to Frederick, all presented in facsimile. Then come specimen pages of the three Hebrew texts and of texts in Provencal, Old German and Old English. A list of names and terms in Hebrew guise, a bibliography and a general index complete the book. There is an historical introduction and a full discussion of the Hebrew sources.

With all this material and so much expert guidance through it, readers who are philologically or historically inclined may enjoy trying to solve some of the many problems pointed out by the authors. Others may be happy just to read the book, for it is seldom that one comes across a work of impeccable scholarship that tells so fascinating a tale as this.

Oriental Institute, Oxford

G. L. LEWIS


Following numerous older enquiries into the Christian-Jewish disputations of the Middle Ages, above all into the disputation of Barcelona, the time seems ripe for a new and comprehensive assessment of this phenomenon; the simultaneous appearance of two large-scale investigations on this theme can be explained in no other way. Also, increased reflection on this or that discussion of the historical presuppositions of the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue is, if not directly, then implicitly, one of the reasons for the reawakening of interest in this fateful phase of Christian-Jewish history.

The more ambitious and demanding of the two works is that of Mr H. Maccoby. It treats of not one disputation, but of the three great debates of Paris (1240), Barcelona (1263) and Tortosa (1413-14), and provides a summary evaluation of the whole phenomenon of the compulsory disputation of the Middle Ages. Accordingly, in the first part of his work, Maccoby presents an analysis of the history and content of all three disputations, and is able by this means to point out the continuity and discontinuity in the thematic disposition and historical conditions. This is without doubt a great advantage of his study. In the second section, he gives the texts of the disputation of Barcelona, i.e., the Hebrew version of Nahmanides and the Latin protocol of the Christian side, both in English translation. In the third part, he furnishes the texts of the disputations of Paris and Tortosa; an English paraphrase of the vikuah of R. Yehiel of Paris and a complete translation of the Latin Christian report of the Paris disputation; and a full translation of the Hebrew version of the disputation of Tortosa as well as translated extracts from the very comprehensive Christian protocols of this mammoth disputation.

As a first criticism of Maccoby's work, it should be said that the title is equivocal if not misleading. By “edited and translated”, one understands in the scholarly
literature of all disciplines that original texts have been issued and rendered into another language. In the present study, only half of this applies: exclusively English versions are offered and no editions in the original tongue.

Where the content and construction of the work are concerned, the question of the literary genre "disputation" - and there is no doubt but that we are dealing here with a particular genre - is regrettably not explained at all. The problem is, however, of immediate significance for, among other things, the historical interpretation of the text. The reports are accepted here quite simply as historical documents without, say, expressly investigating the difference between "historical report" and "propaganda document". The reliability and unreliability of particular details are determined according to theological and historical consistency, but not in addition according to whether the literary genre may possibly require certain statements. The themes are thus handled to some extent a-historically and a-temporally, without any historical spacing or differentiation. The author himself as it were takes part in the disquisitions, which need not necessarily be a disadvantage. But whether the modern Christian-Jewish debate lies, or should lie, on the same level as the medieval disquisitions (as he supposes), is open to question. Thus, to name one example, it is surely no longer a historical judgement, but dogmatic apologetics, when Maccoby reproaches the Christian partners in the disputation for the theological error of equating "God the Father of Christianity with the God of Judaism", and thus of "false premises" (p. 35).

Maccoby's presuppositions have an especially fatal effect in his handling of the vikuah of Nahmanides. Here, he is concerned to provide more than a simple English version. "The aim of the present translation and commentary", he explains, "is to recover the original account written by Nahmanides, not merely to translate the text as edited by Steinschneider" (p. 77). This leads him to various emendations, above all of polemical passages, motivated essentially by a "loss of cogency in the argument", and by "the possibility of restauration of cogency by a simple plausible emedation" (p. 78). The most important example of this is the whole introductory section of the vikuah which, in Maccoby's view, cannot have belonged to the original version because of its downright blasphemous, anti-Christian trend, and must have been added by a later hand. As long as the preliminary question of the literary genre of the text is left unclarified, so far-reaching a conclusion is wholly without justification. As an introduction to a polemical propaganda document for a Jewish audience, the section is in any case perfectly conceivable.

Maccoby is possibly on the right path to the solution of this problem in so far as he distinguishes between two different versions of the vikuah of Nahmanides, namely one in Latin or Catalan written on the instance of, and for, the bishop of Gerona (which has not survived), and the known Hebrew version. But he obviously assumes that these two were to a large extent identical, and therefore feels obliged to remove the polemical passages from the Hebrew. It is nevertheless quite possible that the two "reports" differed in many details, and that the polemical sections (including the introduction) were absent from the one intended for the bishop, the Hebrew version being - as has been suggested - rather in the nature of a propaganda document. This argument is certainly not disposed of by the remark that it, too, "must have been scrutinised by Christian Hebraists such as Pablo Christiani and Raymund de Peñaforde; and Nahmanides must have known that it would be subject to such scrutiny" (p. 101) - especially when it is at the same time surmised that this version was not circulated until after Nahmanides' death (p. 100).

In contrast to Maccoby's study, Dr. H.-G. von Mutius's Habilitationsschrift in
Jewish Studies is concerned with only one disputation, that of Barcelona. Also, whereas Maccoby accompanies his translation with rather sketchy notes, von Mutius offers with his well-articulated translation an exhaustive (sometimes too exhaustive) commentary, paying constant regard to the imprint of traditional material. This is the particular concern, and without doubt the strong point, of his work.

On the other hand, the parts leading beyond the commentary immediately connected with the text are much weaker than in Maccoby. The introduction and the conclusion, which deal with the historical framework of the disputation, amount to not much more than a few commonplaces, and betray by their frequently clumsy and cliché-ridden language that the author is not yet familiar with this field of study. A few examples (which can easily be multiplied) may illustrate this. The incorporation of the Moorish Kingdom of Valencia into the dominions of James I was a "ziemlich bedeutendes Unternehmen", and Valencia fell in 1238, naturally after "heroischem Widerstand" (p. 1). The dependence of the administration on the favour of the king was "total" (p. 2). Nahmanides "verhielt sich der Philosophie gegenüber skeptisch", "andererseits versteifte er sich nicht zu einer schlechthinigen Ablehnung philosophischer Methodik". He valued Maimonides highly, "obwohl er vieles an ihm auszusetzen hatte" (p. 4). Ramon de Peñafort was "einer, der besonders eifrig im Organisatorischen tätig war" (p. 5); etc.

Von Mutius has, however, given some thought to the literary genre of this text, and clearly classifies the *vikuaḥ* of Nahmanides (as well as the Christian "protocol") as a propaganda document for Jewish and Christian readers respectively. This doubtless explains the polemical passages, which Maccoby cleverly emends, and enjoins caution in regard to too naif a historical evaluation of the text. Like Maccoby, von Mutius accepts that there were two versions of the *vikuaḥ*: a Latin or Catalan composition (for the bishop of Gerona) and one in Hebrew. He is equally convinced that both were largely identical. But here he is caught in the dilemma of assuming that Nahmanides in fact submitted a Jewish propaganda document to the bishop. This is hardly probable, and the theory suggests itself that the two reports were not in fact identical, but showed throughout important differences. Whether therefore the lost version for the bishop of Gerona came nearer to historical reality is another question about which there is no point speculating as long as we do not possess it. In any event, it is the case that the surviving Hebrew recension is strongly tinged with propaganda (perhaps not only in regard to individual arguments, but even where the construction of the text is concerned, i.e., in the flow of the disputation), and it would have been useful if this had been recognized more consistently by von Mutius.

All in all, it has proved fortunate that two authors with such different backgrounds and dispositions should have dealt with almost the same topic at the same time. The two studies supplement each other excellently and should be used together.

Seminar für Judaistik,  
Freie Universität, Berlin

Peter Schäfer


In the overall experience of Jewish history, the case of Jews in Arab lands offers a unique opportunity to evaluate and compare the social behaviour of the Jews to that