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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Judaica : Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums**

Band (Jahr): **66 (2010)**

PDF erstellt am: **16.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-961668>

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Printing, Burning and Censorship: Hebrew Books in Italy in the 1550s

von *Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin**

Among other interesting items in the Dalman collection at Greifswald one can find copies of two editions of the *Mishnah* that were published simultaneously in the year 1559: the one in Riva di Trento and the other in nearby Sabbioneta. The first is a censored copy that has been recently examined by Judith Thomanek in an illuminating essay.¹ The second edition was published at the same year in the print shop owned by Tuvia (Tobias) Foa in Sabbioneta. This printing shop (Foa was in fact an entrepreneur who initiated publications according to preorders) was established in 1551, and was closed in 1559, shortly after the printing of the first volume of the *Mishnah*. That is why the publication of this edition was completed only 4 years later in Mantua. The two editions are different in form and size – but besides that they are almost identical. Another edition of the *Mishnah*, without the commentary, was printed a year later in Riva di Trento.

It is not so common to find copies of these two editions in the same collection, particularly in a private one. This peculiar fact can inspire us to reflect on the historical context of their simultaneous publication (together with the third one). It was not the first time in which the *Mishnah* was printed. The first printed editions of the composition appeared already in 1492 in Naples (accompanied by the commentary of Maimonides), and again in 1515 in Pesaro (without any commentary). Two editions of the *Mishnah* were published in Venice a decade earlier: one by Marco Antonio Justinian (1546-7), an edition that accompanied the publication

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1 JUDITH THOMANEK, 'Dies ist die Mishnah des Giuseppe Salvador Ottolenghi.' Zu Druck, Besitzer, Zensor und Zensur eines hebräischen Buches aus dem 16. Jahrhundert, in: CHRISTFRIED BÖTTRICH, JUDITH THOMANEK & THOMAS WILLI (eds.), *Zwischen Zensur und Selbstbesinnung. Christliche Rezeptionen des Judentums*, Frankfurt a.M. / Berlin / Bruxelles / New York / Oxford / Wien 2009 (= Greifswalder theologische Forschungen vol. 17), pp. 93-123. I would like to thank J. Thomanek for guiding me in the Dalman library and for the inspiring conversation on these issues.

of the Babylonian Talmud at this period. A year later (1548-9) it was published by Meir Parenzo in the printing press of Antonio Querini. This edition included for the first time the commentary of R. Obadiah of Bertinoro, a commentary that will be included in many of the editions that have been published later, and became a standard interpretation of the composition. Hence, these Venetian editions should be seen as the corner stone of all editions of the *Mishnah*.

Accordingly, the editions of 1559 cannot be seen as a dramatic innovation and should be discussed together with the Venetian editions of the previous decade. Nevertheless, focusing on them may provide a unique prism for the understanding of the general process, because of the peculiar context of the publication: on the one hand, the simultaneous publication of three editions at the same time (together with the two editions of the previous decade) reflects the emerging interest in the *Mishnah* at that period. It established its status as a sacred and independent book, separated from the Talmud, and marks also its role as the focus of a spiritual-cultural revival. What particularly distinguishes the publications of 1559, on the other hand, is that it took place during the same year in which all copies of the Talmud in the region were confiscated and burnt in Cremona. It is also associated to other canonical projects of publications that took place at the same years and will be discussed later. It is an important moment in the history of the transition to print, one that can provide us with the opportunity to examine the complicated interrelations between printing, culture and censorship.

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The burning of the Talmud in Cremona in 1559 was the last in a series of public burnings that took place since 1553, when Pope Julius III issued a decree demanding that all copies of the Talmud and the literature based on it be confiscated and destroyed. In a bull promulgated on May 29, 1554 (*Cum sicut nuper*), Julius III repeated the order to ban and destroy all copies of the Talmud, but the bull also emphasized that Jews might keep other books, on condition that they contained no blasphemous passages.² In Rome, Venice (then the center of the Hebrew Print) and other cities, the order was immediately implemented, and thousands of volumes were burnt in central squares. In the Duchy of Milan (under Spanish rule), however, the authorities at first attempted to annul the order. In first stage, the Senate accepted the claim of the Jews that in fact the bull had already been implemented, since the forbidden passages were already removed from books. In Cremona, the authorities even encouraged the publication of

2 For the text of this order and the report of the Inquisition on its execution, see MORITZ STERN, *Urkundliche Beiträge über die Stellung der Päpste zu den Juden*, Kiel 1893, pp. 98-102. The order was reprinted in SHLOMO SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 8 vols., TORONTO 1988-1991, vol. VI, pp. 2887-2890, doc. 3165.

Hebrew books when they permitted Vincenzo Conti in 1556 to establish a printing press in the city in 1556.

Yet, as said, in spite of negotiations that took place during these years, finally the decree to ban the Talmud was accepted also here, and in 1559 all books were confiscated and burnt.³ The initiator of this extreme act was the Dominican biblical scholar Sisto of Siena.⁴ Thus, the *Mishnah* was printed at the same year in which the Talmud was forbidden and destroyed. This duality marks the boundaries of permitted knowledge: the text of the *Mishnah* is an integral part of the Talmud, and as such it was burnt. But as an independent text it was permitted and even recognized as a source of authentic knowledge. The publication was sponsored by Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo, the Cardinal of nearby Trent, where some years later (1562-63) the third session of the Council of Trent will dedicate a formative discussion to the methods of control over the print industry.⁵ The act of prohibition was also the act of explicit recognition that the *Mishnah* is an authentic manifestation of the “Oral Torah”. While in the 1540s, the publication of the *Mishnah* by Justinian as a separate work was done together with the publication of a new edition of the Babylonian Talmud, ten years later, when the *Mishnah* was published the Talmud was burnt.

As Thomanek showed, the text published in this context did not satisfy later censors, like Domenico Gerosolimitano who in 1598 revised the copy of the Dalman collection at Greifswald and omitted some of the texts included.⁶ But in order to evaluate these erasures we also have to remember that these omissions were intended to authorize the book.

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3 For a summary of the events and debates in the duchy of Milan, particularly in Cremona, see: WILLIAM POPPER, *Censorship of Hebrew Books*, New York 1899 (repr. 1968) pp. 43-4. 47-8; MEIR BENAYAHU, *Hebrew Printing at Cremona. Its History and Bibliography* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1971, p. 121, and the updated description in YOSEF ADIHI COHEN, *The Converts and the Burning of the Talmud in Cremona (1553-1559)* (Hebrew) MA Thesis, Bar Ilan University 1997, pp. 45-62. The relevant documents were published by STERN, *Urkundliche Beiträge*, and reprinted or summarized later by SHLOMO SIMONSOHN (ed.), *The Jews in the Duchy of Milan*, vol. II, n. 3045/2, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 1324-1326. On the confiscation of the Talmud of early April 1559: STERN, *Urkundliche Beiträge*, 117-122, doc. 112-115; SIMONSOHN, *Duchy of Milan*, II, pp. 1348-1349, 3095.

4 On Sixtus of Siena see: FAUSTO PARENTE, *Sisto Senese: Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento e eta barocca*, 1984, Roma 1986, pp. 211-232. Parente proved unequivocally that the claim that Sixtus was a convert was unfounded.

5 THOMANEK, „Dies ist die Mishnah ...“, pp. 100-105.

6 THOMANEK, *ibid.*

At the same time, the *Mishnah* also received a new status amongst its Jewish readers. Until this period, the *Mishnah* was regularly studied as the basic text of the Talmud, and as part of the study of the Talmudic text. A tradition of reading and learning the *Mishnah* separately existed in Italy and Spain, as can be learnt from the tradition of Manuscripts of *Mishnaic* texts and of the commentary of Maimonides.⁷ But only in the Sixteenth century, parallel to the printings, it received its central role and recognition as an independent composition. Moreover, at that period it became the focus of the exceptional cultural and spiritual revival that emerged in Safed. It was perceived as a sacred text, a source of contemplation and inspiration, and as the access to reach the authentic knowledge of Revelation.⁸ R. Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi (Ha-Ari) as well as R. Yosef Karo, renewed a practice of liturgical reading and learning of *Mishnayot*, accompanied by mystical practices that reflected the desire of contemplation and unification with the spirit of the Tannaim, the Sages of the *Mishnah*. Luria also discovered the graves of the Tannaim, in order to restore the historical context of the creation of the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* as a feminine figure (identical to the Shekhina) was revealed to R. Yosef Karo during his work on his comprehensive legal projects. At the same period, the importance of the *Mishnah* was also emphasized by R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel (Maharal of Prague), who demanded that a serious learning of the *Mishnah* as a separate book will precede the study of the Talmud.⁹

The printing press did not generate the new status the *Mishnah* received, but as in many other cases, provided the tools to enlarge and intensify previous tendencies. The commentary of R. Obadiah of Bertinoro (1440- ca. 1530), written in Jerusalem, is a manifestation of earlier *Mishnaic* consciousness that preceded the print. Nevertheless it seems that printing was instrumental in its establishment and in spreading both the object and the consciousness associated with it.

Thus, at the same period, both Jews and Christian Hebraists emphasized the sacrality of the *Mishnah*. Yet needless to say that the Jews protested against Papal policy and did not intend to undermine its status. The composition remained the foundation of Jewish learning. The burning was indeed a traumatic event and Jews tried to resist Christian restrictions and prohibitions. It is true that to a certain extent the new attitude of the Kabbalists towards the *Mishnah*

7 On the manuscripts of the *Mishnah* see the comprehensive study of YAACOV ZOSMAN, Manuscripts and Text Traditions of the *Mishnah*, in: *Studies in the Talmud, Halacha and Midrash*, Jerusalem 1981, (= World Congress of Jewish Studies 7), pp. 215-250.

8 On the revolution in the status and significance of the *Mishnah* see AARON AHREND, Mishnah Study and Study Groups in Modern Times, in: *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 3 (2004) (Hebrew).

9 This has been recently discussed by Elchanan Reiner. I wish to thank Professor Reiner for sharing with me his observations before publication.

subverted the traditional hierarchy, by putting themselves in the place of the Talmudic Sages, yet the Talmud remained an authoritative source of knowledge even after the condemnation. However it is important to notice that at the same period in which the *Mishnah* turned to be a major text, considered as Scriptures, it was also recognized as such by Christian officials, who promoted its publication while burning the Talmud.

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The *Mishnah* was not the only canonical composition that was published in the region that year. The years of the burnings witnessed the first publication of two other monumental books (among other important works): the *Zohar*, and the major books of codifications of R. Yosef Karo: the *Bet Yosef* and the *Shulchan Arukh*. The print shops in Venice, until then the center of Hebrew printing in the formative period, were closed after the decree of Pope Julius III in 1553 and the burning of the Talmud in Piazza San Marco. For a transitional period, until the re-opening of the Venetian Hebrew print shops after the publication of *Index of Trent* in 1564, the center of printing moved to the places that had already been mentioned: Cremona, Riva di Trento, Sabbioneta and Mantua. The explicit intention of the publishers of these print shops was to continue and follow the Venetian tradition of the previous decades. And indeed, as Isaiah Sonne noted “most of the books printed in Cremona are but new editions of works formerly printed elsewhere”.¹⁰ On the other hand, however, some of the canonical Jewish books were published for the first time at that period. Moreover, as Sonne himself convincingly argued, in many respects the products of these publishing houses expressed another stage of professionalization and improvements of the process of production.

While the printing house of Tuvia Foa in Sabbioneta was established already in 1551, the Conti press in Cremona was established in 1556, during the campaign against the Talmud. The press in Riva di Trento was established in 1559, probably as a result of disagreements among the Jewish partners who worked at the Conti house in Cremona.¹¹ But basically one cannot find substantial differences between the products of these printing houses, and they all share similar principles of editing, as well as of censorship.

The production of the Conti press in Cremona in particular marks the formative stage in the history of Hebrew printing.¹² Working under the threat

10 ISAIAH SONNE, Expurgation of Hebrew Books: The Work of Jewish Scholars, in: *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 46 (1942), pp. 975-1014.

11 See JOSHUA BLOCH, *Hebrew printing in the East*, New York 1941, and also THOMANEK.

12 That explains the relatively wide interest and scholarship dedicated to this press. For some of the most important compositions see above, note 3.

of the burning and within an atmosphere of increasing pressure, the printing in Cremona internalized the restrictions of the Church, and for the first time initiated a pre-publication censorship. Books that were published there since 1558 carried the official permission of the censors.¹³ The pre-publication censorship was probably initiated by the publishers themselves (and also by Jewish delegates) who wished to protect their investments and to ensure that the products will not be banned. As Isaiah Sonne observed in the seminal essay he dedicated to the expurgation of Hebrew books, the editions that were more carefully censored, were also those more professionally and carefully edited.¹⁴

I do not intend any simplistic link or to argue that surveillance has generated the significant cultural production of the period. What I want to suggest is that both the shaping of Hebrew literature and the campaign against the book industry demonstrate in different and even in opposite ways the emergence of print consciousness. The burning and the institutionalization of systematic surveillance express the awareness of the authorities to the implications of the new invention, including the massive spread of Talmudic literature. Within these boundaries, similar awareness generated the revolutionary shift in Jewish culture as well.

Saying that does not mean, of course, to underestimate the implications of the burnings and the continuous prohibition of the Talmud. On the contrary: this dramatic act was traumatic and manifested the marginal status of the Jews in Italy. We should emphasize that while many aspects of the composition were explicitly permitted, the composition itself, as such, remained a demonic as well as blasphemous book that threat Christianity and Christians. This approach to the Talmud is clearly demonstrated in the decision of the council of Trent to consider the publication of the Talmud if it will not appear with the title Talmud. While the demand to remove all anti-Christian statements is understandable, the demand to remove the title cannot be understood but as a fear of the authoritative claim it carried. This approach was unsuccessful, and the Talmud remained the basic book of learning, even if in many cases was held and studied clandestinely.

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In the years 1558-1560, the *Zohar* (and previously other sections of *Zoharic* Literature) were also published for the first time, also in two editions: Mantua (3 volumes, 1558-1560) and Cremona (one volume, probably also under the supervision of R. Yosef Ottolenghi, 1559). Unlike the case of the *Mishnah*, the two editions of the *Zohar* were not identical. While the canonization of the *Mishnaic* text was ancient, as observed recently by Boaz Huss, printing the

13 SONNE, *ibid.*

14 SONNE, *ibid.*

Zohar was a crucial stage in a long process of editing of *Zoharic* literature.¹⁵ As Huss and also Daniel Abrams emphasized, the very idea of the “*Book of Zohar*” had not existed and was first established through printing (still not in a canonized way). What we had before print was “*Zoharic* literature” consisted on a growing number of manuscripts and collections of texts. In that case print definitely marked an important stage, and printing of *Zoharic* literature was therefore part of its formation as a book. The *Zohar* is therefore an obvious product of print culture. Even now, as said, the editions were very different from each other, so the *Zohar* remained an open text, whose canonized version will be determined only later. While the publication of the *Zohar* generated an intensive debate, the publication of the *Mishnah* was accepted as natural.

Notwithstanding these differences, we should remember that the *Zohar* was also considered as a *Mishnaic* composition, the ultimate manifestation of the Tannaic authority and sacrality. Attributed to R. Shimon Bar-Yochai, the great Tanna, it was perceived as a guide to revelation and access to Divine knowledge. The *Zohar* is therefore the Torah of a Tanna, a major component of the context generally represented by the *Mishnah*.

Both the publication of the *Mishnah* and particularly the publication of the *Zohar* were based on collaborations between Jews and Christians. As said, the printing of the *Mishnah* was sponsored by Cardinal Madruzzo. The publication of the *Zohar* was in fact a joint project. It was not only permitted, but was considered as a source of knowledge crucial for the understanding of Christianity, as an authoritative manifestation of Divine revelation. The publication of the *Zohar* took place when the interest of Christian Hebraists in the composition reached its climax, and was encouraged and perhaps sponsored by scholars like Guillaume Postel, the famous Hebraist.¹⁶ What is particularly striking is that one of the initiators of the publication of the *Zohar*, and certainly one of the most enthusiastic supporters of it was Sisto da Siena. As mentioned, this scholar was directly responsible for the burning of the Talmud, and he did it with no less enthusiasm. Therefore it will be wrong to distinguish Hebraism from censorship and prohibition as opposite practices. On the contrary, they complemented each other and together defined the boundaries of knowledge, while redefining the marginal space of the Jews. Hebraists like Sisto da Siena (who was not exceptional in this sense) perceived the burning as an act of “liberating” the Hebrew (sacred) letters from the allegedly demonic composition in which

15 BOAZ HUSS, *Like the Radiance of the Sky. Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of its Symbolic Value*, Jerusalem 2008. See also DERS., *Sefer ha-Zohar as a Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text. Changing Perspectives on the Book of splendor Between the Thirteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries*, in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998), pp. 257–307.

16 See FRANÇOIS SECRET, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris 1964.

they were captured, and of revealing the *Hebraica Veritas* to be found in the *Zohar* and the *Mishnah*.

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The monumental compositions of R. Yosef Karo belong to a different genre, and are dedicated to a different – but the most important – aspect of Talmudic knowledge: the Halakha. These are books of codification that intended to unify and organize the entire Jewish law. Unlike the *Mishnah* and the *Zohar* these compositions hardly interested Christian Hebraists at that period,¹⁷ yet they were confirmed by ecclesiastical authorities almost without any demands for revisions. The *Bet Yosef* was a conclusion of the entire Halakhic discourse: the author provided a detailed account of previous literature in which he examined extensively the differences between the various authorities, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi, in order to reach a clear and definite legal conclusion and to solve issues of disagreement and differences of opinions. The book was written (and published) as a commentary to *Sefer Ha-Turim*, the canonical book of codification of R. Yaakov b. Asher, but it was much more than that, as it collected and discussed all authorities, and heavily relied on Maimonides in its conclusions.

The *Bet Yosef* was written a long time before the campaign against the Talmud. Its publication began before the burnings: the first two volumes were printed in Venice and Sabbioneta in the years 1551 and 1553. Then its publication was interrupted by the burnings to be completed several years later: the last two volumes were published in Sabbioneta and Cremona in 1558. Under these circumstances, the composition got another significance, as a huge source of Talmudic knowledge that was permitted. Evidently, this was not the intention of the author and not the reason for its canonical status and its reception as an ultimate authority and the basic book for study the Halakha until the present. Yet the coincidence remains important, and it should be emphasized that the book, based on the Talmud, was explicitly permitted at the same year in which the Talmud itself was condemned.

While the *Bet Yosef* may be considered as a conclusion of the Jewish Halakhic discourse of the previous centuries, his *Shulchan Arukh* (“Set Table”) obvi-

17 The interest of Christians in these compositions has been increased later with the rise of the genre of ethnographies of Jews. See on that YAAKOV DEUTSCH, A View of the Jewish Religion. Conceptions of Jewish Practice and Ritual in Early Modern Europe, in: *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001), pp. 273-295; DERS., *Judaism in Christian Eye. „Ethnographic“ Descriptions of Judaism in the Writing of Christian Scholars in Western Europe from the Sixteenth Century to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century*, Diss., Hebrew University 2004 and STEPHEN BURNETT, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies. Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century*, Leiden/New York/Köln 1996.

ously demonstrates the main aspects of print consciousness. Unlike the *Bet Yosef* it does not include the entire Halakhic apparatus, but brings the conclusions and exact decisions concerning each of the Commandments. The *Shulchan Arukh* instantly became a “best seller”, and since its first publication it has been recognized as the authoritative presentation of Jewish law.¹⁸

The *Shulchan Arukh* was composed in Safed during the years 1555-1558, namely during the years of the campaign against the Talmud. Far away from the Italian cities in which it was burnt at the same years, but certainly under the impact of the violent measures and the new restrictions. Yet it will be of course reductive to view this fact as an explanation for its composition: it was the complementary foundation of Karo’s exceptional project, the conclusion of an autonomous intellectual process.

The *Shulchan Arukh* should be seen as a clear manifestation of what is commonly called “print culture.” Indeed, it was not a revolutionary book: to a certain extent it should be seen as the conclusion of a long process whose origins go back to the twelfth century, with the appearance of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Tora*, a composition intended to provide a systematic arrangement of Talmudic law and make it accessible and comprehensible. Later, new books of that genre appeared, the most important among them being R. Yaakov b. Asher *Arba’ah Turim* and the Ashkenazi *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Sema”g). The *Shulchan Arukh* was also the conclusion of Karo’s own project: his comprehensive *Bet Yosef*.

These aspects of continuity notwithstanding, we should emphasize the dramatic consequences that accompanied the appearance of the *Shulchan Arukh*. The history of literature of codification can therefore be seen as an exemplary demonstration of the history of literacy in general, manifesting both continuity and change. The question in this case is not whether the transition to print was a revolution but what was revolutionary in the advent of printing.

Indeed, the *Shulchan Arukh* embodies many aspects associated with the advent of print, such as unification, distribution, the rise of new codes, new communities of readers, and the standardization of textual traditions and praxis.¹⁹

18 I have elaborated on that in my „From Safed to Venice: The Shulhan Arukh and the Censor“ in: CHNITA GOODBLATT & HOWARD KREISEL (eds.), *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture. Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, Beer Sheva 2007, pp. 91-115.

19 The act of unification was, however, also an act of division, as shortly after its appearance the Rema (R. Moshe Isserles), published the *Mappa* (Table Cloth) to the *Shulchan Arukh* (Set Table), considered as an interpretation and supplement to the *Shulchan*, while also challenging its claim to universal authority by introducing Ashkenazi traditions and costumes that differed from the Sephardic tradition. But, rather than challenge the status of the *Shulchan Arukh*, as was demonstrated by Elchanan Reiner, it was Rema who established the status of the *Shulchan Arukh* as the

The explicit purpose of the book was popularization, namely making the law available to any Jew, though the main intention was to bring about unification through a standard book serving both scholars and laymen: Karo assumed the book would reach a much larger audience, but at the same time also directed it towards scholars, as a guide for the study of the Talmud and the more sophisticated Halakhic books. Indeed, the *Shulchan Arukh* became the basic book for study in the Yeshivot, and a manual for ordinary people that could be found in many private libraries. The composition was written with the explicit awareness that it would become authoritative and a standard text. Karo was an obvious, albeit exceptional example of “a new author”, who was well aware of the advantages and the rules of the new innovation. Inspired by an obvious messianic perception, he was well aware that the composition would be quickly disseminated throughout the Jewish world, and hoped that it would bring unification and consensus. He insisted on personally supervising its publication and made sure that the editors followed his instructions.

According to Karo’s mystical diary (*Magid Meisharim*) during the writing of both compositions, the *Mishnah* was revealed to him and directed him in his studies and writings²⁰ – as the personification of the *Mishnah* (also identified with the Shekhina). Karo’s project is therefore also a manifestation of the “*Mishnah* consciousness” we observed in this essay.

The first edition of the *Shulchan Arukh* was published in 1565, a year after the publication of the *Index of Trent* (1564). The third session of the Council of Trent (1562-3) dedicated a long discussion of the issue of censorship, and, in conclusion, issued a new *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* which significantly reduced the number of books that were totally prohibited and also introduced a system of permanent surveillance, based on the principle of expurgation: the removal or revision of certain paragraphs as a condition for their permission. This decision marks the recognition that surveillance was not a one-time matter designed – or imagined – to “restore” a supposedly previously existing reality, but rather an ongoing process. The Index left the prohibition of the Talmud and

authoritative text. In most of the editions since 1574, the *Shulchan* was printed with the *Mappa*, thus creating an interesting tension that was realized on the printed page. It was an act of integrating the Sephardic tradition and its accommodation into the Ashkenazi world. The confirmation of the authority and its undermining from then on appeared on the same page.

20 RAPHAEL JEHUDAH ZWI WERBLOWSKY, *Joseph Karo. Lawyer and Mystique*, Oxford 1962. One of the aspects of Karo’s project was the internalization of Kabbalistic sources, particularly the *Zohar*, into the Halakhic discussion. For an analysis of Karo’s Messianic approach and its expression in his legal project see RACHEL ELIOR, R. Joseph Karo and R. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov. Mystical metamorphosis, Kabbalistic Inspiration and Spiritual Internalization, in: *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), pp. 671-709.

its commentaries intact, but with an additional statement according to which “if (the composition) appears without its title ‘Talmud’, and without the attacks and injuries directed against Christianity, it will be tolerated”.²¹ In other words, The Index of Trent granted permission in principle to resume printing and using the Talmud, although only once several of its passages were eliminated. It should be clarified in advance that these directions had little practical influence, as following extensive discussions in the following decades, the possibility of permitting the publication of a censored version of the Talmud was finally rejected: in the Index published in 1596, the Talmud was once again unconditionally banned.

Nevertheless, the extensive discussion that took place on this issue, and the theoretical recognition of the right to use the composition, even if only subsequent to emendations and erasures, was of great historical importance. The discussion also laid the foundation for the broad permission granted to the rest of Hebrew literature, including the literature relied on the Talmud, including books that included many citations of Talmudic literature, like the *Bet Yosef* and the *Ein Yaakov*, the collection of the Haggadic content of the Talmud by R. Yaakov Ibn Habib that was published in Venice (second edition) in 1549. The official permission to publish the *Shulchan Arukh* is an obvious manifestation of this position.

The *Sulchan Arukh* was therefore one of the first Hebrew books to be revised before publication and receive a legal confirmation by both state and ecclesiastical authorities. The composition that reflected the reshaping of Jewish tradition appeared at the same time and in the same context in which Catholic boundaries and ecclesiastical institutions were also shaped. As was already mentioned, the last two volumes of the *Bet Yosef* were among the first books to receive ecclesiastical confirmation before publication, even though a systematic surveillance was not yet established. The *Shulchan Arukh* was one of the first books to be revised after the decision to institutionalize control and pre-publication censorship.

The concurrence of the arrival of the manuscript and the introduction of censorship should not be seen as merely coincidental: the major Jewish composition and the introduction of censorship were part of the same process associated with the introduction of printing and the professionalization of publica-

21 *Thalmud Hebraeorum, ejusque glossae, annotationes, interpretationes et expositiones omnes. si tamen prodierint sine nomine Thalmud et sine injuriis et calumniis in religionem christianam tolerabuntur.* FRANZ H. REUSCH, *Der Index der verbotenen Bücher. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Literaturgeschichte* 2 vols., Bonn 1883-1885, vol. I, p. 279; JESUS MARTINEZ DE BUJANDA, *Index des livres interdits*, Éditions de l'Université de Sherbrooke, XXI vols, Genève 1984-1996, vol. VIII, pp. 105-6 (Emphases not in original).

tion. Moreover, the publication of the book had been delayed for several years: it was compiled in four years (1555-1559) – in each of them Karo completed one volume - but was published only several years later.²² We have no evidence as to the reason for this delay, but it is possible to assume that one of the reasons was the temporary closure of the Venetian Hebrew print houses, following the condemnation and burning of the Talmud in 1553. It does not explain, however, why he did not publish it in Cremona or Sabionetta. During this period, Karo could also have printed the book in one of the printing houses of the Ottoman Empire, and thus avoid the Catholic surveillance. But we may assume that he believed that an explicit permission from the Inquisition would prevent any further prohibition. It seems probable that he preferred the Venetian press (Di Gara), owned by Christians – both for its quality and because it ensured its dissemination all over the world.

While the Talmud itself was prohibited, most of the commandments and customs determined from it were explicitly authorized. This ambivalence marks a crucial dimension of the transformation of the entire Jewish discourse. The Talmud was denied both as a blasphemous book (because of the obvious anti-Christian passages it contains), but also because it was perceived as a rival source of authority. That is why the publication of the title Talmud was unconditionally prohibited even according to the Tridentine Index, which preserved the option for its republication.²³ The title was denied even when the content was permitted.

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We could see therefore that the years in which the Talmud was condemned and burnt were formative years in the history of the printing of Hebrew books and of Jewish culture. The prohibition, confiscation and destruction of the fundamental Jewish book, were accompanied by some monumental projects of publication. While the Talmud itself was condemned, many of the books relied on it were officially permitted, and the *Mishnah* was even acknowledged as an authentic divine book. The editions of the *Mishnah* are part of a larger project, and their examination is essential for understanding the burning themselves.

22 REUVEN MARGALOT, The First Prints of the *Shulchan Aruch*, in: YITZHAK RAPHAEL (ed.), *Rabbi Yosef Karo. Insights and Studies in the Mishnah of the Maran of the Shulchan Aruch* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1969, pp. 89-100; MEIR BENAYAHU, *R. Yosef Behiri* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1991.

23 See the discussion of this issue in FAUSTO PARENTE, The Index, the Holy Office, the Condemnation of the Talmud and Publication of Clement VIII's Index, in: GIGLIOLA FRAGNITO (ed.), *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ADRIAN BELTON trans, Cambridge 2001, pp. 163-193.