

Pe'amim

Studies in Oriental Jewry

153

Halakha, Kabbala and Theology in the Middle Ages

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**Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish
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In This Issue

Ran HaCohen's essay traces the origin and unfolding of a theological discourse (in the West) revolving around the Jews of Ethiopia. Based on its interpretation of Genesis 49: 10, Christian theology since ancient times has denied the possibility of Jewish sovereignty after the coming of Christ. Rumours of a Jewish kingdom in the East, specifically in Ethiopia, thus became an issue in Jewish-Christian polemics. The article traces this discourse in Judaism and Christianity from its origins in the Middle Ages, through the Portuguese Jesuites; Hiob Ludolf, the founder of Ethiopian Studies; James Bruce, the 'discoverer' of the Falasha, and up to the late 19th century. Arguably, even the popular understanding of the term 'Falasha' may be part of this discourse.

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The article by Pinchas Roth describes a religious-legal (halakhic) controversy that erupted within the Jewish community of 14th-century Avignon. The controversy concerned the question of whether sturgeon is a kosher fish permitted for Jewish consumption, but the roots of the controversy lie in larger issues of religious philosophy. The article is based upon a description of the controversy penned by one of its participants, Astrug Moses d'Milhau. His description found in the National Library of Israel, ms. 28°2033 appears here as an appendix to the article.

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In his article, Oded Yisraeli discusses one of the earliest Kabbalistic compositions of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nahmanides), called 'Discourse for the Wedding'. The article identifies here the beginnings of Nahmanides' Kabbalah and makes a comparison between these Kabbalistic expressions and his known kabbalistic perceptions as reflected in his later writings. Against the background of this comparison, it points out the changes in his hermeneutical as well as magical-theurgical stances, and offers a unique perspective for the evolution of Nahmanides' Kabbalah during his life.

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Issur ve-Heter is a comprehensive book of halakha written in Judaeo-Arabic. It looks to have been written in Spain during the generation of R. Maimon, the father of Maimonides. Among the novelties found in the chapter published here, the most interesting is the ceremony of burning barley in the graveyard.

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This paper presents the first occurrence of Hebrew phrases within a work written in Judaeo-Arabic in the late tenth century – Yephet ben Eli's commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah. The paper focuses on a discussion of the use of the Hebrew phrase 'הכנת אכל' (preparation of food) which

reemerged in Ashkenazi sources about 200 years later. It is accompanied by the term 'איכל מוכן' which would re-appear only in modern Hebrew. The article also examines aspects of Yephet ben Eli's halakhic method as reflected in the commentary, delivered as an intriguing Karaite midrash halakha, and presents a critical edition of the paragraph in question. This paragraph will be part of a comprehensive edition of the whole commentary together with a critical edition of his commentary on the book of Chronicles which has also not been paid sufficient attention. It is hoped that this will make a unique contribution to the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew language.

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The article by Jonathan Bensoussan discusses the case of Morris Saban, a North African veteran of the 1948 war; this case depicts a phenomenon that occurred between 1949 and 1950. During this period, hundreds of veterans and a handful of soldiers who were still on active duty, all new immigrants from the Maghreb, demanded to leave Israel. In their quest, they turned to the French representatives in Israel for help – the same sovereign authority which had ruled over them until recently. In a sense, their demands marked the failure of Israel's image as a "melting pot" for Jews from all over the world.

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