

## Letters to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

I read with great interest Rabbi Adam Mintz' "Words, Meaning and Spirit: The Talmud in Translation", *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 5 (1994).

Rabbi Mintz deals largely with the attitude of leading rabbis to the translation of the Talmud and it is, probably, for this reason that he did not mention a Hebrew translation of three tractates of the Babylonian Talmud which was published in Israel between 1952 and 1960. This translation did not elicit any public comment by rabbinic authorities.

The Razal Company was founded in the 1940's for the purpose of publishing the Babylonian Talmud with a Hebrew translation, accompanied by a new commentary, variant readings and source references. The late Prof. Jacob Nachum Epstein, Professor of Talmud at the Hebrew University, was named general editor. In all, three tractates were published: *Baba Kamma*, translated and explained by Dr. Ezra Zion Melamed (1952); *Baba Batra*, translated and explained by Prof. Shraga Abramson (1958); and *Baba Mezia*, translated and explained by Dr. Moses Nahum Zobel and Prof. Hayyim Zalman Dimitrovsky, and edited by Dr. E. Z. Melamed (1960). The volumes, in which the text of the Talmud and the Hebrew translation appear side by side, were published by the Dvir and Massada publishing houses. Prof. Epstein, who died in 1952, edited *Baba*

*Kamma* and examined the first four chapters of the *Baba Batra* edition.

The late Prof. Mordecai Margaliot, author and editor, authority on Midrashic and early rabbinic literature, told me that he had been among the first to be approached by Prof. Epstein to collaborate on this project and was asked to prepare a sample translation. During a visit to the Hazon Ish ztz"l—Prof. Margaliot's father was on very friendly terms with him—the latter asked him about his work and studies. When told of the project to translate the Talmud into Hebrew, the Hazon Ish expressed his opposition to the project. He said, "Zol'n zei nisht meinen as men ken lernen Gemore un a rebben" (let them—people—not believe that one can study the Talmud without a teacher). Following his conversation with the Hazon Ish ztz"l, Prof. Margaliot withdrew from the project.

The scope of Rabbi Mintz' fine study did not call for a listing of all the various translations of the Talmud. May I, therefore, be permitted to mention that besides Rabbi Steinsaltz's edition, another Hebrew translation of the Talmud has been published in Israel: *Talmud Bavli 'Am Yargum Teri Meforash* by Shimon Ben-Shemen. In this edition, the talmudic text is provided with punctuation marks and is accompanied by an elucidated Hebrew translation. Other features designed to help the student include translations of Aramaic words and biographical notes

about Tannaim and Amoraim.

Only a few tractates of this edition have appeared thus far. I have seen the following: *Ta'anit* (1966), *Mo'ed Katan* (1967), *Megillah* (1967), *Hagigah* (1968), *Baba Kamma* (1971), *Baba Mezia* (1978) and *Baba Batra* (2 vols., 1979-1981).

In addition, several other Hebrew translations have appeared. Rabbi Nissim Benjamin Ohana (1882-1962) was a native of Algeria, served as a rabbi in various countries, and for the last 15 years of his life was Sefardi Chief Rabbi of Haifa. He translated into Hebrew the tractates *Ketubot*, *Kiddushin*, *Baba Kamma*, *Baba Mezia* and *Baba Batra* of the Babylonian Talmud. It seems, however, that only *Kiddushin* (1968), *Ketubot* (1969) and *Baba Mezia* (1972) were printed. These editions feature only the translated text together with explanatory notes (I have seen only the translations of *Ketubot* and *Kiddushin*).

In 1968, the "Organization for Talmud-Illustration and Oral-Tora Exploration" (this is the official English title of that body) of Tel Aviv published a Hebrew translation of tractate *Bezah* (*Yom Tov*) of the Babylonian Talmud. This edition features reproductions of the original Talmud pages (with the talmudic text fully vocalized) and, on opposite pages, the Hebrew translation of the text, accompanied by a commentary and illustrations. The translation and commentary were prepared by Abraham Arazi. The volume also contains special features, some in English, to help the student. Six years later, the organization published a translation of the tractate *Rosh Hashanah* in the same format. The translation and commentary were prepared by Shmuel Dov Gevaryahu-Gottesmann with E. Rubin as editor. The special features in Hebrew include an essay on the Hebrew calendar. Rabbi Y. Y.

Baruch Rabinowitz (Grand Rabbi of Munkacz), Chief Rabbi of Holon, served as chairman of the editorial board of both volumes. Prominent rabbis who were associated with the project included the late Rabbi I. Y. Unterman, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and the late Rabbi Dr. Kalman Kahana, Poalei Agudat Israel leader.

In 5733 (1972-73), Mordecai Levanon published Tractate *Berakhot* of the Babylonian Talmud with a Hebrew translation, notes and explanations in Jerusalem. The talmudic text (with Rashi and Tosafot) and the Hebrew translation with notes and explanations were printed on opposite pages. The author mentions in his introduction that, in 1938-1939, a Hebrew translation of tractate *Berakhot* by Rabbi Jozef Fromowicz was printed in Warsaw. (A copy of that edition is found in the New York Public Library.) The original text (in smaller type) and the Hebrew translation (in larger type) are printed side by side. The Hebrew translation is accompanied by a commentary. Some additional features to help the student are printed at the end of the volume.

I have listed here only Hebrew translations of entire talmudic tractates.

Sincerely,  
TOVIA PRESCHEL  
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TO THE EDITOR:

In his informative essay, "Words, Meaning and Spirit: The Talmud in Translation," Rabbi Adam Mintz demonstrates a fine intuitive sense in concluding that even some of the rabbinic authorities who issued *haskamot* for the Schottenstein Talmud did so with ambivalence.

For at least one noted rabbi, however, ambivalence ultimately turned into active opposition. In 1991, Rabbi Menashe Klein prepared

a work for publication, *Kuntres—Shonui Hakhamim bi-Lashon ha-Mishnah*, that specifically reaffirmed the previous ban on the Soncino edition of the Talmud and applied it as well to the Schottenstein Talmud. He wrote:

... To my friends and dear students and especially to *b'nai yeshivot* and *b'nai Torah* ... Regarding the matter about which many of you have asked: whether the English translation known as the Soncino Edition, which was banned by the scholars and Roshei Yeshivot of the previous generation ... now others have arisen and plan to translate the Talmud into English. Is there a difference between this situation and the preceding one or is there no difference?

RESPONSE: Your question touches the very existence of the Holy Torah in our generation and in coming generations. ... Although we concede that it is the intention of the translators to act for the benefit of Heaven, nevertheless it is apparent that it is the work Satan succeeding. ... Furthermore, we have never seen this kind of behavior practiced by our ancestors in any of their previous diasporas. ... As for making the Talmud accessible to *ba'alei tesuvah*, I have always maintained that the first activity should be teaching them Hebrew.

These are the words of one who is pained at the suffering of the Torah that is now being held captive. Now, my friends who obey *da'at Torah*, study God's Torah as it was studied through all previous generations in the original Holy Tongue. Do not touch these English elucidations no matter who is responsible for the translations.

Somehow, Rabbi Klein was persuaded that it was politically inexpedient to challenge Mesorah Publications, and the galleys were deposited in his shul's *shemot* box, where they were retrieved by an enterprising bibliophile and circulated as *samizdat* literature. By 1994, however, conditions had apparently changed, and Rabbi Klein resurrected his polemic against the Schottenstein Talmud, merely amending the date on the title-page.

Perhaps the great inroads made by the Schottenstein Talmud in essentially replacing the Vilna *Shas* as the standard *Shas* used in our community rekindled Rabbi Klein's resolve.

On another note, Rabbi Mintz's conclusion in n. 21 (p. 145) downplaying the extent of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau's opposition to Moses Mendelssohn needs to be amended in light of the article by Y. N. Heshel, "Da'atam shel Gedolei ha-Dor be-Milhamtam Neced ha-Maskil Naitali Herz Weisel," *Kovez Beit Aharon ve-Yisrael* 45 (Shevat-Adar 5753): 119-35. The facsimile reproduction (on p. 124) of Rabbi Landau's letter to Rabbi Zevi Hirsh of Berlin, written in Rabbi Landau's own hand, finally establishes the authenticity of this letter which had been suspected as being a forgery since its first publication in the 1924 edition of *Lev 'Irt*.

In this document, Rabbi Landau describes Mendelssohn as follows: "Now I see that all those who judge him harshly are indeed correct, for he has now proclaimed that he has no share in the God of Israel or His Torah. ... He is like Ravshakeh, an apostate ... a sectarian and an informer." These words obviously do not allow much room for exegesis. Sincerely,

DR. SHILOMO SPRECHER  
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