Simcha Emanuel, עטרת זקנים: עיון מחודש בתולדותיהם של חכמים / *The Crown of the Elders: A New Look at the History of the Sages*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2022. Pp. 230. $33. ISBN: 978-9-6577-7664-3.
doi:10.1086/730959

Simcha Emanuel is a remarkably prolific and well-versed scholar of medieval rabbinic literature. He has published a series of Hebrew volumes that introduce, annotate, and correlate scores of manuscript texts. In addition, he seeks to demonstrate how the content of these texts expands and modifies our understanding of this literature, as well as of those who produced it. Several of Emanuel's more recent articles, dealing with finds in the so-called European Geniza, have appeared in English.

The present volume should nonetheless be of interest to general medievalists. It addresses significant details in the lives of several leading Talmudists living in northern and southern Europe during the period from 1150 to 1350. Irrespective of the precise level of awareness among medieval Christian scholars of their Jewish counterparts, the proximity of these Talmudists to central loci of Christian learning suggests that familiarity with the Jewish scholarly class can be quite useful to modern scholars in establishing parallel trends in textual interpretation and thought. Moreover, Emanuel relies not only on little-known rabbinic passages, but also on archival materials, tombstones, and more.

The book is divided between the rabbinic scholars of northern and southern Europe. It begins with Isaac (Ri) ben Samuel of Dampierre, whose name appears with unmatched frequency in the corpus of Talmudic glosses known as the *Tosafot*. Emanuel tentatively suggests that Ri lived from c. 1115 to 1190, which means that Ri was not much younger than his famous uncle (and teacher), Rabbenu (Jacob) Tam. This suggests that they worked side by side for a period of some thirty years, with important implications for the achievements of both these leading Tosafists.

Emanuel then expands upon the path-breaking claim he proposed more than two decades ago, namely, that Barukh ben Isaac, a student of Ri and author of the halakhic work *Sefer ha-Terumah*, was never present in Worms, the center with which all previous scholarship had associated him. This finding affects not only the authorship of two German rabbinic commentaries attributed to Barukh. It also rebuts the claim that this genre of rabbinic writing developed in Germany alone during this period.

The third chapter deals with Yehiel ben Joseph of Paris, a leading northern French Tosafist of the mid-thirteenth century. Emanuel explicates the route that Yehiel traveled on his way to Israel toward the end of his life. He traveled southward to the port of Marseilles, stopping at the homes of two of his colleagues, most notably Tuviah of Vienna. Unfortunately, Yehiel took ill during his Mediterranean voyage and was forced to return to northern France, where he died. Emanuel notes the irony of a rather similar episode involving the Tosafist Isaac ben Abraham of Dampierre (a student of Ri) which occurred more than forty years earlier.

Chapter 4 focuses on a wider issue. With the passing of four leading Rhineland Tosafists between 1220 and 1230, an educational crisis developed, since there was no longer a rabbinic figure in Germany of sufficient achievement to train the next generation of scholars. For that reason, Meir ben Barukh (Maharam) of Rothenburg (d. 1293), who became a singular arbiter of Jewish law during the second half of the thirteenth century, was forced to travel to northern France to study with Yehiel of Paris and other French Tosafists. Although the creativity of the Tosafists of northern France during the thirteenth century has been downplayed by some, Maharam's experience belies that assessment. Based on his northern French training, Maharam was able to restore the highest level of scholarship to Germanic lands, as evident also from the impressive group of students that he raised. Although Emanuel writes that he is unable to explain why the German Tosafists (who had passed away during the 1220s) were unable to produce their own successors, perhaps their primary roles as rabbinic judges, rather than as academy heads (as was the case in northern France), accounts for the ability of French teachers throughout the Tosafist period to continue to attract excellent students.

The tragic death of Maharam in prison (following his capture in 1286, with his corpse remaining incarcerated until 1307) is the subject of the chapter that follows. Analyzing the disparate accounts of why his release could not be secured, Emanuel downplays an account mentioned by Solomon Luria (a leading rabbinic authority in Poland, d. 1573), according to which Maharam himself prohibited the community from expending an exorbitant amount of money to rescue him. Although some historians have accepted Luria's account, Emanuel shows that it runs counter to other reports of the episode and does not square with Tosafist discussions of the halakhic underpinnings. To be sure, this is not the only instance in which Luria's recounting of earlier events based primarily on rabbinic texts has been shown to be imprecise in the light of historical evidence.

In the remaining third of the book, Emanuel turns his attention to four leading rabbinic scholars of medieval Spain. In Emanuel's view, Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) was likely born before the year 1194 and may thus have lived into his ninth decade. This has suggestive implications for the timing of the variegated works of biblical and Talmudic commentary that Nahmanides produced. Similarly, using both archival and rabbinic texts, Emanuel maintains that the lifespan of Nahmanides's student, Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba), was approximately ninety years. Common to both these scholars was the ability to add to their prodigious writings even at an advanced age.

The final chapters deal with Asher ben Yehiel (Rosh) and his son Judah. Rosh and his family emigrated from Germany to Spain during the early years of the fourteenth century in the face of persecution. Upon reaching Barcelona, Rosh sent young Judah to Toledo to aid in arranging the family's ultimate settlement there. Once again, based on different types of literary and material records, Emanuel determines that Judah died during the Black Death, at the age of fifty-eight, after having succeeded his father as head of the academy in Toledo. Indeed, Rosh died in 1321 (at around age seventy), which means that his notable role as the rabbinic head of the community in Toledo and its academy transpired during only a brief fifteen years. In these matters as well, Emanuel has revised the regnant historical view.

Emanuel's deep scholarship, wide knowledge base, and felicitous writing style are evident throughout. For those who can read (unencumbered) academic Hebrew, this volume is well worth the effort.

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