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**Catalan proper nouns and other Catalan words in the Hebrew account of the Barcelona disputation of 1263 between Friar Paul Christian and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman**

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Corpus Biblicum Catalanicum

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**Abstract.** The Hebrew account of the Barcelona disputation of 1263 between the Dominican friar Paul Christian and the Jewish rabbi Moses ben Nachman has been published on the basis of very late manuscripts. The Catalan proper nouns and other Catalan words transcribed in Hebrew letters in the various editions are highly deformed, and some have even disappeared from the published text, with translations in other languages taking their place (as in the case of the word *duc*, replaced by the Hebrew translation **נגיד** *nagid*). Based on a new edition of the Hebrew text concerning the disputation, one that draws particularly on the three oldest manuscripts, which date from the late thirteenth century and the fourteenth century, we recover (conjecturally, in certain cases) all the aforementioned Catalan words, some of which are in Old Catalan forms no longer present in the modern language. In doing so, we deduce, among other things, that the Hebrew text on the disputation was written in Hebrew or translated from Catalan by a thirteenth-century Catalan Jew from the area of Girona, and there is nothing to suggest that the individual in question was not Nachmanides himself. We place special emphasis on analyzing the old forms of the Catalan words in the text (such as *Pol* rather than *Pau*, *Cervellon* rather than *Cervelló*, *clostres* rather than *claustres*, and *frare* rather than *fra*).

**Keywords:** Catalan words, Catalan words in Hebrew texts, transcriptions, Catalan transcriptions in Hebrew texts, Catalan proper names, Barcelona disputation, Nachmanides, RaMBaN, Moses ben Nachman

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**Introduction**

The Church’s missionary work undertaken in the thirteenth century—mainly through the new mendicant orders—included multiple public debates between Jews and Christians, the main disputations being the one held in Paris in 1240, the one in Barcelona in 1263, and the one in Tortosa in 1413–14.

The Disputation of Barcelona took place in the presence of King James I, and the disputants were the Dominican friar Pol Cristià (referred to in contemporary Catalan writings as “Pau” Cristià [known in English as Paul Christian]) and the rabbi of Girona, Mossé ben Nahman or Nahmànides [English: Moses ben Nachman, called Nachmanides)], whose Catalan name was Bonastruc de Porta.[[1]](#footnote-1) Two accounts of this disputation survive: [p. 127:] one very detailed, attributed to Nachmanides himself, in Hebrew, and the other, much shorter, in Latin, which Jaume Riera i Sans attributes to Friar Pol Cristià.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Hebrew text was first printed in 1681 by Wagenseil for polemical purposes; it is a very imperfect edition, with many interpolations, some of them from the disputation involving Yechiel of Paris.[[3]](#footnote-3) Later, in 1710, it was printed with other disputations under the title *Milḥemet ḥoba* (Compulsory war)*.* This text, far superior to the previous printing, is the one Steinschneider adopted as the basis for his “scientific” edition of 1860.[[4]](#footnote-4) A later edition, based on Steinschneider’s, was edited by Eisenstein (1928). Eisenstein brings together a variety of highly interesting texts in that volume, but applies faulty, thoroughly arbitrary standards.[[5]](#footnote-5) The latest edition, also based on Steinschneider’s, is by Chavel (1962–63),[[6]](#footnote-6) which Eduard Feliu used in his Catalan translation[[7]](#footnote-7) and is the basis for several other translations into modern languages.[[8]](#footnote-8) In fact, Chavel’s edition retains nearly all of Steinschneider’s text, merely adding paragraph numbers and occasional notes indicating proposed corrections; in a few cases, we have found minor differences in the text itself, possibly due to copying errors (see § 4.1 below).

Steinschneider’s text, the foundation for the later editions, is based on the text in *Milḥemet ḥoba* (1710), as we have seen, and also draws on one manuscript from the fifteenth or sixteenth century and another from 1689. However, the Jerusalem-based Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts has actually cataloged and microfilmed a total of sixteen manuscripts, four of them far older than those used by Steinschneider (and of the four, only the first is fragmentary):[[9]](#footnote-9)

Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 2749. Circa 1300. 1 folio.

Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 2437. Early fourteenth century.

Cambridge, University Library, Add. 1224.2. Year 1387.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. héb. 334/11. Fourteenth or fifteenth century.

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The various manuscripts and editions of the disputation contain some Catalan proper names and other Catalan words transcribed into Hebrew letters, though generally distorted by copyists, who sometimes did not understand them and gave them nonsensical forms, and at other times adapted them into their own language (e.g., Castilianizing them as *fray* instead of *frare* [friar], or Italianizing them as *duca* instead of *duc* [duke, leader], or even translating them into German as *bruder* instead of *frare*). In this article, we aim to investigate how these words are transcribed in the oldest manuscripts, in order to discover whether the forms they preserve are truly Catalan or clearly closer to the Catalan forms; if so, on the one hand, we will be able to recover the Catalan forms that the copyists’ errors distorted or even hid entirely, and on the other hand, it will confirm that the original account of the disputation originated in Catalan lands.

A critical edition of the Hebrew account of the disputation is currently being prepared by Professor Ursula Ragacs of the University of Vienna, based on all the manuscripts. That edition is not expected to be completed soon, and therefore we base our present article on a less comprehensive critical edition that we prepared using only the three oldest manuscripts, dating from the late thirteenth or the fourteenth century, which we have compared with the Steinschneider-Chavel edition to determine how much their version, based on later manuscripts, does or does not match the oldest manuscripts. Later manuscripts, however, like those used in Steinschneider-Chavel, sometimes may preserve textual elements that vanished from older manuscripts due to various copying errors and accidents, and so they should not be dismissed out of hand.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The manuscripts we cite are from the following centuries, as established by Ursula Ragacs:

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*a* = Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 2749. Circa 1300. 1 folio.

*A* = Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, ms. 2437. Early fourteenth century.

*B* = Cambridge, University Library, Add. 1224.2. Year 1387.

When citing each word’s location in the manuscripts, we use Chavel’s paragraph numbers and, within paragraphs, the line numbers from our own edition (so § 7,3 = paragraph 7, line 3).

A dot over a Hebrew letter (e.g., **גליים֗**) indicates that the letter is not clearly legible in the manuscript (in this case, it might be a **ס** instead of a **ם**).

**1. Anthroponyms

1.1.** *Arnal Segarra*

§§ 67,1; 75,1

The first name of this Dominican friar is transcribed in the following forms, all of which reflect (though sometimes with copyists’ errors) the Catalan form *Arnal*:

*a*) Without errors: § 67 (**ארנאל**) and § 75 (**ארנל**) (Steinschneider-Chavel).

*b*) With copyists’ errors: **ארכל** (*A*; the copyist misread the letter **נ** as the letter **כ**), **ארול** (*B*; the copyist misread the letter **נ** as the letter **ו**).

The surname appears in distorted form as **די שיגורה** = *de Segura* (§ 67) and **די שגורה** = *de Segura* (§ 75) in Steinschneider-Chavel.[[11]](#footnote-11) Ms. *A* and *B* retain the correct transcription: **שגרא** = *Segarra* in all instances. We note that the sound of the Catalan voiceless *s* is transcribed here, as it normally appears in medieval documents from Catalan lands, using the Hebrew letter **ש**. This normally would not have been possible, since this Hebrew letter can have two sounds—[s] = sin and [ʃ] = shin—which would have made the transcription ambiguous, except that medieval Catalan Jews, like Jews in other Christian European lands, had [p. 130:] lost the voiceless palatal fricative sound [ʃ] and pronounced the letter **ש** with the same voiceless alveolar fricative sound as the **ס**.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In the Latin documents, this name appears with a preposition (*Arnaldus de Segarra*), as in the Steinschneider-Chavel transcription, and without one, as in the transcription in ms. *A* and *B*.

*Arnal* is an old variant form of the name *Arnau*. One could deduce from the Hebrew transcriptions that the Catalan first name of this Dominican friar, who was the order’s provincial superior and the prior of the convent of Santa Caterina, was *Arnal*. In any case, in the *Llibre dels fets* we find “frare *Arnau* de Segarra.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

**1.2.** *Guillem de Cervellon (de Cervelló)*

§ 79,3 (Guillem de Cervellon)

§ 23,1 (Guillem)

In the Steinschneier-Chavel edition, this nobleman’s first name is written correctly in § 23: **גילים** = *Guillem*, while in § 79 the full name is corrupted (and the first name was surely adapted into French), appearing as **ג׳ילס דיסרגון** = *Gilles de Sargon* (?).[[14]](#footnote-14)

In ms. *A*, the first name has a final **ם** = *-m* (clearly legible in § 23) and in ms. *B* it ends with **־ס** = *-s* (§ 79, though it is not clearly legible and might be **־ם** = *-m*; bear in mind that in the spelling in these manuscripts, it is easy to confuse the final **ם** with the letter **ס**):

— Ms. *A*: **גולם** (misread **י** as **ו**) (§ 23); **גיילם֗** (§ 79)

— Ms. *B*: **גיילס** (misread final **ם** as **ס**, surely influenced by the French name Gilles) (§ 23); **גילס֗** (§ 79).

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It seems clear that the original text had a transcription of the Catalan name *Guillem* here, and that subsequently some copyists interpreted it as a transcription of the French name *Gilles*, since the initial letter **ג** can represent the sound of a French *g* before *e* or *i* as well as the Catalan digraph *gu*, and given the ease with which the Hebrew letters final **ם** and **ס** can be mistaken for each other.

The toponymic surname *de Cervelló* is preserved in the forms **דסרו יון** (*A*, which a copyist erroneously divided into two words) and **דסרוייון** (*B*), both of which reflect the Catalan form *de Cervellon*. This toponym, derived from the Latin etymon Cervilione,[[15]](#footnote-15) retains the Romanic final *-n.* This feature started to be lost in most Catalan-speaking regions in the late tenth century, but was retained in the vicinity of the old diocese of Girona until a very late date.[[16]](#footnote-16) The sound of the digraph *ll* [ʎ], which was spelled in various ways in Old Catalan (*ll*, *l*, *yl*, *ly*...), also has various representations in the Catalan-to-Hebrew transcriptions, including a single **י** according to Díaz Esteban,[[17]](#footnote-17) who cites no example of this, and therefore we do not know whether or not these cases involve yeism. In any case, here the etymon includes an *-*ly*-* and therefore, a yeist pronunciation is a possibility; in fact, Joan Coromines documents the form *Cerveyó* in the years 1367–75.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**1.3.** *Pere de Berga*

§ 79,3

This first name is transcribed correctly from Catalan in Steinschneider-Chavel and in ms. *B* (**פירי** = *Pere*). In ms. *A* it is transcribed without the first **י** (**פרי** = *P[e]re*), which is conspicuous because the transcriptions we copied from other documents all include both yods.[[19]](#footnote-19) Generally, in any case, it is not abnormal for a tonic *e* not to be represented with a mater lectionis; examples: *Cresques* = **קרשקש**, *Guillem* = **גילם**.[[20]](#footnote-20)

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The toponymic surname is always transcribed correctly (**דברגא** = *de Berga*), but, without a preposition in Steinschneider-Chavel (**ברגה** = *Berga*).[[21]](#footnote-21)

**1.4.** *Pere de Gènova*

§§ 15,1; 82 (Pere de Gènova)

§§ 16,2; 17,1 (Pere)

The first name *Pere* is transcribed correctly in ms. *A* and in Steinschneider-Chavel in §§ 15, 16, and 17: **פירי**. Ms. *B*, on the other hand, has the distorted form **פייר** in these three places, which may be a transcription of the French form *Pierre* (compare it with the transcription of the name Pere de Berga in the same manuscript: see § 1.3 above). In § 82, Steinschneider-Chavel has the also correct transcription **פירא** (with aleph transcribing the final *e*),[[22]](#footnote-22) while in *B* the word is absent, probably a result of haplography (resemblance to the previous word).

The toponymic surname is transcribed in different forms, all of them good, in § 82: **דגנובא** (*A*; without transcribing the tonic *e*), **דזינובא** (*B*),
**די גינובא** (Steinschneider-Chavel). We note that **ג** is a normal medieval Hebrew transcription of the sound the Catalan *g* makes before an *e* or *i* or that the Catalan *j* makes before any vowel.[[23]](#footnote-23) We have not, however, found Catalan medieval Hebrew texts that transcribe this sound as **ז**, which we do see in ms. *B*.[[24]](#footnote-24) In § 15, both ms. *B* and Steinschneider-Chavel use the same form, but in *A*, the copyist misread the letter combination **נו** as a **ט** and the letter **ב** as a **נ**, yielding the corrupted form **דגטנא**.

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**1.5.** *Pol (Cristià or Crestià)*

§§ 1,6; 2,1; 7,1; etc.

Dominican friar Pol Cristià[[25]](#footnote-25) is called *Paulus* in the Latin account of the disputation and *Paulus* (or *Paulus Christiani*) in the other Latin documents that mention him. Therefore, the researchers who have studied or referred to the Disputation of Barcelona have interpreted this as meaning that his Catalan name was *Pau*. Nonetheless, the oldest manuscripts (*A* and *B*, since the fragmentary *a* does not contain this name) and the Wagenseil, Eisenstein, and Steinschneider-Chavel editions have the Hebrew transcription **פול**, corresponding to the Catalan name *Pol*, an old variant of *Pau*, derived, like Pau, from the Latin form Paulus, but with monophthongization of the diphthong *au*.[[26]](#footnote-26) This form has survived to the present day in toponyms and as a surname.[[27]](#footnote-27) Monophthongization occurs in Catalan in many words (auru > *or*, paucu > *poc*), but not in others (causa > *causa*, clausŭla > *clàusula*). Clearly, then, the Dominican who opposed Nachmanides in the disputation was named *Pol* and not *Pau*.

**1.6.** *Ramon de Penyafort*

§§ 2,4; 104,1 (Ramon de Penyafort)

§ 3,1 (Ramon)

In the Latin documents, this first name is *Raimundus*. In manuscripts *A* and *B* and in Steinschneider-Chavel, it is transcribed **רמון** = *Ramon*, except in §§ 3 and 104, where *A* has the variant **רימון** = *Raimon*, which appears to be influenced by the [page 134:] Latin form, though it could also be a transcription of the Catalan variant Raimon.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The surname appears with the distorted ending (*-ti*/*-te*), perhaps influenced by the Latin form (*Pennaforte*, *Penna-forti*, or by the Castilian form *Peña-forte*), in Steinschneider-Chavel, § 104: **דיפנייא פורטי**. Manuscripts *A* and *B* (§§ 2 and 104) and § 2 of Steinschneider-Chavel transcribe the correct Catalan form, but without indicating palatalization of the nasal using the letter yod: **דפינא פורט**.

The Catalan *t* is transcribed, as usual (even in modern times when transcribing words from other languages into Hebrew) with a **ט** and not a **ת**.[[29]](#footnote-29)

**2. Toponyms (other than surnames indicated among the anthroponyms above)**

 **2.1.** *Barcelona*

§ 2,2.

This was transcribed as **ברצילונה** in ms. *A* (like Chavel’s **ברצלונה**, but with the mater lectionis**י** to represent the *e*) and **ברזלונא** in ms. *B*. We note the use of either **־ה** or **־א** at the end of words to represent the final *-a* (the same happens with other place names: *Girona*/*Gerona*, § 2.3; *Provença*, § 2.5).

We also see that the absence of a vowel represents the sound [e] but not the sound [a] (transcriptions in Chavel and ms. *B*), despite what Díaz Esteban states (see Conclusion #7 and note 43).

Lastly, transcription of the *c* (before *e*) as **ז** in ms. *B* is an anomaly (not least because zayin represents a voiced sound); the most usual transcription of *c* before *e/i* or of *ç* in any context in that era is **צ**, as we find in ms. *A* and in Chavel and also in the word *Provença* (see § 2.4 below; see, though, *Cervelló* with a **ס**, in § 1.2). The reason for using the **צ** is that [page 135:] in Old Catalan, the letter *ç* in all contexts and *c* before *e/i* represented an affricate sound, like that of the **צ** (almost like *t + s*), different from the fricative sound of *s/ss*. The confusion of these two voiceless alveolar sounds began in the thirteenth century, but did not spread to the entire territory until towards the end of the fifteenth century.[[30]](#footnote-30) This explains why in Eduard Feliu’s edition of the rulings of Shlomo ibn Aderet [Salomó ben Adret] (circa 1235–circa 1310), though Feliu worked from modern editions rather than manuscripts from the era, we find the **צ** in most cases (*argenç*, *barcelonès*, *deçà*, *glaç*, *renunciar*; as opposed to: *cessió*, *estopaci,* and *ràncir*, with **ס** or with **ש**),[[31]](#footnote-31) while in a manuscript from Girona from the year 1443 (and one from January 1444), we already mostly find **ס** or **ש** (with **צ** only in *març*; with **ס** or **ש**: *suplicació*, *assignacions*, *cèdula*, *censal*, *ordinacions*, *presentacion*, *procés*).[[32]](#footnote-32)

**2.2.** *(D’)Egipte*

§ 72,6

We find this toponym transcribed correctly in ms. *A*: **דגיפטי** = *d’Egipte*. In the Steinschneider-Chavel edition, it appears with an erroneous word break: **די גיפטי** = *de Gipte*. Ms. *B*, through a copyist’s error, seems to have repositioned the letter **דיאגפטי** :**י**. The letter **ג** represents, as we said above (§ 1.4), the voiced palatal fricative sound [ʒ], and the letter **ט** corresponds to the Catalan *t*, the same as in § 1.6 above.

**2.3.** *Girona or Gerona*

§§ 104,3; 105,2

In this case, the Steinschneider-Chavel edition is the only place we find the faithful transcription of the specifically Catalan toponym: **גירונא** = *Girona* or *Gerona*,[[33]](#footnote-33) [page 136:] with the letter ג representing the voiced palatal fricative sound [ʒ]. Ms. *A* and *B* transcribe the toponym’s Latin form *Gerunda*: **גרונדאה** (*A*), **זירונדא** (*B*). We observed, though, that other Hebrew documents also transcribe the Latin rather than the Catalan form, for both the toponym and the related demonym: **דגרונדא** = *de Gerunda*, **גירונדי** = *gerundí* (or *girondí*), meaning ‘of or from Girona.’[[34]](#footnote-34)

**2.4.** *Provença*

§ 8,3

This toponym is transcribed correctly from Catalan, with the Hebrew letter צ representing the Catalan letter *ç*, as is usual, in ms. *B*: **בפרובנצא** = *Provença*. In ms. *A* there are two transposed letters due to a copyist’s error: **פורבנצה** = *Porvença* (!). In Steinschneider-Chavel, we find no mater lectionisto represent the letter *o*: **פרבינצה** = *Pr(o)vença*.

**3. Other proper nouns**

**3.1.** *Bíblia* [Bible]

§ 39,7

This noun is transcribed correctly in ms. *A* and *B*, with different matres lectionis representing the final vowel: **ביבליה** = *Bíblia* (*A*); **ביבליא** = *Bíblia* (*B*). In the Steinschneider-Chavel edition it appears with an extraneous abbreviation mark, possibly due to misinterpretation and transposition of the first letter **י** by a copyist: **בב״ליה**.

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**4. Common vocabulary**

**4.1.** *Clostres* [Cloisters]

§ 36,1

This word is consistently distorted by the copyists, but from the preserved forms it is easy to reconstruct the original form simply and reliably: **קלושטריש**, with the unvoiced *s* transcribed as **ש** (see § 1.2 above) and the sound [k] as **ק**, as usual. Ms. *B* has very faithfully maintained the original form: it only transposes two letters, **ל** and **קולשטריש** :**ו** = *colstres*. Ms. *A* has the form **קושנורש** = *cosnors* (!): the copyist has omitted the letter **ל** and has misread the letter **ט** as the two-letter combination **נו**, which closely resemble each other in some manuscripts. Steinschneider’s edition has the form **קלישטרוש** = *clistros* (?!), with transposition of the letters **ו** and **י**. Chavel, with no explanatory note, has modified this form to **קלישטרויש** = *clistrois* (?!), with an added **י**, possibly due to a simple copying error (since no note was added about this).

The Hebrew ending **־יש** is the usual way to transcribe the Catalan plural ending *-es*.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The form *clostres* instead of *claustres* is not documented in the Catalan dictionaries. It can, in any case, easily be explained as a folk variant, with monophthongization of the Latin combination au, which tends towards [ɔ] in a tonic position, according to Coromines.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is the same process that brought about the variant Pol as opposed to the more cultured form Pau (see § 1.5 above).

**4.2.** *Dia* [Day]

§ 65,4

From context, this word can be nothing other than Catalan.

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Then he addressed the king, and they summoned the first Jew they could find to be brought before him. And they asked him, “What does *yom* mean in your language?”

And he replied, “Dia. [Day.]”

Both in ms. *B* and in the Steinschneider-Chavel edition, this word is correctly transcribed into Hebrew: **דיא** (*B*), **דיאה** (Steinschneider-Chavel). The resemblance to the Latin form (*dies*) and the overlap with the Castilian form (*dia*) must have meant it was not entirely unfamiliar to the copyists and they therefore respected it. In any case, ms. *A* contains an extraneous **י** at the end: **דיאי.**

**4.3.** *Duc* [Duke, leader]

§ 58,4

This form is preserved only by the fragmentary manuscript *a*: **דוק**. The copyist of ms. *B* did not understand the word and confused it with the similar looking **רוח** ‘spirit.’ Ms. *A* added a vowel, *a*, at the end(represented by a mater lectionis): **דוקא** = *duca*; probably an adaptation of the word into Italian.[[37]](#footnote-37) In the Steinschneider-Chavel edition, the noun is translated into Hebrew: **נגיד** (*nagid*) ‘prince, leader.’ We observe that Wagenseil’s and Eisenstein’s editions, since they did not understand the word, omitted it along with its context.[[38]](#footnote-38)

We should keep in mind that the word *duc* in Old Catalan did not only mean ‘nobleman occupying the highest rank within the hierarchy of nobiliary titles,’ [page 139:] which it still means in Modern Catalan, but also ‘leader of multitudes,’ which is the meaning here and which some copyists translated as **נגיד** (*nagid*).

**4.4.** *Frare* [Friar]

§§ 1,6; 2,1; 2,4; 3,1; 7,1; 8,13; 8,16; etc.

This word was adapted, i.e., translated, into various other languages in the printed editions and in ms. *B*. It is given apparently in Castilian in the Steinschneider-Chavel and Eisenstein editions: **פראי** = *fray*. In German, in the Wagenseil edition: **ברודר** = *Bruder*. In Hebrew, in some other manuscripts: **אח** = *ach*.[[39]](#footnote-39) In French, in ms. *B*: **פראר** = *frère*. Despite this, the forms in ms. *A* (**פארי** = *pare/fare* [?]) and *B* (**פראר** = *frère*) allow us to easily and, we believe, very accurately reconstruct the original Catalan form: *frare*. This word should have been transcribed as **פרארי**: in ms. *A* the first **ר** has disappeared, and in ms. *B*, the final **י** is missing.

*Frare* is the form used in the thirteenth century instead of the modern form *fra* before the name of a member of a mendicant religious order.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**4.5.** *Maestre* [Teacher, master]

§§ 13,7; 14,2; 14,3; 14,4; 23,1; 72,6; 104,3

In the context of the disputation, this is the title applied to Nachmanides by his contemporaries.

This noun is always transcribed correctly from Catalan in Steinschneider-Chavel: **מאישטרי**. It is transcribed similarly in ms. *A*, except in § 14 (lines 2 and 4; it is missing in line 3), where the copyist misread the final **י** as a **מאישטרו** :**ו** = *maestro*, adapting the word into Italian or Castilian. The ms. *B* copyist makes the same mistake in §§ 23, 72, and 104 (while retaining the correct transcription in §§ 13 and 14).

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We observe, as in other examples discussed above, the transcription of the voiceless [s] sound as **ש** (see § 1.1) and of the *t* as **ט**, not **ת** (§§ 1.6 and 2.2).

*Maestre* is the old form of *mestre*. According to Joan Coromines, it is the form typical of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and can still be found throughout the fourteenth century and into the first half of the fifteenth century.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**4.6.** *Recontament* [Retelling]

§ 39,16

In context, this noun is a Catalan translation of the Hebrew noun
 **הגדה**, the Hebrew form of the Aramaic word **אגדה** ‘agadà,’ which literally means ‘telling’ or ‘tale’ and which, within the lexicon of Judaism, has
the specific sense of ‘nonlegal material, such as homiletic texts, narratives, legends, and maxims, which, often as a complement to halakhah, are
found in midrashic literature and the Talmud.’ The context is as follows:
**אותו הספר הגדה רוצה לומ׳ רכונטאמינט** “We also call this book [the Midrash] by the name Aggadah, which means ‘recontament.’ ”

The copyists did not understand the word and it can be found transcribed with different distortions in the manuscripts and editions and even translated into other languages, which the context facilitates (“Aggadah, which means...”). Chavel copies Steinschneider's conjecturally reconstructed form **ראסיונאמינטו** (*rasionamento* [?]), which the latter, followed by Chavel, Maccoby, Tostado, and others, interprets as a transcription of the Italian word “razionamiento.” Eisenstein echoes Steinschneider but specifies: **ראסיונאמינטו בלשון איטלקית** “razionamento in the Italian language.” Wagenseil translates the word into German:
**הגדה קונדיגונג בלשון אשכנזי** “Aggadah, (Ver)kündigung in the German language.”

The forms in ms. *A* and *B* unmistakably retain the Catalan ending *-ament*: **־אמינט** (*A*), **־אמנט** (*B*). They also show the beginning of the Catalan word: *reco*- which is preserved properly in *B*: **רכו־**, while in *A* the copyist has misread the **כ** as a **נ** (the opposite of that copyist’s misreading when transcribing the name *Arnal*: see [p. 141:] § 1.1). We must, however, conjecturally reconstruct the letters *-nt-*, which in both manuscripts appear as **סי** (transliterated: *sy*) instead of **נט**.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**4.7.** *Sermon, sermons* [Sermon, sermons]

§ 39,11 (*sermon*)

§ 39,10 (*sermons*)

In the context of the disputation, this noun is given as the meaning or Catalan translation of the Hebrew noun **מדרש** = *Midrash*.

The singular is always transcribed correctly from Catalan: **שירמון** = *sermon* (*A*, *B*), **שרמון** = *sermon* (Steinschneider-Chavel).

The plural is transcribed correctly from Catalan in ms. *A* and *B* (although in *B* the last four letters are not unambiguously legible): **שירמונש** = *sermons*. However, the plural form in Steinschneider-Chavel seems to have been adapted into Castilian: **שרמ״וניש** = *sermones* (with an abbreviation mark whose significance we do not know).

In the singular we see the form *sermon* and not the usual Catalan *sermó*: the Romanic final *-n* is retained, as we have already seen in the case of *Cervellon* (see § 1.2 above and the note).

**4.8.** *Vagar* [To wander or be idle]

§§ 15,3; 17,4

This verb appears explicitly as a word in the vernacular tongue (Catalan) in the text of the disputation:



[p. 142:]

“It is true that the passage from Scripture merely says that it will not cease permanently; but it might be interrupted, it might *vagar*, as we say in the vernacular.”

The word is transcribed correctly from Catalan, and always in the same way, in ms. *A* and *B* and in the Steinschneider-Chavel edition: **באגר** *vagar*.

**Conclusions**

1. Transcriptions of non-Hebrew words in the text of the disputation—judging from our edition, which prioritizes the oldest manuscripts, from the late thirteenth and the fourteenth century (*a*, *A*, *B*)—shows that all these terms (proper nouns or common vocabulary) are unquestionably transcribed from Catalan.
2. The presence of all these Catalan words in the text of the disputation (six personal names, three toponyms, one other proper noun, seven nouns, and a verb, including some words repeated often in the text) is evidence that the Hebrew text of the disputation was either written in Hebrew or translated from Catalan by a thirteenth-century Catalan Jew from the area of the old diocese of Girona, and there is no reason to think it was not Nachmanides himself.
3. Although publication of the oldest manuscripts does not greatly alter the Hebrew text of the disputation, their transcription of Catalan proper names and words from the Catalan lexicon lets us recover, almost always with certainty, the original forms of these words, which the previously available editions sometimes did not allow us to identify or else retained in very corrupted form or adapted into other languages.
4. Regarding proper nouns, the oldest manuscripts and the published editions lead us to suppose that the Catalan name of the Dominican friar who debated Nachmanides is *Pol*, an old variant of *Pau*.
5. By looking at the Catalan forms proposed by Eduard Feliu in his 1985 translation of the Chavel edition and comparing them to the forms we deduce based on our edition of the oldest manuscripts, we have made the following main discoveries: *a*) The use of the Catalan word *duc* (which the Chavel edition replaces with a Hebrew translation, **נגיד** [*nagid*] ‘prince, leader’). *b*) Old Catalan variant forms in the case of the toponym *Cervellon* (rather than *Cervelló*), the given name *Pol* (rather than *Pau*), and the nouns *clostres* (rather than *claustres*), *frare* (rather than *fra*), *maestre* (rather than *mestre*), and *sermon* (rather than *sermó*). *c*) A variant form of the given name *Arnal* (rather than [p. 143:] *Arnau*). *d*) Conjectural reconstruction of the noun *recontament* (rather than *raonament* o *razonament*).
6. In three cases, manuscript *B* presents forms adapted into French: **גילס** = *Gilles*, instead of **גילם** = *Guillem* (see § 1.2 above); **פייר** = *Pierre*, instead of **פירי** = *Pere* (§ 1.4), and **פראר** = *frère* instead of **פרארי** = *frare* (§ 4.4). Manuscript *A* presents the form adapted into Italian **דוקא** = *duca*, instead of דוק = *duc*. The Italianized form **מאישטרו** = *maestro*, instead of **מאישטרי** = *maestre*, appears twice in ms. *A* and three times in ms. *B*.
7. The Catalan transcriptions follow the criteria found in other medieval documents (with small variations from one period to another, from one document to another, and often also within the same document): transcription by **ב** of both *b* (*Berga*) and *v* (*Provença*), which is also transcribed by **ו** (*Cervelló*). Transcription of the sound [s] (represented by s/ss) by **ס** and **ש**. Transcription of *c* (before *e* or *i*) */ ç* most often as **צ**, in keeping with the era (*Barcelona*, *Provença*), and occasionally as **ס** (*Cervelló*). Transcription of *t* as **ט** (*maestre*) and never as **ת**. Transcription of the final *-a* both as **ה** (*Bíblia*, *Barcelona*, *Girona,* and *Provença* in ms. *A*) and as **א** (*Bíblia*, *Barcelona*, *Girona,* and *Provença* in ms. *B*)*.* We observe that contrary to Díaz Esteban’s assertion,[[43]](#footnote-43) in cases where one must pronounce a postconsonantal vowel that is not transcribed with a mater lectionis, the vowel sound is most often that of an *e* (*Barcelona* in ms. B, *C****e****rvellon*, *Prov****e****nça*, *Guill****e****m*, *S****e****garra*, *B****e****rga*, *r****e****contament*), and not that of an *a* (*Ramon*).

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1. Regarding Moses ben Nachman being the same person as Bonastruc de Porta, see the article “*Moixè ben Nahman*, Bonastruc de Porta” by Jaume Riera i Sans, in this same volume of Tamid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Feliu and Riera, *Disputa de Barcelona*, xii–xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wagenseil, *Tela ignea Satanae*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Steinschneider, *Wikkuaḥ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Eisenstein, *Oṣarwikkuḥim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chavel, *Kitve*, vol. 1, 299–320. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Feliu and Riera, *Disputa de Barcelona*, 1–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See examples mentioned in the introduction to Casanellas and Feliu, *La disputa de Barcelona*, § 3.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See the full list of manuscripts in Ragacs, “Geordnete Verhältnisse,” 88–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. We are publishing this “lesser” critical edition in Casanellas and Feliu, *La disputa de Barcelona*. We thank Ursula Ragacs for providing us with her transcription of the manuscripts (transcribed from facsimiles), which, once compared with our own transcription (also from facsimiles), allowed us to prepare a more accurate and reliable edition of the text. We must also thank Harvey Hames, who provided us with a partial transcription of manuscript *B* (Cambridge) that he made from the actual manuscript; Alexander Fidora who, through the Latin Talmud project (ERC-2013-CoG 613694), obtained for us an excellent color facsimile of that same manuscript *B*; and the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, which provided us, free of charge, with a good color reproduction of manuscript *A*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Chavel, in his English translation, writes: “Arnaldo de Segurra” (Chavel, “The Disputation at Barcelona,” 684). Maccoby: “Arnol of Segura” (Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 133). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For a longer explanation and a bibliography on this matter, see Casanellas, *Moixè ben Nahman o Mossé ben Nahman?* A notable item in the bibliography of this document is Kutscher’s *A History of the Hebrew Language*, 16. We could also add Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Jaume I, *Llibre dels fets*, § 426,4. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Chavel, in his English translation, writes: “Guilles de Sargon” (Chavel, “The Disputation at Barcelona,” 685). Maccoby corrects the toponymic surname: “Gilles *of Cervello*” (Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 113). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Coromines, *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, vol. 3, 364*a*7–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Rasico, *Estudis i documents*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Coromines, *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, vol. 3, 363*b*54–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We note that Díaz Esteban’s seven examples of the name Pere in Hebrew transcription (“Catalanismos,” 77, § 2.*a*.1) all have the first (**פירי**) **י**. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Examples taken from Díaz Esteban (“Catalanismos,” 79, § 2.*c*.8, and 77, § 2.*a*.3). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. We do not know why Chavel writes *Bargo* in his translation, transcribing an *a* where there is no mater lectionis and interpreting the Hebrew letter **ה** as a mater lectionis for the sound [o] (Chavel, “The Disputation at Barcelona,” 685). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The final *-a* is transcribed in the documents both as **־ה**‬ and as **־א**‬. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 73. See examples in Ferrer and Feliu, “La llengua dels jueus,” 25 (*gener*), 25–26 (*juliol*, *juny*), 32 (*registre*), = Feliu, “Llibre de comptes,” 129, § 1 (*gener*); 129, § 4 (*juliol*, *juny*); 30, § 9 (*registre*). In cases where the *g* is part of the digraph *tg* (representing the voiced palatal affricate sound) something similar happens: Feliu, “Mots catalans,” 63 (*galotges*), 65 (*ostatges*). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In fact, this is the transcription (with a diacritic single-quote mark added: **ז׳**) that Modern Hebrew has adopted for this sound [ʒ]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In thirteenth-century Catalan, the form *cristià* and the dissimilated variant *crestià* were both widespread; in fact, in that era, the latter form was predominant according to Joan Coromines (DE-Cat, vol. 2, 1062*b*20–22). Since we know this name only through the Latin documents, we do not know which of the two forms this Dominican used in Catalan. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Moll, *Gramàtica històrica catalana*, § 53, 84–85. According to Ragacs, “Geordnete Verhältnisse,” 88–89, none of the manuscripts transcribes the Catalan form *Pau* (though some do transcribe the Latin form). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See, for example, DCBV, s. *Pol*, art. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. In the *Llibre dels fets*, we often find the form *Ramon* applied to various people, and never the form *Raimon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The **ת** is reserved for transcription of the Greek θ or the digraph *th* in Latin or in Latinisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Coromines, *Entre dos llenguatges*, vol. 1, 14–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Feliu, “Mots catalans,” 58–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ferrer and Feliu, “La llengua dels jueus,” 19–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Catalan initially used the form Gerona, but it often alternated with Girona (a form documented in the year 1251); the form Gerona still survived in the fourteenth century (Coromines, *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, vol. 4, 355*a*20–41). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 74, § 1.*b*.4 and § 1.*b*.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 74. Examples of Catalan plural *-es* endings being transcribed as **־יש** can be found in Feliu, “Mots catalans,” 59 (*caneles*), 63 (*galotges*), 65 (*ostatges*), 69 (*rapes*), 72 (*taces*). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Moll, *Gramàtica històrica catalana*, § 53, 84–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Tommaseo and Bellini, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, book II, vol. 1, 413–14; Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. 4, 1022. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. To the best of our knowledge, the first person to remark that ms. *a* transcribes the Catalan form *duc* was Ursula Ragacs, in an unpublished paper presented at the 3rd Congrés per a l’Estudi dels Jueus en Territoris de Llengua Catalana (Conference for the Study of the Jews in Catalan-Language Territories, held October 15 to 19, 2007), cited in Ragacs, “Geordnete Verhältnisse,” 87. Ragacs considers the Catalan word *duc* a translation of the old Latin form *dux*, which, according to S. Krauss’s dictionary of Greek and Latin loan words in rabbinic literature, the Jews used in old texts, transcribed as **דוך**. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Ragacs, “Geordnete Verhältnisse,” 89–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See DCVB, s. *frare*, acc. 2.*a*, and DECat, vol. 4, 167*a*38–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. DECat, vol. 5, 633*b*42–*b*32. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *A*: **רנוס יאמינט** *B*: **רכוסיאמנט**. The proposal of reading the word as *recontament*, rather than *raonament* or *razonament* (as Eduard Feliu proposed, in Feliu and Riera i Sans, *Disputa de Barcelona*, 24, note 60), we believe was first made by Harvey Hames based on ms. *B* and it was he who privately made us aware of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Díaz Esteban, “Catalanismos,” 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)