



Parshanut and Polemics I

Marty Lockshin, Torah in Motion 5781

Questions

How to identify a polemic:

David Berger: ““In matters of exegetical detail, polemical motives are occasionally obvious, occasionally likely, and occasionally asserted implausibly.”

How much did the classical rabbis and the medieval rabbis know about Christianity?

Did the rabbis see Christianity as an intellectual (as opposed to physical) threat?

Technical question: What does מִין mean?

What does מיין mean?

שבת צ ע"ב: שאלו מינין את רבן
גמליאל מינין שהקדוש ברוך הוא
מחיה מתים אמר להם מן התורה ומן
הנביאים ומן הכתובים ולא קיבלו
ממנו...

Shabbat 90b: The *minim* asked Rabban Gamliel for a source for the belief that God resurrects the dead. He brought proofs from the Torah, from the Prophets and from the Writings, and they would not accept his proofs...

Acts 23

⁶ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial." ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹ Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong in this man..."

Yerushalmi Berakhot 1:5 (with a parallel in Bavli Berakhot 12a)

בדין היה שיהיו קורין עשרת הדברות
בכל יום ומפני מה אין קורין אותן מפני
טענות המינין שלא יהו אומרים אלו
לבדן ניתנו לו למשה בסיני.

Are these *minim* Christians?

Rashi (on Bavli) thought so:

המינין: תלמידי ישו

There's a good chance. But....

It would be appropriate to read the Decalogue [in synagogue] every day [as they did in the Temple]. And why do we not do so? Because of the claims of the *minim*—so that they not say that only these [commandments] were given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

II Corinthians 3

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. . . . Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face . . .

Shabbat 116a

ספרי מינין אין מצילין אותן מפני הדליקה
אלא נשרפין במקומן הן ואזכרותיהן . . .

רש"י: מינין: משרתים לעבודה זרה
וכתבו להן תורה נביאים וכתובים כתב
אשורית ולשון הקודש.

רבי מאיר הוה קרי ליה און גליון רבי יוחנן
הוה קרי ליה עון גליון

רש"י: רבי מאיר קרי ליה - לספרי
המינין און גליון לפי שהם קורין אותם
אונגיל"א

The books of the *minim* should not be saved from a fire on Shabbat. They should be allowed to burn, even the divine names mentioned in them . . .

Rabbi Meir called those books *aven gilayon*; Rabbi Yohanan called them *avon gilayon*.

Rashi: Rabbi Meir called the books of the *minim* "*aven gilayon*" because they call the books *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον).

Shabbat 116a-b

אימא שלום דביתהו דרבי אליעזר
אחתיה דרבן גמליאל הואי הוה ההוא
פילוסופא בשבבותיה דהוה שקיל
שמא דלא מקבל שוחדא בעו לאחוכי
ביה אעיילא ליה שרגא דדהבא ואזול
לקמיה

Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was the sister of Rabban Gamliel [the second, late first century]. There was a *philosofa* in their neighbourhood who acquired a reputation that he did not accept bribes. They wanted to mock him [and reveal his true nature]. She gave him a golden lamp, and they [she and her brother] came before him for judgment.

Rashi and Tosafot on Shabbat 116a

רש"י:

פילוסופא – מין

Rashi:

“*philosopha*”: means a *min*.

תוספות:

מין כדפי' בקונטרס ורבינו שמע מיהודי
אחד שבא מארץ יון ואמר דבלשון יון
פלוספוס הוא דוד החכמה ואית דגרסי
פילא סבא והוא לשון לצון שחוק

Tosafot:

A *min*, as Rashi explained. [But] our rabbi once heard from a Jew who came from Greece and told us that a *philosoph* is a lover of wisdom. There are some who read in the text here *fila sabba*, connected to the [Aramaic] word for mockery and laughter.

Shabbat 116a-b (cont.)

אמרה ליה בעינא דניפלגי לי בנכסי דבי
נשי אמר להו פלוגו א"ל כתיב לן במקום
ברא ברתא לא תירות א"ל מן יומא
דגליתון מארעכון איתנטלית אורייתא
דמשה ואיתיהיבת עוון גיליון וכתיב ביה
ברא וברתא כחדא ירתון

Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

She said to the *philosofa*: I want to share in the inheritance of my father's estate. He said to them: Split it. Rabban Gamliel said to him: It is written in our Torah: When the father has a son, the daughter does not inherit. The *philosofa* said to him: Since the day you were exiled from your land, the Torah of Moses was taken away and the *avon gilyon* was given in its place. There it is written: A son and a daughter inherit equally.

Shabbat 116a-b (cont.)

למחר הדר עייל ליה איהו חמרא
לובא אמר להו שפילית לסיפיה
דספרא וכתב ביה אנא לא
למיפחת מן אורייתא דמשה
אתיתי ולא [נ"א אלא] לאוספי על
אורייתא דמשה אתיתי וכתביב
ביה במקום ברא ברתא לא
תירות אמרה ליה נהור נהוריך
כשרגא א"ל רבן גמליאל אתא
חמרא ובטש לשרגא

The next day Rabban Gamliel brought the *philosopha* a Libyan donkey.
[Afterward, he and his sister again came before the *philosopha* for judgment.] He said to them: I looked to the end of the *avon gilayon*, and it is written there : I came not to subtract from the Torah of Moses, nor did I come [other texts read: but rather I came] to add to the Torah of Moses. And it is written there: When there is a son, the daughter does not inherit. She said to him: May your light shine like a lamp, [alluding to the lamp she had given him as a bribe]. Rabban Gamliel said : The donkey came and kicked over the lamp.

Matthew 5:17-20

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Balaam? (Sanhedrin 106b)

א"ל ההוא מינא לר' חנינא מי שמיע
לך בלעם בר כמה הוה

א"ל מיכתב לא כתיב אלא מדכתיב
([תהלים נה, כד](#)) אנשי דמים ומרמה
לא יחצו ימיהם בר תלתין ותלת שנין
או בר תלתין וארבע

A certain *min* asked Rabbi Hanina [early 2nd century]: “Have you every heard how old Balaam was [when he died]”?

He answered: The answer is not written explicitly. But since it says, “Murderous treacherous men shall not live out half their days,” I conclude that he must have been 33 or 34 years old.

Sanhedrin 106b (cont.)

א"ל שפיר קאמרת לדידי חזי לי
פנקסיה דבלעם והוה כתיב ביה בר
תלתין ותלת שנין בלעם חגירא כד
קטיל יתיה פנחס ליסטאה

The *min* answered: You have spoken well. I have seen the booklet of Balaam and in it, it is written, "Balaam, the lame, was 33 years old when he was killed by *Pinhas lista'a*."

How old was Jesus when he died?

CompellingTruth.org: “Luke 3:23 indicates that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began His earthly ministry, which lasted for three to three and a half years. So, among scholars, the most common estimate is that Jesus was 33 to 34 years old at the time of His death.”

John 8:57: The Jews then said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old . . .”

Solomon Zeitlin, *Jewish Quarterly Review*: Jesus was born a Jew some time between the years 6 BCE, and 6 CE, was crucified by the Romans between the years 30-35.