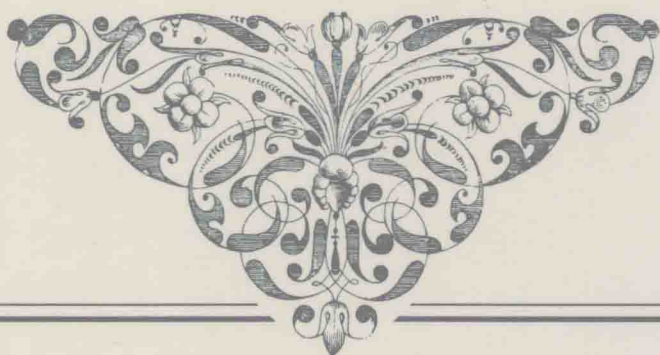


THE
WORLD AND WISDOM
OF THE RABBIS OF
THE TALMUD

THE SAGES

EPHRAIM E. URBACH



EPHRAIM E. URBACH

THE SAGES

THEIR CONCEPTS AND BELIEFS

Translated from the Hebrew by

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

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and London, England

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

In my rendering of Prof. Ephraim E. Urbach's work, *The Sages — Their Concepts and Beliefs*, I have endeavoured to keep as close to the Hebrew original as English usage would permit.

My reason for adopting this course was not only the desire for fidelity, although this was, needless to say, a major consideration, but the nature of Prof. Urbach's work and the qualities of his style. The author is essentially a scholar; he is not only eminently objective in his approach, but he writes with exemplary precision and economy of expression. Thus the basic structure and aims of the book made it vitally necessary for the translator to observe the greatest care in reflecting the exactitude and nuances of the Hebrew; any deviation from this standard would have distorted Prof. Urbach's presentation of his subject.

It must not, however, be supposed that the exigencies of scientific scholarship have voided *The Sages* of literary distinction. While remaining true to its genre, the work makes a notable contribution to modern Hebrew literature by its classical, idiomatic patina and by its streamlined, architectonic construction.

I must regretfully admit that, for a number of reasons, I could not reproduce these characteristics in my translation. But I did attempt to preserve one dominant feature of the work. On almost every page three — or at the very least two — literary strata are discernible: Biblical quotations, Rabbinic dicta, and the author's own comments, analysis, and general discussion. To reflect this threefold literary tapestry, I have employed Elizabethan English (I had recourse mainly, though not invariably, to The Jewish Publication Society version, *The Holy*

Scriptures) for the Biblical citations; the Rabbinic passages I translated myself in a slightly antiquated English (but without the use of 'thou', 'thee', or 'ye'); and for the writer's own discourse I used the modern English idiom. By this means I have sought to convey, in a modest — and admittedly imperfect — measure, the stylistic characteristics of the original.

Translators are often stigmatized — and not altogether without warrant — as traitors (*traduttori, traditori*). But curiously enough in the present instance the translation has one distinct advantage of which, I would hope, even Hebrew scholars will avail themselves. The spectrum of Prof. Urbach's quotations from Talmudic and Mid-rashic literature is unusually wide and inevitably includes a number of obscure passages. Whereas the Hebrew work cites these dicta in their original form, without necessarily adding elucidatory annotations, the translator has consistently been compelled, by his rendering, to interpret them, since every translation is also, by its very nature, a commentary. All my translations of Rabbinic dicta have, like the rest of the English version, the approval of the author.

Consideration for the needs of the English (and perhaps non-Jewish) reader has necessitated, at times, the addition of a few explanatory notes. To avoid overloading the book, these annotations have been kept to an absolute minimum. They will be found in square brackets. The round brackets, on the other hand, where these do not reproduce the writer's own parenthesis, indicate, as a rule, additions in the translation required to make sense in the English.

The renderings of extracts from Philo and Josephus follow the translation of the Loeb Classical Library, which was considered the most suitable for the purpose.

Generally the retention of Hebrew words has been avoided. But this could not be done in the case of personal (or place-) names, technical terms, and the titles of Hebrew books. For this purpose transcription was used wherever possible. However, in quoting variant readings and in exceptional instances where transliteration would not fully convey the Hebrew spelling, the Hebrew characters were retained.

The question of transcription presented a number of problems, which I endeavoured to solve with due regard to the convenience of the English reader. Biblical names are given the accepted spelling

found in the majority of English versions. In the case of Rabbinic references, a compromise plan was adopted: the well-known names are spelt according to the most popular convention (e.g. Akiba, Joḥanan). But in the case of the less familiar names the transliteration is more (though not always completely) scientific. The transcription of technical terms and book titles accords with the rules given in the 'Key to the Transliteration'. The signs for the vowels are used for fully transliterated words, but are often omitted if the word is frequently repeated.

The titles of Hebrew works cited in the Text are generally translated (in square brackets) on their occurrence. But book names that are essentially of a poetic character and would, if translated, only serve to puzzle the English reader, are left in their original Hebrew form. Likewise Hebrew books referred to in the notes are not rendered into English; translation, in this case, would have made the annotations far too unwieldy.

The old Rabbinic teaching that 'All sacrifices will ultimately be abolished, except the thanksgiving offering' comes spontaneously to mind when I consider those who have helped in various ways to bring this work of translation to fruition.

First, I wish to recall, with abiding gratitude, that the late Mr. Silas S. Perry ל"י made this publication possible not only by his financial generosity, but also by his life-long, loving interest in Jewish scholarship, which he fervently believed would ultimately spread the light and wisdom of Jewish knowledge among the broad masses of the Jewish (and non-Jewish) laity. His constant encouragement to me personally in my work for the Perry Foundation I can never forget.

My translation of *The Sages* could never have achieved its present form without the careful attention given to the translation in all its stages by Prof. Urbach. He has been a veritable tower of strength to me, and I record my appreciation of his friendship and inspiring erudition with deepfelt thanks.

Mrs. Yvonne Glickson (a daughter of Mr. Perry) has, with true filial piety, made a noteworthy contribution to the project by her valuable suggestions in matters of styling and presentation. Her association with the work will, I am sure, be a source of gratification to the entire Perry family.

I wish also to acknowledge, with appreciative thanks, my indebtedness to Mr. Ch. Toren, the director of the Magnes Press, for his unfailing interest in the progress of the translation and its publication; to the staff of the Central Printing Press, for the care and devotion with which they carried out their tasks.

Jerusalem

Nisan, 5733

April, 1973

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The English translation of this book is based on the second Hebrew edition without additions or changes. The printing started in spring of 1973. It was still in progress when to the great sorrow of his friends and all who knew him, Professor Israel Abrahams passed away after a brief illness on 26 October 1973. He managed to read most of the chapters in proof before he became ill.

The publication schedule had to be postponed because of his untimely death and also because of delays following the Yom Kippur War.

While working on the translation, Professor Abrahams used to pass to me drafts of each chapter; we would then meet to clarify any problems that had arisen. These hours we spent together discussing and studying the text, trying to achieve the most correct renderings of words, idioms and terminology, gave me great pleasure and will remain in my memory.

Mrs. Yvonne Glickson undertook an additional reading of the proofs; she suggested a few stylistic and linguistic alterations which I have accepted and which, I believe, would have been approved by the translator. The exacting task of proofreading was undertaken by Miss Susan Corb and Mrs. Janet Shvili. Dr. Yosef (Alan) Unterman prepared the indices and Mrs. E. Even Shoshan helped in compiling the bibliography. The publishers and staff of the Hebrew University's Magnes Press and the Central Press, Jerusalem, devoted a great deal of time and effort to complete the work in difficult conditions. To all of these I am most grateful.

10 Kislev, 5735

24 November, 1974

EPHRAIM E. URBACH

An index of non-rabbinic sources was added to the second English edition. I am most grateful to Dr. Robert Brody for his help in preparing the index.

13 Tevet 5739

12 January 1979

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KEY TO THE TRANSLITERATION OF THE HEBREW

CONSONANTS

א = '	ל = l
{ ב = b	מ, מ = m
ב = v	נ, נ = n
{ ג = g	ס = s
ג = gh	ע = '
{ ד = d	{ פ = p
ד = dh	ף, פ = ph
ה = h	צ, צ = ʃ
ו = w	ק = q
ז = z	ר = r
ח = ḥ	ש = ś
ט = ʔ	שׁ = š
י = y	{ ת = t
{ ק, כ = k	{ ת = th
{ ק, כ = kh	

- Note: (1) Unsounded ת at the end of a word is not represented in the transcription;
 (2) the customary English spelling is retained for Biblical names and rabbinic works and authorities.

VOWELS

Long		Short
א (Qāmeṣ gādhōl) = ā	-	= a
י (Ḥireq gādhōl) = ī	י	= e
י (Ḥireq qātān) = ē	י	= i
ו = ō	ו (Qāmeṣ qātān) = o	
ו = ū	ו	= u
: (Šewā) = ě		
י: = ă		
ו: = ǒ		
ו: = ě		

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