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## Abraham ben David of Posquières

c.1120–1198

Provençal rabbinic authority

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Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières (known as Rabad) was one of the most important and prolific rabbinic figures in southern France during the second half of the 12th century. Born in Narbonne, he founded and supported an academy in Posquières using his personal wealth. A son-in-law and student of Abraham ben Isaac Av Beit Din of Narbonne and a student of Moses ben Joseph and Meshullam of Lunel, Rabad was held in the highest esteem by later rabbinic luminaries such as Nahmanides, Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba), and David ibn Abi Zimra (Radbaz).

TWERSKY's book is the definitive biography of Rabad and is a model for its genre. Twersky begins by noting the positions and spheres of influence that Rabad's teachers occupied, by characterizing the nature of rabbinic scholarship in Provence and the flow of Rabad's career and by depicting Rabad's personality. Subsequent chapters identify and describe Rabad's written works with particular emphasis on the glosses (*hassagot*) to Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*; outline the sources

that Rabad had at his disposal, including an important discussion of Rabad's attitudes toward post-talmudic rabbinic works and commentaries as a source of halakhic precedent; and highlight noteworthy disciples, followers, and descendants of Rabad. The final chapter explores Rabad's attitudes toward secular learning, philosophy, and Kabbalah. For Twersky, the glosses composed by Rabad to the works of Maimonides, Alfasi, and R. Zerayah ha-Levi, along with a series of topical halakhic monographs, form the core of Rabad's creativity. In marked contrast to the assessments of 19th-century Wissenschaft scholarship, Twersky demonstrates that Rabad was familiar with philosophical teachings and terminology and was not hostile to rationalistic tenets and secular learning. Although a number of later kabbalists viewed Rabad as a link in the chain of esoteric studies and Rabad's son Isaac the Blind was a leading Provençal kabbalist, Twersky questions the depth of Rabad's commitment to this discipline and notes that, in any case, Rabad's halakhic scholarship and writings existed as an entity completely separate from any kabbalistic teachings and conceptions.

SCHOLEM, as part of a comprehensive survey on the origins of mystical study in medieval Europe, maintains that a series of formulations and phenomena attributed to Rabad by kabbalistic tradition suggest that Rabad, no less than other contemporary Provençal talmudists such as Rabbi Jacob the Nazirite, was significantly involved in the transmission of esoteric teachings. For example, Rabad expressed a view concerning proper mystical intentions during prayer, and he is cited by his grandson Rabbi Asher ben David with regard to the identity of the highest *sefirah* (mystical emanation). In addition, Rabad refers to esoteric notions about angels and the demiurge.

Based on the way that Rabad is cited in talmudic commentaries and codes, SOLOVEITCHIK argues that Rabad's *hassagot* to Mishneh Torah were little known and less influential in the medieval period than modern scholarship has assumed. Rabad was regarded by his contemporaries and successors primarily as the author of commentaries and other freestanding works, some of which have been lost. His intellectual independence led Rabad to free himself almost completely from the geonic orbit. Much of Rabad's interpretational insightfulness was absorbed and transformed by Nahmanides and ibn Adret, while late medieval halakhic writings preserved mainly the criticisms of Rabad and other Provençal

talmudists, rather than their creativity. As a result, Rabad became known to later generations principally as the author of the *hassagot*, when in fact these *hassagot* were among the last things penned by Rabad. They were based largely on his earlier writings and were not meant to be systematic. Any evaluation of Rabad's impact on subsequent talmudic scholarship must take into account the full range of Rabad's rabbinic writings.

SILVER, in the context of an analysis of some of the issues involved in an early phase of the Maimonidean Controversy, compares the glosses of Rabad to Mishneh Torah, which Silver considers to be quite strident, to other contemporary critiques of Maimonides' halakhic thought. These include criticisms composed by Rabbi Moses ha-Kohen of Lunel and Rabbi Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel.

COHEN focuses on one of Rabad's topical treatises, *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh*, which deals with the laws and practices that govern family purity. In the final chapter of that treatise, Rabad enumerates a series of legitimate reasons for sexual relations between husband and wife. Cohen begins with a review of the scholarly assessments of Rabad's open discussion of the motivations for marital relations. Cohen notes that these assessments range from the claim that Rabad demonstrates a more permissive view of sexuality when compared to the mildly ascetic posture found within talmudic literature, to the suggestion that Rabad's approach was closer to the Aristotelian outlook of Maimonides, which adopted a relatively reserved approach concerning sexual relations. Cohen argues that by comparing the material in *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh* to discussions of conjugal sex in Christian writings throughout the medieval period, it is possible to understand better both the uniqueness of and the basis for Rabad's views. Cohen demonstrates that the four reasons given by Rabad correspond closely to those favored by Christian jurists in the mid-12th century. The reasons stemmed, at their core, from an Augustinian model, although, to be sure, Rabad stressed the relative merits of these motives rather than their sinfulness. Cohen's thesis has important implications for measuring the impact of Christian religious thought on medieval rabbinic literature in Christian Europe.

EPHRAIM KANARFOGEL

**Abramovitsh, Sholem Yankev** *see* Mendele Moykher-Sforim

**Abravanel, Isaac** 1437–1508

Portuguese-born financier, courtier, Sephardi leader, and theologian, died in Venice

Barzilay, Isaac E., "Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508)," in his *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian*

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As an influential government official and outstanding Jewish community leader and as one of the most prolific and versatile writers of premodern Judaism, Isaac Abravanel has attracted extensive attention from scholars of Jewish literature and history. Much of this attention, however, has taken the form of articles on specific themes rather than larger monographic studies.

TREND and LOEWE's collection of essays contains some of the best in the spate of mostly popular studies written in the years surrounding the quincentenary of Abravanel's birth. Different articles examine Abravanel's biography and such important and challenging subjects as his biblical scholarship and political thought. Leo Strauss's investigation of the latter has proved enduring and provides a valuable case study in Abravanel's relationship to Maimonidean, medieval Christian, and humanist thought as well.

GAON's book—a doctoral dissertation published a half-century after its completion (without updating)—argues, in large measure convincingly, for Abravanel's unstated reliance in his Torah commentaries on biblical exegesis found in works of the mid-15th-century Franciscan scriptural interpreter Alfonso de Madrigal "el Tostado." The historical and intellectual overviews found in the first part of the book must be used with great caution; the author's precise aim and point of view in drawing the connection between Tostado and Abravanel remain elusive, and the value of the book is further limited by the appearance of many untranslated Latin and Hebrew passages. Still, Gaon's book constitutes the only full-

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# JUDAISM

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