

WORKSHOP

# JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

This workshop will focus on sceptical aspects in Jewish-Christian polemics. Three different points of view will be presented: philosophical controversies found in Halevi's *Kuzari*, conversion as it appears in Abner of Burgos' *Teshuvot la-Meharef*, and confessionalisation in the Early Modern period.

Judah Halevi lived most of his life under Islamic rule, and yet he engaged in anti-Christian polemics in his *Kuzari*. Although the Jewish critique of Christianity is usually considered a reaction to a Christian mission, much evidence indicates that such polemics are not solely a defensive measure. Jewish rationalists engaged in polemics against Christianity as part of their self-definition of Judaism, while Jews who eschewed rationalism, especially those in Christian Northern and Eastern Europe, usually did not engage in such criticisms of Christianity even when there were Christian provocations. The issue, to be addressed by Daniel Lasker, followed by Lawrence Kaplan's response, is to what extent does Halevi's anti-Christian polemics fit this Jewish rationalist paradigm.

Abner of Burgos, the famous Jewish convert to Christianity from the 14th century, wrote extensively after his conversion, praising his new faith and claiming it to be the true religion, while rejecting his birth faith. In many of his works, Abner harshly criticises "Jewish" ideas. At the same time he puts in a great effort to show that the Jewish Rabbis, in fact, accepted the fundamental principles of Christianity, explaining that they had to conceal this acceptance for political reasons. This topic will be presented by Racheli Haliva, followed by Michael Engel's response.

Hayyim Hillel Ben-Sasson, a scholar of the previous generation, has documented the considerable impact that the Christian Reformation had on Jewish history. Further important research on this topic was undertaken by Jonathan Israel, the author of *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*. The subject continues to be investigated by historians. After the collapse of medieval monolithic Christianity, Jews intelligently negotiated new social and political positions on the diversified map of religious groups and sub-groups. At the same time, Jewish authors developed strategies of doctrinal self-definition and polemical self-defense that reacted to the unprecedented religious pluralism. The topic will be presented by Carsten Wilke.

The topic of confessionalisation in the Early Modern period will be explored by Paolo Bernardini, who raises the question "What is meant by 'public' and 'private' theological controversies between Jews and Christians and how do these two types of controversies differ?". The subject will be approached through an examination of the 17th-century anti-Christian Latin polemical work "Porta veritatis" (1634-1640). The polemics contained in this work were "staged" for a very limited public, or for no public at all. What, then, was this work's real purpose? Certainly, it sought not only to establish the "truth" of one religion, or rather some of this religion's tenets, with respect to the other. But also, it sought to demonstrate that a Jew could "actively" defend his/her religion, and to be present as an intellectual on the philosophical scene, a scene that was quite lively and even frantic in the century of Spinoza and Descartes.

## PROGRAMME

**10:00- 10:30 OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION**  
*Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg)*  
*Carsten Wilke (Central European University, Budapest)*

**10:30- 12:00 SESSION 1**  
**Judaeo-Christian Polemics in Judah Halevi's Sefer ha-Kusari**  
**Polemics, Religion and Scepticism in Halevi's Kuzari**  
*Daniel J. Lasker (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva)*  
**Response:** *Lawrence J. Kaplan (McGill University, Montreal)*

**14:00-15:00 SESSION 2**  
**Abner of Burgos – A Jewish Christian or a Christian Jew?**  
**Abner's Double Standard Approach towards the Jewish Rabbis**  
*Racheli Haliva (University of Hamburg)*  
**Response:** *Michael Engel (University of Hamburg)*

**15:30-17:00 SESSION 3**  
**Judaeo-Christian Polemics in the Early Modern Period**  
**The Spice in the Salad Bowl:**  
**Sephardi Apologetical Approaches to Post-Reformation Pluralism**  
*Carsten Wilke (Central European University, Budapest)*  
**Fighting for the Truth?**  
**Some Remarks on the Real Meaning of Early Modern Jewish-Christian Controversies**  
*Paolo Luca Bernardini (Università degli Studi dell'Insubria)*

**DFG**

The event is open to the public,  
with advance registration via e-mail.

Contact:  
[maimonides-centre@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:maimonides-centre@uni-hamburg.de)

15 JUNE 2016  
(SEMINAR ROOM/5<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR)

MAIMONIDES CENTRE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

SCHLÜTERSTRASSE 51  
20146 HAMBURG

CONVENOR:  
RACHELI HALIVA