

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Especially Rapoport, *Toledot Rabbeinu Nissim ben Jacob*, in *Bikkure ha-Ittim*, xii, 56 *et seq.*; Zunz, *G. V.* 2d ed., pp. 139 *et seq.*; idem, *Ritus*, p. 54; Steinschneider, *Cat. Bodl.* cols. 2066 *et seq.*; idem, *Hebr. Uebers.* pp. 932 *et seq.*; idem, *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden*, pp. 103 *et seq.*; Weiss, *Dor.* iv., Index; Michael, *Or ha-Hayyim*, No. 1136; Schorr, *Nissim ben Jacob*, etc., in Geiger's *Wiss. Zeit.* *Jüd. Theol.* v. 431. See also *JEW. ENCYC.* vii. 416a, s.v. *KAIRWAN*.

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NISSIM BEN MOSES OF MARSEILLES:

Philosopher of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He was the author of a philosophical commentary on the Pentateuch, written about 1306, when the struggle between the Orthodox and the friends of philosophy was at its height. This, however, did not prevent Nissim from giving rationalistic explanations of the miracles and of the Biblical narrations. Thus he explains that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was due to a volcanic eruption, like that which in 1302 had devastated the island of Ischia. Nissim's commentary is still extant in several manuscripts, in which it is variously entitled "Ma'aseh Nissim," "Sefer ha-Nissim," and "Ikre ha-Dat." According to Schorr (in "He-Haluz," vii. 144), Nissim wrote also a philosophical homily on Ruth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Schorr, in *He-Haluz*, vii. 102-144; Steinschneider, in Geiger's *Zeitschrift*, 1866, p. 122; idem, *Hebr. Bibl.* ix. 59; Renan-Neubauer, *Les Rabbins Français*, pp. 547 *et seq.*; Gross, *Gallia Judaica*, p. 378.

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NISSIM B. REUBEN GERONDI (RaN, ר"ן):

Physician, astronomer, and halakist; flourished at Barcelona about 1340 to 1380. He had much to suffer at the hands of certain wealthy and powerful Jews of his community, who even slandered him before the government (Isaac b. Sheshet, Responsa, Nos. 377, 447). When the Spanish Jews combined to send a petition to the king entreating his protection, Nissim was one of the committee who drafted the document (O. H. Schorr, in "He-Haluz," 1852, i. 22 *et seq.*). The name of his teacher is not known; for although he frequently terms R. Perez "morenu" (= "our master"), this title was applied to great scholars in general, even by those who had not studied under them. Conforte's statement in "Kore ha-Dorot" (p. 26a) that R. Perez was Nissim's teacher, is, therefore, a mere assumption. It is much more probable that Nissim was the pupil of his father, Reuben b. Nissim, since he says in his commentary on Alfasi's "Halakot" (Shebu., end) that he had received a certain interpretation "from his father and teacher."

Nissim was a clear and acute thinker, and, being for the most part quite independent of his predecessors in his comments, he did not hesitate to refute the foremost earlier authorities, such as Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam, Maimonides, Moses b.

Attitude Toward Predecessors. Nahman, and Solomon b. Adret. He showed his reverence for these teachers, on the other hand, by adopting their opinions in practise, and, according to his pupil Isaac b. Sheshet (Responsa, No. 385), he was in general very cautious in his decisions and inclined toward conservatism. It frequently happens, therefore, that after refuting the opinion of an earlier teacher he finally says: "Yet since the ancients have decided thus, their conclusions may not be set aside."

In his commentaries Nissim endeavored to establish the decisions relating to practise, and he devoted himself to the explanation and defense of Alfasi's "Halakot," since that compendium had been adopted for practical decisions. The extant commentaries

of Nissim on the "Halakot" cover the His Commentaries Shabbat, Pesahim, Ta'anit, tractates Rosh ha-Shanah, Bezaḥ, Sukkah, Me'on Alfasi. gillah, Ketubot, Giṭṭin, Kiddushin, Shebn'ot, and 'Abodah Zarah. Commentaries on Mo'ed Qaṭan and Makkot are erroneously ascribed to him. According to a very improbable statement of Conforte (*l.c.*), Nissim wrote also on all the other treatises covered by Alfasi's "Halakot." He is very detailed and explicit where the subject is important from a practical point of view, but extremely brief when dealing with matters of mere theory.

Nissim wrote also commentaries on the Talmudic treatises themselves. Several of these have been lost entirely, and others are extant only in manuscript. Those which have been printed are ou Shabbat (Warsaw, 1862), Rosh ha-Shanah (Jerusalem, 1871), Baba Mezi'a (Dyhernfurth, 1822), Giṭṭin, Nedarim, Hullin, Sanhedrin, and Niddah (several times), while commentaries on the treatises Pesahim, Bezaḥ, Megillah, Ta'anit, Mo'ed Qaṭan, and Baba Batra are still in manuscript (Azulai, "Shem ha-Gedolim," s.v. "Nissim"; Jellinek, "Kontres ha-Mefares"). In these works also Nissim sought to determine the practical decisions, and at the end of nearly every exposition and explanation of any length he summed up whatever was of importance for practical purposes. He was the first to write a complete commentary on the treatise Nedarim; and this part of his work is the most valuable portion of the collection, since this treatise was neglected in the geonic period, and the later glosses on it left much to be desired.

Nissim was recognized as a rabbinical authority even beyond Spain, and rabbinical questions ("she'elot") were addressed to him not only from his own country, but also from France, Italy, Africa, and Palestine. He wrote in reply about 1,000 responsa (Azulai, *l.c.*), of which seventy-seven only have been preserved. These

As a Rabbinical Authority. show his insight and his rationalistic method of treating halakic material. His responsa were first published at Rome (1546), and were reprinted at Constantinople (1548) and, in an enlarged form, at Cremona (1557).

In addition to the works mentioned above, Nissim wrote a philosophical work containing twelve homilies ("derashot"), displaying in this small volume his familiarity with philosophy, especially with that of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra. He was no friend of mysticism, and even reproved Moses b. Nahman (RaMBaN) for devoting too much time to the Cabala (Isaac b. Sheshet, Responsa, No. 167).

Nissim had two scholarly sons, **Hisdai** and **Reuben** (*ib.* No. 388), and many other disciples, the most prominent being Isaac b. Sheshet. The latter refers in his responsa to various details of his teacher's life, declaring that Nissim was the foremost rabbi of his time, with whom none of his contem-

poraries could compare (*ib.* No. 375), and that he was, moreover, highly respected and famous even in non-Jewish circles (*ib.* No. 447).

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NISSIM (THE ELDER) IBN SHAHIN.

See JACOB BEN NISSIM IBN SHAHIN.

NITER (Hebrew, "nether"): The niter of the ancients was a mineral alkaline salt, carbonate of soda, found in great quantities in Egypt. Natron Lake and Natron Valley derive their name from its presence in them; and they are still exploited for niter as they were in ancient times. In Egypt much niter was used of old for the embalming of bodies, and it was also known to the ancients that in smelting ore, niter quickened the process of flux. In the Old Testament niter is mentioned as a cleansing agent (Jer. ii. 22). It was also frequently employed for medicinal purposes. In Prov. xxv. 20 the effect of songs on a heavy heart is compared to the action of "vinegar upon niter." This is usually explained by the fact that niter effervesces when acids are mixed with it. Perhaps, however, the text should be emended; for the Septuagint reads: "as vinegar on a wound."

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I. BE.

NITTAI OF ARBELA: Vice-president of the Sanhedrin under the nasi Joshua b. Peraḥyah at the time of John Hyrcanus. In Yer. Hag. ii. 76d he is called **Mattai of Arbela**. Arbela was a city of Galilee not far from Tiberias. No halakot of his are extant, but some of his apothegms have been preserved which afford a glimpse of his character. They are as follows: "Withdraw thyself from an evil neighbor; join not thyself unto the wicked; and renounce not the hope of retribution" (Ab. i. 7). These bitter utterances contrast sharply with the gentle maxims of his colleague Joshua b. Peraḥyah. Nittai seems to have spoken thus after John Hyrcanus had deserted the party of the Pharisees and joined the Sadducees, persecuting his former friends. The phrase "renounce not the hope of retribution" was intended to comfort the Pharisees with the thought that Hyrcanus himself would not escape punishment, while the other two injunctions were designed to keep them from joining the Sadducees.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Weiss, *Dor*, i. 132; Z. Frankel, in *Monatschrift*, 1852, pp. 410-413; idem, *Hodegetica in Mishnam*, pp. 33-34, Leipzig, 1859.

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NITTEL: Judæo-German word for "Christmas"; derived from the medieval Latin "Natale Domini" (see Wetzter and Welte, "Kirchenlexikon," vii. 588); Old Latin, "Dies Natalis"; French, "Noël." Moses Isserles speaks of the custom of sending presents on the eighth day after Nittel, which is called New-Year (Shulḥan 'Aruk, Yoreh De'ah, 148, 12). It was also customary among the Jews to play cards on Nittel night, which was explained as being done in opposition to the solemn celebration of that evening by Christians, while really it was merely a survival of the old German custom of merrymaking at this festival (see Tille, "Gesch. der Deutschen Weihnacht," Leipzig, 1900).

D.

NIZZA (ניצה), SOLOMON BEN ISAIAH BEN ELIEZER HAYYIM: Rabbi of Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; equally prominent as sage, Talmudist, and liturgical poet. His father, **Isaiah**, whom he succeeded, was the author of "Derek Yashar" (Venice, 1633), on ethics, and of "Yesha' Yah" (*ib.* 1637), a commentary on the Zohar; and his grandfather **Eliezer Hayyim**, who was rabbi of Padua (c. 1600), wrote "Dammeseḳ Eli'ezer."

Many prominent Talmudists corresponded with Nizza and published his decisions in their works; and his approbations ("haskamot") were in great demand. He was the teacher of Moses and Gershon Hefez, on the latter of whom he delivered a eulogy (published in "Yad Haruzim," 1660). His seliḥah **שבן אחוני עצמי חרו**, in eight rimed stanzas, each of which ends with **נישא יריך**, was inserted in the morning service for New-Year's Day ("Shaharit") in the Roman ritual.

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S.

J. S. R.

NIZZAḤON. See LIPMANN-MÜHLHAUSEN.

NO-AMON: Name designating the city of Thebes, in Egypt, and equivalent to "No, the city of the god Amon"; found in Nah. iii. 8 (comp. Jer. xlvi. 25, where Amon is spoken of as the god of No). The current form is the later Hebrew pronunciation of the older "Na." This is nearly equivalent to the Assyrian "Nē," which is modified from "Na'" by the influence of the guttural. The word is Egyptian and means the "city" par excellence. Thebes was the greatest of the ancient Egyptian cities (observe the repetition of the name in Ezek. xxx. 14-16). It stood at the very center of the Nile traffic, and was distant about 500 miles by the river from the Mediterranean and about 110 miles from the border of Ethiopia (Cush), of whose trade it was the emporium.

Thebes was originally the capital of the fourth nome of Upper Egypt (Pathros). Early in the third millennium B.C. it was made the seat of the eleventh dynasty. But it was not until the expulsion of the Hyksos (about 1570 B.C.) that it became the permanent capital. Under the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties it attained the height of its splendor. The most famous kings of Egypt, Thothmes III. and Rameses II., adorned it with magnificent structures, the remains of which now form the principal ruins of Karnak and Luxor. After the establishment of the Ethiopian dynasty the city lost its prestige. Its decline was hastened by its repeated capture by Assurbanipal during the native uprisings against the Assyrian suzerainty (667-663 B.C.). Since the days of the Ptolemies it has been the great ruined city of Egypt. The Targum and Gen. R. (i, beginning), and also Judah ha-Levi, translate No-Amon by Alexandria.

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NOACHIAN LAWS. See LAWS, NOACHIAN.

NOAH.—**Biblical Data:** Son of Lamech and the ninth in descent from Adam. In the midst of