

Lara Curtis

PhD student of Comparative Literature, UMass, Amherst

Email: LCurtis@complit.umass.edu

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Pursuing “Outside” Knowledge: בחפמות החיצונית : Léon Joseph de Carcassonne’s Translator’s Preface

Léon Joseph de Carcassonne, a fourteenth-century French Jewish translator and physician, discusses in his extensive translator’s preface of 1394 how and why he translated the medical treatises *Lilium medicinae* and *Prognosticis* from Latin into Hebrew. As a Jew living in exile during a period in which expulsions of Jews from France were occurring frequently and Jewish doctors were excommunicated from the Christian medical community, he did not have “easy” access to informative Christian medical treatises. In the same vein, Léon mentions in the preface that as a result of these circumstances under which the Jews were living, members of the Jewish medical community had a “shortage” of medical literature, thereby preventing them from being as informed about medicine as their Christian counterparts. This situation seems to trigger Léon’s desire to pursue “outside” knowledge, which in Hebrew is referred to as בחפמות החיצונית, and gain access to rare medical treatises that belong to the Christian community so that he can use the information from them to apply to his own work when translating books about medicine from Latin into Hebrew for Jewish doctors. In addition to his desire to pursue knowledge from outside of his own sphere, - בחפמות החיצונית - he also discusses problems with translations and interpretations of specific texts, and how his methodological approach to translation is an improvement over how his predecessors translated texts. In my paper discussion, I will illustrate ways in which the salient theme of pursuing outside knowledge - בחפמות החיצונית - proliferates in Léon’s preface, leading to his decision to translate *Lilium medicinae* and *Prognosticis*. I suggest that Léon’s thirst for acquiring new knowledge and his decision to translate these medical treatises is in response to the circumstances of this period, during which the Jewish community was deeply affected by excommunication, and of course, from either being expelled or living under the threat of expulsion. Hence, by exploring how Léon applies the meaning of “outside” knowledge - בחפמות החיצונית - to important questions in this preface, which is a rare document that has received very little attention from students and scholars, we shall have new insight into how Léon Joseph de Carcassonne’s ideas reflect ideological and cultural questions in relation to the Jewish medical community during this period of French history.