

DOCUMENT 1: HASDAI IBN SHAPRUT TO JOSEPH, KING OF THE KHAZARS (CA. 960)

I, Hasdai, son of Isaac, son of Ezra, belonging to the exiled Jews of Jerusalem in Spain, a servant of my lord the King, bow to the earth before him and prostrate myself towards the abode of your Majesty from a distant land. I rejoice in your tranquility and magnificence and stretch forth my hands to God in heaven that He may prolong your reign in Israel. ...

Praise be to the beneficent God for His mercy towards me! Kings of the earth, to whom his magnificence and power are known, bring gifts to him, conciliating his favor by costly presents, such as the King of the Franks, the King of the Gebalim [Otto the Great of the Holy Roman Empire?], the King of Constantinople, and others. All their gifts pass through my hands, and I am charged with making gifts in return. Let my lips express praise to the God of Heaven, who so far extends His loving kindness towards me, without any merit of my own, but in the fullness of His mercies!

I always ask the ambassadors of these monarchs who bring gifts about our brethren the Israelites, the remnant of the captivity, whether they have heard anything concerning the deliverance of those who have languished in bondage and have found no rest.

At length mercantile emissaries of Khorasan told me that there is a kingdom of Judah which is called al-Khazar. But I did not believe these words for I thought that they told me such things to procure my goodwill and favor. I was therefore wondering, till the ambassadors of Constantinople came with presents and a letter from their king to our king, and I interrogated them concerning this matter,

They answered me: "It is quite true, and the name of that kingdom is al-Khazar. It is a fifteen days' journey by sea from Constantinople, but by land many nations intervene between us; the name of the king now reigning is Joseph; ships sometimes come from their country to ours bringing fish, skins, and wares of every kind. The men are our confederates and are honored by us; there is communication between us by embassies and mutual gifts; they are very powerful; they maintain numerous armies with which they occasionally engage in expeditions." When I heard this report I was encouraged, my hands were strengthened, and my hope was confirmed. Thereupon I bowed down and adored the God of heaven. ...

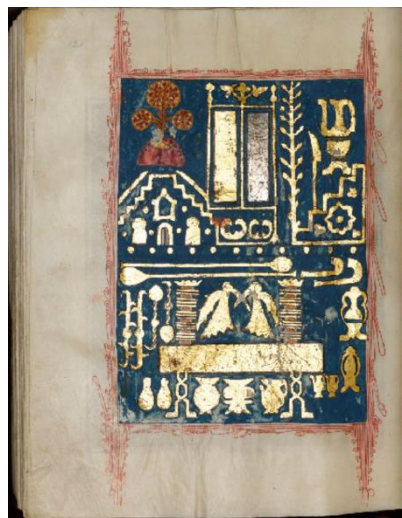
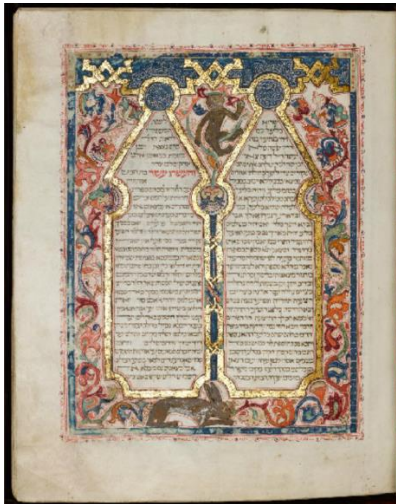
I pray for the health of my lord the King, of his family, and of his house, and that his throne may be established forever. Let his days and his sons' days be prolonged in the midst of Israel!

DOCUMENT 2: NAHMANIDES' REPORT OF THE DISPUTATION OF BARCELONA (1263)

Then Friar Paul began, saying that he would prove from our Talmud that the messiah concerning whom the prophets testify has already come. Before we debate this, I ask that he tell me how this is possible. Indeed while he was in Provence and in many other places, I heard that he said this to many Jews. But I am most surprised. Would he answer me in this regard? Does he mean to say that the sages of the Talmud believed in Jesus as the messiah and believed that he is both human and divine, as held by the Christians? However, it is well known that the incident of Jesus took place during the period of the Second Temple. He was born and killed prior to the destruction of the Temple, while the sages of the Talmud, like R. Akiba and his associates, followed this destruction. Those who compiled the Mishnah, Rabbi and R. Nathan, lived many years after the destruction. All the more so R. Ashi who compiled the Talmud, who lived about four hundred years after the destruction. If these sages believed that Jesus was the messiah and that his faith and religion were true and if they wrote these things from which Friar Paul intends to prove this, then how did they remain in the Jewish faith and in their former practice? For they were Jews, remained in the Jewish faith all their lives, and died Jews—they and their children and their students who heard their teachings. Why did they not convert and turn to the faith of Jesus, as Friar Paul did? He understood from their words that the faith of the Christians is the true faith—Heaven forbid—and he went and converted as a result. But they and their students who learned Torah from them remained and died Jews, as we are this day. ... If these sages believed in Jesus and in his faith, how is it that they did not do as Friar Paul, who understands their teachings better than they themselves do?

[Nahmanides is disputing Dominican Friar Pablo Christiani, a Jewish convert.]

DOCUMENT 3: KENNICOTT BIBLE (1476)



[Moses ibn Zabara, scribe; Joseph ibn Hayyim, artist; commissioned by Isaac, son of Solomon di Brage, Corunna, Spain, 1476; now at Bodleian Library, Oxford]

1047

אני יוסף
והיה
זה הספר
צירתי
והשלמתו