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## DOCTORS AND MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE IN TOSAFIST CIRCLES

### INTRODUCTION

**B**eyond their Talmudic commentaries and halakhic codes, medieval rabbinic scholars made important contributions to the world of medicine, and many Talmudists were themselves practicing physicians. Yet few, if any, of these figures are associated with the Tosafist culture, and history seemingly does not record any medical contributions emanating from the halls of the Tosafist academies. Hence very little research has been dedicated to medical practice and knowledge in Tosafist circles. What was the Tosafist attitude towards doctors and medicine? Were there Tosafists who were knowledgeable in medical techniques and advances?

The first section of this article addresses the Tosafist attitude toward the field of medicine with the goal of demonstrating that unlike other medieval rabbinic circles the Tosafists did not harbor negative attitudes towards doctors and medicine. The second section concentrates on the extent of medical knowledge in Tosafist circles and suggests indications that at least some Tosafists were medically versed. I end the discussion by presenting new indications of Tosafist familiarity with medical knowledge based on unpublished manuscripts that bolster my contention regarding Tosafist attitudes toward the field of medicine and also indicate that certain Tosafists may have actively pursued medical knowledge.

#### I.

In order to fully appreciate the view of the Tosafists we will first seek to identify rabbinic sources that voice a theological opposition toward doctors and medicine. A mishna in *Kiddushin* (4:14) reads, “The best of doctors

## TRADITION

are destined for Gehenom,” and perhaps reflects a rabbinic opposition to doctors. However, this source is not very conclusive due to its non-halakhic context and its failure to indicate the reasons for its condemnation.<sup>1</sup>

A famous passage in the Talmud provides a more concrete negativity towards doctors and medicine. In *Berakhot* 60a the Talmud quotes the text of a prayer to be recited by a patient before undergoing a medical procedure. The last line of the prayer indicates that, ideally, people should not engage doctors or medicine.

One who enters to let blood should recite: “May it be your will, Hashem my God, that this procedure should have positive medicinal value, and should heal me. For You are a God who heals, worthy to be trusted, and Your healing is dependable, *for it isn't the way of man to engage in healing, but they became accustomed to doing so.*”

Rashi explains that the prayer contains negativity towards doctors and medicine because the Talmud feels that man should wait for God to heal him, as God is the true source of affliction. However, Abaye objects to the language of the prayer, arguing that the Bible has granted permission to engage in healing and therefore the concluding line of the prayer is inappropriate.

Abaye responded: “One should not say such a thing, for the school of R. Ishmael has taught: ‘And you shall provide for his healing (*ve-rapo ye-rapo*)—From here we learn that permission was granted to doctors to heal.’”

Abaye likely agrees that ideally man should not engage doctors and medicine. However, since permission was granted, it would not be appropriate to make such a reference in the prayer, for on a practical level man is permitted to engage in the healing enterprise.<sup>2</sup> If so, Abaye’s position also reflects an opposition, at least on an ideal level, to doctors and medicine.

<sup>1</sup> This failure also includes its ambiguity regarding its focus on the “best” of doctors. Rashi first suggests that the mishna condemns doctors because they occasionally kill patients. This explanation alone fails to account for the mishna’s condemning of the “best” of doctors. Rashi provides two additional reasons for the mishna’s negativity towards doctors. The first is that the ability to heal breeds a mentality that denies God’s role in healing. The second is that they disregard the medical needs of the poor. Both of these concerns could indeed be exacerbated when dealing with the “best” of doctors, and explain the mishna’s choice of terminology. There are many other interesting suggestions in Rabbinic literature to account for the specification of the “best” of doctors. For example, the author of *Kol Sofer* on the mishna says that the way a doctor becomes the “best” of doctors is by making many mistakes. Through his trial and error he ends up killing many patients, but he also develops into a skilled physician.

<sup>2</sup> See *Turei Zahav* on *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 336 who writes that Abaye’s argument is on the proper text of the prayer, but not on the fundamental opposition

In the medieval era we find more sources indicating that there were rabbinic scholars who expressed an opposition to doctors and medicine. The most often quoted formulation is the following abridged excerpt from the Bible commentary of R. Moses b. Nahman (Ramban) on Leviticus 26:11,

What role is there for doctors in the home of those who fulfill the will of God after He has promised (Exodus 23:25), “And He will bless your bread, and your water, and I will remove sickness from your midst.” . . . This is what [our sages] teach (*Berakhot* 60a), “For it is not the way of man to engage in healing, but they became accustomed to doing so.” For if they would not have engaged in healing, man would only become ill in accordance with the necessary amount of punishment for his sins, and he would be healed through the will of God. . . . And this is the meaning of what [our sages] teach (*Bava Kamma* 85a), “‘You shall surely provide for his healing’—From here we learn that permission was granted to doctors to heal.” They did not say that “permission was granted to the sick to be healed,” rather since he became ill and he came for healing—for he is one who has become accustomed to healing and he is not from the congregation of God whose portion is for life—the doctor does not have to prohibit himself from healing [the patient] . . . When man’s ways are pleasing to God he should have no involvement with doctors.

A superficial reading of this excerpt certainly suggests that Ramban maintains a theological opposition to doctors and medicine, and that he condemns ordinary God-fearing individuals who seek the service of doctors. However, earlier in the same passage, Ramban opens this discussion with language that indicates that he speaks only of a utopian era. Ramban writes,

When the Jewish nation is spiritually perfect and numerous, they are not governed by the natural order . . . [God will] remove disease from their midst, to the point that they will not need a doctor, or any other medical treatment, as the verse says (Exodus 15:26), “For I, God, am your healer.” And so the righteous did during the time of prophecy, when they committed a sin and became sick they would not seek out doctors, but rather prophets. . .

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to doctors and medicine. It should be noted that there are certainly Mishnaic and Talmudic sources that do not portray a negative attitude towards doctors and medicine—see, for example, *Bekhorot* 4:4.

## TRADITION

Ramban's pitting of doctors versus prophets, direct references to "the times of prophecy," and descriptions of a period when the "Jewish nation is spiritually perfect and numerous," implies that he refers to a utopian society. Even an eschatological tone is sensed when one considers his comments on the next verse.<sup>3</sup>

If Ramban's focus is solely on a utopian era, what is to be done with his passionate condemnation of individuals who utilize the services of doctors? How are we to understand the various Talmudic sources that Ramban quotes as reflecting this condemnation?<sup>4</sup>

A careful reading of the entire passage suggests that while Ramban's condemnation certainly addresses the entire nation in a utopian era, he also speaks to an exceptionally righteous individual in a non-utopian society.<sup>5</sup> This suggested reading accounts for both his early references to a utopian era, and his later condemning expressions that appear to focus on contemporary times. Moreover, I believe this conclusion is bolstered when we consider the verses that Ramban quotes in supporting his condemnation. In the midst of his passionate condemnation, Ramban twice references verses in Exodus,

When the Jewish nation is spiritually perfect and numerous, they are not governed by the natural order . . . [God will] remove disease from their midst, to the point that they will not need a doctor, or any other medical treatment, *as the verse says (Exodus 15:26), "For I, God, am your healer."* . . .

<sup>3</sup> Ramban's comments on the next verse read, "Know well that the Jewish nation never attained this high level ever, not the whole nation and not [even] the individuals, for their merit was never enough . . . these prophecies have yet to be fulfilled, but they will be fulfilled in the time of spiritual perfection."

<sup>4</sup> It would be hard to suggest that all of the Talmudic sources he quotes are focusing exclusively on a utopian era. In particular, Ramban brings as an example the events surrounding a certain Talmudic sage who never called a doctor to his home. This sage certainly did not live in a utopian era of prophecy.

<sup>5</sup> I think one could also explain the Ramban using slightly nuanced language. Ramban's point is not to condemn the utilization of doctors at all, not for the nation in a utopian era, and not for a completely righteous individual in a non-utopian era. Rather Ramban is describing how divine providence ideally operates. According to Ramban, man should truly be impervious to natural disease and should never be in a situation that requires the natural healing of a doctor. An elevated individual is not afflicted due to natural causes, and any sickness is only a result of spiritual causes. This is the reality of a completely righteous existence. Since this individual's affliction is not a result of natural causes, consulting a doctor is a misguided response. Ramban's position here reflects his general understanding of divine providence, in which the completely righteous are not governed by chance or happenstance, and everything that occurs to man is the direct result of divine providence. See, for example, Ramban's commentary to Genesis 18:19.

What role is there for doctors in the home of those who fulfill the will of God *after He has promised* (Exodus 23:25), “*And He will bless your bread, and your water, and I will remove sickness from your midst.*”

These verses, according to Ramban himself, do not refer to a utopian period, but rather address an exceptionally righteous individual in a non-utopian era.<sup>6</sup> Ramban’s utilization of these verses implies that he is not restricting his comments to a utopian era, but is also including an exceptionally righteous individual in a non-utopian society.

It emerges from our analysis that on a theoretical level Ramban does maintain a theological opposition to doctors and medicine, either for the entire nation in a utopian era or for the completely righteous in a non-utopian society. However, Ramban’s remarks do not constitute a categorical opposition to doctors and medicine, as he does not discourage an ordinary God-fearing Jew from engaging doctors or medicine.<sup>7</sup> Quite the contrary, Ramban rules in his halakhic work, *Torat ha-Adam*,<sup>8</sup> that it is a halakhic requirement to seek the medical attention of a doctor when sick.<sup>9</sup>

A stronger opposition, however, to doctors and medicine is found in the Torah commentary of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra to Exodus 21:19.

“And you shall provide for his healing”—this verse teaches that permission was granted to doctors to heal bruises and wounds that are *visible*.

<sup>6</sup> See earlier in the commentary of Ramban on Leviticus 26:11, where he writes: “These blessings in [Leviticus 26], according to their plain meaning, are general blessings addressing the dew, satiety, peace, and procreation. They are not the same as the blessings that were briefly featured earlier [Exodus 23:25], ‘I will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove disease from your midst,’ for there the Torah promised regarding food and drink. . . as it says there [15:26], ‘For I, God, am your healer’ . . . These blessings [in Exodus] are even for the individual who serves God, for when a pious individual guards all of the commandments of God, God protects him from disease.”

<sup>7</sup> While most scholars assume that Ramban is not speaking on a practical level, there are some scholars who understand Ramban’s comments on a practical level. See for example the 19<sup>th</sup> century work *Madregat ha-Adom, Darkhei Bitabon*, chapter 9 where the author advocates reliance on Ramban’s approach for Torah students. See also *Avnei Nezer, Hoshen Mishpat* 193 and *Yabiah Omer, Hoshen Mishpat* vol. IV, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Torat ha-Adom, Sakanah*. See also *Hiddushei ha-Ritva, Kiddushin* 58b.

<sup>9</sup> Ramban’s student, R. Solomon b. Aderet (Rashba), attests multiple times in his responsa to the fact that Ramban himself was a practicing doctor. See *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* 120, 167, and 825. This fact alone is not necessarily pertinent to our discussion as Ramban’s condemnation in his commentary is directed at a patient’s seeking out of a doctor, and he specifically writes that a doctor is granted permission to heal. However, I believe this fact about Ramban does provide an important context when analyzing his position.

## TRADITION

However any disease that is *internal* is in the hands of God to be healed.

Ibn Ezra distinguishes between different types of wounds, and forbids the services of a doctor for “internal” wounds. The straightforward explanation of Ibn Ezra’s terms, “visible” and “internal,” is that they are references to the location, and perhaps severity, of the ailment. Visible wounds are more easily treated, while treatment of internal diseases is more challenging and sometimes leads to the death of the patient.<sup>10</sup> According to this approach, the objection to doctors expressed here is not a theological opposition but rather a practical one.

However, one could suggest a nuanced approach to the Ibn Ezra that his terms “visible” and “internal” refer to the source of the affliction. Permission was granted to doctors to heal *man-inflicted* wounds, but not to heal *God-inflicted* wounds.

The first advantage of this explanation is the Biblical verses’ immediate context in Exodus 21.<sup>11</sup> The Bible there relates that when one individual strikes another, one of the perpetrator’s obligations is to pay for the medical treatment necessary for the complete healing of the victim. In this context, the verse would be qualifying, according to this explanation of Ibn Ezra’s commentary, that the permissibility of seeking out a doctor is only in this case, when a wound is the result of man, but the permissibility does not extend to a wound emanating from God.

This explanation of Ibn Ezra’s commentary is bolstered by Ibn Ezra’s remarks in other locations. In Psalms 32:10 the verse reads, “Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he that trusts in God, mercy encompasses him.” Ibn Ezra comments on the phrase “He that trusts in God,”

You should know that the Bible only allows one to seek healing for man-inflicted wounds, for God alone is the healer of Israel. God’s healing is to strengthen the soul and to increase fear [of God].

This specific comment of Ibn Ezra is crucial for our discussion as it hints at the reason behind Ibn Ezra’s opposition to seeking a doctor’s assistance for God-inflicted wounds: man’s dependence in life should be directed solely to God, as He is the sole healer of Israel. This is also the clear indication of Ibn Ezra’s remarks on another verse in Psalms 38:10.

<sup>10</sup> See R. Yonatan Eybeshitz’s *Tiferet Yisrael on Yoreh Deah* 188:5 where this suggestion is made without specifically attributing it to Ibn Ezra.

<sup>11</sup> It may be that Ibn Ezra’s term *pitsa’aim* (bruises) is a term used specifically for man-inflicted wounds. See for example Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 37b *s.v. pitsa’aim*.

On the phrase “Lord, all my desire is before You,” Ibn Ezra comments, “Directed toward You alone are all of my desires - perhaps I will live - and not towards doctors.”<sup>12</sup>

R. Bahya b. Asher, in his commentary on the Bible (Exodus 21:19), also expresses a similar opposition to doctors and medicine, and expresses clearly the reason behind his opposition - that healing is the domain of God alone.

That which our sages say, “And you shall provide for his healing”—this verse teaches that permission was granted to doctors” was only said in reference to external wounds, as is the subject of the verse, however internal diseases are not in the domain of doctors, *rather it is the hand of the “Doctor of all flesh” and in His hand is the life of all beings.*

What emerges from our discussion is that both Ibn Ezra and R. Bahya maintain a theological opposition to doctors and medicine that may even translate into a practical prohibition.<sup>13</sup> According to them, treatment of a God-inflicted disease reflects a denial of the divine source of one’s ailment and an avoidance of man’s rightful dependence on God, healer of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, in *Esther* 2:11 the verse describes how Mordekhai would walk by the palace to check on Esther. Ibn Ezra remarks that Mordekhai was checking “to see if she needs doctors.” In light of Ibn Ezra’s approach, we must assume that Mordekhai was concerned that Esther was experiencing some type of physical abuse, and would therefore need a doctor for her man-inflicted wounds.

<sup>13</sup> Many scholars understood Ibn Ezra to be ruling this way on a practical level, see for example the responsa of R. Zev Nahum of Biala in *Avnei Nezer, Hoshen Mishpat* 193 and R. Ovadiah Yosef in his *Yabiah Omer, Hoshen Mishpat* vol. IV, 6.

<sup>14</sup> We have seen that not all medieval Rabbinic figures agreed with this theological opposition—restricting the healing of God-inflicted ailments to God alone. Most pronounced in this sphere is R. Moses b. Maimon (Rambam) who championed the role of doctors in Jew life, and even codified in his *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Deot* 4:23, a halakhic prohibition for a Torah scholar to live in a town bereft of a doctor. (In truth the requirement to have a doctor in a city is Talmudic in nature, however, some, such as Rashi, explain the Talmud to be referring to a *mohel* to perform circumcisions.) Maimonides challenged the Rabbinic view that voiced a theological opposition to doctors and medicine, branding their viewpoint as “simple and mistaken.” See Maimonides’ commentary on the mishna in *Pesahim*, chapter 4. Furthermore in his *Treatise on Asthma (Sefer ha-Katseret)* Maimonides included an introduction that addresses the value of doctors and medicine. In this context he repeats his disdain for the theological viewpoint of those Rabbinical scholars that express a theological opposition to doctors and medicine. In section 47 he writes: “The pious fool who abhors the assistance of a doctor, and relies solely on the help of God, is similar to a hungry man who

## TRADITION

In contra-distinction to the view of Ibn Ezra and R. Bahya, the Tosafists maintained a positive attitude towards doctors and medicine, even for God-inflicted wounds. Commenting on the above discussed verse, “*ve-rapo ye-rape*,” “You shall surely provide for his healing,” *Tosafot* in *Bava Kamma* 85a s.v. *ve-rapo* argue that the double expression in the Bible, “*ve-rapo ye-rape*,” forefends against an interpretation that only man-inflicted wounds can be treated. As noted above, this interpretation was suggested by Ibn Ezra and R. Bahya and is representative of a theological opposition to doctors and medicine.<sup>15</sup> *Tosafot* declare,

One may have thought that only man-inflicted wounds [can be treated by a doctor], but divinely-inflicted wounds, if healed [by a doctor], appear as a challenge to a divine decree. Therefore, we are taught [with the double expression of *ve-rapo ye-rape*] that [even such healing] is allowed.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Tosafot* commentary on tractate *Bava Kamma* was edited by R. Eliezer of Tukh, a thirteenth century Tosafist, and was based on the earlier commentaries of the students of the leading Tosafist R. Isaac the elder of Dampierre (RI).<sup>17</sup> Similar explanations that reject, based on the verse’s double expression, the theological opposition represented by the perspective of Ibn Ezra and R. Bahya are also found in other *Tosafot* sources, such as in the *Tosafot* commentary of R. Judah Sir Leon of Paris on tractate *Berakhot*, 60a s.v. *mi-kan*, in the name of R. Judah’s teacher, RI.<sup>18</sup> R. Pertez of Corbiel, a prolific thirteenth century French Tosafist whose *Tosafot* collection were extremely popular and widely disseminated, also

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abhors eating bread and instead hopes that God will protect him and heal him from this disease called hunger.”

<sup>15</sup> There is an anonymous *Tosafot* manuscript (officially ascribed to R. Joseph Bekhor Shor) in the Vatican, published in J. Gellis’ *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, vol. 8 (Jerusalem: *Mifal Tosafot ha-Shalem* Publishing, 1989) 215, paragraph 15, that concurs with the view presented by Ibn Ezra, and seemingly reflects a theological opposition to healing God-inflicted disease. It is hard to address this source in our discussion since its author is unknown to us.

<sup>16</sup> *Tosafot*, *Bava Kama*, 85a. Tradition records that Ibn Ezra corresponded with R. Tam and may have even met with him face to face. See Norman Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 261-263. We can only wonder if this Tosafist passage is an outgrowth in some way of that correspondence.

<sup>17</sup> E. Urbach, *Ba’alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2003), 639-644.

<sup>18</sup> This explanation also appears in the name of RI in the *Tosafot* collection, *Moshav Zekeinim* (London: L. Honig & Sons Ltd., 1959) 166, and in *Tosafot ha-Rosh*, *Berakhot*, 60a s.v. *mi-kan*, introduced with “*ve-li nireh*,” which generally refers to RI in *Tosafot ha-Rosh*, see Urbach 589.

records this explanation, albeit anonymously, in his commentary on tractate *Bava Kamma* 85a s.v. *ve-rapo*. Lastly, this explanation is also found in the name of R. Moses of London.<sup>19</sup> R. Moses was an English Tosafist who maintained a correspondence with leading Tosafists such as RI, R. Isaac b. Abraham (Ritsvah), and R. Moses b. Shneur of Evreux. The presence of this explanation in multiple and influential Tosafist sources demonstrates that this position is representative of the Tosafist culture and suggests that the Tosafists did not maintain a theological opposition to doctors and medicine, even in purely theoretic terms.<sup>20</sup>

Certainly in practice, the Tosafists did not discourage the utilization of doctors and medicine. The prominent French Tosafist, R. Jacob b. Meir Tam, reports the practice to utilize the services of gentile doctors for certain treatments. “For phlebotomy we go to Christian masters because they are experts in the art.”<sup>21</sup> R. Judah Sir Leon of Paris reports without any reservations that it is “customary to pay large sums of money” for the services of a doctor.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, when the German Tosafist R. Simha of Speyers needed medical attention he turned to his student and Tosafist, R. Avigdor Katz of Vienna. R. Avigdor utilized a healing technique<sup>23</sup> morning and evening in his attempts to alleviate the eye ailment that was plaguing his teacher.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Published in Gellis, *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, 215, paragraph 17.

<sup>20</sup> This explanation for the verse’s double expression is also found in the Tosafist commentary on the Bible, *Paneah Razah*, Exodus 21:19. Included in the commentary is an additional explanation attributed to one R. Hayim, whose conclusion also reflects a position that bears no negativity toward doctors and medicine. On the identification of R. Hayyim see the introduction to *Paneah Razah* (Israel: *Mahon Torat ha Rishonim* 1999) 10-11. The *Paneah Razah* is a late thirteenth century work, and its author R. Isaac b. Judah was likely influenced by the German Pietists. See Kanarfogel, “Peering through the Lattices,” *Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 248 fn. 79. As we will see soon, the German Pietists had a positive attitude towards doctors and medicine.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 122.

<sup>22</sup> *Mordekhai* to *Bava Kamma* 116a, sec. 172 and *Sefer Mitsvot Gedolot*, Positive Commandment 74. See Urbach, 238-239, who mistakenly attributes this to RI.

<sup>23</sup> *Teshuvot Maharam*, Prague edition, 55 and *Mordekhai* to *Shabbat*, sec. 385. See Urbach, 414. The healing technique under discussion seems to be more magical in nature than medical. This raises the important issue when dealing with medieval medicine of where to draw the line of demarcation between magic and medicine, see Kanarfogel, *Peering*, 225-226.

<sup>24</sup> If the Tosafists were categorically opposed to doctors and medicine it would also be necessary to explain the positive attitude adopted by R. Judah the son of R. Asher

Moreover, a favorable attitude toward the pursuit of medical knowledge, at least in practice, is discernable in RI's explanation of an incident of a Jewish healer assisting an idolator, recorded in the Talmud. Defending the Jewish healer, Tosafot records a ruling from RI that a Jewish doctor is permitted to heal an idolator when medical knowledge will be gained and thus available for use in healing Jews.<sup>25</sup>

The conclusion that the Tosafists possessed a positive attitude towards doctors and medicine is even more forthcoming when we note that their Ashkenazic countrymen, the German Pietists (*Hasidei Ashkenaz*) do not voice opposition to doctors and medicine.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the main work of the Pietistic movement, *Sefer Hasidim*, contains many references to doctors and medicine, none expressing any theological reservations.<sup>27</sup> For the

b. Jehiel, an heir of the Tosafist tradition and student of R. Meir of Rothenberg, in the following personal account recorded in I. Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Will* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1926), 165.

When I was an infant about three months old, my eyes were affected and were never completely restored. A certain woman tried to cure me when I was about three years of age but she added to my blindness to such an extent that I remained confined to the house for a year, being unable to see the road on which to walk. Then a Jewess, a skilled oculist, appeared on the scene. She treated me for about two months and then died. Had she lived another month, I might have recovered my sight fully. As it was, but for the two months' attention from her, I might never have been able to see at all.

Since R. Judah is reminiscing about his early childhood, which was before his family emigrated to Spain, the decision to utilize the services of this oculist was likely made by his father, the German Tosafist, R. Asher b. Jehiel (Rosh).

<sup>25</sup> *Gittin* 70a s.v. Rav. It is debatable if RI means to limit healing idolators to situations when medical knowledge will be gained or if he is explaining the grounds for a general allowance in all cases. We should note that *Piskei Tosafot* 254 does not record this allowance, although it does record the second allowance, quoted in the *Tosafot* passage. Also, early editions of the Talmudic and *Tosafot* passage refer to all gentiles and not specifically to idolators.

<sup>26</sup> Modern scholarship is still debating the extent of influence of German Pietism on the developing Tosafist culture of Northern France and Germany. For example, E. Kanarfogel has demonstrated quite convincingly that many of the Tosafists were influenced by Pietistic teachings of the German Pietists, see Kanarfogel, *Peering*, 25-26 and 189-220. For specific examples of Tosafists embracing pietistic practices see *Peering* 33-130.

<sup>27</sup> Some references are neither positive nor negative, for example, *Sefer Hasidim*, Wistinetzki Edition (Frankfurt, 1924) 154 and 810 and *Sefer Hasidim*, Margoliot Edition (Jerusalem, 1957) 237. Other references are positive, and speak of the value of doctors and medicine, such as Wistinetzki 1469 and 1470. All of these references to doctors and medicine in *Sefer Hasidim*, also indicate that in the environs of the German Pietists, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century

*Sefer Hasidim*, prayer and fasting are necessary steps in the battle against disease,<sup>28</sup> but so are doctors and medicine.<sup>29</sup>

## II.

Having seen that the Tosafists did not maintain a theological opposition to doctors and medicine, we now turn to questioning the extent to which the Tosafists pursued medical studies, and to what extent they were knowledgeable in the healing techniques and medicine of medieval society.<sup>30</sup> The trend of recent scholarship has demonstrated that the Tosafists were not as “halakho-centric”<sup>31</sup> as conventional scholarship previously

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Germany, there was a presence of doctors. At least two of the references, Wistinetzki 810 and 1470, recount actual cases involving a doctor and are not mere theoretic references.

<sup>28</sup> Wistinetzki 296 and 960.

<sup>29</sup> The only possible negative attitude towards doctors appearing in *Sefer Hasidim* is the following passage:

The son of a Jewish woman became ill. A gentile woman came and said to her: “Give your son to drink upon this stone and he will be cured.” The Jewish woman said: “What is the nature of this stone?” The Gentile woman said that the stone was brought from the pit and it is part of the stone in which (Jesus) was buried, and indeed some Gentiles were given to drink and were cured. The Jewish woman said: “Because she said that it is of (Jesus), I so not want my son to drink upon this stone.” And she did not want to do any treatment with this stone. And this (is what is meant by) “With all thy soul . . . though shalt love the Lord thy God.” (Wistinetzki 1352, quoted in J. Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practice in Germany: The Evidence of *Sefer Hasidim*,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982), p. 593.)

Although the author of *Sefer Hasidim* praises the Jewish mother for refusing the medical advice of the gentile, it is very clear from the context that her opposition is not to medical treatment, per say, but rather to the fact that the curing agent is connected to the Christian messiah.

<sup>30</sup> The Talmud is filled with medicinal information. See, for example *Gittin* 67b-71a and 86a. The Tosafists were certainly well versed in these traditions. However, the Tosafists expressed reservations over relying on Talmudic healing. In *Moed Kattan*, *Tosafot* 11a *s.v. kivra* advises against following a Talmudic health suggestion with the observation that physiological nature has changed as we find that much health advice and medical remedies in the Talmud are no longer reliable.

<sup>31</sup> The term halakho-centric is Professor I. Twersky’s. See “Religion and Law,” *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 69-82. At the forefront of this recent trend is the work of E. Kanarfogel and that of the late I. Tashma.

## TRADITION

believed, and the possibility that they pursued medical knowledge should be seriously considered.<sup>32</sup>

J. Schatzmiller has demonstrated that at least one medical work, the *Sefer ha-Refuot* of Asaph,<sup>33</sup> was studied in medieval Germany,<sup>34</sup> and has posited that the German Pietists were among those who studied it.<sup>35</sup> But

<sup>32</sup> Another important question that is beyond the scope of the current article is if their interest was founded in a general interest in the sciences or if it was merely the product of a utilitarian desire to find cures.

<sup>33</sup> In the pre-medieval period, there were at least two major Jewish medical works. The first is the *Sefer ha-Refuot* of Asaph, a text dated anywhere from the third century to the tenth century. See Aviv Melzer, *Asaph the Physician: The Man and his Book. A Historical-Philological Study of the Medical Treatise, The Book of Drugs* (University of Wisconsin doctoral dissertation, 1972). On page 51 he quotes the views of Steinschneider who maintains the work is from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century, Venetianer who maintains it is from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and Muntner who maintains it is from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Melzer himself on page 72 argues that it is from as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The second major work is the *Sefer ha-Yakar* of R. Shabbetai Donelo printed by Sussman Muntner, *Shabbatai Donelo* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1949) and dated to the tenth century. In addition to these major works, there were also minor treatises, such as *Had El Insan (Description of Man)* penned by a contemporary of Rashi named R. Sadyah b. Nahamani. See J. Schatzmiller in “Doctors and Medical Practice in Germany around the year 1200: the Evidence of Sefer Asaph,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983), 153.

<sup>34</sup> Schatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practice . . . The Evidence of Sefer Asaph.” He proves this by demonstrating that one of the extant manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Refuot*, Oxford Manuscript Opp. 687 (OL. 1645), is of German provenance. Included in his proofs is the observation that many of the formulas for producing medications recorded in the back of the manuscript, apparently added by the manuscript owner, contain German words. Some of these recipes also contain the name of the individual credited with creation of the medication. The two gentiles doctors quoted are both from Germany: Rudolph of Worms and Berthold of Neuhause. Moreover, paleological study of the manuscript conducted by Malachi bet-Arie indicates that the script emanates from Germany and can be dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>35</sup> Schatzmiller posits that the German pietists studied the *Sefer ha-Refuot* in his article, “Doctors and Medical Practice . . . The Evidence of Sefer Hasidim.” To prove his thesis, Schatzmiller documents evidence from the *Sefer Hasidim*. For example, in the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, passages 1469 and 1470 make direct references to a work called “*Sefer ha-Refuot*.” Additional corroborating evidence includes the fact that passage 1368 in *Sefer Hasidim* makes reference to a drug for coughs. This is significant considering that *Sefer ha-Refuot* of Asaph deals extensively with coughs. Additionally, there is an anti-aphrodisiac in the Oxford manuscript (f. 165r) of *Sefer ha-Refuot* of Asaph. This anti-aphrodisiac may be referenced in *Sefer Hasidim*, Wistinetzki Edition 71, where a Jewish doctor claims to have such a drug but does not want to administer it.

we also find that an early German Tosafist from the twelfth century, R. Eliezer b. Nathan (Ravan), references Asaph's medical work, and writes, ". . . Asaph the Jew explains similarly in his *Sefer ha-Refuot*."<sup>36</sup> This quotation attests to the fact that at least one major Tosafist was versed in medical works, and perhaps Ravan's familiarity with *Sefer ha-Refuot* may be reflective of a wider interest in Tosafist circles.

When we turn to thirteenth century Tosafist writings we find more indications that the Tosafists were familiar with the field of healing and medicine.<sup>37</sup> In tractate *Avodah Zarah* 29a, the *Tosafot* commentary, *s.v. ha-Mistaper* addresses the prohibition for a man to look in a mirror, and concludes that looking in a mirror is only prohibited if the purpose is self-beautification. But for an eye ailment it is permitted for a man to look in a mirror. The conventional explanation of this Tosafist passage is that one may use a mirror to visually inspect an ailment of the eye.

However, I would suggest that the true intent of the passage is related to the authoring Tosafist's knowledge of the medical theories of his day. It appears that at least R. Moses of Coucy, author of the Tosafist work, *Sefer Mitsvot Gedolot*, was aware of a medical theory advanced by medieval medical scholars that reflection in a mirror can improve one's eyesight.<sup>38</sup> R. Moses writes that "there are those who look in a mirror in

<sup>36</sup> *Sefer Ra'avan* also known as *Even ha-Ezer* 117b. Sussman Muntner in *Mevoh le-Sefer Asaf ha-Rofeh* (Jerusalem: Geneiza, 1958) 56 notes that the quotation from Asaph is not found in the extant version of *Sefer ha-Refuot*. See there pages 53-64 for additional non-Tosafist Rabbinic quotations of Asaph.

<sup>37</sup> It is crucial to note that most of the Tosafist sources discussed in this article are from the thirteenth century and may reflect certain influences that crept into Ashkenazic culture in general, and Tosafist culture in specific, as the generations proceeded. A case in point may be a seeming medical reference in the writings of R. Hizkiah Manoah (Hizkuni), a non-Tosafist exegete of northern France, who flourished in the thirteenth century. R. Hezkiah quotes a medical tradition from *Sefer ha-Toledet* in his comments on Leviticus 12:2. We can only guess if this work was medical in nature. If it is a medical work, R. Hezkiah's familiarity with it may be due to the considerable Spanish influence present in Hizkuni's writings. It should be noted that the Tosafist Bible commentaries quote the same medical tradition in the name of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, but extant versions of Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary do not contain this reference. See the *Tseidah la-Derekh* Bible commentary on Exodus 1:7 who notes that this medical tradition from *Sefer ha-Toledet* may be hinted to by Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Exodus 1:7.

<sup>38</sup> *Sefer Mitsvot Gedolot*, Negative Commandments 45. Although I was unable to find any corroborating sources for such a belief in general medieval culture, I would venture to suggest that this belief was likely founded on the ancient conceptions of how vision operated, such as Plato's speculation that

## TRADITION

order to improve their vision, for the medical scholars say [looking in a mirror] is good [for one's vision]." This medical theory may be the correct explanation of the allowance of *Tosafot* in *Avodah Zarah* 29a for a man to look in a mirror for an eye ailment.

R. Moses' recording of this medical theory may also account, at least partially, for a strange practice attributed to the prolific Tosafist, R. Samson of Sens. The *Sefer Tashbets* relates that when R. Samson's eyes would hurt he would "cover his face with a mask, except for his eyes, and he would look into a mirror."<sup>39</sup> Perhaps, R. Samson's behavior was aimed at using the mirror's reflection to heal his eye ailment.

These sources certainly suggest that R. Samson of Sens, R. Moses of Coucy, and the author of *Tosafot Avodah Zarah* were not only unopposed to medical techniques, but may have been knowledgeable themselves of medical theories. Additional support that the Tosafists may have been versed in medical knowledge is garnered from our knowledge of at least two prominent thirteenth century Tosafists who may have practiced medicine as a profession. This short list includes the Italian Tosafist R. Zedkiyah b. Abraham ha-Rofe, author of the *Shibolei ha-Leket*,<sup>40</sup> and the English Tosafist, R. Elijah Menahem b. Moses of London.<sup>41</sup>

### III.

I would like to present two additional indications from thirteenth century Tosafist literature that bolster my contention that the Tosafists were not

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the eye issued forth waves that provided the ability to see. See M. Pendergrast, *Mirror, Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). It is also crucial to note, as I noted in an earlier footnote, that R. Moses's knowledge of medical theories may have been a result of his interaction with the Spanish Jewish community. R. Moses travelled extensively to Spain and may have been exposed to information not readily available in Northern France.

<sup>39</sup> *Responsa Tashbets* 543. We know of at least one prominent Tosafist, namely R. Simkha of Speyer who suffered from poor vision. See *Or Zarua* I: 764 and *Teshuvot Maharam*, Prague edition, 55.

<sup>40</sup> It is unclear if the title *ha-Rofe*, appended to the name of R. Zedkiyah b. Abraham, and to his relative, R. Benjamin b. Yekutiel, author of the halakhic compendium *Sefer ha-Tanya* and the ethical work *Ma'alot ha-Midot*, was a medical title or merely a family name. E. Kanarfogel assumes it is a medical title, see Peering, 233 fn. 38, Cf. *Shibolei ha-Leket II*, Hasida Edition (Jerusalem, 1988), 15 fn. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Urbach, 499, and Faye Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 22-23.

only unopposed to doctors and medicine, but were also, to a degree, versed in medical knowledge. An unpublished manuscript from the Leiden University Library<sup>42</sup> of *Sefer ha-Refuot* contains a marginal note that begins with the words, “*Pillulei de-R. Eliezer mi-Tukh.*” The content of the text is hard to decipher, but my conjecture is that the first half of the note is a multi-lingual recipe, and the immediate context of *Sefer ha-Refuot* implies that the recipe is for an aphrodisiac.<sup>43</sup> The second half of the marginal note, which is primarily in Hebrew, appears to contain detailed directions for producing and administering pills. This leads me to the conclusion that this marginal note is a formula for making aphrodisiac pills. Hence, the meaning of the opening words, “*Pillulei de-R. Eliezer mi-Tukh,*” is “The Pills of R. Eliezer of Tukh.”

The presence of a marginal note containing a recipe in a manuscript of *Sefer ha-Refuot* is no surprise. The Oxford manuscript of *Sefer ha-Refuot* is replete with handwritten additions of remedies and medications.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps, this manuscript belonged to a doctor and not only served as a medical textbook, but also doubled as a notebook to record various medications and formulas.

We have already encountered R. Eliezer of Tukh as the editor of the *Tosafot* commentary on *Bava Kamma*. R. Eliezer was a Tosafist of note who flourished in the second half of the thirteenth century. He was held in very high regard in Tosafist circles and is credited with editing many of the Tosafist texts printed in the standard edition of the Talmud.

R. Eliezer is not the only Tosafist attributed with a medical formula. An unpublished passage from a manuscript in the British Library of London<sup>45</sup> also records a medical formula attributed to R. Meir b. Barukh,

<sup>42</sup> Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Cod. Or. 4732

<sup>43</sup> There is a rich history of aphrodisiacs in Jewish tradition. The story of Yael serving dairy products to Sisra, see also *Tosefta Zavim* 2:5 regarding certain milk products. The *dudaim* of Genesis 30:17 and *Song of Songs* 7:14 were known for their aphrodisiac powers. Talmudic sources also address aphrodisiacs, such as the Talmud in *Yoma* 18a regarding foods withheld from the High Priest, *Bava Kamma* 82a regarding garlic, *Berakhot* 40 regarding certain small fish, and *Ketubot* 65a regarding wine. See Fred Rosner, “Mandrakes and Other Aphrodisiacs in the Bible and Talmud,” *Koroth* 7 (1980), 227.

<sup>44</sup> See Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practice . . . The Evidence of *Sefer Asaph*,” and Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practice . . . The Evidence of *Sefer Hasidim*.” The Oxford manuscript has dozens of medications recorded in the back of the text. These additions, like our marginal note, are in a different pen and contain many German words.

<sup>45</sup> Or. 1054/Cat. Margoliouth 1094, f. 59a

## TRADITION

also known as the Maharam of Rothenberg.<sup>46</sup> This formula is apparently for a throat condition and includes various ingredients that must be “boil[ed] in wine and honey,” or “boil[ed] in water and then drunken.” Like R. Eliezer, Maraham was also a late Tosafist involved with the final editing of *Tosafot* texts. He was a contemporary and correspondent of R. Eliezer, and according to one tradition the two together were considered the rabbinic leaders of their generation.<sup>47</sup>

These discoveries regarding two prominent Tosafists are significant contributions to scholarship in assessing the Tosafist attitude towards medicine and doctors and for speculating the extent of their medical knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated in this study that the Tosafists did not concur with the Rabbinic opposition to doctors and medicine voiced by other medieval scholars, and readily availed themselves of the services of doctors. Additionally, I have also shown that they were seemingly knowledgeable, to a degree, in medical practices and healing techniques.<sup>48</sup> Lastly, I have presented newly discovered evidence from unpublished manuscripts that support my contentions regarding their knowledge of medicine, a fact that certainly implies a degree of openness to medical pursuits. This study also contributes to the current trend of Tosafist scholarship, and provides additional proof that the Tosafists may have had intellectual interests beyond the dialectic analysis of the Talmud for which they are known.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear from the manuscript if Maharam created the medical formula or if he merely transmitted the formula from an earlier source.

<sup>47</sup> *Sha'arei Tsiyon*, Buber Edition, 39 and See Urbach 581 fn. 54.

<sup>48</sup> What remains to be studied is the important question of where the Tosafists drew this positive attitude from, and through what channels they received medical knowledge. Was their attitude a result of their understanding of Jewish traditional sources, or received from their original Italian and Eastern roots? Perhaps they were influenced by Spanish culture? Was their knowledge passed down from earlier generations, or did they learn it from Spanish works that were slowly making their way into Northern Europe? Or, perhaps over time they absorbed knowledge through an increased exposure to the gentile culture of Northern France and Germany?