


6-13-2014

Unicums, Fragments, and Other Hebrew Book Rarities

Marvin J. Heller

independent, mj1heller@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ajlpublishing.org/jl>

 Part of the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Book and Paper Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), and the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Heller, Marvin J.. 2014. "*Unicums*, Fragments, and Other Hebrew Book Rarities." *Judaica Librarianship* 18: 130-153. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1036.

Unicums, Fragments, and Other Hebrew Book Rarities

Unicum (yūnikōm). Pl. *unica* (yūnikâ). 1885. (L., neut. sing of *unicus* UNIQUE *a.*] A unique specimen.¹

It is thus conceivable that the Spanish [Hebrew book] productivity before the expulsion of 1492, which wrought such havoc and destroyed so much, may have equaled the Italian. The reader must be reminded that the new evidence that has accumulated (as indeed some of the old) is based to a considerable degree on single copies or fragments—or single leaves. A trivial accident would have destroyed many of these as well, so that the argument from silence is in this case by no means final.

Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*²

INTRODUCTION

Cecil Roth's observation as to "the argument from silence" is insightful, particularly as pertaining to Hebrew books. Books of many cultures and civilizations disappear for several reasons—usage and, perhaps, disinterest leading to disposal being among the most important. This article describes a small number of varied examples of rare Hebrew books, several extant as *unicums*, single extant copies, some as fragments only, and others in limited numbers. The examples cited here, largely taken from my previously published research (Heller 2004; 2011), are rare primarily due to usage and persecution. There is no common thread to these books but for their rarity. All have been reprinted, many several times. Otherwise they share little; the reasons for their rarity and their histories are dissimilar, except that they are Hebrew books that are extant in single or very limited copies.

The subject matter of this article is not about the causes of book rarity *per se*, but rather to describe a variety of Hebrew works of great rarity, either of the individual title, or, in some instances, of a particular edition that, due to external circumstances, is extant in a single or a limited number of copies. The article does not address manuscript fragments, prospectuses, or monographs and pamphlets of several leaves, but rather complete books that are only extant today in fragments, single copies, or in very limited numbers (Heller 2013A; 2013B). Furthermore, it is limited to books printed in the first centuries of printing, which—all other things being equal—are the rarest of printed books. The books addressed here are not, nor are they meant to be, a

¹ Little, William, H. W. Fowler, Jessie Senior Coulson, C. T. Onions, and James A. H. Murray. *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.

² Roth, Cecil. *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 172–173. New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959.

survey of *unicums* and other early rare books, but rather are examples of such works, provided for the readers' interest, edification, and perhaps as an entrée for further exploration.

Hebrew texts, subject to the same ravages of time and, perhaps, occasional indifference as other books, suffered to a much greater extent than their non-Hebrew counterparts from the indignities and deeds, or more accurately misdeeds, of anti-Semites who expended their wrath not only on Jews but also directed their venom towards Jewish books. Among the most worst instances of this malevolence were the burning of twenty-four wagon loads of Talmudic tractates in Paris in 1242 (Heller 1992, 201–240) and the condemnation and burning of the Talmud and related works in Rome on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 5314 (September 19, 1553) and afterwards in several other cities in Italy (Yaari 1958).³

The reasons for a book's scarcity varies, as is the case with the titles described here. This subject, albeit from a different perspective, has been addressed by Avraham Meir Habermann (1961, 102–143) who, in 144 entries, enumerates such books with brevity, recording many books not completed in press. Avraham Yaari, in a collection of articles (1958), also addresses such books, often peripherally and not necessarily from the perspective of their rarity. In contrast, the titles discussed here are a small selection only of completed books, described in greater detail. Nevertheless, the titles described in the article are quite varied.

The sections of this article are arranged according to the nature of the books described: Several incunabula and editions of Rashi's Torah commentary, particularly the Reggio di Calabria Rashi, the first dated Hebrew book; editions of the Bible printed by the Soncino family; a *unicum* Tehilim (Psalms); an extensive section on Talmud rarities; books burned in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century; unknown works found in the Cairo genizah; titles from Constantinople; and an edition of *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni*, a popular much republished work, which is only extant today in small fragments. All of these works of value but today of great rarity extant as *unicums*, fragments, if in small number only.

A cautionary note: One might think that incunabula, those first Hebrew printed books printed before 1500, should be among the rarest of all titles. That is not, however, necessarily so. Adrian K. Offenberg observes that Hebrew incunabula “are generally assumed to be very rare. In fact, one-third of the 139 editions preserved in *public* collections has survived in one, two, or three copies only” (Offenberg and Walraven 1990, xxv–vii; emphasis added). Indeed, of his total count, sixteen only exist in single copies, eighteen in two copies, and twelve in three copies. He also notes that thirteen editions (ten percent of the total) have survived in forty or more copies, including incomplete copies and fragments. Another observation by Offenberg is that “the commentaries of Nahmanides and Gersonides seem to have had a better chance of survival than those of Rashi: perhaps due partly to the latter's greater popularity” (*ibid.*).

³ For the censorship of Hebrew books at this time, see Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon. *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: the Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

INCUNABULA; EDITIONS OF RASHI'S TORAH COMMENTARY

We begin with several titles from the incunabular period, among them Rabbi Aaron ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Lunel's (thirteen–fourteen centuries) *Orḥot ḥayim* and an edition of Rashi's Torah commentary. *Orḥot ḥayim* is a halachic compendium, based on earlier sources, not always noted. The author, more likely from Narbonne than Lunel (Havlin 2007, 213–214), frequently notes the customs of the former location and the opinions of its *poskim* (rabbinic decisors). *Orḥot ḥayim* has been compared to the *Kol Bo*. Although it is not certain which work is indebted to the other, it appears that the *Kol Bo* is the earlier work (*ibid.*).

First printed in Spain or Portugal by an unidentified printer in attractive large square letters, *Orḥot ḥayim* was next printed in Florence in 1750, and has since been reprinted several times. The first edition is extant today as a 27 cm. folio of one leaf fragment in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). Shimon Ākerson notes that the number of leaves in the book is unknown; the single leaf is printed in one column of 30 lines, belonging to the beginning of the book and containing an introduction and a specification of *halakhot*. The introduction was not printed in the second Florence edition of *Orḥot ḥayim* (Ākerson 2004, no. 114).⁴

Rashi's Torah commentary is among the most popular of Hebrew works. It is among the first printed Hebrew books, one of eight Hebrew titles printed in Rome (ca. 1469–1472) by Obadiah, Menasheh, and Benjamin of Rome and was the first dated Hebrew book.⁵ That second edition of Rashi's commentary—the first dated Hebrew book—was printed by Abraham ben Garton ben Isaac in Reggio di Calabria, completion of the work given in the colophon as 10 Adar, 5235 (February 26, 1475).⁶ It is extant today in a unique copy, complete but for the first two or three

4 Pages are reproduced in Freimann, A. and Moses Marx, *Otsar li-melekhet ha-defus ha- 'Ivri ha-rishonah: 'ad shenat ras* (A.T: Thesaurus typographiae hebraicae saeculi XV). Berlin: Marx, 1924. Reprinted in a facsimile edition with supplement to Part I with introductory material by Israel Mehlman and Herrmann Mz. Meyer, see Freimann, A., and Moses Marx. [1924] 1968, B37, 1–2; Offenbergs and Walraven 1990, 3, no. 2.

5 The other seven titles printed in Rome are Rabbi David Kimhi's (Radak) *Sefer ha-shorashim*; Rabbi Levi ben Gershom's (Ralbag) commentary on Daniel; Rabbi Moses ben Jacob of Coucy's *Sefer mitsyot gadol* (*Semag*); Rabbi Moses ben Maimon's (Maimonides) *Mishneh Torah*; Rabbi Moses ben Naḥman's (Naḥmanides) Commentary on the Torah; Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel's *Sefer ha- 'arukh*; and Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret's (Rashba) *Teshuvot she 'elot*. For the dating of these undated works, see Moses Marx, "On the Date of Appearance of the First Printed Hebrew Books," in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Saul Liberman (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 481–501. Both Ākerson (2004) and Offenbergs and Walraven (1990) differ in their order of the Rome incunabula, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

6 For consistency, all the dates in this article are according to the Gregorian calendar, adopted in Rome in 1582 in place of the Julian calendar. The Julian equivalent of 10 Adar, 5235 would be February 17, 1475. The first printed Hebrew book is generally accepted today as being Naḥmanides's Torah commentary, printed in Rome, 1469–1472, by Obadiah, Manasseh, and Benjamin of Rome, whose names appear in the book's colophon. The second dated Hebrew book, the *Arba 'ah turim*, was printed in Piove di Sacco by Meshullam Cusi ben Moses Jacob, completed on 28 Tammuz, 5235 (July 12, 1475; Julian July 3, 1475). Work on the *Tur* may actually have begun prior to Garton's Rashi, but because of its larger size was completed later.

leaves, in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma (Freimann and Marx [1924] 1968, A1, 1–3; Åkerson 2004, no. 31; Offenbergh and Walraven 1990, 147, no. 112).⁷ Printed as a folio ([118] ff.) in a Sephardic semi-cursive font comparable to that used in Spanish manuscripts, it is the only title known to have been printed by Abraham Garton (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Rashi's Torah commentary, Reggio di Calabria, 1475

Rashi, of course, belonging to the eleventh-century Ashkenazic community of northern France, did not write using this lettering style. Habermann (1968, 78) suggests that the term “Rashi script” for our semi-cursive rabbinic letters is derived from the Reggio di Calabria edition of Rashi’s Torah commentary. Glatzer (1988, 89) writes that it is “absurd to claim that its origin [the semi-cursive letters] lies in the 1475 Reggio di Calabria edition of Rashi’s on the Torah.” It is Glatzer’s opinion that the earlier 1470 Rome edition of Rashi, printed in square letters equally common, and that there were two editions of Rashi’s commentary printed in Spain in the fifteenth century, one in semi-cursive, the other in square letters, noting that “in general, early editions disappear quickly, and it would be impossible to claim that a single book, the extent of whose circulation is unknown, is the reason for giving that name to the Sephardic semi-cursive script.” Instead, Glatzer suggests that, “The term ‘Rashi script’ originates rather in the editions of the Bible and Talmud beginning with the Soncino editions and those of Bomberg, which were repeatedly reissued, creating a printing *tradition* which remains to this day.”

Apart from its bibliographic value, the Reggio di Calabria Rashi has intrinsic textual value. Rabbi Menahem Mendel Brakhfeld, in the introduction to his *Yosef Haleb* (Brakhfeld and Brakhfeld

⁷ The largest extant fragments after the Parma *unicum* are two-leaf fragments in the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad – Ohel Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch and in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. There is a facsimile of the Parma *unicum*, titled *Rashi's Commentary to the Pentateuch: First Edition Reggio 1474* with an introduction by J. Joseph Cohen (Jerusalem: Makor Publishing House, n. d.).

1987, 8–9), informs that numerous errors can be found in more recent editions of Rashi due to errors in transmission, frequently compounded by editors, printers, and the unkind modifications of censors. Moreover, explanations of Rashi are often based on these faulty editions. Brakhfeld, based on the Reggio Rashi and other early editions, provides a lengthy listing of emendations to current texts of Rashi.

This *unicum* was in the possession of Giovanni Bernardo de' Rossi (1742–1831), a Catholic abbé, bibliophile, and a Hebraist who authored several bibliographies on the Hebrew book still utilized to this day. De' Rossi's library of rare Hebraica, consisting of 1,432 manuscripts and 1,442 printed books, among them many incunabula, some unique, was acquired in 1816 by Marie Louise, duchess of Parma, wife of Napoleon I and daughter of Emperor Francis II of Austria, who presented it to the Palatine library at Parma (Toaff 2007).⁸ There is a sad coda to this story. As De' Rossi informs at the beginning of his *Annales hebraeotypographici ab anno 1501 ad 1540* (Parma, 1799), he had, with considerable difficulty, acquired a second copy of the Reggio di Calabria Rashi, which was sent to him in a parcel. En route, the postman, on a ferry crossing the river Po, “let it slip from his hands when the barge suddenly gave a turn of the helm. The package sank into the water and was never retrieved” (cited in Offenberg 1992, 135).

EARLY SONCINO FAMILY EDITIONS OF THE BIBLE

We noted above that Offenberg records sixteen titles that exist in single copies only (Offenberg and Walraven 1990). Among those *unicums* eight are described as Biblia Hebraica, that is, Torah (Pentateuch) or books of the Prophets. Of that number one was printed in Faro, Spain, another in either Spain or Portugal, the remainder in Italy, all the Torah portion of the Bible excepting an edition of the Later Prophets and two small editions of Psalms.⁹

Several of these rarities were printed in Naples by Joshua Solomon ben Israel Nathan Soncino, founder of the Soncino press, in the Italian town of Soncino. He began printing with tractate *Be-rakhot* (1483/84), publishing approximately forty titles, among them Bibles (including the *editio princeps* of the Hebrew Bible in Soncino, 1488), *mishnayot*, several *maḥzorim*, Talmudic tractates, and books on grammar in Soncino, Casalmaggiore, and Naples, from 1483 to 1492. Amram ([1909] 1963, 62–63) suggests that Joshua Solomon left Soncino, moved by the deaths of his father and brother and turbulent conditions in Northern Italy, “which interfered with all peaceful pursuits,” that is, renewed persecution of Jews. He relocated to Naples, where King Ferrante I, influenced by his Jewish physician, Guglielmo di Poertelone, treated his Jewish community favorably.

⁸ An alternate version as to how the Palatine library acquired the Reggio di Calabria Rashi is provided by Amram ([1909] 1963, 23), who writes that De' Rossi “dying, he bequeathed his collection of books to the Grand Ducal Library at Parma . . .” A query as to the correct version of how the Palatine library acquired the Reggio di Calabria Rashi was sent to the director of the Biblioteca Palatina on June 20, 2013. A response is still awaited.

⁹ Following the Offenberg order (Offenberg and Walraven 1990), the references for single copy Biblia Hebraica are Offenberg 14, 20, 21, 23, 24, 31, 40, 42; Akerson 62, 63, 120, 64; and Freimann and Marx [1924] 1968, B14, A98, A99, B58, A100.

It is with Joshua Solomon's editions of the Bible printed in Naples in 1492 that we are concerned, several extant as *unicums*. ĪAkerson describes these Biblia Hebraica in his catalog of Hebrew Incunabula in the JTS library, writing that one of them (2004, 307–308, no. 62) is a folio Pentateuch with *haftarot* with vocalization and accents, comprised of eleven loose leaves, 27 lines, printed with square type, two different typefaces, Sephardi-Italian style. The leaves are described as “defective: worn, soiled, moth-eaten, and partly incomplete.” ĪAkerson notes that the text was “printed in two columns (with the exception of certain text parts).” The *haftorah* is for the first day of Passover from the book of Joshua. This folio Pentateuch is independent of a folio Bible printed the same year in Naples by Soncino, of which copies are extant in more than a dozen libraries.

The same year, Joshua Solomon Soncino also printed an octavo Pentateuch (ĪAkerson 2004, no. 63), it too with vocalization and accents. The text, three leaves only, one from Genesis, two from Exodus, is in a single column of 19 lines, also Sephardi-Italian style fonts. It is not known if this fragment is from a complete Bible or was printed with *haftorah* and *Megillot*. The third Naples Biblia Hebraica is a Psalms (ĪAkerson 2004, no. 64) described as a duodecimo (12^o), printed in one column, 12 lines to a page, square type, Sephardi-Italian style. This Psalms consists of thirteen single leaves, some soiled but the text is clear and legible. None of these books are described as having any decorations. That should not be understood to mean that they were printed without any embellishments. While Hebrew incunabula did not have title pages, printers—including the Soncinos—often enclosed the first text pages of their books in attractive artistic frames and often began the text with historiated letters. It is likely that this was the case with these Bibles, the initial pages no longer being extant. Joshua Solomon Soncino died the year after printing these biblical books due to an outbreak of plague in Naples. Parenthetically, the other Psalms extant in a single copy is a 2 ff. fragment of Psalms (unidentified format) measuring 116 × 70 mm. printed in Brescia by Gershom Soncino.

A UNICUM TEHILIM (PSALMS)

A completely different work is a *unicum* edition of Tehilim (Psalms, 16^o: 79 ff.) printed in Prague in 1621. It is not recorded in bibliographic works and its small format (it is a sextodcimo) precludes it having been part of contemporary editions of the Bible, which are in larger formats. The concise text of the title page, set within a decorative woodcut border, states that it is Psalms (see Figure 2), “Arranged according to the days of the week in order, and the one who says it every day is assured that he has a portion in the world to come, in the [Hebrew] year 381 [1621], Prague.”

The title page does not give the name of the printer. It has been suggested (Kestenbaum & Company 1998) that it was either Abraham ben Shimon Lemberger or Moses ben Joseph Bezalel Katz. The text is vocalized and divided according to the days of the week. The verso of the final leaf, 79 f. has a second title page, with the same frame, layout, and set with the same type. It is distinguished only by the substitution of the word *ma'amadot* (special prayers) for Tehilim. Next

are fifty blank leaves from contemporary paper. No Prague edition of *ma'amadot* for this date is known. It has been suggested (*ibid.*) that this may be an instance of erroneous calculation or imposition or perhaps the sole evidence of a project that was not completed.

The only known example of this *unicum* of Psalms, offered for sale by Kestenbaum and Company, was part of the library of the Order of Jesuits in Olomouc (Olmütz, Moravia), known from an upside down inscription on the title page dated 1739 (Kestenbaum 1998, 18–19, no. 38).



Figure 2. Tehilim, Prague, 1621. Image courtesy of Kestenbaum and company

TALMUD RARITIES

We turn now to rare editions of tractates from the Babylonian Talmud. The rarity of these tractates, while often the result of persecution, can also be attributed to other reasons. Indeed, as Raphael Natan Nuta Rabbinoicz (1951) has observed concerning the surprisingly small number of codices of the Talmud, in those lands where the Talmud was not persecuted—such as in eastern Sephardic lands, where Jews enjoyed freedom of religion and the Talmud was not attacked, or in Poland and Ashkenaz, where there were no general decrees to burn the Talmud—a surprisingly small number of codices of the Talmud are to be found. He concludes that when the Talmud was printed with Rashi and *tosafot*, “men no longer learned from their manuscripts, but considered them as utensils without further value, placing them in genizahs, so that they no longer exist”

(Rabbinovicz 1951, 8).¹⁰

As is well known, printed Talmudic tractates, in contrast to manuscripts, are printed with the exegeses of Rashi and *tosafot*. Early Sephardic tractates were printed with Rashi only; a very small number of tractates, however, were published without both Rashi and *tosafot*. Most of these tractates are as rare as they are unusual. The earliest such tractate is an edition of *Hulin*, printed prior to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Copies of this tractate, undated, extant in fragments only, are in the National Library of Israel (NLI), Mehlman Collection; the JTS library; and the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University Library (CUL). They are described by Freimann and Marx ([1924] 1968, B35, 1–3); Offenbergs and Walraven (1990, 163, no. 127); and Yudlov (1984, 21, no. 17).

The text of this unusual edition of *Hulin* is printed in large square letters in a Sephardic font, 30 lines to a page, covering an area of 204:131 mm. Among the unusual characteristics of this tractate are that there are several instances in which a line is completed with letters other than the first letter of the next line. Also, the Tetragrammaton is represented in *Hulin*, rare for a tractate of the Talmud, by two *yodin*.¹¹

Fragments from this press have been found in both the Cairo genizah and in Yemen. A Pentateuch from this press, now in the CUL, was found in the Cairo genizah. The collection of that library contains a considerable number of fragments from a previously unrecorded edition of the Pentateuch, *Megillot*, and *haftarot* (Spanish rite). Based on the fonts, J. L. Teicher (1948, 105–106) concludes that there is no question but that the Pentateuch had been printed in Spain. He speculates that it had reached the genizah via either the printer or someone else connected with the press, who as a “refugee from Spain, collected together the sheets and even the leaves of his newly printed edition at the time of the expulsion and brought the entire material over to Egypt. The date of this print would thus be established as 1492” (also referenced in Dimitrovsky 1979, 77–78; Heller 1992, 41–45; Yaari 1945–1946, 234).¹²

¹⁰ Similar observations concerning texts in general were made by J. R. Slater, *Printing and the Renaissance: A Paper Read before the Fortnightly Club of Rochester, New York* (New York, William Edwin Rudge, 1921), p. 6, who writes: “When we consider the enormous number of manuscript books that must have existed in Europe in the middle ages, we may well wonder why they have become relatively rare in modern times.” Among his answers are their usage as a palimpsest, destruction, “wantonly or accidentally destroyed by fire, especially in times of war and religious fanaticism. In the third place, the early binders, down through the sixteenth century and even later, used sheets of vellum from old manuscripts for the linings and the covers of printed books. Finally, after the invention of printing, as soon as a given work had been adequately and handsomely printed in a standard edition, all but the finest manuscripts of that book would naturally be looked upon as of little value, and would be subject to loss and decay if not deliberate destruction.” Concerning Yiddish texts, see Aaron Lansky, *Outwitting History: The Amazing Adventures of a Man Who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books* (Chappel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004).

¹¹ A number of additional fragments from Sephardic tractates in the JTS library are recorded in Marx et al. 1977, 30, 139–140, 145, 286.

¹² There are numerous other fragments of Sephardic tractates, all of interest in their own right. Nevertheless, to attempt to describe all of them in a relatively brief article would be excessive and detract from other *unicums* and

A *unicum* tractate, *Berakhot* (Figure 3), complete and in excellent condition, now in a private collection, was printed in Salonika at the press of Sabbatai Mattathias Bath-Sheba (Basevi in Italian). The title page has an ornate architectural frame with standing representations of the mythological Mars and Minerva with shields at the side. This frame, first employed by Francesco Minizio (Giulio) Calvo, a printer of Latin and Italian books, afterwards appeared on the title pages of Hebrew books published by the Sabbioneta press of Tobias Foa, and after that press closed in 1569, the frame or copies of it were utilized by printers of Hebrew books elsewhere in Italy, in Poland and in Salonika (Heller 2008, 1–17). The tractate title page is dated “In His goodness He renews [*ha-mehadesh*; in gemetria = 357] daily, [the work of creation]” from the prayer book. A second date, in a brief colophon states “finished and completed, praise to God, Creator of the universe, in the year; Thou hast put gladness [*ha-simḥah*; in gemetria = 358] in my heart” (Psalms 4:8). The letter *heh* represents the millennium (5 in gematria; full era), so that the correct readings are 5352 (1592) and 5353 (1593).

It is not unlikely that this edition of *Berakhot* was printed in Salonika to be exported (smuggled) into Italy where an uncensored Talmud was a prohibited work. In support of this contention are that the title page’s frame with mythological figures was inappropriate for the Jews of Salonika but had been employed by Hebrew presses in Italy where, apparently, it was not objectionable to Italian Jewry. Moreover, books printed for use in Salonika often had the letters *tav”tav*, indicating that they were printed for the *Talmud Torah*, absent from this tractate. To secure financing for a proposed Salonika Talmud the renowned Italian Rabbi Judah Aryeh (Leon) Modena (1571–1648) wrote “a letter to the communities on the printing of the Talmud,” seeking funds to support publication and promising, among other things, books to donors, “in accordance with the value of his offering.” No further mention is made of the project as public reference to it was indiscrete, raising funds to publish an uncensored Talmud banned in Italy.

The Bath-Sheba press was supported by Rabbi Moses de Medina, a wealthy scholar and prominent philanthropist, son of Rabbi Samuel ben Moses de Medina (Maharashdam, 1506–1589). This press had printed a number of titles with considerably more foliation than *Berakhot*, including several volumes of the Maharashdam’s responsa, without seeking financial assistance from Jews in other lands. Furthermore, Protestant books were regularly smuggled into Catholic

rarities. Among the fragments of other Sephardic tractates that should at least be noted are those printed in Faro, Portugal, *Berakhot* and *Gitin* (ca. 1494) by Don Samuel Porteira, folio fragments in which both the text and Rashi are in square letters. For these tractates, see Dimitrovsky 1979, 73–75; Heller 1992, 32–41; Teicher 1948, 106–109; and Mintz and Goldstein 2005, 198–199. David and Samuel ibn Nahmias also printed tractates in Constantinople, now extant as fragments. Their press—the first press in Constantinople and the first press in any language in the Ottoman Empire—predated Turkish language printing, which did not begin until 1727, by 234 years. The fragments are from tractates *Eruvin*, *Pesahim*, *Yoma*, and *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. The fragment of *Eruvin* (ca. 1505) in the Israel Mehlman Collection in the NLI is described as “23 cent. fragment of 8 leaves, very defective, from an unknown edition. The form of the Tetragrammaton is three *yodin* in the form of an inverted *segol*, followed by an inverted *zayin*. The text is in the middle with square letters, Rashi’s commentary is on the inner side of the page and the *tosafot* are on the outer side, both in Rashi script. The arrangement of the pages varies from the customary editions. The fragments here are equivalent to pages 12a–13a, 14b–21b” (Bet ha-sefarim ha-le’umi yeha-universita’i bi-Yerushalayim et al. 1984, 41, no. 141). Concerning these tractates see Heller 1992, 306–308; Mintz and Goldstein 2005, 200–201.



Figure 3. Tractate *Berakhot*, Salonika, 1592

Italy through Venice, a trading partner of the Jews in Salonika. It is not known if tractates other than *Berakhot* were published (Heller 2008, 284–297). Sabbatai Mattathias died in 1601. The Bath-Sheba press continued to publish Hebrew books, albeit in diminishing numbers, under the management of his sons until 1605. It is credited with about forty titles from 1592 to 1605.

Another *unicum*, extant as a nine folio (19 cm.) fragment in the JTS library, is an edition of tractate *Nidah*. The title page is not dated, nor does a date appear elsewhere in the fragment. Nevertheless, the tractate has been tentatively dated as 1608. Here too the tractate, printed in Prague, is unusual in that it is not accompanied by any commentaries, but, as reflected on the title page, was “splendidly printed at the behest of the great *Gaon*, the wonder of our generation, our crowning glory, our Master, Rabbi Leib [Rabbi Judah Loew, Maharal, 1525–1609],” among the preeminent rabbinic figures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The text, which ends on 8b, equivalent, respectively, to folios 12b and 13b of the standard foliation, does not vary significantly from current editions. The tractate reflects an attempt to implement Maharal’s pedagogical theories.

Maharal was opposed to the premature emphasis on Talmud study from an early age and to the *pilpul* (casuistic) method of learning Talmud, instead favoring a logical and orderly approach, consistent with the Mishnah “He [Judah ben Tema] used to say: ‘A five year old begins Scripture; a ten year old begins Mishnah; . . . a fifteen year old begins the study of Gemara. . . .’” (Avot 5: 25).¹³ Maharal believed that students were unaccustomed to reviewing their learning and therefore unable to retain their Torah learning. The omission of *tosafot*, and even Rashi in this edition of *Nidah* are indicative of a tractate designed to emphasize fundamentals and mastery of a text through constant review prior to proceeding to more advanced studies, and of Maharal’s strong belief in the merits of lifelong review of one’s learning. *Nidah* is not a tractate for initiating young students into the intricacies of the Talmud and yet the format of this edition is not one to appeal to older students of Talmud. More likely, the tractate was printed for students of any age who had previously studied tractate *Nidah*, but who wished to review the text on a repeated, frequent basis. This would be consistent with the phrase on the title page, “to continuously review his learning, in every season and every hour, until it will be fluent in his mouth and all that he has learned will be habitual” (Heller 2008, 298–314).

Several years after the publication of the singular edition of *Nidah* in Prague a complete, unusual small quarto format Talmud was printed in Cracow (1616–1620) by Aaron and Mordecai ben Isaac Prostitz. Printed for the use of students, it is distinguished by the inclusion of Rashi and the omission of *tosafot*. The title page of the first tractate, *Berakhot*—most tractates lack title pages—states that it is “small in size but of great quality. We have omitted *tosafot*, and in its place added the *'Arukh's* [Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome, *he-'Arukh*, 1035–ca. 1110] commentary throughout the Talmud,” and included references to important codifiers such as Maimonides, the Semag, and the *Arba'ah Turim*. Quires are only of two leaves. The text is in two columns, the inner column the Talmudic text, the outer column Rashi. The arrangement of the text of these tractates does not follow the standard (Venetian) foliation, which is noted through *Seder Mo'ed* in the outer margin with large square letters, approximately where the page in the Venetian edition begins. The standard foliation is absent from most subsequent treatises. The title page notwithstanding, only the *'Arukh's* brief explanation of terms, but not the subject-commentary, was printed. This shortened version of the *'Arukh* is not printed throughout the Talmud nor is it applied consistently in all the tractates (Heller 1992, 381–390; Rabbinovicz 1951, 84–85; Schwab 1912, 300–303).

This Talmud is of interest to us, not due to its rarity, but rather because of a singular tractate, *Bava metsi'a*. The tractate exists in two distinct formats; one format, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is consistent in format and layout with the other volumes in this Talmud. The other, possibly a *unicum*, is in the JTS library and does not include Rashi but consists of only the text. It alone, of all the tractates in this Talmud, was issued in two formats, one with and the other without Rashi. In the *Bava metsi'a* printed without Rashi, the standard foliation is noted within the text by letters the same size as the text, within parenthesis. This edition of *Bava metsi'a* resembles the 1608 *Nidah* in layout and appearance, suggesting that *Nidah* served as a model for *Bava metsi'a*.

¹³ Translation for all Hebrew classic quotes are from Judaica Press, Davka Corporation, and Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, *Soncino Classics Collection*. Chicago, IL: Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, 1996.

The close relationship between the Prague and Polish Jewish communities is well known. A number of Hebrew printers came to Poland from Prague or its environs, among them the founder of the Cracow press, Isaac Prostitz. The printers of the 1616–1620 Talmud, Isaac’s sons, Aaron and Mordecai, were certainly influenced by the Maharal and issued the small inexpensive edition of the Talmud with Rashi described above, useful to students who wished to review their learning with a basic commentary. Experienced printers and businessmen, the Prostitz brothers must have recognized that the market for such an edition was limited. Their Talmud, to be complete, required that all the volumes be consistent. Nevertheless, they did print at least one tractate, *Bava metsi’a*, a tractate popular in *yeshivot*, in two formats. One volume was printed with Rashi as part of the complete Talmud; the second volume was printed in the same format as the Prague *Nidah*, that is, without Rashi. Perhaps the Prostitz brothers wanted to see if the latter format was commercially viable, which it apparently was not, as no other tractates in this format are known to have been printed.¹⁴

Our last individual Talmudic tractate is the slightest of fragments, merely a title page of tractate *Ḳidushin* (Figure 4) and incomplete at that. Printed in Wilhermsdorf in 1735 by Hirsch ben Hayyim of Fuerth, this tractate is one of several printed in that location, a number known primarily from Johann Christoph Wibel’s *Historische Beschreibung von Wilhermsdorff* (Wibel 1742), and referenced in other bibliographic sources but no longer extant. Moshe Nathan Rosenfeld discovered a title page from the 1735 *Ḳidushin* in the genizah at Reckendorf. At the bottom of the title page there is a double-headed eagle with a crest on its chest. The crest is not blank, but contains the date, given with a chronogram “Bring upon us the light of the redemption [*Or ha-ge’ulah tavi ‘alen*], in gematria 495 = 735]” (Rosenfeld 1995, 179, no. 168).

In concluding this section on Talmudic rarities, it is worth noting an observation of Rabbinovicz (1951) as to the rarity of an entire edition of the Talmud, the Giustiniani Talmud (Venice, 1546–1651), printed by Marco Antonio Giustiniani (“Justinian”). The Giustiniani Talmud is frequently referenced on the title pages of subsequent editions of the Talmud as the source of their text. Rabbinovicz, however, observes that the Giustiniani Talmud was burned at the beginning of 1554, before it could be widely distributed, in contrast to the Bomberg editions, which had been circulated worldwide for decades and could be found everywhere, including in the eastern countries, in the hundreds and thousands. He concludes that printers in Salonika, Constantinople, Cracow, and Basel, unable to acquire a Giustiniani Talmud,

14 One additional tractate, *Sukah*, was printed with only the Talmudic text in 1722. It was printed in Offenbach, although usually it is attributed to Frankfurt on the Oder or Berlin by such authorities as Oppenheim, David ben Abraham, Isaac Metz, Eleazar Solomon von Embden, and J. Goldenthal. *Ḳohelet David: reshimat otsar ha-sefarim*, 676–677, no. 143, Hamburg, Ha-Aḥim ha-meshutafim Bon, 1826; Oppenheim, David ben Abraham, *Reshimah Tamah*, 56, Hamburg: J. M. Brauer, 1782; and Bodleian Library, and Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum hebraeorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana*. Berolini: typis A, Friedlaender, 1852), C. B. 1909.

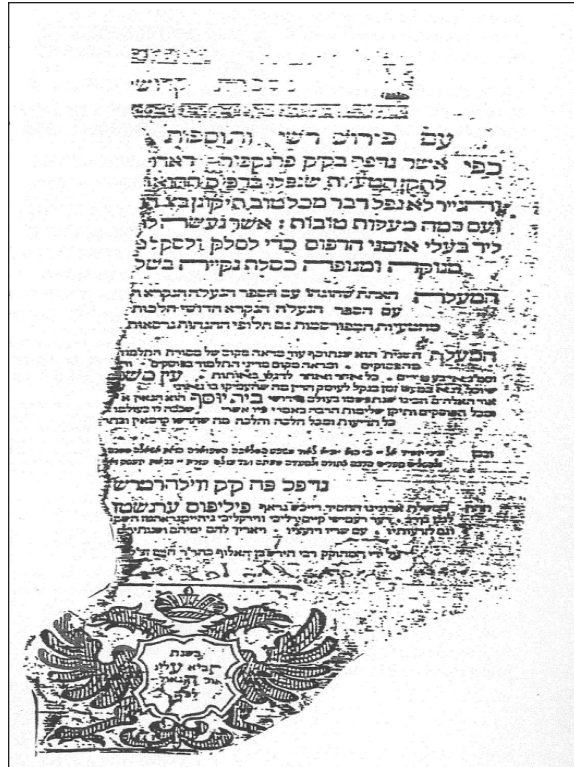


Figure 4. Tractate *Kidushin*, 1735

[T]ook the Bomberg edition and transcribed the Giustiniani additions in the margins from copies belonging to individuals unwilling to sell them. Do not wonder at this, for I have a complete edition of the Bomberg Talmud, and written on the margins are the Giustiniani additions for the entire Talmud in a fine Rashi script. Also, what I said, that they were unable to acquire a Giustiniani edition, is not difficult to appreciate, for while it is possible to find complete Bomberg Talmuds . . . you only find two or three examples from the Giustiniani edition, and from some tractates it is almost as if even individual copies cannot be found. (Rabbinovicz 1951, 68, 70n2)¹⁵

15 The Giustiniani additions referred to by Rabbinovicz were indices that have been reprinted in all subsequent Talmud editions. The indices, prepared by the editor, Joshua Boaz ben Simon Baruch, are *'En mishpat*, *Ner mityah* originally two distinct indices, giving references in halachic codes; *Torah Or* (although that title was not originally used), providing biblical sources; and *Mesoret ha-Talmud* (now *Mesoret ha-Shas*), cross references in the Talmud. Yet another fragment of a Talmudic treatise, one that supports Rabbinovicz's conclusion, is a large format, ten folio attractive edition of tractate *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, surviving as a *unicum* fragment in the JTS library. Printed in 1578 at the Cracow press of Isaac ben Aaron Prostitz, the text of the title page is taken from the Giustiniani Talmud, although this tractate, as well as two others printed at this time, *'Avodah zarah*, and *Ketubot*, is based on the Bomberg Talmud. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* is completed with pages from the Bomberg Talmud, although it is not clear whether that is because no more of the tractate was printed in Cracow or due to another reason peculiar to this particular copy.

BOOKS BURNED IN ITALY IN THE MID-SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The burning of the Talmud in Italy was not limited to that work, many other unrelated books being swept up in the mindless fury of destruction. A notable example is *Lehem Yehudah* (Figure 5), a commentary on *Pirke Avot* by Rabbi Judah ben Samuel Lerma Sephardi, of whom little is known except for the events related to the publication of his book. That work is a commentary of a philosophic but traditional nature, based on the writings of Rabbi Joseph Albo, Don Isaac Abrabanel, and Rabbi Isaac Arama, as well as Talmudic and Midrashic sources. Nevertheless, Lerma is an original thinker, often expressing his own views.



Figure 5. *Lehem Yehudah*, 1553

First printed in Venice at the Bragadin press in 1553, *Lehem Yehudah* was reprinted by Israel Cornelius Adelkind at the Sabbioneta press of Tobias Foa (1554). Lerma has entitled his commentary *Lehem Yehudah*, because “the bread [*lehem*] from which I have benefitted is the bread of Torah, for we find the Torah is called bread, as it states, ‘Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mixed’” (Proverbs 9:5). Lerma continues in the introduction to the reprint, recounting what befell the first edition of his book [my translation]:

I printed my book [*Lehem Yehudah*] in Venice at the beginning of “for the Almighty *Shadai* [in gematira = 1553] has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20) and the ruler of Rome [the Pope] decreed that throughout the kingdoms of Edom should be burned and they burned the Talmud and the *aggadot* of the Talmud of R. Jacob ben Habib. In Ven-

ice, in the month of Marheshvan [bitter Heshvan], which is as its name, it was decreed that the Talmud, the *aggadot* mentioned above, and Rav Alfasi and *mishnayot* should be burned on the Holy Shabbat, and with them they burned all of my books, of which 1,500 copies had been printed. I lost all that was in Venice and not even a single copy remained to me, not even a single leaf from the original for a remembrance. I was forced to rewrite [my book] from memory from the beginning. After I had completed three chapters, I found one copy from the original press in the hands of non-Jews who had saved it from the fire. I acquired it at a dear price, and when I looked into it, may His name be blessed, I saw that the second [copy] was more complete than the first.

Another work that was also seized and burned is *Sefer Ziyoni*, a kabbalistic commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Menahem ben Meir Zioni (late fourteenth–early fifteenth century). The author reputedly served as rabbi in Cologne, Germany, his name appearing as one of the signatories on a document dated 1382. *Sefer Ziyoni* is based on the *Zohar*, *Sefer ha-bahir*, the commentary of Nahmanides, and the *Keter shem tov* of Rabbi Abraham of Cologne, as well as including Ziyoni's own novellae. *Sefer Ziyoni* is representative of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz, with numerous references to the writings of Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worm's *Sode razaya*. It is unusual, for a work of this time and place, in that it also relies heavily on the Sephardic kabbalistic tradition. An interesting first in the book is the mention of Norway, not previously noted in a Hebrew work. Zioni also wrote a kabbalistic work on the powers of evil and demonology, entitled *Sefer tsefuno Tsiyoni*, which is partly preserved in manuscript.

Sefer Ziyoni was first printed in Cremona in 1559 at the press of Vincenzo Conti. The civil authorities had permitted Conti to operate a Hebrew press, and even initially resisted the Dominicans' efforts to curtail its operations. Their efforts were futile, however, as in 1559, Spanish soldiers led by the apostate Dominican Sixtus of Siena made a house-to-house search of Jewish homes, looking for prohibited books. They broke into the Conti press; among the works seized were a thousand copies of the *Ziyoni*. This was done despite the fact that the editor of the book was Vittorio Eliano, grandson of the great grammarian Elijah Levita (Elijah Bahur Ashkenazi), an apostate and member of a Dominican commission to review Hebrew books, and that it is completed with the imprimatur of the Dominican Inquisitor, Alberius, Vicar of Cremona. (Benayahu 1971, 77–84).

With the accession of Cardinal Giovanni Angelo de Medici of Milan as Pope Pius IV—Paul IV who was uncompromisingly hostile to Hebrew books had died in August 1559—the reprinting of the *Ziyoni* was permitted, a year after it had been burned. Unlike *Lehem Yehuda*, a small number of copies of the first printing of *Ziyoni* survived the fire. The second 1560 edition of *Ziyoni* is set in square letters in contrast to the first edition, which was set in rabbinic (Rashi) letters. The change in fonts is attributable to the destruction of some of Conti's type in 1559 and his subsequent transfer of part of his remaining typographical equipment elsewhere. Another difference is that the first edition includes a table of verses and sayings discussed in the text, not in the reprint. Text omitted, in both editions, apparently not mandated by the censor, may have been due to the editor exercising caution. In some instances the second edition is the more complete of the two (Amram [1909] 1963, 314–314; Benayahu 1971, 41n79; Dan 1968, 259–262).

FROM THE CAIRO GENIZAH

Among the many serendipitous findings at the Cairo Genizah were single copies of two books printed by Gershom ben Eliezer Soncino, the eponymous grandson of the illustrious pioneer of Hebrew printing, Gershom Soncino. This latter Gershom Soncino was the first printer in Egypt and these books are the first to have been printed in the Middle East. It is possible that other titles may have been printed by Gershom in Cairo, but were lost or only await discovery. Both titles are *unicums*, although fragments of *Pitron ḥalomot* exist elsewhere. There was no further printing of Hebrew books in Cairo until 1740, when Abraham ben Moses Yatom issued *Hoḳ le-Yiśra-^{el}*; followed by yet another hiatus, for 165 years, until 1905, when Hebrew printing resumed. Parenthetically, the first Arabic press in Egypt was not founded until 1821.

The two books printed by Gershom are *Pitron ḥalomot*, attributed to Rav Hai ben Sherira Gaon of Pumbedita (939–1038), and *Refu'ot ha-Talmud*. *Pitron ḥalomot* is on the interpretation of dreams, *Refu'ot ha-Talmud* is remedies from the Talmud. It has been suggested (Yaari 1936, 57) that both books were printed in 1557 although the dates are uncertain, depending on whether the dates are according to the full era (*lamed-pe-gimel*) or to the abbreviated era (*lamed-pe-ḳof*), the latter giving a date of 1562. The books are physically small and printed on paper of poor quality. Avraham Yaari comments that this Gershom ben Eliezer “left Constantinople to try his luck at his family’s profession in Egypt. However, it appears that he wasn’t very successful, for the few books he printed are small, undistinguished, and were not widely circulated, their distribution apparently being limited to Egypt. If not for the discovery of the Cairo Geniza his name and his press’s work would have been forgotten” (Yaari 1936, 53; Cowley 1935, 89–90; Habermann 1978, 93–94; Rowland-Smith 1989, 16).

CONSTANTINOPLE IMPRINTS

Two works, both printed on the same date in 1559, both printed in Constantinople at the press of Joseph ben Samuel ha-Levi Hachim, and both authored by members of the ibn Gabbai family, are Rabbi Meir ben Ezekiel ibn Gabbai’s *Derekh emunah* and his son, Rabbi Hayyim ben Meir ibn Gabbai’s *Pesaḥ le-ha-Shem*.

Derekh emunah was written in 1539 by Meir ibn Gabbai (1480–ca. 1540), a prominent kabbalist and among the exiles from Spain. It is an explication of the kabbalistic doctrine of the ten *sefirot* (divine emanations) that are the bridge between God, the First Cause, and the world. Organized in a format of ten questions and answers, *Derekh emunah* is based on the *Sha‘ar ha-sho‘el* of the famed kabbalist, Rabbi ‘Azriel of Gerona (early thirteenth century). Ibn Gabbai wrote *Derekh emunah* in response to a query from Joseph ha-Levi, a student who apparently was not satisfied with the earlier work. That student turned to ibn Gabbai requesting more detailed and clearer explanations, the response accounting for *Derekh emunah*’s format. The contents, based on the reprints, are outlined in an introduction, which except for the first response that the world has an Overseer, all address questions relating to the ten *sefirot*.

Two leaves only survive, that is, the title page and introduction from Rabbi Shneur ben Judah Falcon, the author's son-in-law who brought the book to press. Habermann suggests (1961) that publication of this edition, the fragment is dated Wednesday, 8 Kislev, "my *yakir* [Hebrew for "dear"; 320 in gematria = November 18, 1559] son" (Jeremiah 31:19) was not completed.¹⁶ *Derekh emunah* was reprinted soon after, however, in Padua (1562) and again in Cracow (1577). Gabbai's other works are *Tola 'at Ya 'akov* (Constantinople, 1560) and *Avodat ha-ḳodesh* (*Marot Elohim*, Venice, 1566–1568). Both are kabbalistic works, the former on prayer, the latter, considered Gabbai's most important work, encompasses kabbalistic doctrine (Habermann 1961, 104, no. 6; Yaari 1967, 109n157).

Pesaḥ le-ha-Shem, as the title suggests, is on the Haggadah. The book was authored by Rabbi Hayyim ben Meir ibn Gabbai, also a kabbalist, but little else appears to be known about this Gabai. It too was brought to press by Shneur Falcon, Hayyim ibn Gabbai's brother-in-law. The title page dates the beginning of work to Wednesday, 8 Kislev, in the year of "One generation shall praise [*yeshabeah*; 320 in gematria = November 18, 1559] [your works] to another" (Psalms 145:4), the same date as *Derekh emunah* but utilizing a different verse. There is an introduction by Falcon (1b–2a) beginning on the verso of the title page, followed by a brief introduction by Hayyim ibn Gabbai (2a), and the text *Seder aggadah*, which has *halahkot* and the text of the Haggadah.

In his introduction, Falcon discusses how, now that it is no longer possible to bring animal offerings, prayer has taken their place. Similarly, we were commanded to bring a Passover offering (*zevaḥ Pesaḥ*) to arouse our hearts to remember what was done for us in Egypt. Falcon has printed these books by Meir ibn Gabbai on various subjects to address the thirst of the people and answer their questions, and that of Hayyim ibn Gabbai "For Torah and for testimony" (Isaiah 8:20). The beginning of the Haggadah explains the *sod* (esoteric wisdom) of the utensils, koshering in boiling water, *matsah shemurah*, etc. and then the beginning of the text of the Haggadah (f. 7).

Pesaḥ le-ha-Shem exists in a small number of fragments, primarily of the first quire (4^o: 4 ff.), in the NLI and two copies in the JTS library, one of the two with variations. It is also reported that ten copies of the same quire are noted in a catalogue of old printed Hebrew books in Bulgaria. Here too it is suggested that printing was not completed, Isaac Yudlov writing that in the extant copies it is the first quire only that is to be found. He notes that in the NLI there is a second quire of folios 5–8 (Yaari 1967, 109–110n158; Yudlov 1997, 109–110n158; Bet ha-sefarim ha-le'umi ve-ha-universita'i bi-Yerushalayim et al. 1984, 4n21).

A very different work is *Kelal ḳatan* (Constantinople, Abraham Franco, 1665, 4^o: 16 ff.; Figure 6), a kabbalistic discourses on *parashat Ha'azinu* (Deuteronomy 32) by Mattathias Lieberman ben Benjamin Wolf Bloch (ca. 1610/1620–ca. 1668). Bloch is primarily remembered today

¹⁶ November 18, 1559 is the Gregorian equivalent of 8 Kislev 5320. The equivalent Julian date is November 8, 1559.

for his important role in the Shabbatean movement. Born to an influential Cracow family—his grandfather was one of the community’s *parnasim* (benefactors)—Bloch studied under Rabbi Menahem Mendel Krochmal (ca. 1600–1661) and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (d. 1664). After his experiences during the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648–1649 (*taḥ ve-taṭ*), Bloch determined to go up to *Eretz Israel*. On the way he met, either in Constantinople or Izmir, Shabbetai Zevi, becoming one of that false prophet’s leading adherents. Zevi entitled Bloch King Asa and appointed him the Shabbatean representative in Egypt, where because of his learning he was called a *gaon* (mastermind). After Shabbetai Zevi’s apostasy Bloch relocated to Iraq, serving as a *dayan* (arbiter), and continuing to support the Shabbatean movement. *Kelal ḳatan* was published by Bloch on the way to *Eretz Israel*.

In his introduction, Bloch informs that he wrote a desirable interpretation in the manner of *sod* on the entire Torah, calling it after his name *Matat yahu*; it should be a remembrance for him after his death. It is entitled *Kelal ḳatan* because it is one part of his *Kelal gadol* on every *parashah*. Because of what befell him he lacked the money to publish the entire work, so that he is printing this one discourse delivered on *Shabbat Teshuvah* in 1620 in the city of Yas in the synagogue of Rabbi Isaac Moses Rofe ben Abraham Crispin. There are pages of verse with allusions to Chmielnicki massacres (*taḥ ve-taṭ*) and a testament to his son. The initial letters of alternating stanzas on the first page of verse are an acrostic of Mattathias Lieberman, beginning, “‘Why then does a living man complain’ (Lamentations 3:39), in that his throat is open like a sepulcher” (see Jeremiah 5:16). The initial letters of the first column in the second page are alphabetic, the second column spelling Lieberman ben Rabbi Wolf Bloch (Scholem 1973; Yaari 1961, 155–156, no. 259).



Figure 6. *Kelal ḳatan*, 1665

This is the only edition of *Kelal katan*, Bloch's only published work. Yaari knew of one copy only of *Kelal katan*, supposedly a *unicum*, in the NLI. However, there is also a copy in the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad – Ohel Yosef Yitzhak. Another copy was offered for auction at Sotheby's in 1983 (Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc. 1983, no. 98).

MESHAL HA-ḲADMONI

We conclude with a rare octavo edition (Venice, Giovanni di Gara, 1610: 8⁰) of a popular illustrated collection of moral fables and animal stories—Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon ibn Abi Sahula's (b. 1244) *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni*. Little is known about ibn Sahula, except that he was a scholar and poet, born in Guadalajara (Castile), a student of the kabbalist Rabbi Moses of Burgos (1230/1235–ca. 1300), and that he wandered about for much of his life. It is surmised, from the many references to the nature of diseases and their cures, that ibn Sahula was a physician. Ibn Sahula had concentrated on secular poetry until, at the age of thirty-seven in about 1281, his outlook changed and he began to write *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni*.

In the introduction, ibn Sahula writes that his material is original but based on the Talmud and *midrashim*, and that in style he has followed the example of the prophets who presented moral lessons in allegorical form. He also writes to show that Hebrew, now neglected for Arabic fables, is as suitable and fine a vehicle for conveying moral lessons as Arabic. Nevertheless, the dialogue in *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni* is written in the Arabic *maqama* style, that is, rhymed prose and verse. The stories show both kabbalistic and Indian influence. *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni* is divided into five *sha'arim* (portals), each inculcating a different moral value.

The *sha'arim* are “intelligence and wisdom, to teach the simple guile”; “repentance”; “good counsel”; “humility”; and “awe and fear of God”. The text is comprised of seventy-nine parables, each accompanied by a woodcut illustration, in which the author and an adversary debating the value of moral virtues, the author arguing that it is moral conduct that leads to happiness, both sides employing parables and animal fables to support their positions (Figure 7). It is the animals that speak, discoursing on scientific and philosophic issues, making use of biblical verses and Talmudic passages. The deer, knowledgeable in Talmud, lectures on matters of science; the rooster, a biblical scholar, on the four humors¹⁷ and medicine; the dog on psychology; the ram on positive and negative judgment; and the gazelle on astronomy. *Meshal ha-ḳadmoni* is replete with puns, parody, and tales within tales.

Meshal ha-ḳadmoni has been published several times, beginning with a Brescia (ca. 1491), followed by Venice (ca. 1547, 1610, 1644) and Frankfurt am Oder (1693, Yiddish) editions, but the 1644 edition is uncertain. The inclusion in this description of *unicums*, fragments, and other rare editions is because the 1610 edition is extant in two copies, one in the Royal Library in

¹⁷ Humor in the sense of body fluid.

Copenhagen, the other in the Valmadonna Trust Library, each of only four leaves. It is possible that printing was discontinued prior to completion due to the death of the printer, di Gara. The above description is of the ca. 1547 Venice edition (Habermann and Yudlov 1981, 131, no. 273; Habermann 1961, 106 no. 12; Valmadonna Trust and Hill 1989 n32; Waxman [1933] 1960, II, 596–597).



Figure 7. Meshal ha-kadmoni, ca. 1547. The illustration is from this edition, as no copy from the 1610 edition is available

As noted above, the article describes a small number of varied examples of rare books, several extant as *unicums*, single extant copies, some as fragments only, and others in limited numbers. The examples cited here are rare primarily due to usage and persecution. While there is no common thread to these books but for their rarity it is worth noting that with the exception of *Kelal katan*, certainly an outlier among the books described here, all have been reprinted, many several times. Indeed Rashi and the Talmudic tractates are regularly published and republished to this day. The rarity than of the titles described here is of the edition rather than the book itself. Nevertheless, the perils of books, often great rarities, should not be underestimated, as these examples make evident, but also that,

“There is hope for your future, says the Lord, that your books [children] shall come again to their own border.” (Jeremiah 31:16)

“And you shall be secure, because there is hope; you shall look around you, and you shall take your rest in safety.” (Job 11:18)

SOURCES

- Amram, David Werner. [1909] 1963. *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy; Being Chapters in the History of the Hebrew Printing Press*. London: Holland Press.
- Benayahu, Meir. 1971. *ha-Defus ha-‘Ivri bi-Ḳremonah: toldot bet ha-defus shel Venitsyantso Ḳontl ... yisud ha-defus be-Riya di Trento uve-Sabyonetaḥ u-meḳomam be-toldot ha-defus be-Italyah* [Added t.p.: Hebrew Printing at Cremona; Its History and Bibliography]. Yerushalayim: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi. [Hebrew]
- Bet ha-sefarim ha-le’umi yeha-universita’i bi-Yerushalayim, Yitshak Yudlov, and G. J. Ormann. 1984. *The Israel Mehlman Collection in the Jewish National and University Library: An Annotated Catalogue of the Hebrew Books, Booklets and Pamphlets*. Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library Press. [English and Hebrew]
- Brachfeld, Menaḥem Mendel, and Yermie Brachfeld. 1987. *Sefer Yosef Halel: be’urim ye-he‘arot ‘al pe. Rashi ‘a. ha-T*. Antwerpen: Sh. Hoṭterer. [Hebrew]
- Cowley, A. E. 1935. “Ein Soncino-druck aus Kairo 1566.” In *Festschrift für Aron Freimann zum 60 Geburtstag*, edited by Alexander Marx and Hermann Meyer, 89–90. Berlin: Soncino-Gesellschaft der Freunde des Jüdischen Buches. Geburtstag.
- Dan, Joseph. 1968. *Torat ha-sod shel Ḥasidut Ashkenaz* [Added t.p.: Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism]. Yerushalayim: Mosad Byalik. [Hebrew]
- Dimitrovsky, Haim Z. 1979. *Śeride Bavli: mavo bibliografi histori*. Nuyork: Bet ha-midrash le-rabanim ba-Amerikah. [Hebrew]
- Freimann, A., and Moses Marx. [1924] 1968. *ha-Otsar li-melekhet ha-defus ha-‘Ivri ha-rishonah ba-me’ah ha-ḥamesh ‘eśreh* [Added t.p.: Thesaurus Typographiae Hebraicae Saeculi xv.; Hebrew Printing during the Fifteenth Century]. Jerusalem: Universitas Booksellers. [Hebrew]
- Glatzer, Mordechai. 1988. “Early Hebrew Printing.” In *A Sign and a Witness: 2,000 years of Hebrew books and illuminated manuscripts*, edited by Leonard Singer Gold. New York: New York Public Library.
- Habermann, Avraham Meir. 1961. “Ill-stared books.” In *Areshet, sefer shanah le-heker ha-sefer ha-‘ivri* [Added t.p.: Areshet: An Annual of Hebrew Booklore], edited by Israel Mehlman, Abraham Meir Habermann, Naftali Ben-Menaḥem, and Yizhak Raphael, vol. III, 102–143. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk. [Hebrew]

- . 1968. *ha-Sefer ha 'Ivri ba-hitpathuto: mi-simanim le-otioyot umi-megilot le-sefer* [Added t.p.: The History of the Hebrew book; from marks to letters, from scroll to book]. Jerusalem: R. Mas. [Hebrew]
- . 1978. “ha-Madpisim bene Soncino.” In *Peraḳim be-toldot ha-madpisim ha- 'Ivrim ve- 'inyene sefarim* [Added t.p.: Studies in the History of Hebrew Printers and Books], 13–94. Yerushalayim: Re'uvem Mas. [Hebrew]
- Habermann, Avraham Meir, and Yitsḥaq Yudlov. 1981. *ha-Madpis Zo'an Di Garah u-reshimat sifre bet defuso, 324–370 (1564–1610)* [Added t.p.: Giovanni Di Gara, printer, Venice, 1564-1610]. [Israel]: Mekhon Haberman le-meḥkere sifrut. [Hebrew]
- Havlin, Shlomoh Zalman. 2007. “Aaron ben Jacob Ha-Kohen of Lunel.” In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, vol. I, 213–214. Detroit: Macmillan Reference.
- Heller, Marvin J. 1992. *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud*. Brooklyn, NY: 'Am ha-sefer.
- . 2004. *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2008. *Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2011. *The Seventeenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- . 2013A. “Sixteen Leaves or Less: Small Hebrew Works of the Seventeenth Century.” In *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, 253–284. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- . 2013B. “Books not Printed, Dreams not Realized.” In *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, 285–303. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- ĪAkerson, S. M. 2004. *Ḳatalog ha-inḳunabulim ha- 'Ivriyim me-osef sifriyat Bet ha-midrash le-Rabanim ba-Ameriḳah*. 2 vols. Nyu Yorḳ: Bet ha-midrash le-Rabanim ba-Ameriḳah.
- Kestenbaum & Company. 1998. “Fine Judaica: Books, Manuscripts and Works of Art...June 23, 1998.” New York: Kestenbaum & Company.
- Marx, Alexander, Menahem Hayyim Schmelzer, and Gerson David Cohen. 1977. *Bibliographical Studies and Notes on Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Ktav Publishing House.

- Mintz, Sharon Liberman and Gabriel M. Goldstein, editors. 2005. *Printing the Talmud: from Bomberg to Schottenstein*. New York: Yeshiva University Museum.
- Offenberg, A. K. 1992. "The Earliest Printed Editions of Rashi." In *A Choice of Corals: Facets of Fifteenth Century Hebrew Printing*, 133–47. Nieuwkoop: De Graaf.
- Offenberg, A. K., and C. Moed-Van Walraven. 1990. *Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections: A First International Census*. Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers.
- Rabbinovicz, Raphael Nathan Nata. 1951. *Ma'amar 'al hadpasat ha-Talmud: toldot hadpasat ha-Talmud*. Yerushalayim: Mosad ha-Rav Kūq. [Hebrew]
- Rosenfeld, Moshe N., and Ralf Rossmeißl. 1995. *Jewish Printing in Wilhermsdorf: A Concise Bibliography of Hebrew and Yiddish Publications Printed in Wilhermsdorf Between 1670 and 1739, Showing Aspects of Jewish Life in Mittelfranken Three Centuries Ago; Based on Public & Private Collections and Genizah Discoveries*. Jewish Printing in Germany 1. London: M.N. Rosenfeld.
- Rowland-Smith, Diana. 1989. "The Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Egypt." *The British Library Journal* XV: 16–22.
- Scholem, Gershom. 1961. "R. Mattityahu Bloch, Prophet of Shabbatai Zevi." *Kiryat Sefer* XXXVI: 525–533. [Hebrew]
- . 1973. *Sabbatai Sevi; The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Schwab, Moise. 1912. "Une Editione Rarissime du Talmud." *Revue des études juives* LXIII: 300–303.
- Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc. 1983. "Highly Important Judaica: Printed Books and Manuscripts: Volume I." New York, June 23, 1983.
- Toaff, Ariel. 2007. "De' Rossi, Giovanni Bernardo." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed, Vol. 5, 598. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Accessed June 20, 2013.
- Teicher, J. L. 1948. "Fragments of Unknown Hebrew Incunables." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 1 (1): 105–110.
- Valmadonna Trust, and Brad Sabin Hill. 1989. *Hebraica (saec. X ad saec. XVI): Manuscripts*

and Early printed Books from the Library of the Valmadonna Trust: an Exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York: Catalogue. [London, England]: The Library.

Waxman, Meyer. [1933] 1960. *A History of Jewish Literature*. Cranbury: T. Yoseloff.

Wibel, Johann Christian. 1742. *Historische Beschreibung von Wilhermsdorff, darinnen von des Orts Nahmen, Lage, Erbauung, Ab- und Aufnahme, Besitzern und anderen Umständen, wie auch in einem Anhang von den beeden Ritter-Gütern Neuses und Buchklingen zu- länglich Nachricht gegeben wird*. Nürnberg: Lochner.

Yaari, Avraham. 1936. *ha-Defus ha-‘Ivri be-artsot ha-mizrah* [Added t. p.: Hebrew Printing in the East./ “Special supplement to ‘Kirjath sepher,’ v. xiii, xvii.”]. Yerushala[y]im: ha-Ḥevrah le-Hotsa’at sefarim ‘al yad ha-Universitah ha-‘Ivrit. [Hebrew]

———. 1945–6. “Early Hebrew Books.” *Kiryat Sefer* XXII: 234–236. Jerusalem. [Hebrew]

———. 1958. “Šerefat ha-Talmud be-italiyah.” In *Mehkere sefer: peraḳim be-toldot ha-sefer ha-‘Ivri*, 198–234. Yerushalayim: Mosad ha-Rav Ḳuḳ, [Hebrew]

———. 1967. *ha-Defus ha-‘Ivri be-Ḳuṣhta: ... me-reshito ‘ad perots milhemet ha-‘olam ha-sheniyah, u-reshimat ha-sefarim she-nidpesu bah* [Added t.p.: Hebrew Printing at Constantinople; Its History and Bibliography./ “Supplement to Kirjath sepher, vol. 42.”]. Jerusalem: Hotsa’at sefarim ‘al shem Y. L. Magnes, ha-Universitah ha-‘Ivrit. [Hebrew]

Yudlov, Isaac. 1997. *Otsar ha-hagadot: bibliografya shel hagadot pesaḥ*=*The Haggadah thesaurus*. Jerusalem: Magnes. [Hebrew]