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# Articles and notes

## The Manuscript Tradition of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel (Ethiopian Jews): Form and Content. A Preliminary Analysis\*

*Sophia Dege-Müller, Ruhr-Universität Bochum*

The manuscript tradition of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, the Jews of Ethiopia, has not been studied before. This article aims to provide a first tentative analysis of a number of features of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscript tradition, hoping to contribute to a new understanding of this phenomenon. The Betä ʿĪsraʿel lived in close coexistence, albeit not always peaceful, with Christian Ethiopians. The Christian manuscripts must be seen as the starting point from which the Betä ʿĪsraʿel developed their own tradition, by adopting and adapting scribal features. Previous scholarly works on the Betä ʿĪsraʿel have focused mostly on their texts, leaving the carriers of these texts aside. When commenting on the manuscripts, scholars commonly made negative remarks about their quality: a misjudgment that this article hopes to overcome. Some 70 Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts have been examined for this study, resulting in new descriptions of their features and even discovering one genuinely new feature.

The Jews of Ethiopia, known under the endonym Betä ʿĪsraʿel,<sup>1</sup> have been studied extensively in the past. The focus of most of these studies were their origin and religious practices, their literature, and lastly their fate in Israel

\* Research for this article has been carried out under the auspices of the project ‘JewsEast: Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean’, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) within the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovative Programme (grant agreement no. 647467). Several friends helped me to develop this article with their valuable advice. All conclusions and mistakes are obviously my own. I want to thank especially Sisay Sahile and Ted Erho for their repeated assistance, and Bar Kribus, Dorothea Reule and Jonas Karlsson for reading earlier versions of this text, and very helpful feedback and support.

For the sake of conciseness, the following abbreviations are used for the shelf marks of the manuscripts in the most frequently occurring collections: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France = BnF, followed by the collection (Éth., d’Abbadie; followed by the shelf mark); Tel Aviv, Sourasky Central Library, Faitlovitch = Faitlovitch (followed by the shelf mark); Jerusalem, National Library of Israel = Jerusalem, NatLib (followed by the shelf mark). In addition, the manuscripts photographed (and in the recent past digitized) for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, at Collegeville, MN, St. John’s University, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, shall simply be referred to as EMMML no. (followed by the number).

after the mass migrations of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>2</sup> A lot has been written on these topics, allowing me not to go any further into these matters.

In the discussions about the origins of the Ethiopian Jews, this paper follows the scholarly hypothesis of an ethnogenesis that finalized sometime around the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Being influenced especially by the Christians with whom the (emerging) Betä ʿĪsraʾel shared the same areas mostly in the Amhara region around the city of Gondär and in the Səmen mountains, their traditions follow the Christian Ethiopian customs closely in several aspects, especially regarding their literary corpus.<sup>4</sup> Yet, it is not the texts of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel that this study focuses on, but the carriers of said texts—the manuscripts—which have not been studied systematically before. This article aims to provide a first tentative analysis of several features of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel

Where of use, I provide text IDs according to the *Clavis Aethiopica* (CAe), a repertory of textual units attested in Gəʿəz literature being developed within the digital research environment *Beta maṣāḥəft*. It allows to refer univocally to a specific text with its CAe number. All textual units can be filtered at <<https://betamasaheft.eu/works/list>> (all hyperlinks in this article were last accessed on 10 May 2020).

- 1 In the past, the group was usually referred to as the Falasha (It. Falascia, Fr. Falacha, Ger. Falascha or Falaschen, and several variants in different languages). This term is not accepted by the group any more, and should be avoided. In fact as early as in 1851, Antoine d’Abbadie recorded these words from Betä ʿĪsraʾel elders, ‘Nous regardons le mot Falasha comme une injure, et nous nous nommons *Kayla*, mot qui signifie “qui n’a pas traversé la mer,” [...] Néanmoins en Quara les israélites acceptent le nom de Falasha. Dans la langue de ce pays, dite *Huarasa*, le mot *Kayog* signifie *traversa*, et *Kayla*, *ne traversa pas*’. He adds in a footnote that the use of the word *Kayla* (or here the variant *Kaylasha*) is common in Armaçəho, a district north of Gondär (d’Abbadie 1851, 240). Joseph Halévy adds to this discussion: ‘Au milieu de leurs familles, ils emploient l’expression *maison d’Israël* [Betä ʿĪsraʾel] ou simplement Israël, tandis que le nom de *Aihoud*, judéen, juif, est presque inconnu’ (Halévy 1869, 287). This regional prevalence for the term *Kayla* in Armaçəho, noted by d’Abbadie, is still ongoing as field research by Bar Kribus and myself showed in 2019, obviously not as an endonym, but among the local Kəmant population.
- 2 See the discussion of several of these points in Dege-Müller 2018, especially for further references.
- 3 While this is not a uniform theory, the following works present good introduction: Krempel 1972, Shelemay 1986, Abbink 1990, and Quirin 1992 (and in response Abbink 1994).
- 4 For an overview, see Conti Rossini 1919–1920 (with remarks on the manuscripts on p. 578), Leslau 1951, Aešcoly 1951, and Kaplan 1990a (Hebrew). Several of the shorter prayers and liturgical texts have been published (for example Halévy 1877b, 1911). Missing is, however, a study of their major texts, their versions of the Old Testament in general and the Books of Enoch (*Henok*) and Jubilees (*Kufale*) in particular. Judging by the length of especially the latter two texts in the manuscripts, it could be assumed that the versions used may be abridged or shortened.

manuscript tradition.<sup>5</sup> Besides meeting a scholarly interest in their manuscript culture, this research might also serve the Betä ʿĪsraʾel community, as they have lost countless manuscripts when migrating, either because they were left behind in Ethiopia, or vanished on the way.<sup>6</sup>

Studies of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel all agree that the group was mostly illiterate, and did not compose any historical writings of their own.<sup>7</sup> Considering the evidence found in the manuscripts and presented further below, this claim of illiteracy should be reconsidered. What is true is that very few descriptions of the group had come down to us prior to their contact with European Jews and Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. After these contacts, the customs of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel have changed quite drastically. Both Jewish emissaries and Christian missionaries introduced modern schools, with the former also introducing Hebrew, a language previously unknown to the group.<sup>8</sup>

### *Manuscript tradition of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel: state of the art*

As already mentioned, most previous studies have focused on the texts and not on the manuscripts or the general scribal tradition of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel. If occurring at all, such remarks have been made in passing. Common to all works is the negative light they shed on the Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts.

Hiob Ludolf once remarked that the end of Exodus in the Ethiopic translation is incomplete; according to Antoine d'Abbadie, this is still true for the Pentateuch of the 'Fālaša'.<sup>9</sup> In his description of MS BnF, d'Abbadie 150, the French scholar, who probably was the first to collect a considerable number of manuscripts of the group, states: 'mauvaise écriture, ainsi qu'il en abonde chez les Fālaša'.<sup>10</sup> Many other scholars remarked on the orthographical shortcomings. For example, Aeščoly writes: 'L'absence de la voyelle finale -a mar-

5 For the future, I am planning an extensive project to systematically catalogue Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts.

6 The history of MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87 (see <[https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL\\_ALEPH003899511/NLI#\\$FL47653373](https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH003899511/NLI#$FL47653373)>) provides a good example for the perilous track some of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel made to leave Ethiopia. See also the description in Hayon 2003, 5.

7 Naive as I was, Dege-Müller (2018, 278) is no exception: 'Even though their liturgy and other ritual services were based on written scriptures, nothing has come down to us written by their own hands to tell anything about their history; no historical texts, no legal documents, not even hagiographies of their most revered holy men'.

8 There are legends about knowledge of Hebrew among the group, according to which they forgot about the language because they intermingled with Christians, see Leslau 1946–1947, 89–90.

9 Ludolf 1681, III.4.2–3 = Ludolf 1682, 261–262; d'Abbadie 1859, 29.

10 D'Abbadie 1859, 163. See <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10087882s/fl.image>>.

quant soit l'accusatif soit l'état construit est fréquente. Cette absence est habituelle notamment dans des mots finissant en ን ፣ ት ፣ et ድ ፣'.<sup>11</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay sums up previous descriptions like this:

Those who have studied Falasha manuscripts comment on irregularities in orthography and grammar, as well as inconsistency in handling final vowels. A dialectic between the oral and written traditions may well account for many of these. For example, vowels silent in speech are often sung in liturgical performance, perhaps contributing to scribal confusion. The monks and dabtarās who copied Beta Israel manuscripts transmitted the oral tradition as well and were almost certainly the conduits of texts from one domain of the Beta Israel tradition to another.<sup>12</sup>

Denise Margaret Hayon adds another thought on this issue: 'The researchers of written texts generally had access only to those manuscripts acquired and brought back to Europe by travellers to Ethiopia: a limited corpus, and possibly not the best or most complete texts. (It is likely that the Beta Israel priests would have kept these for their own use and would not have entrusted them to outsiders)'.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, the (low) education of scribes (see the following section), a lack of standardized orthography and the influence of regional dialects must have influenced the quality of Betä Ḥsra'el manuscripts.

- 11 Aešcoly 1951, 15. The list of authors is long, and basically includes every scholar who ever worked on texts of this group. A recent example from Jan Dochhorn (2017, 194): '[D]urchgängig sind sie [die Texte] in vergleichsweise späten Handschriften überliefert (gewöhnlich aus dem 19. Jahrhundert), deren Text erheblich verderbt ist'. He continues: 'Die Grenzen zwischen apokryphem und allgemein religiösem Schrifttum verschwimmen bei den Falascha', which, however, is rather imprecise as the Betä Ḥsra'el simply have no concept for apocryphal texts, all the texts they use being of a 'canonical' standing, to stay in this wording.

Since Dochhorn 2017 quotes material produced by the Ethio-SPaRe project (based in Hamburg in 2009–2015, see <<https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/ethiospare.html>>), there is a point that I would like to make in this connection. The Ethio-SPaRe project does not hold any manuscripts, but only digital copies. Since the manuscripts are still in their place of origin, the correct quotation should be (however bulky it might be) e.g. 'MS Soṭa, Soṭa Dābrā Sālam Qəddus Mika'el Mādḥane 'Alām, Ethio-SPaRe SDM-021'. The manuscript images and a short description are accessible online, formerly at <[https://mycms-vs03.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib\\_document\\_00002433](https://mycms-vs03.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_document_00002433)> and now also in TEI XML-format at <<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/ESsdm021>>. Besides, when using the metadata from the Ethio-SPaRe database, the author of each catalogue entry should be mentioned (for example, the description of MS Betä Pāraqliṭos, 'Addāqaharsi Mākanā Həywät Pāraqliṭos, Ethio-SPaRe AP-020, used in Dochhorn 2017, should credit Vitagrazia Pisani as the author).

12 Kaufman Shelemay 1986, 139–140.

13 Hayon 2003, 28–29.

### *Scribes, education, and the role of monks*

Obviously, the quality of Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts stands in close connection with the education of their scribes. This in turn is related to the very unique tradition of monasticism among the Betä ʿĪsraʾel.<sup>14</sup>

While some Jewish groups in the past are known to have practiced extreme asceticism, like the Nazarites, the Essenes or the Therapeutae, there is nothing which can be compared to the monastic movement of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel. The deliberate decision to lead a life in seclusion, asceticism, celibacy, and spirituality has brought some criticism to the group, especially after their migration to Israel. Too often it has been argued that it is nothing more than a copy of Christian Ethiopian monasticism, while, on the contrary, it marks one of the defining elements of Betä ʿĪsraʾel culture.<sup>15</sup> The rulers of the emerging Christian Solomonic dynasty, most notoriously Emperor Yəṣṣāḥ (r. 1414–1429/30), feverishly expanded their territory, and by the fourteenth and fifteenth century had subjugated the political rulers of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel.<sup>16</sup> This power vacuum was filled by the Betä ʿĪsraʾel monks, who from that time on started to function not only as spiritual leaders, but also as leaders of worldly matters for the group. ‘The status and authority of the monks within the religious hierarchy; their roles in education and initiation of religious leadership; and adherence to purity laws, [...] may be considered a central aspect of Betä ʿĪsraʾel’ monasticism.<sup>17</sup> Monks were the highest religious authority of the group. ‘While the Ethiopian Orthodox priesthood is subordinate to a patriarch, the Betä ʿĪsraʾel priesthood was subordinate to the Betä ʿĪsraʾel monastic

14 There were also Betä ʿĪsraʾel nuns, however in much smaller numbers than Ethiopian Christian nuns. During our field works, we usually asked for nuns and were given a few names, but unlike their male counterparts, they do not figure in the manuscripts. At the Betä ʿĪsraʾel cemetery at Doro Wəḥā, some three kilometres from Gädäbge in Wägära, the grave of a nun was shown to us in October 2019. The Betä ʿĪsraʾel nuns mostly did not live in organised groups, but rather as hermits. They received no formal education and lived to assist the poor and needy. There are reports about nuns performing miracles, which is also known about the Betä ʿĪsraʾel monks (Kaufman Shelemay 1989, 85). Usually women became nuns at an old age, when they had become widows. This is something very common also among the Christians, as well as for men, about whom Flad (1869, 33–34) reports: ‘There is yet another class of monks, who hardly deserve the name. They are those who in their old age, and perhaps after several marriages, assume the monk’s cowl, in order to close their lives in a saintly and meritorious manner’. Bar Kribus (2019a, 112–116) gathered the most exhaustive information about Betä ʿĪsraʾel nuns.

15 Kribus 2019b, 254a.

16 Kaplan 1986, 349.

17 Kribus 2019b, 255a.

order'.<sup>18</sup> We have some indications about monastic networks,<sup>19</sup> but we cannot be sure about the hierarchy between the different monasteries. References provided by d'Abbadie in answering Filosseno Luzzatto's questions suggest that, at least during his time, Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa was the home of the leading monk: 'Bien qu'il n'y ait pas d'hierarchie ecclésiastique, les Falashas reconnaissent pour chef le plus savant et le plus habile de leurs moines. Celui qui les régit aujourd'hui se nomme Abba Ishaq [Isaac] et demeure dans le monastère de Hoharwa [Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa]'.<sup>20</sup>

It is usually accepted by scholars that monasticism was introduced to the Betä ʿĪsra'el by Christians, or copied from them. We have two narratives of 'heretic' Christians joining the group and influencing their ritual practices. The first, known from the Christian text *Gädlä Yafqərännä ʿĪgzi* ('Life of Yafqərännä ʿĪgzi'),<sup>21</sup> was Qozmos, a 'runaway heretic monk' who joined the Jews and became a messianic figure for them in the fourteenth century. In addition, he is said to have translated the Bible for them. Interestingly enough, Qozmos is not known to the Betä ʿĪsra'el themselves.<sup>22</sup> In their (mostly) oral tradition the founder of monasticism was *Abba Sabra*, together with his disciple *Šägga Amlak*. The legends about *Abba Sabra* are manifold, falling into two traditions: either he was of Betä ʿĪsra'el origin, or he was a Christian who converted to Judaism. In any case, at some point he lived close to the court of Emperor Zār'a Ya'əqob (r. 1434–1468) so that *Šägga Amlak*, the Emperor's son according to the legends, encountered him. *Šägga Amlak* started following *Abba Sabra* and also converted to Judaism. This enraged the Emperor and the two Jews had to flee into the wilderness. They settled at Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa where *Abba Sabra* founded the first monastery of the Betä ʿĪsra'el.<sup>23</sup> He is also cred-

18 Kribus 2019b, 258a.

19 The 'Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa genealogy' in MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, f. 163r shows that the monastery of Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa in Tačč Armačəho and a monastery in Wälqayt (no name is provided) stood in connection. The same is true for the monastery in Qolq<sup>w</sup>aločč (in the valley of Šowada in Ğan Amora) and Səmen Mänäta (deep in the Simien Mountains National Park). See Dege-Müller and Kribus, forthcoming. There are also indications that the monasteries of Guraba (in Dämbəya) and Čäqo Abba Däbtära (in Čəlga) were linked; see Bar Kribus, forthcoming, 312.

20 Luzzato 1852, 98. Flad (1869, 32) records a different tradition: 'The spiritual head or superior of the monks, and of all the Falashas, lives chiefly in Quara, and is called Aba Simeon. Every province has its chief priest, all of whom, however, are subject to the one in Quara, and are appointed by him'. See Kribus 2019a for additional references to monastic hierarchies.

21 Text and translation in Conti Rossini 1919–1920, 567–577.

22 Dege-Müller 2018, 281–282.

23 Leslau 1974 and Quirin 1988 gathered numerous legends about *abba Sabra*, with his disciple *Šägga Amlak*. See also Kribus 2019a for an updated overview of the traditions.

ited with composing and copying religious texts, as well as with laying down the very strict purity laws of the group.<sup>24</sup> Commemorative notes for the two figures are found in several Betä ʿĪsraʿel texts and prayers, sometimes rather short, sometimes as elaborate as this: ‘For the sake of the covenant of our Father *Abba Səbra* and *Šägga Amlak*, who rejected and hated this transient world on earth, who preferred (God) in their lives, who kept His las and His precepts, and who honoured this Sabbath’.<sup>25</sup>

Similar to the Christian religious hierarchy, the Betä ʿĪsraʿel hierarchy included next to monks also priests, deacons, and *däbtära* (unconsecrated religious scholars, commonly charged with the performance of liturgical music, also renowned for their skill as healers and scribes).<sup>26</sup> All of them were able to write, though over the course of history some groups were not expected to do so (see below). Monks and priests were especially associated with the education of the young.

Reports about Betä ʿĪsraʿel schools and their scribal education leave rather conflicting accounts. Some say that the Betä ʿĪsraʿel maintained no schools of their own, but sent their pupils to Christian church schools, where they acquired some but not full proficiency. Other claim that ‘the Falashas have established their own schools in the villages’.<sup>27</sup>

When several [monks] live together, one of them undertakes the education of boys—girls never receive any instruction. Their course of education consists only of learning to read the Ethiopian character and committing the Psalter<sup>28</sup> to memory. Boys who intend to be monks, Kahen [*kahən*, priests], or Debtera [*däbtära*], must learn the book ‘*Sauasau*,’ [*Säwasəw*] a kind of Ethiopian grammar or dictionary, in order that on Sabbath and feast-days they may be able to translate into Amharic, for the people, those portions of the law which are always read in the Ethiopian tongue [Gəʿəz]. The Debtera for the most part attend the Christian schools. There is a school in connection with every principal church.<sup>29</sup>

Over the course of the centuries the educational system deteriorated, and Aēscoly states in drastic words that ‘the Betä ʿĪsraʿel no longer have monas-

24 The text *Bäqädami gäbrä ʿĪgziʿ abəḥer* (‘In the beginning God created’; CAe 1198), edited and translated by Hayon (2003), is said to be his composition. References to both stories, Qozmas and *Abba Sabra*, also occur in Conti Rossini 1919–1920.

25 [በእንተ ፡ ኪዳኖሙ ፡] [ለአቡነ ፡ አባ ፡] ሰብራ ፡ ወጸጋ ፡ አምላክ ፡ እለ ፡ መነንዎ ፡ ወጸልዕዎ ፡ ለዝንቲ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ኃላፊ ፡ በዲበ ፡ ምድር ፡ እለ አብደሩ ፡ በሕይወቶሙ ፡ እለ ፡ ዓቀቡ ፡ ሕጎ ፡ ወሥርዓቶ ፡ ወእክበርዎ ፡ ለይእቲ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ Devens 1995, 96 (text), 202 (tr.).

26 Kribus 2019a, 88; on the multiple roles of *däbtära*, but also with a focus on Betä ʿĪsraʿel *däbtära*, Kaufman Shelemay 1992.

27 Leslau 1951, xvi.

28 The special tradition of the Psalter is discussed below.

29 Flad 1869, 32.

teries, the only refuge of tradition and literary studies'.<sup>30</sup> He continues, 'since monks and literature are missing, there are no more scribes'.<sup>31</sup> At some point in time it was almost forbidden for Betä ʿƏsra'el to learn how to write. *Qes Asres Yayeh* recounts:

Writing is usually discouraged among the Beta Israelites. Those who do engage themselves in writing are discredited as *tenkawi*, or wizards. And those who engage themselves in preparing the *brana*, goat skin, as writing material, are discredited as *faki*, tanner, which is considered as a lowly occupation. Drawing or painting as occupation (for instance for illustrating books) is forbidden among the Beta Israelites because it is against the law of Orit.<sup>32</sup>

In an interview conducted by Bar Kribus, 'Qes Sämay explains that, after Betä ʿƏsra'el *däbtära* had misused their writing skills by writing amulets, a practice considered contrary to religious law, it was decided that monks and priests should not practice writing in order not to be tempted to commit this sin'.<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to set a date to these changes, and to this 'prohibition' of writing. The manuscripts indicate that at least during the time of Yoḥannəs IV, who ruled from 1872 to 1889, monks were still able to write.<sup>34</sup>

While the existence of monasteries, and their important function within the society is clear, there is one element that stands open to debate—did monasteries function as libraries, as Christian Ethiopian monasteries do? There are reports about certain places, such as Səmen Mänaṭa, which served as a refuge during unstable times.<sup>35</sup> However, if they existed, the libraries were certainly of a more modest size than their Christian counterparts. This opens another question which has not yet been answered—the overall amount

30 Aešcöly 1951, 7, the translation is mine.

31 *Ibid.*, the translation is mine.

32 Asres Yayeh 1995, 96-97.

33 Kribus 2019a, 61.

34 The 'Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa genealogy' in MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87 (cp. n. 19) was written by two Betä ʿƏsra'el monks. In its later part, it refers to Emperor Yoḥannəs (r. 1872–1889). The notes of Ta'ammərat Emanu'el (1888–1963), presented by Wolf Leslau in 1974 (629: 'Taamrat Emmanuel's notes of Falasha Monks and Holy Places') contain several stories about monks and their scribal tradition. There was, for example, uncertainty about the animals slaughtered in the process of parchment making, and if they had to be slaughtered by Betä ʿƏsra'el according to the law, or if also the skin of animals slaughtered by Christians could be acceptable.

35 'Evidently it was traditional to send manuscripts for the safekeeping to Beta Israel monasteries in the Semien Mountains. A large library is still rumoured to exist at the Beta Israel village of Menata, despite two damaging fires' (Kaufman Shelemay 1986, 59). When Bar Kribus and I visited Səmen Mänaṭa in October 2017, we documented ruins of two synagogues, two cemeteries, and one holy site in the distance, but obviously the place had been deserted by the Betä ʿƏsra'el decades ago, and its current inhabitants were all Christians.

of Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts. There have been attempts to establish the number of Christian Ethiopian manuscripts, taking the minimum of essential books necessary to hold proper service, and multiplying it by the number of churches—resulting in about 200,000.<sup>36</sup> For Betä ʿĪsraʾel the only calculation was done by Aešcoly in 1951, thus tremendously outdated.<sup>37</sup>

Some 70 manuscripts have been examined during the preparation of this article, most of which are kept either in Paris (the dʿAbbadie and Griaule collections), or in Israel (the Faitlovitch collection in Tel Aviv,<sup>38</sup> and the collections of the Ben Zvi Institute and the National Library, both in Jerusalem). There are indications that many manuscripts are still in private hands of Betä ʿĪsraʾel now living in Israel,<sup>39</sup> while other manuscripts have remained in Ethiopia and are now owned by non-Jewish individuals or institutions.<sup>40</sup> The number of 70 manuscripts is not very high, but enough to show repeated scribal phenomena, so that a first description of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscript tradition can be proposed.

### *Languages of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel*

Before we can start to look into scribal features a word needs to be said about the languages that the Betä ʿĪsraʾel spoke, and of which we find traces in the manuscripts. A majority of their religious texts are written in Old Ethiopic (Gəʿəz), with smaller parts in Amharic (especially ownership notes and magic prayers), both Semitic languages. In addition, there are considerable passages in dialects of Agāw, a Central Cushitic language. Travellers and scholars in the past have often remarked on the language(s) of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel, leaving a wide array of names for it. ‘[L]es Falachas parlent en famille un dialecte de l’idiome agaou; il leur est si particulier, qu’on le dénote dans le pays par le nom de *falachina* ou *kailina*; le langage usité en Kuara [Qʷara] a une prononciation particulière’.<sup>41</sup> To this David Appleyard adds, ‘it has of course long

36 Uhlig and Bausi 2007, 738b.

37 Aešcoly (1951, 11–12) counted 15 manuscripts.

38 The Faitlovitch collection goes back to the manuscripts, documents and photographs gathered by Jacques Faitlovitch (b. 1885, d. 1951), a scholar and pro-Betä ʿĪsraʾel activist who dedicated his life to establishing links between World Jewry and the Betä ʿĪsraʾel, and initiated the process that would eventually lead to the immigration of Betä ʿĪsraʾel to Israel.

39 Hayon 2003, 5.

40 Two such examples of manuscripts in private hands in Ethiopia are MS Soṭa, Soṭa Dābrā Sālam Qəddus Mikaʾel Mādḥane ʿAlām, Ethio-SPaRe SDM-021, and MS EMMML no. 7703bis (owned by ‘Qes Melkie Azaria’ in Gondār), accessible online via the Virtual Reading Room at <<http://vhmml.org>>.

41 Halévy 1869, 284.

been known that in former times the Falasha spoke more than one Agaw dialect'. The following quote, connected to an analysis of MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bruce 94, shows that not only the study of the languages of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel is complex, but already identifying the language itself.

Around Gondār town and to the west of it, they spoke two Agāw varieties, Kayla and Q<sup>w</sup>ara, as well as Amharic. In regions to the north and east of Gondār, namely Wālqayət, ʾĪgāde, ʾĪllāmt and Wag Həmra they spoke Tigrinya and two Agāw languages (Qəmant and ʾĪmtañña or Xamtanga).<sup>42</sup>

MS Bruce 94 is a very curious example of a manuscript that was commissioned by a European and that therefore contains texts which under normal circumstances would not be found collected in one codex. It contains the Song of Songs written down in 'Amharic, Oromiffa, Fālaša, two varieties of Agāw, and Gafat',<sup>43</sup> plus word lists arranging all six languages next to each other.<sup>44</sup>

The Agāw passages in Betä ʿĪsraʿel literature, as in the Bruce manuscript, were written in the Gəʿəz syllabary, since Agāw had no writing system of its own, which is especially challenging due to two reasons. First, there has not been any systematisation of this language so far, and even the same Agāw prayers appear in very varied spellings in the manuscripts. Secondly, Agāw, belonging to the Cushitic language family, is a tonal language, something for which the Gəʿəz script is not equipped, as it provides 'no indication of the phonetic value of the letters'.<sup>45</sup>

In previous editions of texts that contain Agāw passages, editors have avoided to treat them properly, since they are often, as just mentioned, quite problematic. Halévy admits that he had to leave the Agāw sentences in transcription.<sup>46</sup> This practice was followed by many other scholars. Kay Kaufman Shelemay transcribed and translated the Gəʿəz parts of the text she studied, while the Agāw sentences were marked with '?A', but their words omitted.<sup>47</sup> Monica Devens, who edited and translated the 'Liturgy of the Seventh Sabbath', opted for another treatment of the Agāw, which at least allows a comparison of the text presented by her with other manuscripts.

The Agau portions of the text have not been translated. They are included, however, presented in smaller type and with no indication of the vast differences between the

42 Girma Getahun and Appleyard 2019, 96.

43 *Ibid.*, 95.

44 See *ibid.*, 97 for an image of such word lists.

45 Appleyard 1996, 7.

46 Halévy 1911, 96.

47 Kaufman Shelemay 1986, 231. As an example, on page 244, 'wazaʿenbala tent ?A maḥaranna maḥaranna' is translated as 'And without beginning ?A have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us'.

various manuscripts. Furthermore the translation indicated the presence of an Agaw passage by three dots, ...<sup>48</sup>

In treating the Agāw passages in this way, the modern editors have not given due credit to the Betä ʿĪsraʿel scribes. As noted by Appleyard, ‘[a]fter all these passages do represent probably the earliest indigenous attempt to put a Cushitic language into writing, as far as one can surmise without any prompting or encouragement from an outside source’.<sup>49</sup> Appleyard further stresses a fact that I find to be the most important statement about these passages:

[...] these prayers represent the only major body of Falasha literature that is not either a direct borrowing from or an adaptation of Ethiopian Christian and other ‘outside’ sources, though of course they do draw heavily on the imagery and phraseology of these latter.<sup>50</sup>

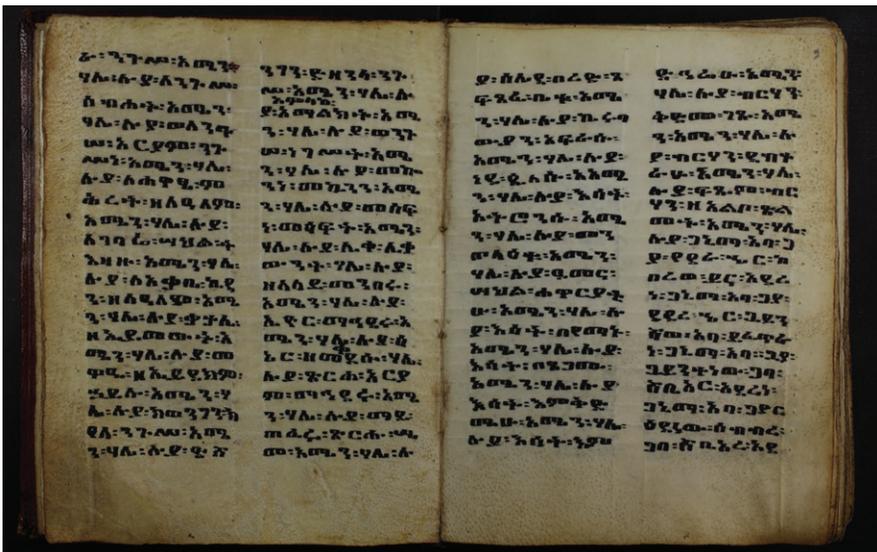


Fig. 1. MS Jerusalem, the National Library of Israel, Yah. Or. 24, f. 9v (© National Library of Israel, <<https://www.nli.org.il/>>). The Agāw portions are inserted into the Gəʿəz text without any marking.

48 Devens 1995, xv, especially for the translation this produces some rather curious images, an example for page 192: ‘Truly ‘living and blessed is my God. ... The God of my salvation is exalted’. ... ‘Who perceives error?’ ... ‘Give me understanding that I might learn Your ordinance’.

49 Appleyard 1994, 207.

50 *Ibid.*

### *Features of Betä ʿĪsraʿel scribal practices*

It should be clear from the beginning that the overall character of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts closely resembles that of their Christian neighbours, given that it emerged from this older and larger tradition. Especially regarding the major codicological features, these manuscript cultures cannot be distinguished from one another: production of parchment<sup>51</sup> (including pricking and ruling), binding structure of quires (respecting Gregory’s Rule as to the alternation of flesh and hair sides), textile threads used as bookmarks, preparation of the inks (mostly red and black), wooden covers, and sometime also sturdy leather satchels to carry the manuscript.<sup>52</sup> Rubrication and abbreviations also closely follow the Christian tradition, divine names being rubricated,<sup>53</sup> as well as words like *qəddus* (‘holy’) or *halleluya* and names of owners and scribes. Numerals and punctuations signs are partly rubricated as in the Christian tradition. Abbreviations use is also similar, *q* for *qəddus*, etc. Maybe especially favoured is the use of ሸሌል (‘20’el’) which is read as *ʿĪsraʿel*.

Features that distinguish the Betä ʿĪsraʿel tradition are minor, and often consist of adaptations of the Christian tradition, although some are innovations. The Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts fall into two categories: those produced by Christians, and those produced by the Betä ʿĪsraʿel themselves. The first category might further be divided into two subcategories: repurposed manuscripts, which were previously Christian, and manuscripts that were commissioned by Betä ʿĪsraʿel, but produced by Christians (these subcategories are not always easy to distinguish). ‘The practice of having the text of the *Orit* (Octateuch) copied by a non-Falasha, providing the text was then carefully examined by the priests for any allusion to or mention of Christ and the Virgin’, was recorded by Leslau.<sup>54</sup> Halévy reports that due to their poverty, the Betä ʿĪsraʿel priests were compelled to buy manuscripts from Christian scribes, as they sold them cheaper than Betä ʿĪsraʿel scribes.<sup>55</sup> Already at the end of the eighteenth century, the traveller James Bruce noticed this practice, ‘the only copy of the Old Testament, which they have, is in Geez, the same made use of by the Abyssinian Christians, who are the only scribes, and sell these copies to the Jews’.<sup>56</sup>

51 As for the origin of the animal skin, see Leslau 1974, 629.

52 Sergew Hable Selassie 1981; Mellors and Parsons 2002a, 2002b; Bausi et al. 2015, 154–174.

53 *ʿĪgziabəher* (Lord), *ʿamlak* (God), and *ʿadonay*, also Moses and Aaron, and sometimes the names of their saints, such as *Abba Sabra*.

54 Leslau 1974, 629, fn. 32.

55 Halévy 1877a, 245.

56 Bruce 1791, 125.

Repurposing of manuscripts

After manuscripts were bought from Christians they had to undergo a process of adaption. This practice of repurposing was often noticed by scholars, and leaves its marks in the codices, such as erasures of words like Mary or the trinitarian formula, which introduces many Christian texts. Sometimes, the new Jewish owner of a manuscript simply wrote their own doxology or praise formula above the incipit of the text, ይትባረክ፡ ጸግዚአብሔር፡ አምላክ፡ ጸሰራኤል፡ (አምላክ፡ ለኩሉ፡ መንፈስ፡ ወኩሉ፡ ዘሥጋ፡)።<sup>57</sup> Halévy notes that ‘private individuals do not feel these scruples, they accept manuscripts from Christians, such as they are, and merely erase those words that shock their convictions; often they do not even touch the manuscript for fear of injuring it’.<sup>58</sup>

A good example is MS BnF, d’Abbadie 157 (Fig. 2), which has the Betā ʿĪsraʿel doxology written over the first column of the text (f. 1r), and within the texts shows signs of careful revisions with the name of Mary or Jesus Christ scratched off (for example ff. 89v, 90r).<sup>59</sup> Another example for this very

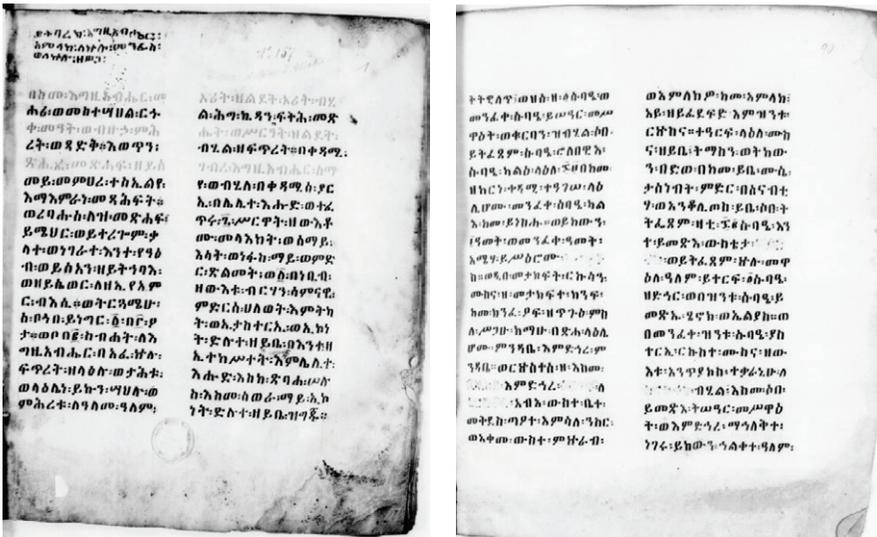


Fig. 2. MS BnF, d’Abbadie 157, ff. 1r and 90r (© BnF, <https://gallica.bnf.fr>).

57 ‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel (the God of all [that is] spirit and all that is of flesh)’. I write the second part in brackets, because the first half is used more frequently, and the long version less so. This doxology is not unique to the Betā ʿĪsraʿel, but also exists in Christian texts. However, they would not write it in the upper margins from an existing trinitarian formula. The usage of the doxology is therefore a clear indication of a manuscript’s association with the Betā ʿĪsraʿel.

58 Halévy 1877a, 245.

59 For the images, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10087594z>.

common feature is MS BnF, Éth. 420 (Griaule 112), a magic scroll, which still has very obvious Christian elements, such as the trinitarian formula, but also shows several erased words. In addition, the Betä ʿĪsraʿel doxology has been squeezed twice into empty parts of the scroll.<sup>60</sup>

Aešcoly had another understanding of such practices, and states that the Betä ʿĪsraʿel are so sought after that some people were tempted to sell fake, he calls it ‘pseudo-falacha’, manuscripts as their own. As an example he gives ms. BnF, d’Abbadie 30, which ‘portant en tête la formule eulogique falacha, et qui n’est pourtant qu’un ouvrage chrétien’.<sup>61</sup> This is only half true, as the texts contained in it are all Old Testament material, plus 1 Enoch (*Henok*), except for the short Christian prayers in the fly leaves and a chronological text on the last folia. Next to the Betä ʿĪsraʿel doxology which was added by a later hand, the same hand has written ‘this book belongs to *Abba Aḥwān*’. From d’Abbadie’s catalogue description we learn that he bought the manuscripts directly from the Betä ʿĪsraʿel *Abba Aḥwān*.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to Aešcoly’s opinion, I would consider this a perfectly fine Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscript. It is part of the group of very large *de luxe* codices (see below), prepared by Christian scribes (note the ornamented leather covers), but repurposed to suit the Betä ʿĪsraʿel. These manuscripts often also follow other typical ‘Christian’ codicology rules such as stichometry,<sup>63</sup> or textile threads as bookmarks.

A very curious case is MS London, BritLib, Or 485,<sup>64</sup> a manuscript containing the Book of Jubilees (*Kufale*) and *Henok*, both texts are used by Ethiopian Christians and Betä ʿĪsraʿel alike. The stratigraphy of this beautiful, probably mid-sixteenth-century manuscript suggests that its religious affiliation shifted over the course of time. On f. 1r, above the incipit, two additional sentences have been added by later hand, first a Betä ʿĪsraʿel doxology, then above it a Christian trinitarian formula (Fig. 3). As the palaeography (and the position on the page) of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel doxology suggests that it is of an older age compared to the Christian formula, one could imagine that the manuscript was originally written (and possibly used) by a Christian, then came into the hands of a Jew, and then changed hands another time, back to a Christian.

A similar case seems to be MS Los Angeles, University of California, Library Special Collections, 10. It is difficult to analyse its codicology based only on the online images, but my assumption would be that a Christian repurposed a Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscript, bound in a (new?) leather cover with cross

60 See <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b531151378>>.

61 Aešcoly 1951, 6. See <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10090692b>>, f. 3r.

62 D’Abbadie 1859, 35.

63 Dege-Müller 2015, 61–65.

64 See <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or\\_485](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_485)>.



Fig. 3. A complex stratigraphy attesting multiple ownership, MS London, BritLib, Or. 485, f. 1r (© British Library Board, <<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts>>).

ornamentation.<sup>65</sup> A secondary hand has added a new owner, Kidanä Maryam (a Christian name meaning ‘Covenant of Mary’),<sup>66</sup> and in the incipit of the second text, the Betä ʿĪsraʿel version of the *Ardäʾt* (‘The Disciples’),<sup>67</sup> a reference to Jesus Christ was added by, possibly the same, secondary hand. The name of the original owner has been erased throughout. The identification of the second text is however clearly the Betä ʿĪsraʿel version.

In MS Soṭa, Soṭa Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʿel Mädhane ʿAläm, Ethio-SPaRe SDM-021, f. 74r, the word *Krəstos* (‘Christ’) was deformed by erasing the *-to-*. However small this action may be, it is deliberate and shows a careful reading of the text.<sup>68</sup>

65 The first text, the *Ṭäbibä Ṭäbibän* (‘The Wisest of the Wise’), was written on folia that had been ruled for in a two-column layout, but the text is written in one only. The text ends at a break between two quires, and the second text, the *Ardäʾt* (‘The Disciples’), starts on a new quire, which has the ‘correct’ ruling for one column only. See <<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz001d7617>>.

66 For example on page (sic) 124.

67 The *Ardäʾt* exists in three versions, two Christian redactions, a short (CAe 3943) and a long one (CAe 3944), and one Betä ʿĪsraʿel version (CAe 3945). In the Christian tradition, Jesus teaches his disciples, in the Betä ʿĪsraʿel version, it is Moses who addresses his followers.

68 Dochhorn (2017, 200) also noticed this scribal feature, and rightly adds that this word would not need to have been censored as the sentence states ‘du hast zuvor

### *Size of manuscripts*

Analysing the corpus of Betä ʿĪsraʾel manuscripts, it becomes obvious that the manuscripts fall into three categories based on their physical size: very large and heavy codices, medium-sized codices, and rather small ones. It stands to argument that all large and heavy manuscripts are those that have been prepared by Christian scribes and were repurposed at a later stage, or were commissioned by Betä ʿĪsraʾel from Christian scribes. These manuscripts usually contain the *Orit*, *Henok*, or *Kufale*. Notwithstanding the lack of illuminations, these manuscripts should be considered the *de luxe* manuscripts of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel.<sup>69</sup> They are (often) bound in blind tooled leather covers, measure c.25–30 cm (width) × 30–40 cm (height), and they are often written in three columns.<sup>70</sup> Several reports on the group contain photographs of Betä ʿĪsraʾel monks or priests holding up such impressive manuscripts.<sup>71</sup>

These manuscripts obviously had to undergo some adjustments to suit the needs of their new Jewish owners. Since the Old Testament texts posed no problems in this regard, it were the codicological features that needed amendments. In two manuscripts I noticed that the cross, which is traditionally the centre of the blind tooled decoration of the leather cover, had been removed, either cut out or scratched off (see Fig. 4).

verleugnet Chris s [sic], Gott', thus denying Christ, which would have been to the liking of Jews.

- 69 They do not stand the comparison with Christian *de luxe* manuscripts, but within the Betä ʿĪsraʾel tradition these large codices are highly venerated. An example for this can be MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87 (cp. n. 70), which enjoys a special place of pride among the Betä ʿĪsraʾel until today.
- 70 Part of this category are also MSS BnF, d'Abbadie 30 (28 × 26 cm, but in two columns); BnF, d'Abbadie 148 (very large, 42 × 38 cm); the heavily censored BnF, d'Abbadie 157 (Fig. 2). BnF, d'Abbadie 117 could also be part of this category: an ownership note by the latest (as can be assumed from stratigraphy) owner (f. 161rb) includes only Old Testament or traditional local (Agäw?) names.
- 71 E.g. Viterbo 1993, photograph 3, no page numbers; Kaplan 1990b, photograph 8, no page numbers; Asres Yayeh 1995, 100. The latest book by Rabbi Menachem Waldman (2019) showcases *Abba Yəshaq Iyasu*, the former high priest of Təgray, on the cover. The photograph of *Abba Yəshaq* taken 1985 in Israel, after the emigration, shows the priest holding up the manuscript, now MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, which was in his family's possession for some generations, with the 'Hoḥ<sup>w</sup>arwa genealogy' preserved in it, which attests to his spiritual and biological descent. *Abba Yəshaq Iyasu* was also recorded reading from the manuscript (see <[https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL\\_MUSIC\\_AL000245172/NLI](https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000245172/NLI)>, starting from around minute 45). Cp. also the photograph taken by Beany Wezelman in Ethiopia in 1966, showing 'Falasha Rabbi holding a book' (in Magnes Collection Online, <[http://magnesalm.org/notebook\\_fext.asp?site=magnes&book=4520](http://magnesalm.org/notebook_fext.asp?site=magnes&book=4520)>).



Fig. 4. Front covers showing cross decoration removed, left: MS Jerusalem, Ben Zvi Institute, 6001; right: MS Jerusalem, the National Library of Israel, Ms. Or. 87.

While in Christian Ethiopian tradition the Gospel manuscripts were used to hold the notes of the institution they belong to ('Golden Gospels'),<sup>72</sup> for the Betä ʿĪsraʾel it were these *de luxe* Old Testament manuscripts that could fulfil this function.<sup>73</sup> In support of that, 'in very important matters which require an oath the Falashas swear by the Torah [*Orit*]'.<sup>74</sup> Personal notes can also be found in the smaller manuscripts.<sup>75</sup>

The medium sized manuscripts, measuring *c.* 18–25 cm (width) × 25–30 cm (height), usually contain texts from the sapiential, prophetic or deutero-canonical books of the Old Testament. They are generally written in two columns, are sometimes provided with blind tooled leather covers, and were most probably also prepared by Christian scribes.<sup>76</sup> MS Faitlovitch MS2, containing Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach, shows elab-

72 Usually written in the margins and empty leaves, these notes are usually land grants, inventory lists, juridical or personal documentations.

73 At least this is true for the abovementioned MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, with its 'Hoḃ<sup>w</sup>arwa genealogy' (cp. n. 19, n. 34). See also MS Jerusalem, Ben Zvi Institute, 6001, f. 180v (available online at <[https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL\\_YBZ002678450/NLI#\\$FL25122108](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_YBZ002678450/NLI#$FL25122108)>; unfortunately, the covers have not been photographed).

74 Leslau 1951, xxviii.

75 For example, an Amharic list of guests contributing to wedding gifts in MS Faitlovitch MS12. I have to express my gratitude to Sisay Sahile who assisted in deciphering and translating this note.

76 E.g. MS Jerusalem, Ben Zvi Institute, 6002 (fragments of Exodus, Leviticus, Nehemia, Jesaia). MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. aethiop. 26 (Twelve Prophets, Isaiah) has the Betä ʿĪsraʾel doxology written twice in the upper margin, above the original trinitarian incipit, ff. 2r, 54r (see <[https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00115506/image\\_5](https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00115506/image_5)> and <[http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00115506/image\\_109](http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00115506/image_109)>).



Fig. 5. MS Tel Aviv, Faitlovitch MS2, ff.1v/2r (photo by the author, reproduced by kind permission of the Faitlovitch Collection, Sourasky Central Library, Tel Aviv University).

orated *haräg* (ornamental bands) with cross ornaments. On the basis of its ornamentation and palaeographical features, it has been dated by Max Wurmbrand to the time of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob (fifteenth century).<sup>77</sup> On f. 1v, facing the incipit of the first text on fol. 2r, a Betä ʿĪsraʿel doxology and a short prayer are found. While the handwriting of this doxology seems old, it is surely not as old as the rest of the manuscript. Still, it is probably the oldest Betä ʿĪsraʿel handwriting that I have encountered so far.<sup>78</sup>

77 Max Wurmbrand prepared a small catalogue of the manuscripts in the Faitlovitch collection, which remains unpublished. There he states: ‘The writing and the drawings have a striking likeness with the Manuscript Orient.650 of the British Museum [...], which is dated from the reign of Zar’a Ya’kob (1434-68). Paleographically, the manuscript seems to belong approximately to the same period’.

78 Very curious is MS BnF, Éth. 4 (Genesis, see <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b100933694>>), also dated to the fifteenth century. On f. 130r, a partly damaged note reads: *ዝመጽሐፍ፡ ዘተሰ[ተ]ሰየጦ [sic]፡ እምአይሁድ፡ አቡነ፡ ማርቆስ ። በ፫፻ ። ብሩር ። ወያአምሩ፡ ከሉሎሙ፡ ነጋድያነ ። ኢየሩሳሌም፡ ዝክሩኒ፡ በጽሎትክሙ፡ ኢትርሰኡኒ፡ ወትረ፡ ለእመ፡ ነጻርክሙ፡ መጽሐፈ፡ ኦሪት፡* ‘The one who bought this book from the Jews for 300 silvers, is *Abunä* Marqos. And all pilgrims of Jerusalem know [him]. Mention me in your prayer, do not forget me, always [remember me] when you see this *Māshafä Orit*’. Should this be a reference to the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, it would be a true sensation; it stands to reason, however, that this manuscript was sold in a non-Ethiopian context, probably in Egypt or Jerusalem. (I have to thank

Manuscripts of medium size have leather covers less often, but the only case known to me, MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Yah. Or 24, is a witness to the same modification of the binding decoration as mentioned above: the blind tooled cross has been covered with some material, most probably wax.<sup>79</sup>

When d’Abbadie described ‘les petits livres des Falasa’,<sup>80</sup> it stands to reason that he was referring to the prayer books of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, which are what I too would call manuscripts of small size, 5–20 cm (width) × 10–20 cm (height). The quality of their craftsmanship is rather low, the parchment being often rough and sturdy, and they usually have no leather covers over the wooden boards.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, ornamentation tends to be very limited, and they are mostly written in one column. They constitute the largest number of Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts and are usually of rather recent age (nineteenth or twentieth century). These manuscripts could be considered the most original manuscripts of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, and the texts found in them are mostly well known Betä ʿĪsraʿel works such as the *Ardäʿt*, *Täʿəzazä Sänbät* (‘Commandment of the Sabbath’; CAe 2436), *Sabʿätä Sänbät* (‘[Liturgy of] the Seventh Sabbath’; CAe 5874), the *Testaments of the Three Patriarchs* (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob<sup>82</sup>), *Nägära Muse* (‘Colloquy of Moses’; CAe 5873), *Gädlä Aaron* (‘Life of Aaron’; CAe 1422), and *Motä Muse* (‘Death of Moses’; CAe 2024).<sup>83</sup> All these texts are adaptations of Christian texts, and some have only been slightly altered.

These small manuscripts also carry the vast and so far rather poorly studied corpus of Betä ʿĪsraʿel prayers and liturgical texts.<sup>84</sup> Even though several have been published, they all lack proper critical editions.<sup>85</sup> In most publications, the range and structure of single texts remain unclear. For example, writing about the text *Bäqädami gäbrä ʿĪgziʿabəher* (CAe 1198), Margaret Hayon states:

Ted Erho, who shared his insights into this manuscript with me). The manuscript has two other interesting features, short verses of the Bible in Hebrew but written in Ethiopic characters in the upper margins on ff. 22v, 90v.

79 In addition to viewing the online images, I could examine the manuscript in person in January 2020. It is only in few cases that it is possible to carry out such analysis, as many libraries have rebound the manuscripts in European bindings.

80 D’Abbadie 1859, 121.

81 Several manuscripts of this category have no wooden boards at all, but are bound in very thick leather covers, such as MSS BnF, Éth. 393/Griaule 89, or Faitlovitch MS14.

82 *Gädlä Abrəham*, CAe 5871, *Gädlä Yəshaq*, CAe 4063, *Gädlä Yaʿəqob*, CAe 4060.

83 They have all been edited and translated, see Leslau 1951 and Kaplan 1990a for good overviews.

84 Conti Rossini 1919–1920, 593.

85 Halévy 1877b, 1911, Aešcoly 1951, or Hayon 2003.

Wurmbrand divided the work into two parts: the first (shorter) an anthology of pious readings; and the second part (most of the book) a collection of prayers. His article dealt only with the first part, and in particular with four short passages. He stated ‘Nous espérons revenir dans une autre étude sur la partie liturgique du livre’. However, he published nothing more on this aspect of the work (which actually comprises most of the text.)<sup>86</sup>

One aspect that might have challenged scholars working on these prayers and liturgical texts is their frequent use of abbreviations.

Beta Israel liturgical prayer draw heavily on scriptural sources, as the priests acknowledge when they attribute prayer texts to the *Orit* or *Dāwit*. However, the dearth of complete scriptural passages in Beta Israel liturgy makes sources difficult to identify. The Beta Israel do not read an obligatory scriptural lesson except on Seged and Astaray, when the Decalogue (Exodus 20) is read in full. The liturgy contains some complete psalms, although selected and paraphrased verses constitute much of the textual materials.<sup>87</sup>

To this Hayon adds:

Some Beta Israel liturgical texts include Amharic instructions regarding order of performance; some of these instructions quote the opening words of prayers, the full text of which is omitted, presumably because they were well known by memory. These texts also include many Agaw words and passages. These texts are clearly very closely interconnected with oral liturgy: they probably originated as writing-down of oral texts by Beta Israel priests and monks intimately familiar with the oral liturgy as they performed it.<sup>88</sup>

The prayer texts in the small manuscripts are also more intermixed with Agäw passages. Next to their usage of abbreviations and paraphrasing, the often poor orthography and rather unskilled appearance might have been the biggest hinderance to a thorough study of these texts.

The small manuscripts, however, can also be home to little treasures: notes written by the allegedly illiterate Betä ʿƏsraʿel. I have found several

86 Hayon 2003, 10.

87 Kaufman Shelemay 1986, 141.

88 Hayon 2003, 41–42. On p. 41 she writes, ‘The Beta Israel liturgical manuscripts are collections of prayers, ordered in certain ways; however, they do not present the complete text of the service in order from beginning to end, in a form that a person attending a liturgical performance could pick up and follow. These texts are functionally secondary to the oral tradition: they presume that the user knows the liturgy by heart; therefore texts that are frequently performed and so presumably well-known do not need to be written in full—they can simply be hinted at, e.g. by the first line or by a brief instruction. The main function of these texts was to act as a memory-aid, especially of prayers less-frequently performed, or specific to particular occasions (e.g. *Seventh Sabbath* and *Astaray*, annual and monthly festivals)’.



Therefore, there might be some gems still unknown to the scholarly world, but if so, they remain unknown so far.

### *Manuscripts and their composition*

As has been shown before, there is a strong tendency regarding which texts are found in which type of manuscript. There are, however, several manuscripts that have been commissioned by European travellers and scholars—among which probably the most famous Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscript, MS BnF, d’Abbadie 107. The explanation that d’Abbadie himself provides about manuscript 107 underlines the problem. He had to commission it himself because ‘il ne me fut pas possible d’acheter’ the contained prayers in any other manuscript.<sup>93</sup> The quality of a manuscript as we find it today might have been influenced by it being commissioned. About MS BnF, Éth. 687, we are informed that the copy was prepared for members of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti:

L’original, un manuscrit sur parchemin datant probablement du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, est depuis longtemps dans la possession de la famille de son propriétaire actuel, un falacha du Qwara, *Abbā Akālē Berru* (አባ ፡ አካሌ ፡ ብሩ ፡) habitant à Waynigē (ወይነጌ ፡) près de Gondar. C’est son fils *Webē Akālē* (ወቤ ፡ አካሌ ፡) qui a exécuté la copie; il est à noter que le copiste ne connaît pas le guèze.<sup>94</sup>

Halévy also describes how he commissioned a manuscript to be written by the Betä ʿĪsraʿel ‘Zerubabel ben-Jacob’ in Wälqayt.<sup>95</sup> He had the manuscript copied on a small paper notebook, and ‘while the handwriting is clear and easy to read, there are many spelling mistakes’.<sup>96</sup> Halévy nevertheless used this as the basis for his publication of Betä ʿĪsraʿel prayers.

I want to make clear that these and similar manuscripts do not necessarily represent the traditional scribal practice of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel and their value as witnesses of this should be assessed carefully in every individual case.

93 D’Abbadie 1859, 119. Aešcoly (1951, 14) adds: ‘Ceci explique quelques particularités du manuscrit. Malgré qu’il soit écrit d’une seule main, les prières sont faites aux noms de quatre personnages différents: Beynewa, Ta’agasan, Seme’on et Bāwla. C’est que le scribe avait à copier quatre manuscrits différents. C’est ainsi qu’on s’explique également la présence répétée deux fois dans notre manuscrit d’un même texte. Il devient également compréhensible pourquoi les différentes parties du manuscrit ne présentent pas un texte également correct’.

94 Strelcyn 1954, 256. Within the same line, Aešcoly (1951, 15), ‘Il est certain que le scribe n’avait pas une grande connaissance du guèze. Certains mots ou groupes de mots ne donnent aucun sens, et si nous n’avions pas d’autre texte on n’aurait même pas pu les reconstituer.’

95 Halévy 1877b, 1.

96 *Ibid.* 2, translation is mine.

### *Excuse on Psalter manuscripts*

The question of the Psalter among the Betä ʿĪsraʾel is a problem that has not yet found a satisfactory solution. Ethiopian Christian Psalter manuscripts contain, by default, the actual Book of Psalms (150 plus the ‘apocryphal’ Psalm 151), the 15 Canticles of the Prophets (Odes), the Song of Songs, and accompanying texts such as the *Wəddase Maryam* (‘Praise of Mary’) and the *Anqäšä bərhan* (‘Gate of Light’). While the *Wəddase Maryam* and the *Anqäšä bərhan* are known to exist independently in manuscripts, the Book of Psalms is rarely found without the other four texts. The combination of all these texts together forms the Psalter, which is commonly called *Dawit*.<sup>97</sup> The Psalms, the Canticles, and the Song of Songs are always written in a specific verse-by-verse layout, in one column with the lines aligned only to the left, leaving a ragged right margin.<sup>98</sup> The *Wəddase Maryam* and the *Anqäšä bərhan* are usually written in two ‘normal’ columns. Thus, an Ethiopic Psalter can be easily identified due to this twofold layout.

The *Wəddase Maryam* and the *Anqäšä bərhan* are Christian texts praising Mary, thus something that a Jew would presumably not tolerate. However, Halévy reports that ‘not unfrequently the praises of the Virgin Mary are found in a book of Psalms belonging to a Falasha’.<sup>99</sup> The usage of the Psalter is not under question, there are countless attestations of single Psalms in Betä ʿĪsraʾel prayer texts. Shelemay remarks ‘the liturgy contains complete psalms, although selected and paraphrased verses constitute much of the textual material’.<sup>100</sup> She continues, ‘the dearth of full and bound renditions of psalms or other scriptural portions complicated the process of segmenting Beta Israel rituals’.<sup>101</sup> Other descriptions of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel’s ritual practice, for example by Asres Yayeh,<sup>102</sup> also frequently refer to the recitation of Psalms.

There are some attestations of Psalters among the Betä ʿĪsraʾel codices. In MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 45,<sup>103</sup> a folio of a Psalter manuscript (with Ps. 88) was used as a guard leave. In MS Faitlovich MS28,<sup>104</sup> which lacks a cover, a loose leave with a portion of Song of Songs (Song 6), has been used

97 Dege-Müller 2015, 61, cp. also Delamarter – Gnisci 2019.

98 *Ibid.* 64.

99 Halévy 1877a, 245.

100 Shelemay 1986, 141.

101 *Ibid.* 143.

102 Asres Yayeh 1995, 49. The author also gives two photographs of a Psalter manuscript (pages 51, 52), unfortunately without any identification

103 See images at <[https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL\\_ALEPH003538029/](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH003538029/)>.

104 See images at <[https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU\\_INST/12279437910004146](https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU_INST/12279437910004146)>.

to wrap in the quires of the manuscript. In MS Faitlovich MS20,<sup>105</sup> f. 59 recto and verso contains Psalms, written in the typical layout, aligned to the left, while the rest of the manuscript has a different layout.

Studying Betä Ǝsraʼel manuscripts, I have not come across a Psalter that I could clearly identify as a Betä Ǝsraʼel manuscript. Also, the larger collections of Betä Ǝsraʼel manuscripts (dʼAbbadie, Griaule, or Faitlovitch) do not indicate Psalter manuscripts that would clearly answer this conundrum. A working group consisting of Israeli and French scholars published in 2019 *The Liturgy of Beta Israel: Music of the Ethiopian Jewish Prayer*, a three CD box with Betä Ǝsraʼel liturgical songs.<sup>106</sup> The box comes with a 192 page booklet in English and Hebrew, but the expectations one would have to learn there about the Psalter are not fulfilled.

### *Magic or protective scrolls and texts*

The magic or protective scrolls of the Betä Ǝsraʼel are also very similar to the Christian tradition. ‘Magic’ is often deemed too negative a term, while ‘protective’ does not give credit to texts that do not ask for protection of any kind.<sup>107</sup> Thus, for the moment, I intentionally want to avoid any discussions about the terminology of this type literature. While there are full-fledged texts, such as the *Ardaʼt*, which are often described as ‘magic’, this here shall mostly describe the short magical prayers and invocations.

The Betä Ǝsraʼel, like their Christian (and also Muslim) neighbours, are very fond of magic scrolls and talismans—as users but also as producers. Within this genre of written artifacts, the boundaries between the Christian and the Jewish tradition are much less tangible than for the manuscripts proper. There are several Betä Ǝsraʼel scrolls that include Christian texts, apparently without causing the user too much disturbance.<sup>108</sup> Also, at least for the area around Gondär, it was a common practice for believers of both faiths to go to either Christian or Betä Ǝsraʼel *däbtära* when needed. That is, a spell cast on you by a Betä Ǝsraʼel needed a Betä Ǝsraʼel counter-spell. The Betä Ǝsraʼel *däbtära* were especially respected for possessing very powerful skills.<sup>109</sup> With this information, the aforementioned statement by *Qes Sämay* appears in a new light—‘after Betä Ǝsraʼel *däbtära* had misused their writing

105 See images at <[https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU\\_INST/12279925010004146](https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU_INST/12279925010004146)>.

106 The tracks can be streamed on Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/album/0iDT4Y-hCo8WphtMNVhAjAo>>.

107 DʼAbbadie (1859, xiv) used the traditional term *abənnät*: ‘Abjinnat est un charme ou une formule magistrale’.

108 For example, MS BnF, Éth. 183, see Aešcoly 1951, 47.

109 Oral information by Sisay Sahile.

skills by writing amulets, a practice considered contrary to religious law, it was decided that monks and priests should not practice writing in order not to be tempted to commit this sin'.<sup>110</sup>

In the absence of a trinitarian formula or a doxology, it is difficult to tell Betä ʿĪsraʾel or Christian scrolls apart, as they follow the same set up and also have the same iconography. Magic scrolls are the most heavily decorated manuscripts of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel, a scroll usually containing from two to four images.

Magic prayers can also be found in codices, e.g. in MS Faitlovitch MS13, which has a prayer against snake bites for its owner Lewi on f. 99r.<sup>111</sup> In MS Faitlovitch MS11, a prayer against *Alhamduliha* and the books of the Arami [Muslims]' is found on f. 35v.<sup>112</sup>

### **Decoration**

In contrast to the talismanic drawings in scrolls, which usually follow certain patterns,<sup>113</sup> codices lack an elaborated iconography, which might be due to the Mosaic law against 'graven images'. Ornamental bands (*ḥaräg*) are more frequent than anthropomorphic images. Richard Pankhurst, the only one who studied 'Falāšā-Christian or Christian-Falāšā Art', presents two *Orit* manuscripts from the Betä ʿĪsraʾel *mäsgid* (synagogue) in Ambobär. One is similar to MS Faitlovitch MS2, which I have mentioned before, and has elaborated *ḥarägs*, even with several cross-shaped ornaments. This manuscript was clearly produced by Christians, and later repurposed by the Betä ʿĪsraʾel.<sup>114</sup> The second *Orit* is even more elaborate. Facing the incipit, we find 'an imposing full-face (Gondarene style?) portrait of a haloed Moses dressed in red and blue, holding a Testament and staring at the viewer'.<sup>115</sup>

110 Kribus 2019a, 61.

111 See images at <[https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU\\_INST/12279928400004146](https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU_INST/12279928400004146)>. The same owner, Lewi, is found in the documents of Faitlovitch, preserved in the Sourasky Central Library in Tel Aviv, document A-B16.2-16.29, page 21 of the pdf. While the Sourasky Library has done a tremendous job of scanning all these notes and documents, and providing them for free online, the data is not ordered in any comprehensible way. These documents shall also be object of a further project on the general Betä ʿĪsraʾel heritage, as they contain (hidden) very important documents. There are several fragments of manuscripts, prayer on parchment slips, or even full (but small) manuscripts, such as the document C16.31.

112 See images at <[https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU\\_INST/12279437640004146](https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU_INST/12279437640004146)>.

113 Mercier 1997.

114 Pankhurst (1993, 47b) suggests this as well.

115 Pankhurst 1993, 47a, colour image plate i.

A similar description is provided by Haim Nahoum, who visited the *māsgid* in Guraba, in Dämbəya:

A la première page de ce livre [*Henok*] que nous avons trouvé chez les Kahen [priests] de Gouraba, on voyait sur un même feuillet les images de Moïse et d'Aaron en costume de prêtres byzantins de couleur rouge et bleu, Moïse tenant en main le bâton traditionnel, et Aaron l'encensoir.<sup>116</sup>

These descriptions, and also the fine image from Pankhurst, stand in stark contrast to the illustrations I have encountered, which are very few (only in two manuscripts until now) and crude. I have indeed so far found only representations of Moses and Aaron and no other figures. MS BnF, d'Abbadie 148, has coloured drawings of 'Moses the prophet' and 'Aaron the priest' on f. 1v.<sup>117</sup> In MS BnF, d'Abbadie 232, which is of mixed medium (paper and parchment), there are two illustrations on thick parchment leaves.<sup>118</sup> It is impossible to establish a quire structure of this manuscript. Chaîne suggests that the two parchment leaves were inserted as guard leaves.<sup>119</sup> Both Aaron (f. 1v) and Moses (f. 10v) are drawn 'très-naïves',<sup>120</sup> in yellow, red, and black, with an iconography that reminds more of talismanic drawings in magic scrolls.

While Moses and Aaron are the highest venerated saints of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, local saintly figures, particularly *Abba Sabra* and *Ṣägga Amlak*, are frequently mentioned in the commemorative notes of the prayer texts. Leslau (1974) collected the notes of Taamrat Emmanuel who reports on the monks and holy places of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel, almost all monks in this list are venerated as saints, only the degree of the veneration varies. However, no depiction of any of these saintly figures has been discovered.

### *Storage of manuscripts*

Although this topic may not directly count as a scribal tradition, I would still like to make a few remarks on the storage of manuscripts. The general number of Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts is much smaller than that of the Christian Ethiopian manuscripts, and thus libraries would also presumably have been much smaller. Generally, we have little information about monasteries, *māsgid*, or individual collections of manuscripts. Halévy writes about his visit to Hoḥwar-wa: 'I was assured that they possessed a collection of manuscripts, which

116 Nahoum 1908, 122.

117 See <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10087526z/f3.image>>.

118 See <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525069018/f14.image>>.

119 Chaîne 1912, 133.

120 D'Abbadie 1859, 223.

they hid away carefully for safety from pillage’,<sup>121</sup> but he did not see it. About another place, [Çäqqa] Abba Däbtära, he states,

I begged one day to be shown the Pentateuch used in the synagogue. It was the only copy extant in the village, and instead of being kept in the sanctuary it was hidden in a receptacle solely known to the priests, for fear it should be stolen by soldiers. I was allowed by especial favour to inspect it. The precaution was taken of shutting the door, and placing a man in the courtyard to watch that nobody entered.<sup>122</sup>

Halévy remains a bit vague, referring to ‘a receptacle’ which was used to store the manuscript. It becomes clearer when we read the description by Yaʾel Kahana, who visited the monastery of Qolqʷaločč: ‘The prayer books and the Torah book are taken by the priest to his house and hidden in one of the Madega [*madəgga*]’.<sup>123</sup> A *madəgga* is an earthenware vessel, and thus it matches Halévy’s description.

Robbers seem to have been a threat to manuscripts, but not always: we know that bandits intentionally ignored MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, when they took everything else from *Abba Yəšəḥa* Iyasu.<sup>124</sup> We have two reports about fires destroying libraries of the Betä ʿƏsraʾel. *Abba* Finhas (the *däbtära* of the village) told Haim Nahoum that a few days before his arrival at Amba Gʷalit a fire had destroyed five huts and the *məsgid*, together with the manuscripts it contained.<sup>125</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay, based on an interview with Yona Boggalä, writes, ‘Evidently it was traditional to send manuscripts for safekeeping to Beta Israel monasteries in the Semien [Səmen] Mountains. A large library is rumored still to exist at the Beta Israel village of Menata [Mänaṭa], despite two damaging fires’.<sup>126</sup>

Still lacking are inventory lists and notes of donation to monasteries or *məsgids*, which are quite common in Christian Ethiopian manuscripts.

### ***Ownership notes and book curses***

Something that has been mostly ignored by scholars working on Betä ʿƏsraʾel manuscripts so far are their ownership notes and book curses. Some of the ownership notes or notes about the commission of manuscripts have been mentioned above. Also in ownership and commission notes, the Betä ʿƏsraʾel

121 Halévy 1877a, 230.

122 *Ibid.* 244.

123 Kahana 1977, 119.

124 This information is provided in the online catalogue, <[https://merhav.nli.org.il/permalink/f/ldj0th/NNL\\_ALEPH21243658280005171](https://merhav.nli.org.il/permalink/f/ldj0th/NNL_ALEPH21243658280005171)>: and in Waldman 2018, 295.

125 Nahoum 1908, 114.

126 Shelemay 1986, 59.

manuscripts follow the pattern of the Christians. Just as we have seen before, however, we encounter small adaptations.

Next to the accounts by Europeans about members of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel community, these notes offer the deepest insight into Betä ʿĪsraʿel family structures and traditions of personal names, especially of females about whom the travel accounts are mostly quiet. It becomes obvious that there is a twofold system of names. First the biblical names, which we encounter mostly with individuals who held a religious office, *dābtāra*, deacons, priests or *māmhār* (‘religious teacher’).<sup>127</sup> The second group of names often belong to lay people and are more traditional Amhara or Agāw names, such as **አሻሻይ** (‘Akṣṣay’), **አርቅሻን** (‘Arqəṣān’), **ጉባባ** (‘Gubaba’), and **ርዳይ** (‘Rəday’).<sup>128</sup> A good mix of such names is found in MS Faitlovitch MS26: **አባ ፍርጽቃ** (‘*Abba* Fərṣuh’), **ርገ** (‘Rəgg<sup>wa</sup>’), **መምሕር ዳንኤል** (‘*Māmhār* Danəʿel’), and **አባ ርጽባን** (‘*Abba* Rəṣban’).<sup>129</sup>

Within the framework of a more extensive project on the Betä ʿĪsraʿel heritage, I plan to establish a biographic database of all people mentioned in texts, travel accounts, and oral traditions, in order to form a comparative overview of Betä ʿĪsraʿel individuals. Such a database could also help in establishing regional preferences for texts. For example, the text *Bāqādami gābrā ʿĪgzi abāher* is known (until now) from four manuscripts only, two from the Faitlovitch collection, two from private owners.<sup>130</sup> The two private owners both state that their manuscripts came from the Səmen Mountains,<sup>131</sup> the other two are MSS Faitlovitch MS25 and MS26. From the latter we have the above set of names—none of which can be identified to so far. It would be tempting however, to suggest a regional, Səmen Mountains focus of this text.

Ownership notes and notes of commissioning go hand in hand, usually starting with ‘This book belongs to ...’. Notes on the commissioning of manuscripts usually contain reference to the person who had the manuscript copied, and often also to the scribe who executed the copy. A curiosity can be found in MS Faitlovitch MS13, where the scribe *Abba* Elyas complains ‘Brother,

127 See n. 88 above for the spiritual and biological genealogy of *Dābtāra* Barok (MS Faitlovitch MS23, f. 2v).

128 MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, f. 163r.

129 See images at <[https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU\\_INST/12279437730004146](https://tau.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/972TAU_INST/12279437730004146)>, f. 60v. Similar in MS Faitlovitch MS11, f. 35r: ‘Həḍan, *Abba* Gəfo, father, my father Təzāz, my mother Niqʿəzša, my teacher *Abba* Arsa’. (**አፃን ፡ አባ ፡ ግፎ ፡ አብው ፡ አብው-የኒ ፡ ትዘዝ ፡ እም-የኒ ፡ ኒ-ቀ-ዝሻ ፡ መመረየኒ ፡** (sic) **አባ ፡ አርሳ ፡**).

130 All were used by Hayon in her edition from 2003.

131 Hayon 2003, 18, 20.

I have finished your work. Please pay me now, or I will be disappointed of you'.<sup>132</sup>

Book curses, which can be very elaborate in medieval Latin manuscripts, have not been studied in the Ethiopian traditions, neither Christian nor Betä ʿĪsraʿel. We find book curses at the end of ownership notes, usually stating that ‘whoever steals this book or erases its text shall be excommunicated by the authority of Peter and Paul’ (or similar).

The Betä ʿĪsraʿel introduced their own twist to this curse, replacing Peter and Paul with Moses and Aaron (sometimes also Melchizedek, the high priest). Before the scribe complained about his payment in MS Faitlovitch MS13, he wrote the commission note for Lewi, ending with the curse: ‘Whoever steals it, and whoever erases it, shall be anathematized<sup>133</sup> by the authority of Moses, and Aaron, and Melchizedek, the high priest (ዘሰረቆ ፣ ወዘፈሐቆ ፣ ወጉዝ ፣ ለይኩን ፣ በስልጣን ፣ ሙሴ ፣ ወአሮን ፣ ወመልክ ፣ ጴዴቅ ፣ ካህን ፣ ዓቢይ ።)’.<sup>134</sup>

Since it is not always clear whether a manuscript was owned and used by Betä ʿĪsraʿel or not, we have to look for the smallest indications. MS London, BritLib, Or. 480 is a beautiful fourteenth or fifteenth-century Octateuch, a text of interest for the Betä ʿĪsraʿel.<sup>135</sup> On f. 119v, we find a recent and short ownership note that—considering the names (all either Old Testament, or Agäw), and the short book curse referencing Moses and Aaron—indicates that the manuscript could have been owned by a Betä ʿĪsraʿel.<sup>136</sup> The note mentions *Abba* Finḥas; a man of the same name was mentioned by Haim Nahoum in his travel report of 1908, as the *däbtära* of Amba Gʿwalit in Dämböya.<sup>137</sup>

### *Secret script*

The last scribal feature that I will discuss seems to be unknown so far, for Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts as well as for Christian Ethiopian manuscripts. It is the usage of a specific type of secret script. Certain forms of secret code have been noticed before in Christian manuscripts, for example in MS Sämäz, Sämäz Maryam, Ethio-SPaRe SMM-001,<sup>138</sup> f. 214rc, where a kind of numer-

132 Paraphrase of the Amharic note on f. 66r: እኑኖ ፣ ወንድሜ ፣ እኔ ፣ ጨረሰሁል ፣ አንተ ፣ ደግሞ ፣ ፣ ተሎ ፣ አድርገህ ፣ ቀጋሮን ፣ ሰጠኝ ፣ እንዳላዘን ፣ ብህ ።’

133 In a Christian book curse this word is usually translated as ‘excommunicated’, which is very little fitting in a Jewish context.

134 Many such book curses can be found, such as MS BnF, d’Abbadie 148 (f. 229va),

135 See <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or\\_480\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_480_fs001r)>.

136 Wright 1877, 1.

137 Nahoum 1908, 114. Admittedly, several decades had passed between 1877, when the manuscript had already been described in London, and Nahoum’s visit in 1906.

Still, it could have been the same person.

138 Description and images at <<https://betamasasheft.eu/manuscripts/ESsmm001/>>.

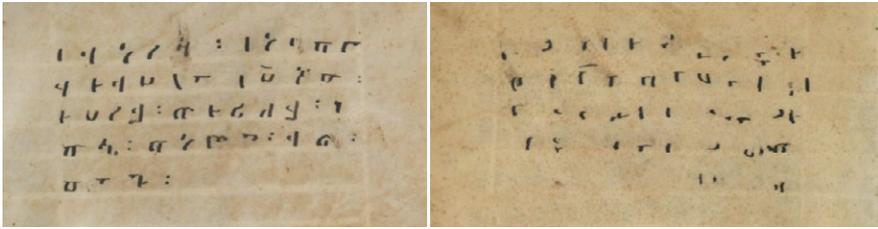


Fig. 6. MS Jerusalem, the National Library of Israel, Ms. Or. 87, ff. 163r, 163v.

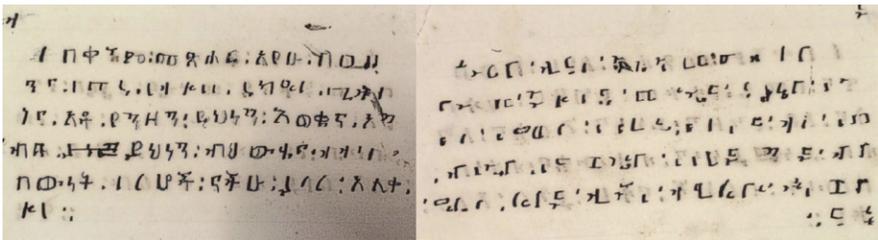


Fig. 7. MS Tel Aviv, Sourasky Cetral Library, Faitlovitch C13.32-16.40, pp. 10, 11.

ical code was used to spell words. More simple techniques are writing words or sentences backwards (EAP/254/1/5, f. 191r).<sup>139</sup> The secret script of the Betä Ǝsra'el, however, uses a different technique.

Attestations of this secret script have been found twice so far, in MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87 (f. 163rv, Fig. 6), and in the documents collected by Faitlovitch, document C13.32-16.40 (Fig. 7). The technique consists in writing only a part of each letter. While some letters can still be read relatively easily, others are harder to decipher. The note becomes complete, and decipherable, through the verso side of the folio, on which the other part of each letter is written. If the manuscript is held up against the light, the characters are revealed fully. I am not sure how the scribe produced such texts, but this is surely the method to see the entire letters.

It remains a mystery so far why these notes were written in this secret way. The Faitlovitch document refers to a ‘book published by Mittwoch and Jensen, which you [the recipient of the note?] shall read. If you read this, you [will] be truly wise, said *Aläqa Tayyä*’.<sup>140</sup> It is not clear to which book this

139 <<https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP254-1-5#?cv=190>>. I thank Jonas Karlsson for showing me this example.

140 በቀኙም ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ አየሁ ፡ በወስጥና ፡ በሜዳ ፡ የታተመ ፡ ዶክቶር ፡ ሚትሶክና ፡ አቶ ፡ የንዝን ፡ ይህንን ፡ እውቁና ፡ አንብቡ ፡ ይህንን ፡ ብታውቁና ፡ ቢታነቡ ፡ በውነት ፡ ብልሆኝ ፡ ናችሁ ፡ ይላል ፡ አለቀ ፡ [sic] ታየ ። The document C13.32-16.40 has no page num-

refers, but the three persons mentioned are known scholars, and collaborated for several years. Eugen Mittwoch was an eminent German orientalist, who taught at Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin.<sup>141</sup> *Aläqa* Tayyā Gäbrä Maryam was an Evangelical Lutheran Christian, who was a lecturer for Gəʿəz and Amharic at the same university between 1905 and 1908. He became Mittwoch's most valuable informant and also authored several scholarly publications himself. Lorenz Jensen was a diplomat, and later German consul in Ethiopia. He was Mittwoch's and Tayyā's student in Berlin.

Although we know all three protagonists of this note, it remains mysterious. Was *Aläqa* Tayyā really the author? Why was it written in this secret way? And how did the note end up among Faitlovich's documents? These are questions that we cannot answer for the time being.

The other note, in MS Jerusalem, NatLib, Ms. Or. 87, is a book curse stating that the manuscript is an *Orit* and that 'whoever steals and whoever erases it shall be punished by the authority of Moses and Aaron'.<sup>142</sup> This note antedates the one in Faitlovich's documents, but is just as mysterious. Why would such an important message be written in a secret script? We do not know for now, but hopefully, further information may be acquired through interviews with Betä ʿĪsraʿel priests and *däbtära*.

### Conclusion

The Betä ʿĪsraʿel have had a rough fate over the centuries in Ethiopia. They have been friends when needed, but more often foes to the Christian ruling state. Nevertheless, they occupied areas which became the heartland of Ethiopian Christianity (Amhara, and especially the regions around Gondär, the imperial capital to be). Even during times of seclusion from their neighbours, the relations rarely stopped completely. The group's manuscripts are the best proof of this. This first comparative description of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel scribal tradition has shown how close the Christian and the Jewish traditions are, with the Betä ʿĪsraʿel manuscripts taking over numerous elements, but adapting them to suit their own religious needs.

While some of the scribal features are rather minor, such as adding shy doxologies in the margins, other features are much more intrusive, such as erasing words or cross ornamentations on the leather covers. The secret script, first described here, appears not to be a uniquely Betä ʿĪsraʿel tradition. It

bers, the secret note is page 10 of the pdf. Without Sisay Sahile I would not have been able to decipher this note.

141 Since 1949 Humboldt University of Berlin.

142 The note reads: ዛቲ ፡ ኦሪት ፡ ዘአንበቢ፣ ዘተ[?] ዘሠረቃ ፡ ወዘፈሐቃ ፡ ለሙሴ ፡ ወአሮን ፡ ቃል ፡ ውጉዝ ፡

would be interesting to discover further evidence of this practice in order to gain a deeper understanding of it. Finally, it must be stressed that large parts of the Betä ʿEsraʾel literary tradition are in need of further study. Especially, critical editions and translations of the prayer texts are a desideratum.

The Betä ʿEsraʾel manuscript tradition is a show case for positive cultural appropriation—the adoption of elements of one culture by members of another. It should be understood as a process of intentional transformation, in which an object undergoes a transformation to emerge with new specific characteristics. Part of this transformation is the reshaping of its visual features, the renaming of the object, a new understanding of its context, a new usage of the object, the combination of which forms the new tradition, or *Sitz im Leben*. The close and continuous connections to Ethiopian Christians were the fertilizers of the development of the Betä ʿEsraʾel manuscript tradition.

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## Historical Annotations in Three Manuscripts from Natan ben Sa'adyah Ha-Kohen Šul'el's Library

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The *nagid* Natan ben Sa'adyah Ha-Kohen Šul'el was born in Tlemcen to a family of North African origin, and subsequently emigrated to Jerusalem and Egypt, where he was appointed *nagid* in 1484. As a learned man and religious leader, he was a lover of books, some of which he copied himself, and some of which he acquired and later sold or bequeathed. His personal story has been successfully outlined, but the story of his books is mostly unknown to date. Two manuscripts from El Escorial Library and one from the Bibliothèque nationale de France show enough evidence in order to be considered as part of Natan Šul'el's library—he copied one, probably commissioned the second one (which later became part of David ibn Avi Zimrah's library), and he bought the third book from a widow. All three codices ended up their wanderings in Western libraries. In this paper I focus on issues related to the production and history of these three books by paying particular attention to their historical annotations, thus exploring Natan Šul'el's facets as patron, scribe, reader, and book collector in the social and cultural context of the late fifteenth-century Eastern Mediterranean.

A valuable, yet little explored, source of documentation for the study of medieval and early modern Jewish cultural history is provided by the thousands of historical notes written in the flyleaves and margins of Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> This evidence has been traditionally neglected,<sup>2</sup> for Hebrew manuscripts have been the object of textual and codicological studies, rather than a source for cultural history. And yet historical annotations in Hebrew manuscripts are comparable to a documentary archive for the study of Jewish social and cultural history in general, and manuscript use and intellectual history in particular.

The codicological study of medieval codices emerged in the 1950s in the context of manuscript cataloguing,<sup>3</sup> and led to the establishment of the foundations of modern cataloguing with the launching of the *Comité international de paléographie* and its main project, the cataloguing of Latin manuscripts

- 1 By historical annotations I mean all texts written in the manuscript from the moment of its production mentioning people, places and/or events related to its history—colophons, deeds of sale, records of inheritances, lists of family births and deaths, notes of ownership, and personal or private notes.
- 2 With the exception of colophons in Hebrew manuscripts, which have been given greater attention as historical sources than the rest of historical annotations. See Riegler 1995.
- 3 See Masai 1950 and 1956.

worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Following this example, the *Comité de paléographie hébraïque* was also established, leading to the publication, in three volumes, of the first true catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts with a codicological approach—*Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques portant des indications de date jusqu'à 1540*.<sup>5</sup> This catalogue also provided, for the first time in the study of Hebrew manuscripts, a historical analysis of the codices from the moment of their copy by reading historical annotations. Even if these were not transcribed—the codicological analysis was at that time the main concern of the authors—the basic information provided by these annotations was mentioned and contextualised so as to understand the ‘afterlives’ of the manuscripts after they were produced.<sup>6</sup>

The case-study I shall now deal with has to do precisely with this historical approach. I shall be dealing here with the reading of the historical annotations and their interpretation in three manuscripts from the library of the *nagid* Natan ben Sa'adyah Ha-Kohen Šul'el (b. 1437, d. 1502).<sup>7</sup>

We know some details of Šul'el's life thanks to the *responsa*, to other writings of his contemporaries, to the documentation of the Jerusalem Islamic Court, and to some fragments of letters and documents from the Cairo Genizah.<sup>8</sup> We know that he was born in 1437, probably in Tlemcen (Algeria), and that in around 1471 he emigrated to Jerusalem; also that some ten years later, after some conflicts with the leaders of the community in Jerusalem, he settled in Cairo, and from 1484 was *nagid* of the Jewish community of Egypt, until his death in 1502.<sup>9</sup> He was not succeeded in office by any of his children, of which he had as many as eight, but it was his nephew Yişhaq who inherited his position and, as we shall see, some of his books. Yişhaq occupied this position intermittently, combining it with his profession as a merchant, until 1517, when he emigrated to Jerusalem after the Ottoman conquest of the former Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt. Yişhaq's only recorded son, Avraham, was orphaned as a child, and had at least four different tutors, who had been chosen by Yişhaq before his death.<sup>10</sup>

One of the fragments from the Cairo Genizah analysed by Abraham David contains a letter sent from Jerusalem to Natan Šul'el by Šelomoh ben

4 Maniaci 2002, 163.

5 Sirat and Beit-Arié 1972; Beit-Arié and Sirat 1979; Sirat, Beit-Arié and Glatzer 1986.

6 For a history of catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts and their methodological approaches, see Del Barco 2014.

7 The title *nagid* was granted to the religious leader of the Jewish community in Egypt during the Mamluk period.

8 On the sources, see David 1988, 374–414.

9 *Ibid.* 375–376.

10 *Ibid.* 377–383.

R. Ḥalfata.<sup>11</sup> Although the letter is undated, David argues that it must have been written at the end of 1481 or in early 1482, once Natan Šul'el had already settled in Egypt. According to David, this was so far the only known source in which Natan Šul'el's name is mentioned with his patronymic—'Our master and Rabbi, R. Natan, son of our honoured Rabbi R. Sa'adyah—may He rest in Eden—Ha-Kohen Šul'el'. The express mention of Natan Šul'el's father, Rabbi Sa'adyah Ha-Kohen Šul'el leads David, moreover, to assume that this is the same Rabbi Sa'adyah Šul'el documented in other sources who was Rabbi in Tlemcen during the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

When dealing with the tutors of the orphan Avraham, the son of R. Yiṣḥaq Šul'el, David transcribes a deed of purchase testifying that David ibn Avi Zimrah (b. 1479, d. 1573, also known as Radbaz) bought the manuscript, in which that same deed of purchase is found, by the intermediary of one of Avraham's tutors, David ben Šošan.<sup>13</sup> The manuscript contains different exegetical works, and the mentioned deed of purchase is found in f. 132v (Fig. 1, last two lines, in smaller script):<sup>14</sup>

קניתי אותו ע"י החכם השלם כה"ר דוד בן יצחק רופוס היתום בנו של הנגיד כה"ר יצחק שולאל  
נ"ע אני דוד בן אבי זמרה

I bought it (the book) by (the intermediary of) the fulfilled sage, our honoured Rabbi David ben Šošan—may the Merciful protect him and bless him—tutor of the orphan who is the son of the *nagid* our honoured Rabbi Yiṣḥaq Šul'el—may he rest in Eden. I, David ibn Avi Zimrah.

The purchase of the manuscript was undoubtedly completed after the death of Yiṣḥaq Šul'el in 1524, which we know by the use of the abbreviation ע"י 'may he rest in Eden' after his name. Although it is not mentioned, the transaction no doubt took place in Cairo where, among his other occupations, Avi Zimrah was the *dayyan* (Jewish religious judge) and head of a *yešivah* (rabbinic academy).

David ibn Avi Zimrah, besides studying at the *bet-din* (rabbinical court) of Yiṣḥaq Šul'el in Cairo while the latter was *nagid* in Egypt, succeeded him as head of the Jewish community in that country after the Ottoman conquest in 1517, although not with the same title of *nagid* that both Natan Šul'el and his nephew Yiṣḥaq had held.<sup>15</sup> His library, famous in his time, was indeed

11 Fragment in New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, ENA 2740.2, see David 1988, 397–398.

12 David 1988, 383–384.

13 The manuscript is MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15. Described in Llamas 1941, 24–26, and Del Barco 2003, 172–173, no. 26.

14 Also transcribed in David 1988, 382 n. 56.

15 See Zimmels 2007.

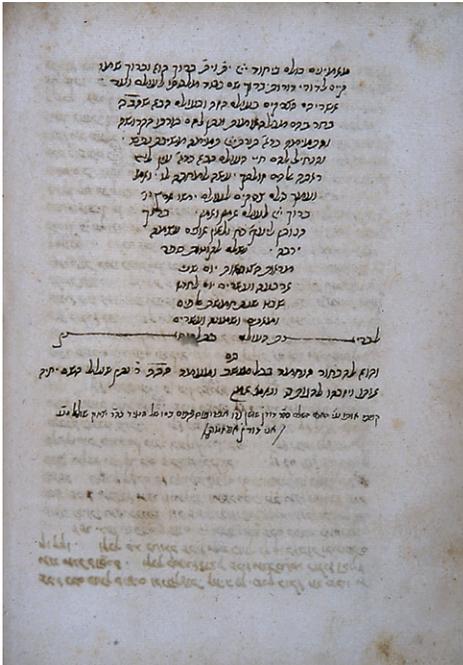


Fig. 1. MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15, f. 132v (courtesy of Patrimonio Nacional, Ministerio de la Presidencia, Gobierno de España).

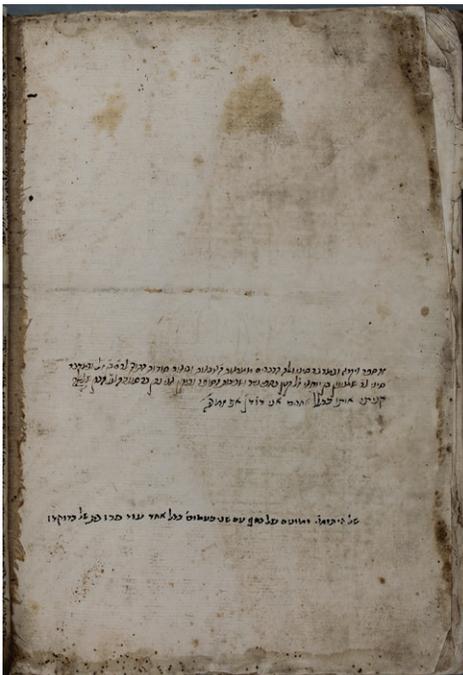


Fig. 2. MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15, f. 263v (courtesy of Patrimonio Nacional, Ministerio de la Presidencia, Gobierno de España).

enriched with the manuscript just mentioned. This is indicated not only in the deed we have just read, but in another one at the end of the same manuscript, on f. 263v, which reads (Fig. 2, third line):

קניתי אותו בדלל אחרים אני דוד ן' אבי זמרה

I bought it (this book) together with others (or 'for the profit of others'), I, David ibn Avi Zimrah.

Concerning Natan Šul'el himself, there are other references mentioning him that appear in this and in another manuscript, also from El Escorial Library. Together with these two manuscripts, we shall look at another one from the Bibliothèque nationale de France also related to Natan Šul'el.

On f. 132v from MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15, where we read the deed of purchase by David ibn Avi Zimrah, we also find a colophon copied immediately after the completion of one of the commentaries included in the book. The colophon reads (Fig. 1, lines 9 [last word]–17):

ברוך הנותן ליעף כח ולאין אונים עצמה ירבה נשלם לקוטות ספר מראות הצובאות יום שני ארבעה ועשרים יום לחדש שבט שנת חמשת אלפים ומאתים ושמונה ועשרים לבריאת העולם בתלמסאן תם

Blessed be the One who *gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increases strength* (Isaiah 40:29). (The copy) of these selections from *Sefer mar'ot ha-sov'ot* was completed on Monday, the twenty-fourth of the month of Ševat, (in) the year five thousand two hundred and twenty-eight from the creation of the world (=18 January 1468) in Tlemcen. Finished.

Immediately after, the same scribe added (lines 18–19):

והוא להבחור הנחמד בכל מושב ומעמד הה' כ' ר' נתן שולל השם יחיה אותו ויזכהו להגות בו ונאמ' אמן

It (belongs) to the pleasant man in every location and state, the fulfilled Rabbi R. Natan Šul'el—may God give him life and the merit to meditate on it, and say amen.

These annotations by the scribe attest the presence of Natan Šul'el in Tlemcen in that year of 1468; indeed, we know that he did not settle in Jerusalem until early 1471. From these annotations it is also clear that the manuscript was copied for Natan Šul'el, to whom we must therefore attribute the selection of the works and the patronage of the manuscript. For further confirmation, on the end flyleaf of the same codex (f. 263v), we find, before David ibn Avi Zimrah's previously mentioned note, an annotation written by Natan Šul'el himself, which reads (Fig. 2, lines 1–2):

זה ספר ויקרא ובמדבר סיני ואלה הדברים ממראות הצובאות וביאור סודות התורה לר' ב' ן' ז' ל' ובמדבר סיני לר' שמעון בן יוחאי ז' ל' קנין כספי נייר ושכירות הסופר ותיקון אני נתן ב' ר' סעדיה נ' ע' הכהן שלא

This book (containing the books of) Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy from (*Sefer mar'ot ha-sov'ot* and *Be'ur sodot ha-Torah* by Nahmanides—may his memory be blessed—and (the *Zohar* for the book of) Numbers by Šim'on ben Yoḥay—may his memory be blessed—is my acquisition (paid with) my money, (including) the paper, the scribe's salary, and the revision. I, Natan, son of R. Sa'adyah—may he rest in Eden—Ha-Kohen Šul'el.

This annotation makes it clear that the making of the manuscript has been paid for by Natan Šul'el, including the paper as well as the scribe's salary and the revisions. In this note we also find the mention that Natan Šul'el makes of himself, in the phrase 'אני נתן ב'ר' סעדיה נ'ע הכהן שלא אל I Natan, son of R. Sa'adyah—may he rest in Eden—Ha-Kohen Šul'el'. This specific reference to his patronymic is thus not only a further reference to the name of his father, in addition to that from the Cairo Genizah fragment dated 1481 or 1482 and studied by David; this is also the earliest of the two.

Although this is a note written by Natan Šul'el himself while he was still in Tlemcen, this is not the earliest surviving text in his own handwriting. Manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Hébreu 110 contains the Targum of Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, and the Five *Megillot* (Scrolls),<sup>16</sup> as well as the alternate version of the Targum (Aramaic paraphrase), or Targum *šeni*, of the book of Esther.<sup>17</sup> On f. 139v of this manuscript, the colophon states:

סליק תרגו' ירוש' ממגלת אסתר ובו נשלם הספר אשר בו תרגו' רות ותרגו' תהלים ותרגו' איוב ותרגו' משלי ותרגו' שיר השירים ותרגו' קהלת ותרגו' איכה ותרגו' מגלה ותרגו' אחר ירוש' למגלה ובכאן נשלמו הכל השבחה לאל וההודאה לשמו וכתבתים לעצמי אני הקטן שבסופרים נתן הכהן ב'ר' סעדיה נ'ע הכהן שלא אל השם יזכני לקרות בספר הזה ובוולתו אני זורעי וכן יהי רצון ונאמר אמן והיתה השלמתו בחדש כסלו שנת רי"ז בתלמסאן מתא תם ונשלם תהלה לאל בורא עולם  
End of Targum *šeni* of the scroll of Esther, and with it this book has been finished, which contains the Targums of Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, and Targum *šeni* of Esther. Now it is all finished—may God be praised and thank His name. I have written them (these books) for myself, I, the tiniest of the scribes, Natan Ha-Kohen, son of R. Sa'adyah—may he rest in Eden—Ha-Kohen Šul'el. May God give me the merit to read this book and its partner (book), to me and my descendants, so be (God's) wish, and say amen. It has been completed in the month of *Kislev* of the year (5)217 (= October/November 1456) in the city of Tlemcen. Finished and terminated—praise to God creator of the universe.

We therefore know that the codex was copied in its entirety by Natan Šul'el himself and was completed in October/November 1456, when he was nineteen years old, in Tlemcen. This colophon also attests, for the third time—along with the Cairo Genizah fragment and MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15—the name of his father, Sa'adyah, since Natan Šul'el refers to himself as 'נתן הכהן ב'ר' סעדיה נ'ע הכהן שלא אל I Natan Ha-Kohen, son of R. Sa'adyah—may he rest in Eden—Ha-Kohen Šul'el.' Moreover, this manuscript constitutes Natan Šul'el's earliest surviving written work so far known to us.

16 Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther.

17 Manuscript described in Zotenberg et al. 1866, 11–12, no. 110, and in Sirat and Beit-Arié 1972, I, 108, Hébr. 110. See also references in Merino 1987 and Taradach and Ferrer 1998, 22.

The Paris manuscript is thus an example of Natan Šul'el's facet as a scribe, something that he seems to have learned in his youth. The aforementioned MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15 tells us about Natan Šul'el's activity as a patron while still in Tlemcen, just before leaving that city for Jerusalem. Another manuscript, also from El Escorial Library, records a third facet of Natan in relation to the books that made up his library—that of collector of manuscripts coming from other libraries.

MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-II-6, contains Raši's commentary to the Five *Megillot*, and David Kimḥi's commentary on Chronicles.<sup>18</sup> The codex is composed of quaternions of parchment, and the text is copied in a semi-cursive Sephardic script. Without a colophon, the copy of this manuscript cannot be dated very accurately. After it was copied, a later owner of the codex had written on the recto of f. 1, originally blank, a reference to the contents of the manuscript, as well as other texts. In this reference, he mentioned David Kimḥi's commentary on Proverbs, now missing from the manuscript.<sup>19</sup>

Of greater interest to us is the deed of sale appearing on f. 81r, at the end of the commentary on Chronicles. Here a witness by the name of Šelomoh ben R. Mošeh Sefardi certifies the sale of the manuscript to R. Natan Šul'el. The deed reads (Fig. 3):

אנו עדים התומי מטה יודעים שמכרה אסטיטה אלמנת ר' משה בוזורידה זה הספר בסך ידוע על יד סירסור  
להר' נתן כהן שלא יצ' וקבלה המעות משלם וזה היה בחדש סיון שנת הרל' ג' ליצירה בירושל' תו'  
שלמה ב' ר' משה נ' ע' ספרדי

We, witnesses signing below, recognize that Aştiṭah, R. Mošeh Bozoridah's widow, sold this book for the agreed amount, by intermediation, to R. Natan Kohen Šul'el—may his Rock and Saviour keep him (safe). She received the whole amount in the month of Siyan of the year 5233 (= June 1473) in Jerusalem—may it be rebuilt and maintained. Šelomoh, son of Mošeh—may he rest in Eden—Sefardi.

As explicitly mentioned, this transaction took place during Natan Šul'el's stay in Jerusalem, two years after his arrival in the Holy City, for we know that he arrived in Jerusalem in 1471 and did not leave for Egypt until some ten years later.

From the previous deeds and annotations in the manuscripts discussed here we can conclude that Natan Šul'el's library was enriched by books in which he performed different functions, related to the production, patronage

18 Described in Llamas 1941, 27–28, and Del Barco 2003, 195–196, no. 40.

19 This commentary must have been detached from the codex at an early stage, since a Latin annotation on the contents added after the arrival of the manuscript in El Escorial warns about the lack of this particular element in the book. The manuscript arrived in El Escorial in 1599, coming from Benito Arias Montano's library. See De Andrés 1970, 33.

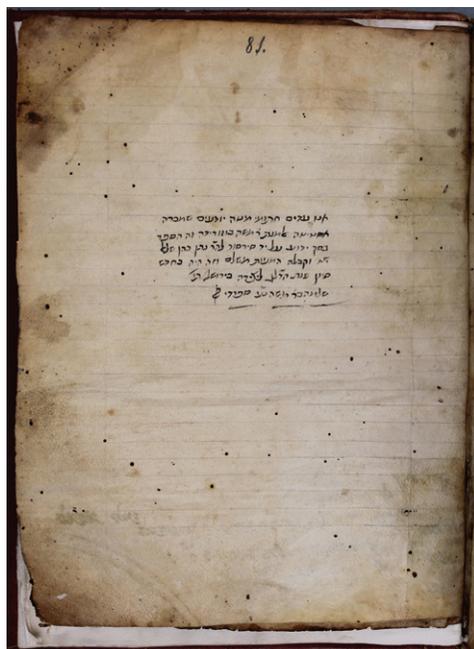


Fig. 3. MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-II-6, f. 81r (courtesy of Patrimonio Nacional, Ministerio de la Presidencia, Gobierno de España).

and acquisition of manuscripts. First, probably in his youth, as evidenced by MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Hébr. 110, he worked as scribe making copies of books for himself. Second, once his income permitted it, he patronized the copying of manuscripts that interested him, as we have seen in MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15. Finally, the codex we have just seen (MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-II-6) attests to the purchase of books by Natan Šul'el, who thanks to their acquisition could form what we assume was a rich library. As we saw at the beginning, some of his books passed to his successor in office as *nagid* of Egypt, his nephew Yišḥaq Šul'el, and eventually some of them were bought by David ibn Avi Zimrah, as MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15.

One question yet to be answered is how the two manuscripts now in El Escorial got there from Egypt in the sixteenth century. Natan Šul'el's books, like most Hebrew books in El Escorial, arrived there in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The books do not provide us with any documentation about how they could get from Egypt to Spain. It seems that they must have

20 MS San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, G-I-15 arrived in El Escorial in 1599 (see previous note), while G-II-6 arrived in 1576, bequeathed by Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (b. 1503, d. 1575) along with his entire library, according to De Andrés 1970, 17–19.

gone through Italy, since most of the of Hebrew books and manuscripts for El Escorial Library were acquired either in Italy or in the Spanish Netherlands by Benito Arias Montano (b. 1527, d. 1598). However, for the moment, in the absence of more specific data and other documentation, we only dare to speculate about the arrival of these books in El Escorial.

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# **Scribal Practices among European Scholars during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Cases of Auguste Steinschneider (Auerbach), Moritz Steinschneider, and Martin Schreiner\***

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This paper discusses patterns of manuscript sharing among European scholars during the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in connection with Martin Schreiner (d. 1926), Ignaz Goldziher's former student, who, between 1894 and 1902, taught at the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* in Berlin. Both before and during his time in Berlin, Schreiner was given access to manuscripts that were in the possession of Moritz Steinschneider. The latter shared with him his copy of Moshe b. Ezra's (d. after 1135) *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-l-mudākara* (nowadays preserved as MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464). The copy, based on MS Oxford, Bodleian, Hunt. 599, had been produced by Steinschneider's wife, Auguste, in 1851, through the painstaking process of tracing (*Durchzeichnung*) the original manuscript. Moreover, at the end of 1897 Steinschneider lent Schreiner a copy of Samaw' al al-Mağribī's (d. 570/1175) *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, a codex completed on 20 Ġumādā II 1315/[16 November 1897], which had been copied for Steinschneider from an earlier witness held at the Khedival library in Cairo.

Handwritten artifacts constitute the bread and butter for scholars of Near Eastern cultures and societies. The enormous increase in digitized manuscript collections and the growing readiness of libraries and institutions around the globe to provide open access to their holdings through the World Wide Web not only make it much easier and more affordable for scholars to access the material relevant to their research, the ever-increasing availability of manuscripts has also prompted a renewed interest in philology, as is suggested by a growing number of critical editions and the evolution of codicology into a discipline in its own right.<sup>1</sup>

A shrinking number of scholars still remembers the time when manuscripts were reproduced by microfilm (or, occasionally, photostats)—a labo-

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1 See e.g. van Lit 2020 (to be used with caution).



Fig. 1. Manuscripts and microfilm rolls (© Photograph Andrea Kane, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton NJ 2019).

rious and expensive technique, both for libraries and readers, and one that allows for only black-and-white reproduction (Fig. 1). The practices of scholars prior to the invention of microfilm technology is already part of the history of the respective disciplines, and its traces often allow insights into our predecessors' scholarly lives and work modes.

Consulting manuscripts *in situ* was an expensive and time-consuming activity, but many scholars were in close contact with colleagues based elsewhere and thus indirectly able to access libraries that would otherwise not be within reach—it was common practice among scholars to prepare excerpts for other scholars from manuscripts that were kept in libraries in Europe (and beyond), as was rendering other kinds of support, such as lending out personally owned manuscripts and collating transcripts with other witnesses. Traces of such practices are evidenced in archival collections and in the correspondence of many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western scholars of Near Eastern societies and cultures. Leiden University Library, for example, owns partial and complete transcripts of some of its own manuscripts prepared by the erstwhile keeper of Oriental manuscripts and books, Cornelius van Arendonk (b. 1881, d. 1946), at the request of his colleagues. Van Arendonk's intimate familiarity with the Leiden collection is legendary, and he generously shared detailed information and partial transcripts of Leiden manuscripts through correspondence. Leiden University Library also owns photostats of some of the Arabic manuscripts in Berlin, London, Milan, and various other

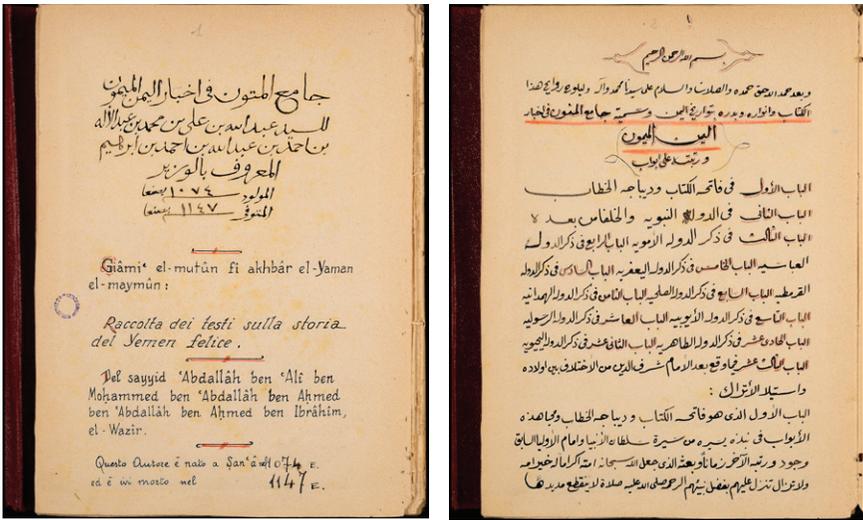


Fig. 2a–b. MS Rome, BANLC, Or. 356 [ZMT 01755], (a) title page and (b) f. 1r (courtesy of the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana).

European libraries that had been prepared at the request of van Arendonk, as well as numerous excerpts in his hand from Yemeni manuscripts held by other European libraries.<sup>2</sup>

When it came to manuscripts located in the Middle East, scholars often commissioned copies on which they relied later when writing their publications. Copies of some of the major sources for the history of Mecca were produced, for example, for Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (b. 1857, d. 1936).<sup>3</sup> The Italian medical doctor Cesare Ansaldi, who sojourned in Yemen from

- 2 His research materials and personal notes are preserved at Leiden University Library under the shelf marks Or. 8261–8305. See Witkam 1981, 61: ‘Until 1946 the keeper of Oriental manuscripts and printed books was C. van Arendonk, who was possessed of such wide erudition that he was considered, during the thirty years of his employment in the library, to be its walking manuscripts’ catalogue’. See also Kramers 1947, 148: ‘Kwam aldus zijn wetenschappelijke arbeid zelden tot het niveau der gedrukte openbaarheid, hij kwam in anderen vorm ten goede aan de zeer velen, die in binnen- en buitenland in zijn functie of als vrienden met hem in aanraking kwamen. Hij was een van het welbekende type van conservatoren, die zichzelf en hun tijd niet spaarden om anderen de gewenschte in- en voorlichting te geven. Door zijn bemiddeling vonden de schatten van de Leidsche handschriftenverzameling overal heen hun weg, terwijl zij, die op het Legatum Warnerianum kwamen werken, zich ieder oogenblik van zijn bereidheid konden overtuigen om hun moeilijkheden op te helderen’.
- 3 See Witkam 2018.

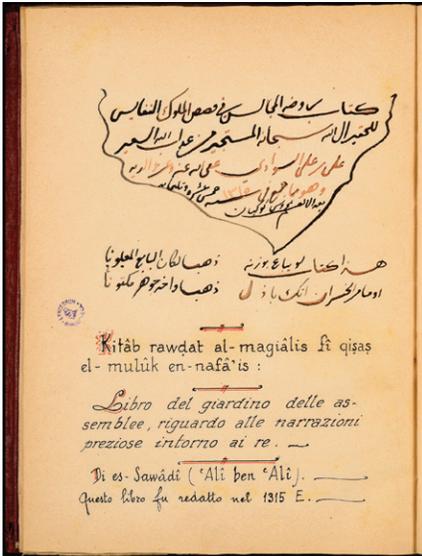


Fig. 3. MS Rome, BANLC, Or. 357 [ZMT 01756], title page (Courtesy of the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana).

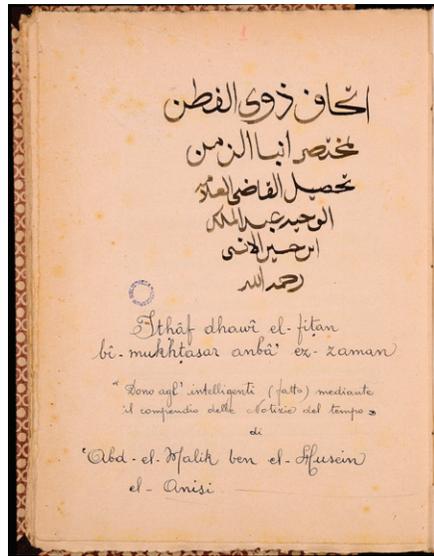


Fig. 4. MS Rome, BANLC, Or. 361 [ZMT 01760], title page (Courtesy of the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana).

1929 to 1932 as a member of the Italian health mission, collected manuscripts of Arabic medical texts. The codices he brought to Italy, which are now in the possession of the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, were clearly produced at his request.<sup>4</sup> Although not dated, their uniform, immaculate *mise-en-page*, with title pages in both Arabic and Latin characters (Figs 2–5), indicate that he had most likely even determined their desired arrangement. The correspondence between Henri Corbin and Wladimir Ivanow (1947 through 1966), the former based in Tehran, the latter in Bombay, often revolved around manuscripts they were trying to obtain, and in several instances they helped each other by commissioning local copyists to produce transcripts of manuscripts that the other was in need of.<sup>5</sup>

4 For a description of the Ansaldi manuscripts (MSS Rome, BANLC, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363), see Traini 1967, 100–109. Digital surrogates are available through Hill Museum and Manuscript Library's virtual reading room (vHML), accessible through <<http://projects.ias.edu/zmt/>> (accessed 26 May 2020). Engaging skilled copyists to make copies of certain books was common practice among European collectors of earlier centuries. For the case of Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter (b. 1506, d. 1557), see e.g. Rebhan 2009, 121; for the case of Levinus Warner (b. 1618, d. 1665), see e.g. van der Heide 1977, 11.

5 Schmidtke 1999, *passim*.

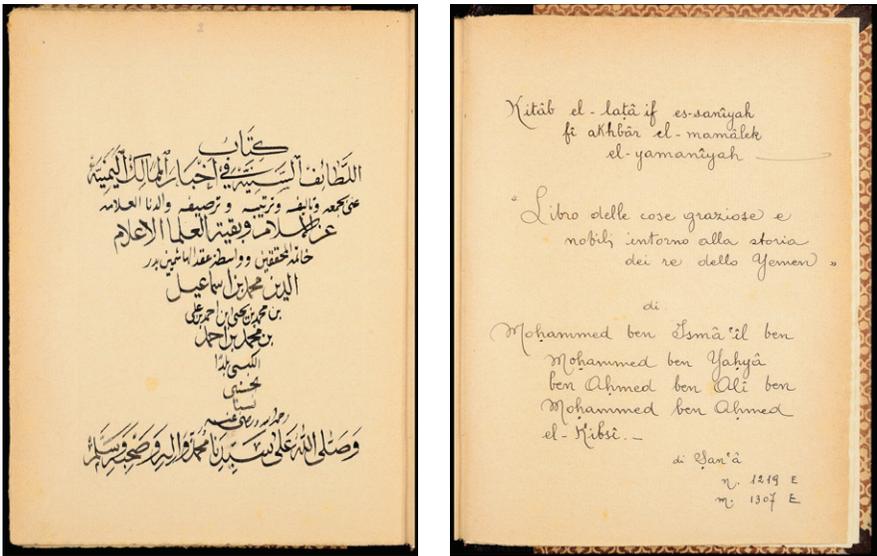


Fig. 5a-b. MS Rome, BANLC, Or. 362 [ZMT 01761], (a) title page (Arabic) and (b) title page (Italian) (Courtesy of the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana).

Interesting examples of manuscript sharing among European scholars during the second half of the nineteenth century can also be observed in connection with Martin Schreiner (b. 1863, d. 1926), Ignaz Goldziher's (b. 1850, d. 1921) former student, who, between 1894 and 1902, taught at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Those eight years constitute the most fruitful period of Schreiner's scholarly career. For the first time, he had an enormous corpus of Muslim literature literally at his fingertips, and, from his arrival in Berlin in December 1893 until 1902, when his scholarly career came to an abrupt end, he made ample use of this opportunity. This is indicated by the regular entries in the readers' register, 'Im Lesezimmer der Handschriften-Abtheilung benutzte Berliner Mss. Orientalia', which minutely records Schreiner's visits to the Königliche Bibliothek reading room to consult the library's Arabic (and Hebrew) manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> Additional evidence for his work on the Berlin manuscripts is provided by the Martin Schreiner Archive, held in the National Library of Israel, which contains his excerpts from numerous manuscripts from the Berlin collection

6 On him, see Schmidtke forthcoming.

7 MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Hs. or. Sim. 8948. See Schmidtke forthcoming, Appendix I ('Manuscripts (Arabic and Hebrew) consulted by Martin Schreiner').

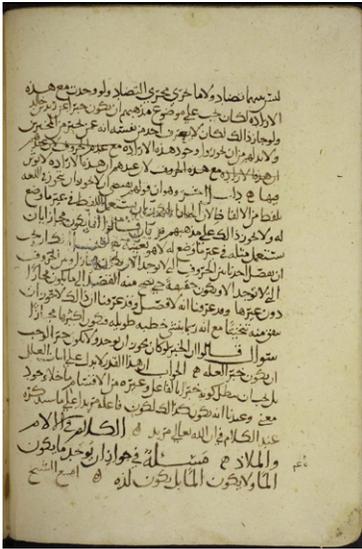


Fig. 6. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Glaser 12, f. 77v (Courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

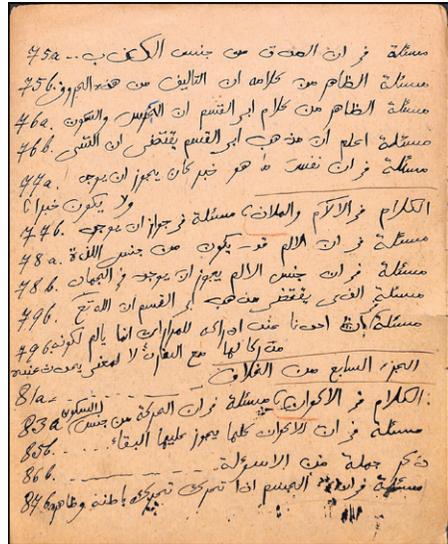


Fig. 7. Portion of table of content of MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Glaser 12, prepared by Martin Schreiner (Martin Schreiner Archive, Archives Dept., National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, ARC. Ms. Var. 347-6 a) (Courtesy of the National Library of Israel).

(in addition to manuscripts from Leiden, Vienna, and Gotha),<sup>8</sup> from his correspondence with Ignaz Goldziher and others,<sup>9</sup> as well as in his published and unpublished work.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly, in Berlin Schreiner was able, for the first time, to access some of the writings by Muslim Mu‘tazilite thinkers, and he was the first modern scholar to do so. It was only a decade prior to Schreiner’s arrival in Berlin that the Königliche Bibliothek had purchased two collections of Arabic manuscripts that had been brought together by Eduard Glaser (b. 1855, d. 1908) during his first two trips to Yemen: the first collection, consisting of 23 manuscripts, was purchased in 1884, the second one, consisting of 242 manuscripts, was purchased in February 1887. Karl Vollers (b. 1857, d. 1909), assistant librarian at the Königliche Bibliothek between 1882 and

8 MS National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Archives Dept., ARC. Ms. Var. 347. See Schmidtke 2012; Greenstein 2019; Schmidtke forthcoming, Appendix I and passim.  
 9 The Hungarian Academy of Sciences preserves 157 letters by Schreiner to Goldziher, written between the years 1887 and 1901, in Hungarian, Hebrew, and Arabic. For Schreiner’s correspondence, see Schmidtke and Zsom forthcoming.  
 10 Schreiner 1983; Schmidtke forthcoming, Appendices II, III, and V.



Fig. 8. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Glaser 52, f. 5r (Courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

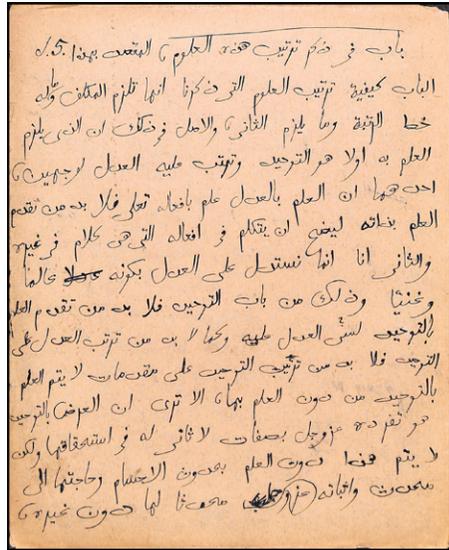


Fig. 9. Beginning of MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Glaser 52, f. 5r, copied by Martin Schreiner (Martin Schreiner Archive, Archives Dept., National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, ARC. Ms. Var. 347-6 8) (Courtesy of the National Library of Israel).

1886,<sup>11</sup> had published in 1884 a short notice about the first Glaser collection in the *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*,<sup>12</sup> and in 1887 Wilhelm Ahlwardt (b. 1828, d. 1909) published his *Kurzes Verzeichniss der Glaser'schen Sammlung arabischer Handschriften*, a handlist covering the first and second Glaser collections.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, since Ahlwardt was about to finalize his monumental catalogue of the entire Berlin collection of Arabic manuscripts when the Glaser manuscripts were purchased, he was able to include their descriptions in the catalogue. Thus information on the materials included in the collection was accessible even before Schreiner moved to Berlin,<sup>14</sup> and it is likely that he was aware of the existence of Muʿtazilite writings in the Berlin collections prior to his arrival. Between 30 October 1894 and 17 August 1895, Schreiner worked on MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin,

11 For Vollers, see Mangold 2007, passim; *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* at <<https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/vollers-karl>> (accessed 19 May 2020).

12 Vollers 1884.

13 Ahlwardt 1887. The handlist largely relies on an inventory of the manuscripts prepared by Eduard Glaser.

14 Ahlwardt 1887–1889.

Glaser 12, a unique copy of the *Kitāb Masā'il al-ḥilāf bayna l-Baṣriyyīn wa-l-Baḡdādiyyīn* by Abū Rašīd al-Nīsābūrī, the foremost student of the chief *qāḏī* and head of the Bahšamiyya, 'Abd al-Ġabbār al-Hamaḏānī (d. 415/1024) (Figs 6, 7), and between 2 February and 17 August 1895, he consulted MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Glaser 52, containing a portion of Ibn Mat-tawayh's paraphrastic commentary on 'Abd al-Ġabbār's *Kitāb al-Muḥīṭ* (Figs 8, 9).<sup>15</sup> Both texts are discussed in detail in Schreiner's publications of 1895 ('Der Kalām in der jüdischen Literatur') and 1900 ('Jeschu 'a ben Jehuda').<sup>16</sup>

Prior to his arrival in Berlin, Schreiner's access to Islamic manuscripts had been more limited. In April 1887 Schreiner spent a few days at the Herzoglichen Bibliothek Gotha where he consulted a copy of al-Ġazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Kitāb al-Mustaṣfā* ('Gothaer Hs. Nr. 925').<sup>17</sup> During a brief trip to Vienna (24 June–2 July 1887), Schreiner had consulted a fair number of manuscripts, portions of which he excerpted for reuse in his later publications. Schreiner also had direct access to manuscripts of Leiden. A handwritten register of manuscripts lent from the Oriental Collections at Leiden, administered by the then Interpreter Legati Warneriani, Michael Jan de Goeje (b. 1836, d. 1909), contains an entry in the name of 'M. Schreiner', address 'Budapest', listing the manuscripts that were sent to him as a loan.<sup>18</sup>

During his student days in Budapest (1881–1887), as well as during his time as a rabbi in Csurgó (1887–1891), Schreiner enjoyed the generosity of a number of colleagues who shared with him their excerpts from manuscripts they had consulted in the past, occasionally also entire manuscript copies they had produced or purchased. These included first and foremost his former teachers in Budapest, David Kaufmann (b. 1852, d. 1899),<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Bach-

15 See Schmidtke forthcoming, Appendix I. Under the supervision of Schreiner, his pupil Arthur Biram (b. 1878, d. 1967) prepared a partial critical edition and study of Abū Rašīd's *Kitāb Masā'il al-ḥilāf*. See Biram 1902. For this and other works by Abū Rašīd al-Nīsābūrī, see also Ansari and Schmidtke 2017, Ch. 1.

16 Schreiner 1895, 1900.

17 Letter from Wilhelm Pertsch to Schreiner, 5 April 1887 (Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Correspondence Goldziher, GIL/38/01/125).

18 *Register of Loans of Manuscripts from the Oriental Collections at Leiden* in MS Leiden, University Library, BA2 5288, 194. For details, see Schmidtke forthcoming, Appendix I. For the library's practice of lending manuscripts to private scholars during the nineteenth century, see Witkam 2012, 272–273.

19 Schreiner 1885a, 10 n. 26 ('Dr. Kaufmann D. tanár úr szíves közbenjárása folytán a commentárnak boroszlói másolatát (a boroszlói rabbiképző könyvtárának 193 sz. kézír.) és az illető helynek két más kéziratból való másolatát használtam'), and Schreiner 1886, 221 n. 2 ('Durch die gütige Vermittelung des Herrn Prof. Dr. David Kaufmann habe ich die Breslauer Copie des Commentars (Hs. Nr. 193 der Biblio-

er (b. 1850, d. 1913),<sup>20</sup> Ignaz Goldziher,<sup>21</sup> and later on also Carlo Landberg (since 1884 Count de Landberg-Hallberger; b. 1848, d. 1924).<sup>22</sup>

Both before and during his time in Berlin, Schreiner was also repeatedly given access to manuscripts that were in the possession of Moritz Steinschneider (b. 1816, d. 1907), the founder of modern Jewish bibliography and one of the most important representatives of modern Jewish scholarship. The following two incidents are particularly noteworthy.

It must have been towards the end of Schreiner's student days in Budapest that Steinschneider shared with him his copy of Moshe b. Ezra's (d. after 1135) *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-l-muḍākara*, a theoretical treatise on Hebrew poetics. Schreiner prepared his own transcription of the book, which he ended with a colophon, dated 1 Elul 5647[/21 August 1887] (Fig. 10a–d). He first referred to the work in his 1888 publication, 'Zur Geschichte der Polemik'.<sup>23</sup> Shortly afterwards, he devoted a detailed study to the *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara*, a

- thek des Breslauer Rabbinerseminars) und die Copien der Stelle aus zwei anderen Handschriften benutzen können') referring to a copy of a commentary on *Sefer ha-Yezira*, attributed to Isaac Israeli (b. c.832, d. c.932). Schreiner 1888, 607 n. 5 ('Die in Beilage I mitgetheilten Stücke sind aus meiner Abschrift der im Besitze des Herrn Prof. Kaufmann befindlichen Handschrift des *Kitāb al-muḥtawī*, über die Frankl in der erwähnten Schrift Bericht erstattet hat'), referring to (nowadays) MS Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann A 280.
- 20 Schreiner 1885c, 270 n. 1 ('Durch die Güte des Herrn Prof. Bacher habe ich in das Arabische Einsicht nehmen können'), referring to MSS Oxford, Bodleian, Pococke 136 and Marsh 659.
- 21 Schreiner 1885b, 139 n. 2 ('Folgende Notiz ist Excerpten aus cod. Lugd. Bat. Warner 480 entnommen, die Herr Dr. I. Goldziher angefertigt hat und die ich durch seine Güte benutzen durfte'), referring to MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 480. Schreiner 1886, 250 n. 1 ('Diese Ausführungen theile ich aus den Excerpten des Herrn Dr. Goldziher mit, die er aus der Leidener Handschrift des Werkes كتاب الأجيبة الفاخرة عن الأسئلة الفاجرة dieses Schriftstellers angefertigt hat und die er mir gütigst zu Gebote stellte'), referring to MS Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1510. Schreiner 1888, 671 n. 3 ('HS. der Leipz. Universitätsbibl. 21 b. Herr Dr. Goldziher hatte die Güte mir seine Excerpte zu Gebote zu stellen'), referring to MS Leipzig, Universitätsbibliotheek, Vollers 855/1.
- 22 Schreiner 1896, 254 n. 1 ('Seit dem Erscheinen meiner Abhandlung [i.e. Schreiner 1895, S.S.] wurde es mir durch die Güte des Herrn Grafen C. von Landberg-Hallberger ermöglicht, eine zweite Hsr. des Kitāb al-milal, die sich im Besitze desselben befindet, zu benutzen. Nach dieser Hsr. kann ich noch folgende Stellen emendiren ...'); Schreiner 1897, 496–497 ('Ich gebe in Beilage I nach einer im Besitze des Herrn Grafen v. Landberg-Hallberger befindlichen Handschrift das umfangreichste Stück ...'), referring to (nowadays) MS New Haven, Yale University Library, Landberg 1.
- 23 Schreiner 1888, 602 n. 4 ('Im Kitāb al-muhadara des Moses b. Ezra, dessen Durchzeichnung ich durch die Güte des Herrn Dr. Steinschneider benutzen durfte, heisst es Bl. 102r ...').



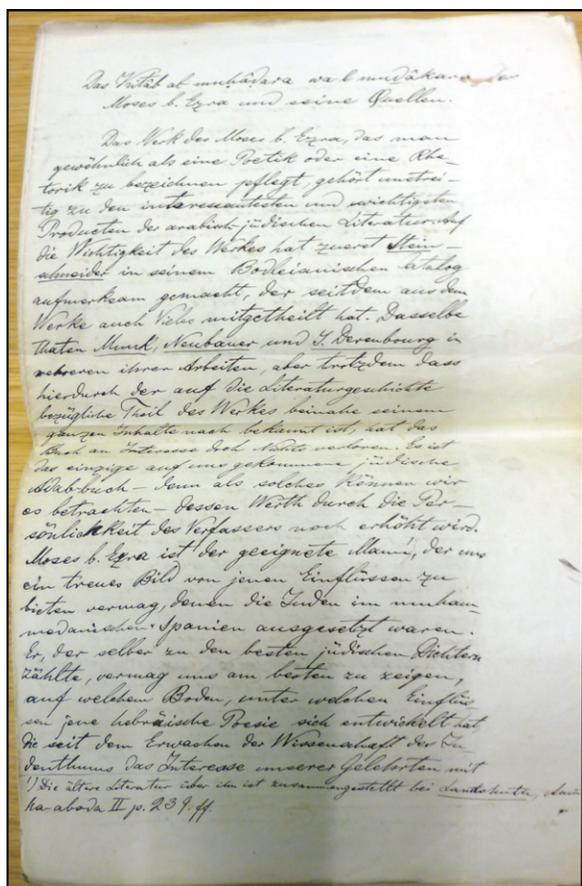


Fig. 11. Beginning of Schreiner 1890 in German original (Martin Schreiner Archive, Archives Dept., National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, ARC. Ms. Var. 347-3 כ"ו) (Courtesy of the National Library of Israel).

French version of which he submitted for publication to the *Revue des études juives* in 1889, which was published in 1890 and 1891.<sup>24</sup>

Towards the beginning of this study Schreiner remarks that '[p]our ce travail nous nous servons d'une copie faite d'après celle que M. Steinschneider a calquée sur le manuscrit d'Oxford, et qu'il a mise obligeamment à notre disposition'.<sup>25</sup> Steinschneider's copy to which Schreiner refers is nowadays preserved as MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464. It was purchased by the Königliche Bibliothek in 1891, when the library acquired

24 Schreiner 1890, 1891.

25 See Schreiner 1890, 98. Schreiner's *Nachlass* comprises the unpublished German original of this study (Fig. 11; MS Var 347-3 כ"ו).

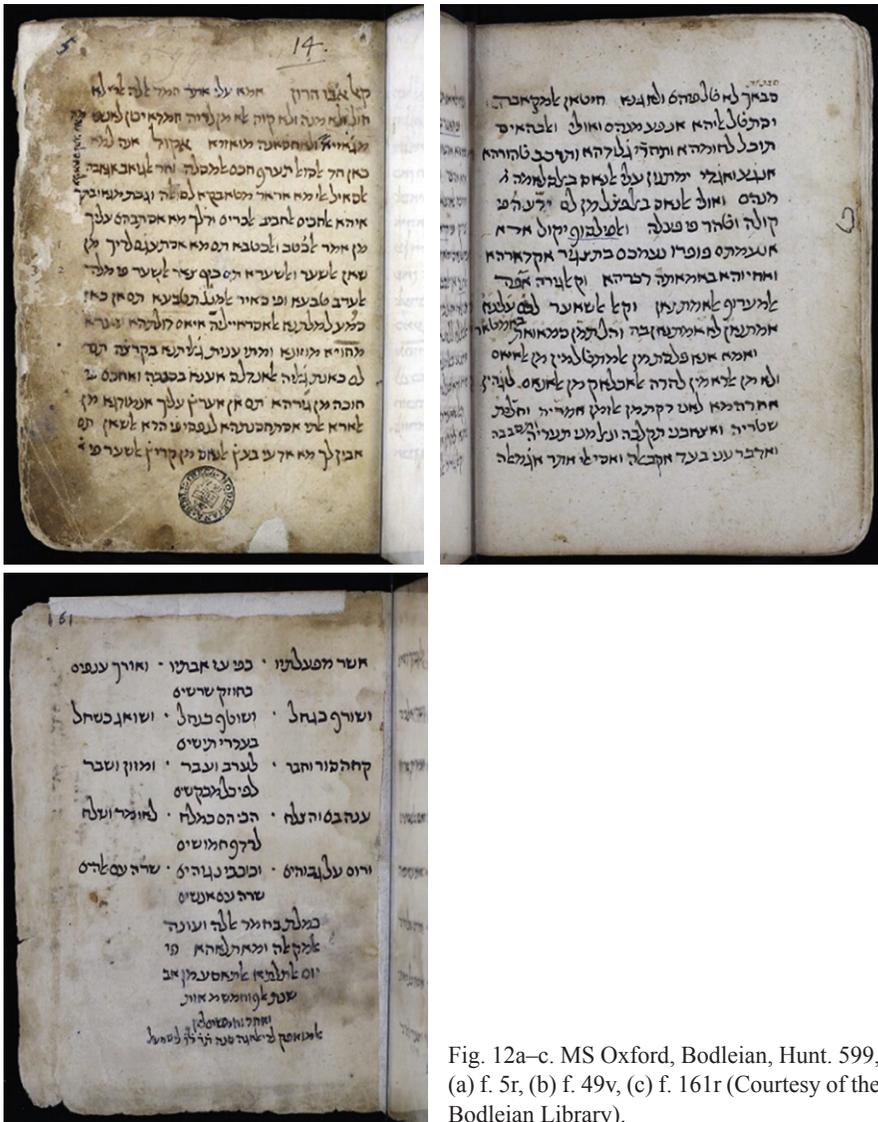


Fig. 12a–c. MS Oxford, Bodleian, Hunt. 599, (a) f. 5r, (b) f. 49v, (c) f. 161r (Courtesy of the Bodleian Library).

an entire collection of manuscripts from Moritz Steinschneider.<sup>26</sup> However, contrary to Schreiner’s brief note, the manuscript had not been produced by Moritz Steinschneider, but rather by his wife, Auguste. As is indicated on the title page of MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464 (Fig. 13a), as well as in the relevant entry in Steinschneider’s catalogue of the He-

26 Figeac 2008, 28.

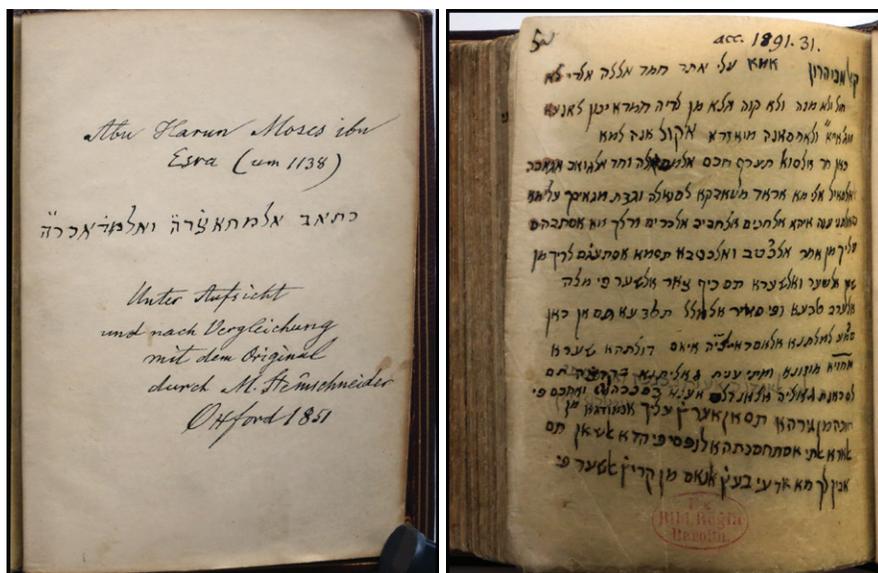


Fig. 13a–b. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464, (a) title page, (b) f. 5r (Courtesy of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

brew manuscripts of the Königlische Bibliothek,<sup>27</sup> it was Auguste Steinschneider who produced in 1851 a precise reproduction (*Durchzeichnung*) of MS Oxford, Bodleian, Hunt. 599 (Fig. 12a–c), which her husband, Moritz, had revised.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the text is written on tracing paper and thus found only on the recto pages of each folio, while the numbering of the pages reproduces the foliation of the Bodleian antigraph (Fig. 13c–e). This method of producing a copy of a manuscript by tracing the hand in the antigraph was common practice among scholars at that time. Schreiner's transcript of Auguste Steinschneider's tracing (*Durchzeichnung*) of the Bodleian manuscript is preserved

27 See Steinschneider 1897b, 29 ('Oct. 464. 161 Bl.; sorgfältige Durchzeichnung des Bodleianischen ms. bei Uri 499 (v. J. 1240, Neubauer 974) durch meine Frau Auguste im J. 1851 und von mir revidirt'); <[http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/receive/SBBMSBook\\_islamhs\\_00004278?XSL.Style=print](http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/receive/SBBMSBook_islamhs_00004278?XSL.Style=print)> (accessed 20 May 2020).

28 Digital images of the Berlin manuscript are available at <[https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX\\_MANUSCRIPTS990001753250205171](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001753250205171)> (accessed 21 May 2020). For a digital surrogate of MS Oxford, Bodleian, Hunt. 599, see <[https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX\\_MANUSCRIPTS990000645360205171](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990000645360205171)> (accessed 21 May 2020). For Auguste Steinschneider (Auerbach) (b. 1823, d. 1898), see Steinschneider 1995.

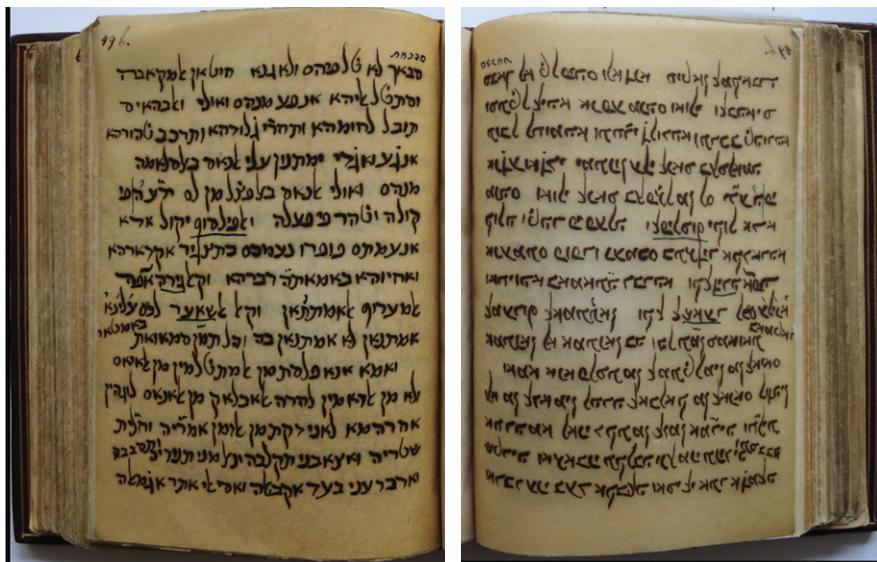


Fig. 13c–d. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464, (c) 49v, (d) 49v (reverse) (with kind permission of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

in the ‘Martin Schreiner Archive’ (Fig. 10a–d).<sup>29</sup> As is the case with all of his preserved excerpts and transcripts from manuscripts, Schreiner never attempted to emulate the hand of the original. On the contrary, he concludes his copy of the *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara* with his own dated colophon, and he adds a table of contents for the entire work (Fig. 10d)—whether he had ever intended to publish a critical edition of the work remains uncertain.<sup>30</sup>

In December 1897 or the beginning of 1898, when Schreiner was already in Berlin, Steinschneider handed him a copy of Samaw’al al-Maḡribī’s (d. 570/1175) polemical text against Judaism, *Iḥām al-Yahūd*. The work was first mentioned in 1840 by Salomon Munk (b. 1803, d. 1867), who discovered an incomplete witness of the *Iḥām* among the Arabic manuscripts kept in the library of the Benedictine abbey of Saint Germain-des-Prés in Paris

29 MS Var 347-6. Steinschneider had also shared his wife’s tracing (*Durchzeichnung*) of the Oxford manuscript with Samuel Landauer (b. 1846, d. 1937). See Steinschneider 1897b, 29 (‘Abschriften aus meiner ihnen vorliegenden Durchzeichnung nahmen Dr. Landauer und Schreiner’); Steinschneider 1902, 150 § 101 (‘Copien daraus in Par., bei S. Landauer in Strassburg u. M. Schreiner in Berlin’).

30 An editio princeps was later published by Halkin 1975. In addition to MS Oxford, Bodleian Hunt. 599, Halkin consulted fragmentary witnesses from the Genizah collections in the National Library of Russia (Firkovitch collections), the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, and Cambridge University Library (Taylor-Schechter collection). See Halkin 1975, 312–313.

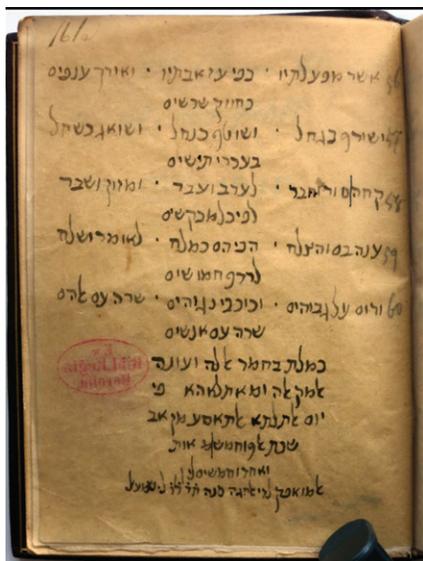


Fig. 13e. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 464, f. 161r (with kind permission of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

(MS S. Germain 214, today: MS Paris, Bibliothèque de France, Arabe 1456).<sup>31</sup> Steinschneider, who still listed the Paris manuscript as a unique witness of the work in his *Polemische and apologetische Literatur* of 1877,<sup>32</sup> became aware of the existence of another, apparently complete witness of the text in the Khedival Library in Cairo, on the basis of volume six of the catalogue, published in 1308[1890–1891],<sup>33</sup> but he was unable to get hold of a copy of the Cairo manuscript.<sup>34</sup> He discussed the matter with an acquaintance of his, ‘Herr S. Friedmann’, who at the time spent winters in Cairo.<sup>35</sup> The latter managed to procure a copy of the original codex, which was completed on 20 *Ġumādā II* 1315[16 November 1897] and dispatched to Steinschneider in Berlin, where it arrived on 17 November 1897. Steinschneider describes the beautiful moment as follows:

- 31 For a description of the manuscript and access to a digital surrogate, see <<http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc90666s>> (accessed 25 May 2020).
- 32 Steinschneider 1877, 26–27 no. 8.
- 33 See *al-Ġuz’ al-sādis min Fihrist al-kutub al-‘arabiyya*, 113 (MS Cairo, Khedival Library, 9 [general number: 8157]).
- 34 Steinschneider 1896, 83 n. 5 (‘Von der ‚Beschämung der Juden‘ waren bisher nur Fragmente bekannt; ms. Khedive VI, 113, vielleicht vollständig, ist hier zum *ersten Male* zur Kenntnis gebracht.’).
- 35 Perlmann identifies ‘S. Friedmann’ as the German philanthropist and early Zionist Paul Friedmann (b. 1840, d. c. 1900). See Perlmann 1964, 26 n. 36 (Introduction). This is possible though not entirely certain.

Von der Schrift dieses Renegaten (um 1170) hat Munk nur ein Fragment in Paris entdeckt. In der Bibliotheca Mathem. ... (Jahrg. 1896 S. 83 n. 5 [see above (S.S.)]) brachte ich zum ersten Male die Existenz eines ms. in der Bibliothek des Khedive zur allgemeinen Kenntnis und sann über einen Weg zur Erlangung einer näheren Nachricht und event. einer Abschrift. Mit einer solchen wurde ich soeben sehr angenehm überrascht. Der Hergang ist folgender: Herr S. Friedmann, geb. Christ, aber Abkömmling von Veitel Heine und Fiduciar der Stiftung, besuchte mich bei seinem wiederholten Aufenthalt hier und gab mir Gelegenheit, seinen edlen selbstlosen Charakter zu erkennen, ... Im vorigen Sommer bat ich ihn, da er die letzten Winter in Cairo verlebte, sich für meinen Wunsch zu interessiren. Am 17. December erhielt ich durch die Post eine im November d.J. von einem Muslim beendete, sehr schöne Abschrift von 103 Octavseiten zu 17 Zeilen in Maroquinband, worin die hebräischen Citate aus Bibel und Gebetbuch in arabischer Umschreibung durch rothe Schrift sich hervorheben. Der Titel ist افحام طائفة اليهود; aber auf die Einleitung folgt S. 8 die Ueberschrift (die ich hebr. umschreibe) אפחאם אליהוד ואלנסארא באלהגה אלעקליה אלך, also: das zum Schweigen-Bringen der Juden und Christen durch rationelle Argumente. Näheres wird ein Specialartikel eines gelehrten Freundes [i.e. Martin Schreiner (S.S.)] bringen. In dem, das schöne Geschenk begleitenden Briefe des Hrn. Fr. heisst es: ‚Ein Muslim hat es geschrieben, ein Hindu hat es gebunden, ein Christ schickt es durch einen Kopten (mein Postdirektor) einem Juden zu Weihachten. Kann man sich ein schöneres Zusammengehen aller Religionen denken. So hoffe ich, dass Sie diese Kleinigkeit von mir—und Dr. Moritz,<sup>36</sup> der mir geholfen—werden annehmen wollen und ihr ein Plätzchen in Ihrer Bibliothek gönnen. Möge der *Isham al-Jahud* Ihnen so wenig den Mund stopfen, als er es bisher den anderen Juden gethan.‘ Das erste, was der *Isham* mich auszusprechen veranlasst, ist ein Dank an die g. Herren, auch im Namen der Wissenschaft, die stets das letzte Wort hat.<sup>37</sup>

Part of this information is included in the colophon added by the nineteenth-century copyist at the end of his copy, including the shelfmark of the copy of the work in the Khedival Library (Fig. 14). Once he received it, Steinschneider passed the manuscript on to Schreiner without further delay, and the latter's study of the text, 'Samau'al b. Jahjâ al-Maghribî und seine Schrift *Ishâm al-Jahûd*', was published in 1898 in the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*.<sup>38</sup> The manuscript was later sold, together

36 He can be identified as Bernhard Moritz (b. 1859, d. 1939), who from 1896 to 1911 served as head of the Khedival Library in Cairo. See Mangoldt 2007, 69–71.

37 Steinschneider 1897a.

38 See Schreiner 1898, 123–124 ('Nachdem Herr Prof. Steinschneider, ... in den Besitz einer guten Abschrift gelangt war, hatte er die Güte, sie mir zur Verfügung zu stellen, wofür dem hochgeehrten Altmeister auch an dieser Stelle meinen verbindlichsten Dank auszusprechen, mir eine angenehme Pflicht ist.'). That Schreiner had written the study in a very short period of time is suggested by Schreiner 1899, which contains an unusually long list of 'Nachträge und Berichtigungen'. This publication was not included by Perlmann in his collection of articles by Schreiner (Schreiner 1983), possibly because Perlmann had himself published an edition of

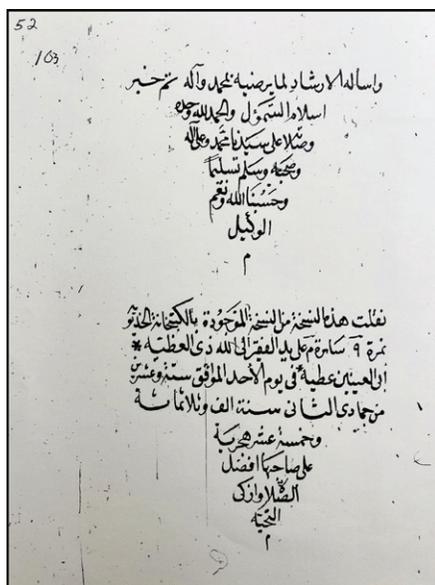


Fig. 14. MS New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Steinschneider 39, f. 52r (Courtesy of the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary).

with other manuscripts of the Steinschneider collection, to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where it is nowadays kept as MS New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2289 (Steinschneider 39).<sup>39</sup>

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the *Iḥām* (Perlmann 1964), which may have rendered Schreiner's earlier publication obsolete in his eyes.

- 39 For the manuscript, see also Marx 1929, 265; Richler 2012, 315. For an account of how Steinschneider's manuscript collection was sold to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, see Kohut 1929, 68; Dicker 1988, 22–24.

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# From Sinai to Munich: Tracing the History of a Fragment from the Grote Collection\*

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In 1921, the Bavarian State Library acquired six Christian Arabic manuscript fragments from the notorious collector Friedrich Grote. All fragments, just like a yet to be determined number of Christian Oriental manuscripts from the Grote collection, originally came from St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai. The aim of the following notes is to exemplarily trace the history of one of these fragments from its place of origin to its present location. The reconstruction of the fragment's whereabouts is largely based on hitherto unused archival material. It will shed new light on the persona of the erratic collector and his methods of manuscript acquisition. This has important implications not only for the membra disjecta of the original Sinaitic codex from which the Munich fragment derives, but for all fragments of Sinaitic origin from the former Grote collection. The activity of collectors like Grote led to the dispersion of fragments of some of St. Catherine's most valuable and historically significant manuscripts. These notes are a modest contribution to restoring the integrity of these historical artifacts.

On 29 September 1951, Georg Graf (1875–1955), the great pioneer of Christian Arabic studies and author of the magisterial five-volume *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, wrote an enthusiastic note to his pen friend Emil Gratzl (1877–1857). Until 1939, Gratzl had been in charge of acquiring Oriental manuscripts for the Bavarian State Library (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, henceforth BSB) in Munich. Graf writes:

Today I experienced great joy, which is partly your merit as well. To explain this, I have to elaborate a bit. Since January 1949, I have been head of the Arabic section of Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO, Leuven) and have had the honour of starting with an edition myself [...]. Further, I have begun preparing another edition, an extensive, in print, yet unknown work of my dear Theodore Abū

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Qurra following the sole London Ms. [...]. Now, as I continued today transcribing the text on the basis of the Ms. photocopy after a long period of interruption, I reached a chapter that was very familiar to me. Indeed, it is a two-page fragment of those Arabic fragments from the ‘Grote collection’, which you were so fortunate to acquire for the BSB. Now I have, albeit for a minor part, a second Ms., which apparently is half a century older and more original. This naturally makes one wish to discover further fragments.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to Gratzl, Graf was not himself an active manuscript collector.<sup>2</sup> But he meticulously followed the whereabouts of Christian Arabic manuscripts that had come to his attention in one way or another, both in private and public possession. The supposed Theodore Abū Qurra fragment mentioned in his letter to Gratzl is one example.

The aim of the following notes is to portray the recent history of this fragment, making use, among other sources, of archival material such as the correspondence between Graf and Gratzl. The ‘Grote collection’ was a recurring topic in their letters since Grote had approached Graf for the first time in 1919. By tracing the history of those (originally three) leaves, which started to occupy Graf again thirty years later, some light can be shed on the persona of the erratic collector and his methods of acquiring.

Today this fragment bears the shelfmark Cod. arab. 1071. On 15 April 1921, Gratzl purchased it for the BSB from Grote along with five additional Christian Arabic fragments (Cod. arab. 1066–1070) for the humble price of

- 1 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 66, 29 September 1951: ‘Heute habe ich eine große Freude erlebt, an deren Ursache Sie ein Mitverdienst haben. Zur Erklärung muß ich weiter ausholen. Seit Jan. 1949 bin ich Leiter der arabischen Abteilung im Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO, Löwen) und durfte selbst mit einer eigenen Publikation beginnen [...]. Außerdem habe ich mit der Vorbereitung einer anderen Ausgabe begonnen, eines sehr umfangreichen, noch nicht im Druck bekannten Werkes meines Lieblings Theodor Abū Qurra nach der einzigen Londoner Hs. [...] Als ich nun heute nach längerer Unterbrechung die Abschrift aus der erhaltenen Hs. Photographie fortsetze, komme ich zu einem Kapitel, das mir ganz bekannt vorkam. Und wirklich es ist ein zweiseitiges Fragment aus jenen arabischen Fragmenten der ‘Sammlung Grote’, die Sie für die B.St.B. zu erwerben so glücklich waren. Nun habe ich also, wenngleich für einen minimalen Teil, eine zweite Hs., wie es scheint um etwa ein halbes Jahrh. älter und ursprünglicher. Da kommt freilich der Wunsch, noch andere Fragmente zu entdecken’. The above numbering follows that of the letters in Gratzl’s Nachlass, which is kept at the Bavarian State Library (shelfmark BSB Gratzliana); all translations from German are mine. On Gratzl, see Hörmann 1966; Haller/Kempf 2011.
- 2 Gratzl bequeathed his collection of Oriental manuscripts to the BSB; see Rebhan 2011.

480 mark.<sup>3</sup> As Graf noted, it is one of the oldest witnesses (if not the oldest) of a voluminous theological tract now commonly referred to as the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*.<sup>4</sup> The Munich fragment contains extracts from Chapters 12 and 13, comprising scriptural and patristic proof-texts for the divinity of Christ. The BSB's online catalogue refers to the fragment as 'Verbatim extracts from an apology of Christianity [a.o.]' ('Wörtliche Auszüge aus einer Apologie des Christentums [u.a.]') and names the eighth/ninth-century Melkite theologian Theodore Abū Qurra (d. c.830 CE) as its author.<sup>5</sup> This ascription, though corresponding with Graf's assertion, is outdated as Abū Qurra is no longer regarded as the author of the *Summa*.<sup>6</sup> The catalogue derives its information from the description given in the *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*,<sup>7</sup> which essentially corresponds to the description Graf published in a short article in 1954.<sup>8</sup> Paul Géhin has studied, in detail, the provenance of (mostly Syriac) Sinaitic manuscripts in Western institutions, many of which originally derive from the Grote collection. He recently pointed out that Graf's article remained the main source of information on Grote,<sup>9</sup> and consequently on our fragment's provenance.

- 3 See *Repertorium der Codices Orientales der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, Kap- sel 1: A–J—BSB Cbm Cat. 40 d (<<https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/0002/bsb00026277/images/index.html?fip=193.174.98.30&seite=29>>; this and other links last retrieved 15 December 2019). The BSB had already acquired an Arabic manuscript (MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1065) from Grote two years earlier on 22 July 1919 for 500 mark. According to the *Repertorium*, Grote 'purchased the Ms. in Syria shortly before the outbreak of the [First] World War'. Grote sold other manuscript fragments toward the end of his life for comparably low prices, such as a Syriac palimpsest fragment (today MS Harvard, Semitic Museum, 8375 = MS Harvard, Houghton Library, MS Syr. 171), for instance, which was acquired in July 1922 for \$5 USD. On this and further Syriac fragments in the Houghton Library, see Kessel 2014b.
- 4 See Swanson 2009. To the manuscripts listed, there must be added MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Syr. 378, ff. 59–60 (*membrum disjectum* of MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1071, see below), MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery Sinai), Ar. NF Parch. 8, ff. 1–7 (identified by Barbara Roggema as corresponding to the text of MS London, British Library (BL), Or. 4950, ff. 132v–133r; parts of Ch. 18), and MS Sinai, Ar. 448, ff. 116v–118v (parts of Ch. 18); the latter is mentioned only as a witness to Chs. 5–8 and 11.
- 5 <<https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV040213482>>; digital images of the fragment are available online: <<https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00095977/images/>>.
- 6 Cf. Swanson 2009, 791–792.
- 7 Sobieroj 2007, 132.
- 8 Graf 1954, esp. 131–132.
- 9 Géhin 2017, 8.

Grote's name is likely to appear whenever one inquires into the history of Sinaitic manuscripts in Western collections. As to this, Graf makes an interesting remark in a letter from 1921, replying to Gratzl's communication regarding the BSB's recent acquisition of the Grote fragments:

When I examined Grote's fragments, I was of the impression to do the gentleman a favor for academic purposes. Finally, however, I had to realize that he had only mercantile interests, and for this purpose any success in determining [the fragments' age and contents] would naturally be beneficial for commercial success too, which was not what I had in mind originally.<sup>10</sup>

It is due to these 'mercantile interests' that Grote's fragments not only suffered from further dissection, but also were eventually dispersed throughout various Western institutions.

This certainly holds true for MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1071. In 1919, Grote approached Graf in writing for the first time. The two never met in person; rather, the collector was in the habit of sending his manuscripts to scholars he knew were experts in their respective fields. In Graf's case, his expertise was the history of Christian Arabic literature to which he had already devoted a monograph several decades before the publication of his *Geschichte*.<sup>11</sup> When the Munich fragment reached Graf in 1919, it consisted of three bifolia, of which, however, only two were acquired by the BSB two years later. In his 1954 description, Graf laconically remarks, 'I have no clue of the whereabouts of the former leaves 1/6.' ('Über den Verbleib der damaligen Blätter 1/6 [...] fehlt mir jede Kenntnis').<sup>12</sup> In Volume 2 of his *Geschichte*, he simply labels the bifolium as 'lost', however, referring to his own transcriptions of all three bifolia.<sup>13</sup>

It is thanks to Géhin that we now know that the missing piece had found its way into the collection of Syriac manuscripts of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF).<sup>14</sup> The Arabic leaf (ff. 59–60) was bound together with eight Syriac fragments, all deriving from Grote's collection, and was as-

10 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 12, April 19, 1921: 'Als ich mich um die Bestimmung der Grotischen Fragmente bemühte, glaubte ich, dem Herrn zu wissenschaftlichen Zwecken einen Dienst erweisen zu können. Am Ende nahm ich gewahr, dass er bloss Handelsgeschäfte intendierte, und hiezu war ihm natürlich Bestimmungserfolg auch sehr dienlich zu geschäftlichem Erfolg, was ich ursprünglich nicht beabsichtigte.'

11 Graf 1905. A parallel case of Grote seeking out scholars to determine the age and content (and ultimately the value) of his manuscripts involved the two Greek palimpsests he later bequeathed to the Abbey of Beuron; see Dold 1929.

12 Graf 1954, 131–132.

13 Graf 1947, 26, n. 1. Graf's transcriptions are preserved in his Nachlass, on which see Tarras 2018.

14 Géhin 2006, 38–40.

signed the shelfmark Syr. 378. The BnF acquired the lot on 4 February 1922 from the Paris bookseller Henri Leclerc (1862–1941). Attached to MS Paris, BnF, Syr. 378 was a short description of the contents of each fragment, issued in Zurich on 10 May 1921. Since Grote died in Regensburg on 15 August 1922, he must have sold the fragment bundle to Leclerc in Paris, following a stopover in Zurich, sometime during the last two years of his life. The detour to Zurich is somewhat puzzling, though the fate of yet another part of the original codex to which the Munich/Paris fragment used to belong can help elucidate it.

When a total of eight Christian Arabic fragments reached Graf in 1919, the three bifolia of the Munich/Paris fragment were enclosed ('beigelegt') with an even larger fragment of 40 folios. Despite his only limited knowledge of the Sinai collection, Graf immediately recognized the fragment as a *membrum disjectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155, since it continued the Arabic translation of the Pauline Epistles edited on the basis of this manuscript by Margaret Dunlop Gibson in 1894.<sup>15</sup> Today, the 40 folios are part of the collection of the British Library (henceforth BL) in London and bear the shelfmark Or. 8612. According to one of Graf's letters to Gratzl, Grote intended to sell his whole collection to the British Library, hoping for 'better business' ('bessere Geschäfte') than he would encounter with German institutions.<sup>16</sup> The British Library bought the fragment in 1920<sup>17</sup> from a certain F.W. Bickel who was also involved in the transactions related to MS Paris, BnF, Syr. 378.<sup>18</sup>

Géhin surmised Bickel to be a bookseller like Leclerc. In fact, however, the person behind the initials 'F.W.' must be identified with the Swiss merchant Friedrich Wilhelm Bickel (1862–1942), father of the Swiss-British social and economic historian Wilhelm Bickel (1903–1977), and no other than Grote's brother-in-law. Bickel had married Grote's sister Margarethe (Theodore Georgine, 1866–1944) in 1892 in Madras, capital of the Madras Presidency of former British India. He was a cotton-grower and shareholder in various companies in India, having earned himself the nickname 'cotton king'.<sup>19</sup> Bickel and his family returned to Switzerland in 1920. Neither he nor his wife Margarethe had any interest in ancient manuscripts. Still, Bickel's professional background and his connections to England made him the perfect

15 Gibson 1894; see also Zaki 2017 and 2019. The first part of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 (ff. 1r–80v), comprising an Arabic version of the deuterocanonical book of Ecclesiasticus, was edited by Frank 1974; see also Tarras 2019.

16 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 12, 19 April 1921.

17 The manuscript bears a red receipt stamp on f. 40r. with the date 10 April 1920.

18 Cf. Géhin 2006, 24; 2010, 14, n. 2; 2017, 8, n. 27.

19 Stumpff 2018, 600.

middleman for Grote's manuscript sells, such that it is his name we find in a number of manuscripts that belonged to his brother-in-law Friedrich Grote.

While Graf conceded in 1925 that he knew 'nothing of the whereabouts of most of the fragments' from Grote's collection,<sup>20</sup> an article published by Fritz Krenkow the following year briefly informs the reader of the British Library's recent acquisition of two Christian Arabic manuscripts (MS London, BL, Or. 8605 and MS London, BL, Or. 8612) and 'some Christian Syriac documents'.<sup>21</sup> Krenkow concluded that these must originate from 'some Syrian Church or Monastery'. However, it was Graf who immediately drew the connection to St. Catherine's. What is more, two years after the collector's passing, Graf had managed to obtain an inventory list of the collection from Grote's wife, who continued to dissolve it. To Gratzl, he wrote:

While perusing [the inventory of Grote's manuscripts], two thoughts occurred to me involuntarily: 1) the wish to possess [the manuscripts] or at least to have them within reach, 2) the great sorrow about the vandalic dismemberment of the rich and precious Mss holdings of the Sinai monastery continuing now for four decades. For I have no doubt that, if not all, at least most of Gote's [sic] Mss fragments derive from the Sinai monastery and that both ignorance and greed bear the guilt of their dismemberment.<sup>22</sup>

Graf's disgruntled remarks raise two important questions: the first regards when Grote acquired his manuscripts; the second and more important regards how he acquired them. The fate of the Munich/Paris fragment shall serve here as an example. Our results, however, affect matters pertaining to provenance with respect to the whole of the former Grote collection. As we will see, answers to the first question are easier to pin down than to the second.

Fortunately, Gibson documented the find context of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 rather accurately, which allows us to reconstruct a *terminus ante quem* for the deliberate disintegration of the original manuscript. In the preface to her edition, she attributes the discovery of 'this little manuscript' to her twin sister Agnes Smith Lewis (1843–1926) and describes it as follows:

20 Graf 1925, 217.

21 Krenkow 1926, 275. To the manuscripts acquired via Bickel belong also the Christian Arabic MS London, BL, Or. 8857 and the Syriac MS London, BL, Or. 8858.

22 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, 2 November 1924: 'Zwei Gedanken sind mir bei der Einsicht [des Inventars der Handschriften Grottes] unwillkürlich gekommen: 1) der Wunsch, sie zu besitzen oder doch in erreichbarer Nähe zu haben, 2) das grosse Bedauern, dass die schon seit vier Jahrzehnten fortgesetzte vandalische Zerstückelung der reichen und wertvollen Hss-Bestände des Sinaiklosters immer noch weitergeht. Denn ich zweifle nicht, dass, wenn nicht alle, so doch die meisten Goteschen [sic] Mss[sic]-Fragmente dem Sinaikloster entstammen und dass Verständnislosigkeit und Habgier zugleich die Aufteilung in Stücke verschuldet hat.'

The manuscript from which I transcribed these Epistles was found by my sister, Mrs. S. [sic] S. Lewis, in February 1892, in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. It did not come out of the chest in the little dark closet which had yielded the Syriac codices, but lay in a basket in another closet at the foot of the staircase leading to the Archbishop's room, a closet which does duty for a library of Semitic and Iberian books. It had the number 155 on its tattered back, and it retains this number in the catalogue of Arabic books which I made the year after its discovery [...].<sup>23</sup>

The practice of keeping manuscripts in baskets and boxes was common at St. Catherine's, but must have changed before the turn of the last century during the period of the Scottish sisters' visits.<sup>24</sup> Gibson's report offers a first important clue as to the history of the *membra disjecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155. These must have been detached from the original codex before February 1892. The date coincides with Grote's stay at St. Catherine's and its environs. The Scottish sisters actually met him shortly before their own arrival at the monastery. Lewis documented the encounter in her travel journal, which Gibson later published:

Our tents were pitched at the foot of the Nughb Hawa, and there to our great delight we met Dr. Gröte [sic], an Anglo-German missionary to the Bedaween, who had been spending the three months of winter in the convent, and had made good use of the time in exploring its Greek library. He had no tent, but slept on an air bed just on the sand, and ate with his Bedawee escort.<sup>25</sup>

The report dates from the beginning of February 1892. Lewis speaks of 'the three months of winter', which means that Grote already had access to the monastery's library by the end (November or December) of 1891. Following this chronology, it is at least possible that Grote's fragments were detached from MS Sinai, Ar. 155 within this time frame.

Now one of the most pressing but also the most delicate questions is how Grote attained these fragments in the first place. All Graf knew (or was made to believe) was that Grote 'had bought them in earlier years in Cairo'.<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Gratzl from 1951, Graf elaborates only a little, writing, 'Mr. Grote formerly told me that he had acquired *all* his treasures from antiquities dealers in Cairo and elsewhere' ('Herr Grote [...] teilte mir früher mit, daß er seine Schätze *alle* bei Altertumshändlern in Kairo u. anderswo erworben habe').<sup>27</sup> As the acquisition history of other Sinaitic manuscripts in European

23 Gibson 1894, 5.

24 Gibson 1899, v, n. 1 remarks that the room upstairs where they used to work within the monastery 'has since been improved by two rooms thrown into it, and the whole has been furnished with shelves, on which the MSS. are arranged according to their numbers, old boxes and baskets being completely abolished'.

25 Gibson 1893, 35. The account is also quoted in Kessel 2014b, 50, n. 42.

26 Graf 1925, 217; cf. also Graf 1954, 125.

27 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no, 66, 29 September 1951; the italics are mine.

libraries shows, whole codices and fragments were already available on the Egyptian antiquities market in the 1880s.<sup>28</sup> It is, however, also the case that manuscripts and fragments disappeared from the monastery between 1889 and 1894, which was noted and made public, for instance, by James Rendel Harris (1852–1941).<sup>29</sup>

A note recently published by Alba Fedeli from the private correspondence between Harris and Gibson documents the monks' viewpoint on the question of who might have been responsible for the pre-1894 misappropriation. According to them, the suspect was 'a certain Swiss German pseudo-missionary, who has spent so much of his time at Sinai, and has been lately in prison three months for theft'.<sup>30</sup> This 'pseudo-missionary' is no other than Friedrich Grote. The correction of 'Swiss' to 'German' is in the original and mirrors Grote's troubled biography. Born in Lower Saxony in 1861 as the first of ten children to the quarrelsome pastor and publicist Ludwig Grote (1825–1887),<sup>31</sup> he and his family emigrated to Geneva in 1877 because of his father's political persecution. The details of Grote's biography shall not occupy us here, as I intend to treat them in a separate publication.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is worth reviewing the circumstances of his sojourn in Egypt in order to get a better impression of the way in which he came into the possession of his manuscripts.

After graduating from Geneva's Faculty of Theology around 1885, Grote held the pastoral office of the Milanese German Protestant Church (Chiesa Cristiana Protestante in Milano) between 1886 and 1889. The church archive still holds his letter of resignation, which yields interesting details:

After diligent personal deliberations and encouraged by the advice of theological friends, I have made up my mind and decided to quit church office in order to devote myself more exclusively to theological studies and thereby prepare myself for academic teaching. An extraordinary opportunity that arose for me in this instant to return to Sinai making use of St. Catherine's library reinforces my intention [...].<sup>33</sup>

28 This is the case, for instance, with five Georgian manuscripts and three single leaves now part of the collection of the University Library Graz. Austrian painter Alphons Leopold Mielich (1863–1929) purchased them in Egypt between 1883 and 1885. On the history of these manuscripts, see Imnaischwili 2008.

29 Detailed in Fedeli 2019, 233–235.

30 Quoted from Fedeli 2019, 234; see also *ibid.* n. 32. The letter is dated 29 January 1895.

31 On whom, see Stumpff 2018.

32 Tarras forthcoming.

33 CCPM, Grote, 11 September 1889: 'Nach gewissenhaften persönlichen Erwägungen und ermuntert durch die Beratung theologischer Freunde bin ich zu dem Entschluß gekommen, aus dem Kirchendienst auszutreten, um mich ausschließlicher den theologischen Studien widmen und dadurch auf Ausübung einer akademischen Lehrtätigkeit vorbereiten zu können. Eine außerordentliche Gelegenheit, die sich

Grote's relationship with the church board was not an easy one and must have contributed its share to his decision. It must also be noted that his plans of an academic career never materialized, which is why his scholarly as well as his collecting activities remained almost exclusively private matters.

Now, what was the 'extraordinary opportunity' he alludes to? As a handful of references in Eduard Schwartz's and Theodor Mommsen's edition of Eusebius' *Church History* makes clear, Grote received payment from the Church Fathers Commission of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences to collate manuscripts at St. Catherine's.<sup>34</sup> This assignment from the prestigious institution was probably Grote's door opener. Moreover, this might also indicate how we have to understand Lewis' remark that 'he made good use of the time in exploring [the monastery's] Greek library' in the period of 1891–92. Grote further writes of his 'returning' ('zurückkehren') to Sinai. From an 1891 travelogue, we not only learn that Grote guided a group of YMCA pilgrims to Sinai in the same year, but also that he 'had spent two months in the peninsula nine years ago'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Grote had visited Sinai for the first time as a 21-year-old c.1882. The trip was sponsored by his peer and life-long friend, count Adalbert zu Erbach-Fürstenau (1861–1944), whom he also joined on a trip to Jerusalem in 1887, resulting in Grote's only traceable academic publication.<sup>36</sup> His traveling companion, by contrast, managed to establish himself as an expert on medieval European book art.<sup>37</sup> It is not unlikely that the count was at least partly responsible for interesting Grote in ancient manuscripts. During his solo tour on the Sinai Peninsula, however, Grote did not let everyone in on his interests. For in the 1891 report there is no mention of manuscripts. According to its author, 'Mr. Grote's purpose in accompanying us was to make certain investigations preparatory to opening a mission among the Bedouins'. Yet, it is also clear that his motives were not exclusively altruistic, and the guide received payment from the travel party. Further, Grote received funding from the Free Church of Scotland (hence Lewis' calling him an '*Anglo-German missionary*').<sup>38</sup> These records of Grote's financial situation indicate, in

mir in diesem Augenblicke darbietet, behelfs Benutzung der Katharinenbibliothek nach Sinai zurückzukehren, bestärkt mich in meinem Vorhaben [...].'

34 See Schwartz/Mommsen 1909, esp. xxx: 'Die Hs. ist von F. Grote auf Kosten der Berliner Akademie verglichen.'

35 Wishard 1891, 429.

36 See Grote 1887.

37 Stumpff 2018, 491–92. See also Crivello 2011.

38 See 'Notes from the Wild Field: Arabia', 210–211: 'Just now, however, a German of the Lutheran church, Rev. Mr. Grote, has been inspired by the published life of Mr. Keith-Falconer to undertake a mission among the Towara tribe of Bedouin around Mount Sinai. He has traveled in the Sinaitic peninsula, and has familiarized

my view, that he must have struggled to support his sojourn in Egypt. Gibson's remark about his having been imprisoned for theft seems to point in the same direction. Moreover, these records appear to stand in striking contrast to a report about the acquisition of one of his manuscripts, being the most detailed account of Grote's methods of acquiring, however, notably differing from the story he used to provide scholars like Graf with.

The manuscript in question is part of the so-called Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus (today MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 35–37),<sup>39</sup> a palimpsest with Georgian and Syriac upper writing and Christian Palestinian Aramaic undertext.<sup>40</sup> The report about the manuscript's acquisition is found in the 1937 volume of *Rotulus*, a catalogue series issued by the Leiden manuscript dealer Erik von Scherling (1907–1956), and reads as follows:

The precious volume had been offered in pawn about 1893 together with other Syriac mss. to a German traveler who had lent money to the monastery of St. Catherina [sic]. It remained in this way many years in private possession without being the object of scientific examination.<sup>41</sup>

As to the Syriac manuscripts mentioned by von Scherling, there is no way of determining which of those manuscripts that ended up in Birmingham, London, Milan, Oslo, Paris, and the Vatican (not to mention those of Grote's manuscripts that were lost during WWII) formed part of this alleged 1893 'pawn'.<sup>42</sup> The Codex Zosimi Rescriptus makes a reappearance in a 1954 Sotheby's auction catalogue, and was by then in the possession of an otherwise unknown D. Maclaren who had purchased the palimpsest by auction in the meantime and is possibly responsible for the provenance statement, which reads: 'Purchased from the monks of St. Catherine of Sinai (where it had been since at least the 10th Century—see colophon of Georgian upper writing), by Friedrich Grote at the end of the last century'.<sup>43</sup> This information does not exactly accord with that given in *Rotulus*, though it might be a simplification

himself with the language of the Bedouin. He goes forth as a private missionary, but with funds obtained within the Free Church of Scotland.'

39 Note that MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 36 was included in sale 18152 (as lot 407) at Christie's on July 10, 2019. See Christie's 2019, 14–15; see also Prescott/Munch Rasmussen 2020.

40 See Desreumaux 1997.

41 Scherling 1937, 32. Quoted also in Fedeli 2019, 235.

42 For Grote's Syriac and Christian Aramaic Palestinian manuscripts, see Géhin 2006, 2007, 2010, 2017, Kessel 2014a, 2014b, Kessel and Smelova 2018, and Müller-Kessler 2014. For his connection to Mingana and the latter's collection held in Birmingham, see Fedeli 2019.

43 Sotheby & Co. 1954, no. 302. The manuscript was bought for 90,000£ by a Dr. O.O. Fischer. Note that Graf 1954, 125, n. 4 alludes to the catalogue as well, however, giving the wrong date.

of the latter. It should be noted that the purported acquisition of the palimpsest dates to the period during which a number of manuscripts were misappropriated from the monastery, as Harris documented. We shall again turn to Graf's engagement with Grote's manuscripts in order to more clearly highlight the discrepancies in their acquisition history.

Already in 1919, Graf expressed his suspicions that most of Grote's manuscripts 'had escaped the Sinai monastery' ('Es ist sehr wahrscheinlich, daß auch die übrigen Stücke dem Sinaikloster entkommen sind').<sup>44</sup> However, he did not speculate on how this could have happened. It was not until 1951 that Graf learned from Grote's widow Käthe Grote-Hahn that the collector himself had visited the monastery. Grote-Hahn sought Graf's help in selling the remainder of her deceased husband's collection.<sup>45</sup> After visiting her in Bad Homburg in September 1950, Graf wrote to Gratzl:

Now what is remarkable is that all manuscripts that I have seen of [the collection] as well as others, which have been published (in catalogues), originate from the Sinai monastery, as the many colophons prove. Mrs. Dr. Grote told me that her husband had been to the monastery. I believe to be entitled to assume with all certainty that the monks of Sinai tore apart their manuscripts themselves and sold them on their habitual journeys to Cairo as well as partly left them to the collector Dr. Grote in the monastery, piecemeal, in order to make more money.<sup>46</sup>

What is truly remarkable about Graf's deliberations is that he may have fallen for the collector's own account (as transmitted by Grote's widow), which he seems to be reproducing here. According to this story, it is the Sinaitic monks themselves who were responsible for the fragmentation and dispersal

44 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 3, 25 July 1919.

45 Shortly after her husband's death, Käthe Grote-Hahn started selling parts of his collection. A rather bold offer was made to Agnes Smith Lewis in 1923; see Fedeli 2019, 239, n. 55. From Graf's correspondence with Gratzl (BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 71, 21 February 1954), we learn that 'Mrs. Dr. Kathi [sic] Grote, [residing] in Bad Homburg, eventually succeeded in selling the whole rest of the manuscript collection to the Vatican Library. I have not received notice of the price from either her or the Vatican Library.' ('die Frau Dr. Kathi Grote in Bad Homburg [hat] doch noch den Ankauf des ganzen Restes der Hss.-Sammlung durch die Vat. Bibliothek erreicht. Über den Preis hat weder sie noch die Vat. Bibliothek mir Mitteilung gemacht.')

46 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 66, 29 September 1951: 'Nun ist das Auffallende, daß alle Hss., die ich davon gesehen habe, und die anderen, von denen schon etwas veröffentlicht ist (in Katalogen) aus dem Sinaikloster stammen, wie die zahlreichen Kolophone dartun. Frau Dr. Grote sagte mir auch, daß ihr Gemahl in diesem Kloster gewesen ist. Ich glaube, ganz bestimmt annehmen zu dürfen, daß die Sinai-Mönche selbst ihre Hss. zerissen haben und bei ihren oftmaligen Wanderungen nach Kairo dort verkauften, z. Tl. auch dem Sammler Dr. Grote im Kloster selbst überlassen haben, Stückweise, um so mehr zu verdienen.'

of St. Catherine's manuscripts. The same is implied by von Scherling's report and the Sotheby's provenance statement. This would mean that the *membra disjecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 were taken from the codex shortly before Gibson and Lewis arrived at the monastery in February 1892 and were sold to Grote before that date.

Another document of uncertain origin appears to testify to Grote's account, or rather its circulation. It is an anonymous handwritten letter in French attached to the composite manuscript MS Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725, comprising six Christian Arabic fragments and one Syriac fragment, again deriving from Grote's collection.<sup>47</sup> It is likely that the addressee of this letter is Grote himself. The anonymous author is concerned with the provenance of fragment VII, a *membrum disjectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 154, which she or he rightly assumes must have been detached from the codex after 1897 since its contents are reproduced in Gibson's 1899 edition of the manuscript's texts.<sup>48</sup> The preface to the edition, to which the anonymous author refers a number of times, details the stages of preparation by use of the manuscript, being completed during Gibson's third visit in 1897. The author speculates that the interest Gibson showed in this manuscript 'must have struck the illiterate monks as proof for its high antiquity and, above all, its value' ('Cet intérêt [...] ne peut avoir manqué de frapper les moins illettrés comme preuve de sa haute antiquité et pourtant de sa valeur').<sup>49</sup> Thus, the author raises the following point:

Have they, looking for profit, after Mrs. Gibson's departure, sought to sell or let sell through their agents at Suez the first two folios, which had been seen and published by Mrs. Gibson, together with the six folios, the absence of which was already noticed by her, suggesting that these were hid by the monks during the visits of the English scholar?<sup>50</sup>

The question could possibly be related to a provenance story Grote provided. The same holds for the subsequent question as to whether the eight folios of the *membrum disjectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 154 'have passed through the hands of the same dealer of Suez' ('il serait intéressant si vos 8 feuilles sinaïtiques n'avaient pas passé par les mains du même négociant ['dealer'] [sic] du

47 The letter can be viewed at <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n/f48.image>>. For a detailed analysis of the single fragments, see Géhin 2006, 25–31. Grote had shown Graf photographs of fragment III in 1921, cf. Graf 1925, 219.

48 Gibson 1899, esp. v–vi.

49 MS Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725, f. 19v; the English translation is mine.

50 *Ibid.*: 'Ont-ils, en quête d'un profit, trouvé moyen, après le départ de Mrs. Gibson, de vendre ou faire vendre par leurs agents à Suez les deux premières feuilles vues et publiées par Mrs. Gibson, plus les 6 feuilles dont l'absence déjà constatée par celle-ci fait supposer qu'elles étaient tenues cachées par les moins lors des visites de la savante anglaise?'; the English translation is mine.

Suez').<sup>51</sup> The story implied by the letter's anonymous author, however, goes beyond the account spread by the above-quoted catalogues, involving the accusation of greed for profit on the monks' side, which by then, of course, was a common trope in acquisition accounts of Western scholars and manuscript hunters.<sup>52</sup>

What conclusions are we to draw from this for the recent history of the Munich/Paris fragment? Thanks to the details provided by Gibson, it is certain that the *membra disjecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 (including MS London, BL, Or. 8612) had been detached from the codex before February 1892. The detachment itself might have occurred either due to the disintegration of binding material or deliberate tampering. In the latter case, the perpetrator was one of the Sinaitic monks or their visitor Grote. Further, the manuscript fragments were either sold to Grote, given as pawn, or pilfered by him. The evidence presented above renders the purchase and pawn options implausible at best. First of all, Grote himself claimed to have bought *all* his manuscripts from antiquities dealers in Egyptian cities (i.e., Cairo, possibly Suez). This is belied by the *Rotulus* (and subsequent Sotheby's) provenance statement, which, in addition, does not mention Arabic manuscripts as part of the pawn. Further, there are the indications of Grote's strained financial situation, and there is his imprisonment,<sup>53</sup> allegedly for theft. As we have seen, thievery from St. Catherine's library was documented for the years between 1889 and 1894, coinciding with Grote's stay on the Sinai Peninsula and at St. Catherine's where he had access to manuscripts (though we hear only of Greek ones). It is striking that the guilt for the dismemberment of the Sinaitic manuscripts is placed on the monks in later accounts, the direct or indirect source of which, however, was Grote. Therefore, the most charitable reading of the evidence is that Grote bought at least some of his manuscripts directly from St. Catherine's, which must have involved the complicity of one of the monks. This is a possibility that calls for further scrutiny. It is strange, though, that Grote later seems to have tried to cover his tracks without any obvious reason. Thus, our sources could also be interpreted as showing that Grote deliberately misappropriated manuscripts from the monastery, which is what the monks expressly accused him of, rendering an indeterminate number of his manuscript holdings illicit. The Munich/Paris fragment might very well be among them.

As these few notes on the recent history of a Sinaitic manuscript have shown, the activity of collectors like Grote (and those who bought from him and from his buyers) led to the dispersion of fragments of some of St. Cath-

51 The author is referring to the provenance report in Lewis 1902, ix.

52 Cf. Stewart 2008, 624.

53 Grote's imprisonment is also documented in Hartwig 1894.

erine's most valuable and historically most significant manuscripts. Manuscripts are much more than text bearers. Manuscripts are themselves historical events, a 'cultural drama' materialized.<sup>54</sup> This drama continues well into our present day, albeit under completely different circumstances than at the time of their production. Fragmentation and dispersion weaken these artifacts as historical sources, something that can only be compensated by the laborious task of locating and reassembling dispersed *membra disjecta*. Here, I have only attempted at a first step, collecting bits and pieces of information concerning the fate of a fragment that ended up in three different European collections. Manuscripts from the Grote collection are still circulating today on the antiquities market, showing that the dispersion of Sinai's manuscripts, lamented by Graf one hundred years ago, still continues,<sup>55</sup> fortunately though to a much lesser degree. It can only be hoped that current owners of these artifacts are as forthcoming as possible about what they have acquired and where it comes from, making them available for further investigation to the scholarly public. Detailed scrutiny of the recent history of Sinaitic manuscripts in Western collections is still much needed. To this the present case study seeks to contribute.

### *Manuscripts*

MS Harvard, Houghton Library, Syr. 171 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 4950

MS London, British Library, Or. 8605 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8612 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8857 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8658 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1065 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1066 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1067 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1068 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1069 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1070 [formerly Grote collection]

54 This notion is borrowed from Nichols 1997.

55 See note 39 above.

- MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1071 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Paris, Bibliothèque national de France, Ar. 6725 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Paris, Bibliothèque national de France, Syr. 378 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 35 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 36 [formerly Grote collection, present location unknown]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 37 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 154
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 155
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# Conference reports

## **Neo-Paleography: Analysing Ancient Handwritings in the Digital Age\***

**Basel, 27–29 January 2020**

The SNSF Ambizione project: ‘Reuniting Fragments, Identifying Scribes and Characterizing Scripts: the Digital Paleography of Greek and Coptic Papyri’ (September 2018–August 2022)—also known as *D-Scribes*—aims at providing an online digital tool to help papyrologists reconstruct fragmentary papyri through a palaeographical approach. On 27–29 January 2020, the *D-Scribes* leader, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, organized the first conference of the project, ‘Neo-Paleography: Analysing Ancient Handwritings in the Digital Age’, hosted by the University of Basel. The conference was designed to gather international computer scientists and humanities scholars, thus stimulating discussions on methods and tools for palaeographic research on different materials and languages and facilitating synergies.

The first day opened with a contribution by Nachum Dershowitz, who presented the digital tool developed by the researchers of Tel Aviv University. With the help of their method, notably adapted from computational biology, the Israeli team tries to reconstruct fragments and recognize scribes, applying the same clustering techniques to different datasets, from the Genizah documents and the Dead Sea Scrolls to Tibetan, Coptic, and Chinese. Mladen Popović, Lambert Schomaker, and Maruf Dhali (Groningen) showcased their work on the dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which combines different perspectives: the evidence from radiocarbon dating; the computational intelligence methods applied to the writing style-base evidence; and the more traditional palaeographic approach. Maruf Dhali also teamed up with Gemma Hayes (Groningen) to use technology to identify the Dead Sea Scroll scribes.

The second part of the day was devoted to the presentation of different machine learning methods. Vinodh Rajan Sampath (Hamburg) showed the general mode of operation of *Script Analyser*, whilst Timo Korikiakangas (Helsinki) provided an example of its application on early mediaeval Italian documents. Elena Nieddu (Rome) presented the project *In Codice Ratio*, focusing on the ap-

\* This report was written within the project ‘NOTAE: NOT A writtEn word but graphic symbols. An evidence-based reconstruction of another written world in pragmatic literacy from Late Antiquity to early medieval Europe’, which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 786572).

plication of automatic or semi-supervised knowledge extraction for handwritten text recognition and automatic transcription of a text.

On 28 January, Peter Stokes (Paris) discussed the problem of clear definitions and a common framework between palaeographers and machines and its implications for *Archetype*, the well-known suite of digital tools for the study of medieval handwriting. Simona Stoyanova (Nottingham) showed how she customized *Archetype* for the research on inscriptions from Trace between the first and the third century CE. Lorenzo Sardone (San Marino) illustrated the variety of the material aspects of the papyri of the demosthenic *On the Crown*. Semiotics and socio-semiotics are the framework of Yasmine Amory's (Gent) approach on categorization of palaeographic aspects of documentary papyri. Coptic comprised the leading part of the second part of the day: the digraph letters from Aphrodito were Lorelei Vanderheyden's (Heidelberg) main focus; Anne Boud'hors (Paris) showed the first results of the reconstruction process of the Coptic fragments belonging to the 'archive of Papas'; Esther Garel (Strasbourg) singled out some notarial offices in Fayyum thanks to a palaeographical and material analysis of Coptic papyri. The Coptic fragmentary manuscripts of the Islamic era and their script were examined by Christian Askeland (Cambridge). The SMR-database of Coptic New Testament Manuscripts, which helps in the recognition of related fragments through palaeographical analysis, was presented by Katharina Schröder (Münster). Alin Suciú's paper (Göttingen) was devoted to the fragmentary Coptic manuscripts from the Library of the White Monastery and the difficulties in the reconstruction of their codicological and palaeographical aspects, which a Virtual Research Environment (VMR) enabled to overcome.

In the last day of the conference, special attention was given to the use of digital humanities for processing and analysing ancient materials. Siamese neural network was illustrated as a very promising method for reconstructing fragmentary ostraka by Marie Beurton-Aimar (Bordeaux); Vincent Christlein (Nuremberg) compared different methods for fragment retrieval of samples written in Greek and English; Convolutional Neural Network models were presented by Imran Siddiqi (Islamabad) for dating manuscripts belonging to the Medieval Paleographical Scale dataset. Tanmoy Mondal (Montpellier) showed how to refine binarized images through Structural Symmetry of Pixels (SSP). IT graph representation and its automatic recognition is one of the challenges which Andreas Fischer (Fribourg) works on when a sufficient quantity of data is not available. A joint presentation by Vlad Atanasiu and Peter Fornaro (Basel) closed the conference, which aimed at demonstrating that the color is also important when speaking of palaeography and digital humanities.

During the conference the following posters were displayed: Benjamin Kiessling, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, Rodney Ast, Holger Essler, *Aligning Extant Transcriptions of Documentary and Literary Papyri with Their Glyphs*; Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello, *D-scribes: Digital Paleography of Greek and Coptic Papyri*; Elisa Nury, Susan Fogarty, Lavinia Ferretti, Paul Schubert, *Grammateus: the Architecture of Documentary Papyri*; Nina Sietis, *NOT A WrittEn Word but Graphic Symbols. NOTAE: An Evidence-based Reconstruction of Another Written World in Pragmatic Literacy from Late Antiquity to Early Medieval Europe*; Leonora Sonogo, *Quantitative Tools for the Dating of Arabic Documentary Texts*.

The full conference details, programme, abstracts, and links to the recorded presentations are available at <<https://d-scribes.philhist.unibas.ch/en/events-179/neo-paleography-conference/>>. Proceedings are being prepared for publication as a special issue of the *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin*.

Nina Sietis, 'Sapienza' Università di Roma

### ***Florilegia Syriaca. Mapping a Knowledge-Organizing Practice in the Syriac World***

**Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 30 January–1 February 2020**

From 30 January to 1 February 2020, a group of scholars in Syriac studies gathered at Ca' Foscari University of Venice to participate in the first workshop organized by the ERC Starting Grant Project 'FLOS: *Florilegia Syriaca: The Intercultural Dissemination of Greek Christian Thought in Syriac and Arabic in the First Millennium CE*'. The meeting, which dealt with compilations of excerpts in the Syriac language, was the first in a series of three workshops planned by the FLOS project, which should progressively broaden their scope to other Eastern Christian literatures and eventually to other religions.

The concept of the workshop originated from the observation that the florilegium, or anthology, though a highly pervasive form of Syriac literature, was generally disregarded in Syriac scholarship. And yet, anthologies and collections of texts have recently been the focus of increasing scholarly attention, and issues of codicology, terminology, and philology have been raised. A broad study of 'reading in excerpts' as a knowledge-organizing practice, transversal to many cultures and covering fields ranging from Egyptology to Late Western Medieval philosophy, has bloomed; indeed, the study of 'multiple-text manuscripts' is a field in rapid and constant expansion. From the point of view of its content, a multiple-text manuscript can be defined as a

manuscript containing diverse writings that are not assigned to the same author and do not belong to the same work—and the florilegium, in particular, as a collection of excerpts from writings of different authors. Many domains have benefited from this scholarly rush, especially Greek Byzantine, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Slavic studies. Syriac florilegia, however, have remained almost untouched by this renewal. And indeed, with very few notable exceptions, they have hardly ever been studied in their own right and have only been pillaged by scholars of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, who picked and published from them some interesting passages of works whose Greek original is lost.

From the sixth century onwards, however, and especially under Abbasid rule from the eighth to the eleventh century, florilegia progressively became a prominent, and in some cases the dominant form through which Syriac and Christian Arabic intellectuals shaped their knowledge of theology, philosophy, ascetic literature, and in some cases even historiography. We can single out at least three major categories of Syriac florilegia: the exegetical florilegium, the ascetical florilegium, and the dogmatic florilegium, the latter aimed at the refutation of heresies and, correspondingly, at the definition of orthodoxy. These three forms usually involve a massive re-use of translated Greek patristic literature. But also Syriac historiography underwent a substantial process of selection and re-organization, resulting in the creation of historiographical florilegia. Many of the extant florilegia bear witness to a high degree of organization of the sources: the excerpts are not only merely juxtaposed, but organized around specific topics in a series of ‘patchwork-treatises’ on the relevant topics, with clear overall aims. They thus vividly reflect a coherent editorial project of the compiler.

The main objective of the workshop *Florilegia Syriaca* was to start outlining a phenomenology of Syriac florilegia, especially of patristic content, and to map their diffusion and relevance in time and space, from the sixth to the eleventh century, and from the Roman Empire to China. In order to do this, during three days of lively and friendly scholarly discussion, the workshop studied Syriac florilegia in their own right, as cultural products possessing their own specific textuality. This approach gave us the opportunity to fruitfully reflect, for the first time in Syriac scholarship, on what florilegia have really been for Syriac culture: laboratories of knowledge, where the selection, re-arrangement, and in some cases the canonization of old sources were prompted by the new needs of an entangled religious and intellectual world.<sup>1</sup>

1 In what follows, the description of the papers delivered at the workshop is largely based, with some adaptations, on the speakers’ abstracts, which were very substantial and provided with bibliographies. This report must thus be considered as the fruit of a collective effort and not as the exclusive work of the present author.

On 30 January Sergey Minov (Sorbonne Université, Paris) opened the workshop with a paper on ‘Anti-Jewish Testimonia among Syriac Christians of the Early Islamic Period: Continuity of a Polemical Genre’. Although the paper was not immediately concerned with the genre of patristic florilegia but with a collection of biblical testimonia, it served as an ideal introduction to what followed, since it tackled the literary genre of testimonia as a precursor of and, arguably, an immediate model for florilegia. Testimonia were collections of scriptural quotations, gathered and organized thematically by Christians for the purposes of apologetic and polemic against Jews and (to a lesser extent) pagans, and had emerged as early as the second century, enjoying a considerable popularity during Late Antiquity. Minov discussed how this genre was still operative during the early Islamic period among Syriac-speaking Christians. The primary focus of his investigation was an unpublished Syriac work, entitled *Collection of Demonstrations from the Old Testament against the Jews and Other Unbelievers*, which is attested in a single textual witness, the West Syrian manuscript London, British Library (BL), Add. 12154 (ff. 201v–222r), dated to sometime between the eighth and the ninth centuries. He addressed the question of whether this composition stands in a direct genetic relation with the early specimens of the Greek *testimonia* literature, or whether it should be regarded as an original compilation, produced in a Syriac-speaking milieu. The problem of a possible social and religious function of this text during the early Abbasid period, including its relation to the rich tradition of Syriac florilegia of this period, was discussed as well.

In the following paper, ‘From Scholium to Florilegium: Tracing the Development of West Syrian Theological Collections’, Yonatan Moss (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) tackled some core questions of the workshop: why did the florilegium become a predominant mode of organizing, transmitting, and creating knowledge in the Syriac world, beginning in the sixth century, and with ever-increasing energy in the Abbasid period? How did the process of selection from larger texts, and compilation in florilegia, work in practice?

Moss’ proposal to enter into these overarching questions was highly concrete and was based on the following logic: the patristic extracts comprised in the theological florilegia (if we limit our focus to these among the various types of florilegia) would obviously need to have been excavated, either directly or indirectly, from earlier manuscripts of continuous patristic texts. It is equally obvious that the surviving manuscript evidence for both continuous texts and florilegia tells only part of the story. Yet, even within those manuscripts that happen to be at our disposal, we may ask whether there are any concrete traces of the processes of selection and extraction of individual passages from the continuous texts and their incorporation into the florilegia.

Moss showed us how he found what he believed to be precisely such traces in at least one continuous, sixth-century manuscript (MS BL, Add. 14567) in conjunction with several of the later theological florilegia. MS BL, Add. 14567 contains several of the ‘minor’ works of John Chrysostom: the five homilies *On the incomprehensibility of God*; the three treatises *To Stagirus the monk tormented by a demon*; the treatise *On the Fact That Demons Do Not Govern the World*; and a series of four extracts from other homilies by Chrysostom, including two from his homilies on Matthew.

Unlike several of the other continuous Syriac patristic manuscripts from the sixth century, MS BL, Add. 14567 is furnished with dozens of scribal notes appearing in the margins. These notes serve a variety of functions: some merely highlight certain passages in the text; others point out lessons to be gleaned from this or that passage; and yet others indicate the theological, polemical, or exegetical import of a passage, or of a phrase, in places where the connection would not otherwise be obvious (especially cases where Chrysostom could not have known about the connection, such as two notes marking passages as ‘against Julian’ of Halicarnassus, who post-dated Chrysostom by a century).

The scribal notes are written carefully, in what appears, at least in the first part of the manuscript, to be a hand very similar, if not identical, to the hand that produced the main text. These notes are invariably linked to a three-dot glyph (the so-called ‘therefore sign’) indicating the part of the main text to which they refer. Many are surrounded by *tabulae ansatae*, or other graphic measures, pointing to their importance. Structurally, the link between the marginal notations and the main body of the text in this manuscript functions like the link between headings to excerpts and the excerpts themselves in the florilegia. Yet, the connection is not merely structural and hypothetical. As he showed in his paper, Moss was able to track down several cases of word-for-word identity between notations found in MS BL, Add. 14567 and headings found in subsequent florilegia, with both, naturally, referring to the selfsame texts. This would seem to open a window unto one of the concrete processes through which the late ancient and early medieval Syriac florilegia were formed.

Using insights gleaned from the recent study of marginal notations in medieval Latin manuscripts, Moss argued that the bridge he found between scholium and florilegium does not only help answer the ‘how’ question about the formation of the Syriac florilegia, but also, to some degree, the ‘why’ question as well.

On 31 January the morning session was opened by Marion Pragt (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), whose paper, ‘Lovers of Learning: Inter-

preting the Song of Songs in Two Syriac Exegetical Collections', concentrated on the exegetical florilegium. Pragt explored the organization of exegetical knowledge in two West Syrian collections: the so-called London Collection, and the Collection of Simeon. The London Collection contains extracts on the interpretation of scripture and related subjects from Greek Christian works and is extant in a single eighth- or ninth-century manuscript (BL, Add. 12168), although the collection itself has been dated to the seventh century. The Collection of Simeon presents a series of commentaries on scripture largely based on Syriac authors and is preserved both in the ninth- or tenth-century manuscript Vatican, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Vat. Syr. 103 and its eleventh-century copy BL, Add. 12144. The paper specifically concentrated on the reception of Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Song of Songs* in both collections. Gregory's *Homilies* circulated in Syriac in both full and abbreviated versions, which have not yet been edited or fully studied, and became one of the main sources for Syriac interpretations of the Song. In the London Collection and the Collection of Simeon, the compilers operated in two ways, both by creating abridged texts from single authors (Gregory of Nyssa in the case of Song 1–6:9) and by adding selected extracts taken from various works. Thus, Pragt examined how the *Homilies* were abbreviated and organized, in what different ways Gregory and other authors were used and what this may reveal about the aims and interests of the compilers. Specifically, she argued that Gregory's *Homilies* were re-organized in different ways, revealing two different organizing principles. Whereas the London Collection presents abbreviated versions of each homily, the Collection of Simeon is structured around verses of the Song which are followed by brief explanations. In this way, the London Collection makes available Gregory's lengthy spiritual *Homilies* in a shorter and more manageable form, while in the Collection of Simeon the *Homilies* are used as a tool to identify the philological, moral and spiritual sense of the Song's words. Moreover, although both collections contain paratextual material, the London Collection mainly uses marginal notes as reading aids, guiding users through the abridged versions of the *Homilies* and enabling them to navigate to a section of particular interest. On the other hand, in the Collection of Simeon, marginal notes offer alternative readings from the Song as well as explanatory notes and additional interpretations. Finally, in both collections, by reworking Gregory's interpretations and through the addition of extracts from other authors (notably Cyril of Alexandria, Severus of Antioch and Daniel of Ṣalah), the compilers introduced ideas which reflect Miaphysite theological interests. The two collections thus show how the Syriac version of a Greek work could be abbreviated and adapted to accommodate the aims and interests of new contexts.

Flavia Ruani (CNRS, Paris) presented her paper ‘Heresiology in the *Demonstrations against Heresies: The Reception of Ephrem of Nisibis’ Heresiological Works*’ as a part of a larger research project that aims at exploring the tradition of Syriac heresiology, both in its direct manifestations (i.e. texts dealing with the refutation of ‘erroneous’ doctrines studied in their own right) and in its internal and self-referential development (namely, the reception and quotation of previous heresiological works in later texts). In this regard, the corpus of Syriac dogmatic florilegia (seventh to tenth century) reveals itself to be particularly interesting. Notwithstanding their own specificities, the florilegia could rightly be considered as part of the Syriac heresiological tradition, both regarding their content and their form. They oftentimes bear the title of *Demonstrations from the Fathers against Heresies* and their main aim is to refute the opinions of a variety of adversaries (Julianists, Nestorians, etc.). Furthermore, they both adopt and adapt a structural way of refutation going back to classical heresiology (starting in the second century in Greek) that consists of quoting excerpts either from the adversaries themselves, for the sake of refutation, or from previous Church authorities, in support of specific arguments.

One way to understand the polemical nature of the florilegia as constructed texts with their own editorial intention, is to study the use they make of previous heresiological works: which ones they quote, in which way, and in which specific contexts. First, the paper offered an overview of the heresiological sources, coming from the Syriac and Greek traditions, which are quoted in the florilegia. Such a survey allowed us to understand which texts were in circulation and available to the authors of the florilegia in Upper Mesopotamia in the seventh to tenth centuries, and/or which ones were deemed relevant for their purposes. In particular, next to sources directly dealing with Christological matters that would fit the florilegia’s aims, there are others with an apparently less relevant content. Two of them were the focus of the following part of the paper. They are both dated to the fourth century, one belonging to the Greek tradition, the other to the Syriac one: the *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis, and Ephrem of Nisibis’ heresiological works, namely the *Prose Refutations against Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan* and the *Hymns against Heresies*. Ruani examined their reception in the florilegia, with a particular emphasis on Ephrem’s texts. After offering a survey of the quotations from these sources, most of which were new identifications, she concentrated on the selection, organization, and content of these excerpts, including the textual modifications that they may have undergone and the contexts in which they were received. Ruani’s analysis revealed that the reception of these texts in a later and religiously different milieu disregarded their original polemical

aims and even their polemical nature, as they were quoted in various thematic sections, some of which feature a spiritual content rather than a controversial one. Finally, in order to understand if florilegia were simple transmitters of heresiology or heresiological work in their own right, the paper enlarged its scope to previous, contemporary and later authors and texts that quote the same sources. Comparisons were drawn, for example, with Philoxenus of Mabbug's *Florilegium* (end fifth century), Severus of Antioch's *Against Julian of Halicarnassus* (sixth century), and Moses bar Kepha's *Treatise on Free Will* (ninth century), still unedited and transmitted by MS BL, Add. 14731. Ruani explored how these authors used fourth-century heresiology and indicated which differences and similarities can be observed with the florilegia. With regard to previous authors, her analysis showed that florilegia did not make use of the selection of fourth-century heresiologists: even when they quote extracts that already existed in an earlier selection, they do not insert them in the same cluster of citations, but rather create their own. With respect to contemporary or later authors, the example of Moses bar Kepha's *On Free Will* suggests that florilegia represented an intermediary source, but also that original works continued to be used in parallel: if *mimro* 3, ch. 2 contains a passage from Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* probably borrowed from a florilegium similar to the one contained in BL, Add. 12155, *mimro* 2, ch. 5 ('Against the followers of Mani and Marcion who destroy free will'), ff. 10r–11r, is a compilation of extracts taken from the *First Discourse* of Ephrem's *Prose Refutations*, which, as far as we can tell, is not transmitted in florilegia.

Marianna Mazzola's paper, "This Story May Provide Proof". History and Authority in Syriac Excerpt Collections and beyond' was based on a project she co-authored with Peter van Nuffelen and Andy Hilken, which received funding from the Belgian FWO to be carried out at the University of Ghent.<sup>2</sup> This project started from very much the same premises as FLOS: i.e. the observation that over the past three decades, scholarship has revised the traditional view that the late antique and medieval practice of excerpting is unoriginal, uninteresting and a sign of intellectual decline; and that scholars now tend to approach excerpt collections as a particular way of organizing and disseminating knowledge. Yet, by understanding excerpts as simply another way of ordering knowledge, Mazzola and colleagues remarked, scholarship on excerpt collections has tended to ignore insights from intellectual history, which showed that from the fourth century onwards, the ability to cite passages from authoritative predecessors (usually church fathers) was a prerequisite for an argument to be judged valid. Excerpt collections therefore are

2 The title of the project is 'Re-assembling the Past. Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Early Syriac Historiography, and Its Byzantine and Arab Context' (FWO 582-842).

not merely forms that organize knowledge, but they also attribute status and authority to particular types of knowledge. The Ghent project seeks to inject that perspective into the study of excerpt collections, by focusing on one particular type of excerpts, namely those drawn from histories. By combining the study of a material form (excerpt collections) with intellectual history through a particular case study (historiography), this project, as Mazzola explained, aims at contributing substantially to the study of 1) Excerpt collections; 2) History of historiography; 3) Identity formation in the Miaphysite church.

(1) *Excerpt collections*. The project will begin with Syriac collections, specifically focusing on those containing historical excerpts, and will compare the results of this study with those that were already achieved for other languages and cultures. Only through comparison can general and culture-specific features be separated.

(2) *History of historiography*. Excerpt collections organize knowledge, but not all types of knowledge are equal. Excerpt collections testify to the rise in importance of quotations from authoritative figures in debate. The authority of a citation was closely linked to its authorship. The project proposes that another feature played a role, namely the kind of text a citation derived from. Not all genres were equal in epistemological status, and historiography is a particularly interesting case. Hardly ever is the status of historical knowledge in relation to other types of knowledge discussed, even though history in the Greek world was born in competition with other types of knowledge, such as medical, philosophical, and rhetorical. Indeed, Christianization had a major impact in this respect; the Christian understanding of history was built on a distinction between, on the one hand, the historical books of the Bible, which, being inspired, were true in the strongest possible sense, and, on the other, ordinary histories that were imperfect. In addition, as history was summed up in Christ, nothing substantially new could happen between the Incarnation and the Second Coming. Paradoxically, although Christianity is called a historical religion, it generated an epistemologically lower status for historiography in comparison to other genres, such as exegesis. The role of historical excerpts in mainly theological collections, then, begs explanation.

(3) *Identity formation in the Miaphysite church*. Scholarship has addressed how history helped shape Miaphysite identity, but has, understandably, focused on extant histories. Yet the embedding of historical excerpts in doctrinal excerpt collections shows how an understanding of the past was intertwined with an understanding of doctrine. In turn, the identification of authoritative theologians that were to be cited in excerpt collections was shaped by a particular view of history. Mazzola illustrated how, by looking at excerpt

collections as presupposing a historical narrative, the Ghent project intends to chart how identity, theology, and narratives of the past were closely related.

Based on existing catalogues, 17 manuscripts have turned out to contain historical excerpts, all deriving from Miaphysite milieus and ranging from the sixth to the twentieth century. Besides the chronological span, these manuscripts contain historical excerpts to very different extents. The main body of the project is focusing on a corpus of three important witnesses from the formative period of the Miaphysite church (sixth to tenth century): Dayr as-Suryān, Syr. 28 (sixth or seventh century); BAV, Vat. Sir. 145 (ninth or tenth century); and BL, Add. 12154 (eighth or ninth century). Their formal differences ensure a wide enough breadth to compare different ways of fashioning excerpt collections, whilst their chronological proximity allows them to be interpreted as witnesses to a single culture. Each manuscript is analyzed at three levels. A first level draws inspiration from material philology: how is the manuscript made up, that is what are its dimensions, format, composition, annotations, and colophons? How are the excerpts organized and introduced? Does the compiler show an awareness of difference in genre? Secondly, the project will assess the overall aim of each single manuscript and ask if it implies a narrative about the past; this will be done by employing rhetorical analysis, i.e. looking at a possible thematic coherence in the excerpts, as well as at the overall architecture of the manuscript. As a final step, the project will focus on the historical excerpts: how is material from histories dealt with (e.g. selection, reworking, positioning)? How does this treatment compare to non-historical excerpts? Does the collection rely on an earlier collection, or has it directly used or even translated the original text from the Greek?

Building on these results, the Ghent project intends to answer its more general questions: (1) Through comparison with earlier work on historical excerpts in other languages, especially Latin and Greek, but also Armenian, it will find out if there are culture-specific and generally shared features of such excerpt collections. (2) Setting the results against a *longue durée* history of the changing status of history in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it will ask how the status of historical knowledge is enhanced in excerpt collections so as to allow it to become a source of authority. As a working hypothesis, the project envisages two non-exclusive options: by suggesting a historical narrative of orthodoxy that supports the status of the theological excerpts, and by selecting elements from histories that are non-historical in nature (such as conciliar documents, letters by church fathers); (3) Relating to identity formation: what role does history play in excerpt collections that seek to establish first and foremost a theological identity? How does the historical narrative implied in the collection compare to the ones present in integrally preserved narratives?

The project will thus be expanding on current concepts of narrative identity, which have been applied more often to complete narrative texts than to implicit narratives like the ones it is dealing with.

Emiliano Fiori (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, PI of the FLOS project) opened the afternoon session of 31 January with the paper 'The Contexts and Afterlife of a Widespread Christological Florilegium (1v–36r): A Travelogue', which illustrated a work in progress he is carrying out within the framework of the FLOS project on a large Christological florilegium preserved in different manuscripts of the British Library and of the Mingana collection. MSS BL, Add. 14532, 14533, 14538, 12155, and Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Syr. 69 date from the eighth to the ninth/tenth centuries. The florilegium, which expounds a Miaphysite Christology in 110 chapters and is mainly made up of quotations from Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, discusses technical topics such as 1) The persistence of a difference between the natures from which Christ derives, which excludes any confusion in Christ while at the same time saving the hypostatic unity, and is safeguarded by the preservation in the union of the so-called 'natural characteristic' of each nature; 2) The exclusion of any duality in Christ to such an extent that it is impossible to mention the number 'two' in relation to him in any respect; 3) The apology of the alleged novelty of the Miaphysite doctrine through a collection of patristic authorities, from Dionysius the Areopagite to the Cappadocians; 4) An overview of the debates held at Chalcedon, proving that the polemical goal of the florilegium is Chalcedonian rather than Nestorian Christology.

An initial exploration of the patristic materials of this florilegium, of their relationship with the above-mentioned topics, and of their complex itineraries through the centuries leads to some provisional results concerning the context in which they were originally collected and the circumstances that may have prompted the production of the florilegium as we have it now. As to the context, the topics discussed in our florilegium were the core of a rather obscure Christological debate at the end of the sixth century, which nevertheless was crucial for the theological self-consciousness of later Miaphysitism, namely the controversy around Probus, a Miaphysite theologian who converted to Chalcedonianism in the 580s. Much of what is discussed in the Christological florilegium as it is now, especially the 'natural characteristic' and the removal of duality, is already present in this sixth-century controversy. These very topics emerge again in an age of renewed polemics that opposed Miaphysites to Chalcedonians, between the end of the Umayyad caliphate and the first decades of the 'Abbasid rule. A precious source of the middle of the eighth century, the letter of a certain Elias who converted from Chalcedonianism to

the Miaphysite faith and addressed to the Chalcedonian syncellus Leo of Ḥar-rān, shows us that the discussion still focused on the same points: Difference vs division of the natures, unity vs confusion, exclusion of any duality. The authorities quoted by Elias to defend his Miaphysite options are the same as in the Christological florilegium and are also organized in a similar way. One generation later, Nonnus of Nisibis and his relative Abū Ra'īṭah used the florilegium in very much the same form as we find it in the British manuscripts for their polemic against the Melkites. Fiori defined his travelogue as incomplete; it is still difficult, and will perhaps remain impossible, to determine the exact production context of the florilegium. However, it seems clear that the travel is bringing us very close to the alleged date of the earliest witness that preserves it, MS BL, Add. 14532 (eighth century according to Wright), and that it reveals the nature of the florilegium as an 'emergency kit' for Christological apology against an adversary who, supported both by the Roman Empire and by the first Caliphs, was in the heyday of its power and influence.

Bishara Ebeid (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, senior researcher in the FLOS project) presented his ongoing research for the FLOS project in his paper, 'Syriac Dogmatic Florilegia and Christian Arabic Writings. The Case of Abū Ra'īṭah al-Takrītī'. Abū Ra'īṭah al-Takrītī, a Miaphysite theologian of the eighth-ninth centuries, was one of the most important thinkers of his Church. He participated in many theological discussions, both with Muslims and with Christians of other denominations. Although his nisbah 'al-Takrītī' might mean that he was the bishop of the city of Takrīt (the main administrative center of the Miaphysite church in Mesopotamia, situated in present-day Iraq between Baghdad and Mosul), scholars today agree that such a hypothesis is improbable. His *nisbah*, then, may point to some form of connection to the city of Takrīt, either his place of birth or of work, since the city was a very important cultural and educational center for the Jacobite Church in that period. Abū Ra'īṭah is mentioned as a great teacher in some Armenian chronicles, which makes us think that he was a teacher in his church in the center of Takrīt. He wrote in the Arabic language, the new lingua franca of the Christians under Islamic rule in the Middle East. His works mostly had an apologetic character and can be regarded as one of the starting points of the Christian theological production in Arabic. In his apologetic writings on the Trinity and Christology, Abū Ra'īṭah uses the patristic heritage to answer the accusations of non-Miaphysite Christians, as well as Muslims. With the first group he makes a direct use of the Church Fathers, quoting some of their works in support of the Miaphysite doctrine, while with the second group the references to the Fathers are indirect. In the Christological controversies of the fifth- and sixth-century Miaphysite authors like Severus of Antioch and

Peter of Callinicum relied on the patristic heritage in order to prove that their doctrine was orthodox and in agreement with the Church Fathers. Two centuries later, the patristic quotations used by Severus, Peter, and other authors were further selected and reorganized in the Christological and Trinitarian patristic florilegia that are currently studied by the FLOS project. These florilegia were copied more than once in the following centuries and continued to be instruments of theological education and formation for the West Syrians. In his paper, Ebeid analyzed the use of the patristic tradition in some of Abū Ra'īṭah's writings (*The first letter on the Holy Trinity*, *The letter against the Melkites*, and *The apology on the Trisagion*) and demonstrated that the latter's knowledge of the Fathers' doctrine and the quotations and references he makes from their works, directly and indirectly, is based on these Syriac dogmatic florilegia.

Herman Teule (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) concluded the afternoon session by bringing us as far as the second half of the second millennium with his paper 'An Anthology of Conciliar Decrees of the Seventeenth Century: Context and Purpose', and allowed us to explore the persistence of ancient compilation practices in a little explored age of Syro-Arabic literature. While still metropolitan of Amid, the later Chaldean Patriarch Joseph II (b. 1667, d. 1713) published in Syriac a selection of conciliar decrees. The oldest extant manuscript is probably an autograph by Joseph himself. As stated by Joseph in one of the introductions to this work (there are at least three), his Syriac text goes back to an Arabic original. This Arabic original could be identified as *Misbāḥ al-lāmi* ('The Burning Lamp'), composed by the Carmelite Johannes Petrus à Matre Dei, one of the Latin missionaries working in Aleppo who cooperated closely with the French Consul François Picquet. The Syriac redaction has some idiosyncratic characteristics. Teule discussed the *Sitz im Leben* of the Arabic original, comparing it to the redaction of Joseph II. The paper focused on the rationale behind the selection of these conciliar documents. In the nineteenth century, Joseph's work was printed by Paul Bedjan; this raises the question of the importance of this work for the Chaldean Christians of the Urmia-Khosrova region, the normal readership of Bedjan's work.

In the last session, which was held in the morning of 1 February, after the rich overview of the previous days on theological, exegetic, historical, and conciliar collections, we finally turned to monastic collections.

Grigory Kessel (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, and Manchester University), who has been dealing with the topic for several years, tackled it again for us in his paper 'A Syriac Monk's Reading: A Perspective on the Monastic Miscellanies'. Kessel moved from the assumption that, as in other Christian traditions, reading played an important role in Syriac Christianity,

but that, in contrast to these other traditions – particularly the Greek-speaking one—the development of reading practices and book culture within the Syriac Christian tradition has not yet received the attention it deserves. As heirs of the ancient Mesopotamian scribes, Syriac Christians placed great value on books and reading. And as with many other aspects of their Christianity, the Syriac attitude towards reading and learning had certain traits unique to its tradition.

Quite often it is hagiographic works that provide the most interesting material for the study of book culture in a monastic milieu. The lives of the Syriac monks offer intriguing evidence about monks' reading practices. Thus, for example, we read in the life of Rabban Bar 'Edta (d. 611) that he memorized the magnum opus of Nestorius, the *Book of Heraclides* (521 pages in the modern edition!), and learned the entire Bible by heart, as well as the works of Abba Isaiah, Mark the Monk, and Evagrius of Pontus.

Moreover, a scholar of Syriac Christianity is in a very fortunate position, as we have in our possession the actual products that reflect the changes and developments that took place within the Syriac monastic tradition from the sixth century onwards, namely the miscellanies. Miscellanies were the main vehicle for the transmission of monastic literature and were deemed essential for a monk's spiritual formation. Already in the earliest extant examples (dating to the sixth century) we can detect a feature that remains constant through time, as each miscellany has a unique combination of texts. Such collections of texts thus offer us a unique glimpse into the Syriac monastic milieu of their day. They show us, for example, which texts were given preference in copying and which texts fell out of use after a period of circulation. Through miscellanies we can observe clearly how Syriac monasticism was shifting from admiration for the Byzantine monastic tradition to the establishment of its own extensive corpus.

Most of Syriac monastic literature, including translations of Greek patristic writings, is preserved solely in monastic miscellanies. A significant number of monastic texts are no longer extant, so the importance of such manuscripts is self-evident. However, it has not yet been established how many of these anthologies are still extant, and those that are known to have survived have not been thoroughly studied. In particular, it is important to discover whether a circulation of texts within such miscellanies presupposed certain changes that those texts had to undergo.

Kessel's paper considered Syriac miscellanies containing ascetic texts as a possible source for the study of intellectual activity in Syriac monasteries, and discussed the particular character and defining features of the miscellanies. By way of an example, he demonstrated some aspects of the significance

of the miscellanies for the study of Syriac literature by presenting as a case study the works of Ephrem of Nisibis (d. 373) that can be found in the miscellanies.

As was highlighted by many scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, the life of Ephrem which is known not only in Syriac but also in Greek laid the foundation for the creation of the so-called 'Ephrem byzantinus' in contrast with the 'Ephrem syrus' (so S. Griffith), the real fourth-century author of *madraše*. Traditionally Ephrem was (and largely continues to be) known in both Byzantine and Syriac milieus as a solitary and even a recluse who left the world and concentrated on permanent contrition for his sins. It is exactly this image that appears when one reads not only the corpus of *Ephraem graecus* but also many Syriac works attributed to him. It is this Ephrem that is known and venerated throughout the Christian ecumene, rather than the one who spent most of his life in Nisibis and was active in Edessa in the last ten years of his life. Thanks to the study of ancient manuscripts that contain the works of Ephrem and their critical editions by Dom Edmund Beck we discovered a completely different Ephrem, open to the challenges of the world and to the demands of his community and steadily fighting for Orthodoxy. Distortion of historical memory has affected not only the biography of Ephrem but his literary heritage as well. As was just mentioned, the image of the historical Ephrem became available to us exclusively thanks to the extant early Syriac manuscripts, which preserved a fairly significant part of Ephrem's authentic corpus. However, just as the historical Ephrem needed revision in accordance with the new ideals of Christian monasticism, so too the body of Ephrem's works was destined to be re-edited and re-thought. The most eloquent witness to the changing attitudes toward the literary heritage of Ephrem are the manuscripts containing his works and which therefore provide us with the material evidence of this transformation. Indeed, Ephrem's authentic works reached us in a special kind of manuscripts, which could be described as collections of works by a single author. A characteristic feature of these manuscripts is the fact that they contain the works of Ephrem alone and usually include whole cycles of *madraše*. To the contrary, through a closer look at the monastic miscellanies produced in different periods in comparison with manuscripts containing the works of Ephrem alone, Kessel showed that the works that these miscellanies transmitted as Ephremian are in fact not by Ephrem himself, but are rather pseudo-Ephremian; Ephrem's authentic works probably did not exert any particular attraction on an audience that was entirely concentrated on ascetical questions.

Vittorio Berti (University of Padua) concluded the workshop with a paper on 'The Composition Criteria of the Christian Sogdian Manuscript E28

in the Light of the Syriac Ascetic Collections of the Church of the East', thus vastly broadening the geographic scope of the meeting and showing how far in space the Syriac practices of collection and compilation reached. The Sogdian Christian MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Turfan, E28 is a set of scattered sheets and fragments discovered in Turfan which were reordered by scholars through a codicological and philological analysis. According to Nicholas Sims-Williams, it might be ascribed to the hand of a single copyist, but it should be possibly subdivided into three groups belonging to three different codices, originating from the same scriptorium. Such materials display an East Syrian monastic miscellany, although not a florilegium in the proper sense: indeed, it collects entire works, which include lives of ancient solitaries, counsels for novices, and ascetical homilies. Berti's contribution focused on one of the three hypothetical manuscripts that contain a set of texts whose identification is fairly complete. According to the current scholarly consensus, it is assumed to have included the History of Mar Awgin, an excerpt from the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah, the *Selected sayings* of Simon of Taibuteh, some excerpts from the first and the second part of the Homilies of Isaac of Niniveh, and other excerpts from the Commentaries of Dadišo' Qatraya on the already mentioned *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah and on the book known as *The Paradise of the Fathers*. In fact, a Syriac manuscript containing all these very texts is not extant. This entails two alternative possibilities: either a hypothetical Syriac model has been lost, or, which is most likely, such composition is an original product of the Turfan Christian monastic community. The latter possibility suggests that we pursue a comparative work on the most pertinent Syriac manuscript tradition for each text collected in the Sogdian miscellany in order to sketch the hypothetical Syriac library known by these Sogdian monks, the imagined audience, and the plausible context of use of the book. In looking for the social features of the intellectual context behind this miscellany, the paper drew on the linguistic study provided by Kessel and Sims-Williams for the *Profitable counsels* of Simon of Taibuteh, the textual analysis of Isaac of Ninive's Homilies, the intricate relation between the Syriac translation of the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah and the commentary on it provided by Dadišo', and finally on a comparison between E28 and the composition criteria of BL, Add. 14653, containing, among other things, the life of Mar Awgin.

In the final discussion we tried to draw some provisional conclusions, especially by singling out the common threads that emerged from the workshop and the more general questions that the papers raised.

Firstly, we dealt with issues which are not specific to Syriac florilegia, i.e. the philological problems that the study of florilegia implied. In some cas-

es, as was observed, for example, in the monastic miscellanies, the florilegium overlaps with the single manuscript, since the occasion that produced the florilegium coincided with the occasion that produced the manuscript. Conversely, we could observe that many florilegia have their own manuscript tradition, being preserved in more manuscripts. But even so, florilegia remain quite unstable artefacts that are subject to expansion through addition of text, or to contraction through abridgment. What is, then, the degree of textuality of florilegia? How strong is it? Can they always be defined as texts in their own right? How should they be approached in terms of a critical edition? This most general question can only be answered by tackling other broad questions:

a) What appears to be most difficult is to determine the journey of the sources from the original works up to the florilegia: during the workshop it has become clear, however, that a possible orientation comes from blocks of excerpts that travel from one work to another rather than from the single excerpts; the single excerpt, however, can also be useful when it showcases certain typical but decisive characteristics like the interruptions with *ܘܥܝܢܐ* ('and again'), *ܘܥܝܢܐ ܡܠܝܠܐ* ('after a while'), etc. More than once, it was observed that florilegia, and not the original texts from which excerpts are drawn, are the source of other florilegia, which thus appear to be florilegia at the second (or even third) degree.

b) In order to assess the internal coherence and agenda of a florilegium it is also crucial to determine, wherever possible, its historical context, especially through the reading of all possible sources touching upon the themes of the florilegium at hand and belonging to its presumable age. Determining the compilation practices, then, implies a work on fine details (see next point) and at the same time on broad pictures.

c) Another fruitful orientation for further studies is the discussion we had on the relation between excerpts from a certain text as they appear in florilegia and glosses to the whole text as preserved in other manuscripts. Since glosses are often present in many Syriac manuscripts, and are themselves quite an uncharted territory, we should consider mapping them more carefully when studying florilegia. Still another point that emerged in the workshop was that the presence of glosses in florilegia manuscripts themselves also bears witness to the ongoing activity of reading and elaboration on the florilegia even once they had reached a relatively stable form.

d) Many manuscripts containing florilegia include more than one florilegium, and some exclusively contain florilegia. Thus, the term 'metaflorilegium' was suggested during the workshop; a useful category indeed, though it certainly requires further elaboration. If one applies it to any manuscript containing a plurality of florilegia, it risks becoming an empty category; it

may rather be useful to apply it to manuscripts in which the different florilegia are bound together by a recognizable agenda or thematic thread.

These general remarks highlight how Syriac florilegia pose problems common to all other traditions of compilation in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean and beyond. One, then, cannot pursue the study of Syriac florilegia without taking into account the developments of more advanced fields, in particular in the most recent scholarship on Greek Byzantine or Latin Medieval studies on multiple-text manuscripts, also because of the sheer fact that some Syriac florilegia are themselves translations of Greek florilegia.

Another more specific, but highly relevant point that emerged in the discussion is that Syriac florilegia had a multilingual life, having an impact beyond Syriac itself, and influencing the arguments and thought of seminal Christian Arabic authors like Abū Rā'īṭah and, later on, Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa'.

Moreover, in the Syriac florilegia we explored, we often happened to observe that the Bible and the Fathers do not seem to be distinguished; the same terminology is used for both, 'testimonia' or 'demonstrations' (ܩܘܪܕܢܐ or ܩܘܪܕܢܐܝܬܐ). The underlying idea is that of a transhistorical truth, which cannot but remain stable from the Bible to whatever age in the history of theology.

Thanks to the high quality of the contributions and the liveliness of the debate, this workshop represented the ideal starting point for the broad reflection on florilegia that FLOS intends to tackle. The questions it raised will be further developed in the proceedings, which should be published no later than the end of 2021, and in the next conferences organized by the project.

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# Reviews

Philippe Bobichon, *Bibliothèque nationale de France. Hébreu 704 à 733. Manuscrits de théologie*, Manuscrits en caractères hébreux conservés dans les bibliothèques de France, Catalogues (CMCH), 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). ISBN: 978-2-503-54547-9, 366 pp.

Arlette Lipszyc-Attali, *Bibliothèque nationale de France. Hébreu 175 à 200. Commentaires bibliques*, Manuscrits en caractères hébreux conservés dans les bibliothèques de France, Catalogues (CMCH), 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). ISBN: 978-2-503-55316-0, 307 pp.

The international scientific community has long pointed out the necessity of a new manuscript cataloguing effort, which would take into consideration the new trends in codicology and palaeography and try to unify cataloguing systems. The *Comité de Paléographie Hébraïque* assumed this task in France. The project of systematic cataloguing of all manuscripts in Hebrew characters kept in French libraries was developed within the IRHT (CNRS), where codicology has been one of the fields especially promoted within its research, with strong support from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), where most of the manuscripts are preserved. At the onset, the scientific responsibility was in the hands of Colette Sirat of CNRS; it was later transferred to Philippe Bobichon of CNRS and Laurent Hérichier, curator of Hebrew manuscripts at the BnF. The directors succeeded in securing collaboration of scholars from across Europe, well trained in Hebrew codicology and palaeography. The overall quality of the series, by the prestigious Brepols publishing house, can be attributed to the thoughtful and careful work of the editors. Aside traditional pure cataloguing data, the catalogues offer a lot of information about the social context of the authors and texts described.

I discuss here the latest two catalogues in the CMCH series; five more volumes (authored by M. Dukan, P. Bobichon, C. Ciucu, S. Di Donato, and J. Del Barco) have appeared since 2008, and others can be expected in the coming years.

Series volume 5 (*Hébreu 704 à 733. Manuscrits de théologie*) is the work of Philippe Bobichon, who had already produced a volume dedicated to theological manuscripts (*Hébreu 669 à 703*; CMCH, 1) in 2008. The latest instalment contains descriptions of diverse codices, which are in no way homogeneous. The author follows the same structure that he used in the previous volume. The entry for each manuscript includes different sections in

an attempt to reconstruct the history of the codex. Each of the codicological units is described separately; thus, the total number of the items in the volume is 54. The detailed description of each item includes its material makeup and historical aspects.

Out of the 54 items, the majority are from Sepharad (17, corresponding to six manuscript volumes), followed by those from Italy (12, also in six manuscript volumes), Provence and south of France (12, two manuscript volumes), Ashkenaz (8, three manuscript volumes), Byzantium (5 manuscript volumes), and the East (5, two manuscript volumes).

Of the 54 items that are catalogued in this volume, 17 were part of the collection belonging to Achille de Harlay de Sancy (b. 1581, d. 1646) and were donated by him to the Paris Oratory in 1620. He had acquired most of them in Constantinople when he was France's ambassador there between 1611 and 1619. Another seven manuscripts were acquired in Italy by Jaques Gaffarel, before becoming part of the Richelieu Library of the BnF. Three manuscripts come from Colbert's library and one from the Mazarin's.

Most of the units are dateable to the period from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century. In some cases, manuscripts originating from different periods have been bound together in a single volume, as is the case with MSS Hébreu 706, 710, 713, and 714.

It has been possible to precisely date some manuscripts, either because a copy date is noted directly in them or through the identification of their scribes. The same is true for localizing the manuscripts. On the total, three are dated and localized, while five others are dated but not localized.

The majority of items in the collection are anonymous or mention only an incomplete name of the scribe, sometimes written as an acrostic or in the colophon. Seven manuscripts give the complete name of the scribe or scribes; three of them are autograph copies.

Of special interest are the personal notes that the manuscripts include, which provide information about owners, heirs, notes of sale, witnesses, different lists of names, etc. E.g. through one of the notes in MS Hébreu 704 we can assume that the manuscript was held by a follower by Shabbetai Zvi. MS Hébreu 707 contains an interesting list of names of Byzantine Jews, and another list of Karaite Jewish doctors. MS Hébreu 709, a *mahzor* from the Ashkenaz, contains a gloss in French written in Hebrew characters. Some notes with blessings in memory of all Jews who lived under the Ottoman empire during the sixteenth century are copied in MS Hébreu 719. Of special linguistic interest are notes written in other languages, such as Occitan (Provençal), Italian dialects, etc. (e.g. MSS Hébreu 724, 726). There are also anonymous notes which provide interesting information about the history of

the manuscript; some of these notes are in the Latin, Arabic, or Greek alphabet, depending on the place or context in which they were written. These notes often reflect the social or historical context in which the codex was copied, and some of them were made during the modern period. The interpretation of the notes is one of the assets of this catalogue collection. It represents a very useful field which is not present in many catalogues.

The catalogue, which also has a title page in Hebrew, opens with a brief general description of the volume (pp. 9–15). Next, the author devotes a few pages to tracing the routes taken by the manuscripts to their current location (pp. 16–23) in order to later fill out the histories of the manuscripts and the texts that are copied in them (pp. 24–37). The author then analyzes the different combinations in the manuscripts of texts, hands, and codicological units.

The description of the manuscripts makes up the main body of the volume (pp. 41–331). The cataloguing of each manuscript makes use of all the usual sections in the collection (general information, material description, textual contents, history of the manuscript, and notes), which are very detailed and accompanied by one or two photographs of the manuscript. The catalogue is completed by an index of manuscripts (pp. 332–335) and a general index (pp. 335–363).

Among the texts contained in the manuscripts described are some works that are either unpublished or not well known, such as those by Elnathan Qalqish, Samuel Sarsa, and Jacob ben Salomon Sarfati. The bibliography offered at the end of each item is extensive, although has some lacunae, mainly of articles referring to the items described. Nevertheless, the catalogue follows the main directions of the collection reaching the level required.

Series volume 7 (*Hébreu 175 à 200. Commentaires bibliques*) is the work of Arlette Lipszyc-Attali; it is the second instalment dedicated to biblical commentaries at the BnF, the first having been *Hébreu 214 à 259* (CMCH, 3) by Silvia Di Donato in 2011.

The introduction to the catalogue (pp. 7–18) provides an overview of the codices described in the volume, with an emphasis on certain notable manuscripts or ones that are of special interest to the author. It should be noted that this introduction is organized differently than that of the catalogue by Bobichon. It lacks some of the sections that are present in other volumes, and an in-depth study of the group of manuscripts is missing.

Most of the biblical commentaries contained in the manuscripts described are by two of the most important commentators: Josef Qimhi (eight manuscripts) and Abraham ibn Ezra (ten manuscripts), although other commentators are also represented, such as Rashi, Levi ben Gershon, Ibn Caspi, and Menahem ben Simon of Posquières.

All but one of the 26 manuscripts covered by the catalogue are from the medieval period. Of them, nine are dated, with the time range being between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. The oldest is a copy of Ibn Ezra's commentary to the Pentateuch, produced in Viterbo (Italy) in 1284 (Hébreu 176). The only pre-modern manuscript in the collection is MS Hébreu 191, copied in Constantinople in the seventeenth century.

The description of the manuscripts (pp. 21–286) follows the same method as in the rest of the collection and is divided into sections on material description, textual contents, history of the manuscript, and notes. As in all other cases, the entry for each manuscript includes one or two photographs. This volume also includes a title page in Hebrew and has a general index (pp. 287–301) and a list of Hebrew abbreviations (pp. 302–305) at the end.

Generally speaking, the catalogue seems somewhat below the standard established by other items in the series. Not only the introduction is not very extensive, but also the description of each manuscript sometimes lacks specifics. The bibliography offered is mainly limited to French authors, overlooking other important contributions.

To summarize, the latest two volumes are two further significant steps towards the goal of the scholars and the publisher, which is the cataloguing of all the Hebrew manuscripts at the BnF. This work is complicated by the fact, seen as in this case, that there is no permanent team of cataloguers. Nonetheless, what has been achieved thus far fully justifies their effort and dedication. The method used in this collection has established an important benchmark for the cataloguing of Hebrew manuscripts.

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Lambertus Willem Cornelis van Lit, *Among Digitized Manuscripts. Philology, Codicology, Paleography in a Digital World*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1: The Near and Middle East, 137 (Leiden: Brill, 2020). DOI: 10.1163/9789004400351. ISBN: 978-90-04-41521-8; E-book ISBN: 978-90-04-40035-1 pp. 333.

The volume at hand, including Bibliography and Indexes of Persons and Subjects, by just looking at the last part provides an idea of the wide range of its interests and contents. The reader will find theoretical sections on digitized manuscripts, advice on downloading, narratives about staring at a computer screen and spending time trying to write code, together with many case studies, some relevant to Islamic manuscripts like the one on the Catalogue of the Rudolf Geyer Collection at Stift Florian, Austria (Ch. 6, pp. 175–226) or the one on the symbols in *al-Mashāri‘ wa-l-Muṭārahāt* by Suhrawardī (pp. 123–131), some relevant only to the argument being made, for example Case Studies 1 and 2 in Ch. 1 (pp. 31–40).

The author starts by declaring that ‘This book is for humanities students or scholars who are classically trained in handling manuscript materials and wish to take advantage of the incredible computing power at their fingertips but are at a loss where to begin’. (p. 1). On the ‘path of least resistance’, which the book advertises (see for example p. 241), towards achieving any research goal with any method, print, digital, or metaphysical, the outcomes for such a reader may be different from the one envisaged by the author, and I will try to detail why I think so. I may not be the intended reader of the author in all sections, but I am for most of what has to do with the use of images and Python, for which I am a beginner only.

I will avoid a full summary of the contents to the reader of this review: this is well organized in the book and other reviews, published on the author’s own blog,<sup>1</sup> detail that once more, and I will try here to avoid further redundancy. Taken as a whole or in parts, this semi-autobiographical work reaches its best in the Postscript (pp. 292–310): after the convoluted descriptions,<sup>2</sup>

1 <<https://digitalorientalist.com/2020/01/04/review-among-digitized-manuscripts-by-l-w-c-van-lit-leiden-brill-2020/>>, last accessed 1 May 2020.

2 My respects and applause to anyone who can really follow and profit from Ch. 7 description of the Python script used to analyze the angle of the flaps of some thousand Islamic manuscripts, pp. 237–270.

listings,<sup>3</sup> sermons,<sup>4</sup> and invectives,<sup>5</sup> the reader may find mildly amusing to read in this last part about the author's bedtime habits with his laptop.<sup>6</sup>

Although this last section of the book would have also been in a better context as a conference's social dinner conversation topic, this may make a good read if we consider a target audience different from the one envisaged by the author.

I would like to start with two general remarks on links and code, before entering a more detailed list of observations on the different chapters. The scarcity of links, printed out or active, in the text or in the bibliography, to the actual resources used by the author or to reference specifications or to any other resource discussed, with the only exception of the author's own projects, leaves the readers into a sort of obscurity, in which they should wonder about the author's capabilities and knowledge, while they are cut out of the sources of such knowledge itself.

The lengthy descriptions of specific pieces of carefully licenced code by the author and the descriptions of implementation details (pp. 175–220)<sup>7</sup> do not explain technical skills, but rather document some of the work done by the author and leave the reader with one more example, too long to follow in part or in pieces, too detailed in its description to help anyone do its own based on it. I fully agree that, as we quote text passages, also code should surface into publications fully, and should be discussed in the same way in which we discuss other sources, especially since it is also a method that delivers a result on which considerations are made. The extent to which this is taken in this book, however, is somehow extreme, with entire files copied in and discussed at length without hooks to the lines of code or anything else.

Already in the introduction the author starts setting wide challenges, providing generic considerations and aiming high with 'life-changing choices' (p. 1) which we should make, pressed by need more than by curiosity, interest, effectiveness, or any other positive reason. The conceptual framework designed and described by the author in Ch. 1 follows in this line and tries to

3 For example the judgmental software cherry picking in Ch. 4 at pp. 107–111.

4 The fine rhetoric exercised in Ch. 1, pp. 13–31, could be intriguing to analyse for scholars of style.

5 I feel very sorry for the strong and not very well grounded words reserved to fellow scholars, for example on pp. 63 and 71. Equally astonishing is the battle aimed against 'large projects' with its apex on pp. 117–121.

6 But this is not the only detail about the author's own experience you will unwillingly learn about: you get to know of his frustration using an iPhone, his email exchanges, his train travels and daily routine, and really a lot about his impressive career.

7 And what is licenced here, the HTML itself? The content of the HTML? The design of it? I am really not sure.

reorganize the universe of knowledge in a way that is, in my opinion, even more obscure than the code descriptions discussed above.

Some people may benefit from the framework for the evaluation of repositories for digital images proposed in Ch. 3, I imagine, although my creativity in thinking of an ethnography of possible readers fails me with examples. The principles proposed in Ch. 2 ('1. size of the collection; 2. online availability; 3. ability to download; 4. the portal; 5. the viewer; 6. indication of page numbers; 7. image resolution; 8. color balance; 9. lighting; and 10. how the image is cut.' pp. 64–68, list from p. 70) are taken from an evaluation grid calibrated on the surface of these resources, and are admittedly highly subjective and based only on one user (the author) experience, not based on any statistical or empirical evidence. The numbers used to quantify this assessment are assigned on the basis of subjective and generic evaluations, and the grayscale visualization of the results makes the reading of the pie charts very hard. At the end of this judgemental prolusion on repositories, we know all about the author's opinion on some online repositories but we have no 'better understanding of digitized manuscripts' (p. 101). The one take away here is that we should treat the digital object as a thing on its own and state clearly that a digital copy had been used and where it was found or how it was obtained as well as how it was used.

Ch. 4 discusses a list of resources for palaeography with a vaguely chronological approach going through a list of software options available, and contains the one most interesting case study in the book, already named above (pp. 121–131). In this case study the author supports his research question using vector images drawn on a tablet. The chapter is, however, invaded by a rather questionable requisitory against team projects funded by grants. In the digital world of the author these huge projects have gone nowhere good, and eventually it sounds like the efforts put by teams of scholars and researchers to develop an idea into a project, the efforts of scholarly reviewers to assess these projects, and the work and money put by funders to foster the efforts of the thoroughly chosen ones is a complete failure in comparison to the entrepreneurship of the lone digital scholar working his way out of the mess all by himself and for his own good.

At p. 56, reporting a ten-year old complaint from Ainsworth that there is no standardized tool to take over the role of the microfilm reader, I wandered about the introduction to IIIF given by the author (pp. 160–167). Are IIIF API specifications not actually performing much the same function but many times better, making any compatible viewer used through any browser on any computer into such a reader? And is such reader not actually able to read whatever the underlying formats and technologies used to serve them, pro-

vided they implement the API? But the confused claims go on the following page (p. 57) where the author says that ‘To a large degree, we have indeed, across the different fields working with manuscripts, forgotten about the material manuscript’, something which, working in a digital project dealing with manuscripts I feel like I can entirely disagree with.

Ch. 5 sets out to go through all that is needed for a full digital edition and deals with how to create a PDF with some software, fonts and keyboard layouts. Coherently with the style of the book we get no indication of how to do these things, even with the named softwares, or where to begin for example with a link or reference to the correct documentation, but we do get to know what keyboard combinations are set in the current computer of the author (p. 145). A two and a half-pages long TEI-XML file, made up for the sake of this example, is commented with ‘The shape and color of this example are typical of XML: every tag has its own level, and this makes triangle shapes when there are tags within it (‘children’). Tags, attributes, attribute values, and tag values all have different colours’ (p. 153). That the typical features of XML are its colour and triangular ‘shapes’ is quite astonishing for a book which claims to introduce to digital methods. Even if these features had any relevance for any markup language, it would be arguably of any relevance for any reader to know. We are then pulled into a discussion of how much space is ‘allocated to things not directly related to the marking up of the text’ and into the immortal discussion on hierarchies and support for Arabic in editors, to which however the pages of this book do not contribute anything new beside restatements of the obvious and known.

Everything becomes clear when the author reminds us that we are all wasting our time, because computers will be able to do the same things we are doing by hand (p. 155) in a matter of years. The misconceptions about TEI spread in this part of the chapter, after a sort of print out of slides on software solutions for some working cases, are nicely paired by the wrong statements made later in the chapter about IIIF. On page 160 we are introduced to the IIIF presentation API and we are told, just to pick an example, that ‘the API does not use that ID to go directly to the image file, but it first looks at an abstraction of the image, called a Manifest, which is a JSON file’. Because we are scholars in the humanities and we like reading and enquiring, and we strive for quality and precision in a field of uncertainties and subjectivity, it is enough to have a look at the API specification,<sup>8</sup> to discover what a Manifest actually is in the Shared Canvas data model and how this does not have anything to do with an ‘abstraction of the image’, in any sort of simplification at the use of beginners or intermediate readers. Web technologies are extremely

8 <<https://iiif.io/api/presentation/2.1/>>, last accessed 1 May 2020.

precise, defined and specified, and a statement like this and the following discussion confuse greatly the beginner, instead of either showing the benefits of the specification or how to implement it. One may also be spoiled and expect, following the specification, that a Manifest following the standard can be loaded in a IIIF viewer, which is not the case with the example printed out (p. 163), neither in the different version which one can find following the link within the printed example. The author tries to make things easier with a comparison of metadata in IIIF and TEI which turns out to be quite confusing, besides not being really justified, since TEI and IIIF are not alternatives but serve very distinct purposes and models (p. 165).

In case this was not enough we are served with wise advice on how to abuse data generously made openly accessible following collaborative, community-based standards. Images shared with their metadata allow for their reuse with the relative information and according to their licencing, they are not intended as a gateway to downloading of resources unless stated in the relevant sections of the metadata. Even in this practical advice on how to get as much as possible, the beginner is led to use a convoluted workflow which parses the Manifest as a string, using the Manifest as a static text for regular expressions exercises. On the other side of the spectrum, while we should download as much as possible, according to the author 'it is only normal to make sure you are not oversharing so that nobody will beat you to the publication of exceptional insights that the data provides' (p. 168). If we have learned about misusing standards, now we are encouraged to follow bad scientific practice. At least we get advice on some state-of-the-art tools to archive as little as possible of what we have stored locally disregarding licencing, clumsily elaborated, eventually abusing some international standards, and finally decided to selectively share.

In the following chapter (Ch. 6), an interesting case study is used to show some HTML, JSON, CSS and Javascript which the author has produced to publish the Catalogue of the Rudolf Geyer Collection.<sup>9</sup> This falls in a category of examples of achieving a lot with few technicalities, but continues to advertise some ways of working which may be understandable for amateurish work, but cannot be sold to scholars. After the story of the interesting data collection using a hand-held device, the author celebrates how the catalogue moved from a dusty backroom to World Wide Web thanks to his efforts. Some of the habits we learned about in the previous chapters are reiterated and with naive lightness the author tells us that he used just any field in Zotero which was not too 'far down' in the form (pp. 181–182). The boundary between abusing technology and creativity with the available is here a bit stretched

9 <<https://lwcvl.github.io/RudolfGeyerCatalog/>>.

(p. 196). Often we end up with workarounds and solutions of convenience to get our tasks done in the time we have, but for the case study presented it seems a bit unnecessary, as it is not necessary to use such cases as examples. The many ‘Hello World’ examples introducing core web technologies would have served the beginner much better. One may even ask if simply making the Zotero library public, putting some care in recording the data correctly, would have not actually served all the needs of the catalogue with some added functionality compared to the static website in the example. Data would have been easily updatable and would not have needed to be exported, for example. The chapter is then concluded with a comparison of tools to visualize data where the author saves and condemns again on the basis of taste, to the detriment of available resources which are accused of not serving his needs, although they do already a lot of what they were planned to deliver and which is not on the radar of the interest of the author (p. 222–225).

Ch. 7, similarly to the previous one, goes into an exercise of coding, where we learn of the painful attempts of the author and are finally persuaded in pages and pages of narrative code description that all this is boring, time consuming (p. 247) and finally pointless, because the same measurement could have really been achieved much quicker by just doing it by hand. This is the chapter I most looked forward to, because I know nothing of image processing and I thought this could motivate me to keep learning (p. 289), but it did quite the opposite.

Perhaps we should challenge at its foundations the myth of the humanist bent on books and of the fear to start learning to programme and (re)start to think of humanists as curious and inquisitive scholars seeking the unknown in the folds of hundreds of different facets of human knowledge. We ought to wish that programming manuals and documentation had many more examples like those offered by van Lit, but in a style typical to programming tutorial which goes step by step in making sure that things can be reproduced for the aims of learning, and with care for the correctness and relevance of the selected cases. Examples in this direction exist already, like the *Programming Historian*, which has the same intended audience.<sup>10</sup> The dryness of specifications and boredom of e-commerce examples and flashy websites as well as the amount of creativity needed to apply a method to a different context should be substituted by resources that instead have the precision and directness of web development resources but the interestingness of a research topic of the humanities.

I certainly share the enthusiasm of the author for digital methodologies, and also share with him in noticing that resources are needed for colleagues

10 <<https://programminghistorian.org/>>, last accessed 1 May 2020.

which are distinct scholars in the humanities and deal with manuscripts to be spared some of the most boring parts of the task of learning to code and programme for a humanist. Ease of access to this wonderful world perhaps does not come only in the form of open access but as accessible and interesting examples parsed and discussed taking the best of the web developers manuals and of the humanities research interests and scientific prose style. Advertising superficial understandings, wrong usage to get first to the result, fostering egoistic behaviours instead of cooperation with institutions and communities at work to support standards, spreads misconceptions and does not help anyone understand, begin or keep going in learning web technologies and digital methods.

The book often delivers the image of a lonely digital scholar who bravely fights a solitary battle. His loneliness is however a bit surprising, in a world of continuous conferences, workshops, efforts, initiatives in digital humanities, a thriving field where communities seem sometimes to outnumber scientific journals. These communities certainly are also the fruit of too many large projects funded by many generous institutions, but they do not lack discussions, fora, and ways of sharing with many different and good tools and contexts.<sup>11</sup>

As a last note for this review, the English of the book is readable, although some choices of style, such as the frequent use of ‘often times’ may surprise. Some words are missing, some periods are incomplete or simply incorrect but we know these from manuscripts and are all getting used to this in print as well as in digital media unfortunately.<sup>12</sup>

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- 11 In the Introduction we are pointed to <<https://github.com/Among>>. Follow this rare link, and you will land in a repository composed of unfinished projects, unpopulated communities, and empty lists of questions and answers, resources, etc. which we ought to feel like contributing to just because they are there.
- 12 Examples: p. 18: ... three-hundred years later, at which a reader ... ; p. 54 ... what to aspect ... ; p. 155 This restriction flows from TEI ... ; p. 222 ... goes bankrupt, will I able ... ; p. 226 is sufficiently short enough ; p. 290 An excellent sign of this is will be the inclusion ... p. 305 ... DSLR camera, intend on digitizing ... Other signs of informality which I would count in this list would be imprecision like ‘As a certain Mr. Degoix remarks ...’ p. 103 or what I would like to consider a mistake, that is the entry ‘pillow (roughly throwing onto)’ in the index of subjects.

