

ABBA MARI BEN MOSES ASTRUC OF LUNEL, *Minhat kena'ot* [Jealous Offering]
In Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Northern Italy, Sermide [Mantua], signed and dated 6 Tammuz 5218 [June 27, 1458]

ii + 162 + i folios on paper, single watermark (Briquet 2667, "basilisk," Ferrara, 1447, Ferrara, 1450, Mantua, 1450), medieval foliation in Hebrew in upper left corners, early modern foliation in black ink in Arabic numerals in lower left corner of text with lacuna (missing four leaves between ff. 23 and 24, new foliation at the top, from towards the end of ch. 22 until mid-ch. 25), modern foliation in pencil (collation i⁸ ii⁴⁺¹ iii¹⁰ iv¹⁰⁺¹ v¹⁴⁺¹ vi¹⁰⁺² vii⁴ viii¹⁰ ix⁴ x¹⁰ xi⁴ xii¹⁰ xiii⁴ xiv¹⁰ xv⁴ xvi¹⁰ xvii⁴ xviii¹⁰ xix⁴ xx¹⁰⁺³ [modern binder reversed and inverted the bifolia as follows: ff. 150, 160, 159, 158, 157, 156, 155, 154, 153, 152, 151, 161, 162]), ruled in blind (justification 130 x 90 mm.), written in an Italian semi-cursive script in brown ink in a single column of 25 lines throughout, minor marginalia in hand of primary scribe, marginal band notabenes appear in first 10 folios, scattered marginalia in Hebrew in modern pencil throughout text, modern annotations in pencil in Hebrew on recto side of second front flyleaf, very minor foxing throughout, minor soiling to first and last folios, worming on ff. 1-15, 51-61, 150-162, modern paper reinforced sewing as part of rebinding, otherwise text very clean. Bound in modern black buckram over cardboard, gilded ownership on spine, rubbed and peeling stamp catalogue on spine, pastedowns and flyleaves of modern heavy bonded paper, heavy browning to front and first rear flyleaf. Dimensions, page size 223 x 154 mm.; binding 233 x 164 mm.

One of only five manuscripts of a collection of letters and pamphlets in the important medieval controversy over the philosophy of Maimonides, the only manuscript of this small group that is dated and bears a colophon, the latter by a scribe who may also have been a wealthy Jewish patron in Mantua. The present manuscript differs significantly from the Pressburg edition and also from two of the other four manuscripts, which present variants.

PROVENANCE

1. The colophon indicates that the manuscript was copied in Sirimone (Sermide) in the province of Mantua in 1458 by the scribe Mordecai ben Avigdor, who signed the manuscript as follows on f. 162: "The book *Minhat kena'ot* is complete. I, Mordecai ben Avigdor, wrote [copied] it and completed it on 6 Tammuz 5218 [June 27, 1458] in Sirimone [Sermide]." Watermarks of Ferrara and Mantua confirm this localization and date.
2. Solomon Joachim Halberstam (1832-1900), a wealthy Polish Jewish scholar and bibliophile who had acquired hundreds of valuable manuscripts from the libraries of Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) and Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), came into possession of this manuscript and included it when cataloging his own personal collection. His shelf mark, MS 194, is stamped on the spine and upper front pastedown, on ff. 1r and 162v, and written in pencil in Hebrew and English on the recto side of the second front flyleaf.
3. The Judith Lady Montefiore College in Ramsgate, England, purchased 412 manuscripts from Halberstam's collection, including ours (shelf mark: MS 271). The transaction was carried out by Rabbi Moses Gaster (1856-1939), principal of the College between 1891 and 1896. The manuscript contains the library stamp of the institution, known in Hebrew as Yeshivat Ohel Mosheh vi-Yehudit, on the front pastedown.

4. Between 1898 and 2001, most of the Montefiore manuscripts, including ours, were placed on permanent loan at Jews' College in London. In 2001, they were returned to the Montefiore Endowment Committee.

TEXT

This codex is the only dated manuscript copy of *Minbat kena'ot*, or the "Jealous Offering," a collection of letters and pamphlets concerning the controversy over the philosophical writings of Maimonides and the ban on the study of philosophy at an early age. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Maimonides (1134-1204), was by far the most influential figure in medieval Jewish philosophy, who also exercised considerable influence in the non-Jewish world. Even in his own day, his works were considered especially daring because he sought to interpret the Bible and the principles of Judaism in a rational manner, tying them to non-mystical theories. He based his ideas especially on Aristotle, Plato, and the neo-Platonists, as transmitted in the writings of Moslem thinkers, in particular Averroes and Avicenna. Jewish scholars in the centuries that followed fell into two camps, the Maimonideans and the anti-Maimonideans.

The *Minbat kena'ot* was compiled by a vehement opponent of the teachings of Maimonides, the Provencal Rabbi Abba Mari ben Moses Astruc, who was born in Lunel toward the end of the thirteenth century and subsequently lived in Montpellier (1303) and Perpignan (after 1306). Abba Mari held that through its reliance on Aristotelian rationalism, the work of Maimonides threatened to undermine the authority of the Old Testament. Enlisting the aid of the famous Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Adret of Barcelona, Abba Mari therefore conducted a forceful propaganda campaign against Maimonides and was able to enact a fifty-year ban on all those who studied science and metaphysics before their twenty-fifth birthday. After settling in Perpignan in 1306, Abba Mari assembled and had transcribed the letters connected with the controversy, the basis for the manuscript tradition.

The present manuscript is one of only five surviving copies of the *Minbat kena'ot*, the only one that includes a colophon, and is more comprehensive than the *editio princeps* (Pressburg, 1838). The other four manuscripts are: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS héb. 97 (fifteenth century, written in Byzantium in the area of the Balkans, Greece, or western Turkey); Moscow, Russian State Library, MS Guenzburg 63 (fifteenth-sixteenth century, in Sephardic script); Parma, Biblioteca Palatina Cod. Parm. 2782 (fifteenth-century Spain, beginning missing, different version from the first edition); and Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Neofiti 12 (c. 1400, Provence, a different redaction used for variants in the Jerusalem 1990 edition of Adret's responsa edited by Dimitrovsky).

It is tempting to identify the scribe with a patron of the same, rather obscure name, Mordecai ben Avigdor, living in Mantua, near Sermide. In 1435, a Mordecai ben Avigdor had copied for him a lavishly illuminated manuscript of Jacob ben Asher's code, *Tur* (Vatican, Cod. Rossiana 555). The Vatican manuscript can only have been ordered by a wealthy patron. If the patron in 1435 is indeed the same person as our scribe in 1458, then the puzzle remains why the wealthy owner of the *Tur* manuscript would at an advanced age have copied out himself 160 folios, when he certainly could well have hired a scribe to do the work for him. No other person of the same name is known.

LITERATURE

Abba Mari ben Moses Astruc of Lunel. *Sefer minbat kena'ot*, ed. Mordecai Bislichis, Pressburg, 1838 [edition].

Adret, Solomon ben Abraham. *Teshuvot ha-rashba*, ed. Haim Z. Dimitrovsky, 2 vols., esp. part 1, vol. 2 [critical edition of the *Minbat kena'ot*], Jerusalem, 1990.

Ben-Shalom, Ram. "Communication and Propaganda between Provence and Spain: The Controversy over Extreme Allegorization (1303-1306)," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: The Pre-modern World*, ed. Sophia Menache, Leiden and New York, 1996, pp. 171-224.

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Feliu, Eduard. "La controvèrsia sobre l'estudi de la filosofia en les comunitats jueves ccitanocatalanes a la primeria del segle XIV; alguns documents essencials del libre 'Minhat Quenaot' d'Abamari ben Mossi de Lunel," *Tamid* 1 (1997), pp. 65-131 [with an English summary].

Halberstam, Solomon Joachim. *Kobelet shelomoh*, p. 27 (MS 194), Vienna, 1890.

Hirschfeld, Hartwig. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Montefiore Library*, London and New York, 1904, p. 87 (MS 271).

Silver, Daniel Jeremy. *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240*, Leiden, 1965.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Maimonides links (University of Columbia)

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm/maimon.html>

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