

ABBA MARI BEN MOSES ASTRUC OF LUNEL, *Minhat Kenaot* [*Jealous Offering*]

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper

[Northern Italy, Sermide [Mantua], signed and dated 6 Tammuz 5218 [1458]]

ii + 162 + i folios (collation: i8, ii4+1, iii10, iv10+1, v14+1, vi10+2, vii4, viii10, ix4, x10, xi4, xii10, xiii4, xiv10, xv4, xvi10, xvii4, xviii10, ixx4, xx10+3), collation error in quire 10 due to modern binding (non singletons in quire reversed and inverted: collation reads ff. 150, 160, 159, 158, 157, 156, 155, 154, 153, 152, 151, 161, 162), on paper, size 223 x 154 mm., single watermark (Briquet 2667, Basilic, Ferrare, 1447; Ferrare, 1450; Mantua, 1450), written in Italian semi-cursive script in brown ink, 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 4 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, single column text, 25 lines per page, text justified by hard point, writing space 130 x 90 mm., 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, and 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 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 the 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 Kenaot*" is completed. I Mordecai ben Avigdor wrote [=copied] it and completed it on the 6th of the month of Tammuz 5218 [=1458] in Sirimone [=Sermide]." Watermarks of Ferrara and Mantua confirm this localization and date.
2. Solomon Hayyim Halberstam (1832-1900), his MS 194, stamped on spine and upper front pastedown, on ff. 1r and 162v, and written in pencil in Hebrew and English in pencil on recto side of second front flyleaf. Polish scholar and bibliophile, Solomon Halberstam was a wealthy and avid collector and scholar of Hebrew manuscripts, including codices from Luzzato's estate and Zunz's private library.
3. Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), his MS 271, stamped on spine, inside front pastedown. Most famous English Jew of his time, Montefiore became a legend in his lifetime, fighting worldwide for the lives and rights of Jews. He founded after the death of his wife Judith Lady Montefiore a college in Ramsgate, which with the appointment of

Haham Moses Gaster in 1887, acquired many manuscripts including the Halberstam Collection.

4. London, Jews' College, on deposit since 1899, as part of the Montefiore Endowment.

## TEXT

This codex is the only dated manuscript copy of *Minbat Kenaot*, 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 Kenaot* was compiled by a vehement opponent to the teachings of Maimonides, the French rabbi, Abba Mari ben Moses Astruc, who was born at Lunel toward the end of the thirteenth century and who 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 ibn 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 Kenaot*, the only one that includes a colophon, and it is more comprehensive than the printed edition of Pressburg. The other four manuscripts are: Paris, BnF, 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 ibn 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

Ben-Shalom, Ram. "Communication and propaganda between Provence and Spain: the controversy over extreme allegorization (1303-1306)," *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora* (1996), pp. 171-224.

Ben-Shalom, Ram. "The Ban Placed by the Community of Barcelona on the Study of Philosophy and Allegorical Preaching--a new study," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 159, 3-4 (2000), pp. 387-404.

Bislichis, M. ed. *Minbat Kenaot*, Pressburg, 1838 [edition].

Dimitrovski, C. ed. *Teshubot ha-Rashba* (The Responsa of Somon ibn Adret), 2 vols., Jerusalem, 1900, esp. part 1, vol. 2 [critical edition of the *Minbat Kenaot*].

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].

Hirschfeld, H. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Montefiore Library*, London, MacMillan, 1904 (reprint from JQR, 1902 and 1903); see the separate catalogue of the Halberstamm collection of 412 manuscripts published as *Qebillath Shelomoh*, Vienna, 1890, no. 271 (reprint Farnborough, Gregg, 1969).

Silver, D. J. *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy*, Leiden 1965.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Maimonides links (University of Columbia)

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

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