

Parma de Rossi 11=MS 2338 and 2339. Catalogue. Richler-Bet-Arie Catalogue, no. 97 (pp.23-24).

Torah with Targum, Haftarah, Job, Proverbs, Massorah and Rashi's commentary, in two volumes (286 and 189 folios).

Beit –Arie states of this MS (Cat., p. 23): ....<France?>, late 14<sup>th</sup> cent. The internal evidence, however, indicates that the MS is without doubt of French origin, i.e., Sarefatic, and the salient characteristics of the slightly angled square book script are like those of many other Sarfatic MSS of the middle or late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover there are a few important notations in this codex which are in a characteristic 13<sup>th</sup>-century documentary script employed in France, Normandy and England. The documentary script-style used in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Ashkenaz, i.e., the Germanic-speaking lands, is of a different character.

That this codex was produced in France is clear from a statement made in Vol I, fol. 271 recto. There it states, in documentary script, the following: “True and evident is it that R. Meir son of R. Senior told me that this Pentateuch was written in the house of his mother-in-law Blanche of KRK R’WNS; it was vocalized and provided with Masorah in the house of the aforementioned distinguished lady by Isaac of SRSWYYR’), who also proofread it carefully after having finished pointing it. That which I heard I have written down and signed — thus says the young man” .... [signature erased]. At the top of fol. 189v of vol. II there are similar words to the same effect: “Indeed, R. Meir b. R. Senior once told me that he had seen in the house of his mother-in-law Blanche of KRK R’WNS <...> R. Isaac of SRSWYYRS pointed this Pentateuch and provided it with Masorah<.....> proofread it <.....> R. Meir<.... >.”

It may be noted in passing that the new Parma catalogue, although correctly spelling the toponym KRK R’WNS, does not identify it; while it neither spells correctly nor identifies the second toponym SRSWYYR’/ SRSWYYRS. As for earlier scholars, neither Zunz, Neubauer, or Gross appears to have taken note of these enigmatic place-names. In the recently published catalogue, Beit-Arie reads the latter place-name as PRSWYYR’, as though with an initial Hebrew *pe*; the consonant in question, however, does not have the characteristics of the writer’s *pe* but rather of his *samekh*. Moreover, Beit-Arie does not identify the place-name, and that for the quite obvious reason that no toponym with initial P or F fits the characteristics of the Hebrew term.

It may be noticed that the name of the *nikbedet*, or distinguished lady, was Blanche (BLNK’), a French personal name possessed, inter alia, by the Jewess Blanche who owned a part of a house in Nimes sold at auction by the royal officials in the wake of the expulsion of 1306 (sources in Gross, Gallia, p. 397). The name of the son-in-law of Blanche, Meir b. Senior, is also known to have been held by one or more French scholars, and the personal name Senior was not infrequently used among French Jews in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. Senior b. Aaron, Nahman b. Senior, Hayyim b. Senior, Senior b. Senior, Senior of Alluy, a grammarian named Senior, and a martyr of the same name, among others. It is clearly evident that Meir b. Senior’s mother-in-law Blanche possessed and

lived in her home before the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306, and it is also reasonable to infer that she gained her honorific title *nikbedet* through a combination of wealth, charitable acts, and the encouragement of scribes and scholars such as the R. Isaac who, in her home, vocalized the Pentateuch under discussion. But in what town was her house located, and from where did R. Isaac hail?

The difficulty with these two place-names is that, while they have the basic characteristics of French toponyms written in Hebrew script, they nevertheless appear to be otherwise unknown, at least in their present spellings. What is abundantly clear, however, from the over two thousand examples of medieval Hebrew spellings of French toponyms given by Gross in his *Gallia Judaica*, is that the names of many of the towns and cities described there have multiple spellings, just as there were multiple spellings of many of the French toponyms themselves (as witness the huge amounts of evidence on this topic in the multi-volume *Dictionnaire topographique de la France*). The Sarfatic Hebrew scribes and writers quite naturally found it particularly difficult to handle occurrences of full and partial nasalisation of n, to transpose forms with *-x*, *-eu*, *-eux*, *-oi*, *-ois* and *-oise*, among many other problems of consonantal and vocalic transposal to Hebrew script that I need not belabor here. In addition, the Hebrew toponyms are often deeply affected by the normal habits of linguistic change, such as the assimilation and dissimilation of consonants or the interchange of surd and sonant phonemes. There were no medieval dictionaries that contained approved spellings of French toponyms, and even when Hebrew writers might have known the more used spellings, they differed amongst themselves as to whether they should transcribe what they saw *written* or what they heard people *say*.

With respect to the identifications of KRK R'WNS and SRSWYYR' / SRSWYYRS (notice that the latter toponym is spelled two ways by one and the same scribe) we may say that no matching or similar Hebrew toponyms occur in the *Gallia Judaica*. This work, however, is based mainly upon Hebrew writings produced by the two main groupings of medieval rabbinic scholars in France — the Tosafists in the north, and the Provençal scholars, often attached to various renowned yeshivot on or near the meridional coast. By contrast, there is a very meager representation in the *Gallia* of Hebraic cultural personalities or subjects relating to “le Centre” — that is, central France — including even the important city of Lyon. In general, by contrast with studies of the north and south, the Jewish history of this central region seems to have been only lightly touched upon by scholars — which raises the chances somewhat that the identities of the two enigmatic toponyms might best be solved by a careful search of the place-names of this particular region of France.

Giving due weight to the fact that the ending *-wyyr'* in the toponym SRSWYYR' has to be compared with other French toponyms having similar endings, we may first notice that the medieval Hebrew spelling for *Bordeaux* — i.e., with *-eaux* ending — sometimes appears as BWRD'WS, BWRDY'WS, or BWRDY'YWS. More to the point with respect to the forms SRSYYR' and SRSWYYRS of the Parma manuscript is the evidence of Hebrew spellings of French toponyms that do not have an *-x* element in the ultimate position. BYLQWYRY, for example, is one of the several medieval Hebrew

spellings for *Beaucaire*; while ‘LSUR’ and ‘LSYR’ are known spelling representing *Auxerre*. The ancient town of *Melgueil* (in the Hérault), also spells *Melgueir* or *Melgoire*, is represented in Hebrew as MLGWYYR. Of all known French toponyms, the one that appears to be closest to the Hebrew spelling —always allowing, of course for the phenomenon of phonetic change — is the town in the Cher department named **Sancerre**. The reason that an *-n* consonant (viz., nun) does not follow the initial *s* would appear to be that, in its position in the word Sancerre, it was not pronounced as *n* but rather was fully nasalized — a common and well known feature of both labial sonant *m* and dental sonant *n* in many positions in French words. The scribe of the Parma manuscript note under discussion could quite readily have heard the word Sancerre as Sarcerre and, accordingly, written it down that way. It may be observed that the form Sancerre developed from an earlier Saint Cere, and the latter from Sacrum Cesaris; in the Middle Ages it included such by-forms as Sancuerre, Sanceurre, and Sancearre (Cf. *Dict. Topographique du Dép du Cher*, Paris 1926, pp.326-327). The substitution of nasalized *n* with *r* is similar to its substitution with *l* in the Hebrew form of the French toponym Saint Gilles, namely, SL GYL (Gross, Gallia p. 650) with the nasalized *n* becoming *l*. (It is curious that this vigorous interchange of these particular consonants occurs as well in the development of Heb. *almanah* (widow) into the Tannaitic verb-form *nitarmelah*.)

Given these various considerations, it is of no little interest that there existed (and still exists) a Street of the Jews (Rue aux Juifs) in Sancerre. I suggest that it was in this town that the punctator and Masoretic specialist Isaac lived or once had lived, and this conclusion may be somewhat reinforced by the information, given in the manuscript note concerning the notable Blanche, that it was she who sponsored Isaac’s painstaking and precise activity in her home. According to the note, she resided in the town of KRK R’WNS, the first word of which (i.e., *kerak*) is associated in Franco-Hebraic toponymy with the Latin *castrum* developing into French *chateau*, as in Kerak Thierry. Kerak Landon, and Kerak Losdon. Of the several French towns having this designation and which might also have a continuation that would resemble the Hebrew consonantal cluster R’WNS, only one is known, and that is **Chateauroux**, in the Indre department, lying only 75 miles (i.e., 125 kms) to the southwest of Sancerre. The locality in which Zunz (*ZGL*, p. 101) has placed the otherwise unknown Biblical exegete Moses b. Berakhiah is indeed the same Chateauroux. The same Chateauroux also sheltered at one time a Rue des Juifs (today: rue Racine) and, moreover, a *Cemetery of the Jews* (cf. Hubert, *AD Indre...anterieures à 1790, serie A*, Chateauroux 1901, pp. 225 ff.)

The ending that Hebrew writers heard as *-oux*, *-eaux*, *-eaulx* or *-eux* was obviously difficult for them to express orthographically. It would appear that the otherwise unknown author of the note in the Parma MS conceived of the spelling as actually including a nasalized infixed *n*. Gross (*Gallia*, pp. 206-07) has at all events signalled his agreement with Zunz’s view that Chateauroux was the native city of Moses b. Berakhiah, but neither he nor Zunz gives a Hebrew spelling for this term or indicates in what manuscript it is or was found. It must also be pointed out that earlier known names of Chateauroux included *Castrum Rodolphi* and *Castrum Rodolphium* or *Rafum*. There is unfortunately no *Dictionnaire topographique* as yet published for the Indre department, so that most of the information on the toponymy of this town remains unavailable. (But cf. *AD Indre: T. and E. Hubert, Indre.AD anterieures a 1790.*)

Obviously, however, a considerable phonetic and orthographic process was at work during the development of Castrum Rodolphium into Chateauroux. Due to the known characteristics of Hebrew forms of medieval French place names, and given also (a) the French personal names in the Parma MS, (b) the relatively short distance between Sancerre and Chateauroux, (c) the fact that there was a Street of the Jews in each of these towns, and also a Jewish cemetery in the latter, (d) the additional fact that Chateauroux has been acknowledged by earlier scholars to have been the home of a Jewish Biblical interpreter, and (e) the further fact that no other French towns are reasonably identifiable with the two Hebrew place-names, the following conclusion appears to be appropriate:

The writer of the Parma footnote, name unknown, states that he was told by a certain Meir b. Senior that the Biblical codex under discussion was written in the house of Meir's own mother-in-law, a distinguished lady of Chateauroux named Blanche. The scribe of the codex identifies himself on one folio as Levi Halfan and on another as *Bien Liaroit Mestier*. Meir was, in addition, an eyewitness to the fact that Isaac of Sancerre, evidently a learned scribe, provided the text with both vocalization and Masoretic annotations, and that this also was done in the home of Blanche. The Pentateuchal text itself is an outstanding example of Sarfatic literary script of the mid- or late 13<sup>th</sup> century, that is, of the period of Jewish life in France before the expulsion of 1306 — and not of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century as is asserted in the recent Parma catalogue