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THE DE ROSSI COLLECTION OF HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS AT THE
BIBLIOTECA PALATINA IN PARMA AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR
JEWISH HISTORY

Introduction

The collection of approximately 1500 Hebrew manuscripts amassed by the Parma priest and professor Giovanni de Rossi during the 18th century, and acquired subsequently by the Biblioteca Palatina located in the same city, has survived there intact until the present day. De Rossi himself wrote a descriptive catalogue in Latin of his entire collection, and this no doubt served as a *vade mecum* for the relative small coterie of scholars who travelled to Parma to study individual manuscripts there during the late 19th and 20th centuries. In our own present time, the world of learning has benefited by a new catalogue of the entire collection (and of the Palatina's smaller Stern collection of Hebrew manuscripts as well), edited by Benjamin Richler and with palaeographical and codicological descriptions by Malachi Beit-Arié. The two Jerusalem scholars are to be congratulated on their outstanding achievement which, building to be sure on the work of predecessors who labored over many years at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew manuscripts on the description and analysis of their continuously growing collections, has resulted in a most readable and useful volume that includes much information not conveyed earlier by de Rossi or other scholars who followed him.

Having studied many of the manuscripts during several visits, both longer and shorter, to Parma over the past two decades, I eventually became convinced that these texts as a whole, particularly when studied with the colophons and other observations that scribes and readers often included in them, contain valuable and often still unexplored historical information that, when brought together and considered in its entirety, might well require serious revisions, reassessments and augmentations to the present understanding of Jewish history and Hebraic culture during the Middle Ages and beyond, as depicted and, one might say, enshrined in printed works. Through the following observations I hope to show why the task of investigation is an urgent one, only made more so by publication of the recent catalogue. The presentation takes the form of an analysis of individual Parma manuscripts; it will continue until several series of critical evaluations of all the pertinent texts has been achieved. The first series will focus on texts of Sarfatic – i.e., medieval French — origin, beginning with descriptions of the several immediately following manuscripts.

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Parma de Rossi 387=MS 3260. Richler-Beit -Arié Catalogue, no. 524 (p. 98).

Rashi's commentary on Prophets.

Beit-Arié describes the text simply as “13th cent. Ashkenazic semi-cursive script. Copied by Gabriel. Colophon: *hazaq hasofer Gabriel* (f. 102r)....”

However, Gabriel was a *Normannic or French* scribe and scholar, and the script, for reasons explained below, need be considered not 13th century Ashkenazic but rather an outstandingly bold and elegant Normannic or French semi-cursive book hand of the late twelfth century.

The scribe Gabriel — consistently so called without a patronymic — is known about from two other manuscripts: Berlin Heb. 15 and Breslau 103. The latter of these must be considered lost, but Berliner and, after him, Landsberg had already in the 1860s culled and published statements from both of these MSS made by Gabriel relating to the opinions of various exegetes, particularly French scholars, regarding difficulties in the text of Scripture. By the wording of these passages it is clear that Gabriel did not engage in personal discussion with most of these exegetes (see my *Jews in Medieval Normandy*, p. 307-08). However, Berliner and Landsberg also quoted Gabriel, from these same two MSS, as stating that he had actually heard certain views “from the mouth of” Moses of Paris and Abraham ibn Ezra. Insofar as Ibn Ezra's main sojourn in northwestern Europe was in Rouen, these latter statements place Gabriel in Normandy, but perhaps also in the Ile de France, in the fifties of the twelfth century — when several colophons of Ibn Ezra's most important exegetical writings locate him precisely in that city (cf. *Jews in Med. Normandy*, pp. 261-275, and sources there cited).

With respect to the Parma codex, it is only at the end of Gabriel's transcription of Rashi's commentary on Ezekiel that the scribe states: *hazaq hasofer Gabriel*. There is no other colophon in the entire text, not even at the end of Malachi. This is unlike certain other texts found at Parma and elsewhere, where the actual scribe of the manuscript sometimes copies verbatim a colophon of an earlier scribe before writing his own. It may therefore be reasonably inferred (as indeed Beit-Arié appears to acknowledge) that this codex is actually written in the hand of Gabriel himself. By this token, however, and given what we know of Gabriel through statements made by him in the Berlin and Breslau codices, the conclusion is quite inescapable that the Parma text is not likely to have been produced in the 13th century but rather was copied by Gabriel no later than late in the 12th — and that the text was produced in Normandy or possibly France rather than in the German-speaking lands. In the absence of any proof that Gabriel's book-hand was influenced by Germanic models, it is inaccurate and somewhat misleading to categorize that hand as “Ashkenazic”. The Parma collection includes other manuscripts that, despite the surprising wording in the recent catalogue, were clearly composed in France. They reflect the culture of the French Jews of the Middle Ages — and should thus properly be designated not as “Ashkenazic” but as *Şarfatic*. In the following pages other examples are given in support of this conclusion, which has obvious bearings on the nature and importance of medieval Jewish history in France and of the relationships of French Hebraic culture with that of the medieval Jews prevalent in other lands.

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Parma 189 =Ms 1940; Richler no. 804. Richler-Beit-Arié catalogue, no. 805 (p. 178).

The *Sefer mišwot qatan (Semaq)* of Isaac b. Joseph of Corbeil, followed by Jonah b. Abraham Gerondi's *Ḥayye 'olam*. 267 folios, vellum.

The colophon, fol. 252 recto, states at its beginning that the scribe of the MS, Zechariah b. Moses, copied down the codex for his teacher Haim b. Moses, the latter described by Zechariah as hailing from PRYQ or FRYQ. De Rossi (*Cat.*, p. 121) omitted mentioning this toponym altogether. However, in the catalogue brochure entitled *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Palatine Library in Parma*, published in Jerusalem in 1985 in conjunction with the exhibition of some of the Parma MSS at the Jewish National and University Library, the teacher is designated (p. 46) as the rather Ashkenazic-sounding “R. Hayyim of Parik [!]” without further identification — although to the best of my knowledge there is no such European or Middle Eastern place-name as Parik. It is perhaps for this reason that in the recent Richler-Beit Arie catalogue, the name is left to stand alone in Hebrew script without transcription or identification. Of the manuscript's provenience, Beit-Arie, in the same catalogue states: “...<France?>, 1297. Ashkenazic semi-cursive script.”

Why there is a question mark after the word “France” in Beit-Arie's description I do not fathom. As the editors of the catalogue acknowledge, the scribe Zechariah was a student of Peretz b. Elijah of Corbeil — the well-known town south of Paris — and it can be readily shown that the codex was produced not in an Ashkenazic but in a French environment. Once the Ashkenazic *idée fixe* is put aside, the identification of the Hebrew place-name presents no difficulty. It designates, straightforwardly, the town of **Frique**, otherwise known as St. Frique or Saint Affrique, situated in the Aveyron region (formerly the Rouerge) — that is to say, that part of southwestern France having Rodez as its main city. A description of the position of Frique is offered in the *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon* of Zedler, Band 9, published in 1735: “Frique, Afrique. Lat. Fanum s. Africani, eine Frankische Stadt in der provinz Rovergue, am Fluss Dourdan, der Stadt Fabres gegen über, eine Meile von Fabres .” Under its full name the town is described at some length in Vol. 1, p. 14 of the *Histoire des communes et des villes de France* by A. Girault de Saint Fargeau published in 1844, in which year the town had 6,336 inhabitants. The author states that “L'origine de cette ville remonte à une époque très reculé ...” and that it specialized in the manufacture of cotton, wool, and leather goods, and of Roquefort cheese.

Returning now to the above-mentioned colophon, it continues, in short, with the statement that Zechariah completed his transcription of Isaac of Corbeil's *Semaq* in the year equivalent to 1297 C.E. Zechariah adds the following remark: “Moreover, I found the following written in the city of Corbeil, in the holy handwriting of my teacher (and) master R. Peretz...at the end of his book: ‘All things hinted at [in Isaac's *Semaq*] one should best write on a single parchment sheet and thereafter look into [Moses ben Jacob of Coucy's] *Semag*, [Isaac] Alfasi's [*Halakhot*] and other books; he should also textually examine the particular commandment *in extenso* in the *Semag* as concerns any particular matter that requires a decisive legal ruling. It is also appropriate to investigate the unwritten hints in [my] *scholia* [*hagahot*] [appended to the *Semaq*]....’ .”

Thus Zechariah identifies the renowned Peretz of Corbeil as one of his teachers, and it is obvious from the wording of his statement that it was in Corbeil itself that he studied under him and found the above-quoted notation in Peretz's book. (Within the context, the words "[which I found] at the end of his book, *besof sifro*", appear to refer to Peretz's own copy of Isaac of Corbeil's *Semaq*, with Peretz's famous scholia, or *hagahot*, included therein.) On fol. 109r Zechariah states that if the reader will but turn the page, he will find two formulae for writs of divorce, and he adds that the one formula is by "the father of this book" — i.e., by Isaac of Corbeil himself — and that the other is "according to the system of our teacher [and] master Peretz, may he li[ve] and be long of days." Thus Peretz was still alive in 1297, the year given by Zechariah as the time of completion of his own copy of the *Semaq* prepared for his other teacher Haim b. Moses of Frique.

Zechariah continues, in the passage just quoted, by stating: "I the writer copied down these [two divorce formulas] into my [own] book in Corbeil, in his [i.e., Peretz's] presence." The two divorce formulas (dated 1244 and 1247 respectively), both mention Bray-sur-Seine, in northern France, as their place of origin..

By 1297, so his colophon indicates, Zechariah was studying, or had been studying, under the tutelage of Haim b. Moses of Frique. This does not necessarily mean that he studied with him in Frique itself; The most we may legitimately infer from the colophon is that Haim *hailed from* Frique. To judge by Zechariah's handwriting and by the fact that he makes use of divorce formulas as practised in the northern French city of Bray-sur-Seine, this scholarly scribe does not appear to have received any part of his education in the Provence but rather somewhere in central or northern France. However, his second Talmudic master Haim may very well have studied at a yeshibah in the Provence: Frique is within a relatively short travel distance of the three most important Talmudic academies of Languedoc — namely, those that could be found throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Narbonne, Bezier and Montpellier. It is reasonable to infer that Haim b. Moses received his Talmudic education in one or more of these schools and afterwards moved to a town in central or northern France where he eventually taught Zechariah and other students. It is known from rabbinic sources that other Provencal scholars as well eventually moved to northern France, where they could study with renowned Tosafists whose method of Talmudic inquiry was their own creation and not shared by the Spanish and Provencal scholars.

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Parma de Rossi 11=MS 2338 and 2339. Richler-Beit-Arié catalogue, no. 97 (pp.23-24).

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

Beit –Arié states of this MS (Cat., p. 23):<France?>, late 14th cent. Square and semi-cursive Ashhkenazic script.”

The internal evidence, however, indicates that the MS is without doubt of French origin, i.e., Şarfatic. The salient characteristics of the slightly angled square book script are like those of many other Şarfatic MSS of the mid- or late 13th century. Moreover there are a few important notations in this codex that are in a characteristic 13th-century documentary script employed in France, Normandy and England. The documentary script-style used in 13th and 14th century Ashkenaz, i.e., the Germanic-speaking lands, is of a different character.

That this codex was produced in France is clear from a passage in documentary script appearing in Vol I, fol. 271 recto, which states: “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 SRŞWYYR'), 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 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 SRŞWYYRS 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 SRŞWYYR')/ SRŞWYYRS. As for earlier scholars, neither Zunz, nor Neubauer, nor Gross appears to have taken note of these enigmatic place-names. In the recently published catalogue, Beit-Arie reads the latter place-name as PRŞWYYR'), as though with an initial Hebrew *pe*. The consonant in question, however, does not have a distinguishing characteristic of the writer's *pe* — viz., a slightly concave left vertical downstroke — but rather is a typical *samekh* (S) in this writer's documentary script. Beit-Arié 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 noted that the name of the *nikbedet*, or distinguished lady, was Blanche (BLNQ') The latter is a French personal name possessed, inter alia, by the Jewess Blanche who owned 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 (Gross, *Gallia*, pp. 41-42), and the personal name Senior was often used among French Jews in the 13th 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 (Gross, *passim*). It is clear 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 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 having 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 Šarfatic Hebrew scribes and writers quite naturally found it particularly difficult to handle occurrences of full and partial nasalisation of *n*, or to transcribe forms with *-x*, *-eu*, *-eux*, *-oi*, *-ois* and *-oise*, among many other problems of consonantal and vocalic transcription to Hebrew script that need not be belabored here. In addition, Hebrew toponyms reflecting foreign place-names 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. It must also be emphasized that there were no medieval dictionaries containing 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 SRŠWYYR' / SRŠWYYRS (where, incidentally, the latter toponym is spelled two ways by one and the same writer), 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 SRŠWYYR' 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 SRŠYYR' and SRŠWYYRS 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 'LŠWR' and 'LŠYYR' are known spellings representing *Auxerre*. The ancient town of *Melgueil* (in the Hérault), also spelt *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 SRṢWYYR²—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 and thus construed the word Sancerre, by a normal process of phonetic assimilation, as Sarcerre, Sarceur, or Sarceures, and accordingly have 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*, it may be noted, 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 the 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. 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 infix *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. (Neither he nor Zunz, however, 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 generally unavailable. (But cf. *AD Indre: T. and E. Hubert, Indre AD antérieures à 1790*.) Obviously, however, a considerable phonetic and orthographic process was at work during the development of *Castrum Rodolphium* into Chateauroux. However, 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 actual scribe of the codex, not to be identified with the writer of the above-described documentary notations, identifies himself on one folio as Levi Ḥalfan 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 not of 14th-century Ashkenazic script but of a Ṣarfatic script of the mid- or late 13th century. The codex is thus by all available evidence, as are certain other rare codices in the Parma collection, a precious Hebrew manuscript written within the era of Jewish life in France before the expulsion of 1306.

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Parma. MS 3507 (Stern). Richler-Beit -Arié, catalogue no. 1135 (p. 299).

Richler states: “Anon. Comm. on the prayers. Includes commentaries on *piyyutim* recited in both Eastern and Western Ashkenazic rites.” He also divulges important information showing that the commentator(s) cited discussions by rabbinical figures of the 13th century, among them Meir of Rothenburg. Beit-Arié adds “<Ashkenaz>, 1386. Ashkenazic semi-cursive script”, without indicating, however, that the text is evidently a copy of an original that must have been produced by its author(s) before the expulsion of the Jews of France in 1306.

The colophon (fol. 193 verso), which does not give the place of composition or of the scribe’s copy, yields a date of 138[8] or 138[6]. Beit-Arié’s transcription of the colophon has precisely the same reading of each word as that given by P. Perreau, *Catalogo dei codici ebraici della Biblioteca di Parma non descritti dal de-Rossi*, Firenze 1880, p. 161, s.v. no. 27 — with the exception, in a date-formula, of the one word *ushemoneh* which is read by Beit Arie as *weshesh ly[...]*, i.e., yielding for him a date of 1386 rather than 1388. A copy of this publication of Perreau is on the open shelves of the manuscript reading-room in the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma, but Beit-Arie, without alluding to it, only states (p. 300) that the colophon “was worn out and deciphered with the help of ultraviolet light”. This formulation is justifiable on the assumption that the authors of the catalogue were unaware of Perrot’s earlier decipherment.

Richler, op. cit., p. 299, states: “The compiler quotes ...his father’s rebuttal of an argument by a bishop from DRWM (variously identified as Dreux or Rouen) ...” The Hebrew text citation that follows in the recent catalogue contains the author’s quotation of a polemical question asked by the “bishop” (*hahegemon miDRWM*) and the answer given to him by the commentator’s father.

There are many occurrences in post-1306 Hebrew manuscript writings, as well as in printed editions based upon them, of the term DRWM (the Hebrew common noun normally meaning “south”) or the scribally-related DRWS being employed to designate a city of northwestern Europe. In my Hebrew and French writings on the Jews of medieval Rouen, and in my more recent work on Normandy, I have published facsimiles of over twenty manuscript leaves, drawn from early prototypes of those same writings, but including also autograph originals, that contain the genuine toponym RDWM in place of the above-mentioned scribal forms. *Rodom* was from early medieval times the normal way, in Latin, Hebrew and Arabic, of designating Rouen. (The process of development from Lat. Rothomagus through Rodom to Roem and then Rouen has been recognized by medievalists for at least three centuries.) The very obvious palaeographical configuration, which regrettably was not observed by earlier scholars, demonstrably vitiates the theory that the scribal form DRWM was an error for DRWS which in turn was claimed to signify Dreux, a town on the border between France and Normandy. Not only is there no manuscript tradition to back up this claim, but there exists no proof whatever that the French ending *-eux* — i.e., the last three units of the term Dreux — was ever spelled in Hebrew manuscripts with the consonants –WS. All the manuscript evidence known at present converges to show that the conversation described by the

commentator was between his father — clearly a learned Jew — and a 13th-century *archbishop* of Rouen, and its special importance lies in depicting for the first time an interreligious debate with a Rouennaise archbishop who showed knowledge of the contents of a Hebrew liturgical poem. It should be added that Meir of Rothenburg, who is mentioned by name elsewhere in the manuscript (fol. 143r), was himself a student of Samuel b. Solomon in the Normannic city of Falaise. Given these facts in juxtaposition with the date mentioned in the colophon, it becomes clear that the text is a 14th-century copy of a mid- or late 13th-century commentary on liturgical poetry composed at least in part by a Jew whose father had either lived or at least temporarily sojourned in Rouen. It is similar in content to that composed, e.g., by Aaron b. Hayyim Hakohen (MS Bodl. 1206) who discusses at length, *inter alia*, a piyyut of the Rouennaise sage Menahem Vardimas b. Peretz (edited in my *Toledot hayehudim be'ir rouen bimé habenayim*, pp. 193-203).

The description of the MS should thus obviously read not “Eastern and Western Ashkenazic rites” but rather “Northwestern European rites”. The Jews of England, Normandy and Royal France have never been known to refer to themselves in the Middle Ages as Ashkenazic or as hailing from Ashkenaz, a term which never included more, in that time-period, than the Germanic-speaking lands. Not only is it misleading of the authors of the recent catalogue to describe, however unwittingly, Hebrew liturgy composed by French Jews as belonging to a “Western Ashkenazic” rite but, given the lack of a place-name in the colophon, the term “Ashkenazic” to describe the handwriting of the scribe is also unwarranted. The MS belongs to a category of texts that may be paleographically described as evincing northwestern European provenience, but the writer may well have been the descendant of French Jews living elsewhere than in Ashkenaz.

(N.B. The text was discussed by I.H. Levine in *Tarbiz* xxix (1960), pp. 162-175; cf also Zunz, *ZfHB* xix (1916), pp. 139-40.)

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Parma de Rossi 185=MS 3082. Richler-Beit-Arié catalogue no. 73 (p. 18).

Torah with Meg. Esther, vellum, 116 fols, heavily annotated with marginal notes giving variant readings for vocalizations and spellings of words in the Biblical passages. The colophon states that the MS was copied down by Jacob b. Isaac in the year equivalent to 1304 C.E. — i.e., two years before the expulsion of the Jews from France — but no place of writing is indicated.

Richler states that the MS contains “Masoretic notes by the scribe, mostly pertaining to rules of writing scrolls...” However, the marginal notes, which were apparently written by someone other than the scribe of the Pentateuchal text itself, show that he was mainly concerned not so much with the rules for the *writing of scrolls*, which require no vocalization, as with the variant readings of words and their vocalizations in *codices* of the Masoretic text of the Pentateuch known to him. Examples: *apud* Gen. 17.13: “...there are books (which have the reading) *hammol yimmōl*” (instead of *himmōl yimmōl*); *apud* Deut. 2.10,21: “In the book of R. Menahem he wrote *warab*” (instead of *werab*); *apud* Gen. 16.6: “I have found in the *Hūmash* of R. Isaac, which is very exact for the Pentateuch, *‘asi lakh*; (but) in book[s] of others, *‘asi lah* (in the clause *‘asi lah hatōb be ‘ēnayikh*).

The authorities and books mentioned include, in an English translation of the writer’s wording, the following:

- “Rashi”;
- “the Maftē’ah”;
- “the books of Spain” (*Aspamia*);
- “the book of Babylonia,”;
- “the books of France” (*Ṣarfāt*);
- “a *ga ‘ayah* in Rabbenu Hananel’s text-examination of the phylacteries”;
- “our books”;
- “R. Yom Tob”;
- “the book of R. Jacob”;
- “my *Tiqqun*”;
- “an old book (*sefer zaqen*, used several times);
- “*sefer torah debē R. Natan*”;
- ”what I have heard from the precise specialists” (*hadayyeqanim*);
- “the book of R. Menahem”;
- “(what I have seen) in the book of the Hazzan and heard from his mouth”.

In a most notable passage, the author refers to “the Book of Commandments written by my teacher R. Moses, who copied the (rules concerning) phylactery straps from the book of R. Maimon who copied them from an ancient book that was in Egypt and had formerly been in Jerusalem in order to proof-read (copies of the Hebrew Bible)”.

From these and other passages we learn that the erudite annotator was a student of Moses of Corbeil and had also studied or engaged in conversation with Joseph the Hazzan of Troyes, often called simply “the Hazzan”. “R. Yom Tob” is probably the eminent Yom Tob of Joigny, When in the 12th and 13th centuries “R. Jacob” is mentioned without further particulars, the expression consistently designates Jacob Tam, the great Champenois Talmudist. R. Menahem is, within that context, clearly to be identified with

Menahem Vardimas of Rouen, who because of his fame was often referred to simply as R. Menahem. The annotator appears to have used or owned Biblical codices that were once the personal possessions of at least some of these and other scholars. The codex, written during the last few years of pre-expulsion Jewish life in France, bears all the hallmarks of a bona fide Šarfatic manuscript, revealing at the same time the high quality and precision of Biblical text-study among learned Jews residing in the French-speaking lands during the late 13th century.

I cannot believe either that the editors of the recent catalogue are unaware of the significance of the names of the scholars mentioned in this text, or that they are of the view that these names do not matter. Yet in that catalogue, the codex under discussion is described as deriving from (I quote) “<...Ashkenaz>, 1304”. It appears that, in this and other instances throughout the catalogue, the editors use the geographical term Ashkenaz — which in medieval texts means only Germany or at most the Germanic-speaking lands — as a designation meant to include France and Normandy as well. They appear to do this particularly in such cases where the places of writing are not specifically indicated in the manuscripts — although at the same time unhesitatingly using the expression “Ashkenazic” to refer to Hebrew scripts that were, in reality, used throughout northwestern Europe. The entire conception implied by these usages appears to be an invention of recent Judaica scholarship, clearly deriving from the fact that after the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306, the culture of the Ashkenazic Jewry did in many ways very gradually become predominant throughout central and eventually eastern Europe. I say “recent” scholarship because as late as 1900, the terms Ashkenaz was treated in an appropriate scientific way, as indicative of medieval Germany and its Hebraic culture (cf. e.g. *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Ashkenaz”). When to the contrary it is used in our own times to describe a cultural and geographic situation that did not actually exist in the middle ages, the term *Ashkenaz* and *Ashkenazic* become etiological instruments misleading readers into thinking that medieval French Jews considered themselves, or were considered by others, to be part of a mega-culture whose main home was Germany. Both French and German rabbinic figures of the middle ages have left us with many statements proving the contrary. There was a flourishing, independent culture in Šarfata as well as in Ashkenaz, and the Parma de-Rossi manuscript collection contains many hitherto disregarded testimonies to that fact. If one is to speak of a medieval Ashkenazic culture, then it is equally appropriate, and equally necessary, to speak of a medieval Šarfatic culture. If on the other hand a more general term to include both of these entities be sought, then what emerges as the most appropriate designation is quite clearly either “Northwestern European Hebraic culture” or a closely similar phrase.

Likewise, while there are indeed grounds to describe some handwriting styles as distinctly *Ashkenazic*, there are compelling reasons, flowing from the internal evidence of numerous pre-1306 codices, to describe other handwriting styles as characteristically *Šarfatic*. As for those handwriting styles that show affinities amongst the Hebrew scribes of Germany, northern France, Normandy and England, these may be appropriately subsumed under the rubric “Northwestern European Hebrew hands”.

(To be continued.)

N.B. The above pages represent the full text of a paper delivered in abbreviated form, and with the same title, at the VIIth Congress of the European Association of Jewish Studies (Amsterdam, 21-25 July 2002).