

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

Rashi's commentary on Prophets.

Beit-Arie describes the text simply as "13<sup>th</sup> 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 that I shall explain, need be considered not 13<sup>th</sup> century Ashkenazic but rather an outstandingly bold and elegant French or Normannic semi-cursive of the late twelfth century.

We know about Gabriel 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 and perhaps also in the Ile de France in approximately the sixties of the twelfth century.

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-Arie 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 of the 13<sup>th</sup> century but was copied by Gabriel no later than late in the 12<sup>th</sup> — 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 many 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 Sarfatic. In the following pages other examples are given in support of this position, which has obvious bearings on the nature and importance of medieval Jewish culture and history in France..