

**FURTHER EVIDENCE CONCERNING JUDAH b. SOLOMON AND THE
“TOWER OF LAS METAMIS” MENTIONED IN MS de ROSSI 1105
(cf. Instalment of 25.ii.2003)**

Thanks to the diligence of my faithful correspondent of Monieux, M. Andy Cosyn, I am now able to report that the “Tower of Las Metamis” referred to in the Hebrew colophon of MS de Rossi 1105, while only partially preserved, is still standing. When passing by Méthamis in 1967, on our way to Monieux via the narrow and sinuous road bordering the southern side of the Gorges de la Nesque (cf. my “Monieux” in *PAPS*, Vol. 113, pp. 82-83), I had not noticed the tower, perhaps because, as M. Cosyn has informed me after visiting Méthamis and discussing some of its history with the mayor, the intact lower portion, of late remodeled into a private home, no longer rises prominently above the roof-lines at the height of the village center.

Also due to the initiative of M. Cosyn, I now have a copy of the interesting and informative monograph by Yvonne Burgues entitled *Les Badaires de Méthamis* (Carpentras, réédition of 1991), in which the author traces the history and folkways of her native community. She shows full cognizance of the military aspects of the site, and discusses both the tower and its adjacent fortress. Describing the Roman occupation of the site, for example, she mentions “l’exceptionnelle position stratégique de Méthamis” (p. 19). The author points out that the fief of Méthamis is first mentioned in 12th-century sources, that its first *seigneurs* were of the Alfanti feudal family, and that on a certain day in 1229 A.D. they hung a banner of political significance over the *donjon du Castrum Alfantorum* situated there (*ibid.*, p. 20-21). (The *castrum* — i.e., the castle or fortress — to be sure, eventually came to be designated as the *Castrum Methamiae*, as is shown in effect by l’Abbé Expilly’s specific statement [*Dict. Géographique*, p. 706] to the effect that the Latin designation was “*C. Methamiae*” — viz., the “C[astrum] of Méthamis”).

Mme. Burgues additionally suggests (p. 24) that it would be of interest to carry out an archaeological investigation “sur l’emplacement du château”; she indicates that its original subterranean foundations are of great antiquity, and that the only important part of it remaining above-ground “is a large square tower (such as existed in the *Castra*)...” which in her day, as she states, had only a ground-floor plus two additional storeys. She adds that insofar as archival evidence indicates that the tower was used as a dungeon, it originally “must have been much higher” than it is now (*ibid.*).

To this may be added the personal communication of M. Cosyn dated 10 March ’03. He states: “Standing as high as I could in Méthamis, I could see very far in the direction of St. Jean. The tower of Monieux stands at an altitude of approx. 700 m., the one at St. Jean de Durfort at 850 m., and Méthamis around 400 m. Looking at the map, and tracing a straight line from St. Jean towards Méthamis, there seems to be a corridor between the hilltops.” The interrelatedness of these towers is quite obvious, as is their defensive purpose. In his communication of 20 April ’03 M. Cosyn adds that the tower known as the “Tour de Pinet,” located near Venasque, “can be seen from the tower of Méthamis.”

M. Cosyn’s observations represent a noteworthy addition to the contribution made in 1887 by the Marquis de Monclar in his study entitled “Notes sur l’Eglise et les restes du Château de Méthamis (Vaucluse),” (*Bulletin monumental*, 6^{ème} série, tome 3, 1887, pp. 68-77) — an article whose reference I owe to M. Claude Silbertin-Blanc in his preface to Mme. Burgues’ monograph, p. 10, note 9. Although M. de Monclar does not cite any Latin or French archival texts specifically referring to Méthamis as *Castrum Metamiae* or *La Tour de Las Methamis*, he makes clear that in his day there was still a good recognition of the military nature of the site. He

too, as Mme. Burgues later on, speaks of the *Castrum Alfantorum* mentioned in medieval documents, in this context describing the “vast square tower whose upper storeys had been demolished” and inferring from the remaining two lower storeys that it was there that the dungeon was located (ibid., p. 71). In describing the traces of the adjoining fortress, he states that the foundations of newer structures indicate the lines of the once-standing château, and that “some steps further on, along the edge of the precipice at the base of which is the bed of the Nesque [river], one may follow the remains of the ramparts which, during periods of warfare, completed the defenses of the fortress” (ibid., p. 76).

We may thus conclude that the above-quoted statement of the scribe in his colophon to MS de Rossi 1105 is fully consonant with the historic reality. Judah b. Solomon of the House of Orgier, a Jew well-versed in Hebrew and evidently deeply interested in the writings of medieval thinkers, had every right to speak of Méthamis as *Migdol las Metamis* when, living peacefully in a small perched village of the Comtat Venaissin, he copied Judah Halevi’s apologetic tract there in the summer of 1521 A.D.

(On the settlement of the Jews in the Comtat during the Middle Ages, cf. H. Gross, *Gallia Judaica*, Paris 1897, s.v. **Avignon**, **Carpentras**, **Cavaillon**, and **L’Isle-sur-Sorgue**; and, with regard to smaller communities of that region mentioned by him, cf. e.g. **Cadenet** [ibid., pp. 548-49], **Malaucène** or **Migdol** [!] **Malaucene** [pp. 360-61], **Baumes** [p. 118-19], **Forcalquier** [p. 3], and **Apt** [p. 37]. Cf. also L. Bardinet, *Les Juifs d’Avignon et du Comtat Venaissin*, Limoges 1880; and R. A.-M. de Maulde [la Clavière], *Les Juifs dans les Etats français du Saint-Siège au moyen âge*, Paris 1886. For the medieval **synagogue of Malemort** as well as the importance of the Apt community, cf. G.-B. Depping, *Les juifs dans le moyen âge*, Paris 1834, pp. 331-32. The **synagogue** of Forcalquier still stands as a private property (letter of R.T. Arndt dated 8.1.90). There was perhaps a rabbinical school in L’Isle-sur-Sorgue, and several medieval Hebrew manuscripts were copied there, including a very fine Parma text on vellum dating to 1296 A.D.— i.e., de Rossi 104, containing a relatively early copy of the *Arukh* [a rabbinic dictionary originally authored by Nathan b. Yehiel of Rome]. In 1433 Joshua b. Samuel made a copy of the Hebrew translation of Saadia Gaon’s *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* in **Sisteron** — i.e., MS de Rossi 417 [Gross, op. cit., p. 664]. An interesting report exists of a persecution at Sisteron, Forcalquier and **Reillane** in 1334 [Gross, op. cit., p. 275.])

The Méthamis colophon serves as evidence of the settlement of Jews in villages within rural areas of the Comtat even after the 1440s, when a decided turn for the worse in their condition transpired, due at times to the anti-Jewish policies of the Popes and at times to the pressure upon Papal authorities from Comtadin officials and representatives themselves. (Cf. e.g. *Jewish Encyclopaedia* II, pp. 352-355, whose paragraphs describe events transpiring not only in Avignon *per se* but in the Comtat Venaissin and the French Papal States in general.)

Moreover, the Jewish inhabitants of the region, including those in the villages, could hardly have avoided the consequences of the Albigensian (viz., Huguenot) crusades during the 16th century, many of whose adherents, as Mme. Burgues (*op.cit.*, pp. 59 ff.) points out, were living in the Vaudois and the environs of Mont Ventoux — that is, close by the Nesque gorge and its neighboring villages. Mme. Burgues (who apparently, however, was unaware during her lifetime of Jewish habitation of the rural Vaucluse region, cf. e.g. p. 59 of her monograph) describes destructive military actions – sometimes involving Méthamis itself – on the part of the Huguenots and their Catholic opponents in this very region in 1536, 1540, 1562-3, and 1570-81. It was probably during this general period of unrest and warfare that the local fortresses, along with their towers, were severely damaged or at times totally destroyed. The destruction of the château of Méthamis, and the grave damage to its tower as well as to the tower and château of Monieux, have at all events not been otherwise explained.

There is, however, no indication at all of disturbances due either to Papal pressures, the Huguenot wars, or any other events that may have affected rural Jewish communities or

individuals of the Vaucluse in 1521, when Judah b. Solomon was engaged in his Hebraic scribal activity at Méthamis.

Méthamis and surviving portions of its château. (Photographs by A. Cosyn.)



(a) Remains of the fortifications where drawbridge stood.



(b) The tower, with entrance to courtyard.

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(c) The tower w/ staircase and door to church.



(d) Old Méthamis w/ tower and church.