

SAMSON BEN ISAAC OF CHINON, *Sefer keritut* [Book of Ratification], copied by Abraham ben Judah of Crete
In Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Candia [Crete], c. 1375-1400

61 folios on paper, single watermark (Briquet 7718, "buche," Arezzo, 1380, Troyes, 1380-1382; and Briquet 7738, Paris, 1397-1399), modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals (collation i¹⁶ ii²⁰ iii¹⁴ iv¹⁴ [-12 through 14, cancelled with no loss of text]), written in Byzantine square (poems, chapter numbers, and incipits) and semi-cursive (text body) scripts in dark brown ink in a single-column text of 25-30 lines throughout (except on ff. 60r-61v, where text is written on two columns), unruled (justification 130 x 90 mm.), enlarged incipits, chapter numeration, marginalia in hand of primary scribe throughout, stylized catchwords on virtually all folio versos and many rectos, sporadic strikethroughs, minor wormholes in margins, occasionally repaired, scattered staining throughout (for the most part not affecting text), particularly on ff. 1-9, 16-17; ff. 1, 10 repaired in outer corners; ff. 17-18, 35-36, 50 reinforced along inner margins. Bound in modern vellum over pasteboard, rubbed on edges, lightly soiled, paper pastedowns and flyleaves. Dimensions, page size, 190 x 135; binding, 200 x 145 mm.

One of the most accurate and earliest complete copies of Rabbi Samson ben Isaac of Chinon's *Sefer keritut* on Talmudic methodology and hermeneutics, this was copied by a known scribe from Crete in Byzantine scripts. With New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS R933, this manuscript was used as the base text for the semi-critical edition published in Jerusalem in 1965. This text survives in about twenty-five manuscripts (over half of these incomplete), and only about five dating from the fourteenth century. All but three known copies are in institutional collections.

PROVENANCE

1. The scribe of our manuscript signed his name in the colophon (f. 61v): "This work, composed by Rabbi Samson son of our teacher Rabbi Isaac of Chinon, of blessed memory, is complete. And its scribe, who copied it from a mistaken and corrupt exemplar under great pressure, is Abraham son of the honorable Rabbi Judah – may he be remembered for life in the World to Come – of Crete." He also indicated his name on multiple other occasions throughout the text by placing three dots next to each of its letters, spelling Abraham (see, e.g., ff. 20v, 25r, 28v, 29r). Though undated, our manuscript can be safely assigned to the late fourteenth century, based both on the watermarks and on the fact that, as pointed out by Malachi Beit-Arié, the same scribe also copied another text, Euclid's *Elements* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hunt. 561), in the Hebrew year 5135 (1374-1375).
2. Solomon Joachim Halberstam (1832-1900), a wealthy Polish Jewish scholar and bibliophile who had acquired hundreds of valuable manuscripts from the libraries of Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) and Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), came into possession of this manuscript and included it when cataloging his own personal collection (shelf mark: MS 101).
3. The Judith Lady Montefiore College in Ramsgate, England, purchased 412 manuscripts from Halberstam's collection, including ours (shelf mark: MS 157). The transaction was carried out by Rabbi Moses Gaster (1856-1939), principal of the College between 1891 and

1896. The manuscript contains the library stamp of the institution, known in Hebrew as Yeshivat Ohel Mosheh vi-Yehudit, on its first and final folios.

4. Between 1898 and 2001, most of the Montefiore manuscripts, including ours, were placed on permanent loan at Jews' College in London. In 2001, they were returned to the Montefiore Endowment Committee.
5. In 2004, part of the Montefiore Collection, including our manuscript, was sold at auction by Sotheby's in New York (lot 147).

TEXT

f. 1v, poem explaining the name of the book:

"See this book, full of delights / And devote your hearts to it in perpetuity / Which has sealed [karat] a covenant of love with the Law of God; / Therefore is it called *Sefer keritut*";

ff. 2-17v, part 1, "Battei middot," introduced by a poem:

"Lie in the valley of the Law, analyze the hidden, / Deepen your interrogation thereof and pose riddles. / Build the abode of wisdom with precious stones / In the courtyard of your mind and with the sets of principles [*u-battei middot*]";

f. 17v, blank space separating the first and second parts;

ff. 18-19, part 2, "Beit mikdash," introduced by a poem:

"Weary not from meditation day and night; / If you know the old, you will understand the new./ Settle in the tent of the Law, take shelter and do not abandon / The true Torah, the holy precepts, and the Temple [*u-beit mikdash*]";

ff. 19-25, part 3, "Netivot olam," introduced by a poem (f. 19v):

"Chirp words of wisdom like a crane, and be not / Like a stupefied or mute man. / Incline your ear to the Law and it shall guide you / To go on this road, the paths of the world [*netivot olam*]";

f. 25-29v, part 4, "Yemot olam," introduced by a poem (f. 25v):

"My brother, dedicate your heart to analyzing the foundations of the Law, / To knowing its hidden things, the revealed and the esoteric, / To understanding the secrets of the Mishnah and the Talmud. / Comprehend the flow of the generations, and the days of yore [*yemot olam*] will be remembered";

ff. 29v-60, part 5, "Leshon limmudim," introduced by a poem (f. 30r):

"Do not cease meditating day and night on/ The Law of God, and place your heart between the staves [of the Ark of the Covenant]; / The Tablets of God lie there. The paths of the Mishnah / Analyze, and lie in the depths of learned language [*leshon limmudim*]";

f. 46, blank space separating chapters two and three of "Leshon limmudim";

f. 60, end of *Sefer keritut*: "Strengthen the affirmation of the work of the redeeming angel, our teacher and rabbi, Samson, may he repose in Eden";

ff. 60-61, Poem praising God attributed to Rabbi Samson ben Isaac of Chinon, beginning, "My soul, submit to God, and exalt His mention; / Bless His name from the pit of captured fawns. / Behold, you derive from a holy place, in which / Reside angels of peace and the majesty of all that is precious";

ff. 61r-v, poem about the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith attributed to Rabbi Samson ben Isaac of Chinon (though cf. Alexander Marx, who seems to doubt this attribution), beginning, "Know the truth, that He exists and is the cause of all existence; / He lasts forever, while everything else passes away. / If He would not exist, it would all be as naught, and every / Sphere would disappear, the mountains would collapse";

f. 61v, colophon, followed by assorted methodological comments on the Talmud in the same hand but in lighter brown ink.

Rabbi Samson ben Isaac of Chinon (fl. late thirteenth-early fourteenth centuries) was one of the last members of the school of Ashkenazic Talmudic commentators known as the Tosafists and was a well-respected scholar; Rabbi Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet (1326-1408) refers to him in one of his responsa as "the greatest rabbi of his generation." His writings include a commentary on the text of the *get* (Jewish writ of divorce), a commentary on some of the tractates of the Talmud (which has not come down to us), and a number of halakhic (Jewish legal) rulings printed in the responsa collections of Rabbis Solomon ben Adret (1235-1310) and Joseph Colon (c. 1420-1480).

His most important work, however, is the *Sefer keritut* on Talmudic methodology and hermeneutics, the first such book by a Tosafist, which was probably composed in the early fourteenth century. The work is divided into five parts: 1) "Battei middot," on the thirteen hermeneutical rules of Rabbi Ishmael; 2) "Beit mikdash," on those rules that apply specifically to the Temple and the sacrificial cult; 3) "Netivot olam," on the thirty-two hermeneutical rules of Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Jose ha-Gelili; 4) "Yemot olam," giving a chronology of the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud and setting forth rules for how to decide the law when they argue; and 5) "Leshon limmudim," on the methodology applied in the Mishnah, Baraita, and Talmud, as well as certain foundational halakhic concepts that appear frequently throughout Talmudic literature.

The *editio princeps* of the book was published in Istanbul (still referred to as Constantinople in Jewish sources) in 1515, and since then it has appeared, at times with commentary, in Cremona (1557), Verona (1647), Amsterdam (1709), Zhovkva (1799), Warsaw (twice: 1854, 1884), Brooklyn (1961), and Jerusalem (1965; reprint: 1983).

Approximately twenty-five premodern manuscripts of the work have come down to us. The majority of these (fourteen) are housed in European libraries in Bologna, Cambridge, Hamburg, Moscow, Munich, Paris, Parma, Oxford, and St. Petersburg; an additional seven can be found in the holdings of American libraries in Cincinnati, New York, and San Francisco; and one resides in the collection of a Jerusalem institute. By contrast, only three copies are currently in private hands (all three sold at auction within the past twenty years). In addition, over half of the surviving manuscripts are incomplete versions, and only about five date from the fourteenth century.

The present manuscript is thus unique in several important respects: it is held privately, is complete, dates from the fourteenth century (the same century in which the book was composed),

and was written by a Cretan scribe in Byzantine scripts, probably the only such copy of the work extant. In addition, its text mirrors closely that printed in the *editio princeps* in 1515. Its completeness and early provenance also made it an important textual witness for the editors of the semi-critical edition published in 1965 in Jerusalem, which also relied heavily upon a New York manuscript (Jewish Theological Seminary, MS R933), as well as, to a lesser extent, several others from Hamburg (Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 168/1), Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 358/1), Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS héb. 335/2), and Parma (Biblioteca Palatina Cod. Parm. 2426).

LITERATURE

Bacher, Wilhelm and Isaac Broydé. "Samson ben Isaac of Chinon," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer, New York, 1906, vol. 11, p. 3. Available at:
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13075-samson-ben-isaac-of-chinon>.

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Samson ben Isaac of Chinon. *Sefer keritut*, ed. Simhah Bunem David Sofer and Joseph Moses Sofer, Jerusalem, 1965 (reprint, Jerusalem, 1983).

Urbach, Ephraim E. *Ba'alei ha-tosafot: toledoteihem, hibbureihem ve-shittatam*, Jerusalem, 1956, pp. 557-558.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Our MS (accessible from within the National Library of Israel)

http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE20198266

Jewish Theological Seminary, MS R933

http://garfield.jtsa.edu:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=45538&custom_att_2=direct
Editio princeps of *Sefer keritut*, Constantinople 1515
<http://hebrewbooks.org/44479>

Jerusalem 1965 (reprint: 1983)
<http://hebrewbooks.org/20728>

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