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**ISAAC BEN JOSEPH OF CORBEIL, *Sefer Mizvot Katan* [*Small Book of Commandments*], with glosses by PEREZ BEN ELIJAH OF CORBEIL  
In Hebrew, manuscript on paper  
[North Italy, c. 1450]**

*i + 211 + I, apparently complete (collation: i-vi<sup>10</sup>, vii-x<sup>12</sup>, xi-xvii<sup>10</sup>, xviii-xxi<sup>8</sup>, xxiii<sup>2</sup>), paper size 207 x 145mm, at least four watermarks (Briquet 13034: Raisin, Suze, 1437; Geneva, 1437/8; Dusseldorf, 1438; Eberbach, 1441; Savoy, 1455; Voorne, 1455; Basle, s.d.; Zeeland, 1442; Briquet 14316: tête de boeuf, Bourg, 1438; Châtillon-les-Dombes, 1438; Mirabel, 1439; Briquet 14314: tête de boeuf, Brussels, 1426; Vufflens, 1428; Lyon, 1430; Morges, 1430; Romainmotier, 1434; Damme, 1441; Strasbourg, c. 1450; and an unidentified feuille or fleur), written in Ashkenazic semi-cursive script in black and brown ink, four sizes of script used to distinguish text (main text, glosses, marginalia, and headings), modern foliation in pencil, catchwords, double column text (first column used for primary text and glosses, second column set out for marginalia), 20-24 lines per page, text justified in plummet on spine and fore edge only (primarily on recto side), writing space 115-120 x 100 mm. and 20 x 150 mm., f. 87r has alternate lettering used for text, f. 87r alone uses ruling, marginalia on fore edge extends into head and foot, early modern Hebrew annotations in brown ink on ff. 1r and 211v, modern Hebrew annotation in pencil written on paper cutting affixed to f. 1r, pen flourishes to marginalia and to text headings from ff. 90 through 211, doodling (basic decorative squares) appear on ff. 70v, 71r, 78v, 107r, 122v, 124v, 125r-129r and 151v and head figure on f. 158v, seven pen-drawn illustrations surrounding catchwords, f. 118v (human head), f. 128v (vase with plant), f. 138v (janus head), f. 148v (vase with plant), f. 158v (bearded man), f. 168v (dog grotesque), and f. 178v (antlers?), all edges to paper appear slightly burned, wear or burning affects text on upper margin, f. 60 has small burn hole affecting text, slight worming to gutters and upper spine edge, f. 73 has lower corner fore-edge chipped, creasing to paper on ff. 1, 5, 44, 90-91, moderate staining on all edges that does not affect text, slight to moderate browning on majority of pages not affecting text, heavy soiling to f. 1 and moderate soiling to f. 108v, f. 73 fore edge lower corner severely torn but with modern repairs to paper, modern paper repairs to worming and to gutters throughout. Bound in modern black buckram over cardboard, binding broken and partially separated from spine, gilded ownership on spine, stamp catalogue on spine, pastedowns and flyleaves of modern heavy bonded paper, heavy browning to front and rear flyleaves. Dimensions 217 x 155 mm.*

One of the most important codes of Hebrew ritual law of the entire Middle Ages written in the thirteenth century by a famous French codifier with glosses by his best-known disciple, extant in well over a hundred manuscripts mostly from France and the Rhineland, found today in many libraries, this copy has attractive layout and script and is signed by a known scribe of German origin who worked in Italy. Only a small fraction of the extant manuscripts are of Italian origin. Many sources for the code and its glosses are known only in manuscripts of this text, and there is still no modern study or critical edition.

## PROVENANCE

1. Although there are no marks of original ownership and the paper appears to be from southeastern France or Switzerland, one of the four scribes, the German immigrant Meir ben Isaac, also wrote in Ashkenazic script three other manuscripts mostly in Italy. The watermarks of the present manuscript suggest the latest possible date of this manuscript around 1450. He wrote the other mss in 1451-1475. The composition of the quires, many of 5 and 6 sheets, also points toward an Italian origin, because this composition was not used in Germany where 4 sheets was the norm almost without exception.
2. Solomon Hayyim Halberstam (1832-1900), his MS 149, stamped on spine, on inside front pastedown, and on f. 1r and 211v. Polish scholar and bibliophile, Solomon Halberstam was a wealthy and avid collector and scholar of Hebrew manuscripts, including codices from Luzzato's estate and Zunz's private library.
3. Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), his MS 123, stamped on spine, inside front pastedown. Most famous English Jew of his time, Montefiore became a legend in his lifetime, fighting worldwide for the lives and rights of Jews. He founded after the death of his wife Judith Lady Montefiore a college in Ramsgate, which with the appointment of Haham Moses Gaster in 1887, acquired many manuscripts including the Halberstam Collection.
4. London, Jews' College, on deposit since 1899, as part of the Montefiore Endowment.

## TEXT

The *Sefer Mizvot Katan* (SeMaK), or the "Small Book of Commandments," is a code of Jewish ritual law (halakhah, practical application to the commandments enumerated in the Torah) written by Isaac ben Joseph of Corbeil, one of the most important French codifiers, who flourished in the second half of the thirteenth century. The negative and positive precepts are divided into seven pillars corresponding to the seven days of the week. One of the last of the Tosafists, commentators on the Talmud in the generations following Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac), Isaac of Corbeil studied in Paris and was a pupil of the "Great Men of Evreux." He is most famous for the present work also known as *Ammudei Golah*, a more concise code

than the *Sefer Mizvot Gadol* that preceded it (earliest manuscript dated 1288). For almost three hundred years, until the publication of Joseph Karo's *Shulchan Arukh* in 1565, it was probably the most popular code of law among Ashkenazic Jews.

Well-received by scholars in its day and found in nearly every Jewish community, the *Sefer Mizvot Katan* survives in approximately 170 manuscripts, of which about 60 date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whereas the remaining are from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The earliest dated copies are from the 1290s, written only a few years after the author's death and the latest dated copy is from 1527. The great majority of the manuscript copies were produced in Ashkenaz (Germany and France and central Europe), less than a dozen in Spain where a different tradition of ritual law held sway, and about 20 in Italy where a large Ashkenazi community lived. The probable location of the present copy is in northern Italy (see Provenance above).

This volume includes the nearly contemporary glosses by Perez ben Elijah of Corbeil (died before 1298, probably 1295) penned in a smaller script and arranged decoratively around the main text. Perez of Corbeil, another *tosafist* and pupil of Isaac of Corbeil, is well known for the *tosafot* he compiled on many tractates of the Talmud. Almost all the manuscripts of the *Sefer Mizvot Katan* have the glosses by Perez, whose glosses also appear in the first printed edition (Constantinople, 1510).

The copious glosses and additions in the margins of most of the pages including extracts from other sources. Many of the extracts are from the thirteenth-century *Sefer Tashbez* by Samson ben Zaddok and among the other authorities mentioned are Solomon of Troyes (f. 32v) Joshua Eliakim the physician (f. 36v), laws of shehitah by Jedidiah of Spiers (ff. 70v, 105v), the book *Terumah Hadeshab* (ff. 137v and 144r) and Samuel ben Elhanan (f. 151v). Most of the names are known only from this manuscript and other copies of this work, one of them dated 1394. So, in all probability most of them date to the fourteenth century. Samson ben Zaddock is known to have lived in the thirteenth century.

Four different scribes copied the volume. The first scribe Meir ben Isaac signed his name on f. 1r and copied ff. 1r-51r. Other unidentified scribes copied ff. 51v-57r and 57r-108v, and a scribe named Joseph copied ff. 109-211 and may have copied most of the glosses as his name is pointed out both in the text and in the glosses. Only the first scribe can be identified with certainty based on three other manuscripts in his hand. Meir ben Isaac also copied Paris, BnF MS héb. 1223 in 1451; the undated manuscript in Parma Bibl. Palatina, cod. Parm. 3261; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Mich. Add. 25 (cf. Neubauer no. 2278). On the Paris manuscript, cf. M. Beit-Arié, et al., *Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques portant des indications de date jusqu'à 1540*, II (Jerusalem and Paris, 1979), no. 82; and on the Parma manuscript, cf. *Hebrew manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma*, ed. Benjamin Richler with palaeographical and codicological descriptions by Malachi Beit-Arié (Jerusalem

2001), no. 559. Meir was probably a German immigrant or came from a family of immigrants. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there was a steady movement of Jews from southern Germany and Austria to northern Italy and many of the scribes we know were of German origin.

First printed in Constantinople around 1510, the *Sefer Mizvot Katan* was, was reprinted twice more in the sixteenth century, twice in the nineteenth century, and about 10 times in the twentieth century, many of the latter reprints of previous editions. However, no critical edition based on the more important manuscripts has been undertaken to date, nor is there a modern monographic study on the work, its author or the glossator.

The manuscript is signed on f. 1 by an internal censor of the Jewish community, Isaac of Arles, whose signature also appears in Montefiore MSS 121 and 215. It is further signed by the censors Gio[vanni] Dom[enico] Vistorini 1609 and Laurentius Franguellus on f. 211v. All the censors are well known, each having reviewed and signed their names on hundreds of manuscripts and printed books. (cf. on the censors of Hebrew books, W. Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books* [1899, reprinted in New York 1969]).

## LITERATURE

H. Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Montefiore Library*, London, MacMillan, 1904 (reprint from *JQR*, 1902 and 1903); see the separate catalogue of the Halberstam collection of 412 manuscripts published as *Qebillath Shelomoh*, Vienna, 1890, no. 123 (reprint Farnborough, Gregg, 1969).