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THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper

Spain [Castile], Ocaña, dated 1490-1491

ii + 303 + i folios (collation: i¹⁰⁺¹, ii¹⁰, iii-xvii¹², xviii⁸, xox-xx¹², xxi⁸, xii¹⁰, xxiii-xxiv¹², xxv¹³, xxvi¹, xxvii¹⁴) almost complete, quire xxvi (=f. 289) is a detached singleton, lacuna of one folio missing between 277 and 278 (is this f. 289?), paper size 204 x 145 mm., (watermarks all showing a hand with a flower, one identifiable, Briquet, no. 10743: Genoa, 1490/2; and Genoa, 1493/1494; two similar to Briquet no. 11154: Palermo, 1482; and Briquet, no. 11159: Genoa, 1483; three other watermarks not in Briquet), written in various Sephardic semi-cursive scripts in brown and black ink, medieval pagination primarily in lower gutter edge on recto side, almost all quires have medieval signatures marking initial page in upper center margin, modern foliation in pencil, text justified by bard point on recto side (spine and fore edges only), writing space 160 x 97 mm., single column text throughout, 26-32 lines per page, ff. 1, 10-11, and 289 re-margined, marginalia, interlinear notations, and corrections in black and brown ink in two contemporary scripts, marginalia, corrections and renewal of text and marginalia in black ink in a later script, rubric on f. 6r, hand nota bene on f. 25r, minor worming to upper margin and spine edge throughout, small tears to paper on ff. 14 and 27 affect text, small tears to paper on ff. 95 and 190 do not affect text, upper margin of paper folded on ff. 165-166, corner creasing to paper on ff. 214-217 and 255-257, damp staining throughout but most pronounced in ff. 1-46 and 290-303, not affecting text, mildew staining to upper margin and upper spine edge on ff. 255-263 and 276-278, small amounts of dark spotting to paper on ff. 205-206, modern paper repairs to gutters throughout, extensive modern paper repairs to margins on second rear flyleaf and f. 1, early paper repairs on ff. 152-153, the combination of medieval ordering of separate quires with the appearance of soiling to first and last folios of each quire suggests that original manuscript was unbound and used as separate quires. Bound in modern black buckram over cardboard, joints broken and split from spine, gilded ownership on spine, though partially missing stamp catalogue on spine, with pastedowns and flyleaves of modern heavy bonded paper. Dimensions 223 x 155 mm.

Unique and unpublished Hebrew translation of Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*--the only extant translation in Hebrew of this work--translated in the late fifteenth century by Abraham ben Joseph ibn Nahmias, probably a member of the Portuguese Ibn Nahmias family, who pioneered Hebrew printing in Constantinople after

the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Abraham recommends studying the philosophy of the Christians, especially that of Thomas Aquinas. Dated and localized by inscription, the copy has an illustrious modern provenance in the Zunz and Montefiore collections.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Spain in Castile on Italian paper and signed and dated 1490-91 by the copyist, just before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.
2. Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Germany, Wiesbaden and Berlin, rabbi, Semitic scholar and Orientalist, theologian, and foremost exponent of the Reform movement in Judaism (provenance cited after Steinschneider, pp. 485-86).
3. Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), his MS 20, early modern catalogue and ownership in brown ink on recto side of second front fly leaf in German in a cursive hand: "Zunz Ms. 20. Thomas Acquinas Com[m]entar zur Metaphzisk Aristoteles." Zunz was a celebrated Jewish scholar, who was born at Detmold and died in Berlin. He was the founder of what has been termed the "[science of Judaism](#)," the critical investigation of Jewish literature, hymnology and ritual. Rabbi Moses Gaster bought 27 manuscripts from Zunz's legacy and presented them to the Montefiore Library.
4. Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), his MS 296, stamped on spine, and 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 Rabbi Moses Gaster acquired many manuscripts including the Halberstam Collection and the Zunz legacy.
5. London, Jews' College, on deposit since 1899, as part of the Montefiore Endowment.

TEXT

This manuscript is a, unique and unpublished Hebrew translation of Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the only extant translation in Hebrew of this work (for the Latin edition, see Thomas Aquinas, *S. Thomae Aquinatis [...] In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio. Editio jam a M. R. Cathala, [...] exarata, retractatur cura et studio P. Fr. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, Taurini [Turin] et Romae, Marietti, 1950*). It was translated by Abraham ben Joseph ibn Nahmias (ff. 1v and 2r), who was probably related to the Ibn Nahmias family in Portugal. Members of this family pioneered Hebrew printing in Constantinople after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Abraham recommends studying the philosophy of the Christians and states that he learned

their language so that he would be able to collect the pearls from their commentaries. Steinschneider gives a summary of Abrahams's flowery introduction, which praises Thomas Aquinas as philosopher who "does not deviate from the correct path" (cf. pp. 485-86).

On f. 303r there is colophon in which the copyist states that the work was finished in Ocaña in the year 1490/1491. Steinschneider assumes that this date refers to the year in which the work was completed by Abraham as well as the date of its copying. The original name of the patron and scribe have been covered by other names, rendering both sets illegible. Before the colophon, the scribe asks for blessing for the translator and expresses a pious wish for himself that begins: *ve-li ani avdo ha-mesayyem*... ("and as for me the one who completes it..."). The translator's preface and colophon appear in *Kerem Chemed*, 8, 1854, pp. 109-112, when it was in the possession of Zevi Hirsch Edelman (1805-1858).

Philosophical works or works of general theology not overtly Christian by at least fifteen medieval Christian writers, many of them scholastics, were translated into Hebrew during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Adelard of Bath, Aegidius, Albertus Magnus and Petrus Hispanus (later Pope John XXI) are just a few of the names. A favorite of Jewish scholars was Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). Over twenty extant Hebrew manuscripts include one or more works by Aquinas. These manuscripts were copied mostly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, mainly in Italy and Spain, reflecting an interest in scholastic philosophy. Steinschneider devoted an entire chapter to these translations (pp. 461-500). Judah Romano, active in the early to mid fourteenth century in Italy was the first to translate several treatises by Aquinas, and he was followed by Eli Habillo who translated several other of Aquinas's works in Spain in the 1470's.

Student and then master at the University of Paris, Aquinas lived at a time when the arrival of the Aristotelian corpus in Latin translation had reopened the question of the relation between faith and reason, a subject also of interest in Jewish thought. The subject of metaphysics for Aristotle, dealing with the first principles of scientific knowledge and the ultimate conditions of all existence, finds its most cogent and coherent account in Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, as presented in our codex in its first (and only) Hebrew translation.

LITERATURE

Aquinas, Thomas. *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, translated by John P. Rowan, 2 vols., Chicago, Regnery, 1961.

Hirschfeld, H. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Montefiore Library*, London, MacMillan, 1904, no. 296 (reprint from *JQR*, 1902 and 1903; reprint, Farnborough, 1969).

Steinschneider, M. *Hebraeische Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*, Berlin, Kommissionsverlag, 1893, pp. 485-486 (reprint Graz, 1956).

ONLINE RESOURCES

On Aquinas and Aristotle

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas>