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ANONYMOUS, [Medical Miscellany]
In Yiddish and Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Poland, Wengrow, dated 1596

i + 89 + i folios, complete, (collation: flyleaf, i 2, ii-ix 8) on paper, paper size 195 x 160 mm., medieval foliation in Hebrew in brown ink on recto side upper fore edge, modern foliation in Arabic numerals in pencil on recto side upper fore edge, f. 85r blank, written in Hebrew and Yiddish non-cursive script using brown and black ink, single column text, 26-30 lines per page, text fore- and spine edge margins justified by hard point, writing space (justification c. 175-180 x 115 mm), ONE LARGE CIRCULAR CALENDAR DIAGRAM in brown ink on f. 19v (94 x 94 mm), TWO LARGE MNEMONIC DEVICES IN THE SHAPE OF THE STAR OF DAVID in brown ink on f. 21r (60 x 60 mm.) and f. 78v (163 x 140 mm.), several smaller illustrations of magical symbols and Stars of David on ff. 28rv, 44r, 59v, 78r-79r, first quire separating from binding, f. 33r has scribal correction by erasure, infrequent interlineal marginal notes in Hebrew cursive hand in black ink throughout manuscript, several cursive and non-cursive marginal notes to ff. 1-2 and 85v-88v in black and brown ink, ff. 19-20 and 25 separating from sewing on lower spine edge, ff. 34-37, 41-43, and 71 separating from sewing on upper spine edge, light chipping and tears to fore edge of paper throughout manuscript, moderate 30 mm tear to fore edge of paper on f. 70, very minor worming to ff. 1-2, thumbing with mild soiling and minor browning throughout manuscript, ff. 72-73 shows water damage to upper right corner of fore edge, small ink smudge to spine edge on ff. 29 and 30. Bound in nineteenth-century heavy tan mottled paper binding over cardboard with dark brown leather reinforced spine and corners, gilded decoration on spine, five raised bands visible on spine, all edges of boards moderately to heavily bumped and worn with some modern tears to paper, lower spine of binding broken and splitting on showing internal quires, front and rear flyleaves made of modern bonded paper, flyleaves used as pastedowns, front flyleaf recto side has modern sale catalogue description pasted in German and Hebrew pasted to recto side of leaf, large tear to rear flyleaf, front pastedown separating from board on lower fore edge, front pastedown has fragmentary paper ex libris affixed to pastedown "MA....065....STHAL." Dimensions: 202 x 166

One of only 15 Yiddish medical manuscripts dating before the seventeenth century and one of the few surviving medieval manuscripts from Poland, the only one from Wengrow. The core of this manuscript contains a collection of medical cures arranged in the order of the ailment or the organ affected, probably written by a physician. The sheer wealth of material in this manuscript and the relative scarcity of other sources, especially in Eastern Europe, should make this manuscript a valuable source for further research.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript is dated and localized by colophon on f. 16v to Wengrov or Wengrow, as it is called in Polish, one of the oldest communities in Poland: "in the words of the scribe Uri son of R. Eliezer, long life to him, who is called Leibman Ashkenazi who writes here in the holy community of Wengrow in the year 1596." The greater part of the MS was thus copied by Uri b. Eliezer, also called Leibelman Ashkenazi in Wengrow, and it was completed in the week the pericope *Netzavim* was read in the synagogue, 5356=September 1596. Founded in the early fifteenth century, Wengrow had a Jewish community already in the beginning of the sixteenth century, and it developed quickly from 1569 on. In 1570, a printing house was established (although it did not thrive). Hardly anything remains from this period of Poland's history due to the famous pogroms led by Bogdan Chmielnicki in 1648.
2. The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem (IMHM), which houses microfilms of 90% of Hebrew manuscripts extant worldwide has only one other manuscript from Wengrow, an 18th - 19th century book of records of the Jewish court in Wengrow (now in Jerusalem, The Jewish National and University Library Ms. Heb. 4^o2).
3. Collection of R. Naftali Herz Levi Von Bima, his sale in *Catalog der reichhaltigen Sammlung hebräischer u. jüdischer Bücher, Handschriften, Portraits etc. nachgelassen van N. H. van Biema in Amsterdam beschrieben von Sigmund Seeligmann ...*, Amsterdam 1904, no. 3584 (auction clipping pasted onto the flyleaf of the manuscript).
4. Private Collection, Jerusalem.

TEXT

ff. 1-2, Index or Table of Contents and additional annotations;

ff. 3-18v, *Goralot* (on throwing lots), in Hebrew, attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra. [Extant in many mss and printed (Florence 1751 et al.)];

Rabbi Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1092 or 1093-1167) was a distinguished Jewish man of letters who wrote widely, on philosophy, astronomy, medicine, poetry, linguistics, and exegesis. Born in Spain, he traveled widely through North Africa, Italy, and France. He is also called "The Wise," and "The Great and The Admirable Doctor."

ff. 19-24, Amulets and charms, some of them attributed to various famous scholars such as Judah he-Hasid and Moses b. Maimon; paragraphs numbered, in Hebrew: 1-40;

ff. 24r-25r: Kabbalistic commentary on the Holy Name of 42 letters. Includes magical usages of the Names. This commentary was printed at the end of the book *Raziel ha-Malakb*. Text numbered to 41. The first edition of *Raziel ha-Malakb* was printed in 1701, so this manuscript is an earlier source of the text. No other manuscripts of this text preceding the printed edition are known.

ff. 25v-26, Seven "Degrees" that were given to Adam when he was expelled from Paradise; Magical uses of Holy Names; found in several other mss; paragraphs numbered: 42-49

ff. 26-26v, *Sefer ha-Iyyun*. Kabbalistic treatise attributed to a Rav Hammai, in Hebrew. The treatise has been printed with the above title; the title in this manuscript is *Sefer ha-Yashar*. The text is incomplete, as the copyist noted at the end. Paragraphs numbered: 50-55. The text is known in many other manuscripts. The author's name is probably fictional and nothing is known about him.

ff. 26-28v: Various amulets, charms, spells etc., a few in Yiddish, the rest in Hebrew. Paragraphs numbered 60-63;

ff. 29-32v, Medical recipes and other notes on medicine, mainly in Yiddish. Paragraphs numbered: 64-153.

ff. 32v-77v: *Sefer Refuot* (Book of Medicine). Medical recipes, kabbalistic prayers, and magical charms, spells and amulets, arranged, roughly, in order of the ailments or organs affected. In Yiddish, with some in Hebrew. Numbered 154-361. This text seems to have been copied from another source as it is neatly arranged and, with the exception of a few notes in the margin, was written continuously and uninterrupted. The source from which this work was copied is unknown, but it was obviously Jewish as it includes Jewish prayers and references to Jewish rituals. The text is apparently unique.

On f. 39 the scribe or a contemporary added a recipe from a physician in "Auserlitz Pilsen" (probably Austerlitz in Moravia). On f. 57r, the scribe noted in the margin that he used one of the amulets in Wengrov. On ff. 74v-75v, there are some recipes on coating in gold etc. Other comments added by the scribe include:

ff. 78-88v: Additional medical and magical recipes in Hebrew and Yiddish, among them a recipe for preparing alcoholic spirits by a R. Koppel, (f. 78r), and on ff. 81v-82v by a different hand on making requests in dreams from a person in "Oven" (=Buda). All the text on ff. 81v-86v seem to be by different contemporary or later hands.

The manuscript consists of two parts, the first, written largely but not exclusively in Hebrew consists of miscellaneous kabalistic and folk texts, relating to fortune, charms, amulets, the signs of the zodiac, and so forth. Incorporated with the text are sketches of interesting amulets. Some of these are previously known and published. A few are extant only in this manuscript (e.g., f. 24-25).

The second composition, which is the basis for our assumption that the writer was a physician by profession, consists of a collection of medications with original additions of the writer himself. The writer added marginal notes, for example, "This I tried and was proven with a baby from the holy community of Wengrow." In the first part of the manuscript the same hand notes: "I heard from R[abbi] Yosef Karo that the entire partaking in lots is in violation of a commandment..." An eminent Jewish codifier, Rabbi Yosef Karo died in 1575, so the writer seems to have known him.

There are only 50 Yiddish pre-1600 manuscripts extant. Of these, half are translations or commentaries on the Bible, one-third are translations of liturgies, 12% are dictionaries or grammar, and 10% are literature (mainly versions of Biblical stories and a couple on religion. The oldest

Yiddish text known to us is a blessing copied by the scribe in 1272 in the Worms Mahzor (http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/mss/worms/about_eng.html).

Yiddish manuscripts copied before the seventeenth century in general, and medical mss in particular, are fairly rare. The IMHM records about 15 pre-seventeenth-century medical MSS in Yiddish, most of them copied in Germany or in Italy. Some are partly in Hebrew and only partly in Yiddish. Yiddish mss copied in Poland are particularly rare, as the late expert on Yiddish literature, Chone Shmeruk wrote in his Hebrew book *Yiddish literature in Poland* (Jerusalem 1981), p. 21. There are probably less than two dozen dated manuscripts written in the sixteenth century that can be localized in Poland.

The sheer wealth of material in this manuscript and the relative scarcity of other sources, especially in Eastern Europe, should make this manuscript a valuable source for research in the history of medicine, philosophy and religion, and the history of Poland.

LITERATURE

Bernstein, M. "Two remedy books in Yiddish from 1474 and 1508," in *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, ed. R. Patai et al. (Bloomington 1960), pp. 289-305.

Frakes, J. C. *Early Yiddish Texts: 1100-1750*, Oxford 2005 [with published extracts from several Yiddish medical texts].

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Steinschneider, M. "Juedische Litteratur und Juedisch-Deutsch: juedisch-deutsche Handschriften," *Serepaeum* 25(1864), 27 (1866), 30 (1869).