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## RABBI MOSES MAIMONIDES, *Sefer Ha-Higgayon* (Treatise on the Art of Logic)

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper

Northeastern Italy, November-December 1465

25 pages on paper, watermark similar to Briquet 2445, Vicenza, 1441 and Venice, 1442, modern pagination in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-outer corners (cited), modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in lower margins of rectos at center, lacking 2 pages (1 folio) following p. 20 (containing text from the middle of ch. 13), no catchwords, ruled along outer margins only, justification of lines via dilation or contraction of letters, abbreviation, and use of anticipatory letters, written in an elegant Italian semi-cursive script in brown ink in a single-column text of thirty-two to thirty-seven lines, enlarged chapter numbers, decorative flourishes on some letters (particularly lameds at the top of a page and gimels at the bottom of a page), tapering text on p. 25, slight scattered staining and damp staining, at times somewhat obscuring text, all folios reinforced along gutters, small nick in upper edges of pp. 1-6; pp. 21-24 (ff. 11-12), bound out of order, upper-outer corners of pp. 21-24 repaired, outer edge of p. 25 repaired. Modern binding of maroon buckram, shelfmark lettered in gilt on spine, modern paper flyleaves and pastedowns. Dimensions 136 x 110 mm.

Maimonides's earliest work, written when he was only sixteen, is this philosophical text, the first extant handbook on logic composed by a Jew. Originally written in Arabic, it circulated widely in the Hebrew translation by Rabbi Moses Ibn Tibbon (d. 1283). The earliest surviving dated manuscript of this text is from 1369; the present manuscript was produced less than a century after that and over sixty years prior to the first edition (Basel, 1527). Moreover, this elegantly written manuscript is a vivid testimony to the rich Judeo-Italian Renaissance culture from which it stems.

### PROVENANCE

1. Written by a scribe who signs his name Abraham (scribal colophon on p. 25; see Text, below) in Italy, likely in Northern Italy given the evidence of the watermarks. The scribe's name (Abraham) is also indicated by means of the dotting of initial letters on pp. 7, 9.
2. Marginalia and corrections intermittently throughout.
3. Given by Rabbi Joseph Hayyim Shrem [1851-1949] to David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942); annexed photocopied letter, dated 25 Omer [5]692 [May 6, 1932].

Descendants of David Sassoon (1792-1864), who was born in Baghdad, but emigrated to India in 1832, have been premier collectors of items of historical importance to Jewish history for more than a century. His grandson, David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942), who moved to England in the early twentieth century, was a businessman, philanthropist, and also an author and scholar. He was as well an avid collector, who assembled the most important private collection of Hebrew manuscripts ever known; Cecil Roth in 1941 described it as "one of the most magnificent collections of Hebrew

manuscripts in private hands in the world to-day." This manuscript is Sassoon 1221 (not cataloged in his famous catalogue of the collection, *Obel Dawid*).

Over the following decades, this library would expand to comprise more than 1,270 Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts and a wide range of printed volumes and lithographs, including over forty incunabula, twenty-eight books printed on parchment, and rare titles, periodicals, and broadsides published in Baghdad, Bombay, Poona, Calcutta, and the Far East.

4. The library then came into the possession of Solomon David Sassoon, a rabbi and communal activist in his own right, who added modestly to the collection and published some of its manuscripts. He, his wife Alice (Aliza Beyla; d. 1998), and their family immigrated to Israel in 1970.

## TEXT

Pp. 1-25, Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Sefer ha-biggayon*, concluding with a colophon on p. 25:

"[The book] was completed and finished – praised be the Creator of the World! – by Abraham, may he live, in the month of Kislev, in the year 5226 Anno Mundi [November-December 1465], on Friday, close to [the time of] receiving the [Sabbath] bride."

Lacking 2 pages (1 folio) following p. 20 (containing text from the middle of ch. 13), and now bound out of order. Modern critical edition and English translation, Efros, 1938.

*Sefer ha-biggayon*, better known as *Millot* or *Shemot ha-biggayon*, is a brief introduction to Aristotelian logic and philosophy composed by Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) when he was only sixteen – about thirty years before the completion of his much more expansive *Moreh nevukhim* (*Guide of the Perplexed*). In fourteen chapters, it treats the 175 most important terms used in the discussion of logical theory, physics, metaphysics, and political science, relying heavily on the prior works of Alfarabi and Algazali. Written originally in Arabic as *Maqālah fī šinā'at al-manṭiq*, it was subsequently translated at least three times into Hebrew, the most famous of these versions being that of Rabbi Moses Ibn Tibbon (d. c. 1283), who appears to have completed his project about 1255.

Although the treatise, the first extant logical handbook compiled by a Jew, achieved immense popularity in its Tibbonian form, the earliest surviving dated manuscript comes from the second half of the fourteenth century (1369). The present, elegantly written copy was produced less than a century after that one and over sixty years prior to the first edition (Basel, 1527).

Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204), commonly known as Maimonides, and also referred to by the acronym Rambam (Hebrew: רמב"ם), was born in Cordova, now modern-day Spain, then part of the Almoravid empire, where he studied the Greek philosophers in Arabic. When the Almohads invaded in 1148 he was forced to leave, and settled first in Morocco, and then in Egypt. During a UNESCO conference celebrating the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1985, Soviet Scholar Vitali Naumkin observed that "Maimonides is perhaps the only philosopher in the Middle Ages, perhaps even now, who symbolizes a confluence of four cultures: Greco-Roman, Arab, Jewish and Western." At the same conference, the Israeli scholar Shlomo Pines concluded, "Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all

time" (*Time* magazine, December 23, 1985). A popular Jewish expression from the Middle Ages is equally apt, "From Moses [of the Torah] to Moses [Maimonides] there was none like Moses."

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