

# LES ENLUMINURES

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ANONYMOUS, [*Sefer ha-temunah* (The Book of the Image)]: *Sod ha-temunah* (The Secret of the Image), *Bei'ur gemarah min ha-temunah* (Explanation of the Image); and *Sod shem ha-meyuhad* (The Secret of the Unique Name)

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper  
Northern Italy, c. 1500-1550

i + 32 + i folios on paper (ff. 1-8 similar to Briquet 3062, "cercle," Brescia, 1517, ff. 9-32 similar to Briquet 3407, "chapeau," Bergamo, 1527-1536), premodern foliation in pen in Hebrew characters in upper-outer corner of recto (ff. 1-4), modern foliation in pencil in Hebrew characters in upper-outer corner of recto (ff. 5-31), modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in lower-inner corner of recto (cited), complete (collation i-ii<sup>4</sup> iii-iv<sup>12</sup>), horizontal catchword on f. 8v only, unruled (justification 135-133 x 110 mm.), single-column text written in Italian square (titles and incipits) and cursive (text body) scripts in brown ink in 22-33 lines, no vocalization, Tetragrammaton abbreviated to the Hebrew letter he followed by an apostrophe, justification via insertion of space fillers, abbreviation, and dilation and contraction of final letters, corrections, strikethroughs, and marginalia in hands of primary and subsequent scribes, tapering text on ff. 16, 25v, floral motifs added in pen in upper margin of f. 17v, diagram on f. 21v, slight scattered staining, library stamps removed from ff. 2, 32v, the latter slightly affecting legibility of text on recto, minor paper repair in upper margins of ff. 1-12 and in outer edges of ff. 30-32, marginalia trimmed on f. 3, a single small wormhole in upper quadrant of ff. 24-32. Bound in eighteenth-century(?) three-quarters vellum over marbled boards, worn and wormed, red-stained paper edges, eighteenth-century(?) paper pastedowns and flyleaves. Dimensions 220 x 157 mm.

Espousing a deterministic view of history and a highly original understanding of such central religious concepts as reward and punishment, free will, and the existence of evil, *Sefer ha-temunah* (The Book of the Image) attracted a wide readership from the late Middle Ages into the modern era, even after leading sixteenth-century kabbalistic authorities denounced its theology. Despite its wide circulation both in manuscript and in print, there is still no modern critical edition. The present volume survives as a beautifully preserved copy of this text, one of only two known exemplars still held privately.

## PROVENANCE

1. While the manuscript has no colophon, it is possible to approximately date and localize it based on the sixteenth-century Northern Italian paper used. In addition, the Hebrew cursive script is characteristically Italian.
2. From two deeds of sale we learn that Jacob ben Joseph sold this book in Venice to Kalonymus Kohen of Asola on Thursday, 1 Sivan 5318 (May 18, 1558). (Note that Thursday coincided with 2 Sivan = May 19 that year.) The deed on f. 16 reads: "Today, Thursday, 1 Sivan [5]318, I sold this book ... to Kalonymus Kohen and received his payment, and this book will belong to the aforementioned Kalonymus in perpetuity, and my below signature will testify for me like a hundred valid witnesses." The deed on f. 32v reads: "[5]318, 1 Sivan, here, Venice. I, the undersigned, sold this book in

perpetuity to Kalonymus Kohen of Asola, and my below signature will testify for me like a hundred valid witnesses. I, Jacob ben Joseph, of blessed memory, confirm and affirm all of the above." (It seems that both deeds were written by Kalonymus but only the one at the end of the volume was actually signed.) The purchaser, who also signed his name in the upper margin of f. 13, is apparently to be identified with the Kalonymus Kohen who bought a kabbalistic miscellany in Venice on Thursday, January 17, 5309 (1549) (Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Ms. Kaufmann A 20; see p. 5). A number of letters written or received by, or mentioning, a man named Kalonymus (Kalman) Kohen (Katz, or min ha-Hazzanim) of Asola during the third quarter of the sixteenth century are preserved in London, Montefiore Library Ms. 464. This Kalonymus' son Gershom served for a time as the *hazzan* (cantor) and scribe of the Jewish community of Padua (Boksenboim, 1994).

3. The manuscript eventually entered a library, as indicated by the eliminated stamps on ff. 2, 32v. It was subsequently sold by Rabbi Aaron Moses Schwartz of Jerusalem (c. 1940-2020), a well-known antiquarian book dealer.

## TEXT

[f. 1r-v, blank]; ff. 2-16, *Sod ha-temunah*, incipit, "be-kol et yihiy begadekha levanim ve-go[mer] hem bigdei kohen le-sharet le-hakdish u-le-hadbik ha-nefesh li-mekom mahatsavtah ... ve-nehenim mi-mennu mal'akhei e-lohim ke-dikhti[v] va-yomer ha[shem] salahti ki-devarekha ve-yashuv shevuteinu vi-yerahem aleinu ke-dikhti[v] ve-rihamti et asher arahem ki melekh hannun ve-raham hu u-marbeh le-hetiv amen"; [ff. 16v-17, blank];

ff. 17v-25v, *Bei'ur gemarah min ha-temunah*, incipit, "amar david gal einai ve-abbitah nifla'ot mitoratekha nifla'ot otiyyot ha-torah ha-elyonah ha-nikret torat ha[shem] temimah ... ve-im ein hassagato sheleimah ka-katuv le-ma'lah tov lo le-hitrahek atsmo ve-lo yavo le-hitkarev el ha-kodesh ki erets okhelet yosheveha hi u-ba-zeh kol maskil yivhar ve-yivhan sof davar ha-kol nishma et ha-e-lohim yera ve-et mitsvotav shemor ki zeh kol ha-adam";

According to Goldschmidt (2020), the texts ff. 2-25v, are the *Sefer ha-temunah* (The Book of the Image), in the Byzantine recension, or Version A, with three parts: *Sod ha-temunah*, *Ve-zeh peirush sod ha-temunah ba-ne'elemet be-sodoteha*, and *Bei'ur gemarah min ha-temunah* or *Be'ur abaron min ha-temunah*, beginning on ff. 2, 6, and 17v, respectively (discussed in detail below). The presentation in our manuscript differs from the printed editions, and the pages left blank, ff. 16v-17, are difficult to explain and may suggest that further research into these texts and their relationship is needed.

ff. 26-32, *Sod shem ha-meyuhad*, incipit, "shema yisra'el ha[shem] e-loheinu ha[shem] ehad da ve-haven sod shem ha-meyuhad eikh hu mityahed mi-koah teivot ve-otiyyot ha-pasuk ha-zeh ... ve-ashrei kol ha-yodea sod zeh ki hu ahuv ve-haviv u-mekubbal le-ma'lah be-emet ve-davuk be-or elyon di-keti[v] or zarua la-tsaddik u-le-yishrei lev simhah u-keti[v] ve-attem ha-devekim ba-ha[shem] e-loheikhem hayyim kullekhem ha-yom"; [f. 32v, blank, apart from the deed of sale and eliminated stamp; see provenance above].

*Sod shem ha-meyuhad* (The Secret of the Unique Name); printed under the title *Sod shem ha-meforash* in Korets (1784) and Lemberg (1892) editions (both discussed below); in manuscripts, it is often copied together with *Sefer ha-temunah*.

*Sefer ha-temunah*, considered by Efraim Gottlieb to be “one of the most difficult works in kabbalistic literature” (2007), is part of a genre of Jewish mystical writings organized as commentaries on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The book takes its name from the graphic shapes (“images”) of these letters, which are understood to be reflective of the mystical form of the Godhead and its *sefirot* (emanations) (Scholem, 1965).

The work explores a number of important ideas within the theosophical school of Kabbalah, most prominently the theory of the *shemittot* (sabbaticals). Drawing on cyclical conceptions of cosmic time going back to the Bible and Second Temple literature (like the Book of Jubilees), and especially on a passage from the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 97a) and the writings of the Spanish Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (1194-1270), *Sefer ha-temunah* develops the idea that the universe will exist for fifty thousand years, composed of seven seven-thousand-year “sabbaticals” followed by a thousand-year “great jubilee.” Each of the “sabbaticals” corresponds to one of the seven so-called lower *sefirot*, which imbues a given “sabbatical” with its particular spirit and character. In accordance with the aforementioned Talmudic passage, at the end of each “sabbatical” the world is destroyed, only to be created anew under the influence of the next *sefirah* in the series. According to the book’s author, the second “sabbatical”—the one in which we currently find ourselves—is governed by the *sefirah* of *din* (strict judgment), which explains the prevalence of sin, evil, and suffering in this world. The redemption of the universe will only come with the advent of the “great jubilee,” when all of existence will ascend on high and be absorbed into the upper *sefirah* of *binah* (insight) (Idel, 2011).

While some manuscripts (as well as the printed editions) identify the author of *Sefer ha-temunah* as Rabbi Ishmael, a high priest active during the final years of the Second Temple, many do not, and modern scholarship has concluded that the work was written anonymously. Opinions differ, however, on its place and time of composition, ranging from the first half of the thirteenth century in the Iberian Peninsula to the latter half of the fourteenth century in the Byzantine lands (Idel, 2012, and Ben-Shachar and Weiss, 2018). A recent essay by Roe Goldschmidt (2020), based on an examination of seventy-nine complete or partial manuscripts of the work dating from the end of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, posits that, in fact, two distinct recensions of *Sefer ha-temunah* were in circulation in the Middle Ages: a more disjointed one, upon which a slightly later kabbalist wrote an extensive commentary, seems to have been compiled in Iberia circa 1300, and a more integrated, commentary-free one had its origins in the Byzantine lands.

Goldschmidt points out that manuscripts of the Byzantine recension, which he calls Version A, are generally composed of three parts, each presenting a different kabbalistic interpretation of the alphabet: *Sod ha-temunah*, *Ve-zeh peirush sod ha-temunah ha-ne‘elemet be-sodoteha*, and *Bei’ur gemarah min ha-temunah* or *Be’iur abaron min ha-temunah*. The use of the terms *peirush* (commentary) and *bei’ur* (explanation) suggests that, from the author’s perspective, section two is really meant to expand upon the meaning of section one, while section three is meant as a gloss on section two (thus obviating the need for a formal commentary). Over 70% of copies of *Sefer ha-temunah* dating from before the year 1600 belong to Version A, and of these almost 40% are Italian. Our manuscript, produced in Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century, belongs to this group as well (the three parts beginning on ff. 2, 6, and 17v, respectively).

As the manuscript record demonstrates, *Sefer ha-temunah* achieved great popularity in the generations following its initial dissemination, even influencing the thought of the celebrated Christian kabbalist Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (Copenhaver and Stein Kokin, 2014). The existence of a number of other compositions expounding similar ideas and often copied (and, later, printed) together with the book has led some scholars to speak of a circle of *Sefer ha-temunah*-influenced kabbalists. One such work is *Sod shem ha-meyubad*, sometimes called *Sod* or *Bei'ur shem ha-meforash*, an extended meditation on the first verse of the *Shema* prayer (Deut. 6:4). Gottlieb actually believed that *Sefer ha-temunah* and *Sod shem ha-meforash* were written by one and the same author (2007). Our manuscript includes a copy of this latter text, too.

The first surviving edition of *Sefer ha-temunah*, belonging to Version B and accompanied by its commentary, was printed in Korets (present-day Ukraine) in 1784. (In a collection of letters published in 1745, Johann Daniel Janozki testifies to the existence of a copy of what he calls Rabbi Ishmael's *Buch des Bildnisses*, printed in Krakow in 1599, in his hometown of Międzychód, and Moritz Steinschneider [1874] theorized that this refers to *Sefer ha-temunah*, but no copy of this supposed edition has been recorded in modern Hebrew bibliography.) The book was later reissued in Lemberg in 1892, with the same basic layout as in the Korets edition but with the text of a manuscript representing Version A added in the lower margins. While *Sefer ha-temunah* has been reprinted a number of times, commented upon, and even translated into Italian (Busi, 1995) and Spanish (Frau-Cortés with Gendra-Molina, 2021) in the intervening years, no modern critical edition of this "outstanding work" (Scholem, 1995) exists, and this remains a scholarly desideratum.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Korets, 1784 edition

[https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL\\_ALEPH990020929600205171/NLI](https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990020929600205171/NLI)

Lemberg, 1892 edition

<https://www.hebrewbooks.org/22102>

Casablanca, 1930 edition (part of *Sefer ha-malkhut*, ff. 4-20v)

<https://www.hebrewbooks.org/33762>

HTML edition

[http://www.hebrew.grimoar.cz/anonym/sefer\\_ha-temuna.htm](http://www.hebrew.grimoar.cz/anonym/sefer_ha-temuna.htm)

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