

SOLOMON IBN GABIROL [attributed to], *Mivhar ha-Peninim (Choice of Pearls)*, with marginal commentary by SAMSON OF JOIGNY

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper

Trino (Italy), 1468

i + 26 + i folios on paper, modern foliation in pencil, this is the first 26 folios of a longer manuscript that included 63 leaves, missing original flyleaves and resewn when it was divided (present collation i-ii¹² iii²; formerly i⁴ ii⁸ iii² iv¹²), horizontal catchwords consistently on the verso of each folio for the main text in the body of the book, and inconsistently or rarely on either the recto or verso (or both) for the commentary in the margins, ruled in lead (justification 155 x 110 mm), copied by the scribe Isaiah ben Jacob Masseran in a mixed Ashkenazi-Italian script in a single column of 22 lines with extensive marginal commentary in a smaller script, f. 1 is loosely attached to binding, colophon f. 26v is partially erased, occasional staining and wormholes not affecting legibility of text, trimmed top margin with some loss of commentary, lower outer corner of 26 leaves renewed with text completed in a contemporary hand, some fading of ink at edges of last leaves. Rebound in limp vellum, spine cracked. Dimensions 185 x 135 mm.

Dated and by a known scribe, this is a fine copy of an influential ethical work attributed to the Spanish rabbi and poet Solomon ben Judah ibn Gabirol (1020-c.1057), with a meticulously copied marginal commentary framing the text on most pages. The last time anyone attempted to use manuscript evidence in issuing an edition of *Mivhar ha-Peninim* was almost half a century ago, in 1976—and even then, only one manuscript was consulted. Since then, many additional manuscripts have become available, and the time is right for new research based on the evidence of all the known manuscripts.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Trino, Italy in 1468 by the scribe, Isaiah ben Jacob Masseran, who emigrated from Savoy to work as a scribe in Northern Italy. Although the colophon on f. 26v was erased and is now illegible, additional colophons in the texts formerly bound with our manuscript establish the date when this was copied (see below). It has been attributed to the scribe Isaiah ben Jacob Masseran, based on the name “Isaiah” in the text in large letters at one point (f. 59v), combined with a comparison of the script with that of other manuscripts known to have been copied by him (Sotheby’s, 2004). His work is known in around twenty manuscripts.
2. Belonged to Solomon Joachim Chayim Halberstam (1832-1900), his MS 117.
3. Sir Moses Montefiore, Bart. (1784-1885), acquired from Halberstam's estate in the 1880s; Montefiore Library, London, England, MS 266 (Hirschfeld, 1904, no. 266).
4. Sold at Sotheby’s New York, *Important Hebrew Manuscripts from the Montefiore Endowment* (January 2004), lot 223.

5. Sold at Sotheby's London, *Western & Oriental Manuscripts* (July 2008), lot 19. Originally, the manuscript consisted of 63 leaves (Hirschfeld, 1904, no. 26), and included four colophons: the erased colophon on f. 26v in our manuscript, as well as colophons on ff 52v, 59v and 62 (in each case, with the scribe's signature struck through, but with intact dates). Following its 2008 sale at Sotheby's, it was disbound and split, apparently into three sections. The present manuscript of 26 leaves was removed from the original manuscript, rebound in limp vellum, and resewn (altering the original quire structure). Another section, ff. 53-63v, with three texts, was sold at TAJ- Art (Auction 5, lot 194, Sept. 13, 2022), and includes the colophons on ff. 59v and 62 and the Montefiore collection stamp.

TEXT

f. 1, Table of contents for *Mivbar ha-Peninim*;

ff. 1v-26v, Main text, incipit, "*Mivbar ha-Peninim bmelitzot bahamim bakedumim u'misble ha'filosofim ha'rishonim . . . na tzuri reish va'osher al titein li hatripini lehem buki*;

Commentary, incipit, "*zeh sefer mivbar hapeninim . . . ki lo hayab li bi'fi ha'zeb la rav v'lo haver*."

f. 26v, Colophon, now illegible, apparently deliberately erased.

Mivbar ha-Peninim (A Choice of Pearls) is an ethical work attributed to the Spanish poet and philosopher Solomon ben Judah ibn Gabirol (1020-c.1057). The present manuscript features a marginal commentary based on a work by the French rabbi Samson of Joigny.

The work is well attested, with around 80 extant copies dating to the 14th and 15th centuries listed in the National Library of Israel's KTIV database. Our manuscript was copied by the scribe Isaiah ben Jacob Masseran, who wrote in a mixed Ashkenazi-Italian style, a result of his movement from Savoy to Northern Italy. The work was first printed by Joshua Solomon Soncino in 1484 and was frequently reprinted in the ensuing centuries. Although there have been three modern editions (Löwinsohn, 1842; Habermann, 1976; and Madar, 2010), Habermann's edition stands out for his attempt to accurately establish the correct text, based on several early editions of the book, plus a manuscript, in comparison with (a published version of) the Arabic original. This edition, done almost a half century ago, represents the last time anyone attempted to use manuscript evidence in issuing an edition of *Mivbar ha-Peninim*, and even then, only one manuscript was consulted. Many additional manuscripts of this text are now available, and the time is right for new research based on the evidence of all the known manuscripts.

A Choice of Pearls mixes Jewish philosophical traditions with Islamic ethical literature, which was readily accessible in Iberia. The work is divided into chapters known as gates, whose titles are only minimally connected to their content. It was originally composed in Arabic and translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon, the primary translator of Jewish philosophical works from

Arabic. Notably, *A Choice of Pearls* is a collection of ethical materials rather than an original work. While popularly attributed to Ibn Gabirol, its authorship has not been conclusively determined.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Our manuscript

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