

RABBI TANHUM BEN JOSEPH HA-YERUSHALMI, *Al-murshid al-kafi* (The Sufficient Guide)

In Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Egypt or Yemen, late 13th-early 14th century

iv + 38 + v folios on paper, early 20th-century paper pastedowns and flyleaves, modern pagination in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-outer corners, incomplete at the beginning and end and with two leaves lacking internally (collation [i-xv lacking] xvi-xviii¹⁰ xix¹⁰ [-1 and 10, with modern replacement blanks inserted] [xx-xxi lacking]), first page of each quire signed in pen near gutter at head in Hebrew characters (damaged on p. 1), midpoints of quires generally dotted in one or more of the outer corners of the middle opening, horizontal catchwords at the end of each quire (see pp. 20, 40, 60), ruled in blind with a mastara (ruling board) (justification approximately 140 x 90 mm.), single-column text written in elegant Eastern square (headings and lemmata) and semi-cursive (text body) scripts in black ink in 18 lines, justification of lines via dilation or contraction of final letters and slanted inscription of final words, corrections in hand of primary scribe, tapering text on p. 35, scattered staining and dampstaining, remargined throughout with repairs touching outer edge of text on pp. 69, 71, 73, 75, some text abraded on pp. 1, 58, 61, 76, small hole affecting a couple letters in middle of pp. 3-4, small wormholes not repaired in upper margins of pp. 3-18, 25-28, 37-40, 47-54. Early 20th-century full dark red gilt-tooled crushed morocco, very slightly scuffed, spine in six gilt-tooled compartments with raised bands, Sassoon shelf mark (410) numbered in gilt in lower compartment, turn-ins gilt. Dimensions 197 x 130 mm.

An extremely popular lexicon among Middle Eastern Jews, *Al-murshid al-kafi* constitutes an important source for the study of "the history of Hebrew linguistic scholarship in the Middle Ages in general, and of Hebrew lexicography in particular" (Shy, 2005). Our manuscript's origins lie in the geographical and temporal vicinity of the work's author. Of the ten copies, all incomplete, of the updated version of *Al-murshid al-kafi* that are known to have survived, the present manuscript (together with TM 1431, on this site, once part of the same manuscript) is the only one held privately, and it serves as a valuable witness to the work's textual tradition.

PROVENANCE

1. While no colophon has been preserved, it is possible to approximately localize and date this manuscript on paleographical grounds to Egypt (or perhaps nearby Yemen) of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.
2. In a letter dated 9 Elul [5]673 (September 11, 1913), Rabbi Isaac Isaiah Dayan of Aleppo, a *mohel* (circumciser) and sometime antiquarian book dealer, offered David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942), one of the most prominent private collectors of Hebraica and Judaica of all time, a "fragment from a book by Rabbi Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi... 37 folios that discuss the roots of Mishnaic Hebrew in Arabic... Its price is £4." (Dayan appears to have miscounted the number of leaves.) On 14 Tishrei [56]74 (October 15, 1913), after some bargaining, including for four other books, Dayan lowered the total price by £1-10-0, but for reasons that are, as yet, unclear, Sassoon wound up paying £34 via Jacob Anzarut & Co., Manchester, to the account of Raphael

Daniel Levi & Co., Aleppo, on December 1, 1913. In any case, the manuscript thereafter entered Sassoon's London library under the shelf mark 410 (written on his bookplate on the upper board and numbered in gilt on the spine). (The price recorded in Sassoon's ledger is £3.) On June 11, 1914, he paid another £2 to have the volume bound at the British Museum.

3. Sassoon's family began selling books from his collection at Sotheby's in 1970. Our manuscript was offered as lot 86 on December 4, 1984, at Sotheby's New York.
4. The codex was put up for auction again twelve years later, this time at Sotheby's London, on June 18, 1996 (lot 42), when it was purchased by Martin Schøyen for his famous collection in Oslo and London and assigned the shelf mark 2195 (written on his bookplate on the lower board). It was thereafter exhibited, from July 29 through August 7, 1998, in the Faculty of Law Library, University of Oslo, in conjunction with the Sixteenth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT).

TEXT

pp. 1-76, [a portion of Rabbi Tanhum ben Joseph ha-Yerushalmi's *Al-murshid al-kafi*], incipit, "hatan o hesped... bein she-nir'eh ba-alil bein she-nir'eh she-lo."

Rabbi Moses Maimonides (also known as Rambam; 1138-1204) began compiling a Jewish legal code in about 1170. The work set out to assemble all the halakhic material scattered throughout the Mishnah, Tosefta, *midrashim*, and Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds into fourteen synthetic books, which were then subdivided into eighty-three treatises comprising a total of one thousand chapters. Rambam titled his project *Mishneh torah* (lit., Repetition of the Torah), "because a person will first read the Written Torah [Hebrew Bible] and later read this, and in that way he will know the entire Oral Torah without having to consult any other book in between."

Unlike Maimonides' other works, which were written in Judeo-Arabic, the *Mishneh torah* was composed in Mishnaic Hebrew. Its prestige derives not only from the authority of its compiler but from its comprehensiveness and its masterful, intuitive organization. Following its initial publication c. 1180, the *Mishneh torah* would go on to exert enormous influence on Jewish thought and practice, especially after Rabbis Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270-1340) and Joseph Caro (1488-1575) elected to use it as one of the foundations upon which they built their own vastly important halakhic codes, the *Arba'ah turim* and *Shulhan arukh*, respectively.

Rabbi Tanhum ben Joseph ha-Yerushalmi, a close adherent of Maimonides' teachings who passed away in Fustat (Old Cairo) in 1291, is best known on account of his rationally inclined Judeo-Arabic commentaries on the books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the present lexicographical work. *Al-murshid al-kafi* (The Sufficient Guide) is so named, according to the introduction, because "it is sufficient vis-à-vis that which was intentionally included herein, and it is a guide for that which was accidentally elided." The book was composed in lucid, exacting Judeo-Arabic for the benefit of those students of Rambam's *Mishneh torah* whose Mishnaic Hebrew was not fluent enough to easily understand his words or those of Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome's Talmudic-midrashic dictionary, *Sefer be-arukh*. (Copies of the latter work were

also apparently hard to come by in Rabbi Tanhum's environs and could be difficult to navigate.)

Al-murshid al-kafi demonstrates its author's wide-ranging knowledge of fields as diverse as musicology, astronomy, physics, optics, architecture, engineering, agriculture, botany, and zoology, as well as his deep familiarity with comparative Semitic philology and grammar. Its utility as a Mishnaic Hebrew dictionary and reference tool for understanding the *Mishneh torah* earned *Al-murshid al-kafi* great popularity among the Arabic-speaking communities of the Middle East, especially of Yemen, and it was copied, reworked, and epitomized in about 140 manuscripts and fragments that have come down to us (Tobi, 1991). As Hadassa Shy has argued (2005), toward the end of his life, Rabbi Tanhum himself prepared an updated version of the book, including corrections, expansions, and reformulations of the original, that has also survived, albeit in far fewer exemplars.

Our manuscript comprises a portion of an early copy of the updated version of *Al-murshid al-kafi* that, like the author's autograph in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, was originally divided into three parts: Part I covering the letters *alef* through *yod*, Part II the letters *kaf* through *ayin*, and Part III the letters *pe* through *tav*. The manuscript as it stands today contains four nearly complete consecutive quires from Part II, from the end of the root *s-p-d* through the middle of the root *a-l-l*. (The full manuscript likely originally contained about 1,400 pages.) On p. 15, for example, under the lemma *sefarad*, the author cites a passage from the *Mishneh torah*'s treatise on the laws of leavened and unleavened bread (5:7) that mentions this biblical toponym, among several others, and then goes on to define each of them in contemporary (medieval) terms: *shin'ar* (biblical Shinar) refers to Iraq, *tsarefat* (biblical Sarepta or Zarephath) to France, *sefarad* (biblical Sardis) to Andalusia, and *erets ha-tsevi* (lit., the dear land) to the Land of Israel, which is "the dearest of all lands" (Ezek. 20:6).

Due to its "highly faithful" readings, this manuscript was used by Hadassa Shy for her 2005 critical edition of the updated version of *Al-murshid al-kafi* in those places where the aforementioned autograph (and two other manuscripts) were either laconic or difficult to decipher. (Previous, partial editions of the original version had appeared in 1903 and 1961.) Remarkably, another portion of this very same manuscript, comprising 200 pages from all three parts of the book, was presented to David Solomon Sassoon as a gift by his dear friend Elkan Nathan Adler (1861-1946), another major London bibliophile, in January 1929, a bit over fifteen years after Sassoon had purchased the present portion. Adler had apparently acquired it from the antiquarian book dealer David Fränkel of Vienna (1876-1948), and it subsequently became MS Sassoon 1048 (see now TM 1431).

LITERATURE

Bacher, Wilhelm, ed. *Aus dem Wörterbuche Tanchum Jeruschalmi's*, Strasbourg, 1903.

Blau, Joshua, ed. *Ha-sifrut ha-aravit ha-yehudit—perakim nivharim*, pp. 249-261, Jerusalem, 1980.

Brisman, Shimeon. *History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances*, vol. 3:1, pp. 27-29, 162, 278, Hoboken, NJ, 2000.

Dana, Joseph. "Sefer 'ha-madrikh ha-maspik' (al-murshid al-kafi) le-r. tanhum ha-yerushalmi: sekirat mishpehot 18 kitvei-yad be-ot tav," *Lesbonenu* 36:1 (October 1971), pp. 14-27, at p. 15 (no. 9); *ibid.* 36:2-3 (January-April 1972), pp. 156-166.

Sassoon, David Solomon. *Obel Dawid: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library, London*, vol. 1, p. 492 (no. 410), Oxford and London, 1932.

Shy, Hadassa. "Al-murshid al-kafi le-r. tanhum ha-yerushalmi (mavo va-arakhim le-dugmah me-ot tav)," *Lesbonenu* 33:2-3 (January-April 1969), pp. 196-207; 33:4 (July 1969), pp. 280-296.

Shy, Hadassa, ed. and trans. *Al-murshid al-kafi [ba-madrikh ha-maspik]: millono shel tanhum ha-yerushalmi le-mishneh torah la-rambam*, esp. p. xxxi, Jerusalem, 2005.

Sotheby's. *A Further Ninety-Seven Highly Important Hebrew Manuscripts from the Collection Formed by the Late David Solomon Sassoon* | New York Tuesday, December 4, 1984, lot 86, New York, 1984.

Sotheby's. *Western Manuscripts and Miniatures* | London 18 June 1996, p. 50 (lot 42), London, 1996.

Tanhum ben Joseph ha-Yerushalmi. *Sefer al-murshid al-kafi [ba-madrikh ha-maspik]*, ed. and trans. by Baruch Toledano, vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1961.

Tobi, Yosef. "Tirgumim u-millonim araviyyim le-'mishneh torah' la-rambam," *Sefunot* 5 (20) (1991), pp. 203-222, at pp. 205-207.

Toledano, Baruch. "Rabbi tanhum ha-yerushalmi," *Sinai* 42:1-6 (Tishrei-Adar 1957-1958), pp. 339-355, at pp. 348-355.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Our MS (high-resolution color images)

<https://fgp.genizah.org/FgpFrames.aspx?mode=home>

FGP #s C295844-C295906

Our MS (digitized black-and-white microfilm)

[https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001348020205171/NLI#\\$FL51558059](https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001348020205171/NLI#$FL51558059)

Our MS (sample pages)

<https://www.schoyencollection.com/19-dictionaries-lexical-texts/ms-2195>

TM 1374