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**JOHANNES DE SACRO BOSCO, *Mar'eh ha-ofanim* [*Tractatus de Sphaera*],
translated by Solomon Avigdor, and JUDAH IBN TIBBON, attributed to, *Ruah Hen*
[*Spirit of Grace*]**

**In Hebrew, manuscript on paper
[northern Italy, second quarter of the fifteenth century]**

xxxv + 22 + iii folios (collation *i*¹² + *ii*¹⁰) on paper, paper size 209 x 151 mm., watermark (Briquet 14871, tête de boeuf à yeux, Brescia, 1434-1445), modern foliation in pencil, written in two Ashkenazic semi-cursive scripts in brown ink, 31-34 lines single column text throughout (justification 140 x 105 mm quire 1 and 140 x 100 mm quire 2), ruled in pencil, marginalia in hand of primary scribes throughout, hand notabene on 13r, **THREE ASTRONOMICAL ILLUSTRATIONS** on ff. 1v (105 x 105 mm.), 2v (40 x 40 mm.), and 10r (50 x 52 mm.), slight worming on spine edge, careful modern repairs to paper on spine edge and corners of f. 22, corners lightly soiled, first and final folios lightly soiled, original medieval quires sewn onto stubs as part of preservation. Bound in twentieth-century cloth on sturdy cardboard with morocco on spine and corners with modern heavy bonded paper used as flyleaves and pastedowns and gilt ornamentation with library catalogue on spine. Dimensions 220 x 185 mm.

First and only medieval Hebrew translation of Sacro Bosco's *Tractatus de Sphaera*, the fundamental work on astronomy and cosmography, extant in forty manuscripts and never edited in modern times. Comparative study of the forty Hebrew manuscripts and their Latin counterparts would be invaluable as an index to the interchange between the cultures in this important area of scientific scholarship. A second popular philosophical work, also lacking a modern addition, is bound with Sacro Bosco.

PROVENANCE

1. Made in Italy, probably in the North (watermarks are Brescia) although written by German scribes, likely emigres, perhaps for Mazliah Finzi, whose name appears on f. 22v and who may be identified with Mazliah ben Zacharias Finzi of Parma, for whom a prayerbook was copied in 1473 (Cod. Vatican Ross. 357). Mazliah is a name rarely found in Italy. Finzi is a well known family name in Italy.

2. Solomon Hayyim Halberstam (1832-1900), his MS 244, on front pastedown, and on f. 1r and 22v. Polish scholar and bibliophile, Solomon Halberstam was a wealthy and avid collector and scholar of Hebrew manuscripts, including codices from Luzzato's estate and Zunz's private library.
3. Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), his MS 424, stamped on spine and on front pastedown and written in pencil on f. 1r. Most famous English Jew of his time, Montefiore became a legend in his lifetime, fighting worldwide for the lives and rights of Jews. He founded after the death of his wife Judith Lady Montefiore a college in Ramsgate, which with the appointment of Haham Moses Gaster in 1887, acquired many manuscripts including the Halberstam Collection.
4. London, Jews' College, on deposit since 1899, as part of the Montefiore Endowment.

TEXT

Johannes de Sacro Bosco (died 1244 or 1256), also known as John of Holywood or Halifax, was a celebrated mathematician and astronomer, whose chief work, *Tractatus de Sphaera*, or the *Sphaera mundi*, became a fundamental medieval text on astronomy. Probably born in Halifax, Yorkshire, Johannes studied at Oxford and then in c. 1220 settled in Paris, where he spent the rest of his life. In c. 1223, he wrote the *Tractatus de Sphaera* based on Ptolemy and comprising chapters on the terrestrial globe, on circles, on the rising and setting of the stars, and on the orbits and movements of the planets. Thorndike calls the *Sphaera mundi* "the clearest, most elementary and most used text book in astronomy and cosmography from the 13th to the 17th century (*The Sphere of Sacrobosco*, 1949, p. 1). It became a required text at all major universities. He also wrote other texts on arithmetic, astronomy, and cosmography, including *Algorismus*, a text book on arithmetic.

This manuscript contains the first and only translation into Hebrew of the *Sphaera mundi*, which is by Solomon Avigdor, who was the son of the physician Abraham Avigdor, himself a translator from Latin to Hebrew and philosopher who lived in his native Arles and Montpellier. Solomon was born in 1378 according to one source and 1384 according to another. In addition to his translation of Sacrobosco's *Sphaera mundi*, he translated, together with his father, Arnaldus of Villanova's popular astrological work *De Judiciis astronomiae* in 1395. *Sphaera mundi* in this translation was published in Offenbach, 1720, and reprinted in facsimile several times in the twentieth century. It is extant in about 40 manuscripts and there are at least three commentaries on the work, extant in multiple manuscript copies, by Mattathias Delacrut (Poland early to mid sixteenth century, printed in the 1720 edition), Moses Almosnino (Salonika, early to mid sixteenth century) and Hayyim Lisker (1636).

Astronomy and medicine were the two scientific fields that Jews studied most intensely. Medicine was one of the fields that offered Jews occupation throughout the Middle Ages, and was a necessity in every community for obvious reasons. Astronomy was connected to establishing and understanding the Jewish calendar and, even though the Hebrew lunar calendar had been computed and set well before the Middle Ages, Jewish scholars continued to study astronomy. Jewish tradition encouraged the study of astronomy for theological reasons as well in order to understand and glorify the works of the Creator. In the early Middle Ages in the lands where Arabic was spoken and where science was most developed (Spain in particular) Jews read Arabic works. Later, when the Arabs were expelled from Europe and their intellectual activity declined, Jews in Spain and Provence who still knew Arabic translated the most popular or necessary works into Hebrew for their contemporaries who no longer understood Arabic. In the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries after the decline of Arabic scholarship, important works on astronomy were being written in Latin in Europe and Jewish interest in astronomy required translations into Hebrew as many of the Rabbis and intellectuals were not conversant in Latin. Steinschneider lists about fifteen astronomical works translated into Hebrew from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.

The second text contained in this manuscript, *Ruah Hen* (Spirit of Grace, from Zechariah 12: 10), was one of the most popularly studied philosophical texts in Hebrew. It is extant in over 100 manuscripts and was published at least eighteen times, three times in the sixteenth century. Copies of the work in manuscript were produced well into the eighteenth century. The attribution to Judah ibn Tibbon is doubtful. Different scholars suggest other medieval writers as its author. Judah ibn Tibbon (ca. 1120-1190) was born in Granada, where Arabic was the lingua franca, and moved to Provence. He translated many works of philosophy and grammar into Hebrew and was the scion of a family of three generations of translators from Arabic into Hebrew.

ILLUSTRATION

This manuscript includes three schematic diagrams illustrating the spheres and the climates (f. 10r). Further study, in comparison with the extensive Latin manuscript tradition, could well indicate what version the author-scribe followed.

LITERATURE

Hirschfeld, H. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Montefiore Library*, London, MacMillan, 1904 (reprint from *JQR*, 1902 and 1903), no. 424; see the separate catalogue of the Halberstam collection of 412 manuscripts published as *Qebillath Shelomoh*, Vienna, 1890, no. 244.

Steinschneider, M. *Hebraeische Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*, Berlin, Kommissionsverlag, 1893.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Latin editions of Sacro Bosco *Tractatus de Sphaera*

<http://ghc.ifi.unicamp.br/Sacrobosco/Sacrobosco-ed1.htm>

Paris 1478 edition

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/scripts/ConsultationTout.exe?O=N058736>