

THE HEBREW MANUSCRIPT
FROM “THE NEW FIND” IN THE
MONASTERY OF ST. CATHERINE
A Jewish Machzor

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ABSTRACT As a library of manuscripts from the ancient Middle East, the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai is second to none except that of the Vatican. In 1975, a new find of manuscripts was made in the monastery, including one Hebrew paper codex. In 1996 I visited the monastery for an examination of the manuscript, which turned out to be a Jewish Machzor. The script type is Sephardic and the watermarks indicate a date in the 16th century. The size of the codex is 157 x 110 mm and its 144 folios contain 279 pages with Hebrew or Aramaic texts. The codex contains a Jewish liturgy to Rosh Hashana and Jom Kippur together with 104 piyyutim, inserted in extenso. 21 of these are written by Moshe ibn Ezra from Granada, and at least one of the piyyutim – “God, save me by thy name” – is previously unknown.

In the year 1981 His Eminence Damianos, the Archbishop of the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, announced officially a new find of manuscripts in the monastery. The announcement was made at the 16th International Congress of Byzantinists in Vienna. Among the manuscripts mentioned by the archbishop was a Hebrew codex, without any further specifications. This new find of completely unknown manuscripts was made already in 1975 and came to be called “The new find”.

I visited the Monastery during a trip to Egypt 1994 and received permission by the Archbishop to see the library of manuscripts. At the same time a document photographer from Greece worked in the Monastery and while showing me the codices of the library he also informed me about the new find in 1975.

When I came home I wrote to Professor Panayotis Nicolopoulos, the director of the National Library of Greece in Athens. He functions as a scientific consultant for the Monastery in questions regarding the Library. Obviously the Greek manuscripts have been in the focus of interest and Nicolopoulos did not know anything further about the Hebrew manuscript. He advised me to write directly to the Archbishop in the Monastery about the newly found Hebrew manuscript and in spring 1996 he answered me. It turned out that Damianos had no further data about the manuscript except its language and that it was safely stored within the Monastery. He invited me to visit the monastery for a first examination, which I performed one week in May 1996.

BACKGROUND

Before I venture into a description of the codex it is pertinent to give a short background information about the Monastery of St. Catherine. For further details I refer to my article "The Monastery of St. Catherine and the New Find" in the *Festschrift* to Ebbe E. Knudsen 1997.

Despite its ecclesiastical character, the Monastery of St. Catherine is an important scientific institution in the field of Semitic philology. As a library of manuscripts from the ancient Middle East it is second to none except that of the Vatican.

Since its foundation some time in the middle of the 6th century,¹ the Monastery of St. Catherine, situated in the southern part of the Sinai peninsular, has been lucky enough to enjoy an unbroken tradition. It has never been robbed, never plundered, and this is partly due to its isolated position in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, partly because it has been respected by both Christians and Muslims.

Before 1975 the Monastery possessed 3329 manuscripts in 12 languages:²

- 2319 Greek MSS.³
- 696 Arabic (all Christian, mostly liturgical and patristic) MSS, of which 36 were missing in 1949, 59 actually are printed books, and one is in Persian, which means the Arabic MSS are 600 in number.⁴
- 266 Syriac MSS.⁵
- 3 Christian Palestinian Aramaic MSS.
- 6 Ethiopic MSS.
- 1 Persian MS, in earlier lists mistakenly held as Arabic.⁶
- 1 Latin MS, a 10th century Psalter.
- 86 Georgian MSS.⁷
- 1 Armenian MSS.
- 1 Coptic MSS.
- 42 Slavonic MSS.⁸
- 1 Polish MS.⁹

The age of the MSS varies from the 4th Century to modern times. The most famous is Codex Sinaiticus, dated to the middle of the 4th century and one of the most important text witnesses to the Septuagint. The greater part of this manuscript was discovered in 1844 by the German scholar K. Tischendorff and subsequently in 1859 during obscure circumstances transferred by him to Russia and presented to the Tsar. Later it was sold to the British Museum.¹⁰ Happily, in the new find 1975, a few new pages of Codex Sinaiticus were discovered, complementing missing pages in the British Museum codex. The memory of this theft and other examples of improper behaviour by scholars has caused the Fathers of the Monastery to exercise extreme cautiousness in showing their treasures to foreigners. Visitors are normally not allowed to see the library at all. Only with special permission from the Abbot, who bears the title Archbishop, it is possible for a scholar to examine a manuscript, and in such a case only in the presence of one of the Fathers.

In the New find in 1975 a store room of ancient manuscripts was discovered at St. Catherine's Monastery, in the northern Justinian wall. At some time in the history of the Monastery this storeroom

had been blocked up and forgotten. The room contained more than 70 boxes of discarded fragments.¹¹ During repairs in an old section of the northern Justinian wall, building workers demolished a wall and unexpectedly discovered a little room which appeared to be a storeroom full of chests. When the chests were opened they turned out to be filled with papyri, parchment manuscripts, and very old written documents of all kinds.¹² Some of the finds lay right in the dust, detached leaves, torn fragments, rollers of scrolls, bindings unstuck from their codex, and so on.¹³ This state of decay also characterizes the Hebrew manuscript.

A third of the New find turned out to be complete codices and there were no less than 120 scrolls. The dates range from the 4th to the 18th century. Most sensationally, there were also some leaves in the store-room of the already mentioned Codex Sinaiticus, and also some leaves of a 9th century manuscript with the first five books of the Iliad. The new find also turned out to contain a large number of papyri in addition to the old collection of papyri containing 42 text and 12 fragments. It added once in a while 83 texts and 10 fragments. Most of these new papyri are in Greek and Latin, some as early as the 6th century, contemporary with the foundation of the Monastery.¹⁴ The find also contained 1148 handwritten codices, of which 836 were Greek manuscripts and 155 Arabic MSS. In addition there were some Syriac, Slavonic, and Armenian MSS, 2 Latin MSS, 2 Ethiopian, and 1 Hebrew (!). Most of the manuscripts are Christian texts, biblical texts, liturgical texts, prayer books, and so on.¹⁵ Only the Hebrew manuscript was non-Christian. It is the only Hebrew manuscript in the Monastery and the only one with roots in the Jewish Synagogue Service.

THE CODEX

When I visited the Monastery in 1996, the Hebrew MS I encountered for the first time turned out to be a medieval paper codex with 144 folio leaves. 279 pages contained Hebrew or Aramaic texts. During my week in the Monastery I performed a pagination of the

codex. The script type is Sephardic of the semi-cursive (Mashait) mode. This means that the manuscript has probably been written in Spain or the Maghrib, or possibly in southern Italy. A check in Birnbaum, *The Hebrew Scripts*,¹⁶ which I brought with me, indicated that the script is very similar to that in a Hebrew manuscript in Toledo from 1366 (Birnbaum, no. 251).¹⁷ However, the watermarks indicate a later dating. I have identified most of the watermarks in the paper with the help of the standard work of Briquet, *Les filigranes; dictionnaire historique des marques du papier* (Geneva, 1907). The watermarks indicate a date rather in the 16th century. I am not an expert of medieval codices nor of early paper production, so the dating is indeed preliminary. The codex is damaged by mice or insects,¹⁸ but the preserved text is otherwise generally readable, often beautiful. There is no title page, nor a colophon which could indicate a date and place of origin. The text on the first page begins abruptly. This together with the fact that the binding is in a bad state makes it likely that the codex once contained more leaves. The size of the codex is 157 x 110 mm (H x W). The first 45 folio are damaged by a hole in the middle of the page. Mice and insects have also damaged a large part of text close to the inner margin. The latter damage has affected nearly all folios. In addition there is a hole at the outer margin affecting the last 11 folio. The outer margin is usually about 20 mm, the inner margin about 15 mm, the top margin 18 mm, and the bottom margin about 36 mm.

The quality of the script varies throughout the MS. A folio page generally contains 15–16 lines, but there are pages with 25 lines and considerably smaller script. We may compare the script in the codex with the aforementioned no. 251 of Sephardic script in Birnbaum's standard work.

Birnbaum no. 251:

ק	ר	א	ט	פ
י	װ	ן	ם	ן
ם	ן	ן	ן	ן
ן	ן	ן	ן	ן
ן	ן	ן	ן	ן

Note the characteristic form of the Sephardic κ . Other characteristics are the forms of the letters ψ , π and λ . It is easy for an unexperienced reader to confuse π with ρ . A comparison with Birnbaum's sample letters indicates that the script of the codex deviates in a few points. The short upper slanting in κ is shorter and less marked, the final *nun* has an upper stroke to the left and not to the right, and in ψ the slanting stroke begins higher up. \beth and \daleth are easily confused. Note also the ligature of $\beth\kappa$. The earliest example of such a ligature is found in a MS with square script in Egypt from the 8th century.¹⁹ The emergence of this ligature is due to the writing of Arabic with Hebrew characters, a habit that began among Jews in Spain after the Muslim conquest in al-Andalus. In order to spare time and space the Jews began to write the Arabic definite article 'al-' as a combination of the Hebrew letters *alef* and *lamed* (\beth). The habit of using such a ligature was never adopted by the Muslims. Later on, the ligature came to be used in all Arabic words containing the sequence $\beth\kappa$ not only for the Arabic definite article. Finally, the ligature came to be used also in Hebrew texts as in this codex.

As far as dating is concerned the script only is an unreliable indicator. Watermarks in the paper indicate the producer of the paper and thus an identified watermark offers a first possible date of the manuscript. During my stay in the Monastery I examined the watermarks and tried to copy them by free hand. Unfortunately I had no special equipment for reproducing the watermarks, like beta-radiography. This is a task that still waits to be done. The number of different watermarks at least indicates that the codex was produced of paper from several different producers. Even the varying quality of the paper indicates this. One of the most common watermarks is similar to Briquet nr. 3465, viz. a hat. This watermark is dated to 1536 and a paper producer in Italy (Venice or Bologna). It should be pointed out that no watermark is complete on one and the same folio since the original sheet was folded several times before binding of the codex. Another common watermark represents a hand with fingers stretched upwards towards a flower, like Briquet nr. 10718, the paper of which is dated to about 1500.²⁰

Parts of this hand are found on folios 74, 75, 87,²¹ 94, 95, 98, 99, 100, 114. Another common watermark is an anchor on a coat of arms, as no. 469 in Briquet, dated to 1512, a paper produced in Bologna. A dating to the 16th century has been confirmed to me by one of the world's leading experts on Medieval Hebrew manuscripts, Professor Malachi Beit-Arié in Jerusalem.

The binding of the codex has been performed by folding of larger sheets of paper, sewing and glueing the folded sheets together in the back. The number of folio for each sheet is puzzling. I examined the binding carefully and arrived at the following statistics:

<i>Sheet nr.</i>	<i>Number of folios</i>	<i>Pages</i>
1	23	1r-23v
2	22	24r-45v
3	17	46r-62v
4	21	63r-83v
5	18	84r-101v
6	20	102r-121v
7	23	122r-144v

I am not a codicologist and cannot presently explain these numbers. It might be that the codex has been produced from discarded paper material. This would help explain why we find uneven number of leaves in some sheets. The technique of folding larger sheets to quires should logically produce quires with an even number of folios. As already stated, the codex has no title page, no preface, and no colophon. There are no covers. The binding in the back is in a bad state of preservation. The folios are often very loose.

THE CONTENT OF THE CODEX

The codex contains a Jewish, probably Sephardic liturgy to Rosh Hashana and Jom Kippur. In this seder piyyutim are inserted in

extenso. Among the authors of the piyyutim the dominating figure is Moshe ibn Ezra (also known as Abu Hārūn), a poet from Granada in Andalusia, who lived about 1055–1135. Other known authors of piyyutim in the codex are Isaac ben Levi ibn Mar Saul, Jehuda Halevi, Abraham ibn Ezra, David ibn Bekoda, Hay Gaon (d. 1038), Solomon ibn Gabirol, Joseph ben Avitur, Yose ben Yose, Isaac ben Judah ibn Ghayyat, Isaac ibn Israel, Jehuda ibn Abbas, Israel Najara. I have so far identified 21 pious poems or piyyutim by Moshe ibn Ezra. There are more than 83 other piyyutim, which makes the codex a considerable collection of Medieval Jewish religious poetry. At least one of the piyyutim is previously unknown,²² “God, save me by thy name”, 9v8 – 10r5:²³

אהים בשמך הושיעני
 ביום אקראך' מהר ענני
 ריבה ריבי וגאלני
 שמרה נפשי והצילני"
 להודות לשמך אהי קמתי'
 ועל[.....]ל[הודות...]תי
 כי אחרי שובי נחמת[י]
 [".....]
 שמרה נפשי והצילני"
 עול עמך [.....] וסיף עליו
 משא כ[.....]ם עבד'
 מאיש חמסי[.....]
 [.....] בריתך ורחם [..]
 [..] וע מפעלי'
 הט אונך לי ותאזין [..]
 [.....] די' א תגמלני"
 שמרה נפשי והצילני"
 רחם [.....] פזורה'
 וקבץ נפוצים'
 לבית [.....] ראו עיני'
 יום הבשורה' בחצי ימי'
 [".....]
 שמרה נפשי והצילני"

The core of the text in the codex is the Jewish liturgy of the two festivals that are commonly called *Yāmīn nōrā'im*. The text contains a lot of additions that seem to be relatively late compared with the critical text of the Jewish siddur found in e.g. Goldschmidt's edition (1970), but also compared with the early *Seder Amram Gaon*, edited by David Hedegård (1951), Tryggve Kronholm (1974) and Goldschmidt (1970). The liturgy exhibits Sephardic characteristics like the words underlined from 2118–11:

אין עוד "אוחילה לאל אחלה פניו אש ה ממנו	24 8
מענה לשון אשר בקהל עם אשיר עוו	9
אביעה רנות בעד מפעליו ככתוב לאדם	10
מערכי לב ומיי >מענה לשון ונאמן יי< שפתי	11

NOTES

1. Late in the life of emperor Justinianus, between 548–565, cf. Galey (1980), 12 f.
2. The numbers that follow are taken from Kamil (1970), unless otherwise stated.
3. Kamil (1970), 60; Clark (1952), VII, mentions 2291.
4. Clark (1952), VII. Kamil (1970), 7, 52, numbers 601 items.
5. Clark (1952), VIII, numbers 257. Kamil (1970), 149, 160, says 266. Manafis (1990), 393 note 1, adduces 270 Syriac MSS.
6. Kamil (1970), 145. From 1470 AD
7. Clark (1952), VIII. Kamil (1970), 56.
8. Thus Kamil (1970), 147. Clark (1952), VII, says 40, but Kamil discovered some new items.
9. Kamil (1970), 146. From the 18th century.
10. Catalog number B. Mus. Add. 43725.
11. Including eight more pages of Codex Sinaiticus, the famous Bible manuscript in Greek, which proves that from the time of the Monastery's founding books were given to it antedating the time of Justinian. Charlesworth (1981).
12. Charlesworth (1981), 1.
13. Manafis (1990), 354.
14. Manafis (1990), 356.
15. Damianos (1982). I am indebted to Professor Lennart Rydén, Uppsala, who kindly translated the document to me.
16. Birnbaum (1971), 267 ff., Birnbaum (1954–57), no. 251.

17. Birnbaum (1954–1971), no. 251.
18. This is the supposition of the Fathers in the Monastery.
19. Birnbaum (1971), 225.
20. No. 10718 (1499–1500).
21. As e.g. Briquet no. 10709 (1478), paper produced in Rhodes.
22. Confirmed by an expert of Jewish religious poetry in Jerusalem, Dr. Nahum Weisenstern. I thank Prof. Malachi Beit-Arié for this report.
23. Folio page 9 verso line 8 to page 10 recto line 5. The codex has been paginated by me. Translation of the first line: "God, save me by thy name! When I cry to you, answer me quickly. Defend me and redeem me. Keep my soul and save me, that I may praise your name, o God that keeps me standing. [...] for after my repentance I have got consolation. [...] Keep my soul and save me."
24. SRA (Goldschmidt), 142, remarks that *לא אל אודילה לאל אודילה פניו* is read in Sefarad.

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