

Ingrid Kaufmann

# **The *Pillars of Exile* by R. Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil: The *Small Book of Commandments* in Codex hebraicus 17, State and University Library Hamburg**

**Abstract:** Cod. hebr. 17 contains an opulently decorated copy of *Sefer Miṣvot Qatan* (*SeMaQ*) and is a typical 14<sup>th</sup>-century Ashkenazic manuscript from the German area of Europe. This is shown by the workmanship of the parchment, the structure of the quires and the script that was used. The text also contains references to the German origin of the manuscript. The separate listing of the commandment ‘To bind *tefillin* on the head’ emphasises the practice among German Jews of saying two blessings while putting on their *tefillin*.

This manuscript is a commissioned work written and decorated by a professional scribe. Although he strived to give the book a homogeneous appearance overall, there is a radical change of page layout from fol. 227r onwards. By adding new columns, the existing comments became more visible. Consequently, *SeMaQ* now resembles a commentary volume inspired by Latin manuscripts. This change ‘modernised’ the book and improved its function, taking into account that the existing aesthetic concept had to be abandoned.

## **1 The *Small Book of Commandments* by Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil**

### **1.1 Its origin, circulation, purpose and contents**

Three years before he died, R. Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil (d. in 1280) wrote the halakhic work עמודי גולה (*Amude Gola*, or *Pillars of Exile*).<sup>1</sup> This book is an abridged and simplified version of the ספר מצות גדול (*Sefer Miṣvot Gadol*), i.e. the *Great Book of Commandments* written by Moshe ben Ya‘aqov of Coucy, which in turn was influenced by Maimonides’ *Mishne Tora*. Over the course of time, R. Yiṣḥaq’s work came to be known as סמ"ק (*SeMaQ*), an acronym standing for ספר מצות קטן

---

<sup>1</sup> Emanuel 2006, 198.

(*Sefer Mišvot Qatan*, the *Small Book of Commandments*), to distinguish it from the book written by Moshe of Coucy.<sup>2</sup> Unlike earlier works of this kind, *SeMaQ* does not contain a list of all 613 commandments found in Judaism, but only lists those that need to be followed in the Jewish diaspora. Since the commandments on sacrifices and cleanliness relating to worship at the Temple are no longer mentioned, *SeMaQ* only contains between 220 and 330 positive and negative commandments, depending on which copy of the manuscript one refers to.

Nowadays, around 230 manuscripts and fragments of *SeMaQ* can be found in libraries, archives and private collections around the world. In view of all the copies made of it, it has rightly been called a ‘mediaeval best-seller’.<sup>3</sup> The wide success of his work was exactly what Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil had intended as he deliberately promoted *SeMaQ*. In writing such a book, he wanted to improve his fellow Jews’ knowledge of Halakha and strengthen their devout belief in God. Like R. Moshe of Coucy, R. Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil was also influenced by the *ḥaside ashkenaz*, i.e. the pietists who were active in Germany at the time. This is particularly clear in his notions of remorse and repentance, but can also be seen in his views on how Jews ought to behave towards Gentiles.<sup>4</sup> R. Yiṣḥaq created a conservative work that was cleansed of elements that contrasted starkly with his notions of Halakha as a body of practical religious laws, or as Haym Soloveitchik writes:

[...] eliminating all dialectic and any Maimonidean traces, Rabbi Isaac penned the definitive handbook of French halakhic practice.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike its predecessor the *Great Book of Commandments* or Maimonides’ *Mishne Tora*, *SeMaQ* was not intended for a learned audience, but for a broader range of ‘middle-class’ readers that had developed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – people who had received enough education to be able to understand simple halakhic texts, but who had not had the opportunity to study the Talmud and *tosafot* (mediaeval explanations and critical commentaries on the Talmud) in any great detail.<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of Aggadah texts and moral anecdotes was meant to capture the attention of less learned readers. In his open letter to the French and German commu-

<sup>2</sup> I shall largely refer to the more popular term *SeMaQ* in this paper, seeing as the title ‘*Amude Gola*’ is hardly used in practice, cf. Soloveitchik 2005, 41, n. 12.

<sup>3</sup> As Judah D. Galinsky said in a lecture entitled ‘The Pillars of Exile (*Semak*) of R. Isaac of Corbeil – a Medieval Best Seller’ held at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University, in February 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Kanarfogel 1997, 209.

<sup>5</sup> Soloveitchik 1998, 75.

<sup>6</sup> Galinsky 2009, minute 1:33:00 to 1:40:10.

nities, which is a standard part of many *SeMaQ* manuscripts these days, we learn what intentions R. Yiṣḥaq pursued with his work and about the unique way in which he went about promoting his book:<sup>7</sup>

Every leader of a synagogue in every town and city is commanded to make a written copy of these *mišvot* [...] and anyone who wishes to make a copy of it or learn from it is to be lent it [...].

And if a delegate [from another community] needs to stay in town for a while in order to copy the *mišvot*, they should pay him six small Turnose a day and provide him with board and lodging as well [...].<sup>8</sup>

R. Yiṣḥaq specifically addressed women in his open letter as well as men:

Accuracy when reading and studying them [the *mišvot*] is just as useful for them [i.e. women] as study is for men. [...].<sup>9</sup>

R. Yiṣḥaq's wishes regarding the circulation of *SeMaQ* were largely taken into account, particularly in Ashkenaz. In the German-speaking part of Europe, it was R. Me'ir of Rothenburg (d. in 1293) who helped disseminate the work. He told his students to write down everything that was 'true and enduring, correct and valid' in this book.<sup>10</sup>

It was R. Yiṣḥaq's wish that the texts in *SeMaQ* should be read and memorised every day. This objective also influenced the way he structured the book. R. Yiṣḥaq writes the following about this point:

Since our teachings are being forgotten in this day and age and I fear that most people today are unfamiliar with the explanations of the *mišvot* imposed upon us, I have written down the *mišvot* that are imposed upon us nowadays [in the form of] seven pillars corresponding to the seven days of the week. And I ask each and every person to read a pillar a day so they can profit from it [...].<sup>11</sup>

There are further sub-divisions within the individual chapters, which vary from one chapter to the next. Various principles are used parallel to each other when it comes to ordering the subject matter: a distinction is generally made between all the commandments by putting the positive ones at the beginning of a chapter or passage, for example. This principle is not adhered to consistently, however.

---

<sup>7</sup> Urbach 1980, 572–573.

<sup>8</sup> Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil 1935. On the CD *Responsa Project*, Bar Ilan, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Urbach 1980, 573 and Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil 1509, fol. 1v.

<sup>11</sup> Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil *Responsa Project*, 2007.

It was not just logical criteria that were paramount in structuring *SeMaQ*, but associations and feelings as well, albeit to a lesser extent. This can be seen in the way the author divided his work into meaningful units – not only do the seven chapters correspond to the days of the week, but they also represent the first six commandments of the Decalogue:

**Sunday** – *[First Commandment: ‘I am the Lord, thy God’]*<sup>12</sup>

*Miṣvot* on the heart

*Miṣvot* on the ears

*Miṣvot* on the eyes, including *miṣvot* on making clothes (emphasised)

**Monday** – *Second Commandment: ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me’*

*Miṣvot* on the human body [as a whole]

**Tuesday** – *Third Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image’*

*Miṣvot* on the mouth (which include prohibiting magical spells, which are mostly said out loud)

**Wednesday** – *Fourth Commandment: ‘Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy’*

*Miṣvot* on the hands

**Thursday** – *Fifth Commandment: ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’*

*Miṣvot* on food (since one is morally obliged to feed one’s parents) and the rule on complying with the principles of law

**Friday** – *Sixth Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill’*

*Miṣvot* on money (since most murders occur because of money)

**Saturday** – (*Shabbat*)

[*Miṣvot* on Shabbat and sexuality]<sup>13</sup>

The structure of *SeMaQ* is rather difficult for readers to follow today. The commandments are not arranged as a list of topics based on subject areas, but on the human body and activities associated with its parts. The prohibitions concerning idolatry are not only found in the second chapter, for instance, which is about the

---

<sup>12</sup> Surtitles were not added to this chapter, but one may assume that the First Commandment is meant here on the basis of section 1 and the names of the other chapters.

<sup>13</sup> A title at the top is also missing in this case.

human body as a whole, but appear throughout the work in the various chapters and sections of it relating to the specific part of the body being dealt with. In the first chapter, the following prohibitions are listed among the *mišvot* on the heart: ‘Not to *fear* the words of false prophets’ and ‘Not to *love* an instigator [who calls on people to believe in other gods]’. In the section on *mišvot* on the ears, it then says one should not *listen* to anything an instigator says, nor should one *listen* to anyone who prophesies in the name of an idol. In the section on the commandments on the eyes, there is a negative commandment about merely *looking at* graven images. In the section on the commandments on the human body in the second chapter, there is a ‘positive’ commandment that calls upon the reader to destroy any altars, memorials and instruments relating to idolatry. The negative commandments include setting up idols to worship, worshipping them and profiting from idolatry. The chapter ends with a prohibition on redeeming an instigator. In the third chapter, the commandments on the mouth include one that says not to *prophecy* in the name of an idol or *speak* in an instigator’s favour. What’s more, anyone who does speak out for an instigator should be *contradicted*. In the fourth chapter, which lists commandments on the hands, the reader is told not to *make* and *erect or set up* any statues or images.

*SeMaQ* was not designed to be used as a reference work, however; its structure is not a thematic one, but more of an ‘organic’, ‘corporeal’ one in nature. This kind of order may have served mediaeval readers as a sort of *aide mémoire* since the way in which the commandments have been associated with the human body makes them easier to visualise and recall. This type of imagery can be invoked even if you don’t happen to have a copy of the actual book at hand and only hear someone talking about the commandments.

## 1.2 The creation of different versions of *SeMaQ*

The brevity of the commandments and the absence of any named sources and explanations did not always make *SeMaQ* easy to follow. Very early on (possibly while R. Yišḥaq was still alive), a student of his called Pereš ben Eliyahu of Corbeil (d. between 1297 and 1299)<sup>14</sup> consequently added some explanatory glosses to the work. These soon came to be regarded as an integral part of *SeMaQ* and are included in all but one of the manuscripts and printed editions of it that have survived. The oldest dated manuscript of *SeMaQ* is part of what is known as the *North French Hebrew Miscellany* (London, British Library, Add. 11639, fols 546v–

---

<sup>14</sup> Richler 1979/80, 58.

640r) and was created in 1279/80 while R. Yiṣḥaq was still alive. This particular manuscript does not contain any notes by R. Pereš whatsoever and has considerably fewer commandments in it than later editions of the work do. R. Yiṣḥaq's open letter, which was added to many editions of *SeMaQ*, is not included in it either. However, this version of the *North French Hebrew Miscellany* corresponds to many of the later codices in terms of its structure.

Minor differences started appearing in the manuscripts very early on and are not only due to copyists' mistakes. These early inconsistencies may, in fact, have something to do with the way in which *SeMaQ* was transmitted. In his open letter, R. Yiṣḥaq explicitly warned the reader not to teach directly from his book without taking a critical look at the texts in question first.<sup>15</sup> These words of caution reveal that he assumed his work was also going to be used for the purpose of oral instruction. It is also possible that his student R. Pereš taught a group of his own students using the book and added comments on the text, thus creating slightly different copies of it as his teaching evolved.

As Israel Ta-Shema has pointed out, in the Middle Ages, Hebrew books were not regarded as finished products by their authors, but were merely felt to represent the interim state of their findings and opinions at the time of writing.<sup>16</sup>

I have noticed that the first chapter of *SeMaQ* hardly varies at all from one copy to the next. It may have been that this first part was thought to be completely finished and was therefore used as an 'authorised' booklet by itself, as it were, whereas the subsequent parts, which the students of Jewish scholars were already familiar with, were still in the process of being finalised.

The rare dated manuscripts of *SeMaQ* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century that have managed to survive along with the manuscripts included in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany* were much longer than the latter. Different versions of *SeMaQ* started to appear quite early and were copied independently of one another during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, producing even more variations on the theme. While the version of *SeMaQ* that is included in the *North French Hebrew Miscellany* and most other manuscripts ends with a negative commandment on sexuality (שלא לבא על אשה), additional prohibitions concerning sexuality and the sexual partners one may not have were added to some manuscripts. The contents added to *SeMaQ* caused the work to grow in size, but this expansion did not take place linearly over the course of time; rather, it seems that various exemplars of it with differing contents were made at a very early stage – differences in the order in which the positive and

<sup>15</sup> Spiegel 2005, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Ta-Shema 1993, 17. See Beit-Arié 1993, 50–51 as well.

negative commandments were written are apparent in copies of *SeMaQ* from as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One such example is a manuscript now kept at the Royal Library in Copenhagen (Det Kongelige Bibliotek), which must have been produced at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century judging from its codicological features.<sup>17</sup>

One of the characteristic features that many *SeMaQ* manuscripts have is that they contain comments and notes. These also differ widely from copy to copy. When the Jerusalem-born scholar R. Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulai undertook a journey through Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he had the opportunity to look at various *SeMaQ* manuscripts while he was travelling. He noticed that the Ashkenazic manuscripts in particular contained glosses that were unique, having no equivalent in any of the other manuscripts.<sup>18</sup> A manuscript known as the *Zurich SeMaQ* (הסמ"ק מצוריד) contains a particularly large number of comments. This work was compiled in Zurich in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and around 15 copies of it still exist today. R. Moshe of Zurich quoted from the Talmudim in it, added whole passages of text from *Sefer Mišvot Gadol* by Moshe of Coucy, drew on mediaeval authorities like R. Yiṣḥaq ben Ya‘aqov Alfasi (1013–1103) and Rashi (R. Shlomo ben Yiṣḥaq, 1040–1105), and also drew on more recent works such as those by Mordekhai ben Hillel ha-Cohen (1240?–1298), the *Tashbeṣ* by Shmshon ben Šadoq and the halakhic compendium *Sefer Kol Bo* (which literally means ‘everything [is] in it’), written at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The commandments listed in many manuscripts of the *Zurich SeMaQ* also vary slightly in terms of their order. For example, לקדש השם (‘Sanctifying God’s name’) and לידבק בשם (‘Cleaving to the name of God’), both of which usually appear in chapter 2, precede it here and even take up a prominent position in the first chapter.<sup>19</sup>

In 1509, the first printed edition appeared in Constantinople bearing the title *Sefer ‘Amude Gola*, and in 1556 another edition was published in Cremona, which

<sup>17</sup> Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Hebr. Add. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Azulai, Ḥayyim Yosef David 1843, 204.

<sup>19</sup> They form the sixth and seventh commandment respectively in the work. I know of the following examples that are in this order: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek (Preußischer Kulturbesitz) Ms. or. quart. 3; London, British Library Add. 18684; Parma, Biblioteca Palatina Cod. Parm. 3158; Oxford, Bodleian Library Opp. 341 and Opp. Add. fol. 40. Besides these, the Hamburg *SeMaQ* manuscript known as Cod. hebr. 89 also follows this order. In my essay (Kaufmann 2011, 53), I have denied the claim that Cod. hebr. 89 is a *Zurich SeMaQ*. A careful look at the manuscript has shown that it may actually be a defective copy of one. Since the edges of the book have been trimmed very closely, one can hardly tell if the glosses that R. Moses of Zurich once added are all there. A few remnants of his glosses are faintly visible at the edges of some of the leaves, but that is all. If the date stated in the bill of divorce (1343) can be believed, this manuscript could possibly be the oldest surviving copy of the *Zurich SeMaQ* of its kind. A closer examination of it is definitely called for if that is the case.

contained individual glosses written by R. Moshe of Zurich. *SeMaQ* started to lose some of its influence when the *Shulkhan Aruch* was printed, however (Venice, 1565). Admittedly, the Cremona edition was reprinted again and again, but even so, it did not circulate as widely as *SeMaQ* had done in the Middle Ages.

### 1.3 The current state of research

The version of *SeMaQ* that Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil originally wrote has been used as a primary source of knowledge on the history of mediaeval Jewish mentality and law ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moritz Güdemann found clues in *SeMaQ* about the life and ethical thinking of mediaeval Jews, for example.<sup>20</sup>

Even now, *SeMaQ* is still an important source of information to researchers interested in the history of Halakha and the mystical world of the Ashkenazic community. Ephraim Kanarfogel has demonstrated that *SeMaQ* was influenced by the pietistic thinking of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*.<sup>21</sup> The *Zurich SeMaQ*, which was printed for the very first time in 1973,<sup>22</sup> caught the attention of academic researchers soon after and came to be cited in papers on the subject of voluntary martyrdom in Ashkenaz written by Haym Soloveitchik,<sup>23</sup> David Malkiel<sup>24</sup> and Abraham Gross.<sup>25</sup> These studies would hardly have been undertaken if Ephraim Urbach's book on the Tosafists had not appeared in 1955 and then become a standard reference work. He presented *SeMaQ* in its contemporary intellectual context and provided an outline of its contents and purpose.<sup>26</sup> Since Urbach's book only covers the Tosafist period up to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the subsequent development of *SeMaQ* manuscripts only received marginal treatment.<sup>27</sup>

Israel Ta-Shema, who wrote the article about Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*,<sup>28</sup> was a scholar who was highly familiar with *SeMaQ*, a fact that is also apparent in his introduction to the new edition of קיצור הסמ"ג (*Qišsur*

20 Güdemann 1880, 80–91.

21 Kanarfogel 1997 and Kanarfogel 2000, 81–92.

22 Har-Shoshanim-Rosenberg 1980–1988.

23 Soloveitchik 1987 and Soloveitchik 2004.

24 Malkiel 2001.

25 Gross 2004.

26 Urbach 1980, 571–575.

27 Urbach 1980 574–575; see Ta-Shema 2004, 17 on this point.

28 Ta-Shema 2007.



*Sefer Mišvot Gadol*).<sup>29</sup> However, he did not write anything that specifically focused on *SeMaQ*.

Ta-Shema's investigations of Tosafist book culture were continued by Simcha Emanuel, who also took a close look at the decisions made by R. Yiṣḥaq and R. Pereš of Corbeil, thereby taking individual *SeMaQ* manuscripts into account.<sup>30</sup> In an essay published in 2012/13, Emanuel partly addressed changes to the language used in the work, which copyists had made as they copied *SeMaQ*.<sup>31</sup>

One scholar who has looked at *SeMaQ* and its mediaeval readership in particular detail is Judah D. Galinsky. He has focused on it repeatedly in the many talks and lectures he has held in recent years: at the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 2009,<sup>32</sup> at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 2011<sup>33</sup> and at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in 2013, for example.<sup>34</sup>

Very few *SeMaQ* manuscripts have been designed in an artistic way, which is why practically no studies of it have been conducted by art historians so far. Sarit Shalev-Eyni's study of Jewish book illumination in the region around Lake Constance is an exception to this rule.<sup>35</sup> In her investigation, she shows that Jews and Christians must have worked together closely to create Hebrew manuscripts of artistic value. To illustrate this point, the author presents a *SeMaQ* manuscript that is now kept in Vienna,<sup>36</sup> the illuminations of which bear a close stylistic similarity to book illumination in the Gothic *Gradual of St Katharinental* which was produced in this Dominican nunnery in Switzerland.

## 2 Codex hebraicus 17

### 2.1 Date and place of completion

According to the information in the colophon on fol. 279r, the manuscript was completed on 14 *marḥeshwan* 5078 (21 October 1317) for R. Yehuda, son of

---

<sup>29</sup> Abridged version of *SeMaG* by R. Avraham bar Efrayim, Ta-Shema 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Emanuel 2006, 198–205.

<sup>31</sup> Emanuel 2012/2013, 444–445.

<sup>32</sup> Galinsky 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Galinsky 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Freud Kandel/Ferziger 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Shalev-Eyni 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. Hebr. 75.

R. Avraham, the scholar (Fig. 1).<sup>37</sup> Although the colophon gives no indication of where the text was written, the sample form for the divorce document, or גט (*get*), on fol. 218r does provide some information which helps us to localise the manuscript: כאן בוורמשה מתא דיתא על נהר ריניוס ('Here in Worms on the River Rhine'). The divorce document is dated 25 av 5077 (12 August 1317).

The place names and dates mentioned in the divorce documents which are attached to *SeMaQ* manuscripts should be treated with caution, however: the date marked by the scribe in a completed copy was not necessarily the current date, just as the place of copying was not always his home town. Divorce documents of older manuscripts were often included along with the dates and place names stated in them. This is especially true in cases where the documents were deliberately not modified out of respect for a person of authority. The mention of a place name such as Corbeil or Paris is therefore of little use with regard to localising a manuscript. Since there are only two months between the date of the divorce document and the completion date in Cod. hebr. 17, though, it is reasonable to assume that the date entered by the scribe was, in fact, the current date and that he had close connections to the town of Worms.

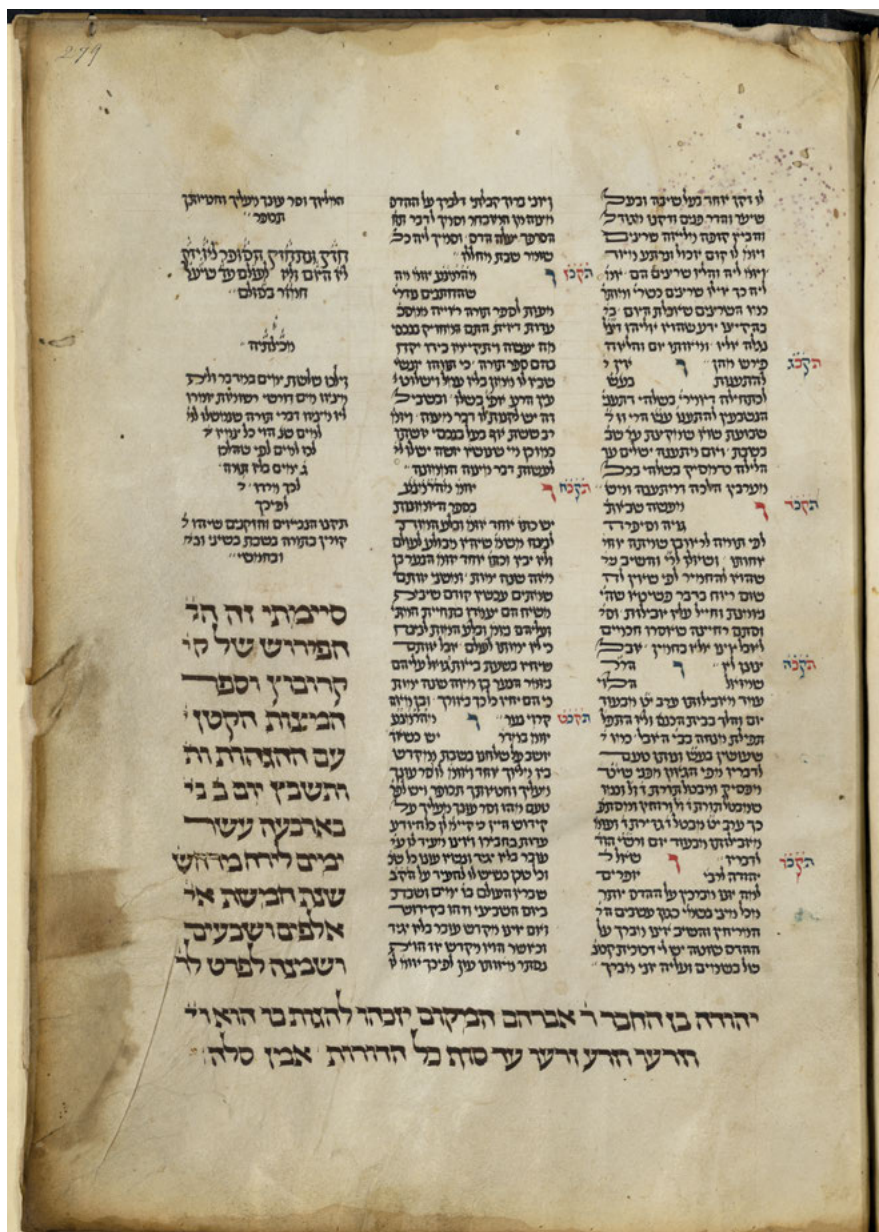
## 2.2 Codicology and palaeography

The multiple-text manuscript contains 20 leaves and comprises four sections: a prayer book, an anonymous commentary on the festival prayers and a table of contents of the two subsequent works – *SeMaQ* by R. Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil and *Tashbeṣ* by Shimshon ben Ṣadoq.

The layout was planned from the outset, as can be seen by the quire structure, since the quires do not separate the individual texts from one another.

- Quire 1 (fols 1–4) = binion (prayers)
- Quires 2–23 (fols 5–181) = 22 quaternions (prayers up to fol. 5r, commentary on a prayer on fols 5v–178v, table of contents of *SeMaQ* starting on fol. 179r)
- Quire 24 (fols 182–186) = binion with a single leaf attached to the front (table of contents of *SeMaQ* up to fol. 182v, table of contents of *Tashbeṣ* on fols 182v–185r)
- Quires 25–35 (fols 187–274) = 11 quaternions (*SeMaQ* fols 187r–260v, *Tashbeṣ* from fol. 260v onwards)
- Quire 36 (fols 275–280) = ternion (*Tashbeṣ* up to fol. 279r, colophon on fol. 279r).

<sup>37</sup> For descriptions of the manuscript see Steinschneider 1878, 56–58; Wandrey 2014.



**Fig. 1:** Hamburg Cod. hebr. 17, fol. 279r, colophon written in square script in the left column and at the bottom of the page, © All images State and University Library Hamburg.

The manuscript, which contains 36 quires altogether, originally consisted exclusively of quaternions. Apart from the first and last quire, where the quaternions have been reduced through wear and tear, the 24<sup>th</sup> quire is also noteworthy. The leaves from fols 185v to 186v are completely blank and, unlike the ends of the other quires, no catchword has been written. This indicates that individual leaves were removed after the work was completed.

The parchment used to write the copy is so finely scraped that it is impossible to distinguish between the hair side and the flesh side; this was a common feature of Hebrew manuscripts produced in Ashkenaz during the last third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and later.<sup>38</sup> The prick marks denoting the lineation are visible on the outer and inner edges – a technique also found in Ashkenaz around the same period.<sup>39</sup>

The design of the book is homogenous throughout with generous margins allowed on every page. The written space on each page measures 21.8 × 16.3 cm and the texts are arranged in three columns with 44 lines each. The basic layout does not even vary where further columns have been added. Several methods have been used to prevent the text from running into the left-hand margin, with the preferred technique being to abbreviate or lengthen certain words.

The main text is copied in Ashkenazic semi-cursive script, while the title and the initial words are written in square script. The entire script has a markedly Gothic design and is reminiscent of Latin codices from the same era. The Ashkenazic semi-cursive script, which had emerged as early as the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>40</sup> became increasingly Gothic in appearance in Ashkenaz, and by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century it practically mirrored the typography of Latin Gothic codices.<sup>41</sup>

The catchwords occur on the last versos of the quires and are written in the bottom left-hand corner of the page. They are highlighted by the use of small drawings made of dashes and written in ink. Some of them take on the shape of geometric figures such as triangles, but specific motifs such as French lilies (fol. 194v) are rarely detectable.

## 2.3 *SeMaQ* as a component of multiple-text manuscripts

Yişḥaq of Corbeil's work covers leaves 179 to 260, beginning with the tables of contents of *SeMaQ* (fols 179r to 182v) and *Tashbeş*. Since the table of contents

---

<sup>38</sup> Beit-Arié 2012, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Beit-Arié 2003, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Sirat 2002, 197.

<sup>41</sup> Sirat 2013, 221.

of *SeMaQ* starts in the middle of the 23<sup>rd</sup> quire, it is clear that the copy of Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil's book was planned not as a codex in its own right, but as part of a multiple-text manuscript.

The introduction to the first printed edition published in Constantinople in 1509 offers an explanation of why *SeMaQ* was merged with a prayer book so early on: 'When the people in France saw his [R. Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil's] humility and devotion, they wrote these *mišvot* in their *siddurim* in order to [be able to] recite them day after day.'<sup>42</sup>

Copying *SeMaQ* into a prayer book was referred to by Colette Sirat in conjunction with the manuscript Cod. hebr. 643 – which is kept at the French National Library in Paris – as a typical French phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> However, there are also several examples in the German-speaking world where the *Small Book of Commandments* has been copied together with a prayer book.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.4 Content

The copy of *SeMaQ* contained in Cod. hebr. 17 is complete and comprises 292 positive and negative commandments.<sup>45</sup> The first *mišva*, לידע שאתו שברא שמים וארץ הוא לבדו (‘To know that He who created Heaven and Earth also rules over all things’), is written on fol. 187r, while the prohibition on fol. 259v – שלא לבא על אשה נידה (‘Not to have intercourse with a woman in her menstrual period’) marks the end of *SeMaQ*.

In the colophon, the scribe explicitly points out that he copied the *Small Book of Commandments* along with all its commentaries. The commentaries by R. Pereš of Corbeil are integrated into the main text right from the beginning and are introduced by the abbreviation מרפ"א = מורנו רבנו פרץ [בן] אליהו (‘our teacher and R. Pereš [ben] Eliya’).<sup>46</sup> The arrangement changes from fol. 227r onwards: R. Pereš' commentaries are no longer woven into the main text, but form sepa-

<sup>42</sup> Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil 1509, fol. 1r, translation by author.

<sup>43</sup> This exceptionally richly illustrated manuscript from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century also contains a *Tashbeš* like the Hamburg codex, Sirat 1997, 245.

<sup>44</sup> One example is the manuscript Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 75, dated by Sarit Shalev-Eyni to 1312–1322 and ascribed on the basis of the illuminations to the area around Lake Constance; Shalev-Eyni 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Although the manuscript ends with the paragraph number 290, this figure corresponds to the number of positive and negative commandments written in the copy and also to the table of contents.

<sup>46</sup> For example, on fol. 192r and fol. 193r.

rate columns.<sup>47</sup> This leads to a radical change in the previous layout of the book, which was uniform. The commentaries by R. Pereš are written in a smaller script and henceforth form sub-columns within the existing columns. Instead of the previous three columns, there are now up to nine on each page, as illustrated by fol. 234r. Whether the scribe made this change at the behest of the person who commissioned the manuscript or because he had access to a further master copy is unclear.

From the second chapter onwards, the manuscript shows some slight discrepancies compared to most other *SeMaQ* versions in terms of the order in which the commandments are listed. The first *mišvot* written in chapter two are numbers 44 to 50. The *mišvot* ‘Mourn for Jerusalem’, ‘Mourn for relatives’, ‘Clean out the leaven [on Passover]’, ‘Not to be alone with women [at a place]’, ‘Not to be alone with non-Jews [at a place]’, ‘That a woman shall not nurse the child of a non-Jewish woman’, ‘That a woman shall not deliver the child of a non-Jewish woman’ come directly after ‘To hallow God’s name’ and ‘Not to profane God’s name’, whereas they appear at the end of the chapter in the print versions<sup>48</sup> as well as in the majority of other *SeMaQ* manuscripts. These are rabbinic decrees rather than the biblical laws of the Tora, which was explicitly emphasised as early as 1279/80: ‘[here] end the time-bound *mišvot* of the Tora, and the *mišvot* of the body commence, which were instituted by the rabbis.’<sup>49</sup> These categories or classifications were not only violated in the Hamburg manuscript. The same discrepancy with regard to the classification of the *mišvot* is found in a number of other *SeMaQ* manuscripts besides Cod. hebr. 17.<sup>50</sup>

Another difference is the commandment listed in section 148 (fol. 211v), להניח תפילין של ראש (‘To put *tefillin* on the head’). In the print editions and in other manuscripts, this commandment is not listed separately, but is subsumed under the commandment לקשור תפילין של יד (‘To put *tefillin* on the arm’).<sup>51</sup> There are at least three other Ashkenazic manuscripts where ‘To put *tefillin* on the head’ is

<sup>47</sup> Steinschneider overlooked the commentaries by R. Pereš in the text, Steinschneider 1878, 58.

<sup>48</sup> The reference pertains to the print edition on which the version featured in the Responsa Project at the Bar-Ilan University (<http://www.responsa.co.il>) is based; Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil 1935.

<sup>49</sup> Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil 2003, fol. 559v.

<sup>50</sup> I am familiar with the following examples: London, David Sofer, Lon Sofer 7 (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century); London, British Library, Add. 18828 (1343); London, British Library, Add. 18685 (1301–1350); Zurich, Braginsky Collection, Brag 115 (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century); Vatican Library, Vat. ebr. 324 (1395–1398).

<sup>51</sup> In Cod. hebr. 17, section 147.

listed separately.<sup>52</sup> This presumably reflects an old rabbinic conflict regarding the number of blessings to be recited while putting on tefillin.<sup>53</sup> German Jews in the Middle Ages, such as R. Me'ir of Rothenburg, observed the custom of reciting one blessing while binding the head *tefillin* and a second one while binding the arm *tefillin*, whilst French Jews only recited one blessing for both. According to Shemu'el of Evreux, who was one of Yiṣḥaq of Corbeil's teachers, it was better to say only one blessing to avoid the risk of sinning by reciting an unnecessary blessing. This issue was also the subject of a response by R. Asher ben Yeḥi'el (Rabbenu Asher or simply Rosh, 1250–1327) from the Rhineland, who had originally said only one blessing under the French influence, but later switched to the practice common in Germany.<sup>54</sup> This was thus a question which still continued to spark rich discussions at the start of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that the commandment 'To bind *tefillin* on the head' is highlighted in some *SeMaQ* manuscripts may have therefore served to emphasise the German custom of saying two blessings.

## 2.5 Book decoration

Cod. hebr. 17 is one of the rare examples of a lavishly decorated *SeMaQ* codex.<sup>55</sup> Red and blue ink was employed consistently for the decorative elements. The scribe wrote the initial words and the numbers of the individual *mišvot* in alternating red and blue ink and introduced a change of colour within some of the initials. Fine decorative components have been added carefully in red and blue ink, reminiscent of the *fleuronnée* (floreted) ornamentation common to monastic book illustration and also used in secular codices.<sup>56</sup>

A small error in the numbering of the individual paragraphs provides an insight into the scribe's method of working. There are two numbers missing on fol. 191r (Fig. 2). At this point, the *mišvot* שלא להסתכל בצלמים ('Not to look at idols'), להסתכל בציצת ('To look at *ṣiṣit*') and שלא לתור אחר העין ('Not to follow whatever unfaithfulness your eyes may see') are written very close together and only the

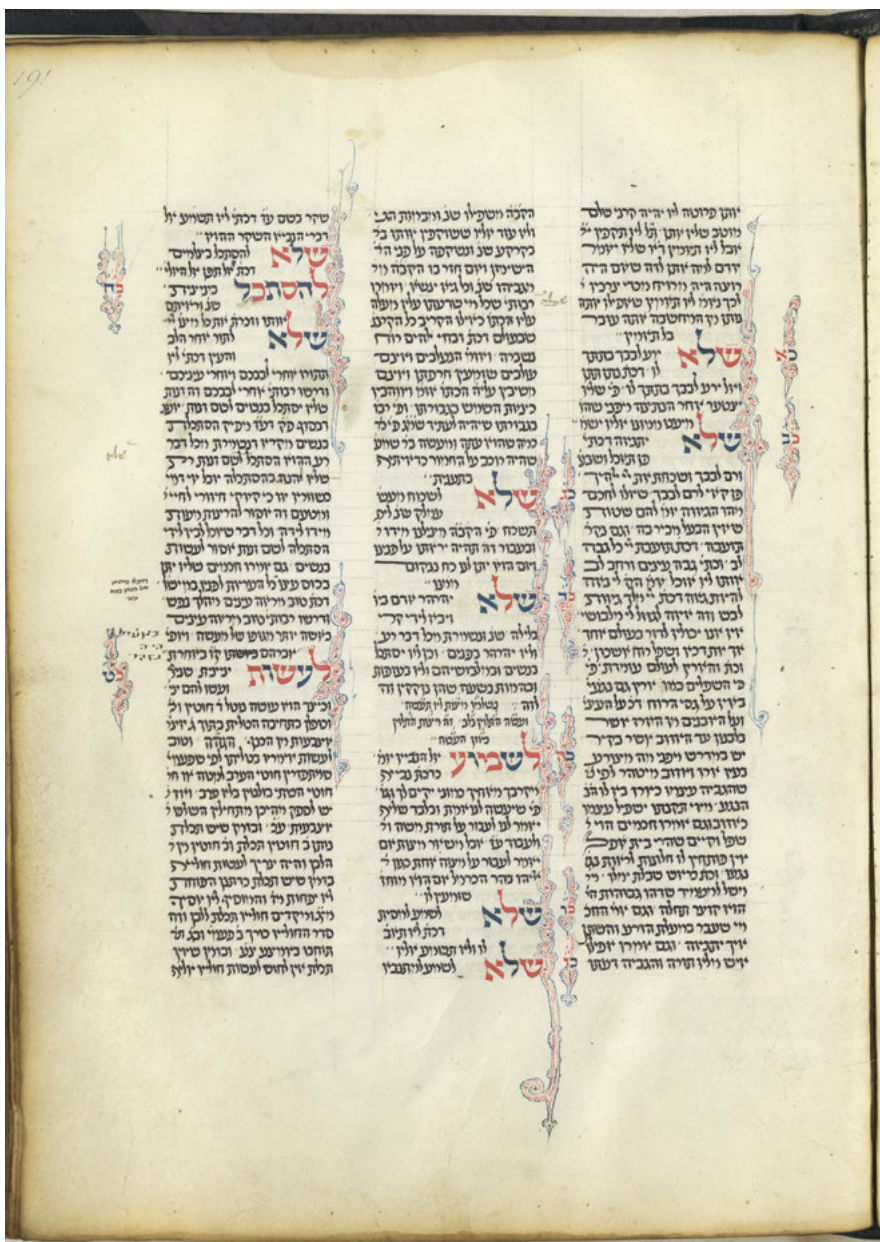
<sup>52</sup> Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Hebr. Add. 6; London. British Library, Add. 18685; Zurich, Braginsky Collection, Brag 115.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Amit 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Meshullam Salman ben Aharon 1761, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Some striking examples are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cod. hebr. 643; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 75; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Seld. A51.

<sup>56</sup> For example, in the second part of St Gall, Kantonsbibliothek, Vadianische Sammlung, VadSlg Ms. 302 (Rudolf von Ems: History of the World. The Stricker, Charlemagne), originated c. 1300 in Zurich.



**Fig. 2:** Hamburg, SUB, Cod. hebr. 17, fol. 191r.



prohibition in the middle has been numbered. This error presumably occurred due to the fact that the scribe wrote the main text first, leaving blank spaces to add the initial words later in coloured ink. It is likely that he then added the numbering and finished by writing the initial words. A large blank space was left for the initial words of the three *mišvot* on fol. 191r, causing the text to run into the right margin. This made it difficult to identify the start of each separate *mišva*, with the result that two of them were overlooked by the scribe when he added the numbering.

While *fleuronnée* ornamentation is predominantly found in the inner panels of the initial words in Latin manuscripts, the initials in this example are surrounded by floral patterns springing forth from a vine tendril decorated with palmette motifs. Unbound by the corpus of any letters, the strands are embellished with circular lobed leaves and sprawl forth between the words. They form forked tendrils and intertwine to construct tangled shapes which clamber up and down the edges of the right-hand columns. At the top, the strands taper off in hook-shaped twists, while the lower end is often delineated by a palmette motif with curved leaves. The strands at the edges bear half-palmettes and create a very vibrant quality, but overall the repertoire of shapes and motifs is relatively limited and is repeated over and over again.

The vegetal patterns do not display any kind of geometric design and they are completely lacking in symmetry. This disrupts the austerity of the page layout and adds a certain degree of airiness. The ornamentation does not contain any figurative or even narrative elements, and references to the text are not immediately identifiable. Likewise, there does not appear to have been any specific system for adding or omitting decorative elements. The decoration stops in the middle of the 25<sup>th</sup> quire (fol. 192r), and is picked up again within the 30<sup>th</sup> quire (fol. 235r). The 32<sup>nd</sup> quire only contains one final embellishment (fol. 250r) and the last ten leaves of *SeMaQ* are unadorned.

The very first initial word of *SeMaQ* – לידע ('To know that...') – appears in slightly larger square script than the rest of the text and is ornamented in a particularly lavish way (Fig. 3). Finely drawn red-blue tendrils blaze out amidst the letters and tower upwards to form seven pillars, presumably an allusion to the name and content of the work, which is divided into seven 'pillars' (chapters) corresponding to the seven days of the week. Interestingly, the beginning of the other chapters is not emphasised by the use of decorative elements; they are only recognisable by the fact that the final sentence of the preceding chapter is always written in smaller script.

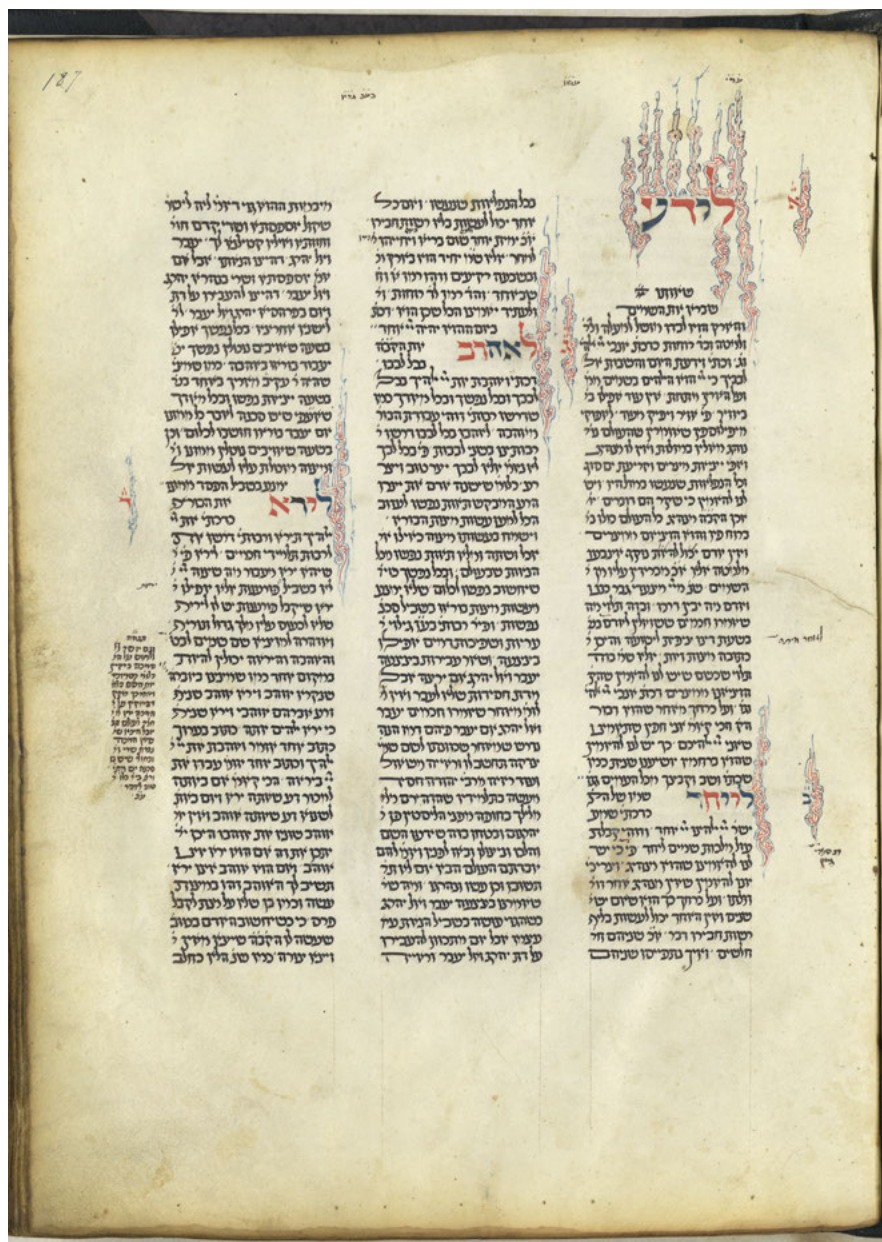


Fig. 3: Hamburg, SUB, Cod. hebr. 17, fol. 187r.

The *fleuronnée* ornamentation found in Ashkenazic manuscripts of the 14<sup>th</sup> century was first discussed in 1987 by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna.<sup>57</sup> She pointed out how the ornamentation of Jewish books was influenced by the Christian cultural heritage, but believed that the books were nevertheless decorated predominantly by Jewish artists. According to her, the visual layout of a commentary on the Talmud dated 1372/73 (Budapest, National Széchényi Library, Ms. fol. hebr. 1) was entirely the product of the Jewish scribe's creativity.<sup>58</sup> The evidence we have today suggests that Jewish books were often illuminated in Christian workshops, however. It has been proven that a number of different florators worked on the above-mentioned Talmud commentary, for instance.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to the very professionally designed floreted panels found in other Hebrew manuscripts, we can assume that the decorations in Cod. hebr. 17 were either added by the scribe himself or at least by someone in his immediate environment, since the limited repertoire of shapes and absence of any form of geometric design is not typical of the style common to the professional workshops of the era.

### 3 Conclusion

Cod. hebr. 17 is a distinctly Ashkenazic manuscript from a German region. The way in which the parchment is processed, the quire structure and the script are typically Ashkenazic. The reference to the city of Worms in the divorce document helps us to narrow down the possible provenance of the manuscript. The text of *SeMaQ* contains further pointers to the manuscript's German origin: the fact that the commandment 'to bind *tefillin* on the head' is listed separately reflects the practice customary among German Jews of saying two blessings when putting on *tefillin*.

On account of its splendid design, the *SeMaQ* copy in Cod. hebr. 17 belongs to the rare breed of *SeMaQ* manuscripts that are richly decorated. Another point that is particularly striking in this copy is the sudden change in how the glosses and commentaries by R. Pereš are displayed; exactly why the scribe made this change is unclear. The decorations were either added by the scribe himself or by someone in his immediate environment. He was allowed a certain amount of freedom by R. Yehuda, son of the scholar R. Avraham, who commissioned the manuscript. The result is a prestigious manuscript which in terms of its artistic quality can easily compete with the codices decorated in professional workshops.

---

<sup>57</sup> Sed-Rajna 1987.

<sup>58</sup> Sed-Rajna 1987, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Fingernagel/Haidinger 2002, 17.

## References

- Amit, Aaron (2008), 'The Curious Case of Tefillin – A Study in Ritual Blessings', in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 15/4: 269–288.
- Azulai, Haim Joseph David (1843), שם הגדולים, (*Shem ha-Gedolim*), Krotoschin: Monasch; Frankfurt: Bach.
- Beit-Arié, Malachi (1993), 'Transmissions of Texts by Scribes and Copyists. Unconscious and Critical Interferences', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 75/3: 33–52.
- Beit-Arié, Malachi (2003), *Unveiled Faces of Medieval Hebrew Books. The Evolution of Manuscript Production – Progression or Regression?*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press.
- Beit-Arié, Malachi (2012), 'Hebrew Codicology: Historical and Comparative Typology of Hebrew Medieval Codices based on the Documentation of the Extant Dated Manuscripts from a Quantitative Approach'. English summary, (pre-publication Internet version 0.1). <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/manuscripts/hebrewcodicology/Documents/HC%20English%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>, viewed on 19 Feb. 2015.
- Emanuel, Simcha (2006), שברי לוחות. ספרים אבודים של בעלי התוספות, (*Fragments of the Table – Lost Books of the Tosaphists*), Jerusalem.
- Emanuel, Simcha (2013/2012), 'מגוף ראשון לגוף שלישי. פרק בתרבות הכתיבה באשכנז בימי הביניים', (From First to Third Person: A Study in the Culture of Writing in Medieval Ashkenas), in *Tarbiz* 81: 431–457.
- Fingernagel, Andreas / Haidinger, Alois (2002), 'Neue Zeugen des "Niederösterreichischen Randleistenstils" in hebräischen, deutschen und lateinischen Handschriften', in *Codices Manuscripti*, 39/40: 15–44.
- Freud-Kandel, Miri / Ferziger, Adam (2013): 'Orthodoxy, Theological Debate, and Contemporary Judaism. A Critical Exploration of Questions Raised in the Thought of Louis Jacobs', in *Advanced Jewish Studies*, Oxford.
- Galinsky, Judah D. (2009), 'על הלכה וחברה: ייחודה של ספרות ההלכה של צפון צרפת במאה ה־13', (talk held on 5 Aug. 2009), *15th World Congress for Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, online: <http://youtu.be/DPD3nGFqSAA?t=1h13m13s>, viewed on 17 Feb. 2015.
- Galinsky, Judah D. (2012), 'המחלקה לתלמוד ותורה שבעל פה', קורות חיים, Bar-Ilan, online: <https://talmud.biu.ac.il/node/243>, viewed on 17 Feb. 2015.
- Gross, Abraham (2004), *Struggling with Tradition – Reservations about Active Martyrdom in the Middle Ages* (The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 19), Leiden: Brill.
- Güdemann, Moritz (1880), *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Frankreich und Deutschland. Von der Begründung der jüdischen Wissenschaft in diesen Ländern bis zur Vertreibung der Juden aus Frankreich; (X.-XIV. Jahrhundert)*, Vienna: Hölder.
- Har-Shoshanim-Rosenberg, Isaac Jacob (ed.) (1980–1988), *Sefer ha'Semak mi-Zurich we-hu Sefer 'Amude Gola' – הסמ"ק מצוריד*, text by Isaac ben Joseph of Corbeil, with comments by Pereš ben Elijah of Corbeil, Moses of Zurich, Jerusalem.
- Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil (1509), ספר עמודי גולה. הנקרא ספר מצות הקצר, Constantinople.
- Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil (1935), ספר עמודי גולה – *Sefer 'Amude Golah*, with comments by Perez ben Elijah of Corbeil, Satmar.
- Yiṣḥaq ben Yosef of Corbeil (2003), 'ספר מצות קטן', in Jeremy Schonfield (ed.), *The North French Hebrew Miscellany. (British Library Add. MS 11639)*, London: Facsimile ed., fols 546b–640b.

- Kanarfogel, Ephraim (1997), 'German Pietism in Northern France: The Case of R. Isaac of Corbeil', in Norman Lamm (ed.), *Hazon Nahum. Studies in Jewish law, thought, and history / presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, New York: The Michael Scharf Publ. Trust of the Yeshiva Univ. Press, 207–227.
- Kanarfogel, Ephraim (2000): 'Peering through the lattices'. *Mystical, magical, and pietistic dimensions in the Tosafist period*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Kaufmann, Ingrid (2011), 'Jüdisches Leben im Spiegel des Zürcher SeMaQ. Kleiderordnungen als Beispiel für die jüdisch-christliche Auseinandersetzung', in *Judaica*, 67/2: 146–177.
- Meshullam Salman b. Ahron (ed.) (1761), 'Avot', in *Talmud Bavli, Roter Schas*, Sulzbach: Meshulam Zalman b. Aharon.
- Malkiel, David (2001), 'Destruction or Conversion. Intention and Reaction, Crusaders and Jews in 1096', in *Jewish History*, 15/3: 257–280.
- Responsa Project, Bar Ilan (2007), *Bar Ilan's Judaic Library, CD-ROM, Version 15*, New York.
- Richler, Benjamin (1979/80), 'על כתבי היד של "ספר היראה" המיוחס לרבי יונה גירונדי', (*Al kitve yad shel Sefer ha-Yir'a ha-meyuhas le-Rabbi Yona Gerondi*), in *Ale Sefer*, 8: 51–59.
- Sed-Rajna, Gabrielle (1987), 'Filigree Ornaments in 14th-Century Hebrew Manuscripts of the Upper Rhine', in *Jewish Art*, 13: 45–54.
- Shalev-Eyni, Sarit (2010), *Jews among Christians. Hebrew book illumination from Lake Constance*, London: Miller.
- Sirat, Colette (1997), 'Le livre hébreu: Rencontre de la tradition juive et de l'esthétique française', in Gilbert Dahan (ed.), *Collection de la Revue des études juives* 16, 243–259, Paris.
- Sirat, Colette (2002), *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sirat, Colette (2013), 'כתבי-היד העבריים של ימי-הביניים. מבוא לתלמיד', <http://hsf.bgu.ac.il/cjt/files/Sirat/sirat%20palographie/content.htm>, viewed on 14 Jan. 2015.
- Soloveitchik, Haym (1987), 'Religious Law and Change. The Medieval Ashkenazic Example', in *AJS Review*, 12/4: 205–221.
- Soloveitchik, Haym (1998), 'Catastrophe and Halakhic Creativity: Ashkenaz – 1096, 1242, 1306 and 1298', in *Jewish History*, 12/1: 71–85.
- Soloveitchik, Haym (2004), 'Halakhah, Hermeneutics, and Martyrdom in Medieval Ashkenaz (Part I of II)', in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94/1: 77–108.
- Soloveitchik, Haym (2005), 'The Printed Page of the Talmud. The Commentaries and Their Authors', in Sharon Liberman Mintz / Gabriel M. Goldstein (eds), *Printing the Talmud. From Bomberg to Schottenstein*, pp. 37–43, New York: Yeshiva University Museum.
- Spiegel, Yaakov Shmuel (2005), 'עמודים בתולדות הספר העברי: כתיבה והעתקה', (*Amudim be-toldot ha-sefer ha-ivri: ketiva ve-ha'taqa*), Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University.
- Steinschneider, Moritz (1878): *Catalog der Handschriften in der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg* 1, Hamburg: Meissner.
- Ta-Shema, Israel (1993), 'The "open" book in Medieval Hebrew Literature. The problem of authorized editions', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 75/3: 17–24.
- Ta-Shema, Israel (2004), 'דברים על הסמ"ג, על קיצור הסמ"ג ועל ספרות הקיצורים', in אברהם בן אפרים, קיצור ספר, i, 'דברים על הסמ"ג', על קיצור הסמ"ג ועל ספרות הקיצורים, מצוות גדול, Jerusalem, 13–21.
- Ta-Shema, Israel (2007), 'Isaac ben Joseph of Corbeil', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 10, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, p. 43. Gale Virtual Reference Library, [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=hamburg&v=2.1&iid=GALE%7CCX2587509615&it=r&asid=4f2289707ecc0fe99bbc413142621937](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=hamburg&v=2.1&iid=GALE%7CCX2587509615&it=r&asid=4f2289707ecc0fe99bbc413142621937). Accessed 22 Sept. 2017.

- Urbach, Ephraim Elimelech (1980), בעלי התוספות. תולדותיהם, חיבוריהם, שיטתם, (*The Tosaphists: their history, writings and methods*), 2 vols, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute.
- Wandrey, Irina (2014), 'Codex hebraicus 17', in ead. (ed.), *Tora – Talmud – Siddur: Ausstellungskatalog (= manuscript cultures 6)*, Hamburg: SFB 950 Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa, 63–67.