



SHIMON IAKERSON

## That Pivotal Year of the Era "From the Creation of the World": A Few Notes on the Origins of Hebrew Printing

Nowadays, almost all researchers engaged in the study of Hebrew printing hold the common view that its history does not start with dated editions, as was the general belief among scholars in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This recent change of attitude has been brought about by the evidence that before 1475, six to eight books were published *sine loco et anno*, whose place of publication has been traditionally identified as Rome, and which appear to be dated between 1469 and 1473.<sup>1</sup> It is also possible that during the period *ante* 1475, printing attempts were made in Mantua.<sup>2</sup> However, I believe that it is the year 5235 of the Era "from the creation of the world", corresponding to the period from 12 September 1474 to 1 September 1475 of the Julian calendar, that constitutes the most pivotal point in the history of Hebrew printing, and, to some extent, of European printing in general. Mastering a new skill usually begins with a series of experiments, and it is only when the produce acquires a certain standard of quality that a master stamps it with his mark.

The story of the inventor of the printing proves might serve as a good example thereof: apparently, the first attempts at printing were made by Johann Gutenberg as early as the late 1430s, whereas the first dated colophon

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<sup>1</sup> Moses Marx was the first to come up with this idea in his article "On the Date of Appearance of the First Printed Hebrew Books" (Marx 1950). Further evidence to support this view was provided in the works of R. Tishby, A.K. Offenberg, and works of my own authorship. It should be mentioned that Offenberg does not simply set apart a group of editions that he ascribes to a Roman printing house, but also suggests a chronological succession of several books (Offenberg 1993; 2004: XLVI-XLVII).

<sup>2</sup> Altogether, there were eight editions printed in Mantua, of which only one is dated. The printing of this edition was completed by the printer Abraham Conat on the 6 of June 1476 (Offenberg 2004: XLVI-XLVII).

appeared only in an edition of the Psalms in 1457.<sup>3</sup> For Hebrew printing, the borderline between an experimental period and proper printing was the year 1475, when the first dated Hebrew books came out of press. Two dated editions – one of them in four volumes – printed in Italy that year, belong to two entirely different book traditions. Moreover, it is worth noting that neither of these traditions has anything to do with Italy. Their colophons' texts nonetheless contain rich literary and bibliographical information and cast a revealing light on different aspects of the history of Jewish domestic life. Also appearing in the year 1475 as a milestone in the history of Jewish as well as Christian printing was the publication of the first Latin edition that made use of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in Hebrew graphics.

In this article, the bibliographical description of these three incunabula<sup>4</sup> will be presented; the specific features of each edition will be analyzed as seen from the perspective of the Hebrew manuscript tradition; the significant role that printed books played in Hebrew book culture as well as in Jewish-Christian polemics will be demonstrated; and, finally, a historic-philological analysis of the colophons will be carried out. The dates, as they appear in all three editions, indicate when the printing of these books was completed, and naturally, can give no answer as to when the printing houses themselves were founded, or when the printing of these particular books began. However, the description of the three incunabula is based on the chronology as it is found in the colophons.

#### 1. *Reggio Calabria 1475: the most important commentary on the Pentateuch*<sup>5</sup>

Bibliographical description:

Solomon ben Isaac (acronym: Rashi). *Commentary on the Pentateuch*. Reggio Calabria: Abraham ben Isaac Ben Garton, 10 Adar 5235 (17 February 1475).

<sup>3</sup> *Psalms*. The colophon was signed by Johannes Fust and Peter Schoeffer, who were the ones to complete the printing of the book.

<sup>4</sup> On the emergence of Hebrew printing and its spread in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, see the prefaces to the catalogues of the collections in New York, at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; and in London, at the British Library (accordingly: Iakerson 2004-05: III-XXXVII; Offenberg 2004: XLIII-LXVII), together with the corresponding chapter in my book, *The Hebrew Book in the Middle Ages* (Iakerson 2003: 144-187).

<sup>5</sup> This bibliographical description is based upon a facsimile edition of the *incunabulum unicum* (Cohen 1968), and on the description *in situ* of the fragment in the JTS collection (Iakerson 2004-05: 9). I have also used information provided by my colleague Prof. M. Beit-Arié (on collation and description of the water-mark).

In-folio. 118 (?) fols., folio 118(?) blank. Collation: [1-9<sup>10</sup> 10-11<sup>8</sup> 12<sup>4</sup> 13<sup>6</sup> 14<sup>2</sup>].  
 Printed in one column, 37 lines per page. No quire signatures.  
 Printed in semi-cursive Sephardi type, with *alef-lamed* ligature.  
 Colophon (f. 117v; fig. 1):<sup>6</sup>

נשלם פי' תורה שרש"י ביארה  
 ובו הייתה אורה לכל בני אברהם  
 אשיר בשיר לאל צור פודה וגואל  
 אשר נתן כאל בלב אברהם  
 אני בדת חשקתי בלב אותה חמדתי  
 דרשתי וחקרתי כיד אברהם  
 אך הניאני הזמן בקשתי מעשה אמן  
 בעזר אשר נתן אלוהים לאברהם  
 במקום למידתי ספרים כתבתי  
 והנם השלמתי לזרע אברהם  
 באמצעותם אולי אשתה מנהר אולי  
 הלזואי ואולי יהי כן לאברהם  
 רואה קרא ואל תשים ספרי לאל  
 כי מה שבם נגאל לא מצד אברהם  
 הלא מצד חברה אשר החשיך אורה  
 זעם גם עברה הביא על אברהם  
 בעזר ישלח יהו' מחזה אל תראו  
 באותם יבאו מצד אברהם  
 להר בית רהטון יקו לב ועשתון  
 אני בן גרטון בן יצחק אברהם  
 בריגו המדינה דעל ימא מותבא  
 בסוף קלבריא שם גר אברהם  
 ליצירת ה' אלפים ומאתים והו' שלשים  
 ב' באדר סוף חודשים לחשבון אברהם

So the Commentary on Torah is finished / which Rashi interpreted / and in  
 him was the light / to all the sons of Abraham

<sup>6</sup> The text of the colophon is given here according to its facsimile in Freimann - Marx  
 1924-31: A I.

I will sing a song to the Lord / our Rock redeeming and saving / who repaid  
 from His bounties<sup>7</sup> in the heart of Abraham  
 The Law I passionately wished (to know) / I cherished it in my heart /  
 sought it and contemplated it / in the right hand of Abraham  
 But the time held me back / I aspired to master a skillful craft / that was  
 given to help / by the Lord to Abraham  
 In the place of my training / I was printing books / and so I completed them  
 / for the offspring of Abraham  
 With their help perchance / I will drink from the Ulai canal<sup>8</sup> / Let it be poss-  
 ible / And let it come true for Abraham<sup>9</sup>  
 You, the onlooker, read and do not turn my books into nothing / because  
 what is false in them / is not so because of Abraham  
 But because of the typesetter<sup>10</sup> of his / who made the light dim / anger and  
 fury brought he down on Abraham  
 With the help / bestowed by Lord / do not contemplate this depiction<sup>11</sup> / of  
 their own accord will they enter / the realm of Abraham.  
 Onto the mountain of the house of Rahaton / (where) the heart will become  
 one with reason / I Ben Garton / the son of Yiṣḥaq Abraham  
 In Reggio, the city on the sea located at the end of Calabria here lives Abra-  
 ham  
 In the year five thousand and two hundred thirty five from the (day) of the  
 World creation. On the tenth of Adar, in the last month<sup>12</sup> by the count of Ab-  
 raham.

<sup>7</sup> In the original כאל "like the Lord".

<sup>8</sup> From: "And I saw in the vision; and when I saw, I was in Susa the citadel, which is in the province of Elam. And I saw in the vision, and I saw in the vision I was at the Ulai canal" (Dan. 8:2). The Ulai (geogr.) – the name of a river, assumedly, one of the rivers in Persia, near Susa; it could also be the Karun, which flows into the Persian Gulf.

<sup>9</sup> The first three parts of this verse are based on the homonymic principle with all the lines ending in אולי.

<sup>10</sup> In the original text, the verb stands in past tense of the forms pa'al or pi'el, with suffix of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular, feminine חברה (*havrah* or *hibberah*) "that who comprised it [the book of Law]". In this context, it obviously points to a typesetter.

<sup>11</sup> B. Friedberg – and, following in his footsteps, J.J. Cohen – when presenting the text of this colophon, change the word by adding the letter *yod* with no obvious reason, which results in "do not fear" instead of "do not look". This, naturally, gives a completely different meaning to the whole line. However, the facsimile of this page, which was incidentally published by Friedberg himself (1956: pl. י), quite distinctly shows a clearly printed תראו.

Bibliography: Davidson 1930: 1 654; De Rossi, *Annales*, I: I; Iakerson JTS: 9; Offenberger - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: 112; *Thesaurus* A 1; Tishby 1983-93: 10. Facsimile edition: Cohen 1968.

The Commentary on the Pentateuch by the distinguished rabbinical authority Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040, Troyes - 1105, same place) was in the Medieval era and remains even today undoubtedly the most popular work of Jewish exegesis. It is important to stress that the first dated Hebrew book printed on the Iberian Peninsula was the Rashi Commentary on the Pentateuch discussed above.<sup>13</sup> During the incunabula period, this Commentary by Rashi went through at least ten printings: six times in separate books,<sup>14</sup> and four times with the biblical text.<sup>15</sup> The reservation “at least” is by no means accidental: only recently, some fragments of an unknown Sephardic edition of a *Commentary* from the incunabula period<sup>16</sup> showed up at book markets.

The 1475 edition of the Rashi's commentary is commonly listed among Italian incunabula. However, this classification is based on a purely geographical principle of origin. If we look at the political map of Italy during the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we cannot help but notice that at the time when the *Commentary* came out, the entire area was under the cultural do-

<sup>12</sup> In Hebrew manuscript tradition, there were various systems for designating a year. Nevertheless, during the incunabula period, the system of counting years from “the creation of the World” prevailed and was used ubiquitously. The month Adar (29 days, falling within the period from January to March) is the sixth month of the Hebrew calendar, and the last month according to the Biblical calendar, where the first month was Nisan. Using biblical chronology had no practical sense, and can be seen instead as a “poetical metaphor”.

<sup>13</sup> Guadalajara: Solomon ben Moses Ha-Levi Alkabez; type-cutting Pedro of Guadalajara. 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1476 (Offenberger - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: 113; Iakerson, JTS, 81; *Thesaurus* B 4). On the origin of Hebrew book printing on the Iberian peninsula, see Iakerson 2012. Other recent publications on the topic: del Barco - Panizo Santos 2010; Iakerson 2000 and 2015; Offenberger 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Offenberger - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: NN 111-114, 114bis. See also footnote 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, NN 13, 16, 17, 18.

<sup>16</sup> 10 leaves; *sine loco et anno* (Spain or Portugal, before 1497). Moreshet auction N 7: *Judai-ca, Objects, Art, Seferim, Manuscripts, Rabbinical Letters* (October 28, 2015), Lot 0098. I had the opportunity to get acquainted with this fragment in Jerusalem in August 2015. This discovery serves as yet another piece of evidence to support my suggestion that more Sephardic editions once existed, which, however, have not survived till our times.

minance of Spain: perhaps due to the peninsula's proximity to Sicily, that was under Spanish rule at that period.<sup>17</sup>

As regards the Sephardic character of this edition, the following features should be mentioned:

1) the name of the typesetter Ben Garton is undoubtedly of Sephardic origin;<sup>18</sup>

2) the typeface chosen for the edition rely on Sephardic semi-cursive. It is worth mentioning that this particular typeface differs significantly from those Sephardic ones that, in the years to come, i.e. when the printing house Soncino<sup>19</sup> started its activities, became the prevailing typefaces of Hebrew printing. This particular typeface most strongly resembles the Sephardic semi-cursive typefaces that were in use in the printing houses of Spain and Portugal;

3) colophon (lines 1-10) is written in the form of quantitative verse, each line of which has four parts. Each part contains six syllables. The lines have three internal rhymes and one interlineal rhyme at the end. The name of the typesetter, Abraham (Hebrew אברהם), is a monorhyme. There is a homonymic rhyme woven into the sixth line. Quantitative poetical colophons appear only in Spanish and Portuguese colophons. The full text of the colophon provides us with sufficient grounds to believe that Abraham Ben Garton and other early Jewish printers, when describing their innovative craft, borrowed from the lexicon developed by Jewish scribes, as printing had not yet acquired its own professional language.<sup>20</sup> That is why the verb in the past tense used with the first person suffix "I wrote/copied" (כתבתי) should be read as "I printed". The evidence for this, first of all, is found in the previous line where the author directly states that he sought the opportunity to master a skillful

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed account see Colafemmina 2012: 21-39.

<sup>18</sup> In various works on the subject, the name of the typesetter is often spelled as Abraham ben Garton (Offenberg - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: n. 112), or Abraham Garton (Colafemmina 2012: x). However, I agree with P. Tishby's opinion that from the colophon's text it follows that *ben* should be read as part of the family name (Tishby 1983-93: 865, n. 10).

<sup>19</sup> The typesetters of the House of Soncino worked out optimal typeface forms that later became practically ubiquitous, and, basically, have remained unchanged to our day. The typefaces of the House of Soncino, Ashkenazic in origin, were developed on the basis of Italian Sephardic handwriting styles, or scripts. For the details see Iakerson 2008: 66-68.

<sup>20</sup> Compare, e.g., the colophon of the Rome edition of the *Commentary on the Pentateuch* by Mošeh ben Naḥman ha-Gerondi "copied/written (נעתק) by 'Ovadyah, Menašeh and Bi-nyamin of Rome".

craft (*ma'asēh oman*, מעשה אמן). It would have been pointless to write here about the skill of a scribe.

It is a known fact that only one copy of the edition has been preserved, and once belonged to the outstanding scholar and Hebrew book collector Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742-1831). Today, this edition, along with the rest of De Rossi's collection, is housed in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma.

The extraordinary lack of copies of the Reggio edition once led specialists to conclude that it was designed to be circulated only in the Pyrenean peninsula; they claimed that the whole production had been transported there, only to disappear from the face of the Earth and sink into oblivion during the tragic years of the Jewish expulsion from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497).<sup>21</sup> However, it hardly seems worthwhile to engage in such historical speculations. The very fact that about 45 other editions from this area have survived to our time can serve as a sufficient proof thereof. We cannot bypass the fact that, in addition to a single copy, there are two other fragments that have come down to us. Also, at least two more copies are mentioned in various historical sources. The fragments are now in the JTS<sup>22</sup> collection and the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad – Ohel Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch.<sup>23</sup> One of the two lost copies is mentioned by De Rossi himself;<sup>24</sup> the second was spotted in the library of the Polish magnate Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770-1861) by Rabbi Elyakim ben Yehudah ha-Milzahgi (ca. 1780-1854).<sup>25</sup>

To sum up the analysis of this edition, it should be once again stressed that everything points in the direction of the Rashi's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, printed in 1475 in Reggio Calabria, as a product of Sephardic book culture. This edition undoubtedly should be viewed as the starting point of the history of Sephardic printing.

<sup>21</sup> See Friedberg 1956; Cohen 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Iakerson 2004-05: n. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Shelf-mark 14534. This fragment is practically unknown, and it does not appear in the bibliography of Offenberger – Moed-Van Walraven 1990. The fragment was given as a present to the seventh Lubavitchy Rabbi Menahem-Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) by the Hebrew books collector Jack Lunzer (1924-2016). Personal communication with the collector.

<sup>24</sup> The collector writes that he purchased also the second copy of the edition. Unfortunately, when caught in a storm on the river Po, the envoy of De Rossi dropped the bag with the book into the water (cf. De Rossi, *Annales*, 3-4).

<sup>25</sup> This information is in his commentary to *Zohar*, *Zoharei Ravy"ah* (Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, Heb. Ms. 121, 40, f. 23v, note 7): quoted in Tishby 1983-93: 868, n. 10.

## 2. *Piove di Sacco 1475: the most popular halakhic compendium*

### Bibliographical description:

Jacob ben Asher. *Arba'ah Turim*. Piove di Sacco: Meshullam Cusi and his sons, 28 Tammuz 5235 (3 July 1475).

In-folio. Printed in two columns, 54 lines per column. No quire signature.

Printed in three different typefaces, Ashkenazic-[Italian] style.

Vol. I (*Orah Hayyim*): 138 leaves, fols. 14-15, 90-91, 136-138 blank. Collation: [1-7<sup>10</sup> 8<sup>8</sup> 9-14<sup>10</sup>].

Colophon (f. 135v; fig. 2):

### נשלם הטור האחד / שבח לאל המיוחד / חזק ונתחזק

1. מי האיש החפץ לראות מוסר תוכחות אורח חיים
2. ישים פעמיו עלי דרכי בל יטה לסור אחוריים
3. בי תעסוק ואל תפסוק ערב בוקר אף צהריים
4. הלא אם תעזבני יום אעזבך גם יומיים
5. הידעתם את מי יעץ חקוק ארבע הטורים
6. הנה הרב מה"ר קוזי נדיב גם איש הביניים
7. אך לא היה עם סיומי זאת אקונן בכפליים
8. אותי עזב עלי ארץ הוא הלך ארץ החיים
9. אז בניו קמו בפרץ המה גררו השירים
10. שכרם תהא מרובה מאת היושב בשמים
11. יזכו היות לשנה הבאה עלות ירושלים

The "First column" is finished / Glory to the Lord, the only one / "be strong, and let us fight bravely".<sup>26</sup>

1. Who is the man who seeks to contemplate virtuous instructions for the journey of life
2. He will direct his steps along my way, and will not go astray, and will not turn back
3. Study me and never stop (your studies), be it night, morning, or day
4. Because, once you forsake me, if only for one day, I will forsake you for two
5. Is it known to you on whose advice we are printing "The four columns"
6. That was our teacher, Rabbi Cusi, the man of valour and generosity
7. But he was not present at my completion, and for this I shall repay double

<sup>26</sup> 2 Samuel 10:12. In full or abridged form (with only the first word) this phrase was frequently used by scribes and early printers to mark the ending parts of texts, i.e., of any Talmud treatise.



8. He left me on the Earth, himself departing into the lands of [eternal] life
9. And when his children "stood in the breach", <sup>27</sup> then did they complete all the rest
10. For which they will have their eternal retribution before the face of the One who resides in Heaven
11. Next year they will be entering Jerusalem.

Vol II (*Yor'eh De'ah*): 108 leaves, fols. 9v, 106v, 107, 108 blank. Collation: [1-10<sup>10</sup>, 11<sup>8</sup>].

Vol III (*Even ha-'ezer*): 70 leaves, fols. 4v, 5-6, 37v, 68-70 blank. Collation: [1<sup>6</sup> 2-3<sup>10</sup>, 4<sup>8</sup>, 5-7<sup>10</sup>, 8<sup>6</sup>].

Colophon (f. 67v):

פה נשלם טור שלישי שבח לאל מרים ראשי  
 1. אשריני ומה טוב חלקי על מה נפל גורל חלשי  
 2. סדר נשים הוחק חוקי בהיותי הטור השלישי  
 3. מה"ר קוזי הרב בקי הוא התחיל בי הרים ראשי  
 4. והנה יום עומדי על פרקי אותי עזב וינטשי  
 5. ויתהלך למרום שחקי לקח אותו אלהי קדושי  
 6. אז אמרתי אחגור שקי גם בגדי אלמנות אלבשי  
 7. אז בניז מלאו ספקי עד סוף ספרי בל אבושי  
 8. כאשר זכו חזק בדקי כן יזכו לצאת לחופשי  
 9. לחזות נועם מאור צדקי עם בניין קריית מוששי  
 סליק חזק

Here the "Third column" is finished. Glory be to the Lord who is raising my head high.

1. Blessed I am and beautiful is my lot, because of the way my destiny befell me
2. (That) the order (of behavior) of women is set down by my law, because it is me that is the third column
3. Our Lord Cusi, the law teacher and the master (of law), he (commenced) the printing of me, he uplifted my head
4. But on the day when I stood up "on my feet", he left and forsook me
5. And he departed for the heights of Heaven. The Holy Lord took him
6. Then said I, I shall "gird with sackcloth and walk in mourning"<sup>28</sup>
7. And then his sons accomplished all that was necessary to complete the [printing] of the book so that now I am not filled with shame

<sup>27</sup> *Psalms* 106:23.

<sup>28</sup> 2 *Samuel* 3:31.

8. And as they vouchsafed "the repairing of the damage,"<sup>29</sup> so let their coming out into freedom be vouchsafed them
  9. And let them contemplate all the pleasantness of the light of my virtue with the erecting of the city of my joy.
- It is completed. Be strong.

Vol. IV (*Hošen ha-Mišpaṭ*): 166 leaves, fols. 41, 151, 165, 166 blank. Collation: [1-4<sup>10</sup>, 5<sup>12</sup>, 6-16<sup>10</sup>, 17<sup>4</sup>].

Colophon (f. 164v; fig. 3):

### חושן המשפט נשלם שבח לאל עולם

ותכל מלאכת עבודת הקודש ביום שיני עשרים ושמנה לחדש  
תמוז הוא החודש הרביעי חמשת אלפים ורל"ה למספר קבועי  
בפייביא די שקו בבית מה"ר משלם המכונה קוזי יבורך מעתה ועד עולם  
חזק

1. אני חכמה לכל חכמה עטרת אני נסתר לכל סוד מסגרת
2. בלי קולמוס ורישומי ניכרת באין סופר חוברתי במחברת
3. בבת אחת דיו עלי עוברת בלי שרטוט כתיבה מיושרת
4. תמה על דבורה הגברת בשבט סופרים היא משושרת
5. לו אותי ראתה במחתרת עלי ראשי הושמתי לכותרת

*Hošen ha-Mišpaṭ* is completed. Glory to the Lord of the World.

And so the holy labour was completed on Monday, the 28<sup>th</sup> in the month of Tammuz, which is the fourth month of the (year) five thousand and 235 of the special count, / in Piove di Sacco, in the house of our teacher Meshullam, also known under the name of Cusi, let him be blessed now and forever.

Be strong.

1. I am wisdom, and the crown of every wisdom, / I am the hidden framing of every mystery
2. with no quill, still my inscription can be seen / without a scribe did I make a book
3. Ink goes unto me immediately, / without lining all that is written is straightened
4. In amazement stand I before Deborah the heroine, / who sang praises to the quill of scribes
5. Had she seen me in secret, / onto her head I would have been put as a crown.

<sup>29</sup> This expression is frequently used when describing the restoration of the Temple (see, e.g., 2 Kings 12:6,7,8,9,13).

Bibliography: Davidson 1930: 6691; De Rossi, *Annales*, I: II; Iakerson JTS: 10; Offenberger - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: 61; *Thesaurus*: A 2; Tishby 1983-93: 11.

The famous halakhic codex by Jacob ben Asher (c.a 1270, Cologne – c.a 1343, Toledo) *Arba'ah Turim* (The Four Orders) was, apparently, the most popular code of practical laws of the Jewish sacred law (*Halakhah*). As a Halakhah compiler, Jacob ben Asher took into consideration both Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions. It was because of this that his code became the source of laws equally respected in Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities. It will suffice to note here that during the incunabula period the code was published in its entirety, or in separate *Turim*, fourteen times.<sup>30</sup> The edition we are discussing here is a huge four-volume code printed in three different square typefaces of the Ashkenazic style. The arranging of the text in two columns, the kind of typefaces used, as well as the overall appearance of the leaves undoubtedly remind us of the manuscripts of Ashkenazic halakhic compendiums of that period.

The edition has three colophons (at the end of the first, third, and fourth books). The close reading of the colophons – the colophons are rhymed, with one monorhyme, “the narrator” being “His Majesty” the book, as was the custom in Italian colophons of that period<sup>31</sup> – casts some light on the book’s history, by no means a smooth one.

First, it becomes clear that the printer Meshullam Cusi<sup>32</sup> who had launched the printing of the book, died before it was completed. This is clearly stated in the colophons of the first and the third volumes: the book itself poses as a widow cast into despair by the loss of her master, whose children stepped in and completed the task. However, it is the third colophon that provides the most significant material for the history of printing. This colophon contains the bibliographical data of the exact time when the work was finished, “On Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> in the month of Tammuz, which is the fourth<sup>33</sup> month (of the year) five thousand and 235 of the special count, in Piove di

<sup>30</sup> Offenberger - Moed-Van Walraven 1990: nn. 61-75.

<sup>31</sup> Compare, for example, the Venetian colophons written in the “books’ person”. Pollard 1905: 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Meshullam Cusi came from a well-known family of Ashkenazic Jews, who moved to Italy following Rabbi Judah Minz (c.a 1408-1506) in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On the Jewish community of Piove di Sacco and the origins of printing there, see Nissim 1972 and 2004; Offenberger 2004: XLVIII.

<sup>33</sup> Here, as in the colophon from Reggio Calabria, months are numbered by the Biblical calendar, where a year starts with the Spring month of Nisan.

Sacco, in the house of our teacher Meshullam, known as Cusi, let him be blessed now and forever".<sup>34</sup>

So, the printing of the book was finished on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, in 5235 (3 July, 1475). In this colophon, the name of the printer is followed by a eulogy for the living: "let him be blessed now and forever" (יְבוֹרֵךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם). In other words, at the time when the last volume had been completed, Meshullam Cusi was still alive, whereas, while the second and third volumes were being printed, he was dead. It can be easily inferred that the order in which the volumes were coming out was not the same as in the treatise by Jacob ben Asher: the fourth volume came out before the first and the third did. Considering the similarity of the style of the first and second colophons, as well as the partly shared information (on the death of the printer and his sons taking over his work), one can also conjecture that the four-volume edition was printed in two stages. Apparently, it was being printed simultaneously on two separate presses: first, the second and the fourth volumes (with one colophon at the end of the fourth), then – the first and the third. Having accepted this hypothesis, which seems quite convincing, the date of the coming out of the *Turim* should be slightly altered, or amended.

On the 3 of July 1475, only the first half of the whole task had been accomplished, and work on this edition went on for another couple of months or so (probably until the beginning of 1476). It is worth noting here that this "amendment" of the date based solely upon a very close and careful reading of the colophons, effects quite a change in the history of the early Jewish printing. Most bibliographers, building their conclusions on the *Turim*'s being a considerably bulkier book compared to that of the Rashi's *Commentary* (482 ll. comp. to 118 ll., which means a much longer period spent on printing), and also accepting the 3 of July 1475 as the date when the entire volume had been printed, have believed *Turim* to be the first dated Hebrew book.<sup>35</sup> However, if we accept that by the 3 of July, 1475, only 166 (one volume), or 274 (two volumes) leaves in-folio had been printed, than it seems highly probable that the printing of the Rashi's *Commentary* (118 leaves) in Reggio di Calabria had been concluded earlier, on the 17 of February 1475.

There are a few more details that can be added to the history of this edition: the text of the third colophon contains a suggestion that after the printer's death his descendants faced some serious problems that might have resulted in their imprisonment. How otherwise could we explain the wish expressed by the book and addressed to the sons of Meshullam Cusi (colophon II, line 5) that "And as they vouchsafed 'the repairing of the damage', so let

<sup>34</sup> Vol. IV, L. 1646, colophon, lines 1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Compare, for example, Tishby 1983-93, no. 11, p. 862, note 2.

their coming out into freedom be vouchsafed them”? It is also plausible that the colophons written in the person of the “widowed book” were penned by the enlightened wife of the late Meshullam Cusi (or were written from her point of view), as she might have had some part in the family enterprise, and, certainly, must have prayed passionately that her sons be set free. However, it is hard to believe that the invocation to a prophetess Debora in the fourth colophon can be regarded as a reminder of the name of Meshullam Cusi’s wife, as some researchers think. To me, it sounds more like a poetic metaphor. Besides the *Turim*, another edition – *Seliḥot* (Penitential Prayers)<sup>36</sup> – lacks bibliographical data: this was printed with the same typefaces and on the same paper used for the dated volume of the *Turim*. It is not unlikely that it was with this edition that the family Cusi started their printing activities: first – an anonymous attempt, then – the publishing of an impressive four-volume edition, during the printing of which the printer died and his sons went broke, ending up in jail on a debt charge.<sup>37</sup>

Summing up the analysis of this edition, I would like to emphasize once again the fact that the halakhic code by Jacob ben Asher published in the small town of Piove di Sacco in 1475 cannot be defined otherwise than a produce of the Ashkenazic culture. From the point of view of cultural history, this edition should be regarded as a starting point in the history of Ashkenazic printing.

### 3. Esslingen 1475: Anti-Judaic polemics and its place in the history of Jewish printing

Jewish printing in the territories conventionally designated as Ashkenaz<sup>38</sup> started only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> I believe this fact makes the Ashkenazic editions from Italy even more valuable for us. However, the year 1475 may be regarded as “pivotal” also because it was then that, for the first time, a Hebrew element was “injected” into Christian printing: I am referring to the first appearance of Hebrew letters in a Latin incunabulum.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> In-folio. 182 leaves. Collation: [1-17<sup>10</sup>, 18<sup>2</sup>] (according to Tishby 1983-93: N 12).

<sup>37</sup> We should not forget though that the colophon’s text is silent on the precise nature of the link between Cusi’s sons professional activities and their imprisonment. One must not therefore jump to any conclusions here.

<sup>38</sup> It is worth remembering that “Ashkenaz” comprises the following territories: Central and Northern Medieval France, England, and Medieval Germany.

<sup>39</sup> The first Jewish typography in Prague appeared in 1512. As for Germany, the first printing houses were founded in Oels (Silesia) in 1530, and in Augsburg as late as 1534.

<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed account, see Marx 1944.

## Bibliographical description:

Petrus Nigri. *Tractatus contra perfidos Judaeos*. Esslingen: Conrad Fyner, 6 June 1475.

In-folio and in-quarto. 50 leaves, f. 1 blank. Collation: [1<sup>12</sup> 2-3<sup>10</sup> 4<sup>12</sup> 5<sup>6</sup>]. 37 lines per page.

Colophon (f. 44v):

Explicit tractatus Ad Iudeorum perfidiam exstirpan / dam confectus per fratrem Petrum Nigri Ordinis praedi / catorum Uniuersitatum Montispessulani in Francia, Sala / mantine in Hispania. Friburgensis ac Ingelstetensis In / Alamannia. situatarum. Baccalarium In theologia forma / tum In lingua hebraica perficientem Qui et ipso corrigen / te Inpressus est per discretum ac Industrium virum Conra / dum Fijner de Gerhussen. In Esslingen Imperiali / villa. ac completus. Anno ab Incarnacione domini. Millesimo / CCCCLXXV die sexta Iunij.

Here finishes the treatise on Jewish perfidy which must be eradicated. Accomplished by brother Peter Schwarz of the Dominican Order [who had studied] at the University of Montpellier in France, at Salamanca University in Spain, and at the universities of Freiburg and Ingolstadt in Germany. By a bachelor read in theology, a scholar of Hebrew language. The treatise was printed by a man of excellence and much assiduity, Conrad (Konrad) Feyner of Gerhausen, with his own corrections. In Esslingen, the imperial city. Completed on the sixth day of June, in the year of the Lord, 1475.

Bibliography: BMC II: 514-515.

Speaking of the uncommon features of this edition, it can be noted that the book was printed by the printer Konrad Feyner on paper of two different sizes: *in folio* and *in quarto*. It is also worth mentioning here that both versions of this edition are preserved in the collection of the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg (shelf-mark 9.11/12/4/14 *in folio* and 9.8.3.51 – *in quarto*), each one brought to the library as parts of convolutes, and both currently in excellent physical condition.

Peter Schwarz, *vel* Petrus Nigri (1434-1483), was a theologian, a Hebraist, and a fervent participator in anti-Judaic disputes. In his main work, *Contra Perfidos Judaeos*, Schwarz frequently quotes Hebrew words, or phrases, in Latin transliteration. The analysis of the criteria used by the author for transcribing Hebrew texts is not within the area of my competence, neither is it directly related to the subject-matter of this article. However, in Schwarz's pamphlet, there appear some words in Hebrew letters as well. It should be

stressed here, though, that the Hebrew words are printed not with metal letters (Gutenberg's method), but with woodcut Hebrew letters (xylographical method). Still, such a case, if only indirectly, might also be regarded as a certain milestone in the development of book printing. Hebrew letters appear in the book three times: 1) at f. 11r, lines 3-4, where the first two words of the Bible are inserted, "In the beginning created" (בראשית ברא); 2) at the same leaf, lines 16-17 – the Tetragrammaton (יהוה); 3) f. 47r, 27 letters of Hebrew alphabet (figs. 4-5).

The analysis of the woodcut letters can yield the following paleographic information:

- the letters imitate Ashkenazic square script of the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>41</sup>
- the letters on the leaf 11r copy the capital letters, which in the original were inscribed with a goose quill. A goose quill, unlike a reed pen, enables one to write with thin as well as thick strokes;
- the woodcarver's knowledge of Hebrew letters' forms, apparently, was not very firm, so he was copying them just as he saw them. This is especially conspicuous in the forms of *resh* and *beth*. The letter *resh* is narrower than its standard form. The letter *beth* appears as something between standard letters *kaph* and *beth*;
- the alphabet on the leaf 47 slightly differs in form from the letters on the leaf 11. The letters of the alphabet are likely to imitate the standard square script, which was used for copying the main texts in Ashkenazic manuscripts of that period.

#### 4. Conclusions

Summing up, I would like to once more highlight the fact that in 1475, at the opposite ends of the Apennine peninsula, books were printed that may be regarded as the first examples of Ashkenazic and Sephardic printing. There is no evidence available that allows us to claim that these books would have circulated only in the areas inhabited by the members of those communities (i.e., in the Pyrenean peninsula and in the Ashkenazic regions). It might be more accurate to say that the very printing of these books testifies, however indirectly, to the fact that by 1475, Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities were so well established in terms of wealth and social integration that early printers could easily count on their product being in demand. The latter conclusion indirectly rebuffs the opinion prevailing in Jewish historical litera-

<sup>41</sup> Various examples of this kind of scripts can be found in the recently published *Specimens of Mediaeval Hebrew Scripts*, 3: *Ashkenazic Script* (Engel - Beit-Arié 2017).

ture that Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities started thriving in Italy only in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The Latin edition of 1475, where woodcut Hebrew letters of Ashkenazi style were used, shows that in 1475 in Germany (or, at least, in Esslingen), there is a high probability that metallic Hebrew letters did not exist. However the use of Hebrew letters beside the use of Latin transliteration of Hebrew words may testify to the need for a visual representation of the Hebrew text and can be read as a form of foreshadowing, which preceded the establishment of the Hebrew book printing in Germany.

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נמלם פ' תורה	סרטי ביורה	וע הייתה חורה	לכלעו צריהם
חטיר צטיר לך	צור שדה ופאל	אשר נתן כאל	כלב אברהם
אז בכת חטקתי	בלבחותי חמדותי	דרטתי וחקרתני	כיד אברהם
אך הטאת הזמן	בקטתי מעטה זמן	צעור אשר נתן	למים לחידהם
צמקום למייתי	ספרים כתבתי	והגם הטלמתי	לזרע אברהם
בזמנשתי אולי	אטתה מבהר אולי	הלחי וחלי	ידיכן לחידהם
רוחה קרח ואל	תשים סערי לחל	כי מה טבם נגל	לא מצד אברהם
הלך מצד חברה	אסרה החטך חורה	זעם גם עברה	הביא על אברהם
צעור ישלח יח	מחזה חל עריו	באותם יבואו	מצד אברהם
לחד בזהרעטון	יקן לב ועשיתי	אז כן געטון	בן יצחק אברהם
ברע המדינה	דעל ימות מותבא	עמוף קלבריוה	טם גר אברהם
לצדה ה' לשם	ומזיתים זה ועלטים	ב' עזר סוף חדשים	לחטטן אברהם

Fig. 1 – Rashi, Reggio Calabria 1475, colophon (from the facsimile).

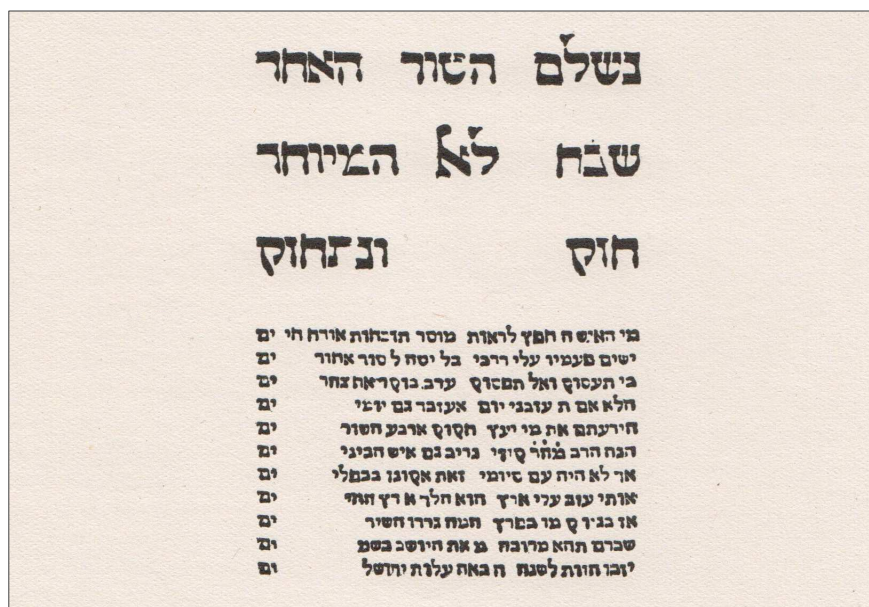


Fig. 2 – Arba'ah Turim, Pieve di Sacco 1475, colophon vol. I (from the facsimile).

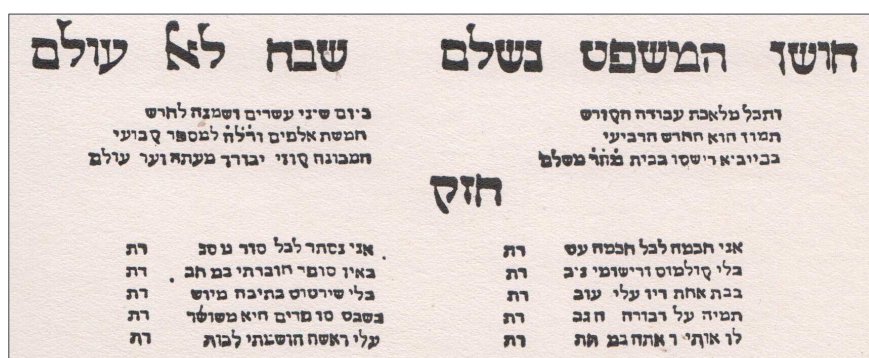


Fig. 3 – Arba'ah Turim, Pieve di Sacco 1475, colophon vol. IV (from the facsimile).

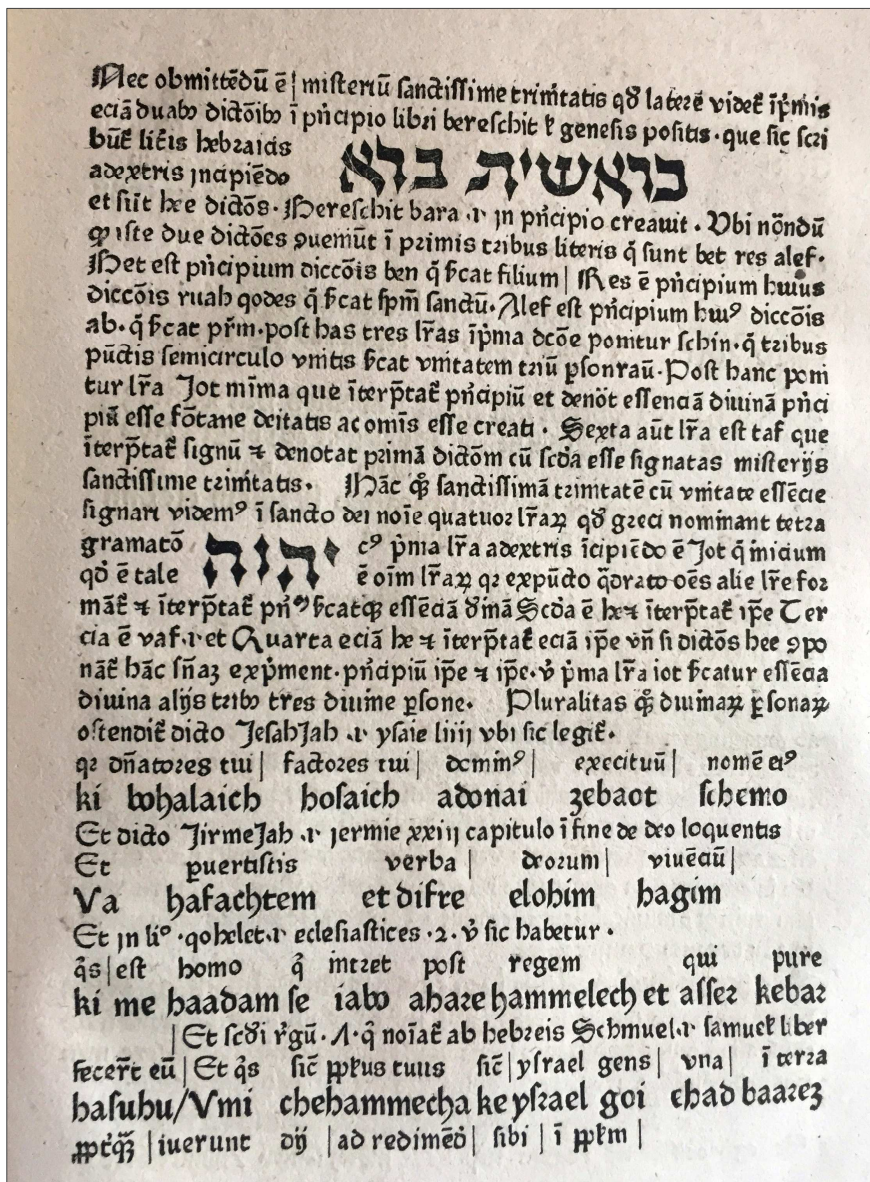


Fig. 4 – Tractatus contra perfidos Judaeos, Esslingen 1475, f. 11r.





Fig. 5 – Tractatus contra perfidos Judaeos, Esslingen 1475, f. 47r.