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## **The most ancient Hebrew manuscripts reused as bookbinding in Europe: The Tosefta of Norcia and the Še'iltot of Ravenna from the 10<sup>th</sup> century**

Seldom does it occur that the research for medieval Hebrew manuscripts, parchment folios, reused as bookbinding, brings to life fragments of texts, copied in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. There have been a number of discoveries of important fragments of codices copied in the Apulian area, particularly in Salento, in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, but to find fragments from the 10<sup>th</sup> century remains very rare, indeed. In this short note, I would like to focus on the two discoveries of Tosefta fragments in Norcia and fragments of the Še'iltot *de-Rav Aḥai*, found in Ravenna. Both date back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and are written in characters of the old square oriental writing of Maghreb typology and in the same script, as known and used also in Sicily.

### *1. The Tosefta fragments of Faenza and Norcia: History of their discovery*

In an Addendum to a 1992-study of mine on the then newly discovered Hebrew manuscripts fragments, unearthed in Corinaldo (Ancona), I published the text of a minuscule fragment of the Tosefta I had found in 1990 in the State Archive Section of Faenza.<sup>1</sup> In the Bologna State Archive, I also

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<sup>1</sup> I published the small fragment, with a picture, in M. Perani, "Frammenti di manoscritti ebraici medievali nell'Archivio Storico Comunale di Corinaldo (Ancona)", *Henoch* 14 (1992) 301-306, in particular p. 303; the fragment is labeled as Hebr. fr. ebr. 7; on the Faenza fragments see also: M. Perani, "Frammenti di manoscritti ebraici nell'Archivio di Stato di Faenza", *Henoch* 12 (1990) 227-229; M. Perani and E. Sagradini, *Talmudic and Midrashic Fragments from the «Italian Genizah»: Reunification of the Manuscripts and Catalogue*, Giuntina, Firenze 2004. All the discoveries in the Faenza State Archive, up to year 2012, can be found in M. Perani e E. Sagradini, *I frammenti ebraici negli archivi di Cesena, Faenza, Forlì, Imola, Rimini e Spoleto*, con la collaborazione di C. Santandrea e di M. Muratori, Olschki, Firenze 2012.

found two bi-folios from a Tosefta copied in Spain during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but this is of no interest in the present study.<sup>2</sup>

The fragment (fig. 1) belonged to an ancient manuscript, copied around the year 1000 CE, and was reused by cutting it to obtain a small reinforcing notch of cm. 6 × 8, which was used to strengthen the anchorage of a strap closing the lip of a register that I wish to present. The small fragment of the Tosefta, which contains only 5 partial lines of *Eruvin* 9, 25-26 and 10, 2-3, had been cut and reused in a volume in the year 1557; then it was detached and placed in an envelope named *Varia liturgica e theologica*.

Although very small, the Faenza fragment provided us with a piece of the most ancient fragment of the entire “Italian and European Genizah”, which, as is known, is not a true Genizah. It was Professor Sussmann who suggested in 1979 to use, as an analogy, the term *genizah*, for the archives and libraries of the old continent where many thousands of sheets and fragments of Hebrew manuscripts, reused to bind registers and books, were discovered. At the end of my *Addendum*, I wrote: “If other discoveries of fragments belonging to the same manuscript are made, we will be faced with fragments of great importance for the study of the manuscript tradition of the Tosefta”. The dream came true, and in March 1997, we discovered a page and a third of another of the same ancient manuscript of the Tosefta, reused as bookbinding of a register of the notary Giovanni Girolamo Vertecchi of Norcia for the year 1665 (fig. 2). I reported this important discovery for the first time during the conference held in Norcia on 22 March 1997 on the theme “Fragments of medieval codices in the testimonies of the Historical Communal Archive of Norcia”.

It would not be surprising if other archives of Umbria – a region where, to date, no systematic investigations have taken place – would return to us in the future other pages of this precious manuscript. The new Norcia fragments were reused in 1665 for the cover of a notarial register. Generally, we observe that in large collections of Hebrew manuscript fragments, such as those in Bologna and Modena, sheets of the same code were dismembered and reused as bindings in the same or consecutive years. A very clear example present the four integral bi-folios of a Talmud Yerushalmi, copied by the scribes of the Otranto School in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which I discovered in the State Archive of Bologna, two thirty years ago and the others only two years ago. The four bi-folios were reused in the year 1573. It therefore seems

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<sup>2</sup> M. Perani, G. Stemberger, “Nuova luce sulla tradizione manoscritta della Tosefta. I frammenti rinvenuti a Bologna”, *Henoch* 16 (1994) 227-252; see also the catalogue: M. Perani, S. Campanini, *I frammenti ebraici di Bologna. Archivio di Stato e collezioni minori*, Olschki, Firenze 1997, 128 and pl. 30.

strange that the small fragment of Faenza and those of Norcia, belonging to the same manuscript of the Tosefta, were reused 108 years apart from each other. But this is possible, because we know that junk dealers spread sheets of the same manuscript in places even hundreds of kilometres from each other, and sometimes even across a very wide chronological arc.

The Norcia Tosefta is now held in the Municipal Historic Archive of Norcia. The two fragments, an entire folio with the text legible on both sides, and a stretch strip legible on the *recto* and *verso*, contain the first part of Tosefta *Nedarim* 4, 7-5, 5, while the strip glued on the folio contains the Sections 6, 5 (*recto*) and 7, 3-4 (*verso*) of the same treatise *Nedarim*.

The reuse of this rare and ancient codex happened a century after the bulla issued in 1553 by Pope Julius III, ordering the confiscation and burning of all the copies of the Talmud. We know that from the masses of codices, destined to be burned, those in parchment were frequently separated, since sought after by the bookbinders for reuse as ligatures. Therefore, it is possible that part of the codex arrived around the year 1665 in Faenza, Romagna, while part had remained in Norcia, central Italy.

## *2. Where are the remaining hundreds of sheets of the Norcia Tosefta likely to be?*

The manuscript codex of the Tosefta must have consisted of many sheets, probably a hundred or more: where did the others end up? This is a good question, to which there is a clear and tragic explanation. It is very likely that both in Norcia and Faenza, a number of sheets of our Tosefta were reused in 1665 by binders to wrap new registers of blank folios to be sold to notaries, priests and ordinary people to register different kinds of documents. The great majority had become registers of private persons or families who recorded their household ledger on them, and who, at the end of a year, when the register was of no more use, fired their fireplaces with it. In fact, only public officials, such as notaries for their protocols or parish priests for baptism or marriage records, were obliged to keep their protocols, depositing them in a notarial or parochial archive. This explains why very few fragments, probably only 2 or 3 percent of the total, have reached us, with the remainder largely irretrievably lost.

## *3. The extant Tosefta manuscripts and textual character of the Faenza and Norcia fragments*

The manuscripts of the Tosefta are few. The first incomplete, extant codex of Tosefta is the Erfurt manuscript (E), copied in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the

Ashkenazi area. According to Israel Ta-Shma,<sup>3</sup> this manuscript is “the result of an aggressive Ashkenazi revision”.<sup>4</sup> The second almost complete text is held in the Sephardic Vienna manuscript (V), written after 1300, and very close to the text of the *editio princeps*. The third Tosefta manuscript in our hands, held in London (L) but copied in a Sephardic milieu in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, contains only the order *Mo’ed* and the tractate *Hullin*. Some fragments of the *Tosefta* are also found in the Cairo Genizah and belong to a later manuscript.

#### 4. Contents and characters of the Faenza and Norcia Tosefta

The text of Norcia Tosefta includes, *Nedarim* 4, 8-6, 5 in the *recto* and in the reverse of the whole sheet. In the upper third of the cut contiguous sheet: *Nedarim* 6, 5 and 7, 3-4, respectively in the front.

The Norcia Tosefta fragments (N) dismembered from a code likely to have been copied in Salento and written in a Hebrew square oriental script, is datable around the 1000 CE and constitutes the oldest manuscript of the Tosefta known to date. These fragments are indeed the most ancient found so far not only within the “Italian Genizah” project, but also throughout Europe, with its European network, created in 2007 and called “Books within books: Hebrew Fragments in European Libraries”.<sup>5</sup>

The Norcia Tosefta fragments are a precious witness of the oriental tradition of this work, in which the text has not yet undergone the harmonization process with the Babylonian Talmud and the Mishnah, to which the

<sup>3</sup> I.M. Ta-Shma, “The Library of the Ashkenazi Sages in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries”, *Kiryat Sefer* 60 (1985) 289-309 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> P. Schäfer, “Once Again the Status Quaestionis of Research in Rabbinic Literature: An Answer to Chaim Milikowsky”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989) 89-94.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com/>. “Books within Books” is a European network of scholars working on fragments of medieval Hebrew books and documents recovered from book bindings and notarial files in various libraries and archives in Europe, Israel and USA. Hebrew manuscripts are important and often unique witnesses of Jewish presence and intellectual activities in medieval Europe. Only a small percentage of the books and writings produced in the past have been preserved. The corpus of fragments reused in bindings has considerably enriched our knowledge of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. Thousands of such fragments have been identified in various libraries and collections in Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and Czech Republic. The richness and diversity of this corpus, referred to as well as the ‘European Genizah’, by analogy to the treasure trove of Hebrew fragments recovered from the Cairo Genizah, offers a unique opportunity to reconstruct the history of the Hebrew book and of the Jewish communities in Medieval Europe.



other listed manuscripts were subjected in following centuries, when they were copied.

Among the almost 15,000 fragments discovered so far in Italy, the Norcia Tosefta and the *Še'iltot de- Rav Aḥai*, found in Ravenna, are the most ancient. The fragments are written in a south oriental square script developed in Palestine and spread in the North African coast of Maghreb, used also in Sicily. From this writing typology developed the Italian Hebrew script in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 5. Codicological description

The text of Norcia Tosefta includes *Nedarim* 4, 8-6, 5 in the *recto* and in the reverse of the whole sheet. In the upper third of the cut contiguous sheet: *Nedarim* 6, 5 and 7, 3-4, respectively in the front. The fragments of Norcia consist of a whole folio and a third of the next sheet cut horizontally, glued by the binder below, with the Hebrew text reversed (figs. 3-6). Since the text of the two fragments is consecutive, they constituted the same central bifolio of a quire. The sheet measures mm. 280 × 240 and the strip mm. 75 × 240. The written area measures mm. 205 × 180, while the text layout is in full page of 31 lines. It contains *Nedarim* 4,8-6,5. The second fragment, almost a third of a folio, had been glued at the bottom of the folio, to stretch the sheet. It is mm 75 × 240 wide, and contains *Nedarim* 6,5 in the *recto* side, and 7,3-4 in the *verso*.

The folio measuring mm. 280 × 240 is not exactly a square size, but it attests the antiquity of these manuscripts, copied before, in later centuries, the dimensions of manuscripts increased in height, while ancient manuscripts are often squares or even wider than taller.

Traces of ruling and pricking are visible, but not clearly and not in all lines. The text is well preserved on the inner sides of the folio, while on the outside a few lines are slightly erased, but remain readable; only a few lacerations cause slight gaps. The colour of the parchment is rather brown, smooth and thin in appearance. The ink is dark brown and there are only a few traces of the scratching performed with a dry point.

### 6. Palaeographic analysis

The justification of the text on the left is quite regular for the alignment, even if not always, and the scribe did not use dilatation or contraction of final letters, which however exceed the rightness and are never broken and resumed using the beginning of the next line first letter (figs. 7-8).

There are almost no graphic fillers except two short strokes in line 8 from below on the *recto* of the entire folio as ". The scribe normally performs the *alef-lamed* fusion and gives his writing a strong square characterization.

In line 3 of the verse of the whole sheet, the scribe performs an unusual fusion between *šin* and *reš* in the word *me-Yiśra'el*:



The left-hand pen stroke of the *šin* also performs the function of vertical line of the *reš* (see figs. 9-10, last line). The upper ascendant rod of the letter *lamed* in the first line at the top of the page is particularly slender and vertically elongated. The scribe has two ways of tracing the internal oblique tract of the *šin*, sometimes with the upper end turned downwards, and sometimes turned upwards. The upper right apex of the *ṭet*, as in the small fragment of Faenza, turns downwards until it sometimes touches the lower left corner inside the letter. In general, the copyist shows some personal swing in his writing style, not always rigorously identical in the rendering of the same letters.

The descending lines of the letters are not straight but oblique, with the upper part hanging slightly to the left. The bases of the letters are also inclined, while in tracing the left descending traits of the *alef* the scribe traces first the vertical traits on the left and joins it with the central oblique tract.

To sum up, the writing is an eastern square of the North African type.<sup>6</sup> We know that in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, some Jews from Tunisia moved to Sicily and they, most likely, introduced their writing style to the island. Then, from Sicily, the Tosefta could have travelled up the Peninsula to Norcia where some folios were reused while some other folios reached Faenza. In fact, the handwriting presents the characteristic writings of this area, differentiating itself from the Babylonian or north-eastern square and from the Palestinian south-western one, from which the Italian handwriting derives. A typical North African character is for example the letter *peh*, which presents the upper bar for a horizontal section, before developing the curve with the “nose” turned inside. Another very rare fusion of letters confirms its origin: it is the double fusion *šin/reš* and *alef/lamed* in the word *me-Yiśra'el* seen above.

<sup>6</sup> E. Engel, “Styles of Hebrew Writing in the Tenth- and Eleventh-Centuries in light of Dated and Datable Genizah Documents”, *Te'udah* 15 (1999) 365-398: 388 and the 12 plates of manuscripts (Hebrew).

### 7. The dating of the Norcia fragments

The dating of the fragments of Norcia happened on a palaeographic basis, thanks to the comparison with a fragment of the Cairo Genizah, now preserved at the Cambridge University Library and bearing the signature T-S 24.7. It is a marriage act, or ketubbah, drafted in Cairo in 1003/1004 of which a full-scale reproduction can be consulted in the Malachi Beit-Arié volume on the Eastern and Yemenite scriptures. The spelling of Norcia's fragments has some similarities, albeit minor, with a manuscript preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, Ms. Heb. c. 28, copied in Baghdad in 997 of which the fol. 49r is reproduced in the aforementioned volume. Some letters, such as *alef*, *ṭet*, *mem*, *peh* and others have similarities with another fragment of the Genizah in Cairo, containing a document written in Fuṣṭat in Egypt in the year 969, also kept in Cambridge, at the University Library, TS 12.499. Therefore, the writing style of the Norcia fragments can clearly be identified as an oriental type writing, dating back to the year 1000 CE, approximately, similar to the most ancient fragments of the Cairo Genizah, used also on the North African coast, in Sicily and southern regions of Italy. M. Beit-Arié had proposed this same dating for the small fragment of Faenza, belonging to the same manuscript, pointed out in a letter, addressed to me on 17 October 1990.

Hence, it is highly possible that this code of Tosefta was copied during the first phase marking the golden age of the rabbinic academies of Salento, by a copyist from the Otranto School. This Apulian area, at the end in 422/23 of Jewish institute of the Palestinian Patriarchy, with a *nasi* with the role of chief of the communities, had inherited all the *morešet Ereš Yisra'el*, namely the cultural heritage of the land of Israel, and remained in close relations with Palestine. As was the case for many other whole or fragmentary manuscripts, copied in Salento, this very ancient Tosefta, could have been brought to Norcia, central Italy, by Jews escaping the massacres of the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Some sheets were dismembered most likely around the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century and reused as register bindings. Other sheets continued the journey towards the northern regions of Italy, as documented by the two small fragments that I discovered in Faenza, reused as reinforcement notches to anchor the leather buckles that closed the register.

### 8. The Še'iltot de-Rav Aḥai from Sicily?

In my research of Jewish fragments, one of the most important discoveries was to find fragments of an ancient Masoretic work in the Archivio Arcivescovile of Ravenna in 1997. The fragments belonged to a manuscript copied in Sicily in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Shortly before, I had found in the same archive a bi-folio reconstituted by four strips, cut horizontally across the open

sheet, which recomposed it perfectly, even if they had been torn apart. It was the central dossier of the file, therefore with four pages of consecutive text, containing the oldest witness in our possession of the Midrash Tanḥuma, Buber, datable to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with parts of *Aḥare* and *Qedošim*.<sup>7</sup>

A few years later, during the restoration of cadastral registers, now preserved at the Archiepiscopal Archive in Ravenna, came to light six strips from two different bi-folios, containing the *Še'iltot de- Rav Aḥai*, copied in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and reused to reinforce the spine of two big Registers containing the *Catastri ferraresi* of the Ravenna Bishop.<sup>8</sup> The cadastral register in which eight strips were rediscovered, was in fact part of the *Catastri Ferraresi* of the Ravenna bishop, a landowner in the main cities of Romagna such as Ferrara, Rimini, Argenta and Cesena (fig. 11).

In a note on the folder where the *Še'iltot* fragments are kept, we learn that they were found in two volumes of the *Catastri Ferraresi* of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century, numbers 1 and 2-4, on the occasion of their restoration, carried out in 1993. If this were the case, we would be faced with a previous re-use of early Jewish fragments, performed two or three centuries earlier than the golden age of reuse, which began in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. One might conjecture that the two large registers underwent a restoration of the binding in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the classic period of reuse. Although it would seem that the restoration of 1993 was necessary due to the bad state of the binding, I think the first hypothesis is probable, because in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries there was still no consolidated Jewish community in Ferrara.

Although these fragments were discovered in Ravenna, the codex of the *Še'iltot* to which they belonged, was dismembered and reused around the late 16<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Ferrara, a town with one of the largest and most important Jewish communities of northern Italy. The registers recorded land and property concessions granted in emphyteusis and the acquisition of property or land. The Ferrara *Catastri* of the Ravenna Bishop had to be filled out by the "Ufficio del Patrimonio" (Heritage Office) of Ferrara,

<sup>7</sup> M. Perani, G. Stemberger, "A New Early *Tanḥuma* Manuscript from the Italian Genizah. The Fragments of Ravenna and their Textual Tradition", *Materia giudaica* 10/2 (2005) 241-266.

<sup>8</sup> M. Perani, "Frammenti di Manoscritti ebraici medievali negli Archivi di Stato di Imola e Ravenna", *La Bibliofilia* 93 (1991) 1-20; Id., "Nuovi frammenti ebraici a Ravenna presso l'Archivio Arcivescovile", *Ravenna Studi e Ricerche* 5/2 (1998) 35-40; Id., "Il riuso dei manoscritti ebraici come fenomeno interculturale: nuovi frammenti di manoscritti ebraici scoperti a Ravenna presso l'Archivio Arcivescovile e la Biblioteca Classense", in M. Perani (ed.), *L'interculturalità dell'ebraismo. Atti del convegno Ravenna Bertinoro 26-28 maggio 2003*, Longo, Ravenna 2004, 147-151.

according to the practice of the ancient regime. It was in the forties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that Cardinal Chiarissimo Falconieri Mellini decided to gather the *Catastri* of the above-mentioned cities, including those of Ferrara, in one location, requesting their transferral to the Archiepiscopal Archive of Ravenna. This is how the *Še'iltot* manuscript, copied in Sicily such as numerous other precious, ancient Hebrew codices, journeyed from Sicily to Ferrara, and eventually Ravenna.

Pinchas Roth recently published an accurate study on the *Še'iltot* importance both in Hebrew and in English.<sup>9</sup> According to Urbach, this was the first work, summarizing the Halakhah, composed by the Geonim after the end of redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: "The first work written by a Babylonian scholar after the Babylonian Talmud was the *Sefer Še'iltot* of Rav Aḥai Ga'on, who emigrated to Erez Israel".<sup>10</sup> Roth summarizes three interesting characteristics of the text: 1. the scribe's systematic effort to be brief; 2. the total absence of derashot, the homiletic sections that each chapter of the *Še'iltot* is supposed to contain; 3. the occasional transition from Aramaic into Hebrew:

The *She'iltot*, like the Babylonian Talmud and most of pre-Islamic Geonic literature, was composed in Aramaic. Towards the end of the Geonic period, though, around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a trend began to develop towards a return to Hebrew.<sup>11</sup>

In his study Roth points out that, in his palaeographic analysis of the fragments found in Ravenna, based on the opinion of E. Engel<sup>12</sup> and M. Beit-Arié,<sup>13</sup> that a similar writing can be seen in the fragment of Cambridge, UL T-S 12.468 (fig. 12).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the writing of this fragment, written in 977/998 in Kairouan, Tunisia, has several similarities with the writing of the fragments

<sup>9</sup> P. Roth, "Še'iltot Fragments from Ravenna", *Ginze Qedem* 1 (2005) 245-271 (Hebrew); Id., "On Some Rabbinic Fragments from the European Genizah, Part 2. The *She'iltot*", *Materia giudaica* 10/2 (2005) 305-312.

<sup>10</sup> E.E. Urbach, *The Halakhah: Its Sources and Development*, trans. by R. Posner, Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat-Gan 1986, 345.

<sup>11</sup> Roth, "On Some Rabbinic Fragments", 309.

<sup>12</sup> In the footnote 19 Roth writes: "I benefited from a consultation with Dr. Edna Engel of the Hebrew Paleography Project, who confirmed my findings regarding the provenance of the Ravenna fragments. However, the analysis itself is my own, and on my own responsibility".

<sup>13</sup> Engel, "Styles", 388.

<sup>14</sup> M. Beit-Arié, E. Engel, *Specimens of Medieval Hebrew Scripts. Vol. II: Sefardic Script*, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem 2002, no. 2.

of the *Še'iltot*. Actually, the Cambridge fragment has a proto-Sephardic script, which shows some affinity with that of the *Še'iltot*, but the letters of the first fragment are more rounded and their letters are the height and width measurement equal. The writing of the *Še'iltot* is more thin vertically, with sharp and pointed features, while the letters are taller than wider. Of course the two writings are both examples of proto-Sephardic script of the North African form or the Maghreb area, in which the characteristics of the old eastern square still prevail (fig. 15 and fig. 18).

According to Roth, the writing would be revealed to be a typical Sicilian handwriting and that would be confirmed by the combination of two characteristics unique to Sicily and attesting its intercultural nature. The shape of the letters is similar to the North African script, generally written using a calamus (reed pen) producing strokes of uniform width, while in Sicily as in Europe, the scribes used a feather quill, able to trace thin strokes that often begin with the curved quill pen cut. Judith Olszowy-Schlanger disagrees with this interpretation.<sup>15</sup> First of all, she points out that Sicily in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries was under the Fatimid influence and its Jewish families had connections with Tunisia, and thus it was culturally a part of the Muslim Maghreb. She also states that there is no evidence that the *Še'iltot* letters were written with a quill, but rather, with a calamus, as was the practice in North African. The argument on which the attribution of the *Še'iltot* to Sicily based on the consideration that the writing is North African but the pen is “European”, does not hold. I personally agree with Judith Schlanger’s opinion.

#### 9. Colophon and purchasing notes

The scribe’s colophon and a few notes of possession by subsequent owners are present on the last page of the precious, ancient manuscript (fig. 13). The colophon is partially mutilated, and the letters legible are: חזק הקורא .....וברו. The lacking part can be easily restored as follows: חזק הקורא וברוך הכותב or “May the reader be strong and blessed the writer”, a formula well known to be used in Hebrew manuscripts of the later centuries, from the Renaissance period onward, but which, according to Sfardata, is not used in medieval manuscripts.

P. Roth writes that, while the short colophon can be reconstructed, the purchase and possession notes are not legible. The ownership notes in their current state are very difficult to be deciphered. Actually, they are difficult to read because the ink is faded or erased. Nevertheless, I was able to read one of them, important in respect of its assumed Sicilian origin and the date at

<sup>15</sup> E-mail sent on June 20, 2020.

which one of its owners acquired the codex. Here is my reading of the note on the left, written over six lines:

סליק שאלתות דרב אחאי  
אני אליהו [ב"ר] שמואל  
קניתי זה הספר מיד עבדיה [ב"ר שמואל] ל  
[.....] בט"ו טבת שנת ה'  
יהי רצון מלפני י"י שאומר  
הנה דיני יציין

Translation:

Are finished the *Še'iltot* by Rav Aḥai. / I Eliyyahu ben Šemu'el bought this book from 'Obadiah ben Šemu'el's hand / ..... on 15 Tevet of the year 5[000] (= 1240). / May it be God's will that I can say: / Behold, He will show me my law.

The long second note, in the margin below under the colophon and written over three or four lines, is however illegible, except for a few terms. The note informs us that Eliyyahu ben Šemu'el purchased the manuscript from 'Obadiah ben Šemu'el, the seller, and likely writes the date of 5000, equivalent to 1240 of the Christian Calendar. The script of the note looks ancient, probably not later than the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. If the manuscript had been copied in Sicily, or at a certain time, arrived to Sicily, the buyer would have likely purchased the manuscript two centuries before the expulsion of the Jews from Sicily, decreed in 1492 by the Catholic Kings for the Kingdom of Aragon, of which Sicily was a part. It is plausible that at that point of time, the manuscript was still on the island and travelled to Ferrara after the expulsion and from Ferrara to Ravenna around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 10. *The journey of the oldest European Hebrew manuscripts from South Italy to North*

The oldest Hebrew manuscripts, both entire codices and fragments, dismembered and reused as bookbinding, followed the path of Jews who had written and owned them, from southern Italy to northern regions. Among them the Norcia Tosefta, whose journey from south to north is attested by folios from which the above described Faenza fragment had been cut. Similar is the journey of the *Še'iltot* from Sicily to Peninsular Italy, very likely due to the expulsion of the Jews from the Aragon Crown, in 1492.

The most ancient Italian manuscripts, which are often the oldest ones produced in Europe, were copied in the golden age of the splendid Jewish culture of Apulia, during the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

However, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, severe persecutions and massacres forced Jews to escape death by fleeing to the central regions of Italy and then to the northern ones. Dozens of ancient manuscripts, copied in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in the southern regions of Italy, were taken to the north Italian regions, in particular to Emilia Romagna, where the sad fate of being dismembered and becoming book covers awaited them.

Among the complete manuscripts, we can mention the Codex Kaufmann of the Mishnah, attested, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to be in Lugo di Romagna, then sold in Padua, where years later it was again sold to an antiquarian bookseller in Budapest, from which David Kaufmann bought it on 28 February 1896.<sup>16</sup> Another treasury is the *Mishnah A* held in Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, a unique work in two volumes with the Sifre, kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with a colophon dated 1072/73, and other codices held in European libraries. In addition, there are the fragments of works copied between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which arrived to Bologna, Modena and other places in the North, where at the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century they were reused as bookbinding.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Perani, "Ebraisti e bibliofili europei a caccia di manoscritti ebraici in Italia fra Sette e Ottocento: Bernard de Montfaucon e David Kaufmann", in F. Sabba (ed.), *Patrimonio culturale condiviso: viaggiatori prima e dopo il Grand Tour*, Associazione Culturale Viaggiatori, Bologna – Napoli 2019, 193-211, in particular 204-209, the paragraph *Il viaggio del Codice Kaufmann della Mishnah dalla Puglia alla Romagna e i suoi possessori*. Online in open access: [www.viaggiatorijournal.com](http://www.viaggiatorijournal.com).





Fig. 1 - The recto (up) and verso side of the fragment of the Tosefta found in 1990 in the Ravenna State Archive, Section of Faenza.



Fig. 2 – The folio and a strip of almost a quart of folio of the Norcia Tosefta, glued in the part below with the Hebrew text reversed, before the detachment from the register.



Fig. 3 – The recto side of the Norcia Tosefta folio. In the margin below the mirror ink traces of the strip glued and its reversed text.



Fig. 4 – The recto side of the strip glued reversed to the lower margin of the Norcia Tosefta folio.



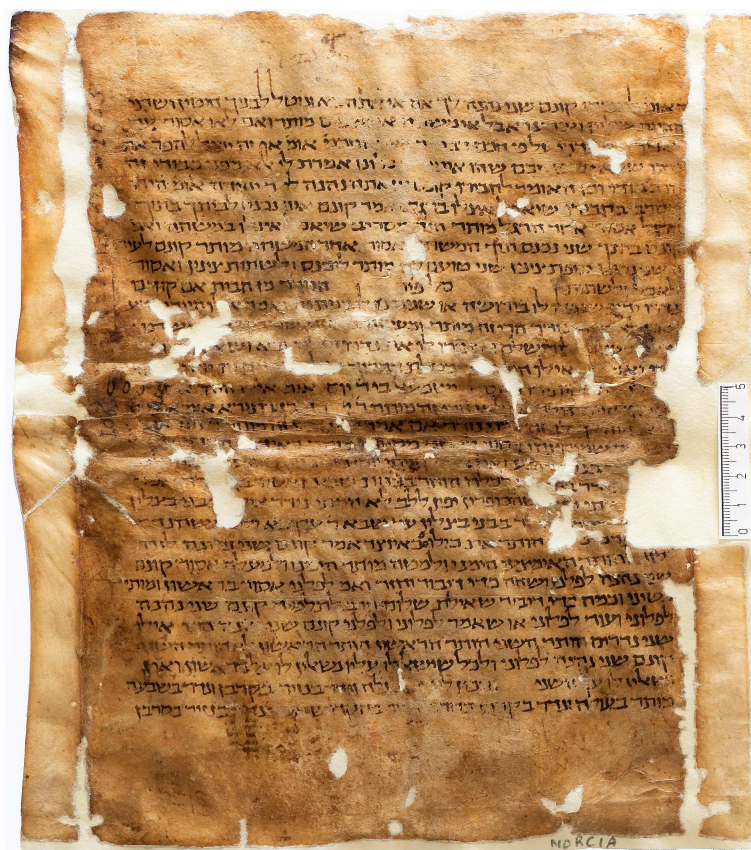


Fig. 5 – The verso side of the Norcia Tosefta. In the left corner on the top, vertically written the year 1665 and related to the deeds contained and likely the year in which the manuscript was dismembered and reused as bookbinding.



Fig. 6 – The verso side of the strip glued reversed to the lower margin of the Norcia Tosefta folio.

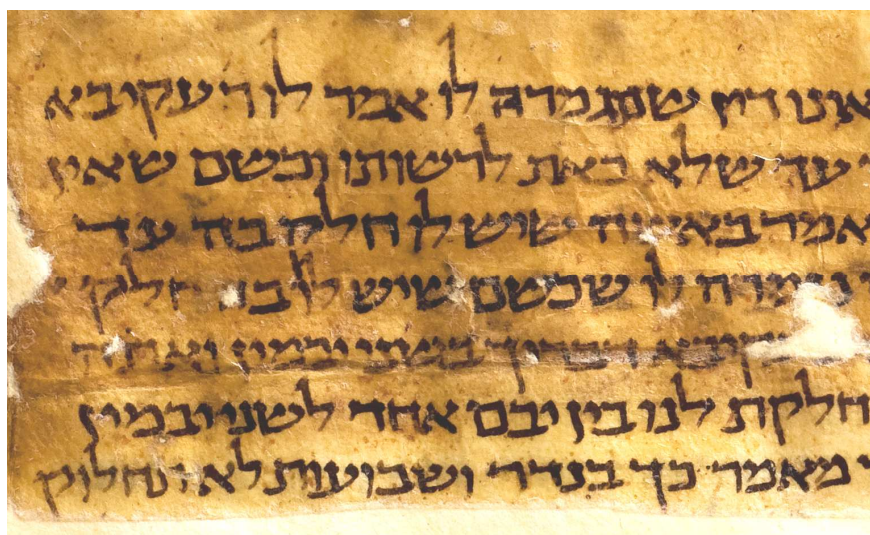


Fig. 7-8 – The script of the Norcia Tosefta.



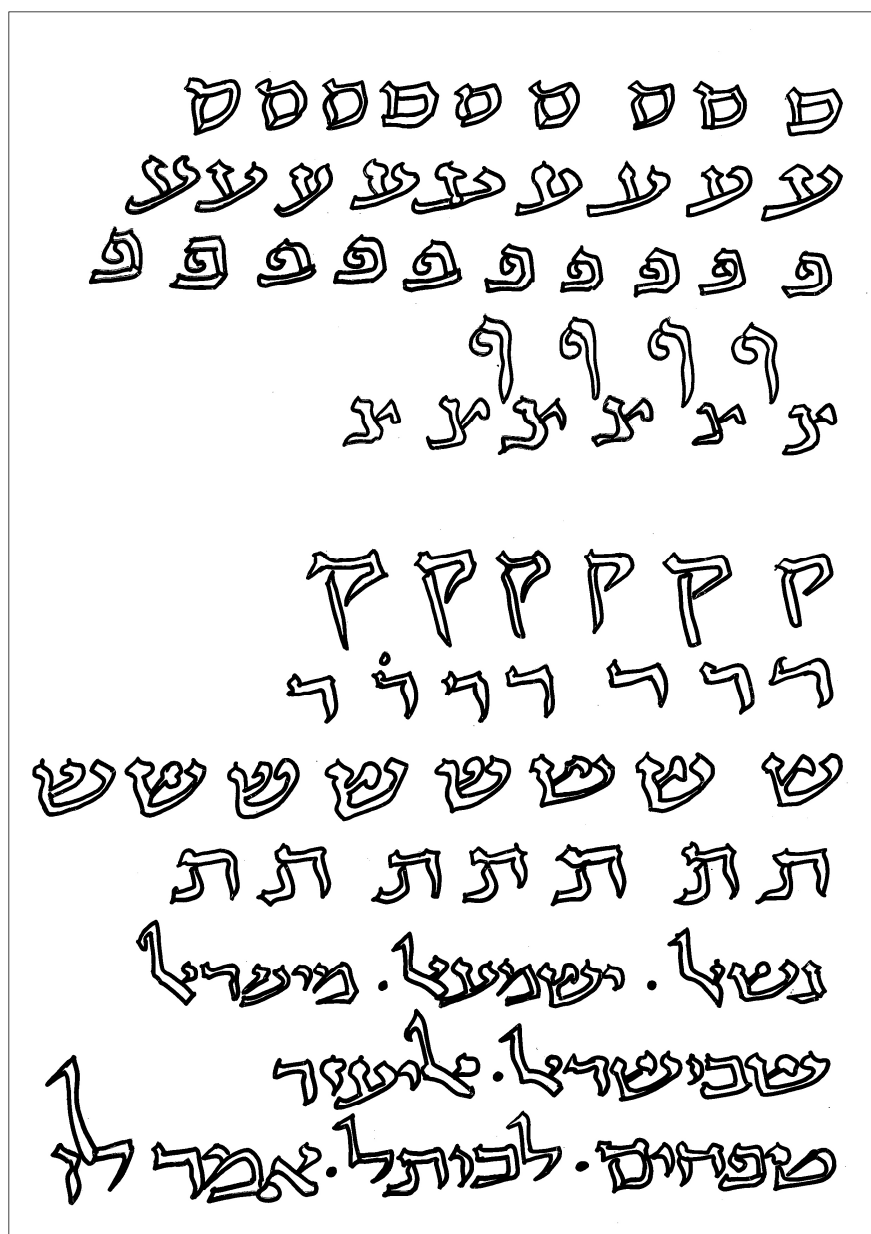


Fig. 10 -The abecedaries of the second part of the Norcia Tosefta letters.





Fig. 11 – The parts visible of the strip of the *Še'iltot* reinforcing the spine of the *Catastri Ferraresi* before their detachment.



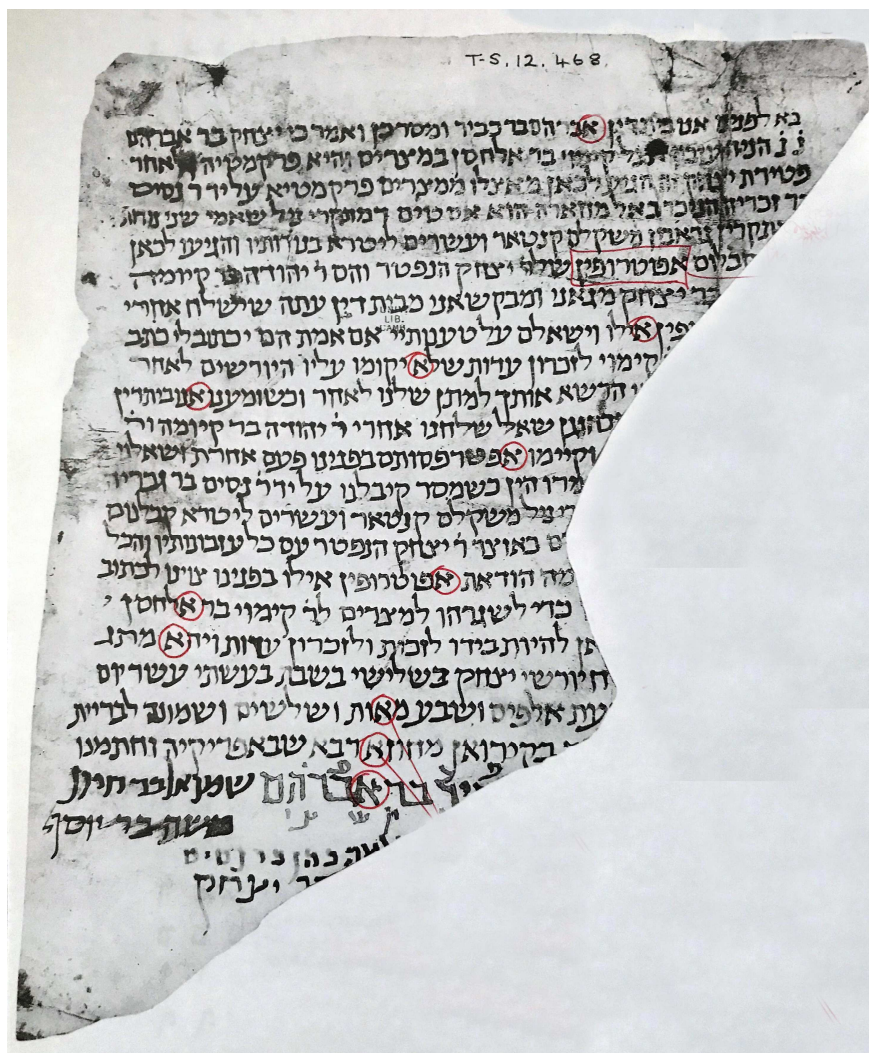


Fig. 12 – The fragment Cambridge, UL T-S 12.468, written in 977/998 in Kairouan, Tunisia, which according E. Engel shows a proto-Sephardic script similar to that of the Še'iltot.

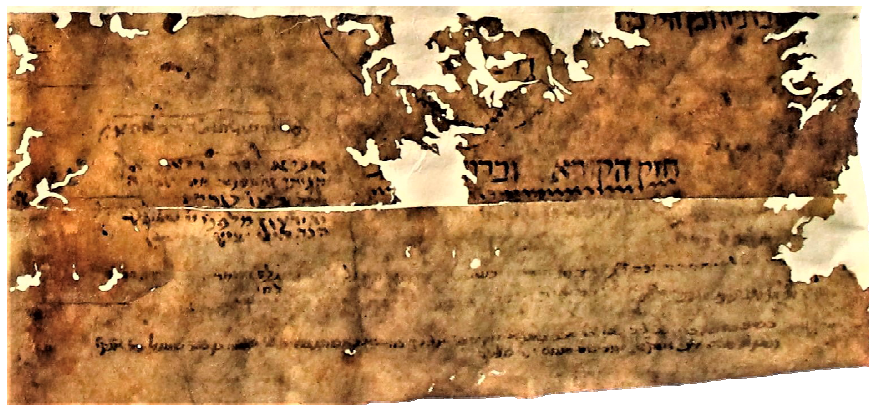


Fig. 13 – The folio with the end of the *Še'iltot* manuscript with the colophon and, on the top on left, the purchase note, among other below on three or four lines difficult to read.



Fig. 14 – A strip of the *Še'iltot* cutting horizontally a bifolio.



Fig. 15 - The abecedaries of the letters of the Še'iltot.





Fig. 16 – The re-composition of the four strips, reconstructing three quarters of a bifolio.



Fig. 17– The re-composition of the two strips, reconstructing almost two quarters of another bifolio.



Fig. 18 – The script of the Še'iltot.