



THE "PERUGIA GENIZAH"

THE FRAGMENTS OF HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS IN THE BIBLIOTECA DEL DOTTORATO OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PERUGIA

EXHIBITION

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MAURO PERANI AND GIANFRANCO CIALINI
WITH THE COLLABORATION OF JOHN SAWYER AND GUSTAVO REICHENBACH
GRAPHICS BY DAVID LANARI

With the recent discovery of Hebrew parchments removed from mediaeval codices and reused to cover printed books, Perugia is added to the list of centres where the phenomenon described as the "Italian Genizah" is documented, by analogy with a true Genizah, or store room where Jews since time immemorial placed sacred texts in order to avoid desecration. Today thanks to the discoveries made by Dr Gianfranco Cialini, we may now speak of the "Perugia Genizah".

It is already more than twenty-five years since the late Giuseppe Baruch Sermoneta in 1981 launched the Hebrew Fragments in Italy Project or the Italian "Genizah" Project. By a happy intuition he anticipated the systematic survey of re-used Hebrew manuscripts which was later coordinated with other projects concerned with non-Hebrew manuscripts discovered in Italy. The survey of the *disiecta membra* of Hebrew codices is not yet complete, but has so far brought to light around 10,000 fragments of Hebrew manuscript books, for the most part whole pages or double pages as well as smaller fragments.

Discovering these remains means giving new life, so to speak, to manuscripts that had been "dead" for four or five centuries. It involves entering into the history of the Hebrew manuscript book, following its journeys, and examining the methods and forms of its conservation, as well as its ritual destruction by the Jews in what may be described as its "death" and "burial" in a genizah, or its destruction in the fires lit by the Church in the sad history of 2000 years of persecution – or in this case in its recycling. There are currently a little more than 70,000 Hebrew manuscript books preserved in around six hundred national, state, public, municipal, university and monastic libraries, as well as in private collections. In addition about 150,000 fragments of mediaeval manuscripts were recovered from the Cairo Genizah in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo. But between the Qumran manuscripts, first discovered in 1947 and dating from the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE, and the most ancient mediaeval manuscript we possess, there is an almost total void of about eight hundred years.

THE PARCHMENT BEFORE THE SEPARATION, STILL ATTACHED TO THE COVER OF THE BOOK

(THE WRITING IS VISIBLE UNDER ULTRA-VIOLET)



From the ninth century to the middle of the sixteenth, only about 5% of all the manuscripts produced by the Jews in the Middle Ages have survived. So the discovery of a single page or even a fragment of a new mediaeval Hebrew manuscript is of enormous significance.

Contrary to what has been said and in part worth repeating once more today, the phenomenon of mediaeval Hebrew manuscripts in vellum being reused in bindings was not determined by the confiscations of the Inquisition, but is part of the general history of mediaeval books and was caused by the spread of printed books which caused the collapse of the manuscript in the book market since hand-written texts could not compete with printed books which were ten or fifteen times less expensive. Unexpectedly this epoch-making revolution in the history of the book, resulted in the fact that the value of manuscripts was measured more by the kilo of vellum, than by what was written on them, whether in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or other popular languages.

The phenomenon of the reuse of vellum applied to every type of manuscript from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth, with a few examples from the eighteenth. We must not automatically assume that the manuscripts found in the archives and libraries of a city were necessarily the possession of the Jews of that city, although this cannot be excluded. It was commercial factors that determined the movement of parchment books for reuse which were sold by second hand dealers over distances of hundreds of kilometers, thereby often leaving in a binder's store in one region, parts of books bought for reuse in another.

In Perugia twenty-four printed volumes have recently been identified which have their binding boards reinforced by double pages of Hebrew manuscripts of large format, reused for this humble purpose. But we must be grateful to this precious reuse insofar as these disiecta membra of books have not all been lost, like thousands of pages and double pages which made up the rest of the manuscripts from which the parchments reused for binding were removed.

Of the twenty-four printed books in question, twenty were rebound with complete double folios, and four detached from two single folios.

The forty fragments, mainly double folios, come from six different manuscripts:

1. Six double folios from a beautiful Hebrew Bible, copied between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth in a German region, containing parts of the biblical book of Jeremiah, with the Aramaic version or Targum intercalated in every Hebrew verse.

2. Four folios from a work copied in an Ashkenazi region in the XIV-XV centuries. It is a legal handbook by the Talmudist Mordekai ben Hillel (Germany c. 1240-98) who wrote this compendium of Jewish religious law in the style of the Tosaphists, or glossators of the Commentary on the Talmus by Rashi (Shelomoh ben Yitshaq). In it the author records, on various complicated legal questions, the opinion of the masters of the Franco-German Talmudic school, many of which are preserved only in this work. Composed before 1286, Sefer Mordekai has the same structure as that used by Alfasi, following the order of the tractates of the Talmud.

3. Two double folios of medium dimensions from the binding of one printed text, which come from a manuscript copied in Italy in the XIV century, containing part of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah ("Repetition of the Torah"), a large-scale legal compendium written by the greatest Jewish philosopher, physician and thinker of the Middle Ages.

4. Twenty folios from a single manuscript containing an important compendium of Jewish religious law, reused in the binding of ten printed volumes, and containing parts of the work of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy, entitled Sefer Mitzvot Gadol or "The Great Book of Commandments".

5. Four folios reused in the binding of two printed volumes, containing part of the legal compendium Sefer ha-Terumah, composed by Baruch ben Isaac of Worms. This copy was done in a Franco-German area between the XIV and XV centuries.

6. Finally, last but certainly not in importance, are eight fragments, mainly single folios, removed from an interesting manuscript containing the Babylonian Talmud, copied in Spain in XIII century, and then, by some sequence of events of which we have no details, brought to central Italy, used as a sacred text, and then finally reused in the binding of four volumes which ended up in the Biblioteca del Dottorato. The fragments from the Talmud are of particular importance both for their antiquity and because of the fact that this work was the Hebrew book most systematically disputed, confiscated and burnt by the Catholic Church and its Inquisition to the point where only one complete manuscript exists, preserved in Munich and copied in the XV century, alongside a few other incomplete manuscripts.

As a footnote we might mention the discovery in the 1980s in the State Archive of Perugia of a fragment removed from a biblical codex of significant antiquity, copied between the XII and XIII centuries and reused in the binding of a printed book. It contains part of the book of Ezechiel cap.48 vv.15-23 and vv.26-34

A PHASE IN THE SEPARATION PROCESS

THE HUMIDIFICATION OF THE PARCHMENT



RABBI CESARE MOSCATI WATCHES THE SEPARATION PROCESS BEING DONE BY MARIA ROSARIA CASTELLETTI, CHIEF RESTORER AT THE LABORATORIO RESTAURO COOREC IN SPOLETO

THE BIBLE

The Bible is known to Jews as the "Tanakh", an acronym of Torah (Pentateuch), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings), the three parts of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah comprises Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; the Prophets are divided into the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the XII Minor Prophets); and the Writings are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, etc.

Six double folios from a beautiful Hebrew Bible, copied between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth in a German region, contain parts of the biblical book of Jeremiah. The Hebrew text is written in a square ashkenazi (north-european) script, alternating verse by verse with the Aramaic of the Targum, the oldest translation of the Bible. In the top and bottom margins, written in a smaller script, is the masora magna, and between the two columns on each page the masora parva, containing the notes of some of the Jewish scholars of the first millennium CE, known as the Masoretes.

Sometimes the masora magna is arranged in delicate ornamental motifs as in mss. B.2.2 and B.2.3



Ms. B. 2.1 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 20,2-15; 27,14-22.
"Cursed be the day on which I was born!"



Ms. B. 2.2 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 22,27-23,10; 23,39-25,1.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!"



Ms. B. 2.3 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 29,14-29; 34,7-18.

"Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his neighbour."



Ms. B. 2.4 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 31,5-17; 32,36-33,5.

"Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted"



Ms. B. 2-5 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 32,20-35; 31,18-32.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."



Ms. B. 2-6 - Bible, Latter Prophets, Jeremiah 39,4-18; 41,8-42,2.

"And they said to Jeremiah the prophet: 'Let our supplication come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us'."

HALAKHAH

Halakhah is the legal tradition of Judaism, as opposed to the theology and folklore of the Aggadah. A large part of Jewish literature, from the Mishnah and Talmud in antiquity to the great codes of Maimonides (12th century), Joseph Caro (16th century) and others, not to speak of the Responsa of famous rabbis down to our own time, is Halakhah in the sense that it contains the discussion of legal questions concerning religious practices as well as many aspects of ordinary daily life. At the centre of every discussion is the Written Torah (Torah she-bi-ktav), the first part of Hebrew scripture, alongside the Oral Torah (Torah she-be-al pe), that is to say, the opinions and decisions recorded in the halakhic literature.

In the exhibition there are fragments of four mediaeval halakhic works.

1. Mordekai ben Hillel, *Sefer Mordekai*, parts of the talmud tractate *Gittin*.

Four folios from 14th-15th century Germany, come from *Sefer Mordekai* ("The Book of Mordekai"), a halakhic work by the talmudist Mordekai ben Hillel (Germany c. 1240-1298). Written in the style of the Tosafists (glossators on Rashi's Commentary on the Talmud) and arranged in the order of the tractates of the Talmud, in a structure similar to that used by Alfasi, it was composed before 1286 and, on various complex legal issues, records the opinions of the Masters of the Franco-German Talmudic school, many of which are preserved only in this work.



Ms. H.1.1 *Sefer Mordekai*, *Gittin*, para. 328-329; 2.2, para. 316.



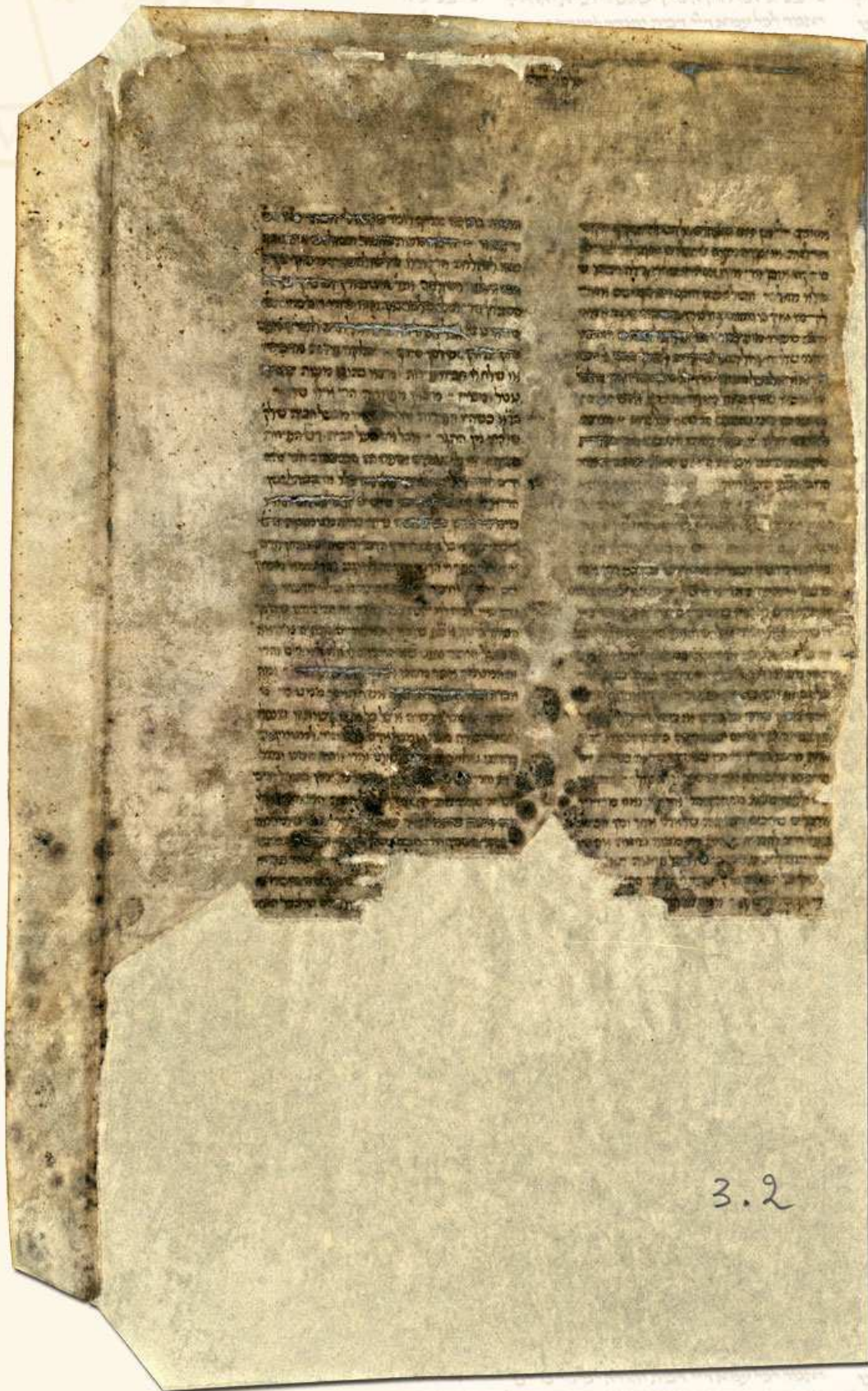
Ms. H.1.2 *Sefer Mordekai*, *Gittin*, para. 359-360; 1.2, para. 369-375.

HALAKHAH

2. Mishneh Torah of Maimonides.

Two double folios come from a manuscript, copied in Italy in the 14th century, containing the Mishneh Torah ("The Repetition of the Law") by Maimonides, also known as "Rambam" (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) (1135-1204). This is a huge halakhic compendium by the greatest mediaeval Jewish philosopher, physician and thinker, who was born in Spain but lived most of his life in Egypt where he was physician to the vizier Saladin and head of the Jewish Community. His greatest philosophical work, the Guide for the Perplexed (1190) was translated into Latin and used by Christian writers including Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274).

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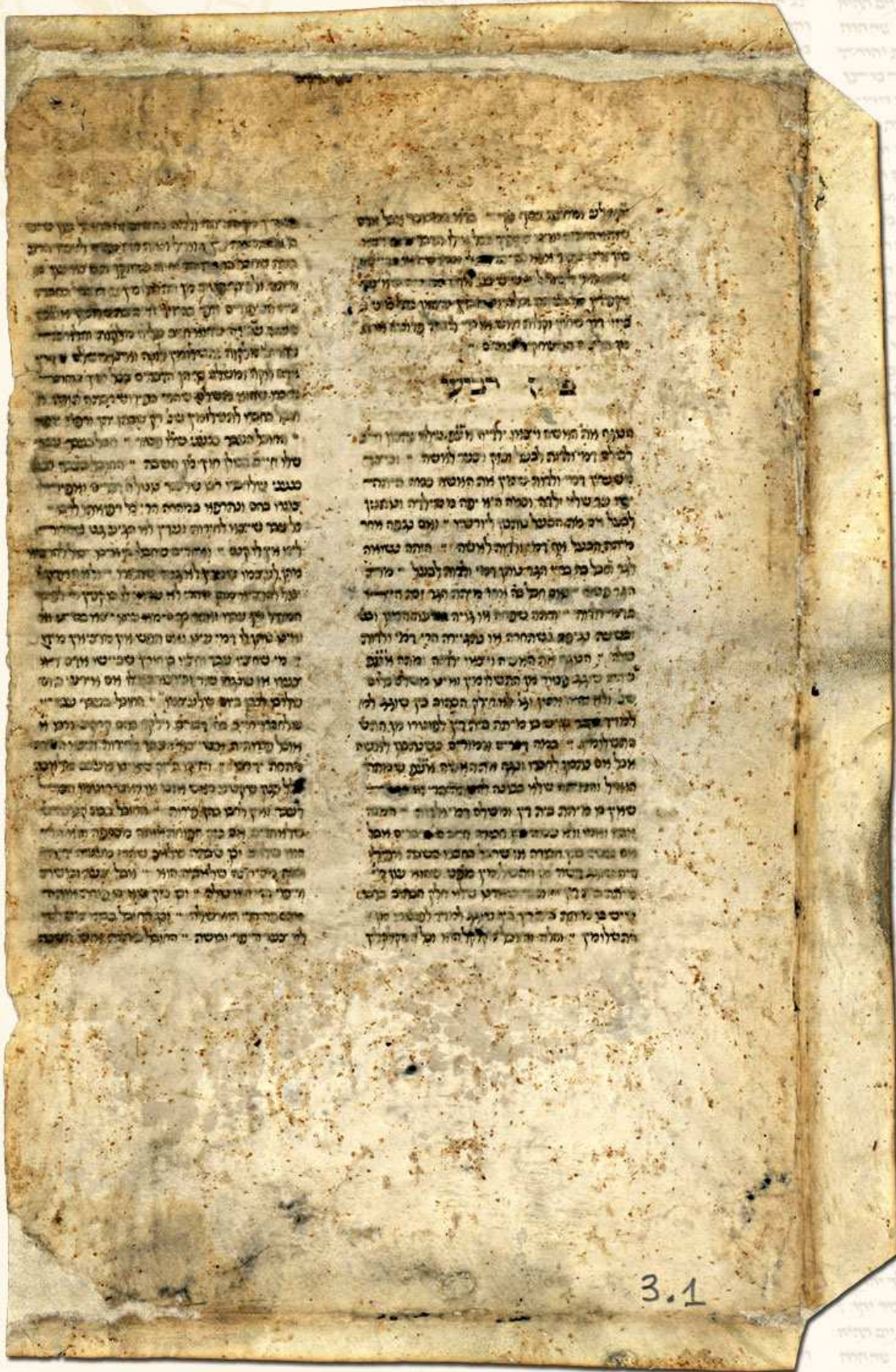


Ms. H.2.2 - Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Sefer Neziqin, Hilkhot Gezeilah wa-Avedah, chap. 15, Halakhah 15 - chap. 16, Halakhah 6.

HALAKHAH

2. Mishneh Torah of Maimonides.

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Ms. H.2.1 - Maimonide, Mishneh Torah, Sefer Neziqin. Hilkhot Hovel u-Maziq, cap. 3, Halakhah 10 - cap. 4, fine della Halakhah 14.

HALAKHAH

3. Sefer ha-Terumah of Baruch ben Yitzchaq of Germiza (Worms).

Four folios from the binding of two printed books, containing part of a halakic work, copied in a Franco-German region between the 14th and 15th centuries, by Baruch ben Yitzchaq of Worms (1170-1211), one of the Tosafists (glossators on Rashi's Commentary on the Talmud). The Sefer ha-Terumah is a compendium of halakhot or rules of conduct arranged according to the most relevant sections of the Talmud (massekhtot). Germiza is the Hebrew name for Worms, one of the most important centres of rabbinical scholarship in the Franco-German region where Rashi himself studied. The Jews of Worms and Mainz (Magonza) were exterminated during the crusades. In Worms there is a Jewish cemetery in which there are thousands of graves, the most ancient of which date back to the age of the Tosafists.

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Ms. H.3.1 Sefer ha-Terumah, Hilkhot Niddah, chaps. 92-93 and chaps. 95-96.

HALAKHAH

3. Sefer ha-Terumah of Baruch ben Yitzchaq of Germiza (Worms).

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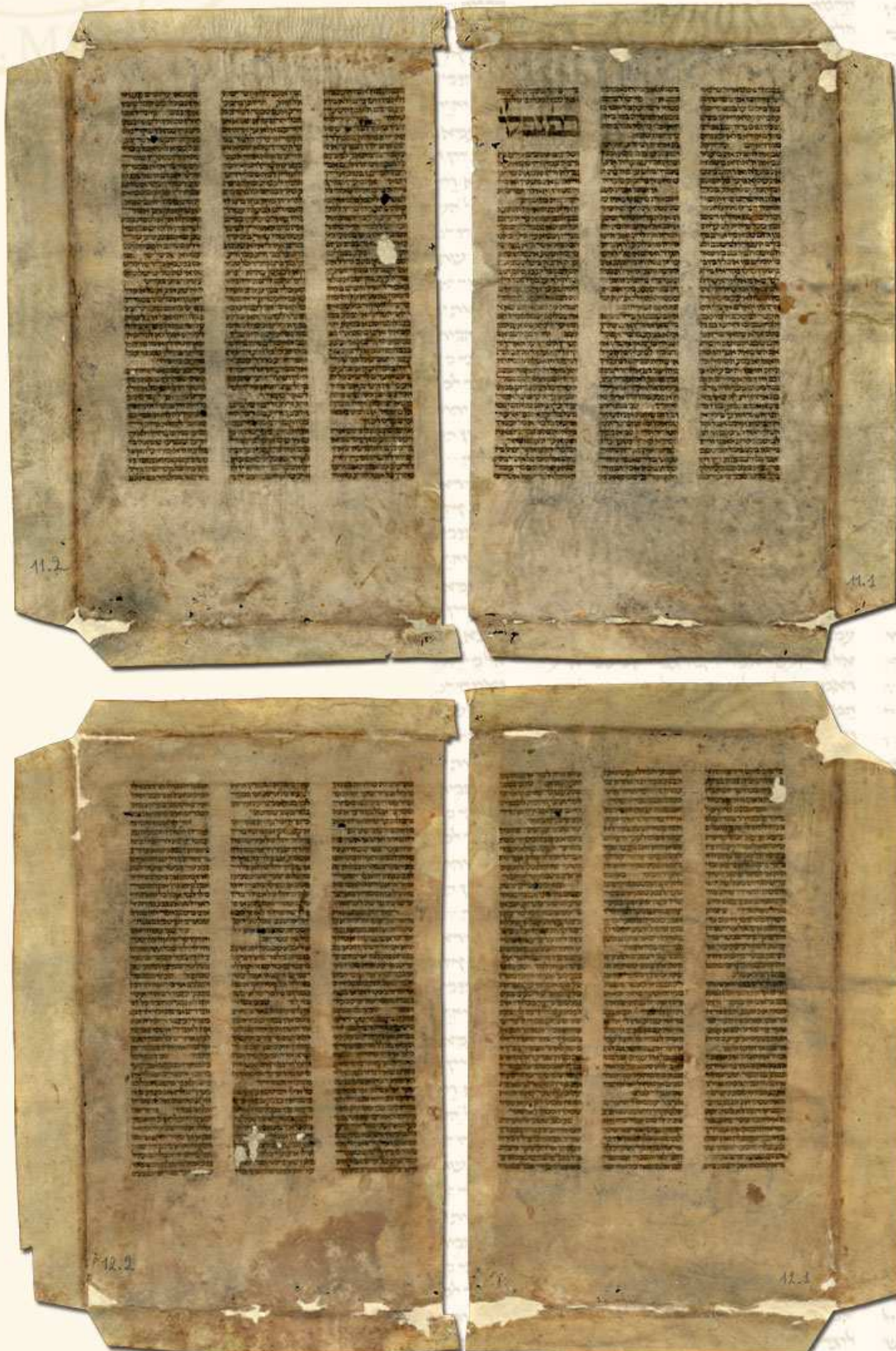
Ms.H.3.2 Sefer ha-Terumah, Hilkhot Avodah Zarah, cap. 136 e capp. 141-143.

HALAKHAH

4. Sefer Mitzvot Gadol of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy.

Twenty folios, from the binding of ten printed volumes, from a manuscript written in a square Ashkenazi script from a Franco-German region area, dating from the 14th-15th centuries. It contains parts of Sefer Mitzvot Gadol ("The Great Book of Commandments"), an important compendium of halakhic law, by Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy (France, first half of the 13th century). The work, generally known by the acronym SeMaG, contains a list of the 613 commandments in the Torah, divided into 248 positive and 365 negative, in an arrangement strongly influenced by Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, but unlike Maimonides, Moshe of Coucy includes long discussions and a variety of interpretations of the halakhic material. He also makes ample use of Rashi's commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and in particular the interpretations of the Tosafists, usually preferring the halakhic traditions of France and Germany to those of Maimonides.

The folios all come from the following parts of the work: Positive Commandments 234 and 243- 258.



Ms. H.4.1 - Sefer Mitzvot Gadol: Positive Commandments 234 e dal 243 al 258

4. Sefer Mitzvot Gadol of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy.

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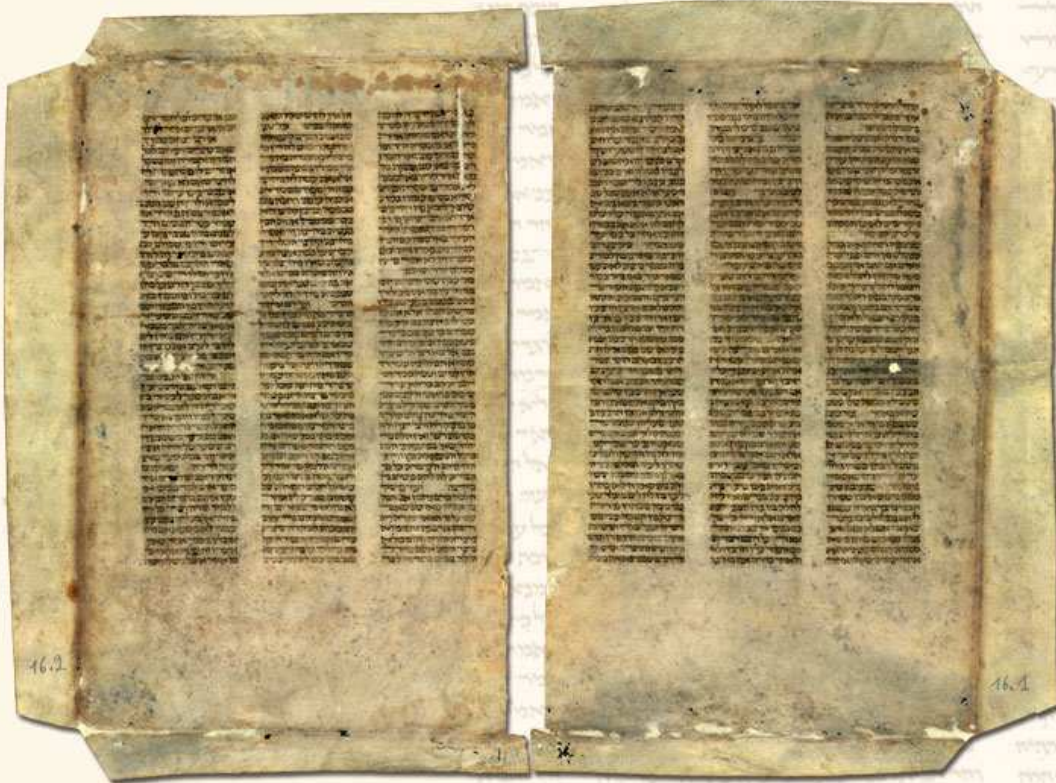


Ms. H.4.1 - Sefer Mitzvot Gadol

HALAKHAH

4. Sefer Mitzvot Gadol of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy.

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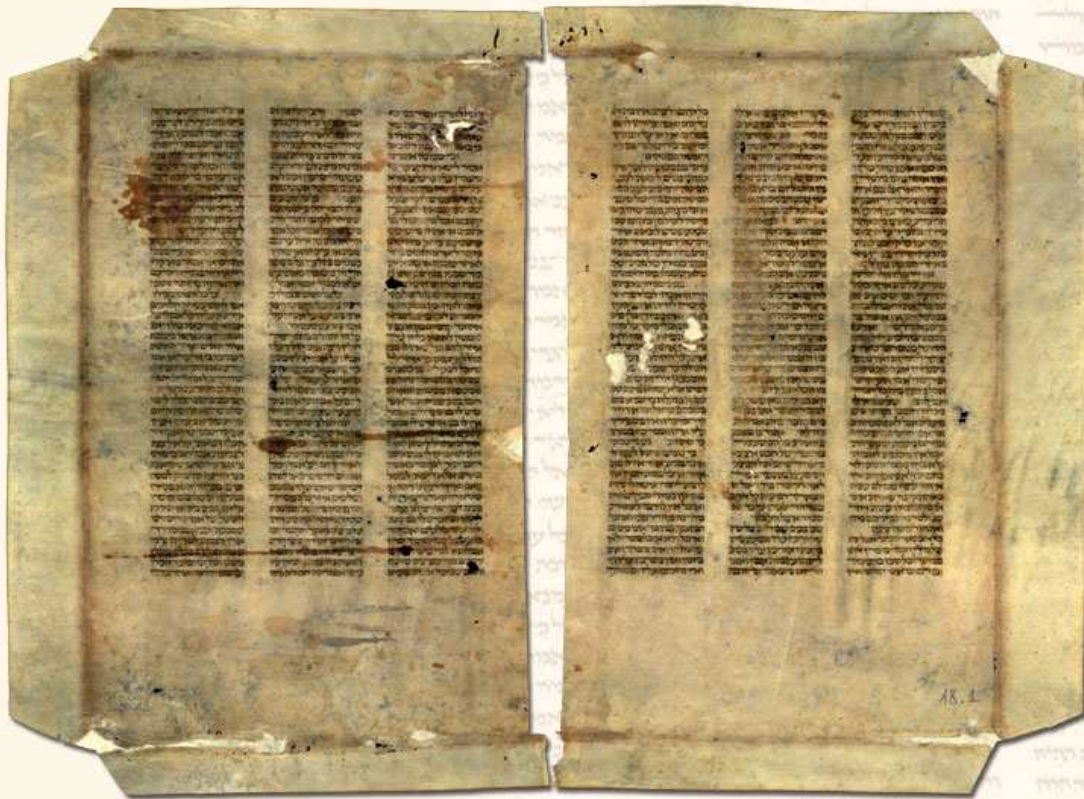


Ms. H.4.1 - Sefer Mitzvot Gadol

HALAKHAH

4. Sefer Mitzvot Gadol of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy.

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Ms. H.4.1 - Sefer Mitzvot Gadol

HALAKHAH

4. Sefer Mitzvot Gadol of Moshe ben Ya'aqov of Coucy.

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Ms. H.4.1 - Sefer Mitzvot Gadol

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

Eight fragments, mainly single folios, removed from an interesting manuscript containing the Babylonian Talmud, copied in Spain in the 13th century, and then, by some sequence of events of which we have no details, brought to central Italy, used as a sacred text, and then finally reused in the binding of four printed books. The fragments from the Talmud are of particular importance both for their antiquity and because of the fact that this work was the Hebrew book most systematically disputed, confiscated and burnt by the Catholic Church and its Inquisition to the point where only one complete manuscript exists, preserved in Munich and copied in the XV century, alongside a few other incomplete manuscripts.

The Babylonian Talmud (Bavli) is less ancient than the Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi), but more complete. The 63 tractates of this vast work, a veritable encyclopaedia of Jewish religious law and the foundation text of rabbinic education, have titles like "Blessings", "Sabbath", "New Year", "Divorce", "Oaths", "Sacrifices" and "Birds' Nests". The fragments on display are from the tractate Niddah which is on the interpretation of the Biblical rules governing impurity caused by the menstrual cycle of women (Leviticus 15:19-31)

Ms. T.1.1 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 37b line 19 - 38a line 36, 38a line 37 - 38b line 45.



Ms. T.1.1 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 38a line 37 - 38b line 45.



Ms. T.1.2 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 40a lines 9 - 37



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Ms. T.1.3 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 43a line 19 - 43b line 28

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

Ms. T.1.4 Babylonian Talmud,
Niddah 45a line 9 - 45b line 1.



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Ms. T.1.4 Babylonian Talmud,
Niddah 45b lines 1 - 38.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

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The Perugia Talmud folios come from the same Talmud manuscript as those discovered in the Bologna State Archive, respectively fragments no. 195 and 204 belonging to Talmud ms. T.CVIII. The Bologna fragments contain pages from the same tractate (Niddah 23a-24a; 25a-25b; 26b-27a)

It is interesting to note that the date of the reuse of the Bologna folios (1555) is two years after the publication of Giulio III's Papal Bull of 1553 prescribing the confiscation of all copies of the Talmud in Rome and their subsequent destruction on a bonfire lit in the Campo dei Fiori on the Jewish New Year in September of that year. The Pope after having carried out the confiscation in Rome, invited all Christian leaders to follow the Roman example, and confiscations and bonfires tragically took place in all the principal cities of Italy. So it appears that this splendid Talmud codex was cut up and reused after it had been confiscated and condemned to be burnt. We know that parchment codices were frequently removed from the bonfires because the vellum of which they were made was very valuable and one could make money by selling it to book-binders for reuse.



Ms. T.1.5 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 49b line 40 - 50b line 7

The books now in Perugia which were bound with other pages from the same manuscript, even though they were published in Venice in 1550, were rebound after 1553 as was customary in that period. This confirms the fact that the confiscations following the Papal Bull of 1553 resulted in there being a large quantity of Talmud codices to burn, and, fortunately for us, some folios which would escape the flames. The fact that the disiecta membra of the same manuscript reached Perugia and Bologna, shows how the second-hand dealers who sold parchment manuscripts for reuse, travelled far on their commercial business. Reused fragments of the most ancient manuscript discovered so far, containing parts of the Tosefta copied in the east in the 10th century, have been found in Faenza and Norcia.



Ms. T.1.6 Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 51b line 44- 52a line 47