A Hebrew "Book within Book" at Fisher Library, University of Sydney

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Abstract

This article presents the first Hebrew "book within book" to be found in Australia. Included within the binding of an early printed Hebrew book entitled *Torat Moshe* (Venice, 1601), housed at Rare Books and Special Collections, Fisher Library, University of Sydney, is a small parchment fragment containing only nineteen Hebrew letters (comprising four complete words and portions of three others). The article traces the path from discovery (first observed by Alan Crown in 1984) to identification (a medieval poem recited on the occasion of the circumcision ritual). The poem is known from only five other medieval manuscripts (London, Oxford, Erlangen, Jerusalem, New York), so that the small Sydney fragment is a crucial, albeit fragmentary, witness to a rarely attested and thus relatively unknown piece of medieval Jewish history and liturgy.

Introduction

During the past several decades, researchers in (mainly) European libraries have discovered the remnants of medieval manuscripts within the bindings and flyleaves of early printed books. The practice of repurposing fragments of earlier manuscripts for the securing of bound books in the early centuries of printing was relatively widespread, especially since the sturdiness of the no-longer-needed (?) parchment scraps made for a readily available and highly effective resource.[1] Today there is a worldwide effort to identify and catalogue these fragments, which typically are in Latin, given that language's domination in medieval Europe.[2] In the vast majority of cases, the older parchment fragment found within the book binding contains a text already known to scholars, though naturally each witness thereto (even a fragmentary one) is precious in its own right.

As with Latin and other European languages (English, French, German, Greek, etc.), so too with Hebrew. Within the bindings and flyleaves of early printed books (both Jewish and otherwise), one finds a considerable amount of earlier Hebrew material on the parchment scraps and strips used to secure the books. A worldwide digital project, known as "Books within Books: Hebrew Fragments in European Libraries," has been established to aggregate all this material, thereby allowing scholars around the globe to learn of each other's discoveries. The project is directed by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger of the University of Oxford and the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris), with support from the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe, and is hosted at its

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[1] For general introduction, with excellent images, see Hester (2018).

[2] The largest digital project is Fragmentarium: Digital Research Laboratory for Medieval Manuscript Fragments: https://fragmentarium.ms/. For a collection of essays on the subject, see Brownrigg & Smith (2000).

own dedicated website: http://www.hebrew manuscript.com/.

Typically, the manuscript fragments reveal familiar texts: Bible, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud of the Land of Israel, Babylonian Talmud, various collections of Midrashim, commentaries, etc. — though once again, each witness to an ancient or medieval text constitutes a precious treasure. On occasion, a less well-known text is revealed, in which case the manuscript fragment may have even greater intrinsic value.

As one can tell from the subtitle of the "Books within Books" project, the vast majority of the fragments are housed in European collections, even though the website includes (or will include, as more material is uploaded to the site) documents currently in Israel, Tunisia, Canada, and the United States. To the long list of countries registered at the "Books within Books" website, we now may add Australia.

Fisher Library

Fisher Library of the University of Sydney contains a fine collection of several dozen Hebrew manuscripts, Torah scrolls, incunabula, and other early printed books, all housed in its Rare Books and Special Collections division. The majority of these documents once were owned by none other than Sir Charles Nicholson (1808–1903), guiding light of the University during its early years, including service as its second Chancellor (1854–1862).[3] As is well known, the great polymath's interests spanned medicine and antiquities, and many points in between. Less well known is the fact that he also studied Hebrew, perhaps while younger, though certainly during the ninth decade of his life, as is indicated on the inside front cover of Fisher MS Nicholson 52 (his personal Hebrew lexicon, written in his own hand, as a learner's guide) where one reads the inscription, "While an octogenarian Sir Charles Nicholson was Studying Hebrew. G.E.S." (see Fig. 1).[4]

Alan D. Crown created a detailed typewritten catalogue of these documents during the 1970s and 1980s, entitled *Hebrew Manuscripts and Rare Printed Books, Held in the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney* (Sydney: Wentworth Press), 1st edition, 1973 / 2nd edition, 1984. Crown's descriptions of the individual documents retain their value until the present day.

As an aside, I note here that some of the Nicholson manuscripts and books previously were owned by the Duke of Sussex, Prince Augustus Frederick (1773–1843), son of King George III; others were owned by Alexander Lindsay, 25th Earl of Crawford (1812–1880); and still others were purchased from Moses Wilhelm Shapira (1830–1884).[5]

As I teach my students, each manuscript has multiple narratives: a) when, where, how,

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[3] For general orientation, see Kirsop (2007).

[4] It is tempting to identify G.E.S. with George Salting, the Australian-born British art collector (1835–1909), with whom Nicholson was quite close, as suggested to me by Wallace Kirsop (Monash University), a student of Nicholson's career as a book collector (see previous note) (pers. com., 28 May 2019). As Professor Kirsop quickly added, though, Salting did not use a middle name or initial. An internet search revealed one such instance with middle initial E.: https://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b1109630~S7 — but this constitutes very slender evidence on which to build even a working hypothesis. Otherwise, the identity of G.E.S. remains elusive.

[5] For the Duke of Sussex and his library, see Gillen (1976, pp. 175–179), even if the author gives short shrift to the Duke's Hebraica collection. For the Earl of Crawford, see Barker (1978). For Shapira, see now Tigay (2017), esp. pp. 57–60 for connections to Charles Nicholson.

by whom, and for whom it was written (or in the case of incunabula, the parallel information); b) who owned the manuscript (or early printed book) over the course of the centuries; and c) how it came to reside in the library which serves as its present custodian.

During my recent tenure as Mandelbaum Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney (mid-March through mid-May, 2019),[6] I had occasion to inspect the entire collection, with Crown's catalogue always at my side.[7] If I may be permitted a personal aside, I should mention that I knew Alan Crown (1932–2010) relatively well (especially given the distance between our two countries), from our first meetings at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (then housed at Yarnton Manor) during the 1990s through to my first visit to Sydney in 2004. Alas, Professor Crown died shortly before my second visit to Sydney in 2011. As I inspected the Hebrew manuscripts at Fisher Library, during this my third visit to Australia, with Alan Crown's catalogue in hand, it was, accordingly, like having an old friend serving as my guide.

Torat Moshe (Venice, 1601)

Attention is drawn here to the first printing of the complete Hebrew work known as *Torat Moshe*, lit. "The Torah of Moses," the Pentateuch with commentary by Rabbi Moses Alshekh (1508–1593),[8] based on his public sermons, printed in Venice by the well-known printer Giovanni Di Gara,[9] in the year 1601 (see Fig. 2). This item was not included in the first edition of Crown's catalogue, though it does appear in the second edition, on p. 30. When Crown wrote his description, the work was still uncatalogued (that is, it bore no shelfmark), though in the intervening years it now bears the designation RB 5101.2.

As far as can be determined, the book is not amongst the documents owned by Sir Charles Nicholson, for his book plate appears in all of those that he owned (save for the scrolls, obviously), and/or the accession documentation records his prior ownership. In the case of RB 5101.2, no book plate is present, nor is any other helpful information present, nor do the library records preserve any such information. Which is to say, the accession documentation seems to be lost in the mists of time.[10] As such,

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[6] During this two-month period I was associated both with Mandelbaum House (a residential college) and the Department of Hebrew, Biblical, and Jewish Studies, though I also should add that this was the third occasion on which I held this visiting position (prior visits were in July–August 2004 and February–March 2011). I here express my gratitude to both institutions for their warm hospitality, with special mention of Ms. Naomi Winton at the former and Prof. Ian Young at the latter. See also the next footnote.

[7] My research at Fisher Library was facilitated by the kind assistance offered by Julie Price, Julie Sommerfeldt, and Fiona Berry, librarians *par excellence* in Rare Books and Special Collections, to whom I express my deep gratitude. As always, my wife Melissa A. Rendsburg provided assistance in manifold ways, including offering another set of perspicacious eyes to detect various jots and tittles which otherwise may have escaped my attention.

[8] In Crown's catalogue, the author is referred to as Moses Alsheik. I have adopted the spelling of the surname Alshekh as it appears in the authoritative *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Preschel and Derovan 2007). In the older *Jewish Encyclopedia* the surname is presented as Alshech (Friedländer 1906).

[9] For information on the printer, see Busi (2007).

[10] The usual array of handwritten notes (all in Hebrew) indicating prior ownership appear at the top of the title page (see Fig. 2) and in the blank flyleaf pages, both in the beginning and at the end (see Fig. 3 for one example). The latter mentions the city of Eibenschütz / Ivančice (Moravia), so that we know that the volume was present there c. 1800 (see caption to Fig. 3 for further details). My gratitude to Joshua Teplitsky (University of Stony Brook) for his reading of the

there is no direct connection between this early printed volume and Nicholson, but I thought I would begin the narrative (as I have done above) with information about the second Chancellor of the University of Sydney, for his persona and collection of Hebrew books and manuscripts nicely sets the stage for the present account.

Sidebar: *Torat Moshe*: Genesis (Constantinople, 1593)

Moreover, while not directly relevant to the current project, one cannot mention *Torat Moshe* by Moses Alshekh without the following short side excursion. Note my wording above, "the first printing of the *complete* [emphasis added] Hebrew work known as *Torat Moshe*", with reference to the Venice, 1601, edition. The word "complete" needs to be included here, because the first part of the commentary, relating to the book of Genesis only, was printed in Constantinople in 1593 (as noted by Crown, see Fig. 7).

This earlier printing constitutes a story in its own right. In brief, the earlier, shorter version of *Torat Moshe* was printed by the great Doña Reyna Nasi (1538–1599), wife/widow of Dom Joseph Nasi (1525–1579), appointed as Lord of Tiberias and Duke of Naxos by the Ottoman sultans. After her husband's death, Doña Reyna used the family fortune to establish a printshop in her palace "in Belvedere near the great city of Constantinople, under the rule of our lord, the great and powerful king, Sultan Murad [= Murad III (r. 1574–1595)], may his glory be exalted" (to quote the title page, for which see Fig. 4). To repeat, this earlier printing is

long inscription. However, none of the information contained within the handwritten notes helps us in our quest regarding the accession of the volume to the University of Sydney Library.

not directly relevant to the topic at hand, but no one should ever pass up the opportunity to mention the printing press established by this aristocratic Jewish woman, Doña Reyna Nasi, in the late 16th century.[11]

The "Book Within Book" Fragment

And now for the "book within book" (see Figures 5 and 6), which already Crown recognised (see Fig. 7). I quote him here *in extenso* (for my comments, indicated by the superscript letters, see below):

> The volume is of interest for its binding which is original and is worthy of a full description. As with many Italian bindings of the period pieces of Hebrew manuscript have been incorporated into the spine. Manuscript pieces of the type have turned up in considerable number in a recent study of the Italian state archives at Cremona[a] and are regarded as a living Geniza.[b] Only a small piece of manuscript is visible in the spine of this volume where the leather casing at the base [*sic*][c] of the spine has crumbled. Here a thin piece of parchment has been used as a lining. The words
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> > 'ani zokher w.....
> > 'anokhi sh(w.....
> > 'at nst...
>
> can be distinguished. These words are not found in such juxtaposition in the Old Testament so the source must be some other Hebrew text. Little can be said about the script from the few words to be seen other than that they have a Gothic

angularity and look like the lettering to be found in German-Hebrew manuscripts of the thirteenth century. [Crown 1984, p. 30]

ᵃ Since Crown wrote these words in 1984, as indicated above, Hebrew "books within books" have been found throughout Europe and elsewhere, though clearly Italy still holds prime position in regards to both quality and quantity, no surprise given that Hebrew printing began in Italy.[12]

ᵇ Geniza is the Hebrew word for "storeroom." By far the most famous such storeroom is the Cairo Geniza located in the Ben Ezra Synagogue. During the period of the 1860s through 1890s, c. 300,000 documents dating mainly from the 10th–14th centuries were removed from the premises. About two-thirds of these are housed in the Cambridge University Library, while the other one-third are distributed among approximately seventy libraries and private collections in Europe, Israel, and North America.[13] To the best of my knowledge, there are no Cairo Geniza documents in Australia.

When the "books within books" documents first emerged in Italian libraries, the term "Italian Geniza" was coined. Once scholars realised that such documents were to be found throughout European (and other) collections, the term morphed into "European Geniza."

ᶜ The visible portion of the medieval manuscript is actually at the top of the spine, not the base. Crown was an expert Hebraist, so this is not a case of holding the book the wrong way; rather it must be simply an honest mistake.

When Crown produced his catalogue on the typewriter in the 1980s, it was difficult to switch back-and-forth between English and Hebrew, and even the addition of diacritical marks was a challenge. Accordingly, when I first read Crown's transcription, before inspecting the Hebrew itself, I was unsure about certain words and indeed letters.

> *ʾani zokher w…..*
> *ʾanokhi sh(w…..*
> *ʾat nst…*

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[12] For details, see Hill (2013).

[13] For general introduction, see Hoffman & Cole (2011).

Now that I have inspected the volume, especially its binding, I am able to present the Hebrew text here with greater accuracy:

[אני זוכר ה
[אנכי שו
[את נסת

In sum, the nineteen visible letters comprise four complete words and portions of three others. Upon seeing the text, I agreed with Crown's assessment that "these words are not found in such juxtaposition in the [Bible, and thus] the source must be some other Hebrew text." Fortunately, today we have an online database of all (or nearly all) Hebrew literature, created by the Academy of the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem), known as Maʾagarim (literally "gatherings, collections, databases"): https://maagarim.hebrew-acad emy.org.il/. This database, in turn, will serve as the basis for the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language project, covering the entire 3000-year history of the language and its literature, in the same way that the *Oxford English Dictionary* surveys, details, and analyses the history of English.

For the nonce, however, scholars are able to access the database, both for its concordance and for its "free text" search. I selected the two-word phrase אני זוכר *ʾani zoker* "I remember" from the above snippet, since this is the only legible portion of the document containing at least two complete words, and entered the selection into the "free text" search window. My attempt was immediately rewarded. The fifth "hit" under this operation yielded the desired composition (see Fig. 8). Note that the highlighted words אני זוכר *ʾani zoker* "I remember" are followed by strings of letters that accord perfectly with what is legible in our binding fragment.

Through this operation, I learned the identity of the text: a *piyyuṭ*, or liturgi-

cal poem, on the occasion of a baby boy's circumcision. What Alan Crown had not been able to uncover, I was able to identify with a few keystrokes. Such is the world in which we live today, with research tools at our disposal that earlier scholars could not have imagined. I must emphasize here that Crown's inability to identify the text, and mine as well, does not constitute a reflection of our scholarly abilities (or lack thereof), for as we shall see, our poem is rarely attested within the annals of Jewish liturgy, custom, and practice.

The Full Poem: "O God, I Recall the Covenant"

I further learned that the manuscript prototype for this *piyyuṭ* at the Maʾagarim database is British Library MS Or. 2772 (= Margoliouth no. 658), with the latter designation referring to George Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part II (London: British Museum, 1905), pp. 278–281 (the first page of which is reproduced here, see Fig. 9).[14] The manuscript is a Jewish festival prayer book, according to the Ashkenazi (i.e., German) rite, dated to 1326. A perusal of the Margoliouth catalogue pages revealed that our little poem is labeled as no. 53 (see Fig. 10). This allowed for easier location of the poem within the large manuscript (310 folios), because the medieval scribe had numbered the individual components in the margin, using Hebrew numerals: in our case נג = 53. Once again, it is good to perform

research of this kind in our contemporary world, because BL MS Or. 2772 is fully available online: http://www.bl.uk/manu scripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_2772. The poem is spread over two pages, fol. 200r (bottom) and fol. 200v (top) (see Figures 11 and 12).[15]

Through the Maʾagarim and British Library searches, I now had the full *piyyuṭ* at my disposal. Based on the usual method of entitling medieval Hebrew poems by their incipits, our poem is called אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית *ʾɛlohekɛm ʾani zoker hab-bərit* "O God, I recall the covenant." With this information in hand, I turned to the authoritative reference work of Israel Davidson, *ʾOṣar ha-Šira ve-ha-Piyyuṭ = Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, 4 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1924–1933), to determine if the poem is registered there — and indeed it is (Davidson 1924–1933, vol. 1, p. 209, no. 4571). Davidson's sources were three printed *siddurim* (sg. *siddur* = prayer book for daily and Sabbath use) and *maḥzorim* (sg. *maḥzor* = prayer book for festivals and special occasions): a) הדרת קדש *Hadrat Qodeš* "Holy Splendour" (Venice, 1599–1600); b) שער השמים *Šaʿar haš-Šamayim* "Gate of Heaven" (Amsterdam, 1717); and c) דרך החיים *Derekh ha-Ḥayyim* "Way of Life" (Stettin, 1862).[16] Below we will return to the earliest of these three printings,

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[14] Margoliouth's project is a work of prodigious scholarship, reaching more than 1200 pages spread over four volumes, published between the years 1899–1915. For a comparable work, see below, n. 31. The reader will recall that British Museum manuscripts of this nature were transferred to the British Library upon the latter's official establishment in 1973.

[15] I here extend heartfelt thanks to Zsófia Buda, manuscript cataloguer at the British Library, Asian and African Studies, for her kind assistance. In the wake of my email to her (17 April 2019) about this manuscript, she very quickly identified the specific location of the poem on fols. 200r–200v, thereby obviating the need for me to search and scroll at the website.

[16] Davidson 1924–1933, vol. 1, p. 209, no. 4571, with cross-references to the sources listed on pp. liii, lxxxviii, and lx, respectively. (Davidson lists everything in alphabetical order, for easy referencing, while I have placed the three sources in chronological order).

the one from Venice, 1599−1600, though we jump ahead of our story.

Here follows the full poem, as presented in BL MS Or. 2772, with poetic lineation (as opposed to a layout per the manuscript lines); my attempt at an English translation; and my annotations marked by superscript letters. The scribe of BL MS Or. 2772 included the Hebrew vowels (per the practice with most prayer books, etc.), though I have omitted them here for simplicity's sake. In addition, the Hebrew text includes a special mark to indicate the end of a poetic line; I have transcribed that mark with the standard English full stop (period). Finally, note that the Hebrew poem includes a rhyme scheme, with each line ending in the syllable -*rit* (starting with the word *bərit* "covenant" in line 1), a technique which cannot be reproduced in English translation.

לברית מילה

אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית.

הנה אנכי שולח לשארית.

את נסתר בנחל כרית.

ופנה לפניו גוים יכרית.

מבשר טוב ושלום באחרית.

אומר לציון מלך אלהיך זהרית.

ובדברי

For the covenant of circumcision:[a]

O God,[b] I recall the covenant,

Behold, I send to the remnant.

The one hidden in the Cherith Brook.[c]

And he will turn towards him, destroying the Gentiles.[d]

Heralding good and peace[e] for the end-of-time.[f]

Saying to Zion, 'King, your God', shining-forth.

And with the words of.[g]

[a] Recall that in Judaism, circumcision is the sign of the covenant (see Genesis 17).

[b] Literally, 'your (pl.) God'.[17]

[c] The name of the brook where the prophet Elijah hid (1 Kings 17:1−7).[18] According to Jewish folklore, Elijah attends each circumcision, with an honorary chair set in place for him, hence, he is invoked here. In addition, according to Jewish tradition, Elijah is the harbinger of the Messiah,[19] as reflected in the following lines.

[d] Heb. *goyim*, lit. "nations," in this context, Gentiles. The role of destroying the Gentiles is not necessarily part of Jewish messianic expectation, but given the continuous attacks on Jewish life and religion in Christian Europe (blood libels, accusations of host desecrations, massacres by Crusaders, disputations, book burnings, expulsions, etc., etc.), one can understand the Jewish poet's hope that Elijah would avenge these actions.

[e] The Hebrew word *ṭov* "good" is written in the left margin of BL MS Or. 2772, fol. 200r, last line, added there after it was accidentally omitted by the scribe.

[f] The Hebrew term *ʾaḥarit* "end of time" refers here to the Messianic Age.

[17] The use of the form אלהיכם, lit. 'your God' (as opposed to "O God" or some other form), is characteristic of a specific genre of *piyyuṭ* which developed in medieval Ashkenaz. The word אלהיכם, lit. "your God," is invoked as an echo of the phrase אני יהוה אלהיכם "I am the Lord your God," which appears in the special Qeduša "sanctification" prayer for Musaf (additional service) on Sabbath and Festivals, at which point poems of this genre were inserted into the service (see also annotation g ahead). The three-word Hebrew phrase, in turn, occurs 34x in the Bible (28x in the Torah, 5x in the Prophets, and 1x in Judges), though in the present instance the Qeduša prayer cites Numbers 15:41. For numerous examples of *piyyuṭim* beginning with the word אלהיכם, lit. "your God," see Davidson 1924−1933, vol. 1, pp. 209−210, nos. 4563−4605. See also the nine such liturgical poems registered by Hollender (2005, pp. 297−298). For general discussion, see Fleischer (1975, pp. 448−449). For easy reference, see also the Wikipedia entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elohekhem.

[18] The Hebrew form of the name, כרית *kərit*, puns on the verb כ-ר-ת *k-r-t* "cut," since in Biblical Hebrew usage, one "cuts a covenant." See further below, n. 26.

[19] In the New Testament, this role is filled by John the Baptist, for which see Matthew 11:12−14, 17:10−13, Luke 1:13−17, etc.

g Each of the poems in this collection ends with this phrase, shorthand for ובדברי קדשׁך *u-b-dibre qodšǝka* "and with the words of your holiness," thereby sending the precentor back to this point in the Qeduša prayer (see n. 17).

Additional Medieval MS Evidence for Our Short Poem

With the full poem now in hand, I next sought to determine whether this *piyyuṭ* is attested in other manuscripts, or whether the British Library manuscript is a unique testimony thereto (besides the later printed volumes registered by Davidson). If the latter, our little fragment, used in the binding of a book printed in Venice in 1601 and currently housed in Fisher Library, would gain much greater prominence.

My first step was to use Facebook at its best, via the Hebrew Codicology and Paleography group. Without disclosing my "discovery" (albeit via Alan Crown's groundbreaking work) of the binding fragment in Sydney, I simply asked members of the group if anyone knew of another attestation of our poem. Within minutes, Yisrael Dubitsky of the National Library of Israel (Jerusalem) (NLI) responded with the sought-after information. Using the NLI's database of Hebrew manuscripts, Ktiv: The International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts (http://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/manuscript), Dubitsky was able to identify in short order three additional manuscripts that contain our poem for the circumcision ritual.[20] As he informed me, somewhat oddly BL MS Or. 2772 was not included in the

Ktiv database (even though it served as the basis for the Maʾagarim database)[21] — but, to repeat, at least three other manuscripts include the poem.[22]

For the record, the three additional manuscripts are:

1. NLI Ms. Heb. 34o1114, an Ashkenazi *maḥzor* (prayer book for festivals and special occasions), dated to 1418 — with our poem on fol. 189v (see Fig. 13).[23]

2. Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen, Germany, Ms. 1267, an Ashkenazi *siddur* (daily prayer book), Worms, 14th century — with our poem on fol. 220r (see Fig. 14).[24]

3. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America (J.T.S.), New York, Ms. 8972, an Ashkenazi *maḥzor* (prayer book for festivals and special occasions), dated to the 13th–14th centuries — with our poem on fol. 92b (see Fig. 15).[25] This version of

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[20] Naturally, I was aware of the Ktiv project, but as I had not yet mastered its search capacity, I was and remain very grateful to Yisrael Dubitsky, especially since he works with the database on a daily basis. And not only for this gesture, but for an ongoing email exchange regarding the various manuscripts (April–May 2019).

[21] Those in the know will find this situation somewhat ironic, because the Ktiv project is run by the National Library of Israel, while the Maʾagarim project is directed by the Academy of the Hebrew Language, both located on the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University (Jerusalem). Moreover, the two buildings are about 500 metres from one another, a short seven-minute walk, which the present author has strolled on many occasions.

[22] Regarding my use of the phrase "at least," see ahead. Incidentally, binding fragments also are included in the Ktiv project, in addition to their availability at the Books within Books project, discussed above.

[23] Available at: http://beta.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000044735/NLI.

[24] Information about this manuscript available at: http://beta.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000170927/NLI. I here extend my thanks to Elisabeth Dlugosch of the Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg for her kind assistance in obtaining the image which appears as Fig. 14.

[25] Available at: http://beta.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH003468718/NLI.

the *piyyuṭ* includes an additional five-word line inserted before the final line: ידעו זאת כל כרותי ברית "may all who cut the covenant know this."[26]

Now, the Ktiv project contains by far the largest database of Hebrew manuscripts in the world, but its search capacity is only as good and as up-to-date as the information contained therein (hence the phrase "at least three other manuscripts" used above). Which is to say, the information is continually inputed by devoted cataloguers and specialists, but each of the thousands of manuscripts must be studied for all its component parts, a lengthy and difficult process. This is especially true for *siddurim* and *maḥzorim* (where one would expect to find our *piyyuṭ*), since there was no fixed liturgical tradition within Judaism, with each community following its own rite, using different prayers, different versions of prayers, different orders of prayers, etc., etc. This stands in contrast, for example, to manuscripts of Bible, Mishna, etc., where the contents does not differ radically from one manuscript to the other, save for the order of the books or the tractates.

Hence, if the presence of אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant" in BL MS Or. 2772 was not detected in the Ktiv search conducted by Yisrael Dubitsky, then perhaps there is another testimony to our poem in another manuscript somewhere.

My next step, accordingly,[27] was to contact Sarah Cohen, researcher and cataloguer of the Ezra Fleischer Institute for the Research of Hebrew Poetry in the Genizah, an ongoing project of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.[28] The Institute (named for the great Israeli scholar who founded the project, now deceased[29]) seeks to create a database of all poems, *piyyuṭim*, etc., attested in Hebrew manuscripts, from both the Cairo Genizah (per its name) and beyond.[30] Does the database, I asked, contain any additional witnesses to our poem, which I had not uncovered via the above-described steps (Ktiv, Maʾagarim, Davidson, etc.)? Cohen responded immediately to my query with a positive answer, yes, in one other manuscript, Bodleian MS Michael 573 = Neubauer, no. 1099, an Ashkenazi *siddur* c. 1400, with the latter designation referring to the standard catalogue, Adolf Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), cols. 303–306, no. 1099.[31] (See Fig. 16 for the catalogue entry and Fig. 17 for our poem as it appears in the manuscript.)

In sum, at the present state of our knowledge, the poem אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant" is attested in five medieval Hebrew manuscripts: London (BL), Jerusalem (NLI), Erlangen, New York (J.T.S.), and Oxford (Bodleian).

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[26] Thus literally, with the Hebrew verb כ-ר-ת *k-r-t* "cut," per Biblical Hebrew usage. See also above, n. 18.

[27] At the suggestion of Yisrael Dubitsky of the NLI.

[28] The website of the Institute is: https://www.academy.ac.il/Branches/Branch.aspx?nodeId=830&branchId=348.

[29] Ezra Fleischer (1928–2006): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezra_Fleischer.

[30] As such, the project is not intended to replace Davidson's *Thesaurus*, whose information derives almost exclusively from early printed books, but rather to augment it.

[31] Neubauer's project is another work of prodigious scholarship, reaching more than 600 pages. For a comparable work, see above, n. 14. I here express my thanks to Rahel Fronda and César Merchán-Hamann (both of the Bodleian Library, Oxford) for their assistance regarding MS Michael 573, including procurement of the image in Figure 17).

Once More:
The "Book within Book" Fragment

With this long expedition into the arcane but ever enlightening world of medieval Hebrew manuscripts, we now return to the small parchment fragment used to bind the first printing of the complete *Torat Moshe* held by Fisher Library. As indicated above, only nineteen letters are visible (see the transcription above), but they are sufficient to allow us to identify the text as a sixth (albeit fragmentary) copy of the medieval liturgical poem, אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant," recited on the occasion of the circumcision ritual. Note that all five of the manuscripts described above emanate from the Ashkenazi orbit, with one of the five pointing ostensibly to Worms.

I say "ostensibly" here because, while the manuscript does not contain a colophon with explicit information regarding Worms, its contents reveal this to be the case. Worms was one of the major Jewish communities in the Middle Ages, along with its neighbouring cities Mainz/Mayence (to the north) and Speyer (to the south), and its specific liturgical traditions are well known and easily discernible. All three cities are situated on the Rhine River in modern-day Rheinland-Pfalz (Rhineland-Palatinate), with the remains of the medieval Worms and Speyer communities in particular still very much visible (cemetery in Worms, synagogues and ritual baths in both cities, etc.). The present writer has had the opportunity to visit the three cities on several occasions (most recently, with his wife Melissa, in June 2018).

The significance of the Ashkenazi provenance of the five aforementioned manuscripts is realised when we recall Alan Crown's description of the script, with reference to the "Gothic angularity [resembling] the lettering to be found in German-Hebrew manuscripts of the thirteenth century." With so little to go on, and with no knowledge of the other witnesses to our little poem, Crown was spot on, such was his expertise in codicological and paleographical matters.[32]

Moreover, I hasten to add that Crown's true expertise was in all matters Samaritan, including the scribal traditions of this small but important religious community.[33] Note further that the Samaritans use a different alphabet than the Jews, so that expertise in the one scribal system (in this case, the Samaritan one) does not automatically translate into expertise in the other (in this case, the Jewish one). And yet, to repeat, Crown was able to localise our parchment fragment based solely on the "Gothic angularity" of the 19 extant Hebrew letters.

In sum, this short poem was part of medieval Ashkenazi liturgical practice, recited on the occasion of the circumcision ritual, but it appears to have enjoyed no currency outside this German-centered community. Furthermore, the author of the poem, as with so many of the Jewish prayers, remains anonymous.

From Germany to Venice

So how did the small parchment fragment containing this poem reach Venice? The route is well known, per the description by Brad Sabin Hill: "Jews did not print in Germany in the 15th century, possibly due

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[32] That said, Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (University of Oxford/École Pratique des Hautes Études), one of the foremost experts on Hebrew paleography, informs me that to her eye the script more likely derives from 14th-century Germany.

[33] See especially the edited volume: Crown (1989), which remains the basic reference work until the present day; along with the more specific authored work: Crown (2001).

to restrictions placed by the German guilds. The first Hebrew presses were founded in Italy, mostly by Ashkenazic Jews who had apprenticed with local Christian printers or learned of the art in Germany and moved south to practice" (Hill 2013, p. 233). One such German Jew, perhaps c. 1500 or perhaps later in the 16th century, brought his prayer book (in manuscript form) with him to Italy; a century later, or some decades later, with printed *siddurim* and *maḥzorim* now readily available, the old manuscript was cut up for reuse, with the parchment strips now serving to reinforce the spines and flyleaves of bound books.

With this information at hand, we return to the aforementioned *Hadrat Qodeš* "Holy Splendour" volumes, a large two-part *maḥzor* printed in Venice in 1599–1600, for which Davidson had recorded the presence of our little poem אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant". Important to note is the fact that, while printed in Venice, the liturgy contained within *Hadrat Qodeš* follows the Ashkenazi rite (as announced on the title page and per the contents), and not the Italian one. (See Fig. 18 for the title page, and Fig. 19 for the printed version of the poem.) Most striking, however, is the fact that this volume was printed by the selfsame Giovanni Di Gara, with whom our story began (see above).

We can, therefore, complete the picture with relatively high confidence. Our anonymous German Jew migrated to Venice, with his prayer book in hand; eventually this manuscript made its way into the printing house of Giovanni Di Gara. If said individual arrived late in the 16th century, perhaps he himself was employed in the printshop, assisting the master Venetian printer. In either case, the *piyyuṭ* for the circumcision

ritual was incorporated into the large two-volume printed prayer book published under the title *Hadrat Qodeš* "Holy Splendour" (in vol. 1, p. 321a) (Venice, 1599); and with the manuscript no longer needed, two years later a fragment thereof was included in the binding of *Torat Moshe*, a commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Moses Alshekh (Venice, 1601).

Oh, to be transported back in time, more than four centuries ago, to witness the scene of printers with their movable type and bookbinders with their parchment scraps and other leather materials, all busy at work in the enterprise overseen by Giovanni Di Gara. Somewhere in that scene, our two books were created — and one of them eventually made its way to Rare Books and Special Collections, Fisher Library, University of Sydney.

Is there more of our poem אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant" to be found within the binding of the Fisher Library copy of *Torat Moshe*? Or are there additional Hebrew fragments, perhaps from another composition, to be found therein? Presumably yes, though herein lies a crucial issue: would anyone wish to dismember an original book binding from 1601 to learn the answer?[34] The binding too is a work of art (in addition to Figures 5 and 6, see now also Figures 20 and 21), so for the moment, the question rests without an answer. Perhaps one day, indeed one day soon, an emerging technology will allow penetration through the outer binding to reveal the layers that lie below.[35]

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[34] Though I realise that some people have performed such operations to reveal more manuscript fragments.

[35] In fact, should the underlying text ever be read, and should more of the poem אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית 'O God, I recall the covenant' be present, it would be very inter-

For example, while I do not know whether the required technology is the same or not, given the variables (ink, age, etc.), one nevertheless may point to the recent "virtual unrolling" of the burnt Hebrew scroll found in the Ein Gedi synagogue, revealed to contain the first two chapters of the book of Leviticus (see Figures 22–24). The scroll (dated to c. 300 C.E.) was excavated in 1970, but it was too brittle and fragile to unroll, and hence it sat in the Israel Antiquities Authority storehouse for 35 years, until computer specialists used micro-CT scanning in 2015 to expose its contents (Segal et al. 2016). I must imagine that such or similar technology would be able to penetrate book bindings of much more recent vintage.

From Venice to Sydney

Earlier, I intimated that if the sole additional medieval testimony to our poem in Fisher Library was the complete version of אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית "O God, I recall the covenant," in British Library MS Or. 2772, the significance of the small 19-letter fragment would rise exponentially. In the end, such is not the case, since, as seen above, three additional manuscripts (located in Jerusalem, Erlangen, and New York) were identified via the search engine at the Ktiv database, and then the Ezra Fleischer Institute database revealed another manuscript (Bodleian Library, Oxford).

Nonetheless, Australia can be proud that one of its largest libraries provides a relatively rare window into a time long ago and a place far away. To be sure, this small manuscript fragment is the first Hebrew "book within

book" item to be found not only in Australia, but within the southern hemisphere.[36] Such was my main purpose in writing this article: to publicise this point.

As the article developed, however, it attained an additional, somewhat unexpected goal: to demonstrate to interested readers the path of scholarship, especially in the digital age, emanating from a brief encounter with a small fragment of medieval Hebrew writing incorporated into the spine of a book by a bookbinder in Venice more than 400 years ago.

Acknowledgements

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esting to learn if the manuscript includes the reading reflected in the printed version of *Hadrat Qodeš* "Holy Splendour." For the different recensions, see the captions to Figures 13, 14, and 15. Should such prove to be the case, the scenario presented herein would be confirmed by this final piece of evidence.

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[36] I have uploaded the fragment to the Books within Books website, where scholars now may access the information. See Fig. 25.

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Illustrations
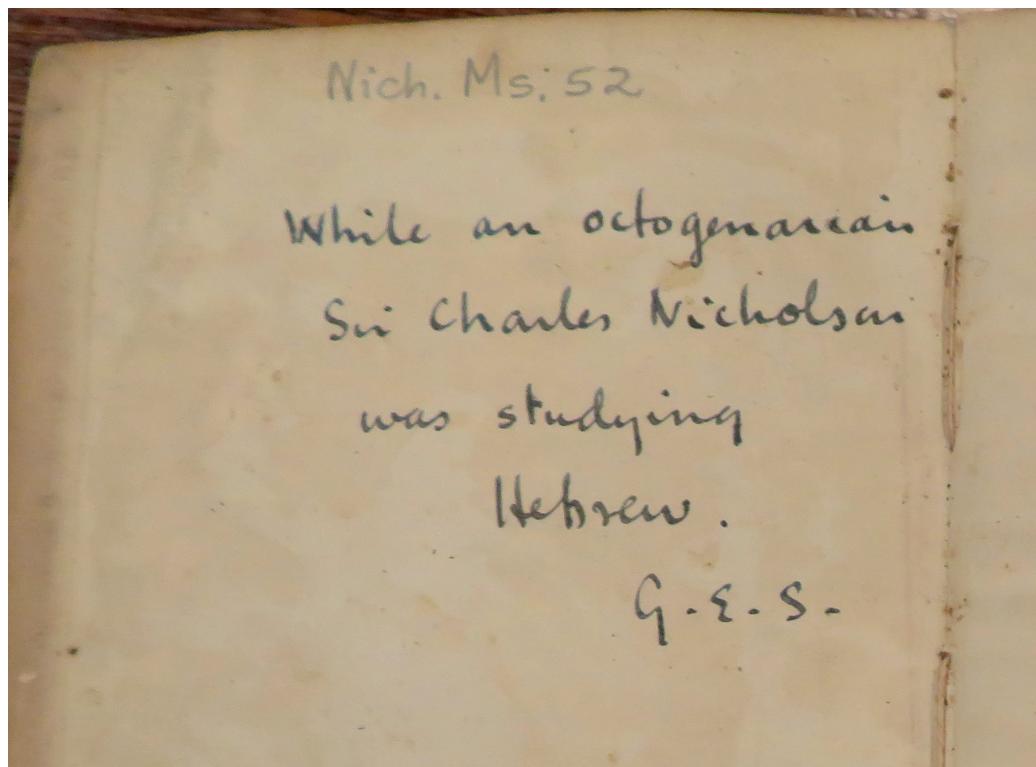
Figure 1: Inside front cover of Fisher MS Nicholson 52, personal notebook with simple Hebrew lexicon handwritten by Charles Nicholson whilst he was learning Hebrew, presumably sometime after 1885. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)

Figure 2: Title page of Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing, in the University of Sydney Library collection. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)
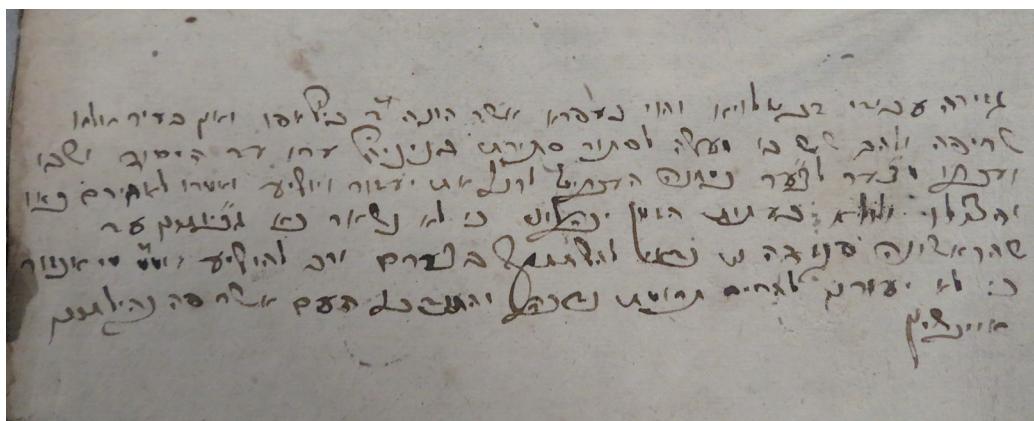
Figure 3: Handwritten note, in Hebrew, on the back flyleaf of Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing, in the University of Sydney Library collection. The inscription appears to be the lament for a Jewish community destroyed, with citation of Psalm 137:7. The last phrase reads כל העם אשר פה קהילתנו אייבשיץ 'all the people who are here (in) our community of Eibenschütz' (= Ivančice, Moravia). This information allows us to place the volume in a particular locale c. 1800, but it does not assist us in our quest to understand how the book reached the University of Sydney Library. My gratitude to Joshua Teplitsky (University of Stony Brook) for his reading and deciphering of this ownership note. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)
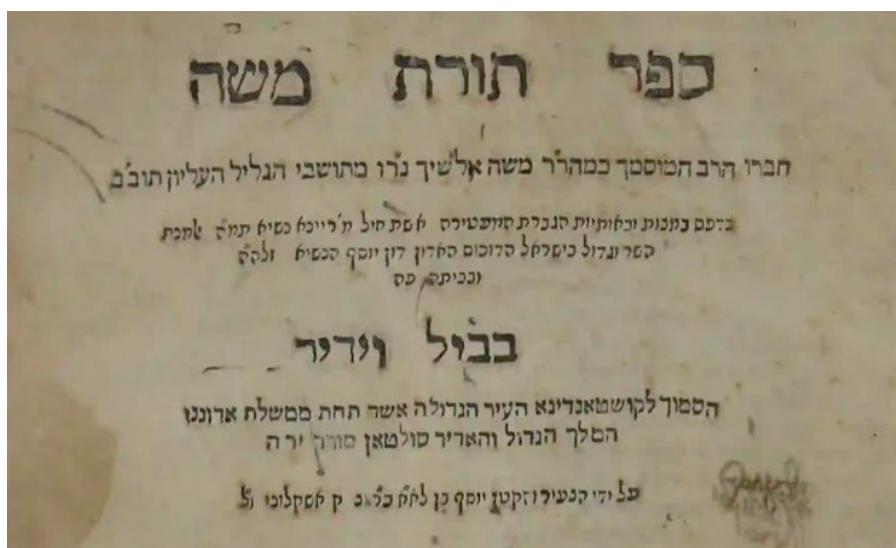

Figure 4: *Torat Moshe*, earlier version, containing the commentary to Genesis only (Constantinople, 1593), printed by Doña Reyna Nasi, who established a printshop in her home 'in Belvedere near the great city of Constantinople, under the rule of our lord, the great and powerful king, Sultan Murad, may his glory be exalted' (to quote the title page). (Source: https://tablet.otzar.org/, used with kind permission.)

Figure 5: The bound volume of Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing. Note the Hebrew manuscript fragment at the top of the spine. See Figure 6 for close-up. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)

Figure 6: The Hebrew manuscript fragment at the top of the spine of the printed book, Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)

Uncatalogued   TORAT MOSHE (Pentateuch with Alsheik's
                                                      commentary)

                          1st edition, Venice, 1601

Although this is a comparatively late work it is quite rare and even some
long-established collections have no copy.

The author, Moses Alsheik, a rabbi and a bible commentator, died not long
before this work was printed. The first part of Alsheik's commentary,
also entitled *Torat Moshe*, was published in Constantinople in 1593, but it
included only the book of Genesis. This is the first full printing of
his commentary on the Pentateuch and it was undertaken by his son in 1601.

The volume is of interest for its binding which is original and is worthy
of a full description. As with so many Italian bindings of the period
pieces of Hebrew manuscript have been incorporated in the spine. Manuscript
pieces of the type have turned up in considerable number in a recent
study of the Italian state archives at Cremona and are regarded as a
living Geniza. Only a small piece of manuscript is visible in the spine
of this volume where the leather casing at the base of the spine has
crumbled. Here a thin piece of parchment has been used as a lining. The
words

                    'ani zokher w.....
                    'anokhi sh(w.....
                    'at nst...

can be distinguished.   These words are not found in such juxtaposition in
the Old Testament so the source must be some other Hebrew text. Little
can be said about the script from the few words to be seen other than that
they have a Gothic angularity and look like the lettering to be found in
German-Hebrew manuscripts of the thirteenth century.

Figure 7: Catalogue entry by Alan Crown (p. 30). I have transcribed and annotated the long final paragraph (including the Hebrew transliteration) above.

☆ **5** <שו' ו> אלהיכם <mark>אני זוכר</mark> הברית.
<שו' 2> הנה אנכי שולח לשארית.
<שו' 3> את נסתר בנחל כרית.
<שו' 4> ופנה לפניו גוים יברית.
<שו' 5> מבשר +[טוב] ושלום באחרית.
<שו' 6> אומר לציון מלך אלהיך זהרית.
ובדברי.$

| מראה מקום: אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית <שו' ו> | המסירה: <שו' ו> | London, British Library, 658 |

שם החיבור: **פיוט לברית מילה** | מחבר לא ידוע | זמן החיבור: אחרי שנת 1100 | סוגה: פיוט ותפילה

Figure 8: The fifth 'hit' at the **Maʾagarim** database (https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/), upon my searching for the two-word string אני זוכר 'I remember'.
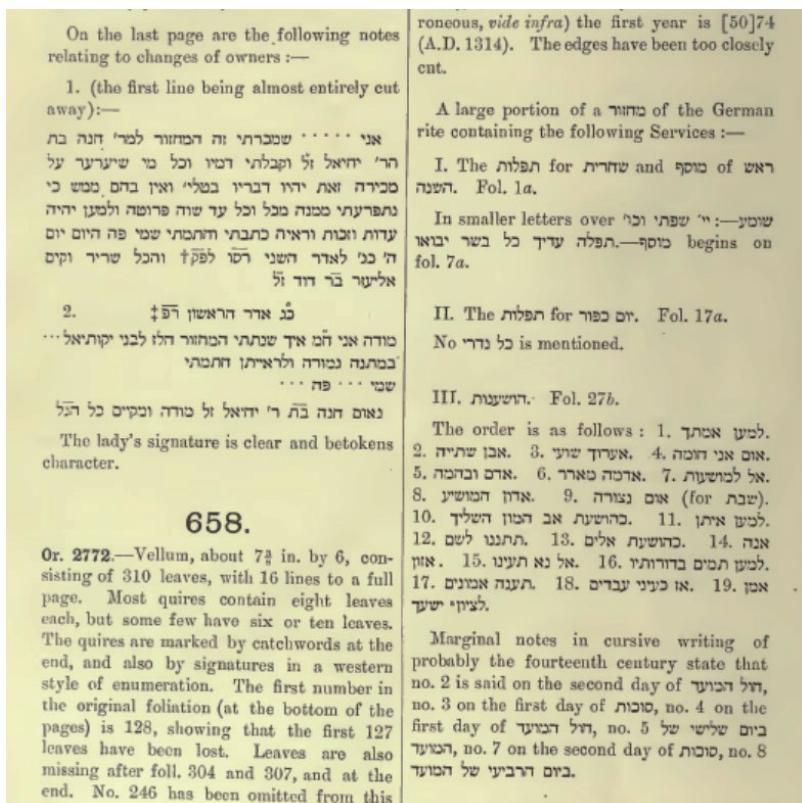
Figure 9: George Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part II (London: British Museum, 1905), p. 278, the first of four pages detailing BL MS Or. 2772 (= Margoliouth no. 658). (Used with permission granted by the British Library.)
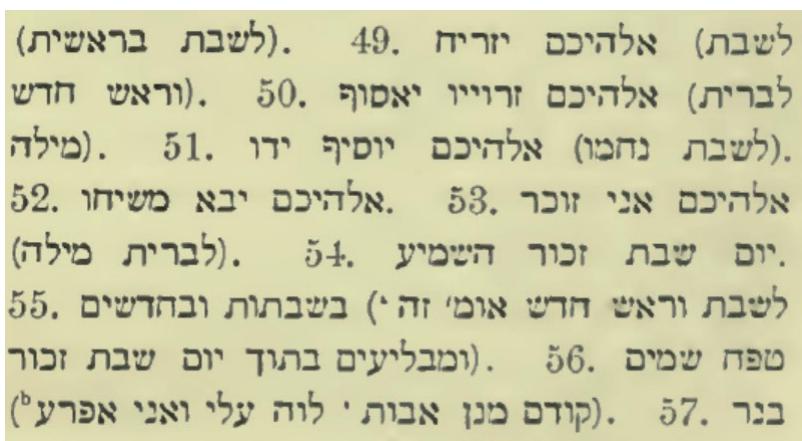
Figure 10: George Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part II (London: British Museum, 1905), p. 279b (bottom), with indication of our short poem as item no. 53 in the list. (Used with permission granted by the British Library.)

Figure 11: British Library MS Or. 2772, fol. 200r (bottom), with the rubric and first four lines of the poem (the opening word is written extra-large). Note also the Hebrew letters נג in the margin, serving as the numeral = 53. (Photo credit: © The British Library Board.)

Figure 12: British Library MS Or. 2772, fol. 200v (top), with the final two lines of the poem and the rubric. (Photo credit: © The British Library Board.)
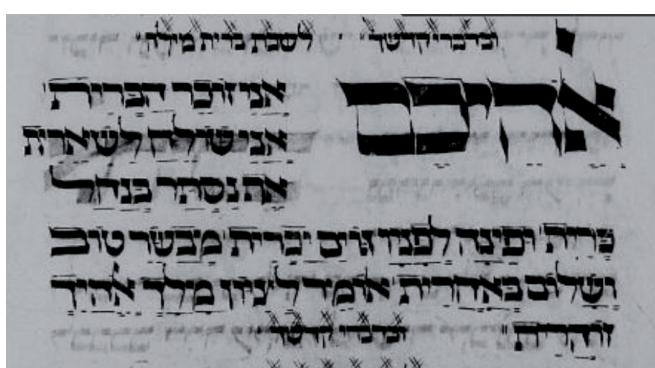
Figure 13: NLI Ms. Heb. 34º1114, an Ashkenazi *maḥzor* (prayer book for festivals and special occasions), dated to 1418 — with our poem on fol. 189v. This version lacks the initial word in line 2 of the poem, הנה 'behold', and uses a different form for the word 'I' (אני *ʾani* instead of אנכי *ʾanoki*), also in line 2. (Image: Courtesy of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.)
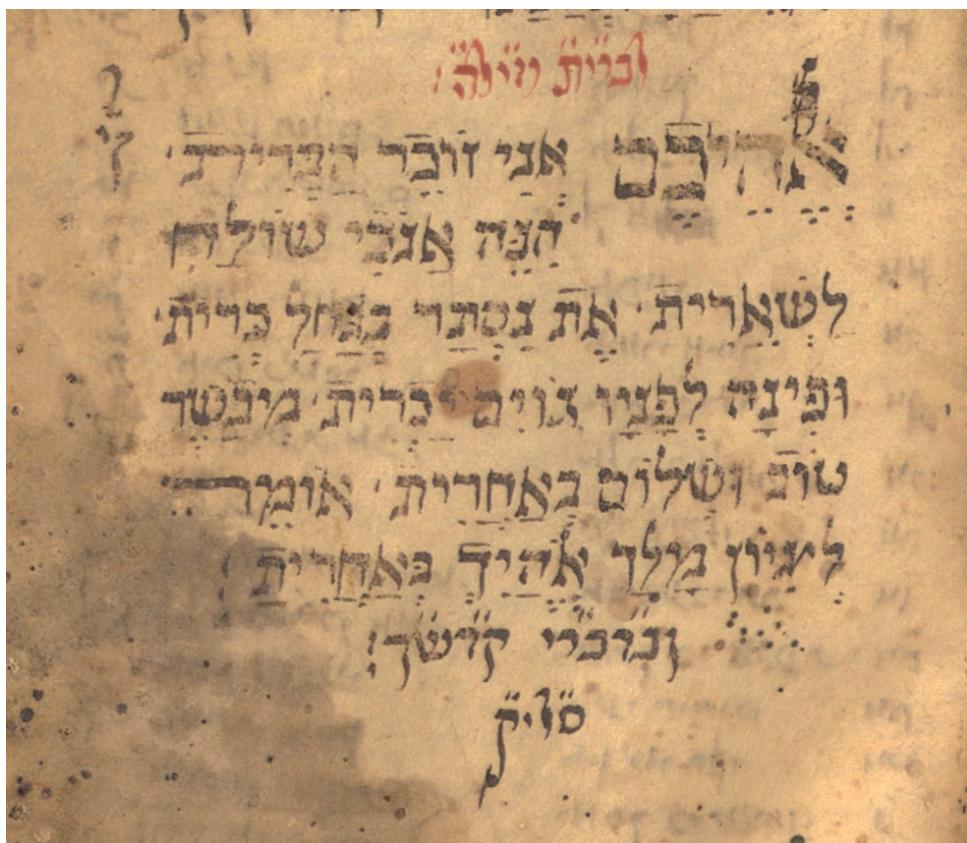
Figure 14: Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen, Germany, Ms. 1267, an Ashkenazi *siddur* (daily prayer book), Worms, 14th century — with our poem on fol. 220r. This version changes the last word from זהרית 'shining-forth' to באחרית 'at the end-of-time', thereby repeating the last word in the previous line. (Image: Courtesy of Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen, Germany.)
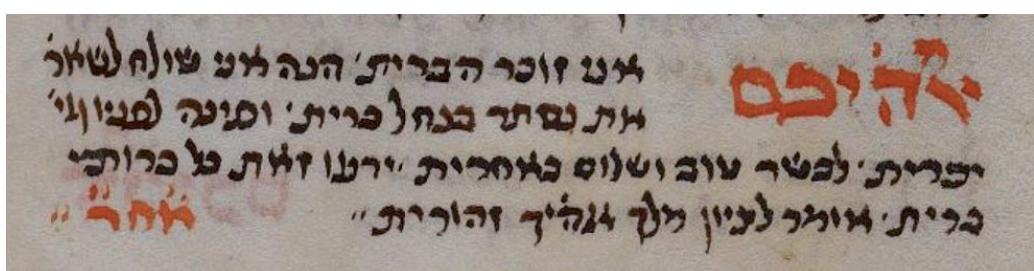
Figure 15: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York (J.T.S.), Ms. 8972, an Ashkenazi *maḥzor* (prayer book for festivals and special occasions), dated to 13th–14th centuries — with our poem on fol. 92b (bottom). This version of the *piyyuṭ* lacks the vowel points, includes an additional line (see above), uses אני *ʾani* 'I' instead of אנכי *ʾanoki* 'I', and reads the infinitive לבשר *ləbaśśer* 'to herald' instead of the gerund/participle מבשר *məbaśśer* 'heralding'. (Image: Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.)

Figure 16: Adolf Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), col. 306b (near the top), with special attention to line 7, where the entry reads: δ. לברית מילה ['for the circumcision ritual']: a. אל' אני זוכר [an abbreviated form of the title of the *piyyuṭ*].

Figure 17: Bodleian MS Michael 573 = Neubauer, no. 1099, an Ashkenazi siddur c. 1400 — with our poem on fol. 145v. (Used with kind permission of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.)

Figure 18: Title page of *Hadrat Qodeš* 'Holy Splendour', Part 1, *maḥzor* for Sabbaths, Festivals, etc., according to the Ashkenazi rite, printed in Venice, 1599, by Giovanni Di Gara. The title page also indicates that within the volume are poems for special occasions such as weddings and circumcision rituals. (Source: https://tablet.otzar.org/, used with kind permission. Also available at: http://hebrewbooks.org/11581.)
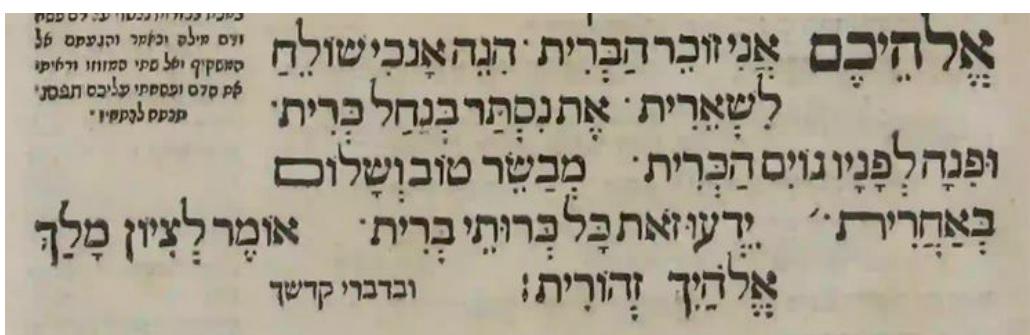
Figure 19: The printed version of אלהיכם אני זוכר הברית 'O God, I recall the covenant', in *Hadrat Qodeš* 'Holy Splendour', Part 1, *maḥzor* for Sabbaths, Festivals, etc., according to the Ashkenazi rite, printed in Venice, 1599, by Giovanni Di Gara, p. 321a. The printed version, incidentally, includes the additional line present in the J.T.S. manuscript (see above, Figure 15), plus there is a textual variant in line 4 of the poem, to wit, הכרית *hakrit* 'destroying' (infinitive serving as gerund) instead of יכרית *yakrit* 'destroy' (with future sense). (Source: https://tablet.otzar.org/, used with kind permission. Also available at: http://hebrewbooks.org/11581.)

Figure 20: Front cover of Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing. Somewhat worn, but its original beauty and workmanship is still discernible. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)

Figure 21: Back cover of Moses Alshekh, *Torat Moshe* (Venice: Giovanni Di Gara, 1601), first printing. Somewhat worn, but its original beauty and workmanship is still discernible. (Photo credit: Gary A. Rendsburg — used with kind permission of Rare Books and Special Collections, The University of Sydney Library.)

Figure 22: The burnt Ein Gedi scroll, discovered 1970, in the Byzantine-period synagogue at the site. (Image: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.)

Figure 23: Image of the virtually unrolled Leviticus scroll from Ein Gedi, Israel, c. 300 C.E., produced by micro-CT scanning. (Image courtesy of Seth Parker, Digital Restoration Initiative, University of Kentucky, U.S.A.)

Figure 24: Reverse image of the virtually unrolled Leviticus scroll from Ein Gedi, Israel, c. 300 C.E. Published in Segal et al., 2016, p. 33. (Image courtesy of Seth Parker, Digital Restoration Initiative, University of Kentucky, U.S.A.)

Figure 25: Screen shot of the entry for RB 5101.2 at the website of the "Books within Books: Hebrew Fragments in European Libraries" project (http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com/). Registration is required for access to the database, though it is free. For our Sydney fragment, go to: http://www. hebrewmanuscript.com/bwb-database/collection-by-city/270.htm.