

Torah with Meg. Esther, vellum, 116 fols, heavily annotated with marginal notes giving variant readings for vocalizations and spellings of words in the Biblical passages. The colophon states that the MS was copied down by Jacob b. Isaac in the year equivalent to 1304 C.E. , but no place of writing is indicated.

The author's marginal notes show that he was very well versed in the variant readings of words and their vocalizations in exemplars of the Masoretic text known to him. Example (Fol. 7 verso): "I have found in the Humash of **R. Isaac**, which is very exact for the Pentateuch, '*asi lakh*'; (but) in book[s] of others, '*asi lah*' (Gen 16.6, '*asi lah hatob be'enayikh*).

The authorities and books mentioned include, in an English translation of the writer's wording, the following:

Rashi  
the Mafte'ah,  
the books of Spain,  
the book of Babylonia,  
the books of France,  
"our books",  
R. Yom Tob,  
the book of R. Jacob,  
"my Tiqqun",  
"an old book (*sefer zaqen*, used several times),  
*sefer torah debei R. Natan*,  
"what I have heard from the precise specialists" (*hadayyeqanim*),  
the book of R. Menahem,  
"(what I have seen) in the book of the Hazzan and heard from his mouth",  
"the Book of Commandments written by my teacher R. Moses, who copied the (rules concerning) tefillin straps from the book of R. Maimon who copied them from an ancient book that was in Egypt and had formerly been in Jerusalem in order to proof-read (copies of the Hebrew Bible).

From these and other passages we learn that the erudite annotator was a student of Moses of Corbeil and had also studied or engaged in conversation with Joseph the Hazzan of Troyes, often called simply "the Hazzan". "R. Yom Tob" is probably the eminent Yom Tob of Joigny, When in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries "R. Jacob" is mentioned without further designations, the expression always designates R. Jacob Tam, and R. Menahem is, within that context, clearly to be identified with Menahem Vardimas of Rouen, who because of his fame was often referred to simply as R. Menahem. The codex, written during the last few years of pre-expulsion Jewish life in France, bears all the hallmarks of a bona fide Sarfatic manuscript, revealing at the same time the high quality and precision of Biblical text-study in late 13<sup>th</sup>-century France.

I cannot believe either that the editors of the recent catalogue are unaware of the significance of the names of the scholars mentioned in this text, or that they are of the view that these names do not matter. Yet in that catalogue, the codex under discussion is described as deriving from (I quote) "<...Ashkenaz>, 1304". It appears that, in this

and other instances throughout the catalogue, the editors use the geographical term Ashkenaz — which in medieval texts means only Germany or at most the Germanic-speaking lands — as a designation meant to include France and Normandy as well. They appear to do this particularly in such cases where the places of writing are not specifically indicated in the manuscripts — although at the same time unhesitatingly using the expression “Ashkenazic” to refer to Hebrew scripts which were, in reality, used throughout northwestern Europe. The entire conception implied by these usages appears to be an invention of recent Judaica scholarship, clearly deriving from the fact that after the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306, the culture of the Ashkenazic Jewry did in many ways very gradually become predominant throughout central and eventually eastern Europe. I say “recent” scholarship because as late as 1900, the terms Ashkenaz was treated in an appropriate scientific way, as indicative of medieval Germany and its Hebraic culture (cf. e.g. *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Ashkenaz”). When to the contrary it is used in our own times to describe a cultural and geographic situation that did not actually exist in the middle ages, the term *Ashkenaz* and *Ashkenazic* become etiological tools misleading readers into thinking that medieval French Jews considered themselves to be part of a mega-culture whose main home was Germany. Both French and German rabbinic figures of the middle ages have left us with many statements proving the contrary. There was a flourishing, independent culture in Sarefat as well as in Ashkenaz, and the Parma de- Rossi manuscript collection contains many new testimonies to that fact. If one is to speak of medieval Ashkenazic culture, then it is equally appropriate, and equally necessary, to speak of medieval Sarfatic culture. If one wishes a more general term to include them both, then I suggest that the appropriate designation is “Northeastern European Hebraic culture”. Likewise, while there are indeed grounds to describe some handwriting styles as distinctly *Ashkenazic*, there are compelling reasons, flowing from the internal evidence of numerous pre-1306 codices, to describe other handwriting styles as characteristically *Sarfatic*. As for those handwriting styles that show affinities amongst the Hebrew scribes of Germany, northern France, Normandy and England, these may be appropriately subsumed under the rubric “Northwestern European Hebrew hands”.