

Parma 189 ± Ms 1940; Richler no. 804 (Cat. p. 178)

The *Sefer miswot qatan (Semak)* of Isaac of Corbeil, followed by the work entitled *Hayye 'olam..* 267 folios, vellum.

The colophon, fol. 252 recto, states at its beginning that the scribe of the MS, Zechariah b. Moses, copied down the codex for his teacher Haim b. Moses, described by Zechariah as hailing from PRYQ or FRYQ. De Rossi (Cat., p. 121) omitted mentioning this toponym altogether. However, in the catalogue brochure entitled *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Palatine Library in Parma*, published in Jerusalem in 1985 in conjunction with the exhibition of some of the Parma MSS at the Jewish National and University Library, the teacher is designated (p. 46) as the rather Ashkenazic-sounding “R. Hayyim of Parik [!]” without further identification — although to the best of my knowledge there is no such place as Parik. It is perhaps for this reason that in the recent Richler-Beit Arie catalogue, the name is left to stand alone in Hebrew script without transcription or identification. Of the manuscript’s provenience, Beit-Arie, in the same catalogue states: “...<France?>, 1297. Ashkenazic semi-cursive script.”

Why there is a question mark after the word “France” in Beit-Arie’s description I do not fathom. As we shall see momentarily, the scribe Zechariah was a student of Peres b. Elijah of Corbeil — the well-known town south of Paris — and the codex was demonstrably produced not in an Ashkenazic but in a French environment. Once the Ashkenazic *idée fixe* is put aside, the identification of the Hebrew place-name presents no difficulty. It designates, straightforwardly, the town of **Frique**, otherwise known as St. Frique or Saint Affrique, situated in the Aveyron region (formerly the Rouerge) — that is to say, that part of southwestern France having Rodez as its main city. A description of the position of Frique is offered in the *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon* of Zedler, Band 9, published in 1735: “Frique, Afrique. Lat. Fanum s. Africani, eine Frankische Stadt in der provinz Rovergue, am Fluss Dourdan, der Stadt Fabres gegen über, eine Meile von Fabres .” Under its full name the town is described at some length in Vol. 1, p. 14 of the *Histoire des communes et des villes de France* by A. Girault de Saint Fargeau published in 1844, in which year the town had 6,336 inhabitants. The author states that “L’origine de cette ville remonte à une époque très reculé ...” and that it specialized in the manufacture of cotton, wool, and leather goods, and of Roquefort cheese.

Returning now to the above-mentioned colophon, it continues, in short, with the statement that Zechariah completed his transcription of Isaac of Corbeil’s *Semak* in the year equivalent to 1297 C.E. Zechariah adds the following remark: “Moreover, I found the following written in the city of Corbeil, in the holy handwriting of my teacher (and) master R. Peretz...at the end of his book: ‘All things hinted at [in Isaac’s *Semak*] one should best write on a single parchment sheet and thereafter look into [Moses ben Jacob of Coucy’s] *Semag*, [Isaac] Alfasi’s [*Halakhot*] and other books; he should also textually examine the particular commandment *in extenso* in the *Semag* as concerns any particular matter that requires a decisive legal ruling. It is also appropriate to investigate the unwritten hints in [my] *scholia [hagahot]* [appended to the *Semak*]...”

Thus Zechariah identifies the renowned Peretz of Corbeil as one of his teachers, and it was evidently in Corbeil that he studied under him and found the above-quoted notation in Peretz’s book. (Within the context, the words “[which I found] at the end of

his book, *besof sifro*, appears to refer to Peretz's own copy of Isaac of Corbeil's *Semak*, with Peretz's famous scholia, or *hagahot*, included therein.) On fol. 109r Zechariah states that if the reader will but turn the page, he will find two formulae for writs of divorce, and he adds that the one formula is by "the father of this book" — i.e., by Isaac of Corbeil himself — and that the other is "according to the system of our teacher [and] master Peretz, may he li[ve] and be long of days." Thus Peretz was still alive in 1297, the year given by Zechariah as the time of completion of his copying the *Semak*.

Zechariah continues, in the passage just quoted, by stating: "I the writer copied down these [two divorce formulas] into my [own] book in Corbeil, in his [i.e., Peretz's] presence." The two divorce formulas (dated 1244 and 1247 respectively), both mention Bray-sur-Seine, in northern France, as their place of origin..

In 1297, so his colophon indicates, Zechariah was already studying under the tutelage of Haim b. Moses of Frique. This does not necessarily mean that he studied with him in Frique itself; The most we may legitimately infer from the colophon is that Haim *hailed from* Frique. To judge by Zechariah's handwriting and by the fact that he makes use of divorce formulas as practised in the northern French city of Bray-sur-Seine, this scholarly scribe does not appear to have received any part of his education in the Provence but rather somewhere in central or northern France. However, his second Talmudic master Haim may very well have studied at a yeshibah in the Provence: Frique is within a relatively short travel distance of the three most important Talmudic academies of Languedoc — namely, those that could be found throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Narbonne, Beziers and Montpellier. It is reasonable to infer that Zechariah received his Talmudic education in one or more of these schools and afterwards moved to a town in central or northern France where he eventually taught Zechariah and other students. It is known from rabbinic sources that other Provencal scholars as well eventually moved to northern France, where they could study with renowned Tosafists whose method of Talmudic inquiry was their own creation and not shared by the Spanish and Provencal scholars.