RABBI NATHAN BEN JEHIEL OF ROME, *Sefer he-arukh* (The Organized Book)
In Hebrew and Aramaic, manuscript on paper
Middle East, 13th century

i + 222 + i folios on paper, modern paper pastedowns and flyleaves, modern pagination in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-outer corners, incomplete (collation indeterminate through p. 12; from p. 13 [i-viii lacking] ix¹⁰ [9-10 lacking] x¹⁰ [1-2, 10 lacking] xi-xii¹⁰ xiii¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xiv¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xv¹⁰ [10 lacking] xvi⁶ [1, 3-4, 6 lacking] xvii¹⁰ xviii¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xix¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xx¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xxi-xxii¹⁰ xxiii¹⁰ [1, 10 lacking] xxiv¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xxv¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xxvi¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xxvii¹⁰ [1,10 lacking] xxviii¹⁴ xxix¹⁰ xxx¹⁰ [1,9-10 lacking] [xxxi lacking, probably a quire of 8] xxxii-xxxiii¹⁰ xxxiv¹⁰ [10 lacking] [xxxv lacking, probably a quire of 8]), first page of each quire signed in pen near gutter at head in Hebrew characters (at least partially visible on pp. 43, 63, 115, 137, 205, 225, 325, 353, 387, 407, 427), original slanted catchwords at the end of each quire, modern catchwords sometimes added in pencil before missing folios, ruled in blind (justification varies), single-column text written in Eastern square (headings and some lemmata) and semi-cursive (text body) scripts in black ink mostly in 26 or 27 lines, justification of lines via dilation or contraction of final letters, abbreviation, insertion of space fillers, and slanted inscription of final words, episodic Tiberian vocalization of text, Tetragrammaton abbreviated to three letters yod in a row, diagrams on pp. 4, 193, 256, brief poems on pp. 305-306, 352-353, 417, corrections, strikethroughs, and/or marginalia in primary and secondary hands, staining and dampstaining throughout, corners rounded, periodic rodent damage in outer and lower edges, modern replacement blanks inserted to mark (most) gaps, slight damage in upper edges of pp. 3-4, small hole in outer margins of pp. 13-14, short tears in outer edges of pp. 41-42, 325-326, 361-362, in upper edges of pp. 133-136, and in lower and outer edges of pp. 285-292, longer tear in lower margins of pp. 351-352, taped puncture on pp. 229-230, small holes in text on pp. 245-246, 387-388, lower-outer corner of pp. 339-340 lacking. Modern brown library buckram, very slightly scuffed, Sassoon shelf mark (1206) numbered in gilt at base of spine. Dimensions 257 x 170 mm.

The first Hebrew-language Talmudic dictionary to achieve wide circulation, *Sefer he-arukh* has had an outsized impact on Jewish lexicography and Talmudic interpretation for over nine centuries. Despite its status as a classic of traditional rabbinic literature, it has yet to be published in a critical edition that accounts for the many surviving manuscripts and Genizah fragments. The present exemplar is among the earliest (if not *the* earliest) substantial Middle Eastern copy of the text extant and almost certainly the oldest in private hands.

PROVENANCE

1. While no colophon has been preserved, it is possible to approximately localize and date this manuscript on paleographical grounds to the Middle East of the thirteenth century. (Malachi Beit-Arié, the last generation's doyen of Hebrew paleography, apparently believed it might derive from the twelfth century [Cuomo, 1974].) The script defies precise definition, with theories about its origins ranging from Egypt to Yemen to Persia.

2. David Solomon Sassoon (1880-1942), one of the most prominent private collectors of Hebraica and Judaica of all time, purchased the manuscript for £20 from the antiquarian book dealer David Fränkel of Vienna (1876-1948) on April 9, 1930, and it thereafter

1, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau
2ⁿᵈ floor
75001 Paris
+33 1 42 60 15 58
info@lesenluminures.com

One Magnificent Mile
980 North Michigan Ave., Suite 1330
Chicago IL 60611
+1 773 929 5986
chicago@lesenluminures.com

23 East 73ʳᵈ Street
7ᵗʰ floor, Penthouse
New York, NY 10021
+1 212 717 7273
newyork@lesenluminures.com

entered his library under the shelf mark 1206 (written on the pastedown of the upper board above his bookplate and numbered in gilt on the spine).

TEXT

pp. 1-444, [portions of Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel's *Sefer he-arukh*], incipit, "de-pirka kamma de-nazir hareini nazir hen ahat… tinok be-va-yik[ra] rabb[ah] be-resh tsav am[ar] r[abbi] yosei mi-penei mah."

With their migration from the Middle East to North Africa and Southern Europe over the course of the early Middle Ages, many Jews found themselves building communities in places where Aramaic was not the lingua franca and where the realia referred to in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds were unfamiliar. This situation naturally necessitated the composition of glossaries that could be used as reference works by those studying Talmudic law. The first of these dictionaries were compiled in Judeo-Arabic by scholars residing within the Islamicate world but were therefore simultaneously inaccessible to many of their brethren living under Christendom (Abramson, 1984).

Into this state of affairs stepped Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel (1035-c. 1103), co-head (together with his two brothers) of the yeshiva in Rome and a widely respected Italian Jewish legal scholar. In *Sefer he-arukh* (The Organized Book), completed at the dawn of the twelfth century, Rabbi Nathan explicates, in alphabetical order—and in Hebrew—the many difficult terms in the Talmuds, as well as in other corpora of rabbinic literature; in several hundred cases, he glosses a given term with its Judeo-Italian equivalent. His detailed explanations contain material of historical and bibliographical value, including descriptions of rare Jewish customs, alternate readings of traditional sources, and quotations of otherwise-unknown passages from important works by early sages (Rovner, 1993 and Ta-Shma, 2001). In addition, due to his stature as a rabbinic authority, the interpretations of various Talmudic discussions given in his dictionary carried legal weight with many later scholars. The model for such a lexical-encyclopedic work may have been Papias' *Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum*, a Latin dictionary of difficult words found in the Bible and Patristic and other writings composed in Italy c. 1040-1050 (Ta-Shma, 2001).

Sefer he-arukh went on to exert enormous influence on subsequent Talmudic lexicography, with several authors compiling addenda and corrigenda to, as well as epitomes or reworkings of, the original text, often giving their books titles that played on the name of Rabbi Nathan's magnum opus. Its importance as a tool for study is witnessed by the fact that it was among the very first books to be published when Hebrew printing with movable type began in Rome c. 1469-1472. It would later be reissued four times in the sixteenth century and at numerous points thereafter. It (or perhaps once of its adaptations) even served Christian Hebraists like Sebastian Münster (Basel, 1527), Philippe d'Aquin (Paris, 1629), and Johannes Buxtorf (Basel, 1639) in composing their own works intended for those who wished to understand the language of traditional rabbinic literature. Because of its exegetical value, starting in the nineteenth century attempts were made to entirely rearrange the text of *Sefer he-arukh* into a kind of commentary on the Talmud and *midrashim* (Brisman, 2000 and Rafeld, 2003).

The first (and, so far, only) critical edition of *Sefer he-arukh* was produced in 1878-1892 by Alexander Kohut, who based his text on seven manuscripts to which he had access, as well as on the first seven printed editions. While his version of the lexicon is the best one available, many

have drawn attention to its shortcomings, and an updated edition taking into consideration more (and earlier) manuscripts remains a scholarly desideratum (Abramson, 1971-1974 and Abramson, 1984). Only very circumscribed portions of the text have been studied at even close to the necessary depth (see Cuomo, 1974 and Sulkin, 1975).

No doubt due to its popularity, *Sefer he-arukh* (including its various adaptations) has come down to us in hundreds of codices and fragments. Building on Blondheim (1935), Cuomo (1974) described sixty-eight manuscripts of the non-abbreviated version of the book, of which thirteen were found to postdate the *editio princeps*. Among the remaining fifty-five, only three Sassoon volumes, including the present one, are still owned privately (the other two are MS Sassoon 986 and MS Sassoon 1008). (Almost all of the early manuscripts discovered more recently in other private collections are fragments of one or two leaves.) Our manuscript was probably originally copied in two volumes comprising about 1,358 pages. In its current state, it contains entries from the letters *dalet* (pp. 1-8), *vav* (pp. 9-10), and *zayin* (pp. 11-12) from volume 1, as well as *samekh* (pp. 13-48), *ayin* (pp. 48-103), *pe* (pp. 103-178), *tsadi* (pp. 178-208), *kof* (pp. 208-305), *resh* (pp. 306-352), *shin* (pp. 353-417), and *tav* (pp. 417-444) from volume 2.

LITERATURE

Abramson, Shraga. "Le-heker he-arukh," *Leshonenu* 36:2-3 (January 1971-April 1972), pp. 122-149; 37:1 (October 1972), pp. 26-42; 37:4 (July 1973), pp. 253-269; 38:1-2 (October 1973-January 1974), pp. 91-117.

Abramson, Shraga." Sefer 'he-arukh 'le-rav natan be-r. yehi'el me-roma," *Sinai* 95:1-2 (Nisan-Iyyar 1984), pp. 27-42.

Blondheim, David S. "Liste des manuscrits de l'Arouk de Nathan bar Yehiel," in *Festschrift für Aron Freimann zum 60. Geburtstage*, ed. by Alexander Marx and Hermann Meyer, pp. 24-30, at p. 26 (no. 14), Berlin, 1935.

Brisman, Shimeon. *History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances*, vol. 3:1, pp. 15-25, 159-160, 272-276, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2000.

Cuomo, Luisa. "Le glosse volgari dell''Arukh di R. Nathan ben Jechj'el da Roma," vol. 1, pp. 39 (no. 19), 49, vol. 2, p. iv, PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974.

Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome. *Sefer arukh ha-shalem*, ed. by Alexander Kohut, Vienna and New York, 1878-1892.

Rafeld, Meir. *Be-pardes ha-millonim: sekirah ketsarah al ha-milona'ut ha-talmudit*, Ramat Gan, 2003.

Ravenna, Gabriel Isaac. "Meni'im u-megammot be-hibburo shel 'sefer he-arukh'," *Ha-ma'yan* 46:4 (Tammuz 2006), pp. 55-67.

Rovner, Jay. "Iyyunim be-yahaso shel r. natan me-romi ba'al he-arukh el peirush rabbeinu hanan'el la-talmud ha-bavli," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* C:1 (1993), pp. 191-197.

Sulkin, Adi. "Nose'ei ha-musikah be-'arukh' le-r. natan ben yehi'el me-roma, ha-me'ah ha-11," M.A. thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1975.

Sznol, Shifrá." Medieval Jewish Greek Lexicography: The '*Arukh* of Nathan ben Jiehiel," *Erytheia* 30 (2009), pp. 107-128.

Ta-Shma, Israel M. "Ha-reka ha-italki le-sefer he-arukh shel r. natan be-r. yehi'el me-romi," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 67:1-2 (June-August 2001), pp. 21-26.

Weinberg, Joanna." Midrash in a Lexical Key: Nathan ben Yehiel's *Arukh*," in *Midrash Unbound: Transformations and Innovations*, ed. by Michael Fishbane and Joanna Weinberg, pp. 213-231, esp. pp. 221-222, Oxford, 2013.

ONLINE RESOURCES
Our MS (digitized black-and-white microfilm available within the building of the National Library of Israel only)
https://www.nli.org.il/he/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001348690205171/NLI

Rome, c. 1469-1472 edition
https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990009600660205171/NLI

Pesaro, 1517 edition
https://www.hebrewbooks.org/11828

Venice, 1531-1532 edition
https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990020213740205171/NLI

Venice, 1553 edition
https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990020213730205171/NLI

Basel, 1599 edition
https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990020213680205171/NLI

TM 1432