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Homepage: [www.aisg.it](http://www.aisg.it)

*Direttore / Editor*

Mauro Perani:

[mauro.perani@unibo.it](mailto:mauro.perani@unibo.it)

*Segreteria di redazione / Editorial Office*

Enrica Sagradini

[segreteria.aisg@unibo.it](mailto:segreteria.aisg@unibo.it)

Tel. +39 0544 936783

*Impaginazione / Editing*

Elena Lolli: [elena.lolli@studio.unibo.it](mailto:elena.lolli@studio.unibo.it)

Sofia Locatelli: [sofia.locatelli@studio.unibo.it](mailto:sofia.locatelli@studio.unibo.it)

*Revision of English Summaries*

Tsipora Rakhovskaya: [tsipora3@gmail.com](mailto:tsipora3@gmail.com)

*Sede di redazione*

Dipartimento di Beni Culturali

Università di Bologna,

sede di Ravenna,

via degli Ariani 1,

I-48121 Ravenna (RA)

Tel. +39 0544 936783.

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APPEALS TO AUTHORITY: LATIN AND HEBREW DRAFTS  
ON A GIRONA BOOKBINDING FRAGMENT\*

All manuscript fragments are unique, but some are more unique than others. The subject of this article is a very unique fragment. Small and torn, reused again and again as scratch paper, the humble scrap contains a draft or copy of a 1388 Latin appeal to King Joan I of Aragon and a Hebrew draft of an appeal to a Rabbinic authority, possibly R. Hasdai Crescas. The author was a senior leader of the Girona aljama who would soon become an apostate during the great upheavals of 1391. Just a few years later

the fragment would be bound by a Girona bookbinder into the binding of a notary book that was eventually housed in the Arxiu Històric de Girona. The binding was opened about a decade ago and the manuscript fragments restored. Measuring just 142 x 145 mm, the fragment was extracted from Book 2, 62 (fragment 6), of the Arxiu, a 1395 notary register of Berenguer Capella.<sup>1</sup> Let us begin with the Latin side of the fragment:

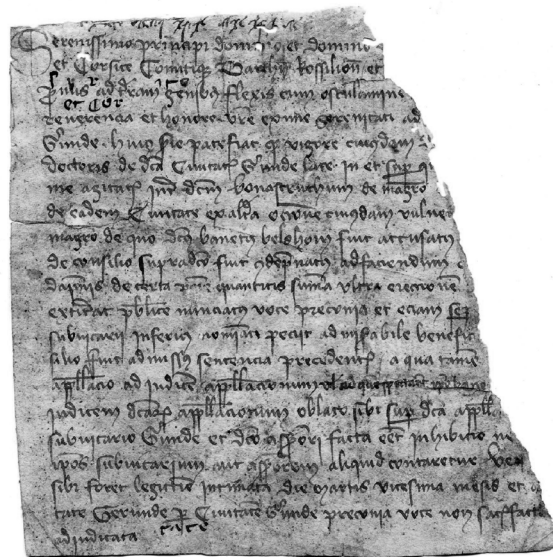


Fig.1 - Arxiu Històric de Girona 2, 62 (6b), Latin appeal from Benet Bellshom to King Joan I of Aragon, 1388.

\* This study was made possible by the research and cooperation of scholars I am indebted to. Katalin Szende's original Latin transcription "kickstarted" the article. Jaume Riera i Sans was generous with corrections and references; much within is based upon his original archival scholarship. Abraham Levine and Pinchas Roth helped decipher and correct the Hebrew transcriptions, along with Yehoshua Granat, who advised concerning the Hebrew poetry, as did Shulamit Elizur. Marina Rustow and Mike Reed shared pearls from the bottomless seas of the Cairo Geniza. Edna Engel examined the Hebrew

k'tav and Latin script. Micha Perry's keen observations and unpublished draft on Hebrew (and Latin) medieval correspondence formulae helped bring the *narratio* draft to *conclusio*. Blanca Villuendas and Idan Pérez contributed their *seny* to this *rauxa*. Tsipora Rakhovskaya offered many valuable corrections and suggestions. Only the errors within are mine alone. I acknowledge support from Bar-Ilan University as a President's Fellow and heartily thank Jean and Tania Guetta.

<sup>1</sup> PERANI, *The "Gerona Genizah"*, cit., p. 166 (VALLS PUJOL, Addendum 4).

1 [Hebrew cursive script, upside-down, later hand]  
 2 Serenissimo principi domi[n]o et domino [...]  
 3 et Corsice comitique Barch[in]o[n]e Rossilion[is]  
 et [Ceritanie ...]  
 4 pronus ad terram genibus flexis cum osculamine  
 [...]  
 5 reverencia et honore. Vestre exim[i]e serenitati  
 ad [...]  
 6 Gerunde huius serie patefiat quod vigore cu-  
 iusdam [...]  
 7 doctoris de dicta civitate Gerunde late in et super  
 q[uestione...]  
 8 me agitate inter dictum Bonastruchum de Magi-  
 stro [...]  
 9 de eadem civitate ex altera, occasione cuiusdam  
 vulne[r]is...]  
 10 magistro de quo dictus Banetus Belshom fuit ac-  
 cusatus [...]  
 11 de consilio supradicto fuit condempnatus ad fa-  
 ciendum [...]  
 12 dampnis de certa peccunie quanti[ta]tis summa  
 ultra eieccionem [...]  
 13 extiterat publice nunciatus voce preconia, et  
 eciam separ[atus...]  
 14 subvicarii inferius nominati peccit ad miserabile  
 benefic[ium...]  
 15 silio fuit admissus sententia precedente, a qua  
 tamen [...]  
 16 appellacio ad iudicem appellacionum, vel ad  
 quem spectaret, ipse Bane[...]

17 iudicem dictarum appellacionum oblato sibi su-  
 per dicta appella[cione ...]  
 18 subvicario Gerunde et dicto assessori facta esset  
 inhibicio ne [...]  
 19 ipsos subvicarium aut assessorem aliquid conta-  
 retur. Verum [...]  
 20 sibi foret legitime intimata die martis vicesima  
 mensis et [...]  
 21 tate Gerunde per civitatem Gerunde preconia  
 voce non satisfact[...]  
 22 adjudicata [in darker ink, Hebrew: גירונה, upsi-  
 de down]

This Latin appeal was written by Benet Bellshom, a prominent senior member of the Girona Jewish community, addressed to the King of Aragon and Count of Barcelona, Joan I (1350-1396).<sup>2</sup> The appeal is probably either a draft version or a personal copy of a letter actually sent in 1388. Both the content and the script font correspond to this date (as we'll see).<sup>3</sup> Line 3 of the charter refers to King Joan el Caçador as ruler of Corsica, Barcelona and Roussillon, clearly referring to Joan I “el Caçador”. In 1344, his father, Pere IV “el Cerimoniós”, of Aragon (1319-1387), conquered Roussillon and Cerdanya (both mentioned in line 3) from Jaime III, along with the Kingdom of Majorca.<sup>4</sup>

During the years leading up to the great upheavals of 1391, the Jewish aljama of Girona faced strife. Internally, quarrels between members of the Jewish community led to the development of factions. Disputes turned violent and spilled over into the general courts.<sup>5</sup> The author

<sup>2</sup> Contra my guess that the letter was addressed to King Pere and concerned a prior Bonastruch. See L. JACOBI, *The Commentary of a Student of Rashba to Chapter “Keitzad Mevarkhin” of Tractate Berakhot from a Girona Archive* [Hebrew], Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 2014, p. 19. An earlier Jewish letter to a king written in the vernacular by paupers was published by Y.T. ASSIS in *T’sisah Hevratit*, Ed. J. DAN, *Culture and History: Ino Sciaky Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 144, note 96.

<sup>3</sup> RIERA I SANS, personal communication, Apr. 20, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> T.N. BISSON, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History*, Oxford 1986, pp. 104-107.

<sup>5</sup> RIERA I SANS, *Els Avalots del 1391 a Girona, in Jornades d’Historia dels Jueus a Catalunya* «Actes: Girona» (Abril 1987), Girona 1990, pp. 101-105.

For a description of the context of disputes within the Jewish communities, see ID., *Els jueus de Girona i la seva organització: segles XII-XV*, Girona 2012, with this particular dispute mentioned on p. 140 at note 369. (This new volume is a historical treasure based primarily on original documentary research.) Despite external pressure, the proliferation of such divisive internal disputes indicates a breakdown in the Jewish community. While Yitzchak Baer consistently placed blame for Spanish spiritual degradation on the rationalist camp, J. FAUR, *Anti-Maimonidean Demons*, «Review of Rabbinic Judaism» 6,1 (2003), pp. 3-52, argues that the rise of Kabbalah and Ashkenazic Rabbinic authority in the 13<sup>th</sup> century led to the crisis in Catalonian Rabbinic culture. In one of his last public talks, ASSIS also criticized Y. Baer’s bias in favor of the Ashkenazi Sages (*Judeo-*

of the letter, Benet Bellshom, mentioned in line 10 in the third person, was listed on the aljama of Girona from the year 1352 onwards; from 1391 on he is no longer found on the lists.<sup>6</sup> According to Riera i Sans, Bellshom entered into a feud with the much younger Bonastruch Desmaestre, mentioned in line 8, recorded as publicly active between the years 1385 and 1437.<sup>7</sup> He is the selfsame Rabbi Bonastruch Desmaestre who was later forced by Antipope Benedict XIII to attend the Disputation of Tortosa in 1413-1414.<sup>8</sup>

The cause of the feud is not known. Several factors may have been involved but there is some evidence that it may have been business oriented. Both Benet Bellshom and Bonastruch Desmaestre were moneylenders. Based upon a database of archival documents, Esperança Valls Pujol shows that the many moneylenders of the Girona Jewish community tended to divide up the various regions surrounding Girona. Desmaestre was one of the most active moneylenders in Girona and his large region of activity overlapped and exceeded Bellshom's.<sup>9</sup> The names of both individuals appear upon various Hebrew financial registers extracted from Girona bookbindings.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever its cause, as a result of the feud, Desmaestre issued a complaint against Bellshom with the local Girona court, who ruled that Bellshom should be banished from the city of Girona.<sup>11</sup> Riera i Sans characterized it as a *Pau i Treva* banishment in order to mitigate commu-

nal violence; his characterization is supported by the text of this appeal. He lists seven preserved royal proclamations regarding the verdict which Bellshom appealed, beginning February 8, 1388, from Barcelona. The final record, an edict from Saragossa dated October 26, 1388, indicates that the sentence of banishment against Benet Bellshom was never actually carried out.<sup>12</sup> The stay of execution of the punishment is a sign of the success of this plea by Benet Bellshom.<sup>13</sup> However, it could also be the result of a Hebrew appeal to a minister suggested in the margins of the backside of the fragment, as will be discussed below.

The second side of the fragment contains original Hebrew traditional poetry in the center and drafts of unrelated poetic prose in the margins, all written in Spanish cursive typical of the Girona bookbinding fragments.<sup>14</sup> The original margins on the Hebrew side are much larger than the margins on the Latin side, so less of this central strand of Hebrew survives. The hand in the margins and the content positively match the Hebrew cursive line at the top of the Latin side and probably the central Hebrew text as well.

The Latin draft or copy was reused as scrap paper for the poetic central text of the Hebrew side and subsequently in the margin running over to the second side. Hebrew and Latin rarely appear together in medieval manuscripts,<sup>15</sup> but in the Cairo Geniza we find compa-

*Arabic in Romance Speaking Societies in the Hispanic Kingdoms*, Hebrew University, July, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 354; S. PLANAS I MARCÉ, *Una Pretesa Interculturalitat: La Comunitat Jueva de Girona I la Seva Relació amb la Societat Cristiana*, «Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins» XLII (2001), pp. 198-199.

<sup>7</sup> RIERA I SANS, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, Apr. 20, 2016. See Y. BAER, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Vol. II, Skokie, IL, 2001, pp. 176-177, 181, 212, 479, 481.

<sup>9</sup> VALLS PUJOL, *Els Fragments Hebreus amb Aljames Catalanes de L'arxiu Històric de Girona: Estudi Textual, Edició Paleogràfica i Anàlisi Lingüística*, Girona 2015. Activity before 1391 is listed on p. 190 and between the years of 1391 and 1401 on pp. 185-186 and 188. These records support Riera i Sans' claim that Benet Bellshom was not martyred in 1391.

<sup>10</sup> See transcriptions in *ibid.*, locations listed on

p. 365. Note: following Riera i Sans, the Bonastruch Desmaestre who appeared in the 1350s is an another, earlier individual.

<sup>11</sup> Banishment was also a punishment meted out in Catalonian Jewish communities. Previously, R. Hasdai Crescas had an alleged informer exiled from Catalonia but that punishment was nullified by the infant Joan, Duke of Girona; subsequently, the excommunication of the same informer was annulled by King Pere by the interdiction of Queen Elinor. See: BAER, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Vol. II, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> RIERA I SANS, *Els Avalots*, p. 102, note 23. The entire incident took place during the second year of Joan's reign.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, personal communication, Apr. 20, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> See: E. ENGEL, *The Sephardic Scripts of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries in View of the Gerona Fragments*, «Materia Judaica» VI/2 (2001), p. 153.

<sup>15</sup> See: J. OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER, *The Money Lan-*

nable cases in which official Arabic documents were reused as scrap paper by Jews.<sup>16</sup>

The other possibility, which cannot be ruled out, is that the central text on the Hebrew side preceded the Latin side, which was itself only a preliminary draft or personal copy written on used paper. This is less likely, as the scribal Latin draft may have been intended for possible actual post and thus written on clean paper. In any case, the Latin definitely preceded the mar-

ginal Hebrew draft letter, which spills over onto the margin of the Latin side. If we accept the chronology that the Latin preceded the Hebrew, then all of the Hebrew text on the fragment was composed between 1388, when the Latin was definitely composed, and 1395 or so, when the fragment was reused as material for the binding of a notary book containing records from 1395. This was a particularly notable period for Jewry of Girona (and the entire Spanish peninsula),

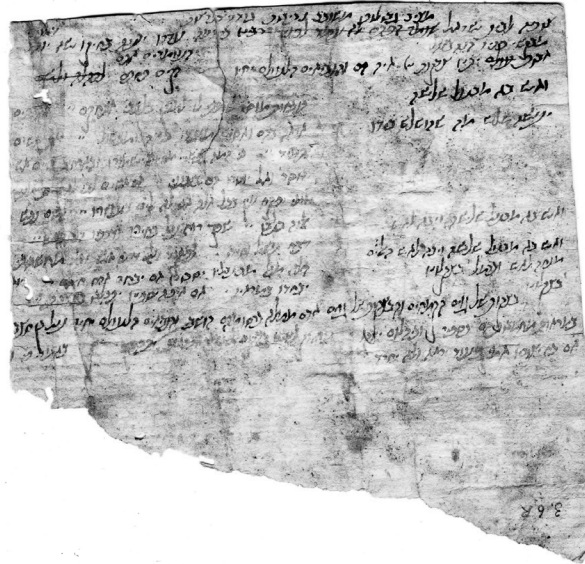


Fig.2 - Arxiu Històric de Girona 2, 62 (6a), Hebrew poetry and draft of appeal, likely from Bellshom to R. Hasdai Crescas, 1388-1395.

with tensions leading up to the events of 1391 and the subsequent efforts of the Jewish community of Girona to renew itself.<sup>17</sup>

Here follows a transcription of the poetry in the left-central region of the fragment (which preceded the poetic draft in the margin), follo-

wed by a translation of legible and cogent segments:

תוכחות מוסר שמתי לו/ו/י למען בלבבי אתח(ק)  
 [כ]ם : ... תים ...  
 אראה בהם ואס[יר] מנגדי פוקה ומכשול :  
 ...אשים...

guage: *Latin and Hebrew in Jewish Legal Contracts from Medieval England*, in *Studies in the History of Culture and Science: A Tribute to Gad Freudenthal*, Ed. R. GLASNER et al., Leiden 2011, pp. 233-250; Eyal Poleg and Paul Saenger, February 2015 Hebrew University lecture: *The Intersection of Hebrew and Latin in a Thirteenth-Century Hebrew Bible of Possible English Origins*.

<sup>16</sup> For example, an Arabic *fatwa* was clipped and the backside was filled with text of *She'iltot*,

attributed to Aḥa of Shabḥa, the first independent halakhic work composed after the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud. See: R. SHWEKA, M. RUSTOW & J. OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER, *The She'iltot, recycling manuscripts and Efrayim b. Shemarya, T-S F13.1 and more*, «Cambridge University Library Fragment of the Month» (October 2011), <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/fofm/october-2011/>

<sup>17</sup> See: RIERA I SANS, *Els Avalots*; I. PÉREZ, *The Testament of a Jewish Woman named Baladre (1325)*,

תמיד : כי המה נפשי מאדו ישמורו ובארחיב חיים  
 אש...  
 אוסר ואל יוסרו הם בעוני: אם אשים לבי ל...  
 ומי יפקח עין בכל אלה אם לא אליים בעוזריו: שם  
 נפש...  
 אליה בלבו : שפך רוח על בחירו ודרכיו ה...  
 דברי משל וחידה: לפקוד אליים דרכם אחר וכלה  
 מחשבותיו...  
 הלא מאל מפעליו יסכונו אם יבחר ארח חיים...  
 יכחדו בממיו : אם איפה יספיו יתהלכו ב ת...  
 ...

I have placed before me words of moral rebuke,<sup>18</sup>  
 so my heart should grow wise ...

When I see them, I shall cast aside iniquity and  
 temptation<sup>19</sup> from before me ...

... always. For my soul is very guarded from  
 them, in extending life ...

... forbid and may they not be punished on ac-  
 count of my iniquity. If I pay heed to ...

Who is overseeing all of this, if not our Lord, his  
 helper? ...

... Pour your spirit<sup>20</sup> out onto his chosen one <and  
 guide or straighten> his path...

... parables and riddles.<sup>21</sup> The Lord will reckon  
 their ways once their plans have been thwarted.

Will the Lord not deem his actions worthy if he  
 chooses the path of life? ...

He shall reject his waters<sup>22</sup>...

Considering the style and punctuation  
 marks this strand is likely an example of stand-  
 alone poetry. One could compare this poem  
 with contemporary local examples found in a

manuscript of collected Hebrew song. The po-  
 ems there are presented by its poetic narrator  
 as an impromptu collegial informal poetry com-  
 petition which developed in 1370 correspon-  
 dence between sages of Barcelona and Girona.  
 Representing Barcelona were none other than  
 R. Nissim Gerondi (Barcelona, c. 1310-c. 1376)  
 and his leading disciple, R. Hasdai Crescas  
 (Barcelona, Saragossa, 1340-c. 1410, discussed  
 below).<sup>23</sup> However, the characteristic Spanish  
 rhythmic structures found there are lacking in  
 this poem, which appears to have been written  
 in a Biblical style without rhythmic meter. This  
 form is rare in the medieval period but is found  
 in the writings of R. Sa'adia Gaon and in a nota-  
 ble fragment in the Cairo Geniza.<sup>24</sup> Returning to  
 our fragment, the upper right margin contains  
 a practice draft of a flowery poetic *salutio* in-  
 troduction of a letter to an important Sage. The  
 marginal text is then translated in its entirety:

צופה לבית ישראל (שומר הפתח לא עמד לפניך  
 [רבינו] [מציב גבולות משובב נתיבות גודר פרצות]

כרועה עדרו ירעה בחיקו ישא עלות ינהל  
 מבקשי פניו הנה באהל

העומדים אתם  
 הקים תחתם (לתהלה ולשם)

אבות (עולם) יתנו צדקות יי איה הם והנביאים  
 לעולם יחיו

ואיש בא מבעל שלישה  
 יעשה שלישי מה שהושלש בידו

Seer of the House of Israel (even the guardian of  
 the gate does not block your way, o master!<sup>25</sup>) [who  
 sets the borders,<sup>26</sup> restores paths, and repairs brea-

«Materia Giudaica» XVII-XVIII (2012-2013), pp.  
 229-247.

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 6:23.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Samuel 25:31.

<sup>20</sup> Ezekiel 39:29 and Zecharia 12:10 (apparently  
 not in the sense of Joel 3:1-2).

<sup>21</sup> See these two paired: Ezekiel 17:2; Psalms  
 49:5; Psalms 78:2; Proverbs 1:6.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps a reference to baptism.

<sup>23</sup> L.A. FELDMAN, *Hilufe 'igrot w'Sirim* [Hebrew],  
 «Kobez Al Yad: Minora Manuscripta Hebraica» VII

(XVII, 1968), pp. 125-160.

<sup>24</sup> E. FLEISCHER, *Medieval Hebrew Poems in Bi-  
 biblical Style* [Hebrew], «Te'uda» VII (1991), pp.  
 201-248.

<sup>25</sup> BT Chagiga 15b, from the eulogy of R. Yoha-  
 nan, who overcame the guardian of the gates of hell  
 to stop the smoke emanating from the grave of Eli-  
 sha ben Abuyah, the great Sage-turned-heretic. The  
 author deleted this line – perhaps too risqué. See  
 below on Benet Bellshom's apostasy.

<sup>26</sup> Deut. 32:8.

ches,<sup>27</sup>] as a shepherd tends his flock, carries them in his bosom, and gently leads the nursing babes who seek your countenance here,<sup>28</sup> in the tent.<sup>29</sup>

Those standing with them he raised in their stead<sup>30</sup> (in praise and in name)<sup>31</sup>

The (eternal) fathers who recall the righteous acts of the Lord,<sup>32</sup> where are they? And the prophets, will they live forever?<sup>33</sup>

A man came from *Ba'al-šališah*.<sup>34</sup> The *šališ* [= minister, *aide de camp*] must carry out the duties he was *hušlaš* [= appointed with].<sup>35</sup>

This opening section transitions from the *salutio* opening into poetic *captatio benevolentiae*, a customary literary transition to introduce the main *narratio* body typical of medieval correspondence.<sup>36</sup> In the last line, the author calls upon a minister to perform his duties. 2 Kings 4:42 relates how Elisha miraculously fed a hundred men with only twenty loaves of bread. It recalls the story of the feeding of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16) and would be adapted as the well-known miracle of Jesus' feeding of the multitude, the only miracle mentioned in all four Gospels, thus an account likely familiar to the author.<sup>37</sup> That verse mentions the place name *Ba'al-šališah*, linked by the author to a Mishnah via the common word *šališ*, which refers there to a third party, but poetically shifted here to its Biblical sense, *minister*.<sup>38</sup>

If we compare this text with the account of the aforementioned 1370 poetry competition,

while the center of our fragment resembles the actual structured poetic compositions (but without rhyme or strict meter), these marginal notes resemble the free rhyming literary poetic style of the narrator introducing the poems, common in medieval correspondence. Down the right margin the author continues playing upon 2 Kings 4:42, linking the end of the verse to another Talmudic saying:

ואיש בא מבעל שלישה ויבא לאיש  
ואיש בא מבעל שלישה ויבא לאיש האלהים  
מנחה לאיש וכרמל בצקלוגו  
בצקלוגו

בצקות של גוים הקמחים והבצקות של גוים אדם  
ממלא כרסו מהם? ה?ושבי והנביאים הלעולם יחיו על כן  
חצב>ת' ... באמרי פי

במראות מחשבותיהם כספיר וכיהלום יזקו  
אם כח יצוריו אמי<ץ> עוד יראה ולא יחרד...  
מחוק? ... ברקים?...

[spilling over back to the Latin side]

ואיש באה מבעל שלישה יעשה שלישי מה...

There came a man from Baal-šališah who brought to the man

There came a man from Baal-šališah who brought to the man of God

an offering for the man<sup>39</sup> and fresh ears of corn in its bran.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 58:12.

<sup>28</sup> Psalms 24:6, 105:4; Proverbs 29:26; and more.

<sup>29</sup> Exodus 33:7.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua 5:7.

<sup>31</sup> Deut. 26:19; Zeph. 3:19.

<sup>32</sup> Judges 5:11.

<sup>33</sup> Zech. 1:5.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Kings 4:42.

<sup>35</sup> Mishnah Ketubot 6:7.

<sup>36</sup> See ALDINA QUINTANA, The Merger of the Hispanic Medieval Heritage with the Jewish Tradition in Judeo-Spanish Texts (I) - Private Letters, «Hispania Judaica Bulletin» 7 (2010), pp. 321-329.

<sup>37</sup> *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Ed. A.-J. LEVINE & M.Z. BRETTLER, Oxford 2011, pp. 27-28.

<sup>38</sup> In Mishnaic Hebrew, *šališ* refers to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party, the father's trusted person, with wealth to be distributed to his daughter, as per the 4<sup>th</sup> definition of *שליש* in E. BEN IEHUDA, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraicitatis: et Veteris et Recentioris* [Hebrew], Jerusalem 1952, Vol. XIV, p. 7164. The author's clever poetic twist is to employ the Biblical Hebrew sense of *adjutant*, the 1<sup>st</sup> definition on p. 7163.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 43:11.

<sup>40</sup> Back to 2 Kings 4:42.

In its bran:

Gentile dough,<sup>41</sup> one may fill his belly with gentile flour and dough,<sup>42</sup> returned.<sup>43</sup> And the prophets, will they live forever? Therefore, I have hewn them <and slain them> by the utterance of my mouth.<sup>44</sup>

In the visions of their thoughts,<sup>45</sup> like sapphire and diamond,<sup>46</sup> refined.<sup>47</sup>

If he employs the strength<sup>48</sup> of his creator, he shall feel awe but not tremble... outside? ... lightning? ...

There came a man from Baal-šališah. The šališ [= minister] must carry out...

This text provides a “behind the scenes” glimpse of a literary correspondent at work in his “laboratory”, brainstorming wordplay ideas onto scratch paper. He linked the texts of verses and Talmudic quotations, crossing out and replacing, until arriving at the formulations to include in his important separate letter.<sup>49</sup> The “gentile flour and dough” are kosher for con-

sumption on Passover according to the Talmud, so long as they have not developed signs of leavening or fermentation. I have not grasped the precise intention of the author by this reference, but he appears to be stirring the recipient to action in this section.

For the sake of comparison, poetry, especially *piyut*, is well-represented in the Cairo Geniza.<sup>50</sup> Some “autograph” versions of locally produced poetry there also reveal the creative poetic composition process.<sup>51</sup> This is an interesting point of commonality between manuscript fragments in the Cairo Geniza and Girona bookbinding fragments such as this one.<sup>52</sup>

Returning to the Latin side, we find a final layer of scribal activity. Some words are copied over between lines 3 and 5 as handwriting practice of the Gothic Latin script. The opening of line 3, “et Corsice,” is copied between lines 4 and 5. After “et Cor-” the elusive gothic “s” may have been attempted between lines 3 and 4 towards the left. Perhaps similarity to the Gothic

<sup>41</sup> Connecting בצק לֶחֶם, “in its bran”, with בצק “dough”, in a novel manner.

<sup>42</sup> BT Pesachim 40a, as cited by Meiri, Ritva and Ran, ad. loc. Like our fragment, these textual formulations contain an additional unit mentioning flour and repeating the word “dough” which is not attested to in any of the manuscript transcriptions of the Saul Lieberman Institute (<http://www.lieberman-institute.com>) or in Alfasi. It appears to be a later local Provençal/Catalonian scribal development influenced by a Baraita in BT Menachot 70b.

<sup>43</sup> Not clear, perhaps referring to a loan to a gentile paid back in the form of flour or dough during Passover.

<sup>44</sup> Hosea 6:5. The inserted text follows the verse and may be cut off in the margin.

<sup>45</sup> Compare R. ELAZAR BEN JUDAH OF WORMS, *Sod Razey*, Part II, Ed. A. EISENBACH, Jerusalem 2004, p. 12, citing “those philosophers”.

<sup>46</sup> Exodus 28:18; 39:11.

<sup>47</sup> Job 28:1.

<sup>48</sup> Isaiah 40:26 and more.

<sup>49</sup> Compare BAER’s general evaluation: «The poetry of the age was characterized by excessive erudition and a bare trace of original inspiration» (*A History*, Vol. II, p. 72). Subsequently, during the disputes at Tortosa noted Hebrew poets would convert to Chri-

stianity: Solomon de Piera, Don Vidal de la Cavalleria, and Magister Astruc Rimoch (*ivi*, pp. 211-218).

<sup>50</sup> Whether or not it is appropriate to refer to the Girona bookbinding manuscript fragments as a *genizah* has been debated; see PERANI, *The “Gerona Genizah”*, cit., pp. 137-138. Regardless of the semantic issues, bookbindings and *genizah* are both uniquely filled with medieval scratch paper!

<sup>51</sup> Drafts of Yedutun ha-Levi’s liturgical poetry (*piyut*), a 13<sup>th</sup> century Fustat local, reveal “the poet at work” revising in the margins. See, for example, CUL: T-S 20.18, discussed by S. ELIZUR, *The Poetry of Rabbi Yedutun Ha-Levi He-Haver* [Hebrew], «Diné Israel» 26-27 (2009-2010), pp. 301-386. Eli he-Haver wrote drafts of letters to Rabbinic authorities (such as Shmuel ha-Nagid) filled with flowery poetry influenced by Spanish meter on the back of expired documents; see T. BE’ERI, *‘Eli He-Haver ben ‘Amram: A Hebrew Poet in Eleventh Century Egypt* [Hebrew], «Sefunot» 8 (2003), pp. 279-345. Also, the *genizah* holds holographic copies of Joseph ben Isaac ibn Avitur’s liturgical poetry. For a letter with extensive use of the margins as scratch paper for other compositions see JTS: ENA 2750.10-11.

<sup>52</sup> On the appropriateness of the term “*genizah*” to describe the bookbinding fragments, see PERANI, *The “Gerona Genizah”*, cit., p. 137.

orthography of “f” or to the opening decorative capital “S” opening the correspondence interested the scribbler. Then, he repeats the “r” and returns to finish the word with “-ice”.<sup>53</sup> At the end the same second hand takes interest in another place-name, the word “Gerunde”, possibly from line 21, which appears to be transliterated to the Hebrew גֵּרונָה at the end of line 22, upside-down.<sup>54</sup>

We can speculate as to the identity of the author of the Hebrew letter. Given that the Latin side was written by Benet Bellshom, he is the only candidate that can be pointed at. A senior leading figure of the Jewish community who addresses the king as *Serenissimo principi domino et domino* would be in his element addressing the Jewish minister: «Seer of the House of Israel, who sets the borders, restores paths, and repairs breaches, as a shepherd tends his flock...». Both the Latin and the Hebrew letters feature formulaic flowery *salutio*, each according to its respective customary style.<sup>55</sup>

Benet Bellshom was a prominent member of the community whose name appears on lists of leaders of the *aljama* as early as 1352. His absence from the register from 1391 onward has been interpreted as a sign that he was martyred. However, according to Jaume Riera i Sans, Benet Bellshom converted to Christianity during the events of 1391, a period of intense church pressure; he was thereafter known as Pere Be-

net de Reixach.<sup>56</sup> The two options which Benet may have been forced to choose from, martyrdom or conversion, are mentioned explicitly in the famous 1391 letter of R. Hasdai Crescas describing the aftermath of the riots:<sup>57</sup>

In the city of Girona, a community which combines learning and humility [*Torah we-anawah be-maqom ehad*], the local rabbis sanctified the Name of God in public [*qiddešu ha-šem ba-rabim* = submitted themselves to martyrdom and did not convert]. **Only few converted**, and the majority found refuge in the burghers' houses and as of today they are in the tower [*ba-migdal*].

Elsewhere in the famous letter, R. Crescas describes how in other Jewish communities all or most Jews converted. In addition to praising the martyrs of Girona, given that Bellshom was a senior member of the community, R. Crescas's “only few converted” might have also been meant to minimize the impact of his own conversion.

The intended recipient of the planned letter is a Rabbinic authority and probably a court official. The most likely candidate by far is R. Hasdai Crescas himself. Already an important minister and familiar with the household of Joan I when he was Duke of Girona, upon the death of Pere IV in 1387 and Joan's ascension to the kingship, R. Crescas' star rose along with his. He would be appointed Rabbi of Saragossa in 1389 and officially assume far-reaching po-

<sup>53</sup> In ancient and medieval times there was never Jewish settlement in Corsica and the Kings of Aragon never fully controlled it so perhaps the name was unfamiliar. See: A. FOREY, *The Crown of Aragon*, In: *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, (Vol. 6), ed. Michael Jones, Cambridge 2000, p. 596.

<sup>54</sup> Micha Perry suggests that Bellshom, the patron, was dictating in the Catalan vernacular to a gentile scribe seated opposite him, writing in Latin, and Bellshom wrote the place-name גֵּרונָה upside-down, in situ. The scene reminds one of Yemenites who learned to read upside-down huddled around a single book; see R. AHRONI, *The Jews of the British Crown Colony of Aden*, Leiden 1994, p. 172.

<sup>55</sup> Compare similar letters published by H. BEINART, *A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Hebrew Formulary from Spain* [Hebrew], «Sefunot: Isaiah Sonne Memorial Volu-

me» (1961), pp. 75-134, including correspondence of R. Hasdai Crescas, pp. 99-100, 113-11, 125-126; also instructive is N. ALLONY, *A Collection of Hebrew Letters from 12<sup>th</sup> Century Spain* [Hebrew], «Sefunot» 17 (1980), pp. 63-82, including a discussion of the word *iggeret* and related terms for “correspondence” on page 64.

<sup>56</sup> RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, cit., p. 148. In 1394 he appears on a deed of sale of a building in Barcelona, along with his brother, who did not convert.

<sup>57</sup> Translation slightly modified from: A. GROSS, *Gerona: A Sephardic Cradle of Jewish Learning and Religiosity*, «Materia Giudaica» VI/2 (2001), p. 165, emphasis mine. For three early versions of the original Hebrew with translations to Catalan, see E. FELIU, *Sobre la lletra que Hasday Cresques adreçà*

wers as a minister of the crown, including imposition of capital punishment throughout the entire Kingdom of Aragon.<sup>58</sup>

Now I will digress shortly to consider the circumstances of Benet Bellshom's conversion and the views of his likely addressee, R. Hasdai Crescas,<sup>59</sup> whose aforementioned letter estimated that 150,000 Jews converted to Christianity on the Spanish peninsula in 1391. Among those forced to convert was none other than R. Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet (*Ribash*, Barcelona, Saragossa, Valencia, Algeria, 1326-1408), a friend of R. Hasdai Crescas and fellow disciple of the great R. Nissim Gerondi. After baptism, he was given a new name and carried on in Valencia as a converso until he was able to escape to Muslim Algeria and not only live as a Jew but flower there into a great Rabbinic authority, authoring many famous and influential responsa. There he addressed the issue of *conversos* leniently, urging their (and his own) reintegration into the Jewish community.<sup>60</sup> Notably, he himself did not choose martyrdom. Warren Zev Harvey contrasts his position with that of his friend, R. Hasdai Crescas, who stressed martyrdom in his account of the tragedies of 1391, in his philosophical writings, and in a sermon which has been attributed

to him. Crescas' son was martyred in Barcelona in 1391.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, Ribash's position seems closer to a poem attributed to R. Reuben ben Nissim of Girona (son of *Ran*), whose alleged account of the events of 1391 did not praise or even mention martyrdom (*qiddešu ha-šem ba-rabim*). However, that account, inscribed on the Torah scroll of R. Nissim Girondi, *Ran*, is now admitted by Harvey to be a 20<sup>th</sup> century forgery on a scroll which post-dates *Ran* by at least a hundred years.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the gulf between R. Crescas and *Ribash* remains. Furthermore, Marc Saperstein, who attributes the aforementioned sermon to R. Crescas, contrasts his position with that of his associate, Profiat Duran (*Ephodi*, Catalonia, c.1350-c. 1415), who was also baptized under duress.<sup>63</sup>

Returning to the Girona bookbinding, Benet Bellshom also emerges as a possible prior owner of other manuscripts extracted from Binding 2, 62. This most notably includes a unique Talmudic Commentary to Tractate Berakhot written by a disciple of R. Solomon ben Adret (*Rashba*). the subject of my Master's Thesis, which led me to this fragment and others in Girona.<sup>64</sup> The same binding also contained multiple pages of a popular text composed by his

*a la comunitat jueva d'Avinyó parlant dels avalots de 1391*, «Tamid» 5 (2004-2005), pp. 171-219.

<sup>58</sup> BAER, *A History*, cit., Vol. II, p. 64, 70, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Y.S. LICHTENSTEIN, *Suicide-Halakhic, Historical, and Theological Aspects* [Hebrew], Tel-Aviv 2008, pp. 272-279, 290-300, 346-350. On medieval rabbinic positions regarding martyrdom, see H. SOLOVEITCHIK, *Religious Law and Change*, «AJS Review» 12/2 (1987), pp. 208-210, and the literature cited in notes 6 and 8; RAM BEN-SHALOM, *Kidush ha-Shem and Jewish Martyrdom in Aragon and Castile in 1391: Between Spain and Ashkenaz* [Hebrew], «Tarbiz» 70, 2 (2001), pp. 227-282; J. FAUR, *On Martyrdom in Jewish Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides* [Hebrew], «Annual of Bar-Ilan University: In Memory of Prof. Meyer Simcha Feldblum» 30-31 (2006), pp. 373-408.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Responsa #11, Ed. D. METZGER, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 12-14.

<sup>61</sup> W. ZEV HARVEY, *Rabbi Hisdai Crescas*, Jerusalem 2010, p. 27-29.

<sup>62</sup> ID., *Hasdai Crescas' Relation to Nissim of*

*Girona* [Hebrew], «Hispania Judaica Bulletin» 10 (2014), pp. 109-112.

<sup>63</sup> M. SAPERSTEIN, *A Sermon on the Akedah from the Generation of the Expulsion and its Implications for 1391*, Ed. A. MIRSKY, A. GROSSMAN, Y. KAPLAN, *Exile and Diaspora*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 113-114. Saperstein attributes a sermon to Crescas, interprets part of a letter from Duran as a response, and suggests a literal reading of Crescas' letter, according to which Crescas played a role in killing his own son to avoid his forced conversion, an act which Crescas attributed to R. Judah in Toledo, a descendant of Rosh. HARVEY, *Rabbi Hisdai Crescas*, cit., p. 26, rejects this proposition.

<sup>64</sup> See the identifications of Girona fragments in the comprehensive doctorate of VALLS PUJOL, *Els Fragments Hebreus*, pp. 31-32, 54, 105, 110, 127, 151, 769-770; and most recently: <http://imhm.blogspot.co.il/2016/02/leor-jacobi-talmudic-honey-fragments-of.html>. *Ivi*, pp. 781, 783, now dates the watermark of the paper of the Talmudic commentary in this binding to roughly 1370.

master, Rashba's *Torat HaBayit HaQašar*.<sup>65</sup> As described in the thesis, a larger than statistically expected frequency of literary relations between the texts of Hebrew fragments extracted from individual bindings suggests that they were often culled from a common source, such as a particular individual's library.<sup>66</sup>

Two other small ripped fragments extracted from the same binding appear to be Latin charters. There are also two complete pages of a Christian liturgical work, with vermilion red headings and paragraph marks common to Latin medieval manuscripts. One of the pages includes four paragraph marks which appear green today but may have become discolored over the centuries. They have also chemically damaged the page, leaving small holes surrounded by green pigment. As far as I am aware, this is the only example of colored manuscripts among the exclusively black and white Girona bookbinding fragments, culled mostly from notebook paper. In light of Benet Bellshom's conversion, the presence of these Christian liturgical fragments in the same binding as his letter is interesting.

This article was originally conceived as a short *addendum* to the article *The Jewish Bookbinders of Girona*, presenting just the Latin side of the fragment. I argued that the fact that the Latin text was composed by a Jew and that the binders themselves were Jewish suggests that there are likely more Jewish items among the numerous remaining Latin fragments, both those already extracted and scanned, and those

still in bindings. To my knowledge, the Latin bookbinding fragments of Girona have not been studied.<sup>67</sup> Even the Latin fragments such as this one were scanned only by virtue of the fact that they were extracted from bindings which also contain Hebrew fragments. Manuscripts in bindings of the Arxiu Històric de Girona and other archives which seem to contain only Latin fragments are left in their original bindings on the shelves of the archive, not extracted.

Thanks to the archival research of Riera i Sans we can safely assume that Benet Bellshom's manuscripts were not seized. He was likely coerced into becoming a *converso*, with the bitterness of his recent dispute with Bonastruch Desmestre perhaps facilitating his decision. Be as it may, newly baptized as Pere Benet de Reixach, he probably gave or sold his scraps to the binders by his own free will, just as any Jew would have done, even a pious one, as discussed at length in the companion article. Alternatively, considering his advanced age, perhaps Benet died with the manuscripts in his possession and his inheritors were simply clearing out his personal files. Whether or not the binders also became *Christians nous* in 1391, they were simply carrying on with the craft they practiced as *Jueus*. Thus they unwittingly preserved many manuscripts, including Benet Bellshom's appeals found in this most unique fragment.

Leor Jacobi  
Bar-Ilan University  
e-mail: leor.jacobi@live.biu.ac.il

<sup>65</sup> JACOBI, *Commentary*, cit., p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 6-8. In this case, a composition of Rashba and of an anonymous student is a close association. However, it must be noted that the great popularity of *Torat HaBayit HaQašar* obviates reading too much into this particular correlation.

<sup>67</sup> M. BLASCO ORELLANA, *Estudio diplomático y paleográfico de los fragmentos hebraicos extraídos del protocolo notarial de Ramon Peradalta* (Arxiu Històric de Girona), «Anuari de Filologia: Secció that binding E. Estudis Hebreus i Arameus» 26

(2004), pp. 69-81, examined all of the manuscripts in binding Gi 5, 136 (which includes only Hebrew fragments, no Latin ones). Her study's focus on all manuscripts of an individual binding is significant, as discussed in JACOBI, *Commentary*, cit., pp. 6-12. Blasco Orellana now also connects Girona fragments with the collections of other neighboring Archives; see: *La Genizah Catalana. Relaciones entre algunos documentos hebraicos de Barcelona, Gerona y Perpiñán*, «Hispania Judaica Bulletin» 10 (2014), pp. 273-286.

SUMMARY

A small paper fragment extracted from a 1395 notary book in the Arxiu Històric of Girona contains a draft of a 1388 Latin appeal to King Joan I of Aragon commissioned by Benet Bellshom, a senior leader of the Girona aljama who would soon become a converso during the great upheavals of 1391. Bellshom appeals a sentence of banishment resulting from a feud with Bonastruch Desmestre, later a representative at the 1413-14 Disputation of Tortosa. Both Bellshom and Desmestre were moneylenders. Between the lines, a Jewish hand practiced copying one of the Latin words and transcribing another into Hebrew square script. The back of the Latin draft was reused as scratch paper for a rare form of Hebrew poetry in Biblical style. The margin contains draft formulations of an appeal to a Rabbinic authority, likely from Bellshom to Joan's minister, R. Hasdai Crescas. Its flowery poetic style, based upon Bible and Talmud, is typical of Rabbinic correspondence of the period.

**KEYWORDS:** Girona; Bookbinding; Manuscript; Hasdai Crescas; Hebrew poetry; Medieval correspondence; Joan I of Aragon; Conversos; Moneylending; Peace and Truce; Banishment.

