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Elias Levita the Lexicographer and the Legacy of *Sefer ha-Shorashim*

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ELÍAS LEVITA EL LEXICÓGRAFO Y EL LEGADO DEL *SÉFER HA-ŠORAŠIM*.— Este artículo trata de la reinterpretación de la tradición lexicográfica del *Sefer ha-Šorašim* (“Libro de las raíces”) en el Renacimiento, en el contexto del cabalista cristiano Egidio de Viterbo (1469-1532) y del intelectual judío Elías Levita (1469-1549). Se pone de relieve el interés de Egidio de Viterbo por la exégesis, los léxicos y las gramáticas hebreas, que ha estimulado la actividad de Levita. Se analizan, después, los aspectos innovadores de las obras lexicográficas de Levita, *Meturgeman* (‘intérprete’), un diccionario de las raíces arameas del Targum, y *Tišbi*, un léxico de hebreo post-bíblico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Diccionario; cábala; lexicografía; misticismo; Renacimiento; raíces.

This article focuses on the reinterpretation of the lexicographic tradition of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* (“Book of Roots”) in the Renaissance, in the context of the Christian kabbalist Giles of Viterbo (1469-1532) and of the Jewish intellectual Elias Levita (1469-1549). I provide an insight into Giles of Viterbo’s interest in Hebrew exegesis, lexicons and grammar, which enhanced Levita’s activity. Then, I go through some innovative aspects of the lexicographic works by Levita, *Meturgeman* (“Interpreter”), a dictionary of Aramaic roots from the Targum, and *Tishbi*, a lexicon of post-biblical Hebrew.

KEYWORDS: Dictionary; Kabbalah; Lexicography; Mystical beliefs; Renaissance; Roots.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explore some of the channels through which the Jewish lexicographic tradition of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* (“Book of Roots”) by David ben Yosef Qimḥi (1160-1235) was handed down to and reinter-

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preted in the Renaissance.¹ I will focus on the Jewish-Christian context of the Roman intellectual circle surrounding the Augustinian reformer, Kabbalist and Hermetist Giles of Viterbo (1469-1532).² More specifically, I will home in on the works of Eliahu Bahur ha-Levi Ashkenazi (1469-1549), Giles' master of Hebrew, better known as Elias Levita.³

Elias Levita, from Neustadt in Germany, was an expert on the Hebrew Masoretic Bible, a philologist and lexicographer, as well as a poet and copyist of mystical texts. Delivering an original point of view on most of the topics he approached, Levita contributed more than any of his Jewish contemporaries to the transmission of Hebrew linguistic and grammatical knowledge to the Christian world. In the field of lexicography, Levita was a *novator*. An analysis of his *Meturgeman* ('Interpreter'), a dictionary of Aramaic roots from the Targum, and *Tishbi*, a lexicon of post-biblical Hebrew words are at the heart of this article.⁴ First, I will provide an

¹ See F. E. TALMAGE, *David Kimhi: the Man and the Commentaries* (Harvard 1975); I. ZINGUER, *L'Hébreu au temps de la Renaissance* (Leiden 1992) pp. 8-26, and S. KESSLER-MESGUICH, "L'hébreu chez les hébraïsants chrétiens des XVIe et XVIIe siècles," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 18:1 (1996) pp. 87-108, and "L'étude de l'hébreu et des autres langues orientales à l'époque de l'humanisme," in *History of the Language Sciences: an International Handbook on the Evolution of the Study of Language from the Beginnings to the Present*, eds. S. AUROUX, E. F. K. KOERNER, H.-J. NIEDEREHE and K. VERSTEEGH (Berlin – New York 2000) vol. 1, pp. 673-680.

² Giles of Viterbo was a powerful high-ranking Churchman, prior of the Augustinian order in Rome and, since 1517, Cardinal. As ecclesiastical minister, he worked hard for the Christian Reformation, the moral reintegration and the reconciliation of the different souls of the Catholic Church before the final detachment of the Lutherans. He imagined a Christian religion, which showed its uncontested metaphysical and temporal prominence towards the Muslim world and the first protestant sprouts, in which the mystical components of Judaism and the kabalistic heritage were intrinsically embedded; cf. J. W. O'MALLEY, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform. A Study on Renaissance Thought* (Leiden 1968); F. X. MARTIN, "Egidio da Viterbo, 1469-1532. Bibliography, 1510-1982," *Biblioteca e Società* 4 (1982) pp. 45-52; J. W. O'MALLEY, "Egidio da Viterbo and Renaissance Rome," *Egidio da Viterbo, O.S.A. e il suo tempo. Atti del V Convegno dell'Istituto Storico Agostiniano, Roma-Viterbo, 20-23 oct. 1982* (Rome 1983) pp. 67-84, and F. X. MARTIN, "Giles of Viterbo, Martin Luther, and Jerome Seripando," *Augustinian Heritage* 2 (1989) pp. 163-174, and *Friar Reformer and Renaissance Scholar. Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo, 1469-1532* (Villanova, PA 1992).

³ See G. E. WEIL, *Elie Lévitte, humaniste et massorète* (Leiden 1963) pp. 70-110.

⁴ I take this opportunity to thank Professor Malachi Beit-Arié for sending me a copy of his article *Eliyahu Levita As a Scribe, Author-Scribe And Codicologist*, forthcoming.

insight into Giles of Viterbo's involvement in the study of the Hebrew language, his interest in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, and his request for Hebrew lexicons and grammars, which motivated and enhanced Levita's activity.⁵ Then, while considering some of Levita's models, contacts and sponsors, I will go through the dictionaries he glossed, edited, and authored. I will analyze the tradition of *Meturgeman* as it is preserved in two autographic manuscripts,⁶ which precede the edition in the publishing house of the Christian scholar Paulus Fagius (1504-1549) at Isny in 1541.⁷ I will also delve into some of the innovative aspects of the lexicon *Tishbi*, first edited at Isny in 1541, notably the occurrence of entries related to the mystical world, which is unprecedented in Hebrew dictionaries.⁸

2. GILES' INTEREST IN HEBREW LEXICOGRAPHY

Around 1515, when Giles of Viterbo recruited Elias Levita as his personal teacher of Hebrew, Giles was already engaged in the study of the Hebrew language and the kabbalah. He wished not only to embody the perfect *homo trilinguis* (understanding Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), but he was also interested in learning Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic.⁹ The desire to be acquainted with any genre of biblical exegesis, be it literal, mystical,

⁵ See R. J. WILKINSON, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation. The First Printing of the Syriac New Testament* (Leiden 2007) pp. 29-62; E. ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah. La collezione ebraica di Egidio da Viterbo alla biblioteca Angelica di Roma," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 26 (2014) pp. 409-446.

⁶ Ms Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Or. 84 and Ms Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France [BNF], Hébr. 98/2; see H. ZOTENBERG, *Catalogue des manuscrits Hébreux et Samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale, Imprimerie Impériale* (Paris 1866) p. 10; A. DI CAPUA, "Catalogo dei codici ebraici della Biblioteca Angelica," in *Cataloghi dei codici orientali di alcune biblioteche d'Italia, I* (Firenze 1878) pp. 85-103; R. GRIÑO, "Importancia del Meturgeman de Elias Lévitá y del Ms Angelica 6-6 para el estudio del mismo," *Sefarad* 31 (1971) pp. 353-361, and ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 437-439.

⁷ See WEIL, *Elie Lévitá*, pp. 133-143, and G. BUSI, "Fagius, Paulus," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem 2007) vol. 6, p. 676.

⁸ See E. ABATE, "David Qimhi et Gilles de Viterbe: La lexicographie juive face à l'héritage magique," *Revue de l'histoire de Religions* (in press).

⁹ See N. ZEMON DAVIS, *Trickster Travels. A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York 2006), and WILKINSON, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah*, pp. 29-62.

allegorical or astral-magical, kindled Giles's interest in the study of the languages. He considered the exegetical and hermeneutic activity to be an essential instrument of power and knowledge.¹⁰ In Giles' perspective, delving into the mysteries of the kabbalah would have opened men's eyes and hearts to a renovated and at the same time original Christianity. In *Zohar*, *Bahir*, *Raziel* and in the other texts of Jewish mysticism, he found the actual proofs for the Christian dogmas such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, Heaven and Hell. Giles himself signed the Latin translation of some of these works, which are extant in autographic manuscripts. He also authored original kabalistic works like *Scechina* and *Libellus de Litteris Hebraicis*. The understanding of Hebrew was of pivotal importance to his cultural strategy.¹¹ Hebrew letters and roots permeated the universe as the very foundation of the origins, and reflected the cosmological and moral texture of the creation, of the human soul and of the providential history.¹²

Giles's interest in *Sefer ha-Shorashim* arose independently from the encounter with Elias Levita, but was then fed by Levita's teachings. A note in one of Giles' registers, dating to 4 January 1513, includes his request to the Augustinian friar Gabriele della Volta (1468-1537) to provide him with a copy of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* together with Qimhi's commentary on the Bible: *Scripsimus ad magistrum Gabrielum Venetum ut mitteret ad nos David super tota Biblia et eiusdem librum de Radicibus*.¹³

¹⁰ F. SECRET, "Aegidiana Hebraica," *Revue des études juives* 121 (1962) pp. 409-416; *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris 1964; ed. rev. Milano – Neuilly-sur-Seine 1985) pp. 106-126, and "Egidio da Viterbo et quelques-uns de ses contemporaines," *Augustiniana* 16 (1966) pp. 371-385.

¹¹ See F. SECRET, *Egidio da Viterbo Scechina e Libellus de Litteris Hebraicis. Inediti a cura di François Secret*, Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici (Roma 1959) and B. COPENHAVER and D. STEIN KOKIN, "Egidio da Viterbo's Book on Hebrew Letters: Christian Kabbalah in Papal Rome," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (2014) pp. 1-42.

¹² See E. R. WOLFSON, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York 2005) pp. 197-202, and K. VON STUCKRAD, "The Secrets of the Texts: Esoteric Hermeneutics," *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden 2010) pp. 110-112.

¹³ The register is held in *Archivio della Curia Generalizia degli Agostiniani* Rome, Dd 12, fol. 99v; see *Aegidii Viterbiensis, OSA, Resgestae generalatus I: 1506-1514, quas edendas curavit Albericus de Meijer eiusdem ordinis. With a Preface by Francis Xavier Martin*, OSA (Romae 1988).

A Latin version of *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, entitled *Liber Radicum*, was prepared under the direct supervision of Giles before he became Cardinal in 1517.¹⁴ The first *recto* of the copy of this work includes Giles' name bearing the title "friar."¹⁵ *Liber Radicum* is also extant in a second manuscript completed in 1519 for the then Cardinal in a more elegant scribal hand.¹⁶ In section 5, the layout of this exemplar will be compared with the manuscripts of Levita's *Meturgeman*. As regards the content, the text of *Liber Radicum* adheres to the original Hebrew. The Hebrew roots are noted in the margin of the text; Qimḥi's commentaries are translated into Latin word by word and the Latin *Vorlage* of the biblical quotations is very literal; the multiple quotations from the Bible, which occur after each root, do not match St. Jerome's *Vulgata*.¹⁷

A personal and autographic notebook, in which Giles lists Hebrew roots, corresponds to the structure of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* as well. The unique manuscript, in which this text has been preserved, is penned in Giles' informal and nearly stenographic handwriting.¹⁸ Though the system of entries is arranged as it is in *Liber Radicum*, the Hebrew roots are not followed by the Latin translation of Qimḥi's commentaries. The text is organized as a concordance and each lemma matches various Latin meanings that Giles collected from Hebrew *midrashim*, *targumim* and kabbalistic texts he approached. He also added near-homophone Greek and Latin words without any real semantic connection to the Hebrew root. By

¹⁴ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Lat. 3; see L. G. PÉLISSIER, "Manuscripts de Gilles de Viterbe à la Bibliothèque Angélique (Rome)," *Revue des bibliothèques* 2 (1892) pp. 228-240, and E. NARDUCCI, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum praeter Graecos et Orientales in Bibliotheca Angelica olim coenobii Sancti Augustini de Urbe, Tomus I, complectens codices ab instituta Bibliotheca ad a. 1870* (Rome 1893) p. 1.

¹⁵ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Lat. 3, fol. 2r, upper margin: "Curavit frater Aegidius Viterbiensis Eremita." This work was dedicated by Giles to the monks of his monastery; see fol. 769v: "Fratris Aegidii V. ord. Eremitarum S. Augustini iussu scripta sunt haec quamquam inculcata, inversa dura et quae recte vix percipi possint. Maluit tum fratres suos his utcumque uti posse quam omnino errare." On fol. 785v, Giles of Viterbo signed the last folio of the manuscript.

¹⁶ Scotland, St. Andrews University Library, Ms BS 1158 H4 D2 C2; cf. F. X. MARTIN, "The Writings of Giles of Viterbo," *Augustiniana* 29 (1979) pp. 141-193.

¹⁷ See ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 434-435.

¹⁸ Paris, BNF, Ms Lat. 596.

connecting the Hebrew roots to and combining them with their Hebrew, Greek and Latin correspondences, Giles intended to reach a sort of basilar and primeval language.¹⁹

By then, the study of Hebrew lexicography by Christian kabbalists was already established after that Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) interpreted David Qimhi's *Sefer ha-Shorashim* in his *Rudimenta Linguae Hebraicae* (1506).²⁰

Besides mystical and kabalistic works, the major topics in Giles' Hebrew library were grammar, lexicography and exegesis.²¹ The contact and exchange with the most brilliant intellectuals of his time allowed him to collect an enormous quantity of Hebrew books. Augustinian friars like Gabriele della Volta, popes like Leo X (1475-1521), Jewish scribes like Menahem, who had already copied an exemplar of the Palestinian *Targum* for Giles in 1504,²² and many others – Jews, converted, humanists

¹⁹ See U. ECO, *La ricerca della lingua perfetta nella cultura europea* (Laterza 1993) pp. 31-40; J. J. BONO, "The Two Books and Adamic Knowledge: Reading the Book of Nature and Early Modern Strategies for Repairing the Effects of the Fall and of Babel," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, eds. J. M. VAN DER MEER and S. MANDELBORE (Leiden 2008) vol 1, pp. 299-340, and S. CAMPANINI, "The Quest for the Holiest Alphabet in the Renaissance," in *A Universal Art. Hebrew Grammar across Disciplines and Faiths*, eds. N. VIDRO, I. E. ZWIEP and J. OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER (Leiden 2014) pp. 196-244.

²⁰ *Institutiones Hebraicae* (Lyon 1520) by Sante Pagnini (1470-1541) and *Dictionarium Hebraicum* (Bâle 1539) by Sebastian Münster (1488-1552) are based on Qimhi's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*; see S. KESSLER-MESGUICH, "Early Christian Hebraists," in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation. From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. M. SÆBØ (Göttingen 2008) pp. 254-263.

²¹ See C. ASTRUC and J. MONFRIN, "Livres latins et hébreux du Cardinal Gilles de Viterbe," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et de Renaissance* 23 (1961) pp. 551-554; MARTIN, "The Writings of Giles," pp. 141-193, and ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 409-446.

²² This particular copy preserved in the Vatican Library, ms Neofiti 1, is at present the only extant copy of the Palestinian *Targum*; cf. R. LE DÉAUT, "Jalons pour une histoire d'un manuscrit du Targum palestinien," *Biblica* 48 (1967) pp. 509-533, and B. RICHLER, M. BEIT-ARIÉ and N. PASTERNAK, *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library. Catalogue. Compiled by the Staff of the Institute of the Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library* (Città del Vaticano 2008) pp. 528-529. The commission of this codex by Giles of Viterbo is called into question by M. McNAMARA, "The Colophon of Codex Neofiti 1: the Scribe Menahem and the Roman Medical Family of Manele," in *Biblical & Near Eastern Essays*, eds. C. MCCARTHY and J. F. HEALEY (London 2004) pp. 154-161.

and cardinals – helped him to purchase, copy, and translate Ancient and Medieval Jewish works.²³

Hebrew teachers were in great demand at that time; nonetheless, there is little information about Giles' former teachers. We know, for instance, that the Jewish cabalist Baruch of Benevento (16th century) translated the *Zohar* into Latin for Giles and that the converted Felice da Prato (ca. 1460-1549) translated the mystical work *Sefer ha-Temunah*. Probably they were the first ones to instruct him to the Hebrew *rudimenta*.²⁴

In 1515, Giles was still longing for an excellent master of Hebrew; from his eminent position, he could only yearn for the best.

3. LEVITA'S EXPERTISE

Well-trained in the Masoretic and targumic tradition and in exegetical and philosophical literature, Elias Levita committed himself to the study of the linguistic and grammatical texts throughout his life, most notably to those of the great commentators of the 11th-13th century from the Sephardic tradition, like Avraham ibn Ezra (1089-1167) and the members of the Qimḥi's family.²⁵

Levita's exegetical technique, as it is found in his lexicographical works, shows a predilection for philological and literal explanations, which remain close to the text; moreover, it contains passages enlightened by the symbolic interpretation and the midrashic legends. David Qimḥi's was his principal point of reference as Levita had taken an interest in the study of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* since his youth. Among the first samples of his handwriting, Levita's Ashkenazi fast hand is recognizable in the mar-

²³ See G. BUSI, *Libri e scrittori nella Roma ebraica del Medioevo* (Rimini 1990) p. 91, and ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 409-446.

²⁴ See F. SECRET, "La traduction d'extraits du Zôhar par Gilles de Viterbe," in *Le Zôhar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris – La Haye 1964) pp. 34-42, and G. BUSI, *L'enigma dell'Ebraico nel Rinascimento* (Torino 2007) pp. 62-63.

²⁵ See WEIL, *Elie Lévi*, p. 103, and M. Z. COHEN, "The Qimhi Family," in *Hebrew Bible Old Testament, the History of Its Interpretation: The Middle Ages*, ed. M. SÆBØ (Göttingen 2000) pp. 388-415.

gins of an incunabulum of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* printed in Naples in 1490 and held at present in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna.²⁶

Levita was also interested in the study of another outstanding lexicographical Jewish work: the talmudic and midrashic dictionary *Sefer he-'Arukh* by Natan ben Yehiel from Rome (1035-1106).²⁷ This is the only known Aramaic lexicon foregoing the writing of *Meturgeman*.

As witnessed by the ownership note in lower margin of the frontispiece - *Fratris Egidi Viterbiensis* ("Friar Giles of Viterbo's"), one of the first incunabula of *Sefer he-'Arukh*, printed in Rome between 1469 and 1472, entered Giles' library before his election as cardinal in 1517.²⁸ Levita added his own glosses, which are easily identifiable in the margins as they are introduced by the formula אִמְרוּ אֵלֵינוּ, "Eliahu said." Later, this phraseology became common in Levita's *nimuqim* ('explanations'), e.g. to the Giustiniani Venetian edition (*in-folio*) of *Sefer ha-Shorashim* of 1546. Bomberg's edition (*in-8°*) of the 1546 *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, which remained the most popular reference for this work throughout the following three centuries, used Levita's commentaries as well.²⁹

After migrating to Italy in 1495, Levita first lived in Padua; in 1509, he went to Venice, and worked (there) as copyist and Hebrew teacher until 1515. His copy of the Hebrew version of *Mozne ha-'Iunim*, a philosophical work by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), dates back to this

²⁶ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Inc. K. 25 F. 2. Levita's glosses are readable in the upper margin of the first recto of the copy, which belonged to the son of Asher Levi, the father of his pupil Mordekhai. On fol. 143r, the date "7th of April 1492" is noted; see WEIL, *Elie Lévit*, p. 3.

²⁷ R. GRIÑO, "El Meturgeman de Elias Levita y el 'Aruk de Natán ben Yehiel como fuentes de la lexicografía targúmica," *Biblica* 60:1 (1979) pp. 110-117, and S. SZNOL, "Medieval Jewish Greek Lexicography: the Arukh of Natan ben Jehiel," *Erytheia* 30 (2009) pp. 107-128.

²⁸ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Inc. 872; see E. ABATE, S. DE GESE, *I libri ebraici della biblioteca Angelica, I. Incunaboli e Cinquecentine* (Rome 2005) pp. 5-6.

²⁹ *Sefer ha-Shorashim* was published first in Rome (1469), then in Naples (1490), and in Venice (Bomberg, 1529). The last edition was prepared by J. H. R. BIESENTHAL and F. LEBRECHT, *Sefer ha-Shorashim: Rabbi Davidis Kimchi Radicum Liber sive Hebraeum Bibliorum Lexicon* (Berlin 1847, facsimile, Jerusalem 1967).

The first text Levita copied for Giles dates only to 1515 and consists of a compilation of Hebrew mystical texts.³¹ In the colophon of this manuscript, Levita remarks on Giles' zeal in the study of Jewish literature:

Many years later, in 1538, in a sort of apologetic foreword to his work on Biblical *masorah*, the *Masoret ha-Masoret*, Levita recalled the first meeting with Giles. Some extracts from this text underline the prestige which Levita held as the major expert of Hebrew grammar and language of his time in the eyes of the prior of the Augustinians:³³

³¹ London, British Library, Ms Add. 27199 witnesses the full text of *Sode Razayya* ("The Secret of Secrets") attributed to the German mystic Eleazar of Worms (ca. 1176-1238) and includes the following works: *Sod Ma'aseh Bereshit* ("Secret of the Work of Creation"), *Sod ha-Merkavah* ("Secret of the Chariot"), *Sefer ha-Shem* ("Book of the Name"), *Perush Sefer Yetzirah* ("The Commentary on the Book of the Formation") and *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* ("the Wisdom of the Soul"); see G. MARGALIOU, *Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum, part III section I, Kabbalah* (London 1909) pp. 4-8; S. WEISS (ed.), *Sefer Sode Rezayya* (Jerusalem 1988), and E. ABATE, "Raziel a Roma, le copie di Egidio da Viterbo (1469-1532)," in *L'eredità di Salomone. La magia ebraica in Italia e nel Mediterraneo*, eds. E. ABATE and S. CAMPANINI (Ferrara forthcoming).

³³ See C. D. GINSBURG, *The Massoreth ha-massoreth of Elias Levita: being an exposition of the Massoretic notes on the Hebrew Bible: or the ancient critical apparatus of the Old Testament in Hebrew* (London 1867) pp. 96-97, and G. E. WEIL, *L'archétype du Massoret ha-Massoret* (Strasbourg 1961).

I left my place and went to Rome, where resided a very distinguished nobleman, a prince of great dignity and wise like Solomon, and his name was Cardinal Giles. When I heard his fame, I paid him a visit. When he saw me, he asked me about my affairs. I said, “Know, my Lord that I am the German grammarian, who possesses the sundry secrets connected with the grammar and the Scriptures, for I have always been occupied with this work, therefore, is no man to be found who is more conversant therewith than I am [etc.].”

When the prince heard my statement, he came to me and kissed me with the kisses of his mouth, saying, “Art thou, my lord, Elias, whose fame has travelled over all countries and whose books are to be found in every corner? Blessed be the God of the Universe who brought you hither, and bade thee come to meet me. Now Abide with me and be my teacher and I shall be to you as a father [etc.].”³⁴

Not long after that encounter, Levita and his family moved to Giles’ palace in Rome, where they remained for more than ten years. Most of Levita’s grammatical works were encouraged, commissioned and financed by Giles himself: *Sefer ha-Harkhavah* (1517), *Bahur* (1518), and *Pir-que Eliahu* (1519), all include a dedication to Giles.³⁵ They were published in the Hebrew print house, which three members of the Jewish community, the brothers Isaac, Jacob and Yom Tov, sons of Avigdor Levi, opened in Rome in 1517. They could count on Giles’ direct protection against the censorship which the Dominicans had imposed on Jewish print. Since 1525, the great humanist and scholar Sebastian Munster (1488-1552) corresponded with Levita and provided Latin translations for his texts. In addition, the first recension of the Biblical concordance by Levita, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, still lying in manuscript form, was composed at that time.³⁶

³⁴ Elias Levita, *Masoret ha-Masoret* (Venice 1538) fols. 8-9: וְעֹזְבֵי אֶת מְקוֹמִי, וּבֹאֵתִי: שְׁמוֹ קֶאֱרִינָאֵל אִיגִידיָהּ, כְּשִׁמְעִי מֵהֶלֶל, עַד רוֹמִי, וְשֵׁם שֶׁר גָּדוֹל מְאֹד, חֲשֹׁמֶן נֶשֶׁא הוֹד, חָכֵם כִּי־יִדִּיָּהּ, שְׁמוֹ קֶאֱרִינָאֵל אִיגִידיָהּ, כְּשִׁמְעִי מֵהֶלֶל, בְּקֶרְתִּי בְּחִיכְלוֹ. וְכֹאשֶׁר רָאִי, עַל אוֹדוֹתַי שְׁאֵלִי וְאִמְרַתִּי דַּע אֲדוֹנִי כִּי אֲנוּכִי הַפְּלוֹנִי הַמְּדַקֵּק הַשִּׁכְנִי רוֹזֵי לִי רוֹזֵי בְּדִקְדוֹק וּבִפְסוּק כִּי כָל יָמַי עֲסוּק אֲנִי בְּזֹאת הַמְּלָאכָה, עַל כֵּן כָּכָה אֵין אִישׁ בְּמַצִּיאוֹת שֶׁנִּצְחָנִי בְּבִקְיֹאת [...] כְּשִׁמְעוֹת הַשֶּׁר דְּבִרְתִּי, קָם וִירַץ לְקִרְאָתִי וַיִּשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ, וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֲחַת זֶה אֲדוֹנִי אֱלִיהוּ אֲשֶׁר שִׁמְעַךְ הוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל הַמְּדִינוֹת סִפְרִיךְ נִתְּפַשְׁטוּ בְּכָל פְּנוֹת, בְּרוּךְ אֱלֹהֵי הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר הִבִּיֵּאךְ עַד הַלּוֹם וְהִקְרָה אוֹתְךָ לִידִי, וְאֵתָה פֶּה עֲמוּד עֲמִדִי, וְתִהְיֶה לִי לֶרֶב, וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לְךָ לֵאב [...]

³⁵ See WEIL, *Elie Lévitā*, pp. 95-102.

³⁶ See E. ATTIA, “L’écriture d’Elie Lévitā dans les manuscrits du *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*,” in *Manuscripts hébreux et arabes*, eds. J. OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER and N. DE LANGE (Turnhout 2014) pp. 263-278.

In 1527, the sack of Rome suddenly interrupted this longstanding collaboration, and Levita was compelled to leave his Roman dwelling.

4. INTRODUCTION TO *METURGEMAN*

In what was to be the last of his years in Rome, Levita had already begun his major lexicographical work, *Meturgeman*, a thesaurus of Aramaic roots stemming from the *targumim* of the Bible. He completed his work in Venice in 1529. An autographic copy of this text in its entirety is held in Rome.³⁷ An authorial introduction, which dates to 1531 and differs from the front matter in the edition of *Meturgeman* printed at Isny in 1541, serves as foreword to this manuscript.³⁸

The copy is dedicated to Giles of Viterbo and includes remarkable advice on text structure and the author's historical and lexicographical perspectives.³⁹

As for the contents of *Meturgeman*, the introduction highlights the similarities and innovations in comparison with the dictionaries by David Qimḥi and Natan ben Yeḥiel. While *Sefer he-'Arukh* includes Aramaic words from the Talmud, the *midrashim* and later rabbinic literature, *Meturgeman* was conceived as *Sefer ha-Shorashim* of Aramaic roots including all the verbs, the names and the words that are found in *targumin*

³⁷ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84.

³⁸ Besides the differences relating to the introduction, the entries in the manuscript copy (Biblioteca Angelica, Or. 84) are more longwinded. The edition is more concise and includes vernacular glosses in German and Italian to make the different meanings of a root more apparent. The use of such glosses resembles the use of vernacular glosses in the tradition of *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, in Provençal and other languages, with an exegetic and explicative purpose; cf. J. KOGEL, "Le'azim in David Kimhi's *Sefer ha-shorashim*: Scribes and Printers through Space and Time," in *The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean: Hebrew Manuscripts and Incunabula in Context*, ed. J. DEL BARCO (Leiden 2015) pp. 182-202.

³⁹ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 2r: אמר אליהו ב"ר אשר הלוי האשכנזי: הגדול משרשי לשון הקדש אשר קראתי שמו ספר בקיאות אל האיש המחבר אחרי שהשלמתי חבורי הגדול משרשי לשון הקדש אשר קראתי שמו ספר בקיאות אל האיש הגדול הנשא ונעלה יקר מחכמה ומכבוד חשמן איגדיאו יר"ה עוד בקשה נפשו למצא דבר חפץ וכתוב יושר בלשון ארמי. ולי אני עבדו קרא והשכרני לעשות לו ספר שרשים מלשון ארמי מכל הפעלים והשמות והמלים הנמצאים מתורגמים בתורה ונביאים וכתובים. ולא אוסיף ולא אגיע מהם ולא אניח מלה אחת הן קלה או חמורה מכל התרגומים הנמצאים על עשרים וארבע ספרים.

of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. It incorporates the biblical roots, which are disposed according to the alphabetic criterion adopted by David Qimḥi. The examples used to develop the meanings of each lemma are chosen from the Bible and from the corresponding Aramaic paraphrases and exegesis in *Targum Onkelos*, *Yonatan* or *Yerushalmi*.⁴⁰

A further inner subdivision of the entries of *Meturgeman* resembles the structure of *Sefer he-'Arukh*: the various meanings of a lemma do not spring from a single ideal root, like in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*; instead, as in *Sefer he-'Arukh*, they are distributed through different entries according to their semantic connotation.⁴¹

It is likely that Levita collated and exploited a good deal of copies of the *targumim*, which Giles made available to him, for this work. In the introduction, Levita delved into the complexity and variety of the manuscript tradition of *targumim* and compared it with the more regular and homogeneous biblical one. The history of the transmission of the *targumim* is outlined for the first time, and the late rabbinic origin of the vocalization and accents signs is demonstrated to contrast with the antiquity of the biblical consonantal text.⁴² To make his explanation clearer

⁴⁰ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 2r: לא כמו שעשה ר' נתן בעל הערוך שלא הביא רק המלות החמרות ורובם מלשון יון או מלשון רומי ומעטים מלות חמורות מתרגום ירושלמי ומעט מזער מתרגום אונקלוס ויונתן. והנה ידוע מדברי רבותינו שאלו השנים תרגומו תורה ונביאים כמו שאמרו בפ"ק דמסכת מגילה. תרגום של תורה אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי ר' אליעזר ור' יהושע ותרגום של נביאים יונתן בן עוזיאל אמרו מפי חגי זכריה מלאכי וכו' עד ויצאתה בת קול ואמרה מי הוא זה שגלה סתרי לבני אדם וכו' עד ועוד בקש לגלות תרגום של כתובים ויצתה בת קול ואמרה לו דייך.

⁴¹ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 3r: [...] והנה אהלך כל שורש לפי הענינים והנמצאים בו הן מעט או הרבה כמו שרש קבל אהלך לד' שרשים הראשון הוא לשון קבלה, כמו שנמצא בלשון עברי ולא קבל, קימו וקבלו. הב' לשון צעקת חמם, כמו צועקים אלי מן האדמה קבלו. הג' לשון חושך ואפלה, חושך השמש קבל שמשא, ויהי חשך אפלה חושך קבל. הד' לשון נגד ונוכח כמו נגד ההר קבל מורא, לנוכח אשתו, לקבל אתתיה. ובשורש עבר נמצאים עשרה ענינים אהלךהו לעשרה שרשים. ע"ש כמו שעשה בעל הערוך ולא כאשר עשה רד"ק בשרשיו.

⁴² Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 3v-4r: [...] כי הספרים הם משובשים מאד ואינם מסכימים זה עם זה בנקוד ברוב במלות, אלא זה אומר ככה וזה אומר ככה. ולהודיע סבה זה צריך אני להאריך מעט אף כי ידעתי שלא יסכימו עמי רוב החכמים מ"מ לא אחשך פי ואחור דעי אף אני והאמת יעשה דרכו. הנה בלי ספק אצלי שבעלי התרגום כתבו כל התרגום בלי נקוד כלל כמו שהתלמוד נכתב בלי נקוד בלי ספק. ואוכיח בראיות ברורות שהנקוד לא היה עדין בימי חכמי התלמוד אף כי בימי המתרגמים. ומה שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל כי עזרא ע"ה תקן הטעמים והמסורת ודרשו זה מפסוק ויקראו בספר תורה אלהים מפורש זה תרגום ושם שכל זה המסורת ויבינו במקרא זה פסוק הטעמים עכ"ל. והנה לא אמרו דבר על הנקודות. גם פסוק הטעמים אחשוב שאין דעתם על הטעמים שאנו קוראים זרקא פזר מונח רביע וכלי כי אם היה כן דעתם היה מספיק להם לומר ויבינו במקרא אילו

and more accessible to Giles, he did not hesitate to turn to St. Jerome and to enlarge upon the authority of the oldest kabalistic commentators on the Bible, “like Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai in *Sefer ha-Zohar*, and in *Sefer ha-Bahir* as well, the *niqud* is not mentioned at all.”⁴³

On fol. 4v of the manuscript introduction, Levita comments on his own title:

And I entitled this work *Meturgeman* which is the Aramaic translation of ‘*melitz* [an interpreter] among them’ [Gen 42, 23], that is ‘*meturgeman* among them’ in Aramaic. And ‘it will be to you as a mouth’ [Ex 4, 16], and it will be for you as an interpreter.⁴⁴

During the ancient synagogue liturgy, the *meturgeman* was the ‘translator,’ the person who explained the reading of the Hebrew Bible through the Aramaic paraphrases to the audience. The title alludes, as a *sphragis* of Levita himself, to his work and to his life. Throughout his life, Levita played a humble role, the function of a mediator, similar to the role of the *meturgeman* in the liturgical service: his teaching and his enlightening reading of the Bible allowed his scholars and readers to better compre-

הטעמים ולא פסוק הטעמים כי בידוע שאין כל הטעמים מפסיקין. וגם אם נודה שם הבינו במקרא פסוק הטעמים כמו שמשמע לשון ויבינו שהוא מבנין הפעיל שאינו יוצא לשלישי כמו לא יבינו משפט. תבינו ואחר נדבר. וכן ויבינו במקרא ר"ל הם בעצמם הבינו פיסוק הטעמים ולא שהבינוהו לאחרים וכן מפורש זה תרגום. והנה התרגום לא נכתב עד שבאו אונקלוס ויונתן. ולפי דעת החכמים כתבוהו שכתבוהו ובאו אונקלוס ויונתן והחזירוהו. ואם כן גם המקרא לא נקד עד אחר חתימת התלמוד כמו שבארתי וכן כתב החכם ר' אברהם ן' עזרה בספר מאזנים, וזה לשונו בקצור. אחרי בעלי התלמוד היו בעלי התורה והם אנשי המסורת ואחר חכמי הדקדוק. ובספר צחות כתב וז"ל כן מנהג חכמי טבריא והם העיקר כי מהם היו אנשי המסורת ואנחנו מהם קבלנו כל הנקוד. עד כאן לשונו.

⁴³ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 4r: ועוד אביא ראייה מהחכם ירונימוס שהעתיק העשרים וארבע לשון לטיני יצ"י והוא הפליג לדבר בהקדמת קצת הספרים דברים טובים באותיות לשון הקדש אבל בנקודות לא דבר דבר מעולם וזה ראייה גדולה כי בימיו לא היה נמצא הנקוד, והוא היה כמה שנים קודם התלמוד. כי הוא היה כמאתים שנה אחר החרבן וחתימת התלמוד היה כמו אחר החורבן. ועוד ראייה אחרת שבעלי הקבלה הקדמונים כמו ר' שימעון בן יוחאי בספר הזוהר וגם בספר הבהיר לא נזכר דבר מהנקוד כלל כפי מה שהוגד לי מבעלי קבלה. המקובלים אחרונים הרבה מהם הפליגו לדבר בנקוד ובטעמים. ונראה מכל מה שהבאתי כי הנקוד נעשה אחר התלמוד. והתרגומים נקדו לא מיד איש אחד ידוע, רק כל מי שרצה מלא את ידו וניקד כפי רצונו ודעתו ספר אחד מהספרים ונקדן אחר נקד ספר אחר כאשר ישר בעיניו לפיכך אין הספרים מסכימים זה עם זה בנקוד התרגום אבל בעלי המסורת שנקדו המקרא כאשר קבלו בקבלה איש מפי איש מסיני ואין בינם מחלוקת בניקוד כלל.

⁴⁴ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 4v: והנה קראתי שם הספר הזה מתורגמן: כתרגומו של המליץ בינותם מתורגמן ביניהון וכן הוא יהיה לך לפה הוא יהי לך לתורגמן.

hend the difficult passages of the Hebrew text and language and contributed to their vulgarization.

The closing lines of the introduction recall the circumstances that caused the great delay in the drafting of *Meturgeman*: in fact, the work was already started in 5286 (1526); however, the catastrophic sack that took place in the following year forced Levita to leave Rome and look for a new and safer home, and delayed the work's progress:

The town of Rome was taken and plundered, and all my books were stolen. I had already composed more than half of *Meturgeman*, but after the raid, I remained with only few quires and pages.⁴⁵

As most of the first quires of *Meturgeman* got lost during the sack, the redaction was suspended and was only begun anew two years later when Levita recovered his tranquility in Venice.

The colophon of *Meturgeman* dates to 10th Tishri 5290 (1529) and the last entry of the dictionary is *Tishri*.⁴⁶ At that time, Levita worked as reviser for the publishing house of Bomberg, taking part in the edition of both the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* by David Qimḥi and *Sefer Arukh* by Natan ben Yehiel.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 4v: והנה התחלתי בחבור זה הספר ברומי רבתיא בשנת חמשת אלפים ומאתים ושש לבריאת עולם. ויהי בשנת השנית להתחלתו שהוא רפ"ז לפ"ק נלכדה העיר והייתי לשלל ולבזה ולקחו ממני כל ספרי וכבר היה נעשה יותר מחציו הספר הזה ולא נשארו לי ממנו כי אם קצת קונטרסים ודפין אשר מצאתי רמוסים ומכוסים בקרב חוצות ולקטטים והבאתים בכלי גולה מעיר לעיר ומממלכה אל עם אחר עד שהבאתי הנה אל עיר המהוללה ויניסיה בשנת פ"ט לפ"ט. In this text, Levita defines the quires *quntrasim*, the plural of *quntres*, that is the Italian *quinternio* (quinion), a quire including five bifolios. In *Tishbi*, which often includes Hebrew terms that became part of the language in Late Antiquity and during the Middle Ages, an entry is dedicated to the definition of *quntres*; see M. BEIT-ARIÉ, "Quntres or Qutres: The Distribution and Spellings of a Term and its Codicological Meanings," in *Mehqerei Talmud: Talmudic Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Ephraim E. Urbach*, eds. Y. SUSSMANN and D. ROSENTHAL (= *Mehqerei Talmud* 3 [Jerusalem 2005; in Hebrew]) pp. 64-79.

⁴⁶ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 425v: תשרי תקעו בחדש שופר, תקעו בירחא, תן חלק לשבעה, הב חלק טב מן זרעך דתשרי שופר. ובפסוק הולך אל דרום, בתקופת תשרי וטבת. תן חלק לשבעה, הב חלק טב מן זרעך בתשרי. זכרו תהילה לאל אשר ברא העולם בתשרי, אשר הואיל שני שרותיה עלי תשרי. וסיימתי את המלאכה בעשרה בתשרי. והפרט אם תסיר האות האחרון מן האות השני אשר בתשרי והיינו את המלאכה בעשרה בתשרי. In the edition of 1541 the last entry is **תשבי** / *Tishbi*, and the text runs as follows: ואני **תשבי** אליהו התישבי, תרגם יונתן דמין תושב, פירוש כל שם עיר אחת ומשם היה. ואני חדשתי בו חדוש בסוף ספר התשבי. מהרה יבא אליהו, כה תפלת אליהו, שחבר זה הספר והשלימהו בעזרת אלי יי הוא שנת הימח'ר אליה.

⁴⁷ Weil, *Elie Lévit*, pp. 112-115.

The introduction to *Meturgeman* was added more than a year later, at the beginning of the month of Shevat 5291 (1531). It is likely that during this interval (1529-1531) the author completed a second re-reading and a full correction of the work. After that, the manuscript was sent to Rome and became part of Viterbo's library.⁴⁸

5. THE TRADITION OF *METURGEMAN*

The exemplar of *Meturgeman* held in Biblioteca Angelica includes 425 medium size paper folios, and is written in different brown inks with a quill pen.⁴⁹ The text was not entirely written in Levita's book hand. The analysis of the script points to two different hands. Levita's fast pen produced the greater part of the copy: his distinctive *ductus* and the particular shape of the letters, notably פ, מ, ג, and ש, are easily recognizable.⁵⁰ Other sections can be attributed to a second Ashkenazi book hand, probably the hand of a scribe working under the surveillance of the author:⁵¹ Levita's revisions and corrections are readable in the margins all along the text, including the sections that were penned by the other scribe.

As regards the layout, the specimen displays the following scribal features: incipits and closing formulas are carved in wider square characters; the roots and some of their inflections are underlined in red ink; the vocalization is in grey ink. Along the right margin, biblical references in Latin were added by two different humanistic handwritings, probably in order to make the study of the text easier for Giles.

⁴⁸ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 5r: ויהי דבר החשמן אלי לאמר מדוע לא כלית את מלאכתך בחבור הספר אשר אמרתי לך וספרתי לו את כל הקורות אותי ויאמר לי ויהי מה השב נא ידך ותהי כבראשונה וגדור פרצות הספר הזה ואני אתן את שכרך ובכך פתני ואפת ויגעתי ומצאתי והשלמתיו היום יום ד' בערב ראש חדש שבט שנת רצ"א לפרט קטן פה וינסייא

⁴⁹ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, 216x288 mm, paper, fols. 425 [424]; see E. ABATE, *Catalogue and Historical Survey of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Angelica, Rome* (Leiden forthcoming).

⁵⁰ The long curved horizontal bar of the ג the short descending traits of the מ, and the פ similar to a כ with a dot inside, are very typical; peculiar is the shape of the semi-cursive ש that is rounded and with a long and curved upper stroke; cf. LE DÉAUT, "Jalons pour une histoire," 509-533, and BEIT-ARIÉ, *Eliyahu Levita*, forthcoming.

⁵¹ See ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 437-439.

The copy of *Liber Radicum* in St. Andrews University Library⁵² resembles the described layout of *Meturgeman*. Incipits and closing formula are written in majuscule; underlining in red ink marks out different textual functions, and biblical references in Latin are noted in the right margin. Both manuscripts contain additional notes and glosses by Giles of Viterbo. The similarities are due to their content (both are lexicons) and the intellectual context of redaction (both were commissioned by Giles of Viterbo).

The exemplar of *Meturgeman* which I described above is a second redaction; according to Levita's account, the primitive version of the work went almost entirely lost during the sack of Rome. It is unclear whether some quires of this earliest text survived the destruction. Yet, it is important to highlight that the exemplar completed in 1531 is not the only extant autographic copy. A second incomplete manuscript, which has remained nearly totally unexplored so far, is held in at the BNF in Paris.⁵³ This exemplar lacks several pages and quires (notably between the roots starting with the letters ב and ג) and ends after the roots starting with the letter ד. At some point, the fragment was bound together with a different manuscript including some chapters of *Targum Yonatan* to Isaiah,⁵⁴ and thus served more readily as instrument for interpreting the Aramaic text.

An examination of the writing, the text layout, and the content reveals this undated copy of *Meturgeman* to be an autograph by Levita as well. The Ashkenazi traits of the script correspond to the specificities of his handwriting. A second Ashkenazi hand, to which part of the entries between the roots אבב and ביש are due, is also detectable. The margins also contain some corrections by Levita himself, who used to supervise the execution of his work in its entirety, including the sections that were penned by his assistant.

⁵² Scotland, St. Andrews, Ms BS 1158 H4 D2 C2.

⁵³ Paris, BNF, Ms Hébreu 98/2, paper, fols. 40r-99v; cf. the notice in ZOTENBERG, *Catalogue des manuscrits Hébreux*, p. 10: "fragment d'une concordance hébraïque et chaldaïque." In the old list of manuscripts belonging to Giles of Viterbo (Paris, BNF, Ms Grec 3074) published in ASTRUC and MONFRIN, "Livres latins et hébreux du Cardinal Gilles de Viterbe," pp. 551-554, the content of the lexicon is described as follows: "sciarascim quorundam vocabulorum in hebreo et chaldeo." In both cases, the author of the Hebrew-Aramaic *shorashim* is not given. In the online catalogue an updated notice mentions Elias Levita as the author of the text.

⁵⁴ Paris, BNF, Ms Hébreu 98/1.

The layout of this manuscript closely resembles the *mise en texte* of *Meturgeman* dating to 1531 and the manuscript of the 1519 *Liber Radicum*. Red motifs mark different sections and functions of the text; the incipits and the ending formulas are executed in wider letters; in the right margin, all along the text, a Latin humanistic hand noted the biblical references. In the left margin, Latin translations of the lemmas are also noticeable, a feature which is missing in the 1531 copy.

The fragmentary *Meturgeman* does not have an introduction and does not include any trace of Viterbo's handwriting either.⁵⁵ Levita only provided an introduction to the completed works and it is likely that this copy was never finished. This leaves us to wonder whether this manuscript could conceivably represent an earlier stage in the redaction of *Meturgeman*, which foreran the text-form achieved in 1531.

When did the specimen reach Paris? One cannot exclude that Giles received not only the dedicated copy of 1531, but also the quires of the unfinished *Meturgeman* (which does not contain bear marks pointing to his ownership). In this case, the incomplete specimen could be in the section of the Cardinal's collection that, after his death, came into the possession of Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi (1501-1550), successor of Giles as bishop of Viterbo. This collection was then bequeathed to the Medici's books heritage, which followed the transfer of Caterina de' Medici (1519-1589) to France.⁵⁶

A second hypothesis, namely that the copy remained in Levita's hands, is equally plausible. When Levita was in Venice in 1536, he served the French ambassador and erudite Georges de Selve (1508-1541) as Hebrew teacher. Upon his departure, he presented him with the second recension of the biblical concordance *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. Georges de Selve brought this exemplar back to France and it is at present held in the Bibliothèque Nationale.⁵⁷ Given the circumstances, there is a possibility that the incomplete *Meturgeman* was sent to Paris as part of the ambassador's belongings.

⁵⁵ See ABATE, "Filologia e Qabbalah," pp. 437-439.

⁵⁶ See D. MURATORE, *La biblioteca del cardinale Niccolò Ridolfi* (Alessandria 2009), pp. 315-336.

⁵⁷ Paris, BNF, Ms Hébr. 134-135.

As yet, these questions remain unanswered. A full philological and critical comparison of the two manuscripts of the *Meturgeman* with the 1541 printed edition could shed new light at least on the enigma of the redaction, but so far, it has not been attempted. A brief sample which takes into account the parallel transcription of the first entry of the lexicon, - the root אבב - clearly indicates that there must be three different *Vorlagen*. Paris, BNF, Ms Héb. 98/2 appears as an intermediate stage of the text, situated between the extended form preserved in Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84 and the more concise text of the edition of 1541.⁵⁸

Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms Or. 84, fol. 7r	Paris, BNF, Ms Héb. 98/2, fol. 46r	Isny 1541
<p>אבב אביב קלוי באש, אביב קלוי בנור, בחדש האביב, בירחא דאביבא, וכן בירח בול, בירחא מיספ איבבא, כי השעורה אביב, ארי שעריא אביבין. ותרגום של כתאנה ברשיתה, כתינתא דבאול מאבבא, איבא פרי האדמה, איבא דארעא, פרי תבואה, פרי איבא, ותקח מפרי, ונסיבת מאיביה, וזה פריה, ודין איבה, ואכלו פרים, ואכלו איביהון, ענפכם תתנו, איביכון תצלחו, ארץ נתנה יבולה, וארצנו תתן יבולה, תרויהון מתורגמים איבא, ושאר לישנא יבול ותבואה מתורגמים בלישנא עבור או עלתא עיין בשרשיהם, ובדניאל ואנביה שגיא, תמצא בשרש אנב</p>	<p>אבב כי השעורה אביב, ארי שעריא אביבין, אביב קלוי באש, אביב קלוי בנור, בחדש האביב, בירחא דאביבא, בירח בול, בירחא מיספ איבבא, כתאנה בראשיתה, כתינתא דבאול מאבבא, אבא מפרי האדמה, מאיבא דארעה, ותקח מפרי, ונסיבת מאיביה וזה פריה, ודין איבה, ואכלו פרים, ואיכלו איביהון, ענפכם תתנו, איביכון תצלחו, אנביה שגיא, תמצא בשרש אנב</p>	<p>אבב אביב קלוי באש, אביב קלוי בנור, בחדש האביב, בירחא דאביבא, השעורה אביב, שועריא אביבין, ענין בכור וראשית וכן תרגום, של כתאנה בראשיתה, כתאינתא באול מאבבא, אבל לשון פרי דמתרגם אבא תמצא בשרש אנב כי שם ביתו</p>

⁵⁸ The printed editions are properly two, as Paulus Fagius provided at the same time a second edition of *Meturgeman* preceded by a Latin introduction, which is addressed specifically to a public of Christian Hebraists.

6. *TISHBI* AND *KABBALAH*?

To conclude, I wish to draw attention to Levita's attitude towards the transmission of kabalistic beliefs to anonymous non-Jewish readers as it is reflected in his lexicon *Tishbi*.

It is generally assumed that Levita was not particularly consonant with the mystical enthusiasm of his patron Giles of Viterbo. However, he does not seem to have held particular prejudices with regard to kabalistic lore. In the second part of the aforementioned colophon of the compilation of mystical texts copied in 1515, he referred (with a touch of irony?) to a kabalistic and astrological belief that he personally happened to adhere to: "I completed this holy book today, on the fourth, that is Hoshana Rabba 5276 [1515], on which, I saw my head in the shadow of the moon. Blessed be God as I am assured not to die this year."⁵⁹

Levita copied manuscripts of mystical texts mainly in the first half of his career and for Giles of Viterbo. Afterwards, he concentrated his efforts mainly on grammar, exegesis and lexicography.

Even if allusions to kabbalah are found elsewhere in Levita's work (like in the manuscript introduction to *Meturgeman*), things changed dramatically after his departure from Rome and the death of his powerful patron in 1532. Levita seems to become more and more prudent and sensitive in his references to these topics, especially in front of his coreligionists, who could consider him to be transgressing Jewish Law. In the introduction to the *Masoret ha-masoret* of 1538, he felt the need to justify himself and his teaching activity to non-Jews in front of a hypothetical rabbinic tribunal: "The sages had not enacted a decree that whosoever teaches a Gentile commits a sin."⁶⁰

According to Levita's self-defense, the rabbinic authorities did not prohibit *tout court* from teaching to non-Jews. They only forbade the di-

⁵⁹ London, British Library, Ms Add. 27199, fol. 601r: והשלמתי הספר הקדוש הזה היום יום ד' שהוא יום הושענא רבא רע"ו אשר ראיתי בו ראשי בצל הלבנה ברוך יי כי מובטח אני שלא אמות השנה הזאת נאם הסופר אליהו ב"ר אשר הלוי אשכנזי המדקדק. On this belief, see M. IDEL, "Gazing at the 'Head' in Ashkenazi Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 6:2 (1997) pp. 265-300.

⁶⁰ LEVITA, *Masoreth ha-masoreth*, fol. 9r: די לנו בזו ראייה שחכמים לא גזרו גזרה שהלמוד לגוים יהיה עבדה.

vulgarization of Jewish Law and of subjects that contained esoteric doctrines like the speculation on the Genesis, on Ezekiel's vision, and the book *Yetzirah*, "which must only be disclosed to the pious, to men of wisdom and intelligence who are of the children of Israel."⁶¹

It is easily noticeable that the mystical speculation on Genesis, the vision of Ezekiel and the book *Yetzirah* were among the main issues of Giles of Viterbo's interests in Judaism, which Levita himself fostered.

And yet, in *Masoret ha-masoret's* introduction, he pretended to be "guiltless and innocent"; his teachings, "whether addressed to Christians or to Jews, were simply related to the grammar of the sacred language and to the explanation of its rules."⁶²

Even if it is not easy to provide a final assessment of his views on the study of the kabbalah by non-Jews, it is certain that Levita could continue undisturbedly in his teaching and scholarly activities. The mystical works he copied survived unpublished, keeping their status as "secrets." Hidden from indiscreet eyes, they continued to circulate in the esoteric collections of the Christian Hebraists, like Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter (1506-1557), who ordered a copy of the compilation produced for Giles in 1515.⁶³ For centuries, Levita's grammatical and lexicographical works provided undiscussed, yet widespread references to the linguistic study of Hebrew language.

During his collaboration with Paulus Fagius at Isny in 1541, Levita completed the first edition of his *Tishbi*.⁶⁴ The lexicon was intended as a collection of Hebrew terms and neologisms that are missing in *Sefer ha-Shorashim* and in *Sefer he-'Arukh*, gathering the terminology that had

⁶¹ LEVITA, *Masoreth ha-Masoreth*, fol. 9r: וְזָךְ אֲנִי בְּלִי פֶשַׁע, כִּי חֲכָמִים אֵינָם אֲסוּרִין רַק שְׁדַּבְּרֵי תוֹרָה לְגוֹי אֵין מוֹסְרִים, וְלֹא אֲמָרוּ אֵין מִלְּמַדִּין, רַק עֲקָרֵי דְּבָרֵיהֶם עוֹמְדִין, עַל דְּבָרִין שֶׁשִּׁיָּךְ בְּהֵן מְסִירָה כְּגוֹן מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית וּמַעֲשֵׂה מִרְכָּבָה וְסֵפֶר יִצְחָר שֶׁאֵין מְגִלָּן אֲלֵא לְצִנּוּעִים אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וִידוּעִים אֲשֶׁר מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה.

⁶² LEVITA, *Masoreth ha-Masoreth*, fol. 10r: וְעוֹד כִּי עֲקָר לְמוֹדֵי עִם גּוֹי כִּיהוּדִי אֵינוֹ אֲלֵא בְּדַקְדּוֹק לְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְכֻלָּלִים אֲשֶׁר לֹהֵם אֶחָדֶשׁ.

⁶³ The manuscript owned by Widmannstetter, at present held in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms Heb. 81, is an exact copy of London, British Library, Ms Add. 27199.

⁶⁴ The printed editions are two, as Paulus Fagius provided at the same time two editions of *Tishbi*, in Hebrew and with a Latin introduction and a Latin translation of the text.

A set of entries in this work relates to the mystical and midrashic tradition. There are lemmas dedicated to mystical concepts and elements like *Gilgul* (reincarnation), *Kabbalah* and *Pardes*, to the demons *Ashmedai*, *Lilith* and *Samael*, and to the angels *Metatron*⁶⁵ and *Raziel*.⁶⁶

In presenting such matters, Levita never gave up his caution. More than once in *Tishbi*, its author is keen to stress his ignorance and pretends to his lack of interest towards the kabalistic and mystical doctrines. In the final part of the entry *Kabbalah*, the text is as follows:

... Kabbalah is divided into two important branches, Speculative kabbalah, and Practical kabbalah. However, I can't explain the topic because of my ignorance, as I haven't studied this science and I don't know anything nor I understand anything of these saint teachings.⁶⁷

The entry *Pardes* ('Paradise') ends with a similar statement:

... The masters of the tradition taught that four people entered the Pardes, hiding the true name of the highest throne, which is well known in the kabbalah, but I don't take care of this here.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ This entry includes a reference to Giles of Viterbo and to his exegesis of Hebrew terms as presented in section 2 of this article. Elias LEVITA, *Tishbi* (Isny 1541) s.v. **מטטרון** / *Metatron*: שר הפנים אומרים שהוא המלאך הרואה תמיד פני המלך יתעלה. ועליו נאמר כי **מטטרון** שמי בקרבו ששמו כשם רבו מטטרון במטטריאה שדי. ושמעתי מהקרדינאל תלמידי כי מטטרון בלשון יווני שליו אולי כי הוא

⁶⁶ See ABATE, "David Qimhi et Gilles de Viterbe," forthcoming.

⁶⁷ **קבל** לשון קבלה לא נמצא רק בעזרא ובדברי הימים / *Kibbel*: קבל / *Tishbi*, s.v. *Levita*, ובהאסתר שהם ספרי הגולה ופעם אחת במשלי שמע עצה וקבל מוסר אבל בתרגום נמצאים הרבה לשונות מתורגמין בלשון קבלה, עיין במתורגמן. גם רז"ל שמשו בו הרבה מאד ואין צריך להביא עליהם ראיות והשם קבול או קבלה והתאר קבלן ומקבל נקרא מי שלמד ספרי קבלה והם סתרי תורה ונביאי שקבל איש מפי איש עד מרע"ה לכך נקראת קבלה והיא נחלקת לשני חלקים עיונית ומעשית ואיני כדאי לבאר ענינה כי בעונותי לא למדתי חכמה זו ודעת קדושים אלה לא אדע ולא אבין.

⁶⁸ **פרדס** רמונים גנות ופרדסים פ"י גן שגדלים בו אלני / *Pardes* פרדס. Levita, *Tishbi*, s.v. מאכל, ומזה קורין הגוים לגן עדן פארדיס וכ"ל פארדייס ומה שאמרו רז"ל ארבע נכסין לפרדס רמז למרכבה העליונה וזה ידוע בקבלה ואין לי בזה עסק.

Under the lemma *Lilith*, Levita quotes from the well-known medieval *midrash Alphabeta of Ben Sira*, which recounts the origin of the amulet for the protection against the female demon in detail.⁶⁹ Once more, in the final part, the account is suddenly truncated: “Shall continue to read in this book [*Alphabeta of Ben Sira*], those who believe in such things.”⁷⁰

In previous Hebrew dictionaries, explicit references to the mystical tradition were hardly found; therefore, these entries can be considered as an implicit tribute to his former exchange with Giles of Viterbo and the Christian kabbalists. In spite of his caution, Levita’s attempts are an absolute innovation in Jewish lexicography and a first endeavor to investigate these topics in a modern detached perspective.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Cf. M. STEINSCHNEIDER, *Alphabetum Siracidis, utrumque, cum expositione antiquae (narrations et fabulas continente). In integrum restitutum et emendatum e Cod. Ms. Biblioth (Berolini 1858)*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ LEVITA, *Tishbi*, s.v. לילית / *Lilith*: רשי פירש שם שדה. לילית אד שם הרגיעה לילית. וכן בפסוק בימים ההם כשבת המלך, בתרגום ירושלמי שדין וליילין נמצא כתוב שאותן מאה ושלשים שנה שחיה אדם פרוש מחוה באו שדים ונתחממו ממנו והוליד שדין ורוחין ומזיקין. ובמקום אחר מצאתי ארבע נשים הם אמות השדים לילית ונעמה ואיגרת ומחלת. ובספר בן סירה בשאלה הששית ששאל נבוכדנצר אותו וזה לשונו מפני מה הבנים מתים כשהם בני שמנה ימים אמר לו מפני שלילית הרגת אותם והאריך שם חרבה וקצתי לכותבם כי אינני מאמין בהם אך מנהג פשוט ביננו האשכנזים שעושין עגול סביב כותלי החדר ששוכבת בה היולדת עם נתר או גחלים וכתבים בכל כותל אדם חוה חוץ לילית ובפתח החדר מבפנים כותבין שמות שלשה מלאכים אלו סנוי וסנסוי וסמגלוף כמו שמסרה להם לילית בעמצה בשעה שרצו המלאכים האלו לטבוע אותה בים כל זה מבואר היטב בספר בן סירה יעייך שם מי שטאמין בו.

⁷¹ Both in the printed editions of *Tishbi* and *Meturgeman*, the last entry is dedicated to the lemma **תשבי** / *Tishbi*, which is one of the principal qualifications of the prophet Elias, and another *sphragis* of our author. In *Tishbi*, Levita challenged directly Qimḥi’s exegesis. The text runs as follows: **תשבי** אליהו התשבי מתושבי גלעד. הנה חפשתי בכל פרושי המפרשים אשר ראיתי ואין אחד מהם מפרש למה נקרא אליהו התשבי מתושבי גלעד, ולמה לא היה נקרא אליהו הגלעדי כמו ברזילי הגלעדי וכן ירמיה הענתותי מיכה המורשתי ודומיהם רבים, ואין גם אחד הנקרא מתושבי עיר פלוני ויונתן תרגם אליהו דמתושב מתותבי גלעד. והרד“ק פירש שבראשונה ישב בעיר ששמה תושב, ואחר כך ישב בגלעד. אבל לא פירש למה נקרא מתשבי גלעד כדלעיל. ואני אתן בזה טעם נכון בידוע שאחד מעשה פלגש בגבעה צו ישראל להרוג את יושבי גלעד שנאמר ויצו אותם לאמור לכו והכיתם את יושבי ישב גלעד. ואי אפשר שלא נמלטו מהם או שלא היו אנשים שלא נמצאו שם בפעם ההיא ולא נהרגו. והנה אליהו היה אחד מהם ואחר זמן שנתישבה העיר חזרו ונתישבו שם התושבים הראשונים שנמלטו. והם נקראו תושבי גלעד. ואם ישאל שואל מניין לנו שאליהו היה שם בזמן ההוא התשובה בזה הלא רבותינו זכרנו לברכה אמרו כי פינחס הוא אליהו, וידוע כי פינחס היה במעשה פלגש בגבעה שנאמר ופינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן היה עומד לפניו בימים ההם, אם כן היה אליהו בזמן ההוא. יהי רצון שכן יהיה עמנו בזמן הזה ויקוים בנו הפסוק הנני אנוכי שולח לכם את אליה, כה תפלת המחבר אליה. לפרט המחבר אליה.

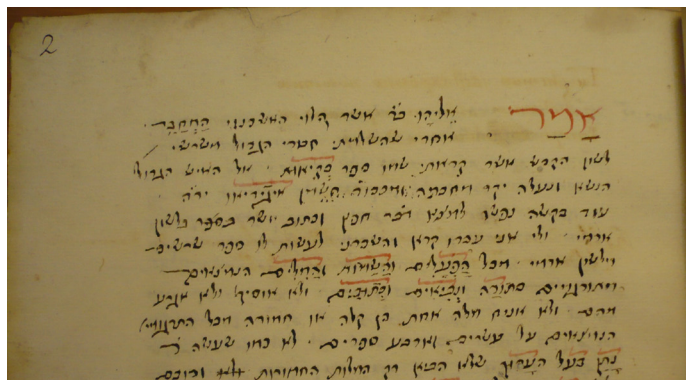


Fig. 1. Upper side of the first recto of the manuscript introduction to Meturgeman. Ms. Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Or. 84, fol. 2r (thanks to Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Italy)

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