The Scholarly Interests of a Scribe and Mapmaker in Fourteenth-Century Mallorca: Elisha ben Abraham Benvenisti Cresques's Bookcase*

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One of the most lavish extant Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, the codex in the former Sassoon collection (MS 368), best known as the Farhi Codex, is also one of the least studied.[1] Famous for the Bible it contains, a series of extraordinarily beautiful carpet pages, and a Temple diagram,[2] the codex has an unusually detailed colophon in which the scribe, "Elisha ben Abraham Benvenisti …known by the name Cresques," informed us that he was born on the 28th of Tamuz, 5085 (July 11, 1325). He further noted that he began working on the manuscript in 1366 and that he concluded the project in 1383.[3] On one of the decorated pages he signed his name again, "Elisha ben Abraham," as part of the calligraphic embellishment to tell us that he was also the illuminator.[4] In 1975

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1 David S. Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library, London* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), 1:6–14; the codex was never sold and is still part of the Sassoon collection; it is, however, not accessible to researchers for examination. I am grateful to R. David Sassoon, Jerusalem, for providing me with high-quality photographs of some of the miniatures. Other pages had to be studied from photographs of rather poor quality. The text was accessed on microfilm. The manuscript will be cited hereinafter as Farhi Codex.

2 Farhi Codex, pp. 42–71and 182–87; Bezalel Narkis, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1984), 98–99; Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art Between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 150–54 and 163–64.

3 The main colophon appears on pp. 2–4; more biographical information is scattered throughout the manuscript on several other folios.

4 Farhi Codex, p. 89.

Jaume Riera i Sans suggested that Elisha ben Abraham was to be identified with the famous mapmaker Abraham Cresques, who is associated with the Catalan *mappamundi* in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Esp. 30)[5] and known from several documents in the Archivo General de la Corona de Aragón in Barcelona and the Archivo Capitular de Mallorca in Palma.[6] Although Riera i Sans argued convincingly on the grounds of the typical Catalan usage of patronymics, his observations were largely ignored in both cartographic and Jewish art history research (with very few

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[5] Literature on the *mappamundi* is copious and can be listed here only selectively: George Grosjean, ed., *L'Atles Català*: *The Catalan Atlas of 1378* (Dietikon: Graf, 1977); Hans-Christian Freiesleben, *Der katalanische Weltatlas vom Jahre 1375: nach dem in der Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, verwahrten Original farbig wiedergegeben* (Stuttgart: Brockhaus, 1977); Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, Ramon J. Pujades i Bataller, and Julio Samsó Moya, eds., *El món i els dies: l'Atles català, 1375* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2008); Abraham Cresques, *Mapa mondi: une carte du monde au XIVe siècle: L'Atlas catalan*, Collection Bibliothèque nationale de France, Sources (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Opus Species and Montparnasse Multimedia, 1998), CD-ROM. The *mappamundi* has also been treated in numerous cartographic surveys; see, among others, primarily Tony Campbell, "Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500," in *The History of Cartography,* ed. John. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 2:371–461; Evelyn Edson, *The World Map, 1300–1492* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007), 79–89; Ramon Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes: La representació medieval d'una mar solcada* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 2007), chap. 5; Philipp Billion, *Graphische Zeichen auf mittelalterlichen Portolankarten: Ursprünge, Produktion und Rezeption bis 1440* (Marburg: Tectum, 2011), 184–90.

[6] Jaume Riera i Sans, "Cresques Abraham, jueu de Mallorca, mestre de mapamundis i de brúixioles," in *L'Atles Català de Cresques Abraham* (Barcelona: Diàfora, 1975), 14–22; the archival material was also studied by Gabriel Llompart i Moragues and Jaume Riera i Sans, "Jafudà Cresques i Samuel Corcós: Més documents sobre els jueus pintors de cartes de navegar (Mallorca, segle XIV)," *Bolleti de la Societat Arqueològica Luliana* 40 (1984): 341–50; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, *Readers and Books in Majorca, 1229–1550* (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), nos. 67, 96, 97, 108, 112, 123; Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, "El testamento del cartógrafo Cresques Abraham y otros documentos familiares," *Estudis Baleàrics* 64/65 (1999–2000): 99–115.

exceptions[7]). Recently it has been shown that his assumptions can be supported by art-historical considerations.[8]

The documents in the archives of Palma and Barcelona, together with the quite detailed information in the colophon of the Farhi Codex, offer a wealth of information regarding the principal dates in Elisha Cresques's life (he lived from 1325 until 1387), his status at the court, and his financial situation. He was an accomplished scribe, a gifted and well-trained miniaturist, and a respected cartographer in the service of the king of Aragon. According to the Farhi Codex colophon, Elisha came from a family of scholars that he refers to as "Rabbis": his father, Abraham; his grandfather [Vidal Haim] Benvenisti; and his great grandfather Elisha. In 1361 Abraham decided to honor his son in appreciation of his work as a Hebrew scribe by buying him a seat in their synagogue.[9] These latter pieces of information indicate that, apart from any artistic training Elisha may have undergone,[10] in all likelihood he also received a traditional rabbinic education.

Insights into his intellectual profile can also be discerned from the Farhi Codex itself, which is, in fact, much more than a typical Sephardi illuminated Bible and was intended, as the mentioned colophon states explicitly, for his, his family's, and his

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[7] See the works listed in note 6; Significantly enough, at the time I published my project on the Sephardi Bibles (see note 2), I myself was not aware of the suggested identification of Elisha ben Abraham with Cresques Abraham.

[8] For iconographic observations, see Sandra Sáenz López Pérez, "El portulano, arte y oficio," in *Cartografía medieval hispánica: Imagen de un mundo en* construcción, ed. Mariano Cuesta Domingo and Alfredo Surroca Carrascosa (Madrid: Real sociedad geográfica, 2009); for stylistic and technical observations, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Observations on the Work of Elisha ben Abraham Cresques," *Ars Judaica* 10 (2014), 27–36.

[9] Archivo Capitular de Mallorca, Not. Num. 14621, n.d.; Llompart i Moragues, "Testamento," appendix, no. 1.

[10] It has been suggested that Elisha was the brother of Vidal Abraham, an illuminator in the king's service. See Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, *La pintura medieval mallorquina: Su entorno cultural y su iconografía* (Palma de Mallorca: Luis Ripoll, 1977), 1:169; see also Riera i Sans, "Cresques Abraham"; Llompart i Moragues and Riera i Sans, "Jafudà Cresques i Samuel Corcós," 344; Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes*, 491–92. Apart from the fact that Elisha and Vidal both had fathers by the name of Abraham, there is no firm evidence in support of this suggestion.

descendants' own use. Elisha explained that he collected various kinds of texts: gematria, philological texts, the Bible, Mishnah and Gemara,[11] and the midrashim of the Sages, so that he and his progeny would be able to learn from them.[12] We find echoes of this collection in the form of a series of texts on the first 194 pages of the codex. These texts are of a varied character—eclectic at first sight—and reflect a relatively broad and multilayered range of interests. On the one hand, they allow us to appreciate Elisha's rabbinic background, and on the other, they demonstrate that he possessed general knowledge beyond traditional Jewish scholarship. Moreover, we know that in 1377 Elisha and his son Jafudà, also a cartographer who collaborated with his father, were involved in the sale of the personal library left by the physician Lleó Mosconi. Elisha not only signed as a witness to the auction, but also acquired six books himself; Jafudà bought three more.[13] In some sense, then, we are able to reconstruct the family's private bookcase.

In the following pages, I draw attention to the texts introduced into the Farhi Codex in order to delineate Elisha's fields of knowledge and interest: history, calendrical issues, Hebrew philology and Masorah, liturgy, traditional biblical exegesis and midrash, and gematria. This close look at the scholarly interests of Elisha as an erudite Sephardi individual sheds a bright light on the professional profile of this man, who has been described by some scholars as a mere colorist, a craftsman who simply put paint on world maps and compasses,[14] with no intellectual input of his own.

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[11] The words 'mishnah' and 'gemara' are erased and one could speculate that Elisha had also planned to add parts of the Talmud to his miscellany, but with the exception of several texts related to the Temple, he did not do so.

[12] Farhi Codex, p. 4.

[13] The list includes 156 titles and offers some indication of the size of an erudite Sephardi Jew's private collection; it is kept in the Archivo del Reino de Mallorca, P-139, fols. 97–107; Hillgarth, *Readers*, vol. 2, no. 96; the Hebrew titles are transcribed in Occitan, and not all of the nine books can be associated with known titles, see Riera i Sans, "Cresques Abraham," with references to earlier publications of the document, note 42. The titles Elisha purchased are: *Laquotot, moresch* (?), *Atonhone quesef, Acoenesefe* (?), and *Tameyha* (?). Jafudà acquired *Nazir ben aonelhec, Sefer* (?), and *Mispete asmaalot.* For further remarks, see below.

[14] Riera i Sans, "Cresques Abraham," 22; Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, "Apunts iconogràfics des del port de Mallorca," *Cartografia Mallorquina* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1995), 71–87; and more recently Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes*, 487.

1. Time: History and Calendar

The colophon points to Elisha's strong interest in history, observable in the way he linked the date of the completion of the Farhi Codex with a whole series of historical episodes. He calculated the year 1383 according to various other calendars, including the Seleucid, the Roman, the Christian, and the Islamic calendars, and related them to various biblical events, such as the deluge, the destructions of the First and Second Temples, and the end of the period of the Prophets.[15] Elisha thus anchored his life and work within a historical timeline, a timeline that goes beyond the narrow focus of Jewish history. Not only was he aware of five different calendrical systems, but he also referred repeatedly to events that are only secondarily relevant to the "Jewish" timeline.

More complex calendrical interest is apparent on the first few pages after the colophon, which are devoted in some detail to an explication of how to calculate leap years and related matters, followed by a list of hagiographic readings for the holidays, as if to link matters of liturgy to the calendar.[16] The section begins with an introductory statement: "I, Elisha ben Abraham Benvenisti, set up the secret of calculating leap years (*sod ha-'ibbur*) in this book, so that I would have it before me arranged as a set table…" We then find a set of tables, and Elisha's explanation that he "arranged the dates of the new moon…. I listed the thirteen cycles…." He did so by choosing the letters of his own name to designate certain years. From this it seems that he probably was familiar with the method used for calculating leap years and used it to build the included set of

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[15] Farhi Codex, p. 3; a similar method was pursued by the anonymous author of the *Libro del conoscimiento de todos los reinos,* a fictional Castilian travelogue of the fourteenth century; for a modern edition with a translation into English, ed. Nancy F. Marino (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999); for the colophon, see p. 2. The relationship between these two books in relation to Elisha's cartographic work will be discussed in my forthcoming study.

[16] Farhi Codex, pp. 6–21. This may have been a wider practice. As Elisheva Carlebach demonstrates, there is an eleventh-century Byzantine-Italian anthology that includes both an *'ibbur* treatise and a liturgical guide for Torah readings and prayers (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, cod. ebr. 299/6); in the middle of the fourteenth century, David Abudarham of Seville likewise linked the calendrical method to the liturgy. *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), 24–25.

calendrical tables. This section concludes with a short text explaining that, during the days of the Temple, the Sages determined the calendar by viewing the moon, which is then followed by a brief summary of the calculation method devised by post-Talmudic scholars.

The calculation of leap years was a matter that concerned only the scholarly elite and was not of particular interest to the wider population, and in this sense it was considered a "secret." Practical information was delivered to broader circles in the form of calendrical tables (*luhot*).[17] During the early Middle Ages the methods for calculating leap years were treated as an esoteric body of knowledge, preferably transmitted only orally. During the twelfth century, when Jewish scholars had gained access to Arabic astronomical texts and the Jewish method had to be updated according to the more recent scientific standards, calendrical knowledge was no longer esoteric, but owing to its complexity it was still limited to those who had scientific training.[18]

In Christian society there was a similar distinction between those who were able to determine the precise date of Easter, which depends on the lunar cycle, and those who used simple calendars for daily life. The date was calculated by various scientific means using a method that was known from the so-called *computus* treatises. The latter can, in many ways, be seen as an equivalent to texts that treat the Jewish secret of calculating leap years. That Elisha was familiar not only with the latter but also with Christian methods of determining the paschal date can be discerned from his work on the Catalan *mappamundi*. There we find the remains of a circular chart that was intended for the calculation of the "golden number," the number that marked any year's position within the Metonic cycle of nineteen years (the cycle contains 235 lunar months that can be synchronized with the solar year). One had to determine the golden number in order to calculate the date of Easter in any particular year.

That Elisha was familiar with the *'ibbur* method sheds some light on his scientific education, for as a painter his professional background would have been limited to artistic training and he would not necessarily have had that sort of knowledge.

[17] For a short overview of calendrical methods in the Middle Ages, see Carlebach, *Palaces of Time*, chap. 1, dealing with the medieval background; for a more detailed discussion on the rabbinic calendar and its development during the Geonic period, see Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, 2nd Century BCE to 10th Century CE* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

[18] For a more detailed description of this process, see Carlebach, *Palaces of Time*, 11–24.

The fact that he did have the knowledge and training needed to arrange a set of calendrical tables, as he did in the Farhi Codex, indicates that he received a scholarly education that went far beyond artistic training. Moreover, since *'ibbur* is related to *computus*, the ability to calculate leap years also enabled Elisha to satisfy his patron's expectation that he would be able to add a device for the determination of the paschal date to the *mappamundi*. Finally, a most telling indication of the wide-ranging interests shared by Elisha and his son is that an astrological treatise by Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1169), *Mishpete ha-mazalot* (Book of the Judgments of the Zodiacal Signs), was found among the books that Jafudà ben Elisha purchased during the 1377 Mosconi auction.[19] Ibn Ezra wrote extensively about *'ibbur* and other calendrical matters,[20] and if Jewish cartographers were more than mere colorists, it is natural that such works would have been counted among the books in their collections.

Apart from the attempts to anchor his work within the framework of different calendars, Elisha dedicated twenty-one pages of his codex to other historical matters.[21] He included a series of texts that likewise demonstrate a clear interest not only in Jewish chronology but in universal history as well. This section consists of several parts and combines elements from different sources. The first part, entitled "History of the Patriarchs" (*Toledot ha-'avot*), establishes a Jewish chronology based partially on the chronographic treatise *Seder 'olam*. It was under the influence of the latter, apparently a tannaitic work, that around the eleventh century Jews began to mark dates in relation to the creation of the world. Other historical inclusions in the Farhi Codex are based on *Seder 'olam zuta*, its focus being the chronology of the Exilarchs in Babylonia and their Davidic ancestry.[22] There is also a list of the prophets based on an interpolation into

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[19] See above, note 14.

[20] For more background on these writings, see Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 19–74.

[21] Farhi Codex, pp. 156–76.

[22] For background on chronographic texts and information about editions of *Seder 'olam* and *Seder 'olam zuta*, see Chaim Milikowsky, "Seder Olam and Jewish Chronography in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 53 (1985), 114–39; Milikowsky, "Seder Olam," in *The Literature of the Sages,* pt. 2, ed. Shmuel Safrai (z"l), et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), 231–37.

Seder ʻolam and later incorporated in the Geonic collection *Halakhot gedolot.*[23] Another of Elisha's historical sections is, in fact, entitled *Seder ʻolam*, but it does not actually fully correspond to the above-mentioned chronographic text and similar works. Rather, it constitutes an abbreviated paraphrase that skips the narrative and midrashic elements and lists only a long series of dated events.

Here we also find a list of Tannaim, Amoraim, and Geonim beginning with Hillel the Elder's move from Babylonia to the Land of Israel (first century BCE). This list is based not only on *Seder ʻolam zuta*, which follows the Babylonian tradition, but also on *Seder tanna'im ve-'amora'im* (List of Mishnaic and Talmudic Sages).[24] Toward its end, Elisha's text leads into the Middle Ages, reflecting the *Letter of Sherira Gaon* (d. 1006) and Abraham ibn Daud's (d. 1180) *Book of Tradition*.[25] All these sources offer accounts of primarily rabbinic history from the Geonic period in Babylonia and the Islamic period in Iberia.

The Farhi Codex also includes a list of the biblical books and the Talmudic tractates, which provide a canonical account of halakhic material but are primarily a reference tool for an overall chronological framework. A similar list within a chronographic framework is found in *Halakhot gedolot.*[26] Finally, Elisha's historical interest went so far as to having had him note the precise birth dates of the sons of Jacob. Similar lists of birth dates are found in the medieval Ashkenazi anthology *Yalqut shimoni*;[27] in *Midrash tadshe*, a midrashic treatise now commonly attributed to Moses

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[23] In the following, only critical editions will be fully referenced; traditional editions are cited according to the traditional chapter counts, *Seder ʻOlam rabbah*, chap. 21; *Halakhot gedolot,* ed. Ezriel Hildesheimer (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1972), 3:375–79.

[24] This list, which originated in a Geonic milieu, appeared in Central Europe first in the *Mahzor Vitry*, *Commentary to Pirqe Avot* 1 and later in the manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud copied in Paris in 1343 (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cod. Hebr. 95), see Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 5–6.

[25] On Ibn Daud's chronographic work, see Katja Vehlow, *Abraham Ibn Daud's Dorot ʻOlam* (*Generations of the Ages*) (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[26] See above, note 24.

[27] Ed. Aaron Heyman, Isaac Shilony, and Dov N. Lerer (Jerusalem: Mossadha-Rav Kook, 1973–99), Ex. no. 162.

the Preacher of Narbonne from the early eleventh century;[28] and in Bahya ben Asher's *Commentary on the Torah*, which appeared in 1299 in Saragossa.[29] While Elisha must have been familiar with one or more of these sources, none of them corresponds fully to his list of dates. This historical section concludes with a version of *Midrash 'eser galuyot* (The Ten Exiles)[30] and a list of fast days based on a section in *Halakhot gedolot*.[31]

Elisha also had an interest in several events in general history that go beyond the point where they intersect with Jewish history. This again links his interests with his cartographic work, where he inserted numerous allusions to non-Jewish history. The sources of his knowledge are not always apparent. He listed several "Chaldean rulers" and, naturally, was aware of the transfer of power from the Babylonians to the Persians, something that he would have known from biblical accounts. He also listed the Persian kings, mentioned Alexander's victory over the Persians, and noted some of Alexander's followers and a selection of Roman emperors.[32]

Following this historical section we find a short text entitled "The Length of the Earth," which offers some information concerning the dimensions of different parts of the known world.[33] These areas are defined according to the biblical tradition, but the interest in their dimensions speaks for itself. Moreover, the fact that this section is part of a much broader historical and chronological framework sheds an interesting light on Elisha's considerations of time and space. In many ways this juxtaposition of chronological data linked to thoughts about the measurement of the earth reflects his cartographic work, which is similarly conceived as a source of information that not only offers cartographic and geographic data but includes many references to history as well.

2. Language

[28] In *Bet ha-midrash*, ed. Adolph Jellinek (Leipzig: C. W. Vollrath, 1852), 3:171.

[29] *Bi'ur 'al ha-torah*, ed. Haim B. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1966), Exod. 1.

[30] *Otsar midrashim*, ed. Judah D. Eisenstein (New York: Biblioteca Midraschica, 1915), 2:149–51.

[31] *Halakhot gedolot*, *hilkhot tish'a be-'av ve-ta'anit*, 1:396–98.

[32] Farhi Codex, p. 179; a similar list appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. Add. Qu. 37, fol. 70, see Adolf Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes Edited from Printed Books and Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 2:196.

[33] *'Orko shel ha-'olam,* Farhi Codex, pp. 178–79.

One of Elisha's main foci is Masoretic scholarship, philology, and language, covering a wide array of subjects. From basic issues about the order of Pentateuch pericopes and biblical books, his focus moved to matters of vocalization and Masorah. First we find a list of pericopes with verse counts, alternative titles, and references to the portions of the tri-annual reading cycle (*sedarim*).[34] This section begins with a list of mnemonic expressions for every pericope; the numerical value of these mnemonic devices is the number of verses in the pericope. This is followed by a more elaborate version of the same idea: each pericope is marked by its original title, the mnemonic expression and a count of the *sedarim*, the verses, the words, and the letters it contains. What is interesting is that these counts are in line with the tri-annual Palestinian reading cycle. During the Middle Ages, *seder* markings were quite common in Castilian Bibles (together with pericope markings), but they were apparently not used anywhere else. The Bible in the Farhi Codex, in fact, has no indications of the *sedarim*. Hence, Elisha's reference to the tri-annual cycle is indicative of a certain theoretical intellectual interest but has no practical, liturgical implications.

Another short section focuses on the importance of the correct order of biblical books and the ways of reading, pronouncing, and vocalizing the text of the Bible. The order does not consider the Pentateuch, but starts with the middle section, Nevi'im (Prophets): Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the twelve Minor Prophets. Apparently, at one time it was customary among the Jews of Iberia to list the books according to their chronology: Isaiah first, followed by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The twelve Minor Prophets came afterward as in the rabbinic tradition, even though some of them predated those three. From there the text goes on to discuss the hagiographic texts—Psalms, Proverbs, and Job—and their order with some explanations.[35]

"Commentary on the Vowels," a short text based on the work of Joseph Kimhi (d. 1170), which discusses "long" and "short" vowels,[36] leads us to the field of

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[34] Farhi Codex, pp. 25–29.

[35] Ibid., pp. 72–73; on the order of books inthe different communities, see Israel Yeivin, *The Masorah to the Bible* [Hebrew], Asufot u-mevo'ot be-lashon 3 (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2003), 37.

[36] *Perush ha-tenu'ot*, Farhi Codex, pp. 16–17.

Masorah. Whereas many Sephardi Bibles contain tables with the differences between Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali, the Farhi Codex also lists differences in readings according to the "Western and the Eastern" usage. These variations have their roots in the diverging Babylonian (Eastern) and Palestinian (Western) reading practices. They concern only the Prophets and the Hagiographs and are not common in all Bible manuscripts.[37] We then find a list of words and names that come in couples or triplets and further lists that are, as Elisha made clear, "included neither in the *masorah gedolah*, nor in the *masorah qetanah*." They are, in fact, based on *Diqduqe ha-te'amim* (Rules of Accentuation) by Aaron ben Asher (first half of the tenth century).[38]

Several more short sections of masoretic interest can be found:[39] sixteen words in which the letters *sin* and *samekh* are interchangeable;[40] sections on "isolated," suspended, and interchangeable letters; "hanging" letters; a list of cases where certain letters are written either enlarged or smaller than usual, arranged according to the alphabet (this arrangement follows the treatment of these letters in the *Masorah parva*);[41] variants of the Severus scroll;[42] valuations (*'arakhim*) in the Bible and the Talmud; various phenomena of word formations (*sod ha-tevot*); a section about a few cases where words should be read even though they do not appear in writing or vice versa (*qere ve-lo ketiv, ketiv ve-lo qere*);[43] a list with word couples that appear with either a *qamats* or a *patah;*[44] and explanations about accents and syllables.[45]

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37 Farhi Codex, pp. 30–33; for some background on both lists, see Yeivin, *Masorah*, 115–20.

38 Ed. Aron Dotan (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1967).

39 Farhi Codex. 108–9; 141–47; 180–81.

40 Several such lists exist, most prominently in *Sefer okhla ve-'okhla* (of which different manuscript versions exist); for these and other lists, see the summary in Lea Himmelfarb, "Rashi's Use of Masoretic Notes in His Commentary to the Bible" [Hebrew], *Shenaton le-heqer ha-miqra ve-ha-mizrah ha-qadum* 15 (2005), notes 17 and 18.

41 Yeivin, *Masorah*, chap. 2.

42 According to the rabbinic tradition, Titus took this scroll, mentioned in various sources, to Rome, and Severus (222–235 CE) later gave it to "the synagogue of Severus"; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 112–14.

43 Yeivin, *Masorah*, 55.

44 Such lists are found in *Sefer okhlah ve-'okhlah*, but they contain different examples; see the version edited by Fernando Díaz Esteban (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1975), nos. 24–25.

Whereas this selection of short sections does not say much about Elisha's specific philological interests, there are several more-substantial texts that offer better clues. For example, there is a commentary on the Masorah, entitled *Ta'ame torah*.[46] Yitzhak Lange and more recently Talya Fishman argue that the earliest commentary on the Masorah was a work by Judah ben Samuel the Pious, the leading figure of Rhineland Pietism at the turn of the thirteenth century.[47] Interest in interpreting the Masorah seems to have been typical of Ashkenaz,[48] and the next scholar to write a commentary was Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg toward the end of the thirteenth century (Maharam, d. 1293). Even though the text in the Farhi Codex bears a different title, it is in fact an exact, albeit abridged version of Meir ben Baruch's work.[49]

This last observation poses some interesting questions about the transfer of Ashkenazi traditions to Iberia. One of Meir ben Baruch's most outstanding students was Asher ben Jehiel (Rosh, d. 1327), who moved to Castile after he had to leave the German Lands and introduced his teacher's scholarship to Iberia. His son, Jacob ben Asher (d. 1343), composed a commentary to the Pentateuch that leans heavily on Meir ben Baruch's commentary and is replete with masoretic material. It is interesting, however, that the Farhi version is much closer to Meir ben Baruch's original than to Jacob ben Asher's text, even though the latter was active in Spain and was more or less Elisha's contemporary. In fact, we do know that Elisha was acquainted with Jacob ben

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[45] Such masoretic lists, of which the most prominent is *Okhlah ve-'okhlah*, circulated in different forms, as separate units not included in the actual Masorah that accompanies the biblical text; for some further remarks, see Yeivin, *Masorah*, 105–9.

[46] Farhi Codex, pp. 110–20.

[47] *Ta'ame masoret ha-miqra le-rabbi yehudah he-hassid*, ed. Yizhak S. Lange (Jerusalem: n.p., 1980), introduction; Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 212–13, believes that the Pietists did not create this and other commentaries of the Masorah but put earlier traditions into writing.

[48] For some notes on the reception of masoretic knowledge among Ashkenazi and northern French scholars, see Lea Himmelfarb, "Masoretic Notes in Rashi's Commentary to the Bible" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Honor of Eliezer Touati*, *'Iyyune miqra u-farshanut* 8 (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ. Press, 2008), 231–44.

[49] *Ta'ame masoret ha-miqra*, in *Teshuvot, pesaqim u-minhagim la-maharam mi-rothenburg,* ed. Yitzhak Z. Kahana (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1957–1977), 1:1–39.

Asher's text, as he used it elsewhere in the Farhi Codex. Nevertheless, for this particular masoretic commentary he chose not to rely on it but to use Meir's text itself, which thus must have been in circulation among Sephardi scholars. Owing to the accuracy of the wording, it must be assumed that Elisha had first-hand access to Meir's version but for some reason decided to include only a selection of the latter's commentaries.

Elisha's interest in matters of language went beyond the Masorah and concerned as well a comparison of vocabularies in different languages. On the margins of his diagrams of the Temple we find a list of expressions from different versions of the Aramaic Targumim, mostly Targum Yerushalmi, with explanations in mishnaic Hebrew and occasionally in Arabic.[50]

Finally, interesting and more significant conclusions especially about Elisha's cultural background can be drawn from a dictionary that we find in the margins of more than 120 pages. An abridged version of David Kimhi's *Sefer ha-shorashim* (Radaq, d. 1235), it also has occasional references to the work of Jonah ibn Janah (eleventh century). However, Elisha diverged from Kimhi in adding some words and skipping others, so his intentions seem to have been different. A key to understanding those intentions is a close examination of the non-Hebrew expressions incorporated in the dictionary. Kimhi's original text explains every root at length and offers a wealth of examples for its use in Hebrew sources. Only occasionally did he add non-Hebrew expressions.[51] Even though Elisha cited Kimhi time and again, he never copied a full entry. Rather, in order to communicate the meaning of a word he tended to rely—much more than Kimhi—on the non-Hebrew equivalents. Hence, his is not a philological scientific dictionary, but rather a handbook for one who needed non-Hebrew expressions to understand the Hebrew.

Only in a very few cases is there some slight relationship between the non-Hebrew expressions in the different versions of the *Sefer ha-shorashim* and the Farhi Codex. In the majority of cases, however, there is no actual correlation between Kimhi and the Farhi Bible, which makes it clear that Elisha used Kimhi in compiling his dictionary, but only as a basic reference. For the explanations, he abridged Kimhi's Hebrew renderings, and for the non-Hebrew expressions he worked out his own.

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[50] Farhi Codex, pp. 183–89.

[51] The language of the non-Hebrew expressions differs from manuscript to manuscript; see the contribution by Judith Kogel in this volume.

Elisha's non-Hebrew words belong to one of the variants of the Occitan language, which fact leads us to the Catalan *mappamundi*, as that work includes a wealth of captions in Occitan. Ramon Pujades i Bataller asks if Elisha himself might have been able to write Occitan in the professional style of a notary or whether he employed a Christian scribe for this work,[52] and examining the Occitan dictionary in the Farhi Codex may offer an answer. Several of the Occitan expressions in the dictionary do have equivalents in the captions of the Catalan *mappamundi*, and here there is almost full correspondence between the two. All in all, the vocabulary of the *mappamundi* captions with their focus on geographic information is very different from the biblical vocabulary of the dictionary, but where they do intersect—as in words such as 'mont' (מונט - mountain), 'flum' (פלום - river), 'gent' (ג׳ינט - people), and the like—they share a common language. Clearly, then, the *mappamundi* and the Farhi Codex use the same language, Occitan, which was the spoken language of Elisha and his family. The compilation of a full dictionary indicates that Elisha had complete command of the Occitan language and a rich vocabulary; moreover, these observations suggest that he may as well have been able to use Occitan in Latin script.

3. Midrash

Elisha also had a great interest in midrash. Quite remarkably, some of the midrashic material he included in his codex is closely linked to masoretic matters and in many ways supplements the philological interests I described above. This applies, first of all, to a midrash entitled *Haserot vi-yterot*, which discusses midrashic explanations about *plene* and defective readings.[53] Not much is known about this text, which was conceived as an explanation of the use and nonuse of *matres lectionis* in the Hebrew language. The *matres lectionis* are vowel-bearing letters, such as *yod* and *vav*, which, even though not part of the grammatical root, are often inserted to indicate a vowel in non-vocalized texts, but under certain circumstances they are left out even in such texts. These issues were, naturally, among the interests of the Masoretes, but the mentioned midrash goes beyond grammatical and lexical matters. It offers exegetical explanations for the missing *matres lectionis*, for example, suggesting that in the story of creation,

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52 Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes*, 491–92.

53 Farhi Codex, pp. 92–108, with an interruption on p. 105.

the word 'God' (אלהים) is spelled without the *vav* because "God judges men with mercy, because would He judge them severely, the world could not exist for more than an hour."[54]

This midrash is extant in several variants. Some twenty manuscript sources have survived, most of which are Genizah fragments of Middle Eastern origin.[55] The majority of these variants differ from one another not only in their wording, but also in the order in which the different explanations appear. For example, a Yemenite recension of several manuscripts lists the different explanations in biblical order; this arrangement seems to be typical only for the Yemenite tradition and was unknown elsewhere.[56]

Even though scholars argue that no one manuscript of this text is identical to any other, the Farhi version has three close relatives. The order in two of the Genizah fragments is almost identical to the order of the Farhi version, and for those explanations that survive in the fragment, the wording is very close. One of the fragments was published by Solomon Wertheimer in 1893,[57] and the other, now in Cambridge, was edited by Bernard Keller in 1966.[58] The latter not only shares the Farhi wording and, with one exception, the order of the explanations, but it is followed by the beginning of the same short text, entitled *Tiqqun soferim*, that we find in the Farhi Codex after the ninety-third paragraph of the midrash. After this section in the codex there are forty more midrashic explanations. *Tiqqun soferim* is a list of eighteen cases in the Bible where the text was changed so that God would not appear in a negative

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54 Ibid., p. 92.

55 Those held in Oxford, for example, were described in the Bodleian catalogue as written in "Syrian character," Adolf Neubauer and A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), vol. 2, nos. 2659, 2856.

56 *Midrash haserot vi-yterot shel ha-torah ha-temimah*, ed. Joseph Tovi (Jerusalem: Makhon Shalom, 1993), introduction.

57 *Bate midrashot* (Jerusalem: Lilienthal, 1893–96), 1:32–45.

58 Cambridge, University Library, T. S. D. 1, 61, fols. 1r–3v; Bernard Keller, "Fragment d'un traité d'exégèse massorétique," *Textus* 5 (1966): 60–84. Keller did not recognize the text as *Midrash haserot vi-yterot* but described it as an independent masoretic treatise, whose author relied on classical midrashim for some of his commentaries. Moreover, he was apparently not aware of either Wertheimer's edition or of *Midrash haserot vi-yterot*, ed. Abraham Marmorstein (London: Luzac & Co., 1917), which published three more manuscript sources.

light.[59] This list was already known in the rabbinic period and exists in different arrangements. The masoretic treatise *Okhlah ve-'okhlah* includes it as well, and the arrangement there follows the canonic order of the Bible.[60] The same applies to the Cambridge fragment[61] and the Farhi Codex. The third close relative is a manuscript from the fifteenth or sixteenth century in Sephardi script, now in Paris,[62] in which the wording is similar and the order of explanations is very close. Moreover, *Tiqqun soferim* is inserted between two sections of the midrash in the same place as in the Farhi Codex. Hence we can perhaps assume that there was a Middle Eastern and Sephardi tradition that combined the *Midrash haserot vi-yterot* with the *Tiqqun soferim* and that Elisha followed that tradition for the Farhi Codex.

We have no information regarding the provenance of these Genizah fragments. When Wertheimer published the first one, it did not belong to any particular collection and did not bear a signature. Hence it cannot be identified with any of the catalogued Genizah fragments; furthermore, none of the latter fits Wertheimer's description, which says nothing about the paleography. We can only assume that it was of Middle Eastern or Sephardi origin. The Cambridge fragment, Keller argued, is datable to any time between 1000 and 1300 and its script is a Middle Eastern cursive.

These observations tell us something about Elisha's interests and his sources. The midrash, which both combines and contrasts masoretic, philological knowledge with traditional midrashic exegesis and gematria, postdates the Masoretes, and a version of it was known to Hai Gaon in the early eleventh century.[63] The relatively large number (eleven) of Genizah fragments demonstrates that the midrash must have been quite popular in the early medieval Middle East. There are also the four Yemenite and three Sephardi manuscripts I mentioned above, among which is the relative of the Farhi version. Several Sephardi scholars were familiar with the midrash, including Moses the

[59] For some background on *Tiqqun soferim*, see Yeivin, *Masorah*, 49; see also earlier Carmel McCarthy, *The* Tiqqune sopherim *and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (Basel: Universitätsverlag, 1981).

[60] This is the case in Zalman Frensdorff's edition (Hannover: Hahn'sche Hofbuchhandlung, 1864), 158.

[61] Keller, "Fragment," 80–83.

[62] Bibliothèque nationale de France, Hébreu 769.

[63] Wertheimer, *Bate Midrashot*, introduction.

Preacher, Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1169), Maimonides (d. 1204), and Bahya ben Asher.[64] Only two of the surviving manuscript sources are of Ashkenazi origin, somewhat contradicting the assumption of nineteenth-century scholars that the midrash was particularly popular among Ashkenazi scholars, a conclusion drawn from the fact that Simhah of Vitry (eleventh century), Moses of Coucy (early thirteenth century), and Asher ben Jehiel also knew of it.[65] All in all, the version of this midrash in the Farhi Codex seems to be of either Middle Eastern or Sephardi origin.[66]

Apart from this focus on midrashim that can be associated with the Masorah, Elisha's midrashic concerns were quite eclectic. The first sign of his interest in biblical narrative is a depiction of Jericho as a maze and a display of the tents of Jacob's four wives, followed by a list of wives of some biblical men whose names are not mentioned in the Bible.[67] More explicit midrashic interest is apparent from a text entitled *Hiddushe torah* of unknown authorship.[68] Its title, "*novellae,*" and its selected use of sources might indicate that it was thought of as a homiletical guide or handbook. We know that Elisha took an interest in that sort of books from the fact that one of the volumes he bought from Mosconi's library was entitled *Laquotot* (Collection) and might very well have been a haggadic compendium. These interests fit well with the nature of the Farhi Bible itself, which Elisha considered a study text rather than a liturgical book. The biblical books are not arranged according to the reading cycles of *haftarot*, but rather

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64 Ibid. One of the three Sephardi sources is an appendix to a Bible that was sold in 1280 in Toledo, Madrid, Biblioteca de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, MS BH 1, described recently in *Biblias de Sefarad – Bibles of Sepharad,* ed. Esperanza Alfonso, et al. (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2012), 186–89.

65 Leopold Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt: Ein Beitrag zur Alterthumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur –und Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: Asher, 1832), 284; Isaac Benjacob, *The Treasure of Books* [Hebrew] (Vilna: Re'em, 1880), 300, note 584.

66 On the margins of pp. 166–76 there are two other small midrashic works related to masoretic matters, *Alfa beta rabbati* (Large Letters) and *Alfa beta zeira* (Small Letters). They list the large and small letters similarly to the better-known *Alfa beta de-rabbi akiva*, but the midrashic explanations are different.

67 Farhi Codex, pp. 22–24.

68 Ibid., 121–39.

follow the traditional canonical order of the books.[69] The exegetical text as it appears there has no parallel in the rabbinic literature of the time. We might speculate that it constituted a collection of exegetical references that had belonged to Elisha's rabbinical ancestors. Occasional references can be found to Rashi, Asher ben Jehiel, and Bahya ben Asher. One of the most dominant sources appears to be Jacob ben Asher's *Commentary on the Torah,* which the text under discussion refers to frequently, often paraphrasing it but hardly ever citing it directly. Moreover, parts of this commentary appear together with the Masorah on the margins of the Farhi Bible.

Most striking are some links to the introduction to Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Torah*.[70] As is well known, Ibn Ezra pursued a rationalist, mostly philologically oriented exegetical approach to the Bible. In his introduction he laid out five different methods of biblical commentary, four of which he dismissed critically as follows: the first was pursued by the Geonim and led them occasionally to the truth; the second, which is erroneous, was followed by the Karaites; the third, "the path of darkness and black gloom," is the method of the Christian allegorists; the fourth method is *derash*; and the fifth, his own method, is that of grammatical, philological interpretation. Of the methods that Ibn Ezra criticized, it was the midrashic approach that he elaborated on using several examples. He noted that as it was pursued by the Sages, there is no need to repeat it. Whereas he was willing to accept the authority of the classical midrash as part of the Talmudic tradition, he was fiercely critical of contemporary midrashic endeavor. He attached a short list of what he considered the most typical examples of this approach, for which he could not muster much enthusiasm. The author of *Hiddushe torah*, perhaps Elisha himself (see below), borrowed freely from this series of "negative" exegetical examples, often using the same wording; this was especially true for the first pericope of the Bible (*bereshit*).

The appearance of exactly these examples seems to indicate that the author of this short treatise made some sort of exegetical statement and undertook an active, somewhat polemical conversation with Ibn Ezra's criticism. This author, by the way,

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[69] There are marginal notes referring to the *haftarot* throughout the biblical part of the codex.

[70] *Perush ha-torah le-rabbenu abraham ibn ezra*, ed. Asher Weiser (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 2005), *Haqdamah*, 1–10; for an English version of Ibn Ezra's introduction, see *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*, ed. Irene Lancaster (London: Routledge, 2007), 143–75.

could not have been much older than Elisha himself, as Jacob ben Asher's commentary, which serves as another dominant source, was written some time during the first half of the fourteenth century. Jacob ben Asher died in 1343 and hence belonged roughly to Elisha's father's generation.

The collection also includes a very short midrashic text of less than two pages, which discusses the stones of the high priest's breastplate (*Ta'ame avne hoshen ve-'efod*).[71] It offers a midrashic explanation for the links made in Jewish tradition between the names of the stones and the names of the tribes, which is actually an abridged paraphrase of a similar section in Bahya ben Asher's commentary.[72] Hence it follows the methodological line taken in the *Hiddushe torah* section, namely the midrashic approach as it was pursued by late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Sephardi commentators with their declared interest in Ashkenazi and northern French scholarship. A depiction of the breastplate appears some forty pages later as part of a series of illustrations related to the Temple (fig. 1). In accordance with another tradition, also included in Bahya ben Asher's commentary, it is made up of twelve compartments inscribed with the names of the tribes and additional letters—altogether seventy-two; they equate, as the commentary explains, to the seventy-two-lettered name of God.[73]

A similar approach was also chosen in the section about the way the tribes were arranged in the desert (*Siddur ha-shevatim*).[74] It starts out with a paragraph about the letters written on the four standards: on the first there is an expression formed by a combination of the first letter of each patriarch's name: *alef* for Abraham, *yod* for Isaac, and *yod* for Jacob; the second standard bears the second letters of each patriarch's name: *bet*, *tsade*, *ayin*, and so on. This is based on *Midrash aggadah*, a rather late midrashic piece, perhaps from the thirteenth century, which borrows from Moses the Preacher's work, Rashi's commentary, and from the likewise late midrashic compilation

[71] Farhi Codex, pp. 139–40.

[72] *Bi'ur 'al ha-torah*, Exod. 28; for some background on Jewish and Christian approaches to the stones, see Samuel S. Kottek, "Precious Stones in Jewish and Christian Medieval Literature: Natural and/or Occult Sciences?," *Korot* 16 (2002): 89–110.

[73] For details, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "The Role of Hebrew Letters in Making the Divine Visible," in *Sign and Design,* ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Brigitte Bedos-Rezak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, forthcoming).

[74] Farhi Codex, pp. 140–41.

Leqah tov.[75] The second section of *Siddur ha-shevatim*, which is also based on *Midrash aggadah*, links the names of the tribes to appropriate biblical verses.[76] The third paragraph quotes *Leqah tov* and explains the order of the tribes' names as they appeared on the two stones of the ephod: according to the midrash, they were arranged in the order of the births of Jacob's sons, but in two rows, each of which consisted of twenty-five letters.[77] Elisha offered a graphic rendering in the form of two columns decoratively framed with filigree (fig. 2): the names Judah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Dan, and Naphtali appear to the right and do form a total of twenty-five letters; in the left row, however, there is an extra letter in the names Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph, and Benjamin. The two illustrations and the speculations concerning the letters that stand behind them indicate that Elisha was quite familiar with the genre of medieval midrash collections of the sort that were so fiercely criticized by Ibn Ezra.

Further matters of biblical exegesis appear in a lengthy section consisting of various "notes" and "explanations" (*te'amim* and *hiddushim*).[78] Several subjects turn up, among which the Tabernacle and Temple figure prominently. This section is somewhat similar in structure to the *Hiddushe torah* discussed above, another somewhat eclectic collection of rather associative exegetical sayings in no apparent order. It begins with some thoughts about Abraham, but soon jumps to the book of Esther and then back to the Pentateuch. The text draws from a whole range of sources that must have been available to its author in one way or another: classical midrashic sources such as the Babylonian Talmud, *Vayyiqra rabbah*, and *Midrash tanhuma*; later midrashic works, such as the later part of *Shemot rabbah* and *Leqah tov*; Sephardi exegeses, such as *Sefer abudarham*; and Ashkenazi sources, such as commentaries attributed to Asher ben Jehiel (*Hadar zeqenim*) and the Pentateuch commentary by Haim Paltiel, a disciple of Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg.

The exegetical section also includes a pictorial rendering of a prophetic vision described in the fourth chapter of the book of Zechariah (fig. 3). On the next page, there is an explanation of the image opening as follows: "Since this book is precious in my

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75 *Midrash aggadah, bamidbar* 2:2; for background, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 310–11.

76 *Midrash aggadah,* ibid.; see also Bahya ben Asher's *Bi'ur 'al ha-torah*, Exod. 1.

77 *Leqah tov*, *tetsaveh* 28:10.

78 Farhi Codex, pp. 148–53.

eyes, I painted the form of the lamp which the Prophet Zechariah saw. In order for the spectator to fully understand it, I shall offer here an explanation…" This explanation links Zechariah's vision with the rebuilding of the Temple and is, of course, also linked to the Temple diagram at the end of the collection.[79] The explanation offered by Elisha is a variant of Ibn Ezra's commentary on the relevant chapters in Zechariah, which was also known to David Kimhi and Rashi.[80]

All the parts of the Temple diagram (figs. 4–6) contain explanatory captions within the painted work based on a variety of sources. These citations fit well with the kind of books that underlie the exegetical elements in the Farhi collection. A few of these citations originated in the Mishnah and the Talmud, and the whole series of diagrams is, in fact, followed by two passages from the Mishnah that describe the Temple and its measurements in detail.[81] Several citations are based on Maimonides' discussions of the Temple, its parts, and its vessels in *Mishneh torah* and his Mishnah commentary. Other sources were Bible commentaries from the French school, such as Rashi, his student and grandson Samuel ben Meir, and Ezekiah ben Manoah, a thirteenth-century northern French scholar about whom we know very little.[82] Bahya ben Asher's commentary is also cited, as are *Bamidbar rabbah*, *Midrash aggadah*, *Yalqut shimoni*, and *Leqah tov*. The fact that there is some correspondence between these latter sources and those that nourished much of the exegetical material in the Farhi Codex suggests that Elisha himself may very well have been responsible not only for including these elements in the visual exegesis of his diagrams, but also for putting together the compilations included in the codex.[83]

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[79] Ibid., 182–87.

[80] *Perush ha-torah le-rabbenu abraham ibn ezra*, Zech. 4:1–3; Rashi, Zech. 4:1–3; David Kimhi, Zech. 4:1–3.

[81] Farhi Codex, pp. 188–92.

[82] For some background, see Sara Japhet, "The Hizquni Commentary to the Pentateuch: Its Nature and Its Goals" [Hebrew], in *Jubilee Volume for R. Mordechai Breuer*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992): 1: 91–111; repr. in Sara Japhet, *Collected Studies in Biblical Exegesis* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2008): 364–82.

[83] For a more detailed discussion of the diagrams as an integral component of the iconographic program of the Codex, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Jüdische Wallfahrt im Mittelalter und die

4. Gematria

Finally, one last element can be discerned as one of Elisha's scholarly foci: gematria. In the colophon to the Farhi Codex, Elisha, noting that 5143 was the year in which he completed his project, linked the number 143 by way of gematria to 2 Kings 3:15: "but now bring me a minstrel" (143 being the numerical value of the letters *mem-nun-gimel-nun* for "minstrel" – *menagen*). At the end of the colophon he equated the numerical value of his Hebrew name Elisha – 421 – to that of the expression: *zeh hu helqi be-khol 'amali* ("this is my reward [lit: my part] for my work"). His Catalan name Cresques, as written in Hebrew, equates to the numerical value of 1000, and that of its *atbash* is 15, which stands for YH, who helped Elisha in his endeavors. He comes back to this interest in gematria toward the end of the collection with a list of different words explained by means of numerology.[84]

In conclusion, the production of the Farhi Codex occupied Elisha ben Abraham Benvenisti Cresques for much of his later adult life. He was forty-one years old when he began the project in 1366 and fifty-eight when he completed it in 1383, four years before he died. He might have planned the codex as a study Bible, but over the years he decided to turn it into a book that would contain the cultural heritage he wanted to pass on to his descendants. We know that Elisha must have owned books; as I noted earlier, he purchased several that had belonged to Lleó Mosconi's collection. However, it is unlikely that he owned copies of all of the books that he included in the Farhi Codex and those that he borrowed from for the short exegetical collections. Avriel Bar-Levav demonstrated recently that medieval Jewish scholars often owned books, but that their knowledge was also largely based on memorized texts. Scholars used to exchange books and to memorize them before they returned them.[85] The act of memorization was,

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Darstellung des Heiligen Landes im Farhi Codex" in *Par.chemin. Wege durch das illuminierte Buch*, ed. Tina Bawden and Karin Gludowatz (forthcoming).

[84] Farhi Codex, pp. 190–92.

[85] Avriel Bar-Levav, "The Archaeology of Hidden Libraries in Medieval and Modern Jewish Culture" [Hebrew], in *Ut videant et contingent: Essays on Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in*

in fact, an act of taking possession of a book. This may well have been Elisha's practice with regard to some of the texts that we catch glimpses of in his miscellany in one way or another.

These texts, Elisha's private bookcase so to speak, open quite a wide window onto his interests. The approach to historical data anchored in non-Jewish history tells us something about his awareness of non-Jewish chronology. His full command of the Occitan language and the observation that in all likelihood he was able to use this language not only in Hebrew transcription but also in professional Latin script is likewise indicative of his level of acculturation to his non-Jewish milieu. This facility also suggests a degree of cultural flexibility that enabled him to develop a professional career that was not aimed solely at providing for the spiritual needs of the Jewish community, but was also—at least in economic terms—designed to satisfy the scientific interests of the court. Knowledge of non-Jewish sources is clearly apparent in the Catalan *mappamundi*, which makes abundant reference to a variety of sources, including Honorius Augustodunensis' *Imago mundi* and Marco Polo's *Il millione*.[86] Moreover, the *mappamundi* displays rich historical data with occasional echoes in the chronological framework created in the Farhi colophon.

At first sight the Farhi collection seems not to be in any particular thematic order. A closer look, however, reveals that Elisha did arrange the sections in thematic clusters; often though, a particular issue seems to have created an association with other matters, inducing him to jump in a different direction only to return later to some subject that had received attention earlier. For example, the texts of calendrical interest are part of such a thematic cluster; in fact, they form the most coherent of these blocks. From there Elisha turned to issues of biblical narration (Jericho and the depiction of the tents), a point that apparently led him to think of the order of biblical books and to the large cluster of masoretic themes. The latter is not finished at that point, and after several departures Elisha returned to the Masorah later on. This kind of associative clustering is typical of the entire collection.

Honour of Ora Limor, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Iris Shagrir (Ra'anana: The Open Univ. of Israel, 2011), 306–8.

[86] On sources used for the Catalan *mappamundi*, see the literature on the map, especially recently, Edson, *World Map*, 79–89.

Despite this somewhat associative arrangement, there are some clear scholarly foci that crystallize from this analysis of the treatises. Elisha's masoretic knowledge was rich, and the relevant sections reflect an interest that went beyond the traditional training of a *masran*, an individual who was trained to copy the Masorah (often not the same person who wrote the main text). Elisha knew of the works of Aaron ben Asher, David Kimhi, and Ibn Janah, and he was aware not only of the differences between Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali, but also of those between Babylonian and Palestinian reading practices. Moreover, his interests in these matters went even further into more obscure realms, such as the midrashic explanations of *plene* and defective reading.

From here one might conclude that Elisha had enjoyed the traditional education of a typical member of the Sephardi elite with its leanings toward the Jewish-Islamic symbiosis of the earlier Middle Ages and rationalist scholarship, as it was rooted in the Middle East. Several further characteristics of his "library" point to this conclusion. He had a relatively broad knowledge of the calendar and related sciences, as they had been disseminated among Sephardi intellectuals by Ibn Ezra. He developed the tradition of the typical Sephardi Temple diagram, which reflected Maimonides' views on the messianic Temple. These views had their roots in a rational approach to the messianic scenario, and as Elisha was familiar with Maimonides' description of the Temple, he may also have been aware of the broader context of rationalist messianism.[87]

Finally, two of the books that were bought by Elisha and Jafudà at the auction of Mosconi's collection shed further light on their interests in the Maimonidean tradition of rationalist scholarship: Elisha bought *Adne kesef*, a commentary of "hidden" elements in the Hagiographs by Joseph ben Kaspi, an early-fourteenth-century southern French rationalist and a defender of philosophy; and Jafudà took an interest in Abraham ibn Hisdai's *Ben ha-melekh ve-ha-nazir* (twelfth century), a Hebrew revision of the story of Buddha, which includes a large number of ethical elements.

As noted Elisha and Jafudà signed as witnesses when Mosconi's books were sold. This indicates that they were fairly familiar with the collection, probably before it

[87] For background on rationalist messianism, typical of Sephardi culture, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "'To the Utmost of Human Capacity': Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991): 221–56; Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ. Press, 1997), chap. 3

was put at auction. Apart from the mentioned books this collection also comprised of an entire corpus of astronomical treatises, several of which also included chapters of geographic interest. Such treatises, as Abraham bar Hiyya's (d. d. 1145) *Tsurat ha'arets* (The Shape of the Earth), for example, and others of Islamic origin, but translated into Hebrew, are all rooted in some way or the other in Claudius Ptolemy's *Almagest*, two copies of which –in Hebrew translation– were also owned by Mosconi. The *Almagest* composed in the second century CE, was one of the corner stones of medieval Islamic astronomy. Since the thirteenth century it was also known to western scientists. A detailed discussion of this corpus and the ways it must have effected Elisha's cartographic work goes beyond the framework of this paper, and will appear elsewhere.[88] The presence of this corpus within Elisha's neighborhood certainly sheds additional light on his scholarly interests under discussion here.

Finally, the thirty carpet pages, with their great debt to contemporary Islamic art, created a suitable framework for these aspects of Elisha's cultural background. As I have shown elsewhere, they reflect the current trends of Nasrid or Maghrebi book art with a formal repertoire that has numerous parallels in fourteenth-century Islamic manuscripts and other artistic media. Hence they testify to an ongoing dialogue with contemporaneous Islamic culture.[89] It is also remarkable that, despite the fact that Elisha was clearly interested in figural miniatures (judging from the rich iconographic repertoire of the *mappamundi,* one can certainly assume that he would have had the skills to create pictorial narratives), he makes a clear point in sticking to the non-figural mode of decoration that by the time he completed the Farhi Codex had been characteristic of Sephardi Bibles for 150 years.

As much as Elisha belongs to the traditional culture of the Sephardi elite, he seems to have had an even broader background and took an interest in the works of those who were opposed to rationalist philosophy or favored the midrashic revival. The aforementioned "conversation" with Ibn Ezra regarding matters of biblical exegesis speaks for itself. He knew Ibn Ezra, was aware of the different methodological options, and made his choice. Dominant sources are relatively late midrashim, such as *Leqah Tov*, which he relied on time and again. Rashi's and Bahya ben Asher's works were

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[88] Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Elisha Cresques ben Abraham: Scribe, Illuminator and Mapmaker in Fourteenth-Century Mallorca*, chapter 2 (in preparation).

[89] Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art*, 150–54.

known to him, as was the commentary of Jacob ben Asher. Even more intriguing is his use of Meir ben Baruch's commentary on the Masorah, which leads us even deeper into Ashkenazi scholarship than what Asher ben Jehiel and his sons conveyed to Iberia. In other words, Elisha must have known Meir's text first hand.

This material belongs to a different sort of intellectual background. It is typical for scholars who were close to the midrashic revival school that flourished in Iberia from the second half of the thirteenth century. Elsewhere I argue that during the thirteenth century and at the beginning of the fourteenth, the art of illumination seems to have echoed the different interests of Sephardi culture, wherein the patrons and artists of Bibles tended rather to the more abstract and aniconic modes of decoration of the Islamic tradition. The fact that all these Bibles postdate the Christian reconquest further underscores the cultural preferences of these patrons. In contrast to these patrons and their attachment to Islamic culture, those who were involved in the production of illuminated haggadot adapted Christian models and creatively coped with rich pictorial narratives.[90] The coexistence of these two different artistic languages seems to have been a remote echo of the Maimonidean controversy that shook Sephardi culture between the 1230s and the early fourteenth century. Elisha's artistic choices, together with large parts of his bookcase, speak very clearly of his strong ties to the Jewish-Islamic symbiosis and its associated cultural values. But the 1370s were no longer a time of fierce controversy, and finding works by Joseph ben Kaspi on the same bookshelf with midrashic texts like *Leqah tov* was no longer necessarily a contradiction.[91]

Throughout his life Elisha must have been well aware of the ever-deteriorating situation of Sephardi Jews among Christians, especially after the crisis of the plague year (1348–1349). These experiences may have led him to create a particular legacy for his descendants. He wanted them to possess a Bible—not just a Bible, but a book with intense aesthetic value. He added an entire corpus of knowledge that reflected his traditional Sephardi background, some of his cartographic and scientific interests, and

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[90] Ibid., chap. 6.

[91] See, for example, the recent remarks by Maud Kozodoy summarizing this situation concisely, "No Perpetual Enemies: Maimonideanism at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. James T. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 151. As Kozodoy shows, the controversy revived later on, during the fifteenth century.

other aspects of scholarship that fit less well into the image of an erudite rationalist with some scientific background. He also seems to have been concerned about his children's and grandchildren's Hebrew skills and added the dictionary, not a learned Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary for the scholar to come to grips with Hebrew roots, but rather a Hebrew-Occitan dictionary, which may have been conceived as an aid for his descendants in reading the Bible. Perhaps he feared that his offspring would no longer want to or be able to memorize their own "library," hence the necessity of putting it into writing in order to pass it on to future generations. Only four years after Elisha's passing, one of the severest waves of persecutions shook the Sephardi communities (1391) and his entire family was baptized. Clearly, then, Elisha's forebodings were more than justified, since it is doubtful that this beautiful book was ever actually used in the education of his descendants. Not only were they all baptized; after the riots the family's economic situation deteriorated and Elisha's widow, Settadar, who had taken the Christian name Anna, gave away one Bible as collateral and sold another, decorated with the "Temple of Solomon," to the convert Bernat de Mon Ros.[92]

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Figures

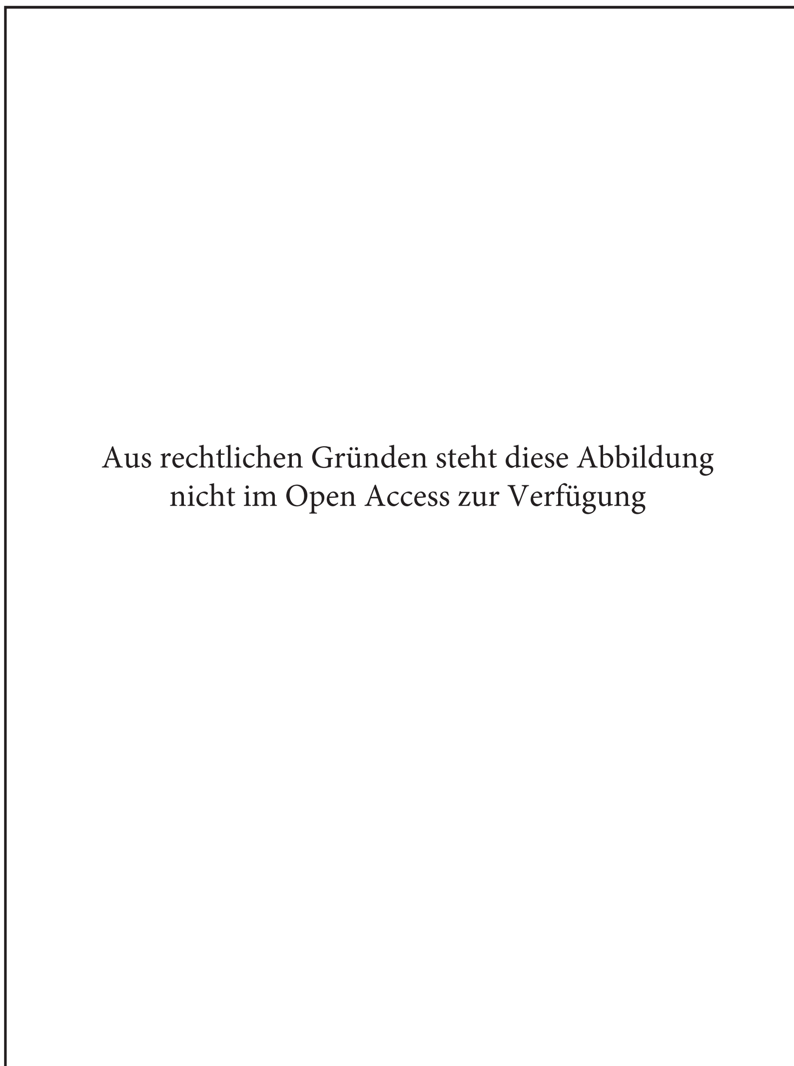

Figure 1: Farhi Codex, p. 184.

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Figure 2: Farhi Codex, Table with tribes.

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Figure 3: Farhi Codex, p. 150.

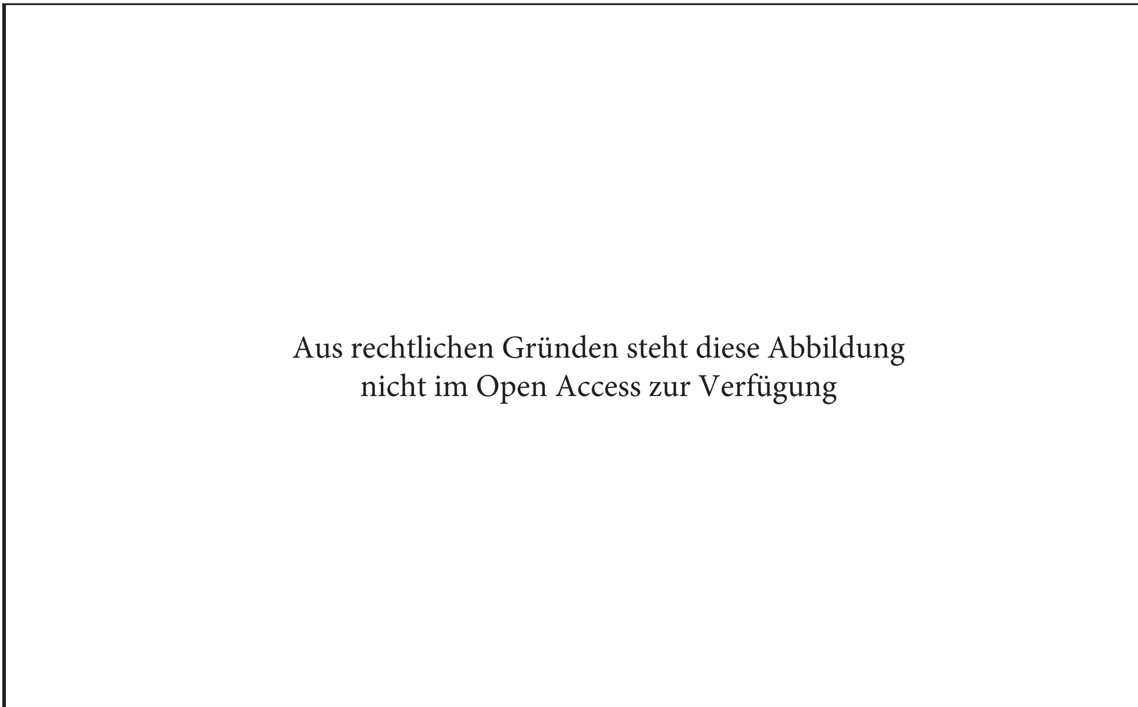

Figure 4: Farhi Codex, p. 182–83.

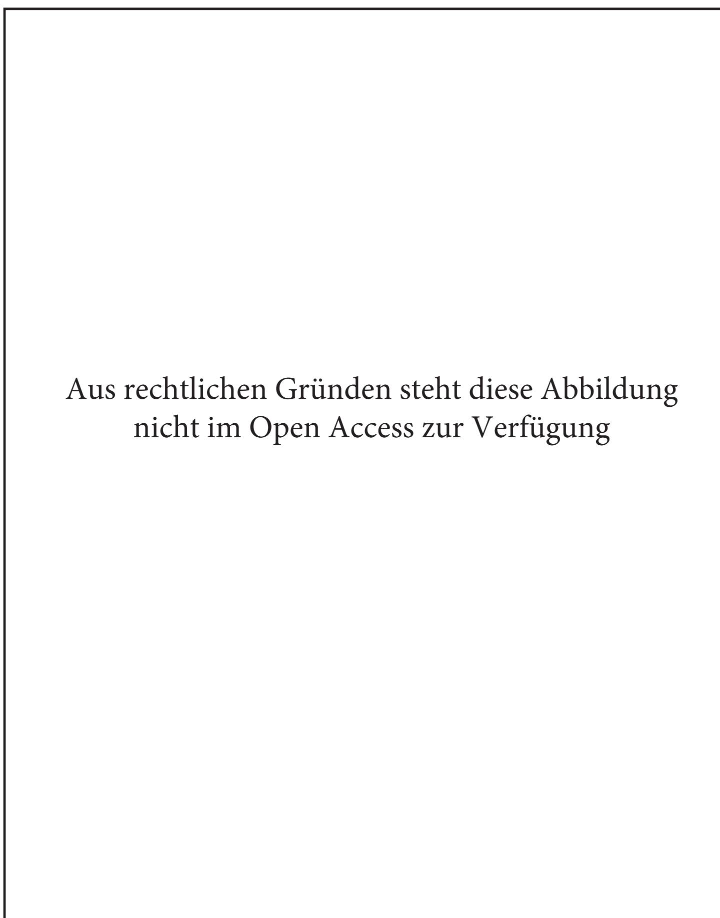

Figure 5: Farhi Codex, p. 186–87.

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Figure 6: Farhi Codex, p. 59.