

THE JEWISH BOOKBINDERS OF GIRONA*

Much scholarship has focused on fragments of Hebrew manuscripts dating from the 13th-15th century which were recently found in Girona bookbindings (and across Catalonia and Spain).¹ The question of this study is: Were the bookbinders Jews or Christians? In a recent discussion of the issue, Mauro Perani stated: «It would be interesting to inquire more deeply into this...».² The present article attempts to respond to this call.

A prevalent scholarly opinion maintains that these manuscripts were placed in the bin-

dings by gentile (or Jewish apostate) bookbinders and were seized from the Jewish community following persecutions or the final exile in 1492. For example, Simcha Emanuel wrote that «a relatively small amount of fragments were revealed in Spanish and Portuguese archives, and they were certainly obtained by the notaries after the expulsion».³ These words were written before Perani's first significant publication of the Hebrew fragments from the Historical Archive of Girona beginning in the late 1990s.⁴ Emanuel now recognizes medieval Jewish acquiescence to

* This article is based upon a section of my Hebrew Master's thesis: *The Commentary of a Student of Rashba to Chapter "Keitzad Mevarkhin" of Tractate Berakhot from a Girona Archive*, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 2014, completed under the supervision of Dr. Aaron Ahrend, whom I thank for numerous contributions. I am especially grateful to Joan Ferrer Godoy, Director of the Arxiu Històric de Girona, and Dani Bosch Pons, for invaluable assistance. I thank Dr. Judah Galinsky and Dr. Sara Offenberg for references and comments, Tamar Kagan for attentive editing, and lastly, the editor, for providing important references, over and beyond laying the scholarly groundwork which made the study possible.

¹ General studies of Hebrew Girona manuscripts and their publication have been spearheaded by Mauro Perani and Esperanca Valls-Pujol. See most recently and comprehensively: M. PERANI, *The "Gerona Genizah": An Overview and a Rediscovered Ketubah of 1377**, «Hispania Judaica Bulletin» 7 (2010), pp. 137-173, with an important Appendix by Valls-Pujol, now eclipsed by her doctorate which appeared just as this article was going to press. The journal *Materia Giudaica* has served as a forum for Girona manuscript studies of Ezra Chwat, Pinchas Roth, and Idan Perez (among others). See now, probably the most significant discovery from Girona regarding Rabbinic literature, by my teacher: A. AHREND, *A Spanish Recension of Rashi's Commen-*

tary to Tractate Berakhot in a Fragment from a Girona Historical Archive Binding, «Materia Giudaica» XIX (2014), pp. 481-500, in-depth analysis of fragments which I joined from two bindings. On Hebrew manuscripts in Spanish bindings from other regions, see for example: J. CASTAÑO, *A Fifteenth Century Letter Addressed to the Dayyanim of Zaragoza*, in W.V. BEKKUM & N. KATSUMATA (eds. *Giving Diamond*), Leiden 2011, pp. 293-306.

² PERANI, *The "Gerona Genizah"*, cit., p. 144.

³ S. EMANUEL, «גניזת אירופה» ותרומתה למדעי היהדות, «גניזת אירופה» [The "European Genizah" and its Contribution to Jewish Studies], «מדעי היהדות» 35 (1995), p. 9, note 11. Traditional scholars follow this approach: A. HOROWITZ, קטע גניזה מפירוש הרא"ה למסכת ברכות [A Geniza Fragment of the Commentary of R. Aaron HaLevy to Tractate Berakhot], «מקבציאל» 38 (2012), pp. 9-12; E. PALEY, פירוש תלמיד הרשב"א לר"ף מסכת [A Commentary to Alfasi, Tractate Rosh HaShanna by a Disciple of Rashba], «חצי גבורים» 8 (2015), p. 56. Many additional scholars have informed me verbally that they assume this position to be historically true.

⁴ PERANI, *A New 'Genizah' for the New Century: Hebrew Manuscript Fragments in the European Archives – The New Findings of Girona* in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the 20th Century in Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress, Toledo 1998, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1999, Vol. I: Biblical, Rabbinical, and Medieval Studies*, Eds. J. Targarona Borrás

having rabbinic manuscripts bound.⁵ The quantity has grown but many more Hebrew fragments remain in bindings. The “relatively small amount” may never reach the many thousands of fragments recovered from Italian, and Central European bookbindings, but they are already numbered in the hundreds and it is no longer possible to claim that these fragments reached the notaries after the expulsion. The phenomenon of binding is documented in Girona as early as 1330 and ended shortly after the expulsion. Tables compiled by Esperança Valls Pujol and the *Arxiu Històric de Girona* do not indicate any correlation whatsoever between the dates of the bindings, the expulsion, the tragedies of 1391, or any other historical event.⁶ If so, what led many scholars to conclude with absolute certainty that the manuscripts were confiscated by Christians, as Emanuel asked: «How did hundreds and thousands of Hebrew manuscripts wind up in the hands of Christian bookbinders?» However, the question which must be asked first is: «Were Catalonian bookbinders Jewish or Christian?». This question has already been addressed by other scholars.

According to Ramon Alberch i Fugueras, the Jews of Girona themselves “recycled” their own worn out Hebrew manuscripts into the bindings they produced, in addition to utilizing paper from Christian sources.⁷ Alberch notes that during the period of their activity during the 15th century, two Jews bound most of the bindings in Girona:⁸ Abraham Vives bound the two most extravagant and famous books found in the Municipal Archive of Girona, known as “the Green Book” and “the Red Book”.⁹ According to Alberch, since Jews are documented to have not only engaged in bookbinding in the 15th century, but to have excelled in it, and we have no evi-

dence of any sort that Christians engaged in paper bookbinding at any time in medieval Girona, we can assume that Jews also bound books in the 14th century and that they themselves utilized their own Hebrew manuscripts.

Perani reports this opinion hesitantly, stating that stronger proofs are required because Jewish law prohibits the use of sacred writings, even of non-Biblical texts. These writings require *geniza*, that is, they must be disposed of respectfully, by burial or placed in long-term storage. If Jews did indeed bind the manuscripts, this would be an example of protracted negligence in observance of the laws of proper disposal of sacred writings over the course of several generations. Given that we are discussing the holy community of Girona, a great novelty is being proposed. The source for the obligation to place sacred writings in *geniza* is a Mishnah of Tractate Sabbath (16,1): «All sacred writings may be saved from a fire (on the Sabbath), whether they are read from [in communal service, such as books of the Pentateuch and prophets] or whether they are not read from [such as Hagiographia]. No matter which language they are written in, they require *geniza*». Before we assume that Jews of Girona supported themselves over a long period of time from a trade which is prohibited according to Jewish law, we need to examine the historical development of that law. What was the opinion of the great Sages of Catalonia regarding cutting, gluing, and binding fragments of their rabbinic writings into bindings? Towards the end of this article the rabbinic sources themselves will be examined, but first let us focus on external evidence which supports the hypothesis of Alberch, that the bookbinders of Girona were Jewish.

It has been established beyond doubt that

and A. Sáenz-Badillos, pp. 621-626. Id., *Un nuovo importante giacimento nella ‘Genizah europea’: gli archivi di Girona*, «Materia Giudaica» 5 (1999), pp. 45-49.

⁵ EMANUEL, מגניזת אירופה [Hidden Treasures from Europe, Vol. 1], Jerusalem 2015, pp. 20-21. This volume appeared after the completion and submission of this article. The introduction updates and expands upon his 1995 article but does not return to discuss Girona or Spanish bookbinding fragments.

⁶ PERANI, *Gerona Geniza*, cit., p. 139.

⁷ R. ALBERCH I FUGUERAS, *Guía de la judería de Girona*, Girona 2003, p. 116, cited by Perani.

⁸ According to Alberch, a Jew named Isaac Maymo bound most of the books between 1435 and 1449, and Abraham Vives bound most of the books between 1472 and 1488. They were listed on many documents as members of the community, see JAUME RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, Girona 2012, p. 352, 357.

⁹ *Ibid.* On the books themselves see: C. GUILLE-
RÉ, *Llibre Verd de la ciutat de Girona (1144-1533)*,

Jews did bind books in Girona during the 14th and 15th centuries. Jews of Catalonia excelled at this trade,¹⁰ as did the Jews of neighboring Majorca.¹¹ However, as stated above, there is no evidence whatsoever that Christians bound books in the region. Moreover, at the beginning of the 14th century, paper had not yet become a commonly implemented writing material in Christian Europe.¹² Parchment was still dominant. Jews were the first to supply proper paper to Christian European kingdoms and their scribes. In the 12th century, Pedro, head of the French Cluny monastery, ridiculed the new paper:

In the heavens, God reads the Talmud. So say the Jews, but what type of book is it? It looks like the types of books we read every day... but these are made of worn-out rags or worse, written with ink that smells like damp feathers or marsh reeds.¹³

The new paper was associated with the other-worlds of the Muslims and Jews. Thus, the Church resisted replacing the traditional parchment with paper. Jewish merchants supplied paper to the crown, priests, scribes, and notaries. Jews sold the paper bound in quires and when these were completed, they bound them into proper books.¹⁴

In the Archive of the Diocesa in Girona, Hebrew manuscripts were found in the bindings

of Christian sacred books. As Joseph Shatzmiller has demonstrated, Jewish bookbinders did not even refrain from binding Christian sacred books.¹⁵ In 1415, Antipope Benedict the Thirteenth forbade Jews from binding Christian books which mention the names of Jesus or his mother inside the book.¹⁶ Many books found in the Archive of the Diocesa fall into this category, as opposed to the secular notary books of the Historical and Municipal Archives of Girona.

Notably, of the three Girona archives, only the Arxiu Diocesa holds cut Hebrew biblical manuscripts written on parchment used as bindings (as opposed to individual pieces of paper glued together into cardboard). There is no evidence that Jews used their own sacred Biblical manuscripts written on parchment as material for bindings. We assume that these were bound by gentiles or apostates and that Jews refrained from desecrating their own Biblical manuscripts, but not from binding sacred Christian books with their own secular paper manuscripts or rabbinic manuscripts of a lower level of sanctity.

After the tragedies of 1391 in which many Iberian Jews were martyred or forced to convert, and until the aftermath of 1492, a wave of refugees fled from Spain, Portugal, Provence, and other regions to Greece, many of them from Catalonia.¹⁷ R. Joseph Caro (Spain 1488, Portu-

Ajuntament de Girona 2000, and G. JULIOL I ALBERTÍ, *Libre Vermell de la ciutat de Girona (1188-1624)*, Ajuntament de Girona 2001.

¹⁰ O. VALLS I SUBIRÀ, *Paper and Watermarks in Catalonia*, Amsterdam 1970, p. 17; and Y. BAER, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Vol. 1, Skokie 2001, p. 426, note 19; Vol. 2, p. 343, notes 28, 29. See especially the comprehensive recent study of J. Shatzmiller cited in notes 15 and 25.

¹¹ J.N. HILLGARTH, *Readers and Books in Majorca: 1229-1550*, CNRS, Paris 1991, pp. 248-250. I thank Eva Frojmovic for this reference.

¹² The earlier *nyar* "paper" mentioned in the Mishnah and Talmudic literature is papyrus. This material was used for various documents, but entire books made from this weak material are extremely rare.

¹³ VALLS I SUBIRÀ, *Paper and Watermarks*, cit., pp. 5-6. See the analysis in: J. BLOOM, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2001,

pp. 204-205. The impact of paper in the Jewish world has not been significantly considered by scholars. In my opinion, the proliferation of Provencal and Spanish Kabbalah depended upon it, particularly verbose Zoharic Kabbalah. In Rabbinic literature the genre of *Ḥidduṣim* could not have been developed and vast compositions such as R. Menaḥem Meiri's *Bet HaBehirah* could not have been disseminated in Medieval Northern Europe which relied exclusively on parchment.

¹⁴ VALLS I SUBIRÀ, *Paper and Watermarks*, cit., p. 17; see note 55 and the sources cited by Halperin in note 24 below.

¹⁵ J. SHATZMILLER, *Cultural Exchange*, Princeton 2013, pp. 150-151.

¹⁶ (Y.) F. BAER, *Studien zur Geschichte der Juden im Königreich Aragonien*, Berlin 1913, p. 165.

¹⁷ J. HACKER, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century*, in *Moreshet Sephard*, Ed. H BEINART (Heb.), Jerusalem 1992, p. 460, 464. On the printing presses of the Spanish exiles

gal, Turkey, Salonika, Safed 1575), the author of *Beit Yosef* and *Shulchan Arukh*, was among the last of them. R. Samuel de Medina (*Maharshdam*, Salonika, 1506-1589) was a prolific younger colleague of R. Caro in Salonika, the “Jerusalem of the Balkans”. He established a *yeshivah* in Salonika and served the Spanish congregations. Maharshdam responded to hundreds of inquiries from the Jewish communities of the Balkans and Italy. In one unprompted independent legal announcement, he protested the Jewish printers of Salonika’s usage of leftover printed pages of sacred books in their new bookbindings. I translate an extensive quote from this document, due to both its importance regarding the historical development of Jewish Law, and because it provides a detailed description of the preparation of cardboard from paper for use in bindings:¹⁸

The customary practice of the bookbinders here in Salonika is to make a cardboard *tabla* from fragments of pages and leftover strips of byproducts of the printing process. They take pages from commentaries and Midrashim, as well as the Bible: Pentateuch, Prophets and the Hagiographa. This is the construction process: page upon page are glued together with *engrudo*,¹⁹ until they form a thick board. Afterwards, this board serves to protect bound books. It appears that the pages are destroyed with the *engrudo* by the hands of the printers.²⁰ Furthermore, they cut the boards into small pieces to cover small books. After trimming the boards to fit the books they cast away the remaining thin strips of

board as waste and trample on them. This is truly shocking for the masses to comprehend and even for a commoner like me. I would not have felt a need to speak out publicly against this practice were it not for the fact that the printers claim that they have the permission of a great legal authority.²¹ This became so difficult to accept that I could not contain myself and still my heart, as I could no longer believe them. To the full extent of my abilities I sought to find support for this opinion. However, as I see it, this is a gross blunder. I refuse to believe that, *chas v’shalom*, permission for the leniency they practice was ever uttered from the mouth of any great rabbinic authority.

It is worth noting that there are at least four logical explanations for leniency worthy of consideration, which could produce four possible claims, as follows. First, the nature of the writing: all sacred writings, such as scrolls, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*, must be written and not engraved or struck. This applies even to a *get*, for the verse states that «it shall be written» and it is learned that this excludes engraving. Printing is not writing at all, but engraving, and if so... Second, on account of the form of the writing: sacred writings all require *ketivah tamah*, full writing without abbreviations, learned from the verse: *u’ktavtam*, «and you shall write» [homiletically expanded to *ketivah tamah*]. In the present case there are many ligatures and if so... Third, on account of the writing material, paper. For all sacred writing must be on one side or the other of a parchment skin. Obviously, paper is disqualified. Finally, a fourth reason is the purpose [of writing]. All sacred writing must be written for the sake of he-

see H. BEN-ELIYAHU, *The Legal Thought of Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra*, Jerusalem 2013, pp. 25-26. According to R. BONFIL, *The History of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Italy*, in *Moreshet Sepharad*, Ed. H. BEINART (Heb.), Jerusalem 1992, pp. 545-546, some of these refugees spent an interim period in Italy. Y. BEN-NAEH, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, Tübingen 2008, pp. 422-425, mentions that the Catalanian liturgical rite was popular in Salonika. He also questions the scholarly assumption that Castellano Spanish is the dominant dialect in the Ladino language of the Spanish refugees (as opposed to Catalanian and other languages or dialects). See also M. LEHMAN, *The En Yaaqov*, Detroit 2012, pp. 42-46, and J. BEN-MAYOR & Y. KEREM, *Salonika*, in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2007, V. 17, p. 700.

¹⁸ תשובות מהרשד"ם [Responso of Maharshdam], New York, 1951, Yore Deah, No. 184, previously

translated by M. GOODBLATT, *Jewish Life in Turkey*, New York 1952, pp. 159-160.

¹⁹ Spanish for “glue”, typically made from flour and water. Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, <http://dle.rae.es/?id=FPWHwo8&o=h>.

²⁰ Looking back with hindsight, we could challenge this statement, as today researchers open the bindings and read the manuscripts. The glue may even preserve the ink rather than destroying it. Maharshdam himself qualified his statement with: “It appears...” Thus, he added another reason for the prohibition, the cutting of the pages, which clearly destroys them.

²¹ Literally: “hang on a tall tree”, paraphrasing BT Pesahim 112a, according to Rashi’s commentary referring to a dubious citation of a great authority.

aven and if one would write without that purpose in mind the writings would be disqualified. It appears that all [or part] of these claims are accepted by those who are lenient; that explains their practice. However, in my humble opinion, none of these claims have enough merit to exempt [the manuscripts] from [the obligation of] *geniza*, let alone to permit actively destroying them by hand...

Maharshdam's description of the practice of the printers of Salonika appears identical with or similar to the process which the Girona bookbinders would have followed. The method may have been brought to Salonika from Catalonia directly, or possibly via Italy, where paper production began in the late 13th century, modeled on Catalonian production and competing with it in the 14th century.²² Fragments of three Hebrew/Judeo-Italian registers have been extracted from 15th and 16th century Italian paper cardboard bookbindings resembling the Catalonian bindings.²³ It appears that Spanish Jewish bookbinders brought their traditions to Italy.²⁴ Jews were also active bookbinders outside of Spain in medieval Germany.²⁵ Furthermore, Maharshdam's Spanish name for the glue, *engrudo*, suggests an Iberian origin. So it seems safe to assume that the Spanish bookbinding practice was transferred by the exiles to Salonika afterwards or in parallel with Italy. If so, Maharshdam is describing a Jewish bookbinding practice already attested to as early as 1330, more than 140 years before the adoption of printing on the Spanish peninsula. With such a deep tradition, it is not surprising that Maharshdam's own opposition was insufficient to eradicate the practice, which had to be redressed by later Rabbinic authorities in Salonika, as we will see.²⁶

Maharshdam mentioned four arguments to exempt printed sacred books from the obligation of *geniza*. The first, that the obligation ap-

plies only to written pages and not printed ones, does not apply to Girona manuscripts. That leaves three arguments, each of which is sufficient in and of itself to exempt the manuscripts from the obligation:

1. They are not written with *ketivah tamah* required for sacred writing, in which each letter is visible separately. Manuscripts served as models for the abbreviations which abound in early printed editions of Salonika which Maharshdam was describing. The Spanish cursive typical of the bound Girona manuscripts are full of abbreviated words, acrostic *rošei tevot*, and ligatures, each of which disqualifies sacred writings.

2. Sacred writings must be written on parchment. If they are written on paper, they are disqualified. Very few parchment fragments are found mixed among the paper of the Girona bookbindings. They are almost all made exclusively of paper as described by Maharshdam.

3. The writing was not for the sake [of heaven]. That is, the authors did not intend to create sacred writings suitable for synagogue service. Thus, they are disqualified from communal use and one is not obligated to place them in a *geniza*.

Maharshdam did not agree with any of these arguments he himself provided to justify the custom of the printers. He states that he only went to the trouble of listing them because of the great rabbinic authority which the printers reported as permitting the practice. Apparently that authority responded to them orally and not in writing, for if so, Maharshdam would certainly have mentioned it. The rabbinic authority had probably already passed away (or possibly migrated) and was thus not available for consultation. Although there is no reason to assume that he was being referred to, it is not

²² BLOOM, *Paper Before Print*, cit., pp. 209-212.

²³ PERANI, *Osservazioni preliminari allo studio del Registro di prestito ebraico conservato nella Badia di Cava dei Tirreni*, in *Sefer Yuhasin*, «Rivista per la storia degli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale, Nuova Serie» 1 (2013), pp. 117, 119-120, 122, items numbers 1, 3, and 8 in the list of Italian registers.

²⁴ D.R. HALPERIN, *Decorated Masorah on the openings between quires in Masoretic Bible manu-*

scripts, «Journal of Jewish Studies» 65, 2 (2014), p. 343, notes 28 and 29.

²⁵ SHATZMILLER, *Cultural Exchange*, cit., pp. 144-147.

²⁶ According to S. ASAF, באהלי יעקב [B'Ohalei Ya'akov], Jerusalem 1943, pp. 22-23, printers of Salonika continued to bind their leftover pages for several generations and numerous examples are found in bindings from the 17th and 18th centuries.

beyond the realm of possibility that the printers were referring to Maran R. Joseph Caro, who was in Salonika from 1533-1534.²⁷ Other remote but reasonable candidates are Maharshdam's teachers from Salonika, R. Joseph Taitazak (Spain, 1465, Portugal, Italy, Salonika, Constantinople, 1546), or R. Levi ibn Chabib (Zamora, Spain, c. 1480, Portugal, Salonika, Damascus, Safed, Jerusalem, 1549). Maharshdam's own rejected arguments are strong and they support the hypothesis that the bookbinders of Girona were Jews who did not perceive any prohibition in using Hebrew manuscripts as a material for bindings. In fact, R. Joseph David (Salonika, 1655-1737), a head of the Salonika rabbinic court, relied upon Maharshdam to permit the printers of Salonika to rebind pages printed with "Rashi script", a font based upon Spanish cursive. R. Joseph David maintained that Maharshdam opposed using pages written with *ktivah tamah* only if the font itself was *ktivah ašuri* square Hebrew, as required for all sacred writing. According to this, Maharshdam himself, here the most stringent and influential authority, would not have protested the binding of the Girona manuscripts!²⁸

Maharshdam humbly and open-mindedly stated that «there are at least four logical explanations for leniency» [emphasis mine]. Following R. Joseph David we have added one more. Now we would like to propose another argument which Maharshdam hinted at but did not list. It is more relevant to Girona bookbinding manuscripts than to the Salonika printing presses. The Hebrew manuscripts bound in Girona include commentaries, legal and liturgical literature,

etc. However, in Salonika, Maharshdam opposed using pages of the Bible itself, as he stated in the quotation above: «... as well as the Bible: Pentateuch, Prophets and the Hagiographa». Maharshdam opposed using pages of all types of rabbinic literature, but only Bible falls without a doubt within the category of sacred writings which the Mishna obligates to place in a *geniza*. Thus, in Girona, pages of the Bible were not utilized for making cardboard bindings.²⁹ This may be due to the technical fact that paper is the main material utilized in the bindings and Bibles were generally written on parchment. The issues are linked, however: because Bible was perceived as more sacred, it was written on parchment, whereas Rabbinic writings were composed on paper notebooks. In my opinion, if the printers of Salonika had not been binding pages of the Bible, Maharshdam would not have protested so emphatically or even at all.

After Maharshdam, towards the end of the 17th century, R. Moses ibn Chabib (Jerusalem, c. 1654-1697) addressed the question of leftover pages from the printing press and he mentioned this reason for leniency explicitly, rejecting it.³⁰ According to this line of thinking, the obligation of *geniza* only applies to pages of books of the Bible and not Rabbinic writings and commentaries. R. ibn Chabib rejected this argument and any distinction between these sacred writings. He relied upon the opinion of the great R. Abraham ben David (Narbonne, c. 1120 - Posquieres, 1198) and his novel proposition that the obligation of *geniza* applies to books of the Talmud.³¹ This novelty is based upon a Talmudic textual variant which appears to be derivative and se-

²⁷ M. BENIHU, יוסף בחירי [Yosef Behiri], Jerusalem 1991, p. 158. Maharshdam was a follower of R. Caro, frequently citing his opus, *Bet Yosef* and supporting him in his dispute with R. Moses ben Joseph di Trani of Safed.

²⁸ *Bet David*, #145. R. Ishmael Cohen of Modina disputed R. Joseph David's interpretation and asserted that Maharshdam did not make an exception for "Rashi script" (*Zera Emet*, Vol. 2, #133).

²⁹ A page of Hebrew Bible on parchment used as a binding is listed by E. CORTÈS, *Fragments de manuscrits hebreus i arameus descoberts de nou a l'Arxiu Diocesà de Girona*, «Revista Catalana de

Teologia», 7 (1982), pp. 1-56. Another example is found in the Arxiu Històric, but it was brought to the Archive from the village of Peralada and was not bound in Girona. In any case, we are dealing in this study with compound bindings, not individual sheets of parchment used as bindings.

³⁰ R. MOSES IBN CHABIB, שו"ת קול גדול, Jerusalem 1907, #55, cited by EMANUEL, *The European Geniza*, cit., p. 11, note 19.

³¹ R. ABRAHAM BEN DAVID, בעלי הנפש [Ba'alei Ha-Nefesh], שער הפרישה, סימן ב, cited in R.Y. CARO, *Bet Yosef*, Oraḥ Ḥayim 240. See: MAIMONIDES, *Mishneh Torah*, הלכות תפילין ומזוזה, 10, 5.

condary.³² That text discusses which sacred writings must be separated with a partition from a couple engaged in sexual relations. However, according to the dominant textual form, which appears to be earlier, only books of the Bible and *tefillin* must be separated.³³

Furthermore, the very fact that R. ibn Chabib had to address the question of binding printed pages of sacred books demonstrates that the decision of Maharshdam was not implemented.³⁴ From our vantage point, the weaknesses of many of the arguments advanced to oppose the use of these pages and their subsequent lack of acceptance by the printers suggests that this state of affairs could be projected back in time to 14th and 15th century Catalonia, where the Jewish bookbinders did not recognize any prohibition at all on the use of Talmudic and Rabbinic manuscripts as material for bookbindings.

If so, those communities would be far from unique. In Yemen, manuscripts of Talmud and rabbinic literature, including Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, were reused in bindings, and this practice continued until the modern period.³⁵ The process of binding worn out paper in Yemen was not fundamentally different from the medieval practice in Catalonia.³⁶ Despite the fact that Maimonides clearly stated:³⁷ «All sacred writings, even *halakhot* and *aggadot*, may not be thrown away», his followers in Yemen clearly did not see bookbinding as an abrogation of this law, but as a fulfillment. The traditional and conservative Jewish communities of Yemen were shielded from many of the developments which affected the communities of Europe. Maharshdam's protest appears to be a reaction to the technology of printing, which multiplied many

fold the number of pages which «may not be thrown away», especially pages from the Bible. Either due to their conservatism or to the much later adoption of printing in the Islamic world, the Yemenite communities were impervious to these developments. The medieval Sages of Yemen would probably have agreed with the side of the argument mentioned by the inquirer of R. Moses ibn Chabib: «... or perhaps it is not forbidden [to bind sacred pages] as it is not worse than *geniza* in which they are buried under the ground», as would the Sages of Catalonia.

As mentioned above, Emanuel cites sources outside of the Spanish peninsula which describe Hebrew manuscripts being transferred to Christian binders. He proves that Hebrew manuscripts written on parchment were confiscated and reused for binding books. According to Colette Sirat, Jews themselves also sold their old books to Christian binders.³⁸ Sirat proves this on the basis of colophons which describe the details of such sales from Jews to Christians. Although there is no contradiction between these two sources, Emanuel offers a compromise solution to explain the phenomenon: «Apparently, the Jews did not sell their manuscripts to bookbinders from their own free will, but they were acquired by intimidation».³⁹ In the twenty years since those speculative words were written, we have learned much about Jewish involvement in and acquiescence with bookbinding in Europe. Most significantly for our purposes, Sirat's findings provide indirect support for the argument that the binders of Girona were Jewish.

To summarize: the historical evidence, a critical analysis of the development of Jewish Law and the practices of other Jewish commu-

³² The variant of *Še'iltot* to BT Berakhot 25b (found in *Paršat Bo* 45, loc. שאילתא דאלו), which reads: בית שיש בו ספרים אסור לשמש.

³³ This version is found in all manuscripts and printed editions, Alfasi, Rabbenu Ḥananel, and Maimonides: בית שיש בו ספר תורה או תפילין אסור לשמש.

³⁴ See the responsim of R. Joseph David cited above, according to S. ASAF, *B'Ohalei Ya'aqov*, p. 23, also cited above.

³⁵ The electronic catalog of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel already lists 51 Yemenite manuscripts

which were extracted from book bindings.

³⁶ See EMANUEL, *The European Genizah*, cit., p. 11, note 16, and the literature cited there.

³⁷ MAIMONIDES, *Mishneh Torah*, הלכות תפילין ומזוזות וספר תורה [Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzot, and Torah Scroll] 10,5.

³⁸ C. SIRAT, *Il Reimpiego dei Materiali dei Libri Ebraici, in Vita e Cultura Ebraica Nello Stato Estense*, Bologna 1993, pp. 37-47.

³⁹ EMANUEL, *The European Genizah*, cit., p. 12.

⁴⁰ PERANI, *The "Gerona Genizah"*, cit., p. 137; EMANUEL, *The European Genizah*, cit., p. 12-13.

nities all point to Jewish bookbinding of Hebrew manuscripts in Girona. Scholars have debated whether the name “*Geniza*” is appropriate for bookbinding manuscripts.⁴⁰ If the Jews of Girona bound their own manuscripts, as proposed here, then the name is quite appropriate, in a sense. Many of the same types of manuscripts which other Jewish communities placed in storage, most famously in Cairo, were placed in bindings by the communities of Catalonia and

Yemen. Bible manuscripts would not have been disposed of in such a manner by Jews anywhere, but must have been buried or placed in storage. Instances of binding with pieces of parchment containing text of the Hebrew Bible are the handiwork of Christian binders and strong indicators of confiscated manuscripts.

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SUMMARY

Evidence is presented supporting the scholarly opinion that Catalonia’s medieval bookbinders of Hebrew manuscripts were Jewish, not gentiles or apostates. Numerous historical sources indicate that bookbinding was a Jewish occupation in the region. Scholarly resistance to this conclusion is based upon the Talmudic obligation to bury worn-out holy texts or store them in “*Geniza*”. A critical study of this branch of Jewish law, based upon a stringent responsum by R. Samuel di Modena of Salonika, among other sources, shows that only actual Biblical texts written on parchment were unambiguously included in this category. Catalonian Jewish communities apparently did not adopt these stringencies regarding paper-based Talmudic, liturgical, and interpretative Hebrew and Aramaic literature abundant in the bindings, nor did their distant coreligionists in Yemen.

KEYWORDS: Bookbinding; Girona; *Geniza*; Jewish Law; Manuscripts; Hebrew; Salonika; Samuel di Modena.