



A Hebrew Fragment in the Municipal Archive in Münster as a Witness to a Little-Known Ritual Practice

EPHRAIM KANARFOGEL

Yeshiva University, New York, USA

E-mail: kanarfog@yu.edu

KATRIN KOGMAN-APPEL

Institute for Jewish Studies, University of Münster, Münster, Germany

E-mail: kogman@uni-muenster.de

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Abstract The Stadtarchiv in Münster, Germany holds a medieval Hebrew fragment with portions of the daily *Shema Yisrael* prayer. Measuring 510 mm in height, this fragment is but a quarter of a large-sized parchment sheet, which was designed to be hung on a wall. This study introduces the fragment and describes its material features and then suggests its possible function against the backdrop of talmudic discussions on biblical texts that are incorporated in prayer. In light of the halakhic position that biblical verses should not be recited from memory but only from a written text, the original sheet was intended to provide worshippers with an accessible copy of the *Shema* text, since many did not have personal prayerbooks.

Keywords Prayerbooks · Recitation of *Shema* · Literacy · Rabbenu Tam · Sefer Mordekhai

The Stadtarchiv in Münster holds a medieval Hebrew parchment fragment (Sammlung Handschriften, Nr. 220),¹ written in strikingly large Ashkenazi square script, that shows portions of several verses from the Book of Deuteronomy to be recited as part of the daily *Shema Yisrael* prayer (Fig. 1). It came to the archive from the Franciscan Convent Ringe in Münster,² but we do not know when it entered into the possession of the convent, where it must have been used as a document folder (Fig. 2).

In the following pages, we first describe the material features of the fragment, followed by a transcription of the remaining text, and suggest a reconstruction of the entire sheet. Its sheer size and the blank verso page exclude

¹We are indebted to Peter Worm, Stadtarchiv Münster, for drawing our attention to the fragment and for discussing the material aspects of the piece with us and dating the German insertions to the 1370s (see below).

²Akte Nr. 59. The convent was founded as a Beguine community house in 1308; in 1491 it was converted into a Franciscan convent and secularized in 1809; see Franz-Josef Jakobi in *1200 Jahre reiche Vergangenheit. Münster im Wandel der Zeit 1* (2000): 137. An inscription on the verso page applied in the convent was added in the nineteenth century.



Figure 1. Münster, Stadtarchiv, Sammlung Handschriften, Nr. 220, Hebrew fragment of the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, early fourteenth century (with permission of the Stadtarchiv)

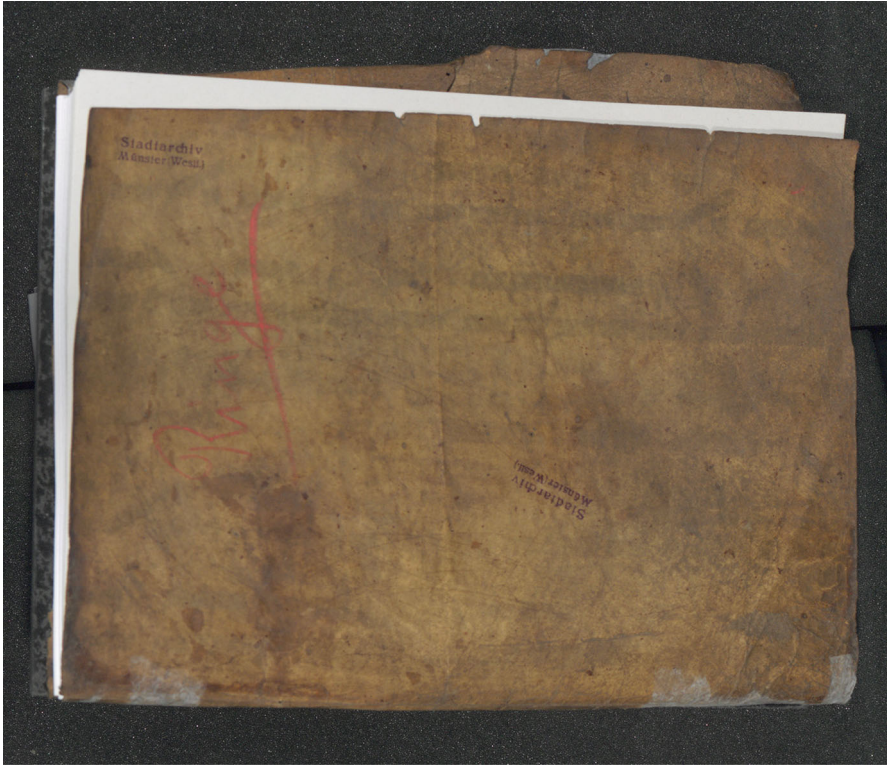


Figure 2. Münster, Stadtarchiv, Sammlung Handschriften, Nr. 220, verso page indicating the folding of the fragment to be used as a folder (with permission of the Stadtarchiv)

the possibility that it was part of a manuscript. We suggest that it served as a ritual device during synagogue services that, as mandated by rabbinic law, enabled the recitation of biblical text from a written source rather than from memory. We then trace the history of this practice and its halakhic background, and with the fragment's facilitating function in mind, attempt to narrow down the region where it may have been commissioned and originally used.

Description of the Fragment

The Münster fragment measures 300 mm in width and 510 mm in height; it has a text column of thirteen lines and the verso page is blank. Each line measures no less than 41.5 mm and letters without masts and roots 22 mm. Hence, the words can be read with relative ease from a distance of four to five or even more meters. Between lines 10, 11, and 12, we find a text in



Figure 3. Münster, Stadtarchiv, Sammlung Handschriften, Nr. 220, Hebrew fragment of the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, detail with inserted German riddles, early fourteenth century (with permission of the Stadtarchiv)

Middle-Low German—two short riddles—inserted upside down, suggesting that whoever added these lines was not able to read the Hebrew (Fig. 3). The insertions can be dated to the second half of the fourteenth century, perhaps to the 1370s, and their language points to the region surrounding Münster, in particular the area between Münster and Coesfeld. A paleographic assessment of the Hebrew text by Edna Engel suggests that the fragment itself should be dated to the early fourteenth century.³

The fragment includes portions of the first two sections (*parashiot*) of the *Shema* prayer in square script and two words in Ashkenazi semicursive script from the phrase *barukh shem [kevod malkhuto le-'olam va'ed]* that are traditionally inserted after the first verse of the *Shema*. It is in particular the insertion of this phrase that points to a date in the early fourteenth century: semicursive scripts are more flexible and given to more frequent change than square scripts, which tend to be stable and conservative.

The plausible assumption that the fragment once included all three portions of the *Shema* prayer points to an original size of approximately 65 × 105 cm for the text block—more than four times larger than the surviving fragment. The remaining piece is tightly trimmed and leaves no margins. Adding about 4 cm for each margin suggests that the original sheet must have measured about 73 × 113 cm at least. Given that the area where the stitches would have appeared is outside the remaining fragment, it cannot be firmly established whether the sheet was composed of two parts stitched together or a single sheet made from a particularly large cow hide. The quality of the parchment, however, suggests a compound of two calf hides. Its texture is particularly smooth and characteristic of parchment made of a calf hide.⁴

³Our thanks to Dr. Edna Engel, formerly from the Hebrew Paleography Project at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

⁴Calf hides yield sheets in the size of approximately 65–70 × 50–55 cm.

The sheet is thicker than the parchment sheets normally used for books and typical of large-size documents. No blemishes, signs of repair or stitches are found on the remaining piece.⁵ In short, in terms of its material features, this sheet was of the highest quality.⁶

In its complete form it must have contained about twenty-seven lines of text written with a quill. The text is vocalized and has cantillation marks. The letters are approximately three times as high as those of the largest Ashkenazi codices intended for liturgical use, that is, for public readings during synagogue services.⁷ Given that the German riddles appear to be complete, they must have been added to the sheet after it had already been cut into pieces. It is likely that the rest of it was used for writing on the verso page, as paper folders or as binding material.

Transcription

The *Shema* prayer consists of three biblical quotations: Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41. In the following, the transcript appears in boldface and the reconstructions of the three parts based on the masoretic text are set in brackets. The fragment also displays cantillation marks, which, however, are not shown in the transcript (see, however, Fig. 1):

- 1 שְׁמַע [יִשְׂרָאֵל י"י אֱלֹהֵינוּ י"י] (Deut 6:4)
 2 אֶחָד. בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם [כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד וְאַהֲבָתָה]
 3 אֵת י"י אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכֹל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכֹל-מְאֹדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים
 4 הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ [הַיּוֹם-עַל-לְבָבְךָ. וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ]
 5 וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשַׁבָּתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ [וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בְּדַרְךָ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ]
 6 וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ [וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפֹּת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ. וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-]

⁵Some unusual Ashkenazi codices out of the ordinary were over 50 cm high. Malachi Beit-Arié described the largest known manuscript of nearly 63 cm height that was made of composite, “artificial” bifolia (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS Or. Fol. 1210–1211, a Bible from 1343); see Malachi Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology. Historical and Comparative Typology of Medieval Hebrew Codices Based on the Documentation of the Extant Dated Manuscripts until 1540 Using a Quantitative Approach*, English version by Ilana Goldberg, ed. and rev. by Nurit Paster-nak (Jerusalem and Hamburg, 2021), 291 n. 8, <https://www.fdr.uni-hamburg.de/record/9349#.YdV841kxnb0#.YdV841kxnb0>. This practice was extremely rare for books, but it may well have been applied to the *Shema* sheet.

⁶We are grateful to Peter Worm for discussing the material features of the fragment with us.

⁷One of the largest of these mahzorim, the Amsterdam Mahzor, is owned today by the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam and the MiQua Museum in Cologne; it was produced around 1260 in Cologne and measures 470 mm in height. A typical page displays twenty-seven lines of text; regular letters measure about 6–7 mm; initial letters measure approximately 18 mm. Similar measurements apply to the mentioned Bible in Berlin, see n. 4 above.

7	מְזוּזוֹת בַּיְתָהּ, וּבִשְׁעָרֶיהָ: [וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ מְשָׁמְעוּ אֶל] (Deut 6:5–9)
8	מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מִצְוֶה וְאַתְּכֶם הַיּוֹם לֹאֲהַבְתֶּם אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם]
9	וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר אֲרֻצְכֶם]
10	בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאִסְפֹּת דְגָנְךָ וְתִירֹשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ. וְנָתַתִּי]
11	עֶשֶׂב בְּשֹׂדֶךָ לְבַהֲמֹתֶךָ וְאֶכְלֹתָ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ. הַשְּׁמֵרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן]
12	[וְאֶפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתֶם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם.]]
13	[וְהָרַח אִף יְיָ בְּכֶם וַעֲזַר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יְהִי מָטָר וְהִאֲדָמָה לֹא]
14	תִּתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ וְאֶבְדַּתֶּם מֵהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטְּבֵה אֲשֶׁר יְיָ נָתַן]
15	לָכֶם. וְשָׁמַתֶּם אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי עַל לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם]
16	אֶתֶם לְאוֹת עַל יַדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם. וְלִמְדַתֶּם אֹתֶם]
17	אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִקְחֶךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ]
18	וּבְקוּמְךָ. וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בַּיְתָהּ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיהָ. לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם]
19	וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לֵאמֹר לָהֶם]
20	כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ (Deut 11:13–21). וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֵל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֵל]
21	בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל כְּנָפֵי בְגָדֵיהֶם]
22	לְדַרְתֶּם. וְנָתַנּוּ עַל צִיצִית הַכְּנָף פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת: וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית]
23	וְרָאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם. וְרָאִיתֶם]
24	וְלֹא תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֹתָם זָנִים]
25	אֲחֵרֵיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי: וְהֵייתֶם]
26	קַדְשִׁים לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם]
27	מֵאֲרָץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים. אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אָמֵן (Num 15:37–41)

Function and Use of the *Shema* Sheet

Thomas Hubka has shown that beginning in the early modern period several large-scale citations from the prayers were customarily hung on the walls of synagogues in Poland.⁸ No such practice is known from the medieval period,⁹ but the Münster fragment, for which no parallels have yet been recorded in Ashkenaz,¹⁰ may attest to an earlier practice.

According to the Talmud (BT Gittin 60b), just as the Oral Law may not be written down, it is impermissible to recite the Written Law (verses from the Torah and the other books of the biblical canon) from memory:

⁸Thomas Hubka, *Resplendent Synagogue: Architecture and Worship in an Eighteenth-Century Polish Community* (Waltham, MA, 2003), 91–93 and 103–108, who suggests that one of the possible functions of these paintings was to aid congregants in reciting lesser-known prayers, which they were unable to memorize.

⁹Ephraim Kanarfogel, “Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory in the Jewish Communities of Medieval Europe,” in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra’anan Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia, 2011), 250–70.

¹⁰We are grateful to Ezra Chwat, Yael Okun, and Andreas Lenhardt for their conversations and correspondence.

R. Judah ben Nahmani the public disseminator of R. Simeon ben Lakish discoursed as follows: It is written, *Write thou these words* (Exod 34:27), and it is written, *For according to the mouth of these words* (ibid.). What are we to make of this? It means: The words that are written you are not at liberty to say by heart, and the words transmitted orally you are not at liberty to recite from writing.¹¹

Taken at face value, this prohibition means that large parts of the daily prayers that include biblical verses must be recited from a written prayer text. A scarcity of available daily prayer books in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, largely due to the cost and effort required to produce them,¹² created an obvious dilemma for contemporary worshippers.

As was their wont, the Tosafists in northern France and the region that is now modern Germany proposed several halakhic solutions. Rabbenu Tam of Ramerupt (1100–1171) cited a talmudic principle from tractate Megillah (18a) to the effect that when a person was sufficiently fluent in the recitation of a biblical text so that no error would be made if it was recited by heart (*shagur be-fiv*), such a person was allowed to pray without a written text. His Rhineland contemporary, Eliezer ben Nathan (Raban) of Mainz, pointed to a prior passage in tractate Gittin (60a), which ruled (on the basis of Ps 119:126) that just as the prohibition of writing down the Oral Law could be suspended if it was no longer possible to fully absorb this material in its oral form, so too the rule that biblical verses should not be recited by heart could be shelved in exigent situations.¹³

Two of Rabbenu Tam's disciples, Isaac ben Samuel (Ri) of Dampierre (d. c. 1190) and Eliezer ben Samuel of Metz (d. 1198), maintained that the talmudic prohibition against reciting biblical verses by heart was in effect only when one person was chanting a biblical verse to fulfill the obligation for others. However, an individual who was reciting verses only to fulfill his own obligation to pray was permitted, if able, to do so from memory. A (stringent) corollary to this approach, noted by both Ri and R. Eliezer, was that a prayer leader had to lower his voice during the recitation of the *Shema* and other biblical verses during the prayer service, as members of the congregation had to recite these verses on their own. This was also the view

¹¹Translation after *Soncino Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London, 1935–1952), with some adjustments for language.

¹²Kanarfogel, "Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory," 256–60.

¹³See Isaac b. Moses, *Sefer Or Zarua'*, ed. Yaakov Farbstein (Jerusalem, 2010), pt. 1, *hilkhot tefilin*, sec. 545, 459; *Sefer ha-Mordekhai le-Massekhet Gittin*, ed. Meir Rabinowitz (Jerusalem, 1990), sec. 407, 628–29; and *Sefer Raban*, ed. David Deblitzky (Bnei Brak, 2012), pt. 1, sec. 42, 131–32.

of Eliezer of Metz's student, Eliezer ben Joel ha-Levi (Rabiah of Cologne, d. 1225).¹⁴

A passage found in a collection of sermons that includes significant Ashkenazi material (albeit preserved in a Byzantine manuscript) asserts that "the German Pietists were accustomed to reading the *Shema* from a written text, and this was especially true for the prayer leader."¹⁵ Ostensibly, the position of the Pietists was that if the prayer leader was reading from a written text, others could perhaps fulfill their obligation through the recitation of the prayer leader since he at least was not chanting the prayers from memory. However, this manuscript passage then notes that R. Meir ben Barukh (Maharam) of Rothenburg (d. 1293), the leading halakhic authority in northern Europe during the second half of the thirteenth century (who had studied with several Tosafists in northern France and had affinities with the German Pietists as well) "wrote that it is prohibited to pray *Shema* or any other Torah portions without a written text." The passage concludes: "And therefore, in all places (*be-khol makom*), Ashkenazi prayer leaders (*shluhei tzibbur ha'ashkenazim*) recite the *Shema* in a whisper (*be-la'hash*)."¹⁶

Another source to consider is *Sefer Mordekhai*, the widely cited halakhic compendium produced by Mordechai ben Hillel, a student of Maharam. Toward the end of his life, Mordechai lived in Goslar in Lower Saxony and in Nuremberg, where he was martyred in 1298. *Sefer Mordekhai* presents the above-mentioned resolutions of both Raban (anonymously) and Rabbenu Tam and applies them to permit the recitation of the *Shema* by heart. However, just prior to presenting these allowances (but in the same section of the work), it concludes (based on a ruling of Isaac al-Fasi [Rif, d. 1103]) that it is permitted to write scrolls containing only a limited number of biblical verses so that children may study from them, adding,

that it is also permitted to write down the [biblical] portions of the daily sacrifices and the complete *Shema* prayer (in accordance

¹⁴See Eliezer of Metz, *Sefer Yere'im ha-Shalem*, ed. A. A. Schiff (Jerusalem, 1973), sec. 268; *Sefer Rabiah*, ed. Avigdor Aptowitz (Jerusalem, 1964), pt. 3, 640 (Ta'anit, sec. 878).

¹⁵Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 1022.1, fol. 110v. For a microfilm, see Jerusalem, Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, NLI File no. F 17029. On collections of sermons in manuscript, see Marc Saperstein and Ephraim Kanarfogel, "A Byzantine Manuscript of Sermons: Description and Selections about Prayer and the Synagogue" [in Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 78 (1999): 164–84.

¹⁶Ibid. On the need for the prayer leader to lower his voice so that he cannot fulfill the obligation of others, see also *Tosafot ha-Rosh le-Massekhet Sotah* (40b), ed. Yaakov H. Lifshitz (Jerusalem, 1969), 70, and *Tosafot Temurah* 14b, s.v. *devarim she-bikhtav*. For full documentation and discussion of all these issues, including the educational training that underlies many of the rabbinic assumptions offered, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Levels of Literacy in Ashkenaz and Sefarad as Reflected by the Recitation of Biblical Verses Found in the Liturgy" [in Hebrew], in *Rishonim ve-Aharonim*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker et al. (Jerusalem, 2010), 187–211.

with the ruling of Isaac Alfasi) because not everyone knows these prayers by heart, and neither does everyone have texts of the Torah to bring with them to the synagogue. This can lead to neglecting the recitation of the *Shema*, which is a Torah precept. Therefore, it is better to write these [biblical texts] down, even though they are not meant to be written [in this kind of partial or selective format].¹⁷

One might suggest that this statement implies that the assumption made by Rabbenu Tam and several subsequent Tosafists to the effect that the morning prayers including the *Shema* were in fact well known by most if not all worshippers was at least somewhat flawed. At the same time, Mordechai ben Hillel likely agreed with the position of his teacher, Maharam of Rothenburg (noted just above) that the prayer leader does not fulfill the obligation of the members of the congregation to recite the *Shema*, even though the passage in *Sefer Mordekhai* does not specifically mention Maharam's ruling.

Nevertheless, it appears that Mordechai ben Hillel's newly proposed solution to the problem of reciting biblical verses by heart during prayer was to encourage the production of written texts of the daily prayers for all worshippers. As developments in the history of book production indicate, this only became possible in his day through a method by which small prayer booklets (texts with fewer pages and soft covers, known as *tefillot*) could be produced more easily and more cheaply than complete prayerbooks. Indeed, based on formulations by Rabiah of Cologne, elsewhere *Sefer Mordekhai* notes that there had been earlier efforts to provide these small collections of written texts for worshippers during the High Holidays, when many of the special prayers for those days (including, for example, the '*amidah* for the *musaf* service on Rosh Hashanah, which contains an unusually large number of verses) were not so familiar.¹⁸

In view of these historical and halakhic developments datable to the final decades of the thirteenth century, the fragment now in the Münster

¹⁷See *Sefer ha-Mordekhai le-Massekhet Gittin* (60a–b), sec. 407, 628–30 (sec. 132).

¹⁸See *Sefer Rabiah*, ed. Avigdor Aptowitzer, pt. 2 (Jerusalem, 1964), 190 (Yoma, sec. 529), and 222–23 (Rosh Hashanah, sec. 536); *Sefer ha-Mordekhai le-Massekhet Yoma*, ed. Machon Yerushalayim (Jerusalem, 1989), sec. 725, 69–70. On the increasing number of Ashkenazi manuscripts of siddurim from the mid-thirteenth century onward, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, *The Early Ashkenazic Prayer Literary and Historical Aspects* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2003), 29–32. All of these sources, and others that deal with the relative absence of mahzorim for the three pilgrimage festivals (and the limited availability of *haggadot* for the Passover seder), together with a description of advances in the forms of book production developed during the second half of the thirteenth century, are discussed in Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Matters of Heaven and Earth: Liturgy, Esoteric Literature, and Cultural Boundaries in Medieval Ashkenaz* (forthcoming), ch. 1.

Stadarchiv was likely intended as another solution, namely, to provide a device that would enable the recitation of the *Shema* from a written source for the congregation (and not only the prayer leader). The material evidence—sturdy parchment of the highest quality and particularly large letters—suggests that it may have been hung on one of the walls of the synagogue.¹⁹ The propriety of reciting biblical verses from written texts had been discussed throughout the Rhineland (including Cologne), leading up to the ruling of the widely authoritative Ashkenazi rabbinic figure Meir of Rothenburg, whose influence extended well beyond the end of the thirteenth century and far further than Franconia and the Middle Rhine region, where he had lived and taught.

Suggestions About the Origin of the Sheet

As the fragment under discussion is of such exquisite quality in terms of both the parchment and the scribal work, it is reasonable to assume that only a large community with well-established religious institutions would have cared to commission such an object. A remote rural community, of which there were several in the fourteenth century in the Lower Rhine region and in Westphalia, with only a small synagogue or no synagogue at all would perhaps have done with a more modest sheet, or even none at all. As noted, it can be determined that it was commissioned in the early fourteenth century by a community associated with Tosafist scholarship through the authority of Meir ben Barukh of Rothenburg a few years after he and Mordechai ben Hillel died, but whether the sheet was actually produced there, cannot be proven. Be that as it may, it is likely that it passed into Christian hands after the persecution of the plague years and came into the possession of the individuals who added the riddles in a dialect that points to the region of Münster and/or Coesfeld around 1370.²⁰

Taking into account this last observation, there are two possible scenarios. First, it is reasonable to assume that the sheet did not travel far and that the German insertions were added in the area where it was most likely confiscated in 1350. This possibility suggests that it was commissioned for the Jewish community of Münster or perhaps nearby Coesfeld, where some of the

¹⁹Given that the sheet was not only divided in several parts, but also that its left margins were tightly trimmed, no hanging device, such as a hole, can be discerned. The cantillations and *rafe* marks included were likely intended to further enable a precise reading in fulfillment of the biblical precept. See, for example, *Araba 'ah Turim, Orah Hayyim*, sec. 64 (end).

²⁰For an analysis of the dialect, see appendix by Robert Damme, member of the Kommission für Mundart- und Namenforschung Westfalens (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe) in Münster, to whom our thanks are extended for a transcript of the riddles, a translation, and the analysis of the text.

linguistic features reflected in the German insertions were common. Given, however, that there is no guarantee that the sheet did not travel elsewhere after it was confiscated, the second scenario may also lead us further afield into the larger area between Münster and Cologne. Politically, this entire region was under the authority of the Archbishopric of Cologne and the Counties of Berg and Mark. As Christoph Cluse, Rosemarie Kosche, and Matthias Schmandt point out, most of the Jews traceable anywhere in the northwest of the Empire, including the bishoprics of Münster and Osnabrück, appear to have had origins or some ties in Cologne.²¹ Moreover, in terms of rabbinic tradition, halakhah, and ritual, the Jews in this entire region were strongly linked to Cologne. It is likely that they used the same prayer rite (*minhag*) and can be considered as culturally independent of other areas with a strong Jewish presence such as Franconia and the Middle Rhine region.²²

But let us look at Münster, where documents mention a synagogue between 1290 and 1300, and there is written evidence of the existence of a Jewish cemetery apparently near the later Schlossplatz, the first in Westphalia in 1301. The community institutions were located where we now find Synadikatplatz, between Prinzipalmarkt and Salzstrasse.²³ Several contemporary Münster Jews are known by name, and most of them owned houses in Cologne and/or had economic ties there. There were also family and business connections with the communities of Coesfeld und Recklinghausen. Not much is known about the latter, which is about 60 km to the southwest of Münster, and we have no information about its size or any of its Jewish community's institutions.²⁴ For Coesfeld, however, to which some features of the German dialect found on the fragment point, there is information about a small Jewish community. Minnemann, the son of Gottschalk of Coesfeld is mentioned in a 1298 document in connection with a real estate transaction in Cologne. After 1323, Bishop Louis II of Münster admitted several Jewish families to Coesfeld and "the small community" apparently grew large enough "for a *minyán*."²⁵

²¹Thus, for example, the first Jews in Münster came from Cologne, as did later families who left records there, see *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, *Von 1238 bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, pt. 2, *Maastricht–Zwolle*, ed. Zvi Avneri (Tübingen, 1968), 561–62.

²²Christoph Cluse, Rosemarie Kosche, and Matthias Schmandt, "Zur Siedlungsgeschichte der Juden im Nordwesten des Reichs während des Mittelalters," in *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter*. Teil 1: *Kommentarband*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Hannover, 2002), 33–54, esp. 33–34.

²³*Historisches Handbuch der jüdischen Gemeinschaften in Westfalen und Lippe*, vol. 3, *Ortschaften und Territorien im heutigen Regierungsbezirk Münster*, ed. Susanne Freund, Franz-Josef Jakobi, and Peter Johaneck (Münster, 2008), 487–88.

²⁴*Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Münster*, 574.

²⁵*Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Münster*, 262.

There were other Jewish communities elsewhere in the Lower Rhine area and in Westphalia (between Cologne and Münster) between 1250 and 1350, but these were outside the region of the dialect of concern. Several small communities are known to have existed, but the information about them is sparse. Often such communities did not have their own synagogues, and their members used the religious services of a nearby town, but there is no evidence of fully institutionalized religious life. In some places only a few names are documented.²⁶ There were larger communities that did have religious institutions, first among them Cologne, whose Jewish community, well known for its economic and its cultural history, was the center of Jewish life in the entire region. Indeed, Jewish Cologne has become the subject of extensive research in recent years.²⁷ Other notable communities were to be found in Dortmund, which in fact was the second largest in the entire area,²⁸ and Duisburg, where archival sources and tax records speak of a community and not just of isolated names.²⁹

It is thus possible, albeit with a degree of speculation, to narrow down the origin of the *Shema* fragment under discussion to either Münster or Coesfeld and to suggest that the sheet was confiscated there in 1350 and subsequently put to use by Christians in the same region. The adoption of this type of liturgical aid among a group of worshippers not particularly known for their rabbinic scholarship can be easily understood. As a community committed to traditional Jewish life and prayer, it was apparently among the first medieval Ashkenazi communities to provide its members with a ready, yet

²⁶Examples include Hamm, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 334–35, and for more information, see *Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg*, 391; Essen, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 227; nearby Werden, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 877–78; Mengede, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 536, and *Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg*, 303; Unna, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 848, and *Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg*, 762–63; Wesel, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 879–80; Borcken, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 97–98, and *Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg*, 209; Kaiserswerth, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, *Aachen – Luzern*, 385; and Monheim, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 546–47; Wipperfürth, *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 911.

²⁷A great deal of information and source material is collected in *Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 420–42. For a presentation of the recent archaeological finds, see *Von der Ausgrabung zum Museum: Kölner Archäologie zwischen Rathaus und Praetorium; Ergebnisse und Materialien, 2006–2012*, ed. Sven Schütte and Marianne Gechter (Cologne, 2012). Ephraim Shoham-Steiner is preparing a monograph on the history of the Jews of Cologne; several publications have appeared thus far. See Shoham-Steiner, “The Clash over Synagogue Decorations in Medieval Cologne,” *Jewish History* 30 (2016): 129–64; idem, “Towers and Lions? Identifying the Patron of a Medieval Illuminated Mahzor from Cologne,” *Jewish History* 33 (2020): 245–73.

²⁸*Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 170, and *Historisches Handbuch – Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg*, 260–61.

²⁹*Germania Judaica*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 178.

effective solution to a long-standing halakhic and social problem.³⁰ On the presumption that the larger a community the easier it would have been to find highly skilled professionals, it is also possible that the sheet was produced by a scribe in Cologne and used in Münster. At the same time, we cannot exclude the possibility that the fragment not only originated in the community of Cologne but was also used there. Dortmund and Duisburg might also be considered in this connection. Be that as it may and given that our focus is not on the production and its locale, but primarily on the function of this item, all these possibilities are tentative. The latter scenarios imply that the sheet traveled to Münster shortly after it was confiscated.

Conclusions

In an era when siddurim were wanting and individual worshippers did not commonly own one, the halakhic requirement to recite biblical verses from a written text created a practical problem. Rabbinic sources that discuss the rule offer various possible solutions. The problem was particularly acute in the recitation of *Shema Yisrael*, which consists of three biblical text portions, a core component of the prayer service that, according to Torah law, is to be recited twice daily. The parchment fragment discussed here attests to a possible practice that may have constituted a solution—the use of a large sheet with the text of the *Shema* copied in big letters onto parchment of particularly high quality. The cantillation marks were supposed to facilitate the proper recitation of the text.

As to the question of origin, we have no firm answer. Putting together the evidence discussed in the previous section, the most likely scenario is that the sheet was prepared in Cologne, clearly the scholarly center of Jewish life in the Lower Rhine region and Westphalia, and a location where all the facilities to produce a parchment sheet of the highest quality must have been available. Having been commissioned by the fairly well-established community of Münster, it must have been confiscated in 1350. Given that the fragment was later used by the Beguine Convent Ringe, it is possible and even likely that it actually reached there shortly after the confiscation. The convent was

³⁰This problem was also treated by rabbinic authorities in Iberia during this period, where the realia and the suggested resolutions were often different. Thus, for example, Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishvilli (Ritva of Seville, d. c. 1325) wrote in a responsum (*Teshuvot ha-Ritva*, ed. Joseph Kafih [Jerusalem, 1959], no. 97): “In our day, there are ignorant people who do not know the Torah portion that describes the ritual fringes (*tzitzit*) which must be recited each day, perhaps even as a Torah obligation, as well as the first part of the *Shema* which according to all is a Torah obligation. These people cannot pray at all, and the prayer leader fulfills their obligation for them.” See Kanarfogel, “Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory, 260–63.”

established in the early fourteenth century and received a privilege by Bishop Louis II, who was still in office during the persecutions of 1350, and he may have passed some of the confiscated Jewish possessions on to the Beguines.³¹ If so, it was there that the sheet was cut into pieces and the riddles were inserted in a mixed dialect or by a scribe from Coesfeld. At some point it began to be used as a document folder. Given the vulnerability of a single unbound parchment sheet and the history of this one unique find, there is little chance that more such items will come to light.

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Appendix: The Inserted Riddles and Their Middle-Low German Dialect

Robert Damme

Transcription:

(1)
*dar steyt³² eyn bo^em houelick der werlt louelick
 myd drutteyn questen myd twevnde³³ viftich nesten*

³¹On the history of the Convent, see Karl Zuhorn, "Die Beginen in Münster. Anfänge, Frühzeit und Ausgang des münsterischen Beginentums," *Westfälische Zeitschrift* 91 (1935): 1–149, esp. 44–49 <https://www.lwl.org/westfaelische-geschichte/txt/wz-9737.pdf>. For the Privilege, see <https://www.archive.nrw.de/archivsuche?link=KLASSIFIKATION-A92x55036348104476920191206080127535A92x24688374996185320200814125109029>.

We are grateful to Peter Worm from the Stadtarchiv for these references.

³²The form of the letter *e* in the manuscript renders this word readable also as *stiyt*.

³³Apparently added by another hand upon an erasure.

iuwelick nest hadde zeuen iungen
*iuwelick iunge hadde synen namen*³⁴
Ra^et wat dat sy

(2)

et en was nu vnde en ys nicht vnde nu(m)mer me^er werden en zal
*ganck*³⁵ *da^er v^et / dar zo^estu dat wal*
*Ra^et*³⁶ *wat dat*³⁷ *sy*

Translation:

(1)

There stands a tree [of] imposing [appearance] and achieving fame in the world, with thirteen bushy branches and fifty-two nests; each nest housed seven bird chicks, each bird chick had its [own] name. Guess what this means!

(2)

It was not and it is not and won't ever become;
 go outside, there you will see it.
 Guess what this means!

Localizing the dialect encounters a series of difficulties. First, it cannot be excluded that the two riddles involve a blend of language features taken from a model text and adapted by the scribe. Second, it is only in the major cities that we find a well-documented Middle-Low German written language. The specific constellation of features in the two riddles may also correspond to the linguistic characteristics of one of the many undocumented urban languages that existed in the region along with documented dialects. Third, the two short texts reflect only a very small number of linguistic elements that suggest a localizable dialect.

The rhyme *sal* (*zal* in the manuscript)/*wal* suggests that the text belongs to one of the northern (but not the most northern) regions of Westphalia (*wal* in contrast to *wol* and *sal* in contrast to *schal*). The conjunction *unde* (*vnde* in the manuscript) and the pronoun *iuwelick* ("each") are common in large parts of Westphalia (albeit not in the farthest west). Finally, the use of *z* for an initial *s* (as in *zal*, *zeuen*, and *zo^esto*) and the vocalism of *zo^esto* with *o* instead of *u* are indicative of a region bordering the Netherlands.

³⁴In the manuscript: *namen* \neq .

³⁵*k* or *h*.

³⁶Letter *R* appears unclear.

³⁷The manuscript has *da*.

This leaves us with two possibilities. First, the language of the riddles may represent an urban dialect that blends eastern and western Westphalian features, a phenomenon that can be observed in Coesfeld, where we find all the mentioned features in the second half of the fourteenth century. This scenario suggests that the scribe originated from Coesfeld or learned his craft there. The second possibility suggests that the riddles were written in a mixed dialect. The form (albeit not the spelling) *sal*, the adverb *wal*, the conjunction *unde*, and the pronoun *juwelick* are found in other contexts in the fourteenth-century Münsteranian dialect. However, the use of *z* for an initial *s* and the vocalism of *zo^estu* are not found in Münster. If we are dealing with a mixed dialect, these divergencies could be accounted for by a scribe who originated from a region near the Netherlands.