Some remarks on the date and original price of a rare Iberian Hebrew incunable

Our knowledge of the production of Hebrew printed books in the Iberian peninsula during the fifteenth century is limited.\footnote{J. Bloch, 'Early Hebrew printing in Spain and Portugal', \textit{Bulletin of the New York Public Library} 44 (1938) 371-420. Reprinted in \textit{Hebrew Printing and Bibliography. Studies by Joshua Bloch and Others}, Reprinted from the Publications of the New York Public Library (...). Selected and with a Preface by Ch. Berlin, New York 1976, 2-54.} Much historical evidence was destroyed with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and the subsequent events in Portugal in 1496. Apart from a group of Iberian Hebrew books, which I attributed to a 'Printer of Alfasi's Halakhot' and which have come down to us in fragments only,\footnote{Cf. A.K. Offenberg, in collaboration with C. Moed-van Walraven, \textit{Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections}, Bibliotheca Humanistica \& Reformatorica, 47, Nieuwkoop 1990, nos 2, 4, 23, 33, 90 and 127.} Rashi's \textit{Perush ha-torah} (Commentary on the Pentateuch) from the press of Solomon ben Moses Alkabiz Halevi at Guadalajara in Old Castile, probably dating from 1476, is the oldest known Spanish printed Hebrew book. Like the first dated Italian Hebrew printed book, which happens to be the same work, it is known from one copy only.\footnote{J. Bloch, 'Early Hebrew printing in Spain and Portugal', \textit{Bulletin of the New York Public Library} 44 (1938) 371-420. Reprinted in \textit{Hebrew Printing and Bibliography. Studies by Joshua Bloch and Others}, Reprinted from the Publications of the New York Public Library (...). Selected and with a Preface by Ch. Berlin, New York 1976, 2-54.} The types used have much in common with Sephardi handwritten books of the period. The press of Alkabiz also published a number of treatises of the Babylonian Talmud with Rashi's commentary, sometimes preserved in a few leaves only.\footnote{C. H. Dimitrovsky, \textit{S'ridei Bavli. A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction}, New York 1979 (in Hebrew).} Likewise three parts of Jacob ben Asher's \textit{Arba'ah Turim} have been preserved in one complete copy each. And finally the same has to be said of an edition of a \textit{Torah} with \textit{haftarot} and \textit{megillot} and a \textit{Haggadah} with additional texts.\footnote{C. H. Dimitrovsky, \textit{S'ridei Bavli. A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction}, New York 1979 (in Hebrew).} In all, during the period 1476-1482 at least fifteen Hebrew books were printed in Guadalajara. Part of the paperstock used...
by Alkabiz appears to have been imported from southern Italy, especially from Palermo, then under Spanish rule.\(^6\)

The British Library in London has a nice collection of five Guadalajara editions, which I had the privilege to describe during the last years.\(^7\) One of these books, the very rare *Perush al nevi'im aharonim* (Commentary on the Latter Prophets) by David Kimhi\(^8\) (a perfect copy has 318 leaves) presented a nice surprise. The copy is imperfect and consists of Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets only (Isaiah-Jeremiah are wanting). A few more leaves are missing from the texts in this copy, but in the centre of the book an almost complete blank has been preserved.\(^9\) On the verso of this leaf I discovered a very interesting contemporary note in minuscule Sephardi Hebrew handwriting. After much puzzling I was able to conclude that part of this little text was not in Hebrew but in old Spanish or Ladino.

The colophon of this edition, which is missing from the London copy but has been published in 1938 by the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* (no. 8170) from a copy which apparently has disappeared in the meantime,\(^10\) only informs us about the year of appearance of the book, the Jewish year 5242 (i.e., 25 August 1481/13 September 1482). In bibliographical literature the edition therefore is always dated '1482'.

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\(^7\) Four treatises of the Babylonian Talmud, to be dated about 1480: Masekhet Yoma, imperfect, 74 leaves, no complete copy known; Masekhet Hagigah, perfect, 42 leaves, only complete copy known; Masekhet Ta'anit, imperfect, 45 leaves, only copy known; Masekhet Qiddushin, imperfect, 140 leaves, only some twenty-odd other leaves are known; and David Kimhi's commentary, discussed here.

\(^8\) There are seven copies known in public collections, but all are imperfect or only fragments.

\(^9\) Fol. 71b of part III (BL C.49.d.9).