One of the most important Yiddish ethical books is undoubtedly Sefer Lev tov. After it was printed for the first time, and already in the course of the seventeenth century, many writers recommended this book to their readers. New editions of the book continue to be published up to date.\textsuperscript{1} Nevertheless, research on Sefer Lev tov has been very limited, since its structure and characteristics are considered to be clear and self-explanatory. In the first edition of the book, printed in Prague in 1620, the author Isaac ben Eliakum pointed out some of the sources he had employed when writing it. One of his principal sources had been Rabbi Judah Kalaz’s Sefer ha-Musar.\textsuperscript{2}

Moreover, Isaac ben Eliakum emphasizes throughout Sefer Lev tov that he is totally committed to Sefer ha-Musar, and that he cannot deviate from its contents even though he really would like to do so.

This is partly mentioned also above, but since Sefer ha-Musar says so, I too must write it again.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1} The last edition of the book, albeit partial, was printed in New York in 1999.

\textsuperscript{2} Constantinople 1537.

\textsuperscript{3} Sefer Lev tov, Prague 1620: fol. 15v.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., fol. 19r.
However, the author not only says that he cannot deviate from his source; on the contrary, he aspires to cite higher authorities.

Nevertheless, a more detailed examination of the book (for instance, the author’s attitude towards his sources, the book’s structure etc.), reveals that what one declares and what one actually does are two different matters. Such a study may highlight new facts concerning the book’s set-up, the structure of various editions, its innovative contents, and the manner in which the subjects are presented.

This article focuses on one such central question: is the first printed edition known to us of Sefer Lev tov (Prague 1620) indeed the first edition of the book? I would like to show that Sefer Lev tov might have had a previous edition, which has been lost. Furthermore, the existing first edition of Prague 1620 includes details that may indicate that an earlier edition of Sefer Lev tov did exist, either in manuscript or even in print, and that it, too, was composed by Isaac ben Eliakum. This ‘opus zero’ edition was possibly a trial version, issued by the author in order to test the book’s chances of success. We will, herewith, present three basic examples from the Prague edition that may confirm the existence of such an earlier edition.

First Example

At the end of the fifth chapter, which discusses hilkhot derekh etz, or norms of behaviour, the author continues with a discussion of the rules concerning the proper conducts concerning women and young girls, adding a supplement which deals with the same subject. At the end of this supplement the author writes:

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5 Ibid., fol. 7r.
6 This is a known phenomenon in music, when a composer suppresses an early youth work or a piece, which the composer did not add to the list of his oeuvre. See for instance the case of Anton Bruckner’s Die Nullte.