

An edition of influential rabbinical scholarship and early example of Hebrew printing.

Adret, Solomon ben Abraham. *Teshuvot she'ilot*. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, [1519?]. 7 7/8 inches (200 mm), [190] pp.

Although the title-page reads *Teshuvot she'ilot le-rabenu Mosheh bar Nahman* (or, *Responsa to Inquiries by our Teacher Moses ben Nahman*), this book is not in fact by that great rabbinic scholar, who introduced the pilpulistic method of Talmudic scholarship to Spain. The true author was his leading disciple Solomon ben Abraham Adret (1235–1310), also known by his acronym as “the RaShBA.” A native of Barcelona and chief rabbi in that city for more than forty years, ben Adret was a prolific author of rabbinic literature: codes, commentaries, and responsa (questions and answers concerning vexed religious and legal matters). Such was his fame that enquiries came to him from Italy, Germany, France, Portugal, and even Palestine.

Ben Adret was the most prolific of respondents. Including the collection attributed to Moses ben Nahman (or Nahmanides), his responsa number more than 3,000. Those relating to civil law and community affairs cast much incidental light on the social history of medieval Spanish Jewry. Other questions concern ritual, contradictory passages in the Bible, and the proper relation of philosophy to tradition. Many of ben Adret's responsa remain in manuscript. A first sampling of 420 were printed in Rome, circa 1469–73. It was apparently the first or second Hebrew book to be published, one of a handful of titles produced by a trio of printers, Obadiah, Manasseh and Benjamin, none of them bearing a date or place of publication. They are generally believed to precede the first dated Hebrew book, published in Reggio di Calabria in 1475—Latin printing had preceded Hebrew, beginning in Italy in 1462, and reaching Rome by 1468.

Printing in Hebrew was initially limited to Italy and Spain, only spreading to Constantinople in 1493, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal. By the early 16th century, there were Hebrew printers in northern Europe and Morocco. No

Hebrew incunables were printed in Venice, although Aldus Manutius occasionally used Hebrew types in his books. Just after his death, the wealthy Christian merchant Daniel Bomberg, a native of Antwerp, established a Hebrew press in Venice. The city soon became the leading center in Italy of Hebrew printing and Bomberg its finest exponent. Between 1516 and 1549, he published more than 200 volumes. Apart from two books in Latin by apostate Jews, all of them were in Hebrew, chiefly editions of the Bible and the Talmud. Bomberg marketed his Hebrew books not only to the Jews of Italy, their numbers swelled by Iberian exiles, but also to Christian Hebraists, for whom Hebrew was revered as one of the three sacred languages. This edition of ben Adret's pseudo-Nahmanides responsa was one of Bomberg's early publications.

On the front pastedown is the bookplate of "The Samson/Copenhagen Judaica Collection." This collection, comprising some 2,000 works in Hebrew dating from 1517 to 1939, was originally brought together by the Jewish community in Copenhagen. It was concealed from the Nazis during World War II but could no longer be properly maintained by 1983. The collection was then sold to the expatriate Danish Jewish businessman Herman R. Samson (b. 1937) who eventually found a home for it in 2003 at the Cecil H. Green Library at Stanford University. The Cecil H. Green Library comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries' 8.5 million volumes, and it houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes. Among the rarities are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.