



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Operation Maimonides and the Norsa Codex in Rome

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The so called "Operation Maimonides" is one of the most interesting interventions of the Italian General Directorate for Archives in order to recover a beautiful and rare document which could leave Italy for ever and so become inaccessible to scholars. The operation has made possible to preserve in Italy the Norsa Codex with the document certifying its ownership by an Italian family since the XVI century.

The owner of the manuscript the Italian State recently paid 1.382.000 Euros for, was Mosheh Yehi'el ben Natan'el Norsa, a banker, a patron, the founder of a famous synagogue with his family business in Mantua, Italy. He was a bibliophile banker with business relations with Gonzaga's Mantua and Este household in Ferrara. Moshe ben Natan'el was not content with printed books, he had a passion for manuscripts which at the beginning of the XVI century were still an useful instrument for circulating culture. The Jews were welcome in the city of Mantua since they had the capitals needed for banking, a vital activity for the economic and social rise of the middle classes and they guaranteed funding for major initiatives in the small Gonzaga State.

The "Norsa Codex", fruit of the Jewish wealth is a manuscript enriched by filigree decorations and containing The Guide for the Perplexed, one of the three major works of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. The manuscript was copied in the Ashkenazi region in the years of the escape from the danger of the Black Death. Once in Italy it was purchased and shared the fortunes and misfortunes of the household and of the city of Mantua. It was reportedly damaged in the Sack of Mantua by the German Landsknechts, in 1630, during the disastrous War of the Mantuan Succession, 1627–31. This Codex represents a fundamental witness of the history of Judaism in Italy and it is certainly also part of the Italian history.

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