

# LEO GRECH/YEHUDAH MOSCONI: HEBREW HISTORIOGRAPHY AND COLLECTIONISM IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

Leo Grech/Yehudah Mosconi is famous for the sale of his library and for his Introduction to the medieval Hebrew chronicle known as Yosippon. The paper recreates his background in Mallorca in the second half of the fourteenth century. It argues that an examination of the Introduction he authored may help to understand the Jewish attitudes to -and perceptions of- history writing at the time. Similarly, his remarks on the acquisition of books differ from more conventional descriptions in terms of progeny. They provide evidence of the thought and ideals of collectionism of Hebrew books in medieval Spain.

*Keywords:* Leo Grech/Yehudah Mosconi. Hebrew book collectionism. Hebrew Historiography.

## RESUMEN

Leo Grech / Yehudah Mosconi es famoso por la venta de su biblioteca y por su Introducción a la crónica hebrea medieval conocida como Yosippon. El artículo reconstruye su contexto en

Mallorca en la segunda mitad del siglo XIV. Argumenta que un examen de la Introducción que compuso puede ayudar a comprender las actitudes judías hacia la composición de obras de historia y las percepciones de la misma en esa época. Asimismo, sus comentarios sobre la adquisición de libros difieren de descripciones más convencionales en términos de progeñe. Proporcionan evidencia acerca del pensamiento y los ideales del coleccionismo de libros hebreos en la España medieval.

*Palabras clave:* Leo Grech/Yehudah Mosconi. Coleccionismo medieval de libros hebreos. Historiografía hebrea medieval.

Leo Grech/Yehudah b. Moses Mosconi, is famous for his library and for his Introduction<sup>1</sup> to an edition of the medieval Hebrew chronicle *Yosippon*. "Famous" is, perhaps, an overstatement, as it is possible to find cited some treatments<sup>2</sup> which ascribe him to the thirteenth century, although he was born in 1328 and died before October 1377. The aim of the following lines is to link these two vectors of his activities while analyzing the Prologue.

On a first encounter with his biography, his birth in the Byzantine empire [in Ohrid, in today's North Macedonia] might seem a key to his thought and attitudes. Nevertheless, even those who tend to focus intently on birth will have to agree that the Byzantine component of his biography is mostly undocumented [e.g. in the usual sense of dated, precise

1 J. Mosconi, "Haqdamah le-Yosippon," Ed A. Berliner from a Roman MS in *Ozar Tob* (supplement to *Magazin fir die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*), Berlin, 1877-78, pp. 17 ff. [Henceforward Haqdamah] Reprinted in *Sefer Yosippon*, ed. H. Hominer, Jerusalem, 1965, p. 37.

2 Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* Seattle: Univ of Washington, 1982 p 35. A. Neubauer, "Pseudo-Josephus, Joseph ben Gorion" *JQR* vol 11 (1899) pp. 355-364.

archival documents] especially in contrast to the multiple archival documents on his life in Spain/Mallorca.<sup>3</sup>

Nor is this component seen as crucial by Mosconi himself. On the contrary, he himself emphasizes his will to travel outside Byzantium and leave the place of his birth. He thanks Divine Providence for helping him to leave Byzantium. His undoubted interest in, and creativity on, grammar or on Abraham Ibn Ezra's commentary<sup>4</sup> is not entirely or directly relevant to his work [1368-1370?] on Yosippon.

There are more recent developments which may help to enhance and amplify our understanding of his projects of historiography and collectionism. Firstly, there is the reconstruction of a Mediterranean society and culture in fourteenth century Majorca. The cosmopolitan character of its ports, shipping and international trade is part of this. Without taking this into account, we cannot understand the innovation, the burgherly merchant's protagonism, the effect of realism [down to mentions of specific buildings] or the Genoese presence in the 1286 *Majorca Disputation*, for example.<sup>5</sup>

3 See for example A. Pons, "Los judios del reino de Majorca durante los siglos XIII-XIV," *Hispania*, XVI (1956), pp. 224-231, and Apendice documental, nos. 38: maestre Leo Metge (a. 1357), and 56: maestre Leo Mosconi, metge. On his early teacher, Shemarya of Negroponte and his Spanish phase, see, e.g. E. Gutwirth, "'Acutissima patria': Locating texts before and after the expulsions," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin*, vol. 8 (2011): 19-38.

4 Howard Kreisel, *R. Judah Leon ben Moses Moskoni Eben Ha-'Ezer Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary*, Beer Sheva: Univ., 2021, notes that Mosconi's is the largest known supercommentary and that it cites various lost previous ones. This could be understood as reinforcing our view of the significance of collectionism for his outlook. On the genre of the Supercommentaries see, for example, Eleazar Gutwirth, "Fourteenth Century Supercommentaries on Abraham Ibn Ezra," in Fernando Díaz Esteban, ed., *Abraham Ibn Ezra and His Age*, Madrid: AEO, 1990, 147-154.

5 Ora Limor, *The Disputation of Majorca 1286 A critical edition and Introduction*, Jerusalem: Univ, 1985.

This is an age of flourishing intellectual, scientific and artistic activity despite the island/kingdom's political problems and the possible economic/fiscal decadence of the aljama [if we take the earlier stages of the Reconquista as measuring rod].<sup>6</sup> This flourishing would not surprise those who are aware of the coeval monumental architectural enterprises [e.g. the cathedral] and the presence of scientists. It is also understood now that there was a noteworthy Jewish culture at that time and place.<sup>7</sup> The weight of Jewish culture is also expressed in the surviving Hebrew MS codices completed in Majorca; in the high prices fetched by the sale of Mosconi's library (1375); in the existence of an exclusive group of cognoscenti which constituted the buyers of his library. Various members of this group would reappear in the responsa of Isaac bar Sheshet and Simeon b. Zemah Duran. Alchemy was cultivated<sup>8</sup> as was rabbinical culture. But although it is usually represented by S.b.Zemah Duran, it should be remembered that his responsa begin to be composed after his move to N Africa, following the events of 1391. The Rabbi's father, Astruc/Zemah Duran had been entrusted with the curatorship of Mosconi's library for its sale. Various other local Jewish scholars were of interest to the royal courts of the Crown of Aragon. In 1359, for example, R. Isaac Nifoci, an astronomer, was chosen as the familiar of the

6 For the economic and fiscal situation of the Jews in fourteenth century Majorca see the first chapter of Natalie Oeltjen, "Crisis and Regeneration: The Conversos of Majorca, 1391-1416" Thesis, University of Toronto 2012, and its bibliograhly.

7 J. Hillgarth and B.Narkiss, "A List of Hebrew Books (1330) and a Contract to Illuminate Manuscripts (1335) from Majorca," *Revue des Études Juives*, 3rd Series, 3 (1961): 304-320.

8 E. Gutwirth, "Alchemy and Armaments: On an aljamiado Fragment in a Houghton MS" *Sefarad*; Vol 81, No 1 (2021). págs. 69-88.

king of Aragon.<sup>9</sup> To a broader public, however, it is the school of cartographers which is probably best known.<sup>10</sup>

It is impossible today to forget Flusser<sup>11</sup> in serious Yosippon studies. This is the case even if we were to attend only to his history of MS transmissions and printed editions of that chronicle which of necessity includes Mosconi. Two additional developments may affect our readings today. The first is the result of a number of contributions by Sela who based herself on a corpus of ca. 160 pages of Arabic Yosippon MS fragments. At an early stage, Yosippon was translated into Arabic. Indeed, Sela maintained that attention to the Arabic version would help in the comprehension of the complex or garbled narratives of the standard Hebrew Yosippon. It would reveal nothing less than the "Origin and Development of the Yosippon Narrative".<sup>12</sup> Whether Mosconi had any contact with this corpus has not yet been investigated. The second major development is that of the identification of the (previously misidentified) MS of the *romance* translation of Yosippon. So far there has been no systematic confrontation of the *romance* translation of the MS at the Biblioteca Menéndez y Pelayo with the Cairene Geniza MSS of Yosippon. Studies of the Biblioteca Menéndez y Pelayo MS tend to concentrate on paleography and codicology rather than the cultural, literary challenges.<sup>13</sup>

9 I. Epstein, *The Responsa of Rabbi Simon b. Zemah Duran as a Source of the History of the Jews in North Africa*. (London 1930), 101; F. Baer, *Die juden im Christlichen Spanien*, Berlin 1929, Index, sv.

10 Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Catalan Maps and Jewish Books: The Intellectual Profile of Elisha ben Abraham Cresques (1325-1387)*. Turnhout: Brepols. 2020.

11 David Flusser, *Sefer Yosippon*. Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1978.

12 S. Sela, "Origin and Development of the Josippon Narrative" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 64 (1994): 51–63. Shulamit Sela, *The Arabic Josippon*, Jerusalem, 2009, 2 vols.

13 M. Sueiro Pena, 'Las dos lecturas de Josefo en la España medieval: la Guerra judaica de Alfonso de Palencia y el Yosifón en romance', in *Actas del VIII Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval (Santander 22–*

Other advances may be less specific and require some argument. According to Frenkel, in what she terms her programmatic article, it is necessary to discuss books produced and consumed by the religious minorities that were an indispensable part of society. For her, the book lists found in the Cairo Geniza have a potential as significant tools for developing a better understanding of the cultural and social history of the medieval Islamic world.<sup>14</sup> It might possibly be argued that they could be of interest for the study of other Mediterranean societies and cultures as well. There are numerous [more than 86?] Yosippon fragments in the Geniza. Given this article's Sephardi interest, it may be noted that amongst the Geniza fragments at the T-S collection in the CUL there are two bifolia of a printed edition of Yosippon, ch. 59ff., in Ladino.<sup>15</sup> The call mark- CUL T-S Misc 17.66- leads us to think that the early twentieth century Geniza scholars at Cambridge, who engaged in the activity informally termed "sorting" by Schechter [we would call it scholarly or informed classification] could identify -and were aware of the significance of- Yosippon MSS and prints in various languages [Ladino, Hebrew, Arabic] and thus made modern research possible by placing them in certain spaces or discrete files [e.g.

26 de septiembre de 1999), ed. M. Freixas and S. Iriso, II, Barcelona, 2000, pp. 1677–91 (at 1682). For the codicology see G. Avenoz, 'Datos sobre el código M-54 de la Biblioteca de Menéndez Pelayo de Santander: el Yosifón en romance', *Boletín de la Biblioteca Menéndez Pelayo*, 75, (1999), pp. 393–401. Estanislau de K. Aguiló i Aguiló et al., "Inventari de la heretat y llibreria del metje juheu Jahuda o Lleó Mosconi (1375)", *Boletín de la Sociedad Arqueológica Luliana*, 10 (1903-1904), 80-91.

14 Miriam Frenkel, "Book Lists from the Cairo Geniza: a Window on the Production of Texts in the Middle Ages." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 80, no. 2, (2017), pp. 233–52.

15 *Contrast Sefer Ben Gurion (Yosipon). First Ladino Translation by Abraham Asa (1753). A Critical Edition*, Lazar, Moshe (Editor) technical editor, Francisco J. Pueyo Mena, Lancaster, Calif. : Labyrinthos, 2000.

10k or Misc 17] rather than spread across 140. 000 or more items.

Understanding Mosconi's library of 198 volumes, like any medieval Jewish book list or inventory, requires some awareness of Geniza book lists to achieve a sense of proportion and a perspective. The study of these lists [despite appearances] is not some contemporary innovation of today and it could be traced back to the age of Ernest James Worman [d.1909] or Wilhelm Bacher [d.1913], but has changed with the publication of Alloni's studies.<sup>16</sup> Thus, when we look at two or three Jewish book lists from 14th century Majorca or even the 6 Majorcan Jewish libraries found by Hillgarth, we might recall that Alloni studies 114 medieval Jewish libraries/book lists. Nor should we forget the list of ca. 139 volumes of Moshe Almaterí [1362] who died in Mallorca.<sup>17</sup> We must also take into account the various studies of medieval Spanish Hebrew book lists in inventories, testaments and other testimonies.<sup>18</sup> Narkiss-Hillgarth have surmised that the Majorcan notaries were not particularly careful or precise in their transcriptions of Hebrew/Aramaic book titles. Steinschneider had referred to the titles in the list of Mosconi's books as *maltraitées*<sup>19</sup>. In general, it is known that medieval notaries transcribed from Hebrew "by ear" not only in Majorca. Similar problems concerning titles-and therefore identification of the books-, for different reasons, occur in the Cairene counterpart. Frenkel

16 Nehemiah Allony, *The Jewish Library in the Middle Ages — Book Lists from the Cairo Geniza*, Edited by Miriam Frenkel and Haggai Ben-Shammai, with the participation of Moshe Sokolow., Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2006.

17 J. Riera i Sans "Cent trenta-nou volums de llibres d'un jueu mercader i talmudista: Mossé Almaterí (1362)" *Sefarad* Vol. 68 Núm. 1 (2008) - 15-35.

18 Eduard Feliu, "Bibliografia sobre inventaris, testaments, llistes i notícies de llibres hebreus medievals", *Tamid* 2 (1998-1999), pàgs. 228-240.

19 J.N. Hillgarth and B. Narkis, "A List of Hebrew Books (1330) and a Contract to Illuminate Manuscripts (1335) from Majorca" *REJ*, 120 (1961), 297-320.

mentions *Ta'anit* as an example. Whether their "books" are books or parts of books [quires] is yet another practical question which might apply to both, Egyptian and Spanish lists. In some cases, the Jewish book lists from medieval Spain refer specifically to *pecias*, a system of manuscript production used mainly in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and to some extent, fifteenth centuries, at the universities. The *pecias* are not entire books but only pieces or sections. The *pecias* in Jewish book lists are evidently less well known to the public at large and less frequently studied than the university-related *pecias*.<sup>20</sup> The system seems to have existed at Salamanca in Spain (1254).<sup>21</sup> The Studium at Lleida, in 1302, possessed *pecias* which needed to be completed.<sup>22</sup>

Mosconi's great library, once thought to be the largest individual Jewish library in the medieval West, no longer appears as an isolated phenomenon. In Majorca itself, in the years 1229-1550, there were numerous libraries including Jewish [and converso] ones as we now know thanks to the archival research of J. N. Hillgarth.<sup>23</sup> The Mosconi sale lists - with some irregularities- mention one copy of *Yosippon*, although in the Prologue, Mosconi refers to about five MSS he

20 E. Gutwirth, "Notarial List of Jewish Books Delivered to the Justicia in Jaca 1415." in *Biblias de Sefarad*, ed Esperanza Alfonso, Javier del Barco, et al Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2012, pp.376-378.

21 Paloma Cuenca Muñoz, "El libro en el siglo xiii: la pecia" In: *I Jornadas sobre Documentación jurídico-administrativa, económico-financiera y judicial*, Madrid:UCM, 2002, pp231-243.

22 Cecil Roth, "The Qualification of Jewish Physicians in the Middle Ages." *Speculum*, vol. 28, no. 4, (1953), pp. 834-43.

23 J. N. Hillgarth, *Readers and Books in Majorca. 1229-1550*, I. Aubervilliers: Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes (IRHT), 1991. (Documents, études et répertoires de l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, 45); idem "Majorcan Jews and conversos as Owners and Artisans of Books" *Exilio y diáspora*, Avraham Grossman; Yosef Kaplan; Aaron Mirsky eds. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi and University: Madrid: CSIC, 1991, 125-30.



had examined and gives the impression of having handled more. It raises the question of whether the inventory really reflects the entire library of Leo or even all the more significant books or only the ones deemed suitable by Astruc Duran. Rubio i Lluch<sup>24</sup> found a document dated 22/4/1378 where King Pere expresses his interest in Mosconi's library and orders the Governor of Majorca to send the books to the King. Whether the order was executed or viable or not<sup>25</sup>, what needs to be observed is that the letter distinguishes between the books of Mosconi that were sold and those which had been loaned [incidentally documenting one of the ways book circulated in that community] and those which had been given away. That is to say that the inventory may not contain the entire library. The one copy of Yosippon was bought at the sale of his books by one of the Najar brothers, Maymon Najar<sup>26</sup>. This may be no coincidence. Recent work has emphasized the antiquarian facet in Najar's thought. His correspondence with Duran certainly includes a letter which concerns a material object from antiquity: the shewbread<sup>27</sup>. The objects of the Jerusalem Temple are a theme which is not foreign to Yosippon's interests.

The opening of Mosconi's Prologue to the *Sefer Yosippon* would, at first sight, seem to support a certain view of medieval Jewish historiography. That is that motivations for reading Jewish history come only from messianism, from

24 Antonio Rubió i Lluch, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-  
eval*, Barcelona, 1907-21, number 294.

25 It is unrealistic to speculate that the King was able to understand or read the technical Aramaic/Hebrew of the ancient and medieval books in Mosconi's library. More realistic would be envisioning court Jews close to him who are interested in such texts.

26 Kayserling, loc. cit. p.196 bis. For other matters relating to Najar, see Epstein, op. cit. pp. 94-96.

27 Exodus, 25; 35; etc.

anguish about the present. Leo presents himself as being in the midst of the troubles which affect the Jews "in this diaspora". He invokes the end, the history [*toldot*] of future days, the redemption and salvation: "When we justify our souls before Him then He will act with us benevolently." He inveighs against the imaginary false teachings "*ha-horaot ha- bduiot*". There are those who do not listen to the voice of the teachers who observe the marvels of God's Torah. That is why the end is not comprehended. The enlightened find consolation by believing that the poor, tossed nation will be saved by God and at the end knowledge will increase. These are all reasons for reading history, i.e. for reading Yosippon.

This view of reading history as an auxiliary to religious [in this case messianic] thought is not new nor is it privative of Mosconi. A concrete example would be the case of the similarity in this with his Tudelan contemporary, Joshua ibn Shoaib, [d. ca.1340] who, in his Homilies/ *Drashot* [on the pericope Miqetz<sup>28</sup>] refers to Yosippon as a witness to the miracles wrought at the time of the Hasmoneans, a topical subject at the Hanuka season. Similar results would be obtained by observing Ezra Melamed's list (however incomplete) of citations of Yosippon in medieval Hebrew bible exegesis.<sup>29</sup>

Mosconi believes that God created a remedy to the blow/injury [*makah*] of the diaspora "in which we find ourselves today" because he granted "us the great prince the authority of priesthood and wisdom and royalty: Joseph the priest son of Gurion the priest". Mosconi, without apparent break in the rhetoric of encomium to "Joseph ben Gurion" -i.e.

28 Joshua ibn Shuaib, *Drashot*, Constantinople: Nahmias, 1523

29 Ezra Melamed, *Mefarshe ha-Mikra: darkhem ye-shitotehem*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978.

to the book he is prefacing -offers a frame or historical background to the life of the historian. That is to say, that according to his view about reading history, it is not enough to learn the events; it is necessary to focus on the historian and his background:

...who lived in the days of the success of Israel in the land of Judah and Jerusalem ...and he lived a long life and his intelligence rose above the storm ...towards heaven ...with God's help he admonished the Israel of his days...and counselled them well...in the second exile when the house of God was destroyed and in mourning...in those days the aforementioned priest was a priest anointed for war a teacher of righteousness...and in Jerusalem there were two families one was Gorion and the other Gurinion.[Prologue]

He uses the book itself, i.e. internal evidence, to reconstruct a biography of the putative ancient historian. He is not impervious to rhetoric. In an aside, he describes a lamentation on Jerusalem as wonderful- *nifla'ah*. In this paragraph, he lists about eight passages which may be used as sources for the biography of the historian, noting the number of the chapter where the references to the life may be found.

He then formulates rhetorically/poetically his view of the ideas of the historian. His was the time when God awakened the historian's spirit and he wrote the book to describe the evil of the destruction of the house of God and his people. The historian admonished his people as did others of his time. He wrote this in his book entitled the *Wars of the Lord/ Milhamot Hashem*. To some extent, Leo's references to *tokhaha*, [*tokhahot Yosef ben Gurion ha-tovot*] "the good admonishments of Yosef ben Gurion", imply his perception of the affinities of history with the Hebrew genre of *musar*, moral and ethical admonishment, so richly cultivated by medieval Jews.<sup>30</sup>

30 J. Dan, *Sifrut ha musar ve-ha-drush* Jerusalem: Keter, 1975. Isaiah Tishby and J Dan *Mivhar sifrut ha musar*, Jerusalem: Newman, 1971.

The historian offers another "utility", namely that Joseph reveals to the reader the secrets of reality, the stories from Adam to his own day which he knew. These are valuable because, says Mosconi, we have no other witness except for the bible which is read by all. A minority understands what is hidden in them. And he wrote the book and gave it a general name, that is, Yosippon, the name which he bore then, when he was anointed for war. He was elevated in dignity, they magnified him in honour by calling him Yosippon rather than simply Joseph. The suffix /on/ is explained by analogy to the ancient case of *Amnon- Aminon*. While he says that the diminutive is a sign of humility, for him, the suffix /on/ is not diminishing or insulting, but, rather magnifying the name of the historian. We might bear in mind that Leo Grech's [and his father's] own name, Mosconi, contains the suffix- /on[i]/.

Such detailed interest in the author of a book in a prologue bears affinities with an item of the Christian medieval *accessus*, which began as the formal introduction to a grammatical commentary on a classical author, such as e.g. Ovid.<sup>31</sup> It later developed in a broader direction which was neither in Latin, nor did it concern grammar nor the classics. More precisely, the reminiscence here, -in the attempts to reconstruct a biography of Yosipon's author in a prologue about the book-, is to the item in the *accessus* known as *vita auctoris*. Today there is little hesitation in seeing the *accessus* as a possible element when dealing with texts of Hispano-Jewish authors such as Lorqi or Abravanel. Nevertheless we feel that Mosconi transcends it. Mosconi brings as his witness *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* which -he writes- is the sixth part of Yosippon, ch 153.

31 Stephen M. Wheeler, *Accessus ad auctores: Medieval Introductions to the Authors (Codex latinus monacensis 19475)*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015.

Mosconi's prologue lists four "utilities" of the history book, Yosippon. The articulation of utilities in prologues is yet another component of the *accessus*. It has been attended to in recent research. It was shown to be one of the affinities between Iberian Jewish and Iberian Christian historiography in the late middle ages. Thus, it occurs in Iberian Christian works of history and also in Iberian Jewish ones.<sup>32</sup>

This section of the prologue is the site of Mosconi's famous sentence, where, citing Jeremiah 31:30, he asserts "For we can read in it the deeds of our ancestors because of whose sins our city was destroyed...and they ate the sour grapes, but our teeth are set on edge.". There is no doubt of the strong "familial component" in his justification of reading history and Yosippon. But there are various other elements as well. These serve to nuance his position. Thus, the first utility does not concern "the forefathers" as much as the "kingdoms of this world". That is, that according to Leo, one can learn from Yosippon, the chronicle, that the kingdoms of the nations are powerful for a time and are transitory, if not ephemeral. So that formally the object of interest is the history of the kingdoms. He mentions judicial astrology and the systems /constellations [*ma`arakhot*] which determine the fate of the nations. When writing about Yosippon's sources, he mentions that Yosippon used gentile sources. ["*sifrei yeter he-`amim*"]<sup>33</sup>

He is aware of Josephus circulating amongst the gentiles.<sup>34</sup> He shows an interest in and gives space to -in the prologue that he composed- the Josephus of the non-Jews. He mentions his name in Greek and in Latin. He produces fragments of a kind

32 Eleazar Gutwirth, "The Historian's Origins and Genealogies: The Sefer Yuhasin," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin*, vol. 6 (2008): 57-82

33 Haqdamah, p22

34 For the real circulation of Josephus [not Yosippon] see Jaume Riera i Sans, "Presència de Josefus a les lletres catalanes medievals" · In: *Studia... M. de Riquer*, Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1987. 179-220

of literary history of Josephus. According to him, Josephus was translated from Hebrew into Greek by Strabo. Gregory, the great bishop in the days of Emperor Sebastian [!] "who lived seven hundred years ago"<sup>35</sup> translated Josephus into Latin. Josippon is called Josephus minor. The book was translated by Gregory from Hebrew into Latin. Ben Gorion also wrote another book for the Romans in their language. There is a difference between the two books. This bishop Gregory was, according to Leo "a great friend of the Jews" who "caused many salvations" He claims that all this is written in the book called "Canonicas" [a term whose morphology points to Moscato's hispanicity rather than to Greek]. What is interesting in his section on Josephus is evidently not the issue of accuracy or data in the fourteenth century, but the fact that these points cannot be interpreted as exclusivist. The numerous items of evidence collected above show a "medievalization", i. e. affinities with surrounding culture. His text contradicts efforts to present him as an icon or showpiece of medieval Jewish historiographic particularism and isolation.

His collectionism needs to be highlighted and "placed". Some would argue that collectionism may be traced to antiquity, as far back as the *Museion* of the Tolemites or the Assyrian Empire's collections in Nineveh. Collectionism today is used in a somewhat different sense. Pleasure, possession and contemplation are prime criteria. Most significant for us is the fact that in numerous book lists we have no evidence of self-awareness as collectionists, no articulated statements as to the motives for accumulating items. There is little that conveys a collector's personality, predilections or ideals. We are conscious of the difference between a copyist/scribe/book sellers' inventory or a professional's tools [e.g. of physicians or astronomers] on the one hand and on the other hand, the

35 Haqdamah, p22

collection of an individual. Not every inventory is a sign of collectionism.

The inventory of his library drawn for the sale has been studied more than once<sup>36</sup> since the early efforts of Aguiló, Steinschneider, M. I. Levi, or M. Kayserling<sup>37</sup> Mosconi refers not only to abstract "versions" but to realistic descriptions of his collecting activities. He feels necessary to add them to his introduction. They occur in his description of the purchase of the codices. He writes<sup>38</sup> that, when he saw the great value of the book, he aimed to possess it. And God, the true helper, helped him to obtain it. He also tells us that he was very happy, as if he had found a great treasure -using the words of Ps.119:162 "[I rejoice at thy word,] as one that findeth great spoil". That is to say that in his writing on the work of history he pays attention not only to matters of *variae lectiones*.

Mosconi confronts different MSS of the same work. He refers to various copies which he saw in different places [*meqomot mithalfim*]. Even his own *vorlage* contained omissions because -he says- the scribe made mistakes when he was not paying attention. He observes their structure and asserts that some are divided into parts and some are not. He characterizes

36 Joseph R. Hacker, "Jewish Book Owners and their Libraries in the Iberian Peninsula, Fourteenth–Fifteenth Centuries" *The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean. Hebrew Manuscripts and Incunabula in Context* ed Javier del Barco, Leiden- Boston: Brill, 2015, pp 70–104

37 Estanislau de K Aguiló, "Inventari de la heretat y libreria del Metje jueu Jahuda o Lleo Mosconi." *BSAL*, 10 (1903-04), 80-91; I. Levi, "L'inventaire du mobilier et de la bibliothèque d'un médecin de Majorque au XIV siècle (Leone Juda Mosconi)", *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. XXXIX (1899), págs. 242-260; M. Steinschneider, "La bibliothèque de Leon Mosconi. Notice bibliographique", *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. XL (1900), pp. 62-63, 168 - 187; M. Kayserling, "Nouvelle note sur la bibliothèque de Leon Mosconi", *Revue de Etudes Juives*, vol. XLI, 82 (1900), págs. 250-265; idem, "Notes sur l'histoire des Juifs de Majorque", *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. XLIV, 88 (1902), págs. 297-300.

38 Haqdamah, p21

some as missing some of the stories. The cases of Ibn Dawd's and Shmuel Ha-Nagid's copies are examples of such "abridgements". But others, too, show these characteristics, although they are not ascribed to known individuals. He prefers one specimen which he pronounces more "complete". We witness, then, a beginning of attention to questions of provenance in the study of discrete, individual MS codices. Later authors [e.g. Profayt Duran] would follow suit.

And after this I put all my heart into seeking and observing the books of the scholars who were famous for their wisdom in order to assuage the soul which desires their words ...and I did not rest till I bought them for costly prices for my poverty and I dictated them and some I wrote myself at my soul's wish with the tears of my heart. And God's providence helped me and I bought many books in every wisdom and some according to my means/ability and circumstances and not according to my wishes... [Prologue]

The passage reads like the memoirs of a collector, expressions of his individual sensibility, desires, and ideals rather than purely a literary history. Accordingly, his collection of MSS could be said to reflect the collector [Mosconi] no less than the author [Yosippon]. As is well known, most readings of the prologue attend to the latter rather than the former. He represents a collector whose financial possibilities are widely different from those of institutions such as the Church, the monarchy and nobility of his age and therefore less well known. It is pertinent to note that he is not only cited in the royal order referred to above, but also named physician to king Pere III and that on 5/2/1365 he would be the recipient of a letter of recommendation from the king of Tremcen [Pons reads Tirimce<sup>39</sup>]. His status as a court Jew is then not in question. It may be helpful to see him in the frame of that social type and

39 A. Pons, *Los judíos del reino de Majorca durante los siglos XIII y XIV*, Madrid 1958, Volume 1, p333



its mind set even though his budgets were not those of contemporary nobility and monarchy. Here it may be recalled that royal and noble courts are the protagonists of early Iberian collectionism as in the cases of the kings of the Trastámara dynasty.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless most studies of collectionism refer to a somewhat later period than that of Leo Grech/Yehuda Mosconi.

40 For other aspects and later evidence of collectionism see e.g. María Luisa López-Vidriero Abelló "Ediciones hebreas en las colecciones privadas del Rey de España" *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, Vol. 82, No. 2-3, SUPPLEMENTO: Il collezionismo di libri ebraici tra XVII e XIX secolo: (2016), pp. 141-174. A prime topic of late medieval royal and noble collectionism is that of the menageries.

