

LOT 200

MIDRASH HA-HEFEZ (MIDRASHIC COMMENTARY ON PENTATEUCH AND HAFTAROT, IN JUDEO-ARABIC), ZECHARIAH BEN SOLOMON-ROFE, MANUSCRIPT ON PAPER [YEMEN]: COMPLETED 4 FEBRUARY 1500

10,000—15,000 USD

DESCRIPTION

144 leaves (10 7/16 x 6/34 in.; 265 x 172 mm) lacking leaves at each end and possibly elsewhere, gatherings mostly of 10 leaves, with some catchwords, 29 - 30 long lines, written in a Yemenite square hand, headings in larger script, some glosses in a smaller cursive hand (some arranged in decorative zig-zag patterns in the lower margins), worn and borrowed throughout, first 8 and last 2 leaves very defective and loose, corners bumped, bound in green cloth.

PROVENANCE

(1) The manuscript is signed and dated by the scribe in a long colophon on p. 170 recording its completion on 4 Adar 1500 by Solomon ben Sa'adyah ben David ben Solomon ben Sa'adyah ben Abraham ben Hisdai ben Sa'adyah ben Gad. This takes his ancestry back seven generations, probably about 200 years. He seems to have written the manuscript for his own use. (2) David Solomon Sassoon (1800 - 1942), his MS.262, perhaps part of the cache of manuscripts bought in the Yemen in 1911

LITERATURE AND REFERENCES

D.S. Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid, Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library, London, 1932, I, pp. 50 - 57*

CATALOGUE NOTE

The author was a noted fifteenth-century Yemenite scholar and medical writer - his surname 'ha-Rofe' means 'the physician' - and he was known in Arabic as 'Yahye ibn Suleiman al-Tabîb'. His *Midrash ha-Hefez* is his most famous work and is the most important Yementie Midrash. It is a philosophical and grammatical commentary on the Pentateuch and Haftarat (extracts from the Prophets, which are read week by week with the Pentateuch), strongly influenced by Maimonides, but also citing Bahir, Sa'adya Gaon, Galen, and other writers, and quoting a number of otherwise unknown Midrashim for which the work is our only source. Sassoon devotes 8 pages to describing the manuscript. It includes a dated reference to the author himself, recording that he was still alive in 1427 (p. 108). There are 7 manuscripts of the text in the British Library, all later than 1500 and all defective. An edition was published in 1962; and cf. S. Liebermann, *Midrashei Teiman*, 1970, pp. 22 - 3. The present manuscript comprises Numbers and Deuteronomy, with their respective Haftarat, opening with the Haftarah from Ezekiel 34:1.