

'Hebraea dictio est'

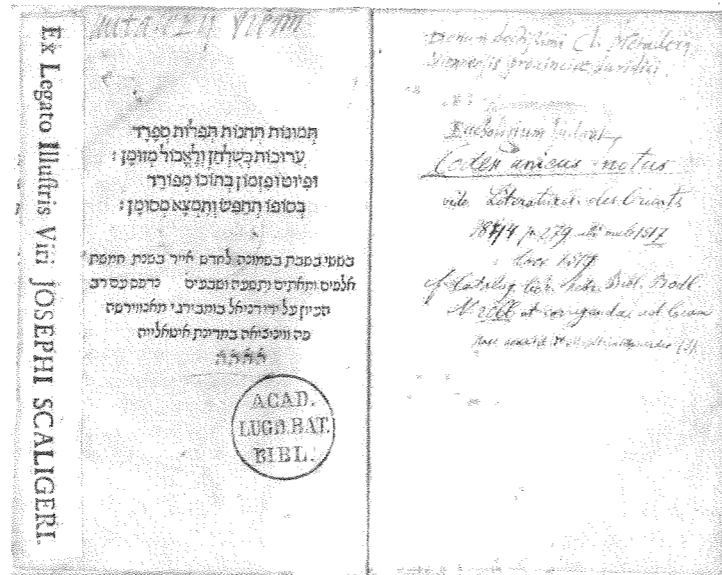
Two books from the library of Claudius Mitalerius

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Amongst the group of sixteenth-century French grammarians, Claudius Mitalerius stands out in several ways. Not much is known about this Humanist and his list of publications is modest. He was trained as a lawyer, but there are no legal publications to his name. He was involved in philology, but apparently as a kind of hobby. His main involvement in the field of French grammar lies in etymologizing and finding kinship between French and Hebrew words. His main publication on this subject is the *Epistola de vocabulis quae Galli a commorantibus in Gallia Iudaeis didicerunt, in usumque receperunt*, that was published as an appendix to Robert Estienne's *Hypomneses de gall. lingua, peregrinis eam descentibus necessariae quaedam verò ipsi etiam Gallis multum profuturæ*, published in Geneva by Henri Estienne in 1582.

The Mother of all Languages

Claudius Mitalerius or Claude Mitalier was 'juge royal (also *Lieutenant Général*) de la province de Vienne' who took his doctors degree on 8 April 1573 at the University of Valence. In Valence he had studied under the French legal expert Jacques Cujas (1520-1590) and the town councillor and law professor Claude Rogier. Among his contemporaries he was generally known as a Hellenist who added notes on the 1576 edition of Valerius Maximus' *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium ad Tiberium Aug. lib. IX* by



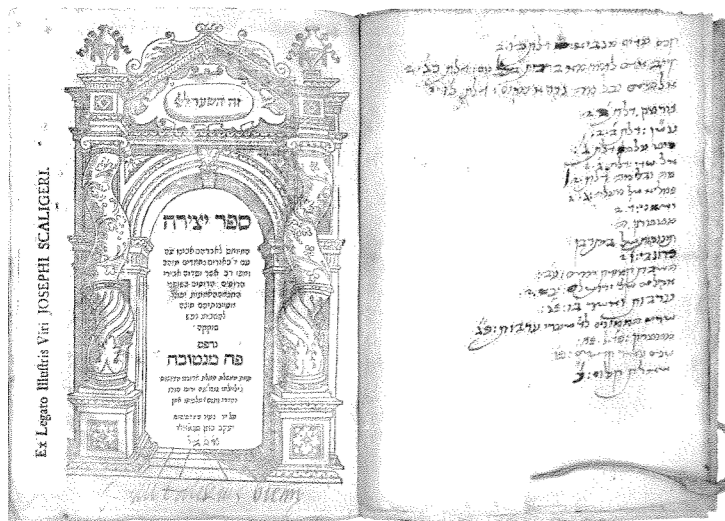
Title page of *Tēmūnōt tahañōt tēfillōt* [...]. 1519. With the owner's mark of Mitalerius (top left) and the inscription by Scaliger (top right) and by the famous bibliographer and Orientalist Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907) underneath. [1370 E 33].

the Dutch humanist Stephanus Pighius (1520-1604). This book consists of a series of anecdotes for the use of orators. One year later he wrote his epistle on the kinship of French and Hebrew words which were introduced by the Jews living in France. The conviction that Hebrew was the mother of all languages was by then widespread and accepted by many scholars.

The epistle was addressed to his colleague Jérôme de Châtillon, the first president of the Parliament of the region of La Dombes near Lyons, and was published in the *Hypomneses* by Estienne. In this epistle he presented, according to B. Gokkes in 1937 'an interesting series of partly foolish, partly clever (but therefore not always true) Hebrew-Romanic etymologies'. For example, he mentioned the French word for cable (*chable*), which he thought to be derived from the Hebrew *chebel*; the French word *jardin* which was taken from the Hebrew *iabar* (forest) and *guerre* being derived from *garah* (to battle). On other occasions he tried to tie French words with the Syriac language (for instance the French *sot* (fool) with the Syriac *sote*). With this epistle Mitalerius demonstrated what modern historians have described as 'a naive passion and an inexperienced way of etymologizing'.

An important Testimony

Contemporaries of Mitalerius must have thought differently about his work. Even Josephus Justus Scaliger had a certain interest in Mitalerius' experiments. Scaliger involved himself with similar experiments on the kinship of some Dutch, German and Persian words in his Leiden period (see *Omslag* 2007, nr. 1). Unfortunately I have not



Title page of Abraham ben David ha-Levi (et. al), *Sefer Yezirah ha-meyuhas le-Avraham avinu* [...]. 1562, with the owners inscription by Mitalerius and Hebrew annotations in an unknown hand. [875 E 24].

been able to find his opinion on the kinship of French and Hebrew words as described by Mitalerius (although after 1600 Scaliger emphasized regularly that not all languages were derived from the Hebrew language), but the two scholars were evidently in contact with each other: they must have met in Valence in the 1570's when Scaliger was studying with Jacques Cujas. As Mitalerius lived in Vienne, only 80 kilometers from Valence, a meeting in this town could possibly also have taken place there. Both books are rare material testimonies of the relationship between both scholars. The name of Mitalerius is mentioned only once in the correspondence of Scaliger. But in this one letter by Scaliger of 12 August 1590 to Scévole de Sainte-Marthe (1536-1623) an important testimony is given on Mitalerius. Scaliger is characterizing Mitalerius as 'un des plus doctes es langues et antiquité romaine de nostre aage'. According to Scaliger Sainte-Marthe had erroneously omitted the name of Mitalerius and of the medical doctor Louis Duret (1527-1586) in his edition of the *Poemata et Elogia* of 1587.

Books as Testimony

In the oriental legacy of Scaliger there are two books that were once part of the library of Mitalerius. Both books bear the inscription 'C. Mitalerius Vienn' on the title page. The two books are:

- Abraham ben David ha-Levi (et. al), *Sefer Yezirah ha-meyuhas le-Avraham avinu* [...] 'im 4 be'urim [...], Mantovah [Mantua], Ya'akov Kohen mi-Ga'zulo [Jacob ben Naphtali ha-Kohen of Gazzuolo], [5]322 [=1562]. [875 E 24]. The *Sefer Yezirah* is also known as the 'Book of Creation', the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism.
- *Tēmūnōt tahañōt tēfillōt* [...]: [sive Preces quotidianæ, Hebraice], Venetiis, Daniel Bombergen, [5]279 = 1519. [1370 E 33]. These are the daily vocal prayers in Hebrew.

This copy not only bears the signature of Mitalerius but also an inscription by Scaliger which reads 'Donum doctissimi Cl. Metallerij Viennensis provinciae Iuridici' and 'Euchologium Iudaeum'. According to Scaliger this book is a ritual on the customs, ordinations and sacraments of the Jews. The book is bound in a early twentieth-century calf binding by the Leiden book binder J.A. Loebèr jr (1869-1957), imitating a late Gothic binding.

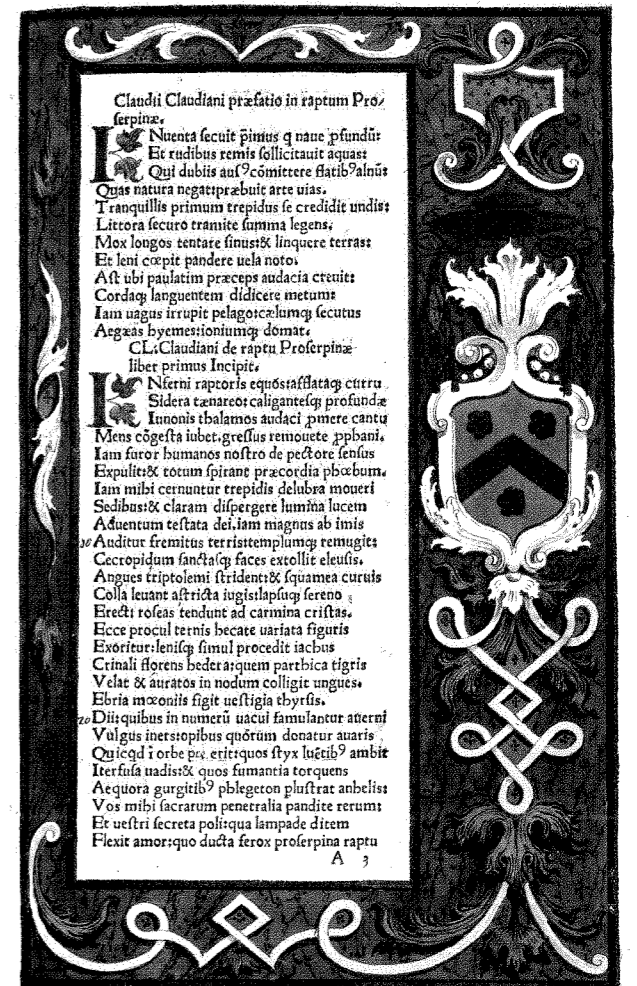
Both copies bear annotations in Hebrew and Latin on the endpapers and in the text, partly by Scaliger and by other unknown, possibly oriental, hands. It will take some further research to establish how Mitalerius got his hands on these rare books and whether or not he used them for proving his own theses. They were certainly of interest to Scaliger, always eager for new books and new information on the Hebrew language and customs.

The two books in the Scaliger collection are new pieces in the puzzle of the sixteenth-century Republic of Letters. They are testimonies of the interaction between two scholars, which lead to new questions to be answered, and new terrains to be explored.

Feigned nobility: a forged provenance

Jef Schaepe (Curator of Prints & Drawings)

One year after the Amsterdam professor of Greek, History and Eloquence Petrus Burman (1713-1778) passed away, his library was set up for sale at an auction in Leiden. The University Library purchased a number of his manuscripts and printed books, including seventeen incunabula. One of these was the 1482 edition of the *Opera* of Claudius Claudianus, the Roman poet and historian, perhaps best known for his unfinished poem *De raptu Proserpinae*. The book was published in Vicenza by Jacobus de Dusa and is one of the two or three books issued by his short-lived printing office. Not uncommon for Italian incunabula coming from prestigious collection the first page is decorated with a painted border of stylized leaves on a green ground, including a coat of arms with a gold chevron and three gold flowers on a blue shield. This can be identified as the coat of arms of the Italian cardinal, poet and bibliophile Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). Of all the incunabula – all but one Italian – that were purchased at the Burman sale the Claudianus is the only one to show up such a luxurious decoration and to boast such an illustrious provenance.



Claudius Claudianus, *Opera*. Edente Barn. Celsano. [Vicentiae, Jac. Dusensis 1482] [1365 A 9].