

## 65. *Massekhet Purim*

Author: Kalonymus ben Kalonymus

Venice, 1552

Printed by Daniel ben Cornelius Adelkind

PRIVATE COLLECTION

COMPOSED BY Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (c. 1286–c. 1328), this Purim parody in the form of a talmudic tractate was printed together with *Sefer Havakbuk ha-Navi*, an anonymous parody of the biblical book *Habakkuk*. Within the top panel of the floral border of the first title page are the words “*Megillat Setarim*.” On the verso of the title page is Solomon ibn Gabirol’s humorous verse, *Ki-Khelot Yeini*. The colophon to the volume dates the completion as 13 Adar I, in the year 5312 (February 8, 1552).

*Massekhet Purim* is designed to read like a talmudic treatise, with Gemara-like discussions on *Mishnayot*. Its humor is meant to be harmless, mocking drunkards, gluttons, misers, and idlers. The text is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with preparations for Purim: when they should begin, women’s duties in preparing for the feast, and the twenty-four dish menu. The second chapter concerns the quantities of food to be eaten and drunk, and the last two chapters describe Purim customs of thirteenth-century Italian Jewry, some of which are otherwise unknown. For example, the text explains that three pounds of meat should be served per plate, because a glutton once dived into a bowl of soup to determine the amount of meat it contained and almost drowned. Three pounds was deemed a sufficient amount to be seen to avoid a repetition of this near tragedy. Discussions are between *tannaim* and *amoraim* with names such as R. Samḥan (merry maker), Kamzan (miser), Kazvan (deceiver), and Shakran (liar). *Massekhet Purim* concludes with a humorous *Hadran* followed by:

... it was written in fun, to amuse people on Purim. One who reads it is none the worse than if he had read books on medicine and other topics that are beneficial to the body but harmful to the soul.

Davidson suggests that *Sefer Havakbuk* was printed a month earlier than *Massekhet Purim*, and some copies were simply bound together. He finds support for this position in the fact that the former has vowels and accents,

while the latter has neither. *Sefer Havakbuk* is dated Adar I, *Massekhet Purim* is dated Adar, suggestive of Adar II. The signatures also start anew in *Sefer Havakbuk*. The title page of *Sefer Havakbuk*, lacking almost all of the information one would expect there from experienced printers, the colophon notwithstanding, would seem to mitigate against the argument for a separate printing.

These parodies have been the subject of rabbinic disapproval, most notably by R. Samuel Aboab (1610–1694) and R. Ḥayyim David Azulai (Hida, 1724–1806). The former harshly condemns parody of the Talmud in his responsa, *Devar Shemuel* (Venice, 1702), no. 193. He prohibits them:

because of *moshav latzim* and they transgress because of “Do not turn to idols” (Leviticus 19:4), and one who writes such works, who transcribes them, and it is not necessary to mention those who print them cause the multitude to sin, etc. . . . [the Torah] clothes itself in sackcloth and says “Thy children have made me as a harp upon which the scorners play” (*Kallah* 1:3).

Israel Davidson, *Parody in Jewish Literature* (New York, 1907; reprint New York, 1966), pp. 19–29, 117; A. M. Habermann, *The Printer Cornelio Adelkind, His Son Daniel and a List of Books Printed by Them* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 88 nos. 8, 9 [Hebrew]; idem, “The Editions and Prints of ‘Massekhet Purim,’” *Aresbet V* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 139 n. 3 [Hebrew]; Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book* (Leiden, 2003); Meyer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature*, II (1933; reprint Cranbury, 1960), pp. 606–608.