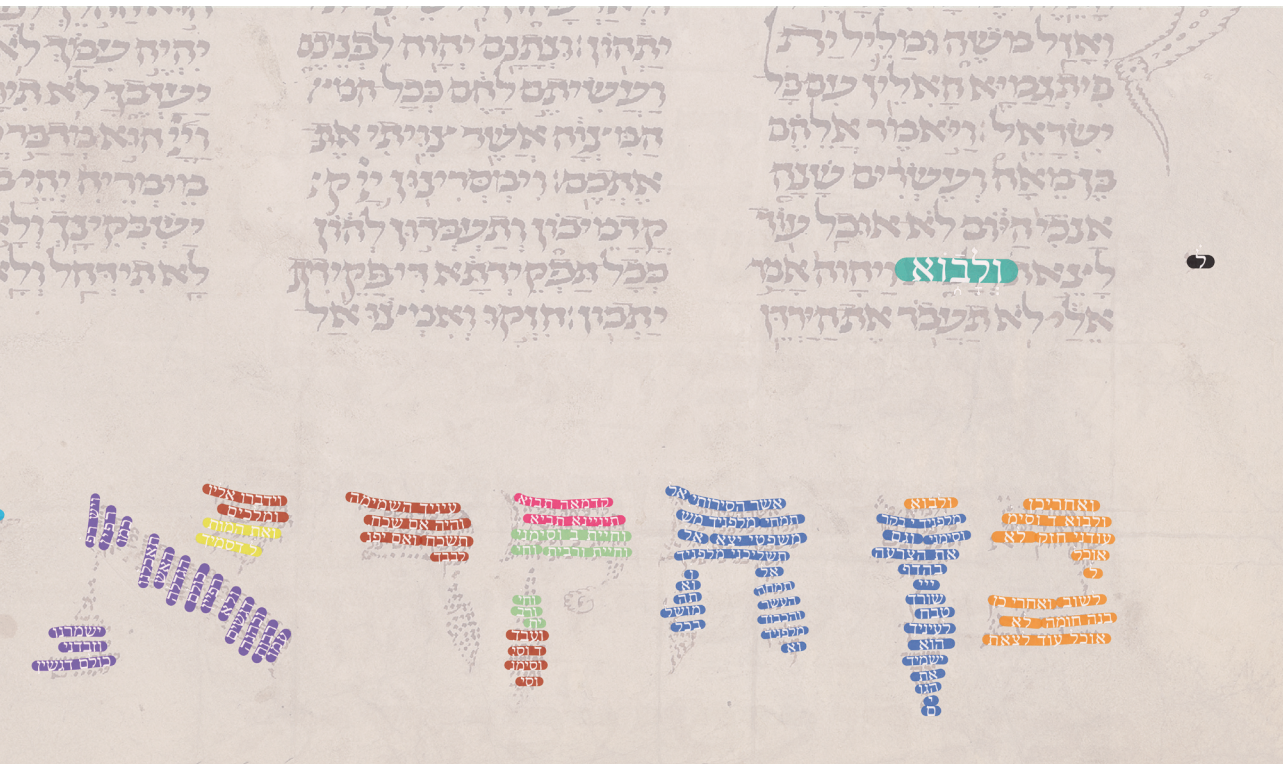


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Title: MS Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana ebr. 14, fol. 236v, <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/236v>

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Taking the Scribe Seriously The Dating of Vat ebr. 14 Reconsidered

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Taking the Scribe Seriously The Dating of Vat ebr. 14 Reconsidered

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Summary

MS Vat ebr. 14 was produced by Eliyya ha-Naqdan, a scribe from northern France who lived in the 13th century. All direct information we have about him today is contained in the colophons of this manuscript and of MS Berlin or. quart. 9, the only two manuscripts of his still extant today. In both cases, Eliyya provides a date of completion, but the information given in Vat ebr. 14 presents difficulties that have let previous investigators to believe that he must have made a mistake. In this paper, we systematically evaluate every plausible option for reading Vat ebr. 14's main colophon to examine the possibility of identifying a date of completion for which the data given by Eliyya match up. We show that an internally consistent date exists, Tuesday, Av 16, 4999 (July 19, 1239 C.E.), only five days before the date the majority of scholars who assume that Eliyya did make a mistake arrive at, Sunday, Av 21, 4999 (July 24, 1239 C.E.). We thus conclude that the assumption that the scribe made an error is unwarranted, and that Tuesday, Av 16, 4999 (July 19, 1239 C.E.) is the likely date of the manuscript's completion.

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1 Introduction

MS Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana ebr. 14 (BAV₁₄) is a medieval Hebrew bible manuscript housed today in the Vatican Library's collection.¹ It was written by the scribe Eliyya ben Berekhyah ha-Naqdan, who revealed some information about himself and his very productive father in the colophons he included in the codex (fols. 234r–241v and fol. 291r). There is also another bible manuscript written by Eliyya extant today; this work, MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz or. quart. 9 (SPK₉), is now part of the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin,² and the scribe added a colophon to this work as well (fol. 197r). Outside of these colophons, no information about Eliyya has so far been found. While it seems clear from paleographic considerations that the two manuscripts were written in the thirteenth century C.E. by a scribe from northern France,³ an exact date for the completion of the two manuscripts can only be obtained from their colophons. The date given in SPK₉ is fairly easy to understand, the only problem being that the century is not spelled out; in contrast, the data provided in BAV₁₄ appear confusing and have led investigators to believe that the scribe must have made a mistake when he penned the colophon. While such a mistake is obviously always a possibility, such an assumption does seem a bit condescending towards the scribe, and it should only be resorted to if everything else fails. Usually, people of our time double-check before writing down the date on a document, and one would assume that a medieval scribe who worked on a handwritten bible manuscript for a long time⁴ would have done his due diligence too. Thus, in this paper we will not accept that the scribe made a mistake, but evaluate every plausible option for reading the text of BAV₁₄'s main colophon in order to find a day of completion for which all the data match up.

1 See MS Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana ebr. 14; available online: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ebr.14 (accessed 02/2022).

2 See MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz or. quart. 9; available online: http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/receive/SBBMSBook_islamhs_00004323 (accessed 02/2022).

3 “[Elijah’s] script shows clear features of Gothic northern French script from the 13th century.” See Élodie Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah Ha-Naqdan: An Edition of Ashkenazic Micrographical Notes*, *Materiale Textkulturen: Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 933 11* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 129, n. 56.

4 One scribe, Simḥah ben Judah of Nuremberg, who finished writing the so-called Worms Maḥzor (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Loud. Or. 324) in 1272, reports in a colophon that it took him more than ten months to do so. Cf. Malachi Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 155–156.

2 The colophons

The first information about the scribe that readers of BAV₁₄ encounter is contained in a colophon that extends over fols. 234r–241v,⁵ where Masoretic notes are used to fill in the space inside the big letters in the bottom margin that make up the text of the colophon. However, on fol. 239r, Eliyya declares that he ran out of Masoretic material⁶ and so uses colophon material to fill in some of the big letters of the colophon—a colophon inside a colophon, so to speak.

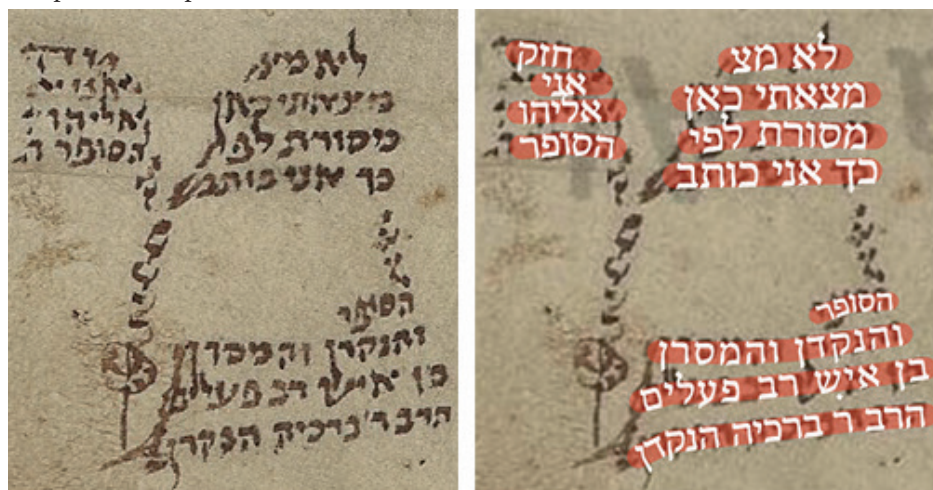


Fig. 1: Eliyya's explanation as to why he turned the letter-shaped masora figurata that he started on fol. 234r into a micrographic colophon inside the big-letter colophon on fol. 239r: *לא מצ מצאתי כאן מסורת לפי כד אני כותב* ...; "here, I didn't find a Masoretic note, therefore I write ..."⁷

The codex' second colophon can be found on the last folio of the manuscript (fol. 291r)⁸ but, unfortunately, this folio is badly damaged and only part of the text remains.

In the first colophon, the question of the completion of the manuscript is not addressed; there

5 Cf. BAV₁₄, fols. 234r–241v, and fol. 291r. Editions of these colophons are available online:

<http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/234r> – <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/241v>, and <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/291r>. [02.fx.0000] (accessed 02/2022).

6 See BAV₁₄, fol. 239r. An edition of this folio is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/239r> (accessed 02/2022).

7 Cf. BAV₁₄, fol. 239r; the edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/239r> (accessed 02/2022). In the first line of this text, the letter combination *מצ* is a preemption of the following word in the next line, *מצאתי*. Eliyya did this a lot when he wanted to fill up space, both in the biblical text and in his micrographs. Cf., e.g., the Corpus Masoreticum edition of fol. 33r of BAV₁₄, available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/33r> (accessed 02/2022). On this folio, one sees this phenomenon quite often, for example in the biblical text, first line of the column on the left, where the letter combination *בר* at the end of the line anticipates the word *ברנמשא* in the next line. In the *masora figurata* on the bottom of the page to the very left, the letter combination *ותשל* anticipates the word *ותשלם* on the lower half of the second circle from the left (first word on the right side).

8 Cf. BAV₁₄, folio 291r; an edition of this folio is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/291r>. [02.fx.0000] (accessed 02/2022).

is, however, one piece of information that might help in establishing a relative chronology of Eliyya's family history. On fol. 236v, in a triangle on the left side of the letter-shaped *figurata*, one reads: *הרב רבי ברכיה* ⁹ *תהיה מנוחתו כב.* [...] This phrase, which often also appears on gravestones, indicates that Eliyya's father Berekhyah was already deceased when the scribe finished the codex.¹⁰



Fig. 2: Eliyyah's blessing on his father on fol. 236v: *הרב רבי ברכיה* [...] *תהיה מנוחתו כב.*; "the revered Rabbi Berekhyah [...] may his rest be in honor."¹¹

In the second colophon on the last page of the codex, Eliyya tells his readers when he completed his work; this sentence, however, has proven itself to be a "troublesome passage."¹²

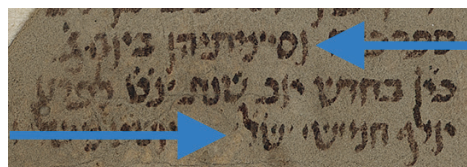


Fig. 3: Information about the completion of the codex in the main colophon of BAV₁₄ on fol. 291r, ll. 34–36.¹³

It appears to many that the information the scribe gave is inconsistent, and the conclusion most often reached is that he made some kind of mistake when writing down the date. However, certain early researchers have suggested readings that can lead to dates that are consistent even with the day of the week Eliyya provided. We will approach the somewhat puzzling formulation of the year in a way that will not only lead to a consistent date, but also fit in with the chronological background and the paleographic findings.

In the following, readings by a number of scholars who formed an opinion on the sentence in question will be discussed. The most valuable insights are, of course, those based on in-person examination of the manuscript, but some early scholars in particular did not have

⁹ See BAV₁₄, fol. 236v; an edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/236v> (accessed 02/2022).

¹⁰ In an article summarizing the life of Berekhyah ha-Naqdan, Tamás Visi concluded from other evidence that "it is certain that Berechiah was no longer alive in 1233," and gives his lifetime as "ca. 1130–ca. 1210." See Tamás Visi, "Introduction: Berechiah Ben Natronai ha-Naqdan and His Works," in *Berechiah Ben Natronai ha-Naqdan's Works and Their Reception*, ed. Tamás Visi, Tovi Bibring and Daniel Soukup, Bibl. liothèque de l'École Des Hautes Études. Sciences Religieuses 182 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 7–28, here 12 and 8.

¹¹ See BAV₁₄, fol. 236v; the edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/236v> (accessed 02/2022).

¹² See Norman Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 332.

¹³ Cf. BAV₁₄, fol. 291r. The numbering of the lines follows that of the *Corpus Masoreticum* edition, available online: [http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/291r.\[02.fx.0000\]](http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/291r.[02.fx.0000]) (accessed 02/2022). Cf. already Norman Golb, *תולדות היהודים בעיר רואן בימי הביניים* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Co., 1976), 122.

easy access to the manuscript and thus had to work with copies others provided. This will be mentioned in the discussion, but all suggestions will be collected and presented in a table for ease of inspection.¹⁴ After a review of these, we will compare those signs whose readings are contested with examples of the proposed letters taken from other parts of the main colophon.

3 What scholars read

The oldest reported reading is given in the Assemani catalogue, published in 1756 by Giuseppe Simone Assemani, then director of the Vatican Library, and his nephew Stefano Evodio Assemani.¹⁵ The catalogue reports the following:

“ביום ג' בי' חדש אב שנת נ"ט האלף החמישי שבח לאל" [sic] וסמייתיו *Abfolvi autem illum feria tertia, die 10. Mensis Ab, Julii, Anno 59. quinti millenarii, hoc est 5059, ab Orbe condito, Laus Deo &c.*”¹⁶ According to Eduard Mahler, Av 10, 5059 was Friday, July 10, 1299, in the Julian calendar.¹⁷ Moritz Steinschneider discussed the date given in BAV₁₄, but we do not know whether he examined the manuscript in person; from what he writes, there is a possibility that he worked from transcriptions others provided. In his 1873 article “Berachja der Fabeldichter,” he curtly states “Epigraph bei Assemani 14, datirt Dienstag 1 Ab (? בר"ח ב' חדש אב ?) 1299.”¹⁸ Even though Steinschneider gives the Julian year here as ‘1299,’ it is not sure that he was referring to the Jewish year 5059 (which Mahler gives as the equivalent), since Ernest Renan and Adolf Neubauer, when they reported on Steinschneider’s reflections, declared that “cette copie fut terminée, selon la souscription qui est à fin du manuscrit, le mardi de la néoménie d’ab, 5049 = 1299.”¹⁹ In a later work, published 1893, Steinschneider explicitly mentioned a copy he received and seems to have tended towards accepting the day of the month as 21: “In der That erhielt ich die mit dem Kalender stimmende Abschrift כ"א בחדש אב לפרט אלף חמישי 21. Ab.”²⁰ The dates Steinschneider might have had in mind are thus either Av 1, 5049 (Wednesday, July 20, 1289) and Av 21, 5049 (Tuesday, August 9, 1289) or Av 1, 5059 (Wednesday, July 1, 1299) and Av 21, 5059 (Tuesday, July 21, 1299).²¹ Henri Gross reports that Abraham Berliner examined our manuscript and formed an opinion on the date of completion: “M. Berliner, qui a vu ce ms., a lu dans l’épigraphie:

14 See pages 119–20.

15 Cf. *N.N.*, “Assemani,” *EJ* 2:599.

16 See Stefano Evodio Assemani and Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliothecae apostolicae vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus* (Rome: Ex typographia linguarum orientalium 1756; repr., Paris: Librairie orientale et américaine, 1926), 15.

17 Cf. Eduard Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, Schriften herausgegeben von der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums (Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1916), 569.

18 See Moritz Steinschneider, “Literarische Beilage: Berachja der Fabeldichter,” *Hebräische Bibliographie: Blätter für neuere und ältere Literatur des Judentums* 13 (1873): 80–85, here 83.

19 See Ernest Renan and Adolf Neubauer, *Les rabbins français du commencement du quatorzième siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1877), 491.

20 See Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893), 960, n. 80, n. 81.

21 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 567, 569.

ט"ש = 99 (= 1339), au lieu de ט"נ = 59 (= 1299).²² We know from Berliner himself that he made use of the manuscript when he composed his *Targum Onkelos*, published 1884, and he indeed states in this work: “Cod. 14 der Vaticana, Pentateuch mit Targum, von Elia für Ascher am 21. Ab 5099 vollendet.”²³ Berliner doesn’t mention the day of the week, but the date given by him corresponds to Tuesday, July 27, 1339.²⁴

Joseph Jacobs, who was mostly known as a folklorist,²⁵ was deeply involved in a debate about the lifetime and place of residence of Berekyah ben-Natronai ha-Naqdan, Eliyya’s father, during the last decades of the 19th century.²⁶ The other main parties engaged in this scholarly exchange were Moritz Steinschneider and Adolf Neubauer. Jacob’s reading is reported by Neubauer: “Mr. Jacobs suggested to us the reading of ט"י for ט"ז, and החמישי for הששי [...], and believes that the Vatican MS. was copied in the year 5019=1259, and in this year the 21st of Ab, indeed, fell on a Tuesday.”²⁷ Mahler confirms that the corresponding Julian date is August 12, 1259, a Tuesday.²⁸ There is, however, no indication that Jacobs examined the manuscript in person.

It seems that Adolf Neubauer did not examine the manuscript in person either, since he mentions “my copy, revised by Prof. Ignazio Guidi,” according to which the manuscript “was finished Tuesday, the 10th of Ab, 5049=10th of July, 1289.”²⁹ Neubauer’s conversion of the Jewish date to the Julian does not conform to Mahler’s in his *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, published in 1916. There we see that Av 1, 5049 was Wednesday, July 20, 1289 in the Julian calendar, which makes the 10th of Av of that year Friday, July 29, 1289.³⁰ However, in 1890, when Neubauer wrote the article quoted here, Mahler’s user-friendly *Handbuch* was not yet in existence and Neubauer might have gotten confused when consulting an earlier work of Mahler’s from 1887, the use of which is a lot more taxing than counting from the 1st of the month to the 10th, which is all that is required of someone using Mahler’s *Handbuch*.³¹ Ignazio Guidi, the scholar who provided Neubauer with a reading of the passage, was an Italian Orientalist and professor at the University of Rome³² and thus in an excellent position to inspect BAV₁₄ in person. Neubauer reports Guidi’s reading as being in favor of וסיימתיהו ביום ג' כ"א בחדש אב שנת צ"ט לפרט אף החמישי ש"ל, but goes on to point out that “Professor Guidi queries the כ, in א"כ” but “does not doubt the א in א"כ. On the other hand he queries the ז in the years, viz., in צ"ז, for which Assemani puts ט"ז; the doubtful letter could also be an ז, i.e., ע"ז.”³³ Therefore, the two dates that Guidi supported are Av 21, 4999

22 See Henri Gross, *Gallia judaica: Dictionnaire géographique de la France d'après les sources rabbiniques*, trans. Moïse Bloch, Publications de la société des études juives (Paris: Librairie Léopold Cerf, 1897), 183.

23 See Abraham Berliner, *Noten, Einleitung und Register*, vol. 2 of *Targum Onkelos*, ed. Abraham Berliner (Berlin: Gorzelanczyk, 1884), 250.

24 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 569.

25 Cf. Cecil Roth, “Jacobs, Joseph,” *EJ* 11:49.

26 Cf., e.g., Joseph Jacobs, “Rejoinders [to the Review of The Jews of England in the Twelfth Century],” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 6 (1894): 375–81.

27 See Adolf Neubauer, “Berechiah Naqdan,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 2 (1890): 520–26, here 520–21.

28 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 567.

29 See Adolf Neubauer, “Analecta I: English Massorites,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 2 (1890): 322–33, here 322.

30 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 567.

31 Cf. Eduard Mahler, *Biblische Chronologie und Zeitrechnung der Hebräer* (Vienna: Carl Konegen, 1887), esp. 90–91.

32 Cf. Erich Kettenhofen, “Guidi, Ignazio,” *Elr* 11:383–84, here 383.

33 See Neubauer, “Berechiah Naqdan,” 520.

(Sunday, July 24, 1239) and Av 21, 4979 (Sunday, August 4, 1219).³⁴

Neubauer also asked another scholar, whom he refers to as ‘Monsignor Ugolini,’ for his opinion on the text. This person must have been “Mariano Ugolini (1854–1932), *Scriptor Hebraicus* [in the Vatican Library] from 1883, then Assistant Archivist from 1909; lastly Prefect of the Secret Archive, 1920–1929,”³⁵ who would have had access to the manuscript at his workplace. Neubauer reports that Ugolini agreed with Guidi on the most probable reading but was not sure about the day of the month being כ"א: “Potrebbe ancora leggersi, ma con minore probabilità ב"ו”³⁶; “could potentially also be read as ב"ו, but with lower probability.” The two possibilities that Ugolini thus saw were Av 21, 4999 (Sunday, July 24, 1239) and Av 16, 4999 (Tuesday, July 19, 1239).³⁷

In the 1930s, Umberto Cassuto examined BAV₁₄ when he cataloged the Hebrew manuscripts of the Vatican Library.³⁸ He gives the date of the manuscript as “An. 1339 (iud. 5099 [...]),” and reads the passage as וסיימתיהו ביום ג' כ"א בחדש אב שנת צ"ט לפרט אלף חמישי,³⁹ that is, Av 21, 5099 (Tuesday, July 27, 1339).⁴⁰

Norman Golb published three books in which he discussed our colophon.⁴¹ In 1976, he transcribed the sentence as וסיימתיהו ביום ג' (?) כ"א בחדש אב שנת צ"ט לפרט אלף חמישי,⁴² indicating that he had doubts about the day of the week. Later, he seemed even less certain, since in 1985 he wrote only “[...]di,”⁴³ and, similarly, “[... ..]” in 1998.⁴⁴ In the first publication, he pointed out that the letter ג had been written differently here than in other places in the colophon⁴⁵ and considered the possibility that the letter א had originally appeared here but was later replaced, due to differing conventions in assigning dates.⁴⁶ Golb remarks in 1998 that the “dating, if transcribed literally, would yield 5099 Anno Mundi” (1339), that the “colophon appears to contain an error of one hundred years,” and argues that the date should

34 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 565.

35 See Delio Vania Proverbio, “Historical Introduction,” in *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library: Catalogue*, ed. Benjamin Richler, Studi e Testi 438 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 2008), xv–xxiii, here xxii.

36 See Neubauer, “Berechiah Naqdan,” 520.

37 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 565.

38 Cf. Israel Abrahams and Cecil Roth, “Cassuto, Umberto,” *EJ* 4:510–11.

39 See Umberto Cassuto, *Codices vaticani hebraici: Codices 1–115*, Bybliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae codices manu scripti recensiti (Rome: Bibl. Vaticana, 1956), 17, 19.

40 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 569.

41 Cf. Golb, תולדות, 120–22; Norman Golb, “Chapitre VIII. Les disciples des maîtres : érudits rouennais sous le règne d’Henri II Plantagenêt,” in *Les Juifs de Rouen au Moyen Âge: Portrait d’une culture oubliée* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 1985 [online]), 211–57, doi: 10.4000/books.purh.8490, paragraph 69–71, and Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy*, 332–33.

42 See Golb, תולדות, 122.

43 See Golb, “Chapitre VIII,” in *Les Juifs de Rouen* [online], paragraph 69.

44 See Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy*, 331.

45 There are two more instances where the letter ג appears in the colophon, but they are very much faded. Cf. BAV₁₄, fol. 291r, table 2 on page 121f for a view of the isolated letters, and Golb’s transcription of the colophon in Golb, תולדות, 122.

46 אך האות הזאת שבקולופון נראית כתובה באופן שונה משאר הגימלים שם (השווה במלה ‘מעגל’ בשורה 39), וייתכן שהיתה לכתחילה א, ותוקנה במרוצת הדורות כדי שתתאים לתאריך כפי שהובן. 141, תולדות, See Golb,

be understood as meaning 4999 (1239).⁴⁷ In short, Golb sees the date as Av 21, 4999 (Sunday, July 24, 1239),⁴⁸ which would conform with a reading of the day of the week as 'יום א'.

Benjamin Richler edited a catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts in the Vatican library; Malachi Beit-Arié and Nurit Pasternak provided the paleographical and codicological descriptions. The catalogue states that the manuscript was “completed on Tuesday, 21 Av 4999=1239” and the relevant sentence in the colophon is transcribed as 'ג' וסיימתיהו ביום',⁴⁹ which, again, leads us to July 24, 1239.⁵⁰ This day, however, was a Sunday and not a Tuesday, as we've seen before.

Élodie Attia “examined the manuscript at the Vatican Library, Rome, in November 2011,”⁵¹ while preparing her monograph on the Masorah of Eliyya ha-Naqdan, and arrived at the same reading—and therefore at the same date—as Golb and Richler's catalogue.⁵²

The various readings of the text are summarized in the following table:

text:	supported by:	date:
לפרט אלף חמישי של	בחדש אב שנת	ג' וסיימתיהו ביום all
	נט	בי ג' Assemani
	נט	Av 1 5059 07.10.1299 Friday
	נט זס נט	ג' בר"ח זס כא Steinschneider
		Av 1 5049 07.20.1289 Wednesday or Av 21 5049 08.09.1289 Tuesday
		or Av 1 5059 07.01.1299 Wednesday
		or Av 21 5059 07.21.1299 Tuesday
	צט	כא Berliner
		Av 21 5099 07.27.1339 Tuesday

47 See Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy*, 332.

48 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 565.

49 See Benjamin Richler, ed., *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library: Catalogue*, Studi e Testi 438 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 2008), 9–10.

50 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 565.

51 See Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 119.






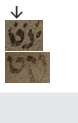


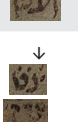

52 Cf. Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 129.

text:			supported by:	date:
יֵט	כֵּא	ג	Jacobs	Av 21 5019 08.12.1259 Tuesday
מֵט	בִּי	ג	Neubauer	Av 10 5049 07.29.1289 Friday
צֵט or עֵט	כֵּא	ג	Guidi	Av 21 4999 07.24.1239 Sunday or Av 21 4979 08.04.1219 Sunday
צֵט	כֵּא or בִּי	ג	Ugolini	Av 21 4999 07.24.1239 Sunday or Av 16 4999 07.19.1239 Tuesday
צֵט	כֵּא	ג	Cassuto	Av 21 5099 07.27.1339 Tuesday
צֵט	כֵּא	ג or א	Golb	Av 21 5099 07.27.1339 Tuesday meant to be Av 21 4999 07.24.1239 Sunday
צֵט	כֵּא	ג	Richler	Av 21 4999 07.24.1239 Sunday
צֵט	כֵּא	ג	Attia	Av 21 5099 07.27.1339 Tuesday meant to be Av 21 4999 07.24.1239 Sunday

Table 1: Readings of the passage under investigation.

4 The most probable readings

In the following table 2, the contested signs are compared with examples of the proposed letters taken from other parts of the main colophon of BAV₁₄.⁵³ However, in two cases, the examples found in the colophon were almost illegible, and for further comparison, examples were pulled from a *masora magna* (mm) note on another folio.⁵⁴ This seemed to be the next best option, since both the colophon and the mm notes are written in semi-cursive Ashkenazi script, even if the size of the letters is not the same; the letters in the mm notes are smaller.

day first sign		day second sign	
	ב from אב, l. 35 ב from רבות, l. 21		א from אב, l. 35 א from אשר, l. 33
	כ from בי, l. 38 כ from כוה, l. 34		י from ביום, l. 34 י from בי, l. 38
year first sign		year second sign	
	י from בי, l. 38		ט from וקט, l. 9
	מ from נאמן, l. 30		
	נ from נדב, l. 33		
	ע from מרע, l. 31 ע from ועניו, l. 30		
	צ from צדק, l. 39 צ from התיצבו, fol. 234r		

53 The pictures of these words were copied from a high-resolution picture of BAV₁₄, fol. 291r.

54 The pictures of these words were copied from a *siman* in the first mm note in the top margin of fol. 234r. This Masoretic note deals with the lemma לעיניכם in Deut 29:1; the fourth *siman* represents the verse 1Sam 12:16.







day of the week		day of the week	
			
	ג from מהגיה, l. 9		א from אב, l. 35
	ג from מעגל, l. 39		
	ג from גם, fol. 234r		

Table 2: Comparison of the contested expressions with letters from the colophon and from one mm note on another folio.

From these comparisons, we see that for the day, the two readings כָּאֵ and בְּיֹ are defensible interpretations. The second reading is a very real possibility because we know that Eliyya was not averse to using the abbreviation יֹ for the number 16 (and did not necessarily prefer טֹ), since he uses יֹ when the number 16 occurs in an mp note, on fol. 240v, discussing וּזְאֵת in Deut 33:1.⁵⁵

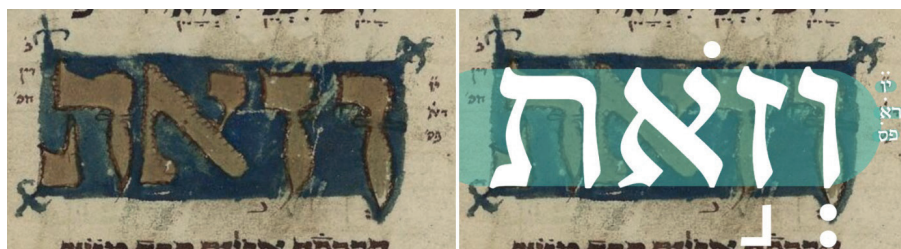


Fig. 4: Eliyya didn't object to using the abbreviation יֹ for the number 16, as this mp note to וּזְאֵת on folio 240v⁵⁶ shows.

The reading בָּא (equivalent to בר"ח) would be possible from the shape of the letters, but one of the abbreviation points that Eliyya put in would then be superfluous.

The year should be read as צֵט, since in the first letter, the scribe clearly executed one short stroke first and then a longish, curved-to-the-left one, which was his *modus operandi* when writing a צ. Whenever Eliyya wrote an ע, he did it the other way around: first a longish, curved-to-the-left stroke and then a short one. The reading י does not explain the second stroke, a מ would again require a curved stroke in the first position (ם is out of the question since there is absolutely no resemblance to this letter), and a נ would not explain the first short stroke. The second letter of the year is a ט, on which everybody agrees. The day of the week looks like a ג. Even Golb does not contest this; he only opined that the ג seems executed differently from the way Eliyya usually writes it, and therefore proposed that the scribe did write an א (in accordance with the date כָּאֵ בַחֲדָשׁ אֲב שְׁנַת צֵט) which was later replaced with a ג by a second hand.

In summary, the most probable readings would be בְּיֹ ג כָּאֵ בַחֲדָשׁ אֲב שְׁנַת צֵט, and בְּיֹ ג בְּיֹ ג כָּאֵ בַחֲדָשׁ אֲב שְׁנַת צֵט, but only the second reading yields a result where the date matches up with the day of the week, namely July 19, 1239, a Tuesday. However, since 'the most probable reading' is a somewhat subjective assessment, we will go on to evaluate those readings that seem less probable as well.

55 [the term] וּזְאֵת [appears] 16 [times in the] beginning of a verse." Cf. BAV₁₄₇, fol. 240v.

56 Cf. BAV₁₄₇, fol. 240v; the edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Vat.ebr.14/240v> (accessed 02/2022).

5 Eliyya's idiosyncrasies

Before we go into the details of Eliyya's formulation of the sentence, it seems prudent to gather some more information about his way of assigning dates. Fortunately, BAV₁₄ is not the only manuscript of his extant today; there is also the other codex, SPK₉.⁵⁷ This manuscript also contains a colophon in which Eliyya provides us with the date of completion.

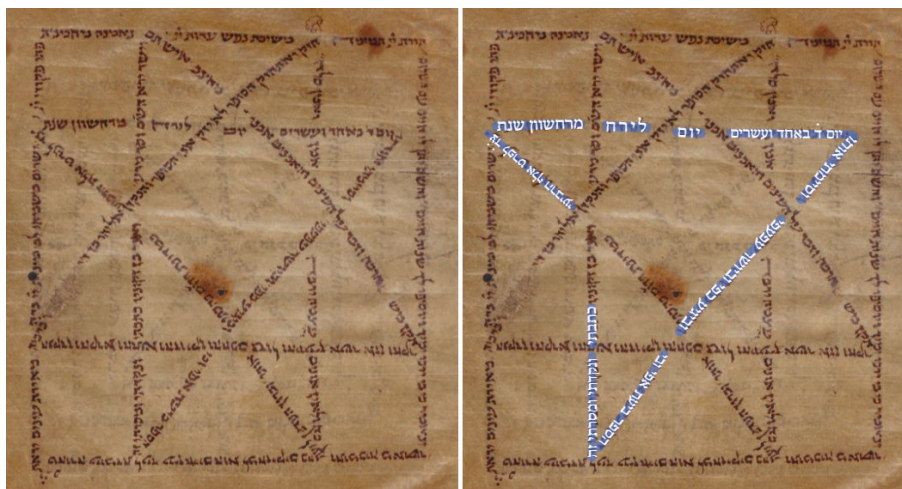


Fig. 5: Information about the time of completion in the colophon of SPK₉.⁵⁸

The text (SPK₉, fol. [401] – 197r) is not as contested as that of BAV₁₄'s colophon and reads:

כתבתי ונקדתי ומסרתי זה / הספר ביעת⁵⁹ אפי ובי⁶⁰ וביגיע כפי וביושר עפעפי וסיימתי אותו /
יום ד באחד ועשרים יום לירח מרחשוון שנת / צד לפרט אלף הרביעי⁶¹

“I wrote this book and added niqqud and Masorah *by the sweat of my face* [Gen 3:19], and *by the labor of my hands* [Gen 31:42], and *by the straightness of my gaze* [Prov 4:25], and I completed it Wednesday, on the twenty first day [belonging] to the moon of Marcheshvan of the year 94 to the detail of the fourth thousand.” (The 21st of Marcheshvan 4994 would be Wednesday, October 26, 1233 in the Julian calendar.)⁶²

Interestingly, Eliyya does not use the same technical term for ‘month’ as in the colophon in BAV₁₄: There, it was בחדש (in the month), while here, it is לירח ((belonging] to the ‘moon’).

57 For a brief description, cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Verzeichniss der hebräischen Handschriften*, vol. 2 of *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin: G. Vogt, 1878), 22–23. For a more detailed description, cf. Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 131–137.

58 Cf. SPK₉, fol. [401] – 197r; the edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Berlin.Ms.or.quart.9/197r%20%5B401%5D> (accessed 02/2022).

59 The word that Eliyya intended to write here is in all likelihood בועת.

60 This letter combination is a preemption of the first part of the following word. Cf. n. 7.

61 The edition of folio 197r[401] is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Berlin.Ms.or.quart.9/197r%20%5B401%5D> (accessed 02/2022).

62 Cf. Mahler, *Handbuch der Jüdischen Chronologie*, 564.

And there are more differences in Eliyya's formulations: While he used the preposition ב in front of the day of the week in BAV₁₄, he does not do so here, but a ב is attached to the number of the day of the month, which might or might not be the case in BAV₁₄. Also, he used Hebrew numerals to provide the number of the day of the month in BAV₁₄, but in this colophon, he wrote out the number in complete words. Another remarkable point is that in BAV₁₄, he uses לפרט אלף חמישי, "to the detail of [the] fifth thousand," while he refers here to לפרט אלף הרביעי, "to the detail of the fourth thousand"—once without, once with a definite article. This calls for an explanation.

BAV₁₄, fol. 291r



SPK₉, fol. [401] – 197r

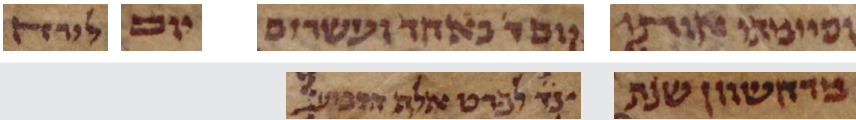


Table 3: Side-by-side view of the sentences about the completion of the manuscripts in the colophons in Eliyya's two extant works.⁶³ The colophon in BAV₁₄ is written in semi-cursive script, the one in SPK₉ in square script (notice, i.e., the execution of the letter א), which makes a comparison a little more challenging.

Let us assume that both manuscripts were written in the same century anno mundi—this seems likely, since SPK₉ was written “in the year 94” and the years under discussion for BAV₁₄ range between 49 and 99, with the outlier being 19 (suggested by Jacobs). If Jacobs is right about the year, BAV₁₄ must have been written 25 years later than SPK₉, in the next century. If 49 were the right number, BAV₁₄ could have been written either 45 years prior to SPK₉ in the same century or 55 years later, in the next century. Both possibilities seem like a bit of a stretch. If 59 were the right number for the year of the completion of BAV₁₄, the only reasonable assumption would be that the manuscript was written in the same century as SPK₉, 35 years earlier.

Leaving Jacob's suggestion aside for the moment, we must find an explanation for how the same century could be designated with the formulation “to the detail of [the] fifth thousand,” on the one hand, and with “to the detail of the fourth thousand” on the other. In both cases, לפרט has so far been translated here as ‘to the detail,’ connecting it with the noun פֶּרֶט.

Avraham Even-Shoshan, in his dictionary, explains the noun פֶּרֶט as “a single thing, one detail of many, a part of a composite entity, in contrast to the whole,”⁶⁴ and Marcus Jastrow suggests the translation “that which is singled out, specification, explicit statement.”⁶⁵ Even-Shoshan goes on to define the two expressions גדול לפרט as “designation of the year

63 Cf. BAV₁₄, fol. 291r and SPK₉, fol. [401] – 197r.

64 See Avraham Even-Shoshan, “פֶּרֶט,” 5:1535. See Avraham Even-Shoshan, “פֶּרֶט,” חלק מדבר מרכב בנעד אל 'בל'.

65 See Marcus Jastrow, “פֶּרֶט,” *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* 2:1224.

of a Hebrew date (*anno mundi*) that explicitly names the thousands,⁶⁶ and לפרט קטן as “designation of the year of a Hebrew date (*anno mundi*) that omits the thousands.”⁶⁷

If we make use of Jastrow’s and Even-Shoshan’s suggestions, לפרט could be understood as meaning (in the context of SPK₉) ‘according to the small count of the [last century of the] fourth thousand,’⁶⁸ and we could assume that a variation of the convention that Even-Shoshan explained regarding לפרט קטן, according to which the millennium is not given, was in use even without the word קטן being explicitly written down—but in our case, the century was omitted instead of the millennium. It seems that the century one lived in did not have to be explicitly named, as is still the case, for example, when people in our day talk of ‘the summer of 84.’ Maybe Eliyya felt a need to name the millennium only because a change from the four-thousands to the five-thousands was coming up. On the other hand, לפרט could (in the context of BAV₁₄) be rendered as ‘up to the exact.’ Thus, the whole sentence in BAV₁₄ would read: “And I completed it on [day of the week], the [day of the month] of the month Av of the [number of the] year up to the exact 5th millennium.” This could then be understood as meaning that ‘number of the year’ years of the last century before the year 5000 had already passed. Such a way of telling time would not be particularly unusual; in central and southern Germany, time specifications such as ‘quarter three’ for 2:15 am/pm (or ‘three-quarter three’ for 2:45 am/pm) are still quite common.

If one accepts this suggestion, the two different systems which Eliyya used to designate the dates are still surprising, since people nowadays usually give dates in accordance to a fixed formula, depending on whatever the convention is in the area they live in. If this habit could be extrapolated to medieval Ashkenaz, this would suggest that Eliyya did not write his two bibles in the same city or area.⁶⁹ We know that he worked on SPK₉ in Rouen, since he tells us so in its colophon: רדום כתבתי אותו, “in the city of Rouen I wrote this [book],”⁷⁰ but he does not give a location for BAV₁₄.

66 See Avraham Even-Shoshan, “לפרט”, 5:1535. מלון אבן-שושן, “גדול בהזכרת האלפים. (משנת בריאת העולם)”, 5:1535.

67 See Avraham Even-Shoshan, “לפרט”, 5:1535. מלון אבן-שושן, “קטן בהשמטת האלפים. (משנת בריאת העולם)”, 5:1535. Regarding dates in medieval colophons and the use of לפרט in general cf. also Malachi Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology: Historical and Comparative Typology of Medieval Hebrew Codices Based on the Documentation of the Extant Dated Manuscripts until 1540 Using a Quantitative Approach*, ed. Nurit Pasternak, trans. Ilana Goldberg (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2022), 168–171, esp. 170.

68 Attia translates לפרט in this manner. Cf. Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 129.

69 The observation that the scribe of SPK₉ “uses a calligraphic script, of the Ashkenazi type, described as the Northern French square script,” and that BAV₁₄ also shows “clear features of Gothic northern French script from the 13th century” (see Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 134 and 129, n. 56), is no counterargument, since “immigrant scribes usually preserve their native script for a long time, even for a lifetime.” See Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book*, 39.

70 An edition of folio 197r of SPK₉ is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Berlin.Ms.or.quart.9/197r%20%5B401%5D> (accessed 02/2022). Regarding the identification of רדום with Rouen: “The ancient Latin name Rothomagus was shortened in the Middle Ages to Rothoma or Rodom and the latter name was then variously transcribed as רודום, רדום, and רודום.” See Bernhard Blumenkranz et al., “Rouen,” *EJ* 17:497–498, here 497.



Fig. 6: Information about the location of completion in the colophon of SPK,⁷¹

Another clue for two different places of origin for the two codices is given by the obvious difference in parchment.⁷² Therefore, if one were, for example, trying to find out more about the patron for whom Eliyya wrote this manuscript (a certain R. Asher),⁷³ one would not be ill-advised to extend one's area of investigation to include other parts of Normandy or southern England—Eliyya might have followed in his father's footsteps in this regard, too, and traveled to the 'island in the sea.'⁷⁴ Another possibility for the place of origin of BAV₁₄ could be Germany. One indication for this lies in the layout of the codex: It is written in three columns with interlinear Targum, whereas SPK₉ provides a Targum only for some Haftaroḥ for special holidays—and it seems that the Jews of France were no longer very keen on the Targum in Eliyya's time, in contrast to their German counterparts, as Sarit Shalev-Eyni explains:

“While from the middle of the thirteenth century on, French scholars tended to prefer Rashi's commentary as a substitute for the *Targum*, the Jews of Germany continued to preserve the recitation of the Aramaic translation by Onkelos, which was regarded as the official version. The difference between the French and German attitudes is

71 Cf. SPK₉, fol. [401] – 197r; the edition is available online: <http://bima2.corpusmasoreticum.de/manuscript/Berlin.Ms.or.quart.9/197r%20%5B401%5D> (accessed 02/2022).

72 About BAV₁₄, Élodie Attia reports: “The parchment used is medium thick. Despite the shaving traces visible on both sides, it is possible, as is common in Ashkenaz, to distinguish between the flesh side (white and smooth) and the hair side (grey and lint). Sometimes the grain is equally visible.” In SPK₉, however, “several kinds of parchment were used in several thicknesses (from very thin to medium thick) and several colors of tanned skin can be observed. The differentiation between the hair and flesh (brighter) sides is usually visible, but the shaving has sometimes erased these differences.” See Attia, *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan*, 120, 131.

73 Cf. the colophons in BAV₁₄ on fols. 239r–240v and on fol. 291r. For an English translation of the colophons, cf. Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy*, 329–32.

74 “There is evidence that he [Berechiah] traveled once to an ‘island in the sea’—probably England.” See Tamás Visi, “Berechiah Ben Naṭronai Ha-Naqdan's Dodi ve-Neḳdi and the Transfer of Scientific Knowledge from Latin to Hebrew in the Twelfth Century,” *Aleph. Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 14, no. 2 (2014): 9–73, here 9.

reflected in contemporary manuscripts. In both France and Germany, the Pentateuch includes all of the biblical texts read in public in the synagogue on Sabbaths and Holy Days, and only those. [...] The main difference between French and German traditions relates to the Aramaic *Targum*. Pentateuchs produced in France sometimes appear without the Targum or have the Rashi commentary in their margins.”⁷⁵

This is, of course, no ‘smoking gun,’ but at least something to consider.

6 The most convincing date

Now we can turn back to our main task: determining the day of completion of BAV₁₄. In accordance with our assumption that Eliyya did not make a mistake when writing down the date, we will choose only those candidates from the table above that lead to a day of the week that matches what Eliyya wrote. This leaves us with:

- Av 16, 4999 = July 19, 1239, a Tuesday (Ugolini)
- Av 21, 4999 = July 24, 1239, a Sunday (Golb)
- Av 21, 5019 = August 12, 1259, a Tuesday (Jacobs)
- Av 21, 5049 = August 9, 1289, a Tuesday (Steinschneider)
- Av 21, 5059 = July 21, 1299, a Tuesday (Steinschneider)
- Av 21, 5099 = July 27, 1339, a Tuesday (Berliner, Cassuto)

Of these dates, the last three can be excluded, since Eliyya wrote SPK₉ in 1233, which means that at that time he was already a fully trained scribe, *naqdan*, and *masran*, and so probably not much younger than 25. In consequence, he would have been about 81+ years old⁷⁶ in 1289, about 91+ years old in 1299, and about 131+ years old in 1339, while the life expectancy even of a member of the aristocracy who had reached adulthood was 64 years in the 13th century.⁷⁷ Incidentally, the last three years do not conform to our suggested understanding of לפרט אלף חמישי של. The date suggested by Jacobs would be theoretically possible; Eliyya would have been about 51+ years old at that time and he would have completed BAV₁₄ 26 years after SPK₉. It could be interesting to conduct an in-depth comparison of Eliyya’s handwriting in the two manuscripts in order to find out if there were any indications of advanced age, maybe a shakier execution of writing or a difference in the intervals between dipping the feather into the ink.

That leaves us with three possible dates in two different years. The fact that only Golb suggests a reading of Sunday as the day of the week, and that this was not based on

⁷⁵ See Sarit Shalev-Eyni, *Jews Among Christians: Hebrew Book Illumination from Lake Constance* (London; Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2010), 9–10.

⁷⁶ Copying books required good eyesight and was thus an occupation best suited for younger individuals, but occasionally a scribe could work at his trade over a long period of time, like “the author and scribe Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol of Avignon, who left Provence and settled in northern Italy where he was active as a scribe over a period of at least 58 years.” See Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book*, 90.

⁷⁷ Cf. Henry Oliver Lancaster, *Expectations of Life: A Study in the Demography, Statistics, and History of World Mortality* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), 8.

something he actually saw written down in the manuscript but on what he supposed to have been there before, makes this date less convincing. For Jacobs' suggestion, we must keep in mind that it's far from sure he ever examined the manuscript in person. And indeed, our close inspection of the number in question makes it rather unlikely that Eliyya wrote י"ט. On the other hand, Ugolini's second choice, ב"י, even though he assessed its probability as less likely than that of א"ט, is definitely plausible. Thus, under the assumption that Eliyya did not make a mistake when writing down the date, Tuesday, Av 16, 4999 = July 19, 1239 is the most convincing date of completion for BAV₁₄. Incidentally, the year 1239 is also arrived at by the majority of scholars who assume that Eliyya did make a mistake when writing down the date of completion of the codex.⁷⁸ Only the days differ: July 19 if there is no mistake, July 24 if there is one—a difference of just five days.

78 Gudi, Ugolini, Golb, Richler, Attia. Cf. table 1 on pages 119–20.

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