Clarifying the Obfuscation Surrounding the Reissue of Sefer ha-Kayanot

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*Sefer ha-kayanot*, a work on meditation, prayer, and proper conduct, is the first book of the kabbalistic teachings of R. Isaac ben Solomon Luria, known as the Ari (1534–72), to be published.¹ Within four years of that printing a second edition appeared, with a false title page and misleading information. This article revisits both editions and attempts to clarify some of the issues concerning the publication of the second printing of *Sefer ha-kayanot*.² The first printing of *Sefer ha-kayanot* was in Venice in 1620, at the press of Pietro and Lorenzo Bragadin, issued in quarto format (65, [1] ff.). The title page describes the book as being by the godly, holy R. Isaac Luria, and promises that:

In it will be found secrets concealed from the eyes of all living, on prayer, flagellation in the grave, and other subjects and many straightforward things “sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” [Psalms 19:11].

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¹ Meir Benayahu, “ha-Sefarim she-nidpesu be-Ẓenetsiyah be-yet ha-defus shel Kaleon,” Asupot 13 (Jerusalem: Yad ha-rav Nisim, 2001), 151–53; idem, Haskamah u-reshut bi-defuse Ṭenetiṣ’ah : ha-sefer ha-‘Ivri me-et havai’ato li-defus ye-‘ad tseto le-or (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi, 1971), 105.
² *Sefer ha-kayanot* has since been republished several times, beginning with a Constantinople edition (1720). A summary of *Sefer ha-kayanot* was published by R. Abraham Hazkuni under the title *Zot ḥukat ha-Torah* (Venice: Stamparia Bragadina, 1659).
1620 Sefer ha-kayyanoth, Isaac ben Solomon Luria (ha-Ari), Venice
The title page further informs the reader that it was brought to press by R. Moses Trinki, and is dated “the times have need of this.” The colophon dates completion of the work to Tuesday 5 Av, “at this time R. Ḥayyim Vital (1542–1620) was sought in the heavenly yeshivah.” The title page is followed by Trinki’s introduction (2a-b), in which he, an emissary from Safed, discusses the difficulties encountered in his travels, having gone first to Damascus and then to Constantinople, before coming to Venice. Trinki also indicates that he himself has authored discourses, but he first wishes to bring this book to press. Following Trinki’s introduction is the text, set in a single column in rabbinic type, which begins with the customs of the Ari and concludes with some pashtim (straightforward kavanot) from the Ari; at the end of the volume there is an index. Sefer ha-kavanot was published without approbations.

Sefer ha-kavanot’s intent is to assist the individual, and even more so the joined community, in realizing the full potential of prayer. Gershom Scholem describes this approach to liturgy as a silken cord aiding the mind in its difficult path through the darkness to God. Mystical meditation via prayer reveals the stages of this passage into the deepest recesses of the soul. Furthermore, one’s kavanah in prayer affects the spheres through which one moves, achieving a spiritual tikun. No two prayers are alike, so each individual’s meditation contributes to the overall tikun. A true level of mystical achieve-
ment in prayer is not simple, for, as Scholem observes, “I have had occasion in Jerusalem to meet men who to this day adhere to the practice of mystical meditation in prayer, as Luria taught it, for among the 80,000 Jews of Jerusalem there are still thirty or forty masters of mystical prayer who practice it after years of spiritual training.” It is Scholem’s opinion that Sefer ha-kayanot was primarily taken from the writings of R. Ḥayyim Vital, the leading student of the Ari and the foremost proponent of Lurianic Kabbalah.

Four years after the appearance of the 1620 edition of Sefer ha-kayanot, a second edition was published, an edition of particular interest because of questions concerning the place and circumstances of its printing. It too is a quarto (65, [s] ff.) in format, and the text of the title page, although set differently (in square as opposed to rabbinic letters), is identical to that of the previous printing, including publication data, the names of the printers Pietro and Lorenzo Bragadin, and the Christian date of 1620. The sole textual variation is in the Hebrew date, here given as בושלום ([s]384 = 1624). The Hebrew date is confirmed by the colophon, which dates completion to Monday 9 Siyan [ם שלו בו] (27 May 1624).

The two editions are, with several notable exceptions, sufficiently alike (for much of the volume, the lines begin and end with the same words) that it seems the 1620 Sefer ha-kayanot was used as the copybook for the 1624 edition. The type is similar, although not identical. The likeness continues to 65a, where the layout changes. Omitted from this edition are the

1624 Sefer ha-kayanot, Isaac ben Solomon Luria (ha-Ari), [Hanau]
pashtim, but an approbation is added below the introduction, written by R. Petaḥiah ben Joseph, *av bet din* in Frankfurt (1622–68), and signed by five other Frankfurt rabbis. Errata are added at the end of the volume.⁶ The approbation states:

“One *mitsyah* leads to another” [Pirke Avot 4:2]. I have seen a precious pearl in the hand of a *shaliah mitsyah* (Torah emissary) of Jerusalem, this book relating the wondrous esoterica of the ways of the godly man, the holy *ga’on* R. Isaac Ashkenazi, to his upright student, R. Moses Trinki, “who poured water on the hands of” [II Kings 3:11] his teacher, who revealed the secrets of the meaning of the *mitsyot* to him, so that I said “great is learning that leads to deeds.” The above emissary urged R. Benjamin ben Yekuthiel to bring it to press so that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” [Isaiah 11:9]…

The approbation continues, prohibiting with a strong ban the unauthorized reprinting of *Sefer ha-kayanot* for ten years and noting that the emissary, Benjamin, has agreed that the price of the book shall not exceed one *reichthaler*.⁷

Petaḥiah edited the book and prepared the errata, the latter to correct the numerous errors introduced by the non-Jewish printer who hastened to finish his work and because Benjamin, in his haste to continue his mission, did not have time to properly edit the work—in addition to which, the first edition was replete with errors. Petaḥiah asks that if additional

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⁶ The signatories to the approbation are R. Petaḥiah ben Joseph, R. Nathan ben Abraham Helen, R. Meir ben Solomon Isaac Reitlinin, R. Aaron ben Samuel ha-Kohen, and R. Joseph Yuspa ben Phinehas Hahn Nördlingen of Frankfurt.

⁷ The restriction limiting pricing, here to one *reichthaler*, is not uncommon. Concerning such restrictions see Nahum Rakover, *Zekhut ha-yotsrim ba-mekorot ha-Yehudiyim* (Jerusalem: Moreshet ha-mishpah be-Yisra’el, 1991), 322, who discusses the use of approbations to control over-pricing.
errors be found he be judged favorably, for at the time he did the work he was incarcerated for twenty-three days in Frankfurt (for reasons unknown). The errata are rare, missing from most copies.8

The first to suggest that this edition is a Hanau imprint was Moritz Steinschneider, a suggestion subsequently accepted by most other bibliographers.9 This is not implausible, given the congenial conditions for Hebrew printing there. Stephen G. Burnett notes that the rulers of Hanau had a relatively tolerant Jewish policy. They considered the Jewish printing of Hebrew books to be a licit activity under imperial law, and Hanau was one of only three locations in Germany where Jewish presses were active between 1555 and 1650 (Hanau the only one in the first decades of the seventeenth century).10

By contrast, Saul Esh suggests that Sefer ha-kayananot is a Frankfurt imprint, quoting R. Joseph Yuspa ben Phinehas Hahn Nördlingen (1570–1637), a signatory to the approbation. Joseph Yuspa writes in his Yosef omets (Frankfurt, 1723) that Sefer ha-kayananot was unknown outside of Erets Yiśra’el, because it was prohibited to send it to the diaspora “until by theft it was recently brought to press here [Frankfurt].”11 In his reference to the work, Joseph Yuspa adds that “in any case, it is possible

10. The other two cities in which there was Hebrew printing were Augsburg and Thiengen, both in the sixteenth century. Stephen G. Burnett, “Hebrew Censorship in Hanau: A Mirror of Jewish–Christian Coexistence in Seventeenth-Century Germany” in The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After (New York & London, 1994), 200–01. Also available online at http://digital-commons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub/46
to say ‘The counsel of the Lord is with those who fear him’ [Psalms 25:14] to set in their hearts to focus on the truth,” citing an example from Sefer ha-kayyanot. 12

It would seem that the use of the Venice edition as a copybook would belie the use of a previously unknown manuscript as the source for the 1624 edition. Moreover, unlike the 1620 edition, which was brought to Venice by Moses Trinki, an emissary whose identity is confirmed elsewhere, the source for this edition is Benjamin ben Jekuthiel, the only reference to whom is in this edition of Sefer ha-kayyanot. 13 Why would Trinki urge Benjamin “to bring to press [Sefer ha-kayyanot] so that ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,’” when he had published the identical book four years earlier? Indeed, Petaḥiah only implies that he has seen Benjamin, writing “I have seen a precious pearl in the hand of a shaliah mitsyah,” purportedly Benjamin: the sole other reference to that shaliah mitsyah described his haste to leave. Perhaps, in a brief meeting (if it occurred at all and Petaḥiah was not a party to the publication), someone—conceivably a representative of the unnamed publisher—gave the book to Petaḥiah. The five other signatories to the approbation are only expressing concurrence to the body of the approbation by adding their names, with no indication that they have had any contact with the shaliah mitsyah. All of this brings into question the reality of the visit, and even the very existence of the emissary and his manuscript. Perhaps this was all invented to hide the use of the 1620 Venice edition as a copybook.

Reprinting works from earlier editions soon after they were published elsewhere was not an infrequent practice; it was, on

the contrary, often a problem for early presses. Lisa Jardine, discussing the early book market, writes that “printers unashamedly reissued works from copies acquired on the open market and reset in their own print-shop.” This was also true for the Hebrew book market, the best known case being that of the Giustiniani-Bragadin dispute over their rival editions of Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah. The former printer, who had previously plagiarized many titles printed by Daniel Bomberg, did the same with the Mishneh Torah published by Alvise Bragadin with the commentary of R. Meir Katzenellenbogen (Maharam) of Padua, fomenting a dispute that culminated in the condemning and burning of the Talmud in 1553–54.

Finally, Herbert Zafren, in a review of seventeenth-century Hanau typography, characterizes Sefer ha-kayanot as sharing features with other questionable Hanau imprints. He concludes that “the so-called Hanau books of 1623 to 1630 were not printed in Hanau.” Perhaps, then, Sefer ha-kayanot was printed in Frankfurt, as Esh would suggest, based on Yosef omets.

There is a difficulty with this suggestion, however, because Hebrew printing in Frankfurt was, with exceptions, a later phenomenon. Hayim Friedberg writes that despite the presence of an established Jewish community in Frankfurt, and although Hebrew printers and booksellers are known to have attended book fairs from an early period, Hebrew printing was not practiced there in a serious manner until the last

decades of the seventeenth century. He notes exceptions, such as *Megilat Vints* (1616) and perhaps a small number of other unknown works, in conjunction with the Hebrew press in Hanau.\(^6\) Similarly, A.M. Habermann dates the establishment of the first Hebrew press in Frankfurt to 1656; Aron Freimann, in his *A Gazetteer of Hebrew Printing*, records the first seventeenth-century work as a Bible (1677), and Yeshayahu Vinograd, in his enumeration of Hebrew books printed in Frankfurt, records only three works from 1614 through 1624, the last an edition of R. Abraham ibn Ezra’s astrological work *ha-Me’orot*, with Latin.\(^7\) To have printed even a relatively small book such as *Sefer ha-kayanot* in Frankfurt seems, then, if not impossible, at least unlikely.

In summary, we can conclude that *Sefer ha-kayanot* was reprinted in 1624 without authorization, in an unidentified site, if not in Hanau then perhaps, but also not likely, in Frankfurt am Main, as a line-for-line copy of the 1620 edition. Rather than deal with any unforeseen complications, the unidentified printers gave their edition an independent provenance, ascribing it to an unauthorized manuscript illicitly removed from the Land of Israel by an emissary unknown except for this single reference to him.

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