The place is Constantinople, capital of the Ottoman Empire; the date December 1493. Elia (Elijah), son of Benjamin ha-Levi, is writing the concluding lines to the almost complete edition of Jacob ben Asher’s great early fourteenth-century religious compendium *Arba’ah Turim* (‘The Four Rows’), a title referring to the four rows of gemstones on the breastplate of the High Priest. The work is completed on Friday 13 December. It is a folio volume of about eight hundred pages, divided into four parts and printed in two columns of mostly forty-nine lines. The four parts, respectively entitled ‘Way of Life’, ‘Teacher of Knowledge’, ‘Stone of Help’ and ‘Breastplate of Judgement’, deal with such subjects as prayer, blessings, the Sabbath, holy days and fasting, laws relating to ritual slaughter of animals, unclean food, idolatry and mourning, marriage, the marriage contract, and divorce. The book can without a doubt be called a bestseller among the Hebrew incunabula: including editions of its separate parts, at least thirteen editions of this work appeared within twenty years.

In his capacity of proof-reader and editor to the press of the brothers David and Samuel Ibn Nahmias, a task certainly entrusted to him as a great and fruitful scholar and poet from a family of Turkish Jews long resident in the city now forty years under Islamic rule, Elia ha-Levi is responsible for the purity of the text which has just been printed. His teachers were the famous Chief Rabbis of Constantinople, Moses Capsali and Elijah Mizrahi, and his qualities were rated so highly that he was later to succeed them in their place.

Nevertheless, Elia’s concluding text betrays a certain anxiety about the results of his proof-reading, for, as he says, ‘it is in the nature of the copying art of printing that no one engaged in it can avoid errors.’ And in order to cover himself in advance he quotes David, ‘sweet singer of Israel’, who has expressed this before in the nineteenth Psalm: ‘Errors – who can discern them?’ That this anxiety was not altogether misplaced becomes apparent precisely in these concluding lines of Elia’s, which in both the Amsterdam copy and the practically complete copy in the British Library show a strange
Fig. 1. Colophon of the *Arba'ah Turim* (Constantinople, 13 December 1493), Part IV, leaf 150°. BL, C.50.d.21 (reduced size)
variant, a grammatical error which moreover does not occur in three other copies known to me at present (in Oxford, Cincinnati and Jerusalem). Now this does not need to be the result of poor proof-reading; it is also possible that the text was originally correct, but that during printing a few letters came loose and were wrongly replaced.²

Today it is known that this book was not only the first book to be printed in the Near East, but also the first product of the printing press in South-East Europe.² Two different kinds of facts can serve as starting point for a reconstruction of the genesis of this book: firstly the book itself, the types with which it has been printed, and the paper used for it; and secondly, the historical reality of that winter of 1493, in so far as we know it.

Let us start with the historical facts as they were some five centuries ago, in the Spain of 1492. This was not only the year in which Columbus discovered America, but also the year in which the Jews were driven out of the realm of Ferdinand and Isabella. Their marriage had united the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, and efforts towards the removal of all ‘unbelievers’ from the whole region were redoubled. The fall of Moorish Granada in 1492 after a strenuous war fulfilled this aim and also brought an abrupt end to the existence of the once thriving Jewish community in Spain which had been there ever since Roman times. Admittedly the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry during the Moorish era, when arts and sciences were flourishing, was long past – I refer to scholars and poets like Maimonides, Nahmanides, Gersonides, Ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi, to name just a few of the better known, and I think of the two famous synagogues of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Toledo and the innumerable marvellous illuminated Hebrew manuscripts of that period. But in 1391 violent persecutions had broken out in the whole country, Jewish communities were decimated, and countless people were forcibly baptized or themselves sought safety in conversion to Christianity. These ‘Conversos’ were, however, looked upon with suspicion and in the course of the fifteenth century became more and more isolated. The situation of the Conversos or New Christians became especially unbearable when in 1483 Tomás de Torquemada, Queen Isabella’s confessor, became Grand Inquisitor. The Jewish communities which were accused of secret contacts with the New Christians were under equally heavy pressure. This development reached its climax on 31 March 1492, when the royal edict was signed in Granada, banishing all Jews in the kingdom who refused to convert to Christianity. The edict came into force no more than a month later, and the months of May, June and July saw a massive and dramatic exodus of tens of thousands. Many fled westward, to Portugal, not knowing that they were walking into a trap which was to be hermetically closed a few years later, but others escaped after what often were appalling sea voyages to North Africa, Italy, Greece and Turkey.

Now let us return to the book under discussion, the Constantinople edition of the Arba’ah Turim. The type with which are printed the titles of its various parts, chapters and paragraphs, as well as the decorative initial at the beginning of the text, are undoubtedly of Spanish origin. Hebrew printing was probably introduced in 1476 in Guadalajara in Castile by Solomon ben Moses Alkabīz ha-Levi, only a short while after

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the first book had been printed in Spain. Guadalajara was an important Jewish centre: it had three synagogues and a Talmudic academy, and a number of important Jewish authors and scholars lived there. This is in contrast to the little town of Hijar in Aragon, of which little is known except that here was established the Jewish press of Eliezer ben Abraham Alantansi, who between 1485 and 1490, in collaboration with Solomon ben Maimon Zalmati, printed the most beautiful Hebrew books ever published in Spain.

One way or another, the brothers David and Samuel Ibn Nahmias, the printers of our book, must have been linked to this press. This is apparent especially from the decorative initial Ḥ. at the beginning of the text, which belongs to a set which was very probably cut, together with a particularly fine decorative border, by a Christian silversmith and collaborator of Zalmati, Alfonso Fernández de Córdoba. Curiously enough the same border was also used for a Catholic service book printed in 1486, probably also in Hijar. This decorative border and some other decorative initials are found in Lisbon a short time later, in use with the equally beautiful Hebrew editions of the press of Eliezer, later given the name Toledano. However, this Ḥ is not among them. The handsome square types found in the Turim were also used in Hijar.

Everything declares that the printers of the Turim were no beginners, rather that they knew their job through and through. The Ibn Nahmias family belongs to one of the oldest and most distinguished Jewish clans of medieval Spain. Most of its representatives are found, to begin with, in Toledo, and later also elsewhere in the country. I do not know where David and Samuel came from, but as I have mentioned before, I suspect that they had something to do with the press in Hijar and that as soon as the edict of expulsion became known they made preparations for the setting up of a printing shop somewhere else. It is possible to reconstruct events even better with the help of data provided by their first book. For the ordinary typeface in which the Turim is printed, formerly referred to as ‘rabbinical’ or ‘Rashi letter’, but nowadays more prosaically called semi-cursive, obviously comes from Naples.

The history of the origin of the book under discussion presents a kaleidoscopic picture; it now moves to the kingdom of Naples around 1490. There too Hebrew books were being printed and Naples was actually the only place in Italy where this was still possible. Towards the end of the 1480s the increasing intolerance of state and church in Italy had evidently made it impossible for Hebrew book production to continue indefinitely. Hebrew printing had begun about 1469 in Rome and had thereafter spread to Reggio in Calabria in the south and to Piove di Sacco in the north, in the region of Padua where the first books bearing a date were published in 1475. Hebrew printing came to flourish particularly in northern Italy, in Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna and especially in Soncino, a small town near Cremona. The Soncino family business quickly dominated a large part of the market. But in 1489 Joshua Solomon, the driving force of the Soncinos, is found to have fled to Naples whither Joseph ben Jacob Ashkenazi Gunzenhauser had preceded him in 1487, and between 1487 and 1492 Hebrew printing in Italy took place mainly in Naples. The only exception in this development was
Gershom ben Moses Soncino, a nephew of Joshua Solomon, who just managed to survive as a Hebrew printer in Brescia in the north.

The history of the Jews in the kingdom of Naples in the fifteenth century displays a remarkable picture of constantly ever-increasing safety and prosperity. After the death without issue of Queen Joanna II of the House of Anjou, who had tried in vain to deprive the Jews of their rights, an attempt which had even provoked protests from her Christian subjects, the accession of the King of Aragon as Alfonso I of Naples in 1442 signified the beginning of a new period of tranquillity. His court became a centre of civilization and learning. He was succeeded in 1458 by his illegitimate son Ferdinand I who, no doubt because he foresaw the economic advantages of such action, conducted a policy of protection of Jewish interests. This was in total contrast to his first cousin Ferdinand II of Aragon and V of Castile, King of Spain, who, as has been stated, signed the edict expelling the Jews from Spain in 1492. In the kingdom of Naples Jews could live and travel freely, were allowed to build new synagogues, did not have to wear the yellow patch forced on them elsewhere, and in 1468 even received full civic rights, probably a situation unique in medieval history. All this, of course, was not without the imposition of yearly taxes.

Not surprisingly, printing and the booktrade were able to develop favourably in this atmosphere of flourishing trade and Renaissance culture. From 1471 until the end of the fifteenth century, about 300 printed books were published in Naples. In 1477 an anonymous Jew appears to have published an edition of Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, not however without having thereby elicited the ire of his Christian colleague Francesco del Tuppó who was preparing an edition of the same work. But it seems that by 1485 Tuppó’s wrath had altogether subsided: in that year he brought out a beautiful edition of the fables of Aesop in which he had apparently intentionally included two stories in which Jews were depicted very sympathetically. The decorative border embellishing the first page of this *Aesopus* turns up again in the printing shop of the Soncinos in northern Italy in 1487.

On the one hand this points to contacts between this Neapolitan Christian printer and the famous Jewish printers of Soncino, and on the other it probably presages the move from northern Italy to Naples of Joshua Soncino’s press. In 1489 he acquired the right to trade in printed books in the kingdom of Naples, and the first known book from his Neapolitan press appeared in the spring of 1490. The press of Joseph ben Jacob Ashkenazi Gunzenhauser had already been in operation since early 1487. At least thirteen editions of Hebrew books from the Gunzenhauser press survive; Soncino published at least ten such. Now it is striking that no dated editions from these presses are known to date from later than the summer of 1492; it looks as if at that time the production of Hebrew books in Naples had come to an abrupt end. Can this have any connection with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and perhaps an even closer one with the arrival of the brothers Ibn Nahmias?

As stated above, the text type of the 1493 Constantinople *Turim* came from Naples. It turns out to be identical with the text type of Joshua Soncino, last used by him in his
grandiose Mishnah edition of 8 May 1492. I assume that the Ibn Nahmias brothers were part of a group of (probably very wealthy) refugees under the leadership of the renowned statesman-scholar Isaac Abravanel who left the port of Valencia on 31 July 1492, the very last day before the edict came into force, and who arrived in Naples at the end of September. There the group was hospitably received, and the King even appointed Abravanel his counsellor.

Since the square type and the only decorative letter used in the Turim originate from the press of Eliezer Alantansi in Hijar, it seems highly probable to me that the brothers Ibn Nahmias left Spain with the clear intention of setting up a press elsewhere, perhaps in Naples. Perhaps Constantinople had already been decided upon as their final destination, and they only wanted to complete their preparations in Naples, where they knew they would find sufficient expertise. For it was universally known that the Turkish sultans received the Jews in their empire with open arms and even assisted them financially, among other things because they looked on them as allies against their Christian enemies, albeit that Bayazid II (1481–1512), the reigning sultan in 1492, preferred it if prominent Jews converted to Islam, in great contrast to his predecessor Mehmed II and his successor Selim I.

But then a catastrophe happened. According to the chronicles of the time, and maybe in consequence of the miserable condition of the exhausted and underfed less well-off Jewish refugees who kept streaming by sea into Naples from Spain, the plague broke out in Naples, within a year killing 20,000 people. (Of course this kind of statistic in medieval chronicles has to be approached with the necessary scepticism; whether there was really a link between the plague and the arrival of Jewish refugees and whether there were really so many dead is still an open question.) But perhaps Joshua Soncino and Azriel Gunzenhauser were among the victims.

To round off my assumption, I suggest that, supplied with sufficient material for the establishment of a press, and perhaps also in company of compositors and press-men from among the Neapolitan Hebrew printing shops, the Ibn Nahmias brothers fled headlong from the plague and moved to Turkey. There they worked the whole year 1493 on the production of their book. But there is a problem. As stated, they had the Soncino text type at their disposal. What I do not know is whether they produced their type material by means of matrices or the punches themselves in Constantinople, or whether they had left Naples with a supply of cast types. True, twelve years later they were using apparently the same type on a smaller body, making it probable that at that time they had the use of the matrices and possessed their own type foundry. But in any event, beginning with the first pages of the Turim, there appear in the book a number of stretched letters – the so-called litterae dilatabiles – which are not found in the Soncino editions.

There are two possible explanations. The first is that the brothers Ibn Nahmias added their extra types themselves or had them made additionally because their experience with equivalent types in Spanish Hijar had taught them that a semi-cursive text type was not complete without these additions. The second explanation could be that Joshua Soncino
himself had these dilated letters made around 1492, but was no longer able to employ
them (or at any rate we have no examples of him using them). This possibility has not
just been snatched out of thin air, for his competitor Joseph ben Jacob Gunzenhauser
had already begun to add two dilated letters to his semi-cursive fount in 1488. Joshua
Soncino may have seen this as a challenge which he could not ignore. As a matter of fact,
he had long since adopted dilated letters in his square typeface.

In order to free our Turim a little from the artificial isolation which is often inflicted
on this book as being the only incunable to have been published in Turkey, it may prove
a useful intermezzo to consider the year 1493 somewhat closer to home (which for me
means setting it in a Dutch context). Whilst the dramatic scenes around the expulsion
of the Jews from Spain were unfolding themselves in Southern Europe, North Holland
was suffering almost incessant rains and storms. In this already watery region, whose
little usable ground would because of the overabundant rainfall no longer produce
anything while it was impossible for the fishermen to sail out, the country population was
suffering from hunger, which led to the revolt of the ‘Cheese and Bread People’. The
Netherlands were governed by the House of Habsburg and Philip the Fair was the
official ruler, though still just under age. For that reason his father, Maximilian of
Austria, had been appointed regent, though not without protests from above all the
Flemings. He had Albert of Saxony subdue the ‘Cheese and Bread People’ in next to no
time and thus force them to pay taxes, the so-called rider money. One year later, in
1494, Philip the Fair was inaugurated. He continued the Burgundian efforts to bring the
different areas under a central administration. It looks like another world, but the
distances seem greater than they are when it is recalled that Philip the Fair later married
Joanna, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, and would therefore in future
claim the Spanish throne. One also recalls that his sister Margaretha was proposed in
marriage to the French king, who was hatching plans to conquer the kingdom of Naples.

And what was book production like in the Netherlands in the same year 1493? That
there was not only fighting between soldiers, peasants and fishermen is proved by a
magnificent handwritten Book of Hours which the artist Spierinck illuminated in
Beverwijk or Haarlem in 1493. Nor was the printing press idle either. On 1 March a
Middle Dutch edition of the Epistelen ende evangelien was completed by Jacobus van
Breda in Deventer, followed immediately by an edition of the same text by Peter van
Os in Zwolle on 26 March. On 30 March Richard Pafraet of Deventer published a
Latin text, the Hymni Prudentii interpretatio by Antonius Liber. On 23 September
Christiaen Snellaert of Delft published an edition of the Middle Dutch Historie van
Apollonius van Thyro.

In a wider European context, 20 May saw an edition of Jacobus de Voragine’s Golden
Legend published by Wynkyn de Worde in Westminster; on 12 December, thus one
day before the Turim, Henricus de Sancto Urso in Vicenza finished a Catalogus
sanctorum et gestorum eorum by Petrus de Natalibus. A week after the Turim, on 20
December, Ptolemy’s Quadripartitum together with other astronomical treatises was
published by Bonetus Locatellus in Venice and on 23 December the German

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Fig. 2. Beta-radiographs of the running watermark (actual size) in the Constantinople edition of the *Arba’ah Turim*, from the copy (Ros. Inc. 397) in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam University Library: (left) Part IV, f. [14].3^b. Felt side. Mark centred in the right half of the sheet; (right) Part IV, f. [3].6^b. Felt side. Mark centred in the left half of the sheet

translation of Hermann Schedel’s famous world chronicle was completed by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg. One of the numerous woodcuts which have made this book so famous shows the Islamic city of Constantinople – and this brings us back to our subject.
Essential for the production of a book is of course the paper on which it is printed. Closer examination of the paper of the Turim will disclose some important information towards the reconstruction of the book's origin. The watermarks occurring in it will be especially useful for the investigation in connection with the doubt raised about the date 1493 in the colophon. And there is more. First of all it can be shown that the paper was manufactured in Northern Italy. More or less 70% of its paper has as watermark pair a bull's head with what for the sake of convenience I shall call a flowering staff between its horns (fig. 2). This mark is North Italian. The remaining 30% consists of paper with a watermark of scales in a circle (in two versions, by the way also North Italian paper), a bull's head with a cross between the horns (also from Northern Italy), and a hand with a flower and scissors with a flower. This mixed paper occurs chiefly in the last part of the Turim. This estimate of the various kinds of paper is however rather rough for it is based on examination of one complete, one incomplete and one half of a copy. But it may not be possible to do much better.

The suggestion presents itself that the Ibn Nahmias brothers carried this paper with them on their journey from Naples to Constantinople, which implies, among other things, that they had already made quite precise calculations of their requirements. One bale of paper contains about 5,000 sheets. In the end the whole book was printed on 204 ¾ sheets and it would not surprise me if they had left with ten bales (seven bales of bull's head and three bales of mixed paper) because they envisaged some 240 copies (in which case about 1,000 sheets could have been reserved for 'proof' and faulty pulls). This amount can, of course, be multiplied by factors of two, three or four, but then in my view with a decreasing measure of probability. If this theory is correct, it could well have been the case that in fact more paper was used up in preparation during printing than had been intended, while it was of course impossible to obtain a supplementary quantity of paper at short notice. This would explain why in the fourth part of the book hardly any composing has been done with the more space-consuming dilated type, and why suddenly a number of pages were printed in one wide column instead of in two columns.

Concerning dating by means of watermarks, let me first explain the basic principles of this method. The science of watermarks began to develop at the end of the eighteenth century. Collections of reproductions of datable watermarks were compiled, culminating in the four-part standard work of Ch. M. Briquet, Les Filigranes, of 1907. Although bibliographers and historians have not always made correct use of this work it still has an enormous influence. Of even greater importance is the still unfinished work of G. Piccard of Stuttgart, which reproduces watermarks systematically in many volumes, arranged according to their type. Between Briquet and Piccard comes the work of the American Allan Stevenson whose chief merit is to have given the science of watermarks a firm methodological foundation. In his masterly book The Problem of the Missale Speciale he deals in a crystal-clear and often humorous manner with the fundamental principles of modern watermark science. These are inter alia:

(i) Watermarks are twins. There were always two moulds in use at the same time, and
the watermarks employed were usually each other’s mirror image or simply a copy of each other; one mark is found in the right half of the sheet, the other in the left.

(2) What determines the identity of two marks is the pattern of knots by which the wire figure, which causes the mark in the paper, has been fastened on the mould; that pattern is the fingerprint of the mark which can already during manufacture become gradually distorted and can move somewhat on the mould.

(3) In order to obtain reliable dating it is very important to search for ‘running marks’, a pair of watermarks which occurs throughout the whole edition of a book; the chances of precisely dating separate sheets are much smaller.

(4) On the strength of his knowledge of late-medieval economic conditions Stevenson was able to state that paper with identical watermarks was in the main used up within three or four years. The mould lasted about one year, and the wire figure which had caused the mark had usually to be replaced after six months. According to my calculations this means that about eighty bales or 400,000 sheets of paper with identical watermarks could be made. I must add that this method of dating is generally valid, for research has shown that there are cases where special caution is indicated and that it can happen also with printed books that a supply of paper has been left lying unused for much longer, up to as much as ten years or more.

But I do not think that in the case of the Constantinople Turim there is any need to consider such an exceptional case. This book is printed on ordinary chancery paper for which the agreed rule of an average duration of three to four years must surely apply. As has been stated, the book is to a large extent printed on paper with a ‘running mark’, a pair of bull’s heads, and fortunately there is a highly detailed reference book on the bull’s head watermark: the three-volume ‘Findbuch’ by Gerhard Piccard, Die Ochsenkopfwasserzeichen. And in it under no. XIII, 524 is found the exact mark which occurs in 70% of the book which Piccard, on the strength of archival research, I would almost say to my great relief, dates precisely: 1493.

After this successful expedition in search of the origin and date of the Turim’s paper I want to return briefly to that variant in the colophon, for an assumed misprint in it is of great importance in Hebrew bibliography in which this book has long played an important role, contrary to general bibliography which seems hardly to be aware of it and usually places the beginning of printing in Turkey in the eighteenth century.

It was Giovanni Bernardo De-Rossi who at the end of the eighteenth century gave the book its first scholarly description. He believed that 1493 had to be a misprint (or even a falsification) for 1503, because a second book from this press is only recorded in 1505; this doubt regarding the date has persisted until our own day. It has to be remembered, however, that the date in the colophon does not of course read 1493, but rather, in Jewish chronology, ‘five thousand two hundred and fifty-four’, and above all that this date is written not in numerals but wholly in words. I trust that with my reconstruction of the history of the origin of this book I have proved that there is no question of a misprint or falsification of any sort, and that this book is a genuine Turkish incunable.

As was just mentioned, a counter-argument that has been put forward is that the next
book to leave the press of David and Samuel Ibn Nahmias was published no earlier than 1505. It is thought unlikely that a press should have produced nothing for twelve years. I can offer four arguments against this. Firstly, the production of these years could have been lost. Indeed, many fifteenth- or sixteenth-century editions survive only in one or two copies, and we simply do not know how many have been lost altogether.

Secondly, it is noticeable that there is a great gap between the typographical design of the Turim and that of the next recorded book of 1505, a Hebrew Pentateuch with commentaries. Where at the beginning the printers had only one square fount and one semi-cursive, in 1505 they had three different semi-cursive founts and three square founts, with vowels, in their type-cases. They had, moreover, a splendid decorative border and an ample number of ornamental initials. All this new material came apparently from the press of Rabbi Eliezer, surnamed Toledano, from Lisbon. It does not appear to me to be too far-fetched an assumption to trace a direct connection between the acquisition of this material and the dramatic events in Portugal in 1497 when King and Church combined in a single act of violence to make an end to a flourishing Jewish culture, resulting inter alia in two main waves of Portuguese refugees to Turkey in 1497 and 1498. In my opinion, this also proves, once again, that the Turim must have been published in any case before 1497. Of this Pentateuch of 1505 only one (as good as) complete copy is known, plus a number of incomplete copies and fragments. Of these at least three are printed on vellum, which makes it clear that the business of the Ibn Nahmias brothers disposed of a large capital. It may also be of interest to note that the Ibn Nahmias press went on to publish the first editions of a number of books by Abravanel, which may be a further indication of their close contact with him as a result of their joint voyage from Spain to Naples.

Thirdly, the long period during which it is believed that the press was inactive may be due to the ambivalent attitude of the Sultan towards the Jews. Bayazid II was convinced of their economic importance for his empire, and tradition has it that he even mocked his enemy the King of Spain for his folly in expelling the Jews. For this reason the large groups of refugees who came streaming into Turkey were financially assisted by way of certain tax exemptions and even material support in establishing a business. On the other hand, the Sultan was at the same time a most conservative Muslim who could not share the liberal opinions of his father Mehmed II. For this reason he closed synagogues built in Constantinople after 1453, and demanded that Jewish court physicians and high functionaries convert to Islam. It is possible to imagine that he (or one of his viziers), having learned that a Jewish religious text had been printed in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, prohibited the continuation of this practice – until some twelve years later, when (after mediation by some influential person or as reward for services rendered or perhaps after payment of a considerable amount of bribes) permission to print was granted again.

Resuming my arguments against the alleged misprint in the date, I now return in fourth and last place to the necessary supply of paper. There were no paper mills in Turkey, and archival investigations have shown that all the paper used in this period in
Constantinople was imported from Venice. But from 1496 to 1503 a naval war raged between the Sultan and the Venetian Republic. The Turkish admiral Kemal Reis inflicted crushing defeats on the Venetians. This led to the definitive conquest by the Turkish Sultan of Bosnia-Herzegovina whose grievous consequences in the former Yugoslavia are still with us today. The possibility cannot be excluded that because of this war at sea no paper was to be had in Constantinople and therefore no printing could take place. What is remarkable in this context is that the book published in 1505 is printed on paper of French provenance: perhaps the brothers Ibn Nahmias had in the end found another solution for obtaining their most important raw material.

I believe I have now completed the reconstruction of the printing history of the Constantinople *Arba'ah Turim*. What I have tried to show is a black and white print which I have then coloured as true to nature as possible. Black and white are the following facts: on 13 December 1493 a book was published in Constantinople, printed on the press of David and Samuel Ibn Nahmias with typographical material coming from Hijar and Naples and on paper from Italy. The rest is my colouring. For we do not and probably never will know whether the brothers Ibn Nahmias belonged to the group of refugees who under the leadership of Isaac Abravanel left Valencia for Naples on 31 July 1492, and whether because of the outbreak of plague they afterwards travelled again, provided with equipment sufficient for the establishment of a printing shop. Perhaps they had long been resident in Constantinople and had sent for their typographical material and paper via intermediaries, who knows, after years of preparation. But the story as told here seemed to me too exciting not to share it.

**APPENDIX**

The full text of the colophon of *Arba'ah Turim* (Constantinople, 1493) reads as follows:

> Then they that feared God spoke with one another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and it was written in the book of remembrance before him (Malachi 3:16) when the people offered themselves willingly to repair the breach of religion and to put the faith back in its place. For the Lord was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to make the Torah great and glorious (Isaiah 42:21). Ho, every one that thirsteth come ye for water, and he that hath no silver (ibid. 55:1) of understanding to quench his thirst from the Talmud to bring out clearly the law pertaining to that which is prohibited and that which is permitted, that which is obligatory and that which is free, that which is compulsory and that which is a matter of choice, on account of the burden of the long-lasting exile, come ye, buy without an effort the vine of the Torah and its milk (cf. Isaiah 55:1) from this important work, the *Four Rows* by the scholar Jacob ben Asher. From it ye shall draw with joy the water of the laws (cf. Isaiah 12:3) without pain to choose the truth instead of its opposite and to make your ear like a millhopper (cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 89a); for his meat is ready for cooking and his vine is mixed (Ketubot 4a), abundant law; the refining pot is for silver (Proverbs 17:3), that which is obligatory and that which is free; and the furnace for gold (ibid.), that which is prohibited and that which is permitted. We saw the excellence of this work and its great value in preference to other codes and that it is splendidly fitting and we made
the effort to spread learning in Israel through the craftsmen Rabbi David Ibn Nahmias and his brother Samuel, may their reward be complete, and there is a reward for their labour, for they are the cause [of the fulfilment] of the commandment, as has already been stated in the chapter 'If one was reading' in Berakhot (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 13a). And I have done my best to make it as perfect as possible by removing all errors imaginable; I, an insignificant man among thousands, Elia, son of Benjamin ha-Levi, may his soul rest in paradise. And truly, it is in the nature of this work that has come about through copying from one hand to another, that none can stand free from error, but thanks to an effort within the limits of things possible, a comparative perfection has been achieved. As the Sweet Singer of Israel has remarked: ‘Who can discern errors?’ (Psalm 19:13). And it has already been stated in the chapter ‘There may be changed …’ in Shekalim (Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 21a), and in the chapter ‘A woman whose husband has gone’ in Yevamot (Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 19a): ‘The lips of a [deceased] scholar, in whose name a traditional statement is reported in this world, move gently …’ to leave it at that. The motto of the conclusion of these rows was the pericope ‘And the spirit of Jacob their father revived’ (Genesis 45:27), Friday 4 Tevet of the year five thousand two hundred and fifty-four, here in the large city of Constantinople, at the time of the great Mohammedan King Sultan Bayazid’s reign, may he live and may the Lord help him and may He enhance his royal rule. Amen.


2 BL pressmark C.50.d.21 (oriental casebook). This copy was purchased for the British Museum on 10 November 1869 from Fischl Hirsch at Halberstadt for £20. Another five complete copies and some fragments are found in public collections (Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana; Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Library; Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library; New Haven, Yale University Library; New York, Jewish Theological Seminary Library; Oxford, Bodleian Library; and St Petersburg, Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences). See D. Goldstein, Hebrew Incunabula in the British Isles: a Preliminary Census (London, 1985), no. 104, and A. K. Offenberg, Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections: a First International Census (Nieuwkoop, 1990), no. 63.

Collation: Chancery Folio. Part I: [1–28 30
(5+4, the fourth leaf disjunct) 4–128 13–146] = 109 leaves, 1 and 109 blank; Part II: [1–108 1110] = 90 leaves; Part III: [1–58 6–710] = 60 leaves, 66th blank; Part IV: [1–18 191] = 150 leaves, 150th blank. The quires show ‘double leaf’ signatures, as found in Hebrew books printed in Hijar, Spain, and in Lisbon.

3 It concerns the word vav-yod-kof-shin-bet (va-yakshev, ‘he hearkened’), in which the kof and the shin are transposed. This variant was noticed by M. L. Weiser, London.

4 The first dated book that was printed in the former Yugoslavia, the Oktoih Pervoglasnik, a Byzantine liturgical work for eight voices, was published in 1494. The place is not mentioned in the colophon, but it is generally agreed that the book came from the press of the monk Makkarije at Cetinje in Montenegro. Cf. F. Leschinkohl, ‘Ein Beitrag zur ersten Druckerei Südosteuropas’, in Gutenberg-Jahrbuch 1954, pp. 115-21, and recently E. L. Nemirovskij, ‘Der slawische

5 Cf. Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century Now in the British Museum [= BMC], Part x (1971): Spain-Portugal, 'Introduction to the presses', pp. lxxi, lxxix, lxx. However, not all information about the Hebrew presses given there is completely reliable. The Museum's Spanish and Portuguese Hebrew books themselves have not been included in the catalogue.


7 Cf. the facsimiles in A. Freimann [and M. Marx] (eds.), Thesaurus typographiae hebraicae saeculi XV (Berlin-Wilmersdorf, 1924–31; reprinted Jerusalem, 1967–9) [= Thes.], B-8, 9, 11.

8 Moses Marx was the first to point this out in his 'A Catalogue of the Hebrew Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the Library of the Hebrew Union College [at Cincinnati]', Studies in Bibliography and Booklore, i (1953–4), p. 33, no. 26.


11 Thes. A73.


13 M. A. Epstein, The Ottoman Jewish Communities and their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, iv (Freiburg, 1980), passim.


17 IDL, no. 1718.


19 IDL, no. 376.


28 F. Babinger, 'Appunti sulle cartiere sull’importazione di carta nell’impero ottomano specialmente di Venezia', Oriente Moderno:

29 This article has been translated from the Dutch by Anna E. C. Simoni. The original version, without the appendix and footnotes, appeared as ‘Aan de wieg van de mediterrane boekdrukkunst: *Arba’ah Turim*, in *Streven: Cultureel maatschappelijk maandblad*, lx (1993), pp. 714-29.


Illustration: Thes. C-1.