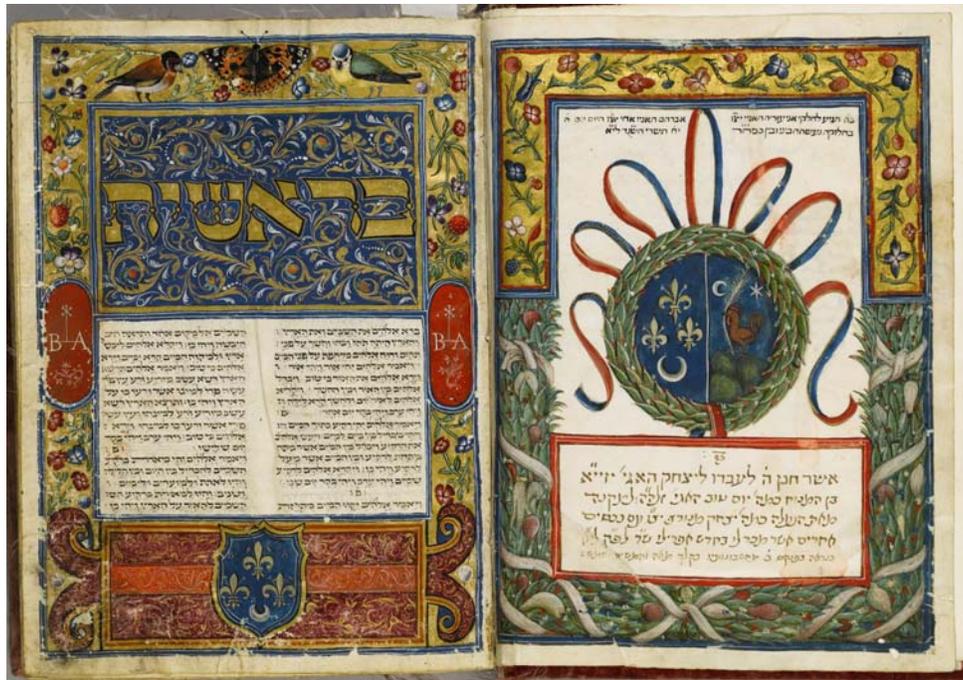


Sotheby's to offer Property from the Delmonico Collection of Important Judaica

17 DECEMBER 2008



Illuminated Hebrew Bible, manuscript on vellum, Florence, 1489 (est. \$150/200,000)

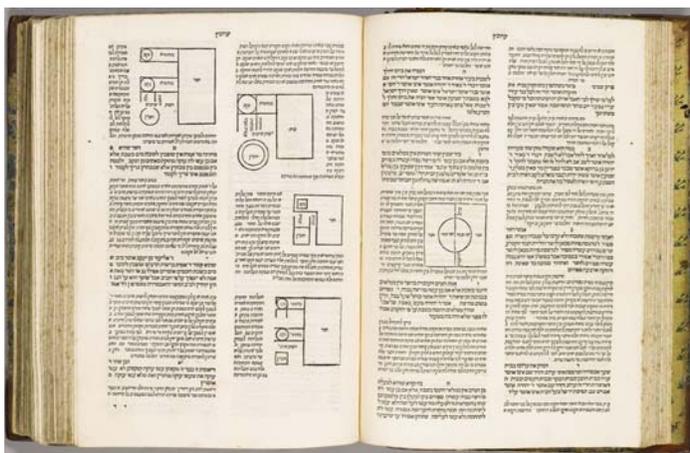
New York, New York – On December 17, 2008, Sotheby's will offer an important single-owner collection of Hebrew manuscripts and rare printed books from the *Delmonico Collection of Important Judaica*. Midway through the last century and unknown to all but a handful of scholars and bibliophiles, a world-class library of Hebrew books and manuscripts was quietly maintained in the stately Delmonico Hotel in New York. A devotee of Hebrew books assembled a library there that included one of the world's largest privately held collections of Hebrew incunabula, and 45 tractates of the first edition of the Babylonian Talmud printed in Venice by Daniel Bomberg, including seventeen tractates of the only known issue printed on blue paper. The 205 lots included in *Property from the Delmonico Collection of Important Judaica* will be on view at Sotheby's New York galleries beginning December 11, 2008 alongside *Important Judaica* and *Israeli and International Art*.

The sale will feature an extremely rare selection of forty-five tractates of the first edition of the **Babylonian Talmud printed in Venice by Daniel Bomberg**, seventeen of which derive from the only known copy printed on blue paper. While the Hebrew Bible is the foundation upon which Judaism is built, it is the Talmud, or compilation of “Oral Law”, that serves as the framework that has given form to Jewish life and ritual observances across the centuries. We know that individuals often kept written notes of the oral tradition and scribes hand-copied individual tractates, however in Venice in 1523 Daniel Bomberg, a non-Jew, revolutionized the distribution of the Oral Law with his monumental compilation of the first complete printed copy of the Talmud – arguably the single most important event in the annals of Hebrew printing. Only a single copy of Bomberg’s celebrated first edition of the Babylonian Talmud was printed as a deluxe edition on blue paper, from which seventeen tractates will be offered in December in a total of eleven lots, ranging in estimate from \$15/20,000 to \$70/90,000*. This offering of First Edition Bomberg Talmuds on blue paper is as rare as the edition itself. No copies of this unique imprint have been offered for sale in over five decades, and none have ever been previously offered at auction. *Property from the Delmonico Collection of Important Judaica* will also include twenty-eight lots comprising tractates from Bomberg’s first edition of the Talmud printed on white paper with estimates ranging from \$5/7,000 to \$25/30,000.



Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shevu'ot Printed on Blue Paper by Daniel Bomberg, Venice, 1521 (est. \$15/20,000)

Also among the highlights are forty-one lots of Hebrew incunabula including the **first complete edition of the entire**



First edition of the entire Mishnah, Naples, 1492, with commentary of Maimonides (est. \$120/140,000)

Mishnah with the commentary of Maimonides, completed in Naples, 1492 (est. \$120/140,000). The commentary on the Mishnah was the earliest of the preeminent Jewish philosopher Maimonides’ major writings, begun when he was in his early twenties, and intended to serve as an introduction for the Talmud. A number of simple diagrams, such as those that illustrate varying interpretations of the laws of *erubin* (boundaries), established an iconography closely followed in many subsequent editions.

The collection also includes an extremely rare and exquisite fifteenth-century illuminated **Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, manuscript on vellum completed by Levi ben Aaron Halfan in Florence, 1489** (est. \$150/200,000). The acme of the Hebrew scribal arts, the execution of the complete text of the twenty-four books that make up the bible requires a special degree of care not present in other contemporary manuscripts. The addition of dozens of decorative elements ranging from the full-page illuminations to striking colored pen and ink drawings and the hundreds of scribal flourishes found in this manuscript all contribute to its unique quality and character.

A rare example of a *tikkun*, or reader's copy of the Pentateuch, dated 1486 from Northern Italy, will also be featured (est. \$100/150,000). The outstanding feature of this extraordinary volume is the presence of two complete copies of the entire text of the Pentateuch arranged side-by-side in the center of every page. One column has the familiar text found in most Pentateuch manuscripts, with *nikkud* (vocalization), *trop* (cantillation) and punctuation, while the other column has only the words of the text as they appear in a Torah scroll, devoid of any punctuation, vocalization or cantillation. This side-by-side arrangement allows for the memorization of these missing elements and facilitates the reader's preparation for a public liturgical recitation using a Torah scroll.



Tikkun, or reader's copy of the Pentateuch, 1486
(est. \$100/150,000)

Also included will be Latin incunabula and early printing including the elegant first edition of Poliziano with the first use of Hebrew type by Aldus (1498, est. \$15/20,000), the first edition of Sabellicus's history of Venice (1487, est. \$15/20,000), and both editions of the Polyglot Psalter from Genoa 1516 (est. \$15/20,000) and Cologne 1518 (est. \$5/7,000).

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium