**How to Identify an Autograph**

Recently I published a scientific edition of R. Joseph Ḥayyun’s *Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah* based on a sole extant manuscript.[[1]](#footnote-1) The manuscript is full of corrections and edits, and in my introduction to the edition I discussed whether the manuscript is an autograph or rather was copied by an expert scribe and only subsequently edited by Ḥayyun.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the introduction, I wrote that despite differences between the script in which the commentary itself is written and that in which the corrections are written, one cannot reject the possibility that both were written by the author, since in Portugal—as in Spain—it was customary to write using three different scripts.[[3]](#footnote-3) Accordingly, I presented several examples in which one can see the author’s exegetical deliberations. However, I presented no additional evidence that the manuscript was an autograph, apart from the fact that it was full of edits and corrections. In this article, I would like to suggest a list of fundamental criteria for identifying an autograph manuscript.[[4]](#footnote-4) The list is compiled from criteria that have been suggested in debates over manuscripts, together with additional criteria that I have added.

One of the most well-known debates that is relevant to our question concerns the four-volume manuscript of Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah.[[5]](#footnote-5) The vast majority of scholars claim that the manuscript was written by Maimonides, and subsequently edited by him over the years,[[6]](#footnote-6) while a minority claim that the manuscript was copied by an expert scribe[[7]](#footnote-7) at Maimonides’ request, and only subsequently edited by Maimonides himself.[[8]](#footnote-8) As is often the case in such debates, both sides summon evidence supporting their contentions and dispute the evidence of the opposing side.

One must admit that there are no criteria that are so decisive as to completely obviate the possibility of disagreement in such matters. However, the coincidence of a number of criteria together increases the probability that an autograph has been successfully identified. In such cases, quantity, as it were, determines quality, and the more criteria that the manuscript meets, the greater the likelihood that one can claim to be dealing with an autograph.

In what follows, we shall divide the various criteria into three categories: explicit evidence, indirect evidence, and evidence arising from a manuscript replete with additions and erasures.

**Explicit Evidence**

1. Sometimes, authors sought the aid of expert scribes to write the original copy of a work due to a lack of free time, fatigue, or else simply because they desired the expertise of said scribe.[[9]](#footnote-9) In some of these cases, these authors would subsequently add their own signatures to the manuscript to indicate that it was a reliable copy.[[10]](#footnote-10) In such instances, we would consider the manuscript to be a reliable copy, but not an autograph proper. However, if the author signed his name *not* in order to authenticate such a copy, that would be evidence that the manuscript in question is an autograph.[[11]](#footnote-11)
2. Manuscripts that conclude with an epilogue by the author and lack a colophon.[[12]](#footnote-12)
3. When a trusted individual (either a student of the author or a close relative) testifies to the manuscript’s being an autograph. In general, such testimonies are found on the first page of a manuscript.[[13]](#footnote-13)
4. In some instances, an author provided instructions for copyists on how to copy his book in the margins of a manuscript. Such instructions can indicate that a manuscript is an autograph.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Indirect Evidence**

1. Instances wherein we have evidence that the manuscript is written in the author’s handwriting,[[15]](#footnote-15) or else we have traditions to that effect,[[16]](#footnote-16) or we have evidence testifying to the existence of an autograph in the same location where the given manuscript was found.[[17]](#footnote-17)
2. If in a given manuscript there are corrections that are signed by someone in the author’s family, there is a reasonable probability that we are dealing with an autograph that belonged to the family.[[18]](#footnote-18)
3. If in a given manuscript there are corrections that are signed by an author who lived in the area from which the manuscript originated and whom we know to have seen the manuscript.[[19]](#footnote-19)
4. Comparison of the manuscript with other manuscripts known to have been written by the author[[20]](#footnote-20) or comparable styles of writing therein—e.g., the form used for citing verses, how the name of God is written, how erasures and corrections are made, etc.[[21]](#footnote-21)
5. Writing a book is a long and ongoing process that can take years in contrast with the process of copying, which generally is significantly shorter in duration. For this reason, a manuscript containing different scripts, different inks, or different types of quills and parchment may indicate that we are indeed dealing with an original manuscript written by the author[[22]](#footnote-22)
6. When a manuscript is complete, and without any gaps or instances of haplography.[[23]](#footnote-23)
7. Occasionally, it is possible to identify what we might call a “hesitant” script, attesting to the author’s deliberations as he struggled to complete a final version of his text that was precise to the greatest possible extent while he was still deep in thought. This contrasts with the script of a copyist, who is generally in a relative state of peace while writing.[[24]](#footnote-24)
8. Sometimes an author will choose to write a commentary on a book of scripture that is sequentially “later” before writing a commentary on a book that is sequentially earlier (or, similarly, he will choose to write a commentary on a later tractate before writing a commentary on an earlier tractate). When the order of books or tractates in a given manuscript is not according to the standard order, this may serve as evidence that we are dealing with an autograph.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**Additions and Erasures**

1. One of the most pronounced characteristics of autograph manuscripts is that they contain many additions in the margins and between lines of text or else contain many erased words and sentences. Compared with autograph manuscripts, copied manuscripts contain relatively fewer erasures and corrections. Further, the more experienced and proficient the scribe, the less need there generally is for corrections. For this reason, when we encounter a manuscript full of erasures and corrections, it is more likely that we are looking at the author’s original manuscript that he erased, corrected, and made additions to as he was writing down his text for the first time.[[26]](#footnote-26) This is particularly likely to be the case if the handwriting of the commentary is identical to the handwriting of the notes.[[27]](#footnote-27)
2. This is especially true when we know that an author revised his work, or that it was his custom to revise his writings in general. In instances wherein the revisions continued for a number of years, we can expect changes in the handwriting in which the notes and corrections are made, especially in cases where the proofreading process extended from an author’s youth to his old age.[[28]](#footnote-28)
3. Some authors were accustomed to revising, correcting, and amending their works even after distribution, in which case it is possible to find manuscripts from both earlier and later editions. For this reason, when a given manuscript represents an early edition of a text, and the corrections therein encompass all the additions contained in a later edition of the text, there is a good chance that we are dealing with an autograph.[[29]](#footnote-29)
4. Emendations that contain expressions that appear to have been written by the author rather than a scribe or copyist, e.g., “or he said,” “now it seems to me” suggest that one is dealing with an autograph. Alternatively, emendations that seem to either revise earlier statements or else elaborate them raise the likelihood that we are dealing with an autograph.[[30]](#footnote-30)
5. Erasures: It is natural that while writing, an author will review and revise what he has written in order to further refine or clarify his ideas. To this end, an author will sometimes draw a line through text to indicate that he is erasing it and expressing his ideas in some other way. Accordingly, manuscripts that contain erasures that are not accompanied by corresponding emendations in the margins and are not the result of a copying error suggest there is a high likelihood that we are dealing with the author’s writing not only in the notes but also in the text itself.

**Examining the Manuscript of R. Joseph Ḥayyun’s Commentary on Jeremiah**

The commentary on Jeremiah is extant in only a single manuscript, which contains the commentary on Jeremiah but is missing commentaries on the first two prophecies.[[31]](#footnote-31) The commentary begins with Jer. 2:29, and the beginning of the manuscript contains six blank pages.[[32]](#footnote-32) This commentary is replete with notes and emendations on nearly every one of its four hundred and sixty pages. The script and ink in which these emendations are written are not uniform. In what follows, we will examine this manuscript according to the criteria enumerated above.

**Explicit Evidence**

From criteria 1–4 enumerated above, our manuscript satisfies criteria 2 and 4. At the end of the manuscript, there is an epilogue in which the author gives thanks to God for helping him to begin and complete his work, which he did not write in his hometown of Lisbon but rather in Évora on account of a severe plague in Lisbon. He indicates that he finished writing the commentary on the fourth of Sivan in the year 5226 (1466). This manuscript has no colophon (criterion 2).[[33]](#footnote-33) The epilogue is written by the same person who wrote the work as a whole, as is apparent from the color of the ink and the form of the letters. The only difference between the epilogue and the rest of the work is a variation in the form of the letter aleph, which in the commentary proper is written in a wide hand and in the epilogue is written in an intermediate hand.

The manuscript is missing commentaries on the first two prophecies. The first note written in the manuscript is: “this prophecy, up to *and the Lord said unto me* (cf Jer. 3:6) is also a rebuke, whereby the prophet rebukes his contemporaries for their wicked deeds. As for the rest of the haftaroth, I/he\* already explicated them in the commentary on the haftaroth.” The purpose of this note is twofold: To delineate the prophecy after having forgotten to do so when he originally wrote the commentary, and to direct copyists to complete the commentary of the first prophecies using his first work, his commentary on the haftaroth.[[34]](#footnote-34)

There is no doubt that this delineation of the prophecy was the work of Ḥayyun and not that of some subsequent commentator who decided to delineate the prophecy based on his own opinion. For this reason, there is no doubt that his note “I/he already explicated” should be understood as “I already explicated” (not he already explicated), and that this note constitutes an addition made by the author himself. It is possible to consider this note as an instruction for copyists (criterion 4), that they should copy his commentary on these prophecies from his previous work.

**Indirect Evidence**

Of criteria 5–11, our manuscript satisfies criteria 8 and 10. Scholars who have researched Ḥayyun’s commentary have concluded that it was his custom to copy verses exclusively in the *qere* (i.e. the pronunciation according to Masoretic tradition as opposed to the written, *ketiv*).[[35]](#footnote-35) And indeed, in this manuscript, verses are only copied according to the *qere* (criterion 8). Study of the manuscript reveals that in instances where the *ketiv* of the verses was cited by accident, he went back and corrected them when he revised his work. For example, initially, he wrote: *was he found* (נמצאה) *among thieves* (i.e., according to the *ketiv*). When he revised his work, he corrected it and wrote: *was he found* (נמצא) *among thieves* (i.e., according to the *qere*). In two instances in the book of Jeremiah where the *qere* inserts a word that is not written in the *ketiv (qere ve-ko ketiv)*, Ḥayyun uses the *qere* form in his citation of the verse. In the opposite case, in the three instances where there are words that are written according to the *ketiv* but according to the *qere* are not read, Ḥayyun omits the *ketiv* form in his citation of the verse.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Ḥayyun customarily wrote introductions to his various works.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is reasonable to assume that he would compose the introduction after having finished writing the work itself. For this reason, the lack of an introduction to the manuscript strengthens the assumption that we are dealing with an autograph, since the author would only have given his book over to be copied after he had completed both the work itself and written the introduction, and not beforehand. It is reasonable to assume that the blank pages that Ḥayyun left at the beginning of the manuscript were meant to be where would later write the introduction to his commentary.

As for the phenomenon of haplography (criterion 10), there are nearly no instances of it in this manuscript.[[38]](#footnote-38) Ḥayyun always quoted the verse or verses he was explaining. Usually, he copied them completely, and in those cases where he did omit a few words, an examination of the corrections makes clear that these are not the result of haplography. Even in the many emendations scattered throughout the manuscript in which Ḥayyun seeks to add something to his commentary, we never find a clear example of a correction involving adding words that had originally been omitted on account of haplography.

**Additions and Erasures**

Of criteria 13–17, the manuscript satisfies four criteria: 13, 14, 16, and 17. As was mentioned above, the manuscript is full of revisions and corrections, and virtually every one of its pages has, at a minimum, at least one erasure, revision, or correction. The revisions and corrections are found, for the most part, in the margins, and to a lesser extent between lines. Sometimes, the revision pertains to a single word or two, while other times it pertains to whole sentences. In this sense, the manuscript entirely satisfies criterion 13. The uniqueness of this manuscript is even more pronounced in comparison to other extant manuscripts of Ḥayyun’s works since nearly none of them contain notes, erasures, or corrections.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Our manuscript also satisfies criterion 14. Ḥayyun was a consistent and fastidious writer. This fastidiousness is evident from the great care he took to revise and amend his commentary, rather than simply being satisfied with what he initially wrote. Ḥayyun mentions this in two of his works, at the end of his commentary on the book of Ezekiel as well as in his commentary on the Song of Songs:

I cannot be certain that the work of this commentary is finished until I have deliberated upon it for some time and perfected it to the extent that I am able.[[40]](#footnote-40) Since I composed this commentary very quickly, I shall deliberate upon it for some time and perfect that which was deficient in it from the first rendering.[[41]](#footnote-41)

For this reason, one can expect that the original manuscript written by R. Ḥayyun himself will contain numerous notes and corrections that Ḥayyun added when he went back to revise his original draft. The style of some of the notes also suggests that we are dealing with notes written by Ḥayyun himself. Many notes begin with the expression, “or should say” (3a on Jer. 2:32; 7a on Jer. 4:30), “or should want” (6b on Jer. 3:9; 7a on Jer. 3:11). Notes in which he delineates the boundaries of a prophecy—which he forgot to do while writing the commentary proper (5b on Jer. 3:6; 100a on Jer. 22:1), can be included in this category. All these notes undoubtedly testify to the fact that they were composed by R. Joseph Ḥayyun himself and not by some scribe who was copying his text (criterion 16). It is unlikely that these notes were written by a scribe under Ḥayyun’s supervision, with Ḥayyun instructing him to make the notes in the manuscript. It is especially unlikely because the script of the comments is not uniform—characteristic of a lengthy and continuous revision process in which the revisor used different scripts at different times.

Does the fact that the notes were written by Ḥayyun indicate that the commentary itself was also written by him? As mentioned at the beginning of this article, I contend that the commentary too was written by him. The only way to prove this is by way of criterion 17—erasures made during the writing process that could only have been undertaken by the author himself.[[42]](#footnote-42)

In order to check this, I examined all four hundred and sixty pages of the manuscript with special attention to every instance in which there was an erasure unaccompanied by an additional note in the margins. Naturally, there were many erasures made during the second stage of revision but I also found dozens of erasures that were almost certainly made by the author *while* he was originally writing his commentary. It is unlikely that Ḥayyun merely dictated the words of the commentary to a scribe, and simultaneously corrected the latter while he was dictating. Further, in Ḥayyun’s epilogue, it becomes apparent that he wrote his commentary while he was in exile from his home and community on account of a plague that had broken out. It is difficult to imagine that he would have been able to find a scribe or other means of writing support.

In what follows, I shall present the evidence and briefly explain the reason behind the erasure in each case. I have divided the types of erasure into three categories: Erasures made before finishing writing a word; erasures made to the contents while revising/reviewing; and erasures made for the sake of improving or correcting the wording. So as not to burden the reader with numerous examples, I present only the most emphatic examples from each category, indicating the remaining examples in the footnotes.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Erasures Made Before Finishing Writing a Word**

On 35a, he writes: “*To the shame of their own faces* (cf Jer. 7:19)—He meant, *do they not bring sorrow upon* themselves, for ~~they acquire g… sorrow~~ became so full of sorrow that they were *ashamed.*” It seems that he had meant to write “for they acquire [great] sorrow,” but he corrected this and instead wrote, “for they became so full of sorrow.”

On 119b, he writes: “*In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim… this word was from the Lord, saying*—~~this word w~~ This verse is a prophecy, which continues to… This is a tale of prophecy… and how did they catch him only to put him to death? And the Lord rescued him from their clutches. And he said: *this word was*—he meant….” (Jer. 26:1). It was Ḥayyun’s custom to delineate every prophecy before explaining it. In the example we are dealing with, we can see that he forgot to delineate the prophecy and began to write “this word w[as],” but when he noticed this, he erased it and added the delineation of the prophecy, returning to the clarification of the verse only afterward.[[44]](#footnote-44)

On 40a, he writes: “*How do you say ‘we are wise’*…. — since even ~~animals are wi~~[[45]](#footnote-45) birds are wiser than them…” (Jer. 8:8). It seems that he initially meant to write: “since even animals are wi[ser than them].” That is to say, *how do you say we are wise*, since even animals are wiser than them. However, he erased this; not to change the meaning of his speech altogether, but rather to clarify that he meant the birds mentioned in the prior verse, specifically, in which the Prophet of Israel had enumerated the birds that were wiser than them: *yea, the stork in heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the ordinance of the Lord* (cf Jer. 8:7).[[46]](#footnote-46)

**Erasures Made to the Contents While Revising**

On 219b, he writes: “*marshal*—~~an officer like~~ a solider, as in *your marshals were like piles of hoppers* (cf Nah. 3:17)” (cf Jer. 51:27). David Kimhi explained that a *marshal* is an officer, while Rashi explained that a *marshal* is a soldier. It seems that initially, Ḥayyun decided to use David Kimhi’s explanation, but later decided to go with Rashi’s explanation.[[47]](#footnote-47)

On 139b, he writes: “*and there is hope for her\* future*—he meant, *for the future* of the redemption, that is, that they shall be redeemed ~~in the redemption of Babel~~ in the *future*—he meant that they shall be redeemed immediately, at the end of the redemption” (cf Jer. 31:16). Ḥayyun explained the entire prophecy as concerning the future redemption, and for this reason, when he wrote “in the redemption of Babel” he erased it and instead wrote “in the *future,*” that is to say, in the eschatological future.

On 107b, he writes: “It seems to be the case that Jeremiah had not yet been born at the time of the exile of Samaria. This is because ninety-five years passed from the time of the exile of Samaria to thirteen years into the reign of Josiah, when his prophecy began. ~~And it was only then that the Lord spoke to him,~~ and he said *behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child* (cf Jer. 1:6)” (cf Jer. 23:13). It seems that initially, he meant to write: “it was only then that the Lord spoke to him [*say not I am a child*] (cf Jer. 1:7),” but he subsequently erased this and instead had Jeremiah himself testifying to his youth “*behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child* (cf Jer. 1:6).”

On 142b, he writes: “and *a man* is an allegory for the great nation, and it is the custom of ~~the weak to court~~ the strong to court the weak” (cf Jer. 31:21). It seems that initially, Ḥayyun made a mistake and wrote “and it is the custom of the weak to court [the strong],” but when he recognized this mistake, he corrected it.

On 22b, he writes: “We can say that he spoke rhetorically when saying *fear ye not Me?* And so on—it is fitting for you ~~to~~ *~~fear~~* ~~the sea~~, for you shall be borne away more easily than the sea” (cf Jer. 5:22). It seems that initially, he meant to write that it was incumbent upon them to fear the sea, but later, he erased this and corrected it, writing that it was incumbent to learn from the sea that they ought to fear the Lord.

104a — “And he called his cutting and removal from there using the language of repair, for ~~the evil and punishments of the wicked are~~ dispersion of the wicked is good both for them and for the world, as the Sages said” (Jer. 22:24). Perhaps he meant to write that “the evil and punishments of the wicked [consist in their being dispersed and expelled],” but he erases this and instead opted to use the language of the Sages in m.Sanhedrin 8:5.

142b — “For it is the custom and nature of the world that the man pursues and courts the woman ~~after the manner of but~~ in order to mate with her” (cf Jer. 31:21). The words “after the manner of” suggest that Ḥayyun wanted to support the preceding idea with a verse from scripture. Further, though it is unclear exactly which verse he had in mind, it seems that the verse began with the word “but.” However, it is also possible that he wrote “but” (*akh*) by accident, when he meant to write “thy husband” (*ishekh*), for this corresponds to a verse that he cites later on: *and thy desire be unto thy husband*.

40b — “*Therefore, I will give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall possess them….*inasmuch as *everyone is greedy for gain…*and transgresses the commandment *do not covet*… *Therefore, I will give*. And on account of that covetousness, they stole from them, therefore I shall punish them measure for measure, and *I will give their wives unto* strangers who are *other* than them, *and their fields to their possessors* who are as strangers to them. I mean, [even] after the death of those strangers, they shall not return to *their fields* even in the Jubilee year…. Rather, those strangers shall take hold of their land for time eternal, such that they will bequeath it unto their *other* children” (Jer. 8:10). This passage contains two corrections. Initially, Ḥayyun sought to write down their punishment and cited words from the verse “*therefore I will give;*” however, he decided against this and added the sentence “And on account of that covetousness, they stole from them” to indicate what moved them to sin. Only afterward did he continue and write, in a slightly altered fashion “there I shall punish them…” He then wrote that their punishment consisted in the fact that their fields would not be restored to their owners even after the thieves died, but he decided against this and wrote that they would not be restored to their owners in the Jubilee.

On 202a, he writes: “~~And we find that in the period of the Tannaim, who said in Berakhot~~ and the Tannaim dispute about this in Berakhot” (cf Jer. 48:47). Initially, he framed his statement as a preamble to citing the Talmud, but later, he erased this and was more precise, specifying that this was a dispute of the Tannaim.[[48]](#footnote-48)

**Erasures Made for the Sake of Improving or Correcting the Wording**

On 60a, he writes: “And his preface was meant as ~~a great greeting to the King Hezekiah~~ a great greeting (in Aramaic) to the King Hezekiah” (cf Jer. 12:5). The Aramaic version of “a great greeting to the King Hezekiah” appears in the Talmud, in Sanhedrin 96a. Initially, Ḥayyun translated the expression into Hebrew, but afterward, he went back and rewrote it using the language of the Talmud. It is possible that he initially sought to write the expression in Hebrew in conformity with the language used in the rest of his commentaries, in which he never uses Aramaic. However, later on, he switched to the exact language of the Talmud either because this particular expression was easily translated or for some other reason.

On 61a, he writes: “*Come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field*—he meant, since the *speckled bird of prey* has been sated by *my inheritance* and cannot *eat* of it, he says to his friends: since we are sated, *come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field.* And they say to them: *bring them to devour,* he meant, come and eat these carcasses to your content. Such are the Babylonians. For they first destroyed Jerusalem and pillaged it, and afterward, they said ~~to the other nations that came with them: ‘since we are sated’~~, some of them spoke to others of them: since we are sated, say to the other nations that they should come, so that they too can pillage and plunder” (cf Jer. 12:9). Initially, he wrote that the Babylonians told the other nations to come and plunder Israel, but he later amended this in order to make the allegory fit the verse better. Just like the *speckled bird of prey* who says to his friends ‘now that we are sated, let us invite the other nations,’ so do the Babylonians say to their friends, ‘now that we are sated, let us invite the other nations.’

On 164a, he writes: “*I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life*… He said *into the hand of them that seek their life*….that desire to kill them, not simply *into the hand of the enemy* who seek to capture and sell them, ~~or~~ *~~into the hand of their enemies,~~* ~~the Chaldeans,~~ *~~and into the hand~~*and this is his saying *and their dead bodies shall be for food* — this is on account of *them that seek their life* killing them instantly and not burying them, but rather leaving out *their dead bodies* which *shall be for food unto the fowls*, and so on. Or, perhaps *their enemies* refer to the Chaldeans, and *them that seek their life* refer to the rest of the nations that accompanied them” (cf Jer. 34:20). Ḥayyun began to write an additional explication, to explain the repetition of *into the hands of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life*, but he erased it and added the explanation in the continuation of the verse. Only afterward, he went back and wrote an additional explication to explain the repetition. This time, he changed and omitted the word *into the hand* — testifying to independent writing, rather than the writing of a copyist scribe.[[49]](#footnote-49)

In conclusion, the manuscript of R. Joseph Ḥayyun’s commentary on Jeremiah satisfies eight of the criteria that suggest we are dealing with an autograph. We can therefore say that there is a high probability that the commentary, the marginal notes, and the corrections, were all written by the author, R. Joseph Ḥayyun, who revised and emended his own work continuously over a lengthy period.

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1. The commentary was published by the Eshkolot Library, with the permission of Herzog College, in conjunction with the Rosen Institute, and with the support of the World Congress for Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 2021. The manuscript is found in the British Library (Add. Ms. 27560); and scans of the manuscript are now accessible on their website. A copy of the scan can also be accessed through the National Library of Israel, under the catalog number F6059. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Abraham Gross (Ḥayyun, 58–62; also 25 n.16) claimed that the entire manuscript is an autograph. Shoshana and Zipur (Shoshana and Zipur, Introduction, 42 n.8) disagree, contending instead that the commentary itself was copied by an expert scribe, and only the many marginal notes were added by R. Ḥayyun himself. Yossi Elitzur (Ḥayyun, 18–20) made a third conjecture, built upon that of Shoshana and Zipur. In his opinion, the expert scribe’s copying of the commentary was undertaken whilst Ḥayyun was dictating the commentary to the scribe. While dictation, Ḥayyun urged the scribe to correct certain words. After the scribe finished copying the commentary, Ḥayyun reviewed it again, adding new notes in the margins. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As Maimonides wrote in his responsa; see the Mekize Nirdamim edition, Jerusalem, 1934, siman 5. Also see Levitzky, *Manuscript,* 69; Sasson, *Introduction,* 19; Beit-Aryeh, *Codicology*, 422. Shilat, *Avot,* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As far as I know, no such list had been put forward previously; rather, in each case, evidence is cited in accordance with the manuscript under consideration. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Two volumes of the Bodleian Library manuscript (Pococke 295—to the orders of Nezikim and Kiddushim; Huntington 117—to the order of Zera’im) and two volumes of the National Library manuscript (to the orders of Mo’ed and Nashim. These volumes are from the catalogues of the Sasson Collection, 72–73). In addition, Levitzky (Five Responsa, 683) contains three pages of a draft in Maimonides’ handwriting from the introduction to the tractate of Taharoth. On this, see more in Blau and Scheiber, *Autograph,* 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See: Toledano, *Yedei Moshe*, iv; Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 72–88; Stern and Sasson, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 261–267; Qapaḥ, *Mishnah*, 6; Blau and Scheiber, *Autograph*, 1 n.1; Shilat, *Introductions*, 14; Shilat, *Avot*, 7–12; Zilber, *Editions*, 427–478. A number of years ago, Edna Engel published an article in which she supported the opinion of those who claim that the entire manuscript was written by Maimonides using paleographical research that she had conducted on Maimonides’ handwriting. In order to conduct paleographical research, a high level of expertise in recognizing the author’s handwriting is required. For this reason, we cannot undertake research of this variety on the manuscript of Ḥayyun’s commentary on Jeremiah. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. There is a consensus among scholars who have studied this manuscript that Maimonides’ custom was to first write a draft, then to review and revise the draft until he reached a desirable version. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Levitzky, *Five Responsa,* 683; Blau, “Do We Really,” 536–543. Stern and Sasson (*Commentary on the Mishnah*) reject Blau’s claims. Would Blau have been persuaded by their contentions? Based on Qapaḥ (*Mishnah,* 6), it would seem to be so; however, Fixler (*Tractate,* 10 n.2) wrote that in a conversation with him, he said that he still doubted whether [the body of the text] was Maimonides’ handwriting, or if only the notes were his. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The phenomenon of authors giving drafts of their work to professional scribes on the condition that the latter would copy them in a fine and clear hand is known to us from other cases. For example, R. Isaac Qaro wrote at the end of his *Toledot Yiṣḥaq*: “The author said: It is possible that there are errors in this book made by the scribe; the wise man who studies it shall correct them…. I did not have an opportunity to scrutinize this [text], for I was pressed, needing to travel to the Land of Israel, as the Lord decreed.” Similarly, Yosef Ofer wrote (*Ḥizquni,* 69) that the author gave a prepared draft to the copyist. See further examples in Spiegel, *Writing and Copying*, 90–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Signatures made for the purposes of validating and authenticating things are quite common. On this, see Spiegel, *Writing and Copying*, 31–34. One of the most famous examples is that of Maimonides’ signature at the bottom of a copy of his *Mishneh Torah*: “I have examined this book of mine, I, Moses son of Rabbi Maimon.” See ms Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hunt. 80, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, R. Ḥaim Yosef David Azulai’s signature on his book *Moreh b’Etzba.* See the scan of a page from the manuscript with his signature in Avivi, *Collection*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The colophon is the work of a copyist (Bet-Aryeh, *Codicology,* 98). Of course, one must not take this as decisive proof—for it is possible that the epilogue too was copied by a scribe. In any case, in the event that there is an epilogue alongside the colophon, it is certain that the manuscript should not be taken to be an autograph. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Like the note of Maimonides’ great-grandson, written on the first page of a manuscript of the former’s commentary on the Mishnah: “This is the original text; and the rest of the original written by the hand of Maimonides himself, may His memory be a blessing, are in my possession…whoever in Israel wishes to study them and be blessed by them, or else to check the precise formulation of a halakhah, shall not be prevented therefrom, since this was the purpose for which he wrote it….thus wrote Solomon b. David b. Abraham, son of the Gaon, our Master [Moses]” (Shilat, *Avot*, 8–9). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On the conditions given by authors to copyists, see: Spiegel, *Writing and Copying*, 93–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Evidence for identifying the handwriting of an author can come from the author’s close relations, whether familial relations or relations from a learning context. For example, the Tosafot were able to testify to the handwriting of both Rashi and Joseph ben Samuel Bonfils; while other scholars were also able to testify to Rashi’s handwriting as well as the handwriting of still other scholars (see Spiegel, *Writing and Copying*, 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In a number of instances, Nahmanides testifies that he relied on a certain edition of R. Isaac Alfasi’s text after having identified his handwriting, such as “Even though my edition of the *halakhot* differs in this instance; for I arrived at this thanks to a first edition which is annotated by the handwriting of the holy one, may his memory be a blessing, himself!” (*Wars of the Lord*, Bava Batra, sec. 761 9b); “For I wrote this after the time in which I had merited….to [see] the first edition which is annotated by the holiness of the author’s hands, may his memory be a blessing” (ibid., sec. 927, 74b). Obviously, Nahmanides could not have recognized Alfasi’s handwriting himself, thus he must have been relying upon a tradition in this matter (Spiegel, *Writing and Copying,* 138). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Like the testimony of R. Joshua ha-Nagid (David V Maimonides) that he had an autograph of Maimonides’ commentary to the Mishnah: “Every copy that we have made comes from the original source copy, which is in the hand of the author himself, may his memory be a blessing” (Razavi, *Responsa,* 74, Question 26 [in the Hebrew translation], 126 [in the original Arabic]). Similarly, R. Musa ibn al-Mahsan testified that he had annotated his commentary based on Maimonides’ autograph; and R. Samuel Landiado testified to the manner in which the name of God is written in the autograph copy of Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah (Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 74). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, a number of researchers have cited as evidence to identify the autograph copy of Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah the fact that it contains notes written by his son, Abraham (see: Toledano, *Yedei Moshe,* 4; Sasson, *Mishnah*, 20; Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Like the annotations of R. Samuel b. Moshe Maghrebi which were made on Maimonides’ Arabic commentary, which is thought to be an autograph (Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah,* 74–77). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For an example of those supporting the claim that the manuscript of the commentary on the Mishnah is an autograph, see e.g., Sasson, *Introduction*, 22–27; Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 81–82. He summarizes Shilat (*Avot*, 9), who wrote: “A comparison between the handwriting in these various witnesses shows clearly, and without a shadow of a doubt, that the corrections and additions in the margins were written by Maimonides himself.” On the characteristics of Maimonides’ unique handwriting, see Levitzky, *Five Responsa*, 686–689. Further, on the various methods for identifying the author’s handwriting, see Spiegel, *Writing and Copying*, 34–36. Levitzky (*Five Responsa,* 683–684) wrote that he had found a collection of ten pages from the *Mishneh Torah* from the Geniza, and that he had identified it as Maimonides’ handwriting. He then sent it to David Sasson who followed suit, replying “in my humble opinion, there is no doubt that this manuscript is written in Maimonides’ own holy handwriting, may his memory be a blessing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Shilat, *Avot,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This idea was developed by Y.M. Toledano in the context of his attempt to prove that the manuscript of Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah is an autograph (Toledano, *Yedei Moshe,* iii–iv). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 77–78; Kahana, *Introductions*, 95 n.18; Barzilay, *Midrash,* 49–50. In cases where there is only a single manuscript, it is possible to distinguish between lacunae that result from haplography in the citation of verses and additions in the margins. S. Immanuel wrote something similar in order to identify the manuscript as an autograph: “The notes in the margins do not include words that the scribe skipped accidentally while copying, only stand-alone additions” (Immanuel, *Ginze,* 393), and so too Ofer (*Ḥizquni,* 70). Spiegel notes (*Writing and Copying,* 90 n.28) that in autographs too it is possible to find instances of haplography, in cases wherein the author was making a clean copy from previous drafts he had written. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For example, M. Levitzky wrote (*Five Responsa,* 679–680) that it is possible to immediately recognize an autograph from the style of the handwriting and the corrections: “The expert eye easily recognizes an autograph. It immediately recognizes the unsure shapes of the letters that flow directly from the mind of the author-writer… the author-writer erases and corrects, subtracts and adds, hangs words between the השטין, and answers in the margins.” Simcha Emanuel writes something similar to this (*Ginze*, 293) in his description of the characteristics of an autograph manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Conversely, when the compositions are found in the proper order, this suggests that we are dealing with a copy. For example, R. Joseph Ḥayyun commented on the books of the thirteen minor prophets before he commented on the book of Ezekiel: “I wrote my commentary on these[=i.e., the thirteen minor prophets] before writing my commentary on the book of Ezekiel, even though the latter precedes the former in terms of their order, for two reasons…” (Elizur, *Ḥayyun,* 20). In the only extant manuscript of his commentary to those books, the commentary on Ezekiel appears *before* the commentary on the thirteen minor prophets, which appears after. This manuscript is in the St. Petersburg Library, the Russian Academy, Center for Oriental Studies, B373. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is particularly true in the case of Sephardic manuscripts. As Spiegel wrote (*Annotations and Emendations*, 196, 371), before the age of the printing press, the scholars of Sepharad and the East did not heavily annotate their books. Most annotations, erasures, and corrections thus constitute a sign that the manuscript is an autograph. Thus, for example, Kamenetsky determined (*Peiruka,* 801) that a manuscript of R. Menashe of Iliya’s “Peiruka l’Takanta” is an autograph “on the basis of erasures and corrections.” Chavel wrote something similar (*Ḥizquni,* 12–13 n.38) in order to determine that the Oxford manuscript (Neubauer 243) that he was using was an autograph; noting in particular that the other manuscripts of Ḥizquni contained no corrections. See also the reply of Yosef Ofer, *Ḥizquni,* 71–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Immanuel, *Ginze*, 293 (in n.10, he adds that even though the manuscript is an autograph, the writer used the plene form in order to left-justify the lines). To see an instance in which there are doubts about determining that a manuscript is an autograph even though it is full of notes and corrections throughout, consider the case of a manuscript of R. Jacob Ḥazzan’s work *Etz ha-Ḥayyim.* Scholars are divided as to whether or not this manuscript constitutes an autograph. In Kauffman’s opinion (*Etz ha-Hayyim,* 364) it is definitely a manuscript, while in Neubauer’s opinion (*Etz ha-Hayyim,* 354) “on the basis of numerous marginal corrections and certains differences in the way geographical names are written…[we can conclude] that the Leipzig manuscript was not written by the author.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Thus, for example, Maimonides himself testifies that he returned to and revised his commentary over the course of many years. The longer the period of revision, the more one can expect to see differences in the handwriting, expressing the difference between the handwriting of a strong, young man and that of a weaker, older man. See further: Toledano, *Yedei Moshe*, iv; Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, 82 n.28. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Stern, *Commentary on the Mishnah,* 78; Blau, “Do We Really,” 539. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For example, Toledano (*Yedei Moshe,* iv): “the word ‘clear,’ which occurs in many of the marginal notes…is a sound testament to the fact that our Rabbi was the one making the annotations….for this word, understood in understood its Arabic sense, only fits the context of a writer who is reviewing or clarifying what he previously wrote.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. R. Joseph Hayyin divided the book of Jeremiah into eighty prophecies (plus one additional section focusing on the story of the destruction). In every instance, before beginning to explain the verses of the prophecy, he delineated the boundaries of that particular prophecy. In a number of instances, Ḥayyun forgot to delineate the prophecy first, and so later added this into his notes. On this, see the introduction to his commentary on Jeremiah (Qapaḥ, *Ḥayyun*, 62–64). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Gross wrote that from the extant commentary in the British Museum, it seems that the manuscript reached the Museum in a deficient state (Gross, *Relations*, 30 n.38). Bet-Aryeh (*Codicology,* 408) notes that “in many manuscripts, it was customary to not begin copying on the first page or folio, and rather to leave these blank in order to preserve the text from erosion.” However, it seems that in this manuscript, the reason for leaving the first pages blank was in order to leave space to write an introduction or else to copy his commentary to one of the other two former prophets. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. After the epilogue, there are another ten blank pages, such that it is impossible to attribute the lack of a colophon to its having been destroyed over the years. See Malachi Bet-Aryeh, *Codicology,* 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On his works, see Qapaḥ, *Ḥayyun*, 10–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See: Shoshana and Zipur, *Introduction*, 28–30, 58; Zipur, *Micah,* 4; Elizur, *Ḥayyun,* 103. Elizur (*Ḥayyun,* 103 n.308) notes that Ḥayyun’s custom was to write the word ‘Jerusalem’ using a defective spelling, which is particularly prominent in comparing the autograph of the commentary to Jeremiah with other manuscripts of his commentaries, in which scribes have corrected this word so that it is written with a plene spelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Qapaḥ, *Ḥayyun*, 73–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Such as in his commentaries on the books of Ezekiel, Pslams, Esther, and each of the thirteen minor prophets. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Throughout the hundreds of pages of the manuscripts, we can only find five instances that might be cases of haplography. However, even these are not clear instances of haplography. It is certainly possible that these are instances in which a note has been added for the purpose of clarification. These instances are [with additions delineated in square brackets]: 2a — ‘*And for the precious things of the fruits of the sun* (cf Deut. 33:14) [and the Philosopher said that man is born from both man and the sun]’ (cf Jer. 2:31); 62b — ‘*the ways of my people* — [from *the ways of my people*, as when I left the city, and as Jonathan said ‘מארחת כנישתא דעמי’]’ (cf Jer. 12:16); 78b — by your own will [and you also shall worship them by your own will] (cf Jer. 16:13); 80a — *on the day of sorrow* [and they said *on the day of sorrow*] (cf Jer. 16:19); 92b — “*evil for good* [for it is found to the case that good is often not repaid with good]” (cf Jer. 18:20). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Worthy of special mention is a manuscript of Israel Alnaqua’s *Menorat ha-Maor* which was copied for R. Moses ha-Ḥazzan, which also contains virtually no notes or corrections. This manuscript can be found in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, while images of the same can be found in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem, F22126. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ḥayyun, Ezekiel, 478. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ḥayyun, Song of Songs, 108b. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Elizur, Ḥayyun, 18–20; see especially n.154 where he provides a number of examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The words that are erased are designated by a strikeout line, while I have designated the words that I believe Ḥayyun intended to write by square margins. I have ordered the examples in terms of their persuasiveness. It is possible to dispute a number of these examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For another example of erasure accompanied by the addition of a delineation of prophecy, see 122b: “this prophecy ~~speak~~ continues to the verse *and it was in that year,* it speaks of….” (cf Jer. 27:1). In this case too, Ḥayyun forgot to delineate the prophecy and began to explain it, writing: “this prophecy speak[s],” but when he realized his error, he erased it and added the delineation of the prophecy before resuming his explanation. In the manuscript, we can find other instances in which Ḥayyun forgot to note the delineation of the prophecy and only in the second stage of reviewing the manuscript did he add the delineation in the margins (see for example, 5b on Jer. 3:6; 100a on Jer. 22:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. He did not finish writing the letter “mem.” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. For other examples, see: 43b — “*that I might go from them*….~~and this was not on account of his hating the~~ and this is [the meaning of] his saying *for they are all adulterers* ” (cf Jer. 9:1). It seems that initially, he meant to write: and this was not on account of his hating the[m, rather he hated the their idolatry]. Afterwards he erased this; perhaps in order to eschew repetition, for he had already written previously “*that I might go from them*—this refers to their idolatry.” Another example can be found on 59a — “*How long shall the land mourn*….he complained more of Nebuchadnezzar’s success ~~in capturing and destroying the Land of Israel, for up to this point, he had complained of his success,~~ and he said *how long* [shall this go on, that] the ~~land of Isra~~ holy *land mourns* at his hand” (cf Jer. 12:4). In this passage, he made two corrections while writing: Initially, he sought to write that now the prophet was complaining about Nebuchadnezzar’s successes in destroying the Land of Israel, since up to that point, he had only complained of his success in general — “for all of the nations worshipped him” (cf Jer. 12:1); however, he erased this, perhaps because at that time, Nebuchadnezzar had not yet destroyed the Land; he had only oppressed it. The other correction is that initially, he aimed to write “*how long shall* the *land* of Isr[ael] *mourn,*” but he erased it and wrote “*how long shall* this continue, that the holy *land mourns*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. For an example in which we can see that he revised his earlier explication, see 113a — “*I will cast you off*, this means ~~separating, removing,~~ leaving” (cf Jer. 23:38–40). The words *I will cast you off* occurs for the first time in 23:33, where Ḥayyun explains it in three different ways: as leaving, as separating, dispersing, and removing, and as destroying. Afterwards, when he happens upon this word again in 23:39, he only explains it in two ways: as leaving and as destroying, getting rid of the possible explanation that it means separating and removing. It is possible that he did this because the verse already includes the phrase *I will utterly tear you out*, which has the sense of wiping out and removing, and Ḥayyun wanted to avoid the suggestion that scripture was being repetitive in its use of different words. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. There are a number of other examples in which it seems that Ḥayyun erased something for the sake of improving his expression or phrasing: e.g., 12b — “or perhaps in his saying *the bare hills* — he meant the wind of the hills, to refer to the wind which settles in the wilderness, where the sand is tremendous; and in its settling, it moves the sand from its place and makes it into hills and great mountains” (cf Jer. 4:11); 60a  “for he was *secure* in them, that they would not make a shepherd of him, for he was born there, for that was the place of his birth” (cf Jer. 12:5); 126b — “for whoever gives a gift to his friend and does not wish to merit thereby to receive it, does not merit by it” (cf Jer. 29:7–9); 220a — “the words *to meet* signify one who approaches his friend two who approach each other” (cf Jer. 51:31). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See further: 187b — “and he said that the reason for their being *dismayed*…. Is that the Babylonians laid siege to them, for they stood had many soldiers, while they had equal or fewer, and as they stood against them they did not fear them at all” (cf Jer. 46:5). Ḥayyun meant to explain their fear of the Babylonians. It seems that initially, he aimed to write “the reason for their being *dismayed*…. Is that the Babylonians laid siege to them, for they stood [against them, for they were at war with them],” but he corrected this and instead wrote that the cause of their fear was the Babylonians’ great number, and because they were laying siege to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)