Sotheby's

New York | +1 212 606 7176 | Lauren Gioia | Lauren.Gioia@Sothebys.com
Jessica Yakubowicz | Jessica.Yakubowicz@Sothebys.com

Sotheby's to Exhibit One of the Greatest Privately Held Libraries in the World

The Valmadonna Trust Library
The Finest Collection of Hebrew Books and Manuscripts in Private Hands
Will Be Shown in its Entirety for the First Time

More Than 11,000 Works Will Be Displayed in Sotheby's Rooftop Galleries
In New York From February 9-19, 2009

The Library is Available for Private Sale

New York, NY; February 9, 2009 – Sotheby's announced today that it would display in its entirety, for the first time ever, the *Valmadonna Trust Library*, the finest private library of Hebrew books and manuscripts in the world. Assembled over the past century, this extensive group of over 11,000 works is monumental in its significance as a primary source on both world history and Jewish life and culture. The collection boasts rarities dating from the 10th century to the early 20th century from Italy, Holland, England, Greece, Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, India, and China, documenting the spread of the Hebrew press and the dissemination of Jewish culture around the globe. Among the treasures in the collection are: the only surviving manuscript written in England before the expulsion of the Jews in 1290; arguably the finest copy of the Babylonian Talmud produced between 1519 and 1523 by famed printer Daniel Bomberg, which was previously in the collection of Westminster Abbey; as well as the preeminent group of Hebrew books in existence from the dawn of printing (15th century). The entire collection will be exhibited in Sotheby's 10th floor galleries from February 9-19, 2009, with the exception of February 14th.

"It is a great privilege to have this historic collection at Sotheby's," said David Redden, Vice Chairman of Sotheby's. "We have worked to honor the collection by mounting an unprecedented exhibition – all 11,000 works on view together for the first time. For scholars and collectors who have only ever seen its highlights, this provides an extraordinary opportunity to view the Valmadonna Library as a whole. And for the public, it is the chance to see one of the greatest collections in the world and witness firsthand the history of the Jewish people.

"The collection is filled with treasures - individual works valued at millions of dollars each. Whoever acquires this remarkable Library, whether a private collector or institution, will take their place among the world's foremost collections, including such great institutions as the British Library, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, La Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the National Library of Israel."

THE COLLECTOR

The Valmadonna Trust Library is the product of the far-reaching vision and passion of a single collector, Jack Lunzer. During the first part of the 20th century, the family of Jack Lunzer's wife had acquired a representative library of Hebrew books printed in Italy during the 16th century, a period often referred to as the 'golden age' of Hebrew printing. This cabinet of splendid Hebrew imprints was acquired by the Valmadonna Trust shortly after the end of World War II, and vastly expanded by Mr. Lunzer from a few hundred original volumes to nearly 11,000. Nevertheless, his aim was not to assemble a large library; it was to assemble a great one. He assiduously pursued single items for decades, traveling to the most remote corners of the world to bring the library together; seeking

the finest possible selection of books that are truly indispensable for illustrating and understanding the Jewish Diaspora. He augmented his own acquisitions and expertise with those of other ardent collectors, acquiring entire collections for his Trust. The rarity and significance of the Valmadonna's holdings are a testament to his passionate pursuit. The name Valmadonna derives from the village near Alessandria, in Piedmont, Italy, with which Mr. Lunzer's family has been connected since World War II.

THE COLLECTION

The Valmadonna Trust Library comprises items both spiritual and secular in their content, offering rich insight into Jewish heritage; religious books and manuscripts include Bibles and Talmuds, kabbalistic texts, prayerbooks, and Passover haggadot (seder guides). Among the Library's other holdings are Hebrew grammatical and legal texts; medical, philosophical and literary treatises; as well as periodicals, broadsheets, and wall calendars—particularly rare items on account of their ephemeral nature.

Its extensive assets are unparalleled in their importance and value. Many items are unique, the only remaining copies of entire imprints now lost to time, the result of the Jewish people's unique struggle in the face of centuries of discrimination.

MANUSCRIPTS

Centuries before printed Hebrew books first appeared in Rome, the Bible, Talmud and other Hebrew texts were meticulously recorded in writing; among the Valmadonna Trust's holdings are an exceptional group of medieval codices and scrolls.

Codex Valmadonna I

The jewel in the Valmadonna Library's crown is one of the most important privately-owned books in the world - a Pentateuch (Hebrew

Bible), written in England the summer of 1189. Known as the **Codex Valmadonna I**, this extraordinary book is the only dated Hebrew text in existence from medieval England, before King Edward I's 1290 edict expelling the Jews. The year following this manuscript's creation, 1190, mobs in York attacked the Jewish community living there, massacring the population, and looting their property; the books and manuscripts were exported and subsequently sold back to Jewish communities abroad. The *Codex Valmadonna I* is thus thought to have survived this journey, having been displaced from its home in England. The oldest in the collection, however, is a **Franco-German Pentateuch**, written in an Ashkenazic script during the 10th or 11th century. This book is one of the earliest texts of the Five Books of Moses written anywhere in Europe.

Other opulent manuscripts in the collection include a **Yemenite** Pentateuch from the early 15th century, replete with characteristic Oriental illumination, as well as a stunning example from **Austria.** Painstakingly produced in Vienna in 1737, this book of "Grace After Meals and other Benedictions," is an archetype of the 18th century revival of Hebrew manuscript illumination.
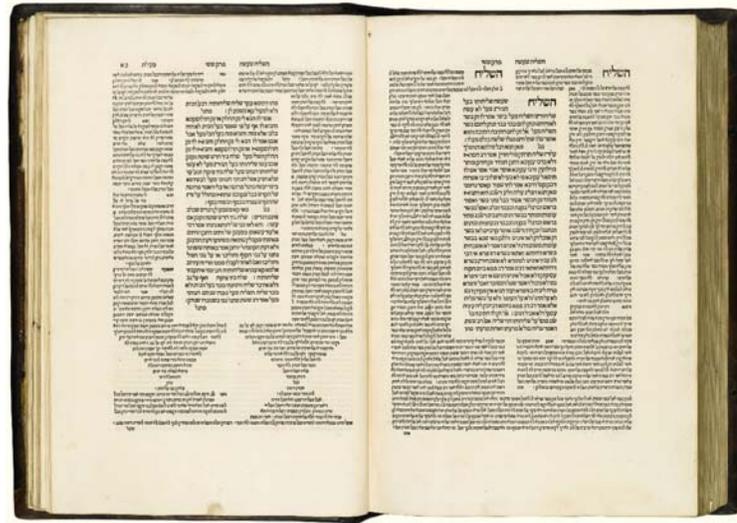

THE EARLIEST HEBREW PRINTING

The first mechanical printing press was invented in the early 1450's, in the Mainz, Germany workshop of Johannes Gutenberg. Barred from entering German printing guilds, Jewish artisans established their own workshops, with the earliest printed Hebrew texts emerging in Rome around 1470. Books manufactured during the 15th century are known as "incunables,"

derived from the Latin word for "cradle," or "swaddling clothes," since they represent the earliest examples of movable type—printing in its infancy. Whereas nearly 29,000 titles are known to exist, fewer than 140 are printed in Hebrew. Remarkably, the Valmadonna Trust holds nearly half of all these Hebrew editions.

The Bomberg Talmud

Daniel Bomberg is responsible for the first complete edition of the Babylonian Talmud (1519/20-1523), universally recognized not simply as one of the most significant books in the history of Hebrew printing, but as one of the great books of the Western world. Among the Valmadonna's many highlights is arguably the finest copy in the world of Bomberg's Talmud. The Hebrew Bible, known as the "Written Law" is undoubtedly the foundation upon which Judaism is built; the Talmud, or "Oral Law," is a compendium of hundreds of years of rabbinical discussion and debate which expound upon the laws of the Bible. The Talmud thus functions as the guiding framework which has given form to Jewish life and ritual observance across the centuries. Daniel Bomberg, a Christian printer of Hebrew books, was responsible for the first complete printed edition of the Babylonian Talmud between 1519/20-1523. The format of Bomberg's Talmud remains the model for all subsequent editions to the present day.

The Valmadonna Library's copy of a nearly perfectly-preserved Bomberg Talmud was kept for centuries in the library of Westminster Abbey. In 1956, Mr. Lunzer attended an exhibition at The Victoria and Albert Museum celebrating 300 years of Jewish resettlement in England. It was there that he first became aware of the Abbey's magnificent and complete copy of the Talmud, and vowed somehow to acquire it. He spent the next twenty-five years determined to fulfill this virtually impossible ambition. Eventually, he purchased a 900-year-old copy of the Abbey's original Charter, and presented it, along with supporting endowments, to the Abbey in exchange for its copy of the Bomberg Talmud.

INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

The books' diverse origins reveal the geographic expansion of Jewish culture; in some cases, texts in the Valmadonna Library were discovered in communities - even on continents - far from their origins, attesting to hundreds of years of Jewish settlement and displacement. Highlights from the Valmadonna Library's treasures, assembled from all around the globe, include:

Europe

Italy in the 16th century was the cradle of Hebrew printing at the industry's very inception, and the Valmadonna Trust includes virtually complete holdings of existing Jewish texts printed during this era, from Mantua, Venice, Naples, Livorno, Pisa and Trieste among many others. Highlights among these Italian works include a brilliant copy of the sole complete incunable edition of the *Mishnah*—the basic text of rabbinic tradition and the core of the Talmud—with commentary by Maimonides. Printed in Naples by Joshua Solomon Soncino and Joseph ibn Peso, 1492, this sumptuous edition contains forty-seven woodcut illustrations interpreting the rules of *eruvin*— among the earliest functional (as opposed to purely decorative) book illustrations in Hebrew printing.

Another fascinating incunable book is Judah ben Jehiel's *Nofet Zufim*, or "Flow of the Honeycomb." The first Hebrew book printed during the lifetime of its author (most likely at Mantua around 1475), this humanist text compares biblical Hebrew rhetoric to the Greek and Roman classics.

Moving beyond the collection's initial focus on Hebrew works produced in Italy, The Valmadonna Library features in-depth holdings from every corner of Jewish Europe. An extraordinary David Solomon Sassoon copy of the 1490 Híjar Pentateuch features both Hebrew and Aramaic text, and luxurious vellum pages; it is the last dated Hebrew book printed in **Spain** before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. From the same era and region, an incunable text on scientific studies by Abraham ben Samuel Zacutuo, was produced at Leiria, **Portugal** in 1496.

Following the 1492 expulsion from Spain, Spanish Jews spread across the globe; The Valmadonna Library's holdings can quite literally track the migration of these communities. Spanish and Portugese liturgical texts—printed in Amsterdam by Marrano Jews who had arrived in **Holland** as refugees after their expulsion from Spain—illustrate the interaction and integration of diverse Jewish communities.

Holdings from **Germany** include a number of remarkable works of Christian Hebraica, produced for the academic communities in such university towns as Hagenau, Cologne and Tübingen. An early Hebrew incunable book from Germany addresses the subject of travel and exploration (Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*, Speier, 1490). Among the Valmadonna Library's most luxurious works is a copy of Plantin's *Biblia Hebraica,* unique and printed on green paper at Antwerp, **Belgium**, in 1584.

Hebrew printing north of the Alps began in **Prague** in 1512 with the circle of Gershom ben Solomon Kohen. Prague was soon established as a great hub of Hebrew printing, from which point printing in Polish communities such Lublin sprung.

The Valmadonna Library boasts a Passover *Haggadah* printed on vellum by Kohen in Prague in 1526. Not only is this book the earliest dated and illustrated edition of the *Haggadah* known to exist; it is also fascinating in that it contains, as the lyrics to a song, the first printed verse in Yiddish.   A later *Haggadah*, published in 1556 by Gershom Kohen's grandsons, is another highlight of the Valmadonna Library. Due to the fire that ravaged the Prague Jewish ghetto in 1557, only one other copy of this edition is known to exist, in the British Library.   Many other major Hebrew printing centers are represented in the exhibition, including **Basel, Paris, Cracow,** and **Geneva.**

Ottoman Empire

Jewish texts produced in what was then known as the Ottoman Empire represent the beginnings of the industry in the region. The Valmadonna Library owns the first book printed in **Turkey**—a copy of Jacob ben Asher's religious legal text, *Arba'ah Turim*, produced in Constantinople in 1493.

Among over 350 treasures from Constantinople, the Valmadonna Library boasts a first-edition of the earliest known secular Hebrew book to be printed at Constantinople—*Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir* (The Prince and the Hermit), an adaptation of an Arabic philosophical romance long popular in Hebrew manuscript.

Works from **Greece** attest to the active Jewish printing industry found there as well, with over approximately 440 volumes produced in shops in Salonika.

Africa, Iraq, India and China

The Valmadonna Library's holdings from these distinct regions, and the diverse Jewish communities therein, reflect the extraordinary lengths Mr. Lunzer undertook in his pursuit of the most rare and important Jewish books for the collection.

Among these is the first book printed in any language on the **African** continent—*Sefer Abudarham*, dating from 1516. Other Hebrew works from Africa include books from Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt.
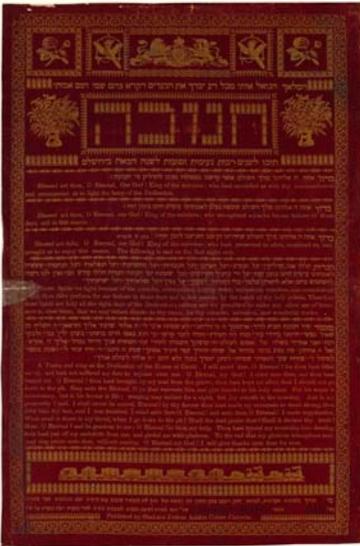
One of the richest areas of the Valmadonna Library is its significant collection of works printed in **India,** including Hebrew pamphlets and periodicals from the mid-19th century through the early 20th century. It was a printer from Bombay who first brought movable Hebrew type to Baghdad in the 1860's. The Hebrew publishing industry there subsequently flowered, as the Valmadonna's collection shows. With over 500 books and pamphlets printed in **Baghdad** in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and Aramaic, the Valmadonna Trust Library is one of the world's vital resources for the study of Asian Hebraica.

Additionally, a small but significant number of Hebrew works from **China**, particularly Shanghai, is held in the Trust as well, including a scarce run of *The Israel Messenger*. These holdings shed fascinating light on the longstanding though often-unfamiliar history of the Jewish people's deep roots across Asia.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Page 1: The earliest manuscript in the Library, a Franco-German Pentateuch, probably written in the 10th or 11th century

Page 2:
"Grace After Meals and other Benedictions," a fine illuminated manuscript from 18th century Vienna
A Beautifully illuminated Italian Hebrew manuscript of the book of Psalms, January 1401

Page 3:
The celebrated Valmadonna English Pentateuch, written in 1189, and one of the greatest of all books in private hands
Sefer ha-Shorashim by David Kimhi. Naples, 1490. The second edition of what was probably the first Hebrew text ever printed

Page 4:
The Westminster Abbey-Valmadonna set of the Bomberg Talmud
First printing of the Biblia Rabbinica, and the first great production of Daniel Bomberg's Venetian press,, 1516-1517

Page 5:
The Pentateuch in Hebrew and Aramaic. Híjar, 1490. The third Spanish edition of the Pentateuch printed on vellum
1695 Amsterdam edition of the Haggadah

Page 6:
One of just two surviving copies of the 1556 Prague Haggadah
Perush ha-Torah by Jacob ben Asher, Constantinople, 1514

Page 7: "Menorah," a Calcutta lithograph printed in gold ink on red paper at the end of the 19th century

#   #   #