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Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma: Catalogue (Kitve ha-yad ha-'Ivriyim be-Sifriyat ha-Palat.inah be-Parmah: k.at.alog), edited by Ben-jamin Richler; palaeographical and codicological descriptions Malachi Beit-Arié. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 2001

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tation was not published.² Finally, a typo in the annotation needs to be corrected: the author's name is Allan, and not Allen E. Levine.

These quibbles should not distract us from emphasizing the major accomplishment of this third edition. It is an updated, cogent, and useful evaluation of all of the relevant publications in English—and all the important ones in most other languages—in the field of Jewish Studies, broadly defined.

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Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma: Catalogue (Kitve ha-yad ha-'lvriyim be-Sifriyat ha-Palaṭinah be-Parmah: қағалог), edited by Benjamin Richler; palaeographical and codicological descriptions Malachi Beit-Arié. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 2001. xxx, 574, 36 p., [48] p. of plates: ill. ISBN 965-7207-00-2

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Italy is a richly fertile ground for the study of the Jewish Diaspora in Europe. From the time of the Roman legions to the present, the territory within the borders of what is now Italy has always had a Jewish presence. The apex of fertility for Italian Jewry may well have been during the end of the

Middle Ages and the first decades of the Renaissance, when Jews recently expelled from France, Spain, Portugal, and German cities found refuge in Naples, the Papal lands, the duchies of Northern Italy, and powerful cities such as Venice.

These Jews, the refugees as well as those long settled in Italy, encountered there one of the most powerful technological innovations of the Western world, the printing press. Although Gutenberg worked in Mainz around 1454, the birth of Jewish printing occurred in Italy. The first books in Hebrew were most likely printed around 1470 in Rome—a mere two decades after the printing press had been invented—and no more than 300 Hebrew titles printed before the year 1500 have survived. Entrepreneurial Italian printers needed Hebrew manuscripts as “raw materials” for their printing endeavors and the confluence of refugees from diverse traditions brought them many manuscripts.

For scholars in the field of Jewish studies, publication of the catalog of the Hebrew manuscripts preserved in the Palatina Library in Parma is an occasion for celebration. This library houses the largest such collection in Italy, and is one of the ten largest repositories of Hebrew manuscripts in the world. Like most scholarly undertakings in the field of Hebrew codicology and paleography nowadays, it is a collaborative effort between institutions and individuals: the manuscripts are preserved in Italy; the publishers of the work are the Hebrew University and the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) in Jerusalem; and the editor is Benjamin Richler, whose *Guide to Hebrew Manuscript Collections* (1994) is the required entry point to any research using Hebrew manuscripts.

Richler, who retired in late 2005 after working for several decades at the JNUL's Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (IMHM), conceived and designed the overall structure of the catalog, and obtained the collaboration of specialists who wrote the descriptions for the manuscripts in their fields of expertise. Richler and his collaborators worked from microfilms deposited at the IMHM, in Jerusalem, while Professor Malachi Beit-Arié, responsible for the palaeographical and codicological descriptions, made several visits to Parma over a period of five years to examine the Hebrew manuscripts *de visu*.

The *Catalogue* describes some 1,600 manuscripts in Hebrew characters, over 1,400 of which come from one source, the collection of Giovanni B. de Rossi (1742–1831), a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Parma. In 1816 the Bibliotheca Palatina purchased his collection and a

² *An American Jewish Bibliography: A List of Books and Pamphlets by Jews or Relating to Them, Printed in the United States from 1851–1875, Which Are in the Possession of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion Library in Cincinnati*. (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1959). Originally presented as the author's rabbinical dissertation, now a publication in the series Monographs of the American Jewish Archives, no. [2].

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special room was built to house it, the “Sala De Rossi per le lingue orientali.”

In his introduction, Richler presents his dilemma as the “compiler of a descriptive catalogue of a large collection of manuscripts . . . compelled to strike a balance between a comprehensive, all-inclusive account and a brief inventory . . . [and to] provide the essential information about all the texts included in each manuscript and the physical features of each codex in a succinct format that will not prove cumbersome or unwieldy to the reader” (pp. xvi–xvii). This reviewer believes that the task was accomplished with flying colors. The volume is very elegantly designed; the fonts chosen for the Latin and Hebrew characters are easy to read; and the text is informative without being tedious. *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma* (also cited in this review as *Catalogue*) is a significant and lasting contribution to the field of Jewish studies.

The *Catalogue* is “classified and arranged by subjects,” in the order adopted by almost all catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts published since the nineteenth century. It begins with the manuscripts of the Bible and proceeds through Talmud, Halakhah, Liturgy, and others, down to the “Varia,” those manuscripts—common in Jewish circles—created by one individual, for his own use, collecting texts in various disciplines.

Each description gives the sequential number of the manuscript in the *Catalogue* and the current shelf-list number needed to retrieve the book from the stacks, and it provides, when relevant, the reference to the De Rossi catalogue of 1803. “Close to half of the 1,432 manuscripts that belonged to De Rossi are Bibles or Biblical commentaries [and] about 250 of the manuscripts in the Palatina Library are liturgical—half of them Roman rite prayer books” (p. xv). Some manuscripts are important for the study of the transmission of Hebrew text: “the De Rossi collection includes two of the oldest and most important codices of the Mishnah (*Catalogue*, nos. 710–711) and one of the oldest copies of the Sifra [*Catalogue*, no. 694], all three manuscripts dating to the 11th or 12th centuries” (p. xv). The *Catalogue* also describes a unique copy of the commentary of Jedaiah ha-Penini on the compendium of Aristotle’s *Physics* (*Catalogue*, no. 1274). Other manuscripts described are among the most accomplished and exquisite works of illumination extant, such as the splendid “Parma Psalter” (*Catalogue*, no. 371), reproduced in a facsimile edition in 1996.

The *Catalogue* is illustrated with reproductions, some in color, of selected pages of manuscripts.

Each illustration identifies the script used in the page reproduced, a feature that will help the readers to familiarize themselves with the terminology used by Beit-Arié to categorize the Hebrew scripts.

The “paleographical and codicological descriptions” by Malachi Beit-Arié, the founder of the Hebrew Palaeography Project, make this catalogue unique and very valuable. To aid his identifications of scribes, places, and dates, Beit-Arié used SfarData, the extensive codicological database of dated medieval Hebrew manuscripts that he helped to build (it is housed at the JNUL). He distinguishes carefully between types of scripts, such as an “Italian square (of Sephardic style) and semi-cursive scripts” (*Catalogue*, no. 939) or an “Italian current semi-cursive script” (*Catalogue*, no. 599, 606). Paleographical details can be very important: a scribe who “wrote mainly in Italian script but also employed a Sephardic-type script for the instructions and non-liturgical texts such as [a] commentary” (*Catalogue*, no. 987) is said to be most likely a non-native Italian Jew from the Hispanic peninsula or Provence. The scholar who wishes to devote further study to the topic of Hebrew scripts should turn to Professor Beit-Arié’s introduction to his Supplement to the catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in Oxford (1994).

Beit-Arié is able to identify specific scribes by their use of certain scripts: a scribe of a Bible in Parma “undoubtedly” wrote nine other manuscripts in four repositories (*Catalogue*, no. 25). A scribe “who copied many MSS in northern Italy between 1468 and 1503 . . . [has an] idiosyncratic handwriting, Ashkenazic type of semi-cursive script mixed with Italian elements” (*Catalogue*, no. 1161). Another scribe named Mordecai, “thanks to his unusual habit of extending and decorating the strokes of the descenders of letters on the last line,” can be positively identified with a scribe in Camerino who copied a manuscript now kept in another repository (*Catalogue*, no. 1204). The most paleographically eccentric is an anonymous scribe who wrote “in a mixed style of Italian and Sephardic-Ashkenazic scripts” (*Catalogue*, no. 1167).

Codicology helps to corroborate paleographical information: one scribe who finished his manuscript in Udine used an Ashkenazic script, “but the composition of the quires is identical to the practice in Italy and the ruling technique is exclusively Italian” (*Catalogue*, no. 1348): we can assume that he bought the quires in Italy already prepared. Codicology helps to narrow the dating of a manuscript: “to judge by the method of ruling the sheets, the MS

could not have been written earlier than the third decade of the 15th cent.” (*Catalogue*, no. 1562).

The *Catalogue* also provides an enormous amount of information on the various owners of the manuscripts, and about the practice of censorship and Jewish adaptation to it: an owner changed the explicit name of a commentary probably to avoid censorship (*Catalogue*, no. 734); some censors tore folios out of manuscripts (*Catalogue*, no. 1032, 1055); censorship existed in Italy as late as 1753 (*Catalogue*, no. 638).

Ultimately, the *Catalogue* aids the researcher’s understanding of the transmission of Hebrew texts. Beit-Arié is able to correct the date in a prayer making reference to martyrs, and then relate this prayer to the martyrs of the First Crusade (*Catalogue*, no. 967). Before copying a poem, a scribe in Italy in the mid-fourteenth century wrote that “it came from a Jew from Spain who brought it to our area” (*Catalogue*, no. 1331). It is significant to our understanding of the centrality of Zion in Jewish thought that an owner wrote in a book he owned that his brother boarded a ship in Venice in September 1567 on his way to Safed (*Catalogue*, no. 1331). Even a late mention by Salomon Buber (1827–1906) on a flyleaf at the end of a manuscript is relevant; it mentions that he received this manuscript on loan in Lvov in 1895 (*Catalogue*, no. 1542). It is also sad to note that the Palatina Library has not always been a careful custodian of its Hebrew manuscripts: in at least one instance we observe that Beit-Arié had to rely

on the microfilm held by the IMHM because the original manuscript was damaged (*Catalogue*, no. 531).

In conclusion, we hope that the IMHM will continue to collaborate with other repositories of Hebrew manuscripts around the world to produce new catalogs as informative as *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma*. The Hebrew manuscripts in the various repositories of the former Soviet Union would be prime candidates for such a collaborative venture.

SOURCES

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