

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Yedidei HaSefer, the Israel Bibliophiles

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Yedidei HaSefer, the Israel Bibliophiles, was formed in 1980 by a group of book-lovers, all of whom were in some way involved in the Book Arts—by way of bookbinding, calligraphy, collecting, illustration, papermaking, printing, publishing, librarianship, conservation, or the history of the book. Several U.S. book-related groups served as models; foremost among them was The Typophiles, a 50-year old organization devoted to fine printing. The Society of Scribes and the Book Workers' Guild were also in the minds of *Yedidei HaSefer's* founders. But because Israel is a small country, where the art of the book has barely surfaced in the consciousness of its citizens, one organization serves the needs of the book-maker, collector and preserver. The purpose of the group is to exchange ideas about the making of fine books and to raise the standards of hand-made books in Israel. *Yedidei HaSefer* is as interested in making Israelis aware of developments in the book arts abroad as it is in bringing to their attention the men and women who have contributed to the art of the modern Hebrew book.

The initial public meeting of the Israel Bibliophiles took place in the Spring of 1981, at the time of the 10th Jerusalem International Book Fair. The guest lecturer, from England, was the late Hans Schmoller, one-time director of Penguin Books, who spoke on "The History of the Paperback" at the Schocken Library in Jerusalem. Mr. Schmoller returned to Jerusalem for the 12th Fair in 1985 to lecture to the group on "Two Twentieth Century Book Designers, Giovanni Mardersteig and Jan Tschichold." After his retirement in 1976, Schmoller expanded his scholarly efforts in the history of typography, printing and papermaking, particularly in the area of decorated papers. Hans and his wife Tanya assembled a splendid collection of book papers acquired during their travels. Schmoller lectured the world over, and wrote several books and articles on these subjects. His friendships with the book personages about whom he wrote and lectured added a dimension to his presentation of their lives and works. *Yedidei HaSefer* was honored to have him as a member, and mourns his loss.

Hans Schmoller's presence in Israel on two occasions was due to the sponsorship of the man who has been the single greatest inspiration to the Israel Bibliophiles, Dr. Robert L. Leslie. Dr. Leslie, who celebrated his 101st birthday in December 1986, is the president of the Typophiles. For many years, as director of The Composing Room, a successful typesetting firm in New York, Dr. Leslie was devoted to promoting the artistic aspect of books by sponsoring exhibitions in The Composing Room's "Gallery 303" and by establishing his lecture series, "Heritage of the Graphic Arts." His personal friends were and are an international all-star cast of contributors to the art of the book. From among these thousands of friends, Dr. Leslie brought with him to the 12th Book Fair some forty outstanding designers, calligraphers, collectors, dealers and professors to participate in his centenary celebrations. Dr. Leslie passed away on April 2, 1987.

The activities of *Yedidei HaSefer* are as varied as its membership. There have been exhibitions, lectures, workshops, films, tours, and special offerings of fine printings available to members. Activities take place "in season," from after the High Holy Days in the Fall, until June. The first exhibition, in honor of the 80th birthday of Dr. Moshe Spitzer, was held in the Spring of 1981, at the Jewish National and University Library. Dr. Moshe Spitzer (d. 1982) was Israel's outstanding publisher, one of the few who cared not only about the literary quality of the books that appeared under his Tarshish imprint, but about the form which these works took. He issued classical works in Hebrew translation, and Jewish and native Israeli literature, printing them on the finest paper available (not always up to U.S. standards). He also commissioned the best established artists as well as unknown but talented illustrators to decorate his books with woodcuts and lithographs. Everything he designed and produced was in fine taste. Typesetters and pressmen groaned when Dr. Spitzer forced them to print a page over and over again until it met with his approval.

In the end, printers were grateful for his efforts and proud of the resulting book. The retrospective exhibition was long overdue. Dr. Spitzer supervised the design of the exhibition catalogue: *Dr. Moshe Spitzer: Books, Typography, Design*, written by Dr. J. Katzenstein, librarian of the Schocken Library. A page from the bilingual catalogue is reproduced in Figure 1. (A few of the catalogues are still available for \$8.)

Other exhibitions sponsored by *Yedidei HaSefer* have been calligraphic ones. At the 11th Jerusalem Book Fair in 1983, the Israel Bibliophiles and the "Uncle Bob Leslie Paper Mill" of Beer Sheva mounted the "International Calligraphy Today" show, brought to Israel by Dr. Leslie. Renamed "Pen and Paper," it proved to be as popular with the public here as it had been earlier in New York, where it was sponsored by the International Typeface Corporation. Israel Bibliophile members who worked on the exhibition decided to hold a competition for the 1985 exhibition at the 12th Jerusalem Book Fair. Only eleven works deemed worthy of inclusion were hung in the limited space made available at the exhibitors' entrance at the Binyane Ha'umah convention center, May 5-10. In 1986, the Calligraphers exhibited their works at the Jerusalem Theatre.

Tours of private book collections, the Jewish National and University Library manuscript collection, the Jerusalem Print Workshop, Keter Press and the Wiener Bindery take place regularly. But the most popular tours have been the annual trips to the parchment factories. Members of *Yedidei HaSefer* have visited the Asher Jacob and Gallandauer workshops, both in Jerusalem's Givat Shaul industrial district. The process of making goatskin parchment (more rarely, deerskin) and uterine vellum (*shlil*, from unborn calves) is fascinating. With each visit, we see the progressive mechanization of Israel's low-tech but flourishing industry. If anyone tells you that *everything* is made in the U.S., tell them that parchment is the one item that must be imported from Israel. There are only about 20 parchment factories in the world today, some seven in

Israel (England and Italy are the other major producers). Jewish scribes of course prefer the Israeli product, and calligraphers in the U.S. are beginning to use its parchment as well.

The films that have been shown to members range from printing as it was done in the age of Plantin (late 16th–17th century) to contemporary papermaking at Barchan-Green in England. The four-part videotape of Donald Jackson's "The Story of Writing" brought a capacity audience when it was loaned by the British Council to be shown by the Bibliophiles at the Israel Museum in 1984.

In 1984, the Calligrapher's Branch—now called the Israel Calligraphy Society—was initiated by artist/calligrapher Edna Miron Wapner, and the Branch has been an active partner of *Yedidei HaSefer* ever since. In its first year, it took over the administration of the introductory course in calligraphy given by Hella Hartman, which had been offered by the Bibliophiles from 1981 to 1983. An advanced course was added for experienced calligraphers, and all-day workshops were introduced. The Israeli six-day work week prevents the sponsorship of many workshops which would be of use to calligraphers. The one Hella Hartman gave on micrography during Hanukah in 1985 brought students and practitioners of calligraphy from all over the country. Mrs. Hartman—a student of typographer, designer, and teacher Henri Friedlaender—has been a first-rate disciplinarian of script, and has already given a good foundation to many of Israel's practicing calligraphers. Samples of her work are in Figure 2. Curators and librarians have also taken the course just for the purpose of improving the quality of the ordinary signs they must write routinely. Once a month the Calligraphy Society meets to hear lectures on subjects such as Hebrew manuscript illumination, papercuts, and Arabic calligraphy and design. In 1987, workshops will be given for advanced calligraphers by well-known calligraphers, such as Lili Wronker. David Moss, a calligrapher who established his reputation in the U.S. and now lives in Jerusalem, showed slides of his recently completed Haggadah. Scholar Dr. Meir Benayahu has twice opened his home to members to show his Hebrew book and manuscript collection. The current chairman is Sharon Binder, who also teaches calligraphy in Jerusalem.

In January 1985, *Yedidei HaSefer* held a dinner for its members at the Ticho House, one of Jerusalem's "musts" for visitors. The home of the late artist Anna Ticho and her ophthalmologist husband, located in the center of town, was transformed into a charming museum under the auspices of

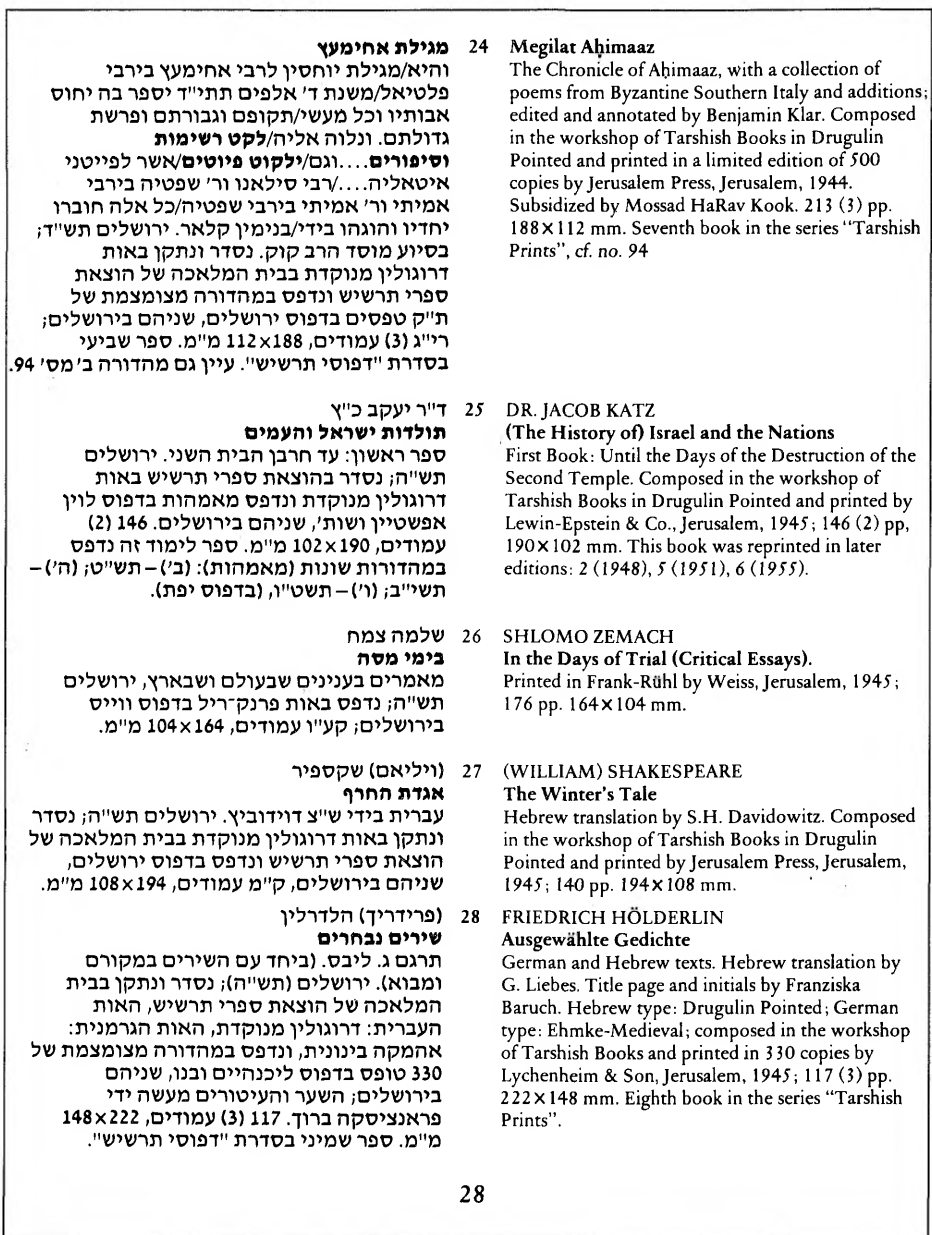


Figure 1. Page from the bilingual exhibition catalogue *Dr. Moshe Spitzer: Books, Typography, Design*.

the Israel Museum (and has the best restaurant for crepes to be found). After dinner, Rachel Cohen, librarian of Ticho House, gave a talk about Anna Ticho and her book collection. It was difficult to tear the guests away from the library; each member found a long lost favorite on the shelves.

The *Newsletter* of the Israel Bibliophiles (*Alon Yedi'ot Yedide Ha-Sefer*), with articles in Hebrew and English, was begun shortly after the group was organized. The logo (see Figure 3) was designed by Fred Pauker, famous for his design of the micrographic "traveler's prayer" doves in script, which for

many years was distributed on all flights by El Al. Designer Ariel Vardi, head of Hadasah College's printing department, designed the *Newsletter* itself. The format has been retained for all issues. It has grown from four pages (the first two issues are long out-of-print) to thirty-two (no. 6). In addition to giving members a summary of the past year's activities, the *Newsletter* has two regular features of permanent value: "Conservation Corner," written by conservator Nellie Stavisky, who gives practical advice on the preservation and repair of works on paper and parchment, and "People of the Book," sketches of the life and work of

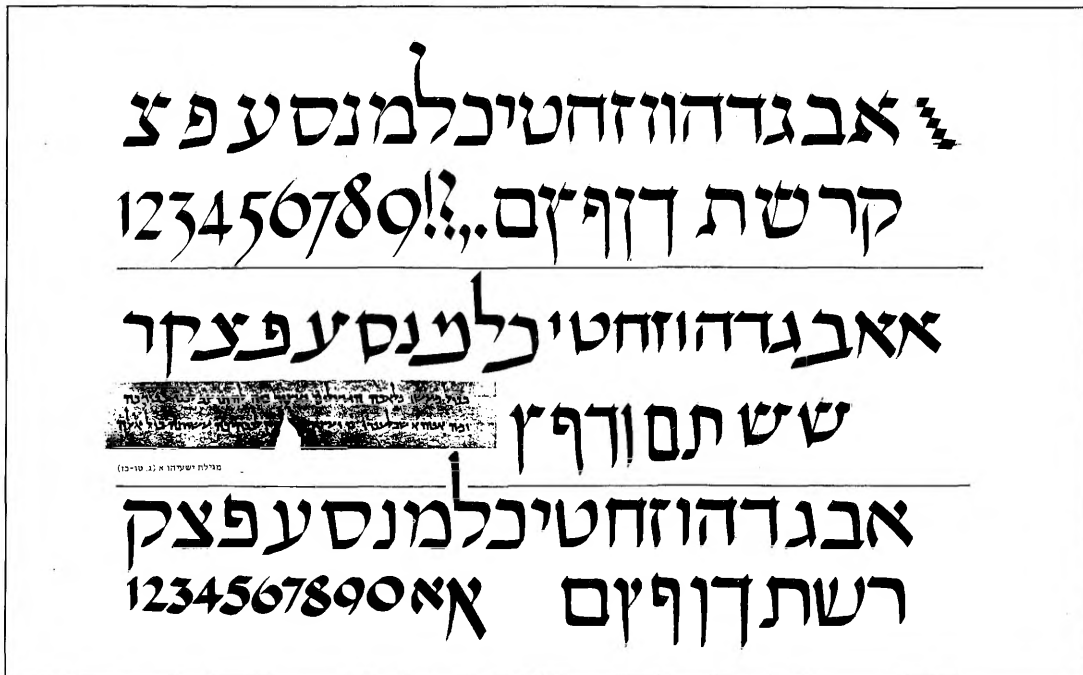


Figure 2. Sample sheet of Sfaradi lettering by Hella Hartman, used in her calligraphy course.

persons who have made major contributions to the Hebrew book in modern times, particularly in Israel. Thus far, book people who have been included are bookbinder Käte Wiener, calligrapher Franzisca Baruch, the late calligrapher and designer Fred Pauker, and designer and publisher Eliyahu Korén. The *Newsletter's* book reviews of international publications on the arts of the book and script are of interest to collectors, publishers, librarians and printers. It is hoped that the *Newsletter* will eventually expand into a journal of the modern Hebrew book and typography.

The "Uncle Bob Leslie Paper Mill" in Beer Sheva has been associated with *Yedidei HaSefer* since the beginning. Founded in 1979, the Mill is located in a beautiful landmark building on Tuviahu Boulevard that was once the Turkish Railroad Station, forming part of the Visual Arts Centre. The rest of the school has now moved to larger quarters, leaving an exhibition hall downstairs and the papermaking equipment upstairs. *Yedidei HaSefer* members are invited to all of their exhibitions (a few of which have been at the U.S. Cultural Center in Tel Aviv), open house/demonstrations, seminars led by guest papermarkers and lecturers from abroad, and regular papermaking courses that run throughout the year. The Mill always needs old cotton and linen rags for pulp, as these make the best paper, so contributions of 100% cotton and linen are most welcome, no matter how old. The Mill, under the direc-

tion of Joyce Schmidt, also makes paper from *mitnan*, a desert plant. Stationery hand-made in Beer Sheva is available from the Mill, and artists' papers made from cotton, linen and Japanese fibers such as gampi, kozo and mitsumata can also be specially ordered.

Courtesy of Dr. Leslie, the Israel Bibliophiles has offered the *Typophile Chapbooks* for sale to its members for the benefit of the organization. The Bialik Institute (P.O.B. 92) in Jerusalem has also sold a limited number of its older special publications to members, of which only a few copies remained.



Figure 3. Logo of Yedidei HaSefer, the Israel Bibliophiles.

Some of these books were designed by Dr. Spitzer. In 1983, the Bialik Institute brought out a slim, handsome volume of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, printed by Ben-Zvi Press on hand-made Beer Sheva paper. The edition was limited to 96 copies, and included an original etching of a portrait of Beckett drawn by Avigdor Arikha, printed at the Jerusalem Print Workshop. It was intended as a tribute to Dr. Spitzer for his contribution to fine printing in Israel; he was involved in the planning stages of this special edition, but unfortunately did not live to see its completion.

One of the aims of the Israel Bibliophiles is to encourage fine printing in Israel, which is sorely needed on a commercial level. The group looks with favor upon the establishment of a private press in Jerusalem in the very near future. Bibliophiles in the U.S. have been asking for such a press for some time.

There are 250 members of *Yedidei HaSefer* in Israel, and about the same number abroad. Foreign membership is \$15 a year. The address of the organization is: P.O.B. 4368, 91043 Jerusalem.

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