

BOOK REVIEWS

Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library. Catalogue. Compiled by the staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. Edited by Benjamin Richler. Palaeographical and Codicological Descriptions Malachi Beit-Arié in collaboration with Nurit Pasternak. Citta del Vaticano, 2008. XXVII + 678 pp., [2], 66* p. (Studi e Testi. 438).

This publication is another indisputable achievement of leading Israeli specialists in the field of investigating and describing Hebrew Manuscripts. It can also be regarded as a part to a larger project dealing with compilation of modern scholarly catalogues of Hebrew Manuscripts in major European libraries. The project is carried out according to a specific scheme: the staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem gives analytical descriptions to the manuscripts on the basis of existing microfilms, while the members of Hebrew Palaeography Project (in this case it is Prof. Malachi Beit-Arié in collaboration with Nurit Pasternak) elaborate codicological and palaeographical details on-site. The above mentioned scheme was used to compile and publish the catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts for the Biblioteca Palantina in Parma in 2001¹. The Vatican collection has been described in the same way, too.

“Je ne sais pas de lecture plus facile, plus attrayante, plus douce que celle d'un catalogue”.

Anatole France, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*

The collection of Hebrew Manuscripts in Vatican is well known to the researchers. Overwhelming majority of the materials belongs to Jewish scriptural tradition of the Middle Ages (9th (?) — 16th centuries). Content of the manuscripts is extremely diverse reflecting almost all directions in the development of Jewish scriptural culture. Midrash collections, Talmudic tractates, works on the Jewish exegesis, law of religion (Halakhah) and mysticism (Kabbalah) are of particular value.

The library is famous for its rarities such as a collection of early Midrash literature. Well known pieces include Midrash Sifra or Torath Kohanim dated late 9th — mid. 10th century (p. 46) by the authors of the catalogue, Sifra that was copied in Northern Italy in 1072/3 (pp. 20—21), a unique manuscript of Jerusalem Talmud dated late 13th early 14th century (pp. 95—96) and many other works. It should be noted that the authors of the catalogue consider the above mentioned Sifra manuscript “perhaps the earliest Hebrew codex extant” (p. 46)².

The collection had already been put into scientific turnover through a series of lists, catalogues and publications. The first printed catalogue of the collection was published in Rome in 1756³. It included the description of 512 Hebrew and two Samaritan manuscripts. Later on some catalogues, descriptions and annexes in Latin, Italian and Hebrew were published⁴. Among them par-

ticular interest presents the work of an outstanding Italian Hebraist Umberto Cassuto (1883—1951) — *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codices Manuscripti Recensiti, Codices Vaticani Hebraici, Codices 1—115* (Vatican, 1956). Unfortunately, the work has not been completed. As it is evident from the title, it includes the description of 115 manuscripts only. However all the descriptions are meticulously performed at a very high professional level.

The reviewed catalogue includes the description of 813 library stock units⁵ that contain an even larger number of manuscripts (scrolls and codices), since the collection has many convolutes and compilations⁶. The catalogue is written in English — the main language of modern science, which expands the circle of its potential readers. Each description contains comprehensive information about the given library stock unit.

The codicological part of the manuscript description (performed de visu by Prof. Malachi Beit-Arié and Nurit Pasternak) includes the following elements: the number of folios, material, size (both the general folio size and the size of the text), description of the structure (quaternion, etc.), number of columns, place or region where copying took place, date or period of creation, characteristics of hand writing. If the manuscript was copied by several scribes, the description should point out the border-lines of each scribe's work.

Analytical part (performed by the staff of the Institute in Jerusalem on the basis of microfilms) consists of characterizing the work, studying the history of its research, publication (including both scholarly publications and facsimile editions) and provenance. The colophons and ownership inscriptions are cited in language of the original and left without translation.

The catalogue is followed by a detail reference section that includes Index of Persons (pp. 639—666), Index of Subjects (pp. 667—668), Index of Place Names

(pp. 669—671), Index of Hebrew Place Names (pp. 671—673), Index of Manuscripts Mentioned (pp. 674—678), Index of Illuminated and Decorated Manuscripts (p. 678), Concordance to the Manuscripts Cited in Benjamin Kennicott's *Dissertatio Generalis in Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum*, Oxford 1780 (p. 678), Index of Piyyutim and Poems pp. 1*—27*), Index of [Hebrew] Titles (pp. 28*—65*).

As a palaeographer and codicologist I was particularly interested in the “field” work of Professor Malachi Beit-Arié and Nurit Pasternak. Unfortunately the codicological parameters mentioned here seem insufficient to me. In my opinion, such catalogue could give a better idea of Hebrew manuscript tradition in general, if it contained information on the pricking and ruling techniques, individual peculiarities of different scribes, etc.

The illustration part is also inadequate or rather not quite corresponding to modern standards. It includes only 16 plates. Probably, this discontent is due to the fact, that previous works of Hebrew Palaeographical Project fully met highest professional requirements. For example, the Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts dated before 1540 in the collections of France and Israel contained most detail codicological information⁷. Each description was followed by at least one illustration. The same approach was used in published volumes of the Description of dated Hebrew manuscripts⁸.

In the end of this review let me emphasize that the Vatican collection of Hebrew Manuscripts has a minute up-to-date catalogue now and, thus, it has entered into the scholarly turnover in full. However, every library, as you know, is a living organism and catalogues can register its composition just for a certain period of time. At the stage of proof-reading and preparing the Catalogue for publication, the Vatican Library acquired 108 Hebrew manuscripts more... Now they are waiting for their turn to be described.

Sh. Iakerson

¹ See my review to the catalogue: *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palantina in Parma. Catalogue*, ed. by B. Richler, palaeographical and codicological descriptions by M. Beit-Arié (Jerusalem, 2001) XXX + 574 pp., *Manuscripta Orientalia* IX/1 (2003), pp. 70—2.

² The manuscript *sine anno* is dated with the help of indirect characteristics. Let us recall that the earliest dated Hebrew manuscript is kept in National Library of Russia: [*Codex Babylonicus*] *Latter Prophets*, with Babylonian vocalization and Masorah. Parchment, 365—370×300 mm, 223 folios. *Sine loco*, August — September, 916. NLR: Evr I B3.

³ *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codicum Manuscriptorum Catalogus... I. Codices Ebraicos et Samaritanos* (Rome, 1756) (facsimile edition: Paris, 1926).

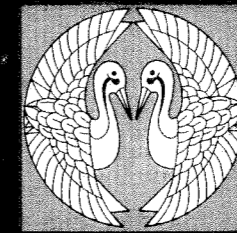
⁴ The history of investigating and describing the collection is given in the introduction by B. Richler on pp. XI—XII and in his reference book *Guide to Hebrew Manuscript Collections* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 192—4.

⁵ For reference: the Russian National Library collection contains 17870 stock units, the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts contains 1147 stock units (the data according to M. Beit-Arié, “The accessibility of the Russian manuscript collections: new perspectives for Jewish studies”, *Jewish Studies in a New Europe: Proceeding of the Fifth Congress of Jewish Studies in Copenhagen 1994 Under the Auspices of the European Association for Jewish Studies* (Copenhagen, 1998), p. 98.

⁶ Compare, for example, the description of the convolute on pp. 115—22 that consists of 59 independent units.

⁷ M. Beit-Arié, C. Sirat, *Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques portant des indications de date jusqu'à 1540. Bibliothèques de France et d'Israël* (Jerusalem—Paris, 1972—1986) (*Comité de Paléographie Hébraïque*). In French and English.

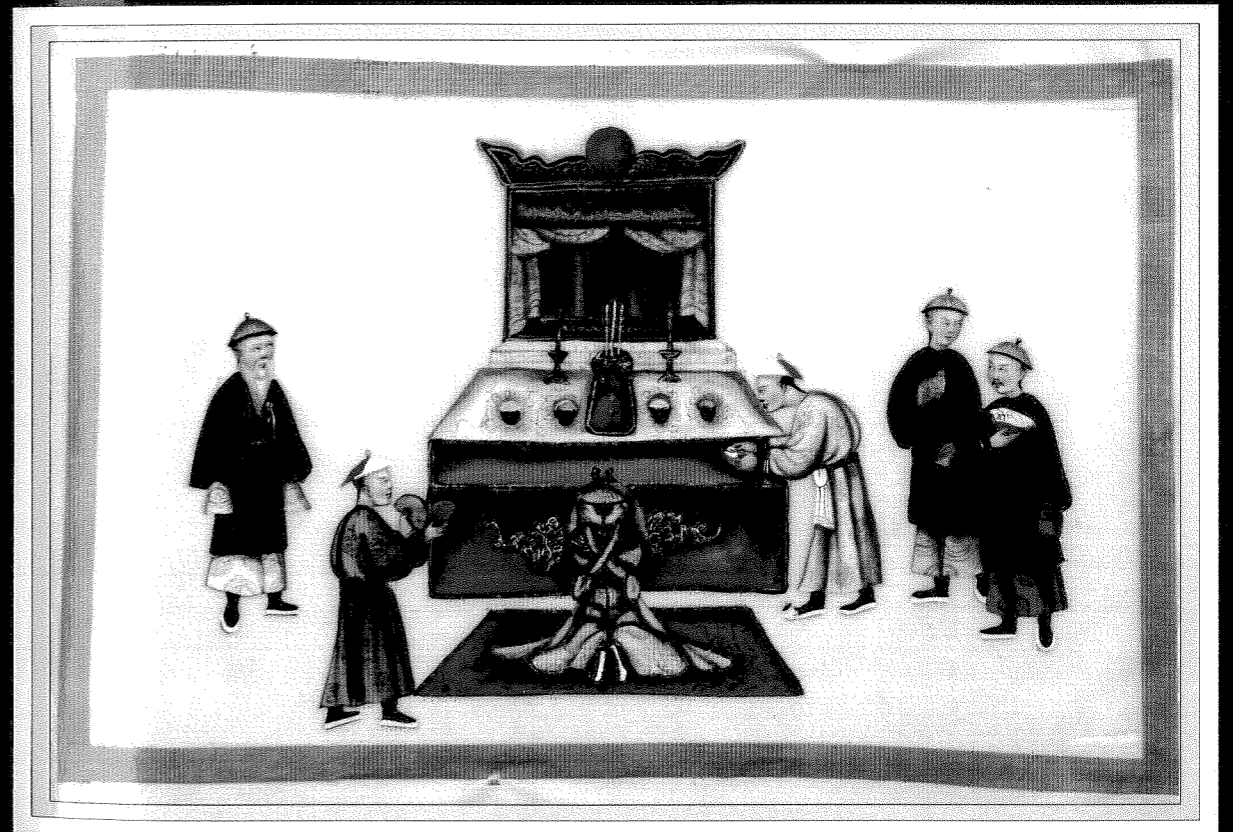
⁸ Beit-Arié, Sirat, M. I. Glazer, *Codices hebraicis litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exhibentes* (Brepols, 1997—2006), i—iv (*Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi... Series Hebraica*). In French and Hebrew.



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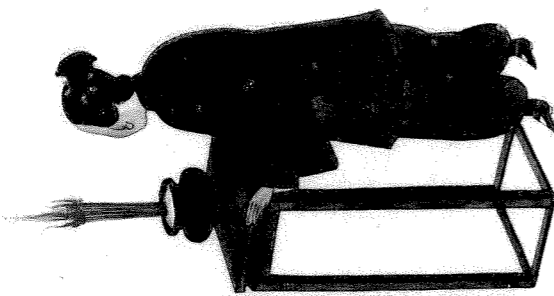
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St. Petersburg

Plate 2

此中國熊香之圖也病人服藥無效請熊
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Plate 1. Sacrifice at a home altar of ancestors before a wedding ceremony. Watercolour on pith, 33×21 cm, China, 19th century. MAE RAS, No. 311-1-12 (7e). Photo by S. Shapiro. Courtesy of the Museum.

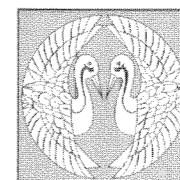
Back cover:

Plate 2. Offering incense to the spirits. Watercolour on paper, 31×23 cm. Beijing, Zhou Pei-chun's workshop, end of the 19th century. MAE RAS, No. 861-3-100-81. Photo by S. Shapiro. Courtesy of the Museum.

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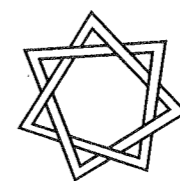
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years of exile in the ice and dirty stares of New England, the intellectual frigidity and provincialism, the horrible weather and dismal light, the evil personal isolation gradually tore apart what was left of my life, yearly trips to St. Petersburg became my only link to authentic culture and human warmth. I stayed often at Karen's apartment on Orbeli Street; and as he reclined on his chaise longue we had long and intricate conversations about Russian and Armenian literature and politics. Roundabout midnight Karen would rouse me from my reading: *James jan, k'entres?* "Dear James, will you have supper?" and we'd sit down in the tiny kitchen for a snack and a glass of vodka. Karen was thin as a rail. I write these lines in a bed in Jerusalem, Israel, where I am recovering very slowly from a terrible motorcycle crash. Gradually I am restoring the muscles of my shattered leg; but when the poor thing was first released from its casts and bandages and stared in horror at its matchstick proportions it reminded me of Karen's skeletal limbs. He used to look up from his meals and tell me he had the *zapasnoi appetit blokadnika*, "the reserve appetite of a Leningrad blockade survivor".

Karen was not just a warm friend, not just a captivating scholar, not just a fascinating Russian Armenian intellectual. He was also the centre of a large circle of friends that began in Petersburg and radiated outward across the planet. His goodness warmed more people than he knew. That warm heart has ceased to beat here on earth, and this is a colder place for it. Karen believed always in the essential affinities of Jews and Armenians. After all, he grew up in the Soviet Union, not the Middle East. He was entirely free of the anti-Semitic, hyper-nationalist virus that has disfigured Armenian life and scholarship in recent years; and despite his venerable stature and imposing credentials, the yellow press in Erevan attacked him. His friendship with foreigners was a mark against him. "James", he used to tell me, "Our enemies have everything on their side... except the truth". Karen visited Israel and liked this country. In the last couple of years he was far too weak to travel; so my hope of his visiting the home here I hope to have will be one more item for the days of the coming of the Messiah, I guess.

Dear Karen, may the earth, as Russians say, rest as lightly as a feather over your earthly remains. And for all of us left behind, *ubitye gorem* — "slain by grief" — God grant us strength to live out our lives in the light of his bright memory and be granted the consolation of being reunited with his enfranchised soul in the regions of the truth beyond space and time.

Barukh Dayan ha'Emet. Blessed is the one true Judge.

James Russell

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Notes to Contributors

Manuscripts must be written in English.

Manuscripts must be clearly typewritten with numbered pages, double linespacing and wide margins throughout. The title should be as brief and informative as possible. The institute at which the work has been done should be indicated at the head of each paper. Authors are requested to include their e-mail address.

Submissions

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Rezvan, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, 3 Universitetskaya nab., 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia, e-mail: rezvan@kunstkamera.ru.