BOOK REVIEWS


There are several important collections of Hebrew manuscripts in the world. Every scholar dealing with Jewish history knows Judaica manuscripts kept in British Library in London, Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Bodleian Library in Oxford, documents from Cairo genizah at the University library in Cambridge and some other less important collections. The unique collection analysed in Shimon Idkerson's book is, in fact, a sort of genizah in disguise. As well as conventional genizah, which have been for centuries hidden from inquisitive eye of a scholar, Jewish treasures of St. Petersburg also had been virtually closed to academic public until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Jacob Mann was, perhaps, the last Western scholar who managed to use materials from St. Petersburg in his classical study in the 1930s. The collection became virtually inaccessible not only for the Western, but also for Soviet scholars.

It is this why the book under review is so important. In fact, it represents the journey — in time and space — to the multifaceted and colourful world of Hebrew manuscript treasures kept in St. Petersburg (hence the title of the book). The book focuses on manuscripts kept at two major academic institutions of the city: National Library of Russia and St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. It is difficult to characterize the genre of the book in one word. It is a colourful work with number of illustrations and facsimiles, a catalogue of the unique Judaica collection, a scholarly study, an introduction to the world of medieval Jewish manuscript tradition, and a bio-bibliographic reference book at the same time. The book is organized in a very elaborate and artsy style, with the main text in the middle, biographic information on a margin, and numerous facsimiles of the most important documents reproduced alongside the text as illustrations. There are as many as 132 illustrations representing a millennium of Jewish manuscript and printed art, from the tenth to the twentieth century. The book ends with the glossary of the most important specialist terms so that even somebody who does not know much about Jewish palaeography can easily read it. The bibliography provides essential references for those who would like to continue their study of Jewish manuscripts and manuscript collections.

As one may deduce from the book, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Judaica collections kept in St. Petersburg. The Judaica collection of the National Library of Russia contains as many as 17,870 manuscript items and numerous rare prints of 45. There one can find the oldest copies of the Jewish Bible and its books known today; the most complete manuscripts of the works by famous medieval Jewish philosophers, linguists, and exegesis, with some works known only from manuscripts kept in St. Petersburg; the oldest dated manuscripts from certain regions (e.g. from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Spain, Turkey, Byzantium); the largest manuscript collection of Jewish sub-ethnic groups such as the Karaites, Samaritans and Krymchaks; unique documents pertaining to the history of Judaeization of the Turkic Khazars; scandalous pseudo-medieval documents which turned out to be nineteenth-century fakes; numerous printed Hebrew incunabula and paleotypes, and much more.

The book starts with the history of the acquisition of the first Judaica treasures in the nineteenth century. The first manuscripts were brought to the Imperial Public Library of St. Petersburg (today's Salykov-Shchedrin National Library of Russia) and Asiatic Museum (today's Institute of Oriental Manuscript RAS) by varied figures such as the Protestant Biblical scholar from Germany Constantin von Tischendorf, Karaites collection Abraham ben Samuel Firkovich, Russian orthodox archimandrite Antonin, Jewish merchant Leo Friedland and some other collectors. The book provides information about the biography of these important figures and the history of the acquisition of their collections. Some of these stories, memoirs and often smack of criminal story and melodrama at the same time. The history of acquisition, preservation, and cataloguing of the manuscripts of St. Petersburg would be unthinkable without understanding the role of Russia's two most important scholars-Hebraists, Daniel Closwon and Abraham Hayarka. Paradoxically enough, there was more of animosity and conflict, then understanding and cooperation between these two scholars — and the book helps one to understand reasons for this strong animosity, and to appreciate the contribution of each scholar to the shaping and forming of the collection, on the other (pp. 60—62). The history of the collection finishes with analysis of the twentieth-century acquisitions which included largely Judeo-Persian, Krymchak and Karaites manuscripts, private collections of Russian Hebraists, and some Yiddish materials (altogether 1,217 codices and documents and 79 scrolls; pp. 62—64).

The main part of the book is dedicated to the analysis of the main tendencies and currents in the history of Hebrew manuscript writing from Biblical times until modernity, including main geographic areas of the spread of manuscript lore, tools used by the scribes, forms and types of manuscripts and their colophons. On the whole, the manuscript folios of the book one can find facsimiles of numerous hitherto unpublished manuscripts, medieval miniatures, drawings and illustrations, and excerts from the most important manuscripts. The copies are not normally provided in Russian translations often accompanied with original Hebrew versions. The author paid a special attention to the colophons. It is normally normal to provide us with information about the name of the scribe, circumstances, the place and the date of composition (copying) of a manuscript. Furthermore, colophons often provide other highly important personal details which help one to understand the history of each manuscript in particular and of Jewish manuscript tradition in general. The uniqueness of these collebors and genizah produces fragments from such important manuscripts as Codex Petropolitans ( Cairo, 1008), the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible known today; Codex Bibliolonica Petropolitana (916), with its unique Babylonian system of vocalization and the oldest dated Hebrew colophon; the oldest copy of the Pentateuch (929); Hebrew-Arabic and Arabic-Hebrew translation of the Bible by Saadah Gaon ( Cairo (?), ca. 1010); Rashî's Bible commentary (North Italy, 1276?—1284?); the oldest Hebrew manuscript from Italy; Samaritan Pentateuch, which contains biblical passages together with the Aramaic and Samaritan translations in paleo-Hebrew script (12th—13th centuries); a copy of the larger version of the letter by the Karaites against Joseph to Hasdai b. Shapurn (Byzantium, 13th century), and many other unique and important manuscripts.

Unbelievable is also a variety of genres of the manuscripts presented in the book: one can find here copies of the Bible, Mishna, and the Talmud, Bible commentaries and translations, philosophical and exegetical treatises, poetry, dictionaries, text- and grammar-books, prayer-books, marriage contracts, belle-lettres, medical and astronomic works, and many other manuscripts. The book also contains a text of the Tosefta, palaeography and the art of manuscript miniatures: the author published numerous samples of Jewish scripts and illustrations, largely in the section dedicated to prayer-books and religious writings (pp. 180—203).

While most of the manuscripts mentioned above were composed or copied by the Rabbanite (i.e. Talmudic) Jews, a large portion of them was left by the Karaites. This fact is explained by the importance of the intellectual output of Karaites thinkers, who continued copying manuscripts well into the twentieth century, to the history of Jewish civilization. Furthermore, the most important part of the collection was formed from the manuscripts collected by Abraham Firkovich, who, being an ardent protagonist of Karaites cause, had a special focus on Karaita manuscripts. The collections boast the works by such important Karaites thinkers and intellectual as the rabbis: from Ben Asher's family, Bible commentators Yehuda Elkana and Joseph ben Shabbetai, and the scholar Yaakov b. Reuven, Joseph al-Hasir, Aaron b. Joseph and many others. Firkovich collections are also highly important for the history of the Karaites themselves and modern period. Inter alia, Idkerson publishes here several most interesting nineteenth-century Karaita documents, such as the decision of the Karaita community of Damascus to donate a 13th-century manuscript of the Bible to the Karaites worthy of the Crema (pp. 62—64). Highly interesting is also a bilingual Russo-Hebrew dedicatory letter from an 18th-century Karaita leader, a letter to Solomon Bein, left on a folio from an Ashkenazi manuscript of the 13th—14th century (!). The inscription was somewhat paradoxically left upside down above the addressee's name. The author of the inscription stated that the manuscript dated back to 9th century, while the addressee of the donation was none other as the Russian general Semen Mikhailovsky (1832—1889), mayor of Odesa (pp. 22—23, 156—157). This fact is highly important for anyone interested in the history of Russian literature. Semen Vorontsov's father, Mikhail Vorontsov, was the governor of Novorossia and the hero of Tolstoy's "Hadzhi Murat". It is known that his wife donated to Russia's most famous poet, Alexander Pushkin, a fragment of the Hebrew inscription, apparently of a Karaites origin. The fact that Solomon Bein gave to Vorontsov-junior a fragment of a Hebrew manuscript is important evidence of the contacts between the Karaites and this illustrious Rus ethnic who was very interested in Jewish culture and he helps one to understand the secret of origin of Pushkin's finger-ring.

One can perhaps see here the irony of the fate, but the fact remains the same: many unique manuscripts composed by Rabbinic authorities survived only thanks to the activity of their adversary, Karaites leader and collector Abraham Firkovich. It is only due to his collector's
The book ends by a convoluted colophon composed by Shimon Iakerson himself in two main languages used by him in this book, in Hebrew and in Russian. This indispensable book, which represents a first attempt of a comprehensive analysis of Jewish manuscript treasures kept in St. Petersburg, needs to be translated into English so that not only Russian, but also Western readers will get a chance to get acquainted with the multifaceted treasure kept in the northern capital of Russia.

M. Kizilov

A. Hamiti, Neqiz Frakulla dhe Divani i tij shqip, Shkup, Prishtinë, Tirana: Logos-A, 2008, 481 f. (Biblioteka: Divan)

The news of publication of the divan of Neqiz Frakulla in the series of “Divan” of Macedonian-Albanian publishing house “Logos-A” arose obvious interests. Among all arabographic literature in European languages Albanian literature is the least explored. The manuscripts are scattered all over the world, various countries and various depositories, including private collections. Its joint catalogue does not exist. And we do not have any slightest idea which texts we actually have in our possession these days. And it is even worse when it comes to the manuscript publications. Unfortunately, modern practice of publishing arabographic manuscripts in European languages understandably boils down to their latinization; to see an original appearance is a rarity. Unlike the case is with the texts in Spanish and Belorussian Poljski languages, no research of the system of communicating Albanian words in Arabic graphics is done, even though the phonetics of Albanian language implies abundant diacritics, which is not always identical in various manuscripts. Unfortunately, once acquainted with the book reviewed, it disappoints you in many aspects. None of the aforementioned problems is given an answer in the current publication. We see only a photograph of a small fragment of the original manuscript on the cover of this book. Even though A. Hamiti had a chance to see the manuscripts fundamental for the publication of this text (Albanian State archives, F.43, D.2-3, F.32, D.2), the latinization is not carried out by him. Thus, his role is that of a researcher and not a publisher. And in regards to the orthography of the original text, the author mentions vocalization and diacritics, but without any particularities. Therefore, all of the numerous puzzles emerging in respect to this or that latinized fragment in the published divan text remain with no comments. It is only natural to open the series of divan publications with this one, since its author, who goes by a poetic pseudonym (muhizot) Neqiz and is known by his personal name Ibritim and ishkra Frakulla or Berati (Birit), was the first one in laying claims to compiling an Albanian divan.

The book is divided into three parts: the first 145 pages are dedicated to the research; pages from 147 to 339 are given to the text of the divan; and pages from 401 to 481 are allotted to the vocabulary.

In his foreword A. Hamiti remembers how long the Marxists times the mystical level of this poetry needed to be disguised. Then he examines the phenomena of arabographic Albanian literature. The word that in Albanian language designates authors of arabographic texts, bejciti, is offered a variety of modern versions — “Albanian literature in Arabic graphics”, “the albanism literary”, “Albanian literature of Islamic origin”, “Muslim Albanian literature”, etc. Actually, bejciti implies poetic art, and Arabographic Albanian literature in its overwhelming majority is indeed poetry. However, isolated prose texts are also introduced every now and then. Furthermore the researcher moves on to the history of acquaintance with Neqiz's texts, beginning with the publication of J.G. van Hahn in 1854 (Hahn used Greek transliteration) and certain bibliographical data, among which there is a great deal of hypothetical, including the date of his birth (the 80s of the 17th century), his studies in Medresa in Berat (Blloq), continuation of his studies in Istanbul, his return to Berat and his forced wanderings between Istanbul, Hotin in Bessarabia (in modern-day Ukraine) and Berat. He died in 1760 (all dates and events in his life are presumed due to the lack of reliable sources). Apart from an Albanian divan, Neqiz also compiled an Arabic one (its location is unknown) and a Turkish and Persian one as well (this one is preserved in the National Library in Tirana). The autograph of Albanian divan presumably compiled in the early 30s of the 18th century is unknown. Its poems have been preserved in copies and anthologies. In the copy of Albanian State archives (F.43 D.2) there are 44 folios (58 pages) which amounts to 54 poems, and in the copy of 1847 (F.43 D.3) there are 31 folios and only 74 poems.

A significant part of A. Hamiti's research is devoted to Near-Eastern poetics — traditional structure of divan, traditional poetic forms, cultural common Muslim characters and images since Neqiz was following all of the aforementioned, only his usage of 'ardal or Albanian folklore metrics provokes debates. But this polemic shows more of a desire to add certain Albanian flair to the poetry of Neqiz. Following Persian and Turkish models, the au-
CONTENTS

TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION .................................................. 3
I. Alimov. Song Ci and "The Notes of Mr. Song Jing-wen" ......................... 3
Kh. Omarchali. Names of God and Forms of Address to God in Yazidism with the Religious Hymn of the Lord . 13

PRESENTING THE COLLECTION ................................................................. 25
A. Gori. Italy in the Horn of Africa and the Ethiopian Islamic Literary Tradition. L. Robecchi Bricchetti and His Collection of Manuscripts ........................................... 25
O. Vasilyeva. Gilt-Stamped Bindings of the Last Quarter of the 16th Century and the Qur'an Workshop ... 38

PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT ................................................................. 37
D. James. A Lost Work by Ibn al-Qitīyya .................................................... 57
M. Debnam. "The Book of Shamsīl and Rustam": a Kurdish Manuscript .... 60

BOOK REVIEWS ......................................................................................... 64
Manuscripta Orientalia in 2009, vol. 15 (list of contributions) ............... 72

Front cover:

Back cover:

Manuscripta Orientalia
International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research
Vol. 15 No. 2 December 2009
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

A. Fedotov, Relevance of the Oldest Qur'anic Manuscripts for the Readings Mentioned by Commentaries. A Note on Sūra “Jāli‘” No. 1, pp. 3-10
A. Ambartsumian, On the Manuscripts of Pahlavi Work “Aylıqgat ‘Izārātā”. No. 1, pp. 11-21
A. Gribi, In-Between the “Elīte” and the “Pagan”: Qur’ānic Boards from West Africa No. 1, pp. 22-34

PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

L. Pavlovskaia, On the History of Photo-Illustrative Collections of the Department of Siberia of MAE RAS. I. The Concept of the Clan Ancestor Spirit and the Territory Host-Spirit Among the Peoples of South-Eastern Siberia in the Context of Ethno- and Culture-Genetics Processes No. 1, pp. 35-40
A. Gori, Italy, the Horn of Africa and the Ethiopian Islamic literary tradition: L. Robecchi Bricchetti and his collection of manuscripts No. 2, pp. 25-37
O. Vasileva, Gifts-Stamped Bindings of the Last Quarter of the 16th Century and the Qazvin Workshop No. 2, pp. 38-56

PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

A. Kudelin, Muhammad ‘Abdu’ll’s Letter to Leo Tolstoy (History of Russian-Arabic Cultural Dialogue in the Beginning of the 20th Century) No. 1, pp. 41-49
M. Dehqan, Malt Muhammad Shari‘ Qad’s Account on the History of Kurdistan: a Unique Manuscript from the Central Library of Tehran University No. 1, pp. 50-52
M. Dehqan, “The Book of Sharafqin and Rustam”: a Kurdish Manuscript No. 2, pp. 60-63
D. James, A Lost Work by Ibn al-Qit (792) No. 2, pp. 57-59

ORIENTAL PANDEMON

I. Alimov, “Tai-ping guang ji”: Motives Related to the Dead Souls No. 1, pp. 53-65

BOOK REVIEWS

Diego de Gaudix. Recopilación de algunos nombres arábigos que las árabo pasieron a algunas ciudades y a otras muchas cosas. by I. Wojewodzki No. 1, pp. 68-70
Shimon Jakerson, Evreiske sokrovišcha Peterburga. Shtiik, kodeksy, dokumenty. by M. Kizlov No. 2, pp. 64-66
A. Hamiti, Nezim frakulla dhe divani i tij shqip by I. Wojewodzki No. 2, pp. 67-68
Rafael Arnold, Sprachwandel, Die Sprache der sephardischen Juden in Italien im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. by I. Wojewodzki No. 2, pp. 69-71

IN MEMORIAM


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Notes to Contributors

Manuscripts must be written in English. Manuscripts must be clearly typewritten with numbered pages, double line-spacing 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 if one is available.

Submissions

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Rezván, 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.