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MASTERPIECES OF JEWISH ART
RUSSIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY

HEBREW MANUSCRIPT ORNAMENT

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Dedicated to dear daddy Vadim Rabinovich on the occasion of his 50th birthday with love and heartfelt wishes

Yana

Дорогому папе Вадиму Рабиновичу - с любовью и сердечными пожеланиями к пятидесятилетию

Яна

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...And Moses turned, and went down from the mountain with the two tables of testimony in his hands, tables that were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

Torah. Exodus. 32.15-17

The seventh volume of the Masterpieces of Jewish Art series focuses primarily on manuscript illumination, which has long-standing traditions in Jewish culture. Jews are often referred to as the people of the Book in view of the exceptional role the Bible had to play in Jewish and not only Jewish history. The subject matter of the present publication, which presents fragments of ornaments of old handwritten codices of the Old Testament, can therefore by rights be regarded as a priori the most important monument of our national art. These fragments form part of a unique collection of Hebrew manuscripts of the Russian National Library of St. Petersburg. While other Judaica collections of most museums and libraries of the former Soviet Union were practically unknown and had to be rediscovered, the collection of Hebrew manuscripts of the former Imperial Public Library of St. Petersburg was made public in Europe over a hundred years ago. The following pages will describe how that collection was formed and studied. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the earliest studies of Jewish art in Russia, the Hebrew Ornament album by Vladimir Stassov and David Gunzburg, was made on the basis of that collection and published in a rich edition in Berlin in 1905. The similar titles of that album and our modest book are not fortu-
itous: both publications draw largely on the same material. True, the Stassov-Gunzburg book reproduced laborious copies of manuscript fragments, whereas the benevolence of library managers has enabled us to acquaint the reader for the first time with the original reproductions of the manuscripts and publish more of them.

At the same time, we regard the Stassov-Gunzburg work as a piece of local Hebraic studies, albeit infrequent in the past, yet meriting full recognition and setting an instructive example of a Russian and a Jewish scholar cooperating in studying the national culture of the people, whose political situation in Russia had always been unstable. It is noteworthy that Vladimir Vasilievich Stassov (1824-1906), whose scholarly interests in that case matched his civic stance, took the initiative to publish that book. When Stassov's monumental study, *Slavic and Oriental Ornament*, was published in St. Petersburg in 1884, his joint undertaking with Gunzburg to study the ornamentation of Hebrew manuscripts was in full swing. In the course of over twenty years of mutual endeavours Gunzburg heard many, as a rule, justified rebukes from Stassov for delays in work on the album. The following description of the great Russian scholar given by Gunzburg seems all the more invaluable in this context. "His attitude to Jewish art was conditioned by the same characteristics of his powerful nature that underlay his other deeds - his absolute dedication to truth, passionate love for humanity, striving after truth and sincerity, admiration for all things natural, viable and real, enthusiasm for kindness and beauty, and recognition of the right of every living being to the utmost development of its personality."

The study of the national uniqueness of Jewish art was for Stassov naturally linked to the main task of his *kulturny" activity, that is, to study and put the original sources of Russian art into contemporary artistic practice. That may seem paradoxical today when growing Russian national sentiment is often accompanied by manifestations of anti-Semitism. The author of many theoretical and critical works on the history of Russian culture, Stassov for several decades published articles on Jewish art in journals and anthologies *Yevreiskaya biblioteka* (Jewish Library) and *Rassvet* (Dawn). Together with the more important of his studies, he included those articles in the collection of his works published in his lifetime. Symptomatically enough, they were never reprinted under the Soviet regime, even though Stassov was among the most progressive Russian critics of the nineteenth century. We have incorporated an excerpt from one of Stassov's articles on Jewish art into this book to acquaint the reader with his writings, which have lost none of their topicality at least in this country, and also pay tribute to that noble man.

Let it be recalled that Stassov was among the initiators of the foundation of a Jewish national art school in Russia. He was the first to pay attention to the talent of young Mark Antokolsky, helped his works gain broad recognition and constantly spoke of Antokolsky as a sculptor, who organically combined Jewish and Russian elements in his works. An impressionable and outspoken person, Stassov might have been wrong in some of his scholarly ideas or assessments, but there is no doubt that his support of Antokolsky and later another gifted sculptor, Ilya Gunzburg, opened the road to sculpture for Russian Jews, the road subsequently traversed by highly distinct artists, such as Boris Shats, Ossip Zadkine, Jacques Lipshits, Yosif Chaikov, Vazir Azgur, Lev Kerbel, Vladimir Sidur and Ernst Neizvestny. The above is not an overstatement because the national mentality of Russian Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century placed the name of the lucky Antokolsky alongside publicly recognized industrialists,
merchants, musicians, lawyers and doctors, thus discovering a new line of activity. Stassov’s part in Antokolsky’s career thus indirectly influenced the development of Jewish art in Russia.

The other author of Hebrew Ornament, David Horaceевич Gunzburg (1857-1910), belonged to the well-known Baron Gunzburg family of bankers and public figures. His father was famous for his extensive interests in science and culture. David Gunzburg specialized in Judaic and Arabic studies and wrote articles on Russian poetry. His preface to Hebrew Ornament, which we have also included in the present publication, is one of David Gunzburg’s major Judaic studies. Written in French (the original is stored at the Russian National Library Manuscript Department), it was first printed in 1905. Prof. Bezalel Narkiss, a renowned connoisseur of Jewish art, included the English translation of that article in the introduction to the 1990 reprint of that album made in Jerusalem. Courtesy of Prof. Narkiss that translation is reproduced below. The study of Hebrew manuscripts and their ornamentation has gone a long way in the one hundred years, which elapsed since the Stassov-Gunzburg work first appeared, and become the most advanced sphere of Jewish art history. The present publication has a modest task to give a preliminary idea of the artistic characteristics of Hebrew manuscripts from the Russian National Library. To this end, the most characteristic and artistically valuable illuminated sheets have been selected from over thirty manuscripts dating mostly to the Middle Ages. Given, as a rule, in a chronological order, these fragments show the stylistic peculiarities of manuscript illumination. We hope that our publication will serve the task of making the treasures of Russian National Library Hebrew manuscript collections fully accessible to scholars.

NOTES
3. In an address on the occasion of Mark Antokolsky’s 25-year-long career, kept at the RNL, Stassov wrote, “… A quarter of a century ago the time came for sculpture, too, in this land. There appeared a young man with a unique talent and unique spirit, who had a calling to do among us and for us what others could not — express his best aspirations and deepest feelings in sculptural forms of beauty and inspiration. That brave and resolute young man was Mark Antokolsky.”
4. Prof. Narkiss included the English translation of David Gunzburg’s introduction to the Hebrew Ornament album in his Illuminations from Hebrew Bibles of Leningrad, Jerusalem, 1990, which accompanied the album reprint. In his introductory article Prof. Narkiss offered a contemporary view of the materials published by Stassov and Gunzburg and provided verified data of a number of NRL-held artefacts.

Alexander Kantsevikhas
Series editor
HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS
AT THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY
On the History of Acquisition and Study
by Olga Vasilieva

Russia’s oldest public library was known under various names, among them Publica Bibliotheca Catariniana, the Imperial Public Library, M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library and the Russian National Library. On May 27, 1795, Empress Catherine the Great signed an architectural project of the library building; on October 26, 1810, Alexander I “endorsed” the library project; on March 6, 1812, the library was “founded”, and on January 2 (14), 1814, “opened for public use.” The memorable dates also include March 17, 1805, when the Manuscript Depot, or the Department of Manuscripts, that “pearl in the crown” and a well of spiritual riches and cultural values of many nations was formed. Manuscripts made their way to the national repository at different periods to become a cultural fact of Russian history and Russian state property¹.

1

Masterpieces of world importance held at the Russian National Library include an invaluable collection of Hebrew manuscripts, comprising about 18,000 storage units. The first and only Hebrew manuscript received before 1805 was a scroll of the Book of Esther, which the first keeper of the Manuscript Depot, P.P. Dubrovsky (1754-1816), happened to have in his collection. Formed during Dubrovsky’s diplomatic service in France, that collection consisted of 900 Western, 50 Russian and 130 Oriental manuscripts, as well as numerous archive papers, and formed the base of the Manuscript Department.²

By the time the first printed catalogue of Oriental manuscripts was published in 1852, the library had six Hebrew scrolls and codices.³

In 1858, the Public Library received thirty Hebrew manuscripts as part of the collection of Leipzig Prof. Constantin Tischendorf (1815-1874), who travelled across the Near East in 1844 and 1853. Alexander II allocated the money to purchase that valuable collection of mainly old Greek and Oriental palimpsests on the request of the director, Baron M.A. Korf. Twenty-nine more Hebrew manuscripts came from Tischendorf in 1859, after his third trip to the East financed by the Russian emperor.⁴

On Alexander II’s order, eight manuscripts were transferred from the Hermitage Library in 1861, including a 1480 prayer-book of European origin, decorated with gilt and color illuminations, as well as foliate and animal ornament (Esp. n. c. 1). That was the first illuminated Hebrew codex to come to the Public Library. It also received elegantly designed solemn odes on the occasion of the coronation of Nicholas I in 1826 and Alexander II in 1860.

In 1856, A.S. Firkovich, a Karaite scholar, traveller, archaeologist and archaeographer, suggested that Korf acquire for the Li-
brary a collection of Hebrew and Karaite handwritten texts brought by Firkovich from Jerusalem, Istanbul, the Crimea and the Caucasus, together with those owned by his family earlier. "Eager to leave these rarities inside his homeland," he did not want to sell them to "foreign men of learning or societies." A special commission of the Russian Academy of Sciences studied the collection for a year and prepared a report, giving it an extremely high assessment. On a royal order, the so-called first collection of Firkovich comprising 1,500 manuscripts on vellum, parchment and paper was purchased for the Library at the expense of the Court Ministry in 1862.

A year later it also received the manuscripts transferred by Firkovich for storage to the Odessa History and Antiquities Society in 1839 and 1852. The latter included the famous Cairo Bible of 1010, also known as the Petersburg Codex, which contained the earliest dated complete text of the Bible in Hebrew (Eap. I B 19A). The last 16 pages of that Bible are sumptuously adorned — the lines of the text of the final masorah form a geometrical ornament, with blanks filled with lavish ornamentation of floral motifs. Opulent gold, the presence of purple, blue and green colors and the specific design of that "background" ornamentation make it possible to speak of its similarity to the illumination of eleventh-century Kufic Korans. There survived a wooden half cover bound in dark-brown leather with a round tooling in the middle and a frame with corners of distinctive shape. This type of tooling is found in bindings of Islamic manuscripts, the provenance of which students ascribe to fifteenth-century North Africa. On four sides the half cover is inlaid with eleven ornamental metal mounts that, to judge by their shape, were made in the eleventh or twelve centuries and could be part of the original binding.

In the Odessa Collection, illumination samples are also represented by a page with a graphic ornament of an "encircled eight-pointed star" made of lines of a Masoretic text against a background of gilt foliage ornament. In its type the graphic ornament is similar to that found in the 1010 Bible. Conversely, the background ornamentation differs markedly in being modest. We see scrolls of plant stems with leaves executed in pink of the priming, which has retained traces of gold only here and there. In style this gilt ornament is very reminiscent of the way details were worked out in the folio

Petersburg Codex
Cairo, 1010
Binding, XIV c.

Пе́тербургский кодекс
Каир, 1010 г.
Переплёт, XIV в.

frontispiece of the Pentateuch of 929 from the Second Collection of Firkovich (Eap. B II 17, folio IV rev.-V). The only difference is that beige was used for priming in the latter case.

Three manuscripts of West European provenance in the Odessa Collection have ornamentation. The fifteenth-century Mishneh Torah of Moses Maimonides is embellished with two lavish illuminations made, possibly, in Italy (Eap. I C 8, folio 18 rev., folio 63 rev.). The fourteenth-century Pentateuch with a Targum Onkelosylaating from France or Germany has a miniature illumination "Hunting a Deer" drawn in ink (Eap. I B 2, folio 230 rev.). Catchwords and an illumination in Rashī’s or Iarchī’s Bible commentary are also drawn in ink.

Who was the fortunate collector to have the luck to acquire those masterpiece of book art? Avraam Samuilovich Firkovich was born in Lutsk, Ukraine, on September 27, 1787. He was of mature age when he decided to devote himself to study and became a melamed and then a hazzan (cantor) of the Karaite community of his native town, until he moved to Kozlov (Evpatoria) in 1823. In his long life Firkovich changed many occupations: he was a merchant, a founder of a printing house, an archaeologist, the author of the Book of Memorial Stones, an avid collector, the "chief Karaite teacher and
instructor,” a “staff member of the Imperial geographical and other societies” and the last scholar of Renaissance type to be accused of falsification by descendants!

After receiving a letter of recommendation from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and without waiting to get the money due for his First Collection, the 76-year-old adventurer set out on another trip to the Near East in 1863, where he assembled an even more extensive collection in eighteen months.

Together with his wife Hannah and grandson Samuel, he visited Istanbul, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Beirut, Aleppo and Nablus and bought manuscripts wherever he went. However, Cairo became the major source of replenishing his collection. Firkovich managed to buy antiques kept in the genizah of the old kenesa (Karaite synagogue) from Cairo Karaites for 1,000 silver rubles. A genizah was a repository for texts not in use due to disrepair or ban, and Firkovich justly supposed that rare handwritten books could be found precisely there.

Firkovich used the term “Cairo genizah” (genizat Mizraim) referring to the Karaite genizah. However, there was an even more famous genizah of the Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo (Fustat). Its manuscripts later fell into the hands of other travellers, namely, the British scholar Solomon Schechter (stored at the Cambridge University Library) and Russian archimandrite Antonin (A.M. Kapustin, 1817-1894), who headed the Russian religious mission in Jerusalem for nearly thirty years, engaged in biblical archaeology and collected old Greek, Syrian, Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts. Under his will, his collection comprising, among other things, over 1,000 Hebrew manuscripts and fragments went to the Public Library and has remained there to our day.

Upon his return to Russia in 1866, Firkovich presented one of his most fascinating acquisitions, the so-called Damascus Torah scroll, to the Library. It is written on soft brown vellum in square characters with crown tags. “Vellum strips were sown together with woven thread rather than dry sinew; this fact shows that the scroll was written by Karaites, as rabbinic law strictly forbids the use of thread in Pentateuch scrolls. The scroll is placed in a cylindrical copper holy ark with Hebrew inscriptions. One of them gives the full names of the donators...” The ark and the enclosed Torah ... are dedicated to

Avraham Firkovich, photograph, second half of XIXth c.

Абраам Фиркович. Фото второй половины XIX в.
the Lord, God of Israel, by Karaites living in Damascus: Joshiyahu Halevi (levite) ben (son) Rabbi Jefet ben R. Aaron Halevi (May he rest in the Garden of Eden) and Azrikam ben Eleazar ben R. Joshua (May he rest in the Garden of Eden)."

Firkovich spent the last ten years of his life in a remote house on a cliff in the dead town of Chufut-kale outside Bakhchisarai. There he sorted out, perused and studied manuscripts he had acquired in the East. He died there on June 30, 1874, and was buried at the old Karaite cemetery in the Valley of Jehoshaphat amid old, sagging and overgrown tombstones that he had studied zealously, striving to learn the history of his people.

After Firkovich’s death Chufut-kale was visited by the German scholar H.L. Stark and A.Y. Harkavy, who made a review of the collection, which was sold by the collector’s heirs to the Public Library in 1876. Fifteen thousand storage units were purchased for 50,000 rubles.

The second collection of Firkovich is divided into several topical parts: the section of Parchment Bible Manuscripts is made of fragments of Bibles that are of great cultural, historical and artistic importance. These include a Pentateuch of 929 copied in Egypt (Esp. II B. 17), a Pentateuch from Spain (Esp. II B. 101) and separate ornamented sheets from different copies (Esp. II B. 262, 267, 269, etc.).

It is noteworthy that both the colors and individual ornamental elements of tenth to twelfth-century Hebrew manuscripts of Egyptian provenance (Esp. II B 262, 267) are close to those of the Cairo Kufic Korans of the same period. In later manuscripts (for instance, Esp. II B 1577, 1580) the type of the geometrical ornamentation is similar to that used in the so-called Mameluke Islamic manuscripts (from the mid-thirteenth to the fifteenth century), and the picturesque foliate ornament is reminiscent of the design of West Iranian manuscripts. At the same time the rich design and "suns" of inlaid gold on the margins of a fragment of the Pentateuch of the second half of the fourteenth – the early fifteenth century (Esp. II B 1525), as well as in the illuminations of Mishneh Torah of Moses Maimonides of the Odessa Collection (Esp. C 8) are reminiscent of Italian manuscript ornamentation. Despite certain similarity in design elements, a Hebrew manuscript can hardly be mistaken for a Christian or Islamic manuscript. The language and graphic design is not all that matters. Vladimir Stassov was right to speak of the original ornamentation of the Hebrew manuscripts from the Public Library and make that originality the key criterion in selecting material for the album. The Firkovich collection is remarkable precisely for its comprehensive array of illuminated Oriental manuscripts of the tenth to fifteenth centuries to be found in no other repository the world over.

In 1888, Alexander III passed a miniature Torah scroll on bone staves, enclosed in a case upholstered with dark blue velvet, that he had received from the Jewish community of Yelisavetgrad, to the Library. It has a silver cover with a dedication inscription and a quotation from the Psalms in gilt letters (Esp. II c. 87).

A printed report of the Imperial Public Library for 1905 stated on page 163 that "through the mediation of V.V. Stassov and I.Y. Gunzburg, Y.Y. Antokolskaya, the widow of sculptor M.M. Antokolsky, made a gift of two works of art produced by the well-known Faberge studio in Petersburg - a) a Hebrew-style Megillah of gilt silver with enamel, including an address written in Hebrew on parchment bestowed upon M.M. Antokolsky by his fans in 1896 on the occasion of his 25th anniversary and - b) an address in Russian in a rich silver binding bestowed upon Antokolsky on the same date by the Society for Disseminating Education among the Jews of Russia."

(The 25th anniversary of Antokolsky's artistic career was marked on December 29, 1896.) As both addresses are kept in Antokolsky's personal
archive, they have failed to draw the attention of jewellery historians and students of Faberge works. L.I. Buchina, the then curator of the Manuscripts Department, has recently brought them to public attention and thus enabled us to publish the first address and its case.

Both the ornamentation of the address text and the case design, obviously, relied on Hebrew ornament motifs represented in the Stassov-Gunzburg album. Ropett (alias I. Petrov) apparently was the first to use them, when designing the title page of the album in 1886. Ten years later those motifs inspired the designers of the Antokolsky address. The lower left-hand corner bears the signature of one of them - D. Maggid. It is still unknown who designed the case. The name of the master - Andreyev - is engraved on a metal plaque mounted on the parchment. It is more likely than not that V.V. Stasov was behind that type of gift. Incidentally, he has signed the address alongside I.Y.Gunzburg, A.F. Koni, V.Y. Makovsky, A.F. Bychkov, I.Y. Repin and N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov.

The Library came into the possession of other Hebrew manuscripts subsequently, albeit they were not numerous. Over the past ten years the collection received five scrolls of the Book of Esther, a large-size incomplete Chumash scroll and an exquisite Torah scroll of fine parchment, which according to its former owners one time belonged to Golda Meir, who in the late 1950s presented it to her Kiev schoolmate.

The arrival of the Firkovich collection at the Public Library caused a pressing need for an expert Hebraist. In 1876, Avraam Yakovlevich Harkavy (1839-1919), whose earlier studies of Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts were financed by the Ministry of Public Education, was enlisted as an extra librarian. He took part in compiling a catalogue, two volumes of which appeared in 1875. Though he formally belonged to the Hebrew department, which stored printed books, magazines and newspapers in Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as Hebraic literature in European languages, he did most work at the Department of Manuscripts.

Harkavy received traditional primary Jewish education and at-
falsifications made by Firkovich to prove that the Karaite ancestors had been no party to the Crucifixion because they were in Babylonian Exile at that time. Chwolson, a scholarly patron of Firkovich, sought to dispute Harkavy, his main aim, however, being to defend his own name: he had no doubt that forgeries were quite possible in principle. Even though no more than several dozens of 15,000 manuscripts may cause suspicion, Firkovich was held in bad repute for quite a while.

Anyhow, Harkavy spent 42 years studying the Firkovich collection in good faith, publishing 400 papers and inventories, producing a vast number of catalogue descriptions and reviewing a total of 11,000 manuscripts. Being of "Hebrew faith and coming from the Novogrudok middle class," he rose to the rank of councillor of the state, was recognized as a member of the hereditary gentry and awarded the orders of St. Stanislav and St. Anne of the second class, St. Vladimir of the fourth class and the Spanish order of Isabella the Catholic.

Though Harkavy worked all his life with Hebrew manuscripts, he had no authority to issue manuscripts to readers. There was but one keeper for the entire manuscript department with its enormous Old Russian, Western, Oriental, musical and archival collections. From 1844 that keeper was A.F. Bychkov (1818-1899) and, when he was appointed library director and elected to the Academy in 1881, his son L.A. Bychkov (1858-1944)\(^2\), a correspondent member of the Academy of Sciences, Slavist, excellent paleographer and expert in the Library collections, became the keeper of the manuscript department and held that post for 63 years. It was he who issued Gunzburg papers for work on the Hebrew Ornament album. In his letter of April 5, 1894, Stasso\(v\) responded to Gunzburg's perplexity over having been unable to gain access to some papers in the following way: "...it could not have been otherwise, because young Bychkov (the keeper of the manuscript hall) had gone on business to Yaroslavl, and all the while the manuscripts were under lock, and nobody had access to them for over a week.\(^2\)

In 1918, D.G. Maggid (1862-1942), a graduate of the Academy of Arts who wrote and designed the Antokolsky address\(^2\), was appointed librarian of the Hebrew department. In the twelve years of his work at the Public Library he by rights believed his major task to be to bring the stock into order, because his predecessor Harkavy could not pay it much attention, having focused on the Firkovich collection. Maggid advised readers and foreign correspondents on the composition of the manuscript collection and prepared the methodological guidelines for the description of manuscripts, although Acad. P.K. Kokovtsov, A.A. Vasilyev and later A.Y. Borisov undertook the last task at that time.

In 1931, after Maggid had been fired in a purge and the Hebrew department had merged with the Oriental department, Y.I. Ravrebe (1883-1939)\(^2\) joined the manuscript department. He carried on the work started by his predecessors in describing the manuscript collection and in seven years compiled several catalogues and inventories, which have lost none of their importance to our day. He was arrested in 1937 for taking part in an "anti-Soviet nationalist plot" and died in a camp.

During the Second World War the entire manuscript collection of the Public Library was evacuated to Melekess (Dimitrovgrad in the Ulyanovsk region). When it returned to Leningrad, K.B. Starova,\(^2\) doctor of sciences and an excellent scholar who studied Qumran scrolls, taught at Leningrad University and later worked as a researcher at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, did a great job by moving the manuscripts to the shelves, compiling catalogues and documenting. She also gave consultations to keepers and readers.

It was not until 1962 that the manuscript department got a Semitologist as its staff member. A graduate of Leningrad University, V.V. Lebedev, in the thirty years of his work at the Public Library, defended two theses on Arabic folk literature, published many papers on the Arabic language, folklore and the Hebrew manuscript tradition\(^2\), as well as several catalogues, and amended inventories made by Harkavy, Ravrebe and other predecessors.

After Lebedev left for Israel, for the first time in the nearly 150-year-long history of the Hebrew manuscript collection some manuscripts were found to be missing. Of the 18,000 manuscripts, which survived the fires of revolutions and wars thanks to the care of several generations of librarians, 96 manuscripts of great historical
and artistic value have disappeared. We were able to reproduce here ornaments of two parchment Bible codices (Eap. II B. 11 and Eap. II B. 53) only in copies made for the Stassov-Gumbrich album and exquisite miniatures, together with the Vienna prayer-book, in the form of photographs that have survived by sheer chance.

Fortunately, we are closing on a brighter note. Upon learning that the 1719 marriage contract bought by it comes from the Russian National Library collection, the National Museum of Israel returned it to the Library and thus enabled us to reproduce it in this album.

In view of growing attention of the world scholarly community to Hebrew manuscripts the Russian National Library, jointly with the Jewish National and University Library, have taken measures to ensure the safety of invaluable artefacts: the overwhelming majority of Hebrew manuscripts were microfilmed (with the full copy stored at the Jerusalem Institute of Microfilms of Hebrew Manuscripts) and the most injured sheets were restored and conserved.

A facsimile edition of the Petersburg Codex of 1010 was published in 1998. The Library’s earliest dated manuscripts are used in the Codices hebraici litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exhibentes, published by the Paris Institute of Text History and the Israel Academy of Sciences. A fragment of the 929 Bible was displayed at the Berlin and Jerusalem exhibitions and published in their catalogues. We hope that this album will also serve the noble cause of the preservation of the cultural heritage of the past.

NOTES
4 Otechet Publichnoi biblioteki za 1858, SPb., 1858, pp. 24-35; id. for 1859, SPb, 1860, p. 8.
5 The Karaites (the Hebrew for “readers”) is a Jewish sect that recognizes only the Old Testament and rejects its interpretation, the Talmud. The final split between the Karaites and the rabbinists took place in the eighth century. In the Russian Empire the Karaites, who speak a Turkic language, lived mostly in the Crimea and Lithuania.
6 Firko, A.S., Zapiska glavnogo karaimskogo uchitelya i