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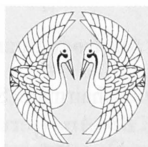
Front cover:

Embroidery design of a dragon. The Qing imperial credentials of the Emperor Xuantong to the Russian Tsar Nicolas II, accordion binding cover. The collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, 34,5×22,0 cm.

Back cover:

Embroidery design on a *tao*. Same credentials, 34,5×22,0 cm.

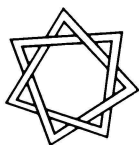
THESA PUBLISHERS
IN CO OPERATION WITH
ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM
PETER THE GREAT MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



Manuscripta Orientalia

International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research

Vol. 9 No. 1 March 2003



THESA
St. Petersburg

BOOK REVIEWS

***Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma. Catalogue.* Ed. Benjamin Richler. Palaeographical and codicological descriptions by Malachi Beit-Arié. Jerusalem: 2001, XXX, 574 pp. — The Hebrew University of Jerusalem / The Jewish National and University Library.**

I dare to break an usual practice of starting a review. I must admit that I received this marvellous catalogue for review half a year ago, read through it quickly, and assessed its unquestionable virtues. However, something prevented me from writing this review immediately. I was unable to figure it out. Was it a long-term personal acquaintance with the authors or the deep professional and human respect I have for them? I felt it was something else. It appeared to me that I failed to grasp something essential in this work, something worth more than the professional description of this or that manuscript. Now I realize the matter. I sensed that because of varying historical circumstances we are at different chronological stages of development in the same discipline. I write these lines in a country where, for many reasons, unique collections of Hebrew manuscripts are concentrated, but their study is still at their naissance, with information available on the level of inventories and card catalogues of the nineteenth century (or later copies of them)¹. Yet I hold in my hands a modern version of the catalogue to one of the most famed and best studied collections of Hebrew manuscripts — the collection

of the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma. In other words, I unconsciously assumed on the basis of Russian collections that the basic function of a printed catalogue was to introduce into scholarly circulation this or that body of unknown, or virtually unknown, manuscripts (for specialists to correct and amend later, so long as the catalogue itself exists). The authors of the work under review long ago overcame this understanding of the goals and tasks of cataloguing. The aim of their work is to introduce into scholarly circulation the most accurate possible multifaceted information (obtained through modern methods and techniques for processing manuscripts) about manuscripts already known to specialists.

The collection of Hebrew manuscripts at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma consists of the private collection of the Christian Bilibicist and bibliophile Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742—1831), which was obtained for the library of Maria Luisa of Austria, Duchess of Parma, in 1816. It included 1,432 manuscripts and some 160 manuscripts that entered the collection from other sources². The collection reflects, in the main, the European (primarily Italian) book tradition. The chronological scope of the material runs from the eleventh to the eighteenth century. The earliest indirectly dated manuscript is from ca. 1072/73 (Catalogue No. 710); the earliest dated manuscript 1240 (No. 281), and the latest 1786 (No. 1406). As one might expect, the largest section, about one third of the collection, is the Bible. A full sense of the collection's thematic composition and the

¹ Not one of the three well-known collections of Hebrew manuscripts has even a primitive print catalogue. I refer here to the following collections: (1) collection of the Russian State Library in Moscow. It was formed in the early 1920s, mainly on the basis of the famed book collection of the Günzburg family. It is known by the hand-circulated (literally) catalogue by Senior Sachs *aeu eano* and inventories "for internal use" that are given to readers in the absence of a catalogue; (2) the collections of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. The famed first and second collections of A. Firkovich and the collection of Archimandrite Antonin entered the library in the second half of the nineteenth century (respectively, in 1862—63, 1876, and after 1894). They are known thanks to a short card catalogue, inventories, and numerous publications. Individual sections of the catalogue have print catalogues (which reflect less than 15 per cent of the collection): A. Harkavy, H. Strack, *Katalog der Hebraischen Bibelhandschriften der Kaiserlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek in St. Petersburg*, erster und zweiter Theil (St. Petersburg—Leipzig, 1875) (Katalog der Hebraischen und Samaritanischen Handschriften der Kaiserlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek in St. Petersburg. Band 1); V. Lebedev, *Arabskie sochinenia i vevreiskoi grafike* (Arabic Works in Hebrew Script), manuscript catalogue (Leningrad, 1987); P. Fenton, *A Handlist of Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in Leningrad* (Jerusalem, 1991); (3) the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies. It consists of the collections of L. Friedland (acquired in 1892) and D. Chwolson (acquired in 1910) and manuscripts acquired in the late 1920s—1930s from the Crimea. It is known thanks to inventories, a card catalogue, and two typewritten copies of descriptions by I. Ginzburg (completed in the late 1930s) and K. Starkova and A. Gazov-Ginzberg (completed in the 1960s). The first (already outdated, unfortunately) is being prepared for publication.

² The history of the collection's creation is described in some detail in Guiliano Tamani's *The History of the Collection*, pp. XIX—XXVII; one can also recommend the entry in B. Richler's *Guide to Hebrew Manuscripts Collections* (Jerusalem, 1994). See *ibid.*, pp. 149—51.

quantitative breakdown of its sections is provided by the material's arrangement in the Catalogue: Bible and Biblical exegesis (Nos. 1—693), Mishra (Nos. 694—709), Talmud (Nos. 710—754), Halakhah (Nos. 755—888), Liturgy (Nos. 889—1137), Kabbalah (Nos. 1138—1227), Philosophy (Nos. 1228—1363), Ethical Literature (Nos. 1364—1382), Homilies (Nos. 1383—1390), Polemics (Nos. 1391—1410), Poetry (Nos. 1411—1421), Philology (Nos. 1422—1462), Science (Nos. 1463—1497), Medicine (Nos. 1498—1539), Varia (Nos. 1540—1591).

The name of the Biblioteca Palatina collection's former owner is familiar to all specialists on the Hebrew manuscript and early-print tradition, as he was not merely an outstanding bibliophile and book connoisseur, but the author of a number of catalogues that undoubtedly influenced the development of Hebrew bibliographies. As primarily an incunabula specialist who focuses on Judaica, I am mainly familiar with De Rossi's work on the history of Jewish book-printing. I mean his relatively early works *De hebraice typographiae origine ac primitiis seu antiquis ac rarissimis hebraicorum librorum editionibus seculi XV disquisitio historico-critica...* and *De typographia hebraeo-ferrariensi commentarius historicum quo ferrarienses judaerum editiones hebraicae, hispanicae, lusitanae recensentur et illustrantur* (1776 and 1780 respectively), as well as his basic catalogue of his own collection of incunabula — *Annales hebraeo-typographici sec. XV...* (Parmae, 1795; reprint. Amsterdam, 1969). In 1803, De Rossi published his major work (on bibliographies, in any case) — a three-volume catalogue of his own manuscript collection *Mss. codices Hebraici Biblioth. ... accurate ab eodem descripti et illustrati* (1,377 Hebrew manuscripts and several dozen “*mss. codicum aliarum linguarum*”, vol. III, pp. 160—200). Each description in De Rossi's catalogue included a general summary of the contents of this or that codex and certain bibliographic and codicological information (for example, folio dimensions, written material, Latin translation of various parts of the colophon, etc.). Like De Rossi's other catalogues, it was in Latin and met the standards for orientalist catalogues of the time³. In the 200 years that have passed since its publication, both the language and standards of scholarship have changed, of course.

The description of the Parma collection under review here meets all modern standards. In a sense, it even sets them. For me, the most significant, qualitative distinction of this catalogue is that it is a collective endeavour. More accurately, it is the work of two teams — the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts (IMHM) and Hebrew Paleography Project (HPP). The IMHM used microfilms from Jerusalem to draw up a bibliographic description that was then edited by Institute Director B. Richler. The computer database Sfar-data (at the HPP) was used to correct the localization and dating of manuscripts in the *sine anno, sine loco* category. Additionally, each manuscript was

checked *de visu* by HPP Director Prof. Beit-Arye and his colleagues. This undoubtedly improved the accuracy of the descriptions and allowed the authors to introduce additional palaeographic elements.

Each description in the catalogue contains the following elements: author's name, title of the work (both in the language of the manuscript and in English transcription), content summary, quantitative characteristics (number of folios, manuscript dimensions), description of material (paper or parchment), location and chronological period of creation, description of handwriting, scribe's (scribes') name(s), person who commissioned the manuscript, information on its further history (notes by owners and censors), and, where necessary, a bibliography. During the first stage of work on the catalogue, the authors no doubt faced the issue of a system for descriptions and the selection of maximally representative information.

In principle, the information listed above is sufficient to obtain an accurate and multi-layered sense of each manuscript. Still, I would like make a few purely methodological additions and express several wishes for the future. First, in my view, any catalogue contains, first and foremost, a description of concrete manuscripts held in a certain library. Information about its production should follow immediately after the brief description of the work. I feel that the following order of description is preferable: author's name, title of work, place copied, copyist's name, time of copying. Second, it seems to me that a catalogue of this level (and one executed by a team of authors) should have an expanded field (at least for pre-sixteenth-century manuscripts) that includes the following: in-folio and in-quarto dimensions⁴, description of quire structure, more detail on materials (parchment thickness and processing, type of paper and, where possible, more information on water-marks⁵), lining and decoration (including descriptions of drawings and paints), general description of the manuscript's and binding's physical condition⁶. Third, I would imagine that any bibliographic citations of the scholarly use or reproduction of a manuscript should be separated from the basic description and included in the Notes section. For example, a description of a famous manuscript of the Mishnah (De Rossi 138, Catalogue No. 710) suddenly confronts readers with references to works by J. N. Epstein, N. G. Haneman, Y. Z. Feintuch, etc. It seems to me that such information overloads the bibliographic description and breaks up its flow.

My remarks, of course, are likely those of a perfectionist. In no way do they diminish the importance of the catalogue, the professionalism of its authors, or the significance of their work for the subsequent study of Parma's marvelous collection.

Finally, I would like to close this short review with a request that the authors of the catalogue turn their attention to Russian book collections. The titanic task of microfilming them (for which the bulk of the credit goes to the

³ Although De Rossi did not indicate the number of folios in the manuscript he described, which is rather strange, even for his day.

⁴ The folio dimensions in the catalogue in millimetres are not a replacement for proportional folio dimensions and do not, of course, tell us how the quires are formed. I note once again that in the De Rossi catalogue, the folio dimensions are given proportionally. One would also like more detail on the dimensions — are these average parameters or the dimensions of a concrete, representative folio (if so, which one?). And what are the dimensions of the text field and their ratio to the upper and lower margins?

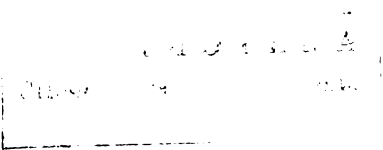
⁵ Only in some instances are there references to C. Briquet's album *Les Filigranes*. No more information is given.

⁶ For example, I am quite interested in bindings, and the catalogue contains no information about them. Bindings contemporary to the manuscripts may have survived; alternately, they are in standard “Parma” bindings like the M. Friedland manuscripts at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies.

authors of the catalogue at hand) was completed several years ago. The time has come to the use the time-tested method of collective work demonstrated in the present catalogue. One could probably begin with the collection of Baron Günzburg (see n. 1), held in the Russian State Library in Moscow. It is comparable to the Parma collec-

tion in size and significance⁷. To return to the catalogue under review, information it provides is exceptionally valuable for all those studying Hebrew manuscripts, which makes it possible to open up new fields of enquiry.

S. Iakerson



⁷ The Günzburg family's collection of Hebrew manuscripts contains approximately 1,900 items. After the death of its last owner (and main compiler), David Goratsievich Günzburg (1857—1910), the library was acquired in 1917 by the Russian Zionist movement for the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. Fast-moving historical events prevented the library's departure for Palestine, however. The library was nationalized and transferred to the collection of the Romyantsev Museum (today's Russian State Library).