

## Book Reviews • Рецензії

SHIMON IAKERSON    Ozar Sepharad: Sephardic Treasury. Sephardic Books from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century. From Manuscripts to Printed Books.

Saint Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2015. 128 p.

ISBN 978-5846514614 [in Russian].

СЕМЕН ЯКЕРСОН    Оцар Сефарад – Сефардская сокровищница. Сефардская книга X–XV вв. От рукописной к печатной традиции.

The manual of Dr. Shimon Iakerson, *Ozar Sepharad: Sephardic Treasury. Sephardic Books from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century from Manuscripts to Printed Books*, is dedicated to an important and specific field of Hebrew studies – the medieval Jewish books which were written in the so-called “Sephardic” geo-cultural area (the Jewish diaspora on the territory of modern Spain, Portugal, Provence, Low Languedoc, Morocco, Algeria and Tunis). As reflected in the subtitle, this manual deals with the narrow but very significant field of Jewish studies as paleography and codification of the Sephardic manuscripts and incunabula.

The author (who has published numerous articles and some books in the field of medieval Jewish manuscripts and books before) systemizes the large material in a very compact and methodologically consecutive manner. First of all, this book is aimed at students who are involved in Hebrew studies: they are provided with ample opportunity to make contact with the ancient texts immediately and become in the future their translators or researchers. But this manual may also be helpful for the specialists who are interested in medieval Jewish literature and history.

Dr. Iakerson’s well-structured manual contains the following parts: introduction (with explanation of the subject, principles of transcription, description of the texts and list of abbreviation), an historical survey, some chapters dedicated to the review of the Sephardic book tradition, paleographic characteristics of the manuscripts and incunabula, and, finally, codification of the books. In addition, the manual includes the Paleographic reading book, the List of incunabula, Bibliography, Supplements, and Index. This large amount of material is set forth very compactly: the manual consists of only 127 pages.

The Introduction introduces the text’s structure – the texts of the Sephardic Jewish culture that were written in the period between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Also, the main principles of transcription are given: the author uses two types of transcription of He-

brew, and both of them are based on the Cyrillic alphabet. The first type is used when a quoted term is widespread in Russian scholarly literature on Judaic studies, and this type renders the Hebrew pronunciation in a simplified manner (so called *popular transcription*); the second type is a special transcription which uses the diacritical signs and reflects all phonetic connotations of Hebrew words. However, in spite of the fact that both types of the Cyrillic alphabet-based transcriptions are used in the Russian literature on the Hebrew and Jewish studies (including the Short Jewish Encyclopedia), it would be better to transcribe Hebrew words in the Latin alphabet-based system. In this chapter the list of abbreviations, Latin terms and conventional signs is also given.

The historical survey is a very important part of the manual, which helps students define the chronological and geographical bounds of the Sephardic world. In this chapter the most important events from the history of the Jewish community in the North Africa, Pyrenean peninsula, and the South France are considered, as well as the most outstanding personalities. The major characteristic features of Sephardic culture are also discussed in this terse survey, which is very helpful for students.

The chapter, “Sephardic book tradition of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. From manuscripts to printed books,” is concerned with the history of Sephardic literature (in the broad meaning of this term), which was written mainly in the Hebrew-Arabic language. This chapter describes Sephardic writing in general terms of translational activity and original writings. The author gives as an example the history of Tibbon’s family: Yehuda ibn Tibbon (1120–1190) and his son Shmuel (1165–1230) were prominent translators who rendered some books from Hebrew-Arabic into Hebrew. In the end of the chapter, the author gives important information about the Hebrew Paleography Project (HPP) and his personal contribution to this project (i.e., the material of the manual is based on Dr. Iakerson’s investigations).

It should be noted, however, that this chapter might have been longer: though this book is concerned with paleography (not with literature), the exposition of Sephardic literary studies (including genres and titles of books) is very short. It would be better for students to learn more about the writings themselves from the point of view of literature (prose, poetry, philosophical treatises, etc.). Like the “Historical survey” this book needs a “Literary survey,” which might have been included in the chapter about Sephardic book tradition.

The next chapter – “Paleographical characteristics of Sephardic manuscript scripts’ type” – is dedicated to description of the origin and the main types of scripts. Dr. Iakerson describes the genesis of the Sephardic script, which was influenced by both the Hebrew and Arabic scripts, and was spread beyond the scope of the Sephardic world in subsequent centuries. In this chapter three main types of Sephardic scripts are described in details: square script (כתב מרובע) – the most widespread in the modern world type of Hebrew writing; semi-italic (כתב בינוני) or “Rashi script,” which is still used for publication of religious literature; and italic script (כתב רהוט) with a minimum of strokes and ligature-type of writing. It is also noted that the distribution of these scripts was not connected with different Hebrew languages (Hebrew-Arabic, Hebrew-

Spanish, Hebrew-Portugal, etc.), but with the form and content of the text: square script was used for the biblical texts and prayer books mainly, while the homiletic, exegetic, juridical, and literary texts were written in semi-italic or italic scripts.

Though no treatise on calligraphic rules came to us from those times, Dr. Iakerson attempts to restore at least some of them by giving his own translation of the passage from the instructions of Yehuda Ibn Tibbon to his son Shmuel. These instructions concern the basic principles of calligraphy, on the one hand, and practical advice on the other of to how to avoid “a bad style” in writing. Some of his instructions sound poetic, for example: “For script, as I have already told you, is the form of the forms and the more cautious is a man in its embodiment, the more beautiful it will look.” This interesting quotation gives students and readers opportunity to touch the process of writing almost immediately.

The chapter entitled “Paleographical characteristics of Sephardic incunabula print types” contains a short historical survey of Sephardic printing and description of print types of the incunabula. In 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Jewish typographies of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Turkey 27 different print types were used, and 20 of them were square, 7 – semi-italic. In this short chapter the table of the Sephardic print types is given with information about cities, typographies and sizes of print fonts. It is also told about the history of the Sephardic printing and the role of Sonchino dynasty.

The last chapter, “Codicological characteristics of Sephardic manuscripts and incunabula,” is divided into two paragraphs: “When, where and by whom were Sephardic book copied?” and “Designating dates.” In the first paragraph the most widespread type of colophons is described; in the second paragraph Dr. Iakerson focuses on the prevailing method in Sephardic books of dating – from the creation of the world onwards. In the second case some examples of calculation are given (all of them have been taken from the ancient books), which assists students greatly.

A significant part of the manual (60 pages) is dedicated to the Paleographical reading book, which consists of 17 manuscripts in different types of script. Each of these manuscripts is a photocopy with a transliteration in the printing square Hebrew script, including a short bibliographical description and codification information. These manuscripts were written between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and contain different texts: liturgical poems (*piyyutim*), fragments of philosophical treatises, colophons, and so forth. This reading book gives students good material for practical work and exercises.

Fragments from the Sephardic incunabula are not given in the reading book, but the full list of the incunabula (51 books) is added to the manual. The incunabula are arranged according to the regional-chronological principle (South Italy – Spain – Portugal – Turkey, from 1475 to 1493 years). Each book has a full bibliographic description, the name of the author, the title in Hebrew with transcription and translation into Russian, the name of the printer, the date and place of publication. This information is very useful for students and researchers.

In the end of the manual, a reader can find the Bibliography and some supplements: Hebrew scripts variations, a list of abbreviations, Russian transcriptions, and

correspondences between months in Hebrew and modern calendars. All these appendixes are very helpful (especially the table of Hebrew script variation) for further practical work with the Sephardic texts. In addition, the index of the names of persons, works and places (both in Russian and Hebrew) gives an opportunity to use this manual effectively.

One of the remarkable peculiarities of this manual is that it is based on the research material in the field of Sephardic books which has been investigated by the author (the list of his books and articles are given in Bibliography). This short but highly practical and helpful manual may be a good pattern for similar handbooks on the specific fields of Jewish studies.

*Dmytro Tsolin*

NADIA VALMAN, LAURENCE ROTH, EDS. **Three Articles on Jewish Art, Body and Identity: A Case Review on**

*The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures.*

London: Routledge, 2014. 414 p.

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Plurality and diversity have not always been valued in academic circles, and Jewish Studies among them were no exception until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, postmodern social studies take new approaches and visions. As soon as any society reaches a certain point in its life, the study of it cannot keep operating the terms of ancient books and principles, and the society has to be studied in synergy with other societies, communities and new terms. The *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures* edited by Laurence Roth and Nadia Valman, and published in 2015, contains articles on most new researches concerning Jewish Studies worldwide. Diverse and different, created by scholars from different cultures, countries, research areas and origins, these texts are divided into three parts following to the principle of terms definition, theory narratives and case studies. While the common field of all those texts is indisputably rich, in the following review we will direct our attention to three of them, representing one part of the *Handbook* each.

The first article recommended by this review is “Art History” by Samantha Baskind and Larry Silver, presented in the first part (“Defining terms: disciplinary perspectives”) of the named handbook. The article starts with *Raphael Soyer and the Search for Modern Jewish Art* in 2004, and while analyzing artistic works of a Russian-Jewish emigrant Raphael Soyer who, according to art scholars’ works, had never identified himself as a Jewish painter or portraitist, Samantha Baskind has extensively researched the topic of Jewish art and art made by Jews.

Although the importance of artists’ cultural identities seems from a personal perspective to be a crucial point of Baskind’s earlier work, by 2006 the *Encyclopedia of*