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978-0-521-09023-0 - Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages: Colette Sirat
Edited by Nicholas de Lange
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Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages

Hebrew manuscripts are our most important source of knowledge about Jewish intellectual, religious and everyday life in the Middle Ages, and anyone wishing to engage with medieval Jewish history needs to know about the manuscripts themselves, how to study them, and the literary genres to which they belong. Colette Sirat offers a comprehensive overview of these subjects in this illustrated introduction to Hebrew manuscript culture. She introduces the reader to many actual manuscripts, highlighting their beauty and originality. A description of the history of texts in Hebrew reveals the range and variety of texts – many of which have never been printed.

The present book is a considerably re-structured, extended and updated version of an earlier presentation in French. It now encompasses all aspects of Hebrew manuscripts – textual, codicological and palaeographical – combining different disciplines to give an all-embracing view of the subject.

The book has been translated from the revised French manuscript and edited for an English readership by leading Hebrew scholar Nicholas de Lange, who worked closely on it with the author.

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COLETTE SIRAT

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Preface

Medieval manuscripts in Hebrew characters are not easy to get to know. My aim in this book is to offer an introduction to them which will give some idea not only of their material features but also of the texts they contain.

In 1992 I published a codicological and palaeographical introduction in Hebrew.¹ Intended for Israeli students, its aim was to help them to read medieval writings. A French edition, published in 1994, included a brief account of the texts for the benefit of a more general readership. The version presented in this English-language edition attempts to integrate fully the history of the texts and the history of the manuscripts. Most of the book was specially written for this new edition. Part I, apart from the few pages on the Bible, is entirely new. Part II (the bulk of the Hebrew and French editions) has been thoroughly revised. Part III is new, apart from some pages about the life and death of manuscripts. Part IV is much reduced in comparison with the Hebrew edition, and a little shorter than the French.

This book has been considerably improved thanks to the pertinent questions and judicious remarks of the author of the English translation, my colleague and friend Nicholas de Lange, for which I thank him warmly. I am also grateful to Rosamond McKitterick for some very helpful observations.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, which provides me with both financial and scholarly resources and makes it possible for the Comité de Paléographie Hébraïque to function. Without this help the present book, like its predecessors, could not have seen the light of day.

Thanks are also due to the librarians of the various libraries in which the manuscripts referred to are held, not only for their general assistance but in particular for providing the photographs without which the exposition would be immensely poorer.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of Bella Image and Christine Feld, who assisted in the compilation of the indexes.

My final thanks go to Kevin Taylor and to all those at Cambridge University Press who contributed, in their various ways, to enabling this book to see the light of day.

¹ For details of this publication and the French edition see the Bibliography.

Abbreviations

- BJRL* *Bulletin of the John Ryland Library*
- CRAI* *Comptes rendus de séances de L'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.*
- Codices I* M. Beit-Arié, C. Sirat and M. Glatzer, *Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi, Series Hebraica. Codices hebraicis litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exhibentes. Vol. I: jusqu'à 1020.* Turnhout, 1997.
- Codices II* M. Glatzer, C. Sirat and M. Beit-Arié, *Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi, Series Hebraica. Codices hebraicis litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exhibentes. Vol. II: 1021–1079.* Turnhout, 1999.
- Codices III* C. Sirat, M. Beit-Arié and M. Glatzer, *Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi, Series Hebraica. Codices hebraicis litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exhibentes. Vol. III: 1085–1140.* Turnhout, 2001.
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- De l'écriture au livre* C. Sirat, *De l'écriture au livre, regard sur le monde des manuscrits au Moyen Age* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem, 1992.
- Ecriture et civilisations* C. Sirat, with M. Dukan, *Ecriture et civilisations.* Paris, 1976.
- EJ* Encyclopaedia Judaica
- L'examen des écritures* C. Sirat, *L'examen des écritures: l'oeil et la machine: essai de méthodologie.* Paris, 1981.
- GLM* Gazette du livre médiéval
- Greek Jewish Texts* Nicholas de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 51). Tübingen, 1996.
- Hebrew Codicology* M. Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology: Tentative Typology of Technical Practices Employed in Hebrew Dated Medieval Manuscripts.* Jerusalem, 1981. [Originally published: Paris, 1977.]
- Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* B. Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts.* Jerusalem and New York, 1969.

- Hebrew Script* A. Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script: History, Palaeography, Script Styles, Calligraphy & Design* (revised and expanded from the original Hebrew edition, *Sefer ha-ketav ha-ivri*). Jerusalem, 1997.
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- JE* *Jewish Encyclopedia*
- JJS* *Journal of Jewish Studies*
- JQR* *Jewish Quarterly Review*
- JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies*
- KS* *Kiryat Sefer*
- The Makings* M. Beit-Arié, *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology*. Jerusalem, 1993.
- ‘Les manuscrits en caractères hébraïques’ C. Sirat, ‘Les manuscrits en caractères hébraïques, réalités d’hier et histoire d’aujourd’hui’, *Scrittura e Civiltà*, 10 (1986), pp. 239–288.
- Manuscripts of East and West* M. Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Manuscripts of East and West: Towards a Comparative Codicology*. London, 1993.
- A Mediterranean Society* S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. 6 vols. Berkeley, 1967–93.
- Mss datés I* C. Sirat and M. Beit-Arié, *Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques, portant des indications de date jusqu’à 1540*, vol. I: *Bibliothèques de France et d’Israël, manuscrits de grand format*. Jerusalem and Paris, 1972.
- Mss datés II* M. Beit-Arié and C. Sirat, *Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques, portant des indications de date jusqu’à 1540*, II: *Bibliothèques de France et d’Israël, manuscrits de petit format jusqu’à 1470*. Jerusalem and Paris, 1979.
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- Les papyrus* C. Sirat, *Les papyrus en caractères hébraïques trouvés en Egypte*, with contributions by Malachi Beit-Arié, Michèle Dukan, Félix Klein-Franke and Herman Harrauer; calligraphy and illustrations by Ada Yardeni. Paris, 1985.

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xvi Abbreviations

La réglure Michèle Dukan, *La réglure des manuscrits hébreux au Moyen Age*.
Paris, 1988.

REJ *Revue des Etudes Juives*
RHT *Revue des l'Histoire des Textes*
SCI *Studia Classica Israelica*
SH *Scripta Hierosolymitana*