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JEWISH TEXTS ON THE VISUAL ARTS

Jewish texts are a hidden treasure of information on Jewish art and artists, the patronage and use of art, and the art created by non-Jews. Most of these texts are written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Those scholars able to read them often do not understand their art-historical importance, while many art historians who would understand the references to art are hindered by language barriers. *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* includes fifty texts dating from the biblical period to the twentieth century, most newly translated. They touch on issues such as iconoclasm, the art of the “Other”, artists and their practices, synagogue architecture, Jewish ceremonial art, and collecting. Through the introduction and essays that accompany each text, Vivian Mann articulates the importance and relevance of these sources to our understanding of art history.

Vivian B. Mann is Morris and Eva Feld Chair of Judaica at The Jewish Museum, New York, and Adjunct Professor and Advisor to the Master’s Program in Jewish Art at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. She has curated and edited catalogues for many exhibitions including *Gardens and Ghettos: The Art of Jewish Life in Italy* and *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain*.

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VIVIAN B. MANN

THE JEWISH MUSEUM, NEW YORK
THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Rabbinic texts translated by
ELIEZER DIAMOND



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הרב אהרן ראובן טשארני זצ"ל

This work is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather
RABBI AARON REUBEN CHARNEY זצ"ל (1888–1970)

a student in the yeshivot of Breinsk, Sokolov, Eshishuk,
Radun, and Volozhin
who loved books and wrote six of them,
who amassed a great library where he taught his granddaughter
as readily as his grandson,
and always answered her questions on Jewish law.

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In writing this book, I have come full circle to a keen interest in talmudic lore that was frustrated by institutional policies in force during my youth, policies that worked to exclude young women from the pursuit of advanced studies in halakhah (Jewish law). Since then, many formal opportunities have been created for women to study Jewish legal texts, so that I have sometimes wondered “what might have been.” Eventually, I pursued a second, extracurricular passion of my high school years – the study of art history. It became my profession. I was lucky enough, in the words of Robert Frost, “. . . to unite/ My avocation and my vocation/ As my two eyes make one in sight.”¹ This book brings together two of my most longstanding intellectual interests, and in that I am gratified.

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Over the years, I have asked questions of my son, Dr. Jordan I. Mann, of Professor Menahem Schmelzer and Rabbi Jerry Schwarzbard of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and of Professors Haym Soloveitchik of Yeshiva University, Avraham Mamann of the Hebrew University, and Walter Cahn and Ivan G. Marcus of Yale University. I thank all of them for giving of their time and knowledge. The comments of the two readers for the press were extremely helpful and I have incorporated nearly all of their suggestions into the text.

I cannot end these acknowledgments without thanking my children and those members of my family and close friends whose love and caring sustained me during a difficult period that coincided with the final stage of work on this book.

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NOTES TO THE READER

Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author. When a rabbinic text was translated by Eliezer Diamond, this is mentioned in the first footnote to the text. Notes to his translations were composed by Professor Diamond, except where followed by the initials of the author. In dealing with rabbinic texts, our aim was to achieve fluent translations, rather than strictly literal ones.

The Tanakh translation of the Jewish Publication Society was used for all biblical passages. Hebrew bibliographical titles were transliterated, as were names, unless the latter have common English equivalents.

Transliterations

The transliteration of Hebrew titles has been guided by the system used in Menachem Elon's *Jewish Law: History, Sources, and Principles*.¹ In all cases where the Hebrew title of a work translates as "Responsa of . . .," it is so listed. Other, more poetic titles are simply transliterated.

Rabbinic Texts

A few characteristics of rabbinic writings should be mentioned:

In discussing legal cases, the rabbis generally avoided naming the litigants, replacing their true names with pseudonyms such as Reuben and Simeon, which are the equivalent of John Doe in English.²

Publishers often assigned variant titles to a previously published text. The name of the book was sometimes used to refer to its author, for example, *Noda biYehudah* for Ezekiel Landau. Another common practice was for a sage to be given an acronym that was based on his initials, thus Radbaz for Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra. Sometimes the term Rabban is employed instead of Rabbi to signify a distinguished scholar.

Authors of responsa often ended their texts with poetic closings that expressed piety or modesty or indicated information of a personal nature. An example is Jair Ḥayyim Bacharach's signature "The preoccupied Jair."

Order of the Texts

The texts have been arranged in six chapters according to subject matter, and within each chapter by date, beginning with the earliest text. When no title was given to the text by its author, I have provided an appropriate title.

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