BOOK REVIEWS


This publication is another indisputable achievement of leading Israeli specialists in the field of investigating and describing Hebrew Manuscripts. It can also be regarded as a part to a larger project dealing with compilation of modern scholarly catalogues of Hebrew Manuscripts in major European libraries. The project is carried out according to a specific scheme: the staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem gives analytical descriptions to the manuscripts on the basis of existing microfilms, while the members of Hebrew Palaeography Project (in this case it is Prof. Malachi Beit-Arié in collaboration with Nurit Pasternak) elaborate codicological and palaeographical details on-site. The above mentioned scheme was used to compile and publish the catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts for the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma in 2001. The Vatikan collection has been described in the same way, too.

"Je ne sais pas de lecture plus facile, plus attrayante, plus douce que celle d’un catalogue”.

Anatole France, Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard

The collection of Hebrew Manuscripts in Vatican is well known to the researchers. Overwhelming majority of the materials belongs to Jewish scriptural tradition of the Middle Ages (9th (?) — 16th centuries). Content of the manuscripts is extremely diverse reflecting almost all directions in the development of Jewish scriptural culture. Midrash collections, Talmudic tractates, works on the Jewish exegesis, law of religion (Halakhah) and mysticism (Kabbalah) are of particular value.

The library is famous for its rarities such as a collection of early Midrash literature. Well known pieces include Midrash Sifra or Torah Kohanim dated late 9th — mid. 10th century (p. 46) by the authors of the catalogue, Sifra that was copied in Northern Italy in 1072/3 (pp. 20—21), a unique manuscript of Jerusalem Talmud dated late 13th early 14th century (pp. 95—96) and many other works. It should be noted that the authors of the catalogue consider the above mentioned Sifra manuscript “perhaps the earliest Hebrew codex extant” (p. 46).

The collection had already been put into scientific turnover through a series of lists, catalogues and publications. The first printed catalogue of the collection was published in Rome in 1756. It included the description of 512 Hebrew and two Samaritan manuscripts. Later on some catalogues, descriptions and annexes in Latin, Italian and Hebrew were published. Among them par-


2 The manuscript sine anno is dated with the help of indirect characteristics. Let us recall that the earliest dated Hebrew manuscript is kept in National Library of Russia: [Codex Babylonius] Latter Prophets, with Babylonian vocalization and Masorah. Parchment, 365×370×300 mm, 223 folios. Sine loco, August — September, 916. NLR: Evr I B3.


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