

THEME SECTION / SEZIONE MONOGRAFICA

From Cairo to Amsterdam

Hebrew Scrolls from the 11th to the 18th Centuries

Emma Abate and Justine Isserles

(eds.)

INTRODUCTION

EMMA ABATE, *IRHT - University of Bologna*

Until recently, research in Hebrew codicology (and voluminology) has not paid much attention to medieval and early modern Hebrew scrolls.¹ According to a commonly held opinion, after the late introduction of the codex in the Jewish world (around the 8th century),² the scroll, as a primordial book form, was relegated almost exclusively to manuscripts dedicated to liturgical service, holidays, weekly readings in the synagogue (*Sifre Torah*, *megillot Ester* etc.), prayers and ritual protection (*tefillin*, *mezuzot*). Their making was codified in rabbinical treatises (*Talmud Menahot*, *Massekhet Sefer Torah* and *Massekhet Soferim*), and later confirmed by the highly respected authority of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) in his *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah*.³ This way, the copy of the biblical consonantal text on the horizontal scroll parchment skin (*gevil*) was perpetuated according to a unique model.

Were other types of scrolls used in the Middle Ages? Has the technique of the manufacture of biblical scrolls ever changed from the middle ages to the present day? The work of Colette SIRAT and Ada YARDENI⁴ has been of great pioneering figure in the study of medieval biblical scrolls, and notably those from the Cairo Genizah. However, their fundamental surveys have remained isolated case studies for a long time. Only in the last few years, scholars of Hebrew codicology and palaeography have brought the scroll format to the center of their interests, thus triggering a true revolution in the research on Hebrew manuscripts.⁵

¹ The term “voluminology” has been notably applied so far to the study of the ancient scrolls and to scrolls discovered in the Judean Desert.

² See M. Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology: Historical and Comparative Typology of Hebrew Medieval Codices based on the Documentation of the Extant Dated Manuscripts Using a Quantitative Approach*, English version 0.3, pp. 39-48.

³ See M. Haran, “Bible scrolls in eastern and western Jewish communities from Qumran to the High Middle Ages,” *HUCA* 56 (1985), pp. 54-55.

⁴ See C. Sirat, in collaboration with M. Dukan and A. Yardeni, “Rouleaux de la Tora antérieurs à l’an mille,” *Compte rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, November-December 1994 [1995], pp. 861-887; A. Yardeni, “The letters sha’atnez gets and open and closed sections in a new fragment of Genesis from the Geniza,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division D* (vol. 1; Jerusalem: 1990), pp. 173-180.

⁵ See J.S. Penkower, “Fragments of six early Torah scrolls: open and closed sections, the layout of *Ha-azinu* and of the end of Deuteronomy,” in N. De Lange - J. Olszowy-Schlanger (eds.), *Manuscrits hébreux et arabes: Mélanges en l’honneur de Colette Sirat* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 39-61; J. Olszowy-Schlanger, “The Anatomy of Non-Biblical Scrolls from the Cairo Genizah,” in I. Wandrey (ed.), *Jewish Manuscript Cultures: New Perspectives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 49-88; M. Perani (ed.), *The Ancient Sefer Torah of Bologna*.

Our collective volume, *From Cairo to Amsterdam: Hebrew Scrolls from the 11th to the 18th Centuries*, takes advantage of this new trend. Indeed, it embraces a collection of essays specifically devoted to the study of Hebrew scrolls, their typology, contents, scripts and production, in the middle ages and in early modern times.⁶

This volume deals foremost with discoveries. Various specialists in Hebrew codicology, palaeography, and Jewish studies contributed to this achievement with their most recent investigations: by adopting an original viewpoint towards the analysis of various scroll typologies, the existence of which was previously almost unknown, they provide a cutting-edge contribution on Hebrew manuscript research. Some of the essays describe the characteristics of non-liturgical medieval scrolls, delving into their contents and palaeographical elements. This is for instance the case with Judith OLSZOWY-SCHLANGER (EPHE, Paris and Oxford), whose article focuses on a fragment of a horizontal scroll of *Derekh Erets Zuṭa*, and with Anna BUSA (EPHE, Paris), examining several *rotulus* fragments of *Pirqa de-Rabbenu ha-Qadosh*, uncovered among the findings of the Cairo Genizah. These exemplars, which palaeographic features date to the 11th-12th centuries, enclose haggadic, popular wisdom handbooks and rabbinic ethics, which were meant as useful *aide-memoire* for medieval education, teaching and preaching activities. Another study by Vered RAZIEL-KRETZMER (University of Haifa) explores lesser-known aspects of the manufacture of liturgical scrolls, which deviate from most canonical models. Notably, her research deals with the fragments of horizontal scrolls, brought to light by the Cairo Genizah's discoveries. They originally belonged to a *proto-siddur* (dating to the 11th-12th century), the traditions of which remain versatile when compared with the canonical later medieval *siddurim* (the prayer books for weekdays and sabbaths). As underscored by J. Olszowy-Schlanger, the writing materials of vertical scrolls, often made with reused papers or parchments, were likely the cheapest books in circulation until at least the 11th-12th centuries. They should therefore be counted as the most accessible books to a large part of North African Jewish readers.⁷

Features and History (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019); N. Gordon, "Blotting Out the Name: Scribal Methods of Erasing the Tetragrammaton in Medieval Hebrew Bible Manuscripts," Part 2, *Textus* 29/2 (2020), pp. 1-45; J. Hartnell (ed.), *Continuous Page: Scrolls and Scrolling from Papyrus to Hypertext* (London: the Courtauld Institute, 2021), see <https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/courtauld-books-online/continuouspage>. In recent years, several post-graduate researchers undertook projects on Biblical scrolls; among them see the work of Jen Taylor Friedman (EPHE, Paris), Mark Farnadi Jerusalmi (EPHE, Paris and Budapest University) and Mordechai Veintraub (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

⁶ Part of the contributions were presented in July 2018 in the "distinguished panel" *From Cairo to Amsterdam: Hebrew Scrolls from the 11th to the 18th Centuries*, organized by Emma Abate on the occasion of 11th Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, Crakow (15-19 July 2018), see <http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com/news/hebrew-manuscripts-at-the-11th-congress-of-the-eajs-28.htm> (accessed 24th June 2021) and the link to the online program www.eajs2018.uj.edu.pl/documents/139564314/139995511/Program_EAJS_digital+5+07.pdf/3e1a067f-057e-4b87-bb1c-a9422dc88b68 (accessed 24th June 2021).

⁷ See J. Olszowy-Schlanger, "Cheap Books in Medieval Egypt: Rotuli from the Cairo

Three essays deal with copies of *Sefer Torah* witnessing unique scribal devices and graphic peculiarities that subsequently disappeared. Roberta TONNARELLI (doctoral student at EPHE, Paris) gives in-depth analyses of a group of scroll fragments found in Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 74.17, which are considered as essential witnesses of the old Hebrew script of Italian type, most probably produced in the context of the rabbinical Apulian academies of the 11th century.⁸ Following, Mauro PERANI (University of Bologna) revisits the oldest complete extant copy of a *Sefer Torah* (12th-13th centuries), rediscovered at the University Library of Bologna (BUB, scroll 2) in 2012.⁹ Perani's investigation reveals the Bologna's *Sefer Torah* to be the unique witness of a tradition which was once identified only through indirect and fragmentary sources. The textual layout can easily be distinguished from the later Torah scrolls, and the shape of some letters is unusual, like the *pe* or the *tet* with the inner stroke rolled inwards (*lefufah*). The way of marking the *tagin* (the ornamental strokes or "crowns" above some Hebrew letters) is very peculiar as well, as they appear on different letters than those according to tradition, which are traced only on the seven *sha 'atnez gets* letters in Torah scrolls. Moreover, as regards the script, the Bologna Scroll is considered one of the most important witnesses of the earliest Sephardic square script.¹⁰

As for the Ashkenazi tradition, Mark FARNADI-JERUSÁLMÍ (EPHE, Paris and University of Budapest) carries out the analysis of scribal practices observed in one of the oldest scrolls of Ashkenazi origin, which also includes a peculiar use of crowns and modified letters. Held in a private collection in Berlin (MS Rhineland 1217, 13th century), this copy, formerly almost unknown, bears evidence of a scribal technique linked to the teachings of the French Tossafist school of Rabbenu Tam (Jacob ben Meir, 1100-1171). Both layouts in the Bologna and Berlin scrolls clearly display their exceptionality, as they demonstrate the presence of alternative graphic traditions preceding the statement of the Maimonidean rulings on the copy of *Sifre Torah*.

With the articles of Saverio CAMPANINI (University of Bologna) and J.H. CHAJES (University of Haifa), the focus shifts to kabbalistic manuscripts of early modern times. Campanini sheds light on the complex history of a com-

Genizah," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 4 (2016), pp. 82-101; Ead., "Reading in the Provinces: A Midrash on Rotulus from Damira, Its Materiality, Scribe, and Date," in Hartnell (ed.), *Continuous Page*, <https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/courtauld-books-online/continuous-page-scrolls-and-scrolling-from-papyrus-to-hypertext/2-reading-in-the-provinces-a-midrash-on-rotulus-from-damira-its-materiality-scribe-and-date-judith-olszowy-schlanger/> (accessed 14 September 2021).

⁸ On this topic, see M. Perani - A. Grazi, "La 'scuola' dei copisti ebrei pugliesi (Otranto?) del secolo XI. Nuove scoperte," *Materia Giudaica* 11 (2006), pp. 13-41. Roberta Tonnarelli's PhD in preparation is entirely dedicated to the analysis of the early Italian-Hebrew script typology.

⁹ M. Perani - G. Corazzol, "Nuovo catalogo dei manoscritti ebraici della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna," in B. Antonino - P. Moscatelli (eds.), *BUB, Ricerche e cataloghi sui Fondi della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna* (vol. 3; Argelato, BO: Minerva Edizioni, 2013), pp. 13-192.

¹⁰ See also J. Olszowy-Schlanger, "The Making of the Bologna Scroll. Palaeography and Scribal Traditions," in Perani, *The Ancient Sefer Torah of Bologna*, pp. 107-134.

mentary on *tagin* attributed to the enigmatic Abraham Pico (whose name is mentioned according to tradition, either as Abraham Pici or as Pico, Picol, Picks, Piques or even Pikes etc.). As discovered by Campanini, the work on the *tagin* is preserved in a single 15th-century manuscript (MS 1609) preserved at the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City, and which once belonged to the humanist and orientalist Agostino Giustiniani (1470-1536), who carried out the Latin translation of some passages from the Hebrew text.¹¹

In the 15th century, the first *ilanot* ("sefirotic trees") *rotuli* appear. They are vertical parchment scrolls of one or more sheets sewn together, merging diagrams of the world of the divine emanation (*sefirot*) with kabbalistic texts. It is to the description of this genre, that J.H. Chajes' research is devoted.¹² The dimensions of the scroll, the structure of the diagram, and the textualisation vary according to the time and place of production, as well as to the kabbalistic trend. The celestial landscape represented in the diagram often includes divine names, drawings of supernatural creatures, angels, zodiac signs, mythological animals, and objects from the Temple of Jerusalem. These artifacts were produced by the kabbalists themselves for the purpose of study, meditation, and even for ecstatic performances; however, some *ilanot* also have a talismanic and magical function. This last characteristic places *ilanot* closer to another genre of vertical parchment scrolls intrinsically connected with magic: that of the scroll amulet or *qame'a*.¹³ The layout of Hebrew amulets took shape in the middle ages and is still fairly widespread today. Instead of being engraved on *lamellae* and *ostraka* or inscribed in papyri as in ancient times, medieval scribes penned amulets for their customers on fairly narrow pieces of vertical parchment or paper scrolls.¹⁴ These are often made up of a single sheet that was to be rolled up, and inserted into a small box, in order to be placed in direct and symbiotic contact with the human body. The amulets texts are a compound of divine and angelic names, biblical verses, Hebrew or Aramaic formulas taken from prayers, mysticism or *halakhah*.¹⁵ The article of Emma ABATE is specifically devoted to this category of scrolls, by means of the edition of three early modern exemplars, held in the

¹¹ S. Campanini, "A Neglected Source concerning Asher Lemlein and Paride da Ceresara: Agostino Giustiniani," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 2/1 (2008), pp. 89-110.

¹² See the recent essay J.H. Chajes, "The Kabbalistic Tree," in M. Kupfer - A. Cohen - J. H. Chajes, *The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp. 449-473 and the site of the *Ilanot* project http://ilanot.haifa.ac.il/site/?page_id=37 (accessed 29.06.2021). See also E. Abate - J. H. Chajes, "Ilanot," in E. Schrijver (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jewish Book Cultures* (forthcoming).

¹³ See T. Schrire, "Amulet," in Roth - Wigoder (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 26 vols. (vol. 11; Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House and Mac Millan Company, 1971-1994), cols. 906-915.

¹⁴ See G. Bohak, "The Magical Rotuli from the Cairo Genizah," in G. Bohak -Y. Harari - S. Shaked (eds.), *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 321-340; B. Rebiger, "'Write on Three Ribs of a Sheep': Writing Materials in Ancient and Mediaeval Jewish Magic," in I. Wandrey (ed.), *Jewish Manuscript Culture* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 339-359.

¹⁵ E. Abate, *Sigillare il mondo. Amuleti e ricette dalla Genizah* (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2015), pp. 7-67.

Bibliothèque nationale de France (MSS héb. 1415/39 and héb. 1415/40), and in the Parisian collection of Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ, Inv. 2002.01.0208). In her commentary, Abate directs a special attention to the bodily imaginary inherent in Jewish amulets, intended to convey their apotropaic and protective efficacy to their owners' body.

To conclude in style, a decorative cycle enriching a group of modern Esther scrolls, produced in 17th-century Europe, is the focus of Justine ISSERLES (EPHE-SAPRAT, Paris). Her essay deals with Esther scrolls engraved by the famous Jewish Italian artist and engraver Shalom ben Mordechai Italia (ca. 1619-1664), whose activity was mostly carried out in Amsterdam. After an overview of various surviving decorated scrolls attributed to this artist, aspects of his engraving technique and iconographic program (influenced by the Renaissance and Baroque art) are highlighted. Isserles analyses in particular six surviving Esther scrolls engraved with the symbolic motif of the "lion, lamb and bear," providing a detailed description of the exemplar held in the University Library of Geneva (MS heb. 4),¹⁶ and comparing it with the five other extant scrolls bearing this motif.

To sum up, the scrolls examined in this volume ultimately reflect the heterogeneity of scribal traditions. As such, the essays are complementary. This collective volume displays the (horizontal or vertical) scroll medium as a starting point for the exploration of lesser-known texts, scribal workshops, and customs. Thus, preconceptions are unraveled, such as the idea of the scroll confined to an immutable ritual book form, as opposed to the codex, the book for studying and reading. Although the codex slowly becomes predominant in Jewish reading practices, the manufacture of scrolls, and their manifold uses are adaptable to new cultural environments and functions, remaining crucial in Judaism until modern times.

¹⁶ See J. Isserles, *Catalogue des manuscrits hébreux de la Bibliothèque de Genève, notices et commentaires* (Geneva: revised 2nd edition, 2021), <https://archives.bge-geneve.ch/ark:/17786/vta3485ae1cf4b675b6> (accessed 29.06.2021)