Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies
An Introduction

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Chapter 4. Cataloguing

Karaite born in Lutsk. The manuscripts were subsequently sold by Firkovitch’s family to the Imperial Public Library in St Petersburg (now the Russian National Library). Abraham Firkovitch actually acquired manuscripts from a number of sources during his trip to the Middle East, but the vast bulk of what became to be known as the Second Firkovitch Collection apparently came from the *geniza* of the Karaite Synagogue in Old Cairo. Firkovitch collected the manuscripts of his first collection (also sold to the Imperial Library) during an earlier trip through the Caucasus and Crimea (on the formation of Firkovitch’s collections, see Elkin – Shapira 2003). The Firkovitch Collections have been divided by the Russian National Library into several sections (a brief description of the divisions of the collection may be found in Sklare 2003, 895, 905-908). The largest part of the collection is that of the sections containing Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic materials, having nearly 10,000 shelfmarks. This is by far the largest gathering of Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts, mostly from the tenth to fifteenth centuries. This collection is extremely important as most of the works contained in its manuscripts are unknown (or nearly unknown) to scholarship. A considerable number are *unica*. From the Stalin period until glasnost, these collections were virtually *terra incognita*, closed to western scholars, until they, too, were microfilmed and made available in Jerusalem. The daunting but essential task of cataloguing this collection was taken up by a team of researchers of the Center for the Study of Judaeo-Arabic Culture and Literature, a unit of the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East in Jerusalem. The cataloguing records of this team are entered into both the ALEPH database of the IMHM and the Friedberg Genizah Project database. Up to the present, approximately 3,500 manuscripts have been catalogued.

The final digital cataloguing project to be described is concerned with what has been called the ‘European Genizah’. In the mediaeval period and the renaissance, folia taken from early European Hebrew manuscripts were used for binding notarial files and were also glued together to make a kind of ‘cardboard’ used in book bindings. Projects have been set up in a number of countries to recover these fragments. And indeed, thousands of such manuscripts have been identified in various libraries and collections in Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. For many years, the national projects worked more or less independently of one another, some establishing their own databases or inventories, while others are in a less advanced stage. A network called ‘Books within Books’ (<http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com>) was established in 2007 in order to bring together all of the separate initiatives concerned with the ‘European Genizah’. Among its activities, this network is setting up an online database which will be accessible to registered users. The network is coordinated by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne.

We have thus gone from the beginnings of the cataloguing of Hebrew-character manuscripts in the eleventh century to the new possibilities of cataloguing made available to us in the twenty-first century. And all of this is but an aid to help us understand the remnants left to us of the cultural world of people writing in Hebrew characters in the tenth, or perhaps fifteenth, centuries.

References


2.7.1 Types of catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts (JdB–MTO)

It is well known that it was in the early 1950s that the foundations of modern codicology were laid and the range of the discipline defined. Alphonse Dain (1896–1964), who first coined the term ‘codicology’ in 1944, intended it to include the history of manuscripts and manuscript collections, research on their current locations, problems of cataloguing, the coverage of catalogues, the trading of manuscripts and their use, but not the study of the material production of the book, which together with analysis of the script belonged more properly, in his view, to the field of palaeography. Reaction to this position was expressed by the Belgian François Masai (1909–1979), founder in 1946 of the journal *Scriptorium*, who
in two articles in that same journal (Masai 1950, 1956) called for a separation between ‘paléographie’ and ‘codicologie’, saying that the former should concern itself with the study of script on any writing surface, and independently of it, whereas the latter should focus on analysis of the material production of the manuscript, establishing a sort of archaeological study of the book (Masai 1950, 293). This perception led to the establishment of two views on the range of codicological work: one which understands the discipline in its most restrictive sense, as limited to archaeological study of the book in order to describe the techniques of production of the book as an artefact, and another broader view which does not content itself with such description but also gives itself the mission of interpreting the data both on the production and use of the object and on the copying and transmission of the text (Muzerelle 1991, 350 refers to these two views as ‘codicologie stricto sensu’ and ‘codicologie au sens large.’).

In the studies which applied the broader view of codicology, the establishment of a chronology and a typology in the production of the mediaeval book became fundamental. This led to the emergence of several projects designed to catalogue dated manuscripts, since they ensure the dating of physical features of the codex and make it possible to establish the chronology of the evolution of production techniques of the mediaeval book, which is essential to the dating of codices lacking a colophon. As early as 1953, the Comité international de paléographie oversaw a project to catalogue all the Latin manuscripts in the world, providing information on the date, place and/or scribe. Following this model of the study of dated manuscripts, two figures emerged within the field of mediaeval Jewish history who were to influence the development of Hebrew codicology and palaeography until the present day: Colette Sirat and Malachi Beit-Arié. 1965 saw the creation of the Comité de paléographie hébraïque—فلسفلة فلسطينية— midfield the participation of the Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes of the CNRS, the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and the Jewish National and University Library (today the National Library of Israel). The first volume of Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques portant des indications de date jusqu’à 1540—אוסף כתבי ימי ממאה וארבעים שנה (Sirat et al. 1972; Beit-Arié et al. 1979; Sirat – Beit-Arié 1986), appeared in 1972, and the idea was that each entry would occupy one or several loose-leaved sheets, so that the reader could organize the descriptions in accordance with her or his needs, following either a chronological criterion (the first volume covered the period from 1207 to 1528), or a geographical or thematic one. Despite these possibilities, the final intention of the authors was to present the manuscripts in the chronological order in which they had been copied, for it is the only criterion by which to establish the development of the typologies of production of the manuscript Hebrew book throughout the Middle Ages. The numbering of the entries reveals the chronological criterion behind the concept of the catalogue of dated manuscripts. The description of the oldest manuscript in the first volume (Paris, BnF, Hébreu 82; copied in 1207) is given the number I,1, the Roman numeral standing for the number of the catalogue volume. The most recent (Jerusalem, Schocken Institute, 13869) is number I, 179.

The publication of the third volume of Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques in 1986 coincided with a period in which so-called quantitative codicology had already taken its first steps. This was a new methodological approach nourished indirectly by post-structuralist theories of the text which benefitted from the new computer tools developed in the early 1980s. The publication in 1980 of Pour une histoire du livre manuscrit au Moyen Âge. Trois essais de codicologie quantitative (Bozzolo – Ornato 1980) represented a sort of manifesto of the new approach, not only because it was the first time that the word ‘quantitative’ had appeared in association with codicology, but because of the methodological approaches it proposed, which were opposed to an understanding of the mediaeval book as an object of cultural analysis. According to these new approaches, the aim was not to analyze an object and understand its function in relation to its material, intellectual and cultural context. The key was to define the material elements which could be unequivocally described in order to study them in large groups or entire ‘populations’ of manuscripts from a particular period and area, and be able to understand their use, application and evolution (Derolez 1988, 5, explains: ‘Which aspects can a catalogue deal with? Since the aim is to compare many manuscripts, only those facts which lend themselves to a rapid and unequivocal description’ (our translation and italics)).

Within the framework of the research carried out by the Comité de paléographie hébraïque and before the third volume of Manuscrits médiévaux en caractères hébraïques even came out, Beit-Arié published the first manual ever to be entirely devoted to Hebrew codicology (Beit-Arié 1977). The book had a clearly quantitative methodology aimed at tracing the most important tendencies in the production of mediaeval Hebrew manuscripts, following geo-cultural criteria and, as far as possible, using a chronological
perspective (Beit-Arié 1977, 12–13 mentions even at this early date that the working process includes the recording of information on computer tapes for its subsequent analysis). Commenting on the quantitative approach, Colette Sirat, who has admirably analysed and interpreted Hebrew manuscript culture in the Middle Ages (Sirat 2002), has highlighted just how little attention has been paid by quantitative codicology to the text and the individuality of manuscripts. She defends the idea of the specificity of each manuscript as an historical artefact subject to cultural analysis. In her opinion, the ‘population’ of manuscripts examined by quantitative codicology has to be representative of total production, and her view is that this does not occur in the domain of Hebrew manuscripts since the vast majority of surviving codices were written between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, with very few examples from before 1200. She also stresses the fact that quantitative codicology occasionally forgets that the manuscript is fundamentally a bearer of text. For Sirat, textual production and transmission cannot be separated from the production and transmission of the physical book, and we cannot therefore omit to highlight and value all the features relating to these processes in each manuscript individually.

This is best exemplified in the ongoing cataloguing project of the Hebrew manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, coordinated by Sirat (the volumes of this catalogue are appearing in the series published by Brepols entitled Manuscrits en caractères hébreux conservés dans les bibliothèques de France: Catalogues, as a joint initiative carried out by the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Institut de recherche et d’histoire des texts, CNRS). The importance of the material characteristics of the individual manuscript lies at the heart of this catalogue. Each of the entries in the catalogue is made up of three parts which reflect the three areas of description of interest in an approach in which the manuscript is analysed as a cultural artefact: first, a physical description of the codex, based on the composition and structure of the quires; second, a description of the content, with a mention of any added material or later interventions; and third, a section dedicated to the history of the codex containing a reconstruction of the use and transmission of the object (and, therefore, of the text which it transmits) based on the colophon and any later annotations, as well as signs of use and ordering to be found within the manuscript (five volumes came out so far: Bobichon 2008, Di Donato 2011, Del Barco 2011, Bobichon 2014, Ciucu 2014).

Extensive codicological descriptions, with the identification of the production area and the type of script, differentiation of hands and of the codicological strata in relation to the texts, in addition to dating based on the documentation of the dated manuscripts, are provided by the recent catalogues of Oxford (Beit-Arié – May 1994), the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma (Richler – Beit-Arié 2001), and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Richler et al. 2008).

The manuscripts catalogued in the previous examples belong to a single library. However, various cataloguing projects since the beginnings of codicology as a discipline in the 1950s have been guided by different selection criteria. These ‘special’ catalogues follow one or several criteria such as the type of manuscript (catalogues of decorated and illuminated manuscripts), thematic criteria (catalogues of biblical codices), special situations (auction catalogues), geographical criteria (by region or country of production or by location) and chronological criteria. As far as the chronological criterion is concerned, in addition to the development of various tools focusing on a particular aspect of production (for instance, ruling or watermarks, cf. Dukan 1988 and Zerdoun Bat-Yehouda 1997) a new catalogue of dated Hebrew manuscripts has seen the light, entitled Codices hebraicis litteris exarati quo tempore scripti fuerint exibentes—אוצר המanuscripts המורים חכמים י במקרא תרבות אוצר המנים (Beit-Arié et al. 1997; Glatzer et al. 1997; Sirat et al. 2002; Beit-Arié et al. 2006). This work complements the one published between 1972 and 1986 and focuses on the immediately previous period, from the start of the Middle Ages until 1280. The need to produce this new catalogue arose when foreign researchers gained access to the Russian collections of Hebrew manuscripts after the fall of the Soviet regime, a development which had a truly revolutionary effect on the study of mediaeval Hebrew manuscript culture. Indeed, most of the earliest codices which appear in the first three volumes of this work are from the collection of the Russian National Library in St Petersburg. The first volume was published in 1997, and the four which have so far appeared cover all the extant dated Hebrew manuscripts until 1200.

Concerning the geographical criteria, Javier del Barco’s catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts in the Region of Madrid is an example of a catalogue gathering different collections in one particular region (Del Barco 2003–2006). Judith Olszowy-Schlanger’s pioneering work Les manuscrits hébreux dans l’Angleterre médiévale: étude historique et paléographique (Olszowy-Schlanger 2003) focuses on the production of Hebrew manuscripts in one specific geographical region, and admirably combines the presentation of
manuscript descriptions in an appendix with the study and interpretation of the data which constitute the work’s main contribution. Indeed, the geographical distribution of manuscript production is a key aspect to bear in mind when seeking to understand Hebrew manuscripts. Jews played an active role in all the processes of cultural contact and exchange in different areas across Europe and around the Mediterranean, and the objects they produced, especially manuscripts, are hybrid products which participated in the artistic and technical trends in these areas. Therefore, a comparative view of Hebrew manuscripts in relation with Latin (and Romance), Greek and Arabic manuscript production has increasingly been adopted since the mid-1970s, and has offered very promising results, both in the field of codicology and in that of palaeography. In the latter, Beit-Arié has shown that cursive and semi-cursive Hebrew scripts were developed in the different cultural areas by reference to the script used by the surrounding host culture (Beit-Arié 1993). The use of the comparative method in Hebrew manuscript culture has led codicologists working on western codices to compare production techniques of Latin, Greek, Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts in order to explore which elements might constitute a ‘universal grammar of the codex’, and to identify the structural elements common to most artisanal traditions (Maniaci 2002a, 25).

References

2.8. Catalogues of Persian manuscripts (IP)
Persian manuscripts were produced from the tenth century to the early twentieth century. The number of surviving manuscripts is not known. According to Mahmoud Omidsalar, there are one million Persian manuscripts in various private and public collections in the Middle East and India (Omidsalar 2004). The World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts published in 1992–1994 provides information on numbers of Persian manuscripts in various libraries and private collections worldwide. The information provided is not exact and serves only as an indication, but it does suggest that Omidsalar’s one million is somewhat too generous a figure; c. 500,000–600,000 might be closer to the mark.

The cataloguing of Persian manuscripts in European libraries began in the middle of the nineteenth century. Among the major holdings to be catalogued were the Persian manuscripts in the British Museum. The collection consisted of 2,536 manuscripts that were described by Charles Rieu in a three-volume catalogue printed in 1879–1883. About a decade later (1895), Rieu published a supplement volume describing a further 425 Persian manuscripts acquired by the British Museum since 1883. Rieu’s catalogue is a good example of the classical standard of Persian catalogues providing detailed information on the contents of the manuscripts. The codicological information is sparse, consisting of the number of folia, size of the codex, number of lines to page, the size of text area, the name of the calligraphic style used by the scribe, and, finally, the copy date. Details of the paper and the binding are not given but decorations are briefly mentioned.

The focus of the catalogue is clearly on the correct identification of the texts and the description of their content. In addition, Rieu exerted himself to give detailed information on the authors, and, according to Rieu himself, the aim of the catalogue was not only to function as a guide to the collection but also to serve as ‘a useful book of reference to the student of Persian literature’ (Rieu 1879–1883, III, xxvii). Bibliographical reference works on Persian literature were not yet available in Rieu’s time and it was not before the early twentieth century that Charles Ambrose Storey (1888–1968) began to work on his life-work Persian Literature, A Bio-bibliographical Survey (Storey 1927–1958, 1971–1977). Storey’s model was Carl Brockelmann’s Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur that had been published in 1899–1902 but where Brockelmann had an edited version of Haqiq Halifa’s (1609–1657 CE) bibliographic lexicon Kašf al-zunūn at his disposal as a major source. Storey had to glean the required information from published manuscript and book catalogues of uneven quality. Storey did not complete his arduous task, and even though the continuation of his work commenced by François de Blois in the early 1990s resulted in the publication of volume 5, the whole work still remains incomplete (Bregel 2005).

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