

COLETTE SIRAT, edited and translated by Nicholas de Lange, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002. 349 pp. £65.00. ISBN 0521770793.

C. Sirat's *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages* is a long-awaited English introduction to the study of Medieval manuscripts in Hebrew script. The book is a much enlarged and updated version of two previous publications of the same author: *From Writing to Book: A Glimpse into the World of Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts*, published in Hebrew, in Jerusalem, as an introductory textbook, and the French *Du scribe au livre*, published in Paris in 1994. The present version, translated from the French and competently edited by Nicholas de Lange, differs in scope from these previous publications. It contains not only an introduction to various aspects of Hebrew book production, but also a large section devoted to the history of texts and their manuscript transmission.

Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages opens with a methodological introduction dealing with such issues as the number of manuscripts produced and preserved, the relationship between printed and manuscript books, the relationship between books and the texts they contain, and some considerations of general Hebrew literacy in the Middle Ages. This introduction is followed by four major parts. Part One deals with texts. After a brief presentation of Jewish texts produced prior to the ninth century CE, the author proposes a general survey of texts copied or written during the Middle Ages according to several categories: Bible, legal literature, liturgy, secular literature, mysticism and kabbalah, philosophy and science, and miscellaneous writings. Part Two, the largest portion of the book, constitutes an introduction to Hebrew codicology and palaeography. Under separate subheadings, the codicology section focuses on book materials and their production (papyrus, parchment, paper), ink and its various recipes, writing instruments, different formats, shapes and sizes of books, ways of composing quires and uniting them to form a book, with page lay-out and preparation of the page for writing, techniques, aesthetic models and instruments used to trace the ruling—lines to guide the writing and assure its regularity. The palaeography section deals with the typology of Hebrew scripts according to geocultural areas and the techniques used by the scribes, and also with the scribe's body position and hand-movements during writing, as well as with various graphic details which reveal the individuality of each scribe. Part Three follows the history of manuscripts: 'their life and death', to use C. Sirat's metaphor, their vicissitudes from the moment they leave the hands of the scribe, through their various uses and owners up to their storage in a genizah (repository) or their destruction or, in more fortunate cases, their modern re-discoveries, preservation in libraries or archives. Part Four contains the sample analysis of several selected manuscripts. This all-encompassing approach to Hebrew manuscripts is illustrated throughout a range of examples gleaned by the author in various libraries and collections, and by over 160 black-and-white reproductions of original manuscripts. A good choice of bibliographical references and indexes concludes the volume.

This introduction to Hebrew codicology and palaeography is based on an intimate knowledge of the manuscripts by the author, the acknowledged founder of the discipline of Hebrew palaeography. In her introduction to the book, Colette Sirat says: 'Having spent more than 40 years of my life in the company of medieval manuscripts written in Hebrew characters, I feel I know them a little: I can speak to them, and they answer me. It is about this friendship that I wish to write.' Indeed, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages* is not a catalogue or a minute typological compendium of Hebrew manuscripts, but rather a mature and thoroughly researched account of the unique cultural and intellectual enterprise of manuscript making, illustrated by highly rele-

vant and striking examples of individual books and scribes from different periods and parts of the Medieval world.

A more controversial part of the book is undoubtedly the section concerning the texts. It surveys all main branches of Jewish literature in a way that is, by necessity, sometimes superficial and based on secondary sources, and, in a few cases (namely in the section on philology), not entirely devoid of some minor inaccuracies. Despite this, however, this section on textual history is highly relevant: it deals with the important issue of the relationship between texts and the physical form in which they are produced and transmitted. Colette Sirat makes her point very clearly: there is a link between the book as a physical object and the texts it carries. Put otherwise, the choice of the shape, script, page layout etc. for a particular text is not random. All those who study Hebrew texts would benefit greatly if they did it in the close context of the books through which these texts have been transmitted.

Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages is an important, full and fascinating introduction to the study of Hebrew book-making in the Middle Ages, and it can be recommended to students, scholars and all those interested in Hebrew manuscripts, as well as in Jewish literature and intellectual history in general.

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EPHRAIM KANARFOGEL, *'Peering Through the Lattices': Mystical Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2000. 274 pp. £13.56. ISBN 0-8143-2531-9.

This fascinating survey reveals new dimensions in the thought of the tosafists. The tosafists flourished mainly in northern France and Germany during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and, according to the dominant view in modern scholarship, they concentrated on the Talmud and the legal and rabbinic literature surrounding it and were not concerned either with pietism or with broader theological questions. In contrast to the accepted view, Kanarfogel presents a wealth of evidence drawn from manuscripts and published material to demonstrate that many of the tosafists enjoyed a wider range of interests that included mystical and magic teachings.

The first two chapters of this book are devoted to a survey of the ascetic practices of the tosafists. One of the premises on which this study is based is the link between asceticism and mysticism. Kanarfogel notes the significant role played by ascetic practices in the *Heichalot* literature and in cabalistic circles in Provence, Gerona and Safed (p. 125), as well as among the German Pietists themselves. He also draws support from the view expressed by Ivan Marcus¹ that the ultimate aim of personal pietism is the preparation of the individual for mystical experience. On this basis Kanarfogel pursues the correlation between the tosafists who practised pietism and those who were interested in magic and mysticism, adducing manuscript and published evidence to show how far interest arises in the same circles. From his description of their ascetic practices and legal rulings, we glimpse a finely drawn mini-portrait of these personalities and their religious outlook. While Kanarfogel does establish a large measure of convergence, however, it would be surprising to find that the radical religious experience that expresses, by renunciation and fasting, a sense of separateness based on closeness to the divine was restricted to those figures that were influenced by the German Pietists.

¹ Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Brill, Leiden, 1981).