

Not Wanderers but Faithful Companions

A Brief Overview on the Hebrew Incunabula Held in Italian Libraries

Marco Bertagna

15cHEBRAICA, University of Oxford, UK

Abstract The late 15th century became a time of dramatic changes in the Hebrew book-making as well. The Hebraica team of the 15cBOOKTRADE project prepared a thorough description of the extant copies of the Hebrew incunabula kept in the libraries of Europe and Israel. Notes of ownership, deeds of sale, personal remarks, institutional stamps, signatures of censors – all of them provide a rich picture of the distribution and use of Hebrew printed books throughout Europe (and also their ways from Europe to North Africa and the Middle East). Among a few hundreds of the checked volumes some were printed in Italy and remained there all the centuries since then; others were printed in Portugal and soon made their way to the Ottoman lands and from there to Yemen or Persia. Although the survey is not complete yet, since some important collections such as Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana still need to be included in the MEI database, the main results can enrich our knowledge on certain rabbis and scholars or provide interesting evidence of communal life, literacy, trade, the role of women and of the books in private possession.

Keywords Hebrew incunabula. Provenance research. Book trade. Libraries. Book-making.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 A Quantitative and Thematic Overview. – 3 The Owners. – 3.1 Some Notable Cases. – 3.2 Jewish Collectors and Professions. – 3.3 Women as Owners. – 3.4 Prices. – 3.5 Censorship. – 4 Conclusions.



1 Introduction

In the culturally tumultuous 15th century, in addition to printing in Latin characters and in many ways strictly connected with and influenced by it, Hebrew printing with movable types also emerged.¹ This took place in Italy at the beginning of the 1570s,² only a few years after the first Latin book had been printed in the Italian peninsula³ and just two decades after Gutenberg's Bible. Several Hebrew printers rapidly appeared in Italy, Portugal, Spain (and also Constantinople) and threw themselves enthusiastically into the new art.

My research for the 15cBOOKTRADE project has focused on Hebrew incunabula held in Italian libraries. It was exciting for me to work close to the cities or villages in which these beautiful books had been produced so long ago. However, since these incunabula were mostly printed in Italy, were purchased and used in local Italian communities and are nowadays still held in Italian libraries, my survey is perhaps less expansive when compared to the study of other collections, from the perspective of the journeys the books underwent after they came off the printing press. This is partly due to the fact that they came into the possession of the institutions that possess them now at a relatively early stage of their history, and for many of them no relocation or displacement has taken place in the last two centuries. Nevertheless, this does not diminish their interest: I have come across great collectors exchanging books; books that circulated within the community and its members; incunabula that were confiscated and then given back to their former libraries.⁴ The most striking aspect of the books, however, is the great number of notes we can still find and read in these volumes. In fact, we can find not only ownership inscriptions but also very personal annota-

1 For a general overview, cf. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books*, chapters I-IV; more detailed works are Friedberg, *History of Hebrew Typography* and the articles written by Peretz Tishby for the journals *Kiryat Sefer* and *Ohev Sefer*.

2 The first book in Hebrew types carrying a colophon appeared in Reggio Calabria, Southern Italy, on 26 February 1475 (the original Hebrew date in the colophon: 10 Adar 5235): it was Rashi's commentary on Torah and was printed by Abraham ben Garton for the local Jewish community of rich silk merchants (Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books*, 24): Solomon ben Isaac [or Rashi], *Perush ha-Torah*. Reggio Calabria: Abraham ben Garton, 17 Feb. 1475. Folio. GW M41207; ISTC is00625180; MEI 02125619.

3 Lactantius, *De divinis institutionibus*, printed on October 29 in Subiaco by Sweeney and Pannartz, the two monks who first brought the new technology to Italy.

4 This is the case of the copy of Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, held in Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, shelfmark: ms 2472; Moses Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*. [Italy: Printer of the Moreh Hanevukhim, about 1473-75]. 4°. GW M2004010; ISTC im00079800; MEI 0212996; this incunabulum was confiscated by Napoleon in 1796, sent to Paris and then kept there until 1815. With the fall of Napoleon, it was returned to the library of the Canonici Regolari Lateranensi del SS. Salvatore (Bologna), to whom it had belonged before 1796. Cf. Miani, "I manoscritti della Biblioteca del SS. Salvatore", 396.

tions (notes about family members or other books possessed), sales contracts, Jewish self-censorship and so on. The real value of these copies, therefore, lies not so much in the movements they have undergone but in the variety of notes and information that we can still find and extract from them.

2 A Quantitative and Thematic Overview

In order to offer an overview of my work, it will be useful to provide some figures: the incunabula I catalogued amounted to 231, and they are held in 13 Italian libraries [tab. 1].

Table 1 Libraries and incunables checked*

Parma - Biblioteca Palatina	88
Piacenza - Biblioteca Comunale Passerini-Landi	31
Torino - Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria	29
Roma - Biblioteca Casanatense	24
Firenze - Biblioteca Nazionale	11
Napoli - Biblioteca Nazionale "Vittorio Emanuele III"	11
Firenze - Biblioteca Laurenziana	10
Milano - Biblioteca Ambrosiana	8
Modena - Biblioteca Estense	8
Bologna - Biblioteca Universitaria	5
Bologna - Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio	2
Ferrara - Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea	2
Milano - Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense	2

* In two cases – Biblioteca Palatina (Parma) and Biblioteca Universitaria (Bologna) – the numbers provided in this table do not represent the actual number of Hebrew incunabula the two libraries hold: in fact, 3 incunabula of the Biblioteca Palatina and 1 of the Biblioteca Universitaria are still to be catalogued in MEI.

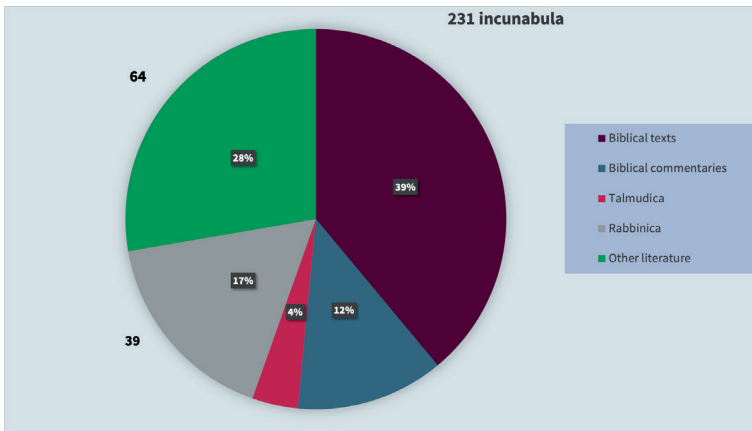


Figure 1 Chart of the distribution of incunabula by content

The largest Italian collection of those I visited is the one kept in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma: we calculated that circa 91 copies are held here.⁵ The figure is approximate since fragmentary sheets are also included in the total, though it is not always clear whether they belonged to incunabula or to later editions. The size of the collection is due to the greatest Italian collector of Hebrew incunabula, the renowned scholar and professor of Semitic languages Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742-1831),⁶ who is responsible also for the second largest Italian collection,⁷ held in Biblioteca Comunale Passerini-Landi, Piacenza. In fact, all but one of the 31 incunabula held in Piacenza had originally been donated by De Rossi to the bibliophile

⁵ Of the 91 incunabula surveyed by Tamani (“Inventario degli incunaboli ebraici della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma”), I have catalogued, up to the present, 88 copies, meaning 3 remain to be inserted in MEI. It should be pointed out, however, for the sake of completeness, that among the books listed by Tamani, some are missing (probably stolen before the 1974 inventory), while others, as mentioned, are probably post-1500 editions.

⁶ There is an impressive bibliography on De Rossi; here, for convenience, it is sufficient to refer to the entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, in its online version: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/de-rossi-giovanni-bernardo_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (2019-11-07).

⁷ Strictly speaking, if we consider only the libraries in the territory of the Italian State, the statement is correct. But if we take into account also other libraries within the confines of the Italian peninsula, we should mention the Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome, which had still to be included in my research: given its 67 incunabula, the Biblioteca Vaticana should be listed as the second most significant library.

Ferdinando Landi (1778-1853),⁸ who then bequeathed all his books to the town's public library.⁹

In terms of the typology of the 231 incunabula, they can be divided on the basis of their content [fig. 1]:

- 119 incunabula are (or are about) Biblical texts: they contain either the whole Bible or specific Biblical books. Among the latter, 45 present the text along with commentaries (such as those of Rashi, Levi ben Gershon, David Kimhi) and 29 consist only of commentaries on parts or books of the Bible;
- 39 incunabula represent what Offenberg calls "Rabbinica",¹⁰ that is to say books on laws, precepts, codifications, such as Jacob ben Asher's *Arba'a Turim* (Four Orders of the Code of Law), Moses de Coucy's *Sefer mizvot gadol* (Great Book of Precepts), Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (The Repetition of the Torah).

Nine books contain Talmudic texts or treatises. Although Offenberg includes the Talmudic books within the "Rabbinica" group, I prefer to consider them as a separate section so as to give a better overview of the order of the incunabula according to the main traditional Jewish fields.

Finally, 64 are incunabula dealing with "other literature" (again following Offenberg's definition).¹¹ Here we have books on liturgy (*mahzor*, *siddur*, that is to say prayer books), medicine (Avicenna's *Canon*), mathematics (the astronomical tables of Mordecai Finzi), linguistics - for example Kimhi's dictionary *Sefer ha-Shorashim* (Book of Roots) or the 'Arukh ([Book] Arranged, the Talmudic dictionary composed by Nathan ben Jehiel), philosophy (Maimonides' *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, Guide for the Perplexed), literature (for instance, the poetical compositions of Immanuel ben Solomon in his *Sefer ha-Mahbarot*, Book of Poems), history (*Sefer Josippon*, Book of Joseph).¹²

In the light of this brief summary, it is easy to see that books related to the Bible (Bibles, Biblical books, commentaries on parts of the Bible) survive in the highest number, more than half the total amount. Offenberg suggests that (at least some) Biblical books "were soon acquired by Christian Hebraists and therefore stood a better chance of

⁸ Cf. [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ferdinando-landi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ferdinando-landi_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

⁹ Cf. the catalogue written, once again, by Giuliano Tamani ("Inventario degli incunabuli ebraici della Biblioteca Comunale di Piacenza").

¹⁰ Offenberg, *Hebrew Incunabula*, XXVIII. Adriaan K. Offenberg has studied extensively the distribution of Hebrew incunabula in world libraries; his work, alongside ISTC, remains a fundamental reference and an invaluable tool for every scholar in this field.

¹¹ Offenberg, *Hebrew Incunabula*, XXVIII.

¹² Josephus Flavius was erroneously considered to be the author of this pseudohistorical work.

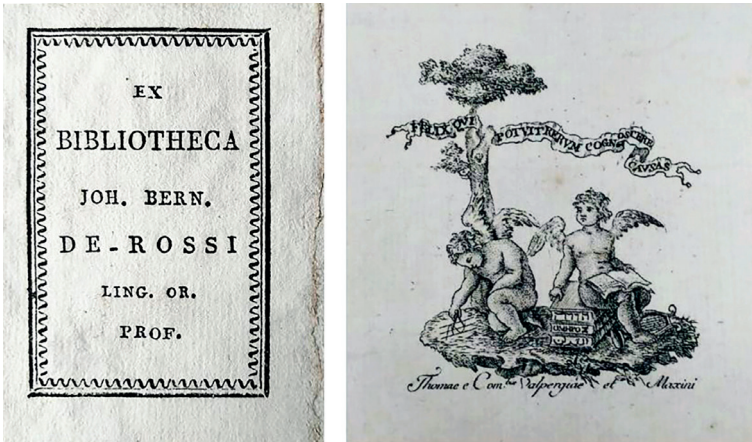


Figure 2 Ex-libris of De Rossi (left) and Valperga di Caluso (right)

surviving”.¹³ Other reasons include the printing of certain editions in a larger number of copies; the natural wear and tear of the most widely used books that the less used were spared; religious persecutions that affected some categories more than others (for instance, Talmudic books suffered severe censorship or were sadly burnt in the 16th century); or even the care that was taken of them because of their high reputation.¹⁴ Finally, it may just have been a matter of taste or the habit of the owners that helped to preserve some books.

And so we come to the central question: who are the owners?

3 The Owners

First of all, we can make a rough division between Jewish and Christian owners. In the incunabula I checked, Christian owners seldom appear before the seventeenth century. On the other hand, Jewish owners are not usually present in the last phases of their history. Based on this observation, we can maintain that Hebrew incunabula circulated among Jews in the earliest centuries of their existence and, after that, for reasons that are still unclear (perhaps because the exacerbation of censorship on Hebrew books made circumstances more difficult for Jewish collectors), there is a prevalence of Chris-

¹³ Offenberg, *Hebrew Incunabula*, XXVII.

¹⁴ See, again, Offenberg, *Hebrew Incunabula*, XXVII.

tian owners. Unfortunately, no traces or documents – sale deeds, donations, requisitions and so on – have survived to shed any light on the crucial transition from Jewish to Christian hands.

As for the Christian – or non-Jewish – owners, renowned names (or indeed any names at all) are few and far between, apart from some well known collectors, such as De Rossi, mentioned above, or Tommaso Valperga di Caluso (1737-1815),¹⁵ an intellectual and polymath from Piedmont [fig. 2]: the latter's collection of incunabula (14 books) was donated to the Biblioteca Universitaria in Turin probably at the beginning of the 19th century and is now the core of the incunabula collection there.

We should also mention Angelo Maria d'Elci, a Florentine nobleman,¹⁶ who donated his books (10) to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand III, who created a special section for them in the Laurenziana Library, where they are still kept today.

It is noteworthy that monasteries or other ecclesiastical institutions, in which appear frequently as owners of Latin incunabula, are found only sporadically as owners of Hebrew incunabula.

Thus, for understandable reasons, Jewish owners form the vast majority. Palaeographical and onomastic analysis have shown that they are generally either of Italian origin or were living in Italy at the time they wrote in the volumes.

3.1 Some Notable Cases

It is worth mentioning the Piedmontese situation: within the books kept in the Biblioteca Universitaria of Turin we are given a glimpse into the life of local Piedmontese Jewish communities. In contrast to other Italian communities, those residing in Piedmont seem very well established in the territory and rather active: commerce, moneylending (in the surviving copies we find notes of accounts and loans to local non-Jews as well), as well as other forms of trade or exchange frequently occurred among the members of the community. Among the goods that they lent or traded there were also, of course, books: we find one incunabula edition,¹⁷ for example, that, over the decades and indeed centuries, passed between members of two families, the Diena and the Colon [fig. 3]. Every owner left his signature in the books; no fewer than 3 Colon and 2 Diena can be found among them.

15 Cf. <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/valperga-di-caluso-tommaso>.

16 Cf. [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pannocchieschi-d-elci-angelo-maria_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pannocchieschi-d-elci-angelo-maria_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

17 The *Mahazor* printed by the Soncinos in 1485, shelfmark: XV.IV.83; *Mahazor*. Soncino and Casal Maggiore: Sons of Israel Nathan Soncino, between 10 Sept. and 9 Oct. 1485 and 21 and 29 Aug. 1486. Folio. GW M19921; ISTC im00007850; MEI 02123154.

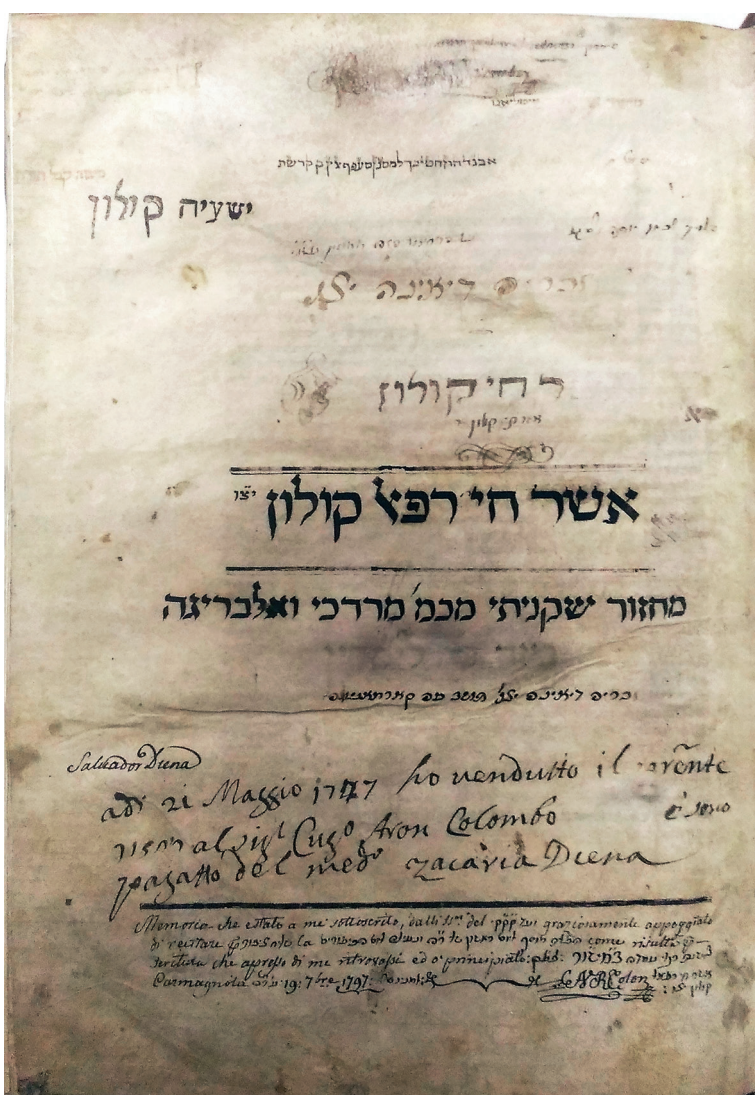


Figure 3 F. alef1r of the Mahazor kept in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, Turin (shelfmark: XV.IV.83) with signatures or notes of various owners from the Dena and Colon families

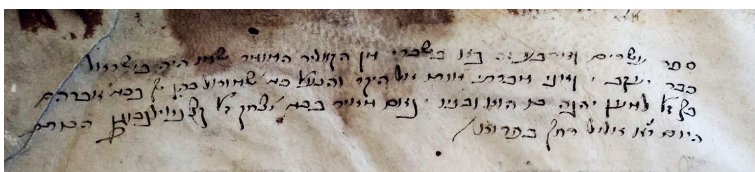


Figure 4 First folio of the copy of the Soncino's Bible (Naples, 1492), now held in the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma (shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1297/1298), with sales contract written by the very Meir Katzenellenbogen hand

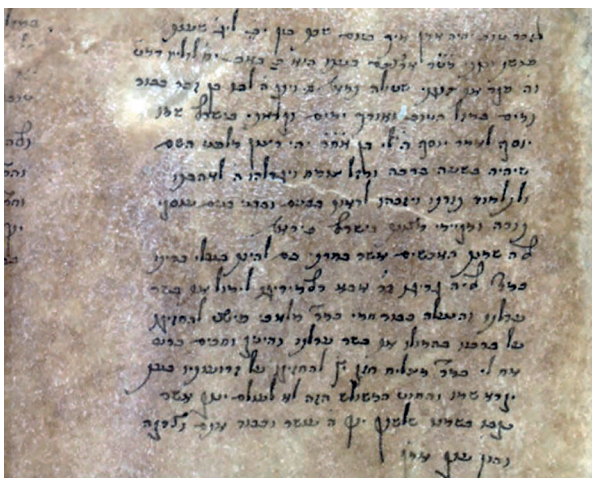


Figure 5 Record of the birth of his son Joseph, written by an anonymous father, with a note about his circumcision in which the name of *Elia Grego figlio di Aba Delmedigo* (Elijah the Greek son of Aba Delmedigo) appears. Front flyleaf, verso, of the copy of Maimonides' *Mishnayot* (Naples, 1492), kept in Parma (shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1396)

Apart from these Piedmontese exceptions, we usually find many names of Jews who signed their books, although most of them are not otherwise known (despite the fact that they sometimes bear renowned family names, still common among Italian Jewry).

However, it is also the case that very well-known individuals can also be found. For instance, on the first folio of a beautiful Soncino Bible printed in Naples in 1492 and now held at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma,¹⁸ we find the signature of Meir Katzenellenbogen, the great rabbi of Ashkenazi descent who lived in Padua in the 16th century.¹⁹ He appears as a seller in a contract written by himself in Ashkenazi-Italian Hebrew script, in which he registered the sale of the book to Samuel Cohen [fig. 4]. He writes: “I sold this [Bible] to Samuel Cohen [...] Word (or ‘affirmation’) of Meir ben Itzhak Katzenellenbogen, who is writing this on 11 Elul 5298 [17 August 1538] in Padua”. The name of this rabbi has especially ominous overtones in Venice. In this city, in the middle of the 16th century, Meir involuntarily started a series of events that led to one of the greatest disasters in the history of Hebrew printing. He had agreed to publish an edition of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, with his own commentaries, with a Venetian printer, Alvise Bragadini

18 *Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim*. [Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, about 1492]. Folio. GW 4199; ISTC ib00525520; MEI 02125656; the incunable was divided and bound separately into two volumes: the first (shelfmark St. De Rossi 1297) ends with Kings, the second (shelfmark St. De Rossi 1298) begins with Isaiah.

19 See, as a summary reference, the entry in the digital edition of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9238-katzenellenbogen> (2019-11-07).

(d. 1575), a Christian who used to print Hebrew books. But the book was soon plagiarised by another Venetian printer, Marcantonio Giustiniani (d. 1571), in a cheaper edition. Meir, obviously upset by this piracy, asked Moses Isserles of Krakow, the most important authority at the time for Ashkenazi Judaism, to adjudicate in the case. Moses banned the pirated edition and forbade any Jew from buying a copy. However, Giustiniani did not give way, and an intense legal dispute ensued, with Giustiniani trying to discredit Bragadin's work by accusing him of publishing books (especially the Talmud) that contained offensive sentences towards Christians. These rumours unfortunately came to the attention of the Holy See: on August 12, 1553, Pope Julius III issued a bull commanding the confiscation and destruction of every copy of the Talmud, Palestinian or Babylonian alike. This ended with the burning of the Talmud (*il rogo del Talmud*, as the episode is commonly known in Italian) in Rome, in Campo de' Fiori, on September 9, 1553, and in Venice, in St Mark's Square, on October 21 of the same year.²⁰

Among other well-known names that appear in these incunabula it is worth mentioning Elia Del Medigo,²¹ the great Jewish scholar and philosopher of the early Renaissance: he is mentioned as one of the participants in a circumcision ceremony in the note written by an anonymous father, on his Mishnah copy,²² about the birth of his son [fig. 5].

In this connection, it is important to remember that a book could function as a kind of diary or register, in which the owners noted the most diverse information: from food recipes [fig. 6] to loans that needed to be repaid [fig. 7], as well as – as we have just seen – the more frequent occurrence of notes on the birth of children [fig. 8].

3.2 Jewish Collectors and Professions

We do not find important collectors of books among Jewish Italian owners, except for Rafael Eliezer from Trastevere. This Jew, who lived in Rome in the 16th century, wrote a list of the books he owned on the last folio verso of his copy of Nahmanides' *Perush ha-Torah* (Commentary on the Torah)²³ [fig. 9]. We count 42 titles: they are mainly

²⁰ Cf. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books*, chapter XI, in particular 254-69.

²¹ Cf. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elia-del-medigo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (2019-11-07).

²² *Mishnayot* with Maimonides' commentary, printed in Naples in 1492 by Joshua Soncino and now held in Parma, shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1396; *Mishnayot* (Comm: Maimonides). Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, 8 May 1492. Median folio. GW M23779; ISTC im00624700; MEI 02123770.

²³ Now held at the Biblioteca Universitaria of Bologna, shelfmark: A.V.KK.IV.10; Moses ben Nahman, *Perush ha-Torah*. [Rome: Obadiah, Manasseh and Benjamin of Rome, 1469-73]. Folio. GW M25518; ISTC im00866140; MEI 02122013.

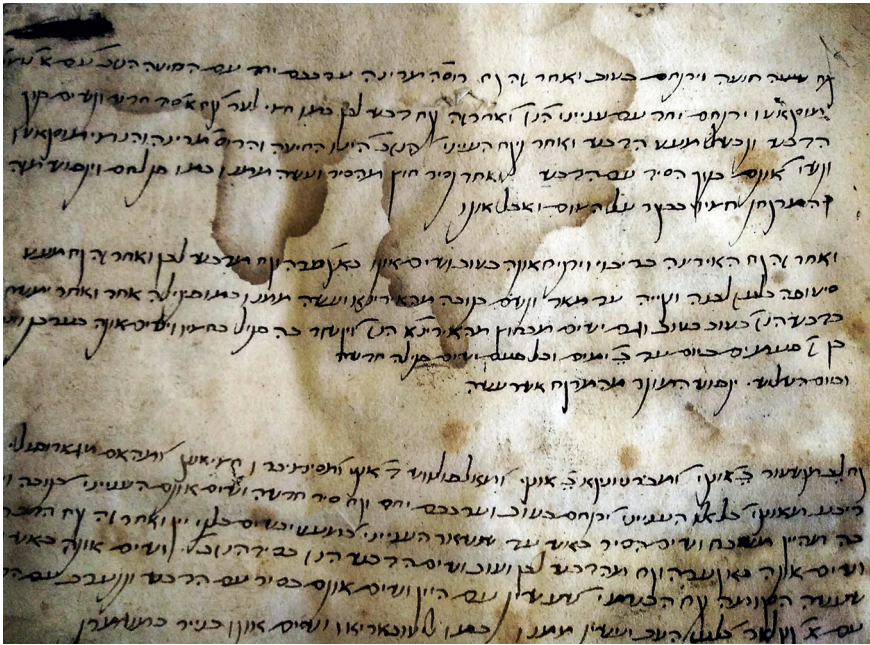


Figure 6 A recipe written on the second front flyleaf, recto, of Rashi's *Perush ha-Torah* copy (Soncino [?], 1487), now held in Parma (shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1179)

Figure 7 The recording of a loan (the lender was likely of galician origin) on the verso of the back blank sheet of the copy of *Nevi'im Aharonim* with commentary of David Kimhi (Soncino [?], 1485 [?]), kept in Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna (shelfmark: AM.N.1V.4)

פרקה
 מרקו
 בסימנא מנא היום ב' לז' שעות זו לחדש שבט שנת
 ה'ת"ב לחשבוננו ולחשבונם
 נולד ליבן והמואלהה במהרר מענה בודיליאנ וקראתי שמו
 אליה מיקאוי הרמון יעריה לתורה ולחופה ולמצות ולמעשים טובים אכ"ז

ה'ת"ב לחשבוננו ולחשבונם
 נולד ליבן והמואלהה במהרר מענה בודיליאנ וקראתי שמו
 אליה מיקאוי הרמון יעריה לתורה ולחופה ולמצות ולמעשים טובים אכ"ז

ארבעה עשר ספרים
 א' ספר המלכות וכו' ב' ספר שופטים וכו' ג' ספר שמואל וכו' ד' ספר דברי הימים וכו' ה' ספר יחזקאל וכו' ו' ספר ירמיהו וכו' ז' ספר יחזקאל וכו' ח' ספר יחזקאל וכו' ט' ספר יחזקאל וכו' י' ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"א ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ב ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ג ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ד ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ה ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ו ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ז ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ח ספר יחזקאל וכו' י"ט ספר יחזקאל וכו' כ' ספר יחזקאל וכו'

Figure 8 Record of the birth of his son Elijah, written by Ephraim Maccavi (he also spelled his family name as Maccabi), with two dates provided: the Hebrew one in Hebrew characters and the corresponding Christian one in Italian and Latin characters. F. [2] of the copy of Joseph Albo's *Ikkarim* (Soncino, 1485), kept in Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna (shelfmark: A.V.B.VII.39)

Figure 9 List of the books owned by Rafael Eliezer from Trastevere, written by himself on the last folio verso of his copy of Nahmanides' *Perush ha-Torah* (Rome, 1469-1473 [?]), now kept in Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna (shelfmark: A.V.KK.IV.10)

Biblical or Talmudic texts (*Prophets, Psalms, Pentateuch*, gemara of some Talmudic tractates) but we also find prayer books (*mahzorim* and *siddurim*) and linguistic works (the *'Arukh* of Nathan ben Jehiel and the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* of David Kimhi). Very interestingly, after (almost) every book title he specified whether the volume was printed or manuscript, on parchment or on paper. He listed all these books after stating, at the top of the page, that those that followed were the books he had, without taking into account the volumes 'which were not bound before'. We know something about his background: from his patronymic - 'son of Judah ha-rofe', that is to say 'Judah the doctor' - it is evident that his family was well educated.

In this last respect, it is usually difficult to identify the social status or the profession of the Jewish owners: apart from some titles ("son of the honourable, our teacher and our master, the rabbi..."), which could help us in assessing at least the cultural standing of the owner's ancestor(s), the signatures or ownership annotations do not provide us with valuable details about the socio-economic level to which the owners belonged.

3.3 Women as Owners

The role women played at the very beginning of the history of Hebrew printing is already quite well-known: two Jewish women were, in fact, directly involved as printers of Hebrew books, namely Estellina Conat, wife of Abraham Conat, and Devorah, wife of Meshullam Cuzi.²⁴ But we also find Jewish women who owned books or sold them on their husbands' behalf. For instance, Rosetta, daughter of Ephraim from Frascati, owned a book containing *Torah, Megillot, Haftarat* and signed it with her name and patronymic [fig. 10].²⁵

Another woman, Stella, wife of Jekutiel, sold in 1508 a copy of the *Perush ha-Torah* (Commentary on Torah, composed by Levi ben Gershon) on her husband's behalf, and this is recorded in the sale deed

24 Estellina printed the *Behinat Olam* of Jedaiah Hapenini ben Abraham Bedarshi probably in 1474, stating in the colophon "I, Estellina, the wife of my lord, my husband, the honoured Abraham Conat, [...] wrote [i.e. 'printed'] this epistle of Behinat Olam with the help of the young Jacob Levi from Provence, from Tarascon". Devorah brought to completion, together with her sons, the work of her husband, who had died suddenly before his *Arba'ah Turim* was finished (cf. Heller, *Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*, 123 and Nissim, *I primordi della stampa ebraica*, 17-18).

25 The note simply says "Lady Rosetta [but it could also read 'Rosanna', as the writing is unclear], daughter of Ephraim from Frascati, wife of Menahem from Modiglian[a?]". There is no date, but, palaeographically, it is possible to date the note to the 17th century. The book is now in the Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome, shelfmark: Vol.Inc. 1961; *Torah, Megillot, Haftarat*. [Hijar: Eliezer ben Alantansi, 1487-88?]. Folio. GW M30628; ISTC ib00525600; MEI 02122606.

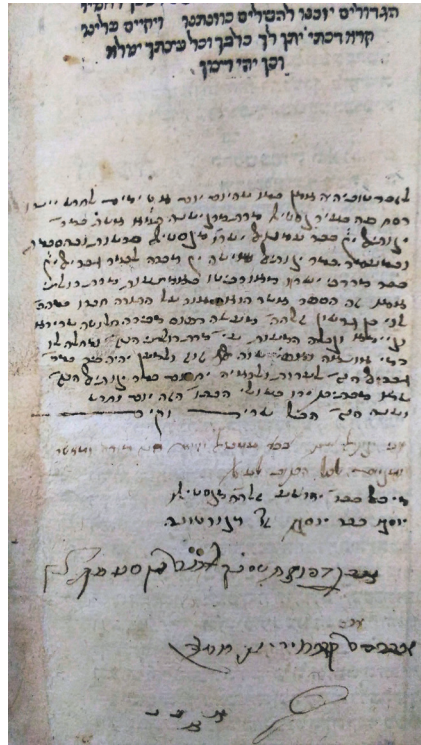
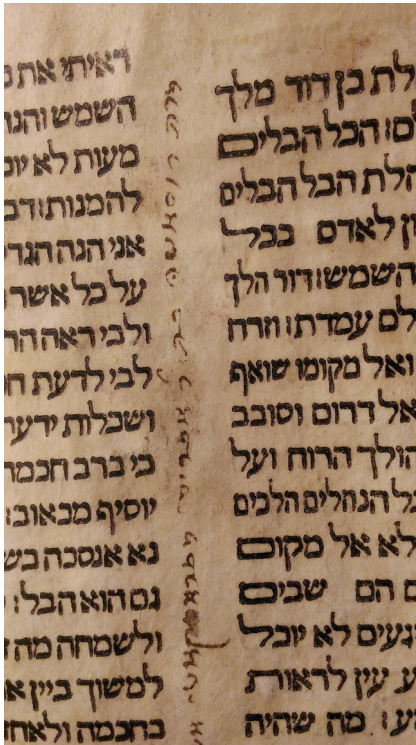


Figure 10 Signature of Rosetta, daughter Ephraim of Frascati, on f. [3]v of her copy of *Torah, Megillot, Haftarat* (Hijar, 1487-1488 [?]) and now held, incomplete, in the Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome (shelfmark: Vol.Inc. 1961)

Figure 11 Sale deed on the last folio verso of a copy of Levi ben Gershom's *Perush ha-Torah* (Mantua, 1475-1476 [?], now held in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, Turin, shelfmark: XV.III.57), with Stella acting as seller on her husband's behalf and Dolce, another woman, as intermediary

written on the last folio verso of the volume.²⁶ The contract states that Stella, who signed the book on the first folio and is mentioned here as *meret markishiana* (lady from Marche),²⁷ is selling the book “with the permission, agreement and support of Jekutiel, her husband”. It

26 Now in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, Turin, shelfmark: XV.III.57; Levi ben Gershom, *Perush ha-Torah*. [Mantua]: Abraham Conat and Abraham Jedidiah, [1475-76]. Median folio. GW M18044; ISTD i00189700; MEI 02122979.

27 Strictly speaking, we have one woman named Stella who signed the book on the very first leaves, and another one, mentioned generically as “lady from Marche”, in the contract at the end of the book. Palaeographically, again, I am quite certain that Stella lived at the beginning of the 16th century and is thus identifiable with the woman of the deed sale.

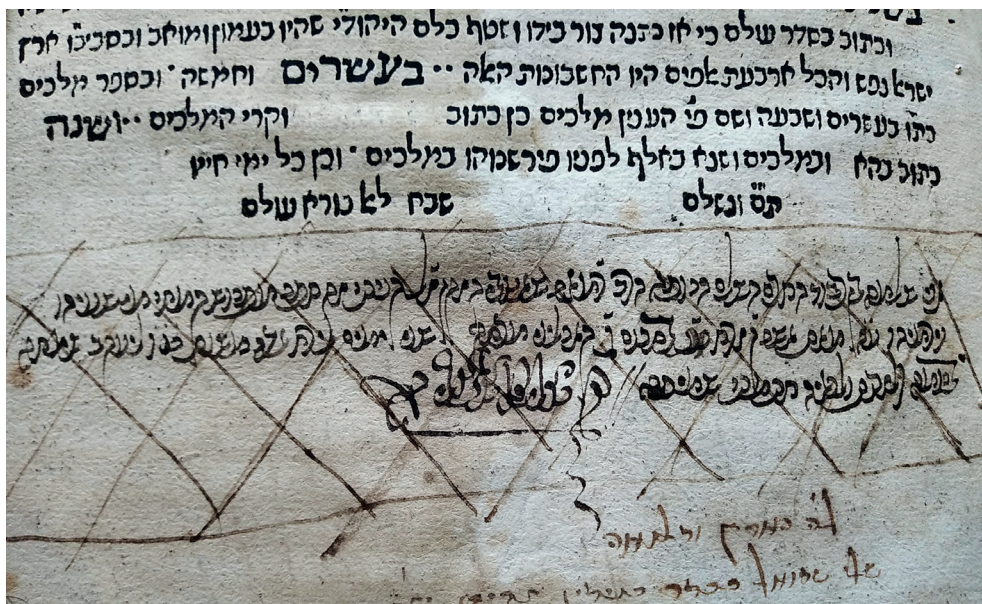
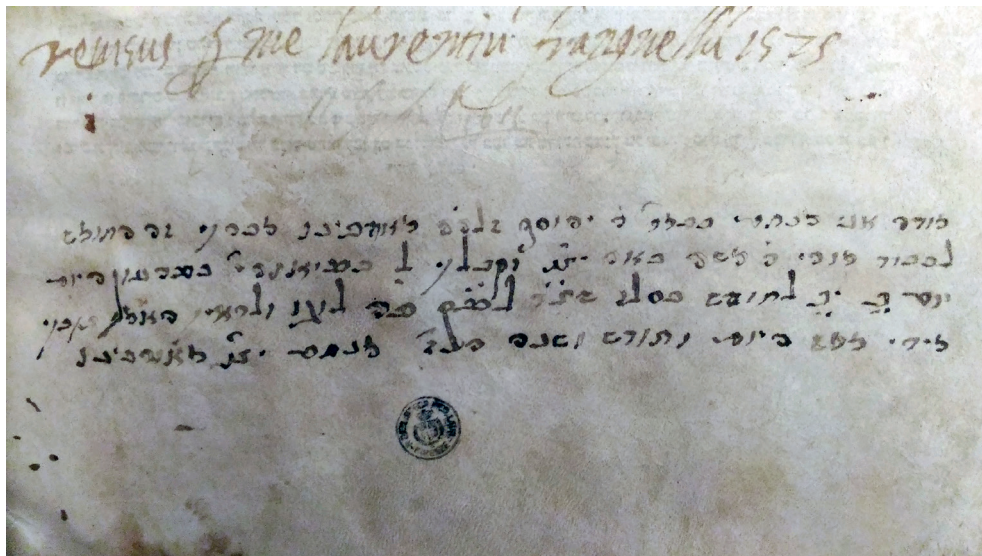


Figure 12 Sale deed in which the seller, Menaḥem of Urbino, states that he received for this book 30 fiorini from Moshe Ber. Last folio verso of the copy of *Torah* with commentary of Rashi (Bologna, 1482) now held in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze (shelfmark: D’Elci 654)

Figure 13 Sale deed in which the buyer, Shelomoh Shatby, notes he paid 3 silver carlini for this book, a copy of David Kimḥi’s *Perush ‘al Neviim Aharonim* (Guadalajara, 1481-1482), now held in the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma (shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1180)

is worth pointing out also that Stella sold her book “with the mediation of lady Dolce”: thus not only was the owner a woman, but another woman concluded the sale [fig. 11].

3.4 Prices

The sales contracts I found usually mention the two parties involved in the transaction, the title/content of the book, the place where the sale took place, and, sometimes, the witness(es) and the prices. It is interesting to read the amounts paid for the books, because this can give us an idea of the value of incunabula in comparison with the cost of living.

As mentioned above, it is not usual to indicate the price paid for a book, yet there are some examples of this.

For instance, a copy of Kimhi's *Perush 'al Nevi'im Aharonim* (Commentary on Former Prophets), printed in Spain, was bought by Shelomoh Shatby in the year 1496 – according to the owner's note – “for the sum of 3 silver carlini” [fig. 12].²⁸ In a sale deed registered in an incunable held in the Laurenziana Library in Florence²⁹ we read that the book was sold in 1633 for 30 florins: “I, Menahem [...] of Urbino sold this Pentateuch to Moses Ber and I received 30 fiorini as payment” [fig. 13].

3.5 Censorship

Under the category of ‘owners’, we should also mention the censors, in line with MEI criteria. The phenomenon of censorship was a plague that affected Hebrew books in particular during the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th; it is well represented in the incunabula I checked: at least 99 copies out of 231 carry either censorship interventions [fig. 14] or just the censor's note – the signature with the date, sometimes also with the place and additional details about the censor's work [fig. 15].

Usually traces of censorship (words, sentences, paragraphs erased or struck through with ink) can be found in incunabula with commentaries on the Bible and in other types of works (rabbinical, literary, philosophical and so on) rather than in incunabula containing

28 The incunable is now held in the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma, shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1180; David Kimhi, *Perush al Nevi'im Aharonim*. Guadalajara: Solomon Alkabiz, between 25 Aug. 1481 and 4 Jan. 1482. Folio. GW 8170; ISTC id00102710; MEI 02124848.

29 It is a beautiful copy of the Torah, with commentary of Rashi, printed in Bologna in 1482 (shelfmark: D'Elci 654; *Torah* (Comm: Solomon ben Isaac). Bologna: Abraham ben Hayyim, for Joseph Caravita, 26 Jan. 1482. Folio. GW M30624; ISTC ib00525570; MEI 02122135).

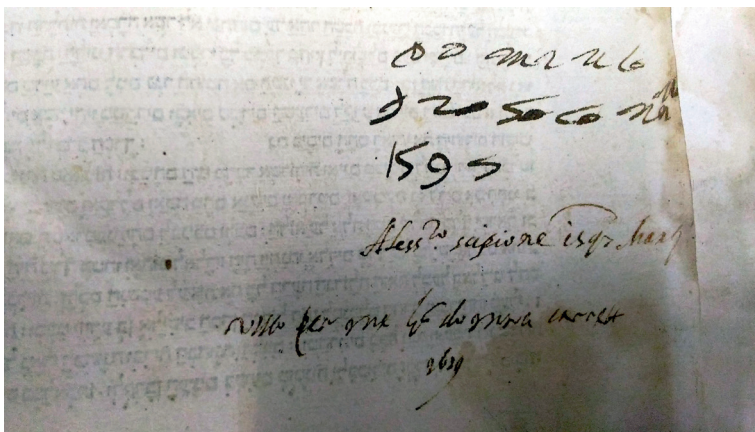


Figure 14 An example of censorship on a folio of a *Mishnah* with commentary by Maimonides (Naples, 1492) kept in the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna (shelfmark: 4.LL.II.10). This incunable in particular is heavily affected by censor's interventions

Figure 15 Three censors' signatures (Dominico Irosolimitano, Alessandro Scipione, Giovanni Dominico Carretto), with dates of their interventions, in the last folio verso of a copy of the *Hagiographa* (Naples, 1487) kept in the Biblioteca Estense e Universitaria, Modena (shelfmark: alfa.&.5.27)

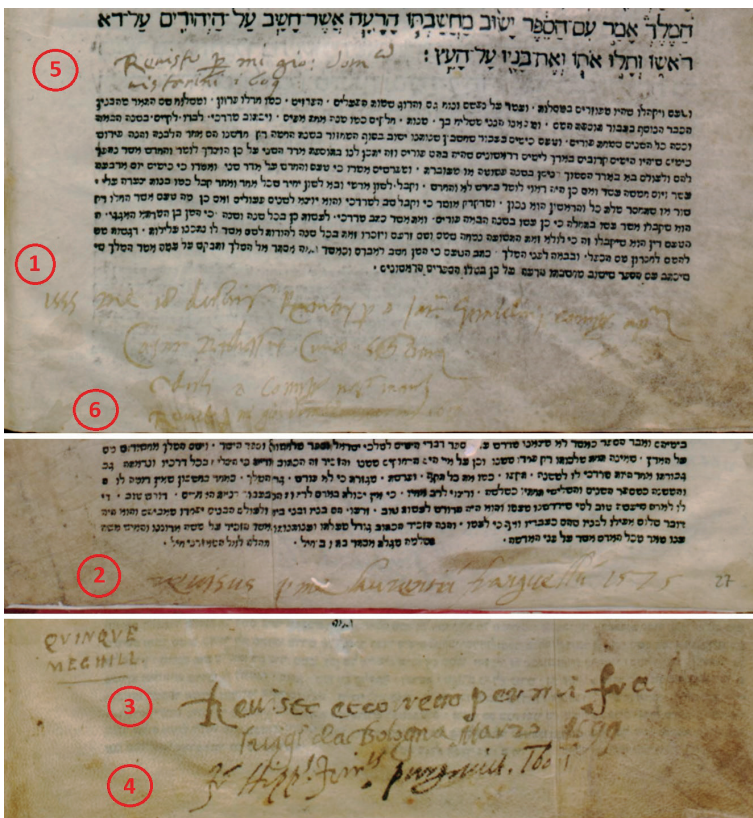


Figure 16 Details of the last two folios – verso of the second to last and recto/verso of the last – of Megillot with Commentaries by Rashi and Abraham ibn Ezra (Bologna, 1482 [?], kept in the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma, shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1362), with the signatures/notes of the six censors who examined the incunable: 1) Jacobus Geraldini, 1555; 2) Lorenzo Franguello, 1575; 3) Luigi da Bologna, 1599; 4) Hippolitus Ferrarensis, 1601; 5) Giovanni Dominico Vistorini, 1609; 6) Giovanni Dominic Carretto, 1619

just the Biblical texts. In the latter, signs of censorship are almost entirely absent.

On average, a book is read/censored by one or two censors, but of ten more censors are involved: a copy held in the Palatina (Parma), the *Megillot* with the commentaries of Rashi and Abraham Ibn Ezra,³⁰ contains the signatures or notes of six different censors [fig. 16]!

30 Shelfmark: St. De Rossi 1362: *Megillot* (Comm: Solomon ben Isaac and Abraham ibn Ezra). [Bologna: Abraham ben Hayyim, about 1482]. Folio. GW 12115/10N; ISTC ib00525980; MEI 02123817.

Since censors did travel across Italy – mainly in the Papal States – it is not always easy to link one censor’s signature to a precise location, unless the place is specifically mentioned. Nevertheless, some censors operated in one or two cities and in a restricted period of time, so their signatures, even without the mention of a location, can give us an idea of where that particular book could have been at that point in time.³¹

4 Conclusions

To conclude this overview of my work, I would add that there are still paths of research that it would be interesting to explore but that I only marginally touched upon in my study because the picture was not yet complete (many incunabula among those preserved in Italian libraries still have to be catalogued in MEI): one such path, for example, could be the analysis of the percentage of books printed in the Iberian Peninsula now preserved in Italy (so far, about 10% of those I studied, 25 out of 231). This could provide insights on the trade and movement of volumes in the Mediterranean area after certain events of far-reaching importance occurred, such as the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496.

But in a narrower sense, considering in particular the field of Jewish studies, it is definitely desirable to continue this project. In fact, the analysis of data gathered from Hebrew incunabula not only fulfils the aims of MEI within the more general context of early European printing, but is also greatly improving our knowledge of the cultural and social life of Italian Jewish communities over the centuries.

What my colleagues and I have done while working on these incunabula had been almost completely neglected in previous researches in Jewish studies: that is, the extraction of a great treasure of information buried in books that had hitherto been studied only as texts, as *incunabula*, as *editions*, and almost never as invaluable *carriers* of historical data. I therefore firmly believe that a great debt of gratitude is due to the 15cBOOKTRADE programme for the ‘Jewish serendipity’ it uncovered and for the new field of research it opened, in the hope that there will be a future for the project.

31 This is, for instance, the case of Alessandro Scipione, who probably worked as a censor only for the Gonzagas in 1597 (cf. his page, among MEI owners, at the URL <https://data.cerl.org/owners/00018010>).

Bibliography

- Amram, David Werner. *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy. Being Chapters in the History of the Hebrew Printing*. Philadelphia: Greenstone, 1909.
- Friedberg, Chaim Dov. *History of Hebrew Typography in Italy, Spain-Portugal and the Turkey*. Tel Aviv: Bar-Juda, 1956.
- Heller, Marvin J. *Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Miani, Laura. "I manoscritti della biblioteca del SS. Salvatore dall'età napoleonica alla Restaurazione". Emiliani, Andrea (a cura di), *Pio VI Braschi e Pio VII Chiaramonti. Due pontefici cesenati nel bicentenario della Campagna d'Italia*. Bologna: Clueb, 1998, 396-475.
- Nissim, Daniele. *I primordi della stampa ebraica nell'Italia settentrionale. Piove di Sacco-Soncino (1469-1496)*. Soncino: Associazione Pro Loco Soncino, 2004.
- Offenberg, Adriaan K. *Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections. A First International Census*. In collaboration with Cornelia Moed-Van Walraven. Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1990.
- Tamani, Giuliano. "Inventario degli incunabuli ebraici della Biblioteca Comunale di Piacenza". *La Bibliofilia*, 72(2), 1970, 221-46.
- Tamani, Giuliano. "Inventario degli incunaboli ebraici della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma". *La Bibliofilia*, 75(3), 1973, 239-81.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables". *Kyriat Sefer*, 58(4), 1983, 808-57.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Italy (Reggio Calabria/Piove di Sacco/Mantova/Ferrara)". *Kyriat Sefer*, 60(3-4), 1986, 865-962.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Italy (Bologna)". *Ohev Sefer*, 1, 1987, 23-50.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Spain/Portugal". *Kyriat Sefer*, 61(3), 1988, 521-46.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Italy". *Kyriat Sefer*, 62(1-2), 1989, 361-406.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Italy (Soncino)". *Kyriat Sefer*, 63(2), 1991, 603-36.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables - Italy (Soncino)". *Kyriat Sefer*, 64(2), 1993, 689-726.
- Tishby, Peretz. "Hebrew Incunables". *Kyriat Sefer*, 58(4), 1983, 808-57.

List of Cited Incunabula

- David Kimhi, *Perush al Neviim Aharonim*. Guadalajara: Solomon Alkabiz, between 25 Aug. 1481 and 4 Jan. 1482. Folio. GW 8170; ISTC id00102710
- Levi ben Gershom, *Perush ha-Torah*. [Mantua]: Abraham Conat and Abraham Jedidiah, [1475-76]. Median folio. GW M18044; ISTC il00189700
- Mahazor*. Soncino and Casal Maggiore: Sons of Israel Nathan Soncino, between 10 Sept. and 9 Oct. 1485 and 21 and 29 Aug. 1486. Folio. GW M19921; ISTC im00007850
- Megillot* (Comm: Solomon ben Isaac and Abraham ibn Ezra). [Bologna: Abraham ben Hayyim, about 1482]. Folio. GW 12115/10N; ISTC ib00525980
- Mishnayot* (Comm: Maimonides). Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, 8 May 1492. Median folio. GW M23779; ISTC im00624700
- Moses ben Nahman, *Perush ha-Torah*. [Rome: Obadiah, Manasseh and Benjamin of Rome, 1469-73]. Folio. GW M25518; ISTC im00866140

- Moses Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*. [Italy: Printer of the Moreh Hanevukhim, about 1473-75]. 4°. GW M2004010; ISTD im00079800
- Solomon ben Isaac [or Rashi], *Perush ha-Torah*. Reggio Calabria: Abraham ben Garton, 17 Feb. 1475. Folio. GW M41207; ISTD is00625180
- Torah* (Comm: Solomon ben Isaac). Bologna: Abraham ben Hayyim, for Joseph Caravita, 26 Jan. 1482. Folio. GW M30624; ISTD ib00525570
- Torah, Megillot, Haftarat*. [Hijar: Eliezer ben Alantansi, 1487-88?]. Folio. GW M30628; ISTD ib00525600
- Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim*. [Naples: Joshua Solomon Soncino, about 1492]. Folio. GW 4199; ISTD ib00525520

