A neglected field within the discipline of Hebrew bibliography is the recording and study of Hebrew book publisher, dealer and auction catalogues. This lacuna is remarkable, given the extent of the Hebrew book trade, even in its formative years, and the well documented and widespread use of catalogues in the general book trade. It is the contention of this paper, in spite of the fact that it is, given the sparse number of recorded catalogues, ‘an argument from silence,’ that there must have been numerous Hebrew book trade catalogues, and that the recording and study of these listings is a worthwhile pursuit.

The Encyclopaedia Judaica informs us, in two separate entries, that the first sales catalogue for Hebrew books is Solomon Proops’ (d. 1734) Appiryon Shelomo (1730), stating Proops ‘was also the first to bring out a sales catalogue of Hebrew books (Appiryon Shelomo, 1730)’ and that ‘From 1715 productions by Proops carried advertisements of books he had published, and in 1730 he issued a sales catalog (Appiryon Shelomo), the first such Hebrew publication.’ A prior comment to the same

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1 The original version of this article was published in Quaerendo v. 26 n. 4 (Leiden, 1996), pp. 245–57.

2 A variety of catalogues, serving distinct purposes, exist. This study is limited to those catalogues of the Hebrew book that relate to the book trade, that is, book publisher, bookseller, and auction catalogues. It does not address catalogues that record holdings of individuals, public collections or bibliographical surveys. A number of studies have been made based on the role of catalogues in the book trade. There are bibliographies of catalogues, as well as works on the field and uses of catalogues. An important pioneer work is that of Graham Pollard & Albert Ehrman, The Distribution of Books by Catalogue from the Invention of Printing to A.D. 1800, Based on Material in the Broxbourne Library (Cambridge: Printed for distribution to members of the Roxburghe Club, 1965). A general study of the field is Archer Taylor, Book Catalogues: Their Varieties & Uses (Chicago 1957), 2nd edn. Rev. by Wm. P. Barlow, Jr. (Winchester 1986); David McKitterick, ‘Book Catalogues: Their Variety & Uses,’ in: The Book Encompassed: Studies in Twentieth Century Bibliography, ed. Peter Davison (Cambridge 1992); and The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America (PBsA), 84:4 (New York 1995), that entire issue being devoted to the subject of catalogues. In addition, a number of articles on the subject have appeared in such journals as The Library and Quaerendo.

effect, and perhaps the source of the EJ entries, can be found in the Jewish Encyclopedia, which states that Proops’s ‘printed catalogue Appiryon Shelomo, 1730 (the first of its kind). . . .’

If this were correct it would be exceedingly strange, given the rich history of Hebrew publishing, that it should take 255 years from the appearance of the first dated Hebrew book, Abraham ben Garton ben Isaac’s edition of Rashi’s Torah commentary (Reggio di Calabria, 1475), for the first Hebrew sales catalogue to be issued, when catalogues, or lists of books available for sale, had been a feature of the general book market from the incunabular period.

It is generally not realized that a flourishing book trade existed prior to the invention of printing. G. H. Putnam, in his classic work on the book in the middle ages, discusses this trade in manuscripts and even notes that among the regulations pertaining to the book trade in university towns was “To place conspicuously in the windows of their shops a price list of all works kept for sale.” Putnam also notes several instances, restrictions on their participation notwithstanding, of Jews engaging in the book trade.

Nevertheless, this is quite removed from the issuing of sales catalogues from which books may be ordered. Sales lists of printers’ wares appeared fairly early, slightly more than a decade after the invention of printing with moveable type. The first list is credited to Heinrich Eggstein of Strasbourg (1466), followed by Peter Schöffer (the son-in-law of Johannes Fust, Gutenberg’s financier and erstwhile partner). Schöffer’s book list (1470) has twenty-one entries, among them the Psalterium of 1457 and the Canon missae of 1458. His independent prospectus for the letters of St. Jerome requests the reader to await his edition and not to purchase any other. Sweynheym and Pannartz’s lists of 1470 and 1472, nineteen and twenty-eight titles respectively, show the price and number of copies per edition, ranging from 16 groschen to 20 ducats. Kroberger’s advertisement, issued sometime after 1480 ‘contains virtually everything the publicity manager of a modern firm could think of.’

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