The Hidden Treasure of Athias

Adri K. Offenberg
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract
In 1761 the Amsterdam Jewish printers, typefounders and booksellers Joseph, Jacob and Abraham Proops bought a collection of Hebrew and Yiddish punches and moulds, which had been used earlier by the famous printers Joseph, Immanuel and Abraham Athias. They announced their acquisition proudly in their almanacs and in a Spanish Bible. A translation of the notification is given here in an appendix. In 1917, the Proops typefoundry, including the so-called Athias Cabinet, was publicly sold and obtained by the Typefoundry Amsterdam, formerly known as N. Tetterode. The contents of the cabinet was carefully studied and even used. In 2001, at the occasion of 150 years Tetterode, the Athias Cabinet has been offered to the Amsterdam University in permanent loan and included in the Reading Room of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana for scientific research.

Keywords
Amsterdam, Tetterode, Athias, Proops, punches, moulds, Rosart, Jacques-François

For some years now, the Amsterdam University Library has been entrusted with an age-old, oak cabinet. It is known as the 'Athias Cabinet' (illus. 1) and its drawers are filled with unique Hebrew typographical material that was once intensively used by Amsterdam Jewish printers.

The name of the Athias Cabinet probably derives from the eighteenth-century Amsterdam Jewish printer and type founder Abraham ben Raphael Hezekiah Athias (1684-1746). He inherited the typographical material from a distant relative, Immanuel ben Joseph Athias (c. 1664-1714), who had also been a printer and type founder in Amsterdam and whose father, the famous


© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2007 DOI: 10.1163/157006907X174247
printer Joseph ben Abraham Athias (1634/5-1700), started a type foundry in 1681. This material was put up for auction in Amsterdam on 25 February 1761 and Joseph, Jacob and Abraham, the sons of the Jewish printer Solomon Proops, bought the cabinet and its precious contents. Shortly afterwards, they proudly announced their new acquisition in the foreword to their *Biblia en dos colunas, hebraico y español* and in a Yiddish almanac from 1762. At that time,

1. The Athias cabinet. Photo by Iman Heystek, Amsterdam U. L.

---

1. M. Kayserling, *Biblioteca española-portuguesa-judáica* and other studies in Ibero-Jewish bibliography by the author, and by J.S. da Silva Rosa; with a bibliography of Kayseling's