ADVERTISING YIDDISH BOOKS: SOLOMON ZALMAN
LONDON’S KOHELES SHLOMO*

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The Jewish Theological Seminary Library houses a hitherto unknown document that sheds intriguing light on the early eighteenth-century printing industry in Amsterdam.¹ This document, a broadsheet seeking backing for the publication of the Yiddish book Koheles Shlomo—which became a bestseller in the Ashkenazi Diaspora during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—attests to eighteenth-century processes of book production. Lacking the necessary funds for publishing his book, Solomon Zalman ben Moses Raphael London attempted to raise money from the general public by issuing this descriptive broadsheet, in the hope that this would persuade Jews to assist him in his task. Not only does this broadsheet enable us to trace the activity of one of the linchpins of Hebrew publishing in Amsterdam, it also illustrates the stages of book production, from idea to printed volume.

Zalman London was born in 1661 in Nowogrudok, Lithuania. Notwithstanding his Eastern European origins, London spent most of his life in central and Western Europe. Because he lived in the British capital for six years (1702–1708), where he served as a darshan for a burial society, the cognomen London was appended to his name.²

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* I thank Dena Ordan for her translation of the body of the article. I must also express my appreciation to Ofra Lieberman and Danny Hacker of the Rare Books Collection at the National Library of Israel for their unstinting assistance while I was engaged in writing this article.

¹ B (NS)H2101: by courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. This unknown source does not appear in M. Gutcho’s recent inventory of Yiddish publications in the Netherlands, Inventory of Yiddish Publications from the Netherlands, c. 1650–c. 1950 (Leiden 2007). It was, however, known to A. Schischa (see n. 2 below), 31–32. I thank Noa Shashar for her assistance in locating the latter source. The broadsheet was offered at auction in 2000 by the Judaica Jerusalem Auction House. The description from the online catalogue, which contains many inaccuracies, including the name of the book and dates, can be accessed at <http://artfact.com/auction-lot/judaica-merciful Jews-. . .-a-proclamation-b-2-p-bj55cv2hxa>. It is likely, but not certain, that London penned the dedication on the obverse of the ad.

² On Solomon Zalman London, see M. Steinschneider, Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana (Berlin 1931) nos. 6949, 9117; A. Schischa, ‘Reb Salomen
The remainder of his life was spent wandering between Amsterdam and cities in Germany—Frankfurt am Main, Offenbach, Hanau, and Fürth—all of which then housed Hebrew presses. Given Amsterdam’s central role in the production of books using the Hebrew alphabet it is not surprising that London spent considerable periods of time there, and books published in this city provide clues to his personal history. First mentioned by name in a book published in 1709, London remained in Amsterdam until 1714, as his involvement in the printing of various books there attests. During that year he relocated to Germany, as we find a number of books produced under his imprint in various locations in Germany, mainly Frankfurt, to which he notes that he lived in close proximity for some time. He returned to Amsterdam in the 1730s and settled in the city with his family. Over the coming years, Zalman was actively engaged in the printing of many books in this city. The year 1749 found him in Fürth, where he apparently met his death.

London’s productivity as a book agent emerges from his involvement in the printing of at least forty books during his lifetime. He was the ‘creator’ of a fifth of these works, i.e., he was their author, translator, or editor. With respect to the remaining works, he was ha- mevi li-defus, the printer-book agent. Although most of his books were published in Hebrew, a number were in Yiddish, including his Koheles Shlomo.

The broadsheet in question was printed on a single sheet measuring $38 \times 25$ cm. Although undated, we can assign its production to 1738.