

(r. 1839–1861), Abdulaziz (r. 1861–1876), Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909), and Mehmed V (r. 1909–1918), that display the evolution of Ottoman royal decrees through centuries.

The following section includes *qit'as* (album pages) from the collections of Ali Emiri Efendi, penned by leading master Ottoman calligraphers such as Sheykh Hamdullah (d.1520), Dervish Ali (d.1673), Hafiz Osman (d.1698), Seyyid Abdullah of Yedikule (d.1731), Sheker-zade Mehmed Efendi (d.1753), Mehmed Rasim of Egrikapu (d.1756), Sheykh al-Islam Veliyuddin Efendi (d.1768), Ismail Zuhdi (d.1806), and Mahmud Celaleddin (d.1829). Among these works, the *qit'a* by Sheykh Hamdullah (p.201) is of exceptional beauty. It displays the perfection and fineness acquired by Sheykh Hamdullah in the late fifteenth century, in the styles of *naskh* and *thuluth*. The *qit'a* by Hafiz Osman (p.217), the calligraphy master of Sultan Mustafa II and Sultan Ahmed III, dated 1099 AH/1687 AD documents the golden age of the artist.

In the section devoted to the *levhas* (panels), the *jali thuluth* panel composed by Sultan Mahmud II (d.1839) with the *zerendud* technique (over-laid with gold) is notable. The rest consists of two *jali thuluth* panels by Mahmud Celaleddin (d.1829), one *jali thuluth tawhid* panel by Mehmed Hashim (d.1845) and a *jali thuluth 'Allah' (God)* panel by Kadi-asker Mustafa Izzet Efendi (d.1876).

The last section, 'books', is a selection of outstanding manuscripts on literature, poetry, medicine, geography, architecture, theology and calligraphy from the Millet Library, including the earliest Turkish dictionary, *Divān-i Lughāt al-Türk*, written by Mahmūd al-Qashghāri, between 1072–1074 AD

Sabuncuoğlu Sheref al-din b. Ali b. Ilyas's *Carrahiyat al-Haniyyah* 'Surgical Operations', Lokman b. Sayyid Hasan al-Urmawi's *Qiyāfat al-Insāniyyah fi Shamāil al-Osmāniyyah* 'Dressing in the Ottoman Tradition', Ahmed b. Ali b. Mehmed Piri Reis's *Kitāb al-Bahri* 'Nautical Geography', Sā'i Mustafa Chelebi's *Tazqirat al-Bunyān* (Book of Buildings) are among the highly valuable manuscripts of the Library, which have already been the object of several studies by leading scholars.

It is entirely to the credit of the Suna and Inan Kirac Foundation the Pera Museum that it has made possible this publication of remarkable specimens of calligraphy and scientific manuscripts from these collections. The general reader and interested scholars would otherwise have remained deprived of its riches.

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EVREISKIE SOKROVISHA PETERBURGA (JEWISH TREASURES FROM ST PETERSBURG) I Vol. By S. M. IAKERSON.
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The St Petersburg public repositories including such renowned institutions as the National Library of Russia, the St Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Museum of Ethnography, and the State Museum of the History of Religion to name but a few, hold many important artefacts and documents pertaining to Jewish culture. Over a period of centuries they were collected and evaluated by reputable scholars, clergymen and learned amateurs. The leader of the Crimean Karaites Abraham Firkovich (1787–1874), the Head of the Russian Christian Orthodox Mission in Jerusalem Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) 1818–1894, the merchant and art patron Moses Fridland (1826–1899) were just two. Other contributions to these collections came from the outstanding Semitists Abraham Harkavy (1835–1919) and Daniel Chwolson (1819–1910), the bibliographer Samuel Wiener (1860–1929) and the ethnographer and folklorist Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport (An-sky, 1863–1920). Their scholarly activity, and collectors' zeal means that since the nineteenth century, until

the present day, any serious advancement of various branches within the Jewish studies, including Biblical studies, history, ethnography, literature, philosophy, history of medicine or learning is simply impossible without proper consideration of the Jewish treasures viz. the manuscripts, early printed books and artefacts kept in St Petersburg. In other words the Jewish collections from St Petersburg are the most prominent in the world.

The book in hand is the first volume of a set “Jewish treasures from St Petersburg”. The set comprises two volumes and reflects extremely well the riches and diversity of the Jewish treasures from scrolls to domestic utensils as preserved in St Petersburg museums and libraries. This masterpiece has been designed and set by the Arca Publishers, The State Hermitage Publishing arm. The text matches the beauty of design. Of the highest scholarly standard and elegantly written, it will be perused with equal interest by a specialist and a general reader. The lucidity and clearness in treating various complex matters is to no small part due to the experience and profound knowledge of its author, Professor Shimon (Semen Mordukhovich) Iakerson of the St Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy. A prolific academic writer and a specialist librarian, Iakerson has spent several decades studying and cataloguing Hebrew manuscript heritage of the territory of the former Soviet Union in Europe and the United States of America. His highly acclaimed works among others include the “Catalogue of Hebrew Incunabula from the Collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America” (New York and Jerusalem, 2004–2005) and “The Hebrew Book in the Middle Ages” (Moscow, 2003), of which the latter became a text book for colleges and universities.

The first volume of the set introduces rarest manuscript books from the St Petersburg collections. A succinct and at the same time very informative exposé pertaining to the history of collections in each instance is accompanied by a full set of colour illustrations. Most of them (79 out of 129) are published for the first time. Accompanied with translations from Hebrew, and when necessary detailed explanations, they make the presentations visual and “live”. In particular this relates to many “close ups” which literary allow one to consider a medieval manuscript as put under a magnifying glass.

The first volume describes and represents the world’s oldest dated vellum copies of the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible. Among other rarities introduced to the learned public, there are unique complete manuscript copies of the works of medieval philosophers preserved only in St Petersburg, as well as the oldest dated Hebrew religious and secular manuscripts. They originate from various parts of the Jewish *diaspora*. The earliest dated manuscripts, codices on vellum and paper, were transcribed in Palestine (988/9), in Egypt (1008–13), Yemen (1144), Spain (1119), Tunisia (941–1039?) and Byzantium (1207).

As an important historian of Hebrew early printed and manuscript book, Iakerson spares no effort in presenting a codex as an artefact. An internal knowledge allows a member of the learned public to have an insight in to such aspects of medieval book production as paper, nibs, ink, illuminations, calculations of space, and many more. A variety of first-hand examples introduce a modern reader to the every day practice of a medieval scribe. According to a published colophon it becomes possible to calculate a daily “output” of a medieval scribe. The calculation yields an average number of folios – six, which one could transcribe, while preparing a calligraphic copy. One has to add that the colophons are organised in a special chapter. Twelve outstanding examples of them are supplied with a digital image accompanied by a meticulous translation into Russian and a detailed commentary, where needed.

Another exciting feature of the book are its personalities. Without a human creator, whether an author, or writer, or a collector one cannot imagine a book existing. Iakerson breaks the concept of a traditional Index of Proper names. Instead it has been converted into a brief “Who is Who” placed on the book’s margins. Such a polyphonic arrangement provides the necessary material of the people directly or indirectly connected to the Jewish collections in St Petersburg. An impressive

number of about one hundred individuals ranging from Rabbi Akiva (first century CE) to Ignatii Krachkovskii (d. 1951) and it includes writers, religious authorities and Russian Imperial officials, who were instrumental in purchasing, cataloguing and safe-keeping the treasures.

A detailed index vastly adds to the scholarly value of the book. There are also chronological tables and other information, which makes the treasures easily accessible for a scholar and a teacher or any interested member of learned public. No doubt the book will also be met with a great interest outside Russia, which urgently necessitates its translation in to English and Hebrew or perhaps even other languages of Europe and the Middle East.

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THE PERSONALITIES OF MITHRA IN ARCHAEOLOGY AND LITERATURE. By A. D. H. BIVAR. pp. xii, 140. New York, Bibliotheca Persica, 1998.

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In today's political climate, there does not seem to be much interest for studies that document Iranian contributions to western civilisation. Victor Davis Hanson, an historian of Greece at California State University, Fresno, writing, astonishingly in my view, of the film *300*, claims that the digitalised action-adventure preserves the spirit of Thermopylae, although it makes "allowance for popular tastes".¹ Unfortunately, this allowance includes a profound demonisation of all Persians, well beyond any perspective of Herodotus. After all, Thermopylae is but one section in Herodotus' long history; there certainly are other sections in which Persians are portrayed more positively.

Professor David Bivar's broad study of Mithraism is a small corrective to the dissection of Iran and the West so prevalent in popular culture today. It challenges the conventional wisdom in Mithraic studies that there is little of Iranian culture in the Mithraism of Rome and Greece. I use the word "small" only with regard to the size of audience; many more will, of course, see *300* and more read the works of Hanson, who has had various personal interactions with members of the Bush administration.² Nonetheless, Bivar's choice of topic is a fitting one for the Yarshater Lecture Series at UCLA, whose objective is to "foster greater mutual cultural enrichment between UCLA and the Iranian community". (p. v)

In the first chapter Bivar sets out the difficulties of a comprehensive study of the god Mithra(s) and his cult. First, there is scope: the book is interested in all mentions of the god as well as remnants of and influences from his worship. For Bivar, the chronology and geography of Mithraism range from the *Vedas* to C. S. Lewis. He rightly notes that with such a perspective Mithraic cult cannot be viewed as a unity, but the comprehensive nature of the survey does pose some problems for thoroughness. For example, in comparing the character Aslan of Lewis's Narnia chronicles to a Mithraic and leonine solar deity, Bivar is unable to provide a source for Lewis's inspirations, but more importantly he does not evaluate the reasons for the similarity (p. 64). Why would the Christian apologist liken his noble lion, his allegory of Christ, to an Iranian deity? And if the similarity is unintentional, that conclusion in itself carries some significance. The second difficulty in the study of Mithra(s) is the scarcity of sources. Since the Roman cult was by its nature practiced in secret, there are few written sources.

¹Victor Davis Hanson, "History and the Movie *300*", *Private Papers*. (<http://www.victorhanson.com/articles/hanson101106.html>). The film is not based on Herodotus but a graphic novel by Frank Miller.

²See again his website <http://www.victorhanson.com>, in particular his interview with Peter Robinson at the *National Review*.