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supporre che la stampa del libricino con la dedica adulatoria a Moskita, ai suoi genitori e alla sua famiglia fosse stata concepita anche per venire ricompensata. Non meno trasparenti sono le parole della dedica della traduzione del *Keter Malkhut* ad una signora della famiglia Ottolenghi. Questi sforzi da parte di Yaakov Heilprun fanno luce sulla condizione di miseria nella quale si trovavano gli intellettuali del suo tipo nelle comunità ashkenazite in Italia. Anche quando ottenne lo stato ufficiale di scriba della comunità ashkenazita di Padova alla fine della sua vita, questo pubblico impiego non era sufficiente a garantirgli una entrata dignitosa.⁷²

Per quanto riguarda lo yiddish, l'attività di Heilprun è già legata al declino della letteratura yiddish in Italia all'inizio del XVII secolo. Il passaggio delle traduzioni dall'ebraico allo yiddish a quelle dallo yiddish all'italiano testimoniano di questo declino. Pochi anni dopo la pubblicazione dei suoi libricini in yiddish, Yaakov Heilprun si accorse che sebbene ci fosse richiesta delle *Mitzvot Nashim* di Rabbi Binyamin Aharon Solnik, che avevano raggiunto una vasta diffusione, non ci sarebbe stato abbastanza pubblico di lettori in yiddish per il libro e sarebbe stato più saggio tradurlo dallo yiddish all'italiano. Egli lo tradusse nel 1614 e esso fu stampato a Padova nel 1625, l'anno della sua morte.⁷³

Possiamo apprendere in modo indiretto di questo processo di declino dall'ultimo libro stampato in yiddish in Italia nel 1609, una Haggadah di *Pesah* con la traduzione in yiddish (n. *21). La prima edizione della Haggadah finemente illustrata con la traduzione in yiddish sembra fosse intesa per l'esportazione al di là dei confini italiani. La sua pubblicazione dovrebbe essere vista nel contesto generale. Dobbiamo esaminare la sua pubblicazione alla luce delle tre stampe simultanee della stessa magnifica Haggadah che apparvero con la loro traduzione in giudeo-italiano e in giudeo-spagnolo, così come in yiddish.⁷⁴ Questa era stata un'iniziativa di ampia portata e ben escogitata, il cui scopo era quello di ottenere la più vasta diffusione possibile grazie alle varie traduzioni e alle illustrazioni.

Nella Biblioteca Ebraica Nazionale e Universitaria si trova una

copìa della Haggadah del 1609 stampata su pergamena espressamente "per il *bahur ... Gershon Parenz*". Secondo la definitiva identificazione di Yaari, Gershon Parenz era un discendente della famiglia di stampatori ashkenaziti che era stata attiva in Italia nel XVI secolo. Era il nipote di Meir ben Yaakov Parenz, che era stato il socio di Cornelio Adelkind nella stampa della traduzione dei Salmi di Elia Levita nel 1545 – il primo libro in yiddish apparso in Italia (n. *53). Ma la Haggadah stampata per il giovane Gershon, un esponente della seconda generazione della famiglia Parenz, era l'edizione con la traduzione italiana e non con quella in yiddish.⁷⁵

Nella sua postfazione al primo libro in yiddish stampato in Italia (n. *53), Cornelio Adelkind rimproverava i lettori yiddish che leggevano opere "profane", che erano soprattutto trascrizioni dal tedesco in caratteri ebraici. Egli offriva la traduzione yiddish del Libro dei Salmi di Elia Levita come un sostituto di carattere religioso alla letteratura alla quale egli si opponeva e della quale egli ricorda in modo specifico *Tutrikh fun Bern oder fun der schönen Glück* (cfr. n. *97). Nonostante la formulazione convenzionale di questa tensione tra narrativa profana e letteratura religiosa, è evidente che verso la metà del XVI secolo gli ebrei ashkenaziti in Italia leggevano ancora materiale "profano" in yiddish che era derivato da varie fonti, comprese le trascrizioni dal tedesco.⁷⁶ Nell'introduzione alla traduzione delle *Mitzvot Nashim* di Heilprun troviamo precisamente la stessa convinzione. In questo caso particolare il traduttore offre il suo libro, destinato alle giunte ebreiche, come un sostituto alla letteratura profana in italiano: Ariosto, il *Decameron* di Boccaccio, e *Amadigi*.⁷⁷ Come la Haggadah "privata" con traduzione italiana appartenente al giovane ashkenazita Gershon Parenz del 1609, la traduzione di Heilprun e le sue parole di opposizione alla lettura della letteratura italiana provano il completarsi del processo di cambiamento linguistico, culturale e letterario che avvenne all'interno delle comunità ashkenazite in Italia settentrionale nel XVI secolo, verso l'abbandono dello yiddish e l'adattamento all'ambiente linguistico locale e alle sue abitudini di lettura.

A number of first names common among Jews in Germany, such as *Teltse* or *Toltse* (from *Doice*), *Yentl* (from *Gentile*), *Bendet* (from *Benedetto*), and a series of Old Yiddish words, whether now extinct, such as *orn* (to pray, from *orare*), or still in active use like *leyen* (to read, from *legere*), and *bentshn* (to bless, from *benedicere*), join other weighty historical evidence for the partially Italian origin of the Jewish migration to the Rhineland and Mosel area towards the end of the first millennium of the Christian era. These Jewish emigrants from Italy to Germany, who were among the founders of Ashkenazi Jewry and the designers of its culture and its language – Yiddish – could not, of course, have foreseen, that a number of their descendants would about four hundred years later migrate back to Italy. By the 15th century Northern Italy, the area where these immigrants settled, had already become a part of the Ashkenazi Diaspora, having joined Germany, Moravia, Bohemia, Poland, Eretz Israel and Egypt.²

Unlike the prolonged attachment of other branches of Ashkenazi Jewry to Yiddish, the devotion of the Italian branch to this language was not long-lived. It seems that by the beginning of the 17th century most Ashkenazi Jews in Northern Italy had already stopped using Yiddish. However, up to that time this Italian branch had been most actively engaged in Yiddish literary creativity as well as in publishing enterprises intended not only for the local reading public but the Yiddish reader everywhere.

The primary evidence for this activity lies in a series of manuscripts which originated in Italy in the 15th and 16th centuries. The earliest dated Italian Yiddish manuscript that has reached us is a *Sefer Refies* (No. 71)³, a book of popular medicine containing 1250 prescriptions and written in Mestre in 1474; the latest is a *Mayse-bukh* (No. 64), a book of *mayseys* (religious or quasi-religious stories similar in scope now to the medieval Latin *exemplum*, now to the Italian *novella*). This collection of 130 stories was completed around 1590 in a place the writer calls 'Rovere' (probably Roveretto or Rovere della Luna, both near Trento), and followed six years later by a quite similar but somewhat smaller collection which another Jew from the same 'Rovere' wrote for his aunt while visiting her in Innsbruck (No. 65).

The number of dated and undated Italian Yiddish manuscripts we know of – apart from 13 personal letters (Nos. 77, 78) and a transfer or sales contract (No. 81) – comes up to 41, but two of them (Nos. 98, 99) were burned in the fire that broke out in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria of Torino in 1904. One manuscript – the over four hundred years old *Mayse-bukh* (No. 65) – was discovered only five years ago, when the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich purchased it from the owner; and the existence of the manuscript collection of sayings (No. 46) and of the book of remedies (No. 71A) was uncovered most recently, in 1999, in the course of work on this catalogue. These events reinforce our belief that other Italian Yiddish manuscripts still exist and may well be privately owned or preserved in libraries in Italy or elsewhere.

The scope of the extant manuscripts varies from the fairly concise to the comprehensive volume of hundreds of pages. Some manuscripts accommodate one single work or just a few items, while others comprise many works of either the same kind or quite different character, resulting at times in most fascinating miscellanea collections (e. g. Nos. 47, 48).

A variety of genres is displayed in the manuscripts: there are books of medicine offering a vast array of prescriptions and some theoretical excerpts (Nos. 71–72); books of customs to be followed throughout the Jewish yearly cycle (Nos. 35–39, 47, 99); books of commandments for women instructing their addressees on their traditional duties and obligations (Nos. 30–31, 36, 47); diverse Hebrew-Yiddish glossaries for the understanding of biblical vocabulary (Nos. 1–3); partial or complete translations of books of the Bible (Nos. 4–6, 10, 37, 47), mainly those which play a part in the synagogue service; translations of prayers and liturgical hymns (Nos. 6, 12, 47); various kinds of renderings of biblical stories such as the Binding of Isaac (*Akedat Yitzhak*, Nos. 10, 48); translations or adaptations of other Hebrew works such as the Book of Virtues (*Sefer Middot*, No. 43), the Precepts of the Fathers (*Pirkei Avot*, Nos. 47–48), the aphorisms of the *Alphabet de Ben Sira* (No. 66), and finally – a free Yiddish translation of what seems to be the translator's original collection of sayings from Hebrew and Aramaic sources (No. 46).

assimilazione gastronomica degli ashkenaziti nell'Italia rinascimentale". pp. 125–136.

² For extensive information on this and many of the following topics see under Shmeruk in our "Bibliography to the Catalogue". See also Khone Shmeruk, *Prokim fun der yidisher literatur-geshikhte*, Tel-Aviv 1988, the Yiddish version of Shmeruk, *Aspects* (all abbreviated titles refer to the bibliography mentioned above).

³ The numbers refer to the descriptions of items in our "Catalogue" and refer the reader to the "Bibliography to the Catalogue".

⁷² Cfr. "Yaakov Heilprun ben Elhanan" nell'indice di *Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua 1603–1630*, Edited with Notes by Daniel Carpi, Gerusalemme 1979 (in ebraico). Secondo i documenti 396, 777, 779 egli cominciò ad avere la funzione di scriba della comunità nel 1618. Morì nel 1625 (cfr. documenti 585, 590, 591). Un documento (513) del 1623 testimonia della sua situazione e del suo status di "scriba della Santa Congregazione". Riferisce di quanto egli avesse sollecitato gli amministratori della comunità "ad assicurargli un dono e un aiuto". Fu deciso di rispondere alla sua supplica e di obbligarlo ogni sposo della comunità a dargli mezzo scudo d'argento!

⁷³ Sulle edizioni di questo libro cfr. n. *34 e lo si confronti a M. Steinschneider, "Die italienische Literatur der Juden", in *MGWJ* 43 (1899), pp. 316–317; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Gerusalemme 1971, vol. XIV, col. 1670. Una copia dell'edizione del 1710 si trova nella Biblioteca Ebraica Nazionale e Universitaria di Gerusalemme. È stampata in alfabeto latino ma con un frontespizio bilingue ebraico e italiano (nella parte italiana del frontespizio i nomi dell'autore e del traduttore sono già stati distorti). Va osservato che questa non era la prima opera italiana che si occupava dei precetti delle donne (cfr. n. 30, 31, 36, 47). Sui manoscritti precedenti, compreso quello che probabilmente fu tradotto dallo yiddish, cfr. Romer Segal, *Works*, pp. 43–44. Comunque, solo l'opera tradotta da Yaakov ben Elhanan Heilprun venne di fatto pubblicata.

⁷⁴ Cfr. "Characteristics" nel nostro n. *21.

⁷⁵ A. Yaari, "A Vellum Copy of the Passover Haggadah, Venice 1609", in *Kiryat Sefer* 30 (1956), pp. 113–117 (in ebraico). (Cfr. n. *29b). Sulla famiglia Parenz cfr. A. M. Habermann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Printers and Books*, Gerusalemme 1978, pp. 167–213 e specialmente pp. 168–172 e 209–210 (in ebraico). Il figlio di questo stesso Gershon Parenz, Moshe, appare vent'anni dopo, nel 1629, come l'ispiratore di una nuova speciale edizione di questa stessa Haggadah, pubblicata un'altra volta in tre stampe simultanee, con la loro traduzione in yiddish (n. *22), in giudeo-italiano (n. *29c) e in giudeo-spagnolo (Yudlov, nn. 55–57) rispettivamente. Per altri dettagli cfr. Habermann, *ibid.*, pp. 266–268.

⁷⁶ Per ulteriori informazioni su questo fenomeno cfr. Shmeruk, *Aspects*, pp. 24–39.

⁷⁷ Dall'edizione del 1710:

"E i vostri figliuoli, & ancora che siano citelle, che non sono ancora כלית לבו debbano legger perchè ci sono bene delli פרקים che possono legger senza trattar de נדה e בטיילה ci sono לו דריש e חלה e הרלקה e il primo capitolo fin al terzo decimo, e ultimo della prima parte son tutte cose Sante, e pii, che trattano del culto Divino, et assai manco male farà, che leggano questo libretto, chel Ariosto le cento novelle. Amadis di Gaula, e simil libri profani, che non è lecito leggerli al שבת come dice רבנו רמב"ם e che da quelli non s'impara se non lascività, e cose vane."

¹ More comprehensive information on Old Yiddish literature in general and on Yiddish literature in Italy in particular is now available in Italian thanks to Elèna Mortara di Verofli and Laura Quercioli Mincer, the editors of *Il mondo Yiddish: Saggi (=Rassegna Mensile di Israel)*, Vol. LXII, N. 1–2, Gennaio–Agosto 1996, Tevet–Elul 5756). Some of the articles published there deal directly with diverse aspects of Yiddish literature in Italy: Chava Turniansky, "La letteratura yiddish nell'Italia del Cinquecento", pp. 63–92; Chone Shmeruk, "Studi su Paris un Viene", pp. 93–123; Maria Mayer Modena, "Leggi in yiddish ma mangia all'italiana:

These genres are joined by a substantial amount of different kinds of stories from diverse sources (Nos. 10, 12, 36, 47–48, 52, 64–65), which appear either individually, in small groups or in large collections, and by a variety of songs and poems (Nos. 47, 52, 59–60, 64), among them moralistic-didactic poems, mocking *pasquils*, songs and poems for the holidays, and poetical contests. Some of these songs and poems are bilingual compositions with parallel Hebrew and Yiddish versions, and – in one single instance – a bilingual poem on the Ages of Man with parallel versions in Yiddish and Italian (No. 47).

Several alluring epic poems on the Books of the Former Prophets, namely Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings (see Nos. 8–10), as well as a poetic adaptation from the German version of King Arthur's legend (No. 68), and a most elaborate and innovative Yiddish rendering of the Italian *Buovo d'Antona* (Nos. 49–50) enhance further the wide range of genres present in the manuscripts and grant it additional appealing colour.

One relatively small group of manuscripts consists of several documents of private or communal character: copies of two personal letters written in Northern Italy in 1476 (No. 77); a deed of sale or transfer of goods between two Ashkenazi Jews in Verona in 1580 (No. 81); a bundle of eleven private letters written a little later in north-eastern Italy and sent to Verona (No. 78); and the detailed lists of manuscript and printed books the Jews of Mantua submitted for censorship in 1595 following an order of the Church (see No. 82).

These documents are bound to contribute valuable information on the cultural history of Ashkenazi Jews in Italy, and most particularly on their Yiddish – spoken versus written, regional versus universal – by confronting it either with the language of their literary manuscripts, or with that of the letters sent to them from other places – from Jerusalem via Cairo to Venice (No. 80), and from Vidim in Bulgaria to Padua (No. 79) – which clearly attest to the role of the Ashkenazim in Italy as a connecting link between Jews in Central Europe and in the Ottoman Empire.

The lists of books from Mantua (No. 82) offer not only a great deal of unusual information about the reading habits, in various languages (mainly Hebrew, Yiddish, Judezmo, Judeo-Italian or Italian) of the different Jewish communities that inhabited the city.⁴ They also present us with facts and figures about 'imported' as well as 'made in Italy' Yiddish books that were then, around 1595, located in the private libraries of Jewish homes in Mantua, and probably read and enjoyed by their owners. In quite a few instances the Mantuan lists are the one and only record of a number of Italian Yiddish books which have not reached us (Nos. *84–*89, *91–*94).

Further evidence of the dynamic literary creativity of Ashkenazi Jews in Northern Italy, besides that of the manuscripts, is provided by the 35 Yiddish books we know to have been printed in Venice, Mantua, Verona, Cremona and Sabionetta since 1545. Until some years ago, extant copies of only 22 of these books, and incomplete copies of one more, were known.⁵ The fairly recent discovery of a copy of the book of fables called *Kü-bukh* (Book of Cows, No. *70) in a private collection in London, and of a complete copy of the Yiddish adaptation of *Paris e Vienna* (No. *69) in the Library of the Seminario vescovile in Verona, brings up to 24 the number of Yiddish books printed in Italy with at least one extant copy known today. And since additional unknown copies of certain books have been found during and through the preparation of the exhibition that preceded this catalogue,⁶ there is very good reason to assume that a proper search in public libraries and private collections alike may uncover missing or even hitherto unknown items.

The Yiddish books printed in Italy during the relevant five decades – from 1545 to 1609 – represent over one third of all the Yiddish books printed throughout the Ashkenazi Diaspora during this period. Besides some of the genres which are already present in the manuscripts – like the books of customs and the books of commandments for women – several additional genres appear in print, such as the rhymed adaptations of fables of Jewish and non-Jewish origin brought together in the *Kü-bukh* (No. *70); translations or adaptations of Hebrew ethical works and manuals on diverse issues – from educating children to making meat *kosher* (e. g. Nos. *44–*45); full translations of the Passover Haggadah (Nos. *21–*23) emerge and so do translations of other prayer books and liturgical items (e. g. Nos. *13–*14, *19–*20); the poetic adaptation of *Paris e Vienna* (No. *69) joins that of *Buovo d'Antona* (Nos. 49–*51); wedding songs in Yiddish only or in Yiddish and Hebrew (Nos. *61–*62) come to light and enhance the diversity within the songs and poems genre, and various kinds of stories (Nos. *63, *84, *86, *87–*88, *92–*93, *95) printed even before the manuscript *Mayse-bukh*-collections are put together, clearly point out Italy as the pioneering, inspiring and flourishing centre of Yiddish narrative prose.⁷

The onset and development of Yiddish narrative prose in Italy is certainly linked to the contemporary Italian *novella*, which contributed greatly not only to European literature as a whole, but also to the renewal and spread of Hebrew narrative prose. And it is indeed to this Hebrew episode that a great part of Yiddish narrative prose is more tightly linked. For stories from the Talmud, Midrash and Apocrypha, which were reworked into easier, simpler Hebrew and printed in Italy, were then translated into Yiddish and printed there; and hagiographic tales and legends about notable figures from the Ashkenazi historical

past, which had spread orally in Yiddish – the spoken language – were first recorded in Hebrew and only afterwards translated back into Yiddish. These two types of *mayse* (stories) or *maysim* (actions, deeds) of inner Jewish origin are joined by a third, the *istoria*, a term by which some hitherto lost items are registered in the lists of books from Mantua implying their non-Jewish provenance and their derivation from European literature. These three kinds of stories not only found their way into the *Mayse-bukh*, but were dominant in Yiddish narrative prose from its flourishing in Italy until at least the late 18th century. In addition, the earliest representatives of a somewhat different kind of *mayse*, which bears a definite local colour and attests to an oral Yiddish origin as well as to an initial recording in this language, are also preserved in an Italian manuscript (No. 52).

In fact, Northern Italy was not only the cultivating ground of various kinds of Yiddish narrative prose, but also the birthplace of two forms of presentation: the *mayse-bukh*, the comprising collection of many stories, and the *mayse-bikhl*, the small booklet of no more than eight leaves with one single story. In the series of *mayse-bikhlekh* printed in Venice in 1552, a new Yiddish prose style emerged, closer to the spoken language and free from the contemporary restricting conventions. It may thus be concluded, that in the development of a flexible narrative prose, the *mayse* played in Yiddish literature very much the same role that the *novella* played in Italian literature.

The manuscript *Mayse-bukh*-collections were precursors of the *Mayse-bukh* which was printed for the first time in Basel in 1602. The printed book had almost doubled the number of stories comprised in either manuscript and was presenting the public with no less than 257 items. The appeal of the *Mayse-Bukh* is attested to by the 17 editions that appeared until the mid-18th century, but it was the inexpensive and popular *mayse-bikhl* that up to the 20th century continued to be the prevalent form of distribution of Yiddish narrative prose of all kinds.

Certain other features – either originated, developed or remodelled in Italy – also left a lasting mark on Yiddish literature for shorter or longer periods after the Ashkenazim in this area had altogether ceased speaking and reading Yiddish.

Let us look, for example, at the *Minhagim*, the books of customs which describe the religious rituals to be observed in the synagogue and at home throughout the Jewish yearly cycle and on special occasions like weddings and funerals. The extant manuscript *Minhagim* (Nos. 35–39) have not been scrutinized, but the printed editions (Nos. *40–*42) are, in fact, an updated Yiddish adaptation of the Hebrew *Minhagim* which were set down in Germany in the 15th century, and printed several times during the 16th in Italy, Poland and Basel. We do not know for sure where the Yiddish adaptation was made, but we do know it

was printed for the first time in Venice in 1589 (see No. *40). The statement made in the title page that the customs included in the book are relevant not only 'throughout Ashkenaz' (meaning Germany) but also in Moravia, Bohemia and Poland as well as among the Ashkenazim in Italy, is an obvious indication of the basic uniform behaviour of Ashkenazi Jews everywhere, and of the intended reading public of a Yiddish book printed in Italy. This was the first time a book of this kind had been published in Yiddish. As a result, the *Minhagim* entered the corpus of literature that provided for the needs of those Jewish readers who did not sufficiently understand Hebrew. During the following 200 years (until 1800), forty editions of *Minhagim* were printed all over the Ashkenazi Diaspora and continued to perform their instructive function. Furthermore, the illustrations which were introduced in the second edition (Venice 1593) not only appeared in most of the following editions in Prague, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Frankfurt on Main and Frankfurt on Oder, but were integrated into a series of other books, mainly the Grace after Meals and the Passover Haggadah,⁸ for the edification and visual enjoyment of children and adults alike. The books of customs – and the illustrated ones in particular – are no doubt exceptional sources of Jewish folklore.

Another example of a long-lasting Italian innovation is exposed in the Yiddish translation of the Pentateuch, the Five Scrolls and the *Haftarot* (i.e. the weekly portions from the Books of Prophets), which was printed in Cremona in 1560 (see No. *7). This evident second edition of the *editio princeps* which appeared in Augsburg sixteen years earlier is much more than just an amended reprint: selected excerpts from the commentary of Rashi, the greatest interpreter of the Hebrew Scriptures, appear in Yiddish translation on the margin of the translation of the Pentateuch and are thus explained by the author, Leyb Bresh: 'In many cases, where I thought it necessary since it was impossible to understand the translation, I added lots of nice tales and stories and accounts of real events from Rashi's commentary for the delight of the reader'. The translation was indeed impossible to understand due to its thoroughly strict word-for-word rendering, its abject following the syntax of the original and its utter disregard of Yiddish syntax. In contrast, the selection from Rashi's commentary offered attractive reading and may have justified the printing of three subsequent editions in Prague and Basel. After that, no more Pentateuch translations of this kind ever appeared, but in most of the various comprehensible translations that replaced them up to the 20th century, large selections from Rashi's commentary are blended into the rendering.

The Yiddish epic poem on biblical topics did not leave a similar lasting mark on posterior literature although it is justly considered the most original, inventive and entertaining genre of Old Yiddish literature. From its first appearance in 1382 in

4 See Baruchson in the mentioned bibliography.

5 See Shmeruk, *Italia*, pp. 135–175 for a detailed list of the 35 books and a thorough description of the extant ones; books with no extant copy are marked there with an asterisk. For a translation of the preface to the list see Ch.

Shmeruk, "Yiddish Printing in Italy" in the present work.

6 On the exhibition see the preface to the present work.

7 See Shmeruk, *Prose*, passim.

8 See Ch. Shmeruk, "The Illustrations of the *Minhagim*, Venice 1593, in the editions reprinted in Prague in the 17th Century", *Studies in Bibliography and*

Booklore, Vol. XV (1984), pp. 34–52; idem, "The Itinerary of an Illustration Since 1593", *Journal of Jewish Art*, Vol. VIII (1981), pp. 54–59.

the oldest known Yiddish manuscript⁹ until its decline two hundred years later, this genre occupied a central place in Yiddish literature. Its initial stages, which gave rise to relatively short epic poems on one concise episode from the Pentateuch, culminated in the *Akedat Yitzhak*. This poem about the Binding of Isaac gained popularity and appeared in several versions, the most refined of which was composed in Italy. Besides allowing for some critical remarks about the hospitality of the Jews of Venice and a concluding wish that the Messiah comes 'biz Cremona un' Venedig' (as far as Cremona and Venice, see No. 48) this Italian version breaks away from certain strict conventions, introduces remarkable innovations and shows a fine sense of humour. However, the part Italy played in the further development of the genre, when it moved on to the epic poems dealing with the full contents of a whole book of the Bible – is the most significant.

Despite its appearance in an Italian manuscript of the 15th century, we are still not entirely certain about the place of origin of the *Shmuel-bukh*. In this extensive epic on the Book of Samuel the genre reached its climax probably due to the attractive strophic design and rhythmic pattern of the work as well as to its fascinating way of casting an original combination of biblical and midrashic contents in the conventional molds of the romance of chivalry. What is perfectly certain is the crucial role Italy played in providing for similar epic poems on other Books of the Former Prophets. Engaging comprehensive epics on the Books of Joshua and Judges (No. 10) were written in Mantua in 1511 following the strophic design and the rhythmic pattern of the *Shmuel-bukh*. About fifty years later it was Mantua where another epic on the Book of Judges was printed (see No. *11). It's author, Yaakov 'tsu der kanen' from Frankfurt on Main, had introduced other new attractive devices and vividly remodelled the strophic design of the *Shmuel-bukh*.

Another fine example of Italian contribution to the development of a genre lies in the *Kü-bukh* (No. *70), the first collection of fables printed in Yiddish. The author draws partly upon the Hebrew *Mishlei Shualim* (Fox fables) by R. Berakhia ha-Nakdan and partly upon the German *Der Edelstein* by Ulrich Boner, but adapts its own selection in a most original manner, lending it a vivid idiomatic language which assists in creating realistic contemporary and typically Jewish settings and characters. Thus, for instance, the promise of a good marriage match (a *shidekh*) appears in the fox's request of the raven to sing nothing else but the chants for the Jewish New Year ('*di nigunim fun rosheshone*'). This kind of playful humorous judaization of the universal fable replaces the subtle Jewish character of the oldest known Yiddish fable - which appeared in the 14th century¹⁰ - and lives on in the genre up to this day. And it is worth observing how the

combination of 'imported' Ashkenazi traditions with the more recent adopted Italian habits is asserted in one of many instances in the *Kü-bukh*. One of the introductions deals humorously with gastronomy and begins the list of desirable foods with '*hüner wakhteln un' kaponi, gali de India, türtl-taubn un' meloni, karpfn troute un' karpioni, farzis, lokshn makaroni*'.¹¹

Playful combinations of words and concepts from various stock, humorous judaization of characters, settings and events, incorporation of Jewish and non-Jewish, Hebrew, German and Italian literary contents and devices, and plentiful poetic innovations pervade the Yiddish works of Elia Levita, the most outstanding personality in the history of Yiddish literature until the 19th century. Elijah ben Asher Ashkenazi ha-Levi,¹² better known as Elijah Bahur, Elye Bokher, or Elia Levita, was born in Neustadt near Nuremberg in 1468 or 1469. He came to Italy in his youth and lived mainly in Padua, Venice and Rome. After a stay of approximately one year (1541) in Isny (Germany), where he supervised the printing of some of his Hebrew and Yiddish books, he returned to Venice, where he died in 1549. He is renown mainly for his achievements in the field of Hebrew grammar and lexicography, his contribution to biblical criticism, and his close intellectual relationship with prominent Christian scholars, first and foremost the Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo. His contribution to Yiddish literature stands out among the varied corpus of his literary work, and a great part of it is an evident result of his direct contact with the surrounding Italian culture.

A number of Elia Levita's works in Yiddish mentioned and attributed to him in other sources, have not reached us: a book entitled *Das bukh der shonen Glukn* (No. *97); translations of the Books of Proverbs, Job and Daniel (see the remark under No. *53); some wedding songs and some *Purim-shpil* pieces (see the remark under No. *69) although one of those pieces may be the one attached to the recently discovered *Mayse-bukh* manuscript.¹³ Lost as well is part of the series of lampoons he exchanged with a Venetian teacher who accused him of looting shops during the fire of 1513 on the Rialto Bridge in Venice. The extant two lampoons – 'on the fire in Venice' and *Hamavdil* (see Nos. 47, 52) – from this series bring to light a new, lively and mordant way of literary dealing with an actual event.

In spite of this comprehensive loss, Elia Levita's significant contribution to Old Yiddish language and literature remains unique and has no parallel in scope and versatility. His *Shemot devarim* (No. *55), printed in Isny (Germany) in 1542, is in fact the first Hebrew-Yiddish dictionary and bears the qualities of a thesaurus; his Hebrew lexicon *Sefer ha-Tishbi* (No. *57), which appeared there a year earlier, includes a few unique and enlightening explanations of Old Yiddish words; his Yiddish translation of the Book of Psalms, which carefully summarizes

the long lived translating tradition of this book, was published in Venice in 1545 and again in Mantua in 1562 (Nos. *53-54) and reprinted many times since outside Italy either separately or in the Yiddish translations of the regular prayer book (the *siddur*).

However, the most important Yiddish work by Elia Levita bearing his name, is his adaptation of an Italian version of the courtly romance *Buovo d'Antona*, which was quite popular around the end of the 15th century not only among Christians – as the number of editions points out, but also among Jews – as the book lists from Mantua make clear. It is therefore not surprising that the book (No. *51) aroused the curiosity of the Ashkenazi Jews who had not yet learned to read and understand Italian, and it is for them that Elia Levita adapted the book into Yiddish in Padua in 1507.

This extremely thorough adaptation contains only 650 stanzas while the original consists of 1400. Only a few abridgements result from partial omissions of erotic episodes; most leave out long and extremely detailed descriptions of battles and fantastic adventures. Thus, for instance, the lengthy description of someone's eventful and dangerous journey is summarized in a short note saying: 'He came through his enemies, I don't know how'; the elaborate description of a long battle is cut short by the author's remark: 'They fought each other, I'll make it short for you'; the depiction of a series of Bovo's adventures, which takes up many stanzas of the original, is condensed to one single stanza in which we are told that Bovo defeated all the dragons and strange beasts he met on his way; and when the author comes to the point of the hero's final victory over a specific giant, he loses patience and says: 'before he killed him he dealt him enough blows, I won't write all this for I think it's a lie'. These abridgements and interpolations seem to have suited not only the author's ironic approach to the material he was adapting, but the attitude of his Jewish readers as well. And it was probably for their further amusement that Elia Levita judaized the positive characters and made them act as real Jews: they congratulate each other with '*mazl tov*' and greet their hosts with '*brukhim ha-yoyshvim*' (blessed be the present); they part with '*sholem*' and swear by '*boyre oylem*' (the Creator of the world); they set the wedding date for '*rosh khayodesh sivan*' (the first day of the month of *Sivan*) and arrange a '*bris-mile*' (circumcision) for their newborn twin sons.

The sporadic judaization of the central characters, the abridgements followed by the ironic comments on the fantastic or unlikely elements of the plot, and quite a few 'vulgar' terms and erotic allusions left in the adaptation or added to it, combine together to create remarkable comic effects. These reach their climax when the most aristocratic heroes, whom no one suspects of being Jewish, suddenly act and speak like Jews. The power of these effects, which

can easily be appreciated and enjoyed even today, must have had a much greater impact on the Jewish reader of the 16th century, who was well aware of the structure of the society he lived in and of the marginal place of the Jews in it. It therefore seems very likely, that even Jews who could read the Italian original turned to the Yiddish adaptation in order to enjoy its specific amusing features.¹⁴

While adapting *Buovo d'Antona* into Yiddish Elia Levita gradually transformed the *ottava rima* of the original to make it fit for this language. Towards the end of the book he turned to accentual-syllabic meter and created accentual iambs,¹⁵ an innovation in European poetry employed shortly afterwards in the Yiddish adaptation of another Italian romance, *Paris e Vienna* (No. *69) by either Elia Levita himself or a most brilliant disciple of his.

The Yiddish *Bovo d'Antona*, also known as *Bovo-bukh* (Book of Bovo) and later on as *Bove-mayse* (Story of Bove), was printed in Isny (Germany) in 1541 and earned a permanent place in Yiddish literary tradition. Several editions in the 17th and 18th centuries preceded semi-prosaic adaptations which appeared either in the form of a *mayse-bikhl* or in a larger format and in Eastern Yiddish. Even in the 20th century Yiddish writers were inspired by the personality of the author or by his work.¹⁶ The name of the hero is still used today, because of the phonetic similarity between *Bove* (the later pronunciation of *Bovo*) and *bobe* (grandmother), in the popular idiomatic expression *bobe-mayse* meaning 'old wives' tales', but deriving in fact from Elia Levita's *Bove-mayse* due to its fanciful nature and the implausible adventures of a hero from Italian popular literature who made a name for himself in Yiddish literature.

To conclude this sampling of special traits of Yiddish literature in Italy, I shall briefly consider one particular feature – the apparently distinct place of women and the special role they seem to have played in the literary output of the Italian branch as compared to that of the other branches.

Old Yiddish literature as a whole is intended – as one author puts it – 'for women and men who are like women' meaning that just like women they, too, do not know Hebrew enough to properly study and understand a Hebrew text. Old Yiddish books everywhere are frequently addressed to 'men and women, boys and girls' and when no addressee is stipulated, his nature – man, woman, or both – is in many cases quite easily implied from the character of the book. However, it seems that in Italy the proportion of books expressly addressed to women – whether to the female public in general or to a certain woman in particular or first and foremost to her – is larger than elsewhere and includes genres which would as a rule be addressed to male readers only or to readers of both genders. Bible translations, for instance, are

9 See L. Fuks (ed.), *The Oldest Known Literary Documents of Yiddish Literature* (c. 1382), I-II, Leiden 1957.

10 See E. Timm, "Die 'Fabel vom alten Löwen' in jiddistischer und komparatistischer Sicht", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Vol. 100 (Sonderheft 'Jiddisch'), pp. 109-170.

11 See the article by Maria Mayer Modena mentioned in note 1 above.

12 See Weil, pp. 133-151.

13 See Timm, *Erzählprosa*, p. 258. Simon Neuberger's study of this work, including the edition of the text, is forthcoming.

14 Other attractive and interesting features of the adaptation have come to light in the comparative study *Il Bovo d'Antona di Elia Bachur Levita e le sue fonti*. Tesi di Laurea submitted to the Università degli Studi di Milano (23.4.1996) by Claudia Rosenzweig, who is presently working on a critical edition of the *Bovo-bukh* as integral part of her dissertation.

15 See B. Hrushovski, "The Creation of Accentual Iambs and Their First

Employment in a Yiddish Romance in Italy (1508-1509)", *For Max Weinreich on his Seventieth Birthday*, The Hague 1964, pp. 108-146.

16 See, for example, J. Opatoşu, *Eliyahü Bokher*, New York 1933; Der Nister, "A *bobe-mayse* oder di *mayse mit di melokhim*" in his book *Gedakht*, Vol. 2, Berlin 1923, pp. 135-286; J. I. Trunk, "Bobe-mayse" in his collection of essays and novels *Kvaln un beymer*, New York 1952, pp. 222-320.

mainly addressed to the male reader, and translations of the Pentateuch offer to assist fathers in teaching their sons and teachers in instructing their pupils. The translation of the Pentateuch published by Leyb Bresh in Cremona in 1560 (see No. *7) seems to be the first to add a distinct mention of a female addressee. Moreover, while criticising men's neglecting the study of the Bible, he remarks: 'when the married and single women and the young girls see that the men do not study, they don't either'. And in praising his book he promises: 'every woman or girl will know about God's Torah and what piousness means when she reads this book every Saturday and holiday and does not waste her time reading other kinds of Yiddish books which are nonsense'.

The general female public is openly addressed in the author's formula 'ikh der shrayber/ diner ale frumen vayber' (I the writer, servant of all pious women), which makes a most frequent appearance in Yiddish works from Italy. Elia Levita, for instance, employs it in his preface to the *Bovo-bukh* (No. *51) before he explains that this publication will be his first response to the requests of several ladies that he publish his Yiddish works. Individual women are the explicit and directly intended readers of several Italian manuscripts: the *Shmuel-bukh* (No. 8) is copied for a certain Freidlen in Northern Italy; a book of customs (No. 39) is dedicated to a Venetian woman called Fradlina; the nephew from Rovere visiting his aunt in Innsbruck writes her a *Mayse-bukh* (No. 65), and the father of a young Serlina in Venice commissions for her the most comprehensive and variegated of all extant Italian Yiddish manuscripts (No. 47).

Not only manuscripts are dedicated to individual women but printed books as well, although the specific woman appears in these mainly as first among the addressed female wide public and may well have been the patroness of the author or the sponsess of the publication. When *Sefer Middot* (see No. 43) was published in 1542 in Isny, Germany, it became the first Yiddish printed book addressing a woman by name, and the addressee, Frau Morada, then a resident of Gunzburg, was most probably Italian. For her and 'for all women and maiden and for whoever reads this book', the rules for reading Yiddish are explained in the last two pages. Other Yiddish books printed in Italy that bear the explicit name of a female addressee are: *Keter Malkhut* (No. *20) for Keyle, wife of Mendele Ottolenghi; *Dinim ve-Seeder* (No. *44) for the young Moskita, daughter of Hizkiya Printo; and *Orekh Yamim* (No. *45) for Rözle, wife of Nehemiah Luzzatto. These three books were adapted from the Hebrew and published by these women's relative, Yaakov Heilprun, who seems to have struggled to make a living as a teacher in care of the instruction and education of the girls in his better-to-do family. It was for one of them that in 1614 he translated from Hebrew into Italian – no longer into Yiddish as he had done before – a book of commandments for women (see No. *34), thereby attesting to the already prevailing neglect of Yiddish in favour of Italian.

While the function of women as addressees of Yiddish literature appears to be just more conspicuous in Italy than elsewhere, other roles they play in Yiddish literature are either only, firstly or mainly Italian.

It is in the second edition of the Italian *Minhagim* (No. *41) that the first printed illustrations portraying actual women – not characters from the Bible or the like – appear, always carrying out a ritual task beside their husbands. The one illustration of a woman alone shows her kindling the Sabbath candles.¹⁷ Groups of women engaged in other acts, among them praying and reading, appear in the oldest manuscript *Minhagim* (No. *35), and become more profuse in the Passover *Haggadot* printed in Venice (e. g. Nos. *21–*23), where they can be seen making the preparations for the *seder*.

Although no copy is extant of the two booklets entitled '*Istoria mi-shalosh nashim*' (a story of three women, No. *84) and '*Mayse mi-Rivka*' (a story concerning Rebecca, No. *87), which were printed in Venice in 1552, their titles attest to the first appearance of women as central characters in Yiddish books.

The women in the adaptations from Italian popular literature play fairly the same role as in the original, although sometimes they do so in a 'Jewish' manner and are at times placed in new situations and under new kinds of observation. The first romantic declaration in a Yiddish book appears in *Paris un' Viena* (No. *69), where the author admits that the reasons for his writing are his deep love for a certain young lady, and his hope that after she reads his book she will reciprocate this love. The author's moving statement does not prevent him from opening the fourth *canto* with a detailed mocking tirade against women which bitingly condemns, among other things, their deceitful character and their artificial beauty. This tirade, which does not exist in the Italian original, is in the Yiddish adaptation attributed by the author to one of the male characters in the book. This first Yiddish so to speak 'anti-feminist' manifesto¹⁸ is joined by the first Yiddish story of romantic infidelity which is delivered by the *Kü-bukh* (No. *70) and makes use of quite risqué allusions and expressions. Some of these features also appear in the wedding songs 'made in Italy'; (see Nos. *61–*62) which are in consequence utterly different from the non-Italian wedding songs that have reached us, one of these being, for example, a bilingual – Hebrew and Yiddish – song of faith in the unity and uniqueness of the Creator.¹⁸

The transformations that the Italian period brought about in Yiddish literature regarding women were obviously only one minor result of the impactful and inspiring influence that Italian literature and the local cultural atmosphere exerted on Yiddish literature during its encounter with the rich and vibrant culture of the land of the Renaissance, an encounter which left a most significant mark on the Yiddish literature of the generations to come.

ASPETTI PARTICOLARI DELLA LETTERATURA YIDDISH IN ITALIA¹

Chava Turniansky

Un certo numero di nomi propri comuni fra gli ebrei in Germania, come *Teltse* o *Toltse* (da *Dolce*), *Yentl* (da *Gentile*), *Bendet* (da *Benedetto*) e una serie di antiche parole yiddish, sia ora estinte, come *orn*, (pregare, da *orare*), sia tuttora in uso, come *leyen*, (leggere, da *legere*), *bentshn*, (benedire, da *benedicere*), si uniscono ad altre testimonianze storiche importanti sull'origine parzialmente italiana dell'emigrazione ebraica verso la Renania e la zona della Mosella verso la fine del primo millennio dell'Era Cristiana. Gli ebrei che emigravano dall'Italia alla Germania e che furono fra i fondatori dell'ebraismo ashkenazita e gli iniziatori della sua cultura e della sua lingua – lo yiddish – non potevano certo prevedere che un certo numero dei loro discendenti sarebbero ritornati in Italia circa quattrocento anni dopo. All'inizio del XV secolo l'Italia settentrionale, l'area in cui questi immigranti si stabilirono, era già diventata parte della diaspora ashkenazita, insieme alla Germania, alla Moravia, alla Boemia, alla Polonia, a Eretz Israel e all'Egitto.²

A differenza degli altri gruppi ashkenaziti, che restarono lungamente legati allo yiddish, l'attaccamento del gruppo ebraico italiano a questa lingua non durò molto. Sembra che all'inizio del XVII secolo la maggior parte degli ebrei ashkenaziti nell'Italia del nord avesse già smesso di usare lo yiddish. Tuttavia fino a quell'epoca questo ramo italiano era stato attivamente impegnato nella creazione letteraria in yiddish, così come nella pubblicazione di opere destinate non soltanto al pubblico di lettori locali, ma anche ai lettori dello yiddish dovunque questi si trovasse.

La principale testimonianza di questa attività consiste in una serie di manoscritti composti in Italia nei secoli XV e XVI. Il più antico manoscritto italiano datato in yiddish pervenutoci è un *Sefer Refues* (n. 71),³ un libro di medicina popolare contenente 1250 ricette mediche e scritto a Mestre nel 1474; il più recente è un *Mayse-bukh* (n. 64), un libro di *mayses* (storie religiose o quasi religiose, simili nelle dimensioni ora agli *exempla* latini medioevali, ora alla novella italiana). Questa raccolta di 130 storie fu completata intorno al 1590 in un luogo che lo scrittore chiama "Rovere" (probabilmente Rovereto o Rovere della Luna,

entrambe vicinie a Trento), e seguita sei anni più tardi da una raccolta abbastanza simile ma alquanto più piccola, che un altro ebreo di quella stessa "Rovere" scrisse per la propria zia mentre si trovava in visita da lei a Innsbruck (n. 65).

Il numero di manoscritti italiani in yiddish, datati e non datati, dei quali abbiamo notizia – a parte 13 lettere personali (nn. 77, 78) e un contratto di trasferimento o di vendita (n. 81) – ammonta a 41, ma due di essi (nn. 98, 99) furono bruciati nell'incendio scoppiato nella Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino nel 1904. Un altro manoscritto – il *Mayse-bukh* di più di quattrocento anni (n. 65) – fu scoperto soltanto cinque anni fa, quando la Bayerische Staatsbibliothek di Monaco lo acquistò dal suo proprietario. Inoltre recentemente, nel 1999, durante il lavoro per il nostro catalogo, sono stati ritrovati un manoscritto contenente una raccolta di detti (n. 46) e un libro di medicinali (n. 71A). Questi episodi rafforzano la nostra opinione che esistano ancora altri manoscritti yiddish italiani in possesso di privati o di biblioteche in Italia o altrove.

La lunghezza dei manoscritti esistenti varia: alcuni sono relativamente concisi, altri sono raccolte di centinaia di pagine. Alcuni manoscritti contengono un singolo lavoro o soltanto qualche breve opera, mentre altri comprendono molte opere o dello stesso genere o di carattere abbastanza diverso tra di loro, che costituiscono talvolta raccolte miscelanee molto affascinanti (ad es. i nn. 47, 48).

Nei manoscritti appare una grande varietà di generi letterari: ci sono libri di medicina che offrono una vasta gamma di ricette mediche e parti teoriche (nn. 71–72); libri di usanze rituali da seguire per tutto il ciclo dell'anno ebraico (nn. 35–39, 47, 99); libri di comandamenti per donne, che istruiscono le lettrici cui sono rivolti sui loro doveri e obblighi tradizionali (nn. 30–31, 36, 47); diversi glossari ebraico-yiddish per la comprensione del lessico biblico (nn. 1–3); traduzioni parziali o complete di libri della Bibbia (nn. 4–6, 10, 37, 47), principalmente quelli che svolgono un ruolo importante nel servizio sinagogale; traduzioni di libri di preghiera ed inni liturgici (nn. 6, 12, 47); vari tipi di versioni di racconti biblici come "La legatura di Isacco" (*Akedat*

gastronomica degli ashkenaziti nell'Italia rinascimentale". pp. 125–136.

² Per una informazione completa su questo e su molti degli argomenti che verranno trattati qui di seguito cfr. la voce Shmeruk nella "Bibliografia del Catalogo". Cfr. anche Khone Shmeruk, *Prokim fun der yidisher literatur-geshikhte*, Tel-Aviv 1988, la versione yiddish di Shmeruk, *Aspects* (tutti i titoli abbreviati si riferiscono alla bibliografia menzionata sopra).

³ I numeri si riferiscono alle descrizioni delle opere nel nostro "Catalogo" e rimandano il lettore alla "Bibliografia del Catalogo".

17 See Chava Turniansky (note 1 above), p. 75.

18 See Shmeruk, *Aspects*, pp. 44–47.