

Jewish-Indian Collection Now Accessible to the Public

IDC Publishers releases Jewish-Indian treasures from the Valmadonna Trust Library

By Liesbeth Hugenholtz

In 1999, the Valmadonna Trust Library in London acquired part of the collection of bibliophile David Sassoon's books. This anthology formed the world's most comprehensive collection of Hebrew prints from Baghdad and India. In 2004, Dutch publishers IDC began the considerable task of publishing the collection on microfiche. The first release, comprising some 340 titles from Baghdad, has now been augmented by more than 750 monographs, manuscripts, and pamphlets from India. Both collections are now available on microfiche and as an online publication.

The Indian prints, produced between 1832 and 1994, cover Jewish religious material, such as liturgies for various occasions, prayer books, and some twenty haggadot, several of which have been illustrated in Indian style. Selections of Talmud en Mishnah are also represented. Bible stories in the Marathi "verse drama" format stand out: These were clearly intended to both educate and entertain at the same time. There are Hebrew-Marathi grammars, glossaries, and alphabet books. Works rooted in the Arabic cultural heritage are represented by story books and collections of proverbs and poetry.

Also featured in this fascinating collection are numerous periodicals and corporation reports that bear witness to the everyday life of Jews in India. Charities were prolific, as were synagogue funds, Jewish educational funds, and the various branches of the Zionist organization in India. Periodicals titled *Or Emet*, *The Jewish Advocate*, *The Lamp of Judaism*—and some twenty more—reveal the circumstances in which the Jewish community lived in India, what they thought about matters near and far, and the nature of their fears and dreams. *Israel's Messenger*, published in Shanghai between 1904 and 1941, is made available on microfiche as a separate publication, and provides a sharp insight into the relations between the Jewish communities in Shanghai, India, and Baghdad.

Individuals are not simply represented by short news items, reports, and pictures in periodicals, but also shimmer through the authentic handwriting of the early lithographed works and manuscript letters. Every edition of the periodical *Doresh Tov le-Amo*, founded in 1855 in Bombay, was prepared by lithograph, clearly in a Baghdadi hand, while the rare series of *Pizmonim*, little booklets lithographed in Par'ur, can clearly be seen to have been written in a non-Baghdadi hand.

As to language, earlier works show more Judeo-Arabic mixed with Hebrew and Aramaic, reflecting printers' entrepreneurship stemming from Baghdad. Later prints tend to be mixtures of Hebrew, Marathi, and English. A linguistic paradise, this collection provides rich material for researchers of the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic dialect and reveal how it fared in India. Further research into Marathi and Hebrew, especially at the crossroads of these languages, can start here.

Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Marathi Jewish Printing in India

657 titles (more than 750 items including the ephemera) on 1,376 microfiches or online

Israel's Messenger. Shanghai 1904-1941

204 microfiches or online

Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic Printing in Baghdad

346 titles on 617 microfiches or online

For more information about the collections, please contact Liesbeth Hugenholtz, publisher at Brill (lhugenholtz@idc.nl) or visit IDC's website at www.idc.nl where you can find comprehensive introductions to the collections by Brad Sabin Hill as well as detailed title lists.

IDC is an imprint of BRILL.