INTRODUCTION: ARTEFACT AND TEXT

The investigation of manuscripts, though occupying a recognized place in Jewish Studies from their inception, has recently become central to a number of highly important general and methodological issues. The reasons for this are to be found in developments in the research agenda within the field itself, and to a certain extent also in wider academic discourse on the nature of texts and reading. Within the field the centrality of manuscript evidence has been particularly stressed for those Hebrew and Aramaic works from the classical talmudic period which appear to have a weak overall structure and redactional identity. For such works, the Middle Ages are now often seen as a watershed (cp. the closing remarks of Alexander's paper) in which some sort of literary uniformity was imposed by scribes and copyists, i.e. by what one might call second-order authors. The cause célèbre of this phenomenon is the literature of early Jewish mysticism, the so-called Heikhalot literature (represented in this volume by the papers of Dan and Hermann); but similar claims are being made with regard to other Hebrew and Aramaic texts from late antiquity, such as the Midrashim. It has even been suggested that such an authoritative text as the Babylonian Talmud was being reworked down at least to the time of Rashi.1 This new view of the textual history of these works and of their comparative lack of literary definition has led naturally to the decision that the proper way in which to present them in scholarly editions is synoptically.2 Again, the most notable example of this turning away from the traditional *apparatus criticus*, which made the reconstruction of the each manuscript as a 'work' in its own right virtually impossible, is Peter


2 The full reproduction of more than one text witness is also used in other disciplines, and not restricted to medieval manuscripts. For an example from philosophy, see R. Lauth and H. Gliwitzky (eds), *Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Nachgelassene Schriften 1804* (J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, II/8), (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1985). This edition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* prints the two main witnesses on facing pages, or *en regard*, as the editors put it (p. xix).
Schäfer's publication of the Heikhalot texts. The analysis of the nature of those texts whose literary identity appears to be the result of an active and dynamic transmission-process rather than of a definitive publication by a single author, is complemented by investigation of medieval manuscript copying per se, and of the attitudes of copyists towards their Vorlagen. Assumptions of a general loyalty to the originals, often fostered by the copyists themselves, have given way to a more nuanced picture. Research into 'aggressive' styles of transmission, involving active intervention in earlier texts, was pioneered by Israel Ta-Shma, who explores a different, though related, theme in his contribution to the present volume.

This inner evolution of the study of ancient and medieval Jewish literature has received an added impetus from the wider academic discourse about the nature of the act of reading as such. Quite apart from the partial success, short-lived or otherwise, of so-called post-modern theories of literature, the nature of interpretation, and the role of the reader in determining the meaning of a text, have been discussed with special urgency in recent years. This methodological and interdisciplinary discussion suggests that we should take much more seriously the shifts of meaning introduced into earlier works by later copyists. The transmission agents can now be seen actually as readers and interpreters of the earlier text; their modifications acquire a new dignity and significance as testimony of reader reaction, and the various ways in which the texts are presented in the manuscripts and thus set in a different context (including their combinations with other documents in the same manuscript or codex) should be of more interest to scholars than they have been hitherto. The effect of this approach is to bring the traditional text-critical aim of


reconstructing earlier or even original forms of the text back into the reckoning, while at the same time, paradoxically, questioning the centrality or achievability of this aim. In this perspective the activity of copying and re-copying an earlier work creates a record of the activity of reading and interpreting that work. Thus, even though the underlying assumptions of the current literary theories which seem to deny that one reading of a text can be shown to be superior to another mean that such theories are of dubious use in strictly historical research (see Alexander’s remarks on their fundamentally ahistorical character), their emphasis on the constant re-creation of meaning by each successive reader can be regarded as reinforcing the need to subject the process of transmission and metamorphosis of Jewish texts in the Middle Ages to an analysis of its own.

The manuscript copy is the manifestation of the reader-copyist’s view of the earlier text. The manuscript expresses this view in a large variety of ways, all of which are bound up with the physical reality of the artefact. The total manuscript – both its physical side and the abstract literary entity contained in it (the ‘text’) – must be considered, if we are to recapture the process of transmission in its interpretative aspects. It has always been accepted that the text of any given manuscript is unique. But why is it unique? Because in the case of handwritten texts the making of the artefact and the making of the text cannot be separated in the way that they are separated in printing. In other words, the uniqueness of the text is intimately linked with the physical aspects of the manuscript. The specks of ink on the parchment or paper are hand-made, and this inevitably means that the new text is the result of a reading of an exemplar. Therefore the mechanics of copying – that the scribe may sometimes have misread the text before him and that accidents happened when he inscribed the characters – fall as surely within the domain of our theme as does the evidence of the deliberate and subtle re-creation of a text by a scholar-copyist who engaged in an informed dialogue with the text he copied. (On these two types of reader-transmission agent, see in particular Beit-Arié’s paper.)

This phenomenon, the re-creation (in the widest sense of the term) of Jewish texts in their medieval transmission, is the theme of the papers collected in the present volume. They were originally delivered in Manchester in April 1992 at a conference entitled ‘Artefact and Text: The Re-Creation of Classical Jewish Literature in Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts’, and they approach the theme

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6 The conference took place in the John Rylands University Library from 28th to 30th April, under the auspices of the John Rylands Research Institute. All contributions contained in this volume except Dr Schrijver’s were delivered at the conference. The presentations of Professors Menahem Schmelzer (‘Some medieval Hebrew prayer books: texts, rubrics and marginalia’) and Bezalel Narkiss (‘Puns and allusions in Hebrew illuminated manuscripts’) were unfortunately not available for inclusion in this volume. The title of Jean-Pierre
from an number of different angles and sub-disciplines in the study of Hebrew manuscripts. The topic is complex and no attempt was made to cover it systematically. Rather the aim was to take a series of soundings which would serve to establish the agenda and illustrate the problematic of the subject.

As we hinted earlier a central group of texts for our purposes are those which are assumed to have been composed in late antiquity, but which survive only in medieval copies. Not only do these works make their appearance in the Middle Ages with disconcerting suddenness on this side, as it were, of a great manuscript divide, but they are often found in the manuscripts in such a variety of text-forms that it is hard to tell whether we are dealing with different recensions of the same work or with different works. It is common to explain such textual diversity by assuming that these texts had an oral pre-history before they were written down in the Middle Ages. Rabbinic prohibitions concerning the writing down of the 'Oral Torah' were, as far as we can tell, set aside as in the case of the Mishnah - from an early period, if they were ever enforced. However, there were two realms of religious culture where the stress on orality remained unusually strong down to the Middle Ages - the liturgy and esoteric mystical knowledge. In the case of the prayers, such an emphasis could be seen as giving pride of place to the performative act over the fixed wording, perhaps expressing a theology of prayer which defined spontaneity qua sincerity as the ideal. Stefan Reif, arguing strongly for the prevalence of orality in the transmission of prayer, describes the development and the fluidity of Jewish liturgical texts between the poles of writing and non-writing, as he traces the history of the

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prayer book from the time of silence before the appearance of written texts down to our own age. Joseph Dan, on the other hand, shows how the problematic claim of the medieval Qabbalists that their traditions had ancient roots - a claim inherent in their mystical stance - makes it difficult to obtain a full and reliable picture of just which texts did in fact inspire their writings. Given this fact, Dan argues, the absence of evidence of written sources for medieval texts cannot be taken as grounds for assuming that they drew on oral traditions from antiquity. And even where the medieval mystics' reliance on earlier writings is obvious - as in the case of the Heikhalot literature - the form, content and range of the texts used might have been quite different from those available to us today, so that the exact nature of the dependence may now be difficult, if not impossible, to document.

Both prayer-texts and mystical traditions share an oral pre-history, and manifest an unusually high degree of re-creation in the process of their transmission. Liturgical manuscripts are notorious for the extent to which they were subjected to inverted normative intervention which made the text conform to local practice rather than the other way around. (See Ta-Shma's remark about how the original text of the Seder of Rav Amram Gaon has been so obscured in transmission as to be unrecoverable.) And the degree to which transmission can become re-creation in the case of a mystical text is illustrated by Klaus Herrmann's analysis of the important New York Heikhalot manuscript. What on the face of it is a copy of an earlier manuscript is, in fact, a different version, and the copyist of that manuscript is a creator of something new, and an author or redactor in his own right. The ethos governing the activity that led to the production of the New York Heikhalot manuscript is a far cry from any abstract a priori picture of the faithful copyist.

How the medieval transmission-agents saw their task, whether merely as a job to be done or as a labour of love, is a theme of Malachi Beit-Arié's paper, which presents evidence mainly from the colophons of medieval manuscripts. On the one hand there was the talmid hakham or scholar - the 'copyist' in Beit-Arié's parlance - who transcribed a text for private purposes and who entered into dialogue with it on the basis of an assumed competence in its subject-matter. Correcting the text involved not only its linguistic garb but could extend to 'mistakes' of fact, or, in the case of poetry, of prosody, or it could amount to editorial activity utilizing a number of exemplars. On the other hand there was the professional transmitter of texts, the hired scribe, who was often not learned, and whose job carried little remuneration and less prestige. The faulty exemplar is a topos of many colophons, which sometimes read like a catalogue of socio-economic ills presented as excuses for deficiencies in the copying.

Lack of literary definition in a work, attributable not so much
to the copyists but to the authors themselves, is discussed by Israel Ta-Shma. Many texts (particularly halakhic texts) had a practical function, or formed part of a recurrent academic curriculum, and this sometimes led their authors to try and keep the lines of communication with the readers open even after the work was 'published', in order to afford them the possibility, as need arose, of revising and updating it. Scholarly scruples and hesitations could prevent a book ever achieving a definitive 'published' state during its author's lifetime (a phenomenon not without parallel in modern times). When final publication was delayed, students might take matters into their own hands and circulate preliminary versions of the master's work in their own publications. As a result a 'work' might survive in several different versions, all of which are 'original' in the sense that they go back to the author. Examples of this phenomenon are discussed also in the paper of Beit-Arié, who suggests that the information contained in the work was often seen as paramount by both copyists and authors, and treated as a collective possession, while the 'work' as a literary entity over which the author might claim ownership (copyright in modern terms) was regarded as of secondary importance. Beit-Arié draws attention to the practice of starting to copy the text in sections while the work was still being composed, which amplified the confusion arising from multiple versions going back to the author himself.

The transmission of the thirteenth-century halakhic compendium Or zarua', as sketched by Emile Schrijver, exemplifies some of these phenomena. In the course of a comprehensive description of the two extant manuscripts of this text, Schrijver draws attention to the mechanisms of its composition and dissemination. The work, which the author, Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, may have spent a life-time writing, is of monumental proportions, and its dissemination was hampered not only by its sheer size but also by the appearance of an abridgement by the

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9 For an example of how the same halakhic material (regarding the question of yein nesekh) was repeatedly reused and revised, with the result that several versions of the one work (Rashi's commentary on Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara) came into circulation, and of how Rashi created further works by dictating to, or collaborating with, his students, see H. Soloveitchik, 'Can halakhic texts talk history?', Association for Jewish Studies Review, 3 (1978), 153–96, here at 156–67.

10 Readers interested in the survival of this facet of scholarly communication in our own days need look no further than footnotes 5 and 24 of Beit-Arié's and Rothschild's contributions respectively; they may also consult Schrijver's self-demystification in the appendix to his article.

11 There are analogies to this situation even in the age of printing: several modern literary authors re-wrote works in proof, or took the opportunity of successive editions to introduce changes (see P. Gaskell, A new introduction to bibliography [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985], 336f, and the literature listed, 413). A case in point is James Joyce, who called for numerous revises of Ulysses, and was clearly reluctant to regard the work as having reached a final and definitive form.
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author’s son: in other words, a derivative text became a transmission rival. The original work consists of multiple layers of cross-referenced text incorporating both later additions by the author himself and secondary growth after his death; and it is likely that substantial parts of the work as they were circulating independently among the author’s students were used in the production of two near contemporary manuscripts. Schrijver’s contribution closes with an attempt to discover the factual core in the famous ‘shipwreck legend’ that surrounds the Amsterdam manuscript of the Or zarua’.

The image of a medieval second-order author, a transmission-agent who was able to ‘improve’ the earlier work in the process of writing it out anew, presupposes a basic literary competence, viz., the ability to write in the vein of earlier times. A text which is both an original creation and late in date is used by Alexander Samely to show that such a competence might well have been available. The text of the Targum of the Amidah was created in the late Middle Ages, but according to the rules of a pre-medieval literary genre. Its existence shows that the competence necessary to produce a work belonging to an earlier literary period could be revived, presumably because the author was well acquainted with, and understood the conventions of, earlier, classical literature. As a comprehensive analysis of the text shows, this late targum does not merely incorporate an interpretation of the Amidah of a type usually reserved for the Bible; it also presupposes a very clear understanding of the literary features of the genre targum, especially of the targums of the Hagiohrapha. In other words, the Targum of the Amidah embodies both interpretative subtlety and literary mimicry. Thus it provides an illustration of the acuteness of formal observation which transmission-agents might well have brought to texts whose genre had ceased to be productive.

Is, then, a general shift from trust in the reliability of textual transmission warranted, as the inbuilt Tendenz of the Artefact and Text programme would seem to suggest? Does the extensive re-creation of classical rabbinic literature in the Middle Ages form a ditch which the historian of Judaism in late antiquity can no longer cross? Philip Alexander does not think so. He argues that every document must be considered on its own merits. Charting the original success of classic textual criticism in the realm of Jewish Studies, Alexander shows how it has been attributed diminishing importance in more recent research. But he sounds a note of caution. Not only must textual criticism still be allowed to distinguish error from intended meaning at the level of individual passages (the localized level), but it may still be applicable to a work as a whole. Its inapplicability at the documentary level cannot simply be assumed; it must be demonstrated. Thus, the Targum of the Song of Songs would naturally be classified as a part of rabbinic literature, and hence would tend to be seen by many now as falling a
**priori** outside the realm where text-critical methods can usefully be applied. However, a detailed investigation of this text and its transmission shows that, despite the immense diversity of the manuscripts, the literary unity of the work need not be questioned; classical text-criticism can – and therefore must – be applied to it: the work invites the scholarly reconstruction of an original text. Alexander suggests how an edition might be presented which would do justice to the complexity of the textual transmission, and yet not lose sight of the critic's responsibility to work back along the *stemma codicum* and reconstruct the lost archetype. A scholarly edition, in the emphatic sense of that word, is needed for the Targum of the Song of Songs. And this text, highly popular in the Middle Ages and widely copied, might not be the only document from late antiquity still recoverable through the veil of the medieval manuscripts.

Let us now consider the ink marks on the paper or parchment, the marriage of meaning and matter, the manuscript as artefact. What are the effects of the fact that the text is handwritten? We have already noted that copying involves reading, that it is not simply the transfer of meaningless shapes from one book to another. Copying normally involves a rudimentary understanding of the signs *as signs*, otherwise the scribe would feel obliged to reproduce exactly the shape of the letters before him, and all other aspects of the physical layout of the original text. Surveying the mechanical aspects of copying, Beit-Arie speaks of the text as passing through the linguistic system of the transmission-agent. This at the very least has to take place, and such rudimentary understanding of the text seems to assign the transmission-agent, in particular the harassed professional scribe documented by Beit-Arie, a middle position between the activity of signifying and the activity of duplicating exactly arbitrary marks in ink. The effect of psychosomatic factors on the accuracy of copying could be devastating (as may be seen by comparing passages inadvertently written by the same scribe twice), and in Beit-Arié's view the sheer unpredictability of the variations that arise defies the theorizing of textual critics.

Jean-Pierre Rothschild considers similar phenomena. However, unlike Beit-Arié he lays emphasis on the fact that the concept of simple 'scribal error' in many cases begs the question. The translation texts in Hebrew, Samaritan and Latin which he uses as examples illustrate the *deliberate* nature of scribal change: scribes take advantage of the general fluidity of texts to introduce changes, or intervene with remedial action in the case of perceived errors. If one's perspective is too narrow such changes might appear to be mere accidents of transmission. Thus, Rothschild argues that while the will to change is present everywhere, the non-semiotic side of manuscripts plays little or no role in the creation of new meaning.

How do strictly artefactual considerations influence a text at its
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point of origin, or in its later transmission? Stefan Reif traces the interplay between the physical medium of transmission and the literary genre of the texts (in his case liturgical texts) recorded in that medium, offering a survey of the various means and techniques for making books which would have been available once the decision had been reached to write the prayer-texts down. For example, it may be no accident that the emergence of the literary form 'prayer book' coincides with the adoption of the codex among Jews in the eighth century, and that the separation of the genres of mahzor and siddur follows the introduction of large-sized prayer books for use by hazanim. The artefact could hardly be more closely linked to the text than when it plays the role of midwife to the text's birth.

The transmitter of texts is often the author of additional text, as, for example, when he inserts a heading designed to make the reading of the original easier, or when he speaks about the manuscript. Scribes, copyists and illuminators place in a the manuscript a large number of non-verbal signs. Any manuscript is a blend of messages, some of which come from the author, others from the producers of the artefact. Apart from non-verbal or meta-textual 'codes' embodied in the layout (e.g. the use of blank space, or of indentation to divide the text into paragraphs), or the use of ornamental or figurative shaping of the text, there are verbal signs which stand outside the main text (e.g. colophons), as well as rubrics, titles, running heads, and other types of meta-text which are often inserted by the maker of the artefact rather than by the author. The complex interplay in a manuscript between the text, the space on the page and any visual elements, may generate new or different text. In a recent article, Claudine Chavannes-Mazel investigates the case of a fourteenth-century French scribe who composed long rubrics because of certain organizational decisions regarding layout. These rubrics were then used by an illustrator as summaries of the narratives which he set out to illuminate. A

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12 As these observations show, the influence of the artefact on the creation of the text by the author is not in principle different from its impact of the transmission of the text by a later reader-copyist. However, the parameters of text production for the copyist or scribe in a later generation might be quite different from the ones prevailing in the author's time, and thus accentuate the distance between the copy and the original.

13 Again, the age of printing could furnish parallels. Gaskell (New introduction [note 11], 300f) comments that the presentation of nineteenth-century novels in three volumes (the 'three-decker') was so powerful a publishing convention that it influenced the writing of fiction.

14 This topic formed part of the Artefact and Text paper of Professor Schmelzer (see note 6 above); cp. also the first section of Gabrielle Sed-Rajna's contribution.

further dimension of the message of the manuscript as artefact can be manifest in the selection and combination within the same codex, or even on the same page, of texts of different type or of different origin.  

Even if a scribe were to copy exactly what an author had written, without adding any text (e.g. in the form of rubrics) or changing the layout, he would still face an important decision about the script itself. Types of script are conventional manifestations of inner-Jewish regional differences. They may also, within a given writing tradition or region, be signals of text segmentation or emphasis. For example, a scribe could choose to alternate square script with cursive, or to vary the size of the characters. A more unusual option regarding the script in which a text is presented owes its existence to the inter-cultural relations of medieval Jewry in general and Karaite Jewry in particular, viz., the choice of the Arabic alphabet. In an eleventh century letter discussed by Geoffrey Khan, this aspect of manuscript production is explicitly addressed. Khan shows that the choice of alphabet, while sometimes up to the individual, involved at other times complex cultural factors. The dignity of the different scripts, the status of the works being copied (the Bible, naturally, ranked highest in prestige), as well as the setting in which the text was to be used, all had to be evaluated by the scribe. Intriguingly Khan shows that a decision of whether a text

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16 See note 5 above.

17 A stimulating discussion of general cultural as well as technical aspects of the use of Hebrew script in manuscripts is found in C. Sirat, in collaboration with M. Dukan, Écriture et civilisations (Paris: CNRS, 1976).

18 These differences in script can be classified as either reflecting/suggesting a certain way of reading the author's text (e.g. marking key words and rubrics), or as being extraneous to the text and as not representing interpretative decisions. An example of the latter category is the use of special scripts for the scribe's name where it occurs: see Schrijver's paper, note 37 and fig.7.
belonged to the ‘oral’ or the ‘written’ tradition might also be expressed in the choice of script. While not affecting the substance of what is being said in the text, the choice of script may convey important messages about it.

Another **locus** of the interplay between verbal and non-verbal messages in the manuscript as artefact is investigated by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna. Presenting a fundamental classification of manuscript illuminations based on their semiotic quality in relationship to the text, she describes the variety of signals by which the visual image enhances, or interferes with, the text. The picture, as an independent semiotic system, has its own network of synchronic and diachronic relationships which are relevant to the an understanding of the history of the manuscript as an artefact. Pictures and other visual elements also often document a certain understanding of the text. They may go back to the author himself and express his intended meaning, or they may represent interpretations of his text conceived in the course of later readings. And, as with the choice of the Arabic alphabet, the adoption of visual elements of Christian origin places Jewish texts in an inter-cultural frame of reference.

The transmission of Hebrew manuscripts in the Middle Ages is not necessarily representative of the transmission of texts in the non-Jewish world (a point made by Beit-Arié). Nevertheless, on the basis of recent research in the field of Latin and early Western vernaculars it seems that individual cases of the dissemination of texts in the West could be understood in the light of phenomena which in the context of Hebrew literature now appear as quite normal (if not the rule). But there are other universes of text-transmission, beyond the horizon of European or Jewish culture. The closest of these, and perhaps the one most likely to offer parallels, is in the Islamic world. Descriptions of the earliest stages of Islamic literary history are reminiscent of the growth and development of Hebrew literature in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. In both traditions oral transmission and a school setting seem to have produced an extensive class of texts whose redactional identity is, to say the least, fuzzy. A similar phenomenon can also be observed in the technical and scientific literature of the Graeco-Roman world (e.g. in medical writings).

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19 See, for example, the works referred to in this Introduction, notes 5 and 15, as well as Beit-Arié's contribution, note 19.

20 Norman Calder notes that theological literature, which shares formal features with juristic documents of early Islam, 'witnesses a structural disorder that may reflect a long process of organic growth, accretion, redaction, etc. Such processes ... presupposing a world of notebook scholarship and school redactions, result in systematic pseudopigraphy,' *Studies in early Muslim jurisprudence* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], 193.

21 See Alexander's contribution, note 6.
Oversimplication of the data in the light of a new trend is a perpetual danger in academic discourse. The majority of the contributions to this volume provide evidence that the ethos in which the medieval copyist-scribe worked, the procedures of reproducing texts while reading them, and the obligation constantly to reset texts in new artefactual frameworks, are incompatible with a naive view of faithful transmission. They strongly suggest that a one-dimensional reconstruction of texts, or a linear presentation of text-witnesses, may be inappropriate for many Jewish works transmitted in the Middle Ages. However, this volume also offers evidence for examining individual cases of literary identity or transmission-history on their merits, and for taking care not to over-emphasize the power of the artefact over the text. The scepticism vis-à-vis the manuscript evidence that is expressed or implied here comes itself wrapped in distrust of generalizations of any type. Should it prove true that one type of oversimplification in the study of medieval Hebrew manuscripts is in process of being shed, the editors suggest that the present volume does not warrant the replacing of a naïveté of one kind with naïveté of another.

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