

Mehevah le-Menahem
Studies in Honor of Menahem Hayyim Schmelzer



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Studies in Honor of Menahem Hayyim Schmelzer

Edited by

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with

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PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that the editors and authors present this jubilee volume to Menahem Schmelzer, our cherished colleague and friend, on the occasion of his eighty-fifth birthday. We believe that this work indicates the esteem we all have for the learned and generous scholar who has touched our personal and professional lives in many ways. A measure of that generosity is the fact that when notice of this planned publication first circulated, scholars contacted us to bring to our attention their connection and sense of indebtedness to this great polymath. Experts from many countries and institutions were eager to participate and were inspired to contribute insights in a variety of fields in which Menahem had demonstrated interest and expertise. As a consequence, this volume became larger and more comprehensive than what had been first planned. We are honored to present the results of our efforts to a dedicated scholar who has always encouraged, assisted, and inspired others.

Menahem, like many scholars in Jewish studies since the nineteenth century, emigrated from his home country in Central Europe in response to dire historical circumstances and in search of an intellectual home where his knowledge and expertise could be appreciated and pursued. He moved from bleak events and surroundings to safe and nurturing circumstances and institutions. Once at the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, Menahem was able to superintend a world-renowned repository of Jewish manuscripts and printed books and engage in scholarship and publication to make its holdings accessible to others. A perusal of his bibliography demonstrates his dedication to these goals. It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of Menahem's work on scholarly publications on Hebrew texts from manuscript sources.

Along with his greatness as a scholar, Menahem's comprehensive knowledge of the Seminary library's holdings and his stewardship of them is legendary. The breadth of his abilities came to the fore in 1966 in the aftermath of the disastrous library fire. Menahem supervised the salvage of volumes and loose pages damaged by smoke and water.

PREFACE

His quickly devised methods of triage saved thousands of works, and were subsequently used by other libraries after similar catastrophic events. His ability to identify, date, and localize individual leaves and fragments made it possible to reunite separated materials and proceed with conservation. In subsequent years library conservators have commented that it was possible for Menahem to recognize and place obscure, unidentified works with a glance across a room. Beyond the confines of the Seminary, he has been an inspiration to Judaica librarians throughout the world.

Our compendium of essays is the second one created to honor Menahem Schmelzer. It joins and complements *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy: Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer* (ed. Debra Reed Blank; Leiden: Brill, 2011). These two volumes bring together the scholarship of three generations of contributors. The present bilingual volume is organized with Menahem's wide range of interests in mind: liturgy, Hebrew poetry and literature, booklore, Talmud, rabbinics, and Jewish history. It is a heartfelt demonstration of the respect and affection of the scholarly community for Menahem Schmelzer, scholar, mentor, and friend.

Most of the articles written for this volume were submitted around ten years ago. For a variety of unexpected reasons, the editing took longer than anticipated. As a consequence the articles do not always reflect the most recent research in their fields.

Three of our esteemed colleagues, Louis Feldman, József Schweitzer, and Dov Zlotnick ז"ל did not live to view this publication. We mourn them and trust that their families will derive satisfaction in seeing their works in print.

Many individuals have assisted in the preparation of this volume; we thank them most sincerely. The Schmelzer family has been generous in giving their time and counsel to this project from start to finish. Particular thanks also go to René Braginsky, David Jeselsohn, Arye Kendi, Maria Chamberlin-Hellman, and Havva Charm Zellner for their help in the production of this volume.

The Editors

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Angelo M. Piattelli

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