

9. שיר השירים (*Song of Songs*). Hand-colored illustrations by Ze'ev Raban (Jerusalem: Ha-Sefer, 1923). 500 copies.

This *Song of Songs* was illustrated by Ze'ev Raban (1890-1970), the foremost representative of the *Bezalel* School of Art founded in Jerusalem in 1906. *Bezalel* became famous for a unique style blending Art Nouveau with motifs from the ancient Near East, a style clearly evident in the illustrations before you now.

10. שיר השירים אשר לשלמה (*The Songs of Solomon*). Hand-written and illustrated by Bernard Alan Solomon. Georgia: Boxwood Press, 1983.

Hand-colored block prints for all eight chapters of the biblical *Song of Songs*. Open here to the print illustrating the verse: "A locked garden is my sister my bride" (*Song of Songs* 4: 12). 17 of 40 signed and numbered copies.

11. שיר השירים (*Song of Songs*). Etchings by Mordechai Beck / calligraphy by Yitshak Pludwinski. Jerusalem, ca. 1999 - 2001.

A magnificent, limited-edition *Song of Songs* featuring the etchings of Israeli artist Mordechai Beck. The sinuous shapes in black and white emphasize the sensual dimension of the text. 122 of 510 signed and numbered copies.

12. שיר השירים אשר לשלמה (*The Songs of Solomon*). 20 silkscreen plates by Tamar Messer. Haifa: Gallery/Studio Tamar Messer, 2001.

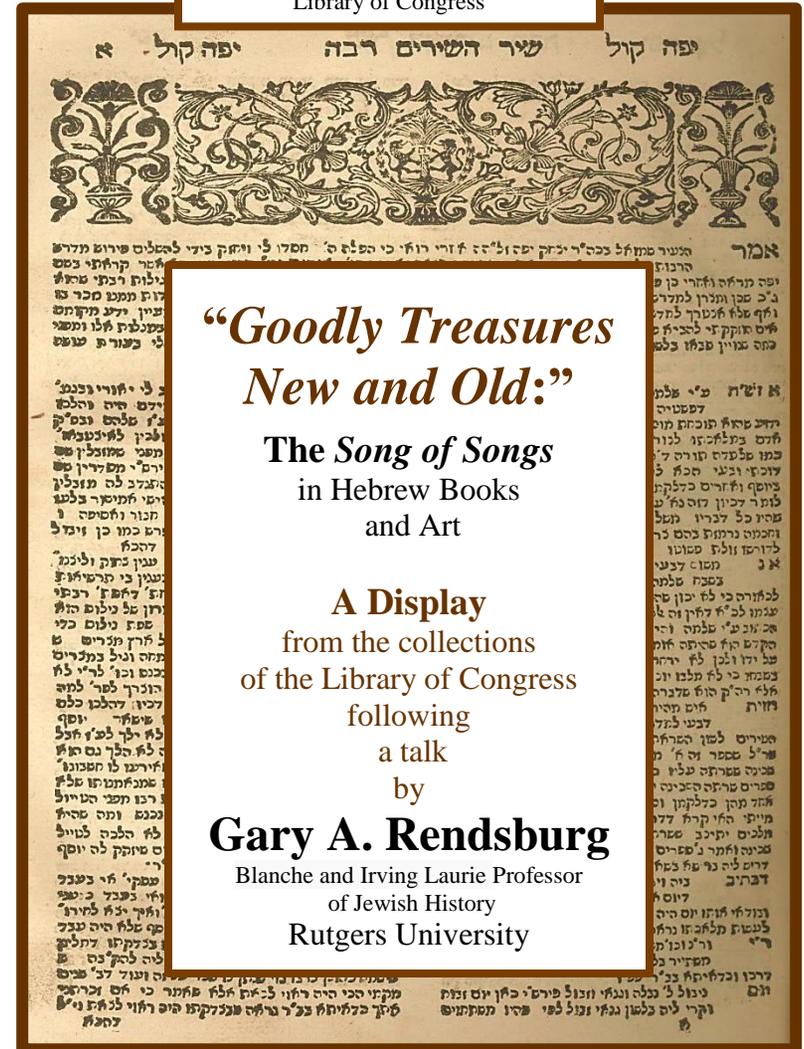
In the introduction to her brightly-colored edition, Israeli artist Tamar Messer discusses her artistic choices:

The Song of Songs has been interpreted in numerous ways. The traditional commentary sees the text as a parable for God's love for the Jewish people. Others treat it literally as a description of the love between a man and woman. I chose to emphasize the Jewish people's connection to its land and to expand on the descriptions of the panoramas, the natural resources, and the seasons; and to focus on the flora and fauna of the Land of Israel.

Housed in a light-colored wooden box with etched cover. 45 of 50 signed and numbered copies.



The Hebrew Section,
African and Middle Eastern Division,
Library of Congress



Detail from יפה קול: שיר השירים רבה. Izmir, 1739. (no. 7 on Checklist)

Monday, October 30, 2017
12 noon – 1:00 pm
African and Middle East Reading Room
Thomas Jefferson Building
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.

“The mandrakes give forth fragrance and at our doors are
goodly treasures new and old which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.”

- *Song of Songs* 7: 14

The Hebraic Section is pleased to display these editions of the *Song of Songs* from the rich collections of the Library of Congress. Traditionally attributed to King Solomon, the *Song of Songs* has been a constant focus of Hebrew creativity through the millennia, a fact amply illustrated in the “goodly treasures” before you now. From the earliest volumes printed in sixteenth-century Italy to the striking artist’s books of the modern era, the items in this display offer a unique glimpse into Jewish history and culture across the ages. We hope you will enjoy seeing them.

- Ann Brener, Hebraic Section,
African & Middle East Division

Checklist of Items on Display

I. Early Printed Sources

1. *מקראות גדולות* (*Biblia Hebraica*). Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1516-17. Vols. I-IV.

Known as the “First Rabbinic Bible,” this was the first printed Bible to separate *Samuel* and *Kings* and to include the traditional rabbinic *masorah*. It was also the first Hebrew book to include chapter and verse headings. The edition, however, was deeply flawed and it was left to the “Second Rabbinic Bible,” published by Bomberg in 1525, to set the standard for all subsequent editions. On display is the first page from the *Song of Songs* with its lovely woodcut of the opening word.

2. *מדרש חמש מגלות* (*Rabbinic Tales on the Five Biblical Scrolls*). Pesaro: Gershom Soncino, 1519.

Perhaps the greatest of the early Hebrew printers, Gershom Soncino set up his press in towns throughout Italy and eventually settled in the Ottoman Empire. This book, possibly the first edition of one of the great classics of rabbinic literature, is a fine example of his pioneering work. Open to the title page with the exquisite borders for which Soncino became known, here with the addition of two charming hares.

3. Tractate *Toharot* (*Purities*). *Babylonian Talmud*. Venice: Daniel Bomberg, 1528.

According to ancient sources, the *Song of Songs* was only included in the biblical canon thanks to the intervention of Rabbi Akiva (d. 135 C.E.), the great sage who saw the poem as an extended allegory on the love between God and the Jewish people. His oft-quoted comment that “all of the sacred writings are holy but the *Song of Songs* is the holy of holies” (*Mishnah, Yadayim* 3:5) is here seen in a volume printed almost 500 years ago by the famed Daniel Bomberg along the canals of Venice.

4. ספר מאה שערים (*One Hundred Chapters*). Isaac ben Elijah Sheni. Salonika: Eliezer ben Gershom Soncino, 1543.

A kabbalistic commentary on the biblical commandments. The introduction offers a mystical reading of the *Song of Songs*. To give one example, the verse “At night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves” (3:1) is interpreted as an allusion to the soul shrouded in darkness, yearning for knowledge of its Creator.

5. פרוש המילות (*The Meaning of Words*). Mordecai ben Yehiel Luria. Cracow: Isaac ben Aaron of Prostitz, 1580.

Explanation of words in the Aramaic translation (*Targum*) of the Five Scrolls, beginning with the *Song of Songs*. Basing his work on that of previous scholars, the author likens himself to a tailor who expertly shortens over-long garments, making them better fitted for use.

6. [שיר השירים עם תרגום ושרח] *Song of Songs* with the Aramaic *Targum* and Judeo-Arabic translation of the *Targum*. 44 ff. Paper. 15.5 x 10 cm. 18th century. Oriental (Near Eastern) semi-cursive script.

Many texts from medieval Jewish communities under Islam are written in Judeo-Arabic, which is Arabic written in Hebrew letters. This Judeo-Arabic text is a translation of the *Targum*, the ancient Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. As is traditional, it begins by attributing the poem to King Solomon (here called “the Prophet Sultan of Israel”): אל תמאניד ואל קסאביה אלדי קאל סלימאן אל גבי צולטאן ישראל בראיי אל נבווא.

7. יפה קול: שיר השירים רבה (*Yefeh Kol: Rabbinic Tales on the Song of Songs*). Izmir (Smyrna), 1739.

Early edition of an important commentary by Samuel Jaffe Ashkenazi (1525-1595), Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in sixteenth-century Istanbul. His work is valued for its textual accuracy and logical explanations of difficult passages. The title page notes that the book was published “during the reign of Sultan Mahmud [I], may his rule be exalted.”

II. Modern Editions and Artist’s Books

8. שיר השירים (*Song of Songs*). Hebrew micrography created by Abraham Stollerman in the shape of a heart. Germany, 1920.

Micrography is the scribal practice of employing minuscule script to create abstract shapes or figurative designs and is an art form found in some of the most beautiful Hebrew manuscripts extant today. The heart-shaped image on display here encloses the entire text from the *Song of Songs*.

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