

HB HB

BERTHOLD'S 1924
HEBREW
TYPE CATALOGUE



RENAISSANCE
BEFORE THE FALL
BY STEVEN HELLER

HB HB



EBREW WAS prohibited in Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, effectively curtailing a rich tradition of Jewish publishing. As a result those scholars and authors who could, emigrated to England, France, and The United States, while a particularly larger number also resettled in Germany (in part owing to the shared linguistics of German and Yiddish). As Berlin's Jewish community swelled in the 1920s, the city became a wellspring for Jewish book and periodical publishing with various ambitious endeavours. Notably the eight volume *Encyclopædia Judaica* (the last volume was published in 1933, the year Hitler was appointed German Chancellor). Another impressive series, the 12 volume *Weltgeschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, sold over 100,000 copies. In 1931 Salaman Schocken founded the prestigious Schocken Verlag. A leading Jewish publisher who produced fiction and non-fiction books, as well as an acclaimed annual *Almanach* of Jewish literature. The firm released over 225 titles until 1938 when forced into exile after the *Krystal Nacht* pogrom (night of broken glass). (Salaman had already left Germany in 1934 for a new life in Palestine, leaving his manager in charge until they could publish no longer. Later in the 1980s, over twenty years after Salaman died, Schocken became an imprint of the American publisher, Pantheon Books).

With this critical mass of Jewish culture emerging during the post-Russian Revolution and post-World War I years, it made sense that one of Germany's most venerable and largest type foundries, H Berthold AG, (founded in Berlin in 1858, with outlets in Leipzig, Stuttgart, Vienna, and Riga), would rigorously develop, produce, and market a relatively wide selection of Hebrew typefaces and ornaments designed both for secular and religious applications. By the late 1910s Berthold had already adopted standard fonts used for text and display based on original 'Shephardic' faces cut in the 16th century by French punch-cutter Guillaume Le Bé (known for a keen interest in Hebrew and Arabic lettering). They also offered latter-day variations: Frank Rühl (designed by Cantor Rafael Frank in 1909 for CF Rühl Schriftgießerei in Leipzig, which was bought by Berthold in 1918), Meruba, Margalit, Rashi, and Miriam. Berthold also seriously invested in the production of new faces in the European or 'Ashkenazi' style including, Stam, Stam Book, Rahel, and Rambam (all with and

without vowels), which were commonly used in European and American commercial, book, and newspaper printing. These types were made available in various weights through general Berthold specimen catalogues, which featured also other non-western alphabets. But in 1924 a dedicated Hebrew catalogue was produced that perfectly complimented Berthold's routine promotional materials for sheer precision and graphic splendor. In hindsight, knowing that barely 11 years later, Jews would be ostracized and so-called 'Jewish lettering' would also be outlawed by the Nazi state, makes this catalogue all the more poignant.

At the time of what some have called the 'Hebrew Renaissance' in Germany, which took hold throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the catalogue was nothing less than a joyous celebration of Hebrew and Yiddish culture. The specimens were vibrantly rendered in the dominant Art Nouveau and Art Moderne (Deco) graphic mannerisms used by European printers for all kinds of commercial purposes. Yet these graphics also exuded a decidedly Jewish style. The man responsible for the catalogue's creation, Joseph Tscherkassky, was the Manager of the Oriental Department of H Berthold AG. The department was founded to cater to the growing printing market in Europe and abroad. Born in the Ukraine in 1879, Tscherkassky was proprietor of his own self-named foundry in Kiev, where he created Hebrew fonts for secular use. Yet little is known about his early life, the success or failure of his foundry, or when, in fact, he immigrated to Germany – although his reasons must have been tied to the fortunes (or misfortunes) of the Revolution. Type historian Stephen Lubell, author of 'Joseph Tscherkassky: Orientalist and Typefounder', published in *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* in 1996, writes that Tscherkassky was interested in the traditions of both Hebrew and Arabic types. This interest and research resulted later on in an equally exquisite Berthold companion catalogue dedicated to Arabic faces.

'Tscherkassky attempted to give the type specimens a very oriental character combined with his visions of the new Hebrew typography,' writes Lubell about the man who might arguably be called the Jan Tschichold of Jewish type. How many typefaces he commissioned, designed, or whether he even designed the complete type catalogue is not categorically known. But it is certain that Tscherkassky, at the behest of Berthold's directors Dr. Oskar Jolles and Erwin Graumann, was responsible for providing Jewish publishers and cultural organizations with a well-stocked library of fine types.

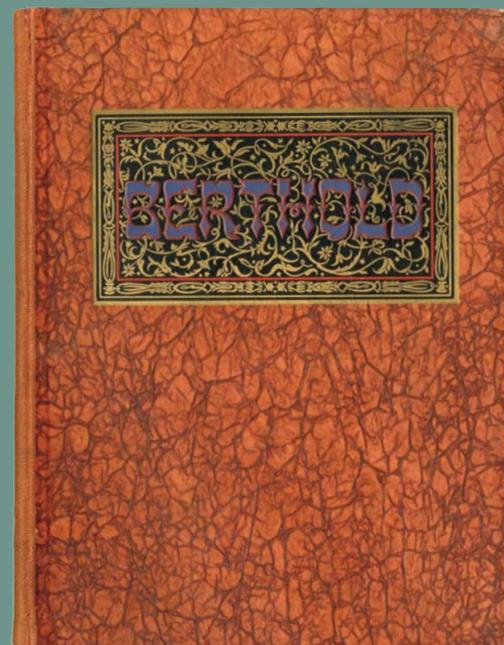


1 Cover of the Berthold Hebrew catalogue, reading from left to right. This cover has an oriental stylistic sensibility that suggests a biblical text. Designer unknown

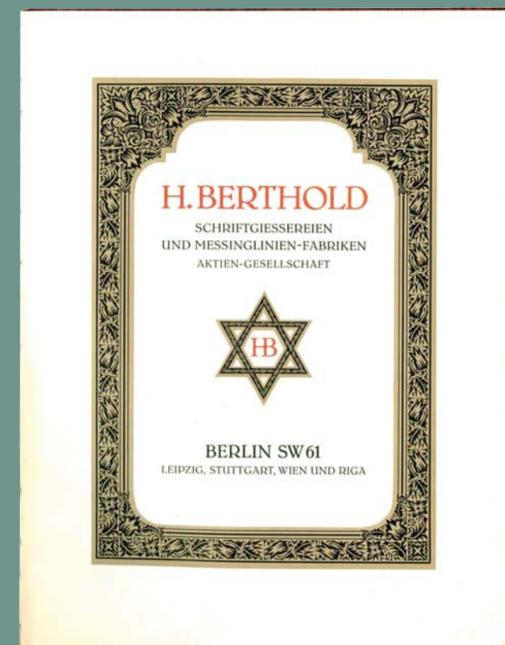
2 Title page of the Berthold catalogue in German, reading from left to right. The Jewish star on this book, when viewed in retrospect, is an ominous prefiguring of things to come

3 Title page of the Berthold catalogue in Hebrew letters, reading from right to left. Although the catalogue includes Yiddish as well as Hebrew, the latter was the more 'official' language

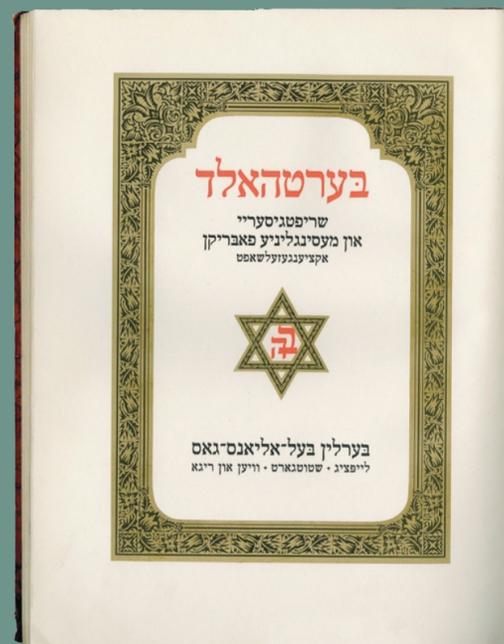
4 Cover of the Berthold Hebrew catalogue with Berthold in Hebrew letters. The layout of this catalogue allowed for the fundamental letter samples when opened this way, and the applications were shown when opened in reverse



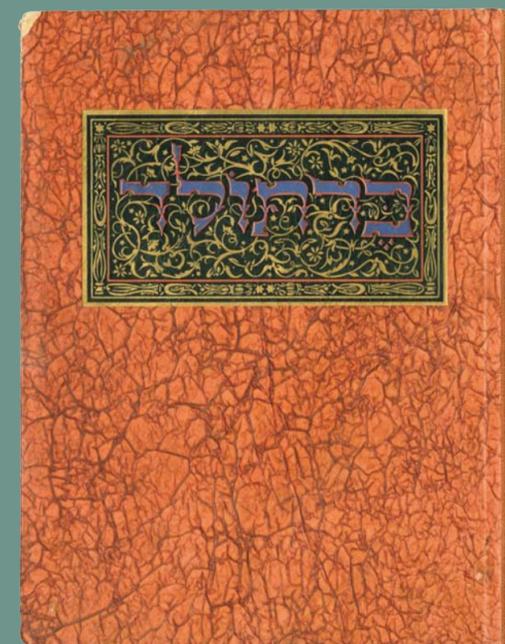
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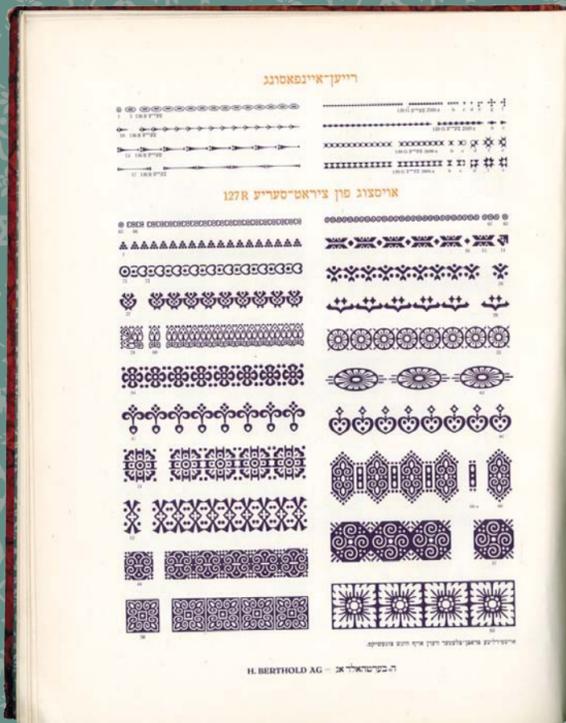
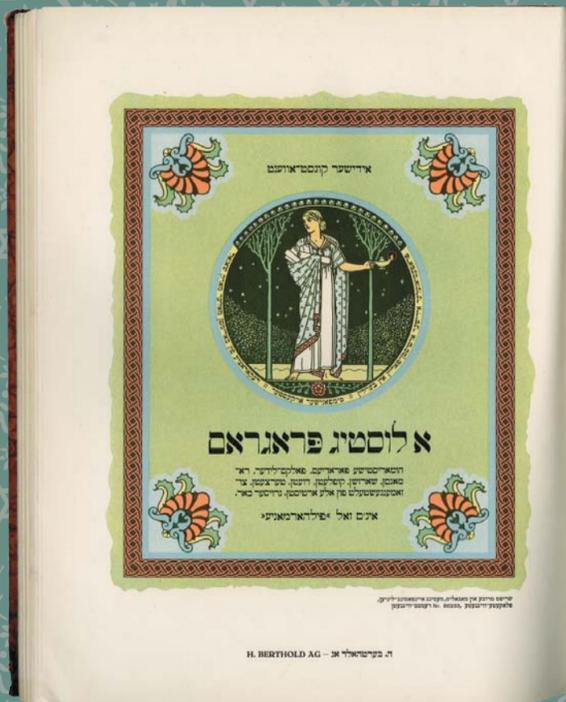
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5 A type sample using orientalist decorative borders and bright "mid-eastern" colors. Some of the samples herein were for restaurants and businesses, others for biblical excerpts

8 Type specimens displaying different border treatments for use in poetry (left) and liturgy (right) were common throughout the catalogue

6 "Ramsis Series" of ornaments based on Egyptian motifs: Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles borrowed heavily from these ancient forms, making them more modern by simplifying the lines. Berthold used these motifs in their German catalogues as well

9 These are pages from a book about historical objects and locales using a classical styling wed to the Egyptian motifs shown above

10 Common flourons and border motifs are drawn from Middle Eastern architecture and applied to printing. Again, many of these elements were used in non-Hebrew Berthold catalogues

7 These type compositions were used for admonishing people to emigrate to the State of Israel (top) and as an ad for a travel and automobile agent. Much of the Hebrew type, whether used for Yiddish or Hebrew applications, had functional, non-decorative purposes

NOTHING WAS spared in the production of the catalogue, which opens both right to left (with text set in Roman) and left to right (with text set in Hebrew). In addition to its intricately embossed reddish-brown covers with hints of gold leaf printing (actually quite biblical in appearance), the endpapers are a cleverly repeating pattern of interlocking Stars of David with the Berthold logo in Hebrew. Inside the bountiful offerings include numerous examples of calligraphic text and display faces along with assortments, decorative initial capitals, dingbats, fleurons, and borders. The typefaces are mostly printed in black, yet the ornaments and a major section devoted to especially designed applications is saturated in vibrant colours. A few spreads of sample book title pages show the blend of classical and modern influences, while the majority of customized designed samples, included menus, theatre programs, and letter and billheads, are illuminated as though contemporary Medieval manuscripts. There is also a noticeable Arts and Crafts influence in some Pre-Raphaelite illuminated initials. But the over-arching stylistic trope is streamlined Egyptian borrowed from the Pharaoh's tombs. One of the specimens features a quotation from Martin Luther about the ancient Hebrew language, which Lubell correctly observes is 'a curious and somewhat disconcerting quotation given Martin Luther's other statements about Jews.'

'This catalogue of Hebrew and Jewish Types,' writes Tscherkassky in his seven-language Preface (including Arabic), 'the first of its kind should redress a great deficiency hitherto existing in Hebrew printing matters.' This correctly presumed great interest on the part of publishing houses and bibliographic societies to preserve and propagate the Hebrew alphabet and language. "During my long years" as owner of the type-foundry Joseph Tscherkassky in Kiev [Kiev] I had no chance of carrying out the long entertained idea of perfecting the Hebrew types,' he adds. 'Only by assistance on the part of the firm H Berthold AG the largest type-foundry in Germany I was able to realize my plans to this great extent.' He continues in a salutary tone, it took 'long years' toilsome preparatory work to examine the Berthold stocks of Hebrew types with the aid of leading Jewish type experts and typographers and I hope I have found the best and most perfect as regards to form, shape and technical make.' He ends by dedicating the catalogue to Dr. Jolles on the celebration of his 25th jubilee as Director. Dr. Jolles, incidentally, though trained as an economist and banker, was an avid Jewish bibliophile, the force behind Berthold-Drucke private press monographs used for



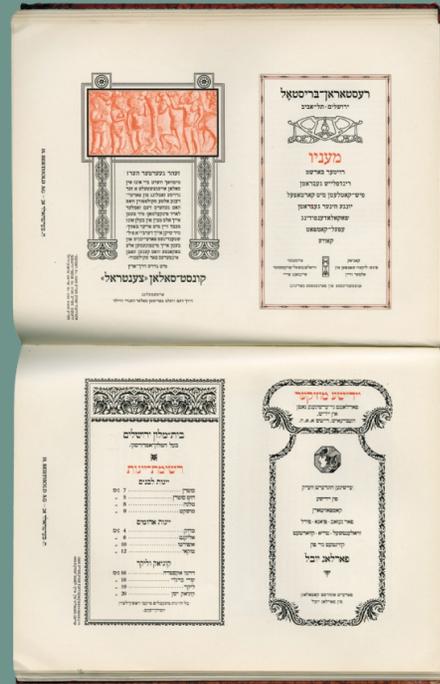
11 Samples showing common uses of Hebrew characters for food and wine menus as well as a Yiddish music book (bottom right) and an announcement for a sculpture exhibit (top left). With the influx of Yiddish speakers into Germany, these applications were increasingly common

12 The endpapers of the catalogue feature a design of interconnected Stars of David with the Hebrew characters for H Berthold inserted in the middle of each

13 Sample of Frank Rühl typeface using words from Genesis: Top line: 'In the Beginning' (ie the lead to the Book of Genesis); Middle line: 'The Water'; Bottom line: 'One'

14 Old Style Hebrew Capitals (as opposed to Modern Hebrew scripts), titled 'Syrian Series,' were popular printing elements for documents purporting to have biblical references

15 More borders and ornaments, titled 'Leana Shmok Series,' produced in a Classical spirit



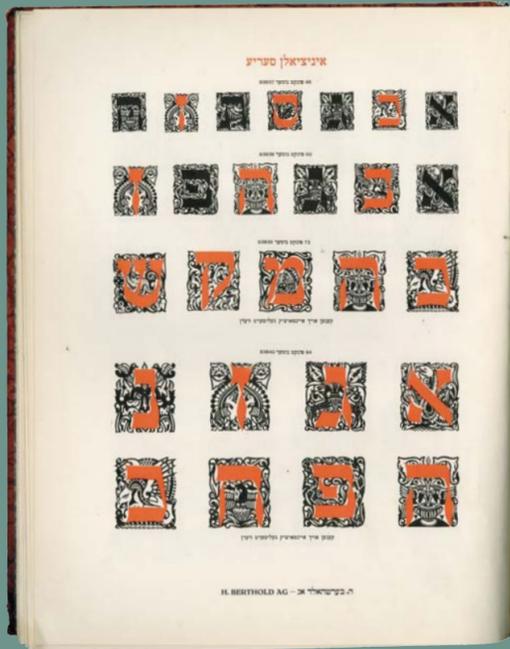
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publishing work of Hebrew type designers and other type matters – and so the perfect advocate for Tscherkassky's work.

The Berthold Hebrew catalogue was largely responsible for spreading the gospel of type throughout central Europe, but it was not the only vehicle. Also in 1924, Berthold produced a booklet of Hebrew types designed by Leopold Kurzböck and Anton Schmid, according to Lubell. And in 1925 Berthold also printed a limited edition of 10 verses from the 'Book of Ecclesiasticus'. Still, Tscherkassky's catalogue was the flagship for Hebrew lettering for many years. Although he was not able in 1924 to predict the campaign to rid Europe of Jewish culture (even though Hitler's beer hall anti-Semitism was audible), he predicted a resurgence of Yiddish in everyday life, thus a growing market for books and other commercial printing. 1924 also marked the founding of The Soncino-Gesellschaft (the Society for the Friends of Jewish Book) in Germany, which according to Lubell was critical of the catalogue in its official newsletter. Although grateful to Berthold for making the effort, the society took issue with the nuances of its design. 'Yet once again one must add with regret, that the creation of a completely satisfactory, well-conceived and classical Hebrew type has not yet been achieved' wrote a reviewer. Similar sighs of classical angst were also heard when in 1925 Tschichold edited an issue of the magazine *TM*, devoted to radical modern 'Elementare Typographie'. Tscherkassky was understandably disappointed by the response.

While Tscherkassky's contribution was considerable, the market for commercial Hebrew type did not grow as rapidly as anticipated. This may have been one reason why in 1930 he moved to South America to manage a Berthold branch in Brazil. Lubell assumes he was demoted from his position in Berlin, but nonetheless the move saved his life. Three years later in 1933 he was fired in a move that prefigured the widespread dismissals of Jews from German professions. He started a new printing company, which became the largest packaging printer in South America. Although Joseph Tscherkassky seemed to have abandoned his overt interests in Hebrew types, *Berthold's 1924 Hebrew type catalogue* – while rare today – is a crucial historical document in light of the fate that befell the Jews of (and so-called Jewish lettering in) Europe.



16 This rate sheet for a business is where Egyptian meets Art Deco styling, printed in vibrant, almost fluorescent colors; it both suggests a unique Hebrew style while conforming to international trends in design



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17 A sample page that includes a passage from the Torah, from a book called 'Stories from the Torah,' about Jacob and his son Joseph. It employs an oriental motif