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PRINTING IN VENICE—BEFORE GUTENBERG?

Michael Pollak

A brief and completely erroneous statement by the sixteenth-century Hebrew chronicler Joseph ha-Kohen to the effect that an unnamed book which he had once seen had been printed in Venice in 1428 set off a bitter debate which was to engage the energies of several generations of printing historians. The chronicler's remark was manipulated in such a way as to cause it to become a key factor in the centuries-long dispute as to whether printing had been invented in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg or in Holland by Laurens Coster. The deeply partisan and often emotional arguments regarding the validity of the ha-Kohen claim, which were to be presented over a period of approximately 250 years, demonstrate quite plainly that when the facts did not support their own convictions certain printing historians were not above twisting them about or sweeping them under the rug. Although some scholars attempted to judge ha-Kohen's statement solely on its merits, too many others did not. Generally speaking, the treatment of ha-Kohen's allegation regarding the existence of printing in 1428 represents a low point in the writing of printing history and serves as a reminder that the works of the early printing historians must be read with considerable caution.

In a Hebrew chronicle written and published in the middle of the sixteenth century the assertion is plainly made that printing was being done in Venice in 1428. This claim appears in the chronicle *sub anno* 1428, in a passage consisting of only twenty-one Hebrew words (fig. 1). Here, re-

אמר יוסף הכהן נראה כי כבר נמצא הדפוס בימי
ההם: ואני ראיתי ספר נרפס בוויניציא
בשנת שצ"ה וזרבע נואח ואלף :

FIG. 1.—The *sub anno*–1428 entry (folio 91b) in the 1554 edition of Joseph ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-Yammim*. Courtesy Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

ferring to himself in the third person, the author announces in clear and unambiguous terms: "Thus says Joseph ha-Kohen, 'It appears that printing had already been invented in those days, for I myself have seen a book which was printed in Venice in the year one thousand four hundred and twenty-eight.' " Regrettably, the chronicler fails to provide any additional details, with the result that his readers are left completely in the dark as to the title of his remarkable book and the names of its author and printer.

The passage just cited is taken from Joseph ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-*

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Yammim l'Malkhei Zarfat u'Malkhei Beit Ottoman ha-Togar [A chronicle of the kings of France and the sultans of the Ottoman Turks], the first printing of which was accomplished by Cornelius Adelkind in the Lombardian village of Sabbionetta during the year 1554.¹ However, ha-Kohen's statement that printing was in existence as early as 1428 was destined to be repeatedly and erroneously attributed to other sources.

It is interesting to consider several of the possibilities which could have induced an Italian-Jewish chronicler of the mid-sixteenth century to postulate the printing of a book in Venice two and one-half decades before the completion of the Gutenberg forty-two-line Bible and, moreover, forty-one years before the publication by Johannes de Spira of Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*, the book which is generally recognized as the first to have been printed in the city of Venice. But it is still more interesting, and even startling, to follow Joseph ha-Kohen's forthright declaration as it passed through the hands of a number of printing historians and to discover how it came to be misrepresented and distorted by both the pro-Gutenberg and the pro-Coster parties in the long and tendentious debate over to whom the credit for the invention of printing should rightfully be assigned. The inference to be drawn in the end is that there is less to be learned from the chronicle of Joseph ha-Kohen about the history of printing than about the helter-skelter fashion in which some of this history was written.

As the passage in which Joseph ha-Kohen presented his sliver of testimony about printing in Venice in 1428 was commented upon in the works of certain scholars, not only was its text corrupted but both the name of Joseph ha-Kohen and the title of his book tended to disappear from sight. In the course of time the authorship of the ha-Kohen statement was attributed by some writers to Joseph Caro, and it was reported by them that the eye-catching reference to the existence of printing in Venice in 1428 could be found in Caro's *Shulkhan Arukh*. It was also argued, in a variation on this theme, that the *Shulkhan Arukh* was itself the book which had supposedly been printed in 1428—a rather feeble hypothesis in that it has the *Shulkhan Arukh* available in print sixty years before the birth of the man who wrote it. An equally ludicrous proposition, enunciated by a German author, provided an entirely different basis for rejecting the claim that a book called *Shulkhan Arukh*, written by Rabbi Joseph Caro, could have been printed in 1428. The truth, as this German author saw and proclaimed it, was that no such individual as Joseph Caro had ever existed. Both Caro and the *Shulkhan Arukh*, he charged, had been conjured up out of the fertile imagination of an overly zealous Dutch historian as part of a nefarious scheme to deny the

1. The *Divrei ha-Yammim* was reprinted in Amsterdam in 1733 and in Lemberg in 1859. Portions of the work have been translated into Latin, French, and German [1, pp. 9–10, 85–86, nn. 12–18]. A complete translation of the work into English, made by Bialloblotzky, was published in 1835–36 [2].

credit for the invention of printing to Johannes Gutenberg. Still more complications were introduced into the affair when other writers mistook the *Shulkhan Arukh* for a legal code of the early fourteenth century, the *Arba Turim* of Jacob ben Asher. At least one bibliographer seems to have gained the impression that it was the *Arba Turim* which was being identified as the book which had reputedly come off the press in Venice in 1428. At one point, a supporter of the Coster cause went so far as to declare that he himself owned a copy of the edition said to have been printed in 1428. Later, another Costerite (who, to give credit where it is due, knew enough at least to describe his source as a Hebrew chronicle) insisted that the claim that a book had been printed in 1428 included the statement that this imprint had been produced "with the invention of Coster at Haarlem." To make matters even worse, a number of the scholars who had interested themselves in the allegation that printing was already known in 1428 chose to resort to *ad hominem* slurs and to arguments based on religious bigotry when they thought that these might be tactically advantageous.²

I

Joseph ben Joshua ben Meir ha-Kohen (1496–1578?) was a person of great talent and considerable energy. Possessed of a profound sense of compassion and intensely committed to the tradition from which he had sprung, he ordered his life in a manner which was to lead one biographer to speak of him as "un homme de grande vertu" [3, p. 46]. A practicing physician, ha-Kohen participated repeatedly and effectively in Italo-Jewish affairs, wrote prolifically on a wide range of subjects, composed verse, and translated several scholarly works into Hebrew. He is best remembered for his two historical treatises, the *Divrei ha-Yammim* and the *Emek ha-Bakha* [Vale of tears].³ Basnage, the eighteenth-century Christian historian of the Jews, was sufficiently impressed by Joseph ha-Kohen's historiographic skills to refer to him as "a second Josephus" [4, vol. 10, col. 241]. Our chronicler, then, was a man of prominence, ability, and good repute.

2. The vicissitudes to which ha-Kohen's 1428 entry was to be subjected will be discussed individually as this study progresses.
3. Joseph ha-Kohen translated a geography of Asia, Africa, and Europe from the Italian to the Hebrew. His Spanish-to-Hebrew translations included a medical work and Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias*. Ha-Kohen, not content with being merely a translator, was given to the practice of interspersing his translations with contributions of his own—one such contribution being a description of certain "remedies for the French disease" which he had found to be effective in treating his patients. He also wrote romantic poetry, a treatise on the gender of Hebrew nouns, and a manual of instructions for the writing of letters. His correspondence, much of which survives, contains a great deal of valuable information regarding the events of his time.

The *Divrei ha-Yammim* is a history of the two major communities of the Western world, the Christian and the Muhammadan, and of their treatment of the Jewish minorities that lived in their midst. As first printed in 1554, following its completion by the author in November 1553, and later reprinted, both in the original Hebrew and in translation, the *Divrei ha-Yammim* consisted of two parts. The first is a chronicle of the period from the dissolution of the Roman Empire until 1520; the second brings the account up to 1553. The author later wrote a third section, extending the period covered by his chronicle to 1575. This third section, however, was destined to remain in manuscript form for nearly four centuries, and it was not until 1955 that it was finally put into print, although in an abridged version [1].

If the name of Joseph ha-Kohen is said to rank high in the annals of Jewish scholarship, then the name of his contemporary Joseph Caro (1488–1575) must be thought of as being at the loftiest pinnacle ever attained in that vast area of learning.

A mystic at heart, Joseph Caro was nevertheless one of the foremost legal thinkers in all Jewish history. His most comprehensive work is the *Beit Yossef* [House of Joseph], a massive compendium of Jewish civil and religious jurisprudence which draws heavily upon the Talmud and the two great codes of the medieval period, the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides and the *Arba Turim* of Jacob ben Asher. The *Beit Yossef* attempts to reconcile or resolve certain differences of opinion existing in the two earlier codes. In addition, it provides rulings for a number of problems which are not discussed in them.

Caro also wrote a shorter and more simplified version of his *Beit Yossef* and called this the *Shulkhan Arukh* [Prepared table], suggesting thereby that it was capable of providing spiritual and intellectual sustenance to those who came to it. In essence, the *Shulkhan Arukh*, composed in plain and forthright Hebrew, set forth the guidelines by which the believing Jew could pattern his daily life. Caro, interestingly enough, did not have too high an opinion of his *Shulkhan Arukh*. He had written it, he took pains to explain, for the use of young students who, presumably, would not be sufficiently advanced in their studies to make their way through the intricacies of the *Beit Yossef* [4, vol. 5, col. 197]. However, because the *Shulkhan Arukh* filled a great void in the literature of Judaism, and because it could be read and understood by nearly all Jews—and not only by those whose training in rabbinics had progressed to a relatively high level—the work achieved enormous popularity.

The first printing of the *Shulkhan Arukh* took place in Venice in 1564–65. Shortly after its publication, the eminent Polish rabbi Moses Isserles wrote a series of notes to Caro's work for the purpose of presenting those aspects of Ashkenazic (northern and central European) ritual usage and legal thought which differed from the Sephardic (Mediterranean) practices and viewpoints prescribed by Caro. Isserles gave this

supplement the name *Mappah* [Tablecloth], since it was designed to be used with the table which Joseph Caro had set.

It became customary to print the *Shulkhan Arukh* and the *Mappah* as a unit: in all standard editions the texts of Joseph Caro and Moses Isserles were printed interlinearly. To differentiate between the contributions of the two authorities, the type style known as the *k'tab Rashi* was ordinarily employed for the notes of Isserles, while a type of a square-bodied design was normally used for the text of Caro.

The first edition of the *Shulkhan Arukh* to include the notes of Isserles was published in Cracow, where Isserles lived, in 1569–71, only a half-decade after the printing of the first edition of the Caro work in Venice.

In a surprisingly short time the *Shulkhan Arukh-cum-Mappah* came to be accepted as one of the great basic texts of Judaism, so much so that the degree to which it influenced the way of life of millions of Jews in all corners of the world can scarcely be overstated. The book remains to this day the most commonly consulted of all reference sources in matters dealing with traditional Jewish practices.

How did Joseph ha-Kohen's claim that he had seen a book which had been printed in Venice in 1428 come to be made?

To begin with, we must set aside as completely unrealistic any lurking suspicions that, notwithstanding all that has been said and done in the fields of bibliographical and historical research on the origins of printing, a book could actually have been printed from movable type as early as 1428 and, moreover, in Venice rather than in Mainz. Insofar as the xylographic reproduction of books is concerned, it is generally believed that this was not practiced in Europe until some time after 1428, but it is not altogether inconceivable that attempts may have been made to produce books by the use of woodblocks at this very early date. It must be conceded, however, that, although the possibility that Joseph ha-Kohen saw a book which had been printed in 1428 by a woodblock technique is exceedingly small, that possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.

In the course of time the accusation was to be made by several writers that Joseph ha-Kohen (or Joseph Caro, when they confused the two) either was lying when he claimed to have seen his elusive imprint of 1428 or, in a softer vein, was merely mistaken.

All the information which we have about the life of Joseph ha-Kohen leads to the conclusion that this was a man whose personal and scholarly integrity cannot be impugned. It is unthinkable that an individual of his background, character, and accomplishment would concoct a hoax about the book being printed in 1428 and attempt to fob this off on his readers. What, moreover, would be the motive behind such a fabrication?

The only inference which may justifiably be drawn, therefore, is that Joseph ha-Kohen simply made an honest error, and that he merely *thought* that the book which he saw had been printed in 1428.

We know, of course, that not every early printed book was actually published during the year which is noted in its colophon, for typographic and editorial errors were not at all uncommon, and a wrong dating did occasionally slip by the correctors. Both Haebler and Pollard list numerous examples of this and other kinds of error, all of which have contributed to misunderstandings as to the dates on which the printing of certain books was completed [5, pp. 164–71; 6, pp. 170–84]; and Haebler even mentions one book, a *Flores* by Bernardus, which is “claimed to have been printed by Phillippe Pigouchet in Paris in the year 1009” [5, p. 167]. As one example of what might have happened, is it not possible that Joseph ha-Kohen saw a Venetian imprint which bore the date, let us say, MCCCCXXVIII instead of MCCCCLXXVIII, the L having been accidentally omitted by the typesetter?⁴

It may also be asked whether Joseph ha-Kohen’s claim for the existence of printing in Venice in 1428 could not have been one of those lapses which a scholar lives to rue. This, however, was not the case. Quite the contrary: Joseph ha-Kohen remained so firmly convinced of the truth of the statement he had made in 1554 that as late as 1577 he repeated that statement—this time in stronger terms.

Toward the latter part of his life Joseph ha-Kohen revised the two sections of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* which had been published in 1554 and added a third, bringing the events listed in his chronicle up to 1575. As previously noted, however, the first printing of the third portion of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* was not to take place until 1955, and then in abridged form.

The revised version of the first two sections, which seems never to have appeared in print, still exists in manuscript, in the form in which its author had perhaps hoped to see the work go to press. This manuscript, in the handwriting of Joseph ha-Kohen himself, bears the Hebrew date (5)337 (= 1577), and I have been privileged to examine it at the British Museum (Heb. MS Or. 3656).⁵ The first two sections, I have found, differ in numerous particulars from the text which was printed in 1554.

4. It is also possible that ha-Kohen could have misunderstood the date of a book which had been printed in Hebrew. An essay by Goldschmidt describes a number of cases in which Hebrew works have for one reason or another been assigned erroneous publication dates. One of the principal causes of such misdatings stems from the requirement that the characters of the Hebrew alphabet do double duty: they are used to represent numbers as well as units of the alphabet. Since the forms of several Hebrew letters are very similar to those of other letters in the alphabet, a date may be misread if it is not printed clearly. Goldschmidt thus reports that the publication date of the first edition of the *Arba Turim* has frequently been given as 1478 instead of 1475 owing to the poor printing of one digit in its colophon [7, pp. 77–78]. Because the colophon written by a scribe was carelessly set in type during the composition of the first printed edition of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, the year of the publication of that edition is often reported incorrectly (as, for example, in the Hebrew-language encyclopedia *Ozar Yisrael* [8, vol. 10, p. 130]).
5. I am indebted to Drs. J. Rosenwasser and Emanuel Silver of the Department of

In the 1577 manuscript, again *sub anno* 1428, ha-Kohen's observation regarding the presence of printing in Venice in 1428 is repeated, but this time there is a slight but meaningful change in the wording (fig. 2).

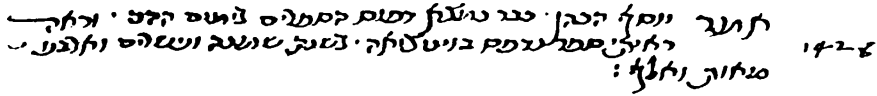


FIG. 2.—The *sub anno*-1428 entry (folio 39b) in the 1577 revision of Joseph ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-Yammim* (British Museum, Heb. MS Or. 3656). The handwriting is that of Joseph ha-Kohen. By permission of the British Library Board.

The reading is now: "Thus says Joseph ha-Kohen, 'The printing of books had already been invented in those days, for I myself have most assuredly seen a book which was printed in Venice in the year one thousand four hundred and twenty-eight.'"

Three differences may be noted between the 1554 and 1577 *sub anno*-1428 texts: (1) the 1577 version dispenses with "it appears" and in so doing becomes slightly more positive in tone; (2) "printing," in the 1554 text, becomes "the printing of books" in the 1577 revision, thus excluding the possibility that ha-Kohen is referring to ephemera; and, most important, (3) in 1577 Joseph ha-Kohen selects a form of the Hebrew verb "to see" which is more emphatic than the form he had employed in 1554.

The essential difference between the two versions lies in their usage of the verb "to see." In the 1554 edition of his chronicle Joseph ha-Kohen merely says *v'ani ra'iti*, which translates literally as "and I have seen" or, in the context in which it appears, "for I have seen." In 1577 he writes *v'raoh ra'iti*, thereby stating the verb twice; and the double use of the verb is a conventional device in Hebrew for adding emphasis to the action denoted by the verb.

The change from *v'ani ra'iti* to *v'raoh ra'iti*—an employment of "to see," incidentally, which occurs in Exodus 3:7—and the elimination of "it appears" [*nirah*] suggest that in 1577 Joseph ha-Kohen wanted to make it quite clear that he was standing his ground. He was saying, in effect, that his 1554 declaration had not been in error. The more positive tone adopted in the 1577 entry seems to indicate that at some time after the publication of the 1554 edition of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* Joseph

Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, British Museum, for calling my attention to the existence of this manuscript of the *Divrei ha-Yammim*. There is a second manuscript, also in ha-Kohen's hand, which represents an earlier revision of the *Divrei ha-Yammim*. This manuscript, dated 1575 and extending the chronology of the 1554 edition to 1573, is held in the library of the Alliance israélite universelle in Paris. In the 1575 manuscript ha-Kohen's wording *sub anno* 1428 is the same as that which he was to employ two years later in his 1577 manuscript.

ha-Kohen's identification of a book as a 1428 imprint had been challenged and that in 1577 he was reaffirming his earlier contention.⁶

We must conclude, I believe, either that Joseph ha-Kohen misunderstood a perfectly valid date in a printed book or that he was misled by a date which was itself erroneous (or did not apply to the time of the completion of the printing of the book but, rather, to the date on which it was finished by its author or its copying was completed by a scribe). It appears to me that ha-Kohen wrote what he honestly believed to be the truth—which is to say that he *had* seen a Venetian imprint dated 1428. I see no grounds which would substantiate any of the charges of dishonesty that were leveled against him.

In 1592, thirty-eight years after the publication of Joseph ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-Yammim*, another outstanding Hebrew chronicle was issued; but in this chronicle the invention of printing is correctly attributed to Johannes Gutenberg, and the year for the invention is given as 1440 [9, pt. 2, fol. 63b]. This work, the *Zemakh David* of David Gans, does not repeat Joseph ha-Kohen's assertion that printing existed in Venice in 1428. Gans, therefore, either was unaware of ha-Kohen's claim (which seems somewhat unlikely in view of the importance and uniqueness of the ha-Kohen chronicle) or ignored it because he did not believe it to be true.

In another Hebrew work, this one from the year 1699, Rabbi Hayyim Yair Bacharach refers to the *Zemakh David* in connection with the invention of printing. "In the *Divrei ha-Yammim* of Rabbi Joseph ha-Kohen," he then says, "it is reported as a matter of interest that printing was to be found in Venice in the year 1428, according to their [the Christians'] reckoning, this being, by our count, the 188th year of the sixth millennium from the creation of the world" [10, fol. 172a]. He also informs us that in a book called *Ko-akh ha-Shem* [The might of the Lord] he has read that iron type was in use in ancient times.⁷ He adds, however, that this type did not consist of individual letters but was made up of complete words which could be strung together and printed accordingly.

It should be mentioned that the vast storehouse of Hebraic literature contains a number of legends in which a knowledge of the printing process is attributed to various biblical figures, including Moses, David, Solomon, and Job, and to the tribe of Benjamin as well [12, p. 2]. There

6. Gross argues convincingly that the 1554 edition of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* was something of a best seller [1, p. 9]. If the book was in fact widely read, ha-Kohen's allegation regarding the existence of printing in 1428 would scarcely have gone unnoticed. It seems likely, therefore, that ha-Kohen could have been challenged on this point by at least one of his contemporaries.

7. Dr. Menahem Schmeltzer of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America has come to my aid in identifying the author of the work to which Bacharach alludes as Elijah Capsali (1483?–1555), rabbi at Candia, in Crete. This work has never been printed but survives as a manuscript at the British Museum, being appended to Capsali's *Chronicle of the Turkish Empire* as folios 270b–92a [11, pt. 3, item 1059, add. 19971, pp. 429–34].

is also a similarly farfetched suggestion that a scribe of the first part of the Talmudic era (that is, before ca. A.D. 200), a certain ben-Kamtsar, was able to reproduce the Tetragrammaton by means of a primitive form of printing [13, fols. 38a–b].

In 1774 the Hebrew bibliographical writer Hayyim Joseph David Azulai placed the invention of printing at Mainz around 5200 (=1440) and added that the craft was subsequently brought to Haarlem [14, pt. 2, fol. 19b]. Azulai repeats David Gans's attribution of the invention to the same time and to Mainz. He also cites Bacharach with reference to the presence of printing in Venice in 5188 (=1428) but neglects to mention that Joseph ha-Kohen was listed by Bacharach as the latter's authority for this item of information.

II

The state of confusion in which Joseph ha-Kohen's 1428 entry was to become engulfed seems to have had its beginnings in a statement composed by Joseph Justus Scaliger in 1608. In a polemical work entitled *Confutatione fabulae Burdoniae*, Scaliger, whom the Encyclopaedia Britannica rather sweepingly describes as "the greatest scholar of his day" [15, vol. 20, p. 43], falters somewhat as he writes these not entirely accurate lines: "Omnium vetustissimum, cuius tamen nomen reticetur, Venetiis excusum profert Rabbi Ioseph Sacerdos in Chronico suo, anno Iudaico 5188, Christiano MCCCCXXVIII. Quod nemo hactenus animadvertit: certe nemo indicavit. Unde ille Iudaeus colligit artem imprimendi ab eo libro incepisse" [16, p. 108].

What Scaliger really means to say here is: "In his chronicle, Rabbi Joseph Sacerdos informs us that the oldest [book] of all, the name of which, however, he fails to give us, was issued at Venice in the year 5188, Christian year 1428, [a claim] which nobody has noticed before now or, in any case, nobody has pointed out. Whence this Jew infers that the art of printing started with this particular book."

Unfortunately, the construction of the first sentence of this passage, as it was written by Scaliger, was to lead some scholars to translate it in the following manner, misleading though this is: "In his chronicle of the year 5188, Christian year 1428, Rabbi Joseph Sacerdos informs us that the oldest [book] of all, the name of which, however, he fails to give us, was issued at Venice, [a claim] which nobody has noticed before now or, in any case, nobody has pointed out."

Our first translation, then, has Joseph Sacerdos reporting, in his chronicle, that he has seen a book which was printed in 1428 in Venice; our second translation has him saying, in a chronicle which was itself printed in 1428, that he has seen a book which came off the press in Venice—no date for this Venetian imprint being supplied. Our second translation is inaccurate as well as anachronistic.

Scaliger's summarization of the ha-Kohen statement unintentionally creates four pitfalls for its readers: (1) The construction of Scaliger's purpose is such as to make it possible for a careless reader to take away the impression that ha-Kohen's chronicle was itself printed in 1428. (2) Scaliger's Latinization of the Hebrew name ha-Kohen as *Sacerdos*, while technically correct and not at all uncommon, is nevertheless misleading. Although Kohen (the *ha* which precedes Kohen is the definite article) and *Sacerdos* both mean "priest," the mental images which the two terms evoke are not quite the same. It may be surmised, therefore, that some of Scaliger's readers would not readily equate the two forms of the name. Moreover, "Ioseph *Sacerdos*" may legitimately be translated as "Joseph, *a* priest" rather than as "Joseph, *the* priest." Hence, "Ioseph *Sacerdos*" could well be applied to any Jew called Joseph who happened to be a member of the priestly clan.⁸ (3) The reader is not told whether both the Hebrew and the Christian dates were provided by the chronicler, or merely one of the two. A Hebrew date would suggest a book printed in Hebrew; a Christian date, on the other hand, might, or *might not*, exclude Hebrew as the language of the book in which it appears. (4) Scaliger has his Rabbi Joseph *Sacerdos* say that printing started with a book which was published in 1428. However, Scaliger is misreading the text here. What the chronicler is actually saying is that he has seen a book which was printed in Venice in that particular year. There is absolutely nothing in the Hebrew text to suggest that *Sacerdos*/ha-Kohen considers 1428 to be the first year in which printing was practiced, or that the book he saw was the first ever printed.

As matters developed, the opportunities for error which were inadvertently introduced by Scaliger in 1608 were to be exploited to the full by succeeding bibliographers who, arising like latter-day Pharaohs, knew not our Joseph.

Peter Scriverius, in his *Laurea Laurentii Costeri*, which was published in 1628, reprints verbatim Scaliger's Latin statement concerning the alleged Venetian imprint of 1428 [17, vol. 1, p. 276]. Scriverius, who is trying to prove that printing was invented by Laurens Coster, tells us that "a certain Jew by the name of Rabbi Joseph, a priest [or, *the* priest ('Rabbi *Joseph*, *Sacerdos*')] reports in his chronicle, under the Jewish year 5188, i.e., the Christian year 1428, that a book was then printed at

8. Generally speaking, the Jewish patronymics Cohen, Kohen, Cahen, Kahn, Kane, and the like imply that their owners are descended on the male side from the high priest Aaron, brother of Moses. People with such names are therefore identified as members of the priestly clan which served in both the First and Second Temples. In the traditional synagogue the cohen (=priest) still performs a limited number of ritual functions, but his position is not to be confused with that of the rabbi. While the rabbi is today charged with certain ritual duties, his basic responsibility is to teach and to judge. One becomes a cohen by birth, a rabbi only by training and ordination. A cohen may become a rabbi (as did Joseph ha-Kohen), but a rabbi who is not of cohanic descent cannot become a cohen.

Venice, and that this book was seen by him personally.⁹ Although this Rabbi Joseph does not give us its title, he insists that the book he saw was genuine [*sic*], and that the art of printing started with it [*sic*]. . . . As best as I can determine, this book, which was shown to the Jew as something rare and extraordinary, is one which still exists; in fact, I myself have a copy of it. . . . It is no wonder that the Jew did not give the title of the book, since it has none. It was printed in folio, and it contains forty illustrations from the Old and New Testaments" [17, vol. 1, pp. 403–4].

The illustrated book which Scriverius describes would appear to be a xylographic *Biblia Pauperum*; but, since Scriverius presents no justification whatever for his startling claim that it is from the same edition as the book reputedly seen by "Rabbi Joseph," it would seem that what we have here is a classic case of the wish becoming father to the thought. One may ask, moreover, whether Scriverius's own book showed a dating of 1428 and Venice as its place of printing. If so, why did he not mention this?

I should think that Joseph ha-Kohen is speaking, in his 1428 comment, of the kind of printed book he would normally see—that is, a book consisting basically of textual rather than illustrative material and, presumably, one produced by means of movable type. However, as has been stated previously, the possibility that ha-Kohen is talking about a block book cannot be completely rejected.

In 1632, and again in 1640, the Dutch scholar Marcus Zuerius Boxhornius addressed himself to the statement of Joseph ha-Kohen—whom he knew, as did Scriverius, as Joseph Sacerdos [18, vol. 1, pp. 134–35; 19, vol. 2, pp. 841–43]. Boxhorn, like Scriverius, accepts ha-Kohen's declaration as factually correct and also makes use of it to show that Coster deserves the credit for the invention of printing. However, although Boxhorn bases much of his case upon the testimony provided by the man he knows as Joseph Sacerdos, he mistakenly identifies this Joseph Sacerdos as Joseph Caro. I do not understand by what strange process of reasoning Boxhorn arrives at the conclusion that Joseph Sacerdos (without Scriverius's intervening comma) is another name for Joseph Caro. It is conceivable, of course, that, following Scriverius, he thinks of the chronicler as a writer named Joseph who is a priest, and also that Joseph Caro is the man who best fits this classification. However, Boxhorn seems to have taken the bulk of his information about Joseph Sacerdos from Scaliger and, in doing so, to have misunderstood Scaliger badly.

Scaliger spoke of a chronicle written by "Rabbi Ioseph Sacerdos." Boxhorn at first refers to the author of the chronicle merely as "Rabbi

9. It is worth noting that in Scriverius's text there is a comma between "Joseph" and "Sacerdos," indicating perhaps that Scriverius is thinking of Sacerdos not as a patronymic but as a clerical title. To Scriverius the chronicler would then be "Joseph, a rabbi who is also a priest."

Josephus"; and, like Scaliger, he gives both the Hebrew and the Christian years in which the elusive Venetian imprint is supposed to have been published. He then says that although he tried for a long time to secure a copy of the chronicle of "Rabbi Josephus" he was never able to obtain one. He surprises us, moreover, by declaring that the chronicle of this "Rabbi Josephus" is actually the book known as the *Shulkhan Arukh* or, in Latin, the *Mensa instructa*. This *Shulkhan Arukh*, he explains, is a work which was derived by "Rabbi Joseph Carro" from the *Arba Turim*. Then, notwithstanding his initial designation of the book in question as a chronicle, he unexpectedly describes the *Shulkhan Arukh* as a legal and ritualistic code and notes that the glosses of Moses Isserles are incorporated in its text. The reader who is interested in pursuing the matter further is referred by Boxhorn to the third Cracow edition of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, printed in 1594, which, Boxhorn states correctly, is cataloged in Johannes Buxthorff's *Bibliotheca rabbinica*.

Boxhorn argues that Joseph Caro [*sic*] should be believed when he says that he has seen a book which was printed in Venice in 1428. Why should we not believe this Jewish teacher, says Boxhorn, arguing in a circle, if he happens to be telling the truth? Since this is not a question of theology, Boxhorn suggests, the testimony of a rabbi may be accepted [19, vol. 2, p. 841]. He concludes, accordingly, that Joseph Caro, the author of a work which at one point he calls a chronicle and at another he calls a legal code, did see a book which had actually been printed in Venice in 1428.

Boxhorn employs the "Caro" statement to bolster his contention that printing was invented by Coster in this manner: Coster, he asserts, started to experiment with movable type at Haarlem as early as 1420. Caro's testimony that a book was printed in Venice in 1428 demonstrates to Boxhorn's satisfaction that in eight years Coster's experiments had progressed sufficiently to make the printing of books practical, even in faraway Venice. (That the presence of printing in Venice in 1428 might point to an inventor other than Coster, perhaps to one who lived in Venice, does not seem to occur to Boxhorn.) To Boxhorn, the "Caro" statement and the other bits of feeble evidence which he assembles emerge as a clear-cut case for attributing the credit for the invention of printing to the Dutch people in general and to Laurens Coster in particular.

Boxhorn's complaint that it was not possible for him to obtain a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh* is puzzling. Boxhorn taught at Leiden and edited texts for the Elzeviers, who had business connections in nearby Amsterdam. Although the first Amsterdam printing of the *Shulkhan Arukh* was not to take place until 1642 [20, col. 1483, item 5940/16], by 1632, the year in which Boxhorn's initial discussion of Joseph Caro appeared, there had already been at least fifteen printings of the *Shulkhan Arukh* [20, cols. 1480–83, items 5940/1–15], and the work was very well known to Jewish scholars and laymen. Since Boxhorn was something of a He-

braist, he would presumably have had contacts with the Jewish community of Amsterdam, perhaps through the Elzeviers, and should have been able to enlist the community's assistance in the very simple matter of securing a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh*.

It seems in order, therefore, to deduce that Boxhorn did not make too determined an effort to obtain a copy of Joseph Caro's celebrated work, in spite of the great importance which he attached to it in his advocacy of the cause of Laurens Coster and in spite of his insistence that his search for the book went on over a long period. It would appear appropriate, however, to insert here a startling explanation for Boxhorn's failure to find a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, which was offered in 1710 by Paul Pater, a German historian who had little use for those who held that Laurens Coster was entitled to the credit for the invention of printing. Pater informed his readers that Boxhorn had been unable to secure a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh* for the simple reason that the book had never existed. For that matter, he added, there never had been a rabbi by the name of Joseph Caro. Both Caro and the *Shulkhan Arukh*, Pater charged, had been created out of nothing but Boxhorn's overworked imagination as a means of building support for the case he was making on behalf of Laurens Coster [21, vol. 2, pp. 718–19].

In 1639, seven years after Boxhorn's initial attribution of the ha-Kohen statement to Joseph Caro's *Shulkhan Arukh*, the Dutch scholar was taken severely to task by Bernardus Mallinkrot, a strong opponent of the Coster forces [22, pp. 59, 72–73]. Mallinkrot denounced Boxhorn for accepting Caro's [*sic*] statement regarding the existence of printing in 1428. Mallinkrot, not aware that Boxhorn had erred in assigning such a statement to Caro, objected to it on the grounds that it was intrinsically absurd. Mallinkrot also pointed out that by his own admission Boxhorn had never seen a copy of the *Shulkhan Arukh*. He hinted strongly that the Jewish claim reported by Boxhorn might not even have been made. His suspicions, as it happened, were well founded, but only in the sense that such a claim does not occur in the *Shulkhan Arukh* and was not made by the particular rabbinical authority to whom Boxhorn had attributed it. It was Mallinkrot's position that even if a Jewish claim of this kind did exist any evidence presented by a member of a despised faith must be considered *ipso facto* suspect. The likelihood, however, is that the partisan stand taken by Mallinkrot with regard to the German origin of printing was extreme enough to have made it impossible for him to accept the validity of the claim in question under any condition, regardless of who had made it, Christian or Jew.

III

With the publication of Mallinkrot's 1639 attack on Boxhorn the pattern was firmly set for the dispute which was to rage around Joseph

ha-Kohen's allegation that there had been printing in Venice in 1428. For the next two centuries or so the literature devoted to bibliography and printing history was marred by the appearance of one article after another which dealt with various facets of a problem that could have been disposed of rather simply—and certainly without introducing *ad hominem* arguments. Fortunately, however, not all writers on the subject were satisfied with this kind of approach, and there were some whose interests lay in discovering the truth. The distortions injected by those who were careless or ignorant and by those who were more concerned about proving a point than about sorting out the facts muddled the waters. As a result, even the most impartial and meticulous researchers found themselves burdened with an accumulation of misinformation which was difficult to shake off.

In 1683–84, in his *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing*, Joseph Moxon has this to say about our 1428 imprint: “*To prove this [that Coster invented printing], they [the Costerites] say that Rabbi Joseph (a Jew) in his Chronicle, mentions a Printed Book that he saw in Venice, in the year 5188 according to the Jewish Account, and by ours the year 1428, as may be read in Pet. Scriverius*” [23, pp. 4–5]. Here, then, we have Moxon not quite understanding Scriverius completely and saying that “Rabbi Joseph” reports that during the year 1428 he had seen a printed book in the city of Venice—a book, therefore, which could have been printed before 1428!

The history of printing which Jean de la Caille published in 1689 attacks Boxhorn's thesis that Coster was the inventor of the art. “Boxhorn,” explains de la Caille, “makes use of a Hebrew book called the *Shulkhan Arukh*, or *Mensa instructa*, which was derived by a rabbi named Joseph Caro from another work, the *Arba Turim*, or *Quatuor ordines*, which is a legal and ritualistic work.” According to Boxhorn, de la Caille goes on, “this book, the *Shulkhan Arukh*, was printed at Venice in the year 1428, and this would not have been possible unless there had been printing at Haarlem some years before this book's appearance at Venice” [24, p. 6]. Just as Boxhorn misunderstood Scaliger, so de la Caille now misunderstands Boxhorn. Boxhorn's claim, actually, was that the reference to a book printed in Venice in 1428 is to be found in the *Shulkhan Arukh* of Joseph Caro, but de la Caille has Boxhorn maintain that it is the *Shulkhan Arukh* itself which is alleged to have been printed in Venice in 1428. De la Caille, of course, is completely unaware of the fact that in 1428 the author of the *Shulkhan Arukh* had not yet been born. It is also possible, in this connection, that de la Caille is somehow jumbling together the texts of Scaliger and Boxhorn, and that he is misreading Scaliger as suggesting that the “Joseph Sacerdos” work (supposedly, as Boxhorn identifies it, the *Shulkhan Arukh*) is the book alleged to have been printed in 1428.

De la Caille and Boxhorn are roundly criticized by Johann Christoph

Wolf,¹⁰ who, in a four-volume catalog of Hebrew imprints which was published in 1715–33, quotes Scaliger and refers a number of times to Boxhorn and de la Caille. At one point Wolf has Boxhorn say that the *Shulkhan Arukh* and the *Arba Turim* are examples of very early printing, the latter having been published in 1428. Wolf attacks this, not realizing that here he has misread Boxhorn. Wolf states, moreover, that in any case the *Shulkhan Arukh* could not have been printed in 1428, since its author was not even alive in the fifteenth century [25, vol. 3, p. 421].¹¹ Wolf also criticizes de la Caille for following Boxhorn in this matter [25, vol. 3, p. 446]. Wolf knows that the author of the 1428 allegation is Joseph ha-Kohen and that the book in which the allegation is made is the *Divrei ha-Yammim* [25, vol. 4, p. 447]. However, he refuses to accept the ha-Kohen statement as valid. “This is certain,” he says. “Either this Jew was deceived by others, or he wished himself to deceive others” [25, vol. 4, p. 447].

Samuel Palmer, in his history of printing published in London in 1732, attempts to prove that Johann Fust, not Gutenberg or Coster, was the inventor of printing. As part of his argument he tries first to demonstrate that the Dutch had absolutely no hand in the invention. In doing this, Palmer runs head-on into Boxhorn; and, refusing to accept Boxhorn’s pro-Coster thesis, he deals with the claim that there was printing in Venice in 1428 in this manner:

The author, upon whose testimony he [Boxhorn] would have us believe it [that a book was printed in Venice in 1428] is one *Joseph Karro*, a *Jewish Rabbi*, who in a book intitled *Shulkhan Aruch* or *Mensa Instructa*, extracted by him out of another Jewish book call’d *Arbagh Thurim*, i.e., *quatuor ordines*, tells us of an old chronicle printed at *Venice A.M.* 5188, which answers to our year MCCCCXXXVIII. This book of *Rabbi Joseph* he [Boxhorn] owns that he could never meet with; yet he infers from what is said there, that there could be no printing at *Venice* at that time, unless *Harlem* had it some years before. I shall content my self with giving *Boxhorn’s* words in the margin;¹² especially since neither his *Rabbi* nor himself have gain’d any credit in this particular; as it would indeed be wonderful, if a *Jew* should be believ’d before the concurrent testimonies of all the learned men of Europe. If he wrote what *Boxhorn* quotes out of him, he either was prodigiously mistaken, or affirm’d it (as is too common with his nation) contrary to his knowledge: tho’ if we should deny that he ever wrote thus, I can’t see with what reason *Boxhorn* could repeat it; since he neither saw the book himself, nor gives the author’s name from whom he took it [26, pp. 69–70].

10. Johann Christoph Wolf and Johann Christian Wolf were brothers and must not be confused. The former was the author of the *Bibliotheca hebraea*, while the latter compiled and edited the *Monumenta typographica*. Both of these works are referred to in the present study.

11. Actually, Caro was born in 1488.

12. Palmer makes several minor errors in his transcription of Boxhorn’s text, but these do not affect the basic meaning of the passage. (I should like to express here my gratitude to Dr. Luis Martin of Southern Methodist University for reviewing and correcting my translations of Boxhorn’s Latin as well as the Latin in several other sources cited in this study.)

Palmer thus identifies the 1428 imprint as a chronicle, although Boxhorn's text, from which he obtains his information, does not describe the nature of the 1428 work at all. Palmer, in effect, starts with a source which is already laden with errors, adds another of his own, and then resorts to invective in order to dispose of a viewpoint which differs with his own.

Palmer's competence as a scholar has been severely attacked by a number of writers. Thus, the *Dictionary of National Biography* cites J. Lewis as saying that Palmer "was a good printer, but a bad historian, ignorant, careless, and inaccurate" and T. F. Dibdin as referring to "that wretched pilferer and driveller, Samuel Palmer" [27, vol. 43, p. 155]. It is questionable, however, whether Palmer's failings are such as to merit condemnations as extreme as those heaped upon him by Lewis and Dibdin. At least a portion of the charges leveled against Palmer should have been directed elsewhere—specifically to that remarkable literary and religious charlatan who is still remembered by devotees of English *curiosa* as George Psalmanazar, the author of a fabricated historical and geographical description of Formosa, of which he claimed to be a native.

The history of printing which bears the name of Samuel Palmer, it turns out, may not even have been written by Palmer. Palmer had been collecting material for this history and had engaged Psalmanazar to do the necessary research. However, Palmer died shortly after hiring Psalmanazar, and Psalmanazar was then assigned the task of completing the book. How much of the finished product was actually Palmer's is moot. At one point Psalmanazar suggested that he himself had had very little to do with the composition of Palmer's book [26, p. 311]; at another he implied that he had written virtually all of it [28, pp. 647–48; 29, pp. 241–43]. In any case, the work was done in a distinctly slipshod manner and is riddled with errors. For our purpose it suffices to note that the Palmer-Psalmanazar account of the 1428 imprint seems to have been ignored by later writers.

Prosper Marchand's *Histoire de l'imprimerie*, published in 1740, summarizes the distortions to which the statement of Joseph Ha-Kohen had been subjected since its initial appearance in 1554. Although Marchand's account is not entirely accurate it represents a step forward in that it corrects several of the misconceptions of earlier writers. Marchand knows most of the reports of any consequence which were made about the ha-Kohen statement before his time. Like Wolf, he is fully cognizant of the fact that the man who claimed to have seen a 1428 imprint was the historian Joseph ha-Kohen, not the legalist Joseph Caro. Marchand's approach to the matter provides an interesting blend of fact and fantasy. He begins by repeating the Scaliger account and by regretting that Scaliger's "Rabbi Josephus" fails to divulge the title of his mysterious book or [*sic*] the place of its printing. Such an act of omission, Marchand suggests, is one "qui pourroit donner occasion de croire que c'est une des Réveries familiares aux Ecrivains d'entre ce Peuple." He then draws

back somewhat from this position by acknowledging that the book alluded to by Joseph ha-Kohen may have been honestly misdated by him because of a typographical error, and he even lists a number of editions of other early works which had been improperly dated [30, vol. 2, pp. 65–67].

Most of Marchand's history of the ha-Kohen testimony is relegated to a lengthy footnote [30, vol. 2, pp. 65–66, note] in which the following items are of interest here: (1) Marchand states, quite correctly, that those writers who have based their accounts solely on the Scaliger paraphrase of the "Rabbi Josephus" claim have come to grief. (2) He chides Boxhorn for assigning the ha-Kohen statement to Joseph Caro's *Shulkhan Arukh* and for calling this book a chronicle. (3) He denies de la Caille's assertion that it was the *Shulkhan Arukh* which was alleged to have been printed in 1428, on the grounds that the work's author had not yet been born in 1428. Marchand informs us, but wrongly, that the first printing of the *Shulkhan Arukh* took place in 1537, in Venice. (4) Marchand cites Paul Pater's absurd charge that Boxhorn's rabbi (Joseph Caro) is merely a figment of Boxhorn's imagination. Marchand is not taken in by Pater's nonsensical accusation. (5) Marchand tells us that he was successful in locating a copy of Joseph ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-Yammim* among the books bequeathed by Scaliger to the library at Leiden,¹³ and that the Orientalist Albert Schultens had been kind enough to translate the 1428 passage from this exemplar into the Latin and send him copies of both the original Hebrew citation and the Latin rendition. He then reproduces the Hebrew wording and the Latin version. The latter is correct, but there are no less than eleven misspellings in the twenty-one Hebrew words constituting the ha-Kohen statement. These spelling errors, presumably, were made by the typesetter, not by Schultens. Marchand, apparently, knew no Hebrew. (6) Marchand excoriates earlier writers for taking the ha-Kohen allegation seriously. He argues, moreover, that even if we were to agree with the Coster supporters that printing was actually being done in Venice in 1428, this does not necessarily indicate that there was printing in Haarlem before that year. Would it not be more logical, he asks, to deduce instead that printing was invented in Venice? (7) The last point made by Marchand is that Joseph ha-Kohen could well have seen a copy of the *Arba Turim*, "faite à Piobe de Sacco dans l'Etat de Venise, en 1478,"¹⁴ and that he might have misread this date as 1428. "Erreur facile," Marchand adds graciously, "& trop ordinaire, tant dans les Manuscrits, que dans le Imprimez." But Marchand

13. It would thus appear that Scaliger's personal library included a copy of the *Divrei ha-Yammim*. Since Scaliger died in January 1609, only a few months after finishing his *Confutatione*, the work in which he spoke of the "Sacerdos" claim, it is highly probable that he owned the ha-Kohen chronicle at the time he was writing his *Confutatione*. Presumably, then, Scaliger was not citing "Joseph Sacerdos" at second hand.

14. Actually, Piove di Sacco was in the district of Padua. It is not far, however, from the city of Venice.

is himself in error here, for the colophon to the first printed edition of the *Arba Turim*, that done by Meshullam Cusi at Piove di Sacco, is dated 1475, not 1478. Marchand's conjecture, however, is not entirely beyond the realm of possibility, but the chances that he is correct are negligibly small.

While this article does not pretend to take note of all the printing historians who turned their attention to the 1428 allegation, three of those who have been listed so far knew that this allegation was made initially by Joseph ha-Kohen, not by Joseph Caro: Hayyim Yair Bacharach in 1699; Johann Christoph Wolf in 1715–33; and Prosper Marchand in 1740. Moreover, in 1740 an attempt to set the matter right was made by Johann Christian Wolf, a brother of Johann Christoph Wolf. In that year the former published an anthology of works dealing with the history of printing, including the two booklets by Boxhorn which have been cited earlier. As part of a footnote to the paragraph in which Boxhorn discusses the 1428 claim, Johann Christian, following in his brother's footsteps, corrects Boxhorn's attribution of the claim to Joseph Caro. He also presents ha-Kohen's text in both the original Hebrew and in a Latin translation [31, vol. 2, pp. 537–38].

One would think that the specific references provided by these scholars would have been sufficient to clear up the confusion surrounding the sources of the 1428 allegation, even if the credibility of this allegation might still remain undetermined. This, however, was not the case. In 1752, in his history of Venetian literature, all that Giovanni degli Agostini seems to know about the 1428 statement is what he has read in Scaliger. Agostini thus reprints Scaliger's few lines dealing with Joseph Sacerdos and then brusquely rejects the Sacerdos claim as a tall tale [32, p. xxxvii]. Agostini appears to be completely without knowledge of Joseph ha-Kohen and his *Divrei ha-Yammim*.

The year 1767 brings another reprinting of Scaliger's reference to Joseph Sacerdos, this time by Oliver Legipontius [33, p. 127]. Legipontius misunderstands Scaliger as saying that the statement that Rabbi Joseph had seen a book printed in Venice occurs in a chronicle of this Rabbi Joseph which was printed in 1428. Legipontius then denies emphatically that printing could have existed so early, his reason being that any assertion that it did contradicts all other available testimony. He concludes that Rabbi Joseph, to whom he refers scornfully as "that circumcised one," either was lying shamefully in an attempt to fool others or was himself being fooled.

By far the best recapitulation of the problems raised by the ha-Kohen statement was offered in 1795 by Father Johannes Bernardus de Rossi [34, pp. viii, 151–52]. De Rossi starts with Scaliger, regretting that the Latin passage in which Scaliger mentions the 1428 allegation has been so badly misunderstood. He notes that Boxhorn misread Scaliger and was later himself misread by de la Caille. De Rossi is familiar with the con-

tributions to the subject by other writers as well, among them Mallinkrot, Agostini, and the brothers Wolf. He reprints the ha-Kohen text in Hebrew and in a Latin translation.

De Rossi says, however, that ha-Kohen's use of a Christian date rather than a Jewish one constitutes sufficient reason for assuming that the book ha-Kohen is claiming to have seen would have been printed in Latin rather than in Hebrew. To support this standard he points out that Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, following Hayyim Yair Bacharach, gives ha-Kohen's dating of the alleged Venetian imprint as 1428, "according to their [the Christians'] count." However, de Rossi's belief that the use of a Christian date implies that ha-Kohen's alleged 1428 imprint was printed in Latin, not in Hebrew, has no real basis in fact. Many books in the Hebrew language have used the calendar of the lands in which they were written. The first edition of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* is not unique in this respect: the chronological captions in the *Zemakh David*, to give another example, are expressed in Arabic numerals corresponding to Christian years.

De Rossi also challenges the suggestion by Marchand that ha-Kohen may have mistaken a 1478 edition of the *Arba Turim* for a 1428 imprint, stating (correctly) that no edition of the *Arba Turim* was printed in 1478 and (incorrectly) that the use of a Christian date by ha-Kohen implies a book printed in a language other than the Hebrew of the *Arba Turim*. Last, de Rossi takes note of the recurring charges of dishonesty to which the author of the 1428 allegation was so often subjected. The reader gains the impression that de Rossi does not agree with these charges.

An especially interesting case in which the ha-Kohen statement was taken as a reliable historical source was reported in 1870 by van der Linde in his famous and ferocious attack on the Costerite forces [35, p. 112, note]. According to van der Linde, there appeared in 1868, in the *Netherlands Spectator* (p. 317), a declaration by a Dr. B. Tideman about "a Hebrew chronicle continued till 1553 . . . in which the author . . . assures us that he has seen at Venice, anno 1428, a book printed *with the invention of Coster at Haarlem*" (italics van der Linde's). A new dimension has thus been added to the battered old statement of Joseph ha-Kohen, and we now have it specifically mentioning not only Coster but also Haarlem!

Van der Linde is severely critical of the Costerites for their misuse of the ha-Kohen statement. He himself regards ha-Kohen as being "very much mistaken" and suggests that the book which ha-Kohen says he saw was "perhaps undated and provided with a written note or a wrong date" [35, p. 112].

Van der Linde is greatly incensed by Scriverius's treatment of the ha-Kohen declaration and by his claim that the book seen by Joseph ha-Kohen (if, indeed, Scriverius even realized that his Rabbi Joseph was Joseph ha-Kohen!) was a *Biblia Pauperum*. Van der Linde sums the matter up in this blunt fashion: "(1) An insignificant, inaccurate passage

in a Hebrew chronicle of the 16th century mentions a book *printed at Venice in 1428*; (2) This inaccurate passage is made serviceable [for the Costerite cause] by distorting it; (3) Although [the title of] the impossible book of 1428 is not mentioned in it, Scriverius puts the *xylographic* Biblia Pauperum in it; (4) On account of this Jewish information . . . 1440 [the date previously assigned by the Costerites to the invention of printing] is . . . changed into 1428, and even the date in the inscription of the so-called Coster house is falsified; (5) Scriverius is dull-brained enough to put the imaginary invention at Haarlem in 1428, and to suppose that in *that same year* printed books could have been found already at Venice" [35, p. 114; italics van der Linde's]. (Boxhorn, it will be recalled, had set the invention of printing by Coster at 1420.)

IV

Although Joseph ha-Kohen's reference to a Venetian imprint of 1428 has attracted relatively little attention in our time, it has not gone entirely unnoticed. Thus, in 1911, G. H. Muller, discussing the sources of the Coster legend, considered it appropriate to reprint an 1840 German translation of the ha-Kohen statement [36, p. 158]. In the 1962 edition of Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises*, moreover, a discussion of Moxon's reference to "Rabbi Joseph" is presented in a footnote [23, pp. 4–5, note]. This footnote correctly identifies Moxon's rabbi as Joseph ha-Kohen and explains that the claim for printing in 1428 appeared initially in ha-Kohen's *Divrei ha-Yammim*. The footnote also reprints Bialloblotzky's translation of ha-Kohen's 1428 passage: "It seemeth that there existed printing in those days; for I have seen a book printed at Venice in the year one thousand four hundred and twenty-eight" [2, vol. 1, p. 264].¹⁵

One would think that Joseph ha-Kohen's old claim for the existence of printing at Venice in 1428 should now be laid quietly to rest. Yet it would not be overly surprising if it is some day exhumed and again brought to the attention of printing historians, perhaps with a trace of the *éclat* with which it was sometimes heralded in the past. In the interim, however, the story of the treatment of Joseph ha-Kohen's erroneous observation must stand as a rather sad reminder of what can happen when partisanship, carelessness, and ignorance are permitted to take the place of honest, meticulous, and unbiased scholarship.

15. Bialloblotzky's translation of the *Divrei ha-Yammim* has been criticized by a number of Hebrew scholars as inferior. (The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, for example, states quite bluntly that the ha-Kohen chronicle was "badly translated by Bialloblotzky" [37, vol. 7, p. 266].) In his rendering of the 1428 entry Bialloblotzky has ha-Kohen say, "I have seen a book printed at Venice in the year one thousand four hundred and twenty-eight." Standing by itself, of course, this can be understood as indicating either that ha-Kohen saw a book which had been printed in 1428 or that he was physically present in 1428 when a book was being printed.

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