

How printing left its mark

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK-FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE HEBREW BOOK

Rabbi Akiva Aaronson

Feldheim

Binyomin Bokor

IF YOU are inquisitive to learn about the history of printed seforim, then this beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated book will enlighten you.

Rabbi Aaronson explains how the invention of the printing press accompanied by developments in paper and ink-making enabled Gutenberg to produce a printed Bible in 1455. Within fourteen years these developments were harnessed to the printing of our sacred texts such as Tenach, Siddurim, Machzorim and the Talmud. The works of the Rishonim such as Rashi, Ramban, Rambam and Rashba were also printed before 1500 on printing presses established in southern Europe, where the centres of Jewish population and learning existed. The book informs us that whilst initially the seforim which appeared had been written by authors who were no longer alive, seforim by living Gedolei Ha'Dor began to appear. Thus, for example, the works of Rav Yosef Karo and the Rema were printed in their lifetimes. Throughout the book, Rabbi Aaronson guides us to become more observant and informed

of the significance of printers' marks on title pages and illustrations.

He takes us into the drama of the lives of authors and provides us with Hebrew originals and their translation of fascinating autobiographies of the Abaranel and Chacham Zvi amongst several others. Remarks of printers such as Gershon Soncino of the 16th Century and those attached to the Rom Shas of the 19th century grab our attention.

Maps of the changing centres of Hebrew printing accompany each historical period. We are provided with examples of the first editions of seforim printed in different cities such as Venice, Amsterdam, Prague, Vilna, Tsefas

and Yerushalayim along with the historical background for the changes in location.

There are also chapters which focus on specific topics such as the chapter on the Pesach Haggadah which is replete with beautiful illustrations of Haggadahs from the 15th-

20th centuries. The chapter on Persecution and Censorship takes us through the challenges which the Church, Czarist Russia and Nazism posed to our printed heritage.

The book ends with a series of comprehensive appendices, indices and glossary enhancing this book's use as a work of reference to layman and scholar.

This volume will raise each reader's appreciation of the printed Hebrew book.

