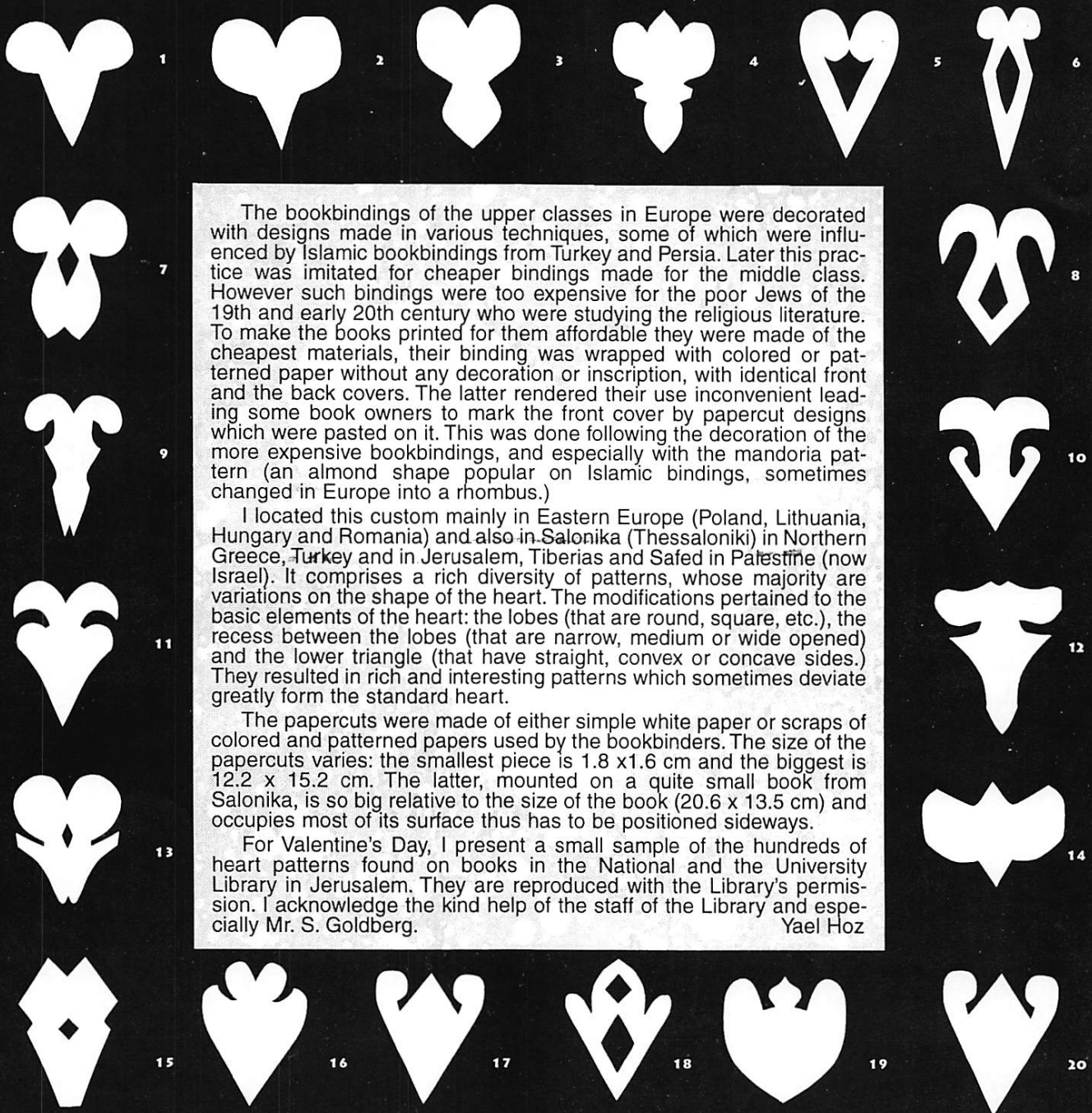


THE HEART AND ITS VARIATIONS ON JEWISH BOOKBINDINGS

BY Yael HOZ



The bookbindings of the upper classes in Europe were decorated with designs made in various techniques, some of which were influenced by Islamic bookbindings from Turkey and Persia. Later this practice was imitated for cheaper bindings made for the middle class. However such bindings were too expensive for the poor Jews of the 19th and early 20th century who were studying the religious literature. To make the books printed for them affordable they were made of the cheapest materials, their binding was wrapped with colored or patterned paper without any decoration or inscription, with identical front and the back covers. The latter rendered their use inconvenient leading some book owners to mark the front cover by papercut designs which were pasted on it. This was done following the decoration of the more expensive bookbindings, and especially with the mandoria pattern (an almond shape popular on Islamic bindings, sometimes changed in Europe into a rhombus.)

I located this custom mainly in Eastern Europe (Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Romania) and also in Salonika (Thessaloniki) in Northern Greece, Turkey and in Jerusalem, Tiberias and Safed in Palestine (now Israel). It comprises a rich diversity of patterns, whose majority are variations on the shape of the heart. The modifications pertained to the basic elements of the heart: the lobes (that are round, square, etc.), the recess between the lobes (that are narrow, medium or wide opened) and the lower triangle (that have straight, convex or concave sides.) They resulted in rich and interesting patterns which sometimes deviate greatly from the standard heart.

The papercuts were made of either simple white paper or scraps of colored and patterned papers used by the bookbinders. The size of the papercuts varies: the smallest piece is 1.8 x 1.6 cm and the biggest is 12.2 x 15.2 cm. The latter, mounted on a quite small book from Salonika, is so big relative to the size of the book (20.6 x 13.5 cm) and occupies most of its surface thus has to be positioned sideways.

For Valentine's Day, I present a small sample of the hundreds of heart patterns found on books in the National and the University Library in Jerusalem. They are reproduced with the Library's permission. I acknowledge the kind help of the staff of the Library and especially Mr. S. Goldberg.

Yael Hoz

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|----|--------------|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|
| 1. | 2.3 x 2.4 cm | 6. | 3.3 x 1.4 cm | 11. | 4 x 3 cm | 16. | 3.9 x 2.8 cm |
| 2. | 2.5 x 2.4 cm | 7. | 4.2 x 3.3 cm | 12. | 4.5 x 3.9 cm | 17. | 5 x 4.1 cm |
| 3. | 3.4 x 2.6 cm | 8. | 5.9 x 5.1 cm | 13. | 4.4 x 3.5 cm | 18. | 4 x 2.5 cm |
| 4. | 3.4 x 2.4 cm | 9. | 4.6 x 3.2 cm | 14. | 2.5 x 3.6 cm | 19. | 3 x 2.9 cm |
| 5. | 4.3 x 2.4 cm | 10. | 5.6 x 4.8 cm | 15. | 4.4 x 2.8 cm | 20. | 3.7 x 3.6 cm |