

***Yalkut Re'uvani:  
Abraham Reuben ben Hoeshke's Popular  
Kabbalistic Midrashic Collection***

By: MARVIN J. HELLER

In 1660, *Yalkut Re'uvani (Ha-Katan)*, R. Abraham Reuben ben Hoeshke's kabbalistic midrashic collection, was published in Prague.<sup>1</sup> It would soon reappear, twenty-one years later, in a different and more popular format. Reuben ben Hoeshke (d. 17 Nissan / April 3, 1673), among the sages of Prague in the seventeenth century, was a noted kabbalist. He had a distinguished lineage: his father, Hoeshke Katz, was an officer of the Jewish community of Prague; his maternal grandfather was the renowned R. Solomon Ephraim of Luntschitz (*Keli Yekar*, 1550-1619).<sup>2</sup> His full name appears to have been Abraham Reuben but the name Abraham appears infrequently, rarely used, given its absence from several of his works and bibliographic references to him.

Kabbalah was succinctly defined by Gershom Scholem, and the place of the *Yalkut Re'uvani* in its literature, as:

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<sup>1</sup> The name Abraham appears infrequently in Reuben ben Hoeshke's works and in bibliographic sources. It does appear in the acrostic preceding the introduction to the 1660 edition of *Yalkut Re'uvani* and on the title pages of the Sulzbach editions of Reuben ben Hoeshke's other works. Bezalel Landau, *Yalkut Re'uvani ha-Shalem: Ma'amarim u-Midrashim, Hadashim gam Yesbanim I* (Jerusalem, 1995), p. 6 [Hebrew], gave the full name, Abraham Reuben, on the title page of his edition of the *Yalkut Re'uvani*, and in the beginning of his discussion of Reuben ben Hoeshke's genealogy. Not to be overly repetitive, but usage of the name Abraham Reuben is extremely rare, not appearing in the bibliographic works consulted nor in encyclopedia entries.

<sup>2</sup> Mordechai Margalioth, ed., *Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel*, IV (Tel Aviv, 1986), cols. 1231-32 [Hebrew]; Kaufmann Kohler, M. Seligsohn "HOSHKE, REUBEN (called also Reuben ben Hoshke Sofer and sometimes Abraham Reuben)." Vol. 6 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 479, informs that the name "Hoshke, his father's name, is a Polish diminutive for 'Joshua,' mistaken by De Rossi ("*Dizionario*," s.v. "Osiki, Ruben") and Zunz ("Z. G." p. 402) for his family name."

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the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teachings of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism, especially the forms which it assumed in the Middle Ages from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward. In its wider sense it signifies the esoteric movements in Judaism that evolved from the end of the period of the Second Temple and became active factors in Jewish history.<sup>3</sup>

The enormous literary output, of which only a fraction has been printed, reflects this state of affairs. In addition to this, selections or anthologies were made, most outstanding of which was the *Yalkut Re'uvini* by Reuben Hoeshke...<sup>4</sup>

The time in which Reuben ben Hoeshke lived was one of turmoil and of considerable difficulty for the Jewish community, that is, *tab-ve-tat* (the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-49), led by Bogdan Chmielnicki, head of a Cossack and peasant uprising against Polish rule in the Ukraine in which the Cossacks and Tartars “acted with savage and unremitting cruelty against the Jews.”<sup>5</sup> Eastern European Jewry suffered yet again during the Polish-Swedish war (1655). One result of this turbulence was an increased interest in kabbalah and mysticism, an interest well served by Reuben ben Hoeshke.

Reuben ben Hoeshke was the author of several works, the most important and most popular being the *Yalkut Re'uvini*, which exists in two formats. Reuben's other titles are *Oneg Shabbat*, a short compilation of Sabbath laws with mystical intentions and kabbalistic sayings, and *Davar she-bi-Kedushah*, a lengthy treatment, in a kabbalistic manner, of the matters of sin mentioned in “the confession” (Heb. *viddui*). We will address, in some detail, each of these works, giving a taste of their contents, indicative of why they have been popular and reprinted several times, as well as noting and discussing the presses that published them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gershon Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, 1953), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 81

<sup>5</sup> Shmuel Ettinger, “Chmielnicki (Khmelnitski), Bogdan,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4 (2007), pp. 654-656. Among the foremost description of the horrific experiences of Polish Jewry during the Chmielnicki massacres is R. Nathan Nata Hannover's *Yeven Meẓulah*. Concerning that work see Marvin J. Heller ““R. Nathan Nata ben Moses Hannover: The Life and Works of an Illustrious and Tragic Figure,” Seforim.blogspot.com, December 28, 2018, reprinted in *Essays on the Making of the Early Hebrew Book*. Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2021, pp. 256-72.

<sup>6</sup> The descriptions of these works are extracted with additions and modifications from Marvin J. Heller, *The Seventeenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus I* (Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2011), var. cit.

The *Yalkut Re'uvni* (*ha-Katan*) is an extensive and comprehensive anthology of kabbalistic and aggadic sayings, organized alphabetically. It is the first printing of a wide-ranging and inclusive collection planned by Reuben and distinct from the second edition of the same name organized by *parashot* (Torah readings). Moshe Hallamish described *Yalkut Re'uvni* as “an important collection of the kabbalistic lore, similar to the 13<sup>th</sup> century anthology of midrashic lore, *Yalkut Shimoni*. Its importance lay in the use of kabbalistic texts and manuscripts composed during the preceding 500 years, many of which have been lost and others such as *Sodei Reẓayya* by Eliezer of Worms, and the Parma manuscript of *Sefer Ḥasidim* have only recently been rediscovered and published.” It includes the teachings of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz and is credited with making available kabbalistic material not widely available to the public.<sup>7</sup>

## I

*Yalkut Re'uvni*, or *Yalkut Re'uvni (Ha-Katan)*, was first published in Prague in 1660 at the press of the Benei (sons of) Jacob Bak in quarto format (40: [162] ff.). Prague at the time, indeed for centuries, was among the most important cities of European Jewry. Its prominence may be attributed to its large Jewish population (for many years it had the largest number of Jews of any city in Europe), its distinguished rabbinic leadership (among them R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel [Maharal], R. Solomon Ephraim ben Aaron of Luntschitz, R. Isaiah ben Abraham ha-Levi Horowitz, and R. Yom Tov Lipmann Heller), noted yeshivot, and central location. Hebrew printing took root in Prague early in the history of the holy craft, quickly becoming a center of Hebrew printing, with a number of active printshops in the sixteenth century.

What was then known as a holy craft began in Prague when R. Meir ben David *Michtam* (scribe), Solomon ben Samuel ha-Levi, Mordecai ben Eliezer, and Shemaryah ben David published an Ashkenaz rite prayerbook in 1512. Jacob ben Gershom Bak (d. 1618) founded the second Hebrew press of note in Prague in 1605. Eight generations of the Bak family printed Hebrew books there until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Jacob Bak was succeeded by his sons Joseph and Judah, who, from 1623, printed under the name Benei Jacob Bak. Joseph left the firm in 1660; Judah printed alone until August 1669, when a libel suit caused a temporary cessation in printing. Two years after Judah's death (1671), in October 1673, his sons Jacob and Joseph were permitted to restart the press,

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<sup>7</sup> Moshe Hallamish, “Reuben Hoeshke ben Hoeshke (Joshua) Katz,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 17 (2007), p. 247.

afterwards publishing books with Hebrew letters until 1696 under the name Benei Judah Bak. As noted above, the titles imprinted above included the first edition of the *Yalkut Re'uvni*, that is, the *Yalkut Re'uvni (Ha-Katan)*.

There was censorship of Hebrew books at this time, but, as Alexander Putik writes, even though censorship was tightened, “it was not reflected in relation to the other ‘problematic’ genre – the Kabbalah... The major kabbalistic encyclopedia *Yalkut Re'uvni*, compiled by the Prague scholar Reuven Hoshke Katz was published by the same printing press in 1660.”<sup>8</sup> The title page states:



1660, *Yalkut Re'uvni (ha-Katan)*, Prague  
 Courtesy of the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad Ohel Yosef Yitzhak

*Yalkut Re'uvni*  
 ילקוט ראובני כלם מאמרים מספרי קבלה ורוי דאוריית לפ"ק (1660 = 420)  
*Yalkut Re'uvni*, excerpts from Kabbalistic  
 and other esoteric works.

These sayings of Kabbalah are the words of writers that the noble Reuben ben Hoeshke Katz, son-in-law (sic.) of the *gaon*, the great, exalted R. Ephraim of Luntschitz who was... *av beit din* of Prague... toiled, found, and gleaned...

From books of Kabbalah, many other works, from the six *Sedarim*, from aggadah, pleasant and becoming, for the public benefit...

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Putik, “The Censorship of Hebrew books in Prague 1512-1670 (1672)” in *Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia*, Olga Sixtová (ed.), p. 209. The other “problematic” genre was the Talmud.

Completed Friday, 6 *Elul*, in the year gleanings of Reuben לקוטא  
הראובני (420 = August 13, 1660).

**Printed here in the ק"ק (holy community) of Prague**

In the domain of our Lord, the Kaiser, Leopold,  
may his majesty be exalted.  
By the printers Benei Jacob Bak.

The title page is followed by Reuben's introduction, which has a header comprised of an acrostic with the initial letters Re'uveni (below), and then the text which begins

הַקְדָּמָה שֶׁל הַרֵב הַמַּחְבֵּר  
 יִלְקוּט  
 ר' א' ווייסז'ן קבלה ב' סניינה נ' עשה י' היות

“He who listens will listen (Ezekiel 2:27) and he who understands will understand,” the initial letters spelling the four letters of the Divine name, and continues “there is reward and punishment [in this world and in the World to Come]. There is a judgment and there is a judge” Who hears iniquity and there is punishment on positive and negative mitzvot, all should take this to heart “and not act willfully anymore” (Deuteronomy 17:37). One who reads in it great mysteries and secrets of the Torah which the ear has not previously heard, and the entire congregation responded there is indeed a God in Heaven Who reveals mysteries.

The text follows, organized alphabetically by topic in two columns, beginning with אֹתוֹת (letters) and concluding with תְּשׁוּבָה (repentance). Within each topic are a varying numbers of entries, each beginning in bold letters with the source from which it originates. For example, within *mem* are, *me'us* (loathing, 1), *milah* (circumcision, 43), *mitah* (death, 36), *malkhut* (royalty, 10), and *malakh* (angel, 141). At the end of the volume is an index of topics and errata. Reuben's sources include R. Isaac Luria (ha-Ari ha-Kodesh), R. Isaiah Horowitz (Shelah ha-Kodesh), R. Moses Cordovero (Remak), R. Nathan Nata Spira (*Megalleh Amukkot*), and R. Menahem Azariah da Fano (*Asarah Ma'amarot*), and a wide spectrum of kabbalistic works, as well as numerous midrashim. Reuben intermingles kabbalah, halakhot and aggadah, but does not add original material of his own.

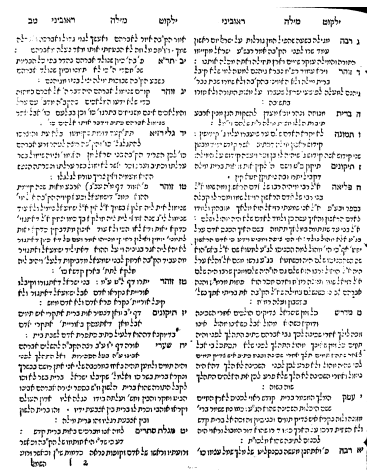
This edition of *Yalkut Re'uveni* is known as *ba-Katan* (the small) or *ba-Kazar* (the brief), in contrast to the much more popular second part organized by *parashot*, known as *ba-Gadol* (the great), printed in Wilhermsdorf

(1681, below). Part one only of the alphabetic anthology was printed, the second part remaining in manuscript. The source of each entry is cited at the beginning of an entry. An example from the text above, under the heading *milah*, is:

13. **Zohar**: *Yitro* 39. *Benei Yisrael*, on whom it was decreed and who accepted the Torah, are called Adam (man). Ishmael, on whom it was decreed and did not accept the Torah, are called *parah adumah* (red heifer) and not man.

28. **Mekhila**: Cherished are converts, for if Abraham Avinu had not been ninety-nine years of age, when circumcised, but he had been twenty or thirty, converts would not have been able to convert from thirty and above.

29. **Tanḥuma**: When Abraham was circumcised, he was in pain from the circumcision. The Holy One, blessed be He, told the angels to visit him. Until the angels went the Holy One, blessed be He, went first, as it says, “And the Lord appeared unto him” and afterwards “and behold, three men.” (Genesis 18:1-2)



1712, *Yalkut Re'uvni (Ha-Katan)*, Bad Homburg  
 Courtesy of the National Library of Israel

The *Yalkut ha-Katan* was reprinted independently once only, in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe in the year **לקו"טים דהראובני** (472 = 1712) and subsequently included in a complete edition of Reuben's works printed in Jerusalem (1995).<sup>9</sup> The Homburg *Yalkut ha-Katan* was published at the press of Seligman ben Hertz Reis in quarto format (4<sup>o</sup>: 1, 77, 2 ff.). Seligman Reis was from a distinguished Frankfurt on the Main family, had previously been a book dealer, and learned the printing trade in Amsterdam. He was briefly active in Frankfurt and would subsequently print in Offenbach. He established the first Hebrew press in Homburg in 1711, remaining active there until 1711-12 (Steinschneider) or 1714 (Friedberg), printing six titles.<sup>10</sup> This edition has an approbation from R. Samuel Kohen Schotten (1644-1719), *av beit din* of Frankfurt on the Main. While the setting varies from the previous edition, the 1660 text was obviously used as a source book for this edition.

*Yalkut Re'veni* has been described in Hebrew bibliographies, beginning with Shabbetai ben Joseph Meshorer Bass' (1641–1718) *Sifte Yesbenim* (Amsterdam, 1680), the first bibliography of Hebrew books by a Jewish author. There are two concise entries, one for each edition of *Yalkut Re'veni*. In *A Bibliographical Survey of Jewish Prague*, Otto Muneles writes:

R<sup>e</sup>UBEN b. HOSKI ha-Kohen  
 Jalkut re<sup>u</sup>beni (katan) Prague 1660 4<sup>o</sup>.  
 (Hebr. Alphabetical index to the cabbalistic literature;  
 Larer ed. Homburg v. d.H. (1712) 4<sup>o</sup>.)  
 Alphabetical index ke kabbalisticke literature,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Concerning Hebrew printing in Homburg see Marvin J. Heller, "Early Hebrew Printing in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (Mainz, 2019), pp. 211-226.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. B. Friedberg, *History of Hebrew Typography of the Following Cities in Central Europe: Altona, Augsburg, Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt M., Frankfurt O., Fürth, Hamberg, Hanau, Heddernheim, Homburg, Ichenhausen, Neuwied, Wandsbeck, and Wilhermsdorf. Offenbach, Prague, Sulzbach, Thannhausen from its beginning in the year 1513* (Antwerp, 1935), pp. 61, 97 [Hebrew]; Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (CB, Berlin, 1852-60), cols. 3024-25, no. 9055.

<sup>11</sup> Otto Muneles, *Bibliographical Survey of Jewish Prague: the Jewish State Museum of Prague* (Prague, 1952), p. 45 no. 136.

## II

A revised, modified, edition of *Yalkut Re'veni*, titled *Yalkut al ha-Torah* (*Yalkut Re'veni*), also known as *Yalkut Re'veni (ba-Gadol)*, to distinguish it from the *Yalkut Re'veni ha-Katan* (the small) or *ha-Kazar* (the brief), was published in Wilhermsdorf (1681) in folio format (2<sup>o</sup>: 5, 7-194 ff.) at the press of Isaac ben R. Judah Loeb ha-Kohen (Katz). A Hebrew press was operative in Wilhermsdorf from 1670-90 and 1712-39.

Moshe Nathan Rosenfeld informs that Wilhermsdorf, a village in Mittelfranken, 20 miles west of Furth, had a Jewish community five centuries ago. At one stage its 226 Jews comprised 20 percent of its population, “but today only the cemetery and the shell of the former Synagogue remain as silent witnesses of a Jewish past.” Isaac Katz, who came from Prague, was descended from a long line of Hebrew printers in Prague. With the closing of the Prague press in 1669, Isaac relocated to Sulzbach, where, in that year, he printed four books. Then, at the invitation of Wolfgang Julius Graf von Hohenlohe und Gleichen, Herr zu Langenburg, who had established a paper mill in Ernsbach and who offered Isaac a ten-year contract, Isaac relocated to Wilhermsdorf, settling within the grounds of the castle. In choosing the books to print, he often selected material printed previously in Prague or that were by Prague scholars or authors. That would include the *Yalkut Re'veni*, printed twenty-one years earlier in Prague. Isaac bar Judah Yuedels Katz passed away on April 30, 1690.<sup>12</sup>

This printing of *Yalkut Re'veni* is a similar extensive anthology of kabbalistic and aggadic sayings, but organized by *parashot*. Printed posthumously, the title page states:

Sayings and Midrashim, old also new, written by one of the elders, descendants of the holy ones, “holy will be said of him” (Isaiah 4:3). It is a book “great and noble” (Ezra 4:10), a basketful of books, by ... the author of *Yalkut Re'veni ha-Katan*, for compared to this it is small, for this work is a great portal for interpreters and sermonizers of the Torah, a pure conduit for those who enter the gates, according to Kabbalah and concealed Torah. May *ha-Makom* (God) enlighten our eyes in his Torah in order to see, eye to eye, “the honor of his excellent majesty” (Esther 1:4).

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<sup>12</sup> Moshe Nathan Rosenfeld, *Jewish Printing in Wilhermsdorf: A concise bibliography of Hebrew and Yiddish publications, printed in Wilhermsdorf between 1670 and 1739, showing aspects of Jewish life in Mittelfranken three centuries ago* (London, 1995), pp. v-vii.



On the verso of the title page is an introduction to *Yalkut Re'uvani* in which lines begin with an acrostic (below) spelling Abraham Reuben b. (מהרר) morenu harav rabbi Hoeshke Kohen, ז"ל.



1681, *Yalkut al ha-Torah (Yalkut Re'uvani)*, Wilhermsdorf  
 Courtesy of the National Library of Israel

Below the acrostic is Isaac bar Judah Yuedels Katz's preface in which he describes his efforts to publish *Yalkut Re'uvani*. He writes that people were eager for this book and he desired to print it for it is as:

“refined silver” (I Chronicles 29:4). After he has seen that it is a precious and desirable work, which all men desire that “stands among the myrtles” (Zechariah 1:8, 9, 10), or which the wealthy expend their money to copy it and store with their treasures, we find that “in the shelter of their wealth is the shelter of wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 7:12) and the wisdom of the poor is in the corner. Because it is a sealed treasure, from Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah, from midrashim, and from commentaries on the Torah, revealed and concealed. I raised up my heart and my spirit vowed to benefit the public to print it so that everyone would be equal in it . . .

The text is in two columns in rabbinic type. It is on the Torah only, Reuben's intent to extend it to the Megillot not being realized. The contents are based on a large variety of midrashic and kabbalistic sources, a number no longer extant or existing only in fragments. Many of the sources quoted in *Yalkut Re'uvani* were noted above, where it was also noted that Reuben intermingles kabbalah, *halakhot*, and aggadah, but does not add original material of his own. Examples of entries are:



1681, *Yalkut al ha-Torah (Yalkut Re'veni)*, Wilhermsdorf  
 Courtesy of the National Library of Israel

“For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews” (Genesis 40:15). When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to give the Torah to the Ishmaelite (Arab) nation they said to Him, what is written in it? He responded, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:13). They answered, we cannot abandon the ways of our fathers who stole Joseph, sold him and brought him down to Egypt, as it says, “For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews” (*Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer*)

“the chief baker” (Genesis 40:16). He is a resurrection of the soul of Cain, and “Cain shall be avenged sevenfold” (Genesis 4:24). White baskets alluding to the nullification of the Temple offerings, white **ריה נהוה** being the letters of “sweet savor” **הורי** then he nullified one hundred candles, equal to the number of baskets **סלי**. (*Gali Razza*).

And Joseph went down to Egypt and they accepted him and made him a ruler, as it says, “And Joseph was the governor” (Genesis 42:6). They honored Jacob, as it says, “the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days” (Genesis 50:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, what honor can I give the Egyptians? He called it by the name of Gan Eden one time, “like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt” (Genesis 13:10). When they turned and enslaved them (the Jews) He turned from this honor and said I will make it desolate, as it says, “Egypt shall be a desolation” (Joel 4:19). (*Midrash Rabbah, Bo*).

Rosenfeld informs that *Yalkut Re'uvni* is recorded in Archival notes as *Jalqut Travena* or *Jalcat Rubena*, and that the price was 1 Gulden. Furthermore, it appears that by 1692 all copies had been sold.<sup>13</sup> *Yalkut Re'uvni*—that is, *Yalkut Re'uvni al ba-Torah (ba-Gadol)*—was first reprinted in Amsterdam (1700). It was placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, remaining there until the last edition of that work in 1948.

### III

Another center of Hebrew printing was in Sulzbach, Bavaria. In Sulzbach, Hebrew presses were active for more than two centuries, printing numerous important titles, including two complete editions of the Talmud (1756-63, 1766-70) as well as individual tractates. Sulzbach is known to have had Jewish residents intermittently from as early as 1305, for at that time the town council was given the right to tax the Jews. For almost three centuries Jewish presence in Sulzbach was transitory, only permitted to conduct business. In 1666, Duke Christian-Augustus permitted the Jews to reestablish a community and, in 1669, due to his interest in kabbalah, authorized the opening of Hebrew print shops by Jews. Permission had been given slightly earlier to Abraham Lichtenthaler, a Lutheran, to operate a press that would print books. Albeit primarily in Latin, the books published by Lichtenthaler had content of Jewish interest. Assisted by Isaac Yuedeles, Lichtenthaler first printed Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont's *Alphabeti verè naturalis Hebraici* (1667), an illustrated pedagogic work for instructing deaf-mutes based on the concept that Hebrew is the primordial language. Lichtenthaler also published Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*, a translation of volumes of the *Zohar* and related works, (1677-78), with two additional volumes printed in Frankfurt am Main (1684).

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<sup>13</sup> Rosenfeld, p. 32.

Shortly afterwards, permission was given to open a Hebrew press. Sulzbach was subsequently home to Hebrew presses printing for Jews, belonging to Isaac ben Judah Katz (Yitzhak Yuedeles) of Prague, one of the Gersonides;<sup>14</sup> Moses Bloch; and afterwards the Fraenkel-Arnstein family. They would print Hebrew books in Sulzbach from 1669 to 1851.<sup>15</sup> These printers would issue more than 700 titles, of which about 50 were published before 1700. The immediate Jewish impetus for opening a press in Sulzbach was the Imperial closure of the Hebrew press in Prague. Jacob Bak left Prague, taking his compositor, the above-mentioned Isaac ben Judah Katz (Yitzhak Yuedeles) of Prague, other workers, and typographical equipment. They began printing in 1669 with a Yiddish *Birkat ha-Mazon* and accompanying Haggadah with woodcut illustrations; R. Isaac ben Eliakim of Posen's *Lev Tov*, an ethical work encompassing all aspects of a pious and observant life; and R. Solomon ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah*, a popular and much reprinted chronicle of Jewish history, first published in Adrianople (1554). The partners separated the following year, partially due to the requirement that they work with Lichtenthaler and partially for personal reasons. Bloch returned to Prague, Yuedels printed one work only in 1670, an Ashkenazi rite prayerbook, and moved on to Wilhermsdorf.<sup>16</sup> No further Hebrew books were published until 1684.

In 1682, Moses ben Uri Shraga Bloch (Pheibus Bloch) established a new Hebrew press. He began printing in 1684 with a fine edition of the *Zohar*, one that greatly enhanced the press's reputation. That edition, partially subsidized by Duke Christian-Augustus, included, in some copies, a Latin introduction by Bloch. In the same year two small works followed, both by R. Abraham Reuben ben Hoeshke Katz, *Davar she-bi-Kedushah* and *Oneg Shabbat*, the first a popular kabbalistic work to arouse repentance, the second kabbalistic ruminations on the *halakhot* of Shabbat, as well as a *selihot* and prayer-books.

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<sup>14</sup> The Gersonides were a famous printing family in Prague. In 1527, Gershom ha-Kohen applied for and received a royal privilege from King Ferdinand of Bohemia, allowing him, that is Gershom alone, to enjoy a monopoly on Hebrew printing in Prague. His descendants, known as the Gersonides, continued to print in Prague until the mid-seventeenth century.

<sup>15</sup> Friedberg, *Central Europe*, pp. 69-70; Habermann, *The History of the Hebrew Book*, pp. 150-51; Menahem Schmelzer, "Hebrew Printing and Publishing in Germany, 1650-1750," in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XXXIII* (London, Jerusalem, New York, 1988), p. 373.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning the financial obligations of Yuedels to Duke Christian-Augustus, Moses Bloch's assumptions of those debts and subsequent financial difficulties, see Friedberg, *Central Europe*, p. 71.



final letters of the title spell *derashah*; and for “those who seek (*dorshei*) the Lord shall not lack any good thing” (Psalms 34:11). It concludes with a list of twenty-two categories of sins in alphabetic order expressed as the *viddui* (confession of sins) on Yom Kippur, that is, the *al bet* (for the sins that we have sinned before you). These are sins that people customarily transgress and which should be confessed daily. Next is the text, which is an explication of the sins set in two columns in small square letters.

Each sin begins with a heading of the sin, repeated as the *viddui*, for example, א eating and drinking, “for the sin that we have sinned before you through eating and drinking,” and then ten paragraphs from a wide selection of kabbalistic, midrashic, and aggadic sources on that entry, the subject matter including: ב *birkat ha-mazon*; ג pride; ד vows and oaths: ה thoughts; ו wine and *yein nesekh*; ז honor of sages; ח evil talk and slander; ט tithes and charity; י *netilat yadayim* (hand washing); יא *zizit*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*; and יב Torat Moshe. Examples of entries from wine (3, 7) and anger (8, 9) are:

3. Also these erred with wine for in that they drank wine they “fashioned a calf” (Exodus 32:4) and said “These are your gods” (Exodus 32:4, 8) and these also erred with wine. (*Tanbuma*)

7. The wine that Isaac gave to Jacob to drink Michael brought from *Gan Eden* and one does not find such wine as this for blessing except by Abraham and Melchizedek. (Midrash)

8. Elijah the Prophet cannot be found beside one who is overly stern (*Reishit Hokhma*)

9. What is written concerning Abraham, he was immediately beset with famine but did not protest. So you too, if beset with affliction, do not object and protest.

(*Rabbah Mikeitz*)

*Davar she-bi-Kedushah* has been reprinted six times, beginning with Zolkiew (undated) and Lvov editions (1830).<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

Our final Reuben ben Hoeshke title is *Oneg Shabbat*, kabbalistic ruminations on the *halakhot* of Shabbat, also printed in Sulzbach by Moses Bloch. It was published in the year who sanctifies שדקמ (444 = 1684) the Sabbath in quarto format (4<sup>o</sup>: 12 ff.). The title page gives the author’s name as Reuben Kohen ben Hoeshke, and emphasizes his grandfather’s renown. It does not use the name Abraham. Why Bloch used Reuben’s full name

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<sup>18</sup> Friedberg, *Beit Eked Sefarim*, daled 122.

with *Davar she-bi-Kedushah* and not with *Oneg Shabbat* is not clear. *Oneg Shabbat* is typical of Sulzbach imprints, and states that it was written by

The author of *Yalkut Re'uvni*, who also wrote the *Yalkut* organized alphabetically according to the *alef bet*, he is R. Reuben Kohen ben Hoeshke Katz, son-in-law of the great *gaon* who was a “prince of God” (Genesis 23:6) in Israel, the exalted R. Ephraim of Luntschitz (*Keli Yekar*), *av beit din* and R[osh] M[esinta] of the praiseworthy great city Prague, may God watch over it until the coming of the redeemer. Amen, may it be His will.

CUM LICENTIA SERENISSIMI

by the printer Moses Bloch



1684, *Oneg Shabbat*, Sulzbach

Courtesy of National Library of Israel

Courtesy of the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad Ohel Yosef Yitzhak

Reuben’s introduction follows. He writes that in it are *dinnim* (laws) of Shabbat, many midrashim, both revealed and esoteric, relating to the rewards and punishments of Shabbat in order that they will learn, “and fear, and no more presumptuously” (Deuteronomy 17:13) violate Shabbat. Furthermore, it is his intent that one should learn on Shabbat, particularly matters of kabbalah, for, as it is known, on Erev Shabbat two angels accompany a person (ref. *Shabbat* 119b). He titles the work *Oneg Shabbat*, for Shabbat is called *oneg* (delight) and his name is in it, in the middle

letters of “and call the Sabbath a delight ויקראת לשבת עונג” (Isaiah 58:13) spell Reuben.

Next is the text, in two columns in small square letters. *Oneg Shabbat* is a compilation of kabbalistic and aggadic sources organized by topic according to the order of Shabbat, with subheadings, each with several entries, as in *Yalkut Re’uveni*, here too without original thoughts. It begins with preparations for Shabbat and finishes with the conclusion of Shabbat. The former encompasses expenditures for Shabbat, washing in hot water, dressing in Shabbat clothing, and not drinking water just before Shabbat. Friday night, for example, includes eleven subheadings, including several on prayers, accompanying angels (3 entries), the extra Shabbat soul (11), *Kiddush* (18), *lehem mishneh* (2), and the meal and *oneg* Shabbat (11). One interesting entry, for Shabbat morning prayers, is that of Hallel ha-Gadol (Psalm 136), in which each of the twenty-six verses is attributed to a different ministering angel, twenty-seven in total, “He gives nourishment to all flesh being repeated.”

*Oneg Shabbat* was reprinted three times in 1700 (Sulzbach, Amsterdam, and Prague). Thirteen editions are listed in the *Beit Eked Sefarim* through 1938, and it was included in the *Yalkut Re’uveni ha-Shalem* (1995).<sup>19</sup>

## V

*Yalkut Re’uveni*, as noted above, is a popular work, reprinted several times. *Yalkut Re’uveni (Ha-Katan)* was reprinted once only, that in Homburg in 1712. In contrast, *Yalkut Re’uveni (Yalkut al ha-Torah)* has been reprinted at least eight times through 1889.<sup>20</sup> A more recent edition of *Yalkut Re’uveni*, noted above, was published in 1995. *Davar she-bi-Kedushah* has been reprinted six times and *Oneg Shabbat* thirteen times.

In his preface to the recent edition of *Yalkut Re’uveni*, the editor, R. Bezalel Landau, writes that the prior ten editions were difficult to read, as the letters were small and densely set.<sup>21</sup> A similar view was expressed by Moshe Rosenfeld who, concerning the imprints of Isaac bar Judah Yuedels Katz, writes “the efforts of the printer were not well rewarded with praise. It was claimed that his books were of poor quality, the type face not aesthetical and the workers were lazy. In view of the difficult conditions, such a judgment appears not justified.”<sup>22</sup> The reader can look

<sup>19</sup> Ch. B. Friedberg, *Beit Eked Sefarim*, *ayin* 291.

<sup>20</sup> Friedberg, *Beit Eked Sefarim*, (Israel, n.d.), *yod* 656 [Hebrew].

<sup>21</sup> Abraham Reuben ha-Kohen Sofer ben Hoeshke Katz, *Yalkut Re’uveni ha-Shalem: Ma’amarim u-Midrashim, Ḥadashim gam Yeshanim*, with an introduction by Bezalel Landau (Jerusalem, 1995), I, p. [3] [Hebrew].

<sup>22</sup> Rosenfeld, p. vii.



at the examples provided in this article, and decide for him/herself as to the quality of these editions. No matter whether the physical quality of the various editions made them difficult to read or not, the quality of the contents was certainly sufficient to require repeated reprints of the *Yalkut Re'uvani*.

Gershon Scholem in discussing Aggadah in kabbalah notes the position, and restates the importance of the *Yalkut Re'uvani* in this literature. Scholem writes:

In the realm of the *aggadah*, the Kabbalah was unrestricted, and many kabbalists made use of this opportunity not only to compose far-reaching interpretations of the early *aggadot* of the Midrash, in which they saw the key to many of their mystic doctrines, but also to create a rich new body of aggadic legend bearing a strong mythic character. In general, they were more at home in aggadic expression than in systematic exposition, and it is to this “kabbalization” of the *aggadah* that much of the attraction of the *Zohar* must be credited. . . . **The classic anthology of nearly 500 years of this kabbalistic *aggadah* is Reuben Hoeshke of Prague’s *Yalkut Re'uvani*** (emphasis added), a first edition of which (Prague, 1660) was organized topically, while its second, enlarged version (Wilmersdorf, 1681) was modelled after the early midrashic anthology, *Yalkut Shimoni*, and was arranged (set) as a commentary on the Torah.<sup>23</sup>

R. Abraham Reuben ben Hoeshke passed away on 17 Nissan, 5433 (April 3, 1673). He was buried in Prague among the foremost rabbis of that city. His gravestone states:

The foremost spokesman in any place,  
Father of all the sages in literature and laws,  
And from the wall of his house we recognize his books printed and engraved.  
Among his writings the book *Yalkut Re'uvani* and the book  
*Yalkut* on the Torah, more desirable than fine gold,  
And “drippings from the honeycomb and sweeter than honey (cf. Psalms 19:11).  
A quick scribe and Kohen to God above Who dwells above  
תנוצב"ה [May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life]  
with the souls of the righteous.<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>23</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 193.

<sup>24</sup> Bezalel Landau, p.14.