Comparatively little scholarly interest has been taken in Hebrew printing in the Islamic World, even though some of the Jews who fled there following their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497 brought with them their printing presses and equipment. These refugees and other exiles who settled among them set up their workshops in Constantinople (1493), Salonika (1513), Fez (1516), Cairo (1557), Safed (circa 1577) and Damascus (1605). The reasons for the few studies on printing in the East are that these exiles were generally unable to maintain their printing activities for any length of time and usually few remains of the works that they printed have survived. In Fez, Safed, Cairo and Damascus the printing of Hebrew quickly disappeared due to the unfavourable economic conditions and probably also the influence of the adverse reaction of the Islamic World to the use of printing for religious literature. Only Constantinople, Salonika and, from 1657, Izmir succeeded in surviving as centres of Hebrew printing probably because of their relatively close ties with Western centres of influence and their greater prosperity when compared with other cities of the Ottoman Empire.

The first attempt at establishing a printing press in Egypt was made at Cairo between 1557 and 1562 by Gershom ben Eliezer Soncino, a grandson of Gershom ben Moses, the famous Italian printer who had migrated to Constantinople. The grandson Gershon moved from Constantinople to Egypt in about 1550. The only known evidence of his activity are fragments of two works, Pitron halomot [Interpretation of Dreams], 1557, and Refu’ot ha-Talmud, which were discovered in the Geniza (storage place) of the old Synagogue of Cairo. The latter title was probably printed by him in 1562, the year of his death.

A second attempt was made in the mid-eighteenth century when a printing press was set up in the Egyptian capital by Abraham ben Moses Yathom. Abraham Yathom had learnt the art of printing in Constantinople with Jonah ben Jacob Ashkenazi, who had been a prolific publisher of Hebrew books there during the previous decade. Abraham printed in Cairo the first edition of Ḥok le-Yišra’el, readings from the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud and Zohar, which the kabbalist Ḥayyim Vital had compiled as readings for each day of the week. The work was edited by Isaac Baruch and published in two volumes in 1740 with the financial assistance of Abraham Zadik. The approbations dated 1740 at the beginning of the first volume are by Chief Rabbi Solomon Al-Gazi of Cairo and Rabbi
Moses Israel of Alexandria. The text of Hok le-Yisrael is printed in two columns set within black ink rectangles—an unusual characteristic for Hebrew printed books but found in some oriental manuscripts.

In contrast to the comparatively high standard of production of the Hebrew books printed in Constantinople at this time, the typeface of Hok le-Yisrael published in Cairo is frequently poor, some of the pages being faint and difficult to read. Probably because of the low standard of printing as well as poor economic conditions in Egypt, the press of Abraham Yathom ceased. The kabbalistic work Hok le-Yisrael became very popular in the latter half of the eighteenth century but it was printed elsewhere, in Venice (1777), in Korets (1785), Lemberg (1788) and in other cities of Poland. It was also reprinted several times (1788, 1797-8, 1843, 1866) in Leghorn (Livorno) on the west coast of Italy. From the middle of the eighteenth century, the Hebrew press of Leghorn (founded in 1650) sought to provide for the needs of the mainly Spanish-speaking Jewish Communities around the Mediterranean basin, especially in North Africa, with whom Leghorn had close commercial ties.

The attempt to establish a printing house in 1740 was thought to have been the last in Egypt until the coming of Hebrew printing to Alexandria in the second half of the nineteenth century, following an influx of Jewish refugees and immigrants from Europe and the Middle East. However, among the holdings of the British Library’s Hebrew Section is an example showing that a further attempt was made at printing in Cairo in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Among the printed books acquired after 1893 is a Haggadah or service book for the night of Passover, the Jewish Spring festival celebrating Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. This Seder Haggadah shel Pesah with a Judaeo-Arabic translation was, according to the title-page (fig. 1), printed (nidas) on "the headstone with shoutings of acceptance" (Zechariah 4: 7) by the compositor (ha-mesader) Abraham ben Shalom ha-Levi at the new press of Moses [Ca?]stilo in Misrayim (Cairo). The date given is equivalent to 1834. The reference to Zechariah 4: 7 as well as physical characteristics and the use of a cursive hand indicate that this Haggadah was lithographed.

The present volume, which measures 23 x 18 cm., consists of thirty-four folios, unpaginated but with catch words. The paper lacks watermarks and chain lines suggesting that locally made paper was used. The corners of most of the folios have been repaired and f. 30 is very severely worm-eaten. At present the volume is misbound as ff. 27–8 should be between ff. 2 and 3. Apart from this, there are two folios missing in each case between ff. 6 and 7, between ff. 12 and 13 and between ff. 22 and 23. Folios 29–34 are duplicates of earlier folios. The Hebrew text of the Haggadah is in the standard Oriental Square script. The Arabic translation and rubrics are in the Sephardi Hebrew cursive script found in North Africa. The colophon on f. 26 verso repeats the name of Abraham ben Shalom ha-Levi and adds the information that the work was printed in order to teach the young men of the Jewish Community (na'are bene Yišra'el). The reference in the colophon to doing the work of the Levites may be an allusion to Abraham ben Shalom’s work as a teacher in Cairo.

Since at least the fourteenth century, it has been a common practice to illustrate the
Fig. 1. The title page of Seder Haggadah shel Pesah (Cairo, 1834)
Haggadah with scenes from the rituals observed at Passover, the story of the Exodus and from the stories of the Rabbis mentioned in the Haggadah in order to teach and keep the younger members of the family interested. This example of the Haggadah lithographed in Cairo includes illustrations of the Passover story and employs black line historiated initials at the beginning of certain passages. A comparison of Haggadot (the plural of Haggadah) printed during this period shows that the model used was an illustrated Haggadah printed in Leghorn which, in turn, was a type based on earlier models printed in Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the Haggadah was not printed with an Arabic version until ten years later in Leghorn, 1844/5, the model used must have been a Haggadah with a Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish) translation. Leghorn was at this period printing many editions of the illustrated Haggadah with a Ladino translation and exporting them to Jewish Communities around the Mediterranean. Commercial ties between Egypt and Italy were particularly close at this time. Indeed paper shipped via Leghorn was the most commonly used form of writing and printing material in government establishments of Egypt.

The illustrated Haggadah with a Ladino translation was very popular and was produced by several Jewish printers in Leghorn, among them Ottolengi and Company, Nahman Sa'dun and Moses Yeshua Tuviana. The Haggadot that they published vary only very slightly from each other. A comparison of the edition of Cairo 1834 with those published in the previous decade shows a particularly close similarity with those Haggadot printed by Ottolengi and Company in 1822 and by the Sa'dun brothers in 1827. However, Abraham ben Shalom of Cairo has replaced the Ladino translation and rubrics with a Judaeo-Arabic version in his own cursive script. He has omitted the evening service for Passover usually recited in the Synagogue as probably unnecessary. He has included additions to the blessing over the wine at the beginning and replaced the hymns sung at the end of the service with a hymn in Hebrew and another in Judaeo-Arabic. In this he was modifying the Haggadah to the ritual as practised among the Jews of Egypt.

The illustrations in the Haggadah of 1834 follow almost exactly those of the Leghorn imprints except that immediately after the order of the service with its mention of 'telling' (magid) the Passover story on f. 5, an illustration has been inserted showing the Israelites building the pyramids of Egypt (fig. 2). This additional illustration was no doubt an attempt to make the Passover story more relevant and immediate to the younger participants for whom this edition was mainly intended. It was a tradition peculiar to the Jewish Community in Egypt that their ancestors built the pyramids. Interestingly, the Israelites are dressed in European clothes although we know from the accounts of foreign travellers at this time that the Jews of Cairo—then numbering at least 3,000—wore the local dress and lived as inconspicuously as possible. The style is probably an attempt to copy the remaining illustrations taken from the Leghorn Haggadot. By showing European clothes, the artist is also emphasizing that the Israelites were foreigners in Egypt.

The Passover ritual lithographed in 1834 by Abraham ben Shalom ha-Levi is not mentioned in Abraham Yaari’s Bibliography of the Passover Haggadah and no other copy is known. The fragmentary nature of the British Library’s copy suggests that the
Fig. 2. The Israelites building the Pyramids
preparation of the edition did not progress much beyond the printing of a very few samples. However, ff. 19-20 show signs of wine stains implying that at some stage these folios formed a complete copy that was used for the Passover meal.

Lithography or printing by etching on stone was a comparatively new process that had been brought to Egypt from Europe. It is likely that the educational reforms initiated by Muhammad Ali, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848, and the setting up of a printing press at Bulaq in late 1821 had an influence on the Jewish Community living nearby in Cairo. One of the main purposes of the government press at Bulaq was to supply Arabic and Turkish translations of European works. The Bulaq press also included a lithograph workshop used mainly for diagrams and plates. Possibly Abraham ben Shalom ha-Levi of Cairo learnt of the technique from this source. A lithograph press was less demanding and cheaper than a movable type press in terms of the technical equipment required. The experiment by Abraham ben Shalom was an attempt to supply the educational need of the Jewish Community in Cairo for texts with Arabic translations. He and Moses [Cas[tilo may have hoped that if this lithographed edition of the Haggadah were successful, it would be possible to set up a Hebrew press with movable type as happened in India, at Calcutta and Bombay, seven years later. As with the two earlier presses in Cairo, the standard of reproduction of both text and illustration was poor and their product could not hope to compete with either manuscript copies or the texts printed in Leghorn. It is clear that in 1834 the financial, educational and social condition of the Jewish Community in Cairo was as yet insufficient to develop and support either a lithograph or a movable type printing press.

It was only with the influx of Jews from Europe and the Near East and the rise of a large mainly immigrant community in Alexandria in the last half of the nineteenth century that Hebrew printing was able to establish itself for any length of time and to a sufficiently high standard in Egypt. Even then, Solomon Ottolengi of Leghorn only managed to print two works in Alexandria, Nahalah le-Yisrael and She'erit ha-naḥalah by Israel Moses Hazan of Alexandria, in 1862, before going out of business. Three years later, Michael Hakohen and Joel Moses Solomon came from Jerusalem to Alexandria to print the last section of part two of No'am ha-midot by Nathan ben Hayyim Amram of Alexandria (the earlier part having been printed in Salonika, 1854) and Nora’ tehillot, the Psalms with a Judaeo-Arabic version and commentaries by Hayyim Amram. Again the press ceased before the latter work was completed. Finally Faraj Hayyim Mizrahi from Persia set up his press in Alexandria in 1873 and successfully printed some fifty titles before his death in 1913. These include several editions of the Haggadah for Passover with his own Judaeo-Arabic translation, and one with that of Mevorach Baranes. Especially noteworthy are the books by Raphael Aaron ben Simeon of Cairo and by Solomon Hazan of Alexandria. One example is Solomon Hazan’s ha-Ma’alot li-Shlomoh, a biographical and bibliographical lexicon being a supplement to Shem ha-Gedolim by the Italian scholar Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, which was printed by Mizrahi in Alexandria in 1894.

In Cairo, printing in Hebrew from 1905 onwards took place in publishing houses whose main concern was printing in other languages. During the First World War, a Hebrew
press in Cairo printed books, pamphlets, rules and regulations, and newspapers for the Jewish Community in Palestine. Among them was the weekly newspaper Ḥadashot me-ha-areẓ, The Palestine News, which was published in Cairo by the British Army of Occupation from 1918 to 1919. After this brief period at the beginning of the twentieth century, the growth of the Jewish population in Palestine allowed Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv to become the dominant centres of Hebrew printing in the area.

1 The main reference work on the subject is by Abraham Yaari, ha-Defus ha-ivri be-arṣot ha-mizrah, 2 pt. (Jerusalem, 1936–40).
2 A. M. Haberman, ha-Madpisim bene Soncino (Vienna, 1933), p. 79; Yaari, ibid., pt. 1, pp. 53, 56–7. The fragments of these two works printed by Soncino are now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and in the Adler Collection in the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.
4 G. Sonnino, Storia della tipografia ebraica in Livorno (Turin, 1912); H. D. Friedberg, History of Hebrew Typography in Italy [in Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, 1956), pp. 86–7. Many of Leghorn’s Jewish inhabitants were Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had moved there via North Africa.
6 The first two letters of the publisher’s name are not clear.
7 Cf. Deuteronomy 33: 10.
12 A. Geiss, ibid., p. 196f.
13 Ibid., p. 216. In a report in the Journal Asiatique of 1828, two students had arrived in Paris from Egypt to study, among other printing and graphic techniques, the art of lithography. They returned to Egypt in 1831, ibid., p. 210.
14 The printing of Hebrew books began in Calcutta in 1841 with the lithographed edition of the Song of Songs, cf. A. Yaari, ha-Defus ha-ivri be-arṣot ha-mizrah, pt. 2, pp. 17, 18. In Bombay, both the Bene Yiśrael and the Iraqi Community began by producing books by the lithograph technique in 1841 and 1855 respectively. Both groups continued to use the technique for some years, cf. Yaari, ibid., p. 52f.
15 It is possible that the epidemic of 1834/5, in which nearly one fifth of the total population died, affected the work of printing, cf. A. L. al-Sayyid Marsot, Egypt in the reign of Muhammad Ali (Cambridge, 1984, reprinted 1998). Isaac Adolphe Grémieux, the French Jewish lawyer who visited Egypt in 1840, was shocked at the low standard of education of the Jewish Community in Cairo. With the help of the Rothschild family, he set up schools in Cairo and, later, in Alexandria. Cf. Landau, ibid., p. 73.
17 A. Yaari, Bibliography of the Passover Haggadah, nos. 1298, 1477, 1538.
18 BL, Oriental Collections press-mark 1969.g.35.
19 BL, press-mark O.P.418 (and 422). Wanting some issues of the supplements.