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PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Franziska Baruch

Henri Friedlaender and I went to interview Franziska Baruch on a wintry afternoon. Although I had known her and of her since I came to Jerusalem in 1939, I did not quite know what to expect. She is, after all, 83 years old. However, when I entered the fourth-floor, walk-up flat in Shmuel Hanagid Street in Jerusalem, any apprehensions I might have had were immediately dispersed. Her tall, lean figure is that of a woman much younger than her years, and so is her personality — straightforward yet modest, vividly recalling events and persons sixty years back, and in speaking of and showing us her work, her strong artistic personality comes through immediately. She is a warm, cordial hostess, and sitting in her sparsely furnished living room, the strongest visual impression is a window giving us the most marvellous view over the new and old city of Jerusalem and Mount Scopus.

In her life, as in her art, she concentrates always on the essential, spurning the merely decorative. The view from her window makes the hanging of pictures on her walls superfluous. The Contents of the wooden cabinets containing Franziska's work are graphic treasure-troves. Apart from the lettering and graphics coming out of the drawers, there are slabs of many-coloured stone incised with trial lettering, ceramic tiles, medallions and bas-reliefs, wooden toys cut by herself, and many other colourful things.

And when we sat down to a lavish tea she had prepared and insisted that we partake, her vivid reminiscences captivated us, creating immediately an atmosphere of easy sharing in the spirit of years long past.

Franziska Baruch was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1901. She studied

graphic design and lettering at the Staatliche Kunstgewerbeschule Berlin (State School of Arts and Crafts). Today she is extremely modest when telling about her student days, yet it is obvious that she was an extraordinarily gifted student. A few facts make us see her varied talents.

In 1920 she was awarded the first prize in a competition to design Christmas plates for the Royal Porcelain Manufacture of Berlin, founded by Frederic II in the 18th century.

During the early 1920's until the rise of the Nazis she worked regularly for the *Reichskunstwart* (Reich Art Counselor) of the Weimar Republic, Edwin Redslob. This official was in charge of graphic design for the

government. Among her more curious jobs was the design of the decorations (including very interesting versions of the German Republic's coat of arms) at the occasion of the 1924 state visit of King Amanullah of Afghanistan, the first royal personage to visit the Republic after the revolution and dethronement of the Kaiser. She not only designed but wood-engraved the emblems to be printed on silk streamers for the banquet table decorations, and hand-lettered addresses to the royal visitor. She also wrote on parchment many other festive addresses, certificates of honour and other documents for the Reich Government. Among her other tasks was the design and lettering of inscriptions for exhibitions in which the govern-

ברחיה בעדי לעולם ותעל
 משהחיה חיי יהודה אלהי:
 בהתעטף עלי נפשי את-יהודה
 זכרתי ותבוא אליך תפלת
 אל-היכל קדשך:
 משמרים הבלי-



Page from Book of Jonah (1953)

Franziska and her mother, who had very little money and no business knowledge and who had never heard of Schocken, this was an expensive and perhaps for a young girl a dangerous trip. In the end, after receiving favorable references on Schocken from a relative who worked in a bank, she bought a 4th class round-trip ticket, packed a large number of sandwiches to avoid having to eat in a restaurant and set out on the long, slow journey (only local, slow trains had 4th class) to Zwickau, a small industrial town in Saxonia. On arriving, she booked a room in the cheapest hotel she could find, and the next morning set out, not without trepidation, to her first business interview. She was seen by A.M. Haberman, Schocken's librarian, but a small, rotund gentleman whom she did not identify came in several times during

she also designed the logo for Ha'aretz newspaper, and in the end designed the Hebrew printing type called Schocken-Baruch, cut by Monotype for the Schocken publishing house. Realizing that there was no future for her in Hitler's Germany, Franziska came to Eretz Israel in November, 1933. In order to qualify for an "artisan's certificate" (the British authorities did not recognize "graphic design" and "lettering" as an artisan's trade), she passed a crash course in window decorating, somewhat hampered by the fact that she was afraid of heights and could not climb ladders. She arrived in Tel Aviv almost penniless, her belongings, apart from a small suitcase, retained in Jaffa harbour as a result of the 1933 Arab strike against Jewish immigration. She got her first job designing for an exhibition in honour of Bialik's

found employment in designing, and sometimes executing, lettering for their buildings. Eric Mendelsohn (the architect of the Old Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus, for which she also designed a mosaic floor), Neufeld (the New Hadassah Hospital at Ein Karem) and others utilized her services. Her lettering style, particularly in Hebrew, can be recognized easily on these and other buildings. We saw at her home trial slabs of different coloured stone incised with Hebrew and Roman lettering which she made before designing inscriptions for execution — typical of the painstaking, thorough way in which Miss Baruch always went about her work. A striking and easily visible example of her art can be seen at the Hebrew Union College on King David Street in Jerusalem.

Life in Jerusalem in the 1930's and during World War II was not easy. Customers for first-rate graphic design and lettering were not plentiful, and the Jewish communal institutions lacked funds.

Among the firms for which Franziska Baruch worked was the sign-painter Dresdner-Drori in Jerusalem, who executed her lettering with feeling and exactitude — business signs, metal plates incised with lettering for offices, and cut-out letters. Other firms for which she worked comprised the Palestine-Egypt Lloyd (later Pel-tours) whose owner Turnowsky founded the now famous art publishers company. She did the window displays for their Jerusalem, Cairo and Beirut offices, their logo and much of their advertising work. Another important customer was the Palestine Post (later Jerusalem Post) for whom Franziska drew maps — a major occupation for her during the war years. Once, when she showed to the journalist C.Z. Kloetzel a map she thought particularly successful and nice-looking, Kloetzel said jokingly: "Praise yourself, my chicken, I'm going to sell you!"

When graphic work was hard to come by, she tried her hand at other projects. At the beginning of the war, when powdered sugar was still available, she made marzipan, incised with lovely designs cut by her in plaster-of-paris and packed in (needless to say) well-designed cardboard boxes with the trade mark

Jewish Jerusalem's foremost delicatessen S-s in Jaffa Street indignantly rejected her Adam-and-Eve design as obscene; otherwise they sold quite well, until powdered sugar became unobtainable.

For the beer-drinking British she



Design for the cover of the Schocken almanac

her interview. She got the job. On her way out, she was taken to Schocken's private secretary to have her expenses refunded. Mrs. Birnbaum would not hear of cheap hotels, sandwich lunches and 4th class travel, and repaid her at the rate for business executives — "after all", she said, "you are an artist!" Mother and daughter Baruch lived for weeks on the reimbursement for this trip.

Franziska later did much work for Schocken — for his publishing house;

birthday, held in a shed in the far north of Tel Aviv, on the site later to become the Levant Trade Fair of 1935. The architect of this exhibition, Zhapushnikov (Arie Elhanani), had heard of her from a common acquaintance, the architect Heinz Rau, one of the few people in Palestine who knew her. Rau later persuaded her to come to Jerusalem, at that time much less provincial than tiny Tel Aviv. He introduced her to other architects, and through them she



Stone-cut table (ca. 1960)

designed ceramic coasters, decorated with a crusader coat-of-arms, which she reconstructed from four differently broken reliefs in a Bethlehem church. These did not sell well. She made book-marks, ex-libris, medallions, and also designed the signets (publishers' marks) for Mossad Bialik, Tarshish, and many others. The logos of the Brandeis Printing School and Precision Mechanics Workshop were also her design. With the beginning of the War of



◀ דפוס לאודי ירושלים ▶

Signet for the Brandeis Printing School (1950)

Independence, she made several graphic designs for the government, e.g. paper notes of 50 and 100 mil "emergence currency". How she came to design the cover for Israel's passport is told in the following story: One dark evening in 1948 a small man with a black mustache knocked on her door, and without introducing himself showed her the cover of the new Israeli passport. He said: "I have to go abroad tomorrow, and I am not going with a passport so badly designed. Please re-write the four lines to be gold-stamped — the Israeli coat-of-arms is already blind-stamped and the lettering has to fit the available space." Franzisca protested that even a small job takes time and experiments, but in the end, moved by the stranger's sensitivity to graphic design, she sat down and accomplished the lettering. She wondered how this could be translated into gilt lettering

by the next day, but the stranger assured her that he would take care of it. In the end he signed an invoice so she would be paid. She later deciphered his signature as "Moshe Shertok" — the first foreign minister of the new state. (See also p. 7)

Franzisca Baruch's work is characterized by her thoroughness, selfless devotion, artistic honesty and a refusal to compromise on quality. She always puts the functionalism, readability and harmony of her lettering first. Her design combines natural, unsophisticated pureness of form with an instinctive feeling for the reach and limits of graphic possibilities. The completed design looks as if it could not be different, inspired by a sober yet imaginative sense for the right form. Her own personality is hidden behind her absolute dedication to the task before her — the job always came first.

She barely made a living from her work, yet she contributed unmeasurably to the renaissance of the modern Hebrew letter and graphic design in Israel.

HF & GS



Medallion for the Israel Touring Club



Israel Soifer

On February 27, 1984, Israel Soifer passed away after a long illness. He was an educator, publisher and writer on subjects of the book and typography; an unassuming, extremely civilized and well-read man, whom no one could help loving and respecting.

He was born in 1905 in Vishnitz, Bukovina, and came to the United States in 1912. He got a general and Jewish education in New York and graduated from New York City College as a teacher. Most of his life he worked as a teacher in the New York City elementary schools. He was a proud Jew and Zionist. Early in his life he developed an interest in writing, editing and the world of the book in general. In fact, he met his wife, then Margaret Krenzler, at a children's summer camp, where both were in charge of the camp paper. They fell in love and married in 1931. Much of his publishing activities were carried out in common with Margaret. The name of their publishing house, The Furrow Press, came to them while on their honeymoon in the country; they were watching the fan-shaped wake of a boat on the Delaware river when the name occurred to them. While still at college, he ran a "books by mail" business, and became aware of and interested in the Private Press Movement then growing the USA — limited editions beautifully designed, printed and bound were among the books he sold. He attended courses in book design and printing sponsored by AIGA (The American Institute of Graphic Arts), and as the final project for one of these, produced a complete book with his own hands. At AIGA, he met many of the great designers of his generation. This interest in and love for the language, design and

typography of the book remained with him all his life. Although his family obligations and the economic climate of post-depression America prevented him from going into commercial publishing, he started to publish shortly after his marriage: *Plays for Children* written by Margaret in single-play booklets, suitable for school children. They were printed beautifully by an outstanding printer — The Southworth-Anthoensen Press of Portland, Maine. This was a prestigious printing press, whose owner was intrigued by the young publisher's sense of design and typography. The *Plays for Children* were a success; many of them went into second and third printings. Other books published by The Furrow Press were: *Children of the Emek* by Libbie Braverman, illustrated by Temima Gezari. It is a story of children born and growing up in Nahalal. It went into many editions, one of which was "updated" by including a Youth Aliya child from Germany. Margaret was the author of *Firelight Entertainments*, a handbook for campfire programs; after several editions it was bought and published by the Association Press of YMCA. In

1935, Margaret's *With Puppets, Mimes and Shadows* was published — another success which went into several printings. Yet in the economic conditions of the 30's, Israeli Soifer had to continue teaching because his publishing venture never did more than cover costs.

In 1951 Israel was invited by Macmillan to join a group of authors of a new series of English grammar textbooks. These books are published in millions of copies, and the association with Macmillan continues to this day. For many years Israel and Margaret also were associated with a children's magazine, *Story Parade*. After seeing *With Puppets, Mimes and Shadows* they asked Israel to try out certain stories in his classes and advise them on the children's reactions. From this grew a monthly feature advising teachers how to use the magazine in the classroom, which continued for about 15 years, until the magazine ceased publication.

The couple's first visit to Israel took place in 1960, when their daughter attended the Institute for Overseas Group Leaders in Israel. In Margaret's words: "When we came to Jerusalem, we both knew that this is where we

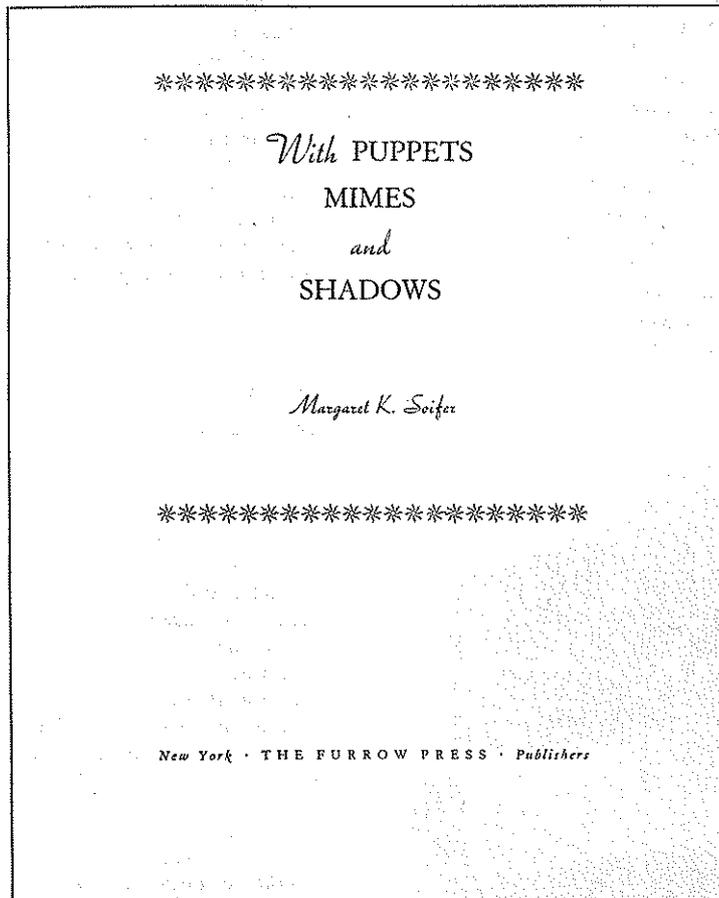
belonged." In 1966 Israel Soifer retired from his teaching job and the couple settled in Jerusalem. Soifer became the Israel correspondent of *Publishers Weekly*, and in 1970 he became editor of *Israel Book World*, a quarterly publication of the Book and Printing Center of the Israel Export Institute. He edited the first 12 issues, and gave it a standard of excellence astonishing in such a small publication. His interest in book design and typography is clearly reflected in the many articles on Israeli book designers, Hebrew printing type, in design competitions, and in the judicious choice of books selected for reproduction in the pages of the quarterly. After three years, when he felt that the standard and style for it had been firmly set, he retired from his work as editor, but remained interested in the publication, and always ready to advise where necessary.

In 1970, he wrote an article on Moshe Spitzer, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, for *Penrose Annual*. This was reprinted in the catalog for the exhibition (in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem) of Spitzer's work on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, by the Israel Bibliophiles.

On July 4th, 1975, his daughter Rebekah and her husband Michael Ben-Yitzhak were killed by the explosion of a bomb in Zion Square in Jerusalem. Israel never recovered from the grief this terrible tragedy inflicted. He aged overnight.

In memory of Rebekah and Michael, the families established the Ben-Yitzhak Fund. The fund's aims are to collect quality illustrated children's books to be housed in the Ben-Yitzhak library at the Children's Wing of the Israel Museum. A biennial award of a medal to the best children's book published by an Israeli publisher, printed in Israel, and designed and illustrated by Israeli artists is presented. Considering that for children the picture book is their first and most important contact with art, the aesthetic standard of children's books is of the highest importance in forming children's visual education.

Israel Soifer's memory will remain with everyone who met him. Behind his self-effacing exterior, there was a wise, good man of unwavering straightness and honesty, warmth and devotion to what he saw as his duty. May his memory be blessed.



Title page designed by Israel Soifer

Gideon Stern