# Contents

List of illustrations vii Preface xiii List of abbreviations xiv

#### Introduction

Languages and alphabets 2
The number of manuscripts in Hebrew characters 8
Printed texts and manuscript texts 12
Texts in Hebrew characters and Jewish ideas 14
The currents of Jewish thought 15
Readers and writers of manuscripts in Hebrew letters 16
Texts and books 16

#### Part I Texts

To the second century CE 19
From the second to seventh centuries CE 26
From the seventh to the ninth centuries CE 34

THE MIDDLE AGES 36
The Bible and its study 38
Legal texts 61
Prayers and liturgical poetry 73
Secular literature 79
Mysticism and kabbalah 84
Philosophy and science 86
Miscellaneous writings 93

## Part II Books

Codicology 102
Writing: calligraphic and personal scripts 170
The scribe 204

Appendix: abbreviations, acrostics and the meaning of the Hebrew letters

#### vi Contents

# Part III The history of books and texts

The life and death of manuscripts 234
Libraries 257
Questions of method: codicology and palaeography 265
Texts, copies and text-editions 269
Judgement on readings and the edition of texts 287

### Part IV Some manuscripts \*

Solomon ibn Gabirol: Liturgical poem (Azharot) 296

Joseph ben Simon Kara: Commentary on Isaiah 298

Commentary on the visions of Ezekiel from an Ashkenazic pietist work 300

Al-Bitruji: Digest of Celestial Physics, from Judah ben Solomon ha-Kohen's Exposition of Science 302

Isaac ben Joseph of Corbeil: Small Book of Commandments 304

Isaac Israeli: Treatise on Urines 307
The Book of the Pietists, long recension 309
Maimonides: Guide of the Perplexed 312
Abraham ben Alexander of Cologne: Keter Shem Tov 314
On Stones 317

Bibliography 320
Index of manuscripts cited 336
Index of names and subjects 339
Index of modern authors and editors cited 346