

THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE LIBRARY

The Old in the New

By Herbert C. Zafren

On June 3, 1961, Arthur Goldberg, Secretary of Labor of the United States, brought personal greetings from President John F. Kennedy and delivered the dedicatory address formally opening the Klau Library of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. This event occurred eighty-six years after the birth of a little library as part of the Hebrew Union College. Perhaps the oldest Jewish institutional library in the New World moved into the newest Jewish institutional library building.

Brick and mortar do not make a library; yet, a significant library deserves a commodious and inviting home. Something of the purpose and philosophy of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Library, something of its history, and a sampling of its contents may perhaps be obtained through an imaginary tour of the beautiful, yet simple and functional structure.

A garden approach imparts a dignified, contemplative tone. One looks into the main floor through an expanse of glass, and is invited to enter by the beauty of color, the brightness of lights, and the attractiveness of books and manuscripts on display just inside the main entrance.

THE DALSHIMER RARE BOOK WING

The exhibit is a motivator as well as a teacher. The dedicatory exhibit highlights some manuscripts and early printed books representative of the collections housed in the Dalsheimer Rare Book Building, a separate small building connected to the main Library. Display cases in the Rare Book Building continue the exhibit begun at the main entrance; the warm, striking Rare Book Room, lined with treasures of the centuries, fills one with a profound reverence for the book, while the specific display gently teaches its lesson.

As we walk around the room, we stop first to examine a few manuscripts: a Biblical Codex from the twelfth century; community records of the Jews of Fürth; the beautiful fifteenth century Cincinnati Haggadah, and other illuminated manuscripts invaluable for the history of art among Jews. The Library has a very large collection of Samaritan manuscripts and important items in liturgy, halaka, poetry, science, and other disciplines.

Two major manuscript collections must be singled out. One is a group of 59 booklets, many in fan-fold form, written by native Chinese Jews. This small treasure constitutes practically all the books that remain from the old Chinese Jewish community and are thus excitingly tantalizing. One of the

volumes, of much historical import, is a Communal Register in Hebrew and Chinese, containing a name list of the men and women who made up the community.

The Eduard Birnbaum Music Collection, famous for its 3,000 manuscripts and a similar number of printed volumes of Jewish music, is the other collection deserving of special mention here. Carefully gathered over a lifetime by Cantor Eduard Birnbaum of Koenigsberg, this corpus of material includes the manuscript work of some of Europe's great cantors of the nineteenth century and earlier; a very basic thematic catalog; portraits of cantors, musicians and singers; and printed books of great rarity. Here, in the finest collection of Jewish music in the world, is the source material for the history of Jewish music of the past centuries.

Noteworthy collections of printed books, too, are housed in the Dalsheimer Rare Book Wing. Among them is the library of Dr. Samuel Adler, 19th century rabbi of Temple Emanu-El of New York, which he bequeathed to the Hebrew Union College. This library of almost 2,000 items is an example of a quality book collection of a learned American rabbi of that period.

The Spinoza collection, a large part of which is in the Rare Book Wing, is one of the finest. It consists of the early editions, in many languages, of the works of the man whose modernism was the cause both of his unpopularity among Jews and non-Jews of his day and of his current popularity in both groups. Here, too, are many monographs on Spinoza's life and works, and the works of those who influenced him markedly and who were influenced strongly by him.

The Library contains a rich sampling of books in unusual bindings. Many styles and colors, and materials including wood, leather, fine parchment, velvet, silver, beads, and ivory are brought together here as samples of changing artistic forms. Often important manuscript fragments or even parts of printed books make up the bindings of other books. Nearby is the Library's group of diminutive books. Because of their size and because they tend to be books like the Psalms and prayer books that are put to very heavy use, the "pocket books" of all periods are quite rare. Among the little books from the 16th century is one, the Book of Psalms printed in Mantua in 1571, which appears to be the only extant copy on vellum. In this connection we might mention that among the Hebrew incunabula in the Library are a number of vellum books including the first printed Pentateuch (Bologna, 1482) and the first printed Mahzor (Soncino and Casal Maggiore, 1485-86). The Library also has copies of the paper counterpart of these two books.

Relatively small but important collections exist for various other subject areas. One of these is the group of books in Marathi, the language of the native Indian-Jewish group from around Bombay who call themselves Beni-Israel. Another is the Library's books on the Inquisition, partly in manuscript, partly

in print. Papal bulls, edicts of inquisitors, royal letters, inquisitorial instructions, and early and later histories make up the collection. The Library is particularly rich in sermons preached at the autos-da-fé held by the Portuguese Inquisition at Lisbon, Coimbra, Evora, and Goa. Here also is the collection of tracts published in the early 16th century on both sides of the Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn controversy over the question of the suppression of Hebrew books. One particularly bitter attack on Pfefferkorn in broadside form seems to be a unique copy.

One of the fine collections acquired by the Library many years ago was that of Israel Solomon. This formed the nucleus of an impressive group of British Judaica including the first book printed in England with Hebrew and Arabic type (Robert Wakefield's book on Semitic philosophy printed in London in 1524), a Hebrew grammar in English by Petrus Martinus (Leyden, 1593), the first to be printed in a modern language, and John Row's Hebrew grammar (Glasgow, 1644), the first book containing Hebrew type printed in Scotland. A more recent collection of Disraeliana is also here.

AMERICANA AND OTHER COLLECTIONS

Perhaps the most rapidly growing section and the most heavily used in the Rare Book Wing is that containing Jewish Americana. Recently augmented by the acquisition of the late Hermann Gold's collection which included, among other rare volumes, an unusual copy of the first Hebrew Bible printed in the United States in Philadelphia, 1814, the Americana section also boasts of many firsts such as the first printed Jewish prayer book in English, that of 1761; the first Jewish periodical in this country, The Jew, published from 1823-1825; and several candidates for the first Hebrew book written and printed in America.

The Library has an excellent Josephus collection. Six 15th century editions and well over fifty 16th century editions and issues attest to the strength of the holdings. The editions are in Latin, Greek, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. There is also one Czech edition of The Wars, printed in 1553 in Prossnitz, Moravia, which might be a unique copy.

No short summary of holdings can do justice to the scope of the rare book collection, to the quality and rarity of these treasures, or to their scholarly importance. There is a wealth of subject source material in the individual books and in the smaller groups, and a sweep of cultural history in the varieties of books - who printed them, where, when, and why. Here are Karaitica from the 16th, 18th and other centuries. Three of the four Karaite books printed in the 16th century are represented. Here are Sephardica including the Constantinople, 1547, polyglot Pentateuch which has Ladino as one of its languages. Also present is the first Spanish Bible (Ferrera, 1553), as well as the first Spanish Bible for Christian use (Basel, 1569). Jews were the first to bring printing to Turkey - in the 15th century. A 1659 edition of Manasseh Ben Israel's Esperança de Israel published in Izmir (Smyrna) shows that the Jews

also introduced printing in Roman characters into Turkey. Early Yiddish books of the 16th century and other Yiddish rarities add luster to the collection.

EARLY HEBREW BOOKS

The Library's fine collection of 16th century Hebrew books is the largest single group among the rare printed books. Over 1,300 volumes, perhaps three-quarters of the known Hebrew books of the century, are gathered here. Bible editions are, of course, well represented, as are commentaries, liturgies, and precedent-setting editions of grammars, dictionaries, halakā and ethical works. Occupying a place of high honor is the famous first edition of the complete Talmud printed in Venice in 1520-23 at the press of the Christian Daniel Bomberg. The Library's beautifully clean and well preserved copy in six majestic volumes is the only known complete copy, uniformly bound in contemporary binding.

The crowning jewel of any rare book collection is the book printed in the first half century of printing. The Library is proud to have 154 such jewels, 74 in Hebrew and 80 in other languages. Among the non-Hebrew are a leaf of the Gutenberg Bible, a beautiful Jensen Bible in Latin (Venice, 1476), medical works by Maimonides and Isaac Israeli, conversionist and anti-Jewish tracts. Among the Hebrew books are Nachmanides's Commentary on the Pentateuch, probably the first printed Hebrew book, and at least one representative from thirteen of the sixteen known places of Hebrew printing in the 15th century.

These are the significant books and manuscripts housed in a fully air-conditioned building of their own, so that they may receive the extraordinary care they richly deserve.

THE KLAU LIBRARY BUILDING

From the treasures in the Dalsheimer Rare Book Wing, named in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Dalsheimer of Baltimore, we return to the main Library Building, named in memory of David W. Klau of New York who, before his untimely death in 1961, actively supported the development of the new Library. The Klau Library, a highly specialized research library in the field of Jewish studies, ranks among the largest repositories of Judaica-Hebraica in the world.

Historically the Hebrew Union College Library in Cincinnati began with the founding of the College in 1875. It soon became apparent that a general Judaica collection was needed to serve as more than a curriculum aid. This has been the direction of the Library's growth. Although it continues to support the curriculum, it now caters to the research needs of the faculty and to the needs of scholars and laymen throughout the world. One aspect of this emphasis on research is the publication since 1953 of a journal of Jewish bibliography, Studies in Bibliography and Booklore. The Library also established in 1969 a monograph series, Bibliographica Judaica.

The first of the Library's five floors contains the initial approach: the circular information-circulation desk, the card catalog containing about 1,000,000 cards, the reference collection in a free standing stack in the middle of the very large room, and tables of various sizes and shapes for the consultation of these materials. To relieve the formal setting and to provide variety, one area is set off for displaying a small part of the 2000 or so current periodicals that come regularly; lounge type seating is provided. Close to the card catalog is the staff work area where library materials are acquired, cataloged and prepared for their proper places. Thus the main floor contains the working tools of the Library, the card catalog and the quick reference books to which staff and readers have ready access, as well as comfortable space for the use of the tools. There is no reading room, in the conventional sense, in the entire building; individual study units and group study rooms are placed in close proximity to the books.

COLLECTION OF 270,000 VOLUMES

The Library's book collection now numbers about 350,000 volumes. In order to serve readers effectively and still be properly protected, the collection has been divided into two uneven parts. The older books have been placed in a multi-tier stack of four levels (a part of the old Library building); the smaller but much more rapidly growing group of more recent books occupies several upper floors of the new building. Books published before 1900 are in the "closed stack" - open only to staff and faculty; those after 1900 are in an "open stack" where browsing by all is invited. The capacity of the "closed stack" is over 150,000 volumes and that of the "open stack" something over 200,000 volumes.

These stacks, not unlike the Rare Book Wing, hold distinguished general collections in all areas of Jewish studies. The Library is particularly strong in bibliography, periodicals, Biblical studies, historical and philosophical studies, the ancient Near East. Its Pirke Abot collection is exceptional; its responsa section is good and fully supplemented by the notable private collection of Dr. Solomon B. Freehof of Pittsburgh which has been presented to the Library. Its Yiddish materials were recently augmented by many thousands of volumes, and its modern Hebrew literature holdings are quite respectable.

All through the years the normal acquisition program of the Library was bolstered by the acquisition of collections notable in their own right. Large numbers of books were presented to the Library by Jonas Bondi, father-in-law of Isaac Mayer Wise, by Dr. Wise himself, and in much later years by Jonah Wise, son of the College's founder. Early in the century the M. Kayserling Library of about 10,000 items was presented to the Library as a gift of Julius Rosenwald. Much later the A. Freiman Collection of 7,000 items including 32 Hebrew incunabula became a part of the Library. Acquisition of the academic libraries of persons like Moses Mielziner and Kaufmann Kohler added further

strength. The Louis Grossman Collection of over 18,000 items was noteworthy in this category.

In more recent years the destruction of Jewish life in Europe led indirectly to other important acquisitions. Through the efforts of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc., the Library fell heir to thousands of volumes salvaged from the European catastrophe. Through another avenue the Library was able to acquire the library of the Mannheim Jewish community through unusual and heartwarming circumstances. First, the non-Jewish public librarian of Mannheim risked his life to save the Jewish books from the Gestapo. Secondly, credit must go to Chaplain Henry Tavel and the post-war Mannheim Jewish community for locating the books and sending them to the Hebrew Union College Library. Thus, has the Library grown by the accretion of publicly and privately collected materials.

MODERN FUNCTIONAL FACILITIES

The physical accommodations for these collections are the most modern and functional possible. To reduce the barrier between the reader and the books he needs, reading spaces have been provided in the stacks and adjacent to them. Within the stacks there are many individual study carrels and several group study rooms. Adjacent to the stacks are the individual faculty studies for every faculty member and for visiting scholars, as well as seminar rooms where teacher and student meet in a library setting. Air-conditioning, excellent lighting, and tasteful interior decoration combine in a suitable environment for prolonged study.

On the basement level is the American Jewish Periodical Center with its microfilm camera and several types of reading machines for different microforms. Its purpose is to reduce to film every American Jewish newspaper and periodical in all languages, from the beginnings through 1925 and selectively thereafter. Over 500 titles have already been put on film and more are planned. The audio-visual stack provides storage space for microfilms, tapes, music discs that enhance the music collection, a fine book plate collection, and an outstanding Israeli stamp collection. In addition to microfilm facilities the Library has a photoduplication laboratory of wide capabilities and a bindery that handles precious materials right on the campus.

The tour of the new building, the third library building in a row on this campus, might well end in the staff lounge where one may meet the people who help the Library fulfill its functions. People with subject doctorates, rabbis, other specialists, and their clerical helpers who are distinguished by excellent linguistic knowledge, constitute a rather unusual group. Leadership has also been notable, as the following list of the principal librarians of previous years attests: Sigmund Mannheimer, 1881 to 1902; Judah L. Magnes (a graduate of the Hebrew Union College in 1900), 1902 to 1904; Adolp S. Oke, 1906 to 1933; and Walter Rothman, 1933 to 1945.

In the new Klau Library modernity of beauty and function blends with the ageless treasures that have been, and are being, eagerly gathered. The rich heritage thus assembled thrills those who come to see, motivates those who come to learn, and serves as basis and springboard to those who would advance Jewish knowledge.