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In the increasingly homogenized information environment in which research libraries function nowadays, it is encouraging to see that these institutions still devote considerable attention and resources to the acquisition of rare and unusual materials. At a time when so much of the current output of academic publishers—both monographs and journals—is provided electronically, often in large, take-it-or-leave-it packages, support for special collections enables libraries to maintain their distinctive profiles. Special collecting also offers the subject specialist an outlet for his or her scholarly expertise (not to mention creativity), which is becoming less of a prerequisite in this brave new age of collection development.

Special collecting also serves as a magnet for new offers of materials that complement a library's existing collecting strengths and it offers opportunities for development outreach as well. To take an example that I have observed at close range, when the San Francisco collector David Rumsey announced the donation to Stanford University of his extensive collection of rare maps and atlases (Gorlik 2009), this led other map collectors to Stanford's doorstep. The Glen McLaughlin historical map collection, which specializes in representations of California as an island, was acquired in 2012 (Sweetkind-Singer 2012) and other collectors have lent their maps for digitization, online access, and long-term preservation in the Stanford Digital Repository. This ambitious collecting program feeds, moreover, into concrete research agendas in Stanford's School of Earth Sciences and its Bill Lane Center for the American West. These cartographic acquisitions also buttress the library's pivotal role as a nexus for instruction in Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

All the same, such collection development initiatives must not be construed as narrowly utilitarian exercises, tailored strictly to an institution's research, teaching, and development needs. Subject specialists are expected to keep abreast of emerging trends in scholarship, so acquisition choices that might appear to be speculative often prove prophetic: "If you build it they will come." The University of Pennsylvania Libraries' exemplary acquisition, in 2012, of the Arnold and Deanne Kaplan Collection of Early American Judaica demonstrates both the instrumental and the visionary aspects of special collecting. The collection builds upon that repository's holdings of Judaica Americana; it addresses the current research interests of the Penn community; and it provides that institution with opportunities to reach constituencies well beyond the confines of that campus.

¹ The book is available from Penn Library Store, at www.pennlibrarystore.com.

The Kaplan Collection is a most suitable fit for a university research library located in Philadelphia, a city rich with museum, library, and archival resources of early Americana where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. Plus, with its focus on Judaica Americana the collection adds to the Penn Libraries' already extensive holdings in this area, which include the personal papers of such nineteenth and twentieth-century American Jewish notables as Cyrus Adler, Isaac Leeser, and Sabato Morais. Moreover, it meshes well with the research interests and expertise of Penn's Curator of Judaica Collections, Arthur Kiron, who is the editor of *Constellations of Atlantic Jewish History, 1555–1890*.

Serendipitously, *Constellations* landed on my desk while I was reading *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza*, by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole (New York: Nextbook-Schocken, 2011). There are obvious differences between the two collections. The Cairo Genizah (librarians' preferred spelling) is an accretion of papers gathered largely randomly over a period of centuries. By contrast, the Kaplan Collection has been carefully assembled over the past four decades. It is a composite of materials in various formats: books, pamphlets, newspapers, posters, broadsides, handbills, trade cards, commercial transactions, business ledgers, manuscripts, letters, official and legal documents, *ketubot*, textile samplers, ritual objects, portrait paintings, watercolors, bottles, and—surprisingly—a pistol.

Even so, there are parallels. As related by the authors of *Sacred Trash*, the first generations of genizah scholars were largely preoccupied with identifying and exploring Jewish texts (as that term is traditionally understood.) Among these are the Ben Sira manuscript (the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus), in Hebrew, which Solomon Schechter brought to light; medieval responsa in the hand of Moses Maimonides himself; and manuscripts of liturgical poems (*piyutim*) dating from the thirteenth century. There was a definite “wow factor” to these discoveries. The mounds of seemingly extraneous “trash” in which these gems were for centuries buried were considered to be largely worthless by the pioneers of genizah scholarship. It was left to later generations to sift, sort through, and analyze the mass of remaining scraps in order to reconstruct the patterns of daily life in Egypt, the Maghreb, and the Levant during the Middle Ages. Fittingly, the scholar who is most closely identified with this reconstruction, Shlomo Dov Goitein—the Proust of Jewish social historians—was a longtime faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, where he produced his magnum opus in six volumes, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1993). Other genizah researchers have followed in Goitein's footsteps.

Arguably, much of what is contained in the Kaplan Collection might also (erroneously) be regarded as the ephemeral “trash” of the American Jewish past, or it might be characterized more generously as a curated accumulation of collectibles. As with the Cairo Genizah, however, the whole is considerably greater than its parts. It is in the interpretation of these artifacts that their true value (beyond the purely monetary) may be measured.

Comparisons between the Cairo Genizah and the Kaplan Collection are evoked implicitly by the cover image of *Constellations*, which reproduces an 1870s-vintage lithograph of a combination

steamship-with-sails on the high seas, flying the American flag.² As with Goitein, who in *A Mediterranean Society* carefully teased out the medieval routes of communication and commerce around that great sea, the Kaplan “[C]ollection amply documents the web of eighteenth-century colonial British, French, and Dutch merchant trade spanning the Atlantic and the continental interior”—and Jews’ participation in that trade (Arthur Kiron, “Introduction: Constellations of Atlantic Jewish History,” p. 4). In Kiron’s words, the Kaplans’

core focus on business history led them to amass hundreds of important financial records of some of the most successful American Jewish merchant families of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as notably, they also collected thousands of ordinary documents that detail the daily struggles of Jewish peddlers, craftsmen, and small business owners. (p. 2)

As such, *Constellations* joins a growing body of scholarship devoted to Jewish participation in, and contributions to, the mercantile economy of the Atlantic world in the colonial era and the rapidly developing capitalist economy of the United States throughout the nineteenth century.

The book’s introduction opens with a “double-edged observation” by the British essayist and political figure Joseph Addison:

The Jews are so disseminated through all the trading Parts of the World that they are become the Instruments by which the most distant Nations converse with each other and by which mankind are knit together by a general correspondence. They are like the pegs and nails in a great building, which, though they are of little value in themselves, are absolutely necessary to keep the whole frame together. (p. 1)

To which Kiron adds: “... the Kaplan Collection was assembled in part to better understand the evolution of Jewish commercial, political, social, and religious life in the transatlantic world in which Addison lived” (p. 2). As the essays in this volume suggest, social and economic historians are likely to have a field day with this collection.

Its earliest items, from Peru and Mexico, date back to the sixteenth century and shed light on the veiled Jewish presence in Spain’s overseas colonial dominions, as revealed for example through Inquisition documents. The Kaplan Collection also includes political and legal documents devoted to Jewish settlement and naturalization in the Dutch and British colonies in Surinam, the Caribbean, and North America. Taking Philadelphia’s Gratz family as just one example among many, the collection contains “dozens of original commercial receipts, legal documents, and personal letters [that] illustrate the extent of their business interests and the complex web of relationships—Jewish and non-Jewish—in which they were bound up” (p. 4).

² The lithograph was issued in Salem, Ohio and promoted that city’s “Great One Price Clothier,” Cohen & Brumberg (p. 11).

Although the Kaplan Collection has demonstrable strengths in its coverage of the colonial period, its “heart and greatest part... is focused on Jewish commercial life in North America during the nineteenth century,” writes Kiron (p. 9). One of its notable sub-collections is a “corpus of over four thousand ... Victorian trade (or advertising) cards ... which advertise Jewish-owned businesses” (p. 11), such as the dry-goods merchants Cohen & Brumberg from Salem, Ohio, whose trade card lithograph adorns the volume’s dust jacket. In the division of labor between the pair of collectors, it was Deanne Kaplan who avidly pursued this collecting avenue.

Two other sub-collections deserve special mention: The Kaplan Collection contains hundreds of letters to and from the Philadelphia editor and publisher Isaac Leeser (1806–1868), which add to the preexisting holdings at Penn of the Isaac Leeser archive (a legacy of Dropsie College). In addition, “the Kaplan Collection holds what may very well be the largest collection of early American Jewish photographs” and “extensively covers the career of Solomon Nunes Carvalho, a portrait painter and daguerreotypist who was one of the first commercial Jewish photographers in the United States and perhaps in the world” (p. 12). These are just a few of the collection’s many highlights, and interested readers can turn to the richly illustrated *Constellations* for additional examples. In time, the entire collection is expected to be available for viewing online.³

The Kaplan Collection, appraised at \$8.5 million, came to Penn as a donation. Fueled by a passion for early Americana, Arnold Kaplan, a Pittsburgh native who lived in eastern Pennsylvania, where he served as chief financial officer of United Health Group, and his wife Deanne launched their collecting of folk art and ephemera when they were in their thirties. Over the years, they amassed a Judaica collection containing more than 11,000 items, with new materials added since the main donation was made in 2012. The Kaplans were fortunate in the timing of their acquisitions: much of what they collected had not yet attracted the notice of other Judaica collectors, and as a result the Kaplans were able to purchase many items at very reasonable prices.

At the dedication ceremony for the Kaplan Collection in November 2012, Arnold Kaplan referred to his passion for collecting Pennsylvania German baptismal certificates (*Taufscheine*, in the plural), a collection that ended up at the Allentown Art Museum. He recounted how, in the early 1970s, he came across a printed *Taufschein* that “was sold and filled in by a literate traveling merchant/scrivener in the area. The certificate was not unusual, except for the fact that the scribe signed his name in cursive Yiddish. To the dealer, the document was just another piece of low-value ephemera. After some customary haggling, it was mine for about \$10” (Arnold Kaplan, “Prologue: The Path from a Collector to a Collection,” p. xvi). Over the ensuing decades, as they built up the collection, the Kaplans attracted dealers’ attentions and began to bid at auctions. In addition, the Kaplans became active supporters of Jewish cultural heritage institutions: the American Jewish Archives, the American Jewish Historical Society, and the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) in Philadelphia.

³ An interactive online exhibit of the collection is available at <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/kaplanexhibit/index.html>.

Discussions concerning the donation to Penn of the Kaplan Collection commenced in 2008. The Kaplans proposed that

the Penn Libraries would take ownership of the entire collection and store the nonarchival material in accordance with museum standards. Penn would make the nonarchival material available to scholars or for short-term loans to exhibit at approved institutions. Importantly, the archival material would be scanned and made available to scholars worldwide. (Kaplan, “Prologue,” p. xxii)

Seeing the potential for a formal collaboration between Penn and the NMAJH, the Kaplans then approached the museum with a companion proposal: “The concept was to have the nonarchival items placed on long-term loan under the care of the museum’s staff. This would allow them immediate access to these items both for study and to use in exhibitions” (Kaplan, “Prologue,” p. xxii). These proposals were eventually approved by each institution, which enabled the Kaplan Collection to become the “glue” for this partnership. In an act of exceptional generosity that in some ways matched the donation of the collection itself, “the Kaplans’ philanthropic commitment also funded the professional cataloguing and digitization... in its entirety...” (Kiron, “Introduction,” p. 21).

The donation of the Kaplan Collection was officially announced in December 2012 (University of Pennsylvania 2012) and the Penn Libraries’ inaugural exhibition was held in the first half of 2014. *Constellations* is the companion volume to that exhibition. In common with other exhibition catalogs, this volume includes essays by several scholarly specialists, each of whom elucidates specific aspects of the collection and places it into historical context. In addition, the essays suggest possibilities for future research offered by the collection.

Aviva Ben-Ur (University of Massachusetts–Amherst) reflects upon the “Atlantic perspectives” offered by the Kaplan Collection in its documentation of Jews in the Western Hemisphere during what she calls the “Portuguese Period” (the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries). Her essay hones in on the controversial topic of slavery in the Atlantic Jewish world both as evidenced by documents in the collection and within the framework of a broader analysis of the legal and social status of Jews in the Atlantic colonies.

Jonathan Sarna (Brandeis University) treats the “lived religion” of American Jews during the early decades of the Republic. A number of artifacts in the Kaplan Collection testify to “what is commonly known as ‘Jewish time’” (Jonathan D. Sarna, “Marking Time,” p. 49), including observance of the Sabbath, Jewish holidays, and life-cycle events. Sarna singles out the handwritten Jewish calendar for the Hebrew year 5539 (1778–1779), compiled by Abraham Eleazar Cohen of Philadelphia, and points out that Cohen’s “*lu’ah* apparently traveled to Lancaster [Pennsylvania] with Jews who fled there to escape the British occupation” of Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War (Sarna, “Marking Time,” p. 50). This calendar is accorded pride of place in the collection as a whole.

Adam Mendelsohn (College of Charleston) treats “the business of Jews in America” in his essay, “A Covenant of Commerce.” As Kiron writes, “The Kaplan Collection... contains a uniquely assembled body of primary source material for economic historians to mine” (Kiron, “Introduction,” p. 18). These include business correspondence, invoices, and printed advertising. One unique component of the larger collection, as has already been mentioned, is its extensive sub-collection of Victorian-era trade cards, which is discussed by Dianne Ashton (Rowan University). This advertising and publicity genre flourished from the 1870s to the 1890s, when it was superseded by “the introduction of a cheap rate for privately printed postcards” (Dianne Ashton, “The Kaplan Collection of Victorian Jewish Trade Cards,” p. 77). The trade cards represent a fascinating combination of iconography and typography promoting diverse product lines and services offered by merchants, business owners, and professionals.

The digitization of these publications, documents, and artifacts is proceeding under the Jesselson-Kaplan American Genizah Project, which is based at Penn and engages other repositories of *Judaica Americana* as well. As the Project’s web page explains:

The Jesselson-Kaplan American Genizah Project is an international initiative to integrate digital technologies into the way we study early American Jewry. Its primary goal is to create an open-access digital repository or ‘genizah’ of physically dispersed primary sources that document the development of Jewish life in the western hemisphere from the 16th–19th centuries. (Penn Libraries Website 2015)

Strikingly, as is underscored on that web page, one of the principal inspirations for this “digital genizah” was an earlier project at Penn (in cooperation with Cambridge University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America) involving “physically dispersed fragments” from the Cairo Genizah itself: “Through this initiative we were able to demonstrate how digital technologies may serve as discovery tools to identify matches among a global diaspora of thousands of fragments of medieval manuscripts” (Penn/ Cambridge Genizah Fragment Project 2015). Collaborative digital initiatives such as these two Penn-based projects are becoming increasingly widespread—the result of a timely confluence of curatorial and administrative priorities, and with the active encouragement of funding agencies. Projects undertaken elsewhere involve the sharing of application programming interfaces [APIs], platforms, and content across institutional and national boundaries.⁴

⁴ Here are just two among many examples: (1) *Judaica Europeana* (<http://www.judaica-europeana.eu>; accessed January 1, 2015) “works with libraries, archives and museums to provide integrated access to the world’s most important collections that document the Jewish presence in Europe.” For more details, see Winer 2014; (2) The International Image Operability Framework (IIIF; <http://iiif.io>; accessed December 31, 2014) is a venture involving “a growing number of cultural heritage institutions and open source software projects committed to sharing and displaying image resources across repositories and the web.” The National Library of Israel is one of IIIF’s partner organizations. IIIF seeks to provide common platforms for sharing “image-based resources [that] are locked up in silos, with access restricted to bespoke, locally built applications.”

The Kaplan Collection thus serves a variety of useful purposes: To begin with, it is an assemblage of primary source materials and artifacts that can be studied hands-on, in traditional library and museum environments. Secondly, the collection leverages what one hopes will be a successful and enduring partnership between a university and a museum. And finally, it is being incorporated into a larger digital collection that will be put at the ready disposal of the larger research community. *Constellations* offers a tantalizing preview of the collection's contents and ways in which they might be presented and analyzed. This catalog has deservedly been honored by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference's 2014 Arline Custer Memorial Award—a fine augury for the future of the Kaplan Collection itself, both in its new home at Penn and in the entire scholarly universe.

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