

Two Articles by Ber Borokhov about Judaica Libraries and Librarians

Zachary M. Baker

INTRODUCTION

Ber Borokhov (Borochoy; 1881–1917) was at one and the same time the leading theoretician of Socialist Zionism and a pioneer in the scholarly field of Yiddish Studies, especially Yiddish linguistics. He was raised in the Ukrainian city of Poltava, in a household steeped in learning. His father, Moshe, was Hebrew teacher and an adherent of the *Hoveve Tsiyon* (Lovers of Zion) movement; his mother, Rachel, was a “genteel woman with a great thirst for knowledge.” Borokhov was educated in a Russian gymnasium and at a young age displayed a strong interest in classical languages (including Sanskrit), philosophy, and Marxian political economy (Reyzen 1928). He fused his commitments to both Marxism and Zionism, and in 1906 published the manifesto of the *Po‘ale Tsiyon* party in Russia. Over the decades, his writings on socialism and Zionism have enjoyed an enduring influence.¹

Borokhov’s devotion to Yiddish is less well remembered outside of Yiddishist circles.² Yet, his involvement with Yiddish scholarship began while he was in his mid-twenties and never flagged. He was the author of one of the cornerstone essays of Yiddish studies scholarship, “The Aims of Yiddish Philology,” and he compiled and annotated the foundational bibliography that accompanied that essay, “The Library of the Yiddish Philologist.”³ At the time of his untimely death in December 1917, Borokhov was working on a multi-volume history of the Yiddish language and literature, which unfortunately was never completed or published (Katz 2008, 1: 218–219).

In late 1914, after the outbreak of the First World War, Borokhov arrived in New York, together with his wife, Luba, and their young daughter, reuniting there with his immigrant parents. He promptly threw himself into Labor Zionist activities in the U.S. and Canada, and assumed the

1. Two collections of Borokhov’s essays on Zionism were published in English translation as recently as the 1970s and 1980s (Borochoy 1972; 1984). His essays, “The National Question and the Class Struggle” and “Our Platform,” were included in the 1997 anthology *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*. Borokhov’s writings on Socialist Zionism also enjoyed something of a vogue during the heyday of the New Left in the U.S. and Britain, in the late 1960s and 1970s.

2. In 1966, a collection of Borokhov’s writings on Yiddish literature and linguistic scholarship was published in Israel (Borokhov 1966). The compiler and editor, Nakhmen Mayzil, was a leading Yiddish literary critic and the editor of the weekly *Literarische bleter*, published in Warsaw from 1924 to 1939.

3. Both of these essays were published in *Der pinkes*, ershter yohrgang [5]672, redaktirt fun Sh. Niger (Vil’no: Vilner ferlag fun B. A. Kletskin, [5]673 [1912/1913]); see: B. Borokhov, “Di oyfgabn fun der yidisher filologye,” cols. 1–22, and “Di biblioteyk fun’m yidishn filolog,” [part 2], cols. 1–65 (also included in Borokhov 1966). For a complete English translation, see Ber Borochoy 2007, accompanied by Trachtenberg’s essay (2007).

editorship of the movement’s organ, *Der idisher kemfer*. He was in frequent demand as a lecturer at gatherings of the Jewish National Workers Alliance (the Labor Zionist organization known as the Farband, in Yiddish) in New York and elsewhere. During his two-and-a-half years in the U.S., Borokhov was also a regular contributor to the newspaper *Di varhayt* (*Warheit*), edited by Louis E. Miller, with a daily circulation of about 50,000 copies.



Fig. 1. “Three in One: Ber Borokhov”; *Der Groyser Kunderes*, October 29, 1915, p. 6. Courtesy of New York Public Library. Right to left: 1. His friends say that he is the creator of the Poale Zion movement. [Borokhov as sculptor, standing under portraits of Theodor Herzl and Karl Marx, next to a bust titled “Poale Zion.”] 2. His enemies say that he is a bookworm. 3. In reality, he is a Jew who starts everything and finishes nothing. [Borokhov seated at a desk; the pages are labeled: “labor movement,” “Jewish statistics,” “Poale Zion,” “humor,” “Congress” (i.e., the movement that led to the establishment of the American Jewish Congress), “Jewish history,” “history of literature,” “phonetics,” “Yiddish grammar,” “bibliography,” “philosophy.”]

For *Di varhayt*, Borokhov contributed dozens of articles about Zionism, world politics, Yiddish literature, and the Yiddish theater. Somehow, he also found the time to pursue his research projects, leading him to make the rounds of the most important Judaica libraries in the U.S. His respectful and affectionate portrait of Abraham S. Freidus (1867–1923), the first chief of the New York Public Library’s Jewish Division (now called the Dorot Jewish Division), hints at the many hours that he spent there during his American years. The NYPL librarian was the subject of quite a few journalistic profiles, but practically alone among Freidus’s contemporaries, Borokhov—an experienced bibliographer in his own right—discerned the professional qualities that lay behind the librarian’s assiduous cultivation of his patrons. Borokhov made a point of highlighting the Jewish Division’s exhaustive card catalog and the Judaica shelf classification that its chief had devised. In addition, having previously visited many European libraries with important holdings of Judaica and Hebraica, Borokhov sketched out what he considered to be their “national characteristics,” drawing comparisons between the overseas institutions and their American counter-

parts. He considered NYPL's Jewish Division to be the prototypical Jewish library, in contrast to the state-supported or ecclesiastical repositories that he had visited in Europe.

Yet, this categorization of NYPL's Jewish Division is not entirely accurate. Although the Hebraist intellectual Reuven Brainin (a contemporary of Borokhov) disparagingly compared the atmosphere of Room 217 to that of a yeshiva, the Jewish Division did not function in isolation from its institutional surroundings or the intellectual and informational trends of its times (Brainin 1923).⁴ Freidus himself justified its specialized classification system:

[T]he fact that the subjects comprised by it belong together has been shown and exemplified in three alphabetical Jewish encyclopedias recently published in English, Hebrew, and Russian... in the host of Jewish periodicals that have appeared and are now appearing in the various languages; in the nature and composition of most of the Jewish private collections and institutional libraries, and the few Jewish departments in general libraries... and in the numerous catalogues of 'Hebraica and Judaica' published. (Freidus 1914)

Moreover, the classification scheme that bears his name was just one segment within NYPL's overarching classification system.

In other words, as far as the organization of information was concerned, the Jewish Division—and its first chief—sought to follow the best professional practices, as understood by contemporaneous bibliographers and librarians. The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, alluded to by Freidus, was a characteristic intellectual undertaking of its era; he was an ex-officio advisor for the encyclopedia project and the Jewish Division served as its workshop.

The three other American Jewish libraries (and their librarians) that Borokhov profiled for *Di varhayt* were those of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati), and the Semitic Division of the Library of Congress (precursor of today's Hebraic Section). In the space of a very few years, these institutions' holdings had been catapulted to the front ranks of Judaica and Hebraica repositories worldwide. Borokhov was especially dazzled by the JTS library, with its impressive holdings of incunabula, Genizah fragments, and ancient artifacts. (Subsequently, the artifacts were transferred to the Jewish Museum when it was established by JTS.) Strikingly, although he was a committed Marxist, Borokhov expressed deep respect and admiration for the role that American Jewish philanthropists were playing toward building these libraries into research collections of global importance. In this article (the second of the two articles translated here), Borokhov also pointed to the global dispersion of major Jewish library collections—a distinguishing characteristic that continues to the present day.

4. See also Brainin's article, "Jewish Dreamers in the Public Libraries," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 22, no. 7 (July 1918): 411–413 (reprinted from the *American Weekly Jewish News*, April 12, 1918).

In the summer of 1917, as he was about to leave for a Russia that was in the throes of revolutionary upheaval, Borokhov expressed a degree of wistfulness for the libraries that he was leaving behind in the United States. (He was accompanied by his wife, who was pregnant with their second child, and their daughter.) Referring to those who frequented such places, Borokhov wrote: “Wherever fate might toss them—one of their best memories will always sweep them back to the quiet confines of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library.” Sadly, only a few months after returning to Russia, Ber Borokhov succumbed to pneumonia and died there at the age of only 36. At the end of 1918, his widow and their two children returned to New York, and a few years later they settled in Mandate Palestine. In 1963, Ber Borokhov’s remains were transferred from Kyev to the Kinneret Cemetery, near the Sea of Galilee.

SOURCES

- Borochoy, Ber. 1972. *Nationalism and the Class Struggle: A Marxian Approach to the Jewish Problem*, ed. Abraham G. Duker. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Borokhov, Ber. 1980. “The Aims of Yiddish Philology,” translated by Dovid Katz. *Jewish Frontier* 47, no. 6 (June–July): 15–19. Accessed October 21, 2020. <http://www.angelfire.com/il2/borochoy/yiddish.html>; Accessed October 21, 2020. <http://www.angelfire.com/il2/borochoy/>.
- Borochoy, Ber. 1984. *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation: Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, ed. Mitchell Cohen. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books.
- Borochoy, Ber. 1997. *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Borokhov, Ber. 1966. *Shprakh-forshung un literatur-geshikhte*, gezamlt un tsunoyfgeshtelt: Nakhmen Mayzil (Tel-Aviv: I. L. Peretz Publishing House).
- Borokhov, Ber. 2007. “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology,” translated by Jacob Engelhardt and Dalit Berman, *Science in Context* 20, no. 2 (2007): 355–373
- Brainin, Reuven. 1923. “Ver zol farvalten di idishe opteylung,” *Der Tog (The Day)*, December 20, 1923
- Freidus, A. S. 1914. “The Scope of the Jewish Division in the Light of Library Practice,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 18, no. 2 (February): 106–107.
- Katz, Dovid. 1980. “Ber Borokhov, Pioneer of Yiddish Linguistics.” *Jewish Frontier* 47, no. 6 (June–July): 10–14.

Katz, Dovid. 2008. “Borokhov, Ber,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, edited by Gershon David Hundert. New Haven: Yale University Press. Accessed October 3, 2020. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Borokhov_Ber.

Reyzen, Zalmen. 1928. “Ber Borokhov,” in *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye*, 1, 3rd ed., cols. 212–213. Wilno: Vilner farlag fun B. Kletskin.

Trachtenberg, Barry. 2007. “Ber Borochov’s ‘The Tasks of Yiddish Philology’.” *Science in Context* 20, no. 2 (2007): 341–352.

THE “PILLAR OF FIRE”¹ OF THE JEWISH BOOK WORLD: ABRAHAM SOLOMON FREIDUS, THE CREATOR OF THE JEWISH DIVISION OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, BY B. BOROKHOV. *DI VARHAYT (WARHEIT)*, NEW YORK, MAY 22, 1917, P. 4

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY ZACHARY M. BAKER

There are people who spend some of their time in the company of their fellows and then some in the company of books. That’s how most readers of books probably behave: Life is with people, and books are there to burnish the spirit. Books get read, but life is lived in a different sphere, a world that is alive.

This year, on May 1st, a man who *lives* in the company of books—and indeed almost solely with them—turned fifty. He is a man for whom the books are his very soul, the essence of his spirit, practically in its entirety. And everyone in New York knows this man—at any rate, all those in Jewish New York who one way or another come into contact with the community of Jewish books. This unusual person is everyone’s friend, everyone’s companion in the Jewish book world: Avrom-Zalmen [Abraham Solomon] Freidus.²

Many of those who devote themselves to scholarly research, whether systematically or casually—academics, journalists, and artists—have often had the opportunity to tap into Mr. Freidus’s knowledge and friendliness. And wherever they might eventually wind up—wherever fate might toss them—one of their best memories will always sweep them back to the quiet confines of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library. For here Mr. Freidus reigns and serves as the sovereign over the books and as the friend of each and every researcher.

1. “The LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a *pillar of fire* by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night. The pillar of cloud by day and the *pillar of fire* by night did not depart from before the people” (Exodus 13:21–22, emphasis added).

2. For background on Freidus, see: *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Subjects in Memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus (1867–1923)* (New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1929), including “Freidusiana: A List of Writings by and about A. S. Freidus”: xi–xxii; Leonard Singer Gold, “Abraham Solomon Freidus,” *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 10, no. 3/4 (Winter 1973/74): 71–72.

The Jewish Division of the New York Public Library is Mr. Freidus's creation, his only beloved child, his life's work. The Jewish library and its librarian are evidently two distinct entities with a single soul. The arrangement of the library is Mr. Freidus's arrangement; the classification of the books follows his logic; the enrichment of the collections is his passion.

It is astounding to think that Mr. Freidus first saw the light of day far away from New York City and from that edifice whose portals face onto Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. It hardly seems credible that the librarian of Room 217, on the second floor, was born not in the Astor Library³ but in far-off Riga (26 Sivan 5627 [1867]). He spent his youth in Paris and in the Land of Israel, but at the age of 22 he was already in his fated city, New York. Soon thereafter he studied the art of library management. Twenty years ago, in 1897, he was invited to serve as librarian of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library.

It comes as one of the greatest of marvels, what Mr. Freidus has made of the small, neglected Jewish Division of scarcely 20 years back. Upon assuming his position, he encountered a mere 2,000 volumes lacking any kind of arrangement or catalog—a random and jumbled assemblage of books. Over the course of two decades of indefatigable labor, Mr. Freidus brought it to the point where it numbers 25,000 book and pamphlet volumes, making it one of the largest Jewish book collections in the world—and arranged it in a manner that has become classic, and is followed by other new and modern book collections.

Who has not heard of Mr. Freidus's *catalog*? At present, it is not a printed catalog in book format; Mr. Freidus has published only a few bibliographies in bulletins of the New York Public Library (for example, he has published lists of Jewish periodicals, Yiddish dramas, works on Jewish history and the situation of Jews in various countries, and so forth). The catalog is a system of cabinets, filled with 120,000 cards and with tens of thousands of newspaper clippings—all of it made by the librarian single-handedly. There, in the catalog, you have everything relating to Jewish matters. If you want to know your own biography or the address of your famous friend, you will find it there. If you are searching for a Jewish organization somewhere—say, “Anshe Boiberik”—just consult Freidus's catalog, and there you have it.

And then there is the *classification* (how the books are shelved so that they can be easily located)! This is Freidus's letter-system, which the greatest authorities in library science consider to be wondrous for its simplicity and exhaustiveness. The shelves are labeled according to letters in the alphabet. If you're looking for something that has to do with the Hebrew Bible, go to the 'D' shelves. If you're looking for Jewish history, seek the shelves marked 'X.' If you want *ma-*

3. The Main Branch of the New York Public Library, located at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street since 1911, was established through the consolidation, in 1895, of the Astor and Lenox Libraries, through a bequest by the Samuel J. Tilden Trust and a sizable financial donation by Andrew Carnegie. At the time of the merger, the Astor Library was located on Astor Place, in a building that later housed the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; now it is the home of The Public Theater.

me-loshn [Yiddish], search among the shelves marked ‘T.’ And so forth. Each section is, in turn, classified into additional sub-sections, so that the entire collection of Jewish books is, with the greatest convenience, subdivided into 500 classes.⁴

With pride and joy, the librarian tours you through his kingdom, pointing out the collections’ wealth. He shows you an entire wall of Jewish periodicals: 4,000 volumes of newspapers and journals, among them the rarest and the oldest. Then there are the 3,000 copies of the Tanakh [the Hebrew Bible] and portions thereof (with and without commentaries), its translations, etc. You will find a collection comprising 2,000 volumes in *mame-loshn*, 500 volumes about the Land of Israel, 2,000 commentaries and responsa [on Jewish law]. In New York, you can get everything that is published in America and almost everything from Russia, thanks to our friend’s two decades of collecting.

Mr. Freidus can also show you several attractions: a collection of Tissot’s Bible illustrations, for which Jacob Schiff paid more than \$37,000⁵ and donated to the library; an 800-year-old Samaritan Pentateuch; a few Jewish incunabula (i.e., printed books dating back to the age of Gutenberg); the first Jewish Bible, which came off the press more than 400 years ago: the Pentateuch edition from Bologna, 1482; manuscripts written by Moses Mendelssohn and by Yehudah Leib Gordon (YaLaG⁶), revealing the difficulties that he encountered with Russia’s antiquated censors; and handwritten letters by deceased geniuses.

This is a *Jewish* library, not only in content but also in the entire ambience that Mr. Freidus has created there. Libraries have national characteristics—oh, how do they have them! Go to a library in Italy and you are instantly struck by the air of centuries of inborn refinement, the elegant atmosphere of a Renaissance church. Visit a library in Germany and you find the cold precision of a police station; you don’t quite know why you need to be in the library—did you want to study there, or did you commit a felony? In France a library is somewhat neglected and in disarray, with people chatting loudly and amiably all around you, the way things are in Paris. Upon entering an Austrian library, you encounter a mishmash of the German police spirit and Slavic

4. The outline of the Freidus classification was included in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Subjects in Memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus* and, with modifications, is now accessible online: http://billi.nypl.org/class-mark/*P/about (accessed October 3, 2020). Each of the classification’s main letters, as delineated by Borokhov, is preceded by *P. Louis Ginzberg, Joshua Bloch, Abraham Solomon Freidus, and Daniel C. Haskell, *Studies in Jewish bibliography and related subjects: in memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus (1867–1923)* (New York: The Alexander Kohut memorial Foundation, 1929).

5. \$37,000 in pre-1914 U.S. dollars is equivalent to close to a million dollars in 2020. The Frankfurt-born banker Jacob H. Schiff (1847–1920) was one of the most generous American Jewish philanthropists. Among the Judaica libraries to which he lent his support were the Jewish Division of NYPL, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and Hebrew Union College.

6. Yehudah Leib Gordon (1831–1892) was a Hebrew poet and a leading figure of the Russian Jewish Haskalah. See: Michael Stanislawski, “Gordon, Yehudah Leib,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia*, 1: 619–621, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Gordon_Yehudah_Leib (accessed September 29, 2020). See also Stanislawski’s monograph, *For Whom Do I Toil: Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

disorder. In England, there is cold politeness, where the library is a gigantic engine that serves you with the friendliness of a machine and the staff are merely small cogs that move according to the clock's ticking.

Mr. Freidus has created the prototype of a *Jewish* library: talmudic acuity and the most precise classification, genuine Jewish warmth, and a persistent approach to service that is authentically Jewish. A German librarian gives you the books unwillingly; the English [librarian], with the cold, apathetic attitude of an indifferent person; the Italian, with the easy-going friendliness of a monk who is satisfied to observe a new person who has come from afar. An Italian librarian takes the initiative by befriending you; Mr. Freidus, by what he gives to you. He wants you to feel at home. I'm reminded of the time when I entered the Biblioteca Ambrosiana [in Milan]: the director, Luigi Gramatica, discerned that before him stood someone who was interested in Jewish matters, so he immediately made the following proposition: "You read Hebrew. Help us out. We have just acquired some Hebrew manuscripts from Yemen; would you be so kind as to catalog them?" But of course; I made a catalog on the first day of my visit.

With Mr. Freidus that would be unthinkable. The library belongs to him; he won't allow you to make the slightest exertion. He cares for a reader as a father does for a helpless child; he will do everything to make you feel that that you are not on your own but are in your father's home. He takes pains for your work to be blessed with good fortune—and he wants no recognition for his efforts.

AMERICA'S JEWISH LIBRARIES, BY B. BOROKHOV. *DI VARHAYT (WARHEIT)*, NEW YORK, JULY 1, 1917, P. 5

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY ZACHARY M. BAKER

I recently took advantage of Mr. A. S. Freidus's fiftieth birthday anniversary, to acquaint a wider readership with the achievements of Mr. Freidus in the kingdom of Jewish books. Before my departure from America I am taking this opportunity to acquaint readers here with the other Jewish libraries in America that, to a greater or lesser extent, I have come to know.

Like the Jewish people, Jewish books are scattered throughout the Diaspora. There is no place on the face of the earth which the Jewish people feel to be its center, no spot that tugs all of the threads of economic, political, and spiritual life of our people, and from which all segments of the people might derive a sense of national unity and interconnectedness. Likewise, there is no point on the globe where Jewish book production in its entirety is concentrated. In our times, a Jew cannot lead a fully Jewish life if he remains situated in just one place. Remaining in one country, he feels that something is missing as far as a complete Jewish life is concerned. A Jew in Russia longs for America, whereas in America, on the other hand, he misses the Old Country. And wherever he might be, he longs for the Land of Israel.

And so it is with the Jewish book world. When I worked in the British Museum, I felt quite strongly that it sorely lacked the New York Public Library's renowned Jacob Schiff Fund, and I felt the same at the Asiatic Museum in Petrograd, quantitatively the largest collection of Jewish books in the entire world.⁷ Working in the New York Public Library, I often came to dream about the marvelous old collections of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the rare Jewish books in the Italian cathedrals and palaces.

But nowhere are Jews freer and wealthier than in America. Therefore, it is a fact—a noteworthy fact—that the best and richest Jewish libraries are located here in this country, which has afforded so much happiness and material security to three million Jews from all corners of the earth and all social classes. Although none of the Jewish libraries here can be compared, in terms of the number of books, with the Asiatic Museum in Petrograd, nevertheless the libraries here are better situated—a lot better—and are in a much more orderly state, with a rich range of holdings that are beyond the dreams of any other country. Here we have such excellent philanthropists of books as Jacob Schiff and Mayer Sulzberger, Louis Marshall, and others—and such essential scholars, European-trained specialists in library science, as Dr. Alexander Marx of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and Adolph S. Oko of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.⁸

So, let us proceed sequentially:

In terms both of the number of Jewish books and their level of rarity and interest, the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, is definitely the foremost one in America. It now numbers more than 52,000 volumes, a higher total than any other city in the world has achieved, apart from—as noted—Petrograd. But in the world of books (as with human society), numbers are not the main thing. In terms of quality, the Seminary library is no ordinary Jewish library, but rather, a magnificent museum of Jewish books and antiquities. When you first enter the seminary's prayer hall you face the old wooden door of a Holy Ark that has been brought over from Cairo, Egypt—from the same synagogue where the famous Genizah was discovered.

7. The Asiatic Museum (*Aziatskii muzei*) of St. Petersburg was established in 1818 and in 1930 was absorbed into the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (now the Russian Academy of Sciences). Concerning its Hebrew collections, see: S. M. Iakerson, "Hebrew Incunabula in the Asiatic Museum of St. Petersburg," *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 4, no. 2/3 (2003): 37–57. (That issue of *SEEIR* was also published as a monograph under the title *Judaica in the Slavic Realm, Slavica in the Judaic Realm: Repositories, Collections, Projects, Publications*, Zachary M. Baker, ed. [Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Information Press, 2003].)

8. Mayer Sulzberger (1843–1923), born in Germany, served as a judge in Philadelphia and possessed one of the largest personal libraries of Judaica, which he donated to the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York City. Louis Marshall (1856–1929) was a prominent attorney and Jewish communal leader in New York City; among other offices and honors, he served as Board chair of JTS. The German-born historian and bibliographer Alexander Marx (1878–1953) was for many years the librarian of JTS. The Russian-born Adolph S. Oko (1883–1944) was educated in Germany and in 1906 was appointed librarian of the Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati); he was a prominent scholar of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza and established HUC's collection of Spinoziana in 1911.

The ark is approximately 800 years old and the venerable spirit of history wafts over the wood and the words that are engraved in it, and over the masses of pages and old parchment fragments from the Genizah itself, which are now preserved in the library.

In terms of its antiquities, the library is truly amazing; it has existed for a total of thirteen years and at the outset it numbered a couple thousand volumes, half of them completely useless (they had to be sold off). It was jump-started by Mayer Sulzberger, the famous scholar from Philadelphia, who initially donated 7,000 rare and expensive books, and since then has donated ever more books, without end. Jacob Schiff has contributed quite a lot—for example, he bought up the rare library that was the legacy of the great Jewish bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider⁹ and donated it to the seminary. Nathan Ottinger’s heirs also gave the library a lovely gift: a large bookcase with precious books.¹⁰

To be sure, however, the library owes its greatest debt to the late Professor [Solomon] Schechter, to its librarian, Dr. Alexander Marx (may he live long!), who is the disciple of the greatest luminary of Jewish bibliography, Moritz Steinschneider, and to the old-style scholar, Israel Shapiro.¹¹ Mr. Shapiro graduated from the yeshiva of Galatz [Romania], and continued to pursue his excellent Jewish education in America. In the course of thirteen years, the two of them [Marx and Shapiro] turned the modest handful of books into the most beautiful museum of Jewish books that one could possibly wish for. With pleasure and pride they lead the visitor through the numerous large rooms where countless thousands upon thousands of old books are shelved; you can get lost in such a treasure-house.

What can you *not* find there! You come across an old Torah scroll from China, housed in a special, Chinese-style wooden cabinet. Next to it is a Torah scroll of Berber Jews from the North African desert, written not on parchment but on red leather. There is an entire bookcase of Jewish incunabula, the very earliest imprints from the age of Gutenberg—62 such rarities, and each one is priceless. You see the first editions of the Talmud, not yet divided into leaves – and the amiable Mr. Shapiro tells you that what we refer to as a *daf* [leaf] was only introduced later on, and as it happens, not by a Jew but, rather, by the famous Christian publisher Daniel Bomberg. There are:

9. The polymath Moritz (Moshe) Steinschneider (1816–1907), a native of Prostějov (Proßnitz), Moravia, was the most prominent Hebrew bibliographer of the nineteenth century, renowned for the catalogs of Hebraica libraries that he compiled and published—most famously, that of Oxford’s Bodleian Library (*Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, Berlin: 1852–1860).

10. This is apparently a reference to the businessman and bookseller Nathan Ottinger, identified by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (October 15, 1928) as a *sofer* and publisher of religious books. See: “Albert Ottinger Descended from a Distinguished Jewish Family,” <https://www.jta.org/1928/10/15/archive/albert-ottinger-descended-from-a-distinguished-jewish-family> (accessed October 3, 2020). His account book from the years 1861 to 1863 is held by the JTS Library (OCLC 10625186620).

11. This is evidently a different Israel Shapiro from the Semitics scholar Israel Schapiro, of the Library of Congress.

- over one hundred magnificent volumes printed on parchment;
- over one thousand Passover haggadot, among them the oldest ones with interesting illustrations;
- over three thousand volumes of responsa;
- old and rare miniature *siddurim*; entire packages of casual prayers.

But it is simply not possible to describe everything!

The Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress, in Washington, is smaller, but it is still very young. Its librarian is also young: this is Professor of Semitic Languages Israel Schapiro.¹² He introduced his own system, one that is original and of the highest quality in its simplicity. All of the books have been rebound and classified with precision. His collection is especially rich in its holdings of Jewish poetry: there is no other location on earth where it is possible to find so many Jewish poets—in Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, and Ladino—as in Washington. Professor Schapiro is a bibliographer in the most modern sense: he does not look at the books superficially, but rather from the inside. He is interested not only in a book's appearance or its provenance, but above all in its soul. For that reason, more than anything, the library in Washington possesses value from the literary standpoint.

The [Hebrew Union College] library in Cincinnati is rich in its collections of Judaica, that is, books on Jewish themes in non-Jewish languages. Dr. Adolph Oko is a specialist in philosophical questions and more than anything emphasizes Jewish thought. He has amassed one of the world's largest collections on Baruch Spinoza.

So, as you see, America has a wealth of Jewish books – richer even than in Europe. And as I leave this country, I will always carry with me my memory of the Jewish book collections that are here, and my profound gratitude to their librarians.

12. Like NYPL, the Library of Congress was the beneficiary of Jacob Schiff's generosity. See: Myron M. Weinstein, "The First Deinard Collection of the Library of Congress," *Judaica Librarianship* 12 (2006): 31–48. The Orientalist and bibliographer Israel Schapiro (1882–1957), a native of Sejny, Poland (near Suwalki), served as Head of the Semitic Division of Library of Congress from 1913 to 1944.