

EPISTLE FROM ISRAEL

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Library Openings

Yiddish Culture Club

A new library, containing 3000 volumes, has been dedicated in the Yiddish Culture Club in Rehovot. The establishment of the library was made possible by a sizable donation of books by a Belgian Jew and later, by a Parisian Jew, who also donated a large ancient book cabinet. The opening of the library in May 1984 was attended by the mayor of Rehovot, Yehezkiel Harmelech; the Chairman of the Club, Professor Pinchas Ehrlich; and several members of the National Council for Yiddish Culture.

Yad Menachem Zvi Torah Library

In August 1984, the Yad Menachem Zvi Torah Library—the restored private library of the late Rabbi Menachem Zvi Eichenstein, the former chief rabbi of the Orthodox Jewish community of St. Louis—was dedicated in Jerusalem. The library, complete with furniture, shelves and several hundred volumes, was moved from the former Eichenstein home near St. Louis to a renovated apartment in Jerusalem, which serves as an annex to the Mishkan Hatorah Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Dov Eichenstein, the elder son of the former chief rabbi. The dedication marked the third anniversary of the former chief rabbi's death. The restored Eichenstein library will serve both students of the Yeshiva and other Torah scholars in Jerusalem.

Wiener Library

Another library which moved to a new home to mark an anniversary was the Wiener Library, Alfred Wiener's authoritative collection on anti-Semitism, the rise of the Third Reich, and other topics related to Jews and Judaism in twentieth-century Europe. To mark Wiener's 100th birthday, the library he had amassed in part by smuggling material out of Germany was moved from its temporary home (since 1980) in the Tel Aviv University Library to a permanent home on the campus. The library contains 40,000

documents relating to the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials and records of the Gestapo and of Arab propaganda offices. The Wiener Library was recently the venue of an international conference on extremist political movements chaired by Prof. Saul Friedlander.

Genazim

Finally, the Tel Aviv archive known as Genazim (meaning a collection of records or documents, usually stored in a hiding place; the best-known example is the Genazah of ancient Hebrew manuscripts found in a Cairo synagogue dating from 882 B.C.) moved from the basement of the Writer's House in Tel Aviv, where it had been housed since it was begun by the late novelist Asher Barash in 1951, to a suite of spacious, sunny rooms on the top floor of the building. The move was made possible by a grant from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. The archive is presided over by Dov Ben-Yaacov and is the world's largest collection of modern Hebrew manuscripts and related documents—some two million items constituting a priceless record of the rebirth of Israel's national language and literature.

Cairo and Cremona Genizahs

Two other genazim were in the news in Israel recently: the afore mentioned Cairo Genazah and the Cremona (Italy) Genazah. The world-famous Cairo Genazah was discovered at the end of the last century, in the attic of the Ezra Synagogue in Cairo by Solomon Schechter, Reader in Rabbinic Studies at Cambridge University. It contains such treasures as fragments of the Book of Wisdom by Ben Sira, written about 200 B.C.; a letter written in Spain by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, one of the greatest Hebrew poets and philosophers; and a legal opinion by Maimonides, written in his own handwriting in Cairo. Its discovery—or rediscovery—by Schechter not only shed light on religious literature, but also provided a fascinating view of daily life in the Jewish community of the Arab world in the Middle Ages. Part of this treasure—a collection of manuscripts

lent by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York—was displayed in an exhibition at the Israel Museum alongside the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are referred to as “the elder sister” of the Cairo manuscripts by the curator, Magen Broshi. In an interview published in the *Jerusalem Post*, Broshi stated that the love letters and bills of lading found in the Cairo Genazah were every bit as important as the major documents in revising our conceptions of medieval Judaism.

A genazah which is still waiting to be researched in Europe is the treasure of six-to-seven-hundred-year-old manuscript fragments used as binding and wrapping material for books and documents on the shelves of the Cremona State Archives in Italy. An effort to bring to light such fragments has been initiated by Dr. Josef Baruch Sermonetta, Chairman of the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was instrumental in obtaining a grant from the Italian National Research Center to finance the search for ancient Hebrew fragments in Italy. With the aid provided by the grant, Benjamin Richler, Deputy Director of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at Hebrew University, and his Italian colleague, Dr. P. Francesco Fumagalli, recently searched through ancient documents at the State Archives in Cremona and found dozens of old Hebrew manuscript fragments pasted to the bindings of non-Jewish books. Most of the fragments were bound into documents compiled after 1559, the date of a major burning of Jewish books in Cremona. The fragments are now being painstakingly removed and restored by nuns from the Abbazia di Viboldone in Milan and will be sent for photographing at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts.

Publication

The *Catalogue* of the Dr. Israel Mehlman Collection, presented to the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) about fifteen years ago, was published at the end of 1984. The collection contains about 2,000 books and pamphlets, most of them in Hebrew; 24

incunabula, and other rare printings from over 200 printing houses in Europe, North Africa and the East. About half of the items are traditional works of religion, and the rest are popular works on religion or on secular subjects. The *Catalogue*, which is 400 pages in length, gives full bibliographical details of the edition and of the specific copy in the collection.

Gifts and Grants

A rare and very valuable medieval Hebrew manuscript of a decorated Mahzor (prayer book) of the Roman rite for the Succot holiday, followed by Halakic treatises and *selichot*, written in Italy on parchment about 1400, was donated to the JNUL by Mrs. Peirina Corgnier Jona. Other recent gifts to the JNUL include four important Hebrew manuscripts purchased at an auction at Sotheby's in New York on June 26, 1984 by Mr. Ludwig Jesselson. A 242-page manuscript of five *chumshai torah*, written in 1485 in Yemen, and acquired by the Chavshush family of Tel Aviv seventy-five years ago, was contributed by them in honor of the 500th anniversary of its composition. An entire collection—focusing mainly on Judaica, Oriental studies, and history and philosophy of the sciences—has been left in a bequest by the late Prof. Meir Martin Plessner of the Hebrew University. This strengthens the JNUL's large research collections in each of these fields.

A grant of 340,000 marks by the Volkswagen Fund of Germany has been awarded to the Hebrew University for the cataloging of 23,000 books on Kaballah and Jewish mysticism in the private collection of the late Professor Gershom Scholem, which is housed in the JNUL. The Volkswagen Fund was established in 1961 from profits of the Volkswagen company to encourage research in new and pioneering areas of world science and culture.

Exhibitions

In commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Prof. S. H. Bergman, first director of the JNUL (1920–1935), an exhibition reflecting his varied activities as teacher, philosopher, librarian and Zionist was held in Berman Hall of the library. A book exhibition on the cultural heritage of Hungarian Jewry was also held in Berman Hall, following the Bergman exhibition.

Two exhibitions were sponsored by the JNUL in connection with the Twelfth International Book Fair held from May 5–10, 1985 in Jerusalem: a display of manuscripts and books relating to R. Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) on the 850th anniversary of his birth, and another of some fifty rare He-

brew manuscripts from the Palatine Library of Parma, Italy. The Maimonides manuscripts included the Commentary on the Mishnah in Maimonides' own handwriting, written between 1158 and 1168. The Parma manuscripts, which had never before been shown outside of Parma, were from a collection of more than 1,500 Hebrew manuscripts from the Middle Ages donated to the library in 1816 by Giovanni B. de Rossi, professor of Oriental languages at the University of Parma.

Anniversary Celebrations

Both the Maimonides exhibition and the Parma exhibition, in addition to coinciding with the International Book Fair, were part of anniversary celebrations—the former of 850 years since Maimonides' birth, and the latter of sixty years since the establishment of the Hebrew University. In addition to these exhibitions, many other events of interest to Judaica librarians were held in connection with these two jubilees. Festivities were held in the Rambam (Maimonides) Library in Tel Aviv to celebrate both the 850th birthday of its namesake and the fiftieth anniversary of the library's founding. The 68,000-volume library was founded by the Tel Aviv municipality in 1935 to mark Maimonides' 800th birthday.

The Israeli organizations involved in marking Maimonides' 850th birthday include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Education Ministry; the National Science Academy; the Justice Ministry; the Hebrew University; Tel Aviv University; the Central Institute for Cultural Relations between Israel and Latin America, Spain and Portugal; the Rambam Institute; and the Tiberias municipality. Events in addition to those mentioned above included an international conference of Judaic studies dedicated to the philosophy of Maimonides held in August, 1985; a symposium on his teachings during the Jerusalem Book Fair; a wide range of educational activities about Maimonides in Israeli schools and universities; and an exchange of academicians, artists and musicians between Israel and Spain.

Finally, the Hebrew University and the Jewish National and University Library, which was established along with it in 1925, marked their sixtieth birthdays with a variety of gala events. One of the events of particular interest to Judaica librarians, however, was an exhibition on the history of these two institutions.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW!!!



Jerusalem Book Fair Next April

The 13th Jerusalem International Book Fair will be held in Jerusalem, April 6–12, 1987.

Over the past 26 years, the Jerusalem Book Fair has become one of the most important literary events on the international publishing calendar, with attendance of over 1000 publishers from some 42 countries.

At each fair, more exhibitors from all over the world, publishers, writers, scholars, literary agents, librarians and book lovers discover the commercial and cultural benefits of this unique Book Fair in the unique City of Jerusalem.

Highlights of the next Fair will include:

- The Awarding of the distinguished *Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society* (The Prize was last awarded to Czech writer Milan Kundera)
- The Third Forum of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies on the topic: "The Future for Publishing Across Language Frontiers."
- The Jerusalem Philosophical Encounters, and
- The Third Jerusalem Symposium on Encouraging Reading—a worldwide gathering of reading specialists.

The Fair, which is held biennially at the Jerusalem Convention Center, Binyanei Haooama, is a joint project of the Jerusalem Municipality, the Israel Book Publishers' Association, and the Israel Ministry of Industry & Trade.

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