

Documenting Heritage: Important Collections in the Frankfurt University Library, Judaica Division on the Internet

by Dr. Rachel Heuberger

The implementation of new techniques in libraries and archives has led to a revolutionary change in information management and has created new ways of accessing many hitherto hidden treasures. A great resource for Jewish research and education in general is the Judaica Division that is part of the *Frankfurt Stadt und Universitätsbibliothek*.

1. The Institution

The Frankfurt University library owns the largest collection of literature on the Jewish people and the State of Israel in the Federal Republic of Germany. Its task is to document the history of the Jewish people and to serve as a resource for study and research in Germany. Financed mainly by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, the Jewish Division is acquiring:

1. all relevant national and international publications covering all aspects of Jewish life and culture in a most comprehensive manner. This means literary ‘everything’ relevant to the history, the religion, the philosophy, the literature, and the identity of the Jews worldwide since the 4th century BC—including books, pamphlets,

- periodicals, newspapers, microforms, sound recordings, videotapes, and electronic databases—from all over the world and in all languages.
2. all publications on the modern State of Israel, including topics such as architecture, geography, education, politics, publishing, film, radio and television, the ethnic minorities in Israel (Palestinians, Druze, etc), and the Middle East Conflict. Special emphasis is placed on materials in Hebrew, particularly the literary production from various ethnic artists and producers, including fiction.
 3. about 500 foreign and 40 German periodicals of Jewish studies are held on subscription. All the materials of the Jewish collection are listed in the on-line catalogues of the library.

2. History

The origins of this Collection go back to the old Hebraica and Judaica Collection which was founded at the end of the 19th century by donations from Frankfurt Jews. At the beginning of the 20th century it was growing steadily due to the generous support of well-to-do Frankfurt Jewish families, like the Rothschilds, to name only one but certainly the most famous of these Frankfurt Jewish patriotic benefactors. These families financed the acquisition of large collections of Jewish books and the manuscripts of Rabbis and scholars from Frankfurt and abroad. When the last Frankfurt Rothschild, Baron Wilhelm Carl von Rothschild died in 1901, his widow Baroness Mathilda donated his private collection to the library.

Aron Freimann (1871-1946) was in charge of the collection for 35 years, from 1898 till 1933, and made it the largest and most significant Hebraica and Judaica

Collections on the European continent. Thus he created the basis for the collection of today. Freimann was an outstanding scholar in the field of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, who engaged in countless scientific, intellectual and social activities and advanced the study of Jewish bibliography, history, genealogy and the development of Hebrew printing. He was called ‘Master of Jewish Bibliography’ and characterized as ‘the greatest living authority in the fields of Jewish Bibliography’ in the 20th century. After being dismissed in April 1933, he succeeded in immigrating to the United States in 1939, where he continued to work at the New York Public Library.

In 1933, after Freimann's dismissal, the collection contained about 40,000 volumes, half of it Hebraica—that is, books written in Hebrew letters. Under the Nazi regime, the collection remained intact. During the Second World War, large parts of the Hebrew collection were destroyed, but the most valuable Hebrew units survived the war.

3. Collection of Today

The collection of today thus contains important historic parts: the Hebrew manuscripts, the Hebrew incunabula, and the collection of Yiddish prints as well as the historic Judaica collection, containing some 20,000 volumes mostly in German and other European languages, all of which survived the war. Starting in 1949 on the basis of these Hebraica units and the 20,000 Judaica books, the collection has grown so that it now has more than 150,000 units, with modern literature being an integral part of the general collection. Every year we add about 5,000 units to the collection.

Hebrew manuscripts

This collection comprises 339 Hebrew manuscripts, the best-known of which is the MS of Glückl of Hameln (1645-1724), a Jewish merchant woman from Hamburg. There exists a special printed catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts.

Hebrew incunabula—books printed before 1501

The library holds 65 early Hebrew prints (about half of all known Hebrew incunabula).

They were listed by Aron Freimann in 1920 and are today listed in the general Incunabula catalogue of the Library. In cooperation with Moses Marx, Freimann also published between 1924-1931 an eight-part collection of Incunabula pages, entitled *Thesaurus of Hebrew Printing of the 15th Century (Thesaurus Typographiae Hebraicae Saeculi XV)*. This is an early example of the conventional way of documentation and information management, implemented already in the Twenties by Freimann. Because the Hebrew Incunabula were spread all over the world, he decided to publish a work containing facsimiles of the specimens, including typical pages from all known Hebrew incunabula produced by printing shops operated by Jews during the 15th century.

Freimann's work provides a survey of all the different types and sizes of letters as well as ornamental blocks and illustrations used by these printers. In the years 1967-1969 the *Thesaurus* was re-issued in Jerusalem, proving the fact that the *Thesaurus* had become an indispensable work of reference for the bibliographer and research student working in the field of early Hebrew printing. Many of these incunabulas are part of the Library.

4. Digital Collections

4.1. *The Collection of Yiddish Prints*— www.jewishliterature.de

One of the outstanding collections documenting Jewish heritage is the Library's collection of Yiddish prints, which is unique in its completeness. The collection consists of about 800 extremely rare and precious Yiddish and German-Jewish books printed in Hebrew letters. The books were written for the daily use, many especially for the use of Jewish women.

The dates range from the middle of the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Altogether 622 titles have been published before 1900, the rest just after the turn of the century.

The oldest book in this collection, a Yiddish translation of the Humash, dates back to the year 1560 and was printed in Cremona, Italy, which is followed by a Humash printed in Basel, Switzerland, 1583. In East Europe Prague appeared early on as a city where Hebrew and Yiddish were printed. Our oldest book is *Sefer leqah tov* by Moses Ben Issachar ha-Levi Saertels, Prag 1604. In the 17th and 18th century many Hebrew books originated in Germany. There were centres of Hebrew printing in the Frankish area in places like Fürth and Wilhermsdorf, in the Slesian area in Dyhernfurt (Breslau), and in the Rhine-Main area in towns like Hanau, Offenbach, Frankfurt/Main, and Sulzbach.

In Western Europe, Amsterdam was from the middle of the 17th until the middle of the 18th century the centre of Hebrew and Yiddish book printing for the whole of Europe. Ashkenasic Jews had lived in Amsterdam since the beginning of the 17th century and the first Ashkenasic Jewish community there was founded in 1635, after many Ashkenasic Jews had fled from Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukraine because of

the ongoing persecutions in the East, such as the Thirty Years War, the Chmielnicki pogroms (1648-1649), and the first Nordic war (between Poland and Sweden from 1655-1660). In the 19th century the main printing locations were in East Europe, in Wilna, Warsaw, and other Polish and Russian towns.

Altogether, these books present the whole range of Yiddish dialects and the development of the adaptation of the Yiddish language to the environment. Thus the books from the German-speaking areas comprise many German expressions and there are numerous passages of German text written in Hebrew letters. The books printed in Amsterdam are mostly in a west-Yiddish dialect. On the contrary the Yiddish, which was spoken and written in the East European Shtetl in the 19th century is made up of different speech elements and grammatical rules.

In the collection there are many editions of so-called women's bibles, the Zene Rene literature. They contain biblical narratives in Yiddish translation for the understanding of Jewish women who did not learn to understand Hebrew. They were used frequently and read on Shabbat-afternoon. The term itself Tse'edah U-Re'eha is an abbreviation of the verse 'Tse'edah U-Re'eha' ('Benot Zion, come out and see, daughters of Zion,' Song of Solomon 3:11). These prints were often reproduced for centuries and are printed in Yiddish to this day.

Many of the liturgical books are works of Tehines (Tehinot)—or Tehinot and Vakashot—and contain prayers that do not constitute a regular part of the Hebrew-Aramaic liturgy. They were mostly composed for women as additional liturgical material to fulfil special religious commandments, such as lighting shabbat-candles, or for praying in special situations, such as giving birth, praying for the health of children and relatives, and so on.

Besides liturgy, many books describe and explain the religious customs, in order to tell Jews rules of righteous behaviour. Today these books are important sources for historical research, as they are portraying Jewish daily life centuries ago.

Religious customs were also laid out in the Minhagim Books, some of them containing illustrations that are famous even today. They have served as models to portray daily Jewish religious life and have been reprinted since then again and again.

In addition there are many books of religious legends about divine miracles, the so called Maase Buch, plays for festivals, like the Purimspiel or the history of Yehudit and the Maccabeans for Chanukah, and even novels. Also interesting are a few translations of widespread stories and folk tales of the late Middle Ages that show that Jews also read the general literature, like translations of the well-known fairytale *A Thousand and One Nights* and the legends of Arthur and his knights. The Sefer Yossipon is a famous example of one of the few chronicles known from the Middle Ages. There are also some historical descriptions that were printed before the French Revolution and the Emancipation of the Jews and that give an accurate report on the situations of the Jews within the traditional community.

From the 19th century there are mostly volumes of Yiddish fiction of famous Eastern European Yiddish writers such as Isaak Leib Perez, Scholem Alejchem, and Schalom Asch.

Thus this collection is a resource for the literature of the Jews as well as a documentation of the history and religion of the Jews. It is a particularly important source for neglected areas like women's studies or daily life, for which it is difficult to find material witnesses.

As with many old books, which are threatened with time, the Yiddish prints are also in bad shape after years of use and handling and unsuitable storage conditions caused by the war. One must not forget that many of these prints were everyday literature, intended to be cheap and practical and to be used in the family. They were not, like some of the religious Hebrew books, precious prints that were kept and used with utmost care. Today the collection is, because of its completeness, extremely important for research purposes. Many of these Yiddish Prints are very rare and are hard to find in Germany or Europe. With the growing interest in Yiddish literature, the demand for the books has been growing in the last years, while the condition of the books has forced the library to maintain a very restrictive policy regarding the use of the originals. Digitizing the historic material and creating a database enables unrestricted use of the books.

Thus modern techniques provide global Internet access to the material witnesses of Jewish heritage. The digitization of the collection of rare Yiddish prints in the Frankfurt Judaica Division is but one example of the use of modern techniques to transmit traditional texts.

The second example differs in content and as well as in technical presentation and is a project still in progress.

4.2. The collection of Jewish periodicals in the German language area—

www.compactmemory.de

Jewish periodicals represent an invaluable source for the research of Judaism from the 17th and 18th century onward and are constantly referred to by scholars and students of Jewish studies. A common problem for all scholars are the difficulties of accessibility of

the majority of these periodicals due to heavy losses during National Socialism. Complete sets of the journals are to be found in only a few libraries, the volumes scattered in various places, and often they have to be used in different modes—as originals, reprints, microfilm, and fiche. Newspapers from the end of the 19th and beginning 20th century are in bad shape because of the bad quality of the paper, so librarians are hesitant to agree to interlibrary loan for originals. Researchers have to accept copies or visit the libraries themselves, meaning considerable investment of work, time, and money.

Therefore the reproduction of Jewish periodicals in digital form is an urgent desideratum of world-wide research. The project provides global Internet accessibility to these major Jewish periodicals.

The project is carried out by the Frankfurt Library in cooperation with the Institute for German Studies at the University in Aachen (*Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen*) under Prof. Hans-Otto Horch and his assistants and the *Bibliothek Germania Judaica* in Cologne. The project is financed by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Foundation) and has been approved for six years from 2000-2006. We have just begun the last phase, which will last two years.

German language texts were processed first, for pragmatic reasons. The project started with eight periodicals, as of today 25 periodicals are online, the majority in German. At a later stage these are to be followed by publications in Hebrew and Yiddish. The periodicals represent the whole spectrum of German-Jewish identity. They differ thematically and include all spheres of life and culture. Examples:

- *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 1837-1922—the longest running Jewish weekly, representing the reform movement in Judaism, engaging for emancipation and equality. Prominent editors were Ludwig Philippson, Gustav Karpeles, und Ludwig Geiger
- *Die Welt*, 1897-1914—weekly of the Zionist movement from its founding until World War I
- *Die CV-Zeitung*, 1922-1938—weekly liberal periodical of the Central Organisation of German Jews, *Centralverein der deutschen Juden*, successor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*.

This database offers not only the texts of the periodicals—as images or full-text, depending on the script—but also a variety of search methods. All essays are catalogued; authors, titles, and subject headings appear in corresponding indexes and enable students to look directly for specific themes and items. In the full-text version one can search for words or combination of words.

5. New Tasks

New ways of transmitting heritage

Both projects will answer the needs of students and scholars in the field of Jewish and German studies, which are growing constantly in Germany today. They not only preserve Jewish heritage but by offering new methods of information access they revolutionize the means of transmission. No longer is the student coming to the library, to a central point of sources, now the information is coming to the student, into his or her home. Thus the

information about our tradition can be spread out and our future task is to find the most efficient ways of reaching our public.