

Judaica
Collection
A History

The Divinity Library
The
Jean and Alexander Heard
Library
Vanderbilt University

Preface to the Updated 1987 Edition

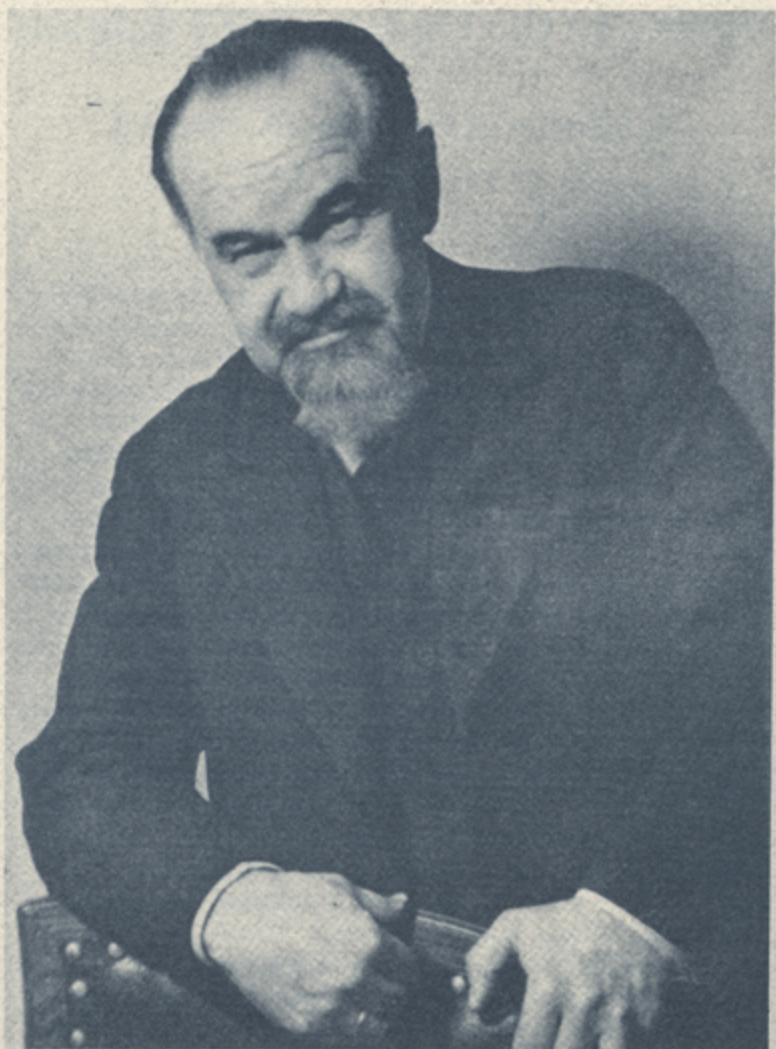
A History of the Judaica Collection

Updated edition, 1987

The staff of the Divinity Library celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of its Judaica Collection with a reception held on May 29, 1980 in the Library. Guests of honor for the occasion were A. Frederick Kuhlman, founder and first Director of the Joint University Libraries, and Lou H. Silberman, Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought from 1952 to 1980. Professor Silberman spoke of "Delights of the Judaica Collection," following the presentation of "A Concise History of the Judaica Collection" by David C. Hopkins. At that time David was serving as bibliographer for the Hebrew Bible program area. He has since finished his dissertation, *Israel's Roots in Canaan: The Origin and Growth of the Fallow-Year Law As a Mirror of Israel's Life on the Land*, which has been published recently in the *Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series, Number 3*, under the title *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age*, Sheffield, England; Decatur, Georgia: Almond, 1985. He and his wife, Denise (who also holds a Ph.D. degree in Hebrew Bible), held a joint appointment on the faculty of Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1980-1986. Likewise, they have accepted a second joint appointment to the faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. as of the fall of 1986.

The following is a transcript of the history given on that occasion, with minor revisions, plus an update on happenings bearing on the development of the Judaica Collection since then.

—DRP



ISMAR ELBOGEN

born 1874 at Schildberg (Posen), died 1943 in New York

A Concise History of the Judaica Collection

David Hopkins

Beginnings

The Judaica Collection of the Divinity Library was begun in 1945 with the acquisition of the professional library of Ismar Elbogen, noted authority on Jewish history and religion. Elbogen had died in August 1943 after a long academic career which flourished at the famed *Lehranstalt für Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin, where he taught from 1902 until 1933.¹ At the time of his death he was working as a research professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City to which he had been invited by a consortium of American Jewish Seminaries.

The complete bibliography for Professor Elbogen's works was compiled by his wife, Regina.² It bears testimony to his enormous contributions to *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums*;³ it includes not only the volume *A Century of Jewish Life*, which Elbogen was selected to write as an update to Heinrich Graetz's monumental *History of the Jews*, but it also lists Elbogen as joint editor of *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.⁴ The stock from which the Judaica Collection has grown is an impressive source.

The complex negotiations to obtain the Elbogen library were begun with his wife in April 1944 with Joint University Libraries' (JUL) Director Frederick Kuhlman's initial letter of inquiry.⁵ A stream of correspondence between Kuhlman and Mrs. Elbogen led to the finalization of the sale in December 1944, and the shipment of the Collection took place at the end of February 1945.⁶

Community Enthusiasm

Negotiating with Mrs. Elbogen to purchase the library was only half of Dr. Kuhlman's task; he had also to find someone willing to donate the necessary funds. Kuhlman's letter files tell a fascinating story of his cultivation, indeed his near courtship, of Mrs. Sarah Lowenstein Teitelbaum for the required contribution. Mrs.

Teitelbaum, widow of Henry Teitelbaum, one of the founders of Loveman's retail clothing store, was a leader of Nashville's Jewish community. She served as president of the Nashville chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women and was a member of the Magazine Circle, the oldest Jewish literary society in town. In addition, she had ties with Sam M. Fleming, then on the Executive Committee of the Vanderbilt Alumni Association (later president of the Board of Trust.).⁷

It appears as well that Mrs. Teitelbaum was something of an adventurer. She was one of the first two women in town to own and drive an electric car. Mr. Teitelbaum never drove, but his wife could be seen about town in what appeared to be a mobile glass box, an unforgettable sight which allowed the public a good look from all around.

Mrs. Teitelbaum had the financial means to help Kuhlman acquire the Elbogen library, and she had a lifetime of dedication to Jewish concerns, so she could be expected to have an interest in the project. One additional factor entered into the mix, however, and it may even have been decisive. The Teitelbaums and the Elbogens had met in Europe in the 1930's, before both women were widowed; thus, there was a point of personal contact between the two women. Kuhlman's approach to Mrs. Teitelbaum was masterful. One of his first letters reads in part:

My dear Mrs. Teitelbaum:

I am sending you this copy of a letter to Mrs. Elbogen⁸ because I believe it will be of great interest to you.

It relates to one of the greatest opportunities that has come to our Libraries in the past ten years. After you have had an opportunity to read this letter, I should like to see you because I believe you may have some suggestions on how we might bring this great library of Jewish literature to Nashville.

That was December 9. Three days and a telephone conversation later, Kuhlman describes a plan of action in a second letter:

The plan, as it has been developed, assumes that we find one or more persons, preferably not too many, who would like to help us acquire this library. We should like to honor on the one hand the memory of Dr. Elbogen because of his great scholarship, and we

should like to call attention to his collection, which is one of great distinction. But we should also like to have this library come to Nashville as a gift of one of our public spirited citizens. He or she might do it in memory of a loved one. Thus, for instance, the bookplate could be modified and the inscription might read as shown. (Figure 1)

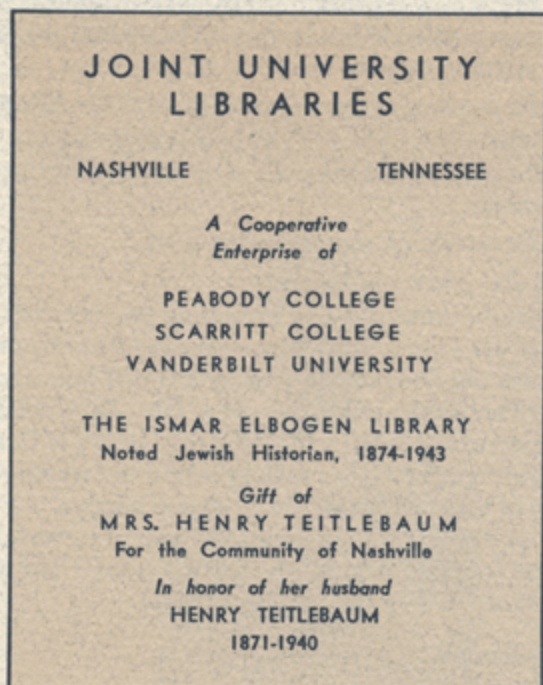


Figure 1

I hope you will forgive me for using your name in this connection.⁹

As an aside at this point it should be noted that Frederick Kuhlman included in his appeal to both Mrs. Elbogen and Mrs. Teitelbaum a list of a great variety of reasons why the Elbogen library should come to Vanderbilt. Prominent among these was the absence of any center of Jewish learning in the Southeast and the real need for a library to ground a better understanding and

appreciation of Judaism.¹⁰ A somewhat trivial, but none-the-less telling, expression of this need appears in a thank-you letter addressed by then Vanderbilt University Chancellor Oliver C. Carmichael to Mrs. Teitelbaum on December 22, 1944. In closing Carmichael wishes her a pleasant Christmas.¹¹

Needless to say, Mrs. Teitelbaum took Frederick Kuhlman's very subtle hint and agreed to provide \$6,000 for the acquisition of the collection as a memorial to her husband. The \$6,000 gift provided for a rather startling range of items:

1. the purchase of the collection of Professor Elbogen which contained 1,837 titles in 2,200 volumes,
2. the packing and shipping of the library from New York to Nashville,
3. the cataloging and processing costs.

Has \$6,000 ever purchased so much?

Then began the difficult task of processing the collection for public use. It was a task complicated by the fact that no one (neither faculty nor librarian) at Vanderbilt at that time was able to handle the Hebrew titles in the collection. First, Dr. Kuhlman secured the services of Isaac Goldberg at the Library of Congress to advise on matters of a Judaica profile which would set the collection apart by use of the term *Judaica* above the call number, etc. Then the services of Rabbi Irving M. Levey, librarian of Hebrew Union College, were enlisted to catalog the Hebrew titles.¹² The task was very nearly completed by the Summer of 1948.

Loventhal Endowment

The growth of this Elbogen library nucleus into today's superb collection was nurtured by other friends of the Joint University Libraries. About the same time that Director Kuhlman was courting Mrs. Teitelbaum for the means to purchase the Elbogen library, a fund was established in honor of Lee J. Loventhal, Nashville insurance executive and member of the Vanderbilt Board of Trust.¹³ Lee J. Loventhal had played a significant role in the establishment of the Joint University Libraries, contributed substantially to Fisk University, and was indeed a leader in the promotion of education, religion, and social welfare. The fund was established by his family for the purchase of material to supplement

the Elbogen collection, particularly books published since 1914 and of special importance to the world-wide Jewish crisis of the 30's and 40's.¹⁴ A relative of Loventhal's (currently a member of the Vanderbilt Board of Trust), Mrs. Mary Jane Werthan, must be singled out as the moving spirit of this endeavor.¹⁵ Among other contributions, Mrs. Werthan helped design the distinctive bookplate carrying Loventhal's portrait.¹⁶ The Lee J. Loventhal bookplate was affixed to a number of books until the fund was exhausted in 1960.¹⁷ (Figure 2)



Figure 2

Faculty and Administration Support

When the late Samuel Sandmel came to Vanderbilt in 1949 to become the first Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, one of his first acts was to spend nearly half of the Loventhal fund. This spending was not frivolous, however. The importance of Sandmel's careful and diligent acquisitions policy cannot be overestimated. His goals as he outlined them in 1951 were "...a modest but good collection of Judaica...to create a collection along the lines of Yale or Harvard."¹⁸

It was during this same early period of the Hillel professorship that the energy and dedication and commitment of JUL Director Frederick Kuhlman became so apparent. His letter files fairly teem with correspondence with booksellers, publishers, and librarians in which he is seen directing the effort to overcome Vanderbilt's late start in assembling the scholarly material essential to advanced graduate work in Jewish Studies. He arranged approval plans and standing orders, sold or swapped duplicates with the libraries of Hebrew Union College, Dropsie University, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He even sent out feelers to individual booksellers about the availability of fine Jewish material and endeavored to secure other libraries such as Elbogen's, only on a smaller scale. The correspondence gives the impression of Dr. Kuhlman's, if not feverish, then at least energetic pursuit of excellence in Judaica, an achievement to which all at Vanderbilt owe a great debt.

This same period also saw additional material for the Judaica Collection provided by a group of Nashvillians who designated themselves "Friends of Jewish Studies."

Goodhart Collection

Of special significance in the history of this Collection are the approximately 160 works (books and photostats) on the great Jewish philosopher Philo given to the Library by Howard Lehman Goodhart in 1951. The precise connection between Mr. Goodhart, whose *New York Times* obituary describes him as "stockbroker, bibliophile, and philosopher,"¹⁹ and Vanderbilt appears to lie in Samuel Sandmel's studies at Yale where he wrote his doctoral

dissertation on Philo under the direction of Erwin R. Goodenough.²⁰ Goodenough and Howard Goodhart had earlier collaborated on the publication of *A General Bibliography of Philo*.²¹ Harvie Branscomb, then Chancellor of Vanderbilt, may also have had a hand in igniting Goodhart's interest in enriching this collection. Previously, Goodhart had given generously from his personal collection of 15th century books and manuscripts to establish a Medieval library in the name of his wife at Bryn Mawr. Goodhart's close ties with Yale University meant that Yale too was a

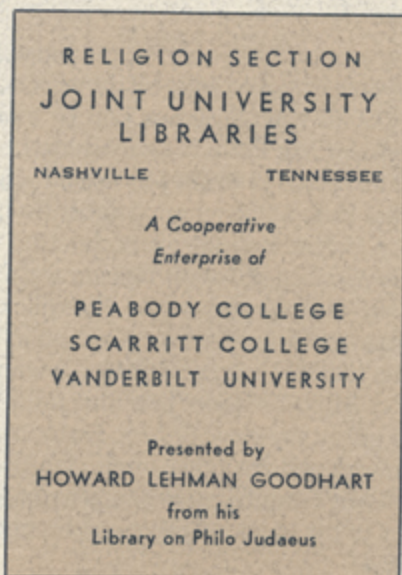


Figure 3

beneficiary of his avid interest in Philo. In fact Goodhart's Philonic library was first sifted by Yale and only then offered to the Divinity Library which was allowed to glean.²² But what a harvest anyway! Among the 160 works were a number of rare books including six from the late 16th century, which are now housed in the Library's Memorabilia Collection.²³

One of the advantages of making a gift such as this during one's lifetime is that it allows one to have a say in the design and wording of the bookplate. Goodhart chose a simple one. (Figure 3)

He remarked upon seeing the printed version of this plate.

"I like the bookplate in every way. I think the wording and form clear and dignified."

This remark appears in a letter to Frederick Kuhlman dated June 25, 1951. Goodhart's obituary was dated just six weeks later. It was fortunate indeed to have received his gift which by itself raised the quality of the Philonic collection in Judaica to heights of excellence.

Eskind Memorial

A continued strong acquisitions policy for the Judaica Collection has been made possible in recent years by the gifts of Mr. Manuel Eskind in memory of his wife. Professor Lou H. Silberman was instrumental in assisting Mr. Eskind's establishment of the Leah Belle Levy Eskind Memorial in 1963. Mr. Eskind is no stranger to philanthropy; he has been a veteran campaigner for the Jewish Welfare Fund Drive.²⁴ Mrs. Eskind's life of devotion to Jewish agencies such as the Council of Jewish Women and the United Jewish Appeal as well as her service to the Nashville community found an appropriate and fitting commemoration in the advancement of the Judaica Collection.²⁵ Her memorial fund was begun with a gift of \$1,000.²⁶ Since that time until 1980 the Library received a gift in the name of Mrs. Eskind annually, and the sum of these gifts surpassed any other single donation to our Judaica Collection. Mr. Eskind's generosity played a substantial role in the maintenance of the Judaica Collection's tradition of excellence. (Figure 4)

Conclusion

Careful and spirited acquisitions and munificent giving mark the history of the Judaica Collection here at Vanderbilt; these have sustained its continuing growth. In terms of sheer numbers this growth has been tremendous. From the original 1,837 titles of the Elbogen library the Collection had doubled to more than 4,000 by 1962. Just a little over a decade ago in 1968, close to 5,500 titles could be found on the Judaica shelves. As of this year, 1980, the number has grown to more than 7,000 titles. If the quality of the holdings could be measured numerically, there would be much of

which to be proud. Quantity cannot alone measure the true value of the Judaica Collection, for the quality of its contents speaks more forcefully than its mere mass. All who have enjoyed the opportunity to use it can attest to its breadth and depth and the joys which await any who explore Vanderbilt's Judaica Collection.

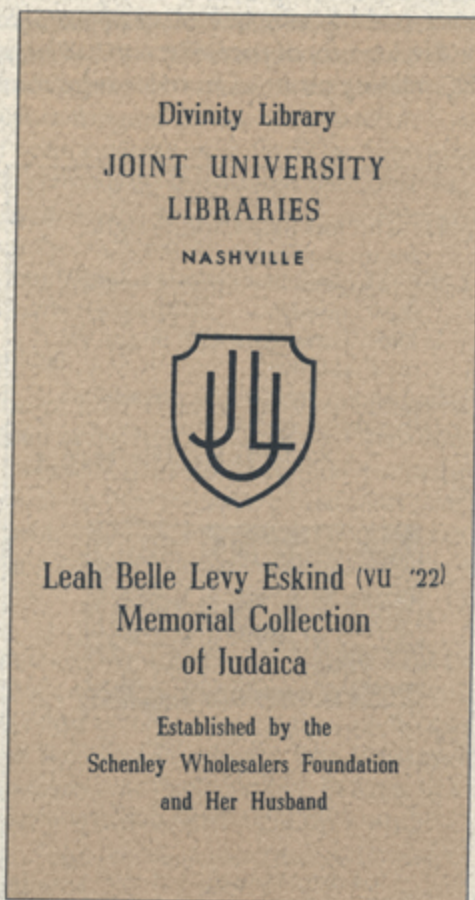


Figure 4

Update since 1980

Silberman Book Fund

In 1984, Rabbi Lou Hackett Silberman, Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, Emeritus, delivered the Cole Lectures, at which time an endowed book fund was established in his honor, an appropriate way to honor Rabbi Silberman. All funds received since 1945 had been used to seize immediate opportunities, and the future needs for development of the Collection had largely gone unattended. The enduring nature of an endowment mirrors

"He who has toiled and bought
for himself books,
But his mind is empty of what
they contain—
Is like a lame man who engraved
on a wall the
figure of a foot, and he tried
in vain to stand!"

Ben Mishle, Samuel ha-Nagid



honoring

Lou Hackett Silberman

Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought
Vanderbilt University, 1952-1980

Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature
and Thought, Emeritus

Professor Silberman's steady devotion and attention to the collection during his twenty-eight years at Vanderbilt. When he arrived, some processing remained to be done for the Collection; he devoted countless hours to working with catalogers. Beyond that, he gave of himself to further development of the Collection—swapping, searching, purchasing from many markets. More than anyone else, he knows the Collection by handling, holding, reading, loving and using it. To this day, he knows most books by their shapes, sizes, colors and contents and, until the Library was moved, he knew where each stood on the shelf.

The bookplate designed for use with materials bought by this endowment bears a quotation of Professor Silberman's own choosing. It spells out his devotion to the Collection.

The design (mid-way) is adapted from an early typesetting of the Hebrew work for book: *sepher*.

Fund raising, begun at the time of the 1984 Cole Lectures, continues for this endowment.

A Place of Its Own

In the summer of 1985 when the Divinity Library was moved to its current location in the North wing of the General Library Building, the Judaica Collection gained a special and distinctive location. No longer in a corner, it now stands in a beautifully panelled, carpeted room. As it turned out, the West wall of its room has a space which is available for a suitable piece of art to complement the collection.

Prospects

During the summer of 1984, Peter Haas, Assistant Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, alerted the Divinity Library Director to a valuable collection being put up for sale, that of Rabbi William Braude of Providence, Rhode Island. Negotiations are underway to evaluate that collection in terms of a supplement to the existing Judaica Collection.

Summary Statement

The Judaica Collection, now numbering well over 7,000 titles, was begun in 1945 with the gift of the professional library of Professor Ismar Elbogen. A discerning acquisitions program, nurtured by

Frederick Kuhlman, Samuel Sandmel and Lou Silberman has developed a collection impressive in breadth and depth. It includes (1) textually oriented study, i.e. Jewish works on the Hebrew Scriptures, *Mishna*, *Talmud*, Gaonic literature and liturgy; (2) tradition-oriented research, i.e. studies dealing with the religious and cultural dimensions of the Jewish tradition; and (3) historical study, i.e. works treating the history of the Jewish people from ancient times to the present. The collection is focused on the historical, social aspects of Judaism and early antiquity. Vanderbilt's Judaica Collection is an enduring source of illumination and stimulation. Furthermore, it is an eloquent statement of this institution's avowed position that the Christian tradition is not to be understood apart from its source, Judaism.

NOTES

1 According to his *New York Times* obituary which supplies our biographical data, Elbogen died August 1, 1943.

2 Regina Elbogen, *Ismar Elbogen 1874-1943: A Bibliography* (Reprinted for Private Circulation from *Historica Judaica* 8 (1946)). This bibliography contains four hundred and three items, not including Professor Elbogen's multiple contributions to encyclopedias including the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, *Judisches Lexikon*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, and the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

3 For an assessment of Elbogen's contributions to *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Erwin Rosenthal, "Ismar Elbogen and the New Jewish Learning", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 8 (1963) 3-28. A portrait of Elbogen constitutes the frontispiece for this volume.

4 *A Century of Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944); *Encyclopedia Judaica: Das Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, chief editor Jacob Klatzkin, asst. chief editor I. Elbogen (Berlin: Verlag Eschkol A.-G., 1928-).

5 Letter of inquiry dated April 12, 1944.

6 Kuhlman finally made an offer for the library in a letter dated December 7, 1944 which he sent just one day after a passionately written five page apologia to Mrs. Elbogen describing what it would mean to Nashville and to JUL to have her husband's library (dated December 6,

1944). The collection was packed by Alfred Lane, acquisitions assistant at Columbia University Library, in twelve wooden crates and 30 numbered cartons and shipped from New York on March 5, 1945.

7 All the biographic and anecdotal information on the Teitelbaums relies upon the personal communication of Dr. Louis Rosenfeld on Nashville, nephew of Mrs. Teitelbaum, to Ms. Dorothy Parks, Divinity Library Director.

8 The letter to which he refers is dated December 6, 1944 and is described in note 6.

9 Letter dated December 12, 1944.

10 In his December 6th letter referred to previously, Kuhlman writes: "*I need not tell you how important it is that there should be intensive open-minded study of the problem of the Jew, for if reason, truth, and justice are to prevail in the treatment of the Jew the world over, then we must combat ignorance, misrepresentation, and hate with education and enlightenment based upon the truth and upon goodwill. In this combat books and sound literature are our best weapon. . . . New centers of Jewish learning are urgently needed. America must become one of the sanctuaries of Jewish scholarship to give the proper perspective for the Jew and the values for which his best leadership has stood. . . . we need this collection in the South-central region partly because of our present poverty in books, as pointed out above, but also because such a collection would make this a Mecca for study and research in problems dealing with the Jew.*"

11 Carmichael's letter of gratitude closes: "With personal regards and best wishes for a pleasant Christmas and bright New Year . . ."

12 Correspondence with Goldberg and Levey toward the goal of processing the collection over a period from 1945 through 1950.

13 Biographical data on Mr. Loventhal was obtained from his obituary which appeared in *The Nashville Tennessean* December 4, 1940.

14 The public announcement of the establishment of the Lee J. Loventhal Collection appeared in *The Observer* November 17, 1944. Contemplated as an enduring endowment, by 1950 it was clear that pressing demands of other Jewish concerns prohibited building up of the memorial which remained merely a restricted fund. Kuhlman's letter to the Executive Committee of the Board of Library Trustees was dated May 18, 1950.

15 Viewed as such by Frederick Kuhlman in his report about the establishment of the memorial to Mrs. Loventhal May 31, 1944.

16 Loventhal's portrait was prepared by the New York artist R. Gregory Gifford and then photographed for the bookplate. The original was apparently hung with an appropriate inscription in the Lee J. Loventhal Room in the Library of Fisk University. Its whereabouts are presently unknown.

For an early history of the Jewish community in Nashville, see Fedora Small Frank, *Beginnings on Market Street: Nashville and her Jewry 1861-1901* (Nashville: Jewish Community of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1976) (VUL F444.N2 f74).

17 According to the Acquisition Department Annual Reports (in Library Archives) 1960 is the last year in which the Loventhal fund existed as a separate entity.

18 In a letter to J. Biegelstein, bookseller from New York City, dated January 24, 1951.

19 *New York Times*, August 11, 1951, p. 11.

20 Samuel Sandmel, *Abraham in Normative and Hellenistic Judaism* (Diss. Yale University, 1949).

21 Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* with a General Bibliography of Philo by Howard L. Goodhart and Erwin R. Goodenough (New Haven: Yale, 1938).

22 Goodhart initiated his gift with a letter listing the offered works' entry numbers from the sequential listing in his bibliography of Philo (note 21). His letter was written on Hotel St. Regis stationery. This list was then checked against the Library's copy of the Goodhart and Goodenough volume. The bibliography was employed again by the Divinity Library cataloger whose hand-written notation of Library of Congress call numbers can still be seen next to each volume in the gift.

23 Numbers 394, 450, 451, 452, 454, 502 in the Goodhart/Goodenough bibliography.

24 A condensed biography of Manuel Eskin and a description of his extensive service to Nashville's Jewish community may be found in *The Observer*, February 21, 1964, p. 22.

25 Leah Belle Levy Eskin's obituary appeared in *The Nashville Tennessean* on May 3, 1963.

26 The initial contribution was matter-of-factly acknowledged by then JUL Director David Kaser in a letter dated November 22, 1963.

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The design on the front cover is adapted from the title page of *Perush 'al-Nebi'im Akaronim* (Commentary on the Later Prophets) by Don Isaac Abravanel, printed in Leipzig, 1640/41. The architectonic motif of the sacred portal has played a primary role in Jewish art throughout the centuries.

The design on the back cover is adapted from an early typesetting of the Hebrew word for book: *sepher*.

