

Hebraica and Judaica resources in Special Collections

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QG HCOL008

The Wolfson Reading Room

Special Collections Centre

The Sir Duncan Rice Library
University of Aberdeen
Bedford Road
Aberdeen
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Introduction

Many individuals, families, organisations and businesses have deposited their papers with the University and as a result, it has acquired an unrivalled collection of material, not solely relating to the history and culture of the north-east of Scotland but of national and international importance.

The University has a rich collection of Judaica which reflects the continuous commitment to the study of Hebrew and Rabbinic literature, as well as the collection, scholarship and publication in connection with these studies. It also reflects a wider interest which can be traced from the early 17th century acquisition of the Codex of the Hebrew Bible (MS 23), which remains one of the University's greatest treasures.

Printed collections

As part of the general stock of The Sir Duncan Rice Library and Special Collections there are many printed editions of the Hebrew Bible, the earliest dated 1517. Altogether there are some 1,000 items relating to Jewish religion and history, and another 500 items on Hebrew language and literature, both classical and modern.

There are numerous other printed collections of, or containing material of, particular relevance. Of particular importance to the University is a publication by John Row (1598-1672), Hebrew scholar and Principal of King's College, Aberdeen: *John Row Hebraeae linguae institutiones* (1644).

There are also named collections of relevance:

Biesenthal Collection

The collection consisting of some 2,000 volumes and described at the time of purchase as 'one of the finest Rabbinical collections in Great Britain', was deposited in the Library on permanent loan from Christ's College, Aberdeen, in 1968. It was acquired about 1872 by Professor William

Robertson Smith for what was at that time the Free Church College in Aberdeen from Dr JH Biesenthal (1804-1886) a converted Polish Jew, then serving at Leipzig as a missionary with the London Society for Promoting Christianity.

About 800 of the printed books are in Hebrew or Hebrew characters, representing virtually the whole published output in Hebrew up to the year 1872; thirty-seven were printed in the 16th century. See: *A Catalogue of the Hebrew books in the Biesenthal Collection* compiled by DRG Beattie. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Library, 1979.

They include many editions of the Hebrew Bible; commentaries by classical, medieval and modern authors, Hebrew and Yiddish translations of the New Testament, editions of and commentaries on the Mishnah, Talmud and medieval codes, works of medieval Jewish mysticism, prayer books, medieval Hebrew poetry and modern Hebrew literature and grammars and dictionaries, both classical and modern.

The non-Hebrew books are mainly in German. A few were printed in the 16th century, many in the 17th, but most date from the 18th and 19th centuries. They consist largely of Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament texts and commentaries in German, Latin, Arabic, Aramaic and Syriac, grammars and dictionaries of Near-Eastern languages other than Hebrew, Rabbinical works, Jewish history, Near-Eastern archaeology, Christian Church history, theology and apologetics, editions of Greek and Latin classics and Church Fathers. Of particular note is a Paris 1545 edition of Irenaeus Contra Haereses, heavily annotated in Latin. Books and pamphlets on topical, social and religious issues, including anti-Semitism, paint a picture of life for Jewish communities in various parts of Europe.

David Daube Collection

The library of David Daube, (1909-1999), jurist and scholar of ancient law, especially Roman and Jewish law. This collection of c.3,000 volumes is currently being catalogued.

Archival collections

Organisation papers

Aberdeen Diocesan Library: manuscript volume containing descriptions of Jewish ceremonies, peoples and language: c.19th century (MS 3337/22).

Personal papers

Beattie, James, poet and scholar, notes on Hebrew: 18th century (MS 30/23).

Biesenthal, Joiachim Heinrich, Rabbinit, Hebrew manuscripts from the Biesenthal Collection: 19th century (MS 3534).

Daube, David, Roman and Biblical Law scholar: 20th century (MS 3878).

Hay, Major Malcolm Vivian, of Seaton, historian specifically his research on the Zionist movement: 1907 – 1962 (MS 2788).

McHardy, Rev. Professor W.D., Hebrew scholar: 19th century – 20th century (MS 3139 & MS 3638).

Schultens, Albertus, Doctor of theology and Professor of Hebrew antiquities at Lugdum Batavis: 'Adnotatio ad Relandi Antiquitates Hebraicas': c.1780 (MS 1068).

Smith, William Robertson, Professor of Oriental Languages and Old Testament Exegesis, Free Church College, Aberdeen: 1866 – 1894 (MS 3674).

Wilson, Robert, physician and traveller. In 1816 Wilson embarked on a grand tour of Europe and in 1820 he pushed eastwards through Egypt, Nubia, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and India. In 1825, he travelled through Africa, Greece and Asia Minor: 19th century – 20th century (MS 417, MS 418, MS 419, MS 434 and MS 3849).

Bible: Old Testament: Masora: 1494. This magnificently illuminated bible is one of the treasures of the University (MS 23).

Megillah: The Book of Esther: c.19th century (MS 1004).

Collection of readings from the Old Testament, from the Talmud and other Hebrew texts: 16th century (MS 160).

Access

Materials are available, upon request, for consultation in the Reading Room. Please search online catalogues to identify individual items.

Further reading

For further reading please also see the studies of a number of manuscripts, printed books and collections in the journals Aberdeen University Library Bulletin, Aberdeen University Review and Northern Scotland.

'The Judaica Collections' (University of Aberdeen Development Trust, undated).

Beattie DRG 'A Catalogue of the Hebrew books in the Biesenthal Collection' (Aberdeen University Library, 1979).

Roth Cecil, *The Aberdeen Codex of the Hebrew Bible* (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1958).