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THE FRENCH MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION AT THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF JERUSALEM

All great national libraries have their manuscript department – a veritable researcher’s treasure trove – and the Hebrew University is no exception to the rule. The growth of the collection has paralleled the development of its supporting institution, the Jewish National and University Library. This article presents a brief history of the national library before discussing its major collections. The latter part of the article reproduces some of the author’s lucky finds – designed to whet researchers’ appetites and to highlight the urgent need to catalogue the surprisingly rich French collection¹.

Aside from libraries located in Christian and Moslem institutions (which we know very little about), Yeshuv- era Jerusalem had several libraries including the Montefiore Library founded in 1875 by Israel Dov Frumkin which was a failure and had to close one year later, and the *Bet Sfarim li-Bnei Israel* founded in 1884 by a group of intellectuals headed by Eliezer Ben Yehuda. The spiritual leaders of the Jerusalemite orthodoxy placed a ban (*herem*) in June 1875 which forbid the use of the Montefiore library. The ban was reissued once again in 1927, for the exhibit of manuscripts from the Schwadron collection. The best known library of the time was the *Midrach Abrabanel* Jewish Library founded by the *Bnai Brith* in 1892, because it became the nucleus of the present day National Library. Its name memorializes the 400th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain.

While the idea of a Hebrew University slowly took shape from 1902 onwards, in tandem with the rise of the Zionist movement, several intellectuals concerned themselves with creating a library worthy of the name, since the yeshivas only had libraries of traditional literature at their disposal. Jeshua Heschel Levin of Volozin was the first to call for such an institution in a famous article published in *Havazelet* on January 15, 1872. On July 14, 1893 the Odessa Committee of *Hoveve Zion* resolved to create a “Central Jewish Library” in Jerusalem. A year later (January 1894) a

¹ I primarily used the excellent catalog by Zvi Baras (ed): *A Century of Books 1882 – 1992*, Jerusalem, 1992, the classic Dov Schidorsky, *Libraries and Books in Late Ottoman Palestine*, Magnes Jerusalem, 1990, as well as information from my many conversations with Margot Cohn, whom I would like to thank for her invaluable assistance.

“Committee for the General Jewish library of Jerusalem” was formed. One of the high points of the history of the Library was clearly the arrival of the Chasanowich library in 1885. A book collector and physician from Bialystok, Joseph Chasanowich (1844-1919) agreed to transfer his 10,000 volumes to the Midrach Abrabanel library in 1895². At the end of the 19th century this library, located on Ethiopia Street, already possessed 15,000 volumes. In 1905, the seventh Zionist Congress voted to establish a National Jewish Library in Jerusalem, with the Midrash Abrabanel library as its core. During the eleventh Zionist congress (Vienna, 1913), Menachem Ussishkin, Chaim Weizmann and Heinrich Loewe energetically supported the project. Loewe had already published a book on the question.³

The first head of the library, Shmuel Hugo Bergmann was appointed in 1920. This Prague philosopher, friend of Kafka, eternal Zionist, member of Brith Shalom and the future inventor of modern Hebrew philosophical terminology was behind the real expansion of the library. He himself had often discussed the role of such a library⁴ and remained its chief librarian until 1935. When the Hebrew University was inaugurated in 1925, the library took on the official title of the Jewish National and University Library. Very early on, in particular through the efforts of the young Gerhard Gershom Scholem, it was to play a crucial role in the classification, acquisition and publication of manuscripts. Settling in Palestine in late 1923, Scholem was hired by the library several months later as head of the Judaica and Hebraica department and served between 1924 and 1927 creating a special classification for Jewish subjects.⁵

Quickly other famous collections – much larger ones – came to Jerusalem such as the one belonging to Ignaz Goldziher. Between 1921 and 1929 the number of volumes rose from 32,000 to 200,000. In the Diaspora, committees were created to regularly enrich the library. Local consulates also provided books. First located on Mount Scopus, it was rehoused on the Givat Ram campus where it stands today. During the War of Independence it was moved to safer territories such as Terra Sancta, in 1948.

Aside from thousands of Hebrew manuscripts, acquired or on microfilm, the library possesses roughly 400 personal archives of poets, writers, scientists, and other prominent men and women. Some collections are in

² See the detailed article by Zvi Barras, “The transfer of the Chasanowich Library to Jerusalem” (in Hebrew), in *Cathedra* 79 (1996), pp. 79-94.

³ *Eine jüdische Nationalbibliothek*, Berlin, Basel, 1905.

⁴ Baruch Shohetman and Shlomo Shunami (eds): *The Writings of Shmuel Hugo Bergman, A Bibliography 1903-1967*. Jerusalem, 1968. See also his comments in *Tagebücher und Briefe*, Miriam Sambursky, Konigstein, 1985.

⁵ See *Gershom Scholem 1897-1982*. Catalog of the National Library of the HU Exhibit, Jerusalem, 1988.

use almost daily such as the Abraham Schwadron (1878-1957) collection which contains more than 12,000 autographs and 7,000 portraits, or the Abraham Shalom Yahuda collection (1877-1951) which contains more than a hundred pages written by Isaac Newton, not to mention the incomparable Arabic collection (about 1500 manuscripts). Among the most well known are the J.L. Gordon, L. Zunz, S. Buber, S. Zweig, A. Einstein, M. Buber W. Benjamin, G. Scholem, and E. Lasker Scheler collections. The French poet Gustave Kahn (1859-1936) collection is also deposited there, and his writings deserve more detailed classification.

Among these, there are collections containing letters sent by and to French speakers, at times in French, such as the pathetic letter by Mircea Eliade to Gershon Scholem. The following examples discovered in the Library point to the value of a systematic classification of these documents.⁶

Gaston Bachelard to Martin Buber, February 23, 1937

I received Kohn's book and I have almost finished it. I find it extremely interesting and it confirms what my "encounter" with you has revealed to me: the depths of your knowledge. I am hard put however to organize these far reaches. The preface to a short book should not be more than a few pages long. This is why I believe that you alone could guide me, by giving me in a few pages the most important themes in your extremely vast work which led up to *I and Thou*. I think it is impossible in a preface to emphasize the distant preparation that Kohn wants. Please don't hesitate. Tell me directly which ideas you hold dear, and I will make it the basis of my comments. In a few pages tell me quickly the key points of your main books. Don't forget that I am only a poor slave of reason, a man of figures, a being who only seizes anxiety in the *tomorrows* of reason, in the unknown which is to come, in thoughts in formation. Through you, I know that there is a foundation in yesterday, an unknown from whence we come. Tell me, narrate this journey I have not made. And I will be the echo. Naturally I will submit the pages to you, just like a student to his teacher....

⁶ These letters are deliberately presented without commentary.

⁷ The full text with commentary can be found in D.B. "De Bar sur Aube à Jérusalem. La Correspondance entre Gaston Bachelard et Martin Buber", in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 150 (1984), pp.201-217.

*Martin Buber to Albert Camus, February 3, 1952*⁸

Dear Colleague,

Your book "L'homme révolté" [The Rebel] appears to me to be of such importance for humanity at this hour that I would like to recommend translating the book into Hebrew to Mossad Bialik, the Israeli publishing house, where I am a member of the editorial board. Do you have any plans on this subject?

There is only one sentence in this book that troubles me. It is on page 370 when you speak of the "implacable sky of the Old Testament." This is entirely inaccurate. The divine word, "I dwell on high, in holiness; Yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit" (Isaiah, 57,15) is not an exception and the "yet" is the real basis of this world.

With admiration and cordial wishes I remain...

Albert Camus to Martin Buber, February 22, 1952

I have read your *I and Thou* with much admiration and benefit and I did not hope, or rather I did not expect to receive an agreement from you which delights and which honors me. I concede with no difficulty that the sentence you mention calls for many shades of interpretation and I have no objection to changing it. This is the disadvantage of enterprises aimed at summarizing that which cannot. My main goal was to highlight the key argument, at the risk of obscuring and doing injustice to the detail. In any case any criticism which points out these errors enables me to correct them and I am grateful to have them

*Paul Desjardins to Martin Buber, July 17, 1928*⁹

Sir,

Please allow me, in writing to you, to use my native tongue rather than awkwardly twisting yours. I can read your language and that way we can communicate. I have been asked by the *Societe de l'Abbaye de Pontigny* to send you an invitation to our Summer Colloquium, and have enclosed the program. You have perhaps heard about this international encounter, inaugurated in 1910, which the agonizing events that have occurred since then have made even more opportune, even pressing. We had counted on the presence of Max Scheler who had already attended, but the second catastrophe as you know has deprived us of him. You among all the Germans we hope to meet the closest and in whom is perpetuated the

⁸ For further details, see D.B. "Albert Camus, Buber et la Méditerranée" in *Perspectives* 5 (1998), pp. 147-155.

⁹ For Buber's relationship with Pontigny, see Introduction d'un inédit de Buber, "le mal est-il une force indépendante?" (Pontigny, 1936), in *Archives de Philosophie* (1988), 529-545. My thanks to Catherine Peyrou who authorized me to publish these letters.

spirit of the *Aufklärung*, but deeper, the one whose attendance at Pontigny would have the most positive impact. You have realized this yourself; thus I am convinced that you will do everything possible not to disappoint us. You are invited *honoris causa* and can choose which of the three ten-day sessions would be the least inconvenient for you to attend. In any of the three, you will be a very precious addition. At the second session, on *Youth After the War*, you will be reunited with any number of your fellow Germans still close to *adolescence*, you will also meet some of our most qualified authors.

Please excuse the lateness of this invitation. Our friend Chestov only gave me your address recently and I have been held back by illness.

Respectfully yours,

Paul Desjardins

Paul Desjardins to Martin Buber, April 18, 1931

Dear and too anxious friend,

I found your letter waiting for me when I returned from Paris where I had spent two days in the company of my grandchildren, with a mixture of “*soave e d’amoro*”, affectionate secrets, precious promises and a slight lack of assurance. I would like to dissipate this small cloud. God willing it will be equally easy to scatter those who cast a shadow on the mutual feelings of our two peoples! Rest assured, I beg you. I do not remember and I cannot imagine what tactless phrase could have prompted your fear in the little letter that my state of fatigue forced me to dictate.

There is nothing, there has never been anything since we have known (or rediscovered) each other here, that my respectful friendship could cause you pain. I have never ceased to consider you as the perfect friend, a friend forever, a friendship made in a few hours through a surprising grace of God. The visit of Sunday February 16, 1930 to Heppenheim with the ride up in the snow to Odenwalt simply confirmed the gift of my heart which I made to you in Pontigny and at Vezelay. Be calm, my brother too hasty to doubt a brother. Naturally I have two regrets: not to have met Madame your wife, whom I feel is really part of you as it is right and too rare – and to be separated from you by the barrier of language (Hebrew more than German), by the length of the journeys, by the multitude of obstacles which prevent both of us from truly establishing a fruitful exchange. Yet nevertheless I know that as soon as we say goodbye – which will be August 28 I hope -- our correspondence will begin anew. We kindle immediately the secret chords that saved our friendship from a lengthy apprenticeship.

You must bring the report of your secret meeting of June 1919 where you so courageously raised the problem of renovation through education. I have already mentioned my own wishes for this initiative, long set aside,

for the lesson of each people. This is a document to be preserved in the archives of the New Europe.

I am happy to know that you hold the chair at the very modern University of Frankfurt. You have I hope met my friend Hendrik de Man. I owe him almost as much as I owe to you but in another area. He made me a socialist without having to renege on anything that I believe in.

For the ten-day session topic, select someone from your circle. I had hoped to have Rudolf Otto from Marburg whom I admire after having read *Das Heilige*. But his health, I understand is an invincible obstacle. The goal is to describe above all in a few examples the re-edification of faith in what is the most characteristic features of humanity today.

Farewell my perfect friend, please give my respects to Madame George Munk, give my affectionate greetings to your grandchildren (whom I remember very well) and for yourself accept the offering which I give you of a friendship which has no fear of time.

Paul Desjardins.

Paul Desjardins to Martin Buber, May 7, 1934

Dear Friend,

On Saturday April 14, a young scholar fervently devoted to the study of religious faith and the proof of its profound unity arrived here – Mr Henry Corbin, the assistant librarian at the National Library for Asian Languages (and Barthian). He is fairly familiar with your work and is sorry that he did not come in time to meet you. He grabbed my copy of *I and Thou*, a book in a class by itself according to him. He spontaneously began the arduous task of translating it into French. He is going to send me his translation of the four or five first pages soon, as a sample of his skills. He plans to send you this sample to get your approval to continue this endeavor. Looking for a publisher will be the next step. However I would like to ask you now whether the idea of turning a work of such perfection in its native language into our language is not problematical.

I have started planning for October (November). In our Union the project which we planned – on Prophetism – will be easy to carry out (in terms of the audience). I have a response from Sylvain Levi for the Hautes Etudes and have included it in this letter. You will see that he directs us towards the Institute of Semitic Studies (headed by Armand Lods). Before I send him our work I need your consent.

I hope the trip back to your Danheim went well and that you were not greeted with bad news. Wherever you go, you leave a luminous path behind you. I am turning over in my mind everything you taught me. I want Mrs. Buber to know what an impression and what a message she leaves – as quick as a flame – by her selfless ability to admire. I hope that we can meet again before the end of summer.

Your devoted friend P.D.

Enclosed a program: would you like more copies?

*Mircea Eliade to Gershom Scholem, June 25, 1972*¹⁰

I am sorry to see that the esteem and friendship you have shown to me have today caused you harm and I wish above all to express my apologies to you. The parts I read of the diary of Mihail Sebastian pained me since Sebastian was one of my best friends and the 'chill' which characterizes the final years of our friendship was the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding. I am partly responsible for this misunderstanding. This is why Sebastian's tragic death, in the Spring of 1945, was almost a traumatic shock for me since the last chance to clear up the misunderstanding had disappeared. I am too tired (you know that I had a pericarditis episode) to relate to you all the details of the circumstances which gradually destroyed our friendship, a friendship whose traces can be found in the full version of the diary, and also in my diary when it is published. I will simply note the most important features.

1) First a number of mistakes should be corrected. In the article you sent to me, it is stated (p. 25, col. 2) that I was appointed under the legionnaire regime as cultural attache to Lisbon in April 1940 and transferred to Madrid in the Spring of 1941. In fact I was appointed cultural attache to London in April 1940 by one of the last governments of King Carol, the adversary of the Iron Guard, then transferred to Lisbon in February 1945 under the government of General Antonescu who liquidated the legionnaires. I remained in Portugal until September 1945, at which time I settled in Paris. I never had a position in Madrid since in February 1941 the press attache was the poet Aron Cotrus and the cultural advisor has been the Professor Al. Busuioceanu, since 1942.

2.) During my stay in England and in Portugal (hence 1940-1945) I never published any articles in the Rumanian press.

3) Between 1942-1944 in Bucarest a volume of essays (*Insula lui euthanasius*) was published on the history of religions and folklore (*Mitul reintegrerii: comentarii la legenda Mesterului Manole*) and a book on Salazar. I also published in Lisbon a small work on the history and culture of the Rumanians (*Os Romanos, latinos do Oriente*). This book, as well as the book on Salazar were designed to bring the two most remote Latin countries together – Rumania and Portugal. This was part of the pan Latin policy of those years. I take no stand. It is part of history and history will be judged by historians.

¹⁰ See the recent book G. Scholem, *Briefe, Bd. III 1971-1982*, hg. Itta Shadletzky, Munchen, 1999, 279-281; 316-317. The diaries of Eliade and Sebastian have now been published.

4) I do not recall having written a single page of legionnaire doctrine or propaganda. But Sebastian quotes (p.24, coll) several lines from a text which was published in the daily of the Iron Guard *Bun a Vestire* (December 13, 1937) and entitled "Why I believe in the victory of the legionnaire movement." I never collaborated with this newspaper. Nevertheless the text exists since Sebastian quotes from it. Probably it was the oral response to a survey, a response 'dictated' by the editor. I can't be more specific. But at the time I worked for several important newspapers where I could easily have expressed such ideas. Why didn't I?

5) Nevertheless, for a long time credit was given to the legend that I was one of the 'doctrine writers' of the Iron Guard. If this story had not been so painful I could have stressed the extravagance of my case: the sole "doctrinarian" who has not written one book, one brochure, one article, one speech referring to a political party whom he is considered to be the ideologist. Several facts contributed to establishing this legend. a) among our mutual friends Sebastian and I had a certain number who were legionnaires b) the magazine *Cuventul*, which Sebastien was the director of until it was outlawed by King Carol in 1934, became a legionnaire propaganda tool and its reappearance in September 1941 made it the paper of the Iron Guard. At that time I was in London and did not send any articles to it. c) Finally and above all, Sebastian and I were the students and admirers of professor Nae Ionescu the editor of *Cuventul*. It would take me pages and pages to describe the complex figure of this philosopher involved in religious issues but also political problems and who was successively the most efficient 'supporter' of Julius Maniu and his national peasant party and then the friend and personal advisor of King Carol and then a redoubtable adversary which brought him closer to Germany and the Iron Guard. Nae Ionescu was loved and hated with equal fervor and even today 32 years after his death his name stirs up a tempest of hate or admiration. Like me and like many other friends and students, Sebastian did not distance himself from Nae Ionescu when he became the ideologist of the Iron Guard. This loyalty created many difficulties for him in particular after having published his novel "*After two thousand years*" with a preface by Nae Ionescu. This long preface was interpreted as a justification of anti-Semitism and Sebastian was violently attacked by the center and left leaning press to such an extent that to defend himself he had to write a little book called "*How I became a Hooligan*". I was one of the few writers who in two long articles published in the magazine *Vreme* not only defended Sebastian but I criticized this preface showing that Nae Ionescu's arguments could not be justified theologically as he claimed. In turn I was also violently attacked by the extreme right press. In the moving dedication Sebastian wrote in my copy of '*How I became a Hooligan*' he called me 'his only rock in the tempest'.

When Sebastian's diary will be published in its entirety we will probably find a page dated March 15 1940 which will describe both of us in tears at the bedside of N.I who had just died.

6) I have devoted some space to the relationship between Sebastian and Nae Ionescu to explain my loyalty to our professor. As I was his assistant at the University, his collaborator on the daily *Cuvantul* and the "editor" of his volumes of essays (*Roza vanturilor*) I became somewhat of his "double". And hence for some people also the ideologist of the Iron Guard. In addition many of our friends were legionnaires or sympathizers. And when the government of Armand Calinescu triggered the offensive against the Iron Guard I was also sent to a concentration camp with Nae Ionescu and several hundred intellectuals and activists. A series of trials were held and those charged were sentenced to 5 to 10 years in prison; some time later most of them were shot following the assassination of Calinescu. I imagine that they also examined my record and that they did not find anything since I was not involved in any trial and was released after three months – the only one incidentally who was granted this privilege. Nevertheless, as could be expected, these misfortunes did nothing to clarify my position to some sectors of public opinion. The misunderstanding – disciple of Nae Ionescu hence also the ideologist, – continued. The fact that in April 1940 I was sent as cultural attache to London, that from February 1941 I was in Lisbon, and that I had not published a single article in the Rumanian press during the most dramatic period (1940-1944) – all these facts did not count.

7) It is true that in the years 1938-1940 we noticed several times, Sebastian and myself to what extent our political orientations differed – I was "on the right". I situated myself in the tradition represented by Eminescu and Jorga. Our friendship nevertheless was maintained. It is also true that during several days I spent in Bucharest in August 1942 I did not try to see him – but for entirely different reasons than those mentioned page 26 column 2, i.e. that "because I was a diplomat I knew the fate which was being prepared for the Jews". I would never have tried to respond to this insult if you, dear colleague, had not read it. The fact is that I was in Bucharest after having had a long discussion with President Salazar. I had asked to be received by the head of the national peasant party, Julius Maniu (who was then in the opposition) but as I was going to his house I realized that I was being followed by an agent and I had to make several detours. I got there late and Maniu had left and I could only speak to his private secretary. During the several days I spent in Bucarest I was followed continuously and this is why I did not try to find Sebastian or other friends and colleagues because I could have compromised them. (The secret police, informed by the Germans knew that there were "feelers"

for an armistice or that attempts were being made in Lisbon, Stockholm and Ankara.)

8) I will never forgive myself for being too cautious, dictated by fear of the all- powerful secret police. It was the last time I could talk with friends, now almost all deceased, the last time I could talk to Sebastian and explain my “position” to him. But I hoped that once the war was over we could resume our relationship. Alas an absurd accident put an end to his life in the spring of 1945 on the eve of his departure for Paris where he had just been named cultural advisor and at the time I myself was preparing to go. Since his death I have never stopped feeling guilty because of my mistake, aggravated by misfortune. By choosing exile I knew that the misunderstandings created by my loyalty to Nae Ionescu would be misinterpreted negatively. Even more so since I collaborated on numerous publication of Rumanian emigration but never those of the legionnaires (*Tara si Exilul, Stindardul*). Most of the articles published since 1947 in the press in exile deal with cultural problems and stress the need for cultural freedom. The few ‘political’ texts express my convictions and my current hopes first of all for the need for a federation of the states of Eastern Europe.

Dear colleague I do not know whether I have succeeded in dissipating your doubts but I hope at least that you now understand the root of the numerous misunderstandings which have made me suffer. I also know that the whole truth will not emerge until the full publication of my Diary and my autobiography, in other words after my death. This certitude helps me to live in peace and serenity the last years of life which have been granted me. I have no illusions as to my scientific work and work as a writer. But I am sure that the books and articles published before and after 1940 express the thought and experiences of a man who resembles more closely the one you believe you know than to the one described in the text which you sent me.

Yours Sincerely,

Mircea Eliade

P.S. We are going back to Chicago on July 6.¹¹

These examples – drawn exclusively from the twentieth century—can be multiplied. Naturally it can be argued that these discoveries should remain the lucky find and the delight of the erudite. However these searches should be made more exhaustive and faster by a systematic specialized survey. A catalog of the French manuscripts in the National Hebrew Library would not only enrich our knowledge of the history of French texts

¹¹ This letter has just appeared in the notes to the third volume of correspondence mentioned above.

but would also highlight the real impact of French culture in the history of the Jews and in modern and contemporary Judaism.

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