

THE LONDON LIBRARY

Special Collections: The Montefiore Pamphlets

An appraisal by Dr. Annette M. Boeckler, Leo Baeck College Library, 2007

The London Library holds a remarkable collection of Judaica spread over several sections of the library.

Within this collection the biggest and most up to date collections are History and Biblical Archaeology. The Jewish History collection (History.Jews) places a good deal of emphasis on books on the History of Ancient Israel (History of biblical Israel), local histories of Jews in various countries or regions and books about the Shoah besides popular general overviews and introductions. The collection contains also books on the history of Jewish Literature (as L. Ginsberg's, Legends of the Jews.)

The Topography section (Topography Palestine & Syria) contains excavation reports of major sites in Israel and Jordan but also classical volumes of the Discoveries in the Judean Desert and other items concerning the beginnings of Dead Sea Scrolls research in 1950's and 1960's.

Much of the Judaica in other areas of the London library is of highly scholarly value. In its philology section (Philology, Hebrew) the London Library hosts some rare copies of 18th and 19th century Christian philological research on Hebrew, as for example J.D. Michaelis, Supplementa as Lexica Hebraica, Goettingen 1792 or Philippo Ouseel, Introduction in Accentuationem Hebraeorum Prosaicum, Lugdunum 1715.

The Religion section contains mostly standard Christian scientific commentaries but it is worth mentioning that it contains the classics of German biblical scholarship of the 19th century in each of its separate sections for the different biblical books. Some areas in this section contain books of special Jewish interest such as the collection about Psalms, which is the biggest collection for any biblical book and contains for example translation of David Kimchi's Commentary. In the Prayer section you will find the latest publications on Jewish Prayer by Stefan Reif and Jeremy Schonfield. The Bible section hosts a brilliant collection of Hebrew Bible prints besides the common Letteris and Ginsburg texts, for example a kind of pocket chumash printed in Amsterdam 1712.

The collection of Jewish Literature (Literature,Hebrew) hosts originals of basic works of the German Wissenschaft des Judentums of the 19 century, which are often reprinted even today, as Bacher's Die Aggada der Tannaiten, August Wuensche's translations of Midrashim besides a lot of other 19th century German translations of classical Jewish literature. It also offers some books about the Dead Sea Scrolls of the 1950's and 60's. Another strong area in the literature section is translations of Midrashim and translations and originals of Yiddish authors (as Asch, Bialik, Mendele Mocher Sfarim). This section further offers translations of Hebrew Poetry of all epochs. Finally it offers some works of present day scholarship on Modern Hebrew Literature.

There are some very few Yiddish Textbooks and Grammars in the Philology section (Philology, Yiddish).

The precious core of the whole Judaica collection in the London Library however is the collection of the Montefiore Pamphlets. The term "pamphlet" is not appropriate as this collection consists not only of speeches, lectures, sermons, addresses, essays, offprints and tractates that Claude Montefiore (1858-1938) had collected during his lifetime, but most of it comprises monographs, biblical commentaries, dissertations, study books and prayer books bound together according to the size of the book making 664 volumes with each containing an average of 10 items. The monographs of between 100 and 200 pages per monograph make up

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the largest part of the collection. About half of these "pamphlets" is written in German; the other half is mostly in English besides some in French and in Dutch and a very few in Hebrew or Swedish.

The earliest items go back to 1818, the latest are from 1938. The contents of the collection cover all areas of interests of Claude Montefiore's life: Modern Biblical Scholarship, Judaism and Christianity, the development of Progressive Judaism especially in Germany and later in Britain (documents of the West London Synagogue), social themes especially about the working class, education, the rise of Zionism and the fight for women's rights. Claude Montefiore is one of the fathers of Liberal Judaism in Great Britain and one of the Founders and first president of the international "World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ)", which today represents 1.7 million members in 42 countries. Liberal Judaism had started in Germany in the early 19th century and spread to England since 1840, but only Claude Montefiore together with his friend Lily Montagu laid the theoretical basis for a liberal movement in Great Britain comparable to the existing German and American movements of his time. The British liberal movement mirrors even today Montefiore's interests in Contemporary Biblical Criticism, in social activity and charity, in education, in the role of women and in philosophy. The "Montefiore Pamphlets" contain writings in all these areas and as the 19th century was the formative period for Biblical Scholarship, Progressive Judaism, Education, Zionism and women's rights, the Pamphlets not only mirror what the father of liberal Judaism was interested in and might have known in his time, but they are at the same time important documents and sources for the formative period of important themes of general interest right up to our own days.

More information on the collection is available from an article by Jack Shamash, published in the Jewish Chronicle in 2011, 'How a library gained from a billionaire's gift'

(<http://www.thejc.com/judaism/judaism-features/51949/how-a-library-gained-a-billionaires-gift>)

and a piece published in the *Treasures from The London Library* series on the History Today website, 'Claude Montefiore: a cautious revolutionary'

(<http://www.historytoday.com/dunia-garcia-ontiveros/treasures-london-library-claude-montefiore-cautious-revolutionary>)