

# The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

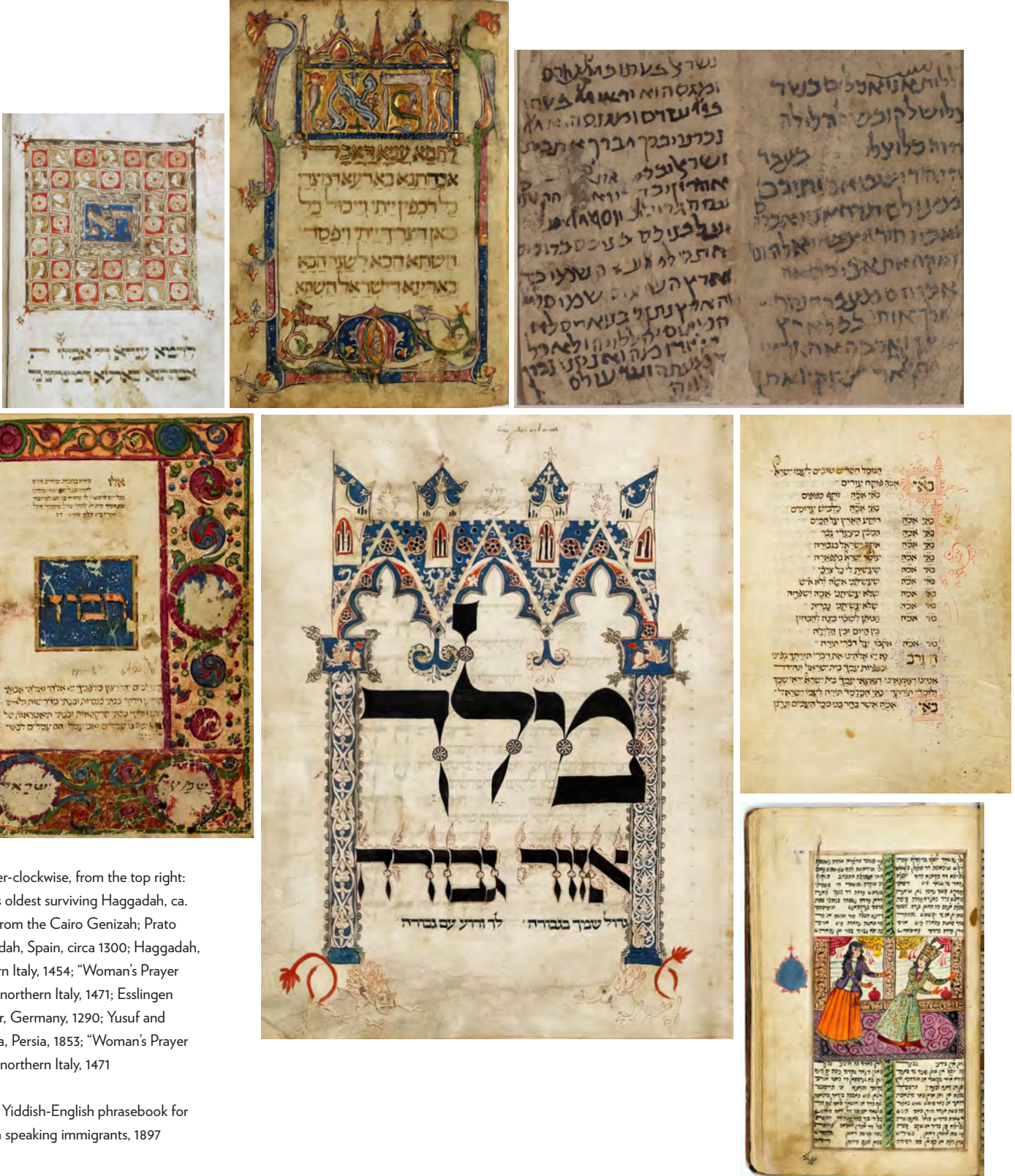
**ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023**



**JTS**

THE LIBRARY





# The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

## 2022–2023 ANNUAL REPORT

**A**fter more than a decade of planning, the new Library of JTS opened its doors this past year, welcoming hundreds of faculty, students, scholars, and more than 2,000 exhibition visitors. The Library's holdings unlock 1,000 years of Jewish cultural and religious practices from communities throughout the globe, inspiring the Jewish future by sparking discovery of our past. In addition to hundreds of thousands of circulating books and periodicals on every topic of interest to Jewish readers, the Library's special collections include nearly 11,000 Hebrew manuscripts, over 30,000 rare printed books, 43,000 fragments from the Cairo Genizah, the largest gathering marriage contracts (kettubot) in the world, Passover haggadot, extensive archival collections, and thousands of prints, videos, sound recordings, and musical scores.

The mission of the Library of JTS is “to collect, preserve and make available the literary and cultural history of the Jewish people” and it is our privilege and pleasure to welcome all who want to explore our treasures, to share the secrets they preserve and the lessons they teach. Our Library users, online and in person, are inspired, enlightened, and delighted by our collections. In this annual report, we share the accomplishments of the past year as we inaugurated our extraordinary new space and greatly enhanced access to the collections to the broadest possible audience.

**85,000 RARE ITEMS IN THE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, INCLUDING MANUSCRIPTS, RARE BOOKS, AND PRINTS... WERE RETURNED TO OUR NEW SPACE.**

## THE NEW LIBRARY OF JTS

Our new Library was designed by renowned architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, who have placed the collections in the center of the newly renovated JTS campus. The new Library has extensive, light-filled space for users to study, research, and relax individually and in groups; a revitalized and modern rare book room; the new Dorothy T. Goldman Exhibition Gallery; a new and updated Brodsky Conservation Lab, the Polonsky Digitization Studio, and a presentation room where we can explain the significance of rare works to audiences from around the country. Wall coverings include custom designed murals based on images from our rare collections.

Over the course of the two years prior to our full re-opening, our Library staff worked tirelessly to bring to their new home both our circulating and special collections from the storage facilities where they were housed during construction. We want to acknowledge the gracious support of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which stored many of our most priceless manuscripts, and Princeton University, which kept our collection of 43,000 fragments and documents from the Cairo Genizah. Altogether, some 85,000 items in the Special Collections and 60,000 items in the general collection were returned to our new space (300,000 volumes remain in off-site storage for next day retrieval). Planning included mapping where all the materials would be housed, tracking inventories, arranging the content and security of dozens of shipments, inspecting each work upon arrival, and selecting works for conservation. This painstaking process enabled the entire rare collection to be returned without damage or loss.



## SUPPORTING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

In addition to daily usage of the Library by JTS faculty and students, along with the general public, we continually receive requests for visits to our Rare Book Room from scholars all over the world, who use our rare materials every day. The Rare Book Room is the heart of the new Library, and its users include scholars looking at manuscripts for their individual research, conservators examining JTS copies of early printed books, people exploring the history of their communities or families in our extensive archival collections, musicians discovering the musical traditions of non-Western Jews in our Johanna Spector archive, and many others.

Beyond providing unparalleled resources for researchers and scholars, the Rare Book Room has quickly become a center of educational programming and support. In the Rare Book Room, we offer students from JTS and other educational institutions sessions that allow them to experience “up close and personal” the actual product of the Jewish histories and cultures they are studying, in some cases the oldest surviving copy of religious texts. Our goal is to integrate these original materials into all classroom work, linking past with present. We teach students not only what these books reveal in their content, but also how evidence of their creation and journeys through the centuries preserve stories of the Jewish experience that are otherwise unknown.

In addition to the JTS campus community, we have created programming for the wider community in New York City and from around the world. In our first year of full operation, we have given innumerable Rare Book Room tours to synagogue groups, clergy organizations (Jewish and non-Jewish), and Jews from across the country who are interested in exploring their heritage through the tangible experience that only books can provide. Earlier this year, for example, we welcomed an interfaith group of clergy, a group dedicated to building bridges between the Jewish and Christian communities. By showing them historical materials bearing the imprint of Christian censorship of Jewish works, on the one hand, and

medieval Jewish prayer manuscripts preserving Jewish curses directed at Christians, on the other, we encouraged them to speak openly and honestly about the legacy they are working together to overcome. They were sobered and energized by what they saw.

The Rare Book Room is not only a place of research for Judaic scholars but central to the education of JTS and other students. For example, the Library recently cooperated with the Footprints project ([footprints.ctl.columbia.edu](https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu)) to train scholars in the reading of Hebrew scripts from the modern (primarily 18th-19th centuries) Sephardi-Arabic speaking worlds. Rare materials from the Library’s collections provided the inscriptions to be decoded, and the work of these scholars, emerging directly from their training, allowed for the enhancement of Footprint’s records of the histories of books in our collection. Together with Footprints, and with funding from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, we have also completed a project to catalog and document footprints of 375 16th century Venetian printed books.



**THE RARE BOOK ROOM** IS NOT ONLY A PLACE OF RESEARCH FOR JUDAIC SCHOLARS BUT CENTRAL TO THE EDUCATION OF JTS AND OTHER STUDENTS.





## EXPANDING OUR REACH

The Library's mission to make our treasures available to the broadest possible audience is being fulfilled through a host of exhibitions and programming, much of which is online.

### Library Exhibitions

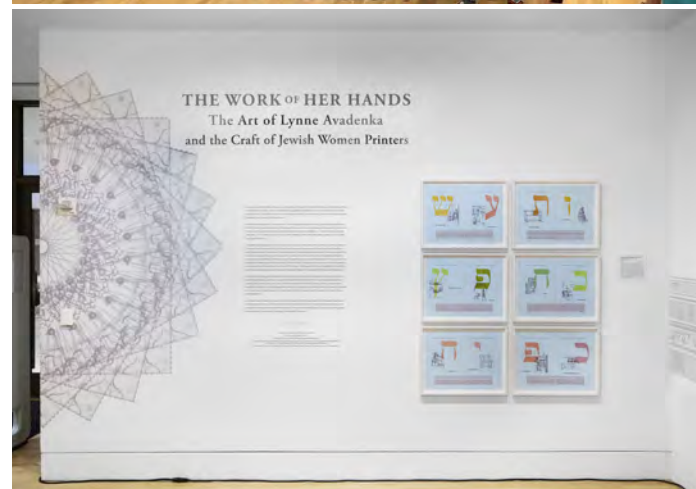
One of the highlights of our new Library space is the Dorothy T. Goldman Exhibition Gallery, which has already welcomed over 2,000 visitors who have resoundingly endorsed the beauty of the exhibits and the unique content presented. The response was so overwhelming that we are planning an expansion of the exhibition space. During our inaugural year, we curated four exhibitions:

#### ***To Build a New Home: Celebrating the Jewish Wedding:***

A presentation of books, etchings, and ketubbot (marriage contracts) demonstrating wedding customs from Jewish communities around the world spanning one thousand years. The exhibit, supported by a generous grant from the David Berg Foundation, included documentation of the development of rituals such as the chuppah (wedding canopy) and smashing a glass. Outstanding ketubbot from the Library's collection were featured.

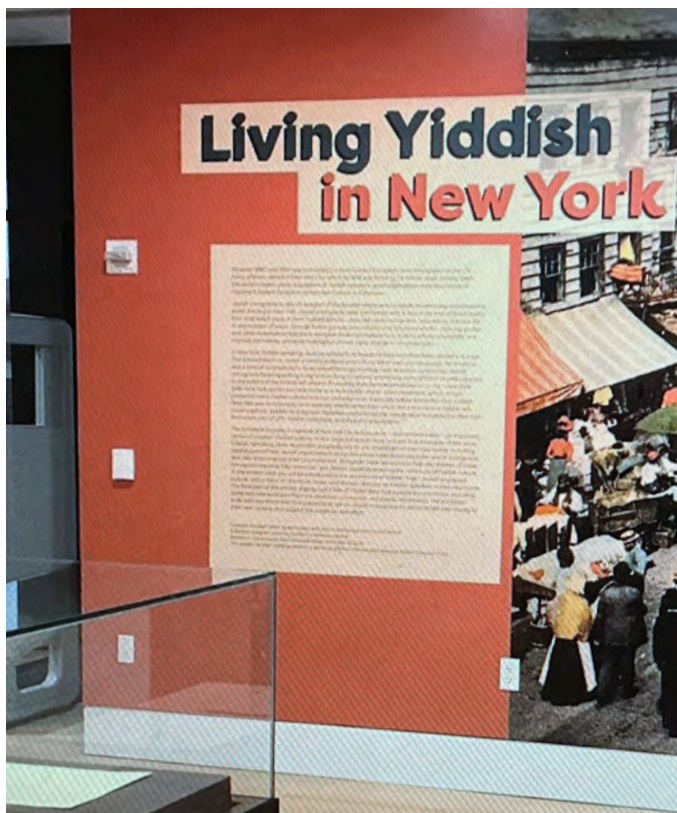


***The Jews of Corfu: Between the Adriatic and the Ionian:*** In partnership with the Judaica division of the Columbia University Libraries, this exhibition was mounted in both locations and included ketubbot, manuscripts, rare printed books, and unique documents from both collections. Viewers had the opportunity to discover centuries of life and traditions of the small but historically significant Jewish community of Corfu, which met its end during the Holocaust.



***The Work of Her Hands: The Art of Lynne Avadenka and the Craft of Jewish Women Printers:*** Artist and printmaker Lynn Avadenka created an original set of works relating to women and print in the Jewish world. Becoming aware of the important presence of women in—and even at the head of—Hebrew printing houses in the centuries since Gutenberg, Avadenka was inspired to try her hand at creating series of works focusing on this theme. Her original pieces were paired with rare Hebrew books from the Library's collections showing the imprint of these Jewish women during the past five hundred years.

**Living Yiddish in New York:** Generously supported by the Feingold-Halegua Yiddish Collection Fund, this exhibition focused on the lived experience of Yiddish-speaking immigrant Jews and their children in the first third of the twentieth century. It featured an abundant variety of Jewish creativity and expression in Yiddish from this period, both practical (such as the formation of organizations to support and educate the immigrants and publications to help them become “American”) and cultural (including images of stage productions, posters, sheet-music, and literary journals). Particularly fascinating were the many writings and publications highlighting the political activities of Jews during this period.



## Loans to Exhibitions

In addition to our in-house exhibition program, we have maintained an active loan program, making available our exceptional pieces to museums around the world. We are particularly thrilled that the Rothschild Mahzor, one of our greatest treasures, has been placed in a prominent location at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it can be seen by the public, in a five-year special installation, side-by-side with another Italian Renaissance Hebrew manuscript, Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, co-owned by the Met and the Israel Museum.

### Other prominent loans include:

- **Yeshiva University Museum “The Golden Path: Maimonides Across Eight Centuries”:** Numerous Genizah fragments, including a fragment with Maimonides signature and other materials relating to Maimonides.
- **Uffizi Gallery “The Jews, the Medici and the Ghetto of Florence”:** Two late 15th century Italian illuminated siddur manuscripts.
- **Jewish Museum “The Sassoons”:** A Cairo Genizah fragment from Syria in 1130 that is a liturgical document for the morning service of special Sabbaths and Passover.
- **Bernard Museum at Temple Emanu-El “Be Fruitful! The Etrog in Jewish Art, Culture and History”:** A lithographic poster of Ethrogim by Meir Gur Aryeh, a magnificent 1709 Corfu Mahzor manuscript, and a rare printed book, “God’s War Against Amalek: A General Prohibition against the Etrogim from Greece and those from Corfu in Particular.”
- **Center for Jewish History “How Jews Became Citizens: Highlights from the Sid Lapidus Collection”:** Four items from the collection that focused on the history of European Jewish emancipation in the 17th-19th centuries.
- **The Museum of the Bible “Scripture and Science: Our Universe, Ourselves, Our Place”:** Five items illustrating the engagement of Jews with science.



## Library Programs

The Library's "Between the Lines" series of online book talks has been flourishing, with over 1,000 viewers this past year. In these programs, Librarian David Kraemer spoke with authors on a wide variety of topics, including Jewish history, religion, Jewish education, book history, Talmud, contemporary Jewish issues, Kabbalah, and contemporary Israeli fiction.

The Library has been online for other programs as well. The Library's rare collections were featured in a program for Smithsonian Associates ("the largest museum-based education program in the world"), offering insights into "The Real Lives of Jews in the Traditional World" focusing on Jewish life in the Middle Ages. Guest curator of our "Living Yiddish in New York" exhibit, Annabel Cohen, offered an online tour of the exhibit for an audience from YIVO, the institute for the study of East European Jewry. David Kraemer also discussed the exhibit in an interview program with Dan Mariaschin, CEO of B'nai B'rith International, as part of their extensive online interview series.

## Publications

The Library was thrilled to celebrate the publication of a comprehensive catalog of our exceptional ketubbah collection, written by world-renowned scholar Shalom Sabar. *The Art of the Ketubbah – Marriage Contracts from the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary* is a monumental catalog begun more than thirty years ago, a lifetime achievement. The catalog, printed in two volumes, documents, with color images, the over five hundred ketubbot in the Library's collections, grouped by the geography of the communities whose memories they preserve, providing the reader with a "grand tour" of Jewish weddings around the world over the centuries. The book also includes images of 46 ketubbah fragments from the Cairo Genizah. This is an invaluable contribution to the study of ketubbot, the artists and scribes who created them, and the families whose wedding celebrations they record.

Installation of the Rothschild Mahzor (1490)  
at the Metropolitan Museum of Art





## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Preserving the collection for future users is a profound responsibility that we approach in a number of ways.

### The Collection

Through purchases and generous donations, the Library continues to build its collection of unique and rare materials, including:

- Esther scroll from Prague ca. 1700
- Seven Ketubbot from the Moldovan Family Collection  
Donated in honor and memory of Jean and Alfred Moldovan:
  - Pisa, Italy, 1795
  - Sijilmasa, Morocco (extinct city), 1902
  - Hamadan, Persia, 1897
  - Bayonne, France, 1810
  - Jerusalem, Israel, 1863
  - Tangier, Morocco, 1891
  - Chicago, United States, undated
- Lithograph printed in Cologne in the last third of the nineteenth century, depicting the welcoming of the Shabbat by the angels
- Two lithograph artworks created by David Moss
- Hundreds of boxes of archival material from scholars and synagogues around the country



### Training Judaica Librarians

We are very excited to be the recipients of a \$250,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a US government agency, to launch and establish a **Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship** program, developed in partnership with the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL). This program aims to equip library and archival professionals with the skills necessary to serve diverse communities across the United States. In this program, over 30 American and 8 European specialists are being trained to meet the special demands of Judaica and Hebraica librarians and archivists. The European participants, including those from Kyiv, Vilna, and Rome, are being funded by a grant from the AJL.

### The Brodsky Conservation Lab

Our loan program, as well as the on-going maintenance and preservation of our rare books, would be impossible without the exceptional work of our conservation team. They were intricately involved with the movement of rare materials back to the Library from storage, assessing the condition of thousands of books, making repairs as necessary, and further protecting over 1,000 books by creating customized boxes prior to shelving.

Among the most important treatments conducted during the past year included our work on the Rothschild Mahzor in preparation for its exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Our conservator examined each tempera miniature and the stability of 477 leaves (954 pages) of text under a stereo microscope using a fine brush. The text is written with iron-gall ink, which is known to be corrosive, but only a microscopic-sized dislodge was observed, so the condition was determined to be safe for the loan. Because this will be a lengthy loan, page-turns will be necessary every three months. To set this up, Akiko Yamazaki-Kleps closely consulted with the Met conservator concerning each planned page opening. Conservators at both institutions also worked together to determine the safest conditions for display in an environmentally controlled case.

Often the conservation of rare materials reveals surprises. A recent example involved two separate books, both containing unexpected printed samples of important Hebrew incunables

(materials printed during the first century of the movable-type printing press, up to 1500) within their covers. A small section of one was tested, revealing that the cover contains 17 layers of printed sheets glued together as a book cover (a common practice early in the history of print). Conservation procedures included testing the ink, water bathing a small section and then carefully separating each layer. All separated sheets were dried between felt sheets and placed in Mylar envelopes for safe handling and future study. The test already done sets a precedent for treating the rest of the covers safely.



AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT TREATMENTS CONDUCTED DURING THE PAST YEAR INCLUDED OUR WORK ON THE **ROTHSCHILD MAHZOR** IN PREPARATION FOR ITS EXHIBITION AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

## Digitization

Inside the Conservation Lab is our Polonsky digitization lab in memory of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, where we regularly capture images of our rare works to add them to our online digital collections. This allows us to fulfill our commitment to make available, online, world-wide, and free-of-charge, images of our treasures to any who might want to consult or research them.

We are digitizing rabbinic manuscripts as part of the Louis and Adele Ginzberg Talmud and Rabbinics Digital Manuscript collection supported by the Lawrence-Gould Family. Amongst the manuscripts recently digitized are a 14th century Yemenite manuscript with a rabbinic commentary on the book of Proverbs, a 14th century manuscript about the 613 commandments from Zurich (1391), a Mishneh Torah manuscript from 13th century Egypt, and a 19th century manuscript on halacha from Aleppo. We have received a prestigious grant from The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), an affiliate of The National Archives, to digitize and make







AFTER A YEAR OF WORK INVOLVING ARCHIVISTS, LIBRARIANS, AND TECHNICAL EXPERTS, MANY OF THE ITEMS IN OUR COLLECTION ARE NOW AVAILABLE DIGITALLY, WHICH WILL OPEN NEW WINDOWS TO UNDERSTANDING JEWISH HISTORY.



accessible a treasure trove of audio-visual files. After a year of work involving archivists, librarians, and technical experts, many of the items in our collection are now available, which will open new windows to understanding American Jewish history and experience in the 20th century. The recordings in the collection encompass a wide range of topics, including programs featuring leaders in American politics, law and ethics, public interfaith programs, lectures, symposia, arts and literature programs, and interviews with and about theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel.

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