The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

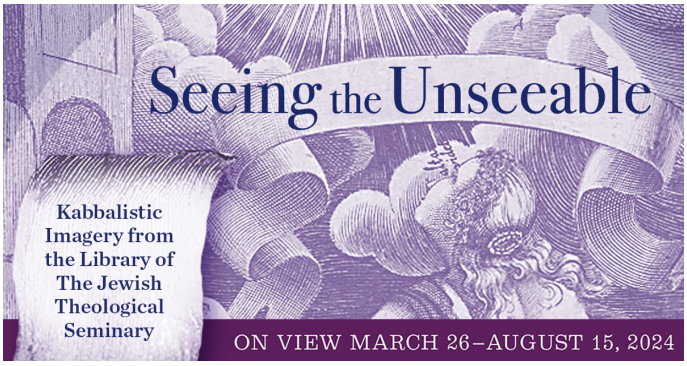
News and Events—Summer 2025

We have had another extraordinary year of activity at the Library of JTS. Our goal remains to make available our unique collection of rare Judaica to the widest possible audience. This year, hundreds joined us for exhibits at the JTS campus and thousands more saw our works exhibited across the globe. At the same time, we have worked not only to preserve the collection through conservation and digitization, but to train the Judaica librarians of the next generation. We are now looking forward to another exciting year, when our largest exhibit ever—over 100 Hebrew manuscripts—will open at the Grolier Club in New York City on September 17 and a new Library website will bring highlights of the collections to online users everywhere.

EXHIBITING OUR TREASURES

During the past year we staged three exhibits on campus in the Dorothy T. Goldman Exhibition Gallery, and many items in our collection were on loan. Loans were made to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Uffizi Gallery (Florence), the Musée d'art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (Paris), the Museum of the Bible (Washington, DC), the Jewish Museum (Berlin), and the Museum Barberini (Potsdam). Of special note was our loan to the Jewish Museum in New York, where a large number of our Esther scrolls, prints, and books enhanced the Jewish Museum's *The Book of Esther in the Age of Rembrandt* exhibition, which will travel to the North Carolina Museum of Art this fall.

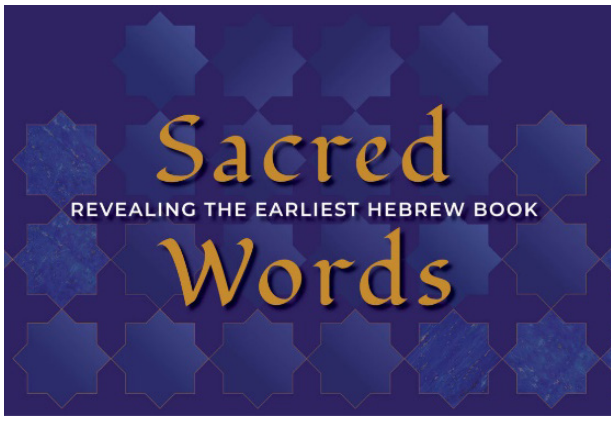
Our exhibits at the Library this past year illustrated the breadth of the collection, across centuries and continents:



Seeing the Unseeable: Kabbalistic Imagery from the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary explored how the Kabbalists represented the doctrine of the sefirot, the ten divine attributes that emanated from within God and through which God interacts with creation. Images were central to how the Kabbalists presented their complex metaphysical ideas and the exhibit included theoretical treatises, diagrammatic scrolls, devotional plaques, and magical amulets.

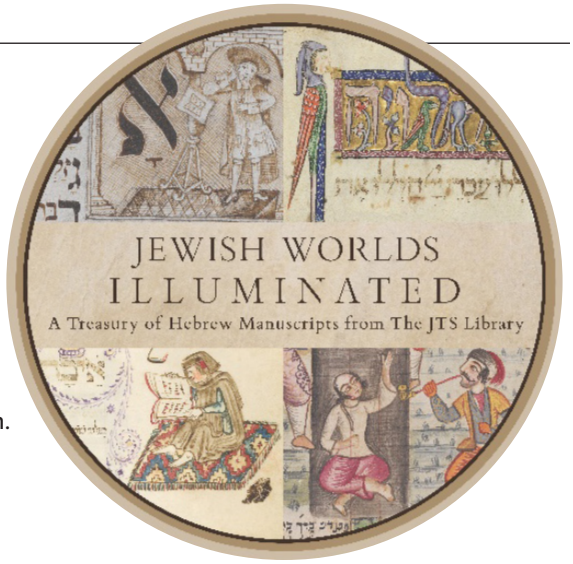
Illuminating Sacred Text: Contemporary Jewish Book Artists and Their Work showcased the work of five outstanding contemporary Jewish book artists, David Moss, Avner Moriah, Izzy Pludwinski, David Wander, and Barbara Wolff, and their illustrated interpretations of religious texts, including Haggadot and biblical stories. The exhibit demonstrated that the ancient tradition of beautifying sacred texts endures in modern times.

Sacred Words: Revealing the Earliest Hebrew Book, presented in conjunction with the Museum of the Bible (Washington, DC), displayed the Afghan Liturgical Quire, a 1,300-year-old manuscript containing Sabbath-morning prayers, liturgical poems, and the world's oldest Haggadah. The discovery of the Quire, the oldest known Hebrew manuscript in book form, demonstrates both the consistency of the liturgy over more than a thousand years as well as the significant role of Jewish merchants and traders on the Silk Road in the early Middle Ages. Also displayed were complimentary pieces from the Library's vast collection of documents written as much as a millennium ago, including siddurim and the second oldest known Haggadah.



JEWISH WORLDS ILLUMINATED

Our next, and largest ever, exhibit, ***Jewish Worlds Illuminated, A Treasury of Hebrew Manuscripts from The JTS Library***, will be presented at the prestigious Grolier Club in New York City from September 17 through December 27. This exhibit will showcase more than 100 Hebrew manuscripts, revealing the religious, intellectual, cultural, and artistic lives of Jewish communities across the globe. Each case will present scribal and artistic masterpieces from a particular region or period, inviting viewers to discover a historical Jewish setting. Guided tours will be available throughout the exhibition. For more information and for tour arrangements please contact Dr. David Kraemer at dakraemer@jtsa.edu.



PROJECT CATALOGING 16TH CENTURY BOOKS COMPLETED

The Library successfully completed an important cataloging project, funded by the The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, in collaboration with the "Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place" project.

This project involved the cataloging of 600 rare, printed 16th century Hebrew books, the records of which are now accessible through the Library's catalog and through WorldCat, reaching users world-wide.

For the partnership with the Footprints project, we gathered detailed provenance information for each book. This information included lists of former owners, donors, buyers, sellers, censors, and more. A quarter of the books were unique copies. Many other books, while not unique copies, are found in the United States only at the JTS Library.

The subject areas treated in these books are varied, ranging from liturgical works from different communities, kabbalistic works, collections of Jewish law, ethical and philosophical works, sermons, and historical texts. The geographic scope of the works is wide, as are the pathways by which they reached JTS. The books were printed in such places as Sabionetta, Verona, Basel, Augsburg, Cologne, Freiburg, Frankfurt an Oder, Antwerp, Prague, Wittenburg, Paris, and Lyon. The largest number of books were printed in Constantinople and Salonica, important centers of early printing. Two books were printed in Safed, a small Jewish community in the Land of Israel.

EXPANDING THE COLLECTION

The Library continues to expand its collections and make them accessible to JTS faculty and students, scholars from around the world, and anyone interested in exploring the history and culture of Jews throughout the centuries. Recent gifts to the Library include the significant collections of retiring JTS professors, the papers of notable rabbis and authors, synagogue archives, a collection of historical New England Jewish lifecycle documents, and important collections of art and choral music books.

THE NEW LIBRARY WEBSITE

The purpose of the Library is "inspire the Jewish future by sparking discovery of our past." This fall we will launch a new and unique website that allows users to explore Jewish history and culture through curated images from our collection. Users may search by topics as varied as holidays, Jewish dress, and prayerbooks, by century, or by the country where the books were written. Each work will be described, allowing the user to fully appreciate its purpose, context, and significance, and the user will then be guided to other related works. No other library in the world has provided this curated mode of access to their collection, and we hope users will be amazed and enlightened by the relevance of manuscripts, scrolls, marriage contracts, and other types of works to our lives today.

TRAINING FUTURE LIBRARIANS

A multiyear grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services has funded the Certificate in Judaica and Hebraica Librarianship. In partnership with the Association of Jewish Libraries, we have enrolled 88 students and librarians from across North America, Europe, and Israel, including from the Library of Congress, the US Holocaust Museum Library, the New York Public Library, the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome, the National Library of Lithuania, and many prominent universities. Participants are required to complete classes in Collection Development, Cataloging, and Reference, in addition to elective classes such as Archives, Special Collections, Paleography, History of Judaica Collections, Digital Humanities, and Hebrew Grammar. After the coursework, participants complete a 100-hour internship, which has enabled participants' libraries to enhance the cataloguing, preservation, and availability of their Hebrew collections, clearly demonstrating the JTS Library's global impact.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES GRANT

The Library at JTS is proud to have received a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a project called, "Cataloging, Preserving and Digitizing At-Risk Broadsides, Ephemera and Prints: Depicting Three Centuries of the Jewish Experience from Persecution and Migration to Settlement in the United States." With this generous award, the Library will be able to digitize 7,000 fragile documents, prints, and ephemera documenting the migration of Jewish people to the United States, as well as Jewish American history and culture. Material will be digitized across four themes:

1. American Jewish Experience: Materials created in Jewish communities in America from the late 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, telling the stories of their lives and experience.
2. Antisemitism: documents that illustrate the history of antisemitism in the U.S. and in Europe during the 17th–19th centuries.
3. Unique social, historical, and communal documents, calendars and genealogical charts spanning 300 years that illustrate the everyday lives of individuals and Jewish communities.
4. Extant Jewish Communities: documents from Jewish communities that were destroyed in the first half of the 20th century due to antisemitism in Europe and Arab lands.

Items in the collection include an 1872 lithograph of the consecration of New York's Central Synagogue, an early 20th century poster in Yiddish from the War Savings Club of New England, a collection of rare antisemitic British caricature prints from 1730–1830, and a large collection of unidentified Holocaust images.

The JTS Library is like few others—an exceptional Jewish library where anyone interested in Jewish heritage and culture can explore unfathomed riches, with the guidance of expert professionals who treasure both the collections we preserve and those who use them.

We look forward to welcoming you to our exhibit at the Grolier Club and at the Library for programs, exhibits, and Rare Book Room tours. For more information or to join our mailing list please contact Dr. David Kraemer at dakraemer@jtsa.edu.

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