Jewish Theological Seminaries and Their Libraries

I. EDWARD KIEV

The scope of this article is confined to the Jewish theological seminaries all of which require a college degree or the equivalent for admission. There are a few rabbinical seminaries possessing substantial collections of Biblical, Talmudic, and Rabbinic literature in the original languages. These will be mentioned but not described, as the nature of their collections is limited in scope and interest to orthodox study.

The four schools which offer academic courses on a graduate level have developed substantial libraries under the supervision and direction of full time professional librarians. In addition to the graduate courses for the ministry, these institutions are accredited to offer graduate courses leading to the Ph.D., Dr. of Ed., Doctor of Hebrew Letters and master’s degrees in education, and in music. These also sponsor interdenominational and interfaith institutes for advanced studies.

All of the schools have programs for pre-theological studies in connection with work being done at universities to prepare prospective candidates for the seminaries.

The first century of Jewish theological study on these shores was marked by great strides in the development of the great institutions which have numbered the outstanding scholars and rabbis who founded, built, and maintained seminaries with a high standard of learning and study. At one point in the last quarter of the nineteenth century a small number of brilliant young scholars were still sent abroad for their theological training. The auspicious beginning of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati proceeded through the vision of men who pioneered in this country from European lands. The first

The author is librarian, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion Library, New York.
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graduates of the Conservative and the Orthodox American seminaries completed their studies here only at the turn of the twentieth century. The familiar apprenticeship or private rabbinical training did not exist here to any significant measure. Leading rabbis who did train promising candidates eventually founded small seminaries connected with their congregations. These seminaries did not exist for long due to lack of organizational support and limited opportunities ensuing from individual effort.

The first synagogues composed of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese elements called their ministers from abroad, chiefly from England and Holland. The congregations of people from Central and Eastern Europe who were accustomed to the German and Polish rite of worship and where the sermons were given in the German language drew their candidates from the centers in Europe. The theological training of their rabbis was obtained at European Jewish theological seminaries after or simultaneously with graduate training at the universities.

The rabbis who came to the American communities in the middle of the century and later are known to have completed studies in philosophy, theology, and ancient Semitic literature. They were also good linguists with a facility for writing in a number of European languages.

They edited and were the chief contributors to magazines which they published in English and in German. They preached and lectured in both languages, compiled and published prayer books and hymn books and not a few published large collections of their sermons delivered in English. From their pens came an English translation of the Hebrew Bible and an authoritative English dictionary of the Talmud and the Midrashim as well as manuals for the study of Judaism, of scripture and of Jewish history.

This survey of Jewish Theological Libraries implies two major bibliographical concerns: Jews or Judaism and material on theological issues. To describe these collections it will be instructive to give the background of the institutions in their American setting.

The collections comprising the whole field of Hebraic and Judaic studies in the United States were developed largely since 1900. The two theological seminaries which made important strides in assembling and building important libraries are the Hebrew Union College Library in Cincinnati founded in 1875, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America founded in 1886. Subsequently, the Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, founded in 1922 became part of the Hebrew Union College to form the Hebrew Union College—Jewish
Institute of Religion with schools and libraries in Cincinnati, New York, Los Angeles, and Jerusalem. The Jewish Theological Seminary founded a California branch in Los Angeles and named it The University of Judaism. The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary is the theological seminary of Orthodox Judaism and is part of Yeshiva University located at Amsterdam Ave. and 186th Street in the Washington Heights section of New York.

The Hebrew Theological College founded in Chicago in 1922 is now the Jewish University of America at Skokie, Illinois. Mesifta Torah Vodaas, located in Brooklyn, is an orthodox rabbinical seminary limiting itself to Rabbinic literature apart from any non-Jewish disciplines. Rabbinical seminaries under orthodox auspices are located in various sections of the United States. Since these are not graduate institutions with regularly organized library facilities they are not enumerated in this survey. There are also several Hebrew teachers colleges in the large cities which contain significant collections of books on Judaism and Jewish history, which are not described here.

The settlement of the Jews in the United States more than three hundred years ago marked the beginning of the Jewish religious community on this continent. The training of rabbis needed to serve the community began here in 1860. When the first theological school, Maimonides College, was opened in Philadelphia, the Jewish population in the United States was 150,000. Other small seminaries were opened and were active for only a short time.

The founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations by I. M. Wise was followed by the opening under its auspices of the Hebrew Union College in 1875.

A prerequisite to a full understanding of the aims of these libraries is an acquaintance with the difficulties of collecting the scattered religious literature published in scores of places since the invention of printing and recovery of ancient manuscripts from oblivion, and the study of these sources by competent scholars for their eventual publication.

The coming of Solomon Schechter to the United States and his work in the reorganization of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the building up of its library, marked the burgeoning Jewish scholarship and systematic study of Jewish theology. Contemporary with Schechter's arrival in the United States was Rabbi Kaufman Kohler's appointment as head of the Hebrew Union College to succeed Wise.

It should be noted that only some of the seminaries use the words
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"theological seminary" in their names. The preference for college or institute was evidently based on the desire to train people for community service and research in addition to the main course of training for the Rabbinate or ministry. The Hebrew word "Yeshivah"—academy, is still used by many orthodox seminaries and schools, as well as by Yeshiva University which was founded as a rabbinical seminary to expand later in several directions to include schools in many fields of science and the humanities.

There are three major branches of Judaism in the United States commonly referred to as Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. There also are groups within these branches representing certain trends in religious life. Inasmuch as none of these groups,—although they maintain theological seminaries,—established usable or open theological libraries, this reference must suffice.

The chief educational goal of the rabbinical seminaries is to offer post college training to men who will be called to minister to the Jewish community. The special training is directed to a mastery at first hand of the ancient sources of the Jewish religious tradition, such as the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic literature and philosophy. The usual course of study is a period of five years after the college degree, which is sometimes followed by post-Rabbinic or post-B.D. graduate study for rabbis or Christian ministers who are candidates for the Ph.D.

The level in every instance is therefore of a graduate student body under faculties of men who are involved in important research in every area of religion and philosophy. The libraries within these institutions project the research and conveniently preserve the fruits of scholars' work without regard to time or place. The resources built up by these institutions in America within a comparatively short period are a credit to the scholars and librarians who had the vision and foresight to assemble countless treasures of the Jewish heritage. The great holocaust, and the extinction of six million Jewish lives and so much of their cultural and religious possessions during the last war, adds importance to what these libraries have acquired for preservation and for study.

The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Library in Cincinnati is housed in a library-building on the campus on Clifton Avenue. A new modern library building is being erected in the same area to house the 155,000 volumes with space for double the present number, and several thousand manuscripts. The new facilities will
have a large comfortable study area with studies for each member of the faculty and audio-visual, microfilm, photostat, and binding facilities.

The collection is highly specialized in the fields of Hebraica, Judaica, and the Ancient Near East. It numbers 125 incunabula and thousands of sixteenth century books of Hebrew and related material. The Jewish music collection is considered outstanding as is the collection of books by and about Spinoza, and the growing section of Jewish Americana. Rabbinic theology and the history and development of Judaism is very strong, as is biblical literature and the inter-testamental literature as well as modern philosophy and theology. A staff of fourteen professional librarians and clerical assistants offers every modern library service: reference, photocopying, interlibrary loans, and lists of new acquisitions. The librarian edits *Studies in Booklore and Bibliography*, published by the library under a Board of Editors from faculty. The American Jewish Archives collects materials and publications about Jews in Judaism in America, and a Jewish Museum of ritual art and antiquities, functions as part of the College-Institute. The budget for the library is allocated by the College-Institute from endowment funds and the proceeds of the Combined Campaign of the College-Institute and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which is the parent organization of the Reform Synagogues in America.

The New York school of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion was founded by the late Rabbi S. S. Wise in 1922, and was called the Jewish Institute of Religion. It functioned as a graduate theological seminary with the added purpose of training men and women for community service and research in religion and Jewish studies. In 1948 the school became a part of the older Hebrew Union College under the presidency of the famous biblical archaeologist Nelson Glueck, its present head.

The library of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, is therefore among the youngest Jewish theological collections, having been started in 1922, or about a quarter of a century after the other major Jewish collections began their phenomenal growth. This library now numbers 77,000 volumes and two hundred manuscripts. Its great strength is in the fields of Jewish history and sociology, in editions and commentaries of the Hebrew Bible, and in the growing field of modern Hebrew literature which is also called for its latest manifestations, Israeli literature. The library is developing its sections on theology and philosophy and is making many addi-
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tions to the Talmudic and liturgical fields. The important scholarly periodicals in the areas of Bible, theology, Hebrew literature, Near Eastern languages and archaeology are kept up to date and bound. The needs of the new School of Sacred Music will be met with a program for developing the collections of Jewish music and comparative liturgy and music.

A dictionary catalog including a subject catalog is accessible along with reference and interlibrary loan services manned by a staff of five. The classification system used is a modification of the scheme originally devised by A. S. Freidus for the Jewish Collection of the New York Public Library. The library is housed on the fourth and the fifth floors of the building at 40 West 68th Street, in the Lincoln Square area of New York City.

The California School of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion was opened in 1955. It provides the first two years of a five year course in graduate theological study as well as pre-theological courses for students preparing to enter the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

The library of the California school consists of about 12,000 volumes, formed largely from the theological and rabbinical library of the late S. S. Cohon, who was the head of the Department of Theology in the Cincinnati school. A librarian and an assistant are in charge.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, located at Broadway and 122nd Street, in the Morningside Heights section of New York (adjacent to Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary) was chartered by the state of New York in 1886. It is a graduate school for rabbinical training and for research and Jewish scholarship. It has now expanded into many units consisting of a Teachers Institute and Seminary College of Jewish Studies, Cantors Institute, and the Interfaith Institute for Religious and Social Studies. The University of Judaism in Los Angeles, California, is the western branch of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The library of the Jewish Theological Seminary was started in 1893 and was reorganized in 1901, when it began to grow by the acquisition of important collections of rare books and manuscripts. The library is in possession of 200,000 printed books and nearly 10,000 manuscripts. These consist of volumes of the Bible and Talmudic and Rabbinic literature, theology, philosophy, liturgy, history, education, linguistics, and law. The core of the library is formed from private libraries of renowned scholars and collectors and acquired by
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purchase or bequest. The library is considered to be the largest and most important collection of Hebraica and Judaica in the world. A microfilm library of copies of Hebrew manuscripts to be found in libraries abroad has been established at the Seminary Library, with copies of 2,040 manuscripts. The periodical collection consists of 21,000 bound volumes with 147 current periodicals received regularly.

The physical plant consists of the reading room on the second floor and library offices on the fourth floor. The book collection is in a ten tier stack built into a tower over the entrance to the building.

The Judaica catalog is made up of all books published in non-Hebrew characters arranged in dictionary form. The Hebraica catalog arranged according to Hebrew title includes all works published in Hebrew characters: Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, Judaeo-Arabic, Ladino, and other dialects using Hebrew transliteration. The system set up by the Jewish Collection of the New York Public Library is the basis of the Seminary Library’s classification code.

The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, originally was founded in 1896 as the Yeshiva for the training of Orthodox rabbis. Its program of theological training is both undergraduate and graduate and also post graduate jointly with Yeshiva College.

The library numbers 60,000 volumes with a concentration in Rabbinic literature and Hebraica. About a third of the collection is Judaica. An author and dictionary title catalog is available, and the classification is based on a detailed expansion of Dewey. The library staff is headed by a librarian and four assistants.

The Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, Illinois, moved to its present location from Chicago in 1959. It offers an undergraduate and graduate program of training for the American Orthodox rabbinate. The library numbers 39,000 volumes comprised of Rabbinic literature, books on the Hebrew Bible, Jewish philosophy and theology and general Judaica with a special collection of Yiddish publications. The classification code is based on the system used in the Jewish Collection of New York Public Library. A dictionary catalog of Hebrew titles and an author and subject catalog is available. The library is headed by a librarian and two assistants.