The rich holdings of the Hebraic Section reflect virtually every aspect of Jewish life through the ages. Over 250,000 items are housed in a stack area adjacent to the Section and are available for examination by researchers. They include an extensive range of books; a broad selection of periodicals current and historical; and a variety of Yiddish and Hebrew newspapers reflecting every possible shade of opinion.

The Hebraic Section strives to share the rich treasures in its holdings with visitors home and abroad. To this end, it has held two major exhibitions within the past twenty years, each showcasing special items from the collections: From the Ends of the Earth (1989) and Words like Sapphires (2012), the latter celebrating 100 years of the Hebraic Section. It also highlights items from its collections through blogs posted regularly on the:

Library’s 4 Corners of the World Blog: http://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/

The Hebraic Section welcomes groups interested in viewing its collections. To learn more about this or to be placed on a mailing list for its programs and events, please feel free to contact us!

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The Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress has long been recognized as one of the world’s foremost centers for the study of Hebrew and Yiddish materials.

Established in 1914 as part of the Division of Semitica and Oriental Literature, its beginnings can be traced to Jacob H. Schiff’s gift in 1912 of nearly 10,000 books and pamphlets from the private collection of Ephraim Deinard, a well-known bibliographer and bookseller who combed the world in search of rare Hebrew books and manuscripts.

In the years since this initial gift, the Library has developed and expanded its Hebraic holdings to include all materials of research value in Hebrew and cognate languages. Today the section houses works in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic, Aramaic, and Syriac.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

In addition to its more general holdings, the Hebraic Section houses a number of special collections. Digitized Finding Aids for these collections can be accessed at: http://www.loc.gov/rr/amedl

Highlights include:

Hebrew Manuscripts: approximately 225 manuscripts dating from the 11th to early 20th centuries, among them the Washington Haggadah of 1478, the chief jewel of the Hebraic Section. The collection is currently being digitized in its entirety.

Hebrew Incunabula: 37 books printed before 1501. These rare Hebrew “cradle-books” span the three major centers of early Hebrew printing: Spain, Portugal, and Italy.

Sixteenth-Century Hebrew Books: over 675 books printed in Italy, Eastern Europe, and the Ottoman Empire over the course of the sixteenth century, among them a number of first printings of classic works.

Ladino Books: books written in the language of the Sephardi Jews following the expulsions from Spain and Portugal. Its online Finding Aid was recently updated with approximately 200 titles.

Yizkor Books: Holocaust memorial books commemorating the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe destroyed in World War II.

Artist’s Books: limited-edition books created at fine art presses. The Hebraic Section currently holds over 75 of these innovative books in Hebrew and Yiddish.

Rare Children’s Books: a magnificent collection of some of the earliest illustrated books for children in Hebrew and Yiddish.

Opening page from the Washington Haggadah.
Handwritten and illustrated by Joel ben Simeon. Vellum. Italy or Germany, 1478. Acquired from the collections of Ephraim Deinard.