

*A History of Histories—of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Exchange: Professor
A.S. Yahuda and the International Trade of Antiquities, Rare Books, and
Manuscripts, 1902-1944*

by Allyson Gonzalez

Abstract

This article provides the first attempt to study comprehensively the influential involvement of the scholar Abraham S. Yahuda (1877-1951) in the international trade of manuscripts and cultural objects. Buoyed by his position as the chair of Rabbinic Language and Literature at the University of Madrid in 1915, Yahuda legitimized and deepened his role in the trade of material objects; his ongoing trade of such objects, in turn, helped to legitimize his scholarship, which continued well after he left Spain. Through a study of previously unpublished files, the piece points to the overlapping of knowledge, power, and the acquiring of antiquities and other objects during the first half of the twentieth century.

Three years after leaving his position as chair of Rabbinic Language and Literature at the University of Madrid, Abraham S. Yahuda decided to sell his collection of Inquisition material. Consisting of more than a hundred rare Inquisition documents, as well as books, manuscripts, paintings, and other paraphernalia from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the former Spanish colonies,¹ Yahuda's

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¹ For two separate copies of this collection, see the files 3779 and 3870 in the Abraham S. Yahuda Archive (henceforth ASYA), National Library of Israel, as well as MS-5e, Box 13, Folder 38, Hebrew Union College Records, 1873-1955 (bulk 1920-1947), American Jewish Archives (AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio. I thank Joe Weber, associate archivist at the AJA, for this material from 2015.

collection from 1926-1927 was in many ways remarkable. Throughout the late nineteenth century, Jewish scholars like Moritz Steinschneider, Heinrich Graetz, and Joseph Jacobs had sought to address the historical lacuna that encircled the study of Iberian Jewish life. Their work, however, had been notably limited, as Yitzhak Baer, one of the doyens of Spanish Jewish history, would eventually describe it.² Jewish and Spanish historians alike, Baer explained, had faced “unusual difficulties” in the study of Jewish life in Spain—from the disparate locations of the source material, to the profound intellectual, linguistic, and methodological sophistication required of such labor.³ Yahuda had helped to propel modern Spanish interest in Judaistic science (*judaistischen Wissenschaft*), as Baer termed it,⁴ but ultimately had “more important” projects in mind.⁵



Fig. 1. Photograph of a portrait of Francisco Sobrino, bishop of Valladolid, oil, 110x85cm, in Yahuda's Inquisition materials. American Jewish Archives, MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda. Courtesy of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio at americanjewisharchives.org.

² Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien* I (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1929), iii-v.

³ *Ibid.*, iv.

⁴ Baer cites the work of the Spanish scholar José Millàs Vallicrosa as evidence. See Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, v. Given Yahuda's limited time in Spain as well as his many absences, however, Baer's assertion regarding Yahuda's impact on “Judaistic science” in Spain may be questioned. For a description of some of the students with whom Yahuda worked at the University of Madrid, see Allyson Gonzalez, “Abraham S. Yahuda (1877-1951) and the Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019): 421; 406-433. For articles on Yahuda's connection to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see the works by Almog Behar, Yuval Evri, Michal Rose Friedman, Mostafa Hussein, Stefan Schorch, as well as Gonzalez in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019).

⁵ Regarding these “more important” projects (*wichtigeren Aufgaben*), Baer seems to refer to Yahuda's work on ancient Egyptian-Hebrew points of overlap, a project that came to light as Baer was writing; see Gonzalez, “Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship,” 429 n121.

That “more important” work—Yahuda’s *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Ägyptischen* (1929), and its emphasis on the significant points of overlap between ancient Egyptian and biblical Hebrew⁶—would be promptly rejected by the leading scholars of the field, after having consumed at least a decade of Yahuda’s labor.⁷ Just outside of Baer’s immediate field of vision,⁸ however, Yahuda had a *different* “more important” project developing in the background, one that would help to propel “Judaistic” studies, as well as Orientalist studies and its modern derivatives, throughout the twentieth century.

From 1902 to 1944, this former professor at the University of Madrid migrated thousands of cultural and religious objects from South Asia to the Middle East and North Africa, as well as from the Iberian Peninsula, the Ladino-speaking Mediterranean, and Latin America into the libraries, museums, and archives located primarily in Europe and the United States⁹—augmenting the intellectual and political status of at least two of the major empires in the modern “Western”¹⁰ world. For at least forty years, Yahuda’s impressive manuscripts, periodicals, and rare books, as well as his involvement in the antiquities trade—as I show in this article—helped to populate the growing collections at the British Museum, Cambridge University, Princeton University, the University of Michigan, as well as the U.S. National Library of Medicine, among others. In some cases, Yahuda’s transactions, as with the Jewish Theological Society, seem to have amounted to a

⁶ “The Language of the Pentateuch and its Relation to Egyptian”; see Abraham S. Yahuda, *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Ägyptischen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1929).

⁷ For an example of an immediate critique, see G. Bergsträsser and W. Spiegelberg, “Ägyptologische und semitische Bemerkungen zu Yahuda’s Buch über die Sprache des Pentateuchs,” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 7 (1929): 113-123. For Yahuda’s response to Spiegelberg, see A. S. Yahuda, “Eine Erwiderung auf Wilhelm Spiegelberg’s ‘Ägyptologische Bemerkungen’ zu meinem Buche ‘Die Sprache des Pentateuch,’ ” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 7, no. 2 (1930).

⁸ For the correspondence between Baer and Yahuda, see ASYA, file 159.

⁹ His selling of items extended beyond these realms, albeit in lesser quantities, from Russia to North Africa, among other locales.

¹⁰ On the employment of “East” and “West” binaries as connected to “ideological codes” relating to emancipation and assimilation which weaken under scrutiny, see the introduction and chapter twenty to David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

few dozen texts.¹¹ In other instances, however, his impact was more profound. As noted by Philip K. Hitti, a foremost scholar of Arabic studies in the United States, Princeton University—following its 1942 acquisition from Yahuda’s collection—could claim to possess the “largest collection of Arabic manuscripts among the academic institutions of the world.”¹²

Working in the aftermath of the 1883 Shapira Affair, which highlighted the need for credibility within the sprawling Near Eastern antiquities and manuscript trade,¹³ Yahuda served as a lettered advisor—as well as a productive source of highly desired cultural objects. Born in a religiously diverse Jerusalem, Yahuda (1877-1951), a profound polyglot of self-declared Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardi heritage, had trained in Germany before becoming a lecturer of Bible and Semitic philology (ca. 1904-1913) at the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies in Berlin. By 1915, Yahuda had become the very first Jewish professor to hold a chair of Jewish studies at a modern Western university, at the University of Madrid.¹⁴ Until his resignation from Madrid in 1923, Yahuda’s pedagogical reach at the school extended from the postbiblical period to medieval Iberia.¹⁵ In addition to his chair, which briefly influenced a generation of Spanish scholars, Yahuda sought throughout his life to found programs and institutions of higher learning for Jewish, Arabic, and Islamic studies across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East,

¹¹ Alexander Marx to Herr Dr., April 12, 1915, file 1714, ASYA.

¹² Princeton received this material through a benefactor, Robert Garrett, a Princeton graduate. See Philip K. Hitti, “The Arabic and Islamic Manuscripts,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 3, no. 4 (1942): 116-122. Among other things, this collection apparently includes material from the library of the famed Imam Shamil (1797-1871), who organized Muslim resistance to tsarist Russia’s advance in the northeastern Caucasus; see Michael Kemper, Amri Shikhsaidov and Natalya Tagirova, “The Library of Imam Shamil,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 64, no. 1 (2002): 121-140.

¹³ This event will be discussed more fully in the coming pages.

¹⁴ Gonzalez, “Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship”; Michal Rose Friedman, “Orientalism between Empires: Abraham Shalom Yahuda at the Intersection of Sepharad, Zionism, and Imperialism,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019): 438; 435-451.

¹⁵ See Allyson Gonzalez, “The First Modern Syllabus: A.S. Yahuda at the University of Madrid,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019). Accessible at <https://katz.sas.upenn.edu/blog/jewish-quarterly-review/first-modern-syllabus-s-yahuda-university-madrid>. Accessed 18 December, 2020.

as well as in the United States.¹⁶ Amid his various travels, this “erudite Oriental”¹⁷ became known for a linguistic and intellectual expansiveness that allowed him, with the aid of familial,¹⁸ personal, and professional contacts, to cull little-known manuscripts and other cultural objects from across the globe.

This article provides the first attempt at a comprehensive study of Yahuda’s influential involvement in the trade of manuscripts and cultural objects. It looks chiefly at Yahuda’s selling of these objects to “Western” libraries, museums, and archives, based on previously unexamined and unpublished archival documents. The article covers his transactions from the first half of the twentieth century, beginning with his Inquisition collection in the 1920s, and the events leading up to it, before turning to the broader interwar years, and finally, to his activities during World War Two. Such transactions were frequently validated by his chairship at the University of Madrid, which continued well after his exit. I argue that Yahuda’s work as a scholar legitimized his activity as a collector, and, in turn, that his collecting helped to legitimize his scholarship as well as his academic standing. In the process, this article builds upon existing scholarship which points to the interrelated and interdependent aspects of power, knowledge, and the acquiring of antiquities and other cultural objects during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹

One important concern of the paper is Yahuda’s provenance—his documenting of an object’s history, from temporary forms of custody to more entrenched instances of legal ownership.²⁰ Yahuda’s provenance offer, I argue, insight into

¹⁶ Gonzalez, “Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship.”

¹⁷ For Orientalist constructions of Yahuda, see Friedman, “Orientalism between Empires.” For the Arabist Ignaz Goldziher’s labelling of Yahuda as an “erudite Oriental,” see I. Goldziher, “Referate,” *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 31, August 6, 1904: 1933-1935.

¹⁸ For a brief description of Yahuda and his brother Yitzhak Yehezkel’s involvement with Arab Islamic culture, see Mostafa Hussein, “Arabian Nights, Hebrew Nights: On the Influence of *Alf laylah wa-laylah* on Jewish Culture in Palestine/Israel,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 125-146.

¹⁹ The literature on this topic is vast, and is particularly influenced by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1977). See also footnote 27.

²⁰ I take this definition of provenance from the “Introduction,” *Provenance Evidence: A Thesaurus for Use in Rare Book and Special Collections Cataloguing* (Chicago: Association of

the means by which material objects and cultural forms of knowledge were accrued by European and American metropolises during a century of unprecedented warfare and violence—as well as into the discourse surrounding such transactions. As the president of Princeton once declared, the Arabic manuscripts in particular had been desired in part for their “symbolic value,” as well as, among other things, for their ability to assert to a deeply embattled planet the “truths of the merging streams of civilization.”²¹ These assertions could exist even as complex ethical issues remain embedded in the Western accumulation of cultural and religious objects, the importance of which this article does not intend to minimize.²²

Certainly, the “truths” behind the merging of civilizations were far from monotone or homologous.²³ If Yahuda’s collections helped to ground claims for a kind of historical multiculturalism, as suggested by Princeton’s president, his provenance often emphasize its opposite—by underscoring the tenuous and even fraught relations involved in such transactions. Where civil and political rights extended unevenly across nation-states, protectorates, and changing empires, Yahuda articulates participatory as well as conflicting ethno-religious episodes, often within fragmented processes of colonialization.²⁴ His provenance describe a world of unpredictable conflict, where, on the one hand, multi-ethnic and/or religious exchange unfold within legal and consenting frameworks. On the other

College and Research Libraries, 1988), accessible online at <http://rbms.info/vocabularies/introductions/ProvenanceIntro.htm>.

²¹ The university received the manuscripts through a benefactor, as will be further discussed; see Harold W. Dodds, “The Garrett Collection of Manuscripts: Acceptance of the Collection by President Dodds,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 3, no. 4 (1942): 113–115.

²² See Neil Brodie and Simon MacKenzie, “Trafficking Cultural Objects: An Introduction,” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 20 (2014): 421–426 and John Henry Merryman, “Two Ways of Thinking about Cultural Property,” *American Journal of International Law* 80, no. 4 (1986): 831–853. For a summary of the primary conflicts, see “Buying, Selling, and Owning the Past,” *Stanford University: Multidisciplinary Research & Teaching*, accessed on February 3, 2015 at <http://news.stanford.edu/news/multi/features/heritage/>.

²³ On de-colonization discourse among colonized persons within the interwar period, see Stuart Ward, “The European Provenance of Decolonization,” *Past & Present* 230, no. 1 (2016): 227–260; and, more broadly, Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁴ For a comprehensive study of colonialization and its ends, see Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of Colonial Empires* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

hand, his writings also warn against “deceitful” figures from afar who threaten to destroy cultural objects—and with them, entire civilizations, including their own. By Yahuda’s account, this most capricious trade unveils a world in which modern *conversos* discreetly bring their family histories to market, a place where contemporary “Inquisitors” act with unchecked ferocity, and where “fanatical Mohammadeans” frustratingly undermine the stability of Western material appropriations.

In the process, this article observes how such documentary narratives—which claimed to offer a descriptive insider view into the details of a transaction—could, in fact, obscure important provenance-related concerns, like the clear recording of ownership and the legal transfer of an object. It also observes how extenuating circumstances, as described by such narratives, may serve to heighten the potential desirability of an item. As such, this article also traces some rhetorical practices within interwar and wartime provenance, and from a figure whose professorship in Spain helped to extend his cultural, linguistic, and geographic reach. At the same time, this piece also highlights the broad role of scholars and collectors—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—as well as the scholar-collector, in the at-times contentious whirligig-like trade.

Throughout the nineteenth century, European archives and libraries had created new methods for processing existing repositories of historical texts and cultural objects.²⁵ At the same time, these institutions increasingly accumulated an extensive array of materials from distant locales—in part, a reflection of their connections with the growth of modern empire.²⁶ Yahuda’s own family, it should

²⁵ Critiquing monolithic definitions of a “European” or European-esque archive, Michel Duchein stresses the unique contexts in which each country’s and region’s archival system developed, as an epistemological structure distinct from that of libraries—and which in many ways remains distinct, even as libraries began during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to hold their own archival collections. See Michel Duchein, “The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe,” *The American Archivist* 55, no. 1 (1992): 14-25.

²⁶ The literature on this topic is vast. In addition to Said, recent critical and geopolitical approaches to the subject include Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing of Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire - Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For Spain, see Manuela Marín, “Orientalismo en España: estudios árabes y acción colonial en Marruecos (1894-

be noted, played a role in this cultural transfer, having worked at various points on behalf of European powers. Yahuda's Calcutta-born grandfather, Salomon Yahuda, for example, aided the British with supplies during the suppression of a mid-nineteenth century uprising in India, becoming a British subject in the process; Yahuda's father, Benjamin, was a rabbi and merchant who shuttled material goods into Palestine and Syria; and, crucially, his older brother, Isaac Benjamin ("I.B."), was a publisher and well-known bookseller who widely distributed texts from Cairo as well as Jerusalem.²⁷ Such actions could dovetail with the work of other African and Middle Eastern traders, who regularly moved cultural objects within and across borders.²⁸ Wartime appropriations also played a key factor in the Western aggrandizement of material objects, as had been the case, for example, with the *desamortizaciones* (seizures/confiscations) connected in part to the social debates that informed the civil wars in nineteenth-century Spain—which expropriated art objects, materials, and land long-owned by the Catholic Church.²⁹ While the Great War also witnessed the pillaging of cultural objects, international policy on the exporting of cultural and religious property would only begin to shift following the vast appropriations during World War

1943),” *Hispania. Revista Española de Historia* 69, no. 231 (2009): 117-146; Aurora Rivière Gómez, *Orientalismo y Nacionalismo Español: estudios árabes y hebreos en la Universidad de Madrid (1843-1868)* (Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2000); and Barnabé López García, “Orígenes del arabismo español. La figura de Francisco Fernández y González y su correspondencia con Pascual de Gayangos,” *Cuadernos de la Biblioteca Española de Tetuán* 19-20 (1979): 277-291.

²⁷ Given the significance of winning British nationality, as well as the date, Yahuda's grandfather may have provided these supplies during the Indian Rebellion of 1857-1858; see Yahuda to Foreign Office, October 21, 1909, file 3058, ASYA.

²⁸ Ghislaine Lydon Krätli, *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011).

²⁹ For a description of these transfers, see José Ramón López Rodríguez, “El desarrollo de los museos arqueológicos en Andalucía durante el siglo XIX,” in *Arqueología fin de siglo: la arqueología española de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (I Reunión Andaluza de Historiografía Arqueológica), eds. María Belén Deamos and José Beltrán Fortes (Seville: 2002), 157-168. For art objects in particular, see Pierre Géal, “La creación de los museos en España,” *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte* 14 (2002): 289-298.

Two³⁰—yet the application of such policies still remain far from uniform, including when applied to other geo-political and historical circumstances.³¹

Finally, although this article examines several of Yahuda's most significant transactions, grounded in part on his authority as a former chair and professor at the University of Madrid, it is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of Yahuda's entire range of provenance. Nor is it concerned, for example, with some object's precise purchase price. The transactions examined here are based on a study of more than three hundred files relating to the first half of the twentieth century from across Europe and the United States, as well as from the National Library of Israel, which houses the bulk of Yahuda's papers.³²

In 1927, while reading through the contents of a recently received package, Adolph Oko, the respected librarian for Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, learned of a stark historical encounter. Examining the documents in hand, Oko read that the materials had been the result of a rescue mission—albeit a historically distant one.³³ As described by A.S. Yahuda, a former chair of rabbinic language and literature at

³⁰ Notably the 1954 Hague Convention as well as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

³¹ Consider Nigeria, which unsuccessfully attempted in 2004 and 2006 to reclaim its Nok statuettes from France, which as late as 1997 had ratified UNESCO's 1970 Convention, signed in Paris. See Marie Cornu and Marc-André Renold, "New Developments in the Restitution of Cultural Property: Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 17, no. 1 (2010): 1-31; 2. For the ongoing work of navigating restitution claims following the Shoah, see, for example, the World Jewish Restitution Organization at <https://wjro.org.il/our-work/restitution-by-country/>. Accessed December 18, 2020.

³² This piece also does not address the bequeathing of Yahuda's collection to Israel's national library after Yahuda's death in 1951. This collection and the legal battle relating to its transfer during the early years of the State of Israel warrant their own separate study; see Jesse Dukeminier and Robert H. Sitkoff, "Hebrew University Association vs. Nye," *Wills, Trusts, and Estates* (Wolters Kluwer Law & Business, 2013), 408-414.

³³ Although Oko received Yahuda's description in 1926, Oko apparently did not study its contents until 1927. For the initial April 6, 1926 letter to Oko, see file 1952, ASYA. Oko's copy—which includes the full Inquisition list, some 56 pages—is preserved at the American Jewish Archives (AJA); see MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda, 1922-1928, AJA. I thank Joe Weber of the AJA for relaying the Oko-Yahuda material.

the University of Madrid, the material under review had been collected from Spain approximately fifty years before by “amateur” collectors. The numerous preserved items allegedly represented the only remains of Inquisitorial archival material which, Yahuda stated, once existed in volume throughout Spain.³⁴ Much of that material, he argued, no longer survived—having partially been carried away by antique dealers seeking to fill museums across Europe. More alarming, Yahuda suggested, had been the on-site destruction by the hands of persons who wanted to erase the history of the Inquisition in Spain—from those who were “keenly interested in sparing the future generations the knowledge of the unglorious [*sic*] activities of the Inquisition with all its cruelties and barbarous practices.” Yahuda added, “It is extremely rare to find nowadays in Spain any collection of such completeness, and still less of such a nature as this one.”³⁵

Oko had been a logical choice as a potential buyer. As one of the main “guardians” responsible for the building of Jewish libraries in the United States,³⁶ Oko had been uniquely positioned to realize a new home for such material. A scholar of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, Oko had largely built the Hebrew and Jewish book collection in Cincinnati,³⁷ and knew well the medieval and early modern circumstances that variously shaped the development of the Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula until its abolition in 1834. Along these same lines, Oko would have been familiar with the theft and destruction of religious and cultural objects that occurred throughout the nineteenth century in Spain, including of the tribunal archives during and after the liberal revolution of 1820.³⁸

³⁴ File 1952, ASYA; and MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda, 1922-1928, AJA.

³⁵ *Ibid.* For an abbreviated list of contemporary sites with primary Inquisition material in Spain, see Lorenzo H. Feldman, “La Inquisición y otros archivos hispánicos,” *Localización: Biblios: Revista electrónica de bibliotecología, archivología y museología* 13 (2002): 1-7.

³⁶ Ismar Elbogen, “American Jewish Scholarship: A Survey in Honor of the Centenary of Kaufmann Kohler,” *American Jewish Year Book* 45 (1943-1944): 47-65; 60.

³⁷ The Editors, “Adolph S. Oko,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 4 (1944): 290.

³⁸ I thank Francisco Bethencourt for his description of the raid of the Inquisition tribunals and public archives during and following Spain’s 1820 liberal revolution. Bethencourt estimates that Spain’s national archives likely contain less than 20 percent of the original Inquisition documents, while in Portugal perhaps more than 80 percent exist in the National Archive. Email correspondence with author, January 12, 2020. As for private collectors in Spain who sold their material to antiquarian/collection houses such as Maggs, see the June 18-19, 2020 discussion on the topic of Spain’s cultural patrimony on the ESPORA listserv

Such narratives had been widely documented, from figures like the Spanish Orientalist Pascual de Gayangos, who as early as 1839 witnessed the “wantonly destroyed” books, pictures, and ornaments resulting from the seizure of church property,³⁹ to that of the Catholic Church in Spain, which had frequently attempted to preserve what it deemed its legitimate cultural patrimony.⁴⁰

Working amid these various forms of destruction, Yahuda argued, were the actions of modern-day *conversos*—the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity, by force or volition, who, he suggested, still retained their Jewish self-identification after nearly half a millennium. Yahuda described how these “*marranos*”—converts to Christianity who secretly practiced Judaism—had fervently searched the country for the precious documents that Yahuda now presented to Oko. “Still conscious of their Jewish origins,” Yahuda wrote, these persons “did not spare time or money to search all over Spain” for the materials, as these items risked being set ablaze by so-called “fatal accidents.”⁴¹ Yahuda was offering a wide if essentialized picture of Jewishness, writing in consonance with other supposed *converso* sightings in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iberian Peninsula, from the travel writer George Borrow’s *converso* village dwellers⁴² to the “classic Sephardi type(s)” living secretly in Portugal, as reported by one of Yahuda’s own relatives, Ariel Bension.⁴³ Such fascination with

(<https://sympa.ucdavis.edu/sympa/arc/espora>). In turn, antiquarian houses would sell these acquired materials to buyers like Yahuda, who regularly purchased from Maggs between 1938 and 1949, if not before; see, for example, file 1653 in ASYA.

³⁹ William Hickling Prescott, *The Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott, 1833-1847* (Boston-New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 104. I thank Thomas Glick for this reference.

⁴⁰ See “Leyes, reales decretos, reales órdenes, circulares y instrucciones dictadas para la conservación de los objetos y monumentos históricos y artísticos,” *Boletín oficial*, May 2, 1882, Archivo Conde de Romanones, signatura 70-1, archives of the Real Academia de la Historia (RAH) in Madrid, Spain; and “Circular de la Nunciatura Apostólica de Madrid sobre enajenación de objetos artísticos,” *Eclesiástico*, July 29, 1922: 380-391, in the Archivo Conde de Romanones, signatura 70-1, RAH.

⁴¹ File 1952, ASYA; and MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda, 1922-1928, AJA.

⁴² Chapter eleven in George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain, or The Journeys, Adventures, and Imprisonments of an Englishman, in an Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula* (London, Paris, New York: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1843; 1908).

⁴³ For a critique of a fantasized Spain and its “orientalización” at the romantic crossroads of the “North-South” and the “Oriente-Occidente,” see Xavier Andreu Miralles, *El descubrimiento de*

ostensible “modern *conversos*” would also resonate with the future claims of the so-called Jerusalem School, and the idea of plural yet durative forms of “immanent” Jewishness.⁴⁴

It seems that the collectors were "Marranos" still conscious of their Jewish origin, who did not spare time or money to search all over Spain

Fig. 2. Yahuda's description of the collectors in Spain. American Jewish Archives, MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda. Courtesy of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio at americanjewisharchives.org.

Writing to Oko, Yahuda explained that the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York had wanted to purchase the collection, but was unable to raise the needed funds, which was partly true.⁴⁵ Alexander Marx, the Seminary's librarian, had certainly found much interest in the ongoing study of Jewish life in Spain and Portugal, and apparently purchased a variety of texts on the subject from Yahuda as recently as 1915—such as Fidel Fita's *Estudios históricos* as well as Joaquim Mendes dos Remedios's 1895 *Os judeus em Portugal*.⁴⁶ Yet Marx had been

España: mito romántico e identidad nacional (Barcelona: Taurus, 2016). For Yahuda's relative, see Ariel Bension, “An Echo of the Inquisition,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, October 21, 1921, 15. At other times, Yahuda was more critical of such supposed *conversos*, noting how they would occasionally attempt to sell the last of their family's remnants; see A.S. Yahuda, *Hed ha-Mizrah*, June 9, 1950: 8 [Hebrew].

⁴⁴ On the concept of “immanence,” see Marina Rustow, “Yerushalmi and the Conversos,” *Jewish History* 28 (2014): 11-49; for a discussion of *conversos* and the Jerusalem School, see David Nirenberg, “Unrenounceable Core,” review of *The Other Within: The Marranos, Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*, by Yirmiyahu Yovel, *London Review of Books* 31, no. 14 (2009): 16-18.

⁴⁵ Yahuda to Oko, April 6, 1926, file 1952, ASYA.

⁴⁶ According to their 1915 correspondence, Marx tried to purchase more than a dozen texts about Jewish life in Spain and Portugal, and Yahuda—based on his private notations—seems to have located several of these items; the two items cited above remain in the library's collection. As Marx notes, Spanish books of “real interest (*wirklichem Interesse*) for the history of the Jews, I always buy for the library, when they are moderately priced.” Some of the texts Marx requested include: Fidel Fita, *Estudios históricos*, listed by Marx as containing eight volumes (1882-1887) as well as Fita, *La España hebrea* (listed as *Historia hebrea*, 1888); Francisco Fernández y González, *Instituciones jurídicas del pueblo de Israel* (1881) as well as Fernández y González, *Los mudéjares de Castilla* (1866); José Fiter y Inglés, *Expulsión de los judíos de Barcelona* (Barcelona, 1876); Enrique Claudio Girbal, *Los judíos de Gerona* (Gerona, 1870); José María de Mas y Casas, *Memoria*

limited both in terms of his school's budget as well as by the interests of its trustees.⁴⁷ Turning to Oko, Yahuda confided that if he (Yahuda) had brought these items to the “Maggs or Southbys (Sotheby's)” auction houses—instead of, presumably, to such financially midweight academic institutions—the collection would have fetched a far higher price.⁴⁸

In a brief note to Yahuda, Oko responded: “Not interested.”⁴⁹

This rejection was not entirely unique. In the three years prior to contacting Oko, Yahuda seems to have prepared this same material for German- and English-speaking buyers—each sharing the narrative that the items had been salvaged from Spain by modern *conversos*—before having turned unsuccessfully to Oko.⁵⁰ As for Oko, his reasoning behind the rejection was neither explicitly ideological nor political. Rather, the Inquisition materials were, “after a careful perusal of the memoranda,” simply not of interest.⁵¹

Yahuda's documenting of extenuating circumstances had frequently driven the logic of a sale, and required some combination of pragmatic and rhetorical agility—even for less dire exchanges, where Inquisitors remained far from the scene. Just three years earlier, in 1924, Yahuda had managed to salvage the sale of the early print run of an important Ladino newspaper to the British Museum, even when the item fell short of its original description. Working with Lionel David (L.D.) Barnett, the longtime keeper for the British Museum's Department

histórica de los hebreos y de los árabes en Manresa (Manresa, 1837); Joaquim Mendes dos Remedios, *Os judeus em Portugal* (Coimbra, 1895) as well as his *Una biblia hebraica da biblioteca da Universidade de Coimbra*. See Alexander Marx to Herr Dr., April 12, 1915, file 1714, ASYA.

⁴⁷ As Marx noted, the cost of the materials exceeded that of previous acquisitions, and the trustees (*Kuratoren*) had no interest and little propensity toward larger issues (*größeren Ausgaben*), presumably of the Inquisition; see Marx to Yahuda, December 24, 1924, file 1714, ASYA.

⁴⁸ Yahuda to Oko, April 6, 1926, file 1952, ASYA.

⁴⁹ Oko responded while traveling; he received Yahuda's offer in the previous year; see Oko to Yahuda, Oct. 7, 1927, MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda, 1922-1928, AJA.

⁵⁰ See Yahuda's various iterations in files 3779 and 3880, ASYA.

⁵¹ Oko to Yahuda, Oct. 7, 1927, MS-5E, Box 13, Folder 38, A.S. Yahuda, 1922-1928, AJA.

of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts,⁵² Yahuda had initially arranged to sell to the museum the first fourteen volumes of the pro-Zionist newspaper *El Avenir*, based in Salonica.⁵³ It was an understandably desirable purchase on several counts: Comprising a majority of the city's population, Salonican Jews were increasingly writing their own histories of the city, the "Mother of Israel,"⁵⁴ even as the idea for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was being variously constructed among local Zionists and non-Zionists alike.⁵⁵ The great fire of 1917 had also recently destroyed many Jewish communal properties and records.⁵⁶ As the date of sale approached, however, what had been intended as a perfunctory transaction changed when approximately half of the latter four volumes of *El Avenir* were said to be missing. Writing to Barnett, Yahuda proposed an immediate corrective—a replacement for the absent items. While recognizing the importance of the Salonican text, Yahuda explained that several volumes of the illustrated Ladino periodical, *El Amigo de la Familia*, would serve as a more than suitable substitute. This Istanbul-based periodical, Yahuda opined, "has become extremely rare and is of a higher literary character than any other Judeo-Spanish [Ladino] paper."⁵⁷ Yahuda could presume to speak with some authority on the topic, as he had recently written on Ladino and its development while serving as a chair at the University of Madrid.⁵⁸ In response, Barnett declined the proposed substitute, opting for a more limited run of the Salonican text, which ultimately reduced the

⁵² A. L. Basham, "Obituary: Lionel David Barnett," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23, no. 3 (1960): 642-644.

⁵³ For a description of the paper, which ran from 1897-1917, see Uriel Macías, ed., *De buena tinta. 150 años de prensa en ladino* (La Rioja: Fundación San Millán de Cogolla, 2008), 21; and Moshe David Gaon, *Newspapers in Ladino* (Jerusalem, 1965), 13 [Hebrew].

⁵⁴ The first precise Jewish Salonican population figures followed the fire of 1917; Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 56-57. For quote, see Devin E. Naar, "Fashioning the 'Mother of Israel': The Ottoman Jewish Historical Narrative and the Image of Jewish Salonica," *Jewish History* 28 (2014): 337-372.

⁵⁵ Paris Papamichos Chronakis, "A National Home in the Diaspora? Salonican Zionism and the Making of a Greco-Jewish City," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 59-84; and Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 23 and chapters 4 and 5.

⁵⁶ K. Papastathis and E. A. Hekimoglou, *The Great Fire of Thessaloniki (1917)* (Thessaloniki: Printing House, S.A., 2010), 15.

⁵⁷ Yahuda to British Museum, October 19, 1924, file 1578, ASYA.

⁵⁸ A. S. Yahuda, "Contribución al estudio del judeo-español," *Revista de filología española* 2 (1915): 343-347.

final price of sale.⁵⁹ An elder in the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardi congregation in London⁶⁰ and an Orientalist in his own right, Barnett gave a slightly more generous reply than Oko. In Barnett's response to Yahuda, he asked few questions—neither countering nor modifying the professor's literary assessment—even though the two individuals had corresponded over the years on topics ranging from the period's rising antisemitism to the possible whereabouts of a Napoleonic text that Yahuda wanted to locate.⁶¹ A similarly kind but brief rejection followed one year later, in 1925, when the museum declined to purchase two lead figures from Benin, under French control for more than thirty years. Such pieces—particularly of fighting figures, as with Benin's legendary female warriors—had recently grown in popularity in France, following the British's own extensive looting of cultural objects during the Benin massacre of 1897.⁶² Slipping the glossy photos of the statues into a return envelope, H.J. Braunholtz from the museum's Department of Ceramics and Ethnography undoubtedly thought of the surfeit of such objects, when he explained to Yahuda: "I beg to thank you... and to inform you that we are unable to consider the question of purchasing the



Fig. 3. Photograph of two Benin figures. A.S. Yahuda Archive, file 1578, National Library of Israel.

⁵⁹ Yahuda to Barnett, October 19, 1924, file 1578, ASYA. See Sarah Abrevaya Stein's description of the journal in *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington, IN: University Indiana Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ A scholar of Indian culture, language, and history, this long-time keeper for the British Museum—also a lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies shortly after its founding in London—edited and published books on the Bevis Marks synagogue and its records in London. See Basham, "Obituary: Lionel David Barnett," as well as Penuel P. Kahane, "Barnett, Lionel David" in <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/barnett-lionel-david>.

⁶¹ File 1578, ASYA.

⁶² For the British Museum's acquiring of pieces from the Kingdom of Benin, and for an analysis of the multiple meanings of Benin's widely circulated objects following the struggle over southwest Nigeria's delta region, see Felicity Bodenstein, "Notes for a Long-Term Approach to the Price. History of Brass and Ivory Objects Taken from the Kingdom of Benin 1897," in *Acquiring Cultures. Histories of World Art on Western Markets*, eds. Bénédicte Savoy et. al. (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 267-288. For the appeal of the Kingdom of Dahomey's cultural objects in modern colonial France, see Julia Kelly, "Dahomey! Dahomey! The Reception of Dahomean Art in France in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century," *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015): 1-19.

figures, as they are not of sufficient importance to us.”⁶³ Yahuda’s authority—even as the first Jewish chair of a modern Jewish studies-related position—had its limits.

Yet Yahuda’s professorship in Spain certainly helped to legitimate numerous transactions over the years, even as the scope of his cultural transfer extended far beyond any declared *converso*-Inquisitorial lingerings in Spain—as well as beyond the modern Sephardi heartlands. As early as 1920, Yahuda had exercised his professorship in Madrid to form an impromptu cultural “mission” of Mesopotamian artifacts on behalf of the British. Having taken leave from Madrid—officially in order to give a lecture in Lisbon—Yahuda contacted the British Foreign Office as part of an elaborate proposal to acquire highly valuable Assyrian antiquities. These items had been docked in Portugal during World War One after having been illegally excavated by German archeologists in Basra, prompting Yahuda, a British subject, to press the Foreign Office to consider their possible acquisition.⁶⁴ The antiquities trade in particular had been of considerable value to England, especially given British awareness of increasing Western appropriations from the Near East, alongside its alarm at the collections being amassed by Germany, Italy, as well as the United States.⁶⁵

In 1921, one year after the Mesopotamian “mission” for the “mother country,” Yahuda would deepen his involvement in the British purchase of rare material objects through the trade of pre-modern manuscripts, even as Yahuda remained conspicuously absent from his university chair.⁶⁶ Working with the British Museum, the professor secured the sale of 114 rare manuscripts, including two in Arabic from the fourteenth century on the subject of medicine and astronomy.

⁶³ H.J. Braunholtz to Yahuda, September 18, 1925, file 1578, ASYA.

⁶⁴ May 7, 1920, FO 371/5186, British National Archives; cited in Gonzalez, “Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship,” 423.

⁶⁵ See the Foreign Office file FO 371/4175, “Project for the Creation of an Imperial Institute of Archaeology in Cairo,” page stamp 209, British National Archives.

⁶⁶ Yahuda very possibly sold items to the museum prior to 1921, the earliest transaction with the museum preserved in the ASYA. The British Museum’s records (housed in the British Library since 1973) do not readily indicate the earliest transaction and need further study. Hannah Graves, British Library-Archives, email correspondence with the author, November 19 and December 30, 2019. For debates in Spain surrounding Yahuda’s university absences, see file 1970, ASYA.

These manuscripts were purchased on behalf of A.S. Yahuda, while listed under the name of “Isaac Benjamin [I.B.],”⁶⁷ as Yahuda frequently worked in conjunction with his elder brother, a Cairo-based bookseller, particularly prior to the mid-1920s. On the heels of this transaction, in 1922, while still affiliated with Madrid, Yahuda expanded his reach in the English market through the sale of thirty manuscripts to Cambridge University, including an eleventh-century copy of Avicenna’s *Book of Healing*.⁶⁸ These Cambridge manuscripts had been originally slated for Magdalen College, Oxford. However, as Yahuda explained to the British Museum on February 23, 1923—notably, one day after he formally resigned from the University of Madrid⁶⁹—Yahuda decided to terminate his negotiations with Magdalen College, as the elaborate talks had grown messy. According to Yahuda, the failed sale rested with Arthur Cowley, a Magdalen fellow, head of the Bodleian Library and a leading scholar of Semitic languages, who had “bargained too much and too long—thinking that he (Cowley) ought to deal with Arabic Mss (manuscripts) in a true Arabic way.”⁷⁰

By the spring of 1925, Yahuda continued his momentum with the British Museum by selling as the lone merchant of record thirty-five manuscripts—including *Two treatises on gnomonics*, written by the fourteenth-century Andalusian scholar

⁶⁷ The two fourteenth-century manuscripts included a medical compendium, known as *Zubda*, on October 8, 1921, as well as astronomical handbook by the Yemen astronomer Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Kawāshī. For details regarding the merchant of record, British Library-Archives, Victoria Ogunsanya, email correspondence with author, October 25, 2019.

⁶⁸ Of the ninety-one manuscripts offered for sale by A.S. Yahuda, Cambridge purchased thirty on September 19, 1922; see classmarks MS Or. 995-1024 on the Fihrist online catalogue: https://www.fihrist.org.uk/?f%5Binstitution_sm%5D%5B%5D=Cambridge+University&f%5Btype%5D%5B%5D=manuscript&page=96. Frank Bowles, Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, email correspondence with author, December 23, 2019.

⁶⁹ Yahuda to Minister of Public Instruction, February 22, 1923, file 3752, ASYA.

⁷⁰ Yahuda to Barnett, February 23, 1923, file 1578. Actually, Cowley agreed to consider Yahuda’s collection, but warned from the outset that his library was “very short of money”; see Cowley to Yahuda, January 24, 1922, file 1975, ASYA. Despite such harsh words, Yahuda had consulted Cowley for advice during his dispute with Moses Gaster (discussed below) and with questions during Yahuda’s time in Spain; Yahuda also sold books to Cowley from at least 1910-1912. See file 587, ASYA.

Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Raqqām.⁷¹ Yahuda's contacts with the British Museum also opened a path for him to sell, one year later, more than two hundred Islamic manuscripts to the University of Michigan.⁷² By the late 1920s, Yahuda also began discussions with the mining magnate Alfred Chester Beatty—with whom Yahuda owned several thousand shares of Beatty's Selection Trust,⁷³ and for whom Yahuda provided material for the famed Beatty collection in Dublin.⁷⁴

Over the years, Yahuda's standing in the trade of books, manuscripts, and cultural objects would be augmented by his short-lived chair in Madrid, even as he built upon his prior renown as a scholar-collector—as someone expert in transporting valuable items across often-unstable political borders, a partial outgrowth of his academic training and research. This training included a doctorate with the famed Theodor Nöldeke at the Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität in Straßburg,⁷⁵ as well as a lecturer post in Bible and Semitic philology (ca. 1904-1913) at the Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin.⁷⁶ As Yahuda's intellectual circles expanded, so would his ability to participate in a wider world of cultural trade.

As early as 1907, Yahuda had already become known on both sides of the Atlantic for his carefully circulated booklists—a kind of informal guide to rare and

⁷¹ On April 4, 1925, Yahuda sold the *Two treatises on gnomonics* along with twenty-two other manuscripts. On October 10, 1925, he sold an additional twelve manuscripts; British Library-Archives, email correspondence with the author, October 25, 2019. These items were listed separately from a collection of sixty-eight manuscripts that were sold specifically by Yahuda's brother, I.B., to the British Museum in 1922; British Library-Archives, email correspondence with author, October 25, 2019.

⁷² Edward Edwards, a noted scholar for the British Museum, apparently contacted the University of Michigan's Francis W. Kelsey (1858-1927) regarding the Yahuda materials. Edwards relayed to Kelsey that the British Museum could not make the purchase, which opened the door for Michigan to expand its manuscript collection. Yahuda seems to work in conjunction with his brother for this sale. See Eryn Kropf, "The Yemeni Manuscripts of the Yahuda Collection at the University of Michigan: Provenance and Acquisition," *Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen* 13 (2012): 1-19.

⁷³ In 1936-1937, Yahuda owned two thousand shares of Selection Trust Limited; see file 3781.

⁷⁴ Yahuda clearly bought, sold, and exchanged pieces with Beatty; see file 217, ASYA.

⁷⁵ The school is now known as the Université de Strasbourg (University of Strasbourg), following the return in 1918 of Alsace-Lorraine to France from Germany, which had annexed much of the region after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).

⁷⁶ Irene Kaufmann, *Die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1872-1942)* (Berlin: Hentrich&Hentrich, 2006), 41.

desirable texts, available to a select group of potential buyers. As explained by Richard Gottheil, the head of the Oriental Department for the New York Public Library as well as a professor at Columbia University, Yahuda's booklists had been in considerable demand even while Yahuda worked as a lecturer in Berlin. Gottheil, born in Manchester and educated in Germany, knew of such lists because of his own purchases from Yahuda.⁷⁷ Participating within a dilated intellectual network, Gottheil, in turn, relayed the requests of other scholars to be included within Yahuda's distribution: "Will you please send your periodic list of books to Hartwig," wrote Gottheil, referring to Hartwig Derenbourg, the first chair of Islam at the École des Hautes Études in Paris, who in 1880 had catalogued Arabic manuscripts in Spain.⁷⁸ Gottheil wrote, as if surprised, "He has not seen it (your book list) at all."⁷⁹

Crucially, some of Yahuda's earliest potential buyers had included even the very faculty with whom he once studied as well as worked. By 1913, Nöldeke along with the Orientalist Julius Euting, both at Straßburg, had apparently sought to find a patron for at least some of the choice Arabic manuscripts that Princeton University would acquire from Yahuda by the 1940s through the American benefactor Robert S. Garrett, a Princeton alumnus.⁸⁰ As Yahuda explained to Garrett prior to the Princeton purchase, both Nöldeke and Euting had been "sorry that there could be found no patron who would spend the sum necessary to buy

⁷⁷ File 979, ASYA. For a biography, see Joshua Bloch and Ida A. Pratt, "Richard James Horatio Gottheil, 1862-1936," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 4 (1936): 472-489.

⁷⁸ Richard Gottheil to Yahuda, June 16, 1907, file 979, ASYA. Yahuda's archive in Jerusalem contains correspondence with Hartwig Derenbourg (Derenbourg) from 1899 to 1900, but does not mention booklists; see file 624, ASYA. For a background on the Derenbourg family—that "dynasty of Orientalists"—as well as a mention of Hartwig's cataloging of Arabic materials in Spain (in the El Escorial), see Vincent Scheil, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Hartwig Derenbourg," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1909): 725-755.

⁷⁹ Gottheil to Yahuda, June 16, 1907, file 979, ASYA. Regarding Gottheil's surprise, consider the important role of Hartwig Derenbourg and his father Joseph, for example, in relaying the work of German Arabists to scholars in France and Algeria; see Alain Messaoudi, "Usages de la science allemande de Paris à Alger (v. 1840 - v. 1920)," *Revue germanique internationale* 7 (2008): 185-199.

⁸⁰ See Yahuda to Garrett, likely 1931; see Garrett's response to Yahuda on October 27, 1931, file 887, ASYA.

them for Straßburg.”⁸¹ Such benefactors had been essential to Germany’s acquiring of Arabic manuscripts—the long result of scientific curiosity, commercial and colonial interest, looting and war, as well as local sovereign desires to create powerful status symbols.⁸² Significantly, with the Princeton purchase, Yahuda seems to have first learned of Garrett, the school’s benefactor, nearly *forty* years before the actual transaction—due to Yahuda’s longstanding connection with the German Orientalist Enno Littmann (1875-1958), also of Straßburg, as Littmann had been hired by Garrett to conduct research in Syria as well as Ethiopia during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁸³ From faculty to students, as well as later alumni, the reticulation of scholarship with the trade of cultural material could extend both horizontally and vertically across a wide landscape.

Behind many of these exchanges loomed the infamous “Shapira Affair” of 1883, which highlighted the critical role of scholars in identifying veritable historical objects, while protecting against the more unsavory aspects of the Near Eastern manuscript and cultural object trade. The incident emerged when Moses Shapira, a Polish-born antiquities dealer in Jerusalem, claimed to possess “the earliest scroll of Deuteronomy ever found.” The event attracted much fanfare until the text and the many Moabite objects in Shapira’s shop were dismissed by scholars as counterfeits forged by the antiquarian dealer and his associate, Salim al-Khouri, a local dragoman (interpreter) and craftsman.⁸⁴ This incident, as well as Shapira’s

⁸¹ See Yahuda to Garrett, undated letter, file 887, ASYA. If Yahuda accurately described the attempted sale to Straßburg, the events would have predated 1913, when Euting died.

⁸² Regarding Arabic manuscripts now preserved in the public libraries of Berlin, Bavaria, and Gotha, see Tilman Seidensticker, “How Arabic Manuscripts Moved to German Libraries,” *Manuscript Cultures* 10 (2017): 73-82.

⁸³ Yahuda was formally introduced to Garrett through Chester Beatty in 1931; see file 217, ASYA. However, for Yahuda’s earlier conversations with Littmann (who briefly succeeded Nöldeke at Straßburg), and their numerous references to Garrett as early as 1903, see file 1557, ASYA. As Henning Trüper notes, Menelik II of Ethiopia had been eager to establish points of contact with Western powers—opening a door for German scholars like Littmann and American benefactors like Garrett—in order to contain Italy’s foothold in the region; see Trüper, “Wild Archives: Unsteady Records of the Past in the Travels of Enno Littmann,” *History of the Human Sciences* 26, no. 4 (2013): 128-148. For broader ethnographic fascinations of Ethiopian Jewry, see Micha J. Perry, *Eldad’s Travels: A Journey from the Lost Tribes to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 76-93.

⁸⁴ Fred N. Reiner, “C. D. Ginsburg and the Shapira Affair: A Nineteenth-Century Dead Sea Scroll Controversy,” *The British Library Journal* 21, no. 1 (1995): 109-127, and for the quote, Martin Heide,

later suicide, shook the Near Eastern cultural trade, even as it fascinated a far wider readership, including in Spain, where the news ran across the front page.⁸⁵ One year later, in 1884, the Ottoman Empire strengthened its antiquities law through Osman Hamdi Bey, the head of the Ottoman Imperial Museum who was himself a respected artist.⁸⁶ This law provided additional protection against the vast exporting of cultural objects from the region, even as European and American powers justified their ongoing foreign presence, not the least of which included the need for local research and education.⁸⁷

Yahuda could offer to his buyers what Shapira variously lacked. In addition to a profound supply of materials and a Jerusalemite heritage, Yahuda had commanded a distinguished education and academic standing, as well as an active pen, for better or worse. In 1908 Yahuda had, in fact, engaged in his own much-watched battle over a newly “discovered” text—in what became a contest between him and a major European collector over the textual foundations of ancient Israelite history. By the end of the debate, Yahuda successfully refuted the collector, Moses Gaster, the Romanian-born *hakham* (rabbi) of the Sephardi congregation of London, who incorrectly claimed to have discovered a Samaritan Hebrew Book of Joshua.⁸⁸ Taken from the perspective of provenance, however, Yahuda’s acuity in the debate was hardly surprising: between 1904 and 1912, the scholar-collector had sold thirty-two Samaritan manuscripts to the Oriental Institute in St. Petersburg, Russia, as well as forty-four pieces to Dropsie College in Philadelphia—all while completing his dissertation on the medieval Iberian

“The Moabitics and Their Aftermath: How to Handle a Forgery Affair with an International Impact,” *New Inscriptions and Seals Relating to the Biblical World*, eds. Meir Lubetski and Edith Lubetski (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 193-242. I thank Marc Brettler for discussing this event with me.

⁸⁵ See, for example, this story from Madrid: “El suicidio de un anticuario,” *El Día*, March 17, 1884.

⁸⁶ Michael Greenhalgh, *Plundered Empire: Acquiring Antiquities from Ottoman Lands* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 539.

⁸⁷ Idir Ouahes, *Syria and Lebanon Under the French Mandate: Cultural Imperialism and the Workings of Empire* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 38-44.

⁸⁸ A striking discovery, if it were correct, since the Samaritan corpus included only the Pentateuch. For Yahuda’s refutation of Gaster, see Stefan Schorch, “Abraham Shalom Yahuda’s Contribution to Samaritan Studies as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 3 (2019): 452-457.

writer Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*.⁸⁹ Quite simply, Yahuda knew the material well in part because of his own direct access to it, when needed.⁹⁰

Yet the power that arose from such a collection—as well as much of its risk—was due to its potential value. Two years into his university appointment at Madrid, Yahuda had to grapple with the fact that much of his collection, still housed in Berlin, might be seized by German authorities.⁹¹ Amid the Great War, such concerns were not unfounded. After all, Max Nordau, the Zionist writer and close companion of Yahuda's in Spain, had recently watched as France, Nordau's longtime home, fully appropriated his family's limited assets.⁹² But Nordau and Yahuda faced different outcomes: Valued at approximately two hundred thousand francs—a considerable sum at the time⁹³—Yahuda's collection in Berlin had the wherewithal to mobilize the interest of the diplomatic branches of both Spain and England. Even if the actual value of Yahuda's materials fell short of the figure quoted to Spanish and British authorities,⁹⁴ Yahuda had made use of his

⁸⁹ Schorch, "Abraham Shalom," 455.

⁹⁰ As evident with the missing volumes from *El Avenir*, Yahuda was not in constant possession of the objects presented for sale, but frequently had them sent from other locales, as discussed more fully in this article.

⁹¹ Yahuda to Arthur Hardinge, June 28, 1917, file 1076, ASYA. According to a later comment made by Yahuda, the items were stored during the war in the attic of the Hochschule in Berlin; see Yahuda to Chester Beatty, August 3, 1927, file 217, ASYA.

⁹² As Christoph Schulte notes, French authorities confiscated Nordau's funds during the war; see Schulte, *Psychopathologie des Fin de siècle: Der Kulturkritiker, Arzt und Zionist Max Nordau* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 350. Yahuda attributed Nordau's plight to Leon Daudet, the antisemitic founder of *L'Action française*, who apparently claimed that Nordau was a German agent propagandizing against France; see A.S. Yahuda, *Ha-Haganah 'al ha-yishuv be-milhemet ha-'olam ha-rishonah: zikhronot mi-yeme shahuti bi-Sefarad* (Jerusalem: Hotsa'at ha-meḥaber, 1951), 22.

⁹³ In contemporary terms, about 44.9 million euros, according to the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE) data at <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/calcul-pouvoir-achat.asp>. For the reference, see Yahuda to Hardinge, June 28, 1917, file 1076, ASYA.

⁹⁴ Certainly a larger figure would have attracted more assistance from the Spanish and British authorities. Unfortunately, Yahuda's available tax records do not clarify the extent of his collection/trade, since his preserved taxes, which exist primarily from the mid-to-late 1930s, list income primarily from local property as well as from shares in companies overwhelmingly in South Africa and London—without reference to his manuscript and cultural object trade; see file 3781, ASYA. As Friedman notes, Yahuda also had land holdings in Palestine during the 1930s; see Friedman, "Orientalism between Empires," 447-449.

university chair in part to press for Spanish intervention by way of the Spanish ambassador to Germany, as well as from England.⁹⁵ Yahuda hoped that such diplomatic channels could expedite the transfer of his material away from Berlin, and specifically without German inspection.⁹⁶ (Yahuda would not have to repeat such concerns again, having with precaution brought much of his collection with him from London to the United States during the Second World War.⁹⁷) Of course, Yahuda likely wanted access to his collection, since the University of Madrid had failed to meet the professor's desired level of income, which Yahuda recognized prior to assuming his post.⁹⁸ Equally important, the Berlin materials also included many of Yahuda's writings, representing some twenty years of research, and appears to have included resources for his future work.⁹⁹

In the meantime, Yahuda's reputation as the "first" modern Jewish chair in Spain had spread among an uneven and diverse readership—including persons who were neither seasoned collectors nor established scholars. In Havana, members of the *Unión Israelita* wrote directly to Yahuda to celebrate his position in Madrid.¹⁰⁰ In Paris, Nissim Behar, a founder of modern Hebrew language education, described Yahuda's hiring by Spain as a "historic event" (*événement historique*).¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Yahuda also noted that he needed the material for his own research; see Yahuda to Hardinge, June 28, 1917, file 1076, ASYA. Yahuda had early on notified the Spanish embassy in Germany about his concerns regarding his collection; see Yahuda's December 18, 1915 letter in file 2490, ASYA.

⁹⁶ It is unclear whether the items were removed in the end: on August 3, 1927, Yahuda claimed that about 16 cases of his collection remained in the Hochschule attic in Berlin; see file 217, ASYA. For Yahuda's petition to the Spanish and English, see Yahuda to Hardinge, June 28, 1917, file 1076, ASYA.

⁹⁷ Yahuda to Bank of England, September 17, 1940, file 178, ASYA; and Yahuda to Wolff, October 22, 1940, file 3033, ASYA.

⁹⁸ Even if Yahuda stressed that monetary concerns were secondary when accepting the chair in Spain, some 8,859 pesos went unpaid since 1917, roughly when his university absences began; see Yahuda to Primo de Rivera, February 9, 1928, ASYA, file 2085A. For the initial discussion regarding Yahuda's salary, see page 378 and following in Manuela Marín et al., *Los epistolarios de Julián Ribera Tarragó y Miguel Asín Palacios: Introducción, catálogo e índices* (Madrid: CSIC, 2009).

⁹⁹ Yahuda to Arthur Hardinge, June 28, 1917, file 1076, ASYA. Yahuda apparently began his project on the "Hebrew-Egyptian relationship" in 1913, which he put aside while in Spain.

¹⁰⁰ File 1040a, ASYA.

¹⁰¹ Behar was writing prior to Yahuda's official appointment as chair. See Nissim Behar letter to Yahuda, November 26, 1913, file 224, ASYA. For Behar's role in the teaching of modern Hebrew,

Oscar S. Straus, a former U.S. diplomat to the Ottoman Empire and the first Jew to serve in a U.S. presidential cabinet, offered a larger geo-political narrative: Yahuda's hiring in Madrid had sent out a message to the "entire world" that the "old spirit of the Evil in Spain is dead or soon-to-die, while the spirit of the Good has managed to survive all these centuries."¹⁰²

In short, Yahuda's position in Spain had resonance, or could be rendered as such. Years after resigning from his position—more than a decade afterward—Yahuda's title as "professor" from the University of Madrid could help to deepen his prior reputation as a preeminent book and manuscript dealer. In fact, Yahuda's short-lived chair at Madrid, which officially ended in 1923, provided the titular model that would be frequently duplicated in professional and private spheres, from the trade of manuscripts, to the delivering of new lectures, as well as within business and official state documents, and often at Yahuda's own urging. When in 1926 Yahuda began manuscript discussions with the University of Michigan, it was as the "Professor [A.] S. Yahuda."¹⁰³ Five years later, in 1931, Spain would secure a visit from "Professor Yahuda"—eight years after he held the title—in order to catalog the country's various manuscripts.¹⁰⁴ In New York, at the Jewish Theological Society, the Berlin-trained Marx had actively followed Yahuda's trajectory from the scholar's first days at Madrid, and afterward frequently referred to "Herr Professor" in his correspondence with Yahuda.¹⁰⁵ Even in London, the King's College highlighted speaker in 1935 for the eight-hundredth anniversary of Maimonides's birth in Cordoba was none other than "Professor A.S. Yahuda, Ph.D. (*lately* Professor of Hebrew and Medieval Hebrew Literature in the

see Shlomo Haramati, *Three Who Preceded Ben-Yehuda: Sephardi-Oriental Forerunners in the National Revival* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Publications, 1978), vii-xii and 83-125 [Hebrew].

¹⁰² Oscar S. Straus to Ángel Pulido, September 29, 1916, file 2097, ASYA. Apparently Yahuda was copied on the note.

¹⁰³ Kropf, "The Yemeni Manuscripts," 9. Yahuda seems to have been associated with his brother for this transaction.

¹⁰⁴ "Spain Invites Jewish Scholars: Jerusalem Editor Among Seven," *The Palestine Bulletin*, October 20, 1931. The participants included "Professor Yahuda," followed by Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum of Cairo and Abraham Elmaleh of Jerusalem, member of the Executive of the Jewish National Council. The remaining four (unnamed) persons were from Spanish Morocco and Tangiers.

¹⁰⁵ Marx to Yahuda, January 31, 1931, file 1714, ASYA.

University of Madrid)”—approximately twelve years after his resignation.¹⁰⁶ This convention followed a general European tradition for preserving the title of professor, even if held for a brief duration.¹⁰⁷ Privately, Yahuda also seems to have upheld its continued use, as suggested by his local taxes and shareholding documents, where he was frequently recognized as “Professor Abraham S.E. Yahuda.”¹⁰⁸

At the same time as Yahuda’s “professorship” retained its titular residue, Yahuda’s standing in the rare book, manuscript, and cultural object trade seems to have overshadowed his scholarly writings. Specifically, Yahuda’s longtime research project, which examined ancient Egyptian-Hebrew philological points of overlap—from *Die Sprache des Pentateuch* (1929), as well as its English-language counterparts, *The Language of the Pentateuch* (1933) and *The Accuracy of the Bible* (1934)—failed to advance his academic standing.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Yahuda’s reputation as a reliable source for texts and cultural objects remained, and could help to justify the creation of university positions. As Godfrey Driver, Regius Professor of Hebrew and vice president of Magdalen College at Oxford, wrote to Yahuda sometime between 1931 and 1932, “We hope to [found] a lectureship in Rabbinic Hebrew, open to everyone, and connect it with the custody of Hebrew + Oriental books in the Bodleian Library. Can I tempt you to help us?”¹¹⁰ Perhaps, implied Driver, the former professor might find interest in such an arrangement.

¹⁰⁶ See postcard, “Moses Maimonides, His Time, Personality, and Influence,” May 20, 1935, King’s College, Department of Spanish, file 1658a, ASYA. *Italics* mine. Yahuda also helped to plant the idea for the talk.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan D. Sarna, “Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Jewish Community of His Youth: The Influence of Solomon Braslavsky, Herman Rubenovitz, and Congregation Mishkan Tefila,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 1 (2009): 35-46; 39.

¹⁰⁸ The initials S.E. for Shalom Ezekiel; see file 3781, ASYA.

¹⁰⁹ Yahuda’s project went through three iterations in five years: *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Ägyptischen* (Berlin, 1929); *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian* (Oxford, 1933); and *The Accuracy of the Bible* (London, 1934). In the end, this project—which consumed more than a decade of his life—was largely dismissed by scholars. For a critique of this work, see footnote no.7.

¹¹⁰ Undated later (1931-1932); see Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Magdalen College, ASYA file 1975. Driver’s letterhead, “From the Vice-President,” places the text between 1931 and 1932. My thanks to Ben Taylor, archivist, Magdalen College; email with the author, May 16, 2016.

Part of Yahuda's expertise as a dealer of rare texts and objects emerged from his ability to work independently, far outside of the public eye. When the antisemitic Gerald Wallop (the "Viscount Lymington") had been found cheating on his wife in 1935, the divorce came to the fore, alongside inheritance duties of about three hundred thousand pounds. In the context of this personal and financial drama, Wallop opted to sell his family's long-held Isaac Newton papers to avoid losing his estate.¹¹¹ Yahuda watched as the sale of these papers moved forward. With Newton's texts almost in hand, an elated Yahuda wrote to his wife Ethel: "(We) have over 1500 pages written by Newton in his own hand on the most important questions is very thrilling indeed. But not only on Religion, Prophecies, Bibles, Faith, and Chronology, but also on alchemy, Mathematics and other purely scientific matters of the greatest importance for his studies and discoveries!!"¹¹²

As Yahuda's standing as a scholar-collector retained its hold, he also began to distance himself from his brother I.B., apparently by the mid-1920s. As the historian S.D. Goitein noted, Yahuda's elder brother was himself a "dealer in Arabic books...(with) connections all over the Arab world."¹¹³ Yet, I.B. had increasingly drawn the ire of buyers in the U.S. and England over the years—in part because of an apparent lack of stability and clarity of communication. As Gottheil in New York repeatedly complained, I.B. often failed to include prices for texts and for the exorbitant shipping costs as part of an estimated final cost of sale. At times, Yahuda's brother also lacked basic tactfulness, as when I.B. incorrectly thought that Gottheil had died in 1916, wherein I.B.'s foremost concern was, it seemed, to find a replacement buyer, and quickly.¹¹⁴ By 1923, a frustrated (and still-living) Gottheil vented to Yahuda, "We should...very much like to get in connection *again* with somebody who can furnish us with books published in the Near East, especially Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia."¹¹⁵ When I.B. disappeared—

¹¹¹ Sarah Dry, *The Newton Papers: The Strange and True Odyssey of Isaac Newton's Manuscripts* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹² Dry, *The Newton Papers*, 161.

¹¹³ Shelomo D. Goitein, "The Origin and Historical Significance of the Present-Day Arabic Proverb," *Islamic Culture* 25-26 (1952): 170; 169-179.

¹¹⁴ Richard Gottheil to Yahuda, June 10, 1916, file 979, ASYA.

¹¹⁵ Richard Gottheil to Yahuda, April 6, 1923, file 979, ASYA. *Italics* mine. Clearly Yahuda seems to have worked with other booksellers, as well. I.B. experienced several setbacks, some personal,

as he did on occasion with both American and British buyers—Yahuda was asked to fill the gap. As Barnett of the British Museum remarked in 1922, when I.B. appeared to have “given up the business” of bookselling in Cairo, Yahuda was needed to provide the names of other “moderately honest bookseller(s)” in the region.¹¹⁶



Fig. 4. Postcard from David Aydan to Yahuda. A.S. Yahuda Archive, file 152, National Library of Israel.

By the mid-1920s Yahuda’s new suppliers included the rabbi David Aydan, who founded the first Hebrew printing press in Djerba, Tunisia. Until the 1960s, Aydan’s various presses in Djerba produced hundreds of works for a wide readership, even as he regularly sold texts to Yahuda.¹¹⁷ By the late 1920s, Yahuda also worked with the al-Khanji library in Cairo, which relayed materials to Yahuda from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the surrounding North Africa—and explicitly made its efforts known to Yahuda, repeatedly reminding the professor that *it* was the first bookseller to access many of these texts.¹¹⁸ As one of the oldest libraries in Cairo, al-Khanji also seems to have purchased material from Yahuda.¹¹⁹ Such transactions at times were illicitly

curated: As explained by Yahuda, the securing of rare books and manuscripts required him to find “the right men, men of personal authority and knowledge” who through their travels could scour the sources in Turkey, Morocco, as well as Iraq.¹²⁰ In some cases, that meant bribing local customs officials—as in Sanaa,

some because of the First World War, when he moved from Cairo to Jerusalem, first in 1918 and then again in 1922; see file 1578, ASYA.

¹¹⁶ Barnett to Yahuda, May 1, 1922, file 1578, ASYA.

¹¹⁷ Files 152 and 189, ASYA. For background, see www.editionsdulys.com/uploads/3/8/9/9/3899427/communaut_spharade_9.pdf.

¹¹⁸ Files 189, 76 and 1379, ASYA. I thank Mostafa Hussein for generously reading the Arabic material from these files and discussing them with me; email correspondence with author, November 20, 2019.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Yahuda to Chester Beatty, May 15, 1929, file 217, ASYA.

Yemen, during the interwar period, when the local imam became outraged over the removal of manuscripts from his region by Italian collectors.¹²¹ Even as Yahuda deepened his relations with such figures, he nonetheless maintained occasional professional dealings with his older brother. Not only had Yahuda sought to protect his brother's book collection in Berlin during the Great War—valued at approximately two to three thousand pounds (about 138,000 euros in today's

terms)¹²²—I.B. was also listed, for example, as the main source of the manuscripts sold by “Professor [A.] S. Yahuda” to the University of Michigan in 1926.¹²³

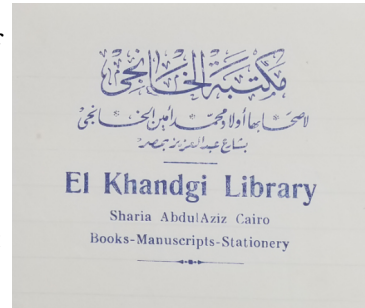


Fig. 5. Letterhead, al-Khanji Library to Yahuda. A.S. Yahuda Archive, file 1379, National Library of Israel.

More than two decades after resigning from the University of Madrid, Yahuda vacated London for New York—which served as a new home for his rare book, manuscript, and cultural object trade. There, in the Big Apple, Yahuda would create his second professorship, as the director of the New School's short-lived Center for the Study of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and Languages (1945-1952), founded largely without pay.¹²⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Yahuda also undertook a second project—one that he clearly wanted known, as he tried to situate himself within the broader history of the thriving cultural object trade within the U.S. Yahuda had already sold more than sixty manuscripts to the Army Medical Library by 1941, promptly followed by the remarkable sale of more than five thousand Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu manuscripts to Princeton University in 1942.¹²⁵ In a full-length article written in 1944 for the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Yahuda sought to cement his impressive standing as a scholar-

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² For the estimated value of I.B.'s collection, see the undated/unsigned letter, file 1076, ASYA. For the historical conversion, see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>.

¹²³ Kropf, “The Yemeni Manuscripts,” 9-10.

¹²⁴ See Gonzalez, “Politics of Modern Jewish Scholarship,” 430-431.

¹²⁵ Rudolph Mach, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (Yahuda section) in the Garrett Collection*, Princeton University Library (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977). It should be noted that Yahuda temporarily ended negotiations during the attempted sale; see file 3736. ASYA.

collector within a wider cultural and historiographical heritage—however, not by turning to the recent Princeton and Army Library transactions, but rather to the late nineteenth century. In so doing, Yahuda would return from the dregs of history Moses Shapira and his assistant, Salim al-Khouri—the infamous Near Eastern forgery-makers from more than half a century before.¹²⁶

In what seemed like a blurring of history and fiction, Yahuda's article explained how in 1902 he (Yahuda) had saved the United States from the wiles of "Salim" (al-Khouri)—still active nearly twenty years after the infamous Shapira Affair. Not unlike Yahuda's closeted *conversos* and the lingering Inquisitors of modern Spain, the Jerusalem-based Salim appeared nearly inexhaustible. In the article, Yahuda described how he, his brother (presumably I.B.), and a professor from the University of Pennsylvania had tried to bypass Ottoman laws in order to secret a rare sarcophagus out of Jerusalem.¹²⁷ However, as the date of purchase neared, Yahuda supposedly recognized that Salim, being helped by an effendi (a well-respected local man), had attempted yet another fraud. Yahuda promptly stopped the sale, causing the scholar-collector to receive "a thousand curses in the name of Allah and all the devils."¹²⁸ Fearing being reported to the Turkish authorities, Salim then supposedly brought to Yahuda the veritable historical objects that the would-be professor immediately purchased: "old coins, old Greek coins, Phoenician glasses and other objects."¹²⁹ Salim also relayed to Yahuda his elaborate techniques for manufacturing fraudulent objects—invaluable tips for a discerning dealer within the often-forged knockabout world of religious and cultural objects.

¹²⁶ Yahuda, "The Story of a Forgery and the Mēša Inscription," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (1944): 139-164.

¹²⁷ Yahuda seems to err on this point, as with several others in the piece. Yahuda references George Barton as professor at the University of Pennsylvania, but Barton does not seem to have held that position until 1922.

¹²⁸ Yahuda, "The Story of a Forgery," 143.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

From the perspective of provenance, Yahuda's encounter with Salim described events that would be variously repeated over the years and across numerous transactions. Yahuda had become an expert at creating unique and detailed narratives as part of his trade—articulating, when possible, what the scholar Neil Brodie has called a “coherent find,” where, for example, objects brought to sale had been notably found together.¹³⁰ (The more comprehensive a find, the logic goes, the higher its intellectual and economic value.) But pragmatic details like coherence seemed to lack the “good story” often practiced by Yahuda: Where were the fortuitous alignments, as with unexpectedly helpful Salim and the *conversos*? And, what of the refracted tensions, evident, for example, in the complaints against Yahuda's own brother, or with many of the booksellers from the “Orient,” who, as Yahuda wrote in private, behaved supposedly like “fanatical Mohammadeans” when dealing with the sale of religious texts?¹³¹ The scholar-collector, Yahuda seemed to suggest, had to rise above and descend into a most uncertain world, in an attempt to document such strange events. The narratives were themselves antiquities of a sort, a history of histories¹³²—of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim exchange—an unstable and precarious world that could, it seems, only be described by the respectable professor from the University of Madrid.

Amid contracts, arguments, disagreements, cancelled negotiations, and longtime correspondence, such rhetoric seemed to exist simply as part of the talking, part of the written hype embedded in the sale of a material object. The colorful narratives within the pages of Yahuda's provenance were at times impressively dynamic. Moving from language to activity, such rhetoric could rival the energetic transport of the material objects they described—moving across and into new lands, one way or another—whether from the hands of Yahuda, al-Khanji, Aydan or others, occurring both licitly and illicitly. And while the president of Princeton in 1942 could reasonably (and even responsibly) uphold the “symbolic value” of the manuscripts recently purchased from Yahuda—in the midst of daily genocide across seemingly innumerable blood-filled lands—the details of such exchanges

¹³⁰ Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole, and Peter Watson, *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material* (Cambridge: The McDonald Institute for Archival Research, 2000), 8.

¹³¹ See Yahuda's undated (1931-1941) handwritten letter to Robert Garrett in file 887, ASYA.

¹³² Compare Yahuda, *Qadmoniot ha-Aravim* (Jerusalem, 1894-1895?).

were, nonetheless, far more complicated than the “truths of the merging streams of civilization.”¹³³ Such transactions would have been impossible without the sustained and often conscious intertwining of consumption, knowledge, and power.

Yet the details of such trade also seemed far simpler. As Yahuda noted while trying to attract Harry Wolfson of Harvard University to a possible sale, the acquiring of an object could merely help with one’s own limited research, larger nationalist projects notwithstanding.¹³⁴ Ownership also meant bragging rights. As if to entice Wolfson, Yahuda explained, “I am the *only* one who made a thorough study of Koran calligraphy through all ages and in all countries.” Yahuda boasted: He even had the visual slides.¹³⁵

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Keywords: Orientalism, Provenance, Sephardim, *Conversos*, Looting

¹³³ The university received the manuscripts through a benefactor; see Harold W. Dodds, “The Garrett Collection of Manuscripts: Acceptance of the Collection by President Dodds,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 3, no. 4 (1942): 113-115.

¹³⁴ For Gershom Scholem’s collection and its connection to the National Library of Israel, see Zvi Leshem, “The Alacritous Work of Librarians and the Insane Labor of Collectors: Gershom Scholem as Book Collector and Librarian—A Collection of Sources,” *Scholar and Kabbalist: The Life and Work of Gershom Scholem*, eds. Mirjam Zadoff and Noam Zadoff (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018), 292-322.

¹³⁵ Yahuda to Wolfson, April 27, 1941, file 3037, ASYA. Italics mine.

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