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FOREWORD

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ISAAC HERZOG,
PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

בית הנשיא
ديوان الرئيس
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

The miraculous return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is a return not just to the physical land but also to the spiritual and intellectual richness cultivated by the Jewish people for generations. It is a return to our cultural treasures, a return to the Hebrew language, and a return to the entirety of Jewish history in all its nuance and complexity.

The founders of Zionism saw the flourishing of Hebrew culture, creativity, and art centered on Hebrew letters as an integral part of their mission. They understood the importance of respecting and cherishing Hebrew letters, whose richness has accompanied us and our ancestors – the people of the book – throughout our travels. They connected Hebrew letters to the process of nation-building and believed in the need to establish an august institution that would house the nation's cultural treasures. They dreamed of a national library as a place for preserving, memorializing, reviving, cultivating, and granting access to the cultural treasures of the Jewish people.

A library – any library – is far more than just rows of shelves lined with books. A library is a treasury of knowledge, a universe of values, a meeting place, a research institution. This and more are true of our national library, the National Library of Israel and the national library of the Jewish people, which is one of our greatest assets as a people and as a nation. It embodies our historical, intellectual, and cultural memory and its revival. It reflects the words, thoughts, and ideas that have constituted us over history and that bind us together to this day as Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora, as the communities and cultures of the Jewish people. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the National Library took on the additional and essential task of preserving and documenting the cultures of Israeli citizens of all religions and faiths as part of its commitment to serving as an intellectual home for all the nation's citizens.

The National Library is engaged not only in documenting the past but also in educating the current generation and sowing the seeds for the ideological, religious, and cultural renewal of future generations. In this sense, the National Library does not just serve as a treasure trove of knowledge, tradition, memory, and culture but also plays an active role in the educational and cultural mission of the State of Israel – by both making its resources accessible to the public and by educating young people about the foundations of our national, cultural, Jewish, and democratic heritage. These commitments are reflected in the ongoing effort to democratize knowledge, to reach different communities, and to document the full range of cultures and ethnicities in the State of Israel.

This unique book offers us a glimpse into a selection of extraordinary treasures from the National Library that tell a fascinating story about a people and a nation. In these pages you will find East and West, old and new, brought together to reveal an astonishing culture whose preservation and perpetuation remains incumbent upon us all.

However, this book features not only treasures of the Jewish people; the contributors to this book recognize that no one person is an island and no nation dwells apart. The Jewish people have evolved through their contact with the surrounding cultures and the world at large, and an integral part of our national heritage has emerged from these encounters with those around us. The National Library, with its vision of culture as a bridge and its commitment to representing and granting access to the knowledge and culture of all Israeli citizens, has cultivated unique collections from the cultures of Islam and Christianity as well as an impressive collection of Arabic newspapers, all of which are represented in this book.

I would like to congratulate all those who initiated and collaborated in the creation of this unique book – a book that expands our hearts and minds. It is my fervent hope that the National Library will continue to be the intellectual home of all Israeli citizens, a dwelling place for the human spirit, and a sanctuary for seekers of knowledge the world over.

add 'Introduction' to footer as rest of text?

PREFACE

SALLAI MERIDOR,
CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

We are honored to present ~~one hundred and one~~ treasures of the National Library on the occasion of the library's renewal and the dedication of its new home in the National Quarter (Kiryat Ha-Leom). It is no accident that these treasures ended up in Jerusalem. It is thanks to those who had the vision to collect the cultural treasures of the nation and bring them to Zion together with the ingathering of Jews from around the world. We are grateful to the Library's founders and leaders throughout the generations – from those who revived Hebrew language and culture, through Joseph Chasanowich, Midrash Abarbanel, and B'nai B'rith, to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which carried the National Library on its shoulders for nearly a century.

The astonishing renewal of the National Library and its transition to its new home also did not take place spontaneously. The renewed library is a testament to the vision and endeavors of the government of Israel, the Rothschild family, the Gottesman family, my predecessor David Blumberg, and others who shared the dream and acted on it. Thanks to these few individuals and institutions, a great vision is today being realized for all the people of the State of Israel and the world over.

When a people and a society select which treasures to preserve, their decisions are informed not just by the memory of the past, but also by hopes for the future. This book, or This volume, 101 Treasures from the National Library of Israel, ~~the National Library of Israel~~ features pages from the historical photo album of the Jewish people, Israeli society, and the diverse cultural and geographical milieus in which the incredible journey of our lives continues to unfold. The National Library tells the story of where we came from and, equally importantly, it can help us determine where we are heading.

The new Library offers a way of responding to many of the challenges most significant to our future: by collecting the cultural treasures of the State of Israel and of the Jewish people for future generations; by serving as a magnet for scholars in the areas of Israel, Judaism, the Middle East, and the humanities; by making the Library's treasures widely accessible beyond its walls through advanced technology; by expanding its circle of influence to the entirety of Israeli society and to the Jewish people at large through education and culture; by making it possible for the young generation to connect with their heritage, on their own terms; by providing a home for all citizens of the State and for members of every community in every corner of the country, as well as for the Jewish people worldwide; and by serving as a world-class national library and a font of knowledge and inspiration for scholars throughout the world, fulfilling the prophetic vision that "out of Zion shall go forth Torah" (Isaiah 2:3).

This is the library we envision for the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

It is a library of the people, by the people, and for the people. It belongs to each and every one of us.

LIBRARIES AND THE POWER OF IDEAS

MARTIN J. GROSS, PRESIDENT,
MARTIN J. GROSS FAMILY FOUNDATION

The National Library of Israel has always been a culturally defining fountainhead of mind and spirit. Its reading rooms, corridors, and cafes have witnessed the intellectual giants of the day meeting to debate, discuss, and enrich each other's research and inquiry. From its earliest days, the National Library's collaborative character was shaped by great thinkers and scholars, such as Samuel Hugo Bergmann and Gershom Scholem. This remains true today, with world-renowned Talmudists sitting next to leading Hebrew poets and translators of Greek and Latin sharing a lamp with experts on the Qur'an. It is a genuine forum for ideas; what begins here as a casual conversation can become a groundbreaking book, a unique interpretation of God's word, or a revolutionary theory of human society.

This defining commitment to conversation and dialogue across cultures and disciplines is discernable not only in the Library's users. As any reader of this volume of treasures can see, the institution's collections are just as broad, just as rich, and just as mutually illuminating.

The National Library of Israel thus realizes an ideal that libraries have always strived to achieve. Libraries preserve the best of us – the testaments of our created and creating minds and spirit. As loadstones of culture and power, libraries are sites of dialogue, debate, and even conflict. They are the guardians of democracy, which relies above all else on freedom of thought, speech, and the written word.

The power of ideas represented by libraries can be seen since their very inception in the mid-seventh century BCE library of King Ashurbanipal in Mesopotamia. The King's library held tens of thousands of cuneiform clay tablets containing the royal decrees of the Assyrian kings, administrative archives, and literary texts. The nineteenth-century discovery of this library not only provided a window into a highly sophisticated ancient civilization, but also an example of a library as an instrument of royal power; in this case, the library contained knowledge the King thought useful for predicting future events.

Moving forward to late antiquity, the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt was meant to be a truly universal library: "a single place where the entire knowledge of the world was stored."[1] This library, the result of a profound cultural vision, served as both a storehouse for documents and a center where scholars could meet and interact; collection and preservation was thus wedded to intellectual creativity as writers and thinkers gravitated to the library in search of a scholarly community.

In sixteenth-century England, libraries were a particular target for cultural and political conflict. As part of his campaign to displace the authority of the Catholic Church in the Reformation, Henry VIII passed laws dissolving Catholic monasteries along with their libraries. Tens of thousands of precious books and manuscripts were destroyed or lost. Following this destruction came Sir Thomas Bodley, who set himself the task of renewing the library in Oxford:

I concluded at the last, to set up my Staff at the Library-Door in Oxon [i.e., Oxford]; being thoroughly perswaded, that in my Solitude, and Surcease from the Common-Wealth Affairs, I could not busy my self to better purpose, than by reducing that Place (which then in every Part lay ruined and wast) to the publick use of students.[2]

In fact, Francis Bacon characterized Bodley's creation as "having built an ark to save learning from deluge."[3]

This example of destruction followed by renewal, one of many that could be cited, underscores the ideological power of libraries in periods of cultural transformation and political conflict.

The last century has been a time of both despair and

hope. Over the past hundred years, we have seen the "industrialization" of the human capacity for destruction. Not only did six million Jews perish in the Holocaust, but an estimated one hundred million Jewish books were destroyed. This was no accident. Jewish books embody the DNA of Jewish civilization, and their disappearance was intended to eradicate Jewish culture.

However, at the same time, this past century has been one of creation, including, specifically, the opening of publicly funded libraries for all. Such openness and transparency serve the lifeblood of democracy, which depends on an educated and informed citizenry. According to Vartan Gregorian, former president of the New York Public Library:

The library is central to our free society. It is a critical element in the free exchange of information at the heart of our democracy…It provides free and open access to the accumulated wisdom of the world, without distinction as to income, religion, nationality or other human condition…It guarantees freedom of information and independence of thought. [4]

Libraries today thus provide the conditions necessary to sustain democracy and human freedom. By preserving books, archival documents, periodicals, music, and all the records of human creativity, both past and present, and making them widely accessible, libraries provide the evidence for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, between fact and fiction. In the words of the American historian David McCullough, "freedom is found through the portals of our nation's libraries."[5]

The National Library of Israel responds eloquently to the call for freedom and democracy. First and foremost, the Library's collections represent the interwoven tapestry of cultures, languages, and ideas that make up Israel today: from the ancient "Damascus Crown" manuscripts of the Bible to modern Israeli caricatures; from the records of the Ottoman court in medieval Jerusalem to annotated Arabic manuscripts of nineteenth-century Dagestan; and from Franz Kafka's notebooks to A. B. Yehoshua's drafts. The National Library is committed to playing a foundational role in maintaining Israeli democracy and supporting the values of the State of Israel by not only preserving but also celebrating this multivocal heritage. What started millennia ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt is now once again manifest in Jerusalem.

1. Richard Ovendon, Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge under Attack (London: John Murray Publishers, 2020), p. 29.
2. Sir Thomas Bodley, The Life of Sir Thomas Bodley, in Literature of Libraries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, eds. John Cotton Dana and Henry W. Kent: Vol. 3 (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1906), p. 57. Original spelling preserved.
3. James Spedding, The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon: Vol. 3 (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dryer, 1868), p. 253.
4. Carton C. Rochell, In Praise of Libraries (New York: New York University Press, 1989), pp. 71–72.
5. David McCullough, Presentation on his book, 1776, at the National Book Festival, September 24, 2005. Accessed on C-Span TV, https://www.c-span.org/video/?189007-14/1776.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY AND ITS COLLECTIONS

AVRIEL BAR-LEVAV AND RAQUEL UKELES

In 1899, Joseph Klausner, an ambitious twenty-five-year-old Zionist activist, traveled to Basel to attend the Third Zionist Congress. Klausner would eventually become one of the State of Israel's foremost scholars and historians, but then he was just a student at the University of Heidelberg with a few meager publications to his name.

Among the many figures Klausner encountered at the Congress was Joseph Chasanowich (1844–1919), a physician and ardent bibliophile from Bialystok, Poland. A follower of the teachings of the Cultural Zionist Ahad Ha'am, Chasanowich had made it his mission to collect books from Europe and send them to Jerusalem in order to create the first Jewish national library – the foundations of today's National Library of Israel.

When the two first met, Chasanowich refused to shake hands with the young historian. Klausner was surprised to discover that the reason was his failure to send three small booklets that he had published to the library. After he explained that the publications did not seem important enough for the library in Jerusalem, Chasanowich exploded: "Everything is important!" he shouted. "Everything!" Abashed, Klausner promised to send those works as well as all his future publications.

Chasanowich's outburst was, undoubtedly, the product of his fervent devotion to the library project. During his lifetime, he sent 22,000 books and rare texts to Jerusalem and sometimes accepted books in place of payment for his medical services in order to collect more material.

Chasanowich did more than simply collect books; he also actively promoted his vision. In 1899, he published a manifesto extolling the concept of a Jewish national library. The text appeared in newspapers throughout the Jewish world and was reprinted in pamphlets disseminated by his fellow "Lovers of Zion" (Hovevei Zion) members across Eastern Europe:

In Jerusalem, a great house shall be built, high and lofty, in which shall be treasured the fruits of the Jewish People's endeavor from the moment it became a nation…and to this great house shall stream our masters, sages, and all the scholars of our nation, and everyone with a heart which understands our literature, and whose spirit yearns and strives for the Torah and for wisdom and to know of the history of our people and the lives of our ancestors.[1]

The National Library of Israel, the unique 130-year-old institution whose most precious holdings are gathered and celebrated here in *101 Treasures*, is the product of an ongoing dynamic dialogue with Chasanowich's vision. As the library of both the State of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide, the National Library's collections range from local to regional and global, from the particular to the universal: Jewish civilization and Israeli culture of all periods and in every language. It also holds robust collections devoted to Islam and the Middle East and Western civilization, cultures in which Jews have played central roles.

Lofty as Chasanowich's original dream of a national library was, one might imagine that his vision was inspired by generations of Jewish library building; after all, what is more fitting for the People of the Book than collecting books? However, surprising as it sounds, Jews do not have a longstanding tradition of building and maintaining libraries.

From antiquity to the dawn of the modern era, the library was an institution of neighboring cultures but

not of Jewish culture. To cite just one example, the great Talmudic academies of Babylonia did not have libraries or, with the exception of Torah scrolls, probably even books. Rather, during the formative period of rabbinic Judaism, the most important texts were those passed on through oral transmission. While the later geonic heads of the Babylonian academies did write their works, there is no evidence that they kept libraries; this at a time when caliphal courts were building great collections.

In the Middle Ages, Christian monks in Europe read, copied, and preserved books in monasteries and royal libraries, and scholars in the Islamic world enjoyed access to a vast array of private, public, and palace collections as well as mosque and college libraries. But medieval Jews had no centralized collections of manuscripts, and Jewish writers often bemoaned their lack of access to basic texts. While a few outstanding Jewish scholars owned private libraries, such as the translator Judah ibn Tibbon (1120–1190), most were forced to travel from teacher to teacher and place to place in search of a particular text. The thirteenth-century *Worms Mahzor,* featured in this book, includes an early Yiddish blessing for the person who carries the tomes from home to the synagogue, suggesting that synagogues housed few if any books. The Jewish books that did exist were at times subject to censorship and even destruction, such as the burning of hundreds of copies of the Talmud in Paris in 1242. Nevertheless, medieval Jewish written culture developed and even thrived despite the lack of accessible book collections.

The fifteenth-century print revolution opened up new possibilities for accessing libraries, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The great European academic libraries began collecting in this period, and for Jews, too, the greater access to printed books and an expanding readership of Jewish scholars and patrons, and Christian Hebraists heralded the establishment of significant private collections. Illustrious Jewish bibliophiles, like the chief rabbi of Bohemia David Oppenheim in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, built private collections, and the first scholarly libraries were established in study houses (*batei midrash*) in Amsterdam and Verona. However, neither wealthy collectors nor study houses developed into ~~full-~~fledged public libraries in the modern sense and certainly not into national libraries. Only in 1902 did a European Jewish library, the Strashun Library in Vilna, open to the public.

Despite the dearth of Jewish models, the idea of gathering the fruits of Jewish literature was very much on the minds of those nineteenth-century intellectuals, Joseph Chasanowich among them, dreaming of a Jewish national revival. Following several failed attempts to start a Jewish public library in Jerusalem, the small yet ambitious Midrash Abarbanel Library opened in 1892; this was the library to which Chasanowich sent his 22,000 volumes. The Jerusalem lodge of B'nai B'rith International raised local funds for the opening of Midrash Abarbanel and was responsible for its maintenance during its first years. However, the burden of sustaining it financially and administratively proved too heavy. In 1905, the Seventh Zionist Congress assumed responsibility for Midrash Abarbanel, aiming to transform it into a true Jewish national library.

The next significant step forward came in 1920, when the World Zionist Organization appointed the philosopher Shmuel Hugo Bergmann as the library's first professional director. Bergmann, who had previously served as a librarian at Prague University, was a Zionist activist and a close friend of Franz Kafka and other members of the Prague Circle. Bergmann expanded the collections dramatically, professionalized staff and procedures, and developed an

A general rule for spelling out numbers is to spell out approximate number, while keeping exact numbers in numeric form.

impressive international network. He hired promising young academics to work at the library, including Gershom Scholem, the paragon of Jewish mysticism studies, and the comparative Islam and Judaism scholar, David Zvi Baneth. Collection development was one of Bergmann's foremost goals, and under his guidance the library received important donations from around the world. Several of Bergmann's most important acquisitions are featured in this book: the unique autograph collection of great Jewish figures gathered by Abraham Schwadron; the book and art collection of Elizabeth Anna Gordon, a British writer in Kyoto; and the 6000-volume strong research collection of Ignaz Goldziher, the great Jewish scholar of Islam and Arabic, which laid the foundations of the National Library's Islam and Middle East collection. Bergmann also cultivated connections with leading Jewish intellectual and cultural figures whose archives he succeeded in bringing to the library, beginning with the archive of Ahad Ha'am in 1927.

In 1925, the library merged with the recently founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem, itself a landmark achievement of the Jewish cultural revival in the Land of Israel. Reflecting its new status, the library changed its name to the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) and, in 1930, moved from its city center location to the university's Mount Scopus campus, where it was housed in the newly dedicated David Wolffsohn building, named for Theodor Herzl's successor as president of the Zionist Organization. Over the following few decades, the synergy between the Library and the university would prove fruitful for both, as best seen embodied in the Library's influential bibliographic journal, *Qiryat Sefer*. For decades, this journal served as a forum for scholarly articles based on the Library's holdings as for announcements of new acquisitions.

Within a few years of the university's opening, it became clear that Jerusalem scholars and librarians had a critical role to play in rescuing and preserving Jewish culture. Increasing anti-Semitism in Europe from the early 1930s drove thousands of Jewish refugees to flee to British Mandate Palestine. Some of the precious archival material they brought with them was donated to the Library and to the newly formed Jewish Historical General Archives (renamed in 1969 as the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People), which was founded to preserve the histories of European Jewish communities; later the Central Archives expanded to document Jewish communities worldwide. The annihilation of European Jewry in the Holocaust also saw the mass destruction of Jewish libraries and collections. Faced with this unprecedented tragedy, in 1944, with the war still raging, Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Hebrew University Rector Leo Mayer, and JNUL Director Gotthold Weil formed the Committee for the Rescue of Diaspora Treasures to document Jewish collections in Nazi-occupied Europe. Following the Allied victory in Europe, the committee sent Scholem and JNUL bibliographers Solomon Shunami and Abraham Yaari to sort through over two million books looted by the Nazis that the U.S. Army had gathered in Offenbach, Germany. The Jewish Cultural Restitution Organization, headed by historian Salo Baron and philosopher Hannah Arendt, distributed the Offenbach books to Jewish institutions around the world, including tens of thousands to the JNUL in Jerusalem.

Back in Jerusalem, however, the Library itself was far from secure. Following the city's division after the 1948 War of Independence, the Mount Scopus campus, where the Library was located, became a territorial enclave cut off from the rest of Israeli-controlled Jerusalem. Photos from this period show Library staff hurriedly lowering books

out of the building by rope to waiting vehicles bound for temporary facilities in Western Jerusalem. Unfortunately, despite their efforts, most of the collection became inaccessible. Curt Wormann, JNUL director from 1947 to 1968, was charged with rebuilding the collection almost from scratch; over the next two decades, the Mount Scopus books were slowly reintegrated into the Library collection.

During the chaos and dislocation of 1948, JNUL librarians also engaged in a citywide effort to salvage books, manuscripts, and periodicals from the empty homes of Palestinian families who had left the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Similar materials were also collected in Haifa and later sent to the JNUL. These materials formed a collection that was placed on deposit at the Library under the auspices of the Israeli government's Custodian for Absentee Property, and are accessible for research today.

After being dispersed among no less than ten different locations throughout the city, the JNUL collections were reunited in 1960 when the Library's modernist Lady Davis Building was opened on the Hebrew University's new Givat Ram campus. During the 1960s and 1970s, the JNUL was the jewel in the crown of the Givat Ram campus – a center for scholars, teachers, and students alike. The new building set the stage for a period of further expansion and greater ambition. As the university grew, the Library expanded its Jewish and non-Jewish collections while including new subjects and formats. These included the National Sound Archives, the world's largest collection of ethnographic and commercial recordings of Israeli and Jewish music, founded by leading musicologist Israel Adler in 1964; the unique archive of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, which was deposited in 1965; and the extraordinary bequest of the Jerusalem-born polymath and renowned collector Abraham Shalom Yahuda, which arrived in 1967.

The Yahuda collection comprises more than 1000 rare Islamic, Jewish, and Christian manuscripts and rare books, 7000 pages of Isaac Newton's theological and alchemical writings, an archival collection of Napoleon in the Middle East, and Yahuda's own massive archive. Further significant donations include the archive of S. Y. Agnon, recipient of the 1966 Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1970; the Eran Laor Cartographic Collection of 12,000 printed maps of the Holy Land, Jerusalem, and other areas in 1975; and the Sidney Edelstein History of Science Collection in 1976.

The Library also undertook a global mission to document Jewish books, music, and manuscripts worldwide through projects devoted to Hebrew bibliography, Hebrew paleography, Jewish liturgy, and more. Undoubtedly, the most significant cultural preservation effort of this kind was the Institute for Hebrew Microfilmed Manuscripts (IHMM). Founded earlier in 1952 upon the initiative of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and later integrated into the Library, the Institute collected copies of almost all known Jewish manuscripts worldwide. Through these multiple endeavors, the Library redefined the scope of its role as a Jewish national library: not only a physical center for Jewish texts, but also a leader of global Jewish literary and cultural projects.

In the late 1970s, the Library, along with other academic institutions in Israel, faced severe financial difficulties. A further challenge arose in 1981, when the Hebrew University moved the faculties of humanities, the social sciences, and law back to the reopened Mount Scopus campus, where a new library was built to serve scholars and students in those fields. The JNUL was thus cut off from many of its users and placed in competition with another university library, leading to an unfortunate period of relative stagnation. Still, during this period, the Library

received a few important donations, notably the personal library of Gershom Scholem. The Scholem library, with its approximately 25,000 volumes, transformed the Library into the world's leading repository of material on Kabbalah and Hasidism.

In the early 1990s, national libraries around the world began to redefine their roles in the new internet era. In Israel too, scholars, librarians, and others were asking how to reconceptualize the Library's purpose as growing numbers of resources became available online. Accordingly, the Hebrew University, together with key supporters, initiated an in-depth evaluation of the future of the JNUL. The conclusions were bold: first, the Library needed to be reinvented in order to meet the challenges of the digital age and realize its full potential as a relevant national institution. Most importantly, it was determined that the Library needed to separate from the Hebrew University and be housed in a new off-campus facility that would be fully open and accessible to the general public. The Library began a comprehensive renewal process led by National Library Chair, David Blumberg, who articulated and launched an ambitious new vision for the Library as a center of culture, education, and knowledge in Israeli society and throughout the Jewish world.

Following these recommendations, the Knesset enacted the National Library Law in 2007, turning the JNUL into an independent institution, to be known as the National Library of Israel. The National Library Law formalized the Library's mandate to serve as the national library of both the State of Israel and of the Jewish people, while also maintaining its role as Israel's premier research library in the humanities. The 2007 law also dramatically expanded the public role of the National Library: not only would it continue to collect and preserve textual materials, but it would also actively disseminate knowledge and foster cultural creativity among the general public.

The few dreamers who laid the cornerstone of the National Library in the late nineteenth century boldly strove to create an institution that would redefine Jewish culture of its day. The renewed National Library aims to be no less of a cultural vanguard: to reflect and define what is means to be Israeli and Jewish in the twenty-first century.

Achieving this aim today requires invoking and expanding Joseph Chasanowich's passionate creed: "Everything is important!" Just as he pursued articles by young Zionist writers of his time, the National Library today scours the globe to collect Jewish periodicals in dozens of languages. The library today seeks out majority and minority voices in order to document all aspects of Jewish and Israeli culture – from the rarest manuscript to the latest internet site. The treasured texts of today also include music, photographs, architectural sketches, oral histories, and more.

Today's National Library houses four main collections: two national collections (Judaica and Israel) and two research collections (Islam and the Middle East and a general Humanities collection). These four collections highlight the distinctive stories of the Jewish people: Zionist history and the return to Hebrew in its literary and popular forms; modern Israeli society; and ongoing conversations with the great cultures of the region and the world.

The Library's collections have grown significantly in the past decade, including historic acquisitions such as the Valmedona Trust Library of more than 10,000 Jewish rare books and prints, and more than 300 newly discovered handwritten documents from ~~11th–13th~~ century Khurasan, popularly known as the Afghan Geniza. Following a lengthy

court battle over rightful ownership, the Library also became the beneficiary of the Max Brod archive, which contains extensive works by Franz Kafka.

Beyond collecting physical materials, the National Library is also expanding its collections exponentially by digital means. One method is acquiring digital collections. For example, in recent years, the Library has collected millions of digital photographs, such as the Danchu Arnon collection documenting Israeli ritual life, which is featured in this book. Another method is leading collective efforts to digitize materials across institutions. For example, the Israel Archives Network, headed by the Library in partnership with the Association of Israeli Archivists, has succeeded in digitizing archives at museums, institutions, and libraries around the country. On a global level, the Library has joined with Tel Aviv University and myriad libraries to digitize hundreds of historical Jewish newspapers from six continents in more than eighteen languages. These projects have transformed scholarship on modern Jewish history and enabled students and history lovers alike to search and download millions of pages from a mobile device.

No less impressive is the Ktiv Digital Library project, a twenty-first century version of David Ben-Gurion's dream of gathering Jewish manuscripts dispersed in libraries around the world. Through Ktiv, the Library, in partnership with the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society, has digitized and thus provided unprecedented access to the vast majority of the world's Jewish manuscripts. The Friedberg Society has also donated hundreds of thousands of digital images of the Cairo Geniza, early manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud, Maimonides' writings, and other corpora. These and other digital collections have enabled the Library to assemble Jewish written culture on a scale that previous generations could only have dreamed of.

The Library's founding vision was not only about collecting texts but also about creating a meeting place for sages and scholars. The National Library's new landmark facility, opening in 2023, aims to be that and more. Just as the renewed Library sees value in publications in a host of genres and formats from all parts of Israeli society and the Jewish world and not only the work of an intellectual elite, so, too, the new building will actively engage diverse audiences, from academics and teachers to journalists and artists – anyone and everyone who seeks to study their past and expand their horizons. It understands the extraordinary value of gathering wisdom from different quarters and aims to be an inclusive space for all. With the new building embodying the values of openness and inclusion, the next chapter of the Library's dream begins.

1. *Ha-Tsefira*, October 18, 1899, p. 1.
2. For a detailed history of the National Library of Israel see the works of its eminent historian, Dov Schidorsky, in "Further Reading."
3. This picture applies primarily to Jews in Christian Europe. There were a few exceptions of Karaite synagogue libraries in the medieval Muslim East, as well as centers for copying manuscripts in the homes of wealthy Spanish Jews before the 1492 expulsion. See Haggai Ben-Shammai, Menachem Ben-Sasson, and Joseph Hacker in "Further Reading."

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

What defines a cultural treasure – the subject of this volume – today?

First and foremost are literary treasures, the pinnacles of cultural achievement produced by society's greatest and most recognized writers and thinkers, such as Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah* or Martin Buber's draft of *I and Thou*.

Some items are cultural treasures by dint of their uniqueness: for example, Naftali Herz Imber's autograph of the Israeli national anthem "Hatikva" is the only known extant copy of the original manuscript. Other texts are treasures because of their long journeys through history and the marks they have acquired along the way. For example, the thousand-year-old letters between Jewish traders along the Silk Road – texts that have survived against all odds and sometimes in almost miraculous circumstances – reveal a previously unknown, rich Jewish community in modern-day Afghanistan. Such treasures allow us to touch history; the serendipity of their survival helps us understand what is precious about culture and community.

But not all treasures are old. A Bukharan siddur handwritten on notepaper in the 1980s embodies the Jewish struggle to preserve tradition under persecution. Modern newspapers of the Karaite community in Egypt and the Arab community in Israel offer diverse perspectives on history and identity.

Such schematic definitions aside, the 101 treasures featured in this book all share one essential feature: they allow us to tell great stories. They are the launching point for the dramatic and the unexpected, eliciting our surprise and wonder and leading us on to further discovery and learning.

The task of selecting only 101 items from the millions of treasures in the National Library collections was daunting yet exhilarating. In our selections, we assembled a collage of items that included both the National Library's most precious manuscripts and exemplars of the extraordinary diversity of our collections. The featured items span the fifth through the twenty-first centuries from myriad places around the globe. We have included items in different formats and genres: manuscripts, books, periodicals, archives, maps, posters, photographs, music, and recent digital acquisitions. While our pre-modern collections are largely the products of male writers and audiences, we also looked to amplify the voices of women, some of whom were previously known and others unsung. In a similar vein, the book features extraordinary Israeli writers, thinkers, and scholars who hail primarily from European (Ashkenazi) backgrounds. We are cognizant of the existing gaps, particularly in representing twentieth-century Mizrahi and Arab-Palestinian writers in Israel, and are working actively to expand the Library's collections in these areas.

The book was developed and edited by the National Library's collections curatorial team who wrote the thematic introductions and more than half of the book's stories. They were joined by thirty-six current and former members of the National Library staff and two academic friends of the library who contributed both ideas and texts.

The items are organized thematically rather than by collection or format and proceed chronologically within each theme. The thematic organization allows an interplay between universalist values and the particular story of the Jewish people throughout its illustrious history and between global issues and the local narratives found in Israeli society today. We invite readers to discover the commonalities and distinctions among the great cultures featured here.

A great library comprises multiple libraries. Each person enters their own library, each of which is real and exists in parallel. We invite you, our readers, to enjoy these stories and to experience the pleasure of strolling through history.