



Among Harvard's Libraries: The Riant Collection in the Harvard College Library

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THE RIANT COLLECTION IN THE HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

James E. Walsh

On 29 March 1896 the Parisian bookseller A. Picard, agent for the sale of the Riant Collection, wrote to Justin Winsor, librarian of Harvard College:

Je suis chargé de négocier la vente d'une Bibliothèque fort importante et d'un intérêt fort particulier. Il s'agit de la collection des livres Scandinaviens assemblée par feu Monsieur le Comte Riant dont je vous envoie d'ailleurs le catalogue par le même courir. . . . Le prix auquel je suis autorisé à traiter serait de quinze à dixhuit mille francs. Je vous prie de m'accuser réception du catalogue.

Winsor's response, if any, is not preserved, but Picard's offer was obviously made to other libraries as well, and this Scandinavian section of the Riant collection found a buyer in the Yale University Library. The Riant catalogue was published in three volumes, 1896–99; the first volume contained the Scandinavian books, and it was for that reason that they were offered for sale separately. When the second and third volumes of the catalogue appeared in 1899, the new Librarian of Harvard College, William Coolidge Lane (Winsor having died in 1898), on 26 July 1899 wrote to Picard to ask what the conditions would be for acquiring *parts* of the Riant library; and he must also have asked Alfred C. Potter, at that time in charge of the Order Department in the College Library, to sound out Picard, for on 13 August 1899 Potter wrote to Lane from Shaftesbury in England, where he was on a bicycling tour:

I saw Picard in Paris the other day about the Riant books, & I am sorry to say that he is entirely unwilling to entertain any offer for separate parts of the collection. If it is not sold as a whole, it will be put up at auction & we must take our chances at the sale. The books themselves are in Switzerland, so of course I could not see them. Altogether I feel that my mission to Paris was not very successful.

Sometime during August or September of that year Archibald Cary Coolidge, Assistant Professor of History at Harvard, must also

have visited Picard in Paris, for on 30 September 1899 he wrote to Lane:

Will you kindly submit to the Library Council the following proposition for the purchase of the Riant Collection whose catalogue you have now in your hands. If the Harvard Library will contribute two thousand dollars to this purchase and take the necessary steps, I agree that the two thousand remaining from my Father's gift of last year be devoted to the same purpose; I offer two thousand more in his name, and I undertake to guarantee the remainder, up to the sum of ten thousand dollars, thereby making a total of sixteen thousand dollars or eighty thousand francs. The amount that I shall have to pay will be the difference between the sum that is required (over and above the six thousand dollars from the other sources) to complete the purchase and the sum which will be realized, after deducting legitimate expenses, by the sale of those books which the Harvard Library does not want. It is understood that, except by special consent, that sale should include all duplicates, the section on theology (etc., sections II to VII [of the Riant catalogue] inclusive) and perhaps the section of manuscripts though I shall hardly insist on this last if the Library seriously wants it. It seems to me that the expenses to be legitimately deducted from the amount realized by the sale of duplicates etc. include the cost of a new catalogue, if one is advisable, advertising, commissions, taxes, etc. but not any work done in the Harvard Library in looking up titles etc. nor binding, nor the freight charges from Paris to Cambridge.

I have but two conditions to make to my offer. First, that the Library besides undertaking all the work should also furnish temporarily all the money (above the available six thousand) that is required, and merely present the bill without interest to me in the end. I undertake to pay it promptly, and even in case of my death sufficient provision has been made.

Second, in the unlikely case that so much money is received from the sale of duplicates etc. that not only noth-

JAMES E. WALSH is Keeper of Printed Books, *emeritus*, in the Houghton Library. His *Catalogue of the Fifteenth-Century Printed Books in the Harvard University Library* is nearing completion.

ing is required of me but even a surplus comes back to the Library, that surplus shall go to reestablishing my Father's fund for the purchase of books on the Eastern Question which will have been devoted to this transaction.

On receipt of this letter Lane cabled Picard on 2 October to tell him that a formal offer would be on its way as soon as authorization was made by the Library Council. This was promptly forthcoming, and on 6 October Lane wrote to Picard that he has understood from Potter "and in consequence of Prof. Coolidge's interview with you which he has reported to us," that the collection must be sold as a whole. He continues:

The Library Council has decided to make you the following offer, which I hope you will find satisfactory.

1. To offer 75000 fr. for the whole collection (in which are included I understand, the 117 manuscripts catalogued on pp. xlvi-xlviii.)

2. To ask you to sell for us such books as are duplicates of what we already have (such as nos. . . . to name a few extensive sets) and possibly contain whole sections in which we are less interested, such as sections II-VII [of theology]. Those books which we wish to retain to be delivered in Paris without additional charge, properly boxed & ready for shipment to America.

3. To pay (1) 5000 fr. immediately on the acceptance of this offer, (2) to pay 35000 fr. on receipt of the books in America, (3) to settle whatever balance is due after the sale of what we wish to sell through you.

If these terms, or terms on practically this basis, are satisfactory to you I shall be obliged if you will cable me, addressing Harvard Library, Cambridge. I have asked my friend Mr. L. W. Pulsifer, now studying in Paris, to call on you as my representative in order that, if any other necessary points ought to be considered without delay, you may discuss them with him. Fur-

ther details in regard to the delivery of the books & the sale of those to be left with you can be arranged, I have no doubt with mutual satisfaction, later.

I cabled to you on Oct. 2 that an offer would be sent, and have waited until today only in order that I might have the formal authorization of the Library Council.

If this offer is accepted, I will ask you kindly to send me 3 copies of the Catalogue which I shall find it convenient to use.

On the following day, 7 October 1899, Lane wrote again to Picard in response to a cable:

It was with great satisfaction that I received your cable message yesterday informing me that the price of the Riant Collection had been reduced to 70000 francs, and I immediately cabled to you our acceptance of the collection at that price.

I had written to you on the 5th inst. offering a different sum & proposing certain terms of payment.¹ In regard to the latter, I shall be quite willing, in consideration of the lower price at which the collection is sold, to withdraw the stipulation that the books shall be delivered *packed & ready for shipment* & to agree that the Harvard Library shall be at the expense of packing & packing-cases for shipment from Paris to America. The other propositions in regard to payment I hereby confirm & hope you will find them satisfactory.

We shall immediately proceed to compare the printed catalogue of the Collection with the catalogue of this Library so as to inform you as early as possible what books we shall ask you to sell for us again in Paris, and in the meantime we should like to arrange with you the terms on which you will undertake to make this sale for us.

One section of the collection (nos. 3255-3752) we particularly desire to receive as soon as may be, and we shall examine the titles in this section first.² If the collection is in such condition

¹ The letter referred to must be that dated 6 October. Perhaps it was dictated on the 5th but not typed up until the 6th.

² This section of the catalogue lists the material about the Crusades.

that it is practicable to deal with one portion in advance of the others I shall ask you to send these books over as soon as possible, after the matter of duplicates to be retained in Paris is determined. We want to have them in our hands by December 1.

I notice that none of Count Riant's own works are included in the Collection as catalogued, and I beg to enquire whether it would not be possible to add to it a substantially complete collection of his works as described in the interesting & exhaustive bibliography prefixed to the Catalogue. Such an addition would be much appreciated.

On 29 October 1899 Picard signified his acceptance in principle:

Nous acceptons en principe le mode de paiement que vous nous proposez. Nous considérons donc l'affair comme conclue et nous sommes très content personnellement d'entrer ainsi en relations plus intimes avec vous—espérant que vous avez toute satisfaction de votre côté.

On 15 November 1899 a brief note from Lane to Picard:

I received your card of the 3d inst. yesterday, in which you say that Count Riant's family intend to present to this Library a set of Count Riant's publications. . . . We only regret that the collection relating to Scandinavian subjects could not also have found its final resting place in this Library instead of in the library of our sister university, of Yale.

Shortly after the beginning of the New Year (3 January 1900) Lane wrote again to Picard:

The three cases of Riant books finally reached us on December 28, after some delay in Liverpool due to the scarcity of steamers, and after a few days further unavoidable delay in Boston. . . . We are delighted at the beautiful condition of the books and their attractive appearance.

The Riant collection was the outstanding acquisition of the year, and Lane commented on it at length in his Annual Report for the academic year 1899–1900:

By far the most important addition of the year has been the Riant library, which we owe to Professor Archibald Cary Coolidge's interest in the history of Turkey and the Latin East, and to his own generosity and that of his father, Mr. J. Randolph Coolidge, of Boston, in giving the larger part of the money needed to make the purchase.

Count Paul Riant, who died in December, 1888, at the age of fifty-two, had devoted his life to the study of the Latin East, the Crusades, and the traces left by the Crusaders in Constantinople and Palestine. The foremost European scholar in this field, he had been elected a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1880 on account of his services to historical study as the founder and director of the "Société de l'Orient Latin," and because of the value and originality of his published investigations, especially his "Exuviae sacrae constantinopolitanae" which traces the fate of the treasures brought away from Constantinople by the Crusaders. . . .

Ill health prevented his working in Paris, but at his country place in Vorpillière, Valais, by means of ample resources and unflagging zeal, he brought together the great library which is no doubt the richest special collection in existence devoted to this subject. One section of the library related to Scandinavian subjects and this was acquired some years ago by Yale University. The other and larger portion is that which has come into the possession of this Library. No detailed description can be given here, but the wealth of its material may be inferred from the extent of the following sections: Crusades, 476 numbers; Wars against Turkey, 319 numbers; Military and Religious Orders, 224 numbers; History (largely chronicles, sources, etc.), 1003 numbers; Geography of the Holy Land, 503 numbers; Theology (including relics of Christ, worship of the Virgin, pilgrimages, relics of the Saints, etc.), 526 numbers; Ecclesiastical history, 391 numbers; Literary history and bibliography, 1016 numbers. . . . Taken as a whole, this is probably the most valuable collection of books that

the Library has ever received, with the possible exception of the Ebeling library of American history received in 1818 from Israel Thorndike.

The price asked for the collection was 70,000 francs, but after deducting the value of the duplicates already owned by the Library, most of which were left in Paris to be sold . . . the total cost, exclusive of freight from Paris to Boston (\$335) proved to be \$10,735. Of this sum the Library contributed \$2,010 from its book funds, Mr. J. Harvey Treat, of Lawrence, Mass., to whom the library has already been indebted in other years for generous gifts, gave \$800 to cover the cost of the theological section of the Library, and the Divinity School Library added \$600 to provide for the section devoted to ecclesiastical history. . . . The balance, \$7,250 was supplied by Mr. J. R. Coolidge and Professor Coolidge. . . .

The library as it reaches us numbers 7,649 volumes and 1,162 pamphlets, of which 603 volumes and 45 pamphlets are the property of the Divinity School. . . .

Fortunately the collection is provided with an excellent printed catalogue, which makes the incorporation of the titles in the regular library catalogue a matter of less pressing importance. As a preliminary catalogue record, the printed titles have already been mounted on cards which can be immediately inserted in the official catalogue with little trouble. The books themselves will be distributed to their appropriate places as rapidly as possible without waiting for further cataloguing. About 870 volumes have already found a home in the "Ottoman" and "Modern Greek" sections; some 600 more are being combined with other books already owned by the Library, and will form a new group devoted to the history of the Crusades,

the Crusading Knights, and the Latin Kingdoms of Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Greece. The hundred manuscripts will remain permanently together as the Riant MSS. and the incunabula, 99 in number, likewise remain for the present undistributed, and in the same locked cases that contain the rarer books from the Schefer and Riant libraries.³

In order to give a special distinction to these books and to honor the name of the scholar who collected them, a special book-plate of appropriate character has been designed and engraved by Mr. E. H. Garrett, of Boston.

An ample supply of copies of the printed catalogue has been received from A. Picard et Fils, who negotiated the sale, and copies will be sent to the principal libraries of the United States in order that a knowledge of what is accessible here may be spread as widely as possible.

Of the 104 incunabula in the Riant Collection some are distinguished by their rarity: Wenzel Faber de Budweis, *Practica siue prognosticatio anni 1492* (Lübeck, Bartholomaeus Ghotan, 1491; no. 947 in vol. 1 of the catalogue of fifteenth-century books at Harvard); Philippus Nuvolonus, *Oratio ad Christiernum, regem Daciae* (Mantua, Petrus Adam de Michaelibus, after 12 May 1474; no. 332 in vol. 3 of the catalogue); *Laus caritatis* (Paris, Antoine Caillaut, ca. 1483; no. 3612 in vol. 4 of the catalogue). Two are unique: Sixtus IV, *Regulae, ordinationes, et constitutiones Cancellariae apostolicae* (Rome, Adam Rot, after 19 December 1471; no. 1337 in vol. 2 of the catalogue); and Paulus Marsus, *Lamentatio de crudeli Eurapontinae urbis excidio* (Venice, Federicus de Comitibus, 1471?; no. S-1619B in vol. 4 of the catalogue). Some of the Riant incunabula are noteworthy for their provenance: *Modus legendi abbreviaturas* (Strassburg, Printer of the 1483 Jordanus de Quedlinburg, 9 August

³ Because several Riant incunables are bound together, Lane's count must be of volumes rather than titles. The Schefer books are those from the library of Charles Schefer that were purchased at auction in Paris. Schefer was a "distinguished student of Eastern history and editor of many volumes of early travel in the Levant. His library contained a rich collection of works relating to the history of Turkey, and much contemporary material of the

16th and 17th centuries bearing on the conflicts between the Turks and the nations of Europe. A substantial part of this collection, amounting to 445 volumes, was bought at a cost of a little under a thousand dollars, and the balance [of the gift of \$3000, by J. Randolph Coolidge] remains to be used for further purchases in the same field."—*Second Report of William Coolidge Lane, Librarian of Harvard University for the year 1898-99.*

1490, from the library of Hilprand Brandenburg; no. 240 in vol. 1 of the catalogue); Rodericus Zamorensis, *Epistola de expugnatione Nigropontis* (Cologne, Ulrich Zell, ca. 1470/71, from the library of Cardinal Étienne Charles de Loménie de Brienne; no. 330 in vol. 1 of the catalogue); and Marcus Antonius Sabellicus, *Decades rerum Venetarum* (Venice,

Andreas Torresanus de Asula, 21 May 1487, from the library of Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter).

Before this group was added to the Library, the total number of incunabula at Harvard was fewer than 200. The Riant collection increased Harvard's holdings by more than a third.

GUIDES TO THE PERPLEXED
IN THE WILDERNESS OF HEBRAICA:
FROM HISTORICAL TO CONTEMPORARY
BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND CATALOGS OF
HEBRAICA

MenaheM Schmelzer

In it you shall find the names of the books of Scripture and of all the commentators, designated by their names, and the titles of all books, arranged in the order of the alphabet, their authors and the subjects upon which they deliberated. I listed them in two main divisions and prepared twenty indexes, each in brevity. The books of the Mishnah, commentators, novellae—old and new—responsa, Talmud, Tosafot and codes, astronomy, philosophy and grammar, ethics, kabbalah, stories, reference works and prayerbooks, all are there. Anyone who wishes to study, do research or find something, should turn to them and shall find everything, the root and the branch. O dear reader, read my introduction carefully and you will realize that my aim is to serve you with all my soul and all my might.

At the outset I would like to dispel any possible misunderstanding: the above quotation is not a description of the *Catalog of the Hebrew Collection of the Harvard College Library*! Rather, it is a translation, almost verbatim, of the rhymed foreword of the first Hebrew bibliography, *Siftei Yeshenim* by Shabbethai Bass, published in Amsterdam in 1680.¹ More than three hundred years later the substantial message of these words could equally apply to the catalog whose publication we celebrate. Both were

created to provide easy access, to offer guidance, service, and help, and to present a bewildering array of data in well-arranged order. These works and many others of a similar nature have an identical aim. Their technique, scope, dimension, and mode of presentation, however, are as different as a horse drawn wagon is from a spaceship. Furthermore, the motivation for creating these instruments of information reflects the spirit and culture of their times and the corresponding ideologies of their authors.

In general I shall refrain from rattling off either titles, authors, places, and dates or lots of statistics, though I cannot resist mentioning that in the 1680 bibliography 1,900 Hebrew titles were listed, while in the new Harvard Catalog there are entries for more than a hundred thousand Hebrew monographs, plus thousands of sound recordings, videotapes and scores. Size alone would make it a monumental work, and here, in honor of the new Harvard Catalog, I shall call attention to the other monumental landmarks in the field, locate them on the map of Jewish intellectual and scholarly history, and characterize their specific features briefly.

All general bibliographies and catalogs of Hebraica, old and new, face a series of common problems and challenges. One of the major problems results from the dispersion of the Jewish people. Hebrew book production through the ages took place in many localities over the globe. Under pre-modern communication and transportation conditions it took a long time for a book printed in one part of the world to reach another part, and it might never do so. Even as late as the nineteenth century, Rabbi Bezalel Ranschburg in his commentary to the Talmudic tractate *Horayoth*

MENAHEM SCHMELZER, former librarian of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, is now Provost and Professor of Medieval Hebrew Literature at the Seminary.

This paper, the Max and Irene Engel Levy Memorial Lecture, was presented in the Widener Memorial Room on 8 May 1995. The occasion was a celebration of the publication of eleven-volume *Catalog of the Hebrew Collection of the Harvard College Library* (München: Saur, 1995).

¹ For a bibliography on Bass, see Herbert Zafren in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 546–47.