

AN INVENTORY
TO
THE CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL
DES ISRAÉLITES DE FRANCE
COLLECTION

Leo Lichtenberg, N. E. H. Manuscript Processor
Klau Library
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

Table of Contents

NOTE TO RESEARCHERS Page 1
HISTORICAL SKETCH Page 2
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE Page 3
BOX AND FOLDER LIST Page 5
SUBJECT TRACINGS Page 7

NOTE TO RESEARCHERS

Provenance

The CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION was purchased from Zosa Szajkowski (Mr. Szajko Frydman), New York City, on behalf of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, by Dr. Herbert C. Zafren, the Librarian, in 1958.

Statistics

CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 4 1/2.
Number of containers: 8 Manuscript boxes.
Approximate number of items: 4,000.
Processed by: Leo Lichtenberg.
Date completed: 1977.

Access and Citations

The CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION is open to researchers deemed to be qualified by the Librarian. The original manuscript collection is available in the Klau Library. A suggested form for at least the first citation is:

Letter from the Consistoire Central to Baron Gustave de Rothschild, 1905, CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Property and Literary Rights

The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion owns the property rights to the CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION. Information concerning literary rights may be obtained from the Librarian.

Acknowledgements

The inventory of the CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION was made possible under a project supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D. C.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Consistoire Central des Israelites Francais was created by a Napoleonic edict in 1808 and ended by the separation of Church and State in 1905. Thereafter its official name was changed to Union des Associations Culturelles de France et d'Algeries, but the unofficial use of the name "Consistoire" persists to the present day.

Originally, the Consistoire Central supervised 13 regional consistories, many of which were removed from its jurisdiction in 1871. However, French Jewry grew after the Franco-Prussian War, and during the three decades represented by the correspondence of this collection, the following consistories were under the supervision of the Consistoire Central: Alger, Bayonne, Besancon, Bordeaux, Constantine, Epinal, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nancy, Oran, Paris, and Vesoul. In addition, the Consistoire Central supervised all the activities of the Theological Seminary in Paris.

The Rabbinical head of the Consistoire Central was the Grand Rabbin de France. During the period covered in this collection, this office was occupied by Rabbis Lazare Isidore and Zadoc Kahn.¹

¹Encyclopedia Judaica, The MacMillan Co., Jerusalem, 1971, Vol. 5, cols. 907-912.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The CONSISTOIRE CENTRAL COLLECTION consists almost exclusively of drafts or copies of letters originating in the Consistoire's office. The documents contained in the collection appear to have served as file copies. Internal evidence indicates that more than half of the documents originally in the files are not present in our collection.

Many of the letters are addressed to the regional consistories. Their predominant themes are the assignment of Grands Rabbins, Rabbins, and Ministres Officiants, along with matters pertaining to their installations, salaries, moving expenses, vacations, and pensions for them or their dependents. There are also discussions of tensions and disputes between regional consistories or communities under their jurisdiction and the synagogue functionaries serving them. The building, enlargement, and renovation of synagogues are frequently discussed. There are also plans for organizing new communities and their personnel, for acquiring land for cemeteries, and for establishing new consistories. The proper provision and distribution of kosher food and the traditional observance of marriage and divorce laws are mentioned in the letters.

There are only a few references to Mohalim, Chazzamim, and teachers -- other than the Seminary professors -- whose functions were presumably performed by the Ministres Officiants. A good part of the correspondence deals with elections to the regional consistories and to the Consistoire Central, as well as with filling vacancies created by resignations or by death.

There is no direct mention of either the Dreyfuss Affair, of Herzl, of the Basle Congress or of subsequent Zionist Congresses. However, there are reactions to Anti-Semitic outbreaks in North Africa and Metropolitan France, as well as evidence of Chibbat Zion.

All the subjects mentioned above are also discussed in correspondence with the Government Ministry in charge of cults, with prefects, and with the Governor General of Algeria.

In addition to the incompleteness of the collection, another major shortcoming is that it contains the incoming correspondence in extremely rare instances.

The SUBJECT TRACINGS consist of a nearly complete list of personal and geographical names in addition to subjects presumably of interest to the researcher. Since the Consistoire Central's secretary was less than meticulous in his spelling habits, the researcher may find many duplications under variant spellings of a name. Also, first names are frequently missing, so that a number of different persons may be subsumed under

Levy, Mr. Some of the same people may again be listed under Levy, Adolphe; Levy, Abraham; or Levy, Auguste.

The years best represented are 1877, 1881, 1883, and 1885; 1906 and 1907, on the other hand, are represented by only a handful of documents.