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The Library's Bassin Collection

by Scott Sheidlower and John Drobnicki

In May 1973, York College President Milton Bassin donated 495 volumes from his father's private collection to the York College Library. The Bassin Collection, which is still shelved separately in the Library's Reference section, contains books written in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic. The reason for this choice of languages is that President Bassin's father Max (sometimes called Morris, Moses, or Moshe) was a noted Yiddish poet and anthologist. The vast majority of the books were published between the late 1940s and the 1950s, and they were almost exclusively published in New York City, which was where many Holocaust survivors had fled after the Second World War.

Max Bassin, who was born in 1889, edited several books, including two major collections of Yiddish poetry – a two-volume collection entitled *Antologye: finf hundert yohr Idische poezye* [*Anthology: Five Hundred Years of Yiddish Poetry*], the first volume of which was published in 1917, and the second in 1922; and *Amerikaner yidische poezye: antologye* [*American Yiddish Poetry: Anthology*], which was published in 1940. The elder Bassin died in 1963 at the age of 74.

The collection focuses on two main sets of topics. The first area, and the largest, is Post-Holocaust Hebrew and Yiddish literature, especially poetry and short stories. Since Max Bassin was so prominent in the Yiddish literary field, many of the books in the collection have been personally autographed to him by the authors.

The second large category consists of Jewish religious volumes. For example, the collection has many copies of the *Tanach* (the Hebrew word/abbreviation used for the entire collection of Old Testament canonical books). Thanks to this gift York also owns both a complete Jerusalem Talmud and a Babylonian Talmud (these are in Aramaic), as well as several Hebrew-Hebrew or Hebrew-Yiddish dictionaries.



Bassin, *American Yiddish Poetry: Anthology*
אמעריקאנער פאעזיע יידישע
[Title page illustration by Judah Tofel]

According to the Library's archival records, the transliteration of the titles in the Bassin Collection was done by Mr. Etson Rose, who worked in the Library's Circulation Department; and once the titles were transliterated, it allowed Prof. Kathryn Soltesz (Head of Cataloging) and Mrs. Vera Pollak (Adjunct Lecturer/Cataloger) to search for Cataloging records and order cards for some titles for the card catalog from the Library of Congress. Unfortunately, the bibliographic records do not seem to have ever made it into CUNY+, either the first-generation NOTIS version or the current Aleph version, so almost no one knows they are here. This underutilized treasure at York could be used one day to research the Hebrew/Yiddish book trade in New York City, since many of the publishers' imprints include their addresses.

1) Title page image from the website of the National Yiddish Book Center, Amherst, MA <<http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/+10319>>.

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