

Inventorying “Pre-modern” Manuscripts in Victorian Public and Private Collections: Expanding the Cultural Archive

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Aided by advances in the digital humanities, efforts have multiplied over the past decades to map cultural heritage and to inventory the manuscript sources for historical and cultural research that are scattered through collections around the world. Within Australia there have been several projects addressing early printed books, art objects and manuscripts, some of which will be detailed below. The small pilot project we are reporting on here—*Inventorying “Pre-modern” Manuscripts in Victorian Public and Private Collections* (IMVC)—has been an attempt to continue this work, focusing on manuscript material within the geographic limits of the Australian state of Victoria.¹ While most work to date has been concerned with Western European material in institutional holdings, whether in Latin or pre-modern vernaculars, this project also looked to the substantial communities of Mediterranean origin that have taken root in Victoria since the widening of migration catchments in the 1960s, whose cultural heritage includes texts written in Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, and in other languages that use those writing systems.² These cultural groups are much less represented in public collections, and a chief focus of the project was to identify and engage with private owners of manuscripts in these communities.

In this article we seek to provide a taste of the surprising riches this approach has uncovered. We first outline the key aims and principles of the IMVC project, and then present two case studies on selected findings, with attention to the provenance, contents, and physical state of the manuscripts under collection, and the personal and cultural significance that these items have for their owners.

¹ The project was funded by the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies (SOPHIS) in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University, and ran from June to December 2021. We wish to acknowledge the support of the School, and also that of the project steering committee, especially Dr Aydogan Kars, whose expertise and community contacts were crucial. The members of the steering committee and the research team are listed here: <https://www.monash.edu/arts/philosophical-historical-international-studies/inventorying-pre-modern-texts-in-victorian-public-and-private-collections>.

² To take the example of communities in Victoria for whom Arabic language or script is an important medium of cultural transmission, based on census data, by 2016 there were 46,334 who claimed Lebanese ancestry, 37,631 Turkish, 17,506 Iranian, and 16,631 Egyptian, as well as smaller numbers from Iraq and Syria. See Victorian Government, “Multicultural Community Profiles,” <https://www.vic.gov.au/multicultural-community-profiles>. Of course, these population figures also encompass people whose traditions were transmitted in other languages and scripts, notably Hebrew, Coptic Syriac and Greek.

The first case study examines elements of a significant private Arabic manuscript collection held in Victoria, and the second details a significant Hebrew collection in the State Library of Victoria (SLV), along with a private collection of Hebrew manuscripts from Egypt and Morocco. We hope that this investigation will provide further insight into the diversity of heritage in contemporary Australia, and serve as a contribution to its social history. For future projects with a different focus, the study may also stimulate further interest in widening the geographic and linguistic boundaries in Australian manuscript repositories, holdings and collections.

Context for IMVC

IMVC builds on significant previous attempts to link different catalogues of Australian pre-modern manuscripts into one resource. After World War II, the first notable attempt to inventory Australia's manuscripts was made by Keith Sinclair. Beginning in 1968 with the publication of a catalogue of the Crouch Collection, as donated to the Ballarat Art Gallery in Victoria, Sinclair's next project, published in 1969, expanded his scope to include all of Australia.³ Focusing on a Western pre-modern manuscript tradition, the inventory mainly collated Latin manuscripts with a few vernacular texts in the Romance or Germanic language groups. Its focus was predominantly on already catalogued institutional collections or private institutional collections, such as the Crouch Collection mentioned above. Subsequent inventorying projects kept to a generally similar scope.

In 1984, Margaret Manion and Vera Vines approached the Western pre-modern manuscript tradition through the lens of art, updating aspects of Sinclair's catalogue with funding from the Australian Research Council (ARC).⁴ Subsequent publications expanded on the theme of the illuminated manuscript, reflecting wider institutional and public interest in Western medieval art.⁵ In 2008, the theme of relating inventorying to institutional and public interest was revisited with the publication of Bronwyn Stocks and Nigel Morgan's edited catalogue for

³ Keith V. Sinclair, *Medieval and Renaissance treasures of the Ballarat Art Gallery: The Crouch manuscripts* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1968); *Descriptive Catalogue of Medieval and Renaissance Western Manuscripts in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969).

⁴ Margaret M. Manion and Vera F. Vines, *Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts in Australian Collections* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984). Their catalogue expands slightly beyond the Latin West, with the inclusion of one Byzantine manuscript.

⁵ Margaret M. Manion, "Illuminating Words," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 28 (1987): 17–33; Ian Potter Gallery and Lyn Nossal, ed., *Gold and Vellum: Illuminated Manuscripts in Australia and New Zealand* (Parkville: University of Melbourne, Museum of Art, 1989), exhibition catalogue; National Gallery of Australia and Pauline Green, ed., *The Book of Kells and the Art of Illumination* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2000), exhibition catalogue.

The Medieval Imagination exhibition at SLV.⁶ The appeal of the exhibition led to a successful ARC Linkage Project running from 2010 to 2012, headed by Margaret Manion and Bernard Muir from the University of Melbourne, Toby Burrows from the University of Western Australia, and Shane Carmody from SLV. This project updated and digitised manuscripts held in public collections in the State of Victoria, which were then linked to a digitisation of the various inventories into a new Australia-wide online database including both medieval manuscripts and artworks—*Europa Inventa: Early European Objects in Australasian Collections*—funded through The Network of Early European Research (NEER) based at the University of Western Australia.⁷

In some key aims, IMVC owes a great deal to *Europa Inventa* in its commitment to provide a digital service for cataloguing pre-modern manuscripts for researchers. The database that was used to record the findings of the project needed to be compatible with other digital initiatives in order to be useful in the future. Accordingly, a prototype database was designed to follow the manuscript description specification in the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) P5 Guidelines, the same model that was adopted for *Europa Inventa*.⁸ The IMVC database includes the standard fields for cataloguing a manuscript—content, foliation, dimensions, script, origin and provenance, along with miscellaneous notes. The database also has the capacity to draw on digital facsimiles of manuscripts in external repositories using the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF).⁹ However, the database has not been currently designed to visually reproduce entire manuscripts nor to provide a sample of scanned images of physical documents. In this respect IMVC agrees with the limited aims of *Europa Inventa*, with the project designed to provide an online catalogue for researchers as opposed to a complete digitisation of catalogued manuscripts. However, future resourcing may build on this basic approach to include these digitised manuscripts.

These earlier manuscript inventorying projects (and numerous smaller studies of individual collections), whether printed or digital, have arguably given us a

⁶ Bronwyn Stocks and Nigel Morgan, eds., *The Medieval Imagination: Illuminated Manuscripts from Cambridge, Australia and New Zealand* (South Yarra: Macmillan Art Pub., 2008), exhibition catalogue.

⁷ See *Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, <https://europa.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/manuscripts/overview>.

⁸ Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), “P5: Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange,” last updated 31 August 2021, <https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ref-msDesc.html>; on the database search framework for the NEER *Europa Inventa* project, see Toby Burrows, “Discovering Early Europe in Australia: The *Europa Inventa* Resource Discovery Service,” in *Digital Libraries: Universal and Ubiquitous Access to Information*, edited by George Buchanan, Masood Masoodian, and Sally Jo Cunningham (Berlin: Springer, 2008): 394–95.

⁹ For the IIIF specifications, see “API Specifications - International Image Interoperability Framework™,” <https://iiif.io/api/index.html>, accessed 9 December 2021.

picture of cultural heritage preservation in Australia where that heritage was understood to be chiefly Western European.¹⁰ IMVC has sought to expand this picture for Victoria by focusing on four language groups: Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic. In addition to canvassing any remaining Western manuscripts that have yet to be adequately catalogued in public and academic databases, it was hoped that the addition of the other language groups would begin a process to more accurately reflect the increasingly multicultural demography in Victoria and, by association, Australia. While the project initially operated with a pragmatic cut-off date of 1600, in line with the increasing dominance of print in Western Europe, this limitation proved less realistic as the cataloguing progressed for recording documents from regions where printing presses remained unavailable into the twentieth century.

Finally, although Australia has a rich tradition in private collections, these tend to enter the scholarly record only when bequeathed to a public institution, as was the case of the Crouch Collection. Neil Boness, in his 1996 essay on the origins of manuscript collections in Sydney, noted a bias towards public collections in inventorying projects, commenting on the difficulty of locating items in private holdings and collections.¹¹ Since IVMC also sought to inventory private collections, it had to navigate the legal and practical challenges and ethical considerations that arise when approaching the private sphere from a public perspective.

Working with Private Owners

While archives in public institutions are generally open to public access and the sharing of information, access to private archives, holdings and collections must be negotiated. At worst, the two types of collections can be at odds: while the archivist assembles data for public purposes (including academic research), curators of private archives may define their collection in terms of its personal, subjective significance and accordingly restrict access to it. Any attempt to gain access to private holdings therefore depends on trust. Our project found two fruitful avenues to build trust: identification with a trustworthy public institution (the sponsoring university, and that university's procedures of ethics approval and research protocols), and recommendation through networks of personal contacts and community organisations. Clear communication of project aims and procedures was crucial, as was giving individuals complete control over the type and volume of information shared and securely stored with the project, through a consent form which provided various options on data disclosure. The project aims were communicated via trusted private institutions such as commercial

¹⁰ Neil Boness notes, for instance, how the inventories of Sinclair and Manion and Vines did not include "Hebrew or Eastern items," in "Manuscripts in the Antipodes: The Origins of the Sydney Collection," *Parergon* 13 (1996): 183–94, quoted on p. 184.

¹¹ Boness, "Manuscripts in the Antipodes," 183.

organisations, newspapers, societies and private networks.¹² The four historically trained language specialists attached to IMVC were able to further develop trust through personal contact and developing relationships with individual collectors.

The purpose of IMVC has been not only to inventory these private collections and little-known elements of public ones, but to begin recording the social history, where possible, behind these collections. The stories of these archives and how they came to be private are also important. In the remainder of this article, we present some examples of collections that illustrate the extent of unknown holdings and the potential their study holds for research in multiple domains.

The Collections

The IMVC research team succeeded in locating 70 manuscripts written in Hebrew, 66 written in Arabic (some of which were part of a collection of over 700, of which the researchers were only able to examine a small fraction, described in Case Study 1), 11 Latin single leaves and fragments, a single leaf in Coptic and a single leaf in Syro-Persian. One group of Arabic script manuscripts and two groups of Hebrew script manuscripts are described in the case studies that follow.

Case Study 1

Inventorying Arabic Script Manuscripts in a Private Collection

The collecting, cataloguing and exhibiting of manuscripts written in Arabic script has tended to be ad hoc in public institutions in a Victorian context, with scholarly interest only gaining traction in the last decade of the twentieth century.¹³ These collections often have little to no connection with the communities that produced them. The founding of the Islamic Museum of Australia in Melbourne in 2010 represented a shift in this regard, as it was supported primarily by the Islamic

¹² For IMVC public outreach, see “Treasure quest: Researchers embark on a pre-modern manuscript mission,” *Lens*, Monash University (23 August 2021), <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/08/23/1383600/treasure-quest-researchers-embark-on-a-pre-modern-manuscript-mission>.

¹³ Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), ix–xii. In Victoria, the notable Middle Eastern Collection of the University of Melbourne with more than 168 manuscripts (and originally established by Prof. John Bowman for the students of the Middle Eastern Department to use in their studies) only began to be formally studied in 1995, and then only scientifically as artefacts. A more comprehensive study of the manuscripts did not take place until 2007. See Robyn Sloggett, “Introduction to the Middle Eastern Manuscript Collection at the University of Melbourne Library,” <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/grimwade-centre-for-cultural-materials-conservation/engagement/uom-library-middle-eastern-manuscripts-collection> (accessed 14 January 2022). When the project research team examined the four Arabic and Turkish manuscripts held at the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (donated as part of the Crouch Collection), they found them to be relatively poorly described, with one having been misidentified. These manuscripts, not mentioned in Sinclair’s catalogue, had been collected mainly for their artistic value, and not regarded as a scholarly or textual resource.

community. Seven manuscripts were donated to this Museum by a private collector. This relatively new public institution with deep connections to its community was also a factor in the ability of IMVC to access personal collections of Arabic script manuscripts. One notable private collector was identified through these institutional and professional connections and contact was made independently via private channels. Initial contact was enthusiastic: the collector wished to share the size and “the beauty” of their collection, including both manuscripts and artefacts. As the communication moved towards a more formal relationship, the collector became more cautious. Communication was subsequently moved into a more personal face-to-face relationship, which reopened conversations, but access to the collection was limited to what the collector perceived were mainly pedestrian and unidentified works.

During scheduled visits set for cataloguing, the private collector also shared some of their other collected artefacts, such as swords used by Turkish soldiers during World War I, metal bowls, pocket Turkish calendars (known as *ruznama*), and pieces of calligraphy. The collector was keen to consult on dating, the identification of the craftsperson, and/or the translation of sentences written on the objects. Thus, mutual benefit became apparent even at this early stage.

Personal conversations with the collector reveal that after they migrated to Australia with their family from Turkey following the first World War they developed an interest in their heritage, particularly to Turkey and Iran. Their interest was encouraged from an early age by their family. The collection was sourced from auctions mainly in Europe (England and France), and the collector has been very cautious about provenance. The collector is also strongly interested in militaria, particularly Turkish materials from World War I. A major ambition is to build a museum and exhibit the manuscripts and artifacts and to share the collection with the public in a private institutional setting.

While the collector has indicated that they have over 700 manuscripts in Arabic script (with texts in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish), we were allowed to inventory only a sample of 50 or so, of which we catalogued 23. The manuscripts made available to the project were works not yet fully identified by the collector and in generally poor condition. These had been sourced from Russia and stored in a box and suitcase. The manuscripts suffered from a variety of common issues: tears, lost bindings, mould damage, stains and insect damage. They represent a wide-ranging collection of Islamic manuscripts covering a variety of dates, places, and topics. Topics include Islamic jurisprudence, mysticism, poetry, stories and fables, prayers, paper preparation recipes, genealogical documents, the history of Iran, and examples of calligraphy. The oldest manuscript is an incomplete copy of Sa‘dī’s *Gulistān* (*The Flower Garden*, written c. 1258), completed on Wednesday 31 March 1540 (947 AH). *Gulistān* is a collection of moral stories in the form of prose and poetry written in Persian (Farsi). This manuscript has interlinear and

marginal translations of selected words in Ottoman Turkish, suggesting that it was once used by a Turkish-speaking owner. The manuscripts in general preserve notes from previous owners revealing how much they bought the manuscript for and whether they rented the manuscripts to other people. Some have seals showing that the manuscripts were once endowed to an institution (*waqf*). Some bindings have the name of the binder stamped on the binding, usually within a decorative cartouche. Some of these binding stamps indicate the year and location, which contributes greatly to identifying the manuscripts and helping to categorise and understand binding techniques and styles.

Valuable information can be extracted from the phrases stamped or written on Islamic leather bindings and, more commonly, lacquer bindings. There are not many surviving bindings with inscriptions. The inscriptions on bindings may include a description of the binding and its decoration; some explanation about the content of the manuscript, usually expressed in poetic form; the name of the manuscript; the name of the author; different names of God and prayers; a prayer that the owner of the manuscript may enjoy a long, healthy life; the name of the owner of the manuscript; the name of the binder; the name of the person who wrote the inscriptions or illustrator; the date of the binding; and the place of production.¹⁴ One of the unique characteristics of this collection is that the bindings of several manuscripts contain the name of the binder. For Islamic leather bindings, the practice of stamping the name of the binder on the front and back covers began in the fourteenth century. Before the seventeenth century, only a very limited number of Islamic bindings bore the name of the binder. The oldest copy with the name of the binder is a copy of the Qur'ān, dated 1306 (706 AH) in the Iran Bastan Museum in Tehran. From the seventeenth century onward, the names of the binders are observable mainly on lacquer Islamic bindings.¹⁵

In this collection, 8 out of 23 examined manuscripts record the names of their binders. Four of the binding stamps also record dates of production (1626, 1792, 1801, 1839). The stamps in this collection of manuscripts further contribute to an understanding of Islamic bindings, the different techniques and materials used in different regions over time, and the names of the artist-binders and their methods. For example, one of the stamps reads “the work of Mulla of Kabuli Mosque, the binder.” Preliminary research shows that this stamp appears on another manuscript, held outside Australia, containing a copy of *Manṭiq al-Tayr* of ‘Aṭṭār of Nishapur (d. 1221), transcribed in the year 1588 (997 AH).¹⁶ A note in that manuscript indicates that it was transcribed in front of the Kabuli Mosque

¹⁴ Iraj Afshar, “Inscriptions on the Bindings of Islamic Manuscripts,” *Nāmeḥ-ye Bahārestān*, 2, no. 1 (2001): 21–44.

¹⁵ Afshar, “Inscriptions.”

¹⁶ Mohsen Ja’fari Mozahheb, “Some Notes on Islamic Manuscripts,” in *Nāmeḥ-ye Bahārestān*, 4, no. 1 (2003–2004): 285–95.

(probably in Kabul). There is no mention of a date in the binding stamp. However, in this collection, there is a date on the binder’s stamp which reads 1839 (1255 AH). As the binding details were collated, it became clear that the binding of the manuscript in this collection was produced probably in Kabul in front of Kabuli Mosque. It also emerged that the binding of the overseas manuscript containing the copy of *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* was probably not original and had been added some 250 years later. Moreover, the name of the binder suggests that these bindings were made for the manuscripts that were meant to be used in the Kabuli Mosque. A further inference is that *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* remained of interest at the Kabuli Mosque from 1588 to at least 1839.

This preliminary investigation into a small, unidentified collection of Arabic script manuscripts sourced from Russia and in generally poor condition reveals that the collection’s notable use of binding stamps may be an important contribution to scholarship. The importance placed on these manuscripts by the collector is not the same as that which may be placed by the academic, a difference in perspective that demonstrates the value of inventorying private manuscript collections.

Case Study 2

Inventorying Hebrew script Manuscripts in Public and Private Collections

Unlike Latin manuscripts, Hebrew manuscripts in Victoria are seldom encountered in public institutions. An exception is a collection of Hebrew manuscripts at the SLV known as the Hailperin collection.¹⁷ Apart from the historical importance of the manuscripts themselves, these collections also preserves fascinating details of historical value concerning Jews who migrated to Victoria in the nineteenth century. We were surprised at both the sheer number of uncatalogued Hebrew manuscripts in Victoria and at how a significant number of these manuscripts originated from Jewish communities in Egypt. We have encountered a diverse array of material that we cannot summarise here in detail, but that include medical texts by Maimonides, Jewish marriage contracts, and Hebrew curse formulas.¹⁸ In the following section we will relate novel information about two collections examined by the project—the Hailperin and a private collection—and situate them among the cultural background of their collectors, so that these documents can be added to the expanding archive of multicultural Victoria.

¹⁷ In New South Wales, however, compare Crown’s 1973 study of the Hebraica Collection in the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney: Alan D. Crown, *Hebrew Manuscripts and Rare Printed Books held in the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1973).

¹⁸ For example, a single manuscript of 228 leaves catalogued from one private collection includes two works by Maimonides (1138–1204): *Pirkei Abokarat* (*The Chapters of Hippocrates*), Maimonides’s commentary on the *Aphorisms* of Hippocrates in a Hebrew translation of the original Arabic; and *Pirkei Moshe* (*The Chapters of Moses*), a medical work by Maimonides in a Hebrew translation of the original Arabic and another private collection included a *Karaites Ketubah* from Cairo, Egypt, 1653.

The Hailperin Collection

The Hailperin collection, as assembled by Dr. David Hailperin (c. 1812–1860), who arrived in Victoria in 1855,¹⁹ has been held at the SLV (or the Melbourne Public Library, as it was then called) for well over 150 years.²⁰ The collection is impressive, containing more than 150 Judaica books and a number of Hebrew manuscripts. These manuscripts have been only partially examined and catalogued, but they are of great historical interest in both their contents and their relation to their collector.

Literature on Hailperin appeared shortly after his death in 1860, in no small part due to his extraordinary life. Maurice Brodzky, a Jewish journalist based in Melbourne, published a sensationalist biography on Hailperin in 1876, titled *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery: A Story of a Colonial Physician*.²¹ Regrettably Brodzky had only arrived in Melbourne in the early 1870s and after Hailperin's death, so he had to rely on second-hand testimonies: the book itself is filled with many unverifiable anecdotes. Nonetheless, various points of detail are confirmed by external sources and the more fanciful tales contained in the volume do manage to convey that Hailperin impressed quite a few Melbournians who remembered him as an eccentric practitioner of black magic. Over a century later, a more scholarly approach to Hailperin's biography appeared in 1984 in two separate articles by Rabbi Israel Porush and M. Z. Forbes, who both revisited Hailperin's collection at the SLV and conducted "detective investigations" in order to extract more concrete details about Hailperin's life.²² Revisiting his collection once again with the advantage of further historical sources available online has allowed us to ascertain new details about his mysterious life. Although many biographical details about Hailperin remain elusive, the manuscripts under his possession confirm the various testimonies (details aside) that he dabbled in the occult.

Hailperin was born in Bucharest, then the capital of Wallachia in European Turkey c. 1812,²³ and from his death certificate we learn that his father Hayim was a "bishop of a Jewish congregation" and his mother's name was unknown.²⁴

¹⁹ Public Record Office Victoria, Inward Overseas Passenger Lists, Oct–Dec 1855 British and Foreign Ports, <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/3AFC5433-F96C-11E9-AE98-217934D1FC21?image=162>.

²⁰ *The Supplemental Catalogue of the Melbourne Public Library for 1865* (Melbourne: J. Ferres, Govt. Printer, 1865): 113–19.

²¹ Maurice Brodzky, *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery: A Story of a Colonial Physician* (Melbourne: Walker, May & Co. Printers, 1876).

²² Israel Porush, "The Colourful Dr. David Hailperin and his Books," *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 9, no. 6 (1984): 417–33; M. Z. Forbes, "David Hailperin, The Strange Rabbi-Doctor and his Times," *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 9, no. 7 (1984): 527–36.

²³ This date can be inferred from Hailperin's age (35) as specified on his 1847 British naturalisation papers: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), HO 1/24/538.

²⁴ The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, Deaths in the District of Inglewood in the Colony of Victoria, 1860.

With extravagant rhetoric, Brodzky relates his appearance as it was remembered, including by someone who had known him in Hamburg:

Those who knew [Hailperin] ... describe him as having been a very handsome man. He was of tall stature, a figure as the father of Federick the Great would have coveted for his chosen regiment of grenadiers; with high and intelligent forehead, beautifully-shaped features, a pure Grecian nose, a beard which was considered the finest in Hamburg.²⁵

Different secondary sources indicate that both Hayim and later David himself were prominent rabbis in and around Bucharest, and one source suggests that "Rabbi David Hailperin" had travelled from Bucharest to Constantinople and never returned, leaving behind a wife.²⁶

Hailperin migrated to Victoria from London in October 1855, and worked in Melbourne as a general practitioner at various different locations; he also delivered lectures at synagogues.²⁷ Shortly after his arrival, the ambitious doctor applied for a position at the synagogue in Sydney, where his application was supported by two respectable members of the Jewish community in Melbourne. Nonetheless, the Synagogue ultimately resolved not to appoint Hailperin to the position.²⁸ It is likely that this rejection had something to do with Hailperin's flirtations with occult magic. In 1856, an anecdotal description of Hailperin in the diary of Polish gold miner Seweryng Korzelinsky (1804–1876) described how Hailperin had made an abortive attempt to conjure gold at a Bendigo digging site:

I had some interesting talks with a rabbi who arrived from Poland via Istanbul. He was rather condescending in his manner and as one of my Jewish friends said to me: "He is so clever that when he talks nobody can understand a thing." The rabbi announced that he had the power to find the mother lode of gold. He was kept in

²⁵ Brodzky, *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery*, 22.

²⁶ Baruch Tercatin și Lucian-Zeev Herșcovici, *Prezențe rabinice în perimetrul românesc* (București: Editura HASEFER, 2008), 275; Paul Cernovodeanu, Raphael Vago, Judy Krausz, and Haim Watzman, *The History of the Jews in Romania: The Nineteenth Century* (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2005), 239. This information would later trickle down to Brodzky, *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery*, 16: "After several years' residence in Palestine ... [Hailperin] decided to return to Europe to accept at Bucharest the very lucrative position of chief Rabbi of the Danubian Principalities."

²⁷ According to *The Melbourne Directory* (Sands & Kenny), Hailperin was a surgeon practising at 5 Swanston Street in 1857 and at 99 Little Lonsdale Street East in 1858; a medical advertisement in *The Argus* of 16 February 1858, however, suggests he moved his practice to 3 Blackwood Street, North Melbourne. In 1860, *The Argus* of 10 March named Hailperin among a list of doctors who received their formal registration to practise medicine in Victoria. Of his lectures, *The Argus* advertised: "The Rev. Doctor Hailperin will deliver a Lecture in the Synagogue, Bourke Street, on Sabbath next, March 1st, at 9 o'clock AM" (29 February 1856).

²⁸ Rev. Moses Rintel (1823–1880) and Solomon Phillips (1810–1877): Porush, "The Colourful Dr. David Hailperin," 422; cf. Brodzky, *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery*, 27–28.

the best of everything by the Jewish Melbourne community and finally announced that the location of the lode was in Bendigo. Eventually a suitable spot was selected and the rabbi demanded that a tent stitched by the hand of a virgin be prepared and a young mother be placed in the middle of it on a chair. He rubbed some black shiny substance into the woman's hand, saying incantations all the time, and when the reflected sunlight from her palm struck the ground it indicated the place where to dig. Dig they did, far below the pipeclay, but did not find any gold. This I think was the demise of the rabbi's name, because soon after someone else was elected to the position of chief rabbi.²⁹

Strange stories followed Hailperin everywhere he went in Victoria, and apparently he would be approached for divination and the exorcism of evil spirits.³⁰ One account says he once summoned a pair of disembodied hands, to the astonishment of a guest.³¹ In another characteristically strange story, the Melbourne journalist Dr. J. E. Neild told Brodsky that Hailperin had prescribed "dog's fat" from a dog "to be killed at midnight, and in a peculiar manner," to effect a "magic cure."³² However, in Hailperin's final years his household was plagued by deaths: first his servant died under questionable circumstances in early 1857.³³ Around 1858, Hailperin decided to move out of Melbourne in search of new riches; he lived in Sunbury and Inglewood among communities of gold diggers, but his search was soon cut short: five months after he was granted his registration as a doctor, he died from pneumonia on 20 July 1860.³⁴ According to his death certificate, he had a *de facto* relationship with "a woman of 41 years of age in Melbourne; name not given," but less than a week later, on 26 July, "Janette Hailperin" appeared to die by suicide from an opium overdose, depressed in the

²⁹ Seweryng Korzelinsky, *Memoirs of Gold-Digging in Australia*, translated and edited by Stanley Robe (University of Queensland Press, 1979), 148–49.

³⁰ Korzelinsky, *Memoirs*, 20.

³¹ Korzelinsky, *Memoirs*, 26–27.

³² Korzelinsky, *Memoirs*, 29. A more anodyne assessment of Hailperin's medical abilities can be found in a short letter printed in *The Argus*, which defended the doctor against the weight of opinion about his practice: "Dr. HAILPERINE [*sic*], Little Lonsdale Street East. In gratitude to the Doctor, and for the benefit of those who are subject to the same painful affection, I deem it my duty to inform the public that I have suffered from Rheumatism for many years; have been under the most eminent medical men, without any beneficial effect, till fortune led me to Dr. H., who cured me within a fortnight. S. Soloberg, 115 Russell Street" (6 January 1857).

³³ Her name was Catherine Shaw, and she died by poison in early April 1857. Self-administering strychnine after a heated argument with her husband, an alcoholic sailor, her death was covered by several papers, and the dying woman had several witnesses, including a neighbour and two doctors; none, however, cast suspicion on Hailperin himself. This was reported in *The Age* (11 April), the *Bendigo Advertiser* (10 April) and the *Adelaide Times* (20 April). The most comprehensive account is that of the *Bendigo Advertiser*.

³⁴ The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria, 9422 / 1860.

wake of Hailperin's death.³⁵ In this grim chapter, Hailperin's quest for knowledge and riches was cut short in middle age.

What still survives of Hailperin, however, is his private book collection. In 1864, his collection was sold to the Melbourne Public Library (now SLV) by the Rabbi and Hebrew scholar Isaac Pulver (1803–1873) for £75.³⁶ The book collection comprises a vast selection of classical Jewish works, Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, a library worthy of a "diligent student of the *Cabalab*," as Brodsky described Hailperin.³⁷ Many of these books are first editions, with the earliest volume printed in 1546, and Hailperin's name neatly handwritten in most of them. The collection includes eight manuscripts that reflect the Doctor's special interest in black magic, divination techniques, Kabbalah, and folklore medicine.³⁸

- (1) *Nof Etz Hayim* ("The Top of the Tree of Life") by Rabbi Chaim Vital (1542–1620). Hebrew; 79 pages; eighteenth century.
- (2) *Mekor Hashemot* ("The Source of the Names")³⁹ by Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto (1625–1697). This work explains Jewish magic concerning the use of holy names and their powers. Hebrew; 59 pages; eighteenth century.
- (3) Folklore medical recipes, amulets and kabbalistic prayers and a seventeenth-century play, *Yesod Olam* ("The Foundation of the World") by Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto.⁴⁰ Hebrew and a few lines in Italian; 60 pages; seventeenth century.
- (4) Folklore medical recipes, amulets and spells. Includes a work titled, *Sod Yesharim*. Hebrew except for an ink recipe written in Italian; 93 pages, seventeenth century.
- (5) Several works, including a Biblical Hebrew-Italian dictionary; *Sefer Magdanim*;⁴¹ *Toldot Adam*; and again *Sefer Magdanim*. All these works treat Jewish magic. Hebrew; 57 pages, eighteenth century.

³⁵ Reported in *The Argus* (2 August 1860) from the *Inglewood Advertiser*: "SUICIDE - A distressing case of suicide occurred on Thursday last, at the late residence of Dr. Hailperin, near the Junction. It appears that the deceased had been living as wife [*sic*] with Dr. Hailperin, who died lately, and was much addicted to drinking. Since his death, she had been continually intoxicated, and was almost incapable of taking care of herself." See also the inquest record: Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 24/P0000, 1860/190.

³⁶ Porush, "The Colourful Dr. David Hailperin," 418.

³⁷ Brodzky, *Genius, Lunacy & Knavery*, 18.

³⁸ As of 6 June 2022 only five of the eight manuscripts appeared in the public library catalogue: http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/primo-explore/search?query=any,contains,david%20hailperin&tab=default_tab&search_scope=Everything&cvid=MAIN&mfacet=rtype,include,manuscripts 1.

³⁹ Also known as *Sefer Shorshei Hashemot*.

⁴⁰ J. Melkman, "Moses Zaccuto's Play *Yesod Olam*," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 1, no. 2 (1967): 1–26.

⁴¹ *Sefer Magdanim* is attributed to the first-century Jewish sage Yonatan ben Uziel. There is only one other known manuscript (dating to the nineteenth century) of this work.

- (6) Various works of black magic spells, divination techniques, amulets, folklore medicine and more. Written by a few hands, and some leaves appear to be older than the others. Hebrew; 37 pages, sixteenth–seventeenth centuries.
- (7) Babylonian Talmud, tractate Beitza. Aramaic and Hebrew; 93 pages.
- (8) This manuscript was not known to us until recently as it was not mentioned in the SLV catalogue. From a quick examination, however, it is clear that it discusses Jewish magic and Kabbalah. Written in Hebrew; 113 pages.

Although some details of these manuscripts were recorded and partially analysed by experts at the National Library of Israel—the SLV had sent a microfiche to them many years ago—there still remains much research to be done. Some of the works included in Hailperin’s manuscripts have never been published or even examined by academics, and, as of writing, we were only able to thoroughly examine a few pages of manuscript (6).

Of particular note in (6) is the work “To Bind a Man,” which includes 20–25 black magic spells, all of which involve erotic themes.⁴² Besides this collection of binding spells, (6) also includes pages on divination techniques with specific instructions for summoning angels or demons. Other pages pose questions peculiar to practitioners of occult magic, with some containing instructions on how the practitioner should frame their commands or how to assume the powers of the semi-divine. In particular, one of the divination techniques described in the manuscript is termed “Vessel Divination.”⁴³ In this ritual, the practitioner is instructed to use a young boy or girl as a mediator for demons invited to enter into a glass vessel filled with water and illuminated by either candles or sunlight. By a remarkable coincidence, in the course of our correspondence with collectors, we found that the original owner of another inventoried private collection claimed

⁴² Interestingly, although they are written in Hebrew and are highly indebted to the Jewish magic tradition, some of these “recipes” include directions that directly contravene Jewish law. On this tradition, see Brigitte (Rivka) Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27 (1996): 289–303; Meir Bar-Ilan, “Between Magic and Religion: Sympathetic Magic in the World of the Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 5, no. 3 (2002): 383–99; Yuval Harary, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017). On the Jewish polemic reactions to this tradition, see Harary, *Jewish Magic* 208, 310–16 330–51. The word used for “magic” in Hebrew is *Kishuf*, and we can already find a strong “anti-magic” sentiment in Biblical texts, e.g., Deuteronomy 18:9–11; Exodus 22:17; 2 Kings 9:22. At the same time, this tradition has always been practised by Jews; both rational and magic approaches have long historically coexisted in Judaism.

⁴³ On this technique, see Lesley A. Beaumont, Matthew Dillon, and Nicola Harrington (eds), *Children in Antiquity: Perspectives and Experiences of Childhood in the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2021), 391–94. Similar “vessel divination” techniques can be found in Egyptian Demotic papyri at, e.g., *PDM* xiv.1–92; for the Demotic magical papyri on this subject (using the notation *PDM*), see Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 196–240.

to have seen this ritual firsthand in Cairo in the 1930s, and also copied down the instructions for the ritual in one of his journals in the decade to follow (in a document still extant).

These spells in Hailperin's possession belong to a long-established esoteric magical tradition that originated in the second to the fifth centuries in the city of Alexandria in Egypt, and they indicate Graeco-Roman-Jewish influences. The formulas in these traditions have remained remarkably intact for centuries, so the spells and magical techniques found in Hailperin's manuscript are almost identical (or very similar) to the ones that we encounter in the magical papyri collection, itself a fusion of elements and deities from the Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian and Jewish religions.⁴⁴ Similar ancient Jewish magical works in Hebrew include *Sefer ha-Razim* (*The Book of Mysteries*)⁴⁵ and *Charba de-Moshe* (*The Sword of Moses*).⁴⁶ The nature of this tradition ensured that Jews who practised these techniques over generations kept it in secrecy or modified it in several points of detail so that the practice of such magic would not contravene formal Jewish tradition. Until the twentieth century, works of this nature were so esoteric that they were never printed.

Our work on this under-studied public collection of Hebrew manuscripts confirms that Halperin was indeed a Faustian figure who sought out esoteric knowledge and power over the natural world. His collection serves as a door through which we can enter into the life of a migrant during the Victorian gold rush era (if an extraordinary case).

A Private Collection

This collection includes some 31 manuscripts that mostly originate from Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Morocco.⁴⁷ The texts include marriage certificates, Jewish hymns, original works, Jewish legal discussions and documents, Jewish mystical works and more. They are written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish), and Judaeo-Arabic, and some of the texts have never been published. Most of the manuscripts are dated from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, with a few from the beginning of the twentieth century, and the majority were purchased by the collector, who still continues to buy most of their manuscripts at online auctions.

The private owner has been collecting printed books and manuscripts from Egypt and Morocco for the better part of 40 years, and is a self-described "collector

⁴⁴ See Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xli–liii.

⁴⁵ Michael A. Morgan, *Sefer Ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); Bill Rebigier and Peter Schäfer, eds., *Sefer ha-Razim I und II. Das Buch der Geheimnisse*, vol. 1: *Edition*, vol. 2: *Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). For information about *Sefer Ha-Razim* and the polemic writing against it, see Harary, *Jewish Magic*, 277–84.

⁴⁶ For information about *Charba de-Moshe*, see Harary, *Jewish Magic*, 284–90.

⁴⁷ In addition, the collector has recently purchased 30–50 *Ketubot* (Jewish marriage contracts) from Cairo and several manuscripts.

by nature;” books comprise the bulk of the collection, with the manuscripts taking up perhaps five per cent (at the collector’s estimation). As a matter of practicality, the collector started with what he could afford—antique books—and purchased the more costly manuscripts in later years. However, the ultimate personal significance for the collector derives from the collection serving as a means to preserve the traditions of his family, who emigrated to Australia in the second half of the twentieth century. The collector’s ancestors were among the Jews in Spain who refused to convert to Catholicism and were expelled in 1492. Many of these Jews thereafter emigrated to Morocco and Egypt. Immediately after the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948, the Arab countries surrounding it declared a war that lasted until the following year (the 1948 Arab-Israeli War); this meant that the Jews who had lived in Egypt were suddenly reframed as Zionist enemies from within. The majority of these Jews were deported or had no other choice but to emigrate to Israel (or other destinations); in Morocco, however, Jewish migration took place a little later in the 1950s and 1960s.

Although most of the manuscripts in this collection are dated to a later time frame than we initially set out to record, it became clear to us that we would need to reconsider our definition of “pre-modern” as one limited to Western Europe and the invention of the printing press. In Jewish communities in Egypt, India, Yemen and more, Hebrew print was not available or was limited. In addition, the manuscripts in this collection (and in others of similar nature) are significant testimonies to cultures that no longer exist.⁴⁸ Since this collection holds many manuscripts, we will only mention eight highlights:

- (1) *Megillat Mizrayim* (“Egyptian Scroll”).⁴⁹ The Scroll of the Egyptian “Purim”, 1524. This scroll appears to describe a later event involving a miraculous rescue of Egyptian Jews. Parallel text with Hebrew (right) and Judaeo-Arabic (left); 15 pages; Iraq; early twentieth century.
- (2) *Sefer Otzarot Chaim* (“The Book of Treasures of Life.”). The teaching of the Ari from his student, Rabbi Chaim Vital, with later printed glosses by the Kabbalists: Rabbi Avraham Ibn Mussa in the name of his Rabbi, Rabbi Yaacov Marracche, and Rabbi Avraham Azulai (Morocco). Hebrew; 141 leaves; Morocco; 1730–1800.

⁴⁸ A parallel collection inventoried by the project comprises 26 Hebrew, Malayalam, and Marathi manuscripts, most of which originate from India; these manuscripts take their provenance from several lost communities, including the Cochin Jews. Unlike the collection described above, however, the collector’s work-related travels in India, rather than family heritage, determined the contents of the collection.

⁴⁹ G. Margoliouth, “Megillath Missraim, or the Scroll of the Egyptian Purim,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 8, no. 2 (1896): 274–88.; A. S. Yehuda, “Megillat Mitzraim,” *Reshumot*, 5 (1928): 3–20; Benjamin H. Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic*, (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

- (3) *Midrash-David* ("Commentary on the Torah") by Rabbi David Ha-Nagid, son of Avraham, grandson of Maimonides.⁵⁰ Originally five volumes (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*), but one is missing from the collection (*Deuteronomy*). Primarily Judaeo-Arabic with some Hebrew; Cairo; 1869.
- (4) *Sefer Takanot* ("Book of Regulations of the Jewish Community in Meknes"). Treats marriage regulations, including a discussion on the preconditions for marrying a second wife.⁵¹ Hebrew and Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish); Meknes, Morocco; eighteenth century.
- (5) *Purim de las Bombas & Sebastian's Purim*. Parchment *megillah* containing two stories of deliverance of North African Jews. The scroll is composed of two *megillot* that were read on the two days of "Purim Katan" celebrated in Morocco.⁵² Only a few such *megillot*, written in the form of a scroll (and not in a pamphlet), are known to exist. There are no other known parchment copies in the form of a *megillah*. Tangier, Morocco; c. 1850–1900.
- (6) *Ketubah*, a Jewish marriage contract between Avraham Yehuda ben Asher Bifirman and Fayna bat Eliyahu Aborbuch. Hebrew and Aramaic; Port Said, Egypt; 1887.
- (7) *Get*. We find that the marriage documented in manuscript (6) with Avraham Yehuda ben Asher Bifirman and Fayna bat Eliyahu Abarbuch-Bifirman had deteriorated and the husband had petitioned for divorce; consequently this Jewish divorce contract (termed a *get* from Aramaic) was sent with a courier from Alexandria, Egypt to Melbourne, Australia, where the wife Fayna lived separated from her husband. Na-Amon/Alexandria, Egypt; 1890.
- (8) *Kontras Heyter Agunah*. A handwritten *responsum* to permit an *agunah* (chained woman), by R. Masoud Chai Ben Shimon, a rabbi of Egypt, with a further *responsum* by R. Aharon Mendel HaKohen, an Ashkenazi rabbi of Egypt. Comprehensive halachic study of a case of a Muslim who converted to Judaism under a fictitious name so that he could marry a beautiful and poor orphaned Jewish girl. His conversion was insincere, and he continued practising Islam and declaring himself a Muslim. The manuscript describes how he married the girl and later abandoned her as an *agunah* (a Jewish married woman whose husband refuses to divorce her by the rules of the Jewish law; when left in that situation

⁵⁰ Ella Almogor, *Kitvei Hayad shel Midrashei R' David Hanagid* (Jerusalem: Machon Beit Tzvi, 1995).

⁵¹ This community in Meknes was established by Jews expelled from Castellon, in Spain.

⁵² This *Purim* was celebrated by Moroccan Jews up until recent times, and was commemorated by reading a *megillah* in public, like the reading of *Megillat Esther*.

she is unable to remarry).⁵³ The rabbis annul the fictitious conversion and the marriage, and permit the girl to remarry. Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic; 23 leaves (approx. 44 written pages). 20.5 cm. Without binding; Cairo, Egypt; 1907.

These selected findings from the Hailperin Collection and a private collection reveal the significant contributions these holdings can bring to both the study of manuscripts and social history.

Conclusion

IMVC, a pilot project seeking to expand the Victorian cultural archive by inventorying pre-modern manuscripts in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, has located and catalogued numerous previously undocumented items and improved upon the knowledge of known works. The language groups themselves had various levels of engagement. The Latin side of the project, building on existing inventories, achieved only moderate success, particularly as relating to private collectors: only three small and fragmentary private collections, albeit with fragments of interest, have been inventoried to date, due in part to issues in locating and communicating effectively to private collectors of Latin material. The Greek side of the project also made few new identifications of uncatalogued manuscripts: here, despite several attempts to communicate with the Greek community, no private collectors were found, perhaps speaking to cultural issues, as the attached expert was not a native Greek speaker. In the cases of Hebrew and Arabic, where both experts had native or native-like proficiency in the language of study, and the Arabic script researcher had access to a native speaker of Turkish, significant progress was made, albeit after much negotiation, with sourcing significant private collections containing what appear to be significant manuscripts. These findings indicate that a cultural affiliation between archiver and collector may be a key in overcoming resistance in the private sphere.

As the project developed with the discovery of new archives, this expansion in chronological scope was further motivated by the need to preserve “diasporic archives” for communities of minorities with unique traditions and customs who have almost or entirely ceased to exist, including, for example, those Egyptian and Moroccan Jews discussed in the case studies.⁵⁴ Documents from these communities often scatter across the globe through migration and an increasingly

⁵³ The manuscript begins with a copy of a testimony received on the affair, dated Av 1907 (July–August), with the copied signatures of the *dayanim* who received the testimony: R. Masoud Chai Ben Shimon, R. Avraham Fresco and R. Aharon Mendel Baharan HaKohen. This is followed by a lengthy responsum signed by R. Masoud Chai Ben Shimon, and a copy of a responsum by R. Aharon Mendel HaKohen.

⁵⁴ On the retrieval and digital archival of Jewish diasporic documents, see in particular James Jordan, Joachim Schloer and Lisa Moses Leff, eds., *Jewish Migration and the Archive* (London: Routledge, 2017).

globalised market of collectors, and digital archiving can hopefully serve as a means of reassembling in a limited sense some representation for such diasporic groups. Also notable in these private collections was their eclecticism, and we often witnessed several works bound together in composite manuscripts; they often contained printed works as well. This eclecticism tended to reflect the personal and non-professional nature of these collections, and the significance of a sense of culture, of family and family history, in the way these collections were put together. The collections also sometimes told interesting stories relating to social history; in one private Hebrew manuscript collection, for instance, we found the written remains of a short-lived three-year marriage with a *fin de siècle* marriage contract (6) and divorce contract (7), and a Rabbinic *responsum* to a young Jewish woman who was refused a divorce from her husband (8).

The outcome of the IMVC project indicates that there is utility in re-inventorying public and private archives and that a modest budget can achieve significant outcomes. Further resourcing, both national and international, is likely to uncover further sources for textual scholarship and expand the historical material available to add to our understanding of Australia's multicultural past and present.