Introduction

Collecting a library, besides being the unusual thing and far from trivial
or vulgar, may turn out to be one of those happy tokens . . . since, being
extraordinary, difficult, and of great expense, it cannot but cause everyone
to speak well, and with admiration, of him who puts it into effect.
— Gabriel Naudé, *Advice on Establishing a Library,* 1627

IN THE CEMETERY OF THE Prague Jewish community, clear of the
cluttered interior of overlaid monuments, a tombstone stands adorned with
a Shield of David to invoke the namesake of the man buried beneath: David
Oppenheim (1664–1736), Prague's chief rabbi from 1703 until his death.
Tourists and visitors to the crowded burial ground can take photos of the
monument or pay their respects, but for students of the Jewish past, a sec-
ond edifice far from Prague memorializes in a more fitting manner the story
of this man in history and memory: his formidable library. In the Bodleian
Library of the University of Oxford some forty-five hundred books and one
thousand manuscripts bear testimony to the insatiable collecting activities
of this man in search of a library that would include every Jewish book.[1]
Over the course of his lifetime, Oppenheim bought, found, published, and
received books and manuscripts from across Europe and the Middle East,
many of which carried traces of previous owners and prior journeys of
these objects before they found their final resting place upon his shelves.

Oppenheim's library has served scholars of the Jewish past in de-
cisive ways. Medieval manuscripts drawn from its shelves provide the
bases for histories of Jewish law and liturgy; small paperback pamphlets
fuel research into early modern Yiddish and the genres of popular culture;

historical treatises provide material for inquiries into collective memory; Sabbatean treatises in printed and manuscript form offer insights into mysticism and messianism; works of grammar and lexicology challenge scholars to consider the linguistic dimensions of Jews in ages past; and scientific and mathematical manuals inspire debates over Jews' embrace of the sciences. Attention to the physical material that fills these volumes enthralls as well. Oppenheim idiosyncratically owned books printed on vellum, others bound in rich leather or velvet, and still more printed on colored paper, in hues of blue, orange, yellow, and grey. The illuminations in his books and manuscripts offer ever enticing reasons for this collection's continued draw for scholars. And yet the rich history of their accumulation—an artifact of a particular moment in Jewish history, culture, and politics—has not been told.

David Oppenheim built his library and used its contents from his unique position in Jewish society. He stood at the meeting point of overlapping networks of influential figures from different but connected aspects of early modern Jewish governance, including the noble court, the *kehillah* (Jewish community), and the rabbinate. Oppenheim lived at the high point of the age of the Court Jews (*Hofjuden;* also called *Hoffakotren* or *Hofagenten*), a Jewish elite of wealth and power who dominated the material and social life of Central European Jewry between the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815).[2] The members of this class financed the projects of German absolutist princes and their consolidation of centralizing states. As provisioners of war material, securers of loans, and financiers of major building projects, the members of these wealthy Jewish families played a significant role in the formation of modern German politics. But their activities had important implications for Jewish life as well. Their positions at royal and noble courts often made them the unofficial spokesmen for the Jewish communities of the Holy Roman Empire and Habsburg monarchy, advocates for the physical security and material sustenance of their fellow Jews. On account of their personal wealth and political influence, they also shaped the dimensions of Jewish communal leadership and sponsored Jewish communal buildings, charities, and book publication. And Oppenheim was related to the most powerful and wealthy

of them. His uncle Samuel Oppenheimer (1630–1703) was the most impor-
tant, famous, and best-positioned of all of Europe's Jews in his service to
the Habsburg court in Vienna. He used his connections to Jews across the
Holy Roman Empire to finance the Habsburg monarchy's wars with both
the French in the west and the Ottomans in the east, notably against the
siege of Vienna in 1683.[3] David Oppenheim's other paternal and maternal
uncles included Moses Oppenheimer, the Court Jew of Heidelberg, and
members of the wealthy Wohl family, who dominated the leadership and
economics of the city of Frankfurt. Oppenheim's own marriage furthered
new and important alliances. His first wife, Gnendel, was daughter of the
Court Jew of Hanover, Leffman Behrens (1643–1714; in Hebrew he was re-
ferred to as Eliezer Lippman Kohen), and his second wife, Shifra, was a
member of the influential Wedeles clan that occupied central roles in the
governance of Jewish Prague. He in turn secured marriages for his son to
the daughter of Samson Wertheimer (successor to Samuel Oppenheimer in
Vienna) and for his daughters to rabbis and financiers in Cleves, Friedberg,
and Hanover.[4] The resources of Oppenheim's powerful family furnished
him with immeasurable wealth and access to the inner circles of local and
imperial power.

Oppenheim's family stature was matched by his credentials as a man
of learning. His education brought him into the tutelage of the most creative
and highly recognized Jewish scholars of the age. During his childhood in
the 1670s in the Rhineland city of Worms, he was taught by the illustrious
scholar Yair Hayyim Bachrach, and as he traveled during the 1670s and
1680s he studied in the major centers of Jewish learning: under Gerson
Ulif Ashkenazi in Metz, Benjamin Wolf Epstein in Friedberg, and Isaac
Benjamin Wolff of Landsberg.[5] The training they offered and the pedigree
they conferred by ordaining him as a rabbi in 1684 established his standing
as a man of rabbinic letters of the highest order.

Social class and intellectual pedigree combined to secure Oppen-
heim's occupation of premier leadership positions, first with his appoint-
ment to the rabbinate of Nikolsburg (in Moravia) in 1691, and then with his
arrival in Prague, the largest urban Jewish settlement in Christian Europe,
in 1703. Additionally, in 1713 he was named rabbi of half of the Jewish re-

gions of Bohemia, and in 1718 his dominion was confirmed over the second half, allowing him to implement a reorganization of its rabbinic structure. These official posts were matched by honorific titles of rabbinic leadership for the communities of Slutzk and Brisk in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He was named the "Prince," or *Nasi,* of the Land of Israel by the Jews of Jerusalem, which enhanced his standing in the world of Jewish letters but occasioned suspicion in the courts of the Habsburg monarchy.

In his role as rabbi in these various locations, Oppenheim was expected to play a part in the apparatus of communal administration, as interpreter of the written statutes of the *kehillah* and chief justice of its highest court. The position conferred authority in less institutionally formal ways as well: in addition to acting as a local court of appeals, Oppenheim decided upon matters of Jewish practice in response to queries from rabbis of cities, towns, and villages and acted on behalf of people who wrote him in the hopes that he would advance their professional and personal interests. Letters crossed his desk from his local Moravian and Bohemian jurisdictions as well as from correspondents farther afield in Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland.

At the core of Oppenheim's identity and activity as a rabbi, intellectual, and communal leader stood his library. His library gained renown among Jewish colleagues and Christian contemporaries, many of whom took pains to visit it in Hanover—where it was housed from 1703—and use the contents of the collection. It thus informed the decisions of local courts and distant decisors. He possessed highbrow scholarly material alongside popular pamphlets and broadsides, and he preserved diplomatic exchanges and communal ordinances in manuscript—an archive of contemporary Jewish life. His collection of manuscripts furnished the printing market with classic texts for wider dissemination. Oppenheim's intellectual authority made him a much-sought-after source for endorsements for newly written books. Remarkably, although Oppenheim was esteemed and famous across European learned circles as an intimate of the world of letters, virtually none of his own writings were published during his lifetime, or for more than two centuries after his death. The restriction of his writings to manuscript form (even in multiple manuscript copies) consigned his

intellectual oeuvre to the margins of Jewish study, when they garnered any attention at all. He has thus receded into history, disappearing behind the library that survived him.

An Age of Collecting: Libraries in Early Modern European Politics and Culture

Prince of the Press tells the story of premodern Jewish life, politics, and intellectual culture through an exploration of a book collection, the man who assembled it, and the circles of individuals who brought it into being and made use of it. Collecting may at first seem a strange point of entry into a discussion of politics, but scholars have long recognized the meeting of social and political worlds in even the most personal of collections. In his 1931 essay "Unpacking My Library," Walter Benjamin plumbed the meaning of collecting as a "relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value," but rather their social meaning. Benjamin noted that

> the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.[6]

Benjamin's consideration of the collector captures the dynamic of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts but that nonetheless preserves the unique character and history of each object within it. Lingering behind the collector's final acquisition and assimilation of each book into the total collection lies the tantalizing notion that the individual histories of books-in-motion reveal more than the idiosyncratic stories of former owners—which

they assuredly and invitingly do — but also offer coordinates for the spheres of activity of the collector and as representative of arteries of power and influence. When taken together, the books of a collection do not simply provide an aggregate of individual items; rather, the whole advances a map that traces economies of exchange and communities of regard as books traveled along various pathways to reach the shelves of the collector.

Whereas Benjamin's collector acts on his or her own personal initiative, in the cosmos of early modern Europe in which David Oppenheim operated, collecting was an important act linked to the overlapping worlds of knowledge and politics, and their material bases.[7] Early modern theorists expressed an acute awareness of the potential of collections of books to serve people of power and influence, and especially as a means of garnering prestige. In 1627, the French intellectual Gabriel Naudé penned a consideration of the function of a library while in the service of Henri de Mesme, president of the Paris *parlement.* Naudé's text *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (*Advice on Establishing a Library*) represented a sort of early modern conduct literature that belonged alongside other books of tutelage and training for courtiers. The book led a nobleman who wished to build a library through the essential components of a collection: it must contain both ancient and modern texts, both books and manuscripts; it must speak to a variety of disciplines; and it must be carefully catalogued and accessible to a scholarly public. A library of this sort, Naudé averred, saved ancient texts from oblivion and furnished scholars with the materials to produce new knowledge. A library's chief function was to serve as a scholarly resource, but Naudé framed every stage of its construction in terms of a subtler (and no less significant) outcome: since it was "extraordinary, difficult, and of great expense" it would "cause everyone to speak well, and with admiration, of him who puts it into effect."[8] Much as they were a service to the world of intellectuals, libraries were bound up with the reputation and position of the people who assembled them, and could accrue significant political capital to their owners.

Naudé's treatise expressed a set of principles then current in cultural imaginings of the early modern library. In their pursuit of the "extraordinary, difficult, and expensive," Naudé, Oppenheim, and numerous others

were participating in an early modern drive to collect. Over the course of two centuries, European collections moved from the curious to the extensive, a means first of expressing marvel and then of bringing order to nature, matter, and knowledge.[9] This was the world made by Renaissance materialism, the discovery of the New World, and the invention of the printing press; it was the age of the English cabinets of curiosities, the Italian *studios*, and the German *Wunderkammer*, of materialism driven by an epistemological shift that was concerned with experience as arbiter of truth, rather than received wisdom from tradition. An essential component of this process was access to the stuff of knowledge via the direct possession of those objects that bore such truths.[10] Central to this endeavor were two assumptions: first, that the human mind was up to this task, and second, that the task had to be accomplished not merely through contemplation, but through encounter.[11] Ownership of an increasing number of objects meant bringing disparate parts into a single whole; it was a way of shaping a narrative and making the surrounding world—of nature, of politics, of religion—intelligible. This thirst for objects was not limited to natural or technological materials; the earliest forms of Renaissance collecting were of manuscripts, which were quickly followed by luxury items, like the objects featured in works of Renaissance painting, as well as the exquisite paints and sculptural materials used to represent this lavish new world.[12]

This was a deeply material way of knowing. Collecting entailed the accumulation of material, which in turn required significant material resources. Early modern libraries were thus seldom the province of scholarly solitude. The seventeenth century witnessed the rise of libraries in the service of state aggrandizement, and scholarly knowledge was intertwined with political activity.[13] Whether in the ducal courts of Italy or the Habsburg *Hofbibliothek* owned by the dynasty in Vienna; the French Bibliothèque Mazarine and Bibliothèque du Roy; the Bibliotheca Augustana at Wolfenbüttel; or the electoral libraries in Berlin and Dresden, the accumulation of literary material accompanied the efforts of rulers to incorporate learning into the mission of the regime as both a product of its beneficence and a prop to its legitimacy.[14] In Central Europe, the age of collecting manifested a larger process of state consolidation, made all the more urgent by

the ravaging effects of the Thirty Years War. Possession of a collection be-spoke power, and its despoliation symbolized an opponent's defeat. In the midst of the Thirty Years War the Catholic allies of the Habsburgs led by Duke Maximilian of Bavaria occupied Protestant Heidelberg in retribution for its ruler's part in rebellion; to fully signify victory, the army expropriated Heidelberg's library, packing its contents into 196 boxes and bequeathing it to Rome as a gift.[15] Independent towns and nobles assembled libraries and archives as counterballasts to state efforts to undermine local prerogative and ancient tradition.[16]

Collecting, wealth, status, and scholarship were closely intertwined. Cultures of antiquarian research, legal reasoning, and record-keeping fur-nished statesmen with the necessary expertise for governance and the sym-bolic authority such knowledge conferred.[17] Conversely, the power held by economic and social elites supported scholars and artists in the pursuit of knowledge, and their patronage directed the contours and development of new knowledge. The very circumstances under which Naudé composed his treatise reflected these conditions. Like other books of conduct common to the courts of Renaissance and Baroque Europe, Naudé's intellectual pro-duction took place in the service of a patron, whose material support en-abled his client to think and write. Naudé's advice was offered to elevate his patron's standing, and that standing in turn shaped the circumstances of Naudé's intellectual production.[18]

Learning and politics were mutually reinforcing in power centers across Europe, but this trend was particularly acute for Jews on account of the fact that Jews were not sovereign anywhere in Europe. In the case of Jewish self-governance, a more tendentious relationship obtained between the coercive power of a community's leadership and its authority to act. The institutions that guided Jewish communal, ritual, and daily life were always contingent, at least in part, upon forces external to Jews themselves, usually in the form of charters and other negotiated terms of settlement, rights of residence, and collective taxation. Instead, in legitimating the poli-cies directed by Jewish communal elites toward governing their own con-stituents, Jewish intellectuals generated a vision of leadership that derived not primarily from might, wealth, or even welfare, but from creating a "holy

community," a *kehillah kedoshah,* which was characterized by its fidelity to Jewish law, Torah, and its study.[19] Whereas communal leadership *in practice* was rooted in economic wealth, the theoretical garb for the *kehillah*'s standing was woven out of the primacy of study and scholarship. Piety thrummed through the lives of Europe's Jews (much as it did for Europe's Christians) as an expectation, but the idealized form of that piety was filtered through the authority of the text, literacy, and study.[20] Study was represented as the highest ideal for the Jewish male—a form of valor and nobility.[21] The intellectual energies rabbis poured into interpreting law to cohere with practice—and not only the reverse—demonstrate the importance of the self-image of fidelity to law and study as a basis for other aspects of Jewish life.[22] Learning conferred authority on the exercise of power.[23]

If the authority of study was an abstract ideal, Oppenheim's genius lay in his ability to give that abstraction a physical manifestation in the symbols and apparatus of study itself: books. In turn, he identified himself with his collection and its ongoing expansion, merging the authority of texts with his position as a leader, effectively creating a personal source of status at once independent of communal institutions and at the same time decisive for their functioning. Even as the items that populated his library came from his personal ties, independent of the boundaries of the *kehillah,* his books provided him with expertise, authority, and elevated institutional standing. *Prince of the Press* is therefore a book about *both* a man and a library, about Oppenheim's political activities and the library as a means for their achievement.

political frontiers as he maintained ties not simply with the Jews of the Holy Roman Empire and their presses, but also with Amsterdam, Venice, and Constantinople. He labored to obtain manuscripts from the Mediterranean worlds of the Iberian diaspora in the Ottoman Empire, especially Jerusalem, and relied on scribes and scriptoria in Italy. In Poland-Lithuania, where the difficult conditions of Jewish life in the mid-seventeenth century had brought a halt to the productivity of the printing presses that had been so active only a century before (and would continue to hum once more half a century after Oppenheim's death), Oppenheim relied on used book dealers and copyists to ensure his collection's completion and, when necessary, provided books from presses in return. His collection inspired not only the movement of objects, but the transit of people as well, as Jewish and Christian intellectuals traveled to visit the collection and consult its holdings.

Prince of the Press shows how books and libraries are important sites of political and cultural authority and contest, even in the absence of the formal mechanisms of the state—and are perhaps even more significant on that very account. Through Oppenheim's library we can arrive at a political life of books and explore the ways in which his holdings wove together various strands of early modern Jewish society. His library operated as an agent of symbolic power and practical knowledge-authority, akin to the great libraries being constructed in the capitals of European sovereigns, yet with the important distinction that neither he nor his Jewish contemporaries were sovereign in any place in Europe or the world. Learning and leadership, commerce and culture were intertwined both in the forces that brought his library into being and in the culture that this library reflects. Oppenheim was the lynchpin between spheres of Jewish commercial life and Jewish cultural life. His story reveals the dynamic impact of one upon the other as revealed through this Jewish library.

The term "Jewish library" requires some explanation. To call any premodern book "Jewish" is not such a simple matter. Books in Hebrew characters in the age of print were the product of cooperative endeavors between Jews and Christians. The labor of book production was accomplished by a variety of individuals: the owner of the press, the typesetter,

various editors, and, in many cases, a censor, not to mention the actual authors of books as well as their heirs, who might posthumously publish their writings. Moreover, technologies of book production, decoration, and illumination traveled between presses and shops, with the woodcuts and copper plates that created the decorations and print that adorned the title pages and contents of books sometimes quite literally traveling between print shops of Christians and Jews.[24] The early print history of two books fundamental to Jewish culture—the Talmud and the rabbinic Bible—are both stories of intensive collaboration between Jewish and Christian actors and interests.[25]

An aggregate of such books into a Jewish library similarly poses a challenge to definition. Oppenheim self-consciously styled himself as a man in the ceaseless pursuit of books. From almost the inception of his collecting activity he expressed an inchoate plan to absorb books into his collection "without end," an intention toward great comprehensiveness. But this comprehensiveness bore a particular Jewish hue, generally marked by the Hebrew alphabet. The overwhelming majority of his books, with so few exceptions that they might be counted on two hands, were written with Hebrew characters, and it may not be inaccurate to say "Jewish" characters instead; the riches of his Yiddish collection point to the relevance of Jewish languages beyond rabbinic Hebrew yet within Hebrew characters. Oppenheim owned all of the classics of rabbinic literature necessary for a career as judge and teacher: multiple editions of the Bible and Talmud with the generations of commentary that had accreted to them. But his collection did not stop there. He kept an up-to-date collection of rabbinic writings on law and philosophy. His library ranged across fiction and poetry and prayer and song, composed not only by Jews, but by non-Jews as well. On the other hand, works composed by non-Jewish scholars on non-Jewish themes entered Oppenheim's collection only once they had been "judaized"—that is, translated, either in his own time or centuries before they arrived in his care. His multiple copies of the *Canon* of Avicenna—rendered into Hebrew by translators before his time—represent one such example from among many.[26] It is hard to imagine Avicenna in Arabic being included in the collection; it is impossible to imagine Avicenna in Hebrew

being left out of it. The French and German romances of King Arthur's court would matter very little to this collector, but the Yiddish tales of *Kenig Artur's Hof* were, of course, included.[27] Aids to study and scholarship by Christian Hebraists were not beyond the scope of the collection, as the inclusion of Johannes Buxtorf's *Concordantiae Bibliorum Hebraicae* and the dictionary of Philippus Aquinas make clear.[28] Conversely, as long as books were produced by and for Jews, no matter the vernacular or the audience, they were eligible for inclusion on Oppenheim's shelves. A Spanish *Vara de Iuda* (a translation of Ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehuda*) belonged in the collection, as did a compilation of sermons delivered in Portuguese to the Amsterdam community by Saul Levi Morteira and Solomon Oliveyra b. David.[29] He owned prayer books for the rites of Central and Eastern European Jews alongside songs to be sung on Purim according to the Italian custom and decisions of Ottoman rabbis with rulings from London.[30]

Both the extent and the limitation of this library make clear that Oppenheim's conception of it was one that included material from as far across the Jewish world as he could reach. What made these works "Jewish" in their eighteenth-century context was that their collector and owner pressed them, during his lifetime, into the service of Jewish communal, legal, and literary uses, which all relied on access to the collection granted by Oppenheim himself. Moreover, the fact that his collection included administrative documents alongside literary manuscripts and printed books meant that his library came to function as an archive for communal records, a repository of legal precedents to be consulted by rabbinic courts, and a treasure trove of unpublished manuscripts for enterprising printers to introduce to a Jewish reading public.

As a functional collection, Oppenheim's library exposes the nature of early modern Jewish communal decision making and power brokerage as dependent upon personal contacts. This view not just of intellectual life but of political power comes to light via the two-pronged character of a study of objects in motion. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai succinctly captures this dynamic as follows: "From a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context."[31] When

we follow the movement of books into Oppenheim's collection and think not only about their cultural and intellectual significance but also about the motivations by which contemporaries supported his drive to collect, we come to see beyond the collection into Oppenheim's own unique social standing. The pieces of his library linked *people* to each other through Oppenheim's mediation: Court Jews to impoverished widows, rabbis to domestic servants, intellectuals to tradespeople, Jewish scribes and scholars to Christian Hebraists, Ashkenazim to Sephardim, and Europeans to the Land of Israel. Oppenheim used his family wealth, the circulation of extant books and manuscripts, and the production of new books both to cultivate scholarly expertise and to broadcast the authority that such expertise conferred upon him.

Kinship, Capital, and Communal Leadership: Early Modern Politics in Practice

Oppenheim's library and personal papers are valuable for a reconstruction of early modern Jewish culture precisely because they were not commissioned by official institutions, but rather were owned by, composed for, and preserved on behalf of an individual acting in his own capacity, not by communal order. The remnants of his personal papers were preserved by collectors who wished to emulate him, not by state-based institutions. His life — and not just his library — therefore offers a vantage point from which to consider Jewish politics in practice. Historians of the Jews acknowledge the great importance of studying the dynamics of Jewish politics with regard to the policies directed toward them both by the states in which they lived and by their own practices of self-governance. When working to produce a political history with texts produced by Jews in the early modern period, however, scholars of Jewish life have often had to satisfy themselves with documents belonging to one of two categories: either the prescriptive texts of communal statute or the rulings of Jewish legal courts and rabbinic decisors.[32] In *Prince of the Press* I offer a different approach to Jewish political history by uncovering a lateral "archive" for the study of the Jewish political past: a library rich with previous owners' inscriptions and volumes of

handwritten letters, and the politics of favor that they represent. In this way I invite scholars to direct their attention to the material object of the book as a means of arriving at a richer portrait of Jewish political culture as reflected by extrainstitutional activity. In Oppenheim's circles, books became a form of currency that could be converted into material well-being, employment, political sponsorship, and intellectual patronage.

An inquiry of this nature calls for an expansive definition of political culture in general, and Jewish political culture in particular. Political culture, as a study of a set of practices, reorients our focus away from watershed episodes in political history and toward a study of the ways in which politics were conducted.[33] Events and episodes are undeniably important, but the dynamics by which those episodes take place are instructive for understanding how power relations were constituted, often most decisively through informal means. In making this book's focus political culture rather than politics itself or political theory, I aim to explore Jewish political life not primarily as it was explicitly theorized, but as it was *practiced.* I look to the wider set of negotiations, persuasions, and competitions that constituted the frames for action.[34]

Oppenheim's library opens a window into Jewish political culture of the early modern period as it was practiced, rather than as it was prescribed. Oppenheim stood at the meeting places of various forms of exchange: of people, ideas, esteem, favors, money, and books. Fellow Jews often approached him in the hopes of engaging him as a power broker who might intervene with his relatives to secure favorable outcomes for political hopefuls. And the means to cultivate Oppenheim's political favor was provided by the gift (or promise) of a book to augment his collection. His library was both a vehicle for promoting an image of prestige and a point of access for supplicants who hoped to benefit from their proximity to this power broker. Using manuscript letters and published prefaces to books alongside state records and communal statutes, I follow the exchange of literary artifacts to plumb issues of persona, power, and reputation in the Jewish communities of Central Europe during the early modern period.

Much of that power structure was based on a unique set of circumstances in the political structure of Central Europe. By the close of the