

Diaspora of Latin American Jewish Books in the Isser and Rae Price Library

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Abstract

The Latin American books in the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica at the University of Florida tell stories of the migration of people and ideas across borders, over generations. Most importantly, however, they reveal the role of books in reflecting and shaping the Latin American Jewish experience. This talk introduces the Price Library's Latin American collection and highlights three of its unique items which, in addition to chronicling the Jewish immigrant experience, have also become protagonists of Jewish history in different parts of Latin America. The first item, a presentation album from 1910, is a one-of-a-kind book given as a gift to Argentina's Director of Immigration, Juan Alsina from the Jewish community. It constitutes a symbolic gesture of both appreciation and as an inducement to the recipient to continue to allow Jewish immigration. An almanac from early-twentieth century Uruguay provides statistics about the local Uruguayan community and, like other modern Jewish calendars, help harmonize the rhythms of traditional and modern Jewish lifestyles. Finally a Mexican cookbook reminds us that as much as Jewish culinary practices conserve Jewish traditions, they also transform through adaptation to new locales and life circumstances. The history of these books continued also after they arrived to the Price Library in Florida which holds books from all over the Jewish Diaspora and Israel. The final part of the talk examines how curatorial choices made in the Price Library contribute to the preservation of Latin American Jewish memory and help the reconstruction of Latin American Jewish history; a history which is captured, even if partially, by the above three examples. Consequently, the talk raises attention to the crucial role libraries play in the movement of cultural and intellectual products and memories.