

From A like Ashkenaz to Z like Zionism:

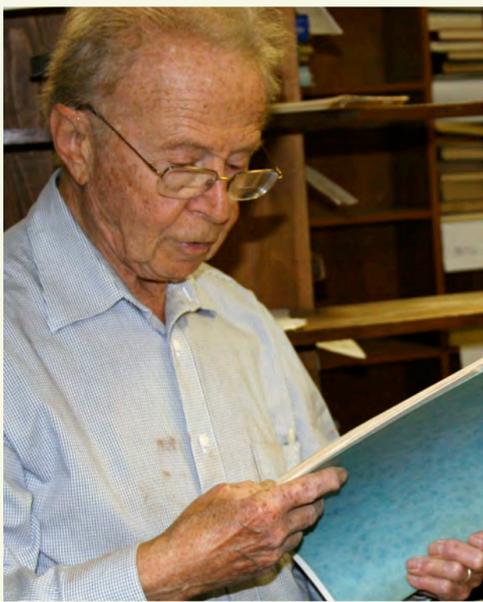
A visit in the German-Jewish Antiquarian Bookstore of Eric Chaim Kline

By Benjamin Rosendahl
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Not much is visible from the outside when you visit Eric Chaim Kline's bookstore: It is located on the second floor of the former Orbach's department store. No sign indicates that there even is a bookshop. "This was very different when my bookstore was in Santa Monica, on the promenade" Kline reminisces in almost accent-free German. Unfortunately, rising rents and the aftermath of a devastating earthquake forced him to move the walk-in store to a different location, where he receives clients by appointment.

After arriving at our appointment, Mr. Kline greets me with a firm handshake and a friendly smile. Time to climb the stairs of the side entrance to the second floor, where a long-disappeared world opens within 15,000 square feet of the store: a vast number of bookshelves filled with rare and ancient editions of the Bible, Talmud, Prayer Books, and much more, many of them profusely illustrated—and all in German. "German Jewry was always very dynamic and my collection reflects this of course" says Kline, not without a little bit of pride.

And indeed, all branches and streams of German Judaism are represented here, stretching from Geiger (Reform Movement) to Samson Raphael Hirsch (Modern Orthodoxy), from the humanistic thoughts of Martin Buber through the historical consciousness of Graetz and Dubnow to the Zionist Movement (Herzl, Achad HaAm etc.). In addition to books, Eric Chaim Kline's inventory includes influential Jewish magazines like *Nachlath Zwi* and *Monatsschrift zur Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* as well as an impressive collection of Passover Haggadot. Many of these works are first editions, and some are quite rare.



Deep in concentration, Alex Lauterbach evaluates works in Polish and German.

"I've recovered the world of my childhood here," says Alex Lauterbach, 84 years old. Alex is one of four retirees who come to Eric Chaim Kline's bookstore every Friday morning to help sort foreign-language books. It all started a few years back, when Eric needed help organizing a collection of Holocaust-related books (today, this collection consists of over 10,000 volumes). The books are in Yiddish, Polish, Hebrew, German and English, and "Only very few people speak all these languages, especially here in L.A." says Mr. Lauterbach, who fled Warsaw in 1939 and arrived in the US in 1941. "Being from a Jewish family in Poland, I already knew Polish and some Hebrew. And thanks to the German-speaking nanny we had as children, we also picked up on German." With time, the interest of the Friday Club widened to Judaica and religious books. "While the Holocaust Collection reminds me of the relatives I have lost, the Judaica Collection brings me closer to them. So when I hold in my hands the same edition of the German Encyclopedia Judaica my parents used to own, it feels like they're looking over my shoulders."

Other than Judaica, the Friday Club also sorts through countless volumes of Yiddish literature by the likes of Sholem Alejchem and Y.L. Peretz. And of course, they always end up with coffee and cake at the round table in the centre of the store. Today, while Harold Marcus, another member of the club, puts on the classical music station, which is



Gene Slater thoughtfully researches rare Judaica.

playing a concert in honor of Mozart's 250th birthday, Eric Chaim Kline brings a pinot noir wine to the table.

"1975 was really an excellent year for pinot," he assures. The reason for the celebration: The University of Judaism will show an exhibition on the Warsaw Ghetto, organized by Lauterbach. After toasting "I'Chaim" Kline excuses himself announcing that he's off to another appointment: His expertise as an appraiser is needed for a private collection.



Friday Club colleagues Amnon Feffer and Harold Marcus consult while sorting Judaica and Hebraica acquisitions.

A few hours later: The Friday Club is just about to leave when Eric Chaim Kline's car arrives at the parking lot. He opens the trunk, filled with boxes of books and a Torah Scroll. "This Torah Scroll is extraordinarily unusual" Kline explains. "It was written in Germany in the 17th century. Look here," he says, pointing out a few letters that are bigger than the rest." This can hardly be found in any Torah Scroll. It is part of a special Ashkenazic kabbalistic scribal tradition, which was practiced from the 14th to the 18th centuries." He and a few of the staff carry the scroll and boxes up the stairs, while Kline mentions that he is going to take many of these books to an international antiquarian book fair—one of the biggest of its kind—the following week.

Other than books, Eric Chaim Kline also wants to exhibit some of his elaborate art collection, including many avant-garde pieces and photographic illustrated works. "Judaism and art are very closely connected, in my opinion. And some of the most amazing art works are illustrations, copper plate engravings, woodcuts and lithographs of Jewish holidays or Judaica, like Shir ha-Shirim (Song of Songs). I want to show this connection at the book fair."

It's obvious he can't wait to see clients, book dealers and friends from Germany, England, Holland and even Australia.