

# Guide to the Julian Joel Obermann Papers

MS 330



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Yale University Library  
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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	4
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Processing Information .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Series I: Correspondence, 1913–1956 .....	6
Series II: Presentations and lectures, circa 1930-1955 .....	7
Series III: Writings, circa 1920-1955 .....	8
Series IV: Academic files, 1917–1954 .....	11
Series V: Personal and biographical files, 1915–1954 .....	12
1966 Addition: Correspondence, 1944–1952 .....	13
Selected Search Terms .....	14

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
(203) 432-1735  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 330

**CREATOR:** Obermann, Julian, 1888-1956

**TITLE:** Julian Joel Obermann papers

**DATES:** 1913–1956

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 12.17 linear feet (22 containers)

**LANGUAGE:** English; Hebrew; German

**SUMMARY:** The papers consist of correspondence, draft manuscripts, teaching and committee files documenting the research, writing, editing, and teaching of Julian Joel Obermann, professor of Semitic languages at Yale University and editor of the Yale Judaica Series.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0330>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0330>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of the estate of Julian Obermann, 1959. Transfer from the holdings of the Yale Judaica Series, November, 1966.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The papers are open to research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

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## Preferred Citation

Julian Joel Obermann Papers (MS 330). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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## Processing Information

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Beinecke Archival Description Unit Processing Manual.

The 1966 Addition was previously classed as Hebrew +153; it was intergrated with the Julian Joel Papers in 2024.

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## Biographical / Historical

Julian Joel Obermann (1888-1956) was born in Warsaw, Poland. He received his Ph.D., University of Vienna, 1915 and M.A. (honorary) from Yale University in 1935. Obermann emigrated to the United States in 1923. Obermann held several teaching positions: professor of Semitic languages, University of Hamburg, Germany (1919-1922?); professor of Semitic philology, Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, 1923-1931; professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1929-1930; visiting professor and professor of Semitic languages, Yale University, 1932-1956. Obermann served as co-editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1934-1938) and editor-in-chief of the *Yale Judaica Series* (1944-1956). Obermann specialized in semitic languages, Old Testament and Ugartic studies, and Islamic and Arabic culture and philosophy. He authored, edited and translated several works, including *Das Problem der Kausalitaet bei den Arabern* (1916); *Der philosophische and religioese Subjektivismus Ghazalis* (1921); *The Arabic Original of Ibn Shahin's Book of Comfort* (1933); *Inscribed Tiles from the Synagogue of Dura* (1942), *Ugaritic Mythology* (1948), Hugo Gressman's *Tower of Babel* (1928), and Soloman Gandz's translation of Maimonides' *Sanctification of the New Moon* (1956).

Obermann never married. He died in New Haven, Connecticut, on October 17, 1956 at the age of 68.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers consist of correspondence, lectures, presentations, writings, teaching and committee files documenting the research, writing, editing, and teaching of Julian Joel Obermann, professor of Semitic languages at Yale University and editor of the *Yale Oriental Series* and the *Yale Judaica Series*. The correspondence is primarily incoming and is both personal and professional in nature. Most of the lectures, presentations, and writings are drafts, identified and unidentified, and range from partial to complete manuscripts. The writings document Obermann's writing and editing projects, including *The Arabic Original of Ibn Shahin's Book of Comfort* (1933); *Inscribed Tiles from the Synagogue of Dura* (1942), *Ugaritic Mythology* (1948), Gressman's *Tower of Babel* (1928), *The Code of Maimonides* (1948-1949), and Gandz's *Maimonides' Sanctification of the New Moon* (1956). The bulk of the papers consist of Obermann's notebooks, which he kept for much of his career. The notebooks contain manuscript writings, lectures,

and editorial and research notes. Most are not identified and have not been organized or individually described. Files on the American Oriental Society, the Committee on Judaica Research, the Judaica Research Committee, the Semitic and Biblical Club (Yale), and the Near East Languages and Literature Department (Yale), though few in number, document Obermann's leadership and interest in promoting semitic and Judaica studies. The papers also include a few legal documents, photographs, and newspaper clippings.

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## **Arrangement**

Organized into five series and one addition: I. Correspondence, 1913 - 1956. II. Presentations and lectures, circa 1930-1955. III. Writings, circa 1920-1955. IV. Academic files, 1917 - 1954. V. Personal and biographical files, 1915 - 1954.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1913–1956

The correspondence is primarily incoming and is both personal and professional in nature. A substantial amount of undated correspondence is filed at the end of the series. Additional correspondence is filed with committee files in Series IV. Academic files.

The series is arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. 1-10	1913–1934	1913–1934
b. 2, f. 1-12	1935–1956	1935–1956
b. 3, f. 1-5	Undated	circa 1920-1955
b. 3, f. 6-8	Drafts of outgoing correspondence	circa 1920-1955

**Series II: Presentations and lectures, circa 1930-1955**

The series contains drafts and typed copies of presentations and lectures. Additional drafts of presentations and lectures may be included in Series III. Writings, especially Notebooks.

b. 4, f. 1-2	Ancient religion, on	circa 1930-1955
b. 4, f. 3	"Biblical Mysticism"	circa 1930-1955
b. 4, f. 4	Islam, on	circa 1930-1955
b. 4, f. 5	"Presupposing an Issue"	circa 1930-1955
b. 4, f. 6	"Principles of the Continuous Jewish Calendar"	circa 1930-1955
b. 4, f. 7	"The Problem of yqtl 'nk in Phoenician"	circa 1949
b. 4, f. 8	"The Third Person Singular in Semitic"	1938
b. 4, f. 9	"Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew"	1934
b. 4, f. 10	"Zion and Palestine"	circa 1930-1940
b. 4, f. 11	"Guest lecture - Zurich"	1950 July 6
b. 4, f. 12-20	Untitled lectures and drafts	circa 1930-1955

### Series III: Writings, circa 1920-1955

The Writing series forms the bulk of the papers. It consists of manuscripts and drafts, partial and full, of Obermann's writing and editing projects, notebooks kept by Obermann, writings of others as well as unidentified manuscripts. File titles are transcribed or supplied based on the topic of the work. If known or suspected to be related, files on the same work or subject are collocated. File titles may not reflect the final titles of works documented in the series. Obermann's notebooks contain manuscript writings, lectures, and editorial and research notes. Most are not identified and have not been organized or individually described.

Files related to the The Book of Maimonides (Yale Judaica Series) is filed in Series IV under American Oriental Society Yale Judaica Series.

Obermann's writings are arranged alphabetically by title or subject, followed by unidentified Obermann (?) manuscripts, including notebooks. A small number of manuscripts writings of others is filed at the end of the series.

b. 5, f. 1	"Abi ul idi"	circa 1920-1955
b. 5, f. 2	"Alphabetic Writing: A Study in its Technical Execution"	circa 1920-1955
b. 5, f. 3	"An Antiphonal [Psalm] from Ras Shamra"	circa 1930-1936
b. 5, f. 4	"The Aramaic Stele from Sajin" (?)	1933
b. 5, f. 5-6	"Biblical Materials on Metalcraft"	circa 1920-1955
b. 5, f. 7	Bibliography (?)	circa 1920-1955
b. 5, f. 8-12	Book of Comfort (?)	circa 1929-1933
b. 5, f. 13	"Calendric Elements in the Dea Sea Scrolls"	circa 1930-1955
b. 5, f. 14-15	"A Composit Inscription from the Church of St. Simeon the Stylite""	circa 1930-1955
b. 5, f. 16	"Dagon and Prince Se"	circa 1930-1955
b. 6, f. 1	Direction of Writing	circa 1920-1955
b. 6, f. 2-3	"Divine YHWH in the Light of Recent Finds"	circa 1930-1955
b. 6, f. 4	End-notes to unidentified manuscript	circa 1920-1955
b. 6, f. 5	"Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des philosophischen und wissenschaftlichen Stils im Neuhebraischen"	circa 1920-1955
b. 6, f. 6-12	Evolution of the Semitic Alphabet	circa 1930-1939
b. 7, f. 1-3	Evolution of the Semitic Alphabet	circa 1930-1939
b. 7, f. 4	"Forward" to unidentified work	circa 1930-1955
b. 8, f. 1	"Zur Frage der Habraeischen Literatur (by Obermann?)	circa 1920-1955
b. 8, f. 2	"Das Ghetto und seine Dichter"	circa 1920-1935
b. 8, f. 3	"Hasan Al-Basri's Treatise on Qadar"	circa 1920-1955
b. 8, f. 4	"Hebrew and Aramaic Elements in the Arabic Writings of Muhammedans"	circa 1920-1955



b. 8, f. 5	"Zur historischen Kritik der arabisch-hebraischen..."	circa 1920-1935
b. 8, f. 6	"A Hymnal History of Ras Shamra"	circa 1930-1939
b. 8, f. 7-16	"Idea of History in Early Islam"	circa 1950-1955
b. 9, f. 1	"Impersonalia from a Semitic Standpoint"	circa 1920-1935
b. 9, f. 2-3	An Important Contribution to Arabic Historiography	circa 1944
b. 9, f. 4	"Introduction A. Author and his work B. The Manuscript C. Material for critical app."	circa 1920-1955
b. 9, f. 5	Introduction (on found Arabic book)	circa 1920-1955
b. 9, f. 6	"Islam und Judentum"	circa 1920-1955
b. 9, f. 7	Lachish inscriptions "Preface"	circa 1935-1938
b. 9, f. 8-11	"New Science of Evidence" [Direction in Writing]	circa 1930-1955
b. 9, f. 12	"Der Philosophische und Religiöse Subjectivismus Ghazalis...", regarding(?)	1921
b. 10, f. 1	"The Ras Shamra Mythological Texts, by James Montgomery" (review)	1935?
b. 10, f. 2	Die Religion des Einzelnen h. des Gemeinsamen (?)	circa 1920-1930
b. 10, f. 3-6	Santification (?)	circa 1935-1955
b. 10, f. 7-9	"A Study in the Technique of Alphabetical Script"	circa 1935-1955
b. 10, f. 10-12	"Tiles Inscribed from Dura" or "Inscribed Tiles from Dura"	circa 1940-1942
b. 11, f. 1-6	Tower of Babel	circa 1925-1928
b. 11, f. 7	"The Truth of Zion and the Reality of Palestine"	circa 1920-1945
b. 11, f. 8	"The Two Elijah Stories in Judeo-Arabic Transmission"	circa 1940-1955
b. 11, f. 9	"The Universality on Mount Scopus" (reprint)	1950
b. 11, f. 10-11	"Yahweh's Victory over the Babylonian Pantheon"	circa 1930-1955
b. 11, f. 12	"Zion and Palestine"	circa 1930-1955
b. 11, f. 13-20	Unidentified Obermann (?) manuscripts	circa 1920-1955
b. 12, f. 1-31	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955
b. 13, f. 1-32	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955
b. 14, f. 1-39	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955
b. 15, f. 1-38	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955

b. 16, f. 1-40	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955
b. 17, f. 1-13	Notebooks in English, German and Hebrew (some are drafts of papers, some have typescripts laid in)	circa 1920-1955
Writings of others		
b. 18, f. 1-5	Unidentified manuscripts, unknown authors	circa 1930-1955
b. 18, f. 6	"The Aramaic Incantation in Cuneiform," by Cyrus H. Gordon	circa 1930-1955
b. 18, f. 7	"Bath-Sheba - A Drama in Three Acts," by Irma Lindheim	
b. 18, f. 8	"Die Bileams - Perikope" (author unknown)	
b. 18, f. 9	"The Hebrew Calendar: A Study in its Early History and Fundamental Principles" (author unknown)	circa 1940-1955
b. 18, f. 10	"Iggeret Teman by Moses Maimonides," by Boaz Cohen	circa 1920-1950
b. 18, f. 11	"Introduction" (author unknown)	circa 1920-1950
b. 18, f. 12	"Koenig Oedipus," by Walter Kraus	circa 1920-1950
b. 18, f. 13	"The Lord of Wing, Water and Fire, (review) by Robert Eister	1943
b. 18, f. 14	"Pro Psalmis," by Louis Massignon	1925
b. 18, f. 15	"A social and Religious History of the Jews," by Salo Wittmayer Baron	1937
b. 18, f. 16	"Vorbemerkung" (preface) (author unknown)	circa 1930-1955
b. 18, f. 17	"Vocabulary of Some North Semitic Inscriptions" and "Addai, Apostle of Odessa" by George Dole	circa 1940-1950

**Series IV: Academic files, 1917–1954**

The series consists of committee, department, and teaching files. The committee and department files document Obermann's leadership and interest in promoting semitic and Judaica studies at Yale and elsewhere. The Statement of concern for German Jews and the Conference on Jewish Relations report (relation to Obermann unknown) illustrate concern about rising antisemitism and the safety of Jewish scholars. See also Series I. Correspondence, especially from 1930-1949.

American Oriental Society (AOS)		
b. 19, f. 1	Annual meeting programs	1932, 1936, 1949
b. 19, f. 2	Committee on Arabic and Islamic Studies	1938–1940
Yale Judaica Series		
b. 19, f. 3	Meetings and Saadia	circa 1945-1947
b. 19, f. 4-7	Code of Maimonides project	1949–1950
b. 19, f. 8-9	Committee on Judaica Research (Yale) / Judaica Research Committee	1944–1948
b. 19, f. 10	Conference on Jewish Relations report	1935
b. 19, f. 11	Near East Languages and Literature Department (Yale)	1948–1954
b. 19, f. 12	Semitic and Biblical Club (Yale)	1951–1954
b. 19, f. 13	Statement of concern for German Jews	circa 1933-1935
Teaching files		
b. 20, f. 1-2	General	
b. 20, f. 3	Tentative Outline of Biblical Courses	circa 1920-1950
b. 20, f. 4	Comparative Linguistics (Yale) - notebook	1933–1934
b. 20, f. 5	Cultur[e?] and Relig[ion?] seminar (Columbia) - notebook	Spring term 1925
b. 20, f. 6	Deuteronomy in Literature [?] - notebook	Spring 1926
b. 20, f. 7	Hebrew and Aramaic course material	1940
b. 20, f. 8	Interventions (Princeton) - notebook	1941
b. 20, f. 9	The Language Institute bulletin and announcement	1932 and undated
b. 20, f. 10	Religious Philosophie - notebook	Winter semester 1917/1918
b. 20, f. 11	Ugaritic course description	circa 1930-1950
b. 20, f. 12	Wisdom - notebook	Fall term 1927/1928

**Series V: Personal and biographical files, 1915–1954**

The series contains a small number of legal documents, newspaper clippings, announcements, and photographs that provide personal and biographical information on Obermann.

b. 21, f. 1	Announcements of upcoming social events and publications (not JJO's)	circa 1930-1950
b. 21, f. 2	Appointment and address books, business cards	circa 1920-1950
b. 21, f. 3	Appointment to Yale	1935
b. 21, f. 4	Diplomas (?)	1915
b. 21, f. 5	Entry in Kuschner's Deutscher Gelehrten-Kalender	1934
b. 21, f. 6	Immigration (?) documents	1918–1920
b. 21, f. 7	List of names and addresses	circa 1930-1950
b. 21, f. 8	List of recipients of Obermann's publications	circa 1930-1950
b. 21, f. 9	News clippings	1915–1954
b. 21, f. 10	News clippings and announcement regarding Obermann	1933–1951
b. 21, f. 11-12	Notes and small notebooks, miscellaneous	circa 1930-1955
b. 21, f. 13	Photographs of Obermann	circa 1920-1950
b. 21, f. 14	Photographs of others and places	circa 1920-1950

**1966 Addition: Correspondence, 1944–1952**

Letters to Julian Joel Obermann from various persons, with copies of his replies; for the most part in connection with his duties as editor of the Yale Judaica Series. Includes letters from O. Neugebauer, Enno Littmann, Arthur Schaade, Charles C. Torrey, Herbert Danby, G.R. Driver, and others; also letters from Isidore Epstein to Danby.

b. 22, f. 1	Personal	1950–1952
b. 22, f. 2	Danby, Herbert, G.R. Driver, and Isidore Epstein	1944–1951
b. 22, f. 3	Neugebauer, O.	1946–1949

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Arabic language -- Study and teaching  
Hebrew language -- Study and teaching -- Early works to 1800  
Islam -- Study and teaching  
Judaism  
Linguistics  
Semitic languages -- Study and teaching

### **Names**

Obermann, Julian, 1888-1956

### **Corporate Bodies**

American Oriental Society  
Yale University -- Faculty