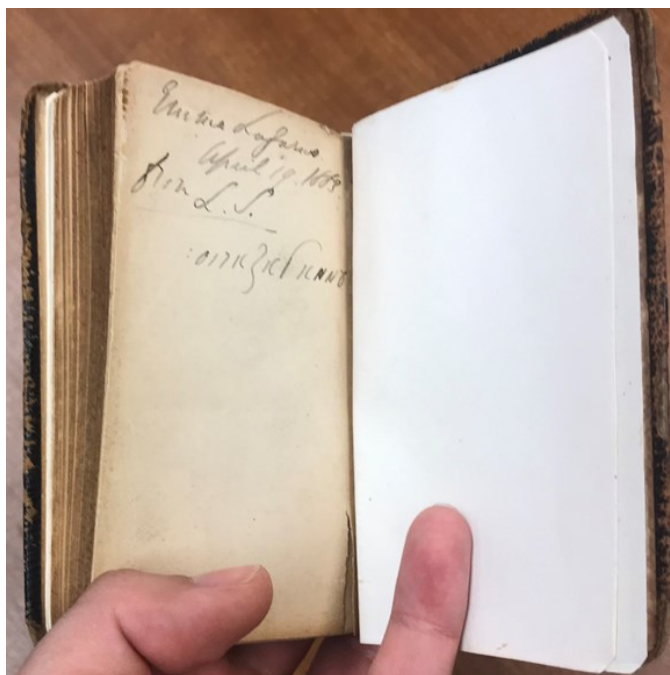


SOURCE A

EMMA LAZARUS' BOOK OF PSALMS



SOURCE B

LETTER FROM EMMA LAZARUS TO ROSE HATHORNE, 1882

"I am going to undertake the study of Hebrew in the Fall with a very learned and intelligent old Orientalist who has offered to teach me all he knows. The Jewish Question which I plunged into so recklessly and impulsively last Spring has gradually absorbed more and more of my mind and heart—It opens up such enormous vistas in Past and Future, & is so palpitatingly alive at the moment—being treated with more or less ability & eloquence in almost every newspaper & periodical you pick up—that has about driven out of my thought all other subjects—I have reached a point now where I must know Hebrew, & I am constitutionally so indolent, that very systematic study is a little alarming to me."

SOURCE C

AN EMBROIDERED SAMPLER CREATED BY ESTHER NATHAN



EMMA & THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

SOURCE

Source A: This is a small book of psalms that is part of the AJHS Emma Lazarus collection. On the cover, Emma writes her name in Hebrew characters. The book was a gift from her tutor, Louis Schnabel and has an inscription, “Emma Lazarus April 19, 1883 From L.S.” Within the book, the Hebrew verse numbers are written in Arabic numerals, presumably by Emma.

Source B: The sampler, an embroidered piece, was created by Emma Lazarus’s mother, Esther Nathan, when she was approximately 12 years old. The sampler shows that she had learned some Hebrew, as it appears on the bottom of the piece.

BACKGROUND

Throughout her career, Emma Lazarus had been engaged with Hebrew poetry that had been translated into English and other languages. Emma had also studied and was fluent in German and French. But from what we know, she hadn’t studied Hebrew formally. It is possible she might have learned some Hebrew from her mother, Esther Nathan Lazarus. The sampler, was stitched by Esther when she was 12/13 and shows that she knew some Hebrew.

In the fall of 1882, when Emma was in her early 30s, she decided to formally study the Hebrew language. In the summer of 1882, Emma wrote a letter to her friend Rose Hawthorn about her decision. Emma had been working with the East European Jewish immigrants on Wards Island and also worked in the office of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid offices.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

As you read the source consider how it informs these questions:

- Why do you think Emma wanted to learn and study Hebrew in her 30s? What connection does that have to her Jewish identity? What connection might it have had to current events of the early 1880s?
- To what extent is Emma learning Hebrew at the age of 33 a surprise or something that makes sense given her education and career? Why?
- What seemed to impel Emma to learn Hebrew?
- We have no report cards or formal school records that connect to either Esther’s or Emma’s Jewish education. How are these sources—the sampler and the Psalm book—helpful?

HISTORICAL NOTES

Definitions of terms used in the source.

Louis Schnabel: Louis was a teacher and journalist who studied and taught around the world. He settled in New York and served as the superintendent, or director, of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. He later became Emma Lazarus’ Hebrew tutor.

“Jewish Questions:” refers to the centuries long discussion about the status and treatment of Jews around the world.