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Penn Libraries Acquire Major Photography Collection with Support of the Lenkin Family

A major gift from Edward Lenkin (C'71, PAR'12) has enabled the Penn Libraries to acquire an outstanding collection of historical photographs of the Holy Land. The Lenkin Family Collection of Photography at the Penn Libraries comprises 3,763 original photographs, primarily of Jerusalem and Palestine taken from 1850 to 1937. These photographs will serve as primary source materials for teaching and research across a broad spectrum of disciplines, including the history of photography, architecture, regional planning, religious studies, history, and political science. In addition to cataloging and conserving the photographs, Penn plans to digitize them, making the Lenkin Family Collection available to scholars and researchers worldwide.

Edward Lenkin is an active supporter of Penn's undergraduate financial aid and alumni development initiatives, and has an avid interest in photography. He saw in this collection the compelling beauty of the images, captured by some of the world's first photographers, and was captivated by the ways in which the collection illustrates the transformation of photography from a rudimentary means of visual representation to a new form of art.

The photographs were collected over the course of some 35 years by Paola and Bertrand Lazard. What began as a way for Paola to maintain a connection with her life in Israel after moving to France developed into the finest private collection of its kind, according to experts. These photos are original witnesses to the architecture, topography, and archaeological exploration of the Holy Land from the earliest days of photography into the 1930s. The collection also includes 813 photo-reproductions, a reference library of nearly 100 secondary sources, and an extensive archive of notes and documents. Among the photographs are dozens of images of the Wailing, or Western, Wall and stunning panoramas of Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus.

Complementing the Lenkin Family Collection of Photography are 151 rare and important books also collected by the Lazard family, and purchased at auction in 2008 by the Penn Libraries through a generous gift from Jay Penske (W'01). The books document five centuries of western engagement with the Holy Land, and include travel narratives and guides, memoirs, missionary accounts, maps, and reports from engineers, archaeologists, and geologists.

Taken together, the Lenkin Family Collection of Photography and the rare books acquired through Jay Penske's gift will benefit the research community at Penn and beyond. The unique and comprehensive scope of the collections makes them valuable resources for interdisciplinary scholarship, particularly in Penn's School of Design, the School of Arts and Sciences, the Annenberg School for Communication, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, and the University Museum. It also complements Penn's outstanding existing institutional holdings in the early history of photography.

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