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Religious Texts in Edith Wharton's Library

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Abstract

In many ways, the story of Edith Wharton's library starts with religion. Wharton received copies of religious texts—including The Book of Common Prayer and works like the Lutheran theologian Richard Rothe's Stille Stunden—as presents when she was a young girl, and these volumes formed the bedrock of a library collection that was fated to grow and expand over the years. This body of religious texts furthermore indicates how Wharton, as she matured, let curiosity guide her beyond the bounds of her Episcopalian upbringing. To her collection of sacred texts and books about Christianity, Wharton added volumes about religion in ancient Greece, the history of monastic orders like the Jesuits and the Franciscans, and "Mohammedanism," better known as Islam.

Keywords

religion, texts, library, Edith Wharton

The following list describes books relating to religion and religious history that can be found in Wharton's library at The Mount today. The sixty-three items listed do not exhaust the limits of Wharton's interest in the subject, however: there are many books that remain at large due to the ways in which Wharton's collection was, by turns, split up, sold off, destroyed, or damaged in the decades following her death. For instance, William Tyler—whose portion of the library inheritance was incinerated during the London Blitz of 1941—remembers that the library contained "a sumptuous history of the Jesuits in the Far East bound in red morocco."¹ Likewise, a library packing list composed by Wharton in the early 1920s and held today at Yale's Beinecke Library lists multiple texts on the history of Islam, including the Marçais brothers' *Les Monuments Arabes de Tlemcen* and *Un Crépuscule d'Islam* by André Chevrillon, which have since been lost.² Recently, more volumes from Edith Wharton's library have been

discovered in England, including some relating to religious history, but these have not yet been thoroughly examined, nor have they been added to the library collection holdings at The Mount. These materials—in addition to other items from Wharton’s library collection that remain missing—might yet lead scholars toward new avenues for engagement with Wharton’s development as a writer and a thinker.

For more information about these and other texts in Wharton’s library, readers may refer to the EdithWhartonsLibrary.org database. The site is currently searchable in its beta form (though only half complete at almost one thousand entries). The beta URL is <http://sheilaliming.com/ewl/home.html>. If one enters in “religion” as a search term, that currently yields a return of eleven entries; “religious,” meanwhile, yields seven, and other tags (like “mythology”) yield still more.

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Appendix

Author	Title	Year/edition	Language
	<i>The Holy Bible</i> (1453–55) ¹	1878	English
	<i>The Holy Bible: Containing Old and New Testaments</i>	1859	English
	<i>Biblia Sacra</i>	(1849) 1899	Latin
	<i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> ²	(1662) 1855	English
	<i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> ³	(1662) 1856	English
	<i>The Book of Saints</i>	1921	English
Anderson, R. B.	<i>Norse Mythology</i> ⁴	1876	English

Author	Title	Year/edition	Language
Arnold, Matthew	<i>God and the Bible</i>	1901	English
Arnold, Matthew	<i>St. Paul and Protestantism</i>	1902	English
Bain, F. W., trans.	<i>The Substance of a Dream</i> and other titles ⁵	1919	English
Bellesort, André	<i>Saint Francis Xavier</i>	(1917) 1926	French
Bodley, John Edward Courtenay	<i>The Church in France</i>	1904	English
Boissier, Gaston	<i>La Religion Romaine D'Auguste aux Antonins</i>	(1874) 1892	French
Borrow, George	<i>The Bible in Spain</i>	(1843) 1896	English
Bréhier, Louis	<i>L'Église et l'Orient au Moyen Age</i>	1921	French
Bremond, Henri	Various	various	French
Bremond, Jean	<i>Les Pères du Désert</i> ⁶	1927 (2nd ed.)	French
Bruno, P. Fr. de J. M.	<i>Saint Jean de la Croix</i>	1929	French
Caxton, William, trans.	<i>The Golden Legend; or, The Lives of the Saints</i>	(1892) 1900	French
Celier, Léonce	<i>Saint Charles Boromée</i> ⁷	1923	French
Chateaubriand, Francois-René	<i>Génie du Christianisme</i>	1809	French
Coulton, G. G.	<i>Five Centuries of Religion</i>	1923–36	English
Creighton, Mandell	<i>A History of the Papacy</i>	(1904–19)	English

(Continued)

Author	Title	Year/edition	Language
Cumont, Franz	<i>Les Religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romain</i>	(1906) 1909	French
Durandus, William	<i>The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments</i>	(1843) 1893	English
Faà di Bruno, Very Rev. Joseph	<i>Catholic Beliefe</i>	1884	English
Fisher, Herbert	<i>Our New Religion</i>	1929	English
Frazer, James	<i>The Golden Bough</i>		English
Gilson, Etienne	<i>Saint Thomas D'Aquin</i>	1925	English
Green, E. A.	<i>Saints and Their Symbols</i> ⁸	(1882) 1888	English
Guyau, M.	<i>L'Irreligion de l'Avenir</i>	(1887) 1895	French
Hammerich, Frederik	<i>Aelteste Christliche Epik der Angelsachsen</i> ⁹	1874	German
Henry-Coüannier, Maurice	<i>Saint François de Sales et ses Amitiés</i> ¹⁰	1922	French
Hubert, Henri	<i>Les Celtes et l'Expansion Celtique</i>	1932	French
Joly, Henri	<i>Psychologie des Saints</i>	(1883) 1889	French
Luchaire, Achille	<i>Innocent II</i>	(1905) 1907	French
Margoliouth, D. S.	<i>Mohammedanism</i>	(1911) n.d.	English
Masson, Frédéric	<i>Le Cardinal de Bernis depuis son Ministère</i>	1884	French
Mater, André	<i>L'Eglise Catholique</i>	1906	French
Max Muller, F.	<i>Chips from a German Workshop</i>	(1867–75) 1876	English

Author	Title	Year/edition	Language
McCabe, Joseph	<i>A Candid History of the Jesuits</i>	1913	English
Montalembert, Charles-Forbes-Rene, Comte de	<i>Les Moines d'Occident depuis Saint Benoît Jusqu'à Saint Bernard</i>	1863	French
Murray, Gilbert	<i>Four Stages of Greek Religion</i>	1912	English
Murray, Margaret Alice	<i>The Witch-Cult in Western Europe</i>	1921	English
Nicolini, G. B.	<i>History of the Jesuits</i>	(1852) 1893	English
Nielsen, Dr. Fredrik	<i>The History of the Papacy in the XIXth Century</i>	(1898) 1906	English
Nourisson, J. F.	<i>Les Pères de l'Église Latine</i>	1856	French
Ozanam, A. F.	<i>Dante et la Philosophie Catholique au 13e Siècle</i>	(1840) 1895	French
Pius X	<i>Ce Qu'on a Fait de L'Église</i>	1912	French
Pastor, Ludwig	<i>Geschichte der Papste</i>	(1885) 1891–95	German
Reinach, Salomon	<i>Orpheus: Histoire Générale des Religions</i>	1918	French
Renan, Ernest	<i>Averroes et L'Averroisme</i>	(1852) 1866	French
Renan, Ernest	<i>Les Évangiles et la Seconde Generation Chrétienne</i>	1877	French
Renan, Ernest	<i>Le Livre de Job</i>	(1859) 1894	French

(Continued)

Author	Title	Year/edition	Language
Renan, Ernest	<i>Nouvelles Etudes d'Histoire Religieuse</i>	1884	French
Renan, Ernest	<i>Saint Paul</i>	(1869) 1893	French
Renan, Ernest	<i>Vie de Jesus</i>	(1863) 1888	French
Rothe, Richard	<i>Stille Stunden</i> ¹¹	1872	German
Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, Jan van	<i>L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles</i> ¹²	(14th c.) 1891	French
Santayana, George	<i>Interpretations of Poetry and Religion</i>	1900	English
Smith, Vincent A.	<i>The Early History of India, from 600 BC to the Muhammadan Conquest</i>	1908	English
Steinmetz, Andrew	<i>History of the Jesuits</i>	1848	English
Vacandart, L'Abbé E.	<i>Vie de Saint Bernard</i>	(1895) 1927	French

1. Contains an inscription from Wharton's mother, potentially on Edith's Confirmation Day, that reads, "Edith Newbold Jones April 29th 1878 L.S.J." Multiple sections marked, particularly in Proverbs, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes.
2. Contains a note from Kenneth Clark written on the fly that reads, "This is Edith Wharton's prayer book given to her on her confirmation & used by her as a girl." Clark kept the half of Wharton's library that was willed to his son, Colin, in trust for many decades.
3. Cover is embossed with the name "Frederic R. Jones" and the date "1858"; contains a note from Kenneth Clark on flyleaf that reads, "Colin Clark left to him by his Godmother Edith Wharton Easter 1938." Ramsden, in his *Edith Wharton's Library* catalog, refers to a quotation from *A Backward Glance* that reads, "The New York of my youth was distinctively Episcopalian; and to this happy chance I owe my saturation with the noble cadences of the Book of Common Prayer" (14).
4. With penciled signature, "EN Jones June 8th 1876." Penciled notes on Anglo-Saxon grammar appear on rear endpages, as do comparisons between Greek and Saxon gods. Ramsden notes that these pages appear "annotated," but he does not provide details in his *Edith Wharton's Library* (3).
5. Note on the fly explains that this book was a gift "From Mrs Cadwalader Jones." Most volumes in the collection remain unopened. Wharton owned two complete sets of Bain's works, which he claimed comprised translations from Sanskrit scrolls, but which were later revealed to be fake.
6. The "Fathers of the Desert" were early Christian ascetics who lived in and around the Scetes desert in Egypt during the third century; several passages in the introduction have been marked.

7. Wharton has marked several titles in the series advertisement list, which appears at the back of the book.
8. Signed "Edith Wharton—Florence, March 1890".
9. Wharton has added a note ("ENJ from Emelyn, July 1 1876") explaining that this book was a gift from Emelyn Washburn.
10. Contains Wharton's signature on fly alongside a note from the source: "fr. Mon. Boccon-Gibod, Jan. 1 1924."
11. With two signatures on the fly: "Edith Jones 1878" and "EN Jones May 17 . . ." (the page has been trimmed and the rest has been cut off); many aphorisms are marked in the text.
12. The introduction has been marked by Wharton; several passages have been marked by Kenneth Clark (or by a member of the Clark family).

Notes

1. Quoted in George Ramsden, *Edith Wharton's Library* (Settrington: Stone Trough, 1999), xvi.
2. Box 50, Folder 1504, YCAL 42, Series 4, Edith Wharton Papers.