

12-31-2008

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Recommended Citation

Elazar, David. 2008. "The Making of a Classification Scheme for Libraries of Judaica." *Judaica Librarianship* 14: 15-25. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1067.

The Making of a Classification Scheme for Libraries of Judaica

DAVID H. ELAZAR

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the history of *A Classification System for Libraries of Judaica*, its development, the process involved in preparing the second and third revisions, and its use in various libraries. The authors of the scheme contend that there was—and is—a need for a classification system for libraries of Judaica to classify and arrange their collections according to Jewish concepts based upon Jewish thought and terminology.

INTRODUCTION

This article is based upon a lecture presented at the Library History Workshop, held at the 66th IFLA General Conference, Jerusalem, Israel, August 17, 2000 (updated in November 2007). I dedicated that presentation to my brother, Daniel Elazar, co-author of *A Classification System for Libraries of Judaica*, who succumbed to cancer in December 1999. He devoted much of his life to Jewish scholarship, books, and librarianship all which were extremely important to him. May his memory be blessed.

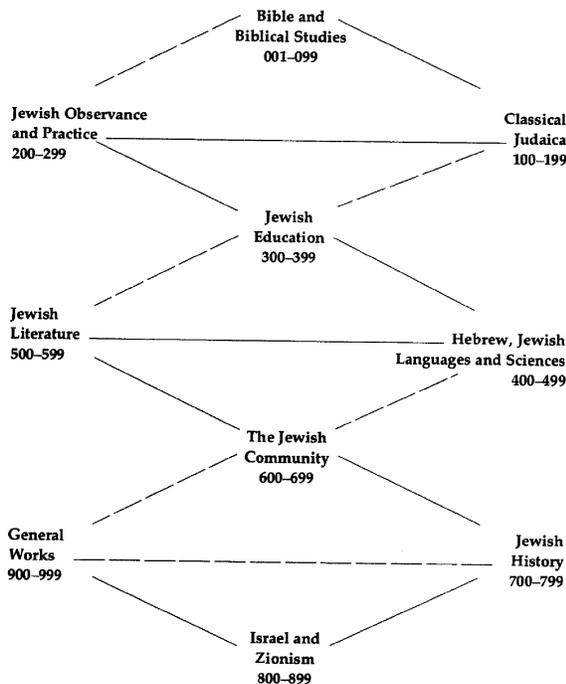
This paper discusses the publication *A Classification System for Libraries of Judaica* (referred to elsewhere in this article as *Elazar* or the *System*). It covers its historical development, along with the philosophy behind it, reinforced by the role of the Jewish library community. Reasons for making changes within the various editions are dealt with, along with examples illustrating these changes. Pros and cons of the *System* are discussed, examples of unique uses are mentioned, and the decision to archive the documents relating to the “making of a classification system” is also described.

INITIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE FIRST EDITION

In 1950, Daniel Elazar took on the task of organizing the approximately 10,000-volume library at the United Hebrew Schools (UHS) in Detroit, Michigan. As he pursued this task, he came to the conclusion that there was a need for a classifi-

cation system for classifying and arranging Judaic collections according to Jewish concepts and based upon Jewish thought and terminology. He saw the existing classification schemes, Library of Congress and Dewey, incorporating the Bible, Judaism, and Israel into a general, non-Jewish world of knowledge without relating Jewish and Jewish-oriented subjects to one another. The UHS, serving elementary, high school and college students, teachers on all levels, and the Jewish community at large, was an ideal setting to test a classification system to organize the published and unpublished literature of Jewish civilization. Daniel Elazar decided upon a decimal system, dividing it into ten major classes:

- 001–099** Bible and Biblical Studies
- 100–199** Classical Judaica: Halakhah and Midrash
- 200–299** Jewish Observance and Practice
- 300–399** Jewish Education
- 400–499** Hebrew, Jewish Languages and Sciences
- 500–599** Jewish Literature
- 600–699** The Jewish Community: Society and the Arts
- 700–799** Jewish History, Geography, Biography
- 800–899** Israel and Zionism
- 900–999** General Works



Scheme of Interrelationships—Nonlinear Primary and Secondary Relationships

In 1952 the first draft was prepared. For nine years the *System* was tested in the UHS environment, including general circulation, college-level research, juvenile services, and pedagogical development. In 1962, the *System* was copyrighted and a mimeographed draft version was circulated for comment and criticism with the assistance of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. During those development years, I, a high school student, worked with the system, running one of the branch libraries of the UHS elementary schools. Upon graduating with a MALS degree from the University of Michigan, I was appointed head librarian of the UHS/Midrasha Library. Daniel and I then decided to professionally refine the system from the dual standpoints of librarianship and Jewish scholarship. In 1968 we applied for and received a Faculty Grant-in-Aid from Wayne State University to assist in preparing the final draft, many sections of which had undergone major revisions. This grant made possible the typing of the final manuscript, which we submitted to the Wayne State University Press for publication. The Press distributed it to various Judaic catalogers in large academic institutions for comments and recommendations. They did not see the need for such a system, as most of them were using the Library of Congress classification system and did not understand the needs of the small to medium special libraries of Judaica. Their recommendation to the Press was not to publish the *System*. We then turned to Dr. G. Flint Purdy, director of the Wayne State University Libraries. He was very impressed with the work and in the summer of 1968, authorized the Libraries to publish and distribute the first edition.

Since the publication of the first edition, use has spread widely throughout the United States, Israel, and other parts of the Jewish world. Libraries of all kinds, in synagogues and community centers, in Hebrew schools, on university campuses, and in research institutes, have adopted the scheme and have worked with it. As a result of the combined efforts of many of these institutions, a wealth of experience in applying the *System* has developed. Credit must be given to the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California for the role that it played in the post-publication development of the *System*. Dorothy Schroeder, known as the “dean of Jewish Librarians in LA,” and her protégés, Barbara Leff, Adaire Klein, and Marjorie Gersh were very influential during this period. As a result of their dedication to the *System*, most of the Jewish libraries in California adopted it, it was used successfully by professionals and non-professionals, a glossary of terms was developed for those less fluent in Judaica, and a course on cataloging and classification (*Elazar*) was taught at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles.

REVISION AND THE SECOND EDITION

Feedback from librarians using the *System* influenced our decision to proceed with the second revision in 1978 (Turtledove Publishing, Israel), and with a reprinting including an Addendum in 1988 (Center for Jewish Community Studies in Jerusalem and University Press of America). Initially, revisions introduced were designed to keep reclassification to a minimum. Modest changes were

made in various sections, including clarifications, changes in terminology, and updating of historical events. Correspondence between the authors and the librarians was most interesting, thought-provoking for both sides, and very constructive. The librarians reported difficulties in distinguishing literary materials and materials discussing literature on one hand, and in fitting the materials into the detailed periodization scheme, on the other. To overcome this difficulty, the category on Jewish Literature (500–599) was totally revamped, creating a situation where librarians had to reclassify, but in return received a product which was easier to handle. The 1988 addendum included corrections and additions to both the *System* and its index.

The following are examples of some of the changes that took place:

001–099 Bible and Biblical Studies

- Better distinguish between types of Biblical Commentaries
- Better accommodate Bibles in different forms
- Clarify the classification of materials dealing with life in Biblical times

200–299 Jewish Observance and Practice

- Sections were designed to make explicit reference to particular texts, customs, ritual objects, and folklore elements
- English translations were added to Hebrew terminology, e.g.: *221.3 Mikveh (Ritual bath)*
- Comparative religion was expanded by request of librarians who maintain general works in their collections

500–599 Jewish Literature

While the first edition was divided by time periods, the second edition was divided by region/ethnic background and forms of literature, e.g., Sephardic poetry, with a section for anthologies and individual works. These major changes were incorporated in close coordination with the librarians who used the *System*.

600–699 The Jewish Community: Society and the Arts

This category had certain problem areas making classification of materials difficult. The areas were identified, subjects were added, and terms were changed for the sake of clarity, without major reclassification.

Class 650 *Social Conditions and Problems* was updated by adding subclasses for: *abortion, birth control, aging, euthanasia, environment*, etc.

800–899 Israel and Zionism

This class was updated and included the following changes:

823 Statehood (1948–); clarified and brought up to date

843 *Party System, Parties*; expanded to include types of parties

890 *Israel and the Middle East*; expanded to include Palestinians, peace efforts, terrorism, refugees

REVISION AND THE THIRD EDITION

A few years later, Rachel Glasser and Rita Frischer, two professional librarians from California—and enthusiastic users and promoters of the *System*—approached the authors suggesting that a new edition was needed. With their assistance, the third edition was published in 1997 (Milken Library of Jewish Public Affairs and Jason Aronson). Subjects were added and certain categories (History and Israel) updated as required. The index was expanded to make it more useful and accurate.

The task of revising the third edition was quite different from that of the second one. The authors worked very closely with Glasser and Frischer (credit was given to them on the cover and title page of the published book). This was made possible by the new era of e-mail, and messages sped back and forth between Israel and California. Each section of the classification system, including the expanded index, was examined, discussed, and finalized. The completed copy was proofread on both sides of the world before being sent to the publishers.

From the onset it was agreed upon that no major changes would be made in the third edition as were made in the second, with the aim of keeping reclassification down to the bare minimum. The following are some of the changes made:

563—*Fiction, Short Stories* (2nd ed.) was changed to *Short Stories* (3rd ed.), with a note to the user that individual works of fiction should be shelved in a separate section of the library, arranged alphabetically by author. Glasser and Frischer suggested this change after polling librarians and users of the *System*.

Notes (clarification):

620—*Jewish Political Structure and Governance*

(2nd ed.) This section includes materials on Jewish National and communal self-government, excluding Biblical and modern Israel, and including quasi-governmental organizations, such as Jewish federations and community councils where they exercise relevant functions.

(3rd ed.) Including materials on Jewish National and communal self-government (excluding Biblical and modern Israel), democracy in the Jewish community, and modern quasi-governmental organizations, such as Jewish federations and community councils.

Index (expansion and clarification):

Falashas	790.1 (2nd ed.)
Falashas (Ethiopian Jews), see Beta Yisrael	(3rd ed.)
Beta Yisrael (Ethiopian Jews)	790.1
Customs (social)	610
Literature	502
Liturgy	233

Correspondence between parties, e.g.:
832–839—*Land of Israel (Major Regional Headings)*

Librarians' (user) feedback:

At this point, we run into problems with the changes in Israel of geographical and political boundaries, names of settlements and/or cities which have been established since the scheme was established, and those that have changed their status. Revising this area (832–839) is a major job. What do you think? And if we decide to do this, what authority list can we use? How about towns now under Arab rule, or disputed territories? We need to be practical as far as the usefulness of this area, yet accuracy is most important. What do you suggest?

Authors' response:

There have been political changes regarding the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but the geography of Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel), has stayed the same. Change the note to read: "832 . . . subdivide country (Eretz Yisrael) regionally . . ." [In the second edition this read: ". . . subdivide country regionally."]

SPELLING AUTHORITY

The first and second editions used *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, edited by Cecil Roth, as the authority for spellings. For the third edition the multi-volume *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Keter, 1972) is used. There are certain exceptions; i.e., for names of organizations and persons, the accepted spelling is the one used by the person or organization. There have been few modifications, as the intention of the authors is to bring the spelling of Hebrew terms into conformity with accepted standard usage. Thus, letters with a "dagesh" are doubled (e.g., Shabbat), wherever doing so conforms with common usage. The authors were not concerned with differentiating between similar-sounding Hebrew letters as is done in some transliteration systems

JEWISH/GENERAL COLLECTIONS

According to reports from librarians, the major disadvantage of *Elazar* is the fact that material with no specifically Jewish content has to be classified under another system, thus creating a situation where the user (in most cases Jewish day schools) has to learn two systems. Throughout the development and revisions of *Elazar*, the authors have been aware of this problem, but contend that this is a classification system for collections of Judaica, and that the advantages

of having such a system overshadows any problems in having to use another system for general works. *Elazar* includes categories on Comparative Religion, General Education, Psychology, the Middle East, General Reference Works, and Library Science for material which is not Jewishly oriented, but still important to any Judaic/Pedagogic collection. Suggestions are included in the chapter "Classifying a Book—General Materials." For example, it is recommended that the library use the prefix "D" for material classified with Dewey and shelve the books in a specified area.

IMPORTANT FEATURES

Librarians who use *Elazar* emphasize two very important features:

1. It offers a logical arrangement for books on the shelf, from a Jewish point of view, making it easy for use and browsing.

Here is a brief anecdote to illustrate:

I converted my library collection to *Elazar* more than 25 years ago because my mentor . . . considered it the best for synagogue libraries. My rabbi confirmed this not long after that, when he came into our library to browse. I asked him if I could show him around and he said, "**What for? Everything is here—just the way I think about Judaism—it's all in order for me!**" I've never forgotten his response, and I've found again and again that materials arranged by *Elazar* are logically "in order" (*Ha-Safran* Internet list, 12 October 1995).

2. The *System* serves as an educational tool for those (librarian and patron) who are not well versed in Judaism, using Jewish/Hebrew terminology with cross references in the index, and categorizing according to Jewish historical periods, as the following examples illustrate.

- (a) Terminology with a Jewish/Hebrew Orientation:

Brit Milah is cross-referenced from the word "circumcision."

Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) is used instead of "Palestine," a name imposed upon the area by the Romans to disassociate the land from the Jews when they were expelled.

The use of *BCE* (before the Christian Era) and *CE* (the Christian Era), instead of BC and AD.

- (b) Historical divisions based upon Jewish historical events:

720 *Emergence of Talmudic Judaism (5th Century BCE–8th Century CE)*, including overall treatment of the Jews in the Greco-Roman period, which is further subdivided:

721 *Second Commonwealth (538 BCE–135 CE)*

727.3 *Jewish Roman War and its aftermath (66 BCE–132 CE)*

UNIQUE USAGE/EXPANSION OF THE SYSTEM

In 1975 an Orthodox college library in Jerusalem decided to use the Elazar classification for its Judaica section instead of the original 200 Dewey class or Gershom Scholem's 296 and 933 "intricate classes" (as the librarian put it). The library simply put a "2" before the *Elazar* numbers, and translated the text to Hebrew. For example, 003 became 200.3. The library was obliged to make modifications because of the introduction of the digit "2" before the numbers. It also put the Mishnah before Talmud Bavli, and deleted or modified some of the classes that were inadequate for its collection. Some numbers were added especially in the sections dealing with Jewish Law and customs.

In 1998, I was approached by a member of the library committee of an institution with 60,000 volumes in its library. He wrote that the library was currently in the midst of a long, ongoing process to reclassify the library from the Freidus system (1929) to LC. Most of the active committee members, comprising rabbis and scholars, were very displeased with the LC system, which, from their perspective, was not intuitive or orderly. He stated that he only recently became aware of the existence of *Elazar*, which seems to be much more reasonable for a library intended primarily for rabbinics and advanced Talmudic and halakhic (Jewish law) studies. In the months to follow there was much discussion on the pros and cons of *Elazar*, with the librarian preferring to continue reclassifying to LC. This could have made a very interesting case study, whereby the librarian was interested in conforming to what other large libraries with Judaic collections have done, i.e., use LC, while the library users wanted a system which is Jewishly oriented, for their convenience and ease of use. The committee decided to keep Freidus for all Judaica holdings, and to subdivide major areas of the collection (Bible, rabbinics, etc.) using *Elazar* classifications as sub-categories.

The authors, believing that a classification system should be a "living" tool, have always encouraged librarians to continue the dialogue by offering suggestions and getting advice, and making minor changes as these fit their needs. One such example is the expansion of the Nazi Holocaust category for a collection requiring more detail in this particular area (*Elazar Classification System: Holocaust Expansion*).

One of the early drawbacks of *Elazar* was the lack of a central cataloging system. Professionals and non-professionals were compelled to do in-house cataloging and classifying. With the advent of the Sinai Temple (Los Angeles) Central Cataloging Service (CCS) for Libraries of Judaica, a very important tool complementing the *Elazar System* became available. The CCS is a provider of *Elazar* classification and cataloging, a service for starting libraries, retrospective conversion, and for continuing cataloging. CCS also supplies a comprehensive Subject Heading List. Another cataloging aid can be found via online catalogs, many of which employ *Elazar* (*AJL Links to Member Catalogs*).

ARCHIVING THE EARLY DOCUMENTATION

During the 1950s and 1960s, our father, Albert Elazar, was the Superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools/Midrasha of Metropolitan Detroit. Because he was an active, prominent member of the Detroit Jewish Community, I opened an archival box for the Elazar family in the Franklin Archives/Family Collections located at Temple Beth El (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan). Since the Elazar Classification System is a product of the Elazar family and was developed in the library of the United Hebrew Schools, I felt it appropriate that any archival material relating to the history of the *System* be placed in this family box (*Elazar Family Collection*).

The collection currently includes an original typewritten copy of the Classification System, dating from 1967, correspondence leading up to its development and publication, and order forms. Also included are documents written by Daniel Elazar from the UHS Library.

CONCLUSION

The making of *Elazar* has been a lifetime project. It has given me the opportunity to maintain a professional contact with the Jewish library community while at the same time make an important contribution to the profession. While it is used mainly in the United States, it can be found all over the world. The *System* has been widely discussed in the professional library literature (Lazinger 1998, Levy 2001, Morgan 1996, Posner 1981, Weinberg 1983).

APPENDIX

In 1995, Barbara Leff (former Library Director, Stephen S. Wise Temple, Los Angeles) summed up the philosophy behind the *Elazar System*, in response to a question on *Ha-Safran* concerning LC vs. Elazar:

Because LC Classification is standard in academic libraries does not mean it is BEST for ALL libraries. To you, LC is standard; to me, Elazar is standard! A small library's primary goal is to reach its audience—to make libraries accessible to users, especially browsers. That's what Elazar does for us and other synagogue libraries.

As you know, LC classification system was created for the entire body of world knowledge with an arbitrary numbering scheme and complex, lengthy numbers; most Judaica items fall in LC's BM and BS categories. As an alternative, Elazar was created for Jewish educators, synagogues and schools; its numbering system is modeled after Dewey Decimal and is in a logical sequence following the development of Judaism. Also, Elazar devotes all 000–999 numbers to Jewish

topics, resulting in simpler call numbers—making it easier for use by children and non-academics.

. . . Elazar is great for browsing—and browsing is what lots of adults and children as well as teachers do in our kind of library. Computers and online catalogs do not replace walking through a library and browsing the shelves.

Another reason I like Elazar is because I learned an overview of Judaism through the Elazar scheme (as a library volunteer with limited library knowledge for ten years prior to getting my masters). Elazar pulls the Judaica body of knowledge together in its outlines and explanations. Elazar's logical sequences and orderliness allows a non-schooled library person to acquire a valuable understanding of Judaism, and, as you are aware, many synagogues ask volunteers or librarians with minimal Judaica background to manage their libraries. Also, non-professional librarians could not possibly handle the many LC cataloging tools in order to catalog their books. Elazar is a single, slim volume, easy to handle and use, and indexed.

Candidly, I have often thought of the additional time, energy and money involved in doing original cataloging—because this is translated into budget. As a director of a large synagogue and day school library, I'm very concerned about cost-effective management. In addition to Elazar, we have a Dewey-cataloged secular day school collection in the same room, which means TWO classification systems to manage, requiring even more cataloging time. So, on the surface it might make sense for us to adopt the more readily available LC system for both secular and Judaica into one system—but I think the patron has to come first.

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