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Harvard Judaica: A History and Description of the Judaica Collection in the Harvard College Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 2004.

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Book Reviews

Berlin, Charles. *Harvard Judaica: A History and Description of the Judaica Collection in the Harvard College Library.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 2004. xii, 130 p.

Reviewed by Arthur Kiron, University of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia, PA

The history of Harvard University's sui generis Judaica Division and its collections are summarized with principled clarity and remarkable reserve in this new publication of the Harvard College Library. The author, Charles Berlin, the Lee M. Friedman Bibliographer in Judaica in the Harvard College Library and Head of its Judaica Division, is uniquely qualified to tell this story. Indeed, he is the author not only of this volume, but also of much of the recent history it recounts between its elegant, gold-embossed, yet understated hard-bound covers. Given the extraordinary scope of Berlin's achievements, this reviewer must pause to acknowledge his 42 years of contributions, which are recorded here.

Charles Berlin's place in the modern history of Judaica librarianship is undoubtedly assured. He is the first endowed Judaica bibliographer at an American university; the first to envision the need and find a way to document in a comprehensive way the modern Israeli experience for those living beyond its borders; the first to take on the complex challenge of building a multi-formatted Judaica collection; and the first to develop programmatically the financial wherewithal to carry out these ambitious goals. He has overseen the transformation of Harvard's disparate Judaica collections into a highly efficient, accessible unity and has done so in the course of the greatest revolution in the history of human communication. Indeed, the first complete retrospective conversion of Hebrew and Yiddish card catalog records to automated online records was accomplished at Harvard under Berlin's direction. And yet, the automation of Har-

vard's Judaica collections, from manuscript inventories and handwritten individual card catalogs to online, fully-searchable records is just one of many technical and intellectual victories carried out by Berlin and the remarkable staff of Harvard's Judaica Division.

The present volume can be viewed as a companion to (or continuation of) other books that Berlin has published celebrating Harvard's collections. Examples include: *Judaica Librarianship: Facing the Future* (1988); *Documenting Israel* (1995); various book and exhibition catalogs; *On Stage, Off Stage: Memories of a Lifetime in the Yiddish Theatre* (1992). A complete listing of the Division's publications appears in this volume's first (of five) appendices.

Harvard Judaica is structured in five chapters. Chapter One describes the guiding principles that have determined the character of the current Harvard Judaica collection. Chapters Two and Three offer a history and description of the collection (including five tables), quantifying and analyzing Widener monograph holdings by language, Harvard College Library (HCL) Hebraica (Hebrew-script) monographs by date and country of publication, Israel Hebraica Imprints in the HCL by date of publication and subject. The fourth, and perhaps most significant chapter, details how access to the collection has been undertaken. This includes technical access, created when the Library adopted in 2000 the Aleph operating system, which supports non-Roman fonts; intellectual access via client-centered, streamlined MARC cataloging; access via collection management efforts and preservation programs; and access for the public via such means as publishing catalogs, mounting exhibits, organizing conferences, lectures, and symposia. The fifth chapter explains how Harvard has acquired the means to undertake comprehensive Judaica collection development during an era when most, if not all, other American

research libraries have been plagued by profound fiscal constraint. The volume concludes with five valuable appendices listing, as mentioned above, the Division's publications, then followed by its exhibitions, lectures, conferences, symposia and colloquia, and over 400 endowment funds.

Oscar Handlin, a pioneering scholar of American immigrant history and the former Director of the Harvard University Library, provides a succinct preface to the book in which he explains the position of Harvard's Judaica collection "as one of the components in an institution dedicated to an all encompassing vision of human knowledge. . . ." (p. vii). Jay M. Harris, the Harry Austryn Wolfson Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of Harvard's Center for Jewish Studies, supplies a foreword celebrating Berlin's "visionary leadership" (p. x) and highlights the world-class caliber of the Division's staff, collection-development policies and practices, fundraising successes, and efforts to make the collections accessible. Berlin then introduces the reader to the Judaica collection at the heart of what he notes Cotton Mather ("Harvard, Class of 1678") once called the "Kiriath Sepher" of American university towns: Cambridge, Massachusetts (p. xi). He then names and acknowledges the remarkable contributions of the current members of the Judaica staff: Violet Gilboa, Littauer Hebraica Technical and Research Services Librarian; Judith Kuperwaser, Judaica Cataloger; Mirit Lerner-Naaman, Library Assistant; Honor Moody, Library Assistant; Leah Orent, Hebraica Specialist; Hadassa Schwartz, Hebraica Cataloger; Elizabeth Vernon, Judaica Technical Services Librarian; as well as the numerous student assistants who have and continue to participate in the work of the Division. Berlin later explains that the unit has promoted a "shared leadership" model (p. 7), encouraging innovation, imagination, and autonomy among the staff.

In the opening chapter, "Building the Harvard Judaica Collection: Guiding Principles," the reader is informed of the Division's mission: "the documentation of the Jewish people throughout history in order to support teaching and research at Harvard and to serve as a resource for the scholarly community" (p. 1). Most telling, perhaps, about the scope of this ambitious statement is the intention to "meet the needs of current scholarship, but also—and perhaps most significantly—to anticipate the future needs of scholarship." "Indeed," Berlin continues, "it can be said that the Division has sought to create needs" and anticipates that "library resources, in an interactive way, can also shape the questions scholars ask" (pp. 2–3). To accomplish this, Berlin has

developed an international "network of vendors" (p. 4) to acquire the range of commercial resources as well as ephemeral types of materials, both in Israel and around the world, that otherwise might have been lost to oblivion. The Division also has engaged in cooperative ventures, such as joint microfilming projects with Israeli cultural institutions to enhance access to otherwise inaccessible resources. Most remarkable, however, has been Berlin's success in developing the financial resources to pursue these policies of comprehensive acquisitions. This prerequisite and the full story of its realization are told in the final chapter.

Historically, the word "Judaica" in the title of this volume refers to Harvard's original collection of works printed in Hebrew. As the history of the collection is narrated, the implied meaning of Judaica expands to include printed books in both Hebrew and non-Hebrew scripts, as well as a variety of additional formats, including "pamphlets, periodicals, posters, broadsides, manuscripts, maps, microforms, photographs, sound recordings (LP, cassette, CD), video recordings (videotape, VCD, DVD), electronic databases, or Internet Files" (pp. 3, 23–37). Berlin emphasizes in this regard that "for most purposes it is content that is important, not the format" (p. 3). In other words, and relative to the mission statement, if something has "Judaic" content, Harvard seeks to acquire it comprehensively no matter what format it may be in.

We also learn that Harvard collects all works published in Hebrew regardless of content. So, for example, the Division purchases under the rubric of Judaica a variety of Hebrew-language scientific and social-scientific works with no ostensive Jewish content. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that Harvard's Judaica collection is described grammatically and ideologically as a singular entity. Despite its diversity of formats, languages and subjects, the mission to collect comprehensively a multiplicity of expressions of Jewish existence throughout time and space presupposes an underlying unity in terms of the meaning of "Judaica." The criteria distinguishing "Judaica" from non-Judaica, however, are not fully explained.

Berlin traces the history of Harvard's Judaica collection and the changes in its operations in the second chapter. The origins of the collection are dated to 1638 with the bequest of a group of Hebrew grammars by John Harvard. In the eighteenth century, the collection included a variety of standard rabbinic works. This early collection perished in a fire in 1764. In the aftermath of the fire, the collection recovered and increased during the

nineteenth century with the establishment of a Divinity School library, and the formation of a Semitics Department. According to nineteenth-century manuscript catalog records and official Library reports, Harvard owned biblical, rabbinic, and post-biblical works of Jewish history and literature. With the merger of the Andover Seminary and Harvard's Divinity School in 1910, the collection was further enhanced, though the extent to which the Andover collection duplicated the Divinity School's preexisting holdings is not clear.

The 1890s saw the beginnings of Harvard's great Yiddish collections with the donation by Harvard's Slavic languages instructor, Leo Wiener, of his library and an additional gift by Morris and James Loeb a month later, on Wiener's suggestion. In contrast to the ample discussion of holdings related to the Ashkenazic experience, there are only scattered references to Ladino holdings, *musikah mizrahit* (p. 29), and contemporary materials related to the Sephardic, Levantine, and Middle Eastern Jewish experiences.

The twentieth century, however, is truly the century of Harvard Judaica. Supported by Harvard alumnus and philanthropist Lucius N. Littauer, and with the counsel of Harry Austryn Wolfson, the dean of American Jewish scholarship, Harvard acquired a collection of approximately 12,000 volumes of Hebraica (including rare prints and manuscripts), assembled by the remarkable bookseller and scholar Ephraim Deinard. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Harvard was among the institutions chosen by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Organization, to send unclaimed books seized or abandoned during the World War II. In 1957, Lee M. Friedman, bequeathed to Harvard "the greatest collection of Western-language Judaica then in private hands in North America" (p. 16). The examples briefly highlighted here obviously amount to a mere sampling of a much larger story. In 1962, Charles Berlin arrived and undertook the task of transforming this large and diverse amount of raw material into a systematically managed and developed collection.

Given the sui generis character of Harvard's Judaica operating model, the question a reader might be left with after finishing this volume is whether the Harvard model is applicable to other university library settings. So for example, what does "comprehensiveness" mean in a time of fiscal constraint, when "selectivity" and cooperative lending programs govern other universities with limited budgets? Should Judaica librarians at other research settings aspire to this goal? It would have

been useful to hear more about the historical relationship between the Harvard College Library Judaica Division and the Library of the Divinity School. Do the College and Divinity School libraries continue to coordinate their collections development programs or are they undertaken independently? If independently, would this model make sense for other universities with divinity schools with more limited resources hoping to avoid duplication? Very little is said about the Judaica Division's rare book collecting policies and how the Judaica team works with Harvard's Houghton Rare Book division in terms of acquisitions and physical processing (presumably all Hebraica is cataloged internally at the Judaica division?).

The ideal of access to the Judaica Division's extensive holdings and expertise, meanwhile, in practice is only guaranteed to members of the Harvard community. Though meant to serve "as a resource for the scholarly community," Harvard's Judaica collections are not open to the public. Virtual access is no less complicated. No Web address appears anywhere in the book directing readers to the Judaica Division. Out of curiosity, I undertook a Google search, entering the phrase "Harvard Judaica Division." I received only six hits, none of which took me directly, either to the Division's home site, or to its special, online collections. After searching Harvard's general library site for "Judaica Division" I arrived at <http://hcl.harvard.edu/widener/departments/judaica.html>, however that location only provided a general description of the Division but no additional access points or guidance (aside from staff e-mail addresses) to the Judaica collections.

In terms of specific criticisms, I would note that while there clearly is much to celebrate about what has been accomplished at Harvard, this volume does not offer a critical history of the development of Harvard's Judaica collections, policies, and services. Surprisingly, *Harvard Judaica* lacks an index, which ironically makes a volume championing the principle of access less accessible than it otherwise could be.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the story of Harvard's Judaica collection and the remarkable leadership role Charles Berlin has played in it, is an important and welcome addition to the bibliography of Judaica librarianship and the history of academic Jewish libraries and learning in modern times.

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