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EPISTLE FROM ISRAEL

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Abstract: Activities of the Judaica Librarians' Group, the Jewish National and University Library, and other Judaica libraries in Israel during 1995–1996 are surveyed. Also, Israeli World Wide Web sites with important information for Judaica librarians, and new Judaica publications of special importance to libraries are described.

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(Updated August 1997)

Judaica Librarians' Group

A clause in the 1993–1996 nationwide work agreement has caused all of Israel to go "continuing-education-happy." The contract grants a significant salary increment for workers who complete 400 hours of study in approved continuing education courses and, as a result, organizations in every sector of the economy have set up such courses. Desiring to provide its members with courses that will help them qualify for this benefit, and that are appropriate to their specialty, the Judaica Librarians' Group selected the 3,000th anniversary of Jerusalem as its theme and sponsored a course in 5755 (1994–1995), comprising five one-day sessions on various aspects of the city during the 19th and 20th centuries, and three additional one-day sessions in 5756 (1995–1996), dealing with "Little-Known Jerusalem," off-the-beaten-track aspects of the city.

Some of the specific subjects covered in 5755 were: Zionist and British Policy Towards Jerusalem; Jerusalem's Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community; Beginnings of Modern Archaeological Excavations in Jerusalem; Jerusalem in Literature; and Planning Jerusalem for the Year 2000. In 5756, lectures dealt with excavations of selected areas in Jerusalem; The Hallowing of the City of Jerusalem in the Bible; Jerusalem in the Movies; and Activities of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, a Jerusalem resident. Lecturers, arranged for by the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, came from leading Israeli institutions, including the Hebrew University, Haifa University, Yad Vashem,

the Central Zionist Archives, the Schocken Institute, and the Ben Zvi Institute itself.

Each session of the course concluded with a tour. Visits were made to facilities such as the Central Zionist Archives, the Yad Vashem Archive, and the Ben Zvi Institute, and to sites and neighborhoods in Jerusalem, including the Western Wall excavations, Rehavia, and Nahlaot. An audiovisual presentation on the First Temple was also included in the course.

Another offering in the same framework dealt with the cataloging of rabbinic materials. Given by Rabbi Shlomo Rotenberg, Chairman of the Hebrew Classification and Cataloging Department at Bar-Ilan University's Wurzweiler Central Library, the course consisted of 10 three-hour sessions, and participants came from university, college, yeshiva, Beit Ya'akov, public, and seminary libraries in the Jerusalem and Tel Aviv areas.

In addition, during this period the Judaica Librarians' Group sponsored other one-day study sessions on selected topics. A January 1996 program dealt with Judaica publishers. Yitzhak Yudlov, of the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL), opened the day with a brief history of Hebrew publishing, and representatives of publishers from universities, research institutes, and the commercial sector talked about their work. Also, Prof. Menachem Cohen, of Bar-Ilan University's Bible Department, described the work of the team producing the new edition of the *Mikra'ot Gedolot* based on the Aleppo manuscript (*Keter Aram Tsova*). This work began appearing in 1992 with the publication of the volume containing Joshua and Judges. Other volumes that have appeared to date are Samuel I–II (1993); Kings I–II (1995); and Isaiah (1996).

A presentation was also made by a representative of the publisher CDI, which has produced the CD-ROM *A Bibliography of the Hebrew Book—1473–1960* (*Bibliography of the Hebrew Book*, 1994). [A lengthy article about the project, by Roger Kohn, will appear in the next issue.—Ed.]

A study day held in March 1996 dealt with the Passover Haggadah, and included lectures on: Illustrations in Manuscript Haggadahs, by Dr. Bracha Yaniv of Bar-Ilan University; Ceremonial Art for the Seder, by Prof. Vivian Mann of the Jewish Museum in New York; and one on a bibliography of haggadot (expected to be published in late 1996), based on JNUL's Bibliographic Project, presented by the Project's director, Yitzhak Yudlov. [Originally scheduled to be published in Summer 1996, the bibliography, containing 4715 entries, appeared in August 1997, in conjunction with the World Congress of Jewish Studies.]

Closing the year's programs in May 1996 was a study day held at the Rambam Library, the Tel Aviv Municipal Library System's central Torah library. This year is the 60th anniversary of the library's founding, and the event was marked by a special evening attended by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel. The program included a group of lectures, a cantorial presentation, and the opening of an exhibition entitled *Pithu li sha'are sefer* ("Open for Me the Title Pages of Books," roughly translated from the Hebrew). This is a play on the biblical verse, "Open for me the gates [the Hebrew word *sha'ar* also means title page of a book] of righteousness" (Psalms 118:19) ("Midor ledor," 1996).

At the study day, Rabbi Avishai Elboim, Director of the Rambam Library and a member of the executive board of the Judaica Librarians' Group, presented an illustrated lecture on title pages of Hebrew books, and led the participants on a tour of the anniversary exhibition. Other lectures included: The Contribution of Scholarly Proofreaders to the Production of Early Printed Hebrew Texts, by Prof. Ya'akov Spiegel, Chairman of the Talmud Department at Bar-Ilan University and author of the recently published *Chapters in the History of the Jewish Book: Scholars and Their Annotations* (Spiegel, 1996); and an illustrated presentation about the search for "lost" Hebrew books (primarily in *genizot* around the world), by Moshe Rosenfeld, who has been engaged in such searches for many years.

Three members of the Judaica Librarians' Group attended the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) Convention in Chicago in June 1995. Susan Cohen, of the JNUL, received the AJL Reference Book Award for her three-volume work, *Antisemitism: An Annotated Bibliography* (Cohen, 1987). Ms. Cohen also conducted a poster session at the convention, on the development of the bibliographic project at the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University, which resulted in her award-winning publication. [See Ms. Cohen's article on the project in this issue.—Ed.]

Gita Hoffman, Chairman of the Judaica Librarians' Group and Head of the Readers' Services Department at Bar-Ilan University's Central Library, delivered a paper critiquing the CD-ROM publication *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book—1473–1960*. Also attending the convention was Ya'akov Aronson, University Librarian, Bar-Ilan University, who chaired the session on the Poster Imaging Project of Harvard College Library's Judaica Division. Mr. Aronson is the Israeli coordinator for an International Judaica Librarians' Convention, whose date and location have yet to be determined. In this capacity, he participated during the convention in the meeting of the planning committee for the forthcoming convention, along with representatives from the U.S. and Britain.

Jewish National and University Library

An issue of *Books & People*, the periodical covering recent activities of the JNUL, appeared in June 1995. The publication has recently been appearing less frequently, because it is written and edited as an extra task by regular members of the JNUL staff, and increased pressures at work have precluded their devoting much time to the magazine. Major articles in vol. 9 describe the JNUL's collection of printed Hebrew books on parchment; new information on Israel Bak's printing press in Safed, gleaned from a recently purchased collection of letters of the Pekidim ve-Amarkalim Society (Officers of the Holy Land, Amsterdam); information about the planned Eretz Yarden Yeshiva in Heshbon, found in the first (and probably only) issue of the Yiddish publication *Erets Yarden Zhurnal*¹⁴ (*Land of Jordan Journal*, New York, 1943); and the details of a cooperative agreement between the JNUL and the V. I. Vernadsky Central Scientific Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev, allowing the JNUL to microfilm Hebrew manuscripts in the Academy's library, as well as periodicals held in Kiev and not found in the JNUL.

Reproduced on the inside back cover of the issue is a letter from the London Committee of the Jews from Bokhara, dated December 1935. The letter asks for help in saving 4,000 Jews who fled Turkestan because of "political persecution and religious oppression." The letter's author, "The Very Rev. Haham, Dr. M[oses] Gaster," goes on to state that "they were allowed to enter Persia and Afghanistan on the condition that they left these countries within a specific time. The East has learned this lesson from the West." Another interesting statement in the letter proclaims that "it is the first time that Sephardi Jews have ever made an appeal. I am sure it will be the last time, for it is quite exceptional. It is not likely ever to be repeated."

Other Judaica Libraries

A number of small Judaica libraries have recently been established in memory of people who unfortunately fell victim to the tense political situation in the Middle East. Alisa Flatow, an American student spending the year in Israel, was killed in April 1995 in a terrorist attack at Kfar Darom, in the Gush Katif Area. Her parents agreed to the donation of her vital organs to patients awaiting transplants ("Transplant . . .," 1995). Later, they decided to honor Alisa's memory in a number of ways, one being the establishment, in September 1995, of a Judaica Library at the Metro West High School in Ra'anana, a school supported by the Metro West Jewish community in Alisa's home town in New Jersey ("Sifriyah le-yahadut . . .," 1995).

The family of Moshe Fogel, who fell while serving in the Israel Defense Forces on the Suez Canal, established a collection of rare hagadot, which is permanently on display at the Haberman Institute for Literary Research, in Lod. Each year before Passover, the season of Moshe's birthday, the collection becomes a traveling exhibit; in 1996 it was sent to the Kaduri School in the lower Galilee, where it was viewed by hundreds of students. Exhibition of the collection has resulted in numerous donations, which have been used to purchase additional hagadot for the collection ("Osef . . .," 1996).

Albert Eliya, Secretary of the Lebanese Jewish Community during the 1970s, was kidnapped in 1974 and never heard from again. In 1995, he was recognized as a martyr by the Israeli government, and in the spring of 1996 his sons, now residing in Europe and North America, established a library in his memory at the Rambam Synagogue in Holon, whose members are Jews from Lebanon. The dedication of the

library merited the attendance of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (Rishon Le-Zion), and Amir Peretz, Secretary General of the Histadrut labor organization, as well as local religious and political figures ("Sifriyah 'a. sh. harug ha-malkhut . . .," 1996).

The Meretz Institute in Mevasseret Zion, an institution dedicated to the education of teachers for religious schools, was the recipient of the library of Rabbi Hananyah Yom-Tov Cohen, deceased Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Bialik, near Haifa. The library is rich in literature relating to many areas of Jewish studies and was placed in a special reading room. In a not-so-usual move, all the volumes in the library underwent a thorough cleaning before being transferred to the Institute ("Sifriyat ha-Rav . . .," 1995).

Databases and Web Sites

At its world headquarters in Brooklyn, the Habad Lubavitch Hasidic movement has a very fine library, including many rare volumes unavailable elsewhere. The Lubavitch library's catalog has been computerized, and copies have been exchanged with the JNUL and the Bar-Ilan Central Library; thus researchers in Israel can now consult the catalog of this rich collection (Krevsky, 1989–1993). [An article about this catalog will appear in the next issue—Ed.]

Bar-Ilan University's Responsa Project has issued version 4.0 of its CD-ROM database (Bar-Ilan University, 1995). To this edition have been added nine volumes of responsa; the *Tosefta* (Lieberman edition of the sections for which it exists, completed by the Zuckerman edition); the Minor Tractates; a number of Midrashim; and the *Bet Yosef* commentary [by Joseph Caro] on the *Tur* [by Jacob ben Asher], plus biographies in English of selected rabbinic figures. The search engine of the project has been improved, so that now a search for a term can be made simultaneously in multiple databases; the screen display has also been enhanced: one can view a number of works side by side.

A new edition of *Orhot Hayim*, by Aaron ben Jacob haKohen of Lunel, who lived at the end of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, appeared recently (HaKohen, 1996). It was newly edited by the staff of the Or Etsion Torah Institute, a branch of the Or Etsion Yeshiva near Ashkelon, and published by the Institute in conjunction with Machon Yerushalayim. The Institute, whose purpose is to produce accurate editions of classical Judaic texts, is now preparing editions of the works of

the Or Zaru'a, Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, ca. 1180–ca. 1250 ("Yatsa le-or . . .," 1996).

At the Hebrew University, a new World Wide Web (WWW) site called *Snunit* deals with many aspects of education. Among the databases included at the site is one called *Kodesh* (<http://www1.snunit.k12.il/kodesh/kodesh.html>). In this database are texts of the Bible, Mishnah, Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, and the Tosefta. Searches can be performed on the texts, or the full text can be displayed.

Now available on the WWW is access to catalogs of major Israeli academic libraries containing strong Judaica collections. The URL address for the Hebrew University's libraries is: http://www1.huji.ac.il/www_dir/lb1.html. On this homepage appear a number of links to other libraries of major importance to Judaica librarians. To access JNUL, click on "ALEPH libraries in Israel" and follow the subsequent instructions on the screen. The other important libraries are listed by name. Bar-Ilan's catalog can be reached via the Bar-Ilan Home Page at the URL: <http://www.biu.ac.il/>. The URL for the University of Haifa Library catalog is: <http://www-lib.haifa.ac.il/www/aleph.html>. Telnet software is required for some of the connections. The JNUL and Bar-Ilan catalogs are in the standard ALEPH format, but University of Haifa and Hebrew University's Mount Scopus Libraries have implemented the new WWW catalog format provided in the latest release of ALEPH. Also included on the University of Haifa Library's homepage is the category "Israeli and Judaica Services," providing links to many important sources of Judaica information on the Web. Direct access to this resource can be obtained at: <http://www-lib.haifa.ac.il/#Israel>.

In the spring of 1996, the University of Haifa Library announced that publication of the microfiche edition of the *Index to Hebrew Periodicals* (IHP) would cease because "continued production . . . is not economically justifiable." This development resulted from the success of the CD-ROM version of the Index. It was also announced that searches in the Tel-Hai newspaper index, a component of IHP, can now be made by newspaper title, and in the near future this feature will also be added to the Bar-Ilan newspaper index, which is also found in IHP (University of Haifa, 1996). Information on IHP via the World Wide Web, including all issues of the *IHP Newsletter*, an electronic publication issued when there are changes in IHP, can be obtained at: [\[lib.haifa.ac.il/www/libinfo/ihpmenu.html/\]\(http://lib.haifa.ac.il/www/libinfo/ihpmenu.html/\). As new issues of the *IHP Newsletter* appear, they are posted on *Ha-Safran*, the Association of Jewish Libraries' electronic discussion group.](http://www-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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