Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library. Broadside Collection. Hamden, Conn.: Micrographic Systems of Connecticut for The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. 3 microfilm reels. $35.00 per reel + shipping

Barry D. Walfish

University of Toronto, barry.walfish@utoronto.ca

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Author Biography & Related Information
Dr. Barry Walfish is the Jewish Studies Librarian at the University of Toronto Library, Toronto, Canada.
Abstract: Reviews the broadside collection published by the Jewish Theological Seminary on microfilm, provides highlights from the collection, and evaluates the organization, cataloging, and indexing of the material.

The Nature of Broadsides

Broadsides are single sheets of paper printed on one side for distribution on the streets or in public meeting-places. They cover "many different forms of popular street literature—handbills, proclamations, advertisements, religious documents, as well as ballads and songs" (Shepard, 1962, p. 23). This description applies to Jewish broadsides equally well, as is attested by the extensive broadside collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary Library, part of which has recently been made available on microfilm.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about broadsides is that they have been preserved at all, since they had "no pretensions to permanence" (ibid.). They address events or issues of immediate concern and are meant to be discarded after having been read or circulated. Yet many broadsides have survived, and they provide important information about the social, religious, and cultural lives of the communities which produced them. Thus they serve as important sources for social and literary historians.

Several examples of books of Judaic interest which are based on broadsides are: 'Am mekadeshe shevi'i (1986), on the struggle for Sabbath observance in Petah-Tikvah, Israel; Herzog, Conflict of Symbols (1987), a sociological analysis of Israeli election campaigns based on campaign posters; and Kluger, Min ha-makor (1977–1987), which includes broadsides produced by the Jerusalem ultra-Orthodox community between 1840 and 1940.

The JTS Collection

The Seminary’s broadside collection is very rich. The three microfilm reels under review contain only a portion of the collection. They include over 1,100 items, originating in various parts of Europe, North America, and Palestine/Israel, and dating from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century. Most are anonymous, but some are signed and even dated. The range of material covered is quite extensive, including religious and secular poems in Hebrew, Yiddish, and European languages; alphabet charts for the study of Hebrew; proclamations and open letters by religious authorities on the burning issues of the day; funeral orations; wedding invitations; and requests for charitable donations. Items of special interest are listed in the Appendix to this review, which provides further details on the nature of this material.

Cataloging of the Material

Cataloging is an expensive, labor-intensive activity. Yet it must be done if a library is to provide adequate access to its holdings. Cataloging of ephemera such as broadsides is a particularly expensive proposition when one considers the extent of each item—a single page. Most libraries would find the cost prohibitive and would at best provide a checklist of their holdings of such material. The Seminary Library is therefore to be highly commended for its efforts to provide full cataloging for this material. By doing this, it has integrated broadsides into its holdings and helped to increase their utilization by its patrons.

Still, I would be remiss in my responsibilities as reviewer if I did not point out several shortcomings and inconsistencies in the quality of the cataloging provided:

1. Mistakes in transcription and romanization. The romanization is especially poor for the Yiddish items. It seems obvious that the cataloger[s?] did not understand Yiddish. For example, no. 2:86 should read "Shtey oyf mayn folk," not "Shete oyf mayn polek; and no. 2:127 should read: "lkh mit mayn sheyne mishpube," not "Eikh mit mayn sheye mishpube" (see Figure 1). French in archaic script also seems to have presented problems. For example, the entry for item 2:110 (see Appendix) should read: "Louange à l'éternel qui a partagé . . . ," not "Lovange . . . qui a partagé . . . ."

2. Omission of important access points. Occasionally, authors and subjects are omitted from the records. For example, although item 3:179 (see Appendix) is signed by Isaac Bernays, the catalog record does not mention his name. Many records do not provide subject headings. If the goal was uniform accessibility, then all items should have received the same level of treatment.

3. Inconsistencies. The same items are occasionally cataloged more than once and sometimes differently. There is no need for such pointless repetition. Duplicate copies should be so indicated. One glaring example of lack of authority control is the case of the author Elazar Aharon Polyasi. His name appears under three different spellings: Ployise, Elazar Aharon; Polyziya, Elazar Aharon; and Pulyasi, Elize­er Aharon (see Hebrew spelling in Figure 2).

Organization of the Broadsides

While the provision of cataloging copy for this material is indeed an important step in making it accessible, other measures could have been taken to enhance its value as a collection. Only minimal effort was made to
Figure 1. Sample catalog records featuring errors in the Romanization of Yiddish.

Figure 2. Catalog records for a single author with three different name headings. The top two records are for the same work.
organize the broadsides in any recognizable fashion before microfilming them. One does encounter groups of related items in various locations on the reels. This is especially true of the first reel, over half of which consists of various Hebrew poems from Italy, including wedding poems, synagogue dedication poems, and eulogies. There are, however, many other poems of a similar nature and provenance scattered among the other reels. Anyone looking for all the Italian Hebrew poetry in the collection would have to scan it in its entirety. The same applies for virtually any other topic; the material is not organized in an easily perceptible manner. Alphabet charts, for example, are scattered throughout the reels, even though the various items are obviously related (see Appendix, items 1:11, 13; 2:21; 3:322).

This shortcoming could have been overcome by adequate indexes, but here, too, the user is not well served. The only index provided is to the call numbers of the items, which have no immediate significance to the reader (see Figure 3). The items are not even numbered in sequence on the reels, and so if one is searching for a particular item on a reel, one must use the call number index and count the items oneself, an extremely cumbersome operation. The only way to access the information provided in the catalog records is through the Seminary's online catalog, which is available in situ or on the Internet. But these tools provide access to the Seminary's entire collection, and users wishing to limit their search to broadsides as a cultural phenomenon or a literary genre would not be helped very much by this type of access. A search cannot be limited by genre because the term 'Broadsides' does not appear in most records as an access point. It does appear in the collection, but this field is not searchable. (A recent telnet search for the subject 'Broadsides' in the Seminary's online catalog turned up close to 400 items. This was more than expected and indicates that the Seminary's catalogers have added the subject heading 'Broadsides' to many records since the time that the microfilms were produced. Still, this represents just over a third of the collection; much more needs to be done to enhance access to this genre.)
One gets the impression that the microfilming of this collection was done in-house as part of a preservation project and that no thought was given initially to making the films available to other libraries. Only as an afterthought was this done, and then no effort was made, presumably owing to lack of time and/or money, to provide proper indexes to the collection.

Conclusion

The JTS Library deserves to be commended for its efforts in preserving, cataloging, and disseminating this important collection. As was already mentioned, the present publication includes only a part of the Seminary’s broadside holdings, and the Library intends to continue microfilming. I would urge the Seminary Library to make every effort to improve the organization and cataloging quality of this material, and to provide proper indexes which would greatly enhance the accessibility of the collection to potential users.

Appendix:
Selected Items from The JTS Broadside Collection

(Captions are the reviewer’s, based, in most cases, on the cataloging provided by JTS on the reels.)

Reel 1

3. Lerner, Mayer ben Mordecai. Responsa regarding burial practices in Altona. Altona, [18—?].

11, 13. Alphabet chart with prayers and woodcut depicting a scene with children playing at a table while the teacher is about to beat a student and an angel hovers overhead. Venice, 1646.

57. Prayer for the sick, during cholera epidemic. Amsterdam, [18—?].

104. Contract for synagogue seat. Lvov, [1813/14].


146. Tehillah ‘al hatsafah ha-makabah (Prayer for the success of the wars of the Queen). Mantua, [1777/78].

149. Publisher’s announcement for Koenigsberg edition of the Arba’ah Turim. Koenigsberg, 1860.

150. Collection of parallel passages to Seder olam, ch. 30 [a chronology of Jewish history from the geonic period]. Stockholm, 1869.

Figure 4. Shemirah (amulet) for a newborn featuring a micrographic portrait of Rabbi Akiva Eger, of Posen. Micrography is an art form in which miniature script (in this case, Hebrew) is used to create geometric or abstract forms or depictions of objects, animals, or human beings. It has been in use since the early Middle Ages, was especially popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and continues to be popular today especially among religious artists, for whom it can be seen as a form of religious expression.

152. Proposal for establishing an evening yeshivah in New York City. New York, [1939/40].

155. Announcement of publication of vol. 2 of ha-Ketav ve-ha-Torah (Text and tradition, by J. Z. Mecklenburg [a commentary on the Torah]. Koenigsberg, [1842/43].

163. Avrahamiyahu, N. Call to introduce Hebrew language instruction in schools all over the world, as Hebrew is the language of peace. Jerusalem [between 1927 and 1932].

177. Genealogical table of the Lehmann family, 1801–1945. [Germany, 1945?].

Reel 2

21. Alphabet chart with prayers. Livorno, 1846. With engraving of teacher whipping a student, and an angel dropping something to students sitting at a table.

58. Ten Commandments with micrographic illustration of Moses. [France, 19—?].
59. Braverman, Hillel. Micrographic illustration of King Solomon, containing Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. [France, 18—?).

60. Shemirah [amulet] for newborn and mother, with micrographic portrait of R. Akiva Eger. [Budapest, 18—?). (See Figure 4.)

61. Struck, Hermann, Hayyim Nahman Bialik's Megilat ha-esh (Scroll of Fire) in a micrographic portrait of the author. Tel-Aviv, [19—?). (See Figure 5.)

62. Goldshu, Mosheh Eliyahu. Jonah's ship in micrography. [Europe, 1897]. (See Figure 6.)

96. Shraiber, M. A. Song in Hebrew and English to commemorate the 100th year of American independence. New York, 1876.


109. Wine song for Purim, a parody of the piyut Zekhor (Remember), which is part of the Geshem service (prayer for rain recited on Shemini Atseret as part of the Musaf service). Czernowitz, 1861.

110. Crosnic, Josef. Song of praise to Napoleon in Hebrew and French. France, [18—?).


Reel 3

14–15. Yiddish poster warning against lice. Berlin, 1923. The text reads: Dam, tsedekte'a, kinim—di dritte make iz di ergste; hit zikh far layz! Fun layz—The third plague is the worst: Protect yourself against lice; from lice one gets plague-typhus.


67. Prayer for lighting Sabbath candles. Mantua, [16—?).

77. Prayer concerning plague in Avignon, France, written in Italy, [18—?).

78. Prayer of thanks for victory of the Emperor Joseph II after the capture of Belgrade. Mantua, [18—?).

96. Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) proclamation against paying taxes to the kefar ha-yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine before the establishment of the State in 1948). [Jerusalem?, 19—?).
Figure 6. The book of Jonah in a micrographic illustration, depicting the ship he sailed on and the big fish that swallowed him.
158. Request to Rabbi Abraham Galliki of Istanbul for charity for Jews of Safed after an earthquake in that city. Istanbul, 1762.

176. Invitation to E. N. Adler for a special service at the Central Synagogue to commemorate the 75th year of Victoria's reign, June 20, 1897. Adler was a well-known bibliophile, collector, and traveler. His manuscript collection was acquired by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1923.

179. Bernays, Isaac. Proclamation against Reform innovations in the prayerbook (references to redemption [ge'ulah], resurrection [tehiyah], and Messiah [mashiah]). Hamburg, 1841. In German in Hebrew script. Bernays was the rabbi of Hamburg from 1821 until his death in 1849. He waged a fierce campaign against the nascent Reform movement and its theological and liturgical innovations.

188. Announcement of the establishment of a fund to provide free education at the Talmud Torah of Venice. Venice, 1775/77.

198. Announcement of a tax exemption for the Jewish community in Bohemia. [Bohemia], 1846.

201. Proclamation by several rabbis against allowing women to vote and run for election in the Palestine municipal elections. Jerusalem, [1919?].

206. Proclamation signed by nine rabbis against the use of Hebrew language in schools ('IVrit be-'IVrit). Jerusalem, 1919.

227. Announcement of a decision by a general meeting of the rabbis of Palestine rejecting the decision by the temporary committee allowing women to vote. Jerusalem, 1920. Witnessed by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, chief rabbi of Palestine from 1921 to 1935.

240. Proclamation by Voice of Torah Jewry that the Jewish people and their redemption are not connected with the State of Israel. [New York, 194-?].

276. Proclamation against introducing secular studies in Jewish schools. Alot ha-berit. Jerusalem, [1878]. (See Figure 7.)

282. Eyder du hast gevashn di hent mit zeyf un vaser, rir zikh nit tsu tsum esn. Rir nit on reyne oygn. K lepige kreynt klevn zikh tsu shmuts. Berlin: "Aze", 1923. (Translation: Do not touch food before you have washed your hands with soap and water. Do not touch clean eyes. Contagious diseases stick to dirt. (See Figure 8.)


Figure 7. Proclamation against engaging in secular studies, issued by a number of Jerusalem rabbis in 1878.
Figure 8. A public health announcement, Berlin 1923. (See Appendix, Reel 3, entry 282 for Romanization of Yiddish text and English translation.)

Acknowledgment

The figures accompanying this article are reproduced courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

References

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Hebrew Bibliographic Data

Dr. Barry Walfish is the Jewish Studies Librarian at the University of Toronto Library, Toronto, Canada.