The Library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano (Latin-American Rabbinical Seminary)

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Abstract: The history, organization, and current financial situation of the Library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires, Argentina, are described. Besides a card catalog for books, the Library maintains an analytical catalog for journals and collections. Sample entries from the two catalogs, as well as an excerpt from the authority list of Spanish subject headings, illustrate the paper.

History

The library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano was founded in 1963, two years after the Seminary opened its doors, by librarian Dr. Suse Halenstein Hart (of the University of Florida). Although the library was located at a different site, the José Mendelson library was not damaged by the bombing of the AMIA building.

3. Sociedad Hebraica Argentina

Belonging to a Jewish club that is analogous in its functions to those of a North American Jewish "Y" or Community Center, this was a large and important library during the 1950s. Nowadays the library circulates only bestsellers. All of the Yiddish books were sent to Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton, FL).

4. Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano

The library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano is described in detail in a separate article, which follows this one.

Conclusion

As stated in this brief survey, the situation of Judaica libraries and archives in Argentina is very poor. No Jewish libraries exist in the interior, except for those in Hebrew schools; the archives of the agricultural colonies were brought to Buenos Aires, or else they disappeared.

Acknowledgment

The editor thanks Zachary Baker, Head Librarian of YIVO, for reviewing the manuscript. Mr. Baker visited Argentina after the bombing of the Jewish community center.

Reference


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evacuation of the members of the “Ring” Jewish youth movement—a branch of the Bund Deutsch-Jüdischer Jugend—from Berlin to Argentina.)

The day Dr. Harf started working, the library owned merely 200 books. It was a great day, not only for the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, but also for all Jewish scholars in Latin America, since this was to become the only professionally classified and organized Jewish library in the region. With money from benefactors of the Seminario, as well as other donors (including the Rothschild Foundation and the Rich Foundation), the library started to grow.

Organization of the Library

Today the library is located in a modern building, occupying its top floors. On the first floor of the library are the reference room, the periodicals room, part of the collection of books, and the offices; on the second floor there are only stacks.

Reference room

There are two card catalogs: the first, for books, is arranged in alphabetical order by author, title, and subject headings; sample entries are in Figure 1. The second catalog is for articles in serials and collections—journals, yearbooks, festschriften, etc. This catalog provides an analysis of their contents, with entries arranged in alphabetical order by author and subject headings. Subject entries are illustrated in Figure 2.

We still have to type these cards because we cannot afford to buy modern technology. As no romanization of Hebrew or Yiddish is done, we have a separate catalog for these languages. The subject headings are often, but not always, in Spanish. An excerpt from the list of subject headings used in the analytical catalog is in Figure 3.

Periodical room

We receive journals and yearbooks primarily from the U.S., Israel, and Europe. Most of these are academic journals. Some serials are bought, some are received as a gift, and others are exchanged for the journal Maj’shavot which is published by the Seminario. Owing to a lack of funds, it is not possible to order all the serials that we need.

Figure 1. Sample subject entries from the catalog of books in the Seminario Library. The headings are in Spanish, even for books in English.
Figure 2. Sample subject entries from the analytical catalog of the Seminario Library. The headings are in Spanish, even for articles in Hebrew.

Figure 3. Part of the authority list for Spanish subject headings used in the analytical catalog.
Stacks

The stacks are not accessible to the public, since no electronic alarm system has been installed. They house approximately 30,000 books, mainly Judaica in various languages. Most of the books are in English, Hebrew, Spanish, German, and Yiddish. Some other languages (including Portuguese and French) are represented as well. The books are arranged in the stacks according to the classification numbers assigned.

Classification Scheme

The classification is based on the one created by the Union Theological Seminary for its library. The Jewish section was not suitable for us; by taking as a basis the general outline of the classification, we created a new scheme for Jewish themes, adapted to our needs (see Figure 4). Nowadays this classification system is also consulted by other libraries and archives in Buenos Aires.

Loan Policy

We have no lending system, since we generally have only one copy of each book. We have a small photocopy machine for people to make copies of the material they need. Although one machine does not fulfill the Library’s requirements, our patrons have gotten used to the limited resources.

Patrons

Although most of the users of this library are rabbis or professors and teachers of Hebrew or Jewish subjects, for the past few years people from non-Jewish high schools and universities have been coming in as well, in search of information. The topics most sought by this type of reader include the Holocaust, the Inquisition, Israeli-Arab relations, bioethics, and comparative religion. In addition, many students from Jewish high schools are sent to the Library to research various subjects such as Jewish history, the Holocaust, and Jewish holidays.

Thanks to ecumenical relations, many priests, seminarists, and professors from Catholic and Protestant schools and universities come to the library in search of information related to religion and philosophy.

Figure 4. Classification scheme for Jewish topics used in the Seminario Library.
Our rabbis and Seminary students also come and try to manage with the material we have, although it is not always what they require. They feel comfortable working here, and are always ready to consult on library questions when asked.

Current Situation

Running a library without an adequate budget is very difficult, if not an impossible task. This has been the situation of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano’s library for the last few years. The economic situation in Argentina has been getting worse of late, and so has the economic situation of the Jews in Argentina. As explained above, the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano is supported by a number of well-intentioned donors, and 10% of the money is assigned to the purchase of books for the library.

Since the budget was and is so limited, we had to decide whether to buy new books or continue the library’s subscriptions to journals, yearbooks, etc., in order for the collection to be up-to-date regarding developments in the Jewish scholarly world. We opted for the second approach.

In an attempt to ameliorate the situation, we started corresponding with other libraries in Argentina and Latin America, without success. When we contacted libraries outside Latin America, however, it was a wonderful surprise for us to receive great help from such libraries as the Library of Congress, The New York Public Library, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the University of Florida, the University of Texas at Austin, in the United States; and the libraries of the Hebrew University and Haifa University in Israel.

In 1978 we initiated an exchange program with these and other libraries around the world, which resulted in a very productive way of obtaining inaccessible material for us, as well as for the participating libraries. Unfortunately this system has slowed down in the last few years. But after attending for the first time a national Convention of the Association of Jewish libraries—in Chicago, June 1995—we hope that we will be able to reinforce these and other contacts with Jewish and academic libraries.
In 1994 we took an important step by inviting the most important representatives of the theological libraries in Buenos Aires to our Seminary. We are planning to work together, in order to join efforts and financial resources. We are, however, the only Jewish library represented in the consortium. We tried to establish the same type of cooperation with Jewish-Hebrew libraries in Argentina, without success. The economic-financial situation here is affecting not only our library and institution, but the entire Argentine academic system.

Conclusion

For some who read this paper, the library of the Seminario may seem to date from the '60s. But although we are so far away in terms of distance, technology, and resources, our goal is the same as that of American Judaica libraries. It is very difficult to run this library and develop it in a community like ours, which refuses to accept its Judaism, its background, its identity, and worst of all, its education.

But we will keep up the fight to make the Seminario’s library accessible and known to every individual who wants to acquire Jewish knowledge, education, and “menschlichkeit.” We will keep on fighting, trying to obtain new materials that are requested by our patrons. We will keep on trying to subsist without a budget. And we hope we will succeed!

Rabbi Tarfon used to say: “You are not expected to complete the work, and yet you are not free to evade it” (Avot 2:16).

Irene L. de Munster is Head Librarian and Rita F. de Sacca is Assistant Librarian of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
... So that we never forget.

**Uncertain Refuge**
Italy and the Jews During the Holocaust
Nicola Caracciolo
Translated and edited by Florence Rechnit Koffler and Richard Koffler
Foreword by Renzo de Felice


Of some 50,000 Jews in pre-war Italy, 42,000 managed to survive World War II. In a country allied with the National Socialists, how did so many survive? Why did individuals and networks take such great risks to rescue them? During the mid-1980's the Italian journalist Nicola Caracciolo, intent on answering these questions, interviewed more than sixty Jewish survivors of the Italy of that era.
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Donna F. Ryan


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These stories and poems, written during and after the Holocaust, reveal the human faces hidden behind the all-too-familiar statistics of the event.
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**The Twisted Road to Auschwitz**
Karl A. Schleunes

"The 1970 publication of Karl Schleunes's The Twisted Road to Auschwitz was a landmark in Holocaust historiography. His interpretation of the Final Solution as a product of unplanned evolution rather than premeditated 'grand design' triggered a debate that has energized Holocaust scholarship over the past two decades." - Christopher R. Browning, author of The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office
Paper, $11.95

New York Public Library Books to Remember List

**Diary from the Years of Occupation, 1939-44**
Zygmun Kukowski

Translated by George Kukowski
Edited by Andrew Kukowski and Helen Kukowski May
Foreword by Monty Noam Penkower

"Because of his post as superintendent of a county hospital in southeastern Poland, Kukowski (1885-1959), unlike the Jews and others among his fellow Christians, was not transported to a concentration camp... The diary is unusual in its depiction of a region's population at large, gentiles as well as Jews, making this a document of historical value." - Publishers Weekly
Illus. Cloth, $37.50

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