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## Epistle from Israel (1995)

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# EPISTLE FROM ISRAEL

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**Abstract:** This column reports on activities of the Judaica Librarians' Group, projects of the Jewish National and University Library, and developments in the field of Judaica in university and yeshiva libraries from 1994 to 1995. Also included is information on a new bookmobile service in Jerusalem that provides Judaica materials on tape, and about new editions of classic Judaica texts.

Ramat Gan, July 1994

## Judaica Librarians' Group

Continuing to present its members with a wide range of learning experiences, the Israeli Judaica Librarians' Group during its third year of existence conducted study days dealing with *shemita* (the sabbatical year), Nobel Prize-winning author Shemuel Yosef Agnon, and a day of *varia* during which forgeries of printed Hebrew books and a decorated wooden *sukah* (booth) were discussed. Appropriately, the study day on *shemita*, held in January 1994, took place at Kibbutz Hafetz Hayim, affiliated with the ultra-Orthodox party, Poale Agudat Yisrael.

Hosting the gathering was the Study Center for Commandments Connected with the Land of Israel, which is headquartered at the kibbutz. Rabbi Menahem Borshtin, whose works include a bibliography of publications on *shemita* (Borshtin, 5746), addressed the group about resources available for the study of this subject. Rabbi Nahum Bruner, Director of the Study Center, spoke to the assembled librarians about theoretical aspects of the subject, and to provide practical knowledge of farming practices during *shemita*, Rabbi Zev Pachino, Rabbi of Kibbutz Hafetz Hayim, described methods used by the kibbutz in its observance of the sabbatical year. The screening of a movie about *shemita*, made at the kibbutz, and a tour of the hot-house maintained by the Study Center to demonstrate permitted methods of growing crops during the sabbatical year concluded the day for the 25 librarians in attendance.

The study day dealing with Agnon took place at his home in Jerusalem. This home, which figures prominently in Agnon's writings, has been turned into a museum. Miri Bernstein, Museum Director, spoke about Agnon's life and his home. The author's daughter, Emuna Yaron, who has been editing his uncollected works, reminisced about her father. To round out the day, Rafael Weizer of the Manuscript Division of the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) spoke about the usefulness of the Agnon Archive at JNUL for gaining insight into the author and his world. A visit to Agnon's study added special interest for the more than 60 librarians who attended.

The year's final gathering, combining a study day and a business meeting, took place at Bar-Ilan University in June. The 40 librarians in attendance heard Dr. Sara Fraenkel, Rare Book Curator at Bar-Ilan and Chairperson of the Judaica Librarians' Group, discuss forgeries among printed Hebrew books. Mrs. Naomi Feuchtwanger-Sarig, lecturer at Bar-Ilan, spoke about the decorated wooden *sukah* from Fischach, Germany, now located in the Israel Museum. This *sukah* lay deteriorating for generations in an attic, when information about it reached Mrs. Feuchtwanger-Sarig's grandfather in the 1930s. He succeeded in gaining possession of the *sukah* and smuggling it out of Nazi Germany to Palestine. The lecture was based upon an article on the subject that recently appeared in *Jewish Art* (Feuchtwanger-Sarig, 1993/94).

During the business meeting, the governing board of the Judaica Librarians' Group was given a mandate to continue in office for another year. Represented on the governing board are university libraries, a yeshiva library, and a public library. The members present also authorized contacts with the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) concerning affiliation as an AJL chapter, as well as being a subgroup of the Israel Society of Special Libraries and Information Centers. Discussions on the matter were held at the AJL convention in

Atlanta (1994), where the group was represented by Dr. Fraenkel. At present (1995), details of being recognized as an AJL chapter are being worked out by AJL's Chapter Coordinator and the Chairman of the Judaica Librarians' Group.

## Jewish National and University Library

In March 1950 David ben Gurion said, "... our first duty is to save Hebrew literature. There are thousands of Hebrew manuscripts lying idle in various libraries. ... It is the duty of the State of Israel to acquire and gather those exiles of the spirit of Israel. ... I do not think that it will be possible to acquire ... the original manuscripts, but their reproductions ... will have the same practical value as the manuscripts themselves. ..." (*Collective Catalogue*, 1989, p. 8).

Thus was born what today is known as the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts. The uniqueness of this Institute has caused it to be the most heavily used of JNUL's special collections. According to JNUL's *Report on Activities in the Year 1993*, presented to the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University in April 1994, during the previous year manuscripts in the collection were consulted 16,701 times as compared to 3,188 requests for materials from all the other special collections held by JNUL (JNUL, 1994, p. 10 [English section]). During the year, 2126 new microfilms of manuscript were added to the collection (JNUL, 1994, p. 5 [English section]), mainly from the newly accessible libraries in the states of the former Soviet Union. [For more information on this, see Benjamin Richler's article in *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 8 (1994), pp. 142-144. —Ed.] The Institute's collection now includes copies of over 50,000 manuscripts.

Volumes 7 and 8 of the JNUL publication *Books and People* appeared in Tishre 5754 (September 1993) and Adar 5754 (March 1994). In addition to the publication's regular feature describing recently acquired manuscripts and printed items,

which appeared in both issues, major articles in volume 7 deal with:

the history of JNUL during the period 1896–1902;

Joseph Chasanowich (d. 1919) and the idea of a periodical to be produced by JNUL (for a synopsis of Chasanowich's overall contribution to JNUL in its early days see Baras, 1992, p. 24 [English section]);

descriptions of (1) a recently acquired document recording the lease of two houses to Rabbi Shmuel Salant, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem's Ashkenazi community from 1878 to 1909, for a period of 375 years; (2) two books whose printing was begun but never completed, from the collection of Michl Rabinowitz, a scholar-publisher who died in 1949; the books were donated by his daughters; (3) a manuscript that was originally in the collection of Rashid al-Din (b. ca 1245–d. 1318), a Jewish physician who converted to Islam and served in various positions at the court of the Ilkhanids, the Mongol rulers of Iraq and Greater Iran;

prayer and the Jewish holidays as viewed by a bibliographer, a description of a bibliography of articles about prayer and the holidays prepared by professor Joseph Tabory of Bar-Ilan University, which appeared as a special issue of JNUL's periodical *Kiryat Sefer* (Tabory, 1993) [See description by Libby Kahane in *Judaica Librarianship vol. 8 (1994), p. 169—Ed.*]; and

a report of a festive evening held honoring the Yiddish author Abraham Sutzkever on his 80th birthday.

Articles in volume 8 deal with letters recently added to the Einstein archive;

the printer and date of printing of an edition of the *Tur, Yoreh De'ah*, Ferrara [usually dated 5237, i.e., 1477];

Hallel in Karaite manuscripts and printed haggadot;

R' Shlomo Kluger and his circle;

more about the leasing of dwellings by Rabbi Shmuel Salant;

payment of donations in an Algerian community in 1791;

Ka-Zetnik [a Holocaust writer], the man and his accomplishments;

Franz Kafka studying Hebrew; and

a donation of documents from the collection of Elie Eliachar (d. 1981), dealing mainly with Jerusalem's Sephardic community.

### Israeli Universities

The Wurzweiler Central Library of Bar-Ilan University aided the university's new Jewish Art Program in mounting its first exhibition during Chanukah, 1993 (*ha-Tsofeh*, 1993a). The exhibition was entitled "Hanukkah Lights: Design in the Light of Halakhah," and dealt with the Chanukah menorah from the point of view of Jewish law. A catalog of the exhibition was issued (*Hanukkah*, 5754). It was first displayed in the lobby of the Judaica building and then moved to the exhibition area of the Central Library.

In addition to a new volume of the ongoing publication *Index to Articles in the Literary Supplements of the Daily Newspapers for 5750* [BI, 1993], the Indexing Unit of the Central Library produced an index to the first 25 volumes of *Bar-Ilan*, a yearbook presenting articles in the fields of Judaica and the humanities (Bar-Ilan, 1993), and the Law Library sponsored the publication of *Index to Legal Articles, Legislative and Judicial Citations, 1978–1991* (Rezinski, 5754).

It was announced in May 1994 by the library of the University of Haifa that the publication of the paper edition of *Index to Hebrew Periodicals* (IHP) would probably be discontinued (Epistle, 1994, p. 129). Databases from the University of Haifa besides IHP that are mounted on Aleph are the *Eretz Israel Data Base* and the *Tel-Hai Index to Hebrew Newspapers*. Future access to the combined Index will be online at most Israeli universities, or via microfiche or CD-ROM editions elsewhere, where Aleph is not accessible.

Recently, databases created by the Bar-Ilan University Library have been added to the combined Index. Besides Bar-Ilan's annual *Index to Articles in the Literary Supplements of the Daily Newspapers*, the material in indexes to periodicals such as *Melilah*, *Bar-Ilan* and *Orlogin* is included. All this data is searchable in a single file.

Recently added to the holdings of the Sourasky Central Library at Tel Aviv University was the Jaffe Collection of approximately 12,000 volumes of Hebrew poetry. This collection, dealing with the subject through the ages, was previously housed in the library of the Diaspora Museum, where access was very limited. The collection's transfer to the Sourasky Library combined with computerized cataloging in the ALEPH system now makes knowledge of its contents available worldwide.

### Yeshivot

At Yeshivat Neḥalim, located near Petach Tikvah, the 1993–94 school year saw the opening of the Ohel Moshe Library. Located in a new facility, the library contains primarily Torah-related material. Its catalog is computerized using the Sapphire system (distributed by Sapphire Information Systems, Kibbutz Mishmar haEmek, 19236 Israel), and a separate computer provides access to CD-ROM databases. Existing alongside the yeshiva library is the yeshiva's Teachers Institute library and multimedia center, whose collection deals primarily with Erez Yisrael (*ha-Tsofeh*, 1993b).

Yeshivat Har Etzion's indexing project, described in a prior column (Epistle, 1993, p. 101), received impetus when its staff was augmented during the summer of 1994. The project deals with rabbinic periodicals that are not included in Haifa University's IHP and with issues of other periodicals for the years prior to their coverage by IHP. To date, several thousand articles have been indexed and can be accessed via the local online catalog, which uses the ALEPH system.

### Bookmobile

During the summer of 1994, a new kind of bookmobile service was initiated by the Torah Culture Branch of the Jerusalem municipality (see photo). While stocking some 300 children's books, this bookmobile's main item, provided at 30 stops in religious sections of the city, is audiotaped lectures on religious subjects. About 12,000 audiotapes in three languages are available for loan or—for a nominal fee—on-the-spot reproduction on high-speed copying machines. The bookmobile itself was purchased by the City of Jerusalem, and the tapes were bought with the help of private donations (*ha-Tsofeh*, 1994).

## New Publications

In a prior column (Epistle, 1993, p. 101), information was given about a new edition of Nathan of Rome's *'Arukh*, a Talmudic dictionary produced in the 12th century. The editor of that work, Rabbi Meir Meizelish, has continued his work on the *'Arukh* and has published a second volume entitled *he-'Arukh 'al ha-Talmud ha-Yerushalmi* [*The 'Arukh on the Jerusalem Talmud*] (Natan ben Yehi'el mi-Romi, 5754). As in the first work, definitions of words prepared by Nathan of Rome have been arranged according to their appearance in the Jerusalem Talmud, at variance with their appearance in the original publication in an alphabetical listing. Numerous pictures have been added to give a visual dimension to many of the terms. To honor Rabbi Meizelish's contribution to the field of Judaica scholarship, he was hosted at a literary party sponsored by the Torah Culture Branch of the Jerusalem Municipality, at which Rabbi Simcha ha-Cohen Kook, Chief Rabbi of Rehovot, spoke about the importance of the new edition of the *'Arukh*.

Continuing his editing of classic Jewish texts, mentioned in Epistle, 1993, p. 101, Rabbi Itzhac Shailat of Yeshivat Birkat Mosheh in Ma'ale Adumim recently published a new edition of Maimonides' commentary to *Pirke Avot* [commonly called in English *Ethics of the Fathers*] (Mosheh ben Maimon, 5754). The new edition includes the Arabic original of the commentary, a new Hebrew translation, and a commentary prepared by the editor.

The second volume of Bar-Ilan University's new edition of the *Mikra'ot Gedolot* [Bible with commentaries], *Mikra'ot gedolot ha-keter*, based primarily on the Aleppo Codex, appeared in 1993. This volume includes the First and Second Books of Samuel (*Mikra'ot gedolot*, 5753).

Published to coincide with a conference entitled "The World of Prayer," held in April 1994 at Bar-Ilan University, was a facsimile edition of a small-format prayer book for travelers, originally published in 1628 (*Sidur*, 5754). Edited by Professor Joseph Tabory and Dr. Meir Raffeld of Bar-Ilan's Talmud Department, the work also includes an extensive introduction treating, among other aspects of the importance of prayer books, their contribution to knowledge about Jewish history and culture, and a bibliography of articles dealing with the prayer book and with Jewish holidays, which is a supplement to Professor Tabory's above-mentioned bibliography.



**Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert cuts the ribbon, inaugurating a bookmobile service providing Torah lectures on audiotape.**

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