Retrospective Conversion of Hebraica Catalog Records: Options, Issues, and Visions*

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Introduction

Retrospective conversion (or *recon*) is a term that refers to the conversion of existing bibliographic records (most often catalog cards) into computer-readable form (Reed-Scott, 1985).

A recon project is generally based on the shelflist of a library, which theoretically has one record per title, reflecting the order on the shelves. Since inventory and weeding are often undertaken simultaneously with recon (Finn, 1987), the shelflist is the ideal record to work with. For libraries that do not have a shelflist, or whose shelflist contains incomplete cataloging data, the main entry catalog (official catalog) or public author-title catalog may serve to provide an accurate record of the library's holdings.

Retrospective conversion in research libraries is generally done through a bibliographic utility, the major ones in the U.S. being OCLC (the Online Computer Library Center) and RLIN (the Research Libraries Information Network). The standards committees of these utilities recognize that cataloging rules have changed greatly over the past few decades. They do not require libraries to reexamine and recatalog their older holdings for a recon project, but simply to input existing cataloging data with a few format changes. The bibliographic standards for recon projects issued by both of these utilities (OCLC, 1985; RLG, 1982) recommend changing punctuation between title page data elements to conform to ISBD/AACR2 (International Standard Bibliographic Description/*Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2nd ed.). In addition, elements of the bibliographic record are identified through MARC (machine-readable cataloging) tags. Although the old cataloging data is reformatted, the content of the bibliographic record, especially the form of headings, may deviate from current cataloging rules. The level of cataloging is therefore coded to indicate to the user that older cataloging has not been upgraded.

RLIN is the only bibliographic utility with a Hebraic capability (Aliprand, 1987), which makes it attractive to Judaica research libraries. To do retrospective conversion on RLIN, a library must first be a member of the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and obtain approval for a recon project. Lower rates are charged for recon than for current cataloging.

A library does not have to qualify as a research library to join OCLC, which has a similar price structure to that of RLIN for recon—discount rates for non-prime time derived cataloging and no charge for original input of records new to the database.

OCLC offers a batch recon service which may also be used by non-members. OCLC staff search a card file against the OCLC database and copy 'hits' or machine-readable bibliographic records that match the key elements on the catalog cards. Batch recon is cheaper than online methods.

RLG is planning to offer a batch recon service as well in which the user will key brief cataloging data on floppy discs and can specify the desired level of cataloging to ensure quality data. This service is scheduled to become available in May 1988.

Commercial vendors have also gone into the recon business, capitalizing on the non-copyrightability of the Library of Congress MARC database. LC itself offers a recon service known as Select MARC (LC, 1985). Bibliographic utilities also include the MARC database, and in addition provide access to cataloging records contributed by their member libraries. Besides OCLC and RLIN, WLN and UTLAS are other library networks offering recon services.

LC began cataloging via MARC in 1968, but Carrollton Press has undertaken a REMARC project which converts pre-MARC LC cataloging data to machine-readable form, including romanized data for Hebraic works. The use of REMARC for retrospective conversion of a research library catalog has been described by Drake & Smith (1984).

With millions of bibliographic records already in machine-readable form, a retrospective conversion project for the average American library consists of finding "hits" in one of the above databases for its bibliographic records and copying them onto magnetic tape or some other medium.

In OCLC's brochures on its recon services, it is stated that the price structure is based on the assumptions that at least 95% of the titles are books in the English language, and that hits are accepted uncritically. Customization services are offered, but these incur higher charges.

Such assumptions do not apply to large research libraries that collect materials in many formats and languages. In this arena, leadership has been exercised by the Association of Research Libraries, which has tried to orchestrate a cooperative, coordinated approach to retrospective conversion of the records of American scholarly resources. The Council on Library Resources has funded a number of ARL studies and reports in this area, the best known of which is called *Issues in Retrospective Conversion* (Reed-Scott, 1984). If a research library applies for a government grant for recon, getting an ARL stamp of approval can be very helpful.

It is generally assumed that if a library is automating and planning an online catalog, it is desirable that its older records be converted to machine-readable form so that two systems need not be maintained. A dissenting opinion has, however, been registered regarding the desirability of total recon of research library catalogs. Arnold Hirshon (1985), in an editorial entitled "The Em-

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peror's Bibliographic New Clothes" in *RTSD Newsletter* (published by the Resources and Technical Services Division of the American Library Association), argues that libraries are jumping on the recon bandwagon just as they switched to LC classification en masse in the late sixties. He feels the latter was a mistake because Dewey's hierarchical structure is better for online searching, and that total recon is unnecessary for large research libraries, in which it has been demonstrated that a large portion of the collection is never used. Hirshon suggests that only materials that circulate be converted. (A similar policy was suggested for reclassification projects in a previous decade.)

Other studies have shown, however, that library users find it unacceptable to have to search both the online catalog and a closed card catalog. Viewing the computer as an oracle, they believe that if it reports a title as not held, this must be true; eventually, total disuse of older materials results. In our own field, Amnon Zipin (1984) has reported on the experience at Ohio State University, in which he observed a lack of use of the Hebraica collection for which a catalog was maintained in card form when all Roman-alphabet materials were input into the online catalog. Ultimately, Zipin decided that Romanized input was preferable to non-inclusion of Hebraica in the general catalog.

Coordinated Plans for Hebraica Recon

In June 1985, anticipating that RLIN's Hebraic capability would soon be operational, the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies (CARLJS), under the auspices of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, submitted a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop a coordinated plan for retrospective conversion of Hebraica by the large specialized Judaica research libraries in the U.S. The proposal was prepared in consultation with Jutta Reed-Scott of the Association of Research Libraries, who indicated that such a project would fit in very well with ARL's national plan for retrospective conversion.

The proposal, entitled "Creation of a Jewish Studies Conspectus and Design of a Hebraic Bibliographic Database for the Research Libraries Information Network," was praised by reviewers for the National Endowment, but was not funded because the project was considered premature. NEH's reviewers were indeed prescient, because RLIN's Hebraic capability became operational only in early 1988, and the one-year project—which was to have included training on that system—was scheduled to end in May 1987.

CARLJS held several follow-up meetings on this proposal, with the purpose of developing strategies for submission of a new one. At these meetings, greater resistance to the idea of a cooperative project was encountered. First, it was suggested that older Hebraica records could remain in card form and that RLIN should be used only for cataloging new acquisitions. Second, many of the Judaica library administrators attending the meeting insisted that a Hebraic card capability in RLIN was a prerequisite to their participation in the network, because local online catalogs with a Hebraic capability are not available—and if they were, they would not be affordable.

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The current focus of CARLJS activity is on the specifications for a Hebraica card program, i.e., the format in which a combination of Hebrew and Roman bibliographic elements should be printed. It is possible that RLIN will eventually provide a Hebrew card capability through its central card service or develop software to print Hebrew cards locally. Alternatively, a commercial software firm or even the Library of Congress may develop a program for printing cards from machine-readable Hebraic records in RLIN.

Assuming the card problem is solved, a continuing concern in the Judaica library community has been the requirement for input of parallel Romanized bibliographic data for Hebraica records in RLIN. Other bibliographic utilities that can accommodate *only* Roman data require the same Romanized elements, and Amnon Zipin (1984) has described the difficulty of creating completely Romanized Hebraica records for OCLC.

Some potential users of RLIN feel, however, that once Hebrew script is available, Romanization is unnecessary and a waste of time. Some have proposed that ANSI-reversible Romanization (ANSI, 1975) be applied, rather than ALA/LC Romanization, which involves reconstruction of vowel points. This issue has been studied by RLG's Bibtech committee, which sets bibliographic standards for the network, and the decision has been made not to approve the alternative Romanization (even though the New York Public Library has already input thousands of Hebraica records using this system) because it would lead to a split in the database, i.e., records for the identical title would not "cluster," in RLIN's terms. The implication of this decision is that Hebraica recon will be time-consuming, involve highly trained staff, and hence be expensive.

There are two developments that should lower the number of original Romanized catalog records that have to be created for Hebraica:

1. In addition to producing printed Hebraica cards in traditional format, the Library of Congress has been inputting fully Romanized records for Hebraica in its MARC database since 1983, when the decision was made to computerize production of the National Union Catalog, and non-Roman alphabets could not be accommodated. From early 1988, LC will be using RLIN's Hebrew capability and adding parallel Romanization.

2. Harvard University has converted its entire Hebraica catalog into machine-readable form (in Romanization), upgrading descriptive headings to AACR2 forms and subject headings according to current LC practice. The database consists of over 100,000 non-unique titles, since microfilms of books are entered as separate records. The breakdown of records by language is roughly 85,000 Hebrew; 18,000 Yiddish. The database is expected to be complete by the end of 1987 and should be loaded on both OCLC and RLIN. Judaica libraries will be able to derive records from Harvard's Hebraica database on RLIN and add Hebrew script data to the descriptive cataloging, and optionally, Hebrew access points.

While this is a massive database, it clearly does not cover all of the Hebraica in American libraries, so there is still a need to plan a cooperative recon project for Hebraica.

Why Recon for Hebraica?

Since there is some resistance within the Judaica library community to the idea of a coordinated Hebraica recon project, the reasons for and benefits of such a project need to be articulated.

1. *Enhancement of public service* and improved access for scholars to Hebraica. RLIN has powerful search capabilities by every title word, Hebrew author names, and Library of Congress Subject Headings, which will have a dramatic effect on Judaica reference service.

2. *Resource sharing*—Automated interlibrary loan and better management of acquisitions will be facilitated via RLIN, obviating duplicate purchases of expensive items by neighboring Judaica libraries.

3. *Cooperative preservation* projects are ideally based on a centralized bibliographic database to record who has microfilmed what. RLG has the administrative mechanism in place for such a cooperative project for Hebraica.

4. *Grantsmanship*—A cooperative recon project can attract funds from government agencies and private foundations, whereas applications from individual libraries for recon may be viewed as housekeeping projects, as were reclassification projects in a previous decade.

My vision of a Hebraica recon project is that representatives of major Judaica libraries should meet and divide the corpus of Hebraica by language and genre according to collection strengths, e.g., liturgy, Rabbinics, Yiddish, music. When the library with the richest collection in each category has converted its records, others will be able to derive cataloging from RLIN for works it owns in that genre.

As for cataloging quality, I would like to see more stringent bibliographic standards applied than the utilities have established. It is interesting that in the Library of Congress original feasibility study on recon, contemporaneous cataloging standards were recommended for recon projects (RECON, 1969). I believe that no group of materials has been affected more by changes in cataloging rules than Hebraica/Judaica. This includes title page transcription, name headings, corporate headings, liturgical headings, and subject headings. Although some librarians view any LC cataloging copy as sacred, in my view, old cataloging copy in which the title *Sholem Aleykhem's Ale Verk* was transcribed by LC as *Ale verk*, and the main entry given was **Rabinowitz, Shalom**—is worthless.

There are tens of thousands of LC Hebraica cards from which the author statement in Hebrew characters was omitted; this cannot be reconstructed from the Romanization. RLIN has a Hebraic capability in its cataloging subsystem before non-Roman data can be accommodated in its authority files. Since headings will not be under centralized authority control, it is important that Roman forms be established in accordance with AACR2 and that access points in the Hebrew script be input by Judaica libraries. This will, in many cases, involve reexamination of the work.

The Romanization of the title proper on thousands of LC printed cards is also incorrect according to current standards, e.g., *geschichte* for the Yiddish word currently transcribed as *geshikhte.*

Should we copy thousands of LC records with the now obsolete heading ***Jews. Liturgy and Ritual***, which has been replaced by a complex subject heading structure? Should we derive older catalog records with the separate headings ***World War, 1939-1945—Jews*** and ***World War, 1939-1945—Poland*** for a book about the Holocaust in Poland? What implications does this have for the consistency and completeness of subject searching? The user cannot be expected to know the history of cataloging practices, and if we want to serve our patrons well, recon for Hebraica will often involve recataloging.

Unlike the typical American public library, we cannot go to an outside vendor for the conversion of our Hebraica records. Optical character recognition, envisioned as a fast technology for converting catalog cards into machine-readable form (Asher, 1982, p. 156), is out of the question for multi-script catalog cards in a variety of typefaces. Trained Judaica catalogers are the only ones who can create this proposed database. The challenge to Judaica library administrators is to allocate staff and other resources to this important project and to consider the collective good of the Judaica research community—not only the priorities of their libraries.

In my view, until we have a local library management system with Hebrew capability, we *can* use RLIN as our online catalog. Although this method of access will incur significant telecommunications and search charges, I believe it is cheaper than the acquisition of minicomputers and library management software, not to mention hiring local systems people. It has been noted that the cost of storing all the machine-readable records of a library in a local online catalog exceeds the cost of creating them after four years (Butler *et al.*, 1978, p. 120).

Complete retrospective conversion of Hebraica and Judaica bibliographic records for all formats—books, serials, music, and manuscripts—is a gargantuan task. It will take planning, time, staff—and a lot of money. If the task seems overwhelming, recall the Hebrew maxim "Lo 'alekha ha-melakhah li-gmor ve-lo atah ben ḥorin le-hibatel mi-menah." (You are not called upon to complete the work, yet you are not free to evade it.)—*Ethics of the Fathers* 2:21.

I hope many of you will take up the challenge.

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Retrospective Conversion of Hebraica at Brandeis University*

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Introduction

At Brandeis, many of our decisions regarding retrospective conversion of our Hebraica catalog to machine-readable form were made in the highly charged atmosphere of library-wide automation. In the Fall of 1984, about 350,000 bibliographic records, or close to 90% of our general collection, were already online when the circulation module of our local GEAC integrated system came up. The bibliographic system, the online catalog, and the acquisitions system followed the circulation system in December (1984), April (1985), and July (1985) respectively. Our totally integrated library system, Library Online User Information System, known affectionately as LOUIS—remember: we are named for Justice Brandeis—was a reality.

That is, it was a reality for some. While Brandeis' general catalogers were using OCLC and GEAC for bibliographic entry, manual production of cards was still the rule for the Hebraica section. Moving from there to an online environment seemed a distant dream.

This brief presentation concentrates on how we moved to cataloging Hebraica online and on the decisions that had to be made and that we are making along the way. A brief "show-and-tell" i.e., a description of what-are-we-really-doing-now, follows.

Standards

Before seeking financial support for the project, we decided upon our basic bibliographic standard: we wanted to preserve the Hebraic vernacular script in our online record; anything less would not have served our constituency of users. Brandeis therefore joined the Research Libraries Group as a special member to utilize the expected Hebraic capability. Credit must be given to the Research Libraries Information Network for working on the intricacies of this software program, now (June 1987) in its very last stages of development; the Hebraic capability is scheduled to be installed in production at the end of this year. Brandeis, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library will be the first group to use this new system.

Our online cataloging standards are identical to those applied in our manual procedures: AACR2 and Library of Congress Subject Headings. For retrospective conversion, we use the guidelines established by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the Research Libraries Group (RLG). For romanization, we follow the Library of Congress Hebraic romanization tables.

The application of these national standards to our local GEAC system was essential. The general retrospective conversion project at Brandeis on OCLC also prepared us for the Hebraic online project on RLIN. I was in charge of "the remainders of retro," that is, of the general retrospective conversion project, after the GEAC system came up. This sharpened my senses to the requirements and needs of a retro project and especially to its relationship to our local online system. Our ultimate goal for the Hebraic retrospective conversion project is to load the RLIN records containing Hebrew script into our local GEAC system in order to create a local online system which will meet the needs of users of both the general and Hebraic collections.

Our GEAC integrated online system demands consistency among library functions, i.e., circulation, online catalog, and bibliographic functions, and we in Hebraica had to be aware of this. In fact, we have been using the GEAC automated circulation system since its beginnings. General library policy has demanded that each circulating item be barcoded and recorded in the circulation database. Since GEAC circulation began, approximately 7500 Hebraic volumes out of a total of about 40,000 Hebraic volumes in the Brandeis collection have circulated and, consequently, are already represented in our circulation system—but only in a brief romanized form. In other words, an author/title/call number record has been put into the GEAC circulation system for any circulating item which was not in the Brandeis main database, including Hebrew materials. We want our fully-tagged MARC records from RLIN to re-

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