

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

Career Prospects of Judaica Librarians

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Co-Editor

As an educator and consultant, I attend many professional meetings, which gives me an opportunity to observe attitudes to librarians in general and Judaica librarians in particular. At one meeting I attended recently, the subject of recruitment to the profession of Judaica librarianship was discussed. One veteran librarian commented that no one should be encouraged to enter this field because it has no *career ladder*. If a young person does express interest in this field, she should be encouraged to train for a "fallback job" first, acquiring a degree in a discipline such as Semitic Studies before entering library school. In this editorial, I disagree with all these points and take issue with this bleak view of the career prospects of the Judaica librarian.

Career Ladder—It is true that many Judaica libraries have only one professional on the staff, and that many universities with Jewish Studies departments employ only one bibliographer and perhaps one Hebraica cataloger. Most Judaica librarians advance their careers through lateral moves, however, rather than moving up the hierarchy of a single institution. I am acquainted with someone whose first job was in a synagogue library, and now holds an endowed chair at a Judaica research library. The increase in the number of such chairs over the past few years is evidence of the increasing respect accorded to our field.

Judaica librarians who choose not to make lateral moves are often accorded higher ranks and salaries by their parent institutions, even if the size of their staff does not increase. Faculty status is held by many Judaica librarians in academic settings, and "Director of Library Services" is a job title held by several synagogue librarians who have contributed to this journal.

Job Outlook—As I see it, the current demand for Judaica librarians is not a temporary phenomenon. As an increasing number of Judaica libraries of all types begin to automate, the need for people with training in library and information science and a relevant subject background will increase. As teachers, principals, and parents associated with Jew-

ish schools become aware of how a quality library can enhance an educational program, the demand for professionals to organize such learning centers can only rise. Adult patrons of synagogue library services are likely to request a greater variety of media offerings and access to computerized information systems, necessitating increased sophistication in the management of such libraries.

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Although not a futurist, I believe Jewish Studies is in a healthy state, and that the demand for Judaica research librarians will grow, especially as more universities recognize the value of scientific collection management and create the position of Judaica Bibliographer—apart from Judaica Reference Librarian and Hebraica Cataloger. Specialized Judaica research libraries and seminaries are also adding to their library staffs and are paying increased attention to their archives, creating even more jobs for those skilled in the organization of information.

Opportunities for the Judaica librarian are not limited to the institutional setting of a library. For example, the self-starter with indexing skills may enhance our access to Judaic literature, and with computer skills, may develop databases to meet a variety of information needs.

Education and Training—I have always disagreed with those who feel that a subject masters is necessary for college librarians in addition to a masters in library science, and I believe that the need for the second masters

is increasingly being challenged. In Judaica as well, I feel that a general background in Jewish Studies and basic familiarity with many languages is more useful than a masters in Akkadian, e.g., and no knowledge of Yiddish or French. Expertise in one narrow area of Jewish Studies does not prepare a librarian for balanced Judaica collection development, reference service, or cataloging. The supposed appreciation of the research process which is gained through the pursuit of the second masters is of questionable value. In any case, a Judaica subject masters should not be pursued *before* the library science degree, as it prepares one for neither college-level teaching (which demands a doctorate) or a career in librarianship.

Fallback Jobs—The "fallback job" of a Judaica librarian is general librarianship. No graduate program of library and information science gives certification in Judaica librarianship as a specialty, although some give credit for courses in Judaica librarianship taken at other institutions. Thus, every Judaica librarian is trained first as a general librarian, and it is worth noting that the current demand for professionals in all types of libraries is unprecedented. *Money* magazine predicted that the job skills most in demand in the year 2000 would be computer science with an overlay of library-information science. *Money* is what often stimulates Judaica librarians to leave our specialty and move into other areas of the field, and this fact leads me to my final point.

Salary Structure—It is well known that, compared to other professionals, librarians are not well paid, and that within this profession, those associated with the humanities earn less than those in the sciences. Judaica librarians in special libraries tend to be paid less than their humanities counterparts in large universities. In my view, however, rather than advising young people not to enter this specialty, directors of Judaica libraries should be fighting for higher salaries for their staff members to minimize the turnover problem and enhance recruitment possibilities. It is shameful to offer a salary of \$18,000 a year to a young person with a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and knowledge of three languages.

COMMENTARIES

IN THE BEGINNING (Continued)

In times of financial crisis, libraries often experience budgetary cutbacks. In the general library literature, one sometimes reads of politicians categorizing libraries as unnecessary cultural frills. In the Judaica community, we enjoy a much greater degree of respect for books, libraries, and learning—which protects us from such attitudes, but which cannot, of course, guarantee full financial support. Administrators of libraries must deal with the difficult question of the percentage of resources to allocate to materials vs. staff.

No one enters Judaica librarianship for the money. It is for the thrill of working with subject matter you love and the satisfaction of using the languages and knowledge you have acquired. There are many devoted volunteers in this field, without whom numerous school and synagogue libraries could not function.

Our journal, *Judaica Librarianship*, is a volunteer effort as well, a publication designed to represent the profession and enhance its image. The increasing flow of high-quality manuscripts to our offices from all segments of the Judaica library community serves as evidence of the vitality of the field and of excellent career prospects for those who choose to enter this exciting and rewarding profession.

Dear Bella and Marcia:

Kudos to the both of you upon the appearance of the latest issue of JL. It is a wonderful issue containing something for everyone. The articles range from the technical to the practical, from the scholarly to the just plain interesting and informative.

With cordial best wishes, both professionally and personally, for the New Year.

*Sincerely,
Harvey P. Horowitz
Librarian
Frances-Henry Library
Hebrew Union College—
Jewish Institute of Religion
Los Angeles, CA*

Children's Literature

To the Editors:

Many thanks to Rachel Meir for an excellent article on "Introducing Holocaust Literature to Children." She presents the unique problems generic to writing about the Holocaust as well as provides insights to the perception and psychological needs of a child absorbing such information.

Editing as diverse and comprehensive a journal such as this is no easy task, and my commendations to the editors for a superb job.

*Sincerely,
Fayge Safran
Editor, TEN DAAT
Torah Education Network
An affiliate of Yeshiva University
New York, NY*

Rare Books

To Our Readers:

It has been brought to the attention of the editors that a full version of Israel Mehlman's paper, "What Makes a Hebrew Book Rare?" (of which we published excerpts with notes by Menahem Schmelzer in JL vol. 3) appeared in the *Jewish Book Annual* [JBA] Volume 39 (1981–1982) in an anonymous translation under the title "What Makes Antique Hebrew Books So Rare?"

There are several ironic aspects to this discovery. First, several members of JL's Editorial Board are also on the Editorial Advisory Board of JBA as listed in vol. 39. The *Jewish Book Annual* is surely found in the libraries of all members of JL's Editorial Board, and yet none recalled this prior publication.

Second, the editors of JL had written to the Jewish National & University Library, publisher of the Hebrew book in which Mehlman's essay on rare books originally appeared, to request permission to publish the translated excerpts; JNUL did not mention in its response that such permission had previously been granted. (JBA cited the original source, but does not indicate that publication of the translation was authorized by the publisher.)

Could a systematic search have identified the prior translation? JBA is not indexed by the *American Index to Jewish Periodicals*, but is covered by the selective Israeli tool *Index of Articles on Jewish Studies*, known

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