LEARNING

A Graduate-Level Course on Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging

Bella Hass Weinberg
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
and
St. John's University
New York

Need for the Course

The "Cataloger Crisis" is a well-known national phenomenon (Hill, 1985), and the crisis in Judaica catalogers is even more acute. The Association of Jewish Libraries' Job Clearinghouse constantly reports openings for Hebraica catalogers in academic and research libraries throughout the U.S. *[See the article by Pearl Berger in the MANAGEMENT department of this issue.]*

Many types of knowledge are demanded of these prospective employees: (a) general library science knowledge, notably familiarity with: the standard code for descriptive cataloging, AACR2 (*Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* 2nd ed.), Library of Congress Subject Headings, and the Library of Congress Classification; (b) knowledge of Jewish languages, mainly Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as of their coterritorial languages, such as Arabic, Russian, Polish, or German; (c) computer literacy and familiarity with the input requirements of a major bibliographic utility such as OCLC or RLIN. A Jewish Studies background is also desirable, as is experience.

Few applicants for positions come with all these types of knowledge, and many Judaica libraries hire people fresh out of library school with knowledge of Hebrew and no prior experience. In such cases, there is a great training burden on the institution, which is time-consuming and expensive. Some Judaica libraries hire people without masters' degrees in library science to serve as Hebraica catalogers, and, in such cases, the training burden in terms of general principles and tools of cataloging is even greater.

The crisis in Judaica catalogers is expected to become more acute as the Hebraic capability of the Research Libraries Information Network (Aliprand, 1987) is now operational.

Judaica libraries will join the Research Libraries Group (RLG) for this reason, and university libraries with Jewish Studies collections are also expected to use RLIN's Hebrew character set in cataloging current materials as well as for retrospective conversion of Hebraica card catalogs.

In response to these needs, a graduate-level course entitled "Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging" was offered by the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in the Spring of 1987.

Background of the Course

In recent issues of this journal, a course in Judaica bibliography offered at Brandeis was described by Cutter (1985), and a series of courses for synagogue librarians was written up by Posner (1987). Information on courses in Judaica librarianship that are offered currently in the U.S. is being gathered by a committee of the Association of Jewish Libraries, and it is hoped that the results of that survey will be published.

The history of courses in Judaica librarianship is difficult to write because descriptions of most of the courses have not been published. The requisite information is, in most cases, buried in catalogs of Jewish Studies programs, which are not covered by periodical indexes, and hence can only be gathered via a sequential search of the catalogs. For example, in browsing through an old catalog, it was discovered serendipitously that over four decades ago, YIVO had offered a series of short courses on Judaica bibliography and libraries (YIVO, 1942).

In describing the background of the course which is the subject of this paper, only related courses in which the instructor was directly involved are noted. Similarly, in

Charles Berlin's survey of *Library Resources for Jewish Studies in the United States*, only Harvard/Brandeis internships in Jewish librarianship were mentioned, based, of course, on the author's personal knowledge (Berlin, 1975, p. 22). A general history of education for Judaica librarianship must be set aside for another researcher to write.

In the Spring of 1974, the Max Weinreich Center offered a course entitled "Problems in [Judaica] Bibliography and Librarianship: a Workshop for Graduate Students and Librarians." The course, which was open to students of both Jewish Studies and library science, was taught by YIVO librarians, and included several units on cataloging (bibliographic organization) in addition to a survey of the primary reference works in Judaica. The course was repeated in the Spring of 1975.

In the same year, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a series of "Courses for Librarians of Judaica," as the brochure indicated. One was devoted to Judaica bibliography and reference works, a second to Hebrew paleography (manuscripts), and a third was entitled "Special Problems in Cataloging and Classifying Judaica." I was invited to participate in the teaching of the latter course. To avoid duplication with the JTS course, the Max Weinreich Center, beginning with its 1975–76 *Bulletin*, listed a course entitled "Field Work: Internship in Judaica Librarianship." The prerequisites included completion of an introductory cataloging or reference course in a library school and knowledge of Yiddish or Hebrew. Internships in Judaica reference or cataloging were offered.

The Jewish Theological Seminary's cataloging course was taught twice—in the Summer and Fall of 1975. The summer course

was concentrated into a period of several weeks and attracted students from all over the U.S. The first half of the course was taught by Rabbi Theodore Wiener, representing the Library of Congress (LC), who explained LC practices in Hebraica and Judaica cataloging. The second part of the course, which I taught, was titled "Hebraica Cataloging: Theoretical Aspects"; it examined LC cataloging critically and described alternate systems. The basic "text" for this component of the course was my draft chapter on "Hebraica Cataloging and Classification" (Weinberg, 1980), that had been commissioned for a book on *Cataloging and Classification of Non-Western Material.* (The book was not published until five years after the preparation of that draft, and the Hebraica chapter had to be revised three times to keep up with major changes in the field, notably the publication of AACR2.)

The JTS cataloging course was repeated in the Fall semester of 1975 with one class session per week; this "edition" of the course attracted mainly library science students and professional librarians from the New York metropolitan area. The course description read: "A survey of the various classification and subject heading systems as applied to Judaic materials. Establishment of main entries for books printed in Hebrew characters. Specific problems relating to the descriptive cataloging of Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino books. Transliteration systems. A course in general cataloging and classification is a prerequisite." This course was the direct ancestor of the one taught in 1987 at YIVO.

As a visiting lecturer at the Graduate School of Library and Archive Studies of the Hebrew University in 1980–81, I had found that Israelis do not treat Judaica *cataloging* as a separate subject (although Judaica classification, bibliography, and the history of the Hebrew book are separate courses). Since Hebrew is their native language and Romanization is not applied in their catalogs, Israeli librarians require training primarily in American cataloging codes and systems for subject analysis and classification. Berlin (1975, p. 21) had previously observed that Israeli library schools do not supply training for Judaica librarians in American academic libraries.

In concluding this background section, mention will be made of one more related course given in the summers of 1984 and 1986 at St. John's University. "Information Sources in Religion" included units on cataloging, classification, and subject headings for religious materials, with significant attention to Judaica, but a knowledge of Hebrew was not a prerequisite, in consideration of the diverse backgrounds of the students. Half of them were primarily interested in Judaica librarianship, and one subsequently enrolled in the cataloging course at YIVO.

Course Description

The Max Weinreich Center mailed out a course announcement for "Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging" in the fall of 1986 to members of the Association of Jewish Libraries, schools of library science, and major library periodicals. The description on the flyer read: "The course will focus on Hebraica and Judaica cataloging for research and academic libraries, with an emphasis on Library of Congress systems. Topics to be covered include: Romanization, formation of headings for Hebrew and Yiddish authors, cataloging of liturgical works, Judaica subject headings and classification schemes, and multi-script authority files." The emphasis of the course was more practical than the one taught at JTS in recognition of the demand for catalogers who can handle Hebraica and Judaica in accordance with LC practice.

As for the audience of the course, the flyer indicated "the course is oriented towards library school students and recent graduates as well as beginning Judaica and Hebraica catalogers. Prerequisites for admission are a reading knowledge of Hebrew or Yiddish and permission of instructor. Some training or experience in cataloging will be helpful." Formal library science training on the graduate level was not a prerequisite, in recognition of the fact that many institutions employ Hebraica catalogers without such experience.

Responses to the flyer were received from all over the country, with advance requests for videotapes and copies of the syllabus and handouts. Filming of the lectures was not economically feasible, however. Registrants were primarily from the Greater New York area; one student came from another state to attend the series of lectures on Romanization. The anticipated variety of educational backgrounds was found in the students that enrolled in the course: some had masters' degrees in library science, others were enrolled in library schools, and a third group was working in Judaica libraries without formal library training. All of the students had a good knowledge of Hebrew.

The section of the syllabus entitled "Course Content and Method" serves to explain the scope of the course in greater detail: "The course will review the theoretical aspects of cataloging and classification that are relevant to Hebraica and Judaica and will focus on the current practices of the Library of Congress (LC). Critiques and modifications of LC cataloging will also be discussed, and alternative systems will be touched upon. (The course will not teach MARC (machine-readable cataloging) tagging or the formats of individual bibliographic utilities such as OCLC or RLIN.) Lectures will be illustrated with handouts of excerpts from the cataloging codes and classification systems discussed, and with samples of LC cataloging. Questions and student participation in the discussions are encouraged. There will be classroom exercises as well as homework assignments."

The course objectives were: (1) to prepare the student to work as a Hebraica/Judaica cataloger in a library using LC systems in a manual or online environment; (2) to prepare the student to make judgments in the evaluation of LC cataloging copy; and (3) to develop an interest in Judaica cataloging issues and to encourage involvement in professional organizations that lobby for change in this area.

Lists of reference sources and recommended readings were provided for each unit; only English-language readings were assigned because, in the experience of the instructor, the majority of American Judaica librarians cannot handle technical library literature in Hebrew. The reading lists had two purposes: (1) to serve as the basis of class discussions, and (2) to provide the student with bibliographies for future reference. The readings were selected for their current relevance to Judaica catalogers in academic or research library settings.

Shortly before the course began, word was received of a forthcoming book from the Library of Congress entitled *Hebraica Cataloging: a Guide to ALA/LC Romanization and Descriptive Cataloging.* Had it been published in time, it could have served as a textbook for a good portion of the course. Instead, the primary sources on which the guide is based—articles from *Cataloging Service Bulletin* in particular—were used to document LC rules. The best source of examples was the YIVO Library's subscription to current LC printed Hebraica cards. Many readings and handouts were from *Judaica Librarianship,* primarily from its sections ALEF BIT (automation) and CATALOG DEPARTMENT.

Course Outline

The class met for twelve two-and-a-half hour sessions. The outline of the topics was as follows:

I.   *Introduction & Linguistic Overview*
     Definitions of Hebraica and
          Judaica.

Linguistic overview of languages using the Hebrew alphabet.
Variant orthography [spelling] in Hebrew and Yiddish.
Attempts to standardize Hebrew and Yiddish orthography.
Romanization vs. original alphabet cataloging.
Graphic and phonetic access to catalogs.
Definitions of transliteration, transcription and Romanization.

II. *Library of Congress Romanization*
Popular Romanizations of Hebrew.
Scholarly Romanizations of Hebrew.
Library of Congress Romanization of Hebrew.
Library of Congress rules for Romanization of numbers, abbreviations, etc.
Reference sources for the Romanization of Hebrew.

III. *Yiddish and Reversible Romanization*
Library of Congress vs. YIVO Romanization of Yiddish
— Differences in the table of consonants.
— Differences in the treatment of Hebraisms.
ANSI Reversible Romanization of the Hebrew Script.

IV. *Descriptive Cataloging*
International Standard Bibliographic Description.
Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd ed.
Library of Congress Rule Interpretations.
Hebraica title page transcription.
Unusual imprints in Hebraica.
Main entry for Hebraica: Author vs. Title.
Establishing Hebrew and Yiddish name headings.

V. *Hebraica Headings and Authority Files*
Uniform titles.
Corporate headings.
Series and serials.
Authority files.
Sources of Hebraica and Judaica cataloging data.
Comparison of American and Israeli cataloging codes for Hebraica.

VI. *Hebraica Filing Issues*
Hebrew and Yiddish words and particles ignored in filing.
Unification of orthography.

Filing Hebraica titles in the integrated catalog.

VII. *Subject Cataloging*
Introduction to Library of Congress Subject Headings.
The cross reference structure of Library of Congress Subject Headings.

VIII. *Library of Congress Subject Headings*
Subdivisions of major Judaica headings in LCSH.
Geographic and historical headings.
Indirect vs. direct subdivision.
Subject heading pattern for liturgy.

IX. *Critiques of Library of Congress Subject Headings*
Critiques of LC Subject Headings for Judaica and in-house modifications.
Alternative Judaica subject heading lists.
Filing in the dictionary catalog.

X. *Library of Congress Classification for Judaica*
Introduction to Library of Congress Classification as applied to Judaica.
Major LCC classes containing schedules for Judaica.
Use of tables in LCC.
Cuttering according to LC practice.

XI. *Critiques of LC Classification*
Philosophical problems of LCC from a Judaic point of view.
Local modifications of LCC for Judaica.
Alternative classification schemes for Judaica.

XII. *Future Trends in Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging*
Computerized cataloging of Hebraica and Judaica and its effect on cataloging procedures.
Local systems for computerized Hebraica cataloging.
Prospects for building a retrospective Hebraica database on a bibliographic utility.

The results of the questionnaire distributed at the beginning of the course had indicated that the majority of students were interested in all of the major topics of the course, which was designed to cover the full range of processes and systems involved in Hebraica cataloging.

Exercises and Exams

The exercises were designed to provide practical experience in the use of cataloging tools and application of the rules established by the Library of Congress. Exercises were assigned on Romanization of a pointed Hebrew text as well as on Yiddish and reversible Romanization. Although most students had indicated that they had minimal knowledge of Yiddish, they did surprisingly well on exercises in transcription of standard Yiddish orthography, which features diacritics for some consonants and several vowel points, rendering Romanization fairly automatic, except for the Hebrew component of Yiddish, which preserves the original consonantal script. The third exercise focused on the conversion of Hebrew dates, including chronograms, to their common era equivalents.

The midterm exam included objective questions on descriptive cataloging of Hebraica as well as texts to be Romanized, Hebrew dates to be converted, and a Hebrew title page to be transcribed in the original alphabet with ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description) punctuation and in Romanization, according to LC rules. This type of double processing is required in Hebraica cataloging on RLIN.

The first subject heading exercise focused on the syndetic (cross reference) structure of Library of Congress Subject Headings [LCSH]. The second provided hypothetical titles of books such as "A Reform Haggadah" and "A bibliography on Sholom Aleichem," for which the student was required to assign a set of subject headings in accordance with LC's current practice. The final exam included an excerpt from the LC Classification for Jewish history along with hypothetical titles to be classified. The test was cumulative for the entire course, with multiple choice and true-or-false questions focusing on the concepts and rules taught.

Evaluation

On the last day of class, students were given an evaluation form, which was to be completed anonymously. Those responding indicated that they had learned "a great deal" or "a significant amount"; most had found the course "moderately difficult." For the question on the assignments and exams, answers ranged from "moderately difficult" to "easy." Students felt that the instructor had covered the subjects of interest to them either "completely" or "for the most part," and that she had been responsive to student comments and questions.

To the question "Do you feel the course prepares you for an entry-level position as a

Hebraica/Judaica Cataloger?", half the students answered "Yes, definitely," and the other half "Yes, with supervision by an experienced cataloger." Affirmative responses were also received to the question "Do you feel the reading lists provide you with adequate leads to further information?"

The final section of the course evaluation form requested "comments and suggestions for improvement in the course design." One interesting suggestion was that more attention be devoted to Hebrew historical bibliography, which is relevant to catalogers in research libraries. Another student wanted "more material on outside (non-LC) practice and how to tamper effectively."

In general, the course was felt to have met its objectives. The caliber and interest of the students—despite the variation in their prior library science training—made teaching the course a pleasant and stimulating experience. The Max Weinreich Center plans to offer the course again in the Spring of 1989.

References

Aliprand, Joan M., "Hebrew on RLIN," *Judaica Librarianship* Vol. 3 no. 1–2 (1986–87), p. 5–16.

Berlin, Charles. *Library Resources for Jewish Studies in the United States.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library, 1975. Reprinted from: *The American Jewish Year Book* (1974–1975).

Cutter, Charles, "Bibliographic Instruction in Judaic Studies," *Judaica Librarianship* Vol. 2 no. 1–2 (Spring 1985), p. 65–67.

Hill, Janet Swann, "Wanted: Good Catalogers," *American Libraries* Vol. 16 (Nov. 1985), p. 728–730.

Posner, Marcia, "Education for Synagogue Librarians at the Queens College School of General Studies: 1984–1986," *Judaica Librarianship* Vol. 3 no. 1–2 (1986–1987), p. 74–78.

Weinberg, Bella Hass, "Hebraica Cataloging and Classification." In: *Cataloging and Classification of Non-Western Library Material,* ed. M. M. Aman. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1980, pp. 321–357.

YIVO. *Catalogue of the Research Training Institute—Aspirantur for the Academic Year 1942–1943.* New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute—YIVO, 1942.

Dr. Bella Hass Weinberg is an Associate Professor in the Division of Library and Information Science at St. John's University and Consulting Librarian for YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. She has taught several courses in Judaica librarianship at YIVO's Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies.