

APPROBATIONS

Brisman, Shimeon. *A History and Guide to Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1987. xxxvi, 502 p. (Bibliographica Judaica; 1) (Jewish Research Literature; 2). ISBN 0-87820-909-3. ISSN 0067-6853.

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Delegates to the Association of Jewish Libraries 1980 annual convention, held in Philadelphia, had the rare privilege of hearing a presentation by Shimeon Brisman, who from 1962 until his retirement in June 1988 was the Jewish Studies Bibliographer at the University of California at Los Angeles. Three years had passed since the publication of his *A History and Guide to Judaic Bibliography*, and in his 1980 lecture he presented highlights of a sequel, which was then still in progress. That sequel, *A History and Guide to Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*, has now been published and stands as volume two of Brisman's *Jewish Research Literature* series. (For the sake of brevity, vol. 1 is henceforth referred to as *Judaic Bibliography* and vol. 2 as *Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*.) A third volume, *Jewish Dictionaries and Concordances*, is in the works and is eagerly awaited by the Judaica library community.

Brisman writes in the preface to *Judaic Bibliography* that around 1960 he

began to collect material for a three volume work to be entitled *Jewish Research Literature*. The purpose of the planned work was to acquaint the scholar and student of Jewish literature with the history and development of a branch of Jewish literature unfamiliar to most of them The accumulated material became the basis for a three-part course in Hebrew bibliography and methods of research, given by the author for graduate students of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Brisman's pioneering establishment of a Judaica bibliography course and his compilation of the *Jewish Research Literature* volumes were a reflection of his

disappointment that the average Jewish scholar, student, or even librarian is totally unaware of the existence of such [basic reference] tools; but he has been pleasantly surprised as a lecturer to notice students' fascination with Jewish

bibliography, a subject usually considered "dry." It seems that Jewish bibliography, when presented in the realm of Jewish cultural and literary history, can become an exciting topic for scholars and students.

Those who heard Brisman's 1980 lecture can attest to the fascination that his topic had on his audience and can perhaps envy those UCLA students who have benefited from closer and more frequent access to his expertise.

The first volume in the series, *Judaic Bibliography*, has chapters devoted to general Hebraica bibliographies, catalogs of Hebraica book collections, bio-bibliographical works, subject bibliographies of Hebraica literature, Judaica bibliographies, bibliographical periodicals, indexes to Jewish periodicals, and miscellaneous Jewish bibliographical works. The 1977 volume is an expository guide to the literature that by far transcends the bibliography-of-bibliographies genre, even as it fits quite comfortably into it.

The current volume, *Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*, guides readers to basic Judaica reference tools that are not primarily bibliographical in nature. The following chapters are contained in it:

1. General Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons.
2. Bible encyclopedias and lexicons.
3. Talmudic-rabbinic encyclopedias and lexicons.
4. Encyclopedias and lexicons of Judaism.
5. Works on the Holy Land, the State of Israel, and Zionism.
6. Biographical encyclopedias and lexicons.
7. Encyclopedias and lexicons of modern Jewish authors.
8. Encyclopedias and lexicons of Jews in the arts and sciences.
9. Encyclopedias and lexicons of diaspora communities.

In both volumes, the body of each chapter includes an extensive narrative section that contains background information on the specific works discussed, as well as bibliographical descriptions of them. The works are usually described in chronological order of their publication, which helps to place them into historical context. Bibliographical descriptions are reiterated in the helpful chronological lists and summaries that appear at the end of each chapter. In addition to these chronological lists, vol. 1 also includes charts that provide a succinct and graphic outline of the development of Judaica bibliographical periodicals and indexes. Footnotes (taking up almost 100 pages of the second volume) elucidate points that are deemed tangential to the text proper. Both volumes are coherently organized, the narrative sections read well, and they include exhaustive author-title and subject indexes.

Let us now turn to the contents of the volume under review, for therein lies the work's distinctiveness. In the preface, Brisman summarizes the growth of the Jewish oral tradition and takes note of the practice of memorization required in the era preceding the introduction of movable type. He notes however, that

the advent of Hebrew printing (about 15,000 Hebrew works, mostly rabbinic, were published between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries) made it almost impossible for one individual to master the entire field of rabbinic studies. Thus, beginning with the eighteenth century, numerous alphabetized and non-alphabetized rabbinic handbooks and encyclopedias in Hebrew came into being.

Efforts to issue modern Judaic encyclopedias in Western languages began in Germany during the nineteenth century. However, the first complete and all-inclusive modern Judaic encyclopedia was published in English in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since then the floodgates of Judaic encyclopedia-making have been

opened, and hundreds of works in various shapes and forms and in various languages have appeared. The existence of such an impressive number of Judaic reference books, largely unknown even to some Judaic students and scholars, motivated the compilation of a guide that would offer information about, and evaluation of, these works.

An absorbing introductory chapter outlines and summarizes a number of influential, if unsuccessful attempts at encyclopedia-making. Among these are two 16th-century proposals by Sephardic scholars from Constantinople, Jacob Almoli and Judah ben Joseph Ibn Balat; various projects by such distinguished 19th-century German-Jewish scholars as Isak Markus Jost, David Cassel, Moritz Steinschneider, and Ludwig Philippon; and late 19th-century Hebrew-language efforts such as Ahad Ha'am's *Otsar ha-yahadut* and Nahum Sokolow's unrealized general encyclopedia in Hebrew.

This introductory discussion leads logically into the first chapter, "General Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons." Brisman defines "general Judaic" as subsuming two overlapping sets of criteria: "(1) encyclopedias in various languages covering the entire spectrum of Judaic information; and (2) encyclopedias in the Hebrew and Yiddish languages containing both Jewish and universal information" (p. 23). Thus, there is room in this chapter for both the purely Jewish *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and for *Ha-entsiklopediyah ha-ivrit*, which includes articles on both Judaic and general topics. Two German-language encyclopedias of an antisemitic character are also described in this chapter: Rudolph Giehrl's *Jüdisches Conversationslexicon für Christen aus allen Ständen* and Heinrich Kraeger's *Sigilla veri; Lexikon der Juden-Genossen und -Gegner aller Zeiten und Zonen, insbesondere Deutschlands*.

The laurels for the first complete Judaic encyclopedia, as we have already seen, go not to a Hebrew or German compilation, but to the English-language *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Brisman provides an in-depth description of the efforts of Isidore Singer, an Austrian Jewish journalist, to produce what he initially wanted to call "The Encyclopedia of the History and Mental Evolution of the Jewish Race." Singer approached encyclopedia publishers in Germany, France, and England with his proposal, without success. He settled in New York City in the mid-1890s, but encountered similar difficulties in promoting his project until

one day in late 1897, while riding in a streetcar, he noticed an advertisement

for a new English dictionary which was being published by the Funk & Wagnalls Company. He became inspired with the thought of turning to the publishers of the new English dictionary with his ideas . . . The plan that he laid before them very favorably impressed the founder of the company and the chairman of its board, Isaac Kauffman Funk (1839–1912), a non-Jewish scholar and Christian minister (by training). (pp. 27–28)

On May 1, 1898 Singer signed a contract committing Funk & Wagnalls to publish a multivolume, English-language Judaic encyclopedia, which was subsequently renamed *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1 appeared in May 1901 and "was received with unanimous acclaim by scholars and laymen alike, in both the United States and Europe" (p. 29); the twelfth and final volume came out in December 1905, ahead of schedule.

In addition to describing the history of the *JE* project, Brisman provides an evaluation of its significance:

The publication of the twelve-volume set of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* signaled the beginning of the American era in Jewish cultural and intellectual history . . . American-Jewish scholars felt an exaltation which motivated them to continue their scholarly pursuits. American-Jewish scholars, from then on, were equal to their European counterparts, and America, therefore, became a more attractive place for European Jewish scholars to settle. Thus, the *Encyclopedia* directly influenced the development of Jewish learning in the United States during the next generation. The publication of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* was in this respect a unique event in modern Jewish cultural history.

Besides its historical implications, the production of the *Encyclopedia* in its own right was an accomplishment of great magnitude and high scholarship. Although some lacunae, errors, and misstatements were discovered here and there, the encyclopedia nonetheless was outstanding, measured against works of a similar nature . . .

. . . The greatness of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* is not in its "completeness" or "near completeness" but in its permanency. Most of the materials in the *Encyclopedia* are still usable today, and are superior to the material found in some similar works of a more recent date. (pp. 32–33)

Brisman's account of the making of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* has been quoted extensively here to give readers an idea of the extraordinary wealth of detail contained in *Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*. The *JE* is but one of several dozen works to be accorded this treatment by Brisman; Chapter 1 alone includes detailed publishing histories of such major multivolume encyclopedias as the Russian-language *Evreiskaiâ entsiklopediâ* (which in turn was based substantially on the *JE*); *Jüdisches Lexikon*; the incomplete German-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and its English-language, Israeli namesake; *Algemeyne entsiklopedye*; *Entsiklopediyah kelalit*; *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*; *Enciclopedia judaica castellana*; *ha-Entsiklopediyah ha-ivrit*; and *Entsiklopediyah kelalit*. In addition, numerous "minor works" (from one to three volumes) are described in this chapter.

While one would expect the experienced Judaica librarian to be familiar with the major encyclopedias enumerated in Chapter 1, the subsequent chapters take us farther afield, into more specialized areas of Judaic learning. It is here that Brisman's book will prove truly indispensable, with its detailed discussions of encyclopedias and lexicons on such topics as Biblical onomastics and biography, biographies of the Tannaim and Amoraim, Kabbalah and Hasidism, geography of the Land of Israel, who's who compendiums, and Hebrew and Yiddish bio-bibliographical lexicons—to take but a select few of the sub-headings included under the main chapter headings.

Omissions

One hesitates to quibble over a few minor omissions. New and seminal Judaic reference works continue to appear, too late in some cases for the printer's deadline. Older titles have, for whatever reason, also been omitted from the published bibliography. The following comments are offered in the realization that a bibliographer's work is never truly finished.

Raphael Halperin's *Atlas 'ets hayim*, a multivolume biographical and genealogical encyclopedia of rabbis and traditional Jewish scholars, is cited twice in Brisman's footnotes (on p. 419, note 50, where the author is identified as Halperin, the date of publication is given as 1980 and the number of volumes as two; and on p. 434, note 10, where the author is identified as Heilprin, the opening date of publication is correctly given as 1978, and the number of projected volumes as "about fifteen"), but not in the text proper. Although this work is not yet complete, it is arguably significant

enough to have been included within the text of Chapter 6, alongside works of a similar nature, such as Nathan Zebi Friedmann's *Otsar ha-rabanim* (cited on pp. 256, 268–269). As of early summer 1988, 14 of a projected 20 volumes of *Atlas 'ets hayim* had been published.

Brisman cites a number of works of a local historical nature in Chapter 9. Under "Czechoslovakia," for example (pp. 300–301), he notes the following work on Moravia, edited by Hugo Gold: *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. A companion volume, also edited by Gold and dealing with the Jewish communities of Bohemia, is not included here and should be cited: *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Böhmens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*.

In the same chapter, under the names of countries and cities, Brisman includes a number of published lists of tombstone inscriptions, e.g.: *Die Inschriften des alten Judenfriedhofes in Wien*. One rare work that is devoted to the old Jewish cemetery of Lodz, Poland is not included here: *Stary cmentarz żydowski w Łodzi: dzieje i zabytki*. This volume, containing over 500 pages, includes chronological and alphabetical indexes and brief biographical entries on the prominent Jews buried there.

Romanization

There are a few problems connected with romanization of Yiddish and Hebrew in *Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons*. For example, the surname of the publisher Shlomo Sreberk is given as "Srebrek" (pp. 93, 94), whereas Yiddish and Polish spellings in works published by Sreberk in Vilna before his emigration to Eretz Yisrael are unambiguous on this point. Another romanization error occurs when Brisman refers to the subject of the *Lerer-yisker-bukh* as "teachers of Tsisha schools in Poland who perished during the Holocaust years" (p. 347). The correct acronym for the *Tsentrale yidishe shul organizatsye* (Central Yiddish School Organization) is *Tsisho*.

For romanization of Hebrew words, phrases, and titles, Brisman relies on the American National Standards Institute's General-Purpose romanization (ANSI Z39.25 Table I). In conformity with what is now virtually universal practice in American research libraries, one hopes that he will use ALA/LC romanization in his forthcoming volume, *Jewish Dictionaries and Concordances*. Not only would employment of ALA/LC romanization represent adherence to a widely-accepted bibliographical standard; it would also help to

avoid the confusion that occurs when the letters "ch" are used to represent two completely different sounds, the one palatal, the other guttural. On p. 266, for example, the name of the publisher Yehoshua Tshatshik is romanized Joshua Chachik (this is also the *EJ* form); elsewhere one sees examples of "ch" used for the guttural consonant that is represented in ALA/LC romanization as either "kh" (for *khaf*) or "h" (for *het*), e.g. "*Chachme Yisrael*." (p. 253; i.e., *Hakhme yisra'el*).

Finally, one regrets the lack of a Hebrew-alphabet title index in a book where so many of the works cited are in Hebrew or Yiddish. Titles are given in the original script in the chronological lists and summaries that accompany each chapter, so Brisman clearly recognizes the bibliographical significance of providing vernacular alphabet information. Readers who may be familiar with specific works, but who may not be acquainted with the vagaries of transliteration schemes, might appreciate the addition of a title index in the original script.

Conclusions

These few critical remarks are in no way intended to detract from the impressive overall achievement of this volume, which is an indispensable component of any Judaica library's reference collection and will be required reading for Judaica bibliography courses. *Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons* has deservedly received AJL's 1988 Harold Mason Reference Book award as the outstanding Judaica reference book to appear during 1987. [See REFERENCE DEPARTMENT in this issue.—Ed.]

In discussing the ways and means by which bio-bibliographical lexicons are compiled, Brisman draws a comparison between the first lexicons of Hebrew and Yiddish literature—one-man efforts of Getzel Kressel and Zalmen Reyzen—and the collective effort that resulted in the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*: "There is a feeling among scholars that works of this nature should generally be prepared by groups of experts rather than by individuals," Brisman writes. "The experience in the production of Hebrew and Yiddish encyclopedias and lexicons somewhat disproves this theory" (p. 284).

In recent decades, two seminal multi-volume Judaica bibliographies have been published, each of them compiled by individuals rather than editorial boards: Shlomo Shunami's *Bibliography of Jewish Bibliographies* and the two volumes published to date in Brisman's *Jewish Research Literature* series. One doubts whether either of these works would have

been conceived, must less executed, had it been left up to a committee to draw up a plan and see to its publication. Just as Shunami's work is a focal resource guiding researchers to subject bibliographies in all branches of Jewish knowledge, Brisman's series leads librarians, scholars, and students to essential Judaica and Hebraica reference tools, à la Winchell and Sheehy, only in considerably more depth. Therein lies the work's utility and—to use a word that Brisman himself attaches to his evaluation of *The Jewish Encyclopedia*—its permanency.

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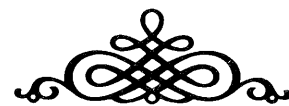
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