

COMMENTARIES

November 22, 1988

Dear Co-Editors of *Judaica Librarianship*:

This letter was planned to be written in 1983 after receiving the first issue of *Judaica Librarianship*. Unfortunately, the pressure of keeping up with daily routines related to my job forced me, at that time, to curtail letter-writing. However, I had promised myself that one day this letter would be written. Now, five years and five published issues later, I am very glad to be able to make good on that promise.

What I had in mind to say in my letter in 1983 was, besides congratulations, to express the wish that the new publication would adequately cover both the professional and technical as well as the scholarly developments in the field of Jewish librarianship. After examining all the published five issues, I am happy to say that you have done a truly masterful job in maintaining a reasonable balance in presenting all the various aspects of modern *Judaica* librarianship. You exceeded my most optimistic expectations. Without exaggeration, *Judaica Librarianship* is now the only magazine of such high quality to be published by Jewish librarians in any language.

After stating all the above, it remains just to wish you and *JL* continued, uninterrupted publication and, please, continue the high editorial standards that made your-our magazine unique among similar magazines of this nature.

Shimeon Brisman
Brooklyn, New York

20 Oct. 1988

Dear Editors:

The Fall 1987-Winter 1988 issue of *Judaica Librarianship* arrived a short while ago. I want to register my view that the publication is an extraordinary journal, and I want to make sure that the editors know how grateful so many of us are for its existence.

Frankly, I can think of nothing that can compete with the journal as far as enhancing the profession of *Judaica* librarianship is concerned. In fact, it may be one of the best journals in any field of *Judaica* now being published.

The quality of the articles is just excellent. The authors clearly know their subjects,

and the editors obviously know how to present their texts in a readable, attractive, impressive way.

Perhaps the most important part of the journal (not to take *anything* away from any single part) is its impact on the field. I can recall, not too long ago, when *Judaica* librarianship seemed to be a second-class career. Now, unquestionably because of the efforts of the editors of your journal, the whole field has grown in stature. What librarian, what bookseller, what publisher, what book lover is not indebted to the editors for their superb job.

As an editor and publisher of *Judaica*, I want to applaud you and wish you continued success. We who struggle to bring out quality *Judaica* owe you much for what you are doing. I am personally proud to be a part of the Jewish book community. As a former professional librarian, as an author, and as a bookseller, I thank you and thank you again for what you are doing. I dare say that your journal has contributed more to our field than anything I can recall. *Yasher koach*.

Sincerely,

Arthur Kurzweil, Editorial Vice President
Jason Aronson Inc., Publishers
Northvale, NJ

ALEF BIT

December 2, 1988

Dear Editors:

We wish to supplement Elhanan Adler's interesting article "The Use of Israeli Machine-Readable Cataloging by American Libraries: a Proposal" [vol. 4 no. 1 1988, p. 23-26] with additional information pertaining to the Research Libraries Group (RLG) and its system, the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN).

Under the heading "Automating Hebrew Cataloging in the United States," the author calls for "agreement among LC, OCLC and RLIN as to the character set to be used and its coding." When defining the Hebrew character set for the RLIN system, RLG solicited advice, not only from Hebraica experts at RLG member libraries, but also from experts at the Library of Congress and libraries which use OCLC. RLG and OCLC

have an agreement to cooperate in the area of standards; staff meet regularly to exchange information.

The RLIN Hebrew character set is the de facto standard for the cataloging of Hebraica in the United States. It has been proposed to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for consideration as an international standard, and there is Israeli participation in the standards-setting procedure. However, until there is a formal U.S. or international standard for a Hebrew character set which RLG can implement on RLIN, Hebrew characters in RLIN records (in the database and when output to tape) will continue to be identified as belonging to a privately-defined character set (in accordance with ISO standard 2022).

An unresolved issue may be viewed as failure to standardize the character set, but is, in actual fact, a question of cataloging policy: Must vocalization which appears *on the source of information* be transcribed in the cataloging record? The Hebrew font which was used most recently for Library of Congress printed cards did not include vocalization, so Library of Congress transcription was limited to the consonants regardless of what was on the piece. LC has carried this practice over to their RLIN records (they also insist that it is not possible to distinguish, and so use, the Yiddish digraphs). Other libraries using RLIN to catalog Hebraic script material disagree. From the point of view of indexing and retrieval, the question is moot, since vocalization is ignored and the Yiddish digraphs are normalized to the component letters.

In discussing the need for accurate romanization of Hebrew bibliographic data, the author states: "The LC/RLIN standard for processing [non-Roman records] mandates a *full* Romanized record to which are appended parallel vernacular fields." The standardization is mandated, not by an agreement between LC and RLG, but by the USMARC Format for Bibliographic Data, and the fact that the default character set in the North American library environment is ASCII (a Roman character set).

Under the heading "Vernacular Access Points and Hebrew Orthography," the author states: "LC/RLIN practice with regard to CJK cataloging indicates that access points will also be entered in the Hebrew vernacular." The access points under

discussion here are clearly names and, possibly, subjects. The inclusion of non-Roman name and subject headings in a record is at the discretion of the library; inclusion is neither mandated nor forbidden by RLG standards, although RLG's Library Technical Systems and Bibliographic Control Program Committee (BibTech) is on record as strongly recommending the inclusion of all appropriate non-Roman access points.

When a library chooses to include non-Roman names and subjects in its records, authority control for such headings is the responsibility of the library. In addition to authority control, the inclusion of non-Roman access points raises other questions with regard to the choice and form of entry: For names, should AACR2 rules, which apply to Roman alphabet headings, be used to determine headings written in non-Roman scripts? For subjects, what rules or thesaurus should be used?

Authority control allows a library to stipulate the preferred orthography for a particular name or subject heading. Inconsistency in orthographic practice—as found in titles—is something that librarians have to grapple with; for example, British 'colour' vs. American 'color'. Hebrew represents a more intense case, with orthographic variation also present in names. RLIN CJK solved a comparable problem—variant written forms for the same Chinese character—by associating the variant forms through the coding scheme. It is possible to formulate an RLIN search to retrieve records containing any variant of a particular Chinese character, or, conversely, to limit the search result only to those records containing a specific form (for example, the simplified form used in the People's Republic of China).

Under the heading "Input and Display of Data and Printing of Catalog Cards," the author claims that "the natural orientation of a MARC record is from left to right." This assertion, as written, is *not true*: a record in the MARC format has no 'natural' orientation, merely a beginning and an end. The language (and hence script) of the cataloging agency imposes an orientation on the display of the data in a record. In the U.S. environment, the default character set is Roman (ASCII). In an Israeli environment, with Hebrew as the default character set, it would be perfectly proper for the tags and indicators to be presented on the right-hand side of the screen, and for the subfield delimiter symbol ("double dagger") to appear to the right of the subfield code.

The right-to-left directional 'flag' (*not* "flags") may be "more complicated" internally, but it is user-friendly. The "frozen" (stationary) cursor is not a viable input strategy; it yields incorrect input in a particular case.

It is true that the RLIN system does not include printing of Hebrew script catalog cards; however, the problem of the lexical flow of bidirectional data is not confined to catalog cards. RLG did confront this problem, and chose to implement the provisions of ISBD(G) in RLIN's formatted displays.

The above comments are intended to clarify certain points, and do not invalidate the solution proposed by the author. Under this solution, however, a continuing workload—that is purely for the benefit of libraries outside of Israel—is placed on the Israeli library: the romanization of name and title headings and the bibliographic description, as well as the enrichment of the machine-readable record with more precise content designation.

The author dismisses the use of 'raw' Israeli cataloging data as a solution, because of the difficulties in converting the records to USMARC, and the burden that would be placed on the Library of Congress to upgrade the records. This solution should not be dismissed so hastily. Increasingly, the Library of Congress and the North American bibliographic utilities will be acquiring machine-readable cataloging from various national sources, including countries where writing is done in a non-Roman script. This problem is not confined to Hebrew, and a generalized solution for national data might well allow 'raw' Israeli cataloging data to be loaded into an American database.

Unless the loading process includes machine-based (reversible) romanization, these records will be accessible only by a number-based search (e.g., on ISBN) or by a search on non-Roman text. This is a limitation, but the libraries most interested in the records will have both the linguistic expertise and the equipment necessary for non-Roman searching. Depending on the subtlety of the conversion process, there may or may not be irregularities in the indexing of the data, for example, as a result of mapping the Israeli main entry to one of the USMARC main entry fields.

Once an American library has the title in hand, processing would include romanizing the Hebrew bibliographic description and adding name and title access points in accordance with AACR2. Note that the burden of doing this does not fall on the Library of Congress alone: the first library to catalog that title does the work. The amount of work that the Library of Congress must do depends on the quality of the original cataloging.

In addition to the disadvantages of using 'raw' Israeli cataloging data that the author identified, there may be one more general disadvantage, and there is also one particular to RLIN. In the romanization of Hebrew, the basic rule is to follow modern

Israeli pronunciation. Librarians in Israel will surely have the advantage over their American colleagues. The RLIN-specific disadvantage is that, unless RLG modifies the rules for "clustering" (grouping of records), a record from Israel will always remain separate from other records for the same title, and will not be retrievable by a romanized search.

We look forward to continuing discussion of the problems associated with the integration of non-Roman material into library automation, which is surely one of the most interesting areas of librarianship today.

Yours sincerely,

Joan M. Aliprand John A. Eilts
Library Systems Analyst Program Officer
The Research Libraries Group, Inc.
Mountain View, CA

CATALOG DEPARTMENT

23 July 1988

Dear Ms. Weinberg:

I am very grateful to you for sending me a copy of the article of yours which I requested ["JEWS—DASH: Library of Congress Subject Headings for Judaica: a methodology for analysis." *Judaica Librarianship* 2 (1985): 20–25,40]. I read the article with great interest, purely as a practising cataloguer/librarian who uses LC subject headings, but with great caution to avoid offence to minority groups. The categories of problem headings you propose for Judaica would have wider application, and your article raises a lot of the issues encountered by a practising cataloguer. I do admit to being an admirer of Sanford Berman when it comes to choice of terminology.

Yours sincerely,

(Mr.) Chris Walker-Cook
Technical Services Librarian
Australian Council
for Educational Research
Hawthorn, Vic., Australia

Editor's Note: The article came to the attention of Mr. Chris Walker-Cook through the current awareness bibliography on indexing in The Indexer (April 1987), compiled by Hans Wellisch (a contributor to our journal). Unable to find Judaica Librarianship in an Australian library, Mr. Walker-Cook wrote to the editor of The Indexer, Mrs. Hazel Bell. As a contributor to that journal and as President of the American Society of Indexers, I frequently correspond with Mrs. Bell, who forwarded the reprint request to me.—B.H.W.