

# EPISTLE FROM ISRAEL

*Susan Lazinger  
Hebrew University  
Jerusalem, Israel*

## Hebrew University

### Conferences and Openings

Hebrew University marked the 40th anniversary of the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls by holding a conference in cooperation with the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book and the Israel Exploration Society.

During the sessions held on the Givat Ram campus, researchers from five Israeli universities and the Israel Museum presented papers summarizing forty years of research on the historic find, which changed the face of Biblical scholarship. Following the presentation of papers, a panel moderated by the Chairman of the University's Institute of Jewish Studies, Prof. Sarah Japhet, discussed the topic "Qumran Between Bible and Mishna." Prof. Emanuel Tov, Chairman of the Department of Bible, presented his view that there were two kinds of texts among the Qumran scrolls—local (written by members of the Essene community in Qumran) and imported—and that the discovery of the Scrolls provided a wealth of new versions for comparison. He added that it is still not known why the scrolls were hidden in the caves, or whether they were actively used by the Essenes or kept in a "closed-shelf" library.

Another important contribution to Jewish Studies is the collection which the late Prof. Gershom Scholem left to the Jewish National and University Library, on Hebrew University's Givat Ram campus, and which has now been opened to the public. When Gershom Scholem arrived in Israel from Germany in the 1920s, he brought with him, to his home in Jerusalem, 1767 books, of which 603 were concerned with various aspects of Kabbalah. With his death in 1982, the JNUL acquired a collection that numbered some 25,000 volumes. Professor Scholem requested that his collection be kept together, and the JNUL honored this request by preparing a special room to house the remarkable library.

Prof. Scholem had worked as a librarian in the JNUL in the twenties and wrote to an unidentified friend, in a letter dated January

1, 1924: ". . . With regard to my work, I was immediately accepted as a librarian and expert in Hebrew in the National Library, and this employment provides me with conditions that seem ideal . . . my work is both important and pleasant."

### Acquisitions

The most recent addition to the Albert Einstein Archives at the JNUL is a letter written by Einstein in 1923 to a fellow scientist. While the letter itself is ordinary enough, the story of how it arrived in Jerusalem is extraordinary. A Jewish woman who lives today in a northern kibbutz spent the war years in Theresienstadt, where she became the protegee of a Czech laborer who worked in a storeroom of confiscated Jewish property. When the letter fell out of a folded carpet one day, the laborer put it in his pocket. Forty years later, he sent it to her at the kibbutz, and when she learned of the JNUL's acquisition of the Einstein Archives, she brought the letter to Jerusalem to add to this national treasurehouse.

Another recent JNUL acquisition is a collection of poems and biographical material of the Jewish-German poet Else Lasker-Schueler, along with more than 40 letters that she wrote between the years 1936 and 1944 to N. Zuri (1869–1945), an archaeologist and writer at Kibbutz Tel Yosef. Lasker-Schueler was an important German expressionist poet, whose work has recently sparked new interest. During her last years, she lived in Jerusalem. The collection was donated to the JNUL, at Zuri's request, by his daughter.

Finally, a recent Judaica auction of 717 items, including hundreds of books and manuscripts saved from the Holocaust, was held at the Jerusalem Sheraton Plaza Hotel. Sponsored by the Society of Judaica Collectors, the marathon auction was attended by two buyers for the National Library, Zion Shorer and Itzhak Yudlov. The highlight of the auction was a bid of \$41,000 for a 500-year-old translation of the Canon of Medicine written by the Jewish physician

Abu Ali al-Hussein Ibn Abdel-Allah Ibn Sina, made by an anonymous bidder. Shorer and Yudlov, whose budgets have been severely cut due to the Hebrew University's financial difficulties, reported that several of the European and American buyers had pledged in advance to contribute their acquisitions to the JNUL.

### Fees . . .

The same financial difficulties that curtailed the budgets of the National Library's buyers led the JNUL to impose an entrance fee of NIS 2 (\$1.20 per day) on October 1, 1987. Despite the exemption of Hebrew University students and faculty—as well as those from other universities—from the fee, the uproar from disgruntled citizens and enraged visitors was so great that two months later, on December 1, 1987, the National Library decided to do away with the entrance fee and impose in its place a borrower's fee of NIS 50 shekels per year, with the same readers exempted. According to University officials, the need for the fees arose because the constantly increasing expenses involved in carrying out the national functions of the library are covered by neither the University nor the government.

### And Subsidies

Assistant Prime Minister and Minister of Education Itzhak Navon has confirmed a budget of NIS 330,000 to be paid over the next year to writers whose books are heavily borrowed from Israel's libraries. This is the second year that the subsidy program for writers has been in effect, although this year the minimum payment has been raised from NIS 25 to 100, and the maximum payment has been set at NIS 6000 (about \$3,600). All writers of Hebrew prose, poetry, drama, literary essays, or children's literature, who live permanently in Israel, are eligible for the subsidy, which is paid on a graduated scale, according to the frequency with which the author's books are circulated from libraries throughout the country. [*A similar system exists in England.—Ed.*]

## Innovations

### Library Link-Ups

Many of Israel's educational institutions, including Hebrew Union College, the Shrine of the Book of the Israel Museum, and the Jewish Art Center are now or will soon be able to communicate, using modems, with the computer of the Hebrew University, which holds the database of the National Library.

In addition, Israelis can now link up with more than 2,000 databases around the world—including those of the British Library, NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), and the Library of Congress—via a global data grid available through the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure's National Center of Scientific and Technological Information (COSTI). According to COSTI's director Jacob Lev, subscribers linked into COSTI's central computer can receive a breathtaking array of information on their screens, such as an article from the morning's newspapers or one from last year's, pinpointed in seconds through sophisticated indexing. "In setting up this computerized data bank," Lev ex-

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plains, "Israel is joining a select handful of industrialized nations who already enjoy such a facility." Headquartered at 84 Ha-Hashmonaim Street (P.O. Box 20125, Tel Aviv 61201), COSTI has over 10,000 subscribers in Israel, including other government departments, research institutes, industrial enterprises, and the media. The Center operates with a staff of 35, most of whom are experts in computers.

COSTI's news service, which includes English summaries of the Hebrew press, Government Press Office releases, background data about Israel, and biographical information about Israeli personalities, is widely used by the Israel and foreign press. In addition, COSTI will soon make available an electronic edition of *The Jerusalem Post* on optical disk, displaying both text and pictures.

### Index to Hebrew Daily News

On a similar subject, a member of Kibbutz Shamir, Yaniv Ya'akov Pitzer, who is on the staff of the kibbutz library, has compiled an index to Hebrew daily newspapers from 1979, covering a broad range of topics. The microfilmed newspapers are available in the kibbutz library.

## New Libraries . . .

Three new libraries of rabbinical literature opened recently in Israel. The first, in Rehovot's "Tikvatenu" Center, was made possible by two grants of NIS 5000 each from the Ministry of Culture and the Rehovot Municipality. The second, under the auspices of, and located in, Ashkelon's "Uziel" School, includes books in four areas: rabbinic literature, children's literature, reference works, and pedagogical literature. The third library of rabbinic literature, intended for Bnei Brak's Haredi population, is divided into the "Chaim Tovim" [The Good Life] Library for children and the "Zahav" [Gold] Library for adults. The collections currently include 5,000 books on various areas of Judaism.

### And One Old Library

The Polish Library, located on Tel Aviv's Allenby Street, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary; everyone who visited the library during the celebration received a small souvenir. The Polish Library has long served thousands of Israelis whose roots are in Poland as a center for culture and literature, as well as Judaica, in their native tongue.

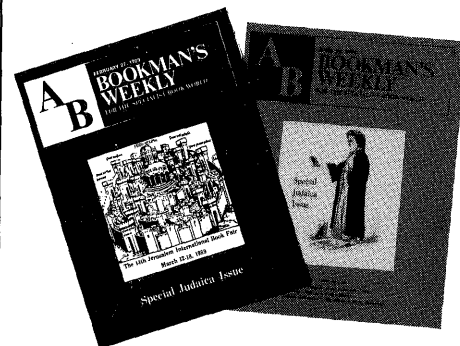
An interview with its director, Edmond Neustein, revealed that the library's principal problem today is that it serves an aging and decreasing population, whose children and grandchildren drop in to the library only to view books on Judaica or to buy a gift for their parents.

Asked if the library had encountered problems acquiring books from Poland after Polish-Israeli relations were severed following the Six-Day War, Neustein answered that for two years after the war, it was indeed impossible to acquire books from Poland, but after that, he was able to resume ordering from the catalogs, which had never stopped coming, even during the years when there was absolutely no contact between the two countries. Neustein pointed out the surprising fact that in the last few years, some 300 books on Judaica have been published in Poland.

When asked what will happen when one day the Polish Library closes its doors for lack of readers, Neustein answered that he sees no possibility for a successor to his library when it passes into history.

*Dr. Susan Lazing recently returned to her position as Head Librarian and Lecturer at the Graduate School of Library and Archive Studies at the Hebrew University after spending a year at Stanford University in California.*

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