

IN THE BEGINNING ♦ ♦ ♦

Professional Reading for the Judaica Librarian

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As a professor of information science, one of the topics I discuss in my courses is the flow of information in scholarly disciplines, including the various forms of literature produced by scientific societies.

It has been a pleasure for me to observe the field of Judaica librarianship taking on more and more of the characteristics of a scholarly discipline. This issue of the journal provides a great deal of evidence that most of the major forms of scholarly publication—primary journals, conference proceedings, treatises, and handbooks—are represented in the literature of Judaica librarianship.

In a special section of this issue, we present the formal papers from the Harvard Conference, "Judaica Librarianship: Facing the Future," held in May 1988. The Association of Jewish Libraries has had conventions for over two decades, and for many years published proceedings as well. The proceedings of the Harvard Conference differ from AJL's in that they contain invited formal papers, prepared for publication with full documentation by the authors (rather than summarized or transcribed by recorders).

Structurally, the special section represents both the forms *conference proceedings* and *state-of-the-art reports*. Overviews of the major aspects of our profession are what I would have liked to see in the premiere issue of *Judaica Librarianship*. I am grateful to Dr. Charles Berlin for commissioning these papers and authorizing their publication in our journal. Conferences are an informal means of scholarly communication, and their proceedings are generally considered "grey literature," not quite published nor widely available. Papers delivered at conferences are, however, often published in *primary journals*, the main formal medium of scholarly communication, which enhances their accessibility.

Judaica Librarianship is a refereed journal, but more of a professional than a scientific journal, since we publish few reports of original research. The format of the journal adheres closely to standards in the field, except that our articles are not accompanied by abstracts. We

are fortunate that a number of indexing and abstracting operations, also known as *secondary services*, create abstracts for many of the articles in *Judaica Librarianship*; these are, in many cases, searchable online.

We have touched on the main forms of primary and secondary literature. Now to the tertiary forms, which compact, synthesize, and bibliography the secondary literature.

Shimeon Brisman's *Jewish Research Literature*, volume two of which is reviewed at length by Zachary Baker in this issue, is an *expository* guide to the reference works in our field. Although classified as a tertiary work, it involves much original (primary) research, and is actually a *treatise*. It may also serve as a *textbook* for courses in Judaica bibliography, and in fact grew out of such a course. While exemplifying several forms of publication, Brisman's series is organized according to the structure of the literature: bibliographies, encyclopedias, and dictionaries.

An *inventory* guide to the literature, entitled *Jewish Reference Sources*, was produced by Charles Cutter and Micha Oppenheim, who continue to track Judaica reference works in a regular column in our journal, complemented by Libby Kahane's periodic lists of such works published in Israel, Europe, and other continents. A manual on Judaica acquisitions, entitled *Building a Judaica Library*, was compiled several years ago by Edith and Meir Lubetski. Edith Lubetski also frequently contributes lists of new acquisition sources to our journal.

With reference and acquisitions covered, that leaves the major function of Judaica cataloging to be compacted in book form. Through the publication of *Hebraica Cataloging: A Guide to ALA/LC Romanization and Descriptive Cataloging* by the Library of Congress, this gap has been filled to some extent. In this issue, reviews of the guide by Leah Adler and myself focus on its content and its format respectively. With respect to the structure of the scientific literature, LC's guide is analogous to a *handbook* or *laboratory manual*, i.e., a manual of practice for a specialty. Although not designed for sequential reading, by virtue of its source,

Hebraica Cataloging may also serve as a textbook for Judaica cataloging courses.

In the DEWEINEAZAR section of the journal, the reissue of the Elazar classification, a tool of major importance to synagogue, school, and center libraries, is reviewed by Marcia Posner. In terms of form of literature, the Elazar scheme is a *numeric table*. The classification schedules most often consulted by Judaica research librarians are those of the Library of Congress, and in this issue, we feature a new column by Ricky Dreyfuss that tracks changes in this system as they affect Judaica librarians.

Dr. Posner proposes that our journal serve as the clearinghouse for additions and changes to the Elazar scheme. In attending the Harvard Conference, it gave me great pleasure to hear *Judaica Librarianship* referred to as "the journal of record for the field" by a number of speakers who proposed new features and columns. I hope some of the proposed ideas will eventually be implemented. The "Register of Judaica Bibliographies in Progress" was suggested by Robert Singerman at an AJL Convention, introduced by Barry Walfish in our last issue, and attracted contributions for this issue.

Having reviewed the formal characteristics of the literature of Judaica librarianship, it remains to be noted that in every scholarly discipline, most information is exchanged through *informal* communication. The published literature, while lagging significantly behind the informal exchange, is the primary source of information for scholars or professionals who are not part of the *invisible college*, an informal network of researchers or leaders in a field. It is the members of the invisible college who organize conferences and found a primary journal to disseminate their work. Conferences provide for immediate feedback on work in progress, while publication in a journal creates a permanent record of contributions to the advancement of a discipline or profession.

I encourage all of you who have original research, projects, or ideas related to Judaica librarianship to share them with your colleagues on the pages of the primary journal of our field.

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