

From Strength To Strength: Judaica Collections Facing The Future¹

Michael W. Grunberger

I too wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this conference, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Judaica Department of the Harvard College Library, and to add my voice to those congratulating Charles Berlin on his extraordinary achievements here at Harvard over the last twenty-five years.

In my talk this morning I will examine collection development in Judaica libraries as though it were a uniform, generic, phenomenon — though I am well aware that the broad range of institutions housing Judaica collections cannot all fit under one umbrella. Our diversity is reflected in the composition of this audience, which includes administrators and bibliographers, catalogers and area specialists, scholars and information scientists, representing Judaica collections in public and private institutions, universities, and colleges, as well as research institutes. We are almost certain to hold differing views on the overall goals of collection development, the role of the collections in our libraries, where Judaica libraries are today, and the problems and issues related to collection development that our libraries face as we look to the twenty-first century.

These differences notwithstanding, there are, in my opinion, common challenges facing our diverse community of Judaica libraries, as each strives to build and maintain collections that reflect aspects of the history, thought, and culture of the Jewish people. These common challenges are inherent in the types of materials that we collect and seek to preserve; in the acquisition sources that we share; in the Middle Eastern or Jewish studies programs that we support; and, in the kinds of scholars whose research we are charged to sustain.

This morning I will touch on a number of areas relating to collection development in general and Judaica collection development in particular. As you will hear, I interpret my mandate rather broadly and ask your indulgence and patience at the outset for what may be a somewhat diffuse and discursive presentation.

Where We Are Today

The bibliographer or area specialist whose responsibility is to develop a Judaica collection has as his or her primary mission

the development of a systematic and rational program of collection building that supports and strengthens the mission of the institution served by the library. While the acquisition of materials to meet the present and anticipated needs of our users is the starting point of all library activities, the maintenance of the collections that we acquire — and here I mean to include security as well as preservation — represents a critical task confronting each of our libraries as we face the future, no less important than acquiring new materials.

We have, to be sure, witnessed an extraordinary period of growth in our collections. In his 1975 landmark article in the *American Jewish Year Book*, Charles Berlin described the rich resources then available for Jewish studies in the United States.² Incidentally, this essay remains one of the few, if not the only, articles in the literature to deal with Judaica libraries from an overall collections perspective.

In his essay, Dr. Berlin presented capsule descriptions of more than thirty U.S. libraries holding important Judaica collections, ranging in size from 10,000 to at least 200,000 volumes. All told, the collections described housed at least 2 million Judaica volumes.

In a survey just completed by Stephen Lehmann of the University of Pennsylvania, thirty-seven libraries with collections of 1,400 to 350,000 volumes are listed.³ The total number of volumes in the Judaica collections reported on by Mr. Lehmann is 3.5 million: a substantial increase in less than fifteen years.

Special mention should be made of three important Judaica libraries established since 1975: the Price Library of Judaica at the University of Florida in Gainesville, established in 1977;⁴ the Lowy collection of Hebraica and Judaica at the National Library of Canada, also founded in 1977;⁵ and the Gruss Talmudic Civil Law Library, established in 1986 at New York University.

Need for Descriptive and Analytic Data

Excepting Dr. Berlin's essay and Mr. Lehmann's survey, however, we have precious little by way of descriptive or analytic data on our collections. We have, to be sure, a long-standing series of articles describing

individual Judaica libraries, both U.S. and foreign, that has appeared as a regular feature in the *Jewish Book Annual*. We are also well represented in the standard library directories, such as the *ALA Directory* and Ash's *Subject Collections*. But we do not have, nor have we ever had, a bedrock of discipline-wide descriptive or analytic data on which to base our collection development activities.

What kind of information should we have in order to fulfill better our collection development responsibilities? First, we ought to gather — if we don't already — and share, which we certainly don't do now, the annual statistics that are commonly used to describe library collections: titles, volumes, serials, annual expenditures, yearly acquisitions, etc.

To coordinate this kind of data gathering we might turn to the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies (CARLJS), while a suitable vehicle to disseminate these statistics might be an annual or biennial supplement to our journal of record, *Judaica Librarianship*. These kinds of descriptive statistics are requisites to establishing the quantitative dimensions of our collections. Further, we need to undertake analytic studies examining the extent to which our collections meet our users' needs.

To establish the qualitative dimensions of our collections, we need to evaluate their respective strengths and weaknesses using a methodology similar to, but not necessarily limited to, the Research Libraries Group's (RLG) conspectus. As many of you know, the conspectus is a collection evaluation tool that has been devised to determine the relative strength and weakness of a given subject area collection; its purpose is to help coordinate collaborative collection development efforts and resource sharing among RLG member libraries. Very simply put, participating libraries assign a value corresponding to a level of collecting intensity for a given subject area, measuring (1) collection strength; (2) current collecting intensity; and, at the discretion of the institution, perhaps a third measure for the (3) desired collecting level. The results are then used to assign primary collecting responsibilities for "endangered" subject areas (i.e., areas for which three or fewer

libraries collect at the 4 level or higher) among participating libraries.

It is interesting to note that in 1985 CARLJS member libraries submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities a proposal to fund a Jewish studies conspectus effort on the part of some of its members. The purpose of this conspectus effort was to support a retrospective conversion project — not collaborative acquisitions among Judaica libraries.

The Crisis in Cataloging

Turning the conspectus on its head to serve technical services rather than using it as a tool to build collections was certainly a creative, resourceful, and probably unintended use of the conspectus methodology; but it is also suggestive and illustrative of a phenomenon that has characterized the Judaica library scene: a confusion of means and ends.

Cataloging has taken on a life of its own. It exists separate and apart from its intended consumers — the students, researchers, and scholars for whom collection developers develop collections and catalogers catalog books.

At one library that shall remain nameless (but not blameless), it is said, jokingly I think, that "the physical book is but a pale reflection of the bibliographic record." The kernel of truth in this exaggerated formulation is reflected in the procedural gridlock that seems to occur once a book arrives in many of our libraries. Witness our growing arrearages, giving lie to our naïve expectations that automation and shared cataloging would speed up processing throughput. From a simple means to an end, connecting a reader with a book, cataloging has evolved into a complex morass of rules and rule interpretations moving ever farther away from our users and from their relatively straightforward requirements.

Let me quickly assure the catalogers among us that I believe that I understand the rationale for the complex structure that now exists: the rules and rule interpretations provide guidance to catalogers nationwide and assure the standardization necessary to share cataloging records through electronic means.

And I understand as well that our focus on cataloging reflects in part our need to process an ever-growing sea of literature. Since the Second World War, we have experienced an extraordinary period of growth, fueled for nine years, from 1964 through 1973, by the PL-480 program, which saw about 1,665,000 items distributed among some twenty-five participat-

ing research libraries, with each full participant acquiring an average of 65,000 individual pieces. We needed to find ways to integrate these acquisitions into our collections efficiently and in a timely fashion. It was at this juncture that many Judaica libraries began to shift from nonstandard, institutional-specific systems to standardized systems — adopting the first and second versions of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR and AACR-II), and conforming in general to the Library of Congress (LC) practice.

What can we do to remedy this situation? As a first step, I believe that we ought to examine what level of description is necessary in order to afford our users access to our materials; to do this, we need to learn more about how our readers look for information. It is crucial that catalogers begin to address end-user information requirements, instead of focusing on fine-tuning and calibrating a grand theoretical cataloging edifice.

Alternative ways to describe our holdings should be explored — through bibliographies of special collections or specific subjects. This would enable us to bring hard-to-catalog items to the attention of our users. We should investigate collection level cataloging, where groups of pamphlets, for example, might be represented by one record in our catalogs. (Something akin to New York Public Library's *PBM class of materials.) For some categories, we may find that "fast and dirty" is the most efficient way to connect our readers with materials in a timely fashion. It may just be that some things that need to be done. . . . don't need to be done all that well.

Collection Building

The techniques of collection development are rather straightforward, and in institutions where the Judaica collection is but a part of a larger collection, these techniques are often based on documents that provide area specialists or bibliographers with collecting guidelines.

At the Library of Congress, for example, there are two basic and complementary tools used to guide our Hebraic collection development activities: acquisition policy statements, which are regularly reviewed and updated, covering the entire spectrum of collecting done by LC and, for foreign acquisitions, blanket order agreements, based on the acquisition policy statements, that spell out the parameters of our acquisitions profile: so many children's books, so many cookbooks, so many calendars, and so on.

Today, the majority of Judaica libraries acquire their Hebrew materials from Israeli

dealers specializing in the book export trade; some institutions are also able to purchase selectively at auction (some even have an angel or two to help acquire high priced items). Retrospective titles are purchased from a network of local and foreign booksellers.

The competition among our libraries for selected titles from these retrospective lists can be quite fierce. I complained to one of our Israeli antiquarian dealers that even though we had cabled him to reserve several titles just two days after we had received his offering, we were still not quick enough to acquire one of the titles that we wanted. Indignantly, I demanded to know how another library could possibly have beaten us to the title. His answer was simple: a full eight hours before our cable reached him, one of his American customers had telephoned him at home at 2 a.m. Israeli time — waking him from a sound sleep — to reserve several titles, including the one in which we were interested. I learned an important lesson from that phone call, one that I am pleased to be able to share with you today: you have to get up *very* early in the morning if you're going to beat Charles Berlin to a Hebrew rarity.

Current Hebraica, however, is generally acquired during regular business hours, purchased from one or two Israeli book exporters. The dependence of a significant number of Judaica research libraries on the services of one or two booksellers is not in and of itself a plus. As we all know, a blanket order arrangement with a book dealer requires constant monitoring and evaluation. A blanket order dealer will be careful to spend his entire allotment, sometimes shipping items that are clearly out-of-scope for one or more of his clients.

The major problems, though, with blanket orders are not sins of commission but rather sins of omission. A dealer will often ship what is at hand, what is easiest for him to acquire, rather than the more difficult and hard to locate items. Because we have no comprehensive bibliographic tool that is sufficiently current to identify these kinds of fugitive titles, by the time we learn of their existence, they have disappeared from the market and are no longer available. So, evaluating the services of Israeli blanket order dealers is both necessary and problematic, to say the least.

If there is an advantage to the blanket order arrangement it is that it establishes a foundation or baseline of acquisitions, upon which a staff of dedicated, detective-like bibliographers can build. On the plus side, also (but barely), it may be noted that the use of one or two blanket order dealers by

the majority of Judaica libraries, has, de facto, perpetuated at least one aspect of PL-480. The same synergy that occurred then occurs now: when one library orders a title not previously shipped, if it is still available, the dealer will send the title to each of his customers. So one library's vigilance generally benefits all of a blanket order dealer's clients.

But we pay a price for this lack of competition in the Israeli book export trade. First of all, our dependence on one or two sources means that our collections are highly duplicative. Of course, this was also the case during the glory days of PL-480, and in addition to reflecting the acquisition process itself, also, to a degree, indicates the duplicative nature of our academic programs. The result, however, is that we now more or less share the same basic strengths and weaknesses. Certain kinds of literature (e.g., political and religious ephemera, Master's and Ph.D. dissertations, publications in Yiddish, Judaica from the Far East and Latin America, Israeli government documents) and certain types of media (e.g., film and television, software, prints, broadsides, photographs, "Rebbe cards") that are extraordinarily difficult to collect are, to the best of my knowledge, not systematically acquired by the majority of our libraries.

Of course, these difficulties have been recognized and individual libraries have developed strategies to collect some of these kinds of items. One maintains a salaried, full-time bibliographic representative in Israel whose primary task is to supplement the blanket order dealer's shipments. A second library has an extensive network of exchange relationships with private and governmental bodies. Still a third carefully scans available cataloging records and borrows on interlibrary loan items that it hasn't acquired from its dealer; it then, with permission, photocopies or films the items if they are no longer available for purchase.

At LC, area specialists take periodic acquisition survey trips to assure adequate coverage and to make on-the-spot purchases of library materials on an "as needed" basis. For example, when a Southeast Asia area specialist undertakes a survey trip to India, he or she may be asked to acquire selected Indian Judaica for the Hebraic Section. The point is that collecting Judaica comprehensively, on a research level, requires a significant expenditure of time, patience, and skill, in addition to an ample budget.

As we face the future, we will encounter new and different technologies that will surely have a significant impact on our collections as well as on our services. In recent

years, collection development librarians have had to cope with materials in new and different formats. General reference tools, such as *Dissertation Abstracts*, *Ulrich's* and *Books in Print*, can now be purchased on CD-ROM; Judaica on CD-ROM cannot be far behind. Indeed, the editor of the *Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language* recently advanced the possibility that the dictionary itself might be issued on CD-ROM.

It is clear that these new techniques will revolutionize the way we fulfil some of our current responsibilities. Optical disk, for example, is an ideal text and image storage and retrieval medium. Today it can store on one side of a disk the equivalent of thousands of pages of text. Storing the full text of certain categories of material in digital form could help to solve a host of storage and service problems. The technology is certainly available; the key issue is identifying appropriate categories of materials to store on the disk. At present what we need to keep in mind is the tremendous potential inherent in these emerging technologies to make information in our collections, as well as the information about our collections, widely and easily available to scholars and researchers.

Collaborative Acquisitions

No single research library can possibly acquire all that it might need to support its users' research. No library can, because it can't anticipate every research demand; it can't afford to buy every title; it can't possibly identify every in-scope title; and it can't always acquire the titles that it does identify and order. It is to expand the resources available to its users beyond its own collections that a library participates in collaborative acquisitions and resource sharing.

Not surprisingly, these twin ideas come to the fore in times of economic insufficiency. When resources are scarce, we take a hard look at the prices we pay for individual items, as well as at our collecting policies. And we begin also to look to cooperative, or collaborative, acquisitions programs to help us meet some of what we perceive to be our collecting requirements. The Farmington Plan, for example, grew up in the postwar period and faded away during the prosperity of the late 60s, when libraries believed that they could fully support their own research needs with their own funds.

I should here acknowledge the very real reluctance of some of our institutions to engage in such projects. This reluctance is based on the reality that no agreement is forever; that institutions change course and their collections and resources are often

redirected; that an item not acquired today is unlikely to be available tomorrow; and that our users prefer convenient, timely, and on-site access to the materials that they need.

One category of material that is, in my opinion, a suitable candidate for a collaborative acquisitions program is precisely the type of material that we are not acquiring successfully from our Israeli blanket order dealers: marginal and ephemeral Hebraica and Judaica. In its "esoteric serials project," CARLJS took an important first step in this direction. For some time now, under the guidance of Dr. Charles Cutter of Brandeis University, it has coordinated the acquisition of marginal, or "esoteric," periodicals by a group of CARLJS members.

That this is the right direction in which to proceed is confirmed by a recent study. A group of subject bibliographers in German Literature and Geology participated in an RLG study, known as the Conoco Study, that confirmed the notion that only fringe or peripheral items were grist for the collaborative mill.⁶ The bibliographers were not prepared to depend on resource sharing for core materials — even though they had assurances that these resources would be readily available to each of the collaborating institutions.

It should be pointed out that it is unlikely that economies could be realized by libraries collaborating only in peripheral areas, since acquiring marginal items often requires the expenditure of far more resources than does material acquired through the usual channels.

But the research value of these kinds of fugitive materials should not be minimized. For example, to acquire Israeli political ephemera, as our host systematically does, requires both an Israeli presence and strategically placed individuals collecting materials in various cities during an Israeli election campaign — surely a very expensive enterprise. But the results of such ambitious collecting efforts are quite impressive. Witness Hanna Herzog's *Contest of Symbols: The Sociology of Election Campaigns Through Israeli Ephemera*, published by the Harvard University Library in 1987 — a work that is both a scholarly explanation of an historical and sociological phenomenon and a guide to a portion of Harvard's unique collection of political ephemera.

Preservation

Once added to our collections, Judaica and Hebraica present to the conservator an unusually broad range of preservation

challenges. Materials requiring treatment range from parchment to clay, from paper to film, from metal to wood. Our libraries house manuscripts, scrolls, cuneiform tablets, magic bowls, genizah fragments, incunabula, broadsides, and, of course, the great literatures of the nineteenth century — Yiddish and Hebrew — embrittled and worn, in many cases, beyond repair. Many of the books and documents in Judaica collections bear the marks of those who sought to destroy or censor them, and their condition often reflects the tortuous wanderings of their owners.

In considering the extraordinary challenges we face as we strive to preserve and secure our collections, we might find it helpful to step back and examine the conflicting contexts in which we operate. On the one hand, we are strongly committed to affording our users free and unrestricted access to our materials; on the other hand, we have an overriding obligation to preserve our collections for future generations.

For example, the best way to preserve a particular watercolor might be in total darkness, hidden away, never again to see the light of day. Yet few would advocate such a self-defeating and absurd preservation course. Or, if one wanted to be certain that the collections were secure from theft, the originals could all be buried in caves and only surrogates would be served to users. But collections, at least in libraries, do not exist for their own sake. Unlike museums, libraries collect, describe, and preserve their materials so that they can be used. The key question then is, What should be the balance between service and preservation, between access and security?

This is the balance that we need to consider when we face the preservation dilemma embodied in the thousands of fragile and embrittled items not designated as rare or valuable, to which our students and faculties must have access in order to do their work. The vast number of such items precludes their preservation via wholesale encapsulation, leaving at present microfilming or perhaps photocopying as the only archival-quality alternative. Unfortunately, this means that in order to preserve a book's content, we often destroy it as a physical object.

For more than a decade, LC has been experimenting with a mass deacidification process designed to arrest paper deterioration by impregnating the paper with diethyl zinc (DEZ). Unfortunately, this technique has not yet reached the production stage. Furthermore, DEZ is not a remedy for books already embrittled; the only way to preserve embrittled volumes in their original formats is either through encapsu-

lation — some would argue that an encapsulated volume does not preserve the original format — or through paper strengthening techniques.

There is a perception that the emerging electronic technologies — CD-ROM, optical disk, magnetic storage media — might one day hold the key to the massive format conversion necessary to preserve efficiently materials already too brittle to use. While the potential preservation value of the new media is generally recognized, scientists disagree as to its current practicableness.

A 1986 report prepared for the National Archives by a distinguished committee of scholars and scientists found that at present the only acceptable preservation options for those documents in the National Archives that were most at risk were either to microfilm them or to photocopy them.⁷ The emerging technologies, such as CD-ROM, magnetic tape, or optical disk, were judged inappropriate for archival preservation because, among other reasons, they are hardware dependent, and the hardware is expected to have a functional life of only ten to twenty years. The blue-ribbon panel thought it unlikely that the hardware and software needed to utilize the storage media of today could be maintained thirty, forty, or fifty years down the road, and they rejected as unfeasible the obvious solution of continuous reconversion of the machine readable data to new formats and standards as they emerge.

And yet, these views notwithstanding, it would be premature, as well as unwise, to reject the new digitalized and magnetic storage media as potential archival preservation solutions. As noted in a Library of Congress statement on its optical Disk Pilot Program:

... although it may be too early to embrace optical disk technology as the solution to archival preservation of information and improved information delivery services, it is also too early to reject the possibility that it could be. . . . If a stable means can be found for archiving these massive quantities of bits and, furthermore, if measures can be developed for monitoring the stability of the archived materials so that new copies can be made well in advance of degradation, then libraries and archives as well as their users may find that we cannot only keep recorded knowledge for a long time but, just as importantly, they can get to it without physically traveling to the place where it is stored.⁸

Security

In addition to our duty to preserve our collections, we have an obligation to secure

them as best as we can from the dangers of fire and theft. We are, to be sure, acutely aware of the dangers to our collections from fire and water; the recent catastrophe in Leningrad — 400,000 volumes destroyed, 3.5 million volumes damaged by water — only serves to underscore the peril. All of our collections are, to varying degrees, vulnerable. An on-going critical task that we face is the systematic elimination of the variables that contribute to such catastrophes in our libraries. At the same time as we work to create hazard-free environments, however, we need to develop realistic plans for coping with institution-wide — as well as with small-scale — catastrophes.

Collection security, for closed as well as open stack collections, is a continuing problem, exacerbated by the high prices that Hebrew books currently fetch at auction. We need to pay more attention to our roles as active custodians of collections, developing ways to monitor our inventories that are not based on the "exception" principle (i.e., that we become aware of a missing title only after it has been requested — or worse, when it is offered for sale at auction or through the trade). A first step, and a small one at that, would be to share information with each other on collection security matters, about the thieves, vandals, forgers, deranged persons, and assorted mischief-makers that pass through our portals.

This morning, I have touched on a number of related collection development issues. I have emphasized that we must continue to focus on building our book collections — monitoring the research needs of our constituents even as we try to anticipate them; that we should study our own collections — learning more about their composition and their use; and that we reexamine — from a user's point of view — how effectively our collections are being described and experiment with alternative ways to make our materials known to scholars.

I have noted that our dependence on one or two dealers, coupled with the lack of substantive competition in the book exporting trade in Israel, has helped to create a situation in which our collections, to a large degree, duplicate one another; that to mitigate this condition, we ought to broaden the focus of our acquisition efforts, tapping nontraditional publication sources, acquiring and building collections in a variety of formats, and perhaps collaborating in the acquisition of assorted categories of ephemera and marginal items. And I have suggested that we need to pay more attention to the active maintenance of our collections, coordinating our individual

Preservation efforts and establishing firm control over our collections.

I have tried to cover collection development for Judaica libraries, broadly defined. But one key variable has not yet been mentioned: the need for expert area specialists and subject bibliographers.

In the twentieth century, American Judaica collections have flourished in great measure through the painstaking efforts of a cadre of devoted Judaica bibliographers trained in their disciplines and diligent in their pursuit of needed materials. We see their hand in North America's great collections of Judaica — so assiduously developed over the course of this century — and it is on these increasingly scarce human resources that we will depend if we are to continue to grow "from strength to strength."

Notes

1. I wish to record my appreciation to Mr. William Sittig, Director of the Collections Development Office at the Library of Congress, for his helpful suggestions during the course of several wide-ranging discussions on the topic. I am grateful as well to Ms. Doris Hamburg, Paper Conservation Section Head at LC, for her counsel on conservation-related issues and to Dr. Julian Witherell, Chief of the African and Middle Eastern Division, for his overall guidance on the larger context of cooperative acquisitions programs. The opinions expressed in this paper, however, are my own and should not be construed to represent the position of the Library of Congress.
2. Charles Berlin, *Library Resources for Jewish Studies in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library, 1975). Reprinted from the *American Jewish Year Book 1974-75*, Volume 75 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1975), pp. 3-53.
3. I am indebted to Mr. Lehmann for sharing the results of his survey with me before its forthcoming publication as an appendix to

Garland Press's *Encyclopedia of Jewish-American History and Culture*.

4. See Robert Singerman, "The Price Library of Judaica at the University of Florida," in *Jewish Book Annual*, Volume 43 (1985-86), pp. 177-182.
5. See Brad Sabin Hill, *Incunabula, Hebraica & Judaica: Five Centuries of Hebraica and Judaica . . . from the Jacob M. Lowy Collection* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1981) and his "Hebraica and Judaica Collections at the National Library of Canada," in *Jewish Book Annual*, Volume 44 (1986-87), pp. 173-183.
6. See "A Preliminary Report on the Conoco Study in German Literature and Geology" (Research Libraries Group, 1986).
7. *Preservation of Historical Records* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1986).
8. From an unpublished article, "The Potential of Optical Disk Technology for Archival Preservation of Knowledge in Human and Machine Readable Forms: A Statement from the Library of Congress," (Library of Congress, 1984), pp. 4-5. I am grateful to Mr. Herbert Becker, Director of LC's Automated Systems Office, for calling my attention to this statement.