

# Hebrew Online: Current Issues and Future Concerns— A View From the Field\*

**Rosalie Katchen**  
Brandeis University  
Waltham, MA

## Introductory Remarks

The AJL Convention Program Committee has asked me to speak about the Hebrew online enhancement in RLIN (the Research Libraries Information Network)<sup>1</sup> from the perspective of users of the system. I do not profess to speak for individual institutions or for individuals themselves. The paper presents my view, as a user of RLIN's Hebrew online capacity, of the opportunities that now exist for librarians dealing with Hebraica. It is especially gratifying to do this while we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Hebraic Section at the Library of Congress. Librarians across the country view the leadership of the Library of Congress as a key element for future change and development.

It has been approximately eighteen months since the Hebrew enhancement in RLIN became available in January 1988. After the initial champagne and parties, we all settled down to the business at hand: creating a Hebraic database using Hebrew script. For the first time, major Judaica libraries are connected to each other in a national database, whether they use Hebrew script or not. The potential for including libraries from overseas, especially Israel, is technically a very real possibility.

Considering the future of databases and technology in general, it is entirely possible that within a few years, a researcher will dial in from home to search this international multi-script database of Hebraica, download bibliographies to a local disk, request books and journal articles through interlibrary loan, read full-text journal articles in special databases, and even reserve books housed at specific locations, to be used at other institutions through some type of consortium arrangement. RLIN is now also accessible on the national "Internet" network in some research institutions. Display of non-Roman scripts in such an environment is certainly a real possibility in the not-too-distant future.

---

\*Paper delivered at the 24th Annual Convention of The Association of Jewish Libraries, Washington, DC, June 19, 1989.

## The Challenge of Technology

What is the view from the field of users of such a database? In my opinion, the user will want it all.

What, then, are our responsibilities toward the scholarly user in providing needed information, now that Judaica libraries are coming of age in the world of automation?

I contend that we need to provide our public with accurate and complete information in as timely a manner as possible. While this does not sound like a radically new thesis of library service, the challenge we face is to maximize the use of existing technology and its potential to achieve this goal: providing our public with *the* most current information about our collections in the most expeditious manner.

The adoption of technology by society has been viewed in three progressively important stages.<sup>2</sup> First, we automate by improving the speed and quality of what we have done, i.e., by mechanizing what we already do. Second, we change the tasks themselves, because technology forces us to look at them differently. In the third stage, technology causes the workflow, and society itself, to change.

We are all familiar with many examples of this from the industrial revolution—the steam engine, the locomotive, the automobile—many forms of mechanization and automation. From a perspective closer to home, so to speak, we can view the creation of the printing press, or even the typewriter, as two examples of technologies that revolutionized book production and the means of dissemination of knowledge. This affected not only society in general, but libraries more specifically. Unlike the librarian in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, the post-Renaissance bibliographer/librarian could no longer be the sole person to know the exact location of the thousands of titles that the printing presses brought to light. The first step of *modern* technological transformation for libraries has fallen in the domain of technical services, specifically cataloging. The

initial creation of a database constituted the first step in this regard. Automation of bibliographic files came at a time when libraries were probably wondering how they were going to bring vast numbers of publications under bibliographic control.

Automation of non-Roman records now stands between phases one and two: that is, we have mechanized or are in the process of mechanizing the tasks, but have not quite yet looked critically at the tasks themselves.

Many of us used some form of national database, even before Hebrew became available on RLIN. Some of us have used local, in-house library systems that "talk" to the larger database in transferring romanized information only. The very fact that we all can now "talk" to each other through the use of RLIN has major implications for the future of Hebrew bibliography, interlibrary cooperation, cooperative cataloging, acquisitions, and even preservation decisions.

## Hebrew Script on RLIN and the User

Let us now examine some of the issues currently facing users of the RLIN Hebrew script enhancement. We are still very concerned about the actual processes of automating what we do. By inputting existing and new Hebrew and Yiddish bibliographic data into the MARC (machine-readable cataloging) format, we enable our users to search online—not only by title and author and series—but also by subject, keyword, publisher, place of publication, date, and many more indexes. We are already sharing our resources and our cataloging data, by allowing others to copy and DERIVE (in RLIN's terms) from our cataloging record, and, in many cases, we are providing detailed holdings information about each title.

But, still, this is mostly an example of phase one of automation: we have mechanized the basic processes of cataloging our materials, but we have not vastly changed the way we look at cataloging itself.

Let me explain this point. Since the creation of the MARC format over twenty years ago, Judaica libraries have tried to use it to take advantage of the ease of automation. Until recently, automated systems did not have the capability to display and index Hebrew in the vernacular. In a solely Roman-character environment, libraries naturally had to accommodate their needs by transliterating Hebrew scripts. For the sake of convenience the *brief* romanized title, which for decades had satisfied all users in a multi-lingual and multi-script card catalog (see Figure 1), became the *full* romanized online record. The Library of Congress based its use of a completely romanized record on two words in AACR2, Rule 1.OE: "wherever practicable," that is: "In the following areas, give information transcribed from the item itself in the language and script (*wherever practicable*) [italics mine] in which it appears there: title and statement of responsibility/edition/publication . . . series." Obviously,

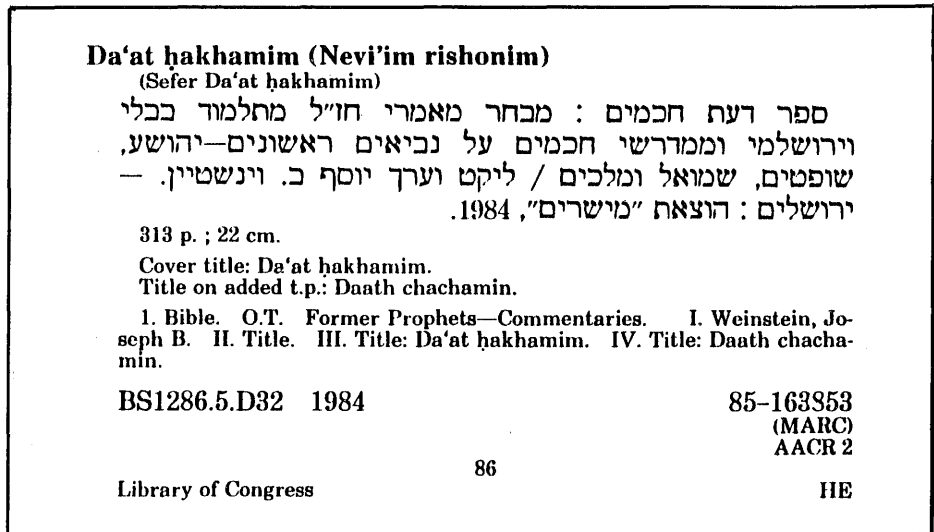


Figure 1. Library of Congress printed card featuring Romanization of the brief title only.

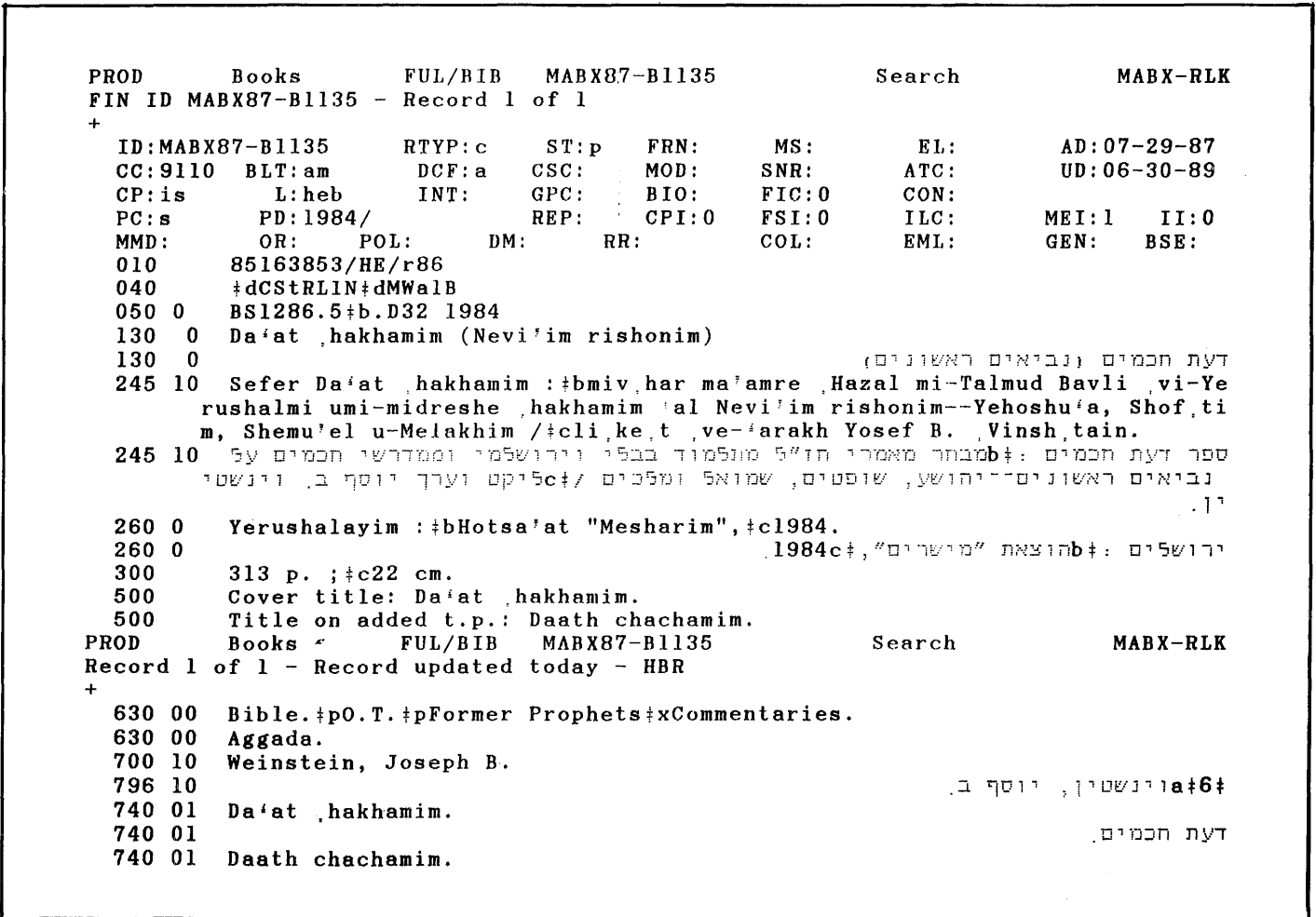


Figure 2. RLIN record featuring Romanization of the complete title page transcription.

PROD Books LON MABX87-B1135  
FIN ID MABX87-B1135 - Record 1 of 1 -

Search

MABX-RLK

דעת חכמים (נביאים ראשונים)  
ספר דעת חכמים : מבחר מאמרי חז"ל מתלמוד בבלי וירושלמי ומדרשי חכמים 57 נביאים  
ראשונים-יהושע, שופטים, שמואל ומלכים / פיקט וערך יוסף ב. וינשטיין. -- ירושלים :  
הוצאת "משרים", 1984

313 p. ; 22 cm.

Cover title: Da'at ,hakhamim.

Title on added t.p.: Daath chachamim.

1. Bible. O.T. Former Prophets--Commentaries. 2. Aggada. I. Weinstein, Joseph  
B. II. וינשטיין, יוסף ב. III. Title. IV. Title: Da'at ,hakhamim. V. Title: דעת  
חכמים VI. Title: Daath chachamim.

LCCN: 85163853/HE/r86

L.C. CALL NO: BS1286.5.D32 1984

ID: MABX87-B1135

CC: 9110

DCF: a

[HBR]

CALL: BS1286.5.D32 1984

Figure 3. RLIN record in LONG format, which emulates Library of Congress card format.

without the development of Hebrew script online, there was only one practicable or even *practical* choice: *full* transliteration.

Until Hebrew was implemented on RLIN, full romanization was the only option for libraries automating their Hebraica catalogs. The Library of Congress has been inputting completely romanized MARC records since 1983, recognizing the importance of continuing to contribute to NUC (the National Union Catalog), which was, from then on, entirely automated. Ohio State University opted for complete romanization, because its users kept looking online for its Hebraica records.<sup>3</sup> The most impressive example is Harvard University's recently completed retrospective conversion project of 100,000 Hebrew and Yiddish records, all fully romanized in order to take advantage of Harvard's HOLLIS system.

If Hebrew script had been available online years ago, we still would most likely have retained the brief romanized title in the Hebrew-script record, in order to provide access for users who need such information and to provide integration within a multi-script system. Should we now continue to romanize the entire title area of each record *and* provide the exact same information in Hebrew script? (See Figure 2.) It is now practicable to follow completely the original dictates of AACR2: to transcribe bibliographic data in Hebrew script (see Figure 3). The technology has caught up. Can we look critically at our procedures and change them because technology has given us new options?<sup>4</sup>

I am happy to report that the Cataloging Subcommittee of the RLG (Research Libraries Group's) Jewish and Middle East Studies Program is working on a proposal from Brandeis University to have RLIN adopt a revised online romanization standard for Hebraica materials: that is, to require only a brief romanized title and to provide the full title transcription in Hebrew script. It is my hope that this standard will someday also be adopted as the USMARC standard.

Our prime goal, however, as stated earlier, is to provide accurate and complete information in as *timely* a fashion as possible. We need to examine critically our cataloging procedures in an online environment, in order to achieve the results we want: more current and retrospective records online. This is *the* major benefit which such a change in standards will generate. Our users encouraged us to make available Hebrew script online. Our challenge is not just to learn the technical aspects of this newest form of automation, but to control and fashion the methods and results that everyone—librarian and user alike—wants, in order to create a user-friendly environment for the cadre of scholars and students who are turning to librarians in increasing numbers for bibliographic guidance and advice.

Control of bibliographic format will influence the quantity and quality of shared cataloging data. Some of the members of the RLIN Hebrew enhancement program have in the past participated in the CARLJS (Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies) Shared

Cataloging Program, which distributes catalog cards for works in the Hebrew alphabet. Connection through RLIN gives us a new opportunity to get cataloging information almost instantaneously. After we all get our feet wet, so to speak, it may then be possible to consider assigning subject areas for preferential original cataloging.<sup>5</sup>

#### Authority Control for Non-Roman Names

While adding non-Roman names to the Hebrew script record is, according to current RLIN standards, optional, most Hebrew script users have taken advantage of this feature in their desire to create a Hebrew script index of names, places, and organizations. Many users find it easier to search and identify a Hebrew or Yiddish name in the original script. At Brandeis, we found that even after Hebrew author cards were no longer produced because of the expense of catalog maintenance, users continued to search by Hebrew author in the Hebrew catalog.

It is therefore gratifying to learn of the work and effort of the Library of Congress in proposing a structure for non-Roman data in MARC name-authority records. The concept behind the LC proposal is to link all forms of a Hebrew or Yiddish name to the established Roman authority record. The Hebrew and Yiddish forms remain cross references. In addition, one of these may also be chosen as a "preferred" Hebrew script form, either if the established Roman form is an exact parallel, or if there is a highly popular Hebrew script form.

In theory, using this method in a bibliographic system with interactive authority control, a search under any of an author's variant spellings or names or acronyms, in any script, would lead the users to works in all languages by this author. This is likely to be similar to the classic, integrated card catalog in which works in all languages by or about a writer were filed under one unique heading in Roman script. The difference in an online environment is that the user can get to the same spot when searching a variety of spellings or scripts, without having to move his/her feet or hands! Cross reference structure will be transparent to the user.

**... we now use RLIN as a public terminal for Hebraica materials.**

While we are still far from interactive authority control in RLIN, the acceptance of these concepts by a national standards committee will open the door for future development by local authority-control vendors. More important, non-Roman data in MARC name-authority records will enhance the quality of our database by providing an official standard for the non-Roman name. At Brandeis, we have always maintained a Hebraic name authority file, which we still use in deciding how to enter Hebrew names online. Inclusion of non-Roman names in the MARC authority record will, however, provide the national framework needed in order to gain some sort of uniformity online, which at present does not exist, for Hebrew script names. The lead of the Library of Congress in this important matter is most welcome.

### **Retrospective Conversion of Non-Roman Script Records**

Another current concern for Hebrew script users is retrospective conversion. At the 1987 AJL convention, I discussed the retrospective conversion project at Brandeis.<sup>6</sup> Because of RLIN's new fee structure, instituted in September 1988, we have re-examined our cataloging procedures in order to minimize our searching costs.

RLIN's Batch Recon program, done offline, is offered to offset the costs of searching online title-by-title. Batch Recon allows any non-Roman data from the source record in RLIN to remain in the newly derived record. A library using the Batch Recon program offline with a DOS/PC disc cannot, however, transfer non-Roman data from the disc into source records to be derived in RLIN. The library must call up the

record and key in Hebrew or Yiddish script online. Retrospective conversion costs for Hebrew and Yiddish script records are, therefore, higher than for Roman-alphabet works. This issue needs to be addressed formally in the Jewish and Middle East Studies Program Committee.

### **Other Concerns**

Topics discussed up to this point include how the Hebrew script enhancement to RLIN affects record format, shared cataloging, authority control, and retrospective cataloging. Other areas affected include collection development, interlibrary loan, and bibliographic instruction.

Effective use of the RLG Conspectus for Jewish Studies areas has not yet become viable; nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the format of this online collection-analysis tool will eventually accommodate itself in some fashion to the needs of new members in this specialized subject area. Sharing resources through interlibrary loan will also be affected as more libraries become aware of individual library and regional strengths in Jewish Studies.

Libraries may also have to consider how their public will use RLIN directly. Since Brandeis has closed its card catalogs, we now use RLIN as a public terminal for Hebraica materials. At some point, we hope to have our records integrated with our local system, when display and indexing of Hebrew scripts become available in it. To meet our present needs, we have developed a preliminary users' guide to searching Hebrew records and Hebrew script in RLIN. After revision, we hope to be able to publish and distribute this to other users of the Hebrew script enhancement. Moreover, with the expansion of the number of Hebrew-script users, additional documentation in this area will surely need to be written.

Use of Hebrew scripts in an online environment is, then, still at phase one of automation: we are trying to cope with the myriad of details in computerizing our workflow in a variety of areas. We are beginning to look at standards, and at individual and institutional needs in a cooperative effort—and progress is being made through the very discussion of proposals and the exchange of ideas. The future may hold any combination of benefits for our users.

Can we then accomplish our goal of providing "accurate and complete information in as timely a manner as possible?" The RLIN Hebrew enhancement has given us all a unique tool in the world of library technology. It is now up to us to look at the

system and ourselves, and to fashion a truly user-oriented database of Hebrew-script records.

### **References and Notes**

1. Aliprand, Joan. "Hebrew on RLIN." *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 3 no. 1-2 (1986-1987), p. 5-16.
2. Morris, Dily E. "Electronic information and technology: and potential for academic libraries." *College & Research Libraries*, vol. 50 no. 1 (January 1989), p. 56-64.
3. Zipin, Amnon. "Romanized Hebrew Script in the Online Catalog at the Ohio State University Libraries." *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 1 no. 2 (Spring 1984), p. 53-57.
4. This idea was also presented at the mid-winter meeting of the LITA/RTSD Retrospective Conversion Interest group, January 1989, where the topic of "Conversion of non-Roman character materials" was addressed by participants in the CJK (RLIN and OCLC) and Hebrew programs.
5. For a discussion of cooperative cataloging for retrospective conversion see: Weinberg, Bella Hass. "Retrospective Conversion of Hebraica Catalog Records: Options, Issues, and Visions." *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 4 no. 1 (Fall 1987-Winter 1988), p. 17-20.
6. Katchen, Rosalie E. "Retrospective Conversion of Hebraica at Brandeis University." *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 4 no. 1 (Fall 1987-Winter 1988), p. 20-22.

---

*Rosalie E. Katchen is Hebraica Librarian at Brandeis University Libraries in Waltham, Mass. She also chairs the Cataloging Committee of the Research and Special Libraries Division of the Association of Jewish Libraries.*