New Reference Books from Israel, 1988/89

Libby Kahane

Jewish National and University Library
Jerusalem, Israel

The directories, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, and bibliographies listed below are part of the collection of the Jewish National and University Library. Most were published in Israel, but some of them are in the Library because it is the Library's aim, as the National Library of the Jewish people, to collect Judaica from all over the world. Some non-Israeli publications that may not have come to the attention of U.S. librarians are therefore included in this list.

The works are arranged in the following categories:

I. Bible
II. Paleography
III. Hebrew Literature
IV. Biography
V. History
VI. Israel
VII. Directories
VIII. Librarianship
IX. Sociology
X. Education
XI. Medicine
XII. Music
XIII. Computer-Readable Reference Tools

Hebrew bibliographic data is given at the end of the article for all the starred entries. Translated titles in brackets are supplied for Hebrew works lacking English title pages. Starred page numbers indicate pagination in Hebrew letters. Price in dollars is given where known, otherwise, in NIS (New Israeli Shekels) with approximate dollar equivalents.

I. Bible


Arranged alphabetically by subject—e.g., Abraham and Sarah, Man and the Angels, the Twelve Tribes, and Prayer—each entry quotes the Midrash or Midrashim on the subject and cites its source. There is an index by Biblical chapters and verses.


The index volume to this outstanding encyclopaedia has two parts: one is an index of names and subjects; the second is an index arranged by the chapters and verses of the books of the Bible.

Entries referred to in the Index were written between 1955, when the first volume appeared, and 1982, when the final volume appeared. Interestingly, entries under the same subject often reveal how formerly accepted theories have been changed by new research.


The Old French words used by Rashi (Solomon Ben Isaac, 1040–1105) in his biblical commentary were intended to clarify the meanings of biblical passages for his contemporaries. For today's biblical student, they are incomprehensible. In this dictionary, they are translated into Modern French, English, Hebrew, and Yiddish.

The book is arranged according to the verses of the Bible. Greenberg cites the biblical word, as well as the Old French word in Hebrew and Latin characters, and gives translations. Additional features of this work are an index of the Old French words in Latin characters, a list of manuscripts used, and 50 pages of bibliographic notes.


Passages from the Talmud or the Midrash are quoted for over 550 biblical personalities, among them: Avinadav, Aviram, Avishag, Tsippora, and Tsefania. The arrangement is alphabetical, with subheadings under names for which there are several pages of quotations. For example, some of the subheadings under Esther are: her beauty, her goodness, as queen, and Mordechai, and Haman.

The English reader interested in locating Talmudic or Midrashic passages about biblical personalities may consult the index volumes to the Soncino editions of the Talmud and Midrash Rabbah.

II. Paleography


This is an excellent tool for the identification of scripts and for the assessment of undated manuscripts. For each of 154 different scripts, there is a page showing individual letters of the script and a plate.
reproducing a page from a manuscript in its actual size, in order to display the texture of the writing and its style.

III. Hebrew Literature


This is a cumulation of the annual bibliography that appeared in Kiryat Sefer from v. 26 (1950) to v. 55 (1980). It covers books and articles on Hebrew literature and its history; on poetry and prayers (piyyutim); on Hebrew poetry in Asia-Africa, Spain, Italy, France, and Germany; and anthologies of poetry and prayers.

The cumulation lists Hebrew authors and subjects in one alphabet. There is a separate list of non-Hebrew entries. A "thesesaurus" indicates subject headings used and serves as an authority file for authors' names. The accessibility of Schirmann's important bibliography is greatly enhanced by this cumulation. A paper edition is to appear shortly.

IV. Biography


Jews who lived in Bordeaux during the 18th and 19th centuries are treated in detail in this biographical dictionary, which is based on research in local archives. In addition to the individual biographical entries, there are also family trees (genealogical tables) for 53 families, lists of the professions practiced by individual Jews, and information about communal institutions.


This biographical dictionary, which was begun in 1978, is to cover Jewish history from the creation through 1985, in twenty volumes. Special features are its elaborate diagrams and maps, which portray the sages in terms of historical events, in terms of the development of Jewish literature, and in relationship to each other.

The following periods were covered in volumes one to twelve: the biblical period, B.C.E. 300–940, 940–1492, 1648–1760, 1760–1850, and 1850–1915.

Volumes 13 and 14 cover the years 1915–1945. Biographical entries for 3,821 rabbis, communal leaders, scholars, and authors who lived during that period are given in volume 13. An average entry has about 35 words. Volume 14 indexes the material by personal and family names, by localities, and by titles of books. It also includes a chronological list and a list of those who perished in the Holocaust.

An index to the entire set, including volumes not yet published, appears in part one of the introductory volume. Sages from every period and every country are listed in one alphabet, by personal names. While there are indexes by family names for the separate periods listed above, a similar cumulated index by family names would be a useful feature in one of the forthcoming volumes of this admirable work.


About 4,000 brief entries list Jews who lived in Germany at any time between 1918 and 1945. Each entry includes bibliographic sources.

Many of the names included in this work are not mentioned in International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigres, 1933–1945 = Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933. The reason for this is that Walk has listed many lesser known persons who played a role in Jewish communal and religious affairs or in Zionist affairs.

V. History


Microfilms of state and municipal Polish archives as well as Jewish materials at the Central Archives form the basis for this guide, which is arranged by localities. Sample entries are "Boćki: Community Record Book, 1721–1808" and "Belz: 1745–1769. Settlement of a dispute between the communities of Belz and Chelm and that of Zamosc concerning the allocation of poll tax, 1745." Language is indicated for non-Polish materials.


These recent volumes in the excellent Pinkas Hakehillot series cover Latvia, Estonia, and the southwestern part of Germany (Wuerttemberg, Hohenzollern, and Baden) from earliest times up to World War II.

The historical survey for each locality includes bibliographic and archival references. Each volume includes an index of persons and localities, with names of localities indicated in Latin characters as well as in Hebrew. In the volume for Latvia and Estonia, place names in each entry are given in Latvian or Estonian, in German, and in Russian.

The latest volume in the series appeared in 1989. Covering Warsaw and its vicinity, it is the fourth volume dealing with Poland.


Archival papers of Canadian Jews and Jewish organizations in the National Archives of Canada are described, with biographical information for each of the personal archives, and historical background on each of the organizational archives. All information is given twice: once in the English section and once in the French section.
VI. Israel—History, Geography


Ha-Levanon, ha-Havatselet and ha-Magid were Hebrew journals which appeared between 1884 and 1910 in Berlin, Cracow, Paris, Jerusalem, and other cities. This index to a total of 110 volumes lists only those articles that have a bearing on the history of the Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel.

Among the entries are: Etrogim in Klaf Hitam, Jerusalem—Yemenites, Jerusalem—Hospitals, Hebron—Jewish Labor, and Safed—Printing, as well as entries for personal names.

This important historical source has been in preparation at Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi since 1970. It was prepared for computerization by the Haifa University Library. An additional 44 periodicals for the same period were also indexed, but the data was not computerized. The card file on those periodicals may be consulted by researchers at Yad Ben-Zvi in Jerusalem.

At this writing, a booklet to accompany the microfiche is in preparation. When the entire product is ready for distribution, a price will be set.


The periodical Teva va-Arets includes a great many articles on Israel's geography, historical geography, and archaeology, in addition to articles on the fauna and flora of Israel. Among the index entries are: History of Jaffa Port, [the] Forest in Biblical times, Hebrew inscriptions at a burial site dating to the First Temple, Volcanic sites on the Golan, Ancient water in the Judean desert.


The accounts of travelers are important sources of information for the history of Eretz Israel. This biographical dictionary of nineteenth-century 'pilgrims' supplies detailed information about each one. It is arranged by categories—researchers, literary persons, artists, royalty, women—and by nationalities—Englishmen, Americans, Frenchmen, Russians, and so on. Jews account for only 19 pages of this generously illustrated book.

Each entry includes the traveler's name in Latin characters and most entries include a portrait. There is an alphabetic index (in Hebrew only) for the reader who is searching for a particular person. A bibliographic section supplies data on books written by and about the travelers.

Among the personalities listed are Eduard Rueppell, who discovered Eilat in 1817; Franz Wilhelm Sieber, who prepared the first map of Jerusalem in 1818; and William McLure Thomson, who wrote about the earthquake in Safed in 1837.

VII. Directories


This directory is intended for Israeli residents, as well as tourists. It lists sites of Jewish interest, tour guides, homes for the aged, religious newspapers and journals, Judaica bookstores and publishers, stores for religious articles, kosher restaurants, wedding halls, orchestras, the religious councils and neighborhood rabbis for the entire country, schools, yeshivot, institutions involved in technology and halakha, sofrit, mohalim and much more. The detailed table of contents is alphabetically arranged, with references to related subjects.

The guide is in Hebrew, with a 10-page section in English. Its avowed purpose is to aid the religious consumer and individuals requiring the services of the religious councils.


More limited in scope than Dappe Shofar, this list only religious educational institutions, but it deals with the subject in greater detail. It covers elementary schools, high schools, vocational schools, kollelim, yeshivot for ba'ale teshuvah, girls' schools, extracurricular activities, and organizations involved in spreading Torah.

Data given for each institution includes address, phone number, name of principal, and often additional information.


This is a mimeographed list of 133 Jewish schools in Argentina, including names, addresses, and phone numbers.


Over fifty pages of this calendar list addresses and phone numbers of communal institutions, synagogues, and organizations, along with the names of rabbis and officers.


Jerusalem's sites and history are described in detail in 28 guided walking tours and five car/bus tours. This excellent guide features photographs on every page and an index of streets, sites, organizations, and institutions.

VIII. Librarianship


This is a printout of the Hebrew subject headings list developed at the Bar Ilan University Library to assist readers in using the subject catalog.

It is used in place of Library of Congress subject headings in English—in contrast to prevailing practice at some Israeli university libraries.

About 70% of the terms are direct translations of Library of Congress subject headings, and 30% are expansions for Jewish religion, Jewish history, and Israel. The library adds new subject headings as needed. This list is not available commercially, but interested libraries are invited to write to the Head Librarian.

IX. Sociology

23. Bibliography on Aging in the Jewish World, compiled by Nina Laval, with assistance from Eileen Kaplan. Jerusalem: JDC-Brookdale Institute of Gerontology
The annotations in this catalog reveal interesting facts about Jewish education during the past 500 years. Among the 101 entries in the catalog are Lekah Tov, the first Hebrew catechism, by Abraham Yagel (Venice, 1542); Yad Ha-Lashon, a Hebrew grammar with explanations in Portuguese, by Solomon de Oliveira (Amsterdam, 1688); and Samuel Israel Mulder's Bibel voor de Israëlitische Jeugd (Leiden, 1847), a 17-volume Dutch translation of the Bible about one hundred years before the rebirth of Hebrew as a spoken language.

The Hebrew readers (chrestomathies) featuring in this exhibition catalog began to appear about one hundred years before the rebirth of Hebrew as a spoken language. The attractive catalog lists 129 books, with a facsimile of the title page of each one. An example is Bet Hasfefer, first published in Vienna in 1806. The edition displayed is the 17th, published in Warsaw in 1883.

XII. Medicine


Dr. Steinberg is the author of several well-known works on medicine and halakha (cited in JL, v. 3, no. 1–2 (1986–87), p. 124), The first volume of this encyclopedia covers letters alef through hehei. Among the subjects are paternity, hospitals, visiting the sick, suicide, and nursing mothers. A subject index refers from related subjects to the main heading.

Each entry includes a definition of the concept, a discussion of its treatment in the Bible and Talmud, its scientific and medical aspects, and a complete review of the halakhic laws involved, from Talmudic times to the most recent decisions. The material is fully documented, and a bibliography on the subject of medicine and halakha is included in the appendices.

XIII. Computer-Readable Reference Tools


This product revolutionizes the search for a source or citation from the Bible, Talmud, and a broad range of Torah literature. It contains the full text of the Bible, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, Shulhan Arukh, Mishnah Berurah, Zohar, Midrash Agadah and Midrash Rabah on one hard disk for use with an IBM-compatible personal computer. These texts are also available individually or in any combination.

The software is “user friendly”; pertinent commands are given at the bottom of each screen. The reader can search for individual words or a combination of words, and can indicate their order and a range of the number of words between them. Synonyms can be retrieved, and if a word has more than one accepted spelling, all the forms will be retrieved. A search by the root of a word will retrieve the word in different verb forms and as a noun with various prefixes and suffixes. For example, searching the root “RHTS” will retrieve hitrathets, bamerhets, rahatsnu, and so on. The texts that are retrieved have the desired word highlighted, and the reader can page forward and backward to read adjacent passages.

When used in conjunction with a word processing program, the text that was retrieved can be copied directly into a file.

By Jacob Blum, Baruch Kahane, and Shlomo Raanan. Jerusalem: B. Kahane (Rehov Sorotzkin 9A), 1989. 7 diskettes. $50.

Maimonides’ codification of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, is a systematic classification of Talmudic and post-Talmudic Jewish law. It is arranged in 14 books, each representing a distinct category of the Jewish legal system. This index to 520 commentaries on the Mishneh Torah is arranged according to the same categories and their sub-sections. Of the books indexed, 330 are themselves arranged in that order, and 120 have indexes that are arranged according to those categories. The remaining 70 books have no indexes, and were indexed especially for this project.

Additional books are continually being indexed. At present, the material takes up two megabytes on seven diskettes to be used with an IBM-compatible personal computer.

A small section of the index, dealing with the Sabbatical Year, Hilkhot Shemittah ve-Yovel, was published in Nitsane Arets (Jerusalem), no. 6, 1988, p. 216–235. Since its publication in Nitsane Arets (an irregular periodical published by the Students of Yeshiva Merkaz Harav, Rehov Harav Kook 9, Jerusalem), much new...
This software package provides a scholar with a bibliography on any talmudic text he is studying. The user inputs the name of a tractate (masekhta) and its page number, and is given references to works (and specific pages) in which that text is discussed. The works cited include those of the ge'onim and the rishonim as well as works of 19th- and 20th-century scholars.

At present, about 200 works are covered in the index, with about 1,000 works planned for inclusion within about three years. Subscribers will be sent up-dated versions regularly.

This index to references complements the Lieberman Institute’s Talmud Text Database, which includes the full text of major manuscripts and printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud. A sophisticated information retrieval program is available for the pre-indexed version of the Talmud Text Database.

Hebrew Bibliographic Data:
4. י. א. ג'י ר"פ. כ"ן. 12.
5. י. ר"פ. כ"ן. 12.
6. י. מ"ד. י. כ"ף. 12.
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