

## An Interview with Jacob I. Dienstag, President of the Association of Jewish Libraries, 1967

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**Q.** How did the merger of the Jewish Librarians Association and the Jewish Library Association occur?

**A.** The Jewish Librarians Association (JLA) [an organization of Judaica research librarians] lost steam for a while, but was resuscitated in the early '60s under the dynamic leadership of Herbert Zafren, of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. JLA then decided to suggest a merger with the other Jewish library organization [the Jewish Library Association], an organization of synagogue librarians. In 1965, a joint Merger Committee of the JLA and the Jewish Library Association met in New York. I was among those representing the JLA. It was wonderful that the merger succeeded.

**Q.** Who were the founders of the Jewish Librarians Association [one of the forerunners of AJL]?

**A.** Sophie Udin, the then energetic librarian of the Zionist Archives and Library, and later librarian of the Knesset [until her death in 1960] was one of the main organizers in 1946. The founding members included Dr. Alexander Marx, of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Dr. Joshua Bloch, of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library; Harry J. Alderman, of the American Jewish Committee Library; Rabbi Philip Goodman, of the Jewish Book Council of America; Dr. I. Edward Kiev, of the Jewish Institute of Religion; Rabbi Isidore S. Meyer, of the American Jewish Historical Society; and myself [of Yeshiva University].

**Q.** What were some of your interests?

**A.** All felt a need for communication among the libraries, and many were interested in the development of professional tools: bibliographies, union catalogs, and indexes.

**Q.** Was anything produced?

**A.** A checklist of periodicals in two large libraries in New York City was published.

**Q.** What particular problems did you encounter?

**A.** The LC classification was not satisfactory. We used to call it "Classification of The American Council of Judaism," because LC cataloged everything out of Judaica. For example, Jewish art and Jewish music were classified, respectively, with general art and general music, rather than with Judaica. We tried to persuade them to change it but did not succeed. Even so, many Judaica libraries adopted LC.

**Q.** Any other problems?

**A.** Status of librarians was an issue. We were considered "dignified clerks." I think that over the years, however, our status improved considerably.

**Q.** How many members were there in JLA?

**A.** At that time there were about 12 people in the New York group. Nationally, there were about 50 people in the association.

**Q.** What do you think you personally contributed?

**A.** At the convention of the merged association, when archival materials were discussed, I recommended that a major library should house such materials because of space [considerations] and possible need of specialized equipment, such as photographic and microfilming equipment. This [recommendation] was accepted. I also suggested that the next convention be held in New York, which it was.

**Q.** How do you view AJL today?

**A.** AJL has become an active and strong organization with many accomplishments that we at one time just dreamed about. May it go from strength to strength.

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**Jacob I. Dienstag,  
AJL President, 1967.**

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