

The Association of Jewish Libraries and Classification

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An Overview

The Association of Jewish Libraries' (AJL) concern with Judaica classification is a matter of record. In reviewing AJL convention proceedings and other publications dating back to 1967, it is obvious that no sooner had the organization taken shape, than debate began about the practical and philosophical ramifications of adopting various classification systems as well as variations from standard forms. This article provides a brief overview of some of the discussions and developments that have ensued.

In treating the Synagogue, School and Center Division of AJL (SSC), the focus is on classification decisions, inconsistency, and the lack of professionalism inherent in early cataloging practices. Steps taken toward providing training of SSC librarians through the auspices of AJL, and recent attempts to standardize classification data—thereby opening the door to eventual networking at the SSC level—are also addressed.

The writer has had only limited access to information on R&S (Research and Special Libraries Division of AJL) classification matters, but published records make it apparent that R&S concerns are centered around Library of Congress (LC) classification practices. Numerous R&S members have had direct input into LC decisions, several while on staff at LC. The major thrust in AJL lobbying of LC on matters of Judaic interest, however, has been in the area of Romanization, which is more closely related to descriptive cataloging than to subject analysis.

Major Figures in Judaica Classification

Before embarking on a summary of the love/hate relationship that members of AJL (like all thinking librarians) have maintained with classification questions and decisions, certain names must be singled out. From the beginning, Mae Weine, through her modified Dewey scheme,

provided those tending small synagogue libraries, many of them untrained and bewildered volunteers, with a basic framework to bring order and accessibility to their collections. Miriam Leikind's even simpler system, devised for The Temple in Cleveland, did the same.

In more recent years, many SSC libraries have adopted *A Classification System for Libraries of Judaica*, by Daniel J. and David H. Elazar (University Press of America, 1979, 2nd rev. ed., 1988). The Elazar scheme offers greater specificity than the aforementioned systems, and is thus better suited for a medium to large-sized synagogue collection. The Central Cataloging Service for Libraries of Judaica (CCS), which employs Elazar, and which constituted a breakthrough first step toward providing SSC with a source of standardized, philosophically desirable classification data, was founded by Rita Frischer in Los Angeles.

In the realm of classification and subject cataloging, Rabbi Theodore Wiener and Bella Hass Weinberg are R&S's counterparts to SSC's Weine, Leikind, Elazar, and Frischer. Rabbi Wiener, Judaica/Hebraica Cataloger at the Library of Congress (LC), has regularly kept R&S members aware of LC decisions on Judaica classification and has, at times, served as a lightning rod for the displeasure of AJL colleagues with LC practices.

Dr. Weinberg, a faculty member of the Division of Library and Information Science at St. John's University, Consulting Librarian for YIVO, and Editor-in-Chief of *Judaica Librarianship*, (*JL*) has been arbiter and interpreter, instructor and gadfly, in Judaica cataloging matters for many years. She has served not only R&S in this regard, but has written and spoken on issues concerning SSC as well. For example, in the premier issue of *JL* (Fall 1983), the "Deweineazar" department featured Dr. Weinberg's survey, "Judaica Classification Schemes for Synagogue and School Libraries: A Structural Analysis"—a valuable

aid to SSC librarians, regardless of their level of training. Dr. Weinberg has also served as an invaluable consultant to CCS since its formative stages, benefiting subscribers from behind the scenes.

Conventions, Committees, and Classification

With these acknowledgments out of the way, we note that the first reference to classification in AJL's published records, in the 1966 Convention *Proceedings*, mentions that the Jewish Book Council (JBC) proposed in that year that AJL adopt a single classification system, which JBC would then publish and distribute. The matter was turned over to SSC, which decided to choose Weine from the three schemes then available (Golub, Weine, Leikind), but to print and distribute the scheme from within the Association. Weine had generously given AJL the scheme that she devised for this purpose. The Weine classification system was at first distributed free in AJL new member kits, but in more recent years it has been sold separately. Although AJL has gone on record as not advocating one system over another, the sale of the Weine classification by the Association naturally resulted in most of the earliest SSC libraries being organized by that scheme.

At its 1970 convention, AJL's ongoing commitment to educating SSC members in matters of classification was emphasized by a full-scale Cataloging Clinic, during which exponents of each of the major classification systems outlined each scheme, explaining its strengths and weaknesses. These papers are published in the proceedings of that convention; today's AJL members might benefit from having them, or more recent, related articles, distributed as separate AJL publications.

By 1975, many newly established SSC libraries had decided to utilize the Elazar scheme. This was especially true in

Southern California, where the deep commitment to Elazar of Dorothy Schroeder, Instructor for Hebrew Union College's Judaica Librarianship courses, moved most members of AJL-Southern California into her camp. Even older libraries, already organized by other systems, reclassified to Elazar in order to gain the needed specificity for their growing collections. Mae Weine had commented, during her presentation at the 1970 cataloging clinic, that her scheme would probably not work for a very large collection and, as small libraries expanded, a number of librarians found her words increasingly true.

Nevertheless, the Weine scheme was still popular for many smaller collections and for combined Judaica and secular collections in day schools, especially on the East Coast. Therefore, in 1975, AJL made available a revised and updated Weine Classification System, one of several revisions made with Mildred Kurland's help. The most recent edition appeared in 1982, when Anita Loeb also compiled an updated relative index to Weine.

Currently, Judith Greenblatt is chairing an SSC Cataloging Committee with the express mandate of expanding Weine by providing either a supplement or a complete revision. This committee will also work with Rita Frischer, CCS founder and coordinator, and Rachel Glasser, CCS cataloger, on coordinating Elazar classification number additions and changes. CCS is vitally interested in having an expanded Weine scheme available, too, because it provides classification numbers from that scheme, as well as subject headings.

R&S concerns regarding classification and subject analysis are also reflected in *AJL Proceedings*. During the 1967 convention, the R&S Technical Processes Committee discussed the possibility of preparing a unified scheme dealing with the specifics of Jewish law (BM 520-523), and presenting it to LC. The idea was dropped when members decided it was impossible for Judaica libraries to come up with a uniform schedule. When the eighth edition of LC subject headings was published in 1976, much discussion ensued at the AJL convention. Members raised objections to the perspectives that were reflected by LC's 70 subject catalogs.

At the 12th annual convention in 1977, Dr. Weinberg presented a paper entitled "Implications of Changes in Library of Congress Cataloging Policies for Judaica and Hebraica Librarians," which was published in 1978 as a monograph by AJL. This comprehensive study is indicative both of R&S

concern with LC decisions and of Weinberg's conscientious effort to share her knowledge with AJL's general membership. Of prime concern were issues of "standard" cataloging and "permanent" bibliographic data, including "established" names, subject headings, and class numbers. Weinberg's paper also included practical comments dealing with alternative class numbers, approaches to integrating changes in classification schemes, and an overview of LC's shelf classification policies, practices, and shortcomings. The paper also discusses descriptive cataloging and explores problems inherent in either deviating or *not* deviating from standard practices. Weinberg, who spent 1979-1981 lecturing at the Hebrew University Graduate Library School in Jerusalem, has also published widely in the secular library world on Hebraica and Judaica classification and cataloging concerns.

The 1983 AJL convention in Long Beach, CA, included a series of sessions on cataloging, with Ellen Siegel Kovacic speaking on LC practice. While Weine addressed the changes in her 1982 scheme, Beth Dwoskin of The Temple (Cleveland), discussed Dewey Judaica variations, and Adaire Klein (Los Angeles), reviewed the second edition of Elazar. That same year, R&S formed a Committee on Cataloging with Kovacic, Micha Oppenheim, Barry Walfish, and Pearl Berger serving as members.

AJL Publications and Classification

AJL had always attempted to use its publications to broaden membership awareness of classification issues, but with the decision to stop publishing convention proceedings, many vitally important papers were not being generally disseminated. Much valuable information was lost to members who were unable to attend yearly conferences. The *AJL Bulletin* attempted to fill the bill (for example, vol. 16, no. 1, Spring 1981, was a special issue on cataloging, but space limits prevented in-depth coverage of many technical issues).

Therefore, it was cause for rejoicing when vol. 1, no. 1 of *Judaica Librarianship* appeared in Fall 1983. Not only did the issue contain the special department called "Deweineazar," which featured the aforementioned article by Weinberg, that analyzes and compares the five classification schemes most commonly used for Judaica, but the journal also had a Catalog Department, edited by Pearl Berger, as a

regular feature. In addition to Weinberg's survey, articles dealing entirely or tangentially with classification over the years have included (in alphabetical order):

Berger, Pearl; Wachs, Sharona R. "Classification," vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 67-68.

Dreyfuss, Ricky. "Library of Congress Classification for Judaica: Recent Changes," vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1988-Winter 1989), pp. 153-156.

Frischer, Rita Berman. "The Central Cataloging Service of the Sinai Temple Blumenthal Library," vol. 4, no. 1 (Fall 1987-Winter 1988), pp. 68-75.

Klein, Adaire. "The Handling of Holocaust Denial Literature in a Special Library," vol. 3, no. 1-2 (1986-87), pp. 55-57.

Posner, Marcia. "A Classification System for Libraries of Judaica, by David H. Elazar and Daniel J. Elazar," vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1988-Winter 1989), pp. 176-177.

Weinberg, Bella Hass. "The Cataloging of Jewish Liturgy by the Library of Congress: A Critique," vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 70-74.

Weinberg, Bella Hass. "Cutter J4: Tampering with the Library of Congress Classification for Judaica," vol. 3, no. 1-2 (1986-87), pp. 45-48.

Weinfeld, Morton. "The Classification of Holocaust Denial Literature by the Library of Congress," vol. 3, no. 1-2 (1986-87), pp. 50-55.

Wellisch, Hans H. "The Universal Decimal Classification and Its Application to Jewish Materials," vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 94-95, 107.

Central Cataloging Service

Since the earliest days of AJL, most SSC librarians have assigned original class numbers. Although a few use commercially available Dewey cards and others depend on LC—despite its inappropriateness for a small collection—the majority perform classification and cataloging in-house and independently, regardless of the scheme used. In some instances, they adhere to available authorities, though they seldom cite these. More often, each institution makes its own modifications, leading to inevitable inconsistencies. Even were this approach to stop today, massive

problems would still have to be overcome should networking arrive—as it probably will one day, even to the most humble synagogue or center collection.

AJL members had heard much discussion over the years of the desirability of centralized cataloging and classification for SSC libraries, and it was growing increasingly obvious that some *real* step, no matter how small, needed to be taken toward standardization of SSC classification, the sooner the better. Since Los Angeles librarian and teacher Dorothy Schroeder (of blessed memory) had been one of the chief advocates for this approach to SSC cataloging and classification, the Central Cataloging Service was conceived as a tribute to her vision.

In 1986, Rita Frischer received approval from the administration of Sinai Temple to use Blumenthal Library as a base for distributing high quality cataloging and classification data to SSC libraries. To fund the project, she applied for and received a community service grant.

The Central Cataloging Service relies primarily on Elazar for classification, although it also provides Weine class numbers for the many libraries still using that scheme.

Since the Leikind scheme has not been updated for a long time, however, it and other alternative schemes are not included in the CCS classification data, which is distributed to subscribers in hard copy at present, but which holds potential for networking when SSC technology catches up. The goal of CCS is, and has been from its beginnings in 1986, to move SSC libraries toward tighter standardization within the admittedly non-standard Judaica systems that most of us have been encouraged to use. To that end, CCS uses as authorities Elazar and Weine's schedules as issued, with tampering done only rarely, after much agonizing, and on consultation with the founders of the schedules.

CCS, which began as a free pilot program, is now dependent on a small but fiercely loyal group of subscribers for its existence.

At present, its home institution will continue to support it as long as it does not become an obvious financial drain. However, CCS, or any succeeding, and/or more sophisticated, program for distributing high quality classification and cataloging data based on non-standard Judaic schemes, will be able to help SSC libraries move forward only if AJL concentrates on convincing SSC library workers, whether volunteer, para-professional, or professional, to stay as aware of current trends and standards as R&S librarians attempt to be, and to strive for high levels of professionalism in the catalogs they establish and maintain.

We have all come a long way in 25 years; we have a long way yet to go in the area of Judaica classification.

Rita Berman Frischer, Director of Library Services, Blumenthal Library, Sinai Temple, in Los Angeles, is the founder of the Central Cataloging Service for Libraries of Judaica.