

## Preservation Microfilming of Judaica: Projects, Plans, Possibilities\*

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### The Issue of the Decade

Preservation of deteriorating library materials, an issue high on the agenda of libraries in the United States, is fortunately a matter that has received significant public attention of late.

• On Tuesday, May 22, 1990, section 3 of *The New York Times*, entitled *The Science Times*, featured an article on mass deacidification of books on its front page.

• Maxine Sitts of the Commission on Preservation and Access<sup>1</sup> states: "Preservation is THE issue of the decade for the library world. Within the last couple of years, everybody has been climbing on the bandwagon – senators, congressmen, state legislators, university presidents and faculties, physical plant managers, the publishing industry, paper manufacturers, environmentalists – even authors like Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, and Joan Didion" (RLG, 1989, p. 3).

• The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)<sup>2</sup> tripled its allocation for preservation projects in 1989 to \$12.3 million.

National library organizations such as the Research Libraries Group (RLG)<sup>3</sup> and the Commission on Preservation and Access are actively working to meet the preservation challenge. Jewish Studies scholars were informed of the preservation issues at the December 1989 conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, when Zachary Baker of YIVO delivered a paper entitled

"Preserving Judaica Research Resources." (A revised version of that paper appeared in the last issue of *Judaica Librarianship* (vol. 5, no. 2).)

Crumbling books and journals on library shelves tell us that the problem is serious and immediate; each day that passes is a day too late for some items. The national attention drawn to the preservation problem tells us that now is the time to act. Judaica libraries in the United States are involved in preservation activities to varying degrees. To date, the work has primarily been conducted locally, by individual institutions. Plans for cooperative projects are on the agendas of both the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies (CARLJS) and the Jewish and Middle East Studies Program Committee (JAMES) of the Research Libraries Group.

The focus of this paper is preservation of the intellectual content of brittle or endangered published materials. This is the area of preservation where cooperation is of paramount importance and where common subject interests and complementary collections in a particular discipline are relevant. Control of the physical environment, mass deacidification, conservation of paper, binding, disaster prevention and preparedness, and security are basic to preservation but are not subject-specific. These issues may be properly addressed in other forums. Discussions at this conference of Judaica librarians should serve, at the very least, to broaden the base of information exchange regarding preservation activities among libraries internationally. With some effort and luck we may look toward developments of a very practical nature for cooperative preservation activities across national borders.

In the United States today, microform is the approved and accepted alternative to artifactual conservation for ensuring

the long-term endurance of the written and printed word or image. New technologies for optical scanning and storage on disc are available and developing rapidly. Until these have been tested and proven, however, microform remains the preservation method of choice. To quote Maxine Sitts once more, "Although we are exploring alternatives . . . microfilming is the only thing that we know works, is cost-effective, and provides for equitable access. The facilities we need to do it are in place, it can happen fast on a mass-production basis, and almost any library can get hard copy from film one way or another. It is a very stable archival medium" (RLG, 1989, p. 6). George Farr, Director of the Office of Preservation at NEH, affirms this approach. In his words, "At present we do not know how long information stored . . . [using optical and digital technologies] will last, nor are there standards for the necessary retrieval systems. For these reasons NEH does not believe it is appropriate to expend public funds on projects that use these technologies" (RLG, 1989, pp. 6, 7).

### Who Has the Master Microform Negative?

A vital element of the preservation microfilming process is ready access to information regarding existing master negatives, their location, and the owners of reproduction and distribution rights. Libraries that wish to borrow or acquire film, fiche, or paper copies, and individuals who require copies of deteriorated publications for their research must have this information. More important for the present discussion, if the continuing preservation effort is to avoid significant duplicate filming, access to a register of filmed titles is basic.

Filming of Judaica publications has been underway in a number of institutions for some time, and several

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thousands of titles have already been preserved. As our libraries prepare for Judaica microfilming on a large cooperative scale, the following questions take on some urgency:

- What sort of access is available to data about filmed titles?
- Where is the information recorded?
- What are the prospects for improved access in the future?
- How do we ascertain what has been filmed abroad?
- Can Judaica collections benefit from international preservation initiatives?

During the spring of 1990, I conducted a survey of members of the Jewish and Middle East Studies Program Committee of RLG and of selected members of CARLJS to ascertain if and where they record information about their preservation microfilming activities. Of nineteen libraries that responded, thirteen engage in preservation microfilming to some degree. Five libraries have reported filmed titles to the *National Register of Microform Masters (NRMM)*. Five have issued published lists of titles filmed. (There is overlap in the last two categories.) Eleven libraries enter records for their microfilms in a bibliographic utility – OCLC and/or RLIN – while two do not. Seven libraries reported that records for a significant number of items they have filmed are currently available neither in a printed list nor online.

It is encouraging to note that eleven of thirteen libraries record current filming in an online network, albeit not all in the same network. There remains, however, a large body of information about microfilmed titles that may not be online. Published lists, printed library catalogs, and commercial vendors' catalogs list titles of microfilmed publications.

Among the major sources are: *Books on Demand* from University Microfilms International, *Guide to Microforms in Print*, *The New York Public Library Register of Microform Masters* or the New York Public Library printed catalogs, *CIS Academic Editions*, the *NRMM*, *The Ab. Cahan Project* of YIVO, the InterDocumentation Company's *Jewish Studies Research Collections* on

*Microform* (distributed in North America by Norman Ross Publishing), *Microfilms of Periodicals*, catalogs issued by the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL), and *Periodicals and Newspapers on Microfilm Available at the American Jewish Periodicals Center* (1984). A selection of current and ongoing projects worthy of note includes Yiddish children's books and Jewish displaced persons publications at the YIVO Institute, American Yiddish imprints and American Jewish periodicals at the New York Public Library, American Jewish periodicals at Hebrew Union College, Rabbinic periodicals at Yeshiva University, and routine preservation microfilming at the Library of Congress and Yale University.

The Harvard University Library is very active in the preservation microfilming arena and has issued checklists and guides of titles filmed. In a project of Harvard in conjunction with the vendor K.G. Saur, nearly 5,000 *Hebrew Books from the Harvard College Library* were filmed and are available for purchase on microfiche. Titles microfilmed at Harvard are recorded both in printed lists and online in OCLC and RLIN. The *Hebrew Books* filmed are primarily 18th- to 20th-century imprints, and there are 11,453 fiche in the collection (Harvard, 1990).

In Spring 1989, the Library Preservation Committee of CARLJS conducted an experiment to obtain information about the search process for identifying existing master negatives. Of eighteen titles randomly selected as candidates for preservation filming, the librarians participating in the study found that six titles, or 33 1/3%, had already been filmed. Most were found in the New York Public Library lists or in the *NRMM*. That was some time ago, and chances are that more would be found if the search were conducted today. In any case, 33 1/3% is a high percentage, and this reaffirms the need for searching to avoid duplicate filming.

Nevertheless, given the variety of lists and sources of data, it is apparent that any filming project attempting to conduct an exhaustive search before a title is filmed is headed for failure. The research would be far too time-consuming and expensive.

A report on *Selection for Preservation* . . . , issued by the Commission on Preservation and Access, suggests that

"if the machine readable bibliographic networks of the country do not evidence the existence of a duplicate preserved item, that may be signal enough to include the item in the preservation process, even though we know that not all of the collections of all libraries are included in that database" (Commission, 1989b, p. 4).

There is no doubt that, ultimately, our goal is to have all Judaica films and fiche entered into a widely available bibliographic utility, so that searching would be a matter of minutes or seconds per title. In the U. S., RLIN's Hebraica online is relatively new, and more time is probably needed for records to be entered and for additional libraries to join as members before we can depend solely upon online searches. Meanwhile, calculated decisions are needed for limiting the search process to a minimum of key sources.

## Prospects for International Cooperation

So far we have dealt primarily with microfilms produced either commercially or by libraries in the United States. This is a narrow perspective, however. What of preservation work in Judaica being done in Israel and in other countries? What are the prospects here for efficient information exchange? Rabbi Yaakov Rosenes, an individual strongly committed to the filming and distribution of important Hebrew works on fiche, who works in Israel in cooperation with the JNUL, sent me a list in May 1990 of 23 recently filmed titles. Nineteen of these fall under the heading "Kovets she'elot u-teshuvot shel rabane Kushta ve-Saloniki" (Collection of Responsa of the rabbis of Constantinople and Salonika). A search of these titles in the Harvard project list yields *five* duplicate items. Here is a case where work was conducted in two places almost simultaneously; information on the related projects was probably unavailable until after the fact. The comparison does, however, point to the potential for redundant efforts in Judaica microfilming.

The Research Libraries Group is building the RLIN database as a primary resource for preservation information. As of mid-1990, RLIN held 370,000 records for microfilm master negatives. These include member contributions, OCLC and British Library data obtained through regular exchange arrangements,

University Microfilms International titles, American Theological Library Association items, and 61,374 *NRMM* 1965-1983 titles converted to tape in a joint venture of the Association of Research Libraries and the Library of Congress. (The latter records cover the letters A-Beal.) When the full *NRMM* file is converted, 400,000 records more will be added to the RLIN total (LC, 1989, p. 70; RLG, 1990a). The queuing function incorporated into RLG preservation projects, in which libraries enter records for items they have scheduled for filming, serves to further enhance information exchange in this field.

RLG's activities on the international front are of particular interest to us here. As already noted, RLG has a reciprocal arrangement with the British Library for exchange of microfilm records. Arrangements have also been made with the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), and negotiations are in process with the Bavarian State Library (Munich). In exchange for information from these libraries, RLG has placed RLIN terminals at their disposal for searching purposes, in what is described as "limited time subsidized arrangements."

A motivating impulse for expanding the horizons of U.S. preservation interests may be traced to the International Project of the Commission on Preservation and Access. "The International Project was begun in June 1988 to explore the feasibility of creating an international database of bibliographic records for preserved materials" (Commission, 1989c, p.1). Mr. Hans Rütimann, the Commission's consultant for the International Project, has traveled widely, visiting libraries, establishing contacts, and working toward the stated goals. Target countries for the project's first phase have been Great Britain, France, West Germany, East Germany, Austria, and Venezuela. The Commission's board has approved expansion of the project, and there is definitely opportunity for other countries to join. Findings so far are that "in most countries, much microfilming has been done – primarily of newspapers – but there are few machine readable bibliographic files to document these efforts in ways that can be disseminated easily. However, without exception, the need for better record keeping is universally recognized and changes are under way" (Commission, 1989a, p. 6.)

## Toward an International Register of Microform Masters

In May 1990, a meeting was held in Zurich, Switzerland, to help along the efforts to create an international register of microform masters. Participants in the meeting included representatives of the initially targeted countries; James Morris, Secretary, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; George Farr, Director of the Office of Preservation at NEH; and Patricia Battin, president of the Commission on Preservation and Access. The meeting was a great success by Hans Rütimann's report, and several formal recommendations to the Commission will result. Among these is that the Commission should conduct an international survey of microfilming projects – current and planned – to compile a directory of microfilming projects at the collection level.

UNIMARC IS the exchange format being considered for a European register of microform masters, and the minimal recording requirements are based on those used by the British Library. The Bibliothèque Nationale has expressed its intention to follow the requirements once these are agreed upon. In the U.S., microform data from other countries may eventually become part of a bibliographic utility, just as data from the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale is already being loaded into RLIN.

With national attention in the U.S. directed toward preservation issues, the Commission's programs have attracted significant support. The Mellon Foundation awarded the Commission a one-million dollar grant to support the development of an international microform database and to facilitate cooperative microfilming abroad, linked to projects in the U.S. (Commission, 1990). The presence of NEH and Mellon representatives at the Zurich meeting underscores their interest in the agenda for an international microform data exchange.

## Data Exchange in Judaica

The movement of RLG and the Commission on Preservation and Access into the international sphere suggests intriguing possibilities for cooperation and data exchange in Judaica microfilming. Chances are that materials of Jewish Studies interest are being, or will be, filmed in European countries.

Furthermore, Judaica data exchange would be greatly enhanced if Israeli libraries were included in these pioneering worldwide programs.

The title of this presentation refers to projects and plans. A cooperative preservation microfilming project for Judaica, proposed and discussed at several Association of Jewish Libraries and CARLJS meetings during the past three or four years, appears to be nearing actualization under the auspices of the Research Libraries Group. RLG has coordinated several large-scale, multi-institutional filming projects during the past decade, and is preparing to launch what is being called a "non-Western" project next. As presently envisioned, this project will cast a wide net, encompassing materials in non-Western languages and reflecting non-Western cultures. The JAMES Committee voted at its May 8, 1990 meeting to pursue participation in RLG's non-Western project. In early 1991, RLG will distribute a "Request For Proposal" to its membership, inviting the nomination of collections for the non-Western program, along with calculations of proposed staffing and budgets. The actual grant proposal will be prepared by RLG staff and submitted to the NEH for funding in June 1992.

Several points should be noted here:

- Relevant collections housed at non-RLG institutions are eligible for inclusion in the project.
- The project is an ambitious one and will run for three years. Its size is largely dependent upon the amount of microfilming that needs to be done and the volume of material that libraries can handle during the three-year period.
- Preparation and filming must meet RLG guidelines. RLG has brought together a team of experts charged with revising its guidelines to reflect the current wisdom regarding the creation of stable, high-quality microfilm. Fiscal implications of adherence to standards and levels of microform production will be taken into account (RLG, 1990b).
- The project may be designed so that much of the preparation and filming is done centrally, with individual libraries responsible only for selection, bibliographic work, and (probably) cataloging.

# FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF JUDAICA AND ISRAELI LIBRARIANS

• All items designated for filming as well as items filmed must be entered into the RLIN database.

• An international component to the project is looked upon favorably by RLG.

It is the task of Judaica libraries participating in the cooperative project to identify collections for filming and to designate institutions to assume responsibility for these collections. This may be accomplished on the basis of known collection strengths, following the model of RLG's Great Collections projects. (The great collections approach presupposes that libraries have significant collections to which resources have been allocated over time, and that by preserving such collections, both local and national priorities can be served.) Alternatively, bibliographies may be used as the basis for selection (Commission, 1989b, p. 3). Judaica libraries have already made some suggestions reflecting subject collections or genres. These include newspapers, serials, Jerusalem imprints, liturgy, rabbinics, Hassidism, Kabbalah, Ladino publications, Yiddish plays, and textbooks. The list seems endless, as does the volume of materials requiring filming. Librarians of independent Judaica libraries and curators of Judaica collections in larger settings working in concert in a supportive environment should be able to meet the challenge.

## Notes

1. The Commission on Preservation and Access is a private, nonprofit organization that fosters, develops, and supports collaboration among libraries to ensure the preservation of published and documentary records, and to provide enhanced access to them. Its first listed objective is the preservation, on microfilm and other archival media, of the contents of deteriorating printed materials (Commission, 1989a, p. 3).

2. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an agency of the U.S. federal government that provides grants for projects in the humanities, including library projects. A separate Office of Preservation has been established at NEH.

3. The Research Libraries Group (RLG) is an enterprise of major universities and research libraries in the U.S. Members of RLG collaborate in ongoing programs

and develop new initiatives to enhance access to research information. The programs focus upon collecting, organizing, preserving, and providing information for scholarship.

RLG has a supporting database, RLIN – the Research Libraries Information Network, which contains in excess of 40 million records contributed by member and nonmember libraries, and is used by libraries, scholars, and researchers. In 1988, RLIN introduced a vernacular online capability for Hebrew called Hebraica online (Aliprand, 1987).

In addition to its major committees, RLG has several special Program Committees dedicated to specific areas of interest. JAMES is the Jewish and Middle East Studies Committee of RLG, with approximately 15 members, all representing Judaica libraries or collections of Judaica within general university or research libraries.

## Postscript (April 1992)

*Changes and new developments have taken place in the two years since the preceding paper was presented. Here are some highlights:*

• *As a result of the RLG restructuring, the JAMES Committee no longer exists as a formal entity.*

• *Retrospective conversion of the NRMM, a project of the Association of Research Libraries and the Library of Congress with the involvement of OCLC, has recently been awarded funding for its final phase.*

• *The International Project of the Commission on Preservation and Access continues to expand.*

• *New possibilities and options for exchange of information are emerging, as the amount of online data increases and becomes accessible through expanding communication networks.*

• *In February 1992, RLG invited member libraries to submit proposals for its Great Collections Microfilming Project, Phase IV. The Project includes non-western languages, and several Judaica libraries responded. The long-awaited and much-discussed cooperative Judaica microfilming project may thus become a reality in early 1993!*

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 April 13, 1990.

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 (Continued from p. 32)

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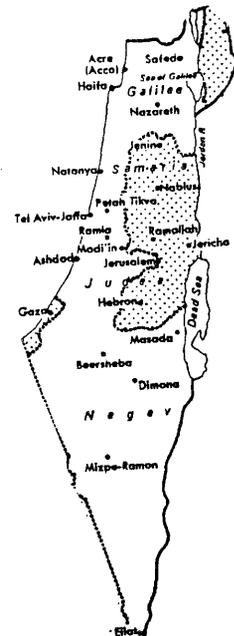
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*The first four-named librarians were the  
 recipients of the Ruth Kahn-Ever Grant  
 from the Libraries Division of the Israel  
 Ministry of Education and Culture in  
 1986, for the development of Hebrew  
 subject headings.*

**Books Received**

*Hebrew Subject Headings, devel-  
 oped by the Hebrew Classification  
 and Cataloging Department,  
 Wurzweiler Central Library, Bar-Ilan  
 University: Shlomo Rotenberg, Shifra  
 Liebman, Gita Hoffman, Sara  
 Shacham, David Wilk. Ramat Gan,  
 Israel, June 1992. 2 v. (798, 435 pp.)*

*A review is scheduled to appear in  
 the forthcoming issue of *Judaica  
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