

IN THE BEGINNING

Bringing Judaica Librarianship to Israel

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A special section of this issue contains papers delivered at the First International Conference of Judaica and Israeli Librarians, held in Jerusalem in July 1990. The following issue (vol. 7, no. 1) is slated to contain papers from the First International Symposium on Jewish Children's Literature, which was organized by Dr. Marcia Posner, co-editor of this journal.

The thesis of this editorial is that the Association of Jewish Libraries, through the publication of this journal and the key role that AJL members played in the organization of the international conference, has contributed to an awareness in Israel of Judaica librarianship as a distinct specialty.

Without question, Israel has always been and remains the world's center for the study of Hebrew manuscripts and the history of Hebrew books and printing. Some of the serials produced in Israel that deal with these subjects are *Kiryat sefer*, *Areshet*, and *'Ale sefer*.

There is a vast difference, however, between Judaica bibliography and Judaica librarianship; one focuses on the book, frequently on its physical form, while the other focuses on the institution that houses collections of books, with an emphasis on systems for organizing them and providing access to their intellectual content.

As a visiting lecturer at the Hebrew University's Graduate School of Library and Archive Studies, I had noted that Israeli librarians did not consider such subjects as Hebraica and Judaica cataloging worthy of a separate course; in general courses on cataloging, as well as Israeli textbooks on the subject, a small amount of attention was devoted to the needs of Hebraica. (This point was originally made in my article, "A Graduate-Level Course on Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging," (*JL* vol. 4, no. 1 (1988) p. 86, col. 1).)

While teaching at Hebrew U., I also worked part-time in the office of *Kiryat sefer*, the bibliographical quarterly of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, where *RaMBI – Index of Articles in Jewish Studies*, a classified bibliography, is also produced. The rubric selected to accommodate a paper of mine on Romanization was "Grammar" (*RaMBI*, vol. 16, 1979, no. 1107). A chapter on Hebraica cataloging was classed under "General Bibliography" (*RaMBI*, vol. 20-21, 1981, no. 9). By 1983, *RaMBI* had added a rubric for "Libraries and Librarianship," and since 1984 the items in that section have been mainly articles from *Judaica Librarianship*.

It was at one of the research library sessions at the First International Conference of Judaica and Israeli Librarians – to be precise, at the conclusion of the session at which papers on "Hebrew Subject Headings" and "The Beginning of Hebrew Printing" were presented (Thursday, July 5, 1990, 8-9:30 AM) – that Ya'akov Aronson, a member of the Organizing Committee of the First International Conference, pointed out that there was no Judaica library organization in Israel, and proposed that one be founded.

At the 1991 AJL Convention held in Miami, Mr. Aronson reported that such an organization had indeed been founded in Israel, with 100 librarians attending the first meeting. The May/June 1992 *AJL Newsletter* (vol. XI, no. 2, p. 13) noted that the group was established as a subdivision of the Israel Society of Special Libraries and Information Centers and that it has held three study days to date.

The American Judaica librarians who proposed that AJL's 25th Anniversary conference be held in Israel, and who worked so hard to make that proposal a reality, are to be congratulated for bringing – not coals to Newcastle – but Judaica librarianship to Israel.

The editors of *Judaica Librarianship* welcome the Israeli librarians who are contributing to this journal for the first time, and we hope that their number will increase. Recalling the peaceful conditions that prevailed in the Middle East at the time of the First International Conference, we wish that peace will become a constant in the region, facilitating travel to Israel as well as communication with its many wonderful residents, especially its knowledgeable Judaica librarians.

As AJL begins to consider the possibility of celebrating its 30th Anniversary by participating in a conference of Hebraica and Judaica librarians in Europe, I express the hope that *Judaica Librarianship* will become truly representative of the field worldwide.