


6-13-2014

Rachel: The Union Catalog of the European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries

Noémie Musnik

Conservatoire national des arts et métiers, Paris, France, noemie.musnik@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Musnik, Noémie. 2014. "Rachel: The Union Catalog of the European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries." *Judaica Librarianship* 18: 116-129. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1020.

Rachel: The Union Catalog of the European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries

INTRODUCTION

Since 2004, Rachel (<http://www.rachelnet.net>) has been the union catalog for several Jewish libraries in Paris: the library of the Alliance israélite universelle (AIU), the Maison de la culture yiddish–Bibliothèque Medem (Medem Library of the Yiddish Cultural Center), and the library of the Séminaire israélite de France (SIF; French Rabbinical Seminary). In December 2005, the media center of the Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ; Museum of Jewish Art and History) joined the network as well. These private institutions, members of the Réseau européen des bibliothèques judaïca et hebraïca (REBJH; European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries), established the union catalog Rachel to facilitate access to their bibliographic resources and encourage wider use of their holdings. By 2008, after a few years of collaboration, together the libraries had amassed some 130,000 bibliographic records, and by 2012, Rachel held over 180,000 bibliographic records. This would not have been possible without the financial and technical support provided by public and private donors and sponsors in France and in Israel: The Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah (FMS; The Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah), the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF; National Library of France), the Direction du livre et de la lecture (DLL, now the Service du livre et de la lecture, a French public agency promoting literacy), and the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL, now the National Library of Israel). In spite of its modest inception in 2004 as a union of four Parisian libraries, the REBJH aspired to become a Europe-wide consortium by integrating into Rachel the catalogs of all European libraries and media centers with significant collections of Judaica and Hebraica.

This article not only reviews the history of both the REBJH and its founding members, but also analyzes Rachel’s current member institutions’ cataloging practices and how these reflect or diverge from those of the founding institutions. Based on initial findings from a user explorative survey conducted in 2008–2009, this paper describes the public service aspect of Rachel and concludes with an update on the status of Rachel since that survey.

THE RÉSEAU EUROPÉEN DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES JUDAÏCA ET HEBRAÏCA (REBJH; EUROPEAN NETWORK OF JUDAÏCA AND HEBRAÏCA LIBRARIES)

The REBJH was established in July 2004 by the AIU library and the Medem Library. The third partner was the nonprofit organization Association pour la sauvegarde et la mise en valeur de la Bibliothèque du Séminaire israélite de France (SIFRIA; Association for the Rescue and Development of the Library of the French Rabbinical Seminary). SIFRIA was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in November 2003 to address the dire conditions at the SIF library and to motivate government funding agencies in France to preserve it. SIFRIA was headed by Laurent Munnich, then a managing partner at the Paris office of a major American firm specializing in

Internet consulting. Inquiring into automating the card catalog of the SIF library, Munnich approached Jean-Claude Kuperminc, director of the AIU library. Kuperminc suggested expanding the scope of the project beyond the conversion of the SIF's catalog to create a more complete union catalog. First named the *Réunion des bibliothèques juives de France* (Union of Jewish Libraries in France) in 2004, the following year it became the *Réseau européen des bibliothèques judaïca et hebraïca* (REBJH; European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries) with the broader goal of building a union catalog to promote preservation and ease access to written and recorded Jewish cultural heritage everywhere in Europe (Kuperminc 2008).

The beginning of the project may be traced back to 1996, when the AIU library began using online cataloging and invited the Medem Library to share its resources. Starting in 2000, both libraries had access to Aleph 300. The Israeli company Ex Libris was the only library automation systems company that offered French libraries software that was capable of handling non-Roman characters in bibliographic records. The two libraries used Aleph 300 for their new acquisitions, but their bibliographic records could only be accessed on site. At that time, the SIF library did not have an up-to-date card catalog or a comprehensive, current shelf list for its holdings.

In October 2002, the SIF and AIU library directors, Joël Touati and Jean-Claude Kuperminc, respectively, presented a report to the main funding source of the SIF, the Consistoire israélite de Paris. One of their main recommendations was that, in order to carry out SIFRIA's plans of bringing the SIF library up to professional standards, it should join the consortium started by the AIU and Medem libraries.

In the next few years, librarians at the AIU and SIF libraries discussed the technical requirements and features of their future shared automation system and online public access catalog (OPAC). During the process, librarians at the AIU library helped SIFRIA in their modernization and renovation of the SIF library. At the same time, Jean-Claude Kuperminc of the AIU library and his colleagues at the Medem Library began considering the retrospective conversion of their card catalog. The AIU, Medem, and SIF librarians also considered upgrading to the new Aleph 500.

In October 2003, with financial support from the Conseil municipal (Paris City Council) and technical assistance from librarians from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF; National Library of France), a steering committee was formed to plan the automation of the three card catalogs. In January 2004, the BnF offered to sign a formal agreement with the three libraries to improve access to library resources on Jewish themes. The resulting *Réunion des bibliothèques juives de France* (Union of Jewish Libraries in France) became part of the French endeavor to increase, at the national level, access to library materials. The Union could then both take full advantage of the experience of the BnF in retrospective conversion of card catalogs and gain access to public funding. Each member organization of the Union had access to common resources, while their staff and library holdings remained distinct within the shared catalog. Funding for the Union came from private and public sources: the Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah (FMS), a leading Jewish organization involved in Jewish cultural affairs; the Direction du Livre et de

la Lecture (DLL) of the Culture Ministry; Paris City Council; and the Ile-de-France Regional Council.

The REBJH succeeded the Union in the summer of 2004. It was incorporated on July 26, 2004 and officially launched at a ceremony at the BnF on June 8, 2005. A fourth library joined the founding institutions in December 2005: the media center of the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ; Museum of Jewish Art and History); and on May 27, 2010, a fifth institution joined the consortium, the Centre français des musiques juives (CFMJ; French Center of Jewish Music), renamed in 2013 as the Institut Européen des Musiques Juives (IEMJ; The European Institute for Jewish Music).

As of 2012, there were seven institutions involved in REBJH. In addition to the three founding libraries, the MAHJ media center, and the CFMJ, two more institutions joined the project: Akadem (the Jewish online university in France) and the Michèle Kahn Library. The following paragraphs describe the participating libraries and their place in the constitution of the REBJH.

THE LIBRARY OF THE OF ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE (AIU LIBRARY)

The Alliance israélite universelle is an international Jewish organization founded in Paris in 1860 to defend the human rights of Jews worldwide. It was especially active around the Mediterranean until 1948, in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Currently it maintains a dozen schools in Israel. The AIU library serves as a center for documentation and research. In 1867, it acquired the private libraries of two prominent scholars, Salomon Munk (1803–1867) and Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865). When the Nazi forces occupied Paris in the spring of 1940, the AIU archives and library were seized and, like many other Jewish libraries in occupied Europe, shipped to Frankfurt am Main to the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage (the Nazi Institute for Study of the Jewish Question). After the liberation of France, it was difficult to judge which materials had been lost because library catalogs had been destroyed and reconstructing them was a complicated, time-consuming task (Kuperminc 2001). Thanks to growing interest in Jewish Studies in France in the last thirty years, the AIU library has been completely renovated and expanded in a process that started in 1989.

The AIU library's policy for collection development emphasizes three major areas of acquisition: Hebrew literature and language, scholarly publications in all areas of Jewish studies, and archival materials that document the daily life of various Jewish communities. The AIU library has received donations belonging to several prominent French scholars, rabbis, journalists, and social activists. One such example is the entire library of Bernard Lazare (1865–1903), one of the early and most vocal defenders of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. The AIU library contributes about half of all the bibliographic records in Rachel.

The AIU Archives focuses on AIU organizational history and on documenting AIU schools that existed outside of France since 1860. It also documents the traditions of North African Jews, their efforts towards political and economic emancipation, and their fights against anti-Semitism. The documents preserved are in many languages and scripts both Roman and non-Roman, including Hebrew, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, Cyrillic, Arabic, Amharic, and more. Cataloging of the AIU printed material has been done in the original language since 1996, when cataloging was first automated.¹

THE MICHÈLE KAHN LIBRARY

This non-lending library was established in 1997 by the AIU in honor of Michèle Kahn (1940–), a celebrated French-Jewish author who began her career as a children’s author and is now focusing on Jewish history. The Michèle Kahn library, housed in the same building as the AIU library, specializes in juvenile literature on Jewish topics, including the State of Israel and the Holocaust. Materials are largely in French, with some books in English and Hebrew. Jewish educators are the main users of this library, working with these materials when preparing lesson plans and furthering their own continuing education.

THE LIBRARY OF THE SÉMINAIRE ISRAËLITE DE FRANCE (SIF LIBRARY; FRENCH RABBINICAL SEMINARY)

The Séminaire israélite de France, first known as the École Centrale Rabbinique de Metz (Central Rabbinical School of Metz, in eastern France), was established in 1829 for the purpose of training newly-emancipated rabbis from French Jewish communities. Located in Paris since 1859, the SIF library also serves the needs of the French Rabbinate. Every year, about fifteen rabbis are in residence before taking a pulpit in France.

The collection of the SIF library is built on the gift of Albert Cohn (1814–1877), a French scholar and philanthropist who taught at the SIF (1860–1876) and gave his private library to the Seminary in 1870.² The SIF specialized library was looted by the Nazis in 1940 and transferred to Frankfurt an Main together with AIU library. After the SIF collection was returned from Germany in the 1960s, the SIF library was completely renovated but fell into disrepair in the last decades of the twentieth century. In 2003, the nonprofit association SIFRIA, founded for the purpose of restoring the SIF library, oversaw the renovation of the library, the rebinding of books, and the re-shelving of the collection according to previous in-house classification schedule. The entire project continued through 2004, and the renovated library was inaugurated in early 2005.

¹ The card catalog that the AIU Archives used before 1996 is preserved in the main reading room and in the closed stacks collections.

² Albert Cohn was also a member of the Central Committee of the AIU, which demonstrates the long-standing nature of the collaboration between the AIU and the SIF.

Especially strong in Rabbinics, the collection of the SIF library is based on Hebraica and Judaica, with imprints from almost everywhere Hebrew books have been printed. The collection's strengths are Bible, Talmud, Jewish Law, Rabbinic responsa, sermons, liturgy, and Jewish history and social studies. It also has a collection of archival materials (Danan and Commission Française des Archives Juives [2005]), 215 manuscripts, several early printed books, many first editions, as well as scores for Jewish liturgical chants. Sixty percent of the collection is in Hebrew, with the rest in French, Yiddish, English, German, Arabic, Russian, and Spanish. The library subscribes to several specialized periodicals and has dozens of archival boxes in process. As of 2012, the SIF library contributed about eight percent of all the bibliographic records in Rachel.

THE MEDEM LIBRARY

The Medem Library was established in 1929 by immigrants from Eastern Europe affiliated with the Jewish Labor Bund. When Paris was occupied in 1940, the library was used as an emergency soup kitchen and the books were transferred to the lower cellar, thereby escaping Nazi seizure; in October 1944, the library reopened under the auspices of the Jewish Socialist association in Paris *Arbeter-ring* (*Cercle des travailleurs*; Workmen's Circle). In the 1970s, with the population of native speakers of Yiddish dwindling, the library's users diversified to include students, scholars and independent researches (Rozier 2009).

In 1979, the nonprofit association Bibliothèque Medem (Medem Library) was established to develop a separate library, not under the *Arbeter-ring*'s patronage. At that time, the collection was systematically cataloged, resulting in two card catalogs: authors and subjects. In the 1990s, Medem acquired several Yiddish collections, mainly from smaller libraries that folded, book collections held by professional brotherhoods and clubs for Yiddish speakers, and libraries of defunct Parisian Yiddish newspapers. In 2002, the Medem Library became part of the Association pour l'étude et la diffusion de la culture yiddish (AEDCY; Association for the Study and Development of Yiddish Culture) and left the premises of the *Arbeter-ring* to create the Maison de la culture yiddish–Bibliothèque Medem (Medem Library of the Yiddish Cultural Center). It became a major center for the preservation and development of Yiddish language, culture and literature, not only in France but also across the entire continent of Europe.

The holdings of the Medem Library include the lion's share of Yiddish publications of the second half of the nineteenth century. Two-thirds of the Medem Library collections are in Yiddish, and the rest are in French, Hebrew, English, German, and Polish. The collection's subjects cover Judaism, mainly in Ashkenazi communities, Jewish literature, history of Jewish communities in Europe, social studies, and Jewish thought. The Medem Library also holds 4,000 recordings of Yiddish songs, Klezmer music, and liturgical music in various formats (audiocassettes, long-playing records, and compact disks), 500 printed scores, and 150 collections of printed scores. Originally, the Medem Library's collection development policies represented the *Arbeter-ring* Socialist orientation, but with the acquisition of Yiddish libraries of other political movements and the broadening of library users' interests, this influence has died out. Today, the

Medem Library remains committed to non-religious principles, and its collection represents the pluralism of intellectual schools of French and world Jewries. This library contributes about a quarter of all the bibliographic records in Rachel.

THE MÉDIATHÈQUE DU MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE DU JUDAÏSME (MAHJ)

As early as 1989, in the very first blueprint of the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ; Museum of Jewish Art and History), the Media Center was designed to enhance visitors' museum experience by serving as a resource center for Jewish art, history and civilization. Situated in the middle of the permanent exhibition, the Media Center includes a library, a video center, and a slide repository.

The Media Center serves various cultural and pedagogical activities of the MAHJ, including arranging guided tours for individuals and groups and hosting youth programs, author presentations, and other cultural events in the main auditorium of the museum. The Media Center works closely with staff at the Curator's and Programming Offices to plan and produce exhibitions. The Media Center also manages the inventory of the MAHJ collections and the acquisition of printed materials for the museum.

The Media Center's collection scope is Judaism (Bible, Talmud, Jewish mysticism, rabbinic literature, liturgy, and practices), Jewish philosophy, Jewish languages and literatures, Jewish art history, and history and anthropology of Jewish communities. Materials are in many languages (French, English, German, Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish) and encompass a variety of formats, including books, serials, archival documents, thematic folders, and artist portfolios. Classification is based on the Dewey Decimal System, but catalogers use an in-house thesaurus (completed in 2003) and name authority file for subject assignment.

INSTITUT EUROPÉEN DES MUSIQUES JUIVES (IEMJ; THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH MUSIC) — MÉDIATHÈQUE HENRIETTE HALPHEN

Recently renamed as the Institut Européen des Musiques Juives (IEMJ; European Institute for Jewish Music), the Centre français des musiques juives (CFMJ; Center for Jewish Music) was founded in 2006. The original members of this institute were the Fondation du Judaïsme Français (Foundation of French Judaism) and the Association Yuval: Association française pour la préservation des traditions musicales juives (Yuval Association: A French Association for Preserving the Jewish Musical Traditions), a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 to preserve Jewish music worldwide. The IEMJ has a reading room equipped for access to both on-site digitized documents and short Internet clips. Its collection is chiefly comprised of recordings and scores of Jewish music, supplemented by relevant books, posters, photographs, and engravings.

AKADEM MULTIMEDIA, THE JEWISH ACADEMIC ONLINE CAMPUS

Established in 2004, Akadem Multimedia is a self-proclaimed French “teaching library, a forum for exchange and communication and . . . the first Jewish academic online campus” (Akadem website). Akadem acts on behalf of the main Jewish cultural organization in France, the Fonds social juif unifié (FSJU; United Jewish Social Fund), to record all public cultural events organized by Jewish institutions in France (lectures, conferences, seminars, etc.). The Akadem Multimedia site serves as the online home for these digitized events, which are sometimes accompanied by text excerpts, reproduction of artworks, maps, Internet links, or bibliographies.

UNDER THE HOOD OF THE UNION CATALOG RACHEL

Containing the bibliographic records for materials from the six libraries and the online video recordings of Akadem Multimedia, the union catalog Rachel, at <http://www.rachelnet.net>, is the main tool created by the REBJH. As of February 2012, there were 183,486 bibliographic records in Rachel. Being a full partner of the BnF, the REBJH aims to enhance access to all Jewish Studies resources in France. From the outset, the REBJH aspired both to increase the discoverability of Judaica and Hebraica resources in French libraries and ultimately to collaborate with European libraries in the field of Jewish Studies. Towards this end, Rachel had to solve several technical problems in the cataloging process and in the formatting of bibliographic records.



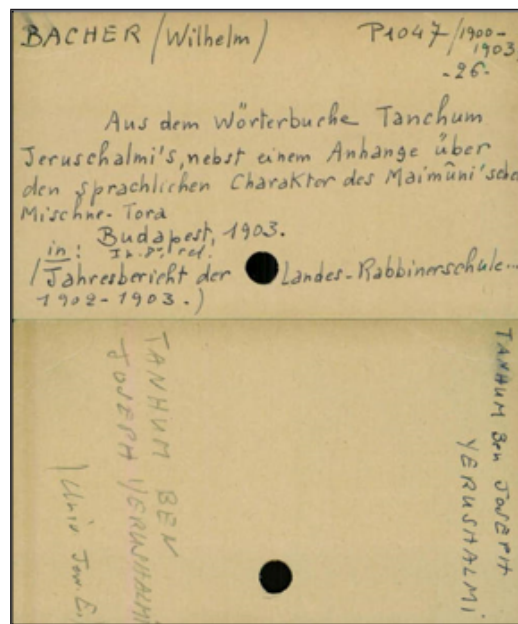
Figure 1. Homepage of the union catalog Rachel. Source: <http://www.rachelnet.net>

The catalogs of the three founding libraries were initially at very different stages of development: partially automated (AIU), card catalog (Medem), and no catalog at all (SIF). The guidelines of the partnership required that each library keep its resources separate and that the Hebrew elements in bibliographic records be transcribed in Hebrew characters and not in transliteration. Since about a third of the combined holdings of the three libraries were in Hebrew, the REBJH

decided to adopt the cataloging utility Aleph 500, the integrated library system used in all Israeli university libraries, sharing their bibliographic data in the Israel Union List (ULI), and in many Judaica and Hebraica libraries in the United States. Aleph 500 proved to be very versatile, able to handle records containing various scripts and languages.

The first step in automation was a massive retrospective conversion of the card catalogs or inventory records of the three founding institutions. The involvement of the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL), now the National Library of Israel, was crucial to retrieving the bibliographic records that correctly corresponded to the card catalogs in the ULI database. A team of twenty catalogers worked on this task in 2004. Because most North American and Israeli libraries, including the JNUL, used MARC21 format for their catalogs, the REBHJ also decided to adopt it, rather than the more common formats used in France, UNIMARC and INTERMARC.

- **Auteur:** Bacher, Wilhelm (1850–1913)
- **Titre:** Aus dem Wörterbuche Tanchum Jeruschalmi's, nebst einem Anhang über den sprachlichen Charakter des Maimuni'schen Mischne-Tora
- **Publication:** Budapest: Orszagos Rabbikepzo Intezet, 1903
- **Description:** 146, 38 p.; 23 cm.
- **Collection:** Jahresbericht der Landes-Rabbinerschule zu Budapest für das Schuljahr; 1902/1903



Titre uniforme : [הגדה של פסח. תרפ"ח. וילנה]
Titre : הגדה ישועת ישראל : עם מעשה אלפס, מיט ציורים אויך איין און צוואנציג מעלות מיט פרושים בעברי טייטש ...
Publication : ווילנא : ראזענקראנץ ושריפטזעצער, תרפ"ח
Description : 8 ; ע' : אורים [48]

2886 2.7.
 [הגדה ישועת ישראל]
 עם מעשה אלפס
 מיט ציורים
 ראזענקראנץ און ווילנע, 1928, 48 ז"ו
 16757

Figure 2. Two bibliographic records from the card catalogs of the AIU library and Medem Library, respectively, scanned and sent to the cataloging team at the JNUL

These were the cataloging guidelines of REBJH:

- **Shared bibliographic records:** the goal was to have only one bibliographic record per book title, even if several copies were held by the various libraries. This principle was not based on what is done in Israel: ULI creates separate bibliographic records for each participating institution. In the REBJH model, a holdings database linked to the bibliographic database contains all the relevant information for each copy held by the individual French institutions.
- **MARC21 format for the bibliographic records,** as used by the JNUL and North American libraries. This was, indeed, a departure from the UNIMARC format prevalent in research and public libraries in France as well as in other European countries. The goal was to avoid or at least limit the need to convert from one format to another. The assumption was that more bibliographic records would be available for retrospective conversion in MARC21 than in any other format.
- **Conformity with the ISO 2709 Standard.** The standard allows for the exchange of bibliographic data among various formats by sharing a common structure and by defining the format for each field and subfield within formats: whether they can be repeated, whether they have a fixed or variable length, etc. The ISO 2709 is the structure underpinning all MARC formats.
- **Easy access to large bibliographic databases** of the BnF, ULI, Oxford, and Library of Congress by using the Z39.50 protocol to search multiple databases in a given query.
- **Cataloging in four languages (French, Hebrew, Yiddish, and English),** with the possibility to add cataloging in other European languages should the consortium expand outside of France. The cataloging language needs to be noted not only in the bibliographic record but also in authority records in order to allow users to properly understand and use it. Namely, the language used in cataloging needs to be specified for the main entry, the subject heading, and the uniform title.
- **Multilingual and multi-script authority records** are established in French, English, Hebrew and Yiddish and can be either controlled or uncontrolled for the main entry (1XX field), the subject fields (6XX), and the added entries (7XX-730), that is, all the names for physical persons and corporate bodies, conferences, uniform titles, geographical names, and topical and genre/form terms. Each institution is able to customize according to its needs; for example, the Medem Library can use detailed headings for Eastern European Jewry, while the MAHJ can go into great detail on Parisian art schools terminology. There is no shared controlled vocabulary for the authority records. The cataloging of the following book (Table 1) illustrates the resulting diversity of cataloging practices: the two libraries that own this book have different subject headings and added name entries, none of them derived from a major source (BnF, NLI, WorldCat). These subject headings reflect local practices, which are labor-intensive and expensive, rather than the more common North American practice of copy cataloging.

Table 1. Different cataloging systems for the same book. Young, James Edward. *At Memory's Edge: after-images of the Holocaust in contemporary art and architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

<p>Rachel System #00001422 Accessed May 31, 2012</p>	<p>Rachel System #000142371 Accessed May 31, 2012</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Catalog/Subject Headings • Spienelman, Art • Mémoires: Shoah • Shoah: art • Artiste juif: Shoah • Architecture: Shoah • Art contemporain: Shoah • Illustrations: architecture: Shoah • Illustrations: art: Shoah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Name Added Entries • Attie, Shimon • Eisenman, Peter • Gerz, Esther • Gerz, Jochen • Levinthal, David • Libeskind, Daniel • Spiegelman, Art • Whiteread, Rachel • Topical Subject Headings • Art relatif à la Shoah • Bande dessinée • Histoire de l'art • Monument commémoratif • Philosophie esthétique • Photographie • Genre/Form Headings • Recueil d'articles

In the process of adopting the above guidelines, member libraries had to overcome three major hurdles:

1. Duplicate bibliographic records: Catalogers had to address situations in which more than one bibliographic record existed for the same title. Programmers involved in the project tracked down most of these duplicate records, but catalogers still had to handle many others. This de-duplication process is still going on in 2014.

2. Authority records: this was probably the most time-consuming issue, since catalogers had to consider the form to be retained and list all the variants to be cited; sometimes the form retained was in two languages, or even in all four: French, Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. The majority of the authority records were retained and variant forms are only in French and Hebrew.

3. Variant indexing practices: this is an ongoing concern, since it cannot easily be resolved in a project of this type. Although all the participating institutions are Judaica libraries, each of them emphasizes a specific aspect of Jewish studies. Furthermore, the expectations of the user population of each library are very different.

Librarians and volunteers in each of the member institutions of REBJH were surveyed during the summer of 2008 regarding their cataloging practices. Librarians were observed while cataloging library materials, and interviewees and focus groups were asked to report on the following topics: Time spent on cataloging activities during daily routine; familiarity with and ease of use of cataloging software; and use of reference tools, consultations, and personal interaction with experienced catalogers while indexing.

The results of this survey were striking. Involvement in cataloging activities varied greatly: while the chief librarian was involved in cataloging only occasionally, it was the main activity (eighty percent of the time) for part-time paid and volunteer staff, often working one or two days a week on a specific holding or collection. The degree of competence also varied from one person to another, depending on the frequency of daily computer usage and on the ability to adapt to changes, especially among older adult volunteers. Moving from one cataloging tradition to the Rachel interface was not a smooth and simple experience for all, librarians and volunteers alike. David Klein, system manager of Rachel, was instrumental in facilitating this transition. He continues to be a key partner in training the professional and paraprofessional staff in using Aleph. With time, the professional staff became more proficient with the core descriptive fields (author, title, and place and date of publication), but difficulties with subject heading fields are still prevalent.³

Some professionals and many volunteers had difficulty in identifying and understanding the names of the fields to populate. Many of the interviewees indicated that they often had to refer to software documentation and their training notes before they could catalog. Time spent on cataloging one item could vary from fifteen to forty-five minutes. This great variation could be explained by familiarity with Aleph; cataloging experience; time available for cataloging; work priorities; and availability of a bibliographic record from another institution. Finally, the interviewed catalogers mentioned that there was only minimal coordination of cataloging rules among the institutions in the Rachel consortium.

In terms of usage, since the Media Center of MAHJ joined the REBJH consortium in 2008, librarians have observed that there is a noticeable increase in the use of the collections, in the flow of occasional visitors, and in the number of visitors arriving with full bibliographic information downloaded from the union catalog prior to their visit.

Based on an informal survey of about ten users in the two other large institutions, most users are satisfied with their search experience. Users of the AIU library usually conduct their searches independently, while those at the Medem Library often consult with the reference librarian. All

³ As indicated by a librarian at the MAHJ, adjusting to the new environment was not easy: “We were accustomed to very simple software with a very simple interface with a lot of prompts, designed by an employee of the Media Center who had created exactly what we needed. Aleph is too complicated and too rigid... And also, there is no end to the number of fields to populate in Aleph!”

in all, reference librarians at these three major research centers are involved in the search process of the users, and some of them develop close professional relationships. Users are still unsatisfied with searching by subject headings; also unsatisfying is the search strategy of jumping from the subject heading found in one relevant bibliographic record to the subject headings index and from it to library materials on the same topic. One of the greatest benefits mentioned by users interviewed was the ability to search across all the libraries in one single search interface.

CONCLUSION

With close to 200,000 bibliographic records, the Rachel network is accessible online via the Catalogue Collectif de France (Union Catalog of France; CCFr), which includes thirty million records from three major French catalogs: the BnF, the Catalogue des Fonds des Bibliothèques Municipales Rétroconvertis (Catalog of Digitized Municipal Library Collections; BMR), and the Catalogue du Système Universitaire de Documentation (SUDOC; Union catalog of French university and research libraries). In addition, selected titles are included in Europeana, a network of European libraries and museums; in fact, it was only recently that the REBJH members completed their first “export campaign” of bibliographic references and digitized resources. Users of the reading rooms now come with a specific request for library items and are more independent in their use of library materials, having already done their bibliographic search at home. Rachel has become a key tool for bibliographic research in Jewish Studies.

Although unwieldy and complex at times, the Aleph ILS and MARC format have performed well in managing library information for most of the participants of the Rachel network, especially when compared with what existed before in most Judaica libraries in France. Some aspects of the cataloging process are still in process, in particular author and historical event authority files, indexing of serial collections, and creation of a concordance among multilingual lists (authorized form vs. the rejected ones). Users look forward to the next version of the interface, which will improve the search process, provide a better display of bibliographic records, and include updated information about the activities of all member institutions. A new interface, as well as an upgrade of the Aleph system, is planned for summer 2014. The role of librarians as facilitators between library resources and users’ information needs is as important as ever; their task is made easier thanks to the Rachel network.

ABBREVIATIONS⁴

AEDCY	Association pour l'étude et la diffusion de la culture yiddish [Association for the Study and Development of Yiddish Culture]
AIU	Alliance israélite universelle http://www.aiu.org/bibli
BMR	Bibliothèques Municipales Rétroconvertis Catalog of Digitized Municipal Library Collections
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France National Library of France http://www.bnf.fr
CCFr	Catalogue Collectif de France Union Catalog of France http://ccfr.bnf.fr
CFMJ/ IEMJ	Centre français des musiques juives, now Institut Européen des Musiques Juives, IEMJ (renamed 2013) [French Center for Jewish Music]; European Institute for Jewish Music http://www.cfmj.fr
DDL	Direction du livre et de la lecture, now Service du livre et de la lecture (A public agency promoting literacy by encouraging access to books and reading, a division of the French Culture Ministry) http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/index.php/Disciplines-et-secteurs/Livre-et-lecture/Service-du-Livre-et-de-la-Lecture
FMS	Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah The Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah http://www.fondationshoah.org
FSJU	Fonds social juif unifié [United Jewish Social Fund] http://www.fsju.org
JNUL	Jewish National and University Library, now National Library of Israel http://web.nli.org.il
MAHJ	Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme [Museum of Jewish Art and History] http://www.mahj.org

⁴ Editor's Note: Original names are in bold type, followed by official English names in regular type. Whenever an abbreviated name does not have an official English version, the author provided an explanation in parenthesis or a translation in brackets. URLs provided whenever possible.

- REBJH **Réseau européen des bibliothèques judaica et hebraica**
European Network of Judaica and Hebraica Libraries
<http://www.rachelnet.net>
- SIF **Séminaire israélite de France**
[French Rabbinical Seminary]
<http://www.rachelnet.net/rachelnet/F/sif.htm>
- SUDOC **Catalogue du Système Universitaire de Documentation**
(Union catalog of French university and research libraries)
<http://www.sudoc.abes.fr>
- ULI **Israel Union List**
(Union Catalog of Israeli libraries)
<http://a20.libnet.ac.il/libnet/uli/>

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