

# EPISTLE FROM ISRAEL

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## **Judaica Librarians' Group**

As a result of interest created by the First International Conference of Judaica and Israeli Librarians held in Jerusalem in June 1990 [see *Judaica Librarianship* vol. 6 no. 1-2], an Israeli Judaica librarians' group was founded in 1991. For administrative purposes, it was decided to operate the group as a subdivision of the Israel Society of Special Libraries and Information Centers (ISLIC), though all programming is prepared independently by the group's members. The organization came into being under very dramatic circumstances, with the initial meeting having to be postponed because of the Gulf War. After a two-month delay, the organizational meeting was finally held in April 1991, at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan. The participants chose a steering committee composed of Elhanan Adler of Haifa University, Ya'akov Aronson and Dr. Sara Fraenkel of Bar-Ilan University, Avishai Elboim of the Rambam Library (Tel Aviv), and Zion Shorer of the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL). The committee chose Ya'akov Aronson to serve as chairman and conducted three additional meetings—study days—during its year term.

The librarians who attended the first meeting at Bar-Ilan heard lectures on the Hebrew subject headings developed by Bar-Ilan's Hebrew Classification and Cataloging Department, presented by Shlomo Rotenberg, the department's Chairman; the University's Responsa Project, given by Dr. Uri Schild, Director of the project (more on these two projects below); and the rare book market, by Dr. Sara Fraenkel, Bar-Ilan's Rare Book Curator. After the lectures, a sample search in the Responsa Project database was conducted, and attendees discussed items of common interest with members of the Central Library's Hebrew Classification and Cataloging Department.

A second study day was held at the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University in October 1991. Lectures included: the restoration of the Aleppo Codex at the Israel Museum, given by Michael Maggen, a member of the Museum's staff; basic restoration procedures that can be implemented by librarians, presented by Tova Szajntuch, Head of JNUL's Restoration Laboratory; and recommendations for a basic bibliography for a Torah Library, by Alex Klein, Director of the library at Michlala Jerusalem Girls' College. A tour of JNUL's restoration laboratory rounded out the day.

Beit Ariella, the central library in the Tel Aviv public library system, hosted a meeting of the Judaica librarians in April 1992. Arrangements for the meeting were made by the Rambam Library, Tel Aviv Public Library's Torah Library, one of the subdivisions of Beit Ariella. In response to members' requests, the program featured a lecture and workshop on problems encountered in the cataloging of Torah literature. Zion Shorer, Chairman of the Hebrew Cataloging Department at JNUL, presented this part of the program. In addition, the program included lectures on computerized Judaica databases, given by Elhanan Adler, Deputy Director of the library of Haifa University; and JNUL's microfilming activities in Russia, by Prof. Israel Shatzman, Director of JNUL. A tour of the Rambam Library followed the lectures and workshop.

The year's final meeting, held at the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem in June, took as its theme the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Topics covered by the lecturers were: Hebrew printing on the Iberian Peninsula before the expulsion, given by Yitzhak Yudlov, Director of the Hebrew Bibliography Project at JNUL; the organization of the Spanish Jewish community in the Middle Ages, by

Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Deputy Director of Machon Ben Zvi; and Spanish Jewry on the eve of the expulsion, by Dr. Moshe Orfali of the Jewish History Department of Bar-Ilan.

A new steering committee was chosen by the participants in this meeting. Those elected to serve on the committee are Aharon Bejell of the library of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shevut; Avishai Elboim of the Rambam Library (more about him below); Dr. Sara Fraenkel and Gita Hoffman, of Bar-Ilan University; and Benjamin Richler and Yitzhak Yudlov, of JNUL. Dr. Fraenkel was chosen by the committee to be its chairman, and plans were made for a study day, to be held in December 1992 at the Wiener Library, Tel Aviv University.

## **Jewish National and University Library**

1992 marked the 100th anniversary of the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL). Though the institution underwent a number of changes before assuming its present form, it can be traced directly back to the founding of the Midrash Abrabanel Library by the Jerusalem Lodge of B'nai Brith in July 1892. Opening the year's celebrations was a ceremony at the library in May attended by Chaim Herzog, President of Israel. Prof. Ezra Fleischer, President of the World Union of Jewish Studies, the main speaker at the event, discussed the importance of the National Library to the Jewish people. He brought greetings to the library on its 100th birthday, as he put it, not only in the name of the patrons of the library but also as the representative of those books that have disappeared over the years and did not have the honor of being represented in the JNUL collection. The evening's program also included selections of classical music presented by an ensemble composed of new immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States, formerly the Soviet Union.

In addition to the opening celebration, the anniversary was marked by a number of other special activities. In June, a festive concert held at the Jerusalem Theatre emphasized the breadth of JNUL's collection, one component of which is the National Sound Archives, which collects recordings of the vocal musical heritage of the Jewish communities around the world.

The Library's history was traced in pictures and documents, in an exhibition mounted in JNUL's Berman Exhibition Hall from May to October. An accompanying catalog with full text in both Hebrew and English (Baras, 1992) includes descriptions of all items in the exhibition, reproductions of the most important ones, summaries of the various periods in the library's history, and—something not found in the exhibition—numerous color plates reproducing important items in the library's collections.

In honor of JNUL's centennial, the Israel Government Coins and Medals Corporation issued a medal picturing on its verso some of the buildings that have housed the library during the years, and bearing crowded bookshelves framed by an appropriate inscription on the obverse. Also, the Israel Philatelic Service featured items from JNUL on its New Year 5753 series of stamps (see illustration). Chosen to represent various types of materials in the collection were a page from the first printed edition of *Meshal ha-Kadmoni*, 1491, the first printed Hebrew book to include illustrations; a 15th-century manuscript containing an Italian Mahzor; and a page from Martin Buber's handwritten draft of the German translation of the Bible that he prepared with Franz Rosenzweig.

The year 1992 also marked the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. To mark the occasion, an exhibition of pre-expulsion manuscripts and printed books from JNUL's collections was featured at the Israel Museum. Much effort was put into presenting a beautifully displayed exhibition and, in addition to the books on exhibit, computer stations provided explanations regarding various aspects of Spanish Jewish life. Short films on Spanish Jewry were shown in an adjacent hall. The exhibition was documented by a well executed catalog with full text in both Hebrew and English, including color plates of all items in the exhibition (*Books from Sefarad*, 1992).

After a term of eleven years as Director of JNUL, Prof. Malachi Beit-Arie returned to full-time teaching in 1991, and Prof. Israel Shatzman of the Hebrew University's Department of History was appointed in his place. Prof. Shatzman has been active in expanding the activities of the National Library. He traveled to Moscow, where he worked out an agreement with the Lenin Library, which has provided JNUL with microfilm copies of Hebrew manuscripts from the Baron Guenzburg collection and which grants JNUL the right to sell copies of the microfilms worldwide. Similar negotiations are now in advanced stages with St. Petersburg (Leningrad) libraries.

A new JNUL periodical, *Books and People*, has been inaugurated at Professor Shatzman's instigation. Appearing in Hebrew and English editions, this publication reports on the activities of the National Library. Four issues had appeared as of October 1992. The fourth issue includes articles on documents from the collection of the Officers of the Holy Land in Amsterdam, recently sold at auction in Jerusalem; the use of discarded Hebrew manuscripts as file folders or in book covers in Italy; the set of stamps issued in honor of the National Library's 100th anniversary; the classification system used in the Judaica Reading Room; impressions of a librarian working in two departments of JNUL, Hebrew cataloging and the department producing *Kiryat Sefer*; as well as a list of recent acquisitions. Librarians can have their names added to the publication's mailing list by writing to the Office of the Director, JNUL, POB 503, Jerusalem 91004, Israel. (Specify whether you want to receive the English or Hebrew edition.)

### Bar-Ilan University

Spring 1992 saw the appearance of two new publications especially important for Judaica libraries. Each represents the culmination of years of work by separate units at Bar-Ilan University. The Wurzweiler Central Library's Hebrew Classification and Cataloging Department issued a printed edition of *Hebrew Subject Headings* (1992) in two volumes. This is the first appearance of a full subject heading system in Hebrew and will greatly simplify the subject approach to searches for Hebrew speakers. The work is modeled on *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and greatly expands coverage of Jewish and Israeli subjects. This latter attribute can be of assistance to Judaica libraries using English

subject headings, as a complete English index accompanies the work [see review in the CATALOG DEPARTMENT of this issue].

Reaching the market shortly after Pesah was a CD-ROM edition of Bar-Ilan's Responsa Project database (Bar-Ilan University, 1992). Containing over 47,000 rabbinic responsa, this database provides information on all aspects of Jewish law and customs, and is rich in historical material. Prior to the issuance of the CD-ROM edition, access to the database was available only by subscription or by posing specific questions to the staff of the Project or of Bar-Ilan's Central Library. Now, individual libraries not only can have the database on site for consultation, but can also use the sophisticated full-text search software to search other databases that are provided with the responsa. These databases include the complete texts of the Bible, Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

Bar-Ilan's Assyriological Institute received as a bequest the library of Prof. Samuel Noah Kramer, one of the world's leading Sumerian scholars. This collection will be housed in the Assyriological Institute, which is named in memory of Prof. Kramer, and, together with the Institute's already existing collection, will provide the most complete library in Israel on Ancient Sumer.

Another significant addition to the collections of Bar-Ilan is the private archive of Rabbi Meir Kahane. This archive contains letters to and from Rabbi Kahane, as well as materials gathered by him while preparing his books and speeches. Processing the material will take about three years, after which the archive will be open to the public as part of the Institute for the Study of Religious Zionism.

### Other Libraries

A veteran Judaica librarian, Rabbi Reuben Elizur recently retired as Director of the Rambam Library. Rabbi Elizur's library career spanned 40 years, the last 15 of which were spent as the Rambam Library's Director. During this time, Rabbi Elizur presided over the building of the library's collection and its move to the present spacious quarters in Beit Ariella. He also developed the classification system that is used today by the library. Appointed as the new Director is Rabbi Avishai Elboim, who

studied at Yeshivat Merkaz haRav in Jerusalem and received his librarianship education at Haifa University.

Recent organizational changes in the Tel Aviv Library system have resulted in the transfer to the Rambam Library of many old rabbinic works from the system's various branches, including some volumes of the Bomberg edition of the Talmud. At present, the catalog of the entire collection is being input to ALEPH (the Israeli-developed computerized library management system, which is used to operate the Israeli library network), making the collection much more readily accessible.

One of the most highly organized yeshiva libraries in Israel is that of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shevut. Its collection is managed by a local version of ALEPH, but until recently, only the program's administrative functions were used. This past summer, an online catalog including about 20% of the library's 40,000 volumes was added to its ALEPH operations. An ongoing retrospective conversion program aims at entering the library's entire catalog into the OPAC (online public access catalog) within three to four years.

A project recently launched by Yeshivat Har Etzion's library is the indexing of articles in rabbinic periodicals. This project is based primarily on the library's collection of over 200 rabbinic periodicals, with plans to index articles in volumes missing from the library's holdings by borrowing them from other libraries. Such a project was undertaken because current Hebrew periodical indexes cover very few rabbinic publications. At a later stage, articles in jubilee and memorial volumes will also be indexed. Access to the index, stored on ALEPH, will be via standard author, title, and subject access points.

### Judaica Classics

New editions of classic works have appeared recently, some of which are especially noteworthy. Nathan of Rome compiled the *'Arukh*, a dictionary of Talmudic terms, in the 12th century. The dictionary's internal arrangement was alphabetical. Now an edition has been prepared by Rabbi Meir Meizelish (Natan ben Yehiel mi-Romi, [1991/92]), which arranges all the words in the *'Arukh* according to their appearance in the Talmudic text and also includes numerous pictures drawn from varied sources.



**Stamps issued by the Israel Philatelic Service for the New Year 5753, featuring items from the Jewish National and University Library.**

Itzhac Shailat of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Ma'ale Adumim has prepared a new edition of Maimonides' introductions to the Mishnah (Mosheh ben Maimon, [1991/92]). This edition includes the Arabic text, a Hebrew translation, and notes and explanations based on the complete body of Maimonides' works.

Also appearing in a new edition providing a newly edited text is *Sefer ha-Hinukh* (Aharon ben Yosef ha-Levi mi-Bartelona, [1991/92]). Produced under the auspices of Machon Yerushalayim, the edition includes a corrected text based on manuscripts and early printed editions, and an extensive introduction by Rabbi David Metzger. The introduction is noteworthy for

the extent of its research into *Sefer ha-Hinukh* and its author.

The *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, the Biblical text accompanied by a standard set of commentaries, is also being published in a newly edited edition (*Mikra'ot gedolot ha-keter*, [1991/92]). The text of the Bible is based upon the Aleppo Codex, the commentaries upon manuscripts, and early printed editions. This project is being undertaken by a team of researchers at Bar-Ilan University's Bible Department, headed by Dr. Menachem Cohen. The first volume of the work, *Joshua* and *Judges*, was exhibited at the 1992 AJL Convention in Los Angeles. It is hoped that publication of the entire set will be completed within six years.

## References

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\*Further information on these items is found in Libby Kahane's column in the REFERENCE DEPARTMENT of this issue.—Ed.

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