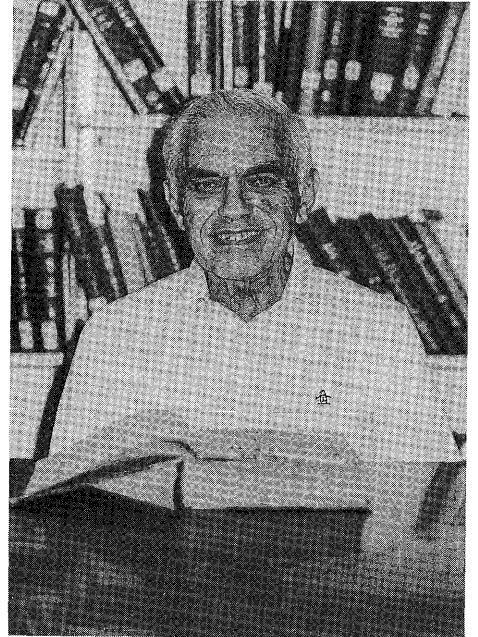


PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

An Interview With Isaac Goldberg, The First Hebraic Cataloger at the Library of Congress

Conducted by:
Peggy K. Pearlstein
*Hebraic Section, Library of Congress
Washington, DC*



Isaac Goldberg.
Photo: Aaron Pearlstein.

Introduction

Isaac Goldberg, a graduate of Yeshiva College and its Teachers Institute, holds an M.S. degree in Library Science from Pratt Institute in New York. He worked for many years in Judaica and other types of libraries: as a cataloger at Yeshiva University, the United States Geological Survey, the Library of Congress (LC), and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA); as Administrative Secretary of the Hebrew Union College Library in Cincinnati; as Acquisitions Librarian in the Engineering and Mathematical Sciences Library at UCLA; and as Director of Libraries of Bar Ilan University (Ramat Gan, Israel). Until 1991, Isaac worked as a bibliographer at the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature. He has contributed to library and Jewish periodicals. Further details are in the biobibliography accompanying this article (see box).

I first met Isaac when I came to work in the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress in 1982. Twice a year, for Rosh Hashanah and Pesah, Isaac has traveled from Israel to Arlington, Virginia, to visit with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. While he was employed by the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, Isaac used the vast resources of the Library of Congress to check references for the Institute's *Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation*. [See his article about this bibliography in *Judaica Librarianship vol. 2 (Spring 1985, pp. 78-79 -Ed.)* Mr. Goldberg currently uses the collections of the Library of Congress for a bibliography he is compiling on medieval Hebrew poets in translation. In November 1992, Isaac Goldberg celebrated his eightieth birthday. An edited version of an interview conducted at LC in 1989 follows.

The Interview

Cataloging at LC

P: 1988 marked the 75th anniversary of the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress. We thought that you would like to share with us some reminiscences of your early days at LC. What brought you to the Library, and when?

I: I am very happy for the opportunity to reminisce about those days. I imagine that most librarians would jump at the chance to work in LC, the greatest library in the world. When I came to Washington in November of 1941 as Junior Librarian of the U.S. Geological Survey, I already wanted to work at the Library. I had met Miss Lucile Morsch, Chief of the Descriptive Cataloging Division, at an ALA [American Library Association] conference. She expressed interest in my coming to LC in view of my Judaica expertise and experience.

P: Were you interested in cataloging? Did you have any knowledge of cataloging rules?

I: No, I didn't. At Yeshiva College Library, now Yeshiva University Library, we bought LC cards, or copied them from LC cards in other libraries. As to cataloging, I must admit that I had no particular interest in it *per se*, but I saw a position as a Hebrew cataloger as a foothold in LC. Besides, cataloging is the basis of all reference and related work in any library.

P: When did you begin work at LC?

I: I reported for work as a Descriptive Cataloger in December, 1942. Miss Morsch assigned me to Mrs. Elizabeth G. Pierce, of the Germanic languages unit, who was detailed to train me in LC cataloging procedures by cataloging German-language

books. This orientation included searching the "official catalog," which contained authority references and was used by LC staff, and establishing author headings when necessary. Section heads were asked to consult with me about problems concerning Judaica headings.

At that time, books came to descriptive catalogers with "manuscript" cards prepared by the preliminary catalogers. For each title, we had to verify the author heading, check and/or revise the description of the book, and add the collation as well as other entries and notes if needed. After examination by the reviser, both of us initialed the "manuscript" card, and the book went on to the Subject Cataloging Division. And so I began to catalog.

P: Was it difficult to learn to catalog according to LC's rules? When did you begin to catalog Hebraica books, which then numbered about 40,000 titles?

I: I must have made good progress, because by the middle of 1943, my reviser, Miss Dorothy Higgins, and Miss Clara

Beetle, head of the Foreign Languages Section, both recommended that I catalog independently. Miss Morsch requested that I catalog a collection of 900 microfilms of German Nazi books and pamphlets before proceeding with the Hebraica. This experience greatly added to my perception of the events in Germany during the Holocaust.

P: Did you have a specific plan to implement with the Hebraica? Were there priorities for cataloging? How was the material arranged?

I: I had met Dr. Israel Schapiro, head of the Semitics Division—as the Hebraic Section was formerly known, who was waiting for the collection to be cataloged. The books were arranged according to category, e.g., bibliography and biography, Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and later rabbinical literature, history, and medieval and modern literature. We agreed that I would begin with bibliography; however, since LC always gives priority to current acquisitions, the Order Division would forward the Hebraic material it received to me in Descriptive Cataloging, and I would work on these books as soon as they arrived.

P: Did World War II have any effect on your cataloging?

I: And how! America's entry into the war revealed many lacunae in the collections, especially in Far Eastern and Middle Eastern materials, including maps, and political, economic, social, historical, and literary publications from countries heretofore poorly represented in LC. With the cooperation of the State Department's Publications Procurement officers in many countries, new material, including Hebraica, came into the Library. At the same time, the concept of blanket-order dealers was adopted. We received materials from Dr. Judah Magnes, Chancellor and first president of the Hebrew University, and LC sent the Hebrew University books in exchange. Later, the Weinberg firm in Jerusalem was appointed blanket-order dealer for LC, an arrangement which is still in effect today.

Transliteration Schemes

P: You mentioned on a previous visit your dissatisfaction with LC's transliteration of Hebrew. Did you follow that in your cataloging?

I: There was no alternative. The printers in the Government Printing Office (GPO), lo-

cated in the basement of the Adams building of the Library of Congress, were also complaining about the transliteration scheme—the system found in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and recommended in the ALA cataloging rules of 1908. For example, *th* for *tav*, *w* for *vav*, and other equivalents did not seem appropriate. I never used *gh* for *gimel*.

Early in 1949, Dr. Frederick H. Wagman, Director of the Processing Department, called me into his office. He voiced the GPO's desire for a more simple, but accurate, transliteration table. I compared the table in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* with that of other schemes used in periodicals and with the scheme of the English Royal Geographical Society. This system was laid down during the days of the British Mandate in Palestine and is still followed today. That's why you see so many *q*'s in place names in Israel, such as Bnai Beraq. The challenge lay in deleting as many diacritical marks as possible, while still remaining faithful to the language. The only diacritical mark I retained was in the *h* for *het*. The table was published in the *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress* (1949), edited by Miss Beetle. The Hebrew transliteration followed the Sephardic pronunciation; for Yiddish I adopted the Lithuanian pronunciation used in the YIVO table.

Classification Schedules and Subject Headings

P: From time to time, on your visits to LC from Israel, where you live now, I've heard mention of the term "PJJ Hebraica." What was that?

I: To put it simply, early catalogers with little or no knowledge of Hebrew and Judaica "dumped" all material to which they could not assign proper classification, into this category. I found here some Bible commentaries, some titles in Hebrew on secular subjects not provided for in the classification tables, and some post-Biblical material. I recataloged these books after checking the earlier cataloging; however, I realized that it was necessary to do more on a larger scale for Hebrew literature and later for Bible, Mishnah, and the Talmud.

P: How did you go about it?

I: I began with Hebrew literature. In the PJ classification table there was no adequate provision for modern works, i.e., from Moses Hayyim Luzzatto to the present. Miss Belle Voegelien, chief classifier of the

Subject Cataloging Division, showed me the rudiments of classifying and cutting, and I began to study the various periods and personalities of modern Hebrew literature. I used Joseph Klausner's classic work, *Historyah shel ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-hadashah* (1930), Fischel Lachower's *Toldot ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-hadashah* (1928), and Aharon Ben-Or's (Orinowsky) *Toldot ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-hadashah* (1923). I also looked closely at Joshua Bloch's "The Classification of Jewish Literature in the New York Public Library," which appeared in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography and Related Subjects, in Memory of Abraham Solomon Freidus (1867-1923)* (New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1929). We broke down Hebrew literature by periods. We were more generous with the breakdown of literature for the period from the end of World War I to the "dor ha-medinah," the time of the creation of the State of Israel after World War II. Now, the works of the poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik are classed in PJ5053—the older group, and the works of poet Moshe Dor are in PJ5054—because he's contemporary. I think it's about time to provide further breakdown.

I also followed LC's policy to put all of the works of one author together, rather than classify poetry and prose by the same author in different classes, which has been the approach in Israel. In retrospect, I think this was a pragmatic and wise decision. For example, Yehuda Amichai, Israel's best-known living poet, has also written short stories and plays. Isn't it easier to find all these forms together, especially when studying the author himself?

P: What resulted from this?

I: I submitted the completed draft, covering classes PJ5050 through 5054, to David J. Haykin, Chief of the Subject Cataloging Division, for final approval. Some decimal points were added, and provision for detailed classification was made by cutting for collected works, translations, selections, separate works, and biography and criticism under individual authors. The classification was adopted immediately, and many items from the PJJ Hebraica classification received full cataloging.

P: What happened with post-Biblical literature?

I: The BM [Judaism] classification schedule needed to be broken down according to Mishnah, the Babylonian and Palestinian

Talmuds, and the various Midrashim. We needed to provide for the individual tractates of the Talmud, the individual Midrashim, their texts, commentaries on them, and critical works about them. Fortunately, the LC classification allowed for an A-Z arrangement of titles. In matters affecting class BM, I always consulted with Theodore A. Mueller, the subject specialist for religion and philosophy, who readily agreed to my suggestions. If you look in the table for the Babylonian Talmud, you will see what we considered a logical arrangement: texts, translations cuttered by language, works about the Talmud, etc., followed by the individual tractates, with the same breakdown. As for the Midrashim, we did not break down every single one in this manner.

Items in this category that had been classified in PJJ Hebraica were properly cataloged, too. I took many headings out of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, since I did not trust the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*. We cataloged all of the Mishnah and Talmud volumes from the arrearage at once, so that the new classification numbers would be reflected on the shelves.

P: Were you ever curious about the application of subject headings to the materials going through your hands?

I: I'm glad you asked that. After acquiring some proficiency in cataloging the PJ (literature), BM (religion), and other material in Hebrew, I asked for a position in Subject Cataloging. I was assigned to spend half-time in Descriptive Cataloging and half-time in Subject Cataloging. Some of the headings I established include "Religious functionaries, Jewish"; "Marbits Torah"; and "Zionism." The Marbits Torah, a composite rabbi-preacher-teacher, is a functionary not met with in Ashkenazic communities, but he occupies an important place in the Sephardic world. The subject heading "Zionism" replaced the heading "Palestine—Reconstruction."

Name Authorities and Authoritative Dates

P: How did you address the problem of establishing an author's name, especially an Israeli name?

I: This seems to be a problem for which there is apparently no solution satisfying all parties. Even if systematic romanization is not preferred, catalogers *cannot* depend on the romanized form of authors' names

Isaac Goldberg: A Biobibliography

Nov. 2, 1912 —Born, Newark, NJ.

Education

June 1933 —B.A., Yeshiva College (now Yeshiva University).
 June 1933 —Graduated, Teachers Institute of Yeshiva College.
 June 1940 —M.S. (Library Science), Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY.

Experience

Sept. 1930—Organized and headed the Teachers Institute Library.
 Sept. 1932—Organized the Yeshiva College Library.
 Sept. 1934–June 1935—Bibliographer, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary Library.
 Sept. 1935–Oct. 1941—Librarian, Yeshiva College Library.
 Nov. 1941–Dec. 1942—Junior Librarian, U.S. Geological Survey, Washington, DC.
 Dec. 1942–June 1948—Cataloger, Library of Congress.
 July 1948–June 1950—Librarian, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.
 Sept. 1950–Sept. 1961—Head, Germanic Languages Unit, Library of Congress.
 Oct. 1961–July 1965—Acquisitions Librarian, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences Library, University of California at Los Angeles.
 Aug. 1965–Nov. 1968—Head, Serials Cataloging Unit, UCLA.
 Dec. 1968–Oct. 1977—Director of Libraries, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel.
 Aug. 1978–1991—Bibliographer, Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, Bnei-Brak, Israel.

Professional Activities

1943 —Developed rules for cataloging Hebraica.
 1946 —Proposed the formation of (and was one of its three founders) the Jewish Librarians Association, an antecedent of the present-day Association of Jewish Libraries.
 1948 —Developed transliteration tables for Hebrew and Yiddish for the Library of Congress—tables later adopted by the American Library Association.
 1951 —Developed the Library of Congress classification of Hebrew Literature; expanded Library of Congress classification of Post-Biblical and Talmudic literature.
 1969 —Co-founder, Standing Committee of the National and University Libraries (SCONUL, ISRAEL).

Publications

Books

1978 —*Bibliography on Absorption of Immigrants from Asia and Africa*. Ramat-Gan, 1978.
 1979–1991 —Founder-compiler, *Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation* (annual).

Selected articles

1950 —"Sifriyat ha-Kongres shel Artsot ha-Berit," *Yad la-Kore'* vol. 2, no. 1 (April 1950), pp. 25–29.
 1970 —"Chaim Selig Slonimski: 19th Century Popularizer of Science." *Samuel K. Mirsky Memorial Volume* (New York, 1970).
 1989 —Agnon, S. Y. "The Beginnings of Tel Aviv," translated by Isaac Goldberg. *Ariel* no. 77–78, (1989), pp. 5–14.
 1992 —Medieval Hebrew poets in translation project: first installment in *AB Bookman's Weekly*, Spring 1992 (Judaica issue).

Personal

March 1944 —Married Loretta R. Mondschein (d. April 1978). Two sons: Joseph Ray and Michael Jerome.

as found in the book; some research must be done.

In 1943, I was faced with this problem, too. I would search bibliographies and the indexes to *Kiryat Sefer (KS)*, the quarterly bibliographical journal of the Jewish National and University Library for authoritative name headings; for romanized names of officials who had served in the Mandate government, I searched the *Palestine Gazette*. At that time, we used to research the original name of an author who had adopted a Hebrew name and have it printed in italics at the bottom of LC cards for his/her works. I found a number of original names in *Sefer ha-ishim* (1936/37), such as Yitshak Ben-Zvi, whose family name was Shimshelovich, and David Ben-Gurion, whose family name was Gruen [according to *Encyclopaedia Judaica; Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel* gives Green as the surname].

During World War II, the director of the JNUL, Gotthold Weil, was visiting in Washington. When he came to LC, I met him in Miss Morsch's office, and presented our problem to him. The practical solution he offered was to ask the editorial staff of *KS* to print in brackets the romanized form of a name next to the Hebrew name. We put the reference from *KS* on the LC authority card. But this is not a foolproof method of determining the official spelling of a name in Latin characters. Two years ago, the editors of *KS* admitted to me that they generally copy the romanized form in the book.

In my own work with the *Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation*, when entering the work of an author new to us, I generally wrote him/her, and asked for his/her preference. A contemporary prose writer named Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, for example, is represented by three different Latin-character forms in some of his older works.

I suppose the only real solution—and this applies only to living writers, of course—is to prevail upon the members of the Publishers' Association to ask Israeli authors to indicate their preferred romanized form of name. But such cooperation seems difficult to obtain.

P: Earlier, you referred to the development of the classification tables for post-Biblical literature, and its cataloging. I am impressed by the great volume of Responsa literature. Did the cataloging of such material present any particular problem?

I: No, but the classification was problematical to the shelf-listers who did the cutting. Modern authors, i.e., authors of responsa of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were cuttered by surname. But for authors prior to the nineteenth century who were cataloged by forename, such as Isaac ben Moses, the shelf-listers claimed that there were too many with the same forename and suggested cutting by the second letter of the forename. The result was Table 4 in the BM (Judaism) classification for authors of responsa, which provided for the use of the second or third letter of the forename in cutting, similar to the breakdown of English and American literature.

P: I've noticed the use of the "slash date" in the body of some Hebrew entries. Was that form in use in your time? What was it supposed to denote?

I: For almost all books, the date is given in Hebrew or in the civil year; however, since the Hebrew calendar does not coincide with the civil year, a problem arises. When it is evident from internal evidence, for example, that the Hebrew title-page date 5747 is actually equivalent to 1987, there is no problem. In the absence of any internal evidence, however—no date in the introduction, no added title page with the civil date, etc.—the cataloger must supply the slash date 1986/87. I began to use this form of dating, not knowing what other libraries were doing in this case.

The Hebraic Section

P: The Hebraic Section houses the National Union Catalogs of Hebraica and Yiddica. Did you have occasion to use them?

I: In my time, there was no catalog as such. Dr. Theodore Gaster, who was appointed Head of the Hebraic Section in April 1945, suggested pulling all the Hebraica cards from the National Union Catalog and sending them to the Hebraic Section, especially since they had been increasing in number. The staff of the Section then filed Hebrew and Yiddish cards into separate author/subject catalogs. That was the origin of the Hebrew and Yiddish Union Catalogs. These were the first union catalogs set up in the Orientalia Division of the Library of Congress, even preceding the Chinese National Union Catalog.

P: What other changes occurred during Dr. Gaster's tenure?

I: Dr. Schapiro had been delighted that, after many years, the Hebrew books were receiving call numbers and being shelved in their proper subject classifications, although this meant that they were placed in the general collections. Dr. Gaster, however, insisted that all books marked "Hebraic" as part of the call number be retrieved from the general collections and housed together with the other materials of the Orientalia Division, of which the Hebraic Section was a part. This was advantageous for several reasons: the Section staff could assist readers and respond to reference queries more quickly, and catalogers who worked on the Hebrew arrears stored nearby could find the book they needed immediately.

P: Isaac, did you have any assistance in these years?

I: In 1948, I left LC for two years to reorganize another library. Until then, no one else worked with me. Upon my return in October 1950, I found Nathan W. Kaganoff, who had been appointed to the Descriptive Cataloging Division several months earlier. He had been ordained by Hebrew Theological College in Chicago, and had served as a chaplain in Germany. He cataloged rabbinical literature and was able to reduce the arrears in that area considerably. In fact, we cataloged about eighty editions of the Zohar at one time! Later, Rabbi Eli Subar was employed by the Library as a preliminary cataloger. I left the Library of Congress in 1961, with some regret, for family reasons; however, I felt that my work was in good hands.

The Larger Jewish Library Community

P: Weren't there times when you were detailed to the Hebraic Section to supply reference or other types of assistance to Judaica librarians outside LC?

I: Yes. One thing stands out in my mind. Since 1936, I had been in frequent correspondence with Shlomo Shunami, the assistant librarian of the JNUL and later the well-known Jewish bibliographer. He played a leading role in pre-state Israel and in the years of Israel's statehood, in the establishment and development of kibbutz and moshav libraries. Sometime in 1946 or 1947, I received a letter from him desperately asking for help in securing a supply of card stock for catalog cards. He had established a central operation for cataloging and distributing catalog cards for current Hebrew books. At that time I was

servicing in the Hebraic Section, and I turned for help to Mr. Verner W. Clapp, then Assistant Librarian of Congress. A week later, Mr. Clapp informed me that a ton of card stock, similar to LC card stock, had been provided by the Smithsonian Institution and was on a New York dock awaiting shipment to Mr. Shunami.

P: Did you have any feedback from or contact with other libraries about your work?

I: Not directly and not immediately. About a year after we had started to catalog Hebraica, the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library sent a small batch of manuscript cards for Hebrew books to the Cooperative Cataloging Section of the Descriptive Cataloging Division. After discussion with Mrs. Helen Stevens, Section Head, and others, it was agreed that I would handle the cooperative cataloging cards as if they were LC cards. If LC had the book in question, I would compare the copy with the book, check the entries (main and added) for conformity with LC's practice, and in all respects treat the catalog copy as if the book was ours—which in fact it was. A dagger appeared at the bottom of the card to show that the book was in LC, and the LC call number appeared in the lower left corner of the card along with the name of the cooperating library. We rarely, if ever, used subject tracings provided by other libraries, especially if they did not conform to ours. The book and catalog copy were then forwarded through

regular channels. In the event that LC did not own the book, the procedure was identical, and the copy was sent to the Government Printing Office for card production.

A word of explanation: the Cooperative Cataloging Program had been established many years before, as a means of publicizing the additions to the collections of other libraries, as well as for the purpose of printing LC cards for such materials. Cooperative libraries for Judaica and Hebraica included the New York Public Library, the Zionist Archives and Library, and (later on) Hebrew Union College Library. This program resulted in the additional benefit of reducing the arrearage in the Hebraic Section.

P: Lastly, Isaac, tell me a little bit about the Jewish Librarians Association, one of the forerunners of the Association of Jewish Libraries.

I: In the fall of 1946, I mentioned to Dr. Gaster that it would be a good idea for persons active in Judaica libraries to meet from time to time to discuss common problems and to share ideas. I wrote privately to Sophie Udin of the Zionist Archives and Library, to Rabbi I. Edward Kiev of the Jewish Institute of Religion, to Isaac Rivkind of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, to Harry Alderman of the American Jewish Committee, and to Miriam Leikind of The Temple in Cleveland, Ohio. We met in New York.

With the authorization of John Cronin, Head of Processing at the Library of Congress, I invited these librarians to send, as a trial, copy for cooperative cataloging. After some editing at LC, their copy was printed with the legend: "[] Library for the Library of Congress." That's why, for example, we began to have so many cards on Zionism: the Zionist Archives and Library in New York sent them to us. Later, the Zionist Archives sent us cards for Hebrew material which we had.

The Jewish Librarians Association also published an anniversary volume honoring Isaac Rivkind for his many contributions to Jewish bibliography. [For further information on this association, see *Judaica Librarianship* vol. 5 no. 2, special section on the history of the Association of Jewish Libraries.—Ed.]

Peggy K. Pearlstein is the Area Specialist in the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress. She holds an M.L.S. and an M.A. in Jewish Studies, and recently received a Ph.D. in American Jewish and cultural history from George Washington University.

**Brown Judaic Studies Presents
The Talmud of Babylonia
An American Translation**

**Call or write for
specific titles**

Now nearing its completion, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation* provides a comprehensive reference system with which sentence, paragraphs, and longer passages can be identified and located. Prior to this translation by Jacob Neusner and his colleagues, passages were located by their place "near the top" or "at the bottom" of a specific page, in a specific edition. The provision of a reference system analogous to the identification of "chapter and verse," establishes a basis on which subsequent work of comparison and analysis may proceed.

**Scholars Press
P.O. Box 6996
Alpharetta, GA 30239-6996
1-800-437-6692**