

Vol. 22 Editor's Note

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The last volume of *Judaica Librarianship*, published during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020), was silent on that shared, unparalleled global experience. To be sure, most of the content for any JL issue is prepared for publication long before it is eventually posted online, and none of the authors, including this one, had mentioned the pandemic at that point. By way of admitting to suffering the pain of COVID-19, I apologize to readers for the long editorial silence since. The two-year gap allowed many of us to take time to process personal hardship and overcome professional setbacks resulting from that global emergency and to regather as a community of information professionals. The scholarly fruits of that unforeseen break are fine and numerous (this volume contains over 200 pages); they may have been slow to ripen but together they make a sumptuous reading feast.

As a reminder, the last *Judaica Librarianship* issue celebrated the journal's move to its new digital home at Open Journal Systems and marked its first entirely open-access volume, further promoting the scholarly output of *Judaica* librarians and archivists and allied scholars of Jewish booklore. Since July 2020, nearly five thousand downloads of articles have been recorded on the journal site, accessed by readers from hundreds of locations around the globe.

Provenance research in Jewish libraries is the primary theme of Volume 22. It is inspired by the continuing efforts to resolve ownership questions, mainly of Nazi-looted Jewish cultural property—print matter and art objects—through practical tools, legal settlements, and scholarly work, including our own association's involvement in the International Forum on *Judaica* Provenance, a joint initiative with the National Library of Israel.

When asked to write a paragraph about provenance research in Jewish libraries, the text-generating Artificial Intelligence (AI) ChatGPT software took 10 seconds to define it as “Studying the ownership and transfer history of books, manuscripts, and other materials,” which “can provide valuable information about the cultural and historical context in which a particular item was created, as well as the individuals or institutions that have possessed it over time.”¹ It correctly observed that the work involves “a combination of archival research, examining historical documents and records, and analysis of physical features of the materials themselves, such as inscriptions, bookplates, and bindings.” Such a description would fit provenance research in any library, of course. “In the case of Jewish libraries,” my AI expert added, “provenance research can also reveal important details about the transmission and preservation of Jewish knowledge and cultural traditions.” Replace the qualifier “Jewish” with any other, and this statement would be pertinent to provenance research in any other field. Lastly, my AI advisor warned me that,

1. Accessed December 26, 2022, <https://chat.openai.com/chat>.

“This research can be time-consuming and requires a strong foundation in Jewish history, literature, and culture, as well as the ability to interpret and contextualize the information gathered.” I would like to assure the AI bot that a “strong foundation in Jewish history, literature, and culture” is what Judaica librarians and archivists bring to this scholarly forum. I would also advise it to learn from them and to apply relevant information to its general description in case it is asked again to ponder this topic. (I wonder if the ChatGPT paragraph will change once it has access to the articles in this volume.)

Several authors in the current issue grapple with ownership concerns and questions of provenance of library and archival collections in a mix of research papers, essays, and reviews, presenting possible solutions to ethical considerations about the origin of individual items or complete collections. Most of these contributions pertain to the fate of heirless print materials owned by individuals who perished at the hands of the Nazis during World War II or by communities that were destroyed. **Diane Mizrahi**, **Ivan Kohout**, and **Michal Bušek** describe in their article how the University of California Los Angeles Library handled the discovery of Nazi-looted books in its stacks not only by returning the physical items to their lawful owners—the Jewish Religious Community Library in Prague, under the auspices of the Jewish Museum—but also by engaging the public in problems of historical provenance and raising awareness of similar cases in the academic context. **Elaine Mael** discusses the Baltimore Hebrew Institute collection merger with the much larger collection of Towson University Library on both theoretical and practical levels, addressing the role that physical books carrying Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. bookplates play in Towson’s commitment to community Holocaust education efforts. In the first of two articles, **Stefanie Halpern** takes readers through a 75-year-old documented journey tracing the history of YIVO’s archival collections. Her detective-style narrative describes heroic efforts to protect YIVO’s prewar collections during and after World War II and the decision not to pursue the physical return of those materials, but instead to unite them digitally with YIVO collections in New York (Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project). **Arthur Kiron**’s Feinstein Lecture about the ownership of Jewish cultural property, presented last summer at the AJL 2022 Annual Conference (Philadelphia, PA), is published here in an annotated form. Applying legal concepts of tangible, moveable property to rare books and considering post-custodial methodologies and digital technologies, Kiron proposes reconciling the conflict between private property rights and public cultural heritage interests by collaborating on open digital spaces that allow access to cultural treasures while preserving—or even increasing—their market value. In her review essay, **Rachel Heuberger** examines two digital tools for provenance research of Nazi-looted cultural objects (the Lost Art Database and the Handbook on Judaica Provenance Research: Ceremonial Objects) and reviews Dora Osborne’s book, *What Remains: The Post-Holocaust Archive in German Memory Culture*, which treats archival collections as a reflection of Holocaust remembrance culture in current-day Germany.

Osborne’s book is an example of several recent works related to Jewish archives published by academics who are not practicing archivists. Legitimized as a research topic by the archival turn theory in research literature, archives themselves—including their collecting decisions and practices and the people behind them—became a subject of scrutiny for cultural studies scholars and

historians, and library and for information science professionals alike.² For that reason, Jason Lustig’s book, *A Time to Gather: Archives and the Control of Jewish Culture*, is reviewed from two viewpoints, that of archivist **Amalia Levi** and that of history professor **Larissa Allwork**.

Two essays in this issue present early twentieth-century views of Jewish libraries and librarians, both originally written in Yiddish. **Zachary Baker** translated and annotated two 1917 newspaper articles published in New York by Ber Borokhov, a scholar of Yiddish linguistics, who devised the theoretical framework for Socialist Zionism. One of the articles is about Abraham Solomon Freidus of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library and his catalog (catalogers are not mentioned),³ and the second one is on American Jewish libraries, including the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Hebraic section of the Library of Congress, and the Hebrew Union College library in Cincinnati. **Joel Finkin** translated nine chapters of the 1929 *Handbook for Libraries*, published by the adult-education arm of Po‘ale Tsiyon in Warsaw.⁴ Based on the socialist principles of that workers’ library, it is hardly surprising to find Ber Borokhov mentioned there too, in a chapter that clarifies which library notifications are considered appropriate (Borokov’s tenth *Jahrzeit* in 1927, naturally). Many of the guidelines still hold today, almost a hundred years after its publication, but the following recommendation (in chapter two) seems to violate current library standards of accessibility: “The librarian is to be found beyond the barrier, seated at a desk, in an area where readers can gather.”

AJL’s Hebraica catalogers are celebrated in two articles in this issue. **Roger Kohn**’s survey of 17 cataloging librarians is based on self-submitted testimonies, author-conducted interviews, and published sources. These profiles illustrate the educational background and training that are needed in this professionally demanding specialization, so crucial to our field whether library users are aware of it or not. **Aaron Taub**’s tribute to Heidi Lerner on her retirement (2021) complements the profiles of Hebraica catalogers by highlighting the professional achievements of this singular individual, who spearheaded many innovative technological projects and published widely in this journal and on the pages of *AJS Perspectives*, the newsletter of the Association of Jewish Studies, among other publications. The Schools, Synagogues, Centers, and Public Libraries division of AJL is represented by **Emily Schneider**’s essay on coping with societal norms in two children’s books, Sydney Taylor’s *All-of-a-Kind Family Uptown* and Sadie Rose Weilerstein’s *Little New Angel*. Schneider examines the textual and graphic representations in these two classics of the *pidyon ha-ben* ceremony—a symbolic redemption of a firstborn son from Temple

2. See for example Kobi Cohen-Hattab and Oded Heilbronner. “Mamlakhtiyut (Statism) and the Establishment of a National Archives in Israel: A Study in Theory, History, and Practice, from the Late 1940s to the Early 1950s.” *Israel Studies* 27, no. 3 (2022): 1–23; Kobi Cohen-Hattab. “Establishing the Israel State Archives, 1948–1950.” *Iyunim* 32 (2019): 324–296. <https://in.bgu.ac.il/bgi/iyunim/32/Kobi-Cohen-Hattab.pdf>. [Hebrew] A growing interest in archival research was noted in the previous issue’s Scatter of the Literature (almost 20 percent of the citations), and continued to expand through 2022, with 25 percent of citations collected for the current column.

3. See also Zachary M. Baker, “Freidus, Borokhov, and the Café Royal.” *In geveb* (March 2021). Accessed Sep 23, 2022, <https://ingeveb.org/blog/freidus-borokhov-and-the-caf%C3%A9-royal>.

4. I thank archivist Shulamit Berger of Yeshiva University Library for bringing the digitized version of this book to the attention of ha-Safran listserv readers (April 13, 2022).

service—and shows how it substitutes for the more problematic depiction of ritual circumcision (*brit milah*, or *bris* in Ashkenazic pronunciation) in Jewish American children’s books.

Jewish German authors and booksellers who escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930s are discussed in an article and a book review in this issue. Read together, the pieces illustrate the cultural fabric of that émigré community, which carried the physical remnants of its rich literacy heritage into its new homes in Ecuador and Palestine.⁵ **Irene Münster** tells the story of four German Jews who opened bookstores in Ecuador with their personal libraries or previous inventory in Germany, established book publishing businesses, or initiated influential translation projects, increasing the country’s literacy rates and contributing to its progress. **Renate Evers** reviews Caroline Jessen’s book, *Kanon im Exil* (German), about the book collections that Jewish German authors took with them to Palestine. These private book collections—now mostly discarded—represent not only their owners’ personal reading preferences, but also the literary canon on which they were brought up, their own milieu, and their shattered hopes to continue their status in the post-war German literary establishment.⁶

Our regular columns cover the long period that passed since Volume 21 was published. The Scatter of the Literature column contains dozens of curated citations of relevant research. The JS/DH (Jewish Studies/Digital Humanities) column by **Michelle Margolis** focuses this time on mapping projects that contextualize geographical locations in Jewish culture and history. As AJL president, Margolis reflects on the state of the Association in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic by describing, among other changes, new services that AJL now provides its members.

I thank the authors for their contributions and for being patient, the anonymous peer reviewers for their input, and the editorial board members for their sound advice and support—especially **Nadav Sharon** for his editorial assistance in preparing this issue. Copyeditor extraordinaire **Nancy Sack** deserves special thanks for her work on this issue.

5. See also the Archiv Bibliographia Judaica database (De Gruyter), based on the archive by that name in Frankfurt am Main, founded by Renate Heuer, and on the *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren*. The database provides bio-bibliographic information on more than 20,000 German-speaking Jews who were known figures in literature, philosophy, religion, art, music and politics. Accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/abj/html>.

6. See also Thomas Sparr, *German Jerusalem: The Remarkable Life of a German-Jewish Neighborhood in the Holy City*, trans. Stephen Brown, London: Haus Publishing, 2021. Sparr describes that same émigré intelligentsia and its books, focusing on the Jerusalem neighborhood of Rehavia, where many of the German Jewish authors lived.