Q. Is there a list of the Zionist press in Vilna, up to World War Two?

The simple answer to this question, posed by a graduate student in Jewish Studies at Montreal's McGill University, is "No." To the best of my knowledge no such list has ever appeared, nor has there ever been an effort even to compile a comprehensive list of all Jewish periodicals—regardless of political orientation and language—published in Vilna before the Nazi Holocaust. This may surprise some readers, who might assume that such an important topic surely would not have been neglected by bibliographers. A glance through Shunami yields at least a partial bibliography of the Jewish, including Zionist, press in Vilna, which was subsequently revised, and printed in Vilna before World War One. Among them the fact that it lacks a geographic index. Moreover, in the articles on "Press" and "Vilna," the encyclopedia gives only the names of the most prominent Jewish periodicals published in that city. The first step to be taken in any in-depth bibliographical search of the Jewish press is to open the two volumes of Shlomo Shunami's Bibliography of Jewish Bibliographies, and turn to the heading "Lists of periodicals." This section is subdivided into the following categories: general, by language, and by country.

A glance through Shunami yields at least three potentially promising and quite specific citations, under the subheading for Poland. Of these (item no. 655) is a list of over 50 periodicals, culled from an article on the Yiddish press in Vilna since the First World War, published in 1922 Vilna Pinkes. This turns out to be a descriptive article about Yiddish dailies, weeklies and other journals published in Vilna during and after World War One. This same article was subsequently revised, and printed in the 1935 collection Vilne (Item no. 656 in Shunami). Appended to the updated article is a list of thirteen Yiddish, eight Polish, one Russian, four Lithuanian, and five Belorussian periodicals which were published in Vilna as of 1934, compiled by the indefatigable bibliographer Ephim H. Jeshurin. In addition, Shunami cites an article (item no. 4860) by Marian Fuks (whom he erroneously identifies as Laiz (Leo) Fuks, a noted Dutch Jewish bibliographer in his own right), on the Jewish press in interwar Poland, published in the Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland. The article by Fuks, which is in Polish, includes a list of Jewish serials published in Poland as of the end of 1938. The list is arranged by city—not broken down by political orientation—and includes Vilna. Numerous other leads might be pursued. Researchers ought not overlook the list of Hebrew periodicals that is printed in volume one (the index volume) of the Encyclopaedia Judaica. For our student's purposes, though, this alphabetically arranged list has serious drawbacks, among them the fact that it lacks a geographic index. Moreover, in the articles on "Press" and "Vilna," the encyclopedia gives only the names of the most prominent Jewish periodicals published in that city.

A somewhat more approachable arrangement is featured in the 1975 volume Di yidishe prese vos iz geven, which is devoted primarily to the fate of periodicals published in the years leading up to the German occupation of World War Two. This book includes a chapter on the Yiddish and Hebrew press in Vilna, by Khaye Lazar (pp. 259-283). The author's approach is highly selective, but each title treated is given a thorough description. In addition, thirty-eight more references to Vilna are listed in the geographic index. Perhaps the best source for the Yiddish press in the Russian Empire (which included Vilna) before World War One is the bibliography Di yidishe prese in der gevezener rusisher imperye, compiled by the Soviet Jewish bibliographer A. Kirzhnits, (which is listed in Shunami under the subheading for Russia (item no. 674))

As Chone Shmeruk has noted, the bibliography by Kirzhnits "takes stock of the most difficult area—the pre-World War One Yiddish press. But for the relatively short period of 1919-39 it seems that, despite the apparent abundance of publications, there are as yet no fundamental works." The various ancillary publications dealing with this period that are cited by Shmeruk include a checklist of incoming periodicals registered at the Vilna YIVO, two bibliographical annuals, and a list of Polish-language Jewish newspapers and serials. The most useful bibliographical sources for the interwar Polish-Jewish press, though, are two lists by the bibliographer Yisroel Shayan.

The first of Shayn's lists, on publications in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish issued by various labor organizations in interwar Poland, was published in Warsaw, 1963. Though this list is quite impressive, including as it does twelve chapters on various Labor Zionist movements active in Poland during those years, its arrangement (by party) is not helped by the absence of an index. Title and geographical indexes ought to have been features of this bibliography. The task, then, of ferreting out Zionist titles published in Vilna is rendered all the more tedious. The second list by Shayn is a tentative bibliography of the "bourgeois" Yiddish press of Poland from 1918 to 1939. This list, which is included in the 1974 YIVO collection Studies on Polish Jewry, is in one alphabetical sequence, and includes a geographic index wherein 135 items for Vilna—not all of them necessarily Zionist in orientation—are mentioned.

By now it should be apparent that our Montreal graduate student will have an approachable task, should she ever undertake in...
earnest to compile a list of the Vilna Zionist press. Not all of the possible avenues of approach have been discussed here, and no doubt readers of this column will be able to bring omissions to my attention. This query serves to illustrate that sometimes the raw material for answering what might seem like a routine reference question is there, but the direct answer is not available in a single source.

Notes

1Fukas, Marian. Prasa Żydowska w Warszawie 1823-1939 (Warsaw: Panstowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979). An extensive list of titles of newspapers and journals—in Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, and other languages, with Hebrew-alphabet titles romanized, appears on pp. 312-340. This list is not complete, however, as Chane Shmeruk has pointed out in his review (note 9).


4Zachary M. Baker is the librarian of the Yiddish Department of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal.


7"Goldschmidt, Eliyahu Yaakov. "Di yidishe prese in der gevezener rusisher imperye."


10Notes


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Establishing a Policy on Gifts for the Synagogue Library

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Introduction

A library's gift policy is usually based on its acquisition policy, which in turn reflects the basic philosophy of the institution. While it is preferable to have a formal acquisition policy, it is possible to establish a written gift policy even without such a document.

These are some of the questions that arise concerning gifts to the synagogue library:
- Who accepts or refuses book donations?
- How does one decide whether to accept or reject a collection?
- What is the library's policy on money or books donated with strings attached?
- How does weeding affect donated books in the collection?

The best way to deal with these issues is to establish a written gift policy, which will aid the librarian in resolving the various problems encountered in the handling of gifts from synagogue members.

Some of my views on these questions follow. I encourage submission of alternative opinions and sample policy statements by readers of this column.

Establishing the Policy

A policy may be developed by the librarian in consultation with the library committee, if there is one, or with the Rabbi and/or administrator of the synagogue. The minutes should be recorded and referred to when the need arises.

Synagogue libraries are dependent for their support on Boards made up of congregants. In establishing policy, therefore, one must strike a balance between professional standards and public relations concerns. In dealing with members of the congregation regarding gifts, it is essential that the librarian avoid confrontation. The librarian should cite the policy and speak in the third person, e.g., "The synagogue library's gift policy states . . .".

Accepting the Gift

It is unlikely that a synagogue librarian would seek to establish a policy which would allow for the refusal of all book donations sight unseen, as hope always exists that a hardcover edition of an out-of-print favorite will be one of the titles in the donation box. A compromise policy might state that books given to the library are accepted with the following provisos: the librarian will choose to keep the titles needed for the collection, and all books not accepted will be disposed of, or the library will not distribute the remaining books to other parties. Alternatively, if local conditions make it possible, the librarian may volunteer to distribute the remaining books.

Handling the Offer of a Large Collection

A gift policy should deal with the offer of a large number of books to the collection which may have Jewish content, be in very good condition, and even valuable—but which deal with a subject area of little interest or use to a particular congregation. The addition of such a collection could markedly change the focus of a library, especially a small synagogue library. As a consequence of accepting a large special collection, the librarian would be compelled to choose between building upon this foundation or treating the collection as a "museum piece." Offers of large collections should be handled differently from the usual small donation of books; if a decision is made not to keep the offered gift, it would be good public relations for the librarian to volunteer to find a more suitable home for the collection.

Gifts with "Strings Attached"

How should one handle a gift of a large sum of money designated by the donor for the purchase of books on a very specific, narrow topic? If the subject requested is esoteric, or if the librarian senses that such material is not suitable for the synagogue collection, the donor should be persuaded to reconsider. It is a good idea to maintain a file of alternate suggestions to present at the opportune moment.

A synagogue library is essentially a circulating library for laymen, and while it serves students, it is not generally designed for scholarly research. Articulating this view, and documenting it as part of library policy, will prevent the problem of inappropriate gifts in almost all cases.

Acknowledgment of Gifts

In some cases, the librarian may be asked to send a letter to the book donor which includes a statement of dollar value for tax purposes. Policy should dictate that this request be refused. The librarian's evaluation has no legal standing. It is suggested that the acknowledgment letter merely state that the library received "X number of used books in good condition," or "X number of new books"—together with the usual expressions of gratitude.

Book Plates

The question arises as to whether or not it is necessary to plate each gift book. I'm convinced that unless there is an explicit request to plate a gift book, not every book acquired through donations requires plating. If a member of the congregation can be made to understand that money s/he donates to the Book Fund is pooled with other gifts and used to purchase books for the library, the concept of one check for one book can be discouraged. On the other hand, if a donor offers to contribute a sum of money large enough to cover the cost of a specific, expensive reference work, then by all means, a special book plate should feature the donor's name. In all questions of plating, common sense and good public relations dictate policy.

Weeding Donated Materials

Weeding, a necessary task in all synagogue libraries, presents a problem when the books to be weeded turn out to be gifts. An example serves to clarify this point. Some years ago, a member family donated numerous works by Sholom Aleichem to a synagogue library; the volumes in Yiddish