

# ALEF BIT

## The Library Automation Scene in Israel—1985

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### ALEPH

The Hebrew University's ALEPH library automation system (Levi, 1984), which has been chosen to serve as the basis of the national network of university libraries, has undergone several significant changes.

The original intent was to use the ALEPH dedicated CDC mainframe at the Hebrew University as the hub of a centralized network, tying in the libraries via ISRANET, the Israeli version of Telenet. The possibility of a decentralized super-minicomputer based network was also offered as a development option. In addition, prospective libraries were encouraged to use the Hebrew University data base as their own, adding their holdings to Hebrew University records or adding new records as needed. Libraries could maintain independent data and authority files; however, this was discouraged. The ultimate goal was the creation of a single national data base which would serve as a national union catalog as well as provide housekeeping services such as circulation control. Critics of this plan felt that it was an attempt to do too much, too fast, in too centralized a framework, particularly given the poor history of interlibrary and inter-institutional cooperation among Israeli universities (Sever, 1983).

In 1984, it became apparent that the various libraries of the Hebrew University itself were unable to reach agreement on forms of bibliographic and subject access as well as responsibility for authority and quality control. As a result, it was finally decided to allow each library to maintain its own bibliographic data and authority files. Subsequently, the unified master file was broken up into individual library files. Users at any library can access the catalog of another library, but a campus-wide search cannot be done expeditiously. Separate files also exist for the national union catalog of serials and for other libraries using the ALEPH CDC (Technion, Ben-Gurion University and the Tel-Aviv Public Library).

In parallel with this development, the experiments of the Technion and Ben-Gurion

University in using ALEPH via ISRANET (for data entry only at this point) led to the conclusion that the Israeli telecommunications infrastructure is not sufficiently reliable to sustain critical library housekeeping operations.

As a result of these two developments, emphasis has been shifted to the decentralized VAX-based version of ALEPH (which was originally intended for marketing outside the Israeli university network). The University Grants and Planning Committee of the Council on Higher Education (the government funding body for universities) has revised its initial decision and will support purchase of individual VAX super-minicomputers for university libraries (at the rate of one per year). These local systems free housekeeping operations from dependence on telecommunications. The union catalog function has now been lost, however (the decision to separate files on the Hebrew University CDC was already a major step in this direction), and the best to be hoped for is that it will be possible to access one library's computer via another. This function is under development.

The Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) has closed its Roman and Hebrew character card catalogs in favor of the ALEPH online system, albeit with some misgivings. The 1984 annual report of the JNUL states that:

"We are now in the midst of the transition from manual to computerized methods, and we find ourselves at a stage where the drawbacks of the new system are apparent, the advantages of the old cannot be exploited, and the benefits of the new have not yet been fully realized. As a result of repeated cutbacks and other problems, the ALEPH programmers are not yet able to meet the requirements of the JNUL as regards printouts and improved search procedures." (JNUL, 1985)

### University of Haifa Cataloging Services

The Grants Committee's decision to support ALEPH to the exclusion of all other systems has caused problems at the University of Haifa library. Haifa has developed myriad library automation and bibliographic systems operating on a PDP 11/34 minicomputer (Adler, 1983) and is unwilling to scrap them in favor of the ALEPH system, concerning which it has both professional and operational reservations. Haifa's development plans called for upgrading to a VAX computer in 1984. The University's difficult financial situation coupled with the Grants Committee's refusal to support non-ALEPH development (even of services not included in ALEPH) have forced the University of Haifa to cease providing cataloging services to outside institutions: card service (MARC and original cataloging) for Ben-Gurion University, Bar-Ilan and the Technion, and microfiche catalogs for the Technion. The Technion and Ben-Gurion University are to receive cards via a new ALEPH card production function being developed.

Haifa would like to develop a VAX version of its HOBITS system for bibliographic retrieval and market subscriptions to its *Index to Hebrew Periodicals* and *Eretz Israel Data Base*. Such a subscription would include the data files (updated periodically), thesaurus file, and search program.

In September 1985, the University of Haifa approved the library's request for a VAX 11/750 super-minicomputer, which will allow the library to continue its unique services and to become a member of the planned ALEPH-based university network (now in its initial test phase).

### Inter-University Committee on Cataloging and Conversion

As a first step towards uniformity in cataloging practice, the Standing Committee of the National and University Libraries set up a subcommittee with representatives of all university central libraries (and of several large departmental libraries) to discuss the problems of automated cataloging and stan-

standardization. The subcommittee began meeting in 1984 and, after devoting several sessions to identifying differences in cataloging practice, has begun to reach decisions, particularly regarding forms of headings. Considering the highly decentralized network which seems to be evolving, this standardization of headings is crucial if any kind of country-wide searching is contemplated.

It should be mentioned here that Israeli libraries, while claiming to adhere to AACR2, follow different local practices—particularly regarding Hebraica and Judaica cataloging. These local practices have never been standardized, and the deliberations and decisions of the Committee constitute a first attempt at standardizing Israeli cataloging practice. The Committee has circulated its decisions as well as a name authority list for classic Judaica uniform title headings in the form of computer printouts.

#### Center for Public Library Cataloging Data

The Center for Public Libraries produces catalog cards for Israel's public and school libraries. Since 1978, the Center has been converting its cataloging data to machine-readable form (1948–1978 in abbreviated form, 1979 to date in full form) using the University of Haifa's HOBITS system. Two printed volumes covering 1948–1978 and 1979–1982 have been produced. Beginning in 1985, the Center offers a COM (computer-output microform) microfiche subscription service containing cumulated cataloging data from 1983 to date. Fiche are arranged both alphabetically (by author/title) and in classified order (by Israeli abridged Dewey). For subscription information, contact the Center (P.O.B. 242, Jerusalem).

The Center's data base will also be used for conversion purposes as public libraries begin to implement automated circulation systems. Experiments in this direction are now underway.

#### Small Library Systems

The past year has seen the appearance of several microcomputer-based systems for small or medium-sized libraries. While some of these systems are little more than an attempt to clothe a general purpose data base management system in a library cloak, at least one software house has invested heavily in developing a system tailored to library needs.

TOP Systems together with Triple D Micro Software, both of Tel-Aviv, have developed a system based on a hard disk and microcomputer work stations which includes catalog maintenance, circulation, in-

formation retrieval, and other library functions. The system, which supports both Hebrew and Roman character cataloging, is available in single and multi-user versions. Some thirty systems have been ordered by or installed in special and public libraries, and this system has been chosen by the Center for Public Libraries for a pilot project under which it is aiding several public libraries to automate.

#### The Information Retrieval Center for Research in the Behavioral Sciences

The Information Retrieval Center for Research in the Behavioral Sciences of the Henrietta Szold Institute serves as a national clearing house for social science research in Israel. The Center maintains a data base from which it produces the quarterly abstract journal *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences in Israel*. The data base is maintained on a PDP 11/44 minicomputer using a retrieval system developed by an Israeli software house. Data can be retrieved by bibliographic details and by descriptors (Hebrew or English).

The data base contained some 8000 items as of Spring 1985. There is full coverage in the fields of education, sociology, demography, immigration, labor, psychology, welfare and criminology; and partial coverage

in political science, management, economics and social medicine (Langerman, 1983).

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