

Tracking Translations: the Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation

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Some countries have an agency, governmental or private, which undertakes to stimulate the translation into other languages of outstanding works of their own literature. In Israel, the year 1962 saw the establishment of the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, a non-profit government corporation whose aim is the stimulation, promotion, and dissemination of translations of the best in contemporary Hebrew belles-lettres.

Inasmuch as there was no bibliographical control of translations from modern Hebrew literature and no checklist of existing translations—except for random listings of individual titles in issues of *Kiryat Sefer* (formerly romanized as *Kirjath Sepher*), the quarterly bibliographical journal of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem—the fledgling Institute was faced early on with the problem of determining what translations were available so as to avoid duplication of effort. To a very great extent, this difficulty was overcome by the publication in 1968 of Yohai Goell's *Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in English Translation* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization; Israel Universities Press). Based almost entirely on the holdings of the Jewish National and University Library, this invaluable reference work lists more than three thousand entries covering poetry, fiction, drama, essays, and children's literature issued through the end of 1965. (Two significant anthologies, namely Ruth Mintz's bilingual *Modern Hebrew Poetry* and Avraham Birman's *An Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry*, though published in 1966 and 1967 respectively, were also included.)

Impressed by Goell's bibliography, and desiring to extend its basic idea—recording translations from modern Hebrew literature into other languages—Nilli Cohen, director of the Institute, commissioned Goell to compile a bibliography of modern Hebrew literature translated into all languages. This work, listing seven hundred books in languages ranging from Arabic to Yiddish, appeared in 1975 under the imprint of the Institute.

Aside from the fact that Goell's 1968 bibliography was limited to translations into English, there are other differences between that bibliography and the 1975 publication. The first bibliography lists items found in periodicals, anthologies, and newspapers; it also gives separate bibliographic entities. It does not list historical and critical material on Hebrew writers and Hebrew literature. The 1975 bibliography is limited to books. Translations appearing in periodicals and general anthologies are not included, except for special issues or sections of periodicals devoted exclusively to modern Hebrew literature. Appendices contain lists of surveys of modern Hebrew literature (in languages other than Hebrew), works on special fields of Hebrew literature, and studies of individual authors.

With more and more translations of poetry, short stories, and other belles-lettres appearing in periodicals, anthologies, and other collections, Cohen realized that the Institute's bibliography of books, though very useful, was less than adequate. There was no bibliographical control or recording of all these translations on an ongoing basis.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a tremendous increase in the number of universities developing departments of Hebrew studies, thus most of the studies on individual authors listed in the 1975 bibliography were academic dissertations or theses. This period also witnessed significant growth in the number of journals devoted to Jewish studies, including Hebrew literature. Relevant material found here also needed to be documented. The Modern Language Association's *International Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literatures* does not cover translations and is not current for critical material. Cohen's solution was to issue a serial bibliography listing modern Hebrew literature in translation, and including bio-critical material on Hebrew writers, book reviews, and essays on the history and criticism of the various phases of modern Hebrew literature and its genres.

As a first step in the attainment of complete coverage, a list was developed of Judaica journals and society publications which include modern Hebrew literature as one of their fields of interest. Relevant data on appropriate items were then transferred to cards, pending publication. Augmented constantly and updated regularly, this card file, now arranged chronologically, serves as our current and comprehensive multilingual database for the *Bibliography*. Within each grouping, the entries are arranged first by genre (poetry, fiction, drama, essays, and humor), then alphabetically by author. Works by a given author are followed by biographical and/or critical material. There is a rubric for general history and criticism of modern Hebrew literature, as well as one for each genre.

Two basic decisions were made before publication of the first issue in the Spring of 1979. It was arbitrarily agreed that the beginning date would be 1972, and there would be two issues per year—a Spring issue listing material in English, and an Autumn issue listing material in other languages. It is interesting to note that Catalan, Chinese, Japanese, and Slovenian have been represented in the *Bibliography*; Serbo-Croatian appears with some regularity.

In addition to listing the material noted above, each issue contains three indexes: 1) an index of Hebrew authors (as author or subject), 2) an index of translators, editors, etc., and 3) a Hebrew index arranged by author and original Hebrew title of the translation listed. The compilation of this last index necessitates a great amount of sleuthing.

The compilers of the *Bibliography* have been sensitive to consumer reaction. Several subscribers had inquired early on about the period between the close of Goell's bibliography (for English translations)-1965 and our beginning date of 1972. To fill this gap, each Spring issue—beginning with the one for the year 1981—includes retrospective material. The 1981

issue covers 1971; the 1982 issue includes 1970 entries; and so on retroactively until coverage will have been completed. Various subscribers had inquired about material in foreign languages published before 1972. To satisfy this request, each Autumn issue, beginning with the one for the years 1979-80, includes material for the period 1948-49 (the establishment of the State of Israel) onward.

Visitors to the Institute wonder at the amount of time and effort sometimes spent in locating a specific item or piece of information. When we describe our *modus operandi*, we are frequently asked why we don't computerize our files. We are working on that, but right now, mainly for financial reasons, we must be content with a manual operation.

We would welcome any comment from readers of this journal; it is only by knowing what bibliographers in the field want to see in this bibliography that we can improve it and make it more useful.

Acknowledgment

No description of the *Bibliography* would be complete without grateful acknowledgment to Amnon Zipin, of Ohio State University Libraries, who has, since the outset of the *Bibliography*, covered English-language journals of Jewish interest published in the United States.

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Compiling the Book-length Bibliography: Concepts and Strategies*

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Although their working environments vary, librarians in the typical seminary, university, or synagogue setting are all in constant dialogue with the users of their collections. In the process of providing reference service to students and researchers, librarians often discover that the existing bibliographic coverage is woefully inadequate for locating frequently sought information in many specialized areas. Recognizing that important topics in the field of Jewish studies lack bibliographical guides, librarians can make a lasting contribution to their profession through the compilation of book-length bibliographies.

In contrast to *analytical* or *critical* bibliography, wherein the objective is the description and identification of printed texts as physical entities (e.g., typography and design, textual variants, and watermarks), our concern here is *enumerative* or *systematic* bibliography, the purpose of which is the preparation of a "list or sequence of descriptions of graphic materials on a given subject or area" (Bates, 1976, p. 9). An aspiring bibliographer should possess the ability to conceive, plan, and organize a project, as well as the tenacity to carry the project through to a successful conclusion—often after the passage of several years. Even more important are those most basic of requirements—accuracy and attention to detail. The bibliographer's potential for success will be enhanced by such traits as curiosity, objectivity, skepticism, intuitiveness, and the sleuthing skills of the detective. A working knowledge of foreign languages and library practices will reap many dividends, as will a thorough comprehension of the issues and scholarly literature of the subject matter being brought under bibliographic control (adapted from Harmon, 1981, pp. 26-27).

Having perceived the lack of an adequate bibliography, e.g., in the case of Karaites and Karaitic literature, the bibliographer must then ascertain that the prospective work will meet a significant need while not duplicating any existing bibliographic tools. Once these considerations related to the

new work's *purpose* are resolved, the compiler will then decide on the book's *scope*; i.e., languages covered, chronological and geographic parameters, or possible format exclusions, such as juvenile and holograph materials. A bibliographer may, in addition, choose to limit the *domain* of the project to the holdings of one library or only the libraries in the United States. Given the paucity of adequate book-length bibliographies, the new book should be as complete as possible within its stated limitations. While bibliographies need not be annotated, it is nonetheless true that the most useful (and most favorably reviewed) ones are annotated. It is recommended that when describing primary source materials, the bibliographer should provide an indication of the holding repository for each item. If the bibliographer continually keeps the needs of the book's users uppermost in his/her mind during the early planning stages, many of the basic questions related to the scope and organization of the material will be resolved with little difficulty. All bibliographers should become familiar with the concise "Guidelines for the Preparation of a Bibliography," prepared by the American Library Association's Reference and Adult Services Division, Bibliography Committee ("Guidelines," 1982).

Locating all of the pertinent material for the bibliography is a challenge for even the most experienced compiler. Needless to say, there is no substitute for on-site visits to libraries with relevant collections, if the bibliographer is to examine each and every item. In order to maximize the return on time invested in traveling to libraries, begin with those that have open-stack collections and self-service photocopying.

The search strategy should include a close examination of all the appropriate author and subject cards (analytics are especially useful). The shelflist is an often forgotten

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