

The Library Automation Scene in Israel—1986

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Kuperman (Continued)

Wordmill, Bigger Byte, Inc., 1 S. Central Ave., Valley Stream, NY 11580. This is an Israeli word processing program based on a Hebrew "chip."

Font programs that include Hebrew

These programs work with dot matrix or laser printers to produce a greater range of fonts and/or higher quality fonts than would otherwise be available. They supplement but do not replace a word processing program. The programs listed below include Hebrew fonts.

Fancy Font, Soft Craft, Inc., 16 N. Carroll Street, Suite 500, Madison, WI 53703.

Fontrix, Data Transforms, 616 Washington Street, Denver, CO 80203.

Letrix, Hammerlab, 5700 Arlington Ave., Riverdale, NY 10471.

User groups

User groups often provide honest and independent information about using computers. The two listed below specialize in Hebrew and Judaica applications of personal computers, and both publish newsletters containing valuable and current information.

Hebrew Users Group, Berkeley Hillel Foundation, 2736 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94704.

Computer Hebrew Users Group of New York, c/o Michael Rand, 21 Bennett Ave., New York, NY 10033.

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Introduction

The major development in the Israeli library automation scene during 1986 was the large number of libraries initiating automated services. In virtually all cases, the libraries chose one of two commercially marketed Israeli library systems: ALEPH or Sifriah-83.

ALEPH—Libraries

In 1985, I reported on the selection of ALEPH by the University Grants Committee as the basis for the university-wide network and on the changes in the network concept towards a highly decentralized system (Adler, 1985). During 1986, the decentralized VAX computer version of ALEPH was installed in several Israeli universities.

The initial intent was to run-in the ALEPH VAX version at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology while maintaining the Hebrew University's older CDC version until the ALEPH VAX version was completed and fully tested. This plan was unfortunately not followed, as the Hebrew University found it necessary (primarily for financial reasons) to drop its leased CDC sooner than planned. Testing at the Technion went on simultaneously with conversion of the various Jerusalem-based libraries (each with its own particular problems which had to be solved in the process) and, as a result, the run-in procedure did not progress as smoothly as it might have.

The Hebrew University itself is now running ALEPH on several VAX computers at its various campuses. The catalogs of the Library of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Mount Scopus campus and the Library of Sciences at the Giv'at-Ram campus have been completely converted, and these libraries function totally online, without a card catalog. Other University libraries (Law, Education, Archaeology, and Agriculture) are in the process of catalog conversion; however, public access terminals are not yet in use. The Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) closed its card catalog in

1985, and all materials cataloged since then are accessible via computer only. There are no plans for mass conversion of the old JNUL card catalog in the foreseeable future. Each Hebrew University library catalog is a separate, independent database with its own authority files—making a campus-wide search rather difficult.

The Technion was the first major library system outside the Hebrew University to use ALEPH VAX, and it has served as the test site for various ALEPH modules. Despite the fact that the Technion has a highly decentralized system of 24 libraries, it is maintaining a centralized automated system with a single database of all its libraries' holdings. As of April 1987, the central library and five departmental libraries are online, including circulation. Other libraries await conversion and a larger computer; meanwhile, they are using a campus-wide COM microfiche catalog, in addition to maintaining their card catalogs. All Technion cataloging since 1981—covering a very high percentage of "live" material in technology—is in the database.

The Ben Gurion University of the Negev and Tel-Aviv University libraries have also moved their files from Jerusalem to local VAX computers. Ben Gurion plans to have public access terminals available in Fall 1987; meanwhile, current cataloging and retrospective conversion are proceeding. Circulation via ALEPH is limited to those items already in the database; a parallel manual system is still in use for unconverted materials. Tel-Aviv University activity consists also primarily of current cataloging and conversion at this stage. Tel-Aviv will have a multiple database system, reflecting its system of several large, highly autonomous libraries.

The Weizmann Institute of Science Library is committed to ALEPH also, even though its central library is currently using the microcomputer-based "Sifriah-83" system (see below).

The University of Haifa Library is currently testing ALEPH alongside its own VAX-based library systems. Haifa has a unique problem in that it already has many highly developed systems, including functions not yet found or even planned in ALEPH. Haifa is considering using ALEPH primarily for cataloging and serials check-in, while retaining its own systems for circulation, acquisitions, invoice processing, and other functions.

Bar-Ilan University has given serious consideration to IBM's DOBIS system, despite the fact that interfacing DOBIS into the ALEPH network would likely be quite difficult. Bar-Ilan plans to do an on-site test of ALEPH as well, and should reach a decision by Summer 1987.

Outside the university network, three libraries are now using ALEPH: the Tel-Aviv Central Public Library (which has been using ALEPH for several years via a direct line to Jerusalem) and two new libraries: the Netanya Public Library and the library of the Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research Institute (ha-Makhon le-heker yamim va-agamim) in Haifa. The latter two have recently signed up for ALEPH-T, a cut-down version of ALEPH being marketed by Ex-Libris, Ltd. Ex-Libris is a new company set up to market ALEPH outside the Israeli University network, replacing Aurec, which had unsuccessfully attempted to market ALEPH earlier. The price of ALEPH-T is linked to the number of terminals in use, starting quite low and increasing as terminals are added. In addition, the fact that the price of VAX and particularly Micro-VAX computers has gone down significantly over the last two years makes ALEPH financially more attractive in the public and special library sector.

ALEPH—Ownership and Governance

ALEPH itself is a software package owned by the Hebrew University via a subsidiary company called ALEPH-YISSUM. As part of its recognition of ALEPH as the basis for the inter-university network, the University Grants Committee (the funding body for higher education in Israel) set up the ALEPH Steering Committee to oversee the development of ALEPH and to recommend special development and maintenance grants. The Committee is composed of several library directors and heads of university computer centers, with representatives of other libraries attending as observers. Despite its hold on the purse-strings, the Committee has not taken as active a role in the management of ALEPH as it might, and has often found itself in the position of approving matters after the fact.

Detailed requests related to specific ALEPH modules are routed through a Software Subcommittee of the Standing Committee of the National and University Libraries (SCONUL). Questions relating to the cataloging or serials modules are usually discussed first in the SCONUL Cataloging or Serials Subcommittees.

ALEPH—Network Aspects

One of the most attractive elements of the ALEPH system has been the networking capability in which a catalog user at one library can, with one command, shift to another library's catalog and continue searching with virtually the same commands, data format, etc.—even while the other catalog is physically found on a distant computer. Similarly, a cataloger would be able to locate an item in another collection and then copy it to his own catalog, editing it as needed. This capability does indeed exist and functions, although not between all libraries as yet and not as smoothly as might be desired.

A network is only as good as the physical link between its units and, unfortunately, the Israeli telecommunications infrastructure is still woefully inadequate. Attempts to base network communications on ISRANET (Israel's version of TELENET) have been unsatisfactory so far, and therefore communications have been done via dedicated point-to-point lines. While these lines insure high quality data transfer, they are very expensive. The libraries have generally used existing dedicated lines already in use between their institution's computer center and the Hebrew University's, paying for their share of the use. Since these lines are already carrying a great deal of non-library "traffic," response time is often very slow. Furthermore, the use of dedicated lines mandates a "star" architecture in which all lines lead to Jerusalem. Indeed, one of the Jerusalem VAX computers also functions as the network "switchboard," routing calls from one library to another.

Other factors affecting network response include the general communications overhead and the work load on the computers involved. Even within the libraries of the Hebrew University itself, there is a noticeable difference when searching on another computer—even if it is on the same campus and the communication line is dedicated to library use.

Aside from technical aspects, there are several professional and management problems affecting network plans: ALEPH is a highly flexible system, allowing libraries the

freedom to determine their own data fields, how to tag them, display them, etc. This freedom could easily lead to anarchy, however, and many inter-university meetings have been devoted to trying to reach some agreement on standard fields, tags, etc. to make one library's cataloging usable in another. Significant progress has been made; however, much of it is based on good will only, and it is yet to be seen how it will stand the test of time.

The problem of multiple catalogs at some universities has already been mentioned. Despite a clear-cut decision of the ALEPH Steering Committee, the Hebrew University (and to a lesser degree Tel-Aviv University) are maintaining separate catalogs for all or some of their libraries. As a result, while it is possible to make a single search to see if a title is available at the Technion, searching for it at the Hebrew University requires shifting in and out of several catalogs (presumably in most cases, a search strategy would begin with the libraries most likely to house a specific title).

A partial solution to this problem would be a national union catalog of monographs, similar to the existing union list of serials (itself an independent ALEPH library). The idea being discussed currently is to take all ALEPH catalogs and merge them into one catalog accessible by main entry and title only. The resulting unrevised file would be made available on a central computer to all network users. Instead of updating this file, it might be totally recreated from time to time.

A further network problem yet to be solved is who will be given access to the network and under what conditions. While the network is primarily that of the university libraries, the Tel-Aviv Public Library already has access to it (since its files reside on one of the Hebrew University's computers). The use of ALEPH by additional non-university libraries will raise questions as to access, fees, etc. Similarly, one of the companies offering videotext-type data services in Israel has shown interest in adding access to the university network as one of its services.

ALEPH—Development

In mid-1986, a meeting was held between representatives of the ALEPH Steering Committee and the Hebrew University administration regarding the continued development of ALEPH. The decision reached was that the first official version of ALEPH was to be "closed" at the end of 1986, and that thereafter, any further development

work would be budgeted separately. The 1986 deadline was to include completion of the acquisitions and serials check-in modules (still not completed in April 1987). Annual maintenance fees (some \$12,500 per library) and special development grants would be applied to an agreed-upon development plan. While priorities have not yet been firmly set, major items planned for development include: Arabic script (up to now Arabic has been "Hebraized"), creation of a national union monograph catalog (see above), adding LC MARC (or at least part of it) as an independent "library" within the network, and development of an interlibrary loan module, as well as improvements to existing modules.

Other badly needed items include a complete rewrite of the ALEPH documentation (much documentation is still missing, and that which exists is often woefully inadequate) and an invoice-processing system. The ALEPH development team is particularly loath to develop an invoice-processing module, since each university's procedures are determined by its finance department and tend to be unique.

University of Haifa Systems

As mentioned above, the University of Haifa is considering adopting ALEPH as its cataloging system, both because it will enable Haifa to be an active part of the network and because the ALEPH cataloging module includes authority control and

detailed inventory control—areas in which Haifa's cataloging system is weak. Similarly, Haifa would like to make use of the ALEPH serials check-in module which is still under development. Haifa intends to retain its own absence-system circulation module, at least until total conversion of the collection has been completed. Similarly, the Haifa acquisitions and invoice processing systems will be retained for some time to come (Tel-Aviv University is also using its own acquisitions system—in its case, a university-wide procurement system which was expanded to meet library needs). Haifa is now experimenting with interfacing and transferring data between its own systems and ALEPH. Implementing an online public access catalog is not envisioned before 1991.

Haifa has had its own VAX computer since January 1986 and has converted all its bibliographic and housekeeping systems to the new computer. Use of Haifa's unique bibliographic files (Index to Hebrew Periodicals, Eretz Israel Data Base, and others) within the university network has been a subject of discussion. Haifa would prefer not to serve as a bibliographic utility (with all the communications, extra hardware, invoicing, etc. involved) and has suggested installing its databases and search software on the VAX computers of interested libraries in return for a set fee. The libraries would then be able to make unlimited use of the data.

Sifriah-83

Israel's "other" commercially available library system is a microcomputer-based system developed by TOP Systems of Tel-Aviv. "Sifriah-83" (its name indicating its date of

birth) is based on IBM-PC or PC-compatible hardware. It is available in single and multi-user configurations. Some 70 systems have been sold in Israel in virtually all sectors of the small-to-medium size library community: from high-tech industry to yeshivot. The system includes cataloging, circulation, and information retrieval; serials check-in and acquisitions are under development.

"Sifriah-83" is marketed in Britain under the name CALM (Computer Aided Library Management) and has been reviewed under that name in several library automation journals (see for example, *The Electronic Library*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October 1985), pp. 242-251).

Summary

Israeli libraries have been following the general trend to purchase an available system rather than to reinvent the wheel. These systems should continue to develop both in breadth and width, improving existing services and adding new modules. The two systems described seem to cover the span of libraries fairly well, and the libraries using them seem generally satisfied.

References

Adler, Elhanan. "The Library Automation Scene in Israel—1985," *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 2, no. 1-2 (Spring 1985), pp. 7-8.

Elhanan Adler is Assistant Director of the University of Haifa Library, and has been involved in all its automation activities.

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