Cutter J4: Tampering with the Library of Congress Classification for Judaica

Bella Hass Weinberg
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
and
St. John's University
New York

Introduction

The majority of large academic and research collections of Judaica in the U.S. are currently arranged by the Library of Congress Classification (henceforth LCC) scheme. The main reasons for this are: (a) the availability of complete class marks for a large number of Hebraica and Judaica on LC printed cards and in its MARC database, and (b) the expense of maintaining and updating a specialized or homemade Judaica classification scheme. Over the past twenty years, most Judaica research libraries—paralleling the trend in the general library world—have either reclassified their collections to LCC or have begun to classify all newly acquired works according to this de facto national standard.

Although the primary reasons for adopting LCC are economic in nature, when Judaica librarians examine the logical and philosophical structure of the LC Classification for Judaica, there is widespread dissatisfaction. In general terms, the source of the dissatisfaction is the "Christian bias" of LCC. It is therefore interesting to note that Christian librarians are also dissatisfied with the LC Classification for Religion and Theology, and there exist several published modifications of the scheme for Protestant denominations and Catholic libraries. Ruth Eisenhart, in an excellent paper entitled "The Classification of Theological Books," makes many points that a Judaica librarian can relate to, e.g., "the religion schedule (BL-BX) is not one of [LC's] best" (Eisenhart, 1960, p. 261).

In the CATALOG DEPARTMENT of this issue, Pearl Berger reports on some of the major categories of LC Classification changes made at Yeshiva University and the Jewish Theological Seminary. A previous column reported on changes in the classification of Jewish law (Berger & Wachs, 1984, p. 67–68). Extensive modifications to LCC in all areas of Jewish Studies have also been made at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The purposes of this paper are to focus on the notion of *tampering* with LCC, to analyze the various levels of tampering with this mammoth classification scheme, and to discuss the implications of modifying a standard classification scheme.

Tamperability of LCC

It is important for Judaica librarians to recognize that LCC is inherently not a tamperable system. One cannot effectively truncate an LC class mark as one can in Dewey. This is because LC's notation is not expressive, i.e., the class number does not, in most cases, increase in *length* as the specificity of a subject increases. Compare the Dewey and LC numbers for the topics *History of Israel* and *History of Israel—Medieval Period*. Dewey's notation (956.94; 956.9403) is expressive of the greater specificity in the latter concept, while LC has the same number of characters in both class marks (DS117; DS124). The impossibility of shortening LC class marks is often cited as the reason for its inappropriateness for synagogue and school libraries, even though LCC's letter base makes for shorter classification numbers than Dewey's in most cases (Weinberg, 1983, p. 29), as the example above illustrates.

A second reason why LCC is not readily amenable to local modification is that its philosophical basis is the *literary warrant* of the Library of Congress collection. Where LC has extensive holdings on a subject, the classification scheme is expanded. It is therefore unfair to fault LCC for lack of specificity in cases where a Judaica library has a richer collection than LC does in a specialized area. (A similar point was made in my article on LC subject headings (Weinberg, 1985, p. 23).) Dewey represents, by contrast, more of a theoretical division of knowledge than a practical classification scheme for a specific collection.

Dewey is a largely *synthetic* classification scheme, while LCC is primarily *enumera-*tive. In other words, Dewey offers building blocks for compound topics, while LC spells out complete numbers for most of these. For example, the class number for "History of Jews in Poland" must be synthesized in Dewey from a number in the basic history schedules, a standard subdivision and an ethnic concept in the tables, yielding 943.8004924, while LC enumerates DS135.P6. There are, however, some tables in LCC, and Pearl Berger, in the CATALOG DEPARTMENT of this issue, records local modifications to the ones for Bible and Talmud.

LCC's overall structure is also more rigid than that of Dewey. The Decimal Classification suggests many alternate ways of classing a topic, e.g., Jewish history may be classed all together or dispersed by country in general history, while alternative class numbers in LCC are rare.

Having established that LCC is not designed for local modification, we now move to an analysis of the various types of tampering found in actual practice in Judaica libraries.

Levels of Tampering

1. *Independent Assignment of Class Marks*—In a pure sense, interpreting the LCC schedules literally, and independently assigning a class mark to a work that LC either does not own or has not yet cataloged constitutes tampering. Why? First of all, because the number of books on the topic has now changed, and the local library's "literary warrant" differs from LC's. Secondly, LC may later catalog the same book and assign a different class number to it. Given what we know about the lack of consistency in classification, LC might interpret the subject of the book differently or might introduce a new class number to accommodate its specific topic. The local library would then have a non-standard class mark for its book, unless it tracked the availability of LC cataloging data for all of its

originally cataloged works and reclassified them when necessary—a very time-consuming procedure. The third reason that independent assignment constitutes tampering is that the cutter number assigned by the local library will probably differ from that which LC may assign to the same book at some later time, or it may conflict with the number assigned to a different book by LC, since LC's shelflisting is done with respect to its own collection. To avoid this possibility, many libraries add an "x" to the cutter number of any work which is independently classified.

2. *Adopting Official Alternatives*—In recent years, the Library of Congress has provided alternative class numbers for certain categories, most notably bibliography. These appear on LC's printed cards in brackets below the official class mark. The latter includes a cutter number for author (or main entry), but the alternative does not. Adoption of LC-sanctioned alternatives therefore constitutes "tampering" in many of the same ways as independent assignment of class numbers. When LC officially sanctions the alternative placement of a subject, it validates the work of librarians who make local modifications to LCC.

YIVO had classified bibliography with the subject, rather than in class Z, for several years before LC made the alternative official. YIVO also occasionally assigns numbers other than those which LC has assigned to individual books when it is felt that they will be more useful to our users in a different class. For example, LC classes "coffee-table" books on Jewish civilization—with numerous pictures accompanied by some text—in DS (Jewish history). We felt that for the purposes of our reference collection, these would be more useful in class N (Art), because of the richness of the illustrations.

3. *Changing the Meaning of LC Class Numbers*—The complaint Judaica libraries have most often regarding the Library of Congress Classification is that too few numbers are assigned to the Jewish aspects of a topic. Very frequently, "Cutter J4" (or J5) is the only allowance for Judaic materials on a subject (hence the title of this paper). One way of resolving this problem in a library which collects Judaica exclusively is to assign to general LCC numbers a Jewish meaning. This is in essence what is done in the Dewey-based Judaica classification schemes for synagogue and school libraries, e.g., in the Weine (1982) system, Dewey's number for music, 780, is assigned the meaning *Jewish music*, with Weine's notation, z780, indicating that it is a nonstandard Dewey number. Where Judaica is integrated with a general collection, this

type of tampering is not possible. If the Judaica collection is separate and has a special location symbol, it is possible—unless the shelflists of the two collections are interfiled.

The Library of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which classifies only its reference collection and one special collection by LCC, has applied this type of tampering to Holocaust materials. LC's number for Holocaust, D810.J4, is conceptually "World War II—Special Topics—Jews." Works on the local history of the Holocaust are interspersed by LC in the geographic breakdown of Jewish history at DS 135, without differentiation, e.g., between the history of Jews in Vilna and the Vilna Ghetto. It is interesting, however, that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is viewed as part of the military history of World War II by LC, and is classified in the geographic breakdown of the War at D765.2. We decided to apply the geographic breakdown of World War II to the local history of the Holocaust rather than to intersperse the latter with general Jewish history. In addition, we took the general form divisions of World War II and assigned them a Jewish meaning. Thus, for example, works on the "Study and Teaching of the Holocaust" are classed in D743.4.

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Assigning a Jewish meaning to LCC numbers can be easily done in general disciplines such as sociology. When uniquely Jewish concepts arise, however, special cutter or class numbers must be introduced, which leads to the next two categories of tampering.

4. *Modifying LC Subject Cutters and Tables*— Subject cutters and tables are LC's primary

synthetic devices or building blocks. The former are used very often for special topics within a broad category such as Bible. Recognizing that almost any topic can be analyzed from a biblical point of view, LC instructs us to cutter A-Z, e.g., BS1199.F8—Future life in the Old Testament.

Alphabetical cuttering by topic often results in an order that is not helpful to the user. Classification theorists (notably Ranganathan) advise that alphabetic arrangement of subtopics should be applied only where no more logical arrangement suggests itself, as in the names of cities within a region or of authors within a given type of literature. In the case of topics within the Bible, Dewey's allowance for synthesis of any number in the classification scheme with the base number 220.8 results in more sensible groupings than LC's cutters. Yeshiva University found LC's alphabetic cuttering of the tractates of the Talmud philosophically unacceptable, and employs a table reflecting the traditional order instead.

Philosophy and logic aside, original assignment of subject cutters involves all of the problems of independent assignment of author cutters, and then some. The major additional problem is *synonymy*—many Jewish subjects can be expressed in two ways—most commonly through a Hebrew term and its English translation. With the recent changes in liturgical cataloging by LC, Judaica librarians had to grapple with inconsistencies in the terms used for existing subject cutters vs. those used in the new descriptive headings (Weinberg, 1984, p. 72). At Cataloging Workshops of the Association of Jewish Libraries, concern was also expressed that originally assigned cutter numbers might not match those which would later be assigned by LC.

Subject expertise is required to develop an original list of subject cutters. Simply deriving terms from titles will yield a list which disperses works on a topic rather than bringing them together. Reference works and occasionally subject experts must be consulted to determine which concepts are synonymous and which terms are preferred.

The Library of Congress often enumerates *reserved cutters* in an A-Z author sequence to anteriorize, or bring to the fore, certain forms, e.g., .A1 *Periodicals*. Some Judaica libraries have applied reserved cutters where LC has not done so to separate reference works from general works on a topic. Many examples of this are found in the changes of the Jewish Theological Seminary Library, as reported by Pearl Berger. Leo Baeck Institute has instituted a clever system of reserved cutters for German-Jewish authors (Stern, 1985, p. 58–59).

Reserved cutters are often built into tables in the LC classification scheme. These are generally applied to blocs of numbers in the main schedules, e.g., for books of the Bible. Some Judaica libraries expand the tables to allow for a finer breakdown in specialized areas. The Jewish Theological Seminary has, for example, used three reserved cutters for the chronological breakdown of Yiddish Literature, all individual works of which LC lumps in one number — PJ 5129.

LCC generally adds a maximum of two subject cutters to a class number and expands the last one decimally to provide for author arrangement. The Jewish Theological Seminary uses a third cutter number for the subarrangement by author of local Jewish history, e.g., DS 135 .P62 .W3 .A-Z for works on Warsaw and the Warsaw Ghetto. The Leo Baeck Institute uses triple cutters for German-Jewish history (Stern, 1985, p. 58).

5. *Modifying LCC Base Notation* — The most drastic type of tampering with the Library of Congress Classification is changing the notation in the main schedules. Most commonly, this involves the addition of integers where LC has not assigned a number, or the interpolation of decimals to accommodate specific topics. At YIVO, the latter was done for the classification of reprints on Yiddish linguistics in the Max Weinreich Collection. LC's limited range of numbers at PJ 5115-17, designed for a small number of dictionaries and grammars, was inadequate for the arrangement of this specialized collection.

As in the case of the adoption of alternative LC class numbers, when LC refines its Judaica schedules, it validates previously made local modifications. It is, however, unlikely that the decimal subdivision selected by LC will match that selected by the local library, necessitating reclassification for conformity.

A more drastic type of change is the reshuffling of a series of class numbers to reflect a preferred order, e.g., for the Jewish canon of the Bible. Even if no new integers or decimal divisions are created, this type of change is substantially different from category 3, in which general numbers are assigned a Jewish meaning.

Less frequently than numerical breakdown, changes to LC classification involve modifications in the letter base of the scheme. Haifa University Library employs a letter unused by LC — X — to arrange its periodicals in broad categories (e.g., XP — linguistic periodicals) rather than classifying them specifically as LC does or arranging them alphabetically, as many other libraries do. XBM would group periodicals on Judaism, while XPJ would gather serials on Semitic languages and literatures.

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) arranges bibliography in a more logical manner than does LC: whereas LC's arrangement is based on the alphabet, NLM prefixes Z to any number in the LC classification to create an order which parallels the main sequence, e.g., ZBF — bibliography of psychology. This idea might be well worth emulating in a Judaica collection.

Implications of Tampering

Standardization — Once a library institutes in-house modifications to LCC, it can no longer be said to be using a standard classification scheme. One of the advantages often claimed for the latter is that a user with knowledge of the LCC number assigned centrally to a book may expect to find it in the same relative location in any academic or research library he visits without consulting the card catalog. Standard classification numbers are also reputed to be helpful in interlibrary loan, now handled largely through bibliographic utilities. A modified

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LCC number must be tagged as a local class number in a network such as OCLC or RLIN to avoid confusion. There are no sanctions, however, for using a non-standard classification scheme in cataloging networks, and there is therefore less pressure to conform to LC in this regard than in the areas of descriptive cataloging and subject headings.

It may be argued that there is something deceptive about using LCC notation in a non-standard fashion, as it may mislead patrons. More seriously, however, there is an element of self-deception on the part of a library which claims to be using a standard classification scheme and practices extensive in-house modification of it. The notation has the outward appearance of LCC, but the underlying structure is different. This is apparent in the Yeshiva University modification of the Talmud schedule which preserves a redundant element of LCC notation for appearance's sake (see the column preceding this article).

Copy Cataloging — At the beginning of this paper, it was noted that the primary advantage of using the Library of Congress Classification is economic, in that complete class marks are available for a great many works. Once a library begins to tamper with LCC, however, the economic advantages of copy cataloging are considerably lessened. Every LCC number found on printed cards or in an online database must be examined to determine whether it falls into the class of acceptable numbers or whether it must be locally modified. If a great many changes have been made in a variety of disciplines (BM; DS; PJ; Z), the review of LC copy will be very time-consuming.

It may be argued, however, that no LCC number should be accepted without review, because errors do creep in. (A general information science book I edited (Weinberg & Benson, 1985) was classified by LC through its Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP) Program in Z6374 — Judaica bibliography. Although the printed cards for this work supplied the correct number — Z674.7, the CIP data is permanently reproduced on the verso of the title page.) Errors aside, LC is constantly creating numbers for new and specific topics and occasionally reworks large sections of the classification, reassigning meanings to numbers. To ensure that like works are kept together, older LC cataloging copy must be reviewed.

In concluding this section, a quote from Eisenhart's paper, written from a Protestant librarian's point of view, is particularly germane: "Seminary librarians are well aware of the benefits of cooperation and painfully aware of the confusion that can follow uninspired local experimentation but it is unrealistic to hope, or fear, that the classifying process can ever be reduced to an uncritical routine of copying call numbers assigned by some central agency." (Eisenhart, 1960, p. 267).

Tampering Guidelines

It is not the purpose of this paper to either condemn or advocate local modifications to the Library of Congress Classification. Instead, the purpose is to analyze the process, methods, and implications in an objective and systematic manner.

There is no question that many subsections of LCC are not arranged from a Jewish perspective. The librarians of institutions which take firm positions on religious or political issues may find that certain components of the classification require local alterations,

while others can be lived with. A case in point is LC's classification of the Golan Heights with Syria (DS 99), which would be intolerable to organizations leaning to the right. Given the cost of creating and maintaining local modifications to LCC, the first guideline is *avoid tampering unless LC's arrangement is totally unacceptable to your user community.* The emphasis here is on *arrangement*—if the *terminology* in the schedules is objectionable, that is not visible to your patrons.

Modifications to LCC are very often implemented because of a lack of specificity in the schedules; however, we have very little information on the desirable level of specificity for users of a library classification scheme. The designer of a special classification scheme for the Union Theological Seminary makes a relevant point: "I find that most people prefer a rather broad shelf classification. The eye takes in readily on the shelves a hundred books or more on one topic and as readers going to the shelves very frequently have a specific author in mind, a straight author arrangement rather than fine subdivisions is more convenient." (Pettee, 1937, p. 259).

Pilpul, a type of Talmudic debate, has acquired the negative connotation of "hair-splitting," in other words, making excessively fine distinctions. In library classification also, excessive specificity may be counterproductive. It is well known that the greater the number of class numbers to choose from, the less the consistency in the application of a scheme. In fact, it has been said that the only classification scheme which can be applied with 100% consistency is one that contains only one number!

Some librarians make the mistake of attempting to duplicate the specificity of Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) in its classification. Before "refining" LCC notation, ask yourself—can this concept be retrieved otherwise, in particular through LCSH? If the library's holdings in a specific class number are not unusually large, *detailed specification of subjects via the shelf classification is unnecessary* and is frequently *redundant with the subject catalog.*

If increased specificity in the shelf classification is warranted, take *hospitality of notation* into account when modifying LCC. Both decimal subdivisions of integers and subject cutters are infinitely hospitable, but the latter, when featuring an uneven number of digits, cause difficulties in filing (.A2, .A25, .A3). A decimal subdivision of an LC integer is also a more obvious change than a modification of cutters, and is thus less likely to result in inconsistent classification,

i.e., copying an LC class mark without taking the local cuttering pattern into account. For example, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) had 700 books in DS149 (Zionism), for which LC had only two form divisions in reserved cutters. JTS expanded the number decimally, shifting periodicals from DS149.A1 to DS149.1.

The most important guideline for a library that finds it necessary to tamper with LCC is: *maintain good documentation.* Each change should be recorded in a staff manual, noting the rationale, the date, and the names of the people involved in the decision. The library may maintain a file of classification changes on cards, in a loose-leaf, or in machine-readable form. Alternatively or in addition, catalogers may annotate a master copy of the LCC printed schedules with local changes.

When local practices change, records of former classification policy should not be discarded. They should be placed in a *historical file of documentation.* It is frustrating for a Judaica librarian to begin working in an institution that has idiosyncratic modifications to LCC with inadequate documentation. For someone trying to write a history of the library, such documentation is invaluable (as I can personally attest (Weinberg, 1980)).

The process of modifying LCC for Judaica often begins with a discussion in a catalog department or official staff meeting. In some cases, a scholar is consulted. It is hoped that the reports and analysis of changes to LCC found on the pages of this journal will lead to further discussion in Judaica libraries and perhaps to additional exchange of information regarding local classification practices to avoid duplication of effort. Input of Judaica cataloging records into RLIN should facilitate this, because unlike OCLC, RLIN does not have a master record concept, and all local variations can be displayed.

Finally, it is hoped that this paper will lead to studies on how LC Classification is *used* in Judaica libraries: Do users primarily browse the classified collection for subject retrieval, bypassing the subject catalog? Do they report to the librarian when they find the LCC sequence illogical? How intolerable is LC's Christian bias? Phyllis Richmond (1977) wrote a paper around the time of the revision of *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* pointing out that librarians modify cataloging codes through debate, rather than on the basis of hard evidence on user needs. Judaica librarians need more than intuition as the basis for tampering with the Library of Congress Classification for Judaica.

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Dr. Bella Hass Weinberg is Consulting Librarian at YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, where she has formulated policies on cataloging and classification for many years. She is also an Associate Professor in the Division of Library & Information Science at St. John's University, and has taught courses in classification at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

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