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Abstract

In 2004, Dr. Charles Berlin, Lee M. Friedman Bibliographer in Judaica and Head of the Judaica Division of the Harvard Library, published a blue, cloth-bound volume entitled *Harvard Judaica* (Berlin 2004) to mark the fortieth anniversary of the start of the programmatic development of the Harvard University Library's Judaica collections (1962–2002).¹ This new, school-colored crimson, also hardback volume, *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century*, published a decade later, may be read both as a sequel and also as a prequel. Where the fortieth anniversary volume was understated and reflective; the latter is celebratory and future oriented even as both look back on past achievements. If the 2004 volume is mostly about the history of a collection and its development, the 2014 jubilee volume is a tribute to the people who made it great. It also is self-consciously presented in the introduction as an “ethical will” by its founder to future stewards of the collection. This bequest is not only material, but also spiritual. It is an effort to share a lifetime of wisdom and practical experience and a hope for the future.

Disciplines

Jewish Studies | Library and Information Science

Berlin, Charles. *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century. Published in Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Judaica Division of the Harvard Library*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 2014. xxi, 235 p., ill. Price [n.a.]. ISBN [n.a.]

In 2004, Dr. Charles Berlin, Lee M. Friedman Bibliographer in Judaica and Head of the Judaica Division of the Harvard Library, published a blue, cloth-bound volume entitled *Harvard Judaica* (Berlin 2004) to mark the fortieth anniversary of the start of the programmatic development of the Harvard University Library's Judaica collections (1962–2002).¹ This new, school-colored crimson, also hardback volume, *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century*, published a decade later, may be read both as a sequel and also as a prequel. Where the fortieth anniversary volume was understated and reflective; the latter is celebratory and future oriented even as both look back on past achievements. If the 2004 volume is mostly about the history of a collection and its development, the 2014 jubilee volume is a tribute to the people who made it great. It also is self-consciously presented in the introduction as an “ethical will” by its founder to future stewards of the collection. This bequest is not only material, but also spiritual. It is an effort to share a lifetime of wisdom and practical experience and a hope for the future.

As an ethical will, *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century* testifies to how the Judaica Division at the Harvard Library under Dr. Berlin's guidance has steadfastly followed “absolute and unchanging goals” (p. 2) while successfully adapting to the rapidly changing digital universe that has emerged in the last decade. The Division's stated mission remains “the documentation of the Jewish people throughout history in order to support teaching and research at Harvard and to serve as a resource for the global scholarly community” (p. xxi). The Division's declared core principles are fixed: “collecting a ‘critical mass’ of materials in ‘real time’; creating opportunities for research; adapting technology and learning from high tech expertise in the private sector; constant assessment for cost-effectiveness; doing more with less; and a belief that perfection is the enemy of excellence” (p. 3).

The method for achieving these fixed goals and implementing these core principles in an ever-changing environment has been a social scientific, business management model of “vertical integration” (p. 2). Dr. Berlin deserves credit for pioneering the application of professional managerial techniques to the practice of Judaica librarianship. Operationally, this means that Harvard's Judaica division encompasses within itself, rather than in a distributed manner, responsibility for the full spectrum of library functions, from acquisitions, to cataloging, to post-cataloging,

¹ See Kiron 2006 for my review of *Harvard Judaica: A History and Description of the Judaica Collection in the Harvard College Library* (Berlin 2004).

to research and public services. Successful private fundraising from alumni and foundations in support of these operations is boosted by a principled fiscal conservatism. This approach seeks to maximize the return on value from expenditures by implementing workflows to increase efficiency and to outsource tasks when possible to reduce the time and costs of in-house technical services. A further cost-reduction technique has been to rely on a pool of part-time, exceptionally talented student workers to accomplish linguistically specialized and mechanical tasks that otherwise would overburden the full-time staff. The Division's budget, which pays for all acquisitions, staff salaries and benefits, outreach programs and supplies, "consists entirely of income from its Judaica endowments" (p. 113). Even as the Judaica Division functions as "an integral part of the Harvard Library system" and receives "considerable extra-budgetary support in terms of technological infrastructure and an array of services", this self-described "microcosm of the Harvard Library", thus, is to a large degree autonomous and self-reliant (p.113).

This rational, functional business model is tempered by a symbiotic intellectual relationship expressed between the Division's idealism and its pragmatism. Problem solving, on a large and small scale—facing "problems as challenges and opportunities" rather than as obstacles and setbacks—comes across as deeply optimistic, indeed both American and Jewish in outlook. Problems can be solved; a better future must be possible. This book is meant to serve as a road map but also perhaps implicitly as a statement about how to be Jewish and American, how to function successfully as a Judaica Division within a larger library system, how to be a minority in a majority culture while preserving the integrity and autonomy of one's core identity, principles, and freedom.

As an ethical will, the structure of *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century*, with its eight chapters and five appendices, totals thirteen sections. This may be a coincidence, but the thirteen sections are numerically identical with Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, recited in the daily Jewish liturgy. There also is a paratextual structure to this celebratory work that frames the unique occasion of its publication. Alan Garber, University Provost, writes a foreword; greetings and congratulations are offered by Sarah E. Thomas Vice President for the Library and Roy E. Larsen Librarian of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and by Eric Nelson, Professor of Government and Director of the Harvard Center for Jewish Studies; the author provides a preface of gratitude and acknowledgments; the preface is immediately followed by the presentation of the Division's full mission statement in five paragraphs. Departmental pictures (Photo Gallery of Scenes from a Half-Century of the Judaica Division) and a final epilogue, restating the purposes of the book, conclude the volume.

Chapter one introduces the volume and its purposes, recapitulating the core principles that have shaped the collection's development. There is an almost direct address to "the future stewards of the Harvard Judaica Collection" about the challenges they will face, the duty to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities, and suggestions about how to solve problems (p. 4). Chapter two, reprinted with slight revisions from the 2004 volume, reprises the history of the collection. Chapter three then narrates its continued development and the challenges that have been faced. Chief

among them, and successfully addressed, was working with vendors around the world, and particularly in Israel, to provide as comprehensive a collection development profile as possible and to set up minimal machine readable cataloging records to facilitate this program on a large scale: “by building on the vendor’s existing infrastructure, the Judaica Division was able to leverage its resources so that the burden of cataloging was shifted to an outside source—the vendor” (p. 25). Notably, this chapter provides specific examples of “critical mass” collecting of primary sources by topic, including rabbinical literature, education, Israeli and Jewish theater, and by format, notably collecting ephemera and audiovisual Judaica.

In chapter four, Elizabeth Vernon, the Lee M. Friedman Judaica Technical Services Librarian for the Judaica division, presents extraordinary, detailed statistical tables profiling the Harvard Judaica collection. She provides the working definition of Judaica used and an exacting review of the methodology that underlies this quantitative analysis of the scope and content of the collection in all formats and in relation to Harvard’s library collections as a whole. We learn that the Harvard Judaica collection consists of 660,732 titles in all formats, in ninety-nine discrete languages. This statistical total constitutes nearly 5 percent of the entire Harvard Library collection. The collection in its entirety covers one hundred forty countries in almost every region of the globe. Among the conclusions she is able to demonstrate is that the ratio of Hebraica to non-Hebraica Judaica is 60:40 percent. The twenty-six tables, meanwhile, reveal that nearly 98 percent of all Hebraica dates from after 1800, and that close to 93 percent belongs to the twentieth and twenty-first century. In many ways, this statistical preponderance of modern and contemporary Hebraica reflects the social scientific orientation of the Documenting Israel program and the effort to collect comprehensively, both of which are most readily achieved *en masse* synchronically, or “in real time”. The Division also engages in ambitious retrospective collection building efforts by systematic reviews of vendor lists and publications in different languages listed in different countries’ national library catalogs to identify and remedy gaps in its comprehensive acquisitions policy.

The writing of chapter five, “Building the Judaica Digital Library” is credited in part to Violet Radnofsky, the Littauer Hebraica Technical and Research Services Librarian. Here we learn of the Division’s ambition to harvest and preserve Israeli and Jewish websites and other “born digital” resources, of the Division’s partnership with institutions and individuals in Israel to document archives and daily life, of current and future digitization projects, and of the advantages and obstacles to the open, online presentation of data, such as limitations posed by copyright laws. Chapter six, “Making the Judaica Collection Accessible”, again reflects the efforts of Elizabeth Vernon, recipient of the Harvard Library’s Carol Ishimoto Award for distinguished service to the library, whose expertise and input about technical and processing issues is gratefully acknowledged by the author. Precise details are given of the Division’s “processing principles” employed to streamline cataloging via its partnership with its Israeli vendor A.I. Weinberg, to produce MARC records, so that shipments of new acquisitions arrive shelf-ready (i.e., cataloged and ready for post-cataloging marking and barcoding). Similarly, automated vendor acquisitions and fund-management strategies are presented in clear and instructive manner as are the methods of oversight and metrics described to monitor the Division’s operations. Noteworthy here is the argument that cooperative automation has enhanced, not compromised quality control.

Chapter seven recounts how this ambitious organizational structure and operation has been financed, emphasizing the value of smaller-sized endowments which have grown and been supplemented over time by donors as much as the six and seven figure planned gifts from foundations and major donors. We also learn that this micro-financing model has been threatened by a new requirement of the Harvard Library that the level for establishing an endowed book fund must be at least \$100,000. Harvard Judaica's named endowments, numbering well over four hundred, are newly constrained by this high entry level. At the same time, the pre-existing and ongoing business model of Harvard Judaica remains one of "stockholders" and "customers". To the former group of donors, careful budget and responsible expenditures are due; to the latter, scholars and students at Harvard and beyond, a critical mass of research materials delivered in a timely manner.

The past and future of the Division are brought to the fore in Chapter eight, focused on "The Role of the Judaica Division Staff". Highlighted here is the work of Vernon and Radnofsky as well as Hadassa Schwartz, the Littauer Hebraica Cataloger and Vardit Samuels, a Library Assistant, followed by a special section entitled "recollections of Judaica Library Student assistants". Remarkably, the Division boasts a host of successful alumni assistants, including several non-Jews, a number of distinguished physicians in private practice, tenured professors in Canada, Israel, Mexico, and the United States, chief financial officers of companies, a successful publisher, and graduate students at distinguished universities. Five appendices, topically identical though ordered differently from that of the 2004 volume, conclude the main text portion. This jubilee volume, thus, is not only concurrent with Dr. Berlin's tenure as a collection builder but also as a division builder. The credit is shared, the results are astonishing, and the hopes for a future of continued excellence, as reiterated in the epilogue, are great.

The Harvard Judaica Division has made monumental strides in advancing its collection building, technical processing, fundraising, and public programming goals. What is not clear, however, is what exactly is "21st Century" about the Judaica Division's activities? What is characteristic of digital librarianship in the twenty-first century is its distributed, networked models of complexity and inter-operability. In many ways, the building of a Digital Library of Judaica at Harvard in practice has followed the same principles as its physical collection building. It is a production model, rather than a usage model, a siloed, collection-centric focus rather than a twenty-first century open data, patron-services orientation. We learn about the challenges copyright laws pose to the collection, but we do not learn what the Division's own positions are on open data, that is, a willingness to make freely available for downloading any content for which it holds the copyright or which is otherwise out of copyright.

The focus, both in terms of budget and staff time, has been to acquire content (analog and digital) and make that content accessible through efficient cataloging workflows. We do not learn, however, how the staff has approached the presentation of its data online beyond the traditional forms of metadata characteristic of twentieth-century cataloging standards (MARC). What if any Digital Humanities partnerships, text-encoded initiatives, Semantic Web participation, or anything

else that distinguishes early stage digitization from contemporary enriched data practices have been produced? Indeed, the word “communication” itself is something of an afterthought. It is difficult to say whether the word appears in the book (I found one occurrence, related to business practices, i.e., communicating with vendors, not scholarly communication), because *Harvard Judaica in the 21st Century* lacks an index (the 2004 volume also was not indexed).

In 2015, the Division’s homepage remains a skeletal point of access and provides no social media modes of communication. The primary public means of searching the collection has been and remains via Hollis, Harvard University Library’s online catalog and public interface. What will the future web presence and interoperable functionality of Harvard Judaica’s collection look like? The Division excelled during the second half of the twentieth century in publishing valuable reference works and monographs, hosting public events, like lectures, symposia, conferences, and mounting physical exhibitions; the electronic versions of these publications appear to be static PDFs of previously printed materials, not encoded as text searchable content. The Division’s massive digital outreach programs are again based on a quantified production model, rather than on models and metrics of patron services, reception, usage, and impact. We learn of partnerships, but these are almost entirely related to building the Division’s own physical and digital holdings.

There is a deeper issue, however, and that goes to the changing nature of scholarship. The goal of creating a “critical mass” of research material is admirable but much of contemporary humanistic research is precisely interested in the unique, the particular edition, the marginalia on the page, what sets one thing apart from the next. The Harvard collection, though generally capable of supporting Judaic research at the highest research levels, is best equipped for investigations of modern and contemporary Jewish societies, particularly in the State of Israel. The historical study of the Jewish book, by contrast, with its emphasis on materiality, does not appear in this account. Building a critical mass of primary sources in real time does not serve the needs of scholars interested in codicology and paleography, in incunabula, and variant printings of the same edition. Harvard Judaica has been advancing a static model of absolute comparative advantage based on quantity, rather than a qualitative, dynamic comparative advantage. A distributed model recognizes the reality that no one institution holds all unique material, that Linked Data helps maximize critical masses of research material that are physical dispersed, and that interoperability is revolutionizing the way in which data is used. The Harvard Judaica model, at least as described in this book, does not address the changing nature of scholarly communication and scholarly practices in the Humanities.

In charting the future, the question then is whether the guiding principles that have shaped Harvard Judaica’s production model over the last fifty years are sufficient or even appropriate for a networked environment of patron services and interoperability? The model of local accumulation and production-based access is facing the challenge of open data and interoperability. Granted that the vertically integrated production model has and continues to work well for Harvard, practically speaking ought it to be recommended for imitation by anyone else? The National

Library of Israel, by contrast, has emerged as the new global leader of Judaica librarianship in its systematic and strategic confrontation with these changes. In the twenty-first century, great Judaica collections may come to be judged not by the size of the collections they have, but by the openness of their data and the public services they deliver. Harvard's Judaica Division may yet prove to be the preeminent university leader in both production and distribution.

SOURCES

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