

The Development, Use, And Revision Of A Classification Scheme For Special Libraries Of Judaica

By David H. Elazar

Back in the early 1950s, Daniel Elazar, then manager of the United Hebrew Schools Library in Detroit, a collection of approximately 10,000 volumes, concluded there was a need for a classification system which would classify and arrange Judaic collections according to Jewish concepts based upon Jewish thought and terminology. Existing classification schemes incorporated the Bible, Judaism, and Israel into a general, non-Jewish world of knowledge without relating them to one another in the spirit of Jewish tradition. *A Classification Scheme for Special Libraries of Judaica* (hereinafter called "Elazar") was the new system developed to address this lack.

college-level research, services to children and youth, and pedagogical development. It was a living laboratory, contributing immeasurably to refinements in the new classification for 16 years before its first publication in 1968. A mimeographed draft version of the system was circulated for comment and criticism in 1962 with the assistance of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. During those development years, David Elazar, who had earned a master's degree in library science from the University of Michigan, was appointed head librarian of the United Hebrew School/Midrasha Library. He and Daniel Elazar have worked together to refine the system from two aspects: librarianship and Jewish scholarship.

With its publication in 1968 by Wayne State University Libraries, use of Elazar spread, not just in the United States, but to Israel and elsewhere. Libraries of all kinds, in synagogues and community centers, Hebrew schools, university campuses, and research institutes, adopted

the scheme and worked with it. A body of experience in applying the system developed. Historical developments and feedback from librarians using Elazar, including the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California, brought about a revision in 1978, published by Turtledove Publishing, Israel, and a reprinting with an Addendum in 1988 by the Center for Jewish Community Studies,

Jerusalem, and University Press of America. Modest changes intended to keep reclassification to a minimum were made mainly to clarify terms and update historical events. Librarians reported difficulties distinguishing literature and literary criticism, and fitting the materials into a detailed chronological scheme. To overcome these difficulties, Jewish Literature (500-599) was revamped, forcing librarians to reclassify, but enabling them to achieve a more effective arrangement.

Recent Progress

In the early 1990s, Rachel Glasser and Rita Frischer, two librarians who used the classification, approached the authors and suggested that a new edition of Elazar was needed. With their assistance, it was published in 1997 by Milken Library of Jewish Public Affairs and Jason Aronson, Inc. New subjects were added, and History and Israel were updated. The index was expanded to make it more useful and accurate. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* was adopted as Elazar's spelling authority. (An exception is made for the spellings of names of person and organizations — those used by the persons and organizations are preferred.)

According to librarians' reports, the major disadvantage of Elazar is that material that lacks specifically Jewish content has to be classified using another system, creating a situation where users (mainly students in Jewish parochial schools) must learn two systems. Elazar includes some suggestions for handling these

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Development And Early Years

The United Hebrew Schools, serving students and teachers at all levels as well as the Jewish community at large, was an ideal setting for testing the new system's capability for organizing the literature — published and unpublished — of Jewish civilization. The setting permitted testing the system as an aid to general circulation,

problems, for example, for shelving purposes the library can use the prefix "D" for material classified with Dewey Decimal Classification. Elazar itself has classes for Comparative Religion, General Education, Psychology, the Middle East, General Reference Works, and Library Science, intended for materials lacking Jewish orientation but likely to be part of any pedagogic collection.

Librarians who use Elazar emphasize two features: first, arrangement of books on the shelf in a logical order from a Jewish point of view, facilitating browsing and use; and second, the educational value of the system and its index, which uses Jewish/Hebrew terminology, for those who are not versed in Judaism (for example, a cross reference leads from "circumcision" to "brit milah") or Jewish history (for example, historical periods include the emergence of Talmudic Judaism, the Second Commonwealth, and the Jewish Roman War).

A classification system should be a living tool and the authors encourage librarians to give suggestions and get advice, now made easier via the Internet (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6527/index.html>), as well as to make minor changes to fit local needs. One such example is an expansion for the Nazi Holocaust devised by Carylyn Gwyn Moser for a collection that needed much more detail in this area (see this expansion at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6527/holocaust.html>).

The Sinai Temple Central Cataloging Service for Libraries of Judaica in Los Angeles is a subscription provider of the Elazar and Weine classifications. The Service allows librarians to obtain professional cataloging on a continuing basis. It also can assist with retrospective conversion, provide back mailings, supply a comprehensive subject heading list, and furnish more than 100 topical bibliographies that include complete Elazar cataloging data.

In conclusion, by adopting Elazar, Judaica libraries may opt to arrange their materials more effectively and serve users more effectively.

Additional Reading

- [1] Catherine Buck Morgan, *Cultural and Religious Problems in Dewey Decimal Classification*, at <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/students/morgan/jcpap.htm>.
- [2] Bella Hass Weinberg, "Judaica Classification Schemes for Synagogue and School Libraries: A Structural Analysis," *Judaica Librarianship* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1983): 26-30.

