

Annual Report to CDNL 2005 – 2006

Name of Country : Israel
Name of Library : Jewish National and University Library
Name of Chief Executive : Prof. Yoram Tsafir

The period since our last report was submitted has been critical regarding the change in the Library's status. For the last 80 years it has fulfilled the functions of a national library and university library. In the absence of a National Library Law, it has not received direct government funding, its chief source of support being the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In recent years it became widely recognized that this situation would no longer allow the JNUL to grow and meet its obligations as a modern National Library. The Committee that was established to lay out the program for the planning of the new national library submitted its final draft in February 2004 to the President of the Hebrew University. It was subsequently approved by the University's governing bodies. A Board of Directors, consisting of a number of prominent academic and public figures, has been appointed to oversee the necessary changes over the transitional period, and a National Library Law is being prepared by the Israeli Parliament's Education Committee.

The new National Library will be expected to play a greater role in a number of spheres, such as curriculum support for schools, participation in the cultural life of the country and leadership for Judaica libraries. It will continue to fulfill its role as a research-level library in the humanities for the Hebrew University alongside its national functions.

The main activities of the JNUL have been carried out against this background, notwithstanding severe budgetary limitations affecting both collection development and readers' services. In June 2005, the catalogue was upgraded to the Ex-Libris Aleph-500 version, following merging of several previously separate databases into the Main Catalog.

Digitization:

- Historic Hebrew newspapers: Full digitized versions of five of the most important early Hebrew newspapers were launched and have already been widely accessed by historians and the general public.
- Talmudic manuscripts : this site was upgraded and augmented by the addition of digitized manuscripts from other institutions.
- Marriage contracts: during 2004 some 450 items were added from other institutions. To date more than 2000 contracts can be viewed. The core collection is comprised of some 1400 documents owned by the JNUL.
- Maimonides exhibition: a virtual version of the exhibition organized by the JNUL to mark the 800th anniversary of the death of Maimonides. The books and manuscripts displayed in the exhibition were also fully digitized.
- The Rare Book Digital Library, launched with the aim of providing free, universal access to the printed treasures of the JNUL. These can be viewed via a link from the library's home page, or from the bibliographic record for each work.

Projects:

- An educational project on the Founding Mothers and Fathers of modern Israel in cooperation with the Israel Center for Education Technology, utilizing archival material held by the JNUL.
- A cooperative cataloging project aimed at creating a union catalog (RACHEL) for three important French Jewish libraries: those of the Alliance-Israelite universelle, Seminaire Israelite de France and Medem-Maison de la culture Yiddish.

Exhibitions:

- "Book people, book houses: images of Jewish libraries", organized with the Goethe Institut Jerusalem, March-April 2004.
- "The Great Eagle at the JNUL": an exhibition of manuscripts and printed books to mark the 800th anniversary of the death of Moses Maimonides, December 2004-March 2005.

Prepared by: Rosalind Duke, Deputy Director

Address : Edmond J. Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem 91341, Israel
Telephone and fax details : Tel.: 972 2 6585017 Fax: 972 2 6511771
Web address of Library : www.jnul.huji.ac.il