Reading Patterns and Libraries in Israel†

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The puzzling thing about Israel is that it is always so old and so new. In a traditional Jewish fashion one would always answer according to what is convenient in a given situation by one of the questions: How can you expect a library system in a such a new country to function properly? On the other hand, one can also ask: How can you let a people with such a glorious and ancient tradition of libraries and such a deep respect for books have such a bad library system in his own country. One will be sincere in both cases.

In the same vein we should look far into the Jewish tradition to understand both the reverence for study and learning and the respect for books and at the same time the lack of a library tradition in the modern sense of the word.

The learned tradition served not only to transmit Jewish culture. It was a prime factor in creating cohesion, maintaining unity, and continuity in time and space. Because they were deprived of national attributes, the Jews have maintained their common heritage through the domain of the intellect.

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The book was a means for the Jew to identify with the history of his nation, with his own past and with his fellow-men.

Learning and studying were the duty of every Jew at least from the Middle Ages onward; moreover, it was a duty commanded by God. Every action which interrupted the study required justification. A Jew was supposed to devote all his time to study and was allowed to stop studying only for the most basic necessities or for earning a living, when there was no other way of existing. Within the Jewish community, especially in the Middle Ages, there was a large measure of cohesion and a great measure of interdependence between members of the community, rich and poor. The duties of every member of the community towards the community as a whole were several, and mainly of two types, linked to the central values of the Jewish people: respect for life and for study.

The supreme duty of every Jew is the preservation of human life. It overrides every other consideration it also covers the duty to ransom prisoners. This age-old custom of taking care of ones own people may be the reason why there has never been a long term problem of refugees among the Jews who have had more refugees in the course of history than any other people. Another related basic value is that of mutual help according to Jewish traditional thinking those who have must help those who have not. Thus the rich was required to look after the poor, marry off daughters with no dowry, and help widows and orphans and needy scholars.

The second duty is the reveration of learning and studying. Every Jewish male was expected to study. In order to be a good Jew, one must follow the law and in order to follow the law, one must know it; this can be learned only by studying. Hence the stress on individual study, not only as children but continually, as adults and into old age. The community was expected to make this devotion to study possible[1] by feeding the scholar and even his family so that he could devote himself entirely to study. Near every synagogue there was a room full of books, a Beit Midrash where every male of the community was supposed to study every moment he could spare from the efforts of earning a living. The

community as a whole was expected to provide a Beit Midrash and the necessary books to all its members and also to outside visitors.[2]

In the set of values of the Jews learning and study stood highest, even higher than making a living or acquiring riches. The rich people among the community shouldered the many duties imposed on them for a variety of prestige reasons: getting a seat in the synagogue near the East wall the most respected place reserved for scholars was possible also by supporting the scholar and the community; to marry one's daughter to a penniless but gifted scholar was considered the second best match. The best match was to marry her to a wealthy scholar, but marrying a poor scholar was infinitely better than marrying a rich ignoramus. Elihu Katz and Hannah Adoni write in their *Functions of the book in society and self*: "As a result, the widespread literacy of the Jewish society was rather unique and different from what occurred in other historical societies. In other societies literacy was limited to groups of the social elite, to the aristocracy and to the clergy. On the other hand, in traditional Jewish society literacy was everyman's legacy."[3] Some, like Cipolla, for example, believe that this high degree of literacy among the Jews in the Middle Ages enabled them to play specialised roles in European society such as in commerce and won for them the protection of political authorities, and at times, even the protection of the church.[4]

Until the Enlightenment by the end of the eighteenth century studying, among Jews, meant exclusively the study of religious matters and legal matters pertaining to religion. However, the Enlightenment marked for Jews in Europe, the beginning of a process of the secularization of the reading, which ended with World War Two.

Study and reading became secular activities both from the point of view of their source of legitimacy and from the point of view of their contents. Study was no longer founded on national, religious values but on individual leanings which emphasize personal inclinations. As a result of this shift, study became either career—oriented or leisure—oriented rather than a normatively prescribed activity, which was pursued for its own

sake. As for content study and learning were no longer restricted to a well defined corpus, of scriptural and rabbinic writings; on the contrary, emphasis is now on a wide range of secular subjects and on the reader's personal choice according to his interests and inclinations.[5] The people of the book are slowly being transformed into a people of books, a people reading books.

Among the Jews living in Northern Africa and Asia, a slow process of secularization in the reading patterns also began in modern times. But unlike in Europe, it resulted in some cases not in mere secularization but in a cessation of reading and literacy altogether. This was probably a process of adaptation to the environment in which the Jews lived in North Africa and in Asia even though such an assertion would have to be proven by thorough research.

The process of the secularization of reading, did not mean that books and reading became marginal values among the founders of Israel. On the contrary, Zionism conceived of the Jewish national revival as embracing all areas of culture both traditional and modern and that moreover this revival would include all strata of the population. Israel was meant to become the cultural center of Judaism, as Ahad Ha'am, the Jewish philosopher and publicist repeatedly advocated.

The first immigrants to arrive in Palestine were mostly from Eastern Europe and the subsequent waves of immigration brought about, that at the time of the establishment of the State about 90% of the Jewish population of Israel were of European or American origin, while only 9% were arrivals from Arabic speaking countries.

After Independence, in 1948 large numbers of Jews arrived as immigrants and refugees from Arab countries in Northern Africa and Asia, along with immigrants from Europe.

The ethnic composition of Israel changed and the proportion of Jews of Afro-Asian origin increased. While many immigrants of European and American origin came for ideological and idealistical reasons at least until the beginning of the Nazi Era, most of the immigrants who came after the establishment of the State from Arabic speaking countries, and who today make up about 40% of the population of Israel were forced to

leave their countries of origin because of political considerations.

After the great immigration waves had subsided and authorities had time to look back and analyze the effect on the educational system made by the policy of "Ingathering of the Exiles", several facts became painfully apparent. The pre-State Jewish population had on the whole been relatively homogeneous: Israeli-born descendants of immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, all more or less on a similar level of education, and with similar ideas about education, Israeli-born descendants of Sephardi communities from Spain and the Mediterranean world, living in Palestine for many generations, and who accepted the views of their Ashkenazi brethren, even if their cultural heritage was somewhat different; and some minorities, like Yemenite Jews. These people created the educational system of the new State: primary schools of eight forms, several good high schools on the European Lyceum pattern, with excellent teaching staff, and as the last stage, the Hebrew University and the Technion, Institute of Technology, patterned on the Central European university tradition, with a few refreshing additions of some American ideas. This conservative system took the brunt of mass immigration. It more or less answered the requirements of immigrants from Europe-the pattern was familiar and the adjustment relatively easy. The language caused problems, but this was solved by intensive instruction for immigrants' children and by modern teaching methods. However, for the bulk of the immigrants from Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, this school system was another bewildering fact in the endlessly bewildering realities of Israel. Compulsory education was enforced, but in addition to language problems, children from Oriental countries were left to cope with their difficulties alone. In families coming from Asia and North Africa, in many cases, the father, though literate, had usually received only a religious education, and also had very little time to help his children, even when he was an educated person by Middle Eastern standards.[6] The mother was in many cases illiterate, if not completely, at least as far as Hebrew was concerned, and was certainly not capable of helping children with school work.

When the number of children from these families makes up the majority, it is very easy to create an elite of well-educated people from European "stock", and to speak philosophically of the lower abilities of Oriental children doomed by their background to lower academic achievements than their supposedly more "intelligent" schoolmates. Even the school system itself meant an obstacle to the child of the Afro-Asian immigrant; compulsory education extended over one kindergarten year and eight years of primary school.[7] Obviously, in such a situation, the selection of children going on to expensive secondary schools would be based on other criteria than that of talent. Income of parents; a tradition of scholarship, deeply ingrained in the European Jew, for whom liberal and scholarly professions were often the only professions available; parents prepared by tradition to great sacrifices, in order to see that their child becomes "a doctor or a lawyer", all these would put numbers of children from certain ethnic groups through high school, while the talented child of Afro-Asian immigrants, one of many children in a family of a poor, barely literate husband and his illiterate wife, had very few chances. His parents' attitude would rather be that learning is a good thing to have but only if you can afford it, and the odds against this child would be formidable.[8]

The Minister of Education, the late Zalman Aranne, realized that unless radical measures were taken, events would take their inevitable and probably irreparable course. Since 1958 new plans and new ideas were experimented with, first cautiously, and later more confidently. A certain degree of so-called "positive discrimination"[9] was exersized: children of Afro-Asian origin, from low-income families, were given extra lessons, their high school fees were reduced or even completely dispensed with, they were accepted in high schools in certain development areas without, or after the most perfunctory entrance examinations. When the yougster's work might help considerably in making ends meet for the whole family, their fathers had to be cajoled and convinced to permit schooling.[10] Children living under cramped conditions and with no suitable space for doing their home-work were given the possibility of

preparing their lessons in the school, in the local youth club, or in the public library (when this was available) under supervision.[11] The old-timers and economically more secure classes, not always pleased to see their offspring denied reduced fees or access to high school, in order to admit a Yemenite or North African child, grumbled loudly, but soon were compelled to accept the fact that no other way was possible, if a nation was to grow out of this conglomerate of immigrants.

However, only part of those who started secondary schooling eventually graduated. Dropping out from secondary schools is substantial and is more prevalent among children of Afro-Asian origin, but on the other hand the number of children in this group with at least partial secondary education is increasing. In view of the ethnic implications of post-elementary education in Israeli society, and the measures taken to reduce the gap between children born in Israel, Europe and America and those born in Afro-Asian communities, it may be revealing to break down post-primary school attendance according to ethnic groups.

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY ETHNIC ORIGIN OF THE FATHER *

	Father born in Israel	Father born in Europe & America	Father born in Asia & Africa**	Total
1961-62	6.4%	67.4%	26.2%	100%
1966-67	7.7%	56.7%	35.6%	100%
1969-70	10.2%	47.2%	42.6%	100%

* *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 21: 560, 1970; 22: 557, 1971

** Including countries of the Middle East, but not Israel, which is listed separately.

As these figures represent percentages out of the total number of secondary school pupils, they seem to confirm that the measures of "positive discrimination" described above, and other means have remedied to some extent the initial inequities in high school attendance. While as late as 1961 the share of children of Afro-Asian origin was merely 26.2% out of the total high school population, it grew to nearly 43% in 1969, in itself no mean achievement.

However, if the breakdown is made by continent of birth of the child itself, the figures for this age group are somewhat different.

SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN AGE-GROUP 13-17 BY CHILD'S PLACE OF BIRTH *

	Israel	Europe and America	North Africa and Asia	Total population aged 13–17 attending school (in %)
1967–68	66.6%	74.0%	38.5%	54.5%
1968–69	71.5%	75.5%	41.0%	56.3%

* Data compiled from *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 20: 560, 1969, Table T/16

In spite of the advances made by children of Afro-Asian origin on the way to post-primary education, the gap between the groups is still considerable, and could be reflected in the reading patterns and habits that are relevant to the subject of our talk.

The patterns of book use can be seen as most directly connected with library development. Library development is at all possible only in a population which uses books. This does not mean, however, that there exists a direct relation between reading and library development, because other means of access to books may exist and these other sources such as book purchases must be given attention separately.

However, books and reading have always had a special role in the collective identity of the Jewish people since ancient times, and the special relationship of the Jews and scholarship has earned them the title "People of the Book". While we can regard the Beit-Ha-Midrash as the fore-runner of the ideal modern public library; publicly owned books, access to all and of central importance in the life of the community-it is also the fore-runner of the Israeli libraries with unorganised collections wanting in professional care.

Thus we should examine the reading situation at the present time, taking into consideration its roots in the past.

Judaism throughout its development has formed a continuous

chain. Israelis do not differentiate between their Jewish identity and their identity as Israelis.[12] Religion, while historically of great value for the formation of the Jewish identity is, for the non-observant Israeli, not conceived as part of his Israeli identity. On the other hand, "Jewishness", based on historical and religious tradition is perceived by all Jews as being part of their identity and attitudes in this respect are considerably similar, if religiously observant and non-observant Israelis are compared. There is also little difference between Israelis of European and American origin and those of Afro-Asian background. The differences that exist depend on educational level. However, it should be kept in mind that larger numbers of people, with a lower educational level come from Afro-Asian communities, so that differences between "Oriental" and "European" Jews can be observed, but that difference should not be overstressed: in 1965, in an earlier stage of the process of acculturation and the elevation of the educational level, 34.3% of Israelis from Asia and North African countries were active readers, reading, at least one book per month.[13] This percentage could be considered quite high even by Western standards and it is probably an outcome of the Jewish tradition, that a population with low educational achievements, reads as much or more than Western, educationally more advanced populations.

In 1970 38% of the Israelis thought that the image of the "People of the Book" was an important characteristic of the national outlook, and an additional 34% thought it was moderately important. On the other hand, "concern for peace among nations" was thought to be a very important characteristic of the Jewish people by 62% of the population and moderately characteristic by another 23%. The national characteristic of "readiness to sacrifice oneself for the ideals of the people", which was a characteristic trait throughout Jewish history was given similar weight as that attributed to concern for peace.[14]

Several surveys on reading were carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, in 1959, 1964 and 1968 and an extensive study on cultural consumption was carried out by a group of researchers headed by Elihu Katz and M. Gurevitch. It was sponsored and financed by the Ministry of Education

and Culture. The mere fact that government financing was given to several surveys of reading may point to the centrality of this subject and of books in Israel.

The survey carried out in 1965 showed that 50% of the adult population, aged over 18 years, were active readers, meaning that they had read at least one book per month. In

READERS OF ONE BOOK PER YEAR AND READERS OF MORE THAN EIGHT BOOKS PER YEAR IN ISRAEL AND SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES *

Country	Read at least one book	Read more than eight books	
	% of total population	% of total population	% of readers
Israel	77	42	55
Switzerland	69	23	33
Denmark	67	39	58
Netherlands	66	35	53
Great Britain	63	39	61
France	56	33	59
Austria	54	14	26
West Germany	52	17	32
Belgium	43	21	49
Portugal	28	15	28
Italy	24	9	38

* Katz E. and M. Gurevitch, The *Culture of Leisure in Israel*, pp. 225–26, including quote from a survey made by Reader's Digest: *A Survey of Europe Today*, London, 1970, pp. 120–21.

1968/69 after the introduction of television in Israel, this percentage dropped slightly to 46.9%, but it rose again to 49% in 1970. However, among those in age-group 14-17, active readership neared 80%. Only about 22% of the population defined itself as non-readers.

According to various findings, the percentage of the total population who reads is significantly higher in Israel than in other European countries, and Israel also leads in the percentage of the population that reads more than eight books a year. Among readers, however, there is less of a concentration of

heavy readers than is true in Britain, France and Denmark. That suggests that in Isreal the readers are not just those highly motivated readers, but there is a much wider spread of reading types than in some other countries. One way of attempting to explain this occurrence is that the Jewish traditional norm of learning leads more people in the strata of low and middle educational level to read than in other countries. This assumption is partially supported by the research findings reported by Ennis for the United States; namely, that readership is infrequent or nonexistent in lower educational levels.[15]

The only data available on the reading occurrence in the United States are in the summary of reading studies reported by Berelson in 1949 (pre-television) which places the average around 25-30%.[16] The situation reported by Berelson is conceded as still accurate in 1965,[17] by Ennis.

Another factor that may point to the effect of the traditional norm in Israel is that there are slighty more women than men who do not read at all,[18] because traditionally only Jewish men are required to be literate, even though literacy was traditionally encouraged for women as well. However, among those women who do read, there is a tendency for them to read more, and more frequently than do the men. Katz and Gurevitch also found that the main factor affecting reading is education, and this is in accordance with findings in other countries.

A high correlation can be detected if we compare secondary school attendance and book reading patterns. The upward trend of reading frequency among people with some high school educational level has also been observed by Katz and Gurevitch. Therefore, with secondary education becoming more and more widespread in Israel, we may expect an increase in the reading population. This increase should probably be taken into account when planning future development of public libraries, if and when such policies will be formulated.

Summing up the causes for readership in general and active readership in particular, all surveys point to the paramount influence of the educational level. The religiously observant population shows, in general terms, patterns similar to those

of the non-religious, thus demonstrating that religious observance does not particularly affect reading, or, as is also likely, that the traditional norm connected with reading is predominant in the whole Jewish population, whether observant or secular.

If the educational level is kept constant, it seems that age is not a predominant factor. The differences that exist in readership among the different groups is probably the result of different educational levels, the younger groups being those who had the advantage of more years of schooling than the older adults. With the advent of a higher educational level for large numbers of the population, increasing levels of reading may be expected as well as higher frequency of reading. Women read more than men when educational levels are constant, with the exception of age group 24-34, where the differences between sexes almost disappear, presumably because this is the time when women are busy rearing children, or entering a career, or both.

Ethnic origin was found to have an influence on the use of leisure in other areas. For example, Israelis of European and American origin tended to sponsor theater performance and concerts more than people of Afro-Asian origin. However, when the educational level is similar, in the second generation, there is little difference regarding reading between the two groups. Again, the differences that exist are probably the result of different educational level, and with the rise in the number of people with at least partial secondary education in Israeli-educated groups, an increase in reading may be expected in this group as well. With the increasing socialization towards reading in early childhood which is the prevalent norm in Israel, the slight differences between European and Afro-Asian origin will probably disappear.

How do libraries respond to the reading needs of the population?

Israel's libraries reflect the odd contradictions inherent in the varied influences that played upon them. The early (pre

State) establishment of universities, with their subsequent proliferation during the sixties, and the acceptance by university libraries of a broad responsibility for service even to the larger community, on the one hand and the early establishment of public libraries, or at least book collections, on the other hand, would suggest a constant growth and development in a liberal service policy, and could be related to the Jewish tradition of the book and love of learning, brought to Israel mainly by the early immigrants from Eastern Europe. In a certain measure the contributions of the Jewish people throughout the world which mitigated local economic hardships, can be seen as part of this same tradition.

However, the elitist and scholarly emphasis seems to mark the academic library, influencing also the development of public libraries, and having a strong impact on the library profession, suggests a different trend from the philosophy of liberal service and library development, and seems to be related to the Central European, or German academic and library tradition, implanted in Israel during the thirties, with the waves of immigration from these central European countries. The scattering of collections in university libraries between central and departmental libraries, and the de-emphasis of public service in all libraries, may be attributable to this tradition, as is the subservient attitude acquired by the library profession toward faculty authority, and by the academic community towards it. This acceptance of a subordinate role, together with processes, inherent in small countries, of centralization of the professional leadership, may be responsible for the current shortage of high level professional librarians to succeed the strong leaders of the earlier years.

The otherwise unexpected development of public libraries in new immigrant settlements from the sixties to the present is the only apparent influence of the immigration from Islamic countries on libraries, and it is an indirect one. To speed the process of acculturation, the promotion of libraries in these settlements became a key activity of the Library Section of the Ministry of Education and Culture and its Director C.I. Golan.

Abba Eban, Minister of Education, in the sixties, acting

as a representative of the central government, perhaps as a result of his Anglo-Saxon background and experience, perceived the cultural and acculturation values of the libraries and established a library section which developed libraries mainly in the new settlements who had mainly a population of immigrants from Arabic speaking countries.

Golan, as Director of this Library Section, implemented this policy as a tool for education and acculturation in the new settlements, thus accounting for a comparatively superior service in these new settlements and in rural environments where it normally would be least expected to occur. The Library Section carried out this policy under Ministers of Education with backgrounds different form Ebans's, a fact, which suggests that the lerders, both those coming from Eastern Europe and native Israelis, may only have needed to be alerted to the need to have been more active in support of library development.

Public Libraries

Libraries were established in Palestine from the beginning of the renewed Jewish settlement. Some libraries were established already at the turn of the last century, including the Jewish National and University Library, which had from its very beginning aspects and roles of a public library, a tradition persisting to our days, and transferred, in some measure, to the new university libraries.

The majority of the veteran settlements, from their establishment or early afterwards had libraries, many of which were established or sponsored by the Histadrut (Israel Federation of Labor). However, these libraries had small collections, from a few hundred to a few thousand books; had closed shelves; and were open to service a few hours a week. It was the Eastern European model of library organization, but a model revised in the light of the Jewish European tradition of the Beit Hamidrash, which collected books meant to serve the community, but paid little or no attention to the organization of the collection. The situation found by Carnovsky in 1954: "The somewhat novel situation of

book provision for beyond its present capacity to organize and service adequately" was not so new indeed; it was the traditional pattern of the Beit Hamidrash library.

However, during the early stages, when the population in most settlements was small and motivated to use libraries for reading rather than for information and reference purposes, the small collections and the lack of organization were not a serious handicap. The person in charge of the local library could remember most of the books in the collection and their location even without the help of a catalog, and service the limited needs of his few customers satisfactorily. In addition the motivated reader could also appeal to the JNUL, which had a larger and organized collection, and receive the book or the bibliographic information by mail. This situation has been quite satisfactory if we keep in mind that the Yishuv (Jewish population of Palestine) numbered 175,000 in 1931 and 355,000 people in 1935,[20] and was the most that such a small community could support financially. It was also during this time up to the mid-thirties, during Hugo Bergmann's tenure as the national librarian (1920-1936), that among the library professional leadership American standards of customer-oriented attitude prevailed. Changes occurred from the mid thirties, but their impact was to be felt only years later. The population increased to 420,000 in 1940 and to 600,000 in 1947. Nearly half of this population originated from Central Europe and came because of the Nazi persecutions. It was during this time that attitudes toward libraries moved both among the population, and more so among the professional library leadership from the Eastern European-Jewish pattern influenced by American library standards, toward a more Central European approach of catering to the intellectual elite, which in Israel was enlarged to include the kibbutz, which was also a sort of an elite. It was also during this time that local library collections grew, throughout the country, mainly by gifts, to become "chaotic" in the way Carnovsky found them in the fifties.

Several forces were at work to delay any feeling of inadequacy in the Yishuv libraries. The population was still small

enough to be served by the existing library framework. Moreover, it was mainly of European origin, Eastern and Central, and was not used to expect different levels of service from libraries. Looking to sources other than libraries for aquiring books seemed normal. In addition, the economic and social conditions discouraged any emphasis on developing libraries. The Yishuv was emerging from the economic crisis of the thirties, its economy including agriculture and industry was just beginning to develop; it was absorbing at a great speed masses of immigrants, and the country was geared towards the efforts of World War II, and later towards the struggle for independence. With all these problems in the forefront of public and governmental attention, any "crisis" in library services carried a comparatively low priority. Until the end of the forties, the libraries seemed to be reflecting the needs of the society, and providing services which were more or less adquate in relation to expectations and economic possibilities of the community.

The situation changed during the fifties, when the population increased far beyond the existing libraries' capability of providing adequate service, when a great part of the population, coming from non-literary traditions, were incapable of establishing western cultural institutions for themselves although they needed the services of cultural and acculturation institutions. It was in this situation that the scholarly and elitist Central European attitudes acquired by libraries proved to be inadequate to meet the newly emerging conditions.

During the nineteen fifties too little attention was given to public libraries; the political leadership was not itself alert to the library situation and no pressure from the public was there to alert them. The veteran part of the population was content with the existing pattern and, although sharing the leadership's values and ideals towards social integration, did not see libraries as an agency that could contribute to a solution of the problem. Many of the immigrants were unfamiliar with libraries and certainly did not feel a need for them. As for the library profession, the educational and professional condition of public libraries rendered them ineffective in the political arena, while

the academic (and real) library leadership represented mainly the Central European values of service to elites.

Because of the prevalence and accumulation of Eastern European Jewish attitudes toward libraries, compounded by the superimposition of the Central European values, no library committees or other forms representing local interest in libraries existed or exists in Israel, another factor which inhibited development from below. The failure to establish libraries in new communities may be attributed to the lack of a library law—little local initiative, and the absence of any group which worked for the establishment and use of library standards in relations to the population served.

The kibbutz population, while 3.6% of the general population, had in 1968 40% of the books in Israel's libraries at its disposal, and its use of libraries is the highest in Israel, and highest among rural populations in the world. However, Berler has shown that the kibbutz population is not a typical rural population, it enjoys the highest level of urban services. However its libraries are primarily used as sources of general reading rather than as centers of information, and few of them are good examples of modern library organization for service. The Jewish tradition of personal acquisition of books, was transformed in the kibbutz to a collective norm; the community acted for the individual in this regard. This accounts for the great number of books typical of the kibbutz libraries, an unusual occurrence in a rural environment.

The library situation in the large cities and veteran medium-sized towns, where the Library Section of the Ministry of Education has not been active, gives the real picture of the effects of library evolution in Israel, when no interference from outside factors occurred. The veteran citizen and the elites are content with the existing libraries, using other resources for acquiring books and information, buying books, or using university libraries. The local leadership in local authorities is weak and does not regard public libraries as a prestigious cultural institution worth efforts for improving it. Thus for a long time the urban library saw its purpose as serving a small minority of well-read people, or providing the "masses" with

"suitable" reading material. With inefficient organization, lack of proper reference collections and unattractive premises, the library did not try to reach out for those readers unused to modern library services, and went on with its previous policy of mainly "preaching to the converted". Instead of an aggressive campaign for drawing new readers, instead of attempting to attract, introduce and educate potential readers, the libraries often failed to serve even existing patrons adequately.

In larger urban settlements, the public libraries were largely left to develop without the interference of a central agency. They consequently stagnated to a consinerable extent, and existed by providing inefficient service to a small proportion of the population from collections largely based on gifts and inadequate budgets. They also lacked planning to a considerable degree and their collections became progressively uneven. Some legitimate aspects of public librarianship, such as reference services and service to industry and business, were completely or to a great extent neglected. In the sixties, we are witnessing an awakening of the interest in public libraries in the large urban settlements: it often takes the form of constructing splendid buildings for libraries, planned without sufficient consultation with librarians and therefore sometimes constitute a monument to the architect or the donors while containing no adequate collection. Current budgets particularly acquisition budgets, have improved but have remained consistently low in relation to the population served.

The new development settlements, both urban and rural, are, in a different way from the kibbutz libraries, an exception to the evolutionary patterns of the Israel public library and may also differ from similar settlements in other countries, Here the activities of the Library Section introduced new standards in the public library scene, and this seems to have had a salutory effect on their development. Thus we find in these settlements a relatively thriving public library with a higher use than in the larger cities. These libraries in development settlements prove that even when dealing with a population originally unaccustomed to using libraries, the need for libraries develops after familiarity has made library use possible.

However, while this conclusion may be relevant to the Israeli situation, it may require some qualifications as a general observation: in Israel, even among the population which is unused to libraries, active readership encompasses a third of the population which is equal to the proportion prevalent in developed countries; thus the change from an active reader to an active library user may not be so difficult to achieve.

Overall Influences of the Library Section of the Ministry of Education and Culture

We have noted the Library Section's success in changing the library scene in developing settlements. Its activities also had significant indirect effects: by introducing new methods and standards in the libraries under its supervision, it could gradually influence others to follows its example, and the positive developments in the larger cities-for instance the establishment of a public library in Jerusalem-may well be at least partially an outcome of the Section's activities. It has had a beneficial effect on personnel by insisting on a minimal level of education and library training for its librarians, and making other authorities in charge of hiring librarians more aware of the need for trained personnel. It has also indirectly affected salaries to all librarians, by insisting that library training would mean higher pay to its librarians, by offering somewhat more adequate salaries to the librarians employed in libraries under its influence, and by attempting to attract librarians with academic background to public libraries, whereever possible. All this made local councils more prepared to insist on library training, for instance, for their library personnel and also forced them to pay more adequate wages, in accordance with the standards set by the Ministry of Education.

On the other hand one should mention that even in libraries under the Library Section's supervision the progress, enormous when compared with the libraries in large and veteran settlements, is still in need of further improvement; library staffs, while having a higher educational standard than before, do not

yet meet the standards of most of the Western countries; library units are small with small staffs, and this precludes the introduction of more sophisticated library and information services; a library network has not as yet emerged even in the settlements supported by the Library Section.

The lack of initiative of the libraries affects in its turn other aspects of cultural development. One of the difficulties of a small country like Israel with regard to reading material is the scarcity of literature in the national language, and the consequent need for translations. In spite of the measures taken by the Publishers' Association and the government, to subsidize such publications as translated textbooks and other material, the very limited local market makes the printing of this sort of material, very unprofitable, and therefore rather restricted. If the thousand or so libraries functioning in Israel could be encouraged to carry some of such titles on their shelves, they could make the difference in the economic profitability of such publishing ventures, and at the same time would make this sort of material available to those for whom these books are prohibitively expensive, because of the restricted market. There can be little doubt that the vicious circle that exists in publishing scientific books and textbooks in Hebrew could be broken, if the public libraries were prepared to cooperate. The benefit for a country with the educational and cultural problems of Israel would probably be much larger than the financial burden involved. As things are, it seems that the libraries fail in many cases to purchase even those books that are available on the market.

It is somewhat difficult to assess the role, or more exactly the lack of influence that public libraries, have had on the overall attempts of Israeli society to create unity out of the basic divergencies of its components. During the years of mass immigration this omission was more understandable than in the sixties, that already allowed for a more consistent effort in integrating immigrants. In spite of the manifold difficuties in the sphere of economics and defense that Israel went through during the last decade, the stream of immigration remained fairly steady and not too demanding, and the lessons provided

by the experience of the fifties could already have been applied. However, to a regrettable extent, the libraries failed to respond to the challenges of the sixties as seen by the policy makers and librarians themselves. They struggled on with their restricted aims, did not often succeed in breaking through official inertia and made only timid attempts to initiate new programs. The fact that throughout the existence of the State, until mid 1975 no library law passed the hurdle of parliamentary debate, that the interests and reluctance of local councils and other agencies and the lack of any sort of pressure group in favor of library legislation, could prevent for over a decade the passing of even such a modest law as that proposed and passed in 1975 lays bare the marginal position of libraries. Even the determined attempts of the Library Section, surely the most energetic developing agent in the country, could produce only half-hearted examples of regional library systems, and no national library system can even be envisaged in the present state of affairs. The library law, which in many countries of the West serves to codify an existing situation (as in Denmark and England) should in a developing immigration country like Israel be the tool for the creation of a library system that would be capable of playing a significant role not only in the library scene, but far beyond, in the realm of education and cultural services to the population. It is surely significant that the most avid users of libraries are teenagers, but it is no less significant that the interest in libraries and their use declines when adulthood is reached without the correspondent decrease in reading habits of the adult population. Libraries are either unaware of this or else do not grasp that this decline is largely due to the fact that the average adult does not find in the library what he wishes to find. Moreover, the libraries compound their failure to attract the adult reader by evading to a larger measure the issue. They go on providing to some extent the needs of the teenagers and those determined readers that would patronize them in any case, and there by may possibly alienate even those who in their teens were enthusiastic library users.

The readership surveys tend to strengthen the view that

readership and secondary education, for instance, are closely connected. However, this is not exploited by the libraries: their collections are not geared to the needs of a progressively better educated population and the university libraries can provide ample examples that they, and not public libraries, are made use of by the well educated adult.

There have been some hesitant beginnings in attracting new readers and underprivileged groups to the libraries. Wherever these beginnings have been made, they have shown that undoubtedly this activity can be well carried out in the public libraries. Unfortunately, this activity is neither widespread nor very popular. Here again, the public libraries seem to be missing a chance to play an important role in the cultural integration of Israelis. The libraries have largely remained on the margin of the integrational effort carried out by the Ministry of Education and other public bodies concerned with the absorption of immigrants. In a country where so much energy and activity is devoted to the problems of integration, this is a pity. In spite of the difficulties in accustoming the population to the use of libraries and their collections, the libraries seem to be waiting for the population to come and demand services from them, and in this sense, their failure is perhaps more critical.

A few librarians are aware of the problem. However, they most usually seem to blame the situation on their budgetary restrictions, which admittedly are often crippling. There seems to be among librarians a certain amount of acquiescence or resignation and nothing of a more aggressive approach. Surely a few hundreds of librarians or even a few scores could influence the authorities by acting together as well as by publicizing library services. However, there seems to be little of this sort of spirit among the librarians. Part of the difficulty may lie in the educational standards and professional abilities of the librarians. Underpaid and undertrained, they seem to neglect the role of libraries in society; these subjects seem to carry less weight in curricula of library courses or library schools than cataloguing rules. This is perhaps the reason that authorities and the general public are largely unaware of these roles and until awareness

both among librarians and the public is achieved, there is little hope for change.

The accomplishments of the Library Section, however, where, by the insight and determination of one single person, who was in a position of influence, may point to the right direction. The Section achieved the best library service in the country within the rural and underprivileged environments. It managed to give good library service to a third of Israel's population—where it would have been least expected. Thus we may believe that possibly a few librarians—in positions of influence—may, with insight and dedication advance the present library situation and adapt to the library needs of present and potential patrons.

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