AUTOMATION: A LIVE COMPARISON OF THREE HEBREW-CAPABLE LIBRARY SYSTEMS:

PART 1: VTLS

Leah Adler

Description: Yeshiva University uses VTLS as its online library system, with two fully integrated character sets, Roman and Hebrew. WEB demonstration of Yeshiva's VTLS OPAC (called YULIS). Discussion of additional VTLS functions, such as cataloging and circulation.

Leah Adler is Head Librarian, Mendel Gottesman Library of Hebraica-Judaica at Yeshiva University, New York, NY. Leah received a Master's degree in natural sciences from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and an MLS from Queens College in New York City. She has worked in the field of Judaica librarianship at Yale University and at Yeshiva University, where she was Hebraica cataloging supervisor before undertaking her current position. Upon implementation of the VTLS automated library system, Leah also became the systems librarian. Leah's past and present AJL activities include: Head, AJL Cataloging Committee; Board member, AJL-NYMA chapter; and Proofreader, *Judaica Librarianship*. She is presently the Indexer for *Judaica Librarianship*. She has also been Recording Secretary, National AJL, R&S Division, and is currently Treasurer of the National AJL.

When Yeshiva University looked to automate its library system, there was one criterion on which we would not compromise: the display and search of Hebrew records in the vernacular. Yeshiva houses a large and heavily used Hebraica collection, and the thought of our patrons having to negotiate records of Hebrew works in romanization did not appeal to us in the least. It was the middle 1990s, and we were looking for an American based integrated library system which had developed multiscript capability. Being US based and therefore compatible with other American online library products was important to us. There was only one such system on the market: VTLS.

VTLS stands for "Virginia Tech Library System." It was developed by Virginia Tech, a college in Blacksburg, Virginia, which may be familiar to you for its famous football team. After a few years VTLS became independent from Virginia Tech, but kept its name and location. We at YU had heard that VTLS had developed an Arabic library system for some Near Eastern countries like Kuwait. We also knew that the Jewish Public Library in Montreal had acquired VTLS as their library system, using VTLS's newly developed Hebrew capability. So we looked into VTLS. We found out that what we wanted from a multiscript library system wasn't quite developed yet. The Arabic libraries, as well as the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, did not follow US MARC cataloging format for their non-Roman records, and, although they had records in two scripts, each record was in its entirety in either Roman or Arabic or Hebrew letters. A combination of two scripts in one record, the way LC had it on its Hebrew catalog cards and the way we at YU had it on our catalog cards, presents its own problems in a computerized world. Bidirectionality, correct right and left justification and word wrap are some of the issues. Neutral characters such as brackets are cause for major headaches. VTLS had not solved these problems at the time. But this did not deter us. To the contrary: it gave us the opportunity to help VTLS develop its dual script system according to our specifications. And VTLS was eager to work with us to develop a system with 880 MARC tags and

one which follows the classic LC dual character display. Success didn't happen over night. It was a gradual process; it took many phone calls, faxes and site visits, but it certainly happened.

We installed VTLS in the summer of 1996 and started with cataloging. In the summer of 1997 we implemented circulation, and in the fall of 1997 we opened the OPAC to our library patrons. In June of 1999 we put the catalog on the web for remote access. We are currently replacing library computers with Windows 2000 PCs, and access to the OPAC in and outside the library is provided uniformly through the web.

VTLS is currently developing and promoting a totally new library system called Virtua, which is based on unicode. It has already been installed in several libraries in the US and abroad. Again, it is not an upgrade of the system we use now. It is a completely different system. VTLS will be phasing out our system, which they call "Classic VTLS," in a few years. We at Yeshiva will migrate to Virtua when the Hebrew display will be ready. As they did with Classic VTLS, the staff at VTLS consults us and uses our records as test records for Hebrew in Virtua.

Hopefully next year we'll be able to do a demonstration of our library system in Virtua. But right now, let's look at YULIS, Yeshiva's OPAC, on Classic VTLS.

YULIS stands for "Yeshiva University Library Information System." Its URL is: http://www.yu.edu/libraries/yulis.htm

The site gives you the option to choose between two gateways. If your pc does not have Hebrew fonts, go to the "YULIS - English (Roman script)" gateway, which shows you the Hebrew records in Romanization. If you have Hebrew fonts, use the "YULIS B with Hebrew script" gateway.

Let's talk briefly about the way we catalog on VTLS:

We use both OCLC and RLIN as sources for copy cataloging.

When we download a record from OCLC, we use OCLC's "Passport for Windows." We have a split screen. On one half we have the OCLC database, in which we select the record to export, and on the other half we have VTLS, where we can instantaneously verify that the record was indeed loaded into our database by the stroke of a key.

With RLIN the procedure is somewhat different. We access the RLIN database on the web, find the record to download, and do a PUT command. This downloads the record to the RLG server, from where we import it in batch mode, by ftp, on a daily basis.

Original cataloging is easy in VTLS. Custom made cataloging workforms can be created; tags are added and deleted at will; fields are entered in English, Hebrew, or a combination of both; diacritics are easily applied.