

Summary of the Special Session of the Readers Association Held at the World Congress
of Jewish Studies

30 July 2013

Remarks by Association representatives:

Chairperson Nadia Zeldes thanked the library administration and its representatives, Orly Simon (head of readers services) and Nachum Zitter (head of reference services) for their cooperation with the association and summarized some of our activity:

- Ongoing meetings with the administration
- Requests for improvements in services for readers
- Our response to the book “giveaway”
- Our recognition of the library’s efforts to empty the remote storage facilities in Givat Shaul
- The successful struggle to restore the exhibitions of current journals

Nadia noted the Association’s perception of part of its role as to be a “watch dog” whose concern is the preservation of the library’s high academic level. Because the Association represents the regulars who use the library, the majority of whom are researchers, this explains our concern with the academic aspects of the library.

Levi Yitzhak Cooper, a member of the audit committee, stressed the importance of cooperation between the readers and the administration in the current building and in the process of building the new library.

Remarks by Orly Simon

Cooperation:

Orly Simon opened by explaining that the administration wishes to reach new audiences but also stressed the importance of cooperation with the current bank of readers. She emphasized the need for reader input on new services and systems, such as Merhav and the Historical Jewish Press. She noted investment by the library in expensive data bases and wondered what underlies the low use by readers.

Orly emphasized the importance of the voice of the Association and the readers in her eyes and noted that she welcomes comments.

Orly also invited the readers to read the Master Plan (available on the library website) and to make queries.

Digitization

In July the library consulted with experts from around the world regarding its digital content strategy: scanning of manuscripts, archives, newspapers, and books.

Questions from the Audience: Sundry Topics

--Manuscripts

Professor Colette Sirat inquired as to place of manuscripts (mainly Hebrew) in the library. She noted the importance of manuscripts and the gaps in the catalog. Colette also suggested that manuscripts should be on public display.

Orly replied that the plans for the new building include space for special collections and reported on a project of digitization of manuscripts. She will ask Aviad Stollman (the Judaica curator) to update us on this project when it is nearing completion and on the

uploading of thousands of manuscripts (including those belonging to the library) to the internet.

The library is presently working on a master plan for the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts. This plan will be implemented over the next three to five years.

--“Core Subjects”

Professor Dvora Bregman noted the importance of specialization by the library in core areas such as Judaica, Islam, and Israel but underscored the importance of a broad definition of the acquisitions policy given that it is impossible to study Judaica without access to general academic literature. Dvora also complained of the necessity for paying for interlibrary loans in general and international loans especially.

Orly noted that the library is focusing on making material available on the internet. It is also looking into the possibility of opening access to some of its databases that are now accessible only in the library to “affiliated readers” from home. Orly again reiterated the low volume of use of the databases available in the library.

--Public Input

Professor Kimmy Caplan noted the phenomenon of “public input” in the planning of public projects: the planners turn to the public with requests for proposals and practical advice that impact on planning. Kimmy maintains that such cooperation is in harmony with the process of planning and designing the new library building. He noted the critical mass of regular users at the library.

Kimmy also commented on the clash between cultural programs held in the present library building and the needs of the regular readers.

--Professional Librarians

Professor Caplan and others raised the issue of the disappearance of the professional librarians from the reading rooms and their transfer to distant offices. Also noted was the fact that when handing over books, the professional librarians conveyed additional information to readers, not necessarily in response to specific questions.

Also raised was the problem of the retirement of all the veteran librarians in the JRR in the fall and who will be replacing them.

Orly noted the current difficulty in finding experienced librarians. She conveyed to us that the library is interested in hiring holders of MA degrees in the relevant fields who would like to undergo library science training.

To sum up: The discussion was on a positive note. Two main points emerged from this session

--The library seeks readers' input on programs and websites that it has launched and regards its contacts with the Association positively.

--Orly will convey our request for "public input" in planning the new building to the relevant body.