Indexes and religion: reflections on research in the history of indexes

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A search of the Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula in the Vatican Library and other large Judaica collections yielded many dictionaries and citation indexes but almost no subject indexes, although the latter are common in Latin Christian manuscripts and incunabula. Reasons for this are suggested, and the compilation of early indexes for religious purposes is discussed. General conclusions relate to the methodological and terminological difficulties of conducting research on the earliest indexes, which were compiled in languages and scripts that are little known. The original manuscripts of early indexes are scattered in libraries throughout the world. Writings on the history of indexing are not concentrated in a single discipline: Descriptions of early dictionaries, concordances, and indexes are often found in religious publications rather than the literature of library-information science. The earliest reference tools related to religion are presented in a chronological table.

Approach to the study

This is not the article I thought I would be writing after doing research on early Hebrew indexes at the Vatican Library. I had previously done a study of the earliest Hebrew citation indexes — reference tools that indicate in which later works a given document is cited (Weinberg 1997), and in summer 1998 traveled to Italy, the cradle of Hebrew printing (Amram 1963, p. 9), in search of the earliest Hebrew subject indexes. Cognizant of the special characteristics of this consonantal Semitic script, I expected early Hebrew subject indexes to differ structurally from those in the Latin alphabet. I planned to analyze their structure and write up the results.

In Hans Wellisch’s (1994a) study of indexes in incunabula (books printed before 1500), no Hebrew works are cited, although Dr. Wellisch knows that language well. Perhaps Hebrew incunabula were not well represented in the collections that Wellisch sampled for his study. Estimates of the number of Hebrew incunabula range between 139 (Offenberg 1990, p. xiii) and 175 (Sheehan 1990, p. 365) — a tiny percentage of the estimated total number of incunabula in all languages, whether one accepts Sheehan’s figure of 40,000 or the more conservative statistics cited by Wellisch: 36,000 or 27,000 (1994a, p. 3). The Vatican Library owns 46 Hebrew titles from this period, some in more than one copy. Tishby (1983, p. 853) notes that the excellent condition of the Vatican’s Hebrew incunabula is unparalleled in any other collection in the world: The vast majority of these books are complete; in particular, the first and last leaves are present. (Indexes to early printed books were sometimes placed at the front. The index to the Nuremberg Chronicle is a prime example, noted by Witty [1965], p. 43.)

Wellisch (1994b) has also written about indexes in manuscripts, reporting that the earliest ones were compiled by Christians for works in Greek and Latin (p. 268). The Vatican possesses more than 800 Hebrew manuscript codices (manuscripts in book form [singular codex], as opposed to scrolls) and is ranked sixth among the countries of the world (distinct from Italy) in terms of the number of Hebrew manuscripts held (Israel 1968, Foreword).

In sum, had Hebrew subject indexes been compiled in substantial numbers during the age of the codex and early printed book, they should have been represented in the holdings of the Vatican Library.

Methodology and terminology

How did I determine which early Hebrew works in the Vatican Library might contain indexes? The descriptions of the Vatican’s incunabula in this language are concentrated in a special section of the four-volume catalog of all the Library’s incunabula (Biblioteca 1997). [Tishby’s list of Hebrew incunabula in the Vatican (1983, pp. 853-7) lacks several titles acquired recently.] I filled out a call slip for the Vatican’s most complete copy of each work because I was interested in examining not only indexes, but also relevant typographic features such as pagination or foliation, running heads, and tables of contents. The last-mentioned feature is considered the forerunner of indexes (Knight 1968, p. 14).

Personal examination of older works for access features is necessary because standard bibliographic descriptions of rare books frequently fail to note the inclusion of tables of contents and indexes. Dunkin’s (1973) manual of rare book cataloging does not require this, and neither term is found in the manual’s detailed index. The catalog record for the Nuremberg Chronicle, which I examined at the National Library of Canada (call no. Reserve D 17 S35 fol.), carefully notes missing blank leaves, but does not identify the Registrum as a substantial index. (Registrum is an ambiguous term: it is frequently found in incunabula at the head of a list of signaturaes, letters or numbers indicating the sequence of quires or gatherings — groups of pages sewn together [McKerrow 1928, p. 25].) The terms tables of contents and indexes are lacking as well in a thesaurus entitled Printing and publishing evidence, issued by the Association of College and Research...
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Libraries (1986). Furthermore, this thesaurus treats as equivalent the terms foliation, pagination, and columnation; the first and last terms mentioned are cross references to pagination in this controlled vocabulary. These three phenomena are very different when the precision of index locators is being considered, and should have been separate descriptors.

In his bibliography of Hebrew incunabula, Tishby (1983, pp. 810-11) provided more detailed descriptions than his predecessors. Some of the data elements he added, such as watermarks, are germane to the dating of books. Tishby records the beginning and end of each quire, which has implications for tables of contents and indexes, but he does not have a field that explicitly notes the presence or absence of these features, although he has such a field for running heads.

Personal inspection of incunabula is also desirable because a book without a printed index may include a handwritten index compiled by its owner (Wellisch 1986, p. 76). Tishby’s brief descriptions of the Vatican’s incunabula report missing leaves but do not record handwritten addenda.

It was possible for me to examine all of the Vatican’s Hebrew incunabula; however, given the quota of manuscripts that researchers at the Vatican Library may request each day, as well as the limited amount of time I had in Rome, I could not examine all 800 Hebrew codices. I therefore selected from the printed catalogs works that I thought were most likely to contain indexes, such as those in the disciplines of astronomy and medicine. I requested approximately 150 codices, many of which contain multiple works bound together.

A major terminological problem for this research is that the word index was used in the Latin catalogs of the Vatican (Biblioteca 1756, 1831, 1956) — as recently as four decades ago — with all the meanings enumerated by Wellisch (1996) for the earliest occurrences of the term. Thus I examined many codices for which the catalog description contains the word index, but the work itself has only a table of contents or a list of books. When I continued my research in New York, I found that the catalog of the Hebrew science manuscripts at the Jewish Theological Seminary (1990), whose language of description is English, uses the term index of subjects (in the description of ms. no. 2725) — as recently as four decades ago — with all the meanings enumerated by Wellisch (1996) for the earliest occurrences of the term. Thus I examined many codices for which the catalog description contains the word index, but the work itself has only a table of contents or a list of books. When I continued my research in New York, I found that the catalog of the Hebrew science manuscripts at the Jewish Theological Seminary (1990), whose language of description is English, uses the term index of contents for table of contents. Even the phrase index of subjects (in the description of ms. no. 2725) led to a list of section headings arranged under chapter numbers, i.e., a table of contents.

The Latin catalogs of Hebrew manuscripts at the Vatican have more detailed descriptions than the Hebrew one (Israel 1968), but the latter is more up to date, i.e., it covers more works. A terminological trap in the Hebrew descriptions is the ambiguity of that language’s term for index — mafteah, from the root meaning ‘to open’. The noun mafteah also means ‘key’ (the symbol of the American Society of Indexers), and works containing this Hebrew word in the title are not necessarily indexes. For example, Mafteah ha-nikud u-mafteah ha-dikduk (catalog no. Vat. Ebr. 107-5), which might have meant “Index to [Hebrew] vocalization and grammar”, is not arranged in a known order. The title is therefore to be translated “Key to [Hebrew] vocalization and grammar”. The Latin word clavis (key) is used in the Vatican catalogs to translate mafteah in this sense. Like the word index, mafteah is also applied to tables of contents. Tishby (1983, p. 854) uses the term in this sense in describing Jacob ben Asher’s legal code. Entry no. 9 of Tishby’s list states that four leaves of mafteah ha-dinim (index of laws)

are lacking in the Vatican’s copy. Personal examination of this incunabulum revealed, however, that the detailed table of contents is defective, and there is no index.

In my study of citation indexes (Weinberg 1997, p. 325), I explained the ambiguity of the Hebrew term mar‘eh makom (literally, “that which shows the place”), which designates both a reference to an earlier source and a citation in a later source. This ambiguity complicated my search for citation indexes, along with the use of the term concordance for these tools in English-language sources. In documenting the present paper, I encountered multiple meanings for the latter term as well. Lyons and Smith (1910, p. 186) discuss the interchangeability of the terms index, dictionary, and concordance. The identification of both early subject indexes and citation indexes, and the analysis of their structure, can thus be done only through examination of the primary sources.

Findings

There were no “back-of-the-book” indexes in the Hebrew incunabula that I examined at the Vatican Library or subsequently at the Lowy Collection of the National Library of Canada and the Rare Book Room of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS); the last mentioned has the largest collection in the world (129 titles). In examining these works I observed that Hebrew incunabula share many typographic features with their Latin counterparts, notably, the method of numbering signatures — mutatis mutandis — Hebrew letters were substituted for Latin ones as well as for arabic numerals. (Witty [1973, p. 194] states that the use of Hebrew letters as numerals is found in the Bible.) Some famous early Hebrew printers were not Jewish, and those who were learned their craft from Gentiles; thus the conventions of Latin incunabula were transferred to Hebraica — only in the opposite direction (right to left). The absence of subject indexes in early Hebrew books can thus not be explained by isolation of the language community or by lack of communication between Jews and Christians.

The only alphabetical Hebrew reference tools that I found in manuscript form were dictionaries of biblical roots or Talmudic terms. These were also among the first printed Hebrew works. Sheehan (1990) lists two editions of Sefer ha-Shorashim (“The Book of roots”) by David Kimhi as well as the Arukh, an early dictionary of the Talmud by Nathan ben Jehiel, among the Vatican’s incunabula. Such dictionaries may be viewed as indexes because they are arranged in a known order, are in a different order from the text to which they refer (ANSI 1984, p. 7), and include locators in the form of source references. An index of roots resembles a concept index because it brings together semantically related words. The process of compiling a root dictionary is, however, different from that of writing a subject index. The former involves grammatical analysis of all the words in a text, while the latter entails considering which words are significant in running text. The Vatican has medieval manuscripts of Hebrew dictionaries, but not the original ones. The latter are described below in the section on The Origins of Alphabetic Indexing.

There were no subject (concept) indexes in the Hebrew manuscripts I examined at the Vatican — only citation indexes. Reasons for this are proposed in the following section.

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Subject indexes vs. citation indexes

One day I came to our Rome hotel from the Vatican Library and asked my husband (Gerard Weinberg), "Why do you think the Jews produced citation indexes while the Christians compiled subject indexes — because the Jews had layers of text such as the Bible, Talmud, and codes?"

"No," he responded, "It's because Christianity was a rejection of legalism, while law was central in Judaism." This explanation made sense, as the citation indexes I had explored included many with a legal purpose. For example, 'En mishpat (Fount of Justice), the citation index embedded in the Talmud since 1546, shows where a law from that compilation is cited in the code of Maimonides (1135-1204), who lived about 1000 years after the Talmud was recorded. An article sent to me by a colleague (David Levy of Enoch Pratt Library) after my return from Rome includes an explicit statement on the Christian rejection of law: "The end of the Law is Christ" (Romans 10:4, cited by Grundmann 1968, p. 103; the King James Authorized Version has the variant reading "For Christ is the end of the law").

Another colleague, Dr. David Gilner of Hebrew Union College, later pointed out that the Christian rejection of law was short-lived. As Christianity became an organized religion, it developed a body of law. Phillimore’s (1910) survey of canon law shows how early this occurred. As the corpus of Christian laws grew, it required an index. Rouse and Rouse (1979, p. 5) describe "a primitive subject index" to the canonical collection of Cardinal Deudsedit, written between 1083 and 1087.

According to the Rouses (p. 4), indexing began in the Latin community, and Hebrew indexes came later. They suggest that the first Christian citation index, Tabula septem custodiarum super bibliaim (which they call "a concordance to the incidental passages in the writings of the fathers") appeared in the middle-thirteenth century (pp. 18-19). Professors of theology with whom I had previously discussed citation indexes were unfamiliar with this genre, which apparently is not found frequently in the early works of Christianity.

Fishman (1935) described a Hebrew citation index written in the late 1100s, arranged in alphabetical order by the quoted verse. At the Vatican I examined a citation index arranged in canonical order, i.e., the order of the Biblical text, bound with a Hebrew translation of Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed (originally written in Arabic), copied in the year 1205 (catalog no. Vat. Ebr. 263). Both the form and structure of this index are of interest: (a) the headwords (the names of the cited Biblical books) are bolded and run in, i.e., they are not at the margin; (b) the locators (the section number in Maimonides’ code) precede the subheadings (the Biblical verses). This is the earliest citation index I have seen to a single book, and the genre was undoubtedly much older, as Gaster (1929, pp. 280, 281) states in describing a late 13th-century citation index.

In the Jewish tradition, Biblical verses served as concept symbols, and citation indexes were effective for several purposes: (a) homiletics (preaching), an application emphasized by Gaster, (b) to show the development of a law, and (c) for vertical legitimation (Weinreich 1980, p. 207) — to lend credence to a text through citation of a classic authority. I believe that the last-mentioned reason was particularly true for Maimonides’ Guide to the Perplexed, a controversial work in the Jewish community: The Biblical references lent the work authority. Maimonides’ legal code, Mishneh Torah, was controversial for its lack of citations to Biblical and Talmudic sources, and was banned for a while (Ben-Sasson 1972). (See also the section on Religious Censorship and Indexes, below.)

I am convinced that citation indexing began with Hebrew texts because of the "layer" theory suggested above. Gaster believed that citation indexes originated as access tools to single works, but his article preceded Fishman’s description of a Biblical citation index to multiple works.

The origins of alphabetical indexing

Rouse and Rouse report (p. 11) that subject indexing was invented in Paris in the thirteenth century. (This is ironic in light of the absence of indexes in many modern French works.) It is an interesting coincidence that the citation index described by Gaster was produced in the same century as the first subject indexes, and in the same country — in the city of Avignon. Wellisch (1994b, p. 268) suggests that subject indexing began in the 4th century with the Apophthegmata, a compilation of sayings of the Greek Church Fathers. Witty describes this as an alphabetically arranged tool rather than a subject index to a narrative text (1973, p. 196). Richardson (1939, p. 844) states that the earliest Biblical dictionary was the Onomasticon by Eusebius (264-340 C.E.), but it was not in alphabetical order. Bacher (1912) notes that a Greek dictionary of Biblical proper names is ascribed to Philo Judaicus, who lived in Alexandria from 20 B.C.E. to 40 C.E.

The Rouses state that dictionaries and concordances were the antecedents of subject indexes (pp. 7, 34). MacFadyen’s (1910) survey of concordances begins with 13th-century Latin tools, but Bussa (1971, p. 595) says that "Biblical concordances were very probably in existence in the seventh and eighth centuries". One of the sources he cites, Leclercq (1948), describes a Greek concordance of geographic names dating from the 6th-7th century, but it was not in alphabetical order.

Wellisch considers the Masoretes, who standardized the text of the Hebrew Bible, “forerunners of the concordance makers” (1985, p. 72). In his survey of Hebrew Biblical concordances, Wellisch (ibid.) notes that Hebrew word lists were compiled by the Masoretes, who began their work in the 4th or 5th century. (Dr. Seth Jerchower of the Jewish Theological Seminary says that Masoretic activity was not that early; the 7th century would be a more accurate date [personal communication].) I examined several Masoretic lists in early Biblical manuscripts at the Vatican.

Bacher (1912) says that the first Hebrew lexicon was to the Talmud, the compilation of Oral Law which was written down much later than the Bible. This lexicon was compiled in the last quarter of the ninth century by Gaon Zemah ben Paltoi of Pumbedita. Lyons & Smith (1910, p. 196) state that Zemah’s dictionary was in alphabetical order. Brisman reports that this work was more of a glossary than a dictionary. The manuscript did not survive, but scholars have proven that it existed. The definitions may have been in a language other than Hebrew, but in that alphabet (Brisman, forthcoming). The Rouses claim that the earliest reference works, Biblical distinctions, were compiled in the middle of the 12th century (p. 8). In their words, "Distinction collections provide one with the various figurative or symbolic meanings of a noun found in the scriptures, illustrating each meaning with a scriptural passage"
Hebrew dictionaries of Biblical roots antedate these. According to Bacher and other sources, the first Hebrew lexicon of the Bible was compiled by Saadia Gaon in the year 913. Like distinctions, it included Biblical passages; thus it is a type of index. Saadia’s lexicon, entitled *Egron*, covered not just the Bible, but the entire Hebrew literature of his era (Brisman, forthcoming). Menahem ben Jacob Ibn Saruq compiled a Hebrew dictionary called *Mahberet* [Notebook] in the 10th century, and Jonah Ibn Janah wrote *Sefer ha-Shorashim* [The Book of roots] in the 11th century — all antedating distinctions.

Early Hebrew dictionaries serve to demonstrate that the concept of alphabetical arrangement was known in that language community at the time when Latin indexes were being compiled. Richardson (1939) points out that alphabetical order is found in the Hebrew Bible itself: in Psalm 119 the initial letters of the verses are in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. (Psalms 34 and 145 also have such an arrangement [S. Brisman, personal communication].) The Psalms are attributed to King David, who lived from 907 to 837 B.C.E. (Kantor 1989, pp. 41, 48); *Encyclopaedia Judaica* gives the dates of his reign as 1010-970 B.C.E. (Oded 1972, col. 1318). Witty (1973, p. 194) says that the order of the Hebrew alphabet goes back to the second millennium B.C.E.

Table 1 summarizes the statements made by various authorities on the earliest indexes and lexicons related to religion.

### Table 1. Chronology of alphabetically arranged texts, dictionaries, concordances, and indexes related to religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Index Type</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Cited Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th cent. B.C.E.</td>
<td>Alphabetically arranged Hebrew verses: Psalms 34, 119 and 145</td>
<td>King David (907-837 B.C.E.)</td>
<td>Richardson (1939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st cent. C.E.</td>
<td>Dictionary of Biblical proper names (Greek)</td>
<td>Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.E.-40 C.E.)</td>
<td>Bacher (1912)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th cent.</td>
<td>Subject index to (or alphabetical arrangement of) Apocryphal sayings of the Greek Church Fathers</td>
<td>Welisch (1994b); Witty (1973)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th–8th centuries</td>
<td>First Biblical concordances</td>
<td>Busa (1971)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 875</td>
<td>First Hebrew script lexicon to the Talmud</td>
<td>Gaon Zemah ben Patul of Pumbedita</td>
<td>Bacher (1912); Lyons &amp; Smith (1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>913</td>
<td>First general Hebrew lexicon: <em>Egron</em></td>
<td>Saadia Gaon</td>
<td>Bacher (1912)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1083-1087</td>
<td>Primitive subject index to canon law</td>
<td>Cardinal Deusdedit</td>
<td>Rouse &amp; Rouse (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th cent.: last quarter</td>
<td>Hebrew citation index to the Bible: in alphabetical order</td>
<td>Maimonides?</td>
<td>Fishman (1935)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th cent.: last quarter</td>
<td>First Latin Biblical distinctions</td>
<td>Cistercians</td>
<td>Rouse &amp; Rouse (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th cent.: first quarter</td>
<td>First known Hebrew citation index to a single book: in canonical order</td>
<td>Maimonides</td>
<td>Vat. Ebr. 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th cent.: 2nd quarter</td>
<td>First Latin citation index to the Bible</td>
<td>Oxford Franciscans under Adam Marsh</td>
<td>Rouse &amp; Rouse (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1230-1244</td>
<td>First concordance (word index) to the Latin Bible</td>
<td>Hugo de Sancto Caro / Dominicans</td>
<td>Rouse &amp; Rouse (1979); Danker (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1297-8</td>
<td>First subject index to a single Latin codex: <em>Summa confessorum</em></td>
<td>John of Freiburg</td>
<td>Kilgour (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1386</td>
<td>First concordance (words in context) to the Latin Bible</td>
<td>Kilgour (1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1438-1448</td>
<td>First concordance to the Hebrew Bible</td>
<td>Isaac Nathan Ben Kolonymus*</td>
<td>Welisch (1985); Danker (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1460s</td>
<td>First subject index to a single printed Latin book: <em>De arte praedicandi</em></td>
<td>St. Augustine</td>
<td>Welisch (1986)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Brisman (forthcoming) cites sources indicating that Mordecai Nathan is the author.*
Religion vs. science

It emerges from all the cited works that early indexes were texts during disputations (religious debates). Indexes were prompted by the need for quick reference to proof immaculate conception. Rabnett (1982, p. 88) notes that such (1994a, p. 4) expressed surprise that more theological works than Religion vs. science

... did not need any indexes", as most early reference tools were applicable in this context: "... indexes are tools of discovery ... that is why it is so hard to think of an index as being used to withhold information” (p. 105).

The purpose of censorship in the Catholic Church was to "guard against heretical writings" (Boudinhon 1910, p. 374). I recall reading that the first indexer of the Bible was burned at the stake. Rev. Norman Hillyer, former editor of the “Indexes Reviewed” column of this journal, pointed me to a source that documents this anecdote: “John Marbeck is responsible for the first concordance of the entire English Bible. Marbeck, a church musician, was sentenced to the stake for heresy in 1544. Bishop Stephen Gardiner, who was fond of his music, interceded for him. Marbeck’s life was spared . . . .” (Danker 1993, p. 12).

Some suggest that Marbeck’s index was objectionable because (a) it detracted from the authority of Christian clergy by making

Religious censorship and indexes

The most interesting and comprehensive (albeit not the earliest) Hebrew indexes that I saw at the Vatican Library were compiled for Christian religious purposes. A Hebrew incunabulum of the Bible dated 1488 (Sheehan 1990, entry no. 3) contains a handwritten index (undated) that notes all the occurrences in the text of the Hebrew word ‘almah. The translation of this word (‘young woman’ or ‘virgin’) is crucial to the Christian tenet of immaculate conception. Rabnett (1982, p. 88) notes that such indexes were prompted by the need for quick reference to proof texts during disputations (religious debates).

Most amazing, however, is a manuscript Hebrew bibliography from the Orientalia collection of the Barberini popes (Barb. Or. no. 53 1626) listing the passages in each work that are to be censored. This codex is of interest to bibliographers, as it shows which Hebrew works were known at the time, often citing specific editions. But the indexer’s perspective is of particular concern here: The process of compiling this reference work was surely almost identical to that of writing a subject index. Someone had to read through the complete text of numerous works and identify the passages that were objectionable from a Christian theological perspective. This is concept indexing, not a simple process of word extraction. Precise locators (e.g., “at the head of the page”, “at the bottom of the page”) were developed to assist censors in finding the passages to be blacked out. One can only imagine how much time the compilation of this reference work took.

Although not identified or indexed as such in the catalog of Vatican Hebrew manuscripts (Israel 1968, p. 85, entry 728), this work is apparently an expanded edition of Sefer ha-zikuk or Index expurgatorius, by Domenico Irasolimitano (1596). Porges’ (1903) description of and excerpts from Domenico’s work do not include the precise locators of the 1626 edition, nor does the copy of the original manuscript at the Jewish Theological Seminary. The 1596 edition is not arranged alphabetically by title, nor does it have an index of titles. The 1626 edition has both of these features.

We may compare such censors’ tools to stoplists, which have been called negative thesauri. These “indexes” required censors to be on the lookout for certain terms, and either black them out or replace them by euphemisms. Hebrew terms for Gentiles (goyim [literally ‘nations’] or nokhrim [literally ‘strangers’]) were frequently to be replaced by the acronym for ‘idol worshipers’ — akum. Not all occurrences of these terms were to be changed, however. The introduction to the 1596 edition of Index expurgatorius allows the word Gentile to remain in discussions of Jewish law, where the use of the term is not seen as derogatory. This involves an indexer’s judgment: substitute “derogatory mentions” for “significant mentions”.

Sonne (1976, pp. 204-5) discusses the Hebrew terms associated with censorship, including several which connote “thorough examination”, the hallmark of indexing. He makes another observation that is germane to the subject at hand (pp. 220-22): Censorship of Hebrew books in the 16th century led to the disappearance of indexes that had been found in earlier editions of these works. It is sobering that index-like tools created for censors had the result of limiting access to religious texts. Although Intner’s article on censorship in indexing (1984) does not discuss religion, it includes statements that are applicable in this context: “... indexes are tools of discovery ... that is why it is so hard to think of an index as being used to withhold information” (p. 105).
theological information directly accessible to the laity, or (b) that in early and medieval Christianity priests were to serve as intermediaries between the individual and God, and as interpreters of religious truths. Fr. Jean-Pierre Ruiz (a professor of theology at St. John’s University) informed me, however, that it is not true that Christianity discourages individual study of the Bible. In his view, the clergy objected to Marbeck’s concordance “for fear that Divine Revelation would be reduced to human proportions and that the canonical shape of the Bible would be challenged” (personal communication). The idea that indexes to sacred works detract from their holiness is fascinating.

In modern Judaism, one encounters negative attitudes to reference works, including indexes, in part because they minimize the effort required to master religious texts. A key concern is that laypersons may use indexes to decide matters of Jewish law by themselves, as opposed to asking a rabbi, who will take their personal situation into account before rendering a decision (Weinberg 1990).

Indexes and memory

Indexes and related reference works serve as auxiliary memory. It is interesting to contrast these with alphabetically arranged texts (acrostics), which have a mnemonic (memory-aiding) function (Witty 1973, p. 195), i.e., helping people memorize a text. Boorstin (1983, p. 485) observes that when books had indexes, “the only essential feat of Memory was to remember the order of the alphabet”.

Indexes appear when memorization declines. Wellich (1985, p. 70) has pointed out that medieval Jews did not need concordances, because they “knew the Scriptures by heart”. Latin concordances preceded Hebrew ones by two centuries. Many people do not realize that the original language of the Old Testament is Hebrew; translations of the Bible to any other language are subject to revision, rendering concordances to older editions of the translated text obsolete. Hebrew Biblical concordances can be organized in different ways, but the text from which the entries are derived remains stable.

The Talmud, known as the Oral Law of Judaism, was also once memorized; it was written down in recognition of “the decline of the generations”. The language of the Talmud is Aramaic, the vernacular of the Jews from approximately 300 B.C.E. to 1100 C.E. (Kutscher 1972). The earliest dictionary of the Talmud was compiled at a time when Aramaic was being displaced by other languages in the Jewish community. The fact that the language of definition of Saadia Gaon’s Hebrew dictionary was Judeo-Arabic suggests that lexicons may be compiled when the use or knowledge of a language diminishes. Brisman (forthcoming) points out that Saadia’s *Egron* was designed to assist Hebrew poets, because the language was no longer spoken.

Brisman suggests that Jews did not need [alphabetical subject] “indexes because the Mishnah and the Talmuds were already arranged by subject” (letter of Jan. 10, 1999). The knowledge required to use these classified arrangements, as well as the canonical sequence of Biblical citation indexes, and early Hebrew dictionaries arranged by the number of letters in a root is the subject of a separate paper that I am scheduled to present at the Association of Jewish Libraries Convention in June 1999.

Conclusions and implications for further research

The primary thesis of this essay is that it is no accident that citation indexes predominated in early Hebraica, i.e., Jewish texts, while subject indexes are common in Christian manuscripts and incunabula. This suggests that it may be worthwhile to explore the reasons for the frequency or lack of indexes in other cultures. Why do so many French works of nonfiction have no indexes? Lack of awareness of indexes, or lack of knowledge on how to compile indexes, is probably not the reason. The explanation for the omission of indexes in French books may be the well-known scholarly attitude that indexes discourage reading.

English literary scholars are familiar with Jonathan Swift’s negative remarks on indexes, expressed in *A tale of a tub*, first published in 1704. In this work (p. 145 in the 1958 edition) the metaphor for the use of indexes is learning through the “back door”. Swift was a minister [although this fact is well documented, I learned it from Prof. Michael Gelber of St. John’s University], and *A tale of a tub* is described as a satire on “the numerous and gross conceptions in religion and learning” (Swift 1909, pp. x-xi), but his observation on indexes may not have been made from a religious perspective (Janet Shuter, personal communication). In checking the references to Swift in *The Indexer*, which were kindly provided to me by Hazel Bell (former editor), I found that Vickers (1990) quoted Swift’s statement: “consulting Indexes . . . is to read Books Hebraically and begin where others usually end” (1721, p. 14; emphasis in original) — an observation that is surely relevant to this paper.

While Swift felt that important books should be read and not indexed, the obverse of this position has been encountered as well. James Anderson often states at conferences that not every document should receive human indexing; the vast majority of documents have little value and merit only automatic indexing. (This opinion is recorded in his forthcoming book.) Works that have been cited and/or given favorable reviews deserve time-consuming human analysis, in Anderson’s view. When we examine the earliest indexes, we find that works considered important enough to receive careful human analysis are primarily in the domain of religion.

Because the earliest indexes were associated with Judaism and Christianity, articles describing them are often found not in information science periodicals, but rather in journals in the field of religion. The footnotes to Rouse and Rouse point to many descriptions of early concordances and indexes that were published in theological journals, often in foreign languages. With respect to the earliest Hebrew citation indexes, I have already discussed the lack of links between the Hebrew literature describing these tools and the largely English literature of information science (Weinberg 1997, p. 328).

Works in non-Roman scripts that are closely associated with the world’s major religions have been excluded from several studies of the history of books and indexing. Taylor’s history of indexes (1966) admits to this in the preface (p. 7). Katz’s recent (1998) history of reference books has no index entries for Hebrew or Judaism, although Jews and Jewish reference books are alluded to in several endnotes (p. 161n10, p. 127n78). In another of his unindexed endnotes (p. 16n11) Katz admits that Arabic sources are excluded from the study. Kilgour’s (1998) history of the book has substantial chapters on the role of Islam
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and Christendom but no discussion of Judaism or Hebrew. In the Golden Age of Spain, there was close cooperation between Islamic and Jewish philologists, and innovations in dictionary design can no doubt be discovered from the study of early Arabic and Hebrew reference works.

Few Western scholars are fluent in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic, as well as knowledge regarding indexing. This explains the conflicting statements about the earliest indexes.

Serendipity and “footnote chasing” were major factors in documenting this paper. The Rouses’ book (1979) came to my attention through a reference in Kilgour (1998), which was on display at my university library. I did a sequential search of the indexed bibliographic references in the endnotes to Katz (1998), also a new book on display, but did not find Rouse cited. (Wellisch [1994a, p. 12] cites a 1976 article by Rouse, but not the book.) The sole topical subject heading assigned to the Rouses’ book by the National Library of Canada (in its Cataloging in Publication Data on the verso of the title page) is “Preaching — History — Middle Ages, 600-1500”; thus a search on “Indexes — History” would not retrieve it.

Several of the cited works on the history of indexing and reference books are poorly indexed. Missing index entries from the Katz book have been noted. The “General Index” to the Rouses’ book lacks entries for indexes, personal indexes, running headlines, and cross references, although all these concepts are discussed by the authors in these terms. The index to Kilgour’s work lacks entries for religion, tables of contents, subject indexes, and Arabic numerals, all of which are discussed on p. 81. McKerrow’s classic Introduction to bibliography (1928) also has no index entries for indexes and tables of contents, despite their relevance to the physical production of a book, as described in the text; nor does he post all discussions of these terms to the heading preliminaries (pp. 26, 188, 190, 217). The catalog of Vatican Hebrew manuscripts (Israel 1968) has only broad categories (bibliography, religion) in its subject index, rendering it difficult to identify citation indexes, censorship bibliographies, etc. Time-consuming sequential searches thus had to be done to document the history of indexes, which are, ironically, designed to obviate such searches.

This paper describes research done in three countries. The Rouses’ book includes a lengthy catalog of manuscripts (pp. 311-407) arranged by the city of the repository; this indicates the wide dispersion of early reference works and indexes. The Rouses did not travel to all the repositories they listed; in some cases they checked microfilms (p. 311). This is not an ideal medium for the study of indexes, as in some cases relevant features such as foliation were written in after the creation of the original manuscript, and this is hard to detect on a microfilm. The position of an index (front or back of a codex) may have changed in the binding process, and only examination of the original artifact allows one to determine this.

The scatter of the relevant documents combined with the fact that standard catalog descriptions for rare books do not note the inclusion of indexes complicates research on the history of this access tool and renders it difficult to make definitive statements on the earliest appearance of a certain type of index or indexing feature. It is clear, however, that citation and subject indexes were invented at least 800 years ago, and alphabetical word lists many centuries before that — all for the glory of God.

A common feature of early Hebrew and Latin (Christian) dictionaries and indexes was an expression of thanks to God at the conclusion of the work — sometimes even at the end of each letter of the alphabet, e.g., in the dictionary of Jonah ibn Janah, entitled Sefer ha-Shorashim, copied in 1294 (Vatican catalog no. Urb. 54). Contemporary indexes no doubt frequently say “Thank God it’s over” or “Hallelujah” when they complete an indexing project, but probably without the religious fervor of their medieval counterparts!

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