

## *Considerations in Preparing a Biblical Bibliography: Case Study—The Scroll of Esther*

by Edith and Meir Lubetski

This paper is based on our experience in preparing *The Book of Esther: A Classified Bibliography* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

A bibliography is fundamental to serious scholarship in any discipline. We conceived this bibliography of the *Scroll of Esther* as a basic tool for researchers, students, clergy, and librarians, as it assembles items scattered all over the world, in many languages, covering a century of scholarship. In addition, it was meant to provide both the novice and the expert with material on a wide range of topics. We wanted to bring together an assortment of views, affording the researcher the opportunity to see the diversity of scholarly opinion on specific subjects. For example, different authors perceive Queen Esther quite differently: One sees her as a feminist; another as a deceitful and relentless person; a third as a model for the successful conduct of life in the Diaspora; and a fourth as a stereotypical woman in a man's world. We wanted our readers to sample a smorgasbord of views and then decide what was most appetizing.

Esther is the biblical queen who has captured the minds and hearts of many scholars. Who was Esther? Is she fictional or historical? How much is truth and how much is fiction? What are the dates of the book's setting, of its writing? Who wrote it? Is the *Scroll of Esther* a feminist story or does it have other messages? Is it serious or humorous? Secular or religious?

Almost every humanistic discipline is represented in the field of *Esther* scholarship: art, literature, history, psychology, sociology, linguistics, political science, religion. Literary criticism abounds: Researchers have studied the *Scroll's* structure, motifs, narrative, irony, humor, and allegory. The individual characters have been analyzed, especially, as most naturally, Esther herself. The relationship of the story or text to other biblical narratives has been explored. Its literary impact has been far-reaching, influencing many literatures including Arabic, American, English, French, Hebrew, Spanish, and Yiddish. Other scholars describe how Persian/Iranian and ancient Near Eastern elements have entered the *Scroll*. Linguistic studies have yielded an explanation of many words, with hypotheses as to their ancient origins. Psychologists have studied the emotions dramatized in the *Scroll*: anger, self-esteem, and assertiveness. Some sociologists have found significance in *Esther* for the South African women's liberation movement. Historians have been challenged with the problem of historicity, and theologians with the canonicity of the *Scroll*. The religious seek God in the *Scroll*, while secularists exclude Him. Christians and Jews find their own meanings and inspiration in the text. Political scientists write about government and politics in the story. Art historians deal with illuminated manuscripts of the *Scroll*; archaeologists find artifacts relating to it. In short, *Esther* has inspired men and women all over the world in manifold ways.

The challenge then was to collect this scattered material and present it in a useful way. It sounds rather simple. After all, librarians know how to search for and retrieve information. As a librarian, I knew the relevant databases, so all I had to do was search those databases, download the material to a bibliographic management tool such as *Refworks* or *Endnote*, and *voilà*—a bibliography! My husband, Meir, is a biblical scholar, so he would know what was important in the field. It would be easy. Or so we thought.

It turned out that there were many issues to be resolved even before we began searching. The main task was to establish guidelines. The first question was simply: what to include and what to leave out? The question may have

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been simple, but the answer certainly was not. The story is told about an excellent worker who cut down trees, split logs, and hauled heavy burdens in record time. But when he was given the task of separating a barrel of apples into large and small, his supervisor found that he accomplished nothing. The worker could not decide which was a large apple and which was a small one. Similarly, it was difficult to decide which items properly belonged in a bibliography, let alone the bibliography of a biblical work. We had to make decisions regarding the scope of the bibliography, its arrangement, our method of research, even the way we presented the raw bibliographic data. We ended up asking ourselves a series of questions.

## SCOPE

We had to establish principles of scope. Should we, for example, include only works of value for the scholar, teacher, or student? Then, if so, how would we define what fit that criterion? Assuming that meant material on an academic level, should we then exclude all popular items? Are scholarly works necessarily “better”? Or, as Professor Mayer Gruber of Ben Gurion University put it, “Neither type [i.e., scholarly or popular] ... has a monopoly on either wisdom or foolishness.”<sup>1</sup>

## AUDIENCE

Further, we had to decide who the audience was for a biblical bibliography. Should we strive for an ecumenical readership including all religious approaches, or target a specific religious audience? Should it be geared to the Jewish scholar, or even be limited further to the Orthodox Jewish world?

If it were decided to target the material to the most inclusive group, the question arose whether or not to label each item with its religious orientation. Jews view *Esther* as a Jewish book, but there are Christians who interpret it along Christian lines. Some items clearly reflect either a Christian or a Jewish bias. Then again, the vast majority of the material may be considered “neutral.” If we would label works by their religious orientation, how would “neutral” works be classified?

## PERIOD COVERED

What years should the bibliography cover? Should the volume include everything ever written on the *Scroll of Esther*, or should it be limited to a specific number of years?

## TYPES OF MATERIAL

Then there was the problem of types of material. It is clear that a comprehensive bibliography should include citations of books, collected works, festschriften, annuals, theses, essays in collections, journal articles, conference papers, and proceedings.

But how should electronic resources be handled? If items appear in both print and online versions, should both be listed, or only one format included? With the exponential increase of electronic materials and their availability, was it necessary to list electronic sources or could our readers be expected to find such sources on their own?

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<sup>1</sup> Mayer I. Gruber, *Women in the Biblical World*. Lanham, MD: American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1995, xi.

What about entries in encyclopedias,<sup>2</sup> dictionaries, and biblical handbooks?<sup>3</sup> There are many such tools. Assuming one limits the choice to biblical reference tools, which, among the many, should be chosen? Should only signed articles in multi-volume works be included? And in what languages? English only, or French and German, etc.? What about newspaper articles? Theoretically, these are more popular, yet there are many scholarly articles in the magazine sections of the major Israeli newspapers, for example.<sup>4</sup> In general, audiovisual media, dramatic versions of the *Scroll*, fiction, and juvenile literature might be excluded, since they do not contribute to scholarly research. And yet, there are dramatic versions of *Esther* that include literary criticism in the same volume. Should those volumes be included in our bibliography?

### MANUSCRIPTS AND TEXT EDITIONS

We thought it would be a good idea to include manuscripts and text editions. But those two categories alone would call for an additional bibliographic volume on the *Scroll of Esther*. And yet, there are certain text editions that are essential for the scholar. So, should exceptions be made?

### CLASSICAL COMMENTARIES

If we were to limit the time frame to relatively recent material, the question arose of how to handle older books and essays that have been republished in our time. Assuming one is compiling a twentieth-century bibliography, should it also include classical Jewish or Christian commentaries that were republished in the twentieth century, even though they were written much earlier?<sup>5</sup> The rationale for including such works is this: If they were important enough to be republished, then they must have value for the contemporary researcher. In the case of the Jewish classical commentators, although they have great insight to offer, they are often unknown to us or ignored. We thought it would be valuable to bring these perceptive resources to the attention of the scholarly community. Philip Alexander emphasizes the value of earlier exegesis in his review of Adele Berlin's commentary on *Esther*. While lauding her book, he also notes that “. . . traditional Jewish exegesis is drawn upon only perfunctorily. This is a pity, since . . . many of the assumed results of modern critical and historical study of the Bible were anticipated by the early modern and medieval commentators, and even by the *darshanim* of late antiquity.”<sup>6</sup>

If we had decided to include pre-1900, republished materials, we would have found the sheer magnitude of rabbinic publications overwhelming, and a further decision regarding selection would have been necessary. Should

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<sup>2</sup> We cited all the entries relating to *Esther* from the following major sets: the *Encyclopedia Mikra'it* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1950-[1982]), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with Keter Publishing House, 2007), and the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1906). There are selected entries from a variety of other encyclopedias/dictionaries that were added in order to present differing points of view. There are additional popular, religious, and general encyclopedias and dictionaries that contain articles pertaining to the *Scroll of Esther*.

<sup>3</sup> From the many introductions to the Bible available, only a selection was included. Additional articles can be found both online and in print.

<sup>4</sup> For newspaper articles in Hebrew, see the *Index to Hebrew Periodicals* (Israel Center for Digital Information Services at the University of Haifa Library, online by subscription).

<sup>5</sup> Many such commentaries were written in the medieval period. For a description and analysis of all the important medieval Hebrew commentaries on the *Scroll of Esther* written between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, see Barry Dov Walfish, *Medieval Jewish Exegesis of the Book of Esther* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Philip S. Alexander, Review of “Adele Berlin, *Esther: Introduction and Commentary*,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27.5 (2003): 50-51.

only the mainstream, well-known commentaries be listed? What about exposing the reader to a few commentaries representative of specific orientations such as Hasidic, Sephardic, mystical, or homiletic?

### HOMILETICS

Homiletics, you say? What is sermon-like material doing in a biblical bibliography that focuses primarily on scholarly works?! Does homiletic material belong at all? In the Society of Biblical Literature's online *Review of Biblical Literature*, Jason Kalman introduces his review of *The Gutnick Edition Chumash . . . with a Commentary Anthologized from Classic Rabbinic Texts and the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe* by saying, "The volume reviewed here is a somewhat odd selection for an academic forum." However, he ends his review stating that, "Although not an academic book, the academic reader . . . will find in it many things of interest" (<http://www.bookreviews.org> 3/2009, 1, 4.). There are many, many homiletic Jewish works on *Esther*, particularly in Hebrew, as well as many Christian pedagogical volumes.<sup>7</sup> Should a small selection of this type of material be incorporated? And, if so, should it be identified as such and isolated from the more scholarly works? Thus the larger question becomes: Should one include items of debatable relevance? There will always be borderline material useful to one, but not to another.

### VERSIONS (TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT)

There are well-known versions of *Esther* that of course must be listed. But what about the *Scroll's* many translations?<sup>8</sup> Should all languages be included or only selected ones? If so, which ones? As we well know, a translation is actually a different version, or even a commentary, since it makes decisions about words and phrases for which there are no definitive meanings. What should the criteria be here for their inclusion?

### EDITIONS

Since secondary literature has been published in several printings or editions, which edition should we list in the bibliography? The first edition, the best scholarly edition, or the latest available edition? What about reprints of articles and books?

### TRANSLATIONS OF COMMENTARY

When a scholarly book was published in more than one language, should just the original edition be listed (usually the English edition), and all its subsequent translations simply mentioned?

### ARRANGEMENT

Once we had addressed all the above problems of scope and gathered a sizable number of citations, we had to decide how the citations in the body of the book should be organized. There were a number of possibilities: alphabetical by author, chronological, or topical. If we arranged items by topic, should the bibliography be broken down into broad subject headings with subdivisions, or should we just assign many very specific subject headings? For example, we could bring all biblical figures together under one heading, "Biblical Figures," or we could list the name of each biblical figure separately within the alphabetical listing.

<sup>7</sup> For Christian homiletic material, consult the following databases: *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*, Catholic Library Association; *Christian Periodical Index*, Association of Christian Librarians.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *WorldCat*, OCLC, and the catalogs of libraries from various parts of the world. The following databases are useful: *Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK)*, <http://www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/hylib/en/kvk.html>; *Judaica Libraries and Archives on the Web*, <http://www.bibliomaven.com>; *libweb*, <http://lists.webjunction.org/libweb>.

Once we chose a structure, would we have to be “religious” in following it, or could we be more flexible, always looking for additional ways to aid the researcher by presenting a “hybrid” arrangement? For example, we might choose to *both* list the items by discrete, specific subject headings, and *also* to include broad sections such as “Biblical Figures,” “Chapters and Verses,” “References to Biblical and Related Works,” and “Terms and Phrases.”

Either way—using broad headings or specific ones, or a combination of both—should the bibliographer arrange the entries under each heading alphabetically or chronologically? Should the bibliography be annotated?

There were other ways to arrange the material. Should we separate books and articles, or maybe arrange entries by language? Should such arrangements govern the whole bibliography or just the section on commentaries?

### *SUBJECT HEADINGS*

How should we choose our subject headings? It made sense to use an established system such as the Library of Congress headings. But should we use them slavishly, or be liberal in adapting them?

### *DUPLICATION OF ENTRIES*

If we decided to list the items according to subject, then the same entry would appear under a number of subject headings, as in a library catalog. In that case, should the full bibliographic entry appear every time it was listed, or should we use “see” references? While repeating the full entry would seem redundant, it would appear so only if one were to read through the entire work from start to finish. But, being a reference work, our bibliography would be consulted only, and those consulting it would (we thought) appreciate finding full listings at every point in the bibliography, instead of having to leaf through the volume to find complete citations.

### **METHOD**

There was no question that bibliographic material should be gathered from the major biblical resources, as those listed in appendix A. But what about other sources? How could we, or should we, set limits? With the multitude of databases available, should we restrict our searching to biblical and related databases, or go much further afield? Was it necessary to check general databases such as Academic Search Premier (EBSCO), or ProQuest (Cambridge Information Group), etc.? Should we search specialized databases such as MLA (Modern Language Association), and PsycInfo (American Psychological Association). When does one say *dayenu* (enough)? Should we keep searching for that one last citation—if there ever is such a thing?

### **BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA**

The simple task of setting out the data in each citation raised unexpected questions. Consider the following examples.

### *JOURNAL TITLES*

Should journals be listed by their full names, so that the user does not have to be bothered by unintelligible abbreviations and the need, once again, to flip back and forth in the text?

## NON-ROMAN TITLES

Most of the material we collected was in English. Questions arose about how to handle the many items in other languages. Should the titles be translated? For scholarly works, it would seem unnecessary to translate titles in the major Western languages, but what about titles in Hungarian, Czech, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Hebrew? We decided that translating the titles would alert researchers to the existence of scholarship in languages with which they were unfamiliar.

How should we list non-Roman titles? In their original language or Romanized? If Romanized, according to what system?

## ISSUE NUMBERS

Since most scholarly journals paginate consecutively, it is generally not necessary to indicate issue numbers for those journals. This is certainly true for print volumes. However, in an online environment, issue numbers are useful in the browsing mode, where full-text journals are accessed by volume and issue number. Therefore, while in the past it was acceptable to give only volume number and pagination, this convention has changed. Now full information ought to be given. But should we continue to leave out issue numbers for consecutively paginated print journals? If we did that, the bibliography would appear inconsistent. And, more seriously, a volume currently in print might sometime later be digitized, rendering our citation inadequate.

## INDEX

The type of index we chose would depend on the format we had chosen for the whole book. If the volume were to be arranged by subject, then an author index would be in order. If arranged alphabetically, then a subject index would be appropriate. And yet, this oversimplified the question. In framing the index, we could add different types of tools to help the researcher. For example, if the body of the bibliography listed entries according to discrete subject headings, a list of broad topics in the index would bring together the scattered subject headings and thus provide an overview. In other words, if all the biblical characters were listed separately, alphabetically in the text, they could be united under one heading, “Biblical Figures,” in the index.

## CONCLUSION

Compiling a bibliography is no simple matter, especially when dealing with the Bible. We have outlined here some of the many questions that came up while working on our bibliography on *Esther*. What decisions did we make in each case? We have hinted at some of our answers here, but you will find full explanations of our decisions in the introduction to our published volume.

Our bibliography on *Esther* is not meant to be definitive. While this may have been our hope at one point, it became unrealistic as time passed and we became aware of the magnitude of the project. We came to interpret the words of *Pirke Avot* (2:21): *אל דילע רומגל הכאלמהל*, “It is not your obligation to complete the task,” as advice and comfort for conscientious bibliographers—so that our manuscript could finally, at long last, be submitted to the publisher.



## APPENDIX A

### SELECT LIST OF MAJOR BIBLICAL RESOURCES

#### *FREE ONLINE DATABASES*

BiBIL (Biblical Bibliography of Lausanne) <http://www3n.unil.ch/bibil/>

BILDI (Documentation for Biblical Literature Innsbruck) <http://www.uibk.ac.at/bildi>

RAMBI (Index of Articles in Jewish Studies) <http://jnul.huji.ac.il/rambi/>

#### *DATABASES AVAILABLE BY SUBSCRIPTION OR PURCHASE*

ATLA (American Theological Library Association) Database

Catalogue of the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem (CD-ROM)

Index Theologicus

Index to Jewish Periodicals

Old Testament Abstracts

#### *PRINT BIBLIOGRAPHIES*

Bibliographie Biblique=Bible Bibliography, 1930-1985, edited by Paul-Emile Langevin. Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1985.

Elenchus Biblicus Bibliographicus

Hupper, William G. *An Index to English Periodical Literature on the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Philadelphia: American Theological Library Association, 1987)

Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete (International Review of Biblical Studies)

#### *CATALOGS*

Catalogs of major general and Judaica libraries in the United States, Israel, and abroad, either or through WorldCat or the Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue.

#### *BIBLIOGRAPHIES*

Bibliographies online or in encyclopedias, books, articles, dissertations, etc.

## APPENDIX B

### CHECKLIST FOR CONSIDERATIONS IN PREPARING A BIBLICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### *SCOPE*

##### **Audience**

- Ecumenical
- Christian
- Jewish Rabbinic

## **Period Covered**

- From the beginning
- 1900-2009

## **Types of Material**

- Electronic resources
- Encyclopedias and dictionaries
- Newspaper articles
- Media
- Dramatic versions
- Juvenile
- Manuscripts
- Text editions
- Homiletic

## **Republished Material**

- Christian
- Rabbinic

## **Versions (translations of the biblical text)**

- All versions
- Select versions

## **Editions**

- First
- Latest
- Most scholarly

## **Translations (of secondary works)**

- All languages
- Select languages



## **Arrangement**

- Alphabetical
- Chronological
- Subject

## **Subject**

- Classified
- Discrete subject headings

## **Entries**

- Full citation for each listing
- See references

## **Journal Titles**

- Full title
- Abbreviations

## **Non-Roman Titles**

- Original language
- Transliteration

## **Issue Numbers**

- Include
- Exclude

## **Index**

- General
- Special