

## **Report on a study tour to selected libraries in Israel (May 8-16, 2018)**

In the summer of 2015 a group of Israeli librarians visited our libraries in the German state of North Rhine Westphalia, and this was our return visit.

The German librarians who took part in the study tour were:

**Dr. Erdmute Lapp**, director of Bochum University Library, main host of the Israeli group in 2015, author of the proposal for the study tour to Israel, which was prepared in cooperation with her partners from the Israeli Library Association and the Goethe Institute Israel.

**Viola Springer**, director of the library of the Folkwang University of the Arts, Essen

**Uwe Stadler**, director of Wuppertal University Library

**Ilona Riek**, Muenster Regional and University Library

**Barbara Bauer**, Bochum University Library

**Irene Barbers**, Central Library of Juelich Research Center

**Dr. Ursula Zängl**, deputy director of the Central Library of Medicine – Life Sciences Information Center, Cologne

**Dr. Hans-Jakob Tebarth**, director of Martin-Opitz Library, Herne

One German colleague and 2 foreign colleagues joined the group without funds from BII (the international office of the German Library Association):

Sabine Dassow-Stadler, University Library Duisburg-Essen

Beth Bloom, Seton Hall University Libraries, South Orange, NJ, USA

Zdravka Pejova for the St. Kliment Ohridski Public and University Library, Bitola, Macedonia

Unfortunately, no colleagues from public libraries could join us on this tour.

In the anniversary year, 70 years after the foundation of the state of Israel, we had a chance to visit numerous interesting libraries in Israel, and we were deeply impressed. Our Israeli colleagues prepared a perfect visit and received us with competence and amazing hospitality. Our Macedonian colleague Zdravka Pejova summed up our impressions: The passion with which the libraries that we saw are run, seems to have a spiritual dimension.

The German participants flew directly from Frankfurt to Tel Aviv on May 8, 2018. Beth Bloom arrived on the morning of May 8 and Zdravka Pejova joined the German group at Tel Aviv airport.

In the evening of our arrival day 2 colleagues from the Israeli Library Association waited for us in the hotel and showed us a restaurant with an ocean view near the hotel, which served good and reasonably priced food. (The food in Israel is always good but not always priced reasonably.)

In the morning of May 9 we visited the Beit Ariela library, the main public library of Tel Aviv. Like many of our library buildings, the building of Beit Ariela is a concrete structure from the 1970s – with all the problems connected with such a building. (Bochum UL was also built in this period. Miriam Posner, the director of the Beit Ariela library and I had already exchanged experience concerning our “concrete beauties” in 2015. Our buildings were planned for a classical library before the age of electronic information. Post hoc wiring and W-LAN installation are not always easy with thick concrete walls; we need to expand access to the electricity grid. Library usage has greatly changed: Users spend the whole day in the library and need an adequate infrastructure, the library needs more multiple-function rooms and overall more flexibility.)

A thorough renovation of the Beit Ariela library building is in process. Several areas are already beautifully renovated, others are being prepared for renovation. In the framework of a very professional and aesthetic renovation the whole entrance area will be modernized and renewed. The library has excellent collections, e.g. theater posters and stage decorations, and opens these for the public.

We were especially impressed by the report of a young library staff member – he stressed that he was not a librarian but a culture manager – who coordinates the cultural activities

of library members of all ages. These are a broad spectrum of activities for and with young people (as an example he named poetry slams) and for and with older people (who, for example, want to learn a language or learn about a current topic); the library is the platform for these activities, coordinates them and makes it possible for potential participants to find peers and meet them. This works so well, because the library has the trust of its members. The American colleague David Lanke outlined this idea for public and academic libraries in his brilliant book *Expect more: Demanding better libraries for a complex world*, and here we could see an excellent example.

We spent the afternoon of May 9 in the libraries of Tel Aviv University. The university's campus in the north of the city reminds one of the campus of a Californian university. (The promotional video of the university declares: "At this university we do not have boxes, because everybody thinks outside the box." I am sure this is a strategic advantage not only for the area of research but also for the university's libraries in a rapidly changing information environment.)

Our colleagues from the Sourasky Central Library (which is also the library for the humanities) the Brender-Moss Library for Social Sciences, Management and Education, and the Gitter Smolarz Library for Life Sciences and Medicine received us together and cordially. The library system of Tel Aviv University consists of a central library / library for the humanities and very strong decentral libraries which are strongly oriented towards fulfilling the needs of the departments they are serving; they closely work together. Until recently each library had its own installation of the Aleph library system, which indicates a strong individuality. During this summer they will all migrate to a common version of Alma, the next generation cloud-based library system. It became clear the advantage of the strong individual libraries is that each can optimally serve the special needs of its clientele; our colleagues communicated that they think the discussion of one and two-tiered library systems totally outdated. The challenges which we libraries have to master currently are possible only in close cooperation with our IT service centers and university administrations.

Later in Jerusalem we learnt about a different model of cooperation between the central library and the decentral libraries. Here the collaboration is anchored in the structure of the library system: The library directors of the individual libraries report to the library authority in the university administration. In both universities library cooperation is not only lip service but politically required and supported.

We were very impressed by the one-on-one information consulting service of the Brender Moss Library, available to doctoral students and researchers. (In German university libraries we also offer consulting services for information related problems of all kinds, but we did not have the courage to officially announce one-on-one service for all in a large university.) The buildings of the central and decentral libraries are thoroughly and professionally renovated and equipped with state of the art technology and furniture. In many cases the renovation was partly or completely funded by private donors, and the names of the donors are listed as in American libraries. In the Brender Moss Library the students even have sleeping couches and tea kitchens, where they can prepare hot beverages and warm up food, they can also deposit food in the refrigerator. (All the appliances turn themselves off before anything gets burnt or overheated.) The students are supposed to feel at home which they obviously do. The Cambalista Synagogue and Jewish Heritage Center and its beautiful building designed by the Swiss architect Mario Botto on the campus impressed us very much.

On May 10 our colleague Daniella Levkovit welcomed us to the Ramle Belfer Public Library. The library serves a Jewish and Arabic clientele with media in Hebrew and Arabic and actively promotes communication and understanding between the 2 groups. As an introduction to the intercultural library projects with Jewish and Arabic library members, which the library offers, Daniella Levkovit showed us a film. This excellent and internationally respected film shows the library in the role of enabler and supporter, who helps break down prejudices. There is a wall in the city, which separates the Jewish and Arabic population. In Germany we are also familiar with the topic of the wall and the

prejudices against anyone living on the other side of the wall. Walls seem to encourage prejudices. (If there is a wall, there must be a problem behind it. This is how a small Jewish girl summarized the prejudices which she felt in her environment.) The library staff members asked the children careful and tender questions trying to create awareness of existing prejudices and question them. (Which animals can be found on your side of the wall? Dogs ... And which animals do you think live on the other side of the wall? Snakes ...). After patient work with the children, the path to the common project was smoothed. In Ramle we regretted most that there was no German colleague from a public library in our group. We could have had a much more lively exchange. It is the role of every public library to integrate the inhabitants of its town and to facilitate communication between different groups by encouraging its members to think about the foreign and the familiar. The Ramle Public Library has an open structure and is an attractive place. We liked the city of Ramle as much as the library. We visited one of the former water cisterns, the mosque and the market. At the market we could taste Ramle at different stalls: Turkish burek, cheese, fish, delicious dates and hummus. The bus on this day was provided by the regional Library Emek Hefer, for which we are grateful; the library director Varda Maor and several colleagues from this library participated in the visits of this day. (Varda Maor is a former president of the Association of Public Libraries in Israel and took part in a study tour to German public libraries some years ago.)

In the afternoon of May 10 we were in the Mediatheque and Public Library Holon. The synergy between the Holon Design Museum, the Cinematheque, the Museum of Caricature and the Library is world famous. We had never seen a materials library before with samples of innovative materials which inspire creative ideas. The Mediatheque hummed like a bee hive, there were people of all ages and very many children.

In the evening of May 10 we saw a performance of the Bat Sheva Israeli Dance Company. Some of us had wanted to see this world class group ever since Miriam Posner had showed us photos from the Israeli Dance Company's archive when she was in Bochum 3 years ago. The city of Tel Aviv treated us to the tickets and gave us much pleasure. The piece *Virus* was an adaptation of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*, in which the Israeli audience was offended. We did not understand the texts in Hebrew, of course, but the language of dance is universal, and on the level of performance we could understand the message. It was a very special experience and unforgettable for all of us who love modern dance.

We spent the morning of May 11 in the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center. In the documentation center the colleague Dr. Alex Avraham explained how the database of Holocaust victims and survivors is maintained. After the fall of the Eastern block a large quantity of information could be added to the database. Hans-Jakob Tebarth and I are Slavic librarians and as such we are familiar with the problems inherent in the cataloging and individualisation of Eastern European names, which our colleague described to us (Latin / Cyrillic script; spelling of the language of the country / spelling of the language of a minority in that country, e.g. Romanian spelling / spelling of the Hungarian minority in Romania; affectionate forms of first names ...).

The memorial site was depressing and yet dignified and was flooded with visitors on this Friday afternoon. The Hall of Names and the art exhibition of Jewish artists about the catastrophes of flight and annihilation impressed me very much.

After we checked into our hotel at the Jaffa gate to the Old City of Jerusalem, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem treated us to a wonderful lunch in a restaurant and antiquarian book store.

Our Tower Hotel in Jerusalem was even noisier than the one in Tel Aviv. Large groups of American college kids – their spring term ended in early May – went wild in their summer holiday and did not give themselves nor others a rest. We heard that there are many summer programs for Jewish students in the diaspora. Students always have more energy!

In the evening our colleague Sanda Bercovici invited us to her house in French town to celebrate the beginning of the Sabbath. She organised a wonderful reception with

traditional Sabbath specialties and live music from Moldavia for the whole group and for the Israeli colleagues who live within easy driving distance. Her partner spoke the Sabbath prayer. It was not easy to get a taxi to take us back in the night. Israelis seem to take the Sabbath rest very seriously.

On Saturday, May 12 we had a free day, which we spent in small groups in the old town of Jerusalem. My American friend and colleague Beth Bloom and I sat at the Western Wall for a long time. I had wanted very much for her to share this Israel experience with me. She had taken part in the study tour of the Israeli group in 2015, and she is Jewish from New York and had never been to Israel before. The Western Wall is not only for lamenting (Wailing Wall) but also for thanking.

In the evening Sanda Bercovici gave us a tour through the new town. (She also works as a tourist guide from time to time. She has many competences.) After the walk we sat in a restaurant with live music, where many people celebrated the end of Sabbath.

In the morning of May 13 we visited the National Library on the Edmond J. Safra Campus of the Hebrew University. A spectacular new building for the National Library is being erected near the Knesset, and the National Library plans to move there in 2019. In the lobby of the current building we admired the stained glass windows created by the Israeli artist Mordecai Ardon. (He was born as Max Bornstein in Galicia in 1892 and was educated at the Bauhaus in Weimar among other institutions; the year of his birth was also the year when the National Library was founded.) This masterpiece of stained glass art was created for the National Library between 1980 and 1984; it will stay in the university and will not move to the new building.

The National Library had many visitors on a Sunday. Our colleagues explained that the library successfully performs the role of an institution for identification and as a community interest company and offers numerous events for a broad spectrum of target groups. It houses collections and archives which are extremely valuable for research. Until 2008 the National Library was also the University Library of the Hebrew University. We had a chance to visit the Einstein archive.

In the afternoon of May 13 we visited the attractive Library of Humanities and Social Sciences and its director Naomi Alsheich – she was also a member of the Israeli delegation in 2015 – and the library authority Dr. Eran Vardi on the Mount Scopus campus. And we saw the exhibition *Israel at 70* in the Library of Education and Social Work of the Hebrew University. We regretted not to have enough time for the law library and the Botanical garden. Sanda Bercovici had planned for us to attend a concert in the Mormon University, for which we had no energy left, but at least we saw the spectacular concert hall with a fantastic view on Jerusalem. The sun was going down over the city, the city was shed with golden light and seemed enchanted.

We regret to have disappointed Sanda by refraining from the concert. She meant too well for us: The bus had to take us back to Tel Aviv, we had to re-check into our hotel and we were supposed to start early the next day. Even without the concert we arrived in Tel Aviv very late.

On May 14 the bus picked us up very early and at 9 we arrived in the Public Library Baqua El Garbia. With money from a Jewish donor, the librarian Fatinah Majadleh built up a model public library for the predominantly Arabic population of the city. The library is attractive, open and inviting. Outside the library has a playground and a rose garden. Fatinah Majadleh collected ideas for her library in German public libraries among others. (My Macedonian friend and colleague Zdravka Pejova and I are consulting the public and university Library Bitola in Macedonia, and we received inspiration for the library in Bitola from Fatinah's library as well as from the public library in Ramle.) Fatinah speaks good English, but she let her 17-year-old son translate for us. The female members of the library staff kept themselves in the background, they seemed very shy but also very friendly, they had beautiful smiles. The mayor Abu Moch Morsi made time for our visit and explained the goals for his city: The Arabic population in Israel needs a voice in the Knesset. Education is a precondition of peace, and the library plays an important role

providing it. We all received a pennant with the inscription City of Peace Baqua El-Gharbiya. The librarian seems to be one of the mayor's close staff members, since the library supports community members in all areas of life and especially in the field of (continuing) education and thus supports the mayor's goals for the city. As the speaker of the German group I gave an interview to a TV journalist; I told him that we were deeply impressed by the professional work of this library.

In the afternoon of May 14 we were welcomed in the Western Galilea College by our colleagues Zahava Santo and Elham Hana. Both colleagues had also taken part in the study tour to Germany in 2015. Our colleagues presented the library's service for its students and especially for the university's Arab students, who do not always speak Hebrew well enough to excel in their classes. Everyone who has studied in a language other than his native language knows that one must always work harder than the fellow students who speak the language as their native language; what an excellent idea that the library offers to help here.

After a tour of the library we visited the city of Acco. The old town on a land tongue on the northern edge of the Haifa bay is girded by a citadel from the time of the crusades. The new town has a predominantly Jewish population, the population of the old town are almost exclusively Israeli Arabs, and Acco is one of the most oriental cities in Israel. Before returning to Tel Aviv on the bus we had something to eat in a restaurant near the harbor.

On May 15 the Israeli colleagues and we had a special session in the framework of the Info 2018 conference on the topic of Open Access – Open Science. (Info 2018 is an annual conference for Israeli academic librarians, organized by the information management company Teldan; some public librarians and foreign guests also take part.)

Irene Barbers presented a road map for Open Access, Dr. Ursula Zaengl presented on *Open Access in Life Sciences and Medicine*, and Dr. E. Lapp presented Bochum UL's activities in the area of research data management and the German vision for a *National infrastructure for research data management*. Beth Bloom informed us on the American perspective on Open Access under the title: *US Open: History and Challenges in the Future*.

The Israeli colleagues Prof. Elhanan Adler from the David Yellin Academic College and Sarit Sambol Szasz from Technion in Haifa gave complementary presentations from the Israeli perspective. On the one hand Israeli researchers are very skeptical towards Open Access publishing, on the other hand Technion, which participates in many EU research projects, supports OA in the same ways we do. Edith Falk from the Hebrew University presented the extensive collection of Open Educational Resources, which the National Library of Israel created.

We could see the library of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art only from outside, because our colleague Yifat Keidar was unfortunately prevented from receiving us. But we had an excellent tour through a world class museum. The museum educator showed us selected works of art and through careful questions involved us and made us look closely, think, see more and become aware of the larger context. She mentioned that she received a special training for this kind of spectator involvement while she lived in Washington DC, but she does not really need it in Tel Aviv, because Israelis tend to think aloud about paintings and immediately start to argue about them. That must be wonderful, I also like arguing about art.

In the evening we had a closing event and a reception in the Goethe Institute Israel. The colleague from the Goethe Institute Library Marietta Sander and her intern accompanied us to all Israeli libraries, and we are happy that the Goethe Institute will continue to stay in contact with all the libraries we visited.

Dr. Wolf Iro, the director of the Goethe Institute Israel, Kirsten Praefke-Meron from the German Embassy and Dr. Gabi Dotan from the Israeli Library Association welcomed the group. Marietta Sander presented the work of the Goethe Institute libraries in the world and in Tel Aviv. Uwe Stadler spoke about Johannes Rau's private library as a nucleus for a community center on the campus of Wuppertal University, and Zdravka Pejova

presented our initiatives for modernizing the public and university Bitola. She invited the whole group to visit Bitola and Ohrid.

We had the opportunity to thank our hosts: the Israeli Library Association and the active colleagues who are the friendly faces of this organisation, the Goethe Institute and BII, the International Office of the German Library Association, who had already supported the study tour of the Israeli group in 2015 generously and who also supported this tour, the Israel company Teldan, which invited me to the Info 2014 conference in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, where I met Sanda Bercovici and Toni Buda; all our colleagues who were our hosts in Israeli libraries, the city of Tel Aviv, the Hebrew University, the cities of Ramle and Acco and everyone who contributed to making this tour an unforgettable experience.



On May 16 at 2.45 a.m. the bus took us back to the Ben Gurion airport. Exhausted and rich with unforgettable impressions we arrived in Bochum / in our respective cities.

A large photo gallery can be found at: [ruhr-uni-bochum.sciebo.de/s/OEqpM5FomN41pps](http://ruhr-uni-bochum.sciebo.de/s/OEqpM5FomN41pps)

Erda Lapp, Bochum University Library