



[&lt; Back to Books Section](#)

## **Extensively updated, new edition of Encyclopaedia Judaica hits shelves**

By: Peter Ephross

**JTA**

**NEW YORK**, Oct. 23 (JTA) — The editors of the Encyclopaedia Judaica's new edition confronted a whole new world.

In the more than 30 years since the first edition was published, Jewish life has been revitalized in the former Communist world, Las Vegas and Atlanta have become fast-growing Jewish communities and women have taken a much more active role in Jewish life — and their contributions have been increasingly recognized.

“The original edition did not take into account that 50 percent of Jews are women,” said Judith Baskin, the director of the Jewish studies program at the University of Oregon and the encyclopedia’s assistant editor for women and gender.

The new edition, the encyclopedia’s second, attempts to rectify that oversight with more than 300 new entries on Jewish women, including biographical entries on well-known figures such as former U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.) and entries on lesser-known women like Beatrice Alexander — founder of the Madame Alexander doll collection — and Asenath Barzani, an Iraqi woman trained by her father in the 1600s as a Torah scholar.

These are among roughly 2,700 new entries in the new edition, to be published Dec. 8 by Macmillan Reference USA and Israel’s Keter Publishing. The 22 volumes contain more than 21,000 entries on Jewish life.

A licensed, online version also will be available but the hope is that institutions, and some individuals, will be willing to fork over \$1,995 — the online version will cost a few hundred dollars more — to have everything they wanted to know about the Jews printed, and at their fingertips.

The comprehensiveness offered by the collection is not available in any one online source, says Jay Flynn, a publisher with Thomson Gale, which owns Macmillan Reference USA.

“Certainly you can go out and find a biography of Billy Crystal and you can read it. What we’re really trying to deliver” is accessibility and authority, Flynn says.

Plus, Jews buy books out of proportion to their numbers, says Michael Berenbaum, the encyclopedia’s executive editor.

“It’s the smell of leather and all that stuff,” says Berenbaum, a Holocaust  
scholar known for his work in creating the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

It took a lot of effort to create that “stuff.” Several years in the  
making, the encyclopedia relied on a worldwide team of scholars, including  
some 1,200 new contributors. Luckily, the field of Jewish studies has  
experienced exponential growth in recent years.

“You’re going to a man or woman who has devoted his or her entire life to a  
topic and you say, ‘Give me 500 words,’ ” Berenbaum says.

Those scholars pored over all the entries — from Aachen to Zyrardow — and  
updated 11,000 of them.

Overall, the new edition has more entries covering Jewish life in the Southern  
Hemisphere — Australia and South America, for example — and the sections  
on American Jewish life and the Holocaust have been  
strengthened.

The dilemmas Berenbaum and his team faced about how to cover  
certain topics are well, almost, talmudic. For example, how do you describe  
Jewish life in New York City? Their answer: Give a portrait of several  
neighborhoods, such as the historic German Jewish neighborhood of  
Washington Heights and the contemporary, heavily Orthodox  
neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Borough Park.

“We gave it a lot of flavor, something that the first encyclopedia  
was much less interested in,” Berenbaum says, though he’s quick to praise the  
editors of the first encyclopedia for their prodigious efforts in the  
pre-Internet era.

Also adding contemporary flavor to the new edition are entries discussing

baseball player Shawn Green and the

recent popularization of Kabbalah.

Not surprisingly, Israel is the largest single “entry,” with an entire volume devoted to the Jewish state. Coming in second is the Holocaust.

Even entries on Holocaust-related matters created more questions: Should the noted Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt have her own entry, or should her biography be part of an entry about the highly publicized 2000 trial that Lipstadt won after historian David Irving sued her in a British court, claiming she defamed him in a book by calling him a Holocaust denier?

The decision? Berenbaum is cagey.

“Read the encyclopedia,” he says.