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Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set

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The **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set** stands as one of the most authoritative and comprehensive reference works ever compiled on Jewish life, culture, history, and religion. For scholars, rabbis, students, and anyone with a deep interest in Jewish heritage, this monumental collection is indispensable. Spanning thousands of years and covering every conceivable topic related to the Jewish experience, the 22-volume set represents the culmination of decades of scholarly effort. In an era where digital resources abound, the physical presence of this encyclopedia on a library shelf still commands respect and offers a depth of curated knowledge that is hard to match online. This article explores the origins, contents, unique features, and lasting value of the **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set**, demonstrating why it remains an essential resource for the 21st century.

The History of Encyclopedia Judaica

The journey of the **Encyclopedia Judaica**began long before the 22-volume set we know today. The first edition, published in 1972 in 16 volumes, was a landmark achievement in Jewish scholarship. It was produced by Keter Publishing House in Jerusalem, in collaboration with the Hebrew University and many leading Jewish scholars worldwide. The original editors, Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, set out to create a comprehensive, objective, and academically rigorous encyclopedia that would cover all aspects of Jewish civilization from biblical times to the modern era. The first edition was well-received but quickly became outdated due to the rapid pace of historical discoveries and geopolitical changes, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of archives that revealed new information about the Holocaust and Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

The Need for a Second Edition

By the early 2000s, it was clear that a new edition was necessary. The result was the second edition, published in 2007 by Macmillan Reference USA in association with Keter Publishing House. This edition expanded the original 16 volumes into the **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set**. The decision to increase the number of volumes was driven by the need to incorporate vast amounts of new research, add thousands of new entries, update existing articles, and include more visual materials, maps, and illustrations. The second edition also aimed to be more inclusive, covering topics such as Jewish feminism, the resurgence of Jewish communities in places like the former Soviet Union, and modern Israeli society in greater depth.

What Makes the 22-Volume Set Unique?

The **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set**is not simply a reprint of the first edition with minor changes. It is a thorough revision and expansion. One of its most distinctive features is the inclusion of over 2,200 entirely new entries, along with tens of thousands of updates to existing ones. The set contains more than 25,000 articles in total, written by a team of over 1,200 contributors from around the world, including many of the foremost experts in their fields. The breadth of coverage is staggering: from biblical archaeology to modern Israeli

politics, from Yiddish literature to Kabbalistic mysticism, from the history of anti-Semitism to the biographies of notable Jewish figures in all walks of life.

Comprehensive Index and Appendices

A key component of the set is the index volume (Volume 22), which provides access to the entire encyclopedia through an exhaustive cross-referencing system. The index also includes a detailed table of contents for each volume, a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms, and a timeline of Jewish history. Additionally, the set features over 10,000 photographs, maps, charts, and other illustrations that enhance the text and make complex topics more accessible. The visual materials are particularly valuable for subjects like ancient Jewish art, Holocaust documentation, and the geography of the Land of Israel.

Authoritative Scholarship

The **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set** is widely regarded as the gold standard for Jewish reference works. Its articles are peer-reviewed and meticulously sourced, with extensive bibliographies that guide readers to further reading. The encyclopedia does not shy away from controversial topics; instead, it presents multiple perspectives and encourages critical thinking. For example, entries on the historicity of the Exodus or the nature of Jewish law in different periods offer balanced discussions that reflect the latest academic research. This commitment to scholarly integrity makes the set a trustworthy resource for both academic research and personal study.

Content and Coverage: What You Will Find Inside

The 22 volumes cover an immense range of subjects. Here is a breakdown of the major categories of content:

- History: Comprehensive articles on Jewish history from ancient times to the 21st century, including the biblical period, Second Temple era, rabbinic period, Middle Ages, emancipation, the Holocaust, Zionism, and the State of Israel.
- Religion and Theology: In-depth explanations of Jewish beliefs, practices, prayers, holidays, rituals, and concepts such as God, Torah, mitzvot, and the afterlife. Also includes entries on all major movements: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and secular Judaism.
- Literature and Language: Coverage of Hebrew, Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, and other Jewish languages. Articles on biblical literature, rabbinic literature, medieval poetry, modern Hebrew literature, and diaspora writings.
- Geography and Communities: Profiles of Jewish communities in every country and region, from ancient Babylon to contemporary New York. Detailed entries on cities like Jerusalem, Krakow, and Baghdad.
- Biography: Thousands of biographies of notable Jewish individuals—philosophers (Maimonides, Spinoza), scientists (Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk), artists (Marc Chagall, Philip Roth), political leaders (David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir), and religious figures (Rashi, the Baal Shem Tov).
- Holocaust and Modern History: Thorough coverage of the Holocaust, including entries on camps, ghettos, resistance, perpetrators, and survivors. Also extensive articles on the history of the State of Israel, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israeli society, and Jewish diaspora relations.
- Arts, Sciences, and Culture: Jewish contributions to music, film, theatre, art, architecture, medicine, physics, and more. Includes entries on Jewish museums, festivals, and cuisine.

The encyclopedia also features specialized topics such as Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah and Hasidism), Jewish law (Halakha), the Dead Sea Scrolls, and comparative religion. Every article is written with the goal of being accessible to a general reader while satisfying the rigorous demands of a scholar.

How to Use the Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set

Given the sheer size of the **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set**, knowing how to navigate it efficiently is

important. Here are some practical tips:

1. Start with the Index Volume: Volume 22 contains a comprehensive index that lists every topic, person, and place mentioned in the set. Use it to find the exact location of information.
2. Look for Headwords: Each volume is organized alphabetically by headword. If you know the name of the subject, simply find the corresponding volume and page.
3. Use Cross-References: Articles frequently include cross-references to related entries (indicated by small capitals or "See also" notes). Following these links can deepen your understanding.
4. Consult the Bibliographies: At the end of major articles, you will find bibliographies listing primary and secondary sources. These are invaluable for further research.
5. Browse the Appendices: The set includes various appendices, such as a detailed timeline of Jewish history, a glossary of terms, and a list of all the contributors.

Whether you are a student writing a term paper, a teacher preparing a lesson, or a curious reader exploring your heritage, the encyclopedia is designed to be user-friendly. The second edition also includes a DVD-ROM version (sold separately), which allows for digital searching and keyword queries.

The Importance of the Second Edition in Modern Scholarship

The **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set** (second edition) is particularly significant because it incorporates scholarship that emerged after the 1970s. For example, the fall of the Soviet Union enabled researchers to access archives that had been closed for decades, leading to new understandings of Jewish life under communism and the fate of survivors. Similarly, the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls in full allowed for updated entries on the sectarian communities of the Second Temple period. The second edition also addresses topics that were previously marginalized, such as the experiences of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, Jewish women, and LGBTQ+ Jews. This inclusive approach reflects the evolution of Jewish studies as a field.

Comparison with Digital Resources

While online databases and digital encyclopedias offer convenience and constant updates, the **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set** holds distinct advantages. The physical set provides a curated, stable, and authoritative collection that is free from the noise and ephemeral nature of the internet. It is also a tangible resource for institutions and individuals who value the tradition of serious scholarship. Many libraries consider it a core reference work, and owning the set signals a commitment to preserving Jewish knowledge. Moreover, for those who prefer reading long articles in a print format, the encyclopedia offers an uninterrupted, focused experience.

Who Should Own the Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set?

This reference work is essential for:

- Academic Libraries: Universities with Jewish studies programs, theology schools, and private colleges should have the set on their reference shelves.
- Synagogues and Jewish Community Centers: For congregants and community members seeking information on Jewish traditions, history, and holidays.
- Schools and Public Libraries: Especially those serving diverse communities or with a strong emphasis on teaching world religions.
- Serious Students and Scholars: Anyone pursuing advanced research in Jewish history, religion, or culture will find the encyclopedia an indispensable starting point.
- Private Collectors: Individuals passionate about Jewish heritage may wish to own this comprehensive resource for personal study and family reference.

The price of the set can be substantial, but many libraries acquire it through grants or special purchases. For

individual buyers, the investment is often justified by the depth and longevity of the content.

Conclusion

The **Encyclopedia Judaica 22 Volume Set** remains a towering achievement in Jewish scholarship. Its comprehensive coverage, authoritative articles, and meticulous editing make it the definitive reference work on Jewish civilization. Whether you are exploring the origins of the Hebrew alphabet, the history of the Jews in China, or the intricacies of the Passover Seder, this encyclopedia provides reliable, well-researched answers. In a world of fleeting digital information, the physical presence of these 22 volumes serves as a lasting monument to Jewish learning and tradition. For anyone serious about understanding Judaism and the Jewish people, this set is not just a collection of books—it is an essential gateway to a rich and complex heritage.

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