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Collect to destroy. The annihilation of German and Polish Jewish research libraries¹

Abstract: Jewish research libraries emerged in the wake of the Jewish Enlightenment and the Jewish studies initiated subsequently. They formed the foundation of this new field of knowledge, rapidly developing by Jewish scholars. The subject of this article is the history of three German libraries – one in Breslau and two in Berlin – and four libraries in the Second Polish Republic: one in Warsaw, two in Vilnius, and one in Lublin. After introducing these Jewish research libraries from their foundation to Hitler's rise to power (1933) and, respectively, to the outbreak of war (1939), the author describes their fate during the years of Nazi rule. Closed, confiscated, destroyed, looted, deported, used in perverse ways – all seven ceased to exist. The subject of the second section of the article is the postwar distribution of the volumes surviving from these Jewish libraries. The article closes with reflections on the study of the provenance of the survived books, dispersed in collections on several continents, as a means of saving the libraries from which they originated from oblivion.

Keywords: Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung zu Breslau – Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, Berlin – Bibliothek der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin – Main Judaic Library at the Great Synagogue of Warsaw – Mathias Strashun Library in Vilnius Jidiszer Wisnszaftlecher Institut (JIWO/YIVO), Vilnius and New York – Jeszywas Chachmei Lublin (Chachmei Lublin Yeshiva) – Nazi looting – post-war restitution policy

Słowa kluczowe: Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung zu Breslau – Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, Berlin – Bibliothek der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin – Główna Biblioteka Judaistyczna przy Wielkiej Synagodze, Warszawa – Biblioteka im. Mathiasa Straszuna, Wilno – Jidiszer Wisnszaftlecher Institut (YIVO), Wilno i Nowy Jork – Jeszywas Chachmej Lublin (Lubelska Szkoła Mędrców) – nazistowska grabież – powojenna polityka restytucyjna

1 The article is the Polish extended version of the paper delivered on 31.03.2022 at the conference at the German Historical Institute Warsaw entitled *Das „Bibliomigratorische“ im deutsch-polnischen Kontext seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*.

Jews are called “People of the Book”. For centuries, their life has focused on the Torah and the Talmud. In the Talmud, not only the acquisition of books but also their lending and borrowing is regarded as a charitable activity². Traces of the first Jewish library, discovered in Wadi Qumran, date back to the time of the Second Temple of Jerusalem (539 BC – 70 AD). In the Middle Ages and later centuries, there were famous book collections of great Jewish scholars and rabbis. Resources of various sizes of religious and rabbinical literature have also been found “for ages” in synagogues, *beit ha midrash*, *cheders*, and *yeshivas*. They served the male section of the Jewish diaspora, treated with respect but utilitarian, as demonstrated by the rite of *genizah*, which does not exist in any other culture, i.e. a kind of burial of sacred books destroyed, among other things, as a result of their intensive use. The latter was often associated with a lack of concern for the state of preservation of even the oldest manuscripts of early printed books, as deplored in the 20th century by Jewish historians and bibliophiles such as Simon Dubnow (1860–1941) and Meir Balaban (1877–1942).

Jewish research libraries, however, are a phenomenon of modernism, as are the public libraries of Jewish communities and various organisations later on. They arose in the German cultural milieu in the wake of *Haskalah* (i.e., the Jewish Enlightenment) and the so-called “*Wissenschaft des Judentums*” born from it, that is, Jewish studies (in Polish *judaistyka*). They were an integral part of the scientific Jewish institutions dealing with this new discipline.

Germany until 1939

Breslau

The first of these institutions was the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau (*Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung zu Breslau*; hereafter JTS or Breslau Rabbinical Seminary). It was opened in 1854, after almost twenty years of fruitless attempts to establish a chair of Jewish theology at the University of Breslau initiated by Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810–1874). The objective of the JTS was to synchronise the tradition of Jewish thought with the categories of the modern humanities and to educate students in this spirit. The complete freedom of research was postulated “based on positive and historical Judaism”, which was required of lecturers and students³. The Breslau Seminary created a model of higher rabbinical education and became a radiating

2 Quoted after: M. Kirchhoff, *Häuser des Buches. Bilder Jüdischer Bibliotheken*, Leipzig 2002, p. 13.

3 E.P. [E. Pessen], *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar*, [in:] *Jüdisches Lexikon. Ein enzyklopädisches Handbuch des jüdischen Wissens in vier Bänden*. Vol. 3, begr. G. Herlitz, Berlin 1929, p. 466.

centre of modern orthodoxy throughout the Jewish diaspora. Many later well-known scholars and rabbis graduated from the college. By the time of its closure in 1938, more than 700 students were studying there, often combining it with university studies; around 250 of them obtained a rabbinical degree. Throughout its existence, the JTS published a highly reputable monthly magazine, “*Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*”, presenting the results of academic research and each year a comprehensive report on its activities⁴.

The library of the Breslau Seminary housed valuable monuments of Jewish writing together with contemporary literature on Judaism and Jewish history. The foundation of the book collection was the famous collection of Judaica created by the merchant, poet, and bibliophile from Trieste, Leon Vita Saraval (1771–1851). It consisted of 63 Hebrew manuscripts (and six Latin ones), the oldest dating from the 13th century. They came from various parts of Europe, the Orient and North Africa, representing all three strands of Jewish tradition: Sephardic, Latino, and Ashkenazic. Alongside illuminated miniatures and ornaments, they contained various styles and types of Hebrew writing. The collection of 48 incunabula, included particularly beautiful ones from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In addition, the Saraval collection contained 1373 Hebrew and Latin early printed books⁵.

Catalogued in 1853 by the bibliographer and orientalist Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907), they were acquired by the Jonas Fraenckel Foundation a year before the JTS opened⁶. *Spiritus movens* of this transaction was the historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), one of the best-known lecturers at the Seminary, where he worked for 37 years until his death. Graetz, who was also a professor at the University of Breslau, supervised the professional running of the library and its development at JTS. From its inception, the seminar had an impressive four-storey building with rooms adapted for library purposes and a reading room⁷. Thanks to statutorily provided funds for the ongoing purchase of scholarly Judaic literature, as well as numerous donations from Jewish scholars and bibliophiles, the book collection of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary numbered

4 Digitised JTS reports are available at the website *Compact Memory* of the Frankfurt University Library, see: *Jahresberichte des Jüdisch-theologischen Seminars “Fraenckelscher Stiftung”*, [online] <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/cm/periodical/titleinfo/2720904> [accessed 07.02.2023].

5 Figures after: B. Zuckermann, *Catalog der Bibliothek des Breslauer jüdisch-theologischen Seminars von 190 seltenen hebraeischen Handschriften und 263 verschiedenen Ausgaben der Bibel und ihrer Theile. Zum Gebrauch für Theologen, Orientalisten und Antiquare*, Breslau 1876, p. I.

6 M. Steinschneider, *Catalogue de la bibliotheque de litterature hebraique et orientale et d’auteurs hebreux de feu Mr. Leon V. Saraval*, Trieste 1853.

7 The now JTS building at 18 Wallstrasse 18 (now P. Włodkowic street) was located near the buildings of the Breslau Jewish community and the White Stork Synagogue (Synagoge Zum Weißen Storch). The building was demolished in the 1950s.

more than 100 Hebrew manuscripts, 50 incunabula, and about 30,000 (40,000, according to other sources) books by the end of the 1930s. The growing holdings of the library, including its most valuable collections, were recorded annually in JTS reports. This is also confirmed by documents of the partially rescued archive of the Breslau Seminary stored at the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw. Among the latter is a catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts prepared by Bernard Weinryb (1900–1982) when he served as librarian at the Seminary and compiled with David Loewinger (1904–1980) in 1936; in 1965 it was published in a scholarly expanded version by them⁸.

Berlin

In 1872, almost twenty years after the establishment of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Eng. College of Judaic Studies; hereafter HWJ) was founded⁹. One of its founders and first lecturers was A. Geiger, the acting rabbi of Berlin from 1870. Like his former efforts in Breslau, Jewish intellectuals in the Prussian capital also failed in their longstanding efforts to establish a chair of Judaic studies at the Berlin university. In later years, in addition, the HWJ was deprived of its university status twice. The first time was between 1883 and 1922, when it was downgraded to the level of a “semi-college”, known as the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Eng. Educational Institution for Judaic Studies). It was downgraded for the second time after the Nazis came to power.

The basis of the activities of Berlin HWJ was the impartial research and teaching enshrined in its statute, unrelated to any religious orientation and covering the full spectrum of the study of Judaism. Its motto was its independence. It

is one of the bases for the development of this type of institution; [only] independently of the instances of the state and the [denominational] community, also independently of any party aspirations, and regardless of dissenting and ad hoc views, it can flourish in the pure pursuit of true knowledge and bear noble fruits for the continuation and development of Judaism¹⁰.

8 D.S. Loewinger, B.D. Weinryb, *Jiddische Handschriften in Breslau*, [s. l.] 1936; eidem, *Catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts in the library of the Juedisch-Theologisches Seminar in Breslau*, Wiesbaden 1965.

9 In 1873 the Rabbinerseminar für das Orthodoxe Judentum was founded in Berlin, in 1877 Landes-Rabbinerschule in Budapest, in 1893 Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt in Vienna. The JTS in Breslau was their model and inspiration, as was for the Jewish Theological Seminary founded in New York in 1886.

10 Quotation from the founding Declaration of the HWJ (Gründungsaufruf) of 1869, after I. Kaufmann, *Die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1872–1942)*, Berlin 2006, p. 14: “Jüdische Miniaturen“. All quotations from German and English translations to Polish by the author of the article.

According to these assumptions, no rabbi in office could be a member of the HWJ Board of Trustees and its chairs were to be filled simultaneously by representatives of both Conservative and Liberal options. Lecturers were required to have academic qualifications; their religious views were a private matter. Students could be Jewish or Christian, male or female. No fees were charged to students.

However, the independence of the Hochschule programme meant its continued financial uncertainty. The interests on the founding capital were insufficient, so the HWJ Board of Trustees had to constantly raise additional funds from patrons and donors, both for the salaries of lecturers and scholarship support for students. Also for the library, which was an important pillar of the institution. Despite budgetary difficulties, thanks to donations and bequests, the HWJ book collection amounted to 21,000 volumes and 115 historical Hebrew manuscripts by the time the Hochschule moved into its new premises on Artilleriestraße in 1907. Fifteen years later, that is, on the institutions' fiftieth anniversary, it was already over 35,000 volumes, and in 1936 almost 60,000¹¹.

For Franz Kafka, who was a student at the preparatory course (Präpanderie) of the Berlin Hochschule at the turn of 1923 and 1924, it represented "a place of peace in troubled Berlin and in the troubled regions of the spirit. The entire premises, beautiful lecture theatres, a large library, peace and quiet, good heating, few students, and all for free"¹².

During the years of the Weimar Republic, the HWJ was at the centre of Jewish intellectual life in Berlin. The total number of its students by 1933 is estimated at 600, and this does not include auditors¹³. In 1932 alone, celebrating its 60th anniversary, the institution had 155 permanent students, including 27 women, as well as many auditors, although the academic training of rabbis and religious teachers, initially only one of many of the Hochschule aims, gradually became its main task¹⁴. The liberal character of the HWJ is demonstrated by the case of its student Regina Jonas (1902–1944), who, after obtaining her diploma as a teacher of religion in 1930, decided to receive a semikhah, i.e., to undergo

11 Data after M. Kirchoff, op. cit., p. 88.

12 F. Kafka, *Postkarte an Robert Klopstock*, Berlin-Steglitz, 19.12.1923, quoted after I. Kaufmann, op. cit., cover p. 2. The preparatory course in the first decade of the HWJ's existence initially served to compensate for deficiencies in general education and insufficient mastery of German, Latin, and Greek among students from Eastern Europe (Ostjuden). In the 1920s, Präpanderie was reintroduced, radically changing its scope to the study of Hebrew and the basics of Judaism, with Eastern European Jews being exempted.

13 Ibidem, p. 19. Held at the HWJ, the "open Monday lectures attracted large audiences" G. Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem. Jugenderinnerungen*, erweiterte Fassung, aus dem Hebräischen von M. Brocke und A. Schatz, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 73.

14 S. Ronen, *Die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums 1872–1942*, [online] <https://www.hagalil.com/bet-debora/journal/ronen.htm> [accessed 08.02.2023]; on the change in the Hochschule's profile see: *Encyclopedia judaica: das Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. 8: Hesse-Jerusalem, ed. J. Klatzkin, I. Elbogen, Berlin 1931, pp. 159–160.

the rite of ordination as a rabbi, and submitted a theoretical dissertation serving this purpose, which was accepted¹⁵.

In the final period of the existence of the Hochschule, from the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 until 1940, 130 students still matriculated there, but gradually both they and the lecturers went into exile (as long as this was still possible), and the institution lost its importance. Only in 1935 was its programme briefly expanded to include open lecturers and scientific discussions by scholars who, as “non-Aryans”, had lost their jobs at the universities and scientific institutions of the Third Reich. After the Crystal Night pogrom, the HWJ was forced to drastically reduce its activities and holdings, although it was not closed down at the time – unlike the JTS in Breslau, as well as the Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary (Rabbinerseminar für das Orthodoxe Judentum) founded in Berlin a year after the HWJ, and with a library stock of 15,000 volumes in the 1930s. Both Jewish colleges had their headquarters in the twentieth century on the same street, Oranienburger Straße, located near the monumental New Synagogue and the Jewish Community in Berlin¹⁶.

And it was on Oranienburger Straße that the most well-attended Jewish library was located. This was the Library of the Berlin Jewish Community (Bibliothek der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin), opened in 1902. Available to Jewish and non-Jewish readers, it was complementary to Berlin’s regular public libraries, covering most of the reading needs of German-speaking Jews. Modelled on the New York Public Library, it combined a research and popular profile. In 1905, Rabbi Moritz Stern (1864–1939) became its librarian. The library, created from the small book collection of the German-Israeli Union of Communities (Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindebund), under Stern’s leadership, which he ran for a quarter century, grew to 70,000 volumes, becoming one of the largest Jewish libraries in Europe in the 1930s¹⁷. Gradually, the profile of its collection, particularly in the area of popular publications, expanded considerably given the growing number of East European Jews (Ostjuden) among its readers, who spoke Yiddish better than German, as well as Polish and Russian. The growing number of users led Stern to establish nine branches of the library in different districts of the city. In addition, in 1917 he enriched

15 The ordination of Jonas did not take place due to the death of her promoter, Talmud exponent Eduard Baneth (1896–1930), and the HWJ did not continue with the proceedings. Jonas was ordained in 1935 as the first female rabbi; she was murdered in Auschwitz. A second woman was not ordained as a rabbi until 1972 in the United States of America.

16 It was Artilleriestraße, today Tucholskystraße. The HWJ was located in building 14, while the Rabbinical Seminary was located in building 31.

17 In 1925, Szymon Dubnow spent the years 1922–1933 in Berlin donated his library brought from Kaunas and containing 5.000 volumes to the BJGB; after: M. Kirchhoff, op. cit., p. 83. Various sources give different numbers of volumes held by the Library: from 48,00 volumes in 1927 to as many as 100.000 in 1938.

its headquarters with an art collection. Later, the eminent expert on Jewish mysticism, the philosopher Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), recalled that this “very important and well-stocked library”.

Even adolescents like me could register, as long as they had a card from their father or mother [...]. Over the years, I was one of the most avid readers of this library, to which I owe much of my Jewish education. The director of the library, Dr Moritz Stern, hovered at an unattainable height, but the lady in charge of the lending library, who at first was surprised by this indefatigable fourteen-year-old, soon turned into an almost maternal guardian¹⁸.

The Second Polish Republic

The readers of the research Jewish libraries of Breslau and Berlin, the students of the institutions of which they were a part, were many Ostjuden, i.e. East European Jews descended from their community of a few tens of thousands in Berlin¹⁹. Their numbers, however, were negligible in relation to the Jewish masses living within the borders of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (with the exception of the Prussian partition) and, from 1918, in the independent Polish state. In these areas, the development of Jewish public libraries was very different from that of Germany. One of the reasons for this was that the overwhelming majority of local Jews spoke Yiddish and belonged to a religious orthodoxy. From the turn of the twentieth century, public libraries were established *en masse*, especially in the Russian partition. This was due, among other things, to the growing national consciousness in the Jewish community. This was expressed both in the flourishing of Yiddish literature and in the emergence and attractiveness of such ideological and socio-political trends as Zionism, Yiddishism, and socialist Bundism. Organisations associated with these movements ran small public libraries or even their networks in many Polish cities and towns (shtetls), bringing together large number of active readers and supporters. According to the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, in 1930 there were 748 educational Jewish libraries in the country, that is, libraries whose stock (estimated at more than 860,000 volumes) consisted predominantly of books in Yiddish and Hebrew²⁰. By contrast, according to Jewish estimates in the Second Polish Republic, taking into account only libraries with collections of more than a thousand volumes, there

18 G. Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 40–41.

19 During the Weimar Republic, approximately 25% of the 170,000–200,000 Jewish inhabitants of Berlin were East European Jews.

20 Z. Gaca-Dąbrowska, *Bibliotekarstwo II Rzeczypospolitej*, Wrocław 1983, p. 183 – Table 12: Educational libraries by language of the book collection. According to the table, Jewish libraries accounted for 8,8% of all educational libraries in the Second Republic.

were 251 Jewish libraries with a total stock of 1,650,000 volumes²¹. Of this number, there were only three large Jewish public libraries of a scholarly nature: one in Warsaw and two in Vilnius. This was also the nature of the Ezra library (Hebrew: *help*) in Kraków, which was smaller than these libraries, with about 6,000 books, but extremely carefully selected. It was the first secular Judaic library on Polish territory. It was founded in 1899, with the support of the Kraków religious community, by a graduate of the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, Rabbi Abraham Ozjasz Thon (1870–1936), a prominent Zionist activist and from 1919 until his death a member of the Polish Parliament²².

Vilnius

This city, sometimes called Lithuanian Jerusalem, which was home to many Jewish publishing houses and printing works, also deserved to be called the centre of Jewish library culture²³. Opened to the public in 1892 in the vicinity of the Old Synagogue, the M. Strashun Library was from the beginning one of the most important centres of Jewish intellectual life in the city²⁴. The multi-lingual book collection of almost 6,000 volumes, according to the last will of its founder Mathiyahu Strashun (1817–1885), a scholar, polyglot and bibliophile, city councillor, and important member of the Vilnius religious community, became the property of the community and formed the basis of the library named after him²⁵. Its original collection reflected the intellectual horizons of the owner and his interest in Talmud and Kabbalah studies but also in philosophy, history, and astronomy. In 1901 Strashun Library was moved to a two-storey building

21 D. Shavit, *Jüdische Bibliotheken in den polnischen Ghettos der NS-Zeit*, [in:] *Bücher und Bibliotheken in Ghettos und Lagern, 1933–1945*, ed. R. Dehmlow, Hannover 1991, p. 59. For detailed data on Jewish libraries in the Second Republic see D. Shavit, *Hunger for the Printed Word. Books and Libraries in the Jewish Ghettos of Nazi-Occupied Poland*, Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 1997, pp. 8–11.

22 See M. Rausz, *Biblioteka i Czytelnia Ezra w Krakowie*, [in:] *Kraków – Lwów: książki, czasopisma, biblioteki*. Vol. 7, ed. H. Košetka, Kraków 2005, pp. 148–157. Before the war the Ezra collection was stored in the building of the Kraków Jewish community and the B'nei B'rith association, in the second half of the 1940 it was deposited by the Germans in the building of the Jagiellonian Library and taken over by the Staatsbibliothek Krakau. They were estimated at the time to be around 3900 volumes. In the 1970s, several hundred volumes from Ezra's book collection found their way, thanks to the efforts of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews, to a branch of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków – History and Culture of the Jews located in the Old Synagogue in Kraków.

23 M. Kirchhoff, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

24 It was the world's first Jewish public library.

25 Mathias Strashun is considered to represent the last generation of Midrashic scholars directly descended from the famous Gaon of Vilnius (1720–1797), one of the most prominent Jewish thinkers of the 18th century. See D. Rabinowitz, *The Lost Library. The Legacy of Vilna's Strashun Library in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Waltham Massachusetts 2019, p. 35 et seq.

erected for this purpose in the courtyard of the largest synagogue in Vilnius. By 1927, the library's holdings had grown to 19,000 volumes and by the late 1930s to 30–35,000, 80% of which were Hebraica, mainly rabbinical, often of exceptional value. From 1928, Vilnius University transferred all obligatory Hebrew and Yiddish copies it received to the Strashun Library. The library's collections were never catalogued. Its legendary librarian Chajkel Łuński (1881–1942/43) was regarded as their “walking catalogue”²⁶. He must have had a phenomenal memory and orientation, with which he served the more than two hundred readers who visited the library's reading room every day between the wars²⁷. Among them was in 1938/1939 also the later American historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz (1915–1990), who recalled years later:

You could see the conflict between the worlds of tradition and modernity played out every day in a kind of dumb show in the reading room of the Strashun Library [...] Because the library was rich in Talmudic and rabbinic works, it was used by pious Jews for advanced study. But the wealth of its holdings in other areas of Judaica also attracted secular scholars and university students. Consequently, on any day you could see, seated at the two long tables in the reading room, venerable long-bearded men, wearing hats, studying Talmudic texts, elbow to elbow with bareheaded young men and even young women, bare-armed sometimes on warm days, studying their texts²⁸.

The library of the Jewish Scientific Institute (Yiddisher Wisnszaftlecher Institut), or YIVO for short²⁹, founded in 1925, had a different character and a completely unique profile. The idea of establishing the Institute expressed

26 Łuński worked in the Strashun Library from 1895. It was largely thanks to his commitment that its collection grew to 50,000 volumes (as for 1940) in the more than 40 years of his work. The library was his passion, he even worked in it on Shabbat. Łuński was also an expert in the history of Jewish Vilnius and the author of publications on this subject often referred to as the “Guardian of Lithuanian Jerusalem”. After: D. Rabinowitz, op. cit., pp. 67–68.

27 The library was open seven days a week, except that on the Sabbath readers were forbidden to write. It was not uncommon for the reading room to be overcrowded to such an extent that one had to wait until a seat became available, readers sat on the floor and even two used one chair. Łuński wrote in a 1935 article that there were 230 readers a day, 25% of whom were women. Correspondingly, 40% were religious students, 25% secular students, 20% writers and teachers, 15% workers. Literature used: 40% rabbinic, 25% *haskala* in Hebrew, 20% in Yiddish (of which 50% fiction, 20% scientific, 40% newspapers and journals, 5% Judaica): *ibidem*, pp. 69–72.

28 L.S. Dawidowicz, *From that place and time. A memoir 1938–1947*, New York–London 1989, p. 119.

29 In foreign-language literature, the abbreviation YIVO is commonly used; in Polish usually JIWO; in sources it also appears as IWO, YVO, YWO. From June 1940, when Vilnius was occupied by the Soviets, the headquarters of the Institute became – by correspondence between Max Weinreich (in New York) and Zelig Kalmanowicz (in Vilnius) – its New York branch, operating under the name YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute. In 1955, the Institute changed its name to YIVO Institute of Jewish Research: after B. Shilo, *Ein Drama in Akten. Die Restitution der Sammlungen des Wilnaer YIVO*, Göttingen 2022, pp. 125 and 130.

the conviction of its founders about the coming of time of cultural flourishing of Yiddish, which was the language of 11 million Jews worldwide, i.e. 70% of their population. Its vigorous development among them began in the second half of the nineteenth century and made it an alternative to traditional Judaism. The extraordinary flowering of Yiddish literature and theatre, the eruption of the Yiddish-language press both in Eastern Europe and in the diaspora of East European Jews, above all in the United States of America, up to the establishment of Yiddish education led to a project among Jewish intellectuals who regarded Yiddish as their mother tongue to create an academic institution to accompany the observed processes³⁰. The mission of the YIVO was thus to comprehensively study and document this so-called Yiddishkeit. Its precursor and spiritual patron was the eminent researcher of Jewish history, culture, and language, and at the same time the political activist and preacher of Jewish autonomy, Simon Dubnow, who had already founded the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society in St Petersburg in 1906.

The philological-ethnographic branch, which was central to the YIVO's activities, was located in Vilnius, with others in Warsaw and Berlin, and branches in New York, Paris, and Buenos Aires. The Institute's archival, museum, and library collections played a primary role in its research. These were housed in the Institute's building, built with contributions from the Polish and international Jewish community, in Vilnius, a city where Yiddish was the language not only of the masses, but also of the Jewish elite. It was opened in 1935 during the YIVO World Congress, which was patronised by members of the Institute's Board of Trustees: Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and, of course, S. Dubnow. The latter and Marc Chagall were guests of honour at the congress³¹.

Lucy Dawidowicz, who came from New York in 1938 as a scholarship holder for an internship at the Vilnius YIVO, described years later her impressions during her first visit to the Institute's building, which was shown to her by its then director Zelig Kalmanowicz (1881–1944):

30 "Even if YIVO's founders did not often articulate that goal, they wanted to redress the wrongs done to Yiddish, which from its earliest days had always been treated with the contempt as the vernacular of the common people, decried as a corrupt "jargon" of German, denied its standing as a pedigreed language with its own grammar and syntax. For generations Jews who wanted to achieve success in the world shunned Yiddish, as if it were the impediment to their advancement. Even at best, Yiddish was regarded as a vehicle for a folk culture, never as a medium for high intellectual endeavor. The YIVO aimed to change both the image and the reality", wrote Dawidowicz, *op. cit.* p. 79. The first advocate of Yiddish as a distinct national language in opposition to the traditional view of it as a dialect of Ashkenazi Jews was Chaim Żytłowski (1865–1943), who advocated the systematisation and study of Yiddish language and literature understood as pillars of modern secular Jewish self-awareness. The symbolic culmination of this stance he inaugurated was the recognition in 1927 by the world Pen Club of a Yiddish branch, even though it was not an official language of any country, with headquarters in Warsaw, Vilnius, and New York.

31 M. Kirchhoff, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

To my big-city eyes its wooden façade gave it the look of a large country house (...) We entered an enormous vestibule. I gasped with astonished pleasure at its uncluttered spaciousness. This was not at all like the interior of a provincial country house (...) corridors of the vestibule led to the library stacks, archives, exhibit rooms and a public reading room. This was plainly an institutional building that prided itself an understatement.(...) On the main floor, an impressive bibliological center was housed in a high-ceilinged room which shelves all the way up to the top, layered with neat piles of folders as far as the eye could see. It contained over 220,000 registered items. We took a look into the library stacks, containing some 40,000 books, including rare books. The Press Archives, a separate room, held about 10,000 volumes of Jewish newspapers from many countries and in many languages. Other rooms contained massive archival collections of manuscripts and autographs, of leaflets, pamphlets, and Jewish communal records, some dating back to Vilna's early Jewish history. Kalmanovich (sic!) told me about some of the YIVO's special collections gathered by YIVO (sic!) committees – folklore materials, Yiddish linguistic and terminological materials, and an archive of over 300 autobiographies of young Jews in Eastern Europe, which served as the basis for sociopsychological research. We looked into the Theater Museum with its permanent exhibit. Artifacts of the Yiddish theatre – playbills, posters, and programs (sic!), manuscripts and working scripts of Yiddish plays- were collected and displayed here. The public reading room had about six or eight reading tables, each seating four persons. I was impressed that each seat had an own built-in tubular fluorescent lamp – something you didn't have in the main reading rooms of the New York Public Library. Upstairs on the second floor were individual study rooms for the research fellows of the Aspirantur, a large conference room, and the offices of YIVO's executives³².

In summation of these impressions, Dawidowicz wrote:

Everything about the YIVO – its location, its landscaped setting, its modern design, the gleaming immaculateness of the place – delivered a message. I interpreted it to mean that the YIVO had class, was no moldering institution, but a place from which distinction and excellence would issue. Even more: The YIVO was no seedy relic of the past; it belonged to the future.

“The founders of the YIVO were determined to raise the status of Yiddish and its culture not just among Jews, but also – perhaps especially – in the worldwide scholarly community”³³. Undoubtedly, the collection of the Vilnius YIVO, with its unique profile and resources incomparable to any other, was a kind of ongoing research laboratory leaning toward the future and charting a new course in Jewish studies. By the outbreak of war, only 20% of them had been catalogued³⁴.

32 L.S. Dawidowicz, op. cit., pp. 78–79.

33 Ibidem, p. 79.

34 J. Borin, *Embers of the soul: the destruction of Jewish books and libraries in Poland during World War II*, “Libraries & Culture: Journal of Library History” 1993, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 445.

During the first Soviet occupation of Vilnius (15.06.1940, from 3.08. that year officially 16th Republic of the USSR – 25.06.1941) both institutions were nationalised. The Strashun Library became the Municipal Public Library No. 4 and the YIVO was given the status of a state scientific institute of Jewish culture, becoming part of the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian SSR. In both libraries, access to the religious, Zionist, and critical literature of the USSR was excluded³⁵.

Warsaw

However, the Main Judaic Library (Pol. Główna Biblioteka Judaistyczna; GBJ) at the Great Synagogue in Warsaw was widely regarded as the most highly regarded Jewish library with a research profile in prewar Poland. Its origins date back to 1860 and are associated with the Warsaw circle of maskilim, i.e. supporters of Jewish enlightenment. However, it was not opened until 1879 as the library of the Great Reform Synagogue in Tłomackie, a year after the impressive edifice of that temple was opened. From 1886, the preacher of this synagogue, and from 1904 also its honorary librarian, was Samuel Poznański (1864–1921), who had been ordained as a rabbi at the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. Poznański brought about an orderly arrangement of the holdings and, in view of the successively growing book collection, which did not fit in the rooms of the synagogue building intended for this purpose, initiated efforts to build a new library building. His efforts were successfully continued by the eminent historian Moses Schorr (1874–1941), who had been rabbi of the Great Synagogue since 1923 and a member of the Senate of the Republic since 1935. In 1927, a competition for the architectural design of the library building was announced, won by Edward Eber (1880–1953). A year later, the foundation stone for its construction was laid in the immediate vicinity of the Great Synagogue. In 1936, the modern, representative edifice of the Main Judaic Library (as its official name now sounded) was opened, with functional storage rooms, a reading room with one hundred seats, and systematically maintained catalogues. It was built as M. Schorr emphasised in his inaugural address, “thanks to the efforts of Jewish society, with the support of government authorities, municipal and

35 The Soviets planned to merge the collections of all the Jewish libraries in Vilnius (including the largest, the Mafitsei Haskala (Society for the Popularization of Enlightenment) library, founded in 1910, with popular literature in many languages); Łuński protested, arguing that the Strashun Library was the National Library for Jews. The merger did not take place due to the outbreak of the German-Soviet war; after: D. Rabinowitz, op. cit., pp. 77–78; see also D. Shavit, *Hunger...*, pp. 38–39.

religious institutions”³⁶. Schorr drew attention to the symbolic, educational, and scientific significance of the Library. He said that the spiritual treasure of national writing gathered there, “referred to as Judaic knowledge, constitutes for our generation one of the fundamental factors in the process of our national revival”³⁷. In this context, he mentioned that the building would also “house the Institute of Judaic Studies (Pol. Instytut Nauk Judaistycznych; INJ), which today is the most serious centre of scientific research work in the field of Jewish knowledge and, at the same time, the only higher education in this field in the country”³⁸. Schorr, the rector of INJ since its foundation in 1928, set ambitious and far-reaching goals for the Institute “so that, especially since the intensity of scientific work among German Jews had weakened under the influence of the new political regime, it would achieve a worthy and deserved place in the race of scientific production”³⁹.

The INJ’s own book collection was relatively modest, but the entire GBJ was at the Institute’s disposal. Just before the outbreak of war it had 40,000 volumes, including 150 valuable historical manuscripts, 10 incunabula, many early printed books, and numerous pinkasim in addition to rabbinic literature and scholarly publications in Jewish studies⁴⁰. The GBJ received a legal deposit of all Hebrew and Jewish publications published in the Second Republic. A 1934 survey gives an interesting insight into the nature of the collection: of the total of 34,700 volumes, 6,000 were in Yiddish, 18,460 in Hebrew, 500 in Polish, and 9,740 in other languages⁴¹.

Lublin

Among the Jewish research libraries in prewar Poland, it is impossible to omit the largest religious library belonging to the Talmudic higher education institution

36 M. Schorr, *Przemówienie inauguracyjne wygłoszone przez rabina prof. d-ra Mojżesza Schorra Senatora Rzeczypospolitej na uroczystości otwarcia gmachu Głównej Biblioteki Judaistycznej przy Wielkiej Synagodze w Warszawie dnia 22 kwietnia 1936 roku*, Warszawa 1936, p. 2. Available at polona.pl

37 Ibidem, p. 4.

38 Ibidem, p. 6.

39 Ibidem.

40 Pinkasim is a book in which records of the history of the community and its internal system, protocols of meetings, etc. were placed. Pinkasim were also kept by funeral fraternities, religious associations, guilds and other social organisations. They are one of the most valuable sources for Jewish history, especially the history of the communities.

41 D. Shavit, *Jüdische Bibliotheken...*, p. 61. These data refer collectively to the collections of the two Warsaw Judaic Libraries: Main and INJ. In a later publication, Shavit gives figures for November 1938: out of a total of 34,047 GBJ volumes, there were 23,787 in Hebrew and Yiddish, the remaining 10,260 in other languages: D. Shavit, *Hunger...*, p. 21.

known as Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin (Yeshivas of the Sages of Lublin)⁴². Its initiator and *spiritus movens* was Rabbi Yehuda Majer Shapira (1887–1933), a member of the authorities of the Orthodox Agudas Israel party and a member of the Polish Parliament and chairman of the Rabbinical College at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment. He was able to raise a huge amount of money for this purpose in the mid-1920s, at home, and in a fund-raising drive conducted with vigour among Orthodox Jewish circles in western Europe and the United States of America. Thanks to them, the six-storey multifunctional building of the Lublin yeshiva was opened in 1930⁴³. Shapira planned to create a Central Torah Library in it⁴⁴. On the basis of the collections gathered here, an anthology of the most important works of rabbinic literature was to be compiled in cooperation between students of the Lublin University and scholars from all over the world. Its first volume was ready in the year of the originator's death⁴⁵. The library resources of Chachmei Yeshiva, among which rabbinic literature predominated and there were undoubtedly many valuable manuscripts and early printed books, increased from 12–13,000 volumes in the year of the opening of the university to more than 30,000 on the eve of the outbreak of war⁴⁶.

42 According to the version of the statute of 8 June 1934 (already after the death of the founder of the yeshivas), the Polish version of the name Jeszywas Chachmei Lublin was: Uczelnia Mędrców Lubelskich im. Rabina Majera Szapiry (Rabbi Majer Shapir's Yeshivas of the Sages of Lublin): after K. Zieliński, N. Zielińska, *Jeszywas Chachmei Lublin*, Lublin 2003, p. 175 (Annex I).

43 In addition to lecture halls, library and reading rooms, it housed a synagogue, mikvah, rector's flat, guest rooms, dormitory for two hundred students, and even a bakery. For most information on the Lublin yeshiva and its library, see A. Kopciowski, *Zagadka księgozbioru lubelskiej Jesziwy*, 24 April 2006, [online] https://www.bu.kul.pl/art_10817.html [accessed 19.04.2022].

44 "The collection of books was initiated by Shapiro himself while he was still travelling in the United States. The rabbi's visits to American cities were usually preceded by the posting of notices in the neighbourhoods of Orthodox Jews informing them of Shapiro's plans to create a large library in Lublin and to collect valuable prints for this purpose. The largest collection of books (four thousand volumes) was donated to Shapira by the American philanthropist Benjamin Gut. Many other American Jews followed his example [...]. A similar action was also carried out in Jewish centres in Poland. Lublin Library Committees were formed in many cities to collect books for the Yesiva. Poorer Jews, unable to afford monetary donations for the construction of the Yeshiva, donated books for its needs" – A. Kopciowski, *op. cit.*

45 Kopciowski points out that "however, students [who were only unmarried men] could not make full use of the Yeshiva's library; everything in its collection passed through the hands of the rector, and it was he who decided what would be in the book collection and what students could borrow", quoted after *ibidem*

46 The Wikipedia mentions the number of 22,000 books and 10,000 journals but without referring the source of these figures, see *Jeszywas Chachmei Lublin*, [online] https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeszywas_Chachmej_Lublin [accessed 10.05.2022]. A figure of 32,000 in 1939 is also given by J. Doroszewski, *Uczelnia Mędrców Lublina (Jeszywas Chachmei Lublin) w latach 1930–1939*, [in:] *Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej na Lubelszczyźnie w latach 1918–1939*, ed. J. Doroszewski, T. Radzik, Lublin 1992, pp. 103, 110–111.

Jewish research libraries in Germany and Poland during World War II

Closed, confiscated, destroyed, looted, deported, exploited in perverse ways – no matter which of these persecutions they fell victim to or how many books from their collections survived – all the Jewish libraries in question have ceased to exist.

Nazi Germany

On the night of 9–10 XI 1938, during the Crystal Night pogrom, the head of the security police Reinhard Heydrich sent a prompt decree to his subordinate services to “seize all archive material in all synagogues and premises of Jewish communities and hand it over to the SD (Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS – Security Service of the Reichsführer SS) posts”⁴⁷. Jewish libraries were included in this if they were not destroyed during the ongoing “November-Aktion gegen Judenschaft” (November Action against Jewry). In a dispute that broke out almost immediately between two Reich dignitaries, National Socialist Party (NSDAP) chief ideologist Alfred Rosenberg and Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, over who would get the bulk of the library loot, the latter prevailed⁴⁸. In February 1939, he ordered a vetting of the confiscated Jewish libraries, which his subordinate Heydrich followed up in March of that year with an order to concentrate them at the SD headquarters in Berlin (SD-Hauptamt). This was preceded by the distribution to closed libraries of a questionnaire on the size and characteristics of their collections. Based on the results of this survey, a list of 71 libraries with a total stock of around 300,000 volumes included 16 libraries considered to be of particular value, among them two in Berlin: the Jewish Community (55,000) and the Rabbinical Seminary (20,000) and two in Breslau: the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS; 28,000) and the local community (10,000)⁴⁹.

At the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau on 18–20 July 1939, “agents of the [National Socialist] party took from the library rooms books belonging

47 “Das Blitz-Fernschreiben” was sent at 1:20 a.m. (already) on 10.11.1938. Quoted after W. Schroeder, *Beschlagnahme und Verbleib jüdischer Bibliotheken in Deutschland vor und nach dem Novemberpogrom 1938*, [in:] *Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut. Zweites Hannoversches Symposium*, ed. R. Dehnel, Frankfurt am Main 2006, p. 32.

48 On the rivalry and division of “Jewish materials“ between the RSHA and the ERR/Institut für Judenforschung-Hohe Schule see D. Rupnow, *Judenforschung im Dritten Reich. Wissenschaft zwischen Politik, Propaganda und Ideologie*, Baden-Baden 2011, pp. 116–118.

49 W. Schroeder, op. cit. p. 34. There, a list of 16 libraries with a total collection calculated at 199,300 volumes.

to the library and from the treasury manuscripts, first prints [probably referring to incunabula]⁵⁰. At the same time, the Gestapo confiscated a chest of silver Judaica. At the end of September of that year, the library collection of the Breslau Seminary was handed over to the newly established Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt – RSHA) in Berlin⁵¹, with the exception of a small part that remained at the local Gestapo branch. Together with other library resources from the list compiled for Heydrich, they became part of the RSHA's Central Library (Zentralbibliothek), more precisely, its section called the Library of Opponents (Gegnerbibliothek des RSHA) subordinate to the RSHA's Department VII dealing with "worldview research and its evaluation"⁵². It consisted of four sections, each dealing with a different enemy of the Reich: the church, Marxism, freemasonry, and Jews. The Jewish department (Judenabteilung) was the largest among them.

The Berlin School of Judaic Studies (HWJ), relegated to the level of a teaching institution again in June 1933, tried to continue its activities despite severe financial and legal harassment. Attempts to relocate it to Cambridge failed in 1938. In November 1939, it was incorporated, like all other Jewish institutions and organisations still in existence, into the Reichsvereinigung der Deutschen Juden (RDJ, Association of German Jews in the Reich), and its collections were moved to the vacant building of the dissolved Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary. The fact that the HWJ did not close at that time was mainly due to the chairman of the RDJ. He was a former student of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, and from 1912 a lecturer at the HWJ, Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873–1956). The college survived until June 1942, when it was finally dissolved. Three students studied there until the end. Together with L. Baeck, they were deported in 1943 to the ghetto in Terezin (Theresienstadt). A large part of the HWJ library followed them there and was incorporated into the Central Ghetto Library (Ghettozentralbücherei – ZBT), founded in 1942, whose holdings were estimated at up to 250,000 volumes. These consisted of books requisitioned from ghetto inmates, but above all books confiscated from public and private German Jewish libraries, and in 1944 also from Hungarian libraries (including the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest).

50 Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŽIH), Inv. No. 105/1059/, chart 10 (printout of letter, sine autor), quoted after N. Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, *Raub und Rückführung der Leon Vita Saraval Sammlung der Bibliothek des Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars in Breslau*, [in:] *Jüdischer Buchbesitz...*, p. 368.

51 Y. Domhardt, *Bibliotheken im Exil. Stationen der Wanderschaft der Bibliothek des Breslauer Rabbinerseminars. Ein Werkstattbericht aus Zürich*, [in:] *NS-Raubgut in Museen, Bibliotheken und Archiven. Viertes Hannoversches Symposium*, ed. R. Dehnel, Frankfurt am Main 2012, p. 151.

52 The German name was: Amt VII RSHA (Weltanschauliche Forschung und Auswertung).

General Government

The book collection of the Main Judaic Library at the Great Synagogue was confiscated by the Germans in the very first months of the occupation of Warsaw. The robbery was carried out by a special SS operative group dealing with organised looting ordered by the RSHA called Kommando Paulsen after its commander Peter Paulsen⁵³. Shortly thereafter, the GBJ collection was taken in its entirety to Berlin and deposited in the repository of the RSHA Central Library in the building of the former Grand Lodge of Freemasons in Eisenacher Straße. Chaim Aron Kaplan (1880–1942?) noted in his Warsaw diary under the date 25 October 1939:

Two days ago the occupier demolished the heavenly temple of the Polish Jews. Like real vandals, they broke into the library on Tłomackie, where precious cultural collections were deposited. They removed all the books and precious manuscripts from it, loaded them into trucks, and transported them to an unknown location. This set fire to the soul of Polish Jewry. Our spiritual refuge, where we found escape from the sufferings that afflicted us, was destroyed.... Behold, the spring that satisfied our hunger for Torah and faith has dried up⁵⁴.

Two months later, on 22 December, Kaplan was forced to add to the previous entry:

The hand of misfortune has fallen on the remnants of what is dearest to us. A few weeks ago, part of the collection of the Tłomackie Library was taken out. Most of it, whole sets of daily newspapers, weeklies, and monthlies. The shelves were still full of books that the hand of misfortune had not yet touched. When [the occupant] left, he put the seals on the closed doors. This week, he returned to complete the plunder work. Truck buses lined up in front of the library, and Jewish passers-by were hauled out to load the books⁵⁵.

Even more tragic (and most common for Jewish book collections in occupied Poland) was the fate of the library of Lublin's Yeshiva Chachmei. The Torah scrolls and religious books contained were thrown onto the pavement by German soldiers and set on fire: "The fire lasted twenty hours. The loud wailing of the Jews of Lublin was drowned out by a summoned military band and [the Germans'] own shouts of joy"⁵⁶. The remainder of the Yeshiva's book collection was moved in 1940 to the former Hieronim Łopaciński Municipal Library converted into a German state library: Staatsbibliothek Lublin.

53 A. Mężyński, *Die Judaistische Bibliothek bei der Großen Synagoge in Warschau und das Schicksal der Bücher aus dem Warschauer Ghetto*, [in:] *Jüdischer Buchbesitz...*, pp. 86–88. See also eadem, *Kommando Paulsen. Organisierter Kunstraub in Polen 1942–45*, Köln 2000. Earlier Polish version: *Kommando Paulsen: październik-grudzień 1939*, Warszawa 1994.

54 Ch.A. Kaplan, *Dziennik 1939 r. Megila życia*, Warszawa 2019, p. 164.

55 Ibidem, p. 251.

56 "Frankfurter Zeitung" of 28.03.1941, quoted after M. Kirchhoff, op. cit., p. 122.

Reichskommissariat Ostland

The fate of the collections of the Strashun Library and the YIVO was sealed after the German invasion of Vilnius at the end of June 1941. In the second week of the city's occupation, Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) envoy Herbert Gotthard arrived there for reconnaissance. This was a special NSDAP organisation set up in 1940 for the systematic plunder of cultural property in the areas occupied by the German Reich. It was headed by A. Rosenberg, who after the outbreak of war with the Soviet Union was appointed by Hitler Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories (Reichsminister für die besetzten Ostgebiete). It was headed by Johannes Pohl, a spokesman for "Judenforschung ohne Juden" (the study of Jews without Jews), who had studied Judaic studies at the German Oriental Institute in Jerusalem from 1934 to 1936 at the behest of the NSDAP. In July 1941, the Gestapo arrested the director of the YIVO during Soviet rule, Noah Pryłucki (1882–1941), the director of the Shimon An-ski Jewish Ethnographic Museum, Eliahu Yaakov Goldschmidt (1882–1941) and the director of the Strashun Library, Ch. Łuński. They were ordered to compile a list of the most valuable objects in their collections for the ERR. Pryłucki and Goldschmidt were immediately murdered after compiling it in early August. Łuński was taken from prison to the ghetto created on 6 September 1941.

After Gotthard left the city at the beginning of August, a special branch of the SS (the Einsatzstab of Vilnius) sent the first eight crates containing the objects on the list drawn up for the ERR, among them manuscripts, incunabula, and early printed books from Strashun Library, to the RSHA in Berlin. Pohl's subsequent attempts to "retrieve" them for the ERR were almost certainly unsuccessful⁵⁷.

The abundance of Vilnius libraries, book collections, and ritual Judaica in the possession of local synagogues, Jewish organisations, and private owners prevented their rapid selection and export to the Reich⁵⁸. It was only after Pohl's visit with his team in February 1942 that the ERR conducted a large-scale screening operation, that is, the segregation of library material into that qualified for export to the Reich and that remaining, destined for milling. The selected collection of the Strashun Library (about 25,000 volumes) was moved to the building of the closed Vilnius University Library. Several hundred books from synagogues and private collections from the city and the surrounding area were also stored there, among them the House of Learning of the Vilna Gaon. They were segregated under threat of death by a group of Jews escorted

57 D. Rabinowitz, op.cit., p. 82.

58 S.C. Sutter, *The lost Jewish libraries of Vilna and the Frankfurt Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*, [in:] *Lost libraries. The destruction of great book collections since antiquity*, ed. J. Raven, Houndmills [et al.] 2004, pp. 219–235.

from the ghetto. They followed the instructions of three Jewish specialists cast by Pohl as forced selectors. In addition to Ch. Łuński, these were the director of the YIVO until 1939, Z. Kalmanowicz and the prewar director of the Grosser Library in Warsaw and now founder of the Vilna Ghetto library, Herman Kruk (1897–1944)⁵⁹. In turn, in the YIVO building, also located outside the ghetto, book collections brought here not only from Vilnius but also from Kaunas and other cities were segregated alongside the Institute's own holdings. Thanks to Kruk, in the spring of 1942, two poets, Szmerke Kaczergiński (1908–1954) and Abraham Sutzkever (1913–2010), among others, found their way to this work. Employed in the selection and handling of the seized collections, they organised an underground group known as the Papierbrigade (Paper Brigade). Its members managed to smuggle from the YIVO building and hide on the ghetto and on the "Aryan side" a considerable part of the Institute's museum, archive and library collections⁶⁰. With the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto in September 1943, the brigade ceased to exist. The two poets who led it managed to escape to the Soviet partisans.

On Saturday 15 IV 1944, a correspondence from the newspaper's Moscow correspondent, Ralph Parker, appeared on page three of the New York Times. It opened with the headline: *Poet partisan from Vilna Ghetto Says Nazis Slew 77, 000 of 80,000; Lithuanian Jews Fought Back in Their Agony – Gorky and Tolstoy Letters Seized from Germans and Taken to Moscow.*

The poet-partisan was A. Sutzkever. It was then that the aforementioned L.S. Dawidowicz and Max Weinreich (1894–1964), cofounder of the YIVO and from 1940 head of its New York branch, learnt of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto and the Jewish resistance organised there. Dawidowicz recalled that Sutzkever:

He also showed Parker a letter written by Maxim Gorky, which he, Sutzkever, had brought to Moscow. He smuggled it out of the Vilnius »famous Jewish Museum«. We didn't know precisely what he meant, but suspected that he was referring to the YIVO. He said that he had also saved »many other valuable relics«⁶¹.

However, the most valuable part of the YIVO library was taken by the ERR to the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage (IEJ; Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question) in Frankfurt am Main. The rest, estimated at around 60%, was destined by the Germans for milling.

59 The rescued ghetto diaries of both became the basis for a relatively accurate reconstruction of the fate of the Strashun Library from July 1941 until the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto, see D. Rabinowitz, op. cit., pp. 75–86. See also B. Schilo, op. cit., pp. 27–30.

60 Ibidem, pp. 30–32.

61 L.S. Dawidowicz, op. cit., p. 251.

Nazi Judenbibliotheken: collect to destroy

The destruction of Jewish book collections, whether by burning them, as in Lublin's Chachmei Yeshiva, by milling them, as in Vilnius, or by leaving them to rot, was clearly barbaric. It was also the destruction, disintegration, and dispersal of library collections accumulated over decades that amounted to the destruction of libraries as deposits of knowledge and memory of the communities and institutions they served. It must be considered a kind of perversion to act according to the motto "to collect to destroy", which defines the purpose accompanying the destruction of the Jewish research libraries of Breslau, Berlin, Warsaw and Vilnius mentioned here. The collections looted from them were used (verwendet) to create a source base for Nazi research justifying the annihilation of Jews and Jewishness (Jüdelei), which, as Rosenberg's ERR aide, Johannes Pohl, called it, "research on Jews without Jews".

The largest such collection of Jewish writing became the library of the Institute for Jewish Studies in Frankfurt/M. Opened in March 1941, the IEJ was the first institute of Rosenberg's planned Higher School of the National Socialist Party (Hohe Schule der NSDAP), for which looted books had already been collected since 1939 in the Central Library of this not yet established Nazi academic institution in Berlin (Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule)⁶². The Frankfurt IEJ held more than one million books, mostly from the looting of the ERR in occupied western Europe, the USSR, and Greece.

The holdings of the second of these perverse library collections, the Gernerbibliothek in Division VII of the RSHA, are estimated at up to two to three million volumes, confiscated mainly in the Old Reich, Vienna, and occupied Poland. These collections came from public and private libraries belonging to various, not only Jewish organisations, population groups, and individuals considered opponents of Nazism and the German Reich. However, it is undoubtedly that the Jewish section of the RSHA library was able to compete in quantity and quality with its Frankfurt rival⁶³.

The third library in this group, the least known and in a sense, if one may say so, the cruellest, was the Hebräische Bibliothek (Hebrew Library) in the

62 The Berlin Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule was founded even before Hitler's decree of 29 I 1940 establishing the Hohe Schule der NSDAP as a place for "National Socialist research and education".

63 About the RSHA library and the looted Jewish collections in its possession see D. Schidor-sky, *The library of the Reich Security Main Office and its looted Jewish book collections*, "Libraries and Cultural Record" 2007, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 21–47; W. Schroeder, *Die Bibliotheken des RSHA: Aufbau und Verbleib*, [online] http://www.initiativefortbildung.de/pdf/provenienz_schroeder.pdf [accessed 3.05.2022].

Theresienstadt ghetto⁶⁴. Disconnected from the ghetto's Central Library and inaccessible to the confined victims, it was intended to be a representative collection of Hebrews and Judaica. To this end, the so-called Talmudkommando, which had been in existence since April 1943, had the task of fishing out valuable prints and manuscripts from the transports bringing to the ghetto the stock of Jewish libraries seized in Breslau, Berlin, Vienna and Budapest⁶⁵. The commando of 20 rabbis, 15 theologians, historians, and librarians was led by the Viennese Rabbi Benjamin Murrelstein (1905–1989) and the Praguian Rabbi Otto Muneles (1894–1967), after the war the first librarian of the Jewish Museum in Prague⁶⁶. By early 1945, the Talmudkommando had catalogued half of the nearly 60,000 volumes collected in the Hebrew Library of the Terezín ghetto.

Apart from the above-mentioned three beneficiaries of the looting of Jewish libraries, there was a constant demand for captured Judaica books from German universities and so-called research institutes conducting studies on the "Jewish question", such as the Institute for German Ostarbeit (Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit) founded in Kraków in 1940 by Governor General Hans Frank. They also included the Prussian State Library, the University Library in Berlin, the Bavarian State Library and the Library of the Reichsuniversität Posen (Reich University in Poznań). As reported on 7 III 1941 "Frankfurter Zeitung", the latter, which had set up a chair for the "study of Jewish history and language", was to receive 400,000 volumes from confiscated Jewish libraries in Poland⁶⁷. "[This research] was to be indispensable in the university even if in a few years there would not be a single student who had seen a living Jew", reported in 1941 the "Deutsche Post aus dem Osten"⁶⁸.

Evacuation

In the summer of 1943, after heavy bombing raids on Berlin, on Himmler's orders part of the RSHA Central Library, including the Gegnerbibliothek of Department VII, was evacuated to Lower Silesia (palaces in Slava – Schlesiensee

64 Information concerning the Hebrew Library in the Terezin ghetto after M. Bušek, *Provenance research in the Book Collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague*, [in:] *Treuhänderische Übernahme und Verwaltung. International und interdisziplinär betrachtet*, ed. O. Kaiser, C. Köstner-Pemsel, M. Stumpf, Wien 2018, p. 147.

65 As well as from the libraries of Jewish communities in Dresden, Hannover, and München. See Y. Weiss, *Von Prag nach Jerusalem: Jüdische Kulturgüter und israelische Staatsgründung*, "Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte" 2015, Vol. 63, No. 4, p. 520.

66 *Ibidem*, pp. 520 and 525. Only these two survived, the other members of the Talmudkommando were deported to Auschwitz.

67 *The black book of Polish Jewry. An account of the martyrdom of Polish Jewry under the Nazi occupation*, ed. J. Apenszlak, [New York] 1943, p. 300. This information has never been verified.

68 *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, N.F. 13 (1941), after: D. Rupnow, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

and Wilkanów – Wölfelsdorf) and to four palaces in the so-called Sudetenland⁶⁹. About 60,000 volumes from the Jewish Department of the RSHA library were taken to the Konzentrationslager (KL) Theresienstadt. However, hundreds of thousands of looted books remained in the Berlin library depot of RSHA Department VII in Eisenacher Straße. In November the same year, most of them were consumed by fire. Among others, a large part of the collections of the Berlin Community Library and the library of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, as well as the bulk (up to 90%) of the holdings of the Main Judaic Library in Warsaw, were burnt in the fire.

The IEJ's collection was transported almost in its entirety from Frankfurt am Main to the Hessian town of Hungen already in the spring of 1943. These included parts of the YIVO and the Strashun Library resources that had been transported by the ERR from Vilnius. In addition, some 11,000 volumes from the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, which the Frankfurt-based IEJ had acquired through exchange or purchase from the Berlin RSHA.

Postwar distribution of rescued books

“Our work is coming to an end. Thousands of books will end up in the trash, and Jewish books will be liquidated. The part that we manage to save we will save with God’s help. We will find it when we return as free people” – noted on 23 August 1943 in the Vilna ghetto Z. Kalmanowicz⁷⁰. Kalmanowicz, Łuński and Kruk did not live to see this moment, they perished in the Holocaust. The poets A. Sutzkever and Sz. Kaczergiński survived in the Soviet partisans. Immediately after the liberation of Vilnius from German occupation in July 1944, they set about rescuing part of the YIVO collection hidden by their Papierbrigade in the ghetto, but also the thousands of volumes that had been taken away for milling

69 These were palaces in Mimoń (Niemes, 256,626 vol.); Nowy Falkenburg (Neu Falkenburg, 93 624 vol.), Nowy Berstein (Neu Peerstein, 59,927 vol. and 131,865 units of archive materials) and Housca (Hauska, exact number unknown, approx. 95,000). These data and detailed information concerning export and distribution of the RSHA Library collections in these palaces: M. Strouhalová, *Hidden or forbidden? Remarkable history of the books stored in the Reserve Collections of the National Library of the Czech Republic*, Prague 2027, pp. 33–51. See also P. Kennedy Grimsted, *Sudeten Crossroads for Europe’s Displaced Books: The “Mysterious Twilight” of the RSHA Amt VII Library and the Fate of a Million Victims of War*, [in:] *Restitution of Confiscated Works – Wish or Reality? Documentation, Identification and Restitution of Cultural Property of the Victims of World War II. Proceedings of the International Academic Conference Held in Liberec, 24–26 October 2007*, ed. M. Borák, Prague 2008, pp. 120–177.

70 Cited from Kalmanowicz’s diary after: D.F. Fishman, *Embers plucked from the fire. The rescue of Jewish cultural treasures in Vilna*, [in:] *The Holocaust and the book. Destruction and preservation*, ed. J. Rose, Boston 2001, p. 72.

and were deteriorating at the recycling point⁷¹. Founded by them in the same month as a haven for the rescued objects, the Museum of Jewish Art and Culture was the first postwar Jewish institution in the city. In the first months, it collected 35,000 books, including 25,000 in Yiddish and Hebrew, and 600 bags of YIVO and Kaunas Ghetto archives⁷². Very soon, however, the Communist authorities of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic and the central authorities in Moscow considered the Jewish museum ideologically undesirable. In the spring of 1945, despite the objections of both protagonists (also in Moscow), dozens of tons of Jewish archival materials, books, and journals saved from the planned disposal by the Germans were milled. Having lost their illusions, Kaczergiński and Sutzkever, like the rest of the museum staff and his friends, one by one left Soviet Vilnius as part of the so-called repatriation, taking some of the rescued YIVO materials in their luggage. By mid-1946, they were already in Poland, which they quickly left under the influence of the Kielce pogrom and pervasive anti-Semitism, heading for Paris.

From wherever they could and by all available means, they sent smuggled YIVO materials to the New York branch of the Institute headed by M. Weinreich under the Americanised name YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute⁷³. From as early as 1942, thanks to his efforts, it was treated by the American authorities as the legitimate successor to the Vilna headquarters, which had been dissolved by the Germans. Weinreich's foresight proved salutary. For in 1948, the last outpost of the Yiddishists in Vilnius, the museum with the Jewish library collections rescued by the two poets, was liquidated. They were saved from further destruction, this time by the Soviet authorities, by the director of the Lithuanian Book Chamber, Antanas Ulpis (1904–1981), who hid the collection in the basement of the former Carmelite monastery, the seat of the Chamber. During the post-Stalinist thaw, they were catalogued, but the public only learnt of their existence in 1988⁷⁴.

71 D.F. Fishman, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–75. They rescued among others H. Kruk's "Dziennik" (Diary) from ghetto, letters of Sholem Alejchem's (1859–1916), manuscripts of Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934), pictures of Jewish painters, and even sculptures of Ilja Ginzburg (1859–1939) and Marek Antokolsky (1843–1902).

72 *Ibidem*, p. 73–75. The museum was located first in a flat and then in the only community building not expropriated by the Soviets on Strashun Street, where offices, the library and the ghetto prison were located during the occupation. The museum immediately became the centre of all matters for the surviving Jews. It had no budget. It obtained permission to employ six staff members who, like both of its founders, worked for free. See also B. Shilo, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–35.

73 Sutzkever, while awaiting a visa to the USA, hesitated whether to send the smuggled materials to Jerusalem to the Hebrew University or to the New York branch of the Institute – he finally decided in favour of New York, sending 360 Vilnius documents between December 1946 and March 1947 to Weinreich, including the Gaon's writings from Vilnius and the Kalmanowicz Diary, after B. Shilo, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

74 *Ibidem*, p. 75.

Like Vilnius, Lublin was also liberated from German occupation in July 1944. The local Jewish Historical Commission (Żydowska Komisja Historyczna – ŻKH) was immediately established there. One of its main tasks, in addition to collecting testimony of Nazi crimes from surviving Jews, was to save the material remains of Jewish heritage. The Ritual Judaica stored by the Germans in the Lublin museum building were secured, including those stolen from the victims of the Majdanek concentration camp. On the other hand, the search for the collection of the Chachmei Yeshiva library, taken by the Germans a few months before the liberation westwards towards Berlin, did not yield any results. Researchers are inclined to assume that these collections were all burnt. It also seems legitimate to assume that they may have been seized by the Red Army and taken deep into Russia. According to other opinions, the less valuable part of the Lublin yeshiva's book collection was supposed to have remained in the city and only disappeared after the war. Five books were found and returned in 2007 to the renovated Yeshiva Chachmei synagogue in its restituted building (converted into a hotel), which was reclaimed by the Jewish community in 2003. Single volumes with their ownership marks have been identified in the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute, the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, and in private collections⁷⁵.

At the end of 1944, the Lublin ŻKH was transformed into the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH) at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. At the beginning of 1945, it was relocated to Łódź. It had representative offices in all provincial cities and more modest ones in all major Jewish population centre scattered throughout the country⁷⁶. In 1947, the headquarters of the CŻKH were moved to Warsaw and renamed the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH). The headquarters of the Institute and the Central Jewish Library created within it became the renovated building of the Main Judaic Library. It suffered relatively little damage during the occupation, unlike the neighbouring Great Synagogue, which was blown up by the Germans on 16 May 1943 after the suppression of the ghetto uprising.

The Jewish Historical Institute not only searched the country for and acquired Judaica that had been rescued from the conflagration: books, archives, works of art and ceremonial objects. The state authorities recognised it as the heir and successor to all the Jewish collections found in the late 1940s by Polish search

⁷⁵ Kopciowski, op. cit. See also the commentary by Jan Krzysztof Wasilewski *Od Redakcji* [From the Editor] below Kopciowski's text. See also Cyfrowa Biblioteka Jesziwy/The Yeschiwa Digital Library, [online] <https://teatrnn.pl/wystawy/cyfrowa-biblioteka-jesziwy/> [accessed 30.05.2023].

⁷⁶ In Lublin, the Commission employed only two people, but after the move to Łódź and the rapid establishment of branch offices, the CŻKH already employed more than 100 people at the beginning of 1946, including 30 at its Łódź headquarters. The local branches of the CŻKH continued to operate until 1950.

teams in German repositories in Lower Silesia and also handed over in November 1946 by the Czechoslovak authorities⁷⁷. In this way, the few rescued GBJ volumes taken to Berlin at the end of 1939 were returned to the Jewish Historical Institute from the RSHA repositories in four Czech palaces, including Mimon (Niemes) and Houska (Hauska)⁷⁸. It was then that the Jewish Historical Institute came into possession of a not inconsiderable collection of books from the Rabbinical Seminary in Breslau brought there, as well as individual volumes from the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and several other Jewish German libraries⁷⁹. However, it is not known whether it was from these Czech castles or from the palace in Wilkanów near Bystrzyca Kłodzka, which housed another RSHA repository, or perhaps from the former Gestapo headquarters in Kłodzko (Glatz) that the Jewish Historical Institute (ŽIH) received the most valuable part of “its” Breslau Judaica from the JTS: more than a hundred antique Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula⁸⁰. On this occasion, the ŽIH received a large collection of historical prints and engravings hidden in Lower Silesia, collected by M. Stern in the Library of the Berlin Jewish Community, which were taken over by the Prussian State Library in the late 1930s. A detailed study of the provenance of this collection, dubbed, not without reason, “second Berlin”, and its journey from its Nazi confiscation to

77 M. Strouhalová, op. cit., p. 51. 56 crates of books and later 880 more volumes were sent to Poland. See also A. Mężyński, *Die Judaistische Bibliothek...*, p. 95. The transport also included books from the Library of the Polish Parliament and Senate.

78 Prof. Szmul Hugo Bergman, who, on behalf of the Hebrew University, solicited in 1946 the transfer from Czechoslovakia of Jewish books found there that had been seized by the Germans to Jerusalem, wrote in a report on this trip: “I witnessed that the Polish government, which was in a hurry to claim all books of Polish provenance, sent trucks on 11 November [1946] to load all books – Jewish and non-Jewish – onto them. In front of my eyes, books from the Library of the Great Synagogue in Warsaw (in Tłomackie) were put on the truck and taken to the train to Mimonia from where they were to be released to Warsaw”, after: Y. Weiss, op. cit., p. 530. A. Mężyński, *Die Judaistische Bibliothek...*, p. 95 quotes the note on 8 III 1947 located in the ŽIH Archive, indicating that the books from the Main Judaic Library in Warsaw were supposed to be stored also in the palace nearby Bystrzyca Kłodzka.

79 The Hebrew University’s hope that the Polish government would transfer part of the collection of the library of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, identified in Czechoslovakia, to Jerusalem as “an important sign of friendship and goodwill towards the Jewish people in Palestine” – especially, since the Breslau JTS was a private institution and its library consisted mainly of religious literature – proved to be faint. See Y. Weiss, op. cit., p. 531.

80 M. Nosek, *The Collection of Leon Vita Saraval*, [in:] *The lost heritage of cultural assets. The documentation, identification, restitution and repatriation of the cultural assets of WWII victims. Proceedings of the international academic conference in Brno (20.-21.11.2003)*, ed. M. Borák, Brno 2003, p. 131: The author believes that the JTS manuscripts from the Jewish Historical Institute were stored in Kłodzko since the confiscation. The same information that the Breslau manuscripts reached the JTS from Kłodzko is given by: *Catalogue of manuscripts and archival material of Juedisch-Theologisches Seminar Breslau held in Russian depositories*, ed. E. Geniewa, Moscow 2003, p. 12. This is a publication of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, published within the framework of the “Heritage Revealed” project in cooperation with the American The Research Project on Art and Archives.

its landing (presumably in 1951) in the collection of the ŽIH is a task that, like many others, awaits⁸¹.

A smaller and less valuable part of the manuscript and early printed book holdings of the Breslau Seminary than that handed over to the Jewish Historical Institute was seized in the spring of 1945 in the Czech town of Mimoň and the Silesian town of Wilkanów (together with other archives captured there) by the “trophy brigades” of the Red Army. Taken to Moscow in accordance with Lavrientiy Beria’s order of 11 September 1945, they were hidden in the so-called special archives of the USSR⁸².

On the other hand, the most valuable 37 manuscripts and incunabula of the Breslau JTS (mainly from the Saraval collection) found their way to the National Library in Prague, together with several hundred thousand books from the RSHA Central Library discovered in the aforementioned palaces of the former Sudetenland⁸³. A large proportion of these were identified and returned in 1947 and 1948 to the Western European countries from which they had been looted. The remainder, if it belonged to Jewish writing – including the Saraval collection, but also, for example, volumes from the YIVO in Vilnius – was deposited with the Jewish Museum in Prague, which, by order of the Czech Council of Jewish Communities, was to take care of Jewish heritage. The Prague museum also received approx. 100,000 volumes of the Central Library of the Terezín Ghetto from confiscated collections from German and Czech Jewish public libraries – among them the Library of the Berlin Jewish Community, also the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and the local Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary – and from looted private book collections. Some of the latter had already been returned to their owners before the communists came to power in 1948. The remaining tens of thousands of volumes, which were considered heirless (i.e., without heirs or legal successors), as well as collections with a similar status found in North Bohemian palaces, were the subject of intensive efforts by the Hebrew University and Jewish organisations in the USA⁸⁴.

81 “Berlinka” is a collection of more than 500,000 valuable archival items of the Prussian State Library in Berlin hidden in Krzeszów in 1943, and stored in the Jagiellonian Library since the end of the war.

82 *Catalogue of Manuscripts...*, p. 12. The catalogue includes 39 manuscripts and archival units from the Breslau JTS, located in the M.I. Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow (Vserossijskaâ Gosudarstvennaâ Biblioteka Inostranoj Literatuty im. M.I. Rudomino) and various Moscow archives.

83 N. Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, op. cit., p. 374; A. Kawalko, *A Story of survival: Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula from the Saraval Collection in the Manuscriptorium – Digital Library of the Memoriae Mundi Series Bohemica Project*, “Medaon. Magazin für Jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung” 2015, No. 17, [online] <https://www.medaon.de/en/ausgabe/medaon-9-2015-17/> [accessed 12.05.2022].

84 On the efforts of the envoys of the Hebrew University and its Library to receive from Czechoslovakia at least some of the Jewish books from the Teresian Ghetto and RSHA repositories in northern Bohemia, see Y. Weiss, op. cit. and B. Shilo, op. cit., pp 79–115. About several efforts of the

As a result, Czechoslovakia decided in 1948 to donate several tens of thousands of volumes from the Nazi looting to the National Library in Jerusalem⁸⁵.

Poland, too, solemnly handed over 85,000 religious books and rabbinical literature (without checking their provenance) to the newly established state of Israel in 1948, as successfully sought by Menachem Mendel Schneerson, treasurer of the Hebrew University⁸⁶.

Redistribution and reconstruction

A growing awareness of the scale of the destruction of Jewish material heritage in Nazi-occupied Europe led Jewish circles in Palestine and the USA to prepare projects for its rescue, restitution, and redistribution already during the war. In Jerusalem, the Oztrot Hagolach Committee (Treasures of the Diaspora) for Jewish libraries recovered in Europe, founded at the Hebrew University in 1944 by, among others, Szmul Bergman and Gershom Scholem, undertook work in this area. In the United States of America, another prominent Jewish scholar, the historian Salo W. Baron (1895–1989), headed the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (CEJCR), established in 1944. It prepared the *Tentative list of Jewish cultural treasures in Axis-occupied countries*, published in New York in 1946, designed to assist in the search for looted and scattered Jewish collections within Germany and occupied Europe⁸⁷. It contained information on almost 700 libraries, archives, and Judaica collections belonging to Jewish communities and organisations and private owners.

Shortly after the capitulation of the Third Reich, envoys of these organisations, starting with Scholem and CEJCR Executive Director Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), undertook a search for surviving collections. The search was carried out in Germany and Austria, but also in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and other countries⁸⁸. Cultural assets without heirs or legal successors were the subject of special efforts. The CEJCR, which was among the founders of the

MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives) section of the US Army and CEJCR, see E. Gallas, »*Das Leichenhaus der Bücher*«. *Kulturrestitution und jüdisches Geschichtsdenken nach 1945*, Göttingen 2016, pp. 200–207.

85 The number of volumes transferred to Jerusalem is not known – sources say sometimes 40,000 sometimes 70,000.: after B. Shilo, op. cit., p. 114. It is known that among them were materials from the Vilnius YIVO, ibidem, pp. 89–92.

86 D. Schidorsky, *The salvaging of Jewish books in Europe after the Holocaust: the efforts of the Hebrew University and of the Jewish National and University Library – success and failure*, [in:] *Jüdischer Buchbesitz...*, p. 205. The figure of 80,000 vol. is given by E. Gallas, op. cit., p. 206.

87 *Tentative list* was published as the supplement to the “Jewish Social Studies” 1946, Vol. 8, No. 1. It is available online at the Commission for Looted Art in Europe website (www.lootedart.com). In 1947 and 1948, its expansions were published: a list of Jewish journals and Jewish publishers.

88 More on this topic in the publications mentioned in footnotes 84 and 86.

Jewish Restitution Successor Organisation (JRSO), felt itself to be the depository of this „orphaned” Jewish cultural property⁸⁹. The Holocaust marked the end of Jewish life in Germany and Eastern Europe in the eyes of Jewish intellectuals concentrated in Otzrot Hagolah and the CEJCR. The rescued Judaica of all kinds were to go to Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora outside Europe. Scholem, together with Theresienstadt ghetto survivor Leo Baeck, argued: “that where Jews go their books want to go with them”⁹⁰.

In 1947, the CEJCR, under the abbreviated name Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), was recognised in the US occupation zone of Germany as the legal trustee (trustee) of “orphan” (heirless: without heirs) Jewish cultural property⁹¹. The zone was home to the largest number of art and cultural works looted by the Nazis in all of occupied Europe. They were taken to several repositories (so-called Collecting Points) set up and managed by officers of the special section of the US Army MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives). One of these repositories was the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD) placed by the Americans in the colossal buildings of the IG Farben concern. More than three million volumes (mostly looted from Jews and Jewish organisations), as well as thousands of ritual Judaica, were taken to the OAD, which opened in March 1946. By the end of 1947, 2.5 million books had managed to be restituted to their owners in Germany or to their countries of origin (mainly in western Europe), which in turn should have handed them over to their legal owners⁹². With regard

89 The JRSO was founded in New York in 1948 by various American and international Jewish organisations as a representative of the orphaned property of murdered Jews and Nazi-dissolved Jewish organisations.

90 G. Scholem, *Briefe. 1: 1914–1947*, ed. I. Shedletzky, München 1994, p. 316. Otzrot Hagolah representatives headed by Scholem and Bergman were of the opinion that absolute priority should be given to the Library of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem considered by them to be the treasury of the Jewish people and not just of Israel.

91 About the JCR, its inception, its activities, and its concept of “recreating” the culture of European Jews see: E. Gallas, op. cit., specifically chapter 2: *Zukunftsentwürfe. Die Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) und die Wiederherstellung der europäisch-jüdischen Kultur*, pp. 77–221.

92 140 OAD staff members did a titanic job. Around 10,000 volumes were sorted and identified every day. More than 90 per cent of the collected stock was restituted; in numbers: Germany (Berlin): 700,000; the Netherlands: 329,000; France: 328,000; USSR: 232,000; Italy: 225,000; Poland: 25,000; other countries occupied by the Third Reich less than 10,000 each. In addition, 24,000 volumes were donated to the displaced persons. See S.J. Pomeranze, *The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Treasures after the Holocaust: the Offenbach Archival Depot’s Role in the Fulfillment of U.S. International and Moral Obligations (a First Hand Account. Proceedings of the 37th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, Denver, CO – June 23–26, 2002)*, [online] <http://jewishlibraries.org> [accessed 27.06.2023]. See too: S.J. Pomeranze, *Personal reminiscences of the Offenbach Archival Depot, 1946–1949. Fulfilling international and moral Obligations*, 30.11.1998, [online] <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/special-focus/offenbach-archival-depot/establishment-and-operation> [accessed 03.05. 2022]. Seymour J. Pomeranze (1915–2011) was the first director of the OAD (March–May 1946) and an officer of the MFAA like his successors Isaac Bencowitz (1896–1972) (May–November 1946) and, until the closure of the OAD

to the countries of eastern Europe, this proved incomparably more difficult, as most of the collections looted there were either the private property of Jews who had perished in the Holocaust or belonged to dissolved and unreactivated Jewish organisations and institutions. This is to say nothing of the communist system that was introduced and the associated programmatic nationalisation and the heightened post-war anti-Semitism that effectively counteracted any hope of a revival of Jewish life in the area.

The collection of the YIVO and the Strashun Library, identified in the OAD with more than 80,000 volumes, obtained a unique position in this context⁹³. As mentioned above, the YIVO, which ceased to exist in Vilnius, had a branch in New York. Since 1942, Weinreich, who headed it, had been enquiring with American Jewish organisations and the US State Department about the fate of the Vilnius headquarters of the Institute and its collections⁹⁴. Almost immediately after the end of the war, Weinreich also informed the US authorities that it was likely that the looted collections of the YIVO were in the Nazi IEJ resources evacuated from Frankfurt to Hungen. The controversy between Weinreich and the JCR over the transfer of the collections of the Vilnius YIVO, above all the identified volumes from the Strashun Library (all of which bore the MSV stamp, unlike the often unmarked collections of the YIVO) and other Vilnius libraries to the New York YIVO, was magnified by the fact that not only the USSR, but also Poland claimed title to the return of at least some of them⁹⁵. Lucy Dawidowicz, who as a JOINT envoy undertook the identification of the Vilnius collections at the OAD in 1947, wrote in a letter to Weinreich.

There is some Polish major [Karol Estreicher (1906–1984), who wants all Polish publications (anything published in Poland) to be returned there. Horne [Joseph Horne, Chefarchivar des OAD von 1947 bis 1949] asked me to tell him about Poland and I helped him maintain the

in 1949, Theodore Heinrich (1910–1981). Bencowitz developed an identification system based on photographs of ownership marks in books. “The photographs were indexed by country and sorters were assigned and responsible for three or four exlibris. Books and documents were sent down conveyor belts, and sorters removed those marked with their assigned exlibris, thereby organizing books by their places of origin. This system proved extremely valuable as it provided sorters who were not familiar with many of the eastern European languages an easy way to identify items. Books were documented in at least thirty-five different languages and over half of the 4,000 ex libris markings were of eastern European origin”. Quoted after *Isaac Bencowitz (1896–1972)*, [online] <https://web.archive.org/web/20120115151238/http://www.monumentsmen.com/bio.php?id=17> [accessed 3.05.2022]. More than two-thirds of the 4,000 stamps and signs concerned Jewish owners.

93 About the Vilnius YIVO collections in OAD see E. Gallas, op. cit., pp. 56–59.

94 For a detailed description of the New York YIVO’s efforts to restore the collections of the Vilnius YIVO found in the American zone of occupied Germany and Czechoslovakia, highlighting the role of M. Weinreich see B. Shilo, op. cit. pp. 39–132.

95 The Central Committee of Jews in Poland has claimed through the Polish government and embassy in Washington, D.C., the return to Poland of 260 crates that went from the OAD to New York’s YIVO, see B. Shilo, op. cit., p. 76.

opinion he already had, that there is no hope for renewed cultural life in Poland. There may be a Jewish community there, but he feels that no one will ever make use of the material⁹⁶.

The American authorities eventually recognised not only the New York YIVO's legal title to the collections of its Vilnius headquarters, but also made it the successor to the "associated libraries" of Vilnius, among them the more than 25,000 volumes of the Strashun Library, which had been owned by the religious community in Vilnius⁹⁷. In two tranches, they arrived in 1948 and 1949 at their new New York home⁹⁸. On 17 June 1947, Dawidowicz witnessed in Offenbach the shipment of 420 crates of YIVO books and archival material to New York: "The experience was for me like a dream come true. All through the war years I had been obsessed by recurring fantasies that I might find, even rescue some of my lost Vilna friends. Finally, I had, in a very tangible way, rescued a part of Vilna, even if it consisted just of inanimate objects – books, mere pieces of paper, the tatters and shards of a civilization"⁹⁹.

In the final stage of the OAD's activities, some 300,000 unidentified volumes remained in it. More than 80,000 of these – together with several hundred Torah scrolls and several thousand ritual Judaica – were received by the JCR treated by the US authorities as trustees of Jewish property deemed either to have no heirs or successors (often a priori in relation to eastern European countries) or to be unidentified. By the end of its mission, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the JCR donated approximately 40% each to Israel (mainly the National Library of Israel at the Hebrew University) and the United States of America (including to the Library of Congress and the Jewish-Theological Seminary in New York), with the rest distributed mainly to Jewish communities in Latin America¹⁰⁰.

In a surprising way, however, the JCR treated the 11,000 volumes of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, which via the RSHA had gone to the library of the Institute for Jewish Question Research (IEJ) in Frankfurt am Main and from there to the OAD, and after its dissolution had been in storage in Wiesbaden since 1949¹⁰¹. The JCR initially intended to distribute them 50–50 between the

96 E. Gallas, op. cit., p. 57. Dawidowicz's letter to Weinreich on 16.02.47.

97 The efforts prior to the decision of the US authorities to donate the Strashun Library to New York's YIVO see D Rabinowitz, op. cit., pp. 102–128.

98 S.J. Pomeranze, op. cit., writes that New York's YIVO received in total 92,000 books and documents from OAD.

99 L.S. Dawidowicz, *What is the Use of Jewish History. Essays*, New York 1992, p. 37.

100 Of this 20%, the JCR also donated a number of books to DPs' camps, mainly in Bavaria, and about 8% to Jewish communities in Western Europe. In total, the JCR took over the trusteeship in occupied Germany and distributed to various Jewish organisations around the world (excluding the "Communist Bloc") some 500,000 volumes and thousands of ritual objects, see E. Gallas, op. cit., p. 15.

101 Y. Domhardt, op. cit., pp. 154–160; see also E. Gallas, op. cit., pp. 175, 254.

National Library of Israel in Jerusalem and the New York Jewish-Theological Seminary, which was founded in 1886 on the model of the JTS in Breslau. Additionally, a small part of the collection was to go to the Jewish community in Mexico (Mexico City).

However, unexpectedly, at the end of 1949, the Swiss Union of Jewish Communities (SIG; Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund) approached H. Arendt and S.W. Baron with requests for the transfer of the Breslau book collection to Switzerland. SIG argued that it would be useful to enrich its own valuable library collection with one that was complementary in character to that of Breslau. Despite Scholem's firm opposition, Arendt acceded to the requests made from Zurich. The JCR thus agreed to the transfer of almost 6,000 volumes from the library of the Breslau Seminary to Switzerland under the condition that they be treated as an indivisible collection and properly conserved. In April 1950, the books arrived in Switzerland, and *lege artis* became the property of the SIG. And almost immediately they were distributed to the three Jewish communities of Zurich, Basel, and Geneva.

Years later

Gershom Scholem believed that no less a tragedy than looting was the deliberate destruction of library collections created over many years that were an emanation of the communities that created and served them. But the greatest and most painful loss, I believe, is the absence of the readers for whom these book collections were created, including those they were intended to serve in the future. This means a break in the cultural continuum, a loss of the foundation of living memory.

The fate of the library of the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung zu Breslau and the present state of its preserved collections make this state of affairs abundantly clear. In the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute, less than half (!) of the hundred historical manuscripts and incunabula of the Breslau Library remain today¹⁰². Some of the more valuable JTS books are available in digitised form on the website of the ŻIH Central Judaic Library without any commentary, which is as much historically false as provenance misleading. The Breslau manuscripts and archival documents held in Moscow's M.I. Rudomino All-Russian State Library for Foreign Literature has been catalogued and were supposed to be available online, but to date we have no knowledge of any

102 102 objects mentioned by G.E. Weil, *Sur une bibliothèque systématiquement pillée par les Nazis: le catalogue des manuscrits et incunables retrouvés de la Bibliothek des Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars in Breslau*, [in:] *Hommage à Georges Vajda : études d'histoire et de pensée juives*, ed. G. Vajda, G. Nahon, Ch. Touati, Louvain 1980, pp. 579–604.

books from the Breslau Seminary stored there¹⁰³. In Mexico (Mexico City), 21 volumes from the JTS book collection have been preserved in the possession of the Ashkenazi Jewish community out of several hundred sent there in 1950 by the JCR. The Jewish community in Basel has sold out over the years of the most valuable rescued Breslau books it had been so solicitous about in the late 1940s, and the rest in a very poor state of preservation were tossed without notice in the summer of 2006 to the library of the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zurich (ICZ; Jewish Community of Zurich)¹⁰⁴. In 2017, part of the JTS collection was also brought to Zurich from the library of the Jewish Community of Geneva. Currently, the ICZ's library as a SIG deposit reportedly holds some 3,400 volumes from the library of the Breslau Seminary, which are undergoing conservation and processing¹⁰⁵. Nothing is known about the more than two thousand volumes missing. In 2004, the National Library in Prague restituted 34 historical manuscripts and seven incunabula of the JTS, mainly from the Saraval collection, to the Jewish Religious Community in Breslau, which, by the way, is not the legal successor not only to the JTS, but even to the German Jüdische Gemeinde Breslau¹⁰⁶. They were handed over on deposit to the Manuscripts and Old Prints Department of the Wrocław University Library, and have not been available anywhere in their original form since. They rest there under the name of the Saraval Collection. Its virtual exhibition is available on the website of the Department of Judaic Studies of the University of Wrocław¹⁰⁷. In 2017, the Berlin Zentral-und Landesbibliothek (ZLB; Central State Library in Berlin) ceremonially donated to the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage (FODZ; Pol. Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego) 24 volumes from the library of the Breslau Seminary that it had identified in the course of researching the provenance of its collections¹⁰⁸. The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB-PK; State Library of Berlin) also found volumes from the JTS in its holdings. Some appear to have been donated by the RSHA, and others

103 The catalogue of JTS manuscripts and archives in Russian collections ensures that it presents all JTS documents in Russia, see *Catalogue of manuscripts...*, p. 14; see also Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, op. cit., p. 374.

104 Y. Domhardt, op. cit., p. 160; G. Heim, *Nie über die Bücher gegangen*, "Tachles" 22.03.2019, [online] <https://swissjews.ch/site/assets/files/0/09/925/tachles-bibliothek.pdf> [accessed 12.05.2022].

105 *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung (Breslau), Bibliothek*, [online] [https://provenienz.gbv.de/3%C3%BCdisch-Theologisches_Seminar_Fraenckel%27scher_Stiftung_\(Breslau\)_Bibliothek](https://provenienz.gbv.de/3%C3%BCdisch-Theologisches_Seminar_Fraenckel%27scher_Stiftung_(Breslau)_Bibliothek) [accessed 12.05.2022].

106 Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, op. cit., pp. 374–378.

107 *Kolekcja Saravala*, [online] <https://judaistyka.uni.wroc.pl/katedra-judaistyki/biblioteka/kolekcja-saravala/> [accessed 12.05.2022].

108 *Provenance research*, Zentral – und Landesbibliothek Berlin, [online] <https://www.zlb.de/en/subject-information/special-area/provenienzforschung/restitutions/jewish-theological-seminary-of-breslau.html> [accessed 15.02.2023].

ended up here after the war as a result of antiquarian purchases¹⁰⁹. The number of JTS volumes in the Jewish Historical Institute, the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, the New York Jewish-Theological Seminary and the Leo Baeck Institute is unknown. It would be possible to collect all the documents, manuscripts and books scattered in so many libraries and archives and at least collectively catalogue them online, creating a kind of virtual memorial to the destroyed library of the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar zu Breslau. The question is, does anyone really want this¹¹⁰?

There are also encouraging examples. In 1995 and 1996 Lithuania donated to the New York YIVO Research Institute the fully digitised collection of the prewar library of the Vilnius YIVO, which neither the Nazis nor the Communists had managed to destroy. Part of them, as I mentioned before, A. Ulpis hid just after the war for decades in the vaults of the former Carmelite monastery in Soviet Vilnius. The other part was discovered in 1993 during the renovation of the former YIVO building¹¹¹. Today, New York's "Vilna Collection" holds more than 6,000 volumes in Yiddish and other languages and 3,000 periodicals from the library of the Vilna YIVO, and from its archives 61 archival corpora (45 linear metres) and 41,000 volumes from the Strashun Library¹¹². And "The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections" project, linking the New York collections of the Vilna YIVO with the Lithuanian collections held at the Lithuanian National Library, the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and the Lithuanian Central State Archives, sets a model of cooperation worthy of the tradition of the pre-war YIVO¹¹³.

The second example worth following is the Digital Library of Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin created by the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre in Lublin. Alongside historical information, it presents

109 More than 70 volumes originating from JTS can be found at State Library of Berlin, see Provenienzforschung, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, [online] <https://provenienz.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/> [accessed 15.02.2023].

110 This otherwise seems relatively easy, given that not much of the material relating to JTS and its collections is already on the websites of various institutions, see *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckel'scher Stiftung (Breslau)*, *Bibliothek*, op. cit.

111 D.F. Fishman, op. cit., p. 75.

112 D. Rabinowitz is critical about the incorporation of almost 80% of the surviving collection of the Strashun Library, which was the property of the Jewish community in Vilnius, into the collection of a private institution such as the Vilnius and New York YIVO; in addition, its placement within the "Vilna Collection" deprives it of its historical autonomy. Nevertheless, he was critical of the 1958 YIVO agreement with Cvi Harkavy, grandson of M. Strashun's brother, who relinquished his private rights to the Strashun Library in exchange for the donation of some 500 duplicates of rabbinic literature to the Hechal Shlomo religious library in Jerusalem. See D. Rabinowitz, op. cit., pp. 146–156, also (less critically) B. Shilo, op. cit., pp. 71–72.

113 *The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections*, [online] <https://vilnacollections.yivo.org> [accessed 3.05.2022].

the preserved books that used to be part of the Yeshiva's book collection – 130 from the collection of the E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, over 200 from private collections, over 100 from the National Library of Israel, 7 from the Jewish Religious Community in Lublin, as well as books from the Maimonides Library, the Har Etzion Yeshiva and the Chabad-Lubavitch library¹¹⁴.

On 23 September 2022, the following two books identified in the collection of the Freie Universität Berlin were returned to the Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin¹¹⁵.

May it be that the reconstructed few years ago bilingual (in Polish and Hebrew) prewar inscription on the façade of the Jewish Historical Institute building in Warsaw, was a harbinger of a similar initiative and joint provenance research with regard to the confiscated Jewish libraries of Breslau, Berlin, and Warsaw: Główna Biblioteka Judaistyczna (Main Judaic Library).

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114 *Cyfrowa Biblioteka Jesziwy...*, op. cit.

115 *Ibidem*.

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