

The Library of Yad Vashem

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Two years ago, during a trip to Israel, I visited the Yad Vashem library, the ultimate Holocaust Resource Center. (For a list of other Holocaust Resource Centers in Israel and Europe, see Appendix.)

The library was founded with the passage of the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law in 5713-1953. The law states that the mission of the institution is "to gather into the homeland material regarding all those members of the Jewish people who laid down their lives, who fought and rebelled against the Nazi enemy and his collaborators, and to perpetuate their memory and that of the communities, organizations and institutions which were destroyed because they were Jewish" (section 2 of the Yad Vashem Law), and among its tasks, it is "to collect, examine and publish testimony of the disaster and the heroism it called forth, and to bring home its lesson to the people" (section 2, article 2).

Physical Appearance

Compared to the monumental scale of other buildings in the Yad Vashem complex, the library is modest, not at all awe-inspiring. The reading room, where one enters, is unprepossessing. It is smaller than expected, with a wall of tightly-packed shelves along the right, a low bookcase supporting recently published books about the Holocaust in a variety of languages and sizes to the right of the entrance, and three rows of industrial metal shelving jutting out at right angles from the left wall. The lightweight reading tables are outfitted with plastic chairs. The physical layout hints little at the extraordinary nature of this library, and not until one examines the collection—beginning with the bank of metal shelves on the left, which house "Yizkor" books, memorial volumes on destroyed Jewish communities in Europe—is its distinction apparent.

Organization

Past the stacks of "Yizkor" books, and adjacent to the reading room, is a small bare room lined with oak card catalogs. The library staff has had to devise its own cataloging and classification schemes. (See "Deweineazar" in this issue for more about locally devised systems for the cataloging of Holocaust collections.)

Books are cataloged according to author, and the cards are arranged in separate sequences by alphabet (Hebrew, Latin, etc.). They are also cataloged by subjects selected from a file of more than 4000 locally developed subject headings. Every name, every place in which the Holocaust occurred constitutes a separate subject. There are hundreds of subject entries for 'Antisemitism' alone, beginning in the 1850s with Gobineau and Chamberlain. Works on each subject are subarranged by language.

The Collection

As of 1984, the library owned more than 80,000 titles, many of which represent multi-volume sets of books, yielding a collection of more than 100,000 volumes. The stacks in view in the reading room hold but a fraction of that number. The bulk of the collection resides in the basement on movable closed stacks.

Books in more than fifty languages are collected here—some in languages few of us can read—among them: Eskimo, Arabic, and Turkish.

Ora Alcalay, the Director of the library, whom I interviewed during my visit, said that Yad Vashem collects all publications on Antisemitism, beginning with the Weimar Republic, as well as basic works on modern European history. It is considered important to include the antecedents of the Holocaust as well as documentation of its occurrence. The library thus has one of the world's largest collections of antisemitic literature (including editions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in more than 20 languages).

It owns a copy of every publication that has appeared to date on the trials of war criminals, from the first trial held in Krasnodar in 1943 through those held in Germany and in all other parts of the world. Yad Vashem also has the world's largest collection of "Yizkor" (memorial) books for Jewish communities—close to 600 volumes.

The library has acquired several important collections, including books of the laws promulgated in several German states dur-

ing the Third Reich on the extermination of European Jewry; a collection of Nazi antisemitic propaganda for children; rare pamphlets dealing with the fate of Poland and Polish Jewry during World War II; antisemitic tracts published in Bulgaria during the inter-war period; a microfilm of the daily bulletins issued by the People's Tribunal which tried war criminals in Sofia during the years 1944-1946; microfilms of the Nazi newspapers *Der Angriff*, *Das Schwarze Korps*, and *Der Sturmer*; and documents of the liberating forces. More is being written about the Holocaust than ever before, and Yad Vashem collects it all—including fiction.

Archives

The core of Yad Vashem is its Archives. Alcalay revealed that more than 50 million documents concerning the Holocaust have been acquired. Survivors of the Holocaust and other people continue to supply additional documentary items: reports, newspapers, photographs, books, identity documents, Nazi announcements and decrees, memoirs, maps. . . . The ways in which some materials have reached, or have been obtained, by Yad Vashem recall the great intrigues and mystery stories of literature. Through an agreement with Poland and Romania, the library has come into possession of priceless documents. Recently acquired documents from Bulgaria were in such a state of decay that they had to be microfilmed. Since this visit to the library, a Documents Microfilming and Restoration Project has been undertaken by the International Society for Yad Vashem/American Society for Yad Vashem, in recognition of the many factors which may cause Yad Vashem to lose precious Holocaust documentation.

Germany recently passed a law that any document more than twenty years old not pertaining to the German people was to be destroyed. The law is not thought to be aimed at destroying Jewish documents, but that would, in effect, be one result. In England, classified documents of thirty years ago are now being declassified. Representatives of Yad Vashem are busy copying all the documents they can or arranging to acquire them before it is too late. They realize that many public institutions, social and cultural organizations, and private persons in

Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union hold hundreds of thousands of items of Jewish documentation. Some countries, such as Poland and Romania, have permitted Yad Vashem to make copies locally.

Thousands of documents have already been copied with official permission, and it is hoped that more will open up. Yad Vashem fears that one day some countries may decide that no more photocopying will be allowed; therefore, there is great urgency to complete the photocopying project.

Publications

Due to numerous requests for lists of educational materials, the library has prepared bibliographies in French, Spanish, English, and German for various age groups. Up until 1974, the library also published a catalogue of its periodicals (250 were received regularly as of 1984) and of new books received each year. Since 1974, these activities have been curtailed for budgetary reasons, and the staff has been able to publish a list reflecting only a small proportion of collected items.

We are currently witnessing a dangerous trend towards revisionist writing on the Holocaust, to demonstrate that it never happened and that Jews were never its special target. It has thus become even more important to collect and conserve these materials so that they can be a source for research and historical study for centuries to come. Yad Vashem has undertaken to publish a 24-volume history of the Holocaust in reaction to revisionist propaganda. This project is being financed by the International Society for Yad Vashem/American Society for Yad Vashem. *The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust* is scheduled for completion in the course of the next decade. The entire series will be published in Hebrew and English, with the expectation that it will also be translated and printed in several other languages. Each volume will have an editor who will write the entire book or parts of it, inviting contributors to write chapters as needed. Titles of the proposed volumes are: *Europe and the Jews*; *The Final Solution*; *The Concentration Camps*; *Germany*; *Austria*; *Bohemia & Moravia*; *Poland*; *The Soviet Union*; *France and French North Africa*; *Belgium*; *Holland*; *Denmark*, *Norway and Finland*; *Romania*; *Bulgaria*; *Italy*; *Libya*; *Greece*; *Yugoslavia*; *Slovakia*; *Hungary*; *The Free World and the Holocaust*; *Sheerith Hapleita* [The Survivors]; *Comparative Analysis*; *Consequences*; and *War Criminal Trials*. Many distinguished editors—among them, Abraham P. Alsberg, Yitzhak Arad, Yehuda Bauer, Shaul Friedlander, Yoav Gelber, Yisrael Gutman, Nathaniel Katzburg, Uriel Tal,

Bela Vago, Leni Yahil, Raoul Hilberg, Louis De Jong, Abraham Margalio, Rafi Gat, and R. Braham—have been appointed.

Users

Among those using the library's services are researchers, authors, and film producers, as well as elementary, high-school, and university students. Tourists, survivors, and relatives of families lost in the Holocaust also visit the library. Israeli citizens may borrow three books a month upon a small deposit of money.

Appendix:

Other Major Holocaust Research Centers in Israel and Europe

Israel

Beit Lohamei Ha-Ghetta'ot
Kibbutz Lohamei Ha-Ghetta'ot
M.P. Oshrat 25-220
Israel

Moreshet

Mordecai Anielewicz Documentation Center
Giv'at Chaviva
M.P. Menashe 37-850
Israel

Ma'su'ah

Kibbutz Tel-Yitzhak
45-805
Israel

Europe

Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine
17 rue Geoffrey-l'Asnier,
75004 Paris, France

Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea
Via Eupili 6
I-20145 Milano, Italy

Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History)
Leonrodstr. 46 b.
D-8000 München 19 West Germany

Institute of Contemporary History
4 Devonshire Street
London, W1, UK

Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie
Postbus 19769
NL 1000 GT Amsterdam, Netherlands

Zydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce
Al. Gen. Swierczewskiego 79 (Tlomackie 5)
00-090 Warszawa, Poland

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