



Simon Schama has called the YIVO Institute the “embodiment of the collective memory of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe.” The core of this memory is the YIVO Vilna Collections. The project to preserve and digitize these materials will ensure their survival for generations to come; it will globally stimulate and disseminate new research and new knowledge; and, moreover, it will enable us to recover the memory of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia shattered by the Holocaust.

This project is one of the essential undertakings of the Jewish people today for building Jewish identity and the Jewish future in America and around the world.

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THE YIVO VILNA COLLECTIONS PROJECT

Newsletter · June 2016

About the Project

“THESE MATERIALS ARE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS”

During World War II, the Nazis looted YIVO’s archive and library in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Jews who were forced to sort the materials for ransacking by the Nazis risked their lives to smuggle some of the rare treasures to hiding places in the Vilna Ghetto. Much was destroyed, but soon after the war some of the materials were recovered by YIVO (by then relocated to the United States) with the help of the U.S. Army. Other items were recovered and rescued from the Soviets by a Lithuanian librarian, who hid them for over 40 years until they were rediscovered in 1988.

The YIVO Vilna Collections project, launched in 2015, is a \$5.6 million, 7-year landmark digital initiative that has inspired funders, scholars, and lay people around the world. Our teams in Lithuania and New York are completing the processing, conservation, and digitization of these collections ahead of schedule.

This project reunites YIVO’s divided prewar library and archival collections through a dedicated web portal. It is a partnership between the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania.

YIVO has raised **\$2.69 million**
out of **\$5.6 million**

DIGITIZATION PROGRESS THROUGH MAY 15, 2016



7,048

books digitized
(1,341,187 pages)

[Project goal: 11,700 books]



166,752

pages of archival
documents digitized

[Project goal: 936,522 pages]

News & Updates

YIVO Receives \$260,000 Grant from NEH

The YIVO Vilna Collections Project has been awarded a two-year \$260,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. We are particularly proud to have received this grant because it is highly competitive, receiving an average of 236 applications a year, of which only about 16% are funded. The NEH funds will go towards covering the work in the YIVO Archives in New York.

Yad Vashem Becomes Project Partner

Yad Vashem has become an institutional partner and financial supporter of the YIVO Vilna Collections project, reviving a partnership dating back to the period right after World War II. Some of the digitized materials that will be available on the website portal hosted by YIVO will also be available in the reading room at Yad Vashem.

First Vilna Collections Scholar Named with New Grant ▶

YIVO has received a 3-year, \$75,000 grant to create a new scholar-in-residence, the Vilna Collections Scholar, to contextualize the archival and library materials in YIVO's Vilna Collections for educational and individual use. The 2016 Vilna Collections Scholar is Alyssa Quint. She will complete a survey of the Esther-Rokhl Kaminska Theater Museum Collection, curate online exhibitions, and develop content featuring collection artifacts. Scholars for 2017 and 2018 will be named in the future.

SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT



Alyssa Quint

Joining the YIVO staff in February as the first YIVO Vilna Collections Scholar, Quint will focus her attention on the Esther-Rokhl Kaminska Theater Museum Collection.

Quint received her Ph.D. from Harvard University and was a research fellow at Penn's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. Quint has taught Yiddish literature at a number of universities, most recently at Columbia University. She has lectured and published extensively on Yiddish culture and recently completed *The Social Life of Jewish Theater*, a manuscript on Avrom Goldfaden and the beginning of the modern Yiddish theater.

Selected Artifacts · New Discoveries from the Vilna Collections



◀ Calculating the Rhythms of Jewish Life

This 1886 edition of *Itim le-vinah* by Joseph ben Moses Aaron Ginzberg, from the Strashun Library, is a *sefer evronot* – a genre that uses rabbinic chronology to calculate the Jewish calendar and times for prayer. *Sifre evronot* often included astronomical data and perpetual calendars. This edition also provides data used to determine the times of sunrise and sunset in various locations in the Russian Empire. This genre of Jewish literature focused both inward on Jewish life and culture, and outward in its awareness of the calendars of the non-Jewish world and utilization of secular sciences such as astronomy.

Reviewing "The Dybbuk"

A surviving fragment of a performance review of S. Anski's *The Dybbuk* by Habimah—the Hebrew-language theater company founded in Moscow, 1918—is the type of document researchers dream of finding. It reveals the inner thoughts and thought process of a prominent historical figure as he works out details on the page. The review, by Yiddish theater director and historian Michal Weichert, begins with a manifesto about the significance of language for the performing arts. It appears to be marked up for publication, possibly in *Vilner Tog*, the Yiddish daily edited by Zalmen Reizen from 1919 to 1939.

How Jewish Scholars Helped Save Karaites from the Nazis

A scrap of paper was found in the Offenbach depot, where some of YIVO's collection was recovered after WWII. Created during the war when YIVO's building served as a Nazi sorting center, it illuminates a little-known sub-chapter of the Holocaust: determining if the Karaites were Jewish and thereby slated for genocide. The Karaites broke away from mainstream Rabbinic Judaism in the 8th century. Scholar Zelig Kalmanovitch was ordered to supervise a team to determine the answer. Kalmanovitch went out of his way to demonstrate that the Karaites had no "racial" connection with the Jewish people.

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*AS OF JUNE 1, 2016

