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YIVO COMPLETES LANDMARK DIGITIZATION AND PRESERVATION PROJECT REUNITING MATERIALS NEARLY DESTROYED BY THE NAZIS

(New York, NY) 10 January 2022 – Today, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) completed the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project (EBVOC), a historic 7-year, \$7 million initiative to process, conserve and digitize YIVO’s prewar library and archival collections which had been divided between New York and Vilnius, Lithuania. Through the Project, these materials have been digitally reunited through a dedicated web portal, making them accessible to a worldwide audience for the first time.

The EBVOC Project is an international partnership between YIVO and three Lithuanian institutions: the Lithuanian Central State Archives, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, and the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

In 1941, the Nazis ransacked the YIVO Institute in Vilna. Many documents were destroyed and a group of Vilna ghetto workers (many of whom had worked for or been associated with YIVO) were forced to sort through the collections and select materials to be shipped to Frankfurt, for use in the Nazi Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question. In 1946, the U.S. Army recovered these documents and sent them to YIVO in New York.

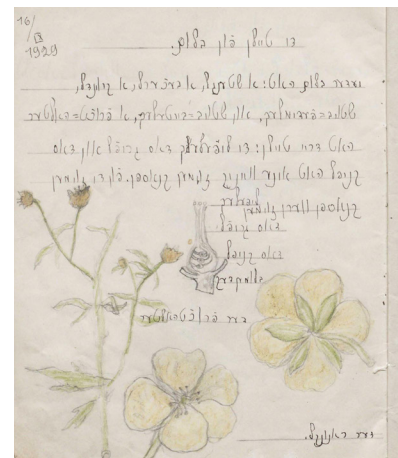
These Ghetto laborers, who became known as the Paper Brigade, risked their lives by hiding materials on their bodies to smuggle into the Vilna Ghetto where they were secretly hidden. These rescued materials were uncovered after the war and then again saved in 1948 from the Soviets by the Lithuanian librarian Antanas Ulpis and remained hidden in the Church of St. George (converted by the Soviets into the Lithuanian Book Chamber) until they were discovered in 1989.

In 2017, approximately 170,000 additional documents were discovered in the National Library of Lithuania, including rare and unpublished works.

These surviving books and documents – split apart by history and located in New York City and Vilnius, Lithuania – are cultural survivors of the Holocaust. Comprised of approximately 4.1 million pages of original books, artifacts, records, manuscripts, and documents, the EBVOC Project is the first of its kind in Jewish history and represents a milestone in preserving Jewish history.



Title page of *Perushim al ha-Torah ve-al Rashi, arba'ah nikbetsu ba-u bo* by Shemuel Almosnino. [Constantinople, 1525].



Page from a school notebook from the TSYSHO (Tsentrale Yidishe Shul Organizatsye - Central Yiddish School Organization) Schools in Lodz, ca. 1928-1929.

This unparalleled collection sheds new light on prewar Jewish history and culture throughout Eastern Europe and Russia, benefiting scholars, students, and the global public for generations to come.

YIVO's original prewar archives and library are the preeminent source of documentation on the subject of East European Jewish civilization, which spanned over 1,000 years. The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project has created the single largest digital collection related to East European Jewish civilization.

The collections tell us how Jews lived, where they came from, how they raised and educated their families, how they created art, literature, music, and language. Furthermore, these documents reveal the relations between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, how they understood their place in the world both politically and socially and how they faced the turmoil and promise of modernity.

For more information about the project visit the website vilnacollections.yivo.org.

For media inquiries, please contact:

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ABOUT YIVO

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is dedicated to the preservation and study of the history and culture of East European Jewry worldwide. For a century, YIVO has pioneered new forms of Jewish scholarship, research, education, and cultural expression. Our public programs and exhibitions, as well as online and on-site courses, extend our global outreach and enable us to share our vast resources. The YIVO Archives contains more than twenty-three million unique items and YIVO's Library has over 400,000 volumes—the single largest resource for such study in the world. yivo.org



A series of Russian military decorations collected by Elias Tcherikower.



Program cover for the Yiddish Press Ball in Warsaw, before and after conservation treatment, 1920s.



QUOTES ON THE EDWARD BLANK YIVO ONLINE VILNA COLLECTIONS PROJECT

Ruth Levine

Chair of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The completion of this project marks a milestone in the recent history of the YIVO Institute and a true fulfillment of our essential mission. It honors those heroes and martyrs who risked and lost their lives to preserve these books and documents and honors the scholars and visionaries who understand that the meaning of these materials goes far beyond the words written on the page. We are grateful for the participation of our Lithuanian partners, the tireless efforts of our archivists and librarians in NY and Vilnius, and our generous donors, without whom none of this would have been possible.

Jonathan Brent

Executive Director & CEO of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project, now completed after a seven-year collaboration with our Lithuanian partners, and thanks to the immense, tireless, joint efforts of our archivists, librarians, conservators, and digitization specialists, has meaning far beyond the approximately 4.1 million pages of books and documents it has for the first time made available to a global public. The completion of this Project is also a reawakening of YIVO's historic mission, an important (and successful) experiment in international cultural activity, and an irreversible marker of YIVO's future as a leading global Jewish institution.

Gitanas Nausėda

President of the Republic of Lithuania

www.lrp.lt/en/institution/president-gitanas-nauseda/32727

I would like to sincerely congratulate the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, its leadership and the staff, on the completion of the milestone project on processing and conservation of the Institute's pre-war archives. The project marks a historic step in presenting to the public the most comprehensive collection so far of the world-famous heritage of YIVO. It has been an immense achievement that, after 7 years of the precise work by the Lithuanian and US experts, the unique collection of documents is available online for the global audience for the first time.

Ingrida Šimonytė

Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania

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I am extremely pleased to thank everyone who has contributed to the historic Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project. You succeeded to recover and bring back a part of lost Jewish history. YIVO had collected the largest library and archive in the world in Vilnius during the interwar period, which has now been turned into the largest digital library of the history and culture of East European Jewry. I am especially glad that this virtual library will be available to everyone wishing to discover and understand the life, language, and culture of the centuries-old Jewish civilization from Lithuania and the entire Eastern Europe.

At the same time, the project has shown, how much we – Lithuania and the world – have lost. The Project team – in Vilnius and New York – have had an extremely important mission and have done an excellent



job, perpetuating the historical and intellectual legacy of Lithuanian Jews. I trust that the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which will soon be celebrating its 100th anniversary, will continue to be a major source of information for both researchers and each of us.

Simonas Kairys

Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania

The successful conclusion of this significant and meaningful project also turns a new page in the cultivation of our memory. It will help fill in the gaps in our knowledge, deepen our understanding of pre-war Jewish life in the region, and build a firm bridge of memory between Vilnius and New York. The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project is an important obligation, first and foremost for Lithuania, but also for the entire world. Each of us must draw on this information, not only because it is necessary to remember, honour and cherish. We must do this if we ourselves want to become better and create a better world.

Vaclovas Šalkauskas

Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York
ny.mfa.lt/niuorkas/en/about-us/about-consulate/consul-general

The sincerest congratulations on the completion of the tremendous Edward Blank Vilna Online Collections Project and deep respect for the team who so remarkably handled the historical YIVO's archives. The feats of the "paper brigade" and its supporters are an inspiring example of the commitment and dedication to all of us today. I am truly happy that this heritage of the Lithuania and European Jewry is now easily accessible to the researchers and the public.

Richard Ovenden

Bodley's Librarian at the University of Oxford

We must remember and celebrate the heroic efforts of the Jewish librarians, archivists, poets, and scholars in the Paper Brigade, who risked their lives to ensure the survival of an astonishing trove of documents that preserve the rich culture of Jewish life across Eastern Europe. The Lithuanian librarian Antanas Ulpis, should also be added to the list of those willing to risk everything so that later generations could access the records of an entire civilisation, attacked in the most vicious way imaginable, but which has endured. This history can now be accessed thanks to the great work of YIVO and their Lithuanian partners.

Prof. Dr. Renaldas Gudauskas

Director-General, Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

The cooperation of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania with the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in this is a very important project provides the world and the Lithuanian community with an even more comprehensive insight into the history and culture of the people who have been an integral part of Lithuania for centuries. It promotes the possibility of deeper knowledge and new research and allows for an even more accurate understanding of the history of Lithuania and adds to the narrative of Jewish history worldwide.



Steven J. Zipperstein

*Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History, Stanford University
Author of POGROM: KISHINEV AND THE TILT OF HISTORY*

Working in the YIVO library first as a doctoral student in the late 1970s, later time and again over the course of the last several decades, I was aware that elsewhere, in Vilna, there were treasures once belonging to YIVO yet beyond reach. Now, finally, this veritable goldmine is united, virtually, opening for the scholar and the general reader knowledge about a vanished world immeasurably more accessible because of this new, extraordinary resource.

Rabbi Andrew Baker

Director of International Jewish Affairs American Jewish Committee (AJC)

YIVO has done something truly remarkable. With diplomacy and creativity, it has overcome physical distance and competing claims to reunite “virtually” this priceless collection while making it immediately accessible to researchers, scholars, and students around the world.

Dr. Rima Cicėnienė

Deputy Director for Research Affairs, The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections Project was a rare opportunity to participate in the reconstruction of the pre-war YIVO archive and make it available to the world and Lithuanian society. This project enables people worldwide to learn about the daily life and holidays, the joys and sorrows and culture of the Jewish people a nation that has lived side by side with us for centuries.

Dr. Samuel Kassow

Charles H. Northam Professor of History, Trinity College

The completion of the EBVOCP is an extraordinary achievement that makes more than four million pages of documents and books available to scholars around the world. What better way for the YIVO to honor the memory of East European Jewry than to give people around the world the chance to get to know the history and culture of “Yiddishland”—and its beloved capital, Vilna!

Dara Horn

Author of PEOPLE LOVE DEAD JEWS and ETERNAL LIFE

This astonishing achievement is a triumph over evil. The project of gathering these great cultural treasures of the Jewish people—begun in Vilna a century ago, continued by heroic Jewish writers smuggling materials out of Nazi hands, and protected by brave Lithuanians during decades of Soviet occupation—is finally complete. The bridge connecting the past and the future is now open.

Dalius Žižys

Director, Lithuanian State Archives

We have done a great job helping people interested in the past improve. I am glad that the archives are becoming more accessible.



Glenn Dynner, Ph.D.

Chair of Religion Department, Sarah Lawrence College

Co-Editor of SHOFAR: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF JEWISH STUDIES

This historical project reunites thousands of documents about Jewish life in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. Some were hidden within the Vilna Ghetto by devoted members of the Jewish “Paper Brigade”; others were looted by the Nazis and taken to Germany. Their rediscovery, reunion, and digitization enables us to relive a uniquely expressive, lost Jewish civilization.

Assoc. Prof. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas

(Vilnius University), former Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania

The entire collection of surviving treasures from Vilna Jewish libraries is an essential resource for genuine appreciation of Jewish heritage in the contemporary Lithuanian society. Through research and education, it will help restore the proper place of Jewish culture in the Lithuanian collective memory.

