

THE JEWISH EUROPEAN EPHEMERA COLLECTION

*Telling Our Story
Piece by Piece*

JONATHAN ROSEN

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A project of The National Library of Israel, and
The Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe, 2017

We invited writer Jonathan Rosen into the expanding archive of the Jewish European Ephemera Collection, launched as part of the National Library of Israel's programme of renewal. We asked him to reflect upon the evolving role that disposable artefacts play in our understanding of Jewish culture, past and present.

GESHER L'EUROPA

Gesher L'Europa is an initiative of the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe and the National Library of Israel (NLI) to create opportunities for European scholars, library and museum professionals, educators and community activists working within Jewish settings to develop an on-going, mutually beneficial relationship with the NLI, and to engage with the NLI's diverse and extensive collections.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Rosen is the author of two novels: *Eve's Apple* and *Joy Comes in the Morning*, and two non-fiction books: *The Talmud and the Internet: A Journey Between Worlds* and *The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature*. In 1990 he helped establish *The Forward* as an English language newspaper and created its culture section, which he oversaw for ten years. After leaving *The Forward* he helped establish Nextbook Inc., a project devoted to Jewish cultural literacy, and created *The Jewish Encounters Book Series*, published by Nextbook/Schocken, which he edited until 2014. Among the books he produced for the series are *Betraying Spinoza* by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *The Eichmann Trial* by Deborah Lipstadt, and *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole. Rosen's essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic* and numerous other publications. He is presently writing a book for Penguin Press about friendship and madness.

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FOREWORD

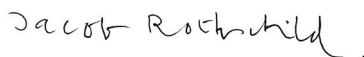
On Tuesday, 5 April 2016, two documents were buried in a capsule under rocky Jerusalem terrain. Two pieces of significant ephemera - a copy of the National Library of Israel Charter signed in 2011, in which the heads of the State declared the launch of the National Library of Israel (NLI) renewal project and a new declaration commemorating the realization of this vision - were lowered into the foundations of the new NLI building at its cornerstone ceremony. Scheduled for completion in 2020, our foundation, Yad Hanadiv and my family are proud to be associated with this project, which as Prime Minister Netanyahu said at the ceremony, 'will be a focus of national pride... a beacon of light to the nations... We will all reap the fruits of the tree of knowledge that will take root here and grow higher and higher.'

The NLI will be a library without borders – with links to Jewish communities, people and libraries wherever they may be, drawing on the cyber revolution to enhance community engagement, digital preservation, open access, and collaborative projects globally. Ephemera – the theatre ticket, train receipt, wedding invitation, film poster – reflecting daily life are an important part of the Library's collection. The NLI has already accumulated a large collection of Israeli ephemera, and now, with the launch of the Jewish European Ephemera Collection, their holdings will be enriched by a diverse range of materials showcasing contemporary Jewish life in Europe.

As Jonathan Rosen highlights in his erudite essay: *It is hard to imagine a more appropriate way of connecting Israel's re-born library and the Jewish communities of Europe than with an ingathering of ephemera. Those elusive artefacts, often found hiding in history's back pocket, today travel openly across borders but continue to prompt questions that cut to the heart of Jewish life in the*

modern world. Unlike books and manuscripts, ephemera flit mysteriously between the fragile present and the long corridor of Jewish memory. They blur the line between the scholar and the amateur, the religious impulse and the secular one, the comforts of home and the confusions of exile.... In a world of constant flux, ephemera are indispensable companions of the struggle to understand the complex world. The question framed by the Jewish European Ephemera Collection is not 'What has been lost in the 20th century?' but 'What is being created in the 21st?'

I am delighted that the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe (RFHE) is working closely with the NLI to bring its treasures to diverse international audiences. In particular, I would like to thank Ruth Gruber, the co-ordinator of www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu who urged us to consider the significance of collecting contemporary ephemera in Europe; and at the NLI, Caron Sethill, Programme Manager - Europe, who has shepherded this project every step of the way, Dr. Yochai Ben-Ghedalia, the Head of Archives and Special Collections, Dr. Yoel Finkelman, Curator of the Haim and Hanna Salomon Judaica Collection and archivist Olga Lempert who is doing a stellar job cataloguing the ephemera. The tremendous support and collegiality of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in enabling the collection of ephemera across the FSU has been exemplary. Finally, the greatest gratitude is reserved for those citizen-archivists across Europe who are depositing materials in over 130 locations in more than 25 countries – creating a record of their own history for generations to come.



Jacob Rothschild

THE JEWISH EUROPEAN EPHEMERA COLLECTION

TELLING OUR STORY PIECE BY PIECE

JONATHAN ROSEN

Think of Noah's ark as a floating library and all the animals on board as a set of Great Books collected in duplicate to ensure the survival of civilization. Think of Noah as a librarian wondering if there will ever be readers again in the world, or if there will even be a world. He sends out a dove and it comes back with an olive leaf, a postcard from the postdiluvian earth informing him it is habitable once more, and that his family and the entire living library can move back onto solid ground. Noah learns all this from a leaf - his first piece of ephemera.

That leaf deserves its place in the pantheon of evanescent artefacts that shape the way we think about the mutable world and our place in it. We need animals and we need plants; we need books and we need ephemera. Easily lost to time, ephemera can change our ideas about the past, giving unexpected glimpses of how the world looked, felt and acted in ways that more durable materials often cannot. Ephemera require a historical context but are also part of the context in which history must be understood. They offer the nuance, shading and inflection necessary for thinking about daily life - and what other kind of life is there?

Haut ab! ("Snip it!"), programme from an exhibition at the Jüdisches Museum Berlin dedicated to the significance of circumcision. Berlin, Germany, 2014. Design: bueromimal, Berlin



REPORT ANTISEMITISM:
A wallet card distributed by the Community Security Trust featuring numbers to call to report anti-Semitic or suspicious acts. U.K.



That is why the National Library of Israel (NLI), in partnership with the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe (RFHE) has launched the Jewish European Ephemera Collection (JEEC), which since 2014 has been gathering postcards, flyers, brochures, ticket stubs and all manner of impermanent printed material from across Europe and the Former Soviet Union (FSU). The JEEC has collected artefacts from Belarus, Bulgaria, Ireland, Hungary, Italy, Greece, Austria, Germany, Ukraine, Denmark, Estonia, the United Kingdom and a dozen other countries.

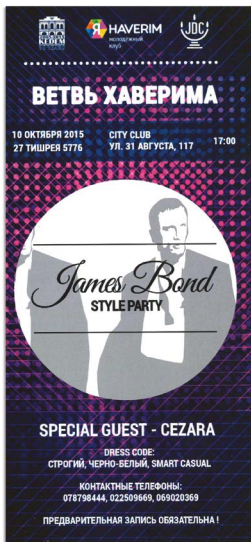
There is no 'summing up' an ephemera collection - especially when it is being drawn from over 130 cities in 25 countries - but even a random sampling takes on a suggestive life of its own. Below is a wallet-sized card from the U.K. with a telephone number for reporting anti-Semitic incidents; to the left is a flyer in German featuring a circumcised banana announcing an exhibit about European attitudes towards brit milah.

To the right, a fill-in-the-blank birthday card from the Khmelnsky Hesed Community Centre in Ukraine wishes the recipient the traditional Jewish blessing of 120 years of life filled with 'good health, no aging, no sadness, nor boredom, and many more birthdays to come.'

History teaches us about the pogroms in the early 20th century that devastated the area of Ukraine named after Bohdan Khmelnsky; it teaches us about the Khmelnsky massacres that decimated the Ukrainian Jewish population in the 17th century. Ephemera sends you a birthday card from the Khmelnsky Hesed Community Centre in 2015, wishing you long life. History teaches about Britain's proud protection of civil



Birthday card: sent to members of the Hesed Besht, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine



Invitation to a party in honor of the 7th annual "Branch of Haverim" awards, Haverim youth club at KEDEM Community Center, Chisinau, Moldova, 2015

liberties; ephemera whisper a word about prejudice, and hand you a wallet card with an anti-Semitism hotline. Putting the pieces together with a proper sense of proportion is not easy, but there has never been a shortcut to understanding.

Here is a James Bond-style party invitation to the chaverim youth club in Chisinau, Moldova. What does it mean? It means Jews in Moldova have parties. The invitation, the circumcised banana and thousands of other items that the JEEC is collecting will be housed in the National Library's state-of-the-art Jerusalem home - currently under construction and scheduled for completion in 2020. There they will share space with over five million books and periodicals, 70,000 microfilmed manuscripts, 8,000 Hebrew letter manuscripts, 2,500 Arabic letter manuscripts, 6,000 ancient maps and tens of thousands of hours of recorded Jewish and Israeli folk songs.

Israel's bibliophilic first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, understood that the infant nation's political viability was bolstered by its cultural heritage. He initiated the NLI's microfilmed Hebrew manuscripts collection in 1950 when the State was just two years old. That collection now represents 90% of the world's Hebrew manuscripts, which is not the sort of claim anybody would ever make about a collection of ephemera which are drawn from a bottomless pool of infinite possibility.

At the same time, they are so easily lost, forgotten or destroyed that whatever is saved has the aspect of something gleaned after a hard rain, or plucked with what Keats called the 'magic hand of chance'. Even if we had 100% of all existing manuscripts, no record

would ever be complete, because no story can ever fully be told.

They are so easily lost, forgotten or destroyed that whatever is saved has the aspect of something gleaned after a hard rain, or plucked with what Keats called the 'magic hand of chance'

In many ways, the JEEC is emblematic of the National Library of Israel's re-creation of itself in the aftermath of a digital revolution that has transformed our relationship to libraries, information, books, buildings, education and culture. Founded in 1892, the NLI was an idea before it was a brick and mortar reality, and a national institution before there was a Jewish state. It was a dream fostered by Joseph Chazanovitch, a scholarly physician from Russia who became inspired by a visit to Palestine. In 1899, he wrote an article titled 'A Letter of Reminder', in which Chazanovitch bemoaned the apathy of the Jewish people in progressing the ingathering of books and restates this goal using the words now quoted as the original vision for the Library. 'A big, high and lofty house will be built in Jerusalem where all the spiritual fruit of Israel will be preserved from the time it became a people.'

Over time, the NLI has had multiple incarnations. It outgrew early locations, merged with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was driven from one campus by war, settled into another and then divided itself like a cell after the Six Day War, inhabiting old and new locations even as the new location became old. Having been granted independence, land and an ambitious mandate by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) in 2011, the NLI has re-imagined itself for the 21st century. Its new building, worthy of those ambitions, is taking

symbolic and actual shape between the Knesset and the Israel Museum.

Nonetheless, the state-of-the-art building is only the visible portion of an institution that is harnessing digital technology and adopting collaborative and open-source initiatives to become a library without walls. The Library's double life, as a real and virtual home for books, in many ways mirrors its dual role as both the National Library of Israel and the Library of the Jewish



*New National Library of Israel Complex:
West Elevation along Ruppin Boulevard
(Evening). © Herzog & de Meuron*

People. To help bridge those twin identities, Gesher L'Europa, an initiative of the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe and the NLI, was established with the aim of creating opportunities for European scholars, library and museum professionals, educators and community activists working within Jewish settings to develop an ongoing, mutually beneficial relationship with the NLI.

One of its signature projects is the Jewish European Ephemera Collection. It is hard to imagine a more

appropriate way of connecting Israel's re-born library and the Jewish communities of Europe than with an ingathering of ephemera. Those elusive artefacts, often found hiding in history's back pocket, today travel openly across borders but continue to prompt



*Jewish National and University Library:
Catalogue room at Terra Sancta, 1960.
Photo: David Harris. The National
Library of Israel, Archives Department,
ARC. 4* 793 06 42.*

questions that cut to the heart of Jewish life in the modern world. Unlike books and manuscripts, ephemera flit mysteriously between the fragile present and the long corridor of Jewish memory. They blur the line between the scholar and the amateur, the religious impulse and the secular one, the comforts of home and the confusions of exile.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ephemera as this: 'Late 16th century: plural of ephemeron, from Greek, neuter of ephēmeros lasting only a day. As a singular noun the word originally denoted a plant said by ancient writers to last only one day, or an insect with a short lifespan, and hence was applied (late 18th century) to a person or thing of short-lived interest.'

In other words, ephemera started out as a lowly form - plants and bugs lasting a single day, and people and things that are their metaphorical equivalent.

The 2013 Collection Policy of the NLI (Appendix 1) defines ephemera as 'impermanent and transitory written or printed material (not originally intended for preservation).' This parenthetical aside suggests the Kafkaesque paradox that gives ephemera their

mysterious power: they are uncollectable things that you collect.

And yet think of Noah's dove, with its green message after great destruction; and think of Jonah - whose name means dove - sitting under a kikayon, a plant that sprang up overnight and yet was big enough to shelter him from the blazing Mediterranean sun. With the exception of Jack's beanstalk, Jonah's kikayon may be the fastest growing plant in all folklore, and the fastest dying because God sends a worm that kills it the next night. The kikayon 'came up in a night, and perished in a night,' God reminds Jonah, who is grieving for it. God makes of the ephemeral plant a metonymy for a city of 120,000 souls that the prophet was reluctant to save. The inhabitants of Nineveh are not 'of short-lived interest,' and neither is the plant, which becomes a lesson taught to a reluctant prophet about the transcendent value of all life. Transitory things bring home eternal truths.

Sometimes they represent the superflux of the prosperous world, as easily collected as posters taken down after a party; sometimes they are pulled from a world on fire, like the documents rescued by Emmanuel Ringelblum and his associates in the Warsaw Ghetto. Operating under the codename Oyneg Shabbes, those

*Ephemera flit mysteriously between
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corridor of Jewish memory.*

heroic men and women risked their lives to preserve a record of the ghetto, even as they shared its fate. Oyneg Shabbes saved six thousand documents - some 30,000 pages - concealed in ten metal crates and two

large milk cans that they buried under buildings inside the ghetto, days before its liquidation.

Ringelblum, known far too little today, was already a serious historian before the war. He had written a study of Polish Jews in the Middle Ages; he understood the importance of careful records, and he meticulously recorded every detail of the deportations once they began. But he also understood that if he was to tell the future about the life and death around him, he would need to collect tickets from cabaret performances, posters urging Jews to fight back and candy wrappers from the synthetic sweets confected inside the ghetto's walls.

Ephemera are wrappers that mean more than what they once wrapped. The great Talmud scholar David

Weiss-Halivni actually attributed his survival in the Wolfsberg concentration camp to a piece of ephemera. He saw a Nazi guard unwrap a sandwich and realized that the wrapper was a page torn from the *Shulchan Aruch*, the great code of Jewish law. He begged the guard for the crumpled scrap, was almost shot for his daring, but in the end received the



18 September 1946, Warsaw, site of the former Borochoy school at 68 Nowolipki Street. Retrieval of the first part of the Ringelblum Archive (concealed in ten tin boxes) by members of the Central Jewish Historical Commission.

This photograph comes from the collection of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

'blet!'. The page was so greasy that it was illegible in places, but as Weiss-Halivni wrote in his memoir, *The Book and the Sword*, the page became for him and other inmates 'a visible symbol of connection between the camp and the activities of Jews throughout history.'

Links in a chain need not be made of metal. The bletl that Weiss-Halivni collected against all odds was turned over for safekeeping to a fellow prisoner named Finkelstein, who risked his life by concealing it in his clothing to keep it safe, taking it out only during secret religious services where it was not read, merely shown. The page itself had become a sacred object. Weiss-Halivni, a prodigy with a vast store of Jewish learning, already knew its contents. It was as a leaf belonging to the larger tree of Jewish life that the bletl brought him comfort, and the communal responsibility of caring for it that gave him hope. Ephemera remain the most elusive and perhaps for that reason the most haunting of all artefacts.

The early Zionists understood that they were building the land and being built by it, and the NLI's ephemera project is as much about collecting as it is about creating a collection, valuable though the collection will be. The NLI's Programme Manager for Europe, Caron Sethill - herself a sort of dove flying between Europe and Jerusalem - hopes to increase the number of countries reached in the coming years, and to develop a wide range of programmes that will harness the popular as well as the scholarly appeal of ephemera, and make the work of collecting itself an educational opportunity. In that sense, the JEEC is a work in progress whose progress is the work.

Instead of coins for the Jewish homeland, people deposit newsletters, brochures, invitations, tickets, calendars, greeting cards and anything printed on paper that might convey, however tangentially, an aspect of the Jewish life of their community.

One method the JEEC uses for gathering artefacts is the distribution of giant blue cardboard collection boxes, put together in a few quick steps and placed in Jewish community centres and schools throughout Europe and the Former Soviet Union. When assembled, they are the size and shape of large desktop lecterns with a slot in the slanted surface at the top. Ms. Sethill explains that they are designed to evoke the old blue-and-white Keren Kayemet collection boxes. Instead of coins for the Jewish homeland, people deposit newsletters, brochures, invitations, tickets, calendars, greeting cards and anything printed on paper that might convey, however tangentially, an aspect of the Jewish life of their community.

The boxes also recall the 'shemos' containers used in religious homes and institutions for stowing documents that cannot be discarded because they contain the name of God, and require transfer to a geniza, a specific storage space. The contents of these secular versions do not need shemos to qualify for inclusion, but all collections of ephemera are related to all others, however distantly, and it's useful to recall the scraps of paper and parchment placed in the attic geniza of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo. Anything with the name of God such as a Torah scroll beyond repair or an erotic spell recited with your pants on your head went into the attic. Some of these documents had been asleep for a thousand years when Solomon Schechter woke them with a scholar's kiss at the end of the 19th century and brought them to Cambridge University Library, where they began life again as scholarly artefacts.

Perhaps the best name for ephemera comes from a book called *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World*



JEEC ephemera collection box
Photo credit: Gregory Kogan

of the Cairo Geniza by the writer-scholars Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman. They use 'sacred trash' to describe that Cairo repository, where even a letter from Maimonides describing his depression after his brother's death might have been discarded

because it dealt not with Torah but mere daily matters.

Not all ephemera are sacred, of course, and not all are trash. But our definitions are always changing and ephemera have a way of confounding traditional concepts of the holy and the profane, the eternal and the disposable. Most never see the light of day; they come into the world for a single purpose, like the Kabbalistic angels that so intrigued Walter Benjamin, and vanish when the task is done. They only become 'ephemera' when we notice them outside their original context, or when, like Noah's dove, they fly in the window to deliver their ambiguous messages. This can make classifying ephemera as complicated as gathering them.

Consider the bullfighting poster overleaf currently on the page of the NLI's website dedicated to the Jewish European Ephemera Collection, though drawn from an earlier collection. Dated 1935, the poster features a painted scene from a bullfight that could have been torn from the living flank of a Hemingway novel. It is a perfect illustration of the delights and challenges of modern ephemera.

There is the bullfighter in his 'suit of lights' with his black hat and red cape. There is the massive bull with his black body and white horns. The bull and the bullfighter are leaning together, doing their death tango under the words 'Plaza de Toros de Córdoba.' Under the painting is the name 'Niño de la Palma,' who was the model for the toreador in *The Sun Also Rises*, a splendid American novel marred by anti-Semitic caricature. Below the bullfighter's name, in smaller print, is another name: 'Maimonides.' True he fled Cordoba with his family to avoid forced conversion or death; nevertheless, the bullfight turns out to be in honor of the 800th birthday of Maimonides, that 'gran filosofo cordobés.'



Bullfight poster advertising a Bullfight in Cordoba in 1935 in honour of the 800th anniversary of the birth of Maimonides.

Artist: Carlos Ruano Llopis

Should that poster be labelled Spain, Cordoba, Hemingway, Bullfighting, Maimonides, 1135, anti-Semitism, 1935, or simply filed under 'The Irony of Jewish History?' Once we are in the modern era, artefacts are the products of so many overlapping or colliding cultures that documents do not need to have spent time in a geniza; they come into the world pre-jumbled. Ephemera are constantly requiring us to figure out, metaphorically, where to hang the bullfighting poster.

Ms. Sethill believes that we are only now beginning to give ephemera the serious attention they deserve. But although they are everywhere, gathering them is no small task when the project takes place in so many countries, in multiple languages, and involves so much individual variation.

To help explain the nature of ephemera and the collection, the NLI has created a beautiful series of postcards. One side of the card features a reproduction of recently collected items: a poster for a food festival in London and a film festival in Warsaw; an airplane ticket from Moshe Airlines for a flight from Sofia to Jerusalem; a flyer for a jazz quartet leading a 'musical journey into the history of Passover' in St. Petersburg, with waves of the split sea scrolling into musical clefs; a catalogue cover for a Limmud conference in Neuuharlingsiel, Germany, which features everything from a suitcase and a running shoe to a Torah scroll and Noah's ark.



Images from a foldout booklet for Gefiltefest, a Jewish food festival in London, U.K., 2015

On the flip side of each card are three simple statements. The first is a definition: *'Ephemera are printed materials with a short life-span, such as invitations, flyers, greeting cards, notices and tickets; together they represent a unique 'slice of life.'* The second is a mission statement: *'The National Library of Israel is bringing history to life by collecting contemporary ephemera from Jewish communities around Europe.'* The third is an invitation: *'Add your piece of the story.'* The juxtaposition of 'short life span' and 'bringing to life' neatly captures the paradoxical power of ephemera, which breathe life even when they speak of death. The key to this balancing act is the unknown contributor, personally invited to participate by adding 'your piece of the story.'

Moshe Airlines: A novelty ticket designed to promote Jewish youth activities in Sofia, Bulgaria. Designed by Maxim Delchev



The added pieces are all different. Some are pious, some irreverent, some both at the same time. A cheeky English-language

brochure for the Gefiltefest Jewish Food Festival poses the immortal question: 'Are you a smoked salmon or salt beef, shakshuka or schmaltz?' On the other hand, an announcement in Russian for a Purim Festival in the FSU with its colourful masks and hamentaschen, betrays not a trace of irony - understandable in a

region still haunted by the memory of suppressed religious expression. For Ms. Sethill, national differences are of telling interest; she points out that where an older generation practiced Judaism in secret, if at all, a colourful proclamation that Purim has arrived might be as piquant an act of self-assertion as Gefiltefest's ecumenical invitation telling all England that it is 'a must for foodies everywhere.'



Invitation to a family Purim event at the Nikitskaya JCC, Moscow, Russia.

Some regions manage both. Consider a poster from the 2015 Warsaw film festival, featuring the representation of a stylish man in a smoking jacket who might look at home in a James Bond movie, or sauntering down the runway of a fashion show. But notice the pocket square in his velvet-collared jacket, which is the top half of a Jewish star. The gold button holding his jacket together is also a Jewish star, and a blue star of David covers one lens of his wraparound sunglasses.

Who is this Jew with the star in his eye - if he is a Jew? I can imagine him attending Gefiltefest, if not the Russian Purim party. But what relationship does he have to Claude Lanzmann, whose name appears on the poster and to whom the entire festival is dedicated?

Lanzmann, descended from Polish Jews, is best known for *Shoah*, a nine-and-a-half-hour Holocaust documentary that includes, among other devastations, a searing indictment of Polish complicity in the Holocaust. Can the stylish man hold up under the dark past? That is a question Jews everywhere have to answer. The stylish man may, in his ephemeral state, do better than most. He seems stable enough, though perhaps a little off balance, like Chagall's Green Fiddler but better dressed.



Promotional flyer for the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival 2014 in memory of Claude Lanzmann. Warsaw Jewish Film Festival - WJFF.pl
Warsaw, Poland, 2014.

Even the Gefiltefest brochure has been dipped in history. It is illustrated with a photograph of bagels and refers to schmaltz but also to shakshuka, the Arabic name of the egg and tomato dish of Tunisian and Moroccan-Jewish origin popular in Israel. Not only is 'celebrating Jewish heritage through food' an important aspect of contemporary Jewish life, the celebration has been shaped by Israel's ingathering of Jews from Arab lands, and by the absorption of hybrid Israeli culture by an Ashkenazi British community in London. Gefiltefest's wry invitation to 'think differently about food' is, like the ephemera project itself, an invitation to an open-source world where the consumers are the creators.

Collaborative at every level, the JEEC has partnered with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) which helped sustain Jewish communities in Eastern Europe even in the worst years of the Cold War. JDC coordinators are using the organisation's vast network to introduce the collection to local Jewish leaders and distribute the collection boxes to schools and community centres where teachers and

Jewish community centre directors are deputising a cadre of citizen-archivists and, over time, will develop programmes around the collection process. When the boxes are filled, JDC coordinators gather them up and ship them to Jerusalem, like operators of an ephemera postal service.

It was across this same region in the early years of the 20th century that the writer and ethnographer

S. Ansky led collecting expeditions through the Pale of Settlement. Racing against the clock, Ansky and his team visited some 70 towns as world war, revolution and mass migration shattered the social cohesion of the shtetls of Eastern Europe. They transcribed songs and stories, took photographs and collected a wide range of ephemera, helping to save the folklore of a deep-rooted culture that stood on the verge of collapse after hundreds of years of vibrant and tenacious life.

A century later, we stand on the far shore of the catastrophe that Ansky foresaw, and the still farther shore of a later catastrophe that Ansky, who died in 1920, could not have imagined. It is, however, important to note that the motivations of the JEEC are not Ansky's. The question framed by the Jewish European Ephemera Collection is not 'What has been lost in the 20th century?' but 'What is being created in the 21st?'

In the wake of the Holocaust it was often workers from the Joint Distribution Committee who brought food, clothing, medical, psychological and spiritual aid to survivors in displaced person camps. They helped many leave but they also helped those who remained



Images from a foldout booklet for Gefiltefest, a Jewish food festival in London, U.K., 2015



Forte piano: Invitation to an interactive concert for children dedicated to the history of Passover at the Yesod Center for Jewish Culture St. Petersburg, Russia, 2014.

to establish a semblance of Jewish communal life amid the devastation. In that sense the JDC's role in gathering material for the ephemera project is especially poignant. The organisation is helping to collect a harvest that has in part grown from seeds they nurtured seventy years ago.

At a recent Limmud conference in England, Ms. Sethill asked participants to think of the collection box as a time capsule and to bring in items accordingly. Imagine, she asked, what these objects would say about your community if the box were opened in 2050. She also invited the participants to add personal annotations to their contributions to give artefacts a personal as well as a communal voice.

The very request for contributions, Ms. Sethill noticed, subtly changed the way people began to imagine their community, as well as their relationship to the mosaic of documents taking shape in Jerusalem. They were being told, first of all, that their artefacts and ideas were part of a global portrait of Jewish life. The visual connection to the Keren Kayemet L'Israel boxes is helpfully apt. The Jewish European Ephemera Collection is collecting free-will offerings, not a poll tax. It isn't about experts taking cultural soil samples to test the health of the Diaspora back in the Jerusalem lab. The whole enterprise is, rather, conducted like a two-way exchange programme.

The question framed by the Jewish European Ephemera Collection is not 'What has been lost in the 20th century?' but 'What is being created in the 21st?'

This is not a one-way operation. Thinking about ephemera has the effect of making the collecting and the postcards, with their succinct, identifying elements and dual Israeli-European identity, seem ephemera too, pre-labelled in anticipation of their discovery 100 years from now. What will they then? That question, too, is part of the project. Ephemera are connected, no matter how different collectors' intentions. One hundred years ago, he wanted his collection to be more than a static one. To that end, he recruited musicians and artists to assist him, hoping his salvage operation would create a new national-Jewish art that would transmute his collection into new creation. As a dramatist he did that, drawing on what he collected for his most famous play, *The Dybbuk*, whose subtitle - *Between Worlds* - could serve as a label for all collections of ephemera. Who is to say what might yet come from the next collection?



This is not a one-way operation. Thinking about ephemera has the effect of making the collecting boxes and the postcards, with their succinct, identifying statements and dual Israeli-European identity, seem like ephemera too, pre-labelled in anticipation of their own discovery 100 years from now. What will they mean then? That question, too, is part of the project. All ephemera are connected, no matter how different their collectors' intentions. One hundred years ago, Ansky wanted his collection to be more than a static archive. To that end, he recruited musicians and artists to assist him, hoping his salvage operation would inspire a new national-Jewish art that would transmute his collection into new creation. As a dramatist he did just that, drawing on what he collected for his most famous play, *The Dybbuk*, whose subtitle - *Between Two Worlds* - could serve as a label for all collections of ephemera. Who is to say what might yet come from the present collection?

Ms. Sethill is absolutely right that finding ways to incorporate the meaning and complexity of ephemera into the work of collecting represents a tremendous opportunity for the Library and will be a key component of JEEC's success. What will citizen-archivists in Vienna, Sofia, Lviv, Minsk, Prague, Tbilisi, Moscow, Trieste, Copenhagen and other cities choose to contribute that represents their cultural values? How does the work of collecting influence a person's understanding of Jewish communal life, and what effect will the relationship with the National Library of Israel have on how they see themselves? Will it challenge or affirm ideas of cultural independence and interdependence?

These are all questions that need to be explored. The past activities of scholar adventurers like Ansky and Schechter can be presented at schools and community venues as part of the present collecting efforts. They are heroes of an unsung tradition that offers important educational tools. Creating contemporary time capsules

can be combined with an exploration of the Cairo Geniza, that greatest of all time capsules. It is also a jigsaw puzzle still being assembled, still posing questions of identity and belonging that echo through our own world.

In *The Ascent of Man*, the BBC series that taught millions of schoolchildren in the 1970s how to think about culture, the mathematician and literary scholar Jacob Bronowski observed that 'Civilization is not a collection of finished artefacts, it is the elaboration of processes.' Ephemera make this manifest. Even in their ancient incarnation, they tend to have a postmodern quality of repurposed materials

'Getting married with US': The cover of an information kit for people intending to be married via the United Synagogue, U.K.



and overlapping or mutable meanings. The pious folk depositing love notes and prayers into the attic of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo saw themselves as respectful undertakers of the Holy Name, even though they were also unwitting collectors. Solomon Schechter, who stuffed the contents of the ancient attic into suitcases, did not see himself as piously depositing a trove of printed material into the sacred repository of Cambridge but he was doing that too.

Schechter devoted himself to decoding the portions of the geniza that contained fragments of Ben Sira's Book of Ecclesiasticus and other ancient writings that he pieced together. He showed no interest in the great heaps of remaining material that he ignored like last year's matzah crumbs and left them for later scholars to explore. Those scholars in turn subtracted what they found of interest and left what they considered trash for historians like Shelomo Dov Goitein, who helped usher in a new age of Jewish social historians who were also intent on looking at culture holistically.

We are living through a digital revolution in which we save things whether we want them or not; the whole world can seem like a great multiplying virtual geniza of undifferentiated information.

'Only superficial people disregard the appearance of things,' said Oscar Wilde, a writer's insight but one useful to scientists, historians and librarians dealing with ephemera. But librarians who work with ephemera today must also contend with a new set of challenges. We are living through a digital revolution in which we save things whether we want them or not; the whole world can seem like a great multiplying virtual geniza

of undifferentiated information. Our least valued transactions are stored the same way we store our most treasured ones - not on paper or parchment, in vaults of steel or stone, but in binary digits that live in an ethereal region of shadow and light.

Ephemera have in a sense anticipated this challenge, which is why they have so often wound up in a box marked only with a region, date or collector's name. Creating an ephemera collection in the midst of a cyber revolution, when libraries are all in the process of digitising their holdings, is a wonderful opportunity because even hidebound holdings are being born again into an ephemeral form so that researchers around the world need only log-on to the website of the National Library of Israel to view one of the oldest Haggadot in the world, Isaac Newton's handwritten notes on the Temple or manuscripts by Buber, Scholem and Kafka. New technology can finally link ephemera directly to other collections, to researchers and to collectors who might someday gather ephemera for the Library armed only with a smartphone.

If ephemera teach us anything, it is that we are never simply 'done' collecting, because culture has to live inside people as well as inside libraries. We need both, just as we need ephemera and more traditionally durable aspects of our civilization.

But even as libraries digitise collections for 'safe keeping,' they know that it may be the document printed out and translated back into paper that will become the ultimate survivor in our age of cyber-instability. If ephemera teach us anything, it is that we are never simply 'done' collecting, because culture has

to live inside people as well as inside libraries. We need both, just as we need ephemera and more traditionally durable aspects of our civilisation.

Ephemera have always challenged any easy system that says, 'this is history - this is not.' In a world of constant flux, ephemera are indispensable companions of the struggle to understand the complex world. When Emmanuel Ringelblum began his collecting in 1939, he believed he was gathering notes for a future study of Jewish life during the war. As the conflagration spread, he hoped his work might contribute to the renewal of Jewish life after the war. When word of the final solution entered the ghetto, Ringelblum realized that he was witnessing the death of 1,000 years of Polish Jewish civilization and the purpose and meaning of the Oyneg Shabbes archive changed once more.

Ringelblum had grown up in the late flowering of a rich world of radical change that mingled traditional Jewish culture, secular Yiddish culture and Polish culture. That it all equipped him to become the ideal chronicler of its terrible end is an irony but not so great an irony that it diminishes the importance of his achievement or his heroism. Like other resistance fighters, he did what he could under terrible conditions. Jewish losses have been incalculable but Judaism continues and we who live in different times must continue it as best we can. But we are, more than ever, inside a fractured mosaic age where representations can only be fashioned out of fragments. We are in the age of ephemera.

When I look again at the poster for the 12th Annual Warsaw Jewish Film Festival, I realize that the debonair man in the smoking jacket is surrounded by a dotted line, as if his creator intended him to be cut out like a

paper doll. I notice, too, that the film festival that year was held at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The Museum - an exploration, celebration and commemoration of 1,000 years of Jewish life in Poland - is a brick and mortar paradox as much as any piece of ephemera. It is a beautifully designed assertion of Jewish presence, and a simultaneous reminder that before 1939 there were three and a half million Polish Jews and today there are only a few thousand.

Making the grim tally is not a denial of the museum's importance, but failing to make it would falsify the museum's meaning. If Judaism did not reckon by remnants there would be no Judaism at all, but it must own fragments for what they are. Ephemera help us do both. Polin devotes an exhibit to Emmanuel Ringelblum, and is built over the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. A third cache of documents, presumed hidden by the heroes of Oyneg Shabbes and never recovered, may yet be lurking somewhere close but deep underground, like a severed taproot.

Perhaps all objects have ephemeral doppelgangers - the found document accompanied by the ghost of the lost ones. And sometimes the found document is itself lost. Deported to another camp, Weiss-Halivni encountered again the man who had volunteered to conceal the page of the Shulchan Aruch: 'I asked him about the bletl. He tapped his hip, and that was enough of a sign that, despite the horrible conditions, which killed perhaps as many as 90 percent of us, the bletl was safe and secure.' But soon after that encounter, the man collapsed. 'Before there was time to remove the bletl from his body, he was taken away to the crematorium. When Mr. Finkelstein's body went up in smoke, the bletl went with him.'

As told in Weiss-Halivni's memoir, the scrap of paper and the man guarding the scrap share a common fate. Not all ephemera survive, but even those that do stand in for millions that did not, and carry intimations of loss. And if the *bletl* had survived, we would still have needed Weiss-Halivni's story to go with it, to tell us of his own survival and another man's death. Ephemera do not speak for themselves; they require context, history and annotation, a whole commonwealth of understanding, if we are ever to reconstitute their meaning. Collected in his book *The Book and the Sword*, the *bletl* is one of the shadow ephemera telling a story about what is no longer there. These too need collecting.

It may seem absurd, incongruous and perhaps grotesque to juxtapose a poster for a film festival and Ringelblum's lost archive simply because they share the same city. One may as well lay Weiss-Halivni's burnt *bletl* alongside a flier for Gefiltefest. But in fact we do need to hold both in our minds. One artefact does not replace the other, obviously, but just as obviously they are connected to each other through the mysterious fellowship of ephemera, even though they are bound to other contexts as well.

Weiss-Halivni is bearing witness but also telling a Torah scholar's parable: a Nazi ate a sandwich and a Jew survived on the wrapper. In a world that inverts good and evil, the wrapper, a page torn from sustaining tradition, is not just holier than the food inside but more nourishing. Alas, that is a metaphor. Without food there is no life. The Shulchan Aruch is a book of codes that derives authority from a name that refers to the Jewish table, and the Jewish table supports real life.

We need Gefiltefish in order to survive as well as the Shulchan Aruch. And when the Gefiltefish brochure declares, 'Come and be inspired to think differently about food,' it is in its own way evoking the Passover Haggadah, 'Let all who are hungry come and eat.'

Ephemera, so easily metaphorized, are not metaphors and in fact remind us of the limits of metaphor. We have grown comfortable with Islam's designation of Judaism as the People of the Book, but Jews are also the People of the Body and the People of the Land. It is ephemera that call us back to our whole selves. They bear traces of the bodies that made and cherished them; ephemera are at once earthbound and evanescent. Perhaps that is why our tradition, anchored in words, has often seemed ambivalent about ephemera, treating them less like Hebrew letters than like vowels. Those dots and bars are necessary for speech but are excluded from sacred texts and exiled from the printed page. They are heard but not seen, invisibly inflecting Jewish culture.

Things began to change in the modern period, when a scholarly revolution transformed the Cairo Geniza from thousand-year-old dumpster into one of the intellectual wonders of Jewish civilization. One might even say that trying to understand the connection between temporary things and lasting ones lies at the heart of Jewish culture. How do we square our obligation to the fragile world around us with our obligation to eternity, and with the long arc of history? Survival in Judaism often involves embracing paradox, and nothing is more paradoxical than a collection of materials that by definition are of limited value.

A good way of appreciating the paradox is to return to the Bible, back even before the book of Jonah, and to think about manna, which arrives in the night with the dew and vanishes the next morning with the sun. It lasts less than a day but keeps the Israelites alive for forty long years. Scholars speculate on the plant and insect origins of manna, putting it in line with the Oxford Dictionary's definition: 'a plant said by ancient writers to last only one day, or an insect with a short lifespan.'

The Israelites are in fact specifically told not to collect manna, or rather not to collect more of it than they will need for a single day. To do so is like trying to hoard time itself. When anxious Israelites try to save an extra amount of the ephemeral stuff, they soon discover that it 'bred worms and became putrid.'

The paradox of manna is connected to the paradox of ephemera, down to the playful etymology the Bible offers claiming that 'manna' derives from the words 'man hu' -- what is it? How to collect this elusive substance that is hard to define and isn't supposed to be collected? It is the ambivalence of tradition towards manna that is so familiar. Despite its airy evanescence, it rots like old flesh if you try to hang on to it. And yet despite the collecting ban, God tells Moses, who tells Aaron: 'Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.' (Exodus 16:33)

Thus the ultimate symbol of impermanence winds up in the Ark, that portable cabinet of eternal curiosities, where the everlasting artefacts of Jewish life are housed, including the Tablets of the Law. There is even a midrash that Jeremiah takes the jar out of the Ark and

holds it up before the people to remind them that God fed them in the wilderness. Jeremiah too celebrates Jewish heritage through food.

It makes sense that we would want to eat our manna and save it, too, since we ourselves are described by tradition as ephemera. We are like grass, says Isaiah; we fade like flowers. And yet to save a life you can break Jewish law. And if you save a single life, the Talmud famously observes, it is as if you have saved an entire world. We have an obligation to the fragile world around us, even as we are enjoined to consider the long arc of history. Survival in Judaism has always involved embracing paradox, and nothing is more paradoxical than a collection of materials that cannot be collected but must be saved because without them we will not know who we are.

APPENDIX 1: Jewish European Ephemera Collection Policy

The Jewish European Ephemera Collection (JEEC) was established in July 2014, within the framework of Gesher L'Europa, an initiative of the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe and the National Library of Israel (NLI) to create opportunities for European scholars, library and museum professionals, educators and community activists working within Jewish settings to develop an on-going, mutually beneficial relationship with the NLI.

The JEEC has a dual purpose:

- to **collect, document, preserve and make accessible** materials that reflect contemporary every day Jewish life in Europe.
- to promote engagement with the NLI amongst Jewish communities and institutions in Europe through outreach that encourages participation and showcases the materials received.

Definition

The Collection Policy of the NLI published in 2013 defines ephemera as 'all impermanent and transitory written or printed material (not originally intended for preservation)'.

In recent years, the importance of the collection of non-book material such as ephemera has been recognised as presenting an authentic aspect of society and culture devoid of the artificiality often found in official publications

In the light of the relatively low cost of producing items of ephemera, they are a reliable reflection of the public domain at a low level of selectivity. Though small and limited in content, the quantity and range of items collected together represent a broad mosaic of cultural and social activity across Jewish Europe.

Ephemeral materials are extremely diverse and include: Calendars, posters, menus, tickets, informational leaflets, advertisements, newsletters, greetings cards, postcards and invitations. In addition, Judaica related materials include grace after meals (birkhonim), synagogue timetables, and items relating to various Jewish rituals.

Collect

The ambition is to cover as broad a range of institutions, cities and countries as possible, recognizing that we do not desire nor expect to comprehensively collect all the ephemera produced in a particular location, so the approach is 'broad and shallow'. We aim to focus on receiving a higher ratio of items from smaller countries and cities than from larger ones, which would already be documented through other records.

We aim to collect ephemera from:

- Jewish institutions serving the general public (eg Jewish Museums, Archives etc)
- Organisations that specifically serve the local Jewish community (eg JCCs, synagogues).
- Non-Jewish organisations that produce Jewish related materials
- The general public – i.e. non- institutional Jewish ephemera

Building awareness amongst institutions and communities in Europe is an essential part of the collection process, and presents opportunities to promote the NLI to wider Jewish audiences.

Collection kits have been produced in Russian, German and English and are being distributed throughout the FSU, (in partnership with the JDC) in Germany and the UK.

Ephemera are also collected through other strands of the Gesher L'Europa programme including educational and cultural events.

By promoting the collection of ephemera, through programme partners, we hope to encourage local Jewish communities and individuals, to 'add their piece of the story' thus helping preserve their heritage and building engagement with the NLI.

Document & Preserve

The materials collected are integrated into the Ephemera collection of the Archives Department of the National Library of Israel.

The unique nature of ephemera invites a special treatment, different from the methods employed regarding books, periodicals or archival material. The material is registered on the file level, based on a hierarchy of Country / City / Institution, and not on an individual item level.

Digital:

It is recognized that much ephemeral material is distributed digitally. Currently, it is envisaged that this will be captured through the NLI's internet archive programme which will periodically harvest defined Jewish websites.

Make Accessible

A dedicated website will be developed during 2017 to promote the JEEC and showcase specific items selected and digitised for their general appeal and to represent the range of materials received - in turn encouraging more contributions.

The JEEC catalogue will be available through the Library's website in 2017.

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL CURATING THE PAST, CREATING THE FUTURE

LORD ROTHSCHILD

Our Library will continue to venerate the book, but at the same time we have to be as engaged with pixels as we are with ink and paper. We have to serve a virtual, global community, as well as a local constituency... The Library will have the responsibility of nothing less than preserving and illuminating the history of Jewish civilisation.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

This new National Library to be built here in Jerusalem the Holy City cannot be simply and merely a national library. It must be a global library, because it was only books that kept us together as a global people.... It is therefore my hope and my dream that the day will come when visitors to the State of Israel, be they presidents, prime ministers, or popes, will be taken first to...the new national and international library, which I propose should be subtitled, 'The Home of the Book for the People of the Book.'

THE RENEWAL PROCESS

Founded in Jerusalem in 1892, the National Library of Israel (NLI) has a distinct dual mandate, serving as the national library for both the State of Israel and the Jewish people. Its vast holdings tell the historical, cultural and intellectual story of the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and the State of Israel throughout the ages. The National Library has recently embarked upon an ambitious initiative to transform itself into a cutting-edge global center at the forefront of knowledge dissemination and cultural creativity. This transformative renewal process is being driven by the principle of open access and is taking place in the realm of content, with a wide range of cultural, educational, and technological initiatives already under way, as well as in the physical realm, with the construction of a new landmark facility in the heart of Jerusalem adjacent to the Knesset.

COLLECTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

The National Library has four core collections: Israel, Judaica, Islam and the Middle East, and the Humanities. Highlights include significant handwritten works by luminaries such as Maimonides and Sir Isaac Newton, exquisite Islamic manuscripts dating back to the ninth century, and personal archives of leading cultural and intellectual figures including Martin Buber, Stefan Zweig and Naomi Shemer. The National Library holds the largest collection of Jewish and Israeli music, as well as world-class collections of manuscripts, ancient maps, rare books, photographs, archival materials, ephemera and more. A constantly expanding range of cultural and educational programming is designed to encourage diverse forms of engagement with these treasures by users in Israel and across the globe. Large-scale digitization efforts already underway aim to offer access to holdings from NLI collections and partner institutions around the world, to all people, in all places, at all times.

NEW NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL COMPLEX

In 2020, the new National Library of Israel building, designed by renowned Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, will open its doors. The lead partners in the building renewal project are the Government of Israel, the Rothschild Family through the auspices of Yad Hanadiv, and the David S. and Ruth L. Gottesman Family of New York. The new building, adjacent to the Knesset in Jerusalem's National District, will reflect the central values of democratizing knowledge and opening the National Library's world-class collections and resources to as broad and diverse an audience as possible.

THE JEWISH EUROPEAN EPHEMERA COLLECTION

Bringing history to life by collecting contemporary ephemera: invitations, flyers, greeting cards, tickets, notices... from Jewish communities around Europe.

Help us preserve and share your story.

To add to our collection, please write to Caron Sethill
at eurephemera@nli.org.il

Become Part Of The Story

www.bit.ly/eurephemera



New National Library of Israel Complex
Central Void & Reading Room - Interior Perspective, Main Entry Level
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A project of The National
Library of Israel, and
The Rothschild Foundation
Hanadiv Europe, 2017



<http://bit.ly/NLI-Eng>