

PROJECT JUDAICA REPORT:
February 1992

Summary:

For more than half a century, Jewish history and civilization were excluded from Soviet higher education and scholarship. The suppression of Jewish studies on the university level contributed to the cultural impoverishment and alienation of Soviet Jewry, and helped perpetuate anti-Semitic myths in Russian society.

PROJECT JUDAICA was established to correct this history of exclusion and suppression. The project is a joint program of instruction and research in Jewish studies sponsored by the Russian State Humanities University (RGGU), the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO). PROJECT JUDAICA offers a comprehensive program in Jewish Studies at RGGU, one of the premier institutions of Russian higher education, and conducts a joint survey of archival resources on Jewish history in Russia and other former Soviet republics.

The program of instruction began in fall 1991. Twenty-five students were admitted into the program, and took courses in Jewish language, history, and culture taught by professors from JTS, YIVO, Brown, and Hebrew University. This group of Jewish studies majors will follow a five-year curriculum of courses until their graduation, when they will become the first cadre of accredited Judaica specialists in Russia.

Numerous other RGGU students attended colloquia, mini-courses, and guest lectures on Jewish topics during the course of the semester. A Judaica division of RGGU's library was opened and is currently in use by students, faculty and the general reading public.

The archival survey amassed information on the Jewish holdings of some thirty archives in Russia and the Ukraine. 500 Jewish archival collections were recorded, spanning the time-period between 1800 and 1956, and documenting all aspects of Jewish social, cultural and political life in Eastern Europe. The archival survey will culminate in 1995, in the publication of a "Guide to Archival Collections on the History of the Jews in Pre-Revolutionary Russia and the USSR".

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Introduction:

Project Judaica is a joint program of instruction and research in Jewish studies co-sponsored by the Russian State Humanities University (RGGU), the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO). The program, which was established by an agreement between RGGU, JTS and YIVO signed in May 1990, pursues the following goals:

- * To train accredited specialists in Jewish history and culture within the framework of Russian higher education.
- * To acquaint Russian college students with Jewish history and civilization.
- * To locate and record all archival collections in the lands of the former Soviet Union related to Jewish history and culture.
- * To publish a guide to Jewish archival collections in Russia, Belarus (Byelorussia), the Ukraine and other former Soviet republics.
- * To train professional archivists who will be competent to catalogue Jewish collections and put them in order, thereby making them accessible to scholars.

The program of instruction began in fall 1991. Students are enrolled in RGGU's general undergraduate schools, while majoring in Jewish history and culture. Faculty from JTS, YIVO and American and Israeli universities are sent to Moscow each semester to teach the Jewish studies courses. Upon completion of the full five-year program of study, graduates will receive diplomas from RGGU certifying their specialization in "Jewish languages, history, culture, texts and archives".

The survey of archival collections relevant to Jewish history is conducted by RGGU's Center for Archival Research, in close consultation with specialists from the YIVO archives and JTS library. Utilizing a network of professional contacts in the archival institutions of Russia, the Ukraine, and other former Soviet republics, the Center compiles information which will be stored in a computer data-base in Moscow and New York. The archival survey will culminate in 1995, in the publication of a "Guide to Archival Collections on the History of the Jews in Pre-Revolutionary Russia and the USSR".

Administration:

Project Judaica is directed by Dr. David Fishman of the Department of Jewish History, JTS, and Research Associate at YIVO. Dr. Fishman, a specialist in East European Jewish History, is the author of numerous studies on the cultural history of Jews in Russia and Poland, including the forthcoming monograph Religious Leadership In Crisis: 'The Committee of Rabbis of the USSR' 1917-1930. He is editor of Yivo Bletter, the Yiddish-language scholarly journal of the Yivo Institute.

The Jewish archival survey is co-directed by Marek Web, chief archivist of YIVO. Mr. Web has written extensively on Jewish archives, and has served as a research consultant for numerous films and books.

Project Judaica is supervised by an Executive Committee consisting of Dr. Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor, JTS; Dr. Ivan Marcus, Provost, JTS; Samuel Norich, Executive Director, YIVO; and Dr. Alan Nadler, Dean of the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies, YIVO.

The project receives guidance and counsel from a distinguished group of international specialists and scholars who serve on its Academic Advisory Committee. The committee's members are: Professor Zvi Gitelman, University of Michigan; Martin Horwitz, New York; Professor Samuel Kassow, Trinity College; Professor Mayer Rabinowitz, Director of the Library, JTS; Professor David G. Roskies, JTS; Professor Menahem Schmelzer, JTS; Professor Robert Seltzer, City University of New York; Professor Michael Stanislawski, Columbia University; and Professor Steven Zipperstein, Stanford University.

The Specialization in Jewish Languages, History, Culture, Texts and Archives at RGGU is supervised by a Working Group of RGGU faculty and administration, chaired by Vice-Rector for Study, Professor Natalya I. Basovskaya. Its members are: Ilya A. Altman, Docent, Department of History and Organization of Archives; Professor Alexander B. Bezborodov, Dean, Historical-Archival Institute; Professor Liudmila Khalilova, Chair, Department of Foreign Languages; Professor Vladimir B. Kior, Chair, Department of History of Russian Social Movements and Political Parties; Sergei E. Kniazkov, Dean of International Affairs; Professor E.V. Starostin, Chair, Department of History and Organization of Archives; Professor Alexander D. Stepaniskii, Chair, Department of Archeography; and Irina V. Tiuriumin, chief of the Office of Study.

The Jewish archival survey is conducted by RGGU's Center for Archival Research, Professor Evgenii V. Starostin, Director; and Docent Ilya A. Altman, Associate Director. The Center's work is supervised by Vice-Rector Natalya I. Basovskaya.

Program of Instruction:

The Jewish Studies Program at RGGU was inaugurated in the fall 1991 semester, with three course offerings:

1. Elementary Yiddish.
Instructor: Pascual Fiszman, YIVO.
12 weeks, 6 hours per week.
2. History and Culture of the Jews in Russia and Poland until 1825.
Instructor: David Fishman, JTS and YIVO.
12 weeks, 4 hours per week.
3. Jews and Judaism in Antiquity.
Instructors: Moshe Greenberg, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Shaye J.D. Cohen, Brown University.
6 weeks, 4 hours per week.

Each course was offered twice, in RGGU's day and evening divisions.

Student interest in the program was intense. Fifty-eight students and auditors applied for admission, which was determined at the end of the semester based on academic performance. An air of excitement surrounded the classes during the first month of study, as students discovered each other's Jewish ancestry, listened to lectures on the previously taboo subject of the Jews, and learned the Hebrew alphabet.

The language of instruction was English, and several applicants discontinued their studies because of the difficulty of following lectures in a foreign language. Communications were facilitated by the fact that two of the instructors (Fiszman and Fishman) knew Russian.

Twenty-five students and auditors successfully completed the semester's full program of study, and were admitted into the specialization. Of them, ten are first-year students of RGGU's Historical-Archival Institute who chose to attend RGGU specifically in order to enroll in the Jewish Studies program. Ten are second and third year students of the Historical-Archival Institute and Program in the History and Theory of Culture. The remaining five are auditors not enrolled at RGGU. All are between the ages of seventeen and twenty-eight.

Given the program's rigorous academic demands (in terms of homework, readings, exams, and knowledge of English), the admissions rate was considered to be impressively high. This was testimony to the students' high level of motivation and interest in the subject matter. Members of the university administration noted that many of RGGU's finest students are enrolled in the Jewish studies program. Close individual attention was paid to the students' progress, since each of them is a prospective specialist in the field of Jewish studies.

Judaica Library:

JTS and YIVO donated 3,000 volumes of select Judaica in Russian, English, Yiddish and Hebrew, to the RGGU library. A separate Judaica section of the library was established, and two part-time librarians were hired to catalogue books and supervise their circulation.

The Judaica library is an open stacks facility. It is available for use by faculty, students, and the general reading public.

Academic Outreach:

In addition to providing systematic training to the students enrolled in the specialization, the Jewish studies program sought to increase awareness and knowledge of Jewish history and civilization in the broader university community through a variety of activities.

The program sponsored a series of public colloquia, in Russian and English, which were open to all RGGU students:

1. "A Guide to Contemporary Western Scholarship on the Bible" (English).
Moshe Greenberg, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.
October 16
2. "Marriage Patterns Among Jews and Christians in 19th Century Tsarist Russia" (Russian).
Shaul Stampfer, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Jewish Open University, Moscow.
October 30
3. "Ethno-History and Its Application to Jewish History" (Russian).
Mark Kupovetskii, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Academy of Science, Moscow.
November 13
4. "Anti-Semitism in the USSR - History and Current Condition" (Russian).
Mikhail Chlenov, Chairman, Va'ad - Confederation of Jewish Organizations and Communities, Moscow.
November 20 and 27
5. "The History of Soviet Yiddish" (Russian).
Genadi Estraykh, Executive Editor, Sovetish Heymland, Moscow.
December 11

6. "Judaism in America" (English).
Ivan Marcus, Provost, Jewish Theological Seminary
of America.
December 18
7. "Judaism and Christianity - Their Relationship in
"Antiquity" (English).
Shaye J.D. Cohen, Brown University.
December 25

The program also offered an informal mini-course in Russian on "Basic Judaism", taught by David Fishman.

1. "The Role of Religious Law in Judaism"
November 14
2. "Articles of Faith and Ethical Teachings of
Judaism"
November 21
3. "The Synagogue and The Jewish Prayerbook"
November 28
4. "The Jewish Calendar and Festivals"
December 5

In addition, Jewish studies faculty delivered guest lectures to the students of RGGU's School of Museology.

1. "Jewish Interpretation of the Bible"
Moshe Greenberg, October 14 and 18.
2. "Judaism and Other World Religions/Civilizations"
Shaye J.D. Cohen, December 19, 24, and 26.

Archival Project:

The first year of the joint Jewish archival project devoted considerable energy to the project's conceptualization and organization. RGGU established the Center for Archival Research and designated it as the agency for conducting the Jewish archival survey. Professor Evgenii V. Starostin, chairman of the university's Department of the History and Organization of Archives, was appointed director with Docent Ilya A. Altman as Associate Director.

In meetings held in New York in February, the project's basic methodology was conceived: Individual archives will locally survey their own records for collections of Jewish provenance and/or relevance to Jewish history. The archives will submit their findings to the Center for Archival Research, which will provide methodological guidance, manpower assistance, and financial remuneration for work done.

Such a large endeavor requires intimate knowledge of the archival system in Russia and the republics of the former Soviet Union. Professors Starostin, Altman, and their colleagues at RGGU's Historical-Archival Institute are especially well-suited for this task, because of the central position occupied by the Historical-Archival Institute in the Soviet archival profession for many decades.

The Center made contact with over one hundred archival depositories, through the dissemination of a survey instrument regarding Jewish collections, and follow-up meetings, letters, and telephone calls. Information was received from thirty archives in Russia and the Ukraine, including the former Central Archive of the Communist Party and the October Revolution Archive (TsGAOR), the two most important depositories in Moscow.

As of January 1992, nearly 500 relevant collections (fondy) have been recorded, covering the time period between 1800 and 1956. Collections include ancient pinkasim (minute books) of kahals (Jewish communal councils), the archives of early Jewish voluntary organizations (education, vocational, and social), the records of Jewish political parties (from Agudath Israel to the Bund and Jewish sections of the Communist Party), records pertaining to the Jews in the archives of Tsarist ministries, documentation of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, and materials on Stalinist persecution (especially the notorious Doctors' Plot). Collections of films, photographs, and sound recordings have also been recorded.

The Center concluded formal agreements of cooperation with the October Revolution Archive (TsGAOR), the Association of Moscow Archives, and the Central Archival Administration of the Ukraine. The agreements stipulate that the above-mentioned archival institutions will include the search for Jewish collections and documents in their official work-plan for 1992. The agreement with the archival administration of the Ukraine is particularly significant, since it is the republic in which the largest number of Jewish archival collections is anticipated.

Work is now under way in the Historical Archive in St. Petersburg, and the Center expects to conclude a formal agreement with the Central Archival Administration of Belarus in the near future.

Beginning in the summer of 1992, students in RGGU's Jewish studies program will be actively involved in the archival survey. Students will conduct internships at the October Revolution Archive (TsGAOR) in Moscow, and various depositories in the Ukraine, thereby acquiring first-hand experience as Jewish archivists, and expediting the work of the survey.

Faculty Development:

Project Judaica is committed to establishing a long-term Jewish studies presence at RGGU, through the creation of regular full-time faculty positions in this field. JTS and YIVO have therefore assumed responsibility for the graduate training of a promising young Russian scholar who will, following the completion of his studies, return to Moscow to assume an academic appointment at RGGU.

The scholar, Mr. Mikhail Krutikov, was admitted to the Graduate School of JTS as a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Jewish Literature, and began his studies in the fall 1991 semester. Mr. Krutikov, who is fluent in both Hebrew and Yiddish, has been a key figure in Russian-Jewish cultural life for several years, as an author, translator, and teacher.

Mr. Krutikov is currently enrolled in advanced graduate seminars at JTS, YIVO, and Columbia University, and has begun work on his Doctoral dissertation, on author and playwright S. An-Ski. He will join the RGGU faculty following three years of study in New York.

Plans for 1992:

In the spring 1992 semester, students of the RGGU Jewish Studies Program will be enrolled in the following courses:

1. Elementary Yiddish (continued).
Instructors: Isidoro Niborsky, Sorbonne, Paris, and Dov-Ber Kerler, Oxford.
12 weeks, 6 hours per week.
2. Topics and Sources in Russian Jewish History.
Instructors: Marek Web, YIVO, Mark Kupovetskii, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, Rashid Kaplanov, Institute of History, Moscow.
12 weeks, 2 hours per week. Research Paper Required.
3. Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages.
Instructors: Menahem Ben Sasson, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Robert Chazan, New York University.
6 weeks, 4 hours per week.
4. English for Jewish Studies Majors.
Instructor: Tatyana A. Markielova, RGGU.
12 weeks, 2 hours per week.

During the spring 1992 semester, students will compose their first original research papers in Jewish history. They will receive guidance and counsel from Mark Kupovetskii and Rashid Kaplanov, two Moscow-based specialists in Jewish history, who will also grade and evaluate the Russian-language papers.

In the upcoming semester, the courses in Jewish history will be opened to students of other RGGU programs as electives. This has been made possible thanks to coordination with the School of Museology and Program in the History and Theory of Culture, whose administrative heads are interested in encouraging their students to take courses in Jewish studies. The planned opening of a Department of Religious Studies in fall 1992 will provide an additional administrative framework for the Jewish studies courses, and will serve as a new source of student enrollments.

In 1992, the Jewish archival survey will move into a new phase. Emphasis will shift from establishing the network of archival contacts to the development of standardized descriptions for the hundreds of collections now being recorded. Individual descriptions will need to conform to the Machine Readable Cataloguing/ Archives and Manuscripts Collections (MARC/AMC) format, established by the Library of Congress and used widely in the library and archival professions. The accumulated information will be stored on a computer database, with copies in Moscow and New York. The development of a large, comprehensive database will be the main goal of the archival project during the next year.

Conclusions:

In 1991, Project Judaica moved from the planning stage to the stage of realization. An intensive academic program was inaugurated, with outstanding faculty, dedicated students, and an active program of courses, colloquia, and guest lectures. The Jewish archival survey made vigorous strides forward as it located and recorded scores of previously unknown documentary collections.

Jewish studies became firmly established in the academic life of the Russian State Humanities University. Some of the fruits of this initiative became evident during the course of the year; others will emerge in the years to come.