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Report on Talks with Altman and Starostin February 1991

Professor Evgeni Starostin, chairman of MGIAI's Department for the History and Organization of Archives, and Dr. Ilya Altman, Docent in the Department, visited JTS and YIVO between February 18 and March 4. They are the two persons directly responsible for administering the Jewish archival search and the Jewish Studies program at MGIAI. They conducted extensive talks with Fishman, Schorsch, Norich and Web, and met with the Academic Advisory Committee. The following is a report on the talks, and the decisions made during their visit.

I. Archival Search:

1. Altman and Starostin's plan for conducting the search involves using a wide network of contacts in the archives to find out about Jewish collections. Starostin's contacts are in authoritative positions (in the archival administration of republics, directors of major depositories etc.), while Altman's contacts are mainly staff-archivists "in the trenches". They will pay archivists for their time and effort to locate and describe materials of interest to us, including closed collections and limited access collections. A questionnaire will go out soon to all their contact people asking for information regarding Jewish collections and collections with material related to the Jews. Starostin will also use his position as a member of the executive committee of the Association of Soviet Archivists to obtain the association's support for the project.

The Jewish historical societies in various cities will also be involved in the project, helping local archivists identify unprocessed Russian-language materials, and materials where rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew or Yiddish is required (e.g. to read the letter-head or stamp/seal of an organization). Unprocessed manuscript materials will be identified by our specialists (Web, Schmelzer) during planned research-trips.

2. Running such a large, complicated enterprise will require an office and some staff in Moscow. The Institute itself cannot "absorb" the cost of such a project, nor can it legally accept funds from outside sources for its operation. It will therefore be necessary to establish a center for Jewish archival research (by whatever name) affiliated with the Institute. The center will obtain office space in the building next-door to MGIAI into which the institute is now expanding. The center will also house the Judaica library we are sending for the Jewish studies program, and include office space for our faculty. It will take a few months to get the center set up legally.

3. JTS/YIVO have hired Starostin and Altman as Director and Associate Director of the archival search project, with a salary of \$300 and \$200 per month respectively for 1991. In addition, both have applied for Memorial Foundation Fellowships which will supplement their salaries. We have offered Professor Basovskaya to work for the archival search project as a Consultant for Administrative Affairs, with an honorarium of \$100 per month. Her cooperation with the project would be most helpful in a variety of areas.

Altman submitted a budget for the cost of the archival search inside the USSR which amounts to 100,000 rubles per year, or \$16,000 at the official exchange rate. \$1,000 was transferred to them as seed money for the project. Starostin and Altman will keep a detailed accounting of the use of funds. Since the Jewish archival research center will be affiliated with institute, there will be some measure of MGIAI supervision.

4. Web, Starostin and Altman discussed in detail the level of archival information to be collected by the search and the format of the future Guide to Jewish Archival Collections. It was agreed to collect information at the most detailed level possible, even if it is not appropriate for inclusion in the Guide, and to maintain all information in a computer database. The Guide itself will describe collections at the record group level. Its format and contents were discussed at length, and publication was set for 1995. At the outset, the search project will focus on Moscow and Leningrad. Altman left with us a computer print-out from GlavArkhiv of 100 Jewish collections in Soviet depositories.

5. The question of Altman's competing responsibilities and loyalties was resolved satisfactorily. He is a full-time faculty member at MGIAI and a part-time archival staff worker at TsGAOR. TsGAOR has an agreement with Yad Vashem regarding the exchange of Holocaust materials, and the joint publication of vols. 2 and 3 of the Black Book. Altman is responsible for preparing the Black Book materials for publication.

The agreement which JTS and YIVO signed with Altman and Starostin stipulates that they will not process any requests for information on Jewish archival materials independently, outside the framework of our project. All requests will be processed via our project, with the requesting institution or scholar paying JTS/YIVO for the search time involved. A copy of all information obtained for the request will be shared with JTS/YIVO. The funds acquired through this mechanism will be held in a separate account. It is clear that Altman and Starostin are just as interested as we are in assuring that there be one comprehensive Jewish archival search, rather than many rival efforts. This arrangement works to everyone's benefit.

6. TsGAOR has processed specific archival requests from Yad Vashem and Prof. Mordechai Altschuler's center in Jerusalem, and the Joint Distribution Committee, all of which are interested in very specific collections (the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, the Moscow office of the JDC). Broader search efforts have been launched by the US Holocaust Museum and the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, both of which have signed agreements with GlavArkhiv [the Central Archival Administration of the USSR]. According to Altman, these efforts have yielded virtually no results, because GlavArkhiv has not implemented the agreements.

During his visit here, Altman proposed to the US Holocaust Museum that they avail themselves of our project for the discovery of Holocaust materials. They are considering the idea, but have already developed their own relationships with a number of individual archives. Altman feels that they would be foolish not to join us, because foreign archivists will only be able to find the most superficial layer of materials - collections already inventorized and not closed to general use.

II. Housing for Faculty/Researchers:

1. Our agreement with MGIAI states that they will provide housing for our faculty. But this is easier said than done. The Institute's dormitory is in terrible condition and no one connected with our project could agree to stay there. It is also more than an hour's commute from the center and nowhere near a synagogue (which poses a problem for some of our faculty). If and when the Institute completes its renovation of a full floor of the dormitory as suites for visiting foreign scholars, as they claim to be doing, we will review our position on using the dormitory.

This leaves two alternatives: renting/buying an apartment or obtaining hotel rooms.

Our official position is that the Institute must live up to its commitments and provide adequate housing for our faculty and researchers - an apartment for long-term faculty coming for a full semester with family, and hotel rooms for shorter-term faculty/researchers or faculty traveling alone. This position is articulated in Schorsch's letter to Basovskaya which Starostin and Altman took back with them. Starostin and Altman felt that if we were firm, the Institute would exert itself in this area. But even this could not guarantee results.

2. Meanwhile, Altman and Starostin will pursue other avenues. They will use a broker to look for a 2-3 bedroom apartment or apartments in the center of Moscow to be purchased for either rubles or dollars. They will not commit

themselves to any apartment without our approval. Starostin will try to use his influence with the Association of Soviet Archivists to obtain hotel accommodations through them.

There always remains the option of our paying for hotel rooms in dollars.

3. The whole housing topic will have to be resolved by the summer. Altman and Starostin did not want to entertain planning a visit by Web or Schmeltzer until our housing arrangements are in place. They also felt that they needed time to plan such a survey trip and make it useful/productive.

III. Curriculum/Faculty:

1. The fall Jewish Studies curriculum is in place:

- (a) Elementary Yiddish - Pascual Fiszman, 6 hours per week, 12 weeks.
- (b) History of Jewish In Poland and Russia Until 1800 - David Fishman, 4 hours per week, 12 weeks.
- (c) History and Culture of Jews in Antiquity - Moshe Greenberg, Shmuel Glick, 4 hours per week, 6 weeks (3 each).

2. The envisioned summer session in July ran into a number of problems, not the least of which was Starostin's and Altman's desire to have the Jewish Studies students work on the archival search project for one month in the summer each year. It was therefore decided to alter the plan of study contained in the original agreement with MGIAI.

The summer session will be eliminated. Instead, JTS/YIVO will send faculty to MGIAI during the spring semester as well. This will require a revision of our working curriculum.

3. For spring 1992, we reached the following agreement:

- (a) An Yiddish instructor will be sent to MGIAI for the full semester to continue language instruction, 6 hours per week, 12 to 16 weeks.
- (b) A second instructor will be sent for part of the semester to teach a content course, probably medieval Jewish history. This course could meet for 6 weeks - 4 hours per week, or for 4 weeks - 6 hours per week.

Since MGIAI's classes continue during the full month of May, and many American institutions (including JTS) finish classes at the end of April, it would be possible to send a faculty member to teach the content course for the month of May 1992. (We might even be able to persuade the Institute to extend our courses into June, which is exam period at MGIAI. But Altman and Starostin did not think this was desirable from an educational point of view. Students will be busy preparing for exams.)

4. Professor Starostin suggested that short term-courses (4 to 6 weeks) be preceded or followed by guided readings in the subject matter of the course. Thus, the Greenberg-Glick course on Antiquity should continue from mid-November through December with an assigned reading list, perhaps under the guidance of a local aficionado of ancient Jewish history (e.g. from the Jewish historical society). The same could apply to the May-June course, probably in medieval Jewish history, which could be preceded by a guided readings period.

IV. Students:

1. Altman and Starostin have totally opposite opinions about the number of applicants there will be for the program. Altman believes that only Jewish students will be interested in applying, that some of them won't pass the Institute's entrance exams, some of those who pass won't know English well enough to enroll in our program, that those who know some English will be intimidated by the stiff language requirement to learn Yiddish and Hebrew etc. He is worried that we might be left with very few students. Starostin believes that there will be interest in this field among non-Jewish students, that the prospect of spending a full academic year in America will be a great drawing-card, and that we may have too many students. All of this will become clear only in May-June-July, when applications are submitted, entrance exams are administered, and admissions announced.

2. Meanwhile, we are working to avoid Altman's "nightmare" scenario. Altman is interested in "salvaging" Jewish studies applicants who fail the MGIAI admissions exam, and employing them in the archival search project. JTS and YIVO have proposed to MGIAI that we would like to offer our program also in the Institute's evening form (similar to Columbia's School of General Studies, for working people), which has an easier admissions standard. This could significantly increase our student body, to include people with full-time jobs. The Jewish Studies "externs" would be admitted into our evening courses. Starostin and Altman endorse this idea fully. This plan will require our faculty to offer their courses twice, in the day-time and in the evenings (i.e. 12 hours of teaching per week for language instructors, 8 hours per week for others).

3. After extensive discussion, we decided to forgo the prerogative of having a separate JTS/YIVO admissions committee interview applicants for the Jewish studies program. Altman argued that we should begin by admitting all interested students, and make cuts based on their performance at the end of the first semester. This would give us an objective criteria by which to evaluate students, rather than using our intuition. This struck us as a sensible way to proceed, especially given concerns about the number of students who will enroll in the program.

4. Admissions for Jewish studies externs remains our prerogative. We need to arrange interviews for late September for interested applicants. Altman suggested that we charge tuition (in rubles - with proceeds going to the Jewish archival research center), so that externs take the courses seriously and attend regularly. It was agreed not to offer them or any other category of students an American B.A. or M.A. That would only set them thinking about using the program as a stepping stone toward a career in America.

V. Library and Equipment:

1. 1,000 selected Yiddish volumes courtesy of the National Yiddish Book Center will be shipped shortly to MGIAI, either by ship (one month's trip) or by diplomatic pouch (via USIA). 500 Russian volumes, courtesy of the JDC have already reached MGIAI. Other book shipments are in the works. The Institute should have no difficulties receiving these book-shipments.

2. JTS/YIVO are currently subscribers to the Soviet-American teleport, a computer-mail communications system. Our communication are paid for by IREX, and we have been sending short messages to MGIAI via the IREX office in Moscow. We urgently need to get Starostin and Altman on the teleport, so that we can communicate with them directly. IREX is putting them on the system and will pay their bill. We gave them a modum which they took back to Moscow. Now all we need to get them is a p.c. We must also be sure that the computer ends up in their hands, for the Jewish archival project, and doesn't end up being used by the Institute for its general purposes. We're working on it.

Computer mail will be vital for our faculty in Moscow. It will enable them to send messages back to JTS, to family, friends and colleagues without delay or difficulty. It will also serve as the channel by which Starostin and Altman will relay the archival information they collect.

VI. Politics and the Program:

1. Starostin and Altman felt that if the political situation stays as it is now, they will be able to conduct a successful archival search project. But if the political situation moves further to the right, they said that it *may* become dangerous for them to conduct such work. If security agencies called them in, threatened them, and demanded that they stop working on the Jewish project, they might have to. Alternately, they talked about a possible scenario in which a new leadership took over the Institute. ("Imagine that Afanasyev is arrested, or better yet, he leaves to become Prime Minister of Russia".) They could not guarantee that a future leadership would be as committed to implementing the agreement with JTS/YIVO as Afanasyev and Basovskaya are.

We can all only hope that if Afanasyev leaves the Institute to assume a major political post, he will work to assure that the Institute's future leadership will continue its liberal orientation.

David Fishman
March 8, 1991

POLICY ON SALARIES AND TRAVEL EXPENSES

(adopted at meeting of Chancellor Ismar Scorsch, JTS, Executive Director Samuel Norich, YIVO, and David Fishman, Project Coordinator, February 15, 1991.)

Salary:

1. Faculty traveling for a full semester (fall or spring) will receive salary equivalent to that which they would normally receive in their home institution.
2. Faculty traveling for shorter stays (3-4 week module or intensive course, 2-3 week research trip to inspect collections) will be paid at a rate of \$1,000 per week.
3. All faculty will receive ruble per diems from the Institute of 14 rubles per day, or 98 rubles per week.

Travel:

1. The project will pay for the travel expenses of spouse and one dependent for faculty traveling for a full semester (fall or spring).
2. For faculty traveling for shorter stays, the project will pay only for the travel of the faculty member himself.

Other expenses:

1. The project will allot stipends for the shipment of personal belongings (incl. books) in the following amounts:
full semester faculty - up to \$1,000
shorter stay faculty - up to \$250
2. The project will arrange and pay for the shipment of kosher food to Moscow. Thus, travel, housing, and some food expenses will be covered by the project, as delineated above.