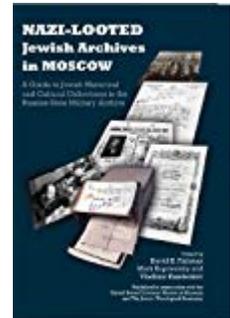


**David E. Fishman, Mark Kupovetsky, Vladimir Kuzelenkov, eds..** *Nazi-Looted Jewish Archives in Moscow: A Guide to Jewish Historical and Cultural Collections in the Russian State Military Archive*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010. xiv + 291 pp. Illustrations. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-58966-220-9.



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At the end of World War II, vast archival, library, and museum collections were transported to the Soviet Union from Berlin and elsewhere in eastern Germany and Austria. Many of these “trophy collections” had in turn been looted by the Nazis and shipped to Germany from across Europe, which is how (for example) files from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Paris office eventually found their way into the Russian State Military Archive (Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv, or RGVA) in Moscow. This English-language edition is a corrected and revised version of the Russian edition (2005). It was prepared jointly by the RGVA and Project Judaica, an academic and archival program co-sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Russian State University for the Humanities. (The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research was one of the original partners in Project Judaica and its former chief archivist, Marek Web, is a member of this volume’s editorial board.) The Russian edition was part of the series Jewish Doc-

umentary Sources in the Archives of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.[1]

The collections described here, the editors write, “formerly belonged to the Central State Special Archive (Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi osobyi arkhiv, or TsGOA) of the USSR,” which was founded on March 9, 1946. That “archive was to occupy a central position in the Soviet archival system due both to its secret status as a closed archive and to the fact that ‘most of the Special Archive’s document collections’ were to be ‘held temporarily’” (p. 2). During 1946 alone, the TsGOA ingested 1.5 million files of foreign provenance, some of which were returned to East Bloc states during the 1950s and 1960s. Subsequently, between 1992 and 2004, an additional 277 collections “were repatriated to France, Poland, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Liechtenstein” (p. 4). Nevertheless, substantial foreign holdings remain, including documents produced by German political, military, and governmental bodies during the Third Reich, and governmental, institutional, and personal archives

that were confiscated by German occupation authorities across Europe.

Jewish collections are only one subset of the Nazi-looted cultural treasures that were removed to the U.S.S.R. and the RGVA is only one of a number of repositories in the former Soviet Union where these materials are to be found. (There was a considerable element of caprice as to which collections Nazi authorities decided to confiscate, where they were taken, whether they survived the war intact, and where they subsequently ended up.) Still, the editors note, “a significant portion of the RGVA’s collections are relevant to the study of Jewish history and culture” (p. 5). Among these are files emanating from official German agencies such as the Reichsicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) and archival documents confiscated by the Alfred Rosenberg Task Force (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, or ERR). “The majority of RGVA collections of Jewish provenance originate from three major Jewish urban centers of prewar Europe: Paris, Berlin, and Vienna.” In addition, there are holdings originating from as far afield as Salonika and Athens (p. 6). Most documents date from 1860-1939, though there are some historical documents and Hebrew manuscripts from earlier periods as well.

*Nazi-Looted Jewish Archives* includes chapters on international Jewish organizations and personalities, specific countries (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia), and mixed collections. Entries typically include the following information: organization or individual’s name, fond number, dates, number of storage units, background on the organization or individual, overview of the collection’s contents, and language(s). The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum microfilmed most of the collections and this is indicated at the conclusion of entries. At the end of the volume is an appendix listing collections that were transferred to their countries of origin (Austria, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands) since 1991.

Jewish communal, religious, fraternal, professional, student, charitable, and political (primarily Zionist) organizations comprise the bulk of listings in the guide. Randomly selected examples of Jewish organizational collections include the Jewish National Fund–Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (Paris); the Caritas Jewish Society of Graz, Austria; and the Grand Lodges of B’nai B’rith in Yugoslavia and Greece. Files for European offices of New York-based organizations such as the Joint, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency are also part of the RGVA’s holdings. Among the personal collections, one that catches the reader’s eye is the Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson collection, i.e., the papers of the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, including sermons, manuscripts on the Chabad movement, and the rebbe’s extensive correspondence. (That collection has not been microfilmed.)[2]

Publication of this guide is to be welcomed by researchers for whom the previous edition, in Russian, is not accessible. A couple of technical observations: First, in describing the extent of individual collections the editors do not define what exactly the extent of a “storage unit” is. For example, the Beth Hamidrash (Vienna; Fond 1273k) is listed as comprising 15 storage units and the World Jewish Congress, Executive Committee (Paris; Fond 1190k) comprises 948 storage units. But what—in linear or cubic feet or meters (standard archival measurements)—are their precise dimensions? Second, in this era of online library and archival catalogues, it would be a boon to scholarship for the sponsors of this publication to make its contents accessible on the Internet.

This guide is a valuable contribution to the now vast literature on the interrelated topics of Holocaust assets and the “spoils of war.”[3] Nevertheless, it raises troubling questions. Why, in effect, do Russian institutions continue to claim archival collections of western and southern European provenance as “trophies”? What plans, if any, do archival authorities in Russia have to

repatriate the remainder of the non-Russian collections in their possession? The fact that microfilms of most of them have been made available is highly laudable, but this scarcely addresses the reality that the archives themselves are still being held as war booty in Moscow, more than six decades after Soviet authorities took “temporary” possession of them.

The death of Seymour J. Pomrenze, in late August 2011, offers a useful counterpoint to this narrative. As a young army captain serving with U.S. occupation forces in Germany, he supervised the organization of the warehouse in Offenbach from which millions of Jewish ritual objects, artworks, archival files, and library books were restituted to their legitimate owners or set aside for redistribution by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (an organization that was led by the historian Salo W. Baron and run by Hannah Arendt). The approach followed in the American and British occupation zones of Germany and Austria during the second half of the 1940s represents the road not taken by Soviet authorities in portions of those countries under their control.[4] And so, we must content ourselves with detailed descriptions of archives housed in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, and Minsk--and be thankful that they are no longer treated by local authorities as state secrets.

#### Notes

[1]. The Russian-language edition is titled *Dokumenty po istorii i kul'ture evreev v trofeinykh kollekt͡siakh Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo voennogo arkhiva: putevoditel'* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gos. gumanitarnyi universitet, 2005). In addition to that edition, since 1997 volumes on Jewish documentary sources in Moscow, Belarus, Kiev, and the Volhyn region of Ukraine have appeared in the series. These are listed on page 1 (note 1) of the volume reviewed here.

[2]. The Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson papers (Fond 706k) are separate from the Schneerson Library; both are claimed by the Brooklyn-based Chabad movement. See, for example, the recent

newspaper article by Paul Berger, “Why Must the Schneerson Collection Leave Russia to Survive?” *Forward* (September 2, 2011), 1, 8.

[3]. Regarding the “spoils of war” and the identification, recovery, and restitution of Holocaust assets, see for example: Elizabeth Simpson, *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: The Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property* (New York: H. N. Abrams in association with the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, 1997); *Spoils of War: International Newsletter* (Magdeburg: Koordinierungsstelle für Kulturgutverluste, 1995-2003); and Avi Beker, *The Plunder of Jewish Property During the Holocaust: Confronting European History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001). The number of books and articles on this topic could fill a modest-sized library.

[4]. On the Offenbach operation see: Leslie I. Poste, “Books Go Home from the Wars,” *Library Journal* 73 (1948): 1699-1704; F. J. Hoogewoud, “The Nazi Looting of Books and Its American ‘Antithesis’: Selected Pictures from the Offenbach Archival Depot’s Photographic History and Its Supplement,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 26, nos. 1-2 (1992): 158-192; and Seymour J. Pomrenze, “Offenbach Reminiscences and the Restitutions to the Netherlands,” in *The Return of Looted Collections (1946-1996): An Unfinished Chapter: Proceedings of an International Symposium to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the Return of Dutch Collections from Germany*, ed. F. J. Hoogewoud, E. P. Kwaadgras et al. (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1997), 10-18. Concerning Jewish Cultural Reconstruction see inter alia: Katharina Rauschenberger, “The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Objects and the Activities of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Inc.,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 53 (2008): 191-211; and Dana Herman, “Hashavat Avedah: A History of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2008), accessible online at: <http://digi->

[tool.Library.McGill.CA:80/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=99925](http://tool.Library.McGill.CA:80/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=99925). On the restitution of western European archives from Russian repositories, see Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, F. J. Hoogewoud, and F. C. J. Ketelaar, eds., *Returned From Russia: Nazi Archival Plunder In Western Europe and Recent Restitution Issues* (Crickadarn, Builth Wells: Institute of Art and Law, 2007). In addition, Grimsted has published numerous articles on the ERR's activities in the East and their aftermath.

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