YERUSHA PROJECT SUMMARY

VISION

Our vision is to virtually unite scattered Jewish documentary heritage from across Europe. Yerusha, (*lit*. inheritance) will create an online portal and database containing archival collection descriptions and will become a major hub and reference point for information regarding Jewish archival heritage.

CHALLENGES

The main threat facing European Jewish documentary heritage today is obscurity.

- This heritage is fragmentary and scattered
- Documents with relevance to Jewish history are concealed within the vast collections of thousands of state, regional and municipal archives
- Only a small portion of Jewish collections can be discovered online
- Most of Jewish documentary heritage lacks visibility and access
- Many Jewish community archives are vulnerable to neglect, decay and even theft
- Negative political changes might hinder access to Jewish documents

GOALS

Yerusha's goal is to confront these challenges through:

- Conducting comprehensive collection level surveys of Jewish documents across multiple countries in Europe to reveal the documents of Jewish historical relevance even when they are held within wider, non-Jewish collections or by non-professional institutions, typically Jewish communities
- Making the results of these surveys available online through the Yerusha portal
- Aggregating and integrating the collection descriptions, digital catalogues, finding aids, and similar electronic documentation of other major institutions and projects concerning European Jewish history
- Linking archives and repositories to researchers and to each other
- Increasing awareness of archival heritage and its fragility
- Providing a forum for information exchange of archives, archival research and related projects across Europe.

At this point, Yerusha does not intend to digitise and publish the documents themselves. Instead, it aims to make information about the collections widely accessible.

OUTCOMES

- Hundreds of thousands of archival descriptions depicting the vast and varied European Jewish documentary heritage
- An easily searchable, user-friendly database
- A network of institutions and researchers focused on the broad field of European Jewish documentary heritage.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Yerusha will be open to anyone with internet access and an interest in Jewish history. In practice, we expect that mainly academic researchers will use the portal. Our key aim is to create a research tool for the scholarly community, while remaining flexible and open to the needs of lay users, especially family researchers.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

There are two sources of information within the Yerusha data pool:

1. Data created by the Yerusha grant programme

Through its grant programme, Yerusha funds projects that create collection-level descriptions of Jewish and Jewish-related archival material. Preference is given to projects that aim to survey a wide swath of archives on a less-detailed level rather than those that are focused too narrowly. Our grantees author the descriptions according to a coherent methodology, the elements of which are as follows:

A) TEMPORAL COVERAGE

Yerusha welcomes descriptions of Jewish archival collections regardless of their date or historical period. However, in practice the lion's share of documents will almost certainly have been produced between the 18th and 20th centuries.

B) THEMATIC COVERAGE

Yerusha will seek information on the following groups of documents:

- Records created and/or accumulated by Jewish entities and corporate bodies: communities, organisations, associations, foundations, companies, and so on.
- Private papers of persons and families with Jewish relevance: for example, rabbis, members of Jewish political parties, people participating in Jewish community life, artists, writers, prominent intellectuals whose lives and/or activities are significantly connected to being

Jewish. Certain cases must be included even if the person/family's self-declared identity is not Jewish.

- Jewish related documents created and/or accumulated by non-Jewish entities, corporate bodies: typically governmental, municipal, judiciary, military authorities, policing agencies, political formations, public discourse groups and so on.

C) GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

Yerusha's own content creation will focus on European institutions.

D) DESCRIPTION STANDARD: THE YERUSHA DATA SET 2.0

In the course of their work, our researchers use the Yerusha Data Set (YDS) - an archival description standard that is based on the General International Standard Archival Description. YDS' elements are comparable with and can be mapped to certain elements of ISAD(G). The data modell was compiled by the Yerusha staff in collaboration with the experts of the National Library of Israel. The system was discussed and approved by the First Yerusha Research Seminar held in November 2014 in London with the participation of the Yerusha grant holders.

E) LANGUAGE

The language of Yerusha is English. This will avoid the fragmentation of information that many similar multilingual projects are suffering from due to the lack of cross-lingual search capacity.

2. Data aggregated from other online sources

There is a vast pool of information on the web regarding European Jewish archival heritage. Yerusha intends to incorporate these sources into its own database through harvesting and ingesting the data provided by various institutions and projects. The transfer of data will be based on technical and legal agreements with the owners of the databases.

THE YERUSHA NETWORK

To date, Yerusha has supported 17 projects implemented by 12 member institutions in 14 European countries with the participation of over 100 researchers performing research in more than 350 archives. The current members of the Yerusha network include:

- Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (Jerusalem)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC)
- Jewish Theological Seminary of America (New York)
- Hungarian Jewish Archives (Budapest)
- Jewish Museum in Prague (Prague)
- State Archives of Belgium (Brussels)
- Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw)
- Leo Baeck Institute (New York)
- Omsk State University (Omsk)
- Commission française des Archives juives (Paris)

COOPERATION WITH THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

Yerusha is being implemented as a joint project by the National Library of Israel and the Rothschild (Foundation) Hanadiv Europe. The cooperation between Yerusha and the Library's Israel Archive Network Project (IAN) is manifold.

A) TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION
The Yerusha database and site will be built as part of the IAN – it will use the same content management system and data storage. However, Yerusha will have its own distinct front end and set of functions. The programming of the site will be performed by NLI experts.

B) KNOWLEDGE ORGANIZATION SYSTEMS
Yerusha's thesauri of places, names and subjects will be created in line with the already existing knowledge organization systems of the NLI.

C) IAN DATABASE
We plan to ingest all data from the IAN database that is relevant for Yerusha, i.e. refers to European Jewish history.

D) NLI AS YERUSHA'S INSTITUTIONAL HOME
After Yerusha has been created and launched, the National Library will host the database and the portal in the years to come – with the financial support of the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe.