

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

2016-2017 REPORT





The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union was endowed by Michael and Laura Mirilashvili in memory of Michael's father.

MOSHE (MISHIKO) MIRILASHVILI Z"L

Moshe (Mishiko) Mirilashvili was born on November 1, 1942, in Kulashi, Georgia. In January 2003, Moshe Mirilashvili founded the World Jewish Congress of Georgian Jewry. He was elected to serve as its president, a position that he maintained until his passing on April 10, 2009. Moshe Mirilashvili contributed generously to the Jewish community in Georgia and throughout his life was constantly engaged in acts of kindness and charity in public and in private.

THE MOSHE MIRILASHVILI CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union operates under the auspices of The International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem. The purpose of the Center is to initiate and promote the innovative research relating to the history of the Jews during World War II who were living in territories included within the borders of the Soviet Union as of June 22, 1941.

Themes investigated by the Center include: the fate of the Jews who were entrapped in territories occupied by the Germans; Jews in the Red Army and in the Soviet Homefront; Soviet policy toward the Jews; and the impact of the Holocaust on the identity of Soviet and post-Soviet Jewry. The research methods employed include newly developed methodologies regarding the history of the Soviet Union and general Jewish history. In addition, they employ the interdisciplinary approaches accepted in history, sociology, anthropology and psychology, as well as the study of identity and historical memory.

The Center organizes conferences and workshops on various topics connected to World War II in the USSR and the Holocaust. At the same time, it initiates research based projects including online projects concerning the Holocaust in the USSR, and supports the publications of books, collections of articles and annotated collections of relevant archival documents. The Center conducts studies on the Holocaust in cooperation with scholars, research institutes, universities, and organizations in the Former Soviet Union, Israel, the United States and Europe, with a specific goal to encourage young scholars in Holocaust research.

THE MOSHE MIRILASHVILI CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION WAS INAUGURATED ON 9 MAY, 2016 AT YAD VASHEM

Alongside Michael and Laura Mirilashvili and their family, honored guests at the dedication ceremony included: Mr. Yuli (Yoel) Edelstein, Speaker of the Knesset; Mr. Zeev Elkin, Minister of Immigration and Absorption and Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage; H.E. Mr. Alexander Shein, Ambassador of Russia to Israel; H.E. Mr. Paata Kalandadze, Ambassador of Georgia to Israel; Rabbi David Lau, the Chief Rabbi of Israel; Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, the Rishon LeZion Chief Rabbi of Israel; Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council and Mr. Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate.

Among the speakers at the event, Adv. Arie Zuckerman, Special Advisor to the Chairman of the Directorate, noted that the Center will play a central role in strengthening Jewish identity and connection to Israel among Jews in the Former Soviet Union, a lifelong focus of the Mirilashvili family. Dr. Iael Nidam-Orvieto, Director of the International Institute for Holocaust Research, presented an overview of current and future projects of the Center.



Michael and Laura Mirilashvili and Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate at the opening ceremony of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center, 9 May, 2016



Memorial Service in the Hall of Remembrance in the presence of (from right): Avner Shalev, Michael and Laura Mirilashvili, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Minister Zeev Elkin, Rabbi David Lau, Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, and Arie Zuckerman

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
Research on the Holocaust in the
Soviet Union

OUR STAFF





DR. ARKADI ZELTSER

Director of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center

Dr. Zeltser received his PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *The Jews of the Soviet Provinces: Vitebsk and the Shtetls 1917–1941*, which was published in Russian in Moscow in 2006; an editor of the collection of letters *To Pour Out My Bitter Soul: Letters from the USSR 1941–1945*, published recently by Yad Vashem; and more than 50 articles. His new book *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union* will soon be published by Yad Vashem within the framework of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center. He is also participating in the new New York University project “A Comprehensive History of the Jews in the Soviet Union,” in the context of which he is preparing the volume “1929–1939/Stalinist Socialism.”

Since 2004, he has been a researcher at the International Institute for Holocaust Research, before being appointed Director of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center in 2016.



SHLOMIT SHULHANI

Coordinator of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center

Ms. Shulhani received an M.A. from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The subject of her thesis was: *The Fate of the Descendants of Mixed Marriages in the Soviet Union During the Holocaust*.

Between 1999 and 2003, she worked at the International School for Holocaust Studies and was a guide and lecturer at Yad Vashem. In 2003, she began working at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, as a coordinator and assistant editor of the Encyclopedia of the Ghettos (published in 2009). Since 2007, she has been a researcher and coordinator for the project "The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR". Since 2016, she has been project coordinator of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center.



Staff members of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

RESEARCHERS:

The Untold Stories Project:

Dr. Leonid Rein

Dr. Yisrael Elliot Cohen

Ms. Dina Katz

Ms. Julia Milovidova

Mr. Alexander Shneidmesser

Mr. Daniel Romanovsky

Jews in the Red Army Project:

Mr. Daniel Romanovsky

Ms. Daria Gekhtman

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
Research on the Holocaust in the
Soviet Union

PROJECTS



CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH ON INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION DURING WORLD WAR II

In 2016 the Moshe Mirilashvili Center inaugurated a unique and innovative research project "Jews and Non-Jews During the Holocaust in the USSR: The Perspective of Inter-ethnic Relations" with the participation of leading scholars from Canada, the Netherlands, Moldova, Russia, the US and Israel.

GOALS

During the wartime period, inter-ethnic relations played a major role in the chances of survival of the Jews of the Soviet Union. This was true for broad segments of the Jewish population regardless of whether the Jews were in Nazi-occupied territories, in the Soviet interior or within the Red Army. The project stimulates dynamic dialogue, regarding the inter-ethnic relations, between scholars employing different methodological approaches to the topic.

DESCRIPTION

Inter-ethnic relations during the Soviet-German war cannot be studied by juxtaposing perpetrators and victims; the topic requires a more sophisticated approach. These relations were the result of centuries of coexistence and friction in the framework of the multi-ethnic realities of Eastern Europe. In the pre-war period, the inhabitants of these areas perceived their situation through the prisms of the rapidly changing political processes and the rapid development of modern ethnic identity.

Inter-ethnic relations were mostly based on traditional images and preconceptions, but were also influenced by new stereotypes, that were created during the massive process of Soviet modernization and by the realization of ethnic equality. Although these developments unfolded differently in the annexed territories, the role of the ethnic factor was very significant there too.

During the War, people sought to rationalize the events around them to explain this new reality to themselves, their families and their communities. However, the Nazis' implementation of the Holocaust meant the differing experiences of Jews and non-Jews challenged the previously held impressions the different communities had had of one another and also meant their experience of the War and of life under the Nazis was fundamentally different from one another. The analysis of these inter-ethnic relations is a rich source of research.

STAGES

As the first stage of the project, within the framework of an intensive two-day workshop at Yad Vashem which was held on 28-29 November, 2016, participants discussed the main issues relating to the topic. The second stage of the project took place in December 2017, where the scholars sent their articles on the topic to the Moshe Mirilashvili Center. The culmination of the project will be the publication of these articles in a special edition by Yad Vashem in 2019.



Prof. John-Paul Himka:

*Thank you again for organizing a **truly interesting workshop**. A really nice selection of speakers and topics.*

PARTICIPANTS:

Prof. Eliyana R. Adler (Pennsylvania State University)

Prof. Natalia Aleksion (Touro College, New York)

Prof. Karel Berkhoff (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocides Studies, Amsterdam; University of Amsterdam)

Dr. Marco Carynnyk (Research Fellow, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto)

Prof. Diana Dumitru (The State Pedagogical University Ion Creanga in Chisinau)

Prof. Gennady Estraiikh (New York University)

Prof. John-Paul Himka (University of Alberta)

Prof. Nikita Lomagin (European University at St. Petersburg)

Dr. Leonid Rein (The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem)

Prof. Saulius Suziedelis (Millersville University, Pennsylvania)



Prof. Karel Berkhoff:

*Thank you for the **interesting workshop**. The people and the atmosphere were nice and you are a **good host**. I read the book 'To Poor out my Bitter Soul' on the plane. It is a most welcome publication.
Best wishes, Karel*

Dr. Diana Dumitru:

*I arrived home safe and sound and I am looking back with warm feelings regarding my trip to Yad Vashem. I wanted once again to thank you for the invitation to the workshop you organized. It was an **excellent event**, with the participation of **first-rate scholars** and I both enormously enjoyed it and **learned a lot**. Also, I want to express my gratitude for your hospitality and making everything run smoothly before and during the workshop.*

Best wishes, Diana

AT THE WORKSHOP ON 28-29 NOVEMBER, 2016



Participants in the international workshop on the ongoing research project "Jews and Non-Jews during the Holocaust in the USSR: The Perspective of Inter-ethnic Relations."



Dr. Diana Dumitru



Prof. John-Paul Himka



Prof. Nikita Lomagin



Prof. Karel Berkhoff

MAPPING THE HOLOCAUST IN THE USSR

The comprehensive research project "Untold Stories: Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the USSR" is dedicated to the history of the Holocaust and how it was implemented in every place of mass murder.

Uniqueness

The Soviet Union was the only country in Europe where most Jews were murdered by the Nazis in close proximity to the cities, towns or villages where they lived before and during World War II. The project's aim is to create a comprehensive picture of the Holocaust in every one of the over 2,600 murder sites scattered all over the territories of the former Soviet Union. The project presents precise and substantiated information on the murder of Jews, as well as information of how to find the murder sites today.

Sources

The history of each community is based on documents, including official Soviet and German reports, testimonies of Jewish survivors, memoirs of their non-Jewish neighbors, and recent academic research. The project presents thousands of documents and photos, as well as over 300 video clips with interviews with the survivors and witnesses, which allow the reader to understand the atmosphere of the war period. A special section of the project is devoted to the commemorative activity of Jews during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The researchers of the project are examining thousands of documents from various archives, including those of Yad Vashem and copies of archival materials from around the world. Our colleagues from Belarus and Ukraine are collecting relevant information about the territories of these countries that will broaden our knowledge about the events in every location and connect the information we have to the local landscape.

Accessibility

This project in English has attracted the attention of the public all over the world, as well as that of researchers studying the Holocaust in the USSR and Soviet Jewish Studies from different universities. While previously, even for a specialist in the field, it took several days to find information about a specific location, today it is much easier to find the relevant information. Having the information available online has helped the project become an important source of relevant textual and visual information. National Geographic was recently in touch with Yad Vashem regarding a farewell letter that was written by a Jewish girl from Lithuania which can now be found on the website of "The Untold Stories." This is a sign of the public interest in the project.

New Horizons

When all of the murder sites in the USSR are mapped on the territories of today's Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, the project will provide new opportunities for scholars to analyze the different types of information and draw comparisons between the implementation of Nazi policy in different regions and territories of the USSR.

Between May 2016 and December 2017, an addition of 225 murder sites were prepared. By the end of 2017, the project included 1,250 murder sites where Germans and their helpers among the local population murdered Jews from approximately 650 communities. This comprises about 40 percent of all murder sites in the Former Soviet Union.



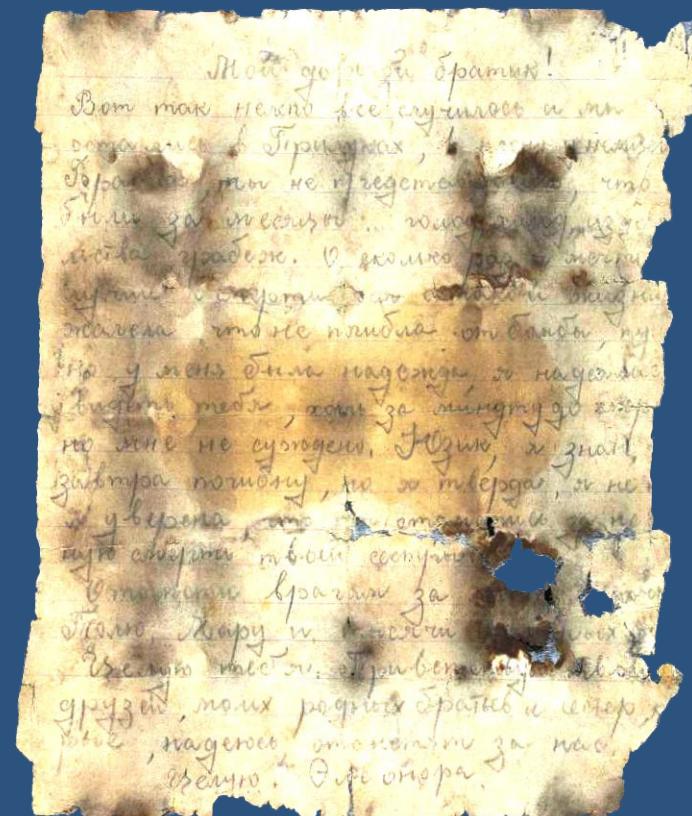
Murder in Ivangorod, Ukraine

UNTOLD STORIES' DISCOVERIES

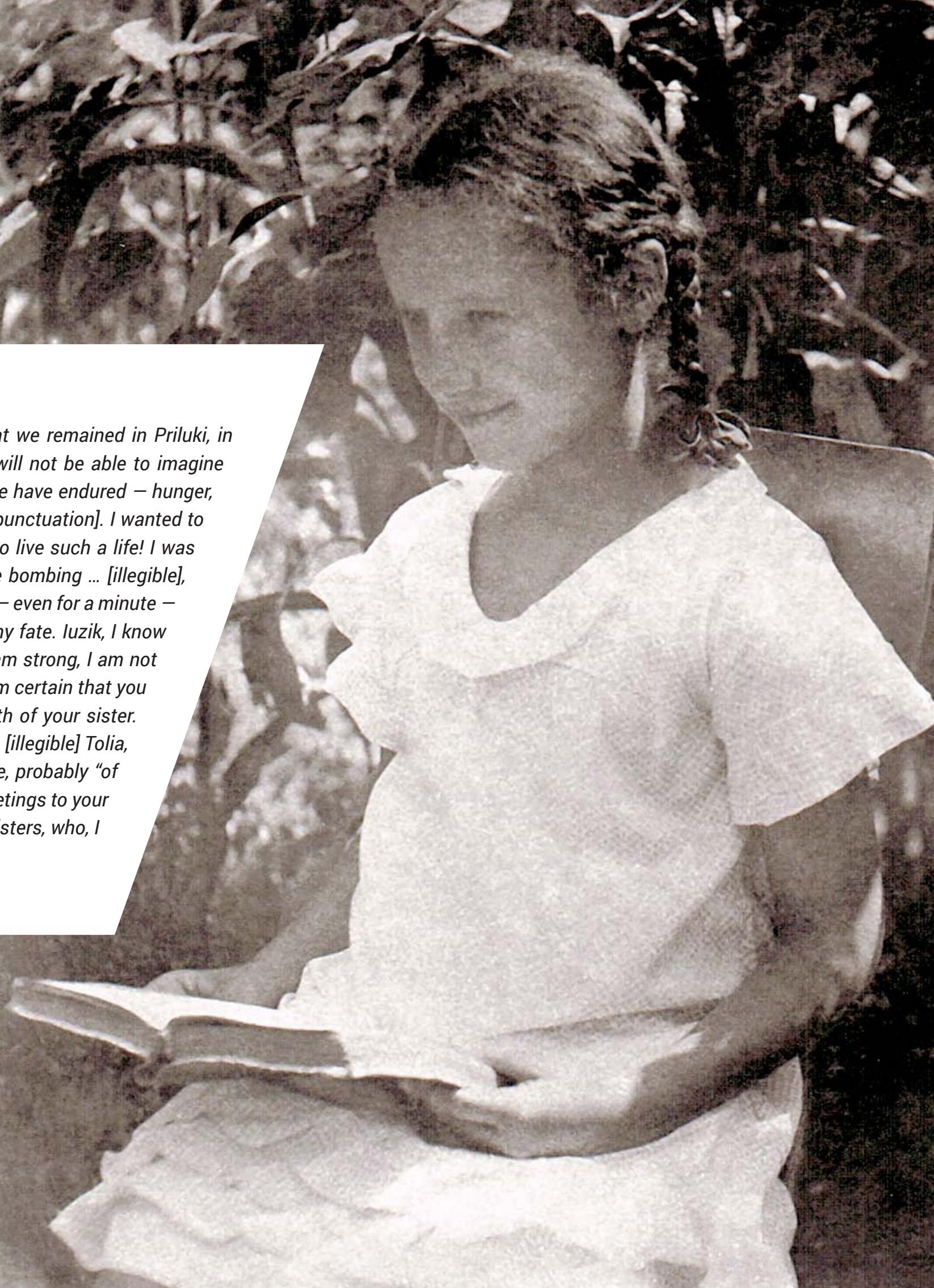
The systematic search for new materials regarding entire territories of the Soviet Union that were occupied by the German and Romanian forces has enabled the researchers of the project to discover very rare personal documents from the war period. One of them was the farewell letter of 14-year-old girl Eleonora Parmut from Priluki in Ukraine addressed in May 1942 to her elder brother Iuzik (Iosif), who had been conscripted in the Red Army at the beginning of the war. The girl decided to write the letter when she realized that all Jews of her town were going to be murdered. Eleonora put the letter under the floorboards of their house in the hope that when her brother returned home after victory over the Nazis he would find it.

The members of the research staff of the project found Eleonora's letter in the Yad Vashem Archives and included it in the Untold Stories project. Information that thereafter arrived at Yad Vashem from the Eleonora's surviving relatives enabled us to complete her story.

Her letter was found in 1965 when the new Ukrainian inhabitants of the house renovated the building. By that time, Eleonora's brother, who had survived the war and returned home, had left Priluki for Baku. The Ukrainian family found Iuzik and sent his sister's farewell letter to him. The letter later was presented to Yad Vashem together with photo of Eleonora.



Letter written by Eleonora Parmut



Eleonora wrote:

It all happened so suddenly that we remained in Priluki, in German captivity. Brother, you will not be able to imagine what kind of [terrible] months we have endured – hunger, cold, abuse, robbery ... [original punctuation]. I wanted to die so many times rather than to live such a life! I was sorry that I did not die from the bombing ... [illegible], but I had one hope – to see you – even for a minute – before dying, but that was not my fate. Iuzik, I know that tomorrow I shall die, but I am strong, I am not ... [illegible, perhaps “afraid”], I am certain that you will avenge the ... [illegible] death of your sister. Take revenge on the enemy for ... [illegible] Tolia, Mara, and thousands – [illegible, probably “of others”]! I kiss you and send greetings to your comrades, to my brothers and sisters, who, I hope, will take revenge for us.

Kisses, Eleonora

Source: The Untold Stories: Priluki –
[http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/
database/writtenTestimonies.asp?cid=
506&site_id=617](http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/writtenTestimonies.asp?cid=506&site_id=617)

The structure

The project contains three sections that together present a comprehensive picture of the horrible events:

- » History of the communities
- » Murder sites - Historical reconstruction of the killing process in each location
- » Commemoration

Each of the sections contains relevant documents, video testimonies and photos.



Page of the Untold stories Project: Community



Page of the Untold stories Project: Commemoration



Page of the Untold stories Project: Murder Site

The project may be found: www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/homepage.html

Sponsors:

“The Untold Stories” online research project is conducted with the generous support of the **Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany**, the **European Jewish Fund** and the **Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (Germany)**.

JEWS IN THE RED ARMY, 1941-1945

THE IDENTITIES OF SOVIET JEWISH SOLDIERS

By presenting biographies of Jewish soldiers in the Red Army, this project explores Jewish identity during the Soviet-German war of 1941-1945. In addition to the war they shared with other Soviet peoples, Soviet Jews had their own war and their own score to settle with the Nazis. As the details of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews became increasingly known during the course of the war, the ethnic consciousness of a large proportion of Jewish soldiers and officers grew, and increasingly motivated them in their fighting.

Between 1941 and 1945 some 350,000 to 500,000 Jews served in the Red Army, with the number of Jews killed while serving estimated between 120,000 and 142,000.



Jews were represented in significant numbers in many different military units: infantry, armored corps, artillery, the Air Force and the submarine fleet. Many Jews served as military translators, physicians, military correspondents and as political officers attached to the various forces. Their noticeable presence in these military professions reflected the high educational level of Soviet Jews.

Among the Soviet troops there was a relatively large number of Jewish women. The majority of them were doctors, nurses and translators. A special group of Jewish women participated directly in combat, for example as pilots or navigators in the Soviet Air Force or in artillery units.

The project contains biographies of Jewish soldiers drawn from many sources, including: memoirs, diaries, letters, military reports and medal recommendations. Many of the biographical articles are supplemented with texts written by the soldiers themselves or by their contemporaries.

Between May 2016 and December 2017, 150 biographies of Jewish soldiers were published, bringing the total number of biographies available online at the end of 2017 to 300.

The project is generously supported by the Blavatnik Family Archives, with materials for the project found in Yad Vashem's Archives, private sources, the Blavatnik Family Archives in New York and other archival sources.

Sergeant Frida Lekhtman



The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
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CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS



CONFERENCE ON THE JEWISH FAMILY IN THE SOVIET UNION – A WORLD FIRST

The international conference: ***The Jewish Family in the Soviet Union: Under German Occupation and in the Soviet Rear*** took place at Yad Vashem under the auspices of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center on 20 November, 2017.



During World War II, serious challenges were posed to basic Jewish family values, primarily in those areas of the Soviet Union occupied by the Nazis. During the mass murder of Jews, an acute moral dilemma arose: on the eve of a mass murder, should one save one's own life or remain with members of one's family only to be murdered together with them. This choice was faced by husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and others. In cases of mixed marriages, for non-Jewish relatives of Jews there was the similar dilemma regarding their behavior towards the children who were born into such families.

There were also many other problems relating to survival in the ghetto, difficult decisions about whether or not to have children, and sometimes in the face of brutally enforced Nazi bans on Jewish childbirth. Such problems were relevant also in regard to family life in the forest or coexistence of the family within the narrow confines of hiding. In these most extreme conditions, the choices made significantly impacted the coherence and stability of Jewish families.



Family relations were also transformed under conditions of evacuation and life in the Soviet rear, where the difficulties of finding work, obtaining food, the high rates of illness and mortality.

All such questions, including – one of main features of these dilemmas – the absence of "a correct choice," were reflected in the papers presented at the conference.

Prof. Shternshis demonstrated through Soviet Yiddish folklore, the trauma of losing loved ones during the Holocaust. The songs of Jewish orphans reflected not only childhood tragedy but also how the Soviet authorities tended to view this tragedy in the early post-war period.



Prof. Anna Shternshis

Dr. Lea Prais highlighted the unique case of the last Lithuanian ghettos and the Nazis' restrictions on Jewish births, as well as the Jewish reaction to this unusual situation, even under the abnormal conditions of the Holocaust in Europe.

Ms. Shlomit Shulhani, Researcher at the International Institute for Holocaust Research and project coordinator of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, described the complicated situation of children from mixed Jewish/non-Jewish families. She discussed the implementation of Nazi policy regarding this specific but significant group, as well as the attitude of the local population towards these children.

In her presentation, Ms. Pessia Farsi described a very specific and important problem for the religious segment of Jewish survivors – the question of *agunot*: wives whose husbands had disappeared and it was thus unclear if she could remarry. She spoke about how rabbis discussed ways of dealing with this complicated halachic issue that affected a large number of Jewish women.

Some lectures can now be viewed as video clips on the website of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.



Dr. Zeev Levin



Ms. Shlomit Shulhani



Ms. Pessia Farsi



Prof. Anna Shternshis wrote:

*The recent conference at Yad Vashem highlighted the **centrality of studying Soviet Jewish families** during the Holocaust. Although the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union has been at the forefront of the recent scholarship, the role that the family structures played in survival of Jews has not yet been examined. **The conference was the first, groundbreaking step** in this direction. I am honored to have been a part of this important initiative.*

PARTICIPANTS:

Prof. Anna Shternshis, University of Toronto

Prof. Natalia Aleksion, Touro College, New York

Prof. Eliyana R. Adler, Pennsylvania State University

Dr. Lea Prais, Yad Vashem

Prof. Atina Grossmann, Cooper Union, New York

Dr. Zeev Levin, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Ms. Shlomit Shulhani, Yad Vashem

Dr. Inna Gerasimova, Independent scholar, Germany

Ms. Pessia Farsi, Tel Aviv University



INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP - "LOCAL GERMAN AND ROMANIAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE HOLOCAUST IN THE USSR: REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF GENERAL POLICIES"

Between 16-17 October, 2017 The Mirilashvili Center held a workshop at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, with the participation of renowned scholars from Germany, Romania and Israel.

These scholars have authored dozens of books and articles about the German and Romanian murder policies regarding the Jews - from Latvia in the north to Crimea and the Northern Caucasus in the South.

At the workshop, intensive discussions about the specific regional characteristics of occupation policies occurred. The participants attempted to strike a balance between consideration of prevailing generalizations about the German and Romanian annihilation policy and its implementation at a local level. This debate is one of the central problems in contemporary research on the history of the Holocaust.



Participants at the workshop



Dr. Diana Dumitru

A number of the participants paid attention to the issue of how different sectors of German or Romanian authorities resolved the tension between an ideological desire to murder Jews and the pragmatic economic need for temporarily delaying their murder. Among the other speakers, Prof. Joachim Tauber discussed the financial organization of the ghetto and Prof. Kai Struve dealt with the very sensitive question of the coordination of activity between the German administration and representatives of "The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists" regarding the murder of Jews in Eastern Galicia.



From left to right: Prof. Dan Michman, Dr. Leonid Rein, Shlomit Shulhani, Dr. Kiril Feferman, Dr. Arkadi Zeltser, Prof. Peter Klein, Dr. Babetter Quinkert, Prof. Kai Struve, Prof. Diana Dumitru, Dr. Adrian Cioflăncă and Prof. Joachim Tauber



Dr. Kiril Feferman, Ariel University:

Dear Colleagues,

*I wish to express my deep appreciation of the workshop, the way it was organized and conducted. I learned a lot and **got some important insights** for my future projects. In addition, the workshop was **excellent** in terms of opportunities for networking (and I hope I made use of them). With deep appreciation and kind regards, Kiril*

PARTICIPANTS:

Prof. Peter Klein (Touro College Berlin)

Prof. Joachim Tauber (University of Hamburg)

Prof. Kai Struve (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg)

Dr. Kiril Feferman (Ariel University)

Prof. Diana Dumitru (Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena)

Dr. Adrian Cioflâncă (The Center for the Study of Jewish History, Bucharest)

Dr. Babette Quinkert (House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site)

Dr. Leonid Rein (The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem)

Dr. Kiril Feferman



Dr. Leonid Rein



PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK: "*THE CLANDESTINE HISTORY OF THE KOVNO JEWISH GHETTO POLICE*"



Prof. Dina Porat



Prof. Dalia Ofer, translator Avraham Atzili, and Dr. Arkadi Zeltser

One of the central tasks of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center is the publication of the documents that will seriously influence Holocaust perception both by researchers and the public. This approach started in 2016 when, with support of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center, Yad Vashem published *The Clandestine History of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police*. This journal of Ghetto policemen, was translated from Yiddish into Hebrew and was edited by Dalia Ofer, Emeritus Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who also wrote the book's comprehensive introduction.

The special symposium on 16 February, 2017 brought together researchers, relatives of survivors of the Kovno Ghetto and members of the public. The book launch was dedicated to the memory of Prof. Dov Levin z"l, an Israeli historian, former inmate of the Kovno Ghetto and a partisan, who for many years researched various aspects of the Holocaust in Lithuania. During the event, Prof. Ofer explained what made this journal from the Kovno Ghetto unique, and why its publication was especially significant for understanding the Holocaust in Eastern Europe in general and for the study of the Holocaust in Lithuania in particular. Prof. Dina Porat, from Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem Chief Historian, Dr. Lea Prais, from the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, and doctoral student Rami Neudorfer also participated in the symposium.

"THE JEWISH REFUGEE PROBLEM DURING THE SHOAH (1933-1945) RECONSIDERED"

On 18-20 December, 2016 a conference was held at Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research, with the title: "The Jewish Refugee Problem During the Shoah (1933-1945) Reconsidered".

The conference presented a broad picture of the different waves of refugees during the 1930s and 1940s in Nazi-occupied areas and in free territories (in Europe, North and South America, and the USSR), and the relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish refugees, on the one hand, and between different Jewish groups on the other.



Participants in the session on "Jewish Refugees in the Soviet Union"

During the conference, a special session on the topic of Jewish refugees in the USSR was sponsored by the Moshe Mirilashvili Center. Eliyana Adler, of Pennsylvania State University, spoke about Jewish refugees from Poland who arrived in Central Asia during the Holocaust. Sara Bender, of the University of Haifa, focused on the problem of Polish Jewish refugees in the eastern Polish territories that were annexed to the USSR in 1939.

Natalia Belsky, from the University of Minnesota, Duluth, discussed the relationships between different groups of Jewish refugees in Siberia and Soviet Central Asia – not all of whom were Soviet citizens, many were Polish citizens for example – and the refugees and the local population.

Sigita Zemaityte from Lithuania spoke about specific groups of refugees from Lithuania in the Soviet interior.



Prof. Eliyana R. Adler



Prof. Natalie Belsky

SYMPOSIUM AND DISCUSSION ON HOLOCAUST MURDER OPERATIONS: “KILLING SITES IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF THE FORMER USSR: HISTORY AND COMMEMORATION”

The symposium “Killing Sites in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR: History and Commemoration” was organized by the Moshe Mirilashvili Center on 28 September, 2016 at Yad Vashem in order to mark 75 years since the mass murder of 50,000 Jews at the Babi Yar ravine on the outskirts of Kiev.

According to Prof. Porat, the Chief Historian of Yad Vashem who was the first speaker at the symposium, the brutal and primitive methods that characterize the mass murders of Jews



in the Soviet Union were the precursor to the industrialized murders by gas that followed in the death camps.

After her, Dr. Lea Prais shared fascinating insights uncovered recently through research conducted by the International Institute for Holocaust Research.

Prof. Dina Porat

She focused on the lesser-known killing sites and the dearth of personal material remaining from that period – basically a few photographs and a handful of letters written by those shortly to be murdered.

Dr. Arkadi Zeltser, Director of the Moshe Mirlashvili Center, concentrated on his recent investigation into the commemoration of the killing sites in the post-Holocaust era. This is the first comprehensive study of the efforts of Soviet Jewry to commemorate the Holocaust after the War. Dr. Zeltser referred to the examination of hundreds of memorials erected by Jews in the FSU from the late 1940s onwards. One of his conclusions is that the image of the "Jews of Silence" – the title coined by Prof. Elie Wiesel z"l to describe the Jews of the USSR – does not correspond to his findings about Jewish Holocaust commemoration in the USSR. On the contrary,

despite the complex Soviet political reality, Jews made every effort to give expression to the unique tragedy of the Jewish people – the Holocaust as carried out in the Soviet Union.

Dr. Naama Shik spoke about Jewish motherhood vis-à-vis the killing sites as it was reflected in the Eichmann Trial.



Participants in the symposium



Participants in the symposium



Prof. Dan Michman

Dr. Na'ama Shik

Dr. Arkadi Zeltser

WHY DIDN'T THE NAZIS MURDER THE KARAITES?

On 27 November 2017, the Moshe Mirilashvili Center organized the presentation of the current scholar at the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Dr. Mikhail Kizilov.

Dr. Kizilov, a well-known researcher of the Karaites, presented his recent research about the Karaites during the Holocaust in the USSR. He discussed the special situation in which this Jewish group found themselves during the Holocaust and about the doubts of Nazi political figures and scholars regarding the Karaites' history and their ethnic origin.

Dr. Kizilov also highlighted the implementation of this policy in the local context.

In his following presentation, Dr. Kiril Feferman, another specialist on non-Ashkenazic Soviet groups of Jews, discussed several questions; including why the Nazis paid so much attention to small groups during the war, while simultaneously murdering millions of others with no such remorse.

Dr. Mikhail Kizilov



Dr. Kiril Feferman



The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
Research on the Holocaust in the
Soviet Union

CULTIVATING FUTURE GENERATIONS



STUDENTS FROM MOSCOW AT YAD VASHEM

Between 18-22 September, 2017, PhD and MA students from the National Research University, Higher School of Economics in Moscow, one of the most prestigious centers of learning in Russia participated in a five-day workshop at Yad Vashem focusing on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. The workshop, organized by the Moshe Mirilashvili Center, aimed at both providing the students with historical knowledge and introducing them to methodological issues in researching this topic.

The workshop emphasized the Holocaust as a specific phenomenon of the war – one that had particular importance in the framework of Nazi Germany’s ideological struggle against “Judeo-Bolshevism.” The lectures by researchers from the International Institute for Holocaust Research and from Israeli universities covered general topics, such as the Holocaust and contemporary antisemitism, as well as ones related to other research topics, including the moral dilemmas faced by Jewish councils in the USSR as reflected in diaries, chronicles and journals; how much the Soviet leadership knew and published about the murder of Jews during the war; Nazi racial policy vis-à-vis non-Ashkenazic Jews in the Soviet Union and the participation of German military and police units in the murder of Soviet Jews.

Two doctoral students from the Higher School of Economics spoke about their research on the Holocaust, followed by a discussion of their own approaches to research.



Prof. Oleg Budnitsky



Participants at the workshop

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES: GRANTS FOR THE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

An important component of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center's activity is its support for promising PhD students researching the topic of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

We believe that the support of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center will help the young scholars in their professional advancement. In the framework of the grants, PhD candidates are required to prepare a high-level academic article based on one of the topics in their dissertations. Their articles will be submitted for publication in Yad Vashem Studies, one of the world's leading journals dealing with the Holocaust.

In 2017, two promising young scholars received this grant: Irina Rebrova and Miriam Schulz.



On 21 December, 2017 the official ceremony of the presentation by the Moshe Mirilashvili Center of its Ph.D. grants will be held at Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research.

From right to left: Prof. Dan Michman, Miriam Schultz, Dr. Arkadi Zeltser, Ms. Shlomit Shulhani and Irina Rebrova

Irina Rebrova (Center for Research on Anti-Semitism of the Technische Universität Berlin). The topic of her PhD dissertation is: "Memory about the Holocaust in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Discourses on World War II (the Case of Northern Caucasus)"

In the framework of her grant Ms. Rebrova prepared the article "Toward the Evacuation to the North Caucasus: Historical Overview and the Features of the Jewish Narratives."

The main goal of her article is to show the potential of oral history as a method of reconstructing little-studied historical events. The study is based on a bottom to top history of evacuation (that is, on that starts with personal experience and then considers the decrees of the occupational authorities). This approach illuminates the state policy on the local level, as well as the experience of ordinary people. The impersonal history of evacuation, with its numbers and general data, gains thus from the personal dimension. Since this region is not typically dealt with studies about evacuation, the information about geographical borders, the history of the war, and the specific features of the Holocaust in the Northern Caucasus are provided.

According to her close reading of oral testimonies, taken by the Shoah Foundation in the 1990s from Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors, the author examines internal and external factors in the decision-making of Soviet Jews to be evacuated or to flee to the North Caucasus from the western parts of the USSR. She also traces the influence of these factors on the way the testimony-givers constructed their accounts. One of the points of Rebrova's article is that those refugees and evacuees who managed to survive the Holocaust in the Northern Caucasus viewed that region as very welcoming, with its warm climate and abundance even though this favourable region was the last choice of destination for many thousand Jews.

Miriam Schulz (Yiddish Studies, Harriman Institute at Columbia University, New York). The title of her PhD dissertation is ***Reflections on the Holocaust in Soviet Yiddish Literature***.

In the framework of the grant Ms. Schulz prepared the article ***She Let That Power Shine Forth: From Kiddush Hashem to the Rise of Heroines in Soviet Yiddish Literature of the 1940s***.

*For centuries **Kiddush Hashem** (Martyrdom) has been ubiquitous in the Jewish lexicon of persecution for centuries as a way of making sense of the depredations of history and of transforming Jewish victims into ultimate and sacralized victors. In the 1940s, the unprecedented wave of persecution unleashed by Nazi Germany radically complicated the discussion of martyrdom among Jews worldwide, including in the often overlooked in the context of the Holocaust Soviet Union. While Soviet Yiddish "war-speak" drew its vocabulary from the Jewish cultural archive, its grammar was both shaped by and simultaneously attempted to present the Soviet Union's unique experience of the highly mythologized "Great Patriotic War" and the Jewish catastrophe as interrelated phenomena. On the one hand, the official Soviet myth was that of a universal Soviet tragedy orbited the Jewish catastrophe as its centerpiece. On the other, the Jewish language of martyrdom proved extremely useful in helping Jews makes sense of their suffering, in providing consolation in face of the Holocaust, in vindicating and/or (re)configuring Soviet Jewish identity, and in serving the political and ideological goals of Jews. It should be stressed that Soviet Jewish martyrological narratives have traditionally been quite gendered. Focusing on works by Dovid Bergelson, Peretz Markish and Der Nister, Ms. Schulz's article focuses on the the range of views of **Kiddush Hashem** in the above-mentioned Yiddish writers. She provides a nuanced account of the Soviet Yiddish treatment of the war in general and of martyrology specifically, as means of differentiating Jews from Soviet "others" and of treating war victims in highly gendered terms. Questions that this author poses are: What role does the feminine as other play in Soviet Yiddish martyrological narratives?, Are there similarities or differences continuities or breaks in the treatment of the image of the female in traditional Jewish martyrological narratives and in the Soviet Yiddish ones of the 1940s?, and In what ways does the use (and potential abuse) of the female image reflect on male Soviet Yiddish authors and their cultural context?*

THE HAIFA UNIVERSITY MA PROGRAM

One aim of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center is to promote the study of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union among the younger generations. During the summer of 2017, like in previous years, the Center continued to support the Weiss-Livnat International MA in Holocaust Studies program for foreign and Israeli students at the University of Haifa.

Dr. Arkadi Zeltser prepared a course devoted to the special characteristics of the Holocaust in the Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis, as well as lesser known aspects of Jewish life in the Soviet rear during the War and the role of Jewish Red Army soldiers in the battle against the Wehrmacht.

In the framework of this course, students were able to learn about the differences between the murder of Jews in the USSR and the murder of Jews in other occupied countries of Europe.

Every year 15-16 students participate in the course. At the end of the course they are



requested to prepare a seminar paper. The papers cover vast areas and topics. For example, Ms. Daria Starikashkina from St. Petersburg, wrote her MA thesis about inter-ethnic relations in pre-war Leningrad. In her work she included some theoretical ideas regarding the topic of inter-ethnic relations that she intends to use in her future PhD thesis about Jews during the Siege of Leningrad.

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
Research on the Holocaust in the
Soviet Union

OTHER FORMS OF ACTIVITIES



CENTER'S ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF YAD VASHEM

Conferences:

1

On 2-5 February 2017 the first Limmud FSU Europe took place in Windsor, UK. Dr. Arkadi Zeltser took part in the meeting where he spoke about memory of the Holocaust in the post-war Soviet Union.

2

On 7-8 February 2017 The Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Center began its systematic work in preparing the concept for a museum at Babi Yar. Leading scholars of the Holocaust from different countries participated in the two day meeting of experts in Kiev in order to formulate the main historical concept of the new museum that is going to be established at Babi Yar. Dr. Arkadi Zeltser participated in the discussions at this meeting.

3

In March 2017, in Vilnius, an international conference entitled *As Mass Murder Began: Identifying and Remembering the Killing Sites of Summer-Fall 1941* was held at the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum in Vilnius. In their papers, Dr. Lea Prais and Dr. Arkadi Zeltser discussed the specific situation of the murder of Jew in the USSR. Their papers were mainly based on materials from the Yad Vashem project *The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR*.

4

On 20 April, 2017 an international conference took place at Tel Aviv University about Jewish participation in the armies of the Allies during World War II. Dr. Arkadi Zeltser spoke about Jews in the Red Army and their identities.

5

In May 2017, the State of Israel and the Russian Federation signed a first-of-a-kind Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), facilitating unprecedented archival cooperation between the two countries. Dr. Arkadi Zeltser participated in the event as an expert on research on the Holocaust in the USSR and as one of representatives of Yad Vashem.

6

An international conference *New Approaches to the History of the Jews under Communism* was held in Prague between 23-25 May, 2017. Leading scholars from different countries who specialized on the topic of Jewish history and culture in the USSR and Eastern-Central Europe participated in the conference. Dr. Arkadi Zeltser delivered concluding remarks at the conference.

7

Between 2-3 October, 2017, an international conference *XX Century: Image of the Enemy in Europe during World War II* was held in Bratislava. At this conference Dr. Leonid Rein participated with a paper *Jews in Belarusian Mass Media Under German Occupation*.

8

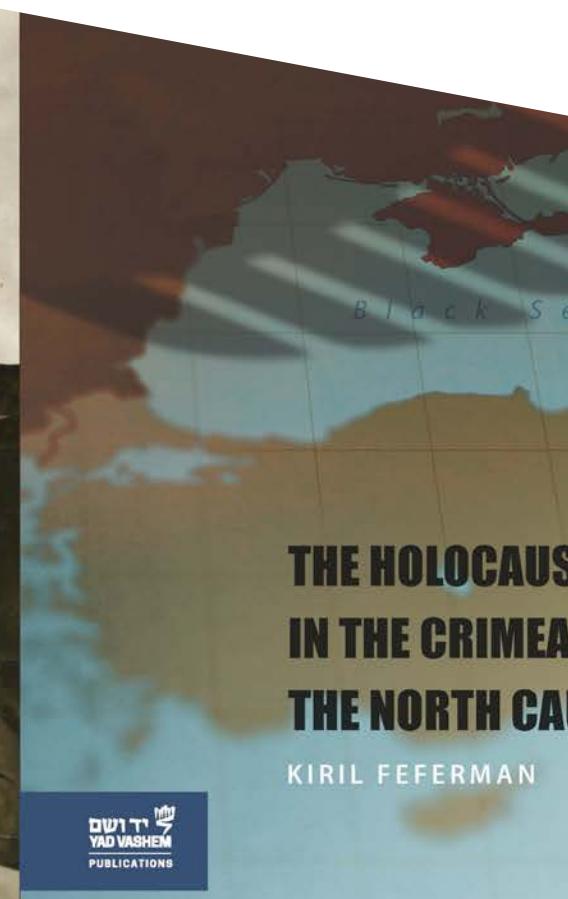
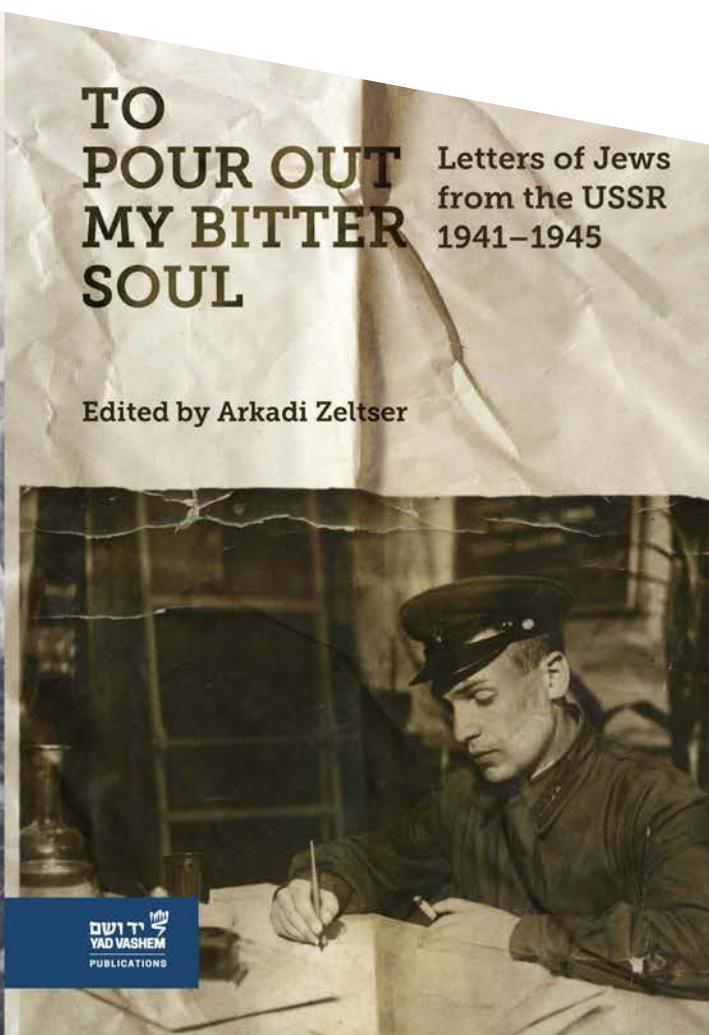
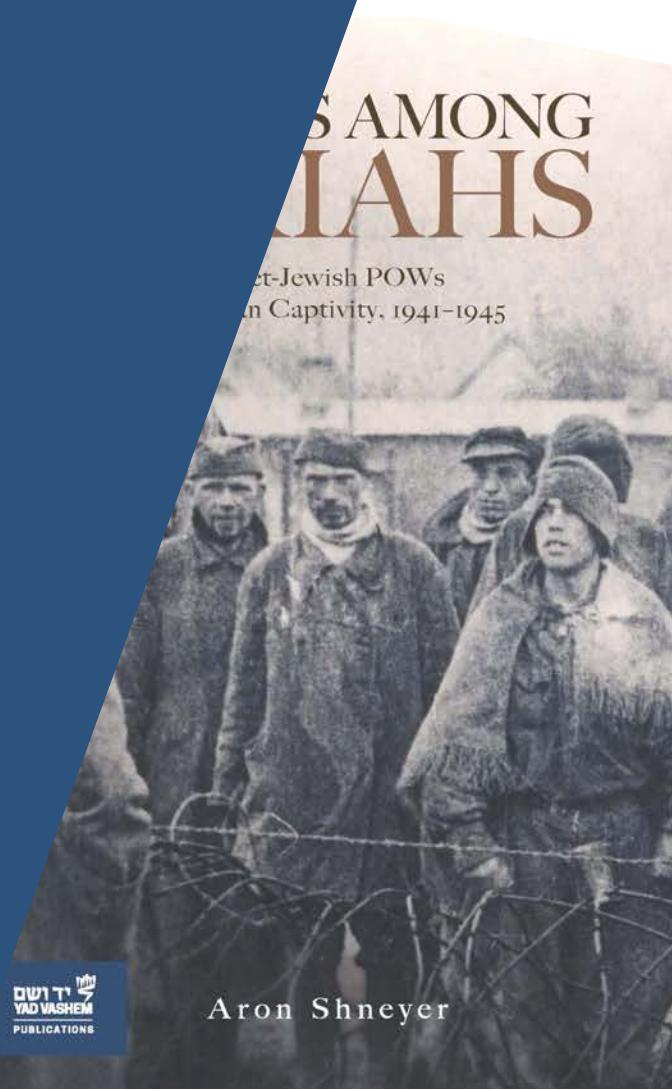
Between 6-8 December, 2017 an international conference *The Nations of Occupied Europe Facing the Holocaust* was held in Warsaw. Dr. Leonid Rein presented the paper: *Between Collaboration and Rescue: Belarusian Society Facing the Holocaust*.



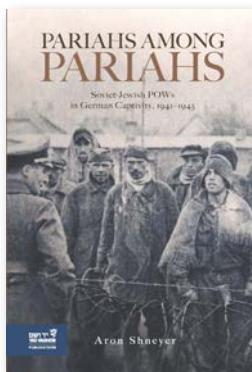
Dr. Arkadi Zeltser lecturing at Tel Aviv University, 20 April 2017

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for
Research on the Holocaust in the
Soviet Union

PUBLICATIONS



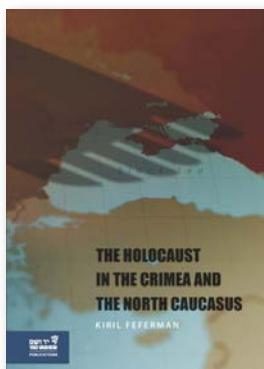
2016 - 2017 PUBLICATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE CENTER



Pariahs Among Pariahs: Soviet-Jewish POWs in German Captivity 1941 - 1945 by **Aron Shneyer**

With the support of the **Moshe Mirilashvili Center**

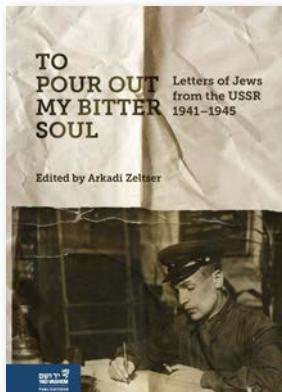
During World War II, Jewish Soviet POWs were specifically targeted. Being recognized as Jewish meant certain death, in most cases on the spot. The overwhelming majority of the Jewish POWs who were captured on the Eastern Front did not survive. Using a wealth of source material, this book relates the experience of Jewish POWs, introducing many accounts that were previously not available in English translation.



The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus by **Kiril Feferman**

With the support of the **Moshe Mirilashvili Center**

This important and fundamental study presents a comprehensive account of the Jews in the Crimea and the North Caucasus during the Holocaust era. Based on extensive archival research, Feferman covers the life and destruction of the Jewish population in the region and describes in detail: the relations between Jews and non-Jews before and during the war; the evacuation of Jews into these regions and out of them; the German occupation and the annihilation of the Ashkenazi Jewish population; and the fate of non-Ashkenazi Jews in the area.



To Pour Out My Bitter Soul: Letters of Jews from the USSR 1941-1945 edited and introduced by **Arkadi Zeltser**

Prepared in the framework of the activity of the **Moshe Mirilashvili Center**

The 100 letters presented in *To Pour Out My Bitter Soul* provide a unique insight into the multi-faceted Jewish life on the territory of the Soviet Union during the years of the World War II. Written between 1941 and 1945, these letters open a window into the world of Soviet Jewry's thoughts and feelings. The authors differed from each other in terms of their education, their prewar experience and their wartime fate. Nevertheless, all of them felt the urgent need to share their thoughts with others. For some of these writers, this collection preserves the last thoughts they were wanted to share with their loved ones before meeting their death, as well as the fate of non-Ashkenazi Jews in the area.



Spies in the Forests: Intelligence Activities of the Soviet Partisans By **Yakov Falkov**; was published in Hebrew in cooperation with the Magness Press in 2017

Spies in the Forests is the first book to evaluate the activity of the Soviet partisan movement intelligence during World War II. Thanks to the detailed analyses of thousands of authentic and previously secret documents from the former Soviet archives, Falkov discusses the partisans intelligence efforts in the territories of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe occupied by the Nazis. The author extensively considers the Soviet guerilla reports about the murder of the Jews in Soviet Union and demonstrates the level of the top Soviet authorities' expertise on the topic.

PUBLICATIONS IN PROCESS, 2017:

- » ***Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union***
By **Arkadi Zeltser**; to be published in 2018

- » ***When the Human Soul Was Silenced: Diary from the Vilnius Ghetto, 1941-1943***
By **Lazar Epstein**; edited by Lea Prais; to be published in Hebrew in 2018

- » ***Jews in the Red Army, 1941-1945***
Translation into Russian of 70 articles that were prepared with the framework of the online project of the same name. The collection will be prepared in 2018.

- » ***To Pour Out My Bitter Soul: Letters of Jews from the USSR 1941-1945***
Publication in Russian, the language in which most of the letters were written of the book that was published in 2016 in English. The letters are being prepared for publication, including the Russian introduction for the book. The collection will be prepared in 2018.

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

WEBSITE

Holocaust Digital Collections

Home / The International Institute for Holocaust Research

The International Institute for Holocaust Research



About the International Institute for Holocaust Research

Research and publications on the Shoah have always been high priorities of Yad Vashem since its official founding by the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) in 1953. Due to the increase of international interest in the Shoah, the desire to

The John Najmann Chair of Holocaust Studies

Yad Vashem Publications

Yad Vashem Studies

Search and Research – Lectures and Papers

The Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Holocaust

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

Fund for Research of the Holocaust in Hungary and Hungarian Jewish History in Honor of Dr. Ingrid D. Tauber

Online Store

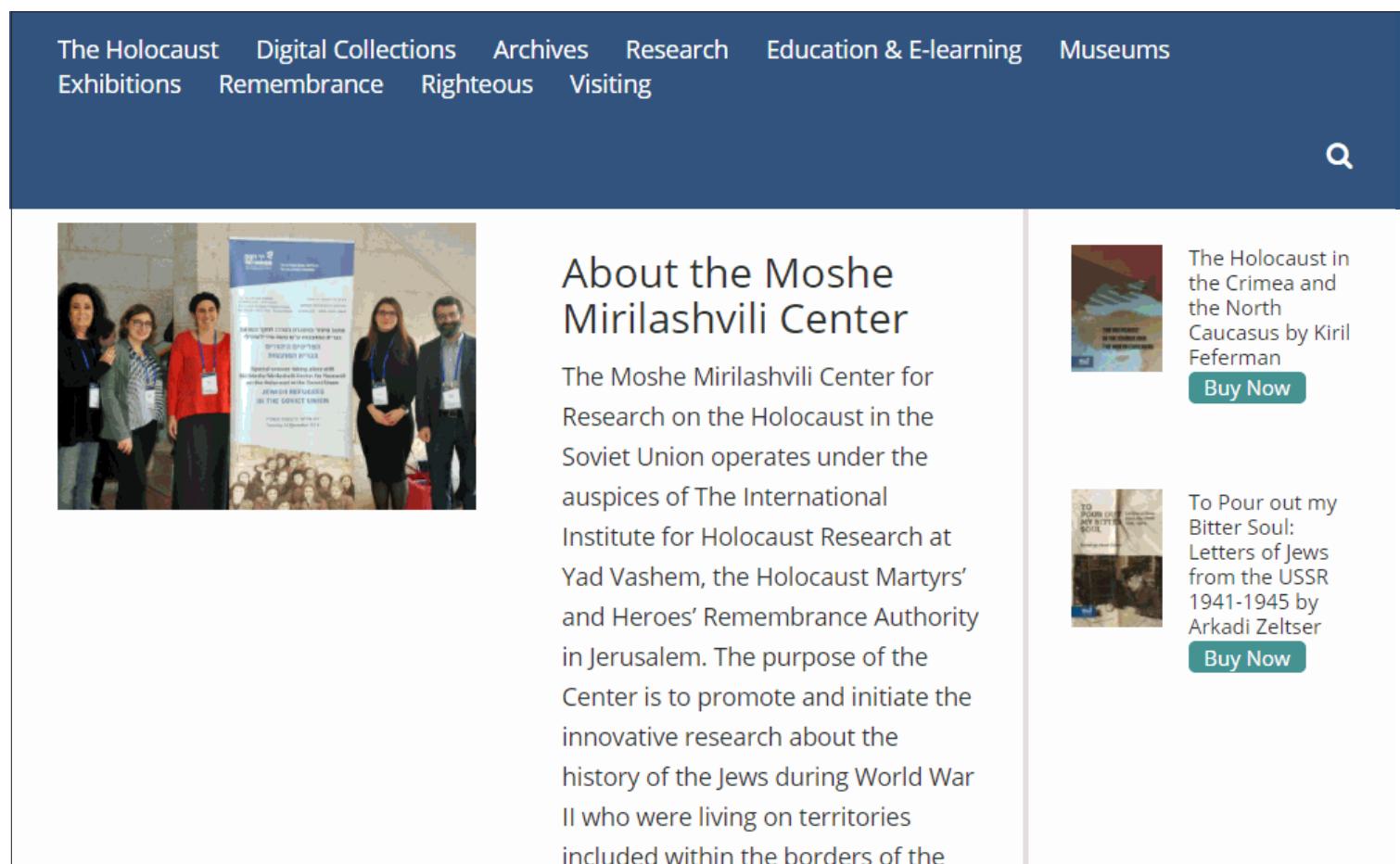


Call for Applications



THE WEBSITE OF THE MOSHE MIRILASHVILI CENTER

In July 2017, the English website of the Moshe Mirilashvili Center was launched. The site displays the current activities of the Center. This information allows people from around the world to learn about the activities run by the Center regarding the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.



The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu with the following items: The Holocaust, Digital Collections, Archives, Research, Education & E-learning, Museums, Exhibitions, Remembrance, Righteous, and Visiting. A search icon is located in the top right corner.

About the Moshe Mirilashvili Center

The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union operates under the auspices of The International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem. The purpose of the Center is to promote and initiate the innovative research about the history of the Jews during World War II who were living on territories included within the borders of the

The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus by Kiril Feferman
[Buy Now](#)

To Pour out my Bitter Soul: Letters of Jews from the USSR 1941-1945 by Arkadi Zeltser
[Buy Now](#)

Sections of the website are devoted to:

- » Conferences, workshops and symposiums organized by the Center. This section includes a selection of papers delivered at different events at Yad Vashem and films of selected lectures.
- » Publications of the Center, including a brief description.
- » Calendar of events from the Holocaust period. Month by month, three events related to the Holocaust in the USSR are presented on the website.
- » Current research projects of the Center.
- » Articles on the history of the Holocaust in the USSR. This section offers online versions of articles published in different places.

