

Pride of Lions

NYPL's Dorot Jewish Division Reigns @ Reference Workshop

By Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions, Hedi Steinberg Library

The twin statues of the King of Beasts standing guard say it all: the New York Public Library is majestic. NYPL's Dorot Jewish Division, a jewel in the crown, was paid royal tribute at NYMA's 2016 Reference Workshop, "Reading between the Lions: Navigating the Dorot Jewish Division in the New York Public Library" -- held Monday, May 16, 2016, at The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School Library and hosted by Shimon Vogel -- Librarian, Abraham Joshua Heschel High School. The workshop highlighted one of the world's truly regal Judaica collections, with speaker Amanda (Miriam-Khaye) Siegel -- Librarian, Dorot Division, New York Public Library -- offering tips and tools for research.

Melting Pot

The workshop began with greetings from Rabbi Noam Silverman -- Head, Abraham Joshua Heschel High School. "It's appropriate that we're here before Lag B'Omer," he remarked. "It's a holiday that celebrates scholars."

How different it was back then, nearly two millennia ago, when securing Jewish texts, let alone writing them, was dangerous. "We are blessed to live in an age," he continued, "where information and scholarship are both plentiful and available."

He concluded, "It is thanks to the librarians that we have access to books, and can keep communities deeply involved in scholarship."

Amanda began with a brief history of NYPL. The central branch was moved in 1911 to its present location -- the largest Beaux-Arts building of its time -- on 5th Avenue and 42nd Street (now called the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building). Dorot, founded in 1897, was relocated in 2008 to the first floor. One of NYPL's four specialized branches, it houses thousands of items of Judaica.

Dorot is the only major Judaica library in New York that is publicly accessible -- and free. People can, and do, walk in, without advance permission or connections, because of its wide focus. Tourists, students, tots, mommies -- the library attracts everyone from everywhere. Therefore, the tenor



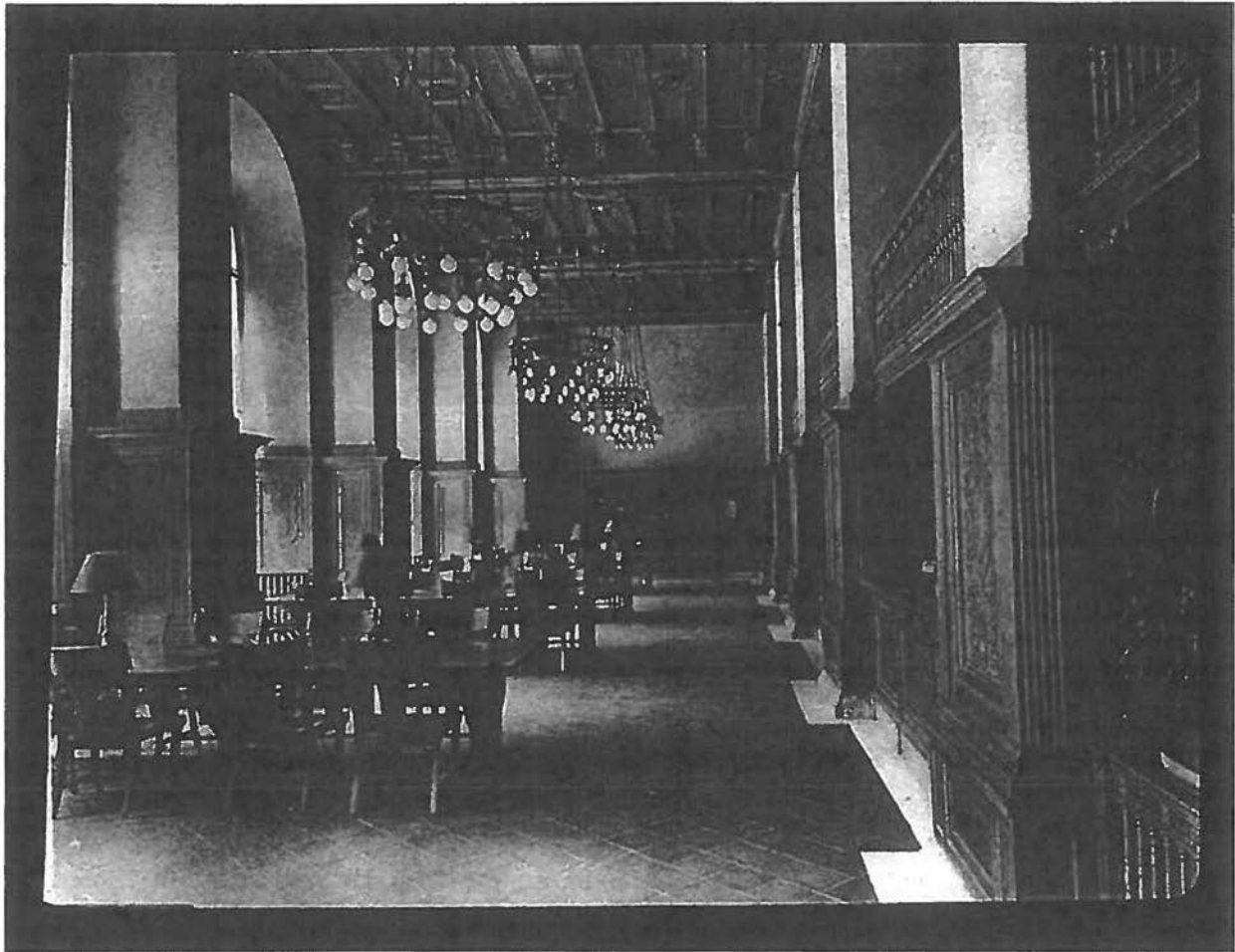
Pots, pans and pie-plates and how to use them: a collection of tried receipts; Hebrew Day Nursery (Baltimore, Md.) (Author) 1905

of the general Judaica collection is scholarly, but not esoteric.

In the NYPL catalog (<http://catalog.nypl.org>) searching can be done in Hebrew letters (author/title/keyword) and limited by date, language, and other access points. The Archives Catalog (<http://archives.nypl.org>) contains special papers and materials, some of which are located in other NYPL research branches -- Archives and Manuscripts Division, Performing Arts Library, and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Items of Jewish interest, i.e. Raphael Patai Papers and Block Publishing Company Papers, can also be found.

Some materials are located offsite, and inter-library loans can be arranged through NYPL's InterLibrary Loan Department. Also, patrons can receive passes to other NYC-area libraries through METRO, in order to consult research

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Drot Jewish Division – Room 111; undated, hand-colored slide from NYPL archives

(Reference workshop, cont'd)

materials not held by NYPL. Thanks to MARLI (Manhattan Research Librarians' Initiative), NYPL has a special link-up with both the Columbia University and NYU libraries, allowing registered researchers to borrow select materials from all three libraries.

Features

In fielding research questions or securing materials, Amanda must hone in on the individual's background or needs. She stresses the following:

- Check catalog and ask for help.
- For on-site orders, call ahead.
- For off-site orders, order online.
- Make an appointment with a research librarian.

Need help in primary sources? What language? And is it easily accessible? Most people want English, which helps to narrow down the search, as often materials they need are in a foreign language they cannot read. Although there is a multilingual staff on hand, NYPL does not provide translation services.

Guiding a search is based on what's:

- Reliable
- Popular
- Fun
- Scholarly
- Or not.

Other factors are the item's era or denomination, or the patron's educational level. For additional help or items not available at NYPL, patrons will often be referred to other local and major repositories, such as the Center for Jewish History.

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Sheet music (about 850 individually cataloged items;
about 40 manuscript scores
from Boris Thomashefsky's repertoire)

(Reference Workshop, cont'd)

Not surprisingly, the Bible ranks the highest Among the demand for classic Jewish texts. Commentaries (371 for Genesis alone) are available in a variety of languages. As far as biographies of biblical figures, NYPL has 550 items.

NYPL's Jewish periodicals collection runs the gamut from print to microfilm to digital. Microfilm holdings include 1500 Jewish periodicals from around the world. Print holdings include:

- English (500+)
- Hebrew (300)
- Yiddish (350)
- Ladino (26)
- Other languages (200+)

In all, there are roughly 500 current titles, including electronic subscriptions, as well as tens of thousands of general periodicals in NYPL, historical and current. The "Jewish Periodicals: A Quick Online Guide" -- www.nvpl.org/blog/2015/03/26guide-jewish-periodicals -- can be used to access online sources. NYPL's microfilm, which contains 1500 Jewish titles from around the world, can be obtained through www.nvpl.org/collections/nvpl-recommendations/guides/worldjewishnewspapers.

Electronic resources can be found on the extensive articles and databases menu: www.nvpl.org/collections/articles-databases. Select "Jewish Studies."

"Access varies," Amanda explained. Login is available through NYPL's on-site computer terminals or through wireless, i.e. laptop or home PC. There are also free access websites, as well as article indexes and databases.

Digital resources include:

- Electronic periodicals indexes
- Digitized periodicals (keyword-searchable)

Given the lack of indexes, patrons might have to know ahead of time the necessary dates, obituaries, and languages. "For some reason," Amanda mused, "obituaries did not appear in early Jewish newspapers."

Among the extensive digital holdings (www.digitalcollections.nvpl.org) are oral histories, Yiddish theater posters, Hebrew manuscripts, photographs, prints. Older (okay, antique) technology such as microfilm is still available for some materials which, because of poor condition, cannot be digitized. Fragile and significant collections like rare books (at least 16,000) can be arranged for photographing, but without flash. (This does, however, raise copyright issues.)

Additional specialized collections include hundreds of Haggadot from all ages, eras, and languages. There is also an extensive collection of sheet music from Yiddish theatre and cabaret -- 850 individual cataloged items, among them about 40 manuscript scores from Boris Thomashefsky's repertoire. About 2700 Jewish cookbooks were largely collected and donated by the late Roberta Saltzman, former Assistant Chief of the division (and NYMA member).

Literature is comprised of several sections:

- 1,000 translations of world literature into Hebrew
- 500 dramas in Hebrew
- 1100 published dramas in Yiddish; hundreds more Yiddish play manuscripts
- 900 translations of world literature into Yiddish
- 360 books of (or about) Ladino literature
- Hebrew manuscripts.

"Dorot has over 1,000 books on Hebrew grammar," Amanda added.

Past is Present

As preservers of historical memory, Dorot librarians are at the forefront. Genealogists, frequent visitors, will find at their disposal:

- 700 genealogy books (about individual families)
- 250 Registers
- Name books
- Books about specific communities (organized geographically)
- Organizational publications.

Biographies and oral histories are much needed in this line of work. NYPL provides:

- 1100+ biographical dictionaries
- 10,000 Jewish memoirs, biographies, autobiographies
- 400+ biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs of non-Jews who had a connection to Jewish life.
- Oral histories (2250 in all, audio and video; 350 transcripts are digitized). Some of the famous include Theo Bikel, Bella Abzug, and David Ben-Gurion.

Someone needing to look up a great-grandparent's *shtetl* will find roughly 30,000 books on Jewish history in 50 languages, organized by country and in some cases by city or American state. There are also 700 Yizkor books (650 of which are online, some translated through JewishGen). These can be found here: www.nypl.org/collections/nypl-recommendations/guides/yizkorbooks. Towns are listed alphabetically by name.

For the Jews of New York, history comes alive through:

- *Landsmanshaftn* publications (200); also B'nai B'rith Lodges (not all from New York)
- Synagogue and organizational publications
- Jewish communal registers
- Books on synagogue architecture
- Neighborhoods

Such resources forge invaluable links between the past and the present.

Added Attractions

Dorot has many additional perks:

- Free lectures and programs on Jewish studies

- Group tours
- Blog posts/research guides
- Free classes and programs for all ages
- Children's Center (located in the same building) which has frequent programming
- Resume help, financial coaching, computer classes, IDNYC, and English classes (now open in her building)
- Free exhibitions
- 4 research libraries and 88 circulating branch libraries
- Research fellowships.

Amanda, whose own specialty is Yiddish language and culture, and American Jewish history, gave a recent workshop on Sholem Aleichem. She listed a number of blogs, such as *Landsmanschaftn in New York: A Quick Online Guide*, or *Finding Yiddish Music: A Quick Online Guide*. The most popular so far – *Celebrating African-American Jews* and *Celebrating LGBT Jews* – are also part of NYPL's program (along with that of the Library of Congress) to promote national Pride or History months and weeks. It's important, Amanda added, that the Library provide high quality, scholarly and professionally prepared information in its blogs and serve the population of NYC and beyond.

"Start your own blog," she cautioned, "only if you have expertise."

Amanda mentioned a special visitor: Rabbi Sidney Kleiman, z"l (1913-2013), longest-serving and oldest active congregational rabbi (Aderet-El, 1939-1996) in the United States. His donation of sermons has enhanced Dorot's impressive collection of rabbinics and devotional literature.

Little wonder that for many a visitor to "Jew York," the Public Library is the first and last stop for intellectual and cultural enrichment. Truly, as Rabbi Silverman stated, we are blessed to live in such times where the sky's the limit as far as access and information, no small thanks to the numerous unnamed librarians who have worked tirelessly "behind the lions" and who, thanks to Amanda Siegel's amazing presentation, were given a voice and a much deserved recognition.

So all hail the "Lion King," the New York Public Library -- and workshop co-chairs Leslie Monchar and Bruchie Weinstein -- for a making the afternoon a "roaring" success!

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