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**“Jewish Councils” Research Guide**

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Abstract (for dissemination)	<p>The aim of the EHRI “Jewish Councils” Research Guide is to create an innovative and easy to use guide through the dispersed and fragmented archival material related to Jewish communities and Jewish leadership under Nazi occupation, thus connecting to one of the most disputed subjects in the Holocaust research. EHRI research guides demonstrate what a collaborative archival project can achieve and how archivists can redefine their tasks beyond providing physical access and creating finding aids restricted to the local collections. The guide does not aim to make the existing archives irrelevant by placing all information online, but to help researchers identify relevant sources and to connect and compare them to documents in other collections.</p> <p>The “Jewish Councils” Research Guide illustrates the primary <i>raison d’être</i> of EHRI – to connect collections spread in many archives and in more countries. The guide tests new tools and methods and establishes a platform for long term connecting and sharing of information and for interaction with the research community(ies).</p>

## Table of Contents

Background.....	4
“Jewish Councils” - historical background .....	4
Selection and specifics of individual Jewish communities .....	5
Data integration and analysis.....	8
Vienna .....	9
Budapest .....	9
Prague .....	10
Reports of the “Jewish Councils” .....	10
Use of example documents.....	10
Contextualisation .....	10
User interface.....	11
Summary .....	11

## *Background*

### **“Jewish Councils” - historical background**

Jewish communities under Nazi rule, or “Jewish Councils”, have been and continue to constitute a controversial subject, for survivors, Jewish public as well as for historians. The Nazi appointed Jewish leaderships in the Jewish communities and ghettos played a very special role: subordinated to the Nazis and obliged to fulfil their orders, they often tried to soften or delay the impact of the persecution and extermination of Jews. (The historian Dan Michman described this form of enforced leadership as headship – the Nazis were interested to govern Jews through their leaders /heads/.) Whereas the “Jewish Councils” and their leaders were often accused of collaboration with the Nazi persecutors and of delivering other Jews to death, the more recent research continues to uncover a much more complex reality which doesn’t fit the simplified concepts of resistance and collaboration around which narratives of the occupation in many European countries have been centred.

The focus on the “Jewish Councils” also corresponds to the stated focus of EHRI on archival materials created by the victims, both individuals and Jewish organisations. While operating under the watch of the SS, the “Jewish Councils” were also continuing much of the previous Jewish relief and other organisations and activities.

The significance of the “Jewish Councils” cannot be measured by their role in the persecution and extermination of European Jews alone, but has to be assessed against previous developments. In most of Europe, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish communities transformed – in the process of emancipation of Jews – from self-administrative bodies which governed Jewish life in almost all aspects into strictly religious communities. Especially in the Western and Central Europe, the connection of many Jews to the new-type Jewish communities loosened and was often restricted to irregular synagogue attendance and paying of religious tax. Just before the Holocaust, the Jewish community did not play an important role in the lives and identities of many Jews who culturally and

socially integrated into the European societies. Moreover, a small, yet important, part of Jews converted and were not registered with the Jewish communities at all.

The subordination of Jewish populations (as defined by racial laws and practices) to Jewish communities or “councils” was thus a sign of the reinterpretation and fragmentation of national citizenship. Jewish communities under Nazi occupation mostly took care of the registration of Jews (including those belonging to other religious congregations), their expropriation, forced labour, distribution of food and other tasks. Among their core agendas belonged social care of the increasingly pauperised population and Jewish emigration.

## **Selection and specifics of individual Jewish communities**

The research guide did not have the ambition to create an all encompassing guide covering all “Jewish Council” collections which would be – due to their number – absolutely impossible. Therefore, at this moment, the EHRI “Jewish Councils” Research Guide provides only a fraction of such Jewish institutions from the period of the WWII. The guide serves as a basis for a long term platform for providing information about archival material which relates to Jewish communities and “Jewish Councils” during the Holocaust, as well as for development of comparative perspectives and new analytical tools. The work so far was aimed at developing and testing approaches and preparing vocabularies, on a selected set of data, that can be used to extend and develop the research guide in the long term. In the future, the guide will be also open for the research community and collection holding institutions to add and connect their data.

To develop and test these approaches, the EHRI WP2 chose to focus on three Jewish communities / “Jewish Councils” for which it could build upon the data and expertise of the partner institutions: the Jewish communities of Prague, Vienna and Budapest. The history of these communities shows both similarities and connections, but significant historical differences as well.

All three communities shared the historical background of the multi-ethnic Habsburg empire which included also cultural exchange, migration, but also a similar experience of antisemitism. But there were also significant differences between them, including different legal framework in the Western part of the monarchy, Cisleithania, and in Hungary. While only one Jewish community within one region was allowed in Cisleithania, in Hungary several formal communities – the Orthodox, the Neolog (Liberal) and the Status Quo – would co-exist next to each other. While the Prague (or more broadly the Czech) Jewish community stagnated demographically, both Vienna and Budapest attracted extensive Jewish migration, in particular from within the Habsburg monarchy, and developed into thriving Jewish metropolis. By the end of the WWI, the three communities found themselves in different nation states, the successor states to the Habsburg monarchy, and faced major challenges, for instance regarding Jewish refugees as well as the citizenship of their members and other supported Jews.

The history of persecution of Jews in the three cities (and countries, after the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918) also shows both similarities and differences. After the “Anschluss” of Austria in March 1938, the persecution of Jews was brought to a new level of radicalisation, including violence, public humiliation and expulsion. The quick subordination of the Viennese Jewish community and the creation of the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung (Central Office for

Jewish Emigration) in Vienna by Adolf Eichmann became in many ways a model for persecution of Jews in other occupied countries, including the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia, where a similar Zentralstelle was established in Prague in 1939. On the other hand, while two thirds of Viennese (or Austrian) Jews were forced to emigrate after the “Anschluss”, with a significant involvement of the Jewish community, only a fraction of Prague (Czech) Jews would manage to emigrate due to the closure of borders as well as the very short period between occupation and the outbreak of the WWII.

On the other hand, Budapest saw the establishment of the “Jewish Council”, under the control of Hungarian authorities, only in 1944, only after the occupation of the country by Nazi Germany (March 1944) and in the period of mass deportations of Hungarian Jews to extermination camps. In this dramatic period, Budapest became also a centre of several rescue initiatives, including the one by the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

The Viennese and Prague “Jewish Councils” promoted and organised Jewish emigration as well as wide-ranging social assistance. Only later on were they forced to assist with the ghettoisation and deportation. On the other hand, the Budapest “Jewish Council” was in existence during the period of massive deportations from Hungary and emigration played next to no role in its activities.

### **Archival history**

The collections included in the guide mostly have a dramatic history, marked by destruction, confiscation and archival migration.

The documents of the wartime Viennese Jewish community (IKG) archives survived the war relatively intact. However, due to its numeric weakness and the feelings of insecurity, in 1952, 1966, 1971 and 1978 two thirds of the archival material of the period from 1626 to 1945 had been transferred to the “The Jewish Historical General Archives” (now: The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem).

The confiscated archival records and manuscripts of Jewish associations, foundations and organisations were transported to Berlin and later on, in 1943, to Silesia. After the end of the war the Red Army discovered the documents, transferred them to Moscow and stored the archival material (more than 2,580 fascicles and 66 Jewish manuscripts of Jewish associations, foundations and organizations) in the so-called Special Archive (Osobyi).

For more than two decades it was assumed that the entire archival records that survived in Vienna had been deposited at the Central Archives in Jerusalem as a loan collection. But the IKG seemed to have overlooked numerous records, indices and books relating to the periods before, during and after the National Socialist era. In 1986 innumerable records were found by Mr. Ernst Meir Stern during the renovation of the cellar of the main synagogue. How and why these records were kept in Vienna remains unknown. The entire archival holdings were brought to a storage place where they fell again into oblivion. In 2000, 800 cardboard boxes, index cards, documents and large books were found reaching from the floor to the ceiling in a storage room at Herklotzgasse in the 15th district of Vienna.

Therefore, the main part of the archive is physically divided between the Archives of the Jewish Religious Community in Vienna and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in

Jerusalem. The data provided in the guide, however, virtually unites both repositories, and link them together, based on the catalogisation conducted in the by the IKG Archives and the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (which is designed to eventually house the WWII-time parts of the collection).

Most of the documents of the wartime Prague Jewish Community haven't survived. Only fragments were collected after the war, mostly through the Czech (Jewish) Documentation Action (Dokumentační akce, 1945-1946). The core of the set of remaining documents was kept in the State Jewish Museum in Prague where it was catalogued and organised into a collection divided according to the administrative structure of the wartime Prague "Jewish Council. Other fragments of such documentation were brought with the Documentation Action to Palestine and are today part of the collection O7.cz in Yad Vashem Archives. The partiality and fragmentation can be well illustrated on the documents of the Emigration department which – as is clear from the remaining documents – had an extended agenda and correspondence. The Jewish Museum collection contains very small sets of core documents and forms, whereas the Yad Vashem collection has, among some other minor sets of documents, fragments of copies of its outgoing correspondence for only several weeks in 1940 which allow us a glimpse into the original extent of the material.

The weekly, quarterly and yearly reports the Prague Jewish community was obliged to submit to the Zentralstelle also have not completely survived. Most of the surviving weekly reports are located in Yad Vashem (O7.cz), but some crucial periods are missing. Different versions of the – often rich illustrated with photos and graphs – quarterly and yearly reports, as well as reports of the Treuhandstelle (the department of the Jewish Community which took care of the confiscated Jewish property) survived in Yad Vashem, the Jewish Museum in Prague, as well as in the Archives of Security Services in Prague (which is part of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes), former Archives of the Ministry of Interior. The latter are part of the collection "Jewish Organisations" (425) based on documents confiscated from Jewish communities and organisations in Czechoslovakia in the midst of the "anti-Zionist" campaign of the 1950s. Since the investigators were more interested into policing the "Zionist" organisations, the wartime reports did not receive much attention and are till today listed in the provisional finding aid as "Poučné brožury vydávané židovskou náboženskou obcí" (Informative booklets published by the Jewish religious community).<sup>1</sup>

Only a fragment of the Jewish Council's documentation survived the war, and the remaining archival material of the Pest Israelite Congregation (Pesti Izraelita Hitközség) is also scarce from 1944-1945. According to Alfréd Hübsch, head of the Central Registry Office (Központi Iktatóhivatal), until the Arrow Cross takeover (October 15, 1944), the "Jewish Council" recorded 6219 case files, while the number of documents processed by the administration of the Pest Israelite Congregation was 7130. Hübsch's data is almost precise: the registry book (iktatókönyv) of the Council has survived and it holds 6214 entries between April 7 and October 13, 1944. Under the increasingly difficult circumstances of the Arrow Cross era, the systematic administration came to almost a complete halt.

However, this more than 6000 registered case files were only a fraction of the actual documentation as many incoming letters and other documents had not gone through the Council's Registry Office. The destruction of the archives commenced as early as the summer months of 1944. According to the postwar testimony of an unidentified former "Jewish Council" member (probably Ernő Pető), the

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1 *Prozatímní inventář k archivnímu fondu 425 Židovské organizace* (Praha: Archiv bezpečnostních složek, 2008), <http://www.abscr.cz/data/pdf/abs/inventar-425.pdf>.

Council systematically burnt some of its documentation in July 1944, while another part of the material was moved to the Buda side of the capital where it perished during the siege. The headquarters of the “Jewish Council” (12 Síp Street) was heavily hit by an air raid on December 10, 1944. Almost the whole 3rd floor collapsed and large part of the Council’s archives was destroyed. In the following months the building was hit by additional bombs.

In the framework of the 1953 antisemitic campaign by the communist government, former “Jewish Council” leaders Lajos Stöckler and Miksa Domonkos were arrested and several surviving Council documents were confiscated. Years later, a part of these had been transferred to the Hungarian National Archives (today: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár), from where they were returned to the Hungarian Jewish Archives (Magyar Zsidó Levéltár) in 2000. Besides these, additional fractions of the original Council archives can be found in the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center (Holokauszt Emlékközpont) as well as among the files of the Ministry of the Interior in the Hungarian National Archives.

### ***Data integration and analysis***

The WP2 team comprising of the Jewish Museum in Prague, Yad Vashem, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies and the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest, together with colleagues from the Archives of the Jewish Community in Vienna and from the Hungarian Jewish Archives, worked together to connect the relevant collections for all three Jewish communities. A short hierarchic keyword list was developed centred around the major agendas of the “Jewish Councils”, such as emigration, social care, and deportation. These keywords were used to map the selected archival material together. Based on this structured vocabulary, the team prepared, a narrative Thematic guide which allows researchers to traverse along the hierarchy of keywords and see the linked data from the included collections.

The guide also shares some of its vocabularies with the Terezín/Theresienstadt Research Guide, in order to build on the conceptual similarities between the “Jewish Councils” in the sense of Jewish communities under occupation and “Jewish Councils” in ghettos, such as in Terezín.

Much attention was devoted to connecting the archival descriptions to the physical locations within the city, testifying to the process of territorial restrictions and eventual ghettoisation (especially in Budapest) of the Jewish population. A list of most important locations was compiled, together with geographic coordinates, for each of the three Jewish communities. Likewise, authority sets of most important personalities of each of the “Jewish Councils” was created, containing basic biographic information.

For each “Jewish Council”, a short archival history (as outlined above) was provided, a historical introduction (for as much as was not covered by the EHRI country reports), as well as an integrated timeline (for all three communities/countries). The guide therefore also assists wider public in understanding and interpreting the data (see <https://portal.ehri-project.eu/guides/jewishcouncil>).

## **Vienna**

The WWII collection of the Archives of the Jewish Community in Vienna (which will be transferred to the EHRI partner Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies in the future) have been described in two ways. The WP2 team created more detailed collection level descriptions that provide a perfect introduction into the overall structure and content of the archival material. Moreover, selected files that deal with emigration and deportation from both Viennese and Jerusalem parts of the historical archive of the Jewish community were catalogued in detail and enriched with structured metadata. In total, 1330 files were cataloged anew and are available for search in the EHRI portal.

## **Budapest**

We were able to provide new and more detailed descriptions on the very unique collection of the Budapest “Jewish Councils” which was, as described above, only recently reconstructed by the Hungarian Jewish Archives. The eleven new descriptions are rich on new information and are linked to vocabularies and authority sets. The descriptions are based on detailed and completely new research in the collection.

For comparison, the WP2-team also used file level descriptions for the period of 1938-1939 of the Neolog (Liberal) Jewish community in Pest, as the collection was catalogued in Yad Vashem. The analysis of the metadata clearly illustrates the difference between the agendas and archival collections of Jewish community under one of the German satellite states and under German occupation, during the deportations.

## **Prague**

For Prague, the core of the provided data is made up by the JMP collection Jewish religious community in Prague during the occupation. In total, 366 detailed data objects (documents) with connected vocabularies and authorities have been prepared, along with their parent records. The narrative guides have also been extended with fractions of the material of the Jewish community in Prague located in Yad Vashem, US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and in the Archives of Security Services in Prague.

## **Reports of the “Jewish Councils”**

Specific case study is based on the the reports sent by the “Jewish Councils” to the Nazi authorities. WP2 used the two incomplete, yet extensive and valuable sets of weekly reports from Vienna and Prague to the Nazi authorities for an in-depth analysis of the created metadata and their changes in time. It especially illustrates the changing possibilities of emigration and the growing pauperisation of Jewish populations of both cities.

## **Use of example documents**



Since detailed cataloguing on the file or document level (like in the case of the Terezín Research Guide) was not fully possible in this case, examples of typical and interesting documents, including their scans, are provided as a part of the guide. The examples are fully catalogued and described and include annotations of typical or interesting elements and of those parts that would be difficult to understand without previous preparation. The approx. 30 examples are much more than just a visually attractive illustration – they provide probes into detailed cataloguing of archival material and help to prepare researchers for their archival visits.

## **Contextualisation**

The guide has been designed not only for highly professional users (such as archivists and historians), but also with a view to the needs of students and interested members of the public. Therefore, we use a very inclusive definition of research: the guides are meant to be used also by people who do not know how to work with traditional archival finding aids and have no extensive historical expertise about “Jewish Councils”. The method of contextualisation was already developed for the Terezín Research Guide and was described in Deliverable 2.1.

## **User interface**

The conceptual approach to the combination of the narrative and structured data and the presentation was described in detail in the Deliverable 2.1. In cooperation with WP20, a user interface was built and tested which makes possible for presentation of structured data, as well as for presentation of textual information and some visualisations of the data. The interface is tightly integrated into the EHRI portal and uses its search capabilities as well as layout (especially for the layout of search results and of individual units of description). However, the research guides offer search capabilities beyond those enabled in the portal-wide search, building on the much richer metadata available for the guides. Apart from fulltext search, the faceted browse in the research guides allows for searching on keywords, people, organisations, as well as places.

## ***Summary***

The EHRI “Jewish Councils” Research Guide creates a platform for linking together and analysis of archival material related to the history and dilemmas of Jewish communities under Nazi rule. On examples of important Jewish communities, WP2 tested methods of linking such data together which can serve as a basis for a long-term development and interaction with the research community.