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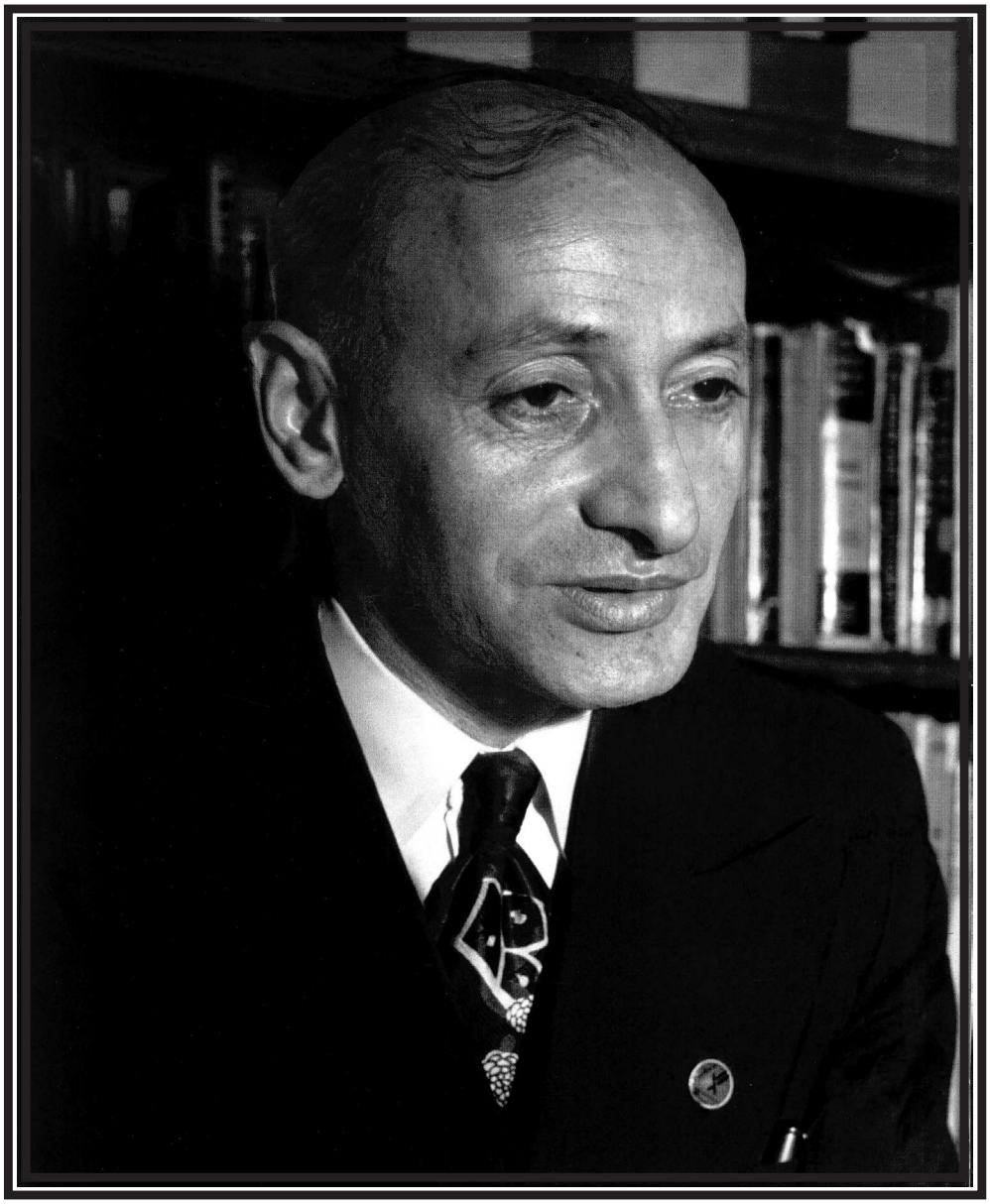
Leyzer Ran Collection

in the

Harvard College Library

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Leyzer Ran
1912-1995

Catalog of the

Leyzer Ran Collection

in the

Harvard College Library

edited by

Charles Berlin

HARVARD
LIBRARY

Cambridge, Massachusetts
2017

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N.B. Transliteration from Yiddish in the essays reflects each author's preference.

Preface

This catalog is published in grateful appreciation of having the Leyzer Ran Collection in the Harvard Library and as a part of the Judaica Division's ongoing effort to bring the Leyzer Ran Collection to the attention of scholars. The Judaica Division is grateful to the family of Leyzer Ran (1912-1995)—his late widow Basheva Ran, his daughter Faye Ran, and his granddaughter Davina—for having presented the Leyzer Ran Collection to Harvard in 1996. Our gratitude is shared by the scholars and students who now and in future generations will benefit from having access to this great research resource. The Collection reflects Leyzer Ran's lifetime of dedication to Yiddish culture and to its preservation for future generations.

The essays published in this catalog (pp. 3-42) pay tribute to Leyzer Ran and his prodigious accomplishments. The information in the catalog regarding the contents of the Leyzer Ran Collection offers a more detailed account of the collection and attest to the depth and breadth of the Ran Collection. The catalog (pp.75-124) includes a listing of some 820 publications—books and pamphlets—added to the Harvard Judaica Collection thanks to this gift. There are also several examples (pp. 43-49) of that most elusive of genres—ephemera—that are representative of the hundreds of single-sheet printed materials to be found in the Ran Collection, and which are in the process of being organized and digitized; these will gradually be made available online. The Ran Collection is especially rich in archival materials, which are described in a preliminary catalog at the folder level (pp. 51-62) and to which a preliminary index is available (pp. 63-71). Photographs in the Ran Collection will also be digitized and put online.

The materials in the Ran Collection are chiefly from Eastern Europe, especially Lithuania and Leyzer Ran's beloved Vilna, but the Collection includes materials from all over the Jewish world—special mention should be made of Cuba (where Leyzer Ran lived from 1946 to 1953)—as is evident from a perusal of the cataloging information in this volume. However, we hasten to add that this catalog does not do justice to the Leyzer Ran Collection. It will take many years of work with these materials by librarians and scholars before the extraordinary richness of this collection can be fully known and truly appreciated.

It is a great pleasure to thank those who have contributed essays to this catalog: Faye Ran, Davina Ran, Ruth R. Wisse, Dovid Katz, Motti Zalkin, and Justin Cammy. Their words—whether personal recollections by those privileged to have known Leyzer Ran, or testimonies to Leyzer Ran by those who know him only from making use of the fruits of his lifetime labor that are to be found in the Leyzer Ran Collection at Harvard—are a moving tribute to Leyzer Ran and his great contribution to Yiddish culture.

The world of Jewish scholarship is forever indebted to Leyzer Ran for his extraordinary efforts both as a scholar and especially as an archivist of Yiddish culture—and to the family of Leyzer Ran for having entrusted the stewardship of this truly unique resource, the Leyzer Ran Collection, to the Harvard Library, where it will be preserved in perpetuity in the service of scholars and students and as a vital part of the Jewish cultural heritage within the spectrum of humanistic research at Harvard University.

* * *

I am very pleased to express our appreciation to two colleagues in the Judaica Division, Elizabeth Vernon, Lee M. Friedman Judaica Technical Services Librarian, who produced the data for this catalog, and Vardit Samuels, Judaica Library Assistant, who was responsible for the design. I also wish to express our gratitude to Sherman H. Starr, Class of 1946, for providing the Sherman H. Starr Judaica Library Publication Fund which has made possible publication of this catalog.

Cambridge, Mass.
August 2017

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Return to "Jerusalem of Lithuania": A Stroll through the Leyzer Ran Collection Archive

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Even as early as the first half of the 19th century, the Jewish community of Vilna had established a tradition of preserving communal and local memory. The first of the local Jewish historiographers, Shemuel Yosef Finn, spent many years laboring over his book *Kiryah Ne'emanah* (*A Faithful City*) which was published with important notes by the Vilna *Maskil*, Matityahu Shtrashun (Vilna, 1860). Most of the material for this work was collected by a local gravestone carver named Hillel Noah Magid-Shteinschneider, who in parallel prepared a collective biography of Vilna's scholars, its rabbis and its intellectuals. The first part of this work, *Ir Vilna* (*The City of Vilna*), was published in 1900, while the second part remained in the private archive of Hillel Noah Magid-Steinschneider's son, Professor David Maggid, until its publication in Jerusalem in 2003 (edited by M. Zalkin).

Underpinning both Finn and Magid-Shteinschneider's works was a desire to present a kind of "summary picture" of the traditional Jewish community's world in the face of the modernization processes that the Vilna Jewish community experienced throughout the 19th century. This impetus led to the publication of the collective volume *Vilne* that appeared in New York in 1935 under the editorship of Yefim Yeshurim, and likewise led Israel Klausner to write and publish his two books, *Korot bet ha-'almin ha-yashan be-Vilna* (*History of the Old Cemetery in Vilna*) (Vilna, 1935) and *Toldot ha-kehilah ha-'Ivrit be-Vilnah* (*History of the Jewish community in Vilna*) (Vilna, 1938). Leyzer Ran also began collecting historical-ethnographic material long before the Holocaust. Evidence of his early historiographic awareness appears on the inner binding of an old notebook found in this collection and containing hundreds of expressions in Yiddish: "collected by Leyzer Ran, Vilna, 1928."

Following the physical destruction of Vilna during the Second World War, there was a renewal of historiographic work focusing on this ancient community. Even in the midst of the war, Israel Cohen's *History of the Jews in Vilna* (Philadelphia, 1943) appeared, as did Israel Klausner's *Vilnah bi-tekufat ha-Gaon* (*Vilna in the period of the Gaon*) (Jerusalem, 1942). After the war, these two of Jewish Vilna's sons, Leyzer Ran and Israel Klausner, each one separately, began gathering documentary material on the history of their city and community which was once known as "Jerusalem of Lithuania." Ran and Klausner became a vital link in the perpetuation of the Jewish community in Vilna, for they had begun collecting historical documentation even before the Holocaust, had seen Jewish Vilna in its glory, and were witnesses to its destruction. Israel Klausner's work culminated in the publication of two volumes entitled *Vilna: Yerushalayim de-Lita* (*Vilna: the Jerusalem of Lithuania*) (Tel Aviv, 1983 and 1988). However, unlike Klausner and other historiographers of Vilna's Jewish community, Leyzer Ran did not confine himself to merely writing a monograph whose subject was the history of the Jews of his city. Rather, Ran strove to preserve the memory of "Jerusalem of Lithuania" in its entirety, in all its aspects. Thus, for example, while Shemuel Yosef Finn and Hillel Noah Maggid-Shteinschneider mostly considered the prominent personalities of the local Jewish community, and the communal and public institutions that were active in the

My research into the Leyzer Ran archive took place in 2008 during my time as a Harry Starr research fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University. I would like to thank Dr. Charles Berlin for the opportunity to examine this collection, and Ms. Elizabeth Vernon for the great assistance that she provided me during my research.

city, and while Israel Klausner focused to a great extent on the political, organizational and public aspects of the life of the community, Leyzer Ran did not attempt to write an intellectual or a political collective biography. Against the background of the destruction of "Jews' Street" and "Gaon Street," "the wood market" and "the fish market," Leyzer Ran sensed that the best monument to his beloved city would be the collection and preservation of the stories, scenes, voices and images of its sons and daughters. He dreamed of a complete, multi-faceted reconstruction of "the city and its fullness," and therefore he looked also at the "Vilna Jews," i.e., the common people. Their "voices" that rise from the Leyzer Ran Collection, are many and varied. Leyzer Ran's Vilna is a city of beggars and water-carriers, "Melamdim" (teachers) and merchants, cobblers and rabbis, midwives and mothers, theater and music, charitable organizations and educational institutions. Everything that came within the gates of Vilna, from the "Gaon of Vilna" to "Rokhele the crazy" who flitted about in the courtyard of the Great Synagogue, found a home within the gates of Ran's large collection.

In order to realize his life's mission, Leyzer Ran diligently, devotedly and stubbornly collected thousands of historical documents with a single common denominator: the world of Jewish Eastern Europe and especially of Jewish Vilna. These documents were gathered from all the ends of the earth, from Europe and South America, from Israel and from Australia. In the early 1970s, when Leyzer Ran sensed that the time had come to publicly display the complete story of his ancestors' city, he used a unique approach. Instead of telling the story of Vilna, the city and its community with words, he published the two volumes of the album *Yerushalayim de-Lita* (*Jerusalem of Lithuania*) (New York, 1974), in which he presented the life of the Jews in Vilna through many hundreds of pictures and drawings. Many were of the opinion that these two unconventional volumes constituted a final summation of Ran's collecting work. Not so. These volumes are only the tip of the iceberg of the large collection found in the Harvard Library.

A preliminary perusal through the collection reveals that Ran chose to go beyond the borders of "Jerusalem of Lithuania" and to collect many documents related to Jewish life in all regions of Eastern Europe, and sometimes even in other places. Most of the documents and letters in this collection are in Yiddish, the language of the Jews of Eastern Europe and Ran's childhood language. He received these letters from Jews who lived all over Eastern Europe, and that is why this collection can serve as a very important resource for an examination of different Yiddish dialects. Even so, in accordance with the rule that Ran set for himself—to collect every document that deals with the life of the Jews of Vilna, and to a large extent also of the Jews of Eastern Europe in general—the collection also contains documentation in Russian, Polish, English, German and Hebrew. Moreover, Ran did not limit himself to collecting primary sources, but also added to his collection many hundreds of relevant newspaper clippings. This aspect of his activity has special importance, for in many cases these clippings are the only remnant of issues that were not preserved in any other place.

The Leyzer Ran Collection, which is now undergoing a detailed analysis, organization and cataloging, includes sections of documentary material, chiefly archival, that is arranged by topics, such as the following:

Vilna

Many hundreds of documents in this collection allow for greater familiarity with Leyzer Ran's hometown, Vilna. Among these are pictures; handwritten poems that its sons and daughters dedicated to her, such as the song of Bunis Mizinek "Gitke Toybes Zavulek" ("Gitek Toybe's Alley") and Hayim Leyb Fuks's "Vilne"; letters written in this city, among which, for example, is a 1928 letter of the writer and translator Yosef Eliyah Trivush addressed to "The Administration of the Vilna Jewish Writers' Associa-

tion" requesting a "poor man's certificate" so that the writer would be able to get assistance for his sustenance. Vilna's central role in Jewish book production is well-recorded in this collection; for example, documents whose subject is the wide-ranging activity of the widow and brothers Romm publishing house. Among the documents dealing with the Jewish experience in Vilna during the Holocaust there is much material on the theater that existed in the ghetto and on the Jewish partisans. Various documents also testify to Ran's great passion for guarding the honor of Vilna and its Jews. Among these is a very sharp letter that Ran sent to the editor of the *Forverts* complaining about inaccuracies that occurred in an article about *Yerushalayim de-Lita* that had appeared in that newspaper.

Folklore

This section in the collection includes many hundreds of folk-tales, songs, jokes and similar materials. Some are materials that were already published, but the majority is material that Leyzer Ran collected from different sources and that had not yet been published. Thus, for example, among the detailed materials dealing with the nicknames and surnames of Eastern European Jews, there is a list that a Yitshak Demba compiled in 1935, containing the nicknames of more than 200 Jews—men and women—who lived in the town of Yanova in Lithuania. This catalog is accompanied by a similar list of nicknames of Jews from the city of Flonsk. These lists allow a scholar to look into these communities from a unique point of view, both in terms of learning the frequency of various personal names in Jewish society of that time and in terms of detailing the occupational profile of men and women of the community. Furthermore, almost every Jewish man and woman who lived in the town had a nickname that reflected, to a great extent, their character and "true" image, at least as it was perceived by the inhabitants of the place. In order to substantiate the historical importance of these lists, Leyzer Ran attached to this group of documents a newspaper article by P. Elias on typical nicknames that were given to teachers in Eastern European towns. Correspondingly, the collective nicknames attached to different communities also reflect their similarities. Thus, from a long and detailed list that Hanokh Halperin prepared, it emerges that the members of the Jewish communities in the towns of Galina, Dobromil, Tlust, Strij and Striskov were known for their lust for eating ("fresers"), while in the Hasidic centers of Zlotchov, Leshkowitz, Mikolnits, Sinyatin, and Premishlan they were known for their Jewish thieves…Similarly, this section contains poems dealing with the lesser-known aspects of the lives of the Jews (e.g., "Robbers and thieves' songs" and "No! I do not want to steal") alongside poems describing a normative reality (e.g. "Two merchants," and "*Heder* songs").

Leyzer Ran also collected hundreds of Jewish folk-songs dealing with different aspects of a Jew's life. In this group we find many love songs, including those gathered and transcribed in the early 1920s by Berl Verblonski of Grodno, and also by Moshe Feigman of Bialystock. In another folder are many handwritten folk-songs—composed by amateur songwriters or written down by amateur ethnographers—that found their way to Ran's collection, such as "A song about an informer," "A pogrom song," and others. Another folder is devoted to folk-songs dealing with Jewish immigrants to America and South Africa. Browsing through folders also leads the researcher to indirect "meetings" with long-gone poets, such as Aharon Zeitlin whose poem, "A marriage canopy over the synagogue court yard," is found in the collection in the poet's own handwriting. Alongside these, the researcher can look at a handwritten article by Shalom Koydanovski, on the phenomenon of folk-songs in Yiddish.

This section of the collection constitutes a major source for scholars of Jewish folk-tales. Some examples of the manuscripts found in the collection are "The emperor and the Jews," "The poverty," "A tale with two Cossaks," "Shmerele and Perele," "The Rabbi and the Rebetsen," and many other stories.

As mentioned, Leyzer Ran aspired to preserve all the features found in the human gallery of the Jewish communities. This is the background, for example, for the many documents whose subject is the world of the cantors who lived and worked in the Jewish community of Eastern Europe. Likewise, the world of the children of the *shtetl* also found a place in this archive. An interesting collection of children's games and children's songs is found in the material that Kalman Mendel from the town of Shkodvil in Lithuania collected in 1933. This material is important for many reasons, including the fact (noted by Mendel) that the material for this collection of children's games and songs was gathered from different towns in Lithuania (Kleme, Tavrig) and it presents a unique aspect of the world of the Jewish children in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Education

This section contains many documents dealing with different aspects of the Jewish educational systems in Eastern Europe, mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. A few of them deal with theoretical aspects of Jewish education of that time, such as a long article by Pinhas Shifman entitled: "The main deficiency in our educational institutions." In this article the author analyzes at length and in detail the major problems confronting the Jewish educational system in Europe during the period under discussion. His impression was that the first stage on the road to solving these problems was "to develop and deepen our national recognition of our educational problem."

However, most of the documents in this section deal with the *practical* aspects of the Jewish educational system. An example of this is a batch of rare and extremely interesting applications to various educational institutions from female and male teachers seeking teaching jobs. Curricula vitae are attached to these requests, making it possible for us to monitor both the social-cultural background of many job-seekers as well as the training of Jewish teachers in Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. In the curriculum vitae attached to his request, A. Meirovits describes the complicated world of the Jewish child, torn between "the strength of the father and the thick leather strap in his hand, and the strength of the mother who seeks to tear up the verdict of father." A typical example of the lengthy and exhausting process of training that these teachers went through is exemplified by the teacher Ester Bulkin. Her studies included participation courses organized by "Yehudiyah" (1918) and in the educational system of "Ts.B.K." (1921); training in craftwork in official courses (summer 1921); studies in the Vilna gymnasium for girls headed by Sima Gurevitch (1922); as well as studying sewing for over a year and a half in the framework of the organization "Help through work." At the same time, the writer also describes the experience she gained in her work in the kindergartens of the Y. L. Perets School, in "Grininke Boymelekh," in the "TOZ" organization, and in additional educational systems. The collection also reveals the difficult financial situation of many of the teachers in Vilna. We find in a report that was prepared by "The Association of the Hebrew Teachers in Vilna" a list of eighty male and female teachers, members of the association, who were "in need of matzos" for Passover. A collection of documents like these enables the researcher to sketch the collective profile of the teachers who worked in the various educational systems in that period.

A large group of documents deals with the world of the Yeshivot in Eastern Europe that was destroyed in the Holocaust. Among these documents is a letter by Rabbi Barukh Dov Leybowitch who admits to the Vilna librarian Haykel Lunski that he established a charitable fund for the "Kneset Beit Yitshak" Yeshivah in Slobodkah, in Kovna. A most important overview of this subject is provided to the researcher through "A questionnaire on the status and quality of the Yeshivot" in the years 1921-1936, and through a list of the Yeshivot that were active in the Lithuanian-Jewish cultural sphere in 1940.

Press

Leyzer Ran attributed great importance to the press in its various forms as a tool for learning about the world of Eastern European Jews. For that reason Ran included in his archive many hundreds of newspaper clippings, as well as Yiddish and Hebrew documents dealing with periodicals that appeared in the Lithuanian-Jewish sphere between the two World Wars. For example, there is a letter from the poet Saul Tchernikhowski and the historian Ben-Zion Katz to the editors of the periodical *Netivot* (October 1927), in which they respond to the editors' request to publish an announcement supporting the periodical and its distribution among the Hebrew-reading public in Eastern Europe. In this context, a letter from Aba Ben Aba, of the town of Libau on the Baltic Sea shore, to Nathan Grinblat, one of the editors of *Netivot*, is especially interesting. In this letter, from 1930, the writer laments: "To whom will I turn with my rhymes where I will be so understood? Woe to me, for in my pain I say Oy! And neither vu nor mu to meet the needs of the time and of art."

Letters

In this section is found Leyzer Ran's correspondence with various Jews throughout the world. It includes letters from the period of his activity in Vilna before the war, as well as letters written to collect the memories of Holocaust survivors. Among the former are, for example, a letter that Ran received in 1926 from the poet Yitshak Katsenelson, and among the latter, prolific correspondence with Hayim Gvati for the purpose of collecting material on Gvati's family history in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. An additional interesting letter was sent to Ran in the early 1950s by Judah David Eisenstein, author of the various "Otsarot" ("Encyclopedias").

General Historical Documentation

Anyone who has experience with archival research is aware of the possible existence of documents that would shed light on unknown historical events. In this respect the Leyzer Ran archive also surprises the researcher quite often. Thus, for example, we find a document from 1937 detailing a joint initiative from the heads of ORT, TOZ and the charity fund in the town of Kremenitz in Volhynia to erect a monument to Isaac Ber Levinson, "The father of the Jewish Enlightenment" in the Russian empire, by converting his modest home into a museum, library and reading room. Similarly, the collection includes a translation into Hebrew of the Lithuanian anthem that was prepared especially for the Hanukka celebration in the Hebrew gymnasium in Kovna in 1921. A diverse human gallery emerges from the many autobiographies that Ran collected, such as those of Moshe Zaltsman, the Jewish writer and Communist; of the writer and translator Nehamah Tsiyonson; and of Mikhl Ivenski and Abraham Ivenitski.

Pictures

Most of the drawings and pictures that Ran had, or that were lent to him by others, were published in the two volumes of *Yerushalayim de-Lita*. Nevertheless, there remain in the archive drawings and pictures that were not published, including a heart-rending scene of a Jewish soldier taking leave of his family before his departure to serve in the Russian army.

Autobiographical material

Leyzer Ran was one of those tireless collectors who save every piece of paper, regardless of how small its importance may be. Thus, the Leyzer Ran collection makes possible a detailed reconstruction of the complex and stormy life of the archive's owner. This documentation begins with an autobiography in his own handwriting, and extends to materials from his activity in Eastern Europe immediately after the war and from the period of his activity in Cuba as a representative of YIVO. It includes articles that he published in various newspapers (e.g., *Havaner Lebn*), material dealing with the Manger Prize that he received in 1981, and also with his many years of activity in YIVO and in various organizations of Jews from Eastern Europe, Lithuania, and Vilna.

Until his last days Leyzer Ran seemed to live in two worlds: the world of the present, in which he lived and worked to preserve the culture of East European Jewry, and the world of the past, the world of his city—Jerusalem of Lithuania. As he put it: "I am a sabra from the Vilna Jerusalem of Yiddish." Thus, a "stroll" through the Ran archive is very much like a journey through the alleys of the Jewish centers of Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, as Hayim Leyb Fuchs described it in his poem "Vilne," which is found in Ran's archive:

> You are a book. I read from every stone the words
> That I stuttered in my childhood-dream.
> On your crooked streets I feel at home,
> And mine are your mountains and valleys.

Everything that has been described above is but a little of what this rich and varied archive contains. In addition to these, the researcher will find many documents dealing with an array of the social, economic, religious, political and spiritual aspects of the Jews of Eastern Europe. It is no exaggeration to say that this archive is just as significant as other well-known archives that deal with the life of Jews in Eastern Europe, such as the YIVO Archive, the Shaul Ginsburg Archive in the manuscript department of the National Library in Jerusalem, and the collections uncovered in recent years in the various archives of Eastern Europe.