



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH GENEALOGY AND PAUL JACOBI CENTER

AT THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, JERUSALEM

2010 Mid-year Report

(end-2009 – June 2010)

A. Executive Summary

A review of the last several months indicates healthy process towards the “institutionalization” of the Institute (IJG), which is now officially four and a half years old. Thus, it has established a regular rhythm of programmes and activities, largely based on its high-level research projects and its attempts to further the teaching of Jewish Genealogy at the university level.

Beyond that, IJG continues to work to advance the status of Jewish Genealogy as a sub-branch of Jewish Studies. After its precedent-setting participation in the prestigious 15th Congress of the World Union of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, August 2009), the Institute is about to present a panel at the European Association of Jewish Studies (EAJS) congress (Ravenna, July). It will continue its efforts to part in major Jewish Studies conferences in the future.

In parallel, IJG has expanded its educational and outreach activities to the wider Jewish Genealogy community and will also continue to do so into 2011.

The Institute has commissioned a “Cost-Benefit” analysis to review its activities, budget and organizational structure in the light of its first four years of work.

Long-term funding, on which the Institute’s future is dependant, remains a pre-occupation.

B. Detail

I. **Attainment of Primary Goals:**

1. Status of Jewish Genealogy

With a view to advancing the status of Jewish Genealogy as a sub-branch of Jewish Studies, the Institute is now lined up to take part in the EAJS (European Association of Jewish Studies) Congress at Ravenna in July. The panel will be composed of researchers directly associated with the Institute, as follows:

- i. Valts Apinis, U. of Riga:
“Jews in Latvia in 1918-1940: a Genealogical Perspective”;
- ii. Federica Francesconi, U. of Bologna and UCLA:
“An Alternative Path toward Emancipation: Jewish; Merchants and their Cross-Cultural Networks in 18th Century Italian Ghettos;

- iii. Neville Lamdan, Hebrew University, Jerusalem:
“Village Jews in the 19th Century Minsk Gubernya through a Genealogical Lens”;
- iv. Maria Jose Surribas-Camps, U. of Barcelona:
“Connecting with the Lives and Lineages of Medieval Catalan Jews”.

The Institute’s participation in two major Jewish Studies conferences over a period of 12 months, just four and a half years after the Institute’s founding, means that new horizons are being opened up to Jewish genealogy and may reasonably be regarded as an achievement. The achievement is all the greater when seen against the backdrop of a total absence of sessions on Jewish genealogy at such conferences in the past and persistent academic skepticism about the subject in general.

IJG will continue its efforts to part in major Jewish Studies conferences in the future.

2. New Research

Institute’s fourth annual research grants competition was announced in February. Various proposals have been submitted for adjudication by the Academic Committee over the summer. It is hoped that the award-winning projects will not only add new directions and dimensions to the work being done at present but will also break new ground geographically-speaking.

For the record, awards have been made in previous years to studies centred in medieval Spain, pre-modern Italy, Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, 18th and 19th century Hungary, the 19th and 20th century “diaspora” of a Lithuanian “*shtetl*”, and Latvian Jewry during the Inter-War period. An additional research project in the “Tools and Technologies” category aimed, successfully, at developing a system to merge and integrate diverse genealogical datasets, using a 19th and 20th “*shtetl*” in Poland as a pilot study. All these studies have relevancies for contemporary scholars in the social sciences and family historians.

Perhaps the most exciting research results to be reported recently were received from Mrs. Maria Jose Surribas-Camps in Barcelona regarding her study into the “Lives and Lineages of Medieval Jews” in the provincial town of Cervera, in pre-Expulsion Spain. Mrs. Surribas uncovered approximately 3,000 original documents in Latin and early Catalan, dating from 1328 to 1499, all throwing new light on the lives of Jews, including several important families associated with the town, among them the famous rabbinical scholar known as “Rashba” (1235-1310). Above all, she proved that the unexplored archives of such small towns are veritable goldmines for the history and genealogies of Sephardi families living today, who trace their pedigrees back to pre-Expulsion Spain. At present, Mrs. Surribas is working on the final version of her report for posting on the Institute’s website. Thereafter, she will prepare her material for publication as a book, in collaboration with Dr. Jeff Malka, the Deputy Chair of our Academic Committee - with all due credit, of course, being accorded to IJG.

3. Teaching

It will be recalled that a major American university agreed to offer a 1-year BA course in Jewish Genealogy on the basis of “academic guidelines” prepared by the Institute’s Teaching Committee. Over the spring, those responsible have been working to advance the proposal but unfortunately things are moving slower than expected due to the need to have the course properly reviewed and approved by a series of programme and teaching committees at the university in question.

In the meantime, the Institute is making efforts to interest a number of select universities with strong Jewish Studies departments/centres in the course. These universities are principally in the States and Canada, but not exclusively so.

Recently, the idea has been raised that the Institute may prepare an inter-active course in Jewish Genealogy for Jewish high-schoolers, as a means of stimulating interest in the subject among teenagers (on a par with the "Roots Project" for Bar/Bat Mitzvah children in Israeli schools). This interesting suggestion will be examined over the summer.

II. New Activities

Herewith some brief updates:

1. Genealogical Repository

As previously reported, the proposal to set up a Genealogical Repository at the National Library of Israel became linked towards the end of last year with the question of the Institute's formal status at the Library, which was under review (as was the status of all external bodies associated with the Library). Recently an encouraging response was received from the Library and, with the assistance of our Legal Counsel, there is reason to believe that both issues (status and repository) can be moved to a positive conclusion in the reasonably near future.

"Ethics in Jewish Genealogy"

In the summer of 2009, the pioneering Jewish genealogist, Arthur Kurzweil (who is a member of the Institute's Advisory Board), assembled an international working group to address this important subject. Much to our regret, Mr. Kurzweil decided to step down from this project in March of this year "for personal reasons". A search for a new chair person for the group will be initiated shortly.

2. Genealogical Glossary in Hebrew

Work on this project is proceeding apace. The project is contemplating "morphing" itself into a multi-lingual glossary for Jewish genealogists (including Hebrew, of course).

3. Jacobi Absolute Generations Scale (JAGS)

Also in the context of providing "Tools and Technologies" for genealogists, Dr. Chanan Rapaport's seminal article describing Dr. Paul Jacobi's unique system to address the problem of determining and enumerating generations on a family tree in a standard and universal way has been posted on the Institute's website and also published in *Avotaynu*, xxv, 4 (Winter 2009), pp. 9-12.

III. Awareness-Raising for the Institute

We have become conscious of the fact that, despite our attempts to publicize the existence of the Institute and its activities, we are still not sufficiently well-known among the Jewish genealogical community and in the academic world at large.

In an effort to raise public awareness,

- i. In March, our Chair, Dr. Sallyann Sack-Pikus addressed a personal letter to every one of the 700 people who attended the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) conference held in Philadelphia last summer. We will repeat this exercise vis-à-vis the attendees of this year's conference in Los Angeles as well.
- ii. The Annual General Meeting, held in January, approved a proposal to invite recognised scholars in diverse fields to become "Associate Fellows" of the Institute. Their involvement with IJG will, we believe, be beneficial in several ways. They will add lustre and credibility to the Institute. Their support for its work will resonate among their peers and thereby give exposure to the Institute among wider academic, and possibly non-academic, audiences than we have reached thus far.

IV. Cost-Benefit Review

Another relevant decision taken at the last Annual General Meeting in January was that after four years of intensive activity, an independent review should be held into the Institute, examining its activities, budget and organizational structure.

We have been fortunate in securing the agreement of Dr. Yona Ettinger, formerly of the Haifa Technion, who has undertaken to conduct this review for the Institute, in the form of "Cost-Benefit Study". Dr. Ettinger is an Israeli physicist of great renown, with a deep personal interest in Jewish Genealogy. He aims to complete his study and present his recommendations by the end of August.

V. Academic Committee

Due to pressure of work, Prof. Michael Hammer of the University of Arizona has felt obliged to retire from the Academic Committee. Dr. Doron Behar, a well-known population geneticist at the Rambam Medical Center in Haifa has generously agreed to replace him. We would like to thank Prof. Hammer for his services to IJG.

VI. Financial Situation – Fundraising (2010-11)

As the Institute looks to its mid- and long-term future, it will clearly have to grow its budget to allow us to maintain and expand our programmes and activities, as we feel we must. To that end, and in the hope of raising additional funds in the order of \$50,000, the Institute has acted in three directions:

- i. It has set up a "Friends of ..." organisation in the United States, a necessary step to enable American donors to enjoy "tax deductibility" on their contributions.
- ii. With the assistance of a fundraising consultant, IJG has made application to over 70 foundations (almost exclusively in the States) for general support and capacity building grants
- iii. Under the gracious sponsorship of Baroness Ruth Deech (a member of the Institute's Honorary Advisory Board), IJG held a "brainstorming" luncheon in the House of Lords on March 22, 2010 that was attended by a small but

distinguished group of British philanthropists. The Director returned to London at the end of May for a follow-up trip, which turned out to be very positive. He returned with a significant 3-year pledge (that is, to be repeated annually in calendar years 2011, 2012 and 2013), together with the prospect of 2 or 3 other contributions, leads and introductions to additional philanthropists and suggestions for two “mega-projects” for the Institute that could conceivably be funded out of the UK. In all probability, he will have to make another follow-up trip in the fall.

VI. Future Plans

If this fundraising effort is successful, the Institute would plan to:

- i. broaden and enrich its current programmes and activities, particularly in the research field;
- ii. advance its ambitious project aimed at re-constructing kinship links in Jewish communities destroyed during the Shoah;
- iii. widen its educational endeavours by producing the first-ever university textbook on Jewish genealogy, accompanied by the necessary teaching aids;
- iv. continue its participation in major Jewish Studies conferences in the future.
- v. extend its outreach to segments of the Jewish world, especially unaffiliated segments, in keeping with its aim of heightening their Jewish awareness through an acquaintance of Jewish Genealogy and increasing their involvement with the Jewish community and the challenges facing it.

Neville Lamdan,
June 2010