

## **THE NAZI'S JEWISH LIBRARY**

**By Alon Kaplan**

An eagle bearing a swastika in its claws, centered in a round black seal, was on the front page of the Hebrew book. This seal and many others were found a few days prior to the commencement of the Eichmann trial, together with hundreds of Hebrew and Yiddish books, part of a collection of 3,000 volumes stored for many years in 10 crates in the basement of the Manchester Central Library.

An investigation revealed that these books were collected by a special unit of the S.S. which operated throughout the Third Reich. The books came from a number of places in the countries under occupation and from Germany itself. Most of them bore the seal of one of the Nazi regime's institutions which was relatively unknown. The address on the seal read: "The Office of the Reich for Investigating the History of the New Germany, the Department for Investigating the Jewish Problem". This office seemingly played an important role in the German "education" system in preparing for the "final solution" and in addition, was to serve as an archive for generations to follow. The Germans did not want to destroy the memory of the Jewish people. They hoped that the succeeding generations would hear about the "final solution" and value the Nazi's great effort.

After the war the Americans established a collecting point for looted books in the town of Offenbach on the banks of the River Main in an effort to locate the rightful owners and distribute the remainder among legitimate Jewish successor organizations. This library, by the name of Offenbach Archival Depot included tens of thousands of books, mostly in Hebrew and Yiddish, but also in other languages.

Of the 2,500 books examined at the Manchester Library approximately 700 bore the common seal: "Offenbach on the River Main - Archival Depot". A number of the books had other or additional seals to that of Offenbach. These seals clarified beyond any doubt the objective of the Germans collecting the books: "The Office of the Reich for investigating the Jewish problem, Frankfurt-on-Main". (Offenbach is a neighbouring town to Frankfurt). Almost all these seals bore the swastika and many testified to the original source of the books: "Property of the Jewish Community" of Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, Koenigsburg, Frankfurt, etc.

It is still unclear how the books arrived to the basement of the Manchester Library. None of the workers remembered anything. It is

possible that the books were sent to the library by a Jewish organization in Manchester which received the books from Germany.

About 45% of the volumes were in Yiddish, 35% in Hebrew and 20% in other languages (mainly German). These books came from two primary sources: Jewish community centers in Eastern Europe and Jewish communities in Germany itself.

### **Ukrainian Yiddish Culture**

About 1,500 of the books examined were plundered from Jewish communities in the Ukraine. The vast majority of them were written in Yiddish and divided into two categories: original works and translations.

Original works included fiction, children's literature and educational books written by, inter alia, Shalom Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Sefhorim, I.L. Perez as well as other Yiddish writers who wrote after the October Revolution - Izik Pepper, David Bergelson, M. Daniel and Peretz Markish.

The translations included fiction, educational books for Jewish schools, books of instruction for farmers and workers, and mainly books of propa- ganda and praise for the Communist Party as well as books deriding and attacking religion, capitalism and their "servants", the rabbis.

The Ukrainian collection included a small number of Hebrew books, in the main, Pentateuchs (chumashim), daily prayer books (sidurim) and holiday prayer books (machzorim) printed many years before the Revolution. From the addresses on the front pages of the books and from the publishers' cards found among the pages, it was apparent that most of the Yiddish books were printed in the years 1910-1941. Almost all were printed in the cities with large Jewish populations: Krakow, Kiev and in the Jewish centre of Byelo-Russia - Minsk. A number of the books, especially the propaganda, were printed in Moscow and Odessa. Many of the books bore the seal "Library of the School for Workers No. 85, Kiev ... The Central State Library Minsk, Komsomolka Street".

Among the pages ample evidence was found of the good use made of the books: reading cards with the date the book was borrowed and returned, as well as book-marks from theatre tickets, etc. Many of the cards were from a library catalogue and were found in a special flap on the inside of the books' covers. On the front pages of a number of the books were hand-written inscriptions in Yiddish, some by the authors themselves.

These seals shed light on the Jewish educational system then prevalent in Ukraine. The language of instruction was Yiddish. Each educational book was marked with the class to which it belonged. It appears that school began at standard 1 and continued until standard 8. The subjects studied were literature, mathematics, history, geology and mineralogy - all in Yiddish.

At the bottom of one of the crates a collection of Yiddish notices was found which had been published on the date of the October Revolution in 1917. These contained the common slogans of the Communist Party calling on the Jews to rejoice in the victory of the Revolution together with their "Ukrainian brothers" who hung them in 1918 and 1919 and who rushed with zeal and energy to fill this role again in 1941....

### **Hebrew Books**

About 1,000 books were from libraries in Germany itself. Most were in Hebrew, some in German and a few in Yiddish; they all dealt mainly with religion. One crate contained about 350 prayer books and pentateuchs. Every collector of books would have wished for such a collection - the printing dated back to the seventeenth century and extended until 1935. The books were printed in places stretching from Lisbon to London and from Amsterdam to St. Petersburg.

The remaining Hebrew books were commentaries on the Torah and the Talmud, books for learning Hebrew, and histories of famous families (such as the Luria family). There were information pamphlets from the J.N.F., The Jewish Foundation Fund, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Jewish organizations in Israel and abroad. Among these books were also a few works of fiction by well-known authors such as Bialik, Tchernechovsky, Frishman and Boule.

### **German Books**

The German books covered all aspects of Judaism, culture, history, religion, customs, etc. There were a number of translations of the Old Testament into German and a few interesting books on the history of Hebrew printing. Here too, there was propaganda material - this time Nazi. At the bottom of one of the crates was a collection of German, French, Polish and Dutch newspapers from 1936. In all, the outstanding headlines read "Recognize the Jews" with articles deriding and containing images and caricatures which left no doubt as to the proposed solution. Particularly upsetting was seeing a beautifully bound book printed in 1935 titled "War letters of German-Jewish soldiers who fell in the first World War". The book was published by "The Organization of Jewish Fighting Soldiers of the Reich". The front page bore the inscription: "We gave our lives for the Reich".

Also found among the papers was a bundle of receipts which included forms for the confiscation of Jewish property. At the top of the form was space for the Jew's name and address. The middle section had a large space for details of the confiscated property and, below, the prices and signature were to be filled in. Every red form had a white copy attached. Order there had to be, even when robbery was involved.

### **From all the Conquered Territories**

On the first page of a Hebrew book titled "Sefer Torah Shomroni" by Y.B. Zvi Yerushalmi, a hand-written inscription in Hebrew was found: "To my uncle Ben Zion, from the author". On the cover of the book, in German, the name Danzig was written in pencil and next to it a number of letters and numbers(perhaps a telephone number?). Also found among these books were strips of paper and catalogue cards written in Hebrew and Yiddish with German cards attached with a translation. A number of these cards bore the Nazi seal. Could it be concluded that the "Office of the Reich" had a team capable of reading Hebrew and Yiddish? Were the members of the team Jewish?

A number of rubber seals clearly showed that besides the two major sources mentioned above, there were additional sources: Jewish libraries in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and Holland. One of the books had a Reich seal surrounded by the address: "The Office of the National Socialist Party, The Department dealing with the Jewish Problem Eastern Europe. Litschmentcht". (This means "lodge" in Polish). A number of other seals were smudged although it was still possible to distinguish the city names Warsaw, Brussels and Antwerp. These books were collected by a special S.S. unit, or as stated on the rubber seal: "The Security Services of the Reichsfuehrer S.S. - The Reichenberg Unit". (Reichenberg was a town in Czechoslovakia conquered in 1938). It seems such units operated everywhere.

The seals were not the only marks. There were also newspaper cuttings and pages written in Dutch. These were not translated except for a small extract which included minutes of a meeting of the Dutch Jewish Committee dealing with the imposition of "confiscation tax" (the Hebrew words written in Latin). A Hebrew seal bore the address: "Sfat-Zion Antwerp".

The pieces of paper, newspaper extracts, letters and stamps in various languages which were not all translated, strengthen the presumption that books were collected for the Offenbach library from all over German-conquered territory. It appears that the quantity of books in the Manchester library was but a small fraction of the original library.

No one could have imagined that the ten wooden crates found in the basement of the Manchester Library in 1960 would contain such interesting and sad testimony to the destroyed culture of European Jewry.