

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



This has been a remarkable time for the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project. Work is underway in Vilnius to catalogue and begin to process the newly discovered collections—170,000 new pages of literary manuscripts, memoirs, theatrical scripts, religious texts, information about the social and political life of

ordinary men and women from across the Jewish world, but also exceptionally important texts from the Vilna Ghetto and German Nazi communications collected in the immediate aftermath of the Shoah.

The richness and breadth of this collection—in both New York and Vilnius—has inspired the idea of creating the first online, digital museum of East European and Russian Jewish culture so that these materials—1.1 million pages and 12,200 books—can be appreciated and understood by the widest audience possible around the world. Galleries on many different topics—Yiddish literature, Yiddish theater, The Bund,

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Education and Religious life, for example—will be constructed out of these digitized materials by leading scholars. The selected materials will be translated into English and integrated with sound, video, photographic, and other materials into state of the art digital galleries making them accessible not only to scholars but to the general public as well.

We are therefore extraordinarily grateful to YIVO's Emeritus Chairman of the Board, Bruce Slovin, for his inspired act of generosity in making a gift of \$3 million for the purpose of constructing the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum. It is through such generosity and farsightedness that YIVO may now begin to realize the dream of its founders as a truly global institution of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe and Russia.

**Jonathan Brent**  
Executive Director & CEO



LOCATED IN THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

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## EDWARD BLANK THE YIVO VILNA COLLECTIONS PROJECT

Newsletter • Summer 2018

### About the Project

"THESE MATERIALS ARE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS"

During World War II, the Nazis looted YIVO's archive and library and other Jewish libraries in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Jews who were forced to sort the materials for the Nazis risked their lives to smuggle some of the rare treasures to hiding places in the Vilna Ghetto. Much was destroyed, but soon after the war some of the materials were recovered by YIVO (by then relocated to the United States) with the help of the U.S. Army. Other items were recovered and rescued from the Soviets by a Lithuanian librarian, who hid them for over 40 years until they were rediscovered in 1988. In 2017, an additional 170,000 documents were discovered, including rare and unpublished works.

The Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project, launched in 2015, is a \$5.9 million, international landmark digital initiative that has inspired funders, scholars, and lay people around the world. Our teams in New York and Lithuania are completing the processing, conservation, and digitization of these collections ahead of schedule.

This project reunites YIVO's divided prewar library and archival collections and remnants of the famed Strashun Library through a dedicated web portal. It is a partnership between the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, and the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

YIVO has raised **\$5.4 million**  
out of **\$5.9 million**

**DIGITIZATION PROGRESS  
THROUGH MAY 31, 2018**



**11,697**  
books digitized  
(2,016,015 pages)

[Project goal: 12,200 books]



**534,505**  
pages of archival  
documents digitized

[Project goal:  
Est. 1.1 million pages]

**OVER 2.5 MILLION PAGES DIGITIZED**

[VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG](http://VILNACOLLECTIONS.YIVO.ORG)

# NEWS & UPDATES

## YIVO Receives \$3 Million Gift to Name and Construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum

YIVO is thrilled to announce a \$3 million gift from Bruce Slovin to name and construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum. This gift was given in honor and in loving memory of Mr. Slovin's wife, Francesca. Selected documents from the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project—YIVO's landmark digitization and preservation initiative—will be translated into English to be featured in galleries, reflecting the entire spectrum of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia.

"I have decided to make this gift as a sign of my appreciation for the leadership of YIVO and to support the creation of this online museum. This museum will provide access to YIVO's meaningful and important archival treasures which are instrumental in preserving the history and culture of the Jewish people," said Bruce Slovin.

### Senator Dick Durbin Receives YIVO's Founders Award

On Sunday, March 11, 2018, Senator Dick Durbin received YIVO's Founders Award for his role in preserving the nearly-destroyed legacy of the rich and vibrant Jewish culture in Vilnius, Lithuania, at a reception hosted with the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago. Senator Durbin was instrumental in his support and assistance in discussions with the Lithuanian Government as YIVO developed the Project in its initial phase.

### Jonathan Brent Discusses the Project at Ezra-Habonim in Skokie, IL

Over 200 people attended a presentation by YIVO Executive Director Jonathan Brent on Sunday, March 11, 2018 at the Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation in Skokie, Illinois. The presentation focused on the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections Project, and in particular the 170,000 recently-discovered items that had been thought destroyed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. "Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation is the perfect spot for this important lecture," said Rabbi Jeffrey Weill, spiritual leader of the synagogue. "Both Ezra and Habonim were founded in the late 1930s by European Jews who fled the Nazis. Many Holocaust survivors joined the synagogue when they came to Chicago after World War II."

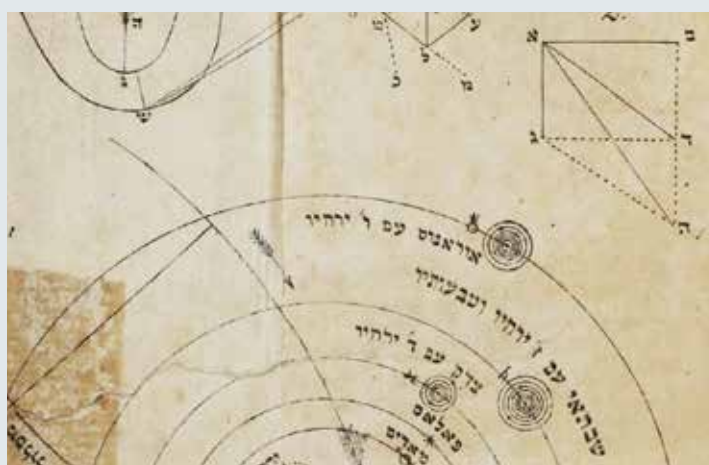
### YIVO Hosts Conference about Using the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections in the Classroom

In March 2018, YIVO took the first step toward demonstrating the significance of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections as a teaching tool with a two-day conference for Lithuanian teachers, co-sponsored by the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. Many of the documents and books in the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Collections relate directly to the Jewish life that flourished in Lithuania before World War II. They not only document everyday Lithuanian Jewish life but also have the potential to illuminate the important role played by the Jewish minority in Lithuanian history and society. This story was suppressed in Soviet times and is only now beginning to be grappled with in the public arena – and in classrooms.

The conference, held in Vilnius in the National Library, attracted the participation of 30 high school teachers from all over Lithuania, who attended workshops and presentations by scholars and educators. Representatives of other cultural organizations, such as the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews (Vilnius University) were also invited to present their educational projects to the attendees.

The conference is envisioned as only the first step in a multi-year initiative in Lithuania in continued partnership with the National Library.

### FEATURED ARTIFACT



A Jewish Scholar Debunks Fears of Halley's Comet

IMAGE: A page with an astronomical diagram from *Kokhava de-shavita* (The Comet) by Hayyim Zelig Slonimski, published in Vilna. From the private library of Mattityahu Strashun, now in the collection of the YIVO Library in New York.

In 1835, twenty-five-year-old Jewish scholar Hayyim Zelig Slonimski, living in Bialystok, published his second book, *Kokhava de-shavita* (The Comet). A self-taught mathematician and astronomer, Slonimski sought to debunk popular fears associated with Halley's Comet, in that year making its once-every-seventy-five-year appearance in the night sky. His other agenda was the promotion of knowledge among Jews at a time when few received any sort of education in secular subjects, such as math and science.

**We are extraordinarily grateful to the Slovin Foundation for their special gift to name and construct the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum.**

## Our Donors\*

We greatly appreciate and acknowledge the following donors for their generous support of this project:

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\*AS OF MAY 25, 2018

