



# INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH GENEALOGY AND PAUL JACOBI CENTER

AT THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, JERUSALEM

## **Annual Report**

(January-December 2009)

### A. Executive Summary

2009 was a good year for the Institute.

By way of background, it should be noted that in the first three years of the Institute's existence (2006-08), we focused our efforts primarily at establishing the Institute firmly and launching activities designed to bring it to the attention of the academic and genealogical worlds. The year just past (2009) was directed towards advancing our declared goals, as set out in the Mission Statement, in a more confident and concrete way.

Thus, beyond expanding our research programme, we proceeded to two new fronts: teaching and advancing the status of Jewish genealogy. At the request of a major American university, we developed a strong 1-year BA course in Jewish Genealogy. Then, we attained some demonstrable recognition of Jewish Genealogy as a sub-branch of Jewish Studies when a precedent-setting panel on the subject sponsored by the Institute was held at the prestigious World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, August 2-6, 2009).

In addition, the Institute received a significant boost earlier in the year, when an extraordinary group of prominent Jewish personalities from across the globe agreed to lend their names and support to the Institute by joining its Honorary Advisory Board.

Finally, thanks to our fundraising efforts, the Institute managed to weather the global financial crisis.

The Institute plans to strive for further progress in 2010.

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### B. Detail

#### **I. Primary Goals:**

##### 1. Research

In September, the Institute's Academic Committee made two grant awards for innovative Jewish genealogical research:

- i. *A Systematic Study of the Riga House Registers as a Source for Jewish Genealogy in Pre-War Latvia*, proposed by a strong team of experts, headed by Professor Rubin Ferber, Chairman of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia in Riga.
- ii. *Communal Protocols and the Daily Life of Hungarian Jews - Proposal for a new [Genealogical] Research Tool* to be conducted by Dr. Howard Lupovitch of the University of Western Ontario.

This is the third consecutive year in which the Institute has run a research grants competition and these two latest awards will not only add new directions to the work being done at present but will also break new ground geographically speaking. In previous years, awards have been made for studies centred on medieval Spain, pre-modern Italy, Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, the 20<sup>th</sup> century “diaspora” of a Lithuanian “*shtetl*” and a reconstruction of communities destroyed in the Shoah. 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 “*shtetl*” in Poland as a pilot study. As indicated, the two latest studies will expand the Institute’s reach and range.

## 2. Teaching

During 2008, Prof. Aaron Demsky, as Chair of the Institute’s Teaching Sub-Committee, approached the heads of over 250 Jewish Studies programs at universities and institutes of higher learning across the world, inviting them to offer courses in Jewish genealogy, under the Institute’s guidance. While reactions varied, some were rather encouraging.

In the spring of 2009, a major university in the States expressed serious interest in offering a 1-year (2-semester) BA course in Jewish Genealogy. Over a period of six months, Prof. Demsky and his committee, together with a number of external consultants (all tenured faculty), worked intensively to elaborate detailed “academic guidelines” for the course. These were sent out in November 2009 and have now been warmly endorsed by the US university in question, which is seeking to launch the course in academic 2010-11.

## 3. Status of Jewish Genealogy

A demonstrable measure of any subject’s academic standing is its acceptance at scholarly conferences and participation therein. In 2008, the Institute approached the American Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) and proposed a panel on Jewish Genealogy at its annual conference; the proposal was rejected on the haughty grounds that:

“The Program Committee ... does not think the topic is an appropriate fit for the AJS annual meeting. The conference focuses on issues in academic Jewish studies, and while there is some overlap in interests between Jewish studies researchers and Jewish genealogists, it’s not likely for there to be a broad enough audience for such a session”.

In contrast, in the year under review, the World Union of Jewish Studies (WUJS) welcomed the Institute’s proposal to take part in its quadrennial conference. As a result, the Institute sponsored a precedent-setting panel on Jewish Genealogy at the WUJS 15th World Congress of Jewish Studies, held in Jerusalem on August 2-6, 2009.

The panel’s moderator was the Chairman of the Institute’s Academic Committee, Prof. Sergio DellaPergola (Hebrew University). Four scholarly presentations were made by researchers directly connected with the Institute, as follows:

- i. Dr. Neville Lamdan (Director, IJG) addressed the theoretical question “Jewish Genealogy – A legitimate field for academic research?”
- ii. Prof. Aaron Demsky (Professor Emeritus, Bar Ilan University) delivered a paper on “Abbaye’s Family Origins - A Study in Rabbinic-Talmudic Genealogy”
- iii. Prof. Ruth Kark (Hebrew University) and Dr. Joseph Glass (Toronto) reported on their interdisciplinary research into “Sephardi Entrepreneurial Elites in late 19th and early 20th century Palestine”
- iv. Prof. Daniel Wagner (Weizmann Institute) made a presentation on his ground-breaking system of “Genealogical Database Merging”.

The panel was well received. Moreover, it elicited an “on-the-spot” invitation from the President of the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS), Prof. Mauro Perani, that the Institute take part in the EAJS Congress in Ravenna in July 2010.

The Institute’s proposals for that important event, submitted jointly by scholars also directly associated with the Institute, have recently been approved by the EAJS Programme Committee. Thus, another significant step has been taken towards the recognition of Jewish genealogy as a legitimate sub-branch of Jewish Studies.

## **II. New Activities**

### **1. Genealogical Repository**

Following a handsome gift from Mrs. Sophie Caplan, one of the Institute’s Founders, it was proposed in May of 2009 that the Institute work towards the establishment of a central repository for significant genealogical archives and collections, on the name of Mrs. Caplan’s late husband, Leslie, who had been an outstanding leader of the Jewish community in Australia for many years.

Over the summer, this proposal was submitted to the Director of the National Library of Israel, who wholeheartedly accepted it - in principle. However, negotiations over the requisite agreement between the Institute and the Library have proceeded slowly, partly in view of the complicated legal issues involved (mainly with regard to ownership of any collections brought in by the Institute) and partly due to staff changes at the upper echelons of the Library’s management, including the resignation and departure of the Director in December, 2009!

### **2. Working Group on “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 subject.

The group set a target of producing its recommendations within approximately twelve months from its commencement of work (fall 2009).

### **3. Working Group on a Genealogical Glossary in Hebrew**

The Institute, in collaboration with the Academy of the Hebrew Language, the Israel Genealogical Society and the web-based *Tappuz* “Family Roots Forum”, has embarked upon the preparation of a scientific glossary of genealogical terms in Hebrew. Also beginning its work in the fall of 2009, the Group is headed by Dr. Chanan Rapaport, the Deputy Chair of the Institute, and is made up of genealogists, philologists and linguists, especially Hebrew language specialists.

The Institute sees this project as part of its efforts to reach out to, and cooperate with, the wider genealogical community. In this specific case, it will provide Hebrew-speaking researchers and family historians with a much-needed tool.

### **4. Website**

Over the last few months, the Institute’s website ([www.IIJG.org](http://www.IIJG.org)) has been completely revamped and enlarged. In technical terms, it has been converted from a “static” site to a “dynamic” one. From a practical point of view, it is considerably more friendly and flexible for both the user and the webmaster.

### **5. Jacobi Absolute Generations Scale (JAGS)**

In the process of expanding the website, the opportunity was taken to post details of an “old-new” tool, designed to facilitate the work of genealogists and other social scientists. That tool

was developed almost half a century ago by the eminent Jerusalem genealogist, Dr. Paul Jacobi, to address the very real problem of determining and enumerating generations on a family tree in a standard way that can be used universally. Although known to a small group of specialists and even mentioned in the literature by Dr. Jacobi himself, this is the first time that the “Jacobi Absolute Generations Scale” has been described *in extenso* and provided with a brief explanation of how it may be readily utilized on most genealogical software systems in the market today.

### **III. Support for the Institute - Honorary Advisory Board**

A concrete yardstick of the growing international support for the Institute is reflected in the membership of its Honorary Advisory Board.

The need for such a Board had been felt for some time but a conscious decision was taken to defer its establishment until the Institute had started to develop something of a track record. Thus, we only began to make approaches to individuals at the end of 2008, after three years of activity. This policy proved itself for, within three months, a Board had come together, made up of 13 prominent Jewish personalities of extraordinary distinction, each with a personal interest in Jewish genealogy. They are:

*Prof. Aaron Ciechanover* (Nobel Prize Laureate in Chemistry, Israel Institute of Technology) *Prof. Irwin Cotler* (MP, House of Commons, former Canadian Minister of Justice and Attorney General); *Baroness Ruth Deech* (House of Lords, former Principal, St. Anne's College, Oxford); *Prof. Alan Dershowitz* (Professor of Law, Harvard); *Amb. Stuart Eizenstat* (former US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and Ambassador to European Union); *Mr. Abraham Foxman* (National Director, Anti-Defamation League, USA); *Sir Martin Gilbert* (historian and author, Oxford); *Mr. Arthur Kurzweil* (author and pioneering Jewish genealogist); *Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau* (Chairman, Yad Vashem Council, former Chief Rabbi of Israel); *Senator Joe Lieberman* (US Senate); *Dr. David Marwell* (Director, Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York); *Sir Malcolm Rifkind* (MP, House of Commons, former British Foreign Secretary); *Congressman Henry Waxman* (US House of Representatives, Chair Energy and Commerce Committee).

In October, Amb. Stuart Eizenstat graciously agreed to act as Chairman of the Board.

### **IV. Plans for 2010**

Subject to budgetary considerations, the Institute envisages, *inter alia*:

1. Expanding its research programme by soliciting support for specific projects.
2. Publishing the results of its research programmes over the last three years in order to put them at the disposal of a wider audience.
3. Identifying institutions of higher learning that may be interested in offering its BA course.
4. Increasing participation in international conferences, etc. for Jewish Studies.
5. Broadening its outreach by:
  - i. Involving in its activities academics with an interest in genealogy;
  - ii. Seeking strategic partnerships with other relevant bodies and organizations within the wider Jewish genealogical community;
  - iii. Launching new projects, such as the mapping of Jewish genealogical sources and resources worldwide, to be conducted by qualified volunteers from the genealogical community.

### **V. Financial Situation (2009) – Fundraising (2010)**

Thanks to major grant from the Goldman Fund in 2009 and the Institute's own fundraising efforts, including a direct appeal to Jewish genealogists through “Nu – What's New?”, the

Institute weathered the world financial crisis and was able to implement its planned programmes and activities, albeit on a very tight budget.

The challenge today is to ensure adequate funding for the Institute to continue to work and grow in 2010. Given the still tentative upturn in international markets, this will not be an easy task.

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Dr. Neville Lamdan,  
Director,  
IIJG,  
December 31, 2009.