

Books on the Move: A Conference at the Schocken Institute in Jerusalem, June 29th-July 1st 2026

This past June, Daniel Hacker, general director of the JTS–Schocken Institute in Jerusalem, organized the conference “**Books on the Move: Transfer in the World of Hebrew Books**,” bringing together scholars of Hebrew printing and book history from universities around the world. The conference explored the history of the Hebrew and Jewish book as a dynamic object of movement, transition, and transformation from the invention of printing to the present day. Participants examined the mobility of books, printers, libraries, and readers across geographical, technological, and intellectual boundaries, demonstrating how Hebrew books function as cultural artifacts that preserve previously undiscovered perspectives on Jewish history, learning, and communal life.

Among the presenters was Marjorie Lehman, Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics and Area Chair of Rabbinic Literatures and Cultures at JTS, who delivered a paper entitled “Books Rooted in Place: Examining the Library of the Bikur Cholim Synagogue in Bardejov, Slovakia.” Her presentation focused on the synagogue's extraordinary collection of approximately 500 volumes, that were cared for beginning in 1942 when a non-Jewish neighbor, Anna Koperniechova, protected both the synagogue and its contents from Nazi and Slovak looters. Following the war, Meyer Spira, one of the last surviving members of Bardejov's prewar Jewish community, cared for the synagogue and its collection of books until his death in 2005, when responsibility for the collection passed to his neighbor, Cyril Bogol.

This project emerged because of a personal connection that Professor Lehman has to the town of Bardejov, Slovakia. Her grandfather-in-law, Pinchas Abramowitz, was a founding member of the Bikur Cholim Synagogue in 1929 and served as its secretary until his deportation to Auschwitz in 1942 (miraculously he survived). As part of a larger effort to create a comprehensive inventory of the synagogue's surviving library, Lehman's research reconstructs the story of Bardejov's once-vibrant Jewish community through its books. The collection includes not only siddurim, chumashim, and Talmudim, but also books of Yiddish and German literature, political treatises, Hebrew primers, and other works reflecting the diverse intellectual and religious life of the community. Ownership inscriptions, stamps, signatures, and marginalia within the books that appear in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, and Hungarian, document generations of readers effected by shifting borders and dislocation. Vestiges of a Jewish community hoping to rebuild itself after WWII are evident in this collection of books.

Unfortunately, by 1948 with the emergence of communism, Jews who had survived and returned to Bardejov and the Bikur Cholim shul fled elsewhere, leaving their books behind once again. Thankfully, the names that fill the title pages and inside flaps of each book offer us an invaluable record of the many individuals who were connected to the Bikur Cholim shul in some way.

In preparation for the conference at the JTS–Schocken Institute, Professor Lehman traveled to Bardejov, Slovakia, to attend the community's annual memorial commemorating the Jews of Bardejov who were murdered during the Holocaust. The visit provided an opportunity to conduct her research in the Bikur Cholim Synagogue while engaging with survivors, descendants, and members of the Bardejov community, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who gathered to honor the memory of those who had been lost. The convergence of archival research and communal remembrance underscored the continuing significance of the synagogue's surviving library as both a material record of prewar Jewish life and a living connection between the community's past and present. By focusing on a collection whose significance lies in its remarkable preservation rather than its circulation, the research of these individual books shows that Hebrew books illuminate Jewish history not only through their movement across time and place but also through their enduring rootedness within a single community.

Dr. Lehman acknowledges Daniel Hacker for organizing such a thought-provoking conference at the Schocken Institute and for giving her the opportunity to speak about her work in Bardejov. She also thanks Emil Fish, founder and president of the Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee and all those who work with him in his mission to celebrate and honor the town of Bardejov. Finally, special thanks to Deborah S. Kleiner, Esq., Associate Professor, Department of Law at The Peter J. Tobin College of Business, St. John's University and a fellow Bardejover for partnering with Dr. Lehman in this endeavor. And finally, many thanks to the co-directors of *Footprints: Jewish Books Through Time and Place* (<https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu/>), who helped Lehman to develop the methodological framework upon which this research project is built.