

AWAKENING LIVES



# YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE

LIFE AND FATE OF A SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN TELZ/TELSIAI, LITHUANIA IN THE INTERWAR  
EXHIBITION CONCEIVED BY ISABELLE ROZENBAUMAS AND MICHEL GROSMAN

בת כמה את?

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# SUMMARY

## “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

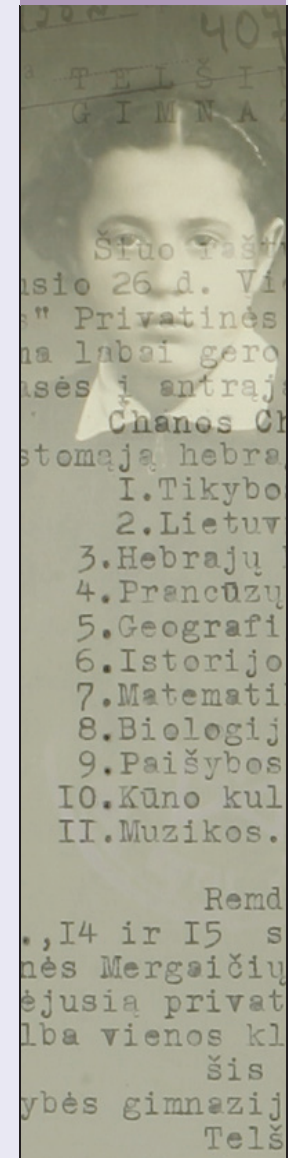
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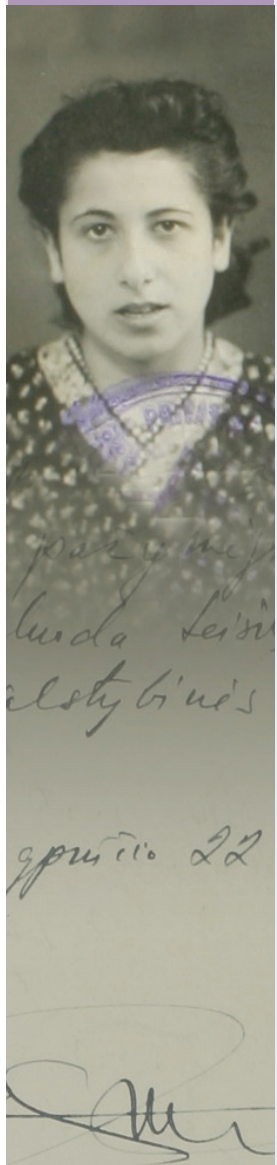
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FRANCE  
 USA





## FOREWORD

### ENCOUNTERING 500 DAUGHTERS OF TELZ THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

“School Was Life” is the public art phase of the project Bat Kama At (How Old Are You?), whose goal is to develop and sustain knowledge of the history and culture of the Jews of Lithuania by focusing our attention on the education of the girls and young women of Telz (Telsiai). This project was born from a fascination with three class photographs saved by my mother during the war. Patches of history unfolded as I examined each face and questioned the slightest detail. These seemingly neutral faces called out to me at a moment when the very last witnesses of their common history

were disappearing and with them the fading memory of a remarkable time. As I passed through the looking-glass, I felt overwhelmed with a vivid presence emanating from within the educational community of the Telz/Telsiai girls’ school in Lithuania. This strong experience, followed by the discovery of the archives of Yavne Gymnasium, has prompted me to gather an advisory committee of scholars and a small team of experimental visual artists to develop this exhibition and installation. Casting new light on little-known aspects of Jewish education in Lithuania, especially that of girls and young women, we also render homage to the entire Jewish

population of Telz, which managed to preserve profound attachment to Jewish tradition while responding to the challenges of modernity. As well, we give due credit to the community’s leaders for their wise vision.

In this encounter with the daughters of Telz on the other side of the looking glass, I was tempted to simply belong to their world. But longing and belonging have more to do with myths than with facts. To understand their real story requires a greater effort. Each one of the faces of the young girls – most of them were massacred by the

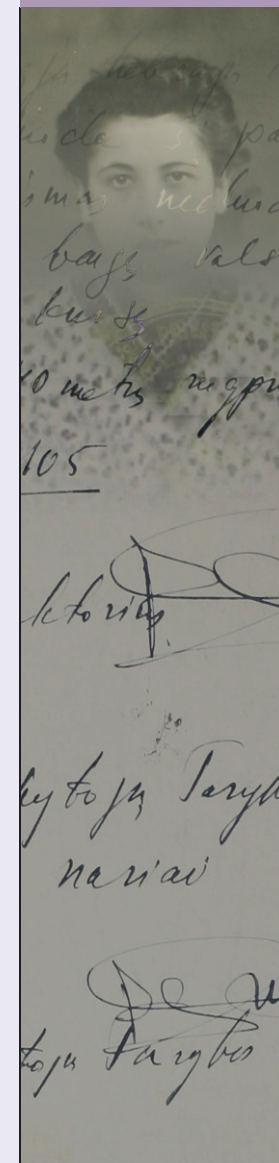


## FOREWORD



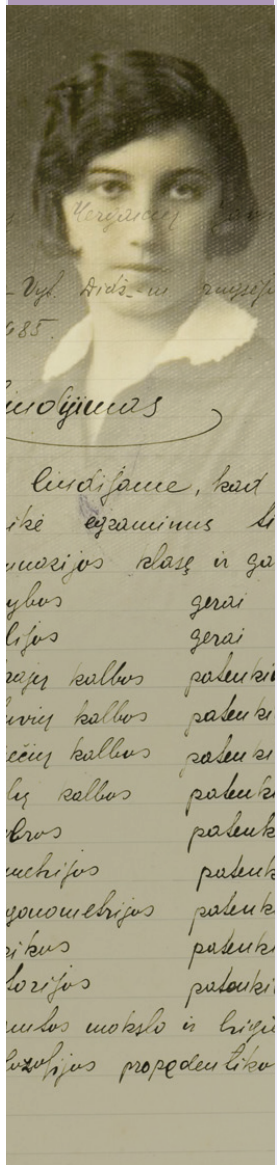
local Lithuanian collaborators of the Nazis – arouses a strong curiosity and affection, as we see in her features the face of humanity. It is precisely by virtue of humanism that the culture of the Jewish population of Telz must be placed in the context of universal history, of a Lithuania bordered by powerful neighbors, of Telsiai at the crossroads of several different cultures, and of an experience of educational excellence that challenges any preconceived notion about the conflict between religion and secularity.

At the heart of this project that aims to create a future with more solidarity against all denial or contempt are the idea of knowledge based in



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TELZER YESHIVA

humanities and science, meaning it can be shared, and a strong concern for the instruction of young people. For, if knowledge is not an absolute remedy against hatred, ignorance is surely an efficient trigger.

**T**he current phase, “Yavne Telz School Was Life,” will consist of exhibits and installations. It is intended to convey factual knowledge, but also to explore what is at stake in transmission of this story, through my own perspective—that of a historian, author and child of witnesses and survivors. The

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artistic work generated from this perspective can only express both an affinity for an art of living and for a past that is fostering the future. Yes, against all odds, in the teeth of destruction – *aftsulokhes* – this project is proposing a form of continuity.

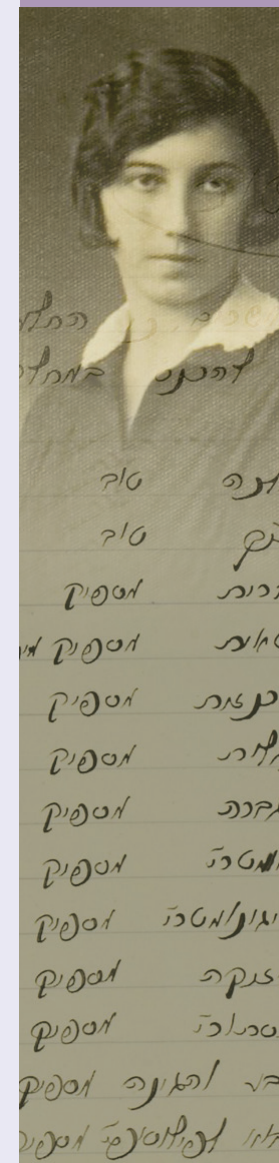
Through forms of representation combining scholarly rigor with subjective expression, the various presentations will illuminate the intellectual and visual richness of a trove of archival documents pertinent to the Yavne Gymnasium in Telz. This connection will be especially stimulating as it proposes

dialogue between the advanced pedagogy that prevailed in pre-war Jewish Lithuania, and current educational forms ranging from the traditional to advanced technology.

The use of innovative displays and contemporary digital techniques does not imply any desire to estheticize, but rather serves the goal of research and determining the realities of the past. If there are beauty and poetry here, they are part and parcel of that past.

The project's advisory committee includes academics and other intellectuals with deep comprehension of the East European context, sure knowledge of the historiography of interwar Jewry, and sensitivity to problems of representation (see list in Appendix).

ISABELLE ROZENBAUMAS

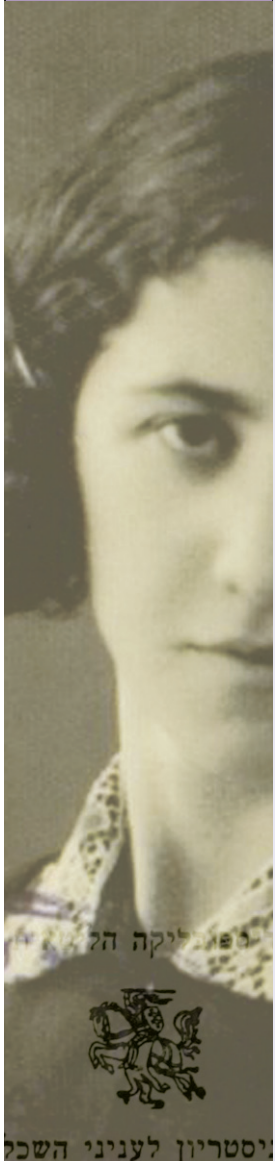




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# THE CONTEXT



A THRIVING EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT

# THE CONTEXT

## THE ASHKENAZI WORLD AT ITS ZENITH: CULTURE, INNOVATION, MODERNITY, PEDAGOGY

In Eastern Europe, situated between East Prussia and Russia, Lithuania was the cradle of a Jewish civilization which reached its high-water mark at the moment it was annihilated. Among the various loyalties by which interwar Jewish society was united and divided, much of the competition took the form of battles for the hearts and minds of the youth. In this broad movement which saw the growth of cultural associations and even sporting clubs, the competition between various religious and political tendencies sparked similar efforts in the realm of education.

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## THE CONTEXT

### LITHUANIAN JUDAISM: RELIGION AND REASON, A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

How shall we describe the distinctive character of Lithuanian Judaism within the context of a larger, culturally dynamic Ashkenazi world?

Since the 18th century, the figure of the Gaon of Vilna has represented an open attitude, promoting the introduction of philosophy and mathematics—algebra, geometry, trigonometry—into religious curricula. The movement of the *Misnagdim* or *Mitnagdim* (in either version, the word means

“opponents”) grew in reaction to the new Hasidic movement. It opposed Rabbi Elijah (Eliyahu) ben Shlomo Zalmen (1720-1797), the famous Gaon of Vilna, to the equally well-known Rabbi Israel (Yisroel) ben Eliezer (1698-1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov, and several generations of disciples in their train.

East European Judaism of the 18th century was haunted by the traumatic memories of the “false messiahs” Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, and accordingly was suspicious of all forms of mystic exaltation although it is now admitted

that the Gaon himself was a big mekubal, a great connoisseur of the Jewish mysticism.

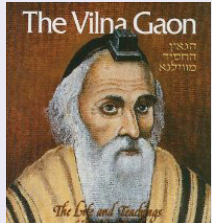
Scholars sometimes assert a parallel between the *Misnagdim* and the Jansenists, noting the former’s intransigent rationalism and their uncompromising critique of the “ostentation” of Hasidic mysticism. The *Misnagdim* regarded textual study as the greatest commandment. In their view, profound understanding of the texts of the Bible and Talmud was at the heart of religious practice, and the source of meaning for both ritual and pedagogy. It was an





- 1) Tikybos .....
- 2) Penkiaknygos ir Bib
- 3) Lietuvių kalbos ir li
- 4) Hebrajų kalbos ir pa
- 5) Vokiečių kalbos .....
- 6) Anglų kalbos .....
- 7) Matematikos .....
- 8) Istorijos su visuomen
- 9) Filozofijos propedeut
- 10) Geografijos (.....) kla
- 11) Fizikos ir kosmograf
- 12) Gamtos mokslo su h
- 13) Specialinio dalyko (..
- 14) Paisybos ir braižybos
- 15) Muzikos ir dainavim
- 16) Dailės (.....) kla
- 17) Darbelių (.....) klasėj
- 18) Kūno kultūros .....

## THE CONTEXT



THE VILNA GAON - RABBI ELIYAHU OF VILNA (1720-1797)

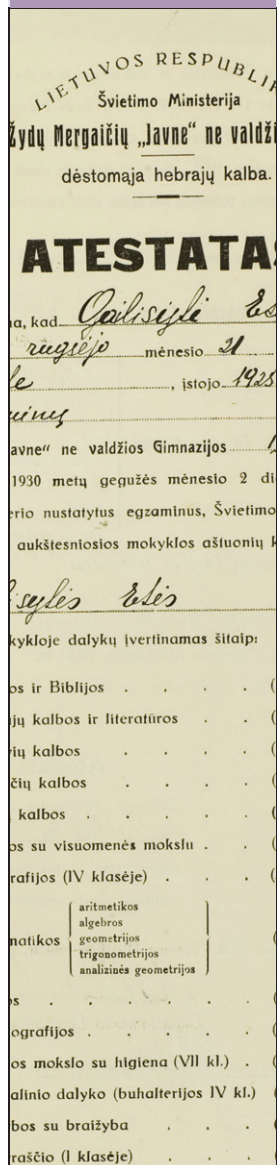
unparalleled love of learning for its own sake. These rigorous standards also inspired a form of asceticism expressed in the ethical concepts of the Mussar movement, which sought to cultivate moral virtue through introspection, analysis of the good based in judgement, and the cultivation of discernment. The devotion to assiduous Talmud study to the exclusion of all emotionalism did not fail to arouse opposition within Jewish circles.

It is also useful to note that the centers of activity for the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment—which

influenced every current in Jewish thought, including the *Misnagdim*—were concentrated in the province of Kurland and close to the Prussian frontier, that is near Telz/Telsiai. It is also possible that proximity to a long-standing and vital Protestant culture influenced Lithuanian Jewish thinkers. Believing themselves to be the bastion of Judaism against mystical and populist heresies, the Lithuanian *Misnagdim* who maintained an ideal of purity and morality were at the same time the most effective promoters of Haskalah.

In this intellectual milieu, the non-Hasidic Lithuanian-style communities were organized around yeshives (talmudic academies) and their *rashei yeshiva* (heads of academies), who attained their status as a result of nomination by the leaders of the preceding generation, and sometimes through marriage with the daughters of prestigious rabbinical scholars.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the full network of Jewish educational institutions in Lithuania at the turn of the century, whether



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Zionist, religious, Yiddishist, socialist or secular, employed avant-garde pedagogical techniques. The first secular Jewish school was established briefly in Vilna in 1808, and the second in 1830. By WWI, educators had established schools to provide a Jewish education for girls in almost every corner of Eastern Europe. Puah Rakovsky, an early Zionist and Socialist from a rabbinical family, opened the first secular middle schools for Jewish girls in Warsaw as early as 1890. In 1918, Sarah Schnirer, also a daughter of a Hassidic family, eager to spread Torah education among girls, opened the first Beys Yaakov school with the support of the Belzer Rebbe, soon absorbed by

the Orthodox organization Agudas Yisroel. The movement was tremendously successful and spread out rapidly in Eastern and Central Europe. The need to give to girls from religious families a secular education was a serious issue for the religious authorities, partly because of the appeal of secularity.

The Yavne schools, starting in the early 1920s, were distinguished by a rigorous level of traditional instruction combined with modern knowledge, and thus represented a successful marriage of the sacred and the profane.

### HOW DOES A TOWN BECOME A CAMPUS ?

Telz, a large town boasting some 7,000 residents, had been home to an internationally renowned Yeshiva since 1875. The Yeshiva was established by several rabbis who introduced novel instructional methods, known in the religious world as *derekh Telz* (the Telz “way” or method), and inspired by the Gaon of Vilna as well as the Mussar movement. In addition to the introduction of rational thought and science along with and integrated with Biblical and Talmudic studies, thus linking religious tradition to Enlightenment modernity, levels of instruction were

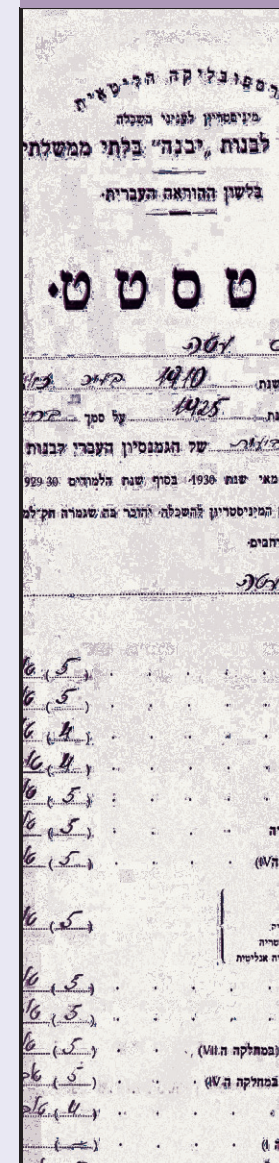
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established. The city also was home to a significant Catholic seminary whose influence extended to the Hanseatic city of Memel (Klaipeda).

What is remarkable about Telz – as the accounts in its book of memory, the *Sefer Telz*, like those of its last survivors unanimously show – was the advanced nature of the pedagogy the orthodox communities provided for their girls, and the extremely high educational level of a series of institutions that blanketed this shtetl, at least half of whose population was Jewish, and made of it a moral and spiritual beacon.

During the twenty years separating the two world wars, an educational institution was either founded or expanded in Telz practically every two years. (See “A Brief History of Jewish Educational Institutions” in Appendix.)

The Yavne Girls’ Gymnasium was established in Telz in 1920, amidst the effervescent atmosphere of the young and independent Republic of Lithuania (1918-1940). From its earliest years, the institution aspired to excellence and attracted the best female students of the





מזכיר

בא-כח המיני

שנתמנה בפקודת

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מאשר את האטסט

דים הגומרים חק-למוד

שנת 1930 של ויט

מנהל

הרפרנט של המיני

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### A CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL: THE YAVNE GYMNASIUM IN TELZ

region, and from more distant cities as well.

**B**ased on extensive interviews of the last witnesses, and on the discovery of an exceptional collection of 489 documents pertaining to the academic records of the Yavne



TEACHERS OF YAVNE GYMNASIUM IN 1927

Gymnasium, the exhibition “Yavne Telz School Was Life” will dramatize the trajectory of this collective educational effort of the Orthodox Jewish world. The instructional program, which was carried out in Hebrew with the exception of language classes, included Latin (in place of English, starting in 1931) and German, in addition to Lithuanian, the national language. In the highest grade, an introduction to philosophy was taught, and scientific subjects (notably differential calculus) were taught at such a high level that one student, arriving in the United States in 1940, was offered two years’ credit in mathematics.

**A**long with their lives, the careers of these young women were irredeemably shattered by the war. The rare survivors who were interviewed maintain luminous memories of the school. The beauty and wisdom of the ambitious educational program of their Yavne school still permeated their words. School was indeed life, as this higher education offered not only the promise of a better life than the hard working one of their parents, but also the possibility of intellectual development, a higher level of responsibility



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and greater control of their personal and social lives. The community's religious leaders must be given due credit for their wise and far-seeing concern for the education and future of their daughters; no matter the choice – secular path or religious tradition – they trusted the young women to choose for themselves.

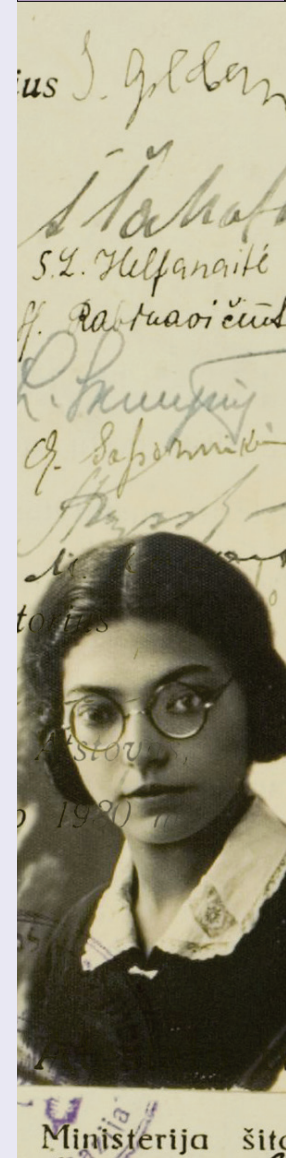


GYMNASIUM YAVNE AND LAKE MASTIS

All societies existing today in the modern world are confronted with the problem of reconciling

modern western knowledge with traditions. The Yavne High School

of Telz offers a historical example at once singular and universal of the necessary integration of cultures and ancient wisdom with the most advanced developments of modern thought.





## RESEARCH-SHATTERING ARCHIVES

### AN UNPRECEDENTED ARCHIVAL COLLECTION

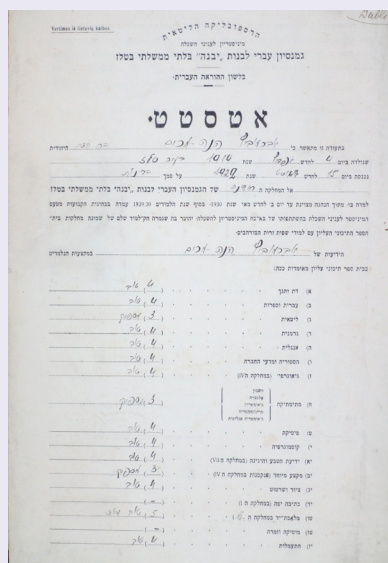
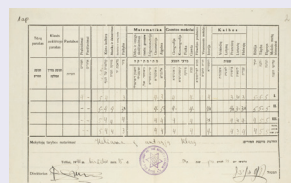
**T**he collection relating to the Yavne Gymnasium in Telz conserved in the Lithuanian Central Archives is unparalleled in its importance. We are aware of additional archives documenting Jewish schools from the interwar period, a time when they developed throughout Lithuania. An enormous amount of important research awaits us in this new, untapped field.

**F**ounded under the authorization of the Lithuanian government on November 8, 1920, the Yavne

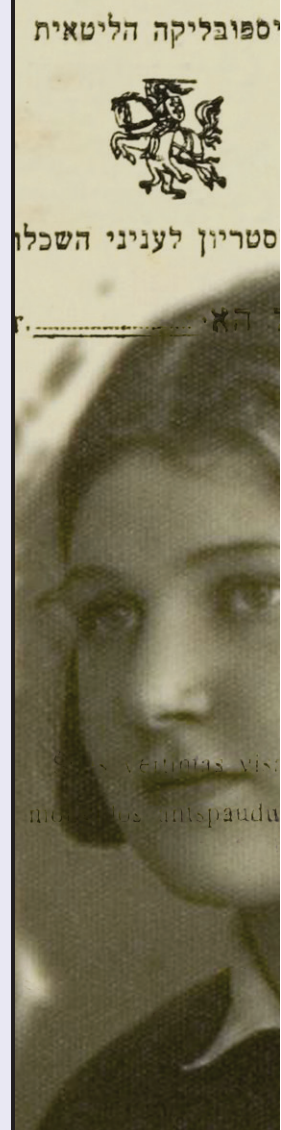
School for Girls stood at 16 Market Square, Turgaus gatvė. The documents' dates range from 1924 until the Soviet authorities closed the school in 1940.

**T**he study of file 1382-1 in the Lithuanian Central Archives containing 489 remarkably preserved documents permitted us to discover in detail the school's curriculum, as well as the individual trajectories of several of its future teachers, thereby significantly advancing our knowledge of this educational community.

**T**hese documents illustrate the school's high standards of excellence. The curriculum bears witness to religious teaching based in reason, comprehensive study of Hebrew language and literature, as well as a wide variety of world literatures in Hebrew translation. A very high level of science and technology and the study of modern languages, as well as Latin, were stressed in a commitment to providing these girls with a solid foundation of professionalisation along with religious and ethical principles.



DOCUMENTS FROM THE FILE 1382-1 OF THE LITHUANIAN CENTRAL ARCHIVES  
FROM THE GYMNASIUM YAVNE IN TELZ BETWEEN 1924 AND 1940







# RESEARCH – SHATTERING ARCHIVES

## THE AUTHOR AS LIVING ARCHIVE

In 2006, starting with three family photographs [1] and accounts of the massacre of 500 girls and young women from Telz, the author set out to interview the last remaining witnesses of this community and discovered the Yavne Gymnasium of Telz's central importance to the education and development of the girls and young women of the town. In 2008 she went to Israel to meet survivors and collected a significant number of class and group photographs. Through the process of interviews and identifications, the author received a documentary yet intimate body of knowledge,

difficult to put in order, and sometimes contradictory. Lists of names, faces with no names, faces reappearing in multiple photographs... Some faces became familiar and when their names were finally established, the author recognized them among those she frequently heard as a child, through her parents. Becoming a living archive means being able to establish links between information provided by informants and documents which gradually emerge. One must connect the dots between names cited in historical accounts heard at home and those which emerge during the accounts of other witnesses, and remember the captions of photographs

published in the Telz book of remembrance read a thousand times over, the Sefer Telz.



CLASS PHOTOGRAPHS WITH ROSA PORTNOI AT DIFFERENT MOMENTS OF HER STUDIES AT THE YAVNE GYMNASIUM IN TELZ

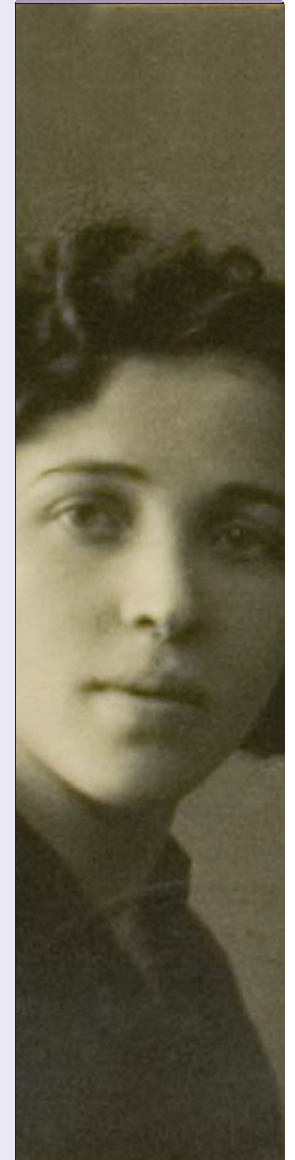


# RESEARCH—SHATTERING ARCHIVES

**G**radually, from one document or photograph to another, the investigation delivered new names, suddenly faces became familiar, friendships and family ties were established, and the information began to take form in a manner which resolved outstanding questions and led to new, more precise ones. Now through the website <http://batka-maat.org/>, part of this material is slowly being reconstructed and immortalize



BEFORE ESCAPING THE NAZIS IN JUNE, 1941, ROSA PORTNOI CUT THE HEBREW LETTERS OUT OF THIS PHOTOGRAPH, SO AS NOT TO BETRAY HERSELF AS JEWISH.





## RESEARCH—SHATTERING ARCHIVES

DAUGHTERS OF TELZ, BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

TRANSFORMING SYMBOLIC NUMBERS INTO HUMAN FACES

**5**00 girls massacred, 489 documents, and today approximately 500 students at Catholic school Vincento Boriseviciaus of Telsiai. In light of the newfound archives, in place of 500 tragic deaths appears a vibrant educational community, a small army of young female graduates.

**B**y what process does the observation of class photographs lead to questioning the past, to imagining the daily lives or personalities of the girls? Which mental associations

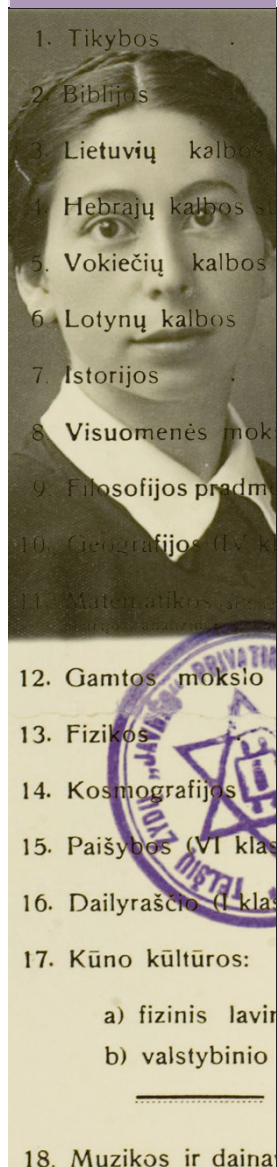
bring these images to life in the absence of information about the place, the time, the culture? What do they teach us and what do we have to learn in order to decipher them?

**F**inally, what do we want to communicate and transmit by presenting these photographs of young women? Although initially the author of this project was informed by family accounts teeming with details, the fact remains that a contextualization of these accounts must be based on rigorous

documentation and cross-checking. The author's original knowledge of these people on the basis of family and witnesses narratives gains direction and context as more information is gathered and organized.

**T**he late account (in 2000) of the girls' murder, and particular conditions in which they were forced into the ghetto, then massacred in December 1941, drew the author towards those three photographs saved by her mother, about which she knew since childhood. Consequently, the close examination of the photographs gave rise to





## RESEARCH – SHATTERING ARCHIVES

and of their education, shows us the commitment of their educators to the construction of responsible individuals in a society which accepts its past and specificity while still looking towards the future. The method of this project is based on a balancing act between the past and the future, between individual and community.

Certainly, this project implements the Jewish imperative *Zakhor* (Remember). However this concept persists through our desire to transmit more than just a memory destined to disappear with one

individual. We are entrusting this memory to another community, to other communities, which in turn will have the responsibility to retell the story, enabling it to achieve the status of history. The echo of the school community of Yavne Gymnasium can resonate in any present school community and can empower it to claim its own future. Finally, we are entrusting the responsibility for this “collective memory” of the Yavne Gymnasium in Telz – to use a term from sociology and anthropology – to education, which is central to this project.

The chosen angle, that of the education of the girls in the context of Jewish Lithuania, requires a historical approach. Because we are focusing on what constructing educated young adults entails, we must accompany them through their life stories, not by starting from the point of their massacre, but by retracing the steps of their existence within the logical sequence of a life with all its promises, of a society that instructs individuals in sight of a future where the acquired knowledge will have meaning, purpose, and will be passed on to future generations.



# RESEARCH – SHATTERING ARCHIVES

These reasons having been enumerated, the reader may see that the tension between life and death can also translate, in terms of representation, to tendencies toward sensationalism or dramatization. Who were these girls, massacred in December 1941, after living through the most horrific ordeal: the murder of their fathers, grandfathers, and brothers in early July, then in late August and early September the extermination of their mothers and grandmothers along with the youngest children? These brutally broken lives could easily justify dramatization; the elimination of such

dramatization involves an added responsibility. The methodology and rigor of this historical research enables us to distance ourselves from these problematic forms of representation, and to translate our emotions into material for reflexion.

WITH THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS OF VINCENZO BORISEVICIAUS GIMNASIJE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT OF BAT KAMA AT IN TELSIAI, 2012



|                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Tikybos             | .                         |
| 2. Biblijos            | .                         |
| 3. Lietuvių kalbos     |                           |
| 4. Hebrajų kalbos su   |                           |
| 5. Vokiečių kalbos     |                           |
| 6. Lotynų kalbos       |                           |
| 7. Istorijos           | .                         |
| 8. Visuomenės moks     |                           |
| 9. Filosofijos pradme  |                           |
| 10. Geografijos (IV kl |                           |
| 11. Matematikos (aritm | metrijos, analitika, geom |
| 12. Gamtos moks        |                           |
| 13. Fizikos            |                           |
| 14. Kosmografijos      |                           |
| 15. Paišybos (VI klas  |                           |
| 16. Dailės (I klas     |                           |
| 17. Kūno kultūros:     |                           |
| a) fizinis lavin       |                           |
| b) valstybin           |                           |
| 18. Literatūra ir dain |                           |



# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

AN INTERNET SITE BECOMES  
A DATABASE

This website testifies to the accomplishments in our research on the 500 girls. The data collected regarding survivors and witnesses of the Yavne Gymnasium of Telz is progressively added to the site <http://batkamaat.org/> thanks to a grant from the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah.

בת כמה את?

EXHIBIT, INSTALLATION, OR MANIFESTATION:

GIRLS AT THE MARKETPLACE OF TELSIAI:  
HOW TO MATERIALIZE A VISION?

Prior to our discovery of the archives of Yavne Gymnasium, with the material we had already collected from informants, we initially imagined 500 life sized banners installed along the central square of Telsiai for 24 hours; entirely white banners would represent all those for whom we have neither name nor photograph. For those whose names we had discovered in a class photograph, pictures would be displayed on stands, captioned with a name or a brief story. This poetic installation proclaiming the presence of each of the girls despite the absence of

remnants slowly transformed with the influx of information over the course of the investigation.



MARKET PLACE - TURGAUS GATVE - IN TELSIAI

Our current project takes a simultaneously more modest and more ambitious form thanks to the discovery of the high school

# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

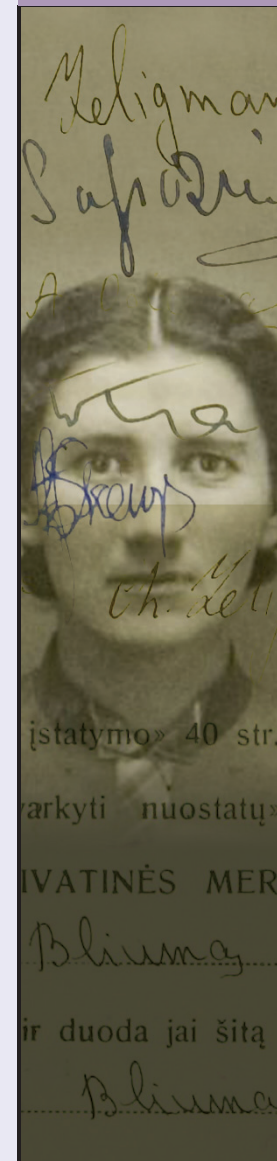
archives. Given the abundance of material, the gathering of the girls will be presented in a progressive fashion over the course of exhibits which will show the progress made in our knowledge of the girls as the research, documentation, and publication of the archives advance, most notably through the website. In the presence of such rich documentation, the possibility of presenting well-documented and contextualized portraits, of creating a representation of this group which is tangible and accessible for a wide audience, requires ever more work and patience.

This demonstration will materialize through an installation which shows the images of collective experience conveyed through the group photographs while also featuring individuals who stand out to meet the public face to face.



A GATHERING OF THE YAVNE GYMNASIUM OF TELZ, IN 1930, AT THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF TEACHERS FROM PALESTINE

The richness of the information and the visual beauty found in the archival documents are emphasized by these young faces which never fully reveal their mystery. The identity photographs appearing on the diplomas and report cards help to clear up unknowns and give us snippets of individual life stories. The quality of these photographs, as compared to that of portraits obtained using group photographs, offer a striking contrast. In certain cases we are lucky enough to possess several images of a given student at different ages, and this presence







*Sorūz Henai*  
*Frédolaisi*

LIETUVOS RES



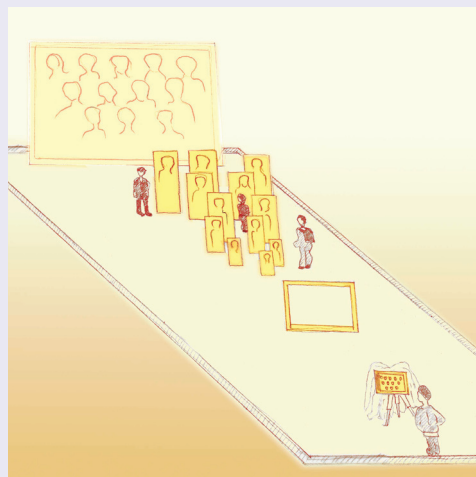
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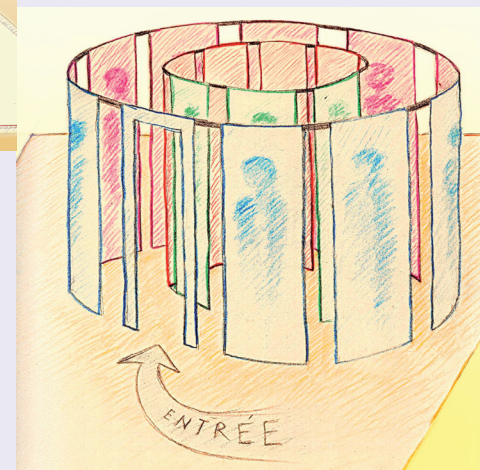
## THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

further emphasizes the void left by the absence of others, and by unidentified faces. We strive to present this community, whose entirety will be forever uncertain, in a march of life and hope, in its drive towards a future shaped by education and training.

**T**he content of these archives clearly lends itself to scenography. In the following pages of this document, proposals can be found for artistic displays which will permit us to shed more light on the profound relationship between this social group and the destinies of its individuals.



SKETCHES FOR STAGING





# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING HISTORY: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO A HISTORICAL MOMENT

**T**he last witnesses to a life and education within the context of Lithuanian Jewish culture are gradually disappearing. This moment imposes new responsibilities – on their heirs, second and third generations of Holocaust survivors, researchers in the field relating to history, educators, and artists – to adopt and adapt new strategies to develop projects and carve narratives.

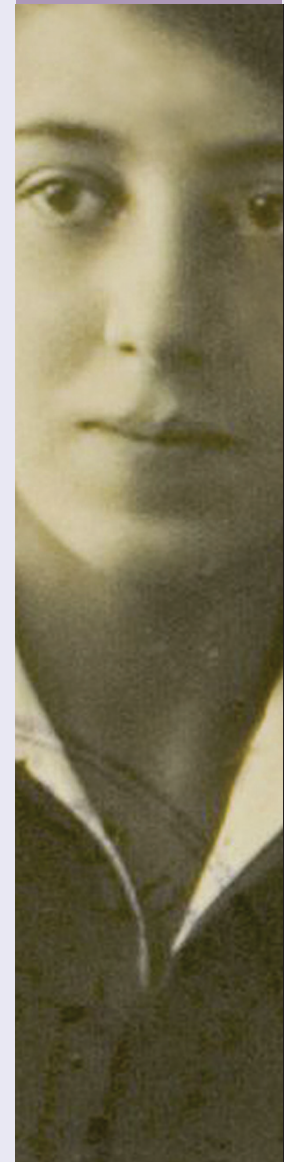
**T**he choice to work with a Catholic secondary school in Telsiai, where the Yavne school was

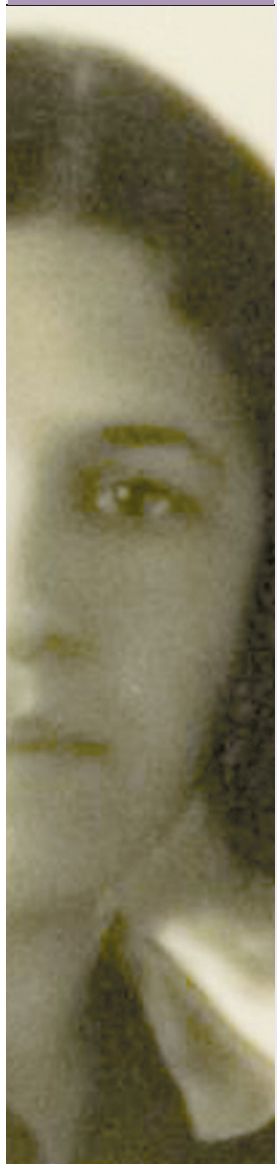
established, followed from a conviction that knowledge and remnants of this history should not be erased from the place where it existed. Raising awareness, – especially among young people – although it might seem symbolic, has a real impact on the future. In some ways, they are as close to our daughters of Telz as a young person can be. They walk in the same streets and breathe the same air. The distance between their culture and the Jewish culture of the interwar, though, is immense. If we cross this divide, we will be able to cross any divide. Once the young students of Vincento Boriseviciaus have learned enough about the world that has

been destroyed, they will express their understanding of this history through art.



WITH YOCHEBED VAREYES, WHO WAS A STUDENT IN YAVNE GYMNASIUM





# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES



WITH SONIA (SARAH YOSLOVITZ) TOOR

**T**he narratives we bring into the classroom, engendered by direct transmission and by knowledge attained over the course of extensive reading

on the subject, serve as a foundation for establishing and expanding knowledge which can be taught and “reappropriated.” If we can succeed in bringing this experience to life in Telsiai, it testifies to the fact that this process is repeatable in different contexts, cities, or countries.

**B**y bringing the archive and personal accounts into the classroom we are able to contextualize them, but also to introduce students to the principles of research, as well as verification and cross-checking of information. By learning to establish a fact, the student “experiences



DISCUSSING FILM PROJECTS WITH STUDENTS OF  
VINCENTO BORISEVICIAUS GIMNASIJE



WITH REYZL BERKMAN AND HER GRAND-DAUGHTER

# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

living history” while responding to a rigorous set of requirements in her or his search for truth. Among young people, wherever they are in the world, no matter what they are offered, there will always be a few who long for truth.

By inviting students to use their intelligence and creativity to design artistic expressions of their newly attained knowledge, we call on them to emotionally invest themselves in the experience, and to assume their responsibility in the process of transmission.

Being at such different points of time and space, the young people who will take part in this project will in fact never be blank slates in their understanding of this history, not only because they are of such a different generation, but also due to their national and religious affiliation, their personalities, and the approach of their teachers. Through the density and seriousness of the knowledge attained during this work and the variety of artistic interpretations it will bring to fruition, this project aims to overcome the challenge of transmission.

## INTERCONNECTED MEDIA

The “Yave Telz School Was Life” exhibition must be particularly targeted toward the young. Of the specific tools relating to the first phase of the project, the creation of batkamaat.org seems appropriate for attracting young people. These tools can combine and become part



§ 54 pastaba II ir § 14  
Gimnazijos Pedagogų  
džiojo— metų *birželio*  
*Merai*

Telšiai, 1930-



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKA



Švietimo Ministeris

A. R. Nr. *2204*



# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

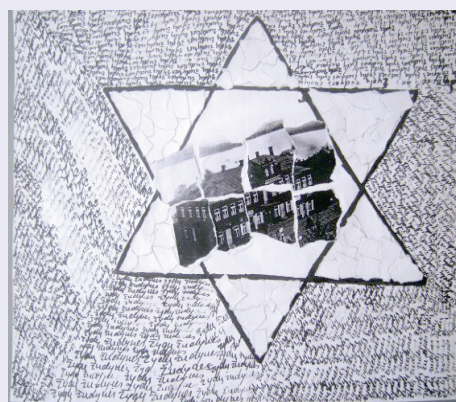
of the museum exhibition or exist independently. They will leave an interactive trace long after the exhibition is over and will allow for a longer-term mobilization. This innovative form of interactive museography resembles a participatory educational experience. We are relying on the museum teaching body and youth activities coordinators or mediators in particular to carry out this part of the proposal.

The exhibition will feature an interactive element which can be followed simultaneously by the visitor or separately on the website. In

addition to a virtual tour of the exhibition on the site [batkamaat.org](http://batkamaat.org), offerings for more in-depth study will be available online within the exhibition itself. Anything that can add to knowledge of the various themes but cannot be addressed in the

“restrictive” framework of the exhibition will be addressed in a logical continuation on the website. In a format possibly resembling a web documentary, virtual tours will be accessible online, such as: a tour of the town of Telz, a presentation of currently existing sites of Jewish life, the location of the ghetto where the girls were confined, and interviews of witnesses or inhabitants.

The related artwork of the students of the Catholic high school Vincento Boriseviciaus of Telsiai, whether photographs, audiovisual works, writings, drawings, paintings,



DRAWING AND COLLAGE BY SIMONA JARUTYTĖ,  
STUDENT OF VINCENTO BORISEVICIAUS GIMNASIJJE  
IN TELSIAI



# THE STAKES OF TRANSMISSION: THEORETICAL AND PRATICAL CHALLENGES

or fabric design will make up a presentation in continuous loop at terminals in the exhibit. Their work will also be put online on pages devoted to them, allowing them to interact on the website or via Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.



TAG OR QR CODE: APPLICATION LINKED TO A PAGE OF OUR WEBSITE WITH ACCESS TO MORE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT A THEME OF THE EXHIBITION

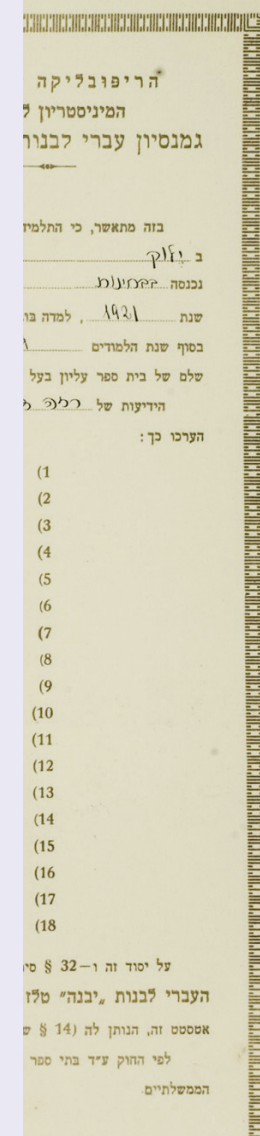
All of these undertakings can take the form of “works in progress” in the same way as the research on the girls, as the progressive additions to the website already suggest.

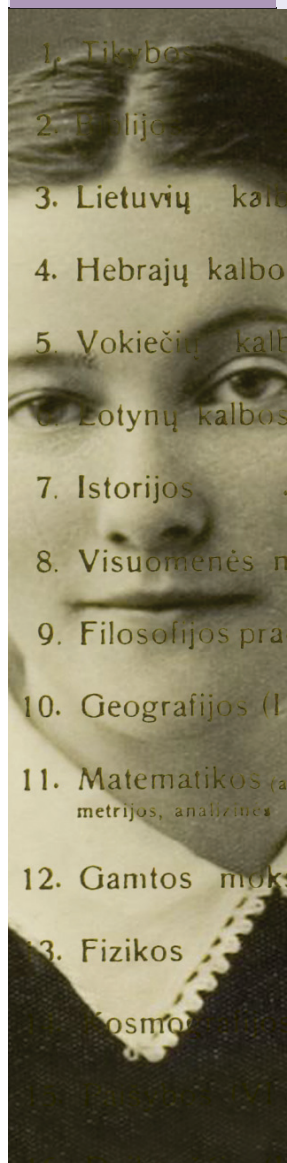
The guest book will take the form of an audiovisual recording of the visitors as they exit the exhibition and will be put online on a special page. Strategically placed QR codes permit the visitor to scan them with their smartphone and to open specific pages of the site which

provide supplemental information on the topics being discussed.

Forums and discussion groups can also be created online over the course of the exhibit.

Wiki articles and pages may also be created for this occasion.





# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

DAUGHTERS OF TELZ MARCHING:

A CONCEPT THAT INTEGRATES THE ADVANCES OF RESEARCH AND ADAPTS TO EVENT SITES

**T**hanks to the discovery of the school archives, the manifestation of the girls’ communal gathering, expanding as the research progresses, is taking form. This permanently evolving exhibition is not the expression of finite knowledge but the account of an investigation in progress. It comes out of a desire to immortalize the history of this academic community, which is gradually revealing itself through an effort of both practical and symbolic consequences.

**A**s the science of the research, its documentation, and



the publication of the archives on the website are moving forward, it becomes possible to convey a vivid perception to a wide audience. The

form of the exhibition must provide for the enlargement in number of the group of girls we come to know, more precise data revealed by the archives, and the lifelike image of an evolving community. This collective experience will be showcased by one or more installation(s) where group photographs and archival documents shed light on one another. Individuals will be brought into perspective through a narrative following that of the investigation.

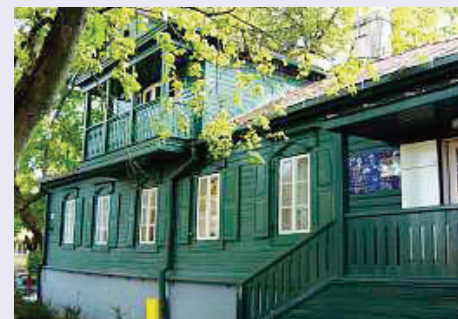
**T**hrough the eyewitness accounts and cross-checking without which they would have remained

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

largely unknown, the girls, families, teachers, and the school will reveal themselves to the public in the same way they did to the author. The visual and documentary richness contributed by the archives is emphasized by highlighting the very real beauty of the faces, but also by the inherent depth these fragile pieces of evidence bring to our understanding of the collective destiny of the community of the Yavne school of Telz as individual life stories.

**F**rom the first presentation in Vilnius to the potential exhibits in

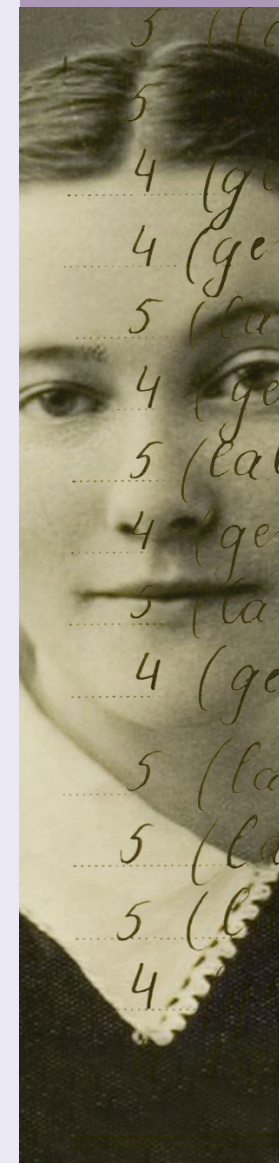
Paris and New York City, the girls' exhibition will take shape and expand until it can unfold into a 24-hour display at the marketplace of Telsiai, the Turgaus Gatve of Telz, filling it one last time with their voices.



THE GREEN HOUSE, SECTION OF THE VILNA GAON STATE JEWISH MUSEUM DEDICATED TO THE EXTERMINATION OF LITHUANIAN JEWS



TOLERANCE CENTER, EXHIBITION AND EVENTS SPACE OF THE VILNA GAON STATE JEWISH MUSEUM







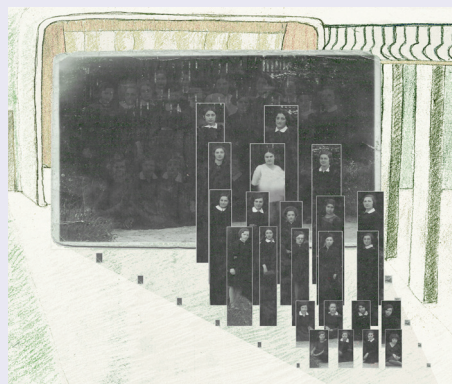
# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM:  
ENCOUNTERS, DIALOGUES, AND WEAVING

“S<sup>chool Was Life</sup>” involves an installation and exhibition which interlace several threads in order to resonate between the author’s own vision and understanding (as a child of witnesses, historian, “living archive” as defined previously) and the interpretation of a group of young students at Vincento Boriseviciaus Gimnasije of Telsiai.

**T**HE IMAGINED INSTALLATION in its first presentation in the auditorium of the Tolerance Center of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

immerses the public in a group photograph of the Yavne Gymnasium of Telz and in the 489 documents from archival collection 1382-1 preserved in the Central Archives of Lithuania.



## DIVING INTO THE ARCHIVES

Ideally, the opening photograph masks a second installation which the visitor discovers by passing through this first installation. An ephemeral, interactive monument composed of reproductions of the 489 archival documents will allow the visitor to read the exhibit as one reads a book, to notice some of the diplomas or report cards, to take a close look at a name or identification photo, to deliberate over the section in Lithuanian or Hebrew of these



# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

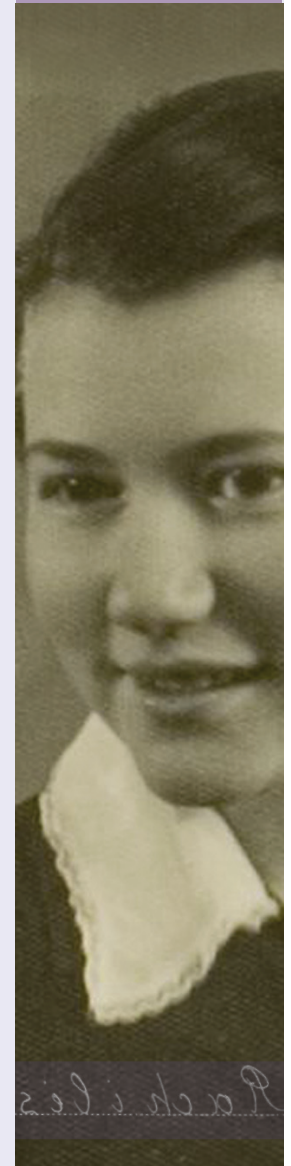
lifelike archives, rich in information yet mysterious (see section: Staging Trend Book).

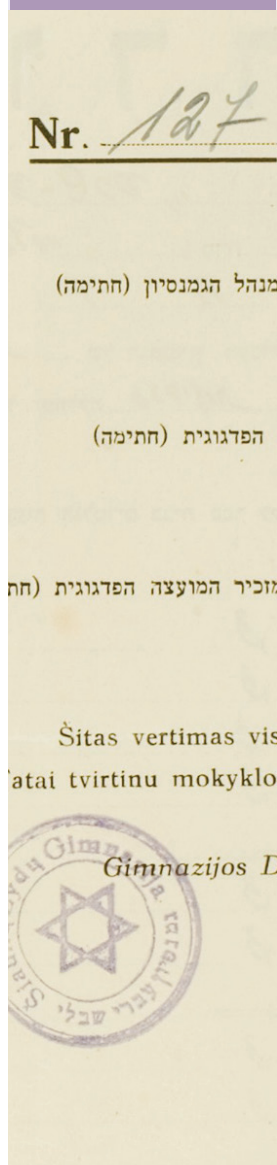


## UNDERSTANDING AN ART OF LIVING THAT COMBINES TRADITION AND REASON

This scenography which borrows certain elements from contemporary art, story telling or pedagogical techniques, aims to immerse the visitor in a sensory experience before asking him to define the nature of what he is seeing (Is it Art? Memorial? Documentation?). This approach aims to whet the visitor's appetite for knowledge and

understanding, and stimulate his desire to follow a path leading him to a civilization destroyed but nevertheless close by.





# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

## 7 INSTALMENTS - 3 GUIDING THREADS

In order not to leave the visitor dissatisfied, the exhibition articulates a narrative composed of several instalments which progressively reveal and explain the intentions of the installation.

THE 7 INSTALMENTS *succeed each other in a layout designed to form the 3 Hebrew letters of the question Bat Kama At? (How Old Are You?)*

THREE THREADS FORM THE NARRATIVE:

a) Primarily narrative, the first, School of Life, deals with the context and daily life of the school as recalled by the girls who survived, using written sources (Sefer Telz), and photographs collected in archives and elsewhere, with the

exception of the second sequence, which departs from this principle.

b) Largely visual, the second thread, Bat Kama At? How Old Are You? puts the visitor in the presence of the girls, in groups or individually, face to face, following the author's search for the remaining informants. Without attempting to illustrate the narrative thread word for word, this introduction enables the visitor to encounter a community through

all of those who, survivor or deceased, guided the author through a true historical quest.



**Bat Kama At (How Old Are You?) is the blueprint for the exhibition.**

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

Visually, the documents with their cursive alphabets and the familiar



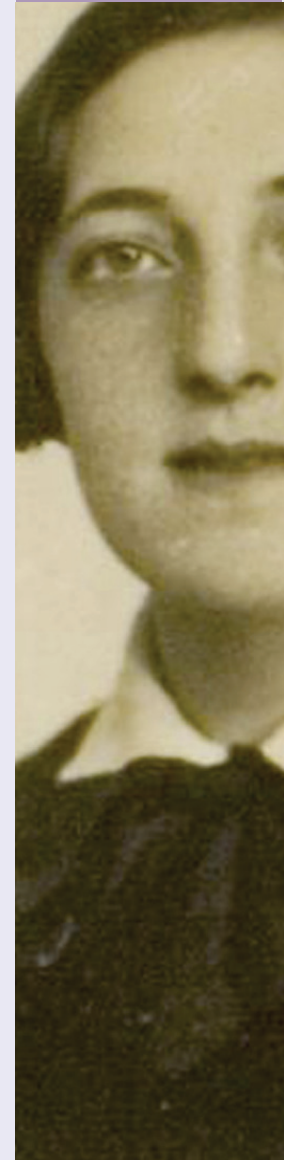
A CONCEPT THAT ADAPTS TO EVENT SITES

nature of the report cards and diplomas correspond to the nakedness of the faces, silhouettes, and facial expressions of the girls.

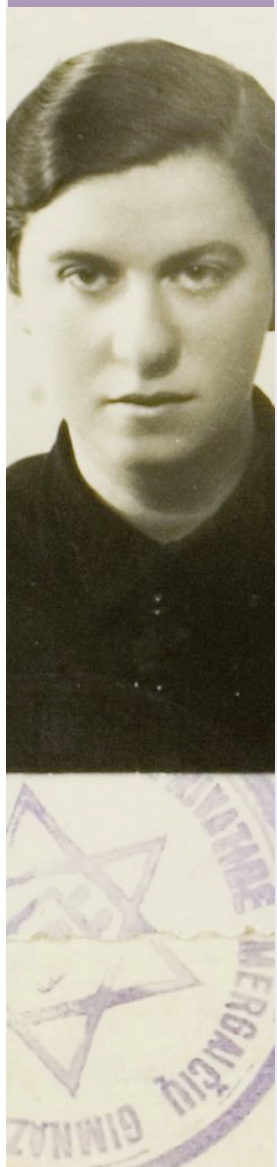
c) Finally, the third thread, More Knowledge, presents a more in-depth study of each theme. Here the content is not mounted on picture rails, but is accessible at a mobile data terminal using QR codes and web links. The website <http://bat-kamaat.org> will become the virtual platform of the exhibition and will assure its longevity. The massive collection of audiovisual documents on the subject, more stories and more history, while too extensive for the



customary length of an exhibition, will be accessible on the site.







# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

## Instalment 1



TIME AND SPACE: TELZ A PICTURESQUE VILLAGE HOUSING A TREASURE. THE VISION OF THE TELZER

### School of Life

Telz epitomizes the image of a small town steeped in a religious atmosphere, operating to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. Shabbes! Shabbes! In the Sefer Telz, the accounts of inhabitants who survived unanimously point to the spirituality of a Jewish shtetl where any energy not spent in the toil of day-to-day

existence was consecrated to study. In the Jewish world, Telz was associated with its internationally renowned Yeshivah.

The 5-day work week, which respected the Jewish sabbath as well as Sunday for the Christian population, offered few luxuries as it was common to work from dawn until late at night.



SEFER TELZ, BOOK OF MEMORY OF THE JEWS FROM TELZ

Childhood was spent studying or providing for one's family, a routine relieved only by Sabbath pastimes and the charming lake.

### Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?

The first two photographs (the third is used in the installation) will be cut out and arranged in fifteen banners (approx. 150cmx50cm ; 59inches tall by 19 inches large). They will be accompanied by labels which briefly state the sources of the information and diplomas available for each face whose identity is known.

### More Knowledge

Option to access the Sefer Telz (NYPL).

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

Links to memoirs published by survivors: Moishe Rozenbaum, Reyzl Berkman.

Sources relating to the Yeshivah of Telz.

Photos of the Yeshivah.

Photos of the rabbinic dynasty.

The streets of Telz, map of the town from the Yizker Bukh.

## Instalment 2

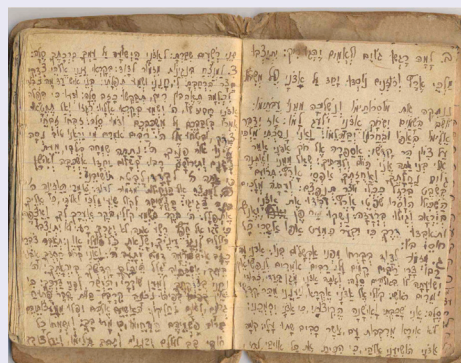


### TIME AND SPACE: TELZ IN LITHUANIAN JEWRY

#### School of Life

In order to provide historical and geographical perspective, we must describe the extraordinary blossoming of intellectual and cultural life which formed the context of interwar Jewish Lithuania. Social and political movements were gaining momentum. Bundists, Zionists of all persuasions, religious movements,

professional training and cooperative movements all competed to capture the hearts and minds of youths. Academic study of the Jewish world – primarily in Yiddish but in other languages as well – was structured around institutions such as YIVO in Vilna, but also around multiple libraries and intellectual or artistic circles. Sports clubs and



DIARY WRITTEN IN HER HIDING PLACE BY REYZL BERKMAN





# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

youth movements abounded. The Yiddish press flourished. In this feverish atmosphere schools multiplied, drawing on the scholarly excellence and training of teachers.

## *Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?*

How can a careful reading of the Sefer Telz reveal this cultural renaissance in a profoundly religious region open to diverse influences? The political and religious affiliations and youth movements discussed therein offer an overview of Jewish life in Telz and the surrounding region of Samogitia (Bund, Zionists, women’s sports club, Maccabis).

The thirst for knowledge and education as well as the tradition of the

Telz Yeshivah are particularly illustrated in the following documents: Images: Yung Vilne, YIVO, *Tizker bikher*.

Schools of all persuasions in Lithuania.

The first photo of Rose Portnoi and the multiple clues it gives us.

A document from the Alka Museum.

Photographs with insets of teachers, the diplomas of whom the investigation has delivered through historical research. Photographs and diplomas of young teachers issued by the high school.

## *More Knowledge*

A detour via the Gaon and the

Musar.

From the Vilna Gaon to the Musar movement. The influence of the Enlightenment, the *Misnagdim* and the cultural movement.





# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

The creation of YIVO in 1924.  
A virtual tour of Jewish Telz.  
The medallions of Romualdas Inciraukas, his sculptures and memorial on the building of the school.  
Bibliographic references.



TELSIAI JESIVA. 2003, BRONZE, ENAMEL, AUTHENTIC BRICK

## Instalment 3



### INSIDE YAVNE GYMNASIUM: WHEN GIRLS SURPASS BOYS

#### *School of Life*

Apart from the excellent level in religion and Hebraic literature, attention to young women's professional

futures motivated the teaching of languages, science, hygiene, and arithmetic. In 1931, for example, Latin, more useful in medical professions, replaced English in the curriculum of the school. In 1923, classes were organized to train teachers, and in 1928 a branch of the teacher training college designated for young women opened, the same year the Yavne high school produced its first graduates.

This higher education elevated the girls' sense of self-worth and responsibility. A number of them would eventually become educators, and among the survivors are a chemist, a radiologist, and a pharmacist.



ROMUALDAS INCIRAUKAS





# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

This section leads to the motives causing the orthodox leaders of the town to open the school to such broad and worldly secular culture.

## *Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?*

Drawing from the large photograph and from the group photograph of the teacher training college, identified girls and their diplomas are highlighted.

A few exceptional diplomas stand out. Using the photograph featuring individual portraits of the second high school class, we follow threads leading to portraits of teachers, their diplomas when we have them, and other group photos: [http://batkamaat.org/?attachment\\_id=2573](http://batkamaat.org/?attachment_id=2573).

The teacher training college for girls.

## *More Knowledge*

The discovery of the high school archives and analyze of the content of the 50 first pedagogical documents of the file 1382-1.

An access point for visitors to more archives published on the website. Excerpts of filmed interviews concerning the level of study in Latin and mathematics.

Interviews with Shoshana Bloch Gifter, and an anecdote from Roza Ziv who mentions reading Homer (in Hebrew).



WITH YOCHEBED VAREYES

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

## Instalment 4



### IN LIGHT OF THE LAST INFORMANTS, A UNIQUE MOMENT

#### School of Life

This investigation carries a sense of urgency, as the last remaining survivors who were these young students in Telz are now around 90 years of age. During our first meeting, in 2008, the memory of Yochebed Vareyes, of scientific training, was quite solid.

However nowadays the informants' memories are fading and ours along

with them. They are capable of mistakes but can also rectify other ones and put a name to a face which would otherwise have remained forever anonymous, or tell an anecdote that illuminates a coherent picture of their social life and gives meaning to the gathered information.

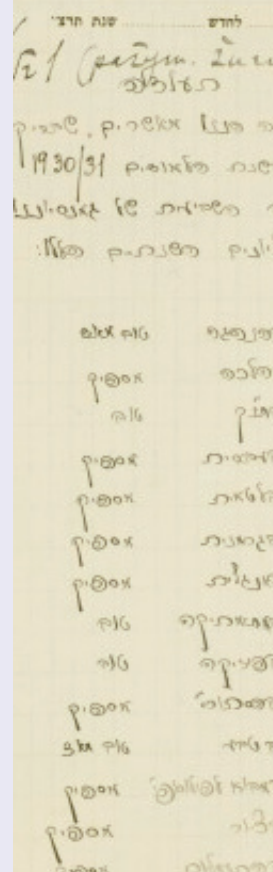


dote that illuminates a coherent picture of their social life and gives meaning to the gathered information.



#### Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?

Centered around 2 photographs from Yochebed Vareyes, this section acknowledges the investigation





# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



which delivered an unexpected number of names. The banners allow us to emphasize the witnesses' central importance to the investigation. By repeatedly examining these rough photographs, practically invisible, unrecognizable features are recognized, then confirmed. Searching through the mass of diplomas eventually reveals familiar names and faces. It was in this way that the author herself recognized Khayele Bloch, whom she had previously met, and of whom she possesses multiple class photographs, as well as Mina Shklar who appears in several other group photographs like this one below wearing her little light-colored dress.

## More Knowledge

Excerpts from films and interviews with witnesses, particularly with Yochebed Vareyes.

Work documents from the research itself, showing the progress in identification of the girls and work with the witnesses.



## Instalment 5



THE UNINTERRUPTED  
THREAD OF THE BLOCH  
FAMILY, PRINCIPAL RABBINIC  
FAMILY OF THE YESHIVAH OF  
TELZ

## School of Life

A family decimated by the Nazis and persecuted in the Gulag puts up a spiritual resistance throughout adversity.

## Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?

The Bloch family gave to Telz several rabbinic lineages. All of the

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

members present in three photographs belonging to professor Jonathan Boyarin were identified during a filmed interview with the Rebbetzin Khaye Bloch Ausband.

Diplomas, portraits, and biographies of the Bloch family abound in the documents collected by the author, as do the diplomas found in the central archives.

## More Knowledge

Interviews with rebbetzins Khaye Bloch Ausband and Shoshana Bloch Gifter.

Jonathan Boyarin's interview of Khaye Bloch Ausband who recognizes one after another of her family members in photographs.



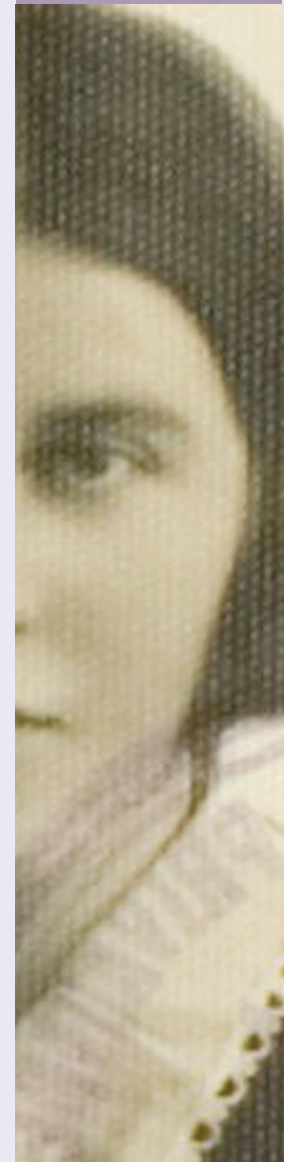
REMNANT OF THE TELZER YESHIVA



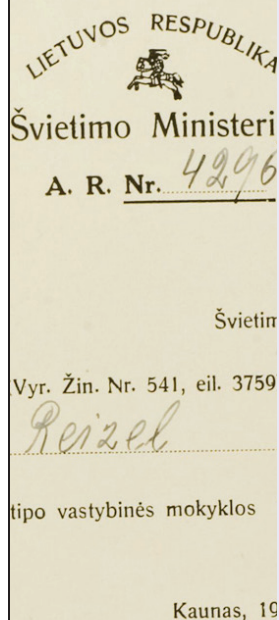
KHAYE BLOCH AUSBAND AND REB AUSBAND Z'L'  
SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH



SHOSHANA BLOCH (REBBETSIN GIFTER)



# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



## Instalment 6



## DESTINIES

### School of Life

How does the investigation of the tragic fate of 500 schoolgirls confined in the ghetto of Telz and murdered around Christmas of 1941 lead the author to research their identities and to strive to learn more about their lives?

To identify them all proves impossible, as does knowing what became of each one. Nevertheless, as the investigation moves along, personalities begin to stand out. Cruelly

interrupted destinies and improbable rescues leave their marks on memories.

### Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?

For the most part, these girls were murdered by Lithuanian Nazi collaborators at Christmastime in 1941 during a final wave of killings which eradicated the Jewish population of Telz. The few cases chosen to illustrate this thread cannot do justice to the massive erasure that occurred.

The large photograph and a return to the photographs used in the installation.

- Tania Gershovitz: recognized by several informants in the large photograph, died during childbirth.

- Henne Bloch: arrested for attempting to bring food into the ghetto, tortured and executed by the Nazis.  
- Mina Bod Girsh and Dvora Bod: two of the daughters of a tailor from Telz. Dvora was killed at the border trying to flee Lithuania for Palestine. Mina is one of our informants.

- Sarah Sonia Yossolowitz: fled Telsiai, was in the ghetto of Kovno and fled to Klaipeda where she was saved; moved to Palestine. After receiving an initial training in pharmacology, she continued her studies and became a radiologist. In the last twenty years, she has become a painter and practices her art under the name of Sonia Toor.



# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

- Reyzl Berkman Privalski: hidden in the forest in the home of a Lithuanian woman, she kept a journal which was published in Israel. She raised a large family and lives in Bnei Brak in close proximity to her children and grandchildren.

## More Knowledge

Interview in 2000 with Raphael Genis, one of the last remaining Jews of Telz, in the film, "Nemt: A Language Without a People for a People Without a Language".

Interviews of informants: Khaye Bloch, Rosa Ziv, Sonia Toor, Reyzl Berkman, Mina Bod.

Excerpts from a film on the paintings of Sonia Toor.



## Instalment 7



## A FUTURE FOR THE STORY OF THE GIRLS OF TELZ

### School of Life

Since 2010, we have been working with the students and teachers of Vincento Boriseviciaus secondary School, a prestigious Catholic school, and a fabric design class of the Art Academy of Telsiai on a project based on the exploration and study of this rich material. The students devoted time to study the context of Jewish life in Lithuania, focusing on the history of education in interwar





# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

Telz (Telsiai). The goal of this presentation is to draw a connection between their vision and ours. This approach, which we shall call “Experience of Living History,” opened the door to creative expression.

## *Bat Kama At? - How Old Are You?*

Two screens will display continuous-loop videos featuring the work of students.

A short film, a “making of” documentary, visual art pieces, literary fiction, and other creative projects.

In the course of their collaboration, a new path of communication was forged by the students and the authors, especially compelling for use



KORNELIJA ULSKYTÉ, STUDENT OF VINCENTO BORISEVICIAUS GIMNASIJE

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



STANDING: KORNELIJA ULSKYTÉ GABRIELÉ VAICIULYTÉ  
SITTING: THE AUTHOR AND BERNADETA ABROMAVICIUTÉ

in conjunction with new approaches to teach Jewish history in Eastern Europe and the Holocaust.

## More Knowledge

Not all student works will be included in the exhibitions, however they will be accessible on the website <http://batkamaat.org>.



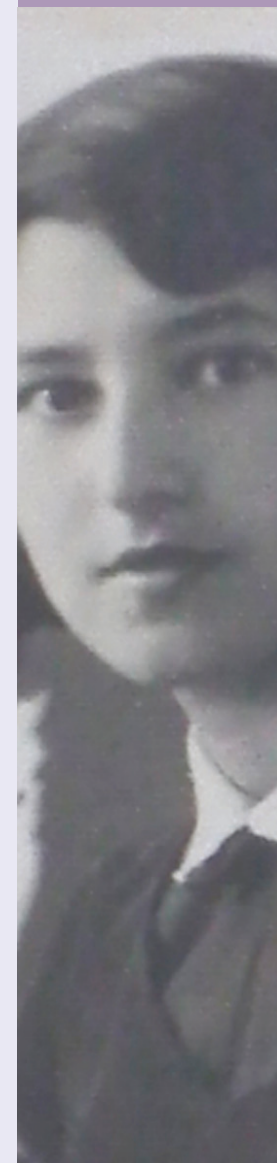
STUDENTS' CREATIONS FOR THE PROJECT IN THE ACADEMY OF ART OF TELSIAI: FABRIC DESIGN WITH PROFESSOR ZITA INCIRAUŠKIENE

## Livre d'or – Guest Book 8

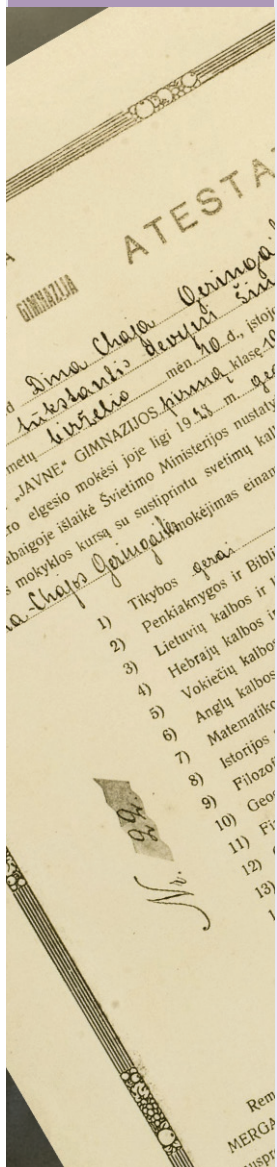
The interactive guest book is a forum for visitors to instantly record and share their comments and critiques. It will also include a link to the website.



DIGITAL GUEST BOOK







# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

## PROPOSALS FOR THE STAGING

### TWO ARTISTIC WORKS ADDRESSING TWO QUESTIONS

The “School Was Life” exhibition will create two art installations which respond to each other, working within the framework of the exhibition as a whole.

These visual works will focus on issues raised by the two central themes of the exhibition on this community of girls at the Yavne High School of Telz:

- Bat kama at? How old are you?
- School was life!

These two themes, around which the proposal revolves, naturally echo an additional question concerning the 500 girls which we will try to answer throughout the investigation:

Who are you? And who were you? These two installations will allow the visitor to encounter the girls in a more physical way, to get at the heart of these questions through a sensory approach. They call for the visitor’s reflection as well as their sensitivity.

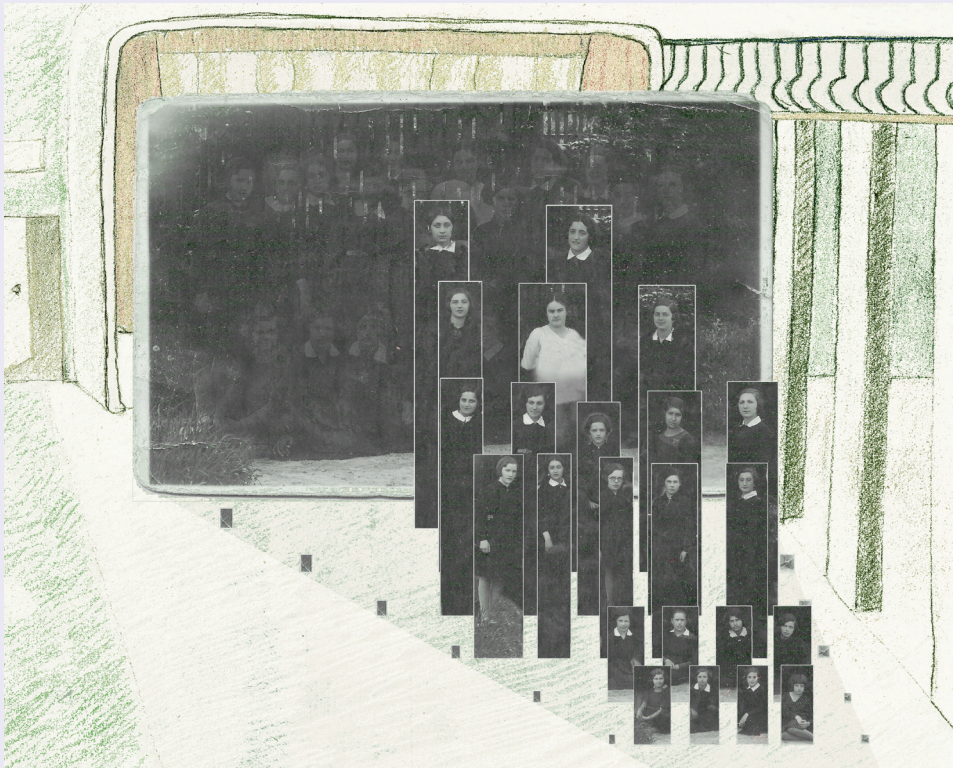
### IN SEARCH OF A PRECISE LOST TIMES

The first work will take the appearance of a life-sized reproduction of one of the three class photographs which guided the author in her

exploration of this slice of history. By using large cut-outs of each individual girl found in the photograph, it will play with a three-dimensional optical illusion.

Coming in front of the installation toward the place from where the photographer taking the picture would have stood, the visitor sees only a very large photograph of girls peering at them insistently. But as he moves closer, he discovers that he can penetrate the photograph and cross the barriers which separate him from the class, as if he were part of it.

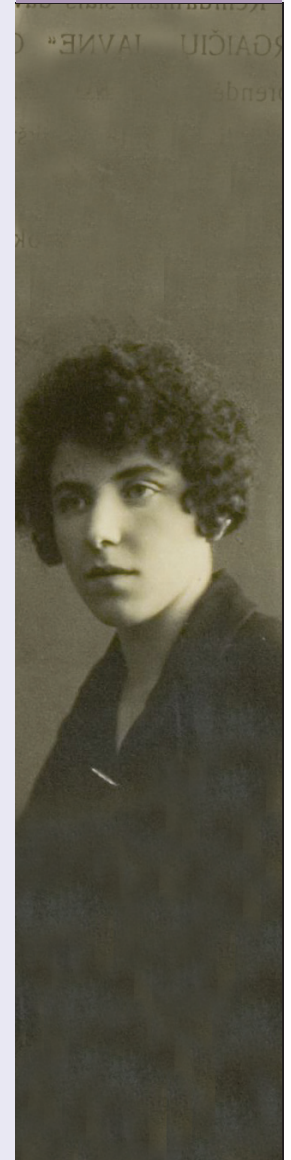
# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



On the reverse sides of the panels the visitor will discover the identities of the girls, pieces of their personal stories, and their familial ties as revealed by our historical research. The desired effect is that of a magician's trick using an optical illusion.

At this point the first installation gives way to the second which will have been completely hidden by the frame of the photograph.

The second installation will serve to deepen the experience and to bring the investigation further into focus.



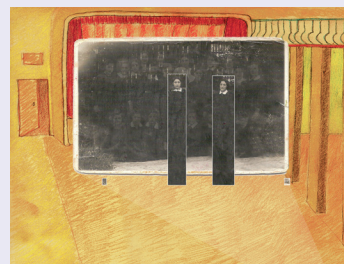
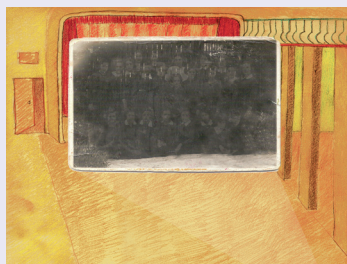
AWAKENING LIVES

VIES ÉCLOUES

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



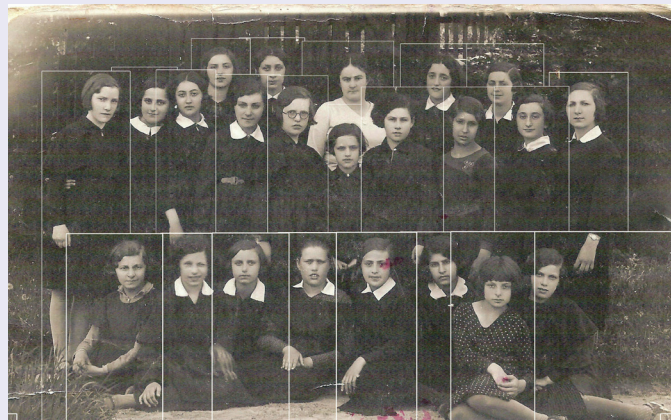
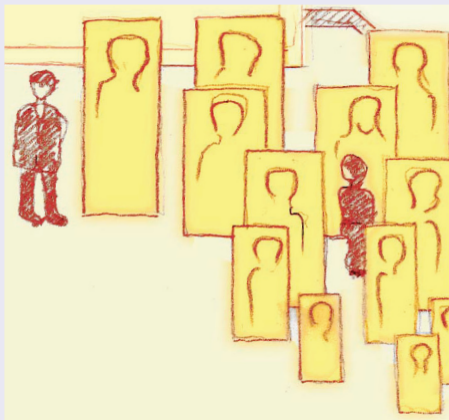
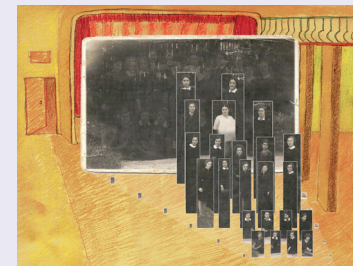
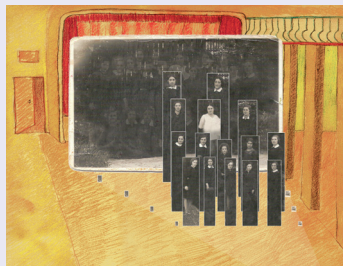
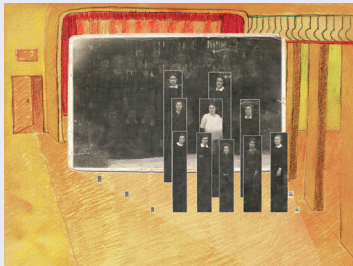
*The first work will take the appearance of a life-sized reproduction of one of the three class photographs which guided the author in her exploration of this slice of history. By using large cut-outs of each individual girl found in the photograph, it will play with a three-dimensional optical illusion.*



THE INSTALLATION STEP BY STEP



# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION



FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VISITOR ENTERING  
THE EXHIBITION



# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

## TREE OF LIFE

**T**he second work responds to a significant and unprecedented proposition: to put at the disposal of all visitors, in plain view and physically accessible, the mass of archival documents forgotten for 90 years. To be a historian means above all to be a detective and archivist, and yet archives are generally put off limits to ordinary people, beyond the shadows of the unknown. Rare, fragile, sheltered from public eyes, they rarely see the light of day. The exceptional discovery of some 500 documents from Yavne High School

of Telz in the Central Archives of Lithuania represents a major breakthrough for our research. It is of great importance to expose that which has been buried and hidden, in both a literal and figurative sense, and to let these once silent records be seen and touched, therefore giving them voices, questions. The Tree of Life is a sculpture into which we are able to dive, to grasp objects and documents, slivers of life on browned paper.

**T**he sculpture will constitute a flexible structure into which the visitor may enter to find the 489

archival documents. It is an open-air resource center where the watermarks of these “awakening lives” appear under the surface, where the straight and decent expressions sprung from the past question the passersby and are questioned in return.

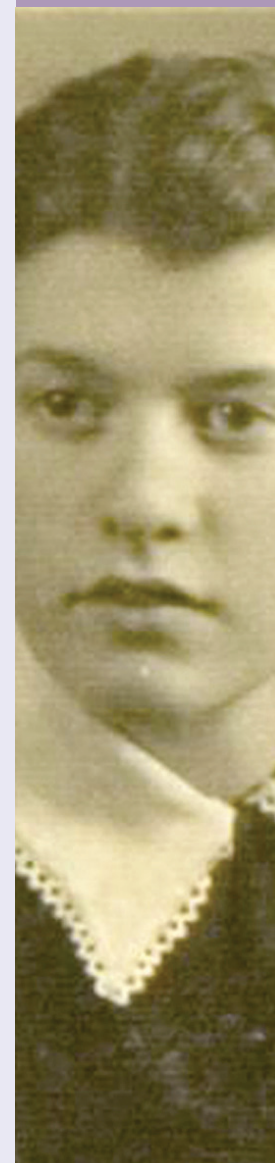
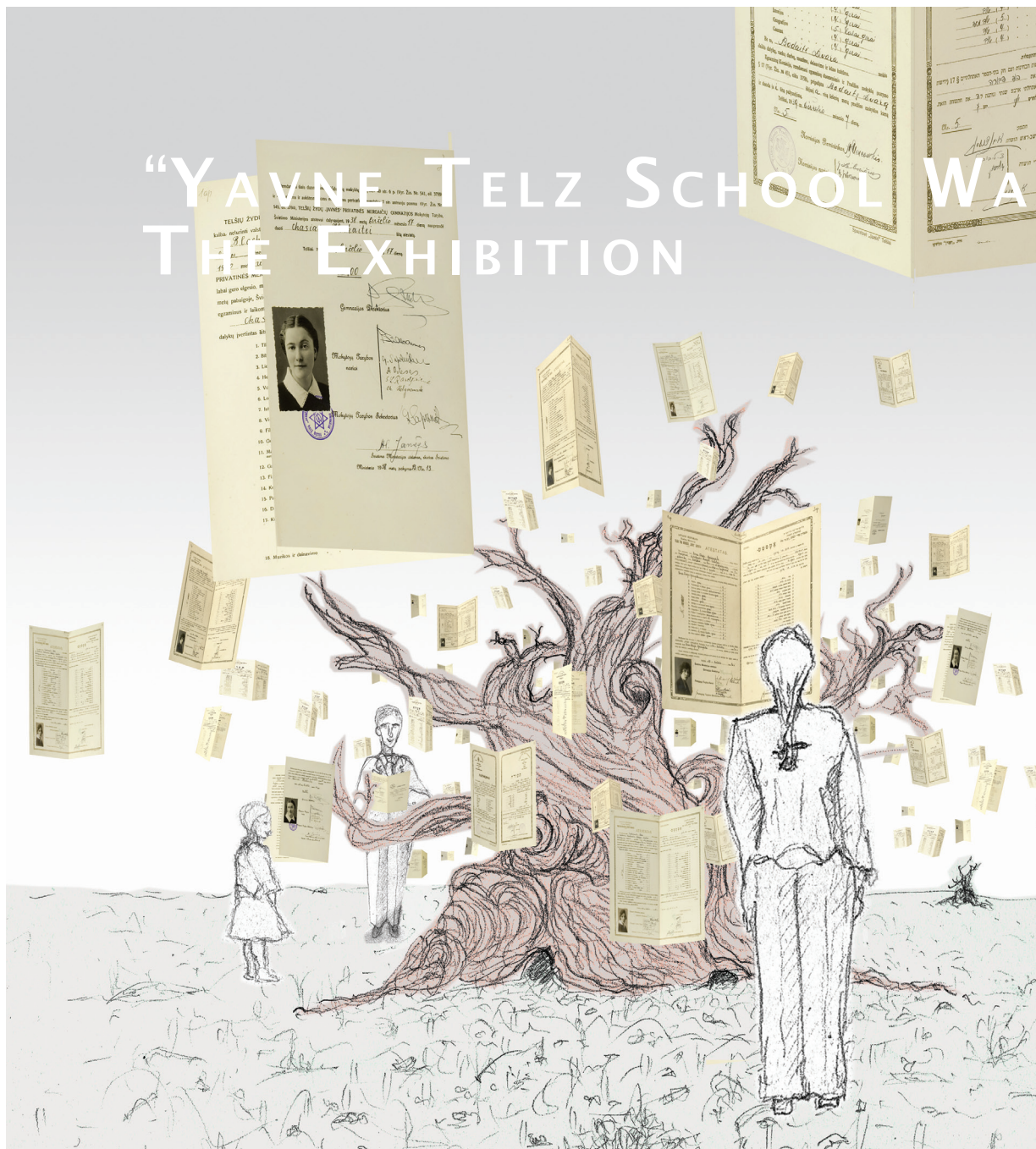




# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION

AWAKENING LIVES

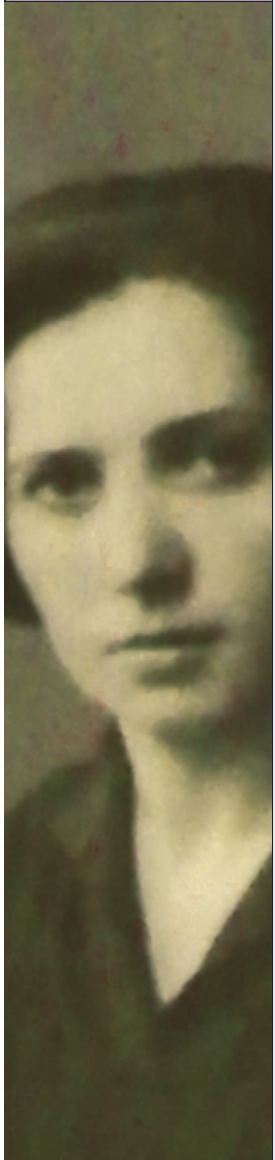
VIES ÉCLOUES





AWAKENING LIVES

VIES ÉCLOUES



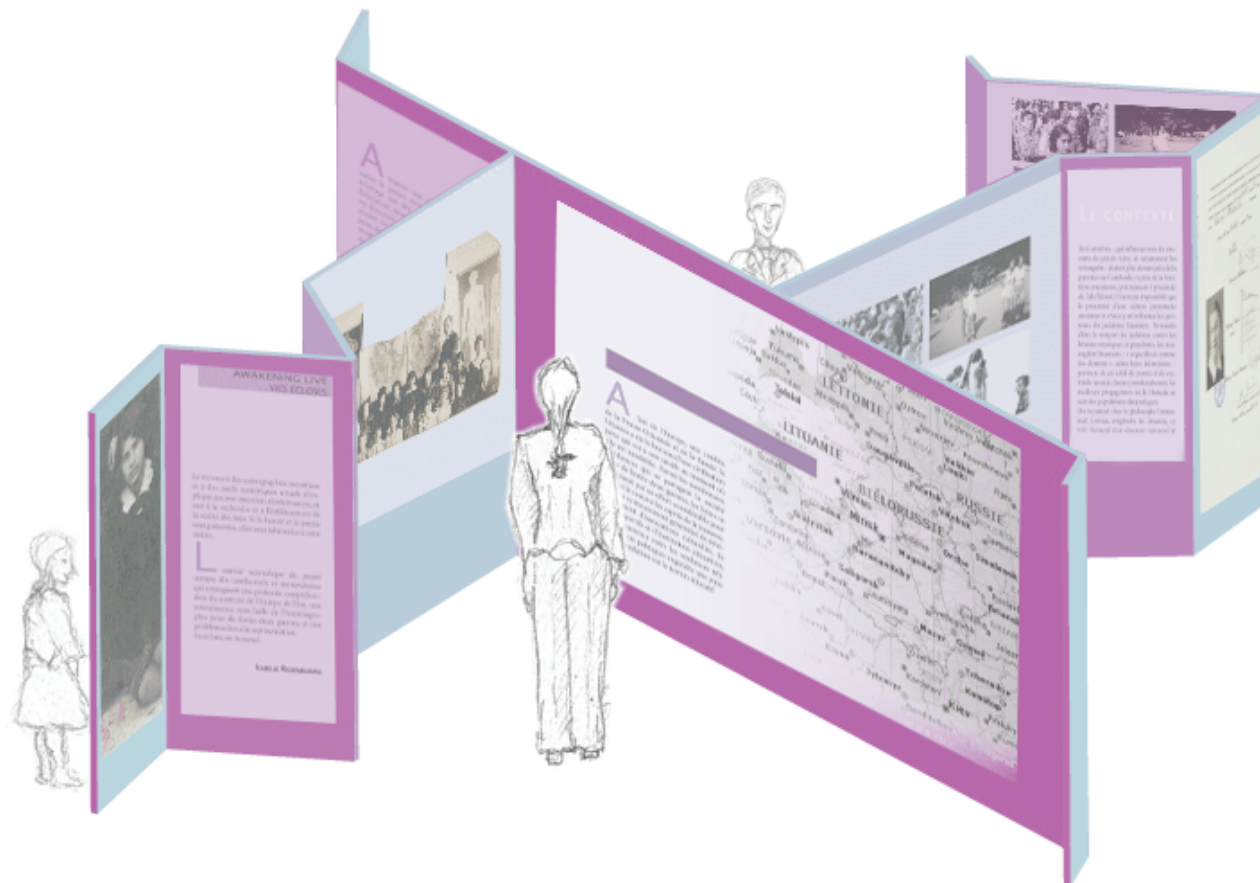
# “YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE” THE EXHIBITION

בת כמה את



**Bat Kama At (How Old Are You?) is the blueprint for the exhibition.**

# "YAVNE TELZ SCHOOL WAS LIFE" THE EXHIBITION





## APPENDIX

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

#### **Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett**

Professor of Performance Studies, New York University; Program Director, Core Exhibition, Museum of the History of Polish Jews: [http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/template/gfx/inf\\_pras\\_1\\_en.pdf](http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/template/gfx/inf_pras_1_en.pdf)



#### **Jonathan Boyarin**

Leonard and Tobee Kaplan Distinguished Professor of Modern Jewish Thought, Jonathan Boyarin, University of North Carolina at Chapel



Hill: <http://www.unc.edu/ccjs/faculty.bios08/boyarin.bio.html>

#### **David Biale**

Emanuel Ringelblum Distinguished Professor. Chair, Department of History. University of California, Davis. Author and editor of many books: <http://history.ucdavis.edu/people/dbiale>



#### **Yitskhok Niborski**

Professor of Yiddish at INALCO, Paris. Fondator and main figure of “Maison de la Culture Yiddish Bibliothèque Medem”, Paris.

Author of dictionaries Yiddish-French: <http://yiddishparis.com/blog/tag/yitskhok-niborski/>



#### **Samuel Kassow**

Charles H. Northam Professor of History, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Kassow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Kassow). His major contribution to Jewish historiography: Who Will Write Our History: Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oyneq Shabes





## APPENDIX

Archive, Indiana University Press, 2007.

**Jonathan Brent**

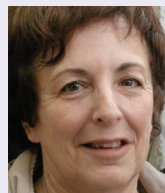
Executive Director, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Editorial Director of the “Annals of Communism” at Yale University Press : <http://www.yivo-institute.org/index.php?tid=154&aid=594>



**Prof. Anna Foa**

Storia Moderna, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università La Sapienza, Roma: <http://w3.uniroma1.it/dsmc/old/docenti/foa.htm>. Also

on the board of the Jewish Museum in Ferrara and Bologna.



**Saul Issroff**

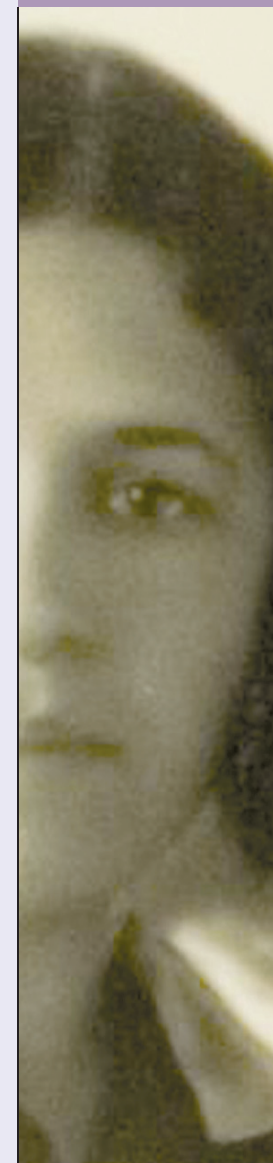
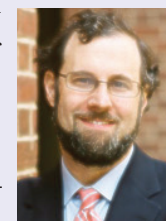
Author, with Rose Lerer-Cohen, of the monumental *The Holocaust in Lithuania 1941-1945: A Book of Remembrance* (4 volumes). He is one of the founding members of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain. He is one of the most distinguished specialists in Lithuanian and



South African Jewish history and archival resources.

**David E. Fishman**

Professor of Jewish History at The Jewish Theological Seminary, teaching courses in modern Jewish history. Dr. Fishman serves as director of Project Judaica, a Jewish-studies program based in Moscow that is sponsored jointly by JTS and Russian State University for the Humanities. [http://www.jtsa.edu/x1342.xml?ID\\_NUM=100154](http://www.jtsa.edu/x1342.xml?ID_NUM=100154)



AWAKENING LIVES

VIES ÉCLOSES



## APPENDIX



EXCURSION OF THE CHILDREN OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FOR THE FESTIVAL OF LAG BA-OMER

## APPENDIX

## THE AUTHORS



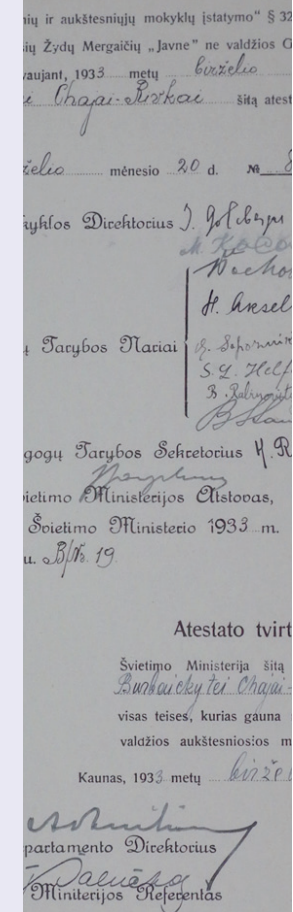
**Isabelle Rozenbaumas** has studied and worked since more than twenty five years in the field of Jewish Studies. Trained as an historian and Yiddishist, professionnel translator

from English and Yiddish to French, she is the author of many translations about Jewish history and culture.

The student, then personal assistant of the French historian Pierre

Vidal-Naquet, she has participated to the editing and publishing of a number of his major works and has closely followed his reflection on the topic of Jewish history relating to Jewish memory.

Librarian at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, in Paris from 1996 to 2003, she has moved in 2004 to New York. There, she has been in charge – as assistant of Paul Glasser – of the Yiddish programs at the Max Weinreich Center in YIVO, New York, from 2006 to 2007. In 2002, her passion for Yiddish has resulted in the making of a film with Michel Grosman [nemt] : une langue sans peuple pour un peuple sans langue – [nemt]: A Language Without A People For A People Without A Language (English version in 2004). She also co-authored her father's memoirs: Moïshe Rozenbaumas, L'odyssée d'un voleur de pommes, La cause des Livres, 2004 – autobiography of a child and young man in







## APPENDIX

Jewish Lithuania, his life and survival as young man and a scout in the Red Army and under the Soviet regime.

Born to this Lithuanian Jewish family, she is since 2008 the author of the project Bat Kama At that is developed on the website <http://batkamaat.org/> and is the source of the exhibitions and installations to be created under the titles Apprendre c'est vivre et School Was Life.

Isabelle Rozenbaumas is the authors of articles, presentations and essays : «Traduire le témoignage», «Toujours la première fois, toujours l'unique fois », presentation at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris, January 2008. « Le jardin de Gusta », postscript to Martin Lemelman, La fille de Mendel, Editions Ça et Là, 2007.

« Une traduction particulière », postscript to Moishe Rozenbaumas, L'Odyssée d'un voleur de pommes, Paris, La cause des livres, 2004.

With Michel Grosman : « Les jeunes filles et la centrale nucléaire », Après Auschwitz (Bulletin de l'Amicale des déportés d'Auschwitz), March (278) 2001. Published in Polish in Midrasz, September (89) 2004 together with a letter to Czeslaw Milosz.

« Les études juives en France au début du XIXe siècle. Ambiguïtés et contradictions », in Transmission et Passages en monde juif, Esther Benbassa (ed.), Editions Publisud, 1997.

« Deux itinéraires d'hébraïstes: Ernest Renan et Joseph Derenbourg », in Pardès 19/20, Le Cerf, 1994.

« La terre d'Israël dans l'histoire », Israël, Guide Bleu, Hachette, 1987, 1995.

« Science du judaïsme en Allemagne et en France au XIXe siècle », DEA theses in History, under the direction of Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Université Paris VII Jussieu, 1987.

Her last translation of Max WEINREICH, Hitlers professorn, New York, Yivo-bletter 27-28, 1946, 1946 [Hitler's Professors. The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People, 1946, Yivo, New York], was translated from the Yiddish original, is about to be published in 2013 at Éditions des Belles-Lettres under the title Les professeurs avec Hitler.

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At the same publisher, she has translated Arnaldo MOMIGLIANO [The Classical Foundations of Modern History (University of California Press, 1990)], Les Fondations du savoir historique, Avant-propos de R. di Donato, 1990; Peter GARNSEY, Famine et approvisionnement dans le monde gallo-romain, 1996; Gabriel GORODETSKY [Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia (Yale University Press, 1999, pbk edn, 2001)], Le grand jeu de dupes. Staline et l'invasion allemande, 2000; Robert ALTER [Necessary Angels: Tradition and modernity in Kafka, Benjamin and Scholem (1991, Harvard University Press)], Les Anges nécessaires. Kafka, Benjamin et

Scholem entre tradition et modernité, 2001.

For Éditions Bayard, she has translated from the Yiddish the memoirs of the early Zionist and Socialist educator, Puah RAKOVSKI [Zikhroynes fun a yidisher revolutzionerin. Buenos Aires: 1954; My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland, edited, annotated and with an introduction by Paula E. Hyman, trans. by Barbara Harshav with Paula E. Hyman. Bloomington, Indiana: 2001], Mémoires d'une révolutionnaire juive, 2006.

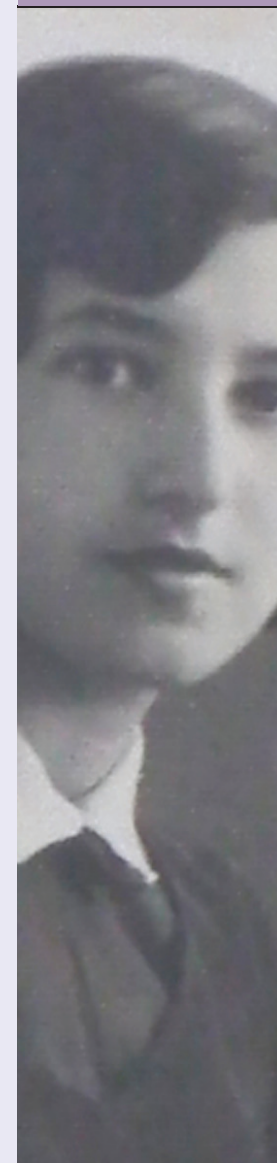
She is also the translator of Chief Rabbi Jonathan SACKS [The Dignity of Difference. How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations (Continuum,

London and NY, 2002)], La dignité de la différence. Pour éviter le choc des civilisations, Bayard, 2002, and of the book of Walteur LAQUEUR [The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism. From Ancient Times to the Present Day (Oxford University press, 2006)], L'antisémisme dans tous ses états. Depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours, Éditions Markus Haller, 2010.

Membership:

ATLF : Association des traducteurs littéraires de France

AJS : Association for Jewish Studies.





## APPENDIX

### THE AUTHORS



**M**ichel Grosman  
 michel.grosman@gmail.com  
 00 33 6.88.54.84.62

Actor and theater and documentary film director Michel Grosman has worked on 11 plays and 9 films shown in over 20 different countries since 1980.

He has directed several films for exhibitions at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (Museum of Jewish Art and History) in Paris, including:  
 - "Dreyfus Aujourd'hui" (Dreyfus Today).

- "La bibliothèque idéale de Gotlib" (Gotlib's Ideal Library).

Two films are available in english version online in their entirety on Vimeo:

- "Sazanikos".

- "[Nemt] A Language Without A People For A People Without A Language".

He has participated in the creation of several installations and exhibitions, such as:

Exhibition of new artistic technology at the Parc Floral in Paris.

"Imaginary Cathedrals" at Galerie Air libre in Evry.

Quebecois Program in Brest 2000.

"Gorges d'Enfer" theme park at the Eyzies in Dordogne.



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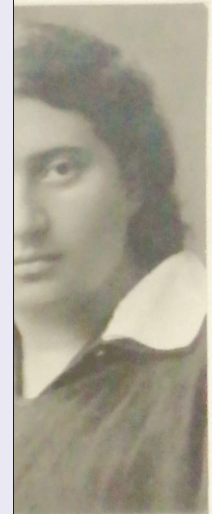
Image of immigration in European television on top of the Arche de la Défense in Paris.

Audiovisual program for development in Central Europe with the NGO: Minority Right Group.

“Discriminations” at the Great Library of France, for the CNFPT (National Center for Regional Public Function). Michel created the website *Bat Kama At*, the primary phase of the project “Yavne Telz School was Life.”

He is a member of the following societies of French authors: ADAMI, SACD and SCAM.

Tels'ai, 1932



TUVOS RESPUBLIK





## APPENDIX

### JEWISH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN TELZ: A BRIEF HISTORY

**P**ractically the entire educational system in Telz was controlled by Orthodox Jews; however, other influences were strongly apparent, such as the spiritualist Mussar movement. Telz was distinguished by its piety and its affinity for study. Be it in the Yeshivah (named “Etz Hayim”: The Tree of Life) or in its synagogues, the rabbinate was the sole authority. Its influence was also felt in the Yavne school which approximately 300 girls from Telz and its surrounding area attended starting in 1921.

**I**n 1920 a nursery school was founded in connection to the Yavne school network, and in the 1930’s the “WIZO” (Women’s International Zionist Organization) established its own school of a similar type. In 1921 an elementary school for girls existed whose curriculum included the study of prayers, the Bible with Rashi’s commentary, and *Halakhah* (Jewish law), in addition to general culture; 120 girls were in attendance in 1935. An “Educational Institute for Boys” also opened in 1920, where the *Gemara* (Talmud) was taught for a duration of 4 years, after which time the students may have been accepted to the

*Mekhinah* (preparatory school) of the Yeshiva. The girls continued their studies at the Yavne Hebrew School, a high school founded in 1921, which acquired fame beyond Lithuania due to the solidity of the religious education it offered its students, in addition to its excellence in secular subjects, including Latin, natural sciences, and physical education. Yavne was comprised of 8 grade levels, and the administration saw to it that the best available teachers were hired there. The curriculum included both religious and secular subjects. Every morning the students participated in a *Shakhris* service led by one of their classmates. *Minkhah* and *Maariv* services were also conducted later in the day, after classes ended.

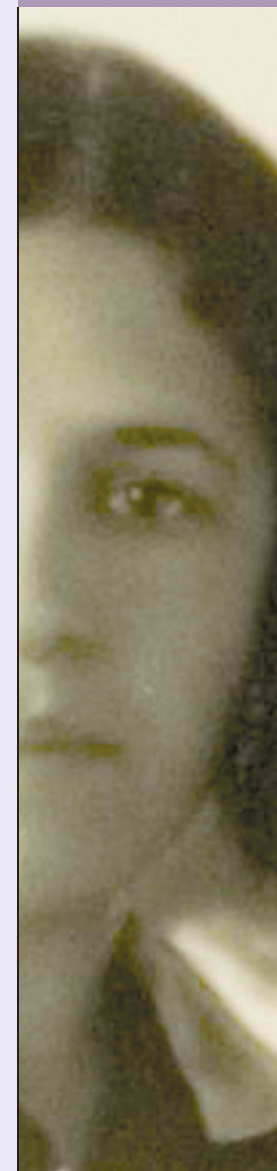
## APPENDIX

**T**his high level of both religious and secular education in Yavne Gymnasium, Sore Pier-Shlomovitz remarks in the Sefer Telz, produced a generation of remarkable educators, graduates of the school, who instilled in their students an authentic *yiddishkayt* (Judaism or Jewishness), and a great respect for their parents and all human beings.

**T**he rabbis and orthodox Jews of the Telz region sent their daughters to this school, whose first principal

was Dr. Levi, succeeded by Shmuel Tsukerman. During the following ten years (1923-1933), the principal was Dr. Yitskhak Rafael Holtsberg-Etsyon, who would later become an inspector of religious schools for the Israeli government, and lived until 1982. Other principals followed: Dr. Levitan-Shereshevsky, Dr. Zaltsberg, Shalom Shokhat, Shelomo Trakhtenberg and Y. Shnaider; the two were murdered in the genocide along with seven of the school's fourteen teachers. The school produced twelve graduating classes during the time of its existence, before closing in 1940 with the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet authorities.

**W**e have evidence from as early as 1923 of training courses for teachers. A teacher training college opened officially in 1928 (as the first graduating class exited Yavne High School). This institution was authorized to dispense degrees awarded by the Minister of Education, permitting the graduates to teach at any affiliated Yavne school in Lithuania. Candidates studied for four years. In total, ten graduating classes of teachers came out of this college. Dr. Mordekhai Vesler (1892-1941), its dean and spiritual guide, was murdered in Telz in July of 1941.





AWAKENING LIVES

VIES ÉCLOUES



# CONTACTS

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English version translated from the French by Jake Shulman-Ment and kindly reviewed by Nahma Sandrow.  
Design of this brochure by Alain Le Roy.

