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Introduction

A Torah in South Texas

In a small synagogue south of San Antonio, a Torah sits in a brightly lit display case to the side of the sanctuary. The scroll is open to a passage from the book of Exodus, the familiar Hebrew text of a song Miriam and Moses sang after escaping Egypt and crossing the Red Sea. All Torahs, including this one, are handmade—the calligraphy copied, the wooden rollers carved and polished, the pages of parchment stitched together one by one. This scroll, however, was made many decades ago, thousands of miles away from Texas, in a country that no longer exists. So why is this Torah here, in a temple on the Gulf Coast, behind glass? A small handwritten sign in the front of the case provides an answer:

This Torah, from Domažlice, Czechoslovakia, was one of the few that survived the Holocaust. It was confiscated by the Nazis during World War II, and was rescued after the war by the Westminster [sic] Synagogue in London, England. It is on permanent loan to Temple Beth El, and its acquisition and display was made possible through the generosity of Dorothy and Harry Trodlier.

Rabbi Kenneth D. Roseman, the rabbi-emeritus of this Corpus Christi congregation, wrote about the spiritual significance of having an artifact from the Holocaust in the temple: “It is not only the physical scroll that has come to rest in South Texas. I believe that the souls of all the Jews of Domažlice, the people who read from this Torah...whose lives were mercilessly cut short, have also migrated to our city and into our congregation.”¹

The gravity of this display was not lost on me when I first came across the Torah as an eight-year-old, but much of the Torah’s history was. For many years, I imagined that it had been smuggled out by an emigrating family, or ripped from the clutches of Nazis, a dramatic saga in the style of a movie like *Monuments Men*. To my surprise, however, I learned that the Domažlice Torah

¹ Kenneth D. Roseman, *Of Tribes and Tribulations*, (Wipf & Stock Publishers: 2014), 24.

in my temple was not one of only a few, as the placard had suggested. It was one of 1,564 Torah scrolls collected by the Jewish Museum in Prague in an unlikely and bizarre moment of cooperation between Nazi officials and Jewish curators. After the war, the Torahs were purchased by a London synagogue and distributed throughout the world to commemorate the Jews who perished in the Czech lands. Today, there are Czech Torahs in museums and universities, temples and synagogues, presidential libraries and even Windsor Castle.

Relatively little has been written about the story of the Czech Torah scrolls, despite recent academic and popular interest in tracing the provenance of Jewish property stolen by the Nazis in the Second World War. Surprisingly, two of the books that focus exclusively on the Czech Torahs are picture books for children: *The Tattooed Torah*, and *I Am A Holocaust Torah*.² Other texts about the Torahs are usually brief, occasionally inaccurate, and often geared towards a popular audience. Academic analyses are few and far between. The scrolls feature mostly as footnotes in other articles, specifically those about the wartime history of the Jewish Museum in Prague³—issues of restitution, national identity, political ideology, and exhibit design are examined, but the Torahs are often excluded. Only two books give attention to the comprehensive story of the Torah scrolls, widening their chronologies to include what happened before and after World War II. The first, *The Second Life of Czech Torah Scrolls*, was created as a bilingual Czech-English catalogue to accompany a 2006 exhibit at the Jewish Museum in Prague.⁴ Basic information about the Jewish religion and ritual practices occupies much of the slender publication before the book begins to narrate the history of

² Jo Gershman, *The Tattooed Torah* (URJ Books, 1983); Alex J. Goldman, *I Am a Holocaust Torah: The Story of the Saving of 1,564 Torahs Stolen by the Nazis* (Gefen Books, 2000).

³ See Hana Volavková, translated by K. E. Lichteneker. *A Story of the Jewish Museum in Prague* (Prague: Artia, 1968); Dirk Rupnow, "From Final Depository to Memorial: The History and Significance of the Jewish Museum in Prague," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2004), 142-159; Leo Pavlat, "The Jewish Museum During the Second World War," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2008), 124-130.

⁴ Dana Veselská, *The Second Life of the Czech Torah Scrolls* (Prague: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006).

the Torahs, and it focuses on describing items in the museum's collection rather than examining Torahs' wider history abroad. The other book, Philippa Bernard's *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, was written in 2005 to replace the smaller informational pamphlets provided to visitors and recipients of the scrolls by the Memorial Scrolls Trust, the London group that distributed the Torahs.⁵ Bernard focuses on the personalities that rescued and restored the scrolls, but there is little mention of the use of the scrolls abroad. Both sources, then, are more institutional self-portraits than dispassionate analytical works. They reference the Torahs' memorial significance, but do not examine the origin of that designation or its influence on the scrolls' current use.

Nearly a century has elapsed since the beginning of World War II, and most people first encounter the history of the Holocaust through books, movies, statues, or museum displays. As years go on, we hear from witnesses and survivors—the primary sources—less and less. As journalist Philip Gourevitch notes in his essay about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), “what we cannot remember directly, we must imagine through representation...our response is less immediately to the event than to the medium that has conveyed it to us.”⁶ There are thousands of monuments, museums, and memorials about the Holocaust across the globe; the ways they represent the past have real power over how and who we remember, and each deserves its own attention. James Young, a scholar of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies and an expert on Holocaust commemoration, emphasizes the importance of establishing a memorial's “biography” —clarifying and recording the “activity that brought them into being, the constant give and take between memorials and viewers,” and the ways in which institutions shape and create those histories.⁷

⁵ Philippa Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire* (London: Westminster Synagogue, 2005).

⁶ Philip Gourevitch, “Behold now behemoth: The Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *Harper's Magazine* (1993).

⁷ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), ix.

This essay provides a biography of the Torahs as instruments of commemoration. The first chapter tells the story of how they were saved during World War II at the Jewish Museum in Prague. The second describes their acquisition by a London congregation, and how members of that synagogue created and realized a restitutive memorial project. The next section situates this memorial within the context of other categories of Holocaust commemoration, linking it to a more recent trend of decentralized memorials. The final section describes the design, layout, and impact of the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum in London.

The scrolls' identities have evolved and overlapped: they have been liturgical texts, museum pieces, object survivors, heirless property, and decentralized Holocaust memorials—in use, on display, in hiding, lost, found. Tracing the memorial Torahs' provenance, preservation, and use reveals a distinctive history that illuminates their remarkable significance.

Origins

The Jewish Museum in Prague and the Second World War

The memorial scrolls are defined by the history of the Jewish Museum in Prague, whose scope changed fundamentally under Nazi occupation during World War II. The story chronicles the remarkable series of events that allowed the museum to acquire and protect an enormous quantity of objects—including more than a thousand Torah scrolls—from Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia. Understanding the wider circumstances of the Jewish Museum explains the first sparks of a commemorative impulse after the war, and debunks a persistent and pernicious legend about how the scrolls were collected.

Prague's Jewish Town, where the Jewish Museum stands today, is now a wealthy shopping district with high-end fashion outposts and upscale restaurants. In the last half of the nineteenth century Josefov—the Jewish Quarter—was populated mostly by the ultra-Orthodox and the most impoverished of the Jewish community.⁸ Derek Sayer, a historian of Czechoslovakia, writes that in the nineteenth century, the Quarter was known for “overcrowding, the squalor, the filth, the disease, the absences of light, of air, of sanitation.”⁹ In 1894, urban planners on Prague's city council called for the demolition of the slums and rebuilding of a newer, cleaner Josefov.¹⁰ Their plans, however, meant tearing down two-thirds of the synagogues in the quarter.

Eager to preserve ritual objects from the demolished synagogues, Solomon Hugo Leiben, a historian, and August Stein, a city councilor, assembled a collection of items and founded Prague's Jewish Museum in 1906. For the first few decades of the museum's existence, it was small but well attended; in 1929, the museum had 13,000 paying visitors.¹¹ The collection had roughly a

⁸ Ctibor Rybár, *Jewish Prague: Gloses on history and kultur: a guidebook* (TV Spektrum, Akropolis Publishers, 1991), 73.

⁹ Derek Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 52.

¹⁰ Rybár, *Jewish Prague*, 90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

thousand articles, divided equally between archival materials, fine art, and Jewish ritual objects. However, no Torah scrolls were included in the original holdings. Most of these objects were silver, such as menorahs, Kiddush cups, and spice boxes.¹²

The scope and scale of the museum transformed radically during World War II. The Munich Agreement in 1938 completely reshaped the borders of the formerly independent republic of Czechoslovakia. Land was ceded to Germany and Hungary before converting Slovakia into a nominally autonomous state and establishing a protectorate in the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. Of all the European capitals, Prague was under Nazi occupation the longest.¹³ In 1939, the Nazis created an office in Prague called the *Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung*, or the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, modelled on a similar administrative office in Vienna. The *Zentralstelle*, the brainchild of Adolf Eichmann, was designed to acquire the property of Jewish people forced from their homes and businesses.¹⁴ This policy of emigration would later become one of extermination. As in other countries, the Prague *Zentralstelle* enlisted the help of the Council of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague to efficiently carry out their goals.

Even after the invasion in 1939, the Jewish Museum in Prague remained open. This was unusual: in 1938, the Jewish museums in Frankfurt and Vienna were both closed and quickly destroyed.¹⁵ In a guidebook written during this time, the Jewish Museum in Prague described its collection as primarily artistic, deemphasizing the religious significance of its collection. However, there were no clear motivations or precedents for the Nazi administration in Prague to permit such a

¹² Leo Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum During the Second World War," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2008), 124.

¹³ Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 8.

¹⁴ Magda Veselská, "'The Museum of an Extinct Race' – Fact vs. Legend," *Judaica Bohemiae* 2 (2014), 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

museum to continue its work.¹⁶ Apart from the silver, the ceremonial contents of a Jewish museum would not have been immediately valuable in the hands of new Nazi owners.

However, some items of Jewish cultural heritage possessed fetishistic magnetism for members of the Nazi elite. Jewish Museum historian Magda Veselská notes that Hebrew books were considered a specifically “sought-after article,” fitting into an ideological inclination for *Gegnerforschung*, or “studying the enemy.”¹⁷ Ceremonial objects “were not nearly as well-documented in Nazi administrative records as Jewish books and archives,” possibly because they were often destroyed.¹⁸ Historian Alon Confino argues that on *Kristallnacht*, the Nazis specifically destroyed Torahs as a way to symbolically purge Germany of Jewish influence: “burning the Bible was a way to visualize Judaism, to make tangible the enemy that was being destroyed.”¹⁹ While Jewish museums were closed, libraries of Hebrew-language literature in Germany survived immediate destruction, their collections shipped instead to the pseudo-academic Institute for Research on the Jewish Question in Frankfurt.²⁰ It is possible that the museum functioned as a storehouse for these kinds of books, as well as the silver objects, which had basic monetary value. Editor and diplomat Ctibor Rybár hypothesizes that “in the concentrating of Jewish cultural monuments the Nazis saw not only an easy way of becoming rich, but also a possibility of misusing them for anti-Jewish propaganda...or perhaps as a means of pressure in the course of negotiations with the allies.”²¹ Veselská also suggests that *SS-Sturmbannführer* Hans Günther, the director of

¹⁶ Veselská, “The Museum of an Extinct Race,” 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸ Julie-Marthe Cohen, “Introduction,” in *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 19.

¹⁹ Alon Confino, *A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 121.

²⁰ Julie-Marthe Cohen, “Theft and Restitution of Judaica in the Netherlands During and After the Second World War,” in *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 201.

²¹ Rybár, *Jewish Prague*, 235.

Prague's *Zentralstelle*, fancied himself a man of culture and scholarship, and that overseeing the museum was his pet project.²²

In 1941, Jewish religious practices in the Protectorate were banned. The Nazis began deporting Jews to Terezín, an Austro-Hungarian fortress converted into a hybrid transit camp and ghetto. The Jewish community in Prague “was compelled to set up a *Treuhandstelle* [trust office] for overseeing the confiscated assets of Jewish deportees,” with requisitioned property to be stored within the Jewish museum, including the now-empty synagogues in the complex.²³ Notably, the last entry in the museum's visitors' book was dated November 24th, 1941, just as the first regular transports to Terezín had begun.²⁴ The Jewish Museum was no longer a public institution. While the museum would continue to curate exhibitions throughout the war, these were only on display for Nazi officials and their guests. In 1942, the museum was rebranded by the Nazis as the “Central Jewish Museum.”²⁵

In the spring of 1942, the deputy of the Protectorate's *Zentralstelle*, Nazi officer Karl Rahm, asked the Jewish community to circulate a letter requiring all books and “historic and historically valuable” objects from outlying communities be sent to Prague to be sorted, organized, and warehoused in the museum.²⁶ In the summer of that year, boxes and parcels from twenty-nine provincial communities arrived in Prague.²⁷ Some communities sent one or two museum-worthy objects, such as military medals or historical letters from their local archives. But in other areas, where the deportations were becoming increasingly intense, the instructions in the letter were

²² Veselská, “The Museum of an Extinct Race,” 63, 66-67.

²³ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

²⁴ Pavlát, “The Jewish Museum During the Second World War,” 124.

²⁵ Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 138.

²⁶ Dr. Karel Stein, “Circular Letter: 3 August 1942,” reproduced in Magda Veselská, *Archa paměti: Cesta pražského židovského muzea pohnutým 20. stoletím [The Ark of Memory: The Journey of the Jewish Museum in the Turbulent 20th Century]* (Prague: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2012), 65.

²⁷ Pavlát, “The Jewish Museum During the Second World War,” 125.

interpreted much more broadly: some communities shipped everything they could to Prague, not only documents and objects from local museums and archives. The resulting catalogue of items includes musical instruments, paintings, or chandeliers, and more mundane possessions, like typewriters, tablecloths, binoculars, and buckets.²⁸ These objects were not necessarily of clear historic or academic interest; most of them had never been in a museum collection before. This assortment of objects suggests that the owners wanted to protect their belongings from looting or ransacking in their absence, and that they planned to return and restart the kind of life—both religious and the secular—that would require those possessions. Later that year, the Jewish museum began to receive massive shipments from towns and villages in the Protectorate, more than a hundred crates from Brno alone.²⁹ Under the guise of an instructive sent by the Nazis and interpreted loosely by the local Jewish communities, the property was unpacked, catalogued, and stored in the defunct museum.³⁰

After these unexpected shipments arrived in the middle of 1942, “a new concept for a central museum emerged” among the Jewish workers at the museum.³¹ These conversations involved the original founders of the museum, leaders of the Jewish Community in Prague, and museum staff—importantly, however, without the participation of Nazi officials.³² The loose interpretations of the circular letter in the outlying communities inspired Karel Stein, a Jewish lawyer and member of the Rural Affairs department of the *Treuhandstelle*, to find a way to take advantage of the enormous volume of materials coming to Prague. He petitioned the Nazi *Zentralstelle* to send out another circular letter, one that would cast a wider net. In the summer of 1942, Stein requested that “all

²⁸ Hana Volavková, *A Story of the Jewish Museum in Prague* (Prague: Artia, 1968), 28.

²⁹ Veselská, “The Museum of an Extinct Race,” 53.

³⁰ A small number of German Jewish communities voluntarily gifted objects to the Frankfurt Jewish Museum in 1938, after a pogrom, but during *Kristallnacht*, the museum was razed and Torah scrolls from local synagogues were hacked to pieces before being burned; see Katharina Rauschenberger, “The Judaica Collection of Frankfurt’s Museum Jüdische Altertümer and Its Worldwide Dispersion After 1945,” in *Neglected Witnesses* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011).

³¹ Pavlát, “The Jewish Museum During the Second World War,” 128.

³² *Ibid.*, 125.

moveable assets" be brought to Prague.³³ Veselská reports that Stein asserted to the Nazi *Zentralstelle* that this property would mostly be "artifacts," and as such, the museum was a logical place to catalogue and warehouse them.³⁴ To the museum staff's surprise, the *Zentralstelle* agreed. The new circular letter asked rural Jewish communities to send *all* of their property—broader than the earlier stipulation of what was historically valuable—specifically listing items of silver, textiles, Torah scrolls, and books.³⁵ The request was issued under the authority of the Jewish Community in Prague with the "consent" of the *Zentralstelle*; the earlier letter had been more forcefully at its "behest."³⁶ Entire synagogues were packaged up and sent to Prague, from the essential and most important religious articles—prayer books, prayer shawls, Torah scrolls—to the quotidian, like pillows, washbasins, and tzedakah boxes.³⁷

While the museum served as a safe haven for the objects arriving from the countryside, Prague remained a dangerous place for Jewish people. Veselská notes that the work at the Central Museum was carried out under great stress, in an atmosphere when many were being deported.

As of 1 January 1943—after five months in operation—the museum team had processed 38,714 objects and 17,965 catalogue cards. As of 1 January 1944 it had processed a further 146,905 objects and 69,729 catalogue cards, and during 1944, under very difficult conditions, it processed a further 65,685 objects under 37,412 registration numbers.³⁸

Among these items were "Torah ornaments—shields, finials, crowns, pointers—candlesticks, plates, beakers, alms-boxes, curtains, canopies, valences, cushions, mantles, shawl bags, kittels, flags and banners, illuminated manuscripts, prayer books, scrolls, wedding contracts, diplomas, ceremonial plaques, portraits, photographs."³⁹ The new collection included more than a thousand individual

³³ Veselská, "The Museum of an Extinct Race," 59.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Stein, "Circular Letter."

³⁶ Veselská, "The Museum of an Extinct Race," 60-61.

³⁷ Stein, "Circular Letter."

³⁸ Veselská, "The Museum of an Extinct Race," 63.

³⁹ Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 138.

Torah scrolls. Though the museum was not open to the public, its holdings were growing at an astonishing rate, transformed by the influx of ceremonial and personal objects. However, the *Zentralstelle*—especially Hans Günther—wanted the Central Museum to stage actual exhibitions for the Nazi staff. It would not be without precedent for a religion to be condemned through the display of its own ritual objects. For instance, the Soviet government attacked the Orthodox church by sponsoring anti-religion museums in the 1920s.⁴⁰ Nazis collected works of modern art they deemed “degenerate”—anything elitist, avant-garde, even remotely Jewish—into exhibitions designed to inculcate derision towards culture that fell outside of the National Socialist ideology. At the Jewish Museum in Prague, three exhibitions were put on during the war, including dioramas about Jewish ceremonies, the history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, and displays of Hebrew books.⁴¹ Incredibly, there was no direct oversight from the Nazis about the style or content of the curation, and the exhibitions—staged by the Jewish curators and designers—contained no national socialist propaganda or antisemitic stereotypes.

Right as the war ended, the museum—which had survived bombings—had acquired more than one hundred thousand objects, expanding its collection nearly three hundredfold. By the end of the war, “over 200,000 separate objects were listed by hand on 101,090 index cards.”⁴² Most of these objects had never been in a museum before. But this work occurred against a backdrop of intense loss. Museum operations slowed by the end of 1943 as employees of the museum were arrested, deported, and killed. By 1945, all of the curators with the exception of Hana Volavková had been deported to Terezín. At the beginning of the war, 118,310 Jews lived in the Protectorate of Bohemia

⁴⁰ Crispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 81.

⁴¹ Leo Pavlát, “The Jewish Museum During the Second World War,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2008), 127-128.

⁴² Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 138.

and Moravia; around 26,000 emigrated before 1941.⁴³ In 1945, only 14,000 Jews remained alive in Czech territories, with a significant proportion of the surviving Czech Jewish population emigrating to Israel. As German historian Dirk Rupnow states, the Jewish Museum's improbable "growth of the collection...was a direct reflection of the deportations of the Jewish communities in the Protectorate," a strange "alliance between museums and death."⁴⁴

In the introduction to *The Cultures of Collecting*, art historian John Elsner writes, "when bureaucracy underwrites the totalizing impulse, collecting is at its most dangerous. The Holocaust can be seen as a collection of Jews."⁴⁵ In this case, however, the collection of objects was done by the Jews: local communities and museum staff hijacked Nazis' pseudoscientific interests and greed to save objects from theft and destruction. Extraordinarily, items from all 153 pre-war Jewish communities that existed prior to World War II were preserved in Prague.⁴⁶ The work of the museum staff and the provincial communities embodied "saving in its strongest sense, not just casual keeping but conscious rescuing from extinction—collection as salvation," an act of cultural resistance.⁴⁷

A notorious legend about the museum's wartime purpose has obscured the genuine story of resistance. The myth complicates the historical record of the objects' provenance, and erases some people who had agency in the process of the Torahs' memorialization. Intended to explain the unlikely fact that the collection and museum facilities were not destroyed, the legend purports that Hitler, Eichmann, or high-ranking Nazi officials in Berlin collected and preserved items to create a

⁴³ "The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-holocaust-in-bohemia-and-moravia>. Web.

⁴⁴ Dirk Rupnow, "From Final Depository to Memorial: The History and Significance of the Jewish Museum in Prague," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2004), 146.

⁴⁵ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, ed. *Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 4.

⁴⁶ Rybár, *Jewish Prague*, 235.

⁴⁷ Elsner, *Cultures of Collecting*, 1.

“museum of the extinct race,” which would provide remnants of Jewish cultural artifacts once the Final Solution successfully had removed any living Jews from Europe. Regardless, the myth is repeated on Prague tourist websites, in academic articles and works of fiction, some including quotation marks that cautiously indicate its status as a hypothesis, others regarding it purely as truth.⁴⁸ For example, Gourevitch’s 1993 *Harper’s Magazine* piece about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. incorrectly claims that “the first-ever plan for a Holocaust museum was drawn up by the Nazis; it was to stand in Prague, a collection of artifacts and images of European Jews, as a triumphant memorial to their annihilation.”⁴⁹ As Magda Veselská illustrates in an article devoted to tracing and debunking this legend, there is no evidence that such grand plans were ever envisioned. She writes that the legend “characterizes more the result than the goal of what happened during the war,” with no documentation recording a coherent Nazi directive about such intentions, and no indication that upper-level officials even knew that the museum in Prague existed.⁵⁰ The legend assumes that the “central” Jewish museum curated by the Nazis would have collected objects from all occupied lands, not just Bohemia and Moravia. However, the museum in Prague had no objects from Slovakia, Germany, or any other country. Such a museum would not need thousands of the same artifact—for example, Torah scrolls—in a collection for a single display; it would be simpler to use one of the most well-preserved samples, or one that best supported the aims of propaganda or stereotype.

⁴⁸ *Baedeker’s Prague* quoted in Introduction to *Capitalism and Modernity: An excursus on Marx and Weber* by Derek Sayer (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4; Bernard Weinraub, “Trove of Judaica Preserved by Nazis to Tour U.S.,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 1983; James Young, *Writing and rewriting the Holocaust: narrative and the consequences of interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 189; John William Bills, “Inside Prague’s Jewish Quarter,” Culture Trip, July 2, 2019, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/czech-republic/articles/inside-pragues-jewish-quarter/>; “Our Holocaust Torah – Sefer Torah #421,” Temple Israel, <https://www.templeisrael.org/sefer-torah-421>.

⁴⁹ Gourevitch, “Behold now behemoth.”

⁵⁰ Veselská, “The Museum of an Extinct Race,” 69.

The actual function of the Central Museum was more pragmatic—and more hands-off—than centrally ordained or ideologically motivated. In most occupied territory, Nazis “amassed their loot...uncritically, with no idea of what it was.”⁵¹ Leo Pavlát, the current director of the Jewish Museum, writes that in Prague “the Nazis had no experts for such specialist work as the registration and evaluation of confiscated Jewish artefacts that were of artistic or historical value. It is possible that the Nazis saw the museum as a special department of the *Treuhandstelle* with a different form of collection, documentation, storage, and evaluation of confiscated Jewish property.”⁵² In that case, the commandeering of the museum was a matter of efficiency, using specialists in Judaic artifacts and books to better evaluate their worth, working within the channels and resources of an existing institution.

For many readers, Jiří Weil’s novel *Mendelssohn is on the Roof*—published in Czech in 1960, translated into English in the 1990s—was their first introduction to the wartime story of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Weil, a Czech-Jewish author who worked at the museum from 1943 to 1945, wrote several well-regarded novels about the Czech experience of the Holocaust that gained an international readership. While names and situations are altered or exaggerated, one of the novel’s chapters is a very lightly fictionalized account of the museum’s operations. Weil writes,

It was actually a museum created at the request of the Central Bureau and also, perhaps, through efforts of certain shrewd people in the Jewish Community...it was to be a storehouse of trophies commemorating the Reich’s victory over its enemy...the museum was supposed to be a victory memorial, for the objects displayed here belonged to a race scheduled for annihilation. Nothing would remain of that race but these dead things.⁵³

He acknowledges the dual—and dueling—intentions in the founding of the museum, dabbling in the salaciousness of the extinct race legend while acknowledging the agency of the Jewish

⁵¹ Katharina Rauschenberger, “The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Objects and the Activities of Jewish Cultural Objects and the Activities of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 53 (2008), 195.

⁵² Pavlát, “The Jewish Museum During the Second World War,” 129.

⁵³ Jiří Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof*, trans. Marie Winn (Allentown: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 69-70.

community. Many of Weil's characters find their work humiliating, if not sacrilegious: "all the objects that had formerly been used for worship...lost their original purpose and now became merchandise, exhibition pieces that would never come to life again in a living faith."⁵⁴ In this fictional account, the legend is attractive for its macabre thrill and literary irony—it is quite possible that Weil advanced the myth in the words of his characters without actually believing in it himself. But repeating the legend outside of a novel—affording Nazis credit for being more clever, powerful, or disturbing than they actually were—ignores the real resourcefulness and agency both of the museum employees and the wider Jewish community in the Protectorate.

The work of the museum was first interpreted in a loosely memorial context in the postwar period. Hana Volavková was the only curator who survived the war; she became the director of the Jewish Museum in 1945, when it was briefly returned to the ownership of the Council of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague.⁵⁵ Volavková wrote in her book, *A Story of the Jewish Museum in Prague*, that the museum could be viewed "reverentially as a unique posthumous memorial that its creators built for themselves."⁵⁶ Volavková saw the museum collection as a whole as a reminder of the resistance of the workers, a cultural and intellectual project that maintained professionalism, dignity, and a sense of normalcy during a time of desecration and inhumanity. She wrote that "mass murder lies in the background of the museum and its collections are not only a symbol, but also a very real memorial to those who were murdered."⁵⁷ It seems she was willing to extend the Jewish Museum's commemorative meaning to include all those who were murdered in the Protectorate, but her original motivations were inspired by her personal remembrance of her colleagues. Magda

⁵⁴ Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof*, 69-70.

⁵⁵ Rybár, *Jewish Prague*, 237.

⁵⁶ Volavková, *A Story of the Jewish Museum in Prague*, 72.

⁵⁷ Magda Veselská, "Jewish Museums in the Former Czechoslovakia," in *Neglected Witnesses*, in *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 138.

Veselská notes in an essay that Volavková's book was "intended as an elegy, not a factual analysis of wartime events": this version of Volavková's conceptualization of the whole museum as a memorial was rhetorical and personal.⁵⁸

Volavková also designed and oversaw the installation of a more formal, traditional memorial to commemorate all Czech victims. The memorial she designed simply lists in red and black ink the 77,297 names of Jews of Bohemia and Moravia who died, with birth and death dates, on an inner wall of the Pinkas Synagogue, one of the buildings of the Jewish Museum's complex. As she imagined it,

Those who during the war were degraded into numbers and transports again received a home and a human face. They are freed by the humble script, written with piety, by an anonymous art that is almost medieval.⁵⁹

Naming all of the Jewish victims returns a feature of individuality that had been denied. From a distance, the sheer number of names blurs into abstraction, an overwhelming visual texture of static. The lists look like the dense handwritten texture of a Torah scroll. Some believe that "the monument [in Prague] was the largest grave inscription in the world," rivaled only by Edwin Lutyens' Thiepval Memorial in France, which lists 72,000 men whose bodies were never recovered during the Battle of the Somme during the first World War.⁶⁰

Leo Pavlát, the current director of the Jewish Museum, states that "the museum as a whole, by some cruel fate, had become the only large memorial to the several generations of Czech and Moravian Jews."⁶¹ But this memorial came under threat almost as soon as the war ended. In the political turmoil of the post-war period, the museum struggled to relocate, maintain, and safely store its enormous collection. The museum was nationalized in 1950 following the communist coup in

⁵⁸Ibid., 125.

⁵⁹Hana Volavková, quoted in Rybár, *Jewish Prague*, 276.

⁶⁰Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 137.

⁶¹Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum During the Second World War," 129.

Czechoslovakia—a “forced donation”—and its functions were curtailed by the secular and increasingly antisemitic ideology of the new regime.⁶² The communist interpretation of World War II preferred to blur any racial or religious distinctions, imagining a victory of a unified proletariat over the fascists, obfuscating any specific mention of Jewish victims.⁶³ As the museum’s assets were now held by the state, “the former owners of these objects, the Jewish communities from which they derived, could not reclaim them,” but could only borrow their own objects through temporary loans.⁶⁴ Some objects, like Torah scrolls, were made available to the small number of Jewish communities that re-established after the war. However, more than eighty synagogues were razed by the Czechoslovakian communist government, many more than the Nazis had torn down during the war.⁶⁵ The State Jewish Museum in Prague continued doing research about cemeteries, synagogues, and other Jewish sites during this period, in the face of continued interference from the secret police.⁶⁶ Its publication, *Judaica Bohemia*, was only printed in foreign languages, not intended for domestic readership.

The museum, and the memorial within it, were closed to the public in 1968. The museum remained shuttered for two decades, ostensibly because of water damage, but in fact because the Jewish Museum had become ideologically incompatible with the communist regime.⁶⁷ The ideology had staying power: Derek Sayer transcribed a sign (written in English) posted in the vestibule of the Jewish Museum in 1992.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ A number of communist bureaucrats in the Czechoslovakian party were sentenced to death in the notorious Slánský Trial in the 1950s, at least in part because of their Jewish heritage; see Meir Cotic, *The Prague Trial: The First Anti-Zionist Show Trial in the Communist Bloc*, (New York: Herzl Press, 1987).

⁶⁴ Veselská, “Jewish Museums in the Former Czechoslovakia,” 127.

⁶⁵ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002), 78.

⁶⁶ Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 81.

⁶⁷ Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 78.

After more than twenty years the State Jewish Museum is opening to the public the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague. In the fifties its walls bore the names of almost 80,000 victims of the Second World War, from Bohemia and Moravia. In the course of the reconstruction, which took place from 1969 to 1989, those names were removed and the Museum intends to proceed with their renewal immediately, which cannot proceed without the personal assistance of the public.⁶⁸

Communism had fallen in the USSR in 1991. In Czechoslovakia, the Velvet Revolution had ushered in democracy. The museum was restored to the ownership of the Jewish Community of Prague in 1994, and re-opened to the public the next year. Nevertheless, the sign's wording—unconsciously, Sayer believes—imitates a trope of communist post-war propaganda. The notice, put up by a Jewish museum, directed at a foreign audience, speaks only of general victims of World War II, not Jews. These semantic tics are also apparent in some of the Czech articles about the history of the Jewish museum in Prague, even ones published as late as the 2000s. In *The Second Life of the Torah Scrolls*, Dana Veselská describes the communist period as one of “rapid change,” with no discussion of the many manifestations of antisemitism under that regime.⁶⁹ Importantly, as Sayer writes, it was “only as Jews, that these families and individuals were classified, counted, transported, and exterminated.”⁷⁰

Given the political situation in post-war Czechoslovakia, it was clear that the potential to return the Torahs to Jewish communities was difficult if not impossible, and opportunities for an enduring and appropriately Jewish memorial were slim. The unlikely story of the objects' safeguarding, at once morbid and triumphant, was obscured by the legend of the museum of the extinct race. It would take an international effort to continue this commemorative impulse born in Prague, preserving both the scrolls and the historical record.

⁶⁸ Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 140-141.

⁶⁹ Veselská, “The Museum of an Extinct Race,” 33.

⁷⁰ Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century*, 141-142.

A Strange Exodus *From Prague to London*

Though the scrolls originated in the territories of Bohemia and Moravia and were kept for many years in the museum complex in Prague, the Torahs' memorial identity was established and upheld in England. In the 1960s in a synagogue in London, these Torahs were described, treated, and disseminated as memorials. Unlike other contemporary restitution efforts operating at the time, which never defined their objectives as commemorative, the people involved in the purchase and distribution of the Torahs called themselves the Memorial Scrolls Committee from the very first years of their project. Various concepts for commemoration were suggested, but the primary memorial venture they settled on was innovative. The Committee envisioned the repair and widespread distribution of Torah scrolls, both those that were damaged and those fit for religious use, to Jewish communities and some secular locations around the globe.

The Torahs were rediscovered—fortuitously but accidentally—when a man named Eric Estorick visited Prague in 1963. As a fine art dealer, he habitually visited Eastern and Central Europe to purchase works of modern art. He consulted Artia, the official Czechoslovakian organization for cultural materials, and expressed interest in procuring Judaica for his father. An Artia representative took him twenty minutes outside of Prague. Warehoused in the damp and untended Michele Synagogue and still wrapped in plastic bags with their wartime tags were over a thousand Torah scrolls from the Jewish Museum. The current conditions of their storage left them exposed to water and mold, with some of the scrolls fusing together in the damp. Regular Torah readings would allow air to circulate, keeping the parchment in good condition and allowing a Torah to be used for many decades, even centuries: most of the scrolls in the Jewish Museum were from the nineteenth

century, but some were much older, the very earliest dating back to 1690.⁷¹ Seeking a patron to bring the Torahs out of Czechoslovakia, Estorick reached out to an acquaintance, the London philanthropist Ralph Yablon, a member of the Westminster Synagogue.⁷² Yablon volunteered to pay for the Torahs and their shipment to Westminster Synagogue, so long as the scrolls were fit to use. Before they were purchased, Yablon sent his friend Dr. Chimen Abramsky, a professor of Hebrew at University College London and a Sotheby's consultant for the sales of Hebrew books and ritual objects, to examine them. He visited Prague for twelve days to evaluate the scrolls' condition as best he could, appraising about five hundred. Abramsky estimated that "two-thirds were kosher, or could be made so."⁷³

The focus on the scrolls' Jewish utility, both in Abramsky's original evaluation and subsequent appraisals, illustrates the clear religious rationale of the project. Torahs that are not kosher are called *pasul*, or defective, and cannot be used during services unless they are properly repaired. Disqualifying flaws can include the oxidation of ink, tears of a certain length, or the misspelling of certain words. The religious laws governing the creation, care, and disposal of Torah scrolls are exacting, intended to treat a text bearing the name of God with proper reverence.⁷⁴ In the hierarchy of Jewish ritual objects, the parchment of the Torah scroll—excluding the wooden rollers—is of the highest echelon, as it bears the name of God. Because of this, a scroll damaged

⁷¹ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 35.

⁷² The congregation had recently separated from the West London Synagogue, the original Reform congregation in the United Kingdom. Westminster Synagogue was and is still based in Kent House, a property in the neighborhood of Knightsbridge that had once been an aristocratic residence; see Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 27-28.

⁷³ Correspondence from Ralph Yablon to Harold Reinhart, 5 December 1963. Memorial Scrolls Trust Archive [uncatalogued]. Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum, London, England [hereafter *MST*.]

⁷⁴ Even today, Torahs are prepared by trained scribes, called *sofers*, with the same materials and methods used hundreds of years ago. Torah scrolls are made of sixty-two individual sheets of parchment, the outer layer of treated and dried skin from a kosher animal—when properly prepared, parchment is more flexible and durable than paper. The exact text of the five books of Moses is copied using the quill of a kosher animal—usually a turkey—with four columns of text on each sheet, then hand-sewn with sinew, and bound to wooden rollers. The process can take over a year to complete.

beyond use must be ritually buried, traditionally within a *genizah*, or an earthenware container in a Jewish cemetery. Continued attention on the quantity of Torahs that could be made kosher underlines an expectation that Yablon, Abramsky, and Estorick made at the very beginning: that these objects would not remain in disrepair, but would be restored and put to use in a synagogue again. A secular museum institution making such an appraisal and purchase might not take these repairs into consideration, perhaps even valuing the damage as a better testament to a historical period of destruction. The scrolls were shipped to London in the first months of 1964, and for the first time in over two decades, the Torahs were back in private, Jewish ownership.⁷⁵ But the Westminster Synagogue was not a professional museum with conservators, specialists, or pre-existing resources for a conservation project of this magnitude. When the scrolls arrived in London, they were unpacked by volunteers from the congregation.⁷⁶

Artia had agreed to the price of 180,000 Czech crowns for the 1,564 Torahs, roughly equivalent to \$30,000 at the time of the sale. Newspapers reported that the proceeds were intended to help restore the Czechoslovakian post-war Jewish communities, but it is doubtful that any of the money went towards that cause.⁷⁷ The Czechoslovakian government, in need of foreign currency, had turned down a “ludicrously low” offer from the Israeli government attempting to purchase the Torah scrolls.⁷⁸ Significantly, the curators at the now State Jewish Museum in Prague were not consulted about the sale—their collection, after all, had become state property. Prayer books and Torah scrolls were the “most vulnerable items, since most of them, from the perspective of the non-specialist, had no unique or significant marks or features (being of similar appearance and

⁷⁵ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

containing the same text).⁷⁹ Reportedly, surviving curator Hana Volavková was not pleased, as she wanted to maintain the integrity of the collection as a whole.⁸⁰ An air of annoyance surrounding the sale persists in writings from the Jewish Museum in Prague to this day; *The Second Life of the Torah Scrolls*—which presumably considers this eventual “second life” to be a positive one—still describes the sale as an “irreplaceable loss” to the museum.⁸¹

Unlike a government or museum with competing interests and opinions to manage, the Memorial Scroll Committee was directed by a small group. Historian Philippa Bernard, a founding member of the Westminster Congregation, calls them the “Triumvirate”: Frank Waley, a founding member of the Westminster congregation; the synagogue’s rabbi, Dr. Harold Reinhart; and Leo Bernard, another member of the congregation. They made the day-to-day decisions, occasionally seeking the input of other figures like Sir Seymour Karminski, Westminster Synagogue’s president, and Ralph Yablon, the philanthropist himself.⁸² The written minutes of the Committee and typewritten correspondence among the main planners often leave the most basic guiding premises unmentioned, specifically the fact that distribution would be their central mission. Because they were friends and fellow members of the congregation, many of the preliminary decisions were settled *ad hoc*, either in person or over the telephone, a theory suggested by the absence of early documentation in the archive and supported by current Memorial Scrolls Trust chairman, Jeffrey Ohrenstein.⁸³ The donor, Yablon, passed his legal ownership of the scrolls to the trustees on the Committee. The Torahs were also to be sent out on permanent loan, making the enterprise distinctly non-commercial. Recipients were asked to cover the costs of shipment, but the Trust ultimately

⁷⁹ Dana Veselská, *The Second Life of the Czech Torah Scrolls* (Prague: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2006), 46. Similar sentiments are expressed in Magda Veselská’s article in *Neglected Witnesses*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸² Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 38-42.

⁸³ Jeffrey Ohrenstein, conversation with author, January 3, 2019.

owned the full collection of the scrolls. Unintentionally, this also built in a prospect for cyclical distribution, which would occur in later decades: when a Torah was no longer of use, it was to be sent back to London, where it could be sent out to a new location. These loans were not made contractually, but in good faith.

The enterprise imagined by the Committee was similar in many ways to the work of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. (JCR), organized by the United States military in 1949. The JCR effectively established a precedent that the valid inheritor of heirless European property was the whole of international Jewry. Comprising twelve independent international Jewish organizations, it was led by groups in the United States, focusing on Jewish cultural property—mostly books and ceremonial objects—found in the American Zone of post-war Germany.⁸⁴ No such enterprise existed in the Czech territories after the war, or in any Soviet-occupied zones; the resettlement of Jewish property from Prague had no governmental support.⁸⁵ Unlike the Memorial Scrolls project, the JCR was consistently involved in national and international politics.⁸⁶ American Jewish organizations wanted to prevent German institutions, like museums, from inheriting Jewish property that had been looted by the Nazis. They focused their attention on removing objects—primarily books, but also fine art, Judaica, and Torah scrolls—from Europe.⁸⁷ This included the six hundred Torahs found in an Offenbach warehouse, originally collected by the Nazis in their Institute for the Study of the

⁸⁴ Rauschenberger, "The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Objects," 197.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸⁶ Dana Herman, "'A Brand Plucked Out of the Fire': The Distribution of Heirless Jewish Cultural Property by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc., 1947-1952," in *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 30.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

Jewish Question.⁸⁸ The JCR intended to transplant “heirless”⁸⁹ property from Germany to international locations with

vibrant communities—centres of Jewish life in which these ritual objects and books would be circulated and used.... [H]ow much material each community would receive was commensurate, in part, with the Jewish population in the community, the recipient organisations’ long-term stability and their ability to care for the material.⁹⁰

In 1949, the director of the JCR believed that this meant the objects should only go to New York City or Israel.⁹¹ Eventually, its scope was widened to include Great Britain, Europe, and other international locations.⁹² Items were incorporated into museums and study centers, new libraries, reintroduced to religious use in synagogues, or disposed of according to Jewish law. A wide and varied community had rights and claims to European Jewish culture, and the items were used however the individual communities saw fit. None of the Torahs or ritual objects distributed by the JCR were considered memorial objects, either individually or collectively—in fact, most of the Torahs they dispensed went to Israel, and the majority were buried.⁹³

The Memorial Scrolls Committee at Westminster Synagogue first met on February 10th, 1964. First, the scrolls were to be carefully reappraised and renumbered according to a new in-house system to fix some discrepancies in the original inventory from Prague. The Torahs were then to be classified by quality, recorded as “kasher [*sic*], repairable, some columns usable, or completely

⁸⁸ Rauschenberger, “The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Objects,” 198.

⁸⁹ A legal debate in Germany arose over ownership of some of the cultural material between the JCR and small, reconstituted Jewish communities in Germany; see Ayaka Takei, “The “Gemeinde Problem”: The Jewish Restitution Successor Organization and the Postwar Jewish Communities in Germany, 1947-1954,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 16, Issue 2 (2002), 266–288.

⁹⁰ Herman, “‘A Brand Plucked Out of the Fire,’” 33.

⁹¹ Rauschenberger, “The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Objects,” 200.

⁹² Herman, “‘A Brand Plucked Out of the Fire,’” 31.

⁹³ Burial was the primary outcome for damaged ritual objects in America, as well: “Those objects that could not be distributed due to irreparable damage were set aside for burial by the Synagogue Council of America...at the Beth El Cemetery in Paramus, New Jersey, on 13th January 1952. The date was chosen for its proximity to the 10th of Teveth, a historic day of mourning and fasting proclaimed as a memorial to the Jewish victims of persecution in all eras. A tombstone was dedicated ten months later, over the graves of the buried religious objects.” See Herman, “‘A Brand Plucked Out of the Fire,’” in *Neglected Witnesses*, 42-43.

spoiled.”⁹⁴ An Orthodox *sofer*, David Brand, offered his services to the Memorial Scrolls project, eventually moving his family into the Kent House property to oversee the repairs of Torahs for many years. The conservation was carried out according to religious rules.⁹⁵ Similar to the ideals of the JCR, the Torahs would be sent where they would “be most cherished and used,” a decidedly subjective metric that the Committee admitted would “give rise to priority considerations which will be difficult to perceive and define.”⁹⁶ Additionally, the Committee wanted to “retain a small reasonable number of Scrolls as our own perpetual Museum and memorial to the perished congregations.”⁹⁷ The fact that this quantity was to be reasonably small indicates that the Committee viewed the distribution process, and not the development of a center in London, as the primary undertaking.

The Committee temporarily considered distributing a greater number of Torahs to Jewish confederations of synagogues in different countries, which would then allocate them as they saw fit. Ultimately, they decided to personally vet the applications, accepting only requests in the form of letters from synagogues on official stationery and not from private individuals.⁹⁸ A call for formal applications was sent out to various publications with wide Jewish readership, such as the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, *The New York Times*, and *The Jewish Chronicle*.⁹⁹ In 1965, Waley noted that “hundreds of requests for scrolls have come to us from all over the world.”¹⁰⁰ Waley wrote to Reinhart in early 1965, stating essential points the Committee needed to consider were

1. Should Reform or Liberal congregations have preference over Orthodox as they appear to have a better chance of surviving?

⁹⁴ MST, Scrolls Committee Minutes, 11 August 1964.

⁹⁵ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 57-59.

⁹⁶ MST, Memorial Scrolls Committee Minutes, 20 February 1965.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ MST, notes from Committee Meeting, 28 April 1965.

⁹⁹ MST, correspondence from Frank Waley to *The Jewish Chronicle*, 6 April 1965.

¹⁰⁰ MST, correspondence from Frank Waley to Harold Reinhart, 24 February 1965.

2. Should youth and teaching organizations have preference as they bring up the next generation of Jews? ¹⁰¹

Ensuring continuous use in a new, stable environment was a clear priority. The comments also belied an implicit bias towards Progressive Judaism, the British version of what would be called Reform Judaism in the United States. Waley stated that, on some of these matters, he has “quite decided views, on others none at all,” adding that he believed “each country which has absorbed any central European refugees should have a Memorial Scroll whether they have asked for one or not.”¹⁰² In a letter to Rabbi Reinhart six days later, Sir Seymour Karminski outlined his ideas of what principles should be used to sort through the applicants. Karminski first prioritized “congregations with substantial Czech connections, in Israel or elsewhere,” then “refounded European congregations (e.g. in Holland) who are short of scrolls” and new congregations in the United States. He gave the example of a new synagogue in Maryland.¹⁰³ Many of these new communities did not have Torah scrolls of their own, and buying a new Torah scroll for a congregation could be prohibitively expensive.

Most of the Torahs were allocated to synagogues or Jewish institutions, but distribution was not limited to Jewish spaces exclusively. In an early meeting, the Committee probed whether the more damaged Torahs could “be used for museums or libraries, or must they be destroyed according to ritual.”¹⁰⁴ In response, Abramsky wrote that “with regard to the posul Torahs the Din [the Jewish Law] says that they should be buried, but this is not obligatory, they can be used also as museums [*sic*] pieces or as decorative pieces for Simchat Torah....there are many Torahs amongst

¹⁰¹ *MST*, correspondence from Frank Waley to Harold Reinhart, 24 February 1965.

¹⁰² *MST*, correspondence from Frank Waley to Harold Reinhart, 24 February 1965.

¹⁰³ *MST*, correspondence from Sir Seymour Karminski to Harold Reinhart, 26 February 1965.

¹⁰⁴ *MST*, Memorial Scrolls Committee Minutes, 20 February 1965.

the posul that are very decorative and will be esteemed as such by the non-Jews also.”¹⁰⁵ The Committee, even in the early days, turned away from a strict definition of restitution, expressing inklings that a memorial Torah’s worth was not solely defined by viability of ceremonial use.

In April of 1965, after receiving seventy-six applications for Czech Torahs, Abramsky wrote a memorandum to Yablon “regarding the applications for the Torahs in Kent House, and their ultimate destination.”¹⁰⁶ This memorandum exemplifies the parameters and guidelines the Committee established when evaluating the applications. Abramsky first listed the seventeen “applications from Reform or Liberal Synagogues and Congregations,” mostly from the United States and Britain, followed by South Africa and Amsterdam.¹⁰⁷ Thirty-eight applications came from Orthodox congregations in Britain, Israel, and other countries. Abramsky noted “this group is a very mixed bag and each one needs careful consideration” to sort “genuine claims” from ones that were “a political organization and can only be treated as such.”¹⁰⁸ A page is spent detailing the validity and political and cultural bent of specific colleges, communities, and yeshivas, more intense attention than is given to any of the Reform communities. Requests to purchase Torahs were resolutely denied: Abramsky described these offers as coming from “unprincipled schnorrers,” and that their “applications all have the character of chutzpah.”¹⁰⁹ The documents indicate a pattern of precedents for assessing the Torahs’ new homes. The Committee never made an explicit list of what would disqualify an application, but it is clear that use for personal benefit would be inappropriate.

¹⁰⁵ *MST*, “Draft memorandum to Mr. R. Yablon regarding the applications for the Torahs in Kent House, and their Ultimate Destination,” from Chimen Abramsky, 15 April 1965.

¹⁰⁶ *MST*, “Draft memorandum to Mr. R. Yablon regarding the applications for the Torahs in Kent House, and their Ultimate Destination,” from Chimen Abramsky, 15 April 1965.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *MST*, “Draft memorandum to Mr. R. Yablon regarding the applications for the Torahs in Kent House, and their Ultimate Destination,” from Chimen Abramsky, 15 April 1965.

For example, Abramsky contemptuously denied an application from a German Jew in Holland, who Abramsky suspected was misrepresenting himself as a Czech Holocaust survivor.¹¹⁰

The allocation of scrolls to Israel ignited one of the most intense debates about the priorities of distribution. Even within Westminster Synagogue, a Progressive congregation, opinions about Israel's political and religious positions differed. To some, like Abramsky, Israel was the more specific inheritor of the cultural property of Jewish Europe, especially as so many Czech Jews had emigrated there. Abramsky wrote that the "most important memorial that can be erected to the six million Jews killed in Europe is to help build up the rising and struggling communities of Israel," which often lacked basic religious materials.¹¹¹ He argued that the Israeli government was focused more on defense, and could not afford to spend on cultural matters. As such, the "allocation of a large number of Torahs to Israel will be the best memorial both to the fallen Czech Jews...and will be a very great honour to the Westminster Synagogue."¹¹² Others were not so keen, especially given the Orthodox bent of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs. Karminski himself, who had regarded the application from the Israeli Ministry of Defense as "important," stated that "in Israel I would give special help to the new Reform and Liberal Congregations, who will need all the help they can get. I would put the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Israel right at the bottom of our list!"¹¹³

Some Israeli officials believed the country had a dominant claim to the Torahs as the locus of post-Holocaust Jewish life. In March of 1964, David Glass, the Israeli Minister of Culture, voiced his opinion that "ALL the Torah scrolls under discussion be consigned for distribution in Israel," and that the Committee had agreed to give the Ministry legal ownership and the authority to decide

¹¹⁰ *MST*, "Draft memorandum to Mr. R. Yablon regarding the applications for the Torahs in Kent House, and their Ultimate Destination," from Chimen Abramsky, 15 April 1965..

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *MST*, Correspondence from Sir Seymour Karminski to Harold Reinhart, 26 February 1965.

which Israeli congregation would receive a scroll.¹¹⁴ These, however, were not the terms of the agreement: Rabbi Reinhart pledged that some, but not all, Torahs would be made available.¹¹⁵ Rabbi Reinhart disputed each point in a letter to Glass, in which he bitinglly commented that “the capacity of the human mind for ‘remembering’ what it wishes, is limitless.”¹¹⁶ The Memorial Scrolls Committee clarified their offer to send fifty Torahs to Israel, which were sent in November of 1964. This shipment did not stop the requests for a greater number: Frank Waley described being “subjected to an invasion by... the Israeli Government who demand I commandeer a ship and sail forthwith with all the Sifre Torah to be handed over to the Israeli government on arrival.”¹¹⁷

There were even more complications after the memorial scrolls reached the promised land. In 1965, the Committee in London received a letter from Kehilat Shalom, a Reform synagogue in Israel. The synagogue was concerned: while it was on the list of approved congregations that the Committee had given to the Israeli ministry, it had not yet received a Torah. The rabbi of Kehilat Shalom suspected a political motivation. He wrote to the Committee that Dr. Zerach Warhaftig, the Minister of Religious Affairs, “had made repeated statements indicating his opposition to Progressive Judaism” in Israel.¹¹⁸ In fact, Warhaftig had a more specific contention, one that challenged the Torahs’ commemorative purpose altogether. In February of 1966, Warhaftig, wrote a letter to Rabbi Reinhart, saying that he found the “regrettable discrepancy in the appraisals,” and that the subsequent quality of the Torahs was “most disappointing.”¹¹⁹ Even though there were 130 synagogues in Israel without Torahs, only two out of the fifty sent from London were deemed

¹¹⁴ *MST*, Correspondence from David Glass to Harold Reinhart, 4 March 1964.

¹¹⁵ *MST*, Correspondence from Harold Reinhart to David Glass, 25 March 1964.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Waley to Rabbi Harold Reinhart, 12 March 1965.

¹¹⁸ *MST*, Correspondence from Rabbi Melvin R. Zager to Frank Waley, 12 July 1965.

¹¹⁹ *MST*, Correspondence from Dr. Zerach Warhaftig to Harold Reinhart, 14 February 1966.

appropriate for religious use, with thirty-three of the scrolls classified as “irreparable.”¹²⁰ Warhaftig wrote that “disqualified Scrolls have been duly deposited in our Guenizah [sic].”¹²¹

It was not only a private dispute. *The Jerusalem Post* catapulted the story into the public eye. The headlines were not flattering: “Religious Ministry rejects 33 scrolls: Sifre Torah from London no good.”¹²² The Memorial Scrolls Committee was horrified that scrolls had been buried without their consent, that their experts were called into question, and that the misunderstanding had made it so quickly to the newspapers. Reinhart was given an opportunity to write a press statement after he travelled to Israel and met privately with Warhaftig in March of 1966, but his statement was edited without his approval after he had flown back to London.¹²³ The new headline was “Some of gift Tora [sic] scrolls found usable: Progressive group to get one,” with that article bearing a subheading, “PROMISE BROKEN.”¹²⁴ Additionally, the congregation’s name was recorded in the article as “Westminster Progressive Synagogue,” inserting a denominational adjective not actually present. In April, Reinhart wrote another angry letter to Warhaftig, stating outright that

Prejudice is operating in the matter of the Scrolls. An ideological war which is being waged, is lamentably insinuated into the business of the sacred Scrolls. This seems to be apparent in all the publicity, where statements are repeatedly mixtures of “requests from ‘Progressives;’ with “unfitness of Scrolls”.¹²⁵

Reinhart also took offense with mentions of the cost, “an utterly callous estimate of the Czech memorial Scrolls, every one of which is a sacred treasure, not only because it is a copy of our Torah but also because it is a brand from the burning¹²⁶, which sears our very soul.”¹²⁷ Correspondence

¹²⁰ *MST*, Correspondence from Dr. Zerach Warhaftig to Harold Reinhart, 14 February 1966.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *MST*, clip of article from *The Jerusalem Post*, n. d.

¹²³ *MST*, “Confidential Report on Meeting in Israel with Dr. Warhaftig” by Harold Reinhart, 8 March 1966.

¹²⁴ *MST*, clip of article from *The Jerusalem Post*, n. d.

¹²⁵ *MST*, Correspondence from Harold Reinhart to Dr. Zerach Warhaftig, 18 April 1966.

¹²⁶ A Biblical phrase from Amos 4:11, which refers to something that is miraculously saved at the very last instant.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

from the Israeli government continuously emphasized the scroll's exclusively religious value. To Reinhart and the Committee in London, however, the Czech Torahs were "doubly sacred" because they served as memorial objects in addition to religious texts. Their commemorative power was not secondary, but equally sacred. A later letter from Warhaftig revealed that the thirty-three *pasul* Torahs were not buried. The misunderstanding had come from a supposed mistranslation of Hebrew into English.¹²⁸ However, it was clear that the Ministry of Religious Affairs still believed that the damaged Torahs *should* be buried, and had no use apart from their ritual reading in a synagogue.

After this public scandal, it was clear that the Committee needed to underscore and codify the Czech Torahs' memorial value. As the result of this spat, Abramsky wrote to Yablon in March of 1966 that

the Committee should have a different form of publicity and write-ups about the Sifrei Torah, namely that they are remnants of destroyed Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia, and each Torah, whether kosher or *posul*, should serve as a memorial to the Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia.¹²⁹

Presented with the risk that the Torahs would be buried and removed from use, Abramsky advocated for asserting clearly and loudly that the Torahs had a non-religious commemorative value that was distinct from their intrinsic sacrality as holy books. By this point, the kosher Torahs had been distributed: 58 to Britain, 21 to North America, 50 to Israel, 8 to Europe, and 11 to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The Committee wrote an interim statement, emphasizing that they would "not rest until the sacred 'brands from the burning' shall have found their most appropriate homes, to memorialize the martyrs and to bring light to future generations."¹³⁰ This marks a turning point: in asserting the power of the Torahs' commemorative significance, the Committee established a clear standard that defined their primary purpose.

¹²⁸ *MST*, Correspondence from Zerach Warhaftig to Harold Reinhart, 5 April 1966.

¹²⁹ *MST*, Correspondence from Chimen Abramsky to Ralph Yablon, 25 March 1966.

¹³⁰ *MST*, Interim Statement, 19 July 1966.

As the Torahs spread to their new locations, some to Jewish communities, some to secular museums and libraries, there was a flurry of discussion about the appropriate use of the scrolls as memorials. An article in the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Journal—a Reform publication—considered whether a Torah should be kept in “a museum case or in [the] ark,” the most sacred space in the synagogue.¹³¹ Torahs are to be handled and stored with utmost respect, so the Rabbinic analysis evaluated which setting would afford the scroll the most reverence. In the journal, Solomon Freehof worried that placing a *pasul* Torah in a display case with other Judaica might equate the scroll with less important objects. He recommended placing even a damaged Torah in the ark, so the scroll will be included in the regular course of worship: “Whenever the Ark will be open for the Torah reading, the congregation will rise in respect for all the scrolls in the Ark and this scroll, now permanently rescued from captivity, will thus be honored among them.”¹³² In 1988, an incensed reader wrote a letter to the editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* about the “shameful revelation that Czech scrolls appropriated as memorials are to be found at Westminster Abbey, in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle,” and other secular spaces like university libraries.¹³³ From his perspective, the practice was “totally contrary to the basic code of Jewish law, which prescribes that holy scrolls should be deposited within the arks of synagogues” or buried in a genizah. Two spokespeople of the Memorial Scrolls Committee responded in the *Chronicle*, highlighting the fact that while most resided within Jewish institutions, “some 800 have already been restored and sent to congregations all over the world, including the communities mentioned” in the letter.¹³⁴ The Torahs—even the damaged ones—had utility and worth as memorials.

¹³¹ *MST*, Photocopy of article from the *CCAR Journal*, Solomon B. Freehof, winter 1975, 72-75.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *MST*, Photocopy of letter in *The Jewish Chronicle* by Simon Goodman, 1988.

¹³⁴ *MST*, Photocopy of letter in *The Jewish Chronicle* by Ruth Shaffer and Constance Stuart, 22 July 1988.

Commemorative Outliers

The Czech Torah Scrolls in Context

When one thinks of other Holocaust memorials—the six glass smokestacks in Boston, the bronze statues of concentration camp victims in a San Francisco park, Berlin’s arresting labyrinth of abstract blocks near the Brandenburg Gate, statues and sculptures in various city centers from New York City to Jerusalem—it does not seem that a group of Torah scrolls scattered across the world would fall into the same category. The genre of Holocaust memorial employs a repertoire of symbols and materials. The previous examples are imposing, designed objects that are focal points in their respective spaces, even if the design resists realistic representation, traditional forms, or obvious aesthetic appeal. They are located in visible public places of national significance where people can visit or encounter as they walk by. The Czech scrolls present an intriguing case study because they do *not* constitute a conventional memorial: they are not national, central, monumental, figurative, or even outdoors. Their original, intrinsic function is religious, yet for many years, they were museum pieces. Today, however, the Czech Torahs are primarily and fundamentally commemorative, drawing on the forms and techniques of a more recent and nontraditional approach to remembrance called the decentralized memorial.

States have historically been the agents and benefactors of memorial-making. The field of memorial studies frequently engages with memorials within a single national context, and this is true for Holocaust memorials, as well. Historian Harold Marcuse describes James Young’s seminal work on Holocaust memorials as “geographic analyses,” examining “artifacts of specific national cultures.”¹³⁵ National frameworks, however, often lead to generalized interpretations of significance. In Europe, Holocaust memorials function as a form of atonement and national penance. In Israel,

¹³⁵ Harold Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 1 (February 2010), 54.

they represent the victory of the Jewish nation-state. In America, they assert civic values of tolerance.¹³⁶ In this case, though, a single national analysis cannot be established. The scrolls were distributed to synagogues and institutions in the sixties, predating the more widespread acceptance of Jewish features in Holocaust memorials, which only became prevalent in the 1980s.¹³⁷ They were distributed by a private, religious institution. The Torahs had no role to play in post-war Czechoslovakian patriotic mythmaking and created only the smallest of splashes in the cultural life of London. Though many scrolls are now found in the United States, there are too many countervailing locations for the Torahs to solely represent one national group or a single denominational identity.

While national frameworks dominate academic texts, the early history of Holocaust memorials reveals more international impulses—the violence of World War II had little respect for borders. The earliest memorials were created by survivors of concentration camps in the places where they were held captive. Eighteen “countries of origin of the victims were listed” by survivors on a chimney of the crematorium at a memorial made in 1946 in Flossenbürg, Germany.¹³⁸ Memorials like these were not organized by the state; moreover, the survivors represented many nationalities. By the time European states became involved in Holocaust memorial projects in the 1950s, competitions for memorial design, such as one in Buchenwald in 1952, were open to foreign artists and architects.¹³⁹ In the Eastern Bloc, monuments and memorials were ideologically transnational. In East Germany and Soviet states, memorials emphasized not Jewish suffering but “international solidarity” among communist governments.¹⁴⁰ Soil and ash from multiple

¹³⁶ Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials,” 55.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

concentration camp sites were incorporated in more traditional monuments in Hamburg, Frankfurt, New York, and Paris.¹⁴¹ Marcuse writes that these memorials held “collections of relics from Holocaust sites to establish their legitimacy and represent the transnational scope of the Holocaust.”¹⁴² Transnational memorials like these symbolically gathered many places in one new commemorative space, an accumulation that spoke to the extensive geography of genocide.

In the 1980s, Germany served as a laboratory for new commemorative forms. To many artists and designers, especially in countries that had perpetrated atrocities, the old styles of commemoration no longer felt appropriate—triumphal arches and bronzes of leaders too definitive, too proud, too much like forms used by fascist governments to glorify their rule. James Young coined the term “counter-monuments” to describe a group of avant-garde works that sit somewhere between monument and performance art, grappling with the prevailing historical narrative in intellectually inventive and formally innovative ways.¹⁴³ American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt installed *Black Form Dedicated to the Missing Jews*, a dark, unlabeled cinder block structure, in the middle of a baroque plaza in Münster, Germany.¹⁴⁴ In Harburg, an intentionally austere *Monument against Fascism* was plated with lead, inviting viewers to inscribe their names as a visual public pledge.¹⁴⁵ As more people signed their name, the pillar was lowered into the ground, eventually until nothing of the column remained. These monuments were designed to be transgressive. Instead of uncritically celebrating a historic achievement, they rejected triumphal design and invited the community to recognize and participate in a more critical reconsideration of the past.

¹⁴¹ Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials,” 68.

¹⁴² Marcuse, “Holocaust Memorials,” 67.

¹⁴³ James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (January 1, 1992), 267–96.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴⁵ Young, “The Counter-Monument,” 274-276.

But counter-monuments were not the only contribution from this fertile commemorative period. West German activists in the 1980s developed another type of non-traditional commemorative form, the “decentralized memorial.” Initially, the contemporary decentralized memorial was used by activists like artist Joseph Beuys, who spread a democratic and ecological message through an art installation that intended to plant seven thousand oak trees in 1982.¹⁴⁶ Soon, however, this dispersed approach was used to critique the country’s fascist past; other projects placed signposts, plaques, and buses throughout German cities.¹⁴⁷ Historian Jennifer Allen writes,

Their monuments contrasted starkly with traditional national commemorative forms, both official and popular: they were small, inconspicuous, and decentralized, composed of hundreds—even thousands—of component parts scattered across European landscapes. And they took deliberate aim at both the topographical and temporal boundaries of commemoration. They pushed memorial practices inward into mundane spaces as well as outward across national borders. They refused to relegate commemorative acts to moments of exception and worked to make them, instead, a more central part of the rhythms of everyday life.¹⁴⁸

The Memorial Scrolls project is a natural member of this category; the Czech Torahs can best be understood as “transgenerational, living monuments that have grown from below and ramified over expansive geographies.”¹⁴⁹

The *Stolpersteine* or Stumbling Stone project is perhaps the definitional example of a decentralized Holocaust memorial, captivating both popular and academic attention. In 1992, artist Gunter Demnig began to replace cobblestones at specific street addresses in Germany with small brass plaques that identified the Holocaust victims who used to live there. The project, now comprising more than seventy thousand stones in many countries across Europe, traces the contours

¹⁴⁶ Jennifer L. Allen, “National Commemoration in an Age of Transnationalism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 91, no. 1 (March 2019), 122.

¹⁴⁷ “Two From Berlin,” *The New Yorker*, October 20, 2003, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/27/two-from-berlin>.

¹⁴⁸ Allen, “National Commemoration,” 119.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

of a historical past which is now invisible: it shows where Jews no longer are. The memorial does not create a single cohesive space with the memorial at its center, like a traditional sculpture or statue might. Rather, the Stumbling Stones have become a facet of the urban environment. Pedestrians are forced to reckon with the absence of Jews as they walk through the city. The Stumbling Stone model has spread to other countries as an inexpensive, participatory model that documents the geography of a forgotten past.¹⁵⁰ In the last two decades, memorial markers were installed to commemorate Argentinian *desaparecidos*; in Russia, the victims of Stalin's purges; in New England, slaves.¹⁵¹ These decentralized memorials highlight something that has been forgotten in a landscape, making new sites of memory by revealing old ones.

The Czech Torahs, however, do not derive their memorial meaning from their contemporary geographic locations. French historian Pierre Nora created the term *lieu de mémoire*, or site of memory, to define a "significant entity...which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" which can assume new meanings over time.¹⁵² The French tricolor flag, cathedrals, archives, and traditional memorials are all sites of memory.¹⁵³ The Torahs in their original use in Czech towns were not sites of memory; that designation developed after the war in London. Nora describes "portable *lieux*, of which the people of memory, the Jews, have given a major example in the Tablets of the Law; there are the topographical ones, which owe everything to the specificity of their location and to being rooted in the ground."¹⁵⁴ He continues, "statues or monuments to the dead, for instance, owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence; even though their location is far from arbitrary, one could justify relocating

¹⁵⁰ Allen, "National Commemoration," 119.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 139-142.

¹⁵² Pierre Nora, "From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*," *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

¹⁵³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7-24.

¹⁵⁴ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 22.

them without altering their meaning."¹⁵⁵ The Torahs do not map out the past situation of Jewish communities in a single country before the Holocaust; their placement today is more emblematic of the postwar Jewish diaspora. Topographical, historical locations define the memorial meaning of *Stolpersteine* and many other decentralized memorials. The Czech scrolls, however, are *lieux de mémoire* that can be transplanted and disseminated, carrying their commemorative value with them.

Crucially, decentralized memorials also offer uncommon opportunities for involvement in the project of remembrance. Most rely on public placement to reach an unsuspecting audience, but some projects involve people in the design as well as the viewing. One positive impact of the *Stolpersteine's* multiplication of memorials is the "massive transnational network of participants it has created. Each stone requires a sponsor; a financier; someone to research the victim's life; someone to make the stone, to advertise its installation, and to lay it; and, finally, guests to attend the installation ceremony," making it the largest "grassroots memorial" in existence.¹⁵⁶ *Stolpersteine* and other decentralized memorials offer a specific pathway of participation, usually in their installation, as well as creating more opportunities for viewers or visitors to encounter them. Public involvement was also a motivation for the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, which memorializes victims of white supremacy in America, specifically those killed by lynch mobs. The memorial-museum complex incorporates traditional features of memorials, like bronze sculptures, but the focal point of the museum is a space with eight hundred six-foot tall steel blocks suspended over visitors, each representing a county in the United States where lynching occurred.¹⁵⁷ On its website, the memorial is described as

¹⁵⁵ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 22.

¹⁵⁶ Allen, "National Commemoration," 132.

¹⁵⁷ Campbell Robertson, "A Lynching Memorial Is Opening. The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It," *The New York Times*, April, 2018.

more than a static monument. In the six-acre park surrounding the memorial is a field of identical monuments, waiting to be claimed and installed in the counties they represent. Over time, the national memorial will serve as a report on which parts of the country have confronted the truth of this terror and which have not.¹⁵⁸

This project is designed to correct a region's relationship with the majority's narrative of its history, especially in the American South, where the memorial landscape is saturated with monuments that glorify the history of the Confederacy. The planned dispersal of the blocks extends the participation in this reckoning while commemorating victims who had been forgotten. Making a decentralized memorial creates more instances for viewers to come across a memorial site, but also to engage in their creation by placing some of the tangible responsibilities of remembrance on the user.

The Czech memorial scrolls are by definition participatory, from their original mode of distribution to their current use. Transportable and transplantable, each Torah reaches a different community; their proliferation allows for each community to create its own customs and approaches to commemoration. There are as many uses as there are Torahs, yet there are notable trends in the ways the scrolls are used as memorials.

One way is the return of the scrolls to predominantly Jewish settings: Torahs are once again incorporated into a religious space, a symbolic expression of the act of remembrance. Cultural theorist Jan Assmann writes that "the term 'memory' is not a metaphor but a metonym based on material contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object."¹⁵⁹ Jewish services interact with the Torah in a tactile way. In addition to the *hagbah* in the service, where the scroll is held aloft for the congregation to see, worshippers often touch the Torah mantle with their fingers, the fringe of a *tallis*, or the spine of their prayer book. The process of dressing and undressing the Torah for

¹⁵⁸ Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice." Eji.org. <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>.

¹⁵⁹ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," *Cultural Memory Studies: An International Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 111.

reading, called *gelilah*, is also an inherently physical process, especially if the scrolls are large or particularly heavy. Interaction with a memorial Torah is much more tangible than what would normally be allowed in a museum or memorial. Czech Holocaust survivor Frank Steiner, in a 1981 lecture about the scrolls, wrote that he “did not want that people look at the Czech Torah as a ‘dead although respected Museum item’ ...we wanted to honor the Czech Jews.”¹⁶⁰ Theodor Adorno famously wrote that “the German word *museal* [museum-like] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present.”¹⁶¹ The Torahs today do serve a purpose—even damaged scrolls can be stored in an ark or brought out of a display case for special occasions. The Torahs were a genuine part of the pre-war Jewish life in Bohemia and Moravia as a whole, objects that were used by the communities that are being remembered. The simple fact of the scrolls’ return and integration into Jewish spaces and ritual practice is commemorative.

Specific services and ceremonies foreground the Torahs’ memorial significance and foster involvement in the rituals of remembrance. In their initial 2016 email newsletter, the Memorial Scrolls Trust wrote that “it was always hoped, and it is now written into the new Loan Conditions, that every Memorial scroll-holding community holds an annual commemorative service dedicated to the Jews associated with their Memorial scroll.”¹⁶² The Westminster Synagogue, for instance, holds a service every year on the date of the deportations of the Jews of Horažďovice and Přeštice.¹⁶³ New Jersey rabbi Norman Patz writes “Our congregation’s custom is to read six names of victims of

¹⁶⁰ MST, Typescript for a speech by Frank Steiner, 1981.

¹⁶¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 173.

¹⁶² Jeffrey Ohrenstein, “Welcome from the Chairman,” *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 1, April 2016, <https://www.memorialscrollstrust.org/index.php/newsletter/88-newsletter-1>.

¹⁶³ MST, “WS Czech Scrolls Commemorative Service” flyer, 2019.

the Holocaust each week in our Kaddish list. Each week includes two names” from Dvůr Králové, the listed town of origin.¹⁶⁴ Torahs are incorporated into rituals of Jewish mourning, from weekly recitations of the Kaddish prayer or significant days of solemnity or remembrance, such as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, or Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Congregations also incorporate the Torahs into celebrations and events not at all related to mourning, like Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, or anniversaries of the original loan of their Torah scroll.¹⁶⁵ Services and ceremonies also impress the memorial intent for the “handful that have gone to non-Jewish recipients,” including a dedication ceremony at a Catholic hospital in the Bronx and a procession and presentation of the scroll to the U. S. Naval Academy.¹⁶⁶

In some communities, the Torah provides a prompt to learn more and connect with the heritage and history of Czech Jews. Other commemorative projects focus more specifically on the Jewish communities where their scrolls originate. For instance, a group of congregations with Torahs attributed to the Slavkov community helped fund the research and publication of a book called *The Jews of Austerlitz*, the German name of the town.¹⁶⁷ The Jewish community of Nottingham, England installed a stone memorial in Slavkov’s Jewish cemetery; the town then converted an old school into a small Jewish museum. One girl from Nottingham held her bat mitzvah ceremony in Slavkov in 2005.¹⁶⁸ A number of American and British congregations “have visited the Czech towns from where their Memorial Scroll came, have worked with the local community to pay tribute to their Jews and have undertaken various activities, including the laying of Stolpersteine” and

¹⁶⁴ Norman Patz, “The Czech Scroll Gathering at Temple Emanuel in New York City,” *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 10, Summer 2019, <https://memorialscrollstrust.org/index.php/newsletter/121-mstnewsletter-10>.

¹⁶⁵ *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 4, Winter 2016-2017, <https://www.memorialscrollstrust.org/index.php/newsletter/91-newsletter-4>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; also Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 70.

¹⁶⁷ Veselská, *The Second Life*, 60.

¹⁶⁸ Brady Haran, “Hana’s tribute to Slavkov Jews,” BBC News, June 10, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4078856.stm.

repairing gravestones.¹⁶⁹ For instance, a Pennsylvania congregation held a ceremony and recited the *kaddish* prayer after installing a plaque dedicated to the Jews of Světlá nad Sázavou in 2015.¹⁷⁰ In the words of Jeffrey Ohrenstein, these trips have “[inspired] the Czech towns of origin in a process of reconciliation with their Jewish history and appropriate recognition of their lost Jewish community,” widening the commemorative community to include non-Jewish Czechs.¹⁷¹

In the last few decades, the internet has provided an important tool and platform for connecting communities with scrolls to one another, as well as facilitating research about the scrolls’ places of origin. In 1999, the Czech Torah Network website was created by a non-profit group to help conduct a census of the scrolls’ United States locations.¹⁷² The website became a platform where congregations with Czech scrolls could share research, increasing the institutional memory surrounding both individual scrolls and heightening the awareness that each individual Torah is a member of a larger commemorative network. The Memorial Scrolls Trust began to send quarterly newsletters so recipients could learn of other memorial scroll projects in 2016, and encouraged congregations and institutions to create a webpage about their Torah’s origin and current use.¹⁷³ The Memorial Scrolls Trust created a Facebook page in 2018, which has around 1,500 followers and posts articles, videos, and photographs about the Czech scrolls.¹⁷⁴ In one case, shares and comments of a post helped locate one of their missing Torahs.¹⁷⁵

The Czech Memorial Scroll project began an earnest attempt by a Jewish institution to create memorials while returning ceremonial objects to communities that would use and cherish them.

¹⁶⁹ *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 1, April 2016.

¹⁷⁰ *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 7, Winter 2018.

¹⁷¹ Shelley Laddie, *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 2, Summer 2016.

¹⁷² The Czech Torah Network website, <http://www.czechtorah.org/home.php>.

¹⁷³ *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 1, April 2016.

¹⁷⁴ “The Memorial Scrolls Trust,” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/memorial.s.trust/>.

¹⁷⁵ Jeffrey Ohrenstein, “MISSING TORAH FOUND,” Facebook post, November 17, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/memorial.s.trust/posts/?ref=page_internal.

Unintentionally, this effort established the earliest and most widespread decentralized Holocaust memorial. Unlike other decentralized memorials, the Torahs are portable sites of memory, representative of their Czech towns of origin but not physically limited to those places. They are not signposts or plaques in urban spaces, but religious texts relocated internationally to primarily private, Jewish spaces that prompt diverse commemorative practices. The memorial Torahs are not inert, forgotten, or unused: the scrolls have proven adaptable, meaningful, and productive sites of memory, creating a worldwide community of remembrance.

Evidence and Embroidery
Sharing a Memorial's History

No words, as eloquently could express
 In Awe, the faith of true humanity
 As do this congregation of the Scrolls
 The mute avowal of the deathless Word
 The earthly mirror of eternal Truth¹⁷⁶

no smoking
 windows open
 use bins
 appoint to places: pairs
 remove poletine & paper
 any numbers or writing on paper to be kept
 do not lose any ticket or contents — all to be secure
 tidy Scroll
 dust Scroll & handles & where mould wipe with tissue
 tie securely both ends
 OUR number to be tied visible front end
 replace on shelf exactly at right number

P.S. Overalls and old clothes are recommended.¹⁷⁷

Both passages were written by Rabbi Reinhart in 1964 when the Torahs first arrived in Westminster.

The first is an excerpt of a formal poem which he composed and shared with the congregation in a newsletter, while the second is a more casual memorandum sent out to members who had volunteered to unpack the Torahs when the shipments arrived from Prague. The two texts reveal an essential tension present even at the very beginning of the project: the need to reconcile the profound emotional impact with the pragmatic demands that the artifacts presented. The dispersion of the Torahs from London across the globe meant that each location could choose what, if any, context the Torah was presented in. In the absence of clear guidelines for display, questions emerged: did the scrolls honor the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, or were they more generalized, symbolic Holocaust memorials? How specific did the memorial have to be? Many years of correspondence between Ruth

¹⁷⁶ *MST*, untitled poem by Harold Reinhart, 1964.

¹⁷⁷ *MST*, "The Czech Scrolls" instructions by Harold Reinhart, 23 August 1964.

Shaffer,¹⁷⁸ the unofficial secretary of the Memorial Scrolls Committee, and Frank Steiner, a Czech Holocaust survivor and amateur historian, illuminate the difficulties of stipulating how a memorial should be interpreted.

Frank Steiner made it his life's work to accentuate and educate about the Czech history of the Torah scrolls, especially in American synagogues, where more than one thousand had found new homes. This work was deeply personal: Steiner wrote that he and his wife were "dedicated to research concerning the histories of the Czech Torahs...it is all in memory of our loved ones and all the Jews who perished in the Holocaust [*sic*]." ¹⁷⁹ In the 1980s and 1990s, Steiner and his wife travelled to various locations—Hawaii, South America, even Corpus Christi, Texas—giving lectures and talks in Jewish congregations about the history of their Torahs. In notes prepared for a speech in 1981, Steiner sketched a general outline about the "CZECH story."¹⁸⁰ The speech initially established the most basic background information. As to the history of Czechoslovakia, he wrote, "Republic new — Oct. 28 — 1918 — using ABC latin not russian type — GERMAN spoken mostly by jews." Steiner also listed well-known Jews who were born in Czech territories, like Franz Kafka, Gustav Mahler, and Sigmund Freud, before providing specifics about the history of the local Torah's town of origin.¹⁸¹

Steiner continually worried that the memorial scrolls' significance was being overgeneralized. In a 1985 letter, he noted that the larger Jewish immigrant populations "are of Polish or Russian origin...and after the emotional ceremony look at this Scroll as a Holocaust memento ref. ALL JEWS who perished."¹⁸² This typewritten line has been indignantly underlined.

¹⁷⁸ Shaffer was the daughter of the Yiddish poet Sholem Asch.

¹⁷⁹ *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Steiner to Ruth Shaffer, 4 March 1987.

¹⁸⁰ *MST*, Typescript for a speech by Frank Steiner, 1981.

¹⁸¹ *MST*, Typescript for a speech by Frank Steiner, 1981.

¹⁸² *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Steiner to Ruth Shaffer, 14 June 1985.

Steiner noted how emotion drove the impulse to respond to the Torah as more broadly commemorative, instead of one that memorialized a specific Czech community.¹⁸³ As a corrective, he suggested that “once a year when saying *kaddish*¹⁸⁴ -- name the community by its name.”¹⁸⁵ Steiner also commented on the additions of new Torah covers: “Many Temples made a circus...disfiguring the Torah with a new cover they made with huge name of their relatives whose honor they secured...horrible sight in a number of cases.”¹⁸⁶ It is easy to see why emphasizing figures in the new congregation instead of the Czech people being remembered would cause offense.

In an early letter, the Memorial Scrolls Committee noted that “the historic significance of the Scrolls” needed to be recorded and emphasized.¹⁸⁷ It considered producing certificates with “relevant information as fully as possible,” a “metal plate with some brief inscription,” and a “Memorial Book which will...contain description, source and destination of each Scroll in so far as possible.”¹⁸⁸ In the end, Torahs were affixed with a brass plaque on the wooden roller, identifying them by number as one of Westminster Synagogue’s “Czech Memorial Scrolls.”¹⁸⁹ Originally, the Committee sent recipients an informational four-page booklet written by Rabbi Harold Reinhart. The booklet offered a description of the role of Sifrei Torah in Jewish services, a brief history, and a strongly-worded justification of the memorial effort: “To keep them in store, rolled up and unused indefinitely, would be tantamount to passive vandalism.”¹⁹⁰ The booklet, though, was not required

¹⁸³ *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Steiner to Ruth Shaffer, 15 January 1991.

¹⁸⁴ A Jewish prayer recited for the dead.

¹⁸⁵ *MST*, Correspondence from Steiner to Shaffer, 25 June 1985.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *MST*, Correspondence from Harold Reinhart, Ralph Yablon, and Leonard Bernard to Frank Waley, 19 May 1965.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 46.

¹⁹⁰ *MST*, “Sifre Torah,” booklet by Harold Reinhart, undated. The text had originally appeared in the 1964 journal *Common Ground*, published by the London Council of Christians and Jews. Memorial Scrolls Trust Archive [uncatalogued]. Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum, London, England.

reading: there were no assurances that such materials would always be accessible to people who came across the Torahs.

The Committee's early considerations of congregations' longevity were becoming increasingly pertinent. When synagogues merged or changed names or temple administration came and went, these changeovers meant that not everyone was aware of where their Torah was, or where it came from. Often, synagogues would call and ask for information they had already been given. In 1985, Steiner wrote to Ruth Shaffer, saying "again [the temple] lost the material and when a new rabbi or president of the Temple takes over — they are ignorant about the Torah's origin....these people recklessly loose [*sic*] the history of these sacred Scrolls."¹⁹¹ Only one week later, after receiving a call from a Maryland synagogue with a Czech Memorial Torah but no clue as to where it came from, Steiner wrote again with increasing distress. He claimed that neither the Nazis or communists "destroyed the information" about the Torahs, but that this casual carelessness was "DESTROYING this precious identification by neglect."¹⁹² The very fact of Steiner's repeated letters indicates that he believed that the Memorial Scrolls Committee had the responsibility to disseminate history along with the Torahs, and had both the authority and duty to improve the situation.

The intensity of Steiner's devotion to remembering the Torahs' origins was informed by other fears, as well. In Czechoslovakia, commemoration was under threat. In letters to Shaffer, Steiner reported that the communist government had cancelled plans to install a plaque in a hotel near a Prague train station that would commemorate the wartime deportations,

giving as a reason 'new aggression of Israel in the Yom Kipur [*sic*] war' — saying such a plaque would offend the feelings of the working people. What on Earth has deportation of poor Jews from CSR [Czechoslovakia] by Hitler to do with the Yom Kippur War is beyond me.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ *MST*, Correspondence from Steiner to Shaffer, 10 June 1985.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Steiner to Ruth Shaffer, 12 January 1986.

The communist authorities had repeatedly balked at overtly Jewish commemorative efforts, removing the names of Czech Jews who had died from the walls of the Pinkas Synagogue. Steiner observed that some of the people listed in the memorial were now considered “Zionist troublemakers....dangerous enemy elements,” and that Hana Volavková, the old curator of the Jewish Museum herself, had been recently designated a “non-person” by the regime.¹⁹⁴ Steiner bemoaned that the Czechoslovakian government “systematically and purposefully were destroying all mementos ref. Jewish historical war-time facts and memorials.”¹⁹⁵

Steiner suggested several measures that would anchor the historical origins of the Torahs in their new locations. First, he recommended the installation of “a PERMANENT little Memorial plaque in their place of worship giving the known name of the city or town it came from, etc.” that would be more visible than the small tag on the Torah itself.¹⁹⁶ Steiner also wanted to create a publicly-available catalog of Torahs and the towns they came from, an enduring resource so the Committee would not have to field so many inquiries. The Committee held the original typewritten catalogue of Torahs and towns that was made in wartime by the Jewish Museum in Prague. Steiner travelled to England to copy this list and cross-reference it with the Committee’s own inventory. He completed his work in November of 1985. With his list completed, Steiner stated that the most essential next step would be to “have ready the individual history of each town” when curious congregations wrote or called.¹⁹⁷ Steiner also ran into obstacles ensuring that the historical hometown of each Torah was properly recorded. The labels of “Original Community” or “Original Synagogue” are problematic, because Torahs from many smaller villages were collected in larger

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ *MST*, Correspondence from Steiner to Shaffer, 28 May 1985.

¹⁹⁷ *MST*, Correspondence from Steiner to Shaffer, 16 January 1992.

towns before being shipped to Prague.¹⁹⁸ Scrolls became associated with the towns or cities where they were first logged, and not their actual place of origin. Any connection of an international congregation with an “original” Czech town would have been an approximation at best, and the list Steiner created was not ever disseminated. He continued to receive queries from congregations for years to come.

Steiner also wanted to avoid giving ammunition to Holocaust deniers who might seize upon inaccuracies and claim that the larger historical details were equally fabricated. Steiner also worried about presenting a Hollywood version of Holocaust history, amplifying sensationalism for wider emotional appeal or perverse fascination. He mentioned in his letters that some congregations had reproduced lore from the Czechoslovakian communist press about the Torahs’ provenance, stories that were exaggerated or totally invented. Some claimed, Steiner reported, that the Nazis had ripped the Torahs from Jewish people’s arms, that “American armies saved these from burning synagogues...SS [men] machine gunned these Torah[s].”¹⁹⁹ Steiner also noted the proliferation of the myth of “the museum of the extinct race.” He observed that newspapers, reporting on Torahs arriving in their local communities, widely reiterated this legend, and that even Jewish children’s books misrepresented the story.²⁰⁰ In his eyes, it ran counter to common sense: “Logic tells me that even crazy Nazis could not believe that Jews all over the world were extinct.”²⁰¹ In 1992, Steiner pointed out that this myth could have been unintentionally propagated by the original booklet written by Rabbi Reinhart in 1964, where the “legend of the extinct race” was mentioned in passing. In the booklet, though, the legend was couched in the phrases “it is said” and “it is believed.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ *MST*, Correspondence from Steiner to Shaffer, 16 January 1992.

²⁰² *MST*, “Sifre Torah,” booklet by Harold Reinhart.

Steiner implies, however, that the Memorial Scrolls Trust had a hand in spreading the rumor about the museum.

Ruth Shaffer responded in 1992, saying that she acknowledged people's tendency to "embroider" the story of the Torahs.²⁰³ Although people's misrepresentations of the story upset her, Shaffer said that, "on the other hand there are many many who do appreciate and feel very emotionally and humble regarding the scroll," and described a moving telephone call that she believed as emblematic of a general trend of response to the Torahs.²⁰⁴ She reported that "it took quite five or six minutes before the man could tell me what he phoned about. He was crying like a child—so overcome with emotion. We just have to [take] the good with the bad."²⁰⁵ Shaffer wrote that for "an undertaking such as this scattered all over the world," the positive emotional impact of the memorial was amplified to such an extent that it outweighed the potential negative consequences of inaccuracy.²⁰⁶ Shaffer, though, believed that the "defunct race" theory could be valid, going on to write that "many articles and historical books...will interpret that period of the Nazis in Prague in many many ways."²⁰⁷ Shaffer thought historical interpretations would be handled by scholars, not by the Memorial Scrolls Trust: their role was more tightly tied to the emotional impact of the memorial.

The Committee in London interpreted the Torahs as commemorative objects, but for several decades, prioritized the distribution of the scrolls over the sharing of their complete history. As historian Michael Imort writes, decentralized memorials are often "incomplete or open in the sense that they offer no in situ contextualization or interpretation frameworks and thus challenge the

²⁰³ *MST*, Correspondence from Ruth Shaffer to Frank Steiner, 29 January 1992.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

beholder to engage with them."²⁰⁸ The letters between Ruth Shaffer and Frank Steiner show how difficult it was to balance that engagement so viewers would be both moved and informed. In the pre-internet era, the ties between the scrolls and their origins, difficult to pin down and even more challenging to maintain, often came undone.

²⁰⁸Michael Imort, "Stumbling Blocks: A Decentralized Memorial to Holocaust Victims," in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. William John Niven, Chloe E. M. Paver (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 240.

A Museum Again

The Memorial Museum in London

One of the original objectives mentioned in the initial meeting of the Memorial Scrolls Committee was to “retain a small reasonable number of Scrolls as our own perpetual Museum and memorial to the perished congregations.”²⁰⁹ Even in 1963, Ralph Yablon wrote that he had “always felt that Kent House could ultimately become the centre for Judaica in London and the housing of these Scrolls suitably with love and care might make the beginning of that kind of effort.”²¹⁰ In a 1964 letter, the Council of Jewish Communities in Prague wrote to London. They approved of plans that the Committee had shared with them, but had not been “informed as to whether it [Kent House] is to be a Memorial solely devoted to the former Czech Jewish communities, or whether it is to be linked with other similar exhibitions.”²¹¹ The Council suggested creating displays that would illuminate the historical background of the Torahs, and offered documents from their collections to help create a “fuller picture.”²¹² Its assistance aimed to make the memorial more like a museum, incorporating primary sources and displays. The Committee had always intended to arrange a display or another sort of educational center on the premises of the Westminster Synagogue, but initially, Kent House served only as the hub of the distribution of the memorial scrolls. It took two decades before a museum was founded and some of the scrolls were situated within the environment of a formal exhibit.

The collection of Torahs in London, even in their damaged and disorganized state, attracted visitors from the week when they arrived. During the early months of the project, several dignitaries and important guests were given tours of the ongoing process. Philippa Bernard writes that

²⁰⁹ *MST*, Memorial Scrolls Committee Minutes, 20 February 1965.

²¹⁰ *MST*, Correspondence from Ralph Yablon to Harold Reinhart, 5 December 1963.

²¹¹ *MST*, Correspondence from Dr. Ehrmann and Dr. Heitlinger, Council of the Jewish Communities in Prague, to the Memorial Scrolls Committee, 11 February 1964.

²¹² *Ibid.*

American tourists, Czech diplomats, theological students, and schoolchildren came to visit the scrolls in Kent House.²¹³ In 1964, Dr. Ivan M. J. Jelinek, a Czech broadcaster with the BBC, visited the synagogue while the Torahs were being sorted and classified. He wrote a summary of his experience, which he translated into English:

We entered a large room. Already from the door I could see the strong wooden shelves reaching up to the ceiling...from each scroll protruded strangely leg-like...I was astonished and shaken...I looked through the two doors back and forth at the same monotonous yet indescribably moving multiplication of shelves and scrolls, arranged in the same position as hundreds of dead bodies in transparent shrouds.²¹⁴

Even at such an early stage in the project, seeing the scrolls in person and in so great a number had a clear impact.

Despite these original inclinations, it took two decades before the creation of a formal museum or memorial space in London was seriously considered. The process of repair and redistribution had taken priority, but by the 1980s the majority of the scrolls had been sent out. The proximate cause of the museum's organization in 1987 was the widespread success and international interest in *The Precious Legacy*, a travelling exhibition created by Czechoslovakia's State Jewish Museum and the Smithsonian Museum. It featured the objects that had been accumulated by the museum during wartime and was visited by over one and a half million people²¹⁵ Notably, no Torah scrolls were included. In the 1980s, museums devoted to the Holocaust had been established; *The Precious Legacy* exhibit provided further proof of interest in this Czech history. Not included were the more than a thousand Torahs collected by the Memorial Scrolls project—no Torahs were included in the *Precious Legacy* exhibit. The curator of this exhibit, Anna Cohn, visited London to

²¹³ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 76.

²¹⁴ *MST*, Correspondence and typescript of radio program from Ivan M. J. Jelinek to Harold Reinhart, 25 June 1964.

²¹⁵ Grace Cohen Grossman, "The Skirball Museum JCR Research Project: Records and Recollections," in *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After* (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 327.

consult about a “somewhat vague conception of a museum to house the residue of the scrolls when distribution is completed.”²¹⁶ Cohn reportedly “[felt] that the Museum could be outstanding,” and proposed two plans for the design, but members of the Memorial Scrolls Trust—Ruth Shaffer, in particular—had other thoughts.²¹⁷

The idea of a museum did not seem quite appropriate; it appeared rather that the scrolls themselves, their appurtenances and the large archive of correspondence should be displayed in the context of the continuing work of repair and distribution. Following much discussion and thought, our present plan is to keep the rooms where they now are, and using the master bedroom and the long hall for visual display of the story of the scrolls and the work done — and still being done — on them. Display of a nucleus of the scrolls would be in the large front room...²¹⁸

Philippa Bernard writes that “members were even wary of the word “museum,” finding it a little pretentious.”²¹⁹ While the members chose a smaller scale for the exhibit in Kent House, the situation of artifacts within a historical narrative constitutes a museum, regardless of size; today, it is called the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum. They rejected Cohn’s designs—which would require intensive and expensive renovations—and opted to do everything in-house, creating a “modest display” that could be accommodated in the top floor of Kent House.²²⁰ The display was to be called The Czech Memorial Scrolls Centre, and was designed and opened in the same place in 1988.²²¹ Subsequent notes indicated that the display should “not attempt to rival existing museums, in Israel and elsewhere, which take the Holocaust as a whole as their theme.”²²² The advantage, then, of examining the Holocaust through a much smaller lens—only the Czech story, focusing on the Torah scrolls—would simplify some of these problems. For example, in 2004, Memorial Scrolls Committee

²¹⁶ *MST*, Correspondence from Frank Steiner to Ruth Shaffer, 4 March 1987.

²¹⁷ *MST*, “Report to Committee,” 7 September 1986.

²¹⁸ *MST*, Minutes of the Committee of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, 23 October 1986.

²¹⁹ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 80.

²²⁰ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 80.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

²²² *MST*, “Memorial Scrolls: Museum Notes for Discussion,” n.d.

contrasted the scope of the museum from “multi-million-dollar Holocaust Museums,” which they described as “so overwhelming and traumatising that children and their parents do not want to absorb their content and message.”²²³ The exhibit would limit its focus to the scrolls’ “origin, their wartime fate, their recovery from Prague, their restoration and redistribution, their new homes.”²²⁴

The more modest design had at its core the “continuing work” being done in London.²²⁵ The intention, expressed by Ruth Shaffer, was to “facilitate the ongoing restoration and redistribution program and the interest of visitors in seeing the Scrolls in situ” — not in their original sites, but within the setting of the memorial project.²²⁶ The first room of the exhibition originally featured the scribe, David Brand, at work. When he passed away, his desk and tools remained in the first room of the museum. Nowadays, it is not unusual for art galleries to make some parts of the conservation process available to visitors, but the centrality of restoration efforts in such a small museum was unusual at that time. In 2003, the Committee discussed the number of scrolls still at the Kent House property in London and specifically “the need to balance the duty of the Trust to distribute the scrolls, together with the necessity to keep enough for the museum display.”²²⁷ Some believed that the museum did not need any great number, but others “felt that the display was part of the purpose of the Trust...pictures of the scrolls would not suffice.”²²⁸ Shaffer had written that it was not “possible for anyone to appreciate the significance of the miracle of the Czech scrolls without coming here and seeing them with their own eyes.”²²⁹ A minimum of fifty scrolls was established.²³⁰ The project of

²²³ *MST*, “The Process of Renewal for the Memorial Scrolls,” 2004.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *MST*, “Memorial Scrolls: Museum Notes for Discussion,” n.d.

²²⁶ *MST*, “Memorial Scrolls: Museum Notes for Discussion,” n.d.

²²⁷ *MST*, Minutes of the Committee of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, July 24 2003.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *MST*, typescript of speech “Story of the Miracle of the Czech Scrolls” by Ruth Shaffer, n. d.

²³⁰ *MST*, Minutes of the Committee of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, July 24 2003.

repair and distribution preceded the creation of the museum, and established the focus of the exhibition.

To get to the Czech Scrolls Museum, visitors take a service elevator from the elegant foyer of Kent House to the third floor. Regular guided tours are led every Wednesday morning, and other visits are organized by appointment only.²³¹ Though entry is free of charge, no more than five hundred guests come each year.²³² Ruth Shaffer once complained that a travel agency put the museum on their itinerary, sending “two coach loads of tourists. Our ability to cater for this was stretched to the full — and we soon had to abandon that idea.”²³³ A consistent limitation that the museum has faced is its size, both in square footage and staff: the museum can only accommodate at most a dozen visitors at once. Efforts are being made to digitize records and photographs of the objects in the collection and to keep a map of the locations of some of the scrolls on the website, so those who cannot travel to London can examine the collection from afar.

The museum situates the Torah scrolls within a wider story of “the pre-war life of the Czech communities, the destruction of those communities, the post-war pattern of Jewish life as reflected in the redistribution of the scrolls.”²³⁴ The exhibit begins in a corridor, the walls presenting infographics that describe Jewish life in Bohemia and Moravia, and the timeline of World War II. Maps and reproductions of photographs illustrate the locations of Jewish communities. The next room displays David Brand’s tools and work-desk, with placards describing the process of making a Torah. In the same room are embroidered Torah binders in plexiglass pull-out drawers, accompanied by Torah pointers, mantles, crowns, and breastplates in vitrines. Some of these Torah binders, also called *wimpels*, came with the scrolls purchased in the sixties; others were borrowed later from the Jewish

²³¹ Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum, London, England. Visited January 2019.

²³² Jeffrey Ohrenstein, Chairman, Memorial Scrolls Trust, e-mail message to the author, 16 March 2019.

²³³ MST, Typescript of speech “Story of the Miracle of the Czech Scrolls” by Ruth Shaffer.

²³⁴ MST, “Memorial Scrolls: Museum Notes for Discussion,” n.d.

Museum in Prague. Made in honor of a boy's circumcision, these ceremonial strips of cloth were used to keep a Torah scroll closed securely. The *wimpels* display a colorful variety of textiles, regional needlework styles, and text in Czech, German, Yiddish, and Hebrew. Torah binders were often embroidered with dates, family names, and other biographical information, which provide clues as to the locations and age of some Central European Jewish communities. The display of the Torah binders demonstrates the Torahs' use not only as religious texts, but also as an element of the material culture of Jewish communities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Czechoslovakia before the war. Including the binders in the museum situates the Torahs within a longer trajectory of Jewish history that precedes the Holocaust.

In the next room, black and white photographs of the staff of the Jewish Museum in Prague honor those who worked there during the war. These are exhibited next to portraits of the leading figures of the Memorial Scrolls Committee, cultivating a sense of continuity between the two institutions. The museum ends in a chilly room. In its early days, the museum featured some of these "tragic broken scrolls" draped in torn prayer shawls and arranged in artful disarray on a black plinth.²³⁵ Now, an austere glass case protects shelves of the most damaged scrolls, ones that are too fragile to travel or even unroll. This is the focal point of the exhibit; often, tour guides photograph visitors in front of the case, and post pictures to the museum's Facebook page.

A key consideration when analyzing the display of Holocaust artifacts is emplacement, which religious studies professor Oren Stier defines as "how, why, and under what conditions are Holocaust-era artifacts situated, and how is the Holocaust engaged" in different memorial and museum settings.²³⁶ While the Torahs are all over the world, the museum presents an important

²³⁵ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 82.

²³⁶ Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 36.

documented example with a large number of scrolls in a setting designed by the organization that initially treated them as memorial objects.

The first level of emplacement of the Torahs in the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum is national. At the official opening ceremony in 1988, speakers combined religious feelings with civic sentiments. England's Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits, spoke about the "indomitable faith of Jews" and his uncle's work as a librarian at the Jewish Museum in Prague.²³⁷ Another speaker reflected with patriotic pride that no better "resting place could be devised for the Scrolls than Westminster, the heart of the commonwealth, the ancient seat of parliamentary democracy, the home of the sovereign, the city which stood as a beacon light to the suffering and the oppressed."²³⁸ The speaker's assumptions, however, raise the question: Why was a chance foreign capital the sensible home for a collection of Czech Torah scrolls? In retrospect, though, it might be equally unexpected for there still to be a Jewish Museum in Prague. Journalist Ruth Ellen Gruber writes about places in Central and Eastern Europe that have become "virtually Jewish." These locations embrace the vestiges of Jewish culture—often in an exaggerated or kitschy way, intended to attract tourists—in places where there are no longer visible populations of practicing Jews. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Gruber claims, is one such location: hundreds of thousands visit every year, and more than one million tourists sightsee and wander in the Jewish quarter more generally, but the current Jewish population in the Czech Republic is in the low thousands.²³⁹ In these locations, Jewish history is incomprehensible outside of the overwhelming reality of genocide. Gruber writes,

In today's Europe all Jewish museums are—to one degree or another—Holocaust museums of a sort; what is presented is inevitably viewed through the backward lens of the Shoah. In parts of Europe, every pre-war object display is a "survivor."²⁴⁰

²³⁷ *MST*, Press Release: Solemn Assembly, August 1988.

²³⁸ *MST*, Press Release: Solemn Assembly, August 1988.

²³⁹ Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 126.

²⁴⁰ Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, 155.

This period of devastating loss overshadows any other content about Jewish history that predates World War II or describes Jewish culture in the post-war period. A museum in London, then, might avoid this backdrop, and provide a more neutral setting to present this history.

The museum rejects a narrative that ends totemically in destruction. A few floors down in Kent House, the Westminster Synagogue holds regular services that include two memorial scrolls.²⁴¹ The Memorial Scrolls Museum is actually, not virtually, Jewish—one exits not through a gift shop, but through the space of an active, contemporary congregation. This is distinctly different from the commission for the USHMM, who were continually concerned that their exhibition would be ‘too Jewish’ for the National Mall and an American audience.²⁴² The emphasis on Jewish survival is exemplified by the diasporic memorial network itself: the last image visitors see before leaving the museum is a map marking the locations of the Torahs that were able to be salvaged and have been sent to other locations, primarily Jewish communities, around the world. Jeffrey Ohrenstein, current chairman of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, stresses that

our Torah Scrolls are not strictly “Holocaust Scrolls” as they were not written, during or for the Holocaust. They are Memorial Scrolls, survivors and silent witnesses of the Shoah, representing all the lost communities destroyed by the Nazis and their supporters in Bohemia and Moravia, as well as other countries.²⁴³

The question of how artifacts are positioned in museum spaces is perhaps just as important as the location of the museum itself. The Torahs were stowed and restored at Kent House before the museum came into existence. In similar museums, though, curators often have the opposite problem—it is hard to find such items for their displays as “the injured, dispossessed, and expelled

²⁴¹ MST, “WS Czech Scrolls Commemorative Service” flyer, 2019.

²⁴² Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 257.

²⁴³ Jeffrey Ohrenstein (chairman, Memorial Scrolls Trust), correspondence with author, March 2019.

are left object-poor.”²⁴⁴ In 1988, the USHMM requested donations of “documents, letters, diaries, original works of art, articles of clothing, photographs and other objects that were created in the camps, in ghettos or in hiding,” resulting in the acquisition of more than ten thousand objects, dubbed “object survivors” by the curators.²⁴⁵ Some of the exhibit designers, dissatisfied with items they saw as trivial and uninspiring, travelled to Europe to find impactful but authentic artifacts, finding many in countries behind the Iron Curtain.²⁴⁶

Institutions like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were influenced by the curation at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum in Poland, which displays enormous piles of shoes and other articles collected from victims before they were murdered.²⁴⁷ Artifacts like these have evidentiary power to represent the terrible scale of human loss, but their display can also be a dehumanizing spectacle. Paul Williams, a professor of museum studies, describes how the “canon of Holocaust victims’ objects...clothing, money, jewelry, eyeglasses, watches, hair” is the result of the industrial process of Nazi murder, constituting “‘byproducts’ of...genocide.”²⁴⁸ The resultant meaning of these objects is derived from the murder, “reducing [the object] to its period of greatest suffering.”²⁴⁹ The context of their use ended when their owners perished; the traumatic event reifies the everyday objects as artifacts with both historical and emotional gravity. But what is the impact of these artifacts on a historical understanding of the past? James Young asks,

What precisely does the sight of concentration-camp artifacts awaken in viewers? ... That visitors respond more directly to objects than to verbalized concepts is clear. But beyond affect, what does our knowledge of these objects—a bent spoon, children’s shoes, crusty old striped uniforms—have to do with our knowledge of historical events?²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 25.

²⁴⁵ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 145.

²⁴⁶ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 146.

²⁴⁷ Linenthal, “Interior Space: The Mood of Memory,” in *Preserving Memory*, 168-216.

²⁴⁸ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 29.

²⁴⁹ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 29.

²⁵⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 132.

Like Frank Steiner, Young is dubious that an exclusively emotional reaction is a useful educational tool, critical that nuanced historical awareness can come from interactions with such objects. Young continues, “these artifacts...force us to recall the victims as the Germans have remembered them to us...these remnants remind us not of the lives that once animated them, so much as the brokenness of lives.”²⁵¹ In most cases, after all, the original collecting was done by Nazis.

In historian Edward Linenthal’s history of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, he argues that the display of artifacts is even more fraught when relocated to international museums. The USHMM displays piles of shoes on loan from a museum at Majdanek. Linenthal writes that artifacts become “domesticated” in the museum setting when removed from their original locations in concentration camps.²⁵² Their presence is still solemn and affecting, but is made safer and less horrifying within the space of the museum. The artifacts are “props in a larger story” that the museum creates; they are chosen, placed, and explained by the museum’s curators, not displayed where they were left historically, as in Majdanek.²⁵³ Even if the objects are irrefutably genuine, the scene as a whole is less authentic. Linenthal argues that removing evidence from the scene of the crime inherently reduces the intensity of a viewer’s experience.

Other scholars believe that the display and relocation of specific kinds of Holocaust artifacts can be constructive. Oren Stier writes about the use of railway cars used for deportations as symbols of the Holocaust in both commemorative and museum settings, examining their emplacement both within an exhibit and within the wider context of the country. Before considering questions of location, however, Stier clarifies that questions of appropriate use also are reliant on the *kind* of artifact in how directly they are defined by victims’ experiences. Stier creates a new vocabulary

²⁵¹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 132.

²⁵² Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 162.

²⁵³ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 162.

within the category of object survivors: “remnants” are left over from the crimes and “indicate the absence of the human bearers,” while “relics” are more gruesome, literal remnants, like human hair. The third category are “unique objects related more obliquely to human experiences [in the Holocaust]: desecrated Torahs scrolls would be included.”²⁵⁴ Interestingly, artifacts he places in this third category are all linked in their connection to saving and preservation: Stier mentions a Danish rescue boat displayed on the USHMM and items saved in a milk can in the Warsaw Ghetto.²⁵⁵ Young and Linenthal’s concerns are confined to remnants and relics; according to Stier’s taxonomy, the Czech Torah scrolls would instead fall into the third category.

The Czech scrolls are unique artifacts; they can and should be treated differently with regard to their exhibition and memorialization. Usually, other Holocaust artifacts like shoes or suitcases would only have been used privately, by a single person; perhaps a wedding ring passed down as a family heirloom would have had a longer lifespan. But Torahs are intrinsically public and multigenerational: each was read from and handled and used by a Jewish community over the course of decades, even centuries. Mending and restoration over the course of decades would have been a natural component of the Torah’s use. In this way, the Torahs differ from other articles like concentration camp prisoners’ uniforms, which were left in disrepair at the USHMM because their damaged condition better “tells a story”²⁵⁶ or the controversial repainting of a railway car that called into question its authenticity.²⁵⁷ “Domestication” is not a concern. Most people would be horrified to wear the shoes of Holocaust victims; the Torahs, because they represent more than just death, have been rightfully assimilated into common use, and are regarded not with revulsion but with reverence.

²⁵⁴ Steir, *Holocaust Icons*, 35.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 161.

²⁵⁷ Steir, *Holocaust Icons*, 48.

Even the Torahs that are too damaged to be used, the ones that constitute the core of the Memorial Scrolls exhibit, are framed within the wider story of the memorial scroll project's success. However, as it was made clear in the planning documents for the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum, the focus is not in representing the devastation of the Holocaust or Nazi crimes; after all, part of the damage happened in the post-war period. The Torah only aims to clarify the story of the scrolls and their memorial value.

In this setting, the quantity of damaged Torahs—even as the intentionally solemn center of the museum—represents more than tragedy. Originally, the presentation of the damaged Torahs was more aestheticized: a centerpiece on a black plinth arranged with “some of the tragic broken scrolls, some wrapped in damaged tallit, their parchment burned or disfigured, their rollers broken.”²⁵⁸ The current, more neutral presentation in a glass exhibit case situates even the most damaged scrolls in an objective setting. Their quantity, unlike the shoes at the USHMM or Majdanek, is not suggestive of the scale of death and destruction, but a practical point of comparison for visualizing the hundreds of Torahs that have been saved and restored. The Torahs provide evidence in a multivalent way: they convey an emotional example of irreparable Jewish culture, but also testify to the much larger impact of the wider memorial project. The Torahs displayed within the narrative created by the museum foreground Jewish people's involvement with the scrolls' use, recovery, and restoration.

The Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum sets their artifacts within an objective and instructive historical chronology, resolving Frank Steiner's complaints about the memorial's historical specificity, and James Young's more general concern about the limits of an artifact's explanatory power. The museum demonstrates that the Torahs have historic meaning and religious value that

²⁵⁸ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 83,

predate and outlast the incursion of Nazis into Czechoslovakia. In London, focusing on these unique artifacts, there are no demands to speak to the entire Holocaust, and no reduction of the people's lives to featureless tragedy. The story that the Torahs tell is not confined to the 1930s and 1940s: while the scrolls were displaced by the Nazis, they were created, used, preserved, and then reclaimed by Jews. Maintaining a clear awareness of the Torah's history, as established by the museum, means that they are not a signifier of trauma, and sets an example for memorial use in other places.

Conclusion

Looking Forward

By 1985, there were no longer any scrolls that could be made kosher, but still “many hundreds of congregations requested a scroll as a MEMORIAL.”²⁵⁹ It seemed that the Memorial Scrolls Committee had successfully promoted the value of the Torahs as commemorative objects. Even more interest was raised after a film made by the NBC and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, called *The Odyssey of the Czech Torah Scrolls*, was broadcast in the United States in 1984.²⁶⁰

Much of the work of the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust since the late 1980s has been devoted to tracking down Torahs which have been misplaced. Memorial Torahs are lost more often than one might expect: Jewish communities dissolve, move, or merge, changing their telephone number and moving to new buildings. Other times, those who funded the donation of the Torah in the first place consider it their own property, even though the scrolls were given out on permanent loan and legally remain the property of the Trust. In one case that almost went to court, a donor took a memorial Torah along when moving to a retirement community in Florida.²⁶¹ In other cases, the provenance of the scrolls is simply forgotten—while older members in a congregation may have known that one of their Torahs was a part of the Memorial Scrolls network, newer temple administrators or clergy may not recall its particular history. Some temples even apply for a Czech Torah not knowing that they already have one. The Torahs’ mobility—what made them so suitable to save, relocate, and distribute—now factors into the risk of being lost a second time.

There are more examples that demonstrate how people treat the Czech Memorial Torahs with attention, reverence, and respect. When a new Jewish community arose in the Moravian town of Olomouc, third largest community in the Czech Republic, the Memorial Scrolls Trust organized the

²⁵⁹ MST, Typescript of interview with Ruth Shaffer, 1985. Emphasis in the original.

²⁶⁰ Bernard, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 78.

²⁶¹ MST, internal memo, 27 February 1992.

return of a Torah from a synagogue in Foster City, California. This return was the first example of a memorial Torah being restituted to its original location, where in 2007 it was read by Czech Jews for the first time in decades.²⁶² In the fall of 2018, when wildfires tore through California, a rabbi disobeyed an evacuation order to rescue his synagogue's Torahs, one of which was a Czech memorial scroll.²⁶³ In February of 2019, more than seventy memorial Torahs were assembled in Temple Emanu-El in Manhattan for a celebration that included speeches and a ceremonial procession.²⁶⁴ It was the first time that some of the Torahs had been together in the same space in fifty years.²⁶⁵

The history of the Czech scrolls reveals an unusual life cycle. Pierre Nora writes, "*lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications."²⁶⁶ The scrolls have assumed various identities and served different purposes, accumulating new layers of significance as they moved from Prague to London and beyond. The history of the Czech Memorial Torahs is still being written, branching and multiplying as the commemorative project develops and changes in its many locations. The memorial scrolls have created a cultural community of memorialization: hundreds of people were involved in the saving, repairing, distributing, and exhibiting of these Torahs, and many more see them, read from them, and learn from them today. The Torahs have shown

²⁶²Lianne Kolirin. "Torah scroll that survived the Nazis returns home," *The Jewish Chronicle*, 29 September 2017. Web. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/torah-scroll-that-survived-the-nazis-returns-home-1.445261>

²⁶³Josefin Dolsten, "How a rabbi saved 4 Torah scrolls from being destroyed in the California wildfires," *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 12 November 2018. Web. <https://www.jta.org/2018/11/12/united-states/how-a-rabbi-saved-4-torah-scrolls-from-being-destroyed-in-the-california-wildfires>

²⁶⁴ *Memorial Scrolls Trust Newsletter*, issue 10, Summer 2019, <https://memorialscrollstrust.org/index.php/newsletter/121-mstnewsletter-10>.

²⁶⁵Sandee Brawarsky. "Torahs As 'Silent Witnesses': Exhibition marks reunion of rescued scrolls from what is now the Czech Republic," *The New York Jewish Week*, 12 February 2019. Web. <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/torahs-as-silent-witnesses/>

²⁶⁶ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 19.

themselves to be adept at hibernation and reappearance: their decentralization should not be cause for concern, but an opportunity for new and continued use. These Torahs—religious texts, Central European Jewish cultural artifacts, decentralized Holocaust memorials—are profoundly connected, not only from generation to generation, but from place to place.

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