

Yad Vashem Collection of Memorial Books:

Bibliographical, Historical and Statistical Aspects / Merav Yisrael

Abstract

Jewish community memorial books, also known as Yizkor books, were written and published since the end of WWR II until today, with the purpose of remembering and commemorating Jewish Communities which existed before WWII. Many of these were created in a joint effort of Landsmanshaftn - mutual aid organizations composed of immigrants and survivors from the same region or town. The members of these organizations recruited resources and joint forces in order to collect, write, document and publish memorial books about their communities of origin. Yizkor books were a continuation of a Jewish mourning and commemoration tradition and held an emotional and educational role for the immigrants and survivors who came from those communities, and their families.

As communal means of commemoration, Yizkor books deal with mourning, grief, remembrance and preserving the memory of Jewish life which no longer exists, using a variety of verbal and graphic means.

Commemoration for victims who were not buried, is a central component in many of the books since the need to commemorate the martyrs is an extremely important task for the survivors. Millions of Jewish Holocaust victims were not brought to burial and have no grave or tombstone. In a symbolic way, the Yizkor books are a replacement to a tombstone and an obligation fulfillment towards the dead. For this reason, many of the books contain lists of names (Kugelmas & Boyarin, 1998. pp. 31-35).

There is no singular definition for Yizkor books and therefor there is no consent regarding the number of them. Different collections of Yizkor books contain different numbers of items. Some of the writers and editors of Yizkor books were scholars or professional writers, but in most cases the books were compiled by various former community members and their work was based

on experience and personal memories. The organizations would usually appoint a committee for the book and the committee members would collect essays, photographs, letters, testimonies, maps, lists etc. from community members and survivors all over the world (Horowitz, 2011 b, p. 7).

Goal and method:

The purpose of this essay is to research and characterize the Yizkor book collection of the Yad Vashem library. Yad Vashem is a world center for commemoration, documentation, research and education of the Holocaust. The Yad Vashem Yizkor book collection answers to the broadest definition of Yizkor books and therefore is a very large collection.

The main question which the research aims to answer is: have Yizkor books affected Holocaust commemoration in Israel and in the world, and if so, in which way?

Other questions adjunct to this question concern writers and editors of the books, years of publication, languages, publishers and geographical distribution of publication and of the communities which the books deal with.

The research is based on the *Livre et société* school, which its basic assumption is that everyday life influences human history (אלידע, 1999, ע' 301-300). Research of the book is based on research methods of Library and Information science, including the field of Bibliometrics, which purpose *is* quantitative analysis of books and other print products, using Statistical tools (Pritchard, 1969).

For the purpose of the research a database has been assembled, composed of all the memorial books belonging to the Yad Vashem library collection. Different criteria were compared and went through analysis, according to research goals.

Findings:

Various findings were seen. Among writers and editors, the vast majority were males. Largest numbers of memorial books were published during the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's and 1990's. The largest number of book was compiled about communities in Poland. A positive correlation was found between the size of Jewish communities in various countries on the eve of WWII and the number of books published about the communities of that country, however no correlation has been found between percentage of Jewish survivors in different countries and the number of book that relate to those countries. The language in which the largest number of memorial books was written in this database was German, followed by Hebrew and Hebrew-Yiddish combination. During the first decades after the war (1940's till 1970's) the dominant languages in which community memorial book were written were Hebrew and Hebrew-Yiddish combination, however from the 1980's till the end of the 20th century, German became the most dominant language.

Conclusions:

The research results, in light of the literature review presented, show memorial books were created by Jewish immigrants and survivors in the first decades after WWII as a continuance to traditions of writing, documentation and commemoration, and as means of processing the mourning and endowing commemoration to the following generations. These books had influence in the years to come on the creation of other community memorial book that were created by individuals and organizations worldwide, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Thus, community memorial books became a widespread means of commemoration not only for community immigrants and survivors, but also for local authorities and non-Jewish populations dealing with their history under Nazi regime, with the purpose of commemorating the victims and Jewish life that ceased to exist, mainly in Germany but in other European countries as well. In that way Yizkor books have a double contribution to the commemoration of European Jewry, in the Jewish as well as non-Jewish world.

MMS Number: 9926634670605776