The Jewish People and Memory: A Special Issue of the Judaic Studies Review

Edited by Dr. Randi Rashkover and Robert Coleman

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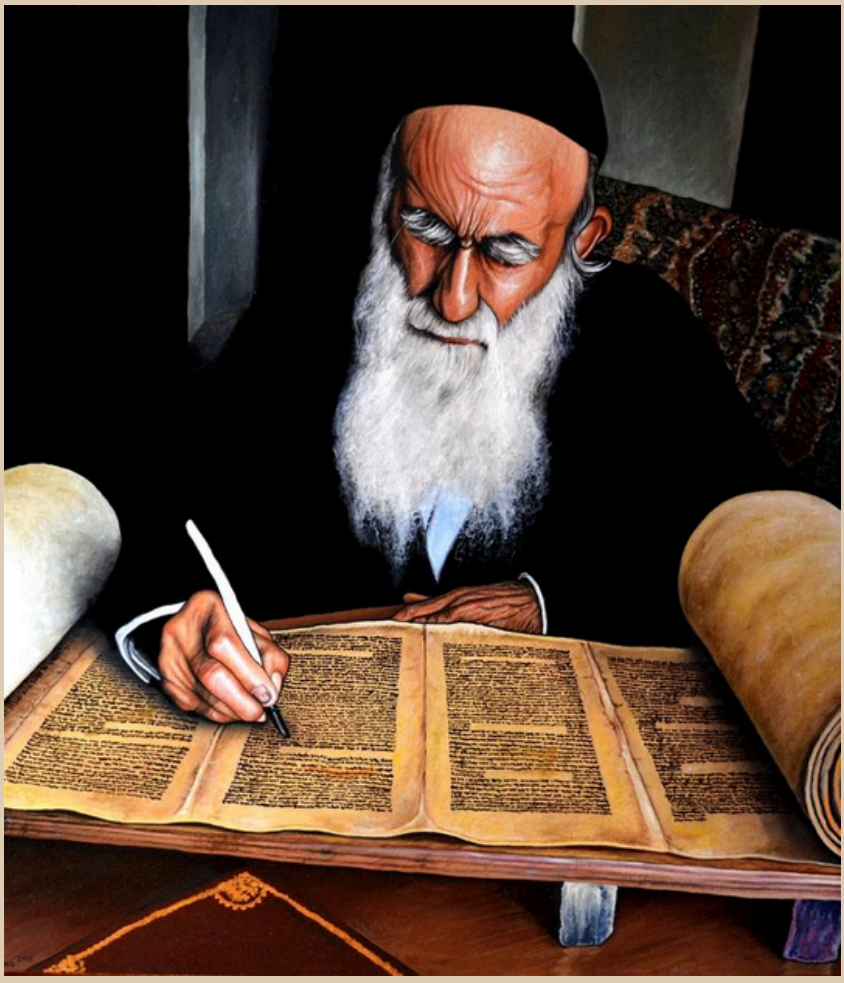

Note From the Editors

We are delighted to welcome you to this special issue of the Spring 2024 Judaic Studies Review! The articles showcased here are indicative of the rigorous and insightful works of undergraduate and graduate students at William & Mary. The authors highlighted here have participated in comprehensive research and analysis of a particularly salient issue: memory. Memory manifests as a pervasive theme throughout the Tanakh. In passages such as Deuteronomy 8:2 and Devarim 8:18, to name a few, the narrator commands readers to remember YHWH's deeds in providing prosperity for Jews throughout time. In this special issue of The Judaic Studies Review, the authors are engaged with the question: how have the Jewish people sought to remember their history throughout time? As societies and individuals continue to distort Jewish events, histories, and people, from Holocaust denial or antisemitic promulgations tied to the attacks on October 7th, this issue hopes to showcase the importance of analyzing how people remember their pasts. Jewish efforts to commemorate their past illuminate our understandings of Jewish identity and the broader role of memory in other religions, ethnicities, and nations. We begin this special issue with Leah Stein's "Weaving Pasts and Presents: The Sudra as a Reclamation of Jewish Collective Memory," which situates Jewish material culture in conversation with anthropological studies of collective memory-making, arguing that the contemporary use of sudra garments serves as meaningful self-styling, reclaiming Jewish memory and bridging Jewish pasts with the present. Next, in "Remembering Colmar's Jewish Community: Examining the Misleading Popular Violence Narrative of the Colmar Collection," Robert Coleman assess the commemoration of the destruction of Colmar's Jewish community, revealing how the Colmar Treasure Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts distorted events to portray a cohesive narrative of the long history of violence against Jews. In "A Holocaust Testimony Microhistory," Sam Gruber traces his family's Holocaust history to provide insight into the use of survivor testimony as a form of Holocaust memory preservation. Finally, Riley Nubauer's "The Three Lives of Hostomice Scroll #853," tracks the history of Hostomice Scroll #853, highlighting how its use today simultaneously represents Jewish destruction and resistance during the Holocaust. In a contemporary moment filled with uncertainty and apprehension for Jews facing persistent antisemitism around the world, we find it crucial that prolific scholarship about Judaism and the Jewish people counters attempts to distort, deny, and erase the diverse and multifaceted stories of Jews. Thus, understanding how Jews have sought to remember their pasts not only illuminates Jewish commemoration practices, but reveals how they have sought to protect their history, culture, and peoplehood in the face of persecution, violence, and antisemitism. As always, thank you and we hope you enjoy this special issue of the Judaic Studies Review.

"Weaving Pasts and Presents: The Sudra as a Reclamation of Jewish Collective Memory" by Leah Stein

Abstract

Within the last decade, the *sudra*, a woven rectangular cloth worn as a neck scarf or turban, has seen a resurgence across Israeli and diasporic Jewish communities, with some individuals increasingly choosing to take up the garment in connection to and as a reclamation of Jewish traditional dress spanning back millennia. This paper explores the sudra's reemergence, positioning its adoption as one of the myriad practices undertaken to tap into, and bring into the present, collective memories of Jewish pasts. Drawing from discussions of collective memory in anthropological discourse, this paper frames collective memory-making as an active, open ended and ongoing process in which the past is iteratively constructed and reconstructed in the present. One medium by which such collective memory-making processes are perpetuated is through the objects and representations with which people are entangled, including the clothing they choose to wear and the adornments with which they decorate themselves. This is the context in which the contemporary adoption of sudra garments is situated, historically contextualized by sudra use across the millennia, from ancient Jewish dress and headdress practices and the use of sudra garments in the Talmudic period, to the subsequent dress practices of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews living as dhimmis and subjected to sumptuary restrictions under Muslim rule. Thus, this paper will argue that contemporary adoption of sudra garments, amidst political and social controversy, constitutes a form of meaningful self-styling, a practice of reconstructing and reclaiming Jewish collective memory, and of bringing Jewish pasts, ancient and recent, back into the present.

Introduction

> May the headgear (*ʿaṭara*) return. May it be placed on top of my head.
> By the will of Him whom I sanctify
> Return, O G-d, deliver my soul!
> I have been punished enough!
> —Shalom Shabazī[1]

> May you restore my crown (*ʿaṭara*), which they threw off.
> I bend in my misery and my enemies rejoice.
> —Shalom Shabazī[2]

Within the last decade, the *sudra*, a woven rectangular cloth worn either as a neck scarf or a turban, has seen something of a resurgence across Israeli and Diasporic Jewish communities, with some individuals increasingly choosing to take up the garment in connection to and as a reclamation of Jewish traditional dress spanning back millennia.[3] Variably referred to as a *sudra* or *sudara* (סודרא in Aramaic) or as a *sudar* (סוּדָר in Hebrew),[4] the garment is referenced throughout Talmudic sources and was characterized as a "*scarf wound around the head and hanging down over the neck*, [a] *turban*" [emphasis in original] in Rabbi and Talmudic scholar Marcus Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, compiled around the turn of the twentieth century.[5]

In this paper, I will explore the sudra's recent reemergence, positioning the adoption of sudra garments by Jews in Israel and across the diaspora as one of the myriad practices and performances undertaken to tap into, and bring into the present, collective memories of Jewish

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[1] Cited in Yosef Tobi, "Politics and Poetry in the Works of Shalom Shabazī," *Israel Affairs* 20, no. 2 (2014), 251.
[2] Cited in Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 38.
[3] Michael Jacobson, "The Sudra: A Connection to a Pre-Islamic Jewish Culture", *HaRimon*, August 2, 2021.
[4] "History", MySudra. accessed March 27, 2024, https://www.mysudra.com/projects-7.
[5] Jacobson, "The Sudra"; Marcus Jastrow, ""סוּדָר", in the *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*. (London: Luzac, 1903). Accessed March 27, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Jastrow%2C_סו%D6%BC1.דָר?lang=bi&lookup=סו%D6%BCדָר&with=Lexicon&lang2=en.

pasts. In my discussion of such practices and performances, I will briefly highlight the debate around collective memory in anthropological discourse and, drawing from anthropological studies of collective memory and discussions of Jewish memory in particular, frame collective memory-making as an active, open ended and ongoing process in which the past is iteratively constructed and reconstructed in the present. One medium by which such collective memory-making processes are perpetuated, I will argue, is through the objects and representations with which people are entangled, including the clothing they choose to wear and the adornments with which they decorate themselves. This is the context in which I will situate the contemporary production and adoption of sudra garments, historically contextualized by a discussion of sudra use across the millennia, from ancient Jewish dress and headdress practices and the use of sudra garments in the Talmudic period, to the subsequent dress practices of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews living as dhimmis and subjected to discrimination and various sumptuary restrictions under Muslim rule over the course of the last several centuries. I will suggest that the contemporary adoption of the sudra by Jewish individuals in Israel and across the diaspora, amidst political and social controversy, is a form of meaningful self-styling, a practice of reconstructing and reclaiming Jewish collective memory, and of bringing Jewish pasts, ancient and modern, back into the present.

Collective Memory and Clothing

Collective memory has been a significant subject of anthropological discourse since the publication of French sociologist Maurice Halbwach's influential works *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and *La mémoire collective* in 1925 and 1950 respectively.[6] Halbwach, through these

[6] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, "Collective memory: Conceptual foundations and theoretical approaches," *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008).

works, argued that an individual's memories are fundamentally and inexorably part of the collective assemblage of thoughts shared among members of the groups to which they belong, locating memories in the physical and psychological spaces these groups communally construct and inhabit, and moving toward an understanding in which "the idea of an individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning."[7] In the decades since, collective memory, defined broadly as a "form of memory that transcends individuals and is shared by a group,"[8] has been heavily debated, with some scholars suggesting that "literally, the idea that a group of people can have memories is nonsense"[9] and others questioning whether memories could ever be anything *but* social and collective in nature.[10]

Ultimately emergent from this discourse has been a burgeoning and interdisciplinary field of memory studies, in which scholars have employed notions of collective memory, collective remembering, social memory, and cultural memory, among others, to capture the way that memory shapes and is shaped by the groups and social contexts in which it is weaved, deployed, and experienced. For instance, Paul Connerton highlights the way shared recollections of the past are sustained through social activity, specifically through ritualized *commemorative ceremonies* and iterative *bodily practices*.[11] In the case of the former, Connerton suggests that these commemorative ceremonies often feature explicit reference to mythological or historical pasts in a sort of "ritual *re-enactment*" [emphasis in original] where these pasts are not only recalled but actively performed.[12] This is instantiated, as Connerton suggests, by the role of holidays in

[7] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 37.
[8] Wertsch and Roediger, "Collective memory", 318.
[9] Maurice Bloch, Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 213.
[10] See for example Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of distortion in collective memory," in *Memory distortion: How minds, brains and societies reconstructed the past*, ed. Daniel Schacter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[11] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.
[12] Ibid, 61.

perpetuating Jewish collective memory, holiday practices enabling Jewish communities to reenact, "recall and recuperate in their present life the major formative events" in their history, such as the collective remembering of the exodus from Egypt during Pesach, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai during Shavuot, the story of Esther during Purim, the victory of the Maccabees during Hannukah, and even the act of creation itself every week during Shabbat.[13]

Each of these examples, according to Connerton, attest not only to the way history—and memory—can be performed and reintegrated into peoples' lives, but the way this process "make[s] the past actual" and allows people to "form a solidarity with [fore]fathers", participating and sharing in memories that span across time, across space, and beyond the confines of the individual; in other words, through the iterative performance of such Jewish ritual practice, "the generations in history hang together."[14] This was likewise highlighted by author Dara Horn in her discussion of Jewish time and memory.[15] As Horn suggests, the ways in which collective memory is perpetuated by the observance of these traditions collapses past and present together, with rabbinic teachings insisting that it was not just Jewish ancestors who were freed from Egypt or who received the Torah but that in a fundamental way *all* Jews, in the present as well as in the future, likewise were liberated in the exodus and stood at Mount Sinai.[16] Horn argues that the construction of time in Judaism is thereby not linear but instead a "spiral of a spiral, a tangled old telephone cord in which the future was the present, which was essentially the past".[17] In her experience, the creation of the world reoccurred at every Shabbat dinner table, the flight to freedom at each Passover seder,

[13] Ibid, 46.
[14] Ibid, 46.
[15] Dara Horn, *People Love Dead Jews* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021).
[16] Ibid, 3.
[17] Ibid, 3.

and "every new year, Abraham once more drew his knife to his son Isaac's throat, holding our future hostage, fate and free will bound together in a double helix that caught us in its grip."[18]

Crucial in this discussion is the *active* and *open-ended* nature of collective memory construction, as the past is not passively handed down but instead agentively and perpetually produced and reproduced. This is highlighted in James Wertsch and Henry Roediger's discussion of the difference between collective memory and "collective remembering", the latter more usefully capturing how group memory is not a "static base of knowledge" but instead an ongoing process involving "repeated reconstruction of representations of the past" and often featuring significant sociopolitical contestation.[19] An important facet of this contestation is the fact that processes of collective remembering do not relay neutral or objective accounts of the past, if indeed such accounts are possible, but instead anchors the past interpretively to the present, employing meaningful past narratives to serve present purposes.[20] In other words, through such active processes of collective remembering, "The past is not simply 'received' by the present. The present is 'haunted' by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present."[21] This process of invention and reinvention, construction and reconstruction, at the core of collective memory-making can involve a range of appropriative, transformative, or preservative strategies and plays out across a range of mediums, from the ritual behaviors people practice or observe, the narratives they transmit through texts and oral traditions, the places and material landscapes they inhabit, and the objects and representations with which they are entangled.[22]

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[18] Ibid, 4.
[19] Wertsch and Roediger, "Collective memory", 319.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The memory of Egypt in Western monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9.
[22] Jan Assman, "Collective memory and cultural identity", *New German Critique* 65 (1995); Ruth M. Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock, "Archaeologies of Memory: an Introduction", in *Archaeologies of Memory*, ed. Van Dyke and Alcock (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 1-14.

One such medium through which people perpetuate memory—through which the past haunts the present—is the clothing they wear. This was noted, for example, by Peter Stallybrass[23] in his discussion of being haunted by the memories and indeed the presence of a late friend when putting on a jacket he had owned and worn, locating clothing as a "residue or ruin of sorts", a "site" of both memory and mourning.[24] More broadly, however, than the role of clothing in keeping alive memories of people after their death, clothing likewise proves a significant means by which people construct their identities in the present, central to the way they position themselves in relation to others, to the social contexts they inhabit, and to the histories with which they are enmeshed. As Valerie Steele suggested, "clothes do not grow in our closets", and "how we choose to dress and present ourselves to the world every day—how we fashion ourselves—is a vital part of what makes us who we are."[25] Particular types and styles of clothing, then, can be central to the ways groups collectively produce and reproduce, materialize and perform their recollections of the past. This, I will argue, is the case with the *sudra*, representing a Jewish garment that has recently reemerged, meaningfully adopted as a means of self-styling in connection to the memory of both ancient and recent Jewish pasts.

Historical Headgear: The Sudra Through Time

In order to understand why the *sudra* has reemerged, and indeed what it means to those who have recently chosen to adopt it, it is necessary to briefly discuss the history of its usage throughout the ancient and Talmudic periods and into the present, as well as the history of its

[23] Peter Stallybrass, "Worn Worlds: Clothing, Mourning and the Life of Things", in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 27-44.
[24] Liliane Weissberg, "Introduction", in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 19.
[25] Valerie Steele, "Preface," in *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, ed. Steele (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), xviii.

suppression in Sephardic and Mizrahi communities living under dhimmitude restrictions and varying sumptuary laws imposed throughout the Muslim world.

a. Ancient Jewish Dress

The question of how ancient Israelites dressed—and indeed whether they were sartorially distinct from neighboring groups—has been a matter of debate. In the earliest visual depictions of Israelites, located on Assyrian reliefs like that of the ninth century BCE Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, Israelite costume was reportedly similar if not identical to that of other Western Asian peoples depicted.[26] According to Alfred Rubens, descriptions of clothing found in the Torah likewise support the assertion that the dress practices of Hebrews did not differ to a large extent from those of neighboring peoples, with the basic garments being among others the *simlah* or *salmah*, a "long roll of cloth, rectangular or shaped, worn as an outer garment by most peoples of Western Asia", the *ezor*, a girdle or loin cloth, and the *kethoneth*, a "shirt-like garment with long or short sleeves" reaching below the knees and sometimes down to the ankles.[27] The same degree of sartorial similarity has likewise been suggested for later periods, with scholars like Lucille Roussin arguing that "the basic items of clothing worn by Jews did not differ significantly from those worn by other inhabitants of the Graeco-Roman world" for example.[28] However, despite the commonalities in dress practices between ancient Jewish communities and their neighbors throughout different times periods, there were several distinct, but perhaps subtle, material and ritual aspects characteristic of Jewish clothing and adornment. For instance, something of an

[26] Alfred Rubens. *A History of Jewish Costume* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967), 6-8.
[27] Ibid, 5.
[28] Lucille Roussin, "Costume in Roman Palestine: Archaeological Remains and the Evidence from the Mishnah", in *The World of Roman Costume*, ed. Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 183; Jonathan P. Roth, "Distinguishing Jewishness in Antiquity", in *A Tall Order: Writing the Social History of the Ancient World*, ed. Jean-Jacques Aubert and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, (Leipzig: K.G. Saur München, 2005), 37-58.

Israelite "national emblem" was "blue fringes" or tassels, as instructions in Numbers and Deuteronomy attest to the attaching of *tzitzit*, tassels with twisted cords, including one of blue, to the four corners of the garments with which ancient Jews covered themselves.[29] Other dress and adornment practices referenced in the Torah include the law of *shaatnez*, which prohibited the mixing together of different kinds of thread, of wool and linen, together in garments, and the wearing of *peot*, or unclipped side locks,[30] though the extent to which these practices *visually* differentiated Jews from their non-Jewish counterparts in antiquity has been a subject of debate.[31]

The type and prevalence of head coverings worn by Jews in the ancient world has likewise been debated, as some have suggested, given the little evidence to the contrary from visual and documentary sources, that "ancient Jews followed the same custom in headdress, or lack of it, as their neighbors."[32] Early depictions of Israelites on Assyrian bas-reliefs show the wearing of caps not unlike those worn by contemporaneous Canaanite groups, and later depictions of Jewish men in Greek and Roman times show them both bareheaded and adorned in a variety of hat styles.[33] Descriptions of clothing throughout the Tanakh likewise attest to the variety of head coverings, particularly for men.[34] Drawing from biblical references to a garment called a *zanif*, meaning "headscarf"[35] and to the verb *habash*, meaning "to wind",[36] some archaeologists and historians have suggested that, among this variety of head coverings, the ancient "Israelites most probably had a head-dress similar to that worn by the Bedouins", namely something like a modern "keffieh

[29] Eric Silverman. *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 14; Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*.
[30] Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*; Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*.
[31] See for example Roth, "Distinguishing Jewishness in Antiquity."
[32] Roth, "Distinguishing Jewishness in Antiquity", 50-1.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Silverman, A Cultural History of Jewish Dress.
[35] Roth, "Distinguishing Jewishness in Antiquity", 50-1.
[36] Emil G. Hirsch and Wilhelm Nowack. "Head-Dress", in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), 292-294.

folded into a triangle and placed on the head with the middle ends hanging over the neck to protect it" from the sun and the elements and "the other two knotted together under the chin."[37] While the archaeological and documentary evidence of clothing from these early periods of Jewish history are somewhat limited, this potential use of wrapped, scarf head-coverings, paralleling those likewise worn throughout the region by neighboring groups, suggest a long history of sudra-like garments in the corpus of Jewish dress practices.

b. Use of the Sudra in the Talmudic Period

The use of a scarf and head covering specifically referred to as a *sudra*, or a *sudar*, by Jewish men is documented throughout the Talmudic period, the era dating between the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the Arab conquest of Jerusalem in the seventh century CE.[38] While there was no requirement at this point for Jewish men to cover their head, documentary records written during and after the period suggest that the sudra was taken up primarily by learned men, scholars and rabbis, with its use as either a neck scarf or headdress serving as a kind of religious and spiritual "insignia of the scholarly class."[39] For instance, a passage of tractate Shabbat in the Babylonian Talmud, composed around the fifth century CE, notes that the "head covering of Torah scholars is called ***sudara***", and suggests that the garment's name is an acronym for *sod yareh* in reference to a verse from Psalms 25:14 which states that "**The counsel of the Lord is with them who fear Him [*sod Hashem lire'av*]**" [boldface and emphasis in original].[40] The use of sudra garments by Jewish scholars during the Talmudic period was also attested to in a

[37] Ibid, 292; see also Eli Davis and Elise Davis. *Hats and Caps of the Jews* (Massada Limited, 1983).
[38] For more about the Talmudic period, see Shmuel Safrai, "The Era of the Mishnah and Talmud (70-640)", in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 307-382.
[39] Samuel Krauss, "The Jewish Rite of Covering the Head." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 19 (1945-46), 142.
[40] "Shabbat 77b: 11", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.77b.11?lang=en

commentary to tractate Shabbat composed by Rabbi Ovadiah Bartenura in the late fifteenth century CE, which suggested that the typical weekday clothing of Jewish sages in the first century CE included not only an "upper cloak", a "wide girdle that he girds from above his uniform", a "short and narrow garment", an "undershirt that he wears on his skin", and a "girdle that he girds on top of it", but also a "hat that is on his head and a turban", an "undergarment tallit that covers his head and his shoulders", and importantly a "kerchief [sudra] on his neck whose two heads are hanging in front of him which is called Shid in Arabic."[41]

Other tractates in the Babylonian Talmud likewise reflect the wearing of sudra garments by prominent scholars and teachers. For instance, a passage of the tractate Berakhot suggests that two different Sages of the fourth and of the late fourth to early fifth centuries CE respectively had "different customs with regard to **wrapping**", as "**Rav Pappa** would **wrap** himself in his prayer shawl **and sit** and recite Grace after Meals" while "**Rav Asi spread a cloth** [sudra] **on his head** as a sign of respect" [boldface in original].[42] Moreover, in the tractate Kiddushin, an incident is related during a *Pidyon Ha-Ben* ceremony of "redeeming" a first-born son,[43] in which the scholar Rav Ashi said that the ceremony could only be conducted when the priest "is an individual **such as Ravi Kahana, who is a great man and is required** to wear **a cloth** [sudra] **on his head**", the passage attesting to the fact that "it was common practice for important people to wear a scarf on their heads" [boldface in original].[44] In another incident related in the tractate Kiddushin, Rav

[41] "Bartenura on Mishnah Shabbat 16:4:3", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Bartenura_on_Mishnah_Shabbat.16.4.3?ven=Bartenura_on_Mishnah,_trans._by_Rabbi_Robert_Alpert,_2020&lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en; Jacobson, "The Sudra"; The wearing of a sudra, referred to in Arabic as *Shid*, was also referenced in Rabbi Yosef Karo's sixteenth century Jewish law code, see "Shulchan Aruckh, Orach Chayim, Siman 10:11", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Arukh%2C_Orach_Chayim.10.11?lang=bi

[42] "Berakhot 51a:20", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.51a.20?lang=bi

[43] Krauss, "The Jewish Rite of Covering the Head", 142.

[44] "Kiddushin 8a: 10-11", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Kiddushin.8a.11?vhe=William_Davidson_Edition_-_Vocalized_Aramaic&lang=bi

Hamnuna came before Rav Huna, who "**saw that he did not cover** his head with **a cloth** [sudra] as Torah scholars did" [boldface in original], and asked him why he had not taken up a sudra, to which Rav Hamnuna replied that he was unmarried and it was "not customary for unmarried men to cover their heads with a cloth",[45] the passage thus illustrating the role of sudra garments not only as religious insignia of Torah scholars but also in identifying the positionality of these men in larger kinship and community structures.

Moreover, Berakhot also contains a section detailing instructions for what blessings learned men should recite at each step of preparation for the day, from hearing the sound of a rooster crow to opening the eyes, getting out of bed, getting dressed, and finally donning sudra garments; the instructions suggest that "**Upon spreading a shawl** [sudra] **upon his head, one should recite: Blessed … Who crowns Israel with glory**" [boldface in original].[46] This blessing to recite when donning a sudra was again referenced in the Pesachim tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, in a story related in Pesachim 111b:7 about the interaction of a city's ruler and a Sage with the *sheidei* demons inhabiting a *sorb* tree.[47] According to the story, the demons came upon the ruler passing the tree and endangered him, and a Sage came and "**did not know that it was a sorb tree of sixty *sheidei***" and so "**wrote him an amulet for one *shida*** demon" [boldface and emphasis in original].[48] The demons in the tree then sung "**The scarf** [sudra] **of** the **Master is like that of a Torah scholar**, but **we checked the Master and he does not know** how to say ***barukh***, the blessing when donning a scarf" the demons seemingly mocking him for not knowing how to property write an amulet [boldface and emphasis in original].[49] This story, like other references to

[45] "Kiddushin 29b:16", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Kiddushin.29b.16?vhe=William_Davidson_Edition_-_Vocalized_Aramaic&lang=bi
[46] "Berakhot 60b:5", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.60b.5?lang=bi
[47] "Pesachim 111b: 7", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024. https://www.sefaria.org/Pesachim.111b.7?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

sudra garments in the Talmud, further makes the explicit connection between the wearing of sudra garments as either scarves or head coverings by Torah scholars, and the differentiation of these men on the basis of their religious knowledge.[50]

c. Sumptuary Laws under Dhimmitude

The experiences of Jewish communities across the Middle East and North Africa underwent significant change in the wake of Islamic conquest from the seventh century CE onwards, particularly relating to their subjugation under Islamic law as *dhimmis* and the subsequent restrictions imposed on their rights, behavior, and indeed their dress practices. Their second-class status legally formalized by the Pact of Umar, Jews—alongside Christians—were classified as *ahl al-dhimma*, people of the pact, and were guaranteed some degree of security provided they accepted and met certain discriminatory conditions.[51] These conditions included the requirement that dhimmis pay the *jizya* tax, which was often understood not merely as an extraction of capital but also a means of discrimination, degradation, and humiliation, and prohibitions that restricted dhimmis from building new places of worship, building houses or tombs taller than their Muslim counterparts, riding horses, employing or being served by Muslims, testifying on their own behalf in Islamic courts, carrying arms, inheriting anything from Muslims, or marrying Muslims (with the exception of dhimmi women who were permitted to marry Muslim men).[52]

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[50] For more references to sudra garments in the Babylonian Talmud, see "Shabbat 120a: 8", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.120a.8?lang=bi; "Beitzah 30a: 3", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Beitzah.30a.3?vhe=William_Davidson_Edition_-_Vocalized_Aramaic&lang=bi; "Bava Metzia 7a: 9", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Metzia.7a.9?lang=bi; "Yoma 78b: 1", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.78b.1?vhe=William_Davidson_Edition_-_Vocalized_Aramaic&lang=bi; "Yevamot 102b: 19", Sefaria, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.sefaria.org/Yevamot.102b.19?vhe=William_Davidson_Edition_-_Vocalized_Aramaic&lang=bi.

[51] Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[52] Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House*, 22; Melvin Konner, *Unsettled: An Anthropology of the Jews* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), 128.

Moreover, the restrictions associated with their dhimmi status broadly rendered Jewish communities across the region vulnerable to massacre and expulsion, subordinated in relation to their Muslim neighbors and authorities, and unable to carry weapons for self-defense or seek legal recourse in the wake of violence.[53] The extent to which these legally enshrined restrictions were enforced differed depending on the relative leniency or severity of the authorities under which Jews lived, their communities subject to the disposition of individual rulers and thereby oscillating between periods of extreme violence and periods of relative religious toleration, between "the dual prospects of opportunity and restriction, protection and persecution."[54]

Another aspect of their dhimmi status was the sumptuary restrictions imposed on Jewish communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa, as Jews across the region were often made to wear distinctive colors, marks, materials, or garments, or barred from wearing styles of clothing popular among neighboring Muslims, in other to visibly cement and maintain social hierarchies and to humiliate and degrade them.[55] This use of clothing emerged by 849 CE, with the introduction by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil of dress signifiers for Christian and Jewish subjects, the latter made to wear yellow garments, distinctive buttons, and badges made up of two yellow cloth patches.[56] Other specific clothing restrictions were imposed in 1004 CE by the Egyptian Caliph el-Hakim bi-Amr Allâh, who ordered Jews to wear black turbans (and later all black clothing) as well as carved wooden blocks symbolic of the golden calf around their necks, and in 1198 CE by the Almohad Amir Abū Yūsuf Ya'qub al-Mansūr, who ordered Jews to wear distinctive dark blue garments and headgear reportedly shaped like a pack saddle, among many

[53] Jacobson, "The Sudra."
[54] Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House*, 87.
[55] Betül İpşirli Argit, "Clothing habits, Regulations and Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire" *Journal of Academic Studies* 6 (2005): 79-96; Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House*, 32.
[56] Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 32-4; Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 47.

other instances of such sumptuary requirements.[57] Color was likewise used as a mark differentiating Jewish communities from the societies in which they lived: while Muslims throughout the region often wore garments in white, red, and green, colors associated with values like fertility, life and purity, Jews were often made to wear black, blue, yellow, and purple, which were associated respectively with themes of misfortune, foreignness, criminality, and mourning.[58] Thus, "in both cut and color, the Islamic world dressed Jews for ostracism", sumptuary restrictions over the course of the centuries[59] not merely visually referencing or reinforcing hierarchies but indeed "amount[ing] to a form of violence" in and of themselves.[60] Coercion and violence likewise undergirded the enforcement of such restrictions, as Jews who dressed outside of their station were subject to physical and sometimes capital punishment, such as those who were flogged for dressing in Muslim attire in Algiers in 1788, executed for wearing forbidden clothing in Constantinople in 1758, or even killed in Tunisia in 1823 for the crime of wearing the wrong hat.[61]

One of the most notable items of clothing often subjected to restrictions and prohibitions under dhimmitude was headgear, and specifically the wearing of headscarves and turbans among Jewish communities.[62] The practice of wearing sudra or sudra-like garments—prevalent amongst Jewish scholars in the previous epoch and constituting a staple of Jewish male attire across the Middle East and North Africa—thus came under threat in many Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish communities. Instances of Jewish turban-style headgear being restricted or banned abound across the last several centuries. For example, in fourteenth century Egypt, the Mamluks assigned yellow

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[57] Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 34; Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 48-9.
[58] Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 51.
[59] Dress laws imposed on Jewish communities in the Middle East with the intention of their humiliation and degradation were still in place into the twentieth century, such as in Yemen where Jews in the mid-1940s were still not permitted to wear shoes in public, or in Iran in the 1960s where Jewish women were prohibited from veiling. See Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 50-1.
[60] Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 51.
[61] Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 50.
[62] Jacobson, "The Sudra."

turbans to Jewish men and prohibited them from wearing the garments in white; in response, the Jewish community attempted to bargain, offering to pay seven hundred thousand dinars and to sew distinctive patches to their headgear in return for the ability to once again wear white turbans, only to be refused.[63] In another instance, the Ottoman Sultan Murad III, who had previously been tolerant to his Jewish subjects, was reportedly so enraged at the sight of lavishly dressed Jewish women in Istanbul that in 1579 he called for the deaths of all the Jews living under his authority.[64] Eventually talked down—and indeed bribed—by a Jewish physician in his employ, Solomon Ashkenazi, Murad III resorted instead to reinstituting dhimmi laws and prohibiting non-Muslims from wearing a turban, "which was to be reserved for true believers."[65]

Similarly, in Yemen in 1667, Imam al-Mutawakkil Ismai'l accused the Jewish community of violating the pact of dhimmitude and ordered for them to all be put to death, but was eventually talked down by an advisor who argued that such an action would cause conflict among the Muslim population over who was to receive their belongings.[66] As such, he intended to debase the Jewish community instead and passed a decree prohibiting Jews from wearing headgear, a "painful blow which greatly humiliated all the Jews."[67] Such headgear prohibitions were likewise enforced into the late nineteenth century, such as in Marrakesh, where an 1877 issue of the *Bulletin of the Alliance Israélite Universelle* reported that Jews were "Prohibited to wear a turban, which is the only sure protection for the head against the rays of the tropical sun, and who cannot, thanks to a cruel refinement, even wear shoes outside of their quarters", further observing that "it is impossible

[63] Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 49.
[64] Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House*, 89; See also Cecil Roth, *The House of Nasi: The Duke of Naxos* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Eraqi Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community*, 36-7.
[67] Eraqi Klorman, *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century: A Portrait of a Messianic Community*, 37-8.

to imagine the suffering of these wretches, who, amid the jeerings of the Muslim population along the road, jump and cringe with pain, their feet town and their nails crushed by the stone."[68]

However, despite these restrictions imposed at many different times and in many locations across the region, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish communities persisted in their dress practices, and when possible, men in these communities continued wearing headgear of various kinds, including turbans and other sudra-like head coverings. A famous example was the prolific scholar and philosopher Maimonides in the twelfth century, who has been depicted in a white turban (**Fig. 1**). Centuries later, Rabbis, scholars, and students in Sephardic and Mizrahi communities would continue wearing cloth wrapped head coverings, attested for example by visual records of the traditional dress of Rabbis in nineteenth century Salonica and Smyrna (**Fig. 2** and **3**), and mid- and late-nineteenth century depictions of Sephardic scholar Moses Edrehi (**Fig. 4**), a Chief Rabbi's son in Jerusalem (**Fig. 5**), and prominent Baghdadi Rabbi Yosef Haim (**Fig. 6**), among others.

Fig. 1 (Left) Moses Maimonides, 1135-1204 (Photogravure in *Portraits of doctors & scientists in the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine: a catalogue*. By Renate Burgess. London: Wellcome Institute, 1973, no. 1876.1).

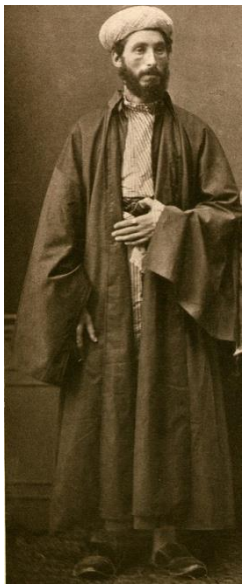

Fig. 2 (Middle) and **Fig. 3 (Right)** Studio portraits taken in 1873 of models wearing the traditional clothing of Rabbis in Salonica and Smyrna respectively, including their white turbans (Photographs in *Les costumes populaires de la Turquie en 1873: Ouvrage Publié Sous Le Patronage de la Commission Impériale Ottomane pour L'Exposition Universelle de Vienne*. By Osman Hamdi Bey. Constantinople: The Levant Times and Shipping Gazette, 1873, pages 84 and 144 respectively). Reproduced in Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 43-4.

[68] Cited in Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 50; See also Bat Ye'or *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, Trans. David Maisel, Paul Fenton, and David Littman (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 316-7.

Fig. 4 Engraved portrait from 1834 of Moses Edrehi, a Rabbi and Professor of Modern and Oriental Languages, by J.C. Hunter (In *The Book of Miracles*. By Rev. Dr. Moses Edrehi. London: Printed for the author. 1834).

Fig. 5 1849 Portrait of David, Son of Rabbi Samuel Majha, Second Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, wearing *kaveze* hat (Lithograph by Hanhart, M. and N. London: Longman & Co, 1849). Held by the Jewish Theological Seminary and reproduced in Rubins, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 49.

Fig. 6 Portrait of the prolific Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, also known as the "Ben Ish Chai", taken sometime before 1910 (Wikimedia commons, accessed April 17, 2024. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rabbi_Yosef_Haim.jpg).

The headscarf garments displayed throughout these photographs and artistic renderings are varied, wrapped in different fashions and varying in color and pattern. Moreover, the wearing of turbans and other cloth wrapped headgear was not limited to Rabbis and scholars, but indeed practiced more broadly by Sephardic and Mizrahi men in Jewish communities across the region. This is attested by documentary and photographic evidence, for example by visual records of traditional Jewish clothing in late nineteenth century Jerusalem, Bursa, and Rhodes (**Fig. 7**, **8**, and **9**) and late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs of Jews from Algeria (**Fig. 10**), Yemen (**Fig. 11**), Kurdistan (**Fig. 12**), and Jerusalem (**Fig. 13**). Evidently, in spite of dhimmi regulations, the practice of wearing cloth head coverings—paralleling those worn by neighboring peoples—persisted into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



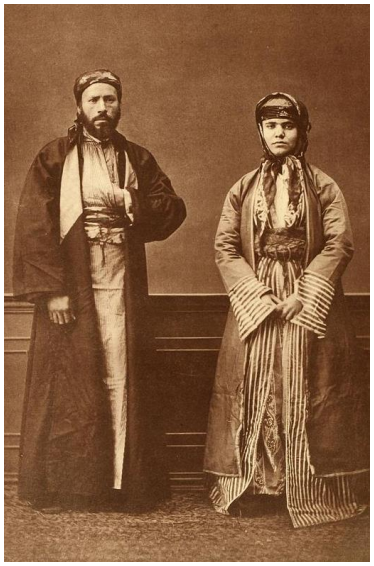

Fig. 7 (Left), Fig. 8 (Middle), and Fig. 9 (Right) Studio portraits taken in 1873 of models wearing the traditional clothing of Jewish men and women in Jerusalem (left), Bursa, Turkey (middle), and Rhodes, Greece (right), including the traditional kaveze turbans worn by those in Jerusalem and Bursa and the tied headscarf of those in Rhodes (Photographs in *Les costumes populaires de la Turquie en 1873: Ouvrage Publié Sous Le Patronage de la Commission Impériale Ottomane pour L'Exposition Universelle de Vienne.* By Osman Hamdi Bey. Constantinople: The Levant Times and Shipping Gazette, 1873, pages 284-5, 136, and 121-2 respectively).

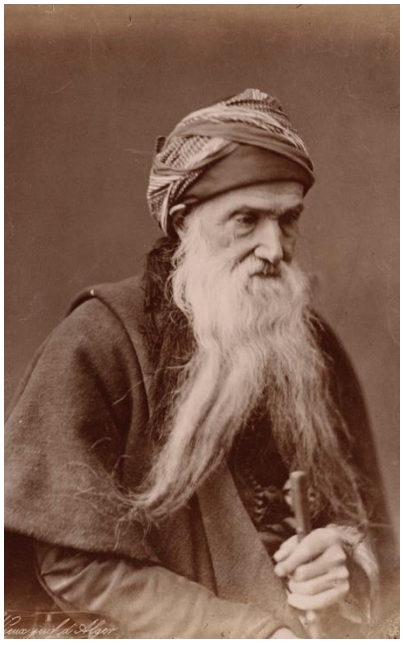

Fig. 10 Photograph of a Jew in 1892 Algeria (Photograph in Volume 1 of the Tupper Scrapbook Collection. By William Vaughn Tupper. 1892). Held by the Boston Public Library.

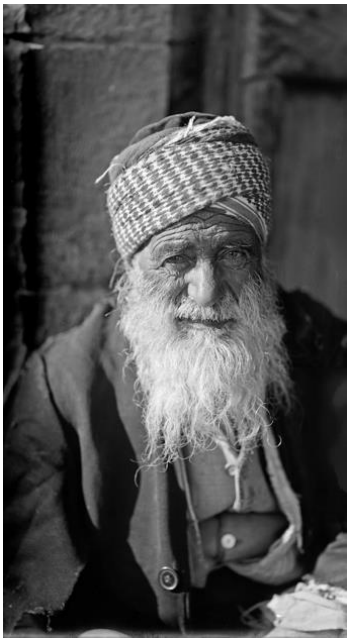

Fig. 11 Photograph of a Yemenite Jew between 1898 and 1914 (Library of Congress, accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.loc.gov/item/2019698174/).

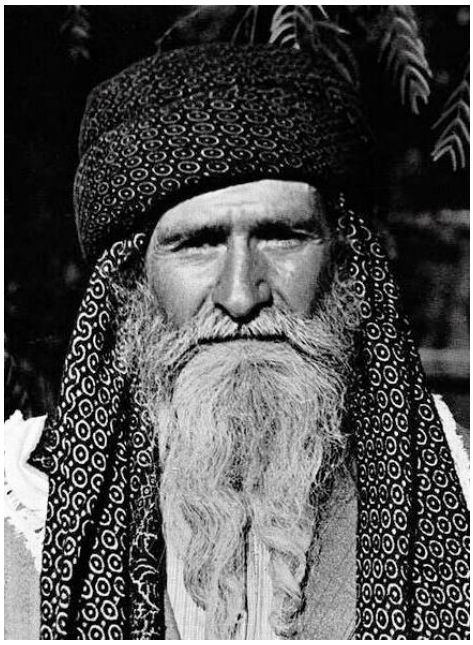

Fig. 12 Photograph of a Kurdish Jew in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1930s (Wikimedia commons, accessed April 17, 2024. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurdish-jews-1930s.jpg).

Fig. 13 Image of Jews praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, including men dressed in turbans and women in cloth head coverings and fringed shawls (Photograph in Palestine depicted and described. By George Edward Franklin. London: J.M. Dent & sons, ltd; New York: E.P. Dutton & co., 1911, page 90).

The Sudra (Re)emerges: A Contemporary Controversy

In 2009, the sudra (re)appeared with a splash. Fashioned by the designer Boruch Chertok and released in collaboration with Erez Safar, who founded and directs an independent Jewish music recording and promotional company called *Shemspeed* (https://shemspeed.com), the new sudra was a woven scarf decorated with the Hebrew phrase "Am Yisrael Chai" (the Jewish people live),[69] tassels at the edges and a "tessellated Star of David pattern in a beautiful blue-and-white palette, reminiscent of ancient *tzitzit*" [emphasis in original].[70] Because of its marketing as a

[69] Michele Chabin, "Reclaiming the Keffiyah?" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 28, 2010. https://www.jta.org/2010/01/28/ny/reclaiming-the-keffiyah

[70] Jacobson, "The Sudra", par. 41; Ruth Eglash, "Heads up! It's the new 'Israeli keffiyeh,' *The Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2010. https://www.jpost.com/israel/heads-up-its-the-new-israeli-keffiyeh.

"Sudra/Keffiyeh",[71] it was soon met with backlash, political contestation and accusations of cultural appropriation.[72] For example, hip-hop artist Shadia Mansour released a song titled "Al Kufiya Arabiya" ("The Keffiyeh is Arab"), which spoke about the controversy around the Star of David patterned scarves, some of its lyrics roughly translating to "Dogs of the past [are] starting to wear it as a fashion statement/ However they change it, whatever color they make it/ The *kufeyyeh* is Arab, and it stays Arab […] It suits them to steal something that ain't theirs/They imitate our style […] Know how to be human/ Before you wear our scarf" [emphasis in original].[73] Other criticisms of Chertok and Safar's designing and releasing of Sudra/Keffiyeh garments came from academics, such as anthropologist Eric Silverman, who suggested that the intention of their endeavor was to "validate Jewish claims to the Holy Land through the idiom of ancient clothing, thus dressing Jews as indigenous Middle Easterners, not recent settlers."[74]

Others, however, have taken issue with the Ashkenormativity[75] embedded in these critiques and the subsequent erasure of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish histories, cultures, and dress practices, which have long included the wearing of scarves, headdresses, and turbans paralleling those of neighboring peoples. Indeed, in response to criticisms, Erez Safar, the founder of *Shemspeed* and also the online clothing store *The Semitic* (https://thesemitic.com) which likewise sells Sudra garments, released a statement about his own family history.[76] As Safar explained, his family originated in Yemen, where his "ancestors had lived for close to 2,000 years" before moving to the British Mandate of Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, going on to clarify that "Jews

[71] The Semitic, "About", accessed April 18, 2024. https://thesemitic.com/about/
[72] Jacobson, "The Sudra."
[73] Cited in Jacobson, "The Sudra", par. 44-5.
[74] Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*, 157.
[75] Ashkenormativity is the assumption that Ashkenazi experience is the only archetypally Jewish experience, and the resulting exclusion of the histories and cultural practices of other Jewish diasporic peoples, including Sephardic, Mizrahi, Romaniote, Bene Israel, Beta Israel, Bnei Menashe, Bukharan, Kaifeng, and Mountain Jews, among others.
[76] The Semitic, "About", accessed April 18, 2024. https://thesemitic.com/about/

indigenous to the Middle East, such as [his] family, have worn some variation of the 'kefya' (cap/kippa) and sudra/keffiyah (head/neck scarves) for thousands of years", the original purpose of which was to provide much needed protection from the elements, the sun, and the sand, and which came to be an important aspect of traditional cultural dress.[77] Speaking to the issue of Ashkenormativity and the backlash to his brand, Safar has also suggested that "people tend to view Jews as Eastern European, and often forget that Arab Jews[78] are also a massive part of our nation",[79] his selling of sudra garments thereby not intended as appropriation but instead as "just one more interpretation of a scarf worn by our brothers for thousands of years."[80]

Within two weeks of Safar and Chertok making such scarves available, they were bought by hundreds of people, orders coming in from all over the world.[81] In the decade since, sudra scarves have been taken up specifically as a means of reclaiming, and indeed reconstructing in the present, the memories of Jewish ancient and recent pasts. This is made clear in the self-professed reasoning of those who have decided to don the garment. For example, in explaining his decision to buy and wear a sudra, Michael Jacobson has highlighted that "the scarf is an expression of my own Middle Eastern ancestry and a connection to the past", a statement "to the world that, despite centuries of exile and persecution, *we Jews have not forgotten our roots*" [emphasis added].[82] Similarly, others reference explicitly the history of ancient Jewish headgear and the more recent dhimmi regulations against such cultural practices, recalling how "In ancient times, it was common

[77] The Semitic, "About", par. 2.
[78] It should be noted that the label of "Arab Jews" has been a subject of contestation, as many Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews do not identify as such, in part because of the long aforementioned history of the persecution and subjugation they faced throughout the Middle East and North Africa. For a discussion of these nuances in identity, see Adiel Cohen, "The invention of Arab Jews erases Mizrahi Jewish history – opinion", The Jerusalem Post, November 8, 2021. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/arab-jews-are-an-invention-opinion-684324
[79] Eglash, "Heads up! It's the new 'Israeli keffiyeh'", par. 3.
[80] The Semitic, "About", par. 4.
[81] Chabin, "Reclaiming the Keffiyah?"
[82] Jacobson, "The Sudra", par. 54.

for Hebrews to wear keffiyot, but the rise of Islam brought with it a series of laws that gave non-Muslims an inferior position in society. Synagogues could not be built higher than mosques and Jews could not ride atop animals for fear that they would appear higher than Muslims. As the keffiyeh came to be seen as the crown of the Arabs and its wearer was attributed an honorable status, non-Muslims were forbidden from wearing such garments."[83] In this context, the return of the sudra is seen as an act of reclamation, as a reconstruction of what is understood to be an "authentic national culture" for the Jewish people in Israel as well as throughout the diaspora.[84]

Similar sentiments have been expressed by peace activist Rudy Rochman, who launched his own sudra company, *MySudra* (https://www.mysudra.com) in 2021, and who has worked to popularize the garment on social media. According to Rochman, the sudra is an article of clothing native to the Jewish people, having played an active role in Jewish culture for thousands of years but is lesser known in the present due to the persecution and assimilation Jews have historically endured.[85] Indeed, Rochman's own family history attests to both the suppression and persistence of sudra use, as he has published images on social media of his great, great grandfather in Oujda, Morocco, who "chose to wear [a sudra] even though it was then illegal for Jews to wear their native head covering", and of his brother's bar mitzvah in Tzfat, where his family can be seen wearing the same garment generations later.[86] The goal of MySudra, then, in Rochman's words, is the revival of the practice of wearing the sudra, "lost to many Jews during their forced displacement", and to ensure "that for generations to come the Sudra will once more be a part of Hebrew culture."[87]

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[83] Avi Yellin, "PA Angered by Israeli Keffiyeh", Israel National News, November 3, 2010. https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/140442, par. 4.
[84] Yellin, "PA Angered by Israeli Keffiyeh", par. 5.
[85] MySudra, "About the Sudra", accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.mysudra.com/about; Rudy Rochman. "Sudra: native Judean headdress." Facebook, June 27, 2021. https://www.fb.com/RudyRochman.Page/posts/sudra-native-judean-headdress-%EF%B8%8F%EF%B8%8Fthe-sudra-is-an-article-of-indigenous-clothing-t/349005949929569/.
[86] Rochman, "Sudra: native Judean headdress."
[87] MySudra, "About the Sudra", par. 8.

Processes of collective memory-making play a key role in this revival movement. Jewish individuals, like those quoted above, have used the sudra as a means of self-styling in connection to Jewish histories, taking up neck- and head-scarf garments in emulation of ancient Israelites, of the sages and scholars of the Talmud, and of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews persisting through dhimmi subjugation; the sudra in this movement emerges as a means of "mak[ing] the past actual", "form[ing] a solidarity" with Jews of past generations, and participating in the perpetuation of Jewish collective memories.[88] Clothing in this context proves to be a significant means through which the recollection of such collective pasts are materialized and performed, and through which identity in the present is constructed, as sudra-clad individuals have visually and conspicuously positioned themselves and their identities in relation to the histories and pasts which with they are enmeshed. Moreover, evident from the new styles and designs that have become popular through contemporary sudra retailers, these processes of collective recollection are not a matter of the past being passively handed down to the present. Indeed, the contemporary sudra sold by *Shemspeed*, *the Semitic*, or *MySudra*, complete with Star of David patterning, Jewish symbols like the Menorah, Hebrew phrases like *Am Yisrael Chai*, and a rainbow of different color options, would have likely been unfamiliar to Jews of previous generations, centuries and millennia. Moreover, the contemporary wearing of the sudra is not practiced only by scholars, or only by men, as Jews of all genders and backgrounds have participated in the movement to revive the ancient garment.

In this way, the past is not simply received but is instead "modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present",[89] as Jewish individuals have constructed and reconstructed, invented and reinvented, the head covering practices of past Jews, in order to serve present and future purposes. In the words of an Israeli peace advocate @judeanceo on Instagram, in a video in

[88] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 46.
[89] Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian,* 9.

which she draped a burnt orange Sudra around her shoulders, “To be a Jew means to carry a responsibility of preserving the Jewish story that our ancestors have preserved for us [and] during our lifetime, we will add to that story and then pass it to the next generation of Jews”, the reclamation of traditions like wearing the Sudra understood as a way of bridging the past and the present, of “continu[ing] the story” and of “leav[ing] a legacy for the future.”[90]

Conclusion: The Fabric of Jewish Memory

In conclusion, I have highlighted the recent movement to revive the sudra as an artifact of cultural dress among Israeli and diaspora Jews, positioning this movement as one involving processes of collective memory-making. Such processes, as I have suggested, involve active, open-ended, and ongoing reconstructions of the past. In the case of the sudra, it has involved fashioning and adopting modern recreations of ancient garments, recreations that have been taken up by their wearers in emulation of ancient Israelite dress and of the fashion of Talmudic scholars and sages, and in memory of the resilience of Jewish communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa who persisted through centuries of subjugation and in some cases retained and passed down their cultural dress to descendants. The sudra has thereby been adopted as a means of identity construction and self-styling, allowing those who don it to iteratively reconstruct these pasts in the present. Thus, the revitalization of the sudra by individuals across the Jewish world represents one of the myriad practices through which the fabric of Jewish memory, ancient and modern, is woven together.

[90] Shay (@judeanceo). 2023. “I got mine from @thesemitic.” Instagram, December 26, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/reel/C1Vhq1vPegc/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=3c4713f1-0edc-4527-89f9-3271fdea5f09

"Remembering Colmar's Jewish Community: Examining the Misleading Popular Violence Narrative of the Colmar Collection" by Robert Coleman

I would like to imagine a story based on a wedding ring from Colmar in 1347:

After retrieving water from the well, she walks through her new city one day after her wedding. The sight of her enchanting, gold wedding ring provokes her neighbors to give her their congratulations at every home she passes by. Some even proclaim "Mazel Tov" to her, a sign of this community's intimacy. Looking at each home's cross upon the edifice of their houses, she does not think how it contrasts with the ring's inscription reading "Mazel Tov." Rather, she thinks to herself "What a lovely neighborhood I have resided in," unconscious of religious differences. And why should she be? Her husband and she moved to Colmar only a few weeks before their wedding and have found their lives quite prosperous, living and working side by side with their Christian neighbors. The wedding ring that reads "Mazel Tov" witnesses her life, in this place where she and her husband's Judaism is a marginal thought.

When she gets home, she places the bucket of water on her kitchen table as thirst penetrates her mind. Taking one sip, she notices a strange taste in this water, something she has never tasted before. Even more strange, her husband, whose medical practice was closed that day, is not home. She coughs, foreshadowing a disease that will become more acute in the following days. Later, she becomes fatigued and disillusioned, with her husband still nowhere to be found, and the water tasting more unusual after each sip. What is this illness? What is this water? What is her husband doing and why has he left? The wedding ring inscribed with "Mazel Tov" remains on her finger, but in the following days, months, and years, she and other Jews will find that "Mazel Tov" will become obsolete.

I created this story and utilized the wedding ring from the Colmar collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to emblematize Jewish life up to the point of the Black Death in

Colmar beginning in 1347. Jews in Colmar cultivated a thriving community and lived side by side with non-Jewish neighbors. As Cathryn J. Prince demonstrates, the Jewish community was expanding and flourishing during the first half of the fourteenth century, as the community, "bolstered by the local wine industry, built a synagogue, a school and a *mikveh*, or ritual bath." Jews also owned property, prospered in business, and boasted doctors and prominent merchants.[1] Archival documents particularly point to amicable business dealings between Jews and non-Jews, further indicating mutual and respectful coexistence among the two groups.[2] The Colmar treasure exhibit at the Met Cloisters materially represents this thriving community, as materials such as silver rings and silk headbands indicate a sense of confidence and security regarding the position of Colmar's Jews.

However, when the Black Death hit its peak in 1348, Jewish life in Colmar largely ceased to exist, as they were targets of persecution. Well-poisoning accusations, which preceded the Black Death, implicated Jews in crimes against Christendom, as non-Jewish communities suspected Jews of poisoning the town's water in their pursuit of destroying Christianity. However, Jews were not the only victims of such accusations. Nor were they the first to be accused of well-poisoning; rather, as Tzafrir Barzilay reveals, groups like leapers, "foreigners," and beggars were initially accused of being directly involved with poisoning the water, while Jews (and Muslims) were alleged to pay them to accomplish this task. By late June of 1348, decisive political action transferred the direct responsibility of well-poisoning onto the Jewish

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[1] Prince, Cathryn J. "Medieval Jewels Hidden by Jews during Black Death on Show at NY Met Cloisters | The Times of Israel." The Times of Israel, October 29, 2019, 2.
[2] Barbara Drake Boehm, *The Colmar Treasure : A Medieval Jewish Legacy* (New York: Scala Publishers Inc., 2019).

population.[3] As a result, the Jews of Colmar were massacred and burned to death, and their community ceased to exist.

However, the memory of the destruction of Colmar's Jews has been construed by contemporary historians and museum curators. While they point to violence against Colmar's Jews as a product of peasant uprisings and mob brutality, in reality, this violence manifested in the legal and institutional spheres. As Samuel K. Cohn Jr. and Tzafrir Barzilay indicate, nobles, clerics, and rulers, were responsible for accusing, torturing, and ultimately executing Jews for poisoning wells. The Colmar Treasure collection, however, portrays the violence propagated by the townspeople, evident in its description of the collection as well as the items it displays. Thus, this paper argues that while well-poisoning accusations in Western Europe were a product of elitist political action, the Colmar collection suggests that the townspeople in Colmar played a primary role in the persecution and execution of its Jews. This portrayal attempts to fit these events into a cohesive and rational narrative that characterizes the long history of violence against European Jews.

The Colmar collection describes the massacres against its Jews as a consequence of "townspeople": peasants, combers, weavers, etc. This aligns with some contemporary scholarly descriptions of the persecution of Jews in France during the Black Death. Norman Cohen, for instance, argues that this persecution was the result of popular rebellion and instigated by the lower classes. However, sources such as German chronicles indicate how elites such as nobles, city councilors, and local clergy were primarily responsible for this violence.[4] Furthermore, as

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[3] Tzafrir Barzilay, *Poisoned Wells: Accusations, Persecution, and Minorities in Medieval Europe, 1321-1422* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 189-190.
[4] "Story of the Colmar Treasure," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, August 7, 2019, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2019/colmar-treasure-medieval-jewish-legacy/story-of-the-colmar-treasure, 1; 1. Samuel K. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," *The Past and Present Society* 196, no. 1 (August 1, 2007): 3–36, 12.

Barzilay demonstrates, Jewish persecution during the Black Death manifested primarily in legal and institutional violence rather than popular violence. Authorities tended to produce and fabricate evidence and extract artificial confessions from Jews: "nobles, institutions, officials, and rulers created, manipulated, or accepted the accusations mostly because they hoped to achieve political or economic benefits." This blame assigned upon Jews not only demonstrates how medieval rulers were confident about Jewish hostility being strong enough for non-Jews to believe these accusations; they were convinced that they could profit by accusing Jews of well-poisoning, as they were traditionally blamed for this and threats to Christendom, as in 1321. Therefore, Jews faced primarily institutional violence, as elites accused, tortured, and executed Jews and manipulated evidence against them for well-poisoning accusations.

However, it makes sense that the Colmar collection would propagate the popular violence narrative in its exhibit. One reason is that public opinion did play some role in well-poisoning accusations. Rumors from the lower classes circulated and they instigated pogroms against Jews, believing genuinely that Jews poisoned wells and were trying to destroy Christendom. However, as Barzilay mentions, accusations from the masses were quite rare and these attacks were much smaller in comparison with the official massacres. Medieval sources overwhelmingly suggest that the accusations and murders stemmed from elites driven to action by religious hatred and self-interests.[5]

However, I suspect a more significant reason that the Colmar collection displayed this misleading narrative: to rationalize this violence and fit it into the long historical narrative of pogroms. As Cohen claims, scholars have attempted to explain the violence and persecution Jews experienced against them during the Black Death as "generalizations about Jews and their killers that are taken as near timeless over the course of the European Middle Ages, to the

[5] Barzilay, *Poisoned Wells*, 192.

Holocaust of the twentieth century and beyond."[6] In other words, scholars have provided time-transcendent historical explanations to explain the violence Jews experienced in 1348 by assuming that the Jews' killers were members of the lower classes. This is because, throughout Jewish history, pogroms have largely been the product of mob violence among the masses against Jews. Historians have portrayed them as a historically and fundamentally bottom-up phenomenon whereby the underclasses accuse and murder Jews. Despite the violence against Jews in Colmar during the Black Death being largely instigated by elitist political actions, scholars tried to assimilate the narrative of Colmar's Jewish community into this prevailing bottom-up framework often associated with the historical narrative of pogroms. By pursuing this, they sought to provide cohesive and logical explanations for their persecution and annihilation from the Colmar community during the Black Death. This negation of reality ultimately misled viewers of the Colmar collection.

The Colmar collection physically displayed this popular violence narrative through the presentation of contextual objects. According to Prince, the objects from the Colmar treasure were "shown alongside related works and artifacts from The Cloisters Collection, The Jewish Theological Seminary, the Bibliothèque municipal in Colmar and private collections in the United States."[7] Objects such as the garment with appliqués for a statuette of the baby Jesus from 14th-century Switzerland, a headband from the upper Rhineland, and a fastener with a falconer on horseback from Paris or the Rhineland were displayed to contextualize the Colmar treasure, showcasing Medieval Jewry's culture and daily life.[8]

However, these contextual objects simultaneously reflected the effort to fit the events in Colmar with the traditional narrative of violence against Jews. The persecution of Jews during

[6] Cohen, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 4-5.
[7] Prince, "Medieval jewels hidden by Jews during Black Death," 3.
[8] Boehm, *The Colmar Treasure*, 38, 60.

the Black Death, as has been shown, does not necessarily fit within the historical narrative of pogroms since accusations and murders were a product of elite actions rather than mob and lower-class hostility. Therefore, the Colmar objects do not necessarily align with the contextual ones, representing periods of different kinds of persecution: the Colmar treasure reflects legal violence, while the contextual objects represent popular violence. While the contextual objects were intended to represent Jewish life in general, they also implicitly served this dual function by materially and falsely equating the experiences of Colmar's Jews with those of other Jewish populations. Hence, by displaying the Colmar treasure alongside objects representative of medieval Jewish culture elsewhere, the collection reflects the attempt to fit the violence Jews experienced in 1348 into the long narrative history of violence against Jews, which misleads the exhibit's viewers.

This attempt to place non-canonical historical events into an established or traditional narrative is common throughout time periods. For instance, the Soviet Union after WWII sought to place the Jewish Holocaust in the context of the Soviet struggle against fascism. In other words, while the Jewish Holocaust was an anomalous event, as the violence against Jews in 1348 Colmar was, the Soviets used it as just one example of the atrocities of fascism, the enemy of communism. Hence, the Holocaust lost its Jewish character to promote this ideology of the Soviet Union's history of fighting and exposing the horrors of fascism. While the Colmar collection did not share this malicious intent, it nevertheless altered the history of well-poisoning accusations and executions against Jews during the Black Death. Drawing from contemporary scholarship, it shifted blame from Colmar's elites to the townspeople, employing the popular violence narrative. The Colmar collection thus illustrates the manipulation of memory by

scholars and public historians to craft a cohesive narrative that amplifies specific historical themes and messages.

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"A Holocaust Testimony Microhistory" by Sam Gruber

As a Jewish teenage girl in 1942, Judy Gruber frantically learned Catholic prayers in a makeshift Nazi prison. The life she knew a few years prior–peacefully roaming the streets of her hometown of Lublin, Poland, learning how to read and write with Christian and Jewish peers, and returning home to an intellectually inclined middle class family–came to a grinding halt with Germany's Invasion of Poland in 1939. Now trapped in the Gestapo-controlled Lublin Castle, Judy had one goal: convince her Nazi captors of her invented Catholic identity–aptly named Chrisha–to survive. Through her successful Christian rebranding, Judy escaped the prison and lived out the remainder of World War II on an actual Catholic Polish family's farm. Meanwhile, her future husband, Samuel Gruber–13 years her senior–served in the Polish Army and was taken as a prisoner of war (POW) by the German Army during the Invasion of Poland. From here, German officers forced Sam to help build the Majdanek Concentration Camp. After hearing that the Nazis would soon kill all Jews working on Majdanek, Sam convinced 22 fellow Jewish POWs to escape with him into the woods outside Lublin. Sam then led a group of Jewish partisan fighters as they sabotaged German occupiers throughout the remainder of the war. I know my Grandpa Sam Gruber and Grandma Judy Gruber's stories well because I heard them on repeat throughout my childhood. While their stories are harrowing and incredible, they serve as microcosms of larger trends in survivor testimony. The ways the Grubers shared their war memories tracks the general narrative of how Holocaust survivors shared their wartime experiences while adding nuance to the existing literature.

In the mid 1990s, scholars arrived at a common timeline for when Holocaust survivors recorded their stories and how the realities of the destruction of European Jewry reached Americans. According to this consensus, little was written about the Holocaust prior to the U.S. forces' liberation of Concentration Camps in 1944. The subsequent sensationalized media reports lead to an immediate explosion in American interest in stories from those who survived the genocide[1]. Americans then saw Germans tried for Holocaust related crimes during the Nuremberg trials from 1945-1946, but eyewitness testimony from Nazi victims played little role as prosecutors used documents as the bedrock of their legal arguments [2]. Scholars considered the period following the Nuremberg trials one of relative silence from Holocaust victims and of apathy from Americans up until the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Lead prosecutor Gideon Hausner similarly based most of his legal claims on documented proof of Eichman's crimes, but sought survivor's oral testimony to create an emotional immediacy that would cut through the dull legal proceedings [3]. Adolf Eichman's trial–loaded with dramatic survivor testimonies–was must-see-tv across the U.S. and helped give survivors the publicity and political relevance that fomented renewed interest in Holocaust stories. The survivor testimony dam would not break until the release of 1978's *Holocaust* miniseries which led to the creation of Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, dedicated to retrieving and archiving Holocaust testimonies. In 1992, the federal government started collecting survivor stories through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). The prevailing narrative

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[1] Cesarani, David, and Eric J. Sundquist. *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*. Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. 1, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uva/detail.action?docID=957694.

[2] Wiederhorn, Jessica. *Case Study: "Above All, We Need the WITNESS": The Oral History of Holocaust Survivor*. Edited by Donald A. Ritchie. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2012. 246, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0017.

[3] Wieviorka, Annette. "The Witness in History." *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 391, https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2005-009.

around Holocaust testimony ends with the smashing success of Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and the founding of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History foundation–now the USC Shoah Foundation. In this narrative, Yale's Fortunoff Video Archives, USHMM, and the Shoah Foundation are all interchangeable Holocaust testimonial organizations. This timeline and narrative has received debate in recent years.

Newer scholarship and the Grubers' history both refine the prevailing narrative of testimony during and immediately following the war. Many victims systematically documented their daily reality throughout the Holocaust. Jewish historians like Emmanual Ringleblum kept detailed notes during their painful stays in Ghettos, but many similar archives were either systematically destroyed or simply lost in the fray [4]. Other comparable wartime accounts, such as the diary of Warsaw Judenrat president Adam Czerniakow, were largely withheld from scholarly debate and publication as historians and Jews interested in the Holocaust struggled to make sense of Nazi-enforced Jewish participation in their own destruction [4]. My grandfather, Samuel Gruber, noted in his USHMM oral testimony that he kept daily notes on his experiences throughout the war, though the final destination of those papers remains unclear [5]. To counter the narrative of Jewish silence following the war, Historian David Cesanari suggests that the research conducted at Displaced Persons (DP) camps, the books written shortly following the Holocaust by survivors like Kitty Hart, and the flurry of news reports all amassed to emotionally burnout the American public to the plight of Jewish victims [6]. Even so, it took decades for survivor testimony collection to reach its zenith. The Grubers provide insights as to why.

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[4]Wieviorka, "The Witness in History," 381.
[5]RG-50.030.0087, Oral history interview with Samuel Gruber, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collections, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 02:29:29.
[6] Cesarani, *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, 5.

Providing their personal testimony was not a priority for the Grubers as they settled into their new lives. During and immediately following the war, stripped of their families, culture, and financial resources, Sam and Judy sought to improve their material standing and form community–largely with fellow survivors. For Jews like the Grubers who landed in New York City in the late 1940s, America offered survivors the chance to move on from the past with cultural multiplicity and economic opportunity[7]. Taking the time to share their war stories with a public audience would have not only distracted from their shared vision of stability, but also may have caused psychological distress as they attempted to first make sense of their experiences personally and with their closest friends.

Sam Gruber's interview with the Yale's Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimony typifies the organization's goal to give survivors autonomy in how they tell their story. The late 1970s saw an explosion in interest in survivor testimonies. A few months after *Holocaust* (1978) debuted, Jimmy Carter established the President's Commission on the Holocaust, the first step in the creation of USHMM [8]. The same year, Sam Gruber published *I Chose Life,* an auto-biographical book detailing his wartime experiences alongside his partisan compatriots. In direct response to the overly-sensationalist depiction of genocide in *Holocaust* (1978), a grassroots group of New Haven Jews organized and filmed the testimony of Holocaust survivor and Yale University psychoanalyst Dori Laub in 1979 [9]. This effort quickly expanded

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[7] Helmreich, William B. *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*, 44-49. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

[8]Carter, Jimmy. "President's Commission on the Holocaust Appointment of the Membership and Advisers to the Commission. | The American Presidency Project," November 8, 1978. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidents-commission-the-holocaust-appointment-the-membership-and-advisers-the-commission.

[9] Shenker, Noah. *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*. Indiana University Press, 2015. 20-22, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gz8z7.

into Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony in 1982 [10]. Sam Gruber's interview with the Fortunoff Video archive features no visual distractions, few interjections from the interviewer, and much discussion of Sam's life before the war [11]. He appears to lead the conversation while speaking at his own pace, wanders off on tangents as he sees fit, and appears emotional at times without marked embarrassment [12]. These realities reflect Fortunoff's academic and psychoanalytic background in their approach to testimonial collection. Rather than emphasizing the pure recording of history, the Fortunoff directors chose to give ultimate agency to the survivor in how they chose to tell their story to provide the survivor with an emotionally rewarding interview experience [13]. Fortunoff leaders like literary scholar Lawrence Langer welcomed survivor's factual inaccuracies or failure to chronologically organize their stories because they saw these digressions as indicative of how survivors framed their lived experiences [14]. Additionally, Fortunoff Video Archives interviews show interviewees against a plain black background in a medium close up with standard 3 point lighting to cede all the storytelling power to the survivor [15]. The Fortunoff collection has refused to promote itself as extensively as the USHMM or Shoah foundation and allows collections to be discovered organically on its modest website [16]. These interview approaches reflect an organization with no explicit didactic mission.

Sam's USHMM testimony reflects the best and the worst of the USHMM's origin. Unlike Fortunoff's grassroots and relatively brisk founding, the USHMM came into being after more

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[10] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 22.
[11] Samuel G. Holocaust Testimony (HVT-2606). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library, 1991. https://fortunoff.library.yale.edu/
[12] Samuel G, Oral History Interview, Yale Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony.
[13] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 24.
[14] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 26.
[15] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 31.
[16] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 28.

than a decade of government committee meetings, congressional hearings, and legislative stalls that ultimately lead to the creation of a federally funded museum on the National Mall. Those federal dollars came with a clear mission statement: to teach citizens about, remember, and document the Holocaust [17]. Their testimonial efforts were thus split into two goals: to provide unvarnished Holocaust survivor testimony accessible to the public in perpetuity and to create compelling content to supplement their museum with emotionally affecting exhibitions [18]. To this end, USHMM selected survivors whose war stories they deemed particularly compelling, guided interviewees towards those aspects of their Holocaust experience they saw as most relevant to the exhibition, and occasionally hurried survivors along towards their desired timeline [19] . In Sam Gruber's USHMM testimony, both Sam and his interviewer show signs of frustration as they try to keep Sam on track and on pace to meet the testimonial guidelines [20]. According to my Uncle, Jack Gruber, Sam regretted doing the interview with USHMM because they chose to exhibit a clip from his interview that he found irrelevant to his story. Sam saw himself as a fighter, but the USHMM exhibition chose to highlight a 1 minute, 32 second humorous clip of him describing an anti-semtic encounter with a German Girl[21]. While Sam rejected the reconfiguring of his speech to meet the expectations of the USHMM, they have made his testimony, and Holocaust survivor testimony broadly, uniquely accessible to the public. No other platform offered a complete transcript of the interview, a relatively large encyclopedia entry available without sign in, and the exhibition of parts of his story in-person for the American public. The museum's occasional

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[17] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 61.
[18] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 66.
[19] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 92.
[20] RG-50.030.0087, Oral history interview with Samuel Gruber, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collections, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 02:29:29.
[21] Gruber, Samuel. "Oral History Interview with Samuel Gruber." 1991, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504582.

disconcerting treatment of survivors does ultimately serve a pedagogic end; to educate the broadest swath of Americans about the realities of the Holocaust.

Judy's USC Shoah Foundation interview is the most narratively coherent recollection of her Holocaust story accessible to our family. In 1994, the Holocaust survivors who consulted Stephen Spielburg during the creation of *Schindler's List* inspired the director to establish a new organization with the goal of amassing the largest repository of Holocaust testimonies in the world [22]. The USC Shoah Foundation urgently began collecting Holocaust testimonies with a mandate to collect as many testimonies from existing survivors as possible. To this end, they utilized a highly standardized process to collect interviews [23]. Videographers were compelled to get to know their subjects in the pre-interview stage, survivors were filmed in their homes with their belongings out of focus in the background, and the camera was to never be cut from its medium close up [24]. These techniques helped to expedite the pre-interview process, set the survivor at ease, and bring a semblance of objectivity to the final testimonial. As the brainchild of Hollywood's most successful director, the Shoah Foundation interviewers kept testimonials coherent by ensuring survivors tell their stories using a classic 3-act structure: the pre-war period to foreground the coming conflict, the war itself, and the triumphant post-war period [25]. During the first and second parts of the interview, the survivors responded to basic sociological questions such as the economic makeup of the survivor's hometown[26]. During the final part of the interview, the survivor's progeny enter the frame for the whole family unit to answer questions regarding the long-term consequences of the Holocaust[27]. As an adolescent, I struggled

[22] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 113.
[23] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 118.
[24] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 123-131.
[25] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 125.
[26] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 121.
[27] Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, 122.

to follow the ins and outs of Judy's highly unusual Holocaust experience, but her Shoah Foundation testimony provided a remarkably logical and detailed resource for understanding not only her life before coming to America, but also the ways in which her Lublin community functioned before, during, and after the war [28]. While some accuse the Shoah Foundation of both prioritizing common memories over profound emotional traumas and attempting to put the complex experiences of survivors into a conventional narrative arch, the organization's steadfast commitment to making testimony an interpretable story works in Judy's case.

As generations of Holocaust survivors passed on, a debate renewed over who owns the memory of the Holocaust. Given that Yale University, USC, and USHMM all exercise stringent legal ownership over their testimonial archives, organizations of their kind have a literal proprietary claim to many of the existing memories of the Holocaust which they propound as the definitive source on the genocide. Memory Studies scholar and second generation Holocaust survivor Julia Creet questioned the value of emphasizing survivor testimony alone:

> The reification of first-generation memory, elevated as it is to the status of untouchable testimony, and justifying logics, is what sets in motion our anxieties about misremembering and appropriation. Over- identification is a problem of over-valuating. We have placed ourselves at the margins of memory by insisting on the unassailable firstness of our parents and grandparents their journeys, and on the importance of their every detail [29].

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[28] Gruber, Judith, Interview 1288. Interview by Scott Fried. *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, November 26, 1995, 1:20-1:54:30, -https://sfiaccess.usc.edu/Testimonies/ViewTestimony.aspx?RequestID=5f73bddd-b044-4fbe-acb2-ea40bd55fd1f

[29] Creet, Julia. "Peripheral to the Past: Memory and Microhistory." *Hagar*, November 1, 2014. 81, https://www.academia.edu/10127171/Peripheral_to_the_past_Memory_and_microhistory.

For Creet, focusing on family stories that exemplify broad historical themes can bring diverse perspectives to the forefront of the memory of the Holocaust, allowing for novel insights into its consequences [30]. Yet, testimonial organizations set up solely to collect and disseminate survivor's words inherently marginalize the rest of the family's perspective while they keep those with lived experience away from determining how their loved one's testimony will be used in perpetuity. To fully understand the impact of the Holocaust in the modern world, more scholarship must be done to understand how descendants of survivors tell their family histories.

[30] Creet, "Peripheral to the Past," 73.

"The Three Lives of Hostomice Scroll #853" by Riley Neubauer

Introduction

Hostomice Scroll #853 has lived three lives. Working backwards from the present day, in the mid-1960s with the help of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, Hostomice Scroll #853 was re-homed in Congregation Habonim on 66th street just off Central Park West in Manhattan. Congregation Habonim was founded in 1939 by former scholarly rabbi of the Essen Synagogue Hugo Hahn and other Jews fleeing persecution after Kristallnacht.1 Its name "הבונים" or "the builders" is in direct contrast to the destruction caused by the Nazis during Kristallnacht. Though almost a century later, the Synagogue strives to remember the friends and family members of congregants who perished in the Holocaust, ensuring that all current children of the congregation, whether present for preschool or Hebrew school, are told the story of Habonim's founding. The Holocaust is an integral part of the congregation's identity, and Hostomice Scroll #853 helps represent that. Traveling back in time to pre-1960s, the scroll was housed in what is today known as the Jewish Museum in Prague. Before they were in a museum, however, they were a part of the everyday religious practice of a small Jewish community in Hostomice, Czech Republic. Hostomice Scroll #853 represents the Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia in the Czech Republic who died in the Shoah. As one of the senior curators at the Jewish Museum in Prague wrote, "These scrolls, however, met with a happy fate, for they were given the chance of a second life. Not all of the scrolls serve ritual purposes today; their commemorative aspect, however, creates a bridge between the past—the tragic fate of their original owners—and the future – the active life of Jewish congregations throughout the world."2

1 "History of Habonim," Congregation Habonim, https://www.habonim.net/about-us/history-habonim#:~:text=Habonim%20was%20founded%20in%20November,to%20in%20their%20native%20country ; Irving Spiegel, "Habonim to Mark 25th Year Nov. 8: Synagogue Here Rose from Ashes of Hitler Terror," The New York Times ,October 25, 1964] https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1964/10/25/118539167.html?pageNumber=45.

2 Magda Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls from the Collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague after the Second World War," European Judaism 41, no. 1 (2008): 122, https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2008.410114

The existence of Hostomice Scroll #853 marks the existence of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Known as the Central Jewish Museum during World War II, under the direction of Nazi leaders, The Jewish Museum in Prague collected and cataloged religious ephemera from synagogues across the country. The growth of the Museum was directly tied to the deportation and extermination of rural Jewish populations. Promptly after these small Czechloslovakian communities packed up artifacts of their Jewish religiosity and sent them to be collected in Prague, the Nazis liquidated the community and sent them, almost always, to their deaths. Only one of the Jewish curators of the wartime Central Jewish Museum survived: Hana Volkavoa. Post-war, she led the Museum to store, research, and analyze the thousands of artifacts they acquired because of the Holocaust. Ironically, the fact that Nazi leadership allowed Jewish curators at the Central Jewish Museum in Prague to accept and catalog artifacts of Jewish life across the country, allowed these small communities to survive long after they were murdered. This material culture tells a story of the interaction between both remembering and forgetting before, during, and after World War II. Hostomice Scroll #853 and the Memorial Scrolls Project are silent witnesses. They represent the existence of thriving Jewish communities that were wiped out by Nazi annihilation. Placing the scrolls in various Jewish congregations today is a constant reminder of this negative moment in Jewish history; however, it is also hopeful—it reminds us that even in the midst of this horror, a Jewish existence managed to survive. Allowing the scrolls to be included in religious services today honors their past life as members of a congregation who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Life 1: Before the War

Hostomice Torah Scroll #853 is not remarkable in its design. Written by a dedicated sopher c.1875, it is 25.75 inches tall and no longer has any of its once likely ornate accessories.[3] As sole remaining curator of the Prague Jewish Museum Hana Volavkova wrote in the preface of her 1949 book *The Synagogue Treasures of Bohemia and Moravia*, "Torah curtain and top drapery, the torah mantle, the swaddling-band, and the cover for the table of the reading of the torah, are made of material, while others such as the crown. the sceptre *[sic]* and the shield are of metal. As with all Eastern peoples, woven furnishings were both more numerous and more important than those of metal."[4] It is then significant that these other forms of material culture did not survive with the scroll itself, and unfortunately it is unknown if they survived at all. In this first life, Hostomice Scroll #853 would have been used by the Jewish community in the synagogue as an artifact of ritual. It would have been read three times a week by the congregants and stored in an ark, likely with other scrolls belonging to the synagogue. Little is known about the synagogue in Hostomice aside from the fact that this particular scroll lived there.

Volkavoa continues, describing that the collection of the Central Jewish Museum was not assembled on any "selective principle," so it contains both "exceptional pieces from early periods but also fabrics of the 20th and especially of the 19th centuries."[5] Had the museum been approaching their acquisitions more selectively, Hostomice Scroll #853 would likely not have been included. While it is unknown what the dressing on this particular scroll would have looked like, it can be inferred that it was quite simple. The only remaining image of the synagogue in Hostomice, likely taken in the early twentieth century, shows a plain building that appears to blend in with the surrounding houses.[6] Perhaps this is because the Jewish community did not

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[3] "853 Hostomice," Memorial Scrolls Trust, https://memorialscrollstrust.org/index.php/scroll-origin-towns?view=scroll&scroll_id=5240.
[4] Hana Volavkova, *The Synagogue Treasures of Bohemia and Moravia* (Prague, Czech Republic: Sfinx, 1949), VIII.
[5] Volavkova, *The Synagogue Treasures*, XIV.
[6] *Former Synagogue in Hostomice*, photograph, https://www.habonim.net/The%20Hostomice%20Scroll.

want to stand out in their majority-Christian neighbors. A curtain from the Synagogue of Suice from 1839 is the closest artifact that Volkavoa analyzes to what might have been in the Hostomice synagogue (geographically and based on the estimated date of creation of the Hostomice Scroll #853).[7] "The curtain," she writes, "shows the strong influence of local folk-art on the Jews of Susice…This folk-art gives a special character to the piece, which sets it apart from the decorations currently used in Polná and other smaller ghettos of Moravia and well documented in the Museum Collection."[8] The Moravian region of the Czech Republic is to the east of Prague, and Hostomice lives southwest of the capital city. Similarly, this curtain was designed in 1839, and is among the newer pieces that the Central Jewish Museum had in its collection; Hostomice Scroll #853 is closely dated to 1875. As such, the "folk-art" influence on the fabric from the Synagogue of Suice would have likely been seen on the dressings and design of Hostomice Scroll #853, though we can never be certain.

The city of Hostomice had a proportionately small Jewish population before World War II; now, that number is even smaller. On the eve of the war in 1934, Hugo Gold saw that the Jewish communities in his native Czechoslovakia were struggling, so he published *Die Juden und Judengemeinde Bohmens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, or *The Jews and Jewish Communities of Bohemia and the Past and Present*. The anthology captured the thriving Bohemian Jewish community just before the Shoah. The entry on "The History of the Jews in Beroun, Hostomice, and the surrounding area" provides numerical information on the Jewish population, the names of senior Jewish leaders, and the locations of important Jewish landmarks. In the Beroun region, which is where the town of Hostomice lies, in 1921, there were only 290 Jews, making up 0.8 percent of the population, which was about half of the total number of

[7] Volavkova, *The Synagogue Treasures*, 71.
[8] Volavkova, *The Synagogue Treasures*, 71.

Jewish people only a decade prior.[9] In Hostomice, the Jewish community constituted only 2.1 percent of the total population.[10] Many of the towns across Czechoslovakia that sent their artifacts to the Central Jewish Museum had a similarly small proportion of Jewish citizens. In fact, the Synagogue in Hostomice is the only one referred to as a "prayer room" by Gold and not a "synagogue," as exist in the neighboring "Beroun, Liteň, Hořovice…Beštín… Mořina, Tetín…Vysoký Újezd, Lochovice …and in Praskolesy."[11] This is a fascinating primary source, as it highlights what the Czech community thought was most important to document about their Jewish community.

Life 2: During the War

What is perhaps most interesting about the 1942 creation of the *Jüdisches Zentralmuseum,* or Central Jewish Museum, is that the process of "museumization" inherently created an overlap of two competing groups' ideologies: Nazi leaders who wanted to systematically annihilate who they deemed to be their enemy and the Jewish people who wanted to continue to preserve their dying community's life and culture. Josef Polak, Director of the Central Jewish Museum during the war, wrote that:

> If the Central Jewish Museum is to operate as a scholarly institution collecting, preserving and documenting the records of Jewish culture from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, it is necessary that it has from the very beginning a well-designed programme of activities. A well- functioning museum should not aim to make an impact by means of the unusual and sensational character of its rare exhibits, but by the completeness and the well thought-out nature of its collections, which should reflect as fully as possible the social, economic and cultural development of, in this case, the Jews living in the Protectorate.[12]

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[9] Hugo Gold, "The History of the Jews in Beroun, Hostomice and the surrounding area (Beraun, Hostomitz und Umgebung)," in *The Jews and Jewish Communities of Bohemia in the Past and Present (Bohemia, Czech Republic)*, ed. Rob Pearman, comp. Jaroslav Polák-Rokycan (Prague: Judischer Buch-und Kunst Verlag, 1934), 29-30, https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/bohemia/boh029.html.

[10] Gold, "The History," 29-30.

[11] Gold, "The History," 29-30.

[12] As quoted in Leo Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague during the Second World War," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 41, no. 1 (2008): 127, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41444625.

Polak's goal of of having a "well-functioning museum" amidst the restrictions of Nazi leadership is admirable, especially since he is cataloging the "social, economic and cultural development of…the Jews living in the Protectorate" that are soon to be brutally murdered. It appears that Polak is determined to maintain the "scholarly" status of the wartime museum, especially since its founding dates back to 1906. The Museum had historically been a prominent feature of the Prague Jewish community, so Polak's desire to continue to collect, catalog, and preserve the "records of Jewish Culture from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" speaks to his understanding of the Museum's place in the larger story of Jewish history. Unfortunately, Polak did not live to see the collection survive the war; he was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.[13]

Ironically the Nazi leadership shared Polak's goal of meticulously documenting the artifacts and lives of the Jewish community in Bohemia and Moravia. On May 28, 1942, SS-Untersturmführer Karl Rahm, the Deputy Head of the Zentralstelle ordered the Department for the Administration of Provincial Communities at the Prague Jewish Community to tell local rural communities to send their "historical and historically valuable" artifacts to Prague. These packages from 29 towns arrived in Prague in June and July of 1942.[14] Just a month later, on August 3, a new note was sent. This time, however, it required "each and every item from the property of the rural synagogues, including books and archive records" to be sent to Prague.[15] The October report of the Jewish Religious Community of Prague office noted that bucolic communities sent their property in just before the Jewish officials of the town were deported.[16]

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[13]"Josef Pollak," *HOLOCAUST.CZ*, last modified December 1, 2016, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/114971-josef-pollak/.
[14] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 125.
[15] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 126.
[16] "Weekly Report of the Jewish Religious Community of Prague, Oct. 1942" quoted in Wolf Gruner, "Chapter 9 Transports, Theft, Forced Labour and Flight," trans. Alex Skinner, in *Transports, Theft, Forced Labour and Flight* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2019), 329, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1850gjq.15.

Though official documentation of Hostomice Scroll #853 is limited, it is almost certain that its wartime journey was a part of the post-August 3, 1942 roundup of Jewish liturgical artifacts.

A Nazi report of the Central Jewish Museum's activities in 1943 states that "the aim was for the museum to become a centre for the collection of all synagogue objects, books and archive material from the property of the former Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia."[17] However, the German report goes further, it describes how the "gathered material" is to be "sorted and documented by specialists…[who] were then given the task of selecting the items of most value and historic interest and of displaying them in special exhibitions."[18] While many may think that the Nazis ultimate goal in organizing the Central Jewish Museum was to create a "Museum of the Extinct Race," historians at the institution today disagree. The German interest in the Museum was likely practical—it enabled them to more quickly and carefully gather the confiscated Jewish artifacts that were of the most value. Similarly, as Former director of the Jewish Museum in Prague Leo Pavlat notes, "it is clear that the Nazis had no experts for such specialist work as the registration and evaluation of confiscated Jewish artifacts that were of artistic or historical value."[19] As such, collaborating with Polak and the Museum's prewar staff allowed provided "illusory hope" for Prague Jewish community members and aided the liquidation of the Jewish rural population.[20] Hostomice Scroll #853 was simply along for the ride.

Though only one Jewish curator survived the war, the existence of these artifacts today demonstrates the brave resistance of the entire curatorial team. In 1941 the Museum held about 1,000 objects.[21] During the two and a half year span where the Central Jewish Museum existed

[17] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 127.
[18] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 127.
[19] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 129.
[20] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 129.
[21] Dirk Rupnow, "From Final Depository to Memorial the History and Significance of the Jewish Museum in Prague," *European Judaism* 37, no. 1 (2004): 145-146, https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2004.370118.

under Nazi leadership, 212,822 objects, books and archive materials passed through its doors. Over seventy percent of the 212,822 total artifacts were archive materials and books; Hostomice Scroll #853 was a part of the twenty percent of liturgical objects from recently-deported communities' synagogues.[22] Though this massive depository is incredible, the number of artifacts that were processed by the Central Jewish Museum staff were directly tied to the number of Jewish people and communities who were forcibly removed from their homes and almost entirely were sent to their deaths. The more towns the Nazis liquidated and made *judenfrei* (free of Jews), the more artifacts they sent to the Central Jewish Museum. Just like those using Hostomice Scroll #853, all of these items of worship were ripped out of their daily life. Almost all museums house artifacts of people and communities who have died; what is different about the Central Jewish Museum is that the majority of their collection exists *because* the Jewish community in their region died. Amidst the "dire conditions" set forth by the Nazis, Pavlat describes how Polak and his staff "led a silent but heroic campaign against destruction and oblivion."[23] The Central Jewish Museum team essentially transformed what was supposed to be a collection property of an extinguished race to be a rare depository of Jewish culture and life before the Holocaust—this documentation exists in spite of the Nazis, not because of them. The fact that Hostomice Scroll #853 and so many other religious relics survived the war is a testament to the resistance efforts of Josef Polak, Hana Volkavoa, and their entire staff.

Life 3: After the War

Hostomice Scroll #853 and its material companions at the Central Jewish Museum lived through the Holocaust. In 1947, Rabbi and Sofer Elisha Rosenfeld spent a few months sorting and restoring Torah scrolls stored in the Museum's administrative building at Jáchymova Street

[22] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 126.
[23] Pavlát, "The Jewish Museum in Prague," 126.

3 in Prague (Hostomice Scroll #853 was moved along with some other scrolls to the Michle Synagogue in the suburbs of Prague, which became a warehouse at which hundreds of Torahs were consolidated and stored).[24] The scrolls remained in storage and were not displayed. Two years later, the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands renounced their claims to the items that the Nazis had siphoned to the Museum; however, there was nowhere else to store everything. It is unclear why the Council relinquished their control over the scrolls, but perhaps it was because of the scale of the collection amidst other projects on which they were working. In 1950 the Museum was officially nationalized and was under Czech state control until 1994, when the collections finally turned over to the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, who in turn helped to reinstate the independent Jewish Museum of Prague.[25] In 1963, American art dealer Eric Estorick expressed interest in acquiring antique Judaica to some of his local Prague contacts; the Czech Government asked if he was interested in purchasing Torah scrolls. Unbeknownst to him, however, was that the Israeli Government was also pursuing the purchase of these scrolls, which included Hostomice Scroll #853. Estorick visited the dark, damp Michle Synagogue, which held roughly 1,800 Torah scrolls. He returned home to London, desperate to find Rabbis or archivists who were willing to purchase and take care of the Torah scrolls. Luckily, Rabbi Harold Reinhart of the Westminster Synagogue and his congregant Ralph Yablon were tempted. Chimen Abramsky, a soon-to-be Professor of Hebrew Studies at the University of London traveled to Prague to evaluate the authenticity and condition of the scrolls, and in February of 1964 1,564 Torah scrolls were shipped to London. Once they arrived, Rabbi Reinhart and Yablon realized they had much too large of a task to take on themselves, and so they founded the Memorial Scrolls Trust to oversee the project.[26] However,

[24] Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls," 116; Michael Heppner, "How the Czech Scrolls Were Saved," Memorial Scrolls Trust.
[25] Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls," 113.
[26] Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls," 120; Heppner, "How the Czech," Memorial Scrolls Trust.

the question of what to do with the over one thousand Torahs still remained. In the Jewish tradition, Torah Scrolls are meant to be used by congregations—they are meant to be read aloud to remind the community of G-d's unconditional love and law and their obligations to live as their G-d wishes; these scrolls are not meant to sit in an archive. Likely inspired by this principle, the leader of the Memorial Scrolls Trust decided to send the scrolls on "permanent loan" to Jewish congregations across the globe.[27] It was through this effort that Hostomice Scroll #853 arrived at Congregation Habonim.

German Historian Dirk Rupnow argues that the true act of resistance that surrounds the artifacts at the Prague Jewish Museum is the fact that their story is told in its entirety today. "The [Prague Jewish M]useum's appropriation by the survivors and its integration into postwar Czechoslovakia were only possible under the conditions of a particular memory," he writes.[28] That "particular memory" is the act of resistance—our remembrance is our modern resistance to what the Nazi government tried so desperately to erase. While this is certainly true, Rupnow's narrative seems to discredit the efforts of Josef Polak, Hana Volkavoa, and the Central Jewish Museum's team. It is their resistance that we truly honor when we use Hostomice Scroll #853 and other artifacts in our daily religious life. At Congregation Habonim, for example, during the shabbat of Yom Hashoah, Hostomice Scroll #853 is taken out of the ark and used during services. Some years it can be read from; other years it simply lies adjacent to another Torah that is opened to the proper column. The Holocaust Torah scroll is being returned to its original purpose—to its original life. The congregation both celebrates the acts of resistance that enabled Hostomice Scroll #853 to reach them and honors those who chanted off it in the past and whose lives were cut short because of their Jewish identity. The scroll serves not as an idol to be

[27] Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls," 120.
[28] Rupnow, "From Final Depository," 150.

worshiped, but rather an icon that can be used to remember the people who should still be using it. It remains, as Jewish scholar Jay Posner would say, as a "relic." It was "once sacred sacrilege," then "the result of destruction and salvage, abandonment and collection, forgetting and memory."[29] Hostomice Scroll #853 is not physically damaged—it can be used during services as it was intended; rather, it is "a result of destruction" of the very people for whom it was created. It can never provide a full testimony. Just as the Central Jewish Museum's collection increased proportionately to the annihilation of the Czech Jewish community, Hostomice Scroll #853's designation as a "relic" of the past exists only because it was "abandoned." It could not provide a source of "memory" to us now without what it lived through in the past.

As the sole staff survivor of the Central Jewish Museum Hana Volkavoa stated in 1955: "This collection [of Holocaust "relics"] has two purposes: it serves as a warning and as instruction. It…provides a vital warning and momentum for all other visitors in the future, as each scroll was once a cultural asset for a number of people who were slaughtered."[30]

[29] Jay Prosser, "Cecil Roth's Torah Scroll Shoe Soles: Collecting Holocaust Relics in Greece," *Holocaust Studies*, January 24, 2024, 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2023.2286081.
[30] Veselská, "The Story of the Torah Scrolls," 116.

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