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**Terezín Research Guide**

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Abstract (for dissemination)	The aim of the EHRI Terezín Research Guide is to create a comprehensive, innovative and easy to use guide through the dispersed and fragmented Terezín (Theresienstadt) archival material and to empower further research on the history of the ghetto. The Terezín Research Guide illustrates the primary raison d'être of EHRI – to connect collections spread in many archives and in more countries. EHRI research guides demonstrate what a collaborative archival project can achieve and how archivists can redefine their tasks beyond providing physical access and creating finding aids restricted to the local collections. The guide does not aim to make the existing archives irrelevant by placing all information online, but to help researchers identify relevant sources and to connect and compare them to documents in other collections. The guide will function as a gateway to the Terezín archival resources and – as an increasing amount of digitised material appears online - it will point to the respective public online catalogues.

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## *Background*

### **Terezín/Theresienstadt 1941-1945**

The ghetto in Terezín (Theresienstadt in German) was one of the major places of suffering and death of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and other European countries. Out of approximately 150,000 prisoners, over 30,000 died there between 1941 and 1945 due to starvation, overcrowded and unhygienic accommodation and diseases. Another 90,000 were deported to ghettos and extermination camps in the East, from where only roughly 4,000 returned. Unlike most other ghettos in Nazi-occupied East-Central Europe, Terezín was not liquidated at the end of the war. A fraction of its prisoners survived inside of the ghetto walls and were liberated in May 1945. The ghetto has been used for Nazi propaganda purposes and served as destination for elderly Jewish people from Germany and Austria. In 1944-1945, in an attempt to mislead the world about the genocide of Jews, Terezín was showcased to delegations of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

### **Documentation and archival collections**

The Terezín “Council of Elders”, the Jewish “self-administration”, produced a large amount of documents, the lack of paper in the ghetto notwithstanding. However, most of these documents have been destroyed at the end of the war on the orders of the SS Commander of the ghetto. Karel Lágus and Josef Polák describe how materials relating to the pre-1945 period were taken away and how this search for ‘dangerous’ documents extended not only to the offices of the ‘self-administration’, but also to the lodgings of the prisoners. Especially lists and card files of murdered people and of those who were deported to the ghettos and extermination camps in the East were

confiscated,<sup>1</sup> as was the physical evidence of death in Terezín: the ashes of people who perished in Terezín were taken away, partly dispersed in the Ohře/Eger river and partly put into an unmarked pit outside of Terezín.

Most of the surviving original documentation was thus either actively used or created after 1st January 1945 (such as for instance a card file of prisoners who mostly survived in the ghetto until its liberation in May 1945), kept illegally by various groups of prisoners, or (re)created after the liberation. Some documents in the central registry or their copies such as the transport lists were hidden and survived its evacuation. A number of prisoners collected and saved various documents: for instance, Karel Herrmann (Heřman) who documented cultural life in the ghetto<sup>2</sup> or H. G. Adler, one of the future historians of the ghetto. The most extensive set of documents was gathered by Hechalutz, the Zionist youth movement around Zeev Scheck, and was transported to Prague after liberation by his girlfriend Alisah (meanwhile, Scheck was deported to Auschwitz and eventually liberated in Dachau).

Terezín is known for the cultural production of prisoners – however, much of the art work and of prisoners' diaries vanished with their authors following the deportation to extermination camps. Only some manuscripts or pictures were left with friends in Terezín or hidden in the walls or other hideouts. The Terezín resistance managed to save some important art works that testified about the reality of life in the ghetto, including those of a group of painters employed in the Technical Department who used their access to paper and other material before they were discovered and deported to the Small Fortress (a concentration camp-like Gestapo prison) in Terezín. Years after the liberation, documents were found in Terezín, for instance the diary of Egon Redlich.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in contrast to some of the other major Polish ghettos, very few authentic photos and film footage from the Terezín ghetto are available. The 1942 and 1944 propaganda films and the photos shot around the filming in 'beautified' Terezín are to be used only with utmost caution.<sup>4</sup> The authentic photo material consists mainly of a series of snapshots taken secretly by a Czech gendarme guarding the ghetto and an extensive series made in Terezín shortly after liberation.

Immediately after liberation, a group of Zionist activists led by Scheck started the *Dokumentační akce* (or "Documentation Project"), a Czech (and later Slovak) version of the Jewish documentation initiatives which collected documents and testimonies in many European countries.<sup>5</sup> Within the short period between liberation and immigration to Palestine, the group collected testimonies, documents, photos and artwork documenting the persecution of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. In 1946, after Scheck had moved to Palestine, the collection was divided: the larger part was sent to Palestine and a smaller one was placed with the Jewish Museum in Prague. At the same time, documents were collected in the Jewish Museum in Prague where H. G. Adler worked until 1947, when he finally

1 Lagus and Polák, *Město za mřížemi*, 201.

2 Miroslav Kryl, "A Significant Source of Information about Prisoners' Recitation and Theatrical Activities in the Terezín Concentration Camp-Ghetto. Karel Heřman's Collection Dating from the Years 1942 - 1945," *Judaica Bohemiae* XXII, no. 2 (1986): 74-86.; Jana Štefaníková, "Činnost Karla Herrmanna v Terezíně 1941-1944 („Heřmanova sbírka“ a její osudy)," *Terezínské studie a dokumenty* (2004): 62-117.

3 Egon Redlich, *Zítřka jedeme, synu, pojedeme transportem: deník Egona Redlicha z Terezína 1.1.1942 - 22.10.1944*, 1. vyd., Dokumenty (Brno: Doplněk, 1995).

4 Eva Strusková. "Film Ghetto Theresienstadt: Die Suche nach Zusammenhängen." In *"Der Letzte der Ungerechten": Der "Judenälteste" Benjamin Murelstein in Filmen 1942-1975*, edited by Ronny Loewy and Katharina Rauschenberger (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2011): 125-158; Karel Margry. "Ein interessanter Vorgänger: Der erste Theresienstadt-Film (1942)." *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (1998): 181-212.

5 For a comparative history of these projects, see Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*

emigrated to the United Kingdom. The collection of the *Dokumentační akce* and of the JMP was apparently used by the first historiographers of Terezín, Zdeněk Lederer,<sup>6</sup> Karel Lagus and Josef Polák.<sup>7</sup> H. G. Adler also drew on this material while working on his influential monograph.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the most important Terezín archives are located in dedicated memorial institutions. Following the Israeli War of Independence, the Documentation Project archive had been stored at the university campus at Mount Scopus, where it was not easily accessible. Only after the 1967 war was the collection moved to Yad Vashem and made available to researchers. Sheck also brought the Hechalutz Terezín collection to Palestine and donated it to the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, while he still continued to extend it. In 1976, most of the collection was transferred to Yad Vashem, whereas a smaller part was kept in the Central Archives and some materials, especially photos, were moved to Beit Theresienstadt in the Givat Haim kibbutz in Israel. Founded by Terezín survivors (including Zeev and Alisa Sheck) in 1960s, Beit Theresienstadt is a museum, an archive and an educational institution. The Terezín collection in Yad Vashem was later also extended by a collection of transport lists and albums devoted to the activity of various departments of the 'Council of Elders' which was saved by Hermann Weisz and acquired after his death in 1979. A third subcollection contains mostly personal information and documents provided by the former inmates and their families.

The Terezín collection in the Jewish Museum in Prague based on the Documentation Project as well as other materials and over time extended by further acquisitions, was organised later into a form that roughly corresponded to the structure of the Jewish "self-administration" in Terezín. Therefore, the Terezín collection attempts to partially reconstruct the largely destroyed and fragmented original Terezín documentation. The collection continued to grow since the fall of Communism, especially in conjunction with other projects of the JMP. Some interesting documents were received as part of the oral history project of the museum and following an appeal to the public to bring documents and photos providing information about their deported and murdered neighbours.

The personal story and the documentation trail of the *Dokumentační akce* leads also to the history of Beit Theresienstadt. Its archive houses especially documents donated by the members of the organisation, including important artwork and children newspapers. Very soon after the foundation of the Terezín Memorial in 1947 (originally as Memorial to the Suffering of the Nation), its archive and later 'Documentation Department' was created which collected documents from former inmates and those found in Terezín, as well as testimonies of former prisoners.

Therefore, any serious researcher of the ghetto has to conduct research at least in these four major Terezín archives: Beit Terezín, Terezín Memorial, Yad Vashem and the Jewish Museum Prague. Further significant Terezín collections and documents can be found in other archives around the world, for instance in the National Archives in Prague (many of the Terezín related documents were digitised by the Terezín Initiative Institute and are partly accessible online at [www.holocaust.cz](http://www.holocaust.cz)), the Center for Jewish History in New York (especially in YIVO and Leo Baeck Institute archives), the Wiener Library in London, NIOD in Amsterdam, the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen or the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich.

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6 Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt*.

7 Lagus and Polák, *Město za mřížemi*.

8 Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941 - 1945*.

## Archival systems and standards

The work package set as its main goal to standardise and integrate the archival descriptions of the four major Terezín archives, which are all EHRI partners. However, the cataloguing standards and data format in these partners show significant differences which also reflect the different character of the institutions and the varying level of archival expertise. While Yad Vashem is a large archive with extensive staff, Beit Terezín is a very small memorial organisation with few staff and limited archival competence. The Terezín Memorial, as a museum funded by the Czech Ministry of Culture, follows museum standards and catalogues documents as individual items. The Beit Terezín archive developed a specific system of collection registration which differentiates between a collection of originals and subject oriented files (which – in turn – often contain copies of the originals). While Yad Vashem only catalogues the material on the file level (with files often containing hundreds of pages), Beit Terezín, Terezín Memorial and the Jewish Museum in Prague provide much more detail information going down to individual documents. Whereas the Terezín finding aid of the Jewish Museum Prague is hierarchical and contains up to ten levels, Yad Vashem's uses subcollections and files, Beit Theresienstadt the file level only, and Terezín Memorial works with separate items. Moreover, the main four Terezín collections integrated in the guide contain a number of copies of items from each other.

The archives use different cataloguing systems and standards: whereas Yad Vashem deploys a robust commercial system with the possibility of standard-compliant export (IDEA), the Jewish Museum runs an open source cataloguing system with a very flexible metadata schema (CollectiveAccess) and developed its own set of metadata elements. The Terezín Memorial stores its data in a simple custom database created without reflecting any usual set of standards. By the start of the project, Beit Terezín only had short textual descriptions of its files stored in separate MS Word files.

## Data integration

The research guide was designed to integrate low or middle level data from the partner collections (ie. document and file level descriptions) and to create contextual information which will improve users' orientation and understanding. The relatively limited extent of archival material on the Terezín ghetto, with the key collections administered by EHRI partners, makes it possible to base the research guide on a very detailed listing of individual files or documents. Because the data in the four repositories was very different in detail, content and structure, no common automated integration mechanism could be applied.

A workshop was held in Prague in month six and was attended by representatives of partners involved in the work package. In the follow-up to the workshop, a specification of the metadata collected, as well as several controlled vocabularies have been developed and disseminated to all partners to assist in maintaining standardised practice. The workshop was also essential for a discussion about the presentation of the guides within the portal and the approaches to various groups of users.

The team of WP2 has agreed not to attempt to unify the descriptive data in the individual finding aids or database systems and instead to focus on unification of the structured metadata such as keywords, places, or people which will make it possible to connect items from different archives. At the very outset of the project, a limited set of principal keywords was defined and a detailed hierarchical list of departments of the 'Council of Elders' was created by the Jewish Museum Prague in cooperation with the other team members. Within the project, the partners improved their data and – as much as possible – used the pre-defined metadata.

Short biographic information was prepared for personalities most often referred to, as well as a basic timeline with details about different events and periods in the history of the ghetto.

Having improved their data and at least partially used the vocabularies created for the guide, the partners provided their data in exports, in MS Excel files or as EAD.

List of vocabularies/lists created for the research guide:

Description	No of records
Hierarchy of most important Terezín keywords	101
Administrative structure of the “Council of Elders”	734
Locations in Terezín (including GPS coordinates)	300
Biographies of important personalities	79
Timeline of the history of the ghetto	115

## Geocoding Terezín Archives

Terezín is a physical structure delimited by the walls of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Habsburg fortress with the dominant role of large barracks (which housed a large number of soldiers before WWII). Therefore, it is ideal test case for connecting archival documents and files to geographic locations and displaying them on a (current or historical) map. Moreover, most of the structures and buildings that have existed during WWII still exist, which makes it easier to use current maps.

The team created an authoritative list of locations (including GPS coordinates) inside the ghetto (houses, barracks, crematorium, etc.), which makes it possible to link documents to specific places on the current or historical map of Terezín. The list also contains further information about the function of the particular buildings. (In future, the data might be used by the visitors to the site of the former ghetto on their portable devices, as they walk through the town.)

## Databases of Terezín prisoners

The guide profits from the existence of the databases of Terezín prisoners which can provide a unified authoritative personal reference and contain further metadata for contextualisation and/or search. All four archives have access to the database created by the Terezín Initiative Institute in Prague (and in fact, the databases of the Jewish Museum Prague, Beit Terezín and Terezín Initiative Institute had been mapped onto each other earlier), but only the Jewish Museum directly employs this database as personal authority for cataloguing of the archive.

In the process of re-cataloguing and mapping, all relevant entity (personal) records have been linked to the records of the Terezín prisoners.

In cooperation with WP19, a specification of an API was suggested which EHRI could use to access the data in the database of prisoners of the Terezín Initiative Institute. Once such an API will be functional, EHRI can automate searching and reading the prisoners’ data.

## Overview of the collected and integrated data

Archive	Collection	Items	Format	Remarks
Yad Vashem Archives	O.64 Theresienstadt	466	MS Excel	Collection description, file

	collection			level descriptions, include textual sub-listings where appropriate
Jewish Museum in Prague	Shoah History Department, Terezín/Theresienstadt collection	5190	EAD	Collection description, document level descriptions
Jewish Museum in Prague	Oral History collection		will be manually entered into EHRI database	Collection level description
Jewish Museum in Prague	Photo collection		will be manually entered into EHRI database	Collection level description
Terezín Memorial	Historical-documentary subcollection, Historical-artistic subcollection	8490	MS Excel	Document level description
Beit Theresienstadt	thematic files	368 files	MS Excel	Document level description, relationships to vocabularies on the file level only

Beyond the DoW, WP2 also analysed the H. G. Adler collection housed in the NIOD Archives and prepared a detailed sub-listing of selected files, and we plan to include selected Terezín collections in the YIVO and Leo Baeck Institute archives (New York), of the National Archives in Prague and ITS in Bad Arolsen.

## Mappings

Exporting the information in a compatible format and integrating it into EHRI is no easy task and requires a great deal of mapping and data transformation. The team therefore analysed the provided data and - where needed - created the mappings between the different sets of metadata of the partners.

Overview of the mappings created:

Institution/Archive	Description	Type of mapping
Yad Vashem	Mapping of keywords, people, places	item-to-authority item mapping
Yad Vashem	Mapping of organisations (departments of the “Council of Elders”)	item-to-authority item mapping
Terezín Memorial	Mapping of keywords, people, places,	value-to-authority item mapping

	organisations	
Beit Theresienstadt	Mapping of keywords, people, places, organisations	item-to-authority item mapping

## ***Guidelines for the user interface***

The research guides will be deeply integrated in the EHRI portal and will use search methods and the user-interface of the portal. Because the EHRI portal is due later, this deliverable contains solely all data necessary to build the guide as a part of the portal. The details of data integration and of portal design have been discussed with WP19 and WP20 in a workshop in Prague in February 2013. WP2 also created a set of wireframes that we used to discuss the functional elements of the research guide. The following are WP2 recommendations for the user interface of the guides.

## **Contextualisation**

The guide has been designed not only for highly professional users (such as archivists and historians), but also with a view to the needs of students, interested members of the public, family members of Terezín prisoners or genealogists. Therefore, we use a very inclusive definition of research: the guides are meant to be used also by people who do not know how to work with traditional archival finding aids and have no extensive historical expertise about Terezín.

Therefore, we suggest to make as much use of the contextual information and scope descriptions, as well as biographies, as possible. This contextual information can even help users formulate the query itself – for instance by offering information about people, definitions of keywords or descriptions of the functions of the main departments of the Terezín “self-administration” before they perform their search. At the other end of the search, the retrieved items (files or documents) will be contextualised not only by scope descriptions, details about places or biographies, but also by placing the document on a chronological scale and making it easy to research related events and documents from the same period. A short history of Terezín, as well as the history of the principal Terezín archival collections, information about the databases of Terezín prisoners and other resources will be available as well. By using the most important keywords, the history of Terezín will also include links to the integrated items, thus making it easier for users to connect the general history of the ghetto with the archival material represented in the guide.

Researchers will be able to combine three ways to approach the data: performing a database search, through a map of locations in Terezín and/or following a virtual finding aid.

## **Search**

We anticipate a combination of fulltext search and faceted search which will allow to filter data on institutions (repositories), people, organisations, locations, timeline and individual collections.

## **Map**

A powerful and convenient access to the content will be provided by a map of Terezín which will visualise the locations related to the items integrated in the guide. We suggest to use a map of Terezín with locations linked to the included items for the front page of the research guide.

## Virtual finding aids

The research guide recognises and builds upon the recognition of the constructed nature of archival collections. Indeed, most fonds or collections which are safeguarded and made public to researchers, are in some way constructed: at the very least by the initial selection of files (often many files are discarded in the process of archiving), by the archival arrangement as well as by the structure and quality of the archival descriptions or finding aids. The archivist is – of course – no passive agent mechanically taking over collections. This is even more valid for Holocaust-related collections generally and the Terezín collections specifically that were compiled by (former) prisoners or activists as an attempt to pro-actively create archives, in the absence of reliable original documentation or in view of its fragmentation.

Therefore, the physical organisation of the integrated collections and the finding aids or other archival descriptions provided by the archives are not the only way to represent the material. The work package has designed a number of ways in which different perspectives on the archival material can be offered, representing all four major Terezín collections together. The research guide therefore avoids ordering information along just one authoritative narrative or path and will instead allow and facilitate multiple ways and approaches.

Next to the possibility of browsing the physical structure of individual collections, virtual finding aids will be constructed in an automated way using the authority lists or controlled vocabularies. This will – for instance – enable researchers to traverse the items linked to the hierarchy of keywords, following its sequence and logic. The following virtual finding aids will be available:

- The hierarchy of keywords.
- The hierarchy of the “Council of Elders”.
- Timeline.

## Continuous browsing

While each item has to have its own identifier, page and URL, we are persuaded that when working with data below the level of collection descriptions, researchers will benefit greatly from a possibility of a continuous browsing through the search results and other views, without the need to enter the item’s page. The amount of data available for each item typically also doesn’t warrant forcing users to descend to the item’s page. Moreover, EHRI strives to represent information about items within archival collections in context, without isolating them from the rest of the collection. This view mode will also replicate the form of a finding aid, which allows researchers to continuously “read” the descriptions and listings of files within a collection.

The researchers will have to be made aware of the possibility that certain items would repeat in the same view or virtual finding aid, for instance when the item is linked to more than one keyword and the user traverses the keywords’ hierarchy. In such a case, we suggest to use different graphic style and to explicitly inform the researcher that the item was already listed above. The descriptions of the repeated item can be also kept collapsed, represented only by item titles.

As users will have the opportunity to switch between different perspectives, special attention needs to be paid to make them aware which virtual finding aid or view they currently follow.

## Summary

Having submitted the Terezín research guide data, we are persuaded that the format of a research guide proved itself and that the research community will benefit from the development of further guides which will build upon the experience gathered so far and will test other methods of connecting

data and of presentation as well.