



EUROPEAN HOLOCAUST
RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

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EHRI helps fill a gap in the bibliography of Jewish history in Trieste

It was long assumed that the archival sources from the Jewish Agency in Trieste were lost to European Jewish History. When Tullia Catalan began a new project to research the role of the city of Trieste as a hub of Jewish emigration to Palestine, the Americas and Israel, she first consulted the [EHRI Portal](#). Here, to her surprise, she found [information](#) about digital records of the Palestine Office of the Jewish Agency, Trieste, held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). She learnt that the collection was received by USHMM from the Central Zionist Archives in Israel in 2021, where the originals are kept. Without EHRI, she would not have known that they are at her disposal and would not have found out that they are digitised.

Tullia started her research during the lockdown of the Covid pandemic, which made the discovery even more important to her work: not only had she found 22 files directly relevant to her research, but she was also able to consult the sources online. The EHRI Portal was a critical tool to advancing knowledge in Tullia's research field of Jewish history, and a "treasure" to her and many colleagues during the pandemic.

"Using the EHRI Thesaurus and the EHRI Portal helped me save a lot of time and plan my research project from the beginning."

Tullia Catalan,
Associate Professor
of Contemporary
History

Tullia Catalan is Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Trieste. Her research interests include the history of the European Jews from the emancipation until today; narratives and representations of antisemitism and antislavism in the Upper Adriatic area; and Public History in border regions. She is currently finalising her next monograph "The chosen people had become a people of navigators"* Jewish Migration through the Port of Trieste 1920-1943, due to be published at the end of 2025.

Finding the records of the Jewish Agency in Trieste was a significant discovery. Tullia explains that up to then, no scholars in Jewish studies had drawn on the records of the Jewish Agency in Trieste. The consensus was that the records had simply disappeared. Her discovery in the EHRI Portal added important new sources to the bibliography of Jewish studies in Trieste. Finding these critical sources, however, was just one of several benefits of using the EHRI Portal for her research. In addition to relevant paper records, Tullia also wanted to consult the testimonies of Jewish emigrants who travelled through Trieste. This oral history archival material is scattered across the world, often held in the countries Jews emigrated to, and finding what is relevant for a specific piece of research can cost a lot of time and money, two resources that are traditionally scarce to researchers. Using the EHRI Thesaurus, she was able to effectively collate a list of relevant testimonies she would want to include in her research without having to leave her office.

The screenshot shows a search result page on the EHRI Portal. The main heading is "Palestine Office of the Jewish Agency, Trieste (L48)". Below this, there is a table of metadata:

IDENTIFIER	irn44055
LANGUAGE OF DESCRIPTION	English
ALT. IDENTIFIERS	2011.120 RG-68.139M
DATES	1 Jan 1939 - 31 Dec 1965
LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION	Item
LANGUAGES	Hebrew English
SOURCE	EHRI Partner
WEB SOURCE	https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn44055
EXTENT AND MEDIUM	22,545 digital images, TIFF 22 microfilm reels, 35 mm
ARCHIVAL HISTORY	World Zionist Organization. Central Zionist Archives
ACQUISITION	Source of acquisition is the Central Zionist Archives, Israel, RG L48, created by the Palestine Office of the Jewish Agency, Trieste. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives

On the right side of the screenshot, there are sections for "ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTIONS", "ARCHIVAL CONTEXT" (showing "United States" and "United States Holocaust Memorial Museum"), "EXPORT METADATA" (with links for "EAD 2002 XML" and "EAD-3 XML"), and "ONLINE HISTORY" (showing "1 year ago", "Items imported", and "Show full history").

Search result from EHRI Portal



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Tullia considers the EHRI Portal as a key tool not just for researchers interested in Holocaust studies but also any tangential disciplines such as, in her case, Jewish history. This is why she encourages all her students to use the EHRI Portal as a departure point when thinking about their own research projects and why she always dedicates one lecture of her teaching to the EHRI Portal and its many benefits. When first embarking on their own research, students always ask: what sources should I consult? The EHRI Portal gives them all the information they need: not just what sources they need to consult but also where they can be accessed and whether they will need to travel to the archives or can access these sources online. Tullia further points out that the EHRI Portal can also be of great value when writing funding applications. Applying for, and winning, funding to build a reputation and begin an academic career can be a high hurdle common to many if not all young scholars. It can be very time-consuming as it often requires several attempts before applications are successful.



Tullia Catalan

To make this process easier, Tullia advises young scholars to consult the EHRI Portal when designing their funding application, e.g., for the prestigious European Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowships. The EHRI Portal can then be cited as the tool that was used to robustly and comprehensively design the research project because, as Tullia emphasises, it contains all key information a researcher needs in one place. Using the EHRI Portal, scholars can quickly get a general overview of what they need to consult in their research; it contains not just information about relevant records but also about testimonies, photographs, and objects.

In the past, Tullia has attended EHRI workshops and followed EHRI conferences, but for her, the EHRI Portal has been the biggest contributor to the advancement of her field. Her speciality, history of the European Jews and in particular antisemitism and antislavism in the Upper Adriatic, is heavily impacted by the challenges of scattered and defragmented sources. She points to two reasons why hardly any historical research on the political and racial persecution in the region of Trieste during the Second World War was done after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when many archives in Eastern Europe began to open up: the complexity of the dispersion of the sources, and the need to understand different languages, not just Italian but also Serbio-Croatian and Slovenian. Furthermore, archival material in Eastern European archives can still be classified in ways that hide, not uncover, material relevant to the Holocaust as archives are often not as alert to the importance of their holdings to the study of the Holocaust. As Tullia explains, it is essential to work together with experts from different regions and countries who have the necessary academic knowledge, linguistic skills and archival expertise. While historians such as Tullia are adept at interpreting documents historically, archivists have invaluable knowledge about their complex provenances and the bureaucracies that produced them. They are also an important source of knowledge to unearth other relevant sources. To fully understand the complex history of the Holocaust in her own border region of Trieste, a transnational and multidisciplinary approach is needed as well as further identification and integration in the EHRI Portal of sources still hidden in archives across Eastern Europe. EHRI's vision, to secure seamless access to all sources and expertise from across Europe and beyond that are relevant to the study of the Holocaust, will continue to support the important work that Tullia Catalan and colleagues are doing.

Although she has not yet submitted her monograph, Tullia is already thinking about the next big research project, inspired by another surprising discovery aided by the EHRI Portal. Tullia and her colleague Matteo Perissinotto found archival material held by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia that will enable them to shed new light onto the complex history of Risiera de San Sabba and the wider region of Trieste during the Second World War. As this project necessitates a European perspective, Tullia will apply for European funding.



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