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# European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction: JCR books in the BHI Rare Books Collection

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**Left:** Unsorted books on the second floor west side of the Offenbach Archives Depot.

**Right:** “Monuments Men” in front of the Depot: Chaplain Isaiah Rackovsky (U.S. Orthodox Rabbi); Capt. Raymond LaMaire (Belgian); Capt. Edith Standen (U.S.); Capt. Patrick J. Kelleher (U.S.); Maj. D.P.M. Graswinckel (Dutch) and Capt. Seymore J. Pomrenze (later Col. and Director of the Depot).

**source:** *Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, 1943–1946.* RG 239, National Archives of the U.S. – exhibited by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in *Offenbach Archives Depot: Antithesis to Nazi Plunder.*

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# European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction: Books in the BHI Rare Books Collection

Holocaust Remembrance Day Exhibit, May 1 –December 31, 2011

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Marginalized, seized, branded as outcasts, forced into hiding, coerced to do the will of their captors, and destroyed: millions of pieces of European Jewry – artifacts, art, religious objects, and books – endured a sort of cultural holocaust that mirrored the plight of six million European Jews. When Allied forces moved across German-occupied territories in 1945 they discovered looted Jewish cultural works squirreled away into various storehouses in Germany and across Europe. Some items had been seized by the Nazis and set aside for special research institutes established to study “the Jewish Question.” Others had been concealed by those who wished to preserve them.

The Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) took responsibility for surveying the various storehouses of looted culture and repatriating it to its original owners. Toward that end the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD) was established and set up shop in a building formerly part of the I. G. Farben Corporation as a clearinghouse for collecting, sorting, identifying provenance, and shipping materials back to original owners. OAD staff members processed up to 30,000 items a day and in relatively short time were able to process approximately two and a half million items. By August 1947 over 2 million books and other identifiable material had been returned to original owners in Germany, the Netherlands, France, the USSR, and Italy. However, approximately 500,000 items remained in the Depot because the items either had no identifying marks to indicate ownership, or owners could not be reached; no doubt, many had perished during the Holocaust.

One of the goals of the Depot was to swiftly repatriate items in hopes of avoiding the chance German authorities and institutions would inherit the Jewish property. Time was of the essence but without any way to identify original owners how could the OAD proceed? It was initially proposed to use these items to establish a Central Jewish Library in Copenhagen but nothing came of this idea. In the end it was decided to

transfer custody of the ownerless materials to the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Inc. (JCR) of New York, a subsidiary organization of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization. In turn, the JCR would distribute the orphaned materials among centers of Judaism and Jewish learning.

From September 1949 to August 1951 Baltimore Hebrew College, later Baltimore Hebrew University, and now the Baltimore Hebrew Institute at Towson University, received approximately twelve shipments of Judaica, including books, rare books, pamphlets, and periodicals. Based on distribution reports from JCR it is estimated that BHC received as many as 4,562 items altogether.



The books in this exhibit are a selection of those from the BHI Rare Books Collection that are identified as JCR books. Most of them are identified as JCR books by a special book plate. Many bear the round stamp of the Offenbach Archival Depot or the eagle shaped stamp of the Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands (The Reich Institute for History of the New Germany). Some may have been secreted behind false walls for safekeeping while others may have been set aside by German authorities to be used for research. Prior to their passing through the OAD it’s difficult to trace their history. As part of the BHI Rare Books collection they will be preserved and made freely available for use by current and future generations.