

Interwar YIVO's History Section: Creation, Goals, Results

Summary

The History Section of YIVO was established immediately after the establishment of the Institute in 1925 in Berlin, as one of the four sections. Simon Dubnov's student Elijas Cherikover took charge of it. In 1926 a group of Warsaw Jewish historians joined the section and formed a separate branch of the section - "Warsaw Historical Commission", which in 1934 transformed into the "Historical Commission for Poland". Although the historiography of the interwar YIVO and intertwined with it the historiography of Polish Jews is quite considerable, the question of the composition of the members of the History Section was not raised, so in the article we present a preliminary table of 14 members. The History section consisted of two large groups from Berlin and Warsaw, one member each operating in New York and Vilnius.

The most important goal of the YIVO Institute was to serve the nation. To achieve that goal, it seems that the most appropriate means would have been the popularization of science and the creation of historical syntheses. Meanwhile, the History Section chose not popularization but academic scholarship as a tool, not so much the emancipation of the nation as the emancipation of

science. In this way, by creating the highest possible level of empirical historical science, YIVO's History section hoped to raise the prestige of the Yiddish language and culture (paradoxically thinking that it was serving the nation). The words used by D. E. Fishman to describe the five founders of YIVO are particularly suitable for the History section: "All the founding fathers of YIVO embraced the nineteenth-century view that scientific scholarship was the highest rung of modern culture. As Jewish nationalists, they considered the creation of modern Jewish scholarship to be an integral part of the Jewish national renaissance."

Following the inductive method of history writing, the History Section set modest goals – to collect material and publish articles, while postponing the writing of monographs and especially syntheses for a later time. Therefore, the most visible result of their work is several collections of articles, of which, according to specialists, the most valuable is devoted to the history of the Jewish workers' movement. The most important works done in the field of history popularization are the Yiddish translations of the ten-volume of Simon Dubnov's "World History of the Jewish People" and "The History of Hasidism".

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