

COLLECTING THE RARE, WHILE STILL OBTAINABLE:
THE JUDAICA DIVISION'S "DOCUMENTING ISRAEL" PROGRAM

THE JUDAICA DIVISION, AS PART OF ITS EFFORTS TO DOCUMENT THE TOTALITY of Israeli culture, does not wait for material to become old and rare. Instead, it saves contemporary material that might well be lost but for its efforts. The "Documenting Israel" program has created at Harvard the largest collection of Israeli materials outside the State of Israel, including the world's largest collection of Israeli posters and the largest collection of Israeli video materials in a research library.

The poster is an important communications tool in Israel, and many in our holdings do not exist, in original form, outside Harvard Yard. Every election produces a large number of posters. Illustrated on the following page, from the May 1999 election, is a poster issued by Shas, the religious party that is a major partner in the governing coalition. The poster—with the legend "To restore the crown to its glory of old"—features pictures of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of Shas; of Rabbi Yitshak Kaduri, an influential mystic; and of Aryeh Deri, the political leader of Shas who was convicted of fraud and accepting bribes in April 1999.

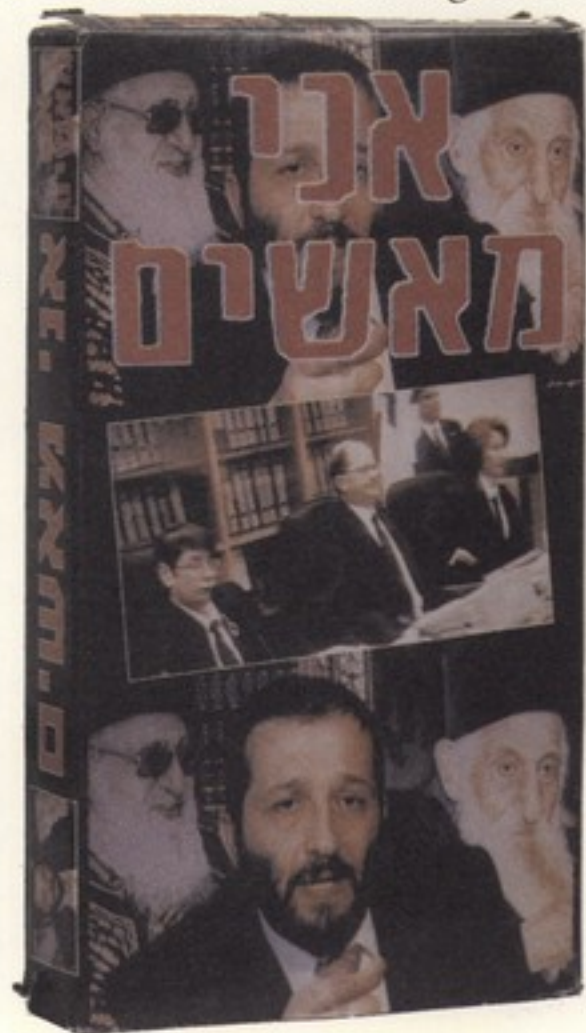


Videodisc (above) and videotape (below right) of "Ani ma'ashim" ("I accuse"), which argues for the exoneration of Shas leader Aryeh Deri.

hundred posters, broadsides, leaflets, sound recordings, videocassettes, and CD-ROMs issued by more than thirty-three competing parties in the 1999 election. These are but a small part of larger collections. Some 150,000 posters are in the collection, from all areas of Israeli life. They are the products of elections of various sorts, national, municipal, and labor federation; musical events; art exhibitions; as well as theatrical and other entertainment events. There are also posters that were put up by religious groups. The videotape collection has well over five thousand titles, ranging from feature films to television series of fifty or more hours. Complementing these are fifteen thousand Israeli sound recording titles, including the largest collection of Israeli popular music of the last quarter century. The sound recordings also include sermons from ultraorthodox circles

To document a culture, it is necessary to collect information in many formats, since different formats provide different insights. That is why, for example, audiovisual materials are needed—such as the videotape and videodisc shown here, which have the title "Ani ma'ashim" ("I accuse"), which echoes "J'accuse" of the Dreyfus Affair and suggests that Aryeh Deri should be exonerated.

The poster and video are among fifteen





"Restoring the crown to its glory of old"—a poster from the May 1999 election. Original 47" × 29.25".

and an extensive collection of Israeli radio programs from Kol Yisrael and others, including most of the archive of Aruts Sheva (Channel Seven), the radio station of the nationalist religious camp. To all this there has recently been added a substantial collection of photographs (print and digital) documenting Israeli theatre, opera, and dance.

These materials, along with "traditional" printed books and periodicals (in paper as well as microform), which are at Harvard in large quantities, make it possible to study contemporary Israel and its recent past. Scholars travel to Harvard from elsewhere in the U.S., from Canada, Europe, and Israel to consult these materials—recently the Kol Yisrael radio programs; Israeli posters; ultraorthodox sermons on the Holocaust; photographs of Israeli opera—but undergraduates do so as well, as is illustrated by the topics of four recent Harvard senior honors theses: Russian immigrant voting in Israeli elections, using election ephemera; the 1999 Israeli election, utilizing election ephemera; the role of mysticism in Israeli politics, based on sound recordings and printed ephemera; and "Musikah mizrahit" ("Oriental music"), a genre of Israeli popular music, this study made possible by the Israeli sound recordings collection. Israeli films have also been integrated into the curriculum of Harvard's Hebrew-language courses.

The posters are often, it can readily be imagined, extremely fragile, so the Judaica Division digitizes each one, a process that also involves creating a cataloging record for each. These will shortly be available on the library's new visual information network, VIA. Many of the audiovisual materials collected also require digitization for preservation and enhanced access.

The above has focused on Israeli materials, by far the largest segment of the Judaica Collection, but the Judaica Division also collects similar materials from other Jewish communities, such as Argentina, Ukraine, and France. What would shortly be unobtainable or so rare as to be available only in fragments we strive to collect now.

CHARLES BERLIN is Lee M. Friedman Bibliographer in Judaica in the Harvard College Library, Head of the Judaica Division, and Head of the Area Studies Department, Harvard College Library.