

Doctoral Research at Harvard University Libraries

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The moment I decided to apply for one of the transatlantic travel grants offered by the European Association for American Studies was the beginning of a most incredible experience. The generous travel grant I was awarded allowed me to conduct research from February 4-17, 2013 at Widener Library, belonging to the library system of Harvard University.



The impressive Widener Library houses three million books and many special collections, including the most comprehensive Judaica Collection in the world. These collections are remarkably diverse, comprising books, journals, microforms, films, pamphlets, posters, audio recordings, electronic resources and ephemera. Thus, the library serves as a most efficient instrument of scholarship for researchers. As there is no open access to the library, a researcher

has to be somehow affiliated to Harvard University. Professor Ruth Wisse, the Martin Peretz Professor of Yiddish Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University was extremely kind and helpful to offer me a research assistant status, which granted me unlimited access to the library's holdings.

I first applied for this transatlantic travel grant to gather bibliography, both primary and secondary sources, for my doctoral project on cultural and literary configurations of Zionism in the U.S. society, as the Judaica Division at Harvard University Libraries is famous worldwide. It has been collecting in great depth materials covering all aspects of Jewish life and culture in the U.S.A. and elsewhere in every period. These materials from all parts of the world include rare and unique books, pamphlets, periodicals, microfilms, posters, photographs, sound recordings and other ephemera. During my two-week visit at the library, having access to rare documents enhanced my understanding of the roots and development of the Zionist idea in the U.S. society, and the connection to the Jewish "refugee question" in the 1930s-1940s. The reports of relief organizations in the U.S. and addresses to the U.S. president, that were meant to be confidential back in those times, and various pamphlets on Zionism turned out to be of prime interest to my research project. Except for the list of materials I wanted to consult that I had put together before going to Harvard, Vardit Samuels, the library assistant for the Judaica Division helped me to add to my list some other key resources related to my research that I was not aware of and she guided me through the wide collection of materials.

My research was greatly facilitated by the HOLLIS catalog, which contains all the materials held by Harvard University Libraries and searches a wide array of resources, including finding aids for archives and special collections, images from visual collections, and enhanced tables of contents. I was thus able to locate easily all the materials that I needed and to use them most efficiently.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Association for American Studies for offering this very generous transatlantic travel grant which allowed me to explore the amazing collections of materials hosted by Widener Library at Harvard University. My very special thanks go to Professor Ruth Wisse, to Rachel Rockenmacher, the coordinator of the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University and to Vardit Samuels, whose kindness and professional advice created a great working environment for me while I was at Harvard and contributed to making my stay there an extremely productive experience. The materials I

collected during the course of the two weeks I spent at Harvard, as well as the wonderful atmosphere I had the opportunity to work in, have been a great stimulus for me to carry on with my research project.

