Lustig, Jason: *A Time to Gather. Archives and the Control of Jewish Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022. ISBN: 9780197563526; 288 S.

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As digital archives have proliferated in the past two decades, discussions about the many forms in which they come have also taken hold, including what is generally called *community archiving*.[1] Yet, it is easy to forget that a long tradition of bottom-up preservation and community archiving exists that long predates our current digital era. Jason Lustig's seminal new book *A Time to Gather: Archives and the Control of Jewish Culture* seeks to document the history of Jewish archiving in the 20th century as a history of community archiving, with all the attendant questions this raises for the relation between archives, power, control, identity and, of course, community. As he notes in the introduction, his book „excavates archives as battlegrounds over control of Jewish culture" (p. 6). Lustig does so, first, by analysing the histories of three archival projects: the Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden, the Jewish Historical General Archives in Jerusalem, and the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, all of which were interconnected as their main protagonists had either German-Jewish backgrounds or spent time in Germany to study. He then proceeds to consider the vexed question of control over Jewish archives in postwar Germany, before examining how digitization has left its mark in the 21st century.

Lustig ties these activities together by noting their diversity yet simultaneous adherence to a 'vision of total archiving' (p. 12) while highlighting the geopolitics of Jewish archives before and after World War II and the Holocaust, and the rise of the State of Israel. His book is not a just a story about Jewish archives and archiving but addresses key concerns of the archival turn of the past decades. This becomes especially clear when he notes that his 'archival perspective on Jewish history' should be seen as a „process of re-thinking the sources upon which our knowledge of the Jewish past rests and reframing these records materially as historical actors themselves" (p. 16). Furthermore, he epistemologically frames his study by invoking Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's concept of 'epistemic things', which asserts that „scholars create the objects of their study rather than 'discovering' them in nature" and that „archivists actively produce history's materials through curation, collection, and preservation, placing them in new spaces that offer transformative epistemic and cultural meaning" (pp. 11–12). Finally, he draws attention to the use of new technologies in Jewish archiving and the link between visions of archival totality and current visions of big data.

In the first chapter, *Archival Totality in the Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden*, Lustig reconstructs the history of the Gesamtarchiv from its inception in 1903 to its Naxi confiscation in 1943. The archive's history paralleled efforts by its key supporter, the Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindebund, to create a Gesamtorganisation of Jewish institutions in Germany. It also followed ideas of archives as organic wholes that were formulated in the so-called Dutch manual of archival practices of 1898.[2] The Gesamtarchiv „followed the [German] state's boundaries closely, establishing a geographical framework of German Jewishness"; it „thus produced a definition of German Jewry through those who were included in the Gesamtarchiv, or left out" (p. 38). Nonetheless, its centralising urge was continuously contested, and the archive struggled to gather local archives and move them to its location in Berlin.

In the second chapter *Ingathering the Exiles of the Past? Bringing Archives to Jerusalem*, Lustig focuses on the Jewish Historical General Archives (JHGA) in Jerusalem, estab-

[1] Jeannette A. Bastian / Andrew Flinn (eds.), Community Archives, Community Spaces. Heritage, Memory and Identity, London 2020.

[2] Ciaran B. Trace, Maintaining Records in Context. A Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement, in: The American Archivist 83/1 (2020), pp. 91–127, here pp. 95–102, https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-83.1.91 (15.07.2023). For more in the Dutch historical archival context: Eric Ketelaar, Archiving People. A Social History of Dutch Archives, The Hague 2020.

lished in 1939, which became the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in 1969. Its vision was of „a national archive of the Jewish people signifying Israel's centrality as a *Jewish* state, as opposed to just a state for the Jews", where „archive making was a foundation for a new nationalist historical approach to Jewish history" (p. 53). The JHGA thus highlights the role of archives in nation building processes. Considering Israel as successor of European Jewry, the archive's mission was to gather 'exiled' diaspora archives in Jerusalem and act as „a component of a Jewish national revival in Palestine" (p. 78). Several leaders were of German-Jewish descent, notably Alex Bein, and the JHGA managed to acquire a sizeable part of the materials from the Gesamtarchiv. The acquisition of other materials could be much more complicated, as Lustig explains in Chapter 4.

Before doing so, however, Chapter 3, *An Archive of Diaspora at the „Jerusalem on the Ohio"*, delves into the American Jewish Archives that were created at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1947. Its founder, the American-born Marcus Jacob Rader had studied in Berlin and regarded American Jewry as the new postwar center of Jewish life, thus staking a competing (diasporic) claim of succession to that of the JHGA. He proceeded to create an archive of American Jewish diaspora based on an understanding of Cincinatti as its historic center (p. 88). Marcus' efforts were „driven by a belief in the importance of dispersion for the preservation of the Jews [he dubbed it omniterritoriality] and their records alike" (p. 87). This manifested in his archival ambition, which was theoretically monumental yet practically envisioned (ultimately) as a network of decentralized archives. He also emphasized the importance of the *information* contained within archival records and was a staunch advocate of photoduplication (Lustig dubs it his „cult of the copy", pp. 103–109).

In the chapter *Making the Past into History: Jewish Archives and Postwar Germany*, Lustig then focuses on postwar fate of Jewish archives and archival materials in Germany, especially on the contentious transfer of the Worms and Hamburg Jewish archives to Israel. Centering issues of ownership and control of community-based archives he discusses the role of various postwar restitution organisations, noting local Jews' opposition. He underscores that the conflict was ultimately over the future of Jewish life in Germany. The attempt by JHGA leaders like Bein to gather Jewish historical materials from Europe and bring them to Israel also signalled a shift from a principle of *provenance* (leaving them in their original context) to that of *pertinence* (locating them in what some saw as their most important context, Jewish history).

In his final chapter, *Digitization, Virtual Collections, and Total Archives in the Twenty-First Century*, Lustig delves into visions of Jewish archival totality in the digital age, guided by the remark that „instead of mitigating issues of ownership and the materiality of knowledge, digitization provides cover for the dream of archival totality, which remains fundamentally unattainable" (pp. 151–152). Using the examples of the YIVO Vilna Collections project, and attempts to digitally reconstruct, the Cairo Genizah he points out that these totalizing reconstruction efforts create new archives that never existed as such. Lustig is at his most critical here, noting that such digital reconstruction efforts should not obscure the history of the collections they include, or awareness of their material basis and issues of ownership.

The conclusion restates the importance of the rising 'archive fever' in modern Jewish culture, and the paradigm of total archives in Jewish history, which was never neutral. He also notes that the „history of twentieth-century Jewish archives offers a range of early and illuminating instances of community-based archiving" (p. 176) and thus highlights much broader „questions of what it means for the marginalized and persecuted – whether communities or individuals – to control their data, and thus their destiny" (p. 179).

Lustig, as already noted, has written a seminal book. Nonetheless, some critical remarks can be made. The book's framework of a paradigm of archival totality sometimes overrides attention to the 'messier' aspects of the practical realization of the archival visions and ambitions he reconstructs. Stylistically, a tendency for repetition can be observed as key points are often restated multiple times, while

one would wish for more empirical detail. Given his subject matter, Lustig also seems somewhat reluctant to dissect the political stakes of the various archival endeavours he analyses in too much detail and delve into the conflictual aspects which are so clearly hinted at. Finally, this reader would have liked to read more about the broader historical context that frames Lustig's study; the archival turn in Jewish scholarship which dates back to the 19th century. Fortunately, this information can be found in the, still accessible, PhD thesis upon which the book is based.[3]

These remarks should in no way detract from what Lustig has achieved with a *Time to Gather*. The book is exhaustively researched and is essential reading for anyone interested in Jewish history and historiography, Jewish archives or the history of community archiving more broadly. Indeed, it touches upon essential questions of the politics of the archive, the relation between archives and nation-building, and the question of what value archives represent for their communities and the ways in which they give meaning to their past. It also represents a broader epistemological critique of archives and the writing of history. In short, this is a groundbreaking book that will set the terms of the debate over Jewish archiving and its politics for many years to come. It also will fundamentally alter the way in which those who study Jewish history look at the archives at their disposal and sensitise them to their epistemic value.

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[3] Jason B. Lustig, „A Time to Gather". A History of Jewish Archives in the Twentieth Century, Los Angeles 2017. See: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53n9k2h9 (15.07.2023).