



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-251691-OMS-22
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

Yeshiva University (Yeshiva University Museum)

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$41,085
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Yeshiva University Museum will collaborate with the Center for Jewish History to digitize 61 Torah binders, called wimpels. The project will serve as a pilot for a digitization initiative that will bring images and data for all the museum's holdings online. Project activities will include creating digital surrogates of these decorative fabric sashes that wrap around the Torah scrolls and are at risk for environmental damage. The project team will also enhance the associated metadata records and make them available through an online public access catalog. As a result of the project, researchers and students will have greater access to this material culture, and the museum will be able to digitally preserve items in their current state before they suffer further deterioration.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

NARRATIVE

Project Justification

Yeshiva University Museum (YUM) will collaborate with its in-house partner organization, the Center for Jewish History (CJH), to digitize 61 unique and highly valuable types of Torah binders, called wimpels, that testify to the remarkable persistence of closely intertwined family and religious life of European Jewry across several centuries even during periods of great persecution. The wimpels are among the most pressing items to digitize at YUM due to their cultural and historical significance, major preservation concerns, and very limited access. This project will digitize the entire wimpel collection and serve as a pilot for a digitization initiative that will bring all of YUM's holdings online, enabling online access as never before, making a leap forward in YUM's strategic plan goal to expand its digital presence, and offering research opportunities for scholars, educators, students, artists, crafters, and curators at peer museums across the globe.

The project will address the Inspire! Grants for Small Museums Goal 3, Collections Stewardship and Access, Objective 3.3, to support database management, digital asset management, and digitization.

In its strategic plan adopted in June 2021, YUM has placed high priority on digitizing its holdings in the interest of preservation, research support, and expanded educational opportunities. Accordingly, YUM is embarking on a multi-year initiative to digitize its full collection of over 12,000 items. Currently, only approximately 18% of this collection has been digitized. The proposed project will serve as a pilot for this comprehensive digitization initiative, representing the first concerted step towards mass digitization. The timing of this grant project also capitalizes on the implementation of a new digital asset management system (Rosetta) in 2019 that ensures digital preservation according to best practices. On the proposed project, YUM and CJH will digitally capture, digitally preserve, and share more widely YUM's collection of Torah binders, the majority of them wimpels that reflect important rites of passage in Jewish life.

Wimpels comprise a particularly strong area of the YUM collection. These long bands of fabric are used to secure the Torah scroll, the biblical Pentateuch manuscript handwritten on parchment, which is the central element in Jewish ritual and synagogue life. In a Germanic folk custom, decorated Torah wimpels are made from fabrics used to wrap an infant at the *brit milah* ceremony, the rite of circumcision affirming the Abrahamic covenant. Wimpels were made of cotton or linen and painted or embroidered with the name of the boy and his father as well as the text of a prayer said during the ceremony that the boy would grow in biblical learning, marry, and do good deeds. The wimpel was frequently decorated with scenes of a bride and groom under the marriage canopy, a townscape, a toy soldier riding a horse on wheels, or children's stories such as *Little Red Riding Hood*. Often the letters of the words themselves were ornamented, painted in patterns or with birds and animals forming the letters.

The wimpels on this project present unique insight into the material culture, family and religious life, and historical circumstances of the time and place of their creation. These artifacts are particularly important as survivors of pre-World War II European Jewish culture. The heritage of Jews in German lands (Ashkenazim) was a unique cultural phenomenon that persisted over centuries. Despite expulsions from local principalities (as opposed to expulsion from the territory as whole as happened in Spain) and outbreaks of antisemitism, there existed a continuity of religious traditions and practices, among them the creation of wimpels.

YUM has 61 wimpels dating from 1643 to 1953. This is a sizeable collection of these unique objects, and 17th century wimpels like the one dating to 1643 are extremely rare. The bulk of this collection comes from two sources: Jewish Cultural Reconstruction and a Washington Heights synagogue. Thirteen wimpels (dating 1893 to 1930) were given to Yeshiva University by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, the organization formed in 1947 and entrusted with the collection of Judaica confiscated by the Nazi regime

whose owners could not be located and the distribution of these items to cultural organizations elsewhere that would care for them. The noted philosopher Hannah Arendt worked as part of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, and YUM holds a letter from her regarding the wimpels from the time of their acquisition. Twenty-nine of the wimpels at YUM came from the genizah (a repository for sacred texts and ritual objects) of Congregation Shaare Hatikvah located in the Washington Heights neighborhood of upper Manhattan, where many German Jews fleeing the Holocaust settled, making it a very important locale for the wimpel tradition. The wimpels from Congregation Shaare Hatikvah date from 1842 to 1953, indicating that many must have been created in Europe before World War II and were treasured so highly that they were among the limited items carried by refugees to America.

The wimpels are part of YUM's overall textile collection, which is notable because of the range of materials, decorative techniques, ethnic traditions, and time periods it covers. YUM's clothing and textile collections have played a prominent role in the museum's exhibitions, including *A Perfect Fit: Jews in the Garment Industry 1866-1966* in 2005; *The Max Stern Collection of Judaica* in 2006, and *Uncommon Threads: Clothing & Textiles from the YU Museum Collection* in 2016. The textile collection has been the focus of several programs and educational outreach activities, such as a site seminar at a conference of the Textile Society of America, an honors history seminar and academic colloquium at Yeshiva University, and for Professor Steven Fine's class, Jewish Art & Visual Culture at Yeshiva University's Stern College. Of this textile collection, the wimpels have particular significance because of the story they tell about marginalized, immigrant communities and their search for safe havens, efforts to honor the artifacts of traditional rites of passage, and how material culture preserves collective memory.

The need to digitize and digitally preserve the wimpel collection is especially strong due to preservation concerns and access limitations. A conservation consultant surveyed all 61 wimpels in 2009-2010 and created condition reports for each (see Appendix for selections). Many of the wimpels are soiled, stained, discolored, water damaged and creased. In many cases, the paint is flaking, or the embroidery threads are fragmented or dangling and can easily catch and pull. Each time the wimpels are handled, there is the risk of further loss. Digitization would preserve them in their current condition before they become more damaged. Access is currently very limited. Researchers visiting YUM onsite make an appointment in advance, and items are only available to view in YUM offices under the supervision of the YUM curator. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this type of appointment even more difficult, as CJH was closed to researchers from March 2020 until August 2021. The size of the wimpels (up to 221 inches or 18 feet) also makes them difficult if not impossible for a researcher to handle. There are also no spaces large enough to safely unroll the larger wimpels where researchers would be able to view them. Digitization will provide a view of the wimpels that researchers would practically never otherwise get: a fully unrolled, flattened, full-length view of the item. Digitization therefore presents the greatest access and ease for the researcher while also protecting the original item from potential damage during handling and digitally preserving it in its current state before any further degradation.

The collection of wimpels is also a fitting first step in a longer-range digitization plan. Not only do they need to be digitized for access and preservation, but they also make up a sizeable but discrete collection core to YUM's mission and are of strong interest to a variety of audiences.

This project is targeted at a diverse set of audiences, including scholars, educators and students, genealogists, individuals interested in arts and crafts, and curators at other museums. YUM serves more than 1,000 researchers annually, including scholars specializing in art history, religion, European history, and Jewish studies. The wimpels will likely appeal most to those researching the history of Ashkenazi Jewry, material culture, visual culture, and religious and domestic life as well as art historians researching art forms (figural and lettering styles), textile historians researching textile decoration (embroidery or painting), and folk art and costume historians analyzing clothing is worn by people depicted in the wimpels. YUM's education programs engage sixty area public, independent, and parochial schools each

year. YUM's immediate Chelsea neighborhood is a vibrant commercial and residential area and is home to many post-secondary institutions, including Pratt Institute's Manhattan Campus, School of Visual Arts, the New School for Social Research and its Parsons School of Design. YUM is located at the Center for Jewish History, also home to the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, which offers free genealogical research assistance to all, reaching 1,400 onsite users and over 30,000 online program participants annually. Libraries around New York City regularly refer genealogists to the Center for its high-quality services. The Genealogy Institute incorporates partner collections into its resources and will direct researchers to the digitized wimpels when relevant, as they hold the names of the boy and his father and sometimes the town in which he was born. Another major target group are museum curators planning exhibitions and in search of loan items for German Jewish history, German Jewish culture, and textiles. For example, YUM lent one of the wimpels to the exhibition *Home and Exile: Emigration of German Jews after 1933* at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, which then traveled to the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn and the Forum for Contemporary History in Leipzig. The proposed project will enable museums to more readily discover YUM's wimpel collection and target requests. The wimpels may also appeal to fabric artists and embroiderers interested in borrowing motifs or creating wimpels of their own.

The beneficiaries of the project will be the target users described above as well as YUM itself, which will benefit from improved collection stewardship for the wimpels and increased experience with digitization workflows, laying the groundwork for its planned digitization of its full holdings.

The wimpels offer multiple opportunities for interpretation and educational materials. Digitized images would be well suited to virtual programming. As part of its efforts to promote the digitized items, YUM will offer [X number of? public programs and/or classes] highlighting the wimpels and the diverse topics and lessons that they shed light upon, such as:

- The range of Jewish ritual in the context of rites of passage, such as birth, bar mitzvah, and marriage.
- Hebrew dates, as wimpels offer the opportunity to teach both the concept of the Jewish calendar and the mathematical calculation of dates that correspond to the secular calendar.
- Considering multiple perspectives on Jewish observance by noting the similarities and differences between the motifs that the various families chose to depict.
- The question of what constitutes tradition. While many individuals own or have seen ritual objects like Hanukkah lamps, kiddush cups, and candle sticks, wimpels are not associated with any biblical commandment or rabbinic ruling yet nevertheless have persisted within Jewish culture.

Project Work Plan

YUM will work closely with CJH to digitize the wimpels and make them accessible online. YUM and CJH will then promote the digitized items, with YUM taking the lead on outreach. Each of these steps is detailed below.

Preparation for digitization: The majority of wimpels are located in one secure, locked Delta cabinet, rolled on polyvinylchloride cores suspended on powder-coated steel tubes supported on each side in a bottomless drawer so that there is no pressure on the fabric. YUM stores these items rolled in accordance with conservation standards for textiles to protect the items and ensure efficient storage space use. Each wrapper has the number of the binder, and they are arranged in numerical order, so they will be easy to locate, retrieve, and track during the digitization process. The wimpels were vacuum-cleaned and wrapped during the 2009-2010 review according to conservation standards (e.g., "Preserving Textiles" by Chief of the National Archives Conservation Laboratory Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler). They will therefore not need cleaning upon retrieval. The YUM Curator or a textile conservator familiar with the collection hired for this project will pull textiles for each shoot and transport them to the CJH Gruss Lipper Digital Laboratory (GLDL), located in the same building where the wimpels are stored. The curator will note the temporary location of the items in the Museum Collection Management System EMu. In consultation

with the YUM curator, the CJH Senior Manager for Metadata and Discovery will create a cross-departmental spreadsheet allowing project staff (not all of whom have access to location information in EMu) to track all steps of the digitization process from transfer to digital asset ingest, following CJH's standard digitization project practices.

Digitization: The wimpels will be digitized in sections, and then the digital images will be carefully stitched together so that the entire wimpel can be viewed from side to side. This follows the process that proved successful during a previous YUM-CJH collaboration to digitize three wimpels, one from 1754, another from the 18th century, and a third from 1603. The CJH Digital Services Manager will set up the photography work area in the digital lab. The Manager and CJH Photographer will use a Canon 5DSR (digital single-lens reflex) 50.6 MP to create archival, high-resolution, master digital images as TIFF (.tif) files. The images will be initially captured in RAW (CR2) format at a pixel size of 8688 x 5792, and the master preservation TIFF files will have a minimum 300 dpi. The wimpels are usually about six inches high and can be as wide as 221 inches. For digital photography of them, a textile conservator will unroll them a section at a time to allow CJH staff to capture an image. The textile conservator will then re-roll them at a proper tension and face in or out depending on whether the item is embroidered or painted, interleaving them on padded rollers with acid-free textile tissue that is either buffered or unbuffered depending on whether the wimpel is painted or embroidered. After capture, the CJH Photographer will process the files using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, convert the files from RAW to TIFF, crop the files, stitch them into a single image per wimpel, and create one master TIFF for each wimpel, and perform quality assurance on the images and manage the files. The Photographer will make sure that images match the objects in tone and color and will include a Kodak Color Separation Guide in each master image for reproduction purposes. The YUM Curator will verify that the correct inventory number is attached to each wimpel. After digitization, the YUM Curator or textile conservator will take the wimpels to the textile workroom, re-roll them safely, and return them to the cabinet in correct order. The YUM Curator will track the return in EMu.

Metadata creation and enhancement: The CJH Senior Manager for Metadata and Discovery will oversee all metadata and digital asset management and preservation for the project. As the first step in this process, the metadata records held in EMu will be cross-walked to create MARC records in the integrated library system ExLibris Aleph. Creating these records will make the items more easily discoverable via the central search bar at search.cjh.org, where the vast collections and 7.2 million digitized items from the collections of all five CJH partner organizations can be discovered. The MARC records will also integrate seamlessly into the digital asset management system, ExLibris Rosetta. The CJH Senior Manager for Metadata and Discovery will work together with the YUM Curator to enhance and expand metadata on each wimpel, including the addition of standard Library of Congress Subject Headings and, where needed, further information on decoration as well as transcriptions and translations of the text inscribed on each wimpel. Further details on the metadata crosswalk process, standards, and workflows can be found in the Digital Products Plan.

Planning and implementation: The project design builds upon past successful collaborative digitization projects between YUM and CJH, including the digitization of three wimpels (see links above). Other past collaborations have included digitizing approximately 350 slides and photographs, 86 children's books, 94 Holocaust-related photographs, 148 glass lantern slides, 62 coins and medals, 112 amulets, 65 documents, and the archival collections of two artists, Abe Grubere and Ina Golub. CJH and YUM are currently collaborating on a project funded by an IMLS Museums for America grant to CJH to pilot motion picture film digitization. These collaborations have largely been funded by grants to CJH; similarly, the wimpel digitization will rely on grant funding.

For the proposed project, the YUM Project Director will provide oversight, checking in at least monthly with the YUM Curator to ensure timeliness of progress and coordinating on grant administration. The

YUM Curator will work closely with the CJH Senior Manager for Metadata and Discovery and the CJH Digital Services Manager to plan and carry out digitization and metadata enhancement. This includes meeting at the start of the project and as necessary throughout to evaluate unforeseen needs and assess adherence to the schedule and deliverables. The YUM Curator will also oversee the textile conservator, record progress every day that digitization occurs.

Promotion: YUM and CJH will promote the completion of the project on their websites and on social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). YUM will also promote the project via Yeshiva University's robust social media accounts. YUM will share news of the project with special interest groups (e.g., the Textile Society of America, the Council of American Jewish Museums, the Association of Academic Museum and Galleries, the Association of Jewish Libraries, the American Academy of Religion, the Museums Council of New York City) as well as area academic institutions (e.g., Fashion Institute of Technology, Jewish studies programs at Baruch College, CUNY, Pace University, New York University, Fordham University).

Risks to the project include potential slight worsening of condition of the wimpels since the condition survey in 2009-2010. Thanks to careful storage and collection management, this is not expected to be a high risk, and the inclusion of a textile conservator on the project team will help to address any issues that might arise. Tracking, handling, digitizing, and digitally preserving the materials are not expected to cause difficulty because YUM is seasoned in collections care and CJH in digitization. The CJH digital lab team digitizes over 100,000 images every year on multiple projects and initiatives. The same experienced CJH team on this project has completed major mass digitization grants funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources, Claims Conference, the German Research Foundation/DFG, the National Historical Preservation and Records Commission, and private funders. CJH was also recently awarded a Save America's Treasures grant for a major digitization project in the coming three years. Thanks to this experience at CJH and the collections expertise at YUM, the project has been carefully planned and no significant risks are expected.

Project Results

This project will create digital surrogates of 61 wimpels and decorative binders, digitally preserving these valuable items and dramatically expanding access to them. Enhanced metadata records will also be created and available through the open public access catalog at search.cjh.org and crawled by search engines like Google for increased discoverability. These digitized items and metadata records will be carefully stewarded according to best practices as described in detail in the Digital Products Plan.

Another critical result will be the creation of a digitization workflow that fits with the recently implemented digital asset management system Rosetta. While CJH and YUM have collaborated in the past, this project will be the first since Rosetta's implementation, meaning that new workflows for metadata cross-walking and enhancement are necessary. By working through these essential steps, this project will lay the groundwork for digitizing the full scope of YUM's collections. The project will therefore contribute to a more robust digital presence, strengthened interpretive functions through exhibitions in-house and loans to other museums, and related virtual educational opportunities.

Digitizing the wimpel collection at YUM constitutes a high-impact project for collections care and access. An *Inspire!* grant would provide the essential funding to preserve digitally and open online access to highly valuable cultural objects that reflect centuries of Jewish life, including Jewish immigrant life in America. The project will fully address the issues of preservation and access currently facing the wimpel collection, advance YUM's mission and strategic plan, and meet the needs of several target user groups currently all but cut off from these valuable items. Perhaps most critically, this project will pilot a digitization process to reveal digitally the entirety of YUM's holdings to the public, which will serve to educate, inform, and inspire audiences for years to come.

DIGITAL PRODUCTS PLAN

The Yeshiva University Museum (YUM) will collaborate with the CJH for Jewish History (CJH, the CJH) to digitize 61 Torah binders. YUM and CJH are committed to creating the digital surrogates according to best practices, making the digitized materials readily accessible, and sustaining the digital items well into the future.

TYPE

Images

Photographers in the CJH Gruss Lipper Digital Laboratory will capture digital images of the Torah binders, creating high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) preservation master TIFFs in accordance with standards derived from the [U.S. National Archives and Records Administration's Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Archival Materials for Electronic Access: Creation of Production Master Files – Raster Images](#).

Since each Torah binder can measure up to 12 feet in length, they will have to be digitized in multiple images. These multiple preservation master TIFFs will then be stitched together to create a single JPEG2000 derivative image for web viewing. This JPEG2000 will represent the full length of the Torah binder, allowing researchers to view the full item and zoom in to see details. Depending on length, each Torah binder may require between 2-15 master preservation TIFFs and one derivative JPEG2000. The project will therefore generate 122-915 master preservation TIFFs and 61 derivative JPEG2000s.

Metadata

The CJH Senior Manager for Metadata and Discovery Eric Fritzier will crosswalk, clean up, and lightly enhance the metadata records for each Torah binder. Description of each binder is currently held in the museum collection management system EMu. EMu does not link with the digital asset management and preservation system, ExLibris Rosetta, where the digital images of the Torah binders will be digitally preserved. A crosswalk is therefore necessary. To enable this, Fritzier will extract description from EMu in accordance with the [Dublin Core Metadata Initiative](#) and use it to create a MARC record for each item in ExLibris Aleph. During this process, Fritzier will conduct any necessary clean-up of the data. Fritzier will then enhance the description, for example by adding Library of Congress Subject Headings. The MARC record will link out to the digitized object and be made widely discoverable, as described below.

AVAILABILITY

The images created on this project will be openly and publicly available online, and CJH and YUM will encourage their discovery and use.

After digitization, CJH will ingest the digital images into the digital asset management and preservation system, ExLibris Rosetta. Metadata will be synchronized between Rosetta and the library system ExLibris Aleph. These metadata records will then be discoverable via the single-search discovery layer Primo (search.cjh.org) and will link out to the digitized images presented to users through Rosetta's online viewer. The Rosetta digital object viewer is designed for access through all standard web browsers. No special tools or software are necessary to discover or view the digital images created through this grant project. The Primo discovery layer at search.cjh.org is compliant with best practices in SEO, and the metadata records linking to the digital objects will also be crawled by search engines like Google, further encouraging discovery.

CJH regularly seeks out opportunities to further enhance discoverability of metadata records and drive traffic to digital assets like those that will be created on this project. In the past, CJH has worked together with its partner organizations to submit records to larger aggregators. Records from YUM were shared to the Jewish Heritage Network in 2020, for example. CJH has also shared records to the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) through the Empire State Digital Network, but this hub has since been decommissioned. CJH is currently investigating other methods of sharing data to DPLA and would be inclined to reestablish harvests if a viable option arises. Beyond metadata sharing, CJH and YUM will drive traffic to the materials by encouraging their use by target audiences as described in the narrative.

ACCESS

The digital images created on this grant project will be made available under the Creative Commons CC-BY license. This will be articulated to researchers in the metadata associated with each item.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustaining the outcomes of this project fits squarely into the core mission and daily activities of the CJH and YUM and will have the full support of both institutions' leaders and staff. The CJH runs the complex network of systems that preserve and make accessible the metadata records and over 7.2 million digital assets across all five partners. Each partner organization is committed to the long-term sustainability of their assets in these shared systems.

The long-term preservation of the digital assets and their associated metadata records will be provided by the CJH's digital asset management and preservation system ExLibris Rosetta. Implemented at the CJH in 2018, Rosetta offers exceptionally strong digital preservation. It automatically assigns preservation metadata, checksums, and creation information to assets upon ingest, monitors checksums and file authenticity, and reports on the obsolescence risks for stored files.

The CJH maintains openly available documentation on Rosetta and its other systems on wiki.cjh.org. The CJH also actively participates in user group communities for Rosetta, Aleph, and ExLibris (ExLibris Users of North America/ELUNA) to further ensure the best possible stewardship of its valuable digital assets. These communities have proven very helpful as a space to discuss workflows, configurations, and best practices with preservation professionals across the globe.

The CJH also cultivates a close community of internal users among its staff and that of its five partner organizations through regular discussion, meetings, trainings, and collaboration around the network of systems shared by the five partners and stewarded by the CJH. One example of this internal collaboration was the formation of a task force several years ago that represented all partners and the CJH tasked with choosing a digital asset management system to replace the aging Digitool system. The result of the task force's work was the selection and implementation of Rosetta, which now offers robust digital preservation for all internal stakeholders.

The physical storage infrastructure for Rosetta is provided by Dell Powervault Storage Arrays and tape library systems for daily backups. As the need for space has increased, the architecture has scaled up to expand disk storage capacity. These servers have been virtualized, allowing for disaster recovery and a future external mirrored site in the cloud. All master files of assets held in Rosetta are also placed in the CJH's Amazon Glacier cloud storage repository as a second backup for further redundancy and geographic distribution.