

Forgotten Firsts: Women Lurking in the Archives

The Johanna Spector Papers and
Audiovisual Materials

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The Library of the Jewish Theological
Seminary

Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Session 7
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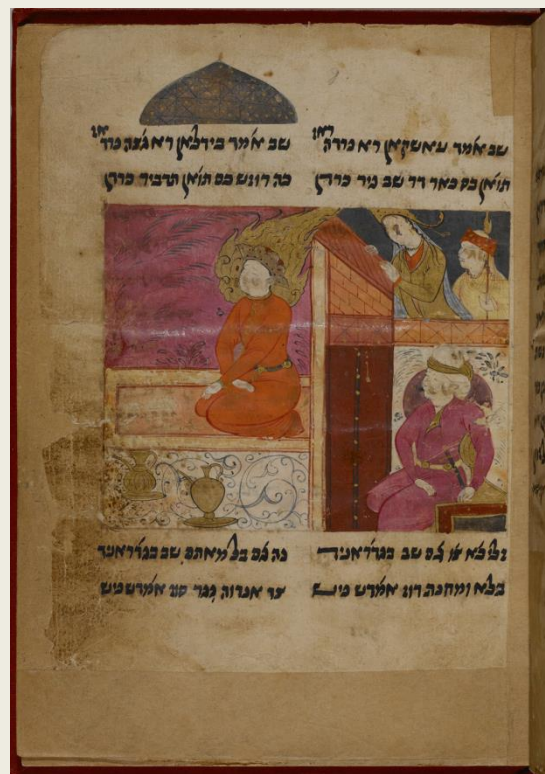
About JTS

- Founded in 1886 in New York
- Jewish university granting undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees
- Rabbinical and Cantorial School in the Conservative tradition



The JTS Library

- Mission is to collect, preserve and make available the literary and cultural heritage of the Jewish people
- Holdings span over 1,000 years of Jewish history including:
 - rare books
 - Cairo Genizah fragments
 - manuscripts
 - archival documents
 - ephemera
 - artwork
 - sound recordings
 - photographs



JTS Archives

- Institutional records of JTS
- Papers of Conservative rabbis, synagogues, and Jewish communal leaders
- Records of Jewish communities, institutions, and prominent individuals in the U.S. and Europe
- Oral histories of prominent American Jewish leaders

Johanna Spector Papers and Audiovisual Materials

- Spector was a professor at JTS
- Donated her papers upon her death in 2008
- Processing the collection through a CLIR Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant
- Collection contains papers, photographs, audio recordings, film reels
- Processing will be complete this summer



Johanna Lichtenberg Spector



- Born 1915 in Libau, Latvia
- Holocaust survivor
- Professor of Ethnomusicology at JTS from 1954-1985
- Studied Middle Eastern and Asian dwindling Jewish communities and conducted her own field research
- Documented the communities through audio recording and film

The Collection

- ~35 linear feet of papers
- ~3 lf of photographs and 3,000 slides
- 867 audio tapes (mostly reel to reel)
- There is a significant amount of film, but it is not within the scope of the grant



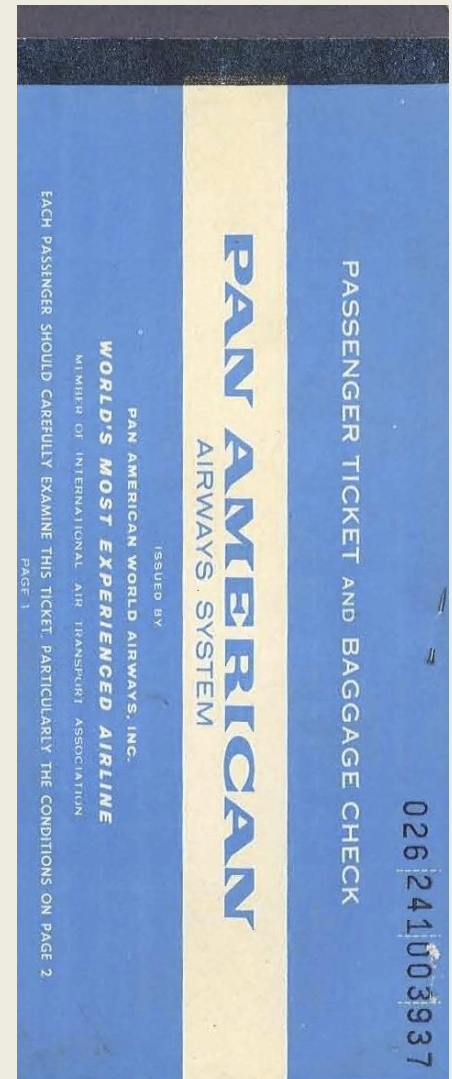
Challenges for Arrangement and Description

- No original order
- Volume of papers



Working Arrangement

- Series I: Personal Papers
 - Subseries A: Correspondence
 - Subseries B: Diaries and Journals
 - Subseries C: Student Papers
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- Series V: Film Footage



Spector and Gender

First female to be
named to
professorship at
JTS in 1970

Series: Professional Organizations



S.E.M. NEWSLETTER

The Society for Ethnomusicology, Inc.

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NUMBER 4

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AT THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

Doctor Johanna Spector has been named Seminary Professor Musicology at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York effective September 1970. Since 1961 she has been Director of the Department of Ethnomusicology, and she is now the first woman named to a professorship in any faculty of the Seminary. Plans for the expansion of the Department of Ethnomusicology within the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities include larger quarters in the new building being constructed by the Seminary.

At present the ethnomusicology program includes three years of undergraduate and two years of graduate study, and it concludes with the Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology. Twenty-five students are enrolled in the undergraduate courses, and five in the graduate program of study. Courses offered in 1970 will be given by Professor Spector as follows: 1. History of Jewish Liturgical Music, the nomadic period in the world. 2. His-

tory of Jewish Liturgical Music, the music of Europe and the Middle East up to recent times. 3. The System of Arabic Classical Music. 4. Occidental Jewish Folksong in relation to Oriental (Persian, Turkish and Arabic) Folksong. 5. and 6. The transcription of oral traditions, a two semester course open to qualified undergraduates and graduate students. Four graduate courses will be given in 1970-71: Compositional Techniques in Persian Music, a workshop for training in analysis of Persian classical music, and Compositional Techniques in Arab Music, a workshop for training interval measurement of Arabic *maqamat*.

This summer of 1970 Professor Spector is in Israel making a colour film on the Samaritan community (an ancient Semitic sect) with a professional film group directed by Daniel Wolman, creator of the Israeli art film, "The Dreamer".



Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Department of Ethnomusicology, employing the departmental strobocoon, an instrument which indicates tonal frequencies, and permits the exact measurement of one sound. Here the students are checking the frequencies of one sound of an Arabic *maqam*. The laboratory facilities include monochord, dodecacardon, a set of 57 tuning forks to the octave, the strobocoon, several tape recorders, and generators. In addition to these facilities, there is available to students an extensive library of rare books on the Middle East, Professor Spector's recorded collection of over ten thousand items made during the course of her years of field work, and a large collection of other tapes and discs, photo slides and films made among Jewish communities around the world.

Awareness of being a woman during field research:

“At first I thought his self restraint and quiet manner was due to the strange environment, the “American girl” and the recording equipment, and that he had no experience in working with a member of the opposite sex—in short that he was quite bewildered and therefore so silent.”

– April 17, 1954, Spector on her first meeting with a Yemenite Rabbi

While making copies of my collection....

Thursday, April 7, 54.

It is strange how a record brings back memories. I see Rav Gafah & prof. Goitein in my room on King George 27- a room large and bright and quite bare but for a wardrobe, a daybed, a little table and the recording machines. The window has no curtains, but looking through it one sees a great deal of Jerusalem - a magnificent view. Over the roofs I can perceive the King David Hotel and the YMCA, the mountains in great distance, Mt. Scopus, the Hospital, part of the shopping district, the Moslem cemetery, the pool and all the flat-roofed houses. The light is bright, the sort of light, which yields wonderfully clear and detailed photos, and most of the people wear dark glasses even in winter. Anyhow- I did. It must have been Rav Gafah's first visit, and all of us were quite shy. My Hebrew was not fluent as yet, and although I knew exactly, what I wanted to record, I left the talking to Dr. Goitein. He had brought Rav Gafah, and I was glad to be able to record an expert in his field- a reliable informant, with whom Dr. Goitein had worked previously. Rav Gafah, the Yemenite, was a short and slight man, not more than 5 ft. high, of dark complexion, a fine pepper and-salt beard, rather short, a black little satin cap, immaculate in/dark European clothes. His hands very small and sensitive.

At first I thought that his self restraint and quiet manner was due to the strange environment, the "American girl" and the recording equipment, and that he had no experience in working with a member of the opposite sex- in short that he was quite bewildered and therefore so silent. But later on I learned that this was his manner: quiet, self-contained, polite and very modest. This man was no mean scholar himself, a connoisseur of/rare books and mss of Hebrew lore, who brought from Yemen 4000 rare books and 600 mss. and 30 Tora-scrolls! A man, who studied many hours a day, wrote essays and learned papers dealing with the Talmud and Yemenite customs,



Spector with Yemenite Jews in Israel, 1952

Series: Diaries and Journals

Field Work with the Samaritans

“...at first the newcomer did not pay any attention to me thinking I was Ratson’s wife. He hardly answered my questions and made me feel keenly what the position of women in the Orient is. At first annoyed, it amused me later to no end. Worse than little boys, women could be seen but should not be heard; the best is to ignore them, since they neither have brains nor education. Although he changed his attitude later, I was glad to have had the experience of having been ‘only a woman’!

-1968, From a draft of Spector’s book about the Samaritans;

Series: Writings



Spector with the Samaritan high priest and her recording equipment, 1960s

World Trip, 1961-1962

1961/62

<u>MRS. JOHANNA SPECTOR</u>		
Sun.	December 10	Tel Aviv to Istanbul El-Al Flight 311
Tues.	December 12	Istanbul to Teheran Pan American Flight 2
Thurs.	December 14	Teheran to New Delhi (No service on Thursday)
Sun.	December 17	New Delhi to Agra Indian Airlines Flight 210
Tues.	December 19	Agra to New Delhi Indian Airlines Flight 209
Tues.	December 19	New Delhi to Bombay (connection) Indian Airlines Flight 182
Fri.	December 22	Bombay to Cochin Indian Airlines Flight 161
Wed.	December 27	Cochin to Madras Indian Airlines Flight 102
Wed.	January 3	Madras to Colombo Indian Airlines Flight 171
Sat.	January 6	(See our Note)
Mon.	January 8	Bangkok to Singapore Cathay Pacific Flight 723
Wed.	January 10	Singapore to Hong Kong Cathay Pacific Flight 726
Fri.	January 12	Hong Kong to Seoul Korean Airlines Flight 502
Sat.	January 13	Seoul to Tokyo Northwest Airlines Flight 6
Sun.	January 21	Tokyo to Honolulu Pan American Flight 2
Tues.	January 23	Honolulu to Francisco Pan American Flight 2

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Travel

- “Very few women travel in India and if at all accompanied by their husbands or servants. I was advised either to travel by plane or air-conditioned first class train-coach. Nothing less would since it is not safe. Well, I am not sure this is a bit exaggerated, but since I have no time anyway I can not even try.”
– December 24, 1961
- “Getting on the plane,
I was again the only woman.”
– February 18, 1962



Spector in India, 1962

Relationship with other Women

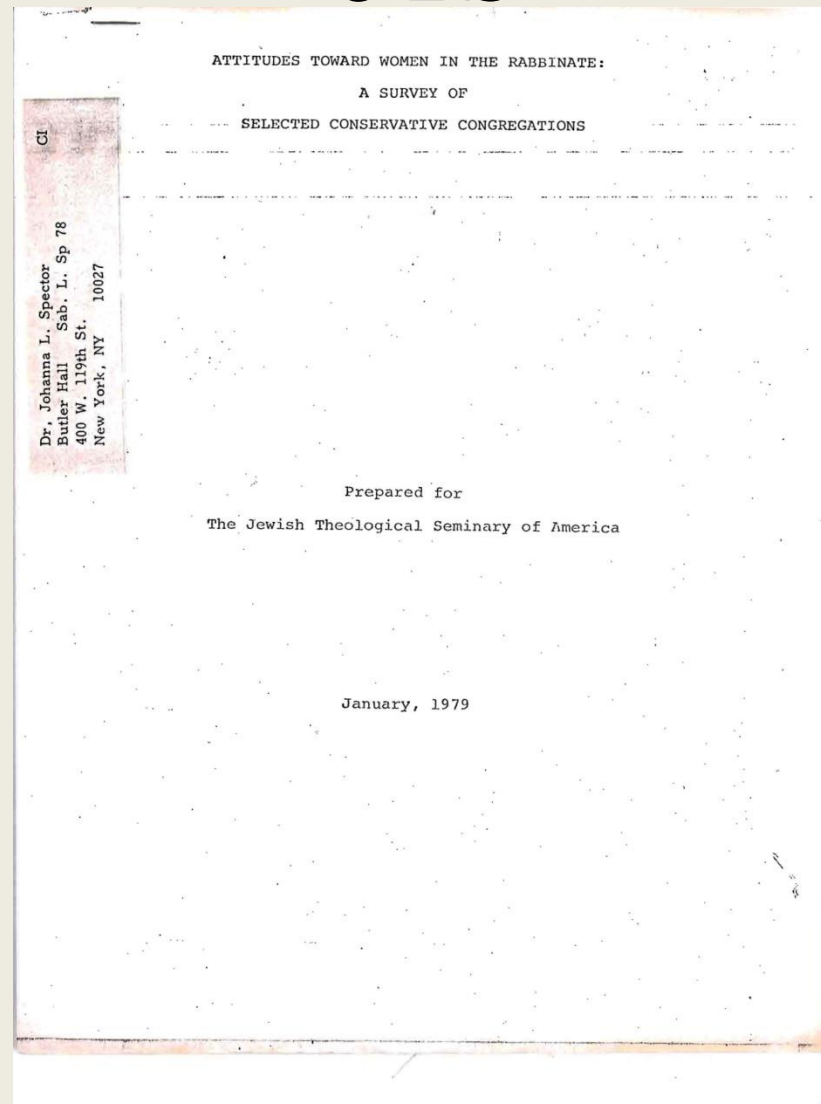
Dear Mrs. Dosmar Kosterlitz,
Thank you very much for your letter of July 12. I am very pleased that a lady took Dr. Mittler's place and I welcome your assistance.

- Letter to Edith Dosmar Kosterlitz, United Restitution Organization, August 2, 1982

Male Colleagues

- “Dr. E. came and stayed a few hours. He is a good-looking man around fifty who has become exceedingly fond of me. I noticed it already last year at my party...He told me now that felt this since Paris (Congress 1957)! I do not encourage his attitude but prefer a friendly exchange of ideas.”
 - July 25, 1962
- “I am still looking for romance and glamour and hate casual affairs. (E.A. was ready this year and so was D.N. but both are married and have children. And I simply refused to play. E.A. seemed even to be serious, and I know that D.N. is unhappy. But can't I get a single man?)”
 - October 26, 1962
- “The only deterrent was B.S. who did not treat me like a colleague, but rather like a competitor advancing his male prerogative.”
 - January 13, 1969 in India

Ordination of Women Rabbis at JTS



Series: JTS Records

Daily Life as a Woman



Spector on Gender

“I was brought up in a time and place where women’s lib was not an issue. My parents provided me with the best education available and I went through private schools and colleges with boys – there were few girls in my classes. I never felt discriminated against because of gender and usually made it to the top of the class. At the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, I was the only girl student and at the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York I was one of the few women teachers with an all male student body. Only in the last decade did I teach women as well. My fieldwork concentrated on male informants who were literate and informed and I never had any difficulty in eliciting information from them. Only in the last years did I work with women and found them far more interesting than men.”

Letter to Charlotte Frisbie, 1988



Spector with Yemenite Brides, Israel, 1953

JTS Staff, 1966



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Initial Collection Description

Jewish Ethnomusicology from the East: The Archives of Johanna Spector

- Project Summary:

The collection of Dr. Johanna Spector (1915-2008) is a major repository of primary source materials related to dwindling Jewish communities in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This collection will attract a wide range of scholars and students of ethnography, history, anthropology, and music. It offers a fascinating exploration of non-Western Jewish religious and communal traditions, which developed and persisted over 2,000 years and which are uniquely documented in this archive.

- Subject(s):

African Studies, Anthropology, Asian Studies, Ethnicity, Race and Migration, Folklore, Hebrew Studies, History, Judaic Studies, Languages and Linguistics, Middle Eastern Studies, Music, Religious Studies



Additional Research Areas

- Ethnomusicology
- Asian/Middle Eastern Jewish Communities
- Holocaust Testimony and Holocaust Survivor Experiences
- JTS History
- Israel in the 1950s-1960s
- Independent film-making
- Women in academia

Conclusion and Questions for Discussion

- There are items relevant to women's history in the collection but they are scattered and buried within series about other topics
- How should we describe the women's history content in the finding aid?
- How do we ensure that the value of this collection for women's history is recognized?
- What is our role as archivists in synthesizing material on this topic?
- Anachronism

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