

# Scientific Department

**Categories: Institutions**

War damaged all signs of East European Jewish traditional life, namely clothing, ceremonies and lifestyle. In order to preserve these forms of life and to “record the countenance of East European Jewishness” for propaganda purposes, the German authorities collected various materials from private homes and from schools such as books, ritual objects and craftsmanship products of Jewish character and verified them. This happened by order of the Ghettoverwaltung Litzmannstadt.

After preparatory work had been done, the Ghettoverwaltung set about working on a permanent Museum of Eastern Jews. Primarily, Emanuel Hirschberg<sup>1</sup>, a teacher and rabbi who stayed in Gdańsk and afterwards in Łódź, was called on to arrange the collected objects as museum exhibits. However, in order to depict the already damaged life of Eastern European Jews vividly, in May 1942, the Ghettoverwaltung ordered the Head of the Council of Elders to establish a Scientific Department and appointed E. Hirschberg as its head. Hirschberg were provided five rooms at Bałucki Marketsquare (vide Baluter-Ring) that he could use as studies and exhibition spaces for his projects to be carried out. Two painters, two graphic artists and 18 skilled craftswomen, mostly from Germany, set to work. They created a series of Eastern Jewish types in form of mannequins, placed in glass cabinets. The relief decorations had to make an impression of natural life. In this way, scenes depicting life of East European Jews were created, namely “Chassidic Wedding in Poland,” “Friday Evening in a Shtetl in Volhynia,” “Kindling of the Lights in a Jewish house,” “Monday in a Beth Midrash” and “Scene of Everyday Jewish Life in the Ghetto in Litzmannstadt.” They were replenished with pictures by I. Lejzerowicz and H. Szylis, also depicting East Jewish and Ghetto motifs.

The figures were made of the following materials: heads of wood, decorations of cardboard, hands of plasticine, hair of silk and wool, clothes of textile scraps, and leather. The scenes mainly give the impression of the grotesque, especially because of their

exaggerated realism. They are obviously lacking in the beauty and intimacy of traditional life of East European Jews. A suspicion arises that such a figurative presentation was created deliberately in order to justify, or even to give reasons for the annihilation of the compelling folklore world.

In May 1943, E. Hirschberg was forbidden to continue that project, as necessary W materials such as wire, wood and textiles were regarded crucial for the wartime economy and no longer available for civil workshops. Despite this, he was allowed to finish with five collaborators some works already begun (figures from the ghetto, family scenes, Beth Midrash).

In January 1944, the works were still in progress and finished figures in the rooms of the Scientific Department.

Inhabitants of the Ghetto distanced themselves from the Department, as they felt the figures of the glass cabinets did not serve artistic, historic and cultural purposes, which was contrary to the interests of Jewry. The Department was not an initiative of the Eldest; just the opposite, it happened against his will.

Dr Oskar Singer

## Resources

Encyclopedia, s. 234-234.

## Tags

Jewish administration folklore

**Updated: 16-03-2026**

**Added: 30-07-2023**

