The enduring mission of the National Library of Israel (NLI) - to collect, preserve, and endow our stories and heritage for this and future generations, to serve and enrich all of Israel’s citizens, the Jewish world, and people everywhere - was as timely as ever in this unusual year of 2020. Moreover, recognizing the crucial need for cultural nourishment and interpersonal connection precisely when we are all contending with challenge, these aspects of our work took on greater urgency over the past year. The Library’s rich array of cultural and educational initiatives and partnerships, professional collaborations, and innovative digital programs, as well as our iconic new home currently under construction in Jerusalem, are designed to ensure that all Israelis, Jews, and citizens of the world can encounter, enjoy, and be inspired by the National Library of Israel and its treasures.

By the Numbers

2020 may be a number many people want to put behind them, but at the National Library of Israel we are happily adding up our numbers, as highlighted in this snappy new video. Here are a few points of pride:

- Over 10 million website visits, a 70% increase over 2019
- Over 6 million website visitors who came via Google – a 114% increase compared to 2019
- 100,000s of items digitized
- 40,000 new books added to the National Library collections
- 150,000 visitors to online cultural events from every corner of Israel and across the globe
- 300 restorations by NLI’s Conservation and Restoration Department
- 2000 teachers in online training courses and conferences
- Over 1 million digital Treasures of the National Library freely accessible online
- 170+ workers at the building site of the new NLI complex, 24-6
2020 Highlights

In the pages below, you will read about the range of National Library of Israel programs and initiatives from the past year. **We are proud of the creative ways in which the National Library, as an institution, contended with the new world reality in 2020** and turned challenges into opportunities.

**Even in this exceptionally trying year, NLI continued to impact culture, scholarship, and society in deep and meaningful ways - in Jerusalem, in Israel, in the region, and beyond. We felt great support from the public. Our new building rose before our eyes. The next two years will be both challenging and exciting. We will continue to strive for professionalism and excellence and approach every hurdle and opportunity head-on.**

*Oren Weinberg, CEO, The National Library of Israel*

We expect that a number of the creative solutions that have arisen during the Coronavirus crisis, such as expanded online programming with the potential to reach broad audiences in Israel and worldwide, will be incorporated into the long-term “regular” functioning of the National Library of Israel. Indeed, **many of the solutions have presented enhanced opportunities for NLI to step up and serve as a library without borders** - providing links to information, communities, and people, wherever they may be, and drawing on technology to enhance community engagement, digital preservation, reference services, open access, educational opportunities, and collaborative projects in Israel and around the world.

We are pleased to share some of the highlights of what has been an extraordinary year for us all:

- **At the onset of the Corona crisis, NLI’s Culture Department quickly reorganized to launch the Reading Room, a rich program of lectures, meet-the-author events, and celebrations of culture, all online and all free of charge.** Tune in and sign up for programs here.
- **NLI online programming is attracting audiences from throughout the world.** As just one example, a recent Reading Room program, *Tolstoy, the Imam from Dagestan, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe*, included participants from Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, the UK, and the US.
- **NLI’s Israel National Center for Humanities Education mobilized to offer online teacher training courses for distance learning** for Israeli teachers who suddenly were required to teach remotely and needed technical and practical guidance. Throughout 2020, NLI’s digital resources for teachers have undoubtedly been more critical than ever.
- The National Library’s collections grow in depth and breadth from year to year. **2020 additions to the collections include Hannah Senesh’s personal archive and the Damascus Crowns (keter damesek).**
- NLI’s education team sharpened its focus on developing and promoting online educational resources for schoolchildren learning remotely, and expanding online offerings in several languages (with a special grant from the Gottesman Fund), including English, Hebrew, Arabic and French.
- NLI actively strives to build international collaborations, partnerships, and outreach in Europe, North America, and around the world in areas of education, heritage, and culture, enhancing our global value and impact as a source of knowledge and connection for all.
- **A growing number of partners** have joined the ranks of significant benefactors of the new Library building and of key NLI programs and activities, and many **new and returning donors** at all levels continue to demonstrate time and again that they are engaged with the Library and stakeholders in our future.
- **Throughout all of 2020, construction of the new National Library of Israel complex has continued,** in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines and government regulations. We anticipate that our new building will be completed by early 2022 with the grand opening scheduled for summer 2022.
The new National Library building and campus, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, with Mann-Shinar serving as Executive Architect, will reflect the central value of opening access to the National Library’s treasures for broad and diverse audiences. Within its 45,000 square meters (480,000 sq. ft.) of space, it will provide venues for exhibitions, cultural and educational programming, reading rooms, study areas, and more in a secure, sustainable, and state-of-the-art environment. The lead partners in the building renewal project are the Government of Israel, the Rothschild Family through the auspices of Yad Hanadiv, and the David S. and Ruth L. Gottesman Family of New York.

When the pandemic hit, a top priority was to minimize its impact on the new National Library construction project, to the greatest extent possible. The Israeli government designated construction as an essential industry, even during Covid-19 shutdowns, and therefore on-site work continued throughout 2020, in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines and government regulations. The Library’s new building project team, together with Library management, have monitored progress closely through daily, weekly, and monthly meetings via Zoom, as well as ongoing in-person visits to the construction site. The building’s exterior and interior have now taken form, as beautifully portrayed in this video that overlays architectural renderings with actual building site photos.

As of October 2020, construction of the three-story concrete framework above the Ruppin Boulevard entrance floor (L1, L2, L3) was completed. The contractor then readied the building site for winter rains, including preparing drainage infrastructure and insulation and temporary closures of open areas. Infrastructure work continues for electrical systems, plumbing, cement block wall construction, plasterboard partition installation, and finishing on the five underground floors (B1-5) and on aboveground floors on the Ruppin Street side. Work on the environmental sculpture installation, “Letters of Light,” has also moved ahead, under the supervision of artist Micha Ullman. The completed letters will be kept in storage until the time comes for their installation in the sculpture garden.

The handover of the current NLI building at the completion of the new building project is in the final planning stages, including mapping the entire transition plan, assessing the time and resources required for all processes (ex: moving books, archives, and rare items to their designated areas), and transferring operations to the new complex. Closures of the Library to the public over 2020 gave staff the opportunity to focus intensively on reorganizing and refreshing the collections, a key piece in the advance preparations. Due to Covid-19-related issues and intermittent lockdowns, processes were delayed somewhat over the course of the year. The estimated date for project completion (building construction and move-in to the new complex) is mid-2022, with the opening gala and dedication of the new National Library of Israel building and campus tentatively scheduled for summer 2022.
New Head of Collections
In fall 2020, Dr. Raquel Ukeles was appointed the new NLI Head of Collections. Raquel Ukeles has served since 2010 as curator of the National Library’s Islam and Middle East Collection. In this capacity, she has overseen development of the collection, led digital, cultural, and educational initiatives based on the Library's Arabic and Islamic cultural heritage materials, and worked tirelessly to strengthen the connection between the Library and Arab communities in Israel and beyond. We wish her success in her new position.

Hannah Senesh personal archive
Zionist icon, war hero, and legendary poet Hannah Senesh left behind a rich literary estate, including manuscripts, photos, documents, personal items, and more. Over the past year, Ori and Miri Eisen of Arizona enabled the transfer of the complete Hannah Senesh archival collection to the National Library, with the support of the Senesh family. 2021 marks the centenary of Senesh's birth – a fitting moment for the Library's intention to open global digital access to this significant archive. The dramatic arc of Hannah's life and the archive that preserves her memory received wide coverage in the Israeli and Jewish press; a short clip documenting the emotion-filled receipt of the archive can be viewed here.

The Damascus Crowns
The Damascus Crowns (keter damesek) are 13th century illuminated Bibles written on parchment that belonged to the Syrian capital's Jewish community for centuries until they were transported secretly to Israel in the 1990s. After a protracted legal battle, the Jerusalem District Court declared the books “treasures of the Jewish people” with historic, religious, and national importance that must be preserved, and ruled that the Damascus Crowns are to remain under the National Library's custodianship for their preservation. On December 29, representatives of the Syrian Jewish community made their first review—via Zoom—to the National Library as trustees of the Damascus Crowns. Dr. Yoel Finkelman, curator of the Haim and Hanna Solomon Judaica Collection, and Marcela Szekely of NLI's Conservation Department presented the items, which were unboxed under climate-controlled conditions. At the meeting, NLI Chairman David Blumberg was named Chairman of the Damascus Crowns Trust steering committee.

The Clinton Bailey Archive of Bedouin Culture
In 2019, Dr. Clinton Bailey, anthropologist and cultural researcher, gifted the National Library with 50 years of research in the form of 350 hours of conversations with Bedouin of the Sinai and Negev deserts. These interviews are one-of-a-kind oral histories of the last generation to come of age before the onset of modernity. Over 2020, NLI digitized the audio material of the original analog cassette tapes, and Dr. Bailey is in the process of inputting metadata and descriptions of the content. This unique and important heritage project is made possible thanks to our lead partner, the Revson Foundation, together with other benefactors, and is on track for completion by March 2022.
Online Professional Training for Teachers

NLI’s Israel National Center for Humanities Education (INCHE) mobilized to offer online teacher training for distance learning for the thousands of Israeli teachers who were suddenly required to teach remotely and needed technical and practical guidance. The first workshop was held in March, and 100s of teachers took part in programs during the first months of the pandemic, advancing both distance teaching skills and connection to and awareness of National Library resources. In preparation for the 2020-21 school year, INCHE hosted a seminar for 600 teachers on “Teaching Literature” and developed distance learning resources for the High Holidays.

Summer programming

During August, NLI ran its summer program for Arab children for the fifth time – but the first time using an online platform. The Covid-19 crisis provided a unique opportunity that enabled hundreds of children from outside Jerusalem to participate, with Zoom participants from Israel’s north, central, and southern regions, as well as from the Palestinian Authority; and the website logged visits from Jordan, the US, and Germany. Also over the summer, NLI’s Education Department launched HaGalshanim (“Surfboards”), a Hebrew-language online summer activity series that logged tens of thousands of visitors, with live Zoom workshops that attracted 1,500+ participants.

Pocket Library

The Pocket Library Hebrew-language audio book program is an INCHE project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. While generally for middle-school students, during the Covid-19 health crisis, the National Library made free audio books available to the public, each with an accompanying educational package. During Passover, NLI offered 10 popular in-copyright books in cooperation with iCast (the leading Israeli audio book app), for children, youth, and adults – leading to some 100,000 visits to the project’s website and more than 15,000 downloads. For Israel Independence Day, another six books were offered. The initiative received extensive media coverage. In parallel to these special initiatives, NLI’s Pocket Library program is operating over the current school year with 400 classes, up from 160 last year.

Young Jerusalem Curators program (2019-20 school year)

Each year some 200 Jerusalem students in grades 6-9, take part in the Young Jerusalem Curators program at the National Library, in Hebrew and in Arabic. The program comprises in-depth research of a chosen topic and a creative project on the same theme. In spring 2020 the various school groups had all managed to complete the research portion of the program and had moved on to the creative stage, when schools closed and restrictions went into effect. Once school resumed, students had the chance to complete their projects, albeit with some modifications. The traditional year-end festive events and exhibitions for family, staff, and friends were held on Zoom.
Digital Projects

We wish our friends, colleagues, and supporters a Happy and Healthy 2021

**Maktoub**
In spring of 2020, NLI launched Maktoub, a project for preserving and opening access to the approximately 3000 Arabic and Islamic manuscripts and selected rare books in the National Library of Israel collection. The Maktoub digital platform will ultimately enable users from around the world to discover, examine, and enjoy the entire collection, with access to high-resolution images of the texts themselves. The digital platform, based on the model of Ktiv - The International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts, will have multiple search functions (such as date, subject, author, and production place) with supporting meta-data in Arabic and English. This project is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Arcadia Fund.

**Australian Jewish Press Digitization Project**
A new collaboration between the National Library of Australia (NLA), the National Library of Israel (NLI), and the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) launched in October, with the aim of digitizing more than 200,000 pages from 180 years of Australian Jewish newspapers, and providing open and free access to them online. The initiative has received extensive press coverage. A new technological infrastructure for the Library’s online press collection also launched at the end of October, offering users quality and efficient search and reading features in all languages, both in historical press collections and daily/current press. Check it out [here](#).

**Digitization of the Suzie and Bruce Kovner National Music Archives**
The National Library has launched a large-scale project, in partnership with Suzie and Bruce Kovner, to complete the process of digitizing NLI’s Music Collection and National Sound Archive through the scanning and cataloging of paper music archives and manuscripts from the NLI collection. The music collection includes over 300 archives of artists and composers, amongst them such greats as Paul Ben-Haim, Andre Hajdu, Naomi Shemer, Noam Sherif, Moshe Wilensky, and David Zahavi.

**New NLI website development**
The National Library of Israel development team is working steadily to characterize, design, and develop components for the new NLI website. These include a revamped homepage; new areas on the site for music, newspapers/periodicals, and piyyut and prayer; the transfer of thousands of pages of content in Hebrew, Arabic, and English; developing a strategic plan for NLI’s digital presence in Arabic; upgrading accessibility; and much more. The new homepage is scheduled to go live in March 2021, and the digital content team is working on the schedule for the complete transfer of content to the new site over the course of the year.
Cultural Programming

The Reading Room: Culture, Knowledge, and Inspiration
At the onset of the Corona crisis, NLI's Culture Department quickly reorganized to launch the Reading Room, a rich program of lectures, meet-the-author events, and celebrations of culture, all online and all free of charge. The Reading Room includes access to live events, as well as recordings of top-quality National Library programs that have taken place in the past. More recently, the Reading Room has significantly increased programming in English and other languages. During 2020, the Reading Room hosted 234 live events with some 150,000 participants in both live and recorded events, enabling great numbers of people, many or most of whom otherwise may not have attended a program at the National Library in Jerusalem, to engage with the treasures of the NLI. We invite the public to tune in and sign up for cultural programs here.

Ramadan Nights from Jerusalem
Ramadan Nights from Jerusalem, initiated by the National Library of Israel, was conceived as a broad collaboration between Jerusalem's great cultural institutions, religious bodies, grassroots initiatives, and community organizations to offer diverse opportunities to experience Ramadan (which fell from April 24-May 23). Under the shadow of Corona, the Ramadan Nights web platform provided meaningful programs for those unable to participate in the traditional prayers, family gatherings, and public events. Live and recorded programs (in either Arabic, Hebrew, or English) included lectures, talks, and virtual tours related to Islamic culture and history; traditional Muslim recitations and prayers; intimate conversations in Jerusalem homes; musical performances; culinary workshops; special family and children's programs; and more. Planning is now underway for Ramadan Nights 2021.

Bustan: Writers’ Encounter Program for Jewish and Arab Writers
Six poets took part in the fourth cohort of Bustan, representing a diverse group (in terms of religion, language, age, gender, ethnicity, and professional background) of highly accomplished fellows who share a talent for poetry. The summer 2020 program was planned in a period characterized by uncertainty and ever-changing Ministry of Health regulations, but as always was modeled to afford the fellows opportunities to devote themselves to writing, in-depth learning, and cultivating relationships among the cohort. The fellows produced an anthology of poems written by and translated by Bustan fellows from Hebrew to Arabic and Arabic to Hebrew. The 2020 Bustan program was in partnership with the Germanacos Foundation and an anonymous donor.

Docu.Text 06
NLI’s flagship summer film festival, Docu.Text, has for the past five years attracted documentary film lovers from around the country to the National Library in Jerusalem. Following a postponement this year due to Covid-19, Docu.Text was reconfigured to take place online as an international celebration of film. Docu.Text 06 ran from November 15-25, 2020 and, in addition to the screening of dozens of films for online audiences in Israel and abroad, included talks and master classes with creators and researchers, film premiers, and virtual tours of NLI collections relevant to certain films. A collaboration with the Docaviv International Documentary Film Festival, Docu.Text 06 also received funding from the Jerusalem Foundation and an anonymous donor.
Resource Development and International Outreach

**Gesher L'Europa**
**Partnership with the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe**
**Gesher 3**
The Trustees of Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe have approved funding for a third phase of Gesher L'Europa for 2021-2024. This will enable NLI to expand its program in Europe, focusing on the opening of the new Library building to create momentum and excitement around the National Library as a leading international institution in Israel and a destination hub for Jewish heritage, culture, and education.

**Jewish Community COVID-19 Archive**
In spring 2020, the National Library launched the Jewish Community COVID-19 Archive, inviting the public to send in digital and physical ephemera materials reflecting the pandemic's influence on Jewish life everywhere. “As the dynamic institution of national memory for the State of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide, we see it as a very natural and critical role for us to be collecting and preserving materials related to how the Coronavirus is impacting Jewish life and practice,” says Yoel Finkelman, Haim and Hanna Salomon Judaica Collection Curator. This time capsule will serve future students and scholars in areas as diverse as sociology, medical history, Jewish communal life, computer science, rabbinic responsa, and more.

**European Days of Jewish Culture**
As part of the 2020 European Days of Jewish Culture (EDJC), on September 6th NLI launched a fascinating and beautifully-designed new online exhibition based on Library treasures: Jewish Journeys. NLI’s exhibition reflects aspects of Jewish journeys over the centuries, including stories and interactive educational activities. This is NLI’s 5th year of partnership in the weeklong festival that takes place in a range of European languages and locations and serves as an important network for Jewish cultural organizations across Europe.

**The Italian Hebrew Books Cataloging Project**
The Italian Hebrew Books Cataloging Project is a partnership between Gesher L'Europa, the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy, and the National Central Library of Rome (BNCR), with an aim to catalog approximately 34,000 Hebrew books in Italian collections and create a unified list hosted by the BNCR. Building on the cooperation fostered prior to the outbreak of the Coronavirus, over spring 2020 the project team clarified all technical details and responsibilities so work could continue during lockdown and ran an online training program in June 2020, for librarians, catalogers, photographers, and the project teams in Rome and Turin. It is to the credit of our Italian colleagues, who found practical solutions in compliance with Corona restrictions and quarantining of books, that the project launched almost on schedule, beginning with the collections in Rome and Turin.

**North America**
**NLI USA**
In 2020, Adina Kanefield joined the National Library team as Acting Executive Director of NLI USA, and Jack Lew and David Makovsky were named the new co-chairs of NLI USA. Together they are infusing a fresh energy and spirit of commitment into the National Library of Israel's American affiliate, and are working to develop a long-term strategic plan for NLI USA.

**Canada**
During 2020, NLI worked to enhance the Canadian community’s awareness of the National Library of Israel and all it has to offer. Led by former Israeli Consul General to Toronto DJ Schneeweiss, the Library has launched a series of collaborations and partnerships which promise to bring increased NLI value into Canadian Jewish communal life. Through a new agreement with the Jerusalem Foundation Canada, Canadian donors can now make tax-deductible gifts to NLI.

**Speakers Bureau**
Inspired by successful (online) speaking engagements over the past year in cooperation with institutions such as the Ramaz School, Torah in Motion, Limmud, the Israeli Consulate in Toronto, and many more, we are currently developing a Speakers Bureau list of NLI staff speakers and subjects for talks in English and other languages, aimed at international audiences.
In August, the National Library shut down for two weeks due to budgetary constraints caused by a shortage in government funding that was compounded by the Corona crisis. During this period, and in its aftermath, we received heartwarming support, in words and in monetary donations, from friends and patrons in Israel and abroad, as well as extensive favorable media coverage. We are especially grateful to David S. & Ruth L. Gottesman for the Gottesman Fund Emergency Relief Grant that enabled us to offset the National Library deficit and return to full capacity, and which was given along with support specifically for NLI educational programming. We successfully negotiated with the Israeli government to procure a portion of the funds they had cut during the year, which helped further balance some of the budgetary shortfall of 2020.

We welcome new and longtime partners who have joined the ranks of significant benefactors of the new Library building and of key NLI programs and activities. Over 2020, the National Library of Israel reached major agreements with Idan and Batia Ofer; The Marcus Margulies Charitable Trust; Children of Israel: Saul Fox; The Azrieli Foundation; Lucius N. Littauer Foundation; Karen and Joseph Levine Philanthropic Fund; Benjamin Shapell Family Fund via California Community Foundation; Rene Braginsky; Hardy Lane Foundation – Fred Tauber and Paula Fredriksen; The Germanacos Foundation; Michael Jesselsohn; Harel Insurance; Bader Philanthropies (Mubadarat); Bruchah At Fund (Sally Gottesman); the Jerusalem Municipality; and Charles H. Revson Foundation, Inc. We also wish to acknowledge and express our gratitude to the many new and returning donors at all levels, who demonstrate time and again that they are engaged with the Library and stakeholders in our future.

The National Library of Israel offers a range of opportunities for you to become involved:

- **Become an International Member** of the NLI, and enjoy an array of benefits while also helping to ensure that the Library’s cultural treasures continue to inform and inspire generations to come.
- **Connect with the National Library online**: Through the NLI website, The Librarians blog, or Facebook page - and on Instagram and Twitter.
- Sign up for the new English-language Cultural Events Newsletter or ask to receive our monthly update, and take part in Reading Room cultural programs online.
- **Donate** to support NLI programs or the new National Library building, with a range of naming and recognition opportunities for benefactors.
- **Come visit!** The NLI Visitor Center offers the general public guided tours and lectures about the Library’s collections, and will soon begin to offer virtual tours.

The National Library of Israel is a registered Israeli non-profit public benefit company. NLI USA, Inc. is a registered not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization in the United States. For tax-deductible donations in Canada and other countries, please contact us to discuss giving opportunities.

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