

The Cyprus Detention Camps

The Cyprus Detention Camps:

The Essential Research Guide

By

Yitzhak Teutsch

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On the cover: *Jewish Refugees Cyprus camps are being emptied, 1949*, by David Eldan, Government Press Office, Prime Minister's Office of the State of Israel

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Dedicated to

Daniella

מנשים באוהל תבורך

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Objectives

Shocking, heartbreaking, depressing, uplifting, moving—all of these words have rightly been used to describe the saga of the Cyprus detention camps.

And what about the word mysterious? Is that word appropriate in the context of the Cyprus camps?

Without a doubt, one aspect—the *Why*—is shrouded in mystery. Why, for example, were heavily armed guards used to deal with visa-less immigrants, many of whom were women and children, some of whom were sick, dressed in rags, and on the verge of exhaustion? (A question, incidentally, that is heard frequently in the United States these days in the wake of the benighted decision to send American troops to deal with visa-less immigrants attempting to enter the U.S. from Mexico.)

But while the *Why* may well lie in the realm of speculation and hypothesis, the other *W*'s—the *Who*, the *What*, the *When*, and the *Where*—have no place there. They belong front and center, under the bright lights and magnifying glass of the historian. In a similar vein, the sources that could shed light on these questions should be categorized and classified, defined and dissected, qualified and quantified. Those sources should be “interrogated . . . with scepticism and imagination as well as with knowledge and understanding of their historical context.”¹ Above all, those sources should be compared with and weighed against one another. The fundamental facts are, after all, the building blocks of the saga; they cannot be the subject of speculation or hypothesis.

This book, focusing on the *Who*, the *What*, the *When*, and the *Where* of the Cyprus camps, has five objectives: first, to collect the broadest possible array of data, including maps, names, biographies, acronyms, dates, statistics, and key concepts; secondly, to provide precise bibliographic

¹ Anthony J. Stockwell, “British Decolonisation: The Record and the Records,” *Contemporary European History*, vol. 15, no. 4 (Nov. 2006), 583.

citations to newspaper articles, archival material, and scholarly works; thirdly, to provide, for selected events, either my own analysis or that of recognized scholars; fourthly, to make note of connections between related data, especially when that data is found in disparate and far-flung sources; and fifthly, to present that data in a format that lends itself to the quick and efficient retrieval of information. It aims, in short, to be a *vade mecum*—a single volume covering both the internal affairs of the camps and the external forces that molded life in the camps.

It is hoped that by answering the fundamental factual questions, we will all be in a stronger position to tackle the persistent *Why* questions.²

Sources Consulted

In gathering and selecting this data, I have consulted the usual array of primary and secondary resources: letters, diaries, memoirs, archival material, newspapers, periodicals, maps, oral testimonies, photographs, historical film footage, and scholarly articles and books. In addition, I have sought out and examined material in admittedly unusual locations, including Internet auction sites, philatelic journals, and YouTube.

I have, of course, included information about the important camp leaders and the prominent decision-makers outside of the camps. In addition, though, I have included information about the forgotten and the overlooked: the American sailors (some of them non-Jews) who chose to be detained in Cyprus; the Arabic-speaking *ma'apilim* who hailed from North Africa; the doctors, nurses, teachers, rabbis, and entertainers who came from Mandatory Palestine to provide their services in the camps; the women who worked in the camps as teachers, photographers, and radio operators for the *Palmach*; the British soldiers who guarded the camps and the British officers who administered them; the injured and the dead (both British and Jewish).

² After writing these words, I chanced upon the essay “In Search of History” by Barbara W. Tuchman, in which the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian addressed the question of when historians should begin to search for the “why”: “I believe it is safer to leave the ‘why’ alone until after one has not only gathered the facts but arranged them in sequence...” (*Practicing History: Selected Essays* [New York: Random House, c1981], 23).

Target Audience

This book is intended to guide historians, students, journalists, diplomats, and anyone else with an interest in this momentous period in modern history.

In an effort to make this research guide accessible to readers without a knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish, I have done the following:

- Provided transliterations and English translations for all Hebrew and Yiddish words and phrases appearing in the **text**. In some cases the translations appear in the text itself—e.g., the *ma'apilim* (clandestine immigrants); in other cases, the translations appear in the Glossary.
- Provided transliterations and English translations for all Hebrew and Yiddish titles that appear in the **bibliography** and **footnotes**. For example, the title *Kfar ha-no'ar be-Kafrisin* is followed by [The Youth Village in Cyprus].

After much deliberation and discussion, I decided to refer to concepts and institutions in their original languages (in transliteration) and not by their English equivalents. Thus, I refer to the *Mazkirut meshutefet* (and not “Central Committee”) and *ha-Shomer ha-tza'ir* (and not “The Young Guard”). Ultimately I was persuaded by two arguments. First, terms such as “Central Committee” and “The Young Guard” have connotations (in this case, Russian/Soviet) that are erroneous and misleading in the context of Cyprus. Secondly, many English-language equivalents are themselves ambiguous or unfamiliar to modern readers. (Consider the Jewish holiday of *Shavu'ot*: The name is sometimes translated as “Pentecost,” which is also the name of the Christian holiday celebrated 50 days after Easter.)

In an effort to make this guide acceptable to the broadest possible audience, I have done a number of things:

- I have made a concerted effort to eschew terms such as “massacre,” “terrorist,” and the like, and to avoid assigning blame and supporting one viewpoint over another. Phrases such as “They succeeded in sabotaging...” or “They succeeded in escaping...”—seen all too frequently in the literature on the Cyprus camps—serve only to inflame, not to inform.

- I have tried to cite a wide range of sources, including American, British, Cypriot, Israeli, and international (e.g., the United Nations). In many instances I have cited sources with contrasting viewpoints.
- Finally, I have not written this guide to promote a specific agenda or advance a particular viewpoint. Rather, as noted above, I have set five objectives for myself: collecting the broadest possible array of data; providing scholarly citations to the sources; analyzing the collected data (or providing references to analyses by recognized scholars); noting connections between related data; and presenting the data in a clear and usable format.

Technical

Translations

All translations of Hebrew and Yiddish text are my own. When I had a question about the correct translation, I checked with local experts, but the responsibility is solely mine.

Transliterations

In general, I have used the standard set jointly by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress (ALA-LC).³ In an attempt to conform more closely to modern usage, I have modified the standard slightly:

1. I have used “ch” for the letter *chet* (ח). Thus, for example, the word for “camps” (מחנות) is transliterated as *machanot*.
2. I have used “ei” for the *tzeireh*. Thus, for example, the phrase “the exiles of Cyprus” (גולי קפריסין) is transliterated as *golei Kafrisin*, and the phrase “Cyprus deportation” (גירוש קפריסין) is transliterated as *geirush Kafrisin*.
3. I have not used the dots below the letters “h,” “k,” “t,” and “v,” nor have I used the accent mark above the letter “s.”

In accordance with the ALA-LC romanization table, I have used the hyphen to separate the definite article from the word proper (e.g., *ha-machanot*).

I have departed from ALA-LC transliteration in three instances:

³ See <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/hebrew.pdf>.

1. The names of *Haganah* ships are transliterated as they appear in Morris Laub's book *Last Barrier to Freedom*.
2. The names of Hebrew newspapers are transliterated according to commonly accepted modern usage. Thus, for example, I have used the spelling *Hatzofeh* and not *ha-Tsofeh*.⁴
3. For certain words and phrases that have a well-established spelling in English-language sources, I have used that spelling instead of the ALA-LC transliteration. Thus, for example, I have used the spellings *kibbutz* (instead of *kibuts*) and *Yom Kippur* (instead of *Yom Kipur*).

Citations

A work with over 1,900 footnotes calls for brevity in citation. Accordingly, I have used the name-date format for citations and have included those citations in footnotes, and not in the text. Furthermore, in order to avoid bloating the bibliography, I have relegated to footnotes all bibliographic information for works that are: 1) tangential to the Cyprus story, and 2) cited infrequently.

Conventions (bibliographic, stylistic, and typographical)

- Names of ships
I have recorded the names of ships in quotation marks—e.g., “Empire Rest” and “Theodor Herzl.”
- Hebrew titles
As noted above, in the bibliography and footnotes, I have recorded each Hebrew title in transliteration, followed by an English translation in square brackets. Thus, for example, the title *Kfar ha-no'ar be-Kafrisin* is followed by [The Youth Village in Cyprus].
- Non-English words
I have italicized non-English words and phrases (e.g., *habeas corpus*, *ma'apilim*, *enosis*) with the exception of non-English place names (e.g., Haifa, Xylotymbou, Dekhelia) and non-English corporate bodies (e.g., Yad Vashem, Keren Hayesod).
- Dates
I have recorded dates in month-day-year order (e.g., Mar. 11, 1947).

⁴ See, e.g., Matthew Wagner, “Hatzofeh, Symbol of Religious Zionism, Closes After 71 Years,” *Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 25, 2008, available at <https://www.jpost.com/Israel/Hatzofeh-symbol-of-religious-Zionism-closes-after-71-years>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As an undergraduate in the late '70s, I had two constant companions in my studies: books and professors. Finding a book meant taking a hike to the college library; meeting a professor meant making a trek to his or her faculty office. A few years later, when I was studying at the graduate level, I basically had the same two options: either hiking to one of the university's libraries (there were 99 of them!), or trekking to the professor's office. In those days, there was no such thing as a flash drive, a CD-ROM, or a website. And there was certainly no one with whom I could talk about his or her personal experiences during Antiquity or the Middle Ages!

Fast forward to the year 2010, when I became intrigued by the saga of the Cyprus detention camps. As I began studying the period, I still had books and professors as my faithful companions. To my delight, however, I had two new sources of information. One was the Internet, which made it possible to search distant library catalogs, send electronic messages, and receive scanned documents from remote archives. Now, instead of using shoe leather, I was surfing the Web, clicking on links, and downloading data from far-flung databases. The other source of information was not technological but human: There were people—real, live people—who had lived through the events in question (and, in some cases, had actively participated in them) and were eager to meet with me and share their memories. Two moments stand out in my mind. About four years ago I was sitting with Moshe Moskovic, who traveled from Mandatory Palestine to Cyprus in late 1947 to serve as an emissary in the camps. In the course of our conversation, Moskovic quoted something that Golda Myerson (Meir) had said upon entering the camps in November of that year. “How do you know she said that?” I asked innocently. “What do you mean?” responded Moskovic animatedly. “I was standing right next to her!” Then about one year ago, I met with Prof. (Emer.) Emanuel Gutmann, who as a young man left Mandatory Palestine to serve as a teacher in the camps. The self-effacing professor regaled me with a number of stories, including one about the day Golda visited the camps. He wanted to take a photograph of Golda's entrance, he told me, but there was a nurse obstructing his view. He asked the nurse to move, they struck up a conversation, and the rest, as they say, was history: Prof. Gutmann and the nurse, Nechama Foreman, wed and

remained married until Nechama's death in 2010. The thrill of sitting with and talking to people who actually witnessed the events depicted in this book will forever stay with me, and I want to express my deep gratitude to each and every one of them.

From the time I began researching and writing this book in late 2013, I have benefited from the professionalism and expertise of scores of archivists and librarians. While they are too numerous to list by name, each one has my sincere thanks.

The professionals at Cambridge Scholarly Publishing were ever gracious and supportive, and they have my sincere thanks. Ms. Rebecca Gladders, Senior Commissioning Editor, deserves special recognition.

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It was my great honor and privilege to be able to confer on many occasions with Dr. Nahum Bogner, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the detention camps in Cyprus and was himself, at the age of 14, a detainee in the camps there. Dr. Bogner read an early draft of my entire manuscript, made important suggestions, and answered innumerable questions with patience and good cheer. All the while, he inspired me with his kindness, generosity, and wisdom. If one person served as the intellectual lodestar for this project, that person was Dr. Bogner. I want to wish him and his family a long, healthy, and happy life.

Finally, I want to express my boundless thanks to my wife Daniella, who was not only my number one supporter in this project but also my primary research assistant, accompanying me on my many visits to libraries and archives and joining me in myriad meetings and interviews. My hope and prayer is that Daniella and I will share many more years of good health and happiness together with our beloved children, their dear spouses, and our precious grandchildren.

Needless to say, I bear sole responsibility for all errors and omissions.

INTRODUCTION

With the liberation of the Nazi death camps in the second half of 1944 and the first half of 1945, countless thousands of Jewish survivors streamed out of Europe in a desperate attempt to reach the Land of Israel. At the same time, the British stood firmly behind their White Paper of 1939, which imposed rigid limits on Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine. The head-on collision of these two groups took place in August 1946, when the British intercepted two *Haganah* ships and deported the *ma'apilim* (clandestine immigrants) to a hastily built detention camp on the nearby island of Cyprus.¹ As the *ha'apalah* (clandestine immigration movement) gathered steam and the number of *ma'apilim* grew, so too did the number of camps: By January 1948 over 31,000 detainees were crammed into 12 camps. While the camps existed for only two and a half years, they unquestionably offer a unique window on one of the most dramatic and fateful liminal periods in modern history.²

#

At first glance, a research guide on the Cyprus camps would hardly seem to be an urgent scholarly desideratum. For starters, the camps were located on an island that covers a mere 3,500 square miles (9,250 square kilometers)—about three-quarters of the area of the Negev region in Israel. Moreover, the camps existed from August 14, 1946, to February 10, 1949—fewer than 1,000 days. Finally, only 52,000 people passed through the camps, and only 31,000 people were detained during the peak period. On top of all that, the two major scholarly works on the camps are unquestionably comprehensive in scope and detail. And on top of all *that*, the events covered in this guide

¹ This was not, of course, the first occasion on which Jews attempted to immigrate to the Land of Israel without visas. Nor was it the first time that Jewish would-be immigrants clashed with the British military. It was, however, the opening volley in a new British campaign to combat visa-less Jewish immigration by deporting the *ma'apilim* to Cyprus.

² There are two excellent introductions to the Cyprus camps saga in English. One, by Nahum Bogner, appeared in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (Bogner 1990a). The other, by Giora Goodman, appeared in *Foto Rachel: Photographs of the Cyprus Detention Camps, 1948-1949* (Goodman 2011a).

took place less than a century ago. Surely full and accurate documents from the era of Golda Meir and Sir Winston Churchill are still readily accessible?

Let's examine each of these points in greater detail. First, isn't it true that Cyprus is a tiny island? Indeed it is, but conditions in the camps—and the fate of the detainees—were determined in places far away from Cyprus: in London, where the British Cabinet held its deliberations; in Washington, D.C., where the President and Congress made their decisions; in Cairo, where the British Military Headquarters issued its directives; in Paris and Milan, where the *Mossad Le-Aliyah Bet* gave its orders; in Lake Success, New York, where the U.N. conducted its business; in Haifa and Tel Aviv, where anti-deportation demonstrators made their voices heard; in Jerusalem, where the British High Commissioner met with leaders of the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Executive; in Rhodes, where Count Bernadotte oversaw implementation of the U.N. truces. If Cyprus was the puppet theater, then London, Cairo, and a dozen other cities were the platforms from which the strings were pulled.

Secondly, didn't the camps exist for a relatively short period of time? Indeed they did: the camps existed for only 912 days. Those 912 days, however, had deep roots in the past. One could point with justification, for example, to May 18, 1941, when a boat with 23 *Palmach* commandos and one British officer set out to sabotage oil refineries in Tripoli, Lebanon. (In 1941 the British and the *Palmach* were still working hand-in-hand.)³ One of the "Twenty-three who went down with the ship," as the doomed operation became known in Hebrew, was a young man named David Nafcha. His untimely death inspired his younger sister to join the *Palmach* and serve in the Cyprus camps.⁴ The younger sister—Biba Nafcha—was the first radio operator to link the underground in Cyprus with *Palmach* headquarters in Mandatory Palestine. One could point, with equal justification, to even earlier events: the deportation of Jews to Mauritius in 1940; the notorious White Paper of 1939; the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The list is endless.

Thirdly, weren't the detainees limited in number? Indeed they were, but their backgrounds, ideologies, and contacts were anything but. First, their backgrounds: The detainees hailed from dozens of countries (including England!) and spoke dozens of languages. Their professions varied widely:

³ On the Zionist policy of cooperating with the British against the Nazis, see Ofer 1990, 23-41 and 49-59.

⁴ (*Cha*)*Viva Nafcha: sipur chayim* (Kibutz Ma'agan Mikha'el: [Ha-Kibutz], 2012), 17.

from tailor and teacher to boxer and brain surgeon. Their reading choices were highly eclectic: according to one study, 61 distinct publications were produced in the camps.⁵ Secondly, their ideologies: The detainees were affiliated with a broad array of *miflagot* (political parties) and *tenu'ot* (ideological movements).⁶ The differences between the various religious sects were especially pronounced.⁷ Thirdly, their outside contacts: The detainees interacted with a broad circle of outsiders: journalists from France; rabbis from Britain; *Haganah* operatives from the Land of Israel; photographers and medical personnel from the United States; German POWs from North Africa; and Cypriots—both Greek and Turkish. There were even reports of detainees who collaborated with the British.⁸ In other words, the researcher who focuses solely on the 52,000 detainees in the Cyprus camps is forfeiting the opportunity to create what Sir Martin Gilbert once called a portrait-in-the-round. In short, from a distance the society of detainees appears to be homogeneous, like a photograph without seams or irregularities. Up close, however, the homogeneity disappears, and the society is revealed to be highly diverse and strikingly individualistic, a veritable mosaic of multicolored pixels.⁹

Next, aren't the two scholarly books on the Cyprus camps sufficiently comprehensive? Indeed they are, but they have two significant shortcomings. One is their age: Schaary's book was published in 1981; Bogner's book, in 1991. A wealth of material has come to light since that time. The second shortcoming is their arrangement. Arranged thematically, they fit squarely in the academic context. They are not, however, much help to the researcher who is looking for a quick answer to the question "What happened in the camps in September 1947?" or the question "What was the location of Camp 66 in relation to Camp 69?"

⁵ Lipman 1994.

⁶ Bogner wrote that there were "eight *tenu'ot* [ideological movements] and *miflagot* [political parties]" in the camps (Bogner 1991, 237). I do not know the basis for Laub's assertion that there were 17 parties in the camps (Laub 1985, 28).

⁷ See, e.g., the disturbing examples given by Avraham Elmaleh in the article "Bemachanot ha-ma'apilim be-Kafrisin" ["In the camps of the clandestine immigrants in Cyprus"], *Hed Hamizrach*, Feb. 25, 1949, 11.

⁸ Schaary 1981, 184.

⁹ Cf. the observation of Moni Langerman (Alon), quoted in Bogner 1991, 236: "In spite of all the commonalities, there are big differences [among the detainees]..."

Finally, aren't full and accurate accounts from the 1940s still readily accessible in libraries and archives? That may normally be the case, but the Cyprus camps were anything but normal. Consider the following facts.

While the camps existed, the British cloaked their operations in great secrecy, imposing rigid restrictions on photography, visits by journalists, and interactions between the detainees and the local population.¹⁰ The *shlichim* (emissaries from Mandatory Palestine) regularly practiced self-censorship.¹¹ In some cases, the detainees produced documentation that was intended not to document their conditions but rather to mislead their captors.¹² In other cases, the detainees vetoed efforts to document their conditions, fearing that those efforts were intended to portray them in a positive light.¹³ The main humanitarian aid organization—the American Joint Distribution Committee—paid scant attention to record-keeping, as can be seen in the words of its country director in Cyprus, Morris Laub. “But fool that I was,” wrote Laub in a letter some two decades after the camps were closed, “not to recognize the need for preserving documents and records for the future historian.”¹⁴ Thus, when the camps were shut down on Feb. 10, 1949, the extant documentation—created by different bodies, at random times, and for various purposes—was incomplete and tendentious.

After Feb. 10, 1949, the already problematic situation became even worse. Let's look at each group in the camps and examine the final disposition of its paperwork.

¹⁰ Concerning secrecy, see the article “Secrecy over Cyprus Works,” *Palestine Post*, Oct. 27, 1946, 3; concerning visits by journalists, see Shahe Guebenlian, “Winter Quarters for Deportees,” *Palestine Post*, Nov. 24, 1946, 1; concerning interactions between the detainees and the local population, see Shahe Guebenlian, “More Nazis in Cyprus,” *Palestine Post*, Sept. 4, 1946, 3.

¹¹ The following example is typical: In a letter dated Mar. 12, 1947, a *shaliach* made a passing reference to an “event” that had taken place in the Cyprus camps earlier that day, adding that he could not describe it in a letter. The “event” was, in point of fact, a shooting by British soldiers that left five detainees injured. (See Ben Yosef 1973, 37-38.)

¹² Schaary 1981, 1-2. Unfortunately Schaary did not provide any examples of this.

¹³ On one occasion, for example, the detainees protested when a newspaper photographer tried to photograph their soccer game, accusing him of trying to create pro-British propaganda. (See Lee McCardell, “Barbed Wire Converts Cyprus Camp to Prison,” *Sun* (Baltimore), Apr. 23, 1947, 6.)

¹⁴ Laub, quoted in Haffner 1970, 329.

The British apparently destroyed or hid the bulk of the documentation they had produced in the course of administering the camps.¹⁵

The detainees had, broadly speaking, three types of paperwork, each type going its own way. The first type of paperwork was that generated by the various movements. This material was transferred to Israel, where each movement took possession of its own material and deposited it in its own archives. Thus, for example, the records of the *ha-Shomer ha-tza'ir* movement were transferred to Givat Havivah, and the records of the *Bnei 'Akiva* movement were sent to Moshav Nir Galim. The second type was that generated by the central committees (there were two: one in the “summer camps” and a second in the “winter camps”). This material was also sent to Israel, where for reasons that are unclear it was divided into two chronological parts: the Pinhas Lavon Archives in Tel-Aviv received material from the earlier period (before the end of 1947), and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem received material from the later period (end of 1947 to the closing of the camps).¹⁶ The third and final type of paperwork was that belonging to individual detainees. Taken by those individuals to their new homes, it was often stored in closets, attics, and other places, where it was exposed to the ravages of temperature, humidity, and poor air quality.¹⁷ In some cases it was put up for sale on e-commerce sites like eBay;

¹⁵ While I have not found any explicit references to the destruction of British documentation, there can be no doubt that their records were extensively culled to remove and discard material deemed unwanted. One example should suffice: In The National Archives of the UK in Kew, there are four files pertaining to the British Military Hospital in Nicosia for the years 1946-1949: WO 261/454, WO 261/455, WO 261/456, and WO 261/457. Those four files contain a total of 16 pages and are filled with such anodyne statements as “Normal hospital routine,” “No administrative difficulties,” and “Morale of unit is excellent” (WO 261/455_002). On Britain’s penchant for destroying and hiding the documentation of its colonial past, see the many articles and books by Dr. Mandy Banton (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London), Prof. Caroline Elkins (Harvard University), and Mr. Ian Cobain (*The Guardian*).

¹⁶ My source for this information is a three-page document titled “Sekirah ‘al arkhivonei machanot ha-golim be-Kafrisin” (“An Overview of the archives of the camps of exiles in Cyprus”) in the Central Zionist Archives (A 559/42). The document bears the “Ex Libris” stamp of David Schaary. While the document’s author is not given, the document bears the reference initials “Zayin Alef” (זא) at the bottom of page three. I assume that these initials refer to Avraham Zilberberg.

¹⁷ In the summer of 2014 I met with an Israeli gentleman who was born in the Cyprus camps. He told me that his father, a *ma'apil* on the “Ben Hecht,” had supported himself in the camps as a photographer. “And where are those photographs today?” I asked. “In a suitcase under my bed...” was the gentleman’s response.

in other cases it was donated to one of more than 30 institutions—including archives, libraries, museums, and national heritage sites—in Israel.

The Rabbinical Council of the Cyprus camps produced voluminous documentation, which constitutes a veritable treasure trove of information on the weddings, births, and deaths in the camps. Unfortunately this documentation suffered the harshest fate. First, it was dispersed over three continents: Asia, Europe, and North America.¹⁸ (Is it possible to speak of the diaspora of Cyprus documentation?) Secondly, none of it is available online. Thirdly, entire volumes simply disappeared.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, it has been almost completely overlooked in articles and books about the camps. While this documentation does not make for easy reading—it is usually written by hand in Hebrew and Yiddish and brims with references to complex rabbinic concepts—it is unquestionably the best source of information on the life cycle events in the Cyprus camps.

The American Joint Distribution Committee transferred its material to Israel, where it languished for decades in substandard storage conditions. When a major digitization project was undertaken in 2011, archivists discovered that some of the material—typically written or printed on flimsy, highly acidic paper—had disintegrated to such an extent that it was too fragile to microfilm.

I refer to the above-mentioned problems as the Four D's: Destruction, Dispersal, Disintegration, and Disappearance. Tragically, these problems require no explanation. There is an additional problem, though, that *does* cry out for clarification, and that problem is Displacement. (Note that there are now *Five D's*.)

Displacement occurs when an artifact (e.g., a letter, memorandum, notebook, or photograph) is removed from its original setting, and no effort was made to make a precise record of that setting. In the case of artifacts from Cyprus, four elements are crucial. First, *when* was it created? (Ideally, an exact date;

¹⁸ Volumes of the Rabbinical Council of the Cyprus Camps are located in Asia (The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel), Europe (the University of Southampton Library, Special Collections Division), and North America (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC).

¹⁹ For example, the Rabbinical Council of the Cyprus Camps produced three *pinkesei leidot* (birth registers). One is housed in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem; the second is housed in the University of Southampton (UK) Library Special Collections Division; the third continues to defy my efforts to locate it.

at a minimum, a year.) Secondly, *where* was it created? (Ideally, a precise location; at a minimum, a general location—e.g., a “winter camp” or a “summer camp.”) Thirdly, *by whom* was it created? (Ideally, the name of an individual; at a minimum, the person’s affiliation—e.g., “a British officer” or “a Jewish camp leader.”) Finally, *why* was it created? If one of these elements was not recorded, it may still be possible to reconstruct that information.²⁰ Usually, however, missing elements cannot be reconstructed; the loss is irreversible. The practical consequences of displacement are dire: Little or no information can be gleaned from a displaced artifact; it is mired in obscurity. A displaced artifact can rightly be compared to an archaeological relic that has been carelessly detached from its original location without that location first being recorded: It is of very limited value.

To illustrate the concept of displacement, it may be helpful to juxtapose a case of a non-displaced document with an example of a displaced document. The “Cyprus Detention Camps Collection” in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives in Washington, D.C.,²¹ offers two such cases. In Series 1 (“Administrative records, 1946-1948”) of that collection, most of the documents have a clear provenance: an explicit date, a legible signature (or at least a legible title), and an unambiguous subject line. There can be no mistaking, for example, that the document titled “Operation F.I.J.I.” in that series gives detailed instructions for the transfer of detainees between camps on Feb. 24, 1948, and that those instructions came from the office of a British officer named Major John Tilly.²² In Series 2 (“Immigrant records, 1943-1947”), however, the researcher encounters a very different situation. The first subseries in Series 2 consists of a jumble of identification papers in Russian, Romanian, and Hebrew. Who collected these identification papers? From whom were they taken? At what time? For what purpose? The researcher is totally in the dark; these are truly displaced

²⁰ Consider, for example, the example of an undated receipt signed by Rose Viteles. In this example, one crucial element—the *when*—is missing. But since we know that Viteles was in Cyprus for a relatively brief period of time (from August 1946 to October or November 1946), it is possible to assign an approximate date to the receipt. In this example, the *by whom* can help us determine the *when*, and we can possibly reverse the receipt’s displaced status. In this manner, I was recently able to inform an elderly Israeli gentleman that I had found an undated receipt for his *brit milah* expenses in a Jerusalem archives. The receipt bore only the English signature of the aid organization’s representative, the Hebrew signature of the gentleman’s father, and the notation “Received 5 Shillings for Brith.”

²¹ USHMM, accession number 2003.465.1.

²² USHMM 2003.465.1: Series 1: Administrative records, 1946-1948 / Instructions, 1947-1948 / Items 5-6.

documents. One may, of course, engage in conjecture: During the first four days of January 1948, while the *ma'apilim* of the “Pan York” and the “Pan Crescent” were disembarking and the British were frantically looking for evidence that the *ma'apilim* were Communists, the British seized these documents as “proof.” Partial support for this conjecture can be found in the very first identification paper, which features a revolutionary red cover with the letters “СССР” (i.e., “USSR”) emblazoned at the top.²³ This is only conjecture, of course, because we have no hard information about the circumstances surrounding the creation of this collection.

Countless additional examples could be adduced, for most of the Cyprus-related material in libraries and archives today must be considered displaced. In one archives, a notebook with hundreds of names—but no record of why or when or by whom they were written down. In another archives, scores of photographs of the Cyprus camps—but no indication of the identity of the subjects or the name of the photographer or the dates or the locations. In yet another archives—an archives, by the way, that prides itself on meticulously following the latest rules of archival description—innumerable memoranda and letters without dates. (What is the use of meticulous archival description if a memorandum or letter lacks a date or a place or an author?) The sad truth is that very few artifacts from the Cyprus detention camps found in libraries and archives today are accompanied by the kind of detailed information that is needed to properly evaluate their historical significance.

In short, the documentation on the Cyprus camps is doubly problematic: while the camps existed, it was incomplete and tendentious; after the camps were closed, it was partially destroyed and widely dispersed. And sometimes it simply disintegrated and disappeared.²⁴

At this point, given the welter of defective data—illegible signatures, ambiguous initials, cryptic acronyms, partial or missing dates, obscure references, and records of unknown provenance—there can be no

²³ USHMM 2003.465.1: Series 2: Immigrant records, 1943-1947 / Identification papers, 1943-1947 / Item 1.

²⁴ For Menahem Oren, two disappearances—that of the diary of the painter Moshe Bernstein, and that of two boxes full of biographical material on the Rutenberg Seminar’s students—were particularly painful (Oren 1985, 182). It should be noted that some biographical information about the students in the Rutenberg Seminar can be found in their registration questionnaires, which are held today by the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. (See, e.g., CZA J21\630.)

gainsaying the need for a guide of some sort. Now the question is: Does *this* guide measure up?

In early December 2016 I decided to put this guide to the test. I pulled out a folder containing photocopies of a set of “rare, top-secret documents” that I had received a few weeks earlier from a very efficient archivist at the Hoover Institution Archives in Stanford, California (did I mention that documentation about the Cyprus camps was widely dispersed?). While the documents were entirely new to me, their contents were—thanks to this research guide—wholly intelligible. The name of the British officer whose material had ended up in the Hoover Institution Archives? *Check*—his name was mentioned in this reference guide. The dates in the documents in Stanford? *Check*—they meshed with the dates in this guide. Most of the abbreviations and acronyms in the “rare, top-secret documents”? *Check*—they were familiar to me, thanks to this guide. I breathed a sigh of relief: My guide had passed the test with a *check, check, and check*.

A few weeks later my guide was again put to the test, though this test differed from the previous test in two respects: first, the test did not happen by my choice, and secondly, the test hinged upon a piece of information that did *not* appear in my guide. Allow me to explain. It began, as happens so frequently these days, with an email in my Inbox: An Israeli friend asked me to help her friend Leah, who was born prematurely on the “Tirat Zvi” and was sent to a monastery—together with her mother—upon arrival in Famagusta. *A monastery?* I asked myself. My friend explained that Leah had been trying for years to discover the name of the monastery but hadn’t had any luck. *A monastery?* I asked myself again. *But there is no mention of a monastery in my guide!* I placed a call to Leah, who told me a very interesting (if somewhat bizarre) story: Her father (now deceased) had told her that the monastery in which she—a newborn of just 1.6 kilo (3.5 pounds)—was cared for was, in fact, a nunnery. *A nunnery? How could this be? Why are there no references to a nunnery in my guide?*

After a few days of mulling over Leah’s strange story, I had an idea. I placed a second call to Leah and succeeded in eliciting a crucial piece of information: Her father had said that the women who took care of her “looked like nuns.” *Ah ha!* I thanked Leah for the information and rushed to find the collection of letters written in the camps by Dr. Walter Falk. And there—lo and behold—I found the photograph whose image I had stored in my memory bank. The photograph showed Dr. Falk, clad in a dark suit, Morris Laub, similarly clad in a dark suit, and the nurse Nechama Foreman,

wearing a white uniform with an elaborate white cap.²⁵ *She looked like a nun!* I did a bit of Googling and discovered that, in fact, the cap historically worn by nurses had evolved from the elaborate headpieces—called cornettes—worn by nuns. It’s not hard to imagine a Polish Jew—especially one who was somewhat disoriented after a long and tiring journey—looking at a woman wearing an elaborate white cap and thinking that she was a nun.

This research guide has thus proven, at least for me, to be a useful tool for understanding the players, events, and forces connected with the Cyprus detention camps. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly much that I have failed to uncover and/or neglected to include. Accordingly, I welcome all comments, suggestions, and questions, which may be sent to cerg2ed@gmail.com. If circumstances warrant, I will update this guide and issue a corrected and updated edition.

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In Sept. 1952, about one month after the death of a close friend, the legendary Yisrael Galili wrote: “His ledger remains open—it is obligatory to continue writing in it.”²⁶ Today, the same could be said for the saga of the Cyprus camps: As long as there are new sources or previously unknown connections between sources, the ledger remains open, and we have an obligation to continue writing in it.

²⁵ Falk 1994, illus. no. 17 (between 160 and 161).

²⁶ Yisrael Galili, “Ahavat adam u-tenufat ha-kerav” [“Love of man and the momentum of battle”], *Al Hamishmar*, Sept. 18, 1952, 2. Galili wrote these words about *Palmach* commander Yitzhak Sadeh, who died on Aug. 20, 1952. The Hebrew reads: פנקסו נשאר פתוח—חובה היא להוסיף ולרשום בו.