

NEWSLETTER 1999/3

The Jewish Cemetery in Fibichova Street

In June of this year the Jewish Museum in Prague took over maintenance of the Jewish cemetery in Fibichova Street, in the Prague district of Žižkov. After the completion of necessary repair and renovation work, which is being prepared by the Museum, the cemetery will be open to the public on request.

The Jewish cemetery in Fibichova Street was established in 1680 as a plague burial-ground for the Prague Jewish Community. Burials took place on a regular basis here from 1787, when burials were banned within the walled city. The burial-ground subsequently became the main Jewish cemetery in Prague. Burials took place here up until 1890, when a new Jewish cemetery was established in the Prague district of Strašnice.



The Jewish cemetery in Fibichova Street is a prominent site of particular historical importance. Around 40,000 persons are buried here, including a number of eminent rabbis and scholars. The most prominent of these is Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793), the Chief Rabbi of Prague and head of the Prague yeshivah (named after his work *Noda bi-Jehuda*). Another prominent personage buried in the Jewish cemetery is Eleazar Flekeles (1754-1826), Landau's pupil and later member of the rabbinic collegium, an elective body established in lieu of the Chief Rabbi's office, which remained unoccupied for several years after Landau's death. Also buried here is the Chief Rabbi of Prague Solomon Yehuda Rapoport (1790-1867) as well as leading representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment, Jewish scholars, physicians and writers (W. Wesely, D. Podiebrad, I. Soyka, E. Altschul). In 1948 a total of 180 Torahs, taken from the Netherlands by the Nazis, were buried in the cemetery. From an historical and artistic perspective, it is possible to follow the development of tombstone designs in the cemetery, from the Baroque, to the monumental Empire style, the Romantic, through to the characteristic styles of the second half of the 19th century.

The cemetery was opened to the public and was used as a public park before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war it fell into disrepair, became increasingly overgrown, and many tombstones were knocked down. The cemetery was eventually closed down and, in 1960, the main area was turned into a park. Between 1985 and 1990 a television tower was built on part of the original cemetery. The oldest section of the cemetery and tombstones of prominent personages, however, were preserved and restored. Despite a reduction in size, the Jewish cemetery therefore remains a prominent historic site.

Acquisitions to the art collection of the Jewish Museum

The Jewish Museum has acquired a self-portrait by the Czech Jewish painter Bedřich Feigl (see photo). Feigl was born in 1884 in Prague and, after attending the Prague Academy of Art, studied in various western European countries. While in Berlin he made the acquaintance of M. Liebermann, a painter with whose style he had a close affinity. He visited Palestine in the 1930s and, before the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, emigrated to England. He died in London in 1965. The newly acquired painting is a work that is highly regarded by experts, both from an artistic and an historical perspective. Dating from 1905 - 1906, it represents the earliest development of this artist. The self-portrait is also valuable due to the fact that only a very few of Feigl's paintings are known from this period.



Origin of the Jewish Museum library holdings (continued from Newsletter 2/1999)

Transfer of books during and after the Second World War

Books from the liquidated Jewish communities of the former Protectorate were not only transferred to the Central Jewish Museum but also to storehouses and closed synagogues in Prague and to other localities, including Terezín, Mimoň and surrounding districts.

Books transferred from Terezín

The Central Library of the Terezín Concentration Camp - Zentralbücherei Theresienstadt (The Terezín Library) was established in 1942 as a mobile library. Throughout the course of its existence - from 17 November 1942 to 31 July 1945 - it handled a total of around 250,000 books. The "Terezín" books were either sent to Terezín with the transports or were seized on arrival in Terezín.



The books that were sent to Terezín with the transports included books from Jewish libraries, principally from Germany, Bohemia and Moravia. After passing through the Treuhandstelle (a centre for the collection and management of confiscated Jewish property belonging to individuals and institutions), they were cleaned and the ex libris bookplates removed. As of 17 March 1943, some 778,195 books had passed through the Treuhandstelle, the least interesting of which were sent to Terezín. These were mostly books from the Reich - from the libraries of Jewish organisations, Masonic and church organisations, societies and private collectors.

In September 1945 the Jewish library, located in ravelin XVIII (the outermost section of the fortress), and the Ghettobücherei library were transferred from

Terezín to the Jewish Museum in Prague. According to the records available, over 100,000 volumes were transferred from Terezín to Prague - the rest were either lost or irretrievably damaged.

On the basis of archive material, it can be assumed that not all of the so-called Terezín library was transferred to the Jewish Museum in 1945. Documentation prepared by the Council of Jewish Religious Communities on 29 November 1946 also shows that a request had been made for library books of non-Czechoslovak origin to be transferred to the Jerusalem National University Library (JNUL). These were books that had previously belonged to Jewish religious communities in Berlin, Munich and other districts in Germany, in addition to books from the Rabbinerseminar Berlin library and Lehranstalt für Wissenschaft des Judentums Berlin, etc.

According to a report prepared by the first post-war director of the Museum, Hana Volavková, 16,215 books were set aside for the JNUL in 1947. From available sources, where books earmarked for the JNUL are marked as duplicates, however, it is not clear whether they were actually sent to the Jerusalem library. According to documentation from 27 September 1949, these books were kept in the synagogue of the Jewish cemetery in Malvazinky in Smíchov (no longer in existence) until 1949, and were later evidently reincorporated in the holdings of the Jewish Museum Library.

Depositories in Mimoň and surrounding districts

From the autumn of 1944, books that had been seized by Reichssicherdienstamt VII from various European libraries, Masonic lodges, Jewish religious communities, monasteries, Russian Marxist libraries, etc. were sent to the Mimoň Mansion. According to the 1948 Report of the Czech Provincial Archives, these volumes (amounting to several thousand) were originally stored in Berlin, but in later 1944 were sent to Mimoň and other mansions, such as Nový Falkenburg, Nový Perkštejn and Houska.

The Prague National Library assumed the partial disposition and charge of the "Mimoň Collection". On 7 November 1947 books belonging to Jewish religious communities in Berlin and other German towns that were stored in Nový Falkenburg, Nový Perkštejn and Houska mansions (but not Mimoň) were transferred to the Jewish Museum in Prague.

In a report prepared by the then director of the Jewish Museum, H. Volavková, however, reference is made to a transfer of Jewish books from Mimoň in 1947. The director also stated that in 1948 "the Jerusalem National University Library received 40,000 volumes from the Mimoň library holdings". It is not fully clear, however, whether the director was referring to Mimoň itself or to the surrounding localities of Nový Falkenburg, Nový Perkštejn and Houska.

A collection of books, for which there is no reliable evidence as to whether they came from the Mimoň Collection or the Terezín Library, is currently housed in the library of the Jewish Museum in Prague.

It is clear that the above collection of books also includes books that may have originally belonged to the Berlin Jewish community (indicated by the stamp of the Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin) and other European Jewish institutions (e.g.,

Jüdische Seminar Berlin and the Jewish community of Vienna). These books are partially incorporated in the library holdings. In none of the library acquisitions, however, was there any indication of the original owners. Other books from abroad (mostly Berlin) form part of the Judaica Collection (perhaps originating from Terezín) and are not included in the regular holdings of the library. As it is not possible to find out from the acquisition registration records who they originally belonged to, these books, included in the library of the Jewish Museum in Prague, can only be identified by a systematic checking of the Museum's entire library holdings. This is with the exception of the historic library of the Jewish religious community and recently purchased books, the origin of which is clear.

(To be continued in Newsletter 4/1999)

Regional exhibitions on Jewish themes - Třebíč

The Moravian town of Třebíč, situated 140 km to the south-east of Prague, once had one of the largest Jewish communities in Moravia. The earliest record of a Jewish settlement here dates back to 1433, the earliest record of a Jewish community dating from the mid-16th century. 260 Jewish families were allowed to live in Třebíč from the end of the 18th century to the mid-19th century. By the end of the 18th century the number of Jews living here had reached 1,170 (59% of the total population). The following years saw a marked decline in the Jewish population of Třebíč as a result of widespread migration following the emancipation of the Jews. After the Second World War the Jewish community here met the same fate as the many other Jewish communities devastated by the Nazis - although it was formally revived, it failed to survive due to a shortage of practising Jews.



The Ghetto of Třebíč is a particularly valuable urban unit and is probably the best preserved area of its kind in the whole of Europe. Amongst other sites to be found here is a Jewish cemetery, which was probably established in the first half of the 17th century, and the Old Synagogue, which was built between 1639 and 1642 and is now used by the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

The so-called Rear Synagogue, which is also part of the former ghetto, was most likely built in the late 17th or early 18th century. Its origins are unclear, with the first record of its existence dating from 1737. The synagogue ceased to be used for services shortly after the First World War, after which time it was used as a storehouse. It continued to be used as a storehouse after the Second World War. An extensive reconstruction project was prepared at the end of the 1980s and successfully implemented in 1997. Particularly striking about the interior of the Rear Synagogue is the original Baroque-style decoration dating from 1707, with floral and ornamental patterns



and Hebrew liturgical texts on the vaulting and walls. The synagogue was officially opened to the public in September 1997. The main nave is also used as a concert hall, and an exhibition featuring the local Jewish community is to be staged in the synagogue gallery. The Jewish Museum in Prague has prepared a number of fascinating synagogue objects for this forthcoming exhibition, many of which originate from this very region.

Jewish Museum material

The Jewish Museum has just published a catalogue of the exhibition History of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, from Emancipation to the Present, which is housed in the Spanish Synagogue. The catalogue includes a brief text on each exhibition topic, in addition to around 100 illustrations of selected exhibits. Also available is the earlier published exhibition catalogue Jewish Customs and Traditions (Klausen Synagogue and Ceremonial Hall). Both catalogues are in English.



Also on offer is a collection of poems and drawings by children imprisoned during the Second World War in Terezín - I have not seen a butterfly around here (English, German, Spanish and Czech) - as well as highly attractive posters featuring the exhibition of children's drawings from Terezín and Museum collection items (curtains and silver - see photo). For those interested in the history of the Czech Jews there is the specialist periodical *Judaica Bohemiae* - both the current issue XXXIV and earlier editions. The Jewish Museum can provide photocopies of editions that are sold out.

For information on how to purchase any of the above publications please contact: Jewish Museum in Prague, Jáchymova 3. 110 00 Praha 1, fax: 00420-2-2310681, e-mail: zmp@ecn.cz

Prominent visits to the Jewish Museum

July

The historic sites of the Jewish Museum were visited by:

committee representatives of the New York - based Simon Wiesenthal Center, Mrs. Nane Annan, wife of the UN General Secretary Kofi Annan (see picture), who was in the Czech Republic on a two-day state visit and the Ambassador of South Africa to the Czech Republic, Thomas Langley.

