

NEWSLETTER 2000/4

Festival of JEWISH CULTURE IN PRAGUE

A major cultural event took place in Prague in November 2000 - the first *Nine Gates Festival of Jewish Culture*. It takes its name from the well-known and identically titled book by Czech Jewish writer Jiří Mordechaj Langer (1894 Prague - 1943 Tel Aviv).

The festival programme was wide-ranging in scope, featuring numerous theatre, music and film presentations, exhibitions, literary gatherings and seminars on Jewish issues, and involving the participation of outstanding Czech and international artists and cultural figures. The Jewish Museum in Prague was also involved in this event. The *Spanish Synagogue* played host to a number of distinguished musicians and the Education and Culture Centre featured several interesting lectures on Jewish history (The Prague Jewish Town, Maharal) and on current issues facing the Jewish community (modern anti-Semitism, Jewish education).

The director of the Jewish Museum, Dr. Leo Pavlát, gave a talk in the Centre on *The significance and objectives of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation*. As is widely known, this Foundation provides financial and organizational support for Jewish education in Central and Eastern Europe. It has been active in the Czech Republic since 1994 and it is through its assistance that a Jewish kindergarten was opened in Prague. The Foundation has also been involved in other educational projects of the Prague Jewish community, most notably the establishment of the Lauder Elementary School *Gur Aryeh* and the Lauder High School *Or Hadash*. In addition, it financially contributes to the activities of the Museum's Education and Culture Centre. Dr. Pavlát's talk was supplemented by a documentary film on the activities of the Foundation. This was followed by a theatrical presentation of *The Golem* by children from the Lauder kindergarten and elementary school (a play written and prepared by Vida Neuwirthová).



Conference on the confiscation of jewish property

Confiscation of Jewish property in Nazi-occupied territory was one of the means by which Jewish rights and freedoms were suppressed and by which Jews were severed from political, economic and social life. Various issues relating to this process and its consequences were addressed by an international science conference on the *Confiscation of Jewish property in Bohemia and Moravia*, which took place in the Education and Culture Centre between 13-15 November 2000. The conference was organized by the Terezín Initiative Institute in collaboration with the Jewish Museum in Prague. Discussions were attended by

representatives of science/research and academic centres, Charles University, Masaryk University of Brno, museums and other local and foreign institutions.

The Lost Neighbours Project

A long-term project *Lost Neighbours* was launched this year by the Museum's Education and Culture Centre under the auspices of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic. Its aim is to make the young generation aware of the fate of Shoah victims. Throughout the year, young people met and spoke to people



who lived through this tragedy. These personal encounters and other findings formed the basis for literary and documentary reports by students, which were compiled in a single volume. This was presented at a discussion forum hosted by the well-known Czech writer Arnošt Lustig, who himself had been through the terrors of the concentration camps.

The project met with great interest among young people and teachers. Those involved in the project were received by the Czech

President Václav Havel in November 2000.

Jewish Museum Exhibits

Collection items displayed in exhibitions of the Jewish Museum in Prague often reflect the aspects or trends characteristic of a certain historical stage in the development of the Jewish community. In this regard, objects that reflect Jewish assimilation into the wider society are of particular interest. Attempts at assimilation were first promoted in various European countries from about the mid-18th century, but primarily in the 19th century. Assimilation in the Czech Lands took a more pronounced form in the first half of the 19th century. An important role in this was played by the late 18th century reforms of Emperor Joseph II.

Initially, Jews adapted to the German environment, but after the 1840s assimilation was directed more towards Czech society. This development was linked, among other things, to the growing political, cultural and social significance of the Czech people. Czech Jewish assimilation was reflected primarily in social life, education and culture. Various Czech-Jewish organizations were established from the 1870s, such as the Association of Czech Academics-Jews, the Czech-Jewish National Association and the Association of Czech Progressive Jews. Jewish children went to Czech schools and the Czech language was used in services and in prayer books, calendars and newspapers.

The assimilation process is reflected by many objects in the Jewish Museum's collections, such as a Torah mantle from 1918 which comes from Sušice (see picture). This can be seen in the exhibition *The History of Jews from Emancipation to the Present* which is housed in the Spanish Synagogue. The donation inscription on the mantle is in Czech with Hebrew letters. Such a combination is a very rare feature, as inscriptions on liturgical objects and on tombstones of assimilated Jews were usually only in Czech.

This mantle - like many other objects in the care of the Jewish Museum in Prague - has its own special history. The embroidered text on the mantle shows that it was donated by Herman and Kamila Barth. When it was seen in the Spanish Synagogue exhibition by Mrs. Hana Grun, who was on a recent visit from the US, she found out that her parents were the donors.



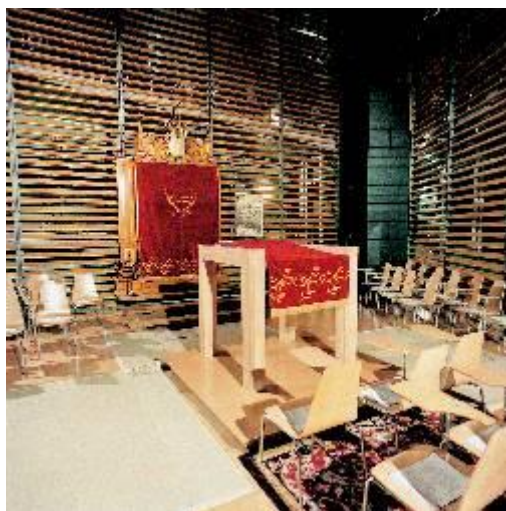
Musica Iudaica

The 9th *Musica Iudaica* International Musical Festival was held in Prague between 2 November-19 December 2000. It took place under the auspices of the Israeli Ambassador, Erella Harel. The festival included a performance in the Spanish Synagogue by the distinguished American cantor *Ira S. Bigeleisen*.

New Synagogue in Liberec

A new synagogue was opened in Liberec at the beginning of November. This was a unique event as it is the first new building of its kind in the Czech Republic since the end of the Second World War.

The Jewish community of Liberec is one of the few communities in Bohemia and Moravia that renewed their activities after the war and have continued to the present day. The history of the Jewish settlement in this area dates back to about the 14th century, which was when the first Jewish families started to settle here. A separate Jewish religious community was not established in Liberec until 1872. An orthodox Talmudic reading-room was opened here after the First World War. The Liberec Jewish community was dissolved during the Nazi occupation.



The new synagogue was built on the site of the original Neo-Renaissance synagogue which was destroyed by the Nazis in November 1938. The Jewish Museum in Prague contributed to the success of the project by providing expert consultation with regards the design of the interior and the

restoration of the Torah ark .

Renovation of The Jewish Cemetery in Fibichova street

Last year, the Jewish Museum in Prague took charge of the administration of another historic building of the Prague Jewish Community - the Jewish cemetery in the Prague area of Žižkov in Fibichova Street. A number of prominent Jewish figures are buried here, such as the former Chief Rabbi of Prague and leading representative of the Prague Yeshiva Ezechiel Landau (1713-1793), his pupil Eleazar Flekeles (1754-1826), and the Chief Rabbi Solomon Yehudah Rapoport (1790-1867).



The Museum has prepared a detailed project covering essential measures to be taken, namely the construction of a new enclosure (currently being completed) and the maintenance of tombstones and the garden. It is expected that this historic monument will be open to the public as early as next year. Visits will be by arrangement.

The Work of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Paris

A touring exhibition of the work of the Viennese Jewish painter Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898 Vienna -1944 Auschwitz) opened in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme in Paris in November 2000. 8 artworks and 25 Terezín children's drawings are on loan from the Jewish Museum in Prague.

Regional Exhibitions on Jewish Themes - Dobruška

The town of Dobruška is situated in Bohemia to the north-east of Prague. The first references to a Jewish presence here date back to the period after the first expulsion of Bohemian Jews from the royal towns in 1543. The Jewish population of Dobruška changed in the course of time and its status was greatly influenced by the granting of equal rights to Jews and the possibility of free movement in the second half of the 19th century. The 20th century witnessed a marked decrease in the local Jewish population. While there were about 70 Jews in the mid-19th century, by 1930 there were only 39. The Jewish community which was established here in the 17th century was not restored after the Second World War. The majority of the local Jewish population died in the Nazi concentration camps. Survivors did not return to Dobruška.

Several sites of importance have been preserved from the original Jewish ghetto (first recorded in 1721), in particular a Neo-Gothic synagogue from the second half of the 19th century. This was built on the site of two previous synagogues which were both destroyed by fire. After the Second World War, the synagogue was sold to the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church which since then has used it as a house of prayer. The cemetery is another historic Jewish site in Dobruška, the oldest tombstones dating back to the late 17th century. Also of interest is the rabbi's house, where an 18th century ritual bath (mikvah) was recently discovered. The Museum of Dobruška, in collaboration with the Jewish Museum in Prague, installed in the vestibule of this house an exhibition on Jewish customs which also deals with the history of the local Jewish community. As well as expert assistance, the Jewish Museum provided the local museum with several items from its collections, including articles that originate from Dobruška and its surroundings.



New publication by the Jewish Museum in Prague

Following the publication of guides to the exhibitions in the Spanish and Klausen synagogues and the Ceremonial Hall, the Jewish Museum has now come out with another book - *Prague Synagogues*. All the historic buildings in the Jewish

Town have undergone gradual reconstruction since the establishment of the Jewish Museum in Prague in October 1994. That was when the Museum became responsible for the care of collection items that had been returned by the state to the Federation of Jewish Communities and for the administration of the historic synagogues that had been returned to the Jewish Community of Prague. Many of these synagogues had waited years for restoration, some were finally opened after years of forced closure.

The book *Prague Synagogues* deals with the history and current state of seven of the most prominent synagogues in Prague. It follows on from a similar publication of the early 1980s which has been completely sold out. The new book features detailed architectural and historical descriptions of these unique memorial buildings of Jewish Prague and is supplemented by a wealth of photographic documentation. The book takes you through seven centuries of Jewish history spotlighting the legendary *Old-New Synagogue* (established c. 1270 and still in use to this day); the *Pinkas Synagogue* (1535) of the Horovitz family (converted to an impressive memorial to the nearly 80,000 victims of the Nazi persecution of Bohemian and Moravian Jews); monuments from the Golden Age of the Jewish Town, including the Renaissance *High Synagogue* (1586) and the *Maisel Synagogue* (1592); and what used to be the second main house of prayer of the Prague Jewish community, the Baroque *Klausen Synagogue* (1694). There is also a fascinating chapter with lavish photographs of the decorative Moorish interiors of more recent buildings - the *Spanish Synagogue* (1868) and the *Jerusalem Synagogue* (1906), the latter being built in the New Town as a replacement for three synagogues that had been demolished in Josefov.

The text is by *Arno Pařík*, the photographs by *Dana Cabanová* and *Petr Kliment*. The book is in two versions: one in Czech, English and German, the other in French, Spanish and Italian. It is available on-line at <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz> and may be ordered from the Jewish Museum in Prague, Jáchymova 3, 110 01 Prague 1, Czech Republic, e-mail: zmp@ecn.cz or via the Internet at <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz>. It is also being prepared as a CD-ROM.

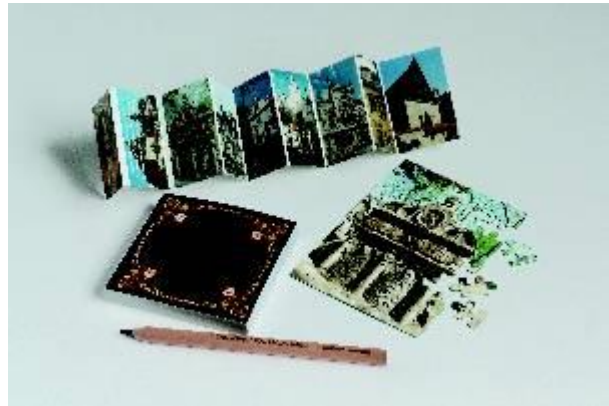
Jewish Museum Souvenirs

The following new souvenirs are on offer:

- bound collection of postcards featuring historic buildings of the Jewish Museum in Prague
- jigsaw puzzle with pictures of the Old-New Synagogue, the Spanish Synagogue and the tombstone of Rabbi Loew,
- a new set of postcards featuring historic sites of the Jewish Museum in Prague,
- wooden pencils with decorative Torah pointers
- writing paper featuring a wedding contract (ketubbah), Ferrara, 1715
- havdalah candlestick

- framed reproduction of the title page of the Tashlich Book (Sefer Tashlich) from 1829

These and other souvenirs can be bought in the Museum's shops in the Spanish, Klausen and Maisel synagogues or ordered from the Jewish Museum in Prague, Jáchymova 3, 110 01 Prague 1, Czech Republic, e-mail: zmp@ecn.cz, Internet-
<http://www.jewishmuseum.cz>.



Prominent visits

September

The historic sites of the Jewish Museum were visited by Jicchak Navon, President of the State of Israel in 1978-1983.

October



The Jewish Museum was visited by Queen Paola of Belgium, who was in Prague on a state visit with her husband, King Albert III.

New Address of the Jewish Museum

The Jewish Museum in Prague is moving its offices to a new address in February 2001: U Staré školy 1, 110 01 Prague 1, Czech Republic, Phone: 0042/02/24819456, fax: 02/24819458. The precise date of the move will be announced on the Internet and in the press.