

Thirty-Nine Precious Synagogue Textiles Find Their Way Home after More Than Eighty Years

Prague, February 18, 2026 – **The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, in close cooperation with the Jewish Museum in Prague, is working to right a long-standing historical wrong. A remarkable group of synagogue textiles—part of the cultural heritage of Jewish communities in what is now Greece, looted by the Nazis during the Second World War—is now being returned to its country of origin. The unique relic of the Greek Sephardic Jewish community was received on 17 February 2026 by Zanet Battinou, Director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, from representatives of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and the Jewish Museum in Prague.**

The collection comprises thirty-nine synagogue textiles discovered shortly after the end of the war on Czech territory and held in the care of the Jewish Museum in Prague since the 1950s. These objects are rare witnesses to Jewish communities that Nazi occupation forces sought to erase from the face of the earth.

Predominantly Sephardic in type, the textiles include synagogue curtains (parokhot), Torah mantles (me'ilim), and covers (mappot), many bearing dedicatory inscriptions in Hebrew and Ladino, the language widely used by Sephardic Jews across the Mediterranean and beyond. When incorporated into the museum's inventory in the mid-1950s, they were broadly labeled as originating from the "Balkans," reflecting the limited possibilities for provenance research at the time.

"In the 1950s, there was no one on the museum staff capable of studying Sephardic synagogue textiles in depth or determining their true origins. Only in recent years have we been able to return to questions that had remained unasked for decades," explains **Michaela Sidenberg, Chief Curator of the Jewish Museum in Prague.**

"What distinguished this group was its clear divergence from the Ashkenazi textiles typical of Central Europe. A renewed examination of Hebrew and Ladino inscriptions—some previously undocumented—revealed family names such as Ardit, Saltiel, Allatini, Tiano, and Benveniste, pointing decisively, above all, to Thessaloniki. One especially moving dedication records a donation to the Thessaloniki yeshiva Or ha-Hayyim by parents mourning the loss of their two young sons," Sidenberg adds.

To verify these findings, the Jewish Museum in Prague collaborated closely with the Jewish Museum of Greece. Together with **curator Anastasia Loudarou**, it was confirmed that the textiles originated primarily from Thessaloniki. "This unique collection of thirty-nine synagogue textiles constitutes part of the cultural heritage of Jewish communities of Greece, looted during the war and carried far from home," says **Loudarou.** "Through close collaboration with our colleagues in Prague, we were able to

identify Greek Jewish surnames, synagogues, and places of worship mentioned in the inscriptions. These textiles are silent witnesses to the destruction of once rich and populous Jewish communities."

Many of the textiles date from after 1917, the year of the Great Fire of Thessaloniki, which destroyed much of the city's Jewish infrastructure. They were likely donated as memorial objects—replacing ritual textiles lost to fire and pogroms. The looted textiles, some of which still bear crude markings left by the perpetrators, were transported from Greece to Berlin and, in 1944, to northern Bohemia.

For **Zanet Battinou, Director of the Jewish Museum of Greece**, the repatriation carries profound personal and institutional meaning. "The Jewish Museum of Greece is deeply moved and honored to have worked with the Jewish Museum in Prague to identify and repatriate these priceless relics of families murdered and communities decimated during the Holocaust," Battinou states. "We are grateful to become the custodians of the dedicatory intentions of the people who created them, and we promise never to cease telling their stories and sharing their precious legacy with the world."

Pavla Niklová, Director of the Jewish Museum in Prague, also emphasizes the importance of the collaboration: "I am grateful to my colleagues for their dedicated care of our Judaica collections, which rank among the most unique in the world. We are proud and delighted that, together with our Greek colleagues, we were able to establish the provenance of this remarkable group. I would also like to thank the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic for working with us to find a way to return these valuable objects to a place where they can once again relate to a living community and where their historical significance can be rediscovered. Finally, we believe that such international collaboration reflects today's interconnected world and paves the way for new partnerships."

"We regard the return of these Sephardic textiles as the fulfillment of our responsibility and moral commitment to the communities whose cultural and spiritual heritage was systematically destroyed and dispersed across Europe during the Shoah. The restitution of such objects is not merely an administrative act — it is a symbol of the restoration of memory, dignity, and the continuity of Jewish life," says **Petr Papoušek, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the CR**, adding: "We deeply appreciate the open and professional cooperation with the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Jewish Museum of Greece. It is precisely this kind of international dialogue, the sharing of professional expertise, and mutual trust that paved the way toward historical justice. We believe that this step represents not only the return of precious heritage to its home, but also a clear expression of solidarity among Jewish communities across Europe."

More than eighty years after they were looted, these textiles—once donated in memory of loved ones to synagogues in Thessaloniki and possibly elsewhere in Greece—are finally returning home. Given the near-total destruction of Greek Jewry, they are invaluable: tangible vessels of memory, linking past communities with future generations.

Jewish Museum in Prague

For 120 years, the Jewish Museum in Prague has been caring for the cultural heritage of the Jewish communities of the Czech lands. Founded in 1906, the museum administers one of the largest collections of Judaica in the world—comprising more than 44,000 collection objects, 130,000 books, hundreds of thousands of photographs, and the extensive archives of Jewish religious communities in Bohemia and Moravia. In cooperation with the Jewish Community of Prague, it oversees eight significant monuments of the Prague Jewish Town and regularly organizes cultural and educational programs. More information available [HERE](#).

Media Contact:

Martina Kemrová

M: +420 603 400 150

E: martina.kemrova@jewishmuseum.cz

pr@jewishmuseum.cz