

FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MISSING ITEM OF CZECH JUDAICA IS RETURNED FROM THE U.S. TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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(Prague, Czech Republic) The Jewish Museum in Prague and the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic have obtained the restitution of a missing Jewish ritual object of Czech origin located in the United States. Originally from South Bohemia, the Torah Ark curtain resurfaced in April 2013 in connection with a Judaica auction at Sotheby's in New York. After nearly sixty years, it is returning home to the Czech Republic.

On March 10, 2014, a flight from New York landed at the Václav Havel Airport in Prague carrying an inconspicuous but unique object. After decades of being lost, a Jewish ritual object from the Czech Jewish community is returning home. This return home brings to a close this object's history, which mirrors the shifting fates of Central European Jewish communities in the 20th century.

This silk and velvet brocade curtain was donated to the Jewish community by Moses and Chayele Liftschitz in 1855. It came to the Prague Jewish Museum in 1943 from Mladá Vožice in South Bohemia, which was annihilated during World War II. During the war, the Jewish Museum served as a central collection point for Judaica from around the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The curtain was catalogued and deposited at the Jewish Museum along with other objects from similarly destroyed communities.

After it went missing in 1956, the curtain resurfaced in a Judaica auction scheduled at Sotheby's in April 2013 under the heading: *A Treasured Legacy: The Michael and Judy Steinhardt Judaica Collection*. After the curtain was identified by curators at the Jewish Museum in Prague and subsequently withdrawn from the auction, the Czech Jewish community reached an agreement with Michael Steinhardt for its restitution and return to Prague.

The restitution of the Torah Ark curtain from Mladá Vožice is the first successful repatriation to the Czech Jewish community from abroad. FJC's president, Petr Papoušek, remarks: *"With regard to the recovered Torah Ark curtain, I greatly appreciate the goodwill and respect extended to the Czech Jewish community by Michael Steinhardt and Sotheby's in New York. The example they set should be emulated. This Torah Ark curtain belongs to the Czech Republic, and its place in the Jewish Museum in Prague's collection is irreplaceable as only within its historical context is the object's intrinsic value realized. I would like to believe that we will soon see the return of other unique Judaica that were wrongfully taken out of the country. They are an integral part of the pillar supporting the collective memory of today's Czech Jewish community."*

The Czech Jewish community is advised and represented by the Ciric Law Firm, PLLC in New York, USA.

Petr Papoušek

President, Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic

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