

Respekt: Prague Jewish historian Fiedler killed by thief

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Prague, Feb 24 (CTK) - Czech historian Jiri Fiedler, who specialised in Jewish heritage in Bohemia and Moravia and its inhabitants, was brutally killed by a young man who first asked for his advice and then came to rob his flat in January 2014, weekly Respekt has written in its latest issue.

Until recently, the brutal killing of Mr and Mrs Fiedler has been one of the few unresolved murders committed in Prague last year.

Fiedler, 78, and his wife Dagmar, 74, were murdered for a few thousand crowns that the young man received in a pawnshop for the jewellery, books and other items he stole from their Prague flat, Respekt writes.

The police have found no indication that the murder would have been connected with Fiedler's work and had an anti-Semitic motive, the weekly adds.

Fiedler was a pioneer of Jewish heritage research. Under the communist regime from the 1970s, he rode his bike and thoroughly documented the disappearing Jewish houses, synagogues, dilapidated Jewish cemeteries and all that was related to them. At home he had filing cabinets in which he stored all the information, Respekt writes.

Fiedler was building an enormous database of Jewish inhabitants, often dead or expelled, and he linked the old photos and data with the surviving descendants.

In the 1990s, his book Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia was issued. He also created an electronic encyclopedia of Jewish communities on Czech territory.

Though unknown to the broad public, he helped hundreds of people, Respekt writes.

In her Eulogy for a Source published in The New York Times last March and mentioned by Respekt, American non-fiction writer Helen Epstein wrote about Fiedler: "He opened the door to my family history, as he did for hundreds of people who had been cut off from their family pasts by war, dispossession, totalitarianism and emigration. Working mostly alone, unpaid and anonymous for decades under Communism, and later as a researcher at the Jewish Museum in Prague, he documented the history of Jews in the Czech lands and was a prolific and often unacknowledged contributor to reports, books, articles and museum exhibits."

Respekt writes that the suspect, Dalibor C. from northern Moravia, confessed to the crime. He faces life imprisonment if found guilty.

The police told ČTK that they arrested the 29-year-old suspect in the Karlovy Vary Region last week, on February 18, and the man, who has not been punished for any crime until now, was taken into custody so that he would not escape.

Chief inspector Josef Mares said the man put on the gas stove after the crime but the flat did not explode, luckily for the police.

The detectives revealed that both victims were stabbed many times and they believe that the crime was planned.

Respekt writes that Dalibor C. contacted Fiedler through the Prague Jewish Museum where he asked for help with mapping a Jewish cemetery in northern Moravia. He had three meetings with Fiedler and then came for the fourth time to commit murder, the weekly writes.

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