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Prague's Jewish cemetery to be digitised

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One of Prague's most emblematic places, the Old Jewish Cemetery made up of 12,000 tombstones all crammed into a tight space behind two synagogues, is being digitised in an effort to list all the people buried there.

More than a century after it stopped being used as a burial ground, the Jewish Museum in Prague, which manages the site, has proposed giving order to the disorder of the graves, which, in some cases, go down four layers into the earth.

According to Daniel Polakovic, a historian of Prague's Jewish community, at least 30,000 people are buried in the cemetery, which was established in the 15th century and spans only one hectare.

'We are in the middle of a digital geodetic plan. It's a complete photographic documentation,' he tells EFE.

The tombstones transcriptions are being catalogued on a database and will be accessible on the internet, Polakovic says.

There is no date for the launch of the database due to the quantity of names and information that needs to be processed.

As well as information about those buried there, the gravestones include information about the parents and families of the deceased, so the database could amount to some 100,000 names, Polakovic says.

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As such, the descendants of Prague's Jewish community and visitors from all over the world will be able to know exactly who is buried in the disordered cemetery - one of the world's oldest surviving Jewish burial sites.

Today, the photogenic cemetery is considered a tranquil oasis and it attracts some 600,000 visitors each year.

Among those laid to rest at the site include Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel, a Talmudic scholar and Jewish mystic.

'He was a religious thinker, a philosopher who published several books during his lifetime,' Polakovic says.

He went down in history not only for his thinking and writing, but also as the creator of Prague's 'golem', a mythical creature he made from clay to defend the Jewish community from antisemitic attacks.

Also buried there is scholar and poet Avigdor Kara, whose tombstone dating back to 1439 is the oldest in the cemetery.

The Jewish community of Prague, which for centuries was one of the most important in Central Europe, was almost entirely wiped out in the Holocaust at the hands of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Until 1938, the Jewish population of the capital, then in Czechoslovakia, was 55,000 people, compared to 5,000 today.

AAP

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