

## NEWSLETTER 1997/1

### **The Educational and Cultural Centre of the Jewish Museum in Prague**

The Centre has organised a number of meetings with foreign and domestic students and lecturers since its official opening in August 1996 (in fact since last April). During the autumn and winter of 1996 seminars were held here for more than 300 students and 40 lecturers from Israel and for smaller groups of students from Norway. More than 300 Czech secondary school pupils and 91 Czech teachers attended lectures and debates where they learnt of the history, culture and customs of Czech Jews. Of particular interest in this connection was the international seminar which took place 3-5 February 1997. This involved historians from Israel, Prof. Ezra Mendelsohn, Prof. Richard Cohen and Dr. David Bankier and also Prof. Eduard Goldstücker from the Czech Republic. As part of the main theme - "History of Jews in the Czech Lands" - they dealt with such issues as the basic characteristics of the Jews, the significance of the bible for Judaism, Christianity and western civilisation, the emancipation of the Jews, anti-Semitism, Jewish identity, the Holocaust and aspects of Jewish life during the communist regime and after its fall in November 1989. The seminar was mainly aimed at secondary school teachers, university lecturers and employees of institutions dealing with the methodological aspects of teaching. The main goal was to contribute, albeit indirectly, to the improvement of history and civil education teaching in Czech schools and also to get teachers to think of ways of enriching the teaching of these subjects by means of various Jewish aspects. The seminar was financed by the European Union - the PHARE programme - with significant participation of the Jewish Museum in Prague.

There have also been a number of cultural programmes in the Centre aimed at the general public. For example last October, on the occasion of the Hanukkah festival, a competition was announced for children and students to design modern Czech Hanukkah lamps - 30 young people took part. The specialist jury was made up of representatives from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, the Academy of Fine Arts, the National Gallery, the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Jewish Community in Prague. The winning design was exhibited together with the other most successful designs in the Klaus Synagogue in the exhibition space given over to the Hanukkah festival.

A rich cultural programme was prepared for the Centre in March - a lecture on the taverns and cafés of the Jewish Town, a film show (Jozef Grusse's film based on the book by Karel Poláček : the Inn at the Stone Table), a lecture by and discussion with Prof. Jacob Neusner from New York , a specialist on the Mishnah and Talmud, a debate among invited guests on the themes of xenophobia and the Genocide. Also successful was the joint concert given by the Jewish group Mišpacha and the Romany group Terne čhave (literally "young children").

### **The ORT computer laboratory**

The ORT laboratory is part of the Educational and Cultural Centre. Its initial task was to create a home page for the museum (<http://www.ecn.cz/ort>). The continually renewed page provides Internet users with basic information on the Jewish Museum in Prague, an outline of all its main activities, permanent and temporary exhibitions, cultural programmes in the Centre and on other items of

interest in the museum. Thanks to the Internet, people from all over the world now have access to current and reliable information on Jewish activities in Prague.

The computer laboratory is also preparing teacher training material - guides to the Centre and also tailor-made multimedia programmes directed mainly at educators at the Centre. Computer training has been organised both for teachers and for other museum employees. The laboratory is not as yet open to the general public, although computer training courses are expected to be started in the near future, particularly for members of the Jewish communities and other organisations in Prague.

### **From the Jewish Museum's metal restoration workshop**

The Jewish Museum in Prague takes care of a rich collection of silver, brass and tin artefacts. Of particular historic and artistic value is the set of synagogue silverware from Bohemia and Moravia - Torah shields and crowns, finials, spice boxes, Hanukkah and Sabbath candlesticks and other objects dating from the 18th to the first third of the 20th century. A number of the mentioned objects are being gradually conserved and when necessary restored. As with textile restoration, the restorers at the Jewish Museum play a major role in the protection of these artefacts of often irreplaceable cultural value. Pavel Veselý's restoration work can be seen in the photograph - a shield, produced in 1852 in Vienna, which consists of seven plates bearing the names of festivals. This oblong shield is topped by a crown supported by two lions which also support the Decalogue tablets in the centre, with five vine-leaf pendants attached to the bottom. After restoration the shield with other silver artefacts (Torah pointers and synagogue curtain bells) were displayed alongside the work of other Czech restorers in the successful exhibition Discourse with the past for the future in the National Museum in Prague, which ran from October 1996 to January 1997.

### **New exhibitions in the Klaus Synagogue**

In December 1996 - February 1997 The Peace of the Desert exhibition was held in the gallery of the Klaus Synagogue. Visitors had the opportunity to see the work of the renowned Israeli artist Ruth Levin, who with this exhibition returned to the city of her birth after sixty years. The curator of the exhibition was Dr. Arno Pařík . In March 1997 another exhibition - Restored textiles from the Jewish Museum in Prague - was opened in the same gallery. Here it is possible to see rare Torah mantles, synagogal curtains as well as covers, wimples, tefillin bags and head covers dating from the 17-19th centuries. The exhibits reflect the high professional standards of the Jewish Museum's restorers and of the numerous specialists co-operating with the museum. The curator of the exhibition is Dr. Ludmila Kybalová. The exhibition runs until 30 May 1997.

### **The estate of Gideon Klein in the Collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague**

At the end of 1996 the archive collection of the Jewish Museum's Holocaust Department was enriched by an exceptionally valuable addition - the estate of

the composer and pianist Gideon Klein who died in January 1945 in the concentration camp in Fürstengrube, Silesia. His life was tragically ended a few weeks after his twenty fifth birthday, thus depriving the musical world of one of the most outstanding pre-war composers and performers.

Gideon Klein was born in December 1919 in Přerov. He left for Prague as an exceptionally gifted pianist to study at the Prague Conservatory where he graduated under Prof. Vilém Kurz. He also studied composition under Prof. Alois Hába and musical science at the Charles University - he was, however, soon forced to leave the University as a result of new anti-Jewish laws, which meant that he was no longer able to perform. In late 1941 he was deported to the Terezín ghetto where he stayed for almost three years. Despite the limitations he became involved in teaching, participated in the cultural life of Terezín and continued to compose.

In October 1944 Klein was included in one of the last transports to Auschwitz (along with other prominent musicians, until then protected by the Terezín council of elders, - Hans Krása, Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas, Rafael Schächter and others). On arriving at the camp Klein passed the selections, thus escaping death in the gas chamber. He was then sent to Fürstengrube where he worked in the coal mines. The eastern front approached in January 1945, after which the camp was evacuated; it was at this time that all traces of Klein disappeared. It remains unknown to this day whether he was sent on the "death march" or whether he fell victim to the mass killing of the SS commandos whose task was to liquidate the rest of the camp.

Klein's estate was offered to the Jewish Museum in Prague by his sister, Eliška Kleinová. She also went through Terezín, Auschwitz and other camps until she finally managed to escape from the "death march" in January 1945. Herself a gifted pianist, she stopped performing in Terezín and instead put all her efforts into protecting and supporting her younger brother, of whose exceptional talent she had been convinced since childhood. She was deeply wounded by Gideon's death at the very end of the war. It affected the rest of her life which she was to devote to the memory of her beloved brother and to promoting his uncompleted work, both in Bohemia and the world. Gideon Klein's estate, which has come into the museum's ownership, mainly consists of pre-war documents such as his birth certificate, all his reports, his diploma from the State Conservatory of Music in Prague, his university registration, extensive correspondence including newspaper articles and concert reviews from the 1930s. The main part of the estate consists of scores of all Klein's preserved compositions dating from the pre-Terezín period (the earliest dating from his childhood). Both the original Terezín scores which have also been stored for a number of years in the Terezín Memorial (the museum also has copies) and the transferred estate constitute a comprehensive and rich source of information on the life and work of this great artist. The documents are also accompanied by a series of family photographs. The estate was transferred with great care due to the efforts of Prof. Kleinová and her assistant Veronika Suchlová. Researchers will be able to see the collection after archive treatment, perhaps during this year.

### **The testimonies of Holocaust survivors on film**

At the instigation of the University of Yale, the personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors were recorded on videocassettes in the Czech Republic during 1996. The project was co-ordinated by Nathan Beyrak from Tel Aviv and directed by

the sociologist Fedor Gál from the Charles University Sociology Dept. It also involved the Czech Foundation of Film and Sociology and Jewish Museum staff, Anna Hyndráková and Anna Lorencová. Alongside the recorded testimonies of Czech Jews and four Romanies are those of three Sudeten Germans who describe how they viewed the removal of Jews from the Sudetenland. The original cassettes are stored in the Yale University archives - copies were received also by the Jewish Museum in Prague. The project was financed by the University of Yale and the private television station Nova.

The project is continuing this year, but is now focused on the testimonies of Romanies who survived the hardships of the war. The resulting document is to be stored in the archives of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington which instigated and is financing the project.

### **Prominent visits to the Jewish Museum**

In January 1997 Dr. Leo Pavlát welcomed Mr. Siegfried Vergin, member of the German Federal Assembly and of the budget committee, to the Jewish Museum in Prague.

In March 1997 on the occasion of the official visit to the Czech Republic of the Norwegian king Harald V, the Jewish Museum was honoured by a visit from his wife, Queen Sonja. Accompanied by the wife of the President of the Czech Republic, Mrs. Dagmar Havlová, the Queen visited the Old-New Synagogue, the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in the Pinkas Synagogue and the Old Jewish Cemetery.

### **Donations from sponsors**

In early 1997 the Jewish Museum in Prague received donations towards the activities of the Educational and Cultural Centre from a number of Jewish institutions, above all from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and also from the American Joint Distribution Committee, the Rotschild Foundation, the Pincus Education Fund for the Diaspora and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. All these institutions greatly contribute to the functioning of the Centre. In the second half of 1997 the Jewish Museum is to open an exhibition in the gallery of the Klaus Synagogue of the work of the American painter, Mark Podwal (the illustrator of Elie Wiesel's book on the Golem and of his commentary to the Pesach Haggadah etc.). This project is being significantly funded by Philip Morris through its subsidiary in the Czech Republic, the Prague-based Tabák a.s.

### **Jewish monuments of Prague on Czech and Israeli postage stamps**

On 30 April 1997 the Czech Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Israeli Ministry of Communications are to jointly issue two special postage stamps on the theme of Jewish monuments in Prague. The initiative to issue stamps on a Jewish theme came from the Jewish Museum in Prague. The design was by the Czech painter James Janíček, the engraving by Miloš Ondráček. On the 8 k stamp is depicted the eastern side of the interior of the Old-New Synagogue in Prague with its five-part ribbed vault, Torah box and section of the

Gothic grille surrounding the tribune (bimah). On the 10 k stamp is depicted the famous tombstone of Rabbi Loew in the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague. Further motifs of synagogue objects - Torah crowns and pointers - were used for the issue of the specially postmarked first day covers. The issue of both these thematic stamps indirectly follows on from the series of six stamps based on Czech Judaism which were issued in 1967. For political reasons - in connection with the Six-day War in the Near East - these stamps were withdrawn from circulation and their further sale was banned. A ceremonial presentation is to take place in the Educational and Cultural Centre of the Jewish Museum in Prague on the occasion of the issuing of the special postage stamps on 30 April 1997. It will be attended by representatives from the Czech and Israeli ministries, the Czech and Israeli Post-offices and a host of guests from the political and cultural world.

### **From the museum's production**

#### *A set of colour postcards of the Pinkas Synagogue*

The Jewish Museum in Prague has prepared for its visitors a new set of four postcards showing the recently restored inscriptions in the memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the Pinkas Synagogue. The impressive photographs are the work of Dana Cabanová, the official photographer of the Jewish Museum.

1 set of postcards - 1 USD.

#### *Judaica Bohemiae*

The Jewish Museum recently issued a further copy of the journal, *Judaica Bohemia XXXII*. Studies are on various themes related to the history of Jews in the Czech Lands, as well as on major collections of *Judaica* in Slovakia and on the fate of Czech Jews during the second world war.

**Alexander Putík** : On the Topography of the Prague Jewish Town Prior to the Pogrom of 1389,

**Lenka Matušíková**: Bestandaufnahme der Hinterlassenschaft von Abraham Stern Kaufmanns und Pächters von Třeboň,

**Bedřich Nosek** : Jewish Hebrew Studies in the Czech Lands in the Pre-Enlightenment Periods - Part IV. Moshe Shemuel Neumann and his Efforts to Revive Hebrew,

**Arno Pařík** : The Slovak Jewish Museum in Prešov (Eperjes),

**Miroslav Kárný**: Vorgeschichte der Regierungsverordnung über die Rechtstellung der Juden im öffentlichen Leben,

**František Fanta**: Memoirs,

**Anna Hyndráková - Anna Lorencová**: Systematic Collection of Memoires Organized by the Jewish Museum in Prague - III.

The contributions are printed in English and German. One copy - 6 USD.

Those interested can obtain a limited number of earlier volumes of the journal at a discount.

For more information on how to buy the *Judaica Bohemia* and the set of postcards write to:

The Jewish Museum in Prague,

Jáchymova 3,

Praha 1,

fax: 00420 22310 681