

NEWSLETTER 2003/3

POSTPONED EXHIBITION

ADOLF KOHN - Painter of the Prague Ghetto

Last year the Jewish Museum in Prague put together an exhibition of paintings of the Prague ghetto by Adolf Kohn. The opening was originally planned for 14 August 2002 but this was set back by the August floods. It was necessary to take down the exhibition immediately and to move the paintings to the Museum's upper floor rooms. Due to flooding in the basement area of the Robert Guttman Gallery, including the technical facilities for the air-conditioning units, the exhibition could not be opened until conditions in the reconstructed gallery had been restored to an extent that met the strict requirements for the display of rare artworks. The opening finally took place on 26 June 2003. It was curated by Dr. Arno Pařík and ran until the end of September 2003.

It is now a century since Adolf Kohn (1868-1953) began painting his small pictures of the vanishing Jewish Town during the clearance of the Prague ghetto. In them he tried to capture the atmosphere of the picturesque corners of the ghetto, where he was born, raised and spent his entire life. He continued to paint and, later on, made a remarkable amount of paintings based on his memories, period photographs and his early pictures. Relatively few of his works, however, have been preserved and the name of this artist remains virtually unknown to this day. Although painting was mainly a hobby for Adolf Kohn, it did give him a modest means of income, for he used to sell his pictures to neighbours, residents of the town, booksellers and visitors to Josefov.

This exhibition was the first independent display of artworks by Adolf Kohn. In total, there were about 120 paintings exhibited, mostly from the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague, together with loans from the National Museum in Prague, the City of Prague Museum and private collectors. Visitors were given their first ever opportunity to compare Kohn's works dating from various periods and showing different views of the hidden corners of the Jewish Town and to appreciate their distinctive naïf poetry.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue (in English and Czech), which includes over 100 full-colour reproductions and a list of his major works. This can be ordered from the Museum's address, by email: sales@jewishmuseum.cz, or online at: www.jewishmuseum.cz/shop/ashop.htm

MUSEUM LIBRARY CATALOGUE ON THE INTERNET

The Museum's Aleph library catalogue has been available on its website since April 2003. Of the total number of books in the library collection (about 100,000), almost 20,000 have been listed in the catalogue so far. This includes all new acquisitions, books on the Holocaust and the Second World War and publications kept at the Museum's Education and Culture Centre. Earlier literature is being continually added to the catalogue as part of a re-cataloguing of the collection.

As well as having the opportunity to search online for records of documents from the library collection, registered library users are also able to extend loans, order documents from the library depositories for a specific time or reserve books that are out on loan.

The catalogue can be accessed at: www.jewishmuseum.cz/english/alibrary.htm

TRAVELLING EXHIBITIONS ON JEWISH HISTORY AND TRADITIONS IN THE DĚČÍN SYNAGOGUE

In the north Bohemian town of Děčín is one of the few synagogues in the Czech border region to have survived the Nazi rampages during the war. It is being gradually restored by the local Jewish community, which also uses it as a venue for various cultural programmes, in particular exhibitions and concerts. On 16 July 2003, two travelling exhibitions – Jewish Traditions and Customs and History of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia – opened in the Děčín Synagogue. Both were prepared by the Jewish Museum in Prague in an attempt to cater as much as possible to the widespread interest that has been expressed in this theme by many museums and cultural institutions throughout the country (see Newsletter 1/2003). The curator is Arno Pařík, an art historian and authority on the history of synagogue architecture who focuses his research on Jewish art and Jewish artists living in Bohemia and Moravia.

Each exhibition consists of twelve wall panels which combine text and pictorial information in an attractive graphic presentation. By viewing illustrations of ritual, historic and artistic objects and documents, visitors have an opportunity to become acquainted with the fundamentals of Judaism and the main Jewish festivals and events in Jewish history. The exhibitions here also feature a group of ritual objects related to certain Jewish communities in north Bohemia, in particular Teplice, Děčín and Česká Lípa. Many of the exhibits also document the contemporary life of local Jewish communities. The items are being exhibited in display cases that have been donated to the Děčín Synagogue by the Jewish Museum in Prague.

The exhibitions are complemented by a large group of artworks by Josef Čísařovský, which are on display in the synagogue gallery. Most of the paintings are inspired by the Jewish cemetery in Hostouň, Central Bohemia, from where the artist comes. This project was prepared for the European Day of Jewish Culture.

RENOVATION OF THE ÚŠTĚK SYNAGOGUE COMPLETED

September 2003 saw the completion of a ten-year renovation project at the Ústěk Synagogue, which was organised by the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic. A permanent exhibition comprising two parts is currently being installed here. The first part will feature the building's original appurtenances and decoration which have been reconstructed, together with exhibits from the Jewish Museum in Prague and several panels containing basic information on the history of the synagogue and the Ústěk Jewish community. The second part will provide an untraditional view of the history and organisation

of Jewish education in Bohemia, as well as of prominent teachers and rabbis. In this way the Ústěk Synagogue will create the atmosphere of an authentic Jewish school – a heder, which, according to local sources, was based here from 1851 onwards.

This important Jewish monument has been rescued largely thanks to support from the Regeneration of City Heritage Zones programme and a contribution from the International Fund for the Help of Holocaust Victims. The permanent exhibition was put together thanks to the help of the Jewish Museum in Prague and its Foundation.

EUROPEAN DAY OF JEWISH CULTURE 2003

As it does every year, the Museum once again took part in the events connected with the European Day of Jewish Culture (held on 7 September 2003). This year the Museum provided free access to the Jewish cemetery in Žižkov and gave lectures at the Education and Culture Centre – Arno Pařík : “The Prague Globetrotter” (about Robert Guttman) and Michaela Hájková: “The Jewish Presence in Contemporary Visual Art”.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

DONATION OF 69 ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

BY EMIL ORLIK The Museum has acquired a set of 69 original drawings by the important Jewish graphic artist and painter, Emil Orlik , a native of Prague. These are portrait sketches of the participants of the March 1918 peace conference in Brest, Lithuania, where Emil Orlik was sent as a reporter. Among those portrayed are many important political figures of the day, aristocrats, diplomats and military leaders (such as the chief negotiator for Austria-Hungary Count Ottokar Czernin, Prince Leopold of Bavaria, the chief negotiator for Germany Richard von Kühlmann, the Chief Admiral of Turkey Hussein Raouf Bey).

Orlik later used these precise sketches, drawn in pencil and black chalk , as a basis for lithographic portraits. His lithographs, which are more like caricatures than realistic portraits, were printed in an album entitled “Brest-Litovsk 1918”.

The set of drawings from the Orlik estate were generously donated to the Museum by the artist’s niece Anita Bollag from North Caldwell, New Jersey. This was arranged via the Project Judaica Foundation, which is run by a long-term supporter of the Museum Mark Talisman, and with the help of another long-term friend of our institution, Rabbi Norman R. Patz, Chairman of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews. Some of the drawings will be on show at an exhibition of Orlik portraits that the Museum will be presenting to the public at the beginning of next year.

This donation significantly enriches the large collection of Orlik s works in the Museum’s collection and is of particular importance as a unique historical document.

UNDER PREPARATION...

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES, SETTLEMENTS AND MEMORIAL SITES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Despite growing public interest, the history of the Jewish community of Bohemia and Moravia is still being documented in a fragmentary way; often, the only available material for those interested in this topic are pre-war publications and specific articles which are being supplemented only gradually by more recent research. In an attempt to satisfy the needs of many inquirers, the Museum has decided to gradually publish on its website the "Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities, Settlements and Memorial Sites in the Czech Republic." This work is being put together by Museum employee Jiří Fiedler on the basis of his private archive. It is the result of more than thirty years' work that Mr. Fiedler has carried out in various localities, archives and libraries, which formed the basis of his earlier book *Jewish Sites in Bohemia and Moravia* (published by Sefer, 1992; English version 1991). The encyclopaedia entries, which are gradually being made accessible in electronic form, are, however, far more extensive and detailed.

At present, about a fifth of the total number of encyclopaedia entries (of which there will be several thousand) have been completed. Photographic documents from the Museum's archive are either attached to the entries or can be ordered separately.

Individual entries can be purchased via the Museum's website at www.jewishmuseum.cz. To get an idea as to the content of the entries, you can look up five samples there.

KAREN LEVINE

HANA'S SMALL SUITCASE

The story of a girl who did not return

With the support of the Jewish Museum in Prague, the publishing house Portál has published a remarkable real-life story of a Jewish girl from Moravia, Hana Brady, who died in the Auschwitz extermination camp. Her story was reconstructed by Fumiko Ishioka, the founder of the Tokyo centre for the study of the Holocaust, where, in 2000, a discovery was made of a small suitcase belonging to Hana Brady, which bore the inscription: Hanna Brady, 16. 5. 1931, orphan. The Czech edition includes an introduction written by Hana's brother Jiří Brady, who is now living in Canada. The book is intended for teachers of elementary schools as a supplement to history lessons and for anyone interested in Second World War memoirs. It can be ordered from the Museum's address, by email: ✉ sales@jewishmuseum.cz, or online at www.jewishmuseum.cz/shop/ashop.htm .

PROMINENT VISITS

June

Jorge Telerman, Culture Secretary, Municipal Assembly of Buenos Aires, Argentina



Peter A. Rafaeli, Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic in Philadelphia, USA
Deborah Lipstadt, USA

July

Douglas Greenberg, President of the foundation Survivors of the Shoah, USA