



PINKAS SYNAGOGUE REOPENED

The Pinkas Synagogue, which is one of the best preserved monuments of Prague's former Jewish town, has reopened to the public after being closed for 14 months. At the end of the 1950s the Pinkas was converted into a unique memorial to the victims of the Holocaust from Bohemia and Moravia, but it remained closed from 1968 until the end of the Communist regime in November 1989. It was renovated in the

following years, as were the almost 80,000 names of Shoah victims which are hand-written on the synagogue walls. Of all the heritage - protected Jewish buildings in Prague, it was the Pinkas Synagogue that suffered the most damage in last year's floods. (see [Newsletter 3/2002](#)).

A team of experts working under climatologist Jan Červenák was put together to preserve the synagogue. The first priority was to make the building stable. Then, the rooms were repeatedly cleaned and disinfected, and a constant temperature was maintained in order to prevent further deterioration of the damaged features.

In accordance with the recommendations of experts, checks on the state of damaged inscriptions were carried out by Michaela Poková, an artist involved in the renovation of the inscriptions in the 1990s. Despite all effort, however, the inscriptions in several areas were destroyed and will have to be renovated gradually. Renovation work on the building was completed on 12 September 2003 and repair of the inscriptions is due for completion in April 2004.



The reconstruction project was supervised by the Jewish Museum in Prague and funded by various sources. The bulk of the costs was covered by the Kooperativa a. s. insurance company (with which the Museum was insured), as

mediated by Aura Lloyd s. r. o. The remaining costs were covered by several international grants and the Museum's own resources. Major financial contributions towards the reconstruction of the Pinkas Synagogue were received from a number of sponsors from the Czech Republic and abroad and from international organizations, most notably: The World Monuments Fund (USA) this project was made possible, in part, by a grant from the WORLD



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reconstruction amounted to k 7.8 million.

On the first floor of the synagogue, the permanent exhibition "Children Drawings from Terezín 1942-44" from the Museum's collections also reopened. Among the Jewish inmates in Terezín, more than 10,000 were under the age of 15 at the time of their incarceration. The Museum's collection includes more than 4,000 original drawings made by these children. In the opening section of the display is a newly installed text about the Art in Extreme Situations programme which is held at a workshop organized by the Museum's Education and Culture Centre.

RENOVATION OF THE STAR ON THE PINKAS SYNAGOGUE

As part of the extensive Pinkas renovation project following last year's floods, an improvement was also made to the synagogue exterior. A Star of David was placed above what used to be the main entrance to the synagogue vestibule (from the former Malá Pinkas Lane), which it had previously adorned for centuries. It is not known when the Star of David was originally placed on the façade above the entrance to the Pinkas Synagogue. It is possible that this occurred during the extension of the vestibule and the women's gallery by the ghetto architect Judah Zoref de Herz before 1622, but it was probably added



later, most likely in the eighteenth century. In any case, a star above the synagogue entrance is evident in all the earliest illustrations of the synagogue dating from the nineteenth century. The star remained in the Pinkas Synagogue after the ghetto reconstruction and the demolition of surrounding houses until the 1950s, when it was removed as part of the ongoing building of the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust from Bohemia and Moravia. After many years, the Star of David has now returned to its original place, once again adorning the second oldest synagogue in Prague.

LONG-LOST FACES

In October 2003, a remarkable exhibition opened at the Robert Guttman Gallery of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Entitled Long-lost Faces - Recollections of Holocaust Victims in Documents and Photographs, this show marks the culmination of a successful project, "Help Search for Neighbours who Disappeared", which was initiated and launched in December 2001 (see Newsletter 1/2002). The Museum contacted the public through a series of media appeals for assistance in the search for mementos, photographs, documents and other material that recall the lives and fates of Bohemian and Moravian Jews before the Second World War. Our aim was to bring today's and future generations closer to those who became victims of one of the greatest atrocities in the history of mankind.



The response from the public was greater than we had imagined. In the course of two years, we were contacted by more than 500 people, including a few from abroad, who provided about 3,000 different documents and objects. Some documents were donated, others were made available to copy. In this way the Museum acquired not only official documents, such as public notices, bulletins and administrative forms from the period of the Nazi occupation,

but also a wide range of personal items - such as portraits, family and school photographs, personal documents, birth and wedding certificates, reports, identification cards, passports and membership cards, as well as official and illegal correspondence from home, Terezín and other Nazi camps and ghettos. Other valuable sources for illustrating the everyday lives of Jewish inmates include diaries, scrapbooks, poems and personal narratives. There is also a completely separate group of small items which were made in concentration camps, such as toys and gifts.

The exhibition highlights a selection of material that effectively records the variety of the newly acquired documents relating to the Nazi genocide of the

Jews. The material in its entirety was transferred to the care of the Museum's Holocaust Department, whose staff have set about the task of researching, inventorying and storing it in archive and photo collections. This has produced a new collection that will constitute an important source for historians. The exhibition was curated by Jana Šplíchalová and Anita Franková and runs from 16 October 2003 until 15 January 2004. It has enjoyed widespread public interest and will later travel across the Czech Republic and abroad.



EXHIBITION OF JEWISH FESTIVALS AND HISTORY IN NÁCHOD

The Regional Museum of Náchod in north-eastern Bohemia has followed the Děčín Synagogue as the next venue for our travelling exhibition "Jewish Traditions and Customs" and "History of the Jewish in Bohemia and Moravia". (See Newsletter 3/2003.) Náchod, which lies on the old road from Prague to Krakow, used to have

a very old and important Jewish community.

In the new regional museum, both sections of the travelling exhibition were supplemented by original material that was provided by the Náchod Museum and loaned from local citizens. The most valuable of such items included drawings by the local artist O. Šafář, dating from the 1950s and 60s. These works depict in detail the old Náchod Jewish Quarter, including an old baroque synagogue. Šafář also provided early photographs of the former ghetto which was destroyed during the second world war and demolished in the 1960s. Also remarkable were documents of several major Jewish textile works in Náchod and its surroundings (such as the Mautner spinning factory), of which there were once several dozen here. The more recent history was enlivened by numerous photos of Jewish citizens from Náchod who were engaged by the English and Soviet armies in action against the Nazis, and photos of members of well-known local families who were executed during the Shoah. This part of the exhibition was rounded off with a display of complete lists comprising information on all the Shoah victims from the Náchod district.

The second part of the exhibition was supplemented by extant ritual items from the collection of the Regional Museum of Náchod - in particular, Holy Ark decorations from the Náchod Synagogue, two curtains and several Torah mantles, candelabra and mezuzot. The most remarkable Jewish items in the collection of the Náchod Museum are two well-preserved leather water skins, previously used by Jewish firemen; bearing the inscription "Kehila kedoshah Náchod" (The Holy Community of Náchod) and dating from 1781, they were

probably used
as a symbol of the Jewish firemen of Náchod.

Next year, this travelling exhibition will be on display in Moravia, the first venue being in the Museum of Local History in Šumperk.

LECTURE SERIES THE JEWISH MINORITY IN 1930S CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Since October 2003 the Museum's Education and Culture Centre has been hosting a series of lectures on the Jewish minority in 1930s Czechoslovakia, which follows on from last year's lecture series that focused on the 1920s. This series has been put together in association with several major experts. Dr. Blanka Soukupová, CSc. From the Faculty of Humanistic Studies at Charles University, focused, among other things, on the Czech Jewish movement and anti-Semitism. Dr. Kateřina Čapková covered the history of Zionism, Dr. Ludmila Nesládková dealt with the socio-demographic characteristics of the Jewish minority, and Dr. Peter Salner, a leading researcher, will be reporting on the situation in Slovakia. The entire programme, including annotations of individual lectures, is available on the Museum's website and will be published at a later date.

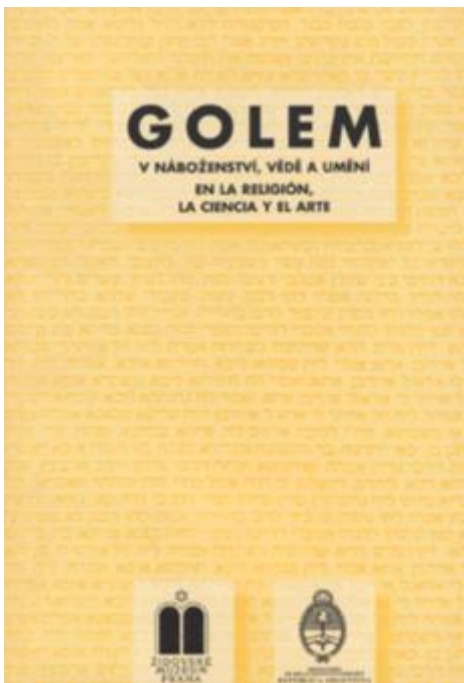
UNVEILING OF A MEMORIAL PLAQUE FOR JOSEF POLÁK IN KOŠICE

On 29 October 2003, as part of the Czech Days in Slovakia, a memorial plaque was unveiled on the historic building of the Eastern Slovakian Museum in Košice for Josef Polák (1886-1945), the important Czech Jewish art historian, museologist, preservationist and educationalist. In 1919-1938, Polák was director of the above museum which, at the time, was becoming a lively centre of cultural life with a number of interesting exhibitions on traditional and modern art. Polák's ample experience bore fruit in 1942-44, when he became one of the leading figures at the Jewish Central Museum in Prague. He perished in 1945, probably in Auschwitz. The unveiling of the plaque was attended by the Consul General of the Czech Republic in Slovakia, Vítězslav Pivoňka, and the director of the Slovak national Museum, Dr. Peter Maráky. In connection with the unveiling of the plaque, the Jewish Museum in Prague financially contributed to the publication of an illustrated leaflet on the life and work of Josef Polák.



IS HANUKKAH YOUR HOLIDAY?

On 7 December 2003, an event entitled "Is Hanukkah your Holiday?" was held in the Jerusalem Synagogue in Prague. Its aim was to bring Hanukkah closer to all those who have Jewish roots but are not actively involved in Jewish life. This event, which was widely advertised several weeks in advance, provided a wealth of interesting information on the Festival of Lights, which has been celebrated for over two millennia. Attention was placed on the historical background of the festival and related customs in a loosely based and clear form. Children from the Prague Lauder Jewish schools sang Hanukkah songs and lit candles in the special Hanukkah candelabrum - the Hanukkiyah. The event was initiated by the conservative Jewish society Bejt Praha and supported by the Jewish Museum in Prague in association with the Jewish Community in Prague and the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic



NEW PUBLICATIONS THE GOLEM IN RELIGION, SCIENCE AND ART

The Czech-Spanish publication, *The Golem in Religion, Science and Art*, comprises ten papers by renowned Czech and Argentine authors. These papers were given at a seminar which was held as part of the Golem 2002-5763 project at the Museum's Education and Culture Centre in October last year (See [Newsletter 4/2002](#)). The aim of this seminar was to connect various scientific disciplines by means of the Golem theme, and this is reflected in each paper. The historical development and basic interpretation of the Golem theme is summed up by Leo Pavlát. The Golem of Rabbi Loew and the possible meanings and interpretations of its creation are dealt with by Vladimír Sadek. The perspective of traditional Judaism on the creation of golems is put forward by the Chief Rabbi of Prague Ephraim Karol Sidon. Psychological aspects of the golem

phenomenon are brought to our attention by the Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka. The Golem's place in the world of myths, and also of genetics and informatics, is explored by Zdeněk Neubauer. A large part of the publication is focused on illustrations of the Golem in art.

Maria Kodama de Borges stresses the major influence of the Kabala on the work of her husband Jorge Luis Borges, whose poem *The Golem* was one of the inspirations for the whole project. The Golem in Czech literature is the topic of Ladislava Hájková's paper.

The texts on the Golem in Czech art (by Arno Pařík) and the Golem myth in cinematography (by Blažena Urgošíková) are both richly illustrated. The

publication ends with a witty overview of Golem stories and behind-the-scenes insights into the making of Pavel Šmok's ballet "The Golem". A select bibliography and filmography is provided for those interested in further study and each paper has a résumé in English. The publication is 268 pages long and has 16 pages of illustrations. It is available at all the Museum's retail areas and on the inter-net at:

www.jewishmuseum.cz/shop.

PROMINENT VISITS

- Delegation of the Israeli Kneset led by speaker Reuven Rivlin
- The wives of ambassadors to the Czech Republic
- The Dutch Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Ida L. van Veldhuizen-Rothenbücher
- Tova Pinto, Director of the Jewish Agency for Israel's Delegation for Central and Eastern Europe

