

MENORAH

**PAPERS FROM THE
WORKSHOP JEWISH
ART AND TRADITION**

Belgrade 5769 - 2009

МЕНОРА

**РАДОВИ РАДИОНИЦЕ
ЈЕВРЕЈСКА УМЕТНОСТ
И ТРАДИЦИЈА**

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JEWISH ART AND TRADITION

A WORKSHOP AT THE FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

The first in a series of workshops entitled Jewish Art and Tradition was held at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, between January 27th and February 10th, 2008. It was organized by the Department of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, the Jewish Historical Museum of Belgrade and international experts from Israel and Europe. Being the first of its kind at the host institution and in Serbia in general, it presented to the students and the broader academic community an academic curriculum which strove to introduce a wide range of subjects related to Jewish history, literature, art and religion. By studying the various aspects of the local Jewish community, as well as Jewish communities worldwide and their relations with nations among which they lived from Antiquity to the present, students attending this workshop gained a new understanding of Jewish history, religion, and cultural heritage.

In the course of this workshop thirty students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, from various departments of the Faculty of Philosophy (Department of Art History, Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Department of History, Department of Archaeology, Department of Sociology) as well as the Faculty for Architecture, University of Belgrade, along with employees of the Jewish Historical Museum from Belgrade and the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia, attended classes organized into five courses.

Milica Mihailović, former head curator and director of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade offered a course entitled Jews on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. This course presented the history of settling and the life of Jews on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, their rich social life within the Jewish community as well as the changeable relation of the milieus of their settlement towards the different communities over several centuries. This series of lectures showed how Jews contributed to the diversity of the Balkan ethnic mosaic by introducing new customs and a different language. Following the tragic Holocaust destruction of their communities, the survivors took on the task of preserving traditions and nurturing the memory of their ancestors

Eliezer Papo, professor of Ladino language and literature at Ben-Gurion University of Beer Sheba, Israel, lectured on the subject of Judeo-Hispanic literature. Over four centuries, from 1492 and their expulsion from Spain until a gradual linguistic assimilation in the first decades of the XX century, all popular



and secular literature of the Balkan Sephardis was written exclusively in Judeo-Hispanic or Ladino. As in the rest of the Jewish world, the Balkan Sephardic rabbis wrote religious texts in Hebrew, the holy language, and reached for the Judeo-Hispanic idiom of the common people only when producing manuals for the broadest public. This course by prof. Papo took into consideration all the more significant genres of Judeo-Hispanic literature, both oral (adages, tales and spells) and written: secular (novel, drama, satire and parody) as well as rabbinical (responsa, ethics, sermons, etc).

Mirjam Rajner, professor of modern and Jewish art at Bar Ilan University in Israel, gave a course on Jewish art. This series of lectures strove to present the fact that, regardless of the words of the Second Commandment and the traditional identity of the Jews as the People of the Book, visual arts are an accompanying element of Jewish religion and history. Prof. Rajner's course reviewed the development of Jewish art from Antiquity to modern times, including synagogue and ceremonial art, the art of book illumination, painting and sculpture. Case studies were chosen from different periods and various geographic locations in order to cast a light on the continuing dialogue between content and form, between Jewish communities and the nations among which those communities existed.

Rudolf Klein, architect and professor of history of architecture at St. Stephen's University in Budapest, presented a course entitled Architecture and the Jews. Although for the greater part of their history the Jews employed architects of non-Jewish origin, buildings raised for Jews and, lately, those designed by Jews, constitute a special chapter in the history of architecture. Due to the religious ban on creating graven images, numerous persecutions and migrations of the Jews, a true „Jewish architecture“ was never created. Nonetheless, practically every period in the history of architecture displays certain Jewish characteristics or elements. During the XX century the role of Jewish architects in creating modern architecture was quite considerable. This course concentrates on both theoretical and practical aspects of Jewish contribution to Western architecture from Antiquity to the present.

Rabbi Isaac Asiel, Chief Rabbi of Serbia and Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Belgrade, lectured on Jewish religion and customs. Together with Christianity and Islam, Judaism is one of the greatest monotheistic religions of Western civilization. Still, its history, the ways in which this religion has persevered and been practiced, as demonstrated by religious customs and regulations, remain insufficiently known, thus opening the way to erroneous interpretation, misunderstandings, even anti-Semitism. This course presented a brief history of the development of Judaism and the different aspects of life of members of the Jew-



ish religious community: the significance of the synagogue and of prayer, the celebrating of the Shabbat, the cycle of Jewish holidays and the life cycle of a Jew.

Along with these lecturers, who held classes daily on their prospective subjects, there were several invited speakers who delivered lectures on specific subjects of their expertise related to Jewish art and tradition. Among them were prof. Milan Ristović (Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade), Milan Koljanin Ph.D. (Institute of Contemporary History, Belgrade), Filip David (writer and professor at the Faculty of Drama, Belgrade), Stefan Sabljčić (chazan of the Belgrade Synagogue and musician) and prof. Jelena Erdeljan (Department of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade).

This workshop also included a presentation of Haggadah in the form of a didactic exhibition entitled "Haggadah, From Illumination to Illustration", prepared by Milica Mihailovic and Barbara Panić, curators of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, and presented at the Institute of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, where all workshop classes were held. This exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue explaining the function and the art of the Haggadah, the text of which was written by Milica Mihailović. Outside the classroom, workshop activities included a field trip to Novi Sad and Subotica and organized class visits to the synagogues of those two cities, major monuments of Jewish art and tradition in the region, including lectures in situ by prof. Rudolf Klein. There were organized and guided tours of the Jewish Historical Museum, the old Jewish cemetery of Subotica and Dorćol, a part of Belgrade traditionally populated by the Jewish community in pre-WWII times. Especially instructive and rewarding were the organized visits to the synagogue of Belgrade and attendance of workshop students at Friday night and Saturday morning services held by rabbi Isaac Asiel. Following the Erev Shabat service all participants of the workshop, students and professors, were invited by Mr. Aleksandar Nećak, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia, to a share the traditional meal with members of the community.

This workshop began with a solemn opening ceremony on January 27th, 2008, International Holocaust Day, hosted by the Dean of the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy, prof. Aleksandar Kostić, and Vice-Dean for Research and International Cooperation of the same Faculty, prof. Jelena Erdeljan. In attendance at the ceremony were more than a hundred distinguished scholars and prominent public figures from Serbia, as well as members of the Jewish community. The Faculty of Philosophy was most deeply honored by the presence at this opening ceremony of the H. E. Arthur Koll, Ambassador of the State of Israel to Serbia.

Judging by the excellent results of evaluation of workshop activities carried out among the students and the satisfaction of all lecturers and other staff



involved in this project, this workshop dedicated to Jewish art and tradition was a great success. Not only did it open up a new field of study in academic circles in Serbia, it initiated bonds between institutions from Serbia, Israel and Hungary which have led to fruitful cooperation and significant results in the field of study of Jewish heritage in South East Europe. Most of all, it succeeded in connecting students and professors in their endeavor to reach a more profound understanding of cultural diversity in the region. During the closing session of the workshop, both students and lecturers expressed their desire to continue working together towards this goal and expressed their hope that this initial gathering shall be continued in another session of this workshop which did, indeed, take place at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, in February 2009.

This volume presents three particularly commended papers produced as a result of research carried out by workshop students under the mentorship and guidance of professors Mirjam Rajner, Rudolf Klein and Eliezer Papo, and the assistance of the staff of the Jewish Historical Museum from Belgrade. These papers, presenting subjects from three different domains of Jewish art and tradition – ceremonial art, architecture and literature, offer an original and significant contribution to the study of Jewish cultural heritage.

The text by Vuk Dautović, Amulet Collection from the Jewish Historical Museum, presents a detailed catalogue raisonné of objects from the legate of Hinko Lederer, a donor and benefactor of the museum. The author offers meticulous descriptions of the amulets and an interpretation of the symbolic meaning of images and texts found on a total of 25 items from this collection consisting of pendants, kutubs (including those of Yemenite and Ottoman origin) and a small yad made of gold, silver and other precious metals, as well as gemmae of semiprecious stone (achate, marble) and an inscribed parchment scroll. On the grounds of textual and paleographic analysis and interpretation of complex anagrams, the author points out that there is clearly a connection between texts found on the amulets of this collection and those of a number of prayers, psalms and parts of Tannah believed to have prophylactic effect. This, in turn, was instrumental in his effort to determine the type and function of each individual item intended for private use.

In his paper, The Synagogue from Pančevo (1907-1956), Milan Prosen discusses the history and fate of the Jewish community from Pančevo and its synagogue, and offers a detailed study of the architecture of what was once not only the most prominent monument of Jewish architecture but rather a landmark of South Banat. This synagogue was designed and built between 1907 and 1909 by Karoly Fenyves, a Budapest architect who had previously been engaged in the project of designing and constructing the dome of the synagogue in Novi Sad,



as assistant to the architect Lipot Baumhorn. The synagogue of Pančevo was his first major individual project. The fact that even the famous Ferenc J. Raichl took part in the contest for the best architectural design, testifies of the scope and importance of the enterprise of raising the synagogue of the Jewish community of Pančevo. The synagogue complex on Dr. Kasapinovića Str. originally included not only the building of the house of prayer but also residential quarters for the rabbi, offices, congregation hall and a mikhveh. It suffered destruction during World War II and was finally torn down in 1956. Once a combination of Orientalism and Hungarian art deco, only fragments of this building remain today, including a decalogue kept at the Jewish Historical Museum of Belgrade. However, preserved architectural plans and designs, as well as old photographs, offer an excellent basis for both the study of the structure and a possible reconstruction.

The text by Viktor Popović is entitled *The Autochthonous Children of Bosnia and "Carpetbaggers": Sephardis and Ashkhenazis in the "Bundle"*, a Humorous-Satirical Column by Sava Skarić. In this paper the author analyzes the attitude of Sava Skarić, a prominent representative and an influential creator of Serbian public opinion in Bosnia and Herzegovina during Austrian occupation, towards Bosnian Jews. In the history of Serbian political writing Skarić is known as an advocate of Serbian-Muslim unity and a fierce opponent of Austrian occupation (1876-1918) as well as of Croat pretensions to Bosnia and Herzegovina within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This paper examines, for the first time, the question of his attitude towards the Jewish population of Bosnia. Having studied in detail the texts of his columns, the author concluded that his stance is ambiguous. Skarić makes a clear difference between the Sephardis whom he regards as autochthonous children of Bosnia, together with Serbs and Muslims, and the Ashkhenazis for whom he has little sympathy and whom he considers to be exponents of Austrian occupation and a modernism which in those days threatened the traditional way of life in Bosnia, of which the Sephardis were an integral part. Although his brittle tongue often finds no justification, the subjective opinions of Skarić, a journalist and an intellectual from Sarajevo, does offer excellent insight of the life of Jews in diaspora, the clash of cultures, the struggle for national identity and the tempestuous social climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the dawn of the XX century.

Jelena Erdeljan

