



**Center for Urban History of East Central Europe**

**International Conference**

**Urban Jewish Heritage and the History of East Central Europe**

**Lviv, 29-31 October 2008**

On 29-31 October 2008 an international conference entitled “The Urban Jewish Heritage and the History of East Central Europe” was held in Lviv at the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe. The theme of the Center of Urban History’s conference was not chosen as the result of happenstance: The multi-faceted material and cultural heritage of the Jewish civilization in East Central Europe, which was almost destroyed during the Holocaust, was revealed during the years of war as being in a complete state of collapse. As a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the liberalization of socio-political life, however, the process of revealing, returning and rejuvenating the memory of the Jewish heritage of East Central Europe has begun. The regeneration and revitalization of the Jewish historical components of this region has become a topic of particular scholarly interest during the last decade. This subject matter includes complicated aspects of theory and practice: The connection between the past, memory and history; the problem of reality, authenticity and the surreal; city planning and economic aspects of restoring the historical heritage, etc. Of critical importance is the issue of space – its symbolic significance and practical use in general demand contextualization within the framework of the Jewish history of East Central Europe.

It is significant that a conference dedicated to Jewish heritage took place in Lviv, once the capital of Hapsburg Halychyna, and an important urban center of Poland during the interwar period that, in its time, played a central role in the Jewish urban life of East Central Europe.

For several days the Center of Urban History became a meeting place for scholars representing diverse areas of study and various countries. Some of the foremost scholars on European matters from Ukraine, Europe, and America traveled to Lviv.

The conference began with the opening of the exhibition “Lviv A World A Way.” Material for the exhibition was kindly provided to the Center for

Urban History by the New Synagogue Berlin – Centrum Judaicum Foundation with the support of the Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) of Germany. The exhibition entitled “Wo ist Lemberg?” (Where is Lemberg (Lviv)?) had been created by the New Synagogue Berlin – Centrum Judaicum Foundation. Over the course of the autumn and winter of 2007 the exhibition was on display in the facilities of the previous synagogue on Oranienburger Strasse in Berlin.

The exhibition consists of twelve topical compositions: the train station, coffee shops, confessions, synagogues, theaters, the university, medicine, the book market, publishers, the “Artes” group, “Polish Radio Lwow,” and the Boim Chapel. By means of these compositions, the exhibition displays artistic and scholarly accomplishments that were made possible through the cooperation of people from different nationalities, languages and religions present in Lviv before 1939. It is an exhibition about a city in which cultures, languages and religions of the east and west intermingled, and where Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, Armenian and German citizens built their lives. That city, though, does not exist any more. War and violence ruined the cultural diversity of Lviv. The Jewish population died under the hand of the Nazis, and the Polish inhabitants were forced by the Soviet regime to relocate after World War II. But the memory of this bygone city has remained in the buildings, streets, texts, and histories. Today the inhabitants and guests of Lviv are once again revealing the past to themselves. This exhibition is destined to contribute to such a revelation, uniting the unknown, forgotten, and erased with the famous and known.

The exposition is presented in Ukrainian, Polish and English. It will be on display until the end of March 2009.

The conference consisted of five thematic panel discussions. The inaugural speech was delivered by Ruth Ellen Gruber, a well-known American writer and author of the book “Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Europe”. While conveying her experience with the revitalization of the Jewish heritage of Europe, the author employed the terms “imagined” and “real” Jewish quarters to indicate that Jewish studies in modern-day Europe are undertaken predominantly by non-Jews who, while studying Jewish heritage, becoming attached to it and penetrating this real world, recreate it to correspond to that which they imagine.

During the first panel discussion participants of the conference considered the reasons for the collapse of the Jewish heritage and the need for its revitalization. During this discussion Omer Bartov (Brown University, Providence), Leonid Finberg (Center of Judaic at “Kyiv Mohylya Academy” National University), Piotr Pilyuk (Sociol and Cultural Association of Jews of Poland , Warsaw) and Haim Gertner (Director of the Yad Vashem

Archive) reported on the current condition of Jewish historic sites in East Central Europe as well as various attempts to collect and process the Jewish documentary and spiritual heritage of contemporary Ukraine. During the discussion, moderator Veronica Wendland (University of Leipzig) expressed the opinion that western historians should leave behind stereotypes about Ukrainian anti-Semitism and, while taking into account the collective trauma of Ukrainians, analyze the reasons for their “silence” about participating in the killing of Jews during World War II. She likewise emphasized the changes that have taken place in Ukrainian historiography during recent years, in particular the tendency to transition from writing the “Ukrainian history” of Ukraine to writing the history of Ukraine.

That same day Serhiy Tereshchenko made a presentation on one of the projects of the Center for Urban History entitled “Lviv Interactive.” This interactive map project was created by the staff of the Center with the goal of showing city life from a historical perspective. The map shows present objects of Lviv but, in contrast to other websites of the city, indicates the influence of history on the current condition of Lviv – its appearance, function, and socio-cultural system. (For more details on this project please refer to the website of the Center for Urban History at [www.lvivcenter.org](http://www.lvivcenter.org).) Some mini-projects were presented within the framework of this project: “Lviv Monuments,” “Lviv Streets,” and “Around Starojevreiska.” From the mini-project “Lviv Monuments” the memorial to the victims of the Lviv ghetto was displayed; from the “Lviv Streets” mini-project (overseen by Ihor Melnyk) Starojevreiska, Kolijiwsczyny square and other streets on which Jews used to live were shown; from the mini-project “Lviv Cemeteries” old and new Jewish cemeteries were exhibited; and from the mini-project “Around Starojevreiska” (overseen by Oksana Boiko) sacred objects of the Jewish quarters as well as a catalog of mezuzah was presented.

After lunch participants of the conference had the opportunity to visit the remains of the Golden Rose/ Turei Zahav Synagogue. The history of the building, current excavations and plans for rebuilding the synagogue were presented by Yuriy Lukomskiy, scholarly co-worker of the archeology department of the Ivan Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies and conductor of excavations of the synagogue remains, as well as by Dr. Serhiy Kravtsov, researcher of the architecture and history of this synagogue.

This excursion was thematically connected with the second panel discussion of the conference: Serhiy Kravtsov (Univeristy of Judaic, Jerusalem), Rudolf Klein (University of St. Stefan, Budapest) and Thomas Hubka (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) discussed architectural and art-historical aspects of the material Jewish heritage. Bob Martins (Vienna Technical University) spoke about the possibilities of digital representations of synagogues by using the example of Vienna.

The third panel considered questions relating to the urban revitalization of Jewish history. Panel participants Samuel Gruber (University of Syracuse, New York) and Anna Lipphardt (University of Constanz) discussed the following basic question: Can previous centers of Jewish heritage – such as Lviv and Vilnius – resurrect and preserve this heritage? In the context of this panel discussion sociologist Natalya Zaitseva-Chipak presented the results of a social survey entitled “The attitude of the current population of Lviv toward the city’s Jewish heritage,” which was conducted by the “Sotsinform” Ukrainian Center for Studying Popular Opinion on request of the Center for Urban History.

The fourth panel discussion of the conference was devoted to the historical recollection of Jews. Panel participants Shelley Salamensky (University of California), Peter Hörst (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn), and Delphin Bechtel (University of Paris IV) used the examples of various cities of East Central Europe from different historical periods to demonstrate the potential of recollection.

Participants of the last panel discussion were the following museum experts and staff members of Jewish museums: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (University of New York, Exposition Director of the Museum of Polish Jewish History), Sabine Offe (University of Bremen), Felicitas Haimann-Jelinek (Jewish Museum Vienna), and Cilly Kugelman (Jewish Museum Berlin). These participants shared their experience in working in these scholarly institutions and considered the question of how to make a Jewish museum not only an attraction to the visitor but also emotionally substantial. The Director of the Museum of the History of Religion in Lviv, Zoryana Bilyk, and Maksym Martyn, from the department of Judaic, presented a project for the creation of a Jewish museum in Lviv on Starojevreiska Street. This panel gave the museum experts and scholars of Jewish matters the opportunity to jointly discuss the idea of a Jewish museum in Lviv, expressing their observations, cautions and advice regarding the project.

The closing discussion of the conference was also very fruitful. In the context of a debate on the renewal and preservation of the Jewish heritage in Lviv, there was a very lively discussion about the current condition of the Golden Rose synagogue. This question elicited many emotions and diverse, occasionally contradictory positions – from an insistence that the structure has to be completely rebuilt to the view that the synagogue’s current remains must be preserved.

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