



News Update – Winter 2007/2008

The Jerusalem Index of Jewish Art

The Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts Section headed by Mrs. Michal Sternthal is about to complete its research on 61 Hebrew illuminated manuscripts housed in the Austrian National Library in Vienna; we are seeking additional funds for another year in order to prepare the catalogue *Die Illuminierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*.



Vienna Siddur SeMaK, 14th century,
Cod. Hebr. 75, fol. 1v.

The next project on the agenda is documentation and research of 50 Hebrew illuminated manuscripts in the Library in Munich (Bayerische StaatsBibliothek). Of about 450 Hebrew manuscripts in the collection, about 120 are illuminated, of which 50 we would like to study in depth. These range from the 13th to the 18th centuries and include Bibles, liturgical books like *mahzorim* and *siddurim* as well as philosophical, medical,

legal, *kabbalistic*, geometrical and astronomical treatises.



Dedicatory plaque, Ioannina, Greece, 1892

The **Ritual Objects Section** headed by Ms. Ariella Amar completed the research on dedicatory plaques, known as *shadai'ot* found in the Romaniot community in Greece. Although the custom ceased to exist, over 1000 plaques were documented during several expeditions conducted around the world. They bear witness to the popularity as well as the evolution of the tradition. This collection of 100 plaques housed in the Jewish Museum of Greece was studied in depth and represents a sample of the larger collection which exists worldwide.

The UNESCO Project “**Endangered Moveable Objects and Their Untold Stories**”, which entails the posting on the Center's website of 100 ritual objects and Hebrew Illuminated manuscripts, has just been completed by the Hebrew Illuminated

Manuscripts and the Ritual Objects Sections with the guidance and assistance of Gilad Hemed, the webmaster and computer expert, who also made the objects accessible on our website. The 100 selected objects originate from various communities and cultures around the world, from the middle ages to the present. Our researchers have outlined their stylistic development and decorations, and determined their dates and origin.

In June 2007 **Ms. Amar** carried out a survey of **Romanian synagogues** and took part in a conference delivering a lecture: “Between tradition and innovation - the decoration programme of Romanian synagogues.”

In the last academic year researchers of the **Architecture Section** headed by Prof. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin completed an in-depth study on **four wooden synagogues in Lithuania: Alanta, Kaltinėnai Seda and Žiežmariai**. It includes the history of each community, description of the synagogues and their measured plans.

Center historian Dr. Levin travelled to **Lithuania** in June 2007 as part of our joint project with the Lithuanian Academy of Fine Arts and the Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews. The project's aim is the preparation of a catalogue of the extant synagogues in Lithuania. Dr. Levin took part in four documentation trips, during which he trained Lithuanian students participating in this project, supervised their documentation work and provided his expertise. The student documentation continued during the entire month and the majority of Lithuanian synagogues have been documented.



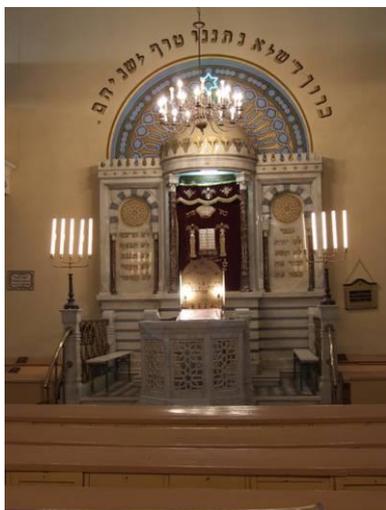
Synagogue with rabbi's house in Kaltinėnai, view from north, photo by Z.Arshavsky

Synagogues were documented in Troškūnai (wooden synagogue), Žemaičių Naujamiestis (wooden with wall-paintings), Alytus (brick with wall-paintings), Skaudvilė, Švėkšna, Klaipėda and Raguva.

Our Senior Researcher Dr. Kravtsov and Dr. Levin participated in August 2007 in two summer schools, organized by the Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization “Sefer” and the Chais Center of the Hebrew University. In Zhitomir, Dr. Kravtsov delivered five lectures on architecture of synagogues in Ukraine during the 16th to the 20th centuries. He also participated in a one-day expedition to the cities of Berdychiv, Ruzhin and Skvira.

In the Summer School held in Belarus Dr. Levin gave lectures on the history of the Jews in Belarus and visited with students 17 townlets where Jewish cemeteries and synagogue buildings still exist. In the Summer School based in Czernowitz he gave lectures about Jews in Galicia and Bukovina and visited 16 places in Bukovina, Galicia and Podolia where synagogue buildings and Jewish cemeteries can still be found.

Following the Conference in Braunschweig in October 2007 (see below) Dr. Kravtsov travelled to **Latvia** where he conducted a



Peitavas Syangogue, Rīga, Latvia.

preliminary survey in several places with the help of Mejers Melers of the Jewish Museum of Latvia and Mr. Valts Apinis of the University of Riga. The places they surveyed were: Rīga (its Old City, City Center, Moscow Forstadt and Šmerli Cemetery), Jurmala (Bulduri, Dubulty, Kemerī, and Majori), the north-western historical region of Kurzeme

(Courland), the south-eastern region of Latgale, and the southern Zemgale.

Dr. Kravtsov surveyed about forty synagogues and other extant Jewish ritual buildings, including one mikveh in Kandava, one cemetery chapel and cemetery ohalim at Šmerli. Eight synagogues and prayer houses (two in Bulduri, three in Dubulty, one in Liepāja, Rēzekne and Subate) are wooden; a number of masonry synagogues are spanned with meticulous wooden vaults, as is the case in Aizpute, Ludza, Tukums, and Valdemarpils. The wooden vault in Aizpute partially preserves authentic painting (cloudy sky with stars).

In **Vilnius, Lithuania** Dr. Kravtsov opened the exhibition of documented synagogues, prepared in partnership with the Art Academy of Vilnius, Vilnius Polytechnic University, and the Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews in Vilnius.

Conferences/Seminars

In April 2007, the Center for Jewish Art held a seminar “**A Tribute to Aliza for her Seventieth Birthday and Long Years of Activity at the Center for Jewish Art**”, where members



Aliza's speech, 26th April 2007

of the Center presented their research. It was particularly heart-warming to witness the

scope of scholarship at the Center in spite of lack of sufficient funds.

The very successful international conference “**Jewish Architecture in Europe**” was held at the Technische Universität Braunschweig in October 2007, a joint event organized by Braunschweig University and the Center for Jewish Art, with about seventy participants from Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Israel, Italy, Poland, Russia,

Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and USA. More details can be obtained from www.bet-tfila.org.

During 2007, the Society for Jewish Art held a seminar on “**Miron Sima and Colleagues**” in February, a seminar on “**Jerusalem of Lithuania: Art and Life of the Jewish Community in Vilnius**” in March, its annual conference on Lag Ba’Omer in May on “**The Revival of the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem**”, and a seminar and workshop on “**Paper Cuts: Tribute to Judith Shadur’s Work**”, all organized by Amia Boasson.

In November-December we held our annual **Mordechai and Nassia Narkiss Lecture Series**, where Prof. Bezalel Narkiss, Ms. Ariella Amar and Ms. Anna Nizza gave lectures relating to their research. Dr. Katrin Kessler received the Mordechai and Nassia Narkiss Prize for excelling in the research of Jewish Architecture.



Dr. Katrin Kessler

Visitors at the Center

Dr. Leonora Bergman, Deputy Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, visited the Center in April 2007 and held discussions with Prof. Cohen-Mushlin regarding documentation of Polish synagogues and potential financial support. Unfortunately, we have not managed up to now to raise funds for this important project.

In October 2007, the Center hosted **Prof. Eva Engel-Holland**, who has recently completed a 42-volume edition of



Moses Mendelssohn

entire works, and has delivered here a lecture on “**Moses Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem.**”

Recently **Mr. Mejers Melers**, representative of the Jewish Museum in Latvia, met with Prof. Cohen-Mushlin and Dr. Kravtsov to discuss the project of **documentation of synagogues in Latvia**. The two institutions will cooperate with the Latvian Authorities for Antiquities, with local architect Sergey Ryzh, professors and students of Latvian Polytechnic University and Rabbi Menachem Barkahan. The aim is to produce a catalogue of synagogues in Latvia.

An Important Slide Collection was Donated to the Center

A collection of 10,000 slides of Jewish Art, mostly of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, was donated by **Prof. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna**, Director Emeritus of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris.

Obituary

Prof. Kurt Schubert, a dear friend of the Center, died at the age of 83 in February 2007. Several years ago he donated the large collection of manuscript reproductions devotedly collected by him and his late wife Prof. Ursula Schubert. The "Ursula and Kurt Schubert (Vienna) Archive of Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts" is used by scholars and students who, through their work, learn to appreciate the Schuberts' scholarship and contribution towards the enhancement of Judaic Studies and Jewish Art.

We appreciate our donors' and friends' interest and involvement in the Center's work and would like to draw your attention to Klil's new bank account:

-Bank HaPoalim, 38 Hapalmach St. (Branch 574), Jerusalem, Israel

-Swift code (for international transfers): POALILIT

-Account # **12-574-234039** in the name of **Klil, International Society for Jewish Art**.

For United States tax deductible contributions, please make your check payable and send it to:

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11 E. 69th St., New York, NY 10028, earmarked for the Center for Jewish Art

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