

Our dear Friends,
We are happy to be able for the 6th time to greet you and your families
and all Jewish people in Israel and in the world with Rosh-ha-Shanah.
Peace and Happiness!
Shalom!

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We present you the diligent work our museum managed to accomplish for this year since last Rosh-ha-Shanah. We thank those whose support greatly helped us in this work and encouraged us for further achievements. We have established new exhibitions, published new books, held lectures and educational programs in Lithuania and abroad. This is our duty to our families gone, our modest input to fight the rising devil of Antisemitism. All we do, dear friends is for our people and our history. It is you who make this possible. Thank you very much!

In the name of the museum's staff and its director Mr. Zingeris,

Rachel Kostanian
Vicedirector

CONTENT

Jewish Life in Lithuania	page 2
New exhibitions	page 3+4
Samuel Bak	page 4
New Books	page 5
Events	page 6
Presentations & Conferences	page 7
Friends and visitors	page 8

EXHIBITIONS

JEWISH LIFE IN LITHUANIA

On February the 22nd, 2002 the exhibition "Jewish Life in Lithuania" had its first opening ceremony in the Tolerance Center of our museum. It inaugurated the start of a tour, which will bring the exhibition to various towns in Lithuania. The exhibition was already shown in the Parliament of Lithuania, in the Raseiniai Region History Museum, in the Jacques Lipchitz-Museum in Druskininkai, and at an international conference on the Holocaust in the Kaunas University. Besides its tour through Lithuania it will also travel to Brussels for the 23rd of September, the Lithuanian Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust.

The exhibition is a co-work of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, the Lithuanian History Institute and the Anne-Frank House (Amsterdam). Its main goal is to present an objective view on Lithuanian Jewry, its history and culture. The exhibition contains 30 panels. It starts with a few introduction panels and then covers the time from the XIV century, when Jews came to Lithuania up to nowadays. Of course it also deals with the tragedy of the Holocaust. Of about 220.000 Jews that lived in Lithuania only 6% survived. With these people a stunning Litvak civilization also disappeared. The exhibition speaks also about Jewish/Lithuanian relations throughout the centuries, the role of Jewish communities and anti-Semitism nowadays. Its concept is to be an educational project for schools and adults.

The exhibition is followed by a beautiful catalogue, which contains all texts and pictures of the exhibition, and by that gives a chance for further investigation of the topics. Two films, "And so they came and asked for help" and

"Surviving Ostland", were also prepared (by Sepp R. Brudermann and Niko Mayer) to be shown together with the exhibition. The latter contain interviews with survivors of the Holocaust in Lithuania and is an additional means of education. This film gives an impression and an overview of the situation for the Jewish population in German-occupied Lithuania (1941-1944), describes the tragic situation in the Ghettos of Vilnius and Kaunas, depicts different forms of resistance, reveals different struggles for survival and presents the difficulties of continuing life after surviving.

In the course of the exhibition seminars and teacher-trainings are organised to provide best preparation for guides and teachers who should be encouraged to deal with these topics during their lessons. The seminars are held by members of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum and the Lithuanian History Institute. They seem to be extremely important, as up to nowadays, even teachers have little knowledge about the Holocaust and very little material to teach with. Therefore we hope that with this work, we are doing something to change this situation and bring the history of Jewish life in Lithuania to the society at large.

JEWIS IN THE FIGHT FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF LITHUANIA 1918-1923

On February 15th, 2001, the eve of the Day of Restoration of Independence of Lithuania (1918 - 1920), the Tolerance Center of the museum opened an exhibition entitled "Jewish Soldiers Volunteers in the Fight for the Independence of Lithuania". The exhibition, documenting the Jewish contribution to Lithuania's independence was unveiled and will travel throughout Lithuanian public schools this year.

Germany administered Lithuanian territory during WW I. Before that, the country languished under czarist occupation more than a century, following the partition of the joint Polish-Lithuanian Republic in the late 18th century by Austria, Prussia and Russia. On February 16, 1918 the Lithuanian Council announced the reconstitution of Lithuania as a sovereign, democratic and independent state with Vilnius as its capital. Lithuania's national army was left weak and poorly armed after World War I. But a corp of 15,000 volunteer soldiers successfully defended their homeland from the opposing armies of Poland and Bolshevik-Russia, which were trying to conquer Lithuania. Among these volunteers were two to three thousand Jews. Jewish politicians urged their communities to volunteer for the country, and as a result Jews from all regions joined the army.

President Valdas Adamkus, members of the Seimas, foreign ambassadors, members of the Jewish Community of Lithuania and other guests honored our exhibition. The documentary "Žydai - Lietuvos savanoriai" ("Jews - Lithuanian volunteers") by filmmaker Saulius Beržinis was shown during the opening ceremony and a speech by Josifas Šapira - son of Isaakas Šapira, founder of the Union of Volunteering Jewish Soldiers - was presented.

About 60 of the Jewish soldiers who volunteered for the Lithuanian Army gave their lives in the fight for independence. Their names are listed on a commemorative plaque unveiled at the Tolerance Center. During the ceremony replica of the flag of Jewish Soldiers Assotiation, originally donated by Antanas Smetona, was presented.

TRAVELLING EXHIBITIONS

On January the 27th, 2002 the travelling exhibitions "Vilna Ghetto Posters" and "Lithuanian Rescuers" were opened in the City Art Gallery of Padua (Italy) and stayed there till May. The opening was inaugurated by museum vice-directors Rachel Kostanian and Onutė Biveinienė. The opening was attended by many high ranking guests and had great resonance in the mass media.

COMMEMORATION OF THE NOVEMBER POGROM

On the 9th of November, 2001 a commemoration at the museum's Tolerance Center marked the 53rd anniversary of the so called "Reichskristallnacht", the countrywide pogrom which was carried out in Nazi-Germany in 1938. During the ceremony the head of the Commitee for Human Rights in the Lithuanian Parliament G. Dalinkevičius delivered a speech to the 300 pupils who attended the commemoration organised by the museum for school-children.

COMING HOME: EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF SAMUEL BAK

A worldwide renowned artist, with over 60 exhibitions of his works in museums and galleries all around the world, Samuel Bak is almost unknown in his country of birth. Having been born in Vilnius in 1933 he had spent a safe

and sound childhood as a member of a big Jewish family, who once lived in the very center of the town (Vilniaus gatvė 10).

When Sam was three years old, a relative - the artist Arnold Adel - noticed the boy's extraordinary talents and recommended the parents to support this hobby by any means. And so they did. Also in the horrible and tragic times of Nazi-occupation, which ended for most of the family members in Paneriai, Samuel's parents and the Jewish intellectuals in the Ghetto - A. Sutzkever, S. Kaczerginski - managed to provide the eight years old artist with some paper, pencils, colors and other materials. His works were shown for the first time at an exhibition in the Ghetto, together with paintings of other Jewish (adult) artists, in 1942 and were seen as a symbol for hope towards a happier future. But still this future wasn't in sight. After the liquidation of the Ghetto, the survivors, among them Samuel Bak and his parents were brought to a work camp. The parents managed to hide their son during the Aktion against children. Every minute longer in the camp was of big danger for Samuel. Putting him in a bag with sawdust his father enabled the boy to escape to be killed later.

Samuel owes his survival to three great persons: Maria Mikulska, Jouzas Stakauskas and Valdas Žemaitis, who gave him a hideaway for several months in the archives of the Bernadin's church. These persons risked their lives to hide him and others. It made possible a happier future. Samuel emigrated to Israel in 1952, lived in Paris, New York, Rome, the U.S (actually his home) where he continued his artistic career becoming known world wide. Eventually we could welcome him and his exhibition "Returning Home" in Vilnius in September last year in the scope of the events commemorating the 60 year anniversary of the Jewish catastrophe in Lithuania. A special pleasure for us was to accept from the hand of the artist 37 of his wonderful works as a donation to the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, complementing to a collection of other 60 of his paintings in our museum, which by wonder had survived from the time of the Ghetto. It had been a wonderful encounter and we are happy to stay in touch with our great compatriot.

MARK ANTOKOLSKI AND VILNIUS

Our museum prepared and presented the entitled exhibition on 31st of July in the Tolerance Center, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the artist's death. The exhibition shows pictures of works of one of the most famous (Jewish-) Russian sculptors of the 19th century: Mark (Mordechai) Antokolski. The exhibition is divided into two periods of his work: the time before 1871, called the Vilnius-Petersburg period, when the artist created a set of works on Jewish themes, and the most productive time, after graduating from the St. Petersburg Art Academy (1871). Beside the reproductions of his works some original documents, like Antokolski's birth certificate - just recently found in the archive in Vilnius - are shown. The preparation of the exhibition has been assisted by the Lithuanian Historical State Archive and the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

BOOKS

ŠOA (HOLOKAUSTAS) LIETUVOJE

The museum published a book "Šoa (Holokaustas) Lietuvoje" compiled by Josifas Levinsonas. This book accumulates both historical documents and historians' articles. It contains information about the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania, about the extermination of Jews in the ghettos, killings in towns, the role of Lithuanians who collaborated with the Nazis in murdering the Jews. It assesses the position of the Catholic church of that time and the repentance of the modern Church. This edition is the first volume of "Šoa (Holokaustas) Lietuvoje". The second one will be dedicated to the saving of Jews, to Jewish resistance, and the current polemics on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE IN THE VILNA GHETTO

This book by Rachel Kostanian describes the great phenomenon of Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto 1941-1943. It was here that the intellectual leadership of the Ghetto, in spite of the horrendous situation in the short period of relative calm led an enormous battle not only for physical survival at any cost, but also for people's dignity: fighting dehumanization. They established a meaningful way of life for the Ghetto inmates, social and medical care for children and adults, schools and nurseries, orphanages and day-care centers, music and performances, lectures and commemorations. They thought of posterity and saved the remains of the unique Jewish heritage of the once Yerushalayim de Lite for the future generations.

ŽYDŲ MUZIEJUS

The almanac "Jewish Museum" (Vilnius, 2001) is a collection of essays, articles and short stories, which acquaint Lithuanian public with the heritage of Lithuanian Jews. The book contains recollections by former ghetto prisoners, anti-Nazi-fighters, and people who lived in Lithuania prior to WWII, as well as a section on Jewish art and

culture. Special attention is given to disclosing the names of rescuers of the Jews during WWII (specifically Anton Schmidt from Austria). Chief editor is Dalija Epstein.

ŠIAULIAI GHETTO: LIST OF PRISONERS. 1942

This book continues a series of supplements to the almanac "The Jewish Museum". It is the first publication of lists of prisoners of the Šiauliai Ghetto, kept in Lithuanian archives. The lists were compiled during the general population census of Lithuania, in May 1942. The book includes articles and photographic materials, as well as an alphabetical index of names of ghetto residents. All the names and other information have been scrupulously checked with the originals and corrected. Two large (50 p.) essays, one written by a ghetto survivor, and the other by a professional historian, describe the Holocaust in Šiauliai and in the whole region. The book also contains an explanatory article for the lists and numerous pre-WWII and postwar photographs of Šiauliai and its Jewish residents. All the texts are presented in Lithuanian, English and Russian.

EVENTS

OPENING OF THE MUSEUM'S TOLERANCE CENTER

The not fully renovated Tolerance Center was opened on Naugarduko str. 10 on the 23rd of September 2001, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Catastrophe of the Lithuanian Jews. After regaining independence of Lithuania and getting back the building, which served as a former cultural center and Jewish theater, the interrupted Jewish history of the building was continued. It houses again a Jewish Institution, which strives to fulfill following aims: assemble and make the Jewish cultural heritage accessible to visitors, exhibit authentic artifacts and documental materials, organise travelling exhibitions and artistic programs, lead educational programs for the youth in sense of tolerance.

For the realization of these goals the Center offers an event hall with 200 seats and a stage for concerts, performances or conferences, space for permanent and temporary exhibitions and other activities. At the opening ceremony several high-ranked personalities took part, among them Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas and cardinal Andrius Juozas Baškis, handing out a greetings telegram of the Pope. The main event of those Commemoration Days was the inauguration of Samuel Bak's art exhibition. A boy from the Ghetto became a world-known artist. Our great honor was to meet among other guests the great artist Samuel Bak, the famous historian Sir Martin Gilbert, the known American politician Steward Eisenstat, Lord Janner, Marcus Claude Gerart, Yves Plasseraud. Also a theater play was performed, in which both Jewish and non-Jewish schoolchildren took part, in order to symbolize a tolerant society. The performance was produced by Henrietta Seeböhm.

50 YEARS OF THE EXECUTION OF THE ANTIFASCIST JEWISH COMMITTEE LEADERS

Founded in 1942 with the approval of the Soviet authorities, the main function of the Antifascist Jewish Committee (Moscow) was to gain support and raise funds from Jewish Communities and Institutions outside the Soviet Union for the fight against Fascism. After the end of the war it came more and more clear that the Committee was used by Soviet authorities just for the purpose of propaganda and fundraising for winning the war. It wasn't needed anymore. In 1948 the leader of the Committee, Solomon Michoels - the famous Jewish actor from the Moscow Yiddish theater - was killed by KGB agents, the Committee was liquidated, and a general anti-Semitic campaign against "Cosmopolitanism and Zionism" was started. In 1952 all other former leading members of the Antifascist Jewish Committee were put on trial for "planning to separate Crimea from the Soviet Union and to create an anti-Soviet Jewish bourgeois Republic". Therefore they were sentenced to death and shot in August 1952. The tragic event is commemorated.

"YIDDISHPIEL" IN VILNIUS

Upon the invitation of our Tolerance Center and the Fund of Jewish cultural heritage the Center housed a special event (8th - 12th of December, 2001): a guest performance of the Israeli theater group "Yiddishpiel". Created in 1987 the goal of the group is to keep alive and further develop the Yiddish language and culture - a language that in Lithuania survived the Holocaust and even the mental genocide of the Soviet Union, and could be heard in the streets of Vilnius and Kaunas some 30 years ago. By the way, quite a number of our staff members speak Yiddish and some study it.

PRESENTATIONS & CONFRENECES

The event was enthusiastically awaited and fulfilled all expectations. The first performance on the 8th of December "Hello Yiddish" was a funny, colorful and astute revue full of sparking humor.

It was followed by a more serious play by the famous Israeli dramaturge Jeshua Sobol "The Heart Is Longing For Songs", a play inspired by the biography and the works of the famous Yiddish poet and songwriter Mordechai Gebirtig. The succes was round of by a humorous performance, prepared in teamwork by Israeli andLithuanian actors. The hearts of the spectators were full with nostalgia and their eyes were wet.

BOOK PRESENTATION "NIEKADA PER AMŽIUS" ("NEVER AGAIN") BY SIR MARTIN GILBERT

One of the several events commemorating the beginning of the catastrophe of Lithuanian Jewry, was the presentation of the newly translated Lithuanian version of the book "Never again" by Sir Martin Gilbert, one of the most renown researchers on the Holocaust. He is Patron of Friends of our museum since 1996.

The book, dealing with the Holocaust in general, is written in a clear and comprehensive way and tries to give answers to the extremely important questions of the historical, social and political background of the Catastrophe. A quite large section is dedicated to the happenings in Lithuania: one chapter on the Vilnius and Kaunas Ghettos, memories of surviving Litvaks, history of the hymn of Jewish Resistance, which was created in the Vilnius Ghetto.

CONFERENCES

Museum staff members Onutė Biveinienė, Juri Greismanas and Arkadij Bliumin took part in the conference on Jaques Lipchitz in Druskininkai on the 20th of October 2001. Onutė Biveinienė presented her paper "The Development of the Work of the Museum".

Emmanuel Zingeris, Rachel Kostanian and Onutė Biveinienė participated in a seminar on Holocaust Education, which was organized by the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London in October 2001.

Rosa Bieliauskienė attended a conference "Jews in a volatile world" in Riga from the 20th to the 22nd of November 2001 and gave a lecture on "Leon and Osip from the Mandelstam Dynasty."

Arkadij Bliumin took part in a conference about various aspects of Judaica by the "Sefer" organization in Moscow from January 30th to February 4th 2002.

Rachel Kostanian presented her paper "The Scientific Work of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum" at a conference in Kedainiai in June 2002 and gave a talk at the opening ceremony in Padua.

PLANS FOR THE NEAREST FUTURE

Exhibitions:

"Vilnius Ghetto Posters" will travel to YIVO in New York in September

"Vilnius Ghetto Posters" and " Jewish Life in Lithuania" will go to Brussels

"The fate of Jews of Vilna and its area" will be finished

"The Jews of Butrimanz (Butrimonis)" will be started

Work on "Jerusalem of Lithuania" will be continued

All the exhibitions are followed by educational programs.

FRIENDS & VISITORS

Publishings:

"The Šiauliai Ghetto: Lists of prisoners" shows up in a couple of months

The bibliographical directory "The Jewish theme in the Lithuanian press" is in advanced work as is the book

"The work camp HKP"

VISITORS

Every year visitors from all over the world come to visit our museum. Among them are survivors of the Holocaust or their descendents, Litvaks who are in search of their roots. Tourists and well known perosnalities of political, scientific and cultural backgrounds are visiting quite often. We present some entries of their impressions into our guestbook:

So much material: so difficult to find words to describe! A most impressive museum which, in its details, forms the most effective answer to those who question the reality of the Holocaust and also those who loosely abuse the word 'genocide'.

Derrick Weleady, Ireland, July 2002

As an Israeli tourist I was/am surprised how little of a great Jewish life is being left in Lithuania today. Yet this small reminder of the terrible past should always live with us, within us, and for all who care.

Julius Rayetzkas, Israel, April 2002

Moving, powerful, painful - none come close to what this means to me, and nothing in words can describe what we must remember. I will say Kaddish for all those who died, in memory of my relatives here, in Latvia and Germany who died in the war.

Also, I feel pride - because the ADL, who I work for in New York, have given help. Proud that I can help. Proud that I am free, in America - but never forgetting my past. Without it - I would not be here.

Brian Marcus, USA, March 2002

We are greatly thankful to our supporters for the last year:

Ariel Moss, Morice and Lorna Swartz, Gene Le Pere, Ella Lidsky, Keith Morgan, Bernie & Bonnie Goller, Elias Vainer, Mary Ann Tuft, Leona Z. Rosenberg, Solon Beinfeld, The New City Jewish Center, Barbara Miller, Natalie Saltiel, Cohen Sidney, Barbara Epstein, Brian Marcus, Martin Abrams, American Fund for Lithuanian and Latvian Jews Inc., Jim Sleeper, Enid and Mel Shapiro, Zeit Stiftung (Hamburg), Rod Friedman, Franz und Ingrid Gruber, Eliza Sainer, H. Kasimov, Jack kabak, Leonore Tiefer, Christoph Dieckman, Keith Morgan, Bernie Goller, Eric Page, M. Povimonski, Myra Skalrew, Elaine Gobstein, David Wasserberg, Saul Isroff, Shlomi

We deeply appreciate our friends who sent us books:

Alex Feitelson, Rolandas Gustaitis, Itzhak Osherowitz, Peter Fischer, Daniel Kac, The Jewish Museum (N.Y.), Walter und Christiane Rieger, Judelis Beilisas, Museum Stutthof, N.N. Shneidman, Philip Shapiro, Tamarina Sofia, The Jewish History Institute Warsaw, National Library of Poland, Yad Vashem, Austrian Embassy in Vilnius, London Jewish Cultural Center, M. Annenberg, German Embassy Vilnius, Ted Smith, Moe Finkelstein, V.Porudaminski, Samuel Bak, Smoliakov