

Novi Sad

An Overview of The Jewish Cultural Heritage

Preface

The publication *Novi Sad, An Overview of The Jewish Cultural Heritage* is the first one of its kind. By writing it we wanted to highlight the impact the Jews from Novi Sad made while shaping the city's urban and cultural core. The buildings, streets, monuments and sights, however, are just as important as the people who built them and who kept the Jewish Community together. Over the centuries, Novi Sad along with its Jews had more troublesome than peaceful times, but just like their city, the Jews survived and managed to prosper. *TONS*, the City's Tourist Information Centre has supported us in representing the Jewish Community as a group of individuals made of flesh and blood who, in spite of carrying the heavy burden of the Holocaust, still have a clear vision while living in harmony with all the other ethnic and cultural groups in Novi Sad.

Goran Levi, B.Sc.

President of the Jewish Community

History

The History of the Jewish People in the Vojvodina Region and the City of Novi Sad

According to certain assumptions, Jews lived in Vojvodina in the centuries even before Christ. The first written records on Jews in the Vojvodina area and Petrovaradin, however, date back to the seventeenth century, when they are mentioned as military suppliers. After settling down in Racko Selo village back in 1693 (which from 1748 on was gradually growing to become Novi Sad), the Jews built a synagogue and had their own graveyard. The first family name we come across in the archives is the name of Markus Philip and three other families. Back in 1690 the Jews were forbidden to live in the bigger cities, and over the years that followed, they were also forbidden to practice certain crafts like making jewelry, stamps, seals or to get engaged in soap-boiling, scrap-iron dealing and to cultivate the land. These sanctions forced the Jews to take up other occupations for a living, such as for example peddling, breeding livestock, while some of them made a living by playing the flute for money across Austro-Hungarian cities. A law followed soon after that restricting the number of marriages for Jewish people within a family - „Familie-tatengesetz“ (This law allowed just one male member of a Jewish family to legally marry). This law was passed during the rule of Carlo the Third, and forced many Jewish families to migrate towards the southern parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Vojvodina) very scarcely populated at that time.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Jews that were living in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were obliged to pay numerous taxes to the crown, such as the tolerance tax (malkengeld = The Queen's money), and the obligatory use of the official language in the Monarchy instead of Hebrew was imposed on them. The Jews were obliged to speak German only and to change their names into German. Despite these restrictions, the Jews enjoyed some benefits as well, such as free education at elementary and secondary schools and practicing the arts.

In 1848 Novi Sad and its citizens were fiercely struck upon during the Riot (1848-1849). In June of 1849, a cannonade from the Petrovaradin Fortress ruined the majority of the buildings in the city, among which were the Synagogue, the hospital and the Jewish community building. During the Riot some anti-Semitic crimes occurred. As a result of the truce that came about, the rights of the Jews were made equal with those the rest of the population in Vojvodina enjoyed,

meaning that the Jews finally could study at Universities and were allowed to practice all kinds of crafts and occupations. As a result, there were many more Jewish military officers, bankers, lawyers and judges.

After the WWI, within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and later, in The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Jews from Novi Sad went through a real renaissance in the area of culture as a consequence of the higher standard of living that followed. Several sport and cultural societies were founded, a Jewish community center was built, two Jewish choirs were set up (Hazamer and Hashira) and several Jewish newspapers were launched. In the winter of 1939 more and more anti-Semitic voices could be heard that resulted in fewer number of Jews in the city's cultural and public life. In 1941 Novi Sad fell under the occupation of the Hungarian army, and Jews in the city faced the Holocaust. Between the 21st and the 23rd of January the occupational forces carried out a three day raid, during which 1200 people were killed, among them Jews, Serbs and members of other ethnic groups as well. Most of the victims were thrown into the icy winter waters of the river Danube, others were shot and executed in their homes or in the streets. What had remained from the Novi Sad Jewry were closed up in the Synagogue in 1944 and deported to Nazi death camps. Most of them suffered torture and died in Auschwitz. After the WWII the number of Jews in Vojvodina has drastically decreased. According to the census from 1946, there were only 3729 Jews. Those who survived the death camps and captivity mostly settled down in the bigger cities, where Jewish communities operated. Many of them, however, will soon leave their homes and go to the newly founded State of Israel, where they will try to build new homes and lives and forget the horrors of the Holocaust. Nowadays, the Novi Sad Jewish community counts about 650 members. The synagogue, the community building, the cemetery and many more sights and buildings are testimonies of the past, the life and culture connected to the Jewry of the city.

Architecture

The Synagogue

(9, Jevrejska Street)

The synagogue in Novi Sad is a shining example of the Secession (Art Nouveau) architecture in Vojvodina. The word 'synagogue' actually comes from the Greek word 'sinagein', which literally means 'to gather'. The building was designed by Lipot Baumhorn, a Jewish architect from Budapest, one of the greatest Art Nouveau architects in this part of Europe. On the facade one can see a classic tripartite division which is a common construction principle when it comes to designing synagogues. The two towers by the entrance symbolize state and unity. In the central part of the front facade we can see the sentence 'Ki beti, bet tefila ikara I kol haamim' meaning: *Let this house be the home of prayer of all nations*. The interior of the synagogue consists of the benches in the ground floor which is a men only area, the gallery space which is for women and the front stage with the Aron Hakodesh, where the Torah Scrolls are kept. The building was erected in 1906 as the fifth synagogue in the city, after the previous one had been demolished during the bombings in 1849. With the Jewish elementary school on its left side and the Jewish community building on the right side, the synagogue makes an architectural complex. Back in 1944, it was here where the Jews were held captured and later sent to death camps. Due to the fact that the Jewish community could not afford the renovation and maintenance costs of the synagogue, in the beginning of the 1990's it was handed over to the city for managing. Today it is mainly used as a concert hall.

The Jewish Community Building

(11, Jevrejska Street)

The former Jewish community building belongs to the synagogue complex. It was built in 1908, from the same construction material as the elementary school and the synagogue, but with less decorative details as its purpose was to serve as an official building. Before the WWII it housed the flats used by rabbis and community officials. Today, just one part of this three story building with its backyard is used by the Jewish community, the rest are private apartments.

The Jewish Elementary School Building

(7, Jevrejska Street)

The Jewish elementary school is also part of the synagogue complex. It was founded in 1802, and it actively operated up until 1942 . During this period the school was considered one of the best educational facilities in Novi Sad. It had very high reputation not only among the local population, but also among the authorities. Its reputation was confirmed in 1921, when it got the rank of a public school, called *The elementary school in Futoska Street*. After the raid, when the Hungarian army murdered 1200 civilians, mostly Jewish and Serbian, the number of students at the school drastically decreased, so it couldn't function anymore. Today, this building houses the elementary ballet school.

The Savings Bank Building

(7, Trg slobode)

The Savings Bank building is another masterpiece designed by Lipot Baumhorn, erected in 1904 in a genuine secessionist fashion, that is obvious by the ornaments on the facade. The façade itself has many rich geometrical ornaments which, along with the terraces that are placed in the depth making dynamic changes in the building's exterior. A massive fence used to be on the roof, which burned down in a fire and was never restored. The people of Novi Sad encountered the Hungarian Secessionist style for the first time when they laid their eyes on this fantastic structure.

Menrath's Palace

(14, Kralja Aleksandra Street)

In the downtown of Novi Sad, one of the most dominating buildings is Menrath's Palace, built by Lipot Baumhorn in 1908. It was named after the Menraths, one of the best known merchant families in Novi Sad, who traded with furniture. The front of the palace seen from the street is two stories high, with shops and a carriage gate in the ground floor and luxurious condos on the second. The opinion of many architectural critics is that the façade of this building is one of the most beautiful secessionist façades in entire Vojvodina. The fundamental project of this object has two parts: the street part which is two stories high and is U-shaped, and the yard building which is one story high, connected with the street part with a series of corridors. The architect did not design only the exterior but the interior of the object as well. Nowadays, this masterpiece unfortunately does not possess the glamorous outlook it once had.

The Jewish Cultural Centre

(8, Petra Drapšina Street)

The members of the Jewish community had to put in extreme efforts in order to build a cultural Centre in 1935. The two story building is located in the vicinity of the synagogue, and had the purpose to house many social events of the Jewish community. It had a big hall with 650 seats, and many smaller rooms in which various cultural events could be held. It had a central heating system and many modern machinery which kept the Center running. The Center was also the headquarters of the Jewish community, the Jewish newspapers, the *Juda Maccabi* sport club, choral groups *Hashir* and *Hazamer* and many other activities. The facade is strictly geometrical but it has influences of modern architecture. It was in this building where most of the Jewish community activities during the World War Two took place. Today, this building houses the Teachers' Collage.

The Nursing Home for the Elderly and Orphanage

***(The corner of 17-19, Vojvodjanskih brigada
1, Sutjeska and Maksima Gorkog street)***

The need and the idea to build a center for the elderly and orphans had existed for a long time but it wasn't built until 1931. It was designed by a local architect Nikola Hadler. The center had the capacity for 50-60 seniors and 60 orphans. After only a year spent at the center, the children had the possibility to attend elementary school, which was very important because before coming to the center, most of them had not attended school and had hardly any possibility of education. The center had operated and prospered up until the start of the WWII, when the occupational army shipped the children abroad and every record on them ended at that point. The elderly from the center were deported with the other Jews from Novi Sad, mostly to Auschwitz. After the Nazis were gone, the state took the building for its own purposes. Today it houses Vojvodina Television.

‘Kora Hleba’ Humanitarian Center and Children’s Day Care (1, Sonja Marinković Street)

The first charity center with the purpose to help the poor and the needy was founded in 1925, called *Free Bread Distributing Association*. The center was run by an esteemed member of the Jewish community, Jelena Kon, along with several renowned local women. Soon after it had been founded the club was turned into a day care center and changed its name to *Bread-Crust* (Kora Hleba). After several years, in 1933, the charity center was finally given a building in Sonja Marinković street. The building was designed by Djordje Tabaković, one of Serbia’s most gifted architects. This two story building with its high ground-floor and simple façade, on which the prevailing horizontal structure is interrupted by a vertical central section, represents another example of the city’s modern architecture. A sculpture by Mihalj Kara, *Mother with child* decorates the building. After the WWII the building underwent some minor adaptations and still functions as a kindergarten.

Some of Novi Sad’s Most Eminent Jews

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Mileva Marić (1875-1948)

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Mileva Marić (1875-1948), were probably Novi Sad’s most renowned couple in history. They were married from 1903 to 1919 and they were bounded not only by love but also by their scientific work. The influence that Mileva had on Einstein’s work is still a mystery to the world and subject to many debates. Einstein would have come to Novi Sad from time to time and would have stayed at the house of Milena’s father, at 20, Kisačka Street. One of the streets in Novi Sad is named after Mileva Marić.

Jelena Kon (1883-1942)

Jelena Kon (1883-1942) was a humanitarian activist who founded the *Bread-Crust* charity organization and children daycare back in 1925. Her approach was unique because she involved women of other religions in the work of her organization. She reopened the new 'Bread-Crust' in 1933 under 1, Sonja Marinković Street, where a daycare center operates nowadays. Jelena was murdered during the infamous Raid in Novi Sad in 1942.

Danilo Kiš (1935-1989)

Danilo Kiš (1935-1989), was one of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century Serbian literature. Although he was born in Subotica, he was settled in Novi Sad from 1942. The famous Bem's Street from his book *Early Sorrows* (Rani Jadi) was Ćirpanova street in Novi Sad, where Kiš lived. His house in Ćirpanova Street does not exist anymore, but another street in the proximity has been named after Danilo Kiš.

Aleksandar Tišma (1924-2003)

He was a writer whose work is recognized far beyond the Balkans. The streets and buildings of Novi Sad have an important role in Tišma's work. This is obvious in Tišma's *A Book About Blam* (Knjiga o Blamu). Its plot prevalingly takes place in a building widely known as 'Tanurdžićeva Palata' (Tanurdzich's Palace) in Novi Sad, where Aleksandar Tišma lived. In the downtown Novi Sad there is a street named after Aleksandar Tišma.

Paula Šosberger (1895-1942)

She became a Novi Sad citizen in 1919, by marrying Josip Šosberger. She has been remembered by her manifold enthusiastic activities in culture and education. Back in the thirties, she set up a Jewish kindergarten attended by not only Jewish, but children of other confessions as well, due to its good reputation. Paula was murdered in the Novi Sad Raid. A street was named after Paula Šosberger in 2009.

Judita Šalgo (1941-1996)

Judita Šalgo (1941-1996), was a Novi Sad born poet and prose writer. Her style of writing belonged to the Neo-Avant-Garde stream, and in her poems her radical views are visible that seem to go beyond the verbal. She lived in a street named after another great poet, the Veljko Petrović Street.

Prim. Dr. Stevan Goldman (1914-1988)

He was a professor at the Medical University of Novi Sad, and he was the first head of staff at the Institute of Pulmonary Diseases in Sremska Kamenica. During the war he was detainee at several death camps, and after the war he was an active officer in the JNA (the Yugoslav National Army). He will be remembered as a great patriot and a pioneer in new ways of medical treatment. The street that leads to the Institute for Pulmonary Diseases in Sremska Kamenica is named after him.

Pavle Pap (1914-1941)

Pavle Pap (1914-1941), was a medical student who had joined politics at a very young age. He was a member of the Jewish organization *Hashomer Hacair* and also member of the Youth Communist Organization of Yugoslavia. Later on he was sentenced to three years imprisonment by the government of the Yugoslav Kingdom for being member of the Communist Party. After he served his time he continued revolutionary work. He was caught and killed by the fascists in 1941. He was awarded the National Heroes Decoration after his death. One street is named after him.

Tomi Lapid (1931-2008)

A renowned Israeli journalist, publicist, who was also the minister of justice in the Israeli government led by Ariel Sharon. In the year 2006, he was appointed head of 'Yad Vashem' Council, the world famous memorial and educational center for studying the Holocaust and its consequences. Tomi Lapid was born in Novi Sad, he had his bar mitzvah in Budapest ghetto. He immigrated to Israel in 1948. A street in Novi Sad was named after him in 2011.

Cultural and Social Activities of the Jewish Community

Commemorations and Anniversaries

The Commemoration for the Victims of the Novi Sad Raid (21.01.1942-23.01.1942)

is held every year in January, next to the *Family* monument on the river bank, at Kej Žrtava Racije river walk. Among those present there is always the Chief Rabbi, high officials from the Serbian Orthodox Church, representatives of the Matica Romska, delegations of political and cultural elite, as well as citizens in great number.

The Chrystal Night Remembrance Day (09.11.1938-10.11.1938)

This event takes place every year in November in the club of the Jewish Community, where renowned historians present lectures on this subject.

The International Memorial Day for the Victims of the Holocaust

The UN declared January 27th as the International Holocaust Day in the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, due to the fact that Auschwitz death camp was liberated on this day. Every year on that day, the members of the Jewish community will gather in the Jewish cemetery by the monument that was built in the memory of the Holocaust victims.

Cultural Activities

The Dance Marathon (Dance Around Novi Sad)

The Marathon takes place twice a year and it lasts over an entire weekend. It is an event dedicated to Israeli folklore and music. It is organized and hosted by our *Ma'ayan* dance group. Apart from domestic dance groups, other groups from abroad take part as guests.

The Israeli Film Days

The Israeli Film Days is a film festival organized jointly by Novi Sad Cultural Center and the Jewish Community. During the festival days, the most recent works of eminent Israeli filmmakers can be seen on screen.

The European Day of Jewish Culture

The European Day of Jewish Culture is a happening that takes place every September in the synagogue and the community club as part of an international project. Beside art exhibitions and theater shows, one can see performances by *Hashira choir* and *Ma'ayan* dance group.

The Sholet

The Sholet is actually a gathering of Jewish Communities from the entire region of the former Yugoslavia. It takes place every year in February comprising several cultural programs and a formal lunch. It was named after a traditional meal (elsewhere known as Chund) which mostly consists of beans and is served on Shabbat.

Activities at the Novi Sad Jewish Community

Ma'ayan dance group

The group was founded in 1996 with the purpose of promoting Israeli folklore and tradition. The young enthusiasts perform their own original choreography. The group has performed all over Serbia in numerous dance and cultural festivals, also at the traditional cultural festival of the Jews from the former Yugoslavia – *Bejihad*.

Hashira Choir

This mixed gender choir founded in 1993 got its name after the Jewish choir that existed between the two world wars. The choir performs Jewish spiritual and religious music and other choir music as well, composed both by domestic and foreign authors. It counts thirty singers (professionals and amateurs), and has performed and been awarded at many festivals in Serbia and abroad.

Klezmer orchestra J'HAZ KLEZMORI

This is the first klezmer orchestra in Serbia, it has been performing since 2007. The trio (the violin, the piano and the clarinet) performs klezmer along with other music genres. Klezmer music is typical for the Ashkenazi Jews.

The youth club

The younger members of the Jewish community and their friends gather at the youth club once a week, where they socialize, organize educational and entertainment activities. Among their interests are field trips, seminars, movie screenings, sport tournaments and entertainment.

The Art Club

The intention to create souvenirs and artifacts with Jewish motifs was the main reason why this Club was set up. With the financial support of the Dutch Humanitarian Fund, drawing, painting, sculpturing, decorating and ceramic art courses are run. A Jewish calendar is printed every year illustrated with the artifacts created at this workshop.

The Library

The Library counts over 3.500 titles mostly on history, Judaism as well as fiction in Serbian, English, German, Hungarian, Hebrew, Yiddish and Ladino languages. There is a fruitful cooperation with Matica Srpska Library and Novi Sad City Library. Several books, proceedings from seminars as well as informative booklets on the Synagogue and the Community have been published so far.

The Computer Club

This IT center is equipped with five networked PCs and printers. Courses are being held (basics, text and photography processing as well as Internet). The club also hosts language courses (English, Italian, French and Hebrew) adapted to various levels.

The Children's Club

Children between 7 and 14 years of age gather at the Club. Activities aimed both at education and entertainment activities are based on professional guidelines, while the councilor always respects the parents' suggestions. The activities include Jewish history and tradition through playful programs. On Jewish holidays and special occasions, performances played by children are staged before the audience.

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