

AEJM Advanced Curatorial Education Program

Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, Budapest, 30.08-3.09.2015

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Recently I had a pleasure to participate for the first time in AEJM A-CEP, which this time had a special emphasis on Judaica silverware, especially the Hungarian one.

The program started with PechaKucha presentations of the participants. Although PechaKucha maybe is not the most convenient format, but it gave the possibility to get at least certain basic understanding about the diversity of the museums participants represent, and the issues they are facing.

The introduction to the collections and exhibition of the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in the first two days was not only interesting, but also very useful for the participants as the museum professionals. Besides the possibility to get acquainted with some real treasures in the collections of the archives, representing the unique Hungarian-Jewish experience, and precious silverware and textile items at the exhibition, we also had to analyze the current state of the exhibition, pointing at its problems. But it was not only about criticizing – it was just simply interesting to explore the pre-modernist concept of the museum.

Of no less importance were the discussions about using the archival material in the exhibition of the museums – something, that is a constant challenge to the curators.

The highlight of the second day was undoubtedly the visit to the National Museum and the workshop, dealing with some Jewish artefacts from its collections. The goal of the workshop was to give an insight in the issues of provenance research, as well as issues, related to the correctness of attribution in the museal collections. It was also a fascinating possibility to see some of the artefacts you don't encounter very often even in the bigger Jewish museum exhibitions – like the comb, belonging to Chevra Kadisha.

The third day started with an extremely interesting visit to the National Library and introduction to its collection of Jewish manuscripts. This was a unique possibility to get introduced to one of the most important collections of illuminated Jewish manuscripts in the world, especially for those of us, like myself, who live in the country with no Jewish manuscripts available. Both the introductory lecture by Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek and comments by the collection curator Kinga Devenyi were very useful for better understanding of the collection and some of the treasures it holds.

The second half of the day was dedicated to workshop, dealing with analyzing the Judaica items from the collections of Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives. For me it was the first experience of close work with Judaica silverware, and I found this workshop to be not only interesting, but also useful and applicable in my everyday work. The skills we gained – to decipher the silvermarks, to distinguish between regional styles of Judaica – are the ones all the curators should possess.

The tour of the Jewish sites in Budapest guided by prominent art historian Prof. Rudolf Klein was an excellent contextualisation of the artefacts we were exploring during the workshops.

The next day started with the presentation of regional Judaica objects from the collections of participating museums. Absolutely striking – although logical – was a great diversity of Judaica. Some of the most interesting artefacts I would consider richly embroidered “Golden dress” from the collections of Georgian National Museum and early XX c. wooden Alsatian mezuzah from Gogel family collections. This showed both secular and religious aspects of Jewish life, both wealth and poverty.

The second half of the day, as well as beginning of the next day, was dedicated to further exploration of collections of Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, particularly to paper objects,

like mizrachs, and filigree objects. This was a good addition to what we have already learned during the seminar.

Particularly fruitful was the workshop and discussion on labelling the objects in the exhibition. The major issues were – to what extent to detail the history of the object in the annotation, what has to be emphasized, and what can be omitted. As this is a permanent challenge for all the curators, I consider it to be one of the key moments of the seminar.

For me one of the most interesting and important parts of the program was visit to the exhibition on rural Hungarian Jewish communities in the Ethnographic Museum. Unfortunately, we didn't have a chance to discuss the exhibition, but I really consider it to very well done, with good balance between artefacts, text and media, emphasizing not the most obvious and well known aspects of Jewish history and culture. For me it was of particular importance, as part of my job is assisting the local non-Jewish museums in creation of Jewish exhibitions, and the Hungarian Ethnographic museum has in this aspect a lot of things to be learned from.

Specially has to be mentioned the perfect organization and planning of the program. The schedule was reasonable, giving the possibility not only to formally listen to the lectures or presentations, but also to reflect on what you have heard, and to discuss it with the colleagues. It also provided certain time to explore Budapest or just to socialize with the colleagues. The choice of optional parts of the program was great.

All in all the seminar can be characterized as well organized, with diverse but clear and adequate set of topics, aimed at professional needs of participants, and therefore very fruitful.