

Report on the annual conference of the Association of European Jewish Museums in Jerusalem, 14 – 17 November, 2015

The “Self” and the “Other”- Jewish Museums Dealing with Notions of Diversity

By Christina Meri, curator of the Jewish Museum of Greece

The participation in this AEJM conference hosted this year by the Israel Museum Jerusalem (IMJ) was especially important for me, as it enabled me also to visit for the first time the museum’s completely renewed permanent exhibition and the special exhibits shown on occasion of its 50th anniversary. Unlike most of the other AEJM member museums, the Israel Museum holds in its collections a great range of material that is historically and in its design comparable to the objects I work with on a daily basis in the Jewish Museum of Greece. To see how this material is exhibited in the IMJ, to investigate it during the conference workshops and to discuss it further with relevant colleagues from the IMJ and other museums, increased my specific job-related knowledge and gave new impetus to my ongoing research on the material culture of Greek Jewry.

As employee of a small Jewish museum, it is of particular importance to me to be regularly informed about new developments in the Jewish museums’ world, in regard to new general museum concepts, pioneering core or temporary exhibition concepts and educational projects. In this context, the conference programme achieved also this year to offer a quick, but nevertheless thorough insight into actual developments of Jewish museums, giving in such a way new impulses and inspiration for new exhibition design and concepts in our own museums.

As the AEJM conference is held each time in light of a specific key issue all Jewish museums should deal with, this time the question was brought to the table how Jewish museums handle and present diversities. The discussions raised complex issues and convinced me that every museum (and first of all my one) should have to reflect deeply on what we show, how we show it and what we avoid to show in our exhibitions; or how much the ‘historical reality’ presented in our museums was influenced by the national school curriculum and how much it reflects only the ambitions of the country’s politics, thus evading to show the diversity of historical experience.