



Archivist on a Bicycle: Jiří Fiedler

Ruth Ellen Gruber, Arno Pařík, Leo Pavlát, Mark Talisman, Samuel D. Gruber, Dušan Karpatský, Helen Epstein, Paul King

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Archivist on a Bicycle is a tribute to Jiří Fiedler, a Czech Protestant, who for most of his life documented extinct Bohemian and Moravian Jewish communities at great danger to himself. His day job was as a children's book editor; his passion was mapping and archiving the sites of Jewish life in the Czech lands. From the 1970s through 2014, he was an invaluable source for scholars, genealogists, museum curators — anyone in the world interested in Czech Jews. Jiří rarely talked about what he called his “strange hobby,” but viewed it as a decent person's response to Nazism and Communism. After the Velvet Revolution, he published Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia and more than one hundred scholarly articles and reviews. His electronic encyclopedia of Jewish communities at the Jewish Museum of Prague contains 1,670 entries. The writers, translators, and publisher have honored Fiedler's spirit by making this collection of essays available “for free.”

“Archivist on a Bicycle is a very special work. Jiří Fiedler was the self-commissioned historian of the Czech Jewish community compiling a vast personal archive before such memory was fashionable, before indeed it was acceptable. Essay after essay in this collection describes his mission and his struggle. The result is a rare insight into life in Czechoslovakia under Communist domination and in the post-Communist era. Fiedler was a man of uncompromising integrity, a ‘moral man in an immoral society.’ I read this book with tears and a smile, with growing admiration and unending gratitude.” —Michael Berenbaum, Professor of Jewish Studies and former Director of the Holocaust Research Institute, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

“A remarkable book about a unique person. Jiří Fiedler's research and photos from a time when nearly no one dared to be openly interested in Jewish topics are an invaluable resource for researchers of Jewish history and culture in this central European region. His murder left ‘a gap impossible to fill or heal’ as Václav Fred Chvátal's contribution in the book argues. This collection brings together articles from contributors in the Czech Republic, England, Israel and the USA. It is a fascinating source of information not only about Jiří Fiedler but about Jews and non-Jews devoted to Jewish heritage in Czechoslovakia.” —Kateřina Šapková, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Institute of Contemporary History

“Conducting research on bygone Jewish sites during socialism was a lonely and dangerous hobby: by remembering Fiedler's dedication and ethics, Archivist on Bicycle offers a history of postwar Czechoslovakia, Jewish history read against the grain, but also shows, with Havel, the power of the powerless. This lovely, funny, sad book commemorates an eminent scholar of Czech Jewish history.” — Dr. Anna Hájková, University of Warwick

“Archivist on a Bicycle is a moving and informative tribute to a scholar and fine human being whose tireless efforts enriched our knowledge about the presence of Jews in the Czech Lands. His research and generous help enabled others to follow.” — Dr. Michael Riff, Director, The Gross Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Ramapo College of New Jersey

“Fiedler, who was not Jewish, did his work at considerable risk to his own safety, possibly as a way to oppose the regime and at the same time to restore the now destroyed Jewish communities to their rightful place in Czech society. After the fall of Communism in 1989, he continued to work as a scholar at the Jewish

Museum of Prague. In this volume, Helen Epstein and Wilma Iggers have collected essays that present a picture of a meticulous and devoted scholar, a witty and playful man, and a decent and courageous human being, who was brutally murdered in 2014.” — Marsha L. Rozenblit, Harvey M. Meyerhoff Professor of Jewish History, University of Maryland

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