

IN THE NEWS

Israeli soldiers storm Gaza shuls

Israeli security forces stormed two Gaza Strip synagogues to confront settlers resisting evacuation.

In Neveh Dekalim, the largest settlement in Gaza, police pulled hundreds of anti-withdrawal protesters out of the house of worship after they failed to heed a 10-minute warning to leave.

With the synagogue emptied, police said 40 families remained in the settlement.

Hours later, riot police broke into the synagogue in Kfar Darom, where hundreds of protesters had holed up.

At least 40 people were injured in the ensuing clash, and 100 people were arrested.

Report: Satterfield shared info with AIPAC

A senior State Department envoy to Baghdad allegedly shared classified information with former staffers at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The New York Times reported Thursday that David Satterfield was one of two unnamed U.S. government officials who shared information with Steve Rosen, AIPAC's former director of foreign policy issues.

However, Satterfield has not been implicated in the legal case against Rosen, Keith Weissman, AIPAC's former Iran expert, and Larry Franklin, a Defense Department analyst.

Satterfield, then deputy secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, allegedly met with Rosen in January 2002 and gave him classified information that Rosen later reported in a memo to other AIPAC staffers, according to the indictment against the three men. Rosen and Satterfield also discussed classified information during meetings in March 2002.

Rosen and Weissman pleaded not guilty Tuesday to conspiracy to pass classified information.

A State Department spokesman called Satterfield a "fine public servant."

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WORLD REPORT

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Avi Ohayon/GPO/BP Images

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon signs evacuation orders for the settlements in the Gaza Strip, in Jerusalem on Feb. 20.

For Sharon, the Gaza withdrawal may determine his place in history

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For better or for worse, Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank is certain to be one of the defining moments of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's political career.

Sharon will be remembered as the Israeli leader who did the most to build settlements and then, when he became prime minister, tore them down.

But when the history books are written, will the pullout be seen as a bold move that saved Israel — allowing it to remain both Jewish and democratic — or as a wrong turn that divided the nation and exacerbated Palestinian terrorism?

Most Israeli leaders have defining mo-

ments associated with them. For David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, the most memorable was his decision to proclaim the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, even though he knew it would lead to a war — one his generals said the Jews had only a 50-50 chance of winning.

Ben-Gurion was active before 1967, the watershed year in Israel's political history. Since then, Israeli history largely has been the story of a debate over how to use the territorial and psychological gains of the Six-Day War to win Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist and achieve peaceful coexistence.

The right wing argued for holding on to

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■ *The Gaza withdrawal may determine Sharon's place in history*

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conquered territories to maintain deterrence and to go for peace only after the Arab states recognized Israel. The left favored offering to return most of the territories to spark peace talks. Subsequent prime ministers are remembered largely for their contributions to this dialectic.

Ben-Gurion's successor, Levi Eshkol, is remembered for stammering in a key address to a frightened nation days before the outbreak of the Six-Day War. For years the perceived nervousness tarred Eshkol as a weak leader.

Though later research did much to rehabilitate Eshkol, a new book by the historian Tom Segev restores his image as a ditherer and blames him for missing a chance for peace with Jordan's King Hussein that might have sidelined Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization decades ago.

Golda Meir is associated with two failures: the inability to read the signals leading to the 1973 Yom Kippur War and insensitivity toward Israel's Sephardi underclass. Together these shortcomings generated a process that led to the emergence of Menachem Begin in 1977 as Israel's first prime minister from the right-leaning Likud Party.

Begin is remembered primarily for the land-for-peace deal he struck with then Egyptian President Anwar Sadat soon after coming to power. He also was able to build an abiding alliance between his Likud Party and the Sephardim. And it was Begin who made the decision to

bomb Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981, a move that at first was criticized around the world but which, in retrospect, was praised by Western officials as far-sighted.

But Begin, too, had his failures. The 1982 Lebanon War that was meant to crush the PLO turned sour as Israel got sucked into an occupation that lasted 18 years, at a high cost of soldiers' lives and international support. Begin resigned as prime minister and remained a recluse until his death, in 1992.

His successor, Yitzhak Shamir — who voted against the peace treaty with Egypt — is remembered for his reluctance to take the peace process forward. "The sea is the same sea and the Arabs are the same Arabs" was his dictum.

But when Shamir started a peace process with the 1991 Madrid conference that the Israeli public felt he would never complete, they turned again to the left, bringing Yitzhak Rabin to power.

Rabin, the general who led the Israel Defense Forces to victory in the Six-Day War, is remembered for the Oslo peace process that cost him his life. He was the first Israeli leader to negotiate with the PLO, beginning an ambitious project that was meant to bring recognition from the entire Arab world in return for most of the territory captured in the Six-Day War and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Twelve years later, however, many Israelis have come to believe that Rabin was naive in rehabilitating Arafat as a potential peace partner and even arming him, without clear evidence that he had abandoned terrorism. Many now see Oslo as a carelessly negotiated process that, in retrospect, raises questions about Rabin's reputation for clear strategic thinking — though it's not clear how Rabin would have proceeded had he lived to see the peace process unravel.

Oslo's collapse nearly five years ago brought Sharon to power. His mandate was to crush the armed Palestinian uprising and try a more careful approach

to peace that Israelis could live with and Palestinians couldn't abuse.

When the "road map" peace plan was formulated, for example, Sharon insisted that — unlike Oslo — it be performance-based, meaning that the process would not advance from stage to stage if the Palestinians failed to keep their commitments.

But the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West

Bank is the main thrust of Sharon's approach, and how it turns out will to a large extent determine how he's remembered.

Sharon's career so far has had many defining moments: the young officer who created Israel's first elite commando unit, on which much of the IDF's fighting doctrine is modeled; the silver-haired general, his head bandaged, crossing the Suez Canal and turning the tide in the 1973 Yom Kippur War; the hero turned villain who, as defense minister, misled Begin in the Lebanon War and was forced to resign in disgrace after Israel's Lebanese Christian allies massacred Palestinians in refugee camps; the inveterate builder of settlements.

Up to this point, Sharon's political philosophy has been based on peace through projection of power. The current withdrawal is an attempt to marry power — Israel has tired of waiting for a Palestinian partner and now is setting the agenda unilaterally — to the return of land to spark a future peace process.

If it works, Sharon will go down in history as an Israeli de Gaulle, a right-wing general who rolled back an untenable occupation when the cost in soldiers' lives and international opprobrium became too high. In Sharon's case, he also will be praised for solving Israel's demographic problem by paving the way for a smaller Israel with an undisputed Jewish majority.

If it fails, however, and instead of a new peace process Israel gets more and worse terrorism, Sharon will be seen as a gambler who gave in to domestic and international pressure — and lost.

The stakes for Sharon and his place in history are high. ■

Israeli political figures are remembered for their behavior during crucial moments.

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Despite pullout tumult, tourists enjoy Israel

By DANIELLA PELED

NETANYA, Israel (JTA) — For visitors to Israel this summer, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip is proving hard to ignore.

"Everybody's orange," laughs Rebecca Kaminski, from Berlin, referring to the color adopted by the anti-disengagement activists. "I'm on the blue side, I guess."

Sitting on the beach in Netanya, the 22-year-old is working on her already impressive tan with a group of girlfriends, all students at a six-week summer ulpan, or Hebrew-language immersion course, in Kibbutz Mishmar Hasharon.

They have not been deterred from visiting Israel in the midst of its exit from the Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank, despite political debates as heated as the August sunshine.

Then there are the soaring tensions between the disengagement plan's supporters and opponents, clashes between settler activists and the police, and the threat of increasing Palestinian terror as the security services focus on the evacuation over the next few weeks.

But Kaminski is thrilled to be here right now. "It's exciting. We're in the middle of a country that the whole world is watching. It's historic."

Her friend Sharon Asscher, 20, from Amsterdam, was not about to let the idea of trouble thwart her visit here. "I haven't come to Israel for five years because of the intifada and I missed it," she says.

Alona Van t'Hoog, 25, from The Hague in Holland, is also a firm supporter of disengagement. "I knew that of course it was going to be a hard time, but I have faith in the State of Israel and the army so I thought it would be OK."

Sitting next to them on the sand, Melis Taragano, from Turkey, is less enthusiastic. "It's going to be bad for the Israeli people, I think, because here it's going to be one big terror," says the 18-year-old. "And Jews fighting Jews is going to be worse."

Tourism in Israel has yet to return to pre-intifada levels, with native Israelis still the dominant presence on beaches and boardwalks. But visitors are slowly returning as the threat of suicide bombings fades. And with terror on the rise around the world, some vacationers reckon they

may as well take their chances in Israel as anywhere else.

"They thought New York City was safe in 2001, and terrorists are blowing up London now, so is anywhere safe?" asks 30-year-old Marquis Cross from Baton Rouge, La., biting into a huge hamburger alongside his cousin James Yage at the Tel Aviv pub Mike's Place, itself the site of a 2002 suicide bombing that killed three people.

Non-Jewish tourists, the pair have visited Jerusalem and taken in the Tel Aviv beaches, with the Dead Sea still to come. "These are nice people. This is a fun city," says Yage, 35, shaking more ketchup onto his fries.

And as for the political situation, "they've been going through these problems for years, and it seems pretty calm now," he adds in his Tennessee drawl.

"It's pretty interesting, but I don't have much of a view so I just turn on the sports," admits Cross sheepishly.

The dramatic television scenes of orange-clad settlers battling Israeli police and soldiers are also being ignored by retirees Samuel and Jutta Rosenblat, from Boca Raton, Fla.

They are visiting the resort town of

Herzliya along with numerous members of their extended family, as they have for many years. Undeterred by terror in the past, they see no reason why the disengagement — which they both support — should put them off this year.

"A lot of people in Florida are afraid to come every year because of the suicide bombings," says Jutta, 82. "It's important to show that we're not afraid

and we have to support Israel."

Her 83-year-old husband, a Holocaust survivor who was in five different concentration camps, agrees that showing faith in the Jewish state is vital. "If we had had Israel before the war, then not so many Jews would have been killed," he says. "We would have had somewhere to go."

The disengagement has also provided an unexpected bonus to the tourism industry, especially in the southern parts of the country. Although most Israelis may be avoiding vacationing in the coastal region around Gaza, with the military imposing many restrictions on travel, journalists have flocked to the area.

Thousands of foreign journalists and TV crews have snapped up every room in the vicinity, with kibbutzim close to Gaza renting out not only their bed-and-breakfast accommodations but all available spaces in their dining rooms, schools and community centers.

I have faith in the State of Israel and the army so I thought it would be OK.

Alona Van t'Hoog
Dutch tourist in Israel

THE DISENGAGEMENT SUMMER



The Tel Aviv beachfront near the main strip of major tourist hotels.

As tolerance grows, Slovak Jews are more at ease

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (JTA)—If there is one thing Jewish leaders in Bratislava are sure of, it's that the world doesn't know much about them.

"Historians publish a lot on the Jewish communities of Prague or Budapest, but not Bratislava. It's out of the way for them," said Maros Borsky, a project manager at the state-run Museum of Jewish Culture and a member of the Bratislava Jewish Community board.

After all, the city's official Jewish community — a body whose officers operate social programs, manage property, and represent Jewish interests to the state — has only 600 members. And Bratislava, with small, attractive Old Town surrounded by a large swath of depressing, concrete Communist-era housing projects, looks more like a sleepy provincial backwater than a country capital.

But just as Slovakia is now earning admiration throughout Europe for progressive reforms that have boosted its economy, the Jewish community is also undergoing dramatic changes.

The community, like the Slovaks themselves, is shaking off the last remnants of a nationalistic, xenophobic pariah state dominated by Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar in the 1990s.

Slovakia became a full-fledged member of the European Union last year with a government intent on stamping out the racial and religious intolerance that made many Jews fearful long after the demise of communism in 1989.

"Slovaks are more comfortable being Jewish now than they were 10 years ago," Borsky said. "During the Meciar years, authors of articles for the Jewish student-union magazine would use an alias or only their first name, but now they use their real names," he said.

He attributes the change in attitude to the fading of Slovak nationalism that Meciar and his sometimes-racist colleagues championed.

There is a palpable sense of optimism among Jewish community representatives as they aim to catch up with other E.U. Jewish communities. Renovation plans are under way for synagogues, cemetery preservation and even tourist routes, often with state support.

Developing a commitment to religion, however, is another matter.

"The majority of our members are Holocaust survivors, and their reaction to what they went through was to reject religion. Their kids, who grew up during communism, feel the same," said Peter Salner, the chairman of the community for the last nine years.

He said the community's main aim was to enrich the life of its members, particularly the elderly, who are its core.

"When I became chairman in 1996, we were delivering 25 hot lunches a day to the elderly. Now it's 100," said Salner.

On a recent summer day, many of Bratislava's elderly Jews were on a weeklong recreational trip to a spa in the east of the country, courtesy of the Jewish community.

The community's recreation center and kitchen, where hot meals are served, is an inviting venue that keeps guests lingering long after the last cup of coffee has been poured.

Built in 2001, it offers social and educational programs for Jews in every age group.

With only one rabbi, a dynamic Chabadnik from the United States named Baruch Myers, the Jews of Bratislava are not immune to the usual conflicts over orthodoxy that have befallen the mostly secular communities of the former Eastern Bloc.

But religious conflicts are muted in Bratislava.

"We don't want to become another Prague," said one prominent community member who asked that his name not be used, concerned at offending his colleagues in the Czech capital. He was referring to the well-publicized infighting that has plagued the Prague Jewish community in recent years.

The contrast with Prague applies to other aspects of community life as well.

The Czech capital — the capital of Czechoslovakia until the Czech Republic and Slovakia became two separate countries in 1993 — has one of Europe's best-preserved Jewish quarters, and the Jewish

Museum is one of the country's leading tourist attractions.

Bratislava's former Jewish quarter — which had been in decline since 1867, when Jews were allowed to live outside the confines of the ghetto — was more or less wiped away in the 1960s as a result of highway construction.

Known as Pressburg during the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Bratislava

was once a major center of Jewish learning. The city had 14 synagogues before World War II.

Only the elegant Bratislava Synagogue remains, dating to 1926. Although renovated, it still lacks heat in the winter.

The city's major Jewish monument, the Chatam Sofer Memorial, does attract its share of tourists each year, as Sofer was among the pre-eminent 19th-century European rabbis who played a major role in the development of Orthodox Judaism.

The Museum of Jewish Culture has only a handful of rooms, and while very informative about the history and fate of Slovak Jews, its scope is limited, admitted Borsky, because it has not been able to expand into more space at the city-owned building where it is housed.

But the museum's ambitious goal is to open exhibitions at synagogues throughout the country, as they are restored.

It plans to open an exhibition on Jewish life, along with a national Holocaust monument in Nitra in September. Later this year, in the women's gallery of a synagogue at the foot of a Unesco World Heritage castle at Spisske Podhradie, another memorial to Holocaust survivors is slated to open.

"This is something the tourist board really hasn't had experience with in the past," he said.

In 2001, the Slovak Federation of Jewish Communities documented the existence of 100 houses of Jewish prayer in the country, including 40 major synagogues of unique architectural interest, which are mostly still in need of repair.

Last year was the first time the federation received money from the state to help reconstruct the country's synagogues. ■

'Slovaks are more comfortable being Jewish now than they were 10 years ago.'

Maros Borsky

Bratislava Jewish official

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

In Slovakia, rabbi, community work together

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Rabbi Baruch Myers is not shy about the businesslike approach that he hopes will bring a religious renaissance to the tiny Bratislava Jewish community.

"P.R., P.R., P.R., that is what it's all about," Myers says from his modern office in the Slovak capital. Books with titles such as "Fundraising for Dummies" and "Managing the Non-Profit Organization" line his bookshelf.

Myers, Bratislava's only rabbi, is from Chabad, a fervently Orthodox international group based in the United States that occasionally is at odds with the mostly secular Slovak Jewish local community. But Myers' relationship with the community is generally amicable — in part out of necessity.

"He is our only rabbi; we cannot forget that," says Peter Salner, the chairman of the 600-member Bratislava Jewish community.

The minyan that Myers runs four days a week may only draw a dozen worshippers, but the community was without a rabbi for 25 years, so it's understandable that people aren't yet comfortable going to synagogue, he says.

Myers and Salner have been making efforts to build bridges between Chabad and the community.

For instance, Salner says Myers has been helpful in trying to resolve an ongoing conflict over whether urns containing the ashes of cremated Jews can be buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Myers supported a compromise that would permit the urns to be placed in a special place of honor just on the edge of the cemetery. The community board rejected the proposal and remains fiercely divided on the issue.

A few months ago the board took the unusual step of asking Myers to attend its meetings.

"That's a great sign," he says.

Myers is unusual in Chabad circles because he has a secular education: He's a graduate of the University of Michigan, where he studied music composition.

Perhaps it's his wide experience with the secular world — he was raised secular, he says — and the fact that he now speaks fluent Slovak that has enabled him to work on developing positive relations with members of the Jewish community and remain

their only rabbi for more than a decade.

"As an American Jew, you have to put on European glasses if you are going to succeed here," he says.

At the Chabad House in Bratislava one day in July, children jump up and down, singing loudly. "Thumbs up, thumbs up," goes one chant, followed by the more religious fare you would expect to hear at a Jewish camp anywhere.

But this is not anywhere: Only a decade ago, dressing as a fervently Orthodox Jew in Bratislava might have elicited a skinhead attack.

Myers himself was assaulted in the early 1990s. But times have changed, said his wife, Chanie, Chabad's local director of education and a mother of 10.

"People see we are not being shot at sunrise, so they are not afraid to send their kids to our summer camp," she says.

Chabad's modern facilities might be part of the appeal, since

they look better than most day-care establishments in this former eastern bloc country.

This year Camp Gan Israel, a three-week day camp, has 50 kids, twice as many as last year — or almost 10 percent of the city's Jewish population, as Chanie Myers puts it.

"That's as if a camp in upstate New York had 45,000 kids," she says proudly.

The camp was the Myers' brainchild after they arrived in Bratislava 12 years ago and started a summer day program for Jewish kids in one of the city's parks, with trips to the public swimming pool.

Kids who attend get all the benefits of a typical summer camp — cultural activities, day trips, lots of exercise and singing — plus lessons in Hebrew and religious instruction. Counselors are mostly fervently Orthodox teenage girls from the United States, 16-year-olds in long skirts and long sleeves with pronounced New York accents. Exposure to English, not always easy to find in Bratislava, is another plus at the camp.

But as Chabad draws more interest among those with Jewish heritage, the potential for conflicts with the official community grows.

The camp expanded this summer to include a section for teens, but few of the campers' parents are members of the official Jewish community.

"They have parents who were raised as Christians or didn't even know they were Jewish, but they are all halachic Jews," Chanie Myers says.

Those who don't meet the halachic criteria of Jewishness — having a Jewish mother — are excluded. That irks some in the community, who complain that non-halachic Jews who identify Jewishly aren't allowed to attend the camp, while some campers are halachically Jewish but have little interest in Jewish identity.

Rabbi Myers admits that one camper has a mother who goes to church and perhaps four others come from homes where at least one parent might at one time have practiced Christianity.

But he says that all of the children in the camp are there because their parents want them to learn about Judaism and Jewish traditions.

"I have kids who start telling their parents about the commandments, and eventually the parents become so interested that they, too, want to observe Jewish holidays," he says.

Salner attributes the popularity of Chabad's camp and kindergarten, which has been operating for a decade, not to a growing interest in a Jewish identity but to Chabad's financial resources, which

have made the camp and school superior to other local, non-Jewish offerings.

After two years of working with the Slovak Education Ministry, Chabad is set to open a Jewish school for grades one through four next year.

Other conflicts have more to do with style than substance. Two years ago, Myers and his wife organized the first public celebration of Judaism in Slovakia since World War II, a Lag B'Omer parade from the Chabad Center to the presidential palace.

"There was terror in the Jewish community that something would happen. We had Jews calling telling us please don't do this, but I sent my son on the float with a kipah under a clown wig, and it went fine," Chanie Myers says.

AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD

'He is our only
rabbi; we cannot
forget that.'

Peter Salner

Chairman, Bratislava Jewish
community

Israeli researchers high on drugs' promise

By KARIN KLOOSTERMAN

TEL AVIV (JTA) — In the early 1960s, just before Flower Children started smoking pot, a young organic chemist with a fondness for medicinal plants isolated the first known cannabinoid, THC, from an 11-pound lump of hashish appropriated by Jerusalem police.

Raphael Mechoulam, now 70, went on to discover more than just the first active compound found in marijuana and hashish. In fact, the past 40 years of his career have laid the groundwork for how researchers work with a group of chemicals called cannabinoids, some of which occur naturally in the human body.

Affecting different parts of the organism, cannabinoids can be applied in areas such as pain relief, cancer treatment and diet suppression.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that terminally ill patients with doctors' prescriptions for marijuana will be prosecuted for violating federal drug laws — even if their home states allow marijuana use for medical purposes — a late June meeting of the International Cannabinoid Research Society in Tampa, Fla., showed how important cannabinoids are becoming for commercial drug research.

Hobnobbing with the research scientists were executives from drug giants Eli Lilly, Pfizer, Merck, Glaxo Smith Kline, Bristol-Meyers Squibb and Sanofi-Aventis, who came to explore the society's latest research.

When the society first convened in 1991, it consisted of a small clique of esoteric

scientists who shared novel research. Almost 15 years later, the group is grabbing the attention of billion-dollar drug developers and is sponsored by the National Institute of Drug Abuse, the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Health Canada.

Richard Musty, the society's director and a psychology professor at the University of Vermont, told JTA that large pharmaceutical companies are eager to find a way to cash in on cannabinoid research. As early as next year, he noted, Sanofi-Aventis hopes to have the first synthetic cannabinoid drug on U.S. shelves. The pill currently is in advanced stages of clinical trials.

Drug developers at Sanofi-Aventis have studied and tweaked the chemical "handshake" that occurs between brain neurons and cannabinoids in the brain's reward centers. Through a process that essentially reverses the handshake, the company hopes to inhibit food intake in overweight people who may be at risk of cardiovascular disease — potentially giving Sanofi-Aventis a large chunk of a diet-pill market that Musty projects will reach \$5 billion.

At the society meeting, Mechoulam handed the R. Mechoulam Annual Award to George Kunos from the National Institutes of Health for work in cannabinoid research. Ironically, the NIH was one of the first bodies to deny Mechoulam research money for isolating cannabinoids in the 1960s.

"Israeli scientists have a way of entering areas where others fear to tread," explained Bernard Dichek, publisher of the biotech monthly BioIsrael. "When Mechoulam's American contemporaries were either smoking marijuana or condemning those who did, Mechoulam forged ahead with the science and discovered the active ingredient anyway."

Mechoulam's seminal work has made the Hebrew University of Jerusalem an international research hub on cannabinoids, with drug developers and health professionals often coming to consult with Mechoulam. Mechoulam leads a team of doctoral students at his Jerusalem laboratories, and his patents are being commer-

cialized by Pharmos, a NASDAQ-traded company with offices in Iselin, N.J., and Rehovot, Israel.

A new drug from Pharmos, Cannabinor, is to begin clinical trials soon in Munich. Cannabinor could fill a hole in the pain-relief market as doctors become reluctant to prescribe Vioxx and other widely used pain drugs because of safety and other concerns.

Pharmos ultimately aims to use Cannabinor to treat moderate to severe post-surgery pain

and alleviate lower back pain and pain associated with cancer. Today, patients rely mostly on opiates to gain even moderate relief, but opioid compounds have substantial unwanted side effects such as addiction and constipation.

Like the Sanofi-Aventis diet-pill formulation, Cannabinor is a synthetic compound that provides therapeutic benefits without the psychotropic effects associated with marijuana and hashish.

Some companies provide a natural cannabinoid plant extract for various therapeutic uses. But the synthetic compounds are far more potent than plant formulations that have been used medicinally for millennia.

Reports indicate that as early as 2737 B.C.E., the emperor Shen Neng of China was prescribing marijuana tea to treat gout, rheumatism, malaria and poor memory. The drug's popularity as a medicine spread throughout Asia, Africa and later the Middle East.

Hashish has been smoked in the Middle East for centuries, Mechoulam notes, and the use of marijuana and hashish is very common among today's Israeli youth. But the synthetic products are much more effective as medicine, Mechoulam says.

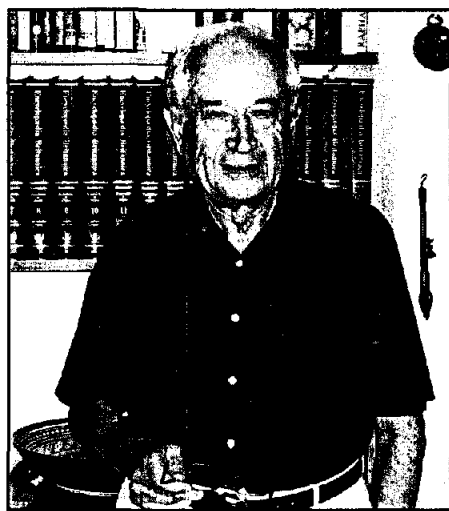
"The problem of medical marijuana and hashish in its pure form is that although it is a good drug in certain diseases, it cannot be used clinically because a patient may get a different concoction every time one inhales," he says.

Mechoulam rarely uses the raw material in his research today. He prefers to study endocannabinoids, which are cannabinoids that occur naturally in the bodies of humans and animals.

Israeli scientists have a way of entering areas where others fear to tread.

Bernard Dichek
Publisher, BioIsrael

FOCUS ON ISSUES



Courtesy of Prof. Mechoulam

Professor Raphael Mechoulam.

ARTS & CULTURE

Scholars prepare to translate ancient Jewish texts

By DANIELLA PELED

LONDON (JTA) — Jewish books about magic and giants are among a slew of ancient texts set to be translated into English.

The manuscripts, which date from the third century B.C.E. to the sixth century C.E., include legends about numerous biblical characters, magical and astrological handbooks, poetry, visions, oracles, and apocalyptic prophecies.

"Some of these books are surprisingly unorthodox," said professor James Davila, who is heading the research project along with his colleague Richard Bauckham at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

Known as Old Testament Pseudepigrapha — meaning "books with false titles" — a term that applies to texts similar to biblical tales but written much later by unknown authors, the documents tell unofficial versions of biblical stories written to satisfy the curiosity of ordinary people of the time.

They include some examples of non-conformist beliefs and practices, such as Book of the Mysteries, a Hebrew handbook written in the talmudic era listing magical incantations and spells that sometimes invoke pagan gods, a practice forbidden by Jewish law.

Others are downright provocative, such as the tantalizingly named "Book of Giants," which expands on a story told in the Book of Genesis where angels are said to have mated with the daughters of men who then gave birth to giants.

Some books retell or reuse Old Testament stories and themes and also include stories about Jews in the Second Temple period — 536 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. — and even pagan prophets of the biblical period, illustrating the demand for imaginative, colorful stories about biblical narratives.

Many documents were written in the name of biblical characters such as Moses and Elijah and contain revelations and prophecies credited to these figures to strengthen the weight of the authorship. ■

Hungarian shul is rebuilt

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

MAD, Hungary (JTA) — Back in the early 1980s, the abandoned synagogue in the village of Apostag, south of Budapest, was in such bad condition that local authorities wanted to tear it down.

The village's Jewish community had been wiped out in the Holocaust, and the synagogue, built in 1822, had been looted, ransacked and seriously damaged during and after World War II.

But Peter Wirth, an architect and monument-preservation expert called to the scene, fell in love with the building and became convinced that it must be saved.

He inspired village leaders with his own enthusiasm and, in a rare example for the time, convinced local and national officials to pitch in on the total restoration of the building for use as a library and cultural center.

The sensitive reconstruction project, which restored much of the original interior decoration, won a coveted international award in 1988 from Europa Nostra, the pan-European Federation for Heritage which represents over 200 heritage nonprofits.

Since then, Wirth, who is Jewish, has made synagogue restoration something of a specialty and has overseen the restoration of about 10 synagogues in Hungary. Some are still owned by the Hungarian Jewish federation, but only one of them, in Vac, is located in a town with a living Jewish community and is still used regularly as a house of worship. ■

This year, Wirth, working with his wife, Agnes Benko, won his second Europa Nostra Award — this time for the full-scale restoration of the 18th-century baroque synagogue in Mad, a winemaking village in the northeastern part of Hungary.

Built in 1795, the Mad synagogue is one of the oldest in the country. Rising on a gentle hill, it forms a triangle with the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches nearby, demonstrating the religious balance that once characterized the village.

No Jews live in Mad today, and the restoration, completed in 2004, incorporates plaques listing the names of the nearly 800 local Jews who were deported to Auschwitz. The restored synagogue, which will serve as a memorial as well as a museum, is

also suitable for religious services.

"The Jewish community in Miskolc, about half an hour's drive from Mad, has promised to lend a Torah for services, if needed," said the architect Andras Roman, who served as professional adviser to the project.

Outside, the synagogue has an elegant, scalloped facade decorated with false pilasters. Inside, the walls and vaulted ceiling are covered with intricate floral and geometric designs painted in soothing pastel colors.

Everything is focused on a central dais, where four pillars support the vault, and on the ark, which is richly decorated with carvings of flowers, the Ten Commandments, and gilded lions and griffins.

"It is a pearl in Hungary's cultural heritage and an important precious stone in the heritage of all Europe," Europa Nostra's executive president-elect, Andrea Schuler, said during a recent ceremony that honored the architects and affixed an award plaque to the synagogue's outer wall. ■

The Mad synagogue is owned by the Hungarian government, which funded 90 percent of the \$800,000 project. A grant from the New York-based World Monuments Fund, which years ago had listed the synagogue on its watch list of endangered heritage sites, provided the remaining funds.

As part of the restoration, a small exhibit mounted in a side room tells the story of the local Jewish community.

Wirth said he and his wife had sought to recreate the way the synagogue looked when it had a thriving congregation — using historical sources, memories, photographs and the surviving traces of decoration to guide their work.

Authorities in Mad say the synagogue restoration has already boosted tourism to the village. They have pledged to maintain the building and hope to find funds to restore the L-shaped yeshiva and rabbi's house that form part of the synagogue complex.

"We want to install a culture-and-exhibition center there, as well as other facilities for the synagogue," said Mayor Imre Galambosi.

"We are striving to revive Jewish traditions here," he said. "The Jewish community always played an important role in the village." ■

An architect wins a second award for synagogue restoration.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli killer wishes Sharon dead

The Israeli who killed four Palestinians on Wednesday said he wishes Ariel Sharon were dead.

Speaking Thursday before his court hearing, West Bank settler Asher Weissgan refused to apologize for his actions. "I'm not sorry for what I did. I hope someone also kills Sharon," the Jerusalem Post reported.

Police said Weissgan grabbed a gun from a security guard at the industrial zone in the settlement of Shiloh and opened fire on Palestinian workers.

Weissgan said he committed the murders in an attempt to stop Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank.

Standoff at Gaza settlement

Israeli security forces faced off with an armed settler at a Gaza Strip outpost.

The leader of the Shirat Hayam enclave, which this week declared autonomy from the Jewish state, barricaded himself in with 500 supporters Thursday as troops and police closed in to evacuate them.

Appearing in front of television cameras with an assault rifle, the man warned that any Israeli personnel who broke into Shirat Hayam risked injury.

Negotiations were under way to defuse the standoff.

Iran gloats over Gaza withdrawal

Iran credited the Palestinians with forcing Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

"The evacuation shows that what was taken by force would not have been retrieved without resistance," Iranian state radio quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi as saying Thursday.

He referred to armed Palestinian attacks during the intifada as "legitimate resistance."

Policeman refuses to follow orders in Gaza

An Israeli border policeman refused to participate in evacuating a Gaza Strip settlement.

The man who refused to participate in the evacuation of Kfar Darom Thursday was handed over to military police.

Gaza animals rescued

The Israeli army is allowing animal-protection groups into the Gaza Strip to rescue animals left behind by departing settlers.

"Animals need help in the evacuation," said Nina Natelson, director of Concern for Helping Animals in Israel. "They must not be left behind to suffer and die from thirst and hunger."

Many settlers are leaving cats, dogs and donkeys behind, in part because they are moving to places where they cannot keep them.

WORLD

European Jewish leader quits

The chief executive of the European Council of Jewish Communities unexpectedly stepped down.

In an e-mail sent Tuesday to board members of the agency, Neville Kluk said his resignation will be effective at the end of September. Speaking on condition of anonymity, one board member said he suspected that "the resignation might be due to Neville being burnt out after working in the Jewish community for so long."

This person also said Kluk plans to remain available to Jewish organizations as a consultant.

Neither the ECJC, an umbrella group for Jewish communities across Europe, nor Kluk was available for comment.

Group presses Austria on doctor

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Austria to annul the medical degree of a doctor believed to have participated in Nazi atrocities.

Albert Heim is believed to have killed hundreds of inmates at Mauthausen by lethal injection.

Heim also worked at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen.

On the verge of being arrested in Germany in 1962, he left the country and his whereabouts are unknown.

NORTH AMERICA

Rice 'empathizes' with Israel

Condoleezza Rice expressed empathy for Israel, but said its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was not enough.

In an interview with The New York Times on Wednesday, the U.S. secretary of state called the withdrawal a "dramatic moment in the history of the Middle East" and called on Israel to loosen travel restrictions for Palestinians and withdraw from more parts of the West Bank.

She called on the Palestinian Authority to disarm Hamas.

Arab Bank to pay fine

The Arab Bank agreed to pay a \$24 million fine for inadequate controls against money laundering that may have contributed to terrorism.

U.S. regulators announced the fine Wednesday.

Several American and Israeli victims of terrorist attacks have filed lawsuits against the Arab Bank, accusing it of transferring funds to its branches in Palestinian areas for payouts to families of suicide bombers.

Sushi bill hits raw nerve

A Jewish couple eating in New Jersey received a restaurant bill with the words "Jew couple" listed on it.

The couple was dining last Friday at an eatery on the New Jersey shore when their bill for sushi came, with "Jew couple" in the part of the bill where a table number or description of customers normally would be, the New York Post reported.

Elliot Stein said that when he complained to the restaurant manager, he was told there was nothing derogatory about the term.

The restaurant's general manager told the Post that the words reflected "poor judgment" by a worker who is no longer employed by the restaurant.

Forum focuses on Torah and the Holocaust

The relevance of the Torah to suffering and the Holocaust is the focus of an international educators' conference.

More than 180 Jewish Learning Institute instructors from 11 countries are focusing on these issues at a forum in New Jersey taking place through Thursday.

The Jewish Learning Institute is run by the Chabad-Lubavitch centers, often in conjunction with local Jewish community centers and other institutions, Chabad said in a news release.

Leo Frank lynching marked

Jews in Atlanta marked the 90th anniversary of the lynching of a Jewish man.

Commemorations Wednesday marked the date when Leo Frank was lynched by a mob after being wrongly convicted of killing a teenage girl in a pencil factory.

Frank was posthumously pardoned in 1986 on the grounds that the state failed to adequately protect him while he was in custody.

The lynching led to the formation of the Anti-Defamation League.