

# Cinemagazine

## **Mokum Aleph** (2015)

Director: Berenike Rozgonyi | 42 minutes | Documentary

'Aleph', the initial letter of the Hebrew alphabet, also means 'the first'. 'Mokum Aleph', the first city or City A, Amsterdam so called in Yiddish by the tens of thousands of Jewish inhabitants who knew our capital before 1940. That this Amsterdam was a whole different city than the city known nowadays, which is apparent from the documentary 'Mokum Aleph', designed and made by Hungarian-Dutch filmmaker Berenike Rozgonyi. The film depicts archive images, historical city maps, life-awakened photo illustrations and poetic voiceovers, the almost forgotten story of Jewish Amsterdam just a century ago.

Whoever is looking for a Dutch kosher sandwich 'halfom' (half liver-half pastrami), Challah Bread of a Jewish baker or a dose of undisputed Yiddish folk spirit will search for long in Amsterdam. In the neighborhoods 'Rivierenbuurt' or 'Buitenveldert' you may find something, but from the original Jewish neighborhood - located between the 'Nieuwmarkt' and 'Waterlooplein' - nothing is left. This area was unrecognizable renewed after the Second World War, which now reminds little of that old place.

'Mokum Aleph' will bring nostalgic feelings to the people who are familiar with this story; the movie will bring beautiful old film and photo images to life to recall the memory. But above all, the big group of Amsterdam people with little historical knowledge of the city, who thought it always was a paradise of Coffee Companies, for highly educated two-way two-careers, two cars and a bicycle, should see this film. Nothing is less true: Amsterdam in the twenties and thirties, and especially the working class neighborhoods, was a chaotic collection of stuffed streets, dilapidated houses with sewers draining off the canals, playing children and shouting women on the streets, a coming and going of street traders, rag pickers, and everywhere hanging laundry. In this film, the Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam is brought to life. 'Mokum Aleph' itself gives directions but no precise locations, so the viewer must look for it himself. So the best is watching the movie with a map of the city or Google Maps nearby, to find all the streets and alleys around 'Rapenburg', the 'Valkeniersstraat' and 'Uilenburg'. Because earlier here was the heart of the Amsterdam ghetto, the "the 'womb' from Dutch Judaism".

Moody music by composer Micha Molthoff adds to the atmosphere and the different voices in voice-over recall poetic memories. Old images are interchanged with shots of modern Amsterdam, still beautiful but different, or as Amsterdam's narrative says, "a new beginning, the people will come. But the rumor does not". In the meantime, many images are shown of construction work, in the same places of earlier times, symbolic for the changes and the passing of time. A nice idea, but the old images are stronger, you would like to see more and hear from the life of then. How did it used to be? About what did the people laugh and about what did they mourn? What did they look like? Here and there the film gives clues, but the selection could have been a little more extensive.

The film consciously chooses for an end in the year 1940. The ending of this story is known, but for collective memory, the years before the war should be of great value. And this beautiful documentary already contributes to this.

Ruby Sanders

'Mokum Aleph' will be broadcasted at the Jewish Broadcasting on NPO2 on Sunday, October 25, 2015.

Tags: 3.5 stars, documentary