



**Synagogues in Germany**  
**A virtual reconstruction**  
**17 May until 01 October 2000**

Under the impact of the arson attack on the synagogue in Lübeck in 1994, a group of students at the Technische Universität in Darmstadt came together in order to address and reappraise an important chapter of German history and building history. With the help of the CAD process (computer aided design), which simulates true-to-life spatial conditions three dimensionally, these students have reconstructed a number of synagogues that fell victim to Nazi violence. Yet the aim in reconstructing these synagogues was not only to stimulate interest in valuable historical edifices but also to once again bring to mind a part of our irretrievably lost cultural heritage and to rediscover this forgotten architecture. The exhibition will present virtual reconstructions of 14 synagogues, which until their destruction had been an integral part of the city profiles of Berlin, Darmstadt, Dortmund, Dresden, Frankfurt, Hanover, Kaiserslautern, Cologne, Leipzig, Munich, Nuremberg and Plauen.

The exhibition is divided into three segments. In the entrance area, where various wordings of law are collated and presented, visitors will be confronted with the increasing deprivation of rights suffered by the Jews in Germany in the 1930s. Their legal and social marginalisation culminated in the deliberate and well-planned attack on the most visible sites of Jewish life - on hundreds of synagogues and prayer rooms throughout the entire German Reich.

Some synagogues had already been dismantled and their obliteration sanctioned in solemn state ceremonies prior to November 1938, such as in Dortmund, Nuremberg and Munich. After the excesses of the 'Reichspogromnacht' of 9 November 1938 most of the Jewish houses of worship were left in ruins. In most cases they were cleared away in a matter of days, the costs of which had to be carried by the Jewish communities themselves. Historical photographs document these dramatic events. The main part of the exhibition is centered around the reconstructions of 14 selected synagogues, at the heart of which are three elaborate simulated films depicting three houses of worship in Cologne (built in 1861 by Ernst Zwirner), Hanover (built in 1870 by Edwin Oppler) and Plauen (built in 1930 by Fritz Landauer). An additional 11 synagogues will be presented in various stages of reconstruction and by diverse technical means (video and slide projection, computer print-outs). Computer monitors will allow a virtual tour of the exterior and interior. Adjustable perspectives, a three-dimensional play of light and shadow also enable a differentiated perception of spatial conditions. This will be complemented not only by background information on the local histories, on architecture and liturgy, but also by eyewitness accounts and a few original objects that have been saved from destruction.

This exhibition particularly seeks to demonstrate the reconstruction process itself. As a result, two working spaces in the exhibition will be set up for students who will continue their work on the project. During the exhibition, the virtual reconstruction of the destroyed synagogue in Dortmund-Hiltropwall (built in 1900 by Eduard von Fürstenau) will „grow“ in front of visitors' eyes. Historical source material (construction plans, photographs and drawings) will provide an insight into the workshop praxis that this project, designated as 'work-in-progress', has maintained.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue comprised of circa 80 pages, which will include an extensive description of the project as well as essays and photographic material on the reconstructed synagogues. A film documentation, broadcast by 3sat and to be presented in

the exhibition rooms, will review the project's results and will take a closer look at various aspects of the virtual reconstruction.

The exhibition will also be complemented by a concert in an effort to, acoustically, bring to life the cultural heritage of the synagogue once again. An introduction will be given by the organist Andor Izsák, who was born in 1944 in Budapest. Andor Izsák has lived in Germany since 1983 and works as a scholar and authentic interpreter of synagogue music. As a result of his work the European Center for Jewish Music was brought to life in 1988, which since 1992 has become affiliated with the Hochschule für Musik and Theater in Hanover. For the past three years Andor Izsák has also been working regularly with the Hamburg boys and youth choir St. Michaelis in order to re-enliven the cantor tradition of song.

This exhibition has been organized in cooperation with the Technische Universität Darmstadt, field of CAD in architecture, the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn. It will be inaugurated by Ms. Edelgard Bulmahn, Minister for Education and Research, and by Mr. Paul Spiegel, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

**Comprehensive essays and photographic material is available at the press office as well as on the Internet at [www.bundeskunsthalle.de](http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de)**

**Introductory material into this subject in the form of catalogue texts can be made available upon request by email.**

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## Chronology

30<sup>th</sup> January 1933

Adolf Hitler is appointed Reich Chancellor.

27<sup>th</sup> February 1933

Destruction of the Reichstag building through arson. The persecution of political opponents becomes more brutal.

1<sup>st</sup> April 1933

Boycott of Jewish shops throughout the Reich. A law instituted on 7<sup>th</sup> April to restore the civil service with life-long security also sanctions the dismissal of 'non-Aryan' civil servants with the exception of former front-line soldiers. This is followed by similar ordinances affecting the majority of independent professions.

10<sup>th</sup> May 1933

Throughout Germany, books by Jewish and non-Jewish but politically or literary unpopular authors are burned in public.

Summer 1933

The citizenship of Jews who were naturalized during the Weimar Republic is revoked. Non-Jews are advised to divorce their Jewish marriage partners.

15<sup>th</sup> September 1935

The Reichstag passes the so-called *Nuremberg Laws*. The *Reichsbürgergesetz* (law of citizenship) differentiates between 'Aryan members of the Reich' and simple 'citizens'. The *Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* (law protecting German blood and German honor) prohibits among other things marriages between Jews and non-Jews.

November 1935

Revocation of the right to vote for Jews

March 1938

Jewish places of worship are deprived of government protection to which they had been entitled as public bodies.

Spring/Summer 1938

Numerous laws are instituted that ultimately seek to purge all Jews from economic life. They are given special passes with additional first names Sarah or Israel.

June 1938

About 1,500 Jewish men are arrested in Berlin and deported to concentration camps.

20<sup>th</sup> August 1938

In Vienna, a central office for Jewish emigration is set up which is to increase government pressure to emigrate.

28<sup>th</sup> October 1938

17,000 Jews of Polish descent, most of whom had lived in Germany for decades, are deported and forced to camp for days in a no-man's-land between Poland and Germany.

7<sup>th</sup> November 1938

In reaction to these events, the 17-year-old Herschel Grynszpan shoots dead the German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, in Paris.

9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> November 1938

The National Socialists take Rath's death as an excuse for their pogrom, the so-called 'Reichskristallnacht' or 'Night of Broken Glass'. On these two days more than 1,000 synagogues are set afire, 7,500 shops are damaged and plundered. At least 91 Jews die, about 26,000 Jewish men are sent to concentration camps.

12<sup>th</sup> November 1938

Subsequently, it was decided to completely expropriate the Jewish population. In addition, Jews were forced to pay one billion Reichsmark in so-called 'expiation', the damage done during the 'Reichskristallnacht' was to be repaired at the cost of the Jewish communities.

## **History of the Synagogue**

### The Tabernacle

During their encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai, God calls upon the children of Israel to "make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25,8). From then on the tablets of the Law, containing the Ten Commandments which Moses brought down from the mountain, were to be kept in a portable shrine known as the Tabernacle. As the Hebrews' first sanctuary it thus was the forerunner of the Temple in Jerusalem and thus of every other Synagogue built afterward. The tabernacle was raised within an enclosed space in the midst of the Israelite encampment. A curtain partitioned its interior: In the anteroom stood an altar with incense, a golden candelabra and a table with the Bread of the Presence. Behind, the Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant with the tablets of the Law.

### The First Temple

Under King Solomon a magnificent sanctuary was built between 957 and 950 BCE. The Temple was surrounded by a courtyard with an altar for offerings and a water basin. On the east side, further courtyards for men and for women were attached. One entered the main room of religious service through the two massive columns of the vestibule. In the main room an incense altar, the table with the Bread of the Presence and ten golden Menorah candelabras were arranged. The Holy of Holies lay beyond.

The Babylonian ruler Nebuchadrezzar II destroyed the temple in 587/86 BCE. Jerusalem was laid in ruins and the population was enslaved and deported to Babylonia.

### The Second Temple

Upon their return from Babylonian exile the Jews consecrated their newly rebuilt temple in 515 BCE. It was not until hundreds of years later that the temple was ultimately destroyed by the Romans. After putting down the Jewish revolt in 70 CE the temple was destroyed by fire, its precious liturgical instruments were taken off to Rome. Just a portion of the rampart's Western Wall remained standing and is known to us today as the "Wailing Wall", the site of many pilgrimages.

### Antique Synagogues

The synagogues of antiquity began to be built around the time of the first Temple. In contrast to the Temple, which focused on worship in the form of offering sacrifice, the synagogue was associated with service centered on sermons. It was a multi-functional building, serving as a site of teaching, prayer and assembly. After the Temple was destroyed, however, the Synagogue replaced the old sanctuary as the exclusive site of religious worship. In late antiquity the synagogue received its traditional form, which is still valid today: a three-aisled interior with a

niche for the Ark of the Covenant and the Torah, or Scrolls of Law, with entrances on the opposite side. In addition to the niche containing the Torah, the Almemor (reading desk for the Torah) was given a fixed position in the center of the room. Seating for women was provided either in a gallery above or in a separate court. Beyond this the synagogue did not maintain specific architectonic or even stylistic characteristics.

### The Middle Ages

The synagogue of the Middle Ages developed from the Sephardim (the Jews of Spain and Portugal) and Ashkenazim (the Jews of Germany, who spread to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe). Lacking a fixed architectural style for their synagogues, Jews of the Diaspora adopted the styles currently used by their host countries. Ashkenazi architecture bore two characteristics: a two-aisled interior with two columns placed at the central axis (Worms, Prague, Cracow), or a simple hall building without columns (Rufach in Alsace, Speyer). The Torah niche had a geographically fixed position, the Bima - also known as Almemor - dominated the room's center. Women observed the religious service from adjacent rooms.

### 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Due to their expulsion from German cities the Jews were forced to settle in rural areas. Their restrictive legal status and the hostility that they encountered from their surroundings is what motivated the majority of the Jewish communities to set up houses of prayer that were hardly distinguishable from the buildings around them. Only small details such as larger windows or a mere hint of a Torah niche revealed the structure's true nature. It was not until the Enlightenment that a change in the social status of the Jewish population occurred. Jews were once again allowed to reside in larger cities and build houses of worship that were architecturally recognizable as such. The Karlsruhe Synagogue was 1798 the first in the modern era to be built in the center of a major city.

### 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In comparison to the cities of England, Holland, Poland and Italy which magnificent Synagogues at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in Germany new developments in synagogue architecture took place. Rapidly growing Jewish communities erected commanding houses of worship equal in quality to Christian religious buildings.

At the same time, Jewish reformers demanded that changes be made to religious service and to traditional spatial arrangements within the synagogue: Removing the Bima from the center in favor of placing it in front of the Ark of the Covenant; the introduction of the organ and a pulpit for sermons in the language of the country; the abolishment of the women's gallery. Orthodox synagogues retained their traditional spatial arrangements, while Reform synagogues adhered to the new concepts.

Since Jewish religious art did not develop its own style that could have been used in the sense of historicism, it initially adopted Neo-Islamic elements that were to point to Jewish roots in the Orient. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the urban synagogue increasingly began to resemble the architectonic design of a Christian church; and the Neo-Romanesque style characterized the exterior of famous synagogues such as Hanover, Munich and Dresden.

It was not until the *Jugendstil* (art nouveau in Germany) that historicism was overcome and new building forms appeared along with a rich Jewish style of ornamentation. Only a few synagogues between 1918 and 1933 took up architectural trends established by Modernism just as self-confidently as it would a regionally developed style.

Between 1933 and 1945 over 1,400 synagogues and houses of prayer were destroyed in Germany.

### “Reconstruction” Room

#### **Berlin, Fasanenstrasse**

The liberal synagogue in the Fasanenstrasse, completed in 1912, was considered to be probably the most famous synagogue in all of Berlin. Built according to the plans of the architect

Ehrenfried Hessel, this house of worship, capable of seating 1,964 persons, was a massive longitudinal building covered by three cupolas. Particularly impressive were the main facade with its sculptural decor and the intricate ornamentation in the interior. Despite its approximation to Romanesque forms, Hessel's architecture bore marked orientaling features. As such it self-confidently broke with national interpretations of the German Middle Ages. After the synagogue erected in 1866 in the Oranienburger Strasse it was the first Jewish house of worship in Berlin not to have been built in a courtyard or behind a community building. The community paper proclaimed self-confidently that "such protection (...) is, thank God, no longer" needed. In the night of 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 seven synagogues burned in Berlin, including the house of worship on the Fasanenstrasse. Magnus Davidson, the chief cantor at the time, remembered later: "I stood there until 5 o'clock in the morning, that's when the fire-brigades left, the fire burnt out and I said Kaddish"

### **Cologne, Glockengasse**

Towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish community in Cologne had increased to such an extent that the construction of a new representative synagogue became necessary. The new building was erected between 1857 and 1861 thanks to a generous donation given by the banker Abraham Oppenheim. The architect Ernst Zwirner, who was involved in completing the Cologne cathedral as of 1833, was engaged to carry out the project

The synagogue in the Glockengasse was constructed in Neo-Islamic style and provided seating for 226 men and 190 women. It was designed as a centralized domed building over a Greek cross plan. After the synagogue was destroyed in a fire in 1867 it was rebuilt according to the original plans. During World War I the community had the copper covering removed from the dome and contributed the material to the war effort.

In the early morning hours of November 10<sup>th</sup> 1938 this house of worship was razed to the ground; in 1943 the property was subsequently transferred to the City of Cologne, which erected an opera house at this site, opened in 1957.

### **Darmstadt, Bleichstrasse**

The history of the Jews in Darmstadt began during the reign of Landgrave Ernst Ludwig (1687–1739), who was dependent on Jewish financiers and merchants for the construction of his Baroque residence. In 1695 Jewish residents of Darmstadt were awarded the privilege to pray in their own communal space, however, they were to do so "quietly and behind closed doors".

In 1906 the Orthodox religious community replaced their old synagogue with an impressive *Jugendstil* (German Art Nouveau) structure built by the architect Georg Wickop. His design encompassed an expansive centralized building with a narthex and two *risalto* towers. A cupola crowned the interior, the galleries above were covered by barrel vaulting. The building's design is characterized by *Jugendstil* features, a style which only tentatively found its way into religious architecture.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the Darmstadt SA-Brigade No. 50 reported the destruction of 37 synagogues in their district – either by fire or explosives. The synagogue on Bleichstrasse was one of them.

### **Dortmund, Hiltropwall**

After numerous pogroms and expulsion waves had occurred, the Jews were finally forced to leave Dortmund by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until after 1808 that they were granted continuous residency in the city.

The community's rapid growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century made the construction of a representative house of worship necessary. On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1900 the synagogue at Hiltropwall was consecrated. It seated more than 750 men and 450 women and was design by Eduard Fürstenau as a centralized building covered by a broad Tambour dome. The architect based his design on the postal building across the street which was built in the Neo-Gothic style promoted by the German emperor Wilhelm II. As a consequence, the synagogue received a rather unusual outward appearance through its

sparing use of Gothic building forms in combination with prominent Renaissance elements and echoes of regional building tradition.

Following Nuremberg and Munich's example, the Dortmund city council decided in August 1938 to pull down the synagogue and it subsequently forced the Jewish community to sell the property. Demolition work began on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

### **Dresden, Zeughausstrasse**

In the year 1834 Jewish religious worship in Saxony was placed directly under the control of the ministry of culture; until then Jewish affairs had been under the jurisdiction of the police authorities. In the same year permission was granted to establish a religious community and to build a synagogue in Dresden.

The house of worship built by Gottfried Semper was ceremoniously consecrated on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1840. Since Semper was the director of the Dresden School of Building, the community was able to commission one of the most renowned architects in Germany. He designed the synagogue as an imposing structure with a projected entrance hall on the west side. The octagonal central tower crowning the building was highly influenced by Romanesque architecture. The squared interior space with its two-storied galleries offered seating for 1,000 persons. The Dresden synagogue was at that time the largest Jewish house of worship in Germany and aroused extraordinary attention.

The public anti-Jewish campaign of terror began with a rally in front of the city hall in the night of 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November, culminating in the fire that destroyed the synagogue.

### **Frankfurt on the Main, Judengasse – Börneplatz – Friedberg Complex**

Of the four major synagogues in Frankfurt only one survived the *Reichsprogromnacht* in the night of 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938. What the fire did not destroy was cleared away or demolished over the next few days. The primary synagogue in the former Judengasse was erected in 1860 and provided seating for 1,100 persons. The architect Georg Kayser built a squared structure with a longitudinal room of worship and a single-bayed narthex. The main facade was divided into a central section with a rising gable flanked by two tower-like *risaltos*. The synagogue's interior was designed in Neo-Islamic style.

1882 the Orthodox community was able to consecrate a representative synagogue on the Börneplatz, which was due to its structural and stylistic design one of the most unique synagogues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was built as a squared building with five window units on the west side and three on the south side. A domed stair tower was placed at the southwest corner. It was reminiscent of similar solutions that were realized for contemporary secular architecture and was the most striking feature of the new synagogue.

The Orthodox Israelite religious community commissioned the architect Jürgen Bachmann and Peter Jürgensen to build an additional synagogue, which was completed in 1907. It seated over 1,000 men, 600 women and 60 choir members. The building complex with its exterior stylization of historical forms defined a not clearly building style.

### **Hanover, Bergstrasse**

As a consequence of increasing political liberalization, the Jewish population in Hanover also doubled in size between 1850 and 1860. The over 1100 members of the Jewish community commissioned Edwin Oppler in 1861 to design a new synagogue. Oppler was one of the first architects to specialize in the construction of synagogues and was the very first builder to address the theoretical issues surrounding this building form: "Romanesque style is German through and through, our country already bears monuments to this art (...) The round arch is a symbol of strength, of gravity and of peace. That is why I chose this style."

This new house of worship was built between 1864 and 1870. The fact that it received such a prominent urban location was unusual in Germany before 1871. The three-bayed building with its cruciform ground-plan and high Tambour dome was constructed in the Neo-Romanesque style preferred by Oppler and provided seating for 650 men on the ground floor and for 450 women in the gallery above. On November 9<sup>th</sup> 1938 the synagogue was set afire, its remaining ruins were demolished on the following day.

### **Kaiserslautern, Luisenstrasse**

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, early synagogues in the Palatinate provided the basic type for synagogues built in the Neo-Islamic style. The use of so-called 'Moorish' architectural features were to furnish Jewish houses of worship with an individual character, making them distinct from Christian religious structures.

The synagogue in Kaiserslautern consecrated in 1886 is a successor to this tradition. Its architect Ludwig Levy designed it as a centralized domed building over a Greek cross plan. The spandrel spaces were extended and incorporated into side aisles with the short arms of the cross. This house of worship, providing seating for 420 Men and for 200 women in the gallery, was considered to be the most important synagogue to be built in the Palatinate for over fifty years. The positive response it was accorded in public is evident in contemporary reports which exuberantly celebrated the synagogue's consecration as a major historical event.

Under the pretext of being no longer suitable for the city's image, the decision to destroy the synagogue was made in July 1938. "A bit of the Orient disappears. The great news hit like a bombshell ..." cheered the *NSZ-Rheinfront* in its August 29, 1938 issue. Two days later, demolition work began.

### **Leipzig, Gottschedstrasse**

Ever since the 15<sup>th</sup> century the traditional convention city of Leipzig had attracted many Jewish merchants from Germany, Bohemia and Poland. As of 1837 the recently founded Israelite religious community undertook efforts to build a larger house of worship that was to replace the many smaller houses of prayer.

Otto Simonson, a student of the renowned architect Gottfried Semper, was commissioned to build the new synagogue. Although the community only numbered 87 official members at the time the building was completed in 1855, the synagogue provided seating for 2,000 persons. The site's triangular form and the strict building regulations, which demanded that an east-west axis always be maintained, were the determining factors in the architect's design. As a consequence, Simonson designed a triangular structure in which the nave was constructed along the principle axis and terminated by a very pronounced apse. The lower aisles flanking the nave ran parallel to the street on both sides. The new synagogue was built in Neo-Islamic style.

In the night of 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the synagogue went up in flames.

### **Munich, Herzog-Max-Strasse**

At the end of the 1860s Munich's Jewish population had increased to such an extent that the construction of a new synagogue seemed imperative. It was not until 1882, however, that the community was granted a centrally located piece of property upon personal intervention from King Ludwig II.

Under the direction of the Munich architect Albert Schmidt a three-bayed hall construction was erected in Neo-Romanesque style. The building's dominant feature was its main facade; the most forceful element of this west facade was the central tower, which with its striking outline set an example for urban architecture. Seating 1000 men and 800 women, the new building was the third largest Jewish house of worship of its time in Germany.

This new major synagogue was ceremoniously consecrated on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1887 in the presence of official government and municipal representatives. Almost fifty years later, on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1938, Hitler personally ordered it to be pulled down. On the following day the community was informed of their synagogue's imminent demolition, which began on 9<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Nuremberg, Hans-Sachs-Platz**

After the Jews were expelled in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until 1862 that Nuremberg established its first Jewish community. Adolf Wolff was commissioned to build the new synagogue, which he designed as a three-bayed axial plan building with a transept and an enormous cupola over the



crossing. In its formal design, which was reminiscent of oriental architecture, he also included gothic elements such as tracery windows along the building's length.

The synagogue, which could seat 935 persons, was consecrated on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1874. The fact that this lavish new building did not receive admiration from all is evident in a spiteful commentary published in the *Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung* (Reformed-Lutheran Church Newspaper), where the construction of the synagogue is portrayed not as a legitimate measure undertaken by the Jewish community but as the "real crown of their triumph".

The extraordinary effect that this magnificent Moorish synagogue had on the medieval cityscape of Nuremberg served as a shabby excuse for the National Socialists to begin their anti-Jewish campaign, resulting in its first climax on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1938 when the synagogue was burnt down.

### **Plauen in Vogtland, Senefelder- / Engel-Strasse**

Laws instituted between 1867 and 1870 abolished residency restrictions for Jews in Saxony and permitted the establishment of Jewish religious communities beyond Dresden and Leipzig. The Israelite Community of Plauen founded in 1884 developed over time into the fifth largest Jewish community in Saxony. However, their wish to build a synagogue could not be realized until a few decades later.

The synagogue that was built in the 'New Objectivity' style (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) and consecrated in 1930 was a declaration of the architect, Fritz Landauer's, and his client's belief in modern architecture and in the Plauen community's strong self-confidence. The new building, capable of seating 800, disregarded the until then conventional division between cult and communal rooms in order to satisfy the various needs of this liberal community.

At dawn on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the synagogue went up in flames.