Synagogues,
Architectures of Memory

Museum of Jewish History
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PATRONAT CALL DE GIRONA
Ajuntament de Girona
Diputació de Girona
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Presentation

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, Girona's Jewish community used to have 800 people and two synagogues, active at different times. The synagogue was a fundamental space for Jewish life. It was the place where the community met, not only to perform the Jewish ritual and prayer, but to learn and discuss religious texts. Catalan synagogues are called "schools" in medieval documents. Those of Girona were dismantled due to expulsion in 1492, but documentary and archaeological research has revealed not only their locations but that the last one, which operated between 1435 and 1492, was located in the space now occupied by this museum.

"Synagogues, architectures of memory" is a selection of lithographs by Dora Szampanier. It shows synagogues that had been landmarks in the landscape of many cities. They were an architectural and cultural heritage, but they were destroyed, or transformed for other uses. Photographs have been preserved and there are works of art that represent them. Almost all exist only in memory. The exhibition evokes those spaces that hosted Jewish communities from all over Europe, traces their remains and crosses, with them, the paths of a collective history and memory.



The author and the exhibition

The synagogues that appear in the engravings of this exhibition are both architectural and memorial heritage. While in use, these buildings were a synthesis of religion and community, of joy and sorrow, of sanctity and material splendour, of past and future.

They were spaces of religious reference that often combined a modest exterior with a great interior magnificence. Those symbols of spiritual and cultural wealth of European Judaism were destroyed by Nazism, which also annihilated the communities that had built them.

Dora Szampanier (Jarosław, 1922–Haifa, 1997) was an artist of Polish origin who went to Israel in 1950. The engravings in this exhibition, which her family donated to the Patronat Call de Girona in 1999, offer a visual journey through synagogues that had known glory days and were reduced to ruins with the Holocaust. The artist made a total of 83 lithographs, from which we have selected a representative sample from different countries and realities.

In her works, Szampanier evokes a vanished splendour in a today also vanished Europe, and she highlights the importance of the synagogue in Jewish communities. The poet already wrote it:

> “Should you wish to know the Source
> From which your brothers drew…
> Their strength of soul...
>
> Then enter now the House of God,
> The house of study, old and gray...
>
> And then your heart shall guess the truth,
> That you have touched the sacred ground…
> And that your eyes do gaze upon
> The treasure of a nation’s soul.”
>
> Hayyim Nahman Bialik

Selection of lithographs by Dora Szampanier

Disclaimer: the author numbered and titled her works in the late 1980s. We provide you the current geopolitical location below the original title.

29. Odessa, Ukrainia

Odessa, Ukraine

The synagogue was built during the 19th century by Jewish immigrants from Brody. In one of the two domes there is a small menorah (seven-branched candelabrum).

32. Lwow-Nachmanowiicz, Ukrainia

Lviv, Ukraine

The Turei Zahav Synagogue was built in 1582 by the master builder Paulus Italus (“Paul the Italian”). First, it was named after Rabbi Yitzhak ben Nachman (Nachmanowicz), and later it was also called the Golden Rose Synagogue. The oldest synagogue in Ukraine burnt in summer 1942.

31. Lwow-Iserlis, Ukrainia

Lviv, Ukraine

The Tempel Synagogue was built in 1844-1845, and was destroyed by German soldiers on entering to Lviv in July 1941. It was a classical building with a large dome, inspired by the Viennese Main Synagogue. “House of Jacob, go in peace, wherever you go” was written on the top.

33. Tarnopol, Ukrainia

Ternopil, Ukraine

The synagogue was built in 1772 as a fortress. It is a three-story, red brick building. The interior is decorated with polychrome frescoes.

36. Brody, Ukrainia

Brody, Ukraine

The synagogue was designed in the 17th century as a powerful stone and brick fortress, with the blessings of the kings, due to the pogroms of Khmelnitsky and his fellow Cossacks.

43. Pohrebyszcze, Ukrainia

Pohrebyshche, Ukraine

This beautiful wooden synagogue no longer exists. The Cossacks burned it after the First World War. Like most synagogues in central and southern Poland, it was built on a basic model, with a single roof over all three components.

30. Luck, Ukrainia

Lutsk, Ukraine

The Great Synagogue in Lutsk was built in 1626 by order of the Polish King Sigismund (Zygmunt) III. It was of the fortress type, with defensive loopholes on all sides of the roof. It was famous for its impressive *bimah* (stage), set between four huge pillars, showing the transition from the Renaissance style to the richly decorated figurative Baroque. In 1869 a fire destroyed all the sacred objects, but the building was saved. Severely damaged by German bombing, it would later be restored by the Dynamo Luck team, who turned it into a sports club. It was transferred to the local community Chabad in 2021, in a very poor state.

Only what I have already lost is mine forever

Rahel, Israel, 1930

37. Wilna, Lithuania

Vilnius, Lithuania

The synagogue, originally built of wood in 1573, was burnt down as a result of the anti-Jewish attacks of 1592 and was rebuilt with bricks and stone, in the Renaissance-Baroque style. It became the centre of Jewish life in Vilnius, towering over the *Shulhoyf*, a complex of other Jewish community buildings and institutions (synagogues, ritual baths, the community council, kosher meat stalls, the Strashun library, among others). It was ransacked and torched by the Nazis in World War II. The Soviet regime tore down the ruins and built a nursery school on the site. Archaeology recently uncovered the foundations, and it is now a protected site.

44. Pinsk, Russia

Pinsk, now Belarus

The synagogue is an interesting building with a Neo-Gothic roof and an entrance with four Ionic pillars.

34. Grodno, Russia

Hrodna, now Belarus

This beautiful two-story wooden synagogue was rebuilt after a fire in the early 19th century. It was finally destroyed by the Nazis.

48. Slonim, Russia

Slónim, now Belarus

The Slónim Synagogue was built in the 17th century. It is a Baroque building with two floors. The main entrance was richly decorated and showed German architectural influences. Furniture warehouse for years, it went up for auction in 2020, and nowadays it needs a full renovation.

9. Lublin, Poland

Lublin, Poland

In its day it was considered the largest Talmudic academy in Poland. It was built during the 16th century in the Baroque style, with two floors and six stars of David on the façade.

28. Wroclaw, Poland

Wroclaw, Poland

The orthodox Neoclassical White Stork Synagogue was built in 1829 and was saved from destruction only because the Nazis used it as a warehouse. The building has now been beautifully restored and is used both as a cultural space and by the local Jewish community.

4. Krakow, Poland

Krakow, Poland

The Old Synagogue (*Alt Schul*, in Yiddish) stands in the Kazimierz district, which is named after King Casimir the Great, who ruled Poland in the mid-14th century and protected Jewish communities. During World War II, German troops looted and damaged it, and even carried out executions there. The building was restored, and today it is the headquarters of a Jewish museum.

Wisdom has built her house and made seven columns for it.

Proverbs 9, 1

6. Lodz, Poland

Łódź, Poland

The beautiful Łódź Synagogue was built in 1870 in the Neo-Romanesque style and was characterized by impressive windows. The three columns stood out for their engravings with Jewish symbols, with the Torah or the twelve figures representing the twelve tribes. It was destroyed by the Nazis in 1942.

13. Danzig, Poland

Currently Gdańsk, Poland

The Great Synagogue in Gdańsk was in the Neo-Renaissance style, with Oriental domes and five Corinthian pillars. It was destroyed by the Nazis in 1938, during the *Kristallnacht*.



12. Przemysl, Poland

Przemyśl, Poland

This magnificent synagogue was built between 1910 and 1918, in an eclectic style with decorative elements of Polish modernism. It was known as the Moshe Scheinbach Synagogue. Today it houses the local library.

65. Cologne, Germany

Cologne, Germany

The Neo-Romanesque synagogue opened its doors in 1899. It was looted, but not destroyed during the *Kristallnacht* because it was surrounded by “important buildings.” The attacks of the Allied forces damaged it during World War II. It was later restored with public funds and reopened in 1959 to accommodate the small surviving community.

62. Berlin, Germany

Berlin, Germany

The Oranienburg Street Synagogue was built between 1859 and 1866 by the architects Eduard Knoblauch and Friedrich August Stüler, combining Romanesque and Oriental elements. It was the largest synagogue in the world. Unlike other previous synagogues, with very discreet façades, this one was an urban reference point. It was badly damaged by the Nazis in 1938 during the *Kristallnacht*, and by bombing by the Allied forces during World War II. Most of the building was torn down in 1958, leaving the front part standing. The front part and magnificent dome were restored and rededicated in the early 1990s.

69. Regensburg, Germany

Regensburg, Germany

The synagogue was built in the year 1891. It had a big central dome and three Neo-Gothic columns on each side. There were two large rose windows on the façade. It was destroyed in 1938 during the *Kristallnacht*.

74. Vienna, Austria

Vienna, Austria

The Leopoldstädter Tempel, in the Tempelgasse, built in 1858 by the architect Forster, follows the plans of King Solomon's Temple. The corner stones were brought from the Holy Land. It had two beautiful columns that evoked Jachin and Boaz. It was destroyed during the *Kristallnacht*.

54. Prague-Stara, Czechoslovakia

Prague, now the Czech Republic

Built in the 13th century in a sober Gothic style, this synagogue is called *Altneuschul* (Old-New Synagogue) because an older one existed until the 19th century, which was demolished in 1867. It is one of the oldest Gothic buildings in Prague.

52. Budapest, Hungary

Budapest, Hungary

The Great Synagogue on Dohany Street in Budapest, completed in 1859, was designed by Ludwig von Forster. It is an example of Neo-Moorish style. It is still used today. The hall has a double gallery, and can seat 3,000 people. During the German occupation it was used as a stable and the horses were tied to the pillars.

Weep no more for the Temple,
Which was overthrown.
Facing west you'll find
Free lanes made of sea.

Salvador Espriu, Catalonia, 1960

61. Venice, Italy

Venice, Italy

Jews lived in Venice from medieval times. In 1516 they were compelled to live segregated on the site of an old foundry — ghetto, in Venetian dialect. The Scuola Grande Tedesca (German synagogue), dating from 1528, is the oldest of the five 16th century synagogue in the Venice Ghetto. The synagogues were located on the upper floors of existing buildings and maintained very luxurious interiors, in contrast to the simple exteriors.

59. Rome, Italy

Rome, Italy

The grand Great Synagogue (Tempio Maggiore) was inaugurated in 1904, following the demolition of the old Jewish ghetto during urban renewal. It was designed in eclectic style with Greek and Assyrian-Babylonian elements by Vincenzo Costa and Osvaldo Armanni, and is noted for its sumptuous interior decoration and towering square dome.

60. Florence, Italy

Florence, Italy

Designed by Marco Treves, Mariano Falcini, and Vincenzo Micheli, and inaugurated in 1882, the Tempio Maggiore is a richly decorated building. The design is inspired by Byzantine and Andalusian architectural models, with Moorish Revival elements. It is considered one of the most beautiful synagogues in Europe. During the Second World War the building suffered little damage, but the most significant damage is due to a flood in 1966, which led to the loss of most of the sacred objects (the Torah, among others).

58. Sofia, Bulgaria

Sofia, Bulgaria

The synagogue was built in 1905-1909 in Neo-Moorish style. A vestibule to the west leads to a large octagonal open-plan space with two levels, with the women's gallery on the upper floor. It contains exuberant decoration from the first half of the 20th century.

56. Bukarest, Rumania

Bucharest, Romania

The "Choral Temple" synagogue in Bucharest was built between 1864 and 1867 in Neo-Moorish style. The architects were Ederle and Freiwald, who modeled it after the Tempelgasse synagogue in Vienna, designed by Forster, and built ten years earlier. Damaged by the fascist armed guard in 1941, it was restored after the war, and more recently in 2007-2015.

57. Zagreb, Yugoslavia

Belgrade, now Serbia

Dora Szampanier made this engraving with an old postcard or photograph from the former Yugoslavia, and she thought that it belonged to the city of Zagreb. In fact, the image resembles the Sephardic Synagogue of Belgrade, built in 1905-08 in a Moorish Revival style, and destroyed in 1941.

75. Toledo, Spain – Santa María la Blanca

Toledo, Spain

Many chapters in the history of Toledo are clearly marked by the Jewish footprint, including science, medicine, literature and finance. There were many prominent Jewish families and they contributed to the life of the community by building synagogues. In 1391, years after the Black Death, many Jews were killed in riots and most of the synagogues were burned. Of the ten known synagogues, only two remain. One is this magnificent monument built in the year 1357 in Arabic style. In the 19th century it would have served as a military barracks and warehouses. It was finally restored and opened to the public.

76. Toledo, Spain – Sinagoga de “El Tránsito”

Toledo, Spain

The oldest synagogue was built here around the year 1200. The predominant design of Spanish synagogues was Moorish, but with a Gothic Christian influence. In the 14th century, Samuel Levi, treasurer of Pedro I of Castile, the Cruel, built it.

It contained the same decorative elements as Santa María la Blanca. The interior was built with brick and stone. It had a wonderful polychrome coffered ceiling. On the walls destined to guard the Torah there were Hebrew inscriptions made with an ornamental design of great beauty and elegance. A book of Psalms crowns the side walls, with 54 arches supported by columns of very unusual designs. The two tall windows in the eastern wall could have reproduced or symbolized the Tables of the Law. After the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, the synagogue was transferred to the knights of the Calatrava order. The belfry bell tower was added under their ownership. Today it contains a public museum and it is considered a national monument.

Inside the new museum is an old synagogue,
Inside the synagogue is me,
Inside me is my heart,
Inside my heart a museum.

Yehuda Amikhai, Israel, c. 1980

78. Tommar, Portugal

Tomar, Portugal

The Tomar Synagogue, northwest of Lisbon, is the oldest in Portugal. It was built between 1430 and 1460 and was only in use until 1496, due to the royal order to convert or leave. In 1516 the building become a prison, in 1600 a Catholic chapel, and later a grocery store. In 1923 a Jewish mining engineer, Samuel Schwarz, dedicated to the study of Portuguese Jews, bought the building, restored it and donated it to the Portuguese government to convert it into a Portuguese Jewish museum.

79. Fez, Morocco

Fez, Morocco

This beautiful synagogue was built around the 17th century. The façade has Baroque influences with a Star of David, a Torah and elements in memory of the twelve tribes.

80. Oran, Algeria

Oran, Algeria

The Oran Synagogue was built in the year 1792 in the Eastern Baroque style.

82. Alexandria, Egypt

Alexandria, Egypt

The Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah already existed in the 15th century. It was built in the Baroque style on the remains of a Coptic basilica sold to the Jewish community. In the year 1890 it was in a state of extreme degradation. An extensive restoration program was carried out, leading to one of the most exciting discoveries for Jewish studies: the genizah, hidden inside a room for centuries.

83. Adryanopol, Turkey

Currently Edirne, Turkey

One of the two synagogues that Edirne has had is a beautiful three-story building halfway between the East and the West: the central part is Neoclassical and the sides are Oriental in style. Abandoned in the 80s, it was restored in 2014-2015.

81. Baghdad, Irak

Bagdad, Iraq

Iraq had many ancient synagogues that were famous as Biblical centres and attributed to Jewish leaders like Ezra and Daniel. Despite their popularity, the synagogues suffered difficulties: in 1762 the local ruler ordered fourteen to be destroyed because they were taller than the mosques, and they had to be completely rebuilt. The distinguished Rabbi Ezra Reuven Dangoor directed this synagogue. Inside, there were the compartments and the arch supported by twenty pillars.

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