

History
of
The Jewish Community
of
Vienna¹

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¹ Gerhard Milchram, *Judenplatz, Place of Remembrance*. Pichler Verlag GmbH & Co.KG. Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna, 2001.

Gerhard Milchaum, Museum Judenplatz for Medieval Jewish Life in Vienna. Pichler Verlag GmbH & Co.KG. Jüdisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Dorotheergasse 11, A-1010 Wien.

Klaus Lohrmann, *Das Jüdische Wien, 1860-1938*. © 1999 Album, Verlag für Photographie, Seilergasse 19, A-1010 Wien. ISBN 3-85164-070-5.
Leopoldstadt, Die andere Heimatkunde. © 1999 by Christian Brandstätter

Rachel Salamander, *Die Jüdische Welt von gestern, 1860-1938*. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co.KG, München. November, 1998. © 1990 Christian Brandstätter, Wien. ISBN 3-423-30700-5.

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Introduction

In 1994, an archeological excavation of a medieval synagogue below the Judenplatz in Vienna was begun. At the same time a coordinated effort was made to create an appropriate monument to the 65,000 Jewish individuals, who were murdered during the Holocaust. Among others, the projects were supported through the combined efforts Michael Häupl, Mayor of the City of Vienna, Peter Marboe, City Councilor for Cultural Affairs in Vienna, Ariel Muzicant, President of the Jewish Community of Vienna, and Simon Wiesenthal. Rachel Whitehead, renowned British sculptress, was chosen to create the memorial, the planning for the design of the square and the design of the Judenplatz Museum in the adjacent Misrachi House #8.

As a result of the discoveries located in their research, a significantly increased knowledge about the history of the Jewish community in Vienna has been documented. The central issues that have been published relate to the facts that this synagogue was typical of synagogues of the medieval period in Eastern and Central Europe, the Jewish community of Vienna was established by the mid-thirteenth century, and the surrounding residential and business district of the Jewish community was intimately related to the synagogue.

It was my plan to excerpt and summarize the history of this Jewish community in Vienna for the benefit of my extended family. Recently, I discovered that two branches of our Romanian ancestors from Iasi and Harlau, Moldavia, emigrated from Brody, Galicia, about 1850.² At that time, they were subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire because the eastern portion of Galicia was seized from Poland and incorporated into the Empire in 1772. Therefore, the significance of the discoveries in the excavations in the Judenplatz in Vienna is directly applicable to the culture of the Jewish community as it may have existed in Brody during that era.

² Samuel and Nathan Goldenberg's father was Baruch Goldberg, who was buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Brody, Galicia (Index from 1892). Ioina Rotenberg, who married Chana Rachel Goldenberg, daughter of Nathan Goldenberg, was born in Brody, Galicia. His father, Moise Iosef Rotenberg, was also buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Brody, Galicia (Index from 1892).

Roman History of Vienna

During the 1st century, C.E., a Roman fort was constructed along the Danube in the area near Vienna. Apparently, an additional site was cleared of trees for military barracks for the troops of the fort at the precise site of the present Judenplatz in the 1st District of Vienna. The Roman fort was built at Vindobona on an elevation to the north of a tributary of the Danube.

The recent discovery of the barracks shed new light on the construction materials and designs of Roman military buildings. The roof of the barracks was supported with wooden posts in the midline. The floor was earthen. By the 2nd century, the outside walls were made of mud bricks, but the inside walls were made of wattle and daub with a border of mud plaster. They cooked in clay oval ovens called “beehive ovens.” There were two elongated residential barracks that were mirror images with a path between them. Each unit measured about 245 by 15 feet and was separated by the path that was about 3 feet.

By the end of the 2nd century, the wooden posts for the roof structures were replaced by stonewalls for better support. The residential units were divided into 14 compartments and an additional unit for a centurion. Evidence was found that the barracks had rooms for creating heat and they had installed ducts in the walls to provide heat to adjacent rooms. Some rooms were exclusively used for living. The pathway between the two barracks was made of gravel and there were preserved wheel ruts from the traffic.

In the 3rd century, the barracks showed signs of disuse. The roof had collapsed and required further rebuilding. There were signs of more permanent building materials used. The rooms were more irregular and there were ducts for floor heating as well as room heating. There were open ovens and fireplaces made of bricks with clay canopies. Walls had colored plasters and stucco decorations.

In the 4th century, a final stage of rebuilding occurred in the barracks. After the military withdrawal, the site continued to be occupied as a settlement until the end of the 4th century. The Roman fort at Vindobona was abandoned in the 5th century. Due to the abandonment and natural decay, the area of ruins was protected by the dirt and natural biological soil

formations. There may have been some agricultural use of the area of the Judenplatz.

Middle Ages in Vienna

Between the 5th and 12th centuries, there were no known continuous settlements in the Vienna area. Only a few remnants of streets have been found in the area of present-day Wipplinger strasse. By the 12th century, however, habitation suddenly changed. Babenberg King, Friedrich II, established his rule over the area of Vienna. Signs of the Jewish community were first recorded in the 1100's. Properties were staked out along Wipplinger strasse, between Wipplinger strasse 15 and the House #8 facing the Judenplatz. Surrounding streets were paved, well planned, and uniform.

The city flourished under the Babenberg rulers and spread to the north and west of Wipplinger strasse. Access to the main area of Vienna was from the west onto Wipplinger strasse. However, the Danube was to the north of the old city. The Judengasse area was south of Wipplinger strasse. The houses were constructed of wood and had wooden outhouses nearby. In 1238, Friederich II made a written declaration of the new rights for Jews in Vienna. That parchment document has been preserved in the Judenplatz Museum. The Jewish Quarter was typical for medieval construction.³

The first synagogue was built about 1250 in Vienna. It indicated that there was a small but important Jewish community. The foundation of the first building was about 58 by 26 feet, which consisted of a main hall. The central room was the "Mannerschul" or men's schul. It contained a niche for the Torah. . An adjacent room was provided for women called the "Frauerschul, which had several small window slits through which the ladies could view the ceremonies within the Mannerschul. The basic building was made of wooden construction. The walls were made of rubble with mortar-covered floors. Later tiles were added. In 1294, a courtyard extension was added, called the Schulhof. It extended toward the residential house #8.⁴

³ See city map of Vienna.

⁴ Residential house #8 became the Judenplatz museum, which was opened to the public in 2001.

Adjacent, was the Judenspital at Judenplatz #9, which housed the hospital, orphanage, and a place for the aged.

Among the artifacts discovered in the archeological excavation of the synagogue was a coin that had been minted between the dates of 1236 and 1239. Therefore, the age of the first synagogue in the Judenplatz has been estimated at 1238. Between 1250 and 1300 the construction of the synagogue was built for permanency and settlement. There was an East-West orientation for religious purposes to provide direction toward Jerusalem. The synagogue was the spiritual and intellectual center of the Jewish community in Vienna. In 1294, the house next to the Schulhof belonged to a Jew named Pedit. It was later sold to other Jews. But, in 1421, when the synagogue was destroyed, and the Jews banished, the house was owned by Rötel von Neuburg and was confiscated by Duke Albrecht V.

By the 1350's, remodeling of the synagogue occurred. A niche was created for the Torah. There were two large columns to support the central part of the roof. This was added protection for the Bimah, which was centrally located and rested upon the old foundation. An additional small annex room was built.

Archeological evidence was discovered, which showed that there had been a severe fire in the synagogue about 1406. This probably had something to do with evidence of further rebuilding afterwards. By 1420, the synagogue had expanded to about 465 square meters {about 4200 square feet}. It was one of the largest synagogues of medieval Europe. The final design resulted in the central Men's Schul, which was surrounded by rooms on three sides of the rectangular building. The roof protection was met with flush façades.

Babenberg rule over Vienna was continuous from 976 to 1246. A brief timeline of history in this region will be helpful to the reader, however:

DATE	HISTORY
6000 B.C.E.	First lasting settlement recorded in the Vienna area
3000 B.C.E.	Danubian culture identified in the Vienna area
1800-800 B.C.E.	Bronze Age settlements in the Vienna area
400 B.C.E.	Celts settle in Vienna area on the Leopoldsberg above the Danube and build an Oppidium
8 C.E.	Vienna area became part of the Roman province of Pannonia

100 C.E.	Roman encampment built on the Celtic Vindobona
433	Huns invade area now known as Austria
500-700	Avars and Slavs settle in Vienna area
800	Charlemagne conquered the Avars. Austria incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire
881	“Wenia” first mentioned in the Salzburg Annals
1000	1 st reference to medieval settlement in Vienna after the “lost” centuries
976-1246	Babenberg rule over Austria
1137-1156	Duke Heinrich II, “Jasomirgott” moved the seat of the Babenberg government to Vienna. Established the first city court life
1200	Vienna reached city limits of expansion
1221	Duke Leopold IV of Babenberg granted trading and municipal privileges to Vienna
1238	Synagogue built in Vienna. Jewish rights established.
1246	Frederick “the Bellicose” died ending Babenberg rule. Ottokar II of Bohemia succeeded to throne and began the construction of the Hofburg.
1276	Ottokar II died in the battle of the Marchfield. Rudolph of Habsburg, newly elected king of Germany, ruled Vienna
1421	Jewish pogrom (Gesera). Entire Jewish community was evicted from Vienna.
1477	Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg married Mary, heiress to Burgundy
1496	Philip, son of Emperor Maximilian I, married “Mad” Joanna of Castile, heiress to Spain, doubling the size of the Habsburg Empire
1526	Archduke Ferdinand of Austria elected king of Bohemia and Hungary, with dominion in Central Europe
1618-1648	30-year War in Europe
1679	Plague epidemic
1683	Second Turkish siege repulsed with the aide of the German and Polish armies
1740	Maria Theresa first female successor to the Habsburg throne
1772	Southeastern portion of Poland, including Brody, was incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

1814-1815	Congress of Vienna redrew the boundaries of Central Europe
1857	Emperor Franz Josef ordered destruction of the city walls, which were replaced by the Ringstrasse in 1865
1914	Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo
1914-1918	WW I
1938	Nazi Anschluss
1945	End of WW II
1955	Permanent Austrian neutrality
1965	OPEC took its seat in Vienna

Medieval houses in Vienna were designed for multiple uses. The ground floor was used for trade. The Jews were merchants, who required places for their business transactions and storage of goods. However, the first floor above ground was used for personal purposes. The merchants had to entertain important guests or occasionally make loans to important individuals. Occasionally they made loans to noble families. Therefore, the interiors of the dwellings often contained ornate wooden beams and beautiful window designs.

The recent archeological research revealed that the houses in the Judenplatz had been remodeled during the 13th and 14th centuries. These changes in their dwellings probably reflected the changes in their customs and community that resulted from both their economic successes and increased population within the Jewish community. A specific and successful Jewish Quarter was identified in 1400-1420s. There were about 70 two-story houses surrounding the Judenplatz. Jews numbered about 800 individuals, which represented about 5% of Vienna's total population (estimated at 16,000). The doors of all of the residences opened directly onto the streets of the Jewish Quarter. Importantly, the Jewish Quarter was not a ghetto. If the doors of the area were closed off at night, they were closed from the inside, not forcibly closed by the Viennese city regulations. As a result, the Jewish community prospered and was successful.

For the Jews, 1421 was a watershed year. A vicious pogrom, called the *Gesera*, occurred. The Habsburg, Duke Albrecht V, expelled all Jews. Their houses were sold or bequeathed to friends and allies of the noble

families. Albrecht V declared, "...that from now on and in future times, no Jews shall be able to gain residence, or property, or place of business here in the city." With the Jewish expulsion, the synagogue was demolished. The stones were reused to build new buildings at the Jesuit University. Many of the university professors had been major initiators of the pogrom. The prompt and organized use of the wooden beams and stones from the synagogue suggested that the whole destruction was well planned prior to the pogrom. In fact, all of the timbers, roof materials, and stones were salvaged to be used for the university.

The foundation and floors of the synagogue were a little below ground level. After the destruction, the remains and trenches were filled with rubble and local debris. That act possibly preserved the remains of the foundations. The objects, pottery shards, and coins were accidentally discarded into the pit that was left. By 1422, the Judenplatz was renamed the *Neue Platz* (the New Square or Plaza). During the archeological research, it was discovered that Christian architects had built the synagogue. Therefore, when parts of the structures were missing, the archeologists could refer to Church constructions as a guide to "fill-in the missing parts."

There were many reasons attributed to the basis of the violence in 1421. Most often it was stated that Jews profited unreasonably from money lending. However, due to prohibitions against money lending among Christians, only the Jews were allowed that task. However, in addition, Jews were prohibited from many other endeavors. It was most probably a very unfair criticism based upon jealousy. Jews were also accused of aiding the invading Hussars. There was severe bigotry among Roman Catholic clergy against Jews, which was used to turn to populace against the Jewish community. Middle class jealousy from the Christian Guilds was aimed at the successes and competition from the Jewish traders. This was similar to the events that occurred elsewhere in Poland and Russia.

1462 was the first year in which the name Judenplatz was first recorded. At that time, the area was used principally for a timber and green fodder market.

During the Christian era that followed, ownership of the residences in the Judenplatz area was by the Christian burghers and upper middle class. There was a major fire in 1509. By 1528, reconstruction of the area resumed. Government tax relief was offered for ten years. Renovations

reflected the different uses of these dwellings. Windows were placed in the ground-floor spaces. Pillars and inner walls for better support were added and cellars were built for storage. Courtyards were also constructed and esthetically appealing window arches were built.

Later in the baroque period, remodeling reflected changes in architecture over the older Renaissance façades in the houses that remained along the Judengasse. By 1694, Judengasse #8 had been resold and was purchased by Maria Anne Gräfin zu Zeyhl. She added another floor to the residence and an attic for the servants. Large wooden rafters were used to support the roof. Tree-ring analysis has dated the beams to 1690's. New wood was also added. All of this expensive remodeling reflected the change of ownership from the merchant class to the new aristocracy. Houses became more comfortable for entertaining. They no longer needed to have large storage areas, which had been mandatory for the prior merchant owners.

Briefly, in 1775, the Judenplatz name was revised to the Jesuitenplatz (Jesuit Square). A residence located at Judenplatz #11 had inscribed upon it, "...Expulsion and incineration of Jews was an act of ablution to maintain purity, the baptism, which referred to medieval prejudices that the death of Christ was blamed on the Jews, their rituals, which violated the Eucharist." That inscription remained through the renovation of 1984. Most of it was destroyed subsequently and only part of the inscription remains in 2001.

In 1789, Mozart lived and composed his famous opera, *Così fan tutte*, at his residence at Judenplatz #3-4.

Much later, in 1860, Judengasse #8 came under the ownership of Countess Eszterhazy-Galantha. The family next sold the property to an insurance company, "Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà." In 1862, a municipal sewage connection was added and there were several minor renovations. Subsequently, the house was again resold to Anne Mandeles. After 1862, the ground-floor premises were converted into depots and commercial places. This had become a common practice in Vienna, whereby the commercial vendors were installed in ground-floor dwellings, leaving the remaining upper floors for private residential housing, often with private courtyards behind the buildings.

In 1907, the Mandeles family created the "Mandelés Family Trust," which was provided for the support of the Jewish self-help organizations of

Vienna. The previous Inn, which had been established in the house, was taken over by the trust. Even in 1939, at the time of the Nazi Anschluss, the trust converted the space into a General Foundation for Jewish Welfare, a type of “soup kitchen.” Eventually, the Jewish community was devastated during the War and the house was “Aryanized” and expropriated by the Nazis. It was used for air-raid shelters. Tunnels were built to nearby houses in the area.

After the War, in 1950, the County Court for Civil Affairs in Vienna awarded the house #8 to the *Israelische Kultusgemeinde*, which administered many of the affairs within the new Jewish community. By 1965, ownership again changed to the Zionist Organization Theodore Zionisten des Misrachi und Hapoel Hamisrachi, Landesverband Austria. This was more simply called the “*Misrachi House*.” Prayer rooms and youth facilities were created for the community.

Memorial to the Holocaust victims of Vienna and the Museum Judenplatz

In 1994, Simon Wiesenthal proposed that a site for a memorial to the 65,000 Holocaust victims of Vienna be established at the Judenplatz. Excavation was started in 1995. With the archeological discoveries of the Roman barracks, the medieval synagogue of 1238, and the residential artifacts, an integrated institution of the Museum Judenplatz at the Misrachi House #8 connected to the underground synagogue restoration has been completed. The Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna administers it.

Rachel Whitehead, a British sculptress, was given the commission to design the monument, which appropriately rests above ground in the plaza near the entrance to the Misrachi House Museum. The proponents of the monument wanted to create a reminder of the Holocaust victims that presented a vision of the contributions of the victims rather than to perpetuate a vision of their humiliation. Mrs. Whitehead created a design that featured the history of the Jews as “people of the book.” She wanted to emphasize the symbol of learning for the continuance of Jewish traditions. Words, rather than images, were to be the central theme of the monument. Since the history of

Jewish destruction in Europe had been recorded and portrayed in Yizkor books, she selected a theme that encompassed books.

The monument was inverted and sealed, without handles on the door, and a unit that was without windows. The “books” were to be uniform and monotonous, with endless copies portrayed to indicate vast life-stories that were now closed forever. The monument should appear “sealed.” The books did not reveal their content; the spines were to be invisible. It was to be a metaphor for the Torah and Bimah in the synagogue, which was preserved below ground and beneath the monument. The void of the books was a metaphor for the destruction and void after the Holocaust.