

## Aspects of Franconia (and Germany)

This year will see numerous events marking 1700 years of Jewish life in Germany. To explain, in 321, 1700 years ago, the Cologne City Council was intent on repairing a bridge over the Rhine but lacked the financial means. It is said that a Jew came forward to help fund the project, but his generosity could only be accepted if he held office in the city's governing body. A request was subsequently submitted to the Roman emperor Constantine the Great. And the reply:

"By law valid throughout the empire, we permit all city councils to appoint Jews to the city council". The emperor had unknowingly produced the first written evidence that Jews had been part of the German population, of German society and of German history for 1700 years.

### And what of Jewish Communities in Franconia?



The Ansbach synagogue, built between 1744 and 1746, escaped destruction in 1938 thanks to its location in the middle of the city.

The first reference to a Jewish community in Würzburg is dated 1119, the first reference to one in Nuremberg comes 27 years later. By the fourteenth century there are thriving communities in many Franconian towns: Bamberg (1096), Aschaffenburg (1147), Ansbach (1328) and Fürth (1440). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Fürth even became known as the Franconian Jerusalem owing to its tradition as a centre of rabbinical scholarship and was, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the largest Jewish community in the whole of Bavaria. Today the city is home to an important Jewish museum in the Königstrasse, which our society visited in 2018.

It is not just Franconia's larger cities that had thriving Jewish communities, but also, perhaps rather surprisingly, rural Franconia. Take Buttenheim, for example, a village between Bamberg and Nuremberg. In 1740 the Jewish population was so large that it was found necessary to erect a building

containing a prayer-room, a mikveh (a bath used for the purpose of ritual immersion in Judaism) and a schoolroom. In 1810 there were 176 Jews living in Buttenheim, some 21 % of the population. It was here, of course, that Löb Strauß (better known as Levi Strauss, 1829-1902) was born.

In Ermreuth, close to Neunkirchen am Brand, there is a fine synagogue dating back to 1822. On November 9th, 1938, it was completely desecrated, only its location within the village saving it from being burnt to the ground.



After several decades of neglect, it was rebuilt, and in 1994 reopened as a place of prayer, encounter and reflection and now hosts regular concerts and talks on Jewish life and culture (<http://synagoge-museum-ermreuth.de/veranstaltungen.html>).

The majority of synagogues fell victim to national-socialist hatred, in towns and villages alike, but Jewish cemeteries managed to survive in large numbers. Some of these have a history stretching back to the late Middle Ages. In Baiersdorf, a Jewish community was first mentioned in a document from 1473, but the beginning of its existence is suspected to be earlier, especially because the oldest gravestones on the Jewish cemetery date back to the early 14th century.

As far as Erlangen is concerned, it seems that Jews were first mentioned in a document of 1432, as was a rabbi in 1478, however in 1515 all Jews were expelled from the city. This naturally led to Jewish communities growing stronger outside of Erlangen, in Bruck, Büchenbach and Baiersdorf, for example. It was not until 1891 that a Jewish cemetery was finally opened in Erlangen, on the northern side of the Burgberg, on the Rudelsweiherstrasse, but in May 1939, and again a few weeks later, it was desecrated. Gravestones were toppled and any metal of value stolen.

Today there is once again a growing Jewish community in Erlangen. The Jewish cemetery has long been re-opened (image below), Stolpersteine have been placed outside the homes of deported Jewish families, there is a school named after a renowned Jewish mathematician - the Emmy-Noether-Gymnasium, and a memorial plaque to the Jewish university professor Dr. Jakob Herz (1816-1871). The first memorial to him erected in 1875 was destroyed by national socialists in 1933.

