



## The House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden:

### A Lighthouse Project and a Challenge for Bruchsal

A civil society in a lively city needs the conversation, needs the discussion about the future. This is about a special feature, it is about a historically weighty place that needs a new future. It is about the property on which the Bruchsal synagogue stood until the Night of Broken Glass (Reichspogromnacht) on November 9, 1938. This historic site is currently being discussed in Bruchsal, and many Bruchsal residents expect it to be a place of living culture, where the past and the present, memory and the future are at stake.

The post-war generation felt it right to completely erase this place - and with it the memory of the Synagogue and the Bruchsal Jews - by placing the local fire station on it in 1953.

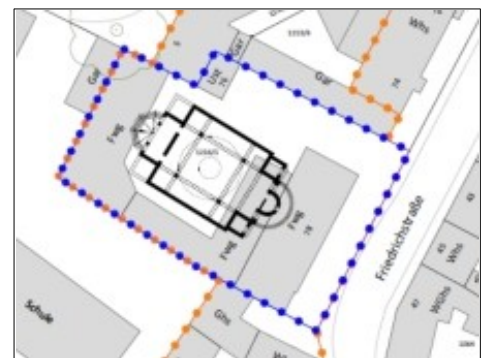
In the meantime, however, there has been commendable preparatory work here in Bruchsal to reflect on the further fate of the synagogue site: the public hearing process, an ideas competition, numerous presentations and discussions. Our remembrance should focus on the positive, may focus on the richness of cultural achievements in German-Jewish history.

Thus, the friends association has developed the concept of a history and culture institution to be built on this site. The plan is not a Holocaust memorial, but a multifunctional exhibition and meeting center for Bruchsal, the Kraichgau and Baden, for Germany and interested people worldwide.

The theater scientist Prof. Dr. Hajo Kurzenberger, who comes from Bruchsal, has made fundamental thoughts about the possibility of the realization of the *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden*, which are published in thesis form below.

## The 10 theses

1. To establish an institution in the Kraichgau town of Bruchsal, which actively involves Bruchsal residents, networks them beyond the region and welcomes guests.
2. The old fire station should remain standing. As a historical document that reminds of Jewish life in Bruchsal, the burning down of the Synagogue, the crimes of the Nazi era and the suppression of what happened in the post-war period.
3. Descendants of Jewish Bruchsal citizens who were expelled or murdered during the Nazi era are to be included in the decision-making process.
4. The *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden* will be established in the old fire station. The synagogue foundations will be uncovered, covered by a glass house or a leaf hut, which will be used as exhibition or meeting places.
- 5 The *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden* contains two departments that correspond with each other thematically and spatially: A cultural room in the basement (former vehicle hall), which is vaulted by the two museum floors. Suggested names: *Tacheles* and *Techtelmechtel*, or: *Old Synagogue - New Fire Station*.



6. Citizens of Bruchsal, especially young people, should be actively involved in the programs of both departments, as is already the case with the laying of the Stolpersteine. Members of different religions and world views are welcome.
7. The organization and management of both departments must be in the hands of competent professionals. For the museum department the *Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg* is the desired partner, for the cultural department the *Badische Landesbühne*.
8. The programs of both departments should be open to all current issues of displacement, racism and anti-Semitism, integration and social coexistence.
9. The *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden* should become a place of experience and learning along the way.
10. Only when the city council and administration have made decisions in the sense of the above concept, can foundation funds etc. be obtained. First contacts have been made.

## Petition and foundation

130 descendants of mainly Bruchsal Jews have initiated a **petition** „for a house of Jewish history and culture of Baden on the site of the burned down synagogue“. In sometimes very emotional, touching words, the petitioners appeal to the city administration and the municipal council to realize this project in Bruchsal.

*„We, the descendants of the Jews from Bruchsal, wish for the future a strong togetherness with the town of Bruchsal, where we have our roots. [...] Now the opportunity arises to remember the Jews in Bruchsal at that time on the terrain of the synagogue destroyed in the 3rd Reich. [...] We would like to build bridges from the past into the future at the place that was of such special significance for our ancestors“.*

The idea of a **foundation** comes from the ranks of the descendants. They plead for a non-profit foundation to which the city of Bruchsal would contribute the synagogue property „as a sign of support to all people who deal with the injustice of that time...“. In the planned advisory board of the foundation, representatives of the Jewish descendants should also find a place and have a say in upcoming decisions. Mistakes, such as those in Freiburg, where the descendants were not involved, must not be repeated in Bruchsal. The decisions made in Freiburg are still considered wrong and unworthy by the Jewish descendants.



The chairman of the *Working Group for the Study of the History of the Jews (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden)*, Dr. Joachim Hahn, is also enthusiastic about the *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden*: „This is a great idea!“. He points out how important it is to achieve consensus in the planning between the city administration, the municipal council, the descendants and important social groups in the town. In Bruchsal, the mistakes made in Freiburg should not be repeated. His conviction: „If this process were to succeed in Bruchsal, it would contribute greatly to the reputation of the city.“

It would be unique in Germany to involve the descendants in decision-making. Bruchsal set an example as a modern community that „understood“. Even if this does not heal the injustice, such an approach can at least help to appease, perhaps even reconcile, those still living who were affected and their descendants.

## Old Synagogue - New Fire Station

The old fire station is to remain, but to be re-designated. This historical place, i.e. the synagogue property, should not be made unrecognizable even in its post-war history. The old fire station is a visible sign of the suppression of the Nazi period after the war.

But first and foremost, this property was and is the historical meeting place of Bruchsal's Jews and the site of Bruchsal's Jewish culture. This culture should be respected and disclosed.

**Concretely: The foundations of the synagogue should also be shown and questioned.**

## Techtelmechtel - the culture floor

Andrée Fischer-Marum, the granddaughter of Dr. Ludwig Marum, member of the Reichstag, who grew up in Bruchsal, writes: „For a very long time I have been annoyed that Jewish things - no matter whether art or science or everyday life - are always presented separately from German art, science, everyday life.“ She is right! Today, more than ever, it is a matter of a new, mutual attentiveness.



The New Fire Station (*Neue Feuerwache*), in this case the *Techtelmechtel* area on the first floor, is to become an educational project that actively involves citizens and familiarizes them with the great achievements of the shared German-Jewish past and culture.

The project should also encourage reflection on what exclusion, anti-Semitism, racism, discrimination, expulsion, flight do to people. But all this without moralistic pointing finger!

For this would be a place of cultural exchange, where amateurs and professional artists realize a diverse program together, an attractive place for visitors from near and far.

Reading circles of German-Jewish classics, music by Jewish composers, theater projects

with German-Jewish texts or themes, but also the planning of travel projects to Jerusalem or cooking classes à la Ottolenghi could take place there.

**The Techtelmechtel area, with an area of 400 square meters and 200 seats, can additionally serve as an auditorium for the nearby Handelslehranstalt (commercial school).**

## Tacheles - the history floors

The elements of the *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden* on the 1st and 2nd floor of the Old Fire Station can be described as follows: Exhibiting, internal work, teaching and learning. Jewish life in Baden, the Kraichgau and Bruchsal is to be presented with the help of contemporary museum education. The Swiss historian, author and museum maker Dr. Uri Kaufmann has suggested many topics for this, starting with a historical outline of Jewish history in Baden from the Middle Ages to early modern times.

The abolition of inequalities in 1862 with the resulting social advancement of many Jews would be another focus, as Jewish residents of many small Kraichgau communities took the opportunity in 1862 to settle in nearby Bruchsal. Later, Bruchsal was the northern Baden municipality from which especially Jews from rural Kraichgau moved to the nearby large cities of Karlsruhe, Mannheim or Heidelberg on their way to success and recognition.

Examples of the rise in industry and commerce include the textile trade of the Oppenheimer family in Bruchsal, the Knopf department store chain, and the Marx and Schrag malt factories. Other important names: Bruchsal's honorary citizen Prof. Dr. Fritz Hirsch, who renovated the castle, Julius Bär from Heidelberg, founder of the Swiss bank of the same name, Nobel Prize winner Richard Willstätter, Sulzberger from Heidelberg as publisher of the New York Times, the Karlsruhe national soccer players Gottfried Fuchs and Julius Hirsch, or Nathan Stein, president of the Mannheim Regional Court (Landgericht Mannheim) and senior councilor of the Israelites (Oberrat der Israeliten).

Important politicians were the Mannheim SPD Reichstag member Dr. Ludwig Frank or the liberal Reichstag member Ludwig Haas, who grew up in Bruchsal. The representative of the state government of Baden-Württemberg against anti-Semitism, Dr. Michael Blume, calls for the Bruchsal Reichstag member Dr. Ludwig Marum and his wife Johanna to be strengthened and honored as „*identification figures*.“ „*It is now high time to give this Baden-Jewish democrat and Nazi victim a deserved place in national history alongside Eugen Bolz, the Scholl siblings or Elser*,” Blume said.

**Bruchsal, 11. Nov. (Antijüdische Kundgebungen.)** Das ruchlose Verbrechen des Juden Grünspan in Paris, dessen Opfer der deutsche Gesandtschaftsrat erster Klasse vom Rath wurde, führte wie in anderen Städten und Orten des Reiches auch in Bruchsal in der Nacht vom 9. auf den 10. November zu spontanen antijüdischen Kundgebungen, wobei die Bevölkerung ihrem Abscheu über die frechen Annahmen des Judentums lebhaften Ausdruck gab. Vor den jüdischen Geschäftshäusern sammelten sich die empörten Menschen und zerstörten im gerechten Zorn die Fenster Scheiben. Zahlreiche Juden mußten in Schutzhaft genommen werden, um sie vor der Volkswut zu schützen. In den frühen Morgenstunden des gestrigen Donnerstag ging die Synagoge in Flammen auf. Am Abend wurden die in Schutzhaft genommenen Juden unter Pfürufen der Mäntel abtransportiert. Wie Dr. Goebbels ankündigte, wird die endgültige Antwort an das Judentum nunmehr auf dem Weg der Befehlsgebung bzw. der Verordnung erfolgen.

**But the reconstruction of the Jewish communities after 1945 will also be presented, as well as the immigration of contingent refugees from 1991.**

## The synagogue foundations - historically important fragments

The synagogue foundations are an indispensable part of Bruchsal's culture of remembrance. German history dictates that they be preserved and appropriately presented.

In addition to the establishment of a memorial garden, there is a proposal to erect a glass house over these exposed foundations. The term *Denkort Fundamente* (place of thinking at/about the foundations), coined by the city



The Bruchsal Synagogue foundations. Photo: private

administration, would thus take on a very concrete meaning, which would literally substantiate the hitherto freely floating designation and make it evidently comprehensible. A glass floor above the synagogue foundations, which allows one to look into the past, a transparency and fragility, in which the horrors of the so-called *Kristallnacht* would be just as present as a new light of the present, which could permeate the glass space.

Practically, this space could be used both as an exhibition space and as a meeting room, as well as a space for the projection of historical images and memories.

The mayor of Bruchsal emphasized the very special significance of the synagogue site: „There is no

other place in Bruchsal where it is so important to reconcile the past and the future“.

## Why Bruchsal in particular?

The question why Bruchsal in particular is excellently suited as a location for the *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden* with its cultur floor *Techtelmechtel* and the two history floors *Tacheles* can be answered plausibly. About 2/3 of all Baden people of Jewish faith lived in North Baden in 1925. At that time, about 16,000 Baden Jews lived in Bruchsal and the Kraichgau region within a radius of about 50 kilometers. But also in the nearby Palatinate, in southern Hesse as well as in Alsace or in Württemberg, there were Jewish communities with a large number of members. However, a site with still existing synagogue foundations and the empty, historically significant fire station can only be found in Bruchsal.

## The added value of this lighthouse project for Bruchsal

Bruchsal has the potential to become a destination for history buffs from all over the world. Bruchsal would be a starting point for visits to the UNESCO World Heritage SchUM sites of Speyer, Worms and Mainz, as well as to the many synagogues or Jewish cemeteries still standing in the Kraichgau region. In nearby Bad Schönborn, the Kislau learning site is planned.

In Bruchsal itself, an excursion to the castle, a visit to Straus's house, a relaxed walk through the pedestrian zone to the Otto Oppenheimer monument or a visit to the Jewish cemetery near St. Peter's Church with the Tahara House are all possibilities. The Obergrombach Jewish Union Cemetery (Verbandsfriedhof) is easily accessible.

It goes without saying that Bruchsal's economy will benefit from the visitors, especially the gastronomy, retail and hotel trade. With this lighthouse project, Bruchsal also proved that it is more than just a baroque castle and asparagus market. Through the *House of Jewish History and Culture of Baden*, the former district town of Bruchsal would be significantly upgraded as a middle center and as a gateway to the Kraichgau region.

Prof. Markus Neppl of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) has stated with good reason how to make our city centers more interesting and lively: "This includes culture and public coexistence. People are beginning to understand that the living environment and the communal use of space have enormous value, even in smaller cities."

© Förderverein Haus der Geschichte der Juden Badens e.V.  
Realisation: Hajo Kurzenberger und Rolf Schmitt  
V.i.S.d.P.: R. Schmitt, Reserveallee 8, 76646 Bruchsal

[www.geschichtshaus-badischer-juden.de](http://www.geschichtshaus-badischer-juden.de)  
[kontakt@geschichtshaus-badischer-juden.de](mailto:kontakt@geschichtshaus-badischer-juden.de)

Bankverbindung: Volksbank Bruchsal Bretten eG  
IBAN DE03 6639 1200 0000 2681 51

September 2022