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Introductory Remark

From the general perspective of historiography, quite a bit has already been written about the early social and institutional history of Jewish communities in post-war Germany. But what can we learn about Jewish communal life in Germany since 1945 when looking through the glasses of ritual objects, synagogue architecture, liturgical practices and their music? These and other research questions guided the interdisciplinary project on “Objects and Spaces as a Mirror of the Religious Practice of Jewish Communities: Traditions and Transformations of Judaism in Germany after the Shoah.” The project was conducted between September 2018 and August 2021 by two university institutes and two Jewish museums, and was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The research teams involved visited several Jewish communities and archives, and conducted narrative interviews with contemporary witnesses, community members and clergy to reveal the history and narratives behind Jewish spaces and their architecture, behind ritual and cultural objects as well as liturgical practices and their musical expressions, in order to gain insight into their meanings for post-war Jewish communities in Germany.

The research teams dived into the world of a reconstructed and revived Judaism in Germany after the great break through the Shoah: A world that revealed itself through the layout of prayer halls and synagogues (their partitioning, wall paintings, stained-glass windows, etc.), through prayer books, synagogue organs, Torah arks and their curtains, through bimot, pews and prayer desks, but also through Torah scrolls and their decoration (crowns, rimonim, mantles). The history of these tangible forms of Jewish heritage is made vivid by contemporary witnesses, by historical audio and film documents (such as radio recordings of synagogue inaugurations), newspapers and other publications, picture collections (photo albums), historical interviews and autobiographical testimonies. Beyond the material manifestations of the post-war history of Jewish life in Germany, an ethnographic study on synagogue music in today’s Jewish communities, on intangible Jewish heritage, completed the research undertaken in the project mentioned above. Through fieldwork among selected Jewish communities, a contemporary *emic* (internal) perspective of Jews in Germany themselves is added to the stories that have unpacked through the analysis of objects and spaces mentioned above. First results of the three-year project, as well as further complementary contributions discussed at an online workshop held in July 2021, are presented in this volume.

Those Jews who survived the Shoah, who left the DP camps and decided to stay in Germany, as well as those who re-migrated from exile were the ones who founded the first synagogue communities from 1945 onwards. These communities initially consisted of Jews originating from Germany and other, mostly Eastern European countries. Later on, that is since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the cultural

composition of the communities was expanded by the influx of Jews from countries of the former Soviet Union. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the post-war communities experienced many social, economic, demographic and cultural challenges, resulting for example in emigration waves of those who did not see a perspective for a permanent stay “in the land of the perpetrators,” and those, who regarded the newly established communities as a “liquidation community” only.

In order to maintain the small congregations despite their cultural and religious diversity, the nineteenth-century idea of a “unified congregation” gained new meaning, although one has to ask to what extent the desired unification originated from the congregations or was imposed from the outside by means of a “new Germany” political agenda. Within the context of synagogue worship, compromises had to be found between differing religious and cultural traditions: that is between Central and Eastern European forms of Orthodoxy and former German practices of Reform Judaism. The effects of these developments can be traced to the present day. Having become a “tradition” themselves, liturgical forms of the post-war period have experienced and still are experiencing renewed change since the influx of Jewish immigrants from the states of the former Soviet Union after 1990, which is also expressed in a diversification of the religious practices of present communities. These changes and their different aspects are presented in the chapter “Liturgy and Music.”

It was only towards the end of the 1940s and increasingly after 1950, when most of the emigrants had left Germany, that permanent community structures developed. New community centers and synagogues were built, while many prayer halls, especially those of the Displaced Persons, disappeared. Now they saw themselves as a *Wiederaufbaugemeinde* (“rebuilding community”) – although the feeling of having to live on “packed suitcases” remained. The structures – temporary prayer rooms or built synagogues – became research objects themselves, exemplifying the development of Jewish post-war history and the changing meaning of objects of the early post-war period. These questions are examined in the first chapter “Synagoges and Spaces.” The heterogeneity of post-war Jewish life in Germany becomes visible in a range of religious, educational and cultural spaces and institutions, as well as in “new” Jewish self-understandings. Both find their expression in a wide range of buildings and facilities provided by the Allies and set up in DP camps, partly in barracks, in assigned houses but also in synagogues that had not been completely destroyed in 1938. This regained Jewish life also reveals itself in historical, sometimes reused ritual and other objects that have been used in these provisional and later on in permanent communal spaces. Such paths of ritual objects are examined in the chapter on “Ritual Objects.”

The project also considers the ideas, objects, rooms and liturgical practices that have been brought into the communities by the new community members, including numerous converts. Thus, older (pre-war) forms and remains of Jewish life in Germany were supplemented and sometimes even replaced by new cultural and religious values, practices and their material expressions. Most often, associated

Jewish knowledge has simply been forgotten. Objects and spaces from the early post-war period that continued to be used in today's congregations became "symbolic objects." By means of these symbols, contemporary Jewish communities seek to preserve the memory of their early post-war history. At the same time, the gradual forgetting of their significance due to the change of generations must be stated, too.

The objects and documents have been handed down in various contexts: in Jewish communities in Germany itself and abroad, in Jewish and general museums (e.g., in the Jewish museums in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Munich etc., but also in numerous smaller museums), in archives (e.g., Zentralarchiv für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, Heidelberg, Centrum Judaicum Berlin), in private collections or estates, and last but not least: in memories, cultural and liturgical practices, and thus in the actual lives of Jews in Germany today. A few early places of worship have been preserved in situ but are no longer used as such (e.g., in Augsburg-Kriegshaber as a branch of the Jewish Museum Augsburg Schwaben, but also in Ampfing, Gelsenkirchen, or Trutzhain), others still serve Jewish communities today (in Berlin, Celle, Frankfurt am Main, Magdeburg, Munich or Weiden).

On the basis of the objects, spaces, written, ethnographic and acoustic sources to be identified and contextualized, the team approached the question of religious life of Jewish communities from different perspectives. The aim of the interdisciplinary research project was to examine and interpret Jewish places of worship in Germany after 1945 (Bet Tfila – Research Unit on Jewish Architecture in Europe, Technische Universität Braunschweig), the ritual objects used by their Jewish communities (Braunschweigesches Landesmuseum and Jüdisches Museum Augsburg Schwaben) as well as their liturgical-musical practices (European Center for Jewish Music, Hanover University of Music, Drama, and Media). From the perspective of the two participating museums, the task was to record and research their own holdings and those still to be documented and to incorporate them into museum practice in an appropriate manner. The results of the research are to be presented in a planned exhibition in Braunschweig and Augsburg.

The contributions published in this volume were presented and discussed in detail at the international online conference "Jewish Communities in Germany in Transition: Objects, Spaces and Traditions as a Mirror of Religious Transformation Processes after the Shoah" held in July 2021. The editors would thus like to express thanks to all contributors. And of course, the team would like to thank all Jewish communities and their representatives who opened their doors and archives for this research project.

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