

SYNAGOGUE OF NÖRDLINGEN IN BAVARIA

scarcely known details compiled by Rolf Hofmann in 2014

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Until the 1990s substantial parts of the former synagogue in Nördlingen still had existed, like the massive outer walls with their large windows. But this fact was unknown to the people of Nördlingen. After the complete demolition of the remains of the former synagogue around 1995 a home for old people was erected at the same site. Now only a commemorative plaque reminds of the past. The synagogue was built during the 1880s according to the plans of Nördlingen city architect Max Gaab in a building style rather inappropriate for a Jewish place of worship. The synagogue was dominated by a twin tower front, which gave the building the somehow strange appearance of a Christian church. Since the towers neither had bells nor a clock there was no practical use of them.

About the reasons for choosing this form of architecture we only may speculate. After the expulsion of Jewish families in 1507, Jews for centuries were not allowed to settle permanently in Nördlingen. In 1861 however leather trader Eduard Höchstädter from nearby Mönchsdeggingen successfully fought for the right of permanent residence in Nördlingen. Over the next 20 years the number of Jewish citizens grew rapidly, so that the construction of a synagogue was inevitable. The building was meant on purpose to be large and impressive in order to express the recovered self-esteem of Jewish families in Nördlingen, its style reminding of a Christian church, following the order of the Bavarian King who recognized Jewish religious communities on the same legal terms as Christian church communities.

The formal dominance of the twin tower front with its relief-like merely indicated “main entrance” caused some practical problems for the organization of the whole synagogue, but maybe this “main entrance” had a hidden spiritual meaning, allowing the Holy Spirit in a non material way to walk through the wall and reach the Torah scrolls right behind. The towers were heading towards Market Square and St Georg Church underlining the importance of the synagogue in a municipal context. The main entrance of the synagogue by no means could not be between the towers, since traditionally there (pointing East towards Jerusalem) had to be the alcove for accommodation of precious Torah scrolls, from which week after week portions of the five books of Moses were read. Thus the actual main access to the synagogue was almost hidden modestly at the Western backyard of the building, accessible by small back alley Luckengasse.

After that the interior of the building however was far less modest. On both sides of the large synagogue hall were the women's galleries with colorful arranged leaded glass windows on the east and the west. On top of all a blue sky ceiling decorated with golden stars was spread. This information came from people who still remember the features of the former synagogue, which undoubtedly had the character of a sacral building (like a Christian church), in contrast to the historical non sacral tradition as a Beit Midrash for the study of the Holy Scriptures.

After the destruction of the interior caused by Nazi vandals during the "Kristallnacht" in 1938 the municipality took the building in possession and thus prevented the complete destruction of the synagogue. In these days this was a bold act of the mayor who could have faced consequences by the Nazi regime. After the war the JRSO (Jewish Restitution Successor Organization) got back the building as trustee of the former Jewish property, but again sold it to the Protestant church community of Nördlingen. The conversion into a parish hall with an employment agency office at ground floor was agreed by the JRSO, as well as the demolition of the twin tower front and the leftovers of the previous sacred use. The plan was elaborated by architect Christian Prechter of Harburg who recorded the historic structure by means of architectural drawings and photos - now a valuable historical document. Prechter had grown up in Nördlingen as son of a postmaster living at Augsburger Strasse. After World War II he had studied architecture since 1945 at the Technical University in Munich under the legendary Professor Döllgast, whose assistant and friend he became. Finally he established himself as architect in Harburg. Only a few years ago (around 2010) he died at old age in Nördlingen where he had spent his final years in a home for old people.