

# SYNAGOGUE OF HARBURG IN BAVARIA

scarcely known details compiled by Rolf Hofmann in 2014

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A closer look at the history of Harburg synagogue reveals its outstanding significance for regional history, though historians have a different view. Until the 1930s however there was unanimous esteem among art historians. Even famous Richard Krautheimer mentioned its formal relationship with medieval synagogues. However, during the 18th century synagogues of this size were rare. Therefore it raises the question for the conditions of its origin. By mid-18th century, a considerable number of Jewish families had found shelter and home in Harburg, not at last because in 1741 all Jews from nearby town of Monheim were expelled. Among the high-ranking personalities who emigrated to Harburg were Court Jew Abraham Elias Model and wealthy Alexander Loew. Model as well as the sons of Alexander Loew likely in 1754 might have contributed significantly to the new synagogue in Harburg.

Because of its massive character and its dominant position in the village panorama, the synagogue of Harburg by far was without any counterpart and thus it represented the self-confidence of Jewish families, who were quite aware of their importance in regional economy. They had extensive long-distance trading relations and were able to offer best quality products at fair prices, in particular on regional markets like in Nördlingen or Ingolstadt. Due to their well established long-distance trade, one can assume that they were able to attract master builders from Eastern Europe for the planning and constructing of the synagogue in Harburg. It is conceivable that they might have chosen a Bohemian master-builder, since their traditional artisan skill had a good reputation, even until today. Indeed the most obvious relationship of the Harburg synagogue actually is to the Altneu-Shul in Prague.

The concise lancet-arch windows and the massive walls as well as the huge truss of the roof structure makes it obvious that the Harburg synagogue in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Swabian territory was an impressive building of particular style and quality. This was also because of the excellent location in the village's panorama, which actually was quite exceptional at a time when other synagogues elsewhere rather were built somewhat hidden and merely had the appearance of simple dwelling houses. The synagogue of Harburg however was a deliberate reminder of medieval Jewish culture, a relevance the building still has today, even though the interior due to several conversions is no longer historical.

Despite lootings caused by Nazi vandals during the "Kristallnacht" in 1938, the externally intact synagogue survived World War II. After basic modification inside the building during the 1960s it was used by an engineer as office building. From 1989 on the former synagogue was organized as a well noticed cultural center for a couple of years in private initiative. Now a practitioner has his medical office in this venerable building.

Finally, it is appropriate to refer to the Jewish Museum in Berlin where at the beginning of the exhibition on rural Jews a wonderful oil painting of the interior of the Harburg synagogue is on display. The artist was Erich Martin Müller. In late summer 1914, right before the outbreak of World War I, he came with the painting class of Professor Kallmorgen from Berlin and made a stop in Harburg, where he visited and painted the interior of the synagogue which at this time was still a place of worship for the Jewish families of Harburg.