

„On the map of European Jewish Heritage, Erfurt is now written in capitals.* *Becoming World Heritage.*“



- 1 The Old Synagogue
- 2 The Mikveh
- 3 The »Stone House«

*JOHANNES HEIL,
Rector, Hochschule
für Jüdische Studien
(University for Jewish
Studies), Heidelberg,
2011

„Jewish-Medieval Heritage Erfurt.
Becoming World Heritage.“



JÜDISCH MITTEL
ALTERLICHES
ERBE / ERFURT

COMPONENTS OF THE APPLICATION



The Old Synagogue

With its oldest parts dating from the 11th century, the Old Synagogue is one of the oldest, largest and best preserved medieval synagogues in central Europe. In 2009, an extraordinary museum was installed here and it has since become a place where original objects from Erfurt's medieval Jewish community are accessible to the public.

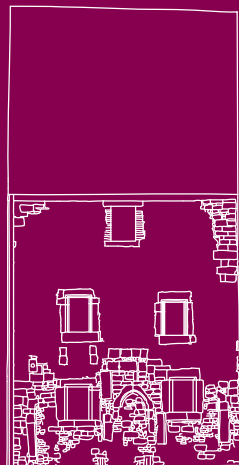
Page 4



The Mikveh

Together with synagogue and cemetery, the ritual bath is another integral part of a Jewish community. It is not only, but mainly used by women, which is why it is also called »women's bath«.

Page 6

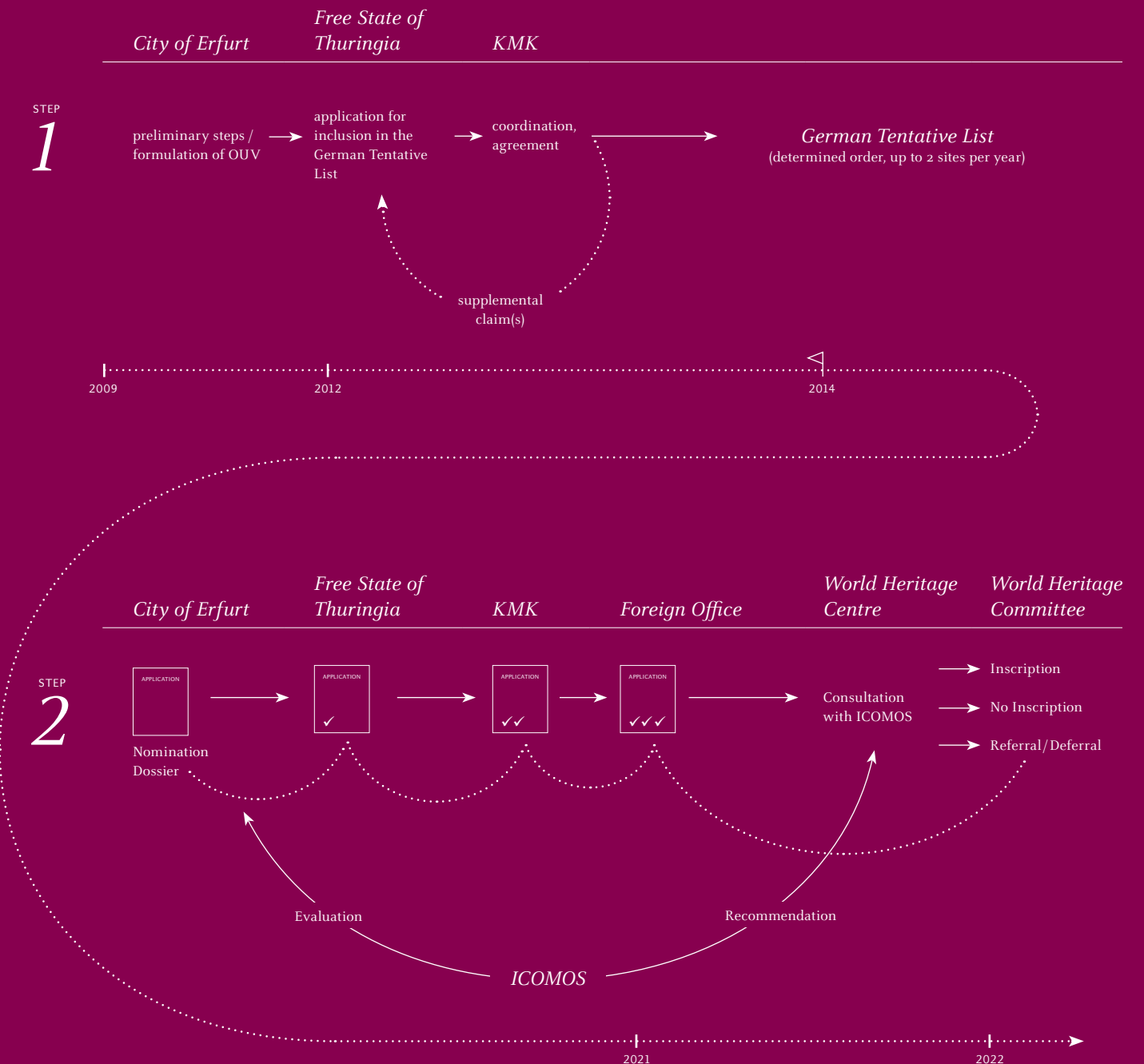


The »Stone House«

In a complex of buildings on Benediktsplatz 1 in the historic city centre, a medieval stone building is located. In the Middle Ages, it was verifiably in Jewish possession. Exceptionally numerous essential structures from its time of construction around 1250 have been preserved.

Page 7

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A WORLD HERITAGE SITE



KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value (core justification of why a site deserves World Heritage status)
Tentative List	List of proposed World Heritage sites a State Party plans to submit over the forthcoming years; compulsory first step for inclusion on the World Heritage List is to be listed on a national Tentative List
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites



The Gravestones

The cemetery of the medieval Jewish community of Erfurt and its affiliated communities was already destroyed in the 15th century. However, individual gravestones were preserved. In the recent past, numerous stones could be recovered during building works all over the old town.

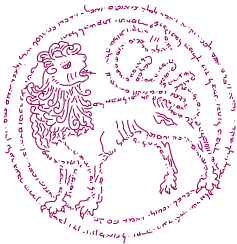
Page 8



The Erfurt Treasure

The so-called Erfurt Treasure is exhibited in the cellar of the Old Synagogue. It was most likely buried before the pogrom of 1349 – a trove unique in size and composition.

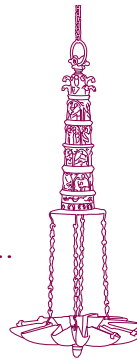
Page 9



The Hebrew Manuscripts

Originating from Erfurt, the Hebrew Manuscripts of Berlin's State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage, bear witness to the significance of the medieval Jewish community. Fifteen manuscripts dating from the 12th to 14th century have been preserved; there is no larger known collection of one single community.

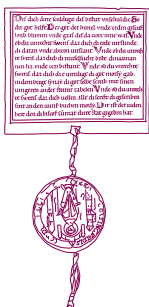
Page 10



The Bronze Lamp

Since medieval times, bronze hanging lamps with star-shaped lamp bowls are known from Jewish contexts. For instance, such lamps are often depicted in medieval manuscripts, in most cases hanging from living room ceilings and used as sabbath lamps.

Page 11



The Erfurt Jewry Oath

The Erfurt Jewry Oath is the earliest record in German language defining the Jews' legal status in the city. It was issued by Archbishop Konrad of Mainz as ruler of the town at the end of the 12th century.

Page 11

“Since early times, Erfurt was the central Thuringian city in economic, political and cultural terms.

“BECOMING WORLD HERITAGE

In the largely intact medieval Old Town of Erfurt, one-of-a-kind constructional testimonies to the important Jewish community from the late 11th to the mid-14th century have been preserved. This edificial evidence is complemented and further enhanced by a globally unique abundance of original objects. Together, they offer valuable clues to Jewish community and everyday life as well as to the co-existence of Jews and Christians in medieval cities – as profoundly and documented by such a large number of authentic evidence as at no other known site.

For this reason, the Thuringian State Capital of Erfurt has decided to seek inclusion on the list of UNESCO World Heritage for its medieval Jewish Heritage.

Principally, only buildings are awarded »UNESCO World Cultural Heritage«. That is why objects such as the Hebrew Manuscripts are not part of the application. As historical sources, however, they do round off our knowledge on ashkenazic, i. e. central European, Jewry in the Middle Ages. As such, they belong to the Erfurt Jewish-medieval Heritage. In 2014, the site »Old Synagogue and Mikveh in Erfurt – Testimonies of Everyday Life, Religion and Town History between Change and Continuity« was added to the German Tentative List for future World Heritage Sites. This means that the application for inclusion in the World Heritage List may be officially submitted to UNESCO in a few years. Until then, the City of Erfurt continues to actively research, communicate and campaign for its potential World Heritage. It issues publications, organises events such as the »Arain!« lecture series, and is counselled by a high-ranking Advisory Board.

“ERFURT IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Since early times Erfurt had been the central Thuringian city in economic, political and cultural terms. In Carolingian times Erfurt became the regional commercial centre. Conveniently located at the crossroads of essential trading routes, the city developed into central Germany's trading hub during the course of the Middle Ages. Apart from trading cloth and grain, the city mainly owed its prosperity to the trade in woad. Erfurt merchants maintained trading relations throughout the Empire, e. g. with Aachen, Lübeck and Flanders. Already at the beginning of the 12th century, Erfurt can be accounted as a city, due to its size and population density, its surrounding wall and a description of its inhabitants as *cives*.

From the early 11th century, Erfurt was under the secular rule of the Archbishop of Mainz. Besides, an independent city council was established from 1250 onwards, striving for greater autonomy ever since its inauguration. As a branch of the Mainz bishops and home to numerous monasteries, Erfurt can also be referred to as clerical and spiritual centre of the region. Even before the founding of the University (1392), schools and monasterial study centres shaped the city's intellectual life.

“THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The medieval Jewish community in Erfurt possessed a synagogue, a mikveh and a cemetery, and was thus a so-called *kehillah*, a fully equipped community, to whom other surrounding settlements could belong as affiliates (*jischuwim*). Within the regional intra-Jewish organization, Erfurt played a superior role towards the nearby Jewish settlements.

The members of the *jischuwim*, which included, for example, the towns of Arnstadt, Stadtilm, Weimar, Eisenach and Gotha, had to frequent the *kehillah*'s institutions for specific services. Above all, this applied to burials, as a cemetery was not existent in all settlements.

The Jewish community in Erfurt was integrated into urban life. Their residential area was located in the quarter between City Hall, Merchants' Bridge and St. Michael's Church, at the very city centre. Indeed, it was predominantly Jews settling in this area close to each other and their community institutions. Christians, however, evidentially settled in the same area, too; it was thus no concluded residential area or ghetto as it came into common use not until the 15th century. Jewish dwellings did not differ from their Christian neighbours' homes. Occasionally, Jews rented their houses from Christians or vice versa. As money lenders, the wealthy Jews were fundamentally important to local trade. As elsewhere, the members of the Erfurt community probably lived

on money trade in the first instance and were commercially well linked. In the 13th and 14th century, money transactions by local Jews have been verified, throughout the Empire and at times with very large amounts. Hence, Jews from Erfurt played an important role as money lenders for economy and trade within and beyond the city. This finding is also supported by the Erfurt Treasure (cf. p. 9). Local intellectual life had a high reputation far beyond Erfurt, too. Important scholars lived and taught here. This intellectually and economically thriving community life was abruptly ended in 1349: On 21 March, almost certainly Erfurt's entire Jewish community was wiped out when armed rioters raided the Jewish quarter. As in many other places, they accused the Jews of having spread the Black Death. The rioters slayed numerous members of the Jewish community, the quarter around the synagogue burned down. Up to 900 people died. Out of fear of persecution, some Jews had buried their valuables. Due to the pogrom, precious community manuscripts and the synagogue interior came into Christian possession. The synagogue itself was profaned and was thus preserved until today. It is to this catastrophe of all things that we owe the existence of the building itself, today's use as a museum and the majority of its exhibits.

THE OLD SYNAGOGUE

The Old Synagogue is situated in the immediate city centre, at the core of the historic old town. Today, it is located on the site of Waagegasse No. 8, between Benediktspatz, Michaelisstraße, Fischmarkt and City Hall. The synagogue's location without direct visibility from the street is typical of medieval synagogues in quarters inhabited by Jews and Christians alike. The synagogue was the centre of community life and hence of the Jewish settlement. The Old Synagogue's architectural history reflects the history of the Jewish community in Erfurt in the Middle Ages. Yet it also bears testimony to subsequent conversions and changes to the building. The oldest parts of the western wall date back to as far as the end of the 11th century and are thus generally the earliest evidence of a Jewish community in Erfurt: a timber from this first construction phase has been dendro-dated to 1094. Nowadays, it can not be reconstructed exactly what the building looked like in this early period. The same applies to the second construction phase of the 12th century. Here again, only a short stretch of the western wall with a sandstone double-arched window (biforium) has been preserved. Around 1270, the Jewish community erected a large and prestigious synagogue, incorporating parts of the previous building. Even today, the representative western façade with five lancet windows and a large tracery rosette effectively shapes the synagogue's outer appearance. The high interior was spanned by a timber barrel vault. Shortly after 1300, the synagogue was expanded by a few metres to the north and another storey was added. The extension had a magnificent symmetrical façade with the synagogue entrance in the middle and five formerly tall lancet windows laid out in a row above the doorway. It possibly housed the women's synagogue, traditionally separated from the main prayer room, or else served as a school for the boys' Hebrew lessons. After the devastating pogrom of 1349 which also caused severe damage to the synagogue, the city of Erfurt acquired the building and subsequently sold it to a local merchant. He converted the synagogue into a warehouse by fitting in a vaulted cellar, splitting up the main prayer room into several storeys with two solid timber ceilings and erecting a new roof truss. Nearly the entire synagogal interior fell victim to this conversion.



Since the late 19th century, the former synagogue was used for gastronomical purposes and had been transformed to that effect: a ballroom, kitchen and dining areas and even two bowling alleys were created. It was due to these changes as well as to adjacent buildings on all sides that the original synagogal edifice was hardly recognizable for a long time. For that reason, the building remained virtually unknown to general perception, fortunately also during the National Socialist era.

Only since the late 1980s has the synagogue returned to public awareness. In 1998, the city of Erfurt purchased the building and had it extensively researched and renovated over the course of the following years. Now housing a museum on the history of Erfurt's Jewish community in the Middle Ages, the synagogue has found an appropriate use anew.

The synagogue's location without direct visibility from the street is typical of medieval synagogues in quarters inhabited by Jews and Christians alike. The synagogue was the centre of community life and hence of the Jewish settlement.



In Spring 2007, the remains of the medieval mikveh were discovered during renovation works on the open space northwest of Merchants' Bridge.

THE MIKVEH

For a Jewish community – not only in the Middle Ages – the ritual bath is of great importance. It was mainly the women who were expected to use the bath after birth and menstruation in order to visit the synagogue in a status of ritual purification. Yet men, too, had to submerge in the mikveh after having been exposed to the dead, sick or other ritually impure persons or objects before entering the synagogue was allowed. Tableware also had to be cleaned in the mikveh before first use or if it had been ritually contaminated.

Bathing in the mikveh was carried out according to precise rules. The completely naked body had to be immersed entirely; even jewellery had to be doffed. The water was required to be »living« water, it was not to be ladled; spring or ground water, on the other hand, were allowed and the basin had to contain the equivalent of at least one cubic metre at all times. In Spring 2007, the remains of the medieval mikveh were discovered during renovation works on the open space northwest of Merchants' Bridge.

The mikveh's walls are of extraordinary quality. Vault and upper mural parts are walled up in even

layers of limestone. The building, about 9 metres long and just under 3 metres wide on the inside, features an alcove in its northern wall, presumably used for depositing clothes. The basin, located on the eastern wall, takes up its complete width. It was reached by a staircase whose course can still be retraced by the former stairs' imprints on the northern wall. According to instructions, the bath was supplied with groundwater, which was constantly available due to the river Gera close by. The stairs permitted complete immersion at all times, seasonal fluctuations were thus easily counterbalanced.

The mikveh structure, according to first assessment erected in the 13th century, reclined on the southern wall of at least one preceding building in the same spot.

The archaeological excavation was concluded in 2010. Then, the erection of a protective building began, defending the remains of the medieval mikveh from external influences on the one hand and enabling its exhibition on the other. Since September 2011, the mikveh is accessible to visitors within guided tours.



The so-called »Stone House« is an exceptional testimony of late medieval secular building culture.

THE »STONE HOUSE«

In a complex of buildings on Benediktsplatz 1 in the historic city centre, a medieval stone building is located. It rises above a medieval cellar whose earliest construction phases can be dated into the 12th century by a Romanesque portal. Yet the edifice predominantly dates from the 13th and was merely changed in few parts during the 14th century. Exceptionally numerous essential structures from its time of construction around 1250 have been preserved, among those the portals to both main storeys, the beamed storey ceiling, the original stepped gable as well as the wooden roof structure.

Unique throughout Germany is the upper storey's room interior with a lancet arched vented lighting niche, hardly changed outer walls with scored joints as well as a painted beam ceiling.

The boards of the ceiling are consistently decorated with a wheel motif, while each of the beams features different ornamentation. The beams have been dendro-dated to 1241/42.

The so-called »Stone House« is an exceptional testimony of late medieval secular building culture. What is more, the edifice can be related to Jewish owners from the end of the 13th century at the latest.

Early in 2015, the high-medieval Jewish housing and trade complex and its interior painted décor have been granted funding for a two-year interdisciplinary project by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). Under the auspices of the Berlin Institute of Technology and the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, it will be extensively re-searched.



“The Erfurt gravestones originate from the 13th to 15th century and hence from a period from which Jewish gravestones have very rarely endured.



“THE GRAVESTONES

To this day, 110 gravestones from the medieval Jewish cemetery near Moritztor have been preserved. Preserved descriptions, transcripts and/or photographs have made aware of around 92 stones. Among the conserved stones, 23 are complete or nearly so; 87 gravestones have been fragmentarily preserved. Presently, three stones are on display in the Old Synagogue. Two stones are in private hands (one of them within a cellar wall). Early in 2013, a »display depot« was installed in the »Stone House«'s cellar to have all gravestones gathered in one place where they are kept safely and can be made accessible to the public in an adequate manner.

The stones known so far have been catalogued, their inscriptions are translated. Data (find spots, dates of deaths, traditions of epitaphs) has been assessed and compared to other medieval Jewish gravestones. The Erfurt gravestones originate from the 13th to 15th century and hence from a period from which Jewish gravestones have very rarely endured. The oldest preserved Jewish gravestone we know of so far was erected in 1244 for a woman whose name is not legible any more. The second eldest gravestone is the one of Hanna, daughter of Yehiel ha-Kohen, from 1245. This stone is so far the one with the most complex inscription.

The stones bear fundamental testimony, not only to Europe's Jewish past, but also to Erfurt's town history: They document the eminent status of the Erfurt Jewish community as a kehillah for Thuringia. What is more, by specific names of the deceased (esp. »Kalonymos«), relations to other communities can be presumed, in particular to the so-called »ShUM« communities Speyer, Worms and Mainz.

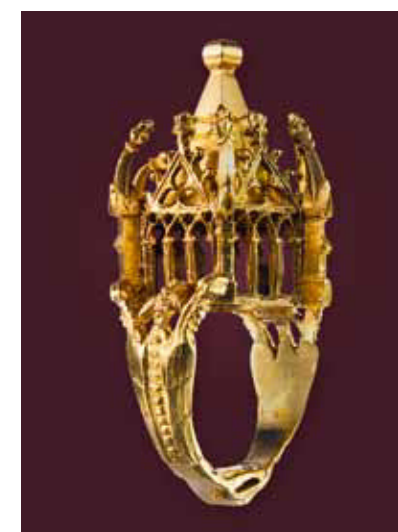
“The most outstanding object in the Erfurt Treasure is a Jewish wedding ring from the second half of the 14th century.

“THE ERFURT TREASURE

In 1998, shortly before archaeological investigations on the site of Michaelisstraße 43 – not far from the Old Synagogue – were completed, a large hoard was discovered underneath the wall of a cellar entrance. With a total weight of nearly 30 kg, it is unique in size and composition. With around 24 kg, 3,141 silver coins and 14 silver ingots of different sizes and weight form the biggest part of it. Moreover, the hoard contained over 700 individual items of gothic goldsmith's art, some highly accomplished. Among them is an ensemble of silver tableware, consisting of a set of eight beakers, one ewer, one drinking vessel as well as a double cup. Among the pieces of jewellery, eight brooches of different sizes and form, partly with abundant ornamentation of precious stones, stand out as well as eight gold and silver rings. Yet, smaller objects such as parts of belts and garment trimmings numerically form the biggest part of the goldsmith's works. All objects can be dated to the late 13th and the first half of the 14th century.

The treasure's most outstanding object is a Jewish wedding ring from the second quarter of the 14th century. Most captivating is the craftsmanship of its Gothic miniature architecture, made of pure gold. As far as it is known to date, only two further medieval wedding rings of the same kind exist throughout the world. The ring as well as the situation of the find spot in the heart of the former Jewish quarter suggest that the treasure was owned by a Jewish family. Due to dating of the hoard inventory, the act of its hiding can be put into context with the pogrom of 21 March, 1349. As last certifiable owner of the site before the pogrom, the Jewish money lender Kalman von Wiehe comes into consideration as former treasure owner. Verifiably, he did not survive the pogrom of 1349.

After having travelled to exhibitions in Paris, New York and London, the Erfurt Treasure is now on display in the cellar of the Old Synagogue and has thus arrived at its permanent home and exhibition venue.



“The so-called Erfurt 1 bible is the largest known Hebrew bible manuscript from the Middle Ages.

“THE HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS

In the Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage, a set of medieval Hebrew manuscripts is being kept. The writings originate from Erfurt, they presumably belonged to the local community and were written between the 12th and 14th century. Most likely, they came into possession of the Erfurt Council after the pogrom of 1349. Until the mid-17th century, they were kept in the Erfurt Council Library. Since that time, the manuscripts had been incorporated into the collections of the Evangelical Ministry in the Augustine monastery, where they remained until well into the 19th century. In 1880, the Evangelical Ministry sold the manuscripts for 5,000 marks to the Royal Library in Berlin. Today, the State Library closely collaborates with the Old Synagogue. For example, the original cover of the Erfurt 1 bible is on permanent loan in the museum and the two institutions have also collaborated on the digitalisation of the entire collection of manu-

scripts from Erfurt. The set of documents includes a few outstanding manuscripts, among them a medieval machsor, a so-called tossefta – a collection of composite manuscripts, mainly responsa literature – and several medieval bibles. The so-called Erfurt 1 bible, accomplished in 1343, is of exceptional size: Consisting of two volumes, each weighing around 50 kg and with a size of more than 60 by 45 cm, it is the largest known Hebrew bible manuscript from the Middle Ages. The respective sections' entry pages are often lavishly decorated with so-called micrographies, skilful illustrations of plants, animals and mythical creatures as well as geometrical ornaments composed of minute writing. Such depictions permitted to circumvene the traditional prohibition of creating images in Judaism. What is more, four of a total of only ten preserved medieval torah scrolls from the Ashkenaz region originate from Erfurt. Among these is the largest known medieval scroll.



“The Jewish-medieval heritage of Erfurt as a whole stands out as an exceptional showcase example of metropolitan and community culture in medieval Ashkenaz.

“THE ERFURT JEWRY OATH

The Erfurt Jewry Oath is the oldest surviving written form of an oath for Jews in German and, coevally, the earliest written testimony of the Erfurt community. It originates from the reign of Bishop Konrad, who held office in late 12th century. Attached to the document is the oldest known seal of the Erfurt Council. With this oath, Jews could defend themselves in court against accusations brought against them by Christians. It documents in an impressive way contacts between Jews and Christians and also the need for legal regulations between these two groups. The Erfurt Jewry Oath marks the beginning of a long documentary tradition of similar oaths which were included in many legal collections and municipal by-laws approximately since the second half of the 13th century. The Erfurt Oath is a mere legal document and, in contrast to many late medieval Jewry oaths, does not prescribe any discriminatory rules of performing the ritual.



“THE BRONZE LAMP

Since the Middle Ages, bronze hanging lamps with star-shaped lamp bowls are known from Jewish contexts. For instance, such lamps are often depicted in medieval manuscripts, in most cases hanging from living room ceilings and used as sabbath lamps. Yet, lamps of this type were also used as sanctuary lamps in synagogues, as historic illustrations prove. Very rarely have such lamps been preserved. Having been made around the year 1160, the Erfurt Bronze Lamp so far is the oldest known example of this type. The lamp base above the bowl with twelve snouts is decorated with figurative depictions. They display scenes from the Old Testament, such as Cain and Abel or the drunken Noah with his sons. Furthermore, we can definitely identify individual episodes from the Samson cycle as well as scenes from the tale of King David. It is from this choice of subjects that we can infer a Jewish background, as in the 12th century, objects from a Christian environment would most certainly have been decorated with depictions from the New Testament. The original lamp is kept in the treasure chamber of Erfurt Cathedral. In the Old Synagogue, a copy is exhibited which was donated by the cathedral chapter on the occasion of the opening of the museum.



IMPRINT

Issued by

State Capital of Erfurt
99111 Erfurt
www.erfurt.de

Editors

Municipality of Erfurt
Culture Directorate
Sarah Laubenstein
Dr. Maria Stuerzebecher
World Heritage Coordinators
Benediktsplatz 1
99084 Erfurt

Phone: +49 361 655-1602
Fax: +49 361 655-1609
Email: welterbe@erfurt.de

www.welterbe-werden.erfurt.de

List of Illustrations:

Pages 4 and 5 – Old Synagogue; details of western façade: rose window (above) and walled up lancet window (below); exterior view: Atelier Papenfuss

Page 6 – Mikveh; exterior view: gildehaus.reich, A. Reich, interior view: P. Seidel

Page 7 – Stone House; exterior view: Thuringian State Office for the Preservation of Monuments and Archaeology (TLDA), C. Misch

Page 8 – Medieval Jewish gravestones; TLDA, photo: E. Driesel

Page 9 – Jewish wedding ring, Erfurt Treasure; TLDA, photo: B. Stefan

Page 10 – Bible Erfurt 1; vol. 1, Berlin State Library, Ms. Or. fol. 1210 p. 2; Berlin State Library – Prussian Heritage

Page 11 – Erfurt Jewry Oath; Municipal Archive Erfurt, o-o/A XLVII Nr. 1

Page 11 – Bronze lamp; Erfurt Diocese, photo: E. Driesel

This publication was kindly supported by the State Chancellery of Thuringia.