

Site 1A: Introduction to Jewish Life in Leopoldstadt
Leopoldstadt, 1020

The history of Jews in Austria is one of repeated **exile** (der Vertreibene) and return. In 1624, after years and years of being forbidden from living in Vienna, Emperor Ferdinand III decided that Jewish people could return to Vienna but would only be allowed to live in one area outside of central Vienna. That area was called “Unterer Werd” and later became the district of Leopoldstadt. In 1783, Joseph II’s “Toleranzpatent” eased a lot of the restrictions that kept Jews from holding certain jobs or owning homes in areas outside of Leopoldstadt. As a result, life in Vienna became much more open and pleasant for Jewish people, and many more Jewish immigrants began moving to Vienna.

Leopoldstadt remained the cultural center of Jewish life, and was nicknamed “Mazzeinsel” after the traditional Jewish matzo bread. Jews made up 40% of the people living in the 2nd district, and about 29% of the city’s Jewish population lived there. A lot of Jewish businesses were located in Leopoldstadt, as well as many of the city’s synagogues and temples. Tens of thousands of Galician Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe made their home there, and brought many of their traditions (such as Yiddish literature) with them.

Questions to Consider

Look up the history of Jewish exile and return in Vienna. How many times were they sent away from the city, and why did the city let them return?

What were some of the restrictions on Jewish life in Vienna before the “Toleranzpatent” in 1783? What further rights did Jewish people gain in 1860? How did this affect Jewish life and culture in Vienna in the late 1800s and early 1900s?

Describe the culture of Leopoldstadt before 1938. Was it rich or poor or both? What sorts of arts and businesses were there?

Are there any famous people who used to live in Leopoldstadt? Who were they and what were they famous for? How do you think that living in Leopoldstadt might have affected their lives and talents?

Site 1B: Leopoldstäter Tempel/Leopoldstadt Temple
Tempelgasse 5, 1020 Wien

As Jewish people gained more rights and citizenship in the 19th century, the Jewish population of Vienna increased sharply, making the construction of a second large Synagogue necessary (the first being the Stadttempel in the 1st district). The Leopoldstadt Temple was designed by Viennese architect Ludwig von Förster and opened its doors on May 18, 1858. In comparison to the Stadttempel in the first district, which had to be concealed behind a regular house façade, this building could stand free and visible to the public, a first for Viennese synagogues. It became known as the Great Synagogue of Vienna, and many of the community's large events were held here.

During the Novemberpogrom in November 1938 the building was destroyed; only parts of the wings survived.

Questions to Consider

What changes in Jewish rights were taking place in the 19th century? Why did more Jewish people want to move to Vienna?

Describe the Leopoldstadt Temple. What did the building look like? What were some of the special features of the synagogue?

Why might it have been important that the building was visible to the public? What does that say about Jews and their role in Vienna at the time the synagogue was built?

Describe the memorial at the site of the Leopoldstadt Temple. Who built it? What does it look like? What does it symbolize?

Site 2: Theater Nestroyhof- Hamakom
Nestroyplatz 1, 1020 Wien

Foto by © Pia Hagenbach

The Nestroyhof was built in 1898 (designed by Oskar Marmorek, a friend of Theodor Herzl) and quickly developed into a center of Jewish culture and the Yiddish Theater movement. As the Nestroyhof gained importance after 1927, it became the home of the “Jewish Theater” company, and famous groups of actors and artists from all over the world came to perform. It was a cultural center for the Yiddish Theater movement. All that stopped in 1938, when the Gestapo shut it down. The building itself was “aryanized” (taken from its Jewish owners) and went through several changes of ownership and purpose after the war. Until 1997 it was the home of a supermarket. In 2009 it was once again made a theater, the Theater Nestroyhof-Hamakom.

Questions to Consider

Describe the history of the Theater Nestroyhof. Who were some of the people who performed here? What different types of media and performance groups did the theater host?

What is “Yiddish Theater”? Describe the movement and some of the themes that Yiddish theater often works with.

The Theater Nestroyhof was at the center of an ownership dispute after WWII between the family that used to own the theater and the family that took ownership after the Nazis seized it. What happened during this dispute, and what was the result?

What is the new “Theater Nestroyhof-Hamakom”? What are the goals of the latest version of this theater? What does the word “hamakom” mean, and why do you think they added it to the name of the theater?

Site 3: Türkischer Tempel/Turkish Temple Zirkusgasse 22, 1020 Wien

Under terms of the peace settlement with the Ottoman Empire in 1718, a Turkish mission was established in Vienna which also included dozens of Sephardic Jews (a subculture of Jews that originate in Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East). In 1736, this group was allowed to form their own independent synagogue, which remained illegal for native Austrian Jews for more than another century. This synagogue, which officially opened in 1887, was built by Hugo von Wiedenfled and modeled on the Alhambra in Spain. The synagogue flew both Austrian and Turkish flags and would celebrate the birthday of the Ottoman sultan and the Austrian emperor every year. This temple was also destroyed during the Novemberpogrom of 1938.

Questions to Consider

The two main subcultures in Jewish communities are the Sephardim and the Askenazi. While they share the same Jewish beliefs, there are cultural differences in traditions such as food, music, and practices. Where do the cultural traditions for each group come from? What are some of the differences between the two groups?

Describe the Turkish Temple. What did the building look like? What were some of the special features of the synagogue?

Under the terms of the **treaty** (der Vertrag) with the Ottoman Empire, Turkish Jews enjoyed a different legal status than Austrian Jews or Jewish immigrants from other countries. How did it affect their rights in Austria before 1938? How did it affect the fate of Sephardic Jews after the Nazis took over in Austria?

Is there any sort of memorial at the site of the Turkish Temple? What does it look like? How does it compare to the memorial at the Leopoldstadt Temple (another site of a former synagogue in the 2nd district).

Site 4: Sammellager/Assembly Camp
2a Kleine Sperlgasse, 1020 Wien

Foto © Hannah Lietz

This building used to be a Vorschule (primary school), and later the Nazis used the classrooms as an assembly camp for people waiting to be deported to ghettos or concentration camps in Eastern Europe. Conditions in the assembly camp were incredibly crowded, dirty and cold, and sometimes people froze in winter. Approximately 45,000 people spent their last days in Vienna in this building, and many were sent directly from here to the gas chambers of a concentration camp.

Questions to Consider

Who were some of the different victim groups who were deported from Vienna? Approximately how many people were deported from Vienna in total? Where were they sent?

Franzi Löw was a Jewish Community Center welfare worker who reported on the conditions of the Sperlgasse Assembly Camp. See if you can find her report, and what she described the conditions of the camp to be like.

There are several memorial stumbling stones (Stolpersteine) in front of the school building. Who is remembered on these plaques? Why do you think they were chosen to represent the memory of this site?

**Site 6: Talmud-Thora-Schule – Altes Jüdisches Museum/
Talmud- Thora-School – Old Jewish Museum**
Malzgasse 16, 1020



The Talmud-Torah school organization, founded in 1814, administered here a school starting in 1850. It was closed during the war, but opened up again in 1946, moved back into the old building in 1956, and became an officially recognized school again in 1978.

The oldest Jewish Museum in the world was also housed in this building. Immediately after the Anschluss in 1938, the museum was closed by the Nazis. A part of its collection was destroyed, and the rest stolen. In 1939 whatever was left was turned over to the Naturhistorisches Museum (Natural History Museum) for a Nazi exhibit on “The Physical and Spiritual Appearance of the Jews” (Das körperliche und seelische Erscheinungsbild der Juden).

Questions to Consider

The Talmud Thora school was and is taught in the Orthodox Jewish tradition. What sort of things do they study in school? How is their school experience similar/different to yours?

Education is considered very important in the Jewish religion. How many of the students in Vienna in 1938 were Jewish? How many of the Gymnasium or private school students were Jewish? How many university students?

What happened to Jewish students in Vienna after the 1938 Anschluss? What changed for them? What sort of restrictions or **hardships** (Schwierigkeiten) did they face?

Why did the Nazis want to take Jewish museum artifacts for the Naturhistorisches Museum? What did they use them for?

Site 7: Foerstergasse 7, 1020 Wien

On April 12th, 1945, just a few hours before liberation, nine Jews, male and female, ages 21 to 82, who had been hiding in the cellar of the house Foerstergasse 7 were taken from their hiding place by an SS commando quartered in this same street and executed in a nearby bomb crater. The first commemorative plaque was installed in 1954, the present one in 1960.

Questions to Consider

Who were the people nicknamed “submarines” during WWII? Approximately how many “submarines” lived in hiding in Austria between 1938 and 1945?

What were some of the ways that people lived in hiding during WWII? Who were some of the people who helped them?

Look up the names of the people who were hiding in this house. Is it possible to find any information about them?

Site 8A: Introduction to Jewish Life in Alsergrund
Alsergrund, 1090 Wien

While Leopoldstadt known as the “Jewish district, Jews lived in almost all of the other districts of Vienna as well. After Leopoldstadt, Alsergrund had the highest percentage of Jewish residents. While Leopoldstadt remained a community with a high percentage of immigrants, Alsergrund became a home for middle-class and professional Jews, and a high percentage of Jewish doctors, lawyers, and businessmen made their homes there. Alsergrund was also a place where some went specifically to move away from the immigrant and traditional background of Leopoldstadt and **assimilate** (sich anpassen) further into non-Jewish Austrian society and culture.

Questions to Consider

When did the Jewish population of Alsergrund start to grow? Why do you think that many Jews began making their homes in Alsergrund during this time period?

Describe the culture of Leopoldstadt before 1938. What sorts of arts and businesses were there? How was the community similar and different to the Jewish community in Leopoldstadt?

Are there any famous Jewish people who used to live in Alsergrund? Who were they and what were they famous for? How do you think that living in Alsergrund might have affected their lives?

Why might some Jewish people have chosen to “assimilate” more into German Austrian culture in the early and mid 1900s? What are some of the ways they might have chosen to do so? What were the benefits and drawbacks of assimilation?

**Site 8B: Gedenksymbol: Schlüssel gegen das Vergessen/
Memorial: Keys against Forgetting**
Servitengasse, 1090 Wien



Foto © Hannah Lietz

A local citizen's research project showed that over half of the people living on Servitengasse before 1938 had been Jewish. The community then developed a focused memorial project that remembers the people who used to live on this street and honors them through research, memorials and education programs. The project resulted in several memorials and plaques, including the "Schlüssel gegen das Vergessen" (Keys against Forgetting), which was opened in 2008. The memorial contains 462 keys, each one attached to the name of a former Servitengasse resident.

Questions to Consider

Read about the Servitengasse 1938 project. What are some of the different memorials and education programs that they have developed? Which projects sound the most interesting to you?

According to the project, what happened to the Jewish people living in Servitengasse after 1938? What happened to the non-Jewish people living there?

Several survivors were interviewed as part of the Servitengasse 1938 project. See if you can find any of their interviews. Who are they, and what are their stories? What were their lives like before the war, when they lived in Servitengasse?

What is your opinion of this memorial? How is it different from other WWII/Holocaust memorials that you may have seen before?

Site 9: Heim für Mischehepaare/Home for Mixed Marriages
Seegasse 16, 1090 Wien



So-called “mixed marriages” are a specific group of victims of the Nazis that rarely became focus of much research. The couples consisted of one who was Jewish within the meaning of the 1935 Nuremberg racial laws, but not the other. Many “mixed marriages” were at first considered “privileged” in the beginning and saved the Jewish partner from deportation and from some of the humiliation and rules that affected other Jewish people.

According to the historian Kurt Schubert, in October 1942 there were still 8,200 Jews in Vienna, 4,000 of whom were partners in mixed marriages. In the summer of 1943 a home for couples in mixed marriages was established in the Seegasse #16. However by December 1943 the home was evacuated and most of the former residents were murdered.

Questions to Consider

What were some of the “privileges” enjoyed by Jewish people in mixed marriages? What dangers did they and their partners face?

Describe the 1935 Nuremberg racial laws about who the Nazis considered Jewish, Roma or Sinti, or part of another racial group. Do the laws always match how people identified themselves?

Were there “mixed marriages” for people in other victim groups, such as where one person in the marriage was Roma or Sinti, or Afro-German, or a foreigner? Is there any research into these types of “mixed marriages” that you can find?

Site 10: Friedhof Seegasse/Cemetery Seegasse
Seegasse 9-11, 1090 Wien



Foto © Hannah Lietz

The cemetery in the Seegasse is the oldest Jewish cemetery still existing in Vienna. The oldest gravestone dates to 1540. Up to 1941 the cemetery contained over one thousand valuable Renaissance and Baroque gravestones. During the Nazi occupation, the old gravestones were hidden in several different places and buried to protect them from being destroyed. The Jews who hid them were all later murdered and the knowledge of the hidden gravestones was lost. An accidental and unexpected discovery in the “Zentralfriedhof” cemetery of about 300 of the hidden gravestones brought people’s attention back attention back to the cemetery. In 2013 additional gravestones were discovered.

Questions to Consider

Describe the history of this cemetery. When was it used? Who is buried there?

How does the history of the cemetery relate to the history of Jews being **exiled** (vertrieben) and returning to the city Vienna?

What happened to Jewish cemeteries during Nazi occupation? Are there any other Jewish cemeteries left in Austria?

What are Jewish traditions for burying the dead? Are there any special Jewish beliefs or rituals around death and dying, burials, or cemeteries?