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Synagogues: Twentieth Century

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appear on the exterior (1888, Ceske Budejovice, Max Fleischer).

Greco-Roman architecture, with pagan associations, was usually considered unsuitable. Nevertheless, in the early nineteenth century, when Americans admired the Greek struggle for independence and associated the Greeks with their own revolutionaries, several U.S. congregations built synagogues in the Greek Revival mode (1841, *Charleston, Beth Elohim, Cyrus L. Warner and David L. Lopez). Occasionally, as in Warsaw (Tlomacka Street, 1877, Leandro Marconi) and Moscow (Arkhipova Street, 1891, Ivan Shaposhnikov and Lev Bachman), a Roman facade was designed for Jews who prudently conformed to a style promoted by their repressive government. At the end of the century, when excavations uncovered ancient Roman-era synagogues, architects in *New York City (1897, Shearith Israel, Arnold Brunner) and *Chicago (1891, Kehillah Anshe Ma'ariv, Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan) devised synagogues meant to reflect an authentic Jewish past.

Islamic forms, connoting the Middle East, came to be seen as particularly suitable. After the construction of the synagogue at Dresden (1840, Gottfried Semper), where the interior supports, horseshoe arches, and ornamentation were inspired by the Alhambra palace in *Spain, this style was adopted in many cities, including Budapest (Dohány Street, 1859, Ludwig von Förster); Cologne (Glockengasse, 1861, Ernst Zwirner); and New York City (1868, Temple Emanuel, Leopold Eidlitz). Spanish and *North African medieval (Moorish) architecture was as delicate and decorative as Gothic, so that it could be seen as "Jewish Gothic." Its potential for decorative elaboration recommended it to many congregations from Samara, Russia (end of the nineteenth century) to New York City's Eldridge Street synagogue (1887, Herter Brothers). This architectural style, however, did perpetuate views of European Jews as exotic and foreign.

Therefore, many Jewish architects favored versions of a sturdy and round-arched Romanesque style that was European in origin. This architectural style had preceded Gothic, just as Judaism had preceded Christianity, and was therefore considered conceptually appropriate. Examples include synagogues at Kassel (1843, Albert Rosengarten), Hannover (1870, Edwin Oppler), and Paris (Rue de la Victoire, 1874, Alfred Aldrophe).

A compromise between Middle Eastern and native European styles called the Byzantine style appeared in synagogues; these buildings had central plans, domes, and, often, nonfigural mosaic decoration. Jews approved of the style's Middle Eastern origin and also its connotations of Roman imperial power, because Constantinople (modern Istanbul) was the capital of the *Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire until 1453. Most of these structures, even if designed in the nineteenth century, were constructed in the early twentieth century.

A few exceptional synagogues defy stylistic classification. These include synagogues in Stockholm (1870, Vilhelm Scholander) and Turin (1889, Alessandro Antonelli), which has an elongated cupola. Most European Jews in Asia and South America imported European ideas about sacred architecture. Synagogues in colonial cities and in North America employed many European styles, but where there was no official state religion, as in the United States, the political connotations of style lost their European potency.

Changes generated by Jews themselves, rather than by governments, were also responsible for new synagogue designs. The Central European Reform movement (see JUDAISM, REFORM: GERMANY), starting with the synagogue in Seesen, Germany (1810), moved the *bimah* (elevated platform used for *Torah reading) eastward toward the *aron ha-kodesh* (Torah ark); placed seats in orderly pews instead of arranging individual chairs and reading desks in a U-shape around the *bimah*; and sometimes provided space for a male choir, a harmonium, or an organ in a loft. As women's literacy and attendance increased and as *sermons and *music became important within modernized services, a women's gallery on only one side of the interior no longer sufficed. Architects accommodated the overflow in galleries above the aisles of the principal interior space, an idea derived from Protestant churches. Tall screens no longer hid women entirely from the view of male worshipers, although decorative parapets provided both safety and a sense of separation. Many nineteenth-century synagogue forms persisted into the early twentieth century. For further reading, see C. H. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (1996).

CAROL HERSELLE KRINSKY

Synagogues: Twentieth Century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most synagogues continued to be historicist in style. Some styles, like the Moorish style, were actually nineteenth-century pastiches of older motifs. However, in many of these buildings, new structural and mechanical technologies and new materials were enthusiastically embraced.

In the early twentieth century a few distinctive synagogue designs broke with tradition. These included the synagogue in Subotica, Serbia (Komor and Jakab, 1901), which combined Balkan, Hungarian, and Jewish folk and architectural traditions, and Hector Guimard's striking Art Nouveau Rue Pavée Synagogue in Paris (1911–13). After World War I there was a shift toward simpler forms. Traditional plan arrangements were often maintained, but Art Deco and Art Moderne styles reduced applied decoration and streamlined forms. Although exteriors were frequently treated monochromatically, many sanctuaries were brilliantly colored, with liturgical, functional, and even mechanical elements uniformly designed with Deco and Moderne motifs. A masterful example is Temple Beth El in Paterson, New Jersey, built in the Art Deco style (Frederick Wentworth, 1929).

In Europe, the developments of the Modernist movement were adapted for synagogues. In Zilina, Slovakia (1928–30), Peter Behrens created a stripped-down version of the domed synagogue popular in *Central Europe. Behrens placed a half-dome on a rectangular block; within, the dome rises on slender concrete piers from a square, set within the rectangular mass. Outside, the ground floor is faced in stone, and the rest of the structure is made of reinforced concrete. Despite the concrete, the building looks traditional because of its massing and the monumental entrance stairway. Like Zilina, the monumental Great Synagogue in *Tel Aviv (ca. 1930) combines traditional elements such as arched windows and a large central dome with the plain smooth wall surfaces and combined massing of block-like forms typical of early European Modernism. The Yeshurun Synagogue in *Jerusalem (Friedmann, Rubin, and Stolzer, 1934–35) eschews the hierarchical arrangement of multiple forms for

a simple joining of two main masses – a rectangular block, entered on its long side, with a tall half-cylinder, housing the sanctuary, joined to the rear.

Experiments with Modernism in synagogue design in the 1920s and 1930s include the Dutch Cubist-style Jacob Obrechtplein Synagogue in *Amsterdam (1927–28), designed by Jewish architect Harry Elte; it also recalls Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple near *Chicago. The Lekstraat Synagogue (A. Elzas, 1936–37), also in Amsterdam, is a plain stone box with simple square windows that emphasizes only the ark (*aron ha-kodesh*, in which the *Torah scroll or scrolls are stored) and the *bimah* (elevated platform used for *Torah reading). Elzas, who won a competition among nine Jewish architects for the commission, designed an unusually spare synagogue. The simple geometry and white concrete walls are offset slightly by the use of exterior stone and the introduction of abundant natural light through large windows. In London, Sir Evan Owen Williams designed a very open interior for the Dollis Hill Synagogue with galleries cantilevered from the wall, rather than supported by piers of columns. The walls and roof are made of corrugated concrete that strengthen the structure. Hexagonal and shield-shaped windows recall the Star of David.

Perhaps the most consistent modern synagogue form of the period was that built in Plauen, Germany (Fritz Landauer, 1930). It was conceived as a white box elevated on stilts at one end; the window arrangement differentiates discreet building functions, much as in contemporary industrial buildings. The Oberstrasse Synagogue in Hamburg (Felix Ascher and Robert Friedman, 1931) combines simple forms and an austere exterior with a symmetrical and hierarchical arrangement of space, the formality of which resembled contemporary civic buildings. Notable modern synagogues were also built in Brno, Czechoslovakia, and Athens, Greece.

After World War II and the *Holocaust, most synagogue construction took place in the United States, where Modernism quickly supplanted earlier styles as an expression of a new Judaism. Demand for suburban synagogues created a boom of modern-style synagogues that also served as educational and community centers. Eric Mendelsohn developed the full expansion of the sanctuary and multiple use of spaces – important concepts for modern synagogue design. He accentuated the sanctuary section within a larger complex using elevated and curvilinear forms; sliding partitions allowed spaces to serve diverse functions at different times. At B'nai Amoona (St. Louis, 1950) a dramatic parabolic roof rises from the ark wall to the entrance wall; the top is glazed, allowing light to pour over the congregation and onto the *bimah* and ark. Mendelsohn's sanctuary at the Park Synagogue in Cleveland is a hemispheric dome that rises almost straight from the ground.

Mendelsohn's designs formed the basis of most suburban synagogue architecture from the 1940s through the 1980s. Percival Goodman appreciated and implemented Mendelsohn's innovations. His many designs lacked Mendelsohn's drama, but they excelled in providing efficient, functional, and differentiated spatial arrangements, often highlighted with accents of modern art. His widely emulated work often applied sculpture to spaces, rather than sculpted space.

Influenced by Mendelsohn and Goodman, many architects transformed the sanctuary space with dynamic expressive forms, often of concrete and glass. Congregations

frequently favored symbolic building profiles recalling mountains or tents. Frank Lloyd Wright expressed his intent for Beth Shalom Synagogue (Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, 1959), writing, "We want to create the kind of building that people . . . will feel as if they were resting in the very hands of God." At Congregation Israel in Glencoe, Illinois (Minoru Yamasaki, 1964), pre-cast concrete arches frame the building, but large gaps in the structure fill the sanctuary with filtered light. The interior is spacious, and the use of light, white walls, and little ornamentation create a cerebral space. The tall, thin gilded ark has been likened to a prayer shawl wrapping the Torah scrolls, but from the sanctuary entrance it also suggests a single flame – a burning bush or eternal light.

In post-War Europe, the primary element of the Ruhrallee Synagogue at Essen, Germany (Dieter Knoblauch and Heinz Heise, 1959), is a hemisphere that rises directly from the ground – with no visible substructure or drum. The unified shape may symbolize the monotheism of Judaism, but it also reflected current trends in architecture favoring pure geometric forms. Inside, the ark is a rectangle inscribed within a broad triangle, set into the shell of the hemispheric dome at the apex of which a Star of David is inscribed, within a series of small round windows that define the shape with light. German architect Alfred Jacoby has inherited these traditions. His designs – often bright, crisp, and comfortable, with a single defining expressive element – have been very popular in late-twentieth-century Germany. His synagogue in Park City, Utah, has brought the language of Mendelsohn and Goodman back to the United States.

The dramatic synagogue in Livorno, *Italy (Angelo di Castro, 1962), replaced the famous Renaissance synagogue destroyed in World War II. The expressive structure is defined by crooked concrete buttresses that, connected by concrete walls, appear to exert pressure to keep the building together; these buttresses allow a large unimpeded interior sanctuary that, like its predecessor, has rows of seats on three sides and the Torah ark on the fourth.

In *Israel, similar expressive tendencies are found. The synagogue in Beersheva (1961) nestles under a sweeping concrete vault that covers the sanctuary like a turtle shell. The vault is anchored in the ground on either side of the small prayer hall that is lit by a wall perforated from floor to ceiling by hexagonal openings. In contrast to Beersheva, the Israel Goldstein Synagogue on the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University (Heinz Rau and David Reznik, 1957) appears ready to float away. The windowless synagogue recalls a giant balloon, as its smooth white bulbous form seems to levitate off the ground; its lower level is pierced with wide arches that light the entire structure, including the sanctuary encased in the building's upper part. Perhaps the most inventive of modern synagogues is the one at the army officer training school at Mitzpeh Ramon (Zvi Hecker, 1969), set in dreary desert surroundings. The exterior of the small sanctuary is concrete that is faceted like crystal to create a complex arrangement of colored shapes and patterns.

Very different is the Cymbalista Synagogue at Tel Aviv University (Mario Botta, 1998), which creates within a unique sculptural form two sanctuaries that are equal in size. Each is a near-cube and they are bathed in natural light funneled from above. The shapes, volumes, and the

use of light are indebted to unbuilt synagogue projects of Louis Kahn.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the number of large synagogue projects has declined in Europe and North America, as resources shifted to the erection of large regional community centers and to Jewish museums and *Holocaust memorials. In a reaction to Modernism, some communities attempted to re-create the lost intimacy of Old World and inner city synagogues – often by erecting smaller chapels incorporating historical styles adjacent to big sanctuaries or including symbolic elements referring to the lost synagogue culture of the Old World. Another trend is the incorporation of “green” technologies into synagogue designs. Environmental concerns remain, however, mostly rhetorical, although a significant effort has been made to integrate synagogues more into natural settings and to include more *gardens and greenery in the synagogue experience. Windows onto gardens and wooded areas, as at the 1989 Jewish Center of the Hamptons by Norman Jaffe (East Hampton, New York), are increasingly common (see ECOLOGY).

In the first decades of the twenty-first century important new synagogues continue to be built that combine the traditions of rationalism and expressionism and also adapt the forms pioneered by the modern masters.

For further reading, see K. Elman and A. Giral, eds. *Per-cival Goodman: Architect, Planner, Teacher, Painter* (2001); S. D. Gruber, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (2003); A. Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945–1965* (1966); C. H. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (1985); R. Stephan, ed., *Eric Mendelsohn, Architect 1887–1953* (1999); and E. Van Voolen and A. Sachs, eds., *Contemporary Architecture and Jewish Identity* (2004).

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Synagogues, Wooden. Wooden synagogues were constructed continuously in *Eastern Europe from the earliest period of Jewish settlement beginning in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries until their almost complete destruction by the *Nazis beginning in 1939. Unlike the synagogues in almost every other country of the Jewish *Diaspora, which followed the existing forms of local and regional architecture, a distinctive type of wooden synagogue architecture emerged in the Jewish communities in the small towns or *shtetls of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The oldest documented wooden synagogues that survived into the twentieth century were built in the south central regions of present-day *Ukraine from the middle of the seventeenth century. Although there were once hundreds of wooden synagogues in small towns in what are now *Poland, Ukraine, *Belarus, and *Lithuania, the surviving documentation, primarily compiled by Polish architectural historians before *World War II, recorded only the largest and finest structures. One region of particular emphasis was present-day northwestern Poland and Lithuania where Jewish communities, such as Wolpa, Olkienniki, and Zabłudow, had erected magnificent synagogues that are generally considered to be masterworks of Eastern European monumental wooden architecture. Late in the nineteenth century, Polish and European architectural historians began to photograph and study the wooden synagogues. The primary sources of documentation were compiled under the direction of the Polish art historian, Szymon Zajczyk, by students of the

Institute of Polish Architecture in Warsaw. It is this documentation that partially survived *Nazi destruction and was published by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka in a series of landmark books beginning with *Wooden Synagogues* (1957 and 1959).

The construction system of most wooden synagogues combined a squared, stacked-log wall system of ancient Slavic origin with a technically advanced, early modern roof-trussing system that typically sheltered a unique, domed wooden cupola above the prayer hall. This curved, tent-like cupola was typically hung from the roof structure and, because of its technical and stylistic sophistication, was probably designed by regional architects employed by the Polish ruling class. This interior cupola combined Baroque styles related to monumental Polish civic buildings and churches with regional traditions of wood construction to produce the uniquely Jewish interior space of the small town synagogue. Surprisingly, this unique aspect of the wooden synagogues was not derivative of the masonry synagogues found in larger towns throughout these regions. The wooden synagogues were almost certainly built by non-Jewish craftsmen (Jews were generally excluded from the building trades) under the direction of regional master builders.

The interiors of these synagogues were dominated by an elaborate octagonal central *bimah* (elevated platform used for *Torah reading) and a monumental multitiered ark (**aron ha-kodesh*; storage cabinet for the *Torah scroll or scrolls) set along the western walls. Although directly related to wooden monumental architecture of the Baroque period, especially church altars, the ark and *bimah* followed distinctive Jewish stylistic models that had developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were found throughout the *Ashkenazic Diaspora.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the prayer hall of the small town wooden synagogue was commonly built alongside a group of subordinate rooms and structures. Typically the auxiliary structures surrounding the prayer hall included an entrance hall, *beit midrash* (house of study), meeting rooms, a women's gallery, and possibly a school. Later in the nineteenth century, as the Jewish community grew, these functions were often transferred to neighboring buildings. A typical exterior expansion to the small town synagogue was the erection of a second-floor women's gallery above the entrance that replaced a first-floor gallery. This change in location may have reflected the influence of traditions from the larger towns. Such expansions can be recognized in exterior photographs by the presence of exterior stairs on the front of the synagogue that women used to attend services while men continued to use the main entrance to the prayer hall on the first floor.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the typical wooden synagogues from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was their common pattern of liturgical wall paintings. In synagogues from the oldest central Ukrainian regions, colorful, elaborate paintings covered the entire walls and ceiling of the prayer hall. The dominant visual elements of the paintings were large painted tablets with portions of daily prayer. Typically these prayers were painted with black Hebrew letters on brilliant white backgrounds and were surrounded by elaborately painted architectural surrounds with columns and arches following the precedent of book art and Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. The remaining surfaces of