
Samuel D. Gruber, Dr., Syracuse University
Preservation Priorities: Endangered Historic Jewish Sites
By saving and renewing architecturally important synagogues that would otherwise be lost, the Jewish Heritage Program of the World Monuments Fund helps Jewish communities to preserve their cultural heritage and to reestablish a sense of stability and identity. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee endorses the efforts of the World Monuments Fund's Jewish Heritage Program and welcomes its participation in the network of endeavors required to accomplish our goals of relief, rescue, and reconstruction.

—THE AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

Dedicated to fostering the unity and creative survival of the Jewish people and its spiritual, cultural, and social heritage, the World Jewish Congress applauds the World Monuments Fund's efforts to restore Jewish heritage sites for the Jewish people and all of mankind.

EDGAR BRONFMAN
President, World Jewish Congress

Thanks to your worldwide efforts it has become possible to preserve for future generations monuments of inestimable artistic, cultural, and religious value. Your aims are especially worthy of support with respect to international understanding, for the preservation of cultural assets in all parts of the world teaches respect for fellow human beings — remote and different though they may be — and serves to reduce hostilities (as music, for example, does at another level) and promote an awareness that multiplicity means enrichment.

SIMON WIESENTHAL

PRESERVATION PRIORITIES:
ENDANGERED HISTORIC JEWISH SITES

TEXT PREPARED BY SAMUEL D. GRUBER
© 1996 WORLD MONUMENTS FUND
WORLD MONUMENTS FUND PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

TEN ENDANGERED HISTORIC JEWISH SITES

1. BELARUS, SLOVIM SYNAGOGUE
2. CZECH REPUBLIC, GREAT SYNAGOGUE OF BUSKOVICE
3. FRANCE, PIAFFENHOFFEN SYNAGOGUE
4. GREECE, ETZ HAYIM SYNAGOGUE OF HANIA, CRETE
5. HUNGARY, MAD SYNAGOGUE
6. INDIA, PARADESI SYNAGOGUE OF COCHIN
7. MOROCCO, RABBI SHLOMO IBN DANAN SYNAGOGUE OF FEZ
8. POLAND, TEMPEL SYNAGOGUE OF CRACOW
9. POLAND, PINCZEW SYNAGOGUE
10. YUGOSLAVIA (SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO), SUBOTICA SYNAGOGUE
Table of Contents

4 BELARUS, SLONIM
6 CZECH REPUBLIC, BOSKOVICE
8 FRANCE, PFAFFENHOFFEN
10 GREECE, HANIA (CRETE)
12 HUNGARY, MÁD
14 INDIA, COCHIN
16 MOROCCO, FEZ
18 POLAND, CRACOW
20 POLAND, PIŃCZÓW
22 YUGOSLAVIA (SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO), SUBOTICA
24 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

SAVING ENDANGERED JEWISH HERITAGE

In the past decade important synagogues have been restored in Berlin, Istanbul, and Budapest. These initiatives, however, only begin to address the dire need for preservation of Jewish architectural heritage. Throughout the world, and especially in Central and Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, important buildings are at serious risk; many are nearly destroyed. In order to address the problem on a global basis, the World Monuments Fund's Jewish Heritage Program was established.

Preservation Priorities: Endangered Historic Jewish Sites describes ten endangered synagogues of historic and artistic importance which face perils ranging from neglect to environmental damage to the ravages of war. These sites have been selected on the basis of careful evaluation of historical significance, intactness of original fittings, urgency of the need for intervention, and the presence of a responsible local community or authority to oversee conservation work and ongoing maintenance. Only two—the Paradesi Synagogue in Cochin, India and the Tempel Synagogue in Cracow, Poland—remain nominally in use. These ten synagogues stand as representatives of hundreds of other threatened landmarks, as well as of thousands more that no longer survive. They have been chosen not only for their importance, but because their preservation is possible. Once restored, all of these buildings will retain a Jewish identity and could be equipped for regular or occasional religious use.

In a period of initial assessment and research beginning in 1988, the World Monuments Fund documented and monitored the condition of Jewish heritage sites all over the world in order to establish the priority list. WMF has already been active at one of these sites—the Tempel in Cracow—for some time now and is dedicated to seeing the synagogue restored. This work will serve as a model for WMF's approach to the preservation of the other sites on its list of endangered Jewish monuments. As the needs of individual sites are met, others will take their places.

WMF is now raising the money needed to fund the conservation of these ten buildings and, as funds become available, will carry out the work of preserving them. In some cases, local groups have formed to identify and help preserve specific sites. In most instances, local governments and Jewish communities have pledged their support. In each of its projects, the Jewish Heritage Program unites communities worldwide with public and private agencies committed to the protection and preservation of Jewish heritage.

Marilyn Perry
Chairman
World Monuments Fund

Ronald S. Lauder
The Hon. Ronald S. Lauder
Chairman
Jewish Heritage Program
Belarus: Slonim

This large baroque synagogue, built in 1642 and situated in the marketplace, was one of the grandest synagogues of Byelorussia and, even in its deteriorated state, is the best-preserved synagogue of its type in Belarus today. Though now used as a warehouse, the brick structure with its gabled roof retains most of the important original elements. These include extensive interior wall paintings, a central four-column bima (reader’s platform, Ashkenazic rite), a decorated ark with stucco lions supporting a Decalogue, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of holy sites, musical instruments, and biblical themes. A low structure attached to the main building is thought to have been added to accommodate women. The main entrance, opposite the ark, has a wooden door adorned with a palm tree and an inscription, giving the date of construction. Serious stabilization and restoration measures are required. The government of Belarus has expressed its interest in collaborating in the restoration of this magnificent building.
Czech Republic: Boskovice

The Great Synagogue of the Boskovice ghetto is the central architectural feature of a remarkably well-preserved Jewish district. The synagogue was built in the seventeenth century and reconstructed in the mid-nineteenth century in a neo-Gothic style. The remains of ornamental paintings, which probably date to the eighteenth century, have recently been discovered under a layer of plaster. Richly painted scenes once completely covered the synagogue walls and vaulting. They featured sacred Jewish texts adorned by plant motifs reflecting folk themes typical of the region. Some upper sections of the paintings are remarkably intact, especially in the women's gallery. Funds are needed to advance the restoration of the synagogue under the auspices of the Jewish community of Brno.
Of the dozens of endangered synagogues in Alsace, the Pfaffenhoffen synagogue is the only intact vernacular one built before 1800. It belongs to what architect Gilbert Weil has called the "community center type." It exemplifies the two-story, nonmonumental synagogue, common throughout Europe before the nineteenth century, with community facilities on the ground floor and the sanctuary on the upper floor. This synagogue closely resembles local houses in its overall form and exterior articulation.

The interior furnishings are complete, and part of the original ark, decorated with lions carved in relief, is preserved. The French government has recently listed the synagogue as a national historic monument. The building is quite dilapidated and requires urgent repairs to preserve the structure and its historic furnishings.
GREECE: HANIA (CRETE)

The Etz Hayim synagogue in Hania was once the center of Crete's substantial Jewish community. It is the only surviving Jewish monument on Crete, which lost its entire Jewish population in 1944. The fifteenth-century stone building was originally the church of St. Catherine. Architecturally, it relates to Venetian buildings of the period in Hania, many of which have already been restored. The arched wall construction is characteristic of this style. The building was converted to Jewish use in the late seventeenth century. Numerous Hebrew inscriptions document its later history. The interior fittings and decorations of the synagogue have been destroyed. Abandoned for fifty years, the building has fallen into ruin. An earthquake in 1994 accelerated the deterioration, seriously damaging the building's northeast corner.

Overall, the building is in very precarious condition and will probably not survive another ten years without timely intervention. Restoration plans, supported by the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and the Municipality of Hania, call for the building to be restored to house a permanent exhibition on the Jewish history of Hania and to serve as a lecture and concert hall. Restoration will also allow for religious services.
Hungary:
Mád

The exterior of this beautiful late baroque synagogue, located in the heart of Hungary’s wine-producing Tokay region, dates from approximately 1795. It was restored in the mid-1970s, but the interior still requires extensive repair and conservation. Although the deterioration of the interior is accelerating due to neglect, the original layout is intact, with most architectural elements still in place. The building is beautifully proportioned and finely decorated. The interior disposition with a central bima-support is the best example of this type of synagogue design in Hungary. Adjacent to the synagogue is a two-story arcaded former yeshiva, which should also be restored.
India: Cochin

The Paradesi Synagogue, one of the most beautiful in the world, was built in 1568 by descendants of Spanish, Dutch, and other European Jews and is still used today. It is the sole functioning synagogue in an area which once had six or seven others. The building is a simple square with a gabled roof of ceramic tile supporting an open cupola with a wide-eaved cap. Looming over the building is a clock tower with faces attached to the exterior sides numbered in Hebrew, Roman, and Malayalam characters. The interior’s white plastered walls contrast with a rich array of Belgian crystal chandeliers and lanterns, an intricately carved wooden ark, a curved all-brass central bima, wooden benches, and hundreds of blue-and-white willow-patterned Chinese floor tiles, which date from the 1700s.

It is the intention of the Cochin Jewish community to deed the synagogue to the Indian government to be maintained as a historic monument even after the last Jews have left Cochin. The building requires many repairs, and before neglect leads to serious damage, it is important that all work be carried out soon. In addition, an endowment is required for the building in order to ensure regular maintenance in the future.
MOROCCO: FEZ

The seventeenth-century Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Danan Synagogue is one of the largest and most important in Fez, built and owned for generations by one of the most prominent Moroccan Jewish families. The interior is a remarkably high rectangular room of two naves divided by three octagonal piers—a revelation of open space after entering the building block through a small door off a slight street-widening in the mellah, or Jewish quarter. Inside, a recessed ark occupies the two central bays of one of the long walls. The central two bays of the opposite wall were open to the recessed tevah (reader's platform, Sephardic rite) area.

Although the Ibn Danan is among the oldest, finest, and most intact of the Moroccan synagogues, it requires immediate conservation intervention. Plaster has fallen from many places on the walls, which also exhibit major cracks. Water penetration from the windows is damaging the ornamental plaster and tile. The roof sags, and some of the wood has rotted. Many windows are either broken or blocked, and others are totally without glass. The deteriorating furnishings, which include original inlaid and painted chairs, benches, and other objects, are also at great risk.
POLAND:
CRACOW

The magnificent Tempel synagogue in Cracow, which is owned by the Jewish Community, is still occasionally used for religious services. It is the only nineteenth-century synagogue to have survived virtually intact in Poland, and it is one of only a few remaining of the thousands that existed in Poland before the Holocaust. It is of great importance from an architectural and cultural standpoint. Located on the edge of historic Kazimierz, Cracow's long-neglected Jewish district, the structure is a superb example of nineteenth-century eclectic religious architecture, incorporating elements of the Romanesque, neoclassical, Gothic Revival, and Neo-Renaissance styles in a pleasing amalgam with a distinct Jewish identity. It is considered to be one of the finest synagogues of the Polish Jewish Reform Movement.

At the invitation of the Cracow Jewish Community, the World Monuments Fund began restoration of the building in 1994. Funds are presently needed to restore the building's elaborate interior. When restored, the Tempel will continue to serve as a synagogue for local and visiting Jews. It will also be used for cultural events for the people of Cracow and visitors from around the world.
Poland: Pińczów

The Pińczów synagogue, erected at the turn of the seventeenth century, remains one of the most historic and artistically significant Jewish buildings still unrestored in Poland. It was built during a period of great expansion of Poland's Jewish community, when Jews hired the foremost architects to build their synagogues. Today, it maintains its original form, vault, and much of its fresco decoration—evidence of Jewish acceptance of the Renaissance style popular among Poland's elite. The ark still exists in fragments. Traces of mural paintings survive, as well—particularly of the Hebrew texts which once filled the walls—as do traces of brilliant blue ceiling paintings. The synagogue has a square main hall covered with a cloister vault with lunettes. A porch with a separate room for the women's prayer hall is above one end. The most precious wall paintings, which date from the second half of the eighteenth century, are attributed to the Jewish painter Jehudi Leib and cover the vaults of the entrance porch. Water penetration is causing serious damage to the building and its decorations.
YUGOSLAVIA
(SERBIA & MONTENEGRO):
SUBOTICA

The Subotica synagogue is one of the finest Jugendstil buildings in the Balkans. Built in 1902 by the popular Jewish Hungarian architectural team of Komor and Jacob, its design was originally submitted for a synagogue competition in nearby Szeged, Hungary. After taking second prize, the plan was adopted by Subotica, which managed to erect the building before the Szeged synagogue was completed. The traditional Balkan Byzantine-Turkish architectural massing and decorations utilizing Hungarian folk motifs are filtered through the playful Jugendstil aesthetic, creating striking contrasts. The building is imposing, but graceful; it is spacious and robust, but intimate and inviting. When compared to other contemporary buildings in the vicinity, notably the town hall, the synagogue makes the otherwise little-known Subotica a significant architectural center.

The Jewish community sold the synagogue to the municipality in the early 1980s, and it was briefly used as a theater. Restoration begun by the Yugoslav government halted with the onset of war. Limited tests have been carried out and plans made, but work is now suspended because of a lack of available funds. The future use of the building remains uncertain, but it will most likely be shared for religious and cultural use, following the example of the recently restored synagogue in Szeged.
Criterias for Selection

The ten sites on the first list of endangered Jewish Heritage Sites were selected for inclusion based on their meeting the following criteria. In most cases, the buildings meet each criterion.

1. Historic, artistic, and/or architectural significance. A building should be an outstanding example of its time and architectural style. A building’s significance might be as a surrogate for the large number of similar monuments now destroyed. Significance can relate to high style (Pińczów, Cracow, Subotica) or to modest, even vernacular, structures (Pfaffenhofen).

2. The building is a rare surviving example from a particular place, period, or type.

3. The building retains significant original elements and has not been irrevocably altered, thus ensuring a reliable restoration of formal and decorative characteristics from its Jewish use.

4. The building is unlikely to be restored in a timely fashion without international assistance—though a partial grant will often be enough to leverage local funds.

5. A responsible local community or authority has been identified or already engaged to oversee work, and to ensure maintenance and sympathetic use of the building after restoration. In some cases, listing is an important step in cementing this local support.

6. Valuable aspects of the building—or the entire structure—are in serious need of repair, and even face imminent deterioration or destruction unless there is quick intervention.

World Monuments Fund

The World Monuments Fund (WMF), an independent nonprofit organization, sponsors and manages architectural conservation efforts around the world. Founded in 1965, WMF works to save outstanding artistic, architectural, and cultural treasures whose loss would impoverish mankind. A current focus of WMF’s work is the restoration of the Tempel Synagogue in Cracow. Other projects include the conservation of the Preah Khan temple complex in Angkor, Cambodia, and the preservation of the Tower of Belém in Lisbon, Portugal.

WMF acts as a catalyst, identifying sites in need of preservation and working, in cooperation with local communities and preservation authorities, to secure international sponsorship for necessary intervention. In many cases, WMF manages preservation projects to their completion. The organization also plays the role of advocate, helping to inform the public of the need to preserve historically significant examples of cultural heritage worldwide. WMF sponsors research, training, and exchange programs to share its on-site conservation experience with students and craftspeople in the field. Since its founding, WMF has completed more than 100 preservation projects in 37 countries.

The World Monuments Fund, based in New York City, has created five independently chartered affiliate organizations that undertake artistic and architectural conservation programs in their own countries and contribute to the success of World Monuments Fund projects worldwide. These affiliates are in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

World Monuments Fund
Gratefully Acknowledges
The Sponsors of this Publication:

The Cahnman Foundation, Inc.
The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation
The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Inc.
Yad Hanadiv