

= Zagreb Synagogue =

The Zagreb Synagogue (Croatian : Zagrebačka sinagoga) was the main place of worship for the Jewish community of Zagreb in modern day Croatia . It was constructed in 1867 in the Kingdom of Croatia Slavonia within the Austrian Empire , and was used until it was demolished by the fascist authorities in 1941 in the Axis aligned Independent State of Croatia .

The Moorish Revival synagogue , designed after the Leopoldstädter Tempel in Vienna , was located on modern day Praska Street . It has been the only purpose built Jewish house of worship in the history of the city . It was one of the city 's most prominent public buildings , as well as one of the most esteemed examples of synagogue architecture in the region .

Since the 1980s , plans have been made to rebuild the synagogue in its original location . Due to various political circumstances , very limited progress has been made . Major disagreements exist between the government and Jewish organizations as to how much the latter should be involved in decisions about the reconstruction project , including proposed design and character of the new building .

= History =

Encouraged by the 1782 Edict of Tolerance of Emperor Joseph II , Jews first permanently settled in Zagreb in the late eighteenth century , and founded the Jewish community in 1806 . In 1809 the Jewish community had a rabbi , and by 1811 it had its own cemetery . As early as 1833 , the community was permitted to buy land for construction of a synagogue , but did not have sufficient money to finance one at the time .

By 1855 , the community had grown to 700 members and , on October 30 of that year , the decision was made to build a new Jewish synagogue . The construction committee , appointed in 1861 , selected and purchased a parcel of land at the corner of Maria Valeria Street (now Praska Street) and Ban Jelačić Square , the central town square . However , a new urban planning scheme of 1864 reduced the area available for construction , and the community decided to buy another parcel of 1 , 540 square metres (16 , 600 sq ft) in Maria Valeria Street , approximately 80 metres (260 ft) south of the original location .

= Design and construction =

Franjo Klein , a Vienna born Zagreb architect , was commissioned to build the synagogue . Klein , a representative of romantic historicism , modeled the building on the Viennese Leopoldstädter Tempel (1858) , a Moorish Revival temple designed by Ludwig Förster . It became a prototype for synagogue design in Central Europe . Zagreb Synagogue used the already developed round arch style (Rundbogenstil) , but did not adopt Förster 's early oriental motifs .

The composition of the main facade , with its dominant drawn out and elevated projection and the two symmetrical lower lateral parts , reflects the internal division into three naves . At ground floor level , the front was distinguished by the three arch entrance and bifora , whereas the first floor level had a high triforium with an elevated arch and the quadrifoliate rosettes on the staircases .

The synagogue occupied the greater part of the plot , facing west . It receded from the street regulation line in accordance with the rule then still enforced in Austria ? Hungary , prohibiting non Catholic places of worship from having a public entrance from the street . The synagogue had a wider and slightly higher central nave and two narrower naves ; unlike Förster 's synagogue in Vienna , it did not have a basilical plan .

Construction began in 1866 and was completed the following year . The synagogue was officially consecrated on September 27 , 1867 , a ceremony attended by representatives of city and regional authorities , Zagreb public figures , and many citizens . It was the first prominent public building in Zagreb 's lower town , and its architecture and scale aroused general admiration and praise .

= = = 19th and early 20th century = = =

With the new synagogue , an organ was introduced into religious service . The small minority of Orthodox Jews found this change to be intolerable , and they began to hold their services separately , in rented rooms .

In the 1880 earthquake , the synagogue suffered minor damage and was repaired the following year .

Largely due to immigration from Hungary , Bohemia and Moravia , the Jewish population of Zagreb quickly grew in size : from 1 @, @ 285 members in 1887 to 3 @, @ 237 members in 1900 , and then to 5 @, @ 970 members in 1921 . The synagogue became too small to accommodate the needs of the ever @-@ growing community . In 1921 a renovation was undertaken to increase the number of available seats . A 1931 plan to increase the capacity to 944 seats was ultimately abandoned . A central heating system was installed in 1933 .

= = = Demolition during World War II = = =

During the 1941 collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia under the Axis invasion in the April War , the Independent State of Croatia was created . It was ruled by the extreme nationalist Usta?a regime . The Usta?a quickly started with the systematic persecution of the Jews , modeled after the Nazi Germany approach , and at times even more brutal . Racial laws were introduced , Jewish property was confiscated , and the Jews were subjected to mass arrests and deportations to death camps in Croatia and abroad .

In October 1941 , the newly installed mayor of Zagreb , Ivan Werner , issued a decree ordering the demolition of the Pra?ka Street synagogue , ostensibly because it did not fit into the city 's master plan . The demolition began on October 10 , 1941 , proceeding slowly so as not to damage the adjacent buildings ; it was finished by April 1942 . The whole process was photographed for propaganda purposes , and the photographs were shown to the public at an antisemitic exhibition first held in Zagreb . It was also shown in Dubrovnik , Karlovac , Sarajevo , Vukovar and Zemun , as an illustration of the " solution of the Jewish question in Croatia " .

A fragment of the film footage of the demolition was discovered five decades later by the film director Lordan Zafranovi? during research for his 1993 documentary feature , *Decline of the Century : Testimony of L. Z.* ; 41 seconds of the film survives . This footage was also shown in Mira Wolf 's documentary , *The Zagreb Synagogue 1867 @-@ 1942* (1996) , produced by Croatian Radiotelevision .

The synagogue 's eight valuable Torah scrolls were saved due to an intervention by Leonardo Grivi?i? , an entrepreneur and industrialist who lived next door from Mile Budak , a minister in the Usta?a government . He was also close to Poglavnik Ante Paveli? and the Third Reich 's ambassador to Croatia , Edmund Glaise @-@ Horstenau . Although Grivi?i? did not have a significant political role in the Independent State of Croatia , he was considered trustworthy . On October 9 , 1941 , he learned about the regime 's plan to start the demolition of the synagogue on the following morning . By that evening , Grivi?i? secretly relayed the information to the synagogue 's chief cantor , Gr?ner , and during the night , the Torah scrolls were moved to safety .

Shortly after the destruction of the synagogue , the Catholic archbishop of Zagreb Aloysius Stepinac delivered a homily in which he said : " A house of God of any faith is a holy thing , and whoever harms it will pay with their lives . In this world and the next they will be punished . " .

The only surviving fragments of the building ? the wash @-@ basin and two memorial tables from the forecourt , as well as some parts of a column ? were saved by Ivo Kraus . He pulled them from the rubble shortly after the end of World War II . The wash @-@ basin and the memorial tables are now in the Zagreb City Museum . The column fragments are kept by the Jewish Community of Zagreb .

= = Reconstruction efforts = =

== 1945 ? 1990 ==

Only one in five Croatian Jews survived the Holocaust of World War II . Between 1948 and 1952 , nearly one half of the surviving members of Jewish Community of Zagreb opted for emigration to Israel , and the community dropped to one @-@ tenth of its pre @-@ war membership . The Yugoslav communist regime nationalized virtually all real estate owned by the Jewish Community of Zagreb , including the plot in Pra?ka Street . All this , combined with the new regime 's general hostility toward religion , made reconstruction of the synagogue nearly impossible .

After World War II , the vacant site of the former synagogue was used as a makeshift volleyball court . The volleyball court made way for a prefabricated department store building , constructed in 1959 . The department store was completely destroyed in a fire on December 31 , 1980 , and was subsequently dismantled . Despite some earlier ideas about a permanent department store building on the same spot , and a 1977 architecture competition for its design , no construction took place . Instead , the parcel was turned into a parking lot , which it remains to this day .

After 1986 , the Jewish Community of Zagreb began to consider a Jewish cultural center and a memorial synagogue . Two architects , Branko Sila?in and Boris Morsan , both of whom participated in the failed 1977 department store competition , came forward on their own accord and contributed their ideas for a new Jewish center in Pra?ka Street . Sila?in 's vision was ultimately not accepted by the Jewish community ; instead , plans were being made for the construction of the cultural center and a synagogue , following an international architecture competition . However , despite support for the project both within Yugoslavia and abroad , the issuance of necessary permits was either stalled or denied by the municipal government . The project was not developed .

== 1990 ? present ==

By the autumn of 1990 , after the first democratic elections in Croatia , the municipal government finally approved the project . An architectural competition was planned for January 1991 . Political turmoil in the country , followed by the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Croatian War of Independence (1991 ? 1995) , caused the project to be put on hold again . In 1994 President of Croatia Franjo Tu?man said to Jakov Bienenfeld , Council member of the Zagreb Jewish community , that they should build the new synagogue at the site of the former synagogue , which will be funded by the Croatian government . Bienenfeld declined the offer believing to be inappropriate when 1800 Catholic churches are left destroyed at the time , during Croatian War of Independence .

In the meantime , the Jewish Community of Zagreb sought to legally reacquire its property . The Croatian denationalization law was enacted in 1996 , and the Pra?ka Street parcel was finally returned to the community on December 31 , 1999 . By 2000 , reconstruction activities were invigorated again . An investment study was submitted to the Government of Croatia and the City of Zagreb in July 2004 and revised in October 2004 . The architecture competition was planned for 2005 . However , a 2005 rift in the Jewish Community of Zagreb resulted in formation of a splinter Jewish community , Bet Israel , led by Ivo and Slavko Goldstein .

In September 2006 , the Government of Croatia formed a construction workgroup . It was decided that the project , estimated at the time at HRK 173 million (US \$ 30 million) , would be partially financed by the Government of Croatia and the City of Zagreb , and that both Jewish organizations should be represented in the workgroup . However , the involvement of Bet Israel was deemed unacceptable by the Jewish Community of Zagreb , which is the sole owner of the Pra?ka Street property , and which also sees itself as the sole legal representative of the Zagreb Jewish community . As a consequence , the community and its president , Ognjen Kraus , refused further participation in the project under the set conditions .

Further disagreements existed about the design and character of the new building . Facsimile reconstruction , while feasible , was not seriously contemplated . There was a general agreement

that the new building should also have a cultural as well as commercial purpose . While the Jewish Community of Zagreb envisioned a modern design reminiscent of the original synagogue , the Bet Israel advocated building a replica of the original synagogue 's facade , perceiving it as having a powerful symbolism . Opinions of architects , urban planners , and art historians were also divided along similar lines .

In 2014 and 2015 , the Jewish Community of Zagreb presented new plans for a 10 @, @ 600 m2 (114 @, @ 000 sq ft) multi @-@ purpose Jewish center and synagogue in Pra?ka Street .