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Tracking Jewish history in Southern Germany along the Rhine valley up to Lake Constance (Bodensee)

Multiple traces of former Jewish life can be found in almost all of the places where historic Jewish communities once existed. Many synagogues were destroyed by Nazi activities in November 1938, but Jewish cemeteries quite often are still in more or less good shape. Besides that often enough Jewish schoolhouses or community buildings still exist, as well as former Jewish business buildings and residential buildings. People in places with traces of Jewish history since decades try hard to preserve the memory of the Jewish families who had once lived there. Memorial plates were fixed on walls, and in front of former Jewish buildings "Stolpersteine" (stumbling stones) remind of the former residents and their tragic fate. Joachim Hahn will display traces of Jewish history and show pictures taken on a trip from Frankfurt along the Rhine river up to Lake Constance.



The map shows the villages and towns of the trip.

One of the first towns on the motorway leading from Frankfurt on Main via Darmstadt to Heidelberg is **Hemsbach**, a home to Jews since the 17th century. Nowadays, its Jewish cemetery and its former synagogue bear testimony to their former presence.

South of Hemsbach, in **Weinheim**, the "Judengasse" (Jew alley), dating to the Middle Ages, is one of the mementoes recalling the former Jewish community.

It is only a few kilometers from Weinheim to **Mannheim**. The city was once home to one of southern Germany's major Jewish communities. Mementoes of the city's rich Jewish heritage as well as the numerous social and cultural contributions made by its Jews are evident throughout Mannheim.

Heidelberg, since about 30 years home of the “University for Jewish Studies” - Hochschule für jüdische Studien, is an important center of Jewish life in Germany today.

Waibstadt is about 25 kilometers southeast of Heidelberg. It pays to see its impressive Jewish cemetery which, founded in mid 17th century amidst a forest, was used at times by as many as 30 Jewish communities in the vicinity.

From 1860 to 1938 **Walldorfs** synagogue was located in a former church. **Wiesloch**, where a settlement of Jews existed in the Middle Ages and from the 17th century, has also an interesting Jewish cemetery.

The **Bruchsal** area included several Jewish communities as in **Gondelsheim** (the former synagogue building has been preserved), **Obergrombach** (a partially preserved cemetery in the forest dating from the 17th century) and other villages. In Bruchsal a plaque recalls the synagogue, erected 1880-81 and completely destroyed in 1938.

In **Karlsruhe** a Jewish community came into being shortly after the founding of the city in the beginning of the 18th century. The main synagogue demolished in 1938, stood on the property at Kronenstrasse. The new synagogue and the community center was inaugurated in 1971 for the community established after World War II. A cemetery, still in use next to the city’s public graveyard is directly adjacent to an orthodox Jewish burial site, distinguished in particular by only Hebrew inscriptions on its grave stones.

Some 25 kilometers south of Karlsruhe we visit the large central cemetery for Jews, in **Kuppenheim**. This cemetery served congregations in the immediate vicinity and even somewhat distant areas from the 17th to the 20th centuries (Baden-Baden, Bodersweier, Bühl, Ettlingen, Gernsbach, Hörden, Kehl, Lichtenau, Malsch, Neufreistett, Muggensturm, Rastatt, Rheinbischofsheim, Stollhofen). In the 19th century, some of these congregations established their own burial ground: Baden-Baden, Bühl, Kehl, Neufreistett and Rastatt.

In **Baden-Baden**, a synagogue, built in the Roman revival style in 1897-1898, was destroyed in 1938. There is a small new Synagogue in Baden-Baden for the community established after World War II.

Offenburg: Offenburg has a relic unique to Jewish history in Southern Germany, a ritual bath (mikve) built around the year 1300. The building of the so-called “Salmen” included a synagogue which had been installed in the banquet room of a former inn operated at the site during the second half of the 19th century.

Until the Nazis came to power a good many Jewish communities existed south of Offenburg: one of them was in **Kippenheim**, another in **Schmieheim**. The former synagogue in **Kippenheim** recalls part of the rich Jewish heritage in the town. From 1986 to 1989 its exterior was faithfully restored to its original condition; what remains of its former interior is being preserved.

The Jewish cemetery in **Schmieheim** was established in the 17th century southwest of the town. It is one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Southwest-Germany. Until the 19th century Schmieheim had more than 500 Jewish inhabitants and a rabbi.

Emmendingen: Emmendingen is located about 20 kilometers north of Freiburg. A small community was established here in 1995, consisting mainly of Jewish families from the former Soviet Union. The synagogue in Schlossplatz, ransacked in 1938, and the torn down, is now commemorated by a plaque.

Freiburg: The inviting design of the new synagogue in Freiburg im Breisgau has attracted worshippers since it opened in 1987. The oak doors from the main entrance of the earlier synagogue next to the university of the town – demolished in 1938 – have been installed in the new house of worship.

For many centuries there were Jewish communities in **Eichstetten**, **Ihringen** and **Breisach**, all in the Kaiserstuhl area west of Freiburg. In **Muellheim** and **Sulzburg**, situated about 30 kilometers southwest of Freiburg, still harbor numerous traces of Jewish history. The late-Baroque, semi-classical synagogue in **Sulzburg**, erected in 1823, was restored between 1980 and 1995 thanks to a campaign launched by preservationists in early 1964; the project was ultimately sponsored by the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg.

At the Swiss border, opposite Basel, lies **Lörrach**, home to settlements of Jews from the 17th century to 1940. In 1995 the community was reborn, mostly due to the arrival of Russian Jewish families.

For about 500 years until their deportation in October 1940, Jews lived in the **Tiengen** district of a town located at the swiss border about midway between Basel and Lake Constance. Besides several memorial plaques, only the former Jewish cemetery recalls the town's Jewish history. The graveyard, leveled in 1938 and converted into an athletic field, was restored as a memorial after 1945.

Between the Swiss town of Schaffhausen and Singen, two more Jewish communities are on the Germany side of the border, **Randegg** and **Gailingen**. In the annals of Jewish history in Southern Germany the town of **Gailingen** is unique. In the 1860's it had more Jewish than Christian inhabitants (about 1.000 each) and a Jewish mayor. The social service facilities in Gailingen included several Israelite institutions of trans-regional importance, in particular a Jewish hospital and the Friedrichsheim, Senior Citizen Home, which served elderly Jews until 1940.

Ueberlingen and **Constance** feature significant reminders of the Jewish presence on the shores of Lake Constance. During the Middle Age a major community was located in **Ueberlingen** where in 1332, in the course of a particularly cruel suppression of Jews, some 300 to 400 Jews were burnt to death in their synagogue. In **Constance** the "Judenturm" (Jew Tower), built in the 13th century as part of the city's fortification, was financed by Jewish families. It reflects the importance of the tow's Jewish community during the Middle Ages. The synagogue of the newly revived 19th –century community was destroyed in 1938. A commercial building at the site has included a prayer room since 1964.

A few pictures of the trip along the Rhine river up to Lake Constance



Hemsbach: cemetery



Hemsbach: former synagogue and former house of family Rothschild



Weinheim: medieval "Judengasse"



Mannheim: modern synagogue



Kippenheim: former synagogue



Offenburg: medieval Mikwe



Loerrach: modern synagogue



Konstanz: medieval „Judenturm“



Ueberlingen: gravestone from 1275



Gailingen: former Jewish school and community building