JÜDISCHES MUSEUM MÜNCHEN

PRESSEINFORMATION
PRESS RELEASE

109 Synagogue Stones
Presse conference: THU | November 19, 2026 | 1.00 pm

During renovation work by Stadtwerke München (Munich City Utilities), at the Großhesselohe weir, more than six hundred tons of partly relief-decorated stonework were recovered from the Isar in late June 2023 and January 2025. Of these, 109 stones were identified as fragments of Munich's former Main Synagogue, which was destroyed by the Nazis in June 1938. Particularly significant is a marble slab showing the two tablets with the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, located above the synagogue's Torah shrine.
The material had been used in 1955/56 during flood-protection works by the Munich-based company Leonhard Moll, which had also carried out the synagogue's demolition. In this way, parts of the destroyed synagogue ended up in the Isar, where they remained hidden for decades.

Designed by Albert Schmidt and inaugurated in 1887, the main synagogue on Herzog-Max-Straße was a prominent and magnificent building in the centre of Munich and a symbolic expression of Jewish self-confidence within the city's society. For members of the Jewish Community, it served as a central place of assembly and worship and remains an important point of reference in the community's collective memory to this day.

The forced razing of the main synagogue, half a year before the November Pogroms of 1938, was a local event of national significance. It was the first synagogue in the German Reich to be violently destroyed on orders of the Nazi authorities in full public view. The intervention in the cityscape was also a demonstration of control over prominent architectural sites and conveyed a clear message: Jewish life was to disappear from German cities. The destruction of the synagogue was thus also an attack on the visibility and of Jewish life as a matter of course in Munich.

The Jewish Museum Munich has developed and coordinated an interdisciplinary research project. Its aims include putting the events of June 1938 in their historical context, preparing an architectural assessment of the stone finds, and establishing the provenance of the objects and the associated ownership rights from a legal perspective.

The legal successor to the Jewish community forcibly dissolved by the Nazi regime is the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern. In accordance with the 1998 Washington Principles, a just and fair and solution was therefore sought: the 109 fragments of Munich's former main synagogue are consequently being restituted by the Free State of Bavaria to the Jewish community. Responsibility for their conservation and storage currently remains with the Bavarian State.

What significance does it have for Munich's culture of remembrance that parts of a building long thought lost have once again become physically tangible? The resurfaced stones are not merely historical evidence; they concern Munich's entire urban community. They raise questions about which stories are visible in the cityscape and which have faded from memory.

Starting in April 2027, the temporary exhibition "resurfaced." by the Jewish Museum Munich will focus on the rediscovered remains of the main synagogue, its history, and the remembrance of a destroyed site. The exhibition presents the interdisciplinary analysis of the stone discovery, the historical contexts of the demolition, and rediscovered fragments. It also documents the suppression of this injustice in the postwar period and traces the first steps towards creating a public memorial culture. Works and commentaries by artists, students, and activists addressing Munich's cityscape bring the subject into the present.

Dr. h.c. mult. Charlotte Knobloch, President of the Jewish community of Munich and upper Bavaria:
"The rediscovery of fragments of the former main synagogue nearly a century after its destruction was a historic moment for us—and for me personally. Alongside the joy, there remains to this day a sense of grief and bitterness that these stones were simply dumped into the river as building rubble even in the 1950s.
I would like to thank the City of Munich and the Free State of Bavaria for jointly overseeing the scholarly analysis of the fragments, and the Free State in particular for their restitution to our Jewish community. Today, these stone witnesses to Munich's Jewish past deserve an appropriate place of honour. In this way precisely, the people of Munich will be able to see what was once part of their city, and will it become palpable that the Jewish community was—and remains—a part of this city."

Markus Blume, Bavarian Minister of State for Science and the Arts:
"These stones have a history that we must not forget. When Munich's main synagogue was demolished in June 1938, it happened in full public view. It was the first synagogue in the German Reich to be destroyed by the National Socialists. The demolition sent an unmistakable message: Jewish life was to disappear from our cities.
With the rediscovery of the 109 fragments, a part of the Jewish history of our city has returned. Preserving it and keeping its history alive is both a mandate and an obligation for us. For this reason, the Free State of Bavaria provided professional support by the Bavarian State Office for Monument Protection for the scientific analysis and keeps the fragments safe in its repository.
With their return to Munich's Jewish Community, we are now taking an important step towards historical justice. Especially at a time when antisemitic resentment is on the rise and political polarization is placing a strain on social cohesion, we must defend our democratic values with determination. Where Jewish life was once violently erased from the cityscape, it must today have a visible, secure and natural place."

Marek Wiechers, Cultural Affairs Officer for the City of Munich:
"These stones carry a message for our urban community, they have something to say — and, in particular, the City of Munich, as the successor to the municipal authorities under the Nazi regime, has something to say: The violent past, in which racial hatred became government policy, is not a closed chapter. The razing of the synagogue in 1938 changed the cityscape, the effects are visible to this day. At that time, the City of Munich commissioned the destruction. It therefore bears a particular responsibility for how the remains of the former main synagogue are handled. The discovery of the stones admonishes us and reminds us in a very special way that we must protect our democracy as the essential foundation of our shared, peaceful coexistence."

Jutta Fleckenstein, acting director of the Jewish Museum Munich
"Not only the physical remains of Munich's main synagogue were pulled up from the Isar river but also something to think about: the significance of history for the present. The Jewish Museum Munich has not only taken on the scholarly examination of the more than six-hundred-ton stone find; it now also has the opportunity to create a space for dialogue in which our culture of remembrance—currently under attack from many sides—can be addressed. It is important to us to respond to current debates in society, reflect on different perspectives, and take a position ourselves."

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