**Title:** Hamburg-Bornplatz Synagogue Postcard

**Year (Hebrew):** 5668

**Year:** 1908

**Location:** Europe – Western

**Short description**

A 1908 postcard featuring a photograph of the Hamburg-Bornplatz Synagogue in Germany.

**Detailed description**

​This is a postcard, printed in 1908, featuring a photograph of the Hamburg-Bornplatz Synagogue in Germany. The synagogue is very large with a tall dome and a circular window in front, and it rises way above the nearby trees. People can be seen standing in the front of the synagogue.

The neo-Romanesque synagogue was dedicated two years before the postcard was printed and was the main synagogue of the Hamburg Jewish community. It served the community until it was damaged in the Kristallnacht pogrom and then demolished during the Holocaust. Today a memorial marks the place where the synagogue stood.

**Would You Like to Know More?**

**The Hamburg-Bornplatz Synagogue** – The Hamburg-Bornplatz Synagogue was the main Orthodox synagogue of the Hamburg Jewish community and was located in the Grindel district. It was dedicated in 1906 and had the capacity to seat 1,200 people. The synagogue was designed in the popular neo-Romanesque style and featured arched windows, a rose window, and a dome. The design of the building reflects the prosperity of the community at the time that it was built, and its resemblance to church designs of the past shows the community’s desire to integrate into German society. The turbulent 1930s in Germany saw many anti-Semitic incidents in Hamburg, and the community requested police protection during large events and holidays; members of the community were warned not to gather in front of the synagogue. On November 10, 1938, the night of the Kristallnacht pogrom, the Bornplatz Synagogue was desecrated and the inside was destroyed. Two days later, the building was set on fire and severely damaged, although not burnt to the ground. In 1939, the Jewish community was forced to sell the synagogue to the city at a very low price and even required to pay the cost of demolishing it. Fifty years after its destruction, the square where the synagogue was located was redesigned as a memorial. A plaque in the square reads: “May the future keep the descendants from injustice.”

**The Jewish Community of Hamburg, Germany**– The Jewish community of Hamburg has existed since the sixteenth century when wealthy Crypto-Jews (Marranos) arrived from Spain and Portugal via Holland. At this time, however, they were not permitted to practice Judaism in the city. The Hamburg Jews worked in finance, trade, and shipbuilding and were heavily taxed. Their financial contribution to the city gradually led to greater tolerance, and by 1611 three Sephardi synagogues had been built in the city. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, a wave of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants arrived, fleeing persecution in Ukraine and Poland. One of the famous Jewish figures of the time was the scholar Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz (1690–1764). The Reform movement arrived in Hamburg in the nineteenth century, and in 1811 a Reform synagogue was built and a new prayer book was published. Other famous Hamburg Jews include, among others, Gluckel of Hameln, Salomon Heine, Moses Mendelssohn, and Max Warburg. The Jewish community of Hamburg became the fourth largest in Germany, and by the time of the rise of the Nazi party, there were close to 20,000 Jews in the city. Under the Nazis, many Jews emigrated, and many Jews of foreign origins were expelled. During the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, most of the synagogues were vandalised or destroyed. In the ensuing years Jews were deported to ghettos and camps in Eastern Europe where many were murdered. In 1945, Hamburg was liberated by the British, and the Jewish community began to reorganise, opening a hospital, mikveh, and old age home. Many of survivors emigrated, but for many years the community numbered more than a 1,000. The immigration from the former Soviet Union strengthened the Hamburg Jewish community and the official number of Jews in Hamburg today is 3,500. The community has a school, synagogues, social organisations, and a kosher shop.

**The Jewish Community of Germany** – The first evidence of Jews living in Germany is from the early Middle Ages. As in other European countries, the Jews in Germany prospered in trade, industry, agriculture, and money lending but were also victims of persecution, false accusations, and massacres. The cities of Mainz, Speyer, and Worms were great centres of Jewish learning, but at the time of the Crusades, entire communities were murdered there. In the fourteenth century, Jews were blamed for the outbreak of the Black Death, and following mass slaughter, many fled to Poland. In the following centuries the persecution of German Jews continued, despite the changes of the renaissance period. Change came towards the end of the eighteenth century with new ideas of religious equality and Moses Mendelssohn’s steps to promote integration and a Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) and to create bonds with the Christian society. The nineteenth century brought pogroms known as the Hep-Hep riots but also gradual emancipation. Jews became increasingly integrated into the German society, and many became part of the intellectual, financial, and political elite of the country. In 1933 more than half a million Jews lived in Germany. However, anti-Semitism was on the rise, and the Nazi party grew in strength. More than 300,000 German Jews fled the country in the early years of the Nazi regime, while the Jews who stayed were victim to pogroms such as the November Pogrom (named by the Nazis Kristallnacht), anti-Jewish laws, and ultimately deportation to ghettos and death camps in Eastern Europe. During the Holocaust more than 130,000 German Jews were murdered. After the war, the Jewish community of Germany slowly began to rebuild itself, and in the 1990s many Jews from the former Soviet Union arrived in the country, such that today the majority of Jews in Germany are of Russian origin. The estimated number of Jews in Germany today is approximately 250,000.

**Synagogue Design** – The design of synagogues is influenced by the place, time, and community that built it. All synagogues face toward Jerusalem and include certain features such as the ark (aron hakodesh) where the Torah scrolls are kept, a curtain (parochet) in front of the ark, a prayer platform (bimah) from which the services are led , and a lamp that is kept constantly lit (ner tamid). In Orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately, while in Reform and Conservative synagogues families sit together. In many Sephardi synagogues the congregation sits around the bimah, while in Ashkenazi synagogues the congregation sit in rows facing the ark. Karaite synagogues differ from the more common synagogues and do not have any seats. While some synagogues are very simple in style, others are very ornate and include stained glass windows, intricate designs on the walls, and candelabras. There are very few traditional guidelines for synagogues except that they should include windows and be the tallest building in the area. In many places, however, Jews were not allowed to build tall buildings, and some synagogues were even built below ground level. For these reasons, synagogues were often built hidden within existing buildings or protected by a high wall. The emancipation of the Jews in nineteenth-century Western Europe impacted the architecture of synagogues, and large, elaborate synagogues were built, often in central locations.

**Teaching Suggestions**

​**​​​Jewish** **History** teachers can use the postcard when teaching about the Jewish community of Germany, and particularly Hamburg, before and during World War II.

**Art**, **Architecture**, and **Design** teachers can use the postcard as an example of a synagogue built in the neo-Romanesque style. It can be compared to other synagogues or churches that were built in the same style.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What type of building is in the picture?
* Describe the architecture of the building.
* What are the surroundings of the building?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* What is the name of the synagogue?  
  Where was it located?
  + When was the synagogue built?
  + What style was the synagogue built in?
  + How big was it?
* Search the education catalogue of the National Library for images of [European synagogues built  in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/education/pages/results.aspx#query=any%2ccontains%2csynagogue&query_inc=facet_local2%2cexact%2cEurope%20%E2%80%93%20Western%2cEurope%20%E2%80%93%20Eastern)  
  Which other synagogues are similar to this one?  
  What does the design tell us about the time period and about the Jewish communities of the time?
* What was the situation of the Jews in Hamburg when the synagogue was dedicated?  
  What can you learn about the community at the time from the building of its main Ashkenazi synagogue?
* What was the Kristallnacht pogrom?  
  What happened to the synagogue at that time?  
  What is at the site of the synagogue today?
* What was the fate of the Jewish community of Hamburg during the Holocaust?
* What is the current Jewish population of Hamburg?

**Connections**

* How large is your synagogue?  
  Have you ever prayed in a synagogue as large and grand as the Bornplatz Synagogue?  
  If so, how did it make you feel to pray there?
* Do you know anyone who lived in Hamburg or another city in Germany during Kristallnacht? If so, what were their experiences?  
  If not, read some testimonies on the internet. For example:  
  [The Girl who Witnessed Kristallnacht](https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-46152567), BBC News  
  [The Kristallnacht Pogrom](https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/kristallnacht/index.asp), Yad Vashem  
  [Remembering Kristallnacht](https://www.holocaustedu.org/education/research/survivor-stories/kristallnacht/), Holocaust Center of Florida

**Creative Ideas**

* **​**Design a memorial to the Bornplatz Synagogue and to the once vibrant Jewish community of Hamburg.
* Create a presentation explaining the architecture of the Bornplatz Synagogue.   
  Highlight other synagogues around the world that were designed in a similar style.

**Target audience:** Primary School, Junior High, High School, Informal Education, Higher Education

**NLI Links**

[Time Travel Ephemera Collection](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/time_journey/Pages/default.aspx)

[Postcard of the Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue, Berlin](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENG700341677&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG&searchurl=https%3A%2F%2Fweb.nli.org.il%2Fsites%2Fnlis%2Fen%2Feducation%2Fpages%2Fresults.aspx%23%3Fquery%3Dlsr16%2Cexact%2CPrimary+Source%26query%3Dany%2Ccontains%2Cgermany+synagogue%26institution%3DNNL%26vid%3DEDU_XML_ENG%26loc%3Dlocal%2Cscope%3A(EDU_XML_ENG)%26sortField%3Dlso04%26indx%3D1%26bulkSize%3D8)  
[Nuremberg Synagogue Decorated for Shavuot](https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENGSP1154&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG&searchurl=https%3A%2F%2Fweb.nli.org.il%2Fsites%2Fnlis%2Fen%2Feducation%2Fpages%2Fresults.aspx%23%3Fquery%3Dlsr16%2Cexact%2CPrimary+Source%26query%3Dany%2Ccontains%2Cgermany+synagogue%26institution%3DNNL%26vid%3DEDU_XML_ENG%26loc%3Dlocal%2Cscope%3A(EDU_XML_ENG)%26sortField%3Dlso04%26indx%3D1%26bulkSize%3D8)