

## Article

# The Construction of the Great Synagogue in Stockholm, 1860–1870: A Space for Jewish and Swedish-Christian Dialogues

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Received: 23 November 2019; Accepted: 30 January 2020; Published: 13 February 2020



**Abstract:** The construction of the Great Synagogue in Stockholm during the 1860s initiated Jewish communal debates on the position and public presence of Jews in the Swedish pre-emancipatory society. An investigation into the construction process not only reveals various Jewish opinions on the sacred building, but also the pivotal role of Swedish-Christian actors in shaping the synagogue's location, architecture, and the way it was presented in the public narrative. The Jewish community's conceptualization and the Swedish society's reception of the new synagogue turned it into a space on the 'frontier.' Conceptually situated in-between the Jewish community and the Swedish-Christian society, it encouraged cross-border interactions and became a physical product of the Jewish and Swedish-Christian entangled relationship. Non-Jewish architect Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander, historical figures prominent in the Swedish national narrative, and local and national newspapers were incorporated by the Jewish lay leadership into the creative process, and they influenced and circulated the community's self-understanding as both Swedish citizens and Jews of a modern religion. The construction process and final product strategically communicated Jewish belonging to the Swedish nation during the last decade of social and legal inequality, thus adding to the contemporary political debate on Jewish emancipation.

**Keywords:** urban studies; synagogue construction; Jewish emancipation; Swedish-Jewish history; modern Scandinavia; Stockholm synagogue; Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander

## 1. Introduction

On 21 January 1863, the Swedish-Christian architect Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander wrote a strongly worded letter to the lay leaders of the Jewish community in Stockholm. The community's umbrella organization—the Mosaic Congregation—had invited him to their annual general meeting to present his plans for the new synagogue, today known as the Great Synagogue. Scholander, however, refused to attend. Instead, he wrote:

Constructing a churchly monument in a narrow courtyard cluttered with privies is a plainly foolish proposal, and therefore I can no longer partake [in this process] in front of the congregation [at the meeting], especially since I [ ... ] have always considered [the site] a last resort.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander to the Mosaic Congregation on 21 January 1863, appendix 9 in protocol 5, 3 May 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, Jewish Community in Stockholm, Swedish State Archive (JCS-SSA). My translation from Swedish. Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander and the Mosaic Congregation alike used the word *kyrklig* to describe the new building on *Wahrendorffsgatan*. Despite being translated as 'sacred,' I use the literal translation 'churchly' to emphasize the Swedish word's close relationship to *kyrka* (church).

Scholander was not happy with the plot bought for the construction of the new synagogue, located in the vicinity of the newly formed city center in the Swedish capital. As the plot was increasingly surrounded by new, tall houses, the sacred building he had in mind, positioned at a central site where it could be easily seen in the city, was no longer possible to build. Scholander's letter quoted above does not only reveal his naïve understanding of Jewish history—synagogues were often located in backyards during the Middle Ages, hiding from public view (Stiefel 2016a)—but also portrays his hyperbolic language aimed at convincing the Jewish lay leaders of the need for a new plot. This desire was shared by some members of the Mosaic Congregation, and as a result, different ideas related to the geographical location for the new synagogue were discussed for five years, between 1863 and 1868, before construction could begin.

Sub-groups of the Jewish community used the architect's viewpoint to support their own cause, using his letter as evidence against the lay leaders. Non-Jewish actors were indeed pivotal in shaping the physical forms of Jewish life in the pre-emancipatory environment of the Swedish capital. Emancipation was not granted until 1870, and the Jewish community utilized the last decade of political inequality to plan and construct a stronger Jewish presence in the city. Towards this end, the Jewish lay leader's relationship with Swedish-Christian national actors—historical figures, as well as architects and journalists—was of great importance; it promoted the building's connection to the Swedish-Christian culture, and circulated the Jewish narrative in the press. This article, therefore, argues that as a way to comment on contemporary political discussions on Jewish social integration, the Jewish community consciously created spatial strategies to publicly communicate a strong Jewish presence in Stockholm. Different sub-groups, hosting a variety of ideas of Jewishness,<sup>2</sup> argued about and together established a physical Jewish presence in the urban landscape, and used a Swedish-Christian architect, as well as the local and national press, to negotiate their various opinions on Jewish life and its belonging to the Swedish society.

### 1.1. *Stockholm: A Capital of a Largely Homogeneous Swedish-Christian Population*

Stockholm during the second half of the 19th century was a budding metropolis. Public transportation was introduced with the construction of the Central Railway Station in 1871 and the instalment of horse-drawn trams in 1877 (Griffiths 2009, pp. 9–10). The city's population increased by 80 percent between 1880 and 1900 (Pred 1990, p. 122). People from rural areas relocated to the city, adding other Swedish dialects to the bustle in the street. Some people were not able to understand each other's pronunciations or vocabulary (Pred 1990). New ethnic groups settled in the capital as well. Italian Catholics arrived at the beginning of the 19th century and worked as, for example, glassblowers and street musicians (Catomeris 1988). Some Romani groups temporarily lived in the southern suburbs (Fernstål and Hyltén-Cavallius 2018). The biggest ethnic groups, however, were Finnish and German migrants, groups with relatively close cultural and religious links to the Swedish population.

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<sup>2</sup> David Biale has conceptualized the existence of 'Jewish cultures.' Arguing that the term 'Judaism' upholds a hegemonic discourse, and proving that Jewish populations throughout time have always lived in a give-and-take relationship with the non-Jewish environment of their habitation, he argues that local customs are absorbed, with the consequential bend of some Talmudic laws. Affected by their historical and spatial locality, each Jewish population thus constructs its own version of 'Jewishness' (Biale 1994, pp. 41–45; Biale 2002, pp. 17–26). The concept of Jewishness has, furthermore, been argued as more encompassing than Judaism, as it includes real, imaginary, and representative elements of Jewish constructions and reproductions of cultural elements (Auslander 2009, pp. 48–49; Hödl 2009, pp. 382–87; Lerner 2009, pp. 44–45). In this article, Jewishness is, furthermore, understood as unique to each sub-group within the historical and spatial locality of Stockholm. It deserves to be mentioned that this approach has been criticized by, for example, Moshe Rosman. He argues that the fragmentary 'multiperspectivism' of Biale's concept only replaces the former master-narrative, thus defeating the purpose of the postmodern, constructivist approach (Rosman 2007, pp. 16–18). Since the concept of Jewishness, however, allows for various Jewish experiences of and perspectives on the world to exist at the same time, I find it appropriate for this study.

The Swedish national identity<sup>3</sup> was developed by intellectuals around the imagined harmony of country life and the remembered glory of the Swedish Empire during the 17th and 18th centuries (Hall 2000). This constructed identity was, thereafter, communicated through and centralized around the Lutheran faith. During the 19th century, priests in the Lutheran Church incorporated the ideas of the Swedish national identity into their sermons, teaching the Swedish population about the sanctity of their nation (Ihalainen 2007), thus connecting religion with the national identity. The Lutheran Church became an intrinsic part of the nation, and its emerging revival groups aimed to homogenize the Swedish population through religion (Lipponen 2004, pp. 116–17). Despite some ethnic diversity, Stockholm was thus more ethnically and religiously homogeneous than its European counterparts.

The construction of buildings in the capital largely consisted of modern monuments such as banks, and factories, and state institutions such as prisons, hospitals, schools, the Parliament House, and a new opera house (Bedoire 2015, pp. 59–125). Religious buildings constructed by religious minorities also became more conspicuous. Reviewing the period before the 1860s, the Calvinist Huguenot temple in central Stockholm was constructed in 1752 (Bedoire 2009), and the Catholic minority built its first church in the southern suburb of Södermalm in 1837. The Jewish community's first synagogue in Old Town, positioned in an apartment house in 1790, was one of the city's first non-Christian sacred buildings (Jewish Museum in Stockholm 2019).

Along with German and Finnish groups, the Jewish community was ethnically and religiously one of the largest minorities in Stockholm. Jews had been allowed to live in Sweden since 1775, but their civic rights were limited in 1782 with *Judereglementet* (The Jewish Ordinance). Banned from guilds and political positions, and limited to living in the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Norrköping, Jews entering Sweden were required to be in possession of 2000 *riksdaler*, thereby ensuring the immigration of mainly wealthy Jews. A Jewish civic 'nation,' as they referred to themselves, was formed within the Swedish nation, and legal disputes on social issues were solved within the community. *Judereglementet* was abolished in 1838, and the period between 1850 and 1870 was marked by political discussions on extended Jewish rights in the parliament, initiated by Swedish-Christian members of parliament. Legal restrictions against intermarriages, the holding of political positions, and settlement in rural areas were only slowly removed in the period leading up to the almost complete legal and social emancipation in 1870 (Svanberg and Tydén 1992).<sup>4</sup>

As traders of sugar and tobacco, and owners of restaurants, bookshops, and textile industries, this first group of Jews from mainly northern Germany and Denmark was both integrated into and important developers of economic and cultural life in Sweden. The Mosaic Congregation opted for Swedish in their protocols from 1839 as a way to show their Swedish belonging (Klagsbrun Lebenswerd 2018). Simultaneously, mainly poor Eastern European migrants started to arrive in the 1860s, which led to the Jewish population in Stockholm increasing to 900 people by 1870 (Svanberg and Tydén 1992, p. 237). The immigration of new groups created internal cultural and religious differences, and with a socio-economic advantage as philanthropists and leaders of the Mosaic Congregation, the established group both aided the newly arrived with food and clothes, and controlled the development of the Mosaic Congregation (Besserman 1984).

The established group in Stockholm, therefore, ensured that the synagogue in Old Town, which had moved to a former auction hall in 1795, became increasingly associated with Reform Judaism in the 1860s. Developed in Germany during the 19th century, Reform Judaism incorporated ideas from

<sup>3</sup> The 'national identity' is understood as a constructed group belonging. As argued by Eric Hobsbawm, any national identity is invented and constructed, adapted to give the modern, political condition a false but cohesive history (Hobsbawm 1992, pp. 1–5). Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an 'imagined community' since its members do not know each other 'yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006, pp. 5–6). Since the national identity of the modern nation needs to exclude others in order to exist, it is in itself at odds with the existence of religious and ethnic minorities.

<sup>4</sup> The emancipation in 1870 did not lift bans on the requirement of cabinet ministers to be baptized into the Lutheran faith. Jews were, therefore, forbidden to hold a position in the Swedish government. This changed in 1951 with the Religious Freedom Act.

*Haskalah*—the Jewish movement that merged Judaism with rational elements of the Enlightenment—and changed some religious rituals by adopting various Christian practices. The Jewish community largely adopted this new religious trend. For example, the Swedish language was used during services, a choir assisted with sung worship, and rabbis used priest-like attire. Some Jews loosened or discarded rules for *shabbat* and *kashrut*. A key motivation for planning and constructing the new synagogue during the 1860s was, for example, that some members desired a building that could accommodate a bigger organ. The organ was adopted among German Jews at the beginning of the 19th century as a way to portray their dual self-understanding as both Jews and Germans (Frühauf 2009, p. 8),<sup>5</sup> and the Swedish-Jewish embrace of the instrument portrays, not only their proximity to German-Jewish life, but also their desire to belong to the Swedish society. Not all members of the community were, however, content with adopting the modernized rituals, creating a community with, in Shulamit Volkov's words, 'a multifaceted image, offering only a mosaic of different stories, independent of each other' (Volkov 2004). Groups adhering to different religious practices within the Jewish community in Stockholm consequently strove to influence and define the construction of the Great Synagogue.

### 1.2. Synagogues as Places on the 'Frontier'

Synagogues erected across Europe during the 19th century primarily functioned as settings for Jewish liturgical practices, but they also became statements of emancipation, and the establishment of a communal home while in diaspora (Gotzmann 2016; Klein 2010; Kraemer 2001). Moving out of the conceptual or real ghetto, and wishing to enter the local society as citizens with equal rights, unemancipated Jews carefully constructed their conspicuous and public presence through new synagogues. Local conditions shaped the way Jews conceptualized and realized these public, religious places as 'signifiers' of their transition from social and spatial isolation into the modern society (Lerner 2000, p. 1). Berlin's Jews, for example, unapologetically demonstrated their Jewishness through synagogues built before their emancipation, while Jews in London made their synagogues conform to the urban environment (Coenen Snyder 2013, pp. 87–150). Before their emancipation, Jews in Florence wanted to build a synagogue in the local neo-Renaissance style, thus emphasizing the similarities between them and the local population, but they were strongly encouraged by local authorities to instead use the Moorish style associated with the Orient (Kalmar 2013). Although situated on a side street, Copenhagen's synagogue was associated with an intellectual space in the city, located close to book publishers and the university. Gothenburg's synagogue was constructed in a modern area of the city. Both synagogues conformed to the German-inspired and Reform-adopted oriental style in the interior design, thus accentuating links to the Reform movement on the inside, while simultaneously allowing the geographical location to publicly express a belonging to the *bourgeois* life of local intellectuals (Leiska 2016, pp. 76–108).

These examples of purpose-built synagogues can be theorized as sites of explicit, material Jewishness, publicly facilitating the community's sense of societal belonging. Therefore, as Saskia Coenen Snyder argues, the synagogues are 'social products actively engaged in the construction of cultural identities' (Coenen Snyder 2013, p. 8). The synagogue was a physical declaration by the Jewish minority in Stockholm of the ideals, hopes, and convictions for their private faith (Schlör 2016). Analyzing Lithuanian synagogues from the 17th century to the 20th century, Sergey Kravtsov asserts that they provided sites for Jews and non-Jews to communicate and find mutual understanding in the otherwise rather unequal society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kravtsov 2010). Although neither the Swedish national government nor Stockholm's local authorities contested the construction of synagogues, as was often the case in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Great Synagogue similarly

<sup>5</sup> The organ was used for the first time in 1810 by the Jewish community in Seesen, and it was approved as a synagogal instrument at the German-Jewish rabbinical conference in 1845 (Frühauf 2009).

offered a chance for Jews and Christian Swedes to converge, communicate, and collaborate in the social and cultural processes involved in the construction of the synagogue.

Functioning, therefore, not only as a Jewish sacred place, the synagogue as a building was a place for Jews and Christian Swedes to interact in the urban landscape. It is positioned on the 'frontier,' described by Sander Gilman as 'the conceptual and physical arena where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build' (Gilman 2003, p. 15). As a space for confronting others and accommodating oneself, the 'frontier' is, in other words, the conceptual site for the construction and contestation of a minority's public home in the modern city. Jewish and Christian-Swedish identities are defined and redefined on this 'frontier,' and the synagogue becomes the geographical site and material product of this relationship. As both a communal and public building, the Great Synagogue's construction process took place on the border between the Jewish 'inner' and the Christian-Swedish 'outer' worlds (Schlör 2007), providing a platform for Jewishness and the Swedish national identity to interact.

### 1.3. *The Great Synagogue as Space for Discussions on Jewish Belonging in Sweden*

The construction of the new synagogue in Stockholm during the 1860s initially appears to echo the motivations behind the synagogues in Berlin, Copenhagen, and Gothenburg. The buildings were architecturally linked to Reform Judaism and communicated their Jewish creators' right to belong to the German, Danish, and Swedish nations, respectively. An investigation into the planning process behind the new synagogue in Stockholm, however, reveals different opinions regarding the new synagogue within the Jewish community, as well as the before-mentioned influential role of Swedish-Christian actors. Both discourses influenced the production of the Jewish sacred place in the Swedish modern, urban milieu during the pre-emancipatory era. The time leading up to Jewish social and legal integration in Sweden demonstratively included the Jewish public performance of belonging to both Jewish and Swedish cultures.

During the 1860s, lay leaders, religious leaders, and Jewish inhabitants, as well as the Swedish-Christian architect, Scholander, debated two important aspects of the synagogue: The geographical location and the religious orientation. The dispute over the synagogue's position in the cityscape served as a backdrop for multiple interpretations of, and hopes for, the Jewish community's position in the Swedish society. The building's urban visibility and sacred role were emphasized differently by all actors involved, and the architect's perspective was used by anonymous sub-groups to support their arguments. Sub-groups also wanted to influence the religious orientation of the new synagogue, and asked for both the inclusion of a *mikveh* and mixed seating. Despite belonging to the Christian community, the Jewish leadership asked Scholander for his expert opinions on both matters, and the architect was also seemingly given much freedom when designing the synagogue. The Swedish-Christian architect was thus integral in the creation of the public Jewishness in Stockholm. Once constructed, the building served as a platform for further communication with the larger society. The local and national press showed interest in the new sacred building. In their articles on the architecture and the inauguration event, they largely circulated the Jewish lay leaders' vision of the synagogue as a physical example of Jewish belonging to the Swedish society. Clearly, as a place on the 'frontier,' the new synagogue in Stockholm became a space for the Jewish community to physically perform both their internal disputes and their relationship with the Swedish national identity, a process heavily influenced and aided by Swedish-Christian actors.

## 2. The Synagogue's Geographical Location: Discussions on Visibility

A plot of land on *Wahrendorffsgatan* (Wahrendorff Street) went up for sale in 1860. The street was located in the outskirts of the expanding city center, just north of Old Town, and in the vicinity of



some of the residential homes of the Jewish lay leaders.<sup>6</sup> Wanting to construct their religious building in the new, modern area of Stockholm, the leadership also determined that ‘there is space not only for a worthy Temple of the Lord measuring 60 cubits in length [27 m] and 30 cubits wide [13.5 m],’ but also for gardens and a playground.<sup>7</sup> Close to the royal park, *Kungsträdgården* (King’s Garden), but also to a recently filled bog, the plot offered the Jewish community a chance for a monumental synagogue, a reasonably central location, and proximity to outdoor walking opportunities during weekends—factors that were important for synagogues built in, for example, New York and London at the same time (Stiefel 2016b, pp. 235–38). The Mosaic Congregation bought the plot. A general meeting on 5 May 1861 unanimously voted for the construction of a new synagogue on the plot, and a building committee was set up during the same meeting, consisting of some of the community’s most wealthy individuals.

This initial enthusiasm quickly waned as doubts about the suitability of the plot’s geographical location arose. This issue was discussed within the Jewish community for five consecutive years. Despite a positive introductory examination of the plot’s foundation in November 1861, which advised against costly pile work, the softer sand base on the eastern side ultimately meant that the synagogue had to be built in the western corner, contradictory to the original plans.<sup>8</sup> The initial plan in 1861 had been to place the synagogue with one of its shorter sides towards the edge of the public *Berzelii Park*, making it fully visible from the newly developed park. A new school and community building would have been positioned behind the synagogue. A later technical examination of the plot in 1863, however, confirmed the need for pile work, and thus forced the synagogue to move further in towards the narrow street and surrounding plots, on which buildings were quickly built. The school and communal hall was located towards *Berzelii Park*, largely shadowing the synagogue behind it. The architect, opposing anonymous sub-groups, and the Mosaic Congregation’s board, debated these two aspects—the plot’s foundation and the synagogue’s proposed visibility—in order to find a location that would express the building’s desired status in the cityscape.

### 2.1. The Role and Influence of the Swedish-Christian Architect

Having already constructed the chapel at the new Jewish cemetery in the northern suburb of *Solna* in Stockholm, Scholander was once again chosen as architect. Educated at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts and in Paris under Louis-Hippolyte Lebas, Scholander, as Stockholm’s city architect,<sup>9</sup> constructed both private palaces and public buildings such as churches, hospitals, universities, schools, and theatres. As the Superintendent’s closest man, from 1864 onwards, he was responsible for examining architectural designs of public buildings across the whole of Sweden (Grandien). He was one of Sweden’s most famous and respected architects in the 1860’s (Bedoire 2015, p. 92), and the fact that the Jewish community chose him as architect for their synagogue signifies the value they put on this new building, including their hope for its future position within the Swedish society. A well-known, famous architect would increase the status of the building, thus promoting the position of the not yet emancipated Jewish population.

<sup>6</sup> For example, more than a ninth of the 900 community members met up at the home of the wealthy, *bourgeois* Bonnier couple on *Drottninggatan* (Queen’s Street) 11, some 700 m from the plot, in 1863 to attend a philanthropic community auction for the benefit of the new synagogue. See: Appendix B in protocol 21, 30 March 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/32, JCS-SSA.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Wilhelm Davidson, David Hirsch, and Eduard Josephson to the Mosaic Congregation, written on 22 December 1860, appendix E in protocol 23, 26 December 1860, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/30, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish. The community’s use of cubits and the word ‘temple’ might suggest that they conceptualized the new synagogue in relation to the earlier Temple of Jerusalem. Cubits was, however, the standardized unit system in Sweden until the 1880s, and, as will be argued below, the word ‘temple’ was used widely by the leadership to explain the building’s sacred purpose, while not necessarily mentioning its religious affiliation. Nonetheless, as will be shown further down in the article, the synagogue was seemingly modelled on the Temple of Jerusalem, and although sources do not reveal any discussions on the actual size of the synagogue, conceptual links might have existed.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix A in protocol 4, 18 April 1861, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/31, JCS-SSA.

<sup>9</sup> The city architect was responsible for designing public buildings.

Scholander, in his professional capacity, wrote about the foundation and the location of the new synagogue in numerous letters to the Mosaic Congregation's board during the construction process. He initially advised that there was no need for pile work, but two years later revised his decision, claiming he had thought the plot problematic from the start. The building's foundation was, however, never the biggest problem for the architect. He wrote on 21 January 1863 that 'the sandwiched location is incompatible with the dignity of the building.'<sup>10</sup> As the surrounding plots were increasingly occupied with tall buildings, Scholander, as seen in the quote in the introduction, found the plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* to be both hidden and insignificant. The architect's reason for seeking a better location is not stated explicitly, but implied. With his reputation and body of work, Scholander was used to working on prominent buildings located on popular, central sites. Despite his reservations, his architectural designs were delivered to Stockholm's Building Office for approval in 1867, some five years after they had been completed.<sup>11</sup> He must, therefore, have finalized the building plans shortly after the plot was bought by the Mosaic Congregation, despite his own doubts about the plot's location.

As conversations about the synagogue's location dragged on, Scholander even offered the Jewish community two solutions in 1866: They could either buy a new plot, or extend and renovate their current synagogue in Old Town. He explained that 'it would be more monumental if a separate, new building could be achieved,' but the old building in Old Town could be made to 'advertise the presence of a holy room, although, all things considered, the façade cannot be as satisfactory and monumental as [a] separate new building.'<sup>12</sup> This was his last objection, and it reveals his hopes for the synagogue. He wanted it to be dominant in the cityscape, easily seen by the people of Stockholm, a *monument*<sup>13</sup>—a word the architect used time and again in his letters—symbolizing the social importance of the building.

## 2.2. Internal Difference on the Synagogue's Visibility

An unnamed sub-group within the Jewish community considered the architect's changed statement about the foundation as a reason to abandon the plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* altogether. On 12 March 1863, they bypassed the community's Building Committee and wrote to Scholander regarding their doubts about the site's suitability.<sup>14</sup> When notified, the Building Committee was forced to scrutinize every aspect of the plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan*, as well as five other available plots in Stockholm, bringing their research to the Mosaic Congregation's general meeting on 6 March 1864. Their report discussed the foundations, the existing buildings, the financial implications, and most importantly, the geographical location of each plot. The exact distance between each plot and the Building Committee's proposed city center—the statue of king Gustavus Adolphus, situated in a square next to *Kungsträdgården*, north of Old Town, overlooking the Royal Palace—was calculated. The members of the Building Committee wanted the chosen plot to be as close to Stockholm's city center as possible, a desire shared by many contemporary Jewish communities striving to build monumental synagogues in their localities (Kalmar 2013).

The choice of city center explains the Jewish community's sense of belonging to the Swedish national identity. First, since he conquered large areas in Central Europe during the Thirty Years' War, the national consensus was that Gustavus Adolphus had been the most successful Swedish king in the nation's history. The historical narrative of the Swedish nation was constructed by intellectuals at the beginning of the 19th century, and Gustavus Adolphus became a personified incarnation of the nation

<sup>10</sup> Appendix A in protocol 4, 18 April 1861, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/31, and appendix 9 in protocol 5, 3 May 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>11</sup> NS037-BN-1867-56-60, Stockholm's Older Building Designs, Stockholm City Archive (SOBD-SCA).

<sup>12</sup> Appendix 3 in protocol 14, 26 December 1866, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/36, JCS-SSA.

<sup>13</sup> The Swedish word refers to a monument raised to memorialize a person or event. Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander, however, uses it to refer to the hoped-for impact of the building—both its architecture and its geographical position in Stockholm.

<sup>14</sup> These unnamed individuals are mentioned in Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander's letter to the Mosaic Congregation, written on 21 January 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA.

and one with the people as he, in the national narrative, battled against religious and spiritual threats (Hall 2000, pp. 180–89). Using the statue of this celebrated national figure as a measurable mark for the location of the synagogue suggests that the Jewish community hoped the new sacred place would communicate a relationship between them and the Swedish nation.

Second, the geographical position was north of Old Town, showing the community's knowledge of the ever-developing urban landscape, and their aspiration to locate their synagogue in the new and modern center of the city. The plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* was 288 meters from the statue, the closest of all the six plots. Considering the synagogue's centrality, the Building Committee noted that 'it is a highly important factor that should not be overlooked,'<sup>15</sup> thus showcasing their interest in a central location. It would not only be the cheapest option, but also give the synagogue the most prominent position in the streetscape.

Still, at the last general meeting concerning the construction of the synagogue on 6 January 1867, five men asked to adjourn the planned final vote in order to eliminate the idea of using the plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* altogether. As the voting nonetheless turned in favor for *Wahrendorffsgatan*, some prominent community members publicly expressed their disagreement with the decision. With a socio-cultural background and status similar to the community leaders, their reason for wanting another location for the synagogue was based on personal conviction, not social status. It can be assumed that these five men were involved in the initial disagreement in 1863: It is never explicitly stated that the men who objected to the *Wahrendorffsgatan* plot at the last general meeting were involved in the initial disagreement in 1863, but seeing no other objection raised during this meeting, it seems likely that this is the same group of people. Since the original disagreement was based on Scholander's verdict on the plot's foundation, the geographical location, and the lack of visibility, this opposing group commented on the synagogue's position in Swedish society. In alignment with the architect, they wanted a visible synagogue, clearly emphasizing its presence in the urban landscape and thus claiming belonging to the Swedish society. The plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* would, in their opinion, not be able to produce such a result.

### 2.3. The Mosaic Congregation Board's Emphasis on Sanctity

The voice of the community's lay leaders was, however, the loudest.<sup>16</sup> Scholander's revised report about the foundations, as well as his comments concerning the location, were met with a mixture of disappointment and opposition. At the general meeting on 3 May 1863, the leaders observed that his reversal was 'as unexpected as [it was] dismal.' They continued: 'One has to regret the contradictions [he] is guilty of, which if sooner spoken, would have saved the Congregation time and the Committee much unpleasantness.' They dryly explained his change of heart by stating that he put his 'architectural honor above everything else.'<sup>17</sup> Although a famous architect, Swedish-Christian Scholander was clearly viewed by Jewish lay leaders as an employed architect, whose opinion was clouded by ambition. As they investigated the possibility of placing a bigger organ in their current synagogue in Old Town,<sup>18</sup> another architect was even employed to do the design: Swedish-Christian Gustaf E. Sjöberg, famous for designing industries and public institutions.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, Jewish lay leaders were not completely satisfied with Scholander.

<sup>15</sup> General meeting, 6 March 1864, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA.

<sup>16</sup> The main material, on which this study is based, is from the Mosaic Congregation's archive, every paper at the mercy of what they chose to keep and explain. It is, therefore, their responses to Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander and the sub-group, mainly directed towards the utility of the future synagogue, that dominate the narrative.

<sup>17</sup> Protocol 5 from general meeting, 3 May 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>18</sup> An article from 1866, describing a gentile's visit to the synagogue, notes the small organ alongside one of the walls (Hallandsposten 1866). Speculatively, the community wanted a bigger organ, hence asking for new designs, but the smaller organ might also have been placed there after 1865.

<sup>19</sup> Architectural drawing by Gustaf Sjöberg in 1865, SE/RA/730128/01/J/J\_1, JCS-SSA.



Contrary to its response to the architect, the leadership listened to and investigated the concerns of the sub-group. The board members not only responded to the sub-group's skepticism, but they also declared their own idea about the future synagogue. They presented a model at the Mosaic Congregation's general meeting on 6 March 1864, which showed that three sides of the building would be visible from the main streets.<sup>20</sup> Referring to the sacred acts performed within the building, they described the building's purpose: To enable the visitor to 'feel lifted to devotion and summoned to peace through the worthy form of the temple and the solemn character of the service.'<sup>21</sup> The board members also wrote that

Our plot [is] particularly appropriate, since it offers the synagogue and those who visit it the calmest, most peaceful site. [Although designated by others as an inconvenience, the geographical location] should, on the contrary, be considered one of the most essential advantages of our plot. Regarding the state of the surroundings, the synagogue would be positioned between two scenic gardens, a location that can only have a favorable impact on church visitors and summon their minds to peace and devotion.<sup>22</sup>

The lay leaders argued that the plot on *Wahrendorffsgatan* was best of all the available sites in central Stockholm, not only because they did not agree with the sub-group's concerns about the geographical location, but also because the location would be a tranquil, peaceful, and devotional place, adequately serving as a site for activities linked to the community's religious life. The leadership thus emphasized the synagogue's sacred role before its social function.

The final vote took place on 6 January 1867. Seventy-nine people were present, which was only roughly nine percent of the Jewish population in Stockholm. Although the chosen plot for the new synagogue was contested, the issue was evidently not deemed important by the majority of the Jewish community. The decision to build the new synagogue on the plot was only passed by a small minority: 46 were in favor, while 33 voted against. Some objected to the vote altogether.<sup>23</sup> The process leading up to the construction of the synagogue portrays a community with different values related to sacred places, particularly regarding the building's spatial visibility and religious tranquility. The various Jewish groups—board members and the anonymous sub-group—used the Swedish-Christian architect to enhance and validate their preferred public projection of the community's status as members of the Swedish society, but the community's lay leadership ultimately managed to outmaneuver internal differences, albeit with a narrow majority, in order to construct the new synagogue on the plot they had acquired back in 1860.

### 3. The Synagogue's Religious Architecture: Discussions on the Jewish Public Presence

The Jewish community ceremoniously buried the cornerstone for the new synagogue on 9 April 1868. Chief Rabbi Louis Ludwig Lewysohn, who was formerly the rabbi of the Jewish communities in Frankfurt an der Oder and Worms, held a prayer and spoke about the importance of the future building. A notice in the national newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter* (Daily News), described his speech as 'warm and moving' as he 'invoked God's protection over the completion of the work' (*Dagens Nyheter* 1868). A hole had been dug in the southwestern corner. In his hand, the Chief Rabbi cradled a hermetically sealed glass box. The Mosaic Congregation's board members had placed gold, silver, and copper coins, minted during the reign of the current Swedish king, Charles XV, in the box, together with a silver sheet, inscribed with a list of their names.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Protocol 19, 7 January 1864, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA.

<sup>21</sup> General meeting, 6 March 1864, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>23</sup> General meeting, 6 January 1867, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/36, JCS-SSA.

<sup>24</sup> The inscription was: 'On the 17th day in the month of Nissan year 5628, this cornerstone for the Mosaic Congregation's House of God was placed by rabbi dr Ludwig Lewysohn, chairman and head of the community, doctor of Medicine and knight

Lewysohn placed the glass box in the hole. All the men mentioned on the silver sheet poured grout on top of the box and spread out the grey-colored mortar. The sacredness of the cornerstone ritual is palpable, and it marked the first physical step towards the materialization of the community's new religious home. The ritual, quite typical for the construction of synagogues at this time,<sup>25</sup> symbolized the metamorphosis of an abstract ideal, planned by the community, into a representative object, communicating with people outside of the community. The incorporation of national connotations in the cornerstone ritual in Stockholm proclaimed once again the community's desire for social equality and national inclusion. In addition, Jewish inhabitants in Stockholm continued to discuss what kind of Jewishness the new synagogue should hold and communicate through the architecture. The Swedish-Christian architect Scholander was, as will be seen below, once again an important voice in discussions on the overall architecture, the *mikveh*, and mixed seating.

### 3.1. The Synagogue's Architecture

Restricted by the plot's rectangular appearance, Scholander constructed a box-like synagogue, complete with protruding cantilevers by the roof and a low ground floor. The second floor with high ceilings is lined with large windows grouped in threes. The western gable holds a window placed in an alcove with columns and Hebrew inscriptions. The rest of the façade is covered in symmetrical illusions of stone slabs.<sup>26</sup> The design vaguely resembles the Hamburg temple model of the Temple of Jerusalem from the 18th century, and is void of ornaments—domes, minarets, stars of David, and cast-iron decorations—associated with the Moorish style many contemporary synagogues were built in, such as the Dohány Street Synagogue (1859) in Budapest, and the New Synagogue (1866) in Berlin.

Local and national newspapers described the synagogue's style as 'Assyrian,' hinting at the historical Assyrian kingdom in the ancient Near East and explicitly mentioning historical sites such as Nineveh and Jerusalem. Alluding to the Temple of Jerusalem, the Great Synagogue, therefore, still aligned to the contemporary oriental trend. It has been suggested that the press was inspired by Scholander to describe the synagogue as 'Assyrian' (Grandien 1979, p. 424), but his choice of design cannot be analyzed due to a lack of sources. His personal notebook, used during travels in Europe in 1863, contains in-depth descriptions of churches, but only rarely includes accounts of synagogues, and when it does, he never compares them to his design of Stockholm's new synagogue.<sup>27</sup> Scholander's biographer argues that the particular oriental style chosen was due to the architect's 'conscious act of distancing' his project from contemporary Moorish synagogues (Grandien 1979, pp. 422–25). Scholander's general inspiration from contemporary trends in archaeology, Orientalism, and Asian and North African architecture might better explain the design.

Both Babylon and Jerusalem were excavated in the middle of the 19th century, and historical objects from Babylon and interpretive sketches of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem circulated in Europe, the styles incorporated into the popular oriental style (Seymour 2014, pp. 173–83; Moscrop 2000, pp. 41–46). The trend was adopted by *bourgeois* Jews across Europe, among which the presentation of Japanese miniature sculptures in the home of the wealthy Ephrussi family in Vienna is just one example (de Waal 2010). Turkish rugs, paintings, and divans were similarly part of the new interior trend in

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Jacob Levertin, other leaders: doctor of Medicine Axel Lamm, Consul and knight Henrik Davidson, cash manager Adolf H. Schück, church leader A. C. Valentin, members of Building Committee: Albert Bonnier and Wilhelm Davidson. Architect S W Scholander, contractor: master builder A P Nilsson.' Protocol 2, 19 April 1868, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/38, JCS-SSA.

<sup>25</sup> A similar cornerstone ritual took place on 14 May 1876 before the construction of the Reform *Wielka* synagogue in Warsaw, as can be viewed in the permanent exhibition at the POLIN museum.

<sup>26</sup> Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander's architectural designs of the Great Synagogue from 1867, NS037-BN-1867-56-60, SOBD-SCA.

<sup>27</sup> During Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander's trip in 1863, the Reform synagogue in Berlin was discussed only in relation to its brick façade, Mannheim's synagogue was of 'Eastern' style with marble colonnades and golden decorations, and Worms' synagogue was 'just an abandoned church.' The synagogue in Cologne apparently deserved further details: it was a 'splendid oriental' building, situated on a narrow street but with a 'Persian' interior of golden reliefs, a blue-colored dome, white marble, and a cast-iron balcony. See: Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander's travel diary, SE S-HS ACC1992/46, Handwritten Manuscript Collection, Royal Library of Sweden.

Sweden at the end of the 18th century (Kåberg 2003). Influenced by contemporary trends, Scholander is likely to have incorporated his own ideas about Jewishness into the architecture of the Great Synagogue. Since discussions about the synagogue's architecture between Scholander and the Jewish community were never recorded in written form, it is difficult to know if the community specifically asked for this 'Assyrian' architecture, or if it was the architect's own idea. When the Finnish-Christian architect Johan Jacob Ahrenberg designed the synagogue inaugurated in Helsinki in 1906, he initially wanted to construct it in an oriental style. While the Jewish community demanded a less ornate building due to economic limitations, Ahrenberg was still the sole decision maker regarding the implementation of the *Art Nouveau* style (Schulman 2016). Some Jewish communities in Scandinavia clearly entrusted their non-Jewish architects with full authority over the design, and the Jewish community in Florence similarly allowed local authorities to dictate the general design of their new synagogue, inaugurated in 1882 (Kalmar 2013). When non-Jewish architects and authorities were responsible for the design of synagogues, they seemingly often preferred an oriental style to differentiate between Jews and the local majority.

In the example of Stockholm, archival material only shows that the community's lay leaders wanted a 'neat monument' with a 'worthy form' that instilled 'peace' and 'devotion'.<sup>28</sup> Practically, they also wanted a cellar, a vestibule, a cloakroom, storage rooms, and offices for lay and religious leaders—combining neatness with a big enough space, for the total cost of 150,000 *riksdaler*. The rectangular plot thus defined the outline of the synagogue, and the budget might have limited the design from including more extravagant domes and forms. Commenting on the limitations of the project, Scholander wrote:

The plot's dimensions have not allowed freedom to strive for the unusual in terms of the building's plan, and [ . . . ] the simple, rectangular floor plan, together with a design for the biggest space, create the easiest executable construction, and thereby also the smallest cost of construction. [In the architectural plan, I] seek doting forms, a character that as much as possible reminds [me] of the monument's solemn, serious purpose, and thus unite with the [desire] for architectural neatness.<sup>29</sup>

His emphasis on a limited budget for the building's construction portrays the project's clear design boundaries. With these restrictions in mind, his choice of style was clearly not only the result of architectural creativity. The finished building on *Wahrendorffsgatan* fitted the customer's needs for neatness, worthiness, devotion, and budget, as well as the plot's rectangular shape.

The synagogue on *Wahrendorffsgatan* was built with a balcony for women, advocating separate seating for men and women, according to tradition. The main nave, however, was more church-like, with the *bimah* placed at the front together with *Aron Hakodesh*, and the aisle leading up to it enclosed by rows of pews, also pointing towards the front. A large on-site organ was added.<sup>30</sup> The interior, therefore, largely aligned to the Reform movement, and the design of the nave, the organ, and the female choir were clearly adopted from Christian traditions in Sweden.

The Reform movement, however, should not be viewed as a united movement. Several people expressed their individual and divergent perspectives on the practices of Judaism during discussions about how the synagogue would be used. Lay and religious leaders had to navigate the modes of religious expression that they thought belonged to the Reform synagogue. The inclusion of an organ and a choir have already been mentioned, but members also raised concerns about the possibility of the construction of a *mikveh* and mixed seating in the synagogue.

<sup>28</sup> General meeting, 6 March 1864, and protocol 5, 3 May 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA.

<sup>29</sup> Letter written by Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander on 28 May 1861, in appendix 7 in protocol 5, 3 May 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>30</sup> Protocol 18, 23 November 1863, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/33, JCS-SSA.

### 3.2. Discussions on the Mikveh

Half a year after the cornerstone ritual, and almost a year after the architectural design of the new synagogue was settled at a general meeting, unnamed individuals asked the board to incorporate a *mikveh* into the new synagogue, just as it had been in the old one. It can be assumed that this group was still adhering to traditional rituals, including the use of the ritual bath. The board and the Building Committee decided to ask Scholander for a report on the available space, sewer solution, and economic costs for the ‘inconveniences and nuisances’ linked to the instalment of the ritual bath.<sup>31</sup> The architect replied three months later, in February 1869, with a drawing depicting how the bath could be constructed in the cellar underneath the synagogue. The tub had to be placed close to the ceiling to enable drainage above ground.<sup>32</sup>

The majority of the community’s board members were, as seen in the rather unenthusiastic choice of words above, resistant to a merged synagogue/*mikveh*, partly because of cost. Scholander’s calculated price for the cellar’s conversion into a bath reached 2300 *riksdaler*, which was deemed too expensive. Lewysohn stated that it was ‘desirable’ to have the *mikveh* in the same building, but not obligatory.<sup>33</sup> The board consequently voted against the *mikveh*.

Some voices rejecting the plan to exclude the *mikveh* were more prominent than others. The Jewish community’s school principal Albert Abraham (Elias) Valentin, for example, wanted his objection noted. Neither the existence of a communal desire for a merged synagogue/*mikveh*-building, nor the objection against the decision to not construct it, were, however, strong enough to influence the design of the new sacred building. The exclusion of the *mikveh* can be read as a clear step towards a more Reform-inspired community. The example also portrays the religious tensions and differences that existed within the community as a whole, but ultimately shows that firstly, the unnamed group supporting the idea of a *mikveh* in the building could not influence the Jewish lay leaders, and secondly, the lay leaders voting on the matter largely believed in a modernization of religious practices.

### 3.3. Discussions on Mixed Seating

In the spring of 1870, a few months before the new synagogue’s inauguration, discussions on issues of seating became heated. There were questions about how much each chair should cost, and if seats should be allocated to each member, or used flexibly. Some members raised the question of whether the synagogue should deviate from the traditional seating structure with men on the bottom floor and women on the balcony. As usual, the board asked Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander for an expert opinion on the possibility of mixed seating in the building. His reply was that the building was not ‘an obstacle to such a change.’ He, however, added that ‘a not insignificant part of the church’s characteristic neatness is lost if men and women sit mixed together.’<sup>34</sup> What he based his opinion on is unreferenced, although the synagogue’s balcony was clearly created with this traditional Jewish practice in mind. The fact that the board valued the voice of a Christian architect on a religious matter is even more noteworthy, highlighting both the lay leaders’ strategy of utilizing Scholander’s voice in disputes, and the architect’s intrinsic relationship with the building.

Scholander might, however, have paraphrased Lewysohn’s statement, which emphasized that ‘to place the different sexes together in a Jewish God’s house is strictly forbidden.’<sup>35</sup> When commenting on mixed seating, the rabbi used Talmudic and Maimonidean writings, arguing that there was only one synagogue in Berlin that practiced mixed seating, and ‘contrasted with the seven million Jews

<sup>31</sup> Protocol 14, 18 November 1868, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/38, JCS-SSA.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander written on 4 February 1869, appendix G in protocol 18, 17 February 1869, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/38, JCS-SSA.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Chief Rabbi Louis Ludwig Lewysohn to the Mosaic Congregation’s board, written on 16 February 1869, in *ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander, written on 27 April 1870, appendix F in protocol 6, 8 June 1870, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/40, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Chief Rabbi Louis Ludwig Lewysohn, appendix G in *ibid*. My translation from Swedish.

on earth, [these 300 people] are a disappearing minority' that should not be used as a role model. While Reform congregations in America had opted for mixed seating as early as the 1850s in order to improve family togetherness, women's roles within the congregation, and the modern image of the Jewish community (Goldman 2001, pp. 78–99; Sarna 1987), mixed seating was mainly introduced among European-Jewish congregations at the beginning of the 19th century, and there were indeed not many synagogues in central Europe that used the new practice in the 1860s (Efron et al. 2009, p. 317). Lewysohn, furthermore, argued that Talmudic laws forbade women from standing in front of praying men or next to their husbands, and some prayers demanded that praying individuals remain in their seats. This could pose a problem because 'if a woman arrives late one has to move in the seats so she can pass.'<sup>36</sup>

The Cultural Commission of the Mosaic Congregation agreed with the rabbi's hesitance, although one member wrote a letter outlining their concerns. This member, with an illegible signature, believed mixed seating would increase the number of attending members, allowing Stockholm's Jews to enjoy the synagogue services with their whole family:

Surely everyone, who during all events in life—joyful or sorrowful, indoors and outdoors—always prefer being surrounding by their loved ones, would also prefer to be surrounded by them in church, and through them be spurred to greater devotion? <sup>37</sup>

The discussions on mixed seating underlined the various opinions that existed within the Jewish community. Some members, possibly inspired by the American examples, endorsed a stronger Reform-inspired, modernized version, while perspectives on economy, liturgy, and gender were used by others to prevent sudden changes. In this example, the lay leadership listened to the Christian architect, the Chief Rabbi, and the Culture Commission, not the other members of their community, and voted to continue with the separated seating in June 1870.

In terms of the Jewishness expressed through the new synagogue's architecture, sub-groups belonging to traditional or more Reform-friendly groups were routinely ignored, and the interior design and use of the synagogue became closely related to a clear, but not extreme, form of Reform Judaism. The Jewishness communicated through the new synagogue was controlled by the lay leadership, aided by the Christian architect, the Chief Rabbi, and socially powerful community members. Without such a strong base of support, sub-groups were never likely to influence the religious architecture and rituals in the new synagogue.

#### 4. The Synagogue's Inauguration: Circulation and Challenge of Jewish Narrative

As has been seen, the new synagogue's position on the 'frontier' was conceptualized and contested within the Jewish community. The result was a synagogue expressing the *bourgeois*-adopted style of Orientalism and Jewish Reform elements, whilst declaring its belonging to the Swedish urban landscape. Local media accounts of the inauguration ceremony on 16 September 1870, reveal, not only the Swedish-Christian reception of both the event and the building, but also the community's carefully fashioned narrative, which together with the building itself, strove to revise the Christian, essentially antisemitic, narrative of Jewish history (Lerner 2000).

##### 4.1. Descriptions of the Synagogue's Architecture

Publishing an article on the almost completed synagogue on 10 August 1870, the local newspaper *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* (New Daily Miscellaneous) was the first newspaper to distribute a textual version of this Jewish place across Stockholm. It reproduced the lay leaders' and Scholander's architectural vision almost word-for-word. The article stated that the synagogue was built in an 'ancient oriental'

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix I in *ibid.*



style, listing the usage of ‘historical characteristics,’ such as the ‘Assyrian’ palm and the hexagon of *Magen David* (Star of David). Historical sites such as Babylon, Jerusalem, and Nineveh were mentioned, evoking the imagination of historical places. The article listed Judaic elements present in the synagogue, but neither architectural particularities nor Jewish imagery were properly explained to the non-Jewish audience. The ‘*el-mimmar*’<sup>38</sup> was, for example, only described as ‘an elevated place.’ It also used the words *kyrka* (church) and *tempel* (temple) eight and three times, respectively, even in the headline, while the word *synagoga* (synagogue) was not even mentioned once ([Nya Dagligt Allehanda 1870a](#)).

The Mosaic Congregation’s board minutes through the 1860s similarly preferred the word *kyrka*, opting for the Christian term to describe their sacred place. While local versions of ‘temple’ as a substitute for synagogue were frequently used among Jewish communities across Europe, the use of ‘church’ was not as common. It portrays the strong level of national belonging that the leaders of the Mosaic Congregation aimed for by constructing the new building. To describe a Judaic ritual, the word *mosaisk* (Mosaic) was chosen. The term was used from the middle of the 19th century until the latter half of the 20th century and was a way for Jews to etymologically show that their identity was confessional, not ethnic. As Swedes with a Mosaic faith, they, therefore, argued that they could be members of the Swedish nation ([Dencik 2006](#), pp. 20–23). By using the exact same choice of words, the article circulated the consciously constructed narrative of the Mosaic Congregation.

The article’s text was thus architecturally technical and socially informed, adopting the terminology of the Mosaic Congregation. As a result of the precise architectural descriptions, Bo Grandien suggests that Scholander cooperated with the newspaper by talking to the journalists ([Grandien 1979](#), p. 424). The analysis of the choice of words above shows that the Mosaic Congregation’s board must also have influenced the article. The article delivered a representation of the synagogue that aligned to the intentions of its creators. As the inauguration day drew closer, other newspapers also published descriptions of the new synagogue, largely reproducing *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*’s text with only minor changes.<sup>39</sup> By recycling the original article, the newspapers further circulated the spatial vision of the community’s lay leaders, solidifying their narrative in the public discourse.

Positive descriptions of the building that introduced the synagogue to *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*’s readers were thus reproduced: Phrases such as ‘one of the most interesting and beautiful important buildings that has been constructed in our country during our lifetime,’ ‘magnificent temple,’ and ‘as original as [it is] harmonious’ praised Stockholm’s newest structure ([Dagens Nyheter 1870a](#); [Nya Dagligt Allehanda 1870b](#); [Stockholms Dagblad 1870](#)). *Aftonbladet* (The Evening Paper) described the synagogue as a ‘neat, but solemn [ ... ] magnificent building’ ([Aftonbladet 1870](#)), echoing the Mosaic Congregation’s vision provided for Scholander in 1863. The synagogue was, however, largely viewed as an architectural accomplishment, not a Jewish sacred place, as shown in the following tribute:

The whole thing is a beautiful testimony to both the great artistry of the architect and the scrupulous labor of the entrepreneur, and all the workers [ ... ], and it has become an ornament in our capital. ([Aftonbladet 1870](#))

Indeed, all newspapers commented on the synagogue’s geographical position. *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* and *Dagens Nyheter* both published the following statement:

Perhaps some Mosaic tradition inflicted this obscured location onto the building, which to a large extent is lost to the capital, and which could have been one of its most distinguished architectural embellishments. ([Dagens Nyheter 1870b](#); [Nya Dagligt Allehanda 1870c](#))

<sup>38</sup> This was the contemporary Swedish way to spell *almemmar*, and the term was used among some Ashkenazi communities. It originally derived from the Arabic word *al-minbar*, meaning a platform in a mosque. When placed in a synagogue, this platform is today more commonly referred to as a *bimah*.

<sup>39</sup> *Dagens Nyheter* credited *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* before launching into the unchanged presentation, adding only a longer section on the specifics of the organ. In turn, *Aftonbladet* credited *Dagens Nyheter* when adding an edited version of the original text to the end of their article about the ceremony. *Stockholms Dagblad* published *Dagens Nyheter*’s version, including the depiction of the organ, crediting ‘some other newspapers.’

The degrading note about the Jewish religion should not be missed in the above quote, especially since it is put in opposition to the accomplished architecture. *Aftonbladet*, on the other hand, stated that:

One has, [ . . . ] not without reason, regretted that this magnificent building has been given such an obscured and narrow location. We assume that the Mosaic Congregation, not without calculation, has chosen this position, which has the advantage that the congregation, whose greater festivals as well as days of Sabbath occur on other times than those of the rest of the city population, is not disrupted by the noise and movement on common streets and places. (*Aftonbladet* 1870)

While the text comments on the relationship between the Jewish inner discourse and the outer architecture, it also echoes the opinions of the Jewish lay leaders. Overall, the newspapers, however, linked their wish for a better location to the architectural achievements of the Swedish-Christian architect, not the desired visibility of Jewishness in Stockholm, and the Jewish community was indeed sometimes blamed for inflicting such an unfavorable location upon a Swedish-Christian architect's work.

*Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, however, added a socio-political perspective to the discussion on the synagogue's visibility, one which no other newspaper at the time chose to republish:

We have recently broken the last problem in our society, which eliminated Jews from Christian societies and forced them to hide their wealth and religious cult in their particularly narrow and dirty quarters. (*Nya Dagligt Allehanda* 1870c)

While commenting positively on the newly received Jewish emancipation in 1870, the newspaper still expressed antisemitic imagery by mentioning the imagined Jewish wealth and religious particularity, as well as insinuating the existence of a ghetto. The author expressed gratitude that *judar* (Jews)—notice the word, which was never used by the Mosaic Congregation—were finally a visible part of the Swedish society, but also explained the synagogue to be a physical embodiment of the increasing power of Swedish liberalism, which is why it deserved a better location in the city. Although largely circulating the Mosaic Congregation's narrative, the local and national press clearly downplayed the building's inherent Jewish status and challenged Jewish belonging to the Swedish society when not following the alleged script or interview derived from the Jewish community's leadership.

#### 4.2. The Inauguration Service

The liberal sentiment was also passionately emphasized by the Chief Rabbi during his sermon at the inauguration ceremony. Not using the words *synagoga*, *judar*, or *mosaisk*, Lewysohn, much like the lay leaders, preferred *tempel*, *gudshus* (House of God), and *israeliter* (Israelites). He, furthermore, universalized his inauguration message by promoting the synagogue's function of nurturing Jews into educated and spiritual members of the Swedish nation in the Christian, public space. He advised the Jewish audience to 'in here [ . . . ], pray as *Israelites*, out there [ . . . ] act primarily as *humans*, as *humans with* everyone else and *for* everyone else.'<sup>40</sup> Although expressing a distinct Jewishness, the synagogue as a public building was, therefore, supposed to physically embody liberal and egalitarian movements, which transformed the Swedish society at the end of the 19th century. According to the Chief Rabbi, it was possible to strive towards a society united in peace and love since:

In a growing number of countries, confessional difference is no longer the foundation for difference before court and law. And we greatly appreciate being able to experience this inauguration holiday, which takes place in the same year that one of the most beautiful pages was written in Sweden's cultural history. This year is also engraved above the entrance

<sup>40</sup> Louis Ludwig Lewysohn's speech can be found in appendix B in protocol 17, 6 October 1870, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/40, JCS-SSA. My translation from Swedish. Louis Ludwig Lewysohn's italics.

to our new temple, encouraging memories to be attached to this year, not only for us, my fellow brothers in faith, but also for all friends of the fatherland, for every friend of humanity, for every friend of justice and truth! <sup>41</sup>

Although not created as a result of the emancipation, the synagogue was inaugurated in the same year that emancipation was granted, making the building a physical reminder of the year Jews became Swedish citizens with equal rights. Lewysohn's speech was praised in the local press as a 'lovely and lively lecture' (*Aftonbladet* 1870), executed with 'a beautiful and also rather truthful moral' (*Nya Dagligt Allehanda* 1870c). *Dagens Nyheter* complemented the rabbi's 'ex tempore' style (*Dagens Nyheter* 1870b), admiring his speaking qualities. The journalists specifically paraphrased, with impressive accuracy, the Chief Rabbi's hope for a humanity united in peace and love, emphasizing his concluding prayer for the fatherland, Swedish politicians, and all gathered.

The performative nature of the inauguration ceremony should, furthermore, not be understated. This was, after all, the first time Jews in Stockholm celebrated their emancipatory belonging to the Swedish nation alongside members of the Swedish-Christian community. The invited guests, members of Stockholm's political, economic, religious, and social elite—current and former cabinet ministers, members of parliament, city mayors, prominent engineers, police commissioners, vicars, barons, and counts—a total of 84 men, took a seat in the never-before used pews.<sup>42</sup> So too did Jewish community members, as well as invited representatives from Jewish communities from the cities of Gothenburg, Norrköping, and Karlskrona. Several newspapers noted the Jewish men's 'covered heads' and the 'dressed-up women' on the balconies (*Aftonbladet* 1870), portraying journalists' reaction to Jewish traditions. The synagogue was packed, and those who had not managed to get a seat in the synagogue gathered outside of it. The Jewish presence thus spilled out onto the streets, turning the quietness of the narrow *Wahrendorffsgatan* into a never-before witnessed spectacle.

The ceremony included an organ-accompanied procession of the *Torah* scrolls, their placement in *Aron Hakodesh*, and the lighting of the eternal light. The synagogue was filled with communal hymns in Swedish, as well as *cantata*, *aria*, and solo and choir performances by famous Swedish-Jewish musicians, some written specifically for the inauguration ceremony. Similar to the liberal religion proclaimed by Lewysohn, the hymns praised God as eternal, wise, graceful, peaceful, holy, creator, and shepherd, worthy of humanity's worship. The mention of 'Jacob' in the *cantata* was the clearest allusion to the Jewish God, but notably did not exclude the Christian God either.<sup>43</sup>

The Mosaic Congregation's carefully staged inauguration ceremony clearly expressed the universal and liberal values of their religion, even though they did not avoid the Judaic rituals that were typical for the ceremony. By stressing Judaism's role in fostering moral and educated citizens, the Jewish community used the Great Synagogue to present a Jewishness compatible with the Swedish national identity.<sup>44</sup> Although newspapers discussed the synagogue's exterior grandeur in relation to the Swedish-Christian architect, and criticized its geographical position in relation to the Jewish community, the ceremony itself was represented in a positive light. The journalists largely enjoyed the performance of a Jewish religion staged around social and moral values, and thus echoed the Jewish community's wish to be viewed as both Swedes and Jews in their articles. The latter element was emphasized towards the end of *Stockholms Dagblad's* (Stockholm's Daily Paper) article:

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. My translation from Swedish.

<sup>42</sup> Plan of procession and list of invited guests in appendix P in protocol 17, 6 October 1870, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/40, JCS-SSA.

<sup>43</sup> All lyrics can be found in the inauguration program, SE/RA/730128/01/A/A\_1/A\_1a/40, JCS-SSA.

<sup>44</sup> This interpretation of the Swedish national identity was based on the values of the emerging *bourgeois* class. The Swedish-Jewish bourgeoisie, for example, donated money for the establishment of classical music institutions at the turn of the 20th century. They believed this act to exemplify their belonging to the Swedish nation, since these music institutions democratized art for the greater masses (*Kuritzén Löwengart* 2017).

It deserves to be mentioned, that two moneyboxes were exhibited at the send-off service in the old synagogue for contribution of money for this year's sick and wounded on the battlefield. These moneyboxes would hereafter be exhibited for some time in the new synagogue. (Stockholms Dagblad 1870)

The referenced war was the Franco-Prussian war, and due to the closeness between Swedish and German cultures, it can be assumed that the money box must have aided German soldiers. Perhaps emphasizing Lewysohn's statement that Jews were now Swedish citizens, taking on the challenge to transform the world into a better place, the journalist painted a picture of a generous community, concerned about social and political issues, who were practically engaged in helping humanity when needed, thus communicating the Jewish intended narrative.

## 5. Conclusions

With the construction of the Great Synagogue on *Wahrendorffsgatan*, the Jewish population in Stockholm established a visible home for their religious practices that clearly also strove to prove its belonging in the city's landscape. Communal disagreement on the nature of the visibility, however, prolonged its construction, showcasing the Jewish community's careful and contrasting considerations on both their social position in the Swedish pre-emancipatory society and their religious orientation. In the end, the communal power struggle ignored extreme viewpoints on both aspects, and the Mosaic Congregation's board members opted for the half-hidden, but geographically central, location on *Wahrendorffsgatan*, and an architecture that was inspired by Reform Judaism. At the time of the inauguration, the Jewish community, now as Swedish citizens with equal rights, continued to perform a Jewishness that was both ritually Judaic and embraced by the *bourgeois*, liberal, and egalitarian sub-sections of Swedish society.

The employment of the Swedish-Christian architect Scholander, was a strategic decision to enhance the anticipated Swedish-Jewish public representation on the 'frontier.' His voice became vital currency used by the different groups involved in the communal discussions to enhance their arguments, and although the gentile writers reporting on the inauguration ceremony articulated some antisemitic prejudices and viewed the synagogue's value as purely architectural, they simultaneously circulated the Jewish narrative of their sacred place as a location for the fostering of morality and Swedish patriotism. The events leading up to the construction and use of the Great Synagogue thus showcases the Mosaic Congregation's sense of Swedish belonging and their success at engaging non-Jewish actors to articulate and circulate this belonging.

Jewish presence, therefore, publically increased during the last decade of Jewish social and legal inequality in Sweden, and was negotiated as a Jewish interpretation of contemporary historical, urban, political, cultural, and architectural trends. As the Swedish parliament discussed extensions of Jewish rights and their emancipation up until 1869, the Jewish urban presence, expressed through the conceptualization and construction of the new synagogue, was used as a conscious strategy to add a Jewish communal voice to the debate. Emancipation was reached in 1870, but how successful was the synagogue at continuously demonstrating Jewish belonging to the Swedish nation? From the emancipation until 1939, the synagogue was visited by some Swedish Christians during *bourgeois* funerals, and the synagogue was once again praised as an architectural masterpiece during the redevelopment of the street at the beginning of the 20th century. After the terror attack on the synagogue in Copenhagen in 2015, Jewish, Muslim, and Romani Swedes held hands, forming a human ring around the Great Synagogue in Stockholm, and stood together against racism, antisemitism, and extremism (Svenska Dagbladet 2015). The synagogue inevitably continues to offer an urban space for the discussion and emphasis of minorities' belonging to the Swedish nation.

**Funding:** This research was funded by *Leibniz Institut für Europäische Geschichte*, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, *Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse*, and *Gertrude och Ivar Philipsons stiftelse*.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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