

Article

Synagogue Architecture of Latvia between Archeology and Eschatology

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Abstract: Synagogue architecture during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century was seeking novel modes of expression, and therefore the remains of ancient synagogues that were being discovered by western archeologists within the borders of the Biblical Land of Israel became a new source of inspiration. As far away as the New World, the design of contemporary synagogues was influenced by discoveries such as by the American Jewish architect, Arnold W. Brunner, who referenced the Baram Synagogue in the Galilee in his Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue at the Jewish Hospital in Philadelphia (1901). Less known is the fact that the archaeological discoveries in the Middle East also influenced the design of synagogues in the interwar period, in the newly-independent Baltic state of Latvia. Local architects picked up information about these archaeological finds from professional and popular editions published in German and Russian. Good examples are two synagogues along the Riga seaside, in Majori and Bulduri, and another in the inland town of Bauska. As was the case in America, the archaeological references in these Latvian examples were infused with eschatological meaning.

Keywords: architectural history; synagogue architecture; Jewish cultural studies; Jewish history; Jewish art history; urban studies

1. Introduction

Synagogue architecture of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century was seeking novel means of expression. Jewish communities in Europe that had emerged in the public sphere and achieved unprecedented visibility in the urban space wished to establish the respectability of the Jewish place of worship as a public building on par with Christian churches. Constructing an elegant synagogue would also express the pride and self-confidence of an enlightened and acculturated community. The appropriate visual references were eagerly borrowed from the most recent scholarly literature to substantiate the architect's suggestions. The Napoleonic campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801) stimulated a general fashion for Egyptian style, though seldom in the Christian sacred architecture. Scholarly reconstruction drawings showed the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem as influenced by Egyptian architecture, in agreement with the architectural theory that linked the Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Jewish, and Greek legacy in a single lineage of divine origin.¹ In the 1850s, open brickwork became popular among the synagogue designers and was justified as historically accurate, having been widely used in ancient Mesopotamia that was rich in clay and was still favored by the Arabs who, according to the latest linguistic and racial theories, were considered closely related to the Jews

¹ On this trend see, for instance, (Krinsky 1985, pp. 73, 77; Kadish 2011, pp. 70–74). On a pre-Enlightenment theory of architecture as a divinely inspired art, see (Soo 1998, p. 169). For theoretical reconstructions of the Jerusalem Temple as a derivative of Egyptian architecture, see (Hirt 1809; Stieglitz 1834; Canina 1845).

(Förster 1859). In the 1880s, the French scholars Charles Chipiez (1935–1901) and Georges Perrot (1832–1914) posited a theory that linked the Jerusalem Temple not only with Egyptian but also with Phoenician and Assyrian architecture (Chipiez and Perrot 1887, 1889).² They expressly referred to the biblical prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple, which in the rabbinical thought served as the model for the eschatological Temple of Jerusalem.³ However, exploration of the ancient synagogues in the Galilee cardinally changed the previous antiquarian and archeologically inspired discourse of Jewish architecture (Fine 2002, 2005; Gruber 2011). The change surfaced not only on the printed page but also in the actual synagogue architecture of the early twentieth century. This article explores how the recent scholarly and archeological discoveries influenced the design of synagogues in the interwar period, particularly in the newly-independent Baltic state of Latvia that then had a vibrant Jewish community, and how the Latvian Jewish identity was constructed through architecture.

2. Synagogues in Ancient Israel as a Source for Modern Synagogue Architecture

Some ruins of ancient synagogues have long been well known to Jewish pilgrims to the holy places in the Galilee, for example, the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi, second century CE) in Meron (Robinson and Smith 1856, pp. 73–74; Anonymous 1900, pp. 106–7). Nevertheless, it was the advance of archeology in Palestine that brought a considerable number of ancient synagogues to the attention of art and architectural historians, architects, and the wider public. Surveys were carried out by English and French archeologists including Edward Robinson (1794–1863) (Robinson and Smith 1841, p. 298)⁴ and Ernest Renan (1823–1892) (Renan 1864, pp. 765–81). The Palestine Exploration Fund was founded in England in 1865; by 1878 a total of eleven ancient synagogues had been discovered (Conder and Kitchener 1881, pp. 230–34, 243–44, 251–54, 256–57, 396–402, 406–8, 414–17). From the 1890s until the eve of the Second World War about 3000 postcards based on 27 photographs taken by the Palestine Exploration Fund were sold worldwide (Vitto 1997, p. 42). These archeological discoveries proved that the architecture of ancient synagogues had nothing in common with Egyptian, Phoenician or Assyrian forms as alleged by Chipiez and Perrot, but was obviously related to the Greco-Roman architecture of late antiquity.

In the USA, in 1901, the first American-born Jewish architect, Arnold William Brunner (1857–1925), drew directly on the ancient synagogues of the Galilee in the design of the Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue at the Jewish Hospital in Philadelphia (Figure 1) (Fine 2002, 2005; Gruber 2011, p. 84; see also Gruber 2003, p. 29). He made particular reference both to the overall classical style and detailing of the two synagogues in Kfar Baram (Arabic: Kafr Birim), both small (for an inscription) and large (Figure 2), as well as of the nearby synagogue in Nabratein (Hebrew: Naburiya) (cf. Conder and Kitchener 1881, pp. 230–34, 243–44). In 1905, a photograph of the newly-built synagogue was published in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (Adler and Rosenbach 1905, p. 678). This was followed up, in 1907, by Brunner’s article in the American professional periodical *The Brickbuilder*, on the impact of recent archeological finds on synagogue architecture, in the light of his own design experience in Philadelphia (Brunner 1907a, 1907b). He was critical of the reconstruction of the Temple by Chipiez and Perrot, “One instinctively feels that their imagination has been allowed too much freedom and that these admirable restorations, while inspiring in the extreme, can hardly be considered as historic documents, nor do they indicate a sufficient degree of accuracy upon which to base an architectural style” (Brunner 1907a, p. 25).

² On the use of this iconography in synagogue architecture, see (Kravtsov 2008).

³ Ezekiel’s prophesy to “make known unto them [the house of Israel] the form of the house [. . .]; that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them” (Ezek. 43:11) was commented by Rashi (1040–1105): “They will learn the matters of the measurements from your mouth so that they will know how to do them at the time of the end.” Rashi’s Commentary on Tanakh holds that this prophesy does not refer to return of Jewish exiles led by Ezra, “for their repentance was not suitable.” Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (1602) reaffirmed this view and the eschatological meaning of Ezekiel’s prophesy in his *Tsurat beit ha-mikdash* (Shape of the Temple).

⁴ On surveys of ancient synagogues, see (Vitto 1997).



Figure 1. The Henry S. Frank Memorial Synagogue at the Jewish Hospital in Philadelphia, architect Arnold W. Brunner, 1901 ([Adler and Rosenbach 1905](#), p. 678).



Figure 2. The large synagogue in Kfar Baram ([Bacher and Dembitz 1905](#), p. 621).

A pupil and apprentice of William R. Ware (1832–1915) and George B. Post (1883–1913), the American adherents of the École des Beaux-Arts tradition, Brunner praised classical architecture as undeniably Jewish, and therefore applicable to modern synagogues, “With the sanction of antiquity it (the ‘classical’ style) perpetuates the best traditions of Jewish art and takes up a thread, which was broken by circumstances, of a vigorous and once healthy style” ([Brunner 1907b](#), p. 37). He claimed that “upon examining the ruined remains that exist today, it is evident that whether this art inspired the Greeks, or was inspired by the Greeks, it was serious and important, and if circumstances had allowed it to develop, it would have probably continued on much the same lines as the art of Greece” ([Brunner 1907a](#), p. 24).

Thus, the archeology of ancient synagogues played an essential role in the construction of a national Jewish architectural identity equal to that of other nations; indeed, to that of the Greeks whom the Enlightenment theory regarded as the progenitors of the finest western architecture. As Samuel D. [Gruber](#) (2011, p. 75) has written, “The tie of classicism to the ancient synagogue helped give American

Judaism a pedigree that would resonate in Western European and American culture, and it allowed Jews to skip over the centuries of Diaspora history—of ghettos and the Pale of Settlement—that fascinated and repelled much of mainstream America”. By the end of the nineteenth century, the American reform movement was especially keen on building synagogues in neoclassical style (*ibid.*).

These changing influences on American synagogue architecture have been remarked upon in general by both Steven Fine and Samuel D. Gruber. I would contend that the portico of Brunner’s synagogue in Philadelphia (Figure 1) was influenced by additional iconographic sources, specifically by Ezekiel’s Temple as imagined in the sixteenth-century treatise by the Jesuit theologians Juan Bautista Villalpando and Hieronymus Prado. Brunner’s Corinthianesque capitals are placed under a Doric frieze, an inversion of the classical orders that appears in Villalpando’s drawings (Villalpandus and Pradus 1604, p. 420; Kravtsov 2005). Alternatively, this allusion could have reached Brunner indirectly via Melchior de Vogüé’s (1829–1916) reconstruction in his 1864 work *Le Temple de Jérusalem*. De Vogüé made a questionable connection between the Jerusalem Temple and the so-called Palace of John Hyrcanus in Araq-el-Emir in Jordan (Figure 3) (de Vogüé 1864a, pp. 37–43; De Vogüé 1864b, pp. 52–62).⁵ Yet, the long side elevations of Brunner’s synagogue feature paired windows borrowed from Chipiez’s drawing of the House of the Forest of Lebanon, however, these bipartite elements cannot be called classical, although they do possess quasi-Palladian semicircular lights (cf. Figures 1 and 4) (Chipiez and Perrot 1889, plate 12). Thus, Brunner’s synagogue in Philadelphia referenced several sources, not only the ancient synagogues of the Galilee but also visions of Ezekiel’s Temple, charged with traditional eschatological meaning.

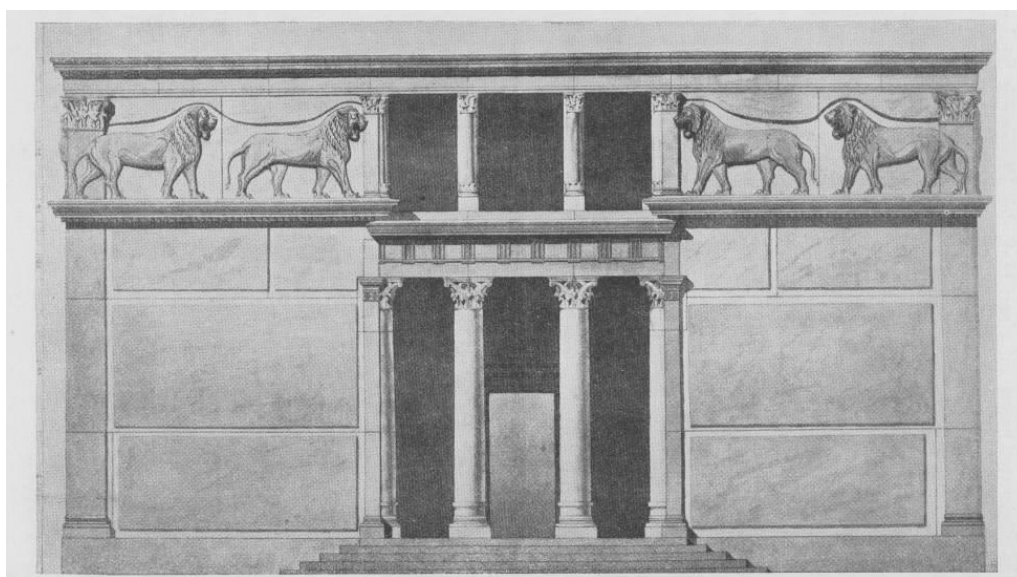


Figure 3. Palace in Araq al-Emir, Jordan, detailed reconstruction by Howard C. Butler, based on the reconstruction by Melchior de Vogüé (1864a). Reproduced from (Cohn-Wiener 1929, p. 70).

⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of the palace in Araq-el-Emir, see (Butler 1907, plates 1, 2). De Vogüé explained the inverse architectural orders used in the Jerusalem Temple in historical terms, by the fact that this building dated from before the codification of the orders by Vitruvius in 30–10 BCE; Villalpando had ascribed the supposed inverse orders in the Temple to divine inspiration.

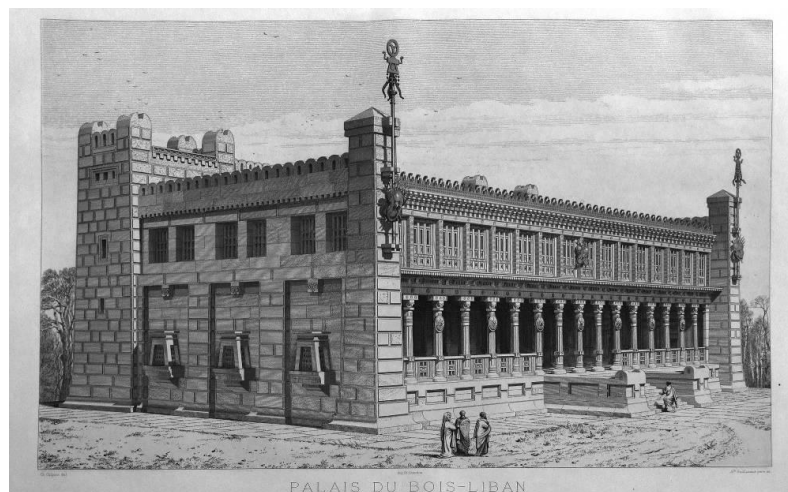


Figure 4. House of the Forest of Lebanon (Chipiez and Perrot 1889, plate 12).

The name of Arnold Brunner, first publicized by the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1905) as a leading American Jewish architect (Adler 1905, p. 404; Bacher and Dembitz 1905, p. 628), was picked up by the Russian *Evreiskaia entsiklopedia* in 1908 (Rogoff 1908, p. 226). The archeological discoveries, which Brunner had discussed and utilized in his built work, were described in this encyclopedia in 1913, although without illustrations (Bernfeld 1913, p. 258). The chief author of the “Synagogue” entry, Simon Bernfeld (1860–1940), wrote: “The influence of Greco-Roman architecture is undoubtedly evident in the style of the Galilean synagogues, but it is specifically Jewish in its essence and it perfectly suits the purpose of the building” (ibid.).

German scholarship was now making substantial progress. Heinrich Kohl (1877–1914) and Karl Watzinger (1877–1948) had undertaken archeological exploration in 1905–1907 and their results were published in 1916 (Kohl and Watzinger 1916). These confirmed Brunner’s contention that “the plan of the basilica was invariably adopted” in the ancient synagogues (Brunner 1907a, p. 24). Kohl and Watzinger proffered several possible reconstructions, which outwardly expressed the basilical structure on the façades of the synagogues in Kfar Baram (Figure 5), ed-Dikke (Figure 6), Umm el-Kanatir (Figure 7), and Tell Hum (Capernaum, Kfar Nahum, Figure 8) (Kohl and Watzinger 1916, pp. 97, 100, 134, plates 3, 4, 5, 6). The latter reconstruction was reproduced by Richard Krautheimer (1897–1994) in his influential monograph *Mittelalterliche Synagogen* (Krautheimer 1927, p. 59).



Figure 5. The large synagogue in Kfar Baram, theoretical reconstruction by Kohl and Watzinger (1916, p. 100).

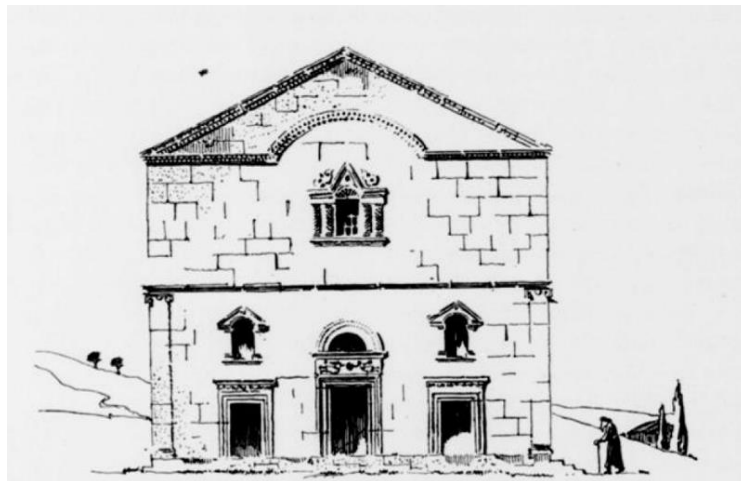


Figure 6. Synagogue in ed-Dikke, theoretical reconstruction by [Kohl and Watzinger \(1916, p. 124\)](#).

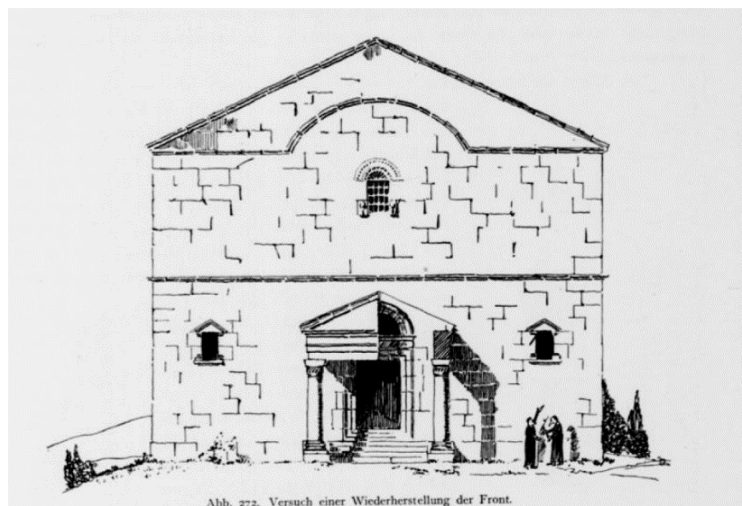


Figure 7. Synagogue in Umm el-Kanatir, theoretical reconstruction by [Kohl and Watzinger \(1916, p. 134\)](#).

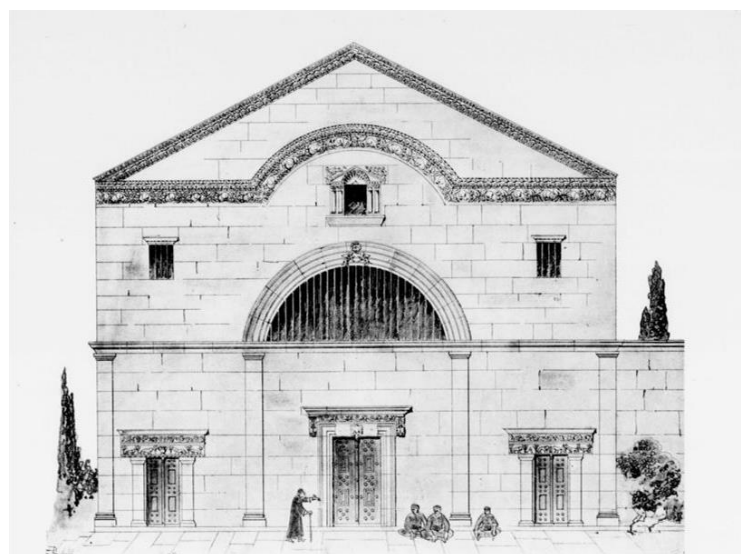


Figure 8. Synagogue in Capernaum (Tell Humm, Kfar Nahum), theoretical reconstruction by [Kohl and Watzinger \(1916, plate 3\)](#).

Ernst Cohn-Wiener's (1882–1941) *Die Jüdische Kunst* was the first of several book-length attempts at a general history of Jewish art (Cohn-Wiener 1929).⁶ It also provided the German reader with visual sources for ancient synagogues in the Land of Israel.⁷ All the aforementioned publications were available to the Jewish community and to practicing architects in interwar Latvia, where both German and Russian languages were spoken.

3. Archeological Inspirations and Synagogue Architecture in Latvia

The Peitavas Street Synagogue in Riga

Chipiez's and Perrot's Temple iconography influenced the Peitavas Street Synagogue, built in Riga in 1903–1905 (Figure 9). This synagogue was designed by two architects of Baltic German origin: the young Karl Rudolf Hermann Seuberlich (Hermanis Zeiberlihs, 1878–1938)⁸ and the experienced Johann Wilhelm Karl Neumann (Vilhelms Neimanis, 1849–1919).⁹ Chipiez's imagery was first proposed in the professional press, in 1896, for the Temple Synagogue in Lviv (Lemberg, Lwów, then under Austro-Hungarian rule), but was eventually applied at the Sha'ar ha-Shamayim Synagogue in Cairo (1899–1904) and the New Synagogue in the Bohemian city Hradec Králové (German Königgrätz, 1904–1905, then also in Austro-Hungary). These two synagogues were being built almost at the same time as the new synagogue in Riga (Kravtsov 2008, pp. 31–35). The latter employed reputedly "Egyptian" elements: cavetto moldings, lotus capitals, sloping door jambs, and relief palm branches. The "Phoenician" contribution exemplified acroteria allusive to the altar horns; the "Assyrian" rosettes decorated the interior architraves. In addition, the fenestration of the street elevation was modeled on the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, all reminiscent of Chipiez's drawings. The point and mode of employing such an exotic combination of styles varied from country to country. In Cairo, it was an allusion to the ancient presence of the Jewish people in Egypt. In Hradec Králové, its exoticism was blended with typical Central European decorative motifs. In Lviv and Riga, it served as a means of avoiding local stylistic controversies. Use of a style redolent of a remote time and place enabled the Jews to escape the "battles of the styles" that was then raging between competing nationalist groups. In Lviv, Poles and Ukrainians were fighting over the historical seniority in the region, of the Romanesque versus the Byzantine styles (Kravtsov 2018, p. 183). Germans and Latvians in Riga were arguing over the merits of the "Nordic" versus the "Baltic" styles (Grosa 2012). Instead, the Jews, aided by the hired architects, opted to construct an "other" Jewish identity, distinct from that of any of the rival nationalist groups.

After the First World War, Latvia became an independent republic. In this state, all the limitations of the Jewish presence beyond the Pale of Settlement, which had been mandatory in the Livland and Courland provinces under the Russian empire, were abolished in 1920. The Latvian Jewish community grew from 79,644 to 93,479 by 1935 (4.79 percent of the general population) (Bogdanova 2004, p. 10). However, their newly-found prosperity was short lived thanks to the Great Depression, which began with the Wall Street Crash in the United States in 1929, the effects of which were felt internationally throughout the 1930s. Similar to other building projects in Latvia, the construction of new synagogues was considerably delayed. Several projects, initiated in the late 1920s, underwent protracted changes.

⁶ English translation: *Jewish Art: Its History from the Beginning to the Present Day*. Afterword by Hannelore Künzli; translated by Anthea Bell (Northamptonshire, 2001).

⁷ See, for instance, photographs of the synagogues in Kfar Baram, Meron, Nabratein, Tell Hum, Ashdod, and Chorazin, in (Cohn-Wiener 1929, pp. 81–85, 88, 90–91).

⁸ Seuberlich received his architectural education at the Riga Polytechnic Institute (Polytechnischen Institut zu Riga) in 1898–1904. Besides the Peitavas Street Synagogue, he is known for his restoration of the medieval Kuresaare Castle (1904–1912, with Neumann), and Riga Zoo. Latvian State Historical Archives, 7175-1-256; (BBLD n.d.).

⁹ Neumann, an architect, art historian and curator, was educated at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts (1875–1876) and received his Ph.D. from Leipzig University. Besides the Peitavas Street Synagogue, he prepared the initial design for Richard Wagner's Villa Wahnfried (1870), built Lutheran churches in Daugavpils (Dinaburg, Dvinsk, 1892–1893), Kuldīga (Goldingen, 1892–1904), and Kabile (Kabillen, 1904–1907) and designed Riga Art Museum (ca. 1905). See (Wörster 2008; BBLD n.d.).



Figure 9. The Peitavas Street Synagogue in Riga, architects Karl R. H. Seuberlich and Wilhelm K. Neumann, 1903–1905. Photo by the author, 2009.

4. Synagogues on the Baltic Riviera

Majori (Majorenhof) is a district of the Riga seaside resort Jūrmala, also known under its German names, Rigascher Strand or Baltische Riviera, in the historical Livland. A synagogue was built in Majori, at 33 Viktorijas Street in 1938–1939, although the original design, as we shall see, dated from ten years earlier (1929). This synagogue is the earliest extant synagogue in Latvia that was inspired by archeological discoveries in the Land of Israel.

Jews, similar to other holidaymakers, generally visited Majori during the summer months, once the Russian ban on renting accommodation to Jews was ended in independent Latvia.¹⁰ The number of Jewish visitors steadily grew, and a “minyan” (prayer quorum) was soon formed in a rented cottage on Viktorijas Street, though to the great displeasure of the Christian landlord. By the end of the 1920s, a purpose-built synagogue had become indispensable (*Hajnt 1939a*).¹¹

Bulduri (Bilderlingshof), another district of Jūrmala, had a longer history of Jewish settlement than Majori. Shoemaker and retired soldier Mordechai-Motel Lezhik (or Ležik, Lessik, Lesik, Leshik, b. Šiauliai, Yiddish Shavl, Lithuania, 1853—d. New York, 1930s)¹² rented a house and garden in Bulduri for 25 years and lived there all year round. He began to host a summer minyan and, in 1906, built in his garden (at Fourth Sķers, i.e., “transverse,” Lane, under a later address 20 Talsu, today 8 Saldus Street) the first synagogue in Bulduri. In independent Latvia, the attractiveness of Bulduri for Jewish holidaymakers increased, not only because of the abolition of Tsarist restrictions but also because of its moderate prices and relative proximity to Riga. The Bulduri Synagogue was run by Lezhik as an elder (gabai) until his emigration to the USA in 1921, and afterward by his son-in-law, a

¹⁰ The Russian imperial government granted residence rights on the Baltic Riviera to the following categories of Jewish citizens: “honorary citizens,” burghers of the nearby town Sloka (Schlock), military veterans, and the families of merchants of the First Guild (which included well-to-do Jews). The local overlord of Majori (Majorenhof), Baron Ernst H. G. von Fircks (1843–1919), explicitly discriminated against Jews by refusing to let property to them. See (*Meler 2015*, pp. 257–8).

¹¹ By the end of the 1930s, the Jewish congregation in Majori numbered 210 (*Bogdanova 2004*, p. 168). The general number of holidaymakers in Majori and neighboring Dzintari (named Edinburgh until 1922) reached 14,925 in August 1938 (*Segodnia 1938*).

¹² On Lezhik’s date and place of birth, see (*JewishGen n.d.*).

shoemaker Samuel Michelson (ca. 1884–1941).¹³ In 1928, the freehold of the site was purchased by the members of the building committee, Meir Ritov (1870–1941), Zalman Chackielewicz, and Moses Chajt. By this time, the synagogue had become too cramped, and its replacement by a larger building was under discussion. However, nothing was done immediately (see below) ([Hajnt 1938a](#); [Meler 2015](#), pp. 260–64).

The plans for a new synagogue in Bulduri, prepared in 1929, were not intended for Lezhik's garden at 20 Talsu Street but for a completely different site on the east side of Upes Street (today Bauskas Street).¹⁴ Upes and Talsu are intersecting streets (running from north to south and from east to west, respectively), but Lezhik's garden was situated on a corner, whereas, the drawings show a west-facing plot on the street. A comparison of the Bulduri plans with the extant Majori synagogue reveals that the project prepared for Upes Street in Bulduri was actually implemented at Viktorijas Street in Majori, some 3.5 km to the west.

The 1929 design was commissioned from a renowned architect, Paul Mandelstamm (1872–1941). Son of a Jewish family in Lithuanian Žagarė (Yiddish Zhagar), he was educated at the German Gymnasium and at the Polytechnikum (1891–1898) in Riga, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life until he was killed during the Holocaust. Throughout his career, he designed about seventy buildings in the Latvian capital, in various styles, from historicism to art nouveau and functionalism. Early on, Mandelstamm was involved in a survey of Jewish sacred architecture and published a brief essay on “religious buildings of the Hebrews” in Riga in 1898 ([Mandelstamm 1903](#), pp. 188–90). Later, he worked for many Jewish clients. Mandelstamm built the Jewish vocational school at 2 Arbenes Street (1904), the burial house in the Old Jewish Cemetery of Riga (1905), and, in 1906, supervised the construction of the Stabu Street Synagogue, which had been designed by the Baltic-German architect, Reinhold Schmerling (1899–1901), all in a Germanic neo-Romanesque or Rundbogenstil style. In the early 1920s, Mandelstamm completed the construction of the Jewish Club in Riga, which had been started in 1913 by the Baltic-German architect, Edmund von Trompowsky (1851–1919), in the art nouveau style ([Kotlyar 2015](#), pp. 164–165). In 1924, Mandelstamm designed the burial house in the New Jewish Cemetery of Riga, this time in an admixture of neo-Romanesque and neoclassical styles.¹⁵ He continued designing synagogues after 1929, for example, in the seaside resort of Ķemeri (Kemmeren) in 1932 ([Bogdanova 2004](#), p. 97).

Mandelstamm's synagogue design of 1929 envisaged a brick structure, where the street elevation at the west was flanked by symmetrical projecting corner pavilions under low hipped roofs (Figure 10).¹⁶ The style combined neoclassicism with modernism by featuring flat platbands instead of cornices, plain pilasters, and door surrounds. The proposed building was to be set back within a spacious forecourt. Both the men's and women's vestibules, located in each of the pavilions, were to have double doors with a semicircular light over them. The central bay of the front elevation would possess no doorway but instead would have three tall rectangular windows. Along the side walls, the windows of the prayer hall were to be a round-headed design and Shields of David were to be used in the glazing of all the windows. Inside, the planned prayer hall would be square, measuring 11 by 11 meters by 5.60 m high. It was to be spanned by a coved ceiling with a ventilation grill in its center. There would be a central “bimah,” according to Ashkenazi tradition. A rear women's gallery, raised only forty centimeters off the floor, was proposed; there was also the option of an upper gallery at the rear, although no stairs were shown in the drawings. A wooden caretaker's house adjoined the synagogue on its northeast corner, while a shady verandah was added on its south.

¹³ Yad Vashem testimony, item ID 3938210.

¹⁴ Latvian National Historical Archives (Latvijas Nacionāls arhīvs Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs, hereafter LNA LVVA), 140-6343-14-202-6. The house number is not specified in this document.

¹⁵ LNA LVVA, 2761-3-13547.

¹⁶ LNA LVVA, 140-6343-14-202-6.

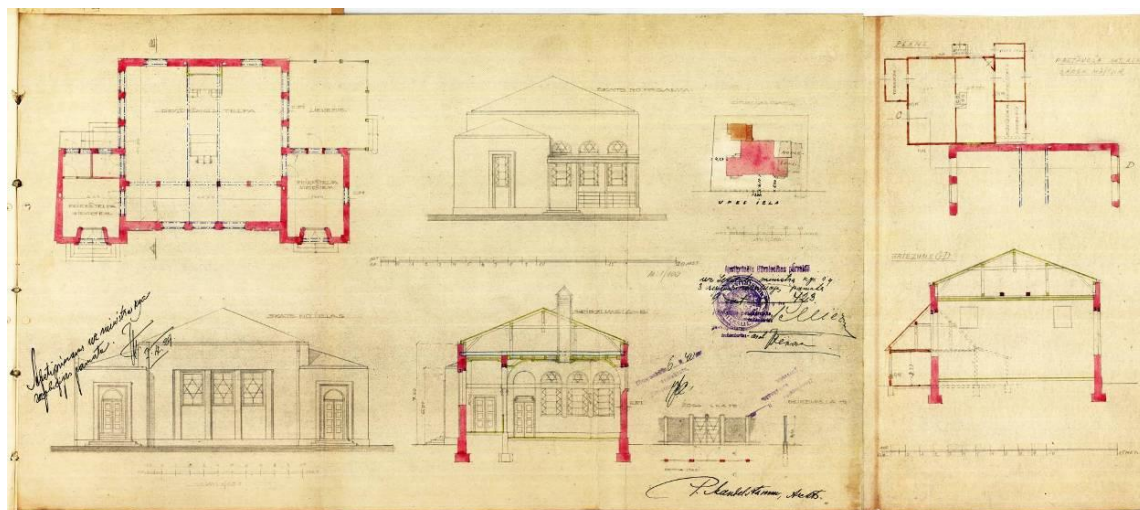


Figure 10. Design for a synagogue in Bulduri by Paul Mandelstamm, 1929, brick alternative. LNA LVVA. Used by permission.

Mandelstamm also submitted a cheaper alternative (Figure 11),¹⁷ of log construction rather than brick. This option differed only in minor details: round-headed windows instead of rectangular windows on the front elevation, a central rose window on the ark wall, and projecting cornices. The caretaker's house was detached and moved further away from the synagogue to the east.

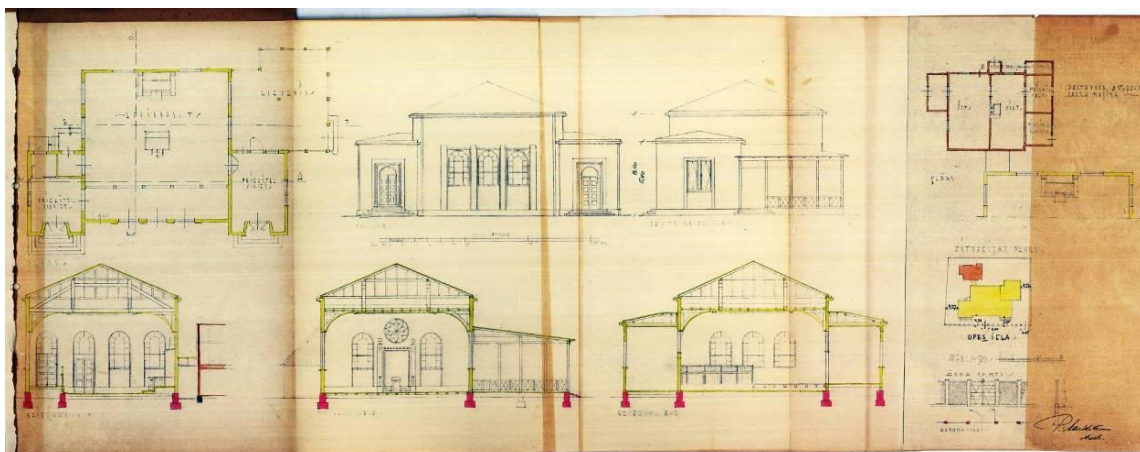


Figure 11. Design for a synagogue, in Bulduri, by Paul Mandelstamm, 1929, timber alternative. LNA LVVA. Used by Permission.

The plans were approved by the construction authorities on 7 August 1929.¹⁸ However, not only did this synagogue not get built for another ten years, until 1938–1939, but it was, as has already been mentioned above, constructed in a completely different district at 33 Viktorijas Street in Majori (Figures 12 and 13).¹⁹ On this site stood an old summer house that the local minyan had been renting at an exorbitant price since 1924 or 1925. Eventually, they decided to make an offer for the plot, in order “not to be subject to chance and to be insured against (unpleasant) surprises” (*Hajnt* 1939a). The purchase of the plot and the construction of the synagogue were carried out by a building

¹⁷ LNA LVVA, 140-6343-14-202-10.

¹⁸ LNA LVVA, 140-6343-14-202-61.

¹⁹ Services in the Majori Synagogue were reported already on 19 and 20 August 1938; *Hajnt* 194 (19 August 1938), p. 3. Its was only inaugurated on 5 August (20 Av) 1939 (*Hajnt* 1939a, p. 4; 1939b).

committee headed by the Chabad Rabbi Naftali Herz Sosnovik (1875–?) and three leading members of the congregation, Yosef Katz, Sh. Dawidowicz, and D. Himmelhoch, with financial backing from affluent Riga merchants including David Bychowski.²⁰ The synagogue was inaugurated on 5 August (20 Av) 1939; a telegram marking the opening of the very first synagogue in Majori was sent to Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942), an authoritarian “leader of the people,” who suspended the constitution in 1934 and occupied the posts of both President and Prime minister of Latvia since 1936 (*Hajnt 1939a*, p. 4; *1939b*). The whole enterprise was a gamble because the site had been bought before all the money had been raised, and therefore when the synagogue was opened, the congregation was in debt (*ibid.*).



Figure 12. Majori Synagogue, Jūrmala, 1929–1939. View from the southwest. Photo by the author, 2009.

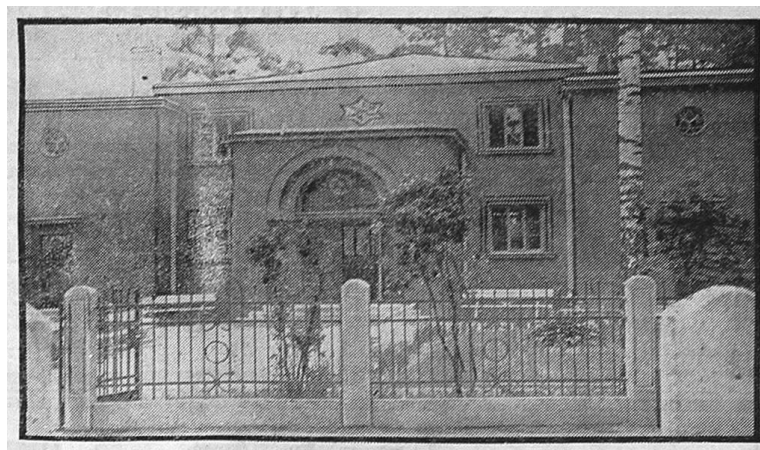


Figure 13. Majori Synagogue, view from the west (*Hajnt 1939a*).

As built, the Majori Synagogue was a compromise, that is to say, part brick and part wood (Figures 12 and 14). The front (west) of the building was constructed of brick, as was the east wall of the prayer hall, but the whole building was plastered to make it look similar to ashlar stone.²¹ The hipped roofs were very low, barely visible from the forecourt. The most striking addition was the main entrance placed in the center of the front bay within a large projecting porch. The double-leaved doors were set within an archway, several orders deep, devoid of columns or pilasters. The doorway was

²⁰ On their identities, see (*Yiddishe bilder 1938*).

²¹ This was proved by an investigation undertaken by Zoya Arshavsky and the author of the present article in 2010.

probably designed to be flanked with two columns, but the latter have never been installed. The porch served the men's entrance and the low women's gallery, which would bar passage to the prayer hall, was not constructed. The porch was flanked by rectangular windows giving light to the two floors of the main mass. The upper-floor women's gallery was built from the outset. The gallery was facing the prayer hall, which received a cupola in the center of the coved ceiling. The cupola reached a height of 7.40 m from the floor level but was not visible from the outside. The corner pavilions contained staircases, had symmetrical western doorways, and additional Shield of David roundels in the upper portions of their front walls, and every opening was framed by moldings.

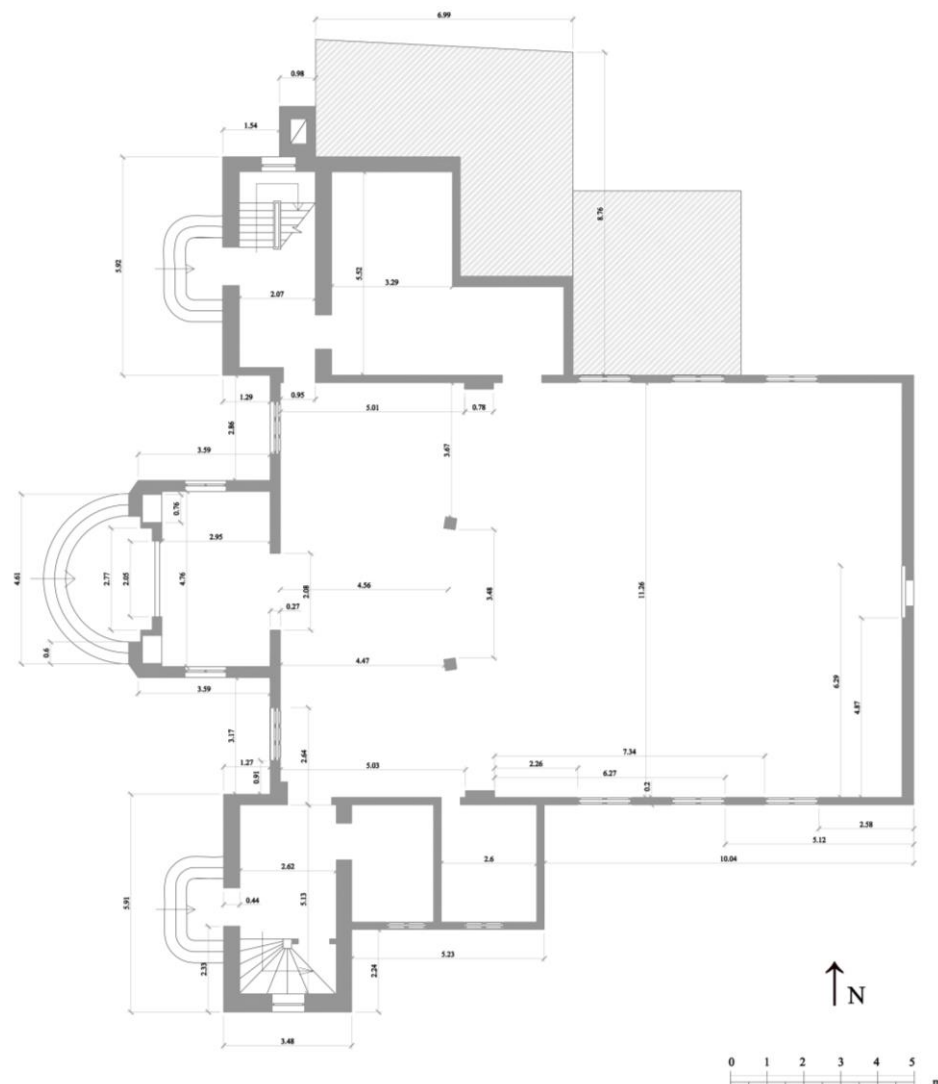


Figure 14. Majori Synagogue, ground plan. Drawing by Zoya Arshavsky, 2010. CJA. Used by permission.

No doubt, the design concept drew on several visual sources. The Mediterranean appearance of the Majori Synagogue stood out from the Latvian vernacular and its aberrations in local Romantic Nationalist architecture of the early part of the twentieth century. The overall layout and massing, including the broad front and corner pavilions, visually quoted from the Mishnaic description of the Herodian Temple, “As a lion is narrow behind and wide in front, so the sanctuary was narrow behind and wide in front” (Middot 4:7). From the seventeenth century onwards, Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (ca. 1579–1654), and other rabbinic commentators, ascribed these elements not only to the Mishnaic but also to the future, messianic Temple (Heller 1602; Kravtsov 2018, pp. 119–38).

The recently excavated ancient synagogues in the Galilee were built of ashlar stone and featured similar architectural elements including a projecting porch and a centrally-placed arched doorway flanked by squarish doors (see Figures 2 and 5, Figures 6 and 7). On the other hand, the style of the Majori Synagogue complimented the latest wave of neoclassicism, the so-called stripped classicism. Unlike the Beaux-Arts architecture, the stripped classicism evoked classical architecture rather than strictly copying it. This style was popular in several countries during the interwar period as a means to embrace modernity without displacing the history and tradition. Because of its blossom under the totalitarian regimes of Fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany, and Stalinist Soviet Union, stripped classicism received its bad name (Fleming et al. 1999, p. 118). However, it was used also in such democratic countries as the New Deal America, Canada, and Australia, and each regime employed it to achieve different political goals (Bryant 2011, pp. 59–61). Similar to the architecture of other authoritarian states, it heralded mightiness of statehood in the governmental architecture of interwar Latvia (Čaupale 2017). Mandelstam, beside his adherence to the Latvian mainstream, was using stripped classicism in his synagogue design to bridge the Jewish historical past and modernity (cf. Bryant 2011, pp. 38, 61). The synagogue was close in style to other buildings of around 1930 by Mandelstamm, which also featured squarish windows and low-slope roofs.²² Mandelstamm may have also been responding in his way, as a Jewish architect, to the contemporary German Heimatschutz ideology, which in a depreciative manner characterized houses with flat roofs as “dachlos” (that is, “without roof”) and “Semitic” (Pommer 1983). At the same time, the Jewish architect and theoretician Józef Awin (1883–1942) promoted such roofs in the periodical *Binyan ve-ḥaroshet* (Building and Industry, published by the Society of Engineers and Architects in the Land of Israel between 1924 and 1934), as indigenous to the Land of Israel and therefore entirely appropriate for its modern architecture (Awin 1927).

A synagogue in the Bulduri district of Jūrmala was also built in 1937–1938, on the plot at 20 Talsu (now 8 Saldus) Street that had been purchased by Mordechai Lezhik’s congregation in 1928. The architect was a Latvian, B. Kļaviņš,²³ but the contractor, Abram Ragol (1880–1942), was Jewish (Segodnia 1937).²⁴ There have been no other buildings by B. Kļaviņš that have come to light with which to compare the Bulduri Synagogue. The building committee was chaired by Shmuel Hirschfeld (ca. 1875–1941), who was elected in late 1936 or early 1937. Leading members of the congregation, Meir Ritov and Zalman Chackielewicz, donated the site. The old premises, which had been built in 1906, were partially dismantled by 24 January 1937, the date of the laying of the foundation stone for the new synagogue (Hajnt 1937; Segodnia 1937). Complete demolition was delayed, in accordance with *halāḥah* (Jewish law) (*b*Megillah 26b), until the new synagogue was opened (Hajnt 1938a; Segodnia 1937).

Construction took a year and a half, and the synagogue was dedicated on 14 August (17 Av) 1938. The architect was not present at the ceremony, but builder Ragol, his team, and volunteers were praised for having worked throughout the winter cold (Hajnt 1938b, 1938c; Meler 2015, pp. 260–65, 268–70). The chief rabbi of Riga, Menachem Mendel Zak (1873–1941) emphasized that in the time when the world produces cannons and other instruments of destruction, the Jewish weapon will be the synagogue (Hajnt 1938c). Speeches were made celebrating the fact that a Jewish place of worship could freely be built in independent Latvia, unlike in the former Tsarist empire. Telegrams expressing gratitude and loyalty were sent to Kārlis Ulmanis, “the leader of the people” (Segodnia 1937; Hajnt 1938c).

An architect’s perspective sketch had been published in the Russian language newspaper *Segodnia vecherom* (Today evening) (Figure 15) (Segodnia vecherom 1937). Only two photographs depict the appearance of the synagogue as built (Figures 16 and 17). Evidently, it deviated in several details

²² See, for instance, the villa at 40 Meža Boulevard in Riga, built by Mandelstamm in 1930.

²³ The Riga telephone directory listed Bernards Kļaviņš without mentioning his profession (Pasta un telegrafa departaments 1940, p. 308).

²⁴ See Yad Vashem witness testimony no. 68217 for biographical data on Abram Ragol. He was deported by the Soviets and died in Krasnoyarsk Krai, Siberia, in 1942.

from the initial design. While the general style was preserved, the cupola was omitted,²⁵ the western front was remodeled, and the fenestration received another treatment. Essentially, this was a fairly modest, stripped classicist building, constructed of timber, plastered and painted gray to imitate stone; the front porch was “rusticated.”²⁶ As built, the porch extended across the whole of the west front under a gently-sloping pitched roof. Beneath the corniced pediment that contained a small Shield of David roundel was a round-headed central doorway. Its arch had “voussoirs,” and a “keystone,” and the door was flanked by round columns which was reminiscent of Romanesque style. On either side of the arch, was a pair of ancillary doorways with flat, hooded lintels. The vestibule was lit by rectangular three-light, mullioned windows, but the prayer hall had a series of four round-headed windows on the side walls, a departure from the rectangular openings envisaged in the original design (cf. Figures 15 and 16). An interior view shows that the ark wall was punctuated by a pair of large round-headed windows, letting in lots of light (Figure 17). By a comparison of the architect’s drawing with the photographs of the synagogue as built, it is evident that the design evolved closer to the “Mediterranean” influences that we have noted at Majori. With respect to its massing, style, the composition of the west front, and modest detailing, Bulduri was influenced by the ancient synagogues of the Galilee (cf. Figure 16 with Figures 5, 6 and 8). In addition, the two columns of the doorway could be interpreted as representing the biblical bronze pillars Jachin and Boaz that flanked the entrance to Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7:14–22; 2 Chronicles 3:17), which, according to Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller’s prediction, would reappear in the Temple rebuilt during the messianic times (Heller 1602, paragraph 48; Kravtsov 2018, p. 133).

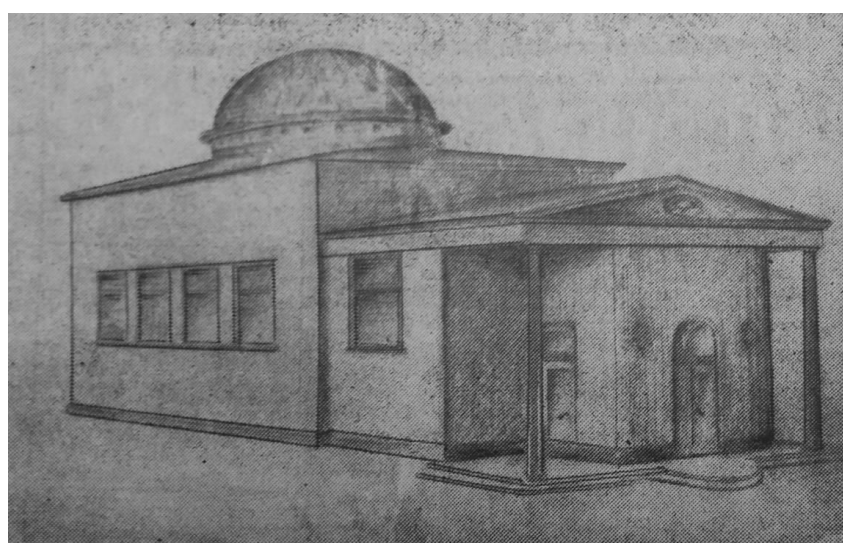


Figure 15. Design for a synagogue in Bulduri, perspective view by B. Klaviņš (*Segodnia vecherom* 1937).

²⁵ The information on the cupola, which was omitted on request of a Riga rabbi, was published by the late Meyer Meler (2015, p. 264). Meler did not mention any source of this information. It is possible that some roof superstructure is seen in a low-resolution photograph of the synagogue (Figure 16).

²⁶ The “rustication” is visible in the photograph (Figure 16) and was mentioned in the newspaper report (*Hajnt* 1938d). We deduce the fact that the Bulduri Synagogue was made of wood from the fact that it was burned down during the Second World War, on 21 July 1941 (Addison 1986, pp. 46–47; Meler 2015, pp. 265–68).

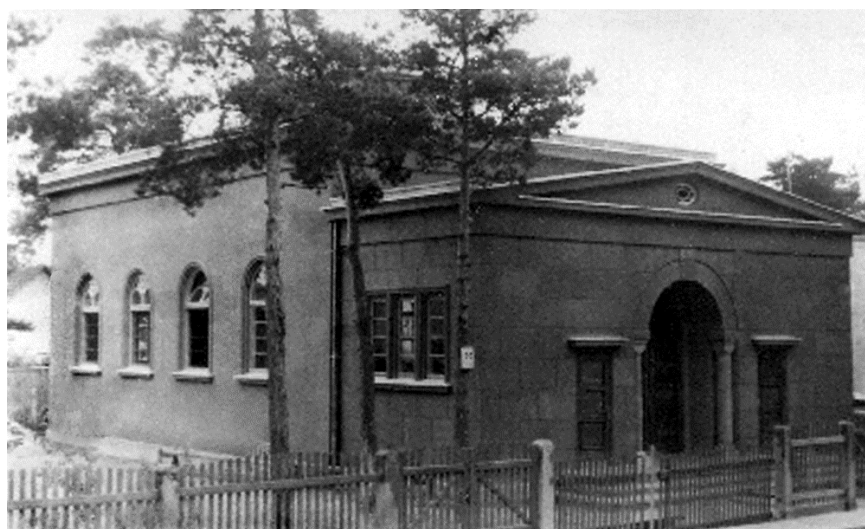


Figure 16. Bulduri Synagogue, Saldus Street, architect B. Kļaviņš, 1938. © Association “Shamir”. Used by permission.

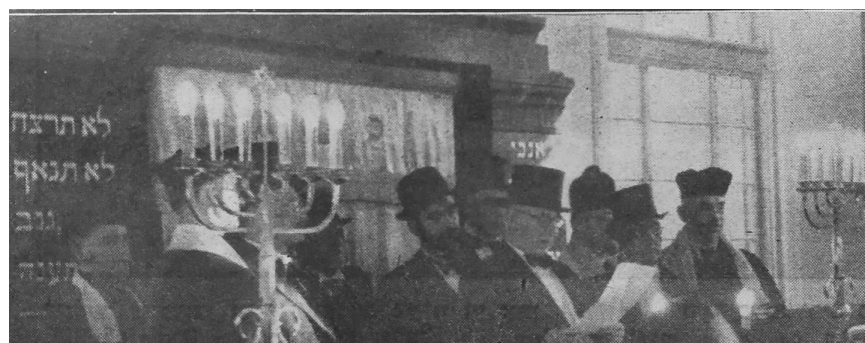


Figure 17. Inauguration of the Bulduri Synagogue, 14 August (Av 17) 1938. *Yiddishe bilder* 46 (18 November 1938).

The Hasidic Kloyz in Bauska

Bauska, known in Yiddish as Bausk or Boysk, is a town in the Zemgale region of Latvia, 66 kilometers south of Riga. In 1867, 1620 Jews lived in the town, comprising 39 percent of the population. A Hasidic congregation was first recorded in Bauska in 1856 (Levin 1988, p. 65). The existing building was located at 2 Azsargu Street (today 2 Kalna Street), next to the bridge across the Mēmele River. The “kloyz” occupied the site of a former synagogue that was destroyed in the flood of 1928 (Bogdanova 2004, pp. 30–31; Levin 1988, p. 67).

The brick kloyz was designed in 1931 by a “construction technician” from Bauska, whose signature is illegible, and his plans were approved by the authorities on 8 August that year (Figure 18).²⁷ According to the design, the kloyz had to be a single-story building with a lofty attic space. It featured a rectangular ground plan, supplied with two lateral projections on its eastern front facing the town’s main Kalna Street. The main entrance was planned at the center of the east front, and it was flanked by rectangular and round-headed windows. This layout was hardly suitable for the Jewish place of prayer; the entrance occupied that very place, where the Torah ark would have been located to ensure the proper direction of prayer. Moreover, the plans envisaged lavatories and upper floor apartments, elements barely thinkable in a Hasidic synagogue as inconsistent with demands of its ritual purity.

²⁷ LNA LVVA, 140-6343-16-62-5.

The kloyz had to be covered with a steep cross-gable roof of variously shaped gables on its different elevations, all reminiscent of a dwelling house, rather than a synagogue.



Figure 18. Design for the Hasidic Kloyz in Bauska by an unknown architect, 1931. LNA LVVA. Used by permission.

The design of 1931 was implemented by 1938 with noticeable alterations (Figure 19) and the author of the final rendition is unknown. A photograph of that period shows the central eastern gable lowered and simplified as compared with the design; other gables have been dropped, and the roof adopted a low hipped shape inappropriate for an inhabited attic space. Probably, the eastern doorway was blocked in order to place the Torah ark there. The east façade was decorated with a flat plaster frieze including a circular pattern and a round-headed shouldered framing of the central door. The overall style of the kloyz became stripped classicist. Its design features were reminiscent of the Galilean synagogues, of the central arched portals flanked by rectangular doors (as in synagogues in Kfar Baram, ed-Dikke, and Capernaum in Figure 2, Figure 6, and Figure 8, respectively) (Cohn-Wiener 1929, p. 81; Kohl and Watzinger 1916, p. 84), of their series of wreaths (as in Chorazin, Figure 20) (Cohn-Wiener 1929, p. 92), the central wreath within the arched hood above the doorway (as in Nabratein and Philadelphia, though without a menorah), as well as lintels overrunning the doorposts and producing so-called crossettes (as in large and small synagogues in Baram, and one in Meron).²⁸ In the Bauska rendition, these forms were greatly simplified and flattened, but still recognizable. The side projections of the façade probably alluded to the Mishnaic Temple, as did the pavilions on the western front of the Majori Synagogue. Sadly, the flat plaster decorative elements of the kloyz, which are depicted in the prewar photograph, did not survive (Figure 21).

²⁸ For definition of crossettes, see (Ware 1904, p. 17). For the portal of the small synagogue in Kfar Baram, see (Cohn-Wiener 1929, p. 85).



Figure 19. The Hasidic Kloyz in Bauska, ca. 1938. Museum “Jews in Latvia”. Used by permission.



Figure 20. Frieze from the synagogue in Chorazin. Reproduced from Ernst [Cohn-Wiener](#) (1929, p. 88).



Figure 21. The former Hasidic Kloyz in Bauska, view from the southeast. Photo by the author, 2007. CJA.

5. Conclusions

The forms and style of ancient Galilean synagogues were employed in the design of the Memorial Synagogue in Philadelphia for the first, but not for the last time. Due to the authoritative and richly illustrated German publications, the Galilean synagogues and their theoretical reconstructions became known to the architects and Jewish communities in Latvia, where their use in actual synagogue architecture surfaced only towards the late 1930s. The discussed examples of this phenomenon were the synagogues of Majori and Bulduri at the Riga seaside, built for the traditional congregations, and, in the case of Bauska, for Hasidim. These synagogues belonged to the Orthodox communities, rather than Reform congregations, who opted for the classicist style in the USA in the early twentieth century. The authors of these Latvian synagogues were the renowned Jewish architect Paul Mandelstamm, little known Latvian architect B. Kļaviņš, the Jewish contractor Abram Ragol, and unknown technician or architect in Bauska. Similar to the Memorial Synagogue, the discussed Latvian edifices bore assorted meanings. They combined architectural quotations from the Mishnaic Temple, which were charged with eschatological meanings, and shapes of the Galilean synagogues imbued with modern cultural significations. The eschatological connotations were reinforced by the traditional dates of the synagogues' inauguration following the Ninth of Av, the day when the destructions of the Temple are mourned. The usage of the style and shapes of the Galilean synagogues was meant to reinstate the historical bond of the Latvian Jews with the Land of Israel (the believably never-broken cultural thread traceable to the antiquity), and in the case of Mandelstamm served to identify him as a Jewish architect. Latvian synagogues were designed in the then-popular stripped classicism, a style that bridged the historical past and modernity, and thus they unobtrusively mentioned the Mediterranean cradle of the Jewish people as well as its pertinence to the modern world. This style ensured that the new synagogues fitted in with mainstream Latvian architecture. It expressed the mightiness of Latvian statehood and the congregations' identification with the nationalism of modern independent Latvia.

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