

Flourishing culture, persecution and integration

Jewish life in Esslingen before 1933



During the first half of the 13th century, Esslingen – a town near Stuttgart in southern Germany – became home to one of the most affluent Jewish communities in the region. It was here that the earliest recorded manuscript written by German Jews was completed in 1290: the “Esslinger Machsor”, a lavishly decorated prayer book. Another Machzor followed in 1293. The town’s first Jewish community was destroyed during the Black Death pogroms. In 1348, the Jewish residents of Esslingen were driven into the town’s synagogue and burned alive. From 1366 onwards, a second Jewish community was formed in Esslingen and lasted for about 100 years. The members of the last Jewish community until the 19th century lived in Esslingen from 1530 to 1542 and were limited to a single street, today known as the “Schmale Gasse”. They moved away due to more and more laws restricting their freedom. Finally, the council ordered the remaining Jewish families to leave the city in 1541/1542.

Prayer for the first day of Passover found in the Machzor of 1293

Source: Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Digitale Sammlungen



Theodor Rothschild, director of the orphanage “Wilhelmspflge”, among students and teachers.



A new Jewish community was established in Esslingen in 1806. Starting in 1819, a synagogue opened, and the teachers of Jewish religious studies in the state of Württemberg were trained at the local teacher’s college. The orphanage “Wilhelmspflge” emerged from an association supporting poor Jewish orphans and neglected children. Jewish companies such as Levi, a jewelry manufacturer, and Jeittelles, a factory for gloves, played a decisive role in industrializing the city.