



ein museum der **wien**holding

Our Medieval City! The First Jewish Community in Vienna

This extensive exhibition enables visitors to discover the Jewish Middle Ages and acquire new knowledge about Jewish life in Vienna. The show at Museum Judenplatz, which opened in 2021, is highlighting the latest research results on the Jewish Middle Ages using unexpected objects, new technologies and barrier-free access. The story of the establishment of Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust Memorial is also addressed in detail.

Important Jewish community in the Middle Ages

Vestiges of the first Jewish community in Vienna can be traced back to the time when Vienna became an important ducal city of the Babenbergs. Mentioned in 1194, Shlom the Mintmaster is the first documented Jew with residence in Vienna. At the beginning of the 13th century, Jewish women and men settled around today's Judenplatz, where they lived together and in close exchange with the Christian population for around 200 years. The Viennese Jewish community developed into one of the most important in medieval Europe, not least because of the numerous influential rabbis – among them Isaac ben Moses, known as Or Zarua. The community came to an abrupt end when Duke Albrecht V ordered the robbery, expulsion and murder of Viennese Jewish women and men in 1420/21.

Use of the latest research findings and technologies

Current archaeological and architectural history research, as well as the latest technologies, make both the excavation of the synagogue, which was destroyed in 1421, and the topography of the Jewish quarter experienceable. The exhibition provides insights into everyday life and explains the history of Judenplatz as an urban space. For centuries after 1421, the traces of Jewish life on this square hardly remained in the city's consciousness. The remnants of the synagogue were first discovered during the building of the memorial for the Austrian Jewish victims of the Shoah. After years of debate, these were made accessible in 2000 through the newly opened Museum Judenplatz.

Making the Middle Ages tangible

The permanent exhibition at Museum Judenplatz allows visitors to participate in the research and exhibiting process: Numerous stations are dedicated to the question of which sources, research methods and scientific disciplines can be used to approach the past. The focus on Jewish Vienna of the Middle Ages also sharpens our view of today's social context. As a place of the present, the museum enables the past to be experienced as something remote and yet surprisingly close at the same time.

Anna Artaker – VIENNA AUTOGRAPHS 1305–1380

The art installation VIENNA AUTOGRAPHS retraces the signatures of members of the first Jewish community in medieval Vienna. It bears witness to the high level of literacy within the medieval Jewish population. Whereas few members of the Christian majority society could read, let alone write, and instead used wax seals to authenticate documents, Jews were already commonly signing documents by hand themselves. Since reading from the Torah in the synagogue is part of the religious rite, it was common for Jewish boys—even back in the Middle Ages—to learn to read and write. As a result, we have the names of some inhabitants of the medieval Jewish quarter documented in their own handwriting. The installation recreates these signatures in light, thus momentarily bringing back to life these people who lived seven hundred years ago.

“Questions and answers”

For centuries, rabbis have been discussing about religious laws or everyday issues. In Judaism there is no central religious authority whose decisions would be binding, so to this day you get different answers to questions depending on which rabbi you talk to. An interactive station and game in the exhibition are dedicated to this topic, giving an impression of the common themes that occupied Jewish communities and their rabbis in the Middle Ages.

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The Museum Judenplatz (Judenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna) is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (wintertime), respectively 5 p.m. (summertime). The Jewish Museum Vienna at Dorotheergasse 11, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. More information at www.jmw.at or at info@jmw.at. Further information can be found at www.jmw.at or at info@jmw.at.

Queries

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Further photo and press material is available on the Jewish Museum Vienna website:

www.jmw.at/de/presse.



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