

Synagogues will be rebuilt on Net

Marcus Fairs

Synagogues destroyed by the Nazis are to be recreated on computer in a bid to preserve a record of a vanished cultural legacy and serve as a memorial to the Holocaust.

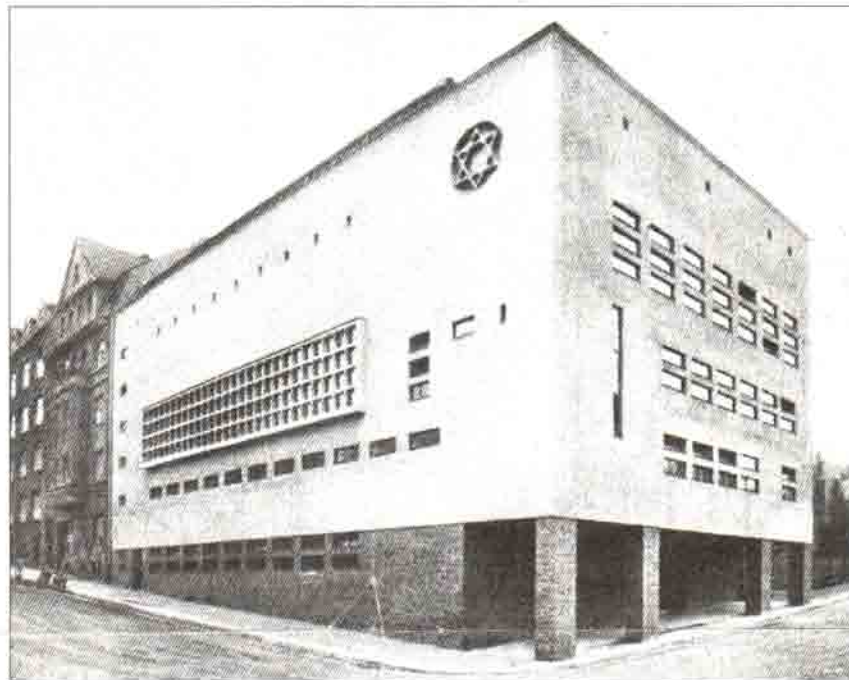
The project has been initiated to coincide with the 60th anniversary this November of Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass," in which over 1,000 synagogues in Germany, as well as countless Jewish-owned buildings, were destroyed by the Nazis, effectively marking the beginning of the Holocaust.

Forty students at the Technical University of Darmstadt near Frankfurt will work on the project, using cad software to create virtual 3D models of Germany's 15 most important vanished synagogues.

The buildings, complete with interiors and exteriors as well as maps and historical data, will then be made available on the Internet.

The Central Council of German Jews is backing the project. Council president Salomon Korn said: "The grandchildren are rebuilding virtually what their grandparents tried to destroy forever." He added: "What is important is that the Germans understand that they have destroyed not synagogues but buildings which are part of German culture: 90% of the synagogues were designed by German architects. They have destroyed part of their own history."

The physical rebuilding of the



A rare photograph of the synagogue at Plauen, designed by Bauhaus architect Fritz Landauer, which was destroyed by the Nazis in 1938. This and 14 other lost synagogues will be recreated on computers by architecture students at Darmstadt Technical University.

structures is neither possible nor desirable, said Korn. Germany's tiny surviving Jewish community has no need for large religious buildings; all new synagogues had to reflect today's situation and be contemporary in design, he said.

Among the buildings to be modelled is a synagogue built by Bauhaus architect Fritz Landauer at Plauen which was destroyed on November 9, 1938 – just eight years after it was completed.

Another is the 1840 synagogue at Dresden by Gottfried Semper, architect of the Dresden Opera, which was considered a masterpiece.

Very few photographs or plans of the buildings survive as the Nazis tried to erase completely all proof of their existence, and students will attempt to track down Holocaust survivors in order to learn about the buildings.

The idea is the brainchild of Manfred Koob, professor of architecture at Darmstadt Technical University.

"It's a chance for me, as a German, to take responsibility for what happened in the past without getting the feeling of guilt," he said.

In the wake of racial violence in Germany in 1994, during which neo-Nazis firebombed a

synagogue at Lübeck, Koob and his students worked on a pilot project, researching and modelling three lost Frankfurt synagogues, as a memorial against violence and to help overcome taboos about the Holocaust.

Now Koob is seeking funds to carry out the computer modelling of the 15 most important synagogues in the country. The department of culture and the city of Nuremberg have already pledged money.

However, Koob is refusing to accept money from Jews. "We do not want them to have to pay for what others destroyed," he said. "They have paid enough."