



TENTATIVE LIST SUBMISSION FORMAT



STATE PARTY: GERMANY

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**NAME OF PROPERTY: OLD SYNAGOGUE AND MIKVEH IN ERFURT – TESTIMONIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE, RELIGION AND TOWN HISTORY BETWEEN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY**

**State, Province or Region: Thuringia, Germany**

**Latitude and Longitude, or UTM coordinates: N 44 31 94, E 56 49 70**

**DESCRIPTION:**

**Justification of Outstanding Universal Value:**

In the largely intact Old Town of Erfurt, unique evidence of the important Jewish community from the late 11<sup>th</sup> to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century has been preserved: the Old Synagogue, one of the oldest, largest and best preserved medieval synagogues, its appendant mikveh and a secular building. The conserved buildings are complemented and enhanced by an unequalled abundance of original objects such as gravestones, manuscripts and the globally unique Erfurt Treasure. Together, they offer priceless clues to Jewish community and everyday life as well as to the coexistence of Jews and Christians in medieval cities. Nowhere else can so many exceptional and authentic testimonies be found gathered in one place to which they are also historically related. Erfurt is an outstanding example of the early heyday of Central European Jewish culture before it was brutally disrupted by the "Black Death" pogroms in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century.

**Criteria met:**

(i)	(ii)	(iii) ✓	(iv) ✓	(v)	(vi) ✓	(vii)	(viii)	(ix)	(x)
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*Criterion (iii): Unique testimony to the culture of Central European Jewry in the Middle Ages*

The Old Synagogue is the best preserved synagogue in Central Europe, its oldest parts dating back to the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is complemented by the medieval mikveh, the "Stone House" and singular authentic objects: The Hebrew Manuscripts from the Erfurt Jewish Community, the Erfurt Jewish Oath (dating back to late 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is the oldest preserved Jewish Oath in the German tongue), a Bronze Lamp, originating around the year 1160 (the oldest known example of its kind) as well as around 60 preserved tombstones from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century from the former Jewish cemetery. What is more, the "Erfurt Treasure", with a weight of nearly 30 kg the largest and one of the most important hoards of medieval Jewish property from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, offers inestimable insight on status, everyday life and trading relations of wealthy Jews as citizens of central European towns and cities. Together, they bear witness to an era when Jewish presence moulded European culture, economy and society. The knowledge it provides about the Jewish community between approx. 1200 and 1349 illuminates, in unrivalled detail, the status of medieval Jewish communities as part of urban society as well as the tense relations between Jews and Christians in everyday and religious life. Erfurt's Jewish heritage thus is a showcase of Jewish communities in Ashkenaz, the settlement area of Central European Jewry.

*Criterion (iv): Outstanding examples of medieval Jewish religious and secular architecture*

The Old Synagogue's quality and state of conservation are exceptional, especially in comparison to other preserved synagogues of a similar age. Its architectural history mirrors in a distinct manner the story of a Jewish community and its highly charged relations to its Christian surroundings. Beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish community increased and flourished until the riots and persecution, which culminated in its complete extinction during the pogrom of 21 March 1349. At the same time, general developments in Jewish sacred architecture between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century can be understood. Put into context with various Erfurt churches, different concepts of sacred spaces become apparent. Due to conversions and alterations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the synagogue housed a restaurant and a ballroom, its original design was hardly

recognizable for a long time. Hence, it was virtually unknown to general perception and thus remained intact during the Third Reich.

The mikveh belongs to the range of early medieval Jewish ritual baths in Europe. Its main construction phase is to be dated to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century; one older building phase is traceable. The building's shape is unusual and so far unequalled. Europe-wide, the so-called "Stone House" is one of the few remaining buildings from this era. Without doubt owned by Jews since 1293 at the latest, it features an original painted beam ceiling from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. It is thus an outstanding example of a medieval secular building from a Jewish context.

*Criterion (vi): Direct association with Judaism and its reception by its Christian surroundings*

The coexistence, incessant discourse and dispute between Jews and Christians have shaped and defined Europe over centuries. Erfurt's rise to scholarly and economic prosperity is a showcase of urban development in the Middle Ages. The contribution of Jewish communities to this age-long process is so far underestimated. Today, medieval Jewish rite, Jewish everyday life as well as Jewish-Christian coexistence are documented in Erfurt with a number of authentic testimonies unrivalled by any other known site worldwide. Yet the same testimonies also bear witness to conflict, persecution and expulsion of Jews in the Middle Ages which is inseparably linked to common memory. In this context, treatment of the Old Synagogue is also exemplary: Beginning with its conversion into a storehouse in the aftermath of the 1349 pogrom, its age-long oblivion until its recent rediscovery and its renewed life as a museum for the history of the Jewish community of medieval Erfurt. In this way Erfurt fulfils Germany's particular historical responsibility to commemorate the common cultural heritage of Judaism and Christianity in Europe and to honour the age-long defining contribution of Jewish citizens to scholarliness and prosperity and therefore to German and European culture and society.

### **Statements of authenticity and/or integrity:**

The Old Synagogue's architectural history reflects all building phases and its various uses from its time of construction up to subsequent conversions and latest changes to the building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of its original parts. Most parts of the building, however, date from the construction phases around 1250-1320 when it was used as a synagogue. After 1350, the synagogue was converted into a storehouse, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was used gastronomically. The traces of these later uses, too, were preserved during restoration, as they were deemed to be the reason the medieval structures survived. The Old Synagogue is enhanced in its impact and significance by a mikveh, excavated in 2007 in the immediate historic city centre as well as a medieval secular building, the "Stone House", in Jewish possession since the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and mostly unchanged since that time. In addition, there are singular authentic objects with an exceptional validity for Jewish culture in Central Europe, globally unique in their sheer plenty. The Jewish-medieval heritage of Erfurt as a whole stands out as an exceptional example of metropolitan and community culture in medieval Ashkenaz.

### **Comparison with other similar properties:**

From the range of few preserved Jewish ritual buildings from the Middle Ages, the Old Synagogue stands out as one of the oldest, largest and best preserved prayer rooms in Central Europe. Comparable buildings have either been destroyed and rebuilt or are preserved to a much lesser extent. Sites representing this early height of Jewish life in Central Europe are currently not listed as World Heritage. In addition to sites of biblical Judaism (Masada, Biblical Tels of Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheba) as well as sites serving as centres of the three world religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Jerusalem, Toledo, Saint Catherine Area), only the World heritage Site "Jewish Quarter and St Procopius' Basilica in Třebíč" (Czech Republic) relates to ashkenazic Jewry. It commemorates the coexistence of Jewish and Christian culture from the Middle Ages up to the 20th century. Medieval synagogues and mikvaot as testimonies of Jewish religion and culture are so far not listed as independent World Heritage. Even younger synagogues, which have been preserved slightly more often, are either not represented on the World Heritage List or merely so as part of a historic Old Town (Prague, Cracow, Bardejov). Owing to its size and quality, the Erfurt Mikveh can be classified as a monumental mikveh similarly to the well-known shaft mikvaot preserved for instance in Cologne, Speyer, Worms and Friedberg (Hesse). Unlike these, however, it represents an entirely different and so far singular type of medieval Jewish ritual bath. The "Stone House" with its original interior is unique throughout Europe. The recent Erfurt rediscoveries and intense scientific research they have triggered significantly broadened the existing knowledge of Jewish settlement and cultural history of the early and high Middle Ages. The abundance of authentic architectural heritage should be seen in context with the previous state of research chiefly based on written sources. On the other hand, material testimonies such as the Erfurt Hebrew Manuscripts have raised an entire set of new questions. In addressing these, further far-reaching insights on Jewish-European history can be expected over the forthcoming years.