

Appeal to Found a Jewish Library and Reading Room, Hamburg (1905)

Abstract

Modern Germany's vast network of libraries and readings rooms served a citizenship with the highest literacy rate in the world and attested to the centrality of reading in everyday German life. Germany's library culture, which grew out of the famous "reading societies" [*Lesegesellschaften*] of the late eighteenth century and gained further impetus under state authorities after the founding of the German Empire in 1871, attracted constituencies from across the social spectrum. These constituencies included Jews, who, by the Wilhelmine period, recognized their community's broad-based hunger for books and other printed matter but also appreciated the need to steer popular reading habits in preferred directions. Thus, members of the Jewish community in Hamburg appealed for the founding of a Jewish library and reading room, which would offer "healthy" books for education and entertainment to refresh the inner lives of patrons. By intentionally collecting works that demonstrated Jewish accomplishments past and present, the library would not only be a site of knowledge but also identity.

Source

HAMBURG, October 1905.

The idea of a public library, following the great examples of America and England, has become so widespread in Germany that establishing a **library** with a **reading room** accessible to the public requires no special justification. In every such case, the guiding objective is to improve the quality of the intellectual sustenance available to the most diverse population groups and to steer the constant need to read in the right direction. Everyone should find appealing and healthy nourishment with which to enliven and fortify themselves in the tiring struggle of life.

Besides institutions of a general nature, however, institutions that take special needs into account are also required. The Jewish segment of the public must be given the means to learn about the momentous Jewish ideas that have changed the world, of the thousands of years of history and peculiar destinies of its tribe, of the literary, scientific, and artistic achievements of the past and present that originated with Jews or were intended for Jewish circles.

A **Jewish library and reading room** should disseminate education [*Bildung*] and ideal enjoyment to the population in a manner **free from any bias or manipulation**. Several of the undersigned associations are already making their book collections available for this purpose, and the Jewish Community Center [*Israelitisches Gemeinschaftsheim*], as before, is also making its rooms available at Hartungstrasse 9. It is nevertheless necessary that the library be substantially improved and continually updated, that a large number of newspapers be laid out, and that some administrative costs be covered as well.

Therefore, the undersigned representatives request—not only in the special interest of the associations they represent but also on behalf of our entire Jewish public—that the institution named the **Jewish Reading Room** be most kindly supported through ongoing contributions.

To this end, you are politely requested to register by filling out and returning the attached form.

Jewish Community Center

Henry Jones Lodge, Independent Order of B'nai B'rith

Jewish-Humanitarian Women's Association

Jewish Youth League

Association for Jewish History and Literature

Society for Jewish Studies

Hamburg Zionist Union

Source: Aufruf zur Gründung einer jüdischen Bibliothek und Lesehalle, Hamburg, October 1905, published in: Hamburger Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte, <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:source-21.de.v1>. From the Staatsarchiv Hamburg; StAHH, 522-1 Jüdische Gemeinden, No. 887.

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