



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the ceremony to present the UNESCO World Heritage
Certificate for the ShUM Sites in Speyer, Worms and Mainz
on 1 February 2023
in Mainz**

It has now been verified and certified: the ShUM Sites in Speyer, Worms and Mainz form part of humanity's world heritage. This is a significant, a truly historic recognition. It is a pivotal moment for the Jewish communities here in the Upper Rhine Valley, for Jews in Germany and Israel, in Europe and around the world. It is a moving moment for the three cities, Rhineland-Palatinate and the entire country.

Before 27 July 2021, there were 49 World Heritage Sites in Germany, from the Roman city of Trier to the old Hanseatic cities of Stralsund and Wismar, from Aachen Cathedral to Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. The list reflected our country's diverse culture and landscapes, but there was also a major absence: Jewish cultural monuments were nowhere to be seen.

That changed on 27 July 2021. On that day, UNESCO designated the medieval Jewish buildings and cemeteries in Speyer, Worms and Mainz to be invaluable and irreplaceable properties of outstanding universal value, thus recognising Jewish cultural monuments in Germany as world heritage for the first time.

Ms Azoulay, I know that it was extremely important to you to present this special World Heritage Certificate in person. Unfortunately, that was not possible 18 months ago due to the pandemic. I am therefore all the more pleased that you have come from Paris to celebrate this recognition with us, here in the highly symbolic New Synagogue in Mainz. I would like to thank you for your words. And I would like to thank you for the inscription of the ShUM Sites in the World Cultural Heritage List. On behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany and everyone present today, allow me to express my sincere gratitude.

The inscription of the ShUM Sites in 2021 was the highlight of a wonderful year during which we celebrated 1700 years of Jewish life in Germany. Back then, hundreds of thousands of people had an opportunity in countless locations to learn about the active role played by Jews in forging German history, how they helped elevate our country's culture to great heights and how Jewish life – in all its diversity – is again enriching our society today.

At the same time, we became aware once more during that anniversary year of the magnitude of the threat Jewish life has always faced in our country and that its presence in our country certainly cannot be taken for granted even today. For hundreds of years, Jews were regarded as aliens – as different – in Germany. Time and again, they were humiliated, marginalised, denied their rights, persecuted and murdered – and that was before the National Socialists and their willing enforcers almost completely exterminated Jewish life in Germany and Europe.

The ensemble of ShUM Sites reminds us more than almost anywhere else how close together light and shadow are. The unique concentration of monuments and gravestones in Speyer, Worms and Mainz testify to the deep roots of Jews in our country, to the blossoming of their culture, to their self-assertion and emancipation, to times of peaceful co-existence with the Christian majority. But not just that. They also testify to antisemitism and a hatred of Jews, to destruction and persecution and ultimately to the Shoah, that betrayal of all civilised values. And they testify to the great courage to make a fresh start which Jews in Germany showed time and again despite all the setbacks and disappointments, all the pain and all the suffering.

This morning, I gained a first impression of how much there is to discover and rediscover here in your cities. In Worms, I walked through the Holy Sand, the oldest remaining Jewish cemetery in Europe and placed a stone on the grave of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. Just as Martin Buber once did, I looked beyond the gravestones to the cathedral and realised with amazement that Worms was both during the Middle Ages: diocesan town and "Jerusalem on the Rhine".

I also had an opportunity to visit Worms synagogue, which has been damaged and restored so many times since the Middle Ages. And in the cellar of Rashi House, I was able to admire the centuries-old west wall of the former community centre. What wonderful examples of Jewish life in Germany! I am immensely grateful that so much has survived over the centuries.

The buildings, wall remnants and gravestones of the ShUM Sites tell the fascinating history of three Jewish communities which came together to form a union in the twelfth century, created a joint legal system, designed a new architectural style – and became the centre of Jewish life in Europe.

They tell the story of distinguished rabbis and scholars such as Shlomo ben Yitzhak and Gershom ben Yehuda, the "Light of the Exile", who all lived and worked in Speyer, Worms or Mainz at that time and were revered far beyond this region. Jewish communities all around Central and Eastern Europe abided by their customs and life rules, rules which were drawn up here. Their liturgical texts, works of religious poetry, as well as their interpretations of the Torah and the Talmud, are present to this very day in the collective Jewish memory.

The ShUM Sites bear witness to educated women who were already highly respected members of the community in the Middle Ages, who had their own room to pray and worked as scribes, merchants or even cantors.

They testify to Jewish and Christian inhabitants of the three cathedral towns living alongside each other in harmony, to their diverse daily contacts and business relations, to exchanges and ever closer ties.

However, the ShUM Sites also bear witness to the dark sides of this history. Time and again, Jews were persecuted in Speyer, Mainz and Worms, their districts devastated, their communities destroyed. The plague pogroms in the mid-14th century brought the golden age of ShUM culture to an end. And this place here, where the old Mainz synagogue once stood, reminds us of the Kristallnacht pogroms of 1938, when the synagogues in all three cities were set on fire. Many Jewish citizens from Speyer, Worms and Mainz emigrated during the National Socialist period. Almost all of those who remained were deported and murdered.

That Jews would ever live in Germany again following the Shoah, that crime against humanity, was inconceivable in the post-war period, and not only to the great Leo Baeck. But history took a different turn and "the epoch of the Jews in Germany" was not "over once and for all": Jewish life returned. What a wonderful gift for our country!

The history of ShUM reminds us how difficult the return of the survivors was and that it definitely could not be taken for granted. Few Jews returned after their liberation from camps, ghettos and hiding places to their home cities in the Upper Rhine Valley. And they often led lives with packed suitcases at the ready because they could not rid themselves of the feeling that they were not safe. Earlier today in Worms, I heard that the synagogue there was rebuilt and officially opened in 1961 before there was a sufficient number of Jews to re-establish a community.

It took many decades until the Jewish communities in the ShUM cities found a new lease of life, partly thanks to the Jews who came to Germany from the states of the former Soviet Union from the 1990s onwards. Today, Jews in Speyer, Worms and Mainz, as well as in many places around our country, are going about their everyday lives, in

kindergartens and schools, in synagogues, community centres and rabbinical seminaries. Jewish life in Germany is more diverse, vibrant, creative and vigorous than it has been for a long time. We are all profoundly grateful for that and it fills me with great joy!

However, we also know that Jewish life in Germany is still under threat. Or, to be more precise, it is once more under greater threat. Antisemitism is displayed much more openly again today, in streets and squares, in school playgrounds, in so-called walks and most especially online. Jews are being vilified, insulted, threatened and even attacked.

That is infinitely painful. It is unbearable. And it cannot be tolerated. There can be no room in our country for hostility towards Jews – irrespective of where it rears its ugly head, how it is expressed or by whom. Our constitutional state must prosecute antisemitic crimes with the full force of the law. All of us, the citizens of this country, must resolutely stand up against all forms of antisemitism. And all of us in government and the administration, in politics and society must work together to ensure that Jews feel completely at home in Germany. No line can be drawn under our responsibility. That is the lesson we have learned from our history, as the ShUM cities demonstrate to us very forcefully.

I firmly believe that to protect Jewish life in the present and the future we have to keep alive the remembrance of its history. And we have to focus on ruptures and contradictions, bright and dark sides. We must never slacken our efforts to preserve the remembrance of the Shoah. We need vibrant places of remembrance to make understood, particularly to young people, what happened back then and how it could happen. And we also need places to provide education and information where we can make the history of Jewish life tangible. Places where knowledge and appreciation, tolerance and respect can grow.

The ShUM Sites are such places. For that reason, too, it is very fortunate that they exist. And that is why it is so important that they are now world heritage. The designation shines a spotlight on Jewish monuments and gravestones. It renders them visible far beyond Speyer, Worms and Mainz. I hope that the ShUM Sites become an integral part of our map of remembrance. And I hope that they attract even more people – people from around the world, from all religious communities, believers and non-believers. I think the rabbis of former times would have liked to see ShUM as a meeting place, as a living symbol of peaceful co-existence!

World heritage brings with it an obligation and Jewish world heritage places us in Germany under a particular obligation. That applies to the Federal Government and the Länder, to the three cities and to society as a whole. Today, I particularly want to thank the people who have been working tirelessly for the ShUM Sites here in the region and in Rhineland-Palatinate for many years: all the men and women who

look after the walls and gravestones and, above all, prevent decay; those who examine the ancient sources time and again in order to uncover more about the medieval communities; those who pass on knowledge in an engaging way and get young people interested in the history of Jewish life; those in Rhineland-Palatinate and in the three cities, in the Jewish communities and at the universities who have helped to get the ShUM communities inscribed on the World Heritage List.

That the two of us will be presenting this Certificate to the Minister-President in a moment is also due to the efforts of all of you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much to you all!

The ShUM Sites are a symbol of Jewish life in Germany. Ancient walls, slanting gravestones, weathered inscriptions, a patina of moss and lichen: all of this brings home to us that Judaism has deep roots in Germany. It has a firm place in our country. And not least this place, the New Synagogue in Mainz, serves as an impressive reminder of how Jewish life is growing, thriving and flourishing again today. Let us protect and preserve it!