

Press release

Official launch of the European Day of Jewish Culture 2022: Sefer Torah returns to Schirmeck after 77 years



Synagogue of Schirmeck. Photo by Ralph Hammann – Wikimedia

Schirmeck - Sunday 4 September 2022. The kick-off of the European Days of Jewish Culture, whose central theme is Renewal, takes place in Schirmeck, Alsace, France, on Sunday 4 September at 11am.

As has been customary for more than 20 years, **the European Days of Jewish Culture 2022 will take place in early September.** A pan-european Festival where the Jewish heritage is opened to the general public, with the aim of promoting dialogue, recognition and exchange.

The European Days of Jewish Culture takes place each year in **more than two dozen countries across the continent**, and has become **Europe's most successful cross-border Jewish cultural initiative.** The Festival is coordinated by the [AEPJ](#), through a large network of institutions dedicated to Jewish heritage and culture. It also has a partnership with the [National Library of Israel](#), which plays an active role in making available to the coordinators a wide range of archival materials and educational resources.

Aimed mainly at local attendees, it seeks to educate about the role of Jewish heritage, culture, and history in local, regional, and Europe-wide context, among other things in order to demystify the Jewish world and promote understanding. Since its first edition more than two decades ago, the Day has evolved into “Days” of Jewish cultural and heritage activities that in some countries take place before and after the official date.

Why in Schirmeck?

In a historical act, the Sefer Torah of this small town will return to the synagogue after **an extraordinary epic journey**, which began with a story of friendship between two young neighbours in Schirmeck, one Jewish and one Christian. When the war came, the two friends were separated. The young Jew did not survive the war, and his friend, Ernest Bohn, was wounded. Seeing how the Nazi troops continually desecrated the synagogue, turning it into a herd of pigs, he decided to rescue the Sefer Torah, which he had had the opportunity to see at his friend's bar mitzvah. He hid it throughout the 1939-45 war.

The city was liberated on 25 November 1944 by the 3rd Infantry Division of the American Army. In January 1945, Ernest Bohn had the opportunity to hand over his treasure to Isaac Rouche, a Jewish chaplain from Algeria who had served in the French army. This chaplain had joined the soldiers of the French Resistance in Morocco under the command of General Leclerc. He was part of the Allied troops of the Liberation of Schirmeck. Since then, Isaac Rouche has carried this Sefer Torah wherever his destiny took him, from Morocco to Switzerland then to Israel.

It was through Isaac Rouche's son-in-law, Mr. Assouline, who lives in Jerusalem and member of the Bnai Brith Association, that the contact was resumed with the Jewish community of Strasbourg, leading, in the end, to the return of the return of the Torah, 77 years later.

The ceremony, organised by Laurent BERTRAND, Mayor of Schirmeck, and Jacques RUCH, President of the Association of Friends of the Schirmeck-La Broque Synagogue, will take at the Schirmeck synagogue with the presence of the relatives of Ernest Bohn, the rescuer of the Sefer Torah, Mr. Assouline, son-in-law of Chaplain Isaac Rouche, and those who made his return to Schirmeck possible.

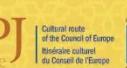
Local, national and international authorities will also be present, including Harold Weill, Chief Rabbi of the Bas-Rhin; Bjørn Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe; the US Consul General, Darragh Paradiso; Catherine Trautmann, former Mayor of Strasbourg and former Minister of Culture of France, and François Moyse, president of the AEPJ.

The European Days of Jewish Culture Kick-off

September 4th, 2022
Schirmeck, Alsace, France

• SAVE THE DATE •




הטכנייה הלאומית של ישראל
المكتبة الوطنية الإسرائيليّة
The National Library of Israel

About the AEPJ

The European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ), an NGO created in 2004, is a network of European institutions, including public bodies, private foundations, federations of Jewish communities and NGO's, that serves as a platform to develop cultural initiatives and educational programs to European Jewish sites. The AEPJ network acts as a channel for intercultural dialogue and promoting better knowledge and understanding of European history, creating awareness of cultural diversity and strengthening European citizens' cultural identity.

The AEPJ serves as an organisational umbrella to welcome, promote, train and help develop unique Jewish cultural and heritage projects of excellence around Europe. A community, a network and a meeting point of professionals working in the field of Jewish Heritage. The AEPJ helps organisations develop their programs, offers training in the field of Jewish cultural tourism and exchange of good practices and promotes the development of transnational programs.

With a heritage approach in line with the Council of Europe, with its integrated and cross-disciplinary approach to cultural heritage and diversity, the AEPJ promotes fundamental European values of human rights, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue seeking to bring the Jewish heritage closer to all European citizens, involving them in the production, circulation and conservation of Jewish culture and heritage

Ceremony program

- 1/ At the head of the procession will be Mr Assouline, son-in-law of Chaplain Rouche who will carry the torah, with the Consulate General of the United States.
- 2/ Arriving in front of the synagogue, the band will start the three hymns: Israeli, French and American.
- 3/ Mr Assouline gives the torah to Mr Bohn's family accompanied by the Mayor of Schirmeck, Laurent Bertrand.
- 4/ The guests enter and take their places in the synagogue; First song by Nico (Matovo)
- 5/ Once everyone is settled, the members of the association pass the torah to each other and Jacques Ruch is the last to place it on the bimah; second song by Nico (Baruch abba)
- 6/ Speeches: Laurent Bertrand, mayor of Schirmeck; Jacques Ruch, president of the Association of the friends of the synagogue of Schirmeck; M. Assouline and François Moyse, President of the AEPJ
- 7/ Jacques Bouhadana opens the Aron - third song by Nico (Evenou Shalom alechem) and Chief Rabbi Harold Weill, accompanied by the descendant of Camille Simonin (Pierre Michel Simonin) and by Manon Weizmann (descendant of Fernand Bloch) places the torah in the Aron
- 8/ Speech by the Chief Rabbi and last word from the master of ceremonies to invite everyone to the village hall for the continuation of the festivities; fourth song by Nico (Inematov)
- 9/ Exit to the village hall: speeches and drinks

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