

Berlin

When compared to other great European cities such as Vienna, Paris, or London, Berlin's founding as well as its growth into a major European city must be considered atypical. Relative to the Roman founding of Vienna, Paris and London, the birth of Berlin and its sister Cölln – one to the west, the other to the east of the river Spree – was, at the turn of the 13th century, quite late. Developing from way-stations for travelling merchants into market towns, and eventually to medieval towns with a joint area of roughly 70 hectares, Berlin-Cölln remained unimportant on the European scene for a long time to come.

For 460 years after its founding, unified as a single settlement in 1307, the town did not grow past the stone walls which were erected in the middle of the 13th century.

The first real expansion the settlement experienced came 14 years after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which put an end to thirty years' terrible religious violence which had taken the lives of half the population of the Berlin, numbering at this point 12,000.

In 1662 the new Electoral town of Friedrichswerder was established to the west of the town, and, as if a curse had been lifted, further expansions rapidly followed. Only twelve years later Dorotheenstadt was founded, and fourteen years later the Friedrichstadt in 1688, which forms the centre of today's Gendarmenmarkt.

The western outskirts were once more altered in 1732-35, with the construction of three Baroque squares – the southern circle, now Mehringplatz; the octagon at the western end of Leipziger Strasse, now Leipziger Platz; and the square which was built at the end of Unter den Linden, the Pariser Platz at the Brandenburg gate. These three squares provided a temporary end to the town's development.

The five small towns which were united under the name Berlin in 1709 were bound within a so-called excise wall during the years 1732-35, together with the outlying areas to the north, south and east. This excise wall was established for the purposes of gathering sales taxes and preventing desertions. For a further 120 years this enclosed area formed the Prussian capital, with 18 town gates and two tax barriers over the river Spree (see *Map A*).

In 1861 the town areas further expanded to include more outlying areas, including the Elector's former hunting territory, the Tiergarten; but it was only in 1920, following the First World War and at the beginning of the founding of the Republic, that laws were made to incorporate 8 small towns, 59 rural settlements and 27 large farms within the new Greater Berlin, which was, with an area of 878 square kilometres, roughly eight times the size of Paris (see *Map B*).

1. Gendarmenmarkt (U-Bahn station Stadtmitte)

Following the founding of Friedrichstadt in 1688, which had been planned and built as an orthogonal grid, an Electoral decree determined that five, and later three, of the squares in the eastern district were to be left undeveloped. These were to be used from around the year 1700 as the sites of official buildings.

From 1701, two small churches were built in the outer squares; the southern one a German church, and the northern for those Huguenots who had fled France and been received following the Edict of Potsdam in 1685. Many of these Huguenots settled in Friedrichstadt.

The district was known up to the early 19th century as the *Friedrichstädtischer Markt*. The later name Gendarmenmarkt has its origins in the stables of the Régiment Gen d'armes, which was erected in the 18th century. This name was only applied to the central square, the surrounding streets all having their own proper names.

When approaching the monument to Friedrich von Schiller at the centre of the Gendarmenmarkt, one is confronted by three monumental structures which, together with the usually three-storied Baroque peripheral constructions from the founding days, earned this square the reputation of being one of the most beautiful in Berlin.

At Charlottenstrasse 56, the site of the modern Hotel Regent, can be found the restaurant and wine merchants "Lutter & Wegener". This famed establishment was, until its destruction in the Second World War, located in the cellar of Charlottenstrasse 49, and was renowned for its regular guests - these included, among other, the judge, poet, author, composer and painter E.T.A. Hoffmann, who also resided at Charlottenstrasse 56; the then-famous actor Ludwig Devrient; the playwright Christian Dietrich Grabbe, who had created with "Napoleon, or, the Hundred Days" the most populous play in German literature; the poet Heinrich Heine; and the political satirist Adolf Glaßbrenner.

Only a few houses further on, at the corner of Charlottenstrasse and Jägerstrasse 57 (currently an antiquarian bookseller), is the site of the Café Stehely. This café was opened in 1820, and became, among a certain clientele, one of the most famous in Berlin. Theodore Fontane wrote, in his autobiographical "From Twenty to Thirty", that leaving the café always gave him a feeling of "*having been for an hour in some sacred place*". This kind of reading/coffee house was of great importance for the intellectual scene in *Vormärz* Berlin (the era between the Viennese Congress of 1815 and the March Revolution of 1848, marked by liberalisation and political unrest), dominated as this period was by censorship and the persecution of demagogues, as it provided a distribution point for progressive political journals and newspapers from outside Prussia.

The legendary *Red Room* was host to meetings between, among others, Heinrich Heine and Gottfried Keller, as well as Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.

Walking clockwise around the Gendarmenmarkt from this point will bring the visitor to Französische Strasse; taking up almost the entire northern length is the façade of the Berlin *Handelsgesellschaft* (Trading Company), built by Alfred Messel in 1890. Turning right from here into Markgrafenstrasse, one reaches the corner to Jägerstrasse. It is precisely here that Sören Kierkegaard stayed, having just completed his doctorate. He came to Berlin for two years at the age of 28 to attend the philosopher Schelling, on whose lectures he later gave this crushing judgement: "*Schelling blathers on unbearably... I am too old to listen to lectures, as Schelling is too old to be giving them. His entire teaching on potency displays the crassest impotence.*"

Two houses further along Jägerstrasse is house number 54, in the attic of which Rahel Varnhagen von Ense held her famous salon for, as the plaque on the house now reads, "*people of all stations and confessions*". This previously Baroque house was home to the salon from 1793.

Construction began in 1780 on two 71 metre tall domed towers, commissioned by Friedrich the Great, and designed by Carl von Gontard. These towers were to be erected in front of the small church and to heighten the distinctive aura of the square. The small church is still visible today, secreted away behind the two monumental structures. Within the antechamber of the northern, French tower, one finds an embossed panel illustrating the arrival of the refugees from France and their reception by the Elector. In the middle quarter, framed as it were by the two domed towers, there stood a French playhouse, built in 1776, for performances by the French court players. This was replaced at the turn of the 19th century – that being the era of the gradual development of German national theatre - by a theatre house designed by the builder of the Brandenburg gate, Carl Gotthard Langhans. On the occasion of a fire which destroyed this building only 17 years after its inauguration, E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose apartment was opposite in Charlottenstrasse 56, wrote in a letter to his friend Wagner; "*I could tell you of the immediate danger in which I found myself, the theatre being in flames a mere 15 to 20 paces from my own house, and the roof of my apartment being itself already ablaze...*" Shortly thereafter, the influential architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, whose works were of great significance for Berlin in this period, provided the design for a grand theatre house which was constructed using remains of the previous building, and the external form of which survives to this day as the home of the Berlin *Konzerthaus*.

Almost the entire, originally Baroque, development on the edges of the square fell victim to the architectural-speculative re-orientation toward new building developments which arose between the founding years of the Empire in Versailles and the early years of the 20th century, and which had its roots in the Imperial aspirations of the would-be world metropolis. The new buildings from this Wilhelmian era were themselves largely destroyed in the bombardments of the years 1943-45, or in the last weeks of the war. It was only in the 1970s that the GDR government decreed that the square should be restored. The modern appearance of the square is then in no way to be compared to what was originally there; this must be imagined.

In the later 1970s it was decided that the three historical monumental structures would be rebuilt, and the buildings surrounding the square would be either restored, or rebuilt using modern methods. The completion of this task was to take longer than the GDR existed, and was continued following the re-unification of the city. What can now be seen is an amalgamation of the styles of six different epochs, beginning with:

1. the small church behind the dome towers, built around 1700, followed by
2. the domed structures, completed around 1780,
3. the playhouse, from the age of Classicism,
4. a few structural remains from the time of the redesigning of the square around 1900 (Charlottenstrasse 55-65, Markgrafenstrasse 40-41, as well as the broad bank building along Französischer Strasse),
5. several residential buildings (Markgrafenstrasse 39-41, Charlottenstrasse 50-54) and the Hotel on the south side, from the GDR era, and, finally,
6. the gap-fillers in Markgrafenstrasse 34-36, Französischer Strasse 40, from the time of re-unification.

In the long-vanished house opposite, the previous number 22, Alexander Humboldt was born in 1769 – again, a plaque draws attention to this.

Jägerstrasse was from an early time of great importance to Berlin banking – it could be said that it was its nucleus.

At the eastern end of the street there once stood the Electoral *Hofjägererei* (court hunting building), in which the *Königliche Giro- und Lehnbank* (Royal Giro and Loans Bank) was based since 1765, which became in 1875 the *Deutsche Reichsbank* (German Imperial Bank).

In 1772 the so-called *Preussische Seehandlung* (Prussian Sea-Trading Company) was established at the southern corner of Markgrafenstrasse and Jägerstrasse; this became the *Preussische Staatsbank* (State Bank of Prussia). In the building erected here in 1901

can now be found, since the GDR era, the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Scientific Academy).

The descendants of the poor Talmudic student, and later businessman and philosopher of the Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn, who came to Berlin from Dessau in 1743, founded a private bank in 1795. In 1815 this bank moved its premises to Jägerstrasse 51. The bank's business was going so well in the years following the wars against the Napoleonic occupation, that the family were able to purchase four further residential and commercial houses in the same street. To this day, the magnificent palatial building (house number 49/50) bears witness to this success.

The last stage of this tour of the Gendarmenmarkt along the Markgrafenstrasse towards the German dome brings one to the houses Markgrafenstrasse 34 to 36. These distinctive buildings with their staggered roofs, extending two stories above the eaves, are typical of the building developments conducted here in the era after the end of the division of the city. What is of interest here is that in the yard of number 35, in 1885, Oscar von Miller and Emil Rathenau established Germany's very first public power station.

Other than most major European cities, Berlin has always shed its skin; the history of the city, the documentation of its changes and developments, has been replaced, and not added upon. The city has always wanted to be modern, and still does so to the present day; it is this which gives the city its only marginally European character.

2. Paths through the Spandauer Vorstadt (U-Bahn station Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz)

Among those suburbs which grew up around medieval Berlin and which were enclosed by the excise wall in the 1730s, the *Spandauer Vorstadt*, named for the direction of the arterial road towards the 18 kilometre distant town of Spandau, was surely the biggest and the most distinctive.

Two decisions which were made in 1672 were to be of immense importance for Jewish life in this city district.

The one was of immediate concern to the Jewish citizens of Berlin. They were for the first time granted their own cemetery, in a field at a certain distance from the Spandauer Tor, now Grosse Hamburger Strasse 26.

The other decision, which was to only have a direct effect on Jewish life in Berlin at a later date, was a decree by the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm to prevent fires in the city. Farm labourers and other workers dealing with highly flammable materials were assigned an area outside the town gates, to the north-east of Berlin, where they were to store straw, hay and other inflammable materials. This was the site of today's Rosa-

Luxemburg-Platz. The area was known as the *Scheunefeld* (barn field). Between the 27 original barns there ran 6 alleys which later, in the 19th century, as hay and straw lost their relevance in industrialized urban areas, became poorly developed streets. This became the *Scheunenviertel* (barn district), a district which was increasingly home to the poorest of the poor. And this district, known by the Berlin bourgeoisie as the city's *Abstellkammer* (broom closet), soon became the most sleazy and sordid milieu in the Prussian royal seat, populated by crooks and prostitutes, and those who had fallen through the social nets of an industrialised city. Nowhere is this more precisely and impressively described than in the restless and hopeless career of Franz Biberkopf in Döblin's 'Berlin, Alexanderplatz'.

The demolition of the *Scheunenviertel* began in 1900.

Construction was begun in 1914 of the *Volksbühne* theatre (the 'people's stage'), in which at first Max Reinhardt could produce his classics of German drama. During the 1920s the stage of the *Volksbühne* was mostly used for the political pieces under the direction of Erwin Piscator, Jürgen Fehling and others. The theatre occupied almost exactly the site where the barns had once stood. The previous inhabitants of the district found new accommodation in the *petit bourgeois*-proletarian, and no less poor, neighbouring streets to the west of the *Scheunenviertel*. They took their lifestyles as well as the name *Scheunenviertel* with them.

This district's reputation did not greatly differ from that of the newly-renovated area. And it is in precisely this district that many Jewish immigrants, fleeing the pogroms in Russia, Poland and Galician from the 1880s to the early years of the 20th century, could find affordable accommodation, as in the old *Scheunenviertel*. This was quite often viewed as a stop-over on the way to America.

Leaving Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz along Hirtenstrasse, one reaches after a few metres Almstadtstrasse, named after the publisher and resistance-fighter Bernhard Almstadt, who was executed by the Nazis in 1944. This has been since the early 20th century the most Jewish street of the district. Roughly a third of the population of this small street were Jewish. Its name, before the war, was Grenadierstrasse, after the nearby barracks of the Third Artillery Regiment in the 18th century. Eike Geisel writes, in his impressive book "*Im Scheunenviertel*", published in 1981; "The Eastern Jewish immigrants have their centre in this one street, which, as familiar as Kolomea or Przemysl, contains everything which the Eastern Jew requires, coming from the Stetl to the city, that the initial blow of strangeness be softened – this is the Grenadierstrasse. On both sides of the street are a multitude of businesses in cellars and shops, bakers and shoemakers, many booksellers and butchers, tailors, both Christian and Jewish handcrafts, a questionable ladies' public house, kosher dining establishments, hairdressers; dives

which present themselves as hotels for passers-through and newcomers, grocers, and, finally, a lively street trade in fruit and vegetables, which has long been known in the streets and lanes of the district without Jewish atmosphere.”

There are reports of small Torah schools, prayer rooms and synagogues in Grenadierstrasse which had no buildings of their own, but which were instead found on single floors of the houses or in their yards.

Following the pogroms in Kischinew, Homel, Odessa and many other places, this street became a kind of magnet for the poverty-stricken Jewish immigrants.

Today, when one walks along Almstadtstrasse, it is hard to imagine the truth of what one knows. Nothing remains of what once characterized this street – no booksellers, no cellar stores, no pubs, no prayer rooms; not a single Hebraic letter can be seen. The barbaric destruction of the Nazi state has removed all traces, erasing all evidence of the history of the street as if it had never been.

Walking in a southerly direction from here one comes to an intrusive neon sign. Nothing is there to remind the visitor that, on the site of this pharmacy, Berlin’s first cinema was opened in 1899, the *Biograph-Theater*.

Moving on along the Münzstrasse, the visitor can hardly know that this was once a thriving centre of street prostitution, and that the street was once busy with crooks and lined with underworld dives.

House number 22 of Max-Beer-Strasse, previously Dragonerstrasse, which runs parallel to Almstadtstrasse, was the site of the Jewish *Volksheim* (people’s home), which was founded by western Jewish intellectuals who wished to rediscover the true roots of Judaism through study of eastern Jews. To this group belonged, among others, Gustav Landauer, Max Brod, Marni Buber, and the young Felice Bauer – Franz Kafka’s fiancée. Turning left at the crossing of Münzstrasse and Schönhauser Strasse, we find on the left-hand side house number 13. This well-preserved building from 1891 was formerly the *Volkskaffeehaus*, which was a coffee house and restaurant for the less well-off, with separate rooms for men and women as a preventative measure against the risk of prostitution.

In the next street, Rosenthaler Strasse, on the opposite side of the street, there is a plaque on house number 38 indicating that the Central Committee of the KPD (German Communist Party), founded in 1918/19, resided here from 1921 to 1926.

An inlaid sign on the ground in the entrance to the neighbouring house number 39 is in remembrance of Otto Weidt, who ran a workshop for the blind in the side wing of the house, in which he also employed blind Jews and concealed them to protect them from deportation. One of the two survivors of those he rescued is Inge Deutschkron.

At the entrances to both this house and its neighbour, number 40/41, there can be found small bronze *Stolpersteine* (‘stumbling stones’), little raised plaques containing

information on victims of the Nazis who had lived here. These plaques were made by the artist Gunter Demnig.

After entering the neighbouring house, Rosenthaler Strasse 40/41, one finds oneself in the first of eight trade and residential yards, the so-called *Hackesche Höfe*, a great combined trade yard association which was built in 1906. Leaving the yards in the direction of the 18th century Sophienstrasse, and turning left into this street, one finds on the left hand side house number 18, the home of the *Handwerkervereinshaus* (tradesman's guild house). A plaque at the entrance tells of early meetings of the *Spartakusbund* as well as of the founding, in 1928, of the Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors.

Following this street to the end, and turning left into Grosse Hamburger Strasse, one can see on the other side of the street the great neo-Gothic hospital of the Catholic *St. Hedwigsgemeinde*; and further along, on the left, and almost hidden in the background, the Baroque, Protestant *Sophienkirche*, untouched by the bombardments. This building has a plaque commemorating the poet Karl Wilhelm Ramler and the "German Sappho" Anna Luise Karsch. The churchyard contains the graves of Leopold von Ranke and Goethe's friend Karl Friedrich Zelter, director of the Berlin *Singakademie*.

At the back of house number 15/16 there can be seen an installation by the artist Christian Boltanski, who had spent a great deal of time researching in order to be able to display on a neighbouring house wall the names and occupations of all residents of the missing house, which had been destroyed in the Second World War.

House number 26 is a place of horror; formerly a Jewish old people's home, this house was abused by the Gestapo as a collection point for 55,000 Jewish victims who were to be transported to the extermination camps. A commemorative stone, as well as a disturbing sculpture by Will and Mark Lammert, have borne witness to this since 1984. A single commemorative stone to the rear of the property, the site of Berlin's first Jewish cemetery mentioned above, is in memorial to the self-taught philosopher of the Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn.

Turning right from Grosse Hamburger Strasse into Oranienburger Strasse, and following the curve of the street to the left, we cross the street and, to the left of Monbijouplatz, look with admiration at the plinth and bust of Adalbert von Chamisso. As a fifteen year old he had entered the service of the second wife of Friedrich Wilhelm II, in the adjacent and since-destroyed palace Monbijou.

Looking past the monument into Oranienburger Strasse, we can see on the right the imposing golden dome of the Berlin Jewish community's *Neue Synagoge*, inaugurated in 1866, which is topped by the Star of David. This Star was saved by the bravery of the local police chief, Wilhem Krützfeld, during the night of the destruction of the synagogues in 1938. On the anniversary on 9th November 1988, the government of the

GDR laid the first stone to initiate the rebuilding of the front portion of the building.

Today, it is once more a centre of the Berlin Jewish community.

On the left side of Grosse Präsidentenstrasse, left of Monbijouplatz, is house number 10, in which the Japanese military doctor, author of classics of modern Japanese literature, and first translator of Goethe's *Faust* into Japanese, Mori Ogai, once lived.

When one leaves the square from its narrow end over the viaduct, and turns a sharp left, one comes to Hackescher Markt. Ending the walk here, one should take a moment to imagine how, in the salon of his father Abraham's house at Neue Promenade 6, the young Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy scintillated Berlin society with his piano playing. One can then return to the present via the only surviving original S-Bahn station, at Hackescher Markt.