

Brods'ka Synagogue in Odesa

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The Brods'ka (Brody, Brodskaia) Synagogue in Odesa was built in 1863–1868. It was founded by enlightened and prosperous Jews who resettled to Odesa from Brody, then under the Habsburg rule. It was the second choral (Reform) synagogue in Russian Empire, whereas the first one was instituted by Josef Perl in Ternopil, shortly under Russian rule in 1815.

From 1820, the “enlightened”—as it appears in the period’s documents—congregation of Odesa rented their “Prayer House No 1” in the property of a grain merchant Vasilii Spiro Xenis, an Austrian subject who adopted Russian citizenship. The next owner, the merchant Konstantin Papudov, continued the lease. From 1841, the congregation prayed in the premises on the upper floor in the property rented from certain Lazutka. In 1847, the Brody Synagogue moved to a new space, also rented but “purposely arranged” and including a women’s gallery. The “cold” (unheated) Prayer House No 1 occupied the corner between Italiaskaia (Pushkinskaia from 1880) and Pochtovaia (today Zhukovs'koho) streets. In 1863, the building committee discussed plans for a new communal synagogue on the same plot. They commissioned the design from Iosif Kolovich, the Odesa architect of Serbian roots, and the general governor of Novorossiia and Bessarabia approved it the same year. Construction was completed in 1868.

The architect has chosen a “Florentine Gothic” style for the Brody Synagogue. This style had been already proposed by the Milan-trained architect Francesco Morandi for the Main Synagogue of Odesa in 1843–1846, though his elevations were not implemented. This expression, most probably, meant to convey the congregation’s commitment to the principles of liberal trade that secured the prosperity of Italian cities. This expression might refer to both Odesa and Brody, which benefited from the privileges of “free trading cities” on the borders of the Russian and Austrian empires. This style could also allude to the south-northern cultural and commercial links

formative for the community. The limestone-built (now plastered) edifice was, and still is, decorated with steep gables and aedicules, with pinnacled and paneled pilasters. Its elevations were pierced with round-headed and pointed windows, and octagonal turrets and domes on its four corners crowned the entire mass. Its street-facing gables were topped with the round-headed Tablets of the Law. The prayer hall was spanned with a barrel vault. The men's and boys' choir loft and a gilded Torah ark in a pointed niche occupied the eastern side of the hall. In 1909, the congregation installed organs above the Torah ark. A Gothic Revival iron-cast fence encircled the site.

In 1925, Soviet authorities converted the synagogue into a workers' club, transferring it to a shoe factory from 1929. In 1944, the synagogue's building became the state archives of Odesa oblast. For the needs of the new tenant, the interior space was split into two floors. The building was restituted to the Jewish community in 2016. Once restored, it will house the Chabad Lubavitch Congregation and the Odessa Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center.

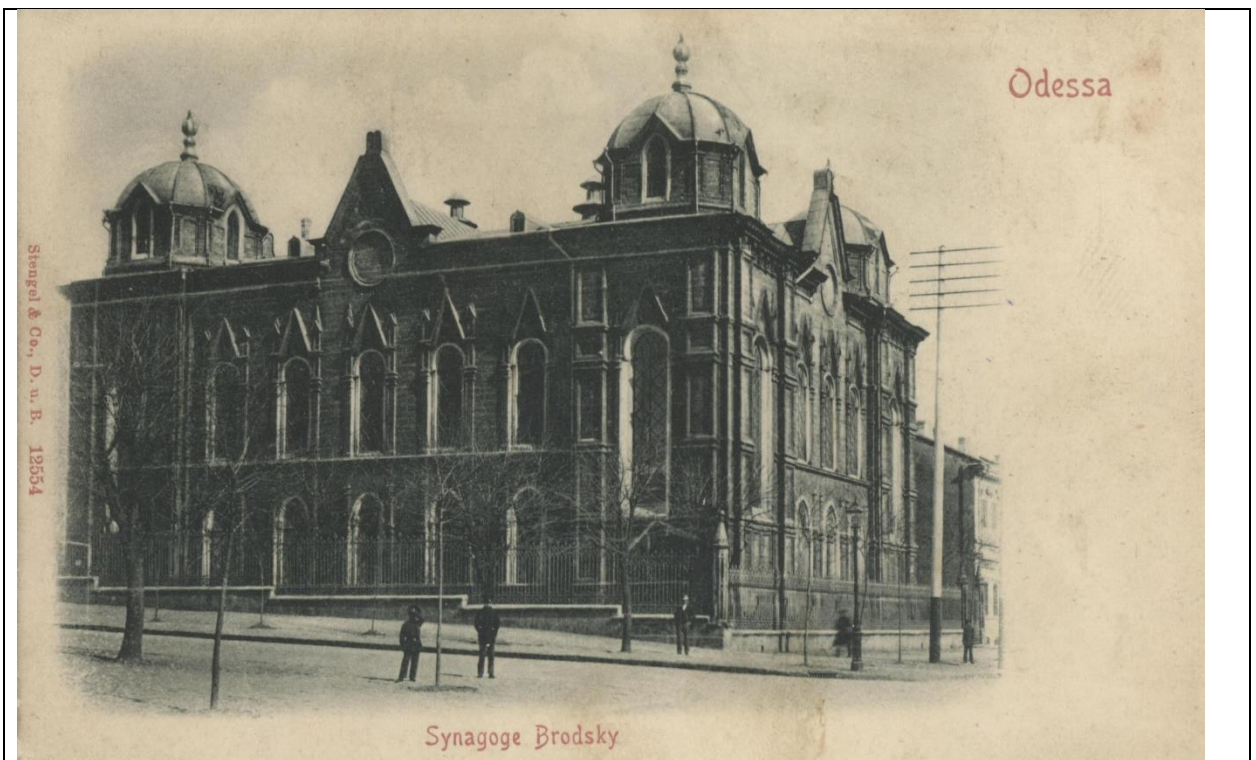
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Brodsky's Synagogue in Odesa. Gross Family Collection.



Brodsky's Synagogue in Odesa, view towards the Torah ark. YIVO



Brod'ska Synagogue in Odesa. © Photograph by Vladimir Levin, 2006. CJA