



## **Culture Heritage Wiesbaden**

### **Some information about the tangible and intangible heritage**

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## I. Wiesbaden: resort – global spa – green spa city

The city of Wiesbaden is situated on the southern slopes of the Taunus hills, a low mountain range east of the Rhine. The starting point in the city's history were the thermal springs emerging at the foot of the hills. Embedded in a fertile countryside, a settlement that was both resort and country town developed from Roman times onwards. As a "global spa", the town enjoyed its heyday in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, the buildings of the inner city are almost exclusively the result of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century town planning.

Even by international standards Wiesbaden, by virtue of its wealth of surviving historical structures and buildings, is an outstanding *Flächendenkmal* – a protected heritage area. Invariably it was the spa business, as a major economic factor, that remained at the centre of all town-planning deliberations. In consequence, the town grew into a city without losing its identity as a spa resort. In the course of the transition from "health" to "society" spa, Wiesbaden cast itself as a stage of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society life.

As regards spread and number of inhabitants, Wiesbaden has verifiably experienced the most rapid development by far among European resorts and spa towns. The small country town of the year 1800, with its population of about 2,000, had grown to 9,000 inhabitants in 1835; the number had risen to over 26,000 by 1865, and had doubled once again to more than 52,000 in 1880. "In 1890, it counted 64,670 inhabitants; at the turn of the century, 86,111; and in 1905, the threshold of 100,000 was crossed. Wiesbaden had thus developed from a resort town into a city, the growth due to a large extent to the growing number of pensioners and persons of private means moving in."<sup>1</sup> This influx of affluent pensioners and rentiers was closely connected with the range of social attractions offered by the spa business. The "fashion spas" in particular – the Great Spas of Europe – progressively took over the functions previously held by princely summer residences, and were consequently distinguished by a high degree of internationality. They were meeting places of nobles and diplomats, which in turn rendered them attractive for the aristocracy and the European upper middle class, recently come into wealth and standing of its own.

The series of maps published in the Spielmann-Atlas provides an overview of the urban development in the municipal area of Wiesbaden.<sup>2</sup> The maps are all to the same scale, allowing a reconstruction of the growth of the built-up area during the period from 1799 to 1910, to twenty-five times its original size. It is remarkable that even in the map of 1799, a tree-lined promenade encircling the entire town as well as several parks are documented. The laying out of a new spa district with a kurhaus, colonnades, park and green spaces (1808-10) marks the beginning of the town's further development. The town's distinctive ground plan, the "Historical Pentagon" that still defines it to the present day, was created, bordered by Wilhelmstraße, Taunusstraße, Röderstraße, Schwalbacher Straße and Luisenstraße. Even in the very first planning documents there is mention of verdant

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Spielmann, in: Spielmann, Christian / Krake, Julius: Historischer Atlas der Stadt Wiesbaden. Zwölf digitalisierte Stadtkarten von Wiesbaden 1799-1910, bearb. v. Thomas Weichel unter Mitarbeit von Rudolf Krämer, Wiesbaden 2002, p. 11: „In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wiesbaden developed from a town of 2,500 inhabitants into a city of more than 100,000. The municipal area grew accordingly: today, it covers an area more than twenty-five times the size of a hundred years ago (1799: 19 ha; 1910: 480 ha) [...]“. Eidloth 2012, p. 27. Data according to Russ 1988, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Spielmann, Christian / Krake, Julius: Historischer Atlas der Stadt Wiesbaden. Zwölf digitalisierte Stadtkarten von Wiesbaden 1799-1910, bearb. v. Thomas Weichel unter Mitarbeit von Rudolf Krämer, Wiesbaden 2002.

mansion districts devised to appear as a continuation of the public parks. With the rapid growth of the urban population, residential space in the town centre was soon used up. In response to the increasing numbers of inhabitants, new residential areas were laid out to the south and west; even today they still retain their characteristic perimeter-block structure.

From Roman times until the building of the first kurhaus the spa business had been concentrated in the immediate vicinity of the hot springs, north of the old town centre. For the year 1799, no less than 24 bathhouses are recorded in this area, all of them privately owned. When the new spa district was established further to the east, large modern spa hotels sprang up in the vicinity of Wilhelmsplatz square (today's Kaiser-Friedrich-Platz).<sup>3</sup> In the years that followed, additional large hotels were constructed on Wilhelmstraße, Taunusstraße, and Sonnenberger Straße to cater for the ever-growing number of spa visitors. Yet more hotels, as well as privately run guesthouses, were established in the mansion districts, while new bathhouses were built in the town centre. On Wilhelmsplatz, the court theatre went up (1825-27, architect: Baurat Zengerle). In 1893/94 the well-known architects Fellner and Helmer of Vienna built the Neues Hoftheater, the new court theatre, on to Neue Kolonnade. The colonnade still serves as the theatre's entrance area and foyer, and has been known as Theaterkolonnade ever since.

One characteristic aspect of Wiesbaden is, and always has been, the close interconnection of the spa district and the surrounding countryside. The parks and green spaces establishing this connection have been preserved in their entirety to the present day, and were still expanded as late as the 1930s. There is the Kurpark with the spa facilities and promenade adjoining it to the east, extended all the way to Sonnenberg in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; there is the romantic landscape garden of Warmer Damm, the earliest extension of the Kurpark, and the Dambachtalanlage; there are the two parks laid out towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Nerotal and in the vicinity of the former Walkmühle compound, today's Albrecht-Dürer-Anlage. With the new spa district and Gesellschaftshaus (i.e. assembly rooms) as a starting point, large mansion districts developed east and north of the old town, their large, and in parts still surviving, gardens serving as a continuation of the public parks and providing a seamless transition of the townscape into the surrounding countryside of the nearby Taunus slopes. Even today Wiesbaden still presents itself as a green spa city.

In 1810, gambling was introduced at the new Wiesbaden Kursaal building. As a spa with a gambling casino, Wiesbaden proved a major attraction for a large and affluent clientele. However, even prior to the opening of the casino the town of Wiesbaden had been publicised throughout Europe by numerous guidebooks in all the major languages, and the properties of its medicinal springs were known and valued. Moreover, towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the valley of the Upper Middle Rhine had graduated, as it were, from a mere transit region en route to the traditional educational tour of Italy to a major tourist destination in its own right. In this capacity, too, Wiesbaden gained entry into the relevant guidebooks.

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wiesbaden developed into a large resort town characterised by an international clientele. Numerous members of the nobility and the ruling families of Europe converged on Wiesbaden on a regular basis, especially once the Prussian emperor, Wilhelm I, and his son, Wilhelm II, took up residence in the town year after year. Proof of the town's international

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<sup>3</sup> Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten (1816-19 by Christian Zais), Hotel Nassauer Hof and extension (pre-1819), Hotel Cecilie (since 1818), Berliner Hof.

appeal and atmosphere is provided by the fact that books and newspapers in numerous languages were available in the reading rooms at the Kurhaus and the library of the Casino-Gesellschaft, and by the number of religious denominations practising their faith at their own places of worship. The Russian church on Neroberg hill (the so-called “Greek chapel”, built 1847-1855) still serves as the centre of a Russian congregation first founded in 1844. The Russian cemetery on Neroberg is considered the largest outside of Russia itself, and has become the final resting place of numerous eminent Russians. Another example would be the Anglican church on Frankfurter Straße. It was built between 1863 and 1865; the English congregation at Wiesbaden, however, has been in existence since the 1830s.

The British clientele at Wiesbaden was responsible for the introduction of golf and lawn tennis too. The Wiesbaden golf club was founded as early as 1893, although initially it had no course of its own. The parade ground at Dotzheim at first, and later the Erbenheim racecourse, were temporarily appropriated as provisional golf courses. It was only in 1911 that work on a proper course started in the so-called Gehm Meadows next to the Chausseehaus compound. Even today the nine-hole course impresses with its ancient trees and immaculate maintenance. A lawn tennis court was laid out around 1900 in the vicinity of the spa facilities. The Wiesbaden tennis club still has its home there, although the club house has been rebuilt, and the courts redesigned.

In 1843 it was stated that Wiesbaden had a European or global reputation<sup>4</sup>; from 1852 the town called itself „Weltkurstadt“<sup>5</sup>, i.e. “the world’s spa”, and was described as “every travelling European’s conversation room”.<sup>6</sup> The new spa facilities including the Gesellschaftshaus by Christian Zais are considered the model used for other facilities and spa casinos in Europe.<sup>7</sup> In spa-specific publications, Wiesbaden has been consistently named, along with Baden-Baden, as Germany’s most eminent spa town.

## II. Wiesbaden: bathing culture – society spa

The use of Wiesbaden’s hot springs dates back to pre-Roman times; their systematic utilisation for health purposes („Kur“) is documented at least since the construction of the Roman thermae. The area of the hot springs surrounding the Kochbrunnen well constitutes the core of the spa district. The development towards a modern spa town, which set in around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, derived its dynamic from the spa business itself. A beginning was made when the spa district was relocated to the eastern part of the town, and a new Gesellschaftshaus was built for it (1808-1810). The building type became a model followed by other European spa towns.<sup>8</sup> At Wiesbaden, the new assembly rooms also came to house the gambling casino – an establishment almost indispensable for the glamorous spa towns hoping to attract an affluent international clientele eager for diversion, and a considerable source of revenue in itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Czysz 2000, p. 259.

<sup>5</sup> Czysz 2000, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> Rheinischer Kurier, date of 23.08.1878.

<sup>7</sup> Fuhs 1992, p. 150 and p. 155 f.

<sup>8</sup> Fuhs 1992, p. 155: „The Wiesbaden kurhaus influenced the concept of the new Baden-Baden kurhaus, and both of them became early 19<sup>th</sup> century trailblazers for the further development of spa-specific architecture.“ The kurhaus in its function as *Gesellschaftshaus*, or assembly rooms, became the new hub of life at the spa, and several more were built between 1827 and 1837, including those at Brückenau, Homburg, Ems, and Kissingen.

The spa district with the Kurhaus, colonnades and green spaces still serves its purpose in an exemplary fashion today. One outstanding bathing facility still in regular use is the Kaiser-Friedrich-Therme (1909-1913, Langgasse 38-40), a remarkably fine building in execution and décor. On Kranzplatz some structures of the original “drinking cure” facilities, rebuilt towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been preserved.

In the vicinity of the springs there are still numerous bathing facilities and hotels, some with traditions reaching far back into the past. At Wiesbaden, the “bathing cure” was traditionally undertaken in the bathhouses, facilities that also offered accommodation. Among the hotels still operating today that used, and still use, the water of the hot thermal springs, the tradition-steeped “Hotel Schwarzer Bock” stands out with its well-preserved bathing facilities, only recently restored with great care and effort. Another establishment just as rich in tradition that unfortunately has not survived was the “Hotel Schwarzer Adler”.

The close interconnection between the city and its surrounding countryside, established among other things by the laying out of footpaths and the building of shelters, viewing towers and other attractions to open up a wide area for the use by visitors, still stands as material evidence of Wiesbaden’s grand old bathing culture.

### **III. Wiesbaden: townscape – spa architecture – mansions and residential buildings**

The heritage-protected ensemble of the city as it stands today encompasses, for the most part, the urban area documented in the city map of 1910. It constitutes one of the largest heritage areas in Germany. The basic urban layout has been preserved to a very large extent. Within this area an uncommonly large number of historical buildings survive in a good or excellent state of preservation.

Building on the foundations laid during the Nassau years and the neo-Classical town planning by Christian Zais and his successors, Wiesbaden attained its final townscape and architectural “face” in the post-1866 (annexation by Prussia), Wilhelmine era. Eminent town planners were Alexander Fach, Reinhold Baumeister and especially Felix Genzmer. It was Genzmer who completed the Wiesbaden townscape as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century total urban artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), finalising a process that had the town’s designation as the capital of the duchy of Nassau as its beginning, and the expansion into a glamorous fashion spa of international standing as its driving force.

The various functions of a spa town are still recognisable even today. The area surrounding the springs features bathhouses run as hotels, still utilising the thermal waters. The public baths of Kaiser-Friedrich-Therme is situated here too; it uses the water of the Kochbrunnen well, making it available to the public by way of numerous applications. The spa district proper with the Kurhaus, purpose-built at the time, is still used for entertainment and social events. Balls and major celebrations are held at the Kurhaus, which also houses the Wiesbaden gambling casino. The urban expansion areas of Bergkirchenviertel and Inneres Westend still reflect the structure of the original lower middle class neighbourhoods. Most of their characteristic backyards, rear houses and workshops have been preserved; some of the properties have been owned by the same family for several generations. The original town expansion area of Ringkirchenviertel is still the preferred residential area of the comfortably situated middle class. In this respect, even the city’s social map survives to the present day.

#### IV. Wiesbaden: world-wide fame - internationality

In his *Naturalis historia*, Pliny the Elder tells of the medicinal properties of the baths of the Mattiaci – the warm springs of Wiesbaden. The next mention of the Wiesbaden springs has come down to us in the writings of an English Franciscan, Bartholomeus Anglicus. His encyclopedia *On the Properties of Things*, dated around 1240, stresses the healing powers of the water issuing from the earth in that place. A number of publications dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century also discuss the medicinal properties of the hot Wiesbaden springs. The beginning of the Modern era, around 1500, was also the beginning of German-language „Bäderliteratur“, or spa-related publications, and the Wiesbaden springs quickly found their place there. Later centuries produced a wealth of medical treatises on the waters of Wiesbaden.

In the later Middle Ages, Wiesbaden was a popular fashion spa. King Albrecht I, Emperor Friedrich III and his son, Maximilian, as well as numerous members of the high nobility frequented the town. Friedrich III of Habsburg, who suffered from a gangrenous leg, is reported to have visited Wiesbaden no less than six times.

In 1812, the balneologist Fabricius refers to a veritable „pilgrimage“ undertaken by the great of the world.<sup>9</sup> Among the recorded visits are that by Grand Duchess Catherine, sister of Tsar Alexander, who was at Wiesbaden in 1814; by the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz; the ruling Duke of Sachsen-Weimar; the ruling Duke of Anhalt-Köthen; the Electoral Prince of Hesse; and the Grand Duke of Luxemburg.<sup>10</sup> In 1857, the Kursaal provided the magnificently decorated venue for the nuptials of Prince Oskar II of Sweden (1829-1907) and Sophia of Nassau (1836-1913). In August 1863, the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph was received with much pomp and circumstance at Biebrich Palace – as well as the town palace, Biebrich was still a residence of the Dukes of Nassau, used mainly as a retreat for a more private life but also as a venue for the reception of visitors of outstanding rank.

The relocation of the ducal residence into the town, finally decided on by the Duke in the 1830s, provided a permanent aristocratic backdrop for the spa culture.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the move appears to suggest a new-found appreciation of the old town. The new residential palace was built in the centre, the old castle precincts – not, as originally planned by Zais, in the fashionable new spa district. At the behest of the Duke, Georg Moller built the palace in 1837-1842<sup>12</sup> opposite the Altes Rathaus (Marktstraße 16; the core building from 1609/10; minor alterations 1725; 1828: all timber framework replaced by masonry; plans by Stadtbaumeister Valerius Bausendorff; execution by Antonius Schöffner<sup>13</sup>). With the Protestant Marktkirche church, built 1852 by Baurat Karl Boos, it gave a new generosity of size to the old town centre. The new setting devised for the Kochbrunnen well, and the pump rooms for the drinking cure, appear to have been carried out with a new and more sophisticated clientele in mind, but may well have been intended to revive the medicinal and therapeutic aspects of the spa as well.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Russ 2012, p. 144, after Fabricius: *Manuel du Baigneur aux Eaux de Wiesbaden*, 1812, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Denkmaltopographie, Wiesbaden I.1*, p. 34. Russ 2012, p. 144. Struck 1979, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Russ 2012, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Russ I.12005, p. 99 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Russ I.1 2005, p. 92 f.

<sup>14</sup> Russ 2012, p. 147 f.

After the annexation by Prussia in 1866, Wiesbaden lost its status as a residential and capital city, but it remained an important administrative centre as the seat of the new Prussian regional authority, the *Regierungspräsidium*. The visits by the new rulers from Berlin, invariably punctuated by magnificently staged public appearances, proved a new and considerable crowd puller. The town palace acquired a new function as the seasonal abode of the German emperors and their retinue. The annual spring “Luftkur”, meetings with other ruling families and, after 1896, visits to the May festivals of music at the court theatre, an event specifically introduced for the imperial family, brought the Emperors Wilhelm I and Wilhelm II back to Wiesbaden numerous times.<sup>15</sup>

Members of the European ruling houses, like the Russian Tsar Nikolaus II and Empress “Sisi” of Austria, came and went at the spa town. “From 1800 onwards, more and more members of the Russian aristocracy travelled to Wiesbaden for a spa break. Many of these visitors stayed on, making the spa town their main place of residence. The Russian-Orthodox church, built 1849-1855, and the Russian cemetery consecrated in 1856 bear witness to the fact. The cemetery is thought to be one of the oldest Russian-Orthodox graveyards in Western Europe, and constitutes yet another unusual feature of Neroberg hill. In time, numerous eminent Russians were to find their final resting place here.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Visits by Wilhelm I that proved important for the town: First visit in the summer of 1867; July, 1871; August, 1872; May, 1874; April, 1875, 1876 and 1877; November, 1878; after the assassination attempts by Hödel (1.05.1878) and Nobiling (2.06.1878); also in April, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1883; also on September 27 and 29, 1883, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Niederwald monument; lastly, in 1884.

<sup>16</sup> Unrath-Scharpenack 2012, p. 41 f. Streich 2007, p. 73. According to Buschmann Vollmer 1995, two of the illegitimate children of Tsar Alexander II (Prince Georgij Aleksandrovič Jurevskij and Princess Olga Aleksandrovna Merenberg née Jerevskaja) found their final resting place here.