

# Article on the Construction of Germany's First Mosque in Berlin (October 3, 1923)

## Abstract

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Designed by the architect Karl Alfred Hermann and built between 1924 and 1927, Germany's first mosque opened its doors to the faithful in 1928. It was prominently located near Fehrbelliner Platz in the Wilmersdorf neighborhood in southwestern Berlin, an area favored by many artists, intellectuals, and Jews. Local Muslim students had spearheaded the construction of the impressive white stone structure, drawing on donations from Muslims both in South Asia and Berlin. Berlin's Muslim community was relatively small and consisted mainly of students, academics, merchants and intellectuals from various backgrounds, including some German converts. It had attained enough size and stature by 1930, however, to found the German-Islamic Society, which numbered close to 1,800 members. This article, which appeared in a regional Saxon newspaper in 1923, reports positively on the initiative to construct a mosque in Berlin. In an obvious allusion to Germany's alliance with the Muslim-majority Ottoman Empire during the First World War, the article reminds readers that Germany's true enemy is France, and not the Islamic world.

## Source

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### The arrival of Islam in Germany.

Berlin-West gets a mosque.

A mosque in a German city would have been surprising to our grandfathers, and probably cause for offense. For too long, Europe has had to defend itself against attacks from the East. The fact that the last attacks by the Turks on Vienna, which culminated in the famous siege of 1683, were financed by France because it wanted to go plundering in the West, has been forgotten; the hatred for the East remained, while that against the hereditary enemy in the West was lulled with European feelings of solidarity. In the meantime, we have come to know the East and the West better, and this has brought us to an internally completely different position towards the Islamic peoples. No reasonable person will therefore see the construction of a Muslim place of worship in a German city as offensive or a desecration of our country. In Berlin, there are a large number of Muslims who are committed to their religious customs. For this, they need a mosque. They would also like to have social rooms, living quarters reserved for them, and a library with study rooms. The mosque that is to be built should satisfy all these needs. It will therefore contain a restaurant with club rooms on two basement floors, and above that the library with study rooms and housing, especially for Muslim students. In addition, there will be two residential buildings with apartments. The actual mosque forms the upper floor, which is elevated about 7 meters above the pavement. From the stairwell, one will enter a vestibule with a ritual well. Then follows the mosque, the assembly room for common prayer and for reading and explaining the scriptures. In Islam there is no altar, just as there is no ritual sacrifice. Nor has Islam developed a tradition of sacred books, as other religions have. Thus, the sacred point is a niche facing Mecca. "Wherever you are, turn your face to the Sacred Mosque of Mecca," says the Quran. The one niche can become several. The plan for new building includes three. Between them will rise the high, narrow pulpit, which is reached by steep stairs. To the west, separated by a lattice, is the women's section, which, according to regulations, will have its own entrance. Even in mosques, the women's section must be separated from the men's section right from the entrance. The mosque is characterized by its slender tower, the minaret, from whose gallery the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. Islam does not have bells. Many mosques in the Orient have two

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minarets; two such towers are also planned for Berlin's mosque. The dome between them will rise 44 meters above the ground; the towers are planned at a height of around 60 meters, so they will stand out in the cityscape with their characteristic silhouette. Indian elements will be chosen for the design, but without following them too strictly. Since the mosque is intended to serve members of a wide range of nationalities, an exact adaptation of the architecture of one country was hardly feasible. In addition, climate, light, and many other factors must be taken into account according to the conditions in Berlin; finally, one must consider the fact that only German artists and artisans are available, and that for this reason alone an exact reproduction of a work from Afghanistan or Asia Minor would be impossible. Only for the ornamental calligraphy, which is so important in Muslim art, will foreign calligraphers be consulted. Details of the construction and execution, especially of the colors, have yet to be determined. In any case, it will be exciting to see the completion of a building that is essentially foreign to us. The question of whether the mosque will fit into the cityscape cannot be answered yet. But since Berlin's west, where the mosque is to be built, has no unified artistic character, there is no reason to worry from this point of view.

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<https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper/item/WF3HZD3Q4IR655QWMPCGNBGKT4TLFM62?issuepage=3>

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