

# Summary

The so-called „Schneller-Altar“ had stood in the chapel of the Syrian Orphanage in West Jerusalem since 1911. The orphanage – founded in 1860 by Johann Ludwig Schneller, a teacher and missionary from Swabia in Germany – had become by World War I the largest and most important Protestant boarding school and educational institution for needy native Armenian children in Syria-Palestine, part of the former Ottoman Empire. Taken over by the British in 1939, the grounds and premises of the orphanage served as a military camp, first for the British, and from 1948 onwards for the Israeli army.

The altar fell into oblivion after 1952 – until it was rediscovered in 2009 and moved to the Wilhelminian Church of the Ascension north of the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Most of its mosaic decoration, however, had disappeared or been destroyed. In 2011 I asked Helmut Mencke, a mosaic designer from Schulzendorf near Berlin, if he would do the restoration and he immediately agreed.

I accompanied him to Jerusalem and together we examined and recorded painstakingly the damage and developed a restoration plan. In addition, I did research on the history of the altar and its mosaic decoration, which led me to the discovery that the Syrian Orphanage and the still existent „Schneller schools“ in Lebanon and Jordan had been overseen and administered from Cologne for about 80 years. From 1890 until about 1970 the chairmen of the Society for the Syrian Orphanage resp. The Schneller schools lived and worked in Cologne.