ESSAYS ON LAY AND ECCLESIASTICAL COMMUNITIES

IN AND AROUND THE MEDIEVAL URBAN PARISH

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From Neighbours to Enemies and Back. Jewish-Christian relations in Northern Europe

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Abstract: Jews and Christians coexisted in numerous towns and parishes throughout medieval Europe. However, during the High and Late Middle Ages, relations between neighbors often turned hostile, resulting in partial or complete annihilation or expulsion of Jewish communities. This chapter will delve into the mechanisms underlying these sudden shifts from neighborly coexistence to enmity, as well as the subsequent step frequently observed: the return of Jewish communities to the places they were forced to abandon a few years or decades earlier. Especially in the Northern parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the documentation of these processes is scarce, and the history of the communities is difficult to reconstruct. The cities of Fulda and Wittenberg will be analyzed as case studies to achieve this objective.

Resumo: Judeus e cristãos coexistiram em numerosas cidades e paróquias da Europa medieval. No entanto, durante a Alta e a Baixa Idade Média, as relações entre vizinhos tornaram-se frequentemente hostis, resultando na aniquilação parcial ou total ou na expulsão de comunidades judaicas. Este capítulo irá aprofundar os mecanismos

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subjacentes a estas mudanças súbitas da coexistência de vizinhança para a inimizade, bem como o passo subsequente frequentemente observado: o regresso das comunidades judaicas aos locais que foram forçadas a abandonar alguns anos ou décadas antes. Especialmente nas regiões setentrionais do Sacro Império Romano-Germânico, a documentação destes processos é escassa e a história das comunidades é difícil de reconstruir. As cidades de Fulda e Wittenberg serão analisadas como estudos de caso para atingir este objetivo.

Parishes and parish churches were not only relevant to Christians in medieval communities, but also affected the lives of non-Christians. In many parts of medieval Europe, Jewish communities become visible only through the hostility of Christians – parishes produced not only the strategies of exclusion, but also the sources from which we can reconstruct the history of some of the communities which were too small to be recorded, or to produce written sources themselves. The documents of recurring expulsions, created by parish priests or manifested in the parish churches themselves, can help to reconstruct, even if only tentatively, the history of some of the minor Jewish communities in Northern Europe.

Jewish communities in Northern Europe

Jews lived in many areas and communities in Medieval Europe – there are, however, some distinct differences between Southern and Northern Europe. The settlement patterns in the South, Italy and Iberian Peninsula, had lengthy and deep roots, and relations between the Christian and Jewish communities had developed since Late Antiquity[1]. Moreover, in the South, Jews were rarely the only religious

[1] For a recent discussion of the differences between Northern European and Iberian accusations of ritual murder, see Francois Soyer, "Jews and the Child Murder Libel in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula: European Trends and Iberian Peculiarities". *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 13, no. 3 (2021): 309-330. https://doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2021.1969673.

'Other' with whom Christians dealt, as Islamic travellers and settlers were commonplace. In the North of the Holy Roman Empire – and even further north – things were different. Firstly, there was no continuity of Jewish settlement from Late Antiquity, with the Jewish communities disappearing with the dissolution of the Roman Empire and taking several hundred years to re-emerge. 1700 years of Jewish life in Germany were celebrated in 2021, but the first few hundred of these were both sparsely populated and documented. There is an ongoing scholarly debate regarding whether there had been a continuity of Jewish settlement in Cologne since Roman times, and written documentation of Jews in Cologne in the year 321 exists, but this serves as the only known example: after this, the sources are silent for 700 years[2]. The first larger communities in the Rhine valley, the towns of ShUM (the initials of the Hebrew names for these places, *Shpira*, *Vermayza*, and *Magentza* forming the initials ShUM), were destroyed during the First Crusade – north of this area, Jewish settlement patterns become visible much later. In many places and towns, the existence of small, and even large, Jewish communities is not impossible, but it is not documented.

Whilst some aspects of Jewish-Christian relations were common to all of these settlements – large and stable or small and undocumented – some other aspects were different. All Jews were legally *servi camerae*, servants of the Emperor, but in many towns and areas, the *jus regalia* (rights belonging to the king) to tax the Jews had been transferred to a local landlord or the town itself[3]. If this landlord was a bishop or a monastery, an ecclesiastical institution was thus

[2] Matthias Schmandt, "Cologne, Jewish Centre on the Lower Rhine". In *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20-25 October 2002*, ed. Christoph Cluse. Cultural encounters in late antiquity and the Middle Ages 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 367-378, *ibid.* 368.

[3] David Abulafia, "The King and the Jews – The Jews in the Ruler's Service", in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20-25 October 2002*, ed. Christoph Cluse, Cultural encounters in late antiquity and the Middle Ages 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 43-54.

responsible for the protection of the local Jews. In all regions, Jews and Christians belonged to different legal spheres and their secular laws had to find ways to regulate business and private relations between the two communities. The physical settlements in the towns varied – there were many towns with Jewish quarters, though usually not walled, but there were also towns where Jewish houses were spread amongst those of Christians[4].

Independent from the development of actual Jewish communities, Christian culture developed an image across Europe, referred to by historians as 'the hermeneutical Jew'[5]: a Jew from theological discourse, a figure of imagination, hatred, and fear which was very prominent in sermons and didactical literature, but which had little to do with real living people of Jewish faith. These imaginary Jews were used to exemplify mistrust in Christian dogmas such as transubstantiation, the Trinity, or Christ's sacrifice for their sins, especially in Christian societies where the pre-Christian religions still played a role – and as such were practiced in private, such as in Scandinavia – and in those societies where Christian heretics were the most frequent religious Other to dogmatic Catholics. This image of Jews was mainly used for the building of Christian identity and self-affirmation, but it has often been confused and unintentionally inculcated with research about the development of Jewish-Christian relations – and thereby as part of the history of the Jewish communities. In some few cases, however, documentation of the hermeneutical Jew can actually lead back to information about the Jewish communities themselves.

In the following sections, the examples of two towns in the central northern part of the Holy Roman Empire, in nowadays Hessen and Saxonia, which in the twelfth and thirteenth century were located

[4] Michael Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich*. 3rd rev. ed. Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter; De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 34-35.

[5] Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity.* The S. Mark Taper Foundation imprint in Jewish studies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

at the northern and north-eastern fringes of the Jewish settlements in the Holy Roman Empire will be presented. They are typical in several regards: there is no documentation of the Jewish community itself and, likewise, written traces in Christian sources are scarce – with the most prevalent sources speaking of conflict, expulsion, and murder. In the case of Wittenberg, it is difficult to define whether a source is evidence of the hermeneutical Jew or the personification of an actual Jewish community. In both cases, establishment of Jewish life, expulsion, and re-settlement follow on from each other.

In both towns, Jews and Christians were intimately connected in the urban space, in legal relations, by paying and receiving taxes and in everyday life. Also in both towns, there is documentation of serious abuse and expulsions, as well as re-settlement. These two examples of medieval towns seem quite typical for the Jewish settlements North of the Alps and outside the main centres in the Rhine Valley. The Jews were subjects of the local landlords, either secular (in Wittenberg) or ecclesiastical (in Fulda). Expulsions and pogroms decimated their numbers several times so that whilst they lived in families, they could not form a community with a rabbi, a shul, and religious infrastructure. None of these smaller communities produced any written sources of their own, or at least none that have survived. Responsa, written answers of rabbis in larger communities, helped individuals to live according to *kashrut* and *halacha* in the diaspora[6]. The survivors of the pogroms sometimes show up in tax lists in larger towns in the area, in Erfurt or Nürnberg for example, or in the *memor* books (books for the memory of the dead in Ashkenazi communities)[7]. However, the medieval heritage of these communities

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[6] See the most current project for indexing the surviving responsa in: Eva Haverkamp et al., *Forschungsprojekt Responsa. Responsa and Archival Records of Medieval Ashkenaz in Legal and Cultural Conversation*. Available online at https://www.jgk.geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/jgk_mittelalter/forschungsprojekt-responsa/index.html.

[7] Rainer Barzen, "Jewish Regional Organization in the Rhineland", in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20-25 October 2002*, ed.Christoph Cluse, Cultural encounters in late antiquity and the Middle Ages 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 233-243, *ibid.* 237.

has been destroyed, and given the number of expulsions, it is not clear at which point this destruction took place.

Scholars of medieval Jewish-Christian relations have often pointed out the continuous presence of violence in these relations[8]. While much general scholarship regarding medieval Jewish-Christian relations relies on evidence within the Iberian Peninsula[9], some scholars have also claimed a kind of 'Sonderweg' (literally 'special path' – a German historiographical theory of a unique form of historical development) for the development in Northern Europe. Robert Chazan has, for example, argued that the Holy Roman Empire north of the Alps had been instrumental to the development of all major forms of anti- -Jewish violence and, thereby, the ground was laid for typical forms of anti-Jewish stereotyping such as blood libel, ritual murder, and the idea of a deviant Jewish physiognomy in this region[10].

Fulda

The town of Fulda received market rights and privileges in the year 1019. Centred around the Benedictine monastery founded by Saint Boniface in 744, This was during the period of his missionary enterprises and foundation of the episcopal see in Mainz. The monastery had an individual named Sturmius as its first abbot. The development of Fulda since the late tenth century was intimately connected to the leading position the monastery held amongst the Benedictines of Germania, and the town of Fulda developed around the monastery

[8] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages – Updated Edition*. Updated edition with a new preface by the author (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3-5.

[9] See for example Maya Soifer Irish, *The Jews and Christians in Medieval Castile: Tradition, Coexistence, and Change* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press), 2016.

[10] Robert Chazan, "The Role of Medieval Northern Europe in Generating Virulent Anti-Jewish Imagery", in *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism. Continuities and Discontinuities from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß (New York, London: Routledge, 2018), 103-105.

and received privileges for coinage, market and toll in 1019. The imperial abbey thrived and the abbots carried the title of prince-abbot from 1220, making Fulda one of the smaller, but well-settled, ecclesiastical territories with strong ties to the kings. Struggles between the town and the abbot landlords became common; in the late Middle Ages, the catastrophic economic situation of the prince-archbishopric and the attempts to relieve this by taxing the citizens led to a civilian uprising in 1330, in which the populace ended up defeated[11].

The quality of source material for the abbey and ecclesiastical territory of Fulda is excellent for the early Middle Ages, mirroring the significance of the abbey at that time. However, this becomes much poorer for the high and late Middle Ages, following the decline of its economic and political standing. It is worth noting that, in particular, documentation regarding the town in the form of town books (*Stadtbücher*) and other urban administrative documents are missing[12]. Consequently, the documentation about Christian-Jewish every day affairs such as purchases, court trials and family contacts are also rare and often come from the neighbouring city of Frankfurt or the archbishopric of Würzburg.

It is unknown when the first Jewish individuals and families settled in Fulda. Some scholars assume that they were already present in the settlement surrounding the monastery before the foundation of the town[13]. Written documentation and traces of a Jewish cemetery are found from the thirteenth century onward. A synagogue was located in the immediate vicinity of the parish church, which was dedicated to Saint Blasius and erected probably in the middle of the

[11] Thomas Heiler, "Fulda, Fürstabtei: Politische Geschichte (Spätmittelalter)", https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Fulda,_Fürstabtei:_Politische_Geschichte_(Spätmittelalter).

[12] Hermann Kratz, "Die Beziehungen zwischen Stadt und Reichsabtei Fulda im Mittelalter", in *Fulda in seiner Geschichte: Landschaft, Reichsabtei, Stadt*, ed. Walter Heinemeyer and Bertold Jäger. Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen 57 (Marburg, Fulda: Elwert; Parzeller, 1995), 349-372.

[13] Klaus-Dieter Alicke, "Fulda," in *Lexikon der jüdischen Gemeinden im deutschen Sprachraum. 1: Aach – Groß-Bieberau* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 1345.

tenth century, re-built in Roman style in the early twelfth century and today is a late Baroque building from the eighteenth century, but occupying the same location. The probable location of the medieval synagogue was in the same place as that of the nineteenth century, in a street named 'Judengasse' since the fifteenth century (today 'Am Stockhaus'), where it remained until the Holocaust. Medieval documentation of the synagogue is extant for the years 1423 and 1508/09. The old cemetery was located outside the town walls, documented in 1476 and in 1516-1520, whilst a new one was established in the seventeenth century and remained in use until the Holocaust. This suggests that the Jewish community of Fulda had a sufficient number of members to form a *minyan* and relevant religious infrastructure to function as an independent religious community, at the latest in the fifteenth century, perhaps earlier. Other documentation than that mentioned here mainly deals with expulsions.

The first and most prominent event when the Jewish community of Fulda was documented was its first annihilation in the years 1235/36, following a blood libel. Accusations of ritual murder had been known in England since the case of William of Norwich in 1144, which was moulded into a cult of martyrdom by Thomas of Monmouth and several similar cases followed, creating the so-called blood libel saints[14]. The phenomenon became common on the European continent as well during the early thirteenth century. The occasion of 1235, when the Jewish community of Fulda was accused of having killed five boys in order to collect their blood has long been seen as the first time accusations of this kind were documented in the Holy Roman Empire[15]. This is both true and contested – it was the first time the narrative of Jewish killers acting upon a Christian child was employed in the Holy Roman Empire, but the Nürnberg *memor* book

[14] Joe Hillaby, "The Ritual-Child-Murder Accusation: Its Dissemination and Harold of Gloucester", *Jewish Historical Studies* 34 (1994): 69-109.

[15] Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a definition of antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 281.

lists another blood libel around Christmas and New Year's Eve 1235, in Bischofsheim ob der Tauber, with Christian sources giving 1235 or 1236 as date for this pogrom[16]. But there had been earlier cases: Previously, in 1147, an anonymous adult male body had been found in a river close to Würzburg, with the Jews of the city being accused as its source, resulting in 20 of them being killed by a mob. As the early cases of blood libel do not necessarily follow the narrative structure which became common in the thirteenth century, with alleged child victims of ritual murder for the purpose of collecting blood, the Würzburg case can be seen as part of the development of the phenomenon that Christian communities more or less spontaneously blamed Jews for unsolved murder cases. It was told in the context of expulsions during the Second Crusade by Ephraim of Bonn, in a long list of other assaults[17].

After the Fulda blood libel, the accusations developed quickly into a full repertoire of imagined practices, motives and plots for ritual murder, which, in many cases, justified spontaneous pogroms as well as trials in secular courts. Theologians such as Thomas of Cantimpré combined exempla of Jewish conversion and punishment with allegations of ritual murder, thus adding to a general depiction of Jews as blood-thirsty and enemies of Christianity – as well as providing a Christian theological foundation of blood libel in its various forms[18]. The case of Fulda has stirred scholarly attention precisely because it pre-dates theological arguments in this area, and thus the flow of information about the alleged Jewish misdeeds is difficult to assess[19].

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[16] Sigmund Salfeld, ed, *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches* (Berlin: L. Simion, 1898), 124-125 (about the victims in Laua and Bischofsheim ob der Tauber).

[17] Robert Leon Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184-185.

[18] See the discussion of his contribution to the blood libel allegation in Irven M. Resnick, "Cruentation, Medieval Anti-Jewish Polemic, and Ritual Murder", *Antisemitism Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019), 95-131.

[19] Cordelia Heß, "Fakten schaffen. Ritualmord und making sense durch antijüdische Ausschreitungen," *Das Mittelalter* (forthcoming).

Written documentation stems from several Latin chronicles, as well as the Nürnberg *memor* book, which lists the victims. Across the wildly differing information contained in the chronicles, the basic plot seems to have been that five dead children were found in a (probably burned down) mill outside the town by the miller and his wife upon their return from Christmas mass. Immediately, the Jews were accused – allegedly because two were seen in the mill during the miller's absence. They were said to have killed the children and collected their blood in linen sacks, intending to take the sacks back to their houses. When the misdeed was discovered, 36 Jews were killed – either by *cruce signati* (Crusaders) or the townsfolk. In the apparent aftermath of this case, corpses of alleged victims of a possible second blood libel were brought to Emperor Fredrick II at his court in Hagenau, where he was asked to expel all Jews. Instead, he collected expert opinions on whether the Jews would need Christian blood for ritual purposes, and when both Christian and Jewish experts said they did not, he issued a bull of protection for the Jews of Germania and Alemannia[20].

The events of 1235/36 in Fulda represent a classic – even stereotypical – case of neighbours becoming enemies, but also mark the first time that the Jewish community in Fulda becomes visible. The Nürnberg *memor* book lists 27 adults and 10 children killed during the pogrom, both male and female[21]. Protection for the Jews and condemnation of pogroms came, not from the landlord, abbot Konrad III of Malchos, the first prince-abbot (1221-1249)[22] of the monastery of Fulda, but from emperor Frederick II, who (as mentioned above) issued a wide-

[20] Andrea Sommerlechner, "Das Judenmassaker von Fulda 1235 in der Geschichtsschreibung um Kaiser Friedrich II". *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 44 (2002): 121-150.

[21] *Das Martyrologium Des Nürnberger Memorbuches*, 122-123.

[22] Konrad Lübeck, *Die Fuldaer Äbte und Fürstäbte des Mittelalters* (Fulda: Parzeller, 1952), https://fuldig.hs-fulda.de/viewer/fulltext/PPN229219721/280/.

-ranging bull of protection in reaction to the goings-on in Fulda – including a posthumous absolution of the Jews of Fulda from guilt[23].

The re-settlement of Jews in Fulda after the pogrom happened quietly and, apparently, quickly. In 1301, king Albrecht I gave the privilege to tax '*universos Iudeos ad presens in suis civitatibus et municionibus residentes, et eos etiam, qui imposterum se recipiant ad easdem*' ('all Jews residing in his towns and settlement, also those who falsely have retracted to these') to abbot Heinrich V of Weilnau (1288-1313), as a compensation for a debt of 500 marks[24]. and this privilege was made a permanent donation in 1310 by king Heinrich VII[25]. Abbot Heinrich apparently had normal relations with his Jewish subjects: he paid debts which his subordinates or their acquaintances had in Jewish lending houses[26], and furthermore he relieved the Jewish inhabitants from some payments required in order to be freed from wearing signs of their religion on their clothing, according to the regulations of the IV Lateran Council[27]. In the following years, however, the abbey of Fulda was involved in a complicated series of trials against a Jewish money lender (Salman) from Mainz and his business partners, resulting in his recurring conviction for usury and many debts, in both canonical and secular courts. The main objective of the abbey was to be freed from financial obligations resulting

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[23] MGH Const. 2.275, no.204. 'Iudeos loci predicti ab obiecto crimine ac alios Iudeos Alemannie a tam gravi infamia dictante sentencia principium pronunciavimus penitus absolutos'.

[24] *Corpus der Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp and Jörg R. Müller (Trier, Mainz 2015), WB01, Nr. 156, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/WB01/CP1-c1-00qz.html. Also printed in *Codex diplomaticus Fuldensis*, ed. Ernst Friedrich Drohnke (Kassel: Fischer, 1850), vol. 1, no. 850, 426.

[25] *Corpus der Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, WB01, Nr. 187, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/WB01/CP1-c1-00tx.html. Also printed in *Codex diplomaticus Fuldensis*, vol. 1, no. 855, 428.

[26] *Corpus der Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, WB01, Nr. 194, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/WB01/WB-c1-001p.html; WB01, Nr. 196, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/WB01/WB-c1-002u.html.

[27] *Ibid.*, TW01, Nr. 151, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/TW01/TW-c1--002m.html.

from the fact that they had acted as bailsmen for Salman, and thus sever their connection to him[28].

Between the Jewish re-settlement in 1249, after the first blood libel, and the next major pogrom lay 100 years of apparently undisturbed inter-faith relations in the town – a conclusion that can be drawn as extant sources do not mention conflict. The Nürnberg *memor* book then lists Fulda amongst the many places where Jewish communities were expulsed or murdered during the Black Death pogroms of 1349/50[29]. In March 1349, Jews in Frankfurt had been forced to admit to the poisoning of wells and sending poison to Fulda and surrounding areas[30]. The community had asked the prince-abbot for protection, but without success[31]. A chronicle reports, 'all Jews who by then were in Fulda were killed and burned'[32].

It did not take long for at least a small proportion of the survivors to once-more re-settle in the town. The next written trace of Jews in Fulda is a letter of protection penned by abbot Johann I von Merlau addressing three Jewish money-lenders, namedly Abraham den Walch, Kopphelin and Vivelman, permitting them to settle with their families in the cities of Fulda, Vacha, and Hammelburg, or elsewhere in the ecclesiastical territory of Fulda, and to engage in the business of lending money at interest, dated 7 June 1399[33].

As the previously mentioned sources regarding the synagogue and cemetery prove, the community eventually recovered from this further pogrom, growing during the late fourteenth and fifteenth

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[28] *Ibid.*, FW01, Nr. 92, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/FW01/CP1-c1-00yr.html.

[29] *Ibid.*, 235.

[30] *Ibid.*, FW02, no. 96, URL: http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/FW02/CP1-c1-008e.html.

[31] Klaus-Dieter Alicke, "Fulda," in *Lexikon der jüdischen Gemeinden im deutschen Sprachraum. 1: Aach – Groß-Bieberau* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 1346.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Printed in *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter*, I (1902), 176, here quoted from Warren I. Cohn, "Five Hundred Years "Auf der Treppen", a History of the Trepp Family of Fulda", *Year book – Leo Baeck Institute* 30, no. 1 (1985), 480.

centuries. Its religious centre remained located in the city close to the parish church, but was never walled in or closed off from the surrounding houses, even though the name 'Judengasse' (lit. 'Jews' Lane') for the street near Gemüsemarkt had been established by the early fifteenth century[34]. With the abbey and ecclesiastical territory Fulda not being affected by the Reformation and the expulsions of Jews which followed in many areas, the community thrived in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with Rabbinic education established in the 1570s[35], despite occasional attempts by the Fulda city council to deprive them of the town's protection[36]. Ghettoization first happened in 1671, when 2000 Jews were expelled 'for all eternity', with the remaining five families enclosed in a Jewish quarter with restricted access to the city.

Knowledge of the Jewish community in Fulda comes from scattered sources, deriving from recorded conflicts, and administrative records from nearby Frankfurt, in which many of the economically successful Jews from Fulda were active, owning property etc. The relations with the abbey – and thereby documentation – varied, depending on the financial gain the abbey was garnering from the community, or the financial or political currency it was hoping to leverage from people who were indebted to the Jews. This situation is typical for smaller Ashkenazi communities which left no written records of their own: documents of violence and destruction are at the same time the surviving documents of the existence of the communities.

[34] *Ibid.*, 482.

[35] Eric Zimmer, R. David B., "Isaac of Fulda: The Trials and Tribulations of a Sixteenth Century German Rabbi", *Jewish Social Studies* 45, 3/4 (1983), 217-232.

[36] Friedrich Battenberg, "Der Fuldaer Tumult von 1591. Zur Politik der kaiserlichen Administration im Stift Fulda im Streit zwischen Judenschaft und Bürgerschaft", *Aschkenas. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 16, no. 2 (2008), 405-419.

Wittenberg

The Jewish community of Wittenberg became known because of its most prominent enemy: Martin Luther, serving as a visual representation of his anti-Judaism. While there has been considerable scholarly focus and public debate regarding these topics, the question of the actual Jewish community in Wittenberg – which may or may not have been the target of this derogatory imagery – has remained more obscure, mostly due to the lack of sources. However, it makes for an interesting case of the interconnection of parish churches and Jewish communities, real or hermeneutic. The example of Wittenberg is significant because it is representative of those towns in the northern and eastern peripheries of the areas of medieval Jewish settlement in the Holy Roman Empire where fragmentary information about the Jewish community can only be deduced from two aspects: information from surrounding towns and areas, and documentation of conflicts.

On the outside of the Wittenberg parish church there is a stone relief known as the 'Judensau' – most scholars prefer to avoid the inherently offensive language and call it 'stone sow' or similar – being a depiction of a pig with two men suckling at its teats and a third lifting its tail and observing what lays therein. The three men wear the pointed hats used in Christian iconography to mark figures as Jewish. The motif is known from at least 30 medieval churches – the majority in German lands, but some examples also from France, Switzerland and Sweden. The figures and their actions vary, but there is always the connection of Jews and this most unkosher of animals, as well as sexual and scatological aspects to their depiction[37].

This relief is, to this day, found on the façade of the parish church in Wittenberg – a vivid example of derogatory iconography of Jews

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[37] Jan Dienstbier, "The Metamorphoses of the Judensau", in *Visual Antisemitism in Central Europe: Imagery of Hatred,* ed. Jakub Hauser and Eva Janáčová (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 1-2.

created by Christians. Whether it was meant as an insult directed toward the Wittenberg Jewish community, or as an admonition for Christians using the imagined Jew in a polemic form is a focus of discussion, with the relative bias varying throughout history. With reference to one of Martin Luther's anti-Jewish texts, the relief was framed with the text 'Rabini Schemhamphoras' in the sixteenth century, making clear that by then, a metaphorical interpretation of the figures and the pig was not intended – instead it was a clear derogation of Jews as worshippers of unclean, sexualized and blasphemous practices. Whilst the stonework remains on view, in 1998, the parish community of Wittenberg added a relief to the floor of the market square, mentioning the Holocaust and anti-Jewish continuities[38]. Even now, the community, the town, and Jewish and Christian scholars from the entire country debate continuously whether the relief should remain in place[39]. In 2022, the German Federal Court of Justice decided that there was no legal reason to force the parish to remove it, despite its derogatory character[40].

The town of Wittenberg had received privileges in 1293. It belonged to the Duchy of Sachsen, which, as a result of several divisions of his estate during the thirteenth century, ended up as a small and fragmented realm, with Wittenberg as the residence of the Ascanian ruler Albrecht II. Rumour has it that an extant Jewish community was expelled in the year 1304 – but despite the numerous mentions of the event and year in previous literature, no evidence in form of written or material sources has been highlighted to corroborate this. Insa Hennen suspects that historiographers of the nineteenth century

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[38] See a picture of the monument here: https://debatte.ekir.de/mahnmal-gegen--judensau-an-stadtkirche-in-wittenberg-2/.

[39] *In Stein gemeißelt – zum Umgang mit eingefurchten antisemitischen Bildern*. Epd-Dokumentation 4/20, Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie zu Berlin, Lutherstadt Wittenberg, 2020.

[40] „'Judensau' an Wittenberger Stadtkirche muss nicht entfernt werden," *Der Spiegel online*, 14.06.2022, https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/judensau-an-wittenberger--stadtkirche-muss-nicht-entfernt-werden-urteil-bundesgerichtshof-a-af6bbe79-5637-40dc-bac1-8074f19e2146.

confused this date with the year 1430, when many local Jewish communities fell victim to the Hussite wars – whilst the documentation of this conflict is almost as weak as that for an expulsion in 1430, there are at least tax registers in which many names of house owners were erased for this year. As additional evidence, a historiographer of the eighteenth century mentions that the Hussites had killed Catholics and spared Jews – the people of Wittenberg had as a consequence expelled the Jews, sending them to the neighbouring territory of Anhalt[41]. Hennen's theory of a confusion of the dates seems likely, given the sparse documentation of a community in the town at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and consequently, this first expulsion of 1304, only a decade after the foundation of the town, may as such have never happened.

The parish church of St. Mary in Wittenberg, where the relief is located, predates the foundation of the town. The church was first mentioned in 1187 and around 1280 the main chancel was built and decorated with stone adornments in the same material and style as that with the sow. Art historians assume that it had been located on the Northern façade of the church until a remodelling of the building in 1570, when it was transferred to its current location, the southern exterior of the choir. In its original location, it was surrounded by other reliefs and stone statues picturing mythical figures, dragons and demons as well as non-figurative decorations, such as leaves[42]. The iconographic context of the sow relief was thus the defence against the forces of evil, and the pictorial representation of Jews amongst the representations of paganism, myth, and evil fit a long--standing Christian tradition of demonizing Jews. It is unlikely,

[41] Insa Hennen, "Juden in Wittenberg und lutherische Judenfeindlichkeit. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte des „schweinischen Steingemähldes“", in *Die „Wittenberger Sau“: Entstehung, Bedeutung und Wirkungsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Reliefs der sogenannten „Judensau“ an der Stadtkirche Wittenberg*, ed. Jörg Bielig et al. Kleine Hefte zur Denkmalpflege 15 (Halle/Saale: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie, 2020), 86-87.

[42] Mario Titze, "Die Sau an der Kirche. Kunsthistorische Fragen an ein viel diskutiertes mittelalterliches Bildwerk", in *Die „Wittenberger Sau“*, 17-56.

however, that – at the time of production and installation – this relief was meant as a direct message or insult to the Jewish community, put simply because there may not have been one in the town around 1290, and furthermore because the broader iconographic context of the stonework suggests further interpretation. There were, however, both Jewish communities and expulsions in the vicinity of Wittenberg, in the territories of Saxonia and Thuringia. Meißen, Merseburg, and Leipzig had Jewish communities since the second half of the thirteenth century. The community in Erfurt had already been expelled in 1220, but re-settled. The victims of a blood libel and expulsions in the nearby town of Weißensee, in Thuringia, and three other local towns were documented in the Nürnberger *memor* book, and a *vita* (hagiography) of the child martyr Conrad, the presumed victim of ritual murder, was produced in 1303[43]. The blood libel allegation of Weißensee led to the murder of more than 100 Jews. Between 1300 and the Black Death pogroms, the number of Jewish settlements east of the river Saale increased, but written documentation remains rare and fragmentary[44].

In Wittenberg, a Jewish quarter developed in the immediate vicinity the church of St. Mary, but by the fifteenth century, Jews also owned houses elsewhere in the town. The number of families and individuals is not known, but several entries in the town book testify to the integration of Jews within the urban community as tax payers and participants in the town's defence. A pogrom in the years 1349-50 in Wittenberg itself is not accounted for, while many of the communities in the territories Meißen, Saxonia and Thuringia were wiped out. Expulsions and murder in the 1430s and 1440s have been mentioned

[43] "Passio Conradi", in *Corpus der Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, TW 1, Nr. 77, 24 February 1303-30 April, http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/TW01/TW-c1-004u.html.

[44] Maike Lämmerhirt, "Von Leine und Werra bis zum Bober. Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Thüringen und Sachsen (1273-1347)", In *Corpus der Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, http://www.medieval-ashkenaz.org/TW01/einleitung.html.

frequently in older historiographic works, but contemporary sources precisely for Wittenberg are lacking.

It is only after the Reformation that sources regarding Jewish communities become more frequent, but once again, they are in the form of documents of expulsion. An expulsion and subsequent prohibition of Jewish settlement across the entire Duchy of Saxonia is testified for the year 1536, as set by Johann Friedrich of Saxonia. In the following decades, the anti-Jewish writings of Martin Luther led to recurrent renewals of this ban, and after 1543, Jewish settlement in Saxonia was allowed for only a very few individuals who received letters of protection. In 1570, the offensive porcine relief was impacted by construction work at St. Mary's parish church, and was relocated to its current southerly position – facing the market square – now with the addition of text reading 'Rabbini Schemhamphoras', referring to one of Luther's hate-speech pamphlets ('Of the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Christ', 1543). Whilst the previous location and context made a reading of the picture as an admonition to Christians to restrain from blasphemy at least possible, as suggested by certain scholars[45], the Lutheran addition shifted its meaning in the clear direction of anti-Jewish slander.

This stone relief is but one of many examples of anti-Jewish polemics. It serves as a visible example – in the central urban space of a medium-sized town in a centrally located but quiet district – of the constant monologue of Christian polemics directed towards Jewish communities: no matter the status and size of the Jewish community, during peaceful co-existence, expulsions, and re-settlements, the stone relief was sat on the façade of the church, insinuating the near relation between Jews, pigs and devils in Christian eyes. The ultimate deterioration of the conditions for Jewish life in the town was brought on by Martin Luther, his disappointment over the lack of conversions to reformed Christianity and his influence on secular rulers.

[45] Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History.* Warburg Institute surveys 5 (London: Warburg Inst. University of London, 1974).

Reformatory propaganda of the time adopted most of the medieval forms of Jew-hate and stereotyping[46].

Fulda, Wittenberg and Jewish-Christian relations in Northern Europe

The two examples discussed here illustrate common traits of the smaller Jewish communities in Northern Europe. Documentation was scarce, mainly connected to pogroms and expulsions, whilst documents from the communities themselves – and in many cases also from the town administration – are found lacking: these, should they have existed, may have shown less violent parts of everyday life and cohabitation. The continuous visibility of hostility covered both the periods when Jews were living in the towns and those before, between and after Jewish settlement. This means that the documents, and thereby our perception, of Jews in these medieval towns are entirely focused on Jews as accused of blasphemy, murder or other deeds – even if the accusations are void of content to the modern reader, and the source can be likewise contextualized, the fact remains that we cannot reconstruct Jewish-Christian relations in peaceful and quiet periods. It also means that the image of medieval Jews in these areas is mainly one of victims, survivors and refugees.

Robert Chazan has identified three factors as significant for the survival of Jews in the German lands during the Crusading period: readiness of ecclesiastical and secular authorities to act, readiness of the Jews to flee, resulting in the removal of urban families to rural fortifications, and a lack of 'millenarian exhilaration' in the communities. Chazan also points out the development of Jewish Pietism

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[46] Generally on the topic of anti-Judaism in Martin Luther's writings, see Thomas Kaufmann, *Luthers Juden*. 3. durchgesehene Auflage (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017); Walther Bienert, *Martin Luther und die Juden: Ein Quellenbuch mit zeitgenössischen Illustrationen, mit Einführungen und Erläuterungen*. Reprint (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Boston: Evangelisches Verlagswerk; de Gruyter, 2019).

during the twelfth century and the 'fierce disparagement' from Christians as a result of the pogroms[47]. However, knowledge of these developments stem from the much better documented and much more densely settled areas in the Rhineland. There is no possible way of knowing if the Jews in Fulda and Wittenberg also had the chance to prepare for pogroms by securing refuges in rural areas. It can be seen, however, that they were affected by concurrent developments across the Holy Roman Empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: struggles between ecclesiastical and secular authorities, the decline of both types of local administration, resulting in a lack of protection, and Christian millennialism fuelled by catastrophes and diseases. The Rhineland Jewish communities were, however, able to re-organize after the pogroms of the twelfth century. In Fulda and Wittenberg, a strong desire to re-settle in the places of expulsion can be seen, which suggests that the communities had probably never disappeared entirely.

The question of why these people wanted to come back, not only to the well-developed centres of Jewish life, scholarship, and culture in the West, but also to the smaller communities in the North and East, is more difficult to understand. In the case of Fulda, the general success of the town and the largely positive relations with the prince--abbots may have played a role. In the case of Wittenberg, the sources are too fragmentary to seed speculation. The relations between Christian parishes and Jewish communities in towns such as these in Northern Europe were simultaneously stable and fragile. Stable, because they lasted many centuries and most often only ended with the *Shoah*. Fragile because neighbours became enemies over and over again, and these relations became, and still are, most visible in the form of anti-Jewish propaganda, and visual and textual culture.

[47] Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500*. 1. publ. Cambridge medieval textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 183-184.

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