

# History of the Jews of Germany



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# Germany



# Word Association

- \* When we think of Germany, most Jews immediately recoil with anger, resentment, fear.
- \* Words we may associate with Germany

- Murder
- Death
- Anti Semitism
- Nazis
- Holocaust
- Darkness
- Hitler
- Persecution
- Pogroms
- Systematic

# Is Germany Categorically Evil?

## Megilla 6b

is the meaning of that which is written:<sup>[54]</sup> „אל-תתן ה' מאוני – *Grant not, HASHEM, the desires of the wicked one, do not remove his nose-ring*<sup>[55]</sup> that they should be exalted, *selah*. אמר יעקב לפני הקדוש – Jacob said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: אל תתן לעשו הרשע – Master of the universe, רבונו של עולם – Do not grant Esau the wicked the desire of his heart. תאנת לבו – „ואני אל-תפק” – *Do not remove his nose-ring*, זו – this refers to

גרממיה – גרממיה של אדום – Germamya,<sup>[1]</sup> a royal province of Edom; שאלמלי הן יוצאין מחריבין כל העולם כולו – who, if they would but go forth, would destroy the entire world.

More about Germamya:

ואמר רבי חמא בר חנינא – And R' Chama bar Chanina said: תלת מאה קטירי תגא איבא בגרממיה של אדום – There are three hundred crowned princes in Germamya of Edom, ותלת מאה – and there are three hundred ושיתין וחמשה מרזבני איבא ברומי – and sixty-five chieftains in Rome. ובכל יומא נפקי הני לאפי הני – And every day [one group] goes forth to encounter [the other group], ומקטיל חד מינייהו – and one of them is killed, ומישרדי לאוקמי מלכא – and they would then have the trouble of appointing a new ruler in his stead.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Rashi

גרממיה • שם מלכות והיא מאדום : מרזבני • דוכסים : יגעתי •  
בתורה : לאוקמי גירסא • שלא תסתכל ממנו : כייעתא דשמיה •  
ויש יגעו וחינו מולא : יחילו • ילחיו ודומה לו על כן לא יחיל טוב



# Is Germany Categorically Evil?

## Yoma 10a

וּפְרָסְאֵי מִנָּא לֵן דְּמִיפְתָּ קְאָתוּ – And from where do we know that the Persians descended from Japheth? דְּכֵתִיב – For it is written:<sup>[4]</sup> „בְּנֵי יָפֶת־גֹּמֶר וּמָגוּג וּמָדִי וַיֵּנוּן וְתִבְלִי וּמִשֶּׁן וְתִירָס” – *The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.* – גּוֹמֶר זֶה גֵּרְמָנְיָא – The country identified as Gomer is Germamia.<sup>[5]</sup> – מָגוּג זֶה קְנָדִיָּא – Magog is

## Artscroll

5. The *Gra* emends this to read גֵּרְמָנְיָא, *Germania*. Although there are several views as to which land this refers to, the *Gra* makes his own view unmistakably clear in his commentary, *Eliyahu Rabba*, to *Negaim* 2:1. His comments there, as explained by *Tiferes Yisrael*, also provide a useful introduction to the following Gemara.

Noah had three sons, Japheth, Ham and Shem, the descendants of whom settled the ancient world (*Genesis* 9:18-19). [If we take the Mediterranean Sea as a point of reference,] the descendants of Japheth settled in [the general area of] Europe [including part of Asia Minor] to the north; the Hamites in Africa to the South; and the Semites in Asia (including the Mideast) to the east. The most northern area of ancient Europe, Germania, was settled by the descendants of Gomer, Japheth's son. The southernmost area of ancient Africa, which *Tiferes Yisrael* identifies as Ethiopia, was settled by Cush, Ham's son. [The area of Germania was north of the Danube River, east of the Rhine, and is largely included in modern Germany. In ancient times, Ethiopia encompassed much of east Africa, extending from the southern part of modern Egypt, possibly as far as Kenya and Zanzibar.]

## Gr'a

### הגהות הגר"א

[א] גמ' גרמניא. ז"ל  
גרמניא (ועמ"ש בא"ר  
רפ"ז דנגעים): [ב] שם  
(דבר אחר) תא"מ (וכן  
מחקו רש"י):

# Is Germany Categorically Evil?



Chochmas Chaim (Ki Seitzeh):

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848-1932) would not recite a blessing King when the King of Germany visited Jerusalem in the year 1899 quoting the Gr" a that Germans descend from Amalek

# First Jews in Germany

- \* The first indication a Jewish community in these regions is found in a decree of Constantine the Great in the year 321 placing Jews on the same level as Roman citizens. It references Jews in Cologne on the Rhine River



# Holy Roman Empire

- \* Idea of Medieval Germany is a misnomer as there was no “Germany” until the 19<sup>th</sup> c. when it emerged from Prussia.
- \* In the Middle Ages, the area was simply an amalgamation of feuding cities, kingdoms and republics
- \* The King of “Germany” answered to the Holy Roman Emperor

# Charlemagne



- \* First ruler to treat Jews well was Charlemagne, King of the Franks. He reigned from 768-814.
- \* By the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, his Kingdom which became known as the “First Reich” included France, Netherlands, Belgium, Northern Spain, Germany and Austria.
- \* He used Jews for diplomacy. They excelled in trade and commerce
- \* When Church forbade usury, Jews gained monopoly on money lending which endeared them to society



# Mainz and Worms

- \* First city to record an official Jewish settlement is Mainz (Mayence).
- \* Shortly after, the city of Worms was settled.
- \* Rabbeinu Gershom ben Yehudah (950 -1028)
  - \* Known as Me'or Ha'Golah
  - \* Lived in Mainz and credited with transforming it into a Jewish intellectual and spiritual center during that time



# Growth of Worms

- \* R' Yitzchak Halevi (d. 1070), who was Rashi's Rebbe, was an early settler of Worms.
- \* First Shul dedicated in 1034
- \* Because of its location on the Rhine River it had a powerful trading status and was a center for commerce.
- \* King Henry IV encouraged Jewish settlement in Worms by exempting Jews from taxation.

# Cemetery in Worms

1076 a Jewish cemetery is established in Worms. It is the oldest preserved Jewish cemetery in Germany



# Takanos Shu'm

- \* The Jewish communities of the cities of Mainz, Speyer and Worms formed a coalition known as Shu'm. It was the center of Jewish life and the authority of Ashkenazic Jewry during medieval times.
- \* Shu'm stands for:
  - \* Shin is for Shpira (Spira)
  - \* Vav for Vormisia
  - \* Mem for Mainz

The cities set up תקנות שו"ם formulated and agreed upon over a period of decades by their Jewish community leaders.

# Jews and Christians



- \* Relationship between Jews and Christians in (Ashkenaz) Germany can be traced to 6<sup>th</sup> century
- \* Gregory I (540-604), “Gregory the Great” rejected forced conversions, but welcomed conversion through persuasion. He protected existing rights of Jews.
- \* In the 9<sup>th</sup> c., during reign of Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne, Bishop Agobard of Lyons began an attack of the Jews.
- \* He accused the King of granting special favor to Jews and allowing them undue influence in his court. “Jewish Lobby”





# Bishop Agobard

- \* Common Christians preferred listening to Rabbis sermons and Jewish preachers
- \* Government gave sanction for building new synagogues
- \* Market day was changed from Saturday so Jews could participate
- \* Agobard wrote letters calling Judaism a “religion of magic and mysticism”



# Conversion of Bodo

- \* Louis the Pious wasn't influenced by Agobard and continued to be good to the Jews.
- \* However, soon after, Bodo a German nobleman and deacon, and a high member of the Church and court of Louis the Pious converted to Judaism
- \* Bodo became Eliezer, had a bris, grew a beard and married a Jewish woman.
- \* Church became concerned that Agobard was correct and a sentiment of Anti-Semitism began to grow

# First Crusade

- \* November 26, 1095 in Clermont, France, Pope Urban II made a public appeal to Christians to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslim Turks.
- \* Christians promised their past sins would be forgiven if they participated. Whoever died in battle would go to heaven. Some inspired by economic and political motives
- \* Jerusalem was the goal but killing infidels along the way was part of the mission.



# Effect of 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade on Jews



- \* Jews accused of crimes against their host countries
- \* Many subject to forced baptism though many chose to give their lives instead
- \* Some practiced Judaism in secret
- \* 12,000 Jews from Speyer, Treves, Worms, Mainz and Cologne murdered.
- \* Entire communities wiped out and lost
- \* A kinnah on Tisha B'Av morning dedicated to above cities

# Further Crusades

- \* Second Crusade: 1144 Pope Eugene III
- \* Third Crusade: 1187 Frederick Babrossa, Emperor of Germany
- \* Fourth Crusade: 1203 Christian warriors set out for Jerusalem but only reached Constantinople, the Christian Greek Orthodox capital. Beginning of tension between Greek and Roman Churches
- \* Fifth Crusade: 1216 led by Frederick II



# Av Ha'Rachamim

אב הרחמים שוכן מרומים, ברחמיו העצומים הוא יפקד ברחמים  
החסידים והישרים והתמימים, קהלות הקדש שמסרו נפשם על  
קדשת השם, הנאהבים והנעימים בתייהם, ובמותם לא נפרדו,  
מנשרים קלו ומארויות גברו לעשות רצון קונם וחפץ צורם. יזכרם  
אלהינו לטובה עם שאר צדיקי עולם, וינקם לעינינו נקמת דם עבדיו  
השפוך, בכתוב בתורת משה איש האלהים: הרנינו גוים עמו, כי  
דם-עבדיו יקום, ונקם ישיב לצוריו, וכפר אדמתו עמו: ועל ידי עבדיך  
הנביא-ג כתוב לאמר: ונקיתי, דמם לא-נקיתי, ויהוה שכן בציון:  
ובכתבי הקדש נאמר: למא יאמרו הגוים איה אלהיהם, יודע בגוים  
לעינינו נקמת דם-עבדיך השפוך: ואומר: כי-דרש דמים אותם וזכר,  
לא-שכח צעקת ענוים: ואומר: ידן בגוים מלא גויות, מחץ ראש  
על-ארץ רפה: מנחל בדרך ישתה, על-כן ירים ראש:

אב הרחמים Father of compassion, who dwells on high: may He remember in His compassion the pious, the upright and the blameless – holy communities who sacrificed their lives for the sanctification of God's name. Lovely and pleasant in their lives, in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions to do the will of their Maker and the desire of their Creator. O our God, remember them for good with the other righteous of the world, and may He exact retribution for the shed blood of His servants, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, the man of God: "O nations, acclaim His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, wreak vengeance on their foes, and make clean His people's land." And by Your servants, the prophets, it is written: "I shall cleanse their blood which I have not yet cleansed, says the LORD who dwells in Zion." And in the holy Writings it says: "Why should the nations say: Where is their God? Before our eyes, may those nations know that You avenge the shed blood of Your servants." And it also says: "For the Avenger of blood remembers them and does not forget the cry of the afflicted." And it further says: "He will execute judgment among the nations, filled with the dead, crushing rulers far and wide. From the brook by the wayside he will drink, then he will hold his head high."



# Rabbi Soloveitchik Commentary

אב הרחמים *Father of compassion.* This prayer was written as a result of the persecution during the Crusades; within it, we mention how the martyrs gave up their lives for the sanctification of God's name. The Crusaders sometimes dragged the Jews into a church and baptized them by force. Knowing this, the Jews did not wait for the enemy to come, but preemptively killed their own wives and children and ultimately themselves, since they feared that under torture they would not be able to withstand the offer of conversion. Tosafot (*Sanhedrin* 74b, s.v. *veha*) raise the question as to whether it is in fact necessary to give up one's life rather than submit to a forced baptism. The answer is that there is indeed no obligation to do so, but that those who did so acted stringently. They considered any gesture to idolatry, even involuntary, as requiring them to incur death rather than engage in it. (*The Lord Is Righteous in All His Ways*)

# Permanent Impact of Crusades

- \* Jews no longer hold public office
- \* Jewish ghetto began which was locked from the outside every night
- \* Jews couldn't wander the streets at night or on Christian holidays
- \* In 1215, Pope Innocent II decreed Jews must wear a yellow badge and Jews couldn't leave their homes for 3 days before Easter





# Ghetto Life



- \* Jewish community in Ghetto was autonomous
- \* Each Kehillah had a shtadlan, a community representative to interact with non Jewish rulers and businessmen.
- \* Jewish isolationism led to the rise of Yiddish which was a medieval German dialect mixed with Hebrew and the local vernacular. Yiddish was the dominant language of Ashkenazik Jews for 800 years.

# 13<sup>th</sup> Century Massacres of the Jews

- \* Series of blood libels and accusations
- \* April of 1298, Jews of Rottinger burned at the stake
- \* Went town to town killing Jews. Entire community of Wurzburg destroyed.
- \* Jews of Nuremberg escaped to a fortress and fought off attackers. Eventually overpowered and slaughtered.
- \* Among them, R. Mordechai b. Hillel ha'Cohen (1250-1298), "The Mordechai"
- \* Within 6 months, 146 communities were destroyed and over 100,000 Jews were massacred.





# Black Death – Bubonic Plague



- \* Killed 25 million people
- \* One third of European population was wiped out
- \* Economic collapse followed
- \* Jews were blamed even though they suffered much less, likely because of greater forms of hygiene due to Halacha.
- \* In wake of Black Death, from 1349-1360 a pattern of expelling Jews began.

# Early 15<sup>th</sup> century

- \* Under King Rupert (1352-1410) things began to change for the positive.
- \* Historians say beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was the happiest interval for Jews in the Middle Ages
- \* He reversed decrees against the Jews and reestablished their rights.
- \* When Rupert died, German Empire returned to anti-Semitism

# Migration

- \* Jewish population of Germany migrated from towns on the Rhine in the South to the East and the North.
- \* Communities began forming in Munich, Vienna and Berlin.
- \* Martin Luther and the Reformation he led did not offer any improvement for the Jews who continued to be oppressed.



# 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries

- \* Rapid growth of the Jewish population
- \* Luther's reformation set tone for the Thirty Years War (1618-1648)
- \* Germany was ravaged. Death attributed to armed conflict, famine and disease. Germany was fractured and France the dominant power.
- \* Jews were needed for the economy and so were reintegrated into society

# Great Rabbis of Germany

- \* Tosafos school initiated during 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade and produced Torah giants
  - \* R' Yitzchak b. Asher – Riva (d. 1130)
  - \* Rabbeinu Tam
  - \* Rashbam
  - \* R'Elazar Rokeach of Worms
  - \* R' Eliezer of Metz (1120-1190)
  - \* Ravva
  - \* R. Yehudah Ha'Chasid
  - \* Ohr Zaruah
  - \* Maharam Rutenberg
- \* Rosh – Rabbeinu Asher (1235-1310) fled from Germany to Spain in 1303 and became leader of Spain after the Rashba

# Ashkenazic Halachists

- \* R' Yaakov ben Moshe HaLevi Moellin – Maharil (1365-1427)
- \* R' Yaakov ben Yehudah Weil – Mahariv (d. 1456)
- \* R' Yisroel ben Pesachiah Isserlin – Terumas Ha'Deshen (1390-1460)





# German Customs

## Wimpel –

- \* Baby boy swaddled in a cloth after his Bris. Cloth later turned into a wrap for the Sefer Torah.
- \* Comes from statement at the Bris – k'sheim shenichnas l'bris, kein yikaneis l'Torah...
- \* Sewing wimpel a good omen so a bride or childless woman asked to do it.
- \* Maharil preferred it be made from silk. Was decorated and often had baby's name and date of birth
- \* Shul Troggen – ceremony of bringin the Wimpel to Shul usually around child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.



Thank You for Coming, please  
remember...

