

CHAPTER 5

THE NEWER JEWRIES OF THE NORTH: GERMANY AND EASTERN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

In the early Middle Ages, northern Europe – from England in the west to Poland in the east – was the underdeveloped area of western Christianity. These backward regions later transformed into the forefront of European civilization and became the center of a remarkable flourishing of Latin Christendom. However, this transformation did not happen everywhere in the same way. While, at first, the German areas led the way in evolving politically, ultimately, northern France and England took over the lead. The first powerful government to appear in northern Europe was the German emperor, a title that suggests a higher rank than that of a king. Nonetheless, over time, the kings of France and England outdid the German emperor, and their monarchies became superior in the medieval West. It is hard to tell which factors determined how the different areas developed. Did the English and the French have better leaders? Were the people, especially in the cities, more resourceful? Is it just because of geography and climate? Or was it a combination of factors?

Although the explanation is unknown, the reality is that while Germany was where the site for the earliest developments of northern-European Jewry took place, the Jewish communities of more western regions eventually outperformed German Jewry, both economically and culturally. German Jews did not experience the same decline and the massive expulsions that occurred in France and England where the blessing of a strong, central government turned into a curse. The Jews of Germany never enjoyed this blessing and likewise never suffered this curse. German Jewry experienced a different kind of decline which resulted from weak governance, widespread hostility towards Jews, and recurrent violence resulting from a combination of both.

Just like northern French Jewry had its hinterland in England, Germany had its hinterland in eastern Europe, especially Hungary and Poland. And just as some Jews moved from northern France westward to England to find new opportunities, similarly, Jews of Germany sought new opportunities in these lesser developed areas of eastern Europe. But that is where the similarity ends. The Jews who

moved to England found more sophisticated economies and governments. In contrast, the Jews who moved into eastern areas of northern Europe were faced with underdeveloped economies and political systems that welcomed their presence and activities. Jewish life in England was gone by the end of the thirteenth century, and by the year 1500, eastern Europe was on its way to become a human reservoir for world-wide Jewry.

GERMANY

Like the Jews in northern France, those of medieval Germany did not see themselves as deeply rooted in German soil. We do not find any mentioning of Jewish ancestry in Germany before the year 1000, and no references to any legal or spiritual precedents from that earlier period. Once again, while individual Jewish traders may well have made their way towards northward prior to the year 1000, medieval German Jewry emerged after. Compared to the Jews of northern France, the German Jews show more awareness of ancestors who migrated from the Mediterranean world into northern Europe. Famous among these recollections are the alleged imperial transfer of the important Kalonymos family from Italy to the Rhineland and the transmission of mystical teaching from the south into the north.

We have noted in the previous chapter two brief reports of invitations to Jews to settle in areas new to them. The first of these reports, which was composed by a Jewish author, mentions an invitation from the count of Flanders; the second, written by a Christian chronicler, describes the support of William the Conqueror for Jewish immigration into England. For Germany, we have far more detailed information on the settlement of Jews in a town new to them. That town was Speyer, located along the Rhine River and the year was 1084. Our information comes from both Jewish and Christian sources, and, indeed, among the Christian sources is the invitation itself!

Let us begin with the Hebrew narrative source. It seems to have been part of a long history of the Jewish community of Speyer, written during the second half of the twelfth century. Unfortunately, the opening sections of this communal record have been lost. What has been preserved begins with one of the longest Hebrew First-Crusade narratives, edited in the 1140s. The collection, as we now have it, ends with a summary of the history of the Jews of Speyer, which describes its beginning in 1084, its fate during the First Crusade, and the rededication of its synagogue in 1104. The description of the rededication ends with the transfer of the Torah scrolls to the rebuilt sanctuary, *“where they remain to*

this very day.” Soon after, the Jews of Speyer resumed praying in their sanctuary, *“where they pray to this very day.”* Both these references give the impression that this chronicle was written considerably later than the rededication of 1104.

According to this survey of the early history of Speyer Jewry, the Jews of Speyer originated from the older Jewish community of Mainz. The chronicler describes that in 1084 the entire Jewish neighborhood that been set on fire: *“All the Jews’ quarter and their street were burned, and we were in great fear of the burghers.”* It was then that the Jews of Mainz were invited by the bishop of Speyer to help build his new town. *“The bishop greeted us warmly, sending his ministers and soldiers after us. He gave us a place in the town and expressed his intention to build around us a strong wall to protect us from our enemies.”* Not all the Jews of Mainz accepted the invitation by the bishop while others did, and the community they created was destined for a long and distinguished history.

The charter of invitation, which was offered by Bishop Rudiger to the Mainz Jews serves as the second source of information on the origins of the Speyer Jewry. This establishment correlated with the Hebrew report and offered more valuable information. The bishop of Speyer, who also served as the temporal lord, Speyer starts off with pointing out the purpose of the invitation. He states that when he was building the village of Speyer into a town, he thought that it would be glorified if it were also be inhabited by Jews. Of course, this wish of the bishop was not to bring Jewish cultural or religious contributions to the town; the Jews were regarded useful for the economic value of Speyer. Bishop Rudiger describes further that he granted the Jews legal status more generously than Jews in any city of Germany. His claims concur well with the Jewish reference to the bishop’s kindness.

Rudiger’s first act of generosity was granting settlement of Jews in an area of Speyer that belonged to him. In fact, there were two areas, one in the lower town and one in the upper town, that the bishop opened up for Jewish settlement. to which had Jews settle in. Additionally, he also provided the Jews with land for burial. Realizing the danger of anti-Jewish violence as had occurred in Mainz, he added he had a wall built around the Jewish quarter to protect them from violent mobs. In later centuries, Christian authorities would demand that Jews live segregated from their Christian neighbors. But in this case, the Jews that moved to Speyer were partially attracted by the separation.

The Jews migrating to Speyer were merchants, and the economic provisions of their charter reflect commercial activities. Jews were allowed to buy and sell all through the town. Jews spending the night there did not have to pay tolls, which indicates a more wide-ranging Jewish trade with also out-of-

town Jews involved. The later Jewish specialization in moneylending, as shown in the history of the Jews in northern France and England and later in thirteenth-century materials from Germany does not appear in this document yet.

Two additional themes in this document are freedom from Church demands and the right of self-government. The former is shown in the rule that Jews *“may legally have nurses and servants from among our people”* and that Jews *“may sell to Christians slaughtered meats they consider unfit for themselves.”* The right of self-government is shown in the following provision: *“Just as the mayor of the town serves among the burghers, so too shall the Jewish leader (archisynagogus) adjudicate any quarrel that might arise among them or against them. If he be unable to determine the issue, then the case shall come before the bishop of the town or his chamberlain.”* Once again, the charter does seem unusually generous. The Mainz Jews may have been attracted by this generosity, as the Hebrew account reports and as Bishop Rudiger intended.

The various privileges granted to the Jews may well have been a source of Christian animosity towards their community. The notion that Jews were necessary for the growth and glory of the town must have sounded offensive to the people of Speyer. The granting of the land, and especially the wall between their neighborhoods was probably resented as well. Finally, the fact that the Jews were not under municipal jurisdiction, that they were allowed their own courts as well as the fact that their more complicated cases would be judged by the bishop himself must have annoyed Christian burghers who also strove to have their own self-government. The tensions between the two groups fed into itself. The Jews moved to Speyer already wary of their Christian neighbors. Their suspicions moved them to request the privileges given by the bishop, which in turn fueled into the anti-Jewish sentiments of the townsfolk.

Six years later, Bishop Rudiger and the leadership of the Speyer Jewish community approached the emperor Henry IV for additional protections. They received provisions that went beyond those in the 1084 charter. Jewish physical safety was assured: if anyone assaulted a Jew, he would have to pay a steep fine or receive harsh corporeal punishment. Jewish property was protected: Jewish homes were exempt from imperial quartering, and their horses exempt from requisitions. The penalties for violating these provisions were high. Finally, Jewish spiritual autonomy was assured with a ban on forcible baptism. This ban included a three-day waiting period for Jews who expressed a desire to convert to ensure their full consent. Once again, the penalties for breaking these laws were steep.

The Jews that the 1084 charter dealt with were essentially businessmen which were given extensive trading rights. An interesting clause in the charter deals with the (unintended) trading in stolen goods. The clause states that *“If a stolen item be found in their possession and if the Jew claims that he bought it, he shall substantiate by an oath how much he paid and how much he would accept, and in that way, he shall return the item to him to whom it belonged.”* For Jewish businessmen involved in extensive buying and selling, this clause was an important safeguard. Jews were also protected against certain kinds of judicial hardship; they could insist on using the Jewish court system, even in cases that involved Christians. And, as mentioned earlier, the Jewish courts were allowed to rule in cases that would arise inside the Jewish community. Beyond the Jewish court system, the court of the bishop was the only court one could appeal to.

At last, there were several useful safeguards against the intrusion of Church law into Jewish life. Jews were allowed to employ Christians except on Christian festivals and Sundays. Although the Jews were prohibited from buying Christian slaves, they were allowed to own pagan slaves. Such pagan slaves could not be lured away from their Jewish masters through baptism. Jews had the right to sell their wine, dyes, and medicines to Christians. The imperial charter of 1090 to the Jews of Speyer was similar to the earlier charter of 1084 in that it was generous in protecting the Jews and in the rights they were granted. Another imperial charter from the mid-twelfth century, granted to the Jews of Worms by Emperor Frederick I presents itself as a confirmation of an earlier charter, also given to the Jews of that town by Emperor Henry IV. The strong parallels between the content and language of that document and our 1090 charter give the impression that there existed, towards the end of the eleventh century, a more-or-less standard version of such grants for the Jews of Germany.

The Jews of eleventh-century Germany, specifically of the Rhineland, are the first protagonists in northern-European Jewry's cultural creativity. As previously noted, during the middle decades of the eleventh century, the famous northern-French Jewish figure Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi) traveled eastward to the Rhineland to continue his studies. He clearly saw the Rhineland academies as being the forefront of Jewish studies at the time.

Rabbi Gershom of Mainz, known as the "Light of the Exile," is the most prominent figure in the earliest phase of northern-European creativity. Rabbi Gershom's leadership can be seen in both the communal and literary spheres, although much is uncertain about both sets of activities. His contemporaries and later Jews obviously recognized him as a significant authority. His *“responsa”*

(replies to questions about Jewish law) were influential in later studies and interpretations of Jewish law. It is believed that he was behind several important communal ordinances that have since gained widespread acceptance among German Jews, and eventually all Western Jews. The most well-known of these ordinances associated with Rabbi Gershom prohibits polygamy. This ordinance has been a pillar of Jewish family life throughout the following millennium.

Hardly anything of Rabbi Gershom's writings still exists, and therefore it is hard to fully understand the scope of his intellectual activity. His work clearly focused on Jewish law and its roots in the Babylonian Talmud. He allegedly copied the Talmud. Since the Talmud is very large in size, it is possible for people to make mistakes while copying it. Different readings of the Talmud can affect how someone interprets important passages. Rabbi Gershom seems to have created an authoritative Talmudic text which allowed scholars in the Rhineland and northern Europe to study the same text. Whatever his exact contributions were, following generations of Jewish thinkers associate Rabbi Gershom with the flourishing of German Jewry and its rise to prominence.

The call to the First Crusade triggered widespread anti-Jewish sentiments. These anti-Jewish sentiments led to bloody massacres that are often described as a detrimental milestone in Jewish history. However, the assaults of 1096 were limited in their location. While violent incidents did occur outside the Rhineland, they would not have left a noteworthy impression on Jewish history. It was the violent eruptions in the Rhineland itself that were earth-shattering. The 1096 attacks on the Jewish communities in Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and Cologne were intense, unprecedented, and deadly. These important early centers of Jewish life were totally devastated. Nonetheless, the Jewish communities in the Rhineland recovered fairly quickly and were able to reemerge as flourishing centers of Jewish life.

These extreme events resulted in the creation of several remarkable Jewish accounts that preserve different voices and viewpoints. They show us aspects of pre-1096 Jewish life, as well as important aspects of the 1096 events itself. Of the different voices, the earliest and most valuable is that of the *Mainz Anonymous*. The gifted author and thinker, writing shortly after the events of 1096, composed a beautiful narrative that shows the early development of the crusade in France, the arrival of the French crusaders in the Rhineland, the arousal of anti-Jewish anger and behavior in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz. Furthermore, it shows the reactions of the authorities and civilians to these new developments as well as the Jewish responses. It was extremely important to prepare the Jewish

community for possible repetitions of the 1096 violence. The author of the *Mainz Anonymous* informed his fellow Jews about the sources of the violence, the behaviors of different elements within the Christian community, and the Jewish reactions. Very importantly, it countered the Christian interpretations of the 1096 events as Christians used them as “proof” of Jewish hopelessness. The *Mainz Anonymous* offered its readers an approach in which the tragedy was, in truth, a victory.

As a start, let us look at life for the Jews before 1096, as described by the *Mainz Anonymous*. As we already know, the Jewish civilians of the Rhineland were subjects of the German emperor who was located far away and therefore had little influence. In practical terms, the Jews lived under the protection of the local Rhineland bishops who were the real political authorities on the ground. The bishops were all determined to protect the Jews, but they were not sure how to best achieve this. In many cases, they failed to accomplish their intentions.

Four bishops were involved, those in charge of the towns of Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and Cologne. Of these, only Bishop John of Speyer, which had a young and small Jewish community, was successful in protecting the Jews. One Sabbath morning, there was an attack on the Jewish neighborhood, and bishop John sent his militia to repel the attackers and punished those involved. He then divided the Jews over different fortresses so they could be protected. Contrary to this tactic, the bishops of Worms and Mainz gathered all the Jews of their towns together in their own fortress. This failed to save the Jews. The bishop of Cologne adopted the tactic used by Bishop John and distributed the Jews over seven fortifications in the area, but this failed to protect them. Almost all these strongholds were attacked and destroyed.

Not all citizens of the Rhineland reacted the same to the anti-Jewish frenzy unleashed by the French crusaders and spread by their German imitators. In many cases, the citizens of the towns in the Rhineland allied themselves with the crusaders. The *Mainz Anonymous* tells us how negotiation with French crusaders were successfully concluded, and the Jews provided them with funds in exchange for their safety. However, it reports: “*All this, however, was unavailing (...) the burghers in every town to which the crusaders came were hostile to us...*” “For example, he described a situation where a locked gate of the town of Mainz was opened to the crusading band of Emicho of Flonheim by citizens who sympathized with them. In contrast, the *Mainz Anonymous*, also described an earlier incident in Mainz.

In this incident an unorganized crusading band was led by a woman and her wonder-working goose. They mocked the Jews and their hopeless situation (a theme to which we will return). When this resulted in dangerous anti-Jewish hatred and growing violence, some of the citizens of Mainz stood bravely alongside their Jewish neighbors and protected them. The *Mainz Anonymous* depicts, for example, the locked gates of Mainz opened to the crusaders under Count Emicho by sympathizing townspeople. On the other hand, the *Mainz Anonymous* also described an earlier incident in Mainz in which a disorganized crusading band, led by a woman with a wonder-working goose, mocked the Jews, thereby evoking a dangerous anti-Jewish atmosphere. But when violence against the Jews almost erupted, some of the citizens in Mainz bravely stood by their Jewish neighbors and protected them.

Bishops and burghers were preexisting elements of Jewish life in the Rhineland. When the Pope called for the freeing of Christianity's sacred sites in the Holy Land and for taking revenge on the Muslims for abusing these sites, he made no reference to the Jews and did not call for anti-Jewish actions. Those crusading armies that successfully made their way eastward and conquered Jerusalem were not involved in the anti-Jewish violence of 1096. It was in the more grassroots groups from which anti-Jewish waves of hatred erupted. In extremist circles, the Pope's call to liberate the Holy Sepulcher (Jesus' alleged gravesite) and to take revenge on the Muslims got confused with the idea that revenge must *first* be taken on those who had been responsible for Jesus' death and burial in the first place (the Jews), and *only then* on those who had more recently abused it (the Muslims). The revenge motif, combined with elevated expectations of the second coming of Jesus and the advent of his reign on earth, inspired these extremist circles to commit anti-Jewish violence.

Those armies that were militarily successful did not take an anti-Jewish message from the call to crusading. However, the more popular French army, led by the charismatic Peter the Hermit, saw the call to crusade as exactly that, an anti-Jewish duty. However, they were quite pleased with the supplies they were able to obtain from the scared Jews of the Rhineland. The most extreme in their thinking were the German groups that came together to form an even bigger group after Peter's journey eastward. According to the *Mainz Anonymous*, the attempt to supply Count Emicho and his followers with provisions in the same way that Peter had been supplied, was a terrible failure. The German group was set on the most drastic form of vengeance, which was to completely destroy the Rhineland Jewish

communities by baptizing those willing to convert and killing those who weren't.

The Jews of the Rhineland had received warnings from their fellow Jews in France about the crusades and the anti-Jewish propaganda that accompanied it. Nonetheless, the Jews were not prepared for the level of violence they were to encounter which had not been seen before. The authorities which promised safety were unable to repel the unexpectedly strong and militant bands of crusaders. The Jews who had counted on the protection of these authorities found themselves trapped, having to face unescapable outbursts of violence. Some Jews saved their lives by (outwardly) converting. However, according to the Hebrew narratives, a larger number of Jews chose to give up their lives rather than their faith.

Many Jews lost their lives, thereby attaining the status of martyrs. Some died fighting against the attackers, and some let themselves to be killed by the crusaders and townsmen. Most radically, others chose to take their own lives, in some cases, even killing their wives and children first before either taking their own lives or allowing themselves to be slaughtered by their attackers.

A report from the *Mainz Anonymous* shows the most radical Jewish response It provides us with a glimpse of its extreme nature and helps us understand the symbolism behind these behaviors. In Worms, *"there was an incident of a young man, named Meshullam ben R. Isaac. He called out loudly to all those standing there and to Zipporah his helpmate: 'Listen to me both great and small. This son God gave to me. My wife Zipporah bore him in her old age, and his name is Isaac. Now I shall offer him up, as did our ancestor Abraham with his son Isaac.'* Zipporah replied: *'My lord, my lord. Wait a bit. Do not stretch forth your hand against the lad, whom I have raised and brought up and who I bore in my old age. Slaughter me first, so that I not witness the death of the child.'* He then replied: *'I shall not delay even a moment. He gave him to us and will take him as his portion. He will place him in the bosom of Abraham.'* He then bound Isaac his son and took in his hand the knife with which to slaughter his son and made the benediction for slaughtering. He then slaughtered the lad. He took his screaming wife from the chamber, and the crusaders killed them ."

This is a terrifying story, and indeed, the *Mainz Anonymous* meant it to be shocking. This remarkable behavior had to be recorded and the anonymous author portrayed it as an

imitation of the greatest biblical figure, the patriarch Abraham. The reader can easily conclude that Meshullam of Worms went even further than Abraham in his devotion. While Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Meshullam actually did it. Abraham's action had no additional ramifications for his family or for himself personally: young Isaac of Worm's death culminated in the deaths of his mother and father as well.

The recitation of the blessing typically chanted over the ritual act of animal slaughter strengthens the impression that this extreme response is morally correct, indeed a holy act. In Jewish tradition, the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham was associated with the site upon which the Jerusalem temples would eventually stand. The biblical story ends with the sacrifice of a ram that takes the Isaac's place. The Jews take gave up their lives saw themselves as sheep and bulls offered at the altar of a spiritual temple along the River Rhine. In addition, there is a clear conviction in the *Mainz Anonymous* that great blessings will be the reward for this radical behavior. The young victim Isaac will be laid to rest "in the bosom of Abraham". The conviction of an abundant and immediate heavenly reward for the martyrs is shown throughout the Hebrew narratives.

The author of the *Mainz Anonymous* wrote his story partially to warn Jewish readers about crusaders, Christian authorities, and Christian neighbors. Secondly, he wrote his narrative out to show love and admiration for the martyrs. *There was, however, a third purpose to his work as well.* The *Mainz Anonymous* and the other Hebrew narratives describe several incidents in which Christians tried to convince the Jews that the appearance of the Christian armies and the slaughter of Jews can only be understood in one way, namely that God had favored the Christians and abandoned the Jews. As a result, this condemning Christian interpretation of the tragedy made the pain that accompanied the catastrophe even worse. Jews needed a different way to understand the events of 1096, a way that would allow them to maintain their Jewish identity in the face of Christian self-righteousness."

The way in which the *Mainz Anonymous* presented the events of 1096 was brilliant. Contrary to Christian claims that Jewish sinfulness had caused God to abandon the Jews and had caused the loss of Jewish life during the First Crusade, the *Mainz Anonymous* presented a quite different picture. God had not turned His back on the Jewish people at all. Rather, He had decided to test them, just as he had previously tested Abraham. The challenging test included life itself, the most precious human

possession. God concluded Abraham's test by awarding him with a great blessing: *"Because you sacrificed your beloved son and did not withhold him, I will give you my blessing and multiply your descendants until they are as numerous as the stars in the sky, and they shall overtake the gates of their enemies. Your lineage will enrich all the countries of the world because you followed my advice."* If God gave all this to Abraham for his willingness to offer the sacrifice of one son, how much more abundant would His blessing be on a generation that actually offered their sons and daughters.

The central position of the Rhineland's Jewish community within northern Europe, especially in spiritual terms, was compromised, but certainly not destroyed by the Rhineland massacres of 1096. During the twelfth century, Jewish life in Germany, as in northern France, continued to evolve in several different directions. The Jewish population in Germany continued to grow, the communities of Worms, Mainz, and Cologne were quickly rebuilt, and the foundations of Jewish economic life became stronger. Spiritual life in the German Jewish communities continued to prosper, though they may have lagged behind the Jewish centers in France. This was more a result of positive developments in France than of negative developments in Germany.

Economically, there were major differences between the French and German centers of Jewish life. The slow development toward a powerful, central government in twelfth-century France did not take place in Germany. The twelfth century, as well as the thirteenth, did show several powerful German rulers, but their rule stretched over areas too vast to oversee. These German emperors were not able to protect their Jews in the same way as French regional rulers and kings did. They never managed to support Jewish economic activities in the same way as the French, but they were also unable to exploit their Jews to the same extent. From the Jewish perspective, the limited exploitation by the government was a good thing. On the other hand, the government's inability to support advanced business operations and its repeated failure to protect Jewish life and property were certainly a negative factor.

Throughout the twelfth century, the German Jewish communities did not thrive economically as much as Jews in France and England did. The kind of sophisticated banking system that would enable economic successes similar to that of the French and English Jews was not possible within German society. During the thirteenth century, pawning would become the most important economic activity for

Jews in Germany. Pawning is borrowing money while using a valuable object as a security deposit. If the amount is not paid back (in time), the lender keeps the object and may sell it in lieu of the payback. Pawnbroking is much less profitable than other forms of moneylending. However, during the twelfth century, German Jews were still mainly active in trading.

Maintaining security was of utmost importance to the German Jews while the Crusades and the anti-Jewish sentiment that accompanied them proved so threatening. Church authorities were prepared to prevent a repetition of the anti-Jewish outbursts of 1096. Through his letters, Bernard of Clairvaux, the spiritual leader of the Second Crusade, tried to prevent anti-Jewish violence from recurring. To neutralize the potential for assaults, he traveled to the Rhineland when anti-Jewish sentiment did erupt again. The Jewish reporter of anti-Jewish violence during the Second Crusade, Ephraim of Bonn, had little to report. He does not seem to know of any large-scale violence inflicted on Jews during the Second Crusade. Ephraim did however mention a few incidents of individual crusaders attacking individual Jews, but nothing like the large-scale assaults on entire Jewish communities in 1096. Ephraim reports three instances where substantial numbers of Jews were killed, but his accounts are so unspecific that scholars have not been able to identify where these instances would have taken place.

The small number of casualties during the Second Crusade are mostly because both the Church leadership, the rulers, and the Jews themselves were prepared this time. Ephraim of Bonn tells us that the strategy of moving Jews out of the cities into rural fortresses, though this had met with mixed results during the First Crusade (Cologne), proved extremely important in protecting the Jews of Germany during the Second Crusade. Indeed, Ephraim himself, at the age of thirteen, was part of a large group of Jews that was brought to the fortress of Wolkenburg. Jews from other important cities found similar refuges throughout Germany. There was also less millenarian fever during the Second Crusade (the expectation of an imminent 1000-year reign of the returning Jesus), which probably also contributed towards reduced violence towards Jews.

The same combination of factors - preparedness on the part of the authorities of Church and state, Jewish readiness, the removal of urban Jews to rural fortresses, and lack of millenarian excitement - also helped German Jews during the Third Crusade. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms was one of the most

important figures within the movement of the *Hasidé* Ashkenaz, the German Pietists. He left us a record of events that occurred in Germany during the Third Crusade. Rabbi Eleazar begins his memoir with an accusation of Jewish ritual murder allegation in Mainz in the year 1187, which we will discuss later. He then states that on the second day of the Jewish New Year, a solar eclipse took place which was interpreted as a divine sign. A few months later, word spread that on the day of the solar eclipse, the Muslims had won a major victory in the Holy Land which eventually led to their reconquering of Jerusalem. This record is told by Rabbi Eleazar with satisfaction and even hatred towards the Christian holy sites that had now been taken by the Muslims.

Jewish excitement over the victory of control of the Holy Land by Muslims was immediately diminished after the rapid mobilization of Christian forces in Europe for a new crusade. This mobilization, according to Rabbi Eleazar, contributed to the now familiar anti-Jewish sentiment across Europe that go along with crusading. Jews in Mainz and other German towns were deeply frightened and responded with prayers and fasting, while also preparing to leave their homes to find safety elsewhere. The Jews of Mainz, among them Rabbi Eleazar, left their hometowns in March of 1188 for the castle of Munzberg where they lived for almost two months, successfully avoiding the crusading bands and safely returning to their homes by late April of that same year.

Rabbi Eleazar writes that an imperial convocation took place in Mainz during which Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and his most important followers “took up the cross” in front of Germany's religious leaders. In his memoir, Rabbi Eleazar included an important letter that was written in Mainz by one of the Jews who had chosen to stay in the city to continue their negotiations with the secular and ecclesiastical leaders. This unusual letter describes the events in a tense and sharp manner. Jewish leaders who chose to remain in Mainz were in grave danger. Crusaders broke into the Jewish neighborhood and endangered the lives of the Jewish delegation. According to the letters, imperial officials took action and saved the endangered Jews. After the imperial involvement, the negotiations were successful. The following decree from the emperor was issued: *“Anyone who wounds a Jew, his hand will be cut off. Anyone who kills a Jew will be killed.”* The assembled bishops supported this decree and stated that the crusade could not be used as an excuse to avoid these punishments. Rabbi Eleazar writes that this strong position of the emperor was crucial in keeping the Jews safe.

As we saw, in the more western parts of northern Europe, the anti-Jewish attitudes that accompanied the crusades evolved from the notion of Jews as the enemies of Jesus in the remote past to a sense that the Jews in the present harbored intense hatred towards Christians. The Jews of northern Europe were thought to be so full of hatred that they resorted to murdering innocent Christians. We have already seen this perception of Jewish hatred reflected in the events in Norwich in 1144. Ephraim of Bonn described a similar incident in the German town of Würzburg during the Second Crusade. There, in 1147, the body of a Christian (an adult this time) was found in the river. The Jews of Würzburg were thereupon accused of murdering the Christian out of hatred for Christianity. The victim had become a martyr. This led to an attack on the Jewish community with more than twenty Jews killed by the mob. The remaining Jews had taken shelter in the local fortress and survived. Ephraim informs us that the bishop of the town personally stepped in and arranged for the burial of those killed. While these events were similar to the ones in Norwich, the important difference is that no Jews in Norwich were harmed while Jews in Würzburg were.

Ephraim of Bonn concluded his account of Jewish fate during the Second Crusade with a list of anti-Jewish incidents from across northern Europe between 1171 and 1196. Some of these incidents involved allegations of Jewish ritual murder. He mentions three cases in which these accusations involved German Jews. And in one of these three, Ephraim tells us, a Jew did actually commit a murder in the town of Neuss in 1186. According to Ephraim, a deranged Jew killed a Christian girl and was immediately killed by enraged onlookers. Thereafter, six more Jews were killed, the Jewish neighborhood was plundered, and the Jewish corpses were publicly displayed in a humiliating way. Several days later, the mother and sister of the deranged Jew were murdered, and several Jews were forced to convert. Eventually, the Jews had to pay large sums of money to the archbishop, and an additional price to bury the displayed corpses.

Ephraim describes two instances of the Jews being blamed for murder: the first being in 1180 in Cologne and the second in 1196 in Speyer. In the latter case, the imperial authorities, which had issued a warning against the harming of Jews, which enraged by the violence and punished the town of Speyer severely. Rabbi Eleazer of Worms, in his Third Crusade memoir, begins with a Mainz Christian charging a Mainz Jew with attempted murder. While no violence occurred in this instance, the Jews had to pay a fine to the archbishop. They were subsequently brought before the archbishop on the second day of

Rosh ha-Shana where they took an oath stating that they had not done any harm to the accusing Christian. They also swore that “*they [the Jews] do not kill Christians on the eve of Passover.*” By the end of the twelfth century, this kind of unsubstantiated murder accusation occurs frequently, across northern Europe. In the more western countries, not much violence was caused by these types of allegations. In Germany, many more Jews lost their lives because of it.

The leading position of the Talmud academies in the Rhineland during the eleventh century diminished greatly during the twelfth. This was possibly the result of the disastrous events of 1096. Even though Jewish life continued there, and the infrastructure of the communities was rebuilt, it may not have been possible to again become the center of Jewish learning. On the other hand, the shift of the center of Jewish scholarship from Germany to northern France had much to do with the flourishing intellectual culture of France, including in Christian circles. French Jews developed novel approaches in the study of Talmud and Bible. It is hard to trace how mutual influencing exactly may have worked, but we can see clear parallels between intellectual innovative activities among both Christian and Jewish scholars. It is evident that the general culture in northern France had an important impact. It seems that this was a stronger factor in the shift from Germany to France than the devastations of the First Crusade.

German Jewry most assuredly did maintain its creative flair in the wake of 1096. There was significant creativity in the area of mystical and pietistic thinking (which emphasized devotional experience and practices). A school of German Jewish pietists arose in the towns of the Rhineland (known as *Ḥasidé Ashkenaz*) which was led by two important figures named Rabbi Judah heḤasîd and Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. The most prominent work of this school is a collection of pietistic stories and teachings known as the *Séfer Ḥasidîm*. This important work reflects the thinking of this Rhineland pietistic circle and influenced future Jewish thinkers across western Christendom.

The religiosity of these German-Jewish pietists was fairly extreme. It came forth from a notion that one must go beyond the level of normal Jewish religious observance. In the notion of the German Pietists, a Jew was expected to exceed the prescribed obligations and do more than what is strictly required. This notion expressed itself in radical asceticism, i.e. abstinence, and denying physical

pleasure. Furthermore, the pietist must give up certain comforts that are normally allowed and undertake spiritual exercises that test the body beyond its normal limits. Some of these extreme practices also occurred in twelfth-century Christian pietistic movements. Just like the extreme martyrological behaviors of 1096 may have been influenced by the elevated religious expressions of the crusade and the level of self-sacrifice among Christians, so too may the extreme asceticism of the *Hasidé Ashkenaz* have been influenced by this phenomenon in Christian circles.

The possibility of Christian influence on the German Pietists does not mean that the *Hasidé Ashkenaz* had a favorable view of Christianity. On the contrary, their writings show a radical sense of the absolute correctness of Judaism and the utter error of Christianity. They did not give intellectual arguments against Christianity like Jewish scholars did in southern Europe, but their criticism of Christianity is nonetheless harsh. Jews who compromise in any way with Christianity do so in error and will be severely punished as a result. Christianity is wrong and idol worship. Jews should keep as far away from it as possible to avoid potential influence.

The German-Jewish Pietists went far beyond their strict self-discipline and self-denial. They created complex mystical beliefs as well. These mystical teachings are still not fully discovered and understood. Like their counterparts in southern Europe, the German-Jewish Pietists were dedicated to move beyond the perceivable realities of all things — in the physical world, in society, and in received religious tradition — and to understand the deeper truths that lay underneath the surface. The ideas of the German-Jewish Pietists were more conventional and less dynamic than those that emerged in southern France and throughout the Iberian peninsula. They were destined to have less of an impact on later Jewish mystical theory and practice.

By the end of the 12th century, the Jews living in Germany had rebuilt their communities from the destruction of 1096. Their economic and political means had sufficiently recovered and there were innovative approaches to spirituality. During the thirteenth century, the emperor sought to expand his authority but increasingly failed in his efforts to do so. Competing local rulers were able to gradually break down the emperor's authority which resulted in a highly ineffective government. This erosion of authority had serious implications for the Jews. The Jews were caught up in the competition between Church, emperor, and local rulers. Simultaneously, these forces provided inadequate protection. In addition, during the thirteenth century, Jews of Germany became increasingly involved in money

lending. As the Jews did not live under an effective government as was the case in northern France and England, their loans were not secured by their government. Therefore, to create some business security, the Jews had to lend against deposits of material pledges, thereby limiting the scale and value of the loans. Finally, the anti-Jewish allegations that had started to circulate in the twelfth century increased during the thirteenth century. Such allegations often culminated in the killing of Jews. The end of the thirteenth century would prove to be a mere foreshadowing of an even worse fourteenth century.

Moneylending was the source of dependence of the Jewish economy. While there were many charters (legal codes) to German Jews during the late eleventh and the twelfth century, none of them addressed Jewish moneylending. In contrast, in 1244, Duke Frederick of Austria passed a charter for the Jews that focused on protecting Jewish moneylending. This charter is important for several reasons. It shows the disagreements between the authorities and the local rulers, and it was copied by authorities of other Eastern Europeans as they wanted to attract Jews to their lands. It is important to discuss these charters as they tell us about the evolving Jewish economy in Germany.

Just like previous charters had done, Duke Frederick's charter included important protections for the Jews. These protections involve physical safety for the Jews. Just like the previous documents, there are punishments against killing a Jew, wounding a Jew, striking a Jew, violence against Jewish women, and kidnapping of Jewish children. All actions are forbidden, and the punishments for committing them are harsh: the killer of a Jew must die; one who wounds a Jew must pay a fine to the Duke's treasury as well as compensate the wounded Jew; likewise for one who strikes a Jew; one who strikes a Jewish woman is to have his hand cut off; the kidnapper of the Jewish child is to be treated as a thief. Besides stipulations concerning the safety of Jewish individuals, this charter also protects Jewish synagogues and cemeteries.

Another major focus of the charter is Jewish judicial rights. The charter protects the Jewish court system and reinforces its authority within the Jewish community. If Jews are brought to justice outside of the Jewish court system, they are only answerable to the court of the Duke. The following protection concerning testimonies against Jews is included: *"In cases involving money or immovable property or a criminal complaint touching the person or property of a Jew, no Christian shall be admitted as a witness against Jews, unless there is a Jewish witness along with the Christian."* This is obviously a very generous condition.

Although these protections are important, it is remarkable that out of the thirty clauses, eleven of them are related to Jewish lending. Yet only one of these eleven clauses mentions lending against land, which had helped northern-French and English Jews acquire their wealth and importance. This clause allows the Jewish lender to take whatever was pledged by the borrower if he does not pay back the loan. This clause states: *"If a Jew has lent money to a magnate of the country on his possessions or on a note and proves these through a document, we will assign the pledged possessions to the Jew and will defend them for him against violence."* Compared to the sophisticated systems that, by this time, had been in place for a long time already in northern France and England, this stipulation is quite primitive.

All the other protections of Jewish lending address issues with pawnbroking, especially about the items that are deposited in exchange for Jewish loans. The charter acknowledges the Church's concerns regarding Jewish lending that we discussed earlier. The last paragraph in the chapter includes a maximum interest rate of thirty-three percent which reflects the prohibition issued by the Fourth Lateran Council of Jews taking exorbitant rates of interest. However, almost every other stipulation favors the Jewish lender. For example, he *"is allowed to receive as pledge all items that may be pawned with him (...) without making any investigation about them, except bloody or wet clothing and sacred vessels, which he shall under no circumstances accept."* What if there was a claim that the pawned object had been stolen and must therefore be returned? *"The Jew must swear on that pledge that (...) he did not know it had been removed by theft or robbery. In this oath, the amount for which the pledge was pawned shall also be included. Then, inasmuch as the Jew has brought his proof, the Christian shall pay him the capital and the interest that has accrued in the meantime."*

These protections for Jewish lenders parallel other protections of Jews: If a Christian claimed that he had pawned a pledge and the Jew denied this claim, or if a Christian claimed that he had borrowed a smaller amount against the pledge than what was claimed by the Jew, or if the Jew claimed that the pledge was already returned, in such cases the Jew could take an oath and the situation was ruled in his favor. If pledges were lost through circumstances out of his control, such as by fire, theft, or violence, as long as the Jew's possessions were also lost, the Jew did not need to repay. The picture of a protected position is clear. What is however important to observe is that the great attention that this ducal charter of 1244 gives to Jewish moneylending testifies to the Jewish transition into moneylending.

We have seen before how the Jews became entangled in the political rivalry of northern France. As the French king strove to increase his power, he claimed his authority over an increasing number of Jewish subjects. This led to an emphasis on Jewish serfdom, which meant that Jews were attached to a specific domain and punished if they tried to leave that domain. In Germany, the Jews were caught up in rivalries as well but under quite different circumstances. There, the most significant rivalry was between Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire (the German emperor). By the thirteenth century, this competition already had a history of more than a century. During the first half of the thirteenth century, the conflict reached its peak when powerful popes collided with Emperor Frederick II. The pope's insistence that the Jews were to be subjugated to the Church conflicted with the emperor's position that the Jews were under his authority.

One of the most pretentious imperial proclamations in defense of the Jews came in 1236. It is written in eloquent and bombastic language, but its high blown statements came with minimal implications.

In fact, despite this grandiose declaration, the reality was a constant erosion of the emperor's power in favor of the local rulers. During the 1230s and 1240s, Emperor Frederick II recognized the authority of several local rulers across Germany, while at the same time losing much land to noblemen and towns. We have already briefly discussed the charter put forward by the Duke of Austria to his Jews in 1244. The circumstances of this charter are telling. In 1238, Emperor Frederick II had tried to take control over Vienna, while promising a generous privilege to the Jews of that town. The charter of 1244 which we discussed before in relation to the developments within Jewish economic activity, was the response of the duke, who announced his rights over the Jews of Vienna and all of Austria. In this battle, it was the duke of Austria who came out victorious. The slow erosion of the emperor's power once again highlights the contradicting developments between the political situation in France versus Germany. In France, the tendency was toward strengthening centralized authority, in Germany, the trend was fragmentation (the breaking up of power). Each of these tendencies held negative implications for the Jews. In the former case, as we have seen, firmer control meant more exploitation. In the latter case, political weakness meant greater insecurity for the Jews who were deeply dependent on governmental support.

In Germany, protection from the government was needed due to the population's growing hatred against the Jews. Accusations against Jews that had started to emerge in the 12th century intensified in the 13th. In fact, the pompous imperial proclamation that we just mentioned was a reaction to the first occurrence of a new expression of the belief that Jews would kill their Christian neighbors out of a deeply rooted hatred of the Christian faith. We have already mentioned the archbishop of Mainz's demand in 1187 that the local Jews take an oath stating that *"they do not kill Christians on the eve of Passover."* It's not clear what exactly prompted this oath. The Passover festival does contain blood imagery. According to the biblical story, the water of the Nile River turned into blood, and the Israelites' first-born were saved by applying sacrificed blood to the doorposts and lintels of the Israelites' homes. The Bible relates: *"And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I attack the land of Egypt."* The oath of 1187 seems to indicate that the idea of Jewish murderousness, already widespread by the end of the twelfth century, had morphed into a fear that Jews might use Christian blood during the Passover ritual.

Although we are not fully informed about the fears that led to the 1187 oath in Mainz, we are better informed about the claim that came up in the German town of Fulda in 1235. There were accusations that Jews had used the blood of Christian children in their Passover ritual. This new allegation was clearly based on the previous assumption that Jews hated their Christian neighbors. Christians believed that bloodshed and murder rituals existed in Jewish tradition and teachings. In the earlier stages of this perception, this idea of ritual murder was linked to Easter week, meaning that Jews were believed to repeat their historic sin (the murdering of Jesus) by crucifying Christian children. In the case of Fulda in the thirteenth century, the ritual had become connected in the minds of the Christians to the Jewish celebration of Passover which takes place around the same time as Easter. Given the symbolism of blood in the Passover story, it was a small step to ascribe ritual use of Christian blood to Jews.

The Jews of Germany sensed the growing danger of the population's rage and turned to the highest authorities of Church. Pope Innocent IV issued a letter repudiating the new defamation. More than a decade earlier, in 1236, Emperor Frederick II had heard the Jewish plea, had thoroughly investigated the issue, and had issued a decree rejecting the new charge. The emperor's investigation consisted of two stages. In the first stage, the emperor organized a meeting of church leaders and noblemen. It produced *"diverse views on the matter ... not adequate to produce clear counsel."* It was

then concluded that the only way to find out if these allegations were true was to question people who had been Jews and who had converted to Christianity. Since they were opposed to Judaism, they would not cover up what they knew firsthand about what went on inside the Jewish community.” The emperor, by the way, made it clear that he himself and his advisors were convinced that Jews were innocent. Jewish experts were only consulted in order to remove all doubt and to convince everyone else. Ex-Jewish experts were gathered from all areas of western Christendom and met under the supervision of the emperor. They examined the new allegation and emphatically rejected it. Based on their Jewish knowledge, these experts concluded that Jews are forbidden to intake any kind of blood, including even blood from kosher animals, as is expressed in the Torah and in the Talmud. For this reason and many others, a desire for human blood is unthinkable among Jews. Taking this into consideration, the Emperor Frederick II acquitted the Jews of Fulda and any other Jews of these criminal charges. He also prohibited any future attacks grounded in this allegation.

The investigation ordered by the emperor and his concluding edict seem to be inspired by fear of this new accusation and by a determination to end it once and for all. These are far-reaching imperial steps and a clear imperial conclusion. That fear was certainly appropriate. The hope that the measurements taken (an assembly of former Jews, their rejection of the accusation, and a ban on anti-Jewish violence based in this accusation) would put an end to the hoax proved to be false. There were several charges against Jews that first emerged during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: a general claim of senseless killing, more specific claims that Jews crucify Christian children, a claim that Jews ritually sacrifice Christian children, a claim that Jews abuse consecrated wafers which represents the body of Christ, and finally the claim that Jews would use Christian blood for their religious rituals. It was this last allegation that was the most persistent throughout the ages. The blood libel remained a popular belief in European mythology from the thirteenth century down into the twenty-first century.

The increased anti-Jewish attitudes combined with a weakening political power in Germany produced a massive outburst of anti-Jewish violence towards the end of the thirteenth century, known as the Rindfleisch massacres. During the 1280's the blood libel accusation, which had supposedly been disproved by the emperor's investigation, resurfaced in several German towns. The hatred was further strengthened by the new accusation of host desecration which had first been raised in Paris in 1290. In April 1298, in the German town of Roettlingen, twenty-one Jews were murdered by a mob led by a German knight named Rindfleisch. The basis for the assault was the allegation of host desecration

(supposed abuse of consecrated a host wafer which, according to Catholic theology, has changed into the body of Christ). In the following five months, Rindfleisch led mobs throughout Franconia, Swabia, Hesse, and Thuringia, in a manner quite similar to the forces led by Emicho of Flonheim in 1096. In this case, however, the loss of lives seems to have been even greater. Despite an order from the emperor to stop the violence, the attacks continued into the first years of the fourteenth century. These attacks highlight the detrimental combination of growing anti-Jewish sentiments and deteriorating political authority.

We already mentioned the general deterioration in European life during the fourteenth century. After three centuries of remarkable progress, during the fourteenth century Europe suffered devastating setbacks of all kinds. It was not just the years of the Black Death, the best known of these misfortunes, which occurred in the middle of the century. All through the century, western Christendom suffered economic hardships, loss of population, political setbacks, and cultural decline. In England and France, there was little or no Jewish population left to suffer the role of scapegoat and to receive the wrath of the majority population. Elsewhere in the western Christian world, however, Jews became the target of much violence. But nowhere in Europe was Jewish suffering as intense as it was in Germany.

In the early fourteenth century, the Jewish communities in western Germany had to absorb a large number of Jewish refugees who had been expelled from France. Though precise details about this migration are not available, William Chester Jordan discovered that some went to counties northwest of royal France while others settled in the Rhineland. Though the numbers of Jews entering these areas may have been small, it undoubtedly put a strain on Jewish life in these areas and especially on the relationship between the Christian majority and the Jewish minority. The immigrating Jews were mostly involved in moneylending, and this meant an additional strain on this sector of the Jewish economy as well.

During the fourteenth century, Jewish life in Germany was affected by the combination of a weak government and rampant anti-Jewish hatred. The Rindfleisch massacres, which ended during the early years of the fourteenth century, were followed in the 1330s by the *Armleder* assaults (i.e. 'Arm Leather'). These assaults were committed by bands of people from the lower classes who wore leather armpieces that resembled the metal armor of knights. The attacks began in 1336 in Franconia. The following year, a tavern keeper by the name of John Zimberlin emerged as the movement's leader. Under Zimberlin's leadership, more than a hundred Jewish communities in the Alsace region were

attacked and many Jews died. However, when the Armleder bands began to attack some Christian groups as well, the bishop of Strasbourg made a strong attempt in May 1338 to put a stop to the violence. In August 1338 an agreement was made with Zimberlin, although some anti-Jewish violence continued. The Armleder attacks turned out to be a frightening prelude to more anti-Jewish violence that would accompany the Black Death in the 1340s.

During the 1340s, there was a massive outbreak of the Bubonic Plague, also known as the Black Death, which impacted the number of Jews within the western Christendom. The plague had spread to every corner of Latin Christendom, wiping out about one-third of the European population in a short time. Besides the unfathomable death toll, another grim aspect of the crisis was the feeling of helplessness. Some believed the plague was God's way punishing the people for their sins. A spike in repentance was seen in an attempt to gain back God's favor. Others were convinced that this was the work of the devil who was assisted by certain evil people. After all we learned before, it is no surprise that no group was so likely to be identified as the devil's assistants as the Jews. From the twelfth century onward, the Jews had been suspected of harboring immense hatred towards Christians. Anti-Jewish rumors were spread which fueled the animosity among the Christians. Examples of such rumors are the abuse of the host wafer (body of Christ) and the killing of Christian children by crucifixion to harvest blood for their Passover ritual. A new form of disinformation now included the accusation that Jews would poison the water wells, thereby spreading the Black death in order to wipe out the Christian population.

There was however another factor that fed the conviction of Jewish guilt for spreading the Black plague. Suspected Jews were forced under torture to "confess", and these so-called "confessions" were reported to the people throughout large parts of Europe. These forced confessions contributed greatly to the belief that Jews had brought about the plague by poisoning Europe's water supplies.

The papal court, with its history of protecting the Jews of western Christendom from certain dangers, tried to combat these growing allegations against the Jews. Pope Clement VI spoke out against the allegations using powerful arguments. He made the argument that the plague was universal and affected communities where there were no Jewish populations, thus proving that the Jews could not be the cause. The German emperor weighed in as well, but at this time of total societal crisis, even statements from these important authority figures had little impact.

All throughout Europe, the Jews suffered on two counts: death directly from the plague and violence due to being blamed for bringing the plague about. However, their suffering was especially harsh in German lands where hatred against Jews was deeply rooted and where the authorities were unable to stop the frequent violent outbursts against the Jews. The violence of the 1340s exceeded all previous occurrences. In many German cities, the anti-Jewish sentiment expressed itself in a less violent way, namely in expulsion of the Jewish inhabitants. These expulsions, inspired by the various expulsions in Northern Europe, were yet factor another sad aspect of the fate of the Jews of Germany in 1348-1349.

During the fifteenth century, there was a clear process of rebuilding across Germany. To an extent, the Jews were also positively inspired by this optimism. However, they continued to suffer from their limited economic possibilities, from the Church's pressure to limit Jewish activities, from widespread hatred among the general population, and from the rulers' lack of power. While Jewish life may have somewhat improved between 1400 and 1500, the circumstances were unfavorable and unhealthy.

German Jews were stuck in their limited economic opportunities, especially in the small pawnshop business that had become a Jewish specialty in 13th-century Germany. Again, it is a useful adventure, but one that regularly evoked animosity towards pawnshop owners. This economic animosity was easily combined with all other anti-Semitic stereotypes that were deeply rooted in the thinking of most Christians. Throughout Germany, fifteenth century history is full of recurring allegations of Jews abusing consecrated host wafers and killing Christian youths to harvest their blood. As we saw before, such accusations regularly led to violence, to the looting of Jewish property, and to loss of Jewish life.

The Jews of Germany continued to be negatively affected by a weakening of political authority. The emperor's policy toward the Jews stayed largely unchanged, but the emperor's power, of which we already saw that it was in a process of diminishing since the eleventh century onward, continued to weaken even further. Increasingly, local rulers and free cities exercised more authority over the Jews in their realm, causing increased inconsistency and instability for the Jews. Earlier, we discussed a power clash between the emperor and the dukes of Austria over who was to govern the Jews, in which the dukes can out on top. The dukes' control over the Jews of Austria became more established during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, but the dukes of Austria were unsuccessful in properly protecting the Jews, nor were they able to guarantee a consistent policy. As a result, in the years 1420-1430, the Jewish

community of Vienna suffered a major outbreak of violence with more than four hundred Jews losing their lives. After this wave of persecution calmed down, the Jews were expelled from the city. A ban on Jews in the city of Vienna was confirmed in 1453 and 1455. As the cities of Germany increasingly gained control over their own affairs, the anti-Jewish hatred among the inhabitants of those cities came to play a more important role in the cities' policies towards the Jews.

The Jews of Germany enjoyed none of the benefits that came with a more centralized government as existed further west. However, they did suffer one major downside that had emerged in the more efficiently governed lands, the phenomenon of expulsion. Now that the expulsion of Jews was seen as a reasonable option, such expulsion became a regular feature in fifteenth century Germany, from areas large and small. Examples of towns that expelled their Jews (at least temporarily) are Augsburg, Cologne, Magdeburg, Mainz, Mecklenburg, Nuremberg, Prague, and Vienna. Examples of larger regions are Austria, Bavaria, Franconia, and Swabia.

Religiously and culturally, the Jews of Germany remained largely focused on the study of the Talmud. The range of intellectual life was limited, largely dominated by the study of rabbinic law and rabbinic literature. Schools for advanced Talmudic study remained central institutions, with some of the older schools continuing to function while others were replaced by new ones as Jewish communities were forced to relocate.

Overall, it is no surprise that the Jews of Germany would look to venture to other areas, either because they were forced out or because they were hoping to find better opportunities and more safety for themselves and their families. As the way west was shut closed, the best option was going further east to areas that were in the process of developing, where there seemed to be better economic opportunities and where the authorities seemed to be interested in attracting Jews for economic reasons. In many ways, the move into the eastern areas of northern Europe seems very much like a repetition of the initial settlement of Jews in western Europe during the tenth through the twelfth centuries.

EASTERN EUROPE

Eastern Europe must be understood in the context of two sets of geographical contrasts mentioned before. Firstly, the division between the economically, politically, and culturally more advanced western regions of northern Europe and its more backward eastern regions. In these latter domains, the Jews

could benefit from this relative backwardness as it allowed them to make valuable contributions to Eastern Europe during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, just as they had done in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the western regions of northern Europe. The second, equally important contrast existed between interior and exposed areas. Both Hungary and Poland constituted the easternmost borders of Latin Christendom as they bordered on areas with other religious identities. As such, they were seen as the first line of defense of Latin Christendom and both countries experienced the violence that came with this exposure to hostile outside forces. Although the economic backwardness of the easternmost areas of northern Europe worked to the Jews' advantage, the anxiety and fear that came with being exposed to conflict with lands outside of Latin Christendom often worked to their disadvantage.

Once again, generalization is impossible and distinctions must be made, even within these areas of northeastern Europe as conditions in Hungary and Poland were quite different. We will first discuss the Jewish community of Hungary, and then move on to the larger and eventually more important Jewish community of Poland.

The history of the Hungary's Middle Ages begins around the year 1000. Positioned between Latin Christendom to the west, Byzantium to the southeast, and nomadic territories to the east and northeast, medieval Hungary encountered challenges from all directions. The strategy of Hungary's authorities was to align with Latin Christendom without falling into the hands of the German emperor. To limit the threat from the German empire, Hungarian rulers frequently allied themselves with the Pope. The Byzantine threat ended with the decline of Byzantium starting in the early thirteenth century, while the threat from the nomadic territories became acute in the 1240s with the invasion of the Mongols. Despite widespread devastation, Hungary recovered fairly quickly, meanwhile strengthening its ties with Latin Christendom.

Hungary's location not only had international ramifications but also influenced the mix of people living within the kingdom. The population was quite diverse, including Jews, Muslims, and Cumans (a tribe of Turkic nomads). Such diversity as existed in places like Hungary was usually good for the Jewish community. They were able to use their skills and economic abilities most effectively in such diversified settings.

Before the year 1000, while there were some Jews in these areas that later became the medieval kingdom of Hungary, the Jewish population of medieval Hungary can be traced back to northern Europe, especially Germany. You can see this firstly, in where they settled – mostly in the northwest part of Hungary, closest to Germany from where the majority of Hungarian Jews originated. Moreover, the legal status of Hungarian Jews was based on a decree by King Bela IV in 1251, which was basically a copy of a charter issued for the Jews of Austria in 1244. This foundational charter was regularly confirmed throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Interestingly, the Jewish community in medieval Hungary does not seem to have grown much in size; it remained relatively small throughout the Middle Ages.

Economic activity among the Jewish population in Hungary began with trading and artistry (especially coin minting). As time went on, the Jews became gradually more involved in moneylending. This is no surprise, as we already saw that Jews participated in moneylending in many counties across Europe. However, there are some differences between Jewish moneylending in Hungary and what we saw in other countries. On the one hand, there was nothing like the sophisticated lending against land that we saw in England and northern France. On the other hand, a number of wealthy Hungarian Jews did emerge, some with connections to the crown and to powerful nobles.

During the later centuries of our, the papacy regularly exerted pressures, seeking to impose restrictions on Jewish activities. These demands of the Church point to an unusual position achieved by a small number of Jews. Hungary's rulers showed reluctance to part with the services of their Jewish advisors and officials, even despite their usual cooperation with the Pope. As we shall see, the attempt to completely drive out the Jewish population in 1360 was quickly recognized as a bad decision and was almost immediately reversed.

During the mid-thirteenth century, Hungary was in shambles by the invasion of the Mongols from the east. Although death and destruction were rampant, the kingdom recovered fairly quickly, which seems to indicate that the basic infrastructure remained intact. While both Jews and Christians suffered during the invasions, there is no indication that the Jews were singled out either by the Mongol invaders or later by the Christian population. King Bela IV's charter for Hungarian Jews seems to have been part of his program of reconstruction, attracting more Jews into his kingdom to help the economy. A century later, the Jews of Hungary were less fortunate during the outbreak of the Black Death. While they did not suffer at the same level as what we saw elsewhere, some of the anti-Jewish allegations did arouse suspicion and anger among the Christian populace. This suspicion led to the king's decision to

expel the Jews from Hungary in 1360, although this decision was revoked only four years later, after realizing that this had been a bad decision for the country.

Not much is known about the cultural and spiritual life of medieval Hungarian Jews. In western-Hungary, archeologists have discovered synagogues and cemeteries from the late Middle Ages, and it seems that the Jews of Hungary were part of the larger medieval Ashkenazi Jewish culture. We have recorded proof that Hungarian rabbis had regular interaction with rabbinic scholars further west, but Hungary does not seem to have been a thriving intellectual center. It looks like the Jewish community of Hungary was a mere outpost of the more westerly Jewish communities of northern Europe, and of the faster-developing community of Poland.

The early development of Poland occurred around the same time as that of Hungary and coincided with the rise of Jewish life in the central areas of northern Europe. Organized political life in Poland began in 1025 with the coronation of Boleslav the Brave, the first major ruler of the Piast dynasty. Poland's governance developed differently from the presumptuous German emperors and from the gradual power buildup of the monarchies in France and England. The monarchy established by Boleslav the Brave quickly broke apart into various principalities, after which the Piast rulers slowly rebuilt their power, which reached its peak when Boleslav the Great (1333-1370) restored royal authority. The result of this unusual development was that the Polish kings of the late Middle Ages (and later) were dependent on the support and cooperation with the nobility. This uncommon relationship between the king and the nobility had major implications for the Jews. On the one hand, Jews had to not only maintain relationships with the monarchs of Poland but also with its noblemen, which to some extent stretched the Jews' abilities. On the other hand, as a result, Jews never became a source of irritation for the nobility, which happened in countries where Jews were mostly dependent on the king, whereby they were perceived as allies of a power-accumulating monarchy and therefore damaging to the aspirations of the local rulers. As we shall see, these unusual political circumstances in Poland impacted Jewish economic activities as well.

Like in Hungary, there is occasional evidence of early Jewish presence in Poland. However, real Jewish settlement seems to have started in the twelfth century. Because Polish Jewry would eventually play such a significant role in Judaism, there has been much interest in its beginnings. In particular, the question has been debated whether Polish Jews descend from the Khazar kingdom, an eastern-European principality whose leadership accepted Judaism sometime during the first half of the Middle Ages. There is something exotic and romantic about the possibility of Polish Jewry origins in Khazar

civilization. But moreover, it suggests that the supposed biological and ethnic unity of Jewish people is made up and that a large section of the current Jewish community is not biologically related to earlier Jewish populations. However, the hypothesis that the origins of Polish Jewry lie with the Khazars does not stand the test of careful examination. While there is agreement on the historical reality of the Khazar kingdom and the conversion of its leadership to Judaism, very few traces remain of the actual Khazars, their practice of Judaism, or what eventually happened to them. More importantly, every aspect of Polish Jewry - location, political status, economic activity, and cultural norms - points to the community originating further west, in German lands, just like the Hungarian Jews. In fact, the Jewish migration from German territory into developing Poland was an integral part of a larger process. The Polish authorities were interested in fostering the immigration of urbanized groups, both Christian and Jewish, from German areas in order to help develop their own lands.

As we have learned before, there was a steady eastward pressure that brought Jews to settle in Poland. In 1290, Jews in England were expelled and moved eastward. Thereupon, Jews in Germany also began to move east due to economic challenges and repeated persecution. Migrating Jews found refuge in Hungary, but Poland became a more significant haven for them. The pattern of Jewish settlement in Poland clearly reflects Germanic origins. The primary areas where Jews settled first were in the western parts of Poland, those areas closest to German lands, with movement further eastward taking place slowly and gradually.

Jewish legal status in Poland also reflects German origins. The charter that Prince Boleslav of Kalisch issued for his Jews in 1264 is clearly an adaptation of an earlier charter issued by Duke Frederick of Austria in 1244. The date of this Polish charter-similar to that of the charter of Bela IV of Hungary-suggests a connection to the rebuilding efforts after the Mongol invasion. The first thirty clauses of the Polish charter are practically identical to the Austrian version, with only two noticeable changes. First, the limitation of interest rate to be charged by Jews in the 1244 Austrian charter is left out of the Polish charter of 1264. Instead, in its place is the indication "*we wish that no one dare to force a Jew to payment of his pledge on his holiday.*" Both changes are meant to benefit Jews already present in Poland and to attract new Jews to move there.

In addition to these thirty stipulations, Duke Boleslav added six more clauses that reflect the position of Jews in the mid-thirteenth century on this eastern edge of Latin Christendom. One of these

additional clauses shows the relatively wide range of economic activities that Jews were engaged in in this developing area. Jews were emphatically allowed to buy and sell without any restraints. Anyone who interfered with this right would have to pay a fine. This closing stipulation of the 1264 Polish charter sounds very much like the earliest charters that were issued for the German Jews in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In many ways, the Jews that moved into Poland were repeating what their ancestors had done in Germany a few centuries before. While Jews in Germany had almost exclusively moved into the moneylending business, the more primitive Polish economy enabled Jews to again diversify their economic activities.

The other central theme within the new clauses of the 1264 charter involves concern over Jewish security and wellbeing. For example, the charter states *“we order that if any Jew, compelled by dire necessity, cries out at night and if the neighboring Christians do not bother to provide the proper aid or heed the cry, every neighboring Christian shall be responsible to pay thirty shillings.”* This and the following stipulation that Jews shall not be accused of using human blood since this act is against Jewish law provide impressive protection of Jewish newcomers. These blood libel had caused deep fears among the Jews of northern Europe which had moved them to seek repudiation from both the papal and imperial courts. In his charter, Duke Boleslav cited the Pope’s repudiation as the grounds for rejecting any ritual blood accusations made against the Jews.

Duke Boleslav went even further. He realized that the blood libel originated from the more common suspicion of Jews killing Christian children. Boleslav stipulated that if such allegations would occur and be brought to court, for the Jew to be convicted three Christian witnesses were needed and as many Jewish witnesses. If a Jewish person is deemed guilty, he should be punished by the regular penalty for the crime committed. If however the accused Jew was found innocent, then the Christian accuser must face the same punishment that the Jew would have received. Boleslav’s extra conditions reflect the existing dangers to Jewish life as well as the duke’s intention to provide maximum protection against them.

We saw that the German origins of Polish Jews are reflected in both its geographic development and its legal status. A third indication of the Polish Jewish community originating in Germany lies in its economic activity. As we saw before, the underdeveloped economy of Poland allowed for more diversified Jewish activity. We have noted in the Boleslav charter references to Jewish trade that sounded very much like the eleventh and twelfth-century rights granted to German Jews. At the same

time, Boleslav's charter also reflects the thirteenth-century Jewish move into pawnbroking which had become so central to Jewish economic life in Germany.

Another indication of the German origins of the Polish Jewish community comes from the realm of Jewish cultural life. During our period, there are recurrent references to contacts between the leadership of Polish Jewry and the rabbis of Germany. During the Middle Ages, the Jews of Poland were not yet successful in establishing vibrant institutions and in flourishing culturally. These goals would be accomplished after the end of the fifteenth century. Overall, the connections with the rabbinic leadership of Germany, as well as the religious traditions and intellectual inquiries being rooted in prior German Jewry, as a further indication of the Germanic roots of Polish Jewry.

On that note, let us now discuss the emergence of Yiddish as the Jewish language in Poland. We have repeatedly seen how Jews would adopt the local language of their environment for everyday communication. In southern and northwestern Europe, it was a variety of the local Romance languages; in north-central Europe this language was a variety of Germanic dialects. Only very few sources about these Jewish vernaculars have survived. At times, these languages would be written using Hebrew characters, giving some evidence to the way these languages have developed. It is up for debate to what level these medieval languages as spoken by Jews were different from the way the majority populace spoke. What happened among the Jews of Poland constituted a new development. They did not take on the language of their new Polish environment but instead held on to the German language with which they arrived. There are two factors leading to this. The first is a simultaneous non-Jewish migration from Germany to Poland, which made especially the cities heavily German in language and culture. The emergence of Yiddish (a Jewish version of German) outside Germany is yet another indication of the German origins of Polish Jewry.

It has already been mentioned that the Jewish immigrants took advantage of Poland's economic backwardness by moving into more diverse activities. Jews were able to again move into trade, alongside the moneylending that had become such a central source of income in other northern-European countries. In addition, the Polish nobles began to employ Jews to manage their estates. This would become a major Jewish occupation after the Middle Ages. As in Hungary, Jews in Poland also became employed as toll collectors and tax farmers, a practice that suggests a relatively primitive bureaucracy, but which therefore offered more opportunities than further west.

The several disasters during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries seem to have improved the Jews' condition rather than worsen it. The Mongol Invasion of the 1240s led Duke Boleslav of Kalisch to support immigration from Germany to enable a revitalization of his devastated urban areas. In order to facilitate this, he issued his previously discussed charter with its protective stipulations for the Jews.

The crisis caused in the mid-fourteenth century by the Black Death, and its reaction to it by the Polish authorities was even more striking. The Black Death resulted in a weakening of Jewish life in the more developed Christian lands to the west. In Poland, however, the devastation led to greater support for the Jews by the Polish authorities. The Black Death took place during the reign of Casimir the Great (1333-1370) when the Polish monarchy was regaining its previous, powerful position (be it limited by the nobles). During his reign, Casimir the Great reenacted twice the charter of Boleslav of Kalisch. This was clearly to reassure the Jews of the support of the monarchy and thereby to attract additional Jewish settlers to his lands. This unwavering support of Jews by Casimir the Great set an invaluable precedent in the history of the Polish monarchy.

The relative economic and social freedom of Jews, together with the strong support of the Polish rulers, in combination with Poland's uneasy location at the eastern extremity of Latin Christendom led the leaders of the Church to regularly criticize the position of the Jews in Polish society. Religious leaders from the top (Pope, archbishops, bishops), all the way to the bottom (common preachers) complained about many aspects of the Jews' presence in society. They claimed that Poland and its Christian identity were fragile, and that the Jews posed a threat to Christian society and faith. Here too, the backwardness of Polish society and its needs, resulting in an openness to Jewish presence, counterbalanced this ongoing pressure from the Church.

Jewish immigration to Poland brought economic, political, and cultural achievements. It also brought negative stereotypes rooted in Christian anti-Jewish motifs that had emerged in the western areas of northern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Crusading agitation occasionally triggered anti-Jewish sentiments leading to violence against the Jewish people. Newer claims of blood libel and host profanation surfaced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and triggered anti-Jewish hatred and mob violence. By-and-large, such anti-Jewish violence was limited, and the authorities were mostly able to suppress it. In a few cases, the agitation resulted in temporary expulsion of Jews from certain municipalities. Overall, the safety of Polish Jewry during the latter centuries of our period was considerably better than the situation in Germany.

As noted, the organization of Polish Jewry historically followed the patterns of Ashkenazic Jewish communities, where local Jewish communities held significant power. However, there is limited evidence from this period about how the organization worked in practice. The rapid changes in the structure of Jewish communities that occurred after this period, indicate that foundational structures were likely being established quietly during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. This would both clarify the power structure at the local level and explain the development of a broader framework within which the various Jewish communities in Poland could cooperate.

The same applies to Jewish cultural life. We saw before how in the western regions of northern Europe, specifically in northern France, Jewish culture evolved rapidly, and we suggested that this was partially due to the stimulating influence of a dynamically developing general culture and society. During our period in Poland, both this stimulation from the general society and a Jewish creativity as seen before in northern France were absent. What we do see is a more common pattern of a slow development with cultural flourishing realized only after centuries of Jewish settlement. Nonetheless, we can recognize the establishment of a stable foundation upon which, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Polish Jewry was able to build a significant framework and achieve important cultural creativity.

Polish and Hungarian Jewish communities grew as Jews moved from developed areas of Northern Europe to these more peripheral nations that welcomed Jewish immigrants in anticipation that these would bring with them some of the progress that was achieved further westward. New Jewish communities were established, and the immigrants received access to extended economic opportunities and governmental support. However, religious pressure and prejudices that had formed in western Europe were not absent. In the centuries that followed 1500, these new communities would develop into important centers of Jewish life, which eventually would serve as the foundation for the reconstruction of Jewish life in places like Germany, France, and England.