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## German City, Jewish Memory

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## CHRISTIAN INTERLOCUTORS AND JEWISH MEMORY

Historians of the early modern period have highlighted the extent to which printing presses, colonial expansion, and traveling, especially the educational Grand Tours of the continent, brought people and cultures into contact. In his classic study of the emergence of the Enlightenment, Paul Hazard traced the origins of this turning point in Western European intellectual history to the act of traveling.<sup>1</sup> Others have subsequently emphasized the importance of border crossings and the ways in which cultural encounters changed the interacting groups.<sup>2</sup> As the Jews of Worms solidified their local customs and practices and anthologized narratives about their past, they transferred oral traditions, rituals, and practice into books. Placed into circulation in this way, these local traditions crossed denominational boundaries both inside and outside the city. Instead of continuing to practice in isolation from each other, Jews and Christians in some ways began to reconfigure their respective cultures in response to this cross-community interaction.

This shift toward text-based forms of remembrance contributed to the proliferation of local traditions that in turn attracted pious and curious travelers as well as Christian scholars, historians of the city, and authors of travelogues. The lasting formulation of Worms's Jewish heritage during this transitional period occurred within (and sometimes despite) these overlapping fields of cultural production. Worms was not isolated, even though the city's relevance had waned ever since the magistrate and bishop in 1659 turned down Karl Ludwig of the Pfalz's offer to replace Heidelberg with Worms as the second residence and university city of the Palatinate. Mannheim accepted the offer, and Worms's political and economic influence began to decline. Similarly, the city's Jewish community, which was one of the few urban congregations to survive the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, lost stature when, under absolutist rulers, Jews were once again encouraged to settle in German cities and towns.

As the Worms community weakened relative to their counterparts in the region, the city began to curtail the Jews' legal privileges even further. Despite the magistrate's successful appeal to the emperor and to the Imperial Diet against the reintroduction of Jews' payment of royal homage, the community continued to turn to their royal protector in cases of disagreement with the magistrate. With both sides asserting their fiscal interest in the Jews, hefty taxes soon followed.<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly impoverished and threatened by their ongoing battles with the magistrate, community members adopted a conservative mien as they tried to remain steadfast to their heritage.<sup>4</sup> More individuals took their house emblems for their family names, complying with the increasing external administrative pressure to fix those names.<sup>5</sup> The community repledged itself to its continuity through the remembrance of rabbinic leaders by adding Naphtali Hirsch Spitz (1712), Menachem Mendel Rothschild (1732), and Moses Brod (1732) to the famous valley of the rabbis in the Holy Sand cemetery.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, during religious services in the house of worship, the Worms *Mahzor* of 1272 remained in use until the nineteenth century, and various cantors and sextons continued to record their names in the book.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned previously, the retrospective style of the synagogue's interior likewise testified to an ongoing affection for the past. The wooden circumcision chairs that were donated in 1730/31 displayed a Romanesque style, and the torah ornaments (*rimonim*) continued to imitate medieval models even as other German Jewish communities were choosing tower shapes for theirs.<sup>8</sup>

Religious customs also held to Worms-specific precedent whenever possible. The community prayer books that were printed during the first half of the eighteenth century detailed the traditional customs and prescribed the continued observance of the local fast days. Similar to its seventeenth-century predecessors, the 1714 edition of the prayer book made clear that its contents were intended to counter both encroaching liturgical changes and diminishing knowledge of the community's own customs.<sup>9</sup> Those customs or stories that had been ambiguous became more clearly fixed. During the 1600s, for example, Juda Kirchheim failed to mention the tombstone of the twelve community leaders, while Juspa supplied a long narrative about their heroic deeds but associated their deaths with the destructions of both 1096 and 1349. In contrast, the eighteenth-century edition related that members of the community had

always encircled the cemetery and visited the graves of the twelve community leaders on Rosh Hodesh Sivan, the day of remembrance for the martyrs of 1096, not 1349.<sup>10</sup>

Once again these gestures of preservation of the past seek to maintain continuity and forge cohesion in a period of social, political, and economic change. Increasing numbers of travelers likely encouraged retrenchment in a city that, due to its storied past, was featured on the itineraries of the early modern British Grand Tourists. Though on the whole less visited than cities in Italy and France, German cities nevertheless attracted their fair share of curious travelers, who then would appear to inspect the historical remnants of the Jewish community as well. Despite its allure, however, poor transportation, frequent customs barriers, and a placement away from main traffic arteries made Worms a demanding destination.<sup>11</sup> Travelers who took the more popular route from Frankfurt to Heidelberg skipped Worms only with some regret, since they all desired to see the city “where Luther made his first appearance before the Emperor.”<sup>12</sup> Those (largely British) Christians who did visit Worms noted that the city “shewes great antiquity, and wantes not magnificence.”<sup>13</sup> Worms’s inclusion in one of the most widely read travelogues of this period no doubt raised such expectations, but the French travel-book author Maximilian Misson was surprised to observe that while he had expected the city to be as large as Frankfurt, he found that it was instead “poor, and ill peopled.”<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, whereas early modern travelers frequently commented on the Jewish communities in Venice, Amsterdam, and London, Christian visitors to Worms were mostly interested in the city’s churches and made little mention of the presence of a Jewish community there.<sup>15</sup>

Travel at this time, however, was not limited to Grand Tours, whatever their renown, and Jews too began to take more interest in visiting Jewish historical sites. To be sure, travelogues and travel writings are not much present in the corpus of Hebrew and Yiddish writings of this period. Yet the scope of this literature certainly expanded with the Yiddish translation of medieval travelogues as well as the publication of pilgrim’s guides for the holy places in Palestine.<sup>16</sup>

Travel itself and travel writing became important channels through which the heritage of the local community was both consolidated and sent beyond the city walls. Travel reports of Worms reveal that by the eighteenth century at the latest, a fixed series of sites and narratives had emerged that every visitor to Worms would encounter. He would tour the

cemetery, for example, inspect the synagogue, and learn about a torah scroll that the locals attributed to Meir of Rothenburg, contrary to the evidence provided only a few decades earlier in Juspa Shammes's book of customs.<sup>17</sup> | 53

Abraham Levie traveled across Europe between 1719 and 1723 and wrote about it. Levie, whose family belonged to the prosperous circle of merchants and court Jews in Germany, first observed that Worms Jews were forced to wear a yellow cloth to distinguish themselves from non-Jews. He did not question the identification of the chapel with Rashi. Indeed, the chapel carried a particular significance for him; he was happy to be able to report "that I sat on Rashi's chair." Levie also was sure to spot the goose on St. Martin's church and paraphrased the legendary account of how the outside wall of the synagogue had opened to save a woman. Apparently unaware of the divergent textual tradition in this regard, however, Levie did not identify the woman as either Rashi's mother (based on R. Gedaliah ben Yosef ibn Yahia's *Shalsholet ha-kabbalah*) or the mother of Yehuda ha-Hasid (based on the account of Juspa).<sup>18</sup>

The emissary from Jerusalem in this period, Haim Yosef David Azulai, traveled widely in the second half of the eighteenth century to collect money on behalf of the Jewish communities in the Holy Land and arrived in Worms in 1753 via a once-weekly coach from Frankfurt. In his travel diary he describes how uncomfortable the trip was for the many cramped passengers in a vehicle otherwise loaded with merchandise and pulled by eight horses over the rocky terrain. In Worms, which Azulai deemed very ancient, based on Juspa Shammes's tales, he was shown the synagogue, the Rashi Chapel, and the cemetery with the tombstone of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. He also inspected the "miracle wall," which he was told had saved Rashi's mother and about which he had apparently read in R. Gedaliah ben Yosef ibn Yahia's *Shalsholet ha-kabbalah*.<sup>19</sup> Despite his apparent interest in the community, however, in his subsequent compendium on Jewish sages, *Shem ha-gedolim*, Azulai said that the Rashi Chapel had been closed when he visited Worms. In addition, he implied that the chapel's association with Rashi was less a historical fact than a traditional belief favored by the Jews of Worms.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike both Azulai and Levie, however, most Jewish travelers held to the model of traditional Jewish pilgrimages that continued to be more common at this time. Whereas medieval travelers like Petahiah of Regensburg had searched for holy shrines in Mesopotamia, their successors also visited the cemeteries of Ashkenaz.<sup>21</sup> Since the late Middle Ages,

pious pilgrims had visited the graves of martyrs and rabbinic luminaries like Meir of Rothenburg, Alexander Wimpfen, Elijah Baal Shem, Juspa Shammes, and Bacharach. While initially rabbinical opinion regarding praying to the dead was, to say the least, divided, the opposition to it was weakened during the early modern period through the publication of books like *Ma'aneh lashon* (expression of the tongue), which appeared in Hebrew in 1615 and was promptly translated into Yiddish. These sorts of Yiddish books containing prayers to honor or petition the departed proved to be immensely popular.<sup>22</sup> Reflecting the growing acceptance of these practices, Joel Sirkes, an eminent Polish rabbi of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, rejected R. Haim Paltiael's opposition regarding cemetery prayers.<sup>23</sup>

Particularly on fast days, Jews from elsewhere as well as local community members would visit cemeteries. Those who paid tribute to the deceased hoped to derive protection through their visit and prayers and therefore recited supplications.<sup>24</sup> Before the High Holidays, Jews would likewise make a pilgrimage to certain revered individuals' graves, since many regarded the deceased as the most appropriate intermediaries before God. They directed their prayers to them as well, particularly in times of illness. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, women recited special prayers as they measured the individual graves as well as the circumference of the cemetery. Upon their return from the graveyard, they turned their measuring threads into candles. To this end, Simeon Frankfurt, for example, composed in his *Sefer ha-hayyim* (Book of Life) a special prayer based on material in *Sefer ma'aneh lashon*. It appears that the light of the candles facilitated the supplication and pleas for divine forgiveness.<sup>25</sup>

The textual tradition for this practice of pilgrimage to cemeteries was respectably long. The author of *Sefer leket yosher*, R. Joseph ben Moses, who lived during the fifteenth century, transmitted the case of a community leader from Augsburg who had vowed to visit all of the cemeteries of the famous Shum communities.<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Solomon ben Jecheil Luria (Maharshal), who was born about 1510 in Poznan, Poland, and died in 1574, recounts that his promise to pray at the grave of his mother in Worms brought him to that city.<sup>27</sup> During the seventeenth century, the popularity of the cemetery was evidenced by Juspa's observation that "many visitors travel to Worms to visit the graves of the Maharam and pious Alexander."<sup>28</sup> For the benefit of these visitors, Yair Bacharach entertained the notion of transcribing the inscriptions of several

tombstones that were becoming increasingly difficult to decipher.<sup>29</sup> Several visitors even carved their names into the Rashi chair in the chapel or inscribed themselves, for example, onto the back of Jacob b. Moses ha-Levi's (Maharil) tombstone.<sup>30</sup> | 55

The practice of leaving one's name implies that a visit forged an intimate relationship between the visitor and the religious artifact, in the same way that Protestant travelers broke off pieces of the bench where Luther had miraculously been saved from drinking a glass of poisonous wine.<sup>31</sup> Other Jewish visitors linked themselves to the Worms community by donating funds to refurbish the synagogue's interior. David Oppenheim's sister Frummet followed in his generous footsteps and provided the sanctuary with new circumcision chairs and a curtain.<sup>32</sup> The son of David Gans, Ischachar Moses, donated a Hanukkah candelabra to the community in 1656.<sup>33</sup> Bluemlein, the wife of Rabbi Koppel Levi, had been born in Worms (she later resided in Mannheim) and bequeathed a torah pointer to the synagogue; the sons of the court Jew Michael May gave the community a torah curtain in 1744 in memory of their grandmother, Rechele.<sup>34</sup>

Insofar as Jews and Christians traveled among each other during this period, narratives about the community's past crossed confessional boundaries. Personal contacts between Christian scholars and rabbis in Worms had existed already during the fifteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Yet during the early modern period the dissemination of local legends raised new questions about the community's past. Christian interpreters critically reviewed local traditions. Hebraists and historians of the city debated the veracity of some of these Jewish historical traditions. At the same time, the Hebraists' compendium of Jewish beliefs, customs, and lore served as the basis for the depiction of the Jews in Worms in some eighteenth-century travel guides. It should be noted, however, that while these Hebraists and guidebook authors disputed Jewish traditions at times, their publications still contributed to the dissemination of the local Jewish heritage of Worms.

In contrast to the often-contentious medieval exchanges between the faiths, the early modern Christian Hebraists, who engaged in lengthy refutations of Judaism, intertwined critical debates about Jewish theological concepts with detailed descriptions of their customs. The first stage in Christian-Jewish polemics, which extended from the beginning of Christianity until the twelfth century, had centered on the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, while later conversations centered on the Talmud.

Particularly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the increasing Christian familiarity with Jewish texts gave credence to the Christian belief that Jews had significantly deviated from biblical precepts. During the early modern period, Christian scholars, often led by converts, sought to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the Jewish tradition, where the initial missionizing motif slowly waned. These studies displayed a new ethnographical curiosity in addition to a protracted polemical interest in what they perceived to be the anti-Christian elements of Judaism. At this stage in the Christian-Jewish disputations, the customs and practices of individual communities gained an unprecedented importance. Quarrelsome literature written by converts to Christianity, the translation of the *Maysebukh* in 1617 by the Giessen professor of Hebrew language Christoph Helwig, the publication of the controversial *Toldot Yeshu* in Latin, and a generally greater familiarity with Jewish historical texts starting in the sixteenth century among Christian scholars provided the emerging European republic of letters with easily accessible information about Jewish traditions and local communities.<sup>36</sup>

The Hebraists branded the community of Worms as steeped in superstitious beliefs and customs. They felt compelled to refute its legendary origin and alleged devoutness, and they were particularly suspicious of a legend that had been immortalized in one of the most radical anti-Christian Jewish tracts of the Middle Ages. *Toldot Yeshu*, a purported history of Jesus, relates that the Jews of Jerusalem sent letters to the various communities about Jesus, whereupon Worms's Jews replied that Jesus should be left alone and not condemned to death. Many manuscripts existed of this text, and it was also translated into Latin at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Taken at face value, of course, this account provided a powerful testimony to the antiquity of the community as well as a defense against the traditional Christian accusation of the Jews.<sup>37</sup> But it also attracted less welcome attention from those who sought to undermine the faith.

The Jews' reliance on these traditions and their acceptance by Christian authors grew more pronounced during the Renaissance, as whole cities, regions, and kingdoms sought (and, in a sense, competed for) their ancient origins.<sup>38</sup> Basing his work on similar accounts from the city of Trier, Jacob Twinger claimed in his influential chronicle of Strasbourg that during the fifteenth century BCE, Trebeta, the son of the Assyrian king Ninus, founded Strasbourg as a refuge. In a race for antiquity among the various cities, chroniclers in Zurich, Mainz, Cologne, and



Basel all adapted this textual tradition in order to assert that their city, too, predated Rome.<sup>39</sup>

In comparison to many other cities, then, Worms developed its distinct historical traditions quite late.<sup>40</sup> Drawing from the existing accounts of other German cities, Worms's first comprehensive chronicler, Johannes Heydeken, provided the city with its ancient tradition only at the beginning of the sixteenth century. He went one better, however, adding to the familiar tradition the claim that the Christian citizens of Worms had participated in the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. After the battle over Jerusalem, they brought Jewish female captives to Worms, which implied in turn that the city's Jews were the descendents of mixed marriages instead of a proud biblical lineage. The replacement of the Jewish version of their descent with a narrative of enslavement and mixed marriages enabled Heydeken to underscore their presently debased nature.<sup>41</sup> Despite his critical agenda, however, he nevertheless unintentionally substantiated the Jewish community's roots in antiquity, whatever story one was inclined to believe.

These various historical traditions justified the Jews' legal standing as much as they helped to consolidate their local identities. Juspa Shammes therefore sought to counter the Hebraists' negative portrayal of the community's origin by inserting a local bishop into the foundation myths, which underscores the increasing regionalism of Jewish culture at this time. Moreover, the prominence attributed to the Dalbergs in Juspa's account might also reflect his personal relationships, particularly with Johann von Dalberg (1445–1503), the bishop of Worms, who was known for his interest in Hebrew scholarship and his significant collection of Hebrew books.<sup>42</sup> In his book on Jewish customs, Juspa explained the absence of the prayer *'adon 'olam* (Lord of the world) by pointing out that the Jews of Worms believed that since their congregation antedated the writing of this prayer, they need not recite it.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, he used his anthology of local legends to revise certain narrative elements from Heydeken's chronicle. In Juspa's version, Ashkenazic Jews saved a member of the Dalberg family in antiquity, for which the family handsomely rewarded them. Subsequently, other members of the Dalberg family were instructed to deal kindly with the Jews, and they paid the ransoms for Jews who were captured during a siege of Jerusalem and then brought to Worms. Juspa, who had heard about this legendary story, insisted that it was still recorded in the annals of the house of Dalberg. He believed that this tradition was the basis for the customs of Dalberg

servants serving as pallbearers at every Jewish funeral and also accompanying couples to their wedding canopy, as were both still observed during Juspa's time.<sup>44</sup>

The partial endorsement of this foundation myth by some Christian authors was a pressing issue for those Hebraists and converts to Christianity who wanted to contest the local traditions. *Shalshet ha-kabbalah*, for example, included several legends about the community and specifically related that God's name had been written on the ceiling of the synagogue but was covered by cobwebs.<sup>45</sup> Enraged by this report and its implication that Worms's synagogue was a temple comparable to that in Jerusalem, the convert Samuel Friedrich Brentz, in his *Juedische abstreifter Schlangen-Balg* (1614), reported on his personal inspection of the synagogue: "I have freely got on the way for a time / and went to Worms / since the Jews regard Worms as the small temple (*Bet mikdash*), that is / for the holy temple / and say: God resides here in a spider web / and their synagogue is filled with spider webs, which once someone wanted to remove / at which point the vault lowered itself toward that Jew / that he had to refrain from it / about which the Jews pretend / what their signs and miracles had occurred / about which a whole book could be written."<sup>46</sup> Salomon Zvi Aufhausen vigorously disputed Brentz's entire diatribe, pointing out in his Yiddish rejoinder that God does not dwell in spider webs.<sup>47</sup>

Brentz was not alone in his ridicule and criticism of the Jewish community in Worms. Unsettled by the proliferation of its mystical and holy traditions, the eminent Christian scholar Martin Diefenbach applied his critical sensibilities and Christian prejudices to the community's history at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>48</sup> For Diefenbach, ultimately, the Worms Jews' resistance to conversion arose from their local tradition, which he regarded as a "fable."<sup>49</sup> To refute Jewish beliefs in general, Diefenbach chose to take issue with the particularities of Jewish customs in the town. Instead of devoutness there, the Hebraists found religious ostentatiousness. Diefenbach turned particularly to the Worms accounts of a messianic pretender who emerged in 1222 in Worms as a sign of their impiousness—this was a popular and fraught topic in Christian writings about Jews in the aftermath of the Jewish messianic movement led by Shabatai Zevi during the 1660s.<sup>50</sup>

Another story widely circulated since the Middle Ages, this one of seduction, featured prominently in Christian debates about Jewish messianism. In Caesarius of Heisterbach's thirteenth-century collection of

moralistic tales, *Dialogus miraculorum* (Dialogue on miracles), he employed the cultural stereotype of the beautiful Jewess and her attractiveness to Christians.<sup>51</sup> Caesarius used the trope to combine debauchment and gullibility with violence: “In the city, I think, of Worms, there lives a Jew, who had a beautiful daughter.” To cover up the unnamed woman’s pregnancy, the cleric who had seduced her convinces her to tell her parents that she is a virgin who will give birth to the messiah. The parents accept this story and look forward to the birth, but when she then gives birth to a girl, one of the members of the community kills the newborn.<sup>52</sup>

When Jacob Eisenmenger, in his notorious anti-Jewish compilation, retold the story, it had acquired a more sinister tone. Rather than their gullibility, his story proclaimed the Jews’ dangerous and vengeful character, as it is now the mother herself who smashes the baby against a wall, committing *Kindesmord*.<sup>53</sup> It may be that Eisenmenger’s portrayal of a woman capable of killing her children is partly informed by First Crusade chroniclers’ reports of the acts of martyrdom committed by women. While some medieval writers interpreted Jewish martyrdom as acts of heroic piety, others saw those acts, especially when committed by women, as evidence of an innate cruelty. The latter interpretation fueled Franciscan debates over forced child conversions in particular and buttressed antisemitic stereotypes of the late medieval period in general.<sup>54</sup> The later Hebraists, however, like Johann Jacob Schudt in his vast book on Jewish history and lore entitled *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten* (Jewish curiosities), at least occasionally reverted to Caesarius’s more charitable rendering.<sup>55</sup>

These Christian critics in turn functioned as interlocutors of Jewish memory when Juspa revised their accounts in his own work. In his rendition of this story, a student employs a sorcerer to put the only daughter, who lived in the house named *Zu den Springbrunnen* in the *Judengasse*, under a spell to seduce her. When the girl realizes her impending danger, she informs her father, who invites ten rabbis to study in his house and form a circle around the girl to protect her. When midnight strikes, everyone except the girl has fallen asleep, and the student appears. She then declares, “I would rather die than sleep with you” and kills him with a knife. The Jews who respond to her cries are finally able to dispel the magic, and the story ends with her exoneration by her Christian neighbors as well as the local authorities. The moral is obvious: “Thus, dear people, you see that God regards the pious and faithful for everything.”<sup>56</sup>

The various versions of this tale demonstrate the extent to which Jewish and Christian cultures intersected and engaged with each other, and

the retelling of tales represented one way in which Jews and their traditions were represented and debated. Hebraists sought to ridicule Jewish character and religiosity, but they also questioned the origin of the community itself. Diefenbach was not alone in his annoyance about the foundation myth.<sup>57</sup> Johann Christoph Wagenseil took issue with it upon learning that the Jews of Worms had bolstered their arguments to the emperor by claiming that they were descendants of those who had settled in Germany before the birth of Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Their alleged origin then helped them to negotiate their privileges, to the Hebraists' dismay.<sup>59</sup> In the community's collections of privileges and ordinances was a copy of their regulations from 1570; it was claimed that the city had originally issued this document in 70 CE.<sup>60</sup> During the seventeenth century, even Christian community leaders repeatedly alluded to the Jews' ancient roots when they petitioned the emperor to help them.<sup>61</sup> In the conflicts at this time over the status of the Jews that led to their temporary expulsion, local pastor Stephan Grün, for example, upbraided Christian burghers for acts of violence against the Jews. Accepting the legendary dating of a tombstone as over 1,600 years old, he argued that the Jews of Worms shared no guilt in the death of Jesus because their community predated his existence.<sup>62</sup>

At issue here was not simply the question of Jewish versus Christian precedence but also the Jews' use of the origin myth to their advantage when they negotiated their legal status.<sup>63</sup> The Hebraists felt even more compelled to refute these claims given that some early modern German chroniclers, theologians, and philosophers had uncritically regurgitated them. Jacob Schudt counted even the Dutch Renaissance scholar Hugo Grotius among them.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to these Christian "believers," Schudt emphatically rejected the evidence provided by *Toldot Jeshu*, even speculating that the Jews of the community must have convinced the author to falsify his account.<sup>65</sup> Despite his conclusion, however, Schudt conceded that the community must have originated around the time of Jesus.<sup>66</sup> Not unlike Juspa Shammes, Schudt saw the Dalberg legend as evidence of longevity, given its continuing manifestation in the dues Jews paid for their weddings and burials.<sup>67</sup> Maximilian Misson, the author of a comprehensive travel guide to Europe, also perused the Latin translation of *Toldot Jeshu* during his sojourn in Worms and reported on the Dalberg legend.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, the first comprehensive history of the Jews, by the French Huguenot Jacques Basnage, was entitled *Histoire du peuple Juif depuis*

*Jésus Christ jusqu' à present, pour servir de continuation à l'histoire de Joseph* (1706–11). It became a standard work during the eighteenth century and it, too, questioned the evidence. Basnage was suspicious from the start: “But those [Jews] of Worms pretend to have given Proofs to the Emperor, and the States of the Empire, that they had no hand in our Saviour’s Crucifixion, and that from time immemorial, they have been settled in this City, which is the reason they have been granted Privileges, which others are deprived of.” Reviewing the claims based on Huldrich’s Latin translation of *Toldot Jeshu*, Basnage concluded by flatly denying their reliability.<sup>69</sup>

Ludvig Holberg, the Danish author of another comprehensive history of the Jewish people that appeared in a German translation in 1747, recounted the Dalberg legend based on Misson’s early modern travelogue. With Schudt and Basnage, Holberg also deemed the account in *Toldot Jeshu* to be both wanting and doubtful. Nevertheless, Holberg concluded that the Jews must have lived in Worms during the time of Jesus, though he joined other Hebraists in questioning their legendary devoutness; like Diefenbach, he even insinuated that the community was “low” and “bad,” and that their many persecutions proved that this was so. In particular, he charged the Jews with deceit for cooperating with the French troops during the occupation of the city at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>70</sup>

Despite their ongoing critical reviews, ridicule, and dismissal, however, travelogues published through the mid-eighteenth century included in their expanded discussions of Worms further details about the Jewish past. Whereas German travel writer Johann Hermann Dielhelm’s first guide neglected to describe Worms’s major attractions, a later edition included a lengthy account. In it he associated Trebeta, the son of the Assyrian king Ninus, with the foundation of the city, thereby situating the beginning of urban life in Worms in the time of Abraham. Dielhelm believed that the other available sources vindicated him—his comprehensive historical account of the Rhineland further reported that the local synagogue prided itself on being the oldest in Germany, and that Rashi had taught there. In the end, nonetheless, Dielhelm dismissed the Jews’ early settlement claim in Worms, but his language notably lacked the harshness that characterized the Hebraist debates.<sup>71</sup>

In line with Dielhelm’s more tempered approach, local Christian historians in Worms likewise affirmed the Jewish tradition, which enabled them to place Worms’s origins in the Roman period. This argument

62 | became important in that it established a basis for reasserting the idea of Worms as an imperial city that was free from ecclesiastical influence. Despite the Christian Hebraists' dismissal of the relevant sources, these local historians carried out excavations in the Jewish cemetery, attempting to locate a Jewish tombstone from the Roman era—such a discovery would have proven that Worms predated Christianity and was exempt from Church rule. Johann Wendelin Jung, who had served as rector of the local gymnasium since 1720, searched the cemetery in the 1740s and determined that the community had been in existence since the sixth century BCE. Löw of Hanau supplied the relevant alleged text from the badly damaged tombstone in question.<sup>72</sup>

When two other local historians reviewed the city's history during the 1750s, an ongoing conflict between Worms's magistrate and the Church further occasioned a reassertion of the Jewish tradition of their pre-Christian origin. Johann Friedrich Moritz endorsed the magistrate's position against the diocese and responded to the Church and their spokesman, Johann Friedrich Schannat, who had been commissioned by Franz Georg von Schonborn, the Archbishop of Trier and Bishop of Worms. Finding the general historical evidence to be lacking, Moritz contended instead that Jung's discovery of the ancient tombstone, as well as the narratives in *Ma'ase nissim*, substantiated his claims.<sup>73</sup>

The insertion of the Jewish foundation myth into the chronicles of the city ensured its future relevance at the very time when the city's Jewish heritage was becoming better known beyond its walls. Newly published chronicles like Menahem Man Amelander's *Sefer she'erit yisra'el* (Book of the remnant of Israel) in 1743 valorized the heroism of Ashkenazic communities like Worms during the First Crusade and the Black Death. Amelander contended that chronicling persecution was a holy duty, but he failed to link the twelve community leaders with the events of 1096, which would have endorsed local remembrance in Worms.<sup>74</sup>

At this point, in fact, this particular identification still seems to have been limited to local forms of memory. A new version of *Ma'ase nissim* by Abraham Wallerstein in 1767 likewise continued to associate the fate of the community leaders with events in 1349. Capitalizing upon the community's renowned past, Wallerstein claimed that his book contained miracles and wonders about Rashi and other righteous Hasidim as well as accounts of various persecutions.<sup>75</sup> He also indicated that the latest persecutions threatened to obliterate the memory of earlier attacks on the community, which made it all the more important to publish his

work.<sup>76</sup> To emphasize the ongoing miraculous character of the community, Wallerstein even added to its traditional legends an excerpt from the *pinkas* of the burial society.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, Yehiel ben Solomon Heilperin's *Seder ha-dorot* (Order of the generations) retold the story of the miracle wall but also reiterated that the Jews of Worms had failed out of arrogance to return to Jerusalem. More importantly, he significantly altered the medieval Spanish Jew David Kimchi's exegesis of Judges 20:15. Whereas Kimchi had stipulated that the tribe of Benjamin ventured to Romania, Heilperin claimed instead that they journeyed to Germany (and Worms). Heilperin's exegesis affirms the extent to which the Worms community was seen to be the oldest German Jewish community by the end of the eighteenth century, surpassing its sister communities in the Rhineland.<sup>78</sup>

As these many and various traditions began to inform the reputation of the community in Europe, the Jews of Worms became objects of mockery. A "Worms miracle" became synonymous with a claim so extraordinary that it was likely to be untrue. The community's recurrent reference to its antiquity became enshrined in a slightly deprecatory fashion. While Worms Jews explained their origins in reference to their omission of the *'adon 'olam* prayer, which postdated the community's founding, a common saying became, "The people of Worms can pride themselves on having existed before God (*'adon 'olam*)."<sup>79</sup>

This mockery reflected the dramatic historical changes in Europe that were transforming Jewish life. In the same year that the French Revolution proclaimed universal equality, Worms commemorated the destruction of the city one hundred years before. For some contemporaries, including Professor Böhmer, who lectured on the historical event in the local gymnasium, the destruction of Worms by French troops in fact anticipated the fate of Paris in 1789.<sup>80</sup> Echoing these sentiments, the Jews reaffirmed their royal alliance during the course of the anniversary of the destruction; they even threatened to fine community members who left Worms on the day of celebration. After the community recited psalms, members clothed in their Sabbath garments gathered in front of Rabbi Samuel Wolf Levi's house and paraded in pairs through the city. They carried a sign, adorned with the emperor's coat of arms, that read: "Here lives his royal majesty and highness and all burghers and Jews!"<sup>81</sup>

When in October 1792 French troops captured the left side of the Rhine and occupied the city, the French challenged Jews' traditional alliances to the German emperor. The importance of those abiding

alliances, coupled with the memory of the last French occupation of the city, made it impossible for community members to view the arrival of the French troops as a good thing. Despite the initial antagonism, however, the community underwent rapid changes. Michael Gernsheim, the so-called bishop of the Jews, had died earlier the same year, and the position would only be refilled five years later. When Herz Abenheim was sworn in to the post, the community leaders insisted that his appointment followed their longstanding traditions. Yet the times had markedly changed, and the position would become largely obsolete under Napoleon's new regime.<sup>82</sup>

Prior to Abenheim's installment, the Jews were asked at the *Konvents-kommission* in March 1793 to renounce the privileges that had been extended to them by the emperor, the city, and the bishop of the city. If they failed to comply, the commission threatened to confiscate their fortunes and draft them. Even these threats did not compel their leaders to renounce their traditional loyalties, however, and soon they, along with other community members, were imprisoned and tortured. To escape the impending danger, Rabbi Samuel Levi fled the city. Upon his return, the mayor of the city and other city officials convened every evening in front of his house, where Levi paraphrased the content of French newspapers.<sup>83</sup>

The Jews' stubborn resistance to their French occupiers illustrates the extent to which the royal alliance (and its memory) had become an inseparable part of their culture. Yet outside of Worms, a new group of Jewish intellectuals had started to promote dramatic changes and challenge their traditional authorities. These Jewish enlighteners advertised themselves as leaders who would advance Jews' cultural, religious, social, and economic renewal more effectively than those presently in power. They sponsored a new educational program in response to the radically changing cultural and political landscape of these decades. Whereas in Worms the commemoration of the destruction of the city in 1689 led to a renewed commitment to the Jews' traditional alliances, these Jewish *maskilim* viewed the French Revolution instead as a promising sign that could quickly ameliorate the status of the Jews in the Germanic lands. Inspired by Europe's societal turbulence, the *maskilim* promoted a new liturgy that had been cleansed of its medieval references to persecution and destruction. Isaac Euchel, the Jewish enlightener from Königsberg, might have overstated the group's accomplishments when he noted that many communities had already excised prayers like *Av ha-rahamim* out of the



liturgy, although this was certainly in line with the maskilic agenda.<sup>84</sup> Despite all such efforts, however, it appears that Worms's Jewish community remained relatively unbothered by the maskilic movement, which flourished mainly in the major urban centers of northern Germany, such as Berlin, Königsberg, and Breslau.<sup>85</sup> | 65

The ongoing tumult in Paris did redirect those British travelers who had hitherto experienced the Rhine Valley, if at all, only on their return from France and Italy. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Rhine Valley was a well-established tourist destination in and of itself, especially for British travelers who had become infatuated with the valley's landscape under the banner of a new aesthetic that sought after the sublime in nature and admired the Rhine as a picturesque and awe-inspiring place. Alongside the river's new enchantment, and influenced by an ongoing revival of the gothic, a sentimental curiosity for the region's crumbling ruins emerged as well. Those British travelers who "delight[ed] in picturesque country" passed through Worms in transit and described its urban space as wretched and impoverished throughout.<sup>86</sup>

Still, the new aesthetic sensibilities of this period ensured the elevation of the Rhineland among poets, historians, artists, and travelers, and this eventually permitted Worms to regain its regional importance. The re-discovery of Shakespeare's writings during the *Sturm-und-Drang-Periode* injected the ideal of sublimity into German literary culture. This also prepared the ground for a Rhine-centered German romanticism, though it would focus mainly on the region between Bingen and Bonn. This area offered what was perceived to be a particularly dramatic natural landscape, interspersed with castles, churches, and ruins, and it drew thinkers like Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang Goethe as well as a bevy of natural scientists. Inspired by Goethe's description of the beauty of the Strasbourg cathedral, for example, sworn German Romantics like the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel traveled along the Rhine as well.

These cultural developments laid the foundation for the unprecedented popularity of the Rhineland as a travel destination in the decades to follow. The new sensibility, and an uncomfortable awareness of discontinuity in German life that had been intensified by the experience of the French Revolution, turned the Rhineland's ruins into the romantic remains of a bygone age. The modern concepts of irreversible time, change, and progress turned the Rhineland into a landscape dotted with memorable vestiges of German culture. In response to the

Enlightenment's rationality and universalism, then, the later Romantics celebrated the historical particularism of this region, which contributed to its transformation into a poetic space that helped nineteenth- and twentieth-century German nationalists integrate it into their national perspective.

Yet while those German Romantics quickly became enthralled with German ballads, folklore, natural landmarks, and castles, they were much less taken with regard to Judaism. Worms and its Jewish community barely factored in Romantic travelers' celebration of the historic German landscape. Within the Rhine region, only the famous Frankfurt *Juden-gasse* attracted any attention, and it was not complimentary.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, however, Jewish traditions came to claim some recognition. On their tour of the Rhine in 1802, Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim collected songs and ballads, which they later published in their *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. If their inclusion of the famous Passover song "Had gadya" signaled some curiosity about Jewish customs, though, their inclusion of a story about the Crucifixion and the Passau host desecration of 1477 exposed a counterbalancing antisemitism.

Alongside these iconic elements in the antisemitic arsenal, Arnim and Brentano also included the song "The Jewish Woman." It acquired a canonical status through this publication and became even better known through the setting of Johannes Brahms.<sup>88</sup> Mirroring the stories of seduction and conversion that had circulated since the Middle Ages, the song mourns the fate of a beautiful Jewess who, in this version, chooses suicide over conversion despite her attraction to a Christian scribe.<sup>89</sup> Thus, for Arnim and Brentano, the song emphasized the irreconcilable differences between Christians and the Jews; other ballads in the collection further denigrated Judaism as alien and dangerous. While the Romantics obviously could not open the revived cultural landscape of the Rhineland to all faiths, changes were slowly taking place. The portrayal of the Jewish women of Worms in literature, for example, which had been traditionally dominated by sorcery, violence, and murder, was being refashioned through stories of seduction, conversion, and self-assertion, thanks to song collections like Arnim and Brentano's.

Politically more benign, but equally unable to contend with cultural divergence, the enlightened societal sensibilities (and the French revolutionary armies) that brought civic equality to the Jews in many locations in Europe initially disregarded Worms's Jewish past. The city became part of France in 1797, and Samuel Wolf Levi became a member of the

French Sanhedrin in 1807, which assembled rabbis and other notables to answer questions concerning relationships between Jewish authorities and the French state, and Jews and other Frenchmen. In the course of these deliberations, the Jewish representatives declared their undivided loyalty to the French nation, and so emancipation proceeded in the conquered territories. New French legislation applied equally to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, though there were a few exceptions. When in 1816 Worms once again came under the tutelage of the Grand Duchy of Hesse and by Rhine, a member state of the German Confederation, this status of equality was maintained. During the 1840s, the remaining restrictions were rescinded, such as the *Moralitaets-oder Handelspatent*, which had compelled Jews to acquire a certificate from the community vouching for their moral impeccability and to take a Jewish oath.<sup>90</sup> | 67

Both the new politics of equality and the Enlightenment's general criticism of Jewish tradition threatened the memory of the community, which had always been enacted in religious rituals and recalled in textual traditions. Written in Hebrew and Yiddish and tied to religious observance, these fragments became weakened during the nineteenth century, when Jewish religious reformers excised medieval *piyyutim* from the liturgy and even canceled the observance of inherited fast days. Moreover, the Jews' longtime alliance to the city and the emperor became outdated in an age that promised to level differences and institute universal citizenship while promoting a new attachment to the emerging German nation.

Yet German nationalism did not override local patriotism; one's city and region continued to matter. Despite the radical changes that the Enlightenment and the French revolutionary wars had brought to the Rhineland, local traditions manifested a great deal of continuity. When local historians (Jews and non-Jews alike) embarked on the study of the community during the first half of the nineteenth century, they began with its diverse premodern textual traditions. These legacies were recognized as important elements in Worms's heritage and provided the Jews with a powerful means of negotiating their path between change and continuity. During the modern period, then, the premodern Jewish traditions and local and regional loyalties became part of a web of historical preservation, local patriotism, German nationalism, German Jewish cultures, and the production of tourist destinations.

