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*Erez gezerah*—‘Land of Persecution’:  
Pogroms against the Jews in the  
*regnum Teutonicum* from c. 1280 to 1350

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In his testament, the Toledo scholar R. Judah b. Asher, who died in 1349, described the *regnum Teutonicum* as the ‘land of persecution’.<sup>1</sup> This assessment from distant Spain was based less on news about the latest events in the Empire than on the personal experience of Judah and even more on those of his father R. Asher b. Yeḥiel (the ‘Rosh’). Probably the most respected Ashkenazic scholar of his time, Asher had emigrated to Spain with his family at the beginning of the fourteenth century. No doubt there were various motives behind the Rosh’s decision to leave Ashkenaz, but the startling as well as fitting words of his son clearly reflect the danger for the survival of Jewish life in the *regnum Teutonicum* at the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. This attitude of near resignation was brought about primarily by heightening tensions in Jewish-Christian relations, manifested in the extreme by the ever increasing and sometimes wide-ranging pogroms against the Jews from around 1280. What is more, the few extant sources concerning the legal position of the Jews indicate a heavier use of the *Judenregal* (rights over the Jews) by the ruling powers in the second half of the thirteenth century, which in turn occasioned a de facto worsening of Jewish legal status.

*1 Ashkenazic Jewry in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century*

Profound changes are obvious in the perception of the legal status of the Jews in the Empire as mirrored in the deplorable fate of Asher’s teacher R. Meir b. Baruch of Rothenburg (the ‘Maharam’), the greatest scholar of Ashkenazic Jewry in the thirteenth century. In 1286, he was on his way probably to emigrate to Eretz Israel when

<sup>1</sup> Abrahams, ed., *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, i (1926), p. 166.

he was taken prisoner in northern Italy and placed under imperial arrest. The Maharam died seven years later in the King's custody in Ensisheim Castle in Alsace. He is said to have forbidden the Jewish community, on the authority of talmudic law, to pay an excessively high ransom demanded by King Rudolf of Hapsburg (1273–91).

Soon after Meir's arrest, King Rudolf had the property of Meir's presumed Jewish companions from Speyer, Worms, Oppenheim, Mainz, and the Wetterau area confiscated, because the emigrants had left imperial territory without Rudolf's consent or that of whoever the Jews were given in fief.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, it seems significant that the description of the Jews as *servi camerae nostrae* by Rudolf's chancery implied an immediate legal dependence of the Jews on imperial authority. Rudolf's directive offers the earliest evidence in the Empire of a limitation on the Jews' freedom of movement. It is implied that in this case, their leaving the *regnum Teutonicum* represented, from the point of view of a financially weak imperial authority, the loss of a source of revenue. Here are the first indications of a process whereby the position of the Jews was transformed from being wards of the emperor to being predestined 'objects' of financial exploitation. This development is inseparable from a widespread commercialization of lordship rights in the Empire of the Late Middle Ages. The earliest relevant documentary evidence, i.e., the mandates of 1286, is contemporaneous with Rudolf of Hapsburg's aspirations to expand, by way of a sweeping recuperation policy, the crown's scope of action which had been much reduced during the turmoil of the interregnum. In this context, Rudolf emphasized not only the close legal ties of the Jews in the Empire to the King but rather—as the example of the confiscated property in 1286 illustrates only too well—made practical use of the royal rights over the Jews even beyond the usual taxation. It must be remembered that the *de facto* deterioration of the Jewish legal status was not confined to imperial territory; it was to some extent based on models from England and France.

Although the catastrophic persecutions during the First Crusade in 1096 occupied a firm place in the collective consciousness of the Ashkenazi Jews, they did not result in as deep a rift in Jewish-Christian relations in the Empire as the events of the period after c. 1280 brought about. Following 1096, everyday Jewish-Christian co-existence apparently returned to normal rather quickly. It was the very lack of precedence of these first extensive persecutions against the Jews that paved the way for the return of normality. The Jews were obviously surprised by the rather spontaneous attacks, initiated primarily by roaming mobs of fanaticized crusaders. In an environment of general economic and social hardships (resulting, most notably, from famine), profound religious changes and political instability had merged with eschatological expectation to form an explosive compound, and when the Pope propagated a crusade to free the Holy Land, it discharged against the alleged enemies of Christ at home. Soon after the Emperor's return from Italy, where he had stayed from 1090 to 1097, the Jewish communities devastated by the persecutions were rebuilt.

<sup>2</sup> MGH *Const.* III, no. 388.

In the following two centuries only occasional, mostly localized, persecutions occurred against the Jews in the *regnum Teutonicum*. What is more, all of them took place in an environment of unusually critical circumstances. This period was marked by the active participation of wealthy Jewish merchants in the urbanization process and the formation of states and by the corresponding willingness of the respective rulers to grant the Jews under their rule favourable settlement conditions and sufficient protection. Increasing reliance on transactions on a monetary basis accompanying a constant population growth and economic expansion opened for the Jews good prospects in moneylending, officially forbidden to Christians by the Church. At the same time, the establishment of a Christian guild system from the twelfth century sharply curbed the economic opportunities for the Jews in trade and business and thus led to a further intensification of Jewish moneylending.

The fact that numerous Jews specialized in this business bolstered the accusation of usury which was propagated ever since the thirteenth century, mostly by the mendicant friars. On the other hand, many theologians continued to advocate the concept concerning God's plan for salvation based on St. Augustine: the Jews, through their very presence as a living testimony to the Old Covenant, bear witness to Christ's divinity and must not be annihilated, for at the Last Judgment they will recognize their mistaken belief and will convert to Christianity. Despite the enormous significance of the Jews for the Christian concept of redemption at the end of time, this traditional image of the Jews had been changing since the eleventh century, and the Jews were increasingly perceived as the killers of Christ. Furthermore, the claim to exclusivity by both faiths gave rise to religiously motivated attempts to restrict Jewish-Christian relations, from the second half of the twelfth century. In particular under Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), these attempts entered more and more into canon law. In the *regnum Teutonicum*, the sometimes discriminating *canones* of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 met with little echo at first. This can be explained by, among other things, the enormous economic significance of the Jews in the formation of states in the Empire as well as by the attempts of the respective rulers at safeguarding the greatest possible independence in the tense atmosphere of competing powers.

By contrast, the elevation of the transubstantiation doctrine to the status of Church dogma, another result of the Fourth Lateran Council, was to have lasting effects on the future of Ashkenazic Jewry. The doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist celebrated in the form of bread and wine formed a precondition for the accusations against the Jews of Host desecration, emerging since the end of the thirteenth century. Just as the charges of ritual murder, which for the first time since antiquity appear in the mid-twelfth century, these accusations were stereotypes which could be seized upon at any time and, with seemingly religious legitimacy, be used to incite latent anti-Jewish sentiments and earmark the Jews as scapegoats in whatever crisis was at hand.

Following isolated cases of ritual murder charges in the Empire, Jews in Fulda in 1235 were confronted for the first time with a blood libel, a variant of the ritual

murder charge accusing Jews of not only murdering Christians, especially children, for religious reasons, but also of using their victim's blood for ritual magic. For the spread of such ideas, the simultaneous propagation of the cult of the Holy Blood by the Christian Church was essential. The following year, Emperor Frederick II had the accusation examined by an 'international' commission of converts whose verdict found the Jews not guilty of the monstrous accusation of ritual murder. In addition, Frederick forbade such groundless accusations for the future. In the same context, the favourable legal status granted by Henry IV in 1090 to the Jews of Worms was extended to all Jews within the Empire.<sup>3</sup> The description of the Jews as *servi camerae nostrae*—a terminological allusion to the 'eternal servitude' of the Jews, just defined theologically by Pope Gregory IX (1227–41)—not only signalled the imperial claim to the Jews' direct bond with the Empire, but also emphasized Frederick II's self-imposed obligation to protect them.

## 2 *The Mainz Pogrom of 1283 and 'Good Werner' (1287/88)*

Despite intense political turmoil in the Empire in the following four decades, sources show that only isolated persecutions took place—and that they focused on the central Rhine and lower Main areas. Evidently regional and local rulers exploited the period of weakness of the imperial authority to increase their political and economic influence, and one means to this end was effectively protecting the Jews. This was true especially of the leaders of the imperial boroughs and other urban centres affiliated with the king, leaders who in times of weak imperial authority must have had an even keener interest in preserving the peace of their towns. When Christians in Mainz attacked the local Jews on Easter Monday in 1283, the seventh day of Jewish Passover (19 April), it was the prelude to a series of widespread persecutions. Easter, the feast on which not only Christ's resurrection but also his passion was remembered, was a favourite date for acts of violence against Jews, particularly when it coincided with Jewish Passover. What triggered the Mainz pogrom was the discovery of the dead body of a boy. It was said that his wet-nurse had sold him to the Jews for performing a ritual murder. The attempts by the Mainz city council to prevent an inquest on the death as announced by the archbishop led to the violent attack on the local Jews, in which at least ten were murdered. Soon after the discovery of the body, the council had been charged with protecting the Jews by the archbishop, who was staying outside the cathedral city, and its intervention was said to have prevented further bloodshed. Evidently it was less a matter of the Jews per se than of the rights over them in the city, just one other bone of contention between the archbishop of Mainz and the commune in their general conflict over authority in the city. The Mainz persecution also spread to Bacharach and Rockenhausen. It is unknown whether the murder of Jews

<sup>3</sup> MGH *Const.* II, no. 204.

in Coblenz at an undetermined date between 1281 and 1286 was connected to the same pogrom. In any case, the *Annales breves Wormatienses* suggest that people even then understood the significance of those events as a trumpet call for further possible pogroms, inasmuch as the Jews 'in all of Germany' had been horrified by the events.<sup>4</sup> After all, with the 'holy community of Magenza', one of the major Jewish 'mother communities' in the Empire had been affected. At the same time as the Mainz persecution, Asher b. Yeḥiel sent his 13-year-old son Judah to study in Spain. Research has usually taken this move as a preventive measure on Asher's part to protect his oldest son from possible violent outbreaks of the increasing anti-Jewish sentiment.

Only three years later, the Mainz Jews were once again caught between the fronts of internal city conflict concerning the jurisdiction over the Jews as an element of local authority. In the autumn of 1286, the city council once more prevented the judicial investigation into the death of a Christian allegedly murdered by Jews. The inquest had been ordered by Archbishop Henry II (1286–88), only recently appointed to that position by the Pope. Henry turned for assistance to the king, who summoned the members of the Jewish council to appear before him. Possibly out of fear of renewed attacks, some Mainz Jews left the Empire with other Jews from Oppenheim, Worms, Speyer, and the Wetterau area, whereupon King Rudolf reacted with the above-mentioned order to confiscate their property. The concerted emigration of numerous Jews from the Central Rhine communities, who were probably to be led by Meir of Rothenburg in northern Italy, can be credited primarily to an increasingly anti-Jewish climate in the region.

The Frankfurt civic council doubtless answered an urgent need for its Jews to be protected when on 26 June 1287 it confirmed for them a verdict by Pope Gregory X (1271–76) clearing the Jews of the accusation that they used Christian blood during Passover for ritual acts.<sup>5</sup> After all, the worst pogrom ever since the persecutions of the First Crusade was raging at the same time in near-by areas on the central Rhine.

The spark for this so-called 'Good Werner' persecution was the murder of the Christian boy Werner of Womrath in Oberwesel around Easter 1287, allegedly committed by his Jewish employer and other Jews. The boy's body, hidden hastily near Bacharach, was said to have made its position known by emitting a miraculous light,

<sup>4</sup> MGH SS XVII, p. 77, lines 26–28: *1283. Anno regni Rudolphi nono feria secunda pasche christiani in civitate Moguntinensi Iudeos invaserunt, multis ex eis occisis, omnem substantiam eorum sibi diripuerunt; que plaga omnes Iudeos per totam Alemaniam percussit.* In 1285, a pogrom occurred in Munich as the result of the accusation of ritual murder. Between 90 and 140 Jews were burned to death in the synagogue.

<sup>5</sup> Kracauer, ed., *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Juden*, i (1914), no. 13 (1274). On 1 June 1275, Rudolf of Hapsburg had also confirmed the bull by Pope Gregory X, a bull whose origins date to Innocent IV (1243–54), see *ibid.* The Frankfurt Jews had been hit by a pogrom as late as 1241 when trying to prevent the conversion of a Jew to Christianity. In this persecution, about 170 Jews lost their lives.

whereupon an immediate cult of veneration commenced. An Oberwesel maid claimed to have known the boy and identified his suspected murderers. Suspect in content and evidently given long after the deed, her statement suggests rather that the Christian servant girl had not necessarily denounced the Jews of her own initiative. The aim of this plot was evidently to aid Bacharach in advancing its sluggish acceptance as a place of local cult and pilgrimage for the alleged martyr by adding a dose of anti-Jewish hostility.

Inasmuch as there were no more Jews in Bacharach after the pogrom of 1283, the simplest thing was to accuse the Jews of Oberwesel of having murdered 'Good Werner' and to attack them before any authority could start investigating the case. In the succeeding months, the pogroms spread to Jewish settlements on the central Rhine, Moselle, and Nahe. In the following year, the wave of persecutions hit a number of Jewish settlements on the lower Rhine and as far as the Ruhr. Here the manifest weakness of the archbishop of Cologne after the battle of Worringen came to the aid of the attackers. A certain political instability prevailed also in the city and archdiocese of Trier because the see had been formally vacant since the schismatic election of 1286. According to the questionable report of one chronicler, Rudolf of Hapsburg commissioned the Mainz archbishop to take action against the veneration of Werner and to announce publicly that the Jews had suffered an injustice. This measure, if the story is true at all, did not have a great effect.

One possible motive for the 'Good Werner' persecutions may have arisen from the fact that the regional agrarian economy concentrated on wine growing. Not only did wine, produced according to strict religious guidelines, have an outstanding religious significance for the Jews. The monoculture occupied an extraordinary position in the Jewish economy as well. It often happened that only Jews specialized in moneylending were able to grant the Christian vintners the necessary loans required for such a climate-dependent crop as wine. In addition, during the period in question, the loans were frequently paid off to the Jews in the form of wine, which in turn could be sold at a profit. The striking spread of the persecutions in a typical wine-growing region would suggest a regional crisis in viticulture, though the evidence remains insufficient to verify this. The religious veneration of the alleged martyr as patron saint of vintners in some French wine-growing areas also points towards a symbiosis of viticulture and the Werner cult.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the tradition of the ritual murder legend of 'Good Werner' was eventually remodelled according to the charge of Host desecration: Werner's tormentors were now said to have seized the boy violently on Maundy Thursday in order to obtain the Host the boy had received earlier in the eucharist celebration. This tradition reveals that the stereotypical accusations of Host desecration

<sup>6</sup> For the connection between wine growing and the settlement of Jews, see especially Ziwes, *Juden im mittleren Rheingebiet* (1995), pp. 233–8. See also the contribution by Haym Soloveitchik in this volume.

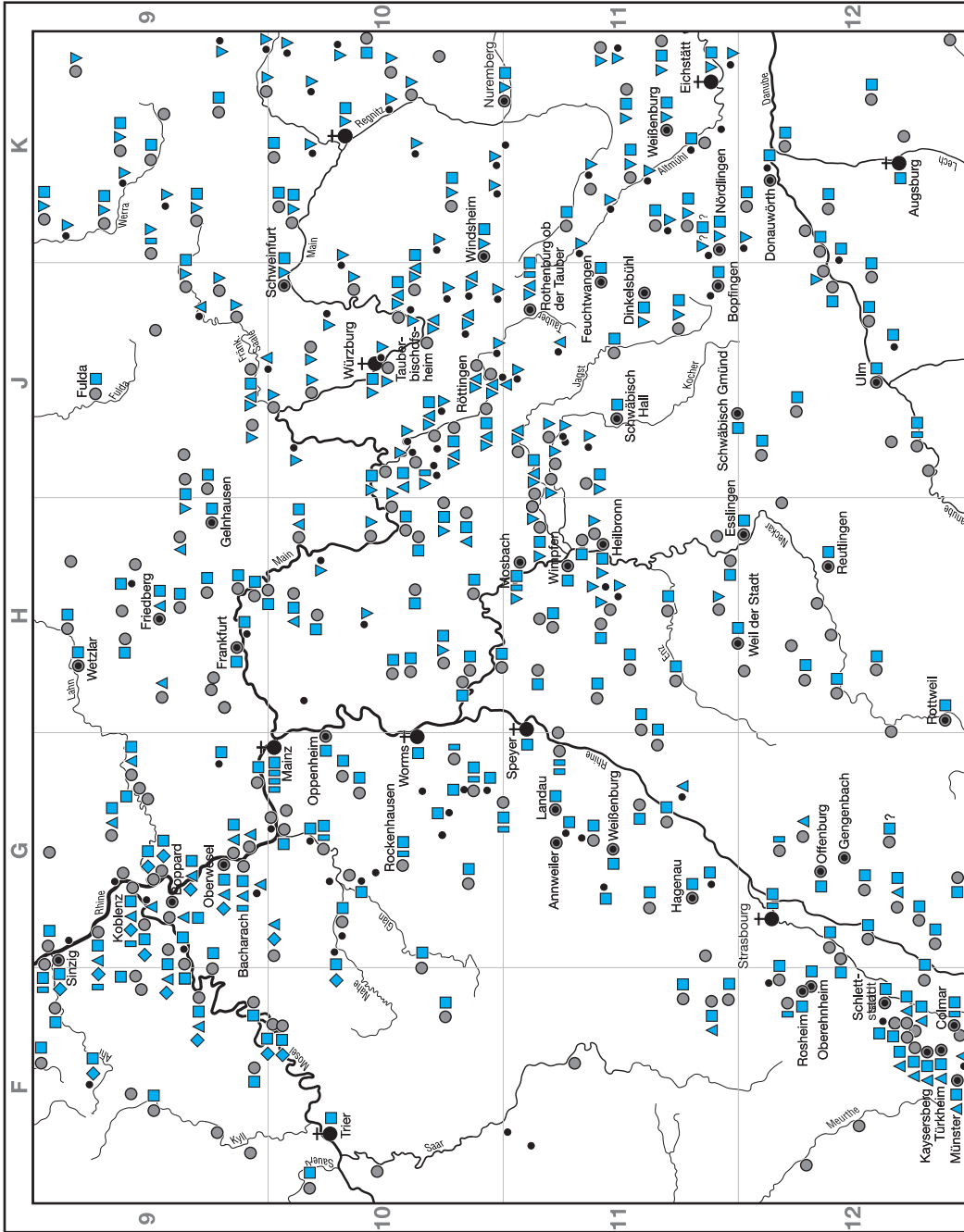
and ritual murder were, in principle, randomly interchangeable. The first documented charge of Host desecration against Jews occurred in Paris in 1290 and thus in a period when the position of the Jews was becoming increasingly precarious in many parts of Western Europe. Among the few areas where Jews were spared persecution or expulsion at the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century was the Iberian peninsula, where R. Asher b. Yehiel emigrated at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

### 3 Host Desecration Libel and 'Rintfleisch' Persecutions (1298)

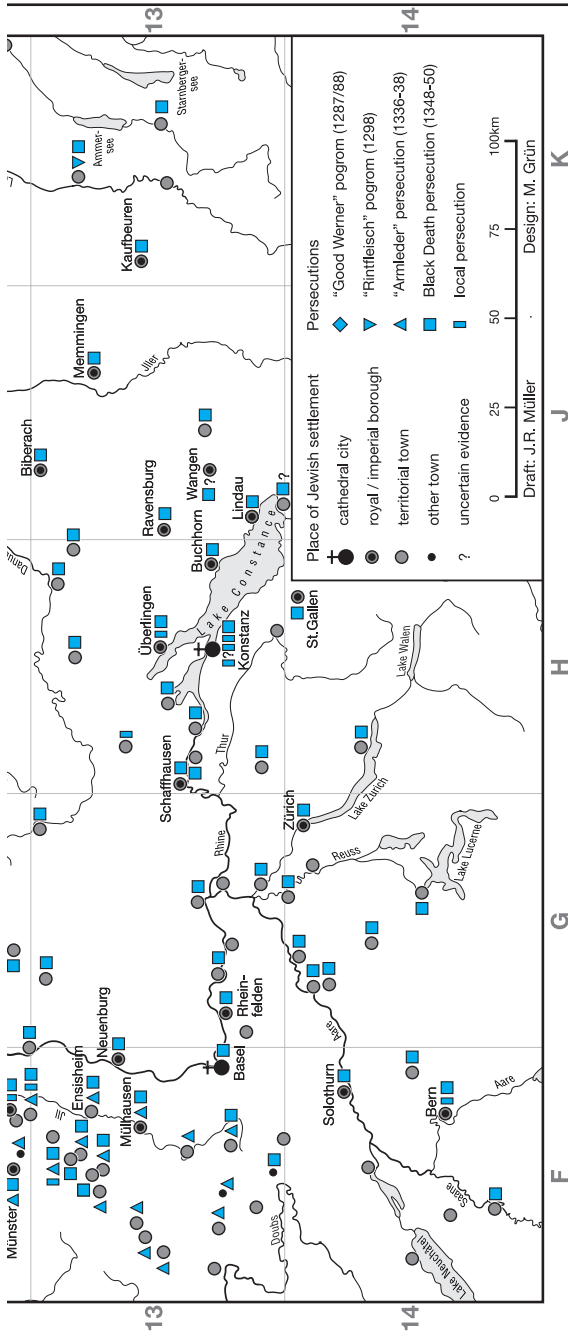
The emigration of the famous scholar was directly preceded by the bloodiest pogroms against the Jews the *regnum Teutonicum* had ever experienced. The massacre, known as the 'Rintfleisch' persecution for its leader, afflicted over 130 Jewish settlements in Franconia and the immediate neighbourhood in 1298. The persecutions began in Röttingen in the Tauber valley where the Jews were murdered on 20 April, following an alleged desecration of the Host. The pogroms occurred in several clearly distinguishable stages, closely following the various phases of the military conflicts over the right to the throne between Adolf of Nassau (1292–98) and Albrecht of Hapsburg (1298–1308). Through his personal intervention, Albrecht finally succeeded in ending the pogroms in late-September. Not only the manifest weakness of the imperial authority but also the involvement of numerous Franconian rulers in the struggle obviously encouraged the mob, led by a butcher or a destitute nobleman, to take up violence against the Jews. The pogroms soon developed a dynamic of their own, so that spontaneous riots sprang up even in many other towns of this area densely settled by Jews, even if the murderous 'Rintfleisch' gangs were not present. The causes of the attacks are many; they include hatred of the Jews incited by the lower clergy and mendicant friars (*cf.* fig. 18), which, expressed in accusations of Host desecration, was



Fig. 18: An anti-Jewish sermon and its bloody aftermath, depicted in Lorenz Fries's *Chronicle of the Bishops of Würzburg* (1546) (Würzburg, StA, Ratsbuch 412, fol. 100<sup>v</sup>)







taken up with great enthusiasm above all in southern Germany. Economic motives were also a factor: Indebtedness to the Jews by Christians at all levels of society is widely documented. After all, Franconia, similar to the central Rhine area, was a leading wine-growing region, particularly susceptible to agrarian crises.

As far as we can glean information from the sources, the persecutors themselves were mostly craftsmen and wage labourers. The ecclesiastical rulers in the cathedral cities of Würzburg and Bamberg seem to have remained passive. In the important Franconian imperial boroughs of Rothenburg and Nuremberg, the town councils attempted to protect the Jews at least for some time, but ultimately in vain. The distant cathedral cities of Augsburg and Regensburg were more successful in this respect: In both cities, the citizenry possessed many of the rights to the local Jews, so that effectively protecting them was not an unselfish thing to do for the civic leadership. In contrast, the representatives of the citizenry in Würzburg, where tensions

Map 18: Persecutions against the Jews in the southwest of the Empire (1280–1350). The map is based on maps C.4.3 and C.4.4 in Haverkamp, ed., *Geschichte der Juden* (2002). Due to the small format, place names were only indicated for Jewish settlements in cathedral cities, imperial or royal boroughs, and those places mentioned in the text. The other place names are to be found in the two above-mentioned maps.

between council and bishop were simmering, took an active part in the annihilation of the Jewish community, most likely in order to inflict harm on the city's ruler, the bishop. The case vividly illustrates what dangers ensued for the Jews when they became political instruments in the conflicts over participation in city rule fought in many places towards the end of the thirteenth and in the first half of the fourteenth century.

If we are to believe Ellenhard's *Chronicle*, the 'Rintfleisch' persecutions would have spread out over the entire *regnum* if Albrecht of Hapsburg had not taken energetic measures.<sup>7</sup> The King finally imposed a fine on several towns because they had delivered up the 'serfs of the imperial chamber' to the attackers; he also renewed the imperial peace with expressed inclusion of the Jews at the Nuremberg diet in November 1298. However, Jewish-Christian relations remained deeply troubled, not only in Franconia.

#### 4 *The Crusade of 1309 and the 'Armleder' Persecutions (1336–38)*

Besides numerous local outbreaks of violence against Jews, one further wave of persecutions in the *regnum Teutonicum* is documented before the late-1330s. The Jewish settlements affected were basically in Brabant, where people eagerly took up an appeal for a crusade proclaimed by Pope Clement V (1305–14). Although the mendicant orders and the Knights of St. John entrusted with preaching the Crusade were only to collect money to equip an efficient crusader army, members of the underclasses spontaneously 'took up the cross', as in 1096, and set out to annihilate the local Jewish communities on their way to the Levant. One reason for the reawakening of the crusading idea probably lay in the strong social and political tensions prevailing in this heavily urbanized landscape in the northwestern part of the Empire, which had led to a series of violent conflicts at the beginning of the fourteenth century. When Jews were persecuted in numerous towns of Brabant in 1309, the bloody attacks were aimed at the Duke of Brabant too. He was able to fulfil his role as protector of the Jews only poorly in the face of the tumultuous character of the pogroms.

Not quite three decades later, the 'Armleder' pogroms marked, in their extent and the number of victims, a renewed escalation of cruelty against the Jews of Ashkenaz, surpassing even the persecutions of 'Good Werner' and 'King Rintfleisch'. The first wave of persecution began in the summer of 1336, originating, as had the pogroms of 1298, in the Franconian town of Röttingen. It was led by Arnold of Uissigheim, a member of the lesser nobility who had been banned a few years earlier. In an allusion to a special arm protection, he was called *rex Armleder*. The first phase of the perse-

<sup>7</sup> MGH SS XVII, p. 139, lines 40–2: ... *et quod etiam [Iudei] per universum regnum fuissent persecuti, si dominus Albertus Romanorum rex in reversione ab Aquisgrani persecutio- nem non sedasset.*

cution was more or less limited to the area between the rivers Tauber and Jagst, where the town of Tauberbischofsheim is said to have been besieged three times in vain by the Armleder troops. This first wave apparently ended in the autumn of the same year, when Arnold of Uissigheim was arrested by Gottfried of Hohenlohe, sentenced by a court of the bishop of Würzburg, and executed.

In the summer of 1337, a second wave of persecutions began with the conquest of Tauberbischofsheim. The resulting pogroms in the Franconian area were said to have been committed primarily by roving farm labourers who were supported locally by the respective underclasses of the small towns. It may be assumed, however, that the attackers, especially in their move against Würzburg, were led by members of the lesser nobility and knights with military experience. Fairly well documented in this context is the rather high level of indebtedness among the rural knighthood in Franconia in the 1330s. Not to be dismissed are the envy and greed named by some contemporary chroniclers as motives for the pogroms against the Jews. Undoubtedly, a socio-revolutionary component, as it were, was involved too, inasmuch as the clergy was not spared by the *rex Armleder* hordes either. We must also name religious reasons and political tensions. King Louis of Bavaria was in conflict with the Avignon papacy and entangled in territorial strife, so that once again the imperial authority was caught up in a phase of utter weakness while pogroms were raging. The reports on the immediate cause of the persecution in Röttingen differ, so that we may assume the usual accusations against the Jews were just later justifications for the persecution.

In Franconia, the fighting came to an end with the defeat of the attackers in a pitched battle near Kleinochsenfurt against an army of Würzburgers. Meanwhile, however, the pogroms in 1337 had moved through the Main area and Wetterau into the central Rhineland. In 1338, they finally broke out in Alsace, where more than one local leader—we hear of an innkeeper and a member of the lesser nobility—was called *rex Armleder*. Practically the entire area of Upper Alsace was overwhelmed by the persecutions. Only after the second unsuccessful siege of the imperial borough of Colmar, whose inhabitants (for their own profit) managed to safeguard their Jews, did the persecutions end at last in May 1338, though without notable consequences for the instigators. The efficiency of various regional peace associations also played an important role in preventing their further spread.

The spread of the 'Armleder' pogroms adequately demonstrates their social aspect. As we can see, the persecutions all took place in typical wine-growing regions with a remarkable degree of urbanization and advanced money and credit economies, and with an extraordinary concentration of Jewish settlement. In these regions of extremely vulnerable agrarian economies, the indebtedness of the agricultural labourers, craftsmen, but also members of the lesser nobility should not be underestimated as a cause for persecuting the Jews. Leaving aside the case of Rothenburg, the Jews in all the cathedral cities and important imperial boroughs owed their effective protection to the fact that the secular and ecclesiastical rulers had to assert their seriously threatened position in this atmosphere of social uprising between 1336 and 1338.

An accusation of Host desecration on Easter 1338 in Pulkau was followed by the murder of Jews in about 30 towns in Lower and Upper Austria, Carinthia, Styria, Moravia, and Bohemia. And after an alleged mocking of Christ in October 1338 in Deggendorf (Lower Bavaria), Jews in around 20 settlements in that region too lost their lives. Both persecutions may have had a direct tie with the preceding ‘Armleder’ movement, though this is difficult to prove. Reactions of the secular rulers differed widely: Whereas Duke Albrecht II of Austria (1336–58) successfully interceded with Pope Benedict XII (1334–42) for an investigation into the Pulkau events (though not much came out of it), the murders in Lower Bavaria were even sanctioned by Duke Henry (1310–39), who also confiscated most of the property of the victims. Rudolf II (1327–53), Count Palatine and a known Jew-hater, even machinated a persecution in his immediate sphere of influence, in 1343.

### *5 The Black Death Persecutions (1348–50)*

If the widespread persecutions of the Jews occurring since the 1280s had taken place mostly in southern German regions down to the central Rhine, the so-called Plague persecutions from 1348 to 1350 also affected the large majority of the Jewish communities in northern Germany, in regions less urbanized and less densely settled by Jews. Along with the accusations of poisoning the wells, documented for the first time in France in 1321, the allegations of Host desecration and ritual murder were developed, as it were, into a conspiracy theory in an atmosphere of grave threat by a raging epidemic. The threat posed by the plague created a catalyst in many parts of the Empire to fight out conflicts of various kinds on the backs of the Jews. As with the previous persecutions, we may find causes for the pogroms in social envy and acute economic hardships, but also in the profound changes in Christian ideals of piety and in conflicts over territorial and urban politics in the absence of a strong imperial power (*cf.* fig. 19).

The first wave of persecutions reached the *regnum Teutonicum* in late-1348 from the southwest during the height of the Wittelsbach-Luxembourg dispute over the imperial throne. By this time, the protection of the Jews claimed by the Empire had long degenerated into a commercial object. In 1342 Emperor Louis ‘the Bavarian’ (1314–47) had introduced the ‘golden penny of offering’ (*goldener Opferpfennig*)—a poll tax for all adult male Jews with property of at least 20 gold florins—meant to guarantee the Jews’ protection; one year later, he had emphasized his absolute right over their lives and properties. However, the Wittelsbacher had no longer been in a position to enforce such claims. The persecutions of the previous decades had already made it clear that effective protection for the Jews could be guaranteed only when local powers were involved. While pawning or otherwise handing out rights associated with the crown’s *Judenregal* had become almost inflationary, the king’s financial and political freedom of action was increasingly restricted, especially during



Fig. 19: The plague pogrom in Würzburg on 21 April 1349, depicted almost two centuries later by Lorenz Fries in his *Chronicle* (Würzburg, StA, Ratsbuch 412, fol. 181<sup>v</sup>)

the above-mentioned conflict over the right to the throne. Yet even the decline of central power does not sufficiently explain why Charles IV (1346–78) promised, after the resignation of his rival Günther of Schwarzburg (1349), impunity and material compensation to leading burghers in the imperial boroughs of Frankfurt and Nuremberg—in case their Jews should become victims of a pogrom! With this inexplicable decision, the emperor from the Luxembourg dynasty paved the way for the organized mass killing of Jews in both of these towns.

Considering the fact that even before the Black Death persecutions, the Jews had served as principal targets for oppositional forces trying to attack the position of ruling factions in the towns, hiring out individual rights over Jews to mutually competing forces must have had a uniquely fatal effect. In 1348 most of the persecutions were still tumultuous pogroms. To check the unforeseeable consequences of such riots, local rulers in the next phase of persecutions, from early summer of 1349, conducted outwardly legal trials against the Jews, with no less catastrophic effects. As a rule, they simply meant organized murder of the Jews and confiscation of their property. Of the important urban centres in the traditional German areas of settlement, only the civic communities of Goslar and Regensburg observed their obligations to protect the Jews. In the east and southeast of the Empire, where protection of the Jews was more strongly tied to the princes, far fewer pogroms occurred. Thus Charles IV was able to safeguard the Jews of Bohemia where he acted as territorial ruler.

## 6 Outlook

Except for isolated cases, 1350 marked not only the end of the Black Death pogroms but also the end of widespread waves of persecution in the German states until the

twentieth century. The noticeable transition in 1349 from mostly explosive violence against the Jews to judicial murder instituted by the rulers found its continuation at the end of the fourteenth century, when ruling powers began to expel the Jews. The *regnum Teutonicum* contemptuously described by Judah b. Asher as the 'land of persecution' gradually developed into a 'land of expulsion' where, until into the sixteenth century, the Jews were expelled from almost all the important urban centres and from numerous states in the traditional settlement areas. The increasing migration that ensued eventually led to intensified settlement of German Jews in Italy and Eastern Europe, whereas the Jews remaining in the western areas of the Empire moved to mainly rural settlements. A large number of towns in the west of the Empire were either lost as settlements or granted dwelling rights to but a limited number of Jews. At the same time, the life-threatening tensions in Jewish-Christian relations, especially prominent in urbanized and territorially fragmented regions between 1280 and 1350, were greatly reduced.

*trans.: F. S. K.*

## FURTHER READING

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## RESUMEN

En una época de crecientes tensiones entre cristianos y judíos, las persecuciones de judíos aumentan numéricamente durante un periodo de cerca de 70 años a partir aproximadamente de 1280, y se extendieron traspasando los límites de las regiones individuales del *regnum Teutonicum*, particularmente en el suroeste del Imperio. La creciente violencia contra los judíos está vinculada a un deterioro del estatuto jurídico de esta minoría religiosa que se manifiesta de manera concreta a partir del reinado de Rodolfo de Habsburgo (1273–91). Dentro de un proceso de comercialización general de los derechos de soberanía, los judíos, protegidos del Imperio, se convierten en objeto de explotación fiscal. La realeza intentaba cada vez más cubrir sus necesidades monetarias crecientes, enajenando, entre otros, los derechos de soberanía sobre los judíos, o bien sometiéndolos a exacciones extraordinarias. De manera paralela, la corona no estaba más en condiciones de continuar una protección eficaz de los judíos en un periodo de crisis, debido a la reducción de su margen de maniobra. Esta protección va a incumbir, cada vez más, a los señores locales y a las élites urbanas, lo que tuvo por consecuencia que en la segunda mitad del siglo XIII y en la primera del XIV, los judíos se encontraron, a menudo, entre dos fuegos, en las luchas urbanas.

Las persecuciones de 1280 a 1350 tuvieron por causa no sólo factores específicos locales, sino también el anti-judaísmo propagado sobre todo por las órdenes mendicantes y eclesiásticos que hacían acusaciones absurdas contra los judíos (crímenes rituales de cristianos o profanación de hostias consagradas) y que encontraron un terreno fértil en una época en la que la devoción cristiana toma formas nuevas, sobre todo desde la segunda mitad del siglo XIII. Este tipo de acusaciones toman a los judíos como chivo expiatorio en situaciones de crisis muy diversas. La predicación contra los judíos, que se habían especializado en el préstamo de dinero desde el siglo XIII, utiliza también la acusación de usura. No es casual que antes de las persecuciones ligadas a la peste, las tres grandes oleadas de violencia anti-judía en el Imperio (« *Guter Werner* », 1287, « *Rintfleisch* », 1298 y « *Armleder* », 1336–38) tuvieron lugar todas ellas en las grandes regiones vitícolas fuertemente urbanizadas y dotadas de los medios de una economía financiera desarrollada y de una densa población judía. La viticultura dependía del crédito y aún más, del clima, y cualquier mala cosecha podía entrañar graves perjuicios económicos.

Con la gran epidemia europea de peste y la disputa por el trono entre las dinastías de Luxemburgo y Wittelsbach, la violencia anti-judía llega a su cenit en el Imperio entre 1348–50, afectando esta vez a extensas zonas del norte del país. En esta situación de crisis, el sentimiento anti-judío, los problemas económicos y sociales y los conflictos políticos (con los matices locales) se mezclan en dichas persecuciones. Salvo raras excepciones, todas las comunidades

judías implantadas en zonas de antiguo poblamiento germánico fueron afectadas por las persecuciones. Únicamente en el este y suroeste del país los soberanos consiguieron proteger a sus judíos. Después de 1350, no hay más que algunos casos aislados de persecuciones judías que sobrepasen un marco local. Ahora se impone una nueva forma de medida represiva contra los judíos ya practicada en otros países europeos desde el siglo XII, esto es, la expulsión decretada por las autoridades políticas.



