

RESEARCH NOTES: In the Eye of the Storm

Despite a wealth of archival and secondary material, the history of the early modern period of the Jews in Germany (1520-1650) has never been systematically investigated by modern scholars. While Jewish communities elsewhere in Germany - wracked by expulsions, oppression and the horrors of the Thirty Year's War - all but disappeared, the Jewish communities of Frankfurt-am-Main, Worms and Friedberg flourished. For example, the population of the Frankfurt ghetto rose from 250 in 1520 to about 3000 in 1610, and its associated rabbinic, communal and cultural institutions reached new heights. Although simmering economic and social antagonism led to Christian mobs plundering the ghetto in 1614 (see engraving above) and expelling all Jews from Frankfurt, the Emperor executed the mob's leaders as rebels in 1616, and the Jews were ceremoniously returned.



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the influential Polish Council of the Four Lands. They have also uncovered evidence of particularly close relations between the Jewish communities of Worms and Friedberg, augmented by a massive exodus from Worms (and Fulda) after 1520. The newcomers soon occupied important posts in the Friedberg community, where they felt more secure under the triple protection of the relatively sympathetic *Burggraf*, municipal council and Emperor.

The researchers are now trying to identify the factors responsible for the relative stability of these three communities, in a time of intense turmoil. Although all three cities were *Reichsstädte*, under direct imperial rule, the Jews of many other *Reichsstädte* were expelled during this period. The strong municipal councils of Frankfurt and Worms and their relatively favorable policies, as expressed in their *Judenstattigkeiten* and *Judenordnungen*, seem another factor, as does the division of control over the Jews, and their lucrative taxes, between many competing centers of power. In Worms the latter included the Emperor, the municipal council, the Dalberg dynasty, the Cathedral Chapter and the Elector Palatine.

The stability of these communities attracted outstanding rabbis and scholars whose proficiency and authority were recognized by all the Jewish communities of Germany. In fact, the Friedberg *Bet Din* (court) had jurisdiction over wide areas of Hesse-Kassel, reaching as far as Westphalia.

Israel Science Foundation grantee Prof. M. Breuer and his colleagues have been investigating this fascinating era as the fourth part of a long-term research and publication project, *Germanica Judaica*, which began in Germany in 1906. Volume 1 was published in sections until 1934 and, after the War, the project was eventually resumed in Israel. Volumes II and III were published in 1968 and 1987-95 respectively.

Prof. Breuer's team has already uncovered new material on internal conflicts within the Frankfurt community after their return in 1616, and on the community's close relations with

