

From: “The Prince-Bishops of Wuerzburg and the Jews in the Late Middle Ages after 1349”

An Essay

Elias Oppenrieder

November 2, 2020

The Prince-Bishops of Wuerzburg and the Jews in the Late Middle Ages after 1349

1. Introduction

Standing on the Market Square of Wuerzburg in front of the impressive *Marienkapelle* today, one would hardly imagine that 700 years ago a synagogue was located at that place. And yet, until the pogrom of April 1349 the religious center of the flourishing Jewish community of Wuerzburg had its place there, serving for religious services as well as demonstrating the wealth of the local Jewry.¹ After 1349, however, the synagogue was apparently destroyed, and instead of building a new one a Christian place of worship was erected² which leads to the question: As the former religious center of the Jewish community in Wuerzburg had ceased to exist, had the community itself as well? In fact, only in 1376 a Jew is mentioned anew in Wuerzburg,³ so the Jewish community must have been hit existentially by the pogrom of 1349. While the pogrom of 1349 is documented by sources and examined in various papers, much less is known about the history of Jews in Wuerzburg in the second half of the 14th and in the 15th century.⁴ This paper thus attempts to examine the situation of the Jewish community in Wuerzburg at the end of the Middle Ages. Contemporary sources about Jewish life in Wuerzburg at that time are scarce, however, and

¹See Karlheinz Mueller, *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*, Mainfraenkische Studien 70 (Wuerzburg, 2004), 44–62, particularly 50.

²See the passage in a deed of donation for the *Marienkapelle* from 1349: “*in loco dicto uff dem juden platz*”: Academia Scientiarum Boica, ed., *Monumenta Boica*, vol. 43 (Munich, 1876), Nr. CXXVIII, here 296.

³See the information in Hatto Kallfelz, “Wuerzburg,” ed. Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim, *Germania Judaica III: 1350-1519* 2. Teilband: Ortsartikel Maehrisch-Budwitz - Zwolle (1995): 1698–1711, here 1699.

⁴The relevant works on this topic (also referred to primarily in this paper) are Mosheh Avigdor Shulvas, *Die Juden in Wuerzburg Während Des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1934). and Mueller, *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*.

the ones existing are mainly charters by the prince-bishops. Thus, the paper's predominant focus is on the relations between the Jews in Wuerzburg and the prince-bishop. He was the political and likewise the religious lord of the town, meaning that the welfare or hardship of Würzburg's Jews depended a great deal on him. Therefore, the paper will be structured along the tenures of the subsequent bishops of the analyzed period, taking into account their general rule and relating it to their dealings with the Jews. To put the situation in Wuerzburg into a broader context, regularly developments in the Reich as a whole will be mentioned. Starting with **Albrecht II. von Hohenlohe's** reign as prince-bishop, when the annihilating pogrom of 1349 took place, the paper will take a look at each of his successors, finishing with **Rudolf II of Scherenberg** who died in 1495. The conclusion of the paper will be an attempt to summarize the Jewish-episcopal relationships under the reign of the different prince-bishops. Before proceeding, however, one constraint has to be made: Almost all of the sources analyzed hereafter express a change in the relationships between the prince-bishops and the Jewry in Wuerzburg. Everyday relations are hardly documented in the surviving sources, so one should not be tempted to take their information for a comprehensive account of Jewish-episcopal relations in Wuerzburg in the late 14th and 15th century, let alone a comprehensive account of Jewish life in Wuerzburg at that time. Nevertheless, these sources can provide us with some valuable insights into the mentioned topics.⁵

2. The Jewish Community of Wuerzburg after 1349 and the Prince-Bishops

2.1 The Prince-Bishops of the late 14th century: Sporadic Indications of Jewish Life after the Annihilation

The pogrom of 1349 fell into a period of disorder and insecurity in the whole *Reich*, with the plague approaching and flagellants wandering about.⁶ In the bishopric of Wuerzburg, the situation was particularly complicated insofar as, following the election of a new bishop in 1345, the candidate chosen by the cathedral chapter, **Albrecht von Hohenlohe**, was rejected by **Pope Clemens VI** who favoured his chaplain, **Albrecht von Hohenberg**, instead.⁷ In his search for allies, **Albrecht von Hohenlohe** turned to the newly elected king **Charles IV**. Beginning from 1346, he stood firmly by **Charles's** side, and so it does not come as a surprise that **Charles** was willing to appreciate the stance of **Albrecht von Hohenlohe**. To do so, he issued a charter on 28th March 1349 assuring the bishop of Bamberg and **Albrecht** that in case any harmful would

⁵On the problem that medieval sources on this topic refer primarily to situations of crisis, see Peter Herde, "Probleme Der Christlich-Juedischen Beziehungen in Mainfranken Im Mittelalter," *Wuerzburger Diözesan-Geschichtsblätter* 40 (1978): 79–94, particularly 79.

⁶See the classic monography by Graus: František Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*, Veröffentlichungen Des Max-Planck-Instituts Für Geschichte 86 (Goettingen, 1987).

⁷See Walter Scherzer, "Das Hochstift Wuerzburg," in *Unterfränkische Geschichte: Vom Hohen Mittelalter Bis Zum Beginn Des Konfessionellen Zeitalters*, ed. Peter Kolb and Ernst-Guenter Krenig, vol. 2 (Wuerzburg, 1993), 17–84, here 41.

happen to the Jews in their bishoprics, **Charles** would not “*take possession of the movable or immovable property of these without the special advice and will*”⁸ of the two bishops. In the charter, **Charles** spoke of the Jews as “*our servi camerae nostrae*,”⁹ a term used for the first time by **Frederick II** in 1236, referring to the conception that the Jews were appendant to the royal chamber which meant that on the one hand the king was obliged to provide for their protection, on the other hand the Jews had to pay taxes to the king. By the mid of the 14th century, however, what initially had functioned as a sort of mutual agreement, had become a hollow promise by the rulers, as **Charles’** charter shows.¹⁰ To the wave of pogroms in the years of 1348/49 **Charles** remained passive and reacted at the very most where his own territorial interests were at stake.¹¹ Therefore, he probably had no qualms about delivering on his promise to the prince-bishop of Wuerzburg after the pogroms had reached the town in April 1349, leading to the complete annihilation of the Jewish community there. In 1350, the bishopric was officially transferred to **Albrecht** by the pope. During his tenure, no Jews are known to have settled in Wuerzburg. Meanwhile, **Albrecht** tried to make use of the belongings of the destroyed Jewish community which he had acquired. In 1354, he appointed a commission of members of the cathedral chapter and officials which was to raise money so that estates could be purchased. To achieve this goal, the commission was also ordered to “*sell the Jews’ school, the Jewish churchyard and the Jews’ houses, yards and street in Wuerzburg*.”¹² While it is unknown whether the buildings were indeed sold, it is documented that the debts of the bishopric, which the prince-bishop had probably hoped to alleviate with the help of the Jewish properties awarded to him, continued to exceed although Albrecht von Hohenlohe even levied new taxes. The assumption that Albrecht might have benefitted more from Jewish merchants and money lenders than their left properties seems standing to reason, especially when one takes into account that as a result of the conflicts of the prince-bishop with the city council, many wealthy burghers left the town, which let the liabilities of the bishopric rise further.¹³

In 1372, differing interests of the chapter, **Charles IV** and the pope as to the new prince-bishop led to several months of uncertainty again. At the end, at the instigation of **Charles IV** and with support of **Pope Gregor XI**, **Gerhard**

⁸“*daz wir mit der selben juden gute weder mit varend oder mit vnuarend [...] noch enmugen mit gabe oder andern sachen da mite daz vertzogen vnd emphremdet mocht werden on iren besundern rat vnd willen*”: Academia Scientiarum Boica, ed., *Monumenta Boica*, vol. 41 (Munich, 1872), Nr. CXXXVII, 389.

⁹“*vnsern camer knechten*”, ibid., Nr. CXXXVII, 389.

¹⁰See Mueller, *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*, 66–69 and 127–129.

¹¹See Alfred Haverkamp, “Die Judenverfolgungen Zur Zeit Des Schwarzen Todes Im Gesellschaftsgefuege Deutscher Staedte,” in *Zur Geschichte Der Juden Im Deutschland Des Spaeten Mittelalters Und Der Fruehen Neuzeit*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp, Monographien Zur Geschichte Des Mittelalters 24 (Stuttgart, 1981), 85–91.

¹²“*zu verkouffen die Juden schul den Juden kirchof vnd der Juden hueser hof hofstet vnd gazzen zu Wirczburg*”: Academia Scientiarum Boica, ed., *Monumenta Boica*, vol. 42 (Munich, 1874), Nr. XLVII, 111. See also Mueller, *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*, 130.

¹³See the considerations by Scherzer, “Das Hochstift Wuerzburg,” 44.

von Schwarzburg prevailed and became the new prince-bishop. As he had inherited an enormous debt burden from his predecessor **Albrecht**, he had to look for means to reduce it.

Therefore, **Gerhard** wanted to draw on the possibility to settle Jews in his bishopric. Thanks to his excellent relations to **Charles IV**, the latter granted the bishop the permission. In a charter issued on 9th December 1373, **Charles** allowed **Gerhard von Schwarzburg** to “*receive Jews, our and the Reich’s servi camerae nostrae, men and women, to defend, protect and shield them and to make use of them.*”¹⁴ It took time, however, after this privilege was granted until a Jewish settlement occurred. Only in 1376 a single Jew is evidenced in Wuerzburg, one year later we know of four Jews. How much distrust and anxiety still existed, is shown by two examples: the Jew Salomon from Frankfurt concluded a contract in 1378 with a local nobleman in which the latter had to bind himself to be taken into custody if he did not repay his dues.¹⁵ One year later, the Jew **Krosche from Weimar** had to pledge after being discharged from prison “*that he would not absent himself from our venerable lord, the bishop of Wuerzburg and that he would reimburse all his dues to the bishop of Wuerzburg and his bishopric.*”¹⁶ One can only guess that another action of prince-bishop **Gerhard** contributed to this distrust: Soon after the pogrom, a Christian *chapel of Our Lady* had been erected in place of the former synagogue. In 1377, **Gerhard** laid the foundation stone for a bigger church. That it was still known in the town, that a Jewish community had existed there several decades ago, shows a document from 1387: A baker and his wife sold some of their properties in Wuerzburg, in detail “*a yard and a garden called Reyesecke located in front of the yard at Stuetgarten, behind the mill, which is called Grabmuele, across the Jewish churchyard.*”¹⁷ In 1390, a decree hit the few Jews living in Wuerzburg by this time: **King Wenceslaus** enacted that all debts to Jews were to be redeemed. Already in 1385 **Wenceslaus** had ordered a debt redemption for several towns to win their favor. Having changed sides, in 1390 he decreed a settlement of debts in the territories of allied princes, one of whom was the prince-bishop of Wuerzburg who paid the sum of 15,000 guilder to **Wenceslaus** in return.

Regarding the debts of the bishopric, **Gerhard von Schwarzburg** was not able to reduce the heavy burden left by **Albrecht**. To the contrary, even if he levied various new taxes and pawned property of the bishopric, the costs of

¹⁴“*juden, vnser vnd des reichs camer knecht, mann vnd weib empfangen, die vorteidigen schutzen schirmen vnd der genyssen muge vnd sulle*”: Academia Scientiarum Boica, *Monumenta Boica*, Nr. XXII, 47.

¹⁵See Shulvas, *Die Juden in Wuerzburg Während Des Mittelalters*, 51f.

¹⁶“*das er sich von dem hochwirdigen vnserm herren, dem bischoff von Wiczburg (!) nicht entpfremden sol [...] Vnd [...] das er vnsern obgenanten herren von Wirczburg vnd sinem stift aller schulde [...] sol ledig vnd los sagen*”: Academia Scientiarum Boica, ed., *Monumenta Boica*, vol. 45: *Monumenta episcopatus wirzburgensis* (Munich, 1899), Nr. CCXLVI, 353.

¹⁷“*Hofreite und Garten gen. Reyesecke (Reis-), gelegen vor dem hofe zu Stuetgarten hinder der muelen, Grabmuele genant, obwendig dez juedenkirchhofes*”: Wilhelm Engel, ed., *Urkundenregesten Zur Geschichte Der Stadt Wuerzburg*, vol. *Regesta Herbipolensia 1, Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Geschichte Des Bistums Und Hochstifts Wuerzburg* (Wuerzburg, 1952), Nr. 468, 19th August 1388, 353.

his clashes with the town led to an increase of the debt. For a short moment, even the imperial immediacy for Wuerzburg seemed possible. In 1397, **King Wenceslaus** enacted an inconsistent document which was interpreted by the citizenry of Wuerzburg as granting them the status of an imperial city. However, **Wenceslaus** reversed himself only a few months later, and in 1400, the troops of prince-bishop **Gerhard** obtained a decisive victory in the battle of Bergtheim.¹⁸ Summing up **Gerhard's** reign and his relations to the Jews of Wuerzburg, there were only tentative signs of a new beginning of Jewish life in the town. The few Jews that did settle in Wuerzburg seem to have conducted their business with increased cautiousness, with good reasons, as the example of the debt redemption in 1390 shows. The relationship between the bishop and the Jews was based exclusively on commercial interests, as the Jews who lived in Wuerzburg did not settle there as part of a community but as individuals whose permittance to dwell depended on the episcopal need of money.¹⁹

Bibliography

- Academia Scientiarum Boica, ed. *Monumenta Boica*. Vol. 41. Munich, 1872.
- , ed. *Monumenta Boica*. Vol. 42. Munich, 1874.
- , ed. *Monumenta Boica*. Vol. 43. Munich, 1876.
- , ed. *Monumenta Boica*. Vol. 45: *Monumenta episcopatus wirzburgensis*. Munich, 1899.
- Arnold, Klaus. “Im Ringen Um Die Buergerliche Freiheit: Die Stadt Wuerzburg Im Spaeteren Mittelalter (ca. 1250-1400).” In *Geschichte Der Stadt Wuerzburg*, edited by Ulrich Wagner, I: Von den Anfaengen bis zum Ausbruch des Bauernkriegs:94–109. Stuttgart, 2001.
- Engel, Wilhelm, ed. *Urkundenregesten Zur Geschichte Der Stadt Wuerzburg*. Vol. Regesta Herbipolensia 1. Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Geschichte Des Bistums Und Hochstifts Wuerzburg. Wuerzburg, 1952.
- Graus, František. *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde*. Veroeffentlichungen Des Max-Planck-Instituts Für Geschichte 86. Goettingen, 1987.
- Haverkamp, Alfred. “Die Judenverfolgungen Zur Zeit Des Schwarzen Todes Im Gesellschaftsgefuege Deutscher Staedte.” In *Zur Geschichte Der Juden Im Deutschland Des Spaeten Mittelalters Und Der Fruehen Neuzeit*, edited by Alfred Haverkamp, 27–93. Monographien Zur Geschichte Des Mittelalters 24. Stuttgart, 1981.

¹⁸See Klaus Arnold, “Im Ringen Um Die Buergerliche Freiheit: Die Stadt Wuerzburg Im Spaeteren Mittelalter (ca. 1250-1400),” in *Geschichte Der Stadt Wuerzburg*, ed. Ulrich Wagner, vol. I: Von den Anfaengen bis zum Ausbruch des Bauernkriegs (Stuttgart, 2001), 94–109, here 104-108.

¹⁹This point is stressed by Mueller, *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*, 135–37.

- Herde, Peter. "Probleme Der Christlich-Juedischen Beziehungen in Mainfranken Im Mittelalter." *Wuerzburger Diözesan-Geschichtsblätter* 40 (1978): 79–94.
- Kallfelz, Hatto. "Wuerzburg." Edited by Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim. *Germania Judaica III: 1350-1519* 2. Teilband: Ortsartikel Maehrisch-Budwitz - Zwolle (1995): 1698–1711.
- Mueller, Karlheinz. *Die Wuerzburger Judengemeinde Im Mittelalter*. Mainfraenkische Studien 70. Wuerzburg, 2004.
- Scherzer, Walter. "Das Hochstift Wuerzburg." In *Unterfraenkische Geschichte: Vom Hohen Mittelalter Bis Zum Beginn Des Konfessionellen Zeitalters*, edited by Peter Kolb and Ernst-Guenter Krenig, 2:17–84. Wuerzburg, 1993.
- Shulvas, Mosheh Avigdor. *Die Juden in Wuerzburg Während Des Mittelalters*. Berlin, 1934.