

## Dismantling a Monopoly:

### Jews, Christians, and the Production of *Shofarot* in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Germany

Andreas Lehnertz (Jerusalem)

#### Abstract

This essay presents a case study from Erfurt (Germany) concerning the production of *shofarot* (i.e., animal horns blown for ritual purposes, primarily on the Jewish New Year). By the early 1420s, Jews from all over the Holy Roman Empire had been purchasing *shofarot* from one Christian workshop in Erfurt that produced these ritual Jewish objects in cooperation with an unnamed Jewish craftsman. At the same time, two Jews from Erfurt were training in this craft, and started to produce *shofarot* of their own making. One of these Jewish craftsmen claimed that the Christian workshop had been deceiving the Jews for decades by providing improper *shofarot* made with materials unsuitable for Jewish ritual use. The local rabbi, Yomtov Lipman, exposed this as a scandal, writing letters to the German Jewish communities about the Christian workshop's fraud and urging them all to buy new *shofarot* from the new Jewish craftsmen in Erfurt instead. This article will first examine the fraud attributed to the Christian workshop. Then, after analyzing the historical context of Yomtov Lipman's letter, it will explore the underlying motivations of this rabbi to scandalize the Christian workshop's fraud throughout German Jewish communities at this time. I will argue that, while Yomtov Lipman uses *halakhic* explanations in his letter, his chief motivation in scandalizing this fraud was to discredit the Christian workshop, create an artificial demand for *shofarot*, and promote the new Jewish workshop in Erfurt, whose craftsmen the rabbi himself had likely trained in the art of *shofar* making.

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In the year 1421, the Erfurt-based Rabbi Yomtov Lipman Mühlhausen wrote letters to all the Jewish communities in Ashkenaz, at the time mainly Germany. In his *halakhic* directive, he informed the Jews about a matter of the highest importance: A *shofar*-maker of his community in Erfurt discovered that a local Christian workshop (of horn-workers or perhaps even goldsmiths) had been deceiving the Jews for decades by substituting ram's horn with (buck) goat's horn in their *shofarot* production. According to Yomtov Lipman, this invalidated most current *shofar* horns in Germany, as a result of which they were forbidden to be used. He urgently called to rectify this problem, specifically by purchasing proper *shofar* horns from two Jewish craftsmen in his community in Erfurt, who had recently become proficient in the art of *shofar* making. Indeed, it was one of these Jewish craftsmen that had discovered the fraud of the Christian workshop in the first place. In light of this fraud, Yomtov Lipman's letter underscored the crucial need for adequate *shofarot* and included a warning: "Every year that the [proper; my addition] *shofar* is not blown at its beginning [i.e., the Jewish New Year], evil occurs at its end." Thus, the rabbinic authority emphasized, the failure to acquire proper *shofarot* would have devastating consequences for the Jewish communities of the region.

The following article will explore this case in depth. It seeks to parse out what actually happened in Erfurt, and why this rabbi scandalized this fraud and insisted so vehemently that

Jewish communities in Germany acquire new *shofarot* from the Jewish craftsmen in Erfurt. I will first discuss the chain of events as described in Yomtov Lipman's letter. I will then present essential technical details of *shofar* crafting that can assist in fully understanding how this fraud persisted for several decades in Erfurt. Thereafter, I will contextualize the *shofar* case and Yomtov Lipman's reaction to it amidst the broader historical situation. Against this backdrop, I will question the possible motivations behind Rabbi Yomtov Lipman's letter and suggest that economic considerations played an important role in his deliberations.

By analyzing this case, the present article seeks to explore how Christian production of ritual Jewish objects had interreligious economic implications. It will highlight forms of Jewish and Christian professional occupation in urban centers, as well as examples of joint enterprise and competition. Furthermore, it will address how a certain product—in this case the *shofar* designated for Jewish ritual use—entered the medieval marketplace and factored into economic interactions between Jews and Christians.

## Rabbi Yomtov Lipman's Letter

Yomtov Lipman's letter, written originally in Hebrew, has survived in several manuscripts of the *Sefer Minhagei Maharil*, a compendium of Jewish laws and customs from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Zalman of St. Goar (c. 1385–1470) compiled this book and made several changes later on. He was a student of Yomtov Lipman's contemporary, Rabbi Jacob Levi Molin, known by his Hebrew acronym, the Maharil (c. 1365/75–1427). The Maharil, a leading German rabbi teaching in Mainz in the Rhineland, was in contact with Yomtov Lipman, who resided in Erfurt during the years prior to his death in 1421.

According to Zalman of St. Goar, Yomtov Lipman informed his fellow Jews in Germany that a Christian workshop in his city had been deceiving its Jewish customers:

For forty years, I saw the Christian craftsman dwelling in Erfurt, and since then, his son has replaced him, and he too lives with us here in Erfurt. And they made many *shofarot*, and the whole land came here to buy [them] until these *shofarot* were spread throughout the [whole] land of Ashkenaz. [Recently,] the honorable R. Kellin ha-Cohen from Erfurt learned to make *shofarot* and realized that all the *shofarot* which were made here [in the Christian workshop] are from goat's horn and not from ram's horn. And the horns [i.e., the raw materials] of the rams which were given to the aforementioned Christian craftsmen were all exchanged good [ram's horn] for bad [goat's horn].

In this source we read that, after studying and acquiring proficiency in the craft of *shofar* making, Kellin ha-Cohen, a Jewish member of Yomtov Lipman's community in Erfurt, discovered that the *shofar* horns made in the Christian workshop were unsuitable. At the core of the problem was the animal horn used for *shofar* making: While Jews purchased the raw, unprocessed ram's horn and gave them to the craftsmen to fashion their *shofarot*, they received finished goat's horn in return. This fraud of the Christian workshop disqualified the *shofarot* for ritual use and therefore created a huge problem for the Jews "throughout the [whole] land of Ashkenaz" who bought from them.

To explain this problem, Yomtov Lipman started his letter with a discussion of the various animal's horns fit for use as *shofarot*. He reviewed the stances of earlier rabbis, among them

authorities such as the highly influential Rabbi Moses Maimonides (c. 1135/38–1204). Maimonides and others declared that indeed only ram's horn is *kosher* for ritual use, meaning that blowing goat's horn would not fulfill the *mitzvah* (religious commandment) to hear the *shofar* blast for the Jewish New Year. From his discussion, Yomtov Lipman concluded that a goat's horn was not fit for use and that it was imperative to blow a ram's horn. The powerful justification he gave was that it was a ram and not a goat that replaced Isaac's sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Gen 22:1–19), which made it meritorious to use *shofarot* crafted from ram's horn.

Fig. 1

When Yomtov Lipman described how the Christian workshop deceived the Jews, he was not exposing a single case of fraud but rather a problem that had been carrying on for decades. He then stressed the fact that

all this was admitted by the Christian craftsman, son of the first craftsman, and he, as well as a Jewish craftsman here [in Erfurt] admitted, that they had not made a single *shofar* from a ram.

According to the rabbi, both the Christian and the unnamed Jewish craftsman admitted (*hodu*) to have participated in these fraudulent business activities. While this workshop had indeed received *halakhically* ideal (raw) ram's horn from its Jewish customers, it only provided the *halakhically* problematic goat's horn as its finished *shofar* product in return.

## Crafting *Shofarot* in the Middle Ages

The first question to address here is why the Christian workshop in Erfurt would replace its customer's ram's horn with goat's horn—an activity that can indeed be called a fraudulent act? The answer has to do with certain economic motivations of this workshop. Let us first discuss the characteristics and value of these two types of horns. Ram's horn grows slower than goat's horn on the animal's head and requires an average of five to six years to reach full-grown size. This means that, while goat's horn was readily found in medieval Erfurt, as well as in Central Europe at large, ram's horn appears to have been both scarcer in supply as well as far more valuable.

This helps us understand the economic motivation of the fraud taking place at the Christian workshop in Erfurt. Indeed, the demand among Jews to have these ram's horns for ritual use meant that Jewish customers were bringing these rarer and more valuable raw horns to the workshop. Yomtov Lipman also specifies that Jews provided the raw materials of ram for their own *shofarot* in his letter. However, such Christian craftsmen were likely catering not only to Jews, but also to a broader clientele interested in various horn-based products. We can therefore assume that the drinking-horns, hunting-horns and ink-horns (inkwells) that were popular among members of the Christian nobility and upper-class at the time were also among the array of horn-worked products this *shofar* workshop manufactured. The process for crafting these various horn products was very similar, and, presumably, the reason to produce

*shofarot* as well. Still, if Jewish customers were providing their own raw ram's horn for the workshop to fashion *shofarot*, as Yomtov Lipman's letter explains, then how could they not realize that they received *shofarot* of goat's horn in return?

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Indeed, ram's horn is thicker and more twisted than goat's horn. Still, between the time the raw material arrived at the workshop to the time the *shofar* became a completed ritual object, each horn had been drastically altered beyond recognition. Let us direct our attention to the technical process of *shofarot* production. Similar to *shofar* production today, the bony core of the horn received by *shofar*-makers was removed by cooking and softening the whole horn. Then, the hollow, still twisted horn was heated over a fire to make it flexible enough to bend. The artisans would then fasten the heated horn to a press in the desired, straightened form until it hardened, so that it would retain its new shape. Heating the horn at this stage had to be done carefully, and multiple times, otherwise it could crack, thus making the *shofar* no longer *kosher* for ritual use. After the horn cooled, and its straightened shape was retained, the smaller end of the horn was cut off, and the craftsmen drilled a hole several centimeters long until air could flow through it. The drilled end served as the mouthpiece and needed to be widened a bit. Finally, depending on the taste of the customer, the whole horn would be polished extensively to smooth out its rough outer surface. Polishing was both time-consuming and labor-intensive but was imperative in making the horn's surface fit for decorative additions.

Regarding decorative (metal) additions to the *shofar*, Zalman of St. Goar quotes his teacher the Maharil: "That is what we say: if it [i.e., the *shofar*] was coated with gold, then it is forbidden to blow it." Still, *shofarot* were costly objects to show off, and also objects that wealthy people would have donated to their synagogue or the community at large. And so, Jews likely added decorative and perhaps even additional (metal) elements to their *shofarot* with some frequency—quite similarly to hunting-horns and drinking-horns. While no known *shofarot* survive from the medieval period, this is attested to in images of contemporary Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. Representations of *shofarot* indicate that they were long, thin horns. The thinner end was often straightened with only the larger end slightly turned upward, suggesting that twisted *shofarot* were not prevalent in medieval Ashkenaz. Furthermore, many of these images of *shofarot* show not only straightened but also variously decorated horns.

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

As the description above demonstrates, the crafting of *shofarot*—as well as drinking-horns, ink-horns, and especially hunting-horns—was a lengthy process in the Middle Ages. Already

by the time our fraud takes place in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, certain advanced technologies had been developed, such as water mills that enabled craftspeople to drill holes or polish faster. Yet, even if the Erfurt workshop used such devices, it still would have required two full-time artisans for at least one or two days in order to complete the work, with one of them in charge of keeping the fire at the proper temperature to straighten the horn. Decorations would take significantly more time to create an exceptional product, thus raising its value and expense. Beyond the lower value of its raw material, the goat's horns had thinner walls than the ram, making it far easier to straighten and drill through, and saving a significant amount of labor time in the process of its production.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Clearly, by the time the *shofar* was finished, the horn had been drastically altered from its raw material form into a ritual object. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the untrained customer would have found it difficult to distinguish between goat and ram *shofar* horns, both visually and by the sound of its blast. Still, the Christian workshop had much time and money to gain by exchanging the ram's horn for goat's horn in its production of the *shofarot* of Ashkenaz, since the hard-to-alter ram's horn could be used for drinking-horns and ink-horns, which did not require straightening or whole-drilling. And so, the fraudulent activity of the Christian workshop of Erfurt described in Yomtov Lipman's letter persisted for decades until the newly trained Jewish *shofar*-maker discovered it.

With this understanding of *shofar* production and how this fraud could have easily persisted for years, we can now return to Yomtov Lipman's letter and its historical as well as political contexts. The fraudulent business activity of the Christian workshop was certainly an issue to resolve, but why did Yomtov Lipman scandalize it so vehemently by warning that "evil will occur" if the adequate *shofarot* were not acquired?

## The Historical and Political Context of Yomtov Lipman's Letter

The historical and political context informing Yomtov Lipman's letter of 1421 began already two years prior. In 1419, the Hussites, a proto-Protestant Christian movement originating in Bohemia and challenging the hegemony of the Catholic Church, had gained many followers. In response, German lords called for a crusade against them and sent an army to combat their forces. The war between the Catholics and the Hussites then broke out and battle raged in Bohemia. All the while, the Jews were preparing for their New Year's holiday celebration on September 21, 1419, when the *shofar* blast was to be ritually heard. It was in this dangerous situation, mere weeks prior to this High Holiday, that the *shofar* fraud was discovered in Erfurt. Notably, times of war and the absence of political stability have always been critical

and dangerous situations for Jews in medieval Germany. Examples of this can be found in the various textual witnesses to the devastating persecutions of Jews during the First Crusade in 1096, which were read and known throughout the Middle Ages. Similar fears were likely at play here in 1419, as Israel Yuval has previously demonstrated. Jews feared that the erupting violence would also turn against them—especially by Catholic mercenaries plundering and ravaging their way through Germany to the Bohemian border. The Jewish tradition ascribes certain protective functions to the *shofar* and its ritual blast. How, then, could the great danger surrounding these Jewish communities at the time be prevented if they did not possess the ideal—or *kosher*—type of *shofarot* to sound, opening up the heavens, and evoking God's mercy as it was granted to Isaac?

Thanks to the Jewish *shofar*-maker Kellin ha-Cohen, who discovered the fraud just in time, the Jewish community of Erfurt was able to acquire the proper ram's *shofar* to blast on the Jewish New Year of 1419. And indeed, in line with the traditional Jewish ascription of the protective powers of the *shofar* blast, the battles in the Bohemian kingdom came to an end only a few weeks later. Following the Jewish New Year's *shofar* blast of September, a peace agreement was signed that November 1419, and the social climate seemed to return to the status quo. In other words, it may have seemed that the protection of the Jews from pogroms in the year 1419 was linked to the sound of the proper *shofar* horns in Erfurt.

The same circumstances can be found two years later in 1421, in the year Yomtov Lipman composed his letter. The political climate in German lands had once again changed: On June 28, 1420, the Austrian Duke Albert V set out on a campaign against the Hussites, but returned on August 10, having lost the battle. Due to his financial losses, the duke held the wealthy among the Viennese Jews hostage and tortured them to reveal where they hid their money. This was followed by the burning of the Jews of Vienna, one of the most prominent Jewish communities at that time, in the so-called *Vienna Gezerah* of May 1421. Also at this time, preparations for the Second Hussite Crusade were in motion among various lords throughout the German lands, and in July, the month in which Yomtov Lipman wrote his letter to the Ashkenazic communities, mercenaries were sent to the Bohemian border, passing by areas neighboring Erfurt.

In light of this renewed dangerous situation in the summer of 1421, the *shofar* and its material, ritual validity became an imperative issue once again. Zalman of St. Goar, a student of the Maharil, traveled to these Jewish communities at the Bohemian border to meet with Yomtov Lipman in Erfurt. This student and chronicler is our primary witness to the events that occurred there and the importance of the *shofar* blast on this Jewish New Year in light of the surrounding danger. In his copy of Yomtov Lipman's letter, Zalman provides an introduction with further information and evidence of the specific impact the latter exerted on the Jewish communities of Ashkenaz. According to Zalman:

Our teacher Rabbi Lipman Mühlhausen [i.e., Yomtov Lipman], peace upon him, sent this epistle throughout the land, to remove the obstacle of the *shofarot* which were not made of a ram's horn. And everyone obeyed. Even Mahari Segal [i.e., the Maharil] ordered the community of Mainz to send someone to Erfurt to purchase a ram's horn *shofar* to be blown on *Rosh ha-Shanah* [i.e., the Jewish New Year]. And the messenger was late to return for *Rosh ha-Shanah*. He brought two short *shofarot* and their pitch was low like a shepherd's horn. And there was not a single member of the community who was able to blow them. Yet, Mahari Segal himself blew them and did not care that their voice was low. Even these very short [*shofarot*] [still] were measured [fit] as *shofarot*. And even though they arrived from outside the *halakhically* [i.e., according

to the Jewish religious law] permissible boundaries [inside of which it was allowed to carry things on a holiday like the Jewish New Year], [they still blew the *shofar*] since the ram's horn was a precious religious commandment.

From Zalman's introduction to Yomtov Lipman's letter, we learn that two *shofarot* were brought to Mainz for the Jewish New Year of 1421, both of which were not easy to blow. No one but the Maharil was able to blow them in this critical situation. It was a privileged task for the *toke'ah* (i.e., the one who blows the *shofar* ritually) to sound the *shofar* in his synagogue before the gathered community. The imperative of hearing the *shofar* on the Jewish New Year was so powerful that the *toke'ah* had to ensure the successful fulfilment of this commandment. Still, it can be challenging to produce the proper sound from a *shofar*, producing some anxieties in completing the ritual. One strategy employed today in overcoming this risk is to bring several *shofarot* as a back-up. We can assume that this was the reason why two *shofarot*, as opposed to a single *shofar*, were brought from Erfurt to Mainz in Zalman's narrative introduction.

Zalman also emphasizes two additional points: First, the importance of the *shofar* as a reminder of the Binding of Isaac and its protective properties (see above); and second, the time of the unnamed messenger's arrival. About this messenger, who is said to have been sent by the Jewish community, Zalman wrote: "He was delayed on the way so that he arrived in Mainz on the first day of *Rosh ha-Shanah* [i.e., the Jewish New Year] at the time of the recitation of the *Yotzer* prayers." According to Zalman, the messenger was delayed on his way from Erfurt to Mainz, a distance of some 200 miles, which would have required at least two days and nights of continuous travel, but rather up to five days.

By the time the messenger arrived, in the midst of the Jewish New Year holiday, the community had gathered in the synagogue and started reciting the *Yotzer*, which is the part of the morning prayers recited just before the Torah reading. After the Torah reading, the *shofar* must be sounded. This report illustrates how serious the situation had become and how vital the correct *shofar* made of ram's horn was for the Jews of Mainz at the time of the approaching crusade against the Hussites. It was crucial enough that Zalman even stressed the delay of the messenger, who ended up arriving after the holiday had already commenced. My assumption is that the messenger was a Christian, and, as several *halakhic* sources show, may explain how the usage of the two *shofarot* was permitted despite his strong delay. Had the messenger been a Jew, the use of the *shofarot* he brought would likely not have been allowed because of the holiday.

Yomtov Lipman wrote his letter to emphatically implore the Jewish communities to acquire the proper *shofarot* made from ram's horn for the Jewish New Year, which fell on August 28, 1421, roughly five weeks after he sent off his letter. He stressed that even now, namely two years after Kellin ha-Cohen had uncovered the *shofar* fraud, there were still Jewish communities that used the wrong *shofarot* made from goat's horns. These communities, possessing the wrong ones, were now implored to acquire *shofarot* of ram's horn, for the sake of protecting their communities from impending harm.

The rabbi also emphasized in his letter that those who manufactured weapons (*balistraot*) would be capable of making *shofarot* as well. This Hebrew term *balistraot*, usually designating cannons, may have a connection to a horn product similar to manufacturing *shofarot*. *Balistraot* seem to mean gunpowder horns, also called gunpowder flasks. The German term for such gunpowder horn-makers as well as weapon-makers in general is

*Büchsenmacher*, and Jews who were called that are recorded more than once in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Germany. Here we see a combination of crafts among blacksmiths, goldsmiths and horn-workers. The 15<sup>th</sup> century was a time when a growing number of inventors and specialists offered their services to local lords and municipalities. Jews, too, belonged to these freelancing specialists who were (as yet) not regulated by guilds. New weapons appeared at this time, and the war against the Hussites was among the first instances when several new fire-weapons had been used, such as handguns, which were filled with gunpowder and which could be carried by soldiers alongside with powder horns.

Fig. 10

This leads us to another layer of interpretation for our source, namely the fantasies nourished by Christians and Jews alike. On the one hand, Jews could interpret *shofarot* as symbolic weapons ‘shooting’ blasts to God to secure His protection against their Christian enemies. On the other hand, Christians incriminated Jews for allegedly supplying their enemies, the Hussites, in Vienna in 1420/21 with special weapons. It seems indeed possible that both Jews and Christians made a connection between *shofarot* and weapons and instruments of war. Such a connection is testified for *shofarot* already in the Bible, when the blowing of the *shofar* signals the beginning of a war.

Indeed, it seems that Christians expressed some interest in the *shofar* as an unusual object that Jews used on occasion. As one of the very few genuine and recognizable Jewish symbols, the *shofar* was also noticed by Christians even in visual sources. An anti-Jewish woodcut image from 1508 shows Jews blowing this ritual object in the synagogue. It was present in the urban space of cities containing Jewish communities in the same way that Jewish singing and prayers were heard outside the synagogue and the Jewish quarters. In 1629, a priest in the city of Kirchhain (Hessen) complained about the Jews going out on their festivals with “such a screaming, singing, and horn blowing” (*ein solch ruffen, singen, hornblasen*) that their Christian neighbors had to leave and sell their houses. Already earlier in 1508, the Jewish convert to Christianity Johannes Pfefferkorn wrote about the *shofar* blowing in his polemics. And even more so, a municipal regulation from Regensburg dating to perhaps 1497 proves that Jews declared the ban (*herem*) among its members by blowing the *shofar* (*pann auf in lessen mit blasueng des hornß*).

Fig. 11

In sum, the historical and political context of 1421 offers one explanation for Yomtov Lipman’s attempt to ban the *shofarot* made of the goat’s horn manufactured in the Christian workshop: The rabbinic authority made it very clear that goat’s horn was improper according to Jewish law. This means that to spare the Jewish communities from possible danger (i.e., pogroms and other persecutions), one could not afford to make mistakes and had to be sure to observe Jewish religious law (*halakhah*) and the local Jewish customs (*minhagim*) meticulously and stringently, as otherwise “evil would occur”. In this instance, and according



to *aggadic* rabbinical sources, using a ram's horn would be considered as *segula*, i.e., a protective value of performing this commandment. Ruling in favor of using a ram's horn rather than a goat's horn was part of Yomtov Lipman's goal to evoke God's mercy for the salvation of the Jewish communities in times of war.

## Rabbi Yomtov Lipman's Motivations

Beyond the protective properties of the ritually correct *shofar* against the dangerous political situation of the Jews during the Hussite wars, I would like to suggest another explanation for Yomtov Lipman's attempt to ban the *shofarot* made of the goat's horn manufactured in the Christian workshop. This is where, once again, money matters. Since, according to Yomtov Lipman's letter, all Jewish communities bought from the same Christian workshop in Erfurt, it seems that a form of market monopoly existed that the rabbi attempted both to dismantle and to replace by creating an artificial demand. He specifies that Jews from all over the "land" (*aretz*, probably referring to the Holy Roman Empire) came to buy from the Christian workshop, thus spreading the *shofarot* of goat's horn all over Ashkenaz—and indeed, our sources do not provide any evidence for *shofar* production elsewhere. It is unclear how the Christian workshop was able to develop this kind of monopoly. Nevertheless, crafting *shofarot* was a laborious task, as discussed above, and it would seem that the Christian workshop combined its traditional horn-working knowledge with that of the nameless Jewish artisan who, at least theoretically, was aware of the correct *shofarot* production process. Therefore, the joint enterprise between Christian and Jewish craftspeople would seem to have been the key factor in the Christian workshop's clientele for *shofarot*; for, a Jewish craftsman would also have been able to foster the trust necessary to encourage other Jews to buy from this workshop.

It is worth noting here that nowhere in Yomtov Lipman's letter did he indicate any discomfort with the notion that Christian artisans crafted *shofarot* for Jews. He knew that Jews had been relying upon this Christian workshop for these ritual objects for forty years (*arba'im shanah*), and indicated no issue with the joint enterprise between the Christian and Jewish artisans in the same workshop. While Christians were frequently organized in guilds by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, scholars have demonstrated how many craftspeople were active as "freelancers" outside these guilds and therefore did not always uphold their guild restrictions, such as the rule to work exclusively with other members of said guild. Therefore, there are various indications of collaboration between Jews and Christians in additional, or "freelancing" crafts, such as the production of parchment and Hebrew books. These nuances of craftspeople's actual everyday situations beyond the guilds and their cooperation and joint enterprises with Jews have gained little attention to date. Thus, Yomtov Lipman's letter from Erfurt is an enlightening indication of such interactions between Jews and Christians in the area of crafts.

While Yomtov Lipman did not indicate an issue with Jews and Christians crafting ritual Jewish objects together, he does strangely indicate the promise to teach (!) everyone interested the art of *shofar*-making in his letter. He adds that he often tried (this *shofar*-making craft) while spending time in the Silesian city of Frankenstein (*ve-harbeh nisiti be-Frankenstein*). Yomtov Lipman does not communicate how or from whom he had learned that craft. We do not know if he learned the art of *shofar*-making from a Jewish craftsman or a Christian—or even taught himself. Frankenstein is geographically situated somewhat

equidistant from Erfurt and Prague, where Yomtov Lipman lived for several years prior to arriving in Erfurt. While it is unclear when exactly he settled in Erfurt, it is important to stress in light of these events that Yomtov Lipman relocated to Erfurt (not before July 17, 1417), two years at most or, more likely, rather a few months before Kellin ha-Cohen uncovered the fraud of the Christian workshop. This raises the question of a possible connection between timing of Yomtov Lipman's move to Erfurt, the training of the Jewish *shofar*-maker Kellin ha-Cohen, the discovery of the fraud in summer 1419, and Yomtov Lipman's attempt to expose the fraud of the Christian workshop and dismantle its monopoly over *shofar*-making throughout all of Ashkenaz. It is particularly suspicious that all these events happened at the same time.

For why would Kellin ha-Cohen—who himself can be traced in some Erfurt municipal sources as well—learn the craft of *shofar*-making in the first place given that the Erfurt workshop had already been delivering *shofarot* to all Ashkenazi communities for decades? The fraud was discovered only after Kellin ha-Cohen had received his training. When he started crafting *shofarot*, he was soon joined by a second Jewish craftsman by the name of Gottlieb Gans, who most likely belonged to Erfurt's leading family of Jewish moneylenders and who learned the craft of *shofar*-making as well. This means that by 1421 Yomtov Lipman already had two Jewish *shofar*-makers in his community that crafted *shofarot* according to his specifications, i.e., from ram's horn and in line with Jewish law.

We have no knowledge of how Kellin ha-Cohen and Gottlieb Gans learned this profession. Apprenticeship is rarely recorded for Jewish craftspeople in the medieval Holy Roman Empire. But since Yomtov Lipman had crafted *shofarot* himself and promised to teach everyone interested the art of crafting *shofarot*, it is possible that he also trained Kellin ha-Cohen. This, again, provokes the question why he would train new *shofar*-makers while a workshop producing *shofarot* was already in existence, and had a monopoly by providing these ritual Jewish objects for all of Ashkenaz. It is possible that he may have tried to dismantle this monopoly even prior to the discovery of the fraud by Kellin ha-Cohen.

However, Zalman's introduction to Yomtov Lipman's letter explained that the *shofarot* were both short and sounded "like a shepherd's horn." This calls for an explanation. Such horns, known as *bukkehornes*, were usually made of goat's horn and were seemingly similar to *shofarot*. Even though they were of smaller size, these two *shofarot* were still fit for use, as Zalman hastens to assure his readers. It was not an easy task for the Jewish community of Mainz to acquire ram's horn that would be big enough to make some splendid *shofarot*. Instead, they had to compromise on whatever was available. That the Jewish community of Mainz was able to obtain only short *shofarot* might also point to the same kind of problems that Yomtov Lipman's new *shofar*-makers faced when starting their business. Did these newly-trained *shofar*-makers receive only an insufficient supply of proper-quality raw materials of ram, or were the *shofarot* they made a product of an even lower quality, thus revealing insufficient training? After all, Kellin ha-Cohen and Gottlieb Gans were new in the *shofar*-crafting business and obviously had gained but little experiences so far. The source also makes clear how *shofarot* are not easy to use—but that Zalman's teacher, the Maharil, was able to blow these two short *shofarot* making him the hero of this story.

Despite these problems, Yomtov Lipman vouched for the excellent quality of the products made by the two Jewish *shofar*-makers, who, I assume were at one time *his* apprentices in the art of *shofar* crafting. He also explained that they would use a sign (of quality) attached to the *shofar* horns to make them recognizable as proper ram's *shofarot*. This is in line with the practices of Christian craftspeople, especially guilds, who frequently used such hallmarks on

their products to attest to their quality and/or origin. In the case of these new Jewish *shofar*-makers in Erfurt, such signs would function as a sort of stamp of religious legal approval on newly-crafted *shofarot*, a sort of *kosher* seal.

It would seem that Yomtov Lipman was trying to dismantle a monopoly by creating an artificial demand for new *shofarot* and ensure Jewish salvation. In 1421, two years since the *shofar* fraud was discovered in Erfurt and with many communities still using *shofarot* made of goat's horn, Yomtov Lipmann found it necessary to write his letter. It seems the Jewish communities did not give much thought to this earlier, and Yomtov Lipman needed to employ a dramatic tone in trying to convince them to purchase *shofarot* from his two craftsmen. He concluded his letter by emphasizing the importance of *shofarot* made of ram's horn once again and even fiercely criticized those continuing to use goat's horn. Quoting the Babylonian Talmud *Rosh ha-Shanah* tractate—as aforementioned at the outset of this paper—he said that: “Every year that the *shofar* is not blown in its beginning [i.e., the Jewish New Year], evil occurs in its end.”

In 1421 peril had indeed befallen the vital Jewish community of Vienna, and mercenaries were now marching through the destabilized German Empire. Jews were in great fear of pogroms, and it appears that Rabbi Yomtov Lipman used this very anxiety to convince the Jewish communities to buy *shofar* horns from his Jewish *shofar*-makers in Erfurt. By acquiring *shofarot* from ram's horn, one was able to evoke God's mercy, who, in turn, would spare the Jews.

Unfortunately, we do not know if Yomtov Lipman's outcry was successful. He died only weeks after writing his letter. The Maharil, in turn, started emphasizing the importance of fasting and special prayers due to the danger of war as well, and he sent out letters to the Jewish communities as testified in *Sefer Minhagei Maharil*. The same book also emphasizes the importance of *shofarot* made of ram's horn in the teachings of the Maharil. In the long run, *shofarot* were no longer made of goat's horn and ram's horn became standard—and such is the case until today. This suggests that the intervention of Rabbi Yomtov Lipman was possibly quite successful.

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The letter of Rabbi Yomtov Lipman presented above offers details of Jewish professional occupation not usually found in municipal records. It also illuminates aspects of Christian-Jewish cooperation which are testified to in Hebrew, Latin, and vernacular sources regularly, but without going into much detail. Such cooperation can be found in the fields of, for example, wine production, *kosher* slaughtering, or the baking of bread.

Still, Erfurt's municipal records reveal almost nothing about Jewish craftspeople. In the records of its medieval Jewish community, one finds no more than a few names of butchers, bookbinders, and scribes in a period of approximately two and a half centuries. Only rarely do we gain more detailed information from the documents, despite the cultural and economic heyday of Erfurt in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nonetheless, the single Hebrew source highlighted here provides a lively depiction of Christians who crafted ritual Jewish objects for all of Germany, and in collaboration with a nameless Jewish craftsman.

The letter by Yomtov Lipman is therefore a valuable source that sheds light on various aspects of craftsmanship. From it we learn that Jews and Christians worked together in workshops at times, crafting, for example, *shofarot* for Jewish ritual use. We also learn that Yomtov Lipman

himself knew the art of *shofar*-making, considering that he promised to teach it to all those interested. But there was a problem: While the *shofarot* from the Christian workshop looked as if they were made of ram's horn, they were made solely of softer goat's horn. At the same time, it appears that the proper *shofarot* made of stronger ram's horn by Yomtov Lipman's newly-trained Jewish *shofar*-makers neither looked nor sounded as good as the Jews had hoped they would. It seems that these *shofarot* did not make a satisfying impression. Not only were they small and low in pitch instead of big, high or loud, but they were also not easy to sound. No wonder that Zalman felt he had to emphasize that the tiny *shofarot* the Jewish community of Mainz received were also proper *shofarot*.

The whole case is, thus, embedded in a mixture of economic and *halakhic* conundrums, all of which the Erfurt rabbi described in his letter. Yomtov Lipman tried to scandalize the Christian workshop's economic fraud. I have argued that by doing so, he also tried to dismantle the workshop's monopoly. He used his rabbinic authority to promote the *shofarot* made by *his* own Jewish craftsmen, and seemingly succeeded in creating substantial competition for the Christian workshop. Can this medieval case, therefore, be likened to modern cases to push forward economic models by utilizing religious authority as was recently studied in the case of "Halalization"? The presented letter by Yomtov Lipman, who after all was also author of the polemic *Sefer Nizzahon*, hints to similar motivations, but the source does not allow a clear decision. We even must ask how much we can trust the content of his letter. While analyzing this source, I attempted to identify two possible circumstances embedded in the letter's *halakhic*, historical-political, and more latent economic argumentations.

In the end, our source is but one example of many concerning Jewish craftspeople in medieval Central Europe, and it proves how complex and manifold the topic of Jewish craftspeople can be. Through an extensive study of Jewish craftspeople, there is no doubt that much more is to be found and learned about Jewish daily life, as well as medieval Jewish-Christian economic relations at large.