

Part I

Antisemitism in Germany

Chapter 10

Antisemitism in the Middle Ages

In view of the fact that millions of Jews were systematically tortured to death at the hands of Germans it is plausible to assume that most Germans violently antisemitic. Yet the historians disagree in their assessment of antisemitism in Germany. Some believe that Hitler was responsible for the destruction of the Jewish people in the Holocaust and that it could have happened without his intervention. Other historians maintain that the antisemitism of the Germans helped Hitler to expedite his annihilations. Still others like Goetz and others maintain that Hitler could have never carried out his massive extermination plans without the antisemitism which was deeply ingrained in the average German.

In the following will be shown that antisemitism in the Middle Ages was more pronounced in the German lands than in other European countries. It will also be discussed that for three generations before Hitler came to power the Gentiles in Germany had lived peacefully and that their contributions contributed much to the development of the oppressed Jews to the dawn of enlightenment in politics and the economy.

The Crusades in Germany trade-craftsmen the wake of the Roman Empire. Their first tragic phase began in 1096 when they were massacred by the crusaders. The crusades began the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to destroy the Moslems in the Holy Land. As they gained momentum moving through the Rhine region and along the Danube they burned Jewish settlements and tortured and killed those who would not become Christians. In the following centuries the Jews

had a turbulent existence throughout Europe. At certain times and localities they were free to travel, were granted protection, and given certain privileges and concessions. At other times they were restricted in their movements, put into ghettos, heavily taxed, forbidden to marry, plundered, tortured, and killed.

Though Goldhagen presents the "Jewish Problem" as an indigenous German one, the facts show it started in Rome and was present in all European countries. Several popes had ruled that the Jews must serve Christians for not having accepted Christ, as formalized by the Decretal of Innocent III in his "perpetua servitus" in 1205. In France and in Germany various ecclesiastical and secular rulers often disagreed about the meaning of "eternal service"—whom and how the Jews should serve. In England, where the authority was more centralized, Edward the Confessor had ruled in 1135 that the Jews were to serve the King only (*servi camere regis*). He decreed that they were free to travel, pay taxes only to him, and that harming a Jew would be like harming the King's property. Though the Jews could not be harmed by others they could be killed or banned from England only by the King's command as it finally happened in 1290.

Goldhagen points to the many ritual murder accusations and the subsequent pogroms which occurred in Germany, referring to the German people, he states: "the will to kill was embedded deep in their belief about the Jews." However, as documented by Langmuir (1990) the first recorded accusation of ritual murder occurred in Norwich, England around 1150. Thomas of Manmoth generated the account of the "Boy William" to show that the Jews still crucify Christians in order to insult Christ and to acquire blood for their own rituals. Later, around 1200, the Abbot of Saint-Mont-Michel recorded that the Jews had crucified "Young Richard" at Pontoise. England acquired her most famous mythical victim in 1155 with the death of "Hugh of Lincoln." Henry III, King of England, investigated this alledged crucifixion

fantasy that the Jews kill Christians for ritual cannibalism, and had Jews executed. This first trial of Jews was ordered by major authority Hugh the Great, who had the Jews enshrined as saints in the Lincoln Cathedral. By the middle of the 12th century England had four such shrines established for the alleged victims of ritual murders.

Concerning the ritual trial in modern Germany Gotha (p. 64 cites Pulzer 1964) (Berlin 1967) who reported that ritual trials took place in Germany and Austria in 1170 and that the liberal newspaper treated the ritual murder charges as pure facts. This, however, did not account for the fact that in the newspaper and court records that Jews did prevail in the trial at Xanten in 1192 when the public prosecutor pleaded for acquittal and the accused Jews were exonerated. There was also the trial at Metz in 1200 when the Jews were convicted of perjury where the editor of an antisemitic newspaper was jailed for slander against the tribunal proceedings. (Adl 1967)

In England and Germany the treatment of the Jews in the 11th and 12th century was as unified as in England, where mistreated Jews persecuted in one principality would often flee to neighboring one. The number of synods convened attempts to regulate the status of the Jews, the so-called nonretention agreements. In 1183 Pope Gregory VIII was able to secure an agreement from the kings that Jews who fled to the papal territory should be seized and returned to their previous domicile.

In spite of these attempts to regulate the lives of the Jews and spite of the Papal bulls (Gregory the Great, Gregory the IX, Innocent IV) which decreed repeatedly that Jews should not be harmed, did occur in France. The Count of Blois, for example, had Jews killed in 1171 to avenge the alleged death of his child, where the corpus delicti could never be found. Another major massacre occurred in

Valreas in 1147. The chimeral fantasies that Jews drink Christian blood for medicinal purposes and that they kill Christian children to show their contempt for Christianity had apparently spread to France. Though Frederick the II and several popes had forbidden the propagation of the "Blood Libel" accusations, the sporadic killings of Jews continued until the Jews were expelled from all of France in 1194.

The Jews were never totally expelled from Germany though at different times they were banished from certain lands and from city states. The first major pogrom occurred in the city of Fulda in 1235 where the Jews were accused of having caused the death of three children who burned in fire one day morning while their parents hid in the hall. The most serious and widespread persecutions in Germany occurred about hundred years later in which hundreds of Jews were killed in Frankfurt, Nurnberg, Mainz and there. This series of killings followed the declaration of Charles IV who authorized the emperor to kill the Jews as long as they impens their Kin for it.

The motives for killing the Jews in Germany financial greed and religious intolerance—were the same ones for which the Jews had been killed in England and France. Yet the Jews in Germany suffered throughout the entire Middle Ages because they were never fully banned from the German lands as they were from England in 1290 and from France in 1306. Moreover, there was more opportunity in Germany to persecute the Jews because when they drove from one place they were often accepted, if not invited, in neighboring states.

After generations or two they would often be persecuted in this new state and at times they were even readmitted to their original locality. Vincent Fettmilch and his followers, for example, plundered the Frankfurt Jews and drove them out of the city though in 1664, but the ruler of the neighboring city of Mainz sent boats to

them. He also sent soldiers to have Fettmilch and his ringleaders hung and ordered the magistrate of the city of Frankfurt to pay restitution. (Kracauer, 1925).

In the theological sphere the Jews, likewise, received much differential treatment. Luther, for example, claimed in 1523 that the Jews had every right to reject the Papist Christianity and maintained that he would have done likewise had he been a Jew. But twenty years later, in 1543, when he found out that the Jews did not convert to Lutheranism as he had hoped for, he published his book, The Jews and Their Lies, in which he called the Jews "disgusting vermins whose synagogues are devils nests of insolence and lies . . . , thirsty bloodhounds and murderous of all Christendom . . . together with the lowliest serfs the Jews should be locked up in barns and burned." (Luther, 1523, 1543). (At the Nurnberg Trials, Julius Streicher tried to defend himself claiming that the murder of the Jews was not his own but Luther's command.)

Luther's teaching caused the expulsion of Jews from various German cities, but they were again readmitted and given special privileges during the Counter-reformation period when the bishops regained some of their power. Ironically, the Jews received their greatest help from the staunch Lutheran King, Gustavos Adolphus. Though he did not allow Jews to settle in his own Baltic kingdom, he granted them certain privileges in his conquered territories. While his soldiers committed horrible atrocities against the German Catholics, they had orders not to pillage or disrupt the Jewish population. The Swedish Army commanders found the Jews to be efficient suppliers for their quartermasters paying them for their services in favors, concessions, and protection. Some of these favored Jews, the 'Court Jews,' became influential in the governments of various principalities in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Goldhagen traces the roots of the Holocaust back to the persecutions and the killings the Jews suffered in the German lands during the Middle Ages. He sees in these persecutions a rather harsh and brutal 'Germanic' type of antisemitism and he believes that it became embedded into the German culture, implying the Jungian concept of the 'collective-folk-conscious.' Yet, even a cursory look at the antisemitism during the Middle Ages shows that the motives for banning or killing the Jews—religious fanaticism, mythical fears, and economic greed—were the same in all countries.