

My Trip To Germany, After Many Doubts

Many times my friends invited me to visit them at their home in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and my relatives called me to come to Dusseldorf. But because I was firm in my rejection of anything German, based on studies of the Holocaust in Chislavichi and Monastyrshchina where my father and mother ZAL had been born and many family members slaughtered, I could not allow to myself to accept their invitations. But time passes, wounds are healed and pain subsides. And two important events which happened recently made me change my mind. The first event was Simon Wiesenthal's announcement that he ended his uncompromising hunt after Nazi criminals because there was all but none of them left. The second one was the book by Y. Tsinman "Babyi Yary Smolenshchiny" and my phone talks with its author from which I understood better who were the true butchers in that region. So, I made a very good and interesting trip. The scenery of Bavarian Alps was simply breathtaking. But I'll limit myself with telling only about the places interesting from the point of view of our history, Jewish in general and Horowitz in particular. The first of them was the city of Frankfurt, the second one –Cologne.

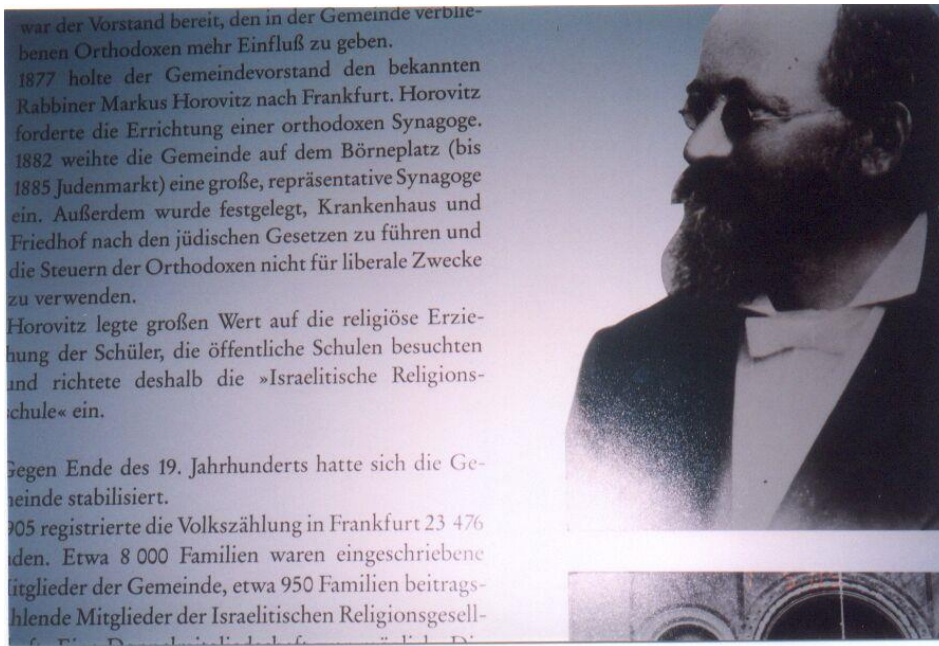
Frankfurt-Am-Main

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I came to the embankment after I visited the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt, which exposition uncovers the history of the city's Jewish community, from the Middle Ages till the Holocaust. In this history our great family was honorably represented by rabbis Pinchas Horowitz and his son Zvi Hirsh, and also by rabbi, writer and scholar Dr. Marcus Horowitz.



Rabbi Dr. Marcus Horowitz

After a short break on the bench in the shade of tall trees, I directed my steps to the Judengasse Museum, which was situated not far from the river. In this museum the history of Frankfurt Jewish community is represented in its visual incarnation: a visitor walks between the walls of the basements of the houses of the Jewish Ghetto which was long ago erased from the earth. An old mikveh survived – it seemed that if filled with water, it would be ready for use.

Evidence of a Jewish community in Frankfurt dates back to the 12th century. At that time, a small group of Jewish merchants from Worms settled in the town, and quickly flourished and grew wealthy. Jews had been in Frankfurt prior to this period as well, but never as official residents – Frankfurt had long been a market town, and Jews visited to trade there as early as the tenth century. The prosperity of the Frankfurt Jews, however, was short lived. The year 1241 marked the first of what would be many massacres and expulsions of the small community. In this first attack, which was sparked by the refusal of a Jew to convert to Christianity, more than three-quarters of the city's 200 residents were killed. The remainder quickly fled the city, but returned by about 1270, when Emperor Frederick II, upset at the loss in tax-revenue from the wealthy Jewish community, ordered strict penalties against anyone who attacked Jews. The community once again grew rapidly, and although forced to pay crippling taxes, was protected against any physical persecution.

The outbreak of the Black Plague in 1349, however, changed the Jews' protected status. Jews were killed and expelled throughout Germany and Europe, and Frankfurt was no exception. The community was completely massacred, and many Jews chose to burn down their own houses while still inside rather than face death from the angry mob.

Because of their important economic role, Jews were invited back into Frankfurt once again in 1360. Their lives in the city however, were regulated more strictly than ever, culminating in the forcible relocation of all the Jews of Frankfurt to a ghetto (*Juddengasse*) in 1462. Originally containing just 110 inhabitants, the community developed quickly, and consisted of 3,000 by 1610. Because the area of the ghetto was never expanded, Jews subdivided their houses and built extra stories to accommodate the exponential growth. The community soon became a center of Ashkenazi Jewry – the yeshivas in the city attracted students from all over Europe, and the community grew very wealthy. In 1616, another pogrom came through the community. Indeed, affluence was a necessity, for the only way the Jewish community continued to exist in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries was by paying enormous tributes in exchange for protection.

In 1624, the two centuries of peace came to a crashing halt as the ghetto was raided and plundered by a mob of artisans and petty merchants, led by Vincent Fettmilch. The group was unhappy with the prominent position of the Jews, and many also owed money to the Jewish moneylenders. Unlike the previous expulsions, however, this one ended happily for the Jewish residents of Frankfurt. The emperor outlawed the rioters, put their leaders to death, and ceremoniously returned the Jew to the ghetto on the twentieth day of the month of Adar, which has been celebrated in Frankfurt ever since as "Purim Winz" ("the Purim of Vincent").

In 1711, the ghetto burned to the ground after an accidental fire spread out of control, but the homes and businesses were quickly rebuilt, and the Jews returned to their isolation. The traditional unity of the Jewish population, however, soon began to decline, as controversy over the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe. The rich families that had long controlled the community saw their influence begin to decline; these families, identifiable by the crests hanging outside their homes, lost their influence to the *maskilim*, who advocated secular education and emancipation. The only exception was the Red Shield, or Rothschild family, which maintained its importance, and became even more prominent in later years.

When, in 1806, Frankfurt was incorporated into Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine, the Jews' lot improved, at least in the eyes of the advocates of emancipation. The spread of the ideals of the French Revolution led to the abolition of the ghetto in 1811. Despite setbacks in 1819 due to the "Hep Hep riots," Jews received rights equal to those of non-Jews in 1824. Frankfurt had by now become a center of the Reform movement, the ascendance of which led to a widening rift between the Orthodox and Reform communities. The latter was led during much of the nineteenth century by philosopher Abraham Geiger; the former, which accounted for only ten percent of Frankfurt's Jewish population in 1842, was revived by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who founded the Orthodox "*Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*" ("Israelite Church Society") in 1851. The community continued to grow and become wealthy; members of the Rothschild family in particular became known for their philanthropy. Several orthodox yeshivas were established, as was a Reform Institute for Jewish Studies, which featured lectures by the scholar Martin Buber.

By the 1900s, Jews in Frankfurt were extremely prosperous and influential. They became active both in business and politics. Many of the Jews fought for Germany in World War I.

Frankfurt and the Holocaust

In 1933, a boycott was targeted at the Jews, and in the subsequent years, more and more restrictions were placed on the Jewish community. On November 10, 1938, the biggest Orthodox and Reform synagogues were burned to the ground. Many Jews emigrated from Frankfurt, and most of those who did not were sent to the Lodz ghetto, and eventually to the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. In 1933, 30,000 Jews lived in Frankfurt; in 1945, only 602 remained.

After the war, a new community was established, consisting of Holocaust survivors and displaced persons. In 1989, immigrants from the recently disbanded Soviet Union increased the size of the community to about 7,000. Today, most of the Jews live in the West End, and are self-employed, particularly as shop-keepers and real-estate brokers. Anti-Semitism is negligible; instead, assimilation is the community's dominant social problem. All the city's synagogues, only one of which dates to before 1938, are Orthodox.

There are few remnants of Frankfurt's Jewish community left today. The ghetto has been gone for more than a century, but the spot on which it stood is still accessible. Not far from the Zeil – the pedestrian mall running through the city's center – on Bornestrasse, is the stretch of land on which the Frankfurt Jews lived for more than 400 years. The Bornestrasse synagogue and the Rothschild home were both destroyed, but plaques mark the spots where they stood.

The Westend synagogue, on Freiherr-vom-Stein-Strasse, is the only Jewish building in the city with a history. The large grey building was built early in the 1900s, and was the only synagogue to survive *Kristallnacht*. The main sanctuary features vaulting stone arches, a massive cupola and blue-and-white Star-of-David stained-glass windows. Though a Liberal synagogue before the World War II, it -like all Frankfurt synagogues today has separate sections for men and women. Near the synagogue is Frankfurt's Jewish community center, opened in 1986, a huge building adorned with large iron menorahs and stone tablets. The building features concerts, lectures, a youth center and the offices of the community administration and Rabbinate.

The Jewish museum on Untermainkai is located in a house that once belonged to the Rothschild family, and features high-tech resources as well as priceless artifacts, including Moritz Oppenheimer's famous portrait of Mendelsohn and Lessing. But the most famous part of the museum is the scale-model of the Frankfurt *Juddengasse*, reconstructed using the blueprints made in 1711 after it was destroyed by fire. The intricate model includes 194 buildings. Abutting the MUSEUM JUDENGASSE AM BÖRNEPLATZ is Frankfurt's OLDEST JEWISH CEMETERY, most of whose tombstones were vandalized during World War II. A painstaking restoration project seeks to register and match the broken stones. The cemetery is surrounded by a high stone wall into which some 11,000 plaques have been inserted...each details the name, birth-date and place of death of the 11,000 Frankfurt Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and creates a starkly moving testament to the destroyed community. To the rear of the cemetery a checkered arrangement of trees is the MEMORIAL TO THE BÖRNEPLATZ SYNAGOGUE, destroyed on *Kristallnacht*.

Just opposite the Römer, Frankfurt's 15th-century city hall, is a HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL, adjacent to the Paulskirche church where, in 1848, the Frankfurt National Assembly made an abortive attempt to unify Germany and to guarantee human rights and emancipation. (The cited historical information was found at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>).

Very close to the museum is the Old Jewish cemetery, the most of its tombstones were destroyed by the Nazis in their crazy war against the Jews, live and dead. The fragments of the tombstones are laid in small piles and one big pile, the evidences of the 20th century barbarity. The big part of the survived tombstones are situated along the cemetery's wall or in the group at its far part, opposite from the gate. A small number of tombstones are organized into a special group – these are the matzevot of prominent residents of Frankfurt. Matzeva of R., the author of "Pnei Yehoshua" is there as well as he tombstones of the Rotschild Family members. Here are also the tombstones of R. Pinchas and his son R. Zvi Hirsh, for them I actually came to Frankfurt.



The Old Jewish Cemetery in Frankfurt

Slowly I was coming to the dear graves. There were many candles, notes, just like at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The inscriptions on the tombstones were partly faded, but nevertheless I managed to read the words of sorrow and gratitude of the Jews whom they taught and led.

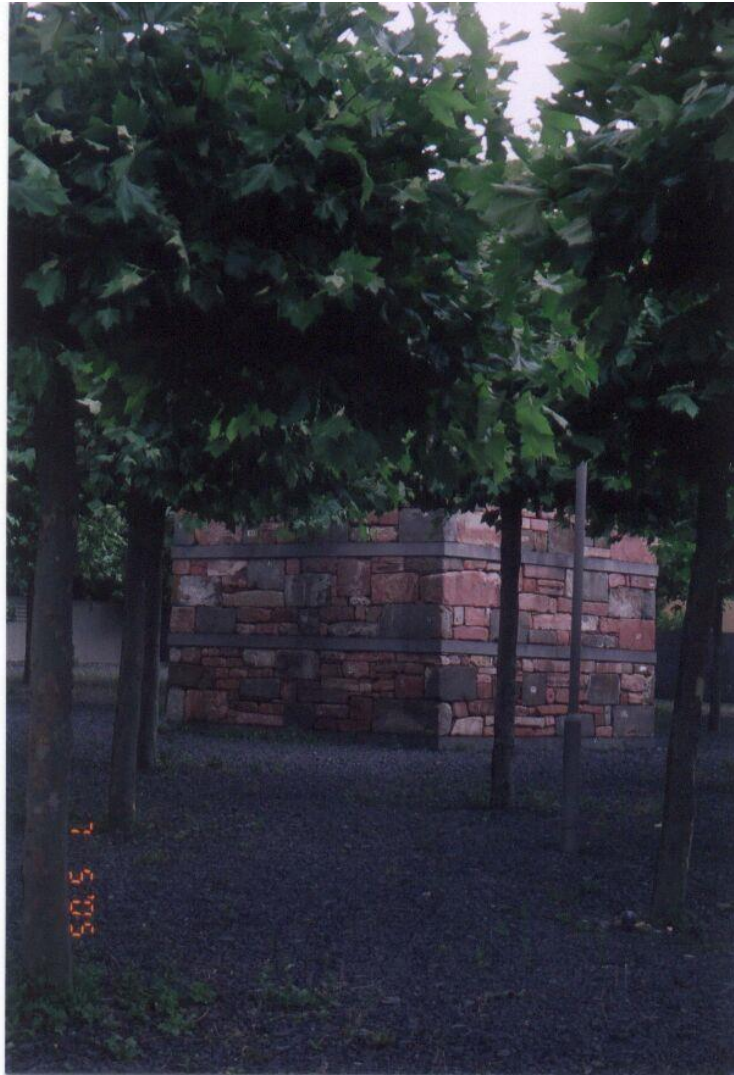


Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz



Rabbi Zvi Hirssh Horowitz

The hands of my watch were unmercifully moving ahead, the museum's closing hour was getting nearer and nearer. Trembling, I locked the heavy iron gate and gave the last glance to the Cube, tolling between young maple trees, assembled with the fragments of the ruined synagogue, and turned to the train station.



Frankfurt: in the memory of Judengasse

Cologne

The Mikveh site in Cologne is frequented by numerous groups of tourists from all over the world: Germans, Americans, omnipresent Japans, etc. Sticking to the transparent roof, they peep intently at the stairway of the medieval mikva descending deep into the dark. According to the historians, it was constructed as early as in 12th century.

COLOGNE first became home to Jews who arrived with the Romans, perhaps as early as 70. Colonia Jews are mentioned in two edicts by Byzantine Emperor Constantine in the years 321 and 331. By the 11th century, there was a Jewish substantial community. Cologne has had many illustrious Jewish citizens, including composer Jacques Offenbach and Zionist philosopher Moses Hess. In 1904, after the death of Theodor Herzl, the headquarters of the World Zionist Organization was moved from Vienna to Cologne when the Cologne Zionist leader, David Wolffsohn, succeeded to its presidency. The Cologne-based Solomon Oppenheim Bank is one of the few major businesses in Germany again under its pre-war Jewish ownership. The medieval Jewish quarter that existed until Jews were expelled from Cologne in 1424 was situated in front of the RATHAUS, the Gothic city hall. The lane that runs in front of the building is the JUDENGASSE. Near the small space next to the RATHAUS

(near today's flagpoles) stood the medieval main synagogue, women's synagogue, hospital ,bakery and community center. All that remains of medieval Cologne Jewry is the MIKVEH, reached by descending fifty feet down a Romanesque stairwell of hewn sandstone. The pool is fed by the Rhine and dates from 1170; it was sealed after the 15th-century expulsion and rediscovered only during rebuilding after the allies' World War II bombing . Renovated and reopened in 1979, it is topped by a glass pyramid, Cologne's modern opera house stands on the site of the 19th-century GLOCKENGASSE SYNAGOGUE destroyed on Kristallnacht. The plaza that fronts the opera house has been named OFFENBACHPLATZ, for the composer Jacques Offenbach, son of a Cologne cantor. The center of contemporary Cologne Jewry --the community now numbers about 5,000 --is the GREAT ROONSTRASSE SYNAGOGUE, the only Cologne synagogue to survive the Nazis

Getting the key from the Old Town hall upon depositing of my passport, me and my cousin Arkady descended the stairs. The walls covered with mold were good evidences of the centuries that passed. The *mikveh* was filled with water, it seemed to be ready for ritual immersion. The once built here synagogue was ruined, the Jewish Quarter, Judengasse does not exist, but the *mikveh*, this material evidence of our residence in this part of Diaspora is still alive and attracts everybody's attention!



Cologne: the Old Mikveh

An intercity express was rushing at 250 km/h to Munich, the last point of my trip. The car I was sitting in was full of Turks, Asians, Arabs. It was new Germany, multinational and open. "But will it be so in the long run", I was asking myself, "or it will be only a short period of tolerance which in a period of economical or political strife will be wiped with a wave of hatred and xenophobia, as it just happened there many times in the Past?"

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