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RESEARCH NOTE

Toleration and Persecution

The Jewish Community of Medieval Regensburg

by Donald L. Keay
Professor of History



Stone Bridge of Regensburg *Circa 1300*

It is often assumed that European Jews of the Middle Ages were a small minority constantly harassed and persecuted by a bigoted Christian population determined to annihilate them. Had such a situation existed, the Christians surely would have succeeded. A truer picture, however, is one of long periods of peace and prosperity as Jews lived side by side with their Christian neighbors, both benefitting from social and economic relations.

It is true that Jews suffered from various restrictions and restraints. They could not hold land under feudal tenure since mutual obligations and responsibilities were based on sacred Christian vows and ceremonies. But they could and did own property within the medieval cities both on an individual and collective basis. Their urban communities became centers for the production of trade goods by skilled artisans and craftsmen and at the same time provided links in the great trading routes which extended into the heart of Varangian Russia, the marts of the Eastern Mediterranean world, and the bazaars of Bagdad. The Jews provided the means by which luxury goods were transported from the East to fulfill the needs and desires of European nobility and the upper echelons of the Christian hierarchy. They also served as bankers to kings, popes, dukes, and bishops, providing them with the necessary funds to wage wars or carry on extensive building programs.

Although anti-Semitic attitudes often appear in works of theologians and scholars, widespread antagonism and prejudice were not whipped up among the masses until the calling of the First Crusade in 1095 and the accompanying religious frenzy which spread throughout Western Europe. The result of this outbreak of fanaticism was wide-scale murder and destruction inflicted upon Jewish communities, particularly in France and Germany.

From that time on sporadic outbursts against the Jews took place, sometimes related to religious bigotry, but increasingly fired by economic issues. Christian merchants and bankers began to take over international markets and the Jews were gradually reduced to pawn broking, a business which led to resentment and hatred, especially among the lower classes who believed the Jews were taking advantage of their financial plight by exacting exorbitant rates of interest. Since the economic issues alone were not sufficient justification for the destruction of Jewish communities, other charges were often raised, as Jews were accused of various types of despicable and anti-Christian activities such as stealing and desecrating the sacred host, poisoning water supplies, and engaging in human sacrifice through the ritualistic slaughter of Christian children.

Yet even during the most violent of the anti-Semitic attacks there were clerics, nobles, and burghers who attempted to protect Jews from violence and destruction. Their motivations varied from economic self-interest to Christian charity and human decency. In this respect a study of the Jewish community of Regensburg, Germany, is quite revealing. For two and a half centuries the leading citizens and politicians persisted in their conviction that it was the duty of government to protect all of its people, including Jews, from physical persecution and financial oppression. Although not always successful in carrying out its policy, the city government at least mitigated the impact of violence, whether the threats came from the Dukes of Bavaria, roving gangs of religious fanatics, or the irate burghers themselves. The Jews as a group also benefitted from imperial and royal charters and from the generally benign and tolerant attitudes of the bishops of Regensburg.

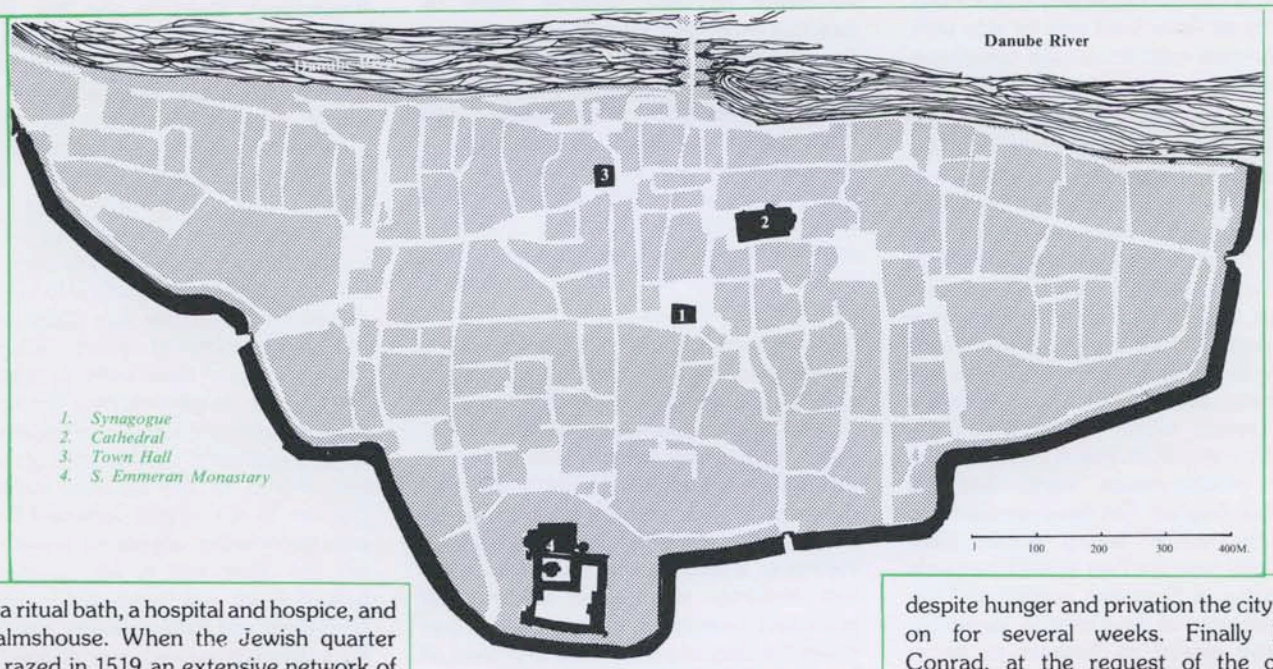
The results was that for the most part the Jews of Regensburg lived securely and prosperously until the second half of the fourteenth century brought a serious decline in trade and industry. The Jews then became convenient scapegoats for the financial difficulties plaguing the city. In 1519 after a long period of oppression and violence, they were expelled from the city; their homes and property were destroyed, and their wealth was confiscated.

The story of the Jews of medieval Regensburg starts in the late eleventh century. In 1096 the first blow was struck when the religious hatred against the Moslem Turks was diverted to the Jewish Infidel, who lived within the Christian community itself. Under the leadership of Counts Emicho and Emmerich, religious fanatics went from city to city where, reinforced by local mobs, they killed and looted the Jews whose only hope of escape was to receive baptism. In Worms almost the entire community was slaughtered, as the Jews preferred death rather than renunciation of their faith. In Mainz the bishop tried to protect the Jews by giving them sanctuary in his palace, but eventually he surrendered to the demands of the mobs and shared in the plunder. Archbishop Herman III of Cologne dispersed the Jews into neighboring villages to protect them, but the effort was in vain as they were hunted down and massacred by Emicho's Crusaders and local peasants. Emicho and his cutthroats arrived near Regensburg in early June where, supported by clerics and townspeople, they rounded up the entire Jewish population, herded them into the Danube, and performed a mass baptism with a wave of the hand. At the same time a mob inside the city looted and ravaged the synagogue.

When King Henry IV learned of the atrocities, he was outraged and promptly ordered that all forced baptisms be considered null and void and gave special permission for the Jews in Regensburg to rebuild their synagogue. Thus the traditional way of life was restored, but the events of 1096 boded ill for the future. The persecutions had deepened the sense of isolation and widened the cultural chasm between Christians and Jews. The minds of

the common people were so poisoned that they believed the killing of the Infidel was pleasing to God. This belief was kept alive generation after generation by clergymen who, because of their sincere but narrow-minded religious zeal, often stirred up riots by city mobs.

Despite the official policy of protection by emperors and the city government, steps were taken during the twelfth century to protect the Jews of Regensburg from violent attacks. The *Judenstadt*, or Jewish quarter, was enclosed by fortified walls and towers with gates which were closed every evening and reopened each morning by a city official. Within the walls were private homes, shops and the various facilities needed to maintain the traditional way of life. The synagogue was the center of the public and private life, serving as a house of worship and prayer, a school, and a meeting place to hold elections, conduct judicial proceedings, and resolve matters of communal concern. The community also had a ritual bath, a hospital and hospice, and an almshouse. When the Jewish quarter was razed in 1519 an extensive network of sub-cellars and underground passages was discovered. Built as places of refuge in an emergency, they were seized upon by Christians as evidence of those secret criminal activities of which the Jews had often been accused.



REGENSBURG
Ca. 1300

Social relationships between Christians and Jews were undermined by the directives issued by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Jews were required to wear identifying symbols (i.e., the yellow badge). Their social intercourse with Christians was restricted, and they were required to remain within their homes hidden from sight during sacred days in the Christian calendar, especially Holy Week.

Although rigorously enforced in some parts of Europe, the edicts were virtually ignored in Regensburg despite strong efforts to bring compliance. In 1267 a papal legate, Cardinal Guido, presided over a synod of prelates in Vienna at which edicts were issued to all clerics to gain obedience to canonical decrees. In Regensburg a fiery, popular preacher named Berthold promoted the cause as he thundered from the pulpit denouncing sinners, heretics, and especially the Infidel, stirring up hostile feelings among the thousands who heard his eloquent sermons. In 1281 Emperor Rudolph while in the city issued directives to Jews within the diocese, ordering them to obey the bishop in regard to canonical restrictions on their behavior and activities. Despite papal agents, church synods, imperial edicts, and the voice of Berthold, friendly relations between Christians and Jews continued in Regensburg as the two communities lived and worked together. The local government refused to enforce the directives or to punish violations.

In 1293, however, a conflict broke out between the Jewish community and the city government over the issue of municipal taxation. The council levied new assessments to defray the costs of strengthening walls and fortifications. Both clerics and Jews protested, insisting the defenses were secure enough and the real purpose was to make payment of city taxes obligatory for those who had traditionally been exempt. The prelates won their case by appealing to higher authority within the church, but the Jews had no such recourse. Rabbi Hayyim protested that charters and customary practices made such collections illegal, but principle had to be surrendered to expedience since it was obvious that attempts to insist on rights would bring open resentment and retaliation from the townspeople. It was deemed more practical to pay what was considered an unjustified and illegal tax out of fear rather than face potential consequences.

Even though the new tax assessment was seen as another attack on the Jewish community, the city government of Regensburg was prepared to take strong measures to protect the Jews from exploitation by outside authorities. In 1297 Emperor Adolph authorized Duke Otto of Bavaria to collect a sum of 200 *Pfund* from the Jewish community. When ducal agents arrived to collect the funds, the council refused to grant permission and rioting mobs forced the agents to leave. Otto placed a siege around Regensburg, but despite hunger and privation the city fought on for several weeks. Finally Bishop Conrad, at the request of the council, served as mediator and a compromise was reached. The Jews were required to pay the assessment but were relieved of the regular annual imperial tax for the ensuing three years. The defense rendered the Jews in this instance was not entirely altruistic, since many wealthy burghers were convinced that a successful attack against the rights of one group of citizens could undermine the rights of all: extortion of money from the Jews could easily be extended to Christians as well.

On three important occasions within the span of the next fifty years the very existence of the Jewish community was severely threatened. In 1298 a widespread persecution began in Roettingen where accusations of desecration of the

consecrated host were made. A Christian fanatic known as Rindfleisch gathered a mob of cutthroats, burned the Jews of the town, and, claiming to have a divine mission to root out the "accursed race," journeyed from city to city murdering and pillaging the Jews. In 1336 a similar movement was instigated by an innkeeper named Johann Zimerli. The leaders called themselves the *Armleder* because of the leather bands worn on their arms, and the followers were known as the *Judenschlaeger*.

The most serious crisis came during the period when the Great Plague ravaged Europe (1348-50). Believing that the pestilence was a judgement from God on a sinful world, fanatics saw in the Jews a convenient scapegoat and accused them of heinous crimes, particularly the poisoning of wells and other water supplies. But on each occasion when danger threatened the Jews of Regensburg, the city council stood firm and issued decrees declaring its intention of protecting its citizens from harm as a matter of honor. The prompt action was effective each time, even though segments of the local population were in sympathy with the anti-Semitic movements and neighboring communities did suffer violence and persecution.

During the second half of the fourteenth century, the status of the Jews deteriorated as the economy of the city went into serious decline. Emperor Charles IV had deliberately diverted the international trade routes to his city of Prague and the loss of commercial activity caused the migration of merchants and artisans to more prosperous cities and towns. Although the Jews were not to blame for the declining trade and industrial production, they were accused of profiteering from financial hardships as more and more people found it necessary to borrow money and pawn personal possessions to money lenders who were accused of charging usurious rates of interest.

As part of his effort to gain the support of Regensburg in a struggle with the princes of the Empire, Emperor Wenzel issued an imperial document dated September 16, 1390, releasing the members of the city council and the citizens from all debts owed to the Jews and directing the latter to surrender all promissory notes, pledges, and pawned objects without compensation. The proclamation brought great jubiliation among the lower classes and immediate steps were taken to enforce the terms. Some Jews complied and turned over papers and articles; others secreted assets and fled from the city. The burghers initiated a house to house search within the Jewish quarter, seizing property and imprisoning Jews who attempted resistance. Members of the council were troubled, since some still believed that providing security for the Jews and their property was in the best interest of the city. But they too were blinded by the prospect of immediate relief from debts, and, rationalizing that any preventive measures would have little or no effect, joined in the general spoliation.

Anti-Semetic riots broke out during the Hussite War and also following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, as Jews were accused of secretly conspiring with and aiding the heretics and Moslems. The Church decrees in regard to Jews were enforced and stringent municipal ordinances further eroded their rights. Merchants and businessmen found access to markets severely limited as boycotts were placed on Jewish goods, and Christian artisans refused to sell their wares to non-Christian customers. Virtually all social relations between Christians and Jews were prohibited, especially the entertainment of each other in private homes or public eating places. The gates of the *Judenstadt* were regularly locked on Christian Holy Days and any Jews who tried to leave the city were seized and returned so they could be forced to continue paying their taxes. At one point Duke Louis of Bavaria joined with Bishop Henry IV in an effort to convert the Jews. A rabble-rousing Dominican Friar, Peter Schwartz, himself a convert, gave lectures to prominent Jews who were forced to attend, pointing out "errors" in their theology and teachings. The efforts were in vain and Christian leaders became convinced that the Jews were too stubborn to listen to reason and so were beyond redemption and must bear the consequences of their own obstinacy.

. . . accusing them of usury, of reviling Mary and of murdering Christ.

In 1473 another converted Jew named Hans Vogol accused Rabbi Israel Bruna of purchasing and then slaughtering a seven-year-old Christian in ritual sacrifice. Bishop Henry was convinced, but members of the city council were not and, under pressure, Vogol finally admitted he had lied. The seventy-year-old rabbi was released on condition that he sign a pledge not to attempt retaliation or seek revenge. The issue of ritual murder was raised again two years later in Trent. The body of a three-year-old Christian boy was washed ashore near the home of a Jew who, under torture, confessed and implicated other members of his community. The testimony of yet another convert named Wolfgang provided evidence against members of the Regensburg community. Seventeen men were tortured until they confessed. After a short trial they were imprisoned and their property confiscated and for several months the rest of the community was barricaded within their quarter. An appeal was sent to Emperor Frederick III who finally forced the release of the prisoners, but only after placing the city under the ban of the Empire and threatening to revoke the municipal charter.

Frederick continued his protection of the Jews when rumors spread concerning another alleged child murder in Baden and accusations of desecration of the host in Passau. Several Jewsof Regensburg were charged with complicity but Frederick interceded and ordered that they be neither tortured nor put to death, but should be treated as other prisoners. After two years of protracted negotiations, the release of the accused was arranged, but only on condition that they make substantial payments to the city and sign an oath not to seek revenge.

The policy of protecting the Jews from illegal or unjust violence or persecution was continued by Frederick's son and successor Maximilian. But preachers and scholars continued to revile the Jews and spread anti-Semitic propaganda as the development of Gutenberg's printing press facilitated the dissemination of such material among the literate population, while vile drawings and caricatures of Jews were spread among the uneducated masses. The old accusations were constantly reiterated but more emphasis was placed on economic issues. The Jews were accused of living in idleness, sloth, and lust supported by ill-gotten gains extorted from poor Christians. Such slander and malice brought physical attacks against the Jews as both men and women suffered violence and abuse in public places. Stories of murder, robbery, stonings and other outrages were reported in city records but it appears that little was done to protect the victims or punish the guilty. A popular anti-Semitic preacher, *Dompreger* Balthasar Hubmaier arrived in Regensburg in 1595 and the young firebrand bitterly denounced the Jews from his pulpit, accusing them of usury, of reviling Mary, and of murdering Christ. He insisted that Christians must be freed from the curse of the Infidel and exhorted the people to be ready to take action and expel them from the city when the opportunity presented itself.

The opportunity did come with the death of Emperor Maximilian in 1519. The city government negotiated with prominent clerics and after a staged anti-Semitic demonstration a delegation of officials ordered the Jews to leave the city. The council claimed it could no longer guarantee the protection of their persons or property, so to keep the peace and prevent popular insurrection they must go. The women and children left, quickly followed by the men a few days later. Mobs swarmed through the *Judenstadt* and soon the gates, walls, houses, and synagogue lay in ruins. The Jewish cemetery was desecrated and many of the inscribed stones were used as building material. A short time later a Christian Church, *the Mariankapelle,* was erected on the site formerly occupied by the synagogue. The bones of a dead child supposedly found in the Jewish quarter were placed in the church as a constant reminder of the "crime and outrages" of the Jews.

. . . continued next page

Regensburg. . . continued

Many of the Jews took up temporary residence in Standtamhof just across the Danube from where they attempted to negotiate permission to return. Eventually they succeeded, but their communal way of life was destroyed never to be restored. The Jews continued to live and carry on business in Regensburg largely because they served necessary economic roles but always on sufferance and at the pleasure of the city government and the Christian citizens.

It is well known that the European anti-Semitism which reached its murderous culmination in the Nazi era had its roots in the Middle Ages. Perhaps less well known, however, is the fact that prejudice against the Jews was by no means universal during the medieval period, even in Germany. Between 1100 and 1350, the Jews of Regensburg were not only tolerated, but were also granted the same protections accorded to Christian citizens, often in defiance of papal edicts, emperors' decrees and the exhortations of religious fanatics. Today we are experiencing a resurgence of interest in the Third Reich, stimulated by movies like *Sophie's Choice* and the publication of Hitler's spurious diaries, as well as by our continuing fascination with some of history's most evil men. But as we recall the horrors of the Nazi period, we should remember also the twentieth-century counterparts of the citizens of Regensburg, those Christians who hid Jews in their attics, helped them escape to England, or even adopted Jewish children. In these Christians, as in their Regensburg forebears, the sense of justice overcame the vicious prejudice around them, and they kept this humanitarian spirit alive in a dark age.



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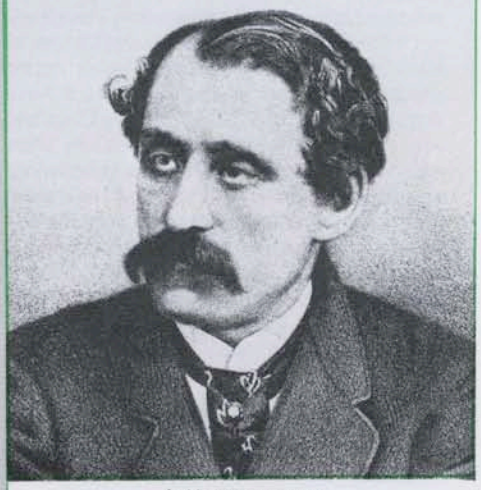
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CULTURAL COMMENTARY

Louis Moreau Gottschalk: *America's Dashing Musical Ambassador*

by Henry Santos
Assistant Professor of Music



L. M. GOTTSCHALK

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829 - 1869), the first American pianist and composer to achieve international fame, can truly be described as a musical ambassador. He toured France, Switzerland, Spain, the U.S., Canada, the West Indies and South America. But ironically, although Gottschalk's compositions and piano virtuosity made a great impact abroad, his work received an unenthusiastic and in some cases hostile reception from the musical establishment in his native country.

Gottschalk was born in New Orleans of Jewish and Creole parents and was reputed to have been one-eighth Black. His keyboard talent was recognized early: he began taking piano lessons at the age of three, and at seven he substituted for his teacher as organist at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. When he was only twelve, the child prodigy left New Orleans to go to Paris for further study.

In Paris, Gottschalk was introduced to the leading composers and writers of the day. He studied piano with Sir Charles Hallé, who founded the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, England, as well as with Camille Stamity, a pupil of Kalkbrenner and Felix Mendelssohn, and Camille Saint-Saëns. With Pierre Maleden he studied composition. In the salons of Paris he became acquainted not only with other musicians, such as Chopin, Berlioz, Offenbach and Bizet, but also with writers like Hugo, Dumas Pere, Gautier and Lamartine.

In probably the greatest period of pianists, Gottschalk was compared favorably with such paradigms of piano artistry as Chopin, Liszt and Thalberg. His playing was described somewhat extravagantly by contemporaries as resembling a "cascade of pearls," and "glittering stardust": he had "the golden touch." The Romantic Period's emphasis on the subjective and emotional quality of music, coupled with a greater freedom of form, molded Gottschalk's artistry. Berlioz praised him as "one of a very small number of those who possess all the different elements of the sovereign power of the pianist, all the attributes that environ him with an irresistible prestige." Chopin also praised him: according to Gottschalk's sister, after hearing her brother's performance of Chopin's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in E Minor*, the Polish composer proclaimed that Gottschalk would become "king of the pianists."

In addition to winning renown for his piano virtuosity, Gottschalk also developed a reputation as a composer. His piano works introduced Europeans to the Afro-Caribbean rhythms of the New World. Three of his most popular compositions, "Bamboula," "La Savanne" (Ballade Creole), and "Le Bananier," (Chanson Negre) were based on New Orleans Negro folk tunes. According to the French composer Hector Berlioz, "Everybody in Europe now knows 'Bamboula,' Le Bananier,' . . . 'La Savanne' and twenty other ingenious fantasies in which the nonchalant grace of tropical melody assuages so agreeably our restless and insatiable passion for novelty."

Gottschalk returned home and travelled by stage coach and railroad car throughout the United States and Canada. He was the first concert pianist of international stature to perform in many small towns in the East, middle and far West.

Gottschalk's kind of recital was somewhat different from those of our own day. The program was highly varied, and often included a few opera selections, a movement from a concerto, a symphony, a play, a juggler, and some piano solos. As Gottschalk was the visiting artist, he was expected to include the local talent on the program. If a work pleased the audience, the artist was expected to repeat it -- many