

A Jewish Memory Book: Nuremburg, 1349
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Background

This paper analyzes the *Memorbuch of Nurnburg, 1349*, which lists the 560 victims, men, women, and children, (about one-fourth of the Jewish population of Nuremburg, Germany), who were burned alive in that city on December 5, 1349. They were killed in the belief that they had caused the Black Plague.¹

The Black Death raged across Europe in 1348 through 1351, ultimately killing a third of the population. Every possible explanation was sought. The Jews were accused of causing the plague by poisoning wells. In the palace of Chillon near Lake Geneva, Agimet, a Jew from Geneva, confessed to the crime after extensive torture. This action was repeated in a few other cities. There may even have been some torture in Nuremburg. In the *Memorbuch*, Reb Yisrael ben Asher and/or his wife, Maras Mina are described as having been “martyred”, and Maras Masda bat Yakov as having been “in great pain and... tested for G-d.”

Atrocities were committed in over 60 large and 150 small Jewish communities across Switzerland and Germany. Jews were killed in riots, by torture, or burnt at the stake. In the largest incident, August 24, 1349, some 10,000 Jews were massacred during riots in Mayence and Breslau, two of the largest communities.

On September 26, 1348, Pope Clement VI (1342-1352, in Avignon) issued a Bull contradicting the libel. He pointed out that the Jews were suffering and dying along with their Christian neighbors. Other rulers issued similar denunciations, but to little effect.

The names of the victims were assembled into lists, called *memorbuchs*. It became the custom to read the names, accompanied by special prayers, on the Sabbath before Shavuot, the spring festival holiday, which falls in May or June. Later, the lists were also read on the Sabbath before the ninth day of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. The lists, sadly, grew longer with the litany of massacres throughout the Middle Ages. The custom of the *memorbuch* fell into disuse in the mid-19th century. The custom has revived with the library of new memory books, by city or region, for victims of the Holocaust.²

The *Memorbuch of Nurnburg* was reprinted with commentary by the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews in 1881. The manuscript was not in good condition, and the Society wanted to reproduce it while it could still be read. My copy is a xerographic reproduction obtained by interlibrary loan from the Union Theological Seminary in Columbus. Translation for this paper was done primarily by Elite Shaiel of the Rabbi Silver Yeshevah Academy of Harrisburg, whom I take the opportunity to thank once again. Ms. Shaiel read the text, pronouncing the names and translating descriptors, while I took the information down for later data entry.

Maras

In two earlier papers,³ I recommended the Hebrew word “reb” as an equivalent of “lord”, with the feminine form, “rebbah” for “lady.” This was because my sources for both papers didn’t contain any alternative. Of the 182 women listed by name in the Memory Book, 144 are referred to as “maras” (teacher) in exactly the same way that “reb” is used for males. The breakdown for the three subgroups, Cohane (descended from the high priests of the Temple), Levite (descended from the lesser priests), and Yisrael (all others) is, as follows:

Memory Book Hebrew Equivalents						
Group	Total Men	Called "Reb"		Total Women	Called "Maras"	
		#	%		#	%
Cohane	17	13	76.5%	22	15	68.2%
Levite	22	15	68.2%	10	6	60.0%
Yisrael	110	93	84.5%	150	123	82.0%
Total	149	121	81.2%	182	144	79.1%

Cohane and Levite are priestly titles, indicating descent from, respectively, the high priests and the lesser priests and attendants of the Temple in Jerusalem. Under Jewish Law, a woman cannot be a priest. The breakdown for women in the above tables refers to women who were the daughters, wives, or widows of Cohanes or Levites.

In most cases, the person not referred to as "reb" or "maras" was probably too young. The terms "the boy", "the youth", "the youngster", "the bachelor", even "the virgin" (#46) were used as a descriptor in 14 cases. Another man was described as "servant." In most other cases, the terms "son" or "daughter" were used without any indicator of age. One woman was simply "his wife", while a male was "his great-grandson."⁴

Names

The names on the list take the form

Honorific* -- Given Name -- Son/Daughter of -- Honorific* -- Parent Name -- Descriptor*

Items with an asterisk did not appear in every case. The Hebrew for "son" and "daughter" are, respectively, "ben" and "bas" (the Ashkenazic pronunciation). Since the parents start off the list for each family, only the first name of children is given. In some cases, another adult may be mentioned, and here, the full name is given. Most often, the adult is a son-in-law, daughter-in-law or mother-in-law.

For example:

Reb Yosef ben Reb Avraham ha-Levi

- Maras Golda bas Dovid
- Berichiya, the youngster
- Shprintze, the small one
- Mina bat Natan, his revered mother-in-law.

Interestingly, the name of the son-in-law is listed before the name of the daughter.

Relationships other than son or daughter also appeared in some names:

- Reb Dovid son-in-law of Reb Yudlin Shammash
- Maras Yula daughter-in-law of Reb Eliakim the gravedigger
- Maras Mina widow of Reb Yitzchak

Kinnui

Jewish boys are traditionally given a Hebrew name, a *Shem ha-Koddish* (holy name), to be used when they take part in Jewish ritual; for example, when they are called to read or to hear the Torah in a synagogue. In addition, they receive a *kinnui*, a civil name for everyday use.

A kinnui could be a vernacular name similar in sound or starting with the same letter as the Hebrew one; Samuel for Shmuel, George for Gershom, or Myron for Meir. It could refer to the person's Hebrew name, possibly in a Biblical reference. A man named Pesach (born on Passover) was also called Bonavaunt since Passover is the Festival that "comes for good." Jacob refers to his son, Judah, as a lion (Genesis 49:9), and a man with that Hebrew name might be called Leon. The name could even be directly translated the Hebrew name Chaim (Life) became Vives, Vidal, or Vitale in French, Spanish, or Italian (from the Latin "viva"). In other cases, part of the name was cut off and a diminutive or endearment added. In the Memory Book, Yakov became Koplin (Little Yakov) and Liebyakov (Dear Yakov). Aberzuss is Sweet Avraham.

Since girls did not traditionally have a part in public observation of Jewish rituals, they got a single name, which might or might not be Hebrew. The name might still have a diminutive, such as Channalin (Little Channa) or Tzuralin (Little Sarah). Girls' names were often descriptive, Bruna = Brown (Haired); based on desirable traits, Guta = Good; or valued objects, Gema = Gem.

Lists of Names

In the lists below, the first name of an actual person is in normal type. A name that only appears as the parent of a person is in *italic*. (If it is both an actual name and parent name the name is in normal type.) A name that only appears as a kinnui or nickname is in **boldface**. The number to the left of the slash indicates how many times the name appears as an actual name. The number to the right of the slash indicates how many times it appears as a parent's name. The numbers are not combined because a single man may appear on the list as the father of several persons. (In only one case, #145 Maras Veromelin bas Maras Kila, the parental name is female.)

Male Name List

<i>Aberzuss</i>	Elazar -- 1/4	Koplin -- 2/0	Pesach -- 1/1	Yishai
Aharone	Eleazar -- 3/3	Lazel -- 1/1	Salman,	Yisrael -- 6/1
Alexandri	Eliakim -- 4/6	Levi	Zalma -- 3/1	Yitzchak -- 10/3
Asher -- 1/1	Eliash, Elish	Liebertrot	Shimon -- 3/3	Yoda -- 1/2
Avraham -- 8/7	Elkanna	Liebyakov	Shimson -- 2/0	Yodalim,
<i>Azriel</i> -- 0/3	Febelman	Manna	<i>Shalom</i>	Yudalin -- 1/1
<i>Barchi</i>	Feblin	Mattitiyah	Shlomo -- 2/0	Yoel -- 1/2
Baruch,	<i>Fishlin</i>	Meir -- 3/3	Shmuel -- 5/5	Yoetz -- 2/2
Berichiya -- 6/3	<i>Fivish</i>	Mikhel	Shnanelin	Yosevel
Benjamin	Froide	Mordechai -- 3/4	<i>Simcha</i>	Yosef -- 11/8
Chaim	Gershom -- 1/1	Moshe -- 10/4	Taggar	Yoselin -- 2/1
Chakkim	Gottzalk -- 2/0	Nachman	Yakov -- 3/6	<i>Yuri</i>
Chezki	Hezekiah -- 3/1	Natan -- 7/3	Yasha'aya	Zeklin
Daniel	Kalonymos -- 1/5	Orshergo -- 1/1	Yechiel -- 7/8	<i>Zerach</i>
Dovid -- 6/3	Kapernator	Peppercorn	Yedidiah	
Elchanon	Karpel	<i>Perigoros</i>	Yekutiel -- 1/6	

Feblin and Febelman are versions of Feibus, which was formerly thought to come from Phoebus, the Greek sun god. It is now considered to be a corruption of Vives, the kinnui for Chaim. Kapernator (Governor) is a kinnui of Elkanah, "G-d owns" or "Head owner." Name #141 is Maras Sarah, the widow of Reb Karpel.

The name Karpel is found in other sources. In 1601, Nathan (Karpel) Zuks and his wife, Hadasi, commissioned an Ark curtain that bore a badge with *three carp in estoile*, a case of canting arms⁵.

Taggar is a Talmudic term for merchant and would be the equivalent of the name Kaufman. The commentary text in the Memory Book feels that Chakkim is not related to the Arabic name but is somehow related to the German name Hagin. The commentary mentions the character from Wagner's Ring Cycle. In fact, Hagin was a diminutive for Yitzchak, as is Zeklin. Peppercorn appears as both a first name and a family name. The commentary says that it is a kinnui of Baruch.

Female Name List

Aline -- 3	Edla	Hulda Yutalin	Peslin, Pessalin,	Tertza
Bela	Edelheid	Keyzerin	Posalin -- 4	Tuva
Belta -- 2	Edalin -- 2	Kila -- 2/1	Peverlin	Tzippora
Bilya	Esther -- 3	Leah -- 2	Pompeleya	Tzuralin
Belin	Froeda -- 2	Lieba	Rachel	Vaeslin
Bluma	Frodelin	Liliya	Rachelin,	Yakhent --2
Bogelin	Gaila	Masda	Rachlin,	Yenta -- 3
Bonelin -- 7	Gema	Matzelin	Retzelin,	Yentalin
Channa,	Gnanna	Meralin, Merlin,	Richlin -- 5	Yotelin, Yotlin
Hanna -- 9	Goda, Guta -- 5	Miralin -- 4	Rachtz, Ritza -- 3	Yuta
Channalin,	Golda -- 6	Meris, Miris -- 4	Sarah -- 4	Zussa
Hannalin -- 7	Goldalin	Millie	Sherlin	
Daiha	Gomelin	Mina -- 8	Shprintza	
Darfa	Gotalin,	Ogiya -- 3	Schöenfrau -- 4	
Devorah	Gutalin -- 10	Olka	Simcha	
Doltza -- 6	Hitzlin/Hotzlin -- 3	Pelta, Polta -- 3	Tillin	

Gaila and Ogiya both derive from Abigail. Channa and Hanna are the same name. In Hebrew, the name Hanna begins with a letter that is sometimes rendered as Ch, rather than H. The letter sounds like the Scottish ch in loch. Shprintza and Yenta derive from the Spanish name Esperanza and the French name Gentile. Yakhent has the same ch and derives from Yochanon. Merlin and Meris are both kinnui of Miriam (Mary).

Family Names: Hoybach and Peppercorn

The *Memorbuch of Nurnburg* states that the name Hoybach or Heubach is related to the German name Offenbach. There were four places in Southern Germany named for this noble family, and the *Memorbuch* suggests that R. Avraham ben R. Shmuel came from one of them. This would make Hoyback, one of the earliest known Jewish place names.⁶

Erasamus called Johannes Pfefferkorn (Peppercorn) "a criminal Jew who became a criminal Christian." Pfefferkorn was born in Moravia in 1469. In 1504, he was convicted of burglary and theft. He was released and soon converted to Christianity. Under the protection of the Dominicans, he wrote a series of anti-Jewish treatises promoting the blood libel⁷ and the suppression of the Talmud. Jews, he said, should be required to hear Dominican sermons urging them to convert, with banishment for those who did not attend.⁸

Occupational Bynames

Barber
 Gravedigger
 Ballin -- keeper of the ritual bath
 Chazzan -- person who leads the prayers at a Jewish service

Gabai -- official of the synagogue, possibly, the treasurer
Melammed -- a teacher of children
Schochet -- person who slaughters animals in accordance with Jewish Law
Shammass -- beadle or pew keeper at a synagogue
Sofer -- scribe

Other Bynames

Descriptors for persons include: the child, the youth or youngster, the bachelor, the virgin, the small, and, the old one. In Ashkenazic folk tradition, a very sick child might be renamed “the old one” to fool the Angel of Death. The Angel would come to take the child but would only find “the old one” and would leave.

The Memory Book also lists the towns of Furth, Kissingen, Kornbach, Kronigsberg, Mainz (in several forms), and Redstadt.

Footnotes

- ¹ In 1338, there were 212 authorized families or approximately 2000 persons. Editorial Staff. “Nuremburg”, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971, Vol. XII, p. 1275.
- ² Editorial Staff. “Memorbuch”, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971, Vol. XI, p. 1299-1300.
- ³ ha-Levi, Eleazar (mka Wolkoff, Lew). “Hebrew Equivalents of SCA Titles”. 1993 II-69 and “Hebrew Equivalents of SCA Titles Taken from Three Period Texts”. 1996. The words “reb” and “rebbah” are listed as Jewish alternatives for “lord” and “lady” in the “List of Alternative Titles as Approved by the College of Arms, October 2017” heraldry.sca.org/titles.html.
- ⁴ The Hebrew word “ninen” “great-grandson” or “descendent” is used to refer to about 100 persons, most of whom are not named. In some cases, there are few names between, the head of, the house and, the “descendent.” Although I have no evidence, I suspect that, the word may have been used to mean “disciple” or “student.”
- ⁵ Altshuler, David, editor, the *Precious Legacy: Judaic Treasures from, the Czechoslovak State Collection*, p. 129.
- ⁶ The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst, the Jews. *Memorbuch of Nurnburg, 1349*. London: 1881, p. 21.
- ⁷ The myth of, the blood libel, that Jews ritually killed Christian children during, the Passover season to use their blood in, the wine or, the matzah, appeared for, the first time in, the *Life and Miracles of Saint William of Norwich*, a Latin work written about 1173 by Thomas of Monmouth and describing events of his own time.
- ⁸ Editorial Staff. “Johannes Pfefferkorn”, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971, Vol. XIII, p. 355-8.