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Jewish Sages in Medieval Erfurt

By *Abraham David**

The earliest evidence of Jewish settlement in Erfurt is from the 12th century, but not before the year 1137. The first evidence of Jewish settling in Erfurt dates from the year 1212.¹ However, we don't have any criteria to estimate the size of that community at that time. Since then, however, a Jewish community lived in Erfurt until the year 1458 when Erfurt's Jews were expelled from town as well as from some other localities in Thüringen.² In the years between there was a number of pogroms against Erfurt's Jews who were tragically hurt, e.g. in the time of the 1221 pogrom.³ During that event R. Shemuel b. Kalonymos *ba-Hazan* (The Cantor) was murdered together with other family members.⁴ R. Shemuel b. Kalonymos is known as a composer of famous poems, inter alia of שיר הייחוד (*Shir ha-yihud* (Song of Uniqueness of God), included in *Mahzor Ashkenazi* (Ashkenazi prayer book for the great holy days) in Hebrew manuscripts and printed editions.⁵

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1 See: A. JARACZEWSKY, *Geschichte der Juden in Erfurt*, Erfurt 1868, pp. 1-3. See also M. WIENER's review on this publication, in: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 17 (1868), pp. 313-317, esp. pp. 314-315; M. LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte der Juden im mittelalterlichen Erfurt, in: S. OST- RITZ ET AL. (eds.), *Die Mittelalterliche jüdische Kultur in Erfurt*, vol. I: *Der Schatzfund – Archäologie – Kunstgeschichte – Siedlungsgeschichte*, Weimar 2010, pp. 334-375, esp. pp. 337-338.

2 See: JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), pp. 58-60.

3 On this traumatic event, see: JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), pp. 4-5; A list of twenty two Jews who were murdered in that event was preserved in the *Nürnberg Memorbuch*, see: S. SALFELD, *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches*, Berlin 1898, pp. 12-13, 98, 120-122; LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte (n. 1 above), p. 338.

4 See: LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte (n. 1 above), p. 343.

5 See: A. BERLINER, כתבים ובהרים, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1945-1949 [1969], vol. I, pp. 145-170; A. EPSTEIN, כתבי אברהם אפשטיין, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1950, vol. I, esp. pp. 263-264; I. ELBOGEN ET AL. (eds.), *Germania Judaica*, vol. I: *Von den ältesten Zeiten bis 1238*, Berlin 1934 [reprint: Tübingen 1963], pp. 99-100.

Another traumatic event was the years 1348/49, the years of the horrible Black Death in the *Reich*⁶ and other countries in Europe (we will come back to this point later).

In that period we can find some Rabbinical figures which led the Jewish community. Some of them were well known sages. It seems that during the second half of the 13th century the Jewish community in Erfurt was a center of Jewish learning. From some sources we learn that it was a place of active Torah learning, and probably there was also a Yeshiva.

In addition to that, there is reason to assume that R. El'azar of Erfurt is identical with R. El'azar b. Yehudah of Worms (born 1160 in Mainz and died 1237 in Worms),⁷ the famous mystic and Halakhist⁸ in Germany in the 12th and 13th centuries, and better known as *Ha-Rokeach*, the name of his Halakhic Book.⁹ This R. El'azar stayed in Erfurt at least for a short while.¹⁰ Another mystic in the same time who resided in Erfurt was R. Nehemiah b. Shlomoh *ha-Navi* (the prophet), also known as *Treuschlein ha-Navi*. He left several Kabbalistic treatises and poems, which were pub-

6 European Jews were the target of popular Christian hostility as a reaction to the Black Death. So Anti-Jewish persecutions were spread in European countries and many Jews were cruelly murdered and more than four hundreds congregations were destroyed almost completely. A lot was written on those tragic events in Germany at that time, see: A. HAVERKAMP, *Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes im Gesellschaftsgefüge deutscher Städte*, in: A. HAVERKAMP (ed.), *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 27-93; F. GRAUS, *Pest – Geissler – Judenmorde. Das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit*, Göttingen 1987; L. RASPE, *The Black Death in Jewish Sources*, in: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 94, no. 3 (2004), pp. 471-489 (In the first note there is a list of some more studies on this theme).

7 On him and his writings: see: E. E. URBACH, *בעלי התוספות*, Jerusalem 1980, pp. 388-411; J. DAN, *תורת הסוד של חסידי אשכנז*, Jerusalem 1968, index; H. LISS, *Elazar Ben Yehuda von Worms: Hilkhote ha-Kavod. Die Lehrsätze von der Herrlichkeit Gottes*, Tübingen 1997.

8 Someone who is dealing with Halakhah. The meaning of Halakhah is: the legal side of Judaism that embraces personal, social, national and international relationship, as well as the practices and observances of Judaism.

9 See: URBACH, *בעלי התוספות* (n. 7 above), pp. 392-405.

10 JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), p. 5. He mistakenly noted that he was residing in Erfurt in 1229 in the time when an anti-Jewish pogrom was in Erfurt, and his wife and his two daughters were murdered. The time of R. El'azar's stay in Erfurt is unknown, see: *Germania Judaica* (n. 5 above), vol. I, p. 100.

lished recently only. It seems that his mystical conceptions were followed by his circle members.¹¹

One of the greatest sages of that period was R. Asher b. Yehiel (1250-1327) who resided in Erfurt for a while at the end of the eighties and the nineties of the 13th century. Better known as *Ha-Rosh* (acronym of *Rabbi Asher*), this sage was a great Talmudist of the last generation of בעלי התוספות (*Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*).¹² *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* is the Hebrew term for Rabbinical scholars who belonged to a great circle of sages from France, Germany and England, intensively developed the Ashkenazi Halakhic literature and tradition (hereafter called: Tosafists), and made lots of substantial contributions to Talmudic interpretation, following the greatest Talmud commentator R. Shlomoh Yitzhaki (Rashi; 1041-1105)¹³ during the 12th and 13th centuries.¹⁴ His youth R. Asher spent in Köln, and later he used to

11 Nothing is known about him, just his time more or less and his residence in Erfurt. His spiritual personality has been discovered just in the last decade by M. Idel, who has published some of his writings, such as: M. IDEL, Some forlorn Writings of a Forgotten Ashkenazi Prophet, in: *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005), pp. 183-196; M. IDEL, פירושו של ר' נחמיה בן שלמה הנביא לפיוט "אל נא לעולם", והערות על ייחודה של הגותו של מחבר נשכח מאשכנז, in: *Morešet Yisrael*, 2 (2005), pp. 5-41; M. IDEL, From Italy to Ashkenaz and Back. On the circulation of Jewish Mystical Traditions, in: *Kabbalah* 14 (2006), pp. 47-94; M. IDEL, הפירוש, in: *Tarbiz* 76 (2006/7), pp. 255-264; M. IDEL, האנונימי ל"אלפא-ביתא דמטטרון": חיבור נוסף של ר' נחמיה בן שלמה הנביא בין אשכנז לקסטיליה במאה השלוש עשרה – השבעות, in: *Tarbiz* 77 (2008), pp. 475-554; M. IDEL, רשימות ושערי דרשות בחוגו של ר' נחמיה בן שלמה הנביא והשפעותיהן, פיוט לא ידוע ליום הכיפורים לר' נחמיה בן שלמה הנביא, in: J. R. HACKER/Y. KAPLAN/B. Z. KEDAR (eds.), מחקרים בתולדות, ראשונים ואחרונים; מחקרים בתולדות, ישראל מוגשים לאברהם גרוסמן, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 237-261.

12 A monograph on R. Asher was written by A. FREIMANN, Ascher b. Jehiel, in: *Jahrbuch der Jüdische-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 12 (1918), pp. 237-317, translated into Hebrew: הר"א – ר' אשר ב"ר יהיאל, Jerusalem 1986. A new research on him came out recently by J. GALINSKY, An Ashkenazic Rabbi Encounters Sephardic Culture: R. Asher b. Jehiel's Attitude toward Philosophy and Science, in: *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), pp. 191-211.

13 He was born and died in Troyes in Northern France. Ten years from his life from 1058 he lived in Germany and studied there in Jewish academies: Mainz and Worms. A lot was written on Rashi, recently by A. GROSSMAN, חכמי צרפת, דרכם בהנהגת הציבור, יצירתם הרוחנית הראשונים, קורותיהם, Jerusalem 1995, pp. 121-253; A. GROSSMAN, רש"י, Jerusalem 2006; A. GROSSMAN, אמנות ודעות בעולמו של רש"י, Alon Shevut 2008.

14 Comprehensive research on *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* has been done by URBACH, בעלי התוספות (n. 7 above); E. KANARFOGEL, Peering through the Lattices, Mystical, Magical, and pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist period, Detroit 2000; I. M.

study in France and Germany. His closest mentor was the famous sage R. Meir b. Barukh of Rothenburg who taught him in Worms.¹⁵ In 1286, R. Meir of Rothenburg was arrested in Ensisheim and Wasserburg¹⁶ by the Caesar Rudolf I, after he was caught in Lombardy on his way to the Land of Israel.¹⁷ It seems that his pupil, R. Asher, resided in Erfurt at that time and became his successor as the greatest Rabbinical authority in Germany. When R. Asher resided in Erfurt, he unsuccessfully tried to free his teacher. In 1303, ten years after his teacher's death (1293), R. Asher left Germany for Spain like many other German Jews who fled from the German lands because of the massive persecutions that happened there in the second half of the 13th century.¹⁸ Two years later R. Asher was invited to become Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community in Toledo where he used to dwell until his death in 1327.¹⁹ R. Asher, as mentioned above, was the greatest Rabbinical authority in the Ashkenazi lands after R. Meir's tragic death. R. Asher left some distinguished comprehensive writings, such as: *Tosfot ha-Ra"sh* (*Tosfot ha-RO"Sh*; comprehensive Talmudic interpretations) and *Piskei ha-Rosh* (*Pisqei ha-Rosh*; Halakhic decisions) which follow the *הלכות* *Hilkhot Rav Isaac Alfasi* (*Hilkhot Rav Isaac Alfasi*), who is known by his acronym: RI"F.²⁰ Both of them were printed as appendix to each tractate of the Babylonian Talmud. From him are preserved around thousand Halakhic

TA-SHMA, *עיונים בספרות הרבנית בימי הביניים*, vol. I, Jerusalem 2004; S. Emanuel, *שברי לוחות. ספרים אבודים של בעלי התוספות*, Jerusalem 2006.

15 On R. Meir of Rothenburg, see: I. AGUS, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg: His Life and His Works as Sources for the Religious, Legal and Social History of the Jews of Germany in the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols., Philadelphia 1947; URBACH, *בעלי התוספות* (n. 7 above), pp. 521-570; S. Emanuel, *תשובות מהר"ם מרוטנבורג וחבריו*, Vol. I-II, Jerusalem 2012.

16 Both places are located in Elsas.

17 See: URBACH, *בעלי התוספות* (n. 7 above), pp. 541-547.

18 Something on Jewish scholars' immigration from German lands to Spain at the turn of the 14th century, see: I. M. TA-SHMA, *עיונים בספרות הרבנית בימי הביניים*, vol. II, Jerusalem 2004, pp. 157-166.

19 On his life in Spain (Toledo), see: FREIMANN, *Ascher b. Jehiel* (n. 12 above), pp. 255-267, 277-294 (Hebrew version, pp. 32-45, 58-76); Y. BAER, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols., Philadelphia 1961, vol. I, pp. 297-301, 316-325; I. M. TA-SHMA, *כנסת מחקרים*, vol. II (n. 18 above), pp. 167-184.

20 He was born in 1013 in Alger, North Africa, and moved to Fez (Morocco) where he functioned as head of a Yeshivah. In his last fifteen years he lived in Lucena (Andalusia, Spain). His Halakhic work which is called: *Halakhot*, is an abridgement of the Babylonian Talmud, see: I. M. TA-SHMA, *הספרות הפרשנית*, לתלמוד, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1999/2000, vol. I, pp. 145-154.

responses.²¹ No question that R. Asher started his Halakhic writings in Germany and finished them in Toledo. It is most likely that at least part of them were composed in Erfurt, it means that he had the facilities there to do so. No doubt, in Erfurt he had his own library and/or the communal library. As mentioned above, it seems that in Erfurt he had some students, too, a Yeshiva as well as a rabbinic court which he headed.

From a laconic source in the *Tosafot*²² we learn about a certain R. Isaac of Erfurt. It might be that this sage was also one of the Tosafists, even though he is mentioned only once in the Tosafot literature.

In the 14th century we know about four sages who resided in Erfurt: R. Israel b. Joel Susslin,²³ a great Talmudist who composed novelties and a commentary to *יצחק אלפאסי הלכות* (*Hilkhot Rav Isaac Alfasi*),²⁴ but he became more famous as the author of the elegy: *ציון ארייך בכי אשר נוך שודד* (*Šiyon arayawekh bekhi ašer nawekh šuddad*)²⁵ on the Black Death persecutions in 1347-1350 which caused the destruction of many Jewish communities in western and central Europe with a lot of Jewish victims. European Jews were the target of Christian hostility as a reaction to the Black Death. Anti-Jewish persecutions spread in European countries, and many Jews were cruelly murdered, more than four hundred congregations in Germany were destroyed almost completely in 1349.²⁶

In the aforementioned elegy of R. Israel b. Joel Susslin of Erfurt, reference is made inter alia to the Massacres in Erfurt and Mühlhausen.²⁷ One

21 On his Halakhic Responsa, see: E. E. URBACH, *שאלות ותשובות הרא"ש בכתבי יד*, ובדפוסים, in: *Shenaton ha-Mišpaṭ ha-‘Ivri* 2 (1975), pp. 1-153.

22 *Tosafot* to bAZ 21a.

23 On him, see the article in: J. KLATZKIN (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Berlin 1931, vol. VIII, p. 635; I. ELBOGEN/Z. AVNERI (eds.), *Germania Judaica*, vol. II: *Von 1238 bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 1968, p. 219.

24 On R. Isaac Alfasi, see above, note 20. On those compositions, see: A. Y. HAVAZELET, *תוספות אלפס: חיבור לא ידוע לחד מן קמאי*, in: *Moriah* 18 (1992/3), pp. 95-102; A. Y. HAVAZELET, *פירוש רש"י שנדפס סביב הרי"ף*, in: *Moriah* 19 (1993/4), pp. 106-116.

25 Published several times, see: S. BERNFELD, *ספר הדמעות*, 3 vols., Berlin 1924, vol. II, pp. 121-142.

26 See above, note 5.

27 On the Black Death persecution in those towns in 1349, see: BERNFELD, *ספר הדמעות* (n. 25 above), pp. 126-127; JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), pp. 23-33; WIENER, *Review* (n. 1 above), pp. 314-315; SALFELD, *Martyrologium* (n. 3 above), pp. 248, 267; GRAUS, *Pest* (n. 6 above), pp. 189-193; M. LÄMMERHIRT, *Juden in den wettinischen Herrschaftsgebieten. Recht, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft im Spätmittelalter*, Köln 2007, pp. 28-31, 40-47; LÄMMERHIRT, *Zur Geschichte*

of its victims was R. Alexander Süsskind ha-Kohen of Erfurt who was put to death as a martyr.²⁸ This sage is known as the author of ספר האגודה (*Sefer ha-Agudab*; The book of bundle), an abridgement of a collection of Ashkenazi Halakhic decisions which is based mostly on ספר המרדכי (*Sefer ha-Mordechai*) composed by R. Mordechai b. Hillel ha-Kohen (13th century)²⁹ and the פסקי התוספות (*Pisqei ha-Tosafot*; Tosafist's decisions).³⁰

After the Black Death terrible persecutions the Jewish community in Erfurt was slowly restored and the Jewish population even increased. The rulers of the principality and the town governors gave protection to those Jews who settled in Erfurt and part of them came back after escaping from the town in the Black Death mass destruction.³¹

One of the sages in the new era of post Black Death catastrophe was R. Meir b. Barukh ha-Levi (1325-1406). Born in Fulda, he held Rabbinical positions in Erfurt, Frankfurt, Worms, and Nürnberg, and after 1392 he moved to Vienna where he spent the rest of his life in Rabbinical position. We do not know of any writing that was composed by him. However, he is mentioned as a Halakhist by his contemporary sages and by those who lived two, three generations later.³² It seems that from the end of the 14th century to the first half of the 15th century the Jewish community became stronger and bigger. Accordingly, we have more information on the spiritual leadership in the Erfurt Jewish community.

(n. 1 above), pp. 347-349; M. LÄMMERHIRT, Jüdisches Leben im mittelalterlichen Mühlhausen, in: *Mühlhäuser Beiträge* 34 (Mühlhausen 2011), pp. 73-90, esp. pp. 76-77.

28 See, BERNFELD, ספר הדמעות (n. 25 above), pp. 126-127.

29 On him, see: WIENER, Review (n. 1 above), pp. 387-389; URBACH, בעלי התוספות (n. 7 above), pp. 556-560.

30 On this treatise, see: S. ABRAMSON, בירורים, in: *Sinai* 58 (1966), pp. 181-192, esp. 188-191; I. TA-SHMA, קיום לאופייה של הספרות הרבנית באשכנז במאות הי"ג-י"ד, in: *Alei Sefer* 4 (1977), pp. 20-41, esp. pp. 36-37 (= TA-SHMA, כנסת מחקרים I (n. 18 above), pp. 337-338).

31 See: JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), pp. 27-58, 70; LÄMMERHIRT, *Juden* (n. 27 above), pp. 56-61; LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte (n. 1 above), pp. 350-351.

32 See: M. GÜDEMANN, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Kultur der abendländischen Juden während des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit*, Wien 1880, pp. 241-242; YOSEF B. MOŠEH, לקט יושר, ed. J. FREIMANN, Berlin 1903, Introduction, pp. XLI-XLII, no. 87; M. KEIL, Gemeinde und Kultur. Die mittelalterlichen Grundlagen jüdischen Lebens in Österreich, in: H. WOLFRAM (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, Wien 2006, pp. 15-122, esp. p. 65.

In that period we find R. Hillel b. Solomon of Erfurt (died in 1417 who studied in Vienna at the *Yeshiva* which was headed by the abovementioned R. Meir b. Barukh ha-Levi after 1392. A few years later, in 1397, R. Hillel resided in Erfurt as a spiritual leader of the Jewish community. In non-Jewish sources he is mentioned as *Meistir Heller* or *Meistir Hellil*, and we learn from those sources that he was a wealthy man. In the beginning of the first decade of the 15th century he was appointed by the authorities, namely the *Landgrafschaft* in Thüringen and by the Markgraf of Meissen as a regional Rabbi of Thüringen. At that time it was quite common to nominate regional Rabbis by the authorities also in other principalities. Nothing from his writings is preserved, however some of his Halakhic decisions were referred to or quoted by his contemporary Ashkenazi sages.³³

In the 15th century there were some other spiritual leaders in Erfurt, among them R. Jacob Weil (died in 1453) who was one of the greatest Ashkenazi Halakhic figures in this century. Till 1416 he studied at the *Yeshiva* in Mainz which was headed by R. Jacob ha-Lewi Molin (born c. 1375 in Mainz, died in 1427 in Worms; known as MaHaRI"l), who was the most prominent Rabbinical figure in Germany in the last decades of the 14th century.³⁴ R. Jacob Weil occupied Rabbinical position in several localities in Central Germany. It might be that he himself directed a *Yeshiva* in Nürnberg, where he functioned as communal Rabbi besides R. Salman Katz, who officiated as Rabbi there.³⁵ Later he served as Rabbi in Augsburg. At the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Augsburg in 1438 he emigrated to Bamberg and later to Erfurt where he became the communal Rabbi for about ten years, before 1444³⁶ until his death in 1453.³⁷ On his life in Erfurt we do not know a lot. He left some writings on *Halakhab*, such as a collection of Halakhic responsa, which contains also some contemporary historical data.³⁸ This Halakhic book was quite popular in printed editions. The most enduring of his contributions is his collection of regulations regarding

33 On him, see: I. J. YUVAL, חכמים בדורם, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 157-164; A. MAIMON/M. BREUER/Y. GUGGENHEIM (eds.), *Germania Judaica*, vol. III: 1350-1519, Teilband 1, Tübingen 1987, p. 314; LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte (n. 1 above), p. 366.

34 On him, see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), index.

35 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 41-42.

36 One of his decisions from Erfurt was issued in 5204 A. M. (= 1444 C. E.), see: Ms. Moscow – Russian State Library, Günzburg 155, fol. 228v.

37 On his death year, see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), p. 182.

38 The first edition of his response came out in Venice 1523.

the Hussites' rebellion, even outside Bohemia, as can be learned from the bitter *Blood Libel affair* (accusation of ritual murder) in Wien in 1420 which led to the expulsion of Wien's Jews in 1421.⁴⁵

The aforementioned synod was attended by five rabbinic scholars: R. Eichel, R. Lipmann, R. Nathan, R. Yehizkiah and R. Abraham Katz. We have some details on each of them. The first one, R. Eichel is identified as R. Yehiel Michal Semelmann who was Rabbi in Halle and Magdeburg in the first quarter of the 15th century.⁴⁶

The second sage is R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen (on him below).

The third sage, R. Nathan, is R. Nathan of Eger (Cheb), born around 1360. For most of his life he served as Rabbi in Eger (Cheb) in Bohemia where he also headed the *Yeshiva* of that town. He settled there till 1430 when the Jews of this community were expelled. Two years later, in 1432, he took his wandering stick and travelled to the Land of Israel, where he died a few years later.

From non-Jewish source we know that R. Nathan was appointed Chief Rabbi of the *Reich* together with two others: R. Jacob Molin from Worms and R. Yohanan Treves in Savoy.⁴⁷ Almost nothing of R. Nathan's writings is extant, several Halakhic responses and decisions only are preserved in manuscripts quoted or alluded to in Halakhic writings of his contemporary sages.⁴⁸

in: *Zion* 54 (1989), pp. 275-319; I. J. YUVAL, Juden, Hussiten und Deutsche nach einer hebräischen Chronik, in: A. HAVERKAMP (ed.), *Juden in der christlichen Umwelt während des späten Mittelalters*, Berlin 1992, pp. 59-102.

45 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), p. 157. On the Vienna event, see: S. KRAUSS, *Die Wiener Geserah vom Jahre 1421*, Wien/Leipzig 1920; E. BRUGGER, Von der Ansiedlung bis zur Vertreibung, Juden in Österreich im Mittelalter, in: H. WOLFRAM (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, Wien 2006, pp. 123-227, esp. pp. 221-224.

46 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 164-166.

47 The first is mentioned above. The second one (died in 1429) is well known scholar, who was one of the prominent scholar in Paris till the last expulsion from France in 1394, then he moved to Italy and settled at least for a while in Venice. On his life in Paris, see: S. SCHWARZFUCHS, *Études sur l'origine et le développement du Rabinat au Moyen Age*, Paris 1957, pp. 49-57, 64; S. SCHWARZFUCHS, Yohanan Trèves et le dernier refuge de l'école Talmudique Française après l'expulsion de 1394, in: G. DAHAN/G. NAHON/E. NICOLAS (eds.), *Rasbi et la culture juive en France du Nord au moyen âge*, Paris/Louvain 1997, pp. 83-94; J. R. HACKER, ר' יוחנן טריוויש ומשפחתו באיטליה וישיבה בפדובה בראשית המאה החמש עשרה, in: *Zion*, LXXVIII (2013), pp. 471-500.

48 On him, see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 172-194.

R. Yehizkiah is identified as R. Yehizkiah of Weissenfels in Sachsen. Nothing is known about his life, except he held the position of Provincial Rabbi of Thüringen from the year 1417 until his death ten years later.⁴⁹

R. Abraham Katz, i.e. R. Abraham b. Elija ha-Kohen, was Rabbi in Halle. But we find him also in Erfurt, Merseburg, and Nürnberg. He passed away around the year 1440.⁵⁰ His father R. Elija ha-Kohen of Braunau (Schlesien) is mentioned as Rabbi in Erfurt in 1370.⁵¹

The most prominent and dominant sage in this group was, however, R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen (died in 1421), called probably after the name of the town Mühlhausen in Thüringen.⁵² He was one of the greatest Rabbinical authorities in central Europe in his time, in the last decades of the 14th and the first decades of the 15th century.⁵³

He is known as author of writings on Philosophy, *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), Halakhic decisions, etc.,⁵⁴ but we don't know where he was born nor where he ended his life, probably in Erfurt. He used to study in Austria with famous sages, such as R. Meir b. Barukh ha-Levi of Wien who was mentioned above as one of the Rabbis in Erfurt, R. Shalom of Wiener Neustadt,⁵⁵ and R. Samson b. Eliezer Barukh she-Amar.⁵⁶

49 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 155, 162, 168.

50 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 167-171.

51 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), p. 167; *Germania Judaica*, vol. III, p. 313.

52 On the Jewish community in Mühlhausen in the Middle Ages till the expulsion in 1436, see: LÄMMERHIRT, *Jüdisches Leben* (n. 27 above), pp. 73-90.

53 On his death year, see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), p. 106.

54 On him and his interests in various fields, See: J. KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן, מיהלהויון: בעל הנצחון החוקר והמקובל, New York 1927; S. NEUFELD, Der Judenmeister Lipmann Mühlhausen, in: *Mühlhauser Geschichtsblätter* 27 (1926-1927), pp. 33-41; E. KUPFER/D. S. LOEWINGER, של ר' יום טוב ליפמן, "תיקון ספר תורה" מילהויון, in: *Sinai* 60 (1967), pp. 237-268; YOM TOV LIPMAN MÜHLHAUSEN, ספר ניצחון, ed. F. TALMAGE (facsimile edition of Nürnberg 1644), Jerusalem 1983, introduction pp. 15-17; V. SADEK, Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen and his Rationalistic way, in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 24 (1988), pp. 98-113; I. J. YUVAL, Kabbalisten, Ketzer und Polemiker Das Kulturelle Umfeld des *Sefer ha-Nizachon*, in: K. E. GRÖZINGER/J. DAN (eds.), *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazic Judaism*, Berlin/New York 1995, pp. 155-171; LÄMMERHIRT, Zur Geschichte (n. 1 above), p. 367; T. VISI, The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Context – The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century, in: *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), pp. 213-243, esp. pp. 230-234. Further information about his writings on Kabbalah, philosophy, and other fields, below in notes 66-68.

55 On him, see: S. J. SPITZER (ed.), הלכות ומנהגי מהר"ש, Jerusalem 1977; S. J. SPITZER,

Before the year 1389 he settled in Prague and served as Chief Rabbi and *Dayyan* (Judge) in the rabbinic court together with two other great scholars who – like him – largely contributed to the same fields of rabbinic literature, philosophy, and Jewish mysticism: R. Avigdor Kara and R. Menahem Shalem.⁵⁷

At that time, Prague was an important center of Jewish learning lead by open-minded aforementioned scholars. It is likewise known that those three people were involved in Jewish-Christian polemics.⁵⁸ R. Yom Tov Lipmann's involvement in this matter will be discussed below.

That R. Yom Tov Lipmann was head of the Jewish court in Prague is also known from a Latin document from the year 1407 where he is called *Judex Judaeorum*, the “judge of Jews”. It seems that after the year 1413 he left Prague and probably spent most of his life in Erfurt,⁵⁹ where he became the dominant rabbinical figure.⁶⁰ In Erfurt he headed a *Yeshiva*. One of his students was R. Salman of Sankt Goar.⁶¹

Rabbi Schalom von Wiener Neustadt, in: *Unsere Heimat* 57 (1986), pp. 141-146.

56 We don't have any biographical details on this sage. It is not clear where he resided in the second half of the 14th century. On his book *Baruch she-Amar*, see: M. M. MESHI ZAHAV (ed.), קובץ ספרי סתם, Jerusalem 1970; TA-SHMA, כנסת מחקרים I (n. 18 above), pp. 338-344.

57 On their interesting in Philosophy and Kabbalah, see: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 10-12; E. KUPFER, לדמותה התרבותית של יהדות אשכנז וחכמיה, במאות היי-טו, in: *Tarbiz* 42 (1973), pp. 113-147, esp. pp. 117-125, 146-147; F. TALMAGE, מכתבי ר' אביגדור קרא ור' מנחם, in: A. A. GREENBAUM/A. L. IVRY (eds.), הגות ומעשה – *Thought and Action. Essays in Memory of Simon Rawidowicz on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of His Death*, Tel-Aviv 1983, pp. 43-52; D. J. LASKER, Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz, in: O. LIMOR/G. G. STROUMSA (eds.), *Contra Iudaeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews* (= Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, vol. 10), Tübingen 1996, pp. 200-202, 205; VISI, Emergence of Philosophy (n. 54 above), pp. 213-227, 239-243.

58 See: LASKER, Philosophical Polemics (n. 57 above), p. 201, no. 28.

59 A monograph on him has been published by KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), for a short overview, see: LÄMMERHIRT, *Juden* (n. 27 above) pp. 407-409.

60 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above) p. 350.

61 See: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), p. 106. He is known as a student of R. Jacob b. Moses ha-Lewi Molin (born c. 1375 in Mainz; died 1427 in Worms) in Mainz, who edited מנהגי מהרי"ל (Jacob Molin's Book of Customs) see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 97 ff.

In 1417 he was in Jena for a short while,⁶² and in a Christian source it is said that around the year 1420 Yom Tov Lipmann stayed in Cracow (Poland),⁶³ but we don't have any further evidence for this.

Of R. Yom Tov Lipmann writings only part is preserved, covering the spectrum of his fields of study, including Jewish philosophy, Jewish mysticism, Halakhah, biblical exegesis, homilies, *Massorah*⁶⁴ etc.⁶⁵ Among his Halakhic decisions there are some which were issued in Erfurt.⁶⁶

He became most famous for his anti-Christian polemical treatise ספר הניצחון (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*; The Book of Victory). This comprehensive treatise which is based on theological and philosophical arguments gave him popularity among his brethren throughout the generations, as we can learn from the existence of the numerous Hebrew manuscripts of this text, amounting to no less than fifty copies, and after the year 1644 we have some printed editions of it.

In the treatise ספר הניצחון (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*), written in the beginning of the 15th century, Yom Tov Lipmann offers Jewish traditional – contradicting the Christian – interpretation of those Biblical verses on which Christian believe is based claiming that those verses hint to various aspects of Christian teachings and dogmas.⁶⁷

62 See: LÄMMERHIRT, *Juden* (n. 27 above), pp. 408-409.

63 See: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), p. 90; TALMAGE, Introduction (n. 54 above), p. 13; LÄMMERHIRT, *Juden* (n. 27 above), p. 408.

64 *Masorah* is a branch in Biblical research related to the traditional vocalization of the text of the Holy Scripture.

65 An overview of his writings has been given by KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 61-89. In some writings his name appears as *Tabyomi* (derived from the Aramaic of Yom Tov), cf. bSanh 97a; bBB 12b; bQidd 14b etc. Some other of his writings were discovered and published by E. KUPFER, ספר הברית וכתבים, in: *Sinai* 56 (1965), pp. 330-343; KUPFER/LOEWINGER, תיקון ספר תורה" של ר' יום טוב ליפמן, in: *Sinai* 84 (1979), pp. 126-132; I. WEINSTOCK, דרשת "תורת ה' תמימה" לר' יום-טוב ליפמן מילהויזן, in: *Temirin* 2 (1983), pp. 93-121.

66 Such as his decision on *Shofar* which should be made from deer horn. This decision, issued by him a few months before he died in 1421, was published by A. Berliner, in *Ha-Levanon*, 1 (1869), pp. 278-279 (Hebrew), see: YUVAL, חכמים בדורם (n. 33 above), pp. 105-106. A reference to another decision of him which was issued in Erfurt is found in Hebrew Ms. Frankfurt a. M. – Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Qu. 12, fol. 148v.

67 On this polemical treaties, see: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 19-26, 50-71; B. BERNSTEIN, "Der Sieg" des Rabbi Jomtov-Lipmann Mühlhausen, in: S. D. LOEWINGER (ed.), *Jewish Studies in Memory of Michael*

It goes without saying that this polemical work did not please Christian theologians, who reacted to it each in his way.⁶⁸ The strongest negative reaction against this book came to light more than two hundred years later. Its first printed edition was prepared for print by the theologian and Christian Hebraist Theodor Hackspan who published it in Altdorf and Nürnberg in 1644. Hackspan's goal in publishing this text in its original language – Hebrew – was to prove with Yom Tov Lipmann's own words how far he went in his criticism against Christianity.

To refute it, Hackspan appended to his edition of the ספר הניצחון (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*) his own Latin polemical work against Jewish anti-Christian concepts entitled *De Scriptorum Judaicorum in Theologia usu vario & multiplici Tractatus* which includes words of reproach against R. Yom Tov Lipmann's theological ideas. Corrections of Hackspan's edition were published later by his student Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633-1705) under the title of *Correctiones Lipmannianae*.

Wagenseil (1633-1705), being himself a famous Hebraist, theologian and jurist in Altdorf, a small city near Nürnberg, was much more drastic in his criticism of R. Yom Tov Lipmann, as we can learn from his book *Tela Ignea Satanae* (*The Fiery Darts of Satan*), which was printed in Altdorf in 1681 in two volumes.

These two volumes contain a collection of Medieval and early Modern Hebrew polemical treatises which had never been printed before. It seems that Wagenseil's intention was to prove that way that the Jews throughout the generations were and blaspheming utter obscenities against Christianity. In this comprehensive publication Wagenseil also tries to criticize very sharply the ספר הניצחון (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*) in particular.⁶⁹ Thus, in his aforementioned book *Tela Ignea Satanae* more than five hundred pages of harsh criticism he devoted R. Yom Tov Lipmann's theological teachings which on the title page he called *Carmen Memoriale Libri Nizṣaḥon a R. Lipomano*, but inside the volume gave the title *Carminis R. Lipmanni Confutatio*.⁷⁰

Guttmann, Budapest 1946, pp. 201-220; TALMAGE, Introduction (n. 54 above); LASKER, *Philosophical Polemics* (n. 57 above), pp. 196-198, 200-201, 206-213; O. LIMOR/I. J. YUVAL, Scepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in *Sefer ha-Nizṣaḥon*, in: A. P. COUDERT/J. S. SHOULSON (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 159-180.

68 See: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 90-109.

69 On the various printed editions of the Latin translation of his treatise see: TALMAGE, Introduction (n. 54 above), p. 19, note 70.

70 See: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 101-106. On his personality

When writing his book, R. Yom Tov Lipmann had the intention to instruct his brethren how to react and respond to the other side in case of disputations between the two faiths. His arguments are based mainly on theology and to a little extent on philosophical theories, which he had learned from the philosophy of his Spanish and Provençal predecessors. Daniel Lasker, an expert in Jewish-Christian polemical literature, claims: “It is clear that, already at the end of the fourteenth century, Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen of Prague was familiar with the kind of philosophical polemics which were common in Spain at that time. He did not employ this type of argument very much, perhaps because his Ashkenazi readers would not have sufficiently understood these contentions”.⁷¹

Yom Tov Lipmann’s *ספר הניצחון* (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*) was quite popular among both Jews, as we have seen above, and Christian Hebraists and apostates, but they differed in the way they made use of it. To what extent these polemical treatises provoked antagonism, dislike and hostility of the Christian side can be learned e.g. from the harsh criticism put forward by Theodor Hackspan and his student Johann Christoph Wagenseil in the 17th century.

There were, of course, other Christian scholars, too, who criticized Yom Tov Lipmann’s polemical work already earlier in the 15th and 16th centuries, among them Bishop Stephan Bodiker (died in 1469, Johannes Capistranus (1386-1456); Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469-1521, Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), Antonius Margaritha (1492-1542), Sebastian Münster (1488-1552), Johannes Buxtorf I (1564-1629) and others.⁷²

We know that R. Yom Tov Lipmann was involved at least in two disputation between himself and Christian theologians. One was arranged in Lindau in southern Bavaria, north of the Lake Bodensee. It may be that R. Yom Tov Lipmann dwelled in this town for a while, but there is no documentary evidence. In his *ספר הניצחון* (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*), however, he mentions an encounter with “the Archbishop of Lindau”⁷³ who discussed

and his attitude to Judaism, see: P. BLASTENBREI, *Johann Christoph Wagenseil und seine Stellung zum Judentum*, Erlangen 2004. His suggestion that Wagenseil actually was a Philo-Semite is very unlikely.

71 LASKER, *Philosophical Polemics* (n. 57 above), p. 210.

72 See: KAUFMANN, *ר' יום טוב ליפמן* (n. 54 above), pp. 90-109.

73 There are some localities in Germany which are called Lindau. It seems this one can be identified as the town Lindau in Bavaria, on the northern coast of the lake Bodensee. On the Jewish community in this town till the year 1430, see: *Germania Judaica*, vol. I, p. 505, vol. II, pp. 488-490; A. DAVID, *למאורעות 1430* הדמים בקהילת לינדאו בשנת 1430, in: *Tarbiṣ*, 40 (1971), pp. 388-389.

with him theological matters. In his report R. Yom Tov Lipmann introduced the archbishop's questions and/or answers with the formula אמר אלי – “Said to me the head of Lindau's priests” (no. 179, 225), or שאלני ראש כומרים דלינדא – “Asked me the head of Lindau's priests” (no. 290) respectively.⁷⁴

The second disputation took place in 1399, a disputation with the Apostate Peter whose original Hebrew name was *Pessach*. Part of this disputation is recorded by R. Yom Tov Lipmann himself in an appendix at the end of ספר הניצחון (*Sefer ha-Niṣṣaḥon*) (no. 347-354).⁷⁵

As a result of Peter's polemic against Jews and Judaism and incitement, eighty Jews were put to death and died as martyrs in the year 1400. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the background of this disputation, as well as about the historical context of the martyrdom of the eighty Jews that followed it. It cannot be excluded that it happened in Prague, but it could have happened somewhere else in Germany or even abroad as well.

It is worthwhile to note that in most of Medieval Jewish-Christian disputations it was apostates, Jewish converts to Christianity, who represented the Christian side, and more than one of them became “famous” for his ruthless attacks on Jews and Judaism.

As mentioned above, the history of the Jewish community in Erfurt ended in the year 1458 when Erfurt's Jews were forced to leave the town,⁷⁶ and it was after hundred and fifty years, in 1608, only that Jewish resettlement in Erfurt started again,⁷⁷ even though Jewish life in Erfurt is known even earlier. Certainly not a Jewish community, but individual Jews may have lived there in the 15th/16th century as well, as we can conclude from two Hebrew documents going back to the last quarter of the 15th and the beginning of the forties of the 16th century which are preserved “accidentally”:

The first document is a *Ketubbah* (a marriage certificate) which was issued in Erfurt in the year 5237 A. M. (= 1477 C. E.).⁷⁸

74 See: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 19-20.

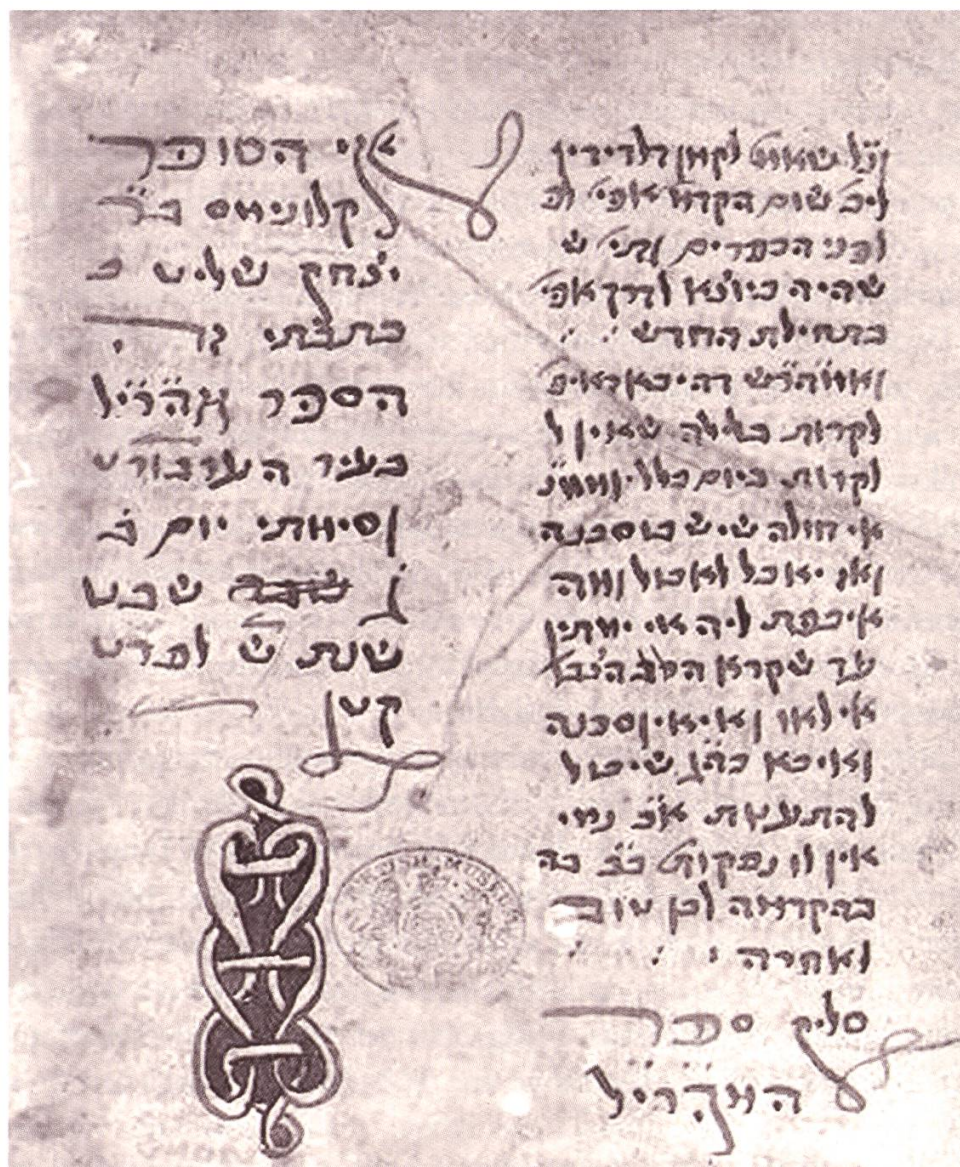
75 On this case, see: KAUFMANN, ר' יום טוב ליפמן (n. 54 above), pp. 21-25; TALMAGE, Introduction (n. 54 above), pp. 13-15.

76 The expulsion decree which was issued in that year has been published by JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), pp. 98-100; LÄMMERHIRT, *Zur Geschichte* (n. 1 above), pp. 368-369.

77 See: JARACZEWSKY, *Juden in Erfurt* (n. 1 above), p. 60.

78 A copy of this *Ketubba* can be found in a Manuscript of the Russian State Library in Moscow (Günzburg collection) no. 993, fol. 62r.

The second one is the colophon of a manuscript of מנהגי מהרי"ל (*Minhagei MaHaRI*"L R. Jacob Molin's Customs) which was copied in Erfurt in 5300 A. M. (= 1540 C. E.).⁷⁹ The colophon reads:



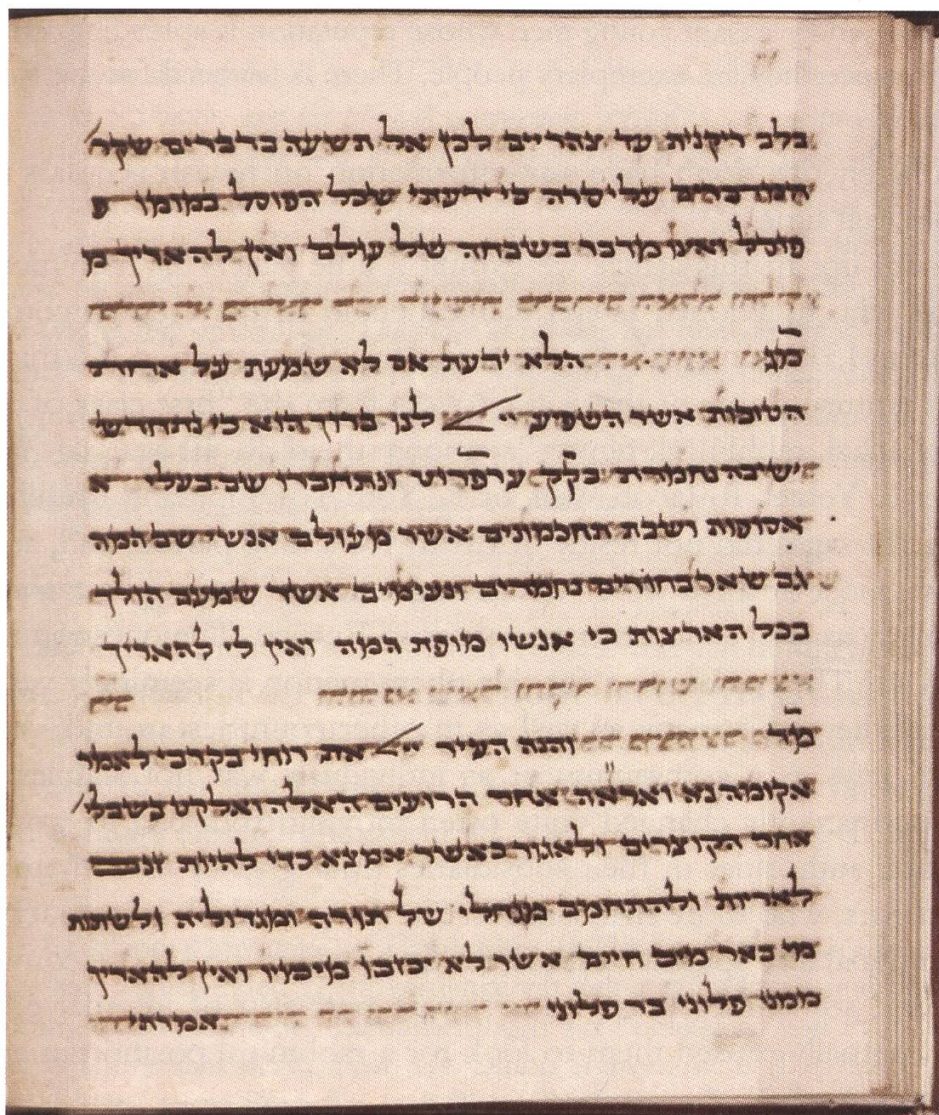
[British Museum – London – The British Library Or. 4607, fol. 193v]

אני הסופר קלונימוס בר' יצחק שליט כתבתי זה הספר מהרי"ל בעיר הערבורט, וסימתי יום ב' ג' שבט שנת ש' לפרט קטן.

I am the scribe Kalonymos son of Isaac I copied this *Book of MaHaRI*"L in the town of Erfurt and finished it on Monday, the third day of Shevat in the year 5300 [January 12th 1540].

⁷⁹ This manuscript is located in the British Library in London Or. 4607 (G. MARGOLIOUTH, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1999, no. 553, fol. 193v.

Regarding the establishment of a new Jewish community in Erfurt, I recently have found remarkable evidence, i.e. a document from an unknown source of the 17th century that provides information about the foundation of a *Yeshiva* there. This document is a copy of an anonymous short letter, or even part of a letter, which belongs to an epistolary copied in the second half of the 17th century and is used to be a part of the possession of Johann Christoph Wagenseil.⁸⁰



[Leipzig – Universitätsbibliothek B.H. 35, fol. 26v]

80 This epistolary is located at the Bibliotheca Albertina (University library) in Leipzig. B. H. 35, fol. 26v. On it, see: A. DAVID, Die Hebräische Handschriftensammlung der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig – Bibliotheca Albertina, in: S. WENDEHORST (ed.), *Bausteine einer jüdischen Geschichte der Universität Leipzig* (= Leipziger Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur, vol. 4), Leipzig 2006, pp. 305-319, esp. p. 314.

הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת על אחת הטובות אשר השפיע יי' לנו ברוך הוא, כי נתחדש ישיבה נחמדת בק"ק [קהילת קודש] ערפרוט ונתחברו שם בעלי אסופות ושבת תחכמונים, אשר מעולם אנשי שם המה. גם שאר בחורים נחמדים ונעימים אשר שמעם הולך בכל הארצות, כי אנשו [צ"ל: אנשי] מופת המה, ואין לי להאריך.

Do you not know? Have you not heard about one of the very best things that God, may He be blessed, has caused to happen to us. Indeed, a lovely Yeshiva has been re-established in the holy Erfurt, and there are joined there well-known collectors of knowledge and groups of sophisticated scholars, as well as charming and pleasant young men whose reputation is spreading among all the lands, since they are exemplary people. There is no need for me to go on at length.

Unfortunately, we don't have any information on Jewish scholars in Erfurt from that time.

To sum up: In this article we exhibit a little gallery of rabbinical personalities who functioned as spiritual leaders in Erfurt's Jewish community from the 13th century till the expulsion from that town in the middle of the 15th century. Some of those sages were from the "first class of Medieval Ashkenazi rabbinical figures", among them R. El'azar of Worms; R. Asher b. Yehiel, R. Jacob Weil, or R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen. Most of the sages did not reside in Erfurt for a long period, and, as far as we know, most of them were "wandering scholars" staying here and there in Germany as well as in other countries in Europe. The question is, why they did so? The explanation for this phenomenon is seemingly very simple. In Medieval Germany as well as in other countries around, the legal status of Jews as a community or as individuals was not stabilized and almost permanently changed quite often moving from bad to worse due to the local authorities or their subsidiaries (*Markgrafs* or *Bischofs*) and even the emperors, who more than once issued decrees which hurt much more the communal and spiritual leaders. So they tried to find more convenient places, and sometimes these leaders were part also of internal conflicts which eventually caused them to look for a rabbinical position in another Jewish community.