



MUSEUM
JUDENGASSE
FRANKFURT MAIN



The Judengasse in Frankfurt

History
Politics
Culture

C.H.BECK

Edited by Fritz Backhaus, Raphael Gross,
Sabine Kößling and Mirjam Wenzel
Translated into English by
Adam Blauhut and Michael Foster



The Judengasse in Frankfurt

Catalog of the
permanent exhibition
of the Jewish
Museum Frankfurt

History
Politics
Culture

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With 81 illustrations
Translations: Michael Foster (Essay Backhaus), Adam Blauhut (all other texts)

1. Edition. 2016
© Verlag C.H.Beck oHG, Munich 2016
Cover design: surface Gesellschaft für Gestaltung mbH, Frankfurt
Cover illustration: Hanukkah lamp by Rötger Herfurth, Jewish Museum Frankfurt
ISBN Buch 978 3 406 69097 6
ISBN eBook 978 3 406 69109 6

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Foreword

Felix Semmelroth

The Jewish Museum Frankfurt was opened in 1988 in a former mansion of the Rothschild family. It was the first Jewish museum in Germany to develop a comprehensive exhibition of Jewish history and culture after the Holocaust. In 1992 the Judengasse Museum was opened as a branch of the Jewish Museum that focused on the archeological finds from the early modern period that were excavated in the city in 1987. In 2015 Frankfurt's municipal authorities and council assembly approved an extension to the main branch of the Jewish Museum in the Rothschild mansion. This project is linked to the redesign of the Judengasse Museum, which will be more closely integrated into the neighboring cemetery, dating back to the Middle Ages, and into the Neuer Börneplatz Memorial to the Third Jewish Community of Frankfurt am Main, Destroyed by the National Socialists. The historical ensemble that is emerging at Börneplatz will allow visitors to explore Frankfurt's Jewish history in a special way.

The redesigned Judengasse Museum concentrates on Jewish life in Frankfurt in the early modern period. It provides a new view of the history and culture of Frankfurt's Jews and shows just how much the city was shaped by its Jewish residents for centuries.

The Judengasse Museum uses archeological finds from the early modern period to present the history and culture of Jews in Frankfurt, covering developments in the city until the ghetto was dissolved around 1800. By contrast, the new permanent exhibition in the renovated and expanded Rothschild mansion will examine the period from Jewish emancipation to the present day and offer an interesting reinterpretation of events that brings the history and culture of Frankfurt's Jews to life as an integral part of the city's history and shows their significance for all of Europe.

Professor Felix Semmelroth

Head of the Dept. of Culture and Science for the City of Frankfurt am Main



Map of Frankfurt am Main (excerpt)
 Matthäus Merian the Younger (1621–1687)
 Frankfurt am Main, 1682, copper engraving
 Historisches Museum Frankfurt

Introduction

Fritz Backhaus, Raphael Gross, Sabine Kößling, Mirjam Wenzel

In 1462 the Jews in Frankfurt were forced to abandon their homes and synagogue and move to a newly built street – the Judengasse – on the edge of the city. Surrounded by walls and accessed via three gates that were closed at night and on Christian holidays, this area of forced residence became the first Jewish ghetto in Europe. Originally inhabited by between 150 and 200 people, the Judengasse experienced significant population growth in the sixteenth century, with the number of residents increasing to around 2,700. Frankfurt developed into one of the most important centers of Jewish life in Europe.

Abraham Levie, a native of Amsterdam, visited Frankfurt on his travels through Germany in the early eighteenth century:

‘In Frankfurt I went to the Judengasse and marveled at the tall houses and the two beautiful synagogues, which had stone arches and were richly decorated with tall windows and fine copper ornament. [...] The Jews are known everywhere for their great devotion to their studies, and the Judengasse is home to many Jewish students from all over Germany and Poland who have come here to take lessons with the learned rabbis. Otherwise, as far as the City of Frankfurt is concerned, it is large and beautifully built.’¹

Abraham Levie was evidently much impressed with the Judengasse. The size of the Jewish community with more than three thousand members in the eighteenth century, the tall houses in the street, the rich ornament on the synagogue, the large number of famous scholars, the students from all over Germany and even from Poland – here the traveler encountered Jewish life in the early modern period in a particularly concentrated form. One urban landmark that left a deep impression on him was the bridge over the Main river, protected by an imposing watchtower. On top of the tower he saw four impaled heads, including the head of Vinzenz Fettmilch, who had led the attack on the Judengasse in 1614 and brought about the temporary expulsion of Jews from the city. His execution and the prominently displayed heads were a monument to justice for all Jews who visited the city.

The Judengasse was also a special attraction for the Christians who visited Frankfurt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is reflected in a number of texts, including the 1777 travelogue by Brandenburg Privy Councillor Andreas Mayer.² In the Judengasse Mayer discovered ‘a small district inhabited by a multitude of the poor children of Abraham [...], a very narrow alley, full of excrement and filth.’ By his own account, he was loathe to enter and did so only ‘out of curiosity to visit a people’ who ‘crawl like vermin in their stinking holes.’ Mayer’s choice of words is typical of most Christian authors, who were inspired less by actual observations of the quarter than by anti-Jewish sentiment.

These various accounts make clear that travelers in the early modern period saw the Judengasse in very different ways. A new perspective emerged in the course of the European Enlightenment: the Frankfurt ghetto, which had been set on fire during the 1796 siege of the city by Napoleon’s troops and never rebuilt, was now regarded as a cautionary tale about the consequences of discrimination and exclusion. In the short story *Noah’s Ark*, which was written almost a century later by writer and journalist Israel Zangwill, the gloomy life in the quarter, marked by anti-Jewish attacks, provides a backdrop to the protagonist’s decision to emigrate to the United States. Pogroms against Jews also play a central role in Heinrich Heine’s historical novel *The Rabbi of Bacharach*, published as a fragment in 1840. In contrast to Zangwill’s story, though, here the attacks take place mainly in rural areas and communities close to the Rhine, from where the protagonist flees to the Judengasse. The novel, which depicts the colorful life in and around the alley, is teeming with shady characters and deliberately leaves open the question as to what influence these characters exert on the *rabbi’s* life in the ghetto. Although the unfinished work casts the Jewish world in the Judengasse in an ambivalent light, it stresses its importance in Jewish cultural history. Both narratives make clear that in the nineteenth century the literary view of the Judengasse was diverse and contradictory. From their backward-looking perspective, literary and artistic works occasionally portrayed the Judengasse as the site of an idealized Jewish past. The best-known, most widespread example of this tendency is the series *Bilder aus*

dem altjüdischen Familienleben, or *Scenes from Traditional Jewish Family Life*, by Frankfurt painter Moritz Daniel Oppenheim. In his paintings Oppenheim presents Frankfurt's Judengasse as the place of an idyllic life dominated by festivals and family bonds. In 1884 the Orthodox newspaper *Jeschurun* even wrote, 'The Judengasse was a Temple of virtue, before whose threshold falsehoods, injustice and godlessness shyly retreated.'

After the Judengasse was demolished between 1867 and 1887, it was buried in oblivion. Thanks to the efforts of Isidor Kracauer, a teacher at the Philanthropin school in Frankfurt, the history of Frankfurt's Jews in the Middle Ages and early modern period was examined in a series of detailed studies carried out in the early twentieth century. These studies focused renewed attention on life in the Judengasse. For their part the Nazis – who came to power not long afterward – saw the Judengasse as the center of the 'international Jewish conspiracy' that was at the heart of their fantasies. It was no accident that the opening scene of the notorious anti-Semitic Nazi film *Jud Süß* was set in the former Frankfurt ghetto.

After the Holocaust, the Jewish cultural heritage of the former Judengasse was for the time being ignored until the archeological finds discovered at Börneplatz in 1987 placed it in the limelight. Plans by the City of Frankfurt to remove the recently discovered traces of Jewish history in order to construct a building for the public utilities company sparked protests and a heated debate over how the Federal Republic of Germany should deal with the remnants of Jewish culture, after the Holocaust. The public discussion resulted in the city's decision to remove the excavated foundations of the former Judengasse houses and, as a compromise with the protestors, to reconstruct parts of the foundations on their original site. The administration building for the Frankfurt public utilities company was constructed and some of the remains, including two *mikvaot*, were made accessible to the public in the building's basement. Today they form the core of the Judengasse Museum, which opened as a branch of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt in 1992. Thus, the history of the Judengasse Museum reflects the post-Holocaust debate in German society about German Jewish cultural heritage.

As part of the redesign of the Jewish Museum, the exhibition in the Judengasse Museum was fundamentally re-imagined and revised. In contrast to the previous exhibition, it does not rely on reproductions but puts objects from the collection of the Jewish Museum and other donors on display that were either produced or used in the Judengasse on the scene of the archeological excavations. These consist primarily of the foundations of five Judengasse houses built after the Great Fire of 1711.

The foundations present a microcosm of life in the Judengasse. Three very narrow small houses, in which poor ghetto residents lived, once stood next to the Steinernes Haus ('Stone House'), which was not built in the usual half-timbered style and was occupied by upper class families. It contained the two ritual baths that allowed residents of the Judengasse to comply with Jewish purity laws. A *Talmudic* academy was housed in the neighboring building. It was here that renowned *rabbis* taught and the famous Frankfurt *Talmud* edition of 1720–23 was produced. The houses testify to the different social, cultural, political and religious themes that shaped life in the Judengasse. The perspective from which the new permanent exhibition reflects on these subjects has changed fundamentally: Jews are no longer shown as individuals who lived an isolated life behind ghetto walls, but as an urban group connected to other urban groups in diverse ways. This is demonstrated, for example, by the exhibited *Hanukkah* lamps. These are examined not only in terms of their ritual significance, but also as the result of a dialog between the Jews who commissioned them and Christian goldsmiths. Another example is the world of images that informed life in the Judengasse. These images reveal less of a specific Jewish life-world than a cultural space in which Jews and Christians lived together, took note of one another and exerted a mutual influence on each other's cultural artifacts. In addition to the web of relations between Jews and Christians, the new exhibition examines the diverse professions in the Judengasse, the *rabbis'* scholarly work, the world of Yiddish literature for which Frankfurt was one of the main printing centers in central Europe and the religious and secular music tradition in the quarter. It poses new questions and offers new interpretations. The Judengasse is brought to life as a site of Jewish life with a

degree of autonomy, a quarter where the commandments of religious law could be observed – or violated – and the residents were able to actively defend themselves against physical attacks and legal restrictions.

In recent decades, Jewish life and culture in the Judengasse have been intensely studied. The conference proceedings *Die Frankfurter Judengasse: Jüdisches Leben in der Frühen Neuzeit* – which were published by the Jewish Museum in 2006 – introduced new perspectives and questions and were followed up by comprehensive studies by Andreas Gotzmann, Thorsten Burger and Cilli Kasper-Holtkotte. The research by these authors has paved the way for a new view of everyday Jewish culture in the Judengasse, which can best be summarized as follows: life in the Jewish ghetto was marked by internal and external conflicts and intense exchanges with the Christian environment. The diverse cultural articulations that emerged under these conditions reflect both the integration of the Judengasse into the society of the imperial city and the threats that characterized Jewish existence in the early modern period.

In a richly illustrated catalog section, the companion book to the exhibition presents and interprets the exhibition objects, offering new insights into the everyday lives of Frankfurt's Jews in the early modern period. This section is preceded by two essays that discuss the general conditions forming the backdrop to the topics addressed in both the exhibition and the catalog. Fritz Backhaus describes the political and legal development of the Jewish community in Frankfurt from the Middle Ages to the dissolution of the ghetto, touching upon the historical events that were of particular importance to the Jewish community. Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek focuses on the period after the Judengasse was demolished and the Judengasse and the Judenmarkt (Jews' Market) were renamed Börnestraße and Börneplatz. She examines how a place of remembrance emerged at this site that reflects the ruptures and contradictions of German Jewish history in the twentieth century.

The exhibition and catalog would not have been possible without the support of our colleagues. We would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Wolfgang Treue, Dr. Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Katja Janitschek, Veronika Kaiser, Dr. Wanda Löwe, Dr. Tanja Roos and Dr. Alexandra Schumacher.

In addition, we would like to thank the individuals and institutions that were willing to lend us their valuable objects for a longer period of time, including the Historical Museum Frankfurt, the Archeological Museum Frankfurt, the Jewish Cultural Museum and Synagogue of Veitshöchheim, the Johann Christian Senckenberg University Library, Frankfurt am Main, the Jewish Museum London, the Jewish Historical Society of England, Dr. David and Jemima Jeselsohn, Switzerland, Dr. Michele and Jacob Klein, Israel, Dr. Josef Pultuskier, Munich and Professor Falk Wiesemann, Düsseldorf.

The project was made possible by the support of the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, Evonik Industries, Gemeinnützige Hertie Stiftung, Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung, Hannelore Krempa Stiftung, Stadtwerke Frankfurt am Main Holding GmbH, Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft and the Gesellschaft der Freunde und Förderer des Jüdischen Museums e. V. We are grateful for their generous funding.

- 1 *Travels among Jews and Gentiles: Abraham Levie's Travelogue*, with an introduction and commentary by Shlomo Berger (Leiden, 2002), pp. 64–65.
- 2 Andreas Mayer, *Briefe eines jungen Reisenden durch Liefland, Kurland und Deutschland an seinen Freund*, Erlangen 1777, pp. 64–66.

The Judengasse in Frankfurt

Fritz Backhaus

Introduction

Archeological remains of the Judengasse in Frankfurt came to light in 1987 during construction of the public utilities' new administration building on Börneplatz. What started out as a routine case of municipal excavation developed into an acrimonious debate about the significance of Jewish historical remains in Germany in the post-Holocaust era. The outcome was a compromise: the finds were removed entirely to make way for the new structure, but the foundations of five of the nineteen buildings uncovered and the remains of two ritual baths (*mikvaot*) were documented thoroughly, so that they could be reconstructed in their original locations in the basement of the new administrative center.¹

The debate, conducted in public discussions, newspapers and other publications, focused principally not on the material remains, but on a largely forgotten or disregarded aspect of the local past: the history of the Frankfurt ghetto. Segregation, coercion, restriction, repression and persecution were some of the factors that dominated the discourse. A work published sixty years earlier, Isidor Kracauer's two-volume history of Jews in Frankfurt, still functioned as the basis of a controversy that ultimately boiled down to the issue of whether the ghetto had been a shelter or a prison.² That reflected the state of research in the 1980s: in post-Holocaust Germany Jewish history, especially that of the Middle Ages and early modern times, was no longer a matter of interest. Jewish scholars had been forced into exile or murdered, and it was not until forty years after the end of the war that historians at Germany's universities slowly began to rediscover the subject – partly impelled by the public, who had started to ask questions.

Scholars at work since the 1990s have developed new perspectives. One of these involves seeing Jews as a social group linked in various ways to other social groups so as to form an overall cultural environment as Christian

in character as it was Jewish. Segregation in ghettos was only one facet of Jewish life in the early modern period: political relations, daily encounters and an existence permeated by religious laws and customs were just as important. Attitudes on both sides tended to be divisive. Christians viewed life in the Judengasse with a mixture of ignorance, curiosity, apprehension and missionary zeal, while Jews often saw Christians as posing a constant threat that could be ward off only by invoking the ultimately unreliable protection afforded by the authorities and the civic community.

The medieval community – description and legal status

Jewish populations did not normally inhabit ghettos in the Middle Ages and early modern times. Frankfurt's Jews originally lived in the center of the city: their earliest synagogue was only a few meters away from the cathedral. They are first documented there in the mid-twelfth century.³ Significantly, their earliest mention in a Hebrew source is also the first record of the Frankfurt fair. Jewish merchants played an important part in developing the settlement around the cathedral and the *Königspfalz* (royal palace) into a fully fledged city. The Jews were subject to direct rule by the king, paying taxes to him and receiving a pledge of protection and special economic privileges in return. From the mid-thirteenth century they were 'servants of the royal chamber' and they retained this *Kammerknechtschaft* status until the end of the Holy Roman Empire, in 1806. Their homes in the center of the city stood not in a closed-off area, but in immediate proximity to the houses of patricians, craftsmen and fishermen. Until well into the fifteenth century municipal documents refer to Jews as 'burghers,' a term expressing their status as inhabitants subject to the benefits and obligations of civic society.⁴ A mark of their increasing segregation in the fifteenth century is a decree passed by the city council in 1446 expressly forbidding Jews to refer to themselves as 'burghers.'

Frankfurt's Jews enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and this is reflected in the fact that they maintained their own social facilities, including a cemetery, a hospital, a synagogue and ritual baths. Several *rabbis* were generally active in Frankfurt, yet in the Middle Ages the city was not among the leading centers of Judaism. Older communities, such as those in Speyer, Worms, Mainz, Cologne, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Erfurt and Magdeburg, possessed greater importance until well into the late medieval period.

Frankfurt's burgher class, which was likewise directly answerable to the king, gradually acquired greater autonomy and eventually received from the king all major rights with regard to self-administration and independent jurisdiction. The city council sought to extend those rights to encompass the Jews, and in 1349 Charles IV granted it dominion over them as a *lien*.⁵ One month after agreement had been reached all the Jews of Frankfurt were murdered. The pogrom would seem to have been planned in advance, since the letter of *lien* granted the council the right to appropriate Jewish property as compensation for the very high sum pledged should the Jews in Frankfurt be killed in the near future.

Christians and Jews

A few years after the pogrom, which formed part of a wave of persecution that swept across central Europe in 1348–50, Jews were able to settle again in Frankfurt. The city acquired dominion over them once more from Charles IV and they were permitted to occupy the same area south of the cathedral as before.⁶ Their legal status, however, was much lower. Right of residence was now limited to a few years. Moreover, the city council instituted an increased number of regulations aimed at controlling their day-to-day existence, in particular their relations with Christians. Although the Jews were in effect governed by the council, the king retained a kind of over-lordship, collecting taxes from them at his election and coronation and on other special occasions, but also implying that they would enjoy his protection if threatened. This dependence on two rival political forces characterized the life of Frankfurt's Jewish community for centuries. The

archbishop of Mainz and other territorial rulers also played a significant role. Cultivating relations with them and obtaining support from them in cases of conflict – tasks performed by the administrative heads of the community and its leading families – were essential to safeguarding the existence of the Jews in the city.

Jewish life in medieval Frankfurt was marked by physical proximity to Christians. This close daily contact contrasted with the religious gulf that separated Jews from Christians. Jews were the only non-Christian group to be tolerated in the city, yet they were constantly the goal of missionary activities. This is reflected to this day in a group of figures above the south portal of the cathedral.⁷ Dating from c. 1355, the sculptures show the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child and St Joseph, along with several Old Testament prophets. Joseph's hat marks him out as a Jew. Like the prophets, who in the Christian view had foretold the coming of Jesus as messiah, Joseph is looking across to where the synagogue used to be in order to show that, again like the prophets, he was a Jew who recognized the truth of the Christian message.

What the nearby Jews thought of this piece of visual propaganda is not recorded. They may have chosen to ignore it, but they will certainly not have been able to overlook the Passion plays that were performed just a few meters away from the synagogue in the fourteenth century. Featuring vocal and instrumental music, these included scenes from the biblical narrative in which Jews were caricatured as obdurate, evil and materialistic. Such polemics stood opposed to the Jewish conviction that they were living their lives in accordance with God's covenant and commandments in a world full of 'idolaters.' The small number of documented conversions to Christianity, despite intensive missionary work, testifies to the strength of that conviction.

Religion played a major part in the pogroms that took place in Frankfurt in 1241 and 1349.⁸ In both, religious motives fuelled the political conflicts that had prompted the attacks and killings. The Jews resisted fiercely and it took several days to overcome them. Forced to choose between baptism and death in 1241, twenty-four men and women opted for baptism and 180 were

murdered. Those killed were remembered as martyrs. Survivors wrote down their names so that their suffering could be commemorated in religious services, especially during *Tisha B'Av*, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and other disasters in Jewish history. For centuries prayers and songs invested the martyrs' adherence to the faith of their forebears with religious meaning as evidence of a divine trial withstood and as a response to personal guilt.⁹

The tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Battonnstraße, which was established after 1260 and in use until 1828, constitute the most important record of Frankfurt's Jewish community in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Their inscriptions indicate how Jewish life was permeated by religion: the values deemed worthy of perpetuating the memory of the deceased were piety and charity, not professional success, wealth or power.

The establishment of the Judengasse

In the 1430s Frankfurt city council began to consider banning all Jews from the city. This accorded with a general trend over recent decades. Major independent cities and many territorial lords had started to expel their Jewish communities in the late fourteenth century. Strasbourg was the first, in 1387. It was followed by such old centers of Ashkenazi Jewry as Cologne, Speyer, Trier, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Erfurt, Magdeburg and Halle. Also driven out of England, France, Spain and Portugal, Jews tended to settle in Poland, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. In sixteenth-century Germany, with large cities closed to them, they began establishing communities in small country towns and villages.

Frankfurt eventually took a different path.¹¹ In 1442 Emperor Frederick III, following his election in the city, decreed that the Jews be removed from the immediate vicinity of the cathedral. The 'bawling in the synagogue' was disrupting Christian services, the imperial decree claimed, and Jews could insult the body of Christ by setting eyes on the Host from their houses during processions. The Jews successfully petitioned the city council to prevent implementation of the decree, but eighteen years later Frederick III

repeated his demand. Almost two years passed before the council finally passed a resolution evicting Jews from the center of the city and resettling them on its periphery. Once more, the Jews resisted by drawing up a petition. Both documents, the second even longer than the first, offer rare and valuable insights into daily life from a Jewish perspective. Although the petitions undoubtedly exaggerate the precariousness of the Jews' situation, they bear witness to threats to Jewish existence very seldom mentioned in other written sources.¹²

In the petitions Frankfurt's Jews describe in dramatic terms the dangers to which they would be exposed in the new settlements at the edge of the city. They feared they 'would be murdered, would be robbed day and night [and that] fires would be started or shots fired.'¹³ Even now the journeymen in the Schmiedegasse, through which they would have to pass every day in order to reach their new quarters, often throw stones at them. In the remote and disreputable area along the Wollgraben moat they would not enjoy the protection of neighbors obliged by law to help them. Only recently they had been set upon by strangers in their synagogue and were rescued only because some police officials happened to be passing by. They also warn the council not to underestimate the cost of building new accommodation for them, because they require large premises for their pawn-broking businesses as well as houses for *rabbis* and other community officials who do not pay taxes. On the other hand, they would not object in principle to their current quarter near the cathedral being sealed off. In fact, they probably saw this as a way of increasing protection.

The arguments of the Jewish community did not go unheeded. In 1442 the council failed to carry out the emperor's decree and in 1460 the Jews' petition caused the council to shelve its resettlement plans, if only for a short time. In addition, when the plans were eventually implemented, they took account of the Jewish demand for sufficiently large buildings and suitable accommodation for community officials. Construction work was overseen by two councilors and the Jews were ordered to occupy their new quarters two years later. The houses consisted of the half-timbered structures customary in Frankfurt. Only the synagogue was built of stone,

a measure for which the council took the precaution of obtaining permission from Pope Pius II. Viewed objectively, the resettlement of the Jews was an astonishing undertaking. It cost the city a great deal in terms of money and effort. Indeed, in 1463 the council obliged the Jews to pay for any construction work carried out from that point on. The buildings remained the property of the council, however, and were placed at the disposal of Jewish families in return for payment of an annual fee.

In 1462 every Jewish family moved into the Judengasse. None left Frankfurt, an option that had often been taken or used as a threat in previous decades in cases of economic conflict.

The demographic structure of the Judengasse

The first surviving record of the Judengasse population dates from 1473.¹⁴ On completion of the first phase of construction, the street had comprised some fifteen houses, a synagogue, a visitors' hospital and a ritual bath. In 1473 the community numbered 154 members. Twenty-two households possessed an established right of residence (*Stättigkeit*). A household might consist of up to nine people, including minors (two to six children are documented), servants, a tutor and adult relatives. Twenty-three people lived as outsiders in Frankfurt. Finally, sixteen are described bluntly as 'lame, blind [or] suffering hunger.'¹⁵ They were accommodated in the Judengasse hospital, where some of them stayed for many years. Thus, no less than ten per cent of the Jewish population lived from charity extended to them by the community. On the basis of an estimated maximum population of ten thousand for Frankfurt as a whole, Jews accounted in 1473 for approximately 1.5 per cent of the city's inhabitants.

Attempted expulsion and population explosion

The establishment of the ghetto did not put an end to demands for the expulsion of the Jews. In 1515 the city's legal adviser, Adam Schönwetter, even launched a plan to expel all Jews from towns and territories in the

entire Rhine/Main region, to be carried out under the aegis of the archbishop of Mainz.¹⁶ This carefully prepared campaign failed as a result of resistance put up by the Jews of Frankfurt. They gained the support of Emperor Maximilian, who regarded the project as an infringement of his rights and strictly forbade its implementation. Relations between the Jewish community and the emperor were ambivalent, however, as had become apparent a few years previously. Johannes Pfefferkorn, a convert from Judaism to Christianity, had been commissioned by Maximilian to confiscate all Hebrew books throughout the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁷ He was to start in Frankfurt because, the emperor wrote, that was where the Jews had their 'highest synagogue.' Maximilian had been persuaded by Pfefferkorn and prominent Franciscans and Dominicans that Hebrew texts contained abuse of Christ and that this made the Jews incapable of recognizing the truth of the Christian message. Frankfurt's Jews were taken by surprise when Pfefferkorn arrived in the city. They sought to prevent the confiscation, but Pfefferkorn used the emperor's written order to gain the support of the city council and the high clergy in the cathedral chapter. In the course of two campaigns over 1,500 books were seized, taken from the Judengasse and stored in barrels. The large number of books indicates how important religious writings were in the life of the Judengasse. Their titles are documented in a list drawn up by the city scribe during the confiscation. He clearly wrote them down by ear and had no knowledge of Hebrew, yet even in this garbled form they reveal that the publications mostly consisted of prayer books and bible commentaries. On the assumption that some twenty families lived in the Judengasse at this time, each Jewish household must have possessed an average of seventy to eighty books – a further indication of the extent to which religious writing and education permeated daily life in the Judengasse. It may be assumed, however, that some of the books were for sale.

Frankfurt's Jews protested against the confiscation of their books and sent their cantor Jonathan Zion as an envoy to the emperor, who was waging war in northern Italy. Unable to bring about the return of the books, Zion at least influenced the emperor to the extent that he appointed four Christian experts to investigate Pfefferkorn's accusations. Three of them asserted the

validity of the latter's claims, while the fourth, Johannes Reuchlin, disagreed. A leading humanist, Reuchlin had shortly before published the first grammar of the Hebrew language. A fierce controversy ensued between Reuchlin, who was supported by Ulrich von Hutten, Erasmus and other humanists, and the adherents of medieval scholasticism, whom the humanists derided as 'obscurantists.' The Jews of Frankfurt played no further part in this dispute, which was of fundamental importance to intellectual developments in modern times: they had been given back their books after promising Maximilian not to sell the pawned jewels of the duke of Brunswick, who had run up debts in the emperor's service. This rapid succession of events testifies both to the precarious basis of the Jews' existence in Frankfurt and to the ambivalence of their relations with the emperor, which oscillated between endangerment and protection.

Jews were spared threats to their existence in Frankfurt for a century after the failed attempts to expel them from the city. The number of those living in the Judengasse increased, rising in the course of the sixteenth century from approximately two hundred to more than 2,700. This population explosion resulted principally from migration caused in part by the expulsion of Jews from their old centers of Nuremberg and Mainz, but above all by Jewish families relocating from towns and villages in the Rhine/Main region.¹⁸ They were attracted by the growth in Frankfurt's economic importance: the fair became one of Europe's leading capital markets, while the influx of Calvinist refugees from the Spanish Netherlands led to the establishment of a flourishing and innovative textile industry. Frankfurt's total population increased to approximately 20,000 in the course of the century. By around 1600, then, Jews accounted for ten to fifteen per cent of the city's inhabitants. These figures are only estimates, and epidemics and war will have brought about considerable fluctuations, yet the fact remains that no other major European city at this time had such a large Jewish population.

Building

The population explosion had far-reaching consequences for the internal structure of the Judengasse. Since the city council hardly extended the area, it became ever more densely built-up.¹⁹ Houses were erected on every vacant plot of land; stables and *sukkot* (structures, often temporary, used during the Feast of Tabernacles) were converted into dwellings; and large existing houses were divided up into two or three units. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were some two hundred residences occupied by about 450 families. The city council's reaction to the influx of Jews is revealing. On the one hand, the religious hostility that had prompted the establishment of the ghetto and the attempts to expel the Jewish population had not declined. Indeed, Martin Luther's fierce anti-Jewish polemics had reinforced prevailing attitudes in the Protestant city. On the other hand, the council tolerated the growth of the Jewish population and gave permission for new houses to be built in the Judengasse. Occasional efforts to limit the number of Jews or at least expel the poorer members of the community were short-lived and largely ineffective. The increase was accepted mainly for economic reasons. Growing revenue from the Jews and their credit brokering practices acquired major significance for the city council, since bad speculation in copper mining had caused it to incur heavy debts. Jewish merchants performed important functions at the fair and as money-changers. Many were also active in outlying areas, supplying neighboring rulers and the inhabitants of towns and villages in the Rhine/Main region with goods and credit.