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Fulda's Jewish Communal and Spiritual Leadership during the Early Modern period

By *Abraham David**

Abstract

Der Aufsatz gibt einen Überblick über die Welt des Geistes der jüdischen Gemeinde Fuldas im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert, wie sie sich aufgrund unterschiedlicher hebräischer Quellen darstellt. Aus jener Zeit sind an die zwölf Gelehrte als intellektuelle Elite und geistige Führer der jüdischen Gemeinde Fuldas bekannt, die ihr vor allem als Oberhaupt der örtlichen Jeschiva und des Rabbinatsgerichts dienten. Einige von ihnen sind dort geboren oder aufgewachsen, hatten ihre Wirkungsstätten aber andernorts. Andere verbrachten einen Teil ihres Lebens in Fulda als Gemeindevorsteher oder Rabbiner. Manche von ihnen sind bekannt geblieben als Autoren von Beiträgen zur rabbinischen Literatur, die handschriftlich und/ oder gedruckt überdauert und vor allem Halacha oder Talmudauslegung zum Gegenstand haben, aber auch andere Themenbereiche wie Predigten, Bibelexegese und Kabbala.

Während das Interesse für Kabbala unter aschkenasischen Juden zwar im 14./15. Jahrhundert begann, setzte die Beschäftigung mit jüdischer Mystik in breiteren Kreisen erst in der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts ein, wie das Beispiel Fulda zeigt. Allerdings stand Fuldas kleine jüdische Gemeinde zu jener Zeit im Schatten größerer jüdischer Zentren wie Frankfurt am Main, Worms, und/ oder Prag.

The article briefly surveys the intellectual world of Fulda's Jewish community in the 16th and 17th centuries as reflected in various Hebrew sources. From that period, about twelve sages can be identified as intellectual elite and spiritual leaders of Fulda's Jewish community, serving it especially as heads of the local Yeshiva and Beit ha-Din. Some of them were born or grew up there, but had their position elsewhere. Others spent part of their life in Fulda as communal or spiritual leaders. Few of them remained known as authors of contributions to rabbinical literature that survived in manuscript and/ or print, dealing especially with Halakhab or Talmudic interpretation, but also with matters related to other fields, such as sermons, Biblical studies, and Kabbalah.

Whereas among Ashkenazi circles interest in Kabbalah began in the 14th and 15th centuries, involvement in Jewish mysticism started to become more popular from the second half of the 16th century only, as can also be learned from Fulda. However, at that time the small Jewish community of Fulda stood in the shade of bigger Jewish centres, such as Frankfurt am Main, Worms, and/ or Prague.

Until today, there is not yet much research done on the spiritual-intellectual, economic, and social life of Fulda's Jewish community in late Medieval and

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Early Modern times. From that long period, we have very few internal sources, and they even do not allow us to give an abridged description of those aspects of the history of Fulda's Jewry.

The existence of a Jewish community in Fulda is well attested in general and Jewish sources throughout the Middle Ages. A short survey on the medieval Jewish community in Fulda can be found in the *Germania Judaica* series (the first three parts), including the traumatic events that happened in the Fulda Jewish community. The first Crusades in 1096, the blood libel case in 1235, and the terrible disaster of the Black Death in 1349, which destroyed the Jewish community in Fulda.¹ It seems that a decade later, the Jewish community there started to be re-established, but we do not have any details as to its life and activities.²

I started to collect information about Jewish life in Fulda from the communal and spiritual points of view, contained in printed or non-printed Hebrew sources. These include rabbinic literature, Jewish ordinances as well as some other kinds of records, which give us the opportunity to learn something about the inner Jewish life in Fulda in the Early Modern period.

As far as I know, records and documents in local archives and abroad bearing on the history and culture of the Jewish community in Fulda during that period are rather rare compared to those related to modern times. At the Archive for the History of the Jewish people in Jerusalem, there are only a few references to the Fulda Jewish community, which belong to the 16th/17th centuries. This situation reflect also two monographs on the Fulda Jewry, which came out in recent decades.³

So far, I have found some Halakhic works and other relevant references in Hebrew manuscripts that provide information about Fulda's Jews, but only a few of them have previously been used in research.

From some Hebrew and German sources of the Early Modern period, i.e. the 16th and 17th centuries, it seems that the Jewish community in Fulda was quite active, as it is likewise attested by the two "Judenordnungen", i.e.

1 For sources on the Fulda Jews in the Middle Ages, see: *Germania Judaica*, vol. I, Tübingen 1963, pp. 113-114; vol. II, Tübingen 1968, pp. 267-268 ; vol. III, Tübingen 1987, pp. 419-421; S. SALFELD, *Das Martyrrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches*, Berlin 1898, pp. 3, 13, 69, 70, 80, 83.

2 For a survey of Fulda's Jewish community in the Middle Ages and Early Modern time, see: P. HORN / N. H. SONN, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Fulda, Ein Gedenkbuch*, Tel-Aviv 1969, pp. 9-42, and M. IMHOF, *Juden im Deutschland und 1000 Jahre Judentum in Fulda*, Petersberg 2011, pp. 85-159.

3 See note 2 above.

statements or privileges explicating the legal status and the rights of the Hessen Jews, which were issued in Fulda. The first one was issued by Georg II (1605/1626-1661), the “landgraven [Landgraf] zu Hessen-Darmstadt” in the year 1615 (?).⁴ The other one was issued by Wilhelm V (1602/1627-1637), “landgraven zu Hessen-Kassel”, in 1633. Ernst Roth has re-published both of the “Judenordnungen” from a printed edition.

In addition to that, from some Hebrew sources we learn about certain aspects of Jewish life in Fulda prior to the expulsion of all the Jews from this town in 1671 (see next two pages).⁵

To begin with the בית הדין (*Beit ha-Din*, Rabbinical Court) of the community in Fulda. As usual in Jewish courts, there were three members nominated as דיינים (*dayyanim*, judges).

In Hebrew and German records of the Jewish synod of the German communities, which convened at Frankfurt am Main in 1603, we learn that the major Rabbinical Courts throughout Germany were in Frankfurt am Main, Worms, Fulda, Friedberg, and Günzburg in Schwaben.⁶ No doubt, this is evidence for evaluating anew the important role, which the Jewish

4 The paradoxical timing of this first “Judenordnung” has been analyzed by E. ROTH, “Hessische und Fuldaer Judenordnungen”, in: *Udim* 9-10 (1978-1980), pp. 97-118.

5 On this expulsion, see: HORN / SONN, *Geschichte der Juden in Fulda* (note 2), pp. 40-42. New research on this event has been done by IMHOF, *Juden im Deutschland* (note 2), pp. 128-140. Recently, I have found in a manuscript, which is located in Cincinnati (Hebrew Union College, Ms. 793) an unknown Hebrew brief record on this event. The record is part of a *Yizkor* prayer and contains a list of Jewish communities in the *Reich*, which were persecuted throughout the generations. It reads פולדה, והגירוש שהיה בשנת תל"ב [צ"ל: תל"א 1671] ובכל המדינה שלשה קהילות חשובות נחרבו, ויותר משלש מאות בעלי בתים נתגרשו (“Fulda and the expulsion that happened in the year [5]432 (it should be [5]431= 1671) and in the whole province. Three important communities were destroyed and more than three hundred householders (families) were expelled.”)

6 This point is discussed by E. ZIMMER, *Jewish Synods in Germany during the Late Middle Ages* (1286-1603), New York 1978, pp. 77-80, 154-155, and 192. – On this influential rabbinical convention, see – *inter alia* - V. PRESS, “Kaiser Rudolf II. und der Zusammenschluss der deutsche Judenheit. Die sogenannte Frankfurter Rabbinerverschwörung von 1603 und ihre Folgen”, in: A. HAVERKAMP (ed.), *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 243-293; B. E. Klein, *Wohltat und Hochverrat, Kurfürst Ernst von Köln, Juda bar Chajjim und die Juden im Alten Reich* (Netiva – Wege deutsch-jüdischer Geschichte, vol. 5), Hildesheim / Zürich / New York 2003, pp. 18-27, and A. Diethard, “Die Rabbinerverschwörung in Frankfurt 1603 und die westfälischen Juden”, in: *Westfälische Forschungen* 59 (2009), pp. 397-408.

24 1671 5

Herzogs der Böhme rüchzt und Jüres leibstige Fürst
hundert Jahr, sein Bernhard Gustav, Abbt des Nisth Julia,
Zinnschaw Nijsein fuzlanthen, Dines Germanium und Gallien
Grimat, Manngewert für Baden und fuzlanthen, Coartitor des
Fürstes Nisth Rampen, Landtgraw für fuzlanthen, gawie
Zinnschaw und fuzlanthen, sein für Wöthel, Badenweiler, Cofe
und Maßberg, der fuzer und fuzer Nisth Laronius, Nisth
gawie für fuzlanthen, das Landtgraw und fuzlanthen
und Zinnschaw fuzlanthen, Nisth gawie für fuzlanthen
bey für gawie für fuzlanthen alle Jüden als ein fuzlanthen
hauptauch für fuzlanthen wöthel für das Landt und Nisth gawie
für fuzlanthen und fuzlanthen, Nisth nicht anwien für
für fuzlanthen Landtgraw, Nisth gawie für fuzlanthen, die
für Nisth Nisth Nisth und fuzlanthen, Nisth gawie
für fuzlanthen Nisth Nisth ein für fuzlanthen, mit gawie für
für fuzlanthen Nisth Nisth gawie für fuzlanthen
Nisth für das fuzlanthen Landtgraw und fuzlanthen
Manngewert für fuzlanthen, Nisth für fuzlanthen, und dann
für fuzlanthen für fuzlanthen gawie für fuzlanthen
mit Nisth Nisth für fuzlanthen, Nisth für fuzlanthen die Jüden
inuentum, Nisth für fuzlanthen für fuzlanthen

Expulsion Order to expel all Jews from Fulda,
issued by Prince Bernhard Gustav of Baden-Durlach on 24 March 1671⁷

7 I am grateful to Dr Michael Imhof, who has published it in his: *Juden in Deutschland und 1000 Jahre Judentum in Fulda*, Petersberg 2011, pp. 135-136, for kindly having permitted to reprint it here.

Swigen Eiden sin biadrumb ind Dittid fingslatten hadt demen selben
 ffutz zu gebaus / an / so was her die mayst kund ad inserim bis das geswab
 ten eines Cwisser selbster angefallat hadt fingsluffen sein biend
 zu gedulten, demn magst sich das in gantzem land nit blers auf
 oder In der fingsluffen nicht fuffte fustrecken sollt. / Hier nit tonig
 der fingsluffen Datto hadt andere fuffung hadt anlagen des land
 Obes fingsluffen folgen zu lasten hadt nit zu der demt laumen zu dief
 Die Hochland sindt In der Rease der glucklichend huter offd fuffg.
 der Hoffe fuffe fuffe. bis auf das Capitul hadt der Datto zu fuffen
 in hollmayt der blugem Datto bezugrichter fuffigeln bezugrichter, hadt
 zu moforow bezugrichter Jedem fuffe fuffe zu gestallat waders. D. gebes
 fuffe der 24 zu Martij 1695.

L. S.
 Dec. 17

L. S.
 Capituli.

L. S.
 civitates
 palatium

community in Fulda played in Western and Central Germany at that time. In this context, we encounter R. NAFTALI HIRTZ B. DAVID BACHARACH who was a member in the forum of that synod and delegate of the Fulda Jewish community.⁸

It seems that the founder of the Fulda Rabbinate as well as the *Beit ha-Din* there was R. DAVID B. ISAAC known as a prominent rabbinical figure at that time. R. David was born in Friedberg probably in the forties of the 16th century where he studied under the supervision of the great sage R. Hayyim son of Bezalel,⁹ the brother of the famous R. Judah Liwa (Loew), the *Maharal* of Prague.¹⁰ In the beginning of the eighties R. David moved to Fulda where he held the Rabbinical position as well as the head of the *Bait ha-Din*, besides being the head of a ישיבה (*Yeshivah*, Talmudic Academy). Ten years later, he left Fulda after a bitter struggle in 1591 between him and one of the Jewish community members who refused to accept his rabbinical leadership. The margrave [“Markgraf”] was also involved in this case. Then R. David went back to Friedberg, his birth town and after a while, he wandered in search of a rabbinical position in several localities, such as Günzburg in Schwaben, again in Fulda, Pappenheim and Bingen, where he probably died in 1607. R. David left some Kabbalistic and Halakhic writings. However, only three of his works are preserved. One of them is מגדל דוד (*Migdal David*, “Tower of David”), which is dedicated to the study of *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), a collection of classic Kabbalistic works, some of them are reproduced in full, of others certain portions only.¹¹ His *Migdal David* has never been published. It was R. David’s intention to include into

8 See: ZIMMER, *Jewish Synods* (note 6), pp. 91, 116, 188-189.

9 On him, see: Y. ZIMMER, -פרקים בתולדות הרבנות בגרמניה במאה השש-עשרה, Beer Sheva 1999, pp. 177-219.

10 The Maharal was one of the greatest spiritual figures in Ashkenaz in the second half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century. He passed away in 1609. A lot was written on him, inter alia, see: E. REINER (ed.), מהר"ל, אקדמות: (ed.), *Maharal, Overtures: Biography, Doctrine and Influence*, Jerusalem 2015. For a short introduction into his life and work(s), see: B. GROSS, Der Hohe Rabbi Juda Löw als Theologe und Gemeinderabbiner, in: J. CARLEBACH (ed.), *Das aschkenasische Rabbinat*, Berlin 1995, pp. 141-150.

11 This text is preserved at least in three manuscripts. One of them is located in Jerusalem, The National Library, Ms. Hebr. 80 397 and was described by G. G. SCHOLEM, כתבי-יד בקבלה הנמצאים בבית הספרים הלאומי והאוניברסיטאי בירושלם, *Catalogus codicum Cabbalisticorum Hebraicorum quot conservantur in bibliotheca Hierosolymitana quae est Judaerum populi et Universitatis Hebraicae*, Jerusalem 1930, no. 43, pp. 106-115; ZIMMER, גחלתן של חכמים (note 9), pp. 30-33.

his work those Kabbalistic texts (in alphabetical order), which were unknown among Ashkenazi scholars interested in *Kabbalah*. However, he also included some Kabbalistic texts that were composed by the חסידי אשכנז (Hasidei Ashkenaz), the Jews who practiced Pietism in Medieval Germany in the 12th and 13th centuries. Among them were R. Judah b. Shemuel *be-Hasid* of Regensburg (c. 1140/50-1217) and R. El'azar b. Judah b. Kalonymos of Worms (c. 1176-1238)¹² as well as some other living Ashkenazi traditions of practical *Kabbalah* which were neglected in his time. His goal was to renew interest in those old unknown texts.¹³ In addition to that, R. David's contributions to the understanding of halakhic matters include four more works, of which two only are preserved: (1) אמת המשפט (*Emet ha-mishpat*), a commentary on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*¹⁴ and (2) דוד משכיל (*David Maskil*).¹⁵ Both of them, however, are not available in printed editions.¹⁶

R. ISAAC B. ELI'EZER MASIE was probably R. David's successor in Fulda. This sage was born in Friedberg, apparently in the thirties of the 16th century. He occupied a rabbinical position in four communities in different German regions: Hechingen in Württemberg; Aach in Baden where he held the positions of Head of the *Beit ha-Din* and head of the *Yeshivah* between the years 1577 until 1585 approximately; Günzburg in Schwaben where he

12 A lot has been written on this group of mystics during the last fifty years; see *inter alia*: J. DAN, תורת הסוד של חסידי אשכנז, Jerusalem 1968; I. G. MARCUS, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany*, Leiden 1981; E. KANARFOGEL, *Peerings through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*, Detroit 2000; H. SOLOVEITCHIK, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism, Sefer Hasidim I and the Influence of Hasidei Ashkenaz", in: *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92 (2002), pp. 455-493. – On R. Judah he-Hasid of Regensburg and R. El'azar of Worms and their writings, see: DAN, תורת הסוד (note 12), index; J. DAN, ר' יהודה, החסיד, Jerusalem 2006; E. E. URBACH, בעלי התוספות, Jerusalem 1980, pp. 392-411, and index; H. LISS, *El'azar Ben Yehuda von Worms: Hilkebot ha-Kavod. Die Lehrsätze von der Herrlichkeit Gottes* (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, vol. 12), Tübingen 1997, and KANARFOGEL, *Peerings through the Lattices* (note 12), index.

13 Some matters related to this trend are discussed by J. BERKOVITZ, "Jewish Law and Ritual in Early Modern Germany", in: D. P. BELL / S. E. BURNETT (eds.), *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Studies in Central European Histories, vol. 37), Leiden / Boston 2006, pp. 489-502.

14 Preserved as an autograph in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Opp. 251.

15 Preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Opp. 728.

16 On him and his writings, see: E. ZIMMER, "R. David b. Isaac of Fulda: The Trials and Tribulations of a Sixteenth Century German Rabbi", in: *Jewish Social Studies* 48 (1983), pp. 217-231; ZIMMER, גחלתן של חכמים (note 9), pp. 29-42.

led a *Yeshivah* at least until 1594. His last rabbinical position was in Fulda where he passed away a few years later. He left a few Halakhic treatises, but only one survived in a manuscript, a collection of halakhic *responsa*, entitled יפה נוף (*Yefeh Nof*),¹⁷ published in Jerusalem in 1986.¹⁸

Halakhic *responsa* are שאלות ותשובות, *questions or queries and answers*. The rabbinic term denotes an exchange of letters in which one party consults another on a halakhic matter. The units of those *responsa* were compiled during the whole period R. Isaac Masie served as rabbi in several towns, in Hechingen, in Aach, Günzburg, and Fulda. *Responsa* are not based on hypothetical questions, but reflect reality. They tell us, what Jewish life in the above-mentioned principalities and elsewhere meant. From the *responsa* we can learn a lot about Jewish life in the second half of the 16th century, e.g. about economic life; issues related to the legal status; traditional religious customs as well as Jewish settlement distribution in those regions.¹⁹

In the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, most of the Jews living on German territories were permitted to settle in the countryside only, i.e. in small villages. Jewish residence in major towns and cities was definitely prohibited after the expulsion of the Jews from numerous towns during the period from the end 14th until the beginning of the 16th centuries. However, very few Jews got permission to settle or re-settle in central towns, such as Frankfurt am Main, Worms, Mainz (after 1583) etc. as well as in smaller towns like Fulda, Bingen, and Friedberg.

In this article, my intention is to introduce briefly some other Spiritual leaders in the 17th century who had connections with the communal and spiritual life in Fulda as their birthplace or their town of residence.

We will start with R. PINḤAS HA-LEVI HOROWITZ, who died in Prague in 1653). He belonged to the famous Horowitz family in Bohemia and was one of the communal leaders of the Prague Jewish community after the time of R. Judah Liwa, the *Maharal* of Prague, who passed away in 1609.²⁰ R. Pinḥas, known as the head of a *Yeshivah* there, held also the position of a דיין (*dayyan*, judge) at the בית הדין הגדול (*Beit ha-Din ha-Gadol*, “Supreme court”) in Prague.

After the year 1616, he moved to Fulda. There he was appointed head of the Jewish Court and, in addition to that, held a position at the *Yeshivah*

17 Manuscript in Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, Ms. Heb. 40 522.

18 A. BERGER (ed.), שאלות ותשובות יפה נוף לרבינו יצחק מזיא זצ"ל, *Halakhic Responsa Yefeh Nof*, with introduction by E. ZIMMER, Jerusalem 1986.

19 On this sage and his *responsa* collection, see: ZIMMER, גחלתן של חכמים (note 9), pp. 84-105; ZIMMER, introduction to שאלות ותשובות יפה נוף (note 18), pp. 11-28.

20 On him, see: above note 10.

there for a period which is unknown. His wife was the granddaughter of the famous R. Judah Liwa, the *Mabaral* of Prague.²¹

R. MESHULLAM ELI'EZER SUSSMANN BRILIN, head of the *Beit ha-Din* in Worms, moved in 1652 to Fulda and was appointed head of the *Yeshivah* there as well as head of the *Beit ha-Din*.²² His son in law was the famous distinguished Rabbi in Worms, R. YA'IR ḤAYYIM BACHARACH (1638-1702), who spent a few years in Fulda as student at the *Yeshivah* run by his father-in-law.²³ One of Bacharach's colleagues, R. ME'IR STERN was likewise a resident of Fulda and highly respected by him.²⁴

R. ELIJAH B. MOSE LOANZ (1565-1636), scholar and kabbalist known also as אליהו בעל שם (*Elijah Ba'al Shem*, "Elijah, Master of the Divine Name"), whose position as head of the *Beit ha-Din* in Fulda lasted few years only, from 1605 to 1609. He was the grandson of the widely known diplomat and intercessor R. Josef (Josel or Joselman) of Rosheim in Alsace (c. 1480-1554), the famous sixteenth-century Jewish leader and advocate of the Jews of the Holy Roman Empire under Maximilian I (1459/1486-1519) and Charles V (1500/1519-1558) and author of some important writings.²⁵ R. Elijah Loanz himself was born in Frankfurt am Main and held rabbinical positions in several Jewish communities in Western Germany, such as Worms (here he

21 See the information on him in O. MUNELES, כתובות מבית-העלמין היהודי העתיק בפראג, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 327-328.

22 On him, see: B. S. HAMBURGER / E. ZIMMER (eds.), מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא לרבי, יו"פא שמש, 2 vols. Jerusalem 1988-1992, vol. I, Introduction, p. 51.

23 On this outstanding sage in Germany at that time, see: D. KAUFMANN, *R. Jair Chajjim Bacharach*, Trier 1894; I. TWERSKY, "Law and Spirituality in the Seventeenth Century: A case Study in R. Yair Hayyim Bacharach", in: I. TWERSKY / B. SEPTIMUS (eds.), *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. pp. 447-467. Some other studies on him have been recently written by J. R. BERKOVITZ, מחקרים בתולדות יהודי אשכנז - *Studies on the History of the Jews of Ashkenaz, presented to Eric Zimmer*, Ramat Gan 2008, pp. 29-56; J. R. BERKOVITZ, בין ביוגרפיה לאוטוביוגרפיה, יוסף דעת (*Yosef Da'at, Studies in Modern Jewish History in Honor of Yosef Salmon*), Jerusalem 2010, pp. 33-66; J. R. BERKOVITZ, "Crisis and authority in early modern Ashkenaz", in: *Jewish Studies* 26 (2012), pp. 179-199; J. R. BERKOVITZ, "The Persona of a 'Poseq': Law and self-fashioning in Seventeenth-Century Ashkenaz", in: *Modern Judaism* 32 (2012), pp. 251-269.

24 In his halakhic *responsa*, *Havot Ya'ir*, Lemberg 1896, no. 66, fol. 38r-39r, he brings one of R. Me'ir's halakhic *responsa*.

25 On him, see: S. STERN, *Josel von Rosheim*, Stuttgart 1959; CH. FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (Studies in Jewish History and Culture, vol. 12), Leiden Boston 2006.

was head of the *Yeshivah*), Mainz, Hanau, and Friedberg. His writings cover several areas, biblical interpretation, Halakhah, Midrash, and Kabbalah. Most of them survived in manuscript only, written by himself and now located in the Bodleian library in Oxford. Among them are (1) מעגלי צדק (*Ma'agelei sedeq*), a super commentary on Rabbeinu Bahya b. Asher Ibn Halawa's (1255-1340) commentary on the Pentateuch, completed in 1612/3;²⁶ (2) אדרת אליהו (*Aderet Eliyahu*), a commentary on the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendour),²⁷ in three volumes, completed in 1628/9;²⁸ (3) צפנת פענח (*Sofnat pa'aneah*), a commentary on the *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*,²⁹ completed in 1632;³⁰ (4) and a comprehensive commentary on *Midrash Rabbah*, whose time of composition is unknown.³¹ To his printed writings, belong (1) רינת דודים (*Rinnat dodim*), a commentary on Canticles, published in Basel in 1600 and other later editions, (2) מכלל יופי (*Mikhlol yofi*), a commentary on Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), also published in Basel in 1630 and later editions.³² His comprehensive (three volumes) אדרת אליהו (*Aderet Eliyahu*) as well as his צפנת פענח (*Sofnat pa'aneah*) are both commentaries on *Sefer ha-Zohar*. The *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the tremendous Kabbalistic treatise was quite popular in Spain and – after the expulsion from there in 1492 – in the Spanish Diaspora, in North Africa and other countries around the Mediterranean, the Near Eastern communities as well as in Italy. However, it was definitely not popular among Ashkenazi mystical circles until the second half of the 16th century. From that time, only one Ashkenazi commentary on this book is known, and that is a commentary written by R. Mose b. Israel Isserles (c. 1530-1572), the great scholar in Cracow, generally known under the acronym of

26 Ms. Bodleian Library Ms. Opp. 216.

27 The central work of Kabbalistic literature.

28 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Opp. 395-397. R. Elijah Loanz integrated in his commentary the commentary on *Sefer ha-Zohar* of R. Moses Isserles of Cracow, see: B. RICHLER, אפרוש הזהר לרמ"א, in: *Kiryat Sefer* 58 (1983), pp. 196-197. Recently, the first volume on Genesis came out by A. D. SHATLAND, Jerusalem 1998.

29 Medieval Kabbalistic work, which is linked to the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, in fact, a commentary on *Beresbit*, see: G. G. SCHOLEM, *Kabbalah*, New York 1974, pp. 218-219 and index.

30 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. 538.

31 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Opp. 199, contains only on Genesis (sections: *Beresbit* to *Va-Yislab*).

32 On him and his family, see: A. EPSTEIN, כתבי אברהם עפשטיין, vol. I, Jerusalem 1950, pp. 340-349; I. TISHBI, תעודות מכתב-ידו של ר' משה לואנץ בנו של ר' יוזלמן מרוסהיים, in: *Sefer Assaf – S. Assaf Jubilee volume*, Jerusalem 1953, pp. 515-528; HAMBURGER / ZIMMER (eds.), מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא (note 22), vol. I, pp. 48-50.

his name *Remu* or *Ha-Rema*.³³ A generation later, the abovementioned R. Eliyahu Loanz authored a second comprehensive commentary on the *Zohar*. It was from this time onwards that the study of *The Book of Splendour* significantly gained momentum among Ashkenazi Jews.³⁴

One of his disciples in Worms was the most famous sage R. YIFTAH JOSEPH JUSPA HA-LEWI SHAMMASH OF WARMISA MANZEPACH (1604-1678). Born and grown up in Fulda until the age of nineteen, when he joined the *Yeshivah* of the aforementioned R. Pinḥas Horowitz. However, most of his life, i.e. more than fifty years, he spent in Worms. There he settled in 1623 and studied at the prestigious *Yeshivah* headed by R. Elijah Loanz. At that time, Worms was one of the leading Jewish communities in Germany.³⁵ Its Rabbis and other Jewish scholars were famous in all of Europe, and its great *Yeshivah* enjoyed widespread reputation. This sage, R. Joseph Juspa Shammash, was very active in the Jewish community in Worms as a *Shammash* (attendant) and scribe of that community. His deep involvement in daily communal life in Worms gave rise to his bearing responsibility for all the functions generally fulfilled by a communal *Shammash*, i.e. by the communal scribe and the secretary of the Rabbinical Court. Inspired by his experiences as scribe of the community and secretary of the Rabbinical Court (*Beit ha-Din*), R. Joseph Juspa compiled his ספר המנהגים (*Sefer ha-Minhagim*), a comprehensive collection of traditional religious customs, which were observed and practiced in Worms' Jewish community. This tremendous collection was copied several times and only recently published in a critical edition.³⁶ There are two more books, which R. Yiftah Joseph Juspa authored dealing with Jewish life in Worms: (1) מעשה נסים (*Ma'aseh Nissim*, "The Book of Marvels or Wonders"), which consists of twenty-three stories on that topic. The first edition came out in Frankfurt am Main in 1662. In addition to that book, (2) at least a small part of the Worms' Jewish community ledger פנקס הקהילה (*Pinḳas ha-qehillah*, "Minute book of the community") survived, which covers the

33 On him and his writings, see: A. SIV, הרמ"א רבי משה איסרלש, Jerusalem 1957; J. BEN-SASSON, משנתו העיונית של הרמ"א, Jerusalem 1984.

34 His interest in some other topics of Kabbalah is reflected in a volume of Kabbalistic writings which he copied by himself for his own purpose in 1582/3. Manuscript in: Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Heid 102.

35 On Worms as a great Jewish centre at that time, see: HAMBURGER / ZIMMER (eds.), מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא (note 22), vol. I, pp. 61-65; F. REUTER, *Warmisa, 1000 Jahre Juden in Worms*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, pp. 63-99; N. ROEMER, *German City, Jewish Memory, The Story of Worms*, Hanover / London 2010, pp. 32-49.

36 HAMBURGER / ZIMMER (eds.), מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא (note 22).

years 1656 to 1659 and contains the records of the business and other commercial activities of Worms' Jews, developed right after the end of the Thirty Years War.³⁷

R. AARON SAMUEL OF KREMnitz (KRZEMIENIEC). Born in Poland, he was a disciple of the great sage R. Solomon Ephraim of Luntshitz (Polish: Łęczyca) in Lemberg.³⁸ In 1606, R. Aaron Samuel made his residence in Fürth. Few years later, in 1611 he became rabbi of the Jewish community in Eibelstadt (in Niederfranken). Again, few years later, in the year 1615 he was appointed head of the *Beit ha-Din* in Fulda, a position, which he held until his death in 1620 (?).

R. Aaron Samuel composed several books, but only two of them are known. One, called באר שבע (*Beer Sheva*), never has been published, and probably got lost. The other one, however, נשמת אדם (*Nishmat Adam*, “The Spirit or Soul of Man”) has been printed several times; its *editio princeps* in Hanau in 1611. Based primarily on Kabbalistic works, but also on Medieval Jewish philosophical tractates, *Nishmat Adam* is designed as a compendium of ideas related to the meaning of man's spirit and soul.³⁹

R. ME'IR B. YACOB SCHIFF (1605-1641), better known under the acronym of his name as מהר"ם שיף (*MaHaRa"m Schiff*). He was born in Frankfurt am Main. His father R. Jacob was a well-known *dayyan* (“judge”) and communal leader there. R. Me'ir Schiff was an outstanding learned person. At the age of seventeen already he was appointed official Rabbi of Fulda's Jewish community. He also headed the *Yeshivah* there. In 1641, the Jewish community in Prague elected him head of its *Beit ha-Din* as well as head of its *Yeshivah*. Unfortunately, he was not given the chance to hold his positions in Prague longer than a few months, because he passed away already that same year.

However, he was a prolific writer and largely contributed to the development of rabbinical literature. Despite his short life, he authored *novellae* as well as commentaries on the entire Babylonian Talmud, entitled חידושי הלכות (*Hiddushei Halakhot*, Halakhic *novellae*), but most of these *novellae* were

37 On him, see: A. EPSTEIN, “Die Wormser Minhagbücher”, in: *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, Breslau 1900, pp. 288-317; HAMBURGER / ZIMMER (eds.), מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא (note 22), vol. I, pp. 23-48; S. EIDELBERG, R. *Juspa Shammash of Warmisa (Worms). Jewish Life in 17th Century Worm*, Jerusalem 1991.

38 On him and his thought, see: H. H. BEN-SASSON, הגות והנהגה, השקפותיהם החברתיות, של יהודי פולין בשלהי ימי הביניים פתיחות והסתגרות - J. ELBAUM, היצירה הרוחנית הספרותית בפולין ובארצות אשכנז בשלהי המאה השש

39 On the content of this book, see: ELBAUM, פתיחות והסתגרות (note 38), pp. 119, note 112, 191, note 33, 230, note 31, 350, note 205, 353, note 219.

burnt in a fire that broke out in Frankfurt am Main in 1711. However, of his *novellae* to the Talmudic tractate *Ketubbot* an autograph is preserved.⁴⁰

For this reason, from *Maharam Schiff's* works on the Babylonian Talmud only *novellae* on some tractates are still extant, which were published for the first time by his grandson R. Yeḥiel Michael Stern ha-Kohen who lived in Frankfurt am Main. The first part of *Maharam Schiff's novellae*, containing the *novellae* on the Talmudic tractates *Beza*, *Ketubbot*, *Gittin*, *Bava Metzriah* and *Hulin*, came out in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe in 1737. The second part, the *novellae* on *Shabbat*, *Bava Kama*, *Bava Batra*, *Sanhedrin* and *Zevahim*, followed there in 1741.

Bearing witness to his intellectual stature and integrity, these *novellae* were quite popular, often studied and adapted by learned Talmudists throughout the generations. This can be inferred from the mere fact that *Maharam Schiff's novellae* were not only reprinted several times, but also, from the middle of the 19th century onwards, together with other Talmudic commentaries appended to various Talmudic tractates. Furthermore, *Maharam Schiff's novellae* themselves became the subject of interpretation and commentary, e.g. by R. Mordechai Mordash of Paritzk, and were appended to the edition of his *Hiddushei Halakhot*, Paritzk 1810 and others as well.⁴¹

In his preface to the first part of *Hiddushei Halakhot*, R. Me'ir Schiff mentions other works on Rabbinic literature written by himself, such as a commentary on the Halakhic codex *Arba' Turim* of R. Jacob b. R. Asher (c. 1269-c. 1343) and a commentary to the Pentateuch. Unfortunately, both of them are no longer extant. In addition to them, he left also a collection of sermons, which he delivered in Fulda. Some of them are preserved and appended to his *Hiddushei Halakhot*. It seems that he also dealt with Kabbalah.⁴²

R. JUDAH MEHLER REUTLINGEN (1609-1659). Born and grown up in Fulda, he was one of R. Me'ir Schiff's students at his *Yeshivah*. It seems that he departed his native town before the end of the third decade of the 17th century. In the later period of the Thirty Years War, in 1632, when Hessen became a major battlefield and heavy fights between Swedes under King

40 Manuscript in Frankfurt am Main, Stadt und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Oct. 31; see: E. ROTH / L. PRIJS, *Hebräische Handschriften* (Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, vol. VI, 1a), Wiesbaden 1982, p. 46

41 On him and on his writings, see: S. A. HORODETZKY, לקורות הרבנות, Warszawa 1911, pp. 191-199; M. HOROVITZ, *Frankfurter Rabbinen*, Ergänzungen von Josef Unna, Kfar Haroeh 1969, pp. 75-78; HORN / SONN, *Geschichte der Juden in Fulda* (note 2), pp. 37-38.

42 As mentioned in his preface to his book *Hiddushei Halakhot*, in the first part.

Gustav II Adolph (1594/1611-1632) and military forces of the Holy Roman Empire under Emperor Ferdinand II (1578/1619-1637) occurred there, we find him wandering through Hessen, because many towns and villages were destroyed in the years of war, and many people of both sides lost their lives on the battlefields. Thus, we meet the sage R. Judah in several towns of Hessen, among them Wenings, Hanau, and Friedberg, where in 1636 he studied at the *Yeshivah* of R. Moses of Bürgel (i.e. R. Mose b. Yishai Joseph Bürgel; c. 1575-1643).⁴³ In 1638, he returned to Hanau, and in 1644, he was appointed communal Rabbi in Bingen and head of its *Yeshivah*. There he stayed until his death, in 1659. R. Judah Mehler Reutlingen had a very good reputation as communal Rabbi no less than as head of the *Beit ha-Din*. During his long stay in Bingen, he was offered a number of high rabbinical positions in several important Jewish communities outside Hessen: in Koblenz, Trier, and Mainz. Though all of these three communities offered him a special contract,⁴⁴ he refused to accept and to leave alone his community in Bingen. When he died, he left behind a huge volume containing a collection of sermons, entitled *שבות יהודה* (*Shevut Yehudah*), which he had delivered Shabbat after Shabbat in the Synagogue of Bingen or elsewhere during the years 1644-1658.⁴⁵ In his preface to this collection, he tells us also a little bit about himself. Since the author apparently unsuccessfully tried to publish this volume, to this very day, the collection remained in manuscript. It is currently stored in the library of the Schocken Institute for Judaic Studies in Jerusalem.⁴⁶ From other sources, we learn that he composed also some other rabbinical works, *inter alia*, a second collection of sermons,⁴⁷ and a number of halakhic *responsa*.⁴⁸ In addition to that, he possibly worked also as scribe and copied a few Hebrew

43 On him, see: ZIMMER, גחלתן של חכמים (note 9), pp. 221-227.

44 In the preface to the collection of his sermons, which we will mention below, he includes the contracts, so we can learn something about the conditions of rabbinical positions in Germany at that time.

45 The manuscript used to be in the possession of Ph. Bloch who described it and published the preface in Hebrew with German translation, see: PH. BLOCH, "Ein vielbegehrter Rabbiner des Rheingaus, Juda Mehler Reutlingen", in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Juden, Festschrift zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag Martin Philippons*, Leipzig 1916, pp. 114-134.

46 Ms. 70057.

47 Moscow, Russian State Library, Ms. Guenzburg 1606.

48 Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, Ms. 890, fol. 29v, in three volumes. Moscow, Russian State Library, Ms. Guenzburg 1607-1609.

manuscripts.⁴⁹ A resident of Fulda was also his relative (uncle?) R. ME'IR MEHLER REUTLINGEN (REUTLINGER). Since here, in Fulda (in the years 1622/3⁵⁰), R. Me'ir had copied for himself a commentary by R. Moses b. Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570),⁵¹ on the *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur* prayers; it has been assumed that he was interested in Kabbalah studies as well.

To sum up. We have briefly surveyed the intellectual scenery of Fulda as reflected in various sources, particularly Hebrew sources, and introduced those Jewish scholars, who shaped that intellectual scenery throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

It turned out that none of them spent all his life in Fulda. Some of them were born or grew up there, but started their career and held their positions somewhere else. Others stayed there for a certain period of their life and served Fulda's Jewish community as rabbis and/or spiritual leaders. It seems that also in Fulda the position of a rabbi was not a permanent position, as it was more or less the normal case in other Jewish communities in Germany at that time as well. There are some reasons for this, indeed. Since the Late Middle Ages, particularly in the aftermath of the disastrous Black Death persecutions in 1349, and still more after the expulsions of the Jews from almost all major cities and towns in Germany, as mentioned above, the situation of the rabbinate deteriorated considerably. Furthermore, the bitter conflict between Jews and Protestant movements gaining more and more ground since the time of Martin Luther's appearance until the end of the Thirty Years War in the middle of the 17th century seems also to have contributed to the growing instability of rabbinical positions. Therefore, it cannot surprise that many rabbis moved frequently from town to town in search of a better rabbinical position or better conditions for the maintenance of Rabbinical Courts and/or *Yeshivot*.

49 For instance: The book of R. Elijah Loanz, *Aderet Eliyahu* (on Genesis) was copied in Bingen in 1652/3: Jerusalem, Schocken Institute for Judaic Studies, Ms. 12296. A volume on the Jewish calendar was copied in Bingen in 1649: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Or. Oct. 3150; *Sefer ha-Zifrah* (on Mathematics), was copied in Hanau in 1640/1: Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, Ms. 890; *More Hata'im* of R. El'azar of Worms, was copied in Bingen 1645/6: Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, Ms. 890.

50 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Opp. 696. He lived also in Frankfurt am Main, where he died in 1630; see: HOROVITZ, *Frankfurter Rabbinen* (note 41), p. 285.

51 Known by the acronym RaMa"Q. He was a prominent Kabbalist in Safed. On him, see: J. BEN-SHLOMO, תורת האלוהות של ר' משה קורדובירו, Jerusalem ²1986; B. SACK, בשערי הקבלה של רבי משה קורדובירו, Jerusalem 1995.

In addition to that, at that time the Fulda Jewish community, too, lived in the shadow of the major Jewish centres such as Frankfurt am Main, Worms, and Prague, thus sharing the same fate like others.

On the other hand, and maybe in response to the deteriorating life situation, during the same centuries, i.e. in the 14th and 15th centuries, we observe the beginning of interest in Kabbalah and the study of Kabbalistic texts in Ashkenaz. However, otherwise than in Spain and - after the expulsion – in the Spanish Diaspora as well as in the Oriental communities and Italy, the involvement in Jewish mysticism by Ashkenazi groups started to become more popular in the second half of the 16th century only.⁵² Here we see that scholars in and of Fulda took an active part in this involvement besides their preoccupation with halakhic matters and Talmudic interpretation, for instance: R. David b. Isaac, R. Elijah Loanz, R. Me'ir Schiff as well as R. Aaron Samuel of Kremnitz. Probably also R. Judah b. Samuel Reutlingen and R. Me'ir Reutlingen. The respective research, however, is still in its infancy only; and to the best of my knowledge, much more remained to be done in order to get the whole picture.

52 This point is clarified by ELBAUM, פתיחות והסתגרות (note 38), pp. 183-222. See also: BERKOVITZ, "Jewish Law and Ritual" (note 13), pp. 489-502.