

AN INVENTORY
TO THE ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION
1786-1868

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Table of Contents

NOTE TO RESEARCHERS Page 1
HISTORICAL SKETCH Page 2
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE Page 4
BOX AND FOLDER LIST Page 5
SUBJECT TRACINGS Page 6

NOTE TO RESEARCHERS

Provenance

The ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION was purchased from Zosa Szajkowski (Mr. Szajko Frydman), New York City, on behalf of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, by Dr. Herbert C. Zafren, the Librarian, in 1958.

Statistics

ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 1 1/2.
Number of containers: 3 Manuscript boxes.
Approximate number of items: 1,500.
Processed by: Leo Lichtenberg.
Date completed: 1977.

Access and Citations

The ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION is open to researchers deemed to be qualified by the Librarian. The original manuscript collection is available in the Klau Library. A suggested form for at least the first citation is:

Letter by Adolphe Cremieux, Edmond Halphen, Fould, Alphonse Cerf Berr, Cahen to the Members of the Commission of the Liquidation of the debts of the old community of Jews of Metz, October 31, 1813, ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Acknowledgements

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* " . . . dettes de l'ancienne communauté des Juifs de Metz."

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The following passages indicate in general terms the geneses and the liquidation of the debts of the "anciennes communautés" with which the documents of the ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION deal.

"The Emancipation Decrees did not put an end to the methods of the 'Ancien Regime,' particularly in the fiscal domain. . . . In April 1792, the Municipal Council of Bischheim lodged the soldiers exclusively with Jewish families."¹ "In 1789 . . . the Alsatian debts were . . . 181,652 livres, but one forced payment caused the Alsatian Jews to be indebted to Cerf Berr for [an additional] 130,000 livres. . . . Generally speaking, . . . the [Jewish] communities preferred to borrow from Christian creditors. Actually, those made long term loans, which were convertible into annuities. Such conditions could not be obtained from Jewish creditors."²

"The Jewish communities were not considered to be affected by the decree pertaining to the [religious] corporations, [therefore] their debts were not cancelled."³

". . . the failure to cancel the debts was an unconstitutional measure, because it presupposed that the Jews still have either the power or the right to organize themselves into [religious] corporations; this right and this power can no longer exist in France for any citizen . . ."⁴

"Thus, the new Jewish bodies were obliged, ipso facto, as inheritors, to repay the debts contracted by the former Jewish communities, whereas the other religions had been relieved of this burden."⁵

"In the same period [1846] the debts of the former Jewish communities were finally settled by partial repayments effected by the successor communities."⁶

1. Patrick Girard, Les Juifs de France de 1789 à 1860, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1976), p. 63. Translation by Felicia Tentner.

2. Op. cit., p. 67.

3. Op. cit., p. 68.

4. Ibid.

5. Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem) s. v. "France."

6. Ibid.

To summarize briefly, some of the debts existed before the Revolution, a great many were added during the Revolution and during the Terror. Despite official emancipation of the Jews and despite the dissolution of religious bodies, Jews continued to be treated not as individual Frenchmen of the "Mosaic Persuasion," but as members of corporate bodies. The communities organized by Napoleon were considered to be the heirs of the pre-revolutionary communities and were, therefore, obliged to assume responsibility for debts incurred prior to 1789 and during the years immediately following. Even Jews who had apostasized were not free from these obligations.⁷

7. Girard, p. 69.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The documents contained in the ALSACE-LORRAINE COLLECTION originate principally from Strasbourg, Metz, Avignon, and L'Isle. Only two folders deal with the last two localities, hence Avignon and L'Isle are not included in the name of the collection.

The general theme of the collection is the liquidation of the debts of the "Anciennes Communautés." Included in the collection are inventories, personal and communal financial statements, proceedings of debt liquidation commissions, copies of decrees, liquidation statements, and assessments, petitions, bills and receipts. The Lorraine material also consists of a goodly number of general communal records, particularly those dealing with communal expenses such as rabbis' and cantors' salaries as well as wages for candle-lighters, maintenance personnel, "crieurs," and repairmen. Many receipts of all sorts are in the collection.

Among the most famous names mentioned are Isaac Adolphe Crémieux, Rabbi David Sintzheim, and a member of the Furtado family.

There are extensive lists of Alsace-Lorraine localities in which individual Jews lived or in which small Jewish communities existed. Other lists enumerate the names of the places in which they lived, the sums paid to them and the sums still owed them. There are petitions requesting the cancellation of the debts.

Alsace-Lorraine and Avignon materials are arranged chronologically in separate sequences. In the Alsatian sequence, the period from 1806 to 1809 is most thoroughly documented; the year 1802 occupies nearly half of the Lorraine folders; 1817 constitutes one third of the Avignon materials, and L'Isle is represented only by two creditors' lists from 1819 and 1820, respectively. The collection will be of value to the student of French Jewry during the Revolution and the First Empire as well as during some decades after Waterloo.