

AN INVENTORY TO THE ALSATIAN
JEWISH INVENTORIES
(1738-1805)

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NOTE TO RESEARCHERS

Provenance

The ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES were acquired for the Hebrew Union College Library in 1958 from Mr. S. Frydman (Zosa Szajkowski) of New York.

Statistics

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 15

Number of containers: 9 flat storage boxes (20 x 16 x 3 1/2)

Approximate number of items: ca. 100 inventories and 50 fragments (2000 pp)

Date completed: 1979

Access and Citation

The ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES collection is open to researchers deemed to be qualified by the Librarian. The original manuscript collection and its microfilm are available in the Hebrew Union College Library.

A suggested form for at least the first citation is:

General Inventory of the estate of the late Eliezer, caller Leiser, b. Meir of Kefar Tittelheim (?) (טיטלא), 1767, ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES, Hebrew Union College Library, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Property and Library Rights

The Hebrew Union College Library owns the property rights to the ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES. Information concerning the library rights may be obtained from the Librarian.

Acknowledgements

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Published Description of the ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES

Zosa Szajkowski, "Alsatian Jewish Inventories in the Hebrew Union College Library," Studies in Bibliography and Booklore IV (1959. 96-97).

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The earliest evidence indicates Jewish settlement in Alsace from the latter half of the twelfth century. Almost throughout the history of their existence in Alsace, the lot of the Jews was miserable, characterized by brief spells of toleration and official protection alternating with more frequent periods of religious and economic persecution at the hands of the authorities and the populace. The Jews of Alsace suffered expulsions, massacres, anti-Jewish riots, special taxes, economic sanctions, exclusions from certain occupations, official liquidations of debts owed them, and various anti-Jewish machinations. Most Jews in Alsace were Ashkenazim, and the majority of them engaged in money lending, cattle, grain, and scrap iron dealing, or other trades open to them. Most lived in various degrees of poverty, their economic situation always precarious. The collection documents the economic status of the Jews whose estates are inventoried and evaluated. Depending upon how accurately and completely these inventories mirror actual financial well-being, they indicate a range, from families apparently well off to those of much more moderate means. As a result of expulsions and prohibitions, the Jews of Alsace came to reside in villages near such major cities as Strasbourg and Colmar, where they were admitted to conduct business. For example, the documents mention no major city; rather the names of little known villages or suburbs, some of which are not afforded entry in the gazetteers, are encountered.

The Jews for whom the inventories were drawn up were French subjects living under the Ancien Régime and into the time of the Revolution. Despite the Emancipation, it does not appear that the fortunes of Alsatian Ashkenazi Jewry rose at the same rate or to the degree enjoyed by other post-Revolution French Jewish communities. At this time assimilation of Jews in Alsace did not keep pace with that of other French communities, but it proceeded more gradually because of resistance on the part of the Jews themselves rooted in their stronger Jewish religious identification.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The ALSATIAN JEWISH INVENTORIES form a collection of detailed lists of the contents of estates of Jews from Alsace, France. The inventories themselves do not tell us whether or not any official purpose, such as taxation, was served by drawing up these inventories and evaluating their contents. They are signed by notaries from the Jewish communities, and a few are translated into French or German and signed by secular authorities. The years in which these inventories were prepared begin in 1738 and continue until 1805. The documents are written in Hebrew Ashkenazi cursive in Hebrew and Yiddish. A very few French and German documents are to be found.

When the documents were unpacked, no order was discernable. Subsequently, the collection was put into chronological sequence. Almost all the inventories consist of at least several bound pages, and many are much longer. On the other hand, fragmentary inventories and supporting documents isolated from their respective inventories were also found throughout the collection. If it proved impossible to reintegrate them, they were placed at the beginning of the collection. The poor condition of many of the inventories required that they be unbound, laid out flat, and encapsulated. To ensure their integrity, these have been reattached with velo-binders. Drawing up a list of subject tracings seems inappropriate to the nature of the collection, as all of the inventories are documents sharing similar format, and the items enumerated and evaluated are recurrent. A name index is also unneeded, for it would be of little use to anyone but the genealogist, who would be hampered in his efforts because only first names followed by fathers' names appear. Anyway, most inventories clearly indicate on their first pages the principals.

It will be instructive to present an outline of the contents of a typical inventory: There is an opening page with a note telling whose inventory the document is, along with his/her place of residence, date of death, and the names of heirs and provisions of the will. There follows the listing of the contents of the estate and their value and totals. Such items as cash and debts, valuables, household goods,

clothing, wines, books, and real estate are included. Claims against the estate are documented. Copies of other documents often included in the inventory are: partnership agreements, guardianship contracts, engagement and marriage contracts, wills, oaths, various authorizations, settlements, and apportionments drawn up in connection with the execution of the will, and transactions among the heirs. There is a summary, and the whole document is finally signed, witnessed, and notarized.

The primary value of the inventories lies in the information they offer on the economic and legal aspects of Alsatian Jewish life. In addition, the many lists of household goods give a glimpse at day-to-day home life. The contents of home libraries are of similar interest. Of linguistic interest is the frequent use of Yiddish as it reveals features of the Alsatian dialect.

Village names mentioned in the collection are: Romansweiler, Niederheim, Wintzenheim, Zellweiler, Schafenhausen, Fegersheim, Mutzig, Hagenau, Oberehnheim, Ingweiler, Osthoffen, Ottersheim, Bischheim, Biesheim, Bergheim, Mackenheim, Sierentz, Mittelbronn, Osthausen, Baldenheim, Uttenheim, Mittersholtz, Diebolsheim, Bodersweier, Ottersweiler. Others occur, but Hebrew transliteration combined with the fact that they might well not be entered in the gazetteers make identification impossible.