

Sailing the rivers of Moselle and the Rhine is an eye-opening experience.

Ancient stony castles sit on craggy hilltops. Miles and miles of green vineyards precariously grow on impossibly steep inclines to produce the best Riesling wines in the world. Pleasant-looking towns and villages dominated by church spires. The peaceful Moselle gives way to the watery superhighway of the Rhine carrying boats ferrying unusual freight and cargo.

While visiting peaceful and picturesque locations, and learning of their turbulent histories, I began to notice an emptiness that was referred to in places, and ignored in others. The emptiness was the missing Jews of the Rhine. Who were they? What happened to them? And how are they acknowledged by the towns that housed them, and destroyed them?

COLOGNE (KOLN).

There were Jews in Cologne (Koln) since the year 321, almost as long as Cologne itself. Over history, the Jewish community suffered persecution, expulsions, massacres and destruction. In the Middle Ages, they were exploited by the rules and the Church and were killed in the name of Christianity, though the real reason

was, by killing the Jew, the Archbishops were relieved of having the burden of repaying the debt.

The Nazi era was the last in a long history of Jewish persecution. Jews numbered 19,500 before World War 2. Over 11,000 were killed by the Nazis.

There is a Jewish section in the Koln Municipal Museum where the grim story is recounted with evidence of the Nazi crime. Jewish artefacts are on display on the first floor in this museum. When I was there, German schoolchildren were being guided through the permanent exhibition.

The Gestapo headquarters were located at 23/25 Appellhofstrasse. This building today houses the National Socialist Documentation Center where 18,000 wall inscriptions tell of persecution, torture and murder under the Nazi regime.

The Jews of Cologne were deported to Thereisenstadt between 28 July and 5th September 1942.

In many German towns Stumbling Stones have been laid into the sidewalks outside what were the homes of Jewish residents who were marched to their fate by the Nazis. In Cologne, I saw the stones reminding us of Dr. Max Goldberg and his wife, Olga, who in 1942 were deported to Thereisenstadt. Later, I stood at the stones recalling Theo Hannes who was deported to Drancy and then to Auschwitz where he died in 1942.

The Synagogue was destroyed on 9th November 1938. A new synagogue was built in 1959 on Roonstrasse.

Barry Shaw: IN SEARCH OF THE MISSING JEWS OF THE RHINE
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Today, Cologne's Jewish community number about 4,500, mainly Jews from Russia.



Relic of a Jewish Past in Cologne



Relic of a Nazi Past in Cologne

KOBLENZ.

Koblenz is pivotally located at the junction of the Rhine and Moselle rivers. Like most German towns, strategically placed along the Rhine, it was bombed by the Allies during the war. Most of the buildings, which contained architecturally picturesque buildings dating back to the 17th century, were reconstructed after the war in the same style making them a delight to wander along the alleyways, small streets and squares.

However, it was in this town that I had an unpleasant experience. I was in a group and our local guide, Werner, spoke excellent English and explained things with a sense of humor and in detail. He was extremely knowledgeable about the development of Koblenz from the Roman and Germanic times through the ages until today.

What began to annoy me was his precision in describing the Allied bombing. He recounted the number of planes, the tonnage of bombs that fell on this town, the number of houses that were destroyed, and the number of people killed. In a sympathetic voice he told us that “*they*” evacuated the women and children to safety in advance of the expected bombing.

Something was missing in his detailed explanation of the history of Koblenz - the Jews.

When I asked him how many Jews were in Koblenz prior to the war, he didn’t know. When I asked him if there had been a synagogue in the town he told me that it had been located in a building he had pointed out to us in a square more than half an hour before. His silence on these issues was troubling to me.

We arrived in another square where he pointed out a building with steps leading up to the entrance and an archway leading into a cellar section. He told us that it had been the town hall up to the war but the present town hall is located in a newer building in another part of the town.

As we continued walking I asked him if the building he had shown us had been the Gestapo headquarters. He hesitantly answered its use was something like that.

I began to be emotional and angry. Out of a pent-up rage I asked him if this was the square where the town's Jews were assembled before they were marched to the train station. He hesitated and mumbled something oblique in a failed answer to my questioning. I pressed my point and asked him where the train station was located and, indeed, it was not far away from that square.

To Werner, there were no missing Jews. There was no admission they existed at all in his town.

Shaking with fury I told my wife I was leaving this tour group, explaining to her my anger at his failure to acknowledge this part of his town's history. It was a sheer coincidence that no sooner had we left our group that we heard voices in Hebrew. It was an Israeli group being led by their Israeli guide.

Later, we came across stumbling stones listing the Daniel family - Otto, Juliane, and Flora - who were deported to Sobibor on 22 March 1942 where they all died.

Koblenz had a population of 80,000 and, in 1929, the Jews numbered barely 800. By May 1939, there were only 308. Many had fled in advance of the rise of the Nazi regime. The synagogue was burned down in November 1938 as part of the infamous 'Kristallnacht' - the Night of Broken Glass. Only 22 Koblenz Jews survived the Holocaust.

There is a memorial to the 6 million Jews of the Holocaust. It is located in the old Jewish cemetery located at Schwerzstrasse 14.

BERNKASTEL.

After the traumatic experience in Koblenz, I needed a pick-me-up and got it with a sympathetic local guide who led our group in the delightful town of Bernkastel. This is a little jewel of a place. However, as in all German towns, it has its black Jewish history.

The first Jewish presence was recorded in 1289. Almost as soon as they arrived they became victims of a blood libel pogrom. During the Black Death the finger of suspicion fell on the Jews who were persecuted or fled the town. It took until the 17th century for a permanent Jewish presence to be established in this Moselle riverside town.

The fate of the Bernkastel Jews seemed reflected in the fate of the town's synagogue. A synagogue with a mikveh (ritual bath) was not established at 77 Burgstrasse until 1852, but it was destroyed by fire in 1880. In 1852, it was rebuilt and rededicated.

Bernkastel is a small town and the peak of Jewish existence there was in 1886 with

110 Jewish citizens.

On Kristallnacht in 1933, the SS and local citizens plundered the synagogue and destroyed its interior. Rampaging Nazis and locals destroyed Jewish property and attacked the small and defenseless Jewish population. 32 Bernkastel and Kues Jews escaped Germany in the early 30s. 15 others fled to other parts of Germany where they remained unsafe from the rise of Hitler and Nazism. The last 4 were deported to Lodz in October, 1940. At least 21 Bernkastel Jews perished in the Shoah.

Our guide took us privately to the stepped alleyway that once housed the synagogue. In another part of town there is a memorial plaque that was unveiled in 1988 to Bernkastel's Jews. A sign in German points to way to an old Jewish cemetery outside the city walls.



Bernkastel Jewish Memorial Plaque

TRIER.

Trier is a town that dates back to the Romans and archeological evidence of that abounds throughout this town. Entrance to the town is through the impressive Roman Porta Nigra gate. Jews have been in Trier, on and off, since the 3rd century. Judengasse can be found by the market fountain. This alleyway leads into what a cramped and narrow Jewish Quarter. The Jews of Trier had a checkered history, to

put it mildly.

The Jews were in trouble as early as 1066 when they were accused of causing the sudden death of Archbishop Eberhard. Then they were forced to provide provisions for the Crusaders for their expedition to the Holy Land. This was a period when Jews were banned from practicing their faith if they wished to remain under the protection of the archbishop. This did not stop the mob from massacring many of Trier's Jews. This period of oppression lasted until the reign of Henry 4th.

The Jews were attacked again during the Black Death of 1349. The plague, caused by the unhygienic habits of the inhabitants, was blamed on the Jews who remained free of the plague's ravishes due to their traditional and ritual cleanliness. Death and destruction of the Jews and their property ensued. Even the Jewish cemetery was desecrated. The Jews fled the town in panic and fear. They did not return until 1356 under an edict of King Charles 4th.

By 1418 the Jews had, once again, been banished by order of the archbishop. The properties of the Jews were sold or requisitioned. These included a hospital. Although some Jews drifted back into Trier, they were expelled in 1589 only to be allowed back shortly after in 1593 on condition that they wear a yellow star to distinguish them from Christians.

Their turmoil was not over. In 1675 the Jews were accused of giving aid and comfort to the French troops that occupied part of Trier after the French had surrendered. Jewish homes were looted and destroyed and several were killed or injured in the rioting against them.

Although limitations were placed on them, Trier's Jews enjoyed a period of tranquility from 1723. A synagogue was built in 1762 on a house that had formerly belonged to Rabbi Mordechai Marx, the grandfather of Karl Marx who was born

and grew up in Trier. Indeed, Karl began to develop his communist philosophy in Trier during a period a great depression and poverty where he saw the poor workers going without food and living in abject conditions while the Prussians flaunted their wealth and their finery.

The rise of Hitler led to a largescale exodus of the city's Jews. On Kristallnacht, between 9-10 November, 1938, the synagogue was destroyed. Almost all the Jews that remained in Trier were deported to Theresienstadt in 1941, never to return.

The Gestapo HQ on Hauptmarkt is now an H & M store. A new synagogue has been built and Jews are, once again, returning to Trier.

COCHEM.

17 Jews, including 10 children were killed in Cochem in a blood libel massacre in 1287. Cochem's Jews were victims of slander and death in 1337 and blamed for the Black Death and killed in 1349. They were expelled in 1418, and again in 1589. Although the Jewish population had swelled to over a hundred before the rise of Hitler, many escaped or were killed in the Holocaust.

There is a Jewish cemetery in the woods below Cochem Castle but I could find no memorial or sign indicating the fate of Cochem's Jews, although there is another Jewish graveyard in Kelbergerstrasse with grave from 1940. Cochem's history, it seems, revolves around other historic matters.

What is maddening is to visit peaceful, semi-isolated small towns far away from the major centers of Germany that were still so fevered with Nazi enthusiasm that synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in tiny places like Bernkastel, Cochem and

Rudesheim had to be destroyed and their local Jews beaten and dragged away to concentration camps in a Jew hatred that infected every town and village along the Rhine and Moselle rivers.

MAINZ.

Anne Roiphe, in a fascinating article in *The Tablet*, narrates how the Crusaders slaughtered the Jews of Mainz on their way to Jerusalem. So brutal was this act that the Mainz Jews elected to commit a collective suicide. Read also Soloman Bar Samson's '*The Crusaders in Mainz, May 27, 1096.*'

The Jewish population and influence in Mainz was so strong that, at the time of the Black Death, when the Christians turned on the Jews in bloody and deadly pogroms, in Mainz, the Jews defended themselves against the mob and killed over 200 before the Christians could reorganize and take their revenge. On one day alone, August 24, 1349, they killed 6,000 Jews in Mainz

There were over 200 synagogues up to the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. Kristallnacht 1938 was the start of Jewish destruction in Mainz. Over a thousand Mainz Jews died in concentration camps. Synagogues were destroyed. It has to be noted that the bishop of Mainz organized a group of people to help Jews escape from Nazi Germany.

Today, many Jews from the former Soviet Russia have made Germany their home, including in Mainz.

Our Mainz guide told me that he had attended and enjoyed an Israeli Film Festival that had taken place in Mainz the evening before our tour.

BREISACH.

I found much of my attention turning to how towns acknowledged the fate of their Jews into their narrative of the long history of their towns. Most were respectful. Others were withdrawn to the point of being dismissive. I was, therefore, pleased to end my investigation in Breisach where my wife and I went on foot in search of traces of Jewish presence in this Rhine town. At one time, 14% of the town's population was Jewish.

With the aid of a city map we made our way to the Blaue Haus (Blue House) in a tiny street named Michael-Eisemann-platz that, until 1940, had been a center for Jewish life in the town. Following the Shoah, it is attempting to again attract German Jews to participate in its new activities. It was closed when we arrived there but there was a notice advertising commemoration events in memory of the 70th anniversary of the Nazi terrors and the Jewish deportation to Gurs. They had used the top floor of this building for prayers after the destruction of the town's synagogue during Kristallnacht.

More than 100 Breisach Jews met their deaths in various concentration camps. Some committed suicide out of despair. This was brought home to us as we crossed the street and came across a corner that Breisach has dedicated to the memory of its Jews.

A marble tiled floor displays a menorah on which stands an impressive brown memorial in the shape of an Aron Kodesh - the holy ark. Engraved upon it is Psalm 25:6 *"Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loyal Covenant as of old."*

Before this memorial there is a table with a loose leaved document file. In it are recorded the personal details of the Breibach Jews caught up in the Nazi Holocaust. Visitors can read the names, dates of birth, addresses in which they

lived, the dates on which they escaped or were deported and, in the case of those who perished, where they met their fate and when.

A sign points the way to Synagogenplatz, a small street that leads, I suppose, to where the synagogue once stood. It is now a commercial yard, but we did stumble across an old Jewish cemetery at the end of this lane from the period 1755-1874. There were partial destruction of gravestones in 1938.

It was satisfying to end our tour in a town that knows how to respect their missing Jews.

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Breisach Jewish Memorial

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