

מקום שנהגו

MAKOM SHENAHAGU

MINHAG BECHHOFEN

MIDDLE FRANCONIA, BAVARIA, ASHKENAZ

**THE CUSTOMS OF THE SYNAGOGUE
THE REGULATIONS OF THE BURIAL SOCIETY
THE COMMEMORATION BOOK**

THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS WERE WRITTEN BY

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SPIRITUAL LEADER OF BECHHOFEN 1867-1903

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INCLUDING

AN EXTENSIVE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BECHHOFEN

BY

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MACHON MORESHETH ASHKENAZ

THE INSTITUTE FOR GERMAN JEWISH HERITAGE

LONDON 5771 - MMXI

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MAKOM SCHENAHAGU

DIE GEBRÄUCHE DER GEMEINDE BECHHOFEN

MITTELFRAANKEN, BAYERN

**DIE GEBRÄUCHE DER SYNAGOGE
DIE BESTATTUNGSVORSCHRIFTEN
DAS GEDENKBUCH DER VERSTORBENEN**

DAS ORIGINALMANUSKRIFT WURDE VERFASST VON

URI SCHRAGA ROSENSTEIN

GEISTLICHER FÜHRER VON BECHHOFEN 1867-1903

HERAUSGEGEBEN UND KOMMENTIERT

VON

RABBINER SHLOMO KATANKA

EINSCHLIESSLICH

EINER UMFANGREICHEN DARSTELLUNG DER GESCHICHTE DER

JÜDISCHEN GEMEINDE BECHHOFEN

VON

RABBINER MORDECHAI DOERFER

MACHON MORESCHETH ASCHKENAS

INSTITUT FÜR DAS ERBE DES DEUTSCHEN JUDENTUMS

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A Sabbath in Bechhofen¹

By J. W.

Translated by HeChaver Moshe Eisemann

Frankfurt am Main - Luzern - Kiryat Sefer

Bechhofen is situated where the small, local railway train steaming out of Ansbach has its final stop. This train travels one and a half hours through fruitful, even territory, until it reaches its scheduled destination - Bechhofen.

After I got to know Bechhofen, there was a deep, symbolic meaning in the fact that the journey came to an end just there.

According to Rav Shamshon Refoel Hirsch זצ"ל² our *Golus* (exile) travail will pass through three stages, corresponding to the lives of Jacob - hatred, Isaac - envy, Abraham - acclaim and honour. Thus when we have attained the last, lofty stage symbolised by Abraham, the long, bitter *Golus*-story - as such an historical development - will have come to an end.

When the surrounding nations will call us "a Prince of G-d", this will mark the end of hatred among brothers. In Bechhofen, dear reader, this terrible hatred remained unknown, even when in the neighbouring villages and Bavarian towns anti-Semitism was rampant.

In the years 1922-3, the hatred of Jews in Bavaria took on abhorrent forms, as many victims related to me. Hitler gangs yelling Swastika songs roamed through the villages. Here they destroyed Jewish gardens; there they shot the dogs belonging to Jews, dogs that had guarded their houses loyally. Jews were not greeted any longer and their homes were searched for weapons. The daughters of Jews were not safe anymore.

¹ This article originally appeared in *Der Israelit*, 30th July 1925/936th Av 5685 (No. 31 p.14) entitled *Ein Sabbat in Bechhofen*. I feel honoured that my dear friend HeChaver Moshe Eisemann has so graciously given of his time and lovingly translated this piece from German to English. I really appreciate his hard work and effort, that has created such a fitting and beautiful beginning to this *Sefer* [Shlomo Katanka].

² פירושו על התורה ויקרא פרק כ"ו פסוק מ"ב In his commentary to Leviticus 26:42.

The Jewish men from numerous rural communities were overcome with an unabated fury. For years they had participated in World War I, not afraid of danger, and now... they clenched their fists ready to fight back.

But the wise Jewish women were not in agreement. "You good Jewish women, do not only hold back your husbands from engaging in a futile battle among brothers - much rather inspire them to obey G-d in Heaven and fulfil His holy commandments."

The air in Bechhofen was uncontaminated by Jew hatred - a miracle, yes, but not without good reason! The spirit of Abraham is firmly domiciled there. Or is there an alternative explanation for the fact that the Christian factories are also closed on the Sabbath? If you do not believe me - go there and see for yourselves! To be sure, the journey is long, but you will be rewarded.

Warm hospitality greets you when you arrive. How far distant from the noise of the big world, and yet in a busy industrial quarter, the spirit of our forefather Abraham is cherished. And when you cross the street with your host or hostess, everyone respectfully lifts his cap. Confronted by the spirit of Abraham our patriarch, which still today elevates his descendants to "Princes of G-d"; Jew-hatred hides in a dark corner and does not dare to emerge.

Not only steadfast adherence to G-d's commandments, but also true humility and modesty are imbued in our host and hostess, and therefore they behold in every village child the image of the Creator. Above Bechhofen flows something of the incredibly high spirituality of Man.

In Bechhofen they fulfil the words of the *Paytan* (the author of the Sabbath table song) *לבוא וממהרים לצאת מן השבת וממהרים לבוא* Those who seek G-d who delay taking the Sabbath out until late and rush to bring it in early. The business closed, the household ready, we sit in our Sabbath clothes two full hours before the beginning of Sabbath, and talk leisurely about matters nearest to our hearts. I will never forget this pre-Sabbath repose and I doubt that it exists anywhere else.

When the time of Sabbath approaches, my host beckons me to accompany him to *shul* (synagogue). We proceed a little along the main street and then turn into a small side road at the end of which a stream, quietly murmuring, winds its way. My host stops outside the gate of a shed and signals me to enter. "But, excuse me, sir", I say without moving, "Did you not say we are going to *shul*?" "Quite so", my host says warmly, "just enter". I could not refrain from glancing once more at the outside of the building: high,

dark, wooden walls, a few windows - all in all, a spacious barn. I probably looked questioningly at him, but he just encouraged me to step forward.

I advanced a few steps and was inside. Immediately the walls and the ceilings fascinated me with such a force that for some seconds I lost my breath. Here was a panorama I had never imagined to exist. The walls and ceilings were totally covered with paintings and drawings. But more than this - there was a bounty of *pesukim* (Biblical verses) everywhere. It was evident that these fantastic creations were not only the work of an eminent artist, but also of some one well-acquainted with our *Tenach* (Bible). The proof that a great artist was at work here, my host added, is demonstrated by the fact that, already years ago, the art experts from München and Düsseldorf came to buy this synagogue from the Bechhofen community. The plan was to build a new shul, *mikveh* (ritual bath) and *beth hamidrash* (study hall) in Bechhofen and, in exchange, to take the old *shul* and exhibit it in a museum in Düsseldorf. In artistic circles the Bechhofen Synagogue is known as the *Scheunensynagoge* (Shed-Synagogue), and art experts from numerous cities often come to view this unique building. There she stands, the shul, in extreme modesty, with an awe-inspiring interior. On the western wall the name of the artist is inscribed, and not far from there he eternalised the memory of Jerusalem. Nothing is known about this artist, who worked here with deep religious fervour, except his personal name.

My host had taken me early to *shul*, intentionally. He told me many interesting things about this *shul*, such as that the community was not prepared to sell it for any price in the world, and that the local authorities now guarded its immutability.

I was able to enjoy the paintings and inscriptions undisturbed.

Now the candles were lit, because no modern lighting was allowed to disturb the character of the *Scheunensynagoge*. The whole community arrived punctually in the *shul*; not a single one profaned the Sabbath.

The teacher is treated respectfully and receives his salary according to state regulations. In contrast, many other small communities prefer not to engage a teacher at all rather than pay him a proper salary.

Filled with Sabbath atmosphere, we are awaited by the hostess after *shul*. The delicious meal is intermingled with words of *Torah*. We retire late at night, resolved to meet again early in the morning to go to *shul*.

I want to mention here a beautiful *minhag* (custom) of the small Bavarian communities. After *shul* in the morning, the whole community comes to visit the *Baal Habayith* (host)

who has guests in his home. Thus, on this Sabbath in Bechhofen we became personally acquainted with the entire community.

The following day we again experienced the genuine *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism) in Bechhofen, albeit divorced from anything earthly. Our host took us to the cemetery. Here all the tombstones have the same colour. Near the entrance there are a number of old graves of rabbis and the Bechhofians have very honourably taken upon themselves to keep these graves in good condition. The professors of art do not only visit the *Scheunensynagoge*, they also come to the cemetery because its simplicity and venerable age make a profound impression on them. Here we find tombstones bent low with old age. They carry the number מ"ש³.

J.W.⁴

³ Denoting the Hebrew year [5]340 corresponding to 1579-80.

⁴ Unfortunately, the identity of the author J.W. is left to conjecture. *HeChaver* Moshe Eisemann suggested that the author was J. Wohlfarth of Frankfurt am Main. *Lehrer* Israel Joseph Wohlfarth served as spiritual leader of Bechhofen from 1831-66. His descendents lived in Bechhofen until 1938. They were killed in the Holocaust. Therefore it is likely that J. Wohlfarth came to visit his distant relatives.

A Flavour of Minhag Bechhofen

By Rabbi David Katanka

Rav of the

Portsmouth & Southsea Hebrew Congregation

We have produced an English supplement which provides a digest of *minhagim* of special interest. This is to direct the reader to seek further elaboration in the Hebrew text and footnotes.

Part 1 - Customs of the Synagogue

A special Mi Sheberach was recited on the Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh or before Rosh Hashana after Ashrei (pp. 9-10, 347).

This was in honour of the Jews who were driven out of Zöschingen in 1741 and donated their ritual objects to the Bechhofen Synagogue. Note that this prayer is a hybrid as it seems it became inappropriate as these people were no longer alive and the second half became a memorial prayer!

When Yom Tov fell on a Shabbos, as it ended, Psalm 111 was chanted before Maariv (pp. 25-6, 60).

This was in order to ensure that the first Holyday had concluded. It seems that this custom did not take place on second evening of *Rosh Hashana*, its melody not being in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion. Similarly, during the nineteenth century in many German congregations, *Ma Tov* was introduced before *Borchu* on second night *Yom Tov* to delay the service until nightfall.

When the eve of Yom Tov coincided with the eve of Shabbos, the entire Kabbalos Shabbos with Lecho Dodi was recited without omission, but if this situation occurred on the last days, the service began with Lecho Dodi, omitting the stanza "Hisna'ari" because of its sad connotation. (pp. 31, 100, 186, 193)

Shabbos Chol Hamoed followed the second pattern.

Jewish Bechhofen

Rabbi Mordechai Doerfer⁵

Part A

History of the Jewish Community

Introduction

Markt Bechhofen an der Heide⁶ is an idyllic village on the River Weiseth in Middle Franconia (Mittelfranken), part of the Ansbach rural district (*Landkreis*) in Bavaria (Bayern). From 1643, Bechhofen was governed by the district court at Feuchtwangen, under the authority of the Duchy of Ansbach⁷ (*Fürstentum* Ansbach). In 1792, Prussia (Preußen) annexed the Duchy of Ansbach. Later, in 1806, Prussia ceded the Duchy to the Kingdom of Bavaria⁸ (*Königreich* Bayern) in exchange for the Bavarian Duchy of Berg. The inclusion of Franconia in Bavaria was a slow process which was only completed in 1816.

Bechhofen is centrally located, with the capital city of Mittelfranken, Ansbach, in the north, Feuchtwangen in the west, Dinkelsbühl, in the south-west, Wassertrüdingen in the south and Gunzenhausen in the south-east. From the mid-twelfth century there was

⁵ Born in Göttingen, Niedersachsen, Germany, Rabbi Doerfer graduated as an architect from Hildesheim University. He moved to Israel in 1999 and lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Sefer. Today he works part-time as an architect, as well as learning in a local *Kollel*.

This history has been rendered from Hebrew to English by Rabbi Shlomo Katanka. The English version contains additional material, particularly in the sections Part C: *The Bechhofen Jewish Cemetery* and Part D: *The Spiritual Leaders of Bechhofen*. Two sections, namely: Appendix II: *The Bechhofen Judenmatrikel 1813-61* and Appendix III: *The Bechhofer Family*, have been written by the translator.

⁶ Literally translated as Market Bechhofen on the Heath. Bechhofen in medieval times was known as Pechoven an der Wisent. Over the years the name Bechhofen has been spelled in Hebrew Literature in various forms: בעק הופן, בעק הובין, בעקהופין, בעכהויפין, בעכהויפין, בעכהאפען, בעכהאפן, בכהפן, בעכהאפן, בעכהאפען.

⁷ Known in Hebrew as *Medinath* Ansbach מדינת אנשבאך.

⁸ Bavaria, whose capital city is München, has seven administrative districts (*Regierungsbezirke*): 1. Oberfranken, Upper Franconia in the north (capital: Bayreuth), 2. Oberpfalz, Upper Palatinate in the north east (capital: Regensburg), 3. Niederbayern, Lower Bavaria in the east (capital: Landshut), 4. Oberbayern, Upper Bavaria in the south east (capital: München), 5. Schwaben, Swabia in the south west (capital: Augsburg), 6. Mittelfranken, Middle Franconia in the west (capital: Ansbach), 7. Unterfranken, Lower Franconia in the north west (capital: Würzburg).

a market in Bechhofen, which attracted commerce. In addition, it became a centre for trading goods because of its positioning on the intersection of two important trade routes, one from Feuchtwangen to Gunzenhausen, and the other from Nürnberg via Schwabach, past Dinkelsbühl, where goods were transported from Nürnberg to Schwaben. This route was headed towards France and started in Switzerland. From 1364, Bechhofen was designated as a *Stadt* (town), and retained that status until the mid-seventeenth century when it became known as Markt Bechhofen which means that the populace were *Bürger* (citizens) as opposed to villagers. It was originally a walled city with three gates, the wall finally being demolished in 1880. From the early nineteenth century and up to the present day, Bechhofen became famous for manufacturing high-quality brushes of all types. Local Jewish families were prominent in this industry. In 1903 the village was connected to the railway network, and it was the last stop on the branch line Ansbach-Wiedersbach-Herrieden-Bechhofen. The train line was closed for passenger trains in 1966 and for freight in 1970, but the station building still exists. The general population grew steadily: in 1861, 667 residents, by 1880, 800, and at the turn of the century there were 1,000 residents. Over the thirty two year period 1939-71, the numbers more than doubled, reaching 2,500. Today the population has climbed to approximately 2,800.

1. The Beginnings

It is unclear when precisely the first Jews settled in Bechhofen. Jews were given the right of abode by the ruling Dukes (*Burggrafen*) of Nürnberg from the thirteenth century. This applied to all the territories under their rule, which during that period included Bechhofen. In 1270, we find recorded for the first time that Jews were living in Bechhofen. This was after the expulsion of the Jews from nearby Gunzenhausen⁹. It is unlikely that those early Jews settled permanently. During the Middle Ages most German Jews lived in the cities. From 1351, Bechhofen was allowed to have a market and was authorised to adjudicate in its own courts. Bechhofen itself does not feature in any official records before 1311, but it seems that the village did exist earlier, probably being founded in the twelfth century. *Lehrer* Jankelowitz¹⁰ claimed to have seen a tombstone dated 1376 in Bechhofen's Jewish cemetery and because it was situated

⁹ Lang p.32.

¹⁰ Jankelowitz p.606. *Lehrer* Max Jankelowitz, spiritual leader of Bechhofen 1924-5.

in the fourth or fifth row, it would imply that the community was founded many years earlier. Due to the tombstone's weathering, it is now impossible to verify his findings.

In 1550, Hans Arnold von Seckendorff-Pfaff, the ruler of Bechhofen, gave the Jews his protection. This leads us to the conclusion that the first permanent community was established during that period. In the next few decades similar Certificates of Protection were issued¹¹, but we do not know the extent of this fledgling community. There is written evidence that a synagogue existed in 1564, but it is unlikely that this was an independent structure.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the Jews of Germany were forced to move to villages and hamlets because of their expulsion from many of the towns and cities. During this period, they had precious little peace and tranquillity. The fact that Germany had no real centralised government saved the Jews from complete expulsion as was endured by the Jews of England, France and Spain¹². Even when the Jews were expelled from one region, they were able to find shelter and settle in another region, but they lived in constant fear that they might lose favour in the eyes of the local ruler. This led Nachman Gidal¹³ and others to exaggerate and claim that the Jews of Germany lived in forests and on the roads from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

The aforementioned sorry state of affairs that German Jewry found itself in during the Middle Ages provides us with the background that will help us understand the historical context in which the Jewish community of Bechhofen was born.

2. The Golden Years: The Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries

The local Register (*Salbuch*) records seven Jewish households in 1589 and twenty in 1603. The oldest tombstone in Bechhofen that is legible at present dates from 1602, which proves that the cemetery was founded before that date. In 1619, it is recorded that a permanent synagogue was functioning, which was later destroyed in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48). Unfortunately, during this period, Jews were expelled from almost all of the cities in Germany (excluding Frankfurt and Worms). These expulsions led to the dawn of the era of the German village Jew¹⁴.

¹¹ Stimpfig p.5.

¹² After the establishment of a central government in 1872 it took only 70 years before the Jews were expelled completely from Germany.

¹³ Gidal p.12.

¹⁴ In German, *Landjudentum*.

Part B

The Bechhofen Synagogue - The Scheunensynagoge

This guide to the Bechhofen Synagogue is based on the work of Mr. Theodor Harburger⁶¹, who visited Bechhofen in 1928. He inspected, in an official capacity, virtually all the synagogues of Bavaria from 1926-32 (even those that were already disused) and he took photographs⁶² of communal buildings, cemeteries, and religious artefacts. Most importantly, he recorded in detail what he saw in the form of a diary. In addition, the late *HeChaver* Jerry (Gavriel) Bechhofer (who celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in Bechhofen), provided his personal recollections of the synagogue.

61 Theodor Harburger (his Hebrew name was Tzvi Halevi), was born in 1887 in München. He studied the History of Art at various universities. From 1926-32 he worked for the Union of Jewish Communities of Bavaria (*Verband Bayerischer Israelitischer Gemeinden*), where he took approximately 800 photographs, and noted down what he saw. This included synagogues, cemeteries and religious artefacts. Unfortunately, to this day, most of his important research has hardly been studied. He was active in the Zionist Movement from 1906. As early as 1933, he understood that there was no future for the Jews in Germany, so he packed his belongings and moved with his wife to *Eretz Yisrael*. Mr. Harburger opened a hotel in Tiberias, later closed it (due to troubles with the Arabs), and moved to Haifa. He passed away in 1949 and was buried in Naharia. His work on Bavarian Jewry is held at the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. The Central Archives printed many of his photographs in *Theodor Harburger, Die Inventarisierung jüdischer Kunst- und Kulturdenkmäler in Bayern*, published in 1998 together with the Jewish Museum of Franconia in Fürth.

Lehrer Simon Brückheimer (1889-1950), spiritual leader of Marktbreit (Unterfranken), traveled around the Bavarian Jewish communities in the mid- to late-1930s in a voluntary capacity. He preserved and recorded the property of the village communities on behalf of the Union of Jewish Communities of Bavaria. In his priceless notebooks, he recorded the inventories of Bavarian congregations, including Bechhofen. They are presently held in the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. This served as an additional list of the various religious artefacts and archival material that was held by the Bechhofen Jewish community, and was used during the preparation of this history. I am immensely grateful to Prof. Dr. Peter Kuhn who discovered, copied and sent to me the pages from the notebooks referring to Bechhofen.

62 The pre-Holocaust photographs of the Bechhofen synagogue are copyright and were originally produced by the local photographic firm "Fotostudio Lang" of 9 Gunzenhausener Straße, Bechhofen, where they are still preserved. Bechhofen's local Jewish historian, Herr Herbert Dommel, very kindly arranged permission to reproduce these historic photos, and sent digital copies of them to be included in this work. I thank him and feel greatly indebted to him, especially in view of the unfortunate fact that, since its destruction, the photographs are the only way to bring back to life this beautiful synagogue.

1. Historical Background

The first record of a fixed house of prayer in Bechhofen was in 1564. It is unknown whether this was an actual synagogue or a room used for prayer. A new synagogue was erected in 1619, which was subsequently torn down during the Thirty Years' War⁶³, during which large areas of Germany were destroyed. The Jewish community received permission to rebuild the synagogue in 1684. It is assumed that this was the famous "Barn" Synagogue (*Scheunensynagoge*). It was therefore one of the oldest synagogues in pre-*Kristallnacht* Germany. The building became famous once the wall drawings of Eliezer Sussman Katz were completed in 1732. In 1913 the Synagogue was declared a "Protected Historic Monument"⁶⁴ by the Bavarian State officials, and it received grants for its restoration from the government. Unfortunately even this privileged status did not save it from destruction on *Kristallnacht*.

In my article *The History of the Jewish Community*, we discussed the claim that Bechhofen was a community of Polish refugees. We showed that this was a typical German synagogue, quite unlike its Polish counterparts. In this article we will expand on these points.

2. Typical German Rural Synagogues

Medieval city synagogues⁶⁵ functioned solely as houses of prayer. Separate buildings were used for other communal functions. In important communities such as Worms or Cologne, a type of "Community Centre" was created similar to the Greek *Agora*, the Roman *Forum*, or the medieval square, which housed the market. Typically, the synagogue, *yeshiva* (Talmudical college), wedding hall, and *mikvah* (ritual bath) surrounded the main courtyard. Once Jews moved into the villages, a need was created for a different type of synagogue, more suitable for smaller and more spread out rural communities.

Over the years a new type of communal building evolved. This building was not only a synagogue but included various additional rooms which varied according to the size of

⁶³ In 1632 Bechhofen was destroyed during the invasion of Croatian soldiers into Franconia. It would seem that its synagogue was also destroyed. In this attack, many German towns and villages were completely obliterated.

⁶⁴ *Denkmalschutz* in German; similar to a "listed building" in Britain.

⁶⁵ Until the late medieval period German Jewry lived mainly in cities, normally in a single Jewish street (the *Judengasse*).

Part C

The Bechhofen Jewish Cemetery

1. The Establishment of the Cemetery

The imposing and ancient Jewish cemetery of Bechhofen was, and still is, of great importance. This consecrated ground was where, for centuries, the departed from communities throughout the region were laid to rest. Local records report that in 1589 there were seven Jewish households in Bechhofen, an indication that an organised community must have already been established. It is difficult to imagine that a community existed much before this date. Nevertheless *Lehrer* Jankelowitz¹⁵⁰ asserts that he saw a tombstone dating from 1376, and because it stood in the fourth or fifth row it cannot have been one of the oldest tombstones and therefore the cemetery dates from much earlier¹⁵¹. The oldest tombstone currently legible dates from 1602. During the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) the cemetery was severely damaged and the synagogue was destroyed.

2. A Description of the Cemetery

The perimeter wall was repaired in 1662. At that time, many village cemeteries were not enclosed. Consequently, the mere existence of such a wall demonstrates the importance of the cemetery. Most of the original wall still exists, except the section that was dismantled in order to extend the cemetery. From 1702-6 the cemetery was extended, and two hundred years later, in 1910, additional land was consecrated. The cemetery covers an area of 25,000m (25 dunam)¹⁵². There are 2,223 tombstones still standing and an estimated total of 8,000 souls have been laid to rest over the years, which makes it one of the largest Jewish burial grounds in Germany.

The *taharah*-house (a small building where the deceased are washed and dressed in preparation for burial) was situated near to the entrance of the cemetery. Its date of construction is unrecorded. The entire building was destroyed during the early hours of the morning of *Kristallnacht* (10th November 1938). A limestone "bed" (used during the

¹⁵⁰ Jankelowitz p.606. *Lehrer* Max Jankelowitz, Spiritual Leader of Bechhofen 1924-5.

¹⁵¹ Needless to say, to correctly decipher the dates inscribed on old, weathered tombstones can be difficult, and the results of such readings are often quite inaccurate.

¹⁵² 6 acres.

Part C

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The imposing and ancient Jewish cemetery of Bechhofen was, and still is, of great importance. This consecrated ground was where, for centuries, the departed from communities throughout the region were laid to rest. Local records report that in 1589 there were seven Jewish households in Bechhofen, an indication that an organised community must have already been established. It is difficult to imagine that a community existed much before this date. Nevertheless *Lehrer* Jankelowitz¹⁵⁰ asserts that he saw a tombstone dating from 1376, and because it stood in the fourth or fifth row it cannot have been one of the oldest tombstones and therefore the cemetery dates from much earlier¹⁵¹. The oldest tombstone currently legible dates from 1602. During the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) the cemetery was severely damaged and the synagogue was destroyed.

2. A Description of the Cemetery

The perimeter wall was repaired in 1662. At that time, many village cemeteries were not enclosed. Consequently, the mere existence of such a wall demonstrates the importance of the cemetery. Most of the original wall still exists, except the section that was dismantled in order to extend the cemetery. From 1702-6 the cemetery was extended, and two hundred years later, in 1910, additional land was consecrated. The cemetery covers an area of 25,000m (25 dunam)¹⁵². There are 2,223 tombstones still standing and an estimated total of 8,000 souls have been laid to rest over the years, which makes it one of the largest Jewish burial grounds in Germany.

The *taharah*-house (a small building where the deceased are washed and dressed in preparation for burial) was situated near to the entrance of the cemetery. Its date of construction is unrecorded. The entire building was destroyed during the early hours of the morning of *Kristallnacht* (10th November 1938). A limestone "bed" (used during the

¹⁵⁰ Jankelowitz p.606. *Lehrer* Max Jankelowitz, Spiritual Leader of Bechhofen 1924-5.

¹⁵¹ Needless to say, to correctly decipher the dates inscribed on old, weathered tombstones can be difficult, and the results of such readings are often quite inaccurate.

¹⁵² 6 acres.

taharah) survived and is now on display at the *Reichsstadt* Museum in nearby Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Mittelfranken.

As is customary throughout the Jewish world, various different groups of people were laid to rest in their own section: *Maranan Verabanan* (rabbis) and those killed *Al Kiddush HaShem* (because they were Jewish) in the front row. Mothers who died in childbirth (sometimes with their babies) were also accorded a special section. It is recorded that on the first day of *Selichoth* 5660, 16th October 1900, two worn-out *Torah* scrolls were buried in the Bechhofen cemetery, according to time-honoured tradition¹⁵³.

Two world-famous rabbis are buried in Bechhofen, Rabbi Shimon Akiva Baer (d.1724), and Rabbi Yosef Wassertrüdingen (d.1761)¹⁵⁴. In addition, there are significant rabbis, spiritual leaders, and communal dignitaries who are interred in the cemetery. Bechhofen and the surrounding villages were not large enough to employ a resident rabbi, therefore the rabbinical section of the cemetery was small considering the size and age of the cemetery.

Throughout the cemetery, only Hebrew was inscribed on the front of the gravestones. From the 1840s some recorded basic information about the deceased in German on the back of the gravestones and by the 1880s nearly all the gravestones had some German epitaphs, but still engraved only on the back. Often burial plots were reserved in advance by family members, for a fee. The lists of reserved burial plots included people who had moved away and lived in various locations throughout Germany and some further afield, for example, in London and New York. They wanted to be laid to eternal rest together with their ancestors in the historic Bechhofen cemetery. Many of those who died before 1938 were buried in accordance with their wishes in Bechhofen, even though they had lived for many years far from Franconia.

3. The Regional Cemetery

In Franconia it was common that one cemetery served many Jewish communities in the region, unlike most communities which, whether large or small, had their own cemetery. Other local examples include Schopfloch and Georgensgmünd, both of which are situated in Mittelfranken. The communities that interred their dead in

¹⁵³ See *Babylonian Talmud, Megilah 26b, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 154:5 and Shulchan Aruch Yorah Deah 282:10.*

¹⁵⁴ The members of the Wassertrüdingen Burial Society visited his grave once a year on the first day of *Selichoth* (usually the last Sunday of the Jewish year and often the previous Sunday as well.)

Bechhofen were known collectively as *Galil Bechhofen* (Bechhofen Regional) Burial Society, and in German the official name was *Israelitischer Begräbnis-Verein Bechhofen* (The Jewish Burial Society of Bechhofen). Over the centuries, fixed routes were used by the various communities to transport their dead for burial in Bechhofen. Often the local non-Jews named these paths *Judenweg* or *Judenstrasse*.

In 1706, the Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, Wilhelm Friedrich (who ruled 1703-23) proclaimed that the Jews of fourteen surrounding communities had to bury their dead in Bechhofen. They were Gunzenhausen, Stadeln, Wi[e]dersbach, Lehrberg, [Alten]Muhr, Wurma [Unterwurbach], Cronheim, Dentlein, Wassertrüding[en], Onolzbach [Ansbach], Leutershausen, Colmberg, Jochsperg [Jochsberg]"¹⁵⁵. This edict confirmed the importance of the Bechhofen cemetery.

4. An Historical Survey of the Regional Communities

I feel it appropriate, at this point, to summarise the history of the Jewish communities in Mittelfranken that are known to have made use of the Bechhofen cemetery during various periods of its long history¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁵ This list is from a manuscript of an official copy of a letter sent from Bechhofen to the authorities at Ansbach, dated 4th June 1706. This document, now over three hundred years old, is preserved at the Bavarian State Archives, the *Staatsarchiv* at Nürnberg, and a copy was very kindly sent to me by Prof. Dr. Peter Kuhn of München. I thank him for troubling to find this highly- important primary source. The edict also mentioned the six communities (situated in Mittelfranken) that had to inter their dead at the Pappenheim Cemetery namely "Dittenheim, Heidenheim, [Markt] Berolzheim, Weinmersheim, A(h)lesheim, and Treuchtling[en]". Contrary to popular belief, the Jews of Treuchtlingen never buried their dead in Bechhofen. In actual fact they used the Pappenheim Cemetery until they inaugurated their own local cemetery in 1773/1774, which in turn also served the neighboring communities of Ellingen, Weimersheim, Markt Berolzheim, and Dittenheim.

¹⁵⁶ With the exception of villages that never had more than a few isolated Jewish families, all the communities employed a spiritual leader (*lehrer*) under the auspices of the District Rabbinate, held Hebrew classes for the youth (sometimes for very small numbers) and had a *mikvah* (ritual bath). See Appendix I: *The Spiritual Leaders of Bechhofen*, for more information regarding the *Lehrer* and his responsibilities. Each village held services at one communal synagogue the focal point of the community. In Franconia, the Western *Ashkenazic* rite was strictly followed (as was the case in Bechhofen), see Section 1, *Minhagei Beth Haknesseth*, of the Hebrew section.

Most of the information about the destroyed communities has been taken from *Pinkas HaKehiloth* by Dr. Zvi Ophir (Ofenburg) published by Yad Vashem (Jerusalem, 1972). This irreplaceable book is the most important detailed reference work on Jewish Bavaria. In addition, when chronicling the communities that vanished before the Nazi period, *Alemannia Judaica* was consulted. This is a valuable online resource, which is led and directed by Dr. Joachim Hahn of Plochingen, Baden-Württemberg. I

ALTENMUHR

also referred to as MUHR

The community was founded in 1720. By 1796 there were 188 Jews and in 1837 some 250 souls (about 35% of the total population). By 1925 the community had dwindled to only 49 souls (6.7% of the population). The local Synagogue was built in 1815 (and renovated in 1878). During *Kristallnacht*, the interior of the synagogue was destroyed. The outer shell of the building survived, but was eventually demolished in 1968. The community included a Jewish school which closed in 1924. Until 1906, they buried their dead in Bechhofen, and from then on they used the Gunzenhausen Cemetery. From 1929 they shared their *Lehrer* with nearby Windsbach. The last 3 Jews left on 11th November 1938.

ANSBACH

originally known as ONOLZBACH

The Jewish community was established during the first half of the fourteenth century. Rabbi Suskind of Ansbach was a *Dayan* (Judge) in the *Beth Din* of Nürnberg (Court of Jewish Law). Most of the Jews were killed during the Black Death of 1349, and the few survivors were expelled. In about 1372, the Jewish community was re-established under the first known *Rav Hamedinah* (Provincial Rabbi) Rabbi Meir, who lived in Bayreuth, Oberfranken. Rabbi Pymann served as the local rabbi from 1456-8. The Jews were very nearly expelled in both 1515 and 1539. Finally, in 1550, the edict of expulsion was ordered by Margrave Georg Friedrich and no Jews lived in Ansbach by 1564. With no other option available the refugees settled in nearby villages.

Official permission to return to Ansbach was given in 1609. A synagogue existed during the medieval period, and a synagogue was also recorded in the fifteenth century. From around 1600 until 1675, prayers were held in a special room in the home of Amson Model. At that time it was still illegal to build a synagogue. After having disagreements concerning the timing of the prayer services, a splinter-group held services at the home

hereby wholeheartedly thank him together with his team of scholars. Their hard work is really much appreciated.

It is important to note that very few Jews were directly deported to the concentration camps from the villages. Instead, the Nazis forced the village Jews to leave their homes and they usually moved to nearby towns or cities. Fortunately, in some cases, they managed to relocate abroad.

Part D

The Spiritual Leaders of Bechhofen

Introduction

The spiritual leaders that served many of the smaller rural Jewish communities in Germany were known as *Judenlehrer* (Jewish teachers). They were not actually qualified rabbis. Their main task was to teach *Torah* to both adults and children, hence they were referred to by the title *Lehrer*. In addition, they served all the major religious needs of the community which included: (1) a *Shliach Tzibur Kavua* a semi-professional *Chazzan*, who led the congregation in prayer, (2) a *Shochet*, slaughtering fowl and livestock in accordance with Jewish Law, (3) a *Mohel*, circumcising all boys born in the community, and (4) a communal secretary and scribe¹⁷³.

During 1873, the Orthodox newspaper *Der Israelit* printed vacancies for over 120 *Lehrer* throughout Germany; whereas during the same year only a few vacancies for rabbis were advertised (I imagine that rabbis would change with less frequency). I would therefore estimate that at least 500 such *Lehrer* served German Jewry during that period.

During the nineteenth century, as part of the authorities' programme to systematise and regulate the Jewish community, the office of District Rabbi (*Berzirksrabbiner*) was created. In addition to his duties as rabbi of his town of residence, he supervised a few smaller, nearby communities and would oversee the *Lehrer* of each community. He would make an official visit to the small communities under his wing twice a year¹⁷⁴. Such direct government interference weakened the independence of the Jewish community. For 200 years, Bechhofen was a small rural community, never quite large enough to employ its own rabbi¹⁷⁵. Instead, like other similar-sized communities, a distinguished line of *Lehrer* competently led the congregation.

¹⁷³ Most *Lehrer* were equally or often more qualified than many contemporary young communal rabbis. This leads me to believe that if they would have lived nowadays they would have been known by the title Rabbi. In many small communities in Eastern Europe, a similar office existed, and the leader was known colloquially as a *Kol Bo'nik*.

¹⁷⁴ He would take the opportunity to test the children enrolled in the village Hebrew classes to gauge the extent of their religious knowledge and to oversee community affairs.

¹⁷⁵ During the eighteenth century, two fully-ordained rabbis lived in Bechhofen, a father and son: Rabbi Shlomo son of Nachman Aryeh (Leib) of Kolin (Bohemia, today the Czech Republic) and Rabbi Yonah.

Herr Herbert Dommel, the resident historian of the Jewish community, has kindly prepared this roll of Bechhofen's spiritual leaders and accompanying historical information. Many thanks to him for giving us access to his research, and for his constant assistance.

Lehrer Veih's (Feis) Abraham Block

b. Ansbach, 1744

He is the first documented *Lehrer* of Bechhofen, but it seems quite probable that he was preceded by other incumbents¹⁷⁶. His surname is sometimes spelled as Blok or Bloch. On the 4th April 1777 he was awarded a permanent right of abode in Bechhofen. This was given to him on condition that he paid one *gulden*¹⁷⁷ per year to the security fund, and he was forbidden to work in any other capacity. There is no record of when he left his post.

Lehrer Moses Hirsch Bechhold

b. Bechhofen, 1771

It seems that originally he was a *Lehrer* in Ansbach. He served from July 1829 (or perhaps earlier) until July 1830. He seemed to still be a resident of Bechhofen in 1836.

Rabbi Shlomo served as a *Moreh Tzedek* (Rabbinical Arbitrator) at Schnaittach (Mittelfranken) from 1724-32 before coming to Bechhofen. He wrote a rabbinic treatise *Yerioth Shlomo* (never published) and died in approximately 1770. Rabbi Yonah also practiced as a *Mohel*, and circumcised many of the boys born in Bechhofen, including his own eight sons. (He was also father to three daughters). He travelled to 14 other neighbouring communities to perform the *mitzvah* of *milah* on their sons. He wrote an important historic manuscript (held at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem) in which he records the details of the 157 *miloth* that he performed from 1736-85. At this point it is my pleasant duty to record the great appreciation I have for the important and valuable research regarding Rabbi Shlomo Kolin that has been conducted on my behalf by Dr. Andreas Angerstorfer of Regensburg University, and assisted by the local Schnaittach historian, Frau Birgit Kroder-Gumann, in addition, I am indeed very grateful to Mrs. Gisela Naomi Blume of Zirndorf who supplied me with much additional important information. A letter written by Rabbi Shlomo in 1756 forms part of Appendix III in the Hebrew section: *Responsa Examining the Bechhofen Custom Regarding the Order of Precedence for Reciting Kaddish*.

¹⁷⁶ From at least 1812 the community employed the *Chazzan* Lazarus Mayses [Moises] Eppinger (b.1769). He also served as a *Shochet*.

¹⁷⁷ The *gulden* was a gold coin equivalent to approximately US\$60.

Appendix I

The Demographics of Bechhofen Jewry

The figures presented below give a snapshot of the total Jewish population of Bechhofen in various years throughout the more than 300 years of its history. It must be noted that some of the figures seem to contradict each other; this is because they are based upon conflicting sources, but these slight differences do not impair the overall picture conveyed.

The following chart is based upon information that appears in *Pinkas HaKehilloth of Bavaria* by Dr. Zvi Ophir (Ofenburg) and published by Yad Vashem (Jerusalem 1972, p. 283), a comprehensive history of the Jewish communities in Bavaria before the Holocaust:

1714	13 families
1763	5 people
1811	150 (total population 560)
1837	170 (of 810)
1871	91 (of 731)
1890	67 (of 829)
1910	44 (of 1109)
1933	31 (of 1356)
1st January 1938	23
13th October 1938	0

The following chart I compiled using different local historical sources, and commences over 100 years earlier:

1589	7 families
1603	20 families (a number only achieved again 200 years later)
1679	13 Jewish houses (amongst 45 houses in total)
1705	15 Jewish houses
1713	82 Jews (out of a total population of 291)
1806	141 Jews (of 590)
1813	43 Jewish households

Appendix II

The Bechhofen Judenmatrikel 1813-61

In 1813 an edict was passed that ordered the Jews of Bavaria to be formally registered with the local authorities. At the same time they had to adopt surnames (in some instances they were given surnames). Various basic particulars were also recorded: number of children, occupation, age, property owned, etc. This process was known as the *Judenmatrikel* (Jewish license or certificate). Unfortunately, only the firstborn (once married) were allowed to reside in the same vicinity as their parents; the other children were forced to leave their birthplace and set up home outside of Bavaria. This arrangement continued until 1861. For more details please see above in Part A: *The History of the Jewish community*, ch. 4 *The Fall of Jewish Village Life*.

This register has been put together using two secondary sources: a manuscript of the *Judenmatrikel* compiled in 1932 by the Bavarian State Archives (*Staatsarchiv*) in Nürnberg and copied by the Society for Family Research in Franconia (*Gesellschaft für Familienforschung in Franken e.V. - GFF*), and a copy of the original documents recorded in Stimpfig (pp. 36-44). I was very kindly granted permission to reproduce parts of the *Judenmatrikel* from the copyright holders Prof. Dr. Werner Wilhelm Schnabel (Chairman of GFF) and Dr. Gerhard Rechter (Director of the Bavarian State Archives). It is my pleasant task to thank Herr Wilhelm Veeh (of GFF) for helping me obtain this permission; I believe this register really enhances this volume.

Stimpfig covers the earlier period and the archive the later period, but there is an overlap. Please take note that due to this overlap I may have mistakenly included the same people twice, or left out those who had the same name. Very few women are included in this list because often their names were not registered independently of their husbands/fathers. Interestingly, many names include the father's name as a second name: for example, Nathan Mayer Rothschild denotes Nathan son of Mayer Amschel Rothschild (and his father was Amschel Moses Rothschild). This was true for all his children: Amschel Mayer Rothschild, Salomon Mayer Rothschild, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, Calmann Mayer Rothschild, and Jakob Mayer Rothschild. It must be noted that there are variations in the spellings of both first names and surnames in both sources, and in some cases, even amongst members of the same family.

B

Isaac Joseph Baer Bechhöfer (b.1770), Joseph Baer Bechhöfer (b.1744), Nathan Isaac Bechhöfer (b.1813), Alexander Lippmann Bechhold (b.1781), Hirsch Bechhold

Appendix III

The Bechhofer Family

The well-known Bechhofer family resided in Bechhofen for almost 350 years, from 1589 until 1938, when they were expelled by the Nazis. Over the centuries, the Bechhofers were inextricably bound up with the Bechhofen community, hence it is highly appropriate for this important family history to be part of this volume.

In the mid-1930s, a member of the Bechhofer family, (who had left his ancestral home and had taken up residence in Nürnberg), commissioned *Lehrer* Nachum Zev (Willy) Goldberg, (the last spiritual leader of Bechhofen, 1929-38), to compile a history of the Bechhofer family. *Lehrer* Goldberg was an expert in German-Jewish genealogy, and he rose to the occasion and produced a comprehensive thirty-two page, home-typed booklet entitled *Die Chronik der Familie Bechhoefer* (The Bechhofer Family History), incorporating information from original archival material, tombstones and oral family tradition. He completed his monumental work two years after the Nazis ascended to power, on 18th June 1935.

Three main sources form the basis of this appendix:

1. The *Chronik* (a copy of which was kindly supplied by Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer of Monsey, NY).
2. Personal correspondence with the late *HeChaver* Jerry Bechhofer of Washington Heights, New York, NY (over the years 2004-6).
3. An extensive letter written in 1988 by the late *HeChaver* Jerry Bechhofer to a relative, detailing the family history from approximately 1900.

For the most part, I have limited the scope of this family history (mainly) to members of the family that were born or lived in Bechhofen. In general, I have used the German spelling of the names as found in the *Chronik*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer for reading and editing this appendix, and patiently answering my questions pertaining to the family history. Two branches of the Bechhofer family lived in Bechhofen until their expulsion by the Nazis. There were two sons of Gabriel (1855-1905) and Sara (1855-1907) Bechhofer: Bernard Bechhofer (1888-1960) and Isaak Bechhofer (1892-1978).

The family originally moved to Bechhofen from Herrieden in 1589. (For a short history of the Jewish Community of Herrieden, see Part C: *The Bechhofen Jewish Cemetery*, ch. 4, *Herrieden*). Bechhofen at that time was a newly-established community

Acknowledgments

עליון תהילות לא-ל עליון With tremendous gratitude I lift up my eyes Heavenward and express my gratitude to G-d for His Divine Assistance for every facet of life, and in particular with my preparation of this work. Without His guiding hand nothing could have ever been written.

Such a venture obviously requires the collaboration and input of numerous other people. In the general Hebrew introduction I have expressed my thanks to individuals who have helped in preparation of this work. Other contributors have been acknowledged where appropriate in the footnotes. But here I feel that I would like to mention a few individuals who have helped with the English section.

The history of Bechhofen has been thoroughly researched by my dear friend and colleague Rabbi **Mordechai Doerfer Shlita**, a true *Talmid Chacham* (Torah scholar). I am delighted to express my thanks to him for his major contribution. I have attempted to translate his History into English, as well as my supplying some additional information. In particular, I would like to draw attention to Part B, *The Bechhofen Synagogue - The Scheunensynagoge* which is a unique insight into the design of *Ashkenazic* synagogues, cleverly combining the elements of *halacha* (Jewish Law), *minhag* (custom) and architecture. Originally I had planned to include a German version of his History in this volume. For various reasons this was abandoned, but instead it is hoped that excerpts from the Bechhofen manuscripts will be published in a separate volume with a short commentary in German, sometime in the future.

My sincerest appreciation to:

My father, Rabbi **David Katanka Shlita**, wrote a digest of the more unusual *minhagim* with explanations. He is a pillar of strength.

My mother, Rebbetzin **Marilyn Katanka Tlita** who has always found time to be of assistance, and is constant source of encouragement.

Rabbi **Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer Shlita**, a respected *Talmid Chacham* of repute, who skilfully corrected and supplemented the Appendix: *The Bechhofer Family* and has been an enthusiastic supporter of this project.

HeChaver **Moshe Eisemann Shlita**, who translated from German, with great warmth and care, the moving account of a Shabbos in Bechhofen. I feel privileged that he agreed to enhance this work with his contribution.

Rabbi **David Kern Shlita**, who proofread the German, and gave sound professional advice.

Herr **Herbert Dommel** of Bechhofen, a local historian, who oversees the historic Jewish cemetery. He has been at the end of the line answering all the difficult historical questions that are next-to-impossible to find out from here.

Professor Dr. **Peter Kuhn**, head of the Jewish Studies Department at the University near München, whose years of study and research into Jewish Franconia- and his advice to me- enhanced many aspects of my work.

Special thanks are reserved for Rebbetzin **Nechama Davis Tlita**, who expertly proofread and corrected the entire English section. Her professionalism transformed my work.

Last but by no means least - אחרון אחרון חביב - my wife, Rebbetzin **Channah Leah Katanka Tlita** who advised and has taken her share in various aspects of this work, and with *mesirus nefesh* has put up with an author as a husband for the duration of the project.

Rabbi Shlomo Katanka
Sunday, 22nd August 2010 - 12th Elul 5770
Edgware - London

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