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# Speyer, Worms, Mainz (ShUM): Connecting Centuries through Music, Art, and Spirituality

This chapter focuses on the tangible and intangible remains of the alliance ShUM created by the Jewish communities in Mainz, Worms, and Speyer alongside the Rhine. ShUM is an acronym of the first letters of the Hebrew city names: Shpira, Warmaisa, Magenza. These communities had an impact far beyond its blooming days in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century and far beyond its geographical scope along the Rhine. Legends, prayers, and liturgies that originated in ShUM have survived centuries. Jewish personalities from the 10<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century are still present in Jewish life and learning. The tangible monuments and cemeteries as well as the intangible heritage reflect the brightest and darkest times of Jewish history in Ashkenaz and are engraved in Jewish memories.

## Forethoughts

Jewish places and spaces in Europe are post-Shoah and, often, because of migration, flight, and mass murder or expulsion, often post-Jewish.<sup>1</sup> Some post-Jewish spaces were revived in the past decades when Jews arrived from Eastern Europe and joined the small number of Jews to reopen synagogues and community centers nearby grounds where a former Jewish community had lived. Jewish spaces mirror past and sometimes present Jewish life, spirituality, diversity, and local characteristics.

Many of these sites and spaces remained post-Jewish and were transformed into educational and meeting centers for the local people. It also happens that, as Diana Pinto states in her contribution to this volume, “such spaces were not ends in themselves but above all starting points for other pluralist understandings of

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<sup>1</sup> See “Thematic Focus: Jewish Space Reloaded!”, ed. Eszter B. Gantner and Jay Oppenheim, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23/2 (2014); Richard I. Cohen, *Visualizing and Exhibiting Jewish Space and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hannah Ewence and Helen Spurling, *Visualizing Jews Through the Ages: Literary and Material Representations of Jewishness and Judaism* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Europe's many religious and cultural minorities".<sup>2</sup> From this thought onwards, post-Jewish spaces are often used for governmental political statements as showcases for democratic values and the fight against antisemitism. This turns into a misuse if such ceremonies are held under governments that are right-wing dominated or taking an authoritarian turn. Indeed, Jewish spaces can be "warning stations" for the present regarding violence and expulsion and, as Pinto underlines, have therefore the power to unite, not only where the Shoah is commemorated, "Jewish and non-Jewish voices".<sup>3</sup>

Some heritage sites and Jewish spaces throughout Europe, however, still present a trivialization of Jewish history with a kitschy note on Shtetl-romanticism, while reducing Jewish life to persecution and victimhood.

This is not true for many Jewish museums, from Paris to Berlin and Frankfurt/Main or Warsaw. Instead of being Holocaust museums disguised as Jewish museums, they focus, for example, on the Jewish history of the city, the region, and the country. The topics are widened from daily life during the centuries to questions of Jewish identities and on questioning aspects from the present such as remembrance culture. These museums create innovative open spaces to rethink Jewish history and to create spaces where Jewish diversity is reflected. The Jewish Museum Frankfurt took up the topic of "Revenge" in Jewish narratives<sup>4</sup> and the Jewish Museum Hohenems on Jewish music ("Jukebox – Jewkbox").<sup>5</sup> In addition, Jewish museums were designed to educate and show the non-Jewish majority aspects of Jewish religion and history and create a commemoration culture within this frame. For years, this has changed, as Jewish museums are also a Jewish space – more so, after October 7, 2023:

Jewish museums have experienced a new dimension of politicization and new challenges and hostilities, but also rising expectations due to a growing demand for education on antisemitism and the Shoah as a result of the recognition of a widespread antisemitic ideology that is experiencing a dramatic resurgence. The fundamental questions of how to develop the proper coping mechanisms and create a resilient environment within our community are important.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", p. 23, in this current volume.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.juedischesmuseum.de/en/visit/detail/revenge-history-and-fantasy/>.

<sup>5</sup> See [https://www.jm-hohenems.at/en/exhibitions/past\\_exhibitions/jukebox-jewkbox](https://www.jm-hohenems.at/en/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/jukebox-jewkbox).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.aejm.org/events/aejm-annual-conference-2024/>.

As Jewish communities are interested in taking part in developing Jewish museums, Ruth Ellen Gruber's concept that "a virtual Jewish world has an intense visible, vivid Jewish presence in places where few Jews live today" has changed.<sup>7</sup>

Innovative Jewish museums change and adapt, reflect and rethink. Some Jewish spaces that are not marking mass graves, killing sites and other sites where only destruction can be recollected, and are Jewish spaces where life was once vivid, are nevertheless designed as memorial sites.<sup>8</sup> These Jewish spaces carry an enormous burden and visitors anticipate being silent, honoring the dead, learning a lesson. These Jewish sites are like a time capsule, frozen at a certain point, not a space where one can be amazed about the richness of Jewishness that had been so lively there or, in cemeteries, see the stones like a book of the community's history.

After the Holocaust, an unbiased approach [...] to European Jewish topography is not easily achieved. As a result of the Holocaust, the predominant focus, especially in European academia, is on spaces of death and remembrance, memorials and museums, voids, and relicts, rather than on living Jews and their spaces and spatial strategies, past and present. [...] Focusing on *how* Jewish spaces are produced, we are not so much interested in an ideal objective, the "essence" of Jewish space or the built end-product but rather in the creation of Jewish space and in Jewish spatial experience.<sup>9</sup>

Non-Jewish visitors of Jewish sites too often have little knowledge about Jewish resilience, spirituality, and diversity; not to forget the subconscious or openly antisemitic images that can be found in all strata of societies and accompany the visitors while they are strolling through Jewish spaces.

Jewish spaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should tell stories of the (former) inhabitants; of local, regional history and how Jews and non-Jews interacted, encountered each other, where the painful fracture lines are, where Jewish resilience and resistance against persecutions and pogroms developed. If these narratives are connected to art, music, legends and lively traditions, Jewish spaces offer sensory, tangible experiences and colorful images of the Jewish past and presence.<sup>10</sup>

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7 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 years after *Virtually Jewish*", p. 7, in this current volume.

8 This one can find in, e.g., Germany and Poland, where memorial stones are erected on cemeteries, commemorating the Jews who once lived there. The spaces where Jewish life once existed are often left unmarked. See <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/>.

9 Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Space. An Approach", in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch and Anna Lipphardt (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 1.

10 Michal Küpper, Barbara Rösch, and Ulrike Schneider, *Makom: Orte und Räume im Judentum: Real, abstrakt, imaginär. Essays* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007).

Within such processes of creative approaches those responsible for memory and interpretation cross borders between virtual and real-life, and shape authenticity in the present.

A note post-October 7, 2023: We see excessive antisemitic incidents all over Europe and populistic parties that gain ground all over Europe. Antisemitism, rejections of remembrance culture, trivializations and relativizations of the Shoah, as well as rejections of Jewish history as representations of a “white, dominant culture” by those who transformed postcolonial studies into an ideology,<sup>11</sup> are attacks against Jews and Jewish spaces. Targets are post-Jewish spaces, memorials, but also today’s Jewish institutions that are, like in Frankfurt, Worms, or Berlin, housed in buildings that were inhabited by a community and/or museums only years after the Shoah. Are there safe Jewish spaces or Jewish museums after 2023? Will there be authentic Jewish life in some decades ahead of us? We cannot answer these questions now. But we see that these spaces have already a place in virtual realities, in social media, and are undergoing a transformation process: they are virtual Jewish spaces based on real spaces. They are regional but universal, they are authentic but virtual.

## ShUM: Memory and Resilience

“Verily our teachers in Mainz, Worms, and in Speyer belong to the most learned among the sages, the holy ones of the Most High [...] from there goes forth the law to all Israel, [...] since the days of their founding, all communities turn to them, on the Rhine and in all the land of Ashkenaz.”<sup>12</sup>

In medieval Hebrew literature, Ashkenaz had a spatial and a cultural meaning. It referred to Western and Central Europe, and later also included Eastern Europe.

ShUM as the medieval Jewish erudite epicentre started with the Jewish community of Mainz (Magenza) in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Legends accompany the arrival of the Kalonymos family from Lucca as the founding fathers and mothers of ShUM. Stories about ShUM persist because ShUM in Jewish memory is an outstanding

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<sup>11</sup> Susanne Urban, “The Shoah, Postcolonialism, and Historikerstreit 2.0: Germany’s Past in Its Present”, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 16/1 (2022): 83–97.

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Isaac ben Moses (Isaac Or Sarua) cited in Siegmund Salfeld and Alex Bein, “Mainz”, in *Germania Judaica, Bd. 1: Von den ältesten Zeiten bis 1238*, ed. Ismar Elbogen, Aron Freimann, and Haim Tykocinski (Breslau: H. & M. Marcus, 1934), p. 186.

place and space, as the cradle of Ashkenazic Jewry and as “Jerusalem on the Rhine”.

Meshullam ben Kalonymos, the founder of the Jewish community of Mainz died around 1000/15.<sup>13</sup> When Meshullam arrived from Lucca in Mainz with his and other families, they carried liturgies from Italy, Babylonian scholarship, and mystical thinking in their luggage. Mainz and Worms were the first of the three communities to be connected through families, marriages, and scholarly exchange. When Jews settled in Speyer in 1084, ShUM was completed and reached its first heyday.<sup>14</sup> In these three episcopal cities, the Jewish communities did not live in ghettos, but in alleys around their synagogues, mikvaot, and community buildings. In Worms and Speyer a ghetto was designated after the black death pogroms of 1349; in Mainz in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Jews in ShUM were pacemakers for the urbanization of the Rhenish centers due to their connections that extended beyond national and cultural borders. Medieval Judaism was urban. Then the Crusades after 1096 wiped out entire communities along the Rhine. Peasants, day laborers, beggars, criminals, clergy assaulted the Jewish quarters. In Speyer, a dozen Jews were killed, in Worms around 800, and in Mainz the estimation is 1,100. Many Jews fought, resisted, or committed suicide rather than await the murderous mob.<sup>15</sup> After the crusades, Jews in ShUM slowly rebuilt their lives, but the experience left a mark: faith and God were questioned, concepts of asceticism developed, and architectural responses were built, like monumental mikvaot and women’s shuln.<sup>16</sup> Between the 11<sup>th</sup> century and 1349, ShUM was again a Jewish centre in Ashkenaz. When in 1348 the plague broke out

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13 Elisabeth Hollender, “Meschullam ben Kalonymos der Große”, *Beiträge zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte aus dem Salomon Ludwig Steinheim-Institut* 1/2 (1998): 12.

14 On ShUM: Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), *Leuchte des Exils. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Mainz und Bingen* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2016); Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), *Warmaisa. Klein-Jerusalem am Rhein. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Worms* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2020); Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), “Mögen diese Pflöcke niemals herausgerissen werden” *Kehillah Schpira. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Speyer* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2022); Karl E. Grözinger (ed.), *jüdische Kultur in den SchUM-Städten. Literatur – Musik – Theater* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014); Fritz Reuter, *Warmaisa. 1000 Jahre Juden in Worms*, 3rd ed. (Worms: Self-publishing, 2009); Niels Roemer, *German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms* (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2010); Susanne Urban, Gerold Bönnen, and Günter Illner, *Die Ausstellung SchUM am Rhein. Vom Mittelalter zur Moderne. Jüdisches Museum Worms – Raschi-Haus* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2021). See also <https://schumstaedte.de/literatur/>. All websites mentioned in this chapter were last accessed on May 1, 2024.

15 Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

16 Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women and Everyday Observance* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Elisheva Baumgarten and Ido

in Marseille and spread north, anti-Jewish pogroms started. Between June and December 1349, Jewish communities from the Rhine to the Netherlands and on to Franconia were massacred as they were held responsible for the plague through conspiracy stories such as the poisoning of wells. The downfall of Ashkenaz also affected ShUM as remaining Jews fled east or south. Nevertheless, ShUM stayed as a role model for architecture, and its scholarship, piyyutim (Jewish liturgical poems), liturgies, local customs, and religious laws have been passed down to this day. ShUM was the cradle and heart of Ashkenaz and a perfect Jewish space – a Jewish arcadia – that made it a place of pilgrimage throughout the centuries. ShUM mirrors, through stories and narratives, that Jewish heritage in specific places reaches beyond sites, that its meanings are not exclusively linked to the original or reconstructed tangible remains but extend into spaces and Jewish memory wherever Ashkenazi culture is alive. A Jewish visitor from the US once told me, after we both found shelter during a heavy rain in the Rashi-Yeshiva near the synagogue:

ShUM is our ancestral home. It is the basis of everything in Ashkenazi Jewry [ . . . ] When I open the Hebrew Bible, I see comments from Rashi. When my wife was here with me the first time, we both broke out in tears. It is our source.<sup>17</sup>

Stories entangled with ShUM can help in trying to overcome trauma and building up resilience. The Jews in ShUM demonstrated resilience after each pogrom and destruction throughout the centuries. Jews from Worms or Mainz, who emigrated after 1933, took ShUM, its values, and traditions with them into exile. Some even carried memorabilia like a Kiddush cup with an image of the Worms Synagogue on it in their luggage or hung up a huge tapestry with the medieval house mark of their ancestral home.

ShUM can be seen as a “lieu de mémoire” (a place of memory), following the idea of French historian Pierre Nora in the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> Although this paradigm or theoretical idea has since then been widely reflected, revised, or criticized, it can be connected to ShUM.<sup>19</sup> Although Nora focused his idea on the French nation, it

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Noy, *In and Out, Between and Beyond: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe* (Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, 2021).

17 Exchange with a visitor in Worms (January, 2020).

18 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Gallimard), abridged translation available in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–8).

19 Criticism has been formulated from postcolonial views: Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

can be transferred to the concept of a collective memory of a social/religious/national group that crystallizes in certain places. Place is not to be understood geographically. Such a place/space represents a special symbolic power that leads to an identity-forming function for the respective group. This is true for ShUM. Whenever and wherever one meets a Jewish person and asks about ShUM, another story is told. Everyone seems to be connected.

It seems what Ruth Ellen Gruber stated is true for ShUM, as it opens up many approaches: “Does ‘Jewish’ mean intellectual? Commercial? Dynamic? Educated? Artistic? Creative? Multicultural? Rich? Poor? Foreign? Assimilated? Excluded? Exclusive? Quaint? Israeli? Old-fashioned? Pre-War? Religious? Secular? Yiddish? Victim? Communist? Dead and gone? ‘Other’?”<sup>20</sup> ShUM is everything at once. ShUM reflects the fact that Jews develop, despite trauma and loss, strength and resilience. ShUM conveys confidence that Jewishness survives. ShUM provides orientation and anchoring at the same time, the space reflects peculiar and unique spirituality.

On July 21, 2021, the medieval monuments and cemeteries in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz were inscribed as the first genuinely European and German Jewish sites in the UNESCO World Heritage list.<sup>21</sup> If this makes them more a global “lieu de mémoire”, I have my doubts.

## From a Dainty Pillar to Golem

For many years a modest pillar was on display in the women’s shul in Worms. Since September 2020 it has been on display in the new exhibition in the Jewish Museum Worms. To understand its meaning, one must go back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Eleazar ben Jehuda Kalonymos (ca. 1165, Speyer—ca. 1230, Worms) in 1190 was appointed as rabbi in Worms where he established a renowned shul and wrote book after book. He was, for instance, the teacher of Rabbi Isaak ben Mose/Or Sarua.<sup>22</sup> From 1220 onwards Eleazar represented Worms at meetings of scholars from the ShUM communities that defined the *Takkanot ShUM*<sup>23</sup> as binding re-

<sup>20</sup> Gruber, “Life after Life”, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> For the UNESCO application and additional information, see: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/rtymp/gbdd/#p=1>; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1636/>; and <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/RQXl7t9n8C-IQ>.

<sup>22</sup> See Isaac Or Saura: <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8205-isaac-ben-moses-of-vienna>.

<sup>23</sup> Rainer Josef Barzen, *Taqqanot Qehillot Šum. Die Rechtssatzungen der jüdischen Gemeinden Mainz, Worms und Speyer im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019).

ligious-legal decisions. Eleazar married Dulcia from Speyer, a cantor's daughter, in 1183. They had a son, Jacob, and two daughters, Bellette and Hannah. This family was urban and emotionally close-knit. They loved learning, teaching, and debating. They were embedded in Jewish traditions and customs and were open to and supportive of the individuality of each other. The family's charisma shone beyond Worms. Dulcia was educated, a female cantor and prayer leader. She taught women to sing and to read, supported less well-off women to afford a wedding, and organized her husband's teaching house. She gave out what are now called microloans and ran a pawnshop. She prepared female bodies for funerals, sewed Torah scrolls, and she organized the synagogue for holidays. All this we know because she was murdered.<sup>24</sup> In November 1196, the family was attacked in their home "Haus zum Hirschen" at one end of Judengasse in Worms by two criminals. Dulcia and the two daughters were killed, the son injured. Dulcia ran out to get help, but the murderers caught her and hacked her to pieces. Her husband locked the door and survived with his son and pupils, some of them wounded.<sup>25</sup> Why do anti-Jewish massacres often leave the same images? The killers, most likely driven by greed, as Dulcia's business was well-known, were caught by the local authorities, following the German emperor's mandate to protect Jews under his rule. At least one was executed. Eleazar wrote a moving lament for his wife and daughters:

Her husband trusts her implicitly, she fed and clothed him in dignity / So he could sit among the elders of the land, and provide Torah study and good deeds; / She always treats him well throughout their life together; / Her labor provides him with books, her very name means "pleasant" / [ . . . ] Zealous in everything (she did), she spun (cords) for (sewing) tefillin and megillot, gut for (stitching together) Torah scrolls; / Quick as a deer she cooks for the young men and attends to the students' needs / [ . . . ] Known and wise, she serves her creator joyfully.<sup>26</sup>

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24 See Dulcia of Worms: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dulcea-of-worms>.

25 Judith R. Baskin, "Dolce of Worms: The Lives and Deaths of an Exemplary Medieval Jewish Woman and her Daughters", in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 429–37; Judith R. Baskin, "Dolce of Worms: Women Saints in Judaism", in *Women Saints in World Religions*, ed. Arvin Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 39–70; Ivan G. Marcus, "Mothers, Martyrs, and Moneymakers: Some Jewish Women in Medieval Europe", *Conservative Judaism* 38/3 (1986): 34–45; Kenneth R. Stow, "The Jewish Family in the Rhineland in the High Middle Ages: Form and Function", *The American Historical Review* 92/5 (1987): 1085–110.

26 See Eulogy for Dulcia: <https://opensiddur.org/prayers/life-cycle/death/mourning/dulcea-a-woman-of-valor-an-elegy-by-eleazar-of-worms-ca-1196/>.

The eulogy is a variation of “Eshet Chayil” (“Praise of the brave woman”) from the end of the book of Proverbs; it is sung or recited on Shabbat.<sup>27</sup> Eleazar describes his wife as “pious” or “saintly” and refers to the Hebrew *ne’imah*, “pleasant”, which is linked to the meaning of Dulcia’s name in Latin: “pleasant, kind”. His daughters he remembered in a separate text, more prose-like:

Let me relate the life of my older daughter Bellette. She was thirteen years old and as modest as a bride. She had learned all the prayers and songs from her mother [ . . . ] The maiden followed the example of her beautiful mother [ . . . ] Bellette was busy about the house and spoke only truth; she served her Creator and spun, sewed, and embroidered. She was imbued with reverence and with love for her Creator; she was without any flaw. Her efforts were directed to Heaven, and she sat to listen to Torah from my mouth. [ . . . ] Let me talk about the life of my younger daughter [Hannah]. She recited the first part of the Sh’mah prayer every day. She was six years old [ . . . ] She entertained me, and she sang.<sup>28</sup>

Although Eleazar commemorates his wife and his daughters through the eyes of Jewish male expectations regarding what was back then appropriate female behavior, it is a poem of love and affection. Eleazar did not marry again: “I am stricken by sufferings and by wretchedness; my posterity and my equilibrium have fled from me. [ . . . ] He will avenge them; where no eye can see, their souls will be wrapped in eternal life”.<sup>29</sup>

Then there is the pillar, dainty as a young girl, carved between 1180 and 1230. It was recovered in 1957 from the rubble of the Worms Synagogue destroyed during and after the Nazi pogroms in November 1938.<sup>30</sup> The inscription says: “/ blessed / woman / Bellette, / the lady, / for (her) good / (be) remembered / in the number / of young women”. Ornamental works show a tree of life and a palm tree. Were there also pillars for Dulcia and Hannah? Perhaps they were part of a window in the women’s shul, built in 1212/13.<sup>31</sup> Were pillars for Dulcia and Hannah destroyed in the pogrom of 1615?

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27 See Eshet Chayil: <https://jwa.org/article/background-information-on-eshet-chayil>.

28 Baskin, “Dolce of Worms: The Lives and Deaths”, p. 437.

29 Ibid., p. 434.

30 See *Fünfzig Jahre Wiedereinweihung der Alten Synagoge zu Worms. Erweiterter Nachdruck der Forschungen von 1961 mit Quellen* (Worms: Worms-Verlag, 2011); Roemer, *German City, Jewish Memory*; Michael Brocke, “Bellette und ihr Pfeiler in der Wormser Frauensynagoge”, *Der Wormsgau* 33 (2017): 29–38.

31 Women’s shuln offered spaces in which female cantors, prayer leaders, and female community members created their gatherings and sung parallel to the men in the adjacent space. See Elisheva Baumgarten, “Praying separately? Gender in medieval Ashkenazi Synagogues”, *Clio. Women, Gender, History* 44 (2016): 44–62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26485956>; Avraham Grossmann, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

From Eleazar to Golem: In the Hebrew Bible, Golem is a synonym for “raw material, shapeless mass, imperfect substance” in the Psalms (139:16). Adam for the first twelve hours of his existence was a Golem, a body without a name or soul. Golem takes on a more concrete form in Jewish mysticism after the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars argued whether Golem counts for a minyan or must go to the mikveh. With the medieval Kabbalah and a commentary on the medieval “Sefer Yetzira” (Book of Creation), Eleazar of Worms made Golem more present in Jewish mysticism.<sup>32</sup> Eleazar wrote that inanimate matter could be brought to life by certain number and letter combinations of the Hebrew alphabet; he repeated this in the “Sefer Hashem” (Book of the Names of God). Was Golem a shield against the outer world, a kind of protecting mass? In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, according to the legend, Rabbi Judah Löw created Golem to protect the Jewish community in Prague. Bringing Golem to life is the conclusion of the ritual and happens through the power of Hebrew letters. Aleph, Mem, and Tav together form the word “Emet” (truth). These letters are written on Golem’s forehead. Another option: scratching the letters into a piece of clay or writing them on parchment and placing it under Golem’s tongue. Golem was strong and protected the Jews in Prague. One day Golem became angry and unpredictable, started to destroy houses, and threw rocks around. Rabbi Löw scratched out the Aleph of “Emet”. When only Mem and Tav remain, the word means “death”. The remains of Golem are said to still be in the inaccessible attic of the Old-New Synagogue in Prague. Time passed; Golem remained. Shortly before the First World War, non-Jew Gustav Meyrink published a novel that is a dark, psychedelic turn-of-the-century crime thriller. The book was a resounding success and Golem also became popular with a non-Jewish audience. German silent movies took up the topic, although not free from antisemitism.<sup>33</sup>

Pop culture took a liking to Golem from the early 1940s onwards. Jewish illustrators in the US created superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Iron Man, or Captain America and Wonder Woman – and their evil counterparts.<sup>34</sup>

For him [the Jewish illustrator], forming a golem was a sign of hope against all hope in times of despair. It was an expression of a longing that a few magic words and a skilled

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<sup>32</sup> On Golem, see: <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/golem-from-mysticism-to-minecraft>; <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/golem-catalog-online>; <https://schumstaedte.de/golem>.

<sup>33</sup> Omer Bartov, *The “Jew” in Cinema. From “The Golem” to “Don’t touch my Holocaust”* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> See Jewish Museum Berlin, *Heroes, Freaks, and Super-Rabbis. The Jewish Dimension of Comic Art* (Berlin: Jewish Museum, 2010); Johnny E. Miles, *Superheroes and Their Ancient Jewish Parallels. A Comparative Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018); and <https://www.thedailybeast.com/superman-is-jewish-the-hebrew-roots-of-americas-greatest-superhero>.

hand could produce something – something simple, tumbling, strong – that was free from withering criticism, from the evils, cruelties, and inevitable errors of the great creation.<sup>35</sup>

Letters turn Golem on and off – Superman wears an “S” on his chest. In the movie “Man of Steel” (US, 2013), it is said that the “S” in the language of Krypton, the planet where Superman comes from, means “hope”. The Israel national anthem is the “Hatikvah” which means hope. Superman’s name that his parents gave him was Kal-El. Kal in Hebrew is “voice” and “vessel”. El is the suffix that means “God”. Superman is the vessel of God, like Moses. Whereas the baby prophet lay in a reed basket to protect him from the Egyptian pharaoh, Kal-El’s parents had put him in a spaceship before the planet was destroyed by evil forces. Both babies are rescued by non-Jews. Both Superman and Golem become rescuers.

Israel’s first large-scale computer in 1966 was called Golem. This new Golem was based on a much simpler, and yet at the same time much more complicated system. Instead of 22 elements, he knew only two, the two numbers 0 and 1, which make up the binary number system – and, as philosopher Gershom Scholem added: “[. . .] I would say that the ancient Kabbalists would have been pleased to take note of this simplification of their own system. That’s progress! [. . .] Can Golem love? I must leave it to you to answer this question for the new Golem. [. . .] I just say to Golem and its creator: develop peacefully and don’t destroy the world. Shalom”.<sup>36</sup>

Golem also appeared in the cartoon series *The Simpsons*. In one scene, Golem is throwing up masses of scrolls. Does he have multiple lives? Perhaps he can never be turned off?<sup>37</sup> Are computers, robots, artificial intelligence Golems? Today, Golem can also be female.<sup>38</sup> Golem shows that human creativity and the uncontrollability of created things belong together.

Eleazar, Bellette, Golem: entangled stories that reflect resilience and empowerment. In a commentary from ca. 1200, Eleazar wrote: “When non-Jews attack them, Jews are allowed to defend themselves with weapons. Even on a Shabbat, a Jew is allowed to defend himself”.<sup>39</sup>

Golem finally came back to Worms, created from Hebrew letters by American artist Joshua Abarbanel whose artwork was installed close to Bellette’s memorial

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Chabon, *Die unglaublichen Abenteuer von Kavalier und Clay* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), p. 741.

<sup>36</sup> Gershom Scholem, “Der Golem von Prag und der Golem von Rehovot”, in *Judaica* 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> On *The Simpsons* and Golem, see: [https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Male\\_Golem](https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Male_Golem).

<sup>38</sup> Helene Wecker, *The Golem and the Djinni* (New York: Harper, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> H. Fischer, *Die verfassungsrechtliche Stellung der Juden in den deutschen Städten während des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Breslau and Aalen: H. & M. Marcus, [1931] 1969), p. 102.

pillar in the Jewish Museum (Fig. 1). This is in some variation Ruth Ellen Gruber's concept of virtual Jewishness: to transform an idea and a tradition, connected to a specific Jewish space, into some new variation, connected with authenticity of thought and space.<sup>40</sup> Joshua Abarbanel only visited Worms and the Jewish Museum after the COVID-19 pandemic, in October 2023:

I felt hallowed, haunted, hollowed, and vaunted. Walking down Judengasse towards the synagogue is to journey back through time. There is a desire to listen to the stones of the streets and buildings as if they speak for the people who lived here for centuries before me – eating, sleeping, studying, praying, working, laughing, and crying. There is a sense of mournful prayer, of resilient beauty and erudition, of great joy and tremendous pain, seemingly in the past yet simmering just below the surface today. To be in the museum descending the stairs of the exhibition space down to the basement and to find *Golem* at the bottom is to discover a womb in time. It is also a tomb that is eternal and yet, according to its origins, perhaps only temporary. The work can exist in this space in a way that feels, as my grandparents would have said, *beshert* (meant to be).<sup>41</sup>



**Fig. 1:** Exhibition space, artwork by Joshua Abarbanel. Photo: © conceptdesign/Susanne Urban: Installation in the Jewish Museum Worms.

<sup>40</sup> See Gruber, "Life after Life".

<sup>41</sup> Statements made by Joshua Abarbanel via email to the author (April 25, 2024).

The story of Golem has universal appeal and endures through time because its elemental themes are core to the human experience. The dynamics of the struggle for power, violence, and justice in society are as relevant today as they were one hundred years ago, if not one thousand.<sup>42</sup>

As Joshua has himself connected to Golem, he finished his thoughts as following:

Actually, it's been difficult for me to get rid of my Golem obsession. Given the resources, I would love to create an even larger version of *Golem*, say 18 meters in metal, to be sited in an outdoor, public area in Worms. My fantasy has children climbing upon it like Lilliputians in *Gulliver's Travels*. In addition to that vision, I would consider incorporating scrolls as the main element in a sculpture made around the theme of the spiral nature of time. Like the Torah that contains story after story laid out sequentially or tangentially, depending on whether the scroll is rolled or unrolled. I wonder what stories would be told if one could read a word or passage through each layer of a rolled Torah? ShUM to me is like an unearthed scroll from some time gone by – in the past, yet somehow also in the future.<sup>43</sup>

## Unetane Tokef and Leonard Cohen

The central prayer on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is Unetane Tokef. The daughter of Youth Aliyah-founder Recha Freier,<sup>44</sup> Maayan Landau (1929, Berlin–2018, Jerusalem), admired ShUM as a source of Jewishness and wrote to me in 2016 about how this piyyut emerged in the 11<sup>th</sup> century:

Rabbi Amnon of Mainz was a learned, honored, and handsome man. The bishop demanded he should be baptized. Clergymen spoke to him every day; he refused. They pushed him and that's when he said, to be left alone: "I think about it for three days". The way he said it – as if he had doubts! He didn't need anyone to tell him which God he should believe in! When he got home, he didn't eat, he didn't drink; he mourned. All those who loved him came to comfort him, but he refused and wept: "This will take me to the realm of the dead". After three days, the bishop called him. Amnon refused. The bishop ordered his men to take him. When Amnon stood before the bishop, the question was: "Rabbi Amnon, why did you not come to give me your answer?" Amnon said: "The tongue that spoke must be cut". The bishop replied, "Yes, the tongue must be cut, and the feet that did not come must also be cut. And I will torment the soul". The Evil One ordered Amnon to be cut and tortured and then released his battered body on Rosh Hashana. Amnon asked his community to carry him into the synagogue. When the chazan came to a certain place in prayer, Amnon said

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Susanne Urban (ed.), "Rettet die Kinder!" *Die Jugend-Aliyah 1933 bis 2003: Einwanderung und Jugendarbeit in Israel* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdisches Museum, 2003). On Recha Freier, see: <https://www.norden.de/output/download.php?fid=3170.1929.1.pdf>.

the *Unetane Tokef*, which was written down immediately.<sup>45</sup> He then died and disappeared from the sight of the worshippers. God had probably taken him directly.<sup>46</sup>

A parchment with *Unetane Tokef*, dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was found in the Cairo Geniza.<sup>47</sup> *Unetane Tokef* reflects the annual judgement of God on each Jew individually and that, amidst all uncertainty, God is enduring. It is also about human responsibility and the possibility of individual choices while facing the judgement:

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed – how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree.<sup>48</sup>

*Unetane Tokef* is intellectually and spiritually most challenging:

The climactic line [ . . . ] is usually taken as a claim that “repentance, prayer, and charity” can nullify a decree from on high. Surprisingly, these words come at the end of a text that just claimed the opposite: that our fate was already irrevocably determined. Paradoxical! It seems that *Unetane Tokef* is a masterpiece of theological contradiction, as if to say, “Beware! Everything is written [ . . . ] but everything can be changed. And remember that your thoughts, your words, and your deeds can save you”.<sup>49</sup>

This is when, during the Yom Kippur War in Israel in 1973, the poet and musician Leonard Cohen steps into the picture.<sup>50</sup> In 1973, Cohen lived on the Greek island of Hydra. Matti Friedman, who has compiled the story of Cohen’s stay in Israel during the 1973 War impressively uncovered a manuscript by Cohen he had writ-

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<sup>45</sup> Tradition says it was Rabbi Kalonymus ben Meshullam (murdered 1096).

<sup>46</sup> Email from Maayan Landau to the author (February 14, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> For the history of *Untane Tokef*, see: <https://en.yhb.org.il/the-story-of-the-unetaneh-tokef-prayer/>.

<sup>48</sup> For the full text of *Unetane Tokef*, see: [https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh\\_Tokef.4?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh_Tokef.4?lang=bi).

<sup>49</sup> See Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur, “Is *Unetane Tokef* palatable?”, <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/259128.20?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>.

<sup>50</sup> See Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: The Early Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020); Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: From This Broken Hill* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022); Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: That’s How the Light Gets In* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022); and Sylvie Simmons, *I’m Your Man. The Life of Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: Random House, 2013).

ten after returning from Israel in which he reflected on his stay on various levels: “I am in my myth home, but I have no proof and I cannot debate, and I am in no danger of believing myself. [ . . . ] Speaking no Hebrew, I enjoy my legitimate silence”.<sup>51</sup>

One day a group of Israeli musicians, including Matti Caspi and Ilana Rubin, approached Cohen in a café. He explained he wanted to help secure the harvests, while the Israelis defended the country. It was not harvesting season, and the Israeli musicians told him they were heading to the Sinai Desert to perform on IDF bases:

After the musicians left the café, one of them made a call to an air force officer. The air force was hemorrhaging planes and pilots at a rate so shocking it was being hidden from the public, but someone there still found time to get a guitar for Leonard Cohen. None of the artists had any idea how bad things were.<sup>52</sup>

In an interview with the leftist “Davar”, Cohen said: “A Jew remains a Jew. Now it is war and there is no need for explanations. My name is Cohen, so?”, and he continued: “We just went to little places, like a missile site, and they shined their flashlights at us, and we sang a few songs. Or they gave us a jeep and we walked the path to the front and where we saw a few soldiers waiting for a helicopter or something, we sang a few songs. [ . . . ] It was very informal, and very intense”.<sup>53</sup> While being broadcasted by the IDF channel, one can hear Cohen saying: “These songs are too quiet for the desert. You belong in a room with a woman and something to drink. Where I hope you all will be very soon”.<sup>54</sup>

Cohen and his fellow musicians played for an audience confronted with death. He was aware that these songs might be the last the soldiers would hear. Amidst the war he started to write “Lover lover lover (come back to me)” with the lines: “And may the spirit of this song / May it rise up pure and free / May it be a shield for you / A shield against the enemy”. Leonard Cohen wanted to protect the soldiers. He, as a Cohen,<sup>55</sup> gave them a priestly blessing. “Men were get-

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51 Matti Friedman, *Who By Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2022), pp. 45–6.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

53 On Cohen in Israel, see: <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/leonard-cohen-sinai/>.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Cohen is one of the most widespread Jewish family names. Kohen means priest. The family name Cohen, Kahane, Kagan, and more variations are connected to the idea of being a descendant of the priestly family from biblical times. Leonard Cohen was aware of his ancestry and, for instance, at his concert in Israel on September 24, 2009, he spoke Jewish prayers and blessings to the audience. He ended his concert with the priestly blessing: <https://forward.com/news/115181/hallelujah-in-tel-aviv-leonard-cohen-energizes-d/>.

ting killed. I began to end our show with a new song [...] I said to myself: perhaps I can protect some people with this song".<sup>56</sup> IDF-soldier Shlomi Gruner remembered Cohen: "It is [...] as if you're walking in the desert and God comes down to you and starts speaking. It was like Moses hearing the voice and I walked towards it. [...] A steel helmet on the sand. Sitting on the helmet is a figure with a guitar, singing 'Lover, lover, lover'".<sup>57</sup>

In September 1974, Cohen underlined in an interview: "Wherever you saw soldiers you would just stop and sing [...] Everybody is responsible for his brother".<sup>58</sup> Already in March 1974 Cohen had started writing "Who by Fire", his version of *Unetane Tokef*. The war in 1973 started during Yom Kippur, when liturgies and piyyut from ShUM were sung and recited in synagogues throughout Israel. Services stopped, Israelis went to war, lost loved ones, died, were wounded. In the words of IDF-soldier Amichai Yarchi: "The Yom Kippur of the war was the end of an era and the beginning of a new era".<sup>59</sup>

In 1974, Cohen rewrote *Unetane Tokef* and adapted it to what he had experienced in Israel in 1973: "And who by fire, who by water. Who in the sunshine, who in the nighttime. Who by high order, who by common trial, [...] Who for his greed, who for his hunger. [...] Who in mortal chains, who in power. And who shall I say is calling?".

"Who shall I say is calling?" is a repeating line in this song. Is it God who decides over death and life? But does God exist? Who is responsible? Is it mankind or is it the enemy at war who decides? Are we free in our decisions?<sup>60</sup> Cohen was the great-grandson of a Rabbi from Lithuania. "Who by Fire" is a prayer, as Leonard Cohen once confirmed himself.<sup>61</sup> Many non-Jews know this modern version of *Unetane Tokef*, but few know that it stems from a Jewish liturgy, from ShUM. Today, in liberal synagogues around the world, Cohen's "Who by Fire" is sung on Yom Kippur, after the traditional *Unetane Tokef*. Or *Unetane Tokef* is recited to the melody of "Who by Fire". Both piyyut are comforting, and both are a spiritual challenge.

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<sup>56</sup> Friedman, *Who By Fire*, p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 176–7.

<sup>60</sup> On Cohen's Jewish spirituality mirrored in his songs, see Harry Freedman, *Leonard Cohen. The Mystical Roots of a Genius* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), especially pp. 191–201 on "Who by Fire".

<sup>61</sup> Freedman, *Leonard Cohen*, p. 201.

## Punchlines from Kalonymos

Jewish rapper and activist Ben Salomo was born as Jonathan Kalmanovich in Israel in 1977 and has lived in Germany since he was a child. Jonathan set out on a spiritual journey when he discovered that his family name went back to the name Kalonymos – which connected him to the dynasty of scholars, rabbis, and poets who founded the Jewish community in Mainz, from which both Eleazar from Worms and the person who wrote *Unetane Tokef* after Rabbi Amnon's words originated.<sup>62</sup> In August 2021, Jonathan embarked on a journey to ShUM and a documentary was made.<sup>63</sup>

Jonathan – here: the musician, Ben Salomo – does what his ancestors did: he writes and composes about challenges Jews face in society, what religion means, and how to create empowerment. In “Identity” he sings:

Ben Salomo means son of peace; I cannot be killed. [ . . . ] If you want to know your future, you must know where your roots lie. Music is my great devotion, without it I would have fallen in times of crisis, I'd have fallen low and would be lying on the ground. She blessed me, the son of peace, for this I remain faithfully at her service, even if I don't earn a Euro.<sup>64</sup>

In 2021, he wrote a song about being a Jew who immigrated to Germany:

Countless generations, millions of my ancestors have lived here. But this land has not spared them. As hard as they tried, they were not rewarded. How many more memorials are needed, until the last tear drips from our eyes? Jewish life – to be precise: synagogues, museums, as if stuffed, or behind bulletproof glass, ready for the next one planning an attack, waiting for the next massacre, disguised as criticism of Israel – apparently, you're allowed to do that.<sup>65</sup>

In November 2023, Jonathan launched a song facing the wave of antisemitism after October 7, 2023. He mentions Kalonymos as his resilient and resisting ancestors.<sup>66</sup>

In his songs, Jonathan as Ben Salomo underlines what it means to rely on tradition and to hand it over from generation to generation, following the Jewish concept “From generation to generation” (“l'dor va l'dor”). It is first used as a con-

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<sup>62</sup> See <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9168-kalonymus>.

<sup>63</sup> See “Was sind schon 1000 Jahre?”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuzCJAF2NoQ>.

<sup>64</sup> For the song text, see: <https://genius.com/Ben-salomo-identitat-lyrics>.

<sup>65</sup> See <https://genius.com/Ben-salomo-deduschka-lyrics>.

<sup>66</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylc7LlKjkts> (minute 01:02). In addition, see the podcast with Ben Salomo, released December 12, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/podcasts/welt-talks/article248996436/Mathias-Doepfner-im-Gespraech-mit-Rapper-Ben-Salomo-ueber-den-wachsenden-Antisemitismus.html> (after minute 11:00).

cept in the beginning of “Pirkei Avot” (Chapters of the Fathers), when it says that the Torah is passed from one generation to the next. Its variations are found in daily prayers and Psalms and in the book of Exodus. In a way, it is one basis for how to commemorate and not to let memory and learning be interrupted.

Kalonymos is not only a name for him, but an unbroken tradition and inspiration:

ShUM mirrors how deep Jewish history is rooted in German history and vice versa. This is something that must be told. So many Jewish people are connected to ShUM, and this entanglement is showing that ShUM is a German, a European and a Global Jewish space – for 1,000 years.

Regarding ShUM and its meaning after October 7, 2023, Jonathan with a deep sigh said:

We see antisemitism is rising and people demand annihilation – now of Jews in Israel. The Crusades eliminated ShUM, as did the Black death pogroms. My grandfather in Rumania was told to “go to Palestine”, I am now told, my family and my people shall leave “Palestine”. We are ousted, again and again. My music underlines my perspective and I want to help people to know, we have resilience and survive, we are not passive, we fight back. Since October 7, we encountered a lack of empathy. I know Jews who will leave Germany, but they will not leave ShUM, they take it with them, again. These roots remain!<sup>67</sup>

## What will Remain?

As Diana Pinto writes, we must ask ourselves questions about the future and how to present Jewish heritage. What will be the values and images presented in ShUM?

ShUM reflects continuity of memory despite Jewish discontinuity in these places. ShUM is a unique urban Jewish heritage reflecting the fact that Jewish heritage is European and even global heritage. ShUM is transnational and mobile, transgenerational, timeless, and textual. ShUM is not something closed off in the past, it is alive. It is a Jewish space to find comfort and empowerment. The stories connected to these spaces are powerful, inspirational heritage. They are authentic, they are also virtual or non-tangible as they remain in people’s minds and souls.

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<sup>67</sup> Email from Jonathan Kalmanovich to the author (April 30, 2024).

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