The preservation of the funerary traditions of a religious minority: Jewish cemeteries in Europe

El mantenimiento de las tradiciones funerarias de una minoría religiosa: Cementerios judíos en Europa

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Abstract

This article gives a brief outline of the development of Jewish cemeteries in Europe since antiquity up to today. It focuses less on gravestones than on the positioning, layout and later design of these burial places. Jewish cemeteries reflect the ever changing situation of a religious and social minority within a sometimes tolerant, but mostly intolerant environment. It's a history of separation and integration, of retaining tradition or assimilation. O two millennia a core of Jewish belief in afterlife and coping with death and burial was kept. Their upkeep is a gigantic task, as these 'Houses of Life' are a testimony to a minority of early Europeans, who connected the continent following the collapse of the civilisation of antiquity.

Key words

Jews, cemeteries, minority, assimilation, Europeans.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece un compendio de la evolución de los cementerios judíos en Europa desde la antigüedad hasta nuestros días. No está centrado en los sepulcros sino en su posicionamiento, distribución y diseño posterior. Los cementerios judíos reflejan una situación en constante cambio de una minoría religiosa y social dentro de un entorno a veces tolerante, pero, en la mayor parte de los casos, intolerante. Es una historia de separación e integración, de conservar la tradición o de asimilación. A lo largo de más de dos milenios se ha mantenido el núcleo de creencias judías sobre la vida después de la muerte y cómo afrontar la muerte y el entierro. Su conservación es una tarea gigantesca, ya que estas 'Casas de la Vida' son el testimonio de esta minoría de europeos tempranos que conectaron el continente tras el colapso de la civilización de la antigüedad.

Palabras clave

Judíos, cementerios, minoría, asimilación, europeos.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When Klaus Schriewer first approached me with his idea for the symposium and this lecture, I realised, how much our view on Jewish heritage is focused on local, regional and later national traditions and remains or the divide between Sephardim or Ashkenazim. We think of the Jews in Rome or Venice, later in Italy, Paris, France or Berlin and Germany. But from the onset of the first real European Empire, the Roman one, which united –not in a peaceful way, we have to admit– much of what we call the EU today under one law and one civilisation, the Jews became the first real Europeans.

This Empire and Pax Romana were perfect for them: Under one law and by mostly safe roads and shipping routes, they could travel everywhere, they could settle anywhere. When the Empire was at its zenith under Emperor Trajan, you find Jews in almost every bigger city or even town from Britain to Spain, from the Strait of Gibraltar to the wilds of Germany and the Black Sea. In a polytheistic state they were free to follow their religion –as long, as this wasn't turned into politics like in Israel in 70 C.E.– and they very often lived as Roman citizens and had the right to choose any profession they wanted.

With the gradual collapse of the Empire, the rise of an intolerant state religion called Christianity and the decline and later destruction of the civilisation of antiquity –again caused in the name of The Saviour, the closing of the last academy of philosophy in Athens by Emperor Theodosius in 529 is one of its sad highpoints– this golden era for the Jews ended. Very often prosecution by the new Christian rulers followed. But the Jews kept on, even in the darkest days of the Middle Ages, commuting through Europe. Connecting what was left of a once urban civilisation they kept alive something like interregional exchange of knowledge and goods. They were crafts men, traders and bankers, they could read within a now almost illiterate world –even Charlemagne couldn't read or write! Many of them spoke different languages. They moved and travelled all over the continent, out of free will or forced by power and violence. They created networks connecting a continent which for centuries fell back into the separation of tribes and badly ruled feudal entities. The Jews kept alive cosmopolitism when tribalism was ruling, dialog and exchange of ideas, information and goods when ignorance and chauvinism became the base of politics.

This early and really European way of living made them the first Europeans, and they kept up this cosmopolitism over the centuries even up

to the days of the later Middle Ages, when finally more and more people got on the move again.

Everywhere the Jews settled, almost the first thing they did –even before building synagogues– was laying out cemeteries. Following an ancient rule from Roman antiquity, these burial places had to be out side cities. And they were Houses of Eternity or at least perpetuity, as a Jew is resting in his grave forever, the burial place not being allowed to be reused. This gives Jewish cemeteries a continuity which Christian cemeteries miss: If they don't get destroyed, they are kept over millennia, as we see in the medieval cemeteries in Worms or Prague up to today. This makes them witnesses of European burial culture over a very long period, from the Jewish catacombs in Rome up to today.

While Jewish graves are forever, the habit of marking or even designing them changes over the centuries. From ancient times in Erez Israel, where graves just were marked by a pile of rocks –this is where the habit to put a stone on a Jewish grave comes from –up to the enormous neoclassicist family mausoleums in late 19th century Berlin and Budapest is a long development. Also, the layout and design of the cemeteries reflect this history of change. It shows that within a core of religious rules about burial and cemetery there is space for adapting to influence from surrounding societies and their art and changing habits. The core is, I would say, caring attention for the body and the still restless and disorientated soul of the deceased, its preparation for eternal rest up to the day of resurrection. Honouring the person and keeping his or her name for prosperity is another part of it. But much above the grave can and has changed over the millennia.

I will take you on a journey through this immense heritage of Jewish cemeteries of Europe, by showing you typical burial places of each historical period. They stand for tens and thousands of cemeteries all over the continent. With the names on their gravestones, they are archives of Jewish communities which very often still exist –except for areas, which came under the ruling of Germany from 1939-1945–. Here communities of 6 million murdered Jews were destroyed. Although these men, women and children mostly didn't find a place in a House of Life, the cemeteries they left behind became a testimony to very often millennia long Jewish life which got extinguished in the Shoa. These cemeteries therefore are an even more precious part of the heritage of the cemeteries of Europe.

2. ANTIQUITY

Beginning our journey, we have to look at Erez Israel first, where it has been the norm since the time of the patriarchal fathers about 1.400 B.C.E., to bury the dead in caves, as in Hebron. The majority of families buried their dead in their own, separate vaults. True cemeteries as communal burial places are found only in the post-Biblical period. The creation of communal burial places reflects a process of increasing population density and urbanisation. The dead from cities and larger villages could no longer be laid to rest in individual graves or in caves scattered across the landscape. The growing number of dead and the ever-dwindling amount of space available ultimately led to the merging of subterranean single graves in specially-constructed, again subterranean cemeteries: the catacombs.

Burial in caves and catacombs remained the most common Jewish method of burial during the entire period of Antiquity. Unlike the caves, which were usually only intended to accommodate individuals or families, the catacombs offered purpose-built, collective burial sites, i.e. subterranean cemeteries.

Beth She'arim in Galilea in Israel became a central burial place for the Jews of Palestine and the diaspora from the 2nd century C.E. With entrance gates, forecourts like this one in Rome and rooms for setting up sarcophagi, these catacombs, which were used until the 4th century, are among the best-preserved examples of catacombs from the Roman period outside Europe and their typology is similar to that of the catacombs in Rome, which were built around the same time. In Beth She'arim, the evolution from a separate family grave to a communal burial ground was completed. The catacomb had become a subterranean cemetery.

Let's now turn towards Europe.To begin with, Rome was not one of the centres of Jewish life. It was only when Rome gradually grew to become a commercial metropolis in the following decades that more and more Jews moved there, creating large synagogue communities from imperial times onwards. There even was a synagogue, which thrived under the special patronage of Emperor Augustus.

Despite the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the living conditions of Jews in the Roman Empire were as described earlier on such that, often with the same legal status as Roman citizens, they enjoyed the same rights to religious worship. The system of polytheism gave the Jews enough scope to establish themselves as a tolerated minority within the Roman pantheon.

The dead were laid to rest in catacombs like those at Vigna Randanini and Villa Torlonia, in accordance with the tradition brought from Israel and in line with local topographical conditions. These catacombs were situated on the metropolis's arterial roads. But in the empire's smaller cities too, such as Venosa and Syracuse, the Jews buried their dead in catacombs. This burial practice was adopted by the early Christians, many of whom were initially Jewish.

Non-Jews and non-Christians, on the other hand, buried their dead mostly in the ground or in monuments above the ground. «In point of fact, the mode of burial followed in catacombs is undoubtedly of Jewish origin» (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1902: 614).

With the gradual decline and collapse of the Roman Empire from the later 3rd to 5th century, the Jews' social and economic positions suffered too. Finally, Emperor Theodosius (347-395) elevated Christianity to the status of state religion.

In southern Italy, small Jewish communities survived in a few towns such as Venosa. Initially, the catacombs of Venosa, appear to have continued in use. But some 23 known gravestones from the 9th century do not come from the catacombs, but rather from a nearby cemetery discovered shortly after the catacombs.

«The dead were first buried in the catacombs and then, later, probably by no later than the 9th century, in a cemetery, meaning that the transition from the catacombs to the cemetery probably occurred in the early Middle Ages» (Künzl, 1999: 64). The same happened in Rome, where above the Porta Portese catacomb in the early Middle Ages a cemetery was created. Both in Rome and Venosa the transition from the ancient catacomb burials to above-ground cemeteries can be studied.

The Jewish catacombs are together with some remains of synagogues as the one in Ostia the earliest witnesses of Jewish life in Europe and an important part of the heritage of European cemeteries. They are a bridge between the Middle East and Europe.

3. MIDDLE AGES

No cemeteries have survived, however, from the 8th to the early 11th centuries –only a few isolated gravestones–. This led Sylvie-Anne Goldberg to conclude that:

«Ordinary Jews were buried (...) in funerary spaces shared by others and doubtless without the benefit of headstones, as was customary in the *extra-muros* cemeteries of the late Middle Ages» (Goldberg, 1996: 25).

The presumption that Jews buried their dead alongside Christians in multi-faith cemeteries outside the areas where they lived –probably in separate sections– is a plausible explanation for the lack of Jewish cemeteries during the early Middle Ages. The Jewish parts of the cemeteries were then ransacked and destroyed together with the Christian graves over the course of subsequent centuries. The small number of preserved gravestones can also be explained by the fact that, up until the 11th century, these were frequently made from fast-weathering wood or no headstone marked the grave at all.

Between the 9th and 11th centuries, a trend developed of performing Christian burials close to churches or actually inside them. This practice was of course not acceptable to the Jews and from the 11th century the first separate Jewish cemeteries, such as those in Speyer and Worms, began to reappear.

The creation of the Jewish cemetery of the later Middle Ages, as can still be seen in the Worms' cemetery «Holy Sand» today, is thus the result of religious segregation.

From the 11th century, with the re-emergence of major cities and safer trading routes, architectural traces of Jewish life begin to reappear in Europe. Thriving Jewish communities grew up in the major cities along the trading routes of the Rhineland, as well as in Spain, England, France and Italy.

The Jews established synagogues and ritual baths (Mikwot), which were often built by the same architects as the large Romanesque and later Gothic cathedrals that also sprang up around the same time. The «Holy Sand» cemetery at Worms, going back to the 13th century, is one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe. The cemeteries of this period mostly are the only remaining witnesses to communities that became the victims of murderous pogroms during the crusades and major plague epidemics.

The cemeteries of the Iberian Peninsula, which the Jews built until they were finally driven out in the late 15th century, however, have all been lost, at least superficially. Today, gravestones from this period are found in museums.

Since most of the cemeteries in Spain and Portugal were built outside towns and villages, some have been retained as meadows, fields or parks. The gravestones have gone, but the graves are often still there. This means that according to Jewish religious law, Halacha, these places with their no longer visible graves are still cemeteries and must not be disturbed or touched. At

Barcelona's Montjuïc medieval Jewish cemetery this led to a well documented dispute between the Jewish community and archaeologists, who claimed their right to dig out Jewish graves for scientific reasons, a claim, which outraged the Jewish world.

Here we see the peculiarity of the heritage of Jewish cemeteries: How ever old they are, perhaps with no gravestones at all, if the graves have not been taken away, they still are functioning cemeteries to which not only the laws of State or conservation, preservation and science apply but also religious law.

In Hamburg in 1990 this led to the construction of a vast bridge over a Jewish cemetery. On top of the bridge a shopping mall was constructed, the cemetery lying beneath. A «House of Shopping» above a «House of Life».

The remains of later cemeteries like in Frankfurt, Venice and Prague exhibit many structural similarities in terms of their design: they were originally situated outside or on the outskirts of the city, were surrounded by walls and most of them appear not to have had any *tahara* houses –the *tahara* ritual of cleaning the corpses being performed in homes or communal rooms–.

The cemeteries were filled in chronological order, with law-abiding people, such as rabbis, being buried separately from sinners, who were generally interred along the cemetery walls. The graves were laid at the prescribed distance from one another mostly in irregular rows without any walkway areas. The Jews were only rarely given extension areas for their cemeteries which resulted in cemeteries being very densely populated. This reflects the cramped living conditions of the over-populated Jewish quarters that were also rarely expanded. If space became short and the cemetery could not be extended, soil was laid over the existing graves and new graves dug without disturbing those underneath.

Prague is a famous example for this. Here since the late Middle Ages, the cemetery and residential area had formed so compact a unit that it is no wonder many gravestones bear a quote from Jeremiah (9, 21): «Death is come up into our windows».

In recent years, excavations of several medieval Muslim cemeteries have shed light on the presence of people of Islamic faith in France and Spain. The oldest Muslim graves ever in Europe were discovered in 2006 in southern France at Nimes. According to genetic research, the graves are dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries, coming from the Muslim conquest of Europe during this period. The bodies were placed into the pit facing southeast,

towards Mecca, which clearly identifies them as Muslim (Gleize, Medisco *et al.*, 2016).

And in Tauste, in the Spanish province of Zaragoza, some 400 Muslim graves from the eight to the eleventh centuries came to light, making this cemetery one of the oldest in the country. The bodies there also were in the typical position turned towards Mecca (Mahmoud, 2020).

These early European Muslim cemeteries show that the habit of burial towards the Holy Sites and without coffins is very old. It is kept on up to today. Also, it shows a stunning similarity with the Jews, who burry towards The Temple at Jerusalem. So, in both faiths the dead are buried towards their Holy Sites respectively, perhaps the Muslims adopting a custom which they had seen at the older other Religion of the Book. But there also are other similarities like a ritual of washing of the dead and an eternal grave, at least as long, as the bones haven't disintegrated into dust.

4. RETAINING TRADITIONS. RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE

After the victory of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella over Granada, the last Muslim «Moorish kingdom» in Spain, in 1492, the monarchs announced the «Edict of expulsion»: Jews had to leave their homeland, known to them as Sepharad, within four months. However, many Jews had left the Iberian peninsula for havens abroad long before the fall of Granada. Some went to North Africa, particularly to Morocco. A large number fled to Istanbul, the former Constantinople, which had been taken by the Turks in 1453. In the capital of the fallen Byzantium, now the Ottoman Empire, they were warmly welcomed by the sultan. Jewish life prospered under Ottoman rule for centuries and a unique blend of Muslim and Jewish culture developed, which is clearly visible in the style of dress and gravestones in this picture. «Maranos» had left the Iberian peninsula to spread across the globe. They went to England, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the New World.

In many places they met Ashkenazi Jews, with tensions often arising. In some locations, Ashkenazim and Sephardim established parallel communities with separate synagogues, as in Venice and Istanbul, and –more rarely– also their own cemeteries, as in Amsterdam and London.

Amsterdam Ouderkerk cemetery is one of the best preserved sephardic cemeteries of this period with a contemorary Tahara house and gravestones

full of figures telling stories from the bible –a violation of the commandment against graven images, Ashkenazim never would have accepted–.

Often, however, the dead were buried in shared sites. Berlin, Krakow and Rome are examples of such common ground.

There were many Muslim cemeteries of this period in the areas of the Balkans, being part of the Ottoman Empire in these days. With the gradual decline of the empire and retreat towards some areas around Istanbul today however, most of them were destroyed out of hatred for the former «opressors» or just following extensions of cities and towns. Also there was no one to look after them. Only a fiew survive in nowadays nonmuslim countries, like the tiny one below Budapest's castle and some Türbe, mausoleums. One of the best preserved is the one for Gül Baba, the author of *Meftahū'l-Ghayb*, also in Budapest (1543-1548).

In Greece after the liberation (from 1821 on) Muslim cemeteries were destroyed except for some around mosques and other türbes, which got converted into dwellings. There are two very good examples in Chania on Crete. On Rhodes however, which only became Greek again in 1947 after centuries long Ottoman rule, a very important old Muslim cemetery survives.

In areas with still a stronger Muslim population like Albania, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia, more cemeteries still exist.

5. THE AGE OF EMANCIPATION

In Prague's Olsany cemetery a new trend developed from the end of the 18th century. For the 800 years in which separate Jewish cemeteries had been situated outside residential areas they were built in accordance with the rules of *halakha* but with little regard to aesthetic beauty. From 1784, however, Prague's Olsany cemetery featured the designs of contemporary English landscape gardens. The site aimed to counter sombre thoughts with beauty.

This beginning aesthetisation of the Jewish cemetery is a key developmental strand. The park cemetery of Prague's Olsany is therefore an important bridge between the traditional Jewish cemetery and the cemeteries of the time of Emancipation.

The process of emancipation for the Jews of Europe, based on the ideas of the Enlightenment, first led to legal consequences in revolutionary France

and continued gradually and with varying degrees of success in the other countries of Europe. After the end of the First World War, and as a result of the collapse of the late-feudal regimes in Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia, the Jews of Europe were regarded almost everywhere as equal citizens. The Jewish cemeteries of the nineteenth century reflect emancipation and Jewish integration into their surrounding societies in a rather impressive way. But the adoption of building and grave constructions and of mourning customs from Christian compatriots also shows the other side of the coin: assimilation and the abandonment of Jewish tradition.

The nature of the generally walled-in Jewish cemetery lying outside the gates of residential areas remained unchanged until the end of the eighteenth century when, during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, rulers –just like the Roman emperors of their day– decreed that for hygiene reasons the cemeteries had to be moved back out of the cities and churches to beyond the city gates. Many old Jewish cemeteries, swallowed up by the cities' growth and situated within the extended fortifications of the city walls, now fell victim to this revived regulation and had to be closed, even though they were full anyway. The spatial separation between Jewish and Christian burial sites, which was complete by the later Middle Ages, was thus undone. Both were now once again located, just as in Roman times, outside the city gates, and it again became possible to build them next to each other or even create them as jointly functioning units.

The circle that started with the multi-faith cemeteries of the early Middle Ages therefore closed in 1804 in Napoleonic Paris, when once again a multi-faith cemetery was built: the Père-Lachaise. For the first time in Europe, the emancipated Jews were assigned a separate section, initially separated by a wall.

This trend for creating Jewish sections within cemeteries built by state organisations or town councils continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. At the same time, however, there were communities who insisted on their own separate cemeteries.

Virtually all Jewish burial sites created in cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, regardless of whether they form part of a multi-faith cemetery or are separate, share the already mentioned trend towards making the cemetery grounds more pleasant and less forbidding.

The early example of Prague's Olsany park cemetery was continued throughout the nineteenth century, although its landscaped designs were

rarely found until later years, the Rat-Beil-Strasse cemetery in Frankfurt being a rare example of just such a landscaped cemetery from the early nineteenth century.

In Dessau in 1787, a communal burial site was created that was to be «pioneering for cemetery design in the next few decades». The square cemetery, with avenues of trees –therefore called «Alleequartiersfriedhof»– central circular flower bed and enclosure of the grave areas became the model for the new cemeteries built outside city gates. It foreshadowed the cemeteries of the second half of the nineteenth century with their large squares, crossroads and spatial segregation of the classes of grave, representing a faithful depiction of the world of the living. The living conditions of the Jews, whether in palaces or villas, or in unhealthy, overcrowded tenements and the inherently strict social hierarchy were all reflected almost exactly in the cemetery. The medieval maxim of equality in death, increasingly questioned since the start of the nineteenth century, was now completely abandoned. The rich built grave monuments whose size, style and material revealed a desire for an eternal presence this side of the grave, one that was often accompanied by an eroded belief in *olam haba*, the world of the future following the arrival of the Messiah.

Weißensee cemetery surely represents the highpoint of this development towards the beautification of the Jewish cemetery in Europe. It's elaborately designed system of 15 km long avenues and squares and its grave monuments for the grand and the poor is in this form and size a unique expression of this process and of the integration of the Jews into the surrounding societies.

At the same time, many Jews left Judaism, converting to Christianity or leaving their communities and were thus never interred in the «Houses of life».

In parallel to the design-related and functional restructuring of cemetery grounds, increasingly complex developments were taking place in cemetery buildings. Initially, there are the early simple *tahara* houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as those in Worms, Amsterdam, London or Georgensgmünd. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century, concerns over the burial of people who were merely comatose rather than dead became widespread and along with it criticism of the Jews' practice of a quick burial. As a consequence the cemetery buildings that appeared around the end of the eighteenth century were intended increasingly for the purpose of watching the bodies to make sure that the victims were not just

comatose. Such a building was requested by the «Society of Friends», set up in 1792 by Jewish Enlightenists of Berlin. Designed by Salomo Sachs, Prussia's first Jewish architect, this cemetery building, to be built in the neo-classical style, featured a room for observing the bodies, but no *tahara*.

The first Jewish cemetery buildings also started to make their mark on the town skyline around this time. Prompted by the spirit of the Enlightenment, the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau, for example, had his architect Friedrich Wilhelm von Erdmannsdorff (1736-1800) build a synagogue and a cemetery, complete with neo-Palladian ceremonial building, for the local Wörlitz Jewry. This ceremonial building no longer stood hidden behind walls, but instead took up a strong position, just like later synagogues in Europe, within the town's streets. Design then progressed from an «inspector's house», complete with mourning room and *tahara* at the Schönhauser Allee in Berlin, plus an elaborate, neo-classical gatehouse with similar rooms in Frankfurt to the architecturally complete, complex cemetery buildings of Neorenaissance Berlin Weissensee, St Petersburg, its design based on an Ottoman mosque, and modernist Kaliningrad.

These buildings contained all the necassary functional facilities, such as a mourning room, waiting room, *tahara*, cool rooms, toilets, offices, archives, workshops and even horticultural nurseries. Furthermore, the mourning room, which was a new development of the nineteenth century, became the focus of the cemetery as a whole. Eulogies were no longer held outdoors from a pulpit but instead were delivered in the warmth of the often heated mourning rooms. Their elaborate décor and furnishings reflected the communities' wealth, and the cemetery overall, together with the graves themselves, became a representation of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

Styles of the surrounding society were adopted everywhere, although the heated discussions that surrounded the construction of synagogues in the nineteenth century over the correct, ideally «Jewish» style, is barely detectable in the cemetery buildings, probably due to the fact that they were less in the public eye.

Only a few architects, such as Béla Lajta in Budapest, tried to maintain a symbiosis of the country's national style and formal echoes of the Jews' Middle Eastern origins –in this case Hungarian Castle entrance buidling and Mesopotamian Temple Tahara building–.

And in 1929 Erich Mendelsohn finally came up with a deliberate, classic modern design for the construction of a Jewish cemetery in Königsberg, now Kaliningrad.

However, a different world existed outside the large cities and towns of Europe in the grip of the First World War. In the villages and small towns of western Europe and the *shtetls* of eastern Europe, the old cemetery forms –narrow rows of graves, uniform headstones and strict separation from Christian cemeteries– were preserved.

In parallel, Muslim cemeteries slowly start appearing in the second half of the 19th century. In 1857 the first Muslim cemetery was opened in Paris after the Middle Ages as part of the Père Lachaise cemetery. According to the rule of seperation of religion and state burials of all faiths have to take place in communal cemeteries –up today.

1917 in the United Kingdom in Woking, Surrey, a Muslim cemetery was opened for soldiers who had died during the Great War. The reason to create this burial ground was partly to counteract German propaganda that Muslim Indian soldiers were not being buried according to their religious rites.

Part of this «pro-muslim» German propaganda was a cemetery for Muslim prisoners of war. It was attached to camps specially built for soldiers of Muslim faith fighting for the British Empire. Complete with a mosque and other amenities the camp near Berlin was meant to make the prisoners fight for Kaiser and the Ottoman Sultan.

6. AFTER SHOA

The Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated in January 1945, some other camps even later. January 27 2020 this was 75 years ago.

After spring 1945 the few Jews who had survived tried to leave Europe as quickly as possible. Everywhere in previously Occupied Europe, the Jewish communities, which were slowly re-establishing themselves in spite of everything, remained extremely small. There was therefore simply no need for new cemeteries.

Berlin and Thessaloniki are among the few exceptions, and it is only since the collapse of the Soviet Union that the Jewish communities of Europe have begun to grow again and more new cemeteries are being built.

In 2003 a new cemetery in Amsterdam was opened. It excemplifies, how the rules of *halakha* are followed by a Liberal community with a strong sense of tradition and of the history of European Jewry. And an «Israel» stone wall of the Amsterdam *tahara* house shows a very long journey from

the catacombs in Rome and medieval Worms with its «Holy Sand» mythically brought from the Holy Land.

Here we have come to the end of this journey of the vast heritage of Jewish cemeteries in Europe. It is part of the general heritage of cemeteries all over Europe, these being mostly Christian in all its denominations, Muslim, with other religious background or communal. These burial places reflect the continent's rich cosmos of believes about death and afterlife. Within this the Jewish cemeteries are a special case, as they also are places of stronghold of identity of an often prosecuted minority and in theory unchangeable.

Surprisingly few Jewish cemeteries were destroyed during Nazi times –in contrast to synagogues–. But with millions of people being killed, now there are no relatives left to take care of the graves of their ancestors. As according to *halacha* all graves have to be kept forever, there now are ten thousand of Jewish cemeteries all over Europe. This is a heritage, which in theory has to be kept, protected and cared for, for religious reasons and as a testimony to European history.

In many cases there are no resources for upkeep and restoration. This often is a problem in Eastern Europe with its thousands and thousands of burial places.

In Germany a growing conscience of the responsibility for keeping of what is left of Jewish heritage after Shoa led to private, communal and federal campaigns and programs for the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries. In general, the situation is better in Western than in Eastern Europe. But with growing anti-Semitism everywhere, a new/old threat to Jews and Jewish heritage leads to attacks on people, synagogues and cemeteries. Urban Jewish cemeteries specially need protection. Jewish cemeteries in the country are less under threat from attacks than from neglect and decay.

But there also are growing anti-Muslim sentiments and movements which cause big problems when new cemeteries (and mosques) for a growing Muslim population are planned and finally, after often hard resistance, built, forgetting that when people built places of worship and burial they show they want to stay and integrate into the society of their new home country. Here a discussion is repeated which took place already in the 19th century when more and more Jews settled in the big cities of Western Europe, having fled from Russia. It shows the problematic situation of religious (and ethnic) minorities in all times and everywhere.

Many people, institutions and even governments all over Europe work against anti-Semitism (and Xenophobia), this ever so old and unfortunately again growing disease. So let's be hopeful and take Jacob van Ruisdael's rainbow message of hope and optimism to our minds and hearts.[1]

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