

A window on the Freiburg Jewish community from Sulzburg and Müllheim

Emanuel/Mendel Dreyfuss died in 1886. He had been the honoured rabbi of the district for 54 years and had been residing in Sulzburg.

In December of the same year a Jewish resident of Sulzburg expressed his fear in the periodical “Der Israelit”, that no new rabbi might be appointed for this district, and that Sulzburg might be included in the rabbinate of Freiburg. He claimed that Sulzburg needed a rabbi living there, not one visiting the community once or twice a year without really knowing it. The fact that the Jews of Sulzburg were comparatively religious was, the writer claimed, due to the energy and initiative of Emanuel Dreyfuss, and to the respect for him. The community needed the example of a pious rabbi who could instruct the adults and control the schools.

He wrote further that in the city, on the other hand, most Jews were “unfromm”, impious, while in the country the majority was pious, and the community of Freiburg was strictly impious, one of the signs for this being the installation of an organ. That community had received the rabbi that suited her. The Sulzburg Jews didn’t have a grudge against the Freiburg community, but they didn’t want to be imposed on them a rabbi who had shortened the prayers on the High Holidays and introduced breaks on Yom Kippur. The writer suggests that the communities of Sulzburg, Müllheim, Lörrach, Kirchen etc. should work together, not sparing pecuniary sacrifices, to employ their own rabbi in Sulzburg or Müllheim with the agreement of the “Oberrat”, the consistory of the Israelites in Baden.

In May 1887, a person who claims to know the situation in Sulzburg very well, writes in “Der Israelit”, attributing to the Sulzburg residents a lot of good intentions but not enough energy and initiative. He claims the even the impious didn’t want a rabbi who was not strictly pious. The contemporary generation had sunk from the religious level of their parents who had still “rested in God”. An impious rabbi was like a will-o’-the-wisp beckoning the wanderer into the swamp, like a weak little flame that does not warm you in winter. The Sulzburg Jews were horrified (*during a visit to Sulzburg ?*) when the rabbi of Freiburg made fun of the Eruv *. Although even here, there were persons who didn’t appreciate “Tragen”, *the rules as to carrying on the Sabbath*, but were concerned about the rabbi’s vacillating attitude towards the question of chechita **.

When Rabbi Dr. Cahn of Wiesbaden came to Sulzburg to pray at his ancestors’ graves, he was asked to preach in the synagogue. After the Oberrat had received a reproach, asking why they had allowed an unauthorized person to do this, there was great agitation in Sulzburg. People here knew that the religious principles of the Freiburg rabbi were “rather elastic” and changing. There was a group of persons who had pledged to pay a certain sum per year into a fund. The royalties ought to suffice for the salary of a rabbi. They were in contact with a young, extremely efficient, widely educated rabbi, an excellent preacher and teacher. The community needed at its head a law-abiding man of principle.

The community of Sulzburg never succeeded in getting their own rabbi after 1886.

After: articles from “Der Israelit”, discovered and put in the net under “Alemannia Judaica” by Dr. Joachim Hahn.

Résumé by Sibylle Höschele, in italics: additions by the author.

* "Eruv" refers to a Sabbath boundary drawn around an Orthodox Jewish community which allows observant Jews to carry on within the boundary activities that would otherwise be forbidden on the Sabbath such as carrying objects out of doors, e.g. keys, tissues, or pushing baby carriages. Without an Eruv it would have been difficult for them to leave their homes.

** "shechita" or "shechita" is the ritual killing process required to produce kosher meat.