



# Dates from the Jewish history of Cham

by

Timo Bullemer

**RIJO** takes particular pride in hosting the following feature about the Jewish history of the town Cham in Upper Palatinate. Not only that we are able to fill a ‘white spot’ on the map of Bavarian Jewry with meaning, the author also makes available the results of his groundbreaking research to Internet surfers in order to stimulate the interest in the topic and to enter an open interchange of information. We are sure that this generosity will be appreciated by our visitors and are hoping for many researchers to emulate this example.

**RIJO**

<u><a href="#">Introduction</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Dates from the Jewish history of Cham</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Sources and literature</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Town map with sites related to the local Jewish history</a></u>
<u><a href="#">The cemetery of the former Jewish community of Cham</a></u>

## Introduction

With this view on the Jewish history of Cham I would like to present a small and by that typical Jewish community in eastern Bavaria.

Cham is a town north-east of Regensburg, only 17 kilometers from the Czech border and the capital of the county by the same name. The following description is based on my research, which I started as Cham's town archivist in the year 2000. Since then I could find out many details, but many questions about occurrences or former community members remained unanswered yet. Therefore I would be glad, if the internet could help to publicize the history of this community and to contact former members or their descendants. My email address is:

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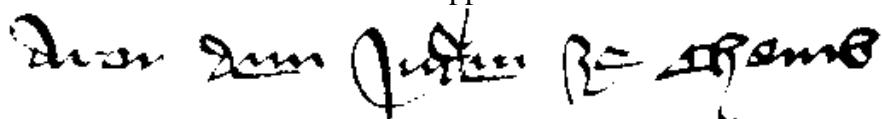


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## Dates from the Jewish history of Cham

1336, 1337 Already in the 14th century, allusions to people of the Jewish faith in Cham can be found in the records. In those days the town boomed. The income of a customs house and the situation near by an important trade route from Regensburg to Prague were responsible for comprehensive goods trade and commerce. It is possible that the first Jewish inhabitants of Cham came from Regensburg, where one of the oldest German-Jewish communities is documented. A man called Toefel is the first Jew in Cham, who is proved in documentary records of the years 1336 and 1337.

1371 Economical decline lead to social tensions which were, among others, responsible for the pogroms in medieval Germany. A violent eviction of the Jews like in the neighboring towns of Deggendorf 1337 and Straubing 1338 is mentioned in Cham, too. But the sovereigns did not want to lose the income from the high taxes which Jews had to pay ("Judenschutz"), therefore Jewish businessmen were allowed to settle down again. In the Middle Ages there were Jewish settlements in almost every town of the Upper Palatine and Cham was no exception. In the year 1371 "Aron the Jew from Cham" appears in a deed.



Deed from 1371, mentioning Aron the Jew from Cham

1468 - 1491 Depending upon the will of the sovereign, Jews were evicted or allowed to settle down. In various records of the years 1468 to 1491 five Jewish families can be found in Cham. They had to live in a segregated quarter or ghetto. Today there is still a street by the name "Judengasse" respectively "Judenstrasse" (Jews' lane). It is said that close to the eastern end of this street the synagogue and school were situated. The last remnants of these buildings were destroyed in a fire in 1873.



recent shot of "Judenstrasse" (Jews' lane)

(photo: Timo Bullemer)

- 1519 At the western front of the town hall one can find the gravestone of Mirjam, the daughter of Ephraim. She died on May 28, 1230. An inscription beneath the Hebrew letters states that in the year 1519 all Jews were evicted from Regensburg. The stone was originally on the Jewish cemetery in Regensburg. When the Jews were driven out, the cemetery was destroyed and many gravestones were used as construction material. Others were brought to villages and towns in the vicinity to remember the eviction of the "heaths." Besides the one in Cham there are gravestones from the Regensburg cemetery in Straubing and Kehlheim, too.



**Gravestone from the medieval Jewish cemetery of Regensburg at the front of the Cham town hall**

- 1553,  
1556 In the years to follow evictions like in Regensburg also took place in other parts of Bavaria. From 1553 on, Jews were not allowed to live in the entire duchy of Bavaria. Three years later an edict forbade them the stay in most parts of Upper Palatine including Cham. For the next three centuries Jews could not take their residence in this region.

- 1813 The edict regarding the Jews in the kingdom of Bavaria (June 10, 1813) granted the freedom of faith to the Jewish population and for the first time gave their religion the adequate status of a private church. But the restrictions of a special paragraph ("Matrikelparagraph") prevented Jews from settling down in Cham and other places where no Jews lived in 1813, because Jewish inhabitants were limited to the number of this very year.

- 1863 On November 10, 1861 the regulations of "Matrikelparagraph" were suspended. Two years later Isaak Lazarus Boscowitz from Floss was the first Jew to come to Cham where he opened a shop for fabrics.



Advertisement by the Jewish salesman Boscowitz from 1863

- 1867 In the following period of time, the connection to the railway system promoted the economical growth of the town. For that reason more Jewish families came to the region. In 1867 13 Jews resided in Cham, in nearby town Furth im Wald four and in Roetz one.
- 1885 The number of Jewish families in Cham had risen to nine. By that most of the Jews in Cham county lived in the town. Their majority came from adjacent Bohemia and maintained close relations to their former communities. For example weddings and funerals were held there.
- 1886 At first Cham Jews wanted to join the Jewish community of the Czech town of Domazlice. But the Bavarian government did not approve this plan. For that reason they founded their own local community in 1886. The Jews from Furth im Wald and Koetzing joined the new community. Later the parish was extended to the towns of Roding, Waldmuenchen, Neunburg vorm Wald and Viechtach.

*Israelitische Cultusgemeinde  
Cham*

- 1889 As the first project of the community, the Jewish cemetery near Windischbergerdorf was constructed.
- 1895 The Jews of Cham maintained no synagogue, but a prayer room. In 1895 they could rent the former hall on the second floor of a restaurant and use it for religious services. In the next years they were discussing, if they should build a synagogue. Finally they bought the ground for the new building, but this idea was never realized. The Jewish community employed a teacher, who taught religion in the prayer room. In addition he held the office of a cantor and conducted the services. The congregation in Cham could not afford to employ a rabbi. Rabbis of bigger cities took care of large districts with numerous Jewish communities. The Jews of Cham also did not build a ritual bath (Mikwah) for financial reasons.
- 1910 In 1910 120 Jews lived in the area of today's county of Cham, most of them in Cham itself (80 souls). At this time about 1.8 % of the town's inhabitants were Jewish. Despite of their small percentage of the overall population Jews ran numerous shops, department stores and other businesses here, having a substantial influence in the economic growth of Cham, e.g. the shoe store of Benjamin Eisfeld, the department store of Samuel Neuburger and the textiles shops of Gustav Bloch and Moritz Stern.

## **S. NEUBURGER & CO. CHAM.**

**Herren- und Knaben-Anzüge**

**Herren- und Knaben-Ulster**

**Bozener Mäntel**

**Lodenjoppen**

**HOSEN**

**Wetterkrägen**

*in jeder Größe.*

**Hundens  
Hosen  
Westen**

**Kragen  
Kravatten  
Hosenträger**

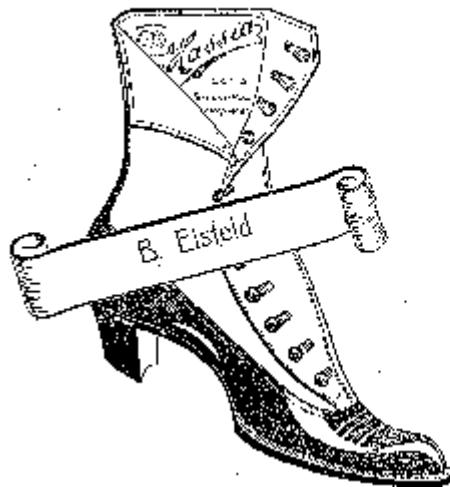
**Kragenschoner  
Rodelmützen  
Rudelsweater**

**Socken  
Strümpfe  
Handschuhe**



**Tuch und Buxkin** in gross und  
in detail.

# B. EISFELD, CHAM Hauptplatz 276.



Schuhwarenhaus.  
Eigene Werkstätte.  
Größte Auswahl in allen Sorten Schuhwaren vom einfachsten bis elegantesten Genre.

- 1920 Leaflets and posters with anti-Semitic contents circulated in Cham.
- 1922 Foundation of the local chapter of the Nazi Party in Cham.
- 1923 The publisher of the notorious anti-Semitic propaganda tabloid "Der Stuermer", Julius Streicher gave a speech at a meeting of the NSDAP (Nazi party) in Cham. The members of the local chapter of "Centralverein" (Central association of German Citizens of Jewish Denomination) reacted to this in a newspaper ad, sharply refusing Steicher's tirades against the Jews.
- 1930 Of course Jewish citizens took part in the local clubs and associations, too. The voluntary fire-brigade for instance had five Jewish members:



- 1933 On April 1, 1933 SA men carried through the boycott against Jewish businesses in Cham as they did all over Germany. The first Jews emigrated, most of them going to neighboring Czechoslovakia.
- 1934 -  
1937 Members of the local SA and "Hitlerjugend" (Hitler Youth) campaigned several times against Jewish citizens:  
Starting in 1934, anti-Semitic slogans were painted on the windows of Jewish shops or stickers with the same content were fastened to them.  
In 1935 a group of Jewish boys from Berlin hiked through parts of Germany. They were arrested in the prison of Cham for allegedly breaking a law which prohibited members of Jewish associations to wear uniforms.  
On December 20, 1936 Nazis organized a demonstration against Jewish shops. In the following night unknown offenders broke a window and the display of the Eisfeld store. In February 1937 Nazi party members took photos of customers of the same store and displayed them publicly in order to denounce the "Aryan" customers.
- 1937 -  
1938 The forcible hand-over of their businesses ("Arisierung") withdraw the means of subsistence from many Jewish families and incited emigration from Germany. In 1933 72 Jewish citizens lived in Cham. By October 1938 only 24 were left.
- 1938 The effects of the so-called "Reichskristallnacht" did not leave the Jewish population of Cham untouched, but obviously now damages were done to Jewish property that night, because there were no more stores owned by Jews. Witnesses report that Nazis tried to burn down the prayer room, however neighbors extinguished the fire. Records and ritual objects were confiscated, but the furniture was preserved by the owner of the restaurant on first floor till the end of war. The Jews who remained in Cham were arrested. The next day police released the women, but most men were shipped to the concentration camp Dachau for three to four weeks.
- 1942 In 1942 two Jews still lived in Cham. One woman was married to a Christian and therefore saved from deportation.  
The other person, a 62-year-old man, was transported to Regensburg at the beginning of April 1942 and later on deported from there. However he is not the only Holocaust victim from Cham. Other people who were born in this town or lived here for many years, were deported from Czechoslovakia or other German towns and perished in the extermination camps. It is assumed that 33 members of Jewish community of Cham fell victim to the Holocaust.
- 1945 On April 22 and 23, 1945 columns of prisoners from concentration camp Flossenbürg reached several places in Cham county. On April 23 the US army liberated them near Cham. The UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) established two camps for Jewish "Displaced Persons" in Cham, one of them in the building where the prayer room used to be until 1938. After the room had been restored, these DPs celebrated the first Jewish religious service in September 1945.

1945 - In 1945 the survivors of the Shoah founded a committee which became the nucleus of a new Jewish community in Cham with 311 members in 1945. Only one year later the number had decreased to 260 already. After Israel's declaration of statehood in 1948 more and more Jews emigrated from Cham. The local camps were dissolved in March 1949. Only the prayer room was still in use.



1950 At first the victims of the death marches were buried on several provisional cemeteries in the county area. In Cham they were buried in a special department of the municipal cemetery which was inaugurated in 1950. After most of the bodies had been transferred to the memorial site of Flossenbuerg concentration camp in 1957, only a memorial remained here.



**Memorial on the Christian cemetery of Cham. 446 prisoners of the concentration camp Flossenbuerg were buried here till 1957.**

(photo: Timo Bullemer)

- 1973 - In 1973 the Jewish community Cham had 16 members. Since sometimes between 1973 and 1975 the body of ten adult men to celebrate a service was no longer available here. Hence the local Jews seized using the prayer room. Today the Jewish community of Amberg takes care of the local Jews.
- 1991 Today the former prayer room is used as the aula of a junior high school. A memorial plaque for the victims of the Nazis has been inaugurated near the entrance in 1991.  
 Several years ago a street was named after Cham born Dr. Karl Stern. During the Nazi era he had to emigrate and became a well-known psychiatrist in Canada.



**On the second floor of this building was the prayer room of the Jewish community for many years.**

(photo: Timo Bullemer)

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