

**Life under Siege:
The Jews of Magdeburg under Nazi Rule**

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Declaration

I certify that the contents of this thesis have not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The extent to which I have availed myself of the work of others is acknowledged in the text of this thesis.

Abstract

This regional study documents the life and the destruction of the Jewish community of Magdeburg, in the Prussian province of Saxony, between 1933 and 1945. As this is the first comprehensive and academic study of this community during the Nazi period, it has contributed to both the regional historiography of German Jewry and the historiography of the *Shoah* in Germany. In both respects it affords a further understanding of Jewish life in Nazi Germany.

Commencing this study at the beginning of 1933 enables a comprehensive view to emerge of the community as it was on the eve of the Nazi assault. The study then analyses the spiralling events that led to its eventual destruction. The story of the Magdeburg Jewish community in both the public and private domains has been explored from the Nazi accession to power in 1933 up until April 1945, when only a handful of Jews in the city witnessed liberation. This study has combined both archival material and oral history to reconstruct the period. Secondary literature has largely been incorporated and used in a comparative sense and as reference material.

This study has interpreted and viewed the period from an essentially Jewish perspective. That is to say, in documenting the experiences of the Jews of Magdeburg, this study has focused almost exclusively on how this population simultaneously lived and grappled with the deteriorating situation. Much attention has been placed on how it reacted and responded at key junctures in the processes of disenfranchisement, exclusion and finally destruction. This discussion also includes how and why Jews reached decisions to abandon their *Heimat* and what their experiences with departure were. In the final chapter of the community's story, an exploration has been made of how the majority of those Jews who

remained endured the final years of humiliation and stigmatisation. All but a few perished once the implementation of the 'Final Solution' reached Magdeburg in April 1942. The epilogue of this study charts the experiences of those who remained in the city, some of whom survived to tell their story.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all Jewish *Magdeburger*, past, present and future.

It is particularly dedicated, however, to those Jewish *Magdeburger*, who reached the safe shores of Australia and to their loved ones and friends, who did not and were subsequently consumed by the catastrophe which engulfed European Jewry. The Magdeburg interviewees have all remained a constant source of admiration, inspiration and deep respect throughout the lifespan of this research project and beyond.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AKPS	<i>Archiv des Konsistoriums der Evangelischen Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen, Magdeburg.</i>
ALJGSA	<i>Archiv des Landesverbandes Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg.</i>
ASGM	<i>Archiv der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Magdeburg.</i>
BAB	<i>Bundesarchiv, Berlin.</i>
BdM	<i>Bund deutscher Mädel</i> (League of German Girls). The female branch of the Nazi youth movement.
BLHA	<i>Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam.</i>
CAHJP	The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.
CE	Common Era.
CJA	<i>Archiv der Stiftung 'Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum', Berlin.</i>
CV	<i>Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens</i> (Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith).
Gestapa	<i>Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt</i> (Office of the Gestapo, the Secret State Police).
HJ	<i>Hitler Jugend</i> (Hitler Youth). The male branch of the Nazi youth movement.
LBIA NY	Leo Baeck Institute Archives and Library, New York.
LHASA D	<i>Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt – Abteilung Dessau, Dessau.</i>
LHASA MD	<i>Landesarchiv Magdeburg – Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg.</i>
NS-HAGO	<i>Nationalsozialistische Handwerks-, und Gewerbe-Organisation</i> (National Socialist Organisation of Crafts, Commerce and Industry). Main Nazi middle-class interest group and most militant instigator of middle-class boycott activity of Jewish establishments.

RM	<i>Reichsmark</i> . Unit of currency in Germany until 1945.
SA	<i>Sturmabteilung</i> (Storm Detachment). The storm troopers or 'Brownshirts,' founded in 1921 as a private army of the Nazi Party under Ernst Röhm. Hitler's first bodyguard, later eclipsed by the SS after the massacre of its leadership in June 1934 in the so-called 'Röhm <i>Putsch</i> .'
SD	<i>Sicherheitsdienst</i> (Security Service). The intelligence branch of the SS, formed in March 1934. Composed of what was said to be the elite of the elite. The SD was responsible for the security of Hitler, the Nazi hierarchy, the Nazi Party and the Third <i>Reich</i> .
SJMA	Sydney Jewish Museum Archives and Library, Sydney.
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> (Protection Squads). Protection squads formed in 1925, the black-shirted personal bodyguard of Hitler which grew into the most powerful organisation in the Nazi Party and the Nazi State, under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler.
STAM	<i>Stadtarchiv Magdeburg</i> , Magdeburg.
USA	The United States of America.
USHMMA	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, D. C.
YVA	<i>Yad Vashem</i> Archives, Jerusalem.

Glossary

Abteilungsleiter – Section or Department Head.

Achte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz – Eighth Decree of the *Reich* Citizenship Law. This decree was enacted on 17 January 1939.

Aliyah (literally ‘Going up’) – Immigration to Palestine.

Allgemeine Deutsche Credit-Anstalt, Filiale Magdeburg – Magdeburg branch of the General German Credit Bank.

Allgemeiner Rabbinerverband Deutschlands – General Union of Rabbis of Germany.

Altreich (literally ‘Old *Reich*’) – Germany, with the geographical boundaries of Germany prior to the annexations of foreign territory.

Altstadt – Old Town Centre.

Bar Mitzvah (literally ‘Son of the Law’) – Religious ceremony to mark a Jewish boy’s religious maturity at the age of thirteen.

Bat Mitzvah (literally ‘Daughter of the Law’) – Religious ceremony to mark a Jewish girl’s religious maturity at the age of twelve.

Berufsbeamten-gesetz – Law for the Restoration for the Professional Civil Service. This law was enacted on 7 April 1933.

Betverein ‘Ahawas Reim’ – ‘Love of One’s Fellow Man’ Prayer Association. One of the *Shtibl* communities in Magdeburg.

Beth Din (literally ‘House of Judgement’) – Rabbinical Court of Law.

Bezirksstelle Sachsen-Thüringen der Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland Verwaltungsstelle Magdeburg – Magdeburg Administrative Office of the Regional Bureau of the National Association of Jews in Germany.

B’nai B’rith (literally ‘Sons of the Covenant’) – Jewish service organisation.

Brith Chaluzim Dathiim (literally ‘Religious Pioneers of the Covenant’) – Zionist youth organisation in Magdeburg.

‘Brucks höhere Handelsschule’ – Vocational business college in Magdeburg owned by Alfred Bruck and under the directorship of Albert Hirschland. The college was later renamed *‘Kaufmännische Privatschule’* (‘Private Business College’).

Bund Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Juristen, Gau Magdeburg-Anhalt – Union of National Socialist German Members of the Legal Profession for the Magdeburg-Anhalt District.

Cheder – Religious school in the Eastern European tradition attached to the *Shtibl*.

Chevre Kadishah (literally ‘Holy Society’) – Jewish burial society.

Chuppah (literally ‘Canopy’) – Canopy under which a Jewish wedding ceremony takes place.

Der Schild (literally ‘The Shield’) – National sporting association of the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten*.

Einheitsgemeinde (literally ‘United Religious Community’) – This concept arose out of numerical necessity in smaller communities in Germany. This permitted all acculturated German Jews to practise their Judaism according to their own wishes and respective levels of observance in a unified, culturally German-Jewish ethos, irrespective of their rabbi’s religious affiliation. At the *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg*, this expression and practice ranged from Liberal Judaism to Neo-Orthodoxy.

Elbstrombauverwaltung – Municipal Authority for Construction on the River Elbe. This was a governmental agency in the government of the Province of Saxony, based in Magdeburg.

‘*Elsaß*’ – ‘Alsace’. Shoe repair shop in Magdeburg.

Erste Verordnung des Herrn Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat – First Decree of the *Reich* President for the Protection of the People and State. This decree was enacted on 28 February 1933.

Frauenbund der Mendelssohn-Loge XII 357 – Women’s Association of the Mendelssohn Lodge XII 357.

Fünfte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz – Fifth Decree of the *Reich* Citizenship Law. This decree was enacted on 27 September 1938.

Gau Magdeburg-Anhalt – Nazi Governmental Administrative District of Magdeburg-Anhalt.

Gauleiter – District Leader of the Nazi Party.

Gauwirtschaftsberater – District Economic Advisor of the *Gauleiter*. Leading Nazi Party official in antisemitic economic activity.

Generalgouvernement (literally ‘General Government’) – Official name for Nazi-occupied Poland.

Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre – Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour. This law was one of the Nuremberg Laws and was enacted on 15 September 1935.

Haavara (literally ‘Transfer’) – Scheme for the transfer of capital to Palestine.

Habonim (literally ‘The Builders’) – Socialist Zionist youth movement.

Hachsharah (literally ‘Training’) – Agricultural training farm of the Zionist movement for youth.

Haushaltswarengeschäft – Household goods shop.

Hechalutz (literally ‘The Pioneer’) – Pioneering Zionist youth movement.

Israelitische Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg (literally ‘Israelites’ Burial Society of Magdeburg’) – Jewish Burial Society of Magdeburg.

Israelitischer Frauenverein (literally ‘Israelites’ Women’s Association’) – Jewish Women’s Association.

Israelitischer Friedhof (literally ‘Israelites’ Cemetery’) – Jewish cemetery.

Israelitischer Witwen- und Waisen-Unterstützungs-Fonds (literally ‘Israelites’ Welfare Fund for Widows and Orphans’) – Jewish Welfare Fund for Widows and Orphans.

Israelitisches Altersheim (literally ‘Israelites’ Home for the Aged’) – Jewish Home for the Aged.

Judendorf – Jewish settlement.

judenfrei – Cleansed of Jews.

Judenhaus (pl. *Judenhäuser*) – Jew house. Designated, segregated housing for Jews. Commencing in May 1939, Jews were forced out of their homes and crammed into designated apartments. Often such apartments and even rooms were shared.

Jüdisch-liberaler Jugendbund ‘Heimat’ – ‘Homeland’ Liberal Jewish Youth Association.

Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg – Jewish Regional Credit Bank of Magdeburg.

Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg – Jewish Cultural Society of Magdeburg. Successor organisation of the *Jüdischer Verein Freundschaft zu Magdeburg*.

Jüdische Kultusvereinigung – Jewish Religious Association. The name given to each Jewish community on 28 March 1938, when all communities lost their legal status as incorporated bodies.

Jüdische Vereinigung 'Ahduth' – 'Solidarity' Jewish Association. One of the *Shtibl* communities in Magdeburg.

Jüdische Winterhilfe – Jewish Winter Relief.

Jüdischer Hilfsverein zu Magdeburg – Jewish Aid Association of Magdeburg.

Jüdischer Jugendverein 'Ludwig Philippson' – 'Ludwig Philippson' Jewish Youth Association. Jewish youth group attached to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg*, named in honour of Rabbi Dr Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889).

Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba' zu Magdeburg – 'Bar Kochba' Jewish Gymnastics and Sports Association of Magdeburg.

Jüdischer Verein Freundschaft zu Magdeburg – Jewish Friendship Association of Magdeburg. Jewish cultural organisation in Magdeburg.

'Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend' – 'Magdeburg and District Weekly Jewish News'.

Jugend-Alijah (literally 'Youth Aliyah') – Organisation for transferring young people to Palestine and caring for them there.

Kashruth – Jewish dietary laws.

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Kaufhaus – Department Store.

'Kaufhaus Gebrüder Barasch' – 'Barasch Brothers' Department Store'. The largest and most modern department store in Magdeburg.

'Kaufhaus Gebrüder Karfiol' – 'Karfiol Brothers' Department Store'. One of Magdeburg's many department stores.

Keren Hayesod – Palestine Foundation Fund, which after 1948 became the United Israel Appeal.

Kindertransport (literally 'Children's Transport') – Organised groups of Jewish children and youth, who were unaccompanied emigrants from Germany between 1934 and 1939.

Kleiderhof – Clothing depot in mediaeval times.

Kosher – In compliance with Jewish dietary law.

Kreis- und Abschnittsleiter – Local District and Sector Leader of the Nazi Party.

Kreisamtsleiter – Local District Administrative Leader.

Landesverband Mitteldeutschland des C. V. – Central German State Union of the CV.

Lederwarengeschäft – Leathergoods shop.

Maccabi (also *Makkabi* [German spelling]) – International Jewish sports organisation.

Mendelssohn-Loge XII 357 – Mendelssohn Lodge XII 357. The *B'nai B'rith* Lodge in Magdeburg.

Mikvah – Jewish ritual bathhouse.

Minyan – Group of ten adult Jewish males, the quorum required for communal prayer.

Mischehe – Mixed marriage.

Mischling (pl. *Mischlinge*) – Person of mixed race.

Mizrachi (literally ‘East’) – Religious Zionist movement and political party.

Nebbich (literally ‘a Nobody’) – A non-entity, a pitiable person, a drab person.

Nordfront (literally ‘Northern Front’) – Northern suburbs.

Obermeister – Head of a professional guild.

Oberschullehrer (f. *Oberschullehrerin*) – Teacher at a Secondary High School.

Ostjuden (literally ‘Eastern Jews’) – Eastern European Jews. Term often used in a derogatory manner.

Palästina-Amt Berlin, Zweigstelle Magdeburg – Magdeburg Branch of the Palestine Office. This organisation operated as a department of the *Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland* under the auspices of the Jewish Agency.

‘Parlophon-Haus Silbermann’ – ‘Silbermanns’ Musical Instrument Shop’. Musical instrument shop in Magdeburg.

Paulus-Bund – League of Saint Paul. Association of ‘non-Aryan’ Christians.

Poale Zion (literally ‘Workers of Zion’) – Socialist Zionist party.

Polenaktion – The deportation of stateless, Polish Jews from Germany from 27–29 October 1938.

Polnische Juden (literally ‘Polish Jews’) – Polish Jews. Term often used in a derogatory manner to describe Eastern European Jews.

Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg – Magdeburg Advisory Bureau of the Provincial Union for Jewish Social Welfare in Saxony-Anhalt.

Purim – Jewish festival which commemorates the deliverance of the Jews of Persia from Haman, as told in the biblical book of Esther.

Rassenkunde – Race Studies. Subject introduced into the German school curriculum during the Nazi period.

Rassenverseuchung – Race contamination.

Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg (literally ‘National Union of Jewish Front Soldiers, Magdeburg Branch’) – Magdeburg Branch of the National Union of Jewish War Veterans.

Reichsbürgergesetz – *Reich* Citizenship Law. This law was one of the Nuremberg Laws and was enacted on 15 September 1935.

Reichsflaggengesetz – *Reich* Flag Law. This law was one of the Nuremberg Laws and was enacted on 15 September 1935.

Reichsfluchtsteuer – *Reich* Flight Tax. Proclaimed in 1931 under the Brüning government to prevent flight of capital from Germany. Implemented by the Nazi government as a means to pilfer the property and assets of emigrating Jews.

Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei im Reichsministerium des Innern – *Reich* Leader of the SS and Chief of the German Police of the *Reich* Ministry for the Interior. This position was occupied by Heinrich Himmler.

Reichstag – German federal parliament established in 1871. It was stripped of its legislative function during the Third *Reich* and its role was largely decorative.

Reichskristallnacht (literally ‘the *Reich*’s Night of Broken Glass’) – Pogrom of 9–10 November 1938 throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland, so named by the Nazis.

Reichssicherheitshauptamt – *Reich* Main Security Office formed in 1939. Its departments included the Intelligence Division, the Gestapo, the Criminal Police and the SD.

Reichsverband der jüdischen Kulturverbände in Deutschland – National Union of Jewish Cultural Associations in Germany.

Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland – National Representative Council of Jews in Germany, established by the Jewish communities of Germany on 17 September 1933 and headed by Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck.

Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland – National Association of Jews in Germany, a compulsory organisation for all Jews in Germany established by the Nazi regime on 4 July 1939, superseding the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland*.

Reichszentrale für jüdische Auswanderung – Reich Central Bureau for Jewish Emigration.

Religionsschule – Religious school in the German tradition attached to the synagogue.

'Ring', *Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend* – 'The Ring', Union of German-Jewish Youth. Jewish youth association in Germany which espoused Jewishness within the German context, but not Zionism. Renamed the 'Ring', *Bund jüdischer Jugend* (Union of Jewish Youth) in 1936.

Schutzbrief – Letter of Protection.

Schutzjuden – Protected Jews.

Shoah (literally 'Catastrophe') – Hebrew term which is now used to refer to the Holocaust.

Shochet – Ritual slaughterer of animals according to Jewish law.

Shtibl (pl. *Shtiblech*, *Shtibls* [English corruption]) – Prayer room in the tradition of Eastern European Jewry.

SS-Untersturmführer – A second lieutenant in the SS.

Staatspolizeistelle für den Regierungsbezirk Merseburg – State Police Bureau for the Administrative Region of Merseburg.

Studienrat (f. *Studienrätin*) – Teacher at a Secondary High School.

Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg – Synagogue Community of Magdeburg.

Tallit – Prayer shawl worn by Jewish males.

'*Taschen-Freiberg*' – 'Freibergs' Bags and Suitcases'. Leathergoods shop in Magdeburg.

Torah (literally 'Teaching' or 'Guidance') – The five books of Moses and the first third of the Hebrew bible. It is read aloud in the synagogue on the Sabbath and during the festivals.

Union der Zionisten Revisionisten, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg – Magdeburg Branch of the Union of Revisionist Zionists.

Verband der liberalen Rabbiner Deutschlands – Union of Liberal Rabbis of Germany.

Verband Nationaldeutscher Juden – Association of National-German Jews.

Verband ostjüdischer Organisationen Magdeburgs – Union of Eastern European Jewish Organisations of Magdeburg.

Verein der Freunde Israels – Association of the Friends of Israel.

Vierte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz – Fourth Decree of the *Reich* Citizenship Law. This decree was enacted on 25 July 1938.

Volksgemeinschaft – The National People’s Community. Nazi slogan expressing the allegedly classless form of national solidarity to which the regime aspired.

Volksgenosse (pl. *Volksgenossen*) – Member of the German People or German National community.

Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes – Winter Relief Assistance of the German People.

Yeshivah – Talmudic college.

Yom Kippur – Day of Atonement.

Zehnte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz – Tenth Decree of the *Reich* Citizenship Law. This decree was enacted on 4 July 1939.

Zeiri Misrachi für Deutschland (literally ‘Young Mizrachi in Germany’) – Young Mizrachi Movement of Germany.

Zeiri Misrachi-Heim – Young Mizrachi Home.

Zentralstelle für jüdische Wirtschaftshilfe – Central Bureau for Jewish Economic Aid.

Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der deutschen Juden – Central Welfare Agency for German Jews.

Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg – Magdeburg Branch of the Zionist Federation of Germany.

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The story of the Jewish community of Magdeburg during the Nazi era, so far largely untold, could not have been written in such detail without the assistance of a number of particularly important archives. I wish to express my deepest thanks to all the archives and libraries, listed in the bibliography of this thesis, for their efficient and professional assistance throughout the life of this project.

As all of the primary sources necessary for this project were located in foreign archives, this led to the necessity of extensive travel. This required both short- and long-term stays abroad, primarily in Germany, Israel and the USA. For this very reason, there are a number of individuals, archives, institutions and organisations which must be acknowledged by name. Without their efficiency, kindness and generous access to both the source material itself and to reproduction facilities, my research trips abroad would have been neither as effective nor as productive.

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