

the portraits in
great great

Portraits of Our Past:
Discovering Moises Kaz in the German Archives *
Emily Rose

I grew up looking at two oil paintings hanging above the mantel in my grandfather's New York City apartment (see illustration 1). Somehow I had never inquired about the portraits, and no one in the family had ever told me anything about them. I had no inkling of how meaningful they would become to me.

The story began in 1992 when an elderly distant cousin gave me several pages of a copy of a handwritten German-language Jewish family register that had been brought to America in 1941. My cousin helped me read "Berlizheimer," a name I knew. Then he showed me the name "Kaz," a name I had never heard with respect to my family. He read the name of the village of "Mühringen" written at the top of the page. No one had ever mentioned Mühringen to me, nor had any stories been handed down. All I had known was that my great grandfather had come to the American Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century from Germany. And so began my journey to learn about my family.

I now know that the subjects of the portraits in my grandparents' home were my great great great grandparents Joseph David Berlizheimer (1761-1855) and Gustel Kaz Berlizheimer (1779-1861). The documents I found later in the village, county and state archives revealed their story and the history of rural Jews in south Germany. Up to 1870, over ninety percent of the Jews lived like my ancestors in the villages and small towns.

Joseph David peddled fabrics in the Black Forest Region. Gradually he rose from peddler to merchant. He served as the president, *parnas*, of the Mühringen Jewish community and on the kingdom wide emancipation committees. He appears the successful burgher. One of their children, David, opened a fabric shop and started a cottage-weaving factory in the house bought by Gustel's father, Moises, in 1796.

David died of lung disease in 1849, leaving his second wife with young children. Mina Gundelfinger Berlizheimer and her stepchildren tried to keep the weaving business

afloat, but hard economic times and the collapse of the weaving industry made that impossible. The business went bankrupt, and Mina had no choice—like so many other Christians and Jews—but to immigrate to America. In 1857, Mina and her children joined other Berlizheimers who had already settled in the young city of Chicago. Mina died four years later when my great grandfather was 16 years old.

The story of Gustel Kaz Berlizheimer's father, Moises Kaz, illustrates the wide range of documents that can be uncovered in the German archives. In 1994 I met Hans Peter Müller, the author of the Mühringen village history. He helped me find yellowed, fragile and dusty documents about the Berlizheimer family and Moises Kaz in the Mühringen archive, which was then located in the village hall. When the village hall closed for the day, we sat outside the Adler Inn, and he translated some documents for me.

Looking at a house insurance register he read, "Joseph David Berlizheimer took over the house in Mühringen previously owned by Moises Kaz who was living in Rottweil." The name "Moises Kaz" leaped from the page! He was my great great great great grandfather, as listed on the handwritten family register. Since there were no notations on the family register, I had assumed that Moises had lived his entire life in Mühringen. So I drove about 35 minutes south to Rottweil. The director of the town archive greeted me with incredible enthusiasm. He showed me the large houses that Moises Kaz and his descendants had owned in the nineteenth century, and where the Jewish community had worshipped for decades. He also told me the story of how Moises Kaz saved the town from Napoleon's army in 1799. I spent hours in the archives uncovering even more information about Moises' life, and how he and his family impacted the history of the rural Jews.

I did the research for the book *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*, over five years. While looking for documents, I learned how the German archives were organized, and how someone who does not

read or speak German could track down information. Although I generally thrived on the challenge of uncovering documents, more precise research techniques would have saved me hours of frustration. In most instances, the information presented here reflects my experiences doing research in Baden-Württemberg, but it can be used as a guideline to undertaking research in the archives in the other German states.

Of course, for *Portraits of Our Past* the events of Moises Kaz's life are placed in chronological order. The genealogist, on the other hand, needs to know where to find the information. So I will explain his story in that way.

Before we begin the nuts and bolts of doing research in the archives, I need to emphasize the important role history books played in my research. That first year I bought or photocopied parts of books that pertained to Mühringen, Rottweil or Württemberg Jewish history. Then I checked all the text and citations and made a detailed list before I returned to the German archives the next year. Unfortunately, due to archive reorganizations, most of the citations were no longer valid, but at least these lists gave me a road map of what I should be able to find.

And so I started looking into the old volumes and documents to find out about the life of Moises Kaz. In the village archive (*Gemeindearchiv*) of Mühringen, mid 18th century community tax lists (*Gemeindesteuerkataster*) included a Löb Kaz, coming from Nikolsburg, a Jewish community in Bohemia. Löb was the given name of Moises' father on the Jewish family registers. In the contract book (*Kaufbücher*), Moises was listed as a guarantor, as a purchaser of apartments, and then in 1796, as a purchaser of an expensive house (see illustration 2). His signature was in Hebrew indicating that he probably did not write German. The contract books often list only the seller in the index so each page needs to be studied to find the buyer. The fire insurance register (*Brandversicherungskataster*) was the volume that enabled me to discover that Moises Kaz had moved to Rottweil. It is organized by house number; often the



Joseph David Berlzheimer



Gustel Kaz Berlzheimer



Moises Kaz's headstone

information in the remarks column is very pertinent. By means of the property registers (*Güterbücher*), I was able to trace the ownership of Moises' house until his descendants sold it when they were bankrupt and immigrated to America in 1857. These heavy volumes list property number, owner, previous and subsequent owners, and the property value. They are organized by name or property number, and sometimes a single index serves several volumes.

The Jewish cemetery documentation (*Jüdische Friedhofsdokumentation*) listed the grave of Moises Kaz. In the cemetery, although the headstone was greatly weathered, I could make out the two fingers still visible from the outstretched hands of the priestly benediction. This confirmed that Moises was indeed a Kohen (see illustration 3).

Since Moises Kaz did business in the town of Rottweil from the 1780s and moved there in 1803, the next archive level was the town or city archive (*Stadtarchiv*). The best source was the community and town council minute books (*Gemeinderatsprotokolle* / *Stadtratsprotokolle*). These are chronological and usually with an index, and list in detail all the deliberations of community or town councils including transactions, certificates, citizen status, trade status, relations with the town, complaints, etc. Each volume has an index, and the indexes are usually at the beginning or end, but sometimes they are located in the middle. In the index, individuals are listed under last names, or first names, or also under "*Juden*," "*Jud*" and "*Israeliten*." Sometimes the index is incomplete. In most volumes, the pages are numbered 1 followed by 1b; then 2, 2b; and so forth. It is important to photocopy the front page of the volume or any identifying number.

In the minutes books I found the story of how Moises Kaz, at the town's request, had bought the silver owned by the churches and guilds in 1799 when Napoleon's army was threatening to ransack the town. I spent days trying to find the contract itself. I couldn't find it in the index or by going page by page. Finally I said, "I give up" and placed the

heavy volume on the table. Looking down, I saw it had opened to the contract – it had just been placed unbound between the pages of the volume!

Trade tax registers (*Gewerbsteuerkataster*) list individuals with trade category and amount of tax paid. Here I could track the success of Moises Kaz's store and then his bankruptcy in the 1820s.

Contracts (*Verträge*) include engagement, wedding, and estate documents. They are listed and numbered in chronological order by the date of the end of the process. The categorization of these contracts and also of emigration documents does not differentiate, and therefore separate, Jewish and Christian parties.

When Moises received his permission (protection letter, *Schutzbrief*) to do business and live in Rottweil, he published a small announcement in the local newspaper. Looking patiently through issues of the newspaper (*Zeitung*) provided information about Moises' business including his stock and his subsequent bankruptcy. These volumes sometimes have an index.

The types of documents described above can be found in both the village and town/city archives. Many of these have an archive organization register (*Findbuch* or *Repertorium*), that is usually typed or at least not written in the old German script.

Rottweil came under the political control of the Duchy of Württemberg in 1801. Therefore, the information about Moises Kaz also had to be tracked in regional and state archives (*Staatsarchiv*). Often transactions or proceedings initiated at the local or county government level proceeded to the regional and state levels of government, and then returned to the local or county level. (For links to the specific German archives, see www.lad-bw.de) These archives have a complex organization system, fixed times for ordering materials, and more rigid photocopying schedules. The state archives have many archive registers: I found documents about Moises Kaz by searching under his name, under Rottweil, and under the broader topics of Jewish legislation and

petitions (which often did not identify him by name).

One of the books I found that first year was a legal history of the Jews to 1828. There I found an 1807 decree by the king in favor of Moises. Unraveling that story entailed many long documents as Moises' petitions to buy land at auction or from bankrupt buyers were turned down at all levels of government and by the high courts.

The king, however, decreed that any subject who was capable of developing land or having it developed could do so regardless of his faith. From this decision came an 1811 decree allowing Jews to own land. I found the decree in the annual Württemberg law register (*Regierungsblatt*). Some indices are located in the middle of these law volumes.

Jewish family registers for each locale (*Jüdisches Familienregister, Ortssippenbuch*) gave me the basic information about the Kaz family. In the Rottweil Jewish family registers I found that Moises was born in 1750 and died in 1829. The registers are located in the state archives in Württemberg. They are also located at the Jewish Community Administration in Stuttgart (*Israelitische Religionsgemeinschaft*), and some original volumes are in the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Givat Ram Campus, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

I had been reading the Rottweil histories in which the success of a Rothschild as a town doctor in the 1840s and his subsequent ownership of the town's newspaper were described. In the family registers, I found that

this Rothschild (no relation to the banking family) was the grandson of Moises Kaz.

Documents relating to Jewish affairs – from the community to kingdom wide issues – are housed in the Ludwigsburg State Archive, 30 minutes north of Stuttgart. Moises founded the Rottweil Jewish community in 1806; in the archives we can find the organization petitions and documents pertaining to problems of even such a very small Jewish community. We find that the Ministry of the Interior gave the Rottweil community permission to have a “church” and to set up a fund for the poor, both under its own local administration.

The Ministry stated that the synagogue and religious objects that Moises Kaz personally owned in his house were separate from the “church's” possessions. The archives of the Jewish Superior Church Authority (*Königlich Israelitische Oberkirchenbehörde*) – with its jurisdiction over “church” taxes, rabbis, teachers, and even the apprenticeship program after 1828 – give detailed information about all the Jewish communities and their members. The Ludwigsburg State Archive has an excellent archive organization book for Jewish subjects, people, and places.

My research in the German archives revealed the story of Moises Kaz and his descendants. Their story is part of the history of the rural German Jews in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The portraits of Moises Kaz's daughter and son-in-law are his legacy for future generations.

The image shows a section of a handwritten document, likely a contract, written in German. At the top left, the word "Kaufkon." is written in a cursive hand. Below it, there is a large, stylized signature. To the right of the signature, there are several lines of text, including "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde", "Kaufkon. der Gemeinde". The text is written in a cursive hand and is somewhat difficult to read due to the handwriting.

Section of Moises Kaz's contract with his signature

Using the German State Archives

Documents are organized in basically the same way in each of the State Archives, but the designations differ from archive to archive. Ask a staff member to check your order form to be sure you have written the required information correctly. Two citations illustrate the system:

HStASt E 146/2 Bü 1193 I and StAS Wü 125/23 Bd. 1 Nr. 28.

1. Name of archive. HStASt is the designation for the Central State Archive in Stuttgart, and StAS is the abbreviation for the State Archive in Sigmaringen.
2. Documents are organized into broad subject matter sections based on governmental sectors and departments called *Bestände*, a “file cabinet.” E 146/2 and Wü 125/23 indicate the subject matter section.
3. Within that “file cabinet” the documents are organized into *Büschel*, “file drawers.” These “drawers” can contain only a few files or a stack two feet high. Bü 1193 I and Bd. 1 Nr. 28 are examples of these file drawer designations.
4. Within the “drawer,” the files are usually organized chronologically, but it is best to check all the files. In some cases, the files are numbered or the pages within a file are numbered, and you should use that number for your photocopying list. Identifying the document by date, however, is the most consistent method for your own records.

After you photocopy a document, write the archive, name of volume, page number, and location of the volume in the archive on the back of the document. Be sure the date is on the page you photocopied or search for a date in the preceding pages.

When in doubt, photocopy. You never know what additional information you will find when you have time to study a document. The cost of photocopying in the state and some town archives can be quite high, while some local archives do not charge a fee.

* Adapted from *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*. Copyright 2001 by Emily Rose, by permission of the publisher, The Jewish Publication Society, 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

The German edition, translated from English, is entitled *Als Moises Kaz seine Stadt vor Napoleon rettete: Meiner jüdischen Geschichte auf der Spur* (When Moises Kaz Saved his Town from Napoleon: On the Trail

of My Jewish History), was published by Konrad Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart in 1999.

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