

A HISTORICALLY CHARGED SITE

The exact date on which the Rosenwiller Jewish Cemetery was founded remains unknown to this day. What we do know, though, is that it already existed in the 14th century, the cemetery being mentioned in a Charter signed by Emperor Charles IV in 1366.

The large-scale massacre of the Jews of Strasburg on February 14th, 1349 – known as the Saint-Valentine Massacres – left its mark on the 14th century. Falsely accused of spreading the Black Death, entire families were brutally slaughtered. As a result, the Jewish population dwindled down to fewer than 100 families, thus reducing the number of burials in Rosenwiller.

It was only in the mid-18th century that records began to show an increase in burials. In 1747, the cemetery underwent its first extension and a walled enclosure was built and fitted with a locked gate. By 1752, approximately 900 graves had been dug. As the Jewish population was increasing, the cemetery was extended for a second time in 1763.

In 1793, Commissioner Oberlin and municipal representatives ordered the destruction of tombstones bearing religious symbols.

It was during this period, known as the Reign of Terror, that the cemetery was reduced to rubble. Numerous tombstones were damaged or demolished.

Cemetery records were destroyed during the Second World War and only one copy dating from 1936 provides an account of its history up until 1753. It was produced by Cerf Picard, an officiating minister of the Rosheim community who was deported to Auschwitz, where he died in 1944 at the age of 78. During the 19th century, the number of burials decreased as the majority of the Jewish population had moved to larger cities like Strasbourg. From the Middle Ages to the present day, around 7000 people are estimated to have been buried on this site, with approximately 5570 names inscribed in the burial records from 1753 to 1980.

On 27 February 1979, a governmental decree granted permission for the old part of the cemetery to be recorded in the Site Inventory.



KEY DATES

- 1366 : first official record of the cemetery
- 1729: Construction of the first wooden fence
- 1747: First extension of the property; construction of a stone - walled enclosure with a locked gate.
- 1763: Second extension wall knocked down
- 1793: Repression, looting and destruction of graves
- 1882: Construction of the current western entrance and recent extension
- 1979: Old cemetery registered in the Site Inventory



A UNIQUE CULTURE WITH SIMPLICITY AS ITS HALLMARK

The burial ritual is tinged with simplicity and modesty. Ostentatious decoration and religious symbolism go against the spirit of Judaism and Jewish tradition. Therefore, it is not customary in the Jewish culture to place flowers on graves.

A great deal of respect is shown to the body of the deceased. The purpose of these rituals is to comfort and assist the mourners, allowing them to fully express their pain and helping them to deal with their grief.

Visiting the grave is not a common practice because life must go on, after all. In order to help mourners move forward, there are a number of rituals and religious ceremonies enabling them to pay tribute to their loved ones.

An ancient custom is to place a stone on the grave, a sign of the mourner's visit and a symbol of memory. The stone may also symbolise a good deed that the mourner vows to perform in honour of the deceased.

Yiddish

Yiddish is a Germanic language combined with Hebrew and Slavic vocabulary. It was the vernacular language of Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Yiddish was spoken by 11 million people, tantamount to two thirds of the Jewish world. Use of the language is now on the decline.

Stones placed on a grave



Candelabra on a tombstone (near Jaffa)- reference to the holy body



RITUALS AND CEREMONY

BEFORE THE BURIAL - WATCHING OVER THE DECEASED

Watching over the deceased - Reading from the Book of Psalms.

The body is dressed in white cotton or linen. The face is covered as a sign of respect and in order to keep the image of the deceased alive.

A Shiva candle is lit. This candle must remain lit for the next seven days (it represents the soul of the deceased, which is still present).

Mirrors, symbolising vanity, are covered over.

Mourners (Onèn) refrain from having any meat or wine, and do not say Grace at mealtimes. They do not say daily prayers (Shema) and do not gather for common prayer (Minyan).

BURIAL

The body is buried in a coffin made of pine deals, with no vault. The body is never exhumed.

The ceremony is simple, with no signs of wealth or ostentation.

Flowers are not customary.

Placing earth on the grave - three handfuls of earth are thrown into the grave to symbolise the return to dust.

The Keri'ah ritual - rending of garments: a piece of clothing is ripped apart during the ceremony, symbolising the expression of grief caused by the loss of the loved one. The garment is kept for seven days and then disposed of.

SEVEN-DAY MOURNING PERIOD

The burial is followed by seven days of mourning, during which it is customary to

remain at home and refrain from working or shaving.

The burial is traditionally followed by a meal favouring certain foods such as hard-boiled eggs, lentils, etc. These foods symbolise the cycle of life.

The seven-day mourning period is punctuated by prayer sessions (Minyan) attended by at least ten people to say Kaddish (prayers).

At the end of this period, daily life resumes but mourning continues for another year.

SHELOSHIM

Thirty days after the burial

Transitional period where a few rules are still followed, such as not shaving, not getting a haircut and not wearing new clothes. All types of festivities are avoided. Mourners continue to recite Kaddish every day.

On the thirtieth day after the burial, mourners say Kaddish and may hold a small memorial ceremony for the deceased.

SHANAH

The year following the burial

Following the death of a parent (father or mother), mourners continue to say Kaddish for eleven months. During this period, they exercise self-restraint by not showing signs of gladness and by not attending festivities of any kind.

«Yahrzeit»

Anniversary of the death

One year after the death, mourners light a candle for 24 hours, starting at sunset.

It is also customary to make a donation to the community or to someone in need.

BURIAL MONUMENTS

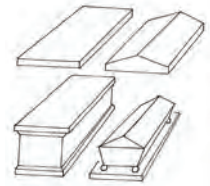
TOMBSTONE SHAPES

Tombstones face Jerusalem.

Vertical tombstones



Horizontal tombstones



While their shape is not specific to Jewish culture and is often identical to that of Christian tombstones, their ornaments and low relief sculptures differ.

Tombstones located in the old sections are mainly made from sandstone, a fine-grained sedimentary rock. This soft type of rock lends itself well to carvings and etchings.

In the Middle Ages, carvings and symbols were still very simple. They then became more complex, paying tribute to the deceased while highlighting their personality traits. Ornaments and their meanings might inform about a person's craft, profession and position in society.

MEANING OF THE EPITAPH

Here lie the remains of a man who was loyal to his people and who devoted his life to the well-being and the glory of the community. Constantly striving for justice, he was honest in his daily dealings, compassionate towards the poor, and firmly stood by the needy in times of trouble.

He feared the Lord and supported Israel.

Blessed be the memory of the noble, distinguished and illustrious Nephtali Hirtz Medelsheim. May justice precede him and his soul rejoice in the garden of the Lord. He passed away on the holy day of Sabbath, 4 Tebet 554 of the Jewish calendar, and was buried the following day on Sunday 5 Tebet.

May his soul enter into the bond of everlasting life and rest among the souls just and righteous, and may he rise up to receive his reward at the end of Time.

Amen, Selah.

Translation into French by Robert WEYL, *Le Cimetière Juif*, published by SALDE (Société Alsacienne et Lorraine de Diffusion et d'Édition)

Here lie the remains of



Tombstone of Hirtz Medelsheim, known as Cerf Berr - 1726 – 1793

א	alef	1	ט	tet	9	פ	pé	80
ב	bet	2	י	yud	10	צ	zadé	90
ג	gimel	3	כ	kaf	20	ק	quf	100
ד	dalet	4	ל	lamed	30	ר	resh	200
ה	hé	5	מ	mem	40	ש	shin	300
ו	vav	6	נ	nun	50	ת	tav	400
ז	zain	7	ס	samekh	60			
ח	'het	8	ע	ayin	70			

Excerpt from a book by Robert WEYL, *Le Cimetière juif*, published by SALDE (Société Alsacienne et Lorraine de Diffusion et d'Édition).

MEANING OF THE EPITAPHS

The first two Hebrew letters above the text mean «here lie the remains of». Surnames and first names are often followed by the place of birth in order to distinguish between people with the same name.

The date carved on the tombstone is based on the Jewish calendar. This seven-day lunar-solar calendar starts on Sunday and ends on Saturday (Shabbat).

ORNAMENTS AND MEANINGS

Objects carved on tombstones have both a decorative and symbolic function.

The hands of Cohen, from the Hebrew «Cohanim» meaning « "devoted" or "dedicated", point to the person's genealogy, in this case families or descendants of priests.

Plant symbols also suggest rebirth: a new tree will grow from a single willow branch planted in the ground; a tulip will blossom from a seemingly lifeless bulb.

Appearing in various forms, the sun symbolizes resurrection in popular tradition.

**Ornaments and meanings characteristic of Jewish culture.*



The hands of the Kohanim (from «Cohen», meaning «priest»)*



The water pitchers of the Levi'im (from «Levi», meaning «temple servant»)*



Circumciser's tools *



The Sabbath lamp, lit by devout women*



The ram's horn (Shofar), blown by high priests or officiating ministers*



The sun (swastika) is a symbol of resurrection*



A broken column indicates a young life cut short.



A willow tree or branch: symbol of sorrow and rebirth



Poppy seed



Hands clasped together, a loving couple



The crown



An hourglass, sometimes winged, symbolises the passage of time.



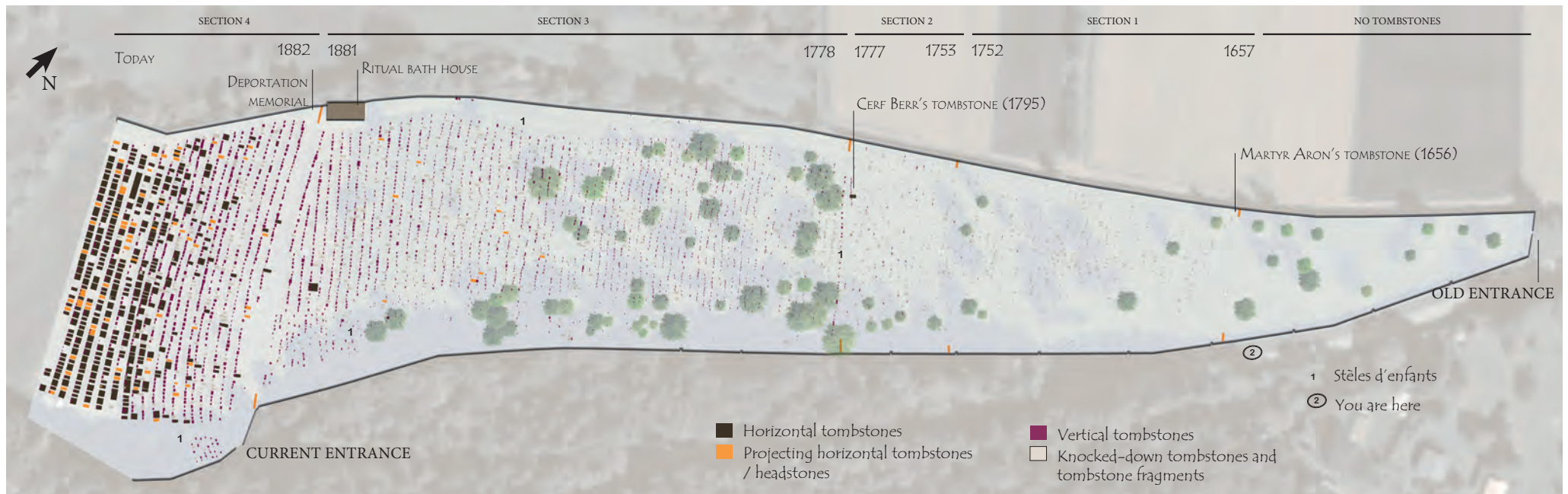
Ivy branch



Tulip



Floral decoration





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