



## Germany: Debates continue over the “Judensau” carvings on medieval churches

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**August 11, 2023 - This post isn't about Jewish heritage — but about heritage referencing Jews.... The Jewish Chronicle and other media recently have published articles about the longstanding — and continuing — debate over what to do about the medieval carving of the so-called Judensau (Jews' sow) on the town church, or Stadtkirche, in Wittenberg — the church where Martin Luther preached.**

The carving is one of many representations from the Middle Ages found in German-speaking parts of Europe — at least two dozen — that show the intensely derogatory depiction of Jews suckling from the teats of a female pig.

Martin Luther (who in his writings used vile antisemitic language and advocated for burning of synagogues and Jewish comes) described the carving in a work he published in 1543 as “a sow carved into the stone under which lie young pigs and Jews who are sucking; behind the sow stands a rabbi who is lifting up the right leg of the sow, raises the behind of the sow, bows down and looks with great effort into the Talmud under the sow, as if he wanted to read and see something most difficult and exceptional; no doubt they gained the Shem Hamphoras [a version of the name of God] from that place.”

[In the latest development](#), Felix Klein, the German government commissioner for Jewish Life and the Fight against Antisemitism, urged the city to remove the carving, as Wittenberg may become the host of a new German-Israeli youth organisation.

Debate has been going on for years over what to do about the carving. In [June 2022](#), Germany's supreme court ruled that the sculpture can stay on the facade of the church.

Elsewhere, in May of this year the Protestant church in Brandenburg announced that the “Judensau” carving on an interior pillar of the Brandenburg cathedral will be covered up, rather than removed, as removal would be structurally impossible.

Bishop Christian Stäblein emphasized that there was “neither any doubt about the anti-Semitic statement that emanates from this relief, nor about the guilt of the churches for actively promoting hatred of Jews and anti-Semitism”. The task now is “to deal with this heavy, shameful legacy in a conscious and appropriate manner”.

Earlier this summer, JHE's Ruth Ellen Gruber took a look at the 14th century Judensau sculpture on a pillar of the south facade of the late-Gothic cathedral in Regensburg, Germany.

The [Jewish guide to Regensburg](#), created as part of the Rediscover project and posted on the city's web site, describes “Judensau” sculpture as follows:

The limestone sculpture, made between 1340 and 1380, clearly shows is a female pig or sow, which is being held by one ear by a man wearing a hat, so that the other two men can

suckle on the teats of the animal. One of the men has no head anymore, but the other one wears the pointed hat, which Jews had been required to wear during the Middle Ages. The pig is seen as unclean in the Jewish faith and stands for pure blasphemy. The insult of the entire scene was even more severe, as the sculpture was placed right opposite of one of the main gates into the Jewish quarter[.]

The sculpture is quite weathered and high up, and hard to make out in detail from the ground.

We were pleased to see the new information panel [installed near the carving](#) this past January 2023, under the auspices of the city, the region, and the local Jewish community. Unveiled by the Bavarian Minister of Education, it headlines that “Judensau” sculptures are anti-Semitism carved in stone” and provides background.

[The Rediscover guide notes](#) that the text “was created by the Munich professor Dr. Eva Haverkamp-Rott in coordination with the anti-Semitism commissioner of the Free State of Bavaria and coordinated with all institutions involved.”

There is also a QR code where you can access the website of the Bavarian Anti-Semitism Commissioner and find “further information about anti-Semitic depictions on historical buildings in Bavaria and about the history of Jews in Regensburg.”

Source: [Jewish Heritage Europe](#).