



The Decree of 321: Cologne, the Emperor, and Jewish History

table of contents

Imprint

Publisher:

MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum
in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne
Gürzenich Quartier
Augustinerstraße 10–12, 50667 Köln

Responsible:

Dr. Thomas Otten
Director MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum
in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne

Authors:

Dr. Laura Cohen, Scientific Curator
of the „2021. Jewish Life in Germany“ project (lc)

Dr. Thomas Otten, Director MiQua. LVR-Jewish
Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne (to)

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Ristow, Scientific Curator MiQua.
LVR-Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter
Cologne (sr)

Layout:

Bosbach Kommunikation & Design

Front cover photograph:

Collage: Bosbach Kommunikation & Design,
using the following photos: Head – Antique Statue in
Rome (tichr/Shutterstock 255442417), Law of 321
(* Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Codex Theodosianus
16, 8.3.)

Print:

LVR-Druckerei, Inklusionsabteilung,
Tel 0221 809-2418

ISBN: 978-3-96719-007-6

2nd edition, revised and expanded

04	Greeting
07	Emperor Constantine's decree
08	Early Judaism in Northwestern Euope
19	The Codex Theodosianus
19	Imperial legislation in the 4 th century
24	2021 – 1700 years of Jewish life in Germany

A contribution by the LVR
as part of the overall:

Gefördert durch:



Dr. Corinna Franz

Head of LVR-Department of Culture
and Regional Cultural Heritage



Dr. Thomas Otten

Director MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in
the Archaeological Quarter Cologne

Dr. Corinna Franz (Photo: Uwe Weiser) // Dr. Thomas Otten (Photo: Sharon Nathan/LVR)

Greeting

Dear readers, dear friends of MiQua,

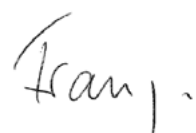
Following an enquiry from Cologne, the Roman Emperor Constantine passed a far-reaching law in AD 321 under which Jews were permitted to hold offices in both the Roman Curia and the city administration. This decree is the earliest surviving documentary evidence of the presence of Jews north of the Alps. In 2021, we looked back on a 1700-year history of Jewish life in Germany, which was celebrated in numerous events during a nationwide anniversary year, which was prolonged until July 2022. The MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne, which is still under construction, played a central role during the anniversary year as it told the 2000-year history of Cologne and therefore also the history of the Jews, who have been part of German society and history since ancient times. This history also includes exclusion and expulsion, pogroms, and murder.

The Rhineland Regional Council (RRC) had an obligation to help shape the anniversary year accordingly and to contribute to the initiation of cultural, political, and inter-religious public discourse as well as to take a clear stance against anti-Semitism, which is currently increasing. What could be more fitting in this context than to bring the LVR's activities to the attention of a broad public? Together with the MiQua, which is currently being built at Rathausplatz, Cologne, and the LVR CULTURAL CENTRE-Rödingen Village Synagogue, we want to raise awareness of the 1700-year-long continuity of Jewish life in Cologne, rural areas, and throughout Germany. The MiQua presented a very varied series of events throughout the anniversary year, which included an exhibition in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Cologne's KOLUMBA art museum, a travelling exhibition through five municipalities in the Rhineland region and Westphalia, an academic conference, and a series of public lectures and seminars in conjunction with the Universities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, and Berlin.

As such, publishing an introductory text on the historical context of the Law of 321 and providing all interested parties with an initial guide to understanding this unique source seemed the obvious thing to do. This publication presents the current state of research on Judaism north of the Alps during the 1st millennium, explains the significance of the *Codex Theodosianus* – a collection of laws from Late Antiquity dating from the early 5th century – and presents the law itself in the context of the prevailing religious situation in the Roman Empire during the Constantinian era. Interpretive approaches based on archaeological and historical sources are also important so the lively interest with which this guide has been met and the fact that the first edition very quickly sold out is all the more gratify-

ing. We have therefore taken the opportunity to comprehensively revise the text and add further illustrations.

We very much hope that you will enjoy reading this brochure and that it will leave you looking forward to the other various events that will be held in 2022.



Dr. Corinna Franz
Head of LVR-Department of Culture
and Regional Cultural Heritage



Dr. Thomas Otten
Director MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in
the Archaeological Quarter Cologne

Emperor Constantine's decree

Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium – the forerunner of modern Cologne and then capital of the Lower Germanic province – first came to the attention of Rome and the Emperor in the early 4th century AD when, apparently, some members of the city council approached the Emperor on an administrative issue, who seems to have taken an interest in the matter as he set out his response in a letter in which he refers to a law that was to be binding throughout the Roman Empire. With a certain scope for special rights and exemptions, the Constantinian decree of 321 authorised the provincial cities to appoint Jews to the city council. The decree sheds light on the history of Jews in Cologne in Late Antiquity and is a unique documentary source for research, yielding certitudes and uncertainties as well as provoking speculation and interpretation.

The purpose of this brief presentation is to highlight the potential and limitations that the statements set out in the decree offer for Jewish life both in Cologne and the Roman provinces in Late Antiquity. The specific value of the decree as well as the rarity of early evidence of Jewish history and culture in the first millennium becomes clear in comparison with other written and archaeological sources.

The decree is of constitutive importance for the collaborative project '2021. Jewish Life in Germany'. Together with archaeological sources from two thousand years of the city's history, it marks the origin of all reflections on the early period of Jewish life in Central Europe and establishes the narrative of the MiQua, the planned Jewish Museum in Cologne's archaeological zone. (to)



Fig. 1: View of the underground exhibition area of the planned MiQua, which will be dedicated to Emperor Constantine's decree (© Wandel Lorch Architekten)



Fig. 2: Replica of a reconstructed oil lamp from the Late Antiquity period found near the Gallus Chapel in Augsburg along with the remains of Old Testament frescoes (Photo: Römisches Museum Augsburg)

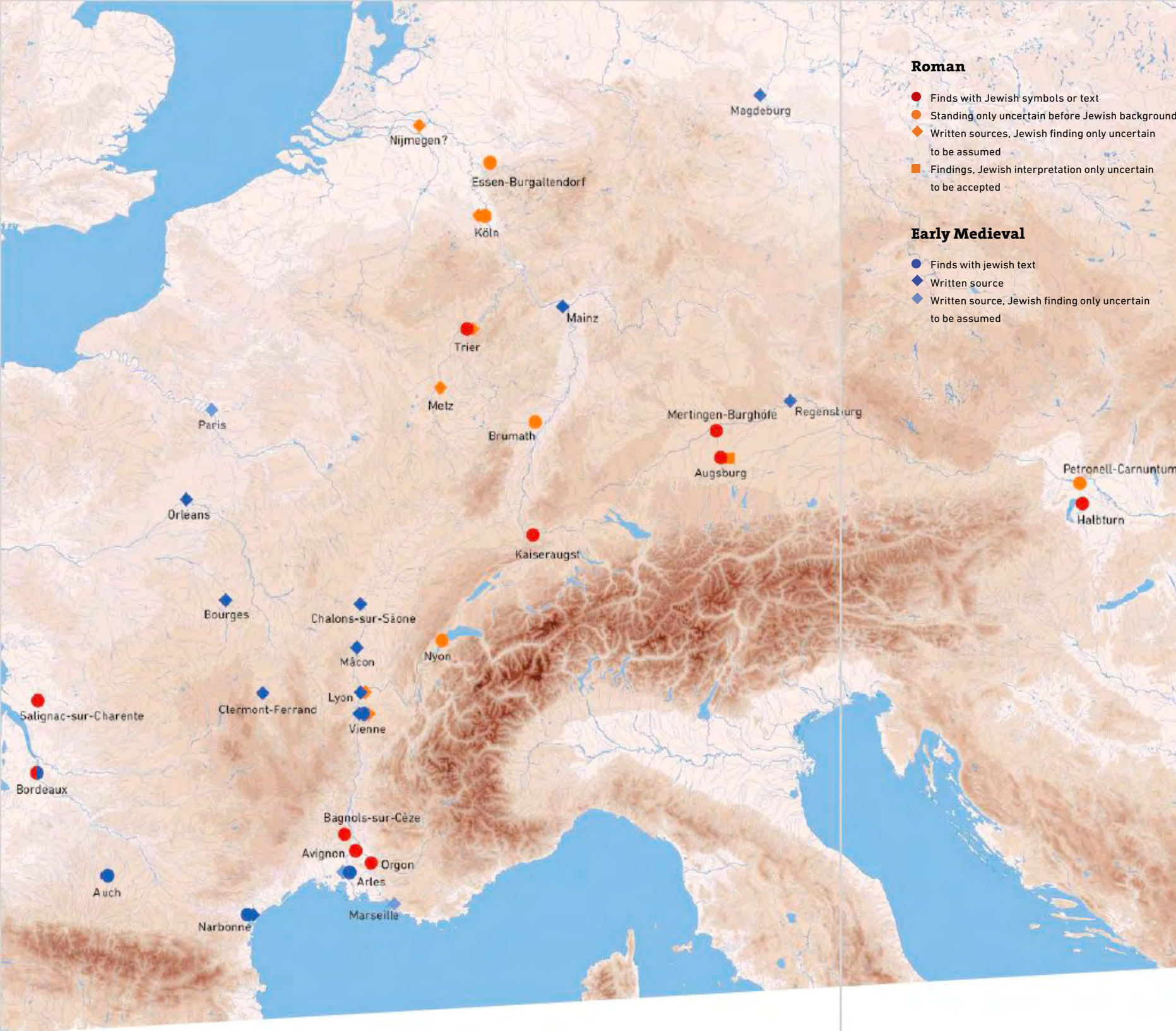
Early Judaism in Northwestern Europe

Earliest evidence in Cologne

Among other things, excavations carried out by Otto Doppelfeld over half a century ago in 1953 and 1956 around Cologne's Rathausplatz, the former Roman governor's palace (praetorium), the synagogue and mikveh yielded features from the early era of Judaism in Germany and, at least, the Council Chapel. These excavations awakened a general interest in early Judaism in antiquity and the Middle Ages, yet hardly any new sources have come to light since then, which essentially means that the conclusions drawn in the 1960s about early Judaism are still valid today. The current excavations, which began in 2007, also confirm the insights gleaned at that time. Whilst the „Decree of 321“ (actually just an excerpt from a letter), the earliest document of this kind found north of the Alps, is often accredited to Cologne, but material sources from this period are completely

lacking. Being home to a synagogue built in the early 11th century and a mikveh that is presumably of the same age, Cologne along with Worms and Speyer boasts the oldest archaeological evidence of Jewish life in regnum Teutonicorum, and the later so called Roman-German Kingdom.

Jewish cult buildings in the northern diaspora may have been of a completely different design to those in the eastern Mediterranean, where examples can be found dating back to the 3rd century AD. It is entirely possible that archaeologists have not yet recognised older synagogues as such in other places, as would be conceivable in Augsburg, for example (Fig. 2). Indeed, no such synagogue can be clearly identified in Rome itself, although the written sources mention eleven Jewish places of worship within the city, which is indicative of the difficulty of identifying synagogues in the Late Antiquity period.



The archaeology of Judaism

Whereas archaeological evidence can even be found for the existence of early Jewish settlements in Mediterranean Europe, the same is not true in the northern Alpine region. Whilst there appear to have been Jews living in this area too, their presence in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages is only attested by a few written sources and isolated minor finds and inscriptions (Fig. 3). Based on these facts, it seems likely that the Jews lived in the midst of mainstream society but left hardly any material traces behind. So, the early period of Jewish history in Germany and France, where written sources can still be found in the subsequent early Middle Ages, only comes into sharper focus as of the beginning of the High Middle Ages, i.e., the period around the year 1100.

Fig. 3: Map of archaeological sources of Judaism north of the Alps in the 1st Millennium (Graphic: Christoph Duntze / LVR, content: Sebastian Ristow / LVR, 2021)

Fig. 4: Lead seal with menorah from Mertingen-Burghöfe
(Photo: Manfred Eberlein, D 2006-68, Lead seal, Burghöfe)



It is certainly worth mentioning certain finds with a Jewish connection from the northern Alpine region, particularly from the Late Antiquity period, such as an oil lamp bearing the image of a menorah¹ from the 4th/5th century discovered during an excavation at St. Gallus in Augsburg. Among the older finds from search campaigns using metal detectors at Mertingen-Burghöfe was a lead seal from the Roman period, which also bears the image of the menorah (Fig. 4).

A law was passed in Trier during the reign of Emperor Valentinian I (364–375), which prohibited the quartering of

soldiers in synagogues. Finds dating back to Late Antiquity showing Jewish imagery are also known from this site but lack any archaeological context. Three weights bearing Hebrew abbreviations for weight without any indication of where they were discovered were all held in private collections and are associated with Trier, although it is no longer possible to verify this origin. Four lead seals bearing the image of the menorah, the etrog² and, in one case, a shofar³, have also been discovered. Objects of this kind arrived in Trier in the course of general trade and are not suggestive of the actual presence of Jews.

¹ It is said that the seven-branched candlestick design can be traced back to Moses' interaction with the numinous at Mount Sinai, which meant that it could be co-opted as a symbol both by Jews and Christians. Although the ancient menorah from the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem has not survived, it is repeatedly depicted as a symbol.

² A variant of the citron used for candied lemon, which has been part of the prescribed Jewish festive bouquet since the days of Moses and is therefore a symbol depicted exclusively in Jewish art.

³ The horn, often of a ram, has been blown for ritual purposes in Judaism since ancient times and commemorates Abraham's planned sacrifice of Isaac.

Abb. 5: An oil lamp from Trier dating back to the late 4th century showing the menorah on the upper surface (Photo: Thomas Zühmer, © GDKE/Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier)



The situation is different in the case of the fragment of an oil lamp from around AD 400, which was also found in the main market square in Trier in 1901 (Fig. 5) in a confirmed archaeological context. A menorah with a tripod base and angled arms is shown on the outer edge of the surface i.e., the rim of the central image and on the entire upper side.

Three other lamps adorned with Jewish motifs have been found in France dating to the Late Antiquity period oppidum of Lombren near Bagnols-sur-Cèze, as well as in the Avignon area and in Salignac-de-Pons. It is likely that pictorial motifs, such as the menorah, were only sold to those who were familiar with the image, which was otherwise relatively rare in the pictorial palette of Late Antiquity and was primarily restricted to Jewish contexts. Clay lamps, such as these, were commercial goods, but, by

contrast with glass and especially metal, they were probably not just purchased for their material value, but also because of the buyer's familiarity with the motifs they bore.

The signs on a lost oil lamp from the civilian town of Petronell-Carnuntum near Vienna are more likely to be geometric decorations than Hebrew characters. The image of the menorah on finger rings, such as those depicted on a specimen from Kaiseraugst in Switzerland, which probably dates from Late Antiquity, and on a now lost 19th-century find from Bordeaux in France, which also featured a monogram, may be interpreted as a clear indication of a Jewish background, as a ring is undoubtedly a personal possession, and any decorative motifs will have a special meaning for the owner. Other Jewish symbols are depicted in Kaiseraugst in addition to the menorah.

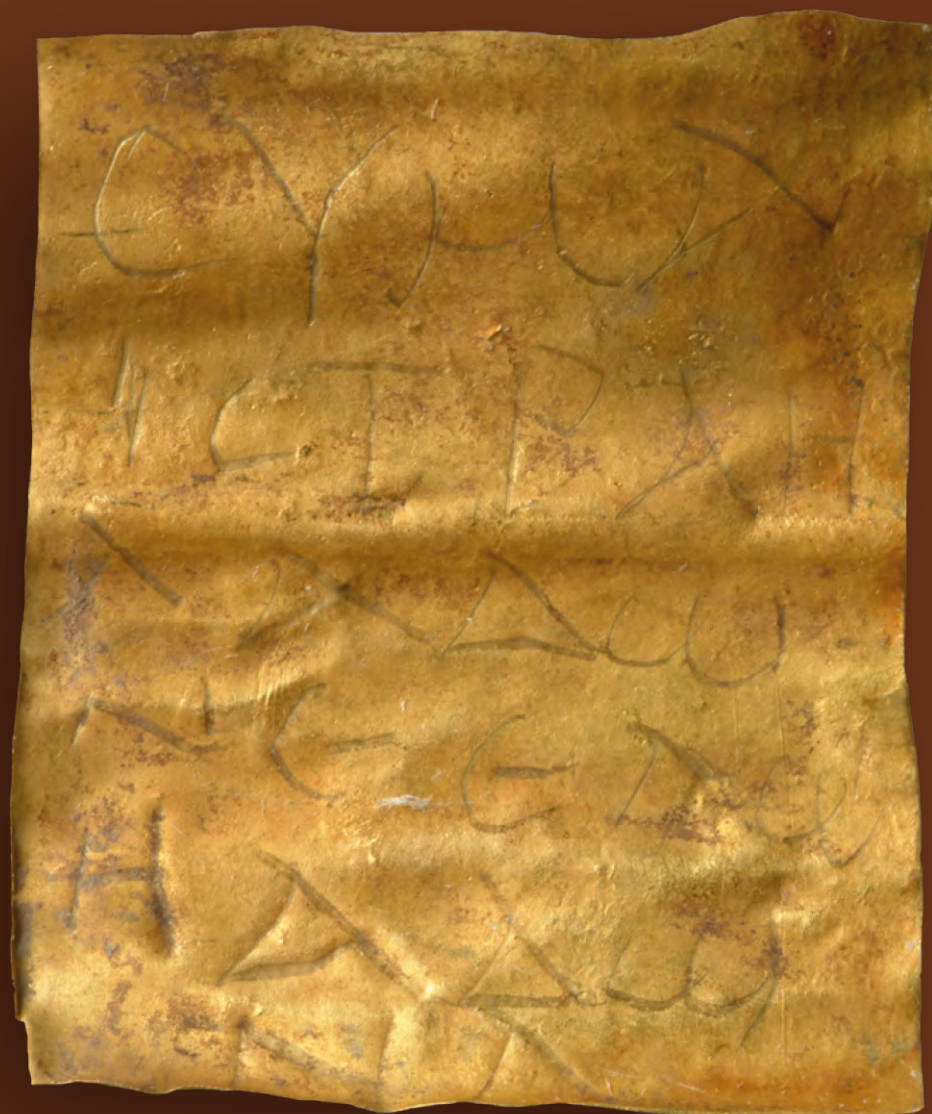


Fig. 6: An amulet from Halbtorn, Austria
(Photo: Gabriele Gattinger, Department of
Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology,
University of Vienna)

In terms of a potential proof of personal Jewish faith, a find from a child's grave in Halbtorn, Austria, in the Roman province of Pannonia I – an amulet in the form of a silver capsule from the 3rd century – is easier to interpret from an archaeological perspective ⁴ (Fig. 6). The Shema Yisrael is engraved in Hebrew, but in Greek letters, on the gold plate rolled into it (Συμα Ἰσραήλ Ἀδων[έ] Ἐλωή Ἀδων[έ] ἄ, i.e., "Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one") ⁵. The mother or parents of the 18-month-old girl probably hoped that the prayer text would provide help and divine protection for their child, who had died young, although placing the amulet in the grave may simply have been rooted in some magical belief, completely detached from personal notions of piety. An Aramaic inscription on wall plaster in Nyon, Switzerland, may also be regarded as evidence of a Jewish background.

A graffito engraved on a fragment of a plate made of non-ferrous metal or bronze, which was found in Essen-Burgaltendorf in 1992 along with other random artefacts from the Roman period, has been identified as the word IUDAIIA. As the final element of a proper name, this could be a reference to a Jewish owner, although it may just indicate the place of origin which, in the multi-religious and ethnically mixed Roman state, would preclude any further interpretations. The same applies to a plumb line, discovered in Cologne, which was part of a measuring device from the Roman period, the interpretation of which is generally disputed. Other finds that have been interpreted as Jewish must either be relegated to the realm of magical texts or originate from collections with uncertain provenances.

⁴ The Roman province of Pannonia, which like Germania was divided into I and II in the late period, essentially encompassed present-day Hungary, although some small parts of it are now in Austria.

⁵ The text contains a small spelling error, namely the additional tau in "Israel", which turns it into "Istrael." It may be that the maker or bearer of the amulet, who may have been a magician or a merchant, was neither fluent in Greek nor knew the Shema Yisrael, which, just as today, would not have been uncommon in ancient times.

Fig. 7: A finger ring from Brumath, France, believed to depict Noah's Ark. (Photo: Sebastian Ristow, edited by Horst Stelter / Duisburg)



It is no coincidence that Jewish images and symbols started to appear more frequently around the time when the use of early Christian motifs became common. Instead, it probably represents a reaction to the use of Christian symbols, which became possible in Late Antiquity, and does not necessarily indicate any rivalry between the religions. In economic terms, the production and trade of objects featuring Jewish iconography presupposes the existence of a client base. With this in mind, it is important to point out another problem with archaeological sources. In principle, as a depiction of Noah's Ark on a ring from Brumath in Alsace shows, any Old Testament reference included in craftworks from the Late Antiquity period or Early Middle Ages could also have been created in a Jewish context (Fig. 7).

There are few written sources attesting to the presence of Jews in the Frankish Empire during the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, i.e., the 5th to 10th centuries. Because there is nothing to compare them with, the silk fabrics from the Late Medieval shrine in the Severinskirche in Cologne are of the highest art-historical and archaeological importance. The fabrics bear Sogdian inscriptions, which were applied at a later date⁶ and were used to enshroud the bones of St. Severin. The fabric, which originated in the eastern Mediterranean region has been scientifically dated to between 680 and 890. Nobody knows precisely where it came from and under what circumstances it arrived in Cologne nor why the foreign Hebrew characters, which spell out a blessing and a name (Joseph), which

were probably transport notes added by the fabric merchants, were left on the textile. It is probable that nobody in Cologne could understand the inscriptions, but as nobody wished to damage the valuable fabrics, which were far from common at the time, they were left unaltered.

Evaluating archaeological finds and features

Unlike in neighbouring Roman Pannonia to the south-east, which essentially encompassed present-day Hungary, as well as in such regions as modern-day France and Spain, the mere existence of these fortuitously surviving finds and objects does not constitute evidence of any organised Jewish community in the German-speaking world in the first millennium. The informative value of individual finds and written sources is simply too limited to support such a claim. The problem that arises from the small number of found objects can be seen in the distribution map of features or finds from the early Jewish period (Fig. 3). As in the case of the lead seals mentioned above, no further conclusions can be drawn from individual finds about their original context or the presence of Jews in a given location nor is it always possible to date them with sufficient accuracy.

In addition to the problematic status of primary sources, another factor to be taken into account is that not every maker, buyer,

or owner of objects bearing Jewish pictorial motifs in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages can be assumed to have been familiar with the motifs and iconography. Consequently, caution is advisable when it comes to interpreting the religious significance or the personal piety of the erstwhile users of recent archaeological finds.

Conclusion

So, what can we infer from the meagre archaeological record of early Judaism? Jews have always occupied a special status, but in the ancient world it was one of legal and social equality with other population groups. In religious terms, however, Jews retained an exceptional position, which, for example, is clearly evident in terms of duties payable in connection with state offices, which can also be seen in the letter of 321 that is associated with Cologne. In antiquity, however, Jews and Christians were both influenced by the same cultural background. Similarities, but also differences in the imagery included in both Christian and Jewish funerary inscriptions can be seen in the catacomb art of the Mediterranean region as well as in such details as the use of the set phrase *hic requiescit in pace*⁷, which is usually regarded as Christian. The similarities in the forms of expression that are reflected in archaeological finds – and therefore also the problems of interpretation of current archaeological and epigraphic⁸ observations – illustrate this. Some people also converted

⁶ A language, related to Aramaic, which was written and spoken within the Central Asian area that fell under Persian influence. Jesus of Nazareth also spoke an Aramaic dialect. An area with a rich trade tradition, which was home to numerous Jewish merchants in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

⁷ "Rest in peace here".

⁸ Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions.

from Judaism to Christianity during this period; Bishop Simon of Metz, for example, who lived in the Late Antiquity period, may have been of Jewish origin. Because Judaism was not a “missionary religion” whereas the early Christian communities were always concerned with their own expansion, opportunities for development were unequally distributed between the emerging early Christians and the Jews.

Similar to early Christianity, for which there are almost no 4th-century findings that can be identified as churches or places of worship in the German-speaking region, examples of the typical architecture of synagogues is also lacking in this early period. It may be that, like the Christians, Jews met in converted private spaces, such as the *conventiculum ritus christiani*⁹ for which there is a historical record in Cologne dating back to the middle of the 4th century. There is no archaeological record of the Episcopal church in Cologne from this period, and it may well have been located in a private building. It may not even have been possible for Jews to build synagogues, regardless of their respective numbers in the Roman cities. The Codex Theodosianus even mentions a ban on the building of synagogues in 415 (Cod. Theod. 16, 8, 22), which may have been in force earlier and whose application may have varied from region to region. It is no longer possible to employ archaeological methods to identify cult spaces if the corresponding liturgical furnishings – which probably took the

form of wooden and mobile fixtures – have been removed from private spaces used for cult purposes, or if they have not been preserved for other reasons. An archaeological classification of otherwise unspecific buildings can only succeed in those rare cases in which the building décor was of a fixed nature, as in the case of the ancient synagogue or the Dura Europos house church in Syria, each of which is adorned with a rich array of wall frescoes.

This critical description and classification of these primary sources illustrates the particular significance of the excerpt from the letter of 321, especially in light of the small number of other sources relating to Judaism in Late Antiquity. Even records of Jewish culture in the early medieval Frankish dominions are still extremely rare and are primarily found in the northern Alpine region in France. It is therefore difficult to determine the extent and continuity of Jewish community life between antiquity and the Middle Ages, even in Cologne. The potential and limitations of archaeology as a historical science are clearly defined. (sr)

⁹ A small Christian meeting space, as suggested by the description of Ammianus Marcellinus, although Ammianus, who was not himself a Christian, may have downplayed the size and significance of this space.

The Codex Theodosianus

Constantine's decree of 321 has been preserved as a copy in a collection of laws – the Codex Theodosianus – in which all Roman laws and imperial constitutions enacted by Constantine the Great and subsequent Roman emperors since 312 were collated in Latin and in abbreviated form by order of the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II (408–450) between 429 and 437. This codex has been copied and reproduced multiple times since the 5th century.

We know that this compilation of laws was first published in February 438 and became legally binding for the entire Roman Empire on the 1st of January 439. The fact that the laws were applicable throughout the empire is interesting insofar as there were two emperors from 395 onwards due to the split between the Eastern and Western Roman em-

pires, who nevertheless enacted common laws. The Codex Theodosianus even remained in force north of the Alps following the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 and formed the basis for subsequent legal texts making it an important source that sheds light on the legal situation during this era.

The codex originally comprised 16 sections, of which only the texts of volumes 6 to 16 have survived. Copies of the codex date back to the 10th century, although the majority of them have only been preserved in fragmentary form. The oldest known copy of the decree of 321 – which was included in the 16th volume of the Codex – was made in the 6th century and is currently held in the Vatican Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Cod. Reg. Lat. 886). (lc)

Imperial legislation in the 4th century

The year 321 fell within the fascinating period of upheaval in Late Antiquity, finishing the Roman era and starting later the Middle Ages. Many new principles of order and administration were introduced in the Roman Empire around 300 under Emperor Diocletian, who also ordered the first compilation of existing legal sources. Throughout this vast dominion, successive emperors had enacted Roman laws in different places and at different times. Following a certain waiting period, communities that approached the ruler with a legal problem could hope for a legislative solution. This may well have been

the case with the text of the missive sent to the Cologne Senate in 321, which was written on the 11th of December that year. Neither the 6th-century copies currently housed in the Vatican nor those made in Ivrea in the 9th/10th century nor the traces of letters on the torn-out pages of a copy produced by the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Cologny near Geneva (Bodmer 107) around the same time shed any light on the question of which city originally sent the request for legal clarification.

The law

The transcript of an extract from a letter supposedly sent to the representatives of the city of Cologne, the so-called decurions, by Emperor Constantine is included in section 16, 8.3 of the Vatican copy of the Codex Theodosianus (Fig. 8).

Idem a. Decurionibus Agrippiniensibus.

Cunctis ordinibus generali lege concedimus Iudaeos vocari ad curiam. Verum ut aliquid ipsis ad solacium pristinae observationis relinquatur, binos vel ternos privilegio perpeti patimur nullis nominationibus occupari.

Dat. III Id. dec. Crispo II et Constantino II cc. conss

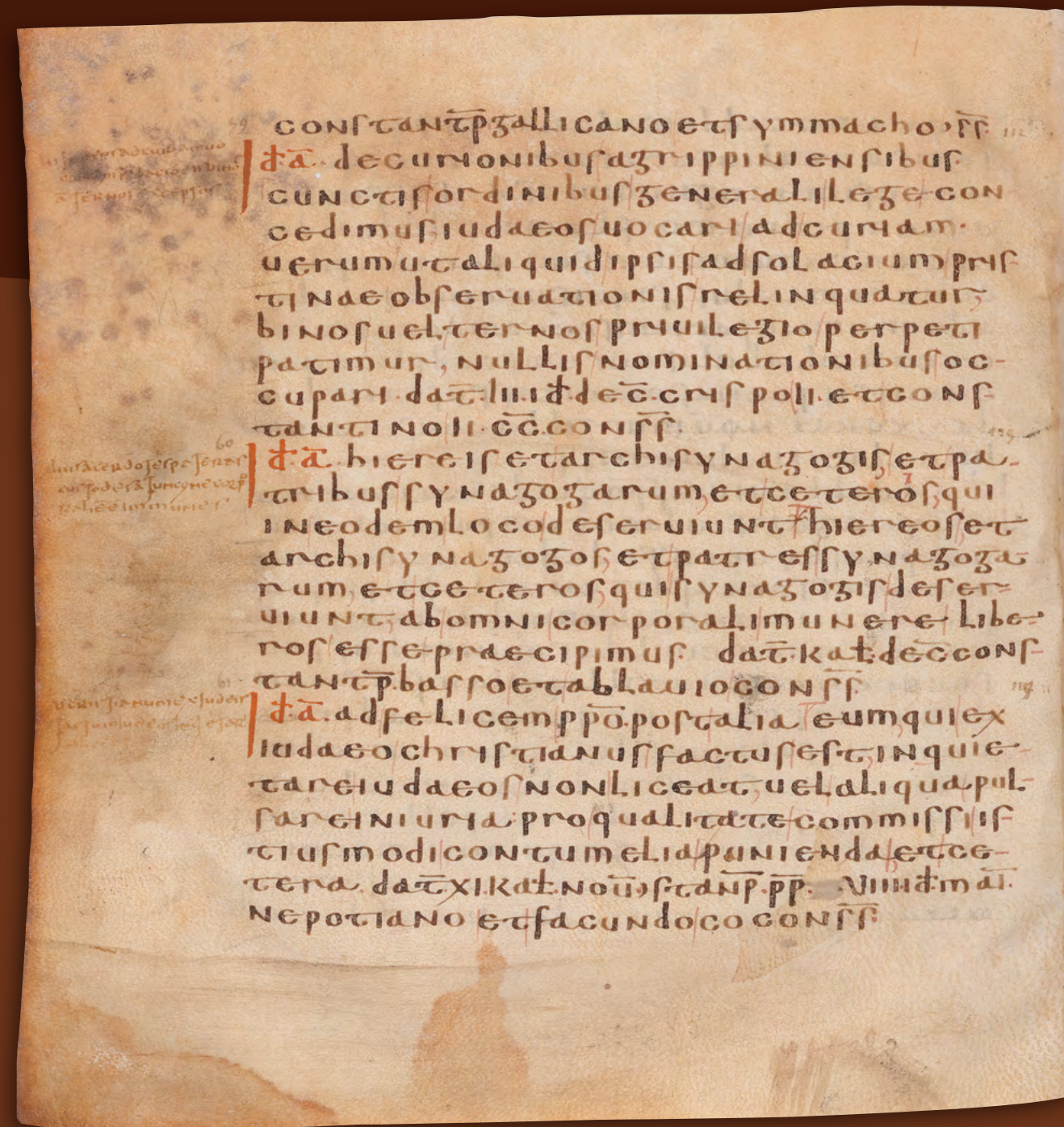
The line above the legal text begins with the abbreviation used for the same emperor or referred to on the previous page, i.e., Constantine the Great. This is followed by the addressee to which the letter was sent: decurionibus Agrippiniensibus, i.e., the decurion council of the city of Cologne. Classical historian Hartmut Leppin translated the entire entry in the codex as follows:

(From) the same Emperor (Constantine) to the city councillors of Cologne:

Through this general law, we hereby grant all city councils the right to appoint Jews to the council. But, to ensure that something of the old custom remains for their consolation, we hereby grant a perpetual privilege under which two or three of them shall not be claimed by any nominations to be taken up.

11th of December 321

Fig. 8: Law of 321 (Photo: © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Codex Theodosianus 16, 8.3.)



Broad interpretations

This text is usually interpreted as “proof” of the “oldest Jewish community north of the Alps”, which is thus “proven” to have existed in Cologne. Another occasional interpretation is that the law mentioned in the letter was enacted in Cologne or had some specific significance for the city, the implication being that the Jewish community in Cologne was particularly old, large, and important. Some have also hypothesised the architecture of a 4th-century Jewish house of prayer from the text. Until a few years ago, another law from the year 330, which was placed in the Codex after the letter from 321 and mentions religious offices in a Jewish community, was thought to relate to Cologne. Yet traditional sources indicate that this second law was neither sent to Cologne nor enacted there. And finally, it is worth pointing out that errors occurring during copying processes can confound this kind of topographical attribution of or to texts or that they may already have been an invented element in the original source. For a large number of the texts collated in the Codex Theodosianus, no specific association with a given location has survived. Similarly, in the case of the law under discussion here, it is not known where it was enacted: it is possible that the only surviving copy of the letter is a transcript that was sent to Cologne, which could also have been obtained when the codex was compiled in the 5th century. Whatever the case, there were no comprehensive archival holdings in Constantinople at the time that could have been used to collate

laws dating back to the Constantinian era; instead, the compilers had the respective texts sent to them from Rome and the provinces. The transcript from Cologne may also have found its way into the Codex in the same way, possibly even from a private archive, where it may have been deposited for some purpose related to practical legal transactions, which may also have influenced the text and choice of addressees.

The content

What does a sober, science-based analysis of this legal text reveal? What robust content remains that would allow us to make statements about the life and significance of Jews in Cologne in the Late Antiquity period?

As previously explained, it is possible that by pure coincidence the only transcript of the law that has survived was the one that was addressed to the city of Cologne: no other copies have survived that may have been sent to other provincial capitals. The known facts of the case undermine the evidence for a Jewish society in Cologne, whose ranks might have included members of a high social standing, who may have been eligible to serve on the council. Of course, this does not disprove any such assumption.

We can formulate five statements without resorting to further speculation or conceptual models regarding the relationships underlying the law:

1. Assuming that the request for the legislation was sent from Cologne, and further assuming the premises of the tradition, we may reasonably conclude that there was an unknown number of Jews living in Cologne in the early 320s who could be the reason for such a request from the Cologne City Council.
2. At least one Jew living in the city, which had requested the law, must have been wealthy enough for the City Council to be interested in appointing him, because one was required to use one's own money to hold the honorary office in question. No specific conclusions about the number of powerful Jewish citizens can be drawn from the fact that the law was of general significance for the city in question. After all, the emperor provided a general clarification of the question so that it could be applied throughout the empire, even under different circumstances. The allusion to Jews plural, i.e., also to those who were to be exempted from the obligation in the future, is therefore probably due to the general applicability of the law and does not reflect the situation in any particular city.
3. It would seem reasonable to assume that Jews were present in more or less every important city of the Roman Empire in the Late Antiquity period. So, irrespective of the request that prompted its enactment, this legislation

alludes to a general norm rather than to some specific peculiarity of Cologne and other cities within the Roman Empire. One can well imagine that, assuming these people were part of a group with which they shared a cultural affinity and did not travel around and settle down as solitary individuals, they would also organise themselves within a community context. This is likely to be particularly true for the urban centres in the Late Antiquity period including Cologne.

4. The law only provides a snapshot of the place in which the enquiry originated. It is possible that the particular Jew or Jews to whose presence the legislation and the letter referred had already left the place by the time it came into force, or sooner or later afterwards.
5. The crucial point for a sober assessment of the then situation in Cologne is therefore that the surviving extract of a letter from Constantine neither proves nor disproves the existence of a Jewish community in Cologne in the Late Antiquity period. However, in the context of ancient legislation pertaining to Jews, it has a general probative character for Jewish life in the imperial provinces and therefore also confirms the overall impression derived from the archaeological finds dating back to late antiquity. As the map in Fig. 3 shows, this also applies to the northern Alpine region. (sr)

2021 – 1700 years of Jewish life in Germany

The law of 321 is the earliest surviving written source for the existence of Jews in Northwestern Europe. Its evidentiary character makes it particularly significant for Jewish life in Germany. It proves that Jewish people have been living within the territory of present-day Germany since the earliest times and that they have been involved in the social, cultural, and scientific spheres ever since. Jews have been part of Germany's population, society, and history for 1700 years.

This long tradition was celebrated in numerous events during the course of a nationwide German-Jewish Year.

The name of the '321–2021: 1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany' association, founded to organize and run this German-Jewish Year, refers to the year 321 when the decree was issued. The association, which is funded by the German Federal Government and the

LVR and MiQua flagship projects during the German-Jewish Year 2021

From its headquarters in Cologne, the Rhineland Regional Council (RRC) and its cultural institutions have been researching the historical traces and contemporary history of Jewish life and everyday culture in the Rhineland region for years, which is why the LVR decided to partner with the MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in

City of Cologne, coordinated a series of nationwide events and projects in 2021. The purpose of the 2021 event year was to highlight and make tangible today's vital and diverse Jewish life in Germany and its 1700-year history, whereby emphasis was also placed on the European dimension of Jewish history and culture and on the prospects for a common future for both Jewish and non-Jewish people.

The patron of the anniversary year was Federal President Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The association served as the central point of contact for all institutions, associations, and Jewish communities that wished to organise projects to help shape the German-Jewish Year 2021.

For more Information please see:
<https://2021jlid.de>
E-Mail: INFO@2021JLID.DE

the Archaeological Quarter Cologne and the LVR CULTURAL CENTRE-Rödingen Village Synagogue for the theme year in 2021, to form a project consortium that realised a variety of activities throughout the year in Cologne, the Rhineland, and Westphalia.



Fig. 9: The Amsterdam Machsor (Photo: Klaus W. Schmidt)

The MiQua. LVR Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne planned an exhibition specifically for the German-Jewish Year 2021, which focused on the 1700-year history of Jewish life both in Cologne and throughout Germany. In addition to the decree of 321 as a starting point, the "Amsterdam Machsor", a Jewish prayer book from the 13th century, and one of the oldest Hebrew illuminated manuscripts in the German-speaking world in which specific reference is made to Cologne and Cologne rite, also occupies a special position.

These two sources formed an important basis for the exhibition, which primarily used written records to provide insights into Jewish life in Cologne from the earliest known date in 321 through the

Middle Ages and early modern times to the present day.

This focus on written sources reflects the fact that the sources on Jewish life in Germany, beginning with the Decree, are primarily available in written form. This approach can reveal an even deeper level in that the Jewish religion is primarily based on word and scripture. Knowledge and education, reading and writing are among the most important pillars of life for all members of the Jewish community. These two levels were related through exhibits, some of them of a religious nature, and of great artistic value, such as the Machsor or the richly decorated Haggadah by Isaac Offenbach, accompanied by historical documents that elucidate the rights,

duties, and living conditions of Jews in Cologne.

A touring exhibition, sponsored by the LWL Cultural Foundation, was on display in Essen, Münster, Cologne, Wesel, and Dortmund in 2021, whilst the German-Jewish Year 2021 concluded with a larger-scale exhibition in Cologne featuring the original exhibits. In 2022 the exhibition travelled through Cologne and Munich and will also be on show in Aachen and Heilsbronn.

Accompanying programmes, such as a series of lectures, a symposium, and follow-up projects, made the anniversary year a multifaceted and extremely rich

opportunity for dialogue and mediation, whereby the history of the Jews of Cologne may serve as an example for the whole of Germany. Our hope was that the anniversary in 2021 would contribute to making the history of the existence and active involvement of the Jewish population in Germany, which dates back 1700 years, comprehensible within the context of the history and culture of the Federal Republic of Germany. (lc)

MiQua. LVR-Jewish Museum in the Archaeological Quarter Cologne

Gürzenich Quartier, Augustinerstraße 10–12, 50667 Cologne, Tel +49 221 809-7156

miqua@lvr.de, www.miqua.lvr.de