

A Headstone – a plate – a queer pedigree
Researching German Jewish Families in the 1700s
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Contacts with family members over a long period of time and requests for help from other persons were the cause for my intensive research work in Langendernbach, a village in the Westerwald north of Frankfurt am Main. Because of the manifold research approaches I think this story to be of general interest. A headstone of 1731 on the central cemetery, a Seder plate of 1755 made for an unknown person and a pedigree of a family in a far-off village around and before 1800 shall be examples for different ways to reconstruct Jewish families in the 18th century.

The headstone for Mordechai Joseph leads us into the era before the family names (in this region since 1841) and before the vital registers for the whole population (since 1817). Therefore my good knowledge of the 19th century was of no help.

A few years later, I was confronted with the next object: a Seder plate of 1755, which was probably made for a Jew in Langendernbach. The question was, if the present Jewish owner in the USA was its rightful owner. The first task to define the place name "Dernbach". There were 6 possibilities, Langendernbach remained. But who was Wolf Mordechai? The *Schutzgeld* registers in the annual *Rechnungen* or budgets were without patronymics: a person with the given name Wolf paid his taxes from 1742 until his death in 1763. In the second volume with the collected documents, I found a death certificate signed by other Jews with his complete name Wolf Mordechai. The 18th century is not only the era without family names but also without patronymics in many documents. The first owner was found.

This research in various files led to more information. Before him, an older sister married a person with a *Schutzbrief*. More important: now Mordechai Joseph proved to be their father. Wolf's orphans were young. The persons from a neighboring village on the death certificate became their guardians. The family ended with the children's early death. Now my research went backwards in time from the present owner. With the help of the civil vital registers a direct genealogical line could be found.

The third item had no connection with Langendernbach: a family tree from a village far away on the other or western side of the Rhine. It contained many of those mistakes, which one can find in trees going from the family names backwards to the patronymics. After these and other corrections I found out that the young woman, who married into this village, was born in a village on the western side. Her father was Samuel Meyer of Langendernbach.

Thus I came back to my favorite village with the question: Who was Samuel's father Meyer? He could belong to Wolf Mordechai's generation. There were enough entries with this most popular name but none was fitting. The solution was an unexpected one. Meyer Mordechai did not appear in the tax lists, because contrary to all rules he did not have the status of a *Schutzjude*. Nevertheless, he married twice and had at least 10 children. He was the missing link between the oldest headstone and the large Löwenstein family in the 19th century.

These results were only possible, because in the course of time I had read a lot of different sources, which will be mentioned in the presentation. I had improved my techniques which I want to share.