SPECIAL FEATURE - OTHER PURIMS IN HISTORY

Purim Saragossa
17th Shevat

PURIM SARAGOSSA TOOK place in the early 1400’s in the capital of medieval Spain (the actual location is disputed, with some claiming it took place in Sicily). Whenever the King of Spain celebrated a special occasion with a royal parade, the Jews of Saragossa would go forth to greet him, carrying the beautiful cases of the Sifrei Torah. The actual Sifrei Torah were left in the synagogues. By chance, a servant of the king found this out and told the king. The king decided to arrange a parade for the very next day. He would demand that the Jews open the cases, and see if his servant’s claim was true.

The Jews prepared for the parade as usual, by removing the Torah scrolls from their cases. That night though, the shamash of the main synagogue dreamt that an old, gray-bearded man came to him, telling him danger was imminent and that he must place all the Torah scrolls back in their cases. The shamash awoke trembling and immediately ran to do so. Unbeknownst to him, all the other shamashim of the other synagogues had the same dream.

The next day, when the king ordered the Jews to open the Torah scroll cases, everyone was shocked to see the Torah scrolls sitting neatly inside each one. In appreciation, the king exempted the Jews from taxes for three years.

In gratitude for their special miracle, the Jews of the city decided to commemorate this day as “Purim Saragossa,” and wrote a special “Megillah” describing the event.

Purim Vintz
20th Adar

IN THE EARLY 1600’s, the powerful Vincent Fettmilch led an uprising against Frankfurt’s Jews, breaking into the ghetto and destroying Jewish homes and shops, desecrating the synagogue, looting and pillaging, and wounding and killing many Jews. The Jews who remained were ordered to flee for their lives. Fettmilch announced that any Christians helping or hiding Jews would be dealt with harshly. The Jewish community was destroyed.

When news of the pogrom reached the Emperor, he was outraged. He ordered Fettmilch to be tried and killed, and welcomed back the Jews of Frankfurt, ordering the city to restore their homes and losses.

On the 20th of Adar in 5376, 1616, Vincent Fettmilch was publicly executed, and the Jews returned to their homes. The Jews of Frankfurt celebrated this day as “Purim Vincent” or “Purim Vintz.” Like Ta’anit Esther, they also instituted a day of fasting and prayer on the 19th of Adar, to remember the victims of the pogrom.

According to some accounts, the Chatam Sofer, who was born in Frankfurt, celebrated Purim Vintz even when he served as Rabbi of Pressburg.

OTHER PURIMS IN HISTORY

Did you know the Jewish calendar contains other “Purims”? Throughout history, when a Jewish community was saved from destruction, it marked the day with a Purim-like commemoration, in celebration of and giving thanks for their salvation. Although many of the facts surrounding these events have become lost or confused over the course of history, the legends of these Purims remain. Here are a few of the most well known and interesting of these Purims.
Purim Fossano
18th Nissan

IN THE SPRING of 5556 (1796), the city of Fossano, in Northern Italy, was besieged by the advancing French army. In the midst of the siege, the Jews of Fossano celebrated Pesach. Seeing the Jews celebrate while the city was suffering made the townspeople suspicious and angry. A few days later, on the fourth day of Pesach, the French army opened fire, but no damage was done to the Jewish ghetto.

Certain the Jews were sympathizing with the enemy, an angry mob soon rushed to the Jewish Quarter. The Jews huddled in the synagogue to pray and defend themselves. As the mob approached the synagogue, a shell from a French cannon tore through the wall of the synagogue and landed right in front of them. Terrified, the attackers ran for their lives. The hole the shell had made in the wall was turned into a window in commemoration of this great miracle.

PURIM CHEVRON
(also known as Purim Taka – “Window Purim”)

IN 1824, THE cruel Pasha who ruled over Chevron rounded up the rabbis of the community and announced he was imposing a tax of 50,000 grushim. They had three days to provide the sum. If they failed, the rabbis would pay with their lives and the Jews would be tortured.

The rabbis declared a three-day fast and everyone gathered in the synagogue to pray. They were a poor community and knew they could never raise such a sum of money.

The Jews decided to appeal to the Avot in Ma’arat HaMachpela to pray on their behalf. Since Jews were forbidden from entering the actual cave, they bribed an Arab guard to take the written appeal and throw it through a “window” into the cave where the Patriarchs are buried.

It was midnight, a few hours before the third day. The Pasha was unable to fall asleep, so he began counting his money. Suddenly, he was startled to see three strong, large men, swords at their sides, standing in his room. “Give us the money!” they threatened. Terrified, the Pasha handed it over his bag of money and a golden necklace for good measure.

The Pasha awoke, trembling. It was just a nightmare. The next morning, while the Pasha was on his way to the Jewish Quarter to demand his tax, the rabbis found a bag of money in the window of the synagogue – exactly 50,000 grushim and one gold necklace.

The Pasha turned pale. “Your holy fathers – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – brought this money to you!” he exclaimed. “Forgive me, I will do you no harm.”