

Karl Marx's Czechoslovak Ancestry

By Mila Rechcigl

There has been a plethora of biographies depicting the life and works of the Karl Heinrich Marx, usually considered the founder of communism. Most of the biographers stress the point that he was a descendant of a long line of rabbis from the Rhine region of Germany. This supposition is certainly correct when one considers the ancestry of his father's mother. It is surprising that the biographers have usually ignored his father's paternal roots, not to speak about Karl Marx's mother's ancestors. A comment is frequently made that little is known about them. Such statements are even more surprising, considering the fact that the location of Karl Marx's grandfather's native place is clearly visible on his gravestone in the Jewish Cemetery in Trier, Germany. The people who can read the Hebrew alphabet, can clearly read the name Postelberg, which stands for Postoloprty, a town in the Czech Republic, located in the Usti nad Labem Region, about 7 km from Louny.

For those who are unaware of this, I have prepared an abbreviated summary of Karl Marx's ancestors.

Parental Ancestry

Karl Marx's father, Heinrich Marx (1782-1838) was born in Saarlouis, Saarland in Germany. His original name was Hirschel Levi which, upon converting to Protestantism, was changed to Heinrich. He was a lawyer and judge in Saarlouis and later in Trier (Treves), Germany.

Heinrich Marx was the son of Meir Levi, later surnamed Marx, who was born in Postoloprty, Bohemia in 1748, who later moved to Trier, Germany, where he died in 1804. He was married Eva Lwow (1753-1823), a daughter of Moses ben Joshua Heschel Lwow, rabbi in Trier. The latter's ancestors were mostly rabbis. Marx succeeded his father-in-law, on the latter's death, as a chief rabbi of Trier.

Meir Levi Marx's parents were Samuel (Schmuel) ha-Levi (1735-bf. 1777), born in Postoloprty, Bohemia, and Malka of unknown surname. Little is known about Samuel Levi's father, except that his name was Mordechai Marx and that he lived in Postoloprty, Bohemia.

Maternal Ancestry.

Karl Marx's mother, Henrietta Pressburg was born on September 20, 1780 in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Her parents were Rabbi Isaak Heyman Pressburg and Nanette Cohen.

Isaak Heyman Pressburg was a native of Bratislava (Pressburg in German), where he was born around 1747. He came to Nijmegen, The Netherlands in 1832, where he became a merchant, and where he died in 1832. Nanette (1754-1833), who was a native of Amsterdam. The Netherlands, came from a prominent Barent-Cohen family, many of whom were rabbis.

Isaak Pressburg's father was Chaim Pressburg (Heyman ben Meir Michel), a native of Bratislava who later lived in Bohemia. His spouse was Hendrina Kutsch from Bohemia, whom he married in 1785.

There is some question who was actually Chaim Pressburg's father. It could have been Rabbi Michel Lazarus Pressburg (d.1756), or his brother Mayer Pressburg (d. 1752). What seems to be certain, however, that Chaim's grandfather was Simon Michel, a native of Raab, Bohemia (d. 1719), who later changed his name to Pressburg, after he removed to Bratislava.

It is of interest that through Simon Michel, Karl Marx was related to Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), a brilliant romantic poet and towering figure of 19th century literature. Marx's mother Henrietta Pressburg was Heinrich Heine's 3rd cousin.