

December 5

Jews martyred during the black death (1348-1349)

Between 1348 and 1350 Europe experienced what may have been the most terrifying calamity in its history: the plague epidemic that historians say killed more than a fourth of the continent's population.

After an distraught search for possible causes of the scourge, in September 1348 Jews were forced under heavy torture to make false confessions, declaring that they had poisoned wells and aqueducts in several major cities.

Word of the false confessions spread throughout Europe, giving rise to an unprecedented wave of antisemitic hatred. More than three hundred Jewish communities were attacked, and large numbers of Jews were massacred or expelled from Europe.

Despite Clement VI's papal bull condemning the false accusations, popular revolts sent a significant percentage of Europe's Jews to their death. Considered guilty of having committed deicide by killing Jesus, the children of Israel were thought to have attracted divine punishment upon themselves and the rest of Europe's population. Only the Jews of Poland and Lithuania escaped the tragedy.

On December 5, 1349 the last great act of antisemitic violence took place in Nuremberg, when a popular uprising turned into a massacre and about 500 Jews were tortured and dismembered, or burned alive on pyres hastily set up throughout the city.

A READING

The plague struck England and many people were dying every day. So the king met with his counselors. "Why is it," asked the king, "that we are being assailed by these torments?" His counselors answered, "It is because of the crime committed by the Jews that we are victims of this scourge." The king then forced the Jews to be baptized. Yet in the meantime England's mourning and affliction had doubled, and because plague, war and famine had devastated the country, the king had two tents erected near the sea: in one he placed the Torah, in the other the Cross. And the king said invitingly: "After I separated you from your God with violence, our misfortunes have doubled. Now, therefore, choose freely what you wish to do. In one tent is the Torah, in the other the New Law." All ran towards the Torah, women and children included, but only one person at a time could enter the tent. As they entered one by one, their throats were cut and they were thrown into the sea, without the others being able to understand what was happening inside the tent.

Joseph Ha-Cohen, from *Valley of Tears*

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Sabbas (d. 532), abbot (Monastic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (26 hatur/hedar):

Valerian, Tiburcius and Cecilia of Rome (2nd-3rd cent.), martyrs (Coptic Church)

Iyasus Mo'a (d. 1294), monk

Martyrs of Nagran (Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:

Aloys Henhöfer (d. 1862), preacher of the Revival in Baden

MARONITES:

Sabbas, monk

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Sabbas the Sanctified, monk

Michael the Soldier (Serbian Church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Sabbas, monk (Malabar Church)

OLD CATHOLICS:

John Damascene (d. 749), confessor