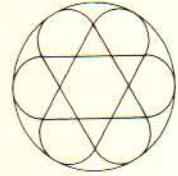




Centre for German-Jewish Studies

NEWSLETTER

University of Sussex



No 11, July 2000

Editor: Nina Brink

ISSN 1265-4837

The Renaissance of German-Jewish Studies

by Michael J. Blumenthal, Chief Executive of the Berlin Jewish Museum

After a long period of quiescence, there has now developed a remarkable growth of interest in German-Jewish history. The first generation in Germany did not want to talk about the subject, the second generation was busy rebuilding the country, and it is now, as they are in positions of power and their children are asking questions, that the desire to know more, to understand better, has grown in Germany and in other countries around the world.

On the Jewish side the same thing has happened. The survivors were traumatized and really did not want to talk about their experience, and it is the later generation of younger people who have an interest in it. So as I speak to young German audiences, non-Jewish audiences or Jewish audiences, the questions are the same and the desire to understand what happened in Germany and to put it into some kind of context is very great indeed.

The Jewish Museum in Berlin is a reflection of this renaissance of interest. Both at the level of Berlin and at the Federal level, the desire to promote the study of German-Jewish history and to have in the capital a major institution devoted to that story is very remarkable, and the structure designed by Daniel Libeskind is a magnet for people from all over the world. In this museum we are trying to show the entire two-thousand-year history of the presence of Jews on German soil, as Germans, becoming Germans over time. It is a story full of ups and downs, full of the most glorious achievements and the most terrible disasters.

At the Museum we have three goals in mind. First, to show that you cannot understand German national history without understanding German-Jewish history, because they are closely intertwined in every field, whether it is science, arts, literature or business. A very small group of people, never more than one percent of the total population, made an extraordinary impact on German history and indeed on western European culture.

A second goal is to teach, through history, the lesson of tolerance towards minorities, not just the Jewish minority but also other minority groups in our global culture. And, as a counterpoint to that, the terrible cost of intolerance, which the German experience also shows us.



*Michael Blumenthal (left) with Lord and Lady Attenborough
(photograph by Dennis Ramsey)*

Thirdly, we wish to take our place in the scholarly interchange on this whole field of German-Jewish history. One of the reasons why I am delighted to join you this evening is that I am hoping that this institution which has been created at the University of Sussex will become an important link in the network of institutions existing throughout Germany, in the United States, in Israel and in Europe. We would like to have the link with you and with scholars in Britain because there is still a great deal of work to be done.

This is a shortened and edited version of a speech delivered by Michael Blumenthal at the fund-raising dinner organized by the Centre for German-Jewish Studies in London on 22 February 2000. The event was hosted by Lord Attenborough, Chancellor of the University of Sussex, and the guests included the German Ambassador, Dr Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz.

Dedication Service and Academic Conferences

The Brighton Holocaust Memorial



*The Brighton Holocaust Memorial
The artist Gerald Zbrak (left), pictured with the
Chief Rabbi and the German Ambassador
(photograph by David Bennett)*

The dedication service for the new Holocaust Memorial, held at Meadow View Cemetery in Brighton on 1 May

2000, was attended by a large and distinguished gathering, including the Chief Rabbi, Professor Jonathan Sacks, and the German Ambassador, Dr Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz. After the Communal Kaddish, Dr von Ploetz delivered a short oration, emphasizing the great change that has taken place in Germany in the second half of the twentieth century: 'Today the vast majority of Germans are lastingly defined by the confrontation with the Holocaust and the debate on guilt and responsibility.'

He also drew attention to the importance of the new Berlin Jewish Museum and recalled the Jewish world before the Holocaust, described by Rabbi Hugo Gryn as 'a beautiful world that was caring, that was God-fearing, that had a very high set of values'. In addition to the Holocaust it is the values of that world, which are to be commemorated at the new Museum. Dr von Ploetz drew a parallel between the aims of the Museum and those of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies at Sussex: 'to rediscover and research into Jewish life in central and eastern Europe - to remember not just the victims, but the people themselves'.

The Memorial was designed by the local artist Gerald Zbrak and incorporates, in English and in Hebrew, the lines from Isaiah, chapter 56: 'And I will set for them a Monument and Memorial that shall never be destroyed'.

The Interpretation of Dreams

Is the centenary of Freud's epoch-making book a cause for celebration or a time to lay to rest an outdated theory? To investigate this question, the Centre organized a conference in London on 24 - 26 May, which brought the disciplines of psychotherapy, neurology and cultural history together in a fruitful dialogue. Edward Timms reconstructed the Viennese cultural context from which Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* emerged, emphasizing the significance of his Jewish heritage. This was corroborated by a paper on 'Jewish Dreaming' by Stephen Frosh, Professor of Psychology at Birkbeck College, London. Freud's debt to literary tradition was analysed by Ritchie Robertson and Malcolm Bowie, intellectual historians from Oxford, while Laura Marcus (Sussex) explored the links with 'cinematographic consciousness'. The pervasive influence of psychoanalysis on a wide variety of readers was documented by Dr John Forrester, Reader in the History of Science at the University of Cambridge.

The importance of dream interpretation for current practices of psychotherapy was explored in papers by Dr Margot Waddell, Consultant Child Psychotherapist in the Adolescent Department of the Tavistock Clinic, Dr Martin Stanton, Director of

the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Kent, and Professor Marianne Springer-Kremser, Director of the University Clinic for Depth Psychology in Vienna. It became clear that the discourse of the dream remains just as vital it was in Freud's day, with the significant difference that analysts are no longer so much 'detached experts' as 'involved participants' in the therapeutic process.

The conference concluded with a paper on 'Freud's dream theory in the light of modern neuroscience' by Dr Mark Solms, Lecturer in Neurosurgery at St Bartholomew's Hospital and Consultant at the Anna Freud Centre in Hampstead. Dr Solms reviewed the experimental work relating to REM-sleep, which has taken place since the 1950s, and then demonstrated how new techniques of imaging, combined with the study of brain lesions, have shown that the forebrain remains active during the dreaming process (just as Freud's model of the dreaming mind implied), while appetitive drives (Freud's 'libido') provide the prime motivation for the dream plot. In short, the findings of neuroscience are 'highly compatible' with Freud's topographical theory.

This conference formed one of the highlights of the Dreamscapes Festival, organized in London during May by the Austrian Cultural Institute. The proceedings are due to be published in the journal *Psychoanalysis and History* in Spring 2001.

Jewish Scholarship and Religious Pluralism

From 2 - 8 March the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem and the Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the Leo Baeck Institute in Germany jointly held their third doctoral and post-doctoral seminar for European and Israeli historians in Jerusalem, entitled 'Culture, Pluralism and Jewish Society in the Historical and Contemporary Context'.

Henri Soussan, a Sussex DPhil student and holder of the Lucas scholarship, presented a paper on 'Orthodox and Liberal Scholars in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*', a topic which occupies a prominent position in any discussion of religious pluralism. While generally viewed as a path to religious reform, by the end of the nineteenth century the Science of Judaism had come to refer to a much more complex social movement. At the turn of the century two rival organizations emerged, ostensibly highlighting the incompatibility between orthodox and progressive scholarship. However, even as the new organizations seemed to bring differences and opposition to the fore, the level of discourse which prevailed clearly demonstrated that Jewish scholarship had become firmly established as the common denominator between religious factions.

German Research Colloquium

The programme for the Summer Term included papers on 'Moses Mendelssohn's Afterlife' (Professor Michael Brenner), 'Martin Buber and the Question of Community' (Dr David Groiser) and 'German Jews, American Jews, Israeli Jews and the Origins of Aesthetic Surgery' (Professor Sander Gilman). The importance of Oral History Research as a means of elucidating questions of Jewish identity was emphasized in the two complementary papers summarized below.

On 25 April Dr Cathy Gelbin, Director of Research and Educational Programmes at the Centre, gave a talk entitled 'Mishmash and Bastardization: The Discussion around Children of Jewish and non-Jewish Parentage in the German Context'. Her research in this field is based on life history interviews conducted with survivors in Berlin during the 1990s. Her paper, however, also included an analysis of how ancient Jewish traditions and modern Jewish communities perceived and treated children of mixed marriages.

According to racial theories which emerged in the early nineteenth century, *mixed-race* individuals were seen as physically and mentally corrupt, and *hybrid* populations were associated with the ultimate downfall of civilization. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Jews began to be included in the concept of racial Otherness, and Jewish-Christian intermarriage became a major source of anxiety about alleged progressing *racial miscegenation*.

The Nazi period saw the translation of racial theories into a social practice with separate legislatures towards those defined as German, Jewish or of Jewish *mixed-race* (*Jüdische Mischlinge*). While *Mischlinge* were spared from deportation by decree, their sterilization was planned, though never carried out due to the lack of effective means of mass sterilization. In late 1942 they were interned in forced labour camps in Germany, which most were able to survive. However, individual life testimonies of former *Mischlinge* reveal an apparent discrepancy between the Nazis' legislature and the actual practice against this group. The absence of a collective experience of persecution made it difficult for many former *Mischlinge* to speak publicly about their experience, with a specific literature by and about them only recently emerging.

On 2 May Dr Barbara Einhorn, Director of the Research Centre in Women's Studies at the University of Sussex, presented a paper entitled 'Nation, Landscape and Identity in Narratives of Exile and Return'. It was based on oral testimonies and written narratives of German-Jewish Marxist women who were driven out of their homeland by German fascism, yet returned after the end of World War II.

The paper set out to elicit a sense of the complex ways in which people construct their understanding of identity in relation to notions of nation and belonging. The aim was to explore what made this largish group of refugees from Hitler's Germany return, how they felt about Germany as 'their' country (*Vaterland*), their 'homeland' (*Heimat*), or at the very least their country of origin. The lecture on 'Vaterlandsliebe', delivered in Paris by Anna Seghers in 1935, exemplifies this attempt to combine German patriotism with the socialist dream.



Anna Seghers

Women of Seghers' generation 'migrated' twice in one lifetime: the first time fleeing their homeland in a forced migration to escape persecution and death; the second time returning as a voluntary 're-migration' in the name of an ideological commitment. Oral history narratives recorded during the 1990s present both exile and return in retrospect. Thus their subjective identifications relate to Germany first from the perspective of involuntary exile; second, from the perspective of a commitment to socialism; and finally, towards the end of their lives, from the vantage point of a united Germany, achieved at the expense of the death of the socialist dream in whose service they returned. This means that they have been forced - through moments of historical crisis - to renegotiate both their own identities and their relationship with Germany several times during a single lifetime.

The intimate inter-relationship of the personal and the political in these women's lives, and the retrospective reworking of their historically driven life decisions, make these narratives on the issues of landscape and homeland particularly rich sources on the subject of identity and belonging.

