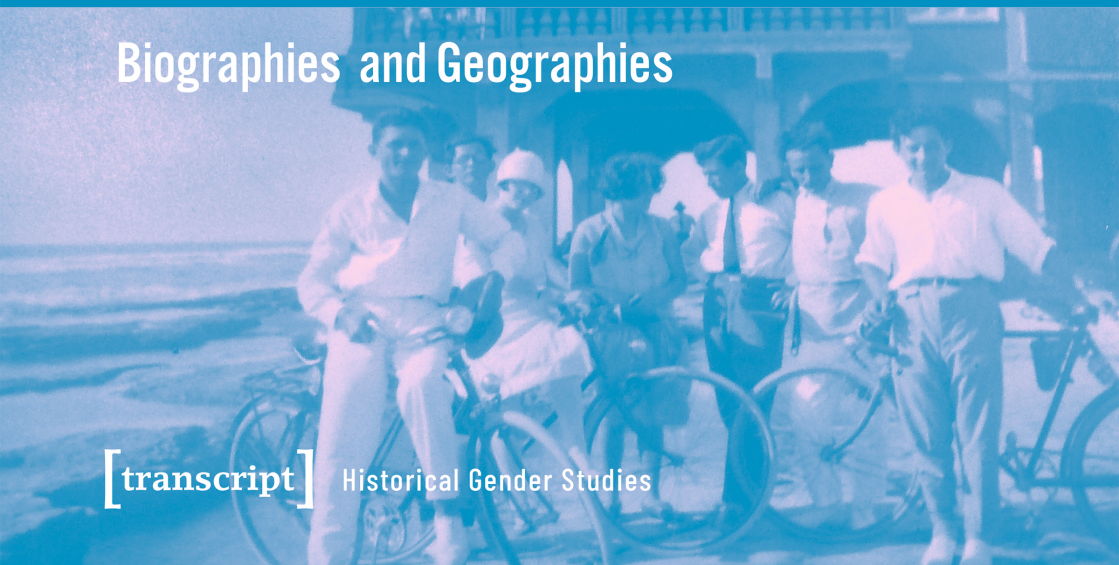
Andreas Kraß,
Moshe Sluhovsky,
Yuval Yonay (eds.)

QUEER JEWISH LIVES BETWEEN CENTRAL EUROPE AND MANDATORY PALESTINE

Biographies and Geographies



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Queer Jewish Lives Between Central Europe and Mandatory Palestine
Biographies and Geographies

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When queer Jewish people migrated from Central Europe to the Middle East in the first half of the 20th century, they contributed to the creation of a new queer culture and community in Palestine. This volume offers the first collection of studies on queer Jewish lives between Central Europe and Mandatory Palestine. While the first section of the book presents queer geographies, including Germany, Austria, Poland and Palestine, the second section introduces queer biographies between Europe and Palestine including the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), the writer Hugo Marcus (1880-1966), and the artist Annie Neumann (1906-1955).

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Contents

Introduction
Queer Jewish Lives Between Central Europe and Mandatory Palestine
Moshe Sluhovsky 7

I. Geographies

Queer Jewish Lives in Germany, 1897-1945
Movements, Professions, Places
Andreas Pretzel & Andreas Krass 29

Being a Jewish Lesbian in Berlin
Belonging and Solidarity during the Weimar Era and the Third Reich
Hilla Lavie 77

Myth of the Homosexual Subculture in Weimar Germany?
Thoughts on Lesbian Circumstances in the 1920s
Janin Afken 97

Popular Entertainment in Central Europe as a Space for Jewish and Queer Migration Experiences
Susanne Korbel 111

Gay German Jews and the Arrival of 'Homosexuality' to Mandatory Palestine
Yuval Yonay 131

The Hebrew Lesbian
Image and Reality in the Hebrew Press in Mandatory Palestine and Israel, 1930s-1960s
Orit Yaal 157

II. Biographies

Magnus Hirschfeld in Palestine
The Journey of a German Jewish Sexologist (February 14–March 13, 1932)
Andreas Krass 183

Anne (Annie) Neumann: The New Woman
Yael Rozin 221

Jewish Homosexual Orientalism?
On Hugo/Hamid Marcus's Writings
during the First Three Decades of the 20th Century
Benedikt Wolf 239

Queer Messianism
The Controversial Case of Mordechai Mendel in Interwar Warsaw
Piotr Laskowski 265

Giora Manor, the Kibbutz and the Transparent Closet
Dotan Brom 291

Contributors 311

Acknowledgments 315

List of Images 317

Index of Places 319

Index of Names 323

Introduction
Queer Jewish Lives Between Central Europe and Mandatory Palestine

Moshe Sluhovsky

During the Deutsches Kaiserreich, both the Jew and the sodomite were reconfigured as new subjecthoods, identities, categories, and social types.[1] The emancipated Jew, the homosexual, and the lesbian comprised new categories of personhood, and a debate concerning their integration into the surrounding society followed soon. Furthermore, Germanness (Deutschtum) too was being reinvented at this time as a new political entity, embarking on a process of nation-building in a recently unified state. The post-Emancipation Jew, who was increasingly present on the streets of German cities and towns (as s/he was elsewhere in Central and East-Central Europe), was no longer merely a member of a religious minority, identified by visual external markers, a language, and an adherence to a set of traditional rituals, nor was s/he confined to specific occupations. Emancipation and social and economic mobilities enabled these "New Jews" to integrate into society and benefit from the advantages of modernity, in the process shedding their traditional and visible marks of alterity. Similarly, the homosexual (whether male or female) was no longer defined only as a criminal or a pervert found on the margins of society, often in hiding. Like the Jew, s/he ceased to be an 'other' who could easily be physically identified. On the contrary, s/he could now be discovered to be a prominent officer in the German army, like General Kuno von Moltke; a member of the

1 The categories 'Jew' and 'homosexual' are obviously problematic in any period and context. In this collection, they are used to refer respectively to people who were, or were perceived to be, ethnically or religiously Jewish or of Jewish descent, and to men and women who exhibited same-sex erotic and sexual attachments or were suspected of having such attachments or inclinations. We use the term 'homosexual' to designate both gay men and lesbians; we refer to individuals as homosexuals even if they were also involved erotically or sexually with people, men or women, of the opposite sex but were or are nonetheless assumed to have had same-sex desires. We also use the term 'gay,' which is obviously anachronistic, because this term seems appropriate to describe people whose homosexual identity was a core component of their subjectivity. We similarly refer to a 'gay scene' or 'gay culture' when referring to social interactions that can already be identified as serving these individuals' interactions in the public sphere.

emperor's own entourage, like Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg; or a member of a leading Jewish commercial family, like Wilfrid Israel (Mancini 2010; Domeier 2010; Beachy 2014: 120-39).

The New Jew and the New Homosexual now not only resembled the non-Jew and the heterosexual; they could act like, compete with, and even marry Gentiles and heterosexuals. They were everywhere, but visible nowhere. This potential integration and absorption into mainstream society was welcomed by members of these two social groups, as well as by large segments of liberal German society. But it was conceived as a threat by other elements in Germany, which saw this social blending as a danger to the nascent German nation. In the new antisemitic and homophobic discourses, both the New Jew and the New Homosexual were pathologized as degenerate and sick, and mechanisms had to be devised to identify them in order to reaffirm and maintain their inherent otherness (Gilman 1989).

Writing about France of the 1890s, Hannah Arendt identified a paradox of the fin de siècle: certain elite circles in France, Great Britain, and Germany had "discovered the attractiveness of Jews and inverts" (Arendt 1951: 82). They no longer wanted to kill them, but maintained antipathy and even horror toward them. In a moment of fascination with the exotic, the strange, the dangerous and the monstrous, Arendt asks, who could better represent the infinite variety of nature than the Jew and the homosexual?

In liberal, antisemitic, and homophobic imaginations and representations, the Jew and the homosexual have often overlapped in their perceived cliquishness, cosmopolitanism, and, above all, effeminacy (in the case of Jewish men and male homosexuals) or over-masculinity (in the case of Jewish women and lesbians). But to what degree was this phantasmic association of Jewishness and homosexuality also a historical reality? Were Jews more likely to be attracted to people of their own sex than non-Jews? Were Jews overrepresented among German or Central European homosexuals, or homosexuals overrepresented among Jews? Did Jews play a role in the emerging homosexual scene in Berlin and other German cities during the Second Reich and the Weimar Republic above and beyond their numerical presence in society? If so, what accounts for this overrepresentation? And to what degree were Jews significant in the emerging gay scenes in other Central European cities, such as Budapest (Kurimay, 2020), Prague, and Warsaw? These questions shape the investigations that constitute one of the two components of this book.

*

As becomes clear from the articles that analyze the Jewish presence in the gay world of Berlin and other Central European cities and that document the lives of gay individuals, Jews did indeed participate in the new gay culture that was developing in these urban centres, with some Jews playing an important role in the invention of new gay and lesbian identities, forms of sociabilities, and activism. Importantly, though, just as the New Jew and the New Homosexual came into being in tandem, so did their exclusion, criminalization, and (in the Jewish case) annihilation. The German-Jewish presence in the gay and lesbian subcultures in Germany, including the not-insignificant and uniquely rich Jewish-lesbian subculture (Steakley/Wolff 1981; Boxhammer/ Halusa/Liu

2015; and Lavie in this collection), came to a tragic end under Nazism, when the German nation reconfigured itself once more, this time as a *Volksgemeinschaft* of people seen as healthy in their racial, moral, and physiological bodies. And while the 1930s were marked by mass migrations of both Jews and prominent homosexuals, the 1940s were marked by arrests, deportations, and mass murder.

Migration and escape, too, were a shared characteristic of gays and Jews (Weston 1995; Luibhéid 2008; Korbel in this collection). Among the numerous emigrants from Germany, many left to Mandatory Palestine, then under British rule. More than 57,000 Jews came legally from Central Europe to Palestine between 1933 and 1940, almost two-thirds of them from Germany. Legal Jewish immigration, though, was restricted to 75,000 Jews over the following five years after the White Book of 1939, and many Jews entered the country illegally. If we include illegal immigrants, who broke through the blockade set by the British authorities to prevent Jewish immigration, the number of Central European immigrants, both German- and Czech-speaking, was at least 82,000, and may have been as many as 90,000 (Gelber 1990: 61, 63, 385). The second component of this collection investigates the migration of gay and lesbian German Jews to Mandatory Palestine, and the contribution they made to creating forms of gay sociability in their new *Heimat*. It is a main argument of this collection that these German Jewish immigrants imported with them – and thus helped to shape – new lifestyles, forms of sociability, and notions of identity and subjecthood in the small Yishuv (the Jewish segment of the population of Mandatory Palestine).[2] Using prosopography, oral interviews, archival documents, and literary sources, this collection is a first attempt to map both the Jewish contribution to gay cultures and politics in Berlin (as well as other urban centers in Central Europe), and the significance of German-Jewish immigrants to gay life in the nascent Yishuv.

Of course, living as Jews in Mandatory Palestine did not eradicate all forms of exclusion and otherness experienced by these German-Jewish immigrants. Not only did they remain members of a sexual minority in a puritan society; they had to readjust their identity, which was often urban, secular, and liberal, to a society that had been shaped by a fusion of small-town Eastern European provincialism, Russian socialism, and lower-middle-class aspirations to become modern. They also had to fit into an ethos of masculinity and physical prowess that was often (but far from always) attached to agricultural labor. It has become an established paradigm that early Zionism cultivated and promoted the Muscle Jew – rough and tough both inside and outside – as the sole model for the rejuvenation of land and nation (Boyarin 1997; Gluzman 2007; Dekel 2011. On the history of the term 'Muscle Jews', first coined by the Zionist intellectual Max Nordau, see Presner 2007). This simplistic view has finally been challenged (Wildmann 2009; Conforti 2011; Farges 2018; Hollander 2019). The second component of this collection deals therefore not only with the creation of the new gay sociality in Palestine, but also with the difficulties faced by the German Jewish homosexual immigrants.

Thus, employing both biographical case studies and general surveys, the collection is a first attempt to document gay lives in Jewish Mandatory Palestine. More work needs

2 For purposes of brevity, I will refer to these gay and lesbian immigrants as homosexuals; the problematization of this usage will appear later in this introduction.

to be done to discover additional players in both Central Europe and Palestine. Crucially, we have not been able to document sexual and emotional same-sex interactions between German-Jewish immigrants and Arab men in Mandatory Palestine, interactions that undoubtedly took place. And, regrettably (and as is usually the case), it has been easier (in both Germany and Mandatory Palestine) to document the lives of gay men than the lives of lesbians. Nevertheless, the collection offers the contours of the active engagement of gay and lesbian Jewish men and women in both gay cultures – the German and the pre-Israeli – between the late 19th century and the early years of the State of Israel.[3]

*

As Robert Beachy, Jens Dobler, Florence Tamagne, Clayton J. Whisnant, and many others have demonstrated, new identities and new forms of sociability, entertainment, and politics came into being in major German urban centers – foremost among them Berlin – from the 1870s on (Beachy 2014; Bollé 1984; Dobler 2003; Tamagne 2006; Whisnant 2016). This was also the period in which Jews came to prominence in the urban culture of Germany. As industrialists, entrepreneurs, bankers, and merchants, but also as scholars and artists, Jews were ubiquitous in emerging fields and technologies. The assimilation of German Jews into German culture after 1870 was an assimilation into an urban, urbane, and modern culture (Mosse 1985; Elon 2002). Jews were especially prominent in the liberal professions, among them medicine (especially new fields such as dermatology and venereology), psychology, psychoanalysis, and sexology (Eppinger 2001; Haeberle 1982). They played an important role in the cultural life of the modern German city as owners, managers, and patrons of theatres and museums, as pioneers of the film industry, and as collectors and donors of modern art.

It is worth mentioning that the history of the creation of modern gay identity and culture and the history of German-Jewish assimilation tend to be presented in a self-congratulatory tone. Gay German history is usually told by gay and lesbian historians, who, following the revival of gay-affirmation politics and identities from the 1970s on, have claimed the Berlin of the fin de siècle and of the short-lived Weimar Republic as a golden age. Similarly, German Jewish history was developed by people who were themselves German Jewish refugees, among them George L. Mosse, Walter Laqueur, Fritz Stern, and Peter Gay (Mosse 1985; Laqueur 1974; Gay 1968; Stern 1987). Neither history can escape the teleological perspective that results from the historians' awareness of the brevity of this experiment in modern cosmopolitanism and acceptance of the other. As previously mentioned, the growing visibility of Jews and gay people in the public urban sphere was, from its very start, accompanied by anxieties and resistance. In fact, Jews and homosexuals themselves were not necessarily promoters of tolerance or modernity. One should never forget that among assimilated Jews there was no lack of conservative, even reactionary Jews; that self-hate was not uncommon among gay people or among Jews; and that some individuals managed to be Jewish, gay, antisemitic, homophobic

3 This research project was sponsored by the German Israel Foundation (GIF), grant I-1335-111.4/2016.

and misogynistic at the same time – Otto Weininger (1880-1903) comes to mind, but he was far from the only one (Weininger 1906, originally published 1903).

This complexity and interplay of identities and anxieties can be documented in the case of one of the most prominent Jews of the period, Walter Rathenau. Rathenau (1867-1922) was the son of the founder of the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft (AEG), the German Electric Company, and played a leading role in the German economic effort during the First World War. As is well known, he was the target of vicious antisemitic attacks, and was murdered by right-wing radicals in 1922 while serving as foreign minister of the Weimar government (Volkov 2012: 28-33). Rathenau never married, and we have no idea whether he felt emotional attachments to other men (or women, for that matter). Shulamit Volkov, however, is not the first to have speculated that he might have been a homosexual: while cautioning us that the vocabulary of male camaraderie was highly romantic and melodramatic in his period, she also notes that he developed intimate friendships with more than one man (most of whom, parenthetically, were blond and aristocratic).[4] Volkov also suggests the possibility that his extreme emotional detachment was a defence mechanism against his own homosexual drives. Such a 'closet' could also account for his discreet refusal to add his signature to the 1908 campaign, led by Magnus Hirschfeld, to decriminalize homosexuality (Botstein 2016: 137). Among the men Rathenau was especially close to was Harry Graf von Kessler (1868–1937), the Anglo-German count, diplomat, writer, and patron of modern art, who was, as Volkov aptly puts it, "as open a homosexual as was at all possible at the time" (Volkov 2012: 33). It was Kessler himself, who was later to become Rathenau's first biographer, who draws our attention to the fact that some of Rathenau's letters to men read like love letters (Kessler 1929: 65, in Volkov 2012: 33).

In 1897, Rathenau published "Höre, O Israel," a vicious attack on the assimilated Jewish milieu of Berlin, the same milieu to which he himself belonged (Rathenau 1897).[5] In this blistering article, Rathenau, driven by the narcissism of small differences, finds his erstwhile brethren insufficiently assimilated for his taste. He accuses them of refusing to integrate into German society and culture and of behaving in a manner that necessarily prevents their acceptance by their gentile fellow Berliners. The Berliner Jewish elite, Rathenau claims, is a strange tribe (*menschenstamm*) that is conspicuously adorned, hot-blooded, and animated in its gestures and behaviour. This is an Asian horde of soft-bodied, round-formed, and self-pitying arrivistes, who continue to speak in an identifiable manner and congregate within a voluntary, invisible ghetto, like a foreign organism within the social body. Their cliquishness, coarseness, and refusal to integrate are at least partly responsible for German society's spitefulness toward them. Interestingly, this description recalls Otto Weininger's 1903 remarks about the growing presence of the "dandified homosexuals" whose numbers had increased so dramatically in the recent past – and perhaps this is not a coincidence. The latter, too, stand apart due to their

4 And see his article "Von Schwachheit, Furcht und Zweck," (Rathenau 1925), 26, where he sings the praises of the brave, "wondrous and mysterious primeval Northern race whose blond heads we are so glad to crown with all the splendor of humanity." Quoted in Robertson 1999: 299.

5 English translation in http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=717.

cliquishness, bodily feebleness, femininity, loudness, and sing-song manner of speech (Weininger 1906: 73; Gilman 1989: 266).

"You establish associations – for defence, rather than introspection," Rathenau goes on to accuse the assimilated Berlin Jews. Historians have suggested that he was referring to the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens*, established in 1893, or perhaps to the First Zionist Congress, which was to meet a few months after the publication of Rathenau's article in Basel. I wish to offer an additional possibility, one that is related to the mid-May 1897 inaugural meeting of the first organization for gay rights, the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee* (*WhK*), which was convened in Charlottenburg, Berlin. Given the phantasmic morphological, behavioral, and physiological similarities between Jews and homosexuals, and considering Rathenau's desire to disavow any affiliation with the latter, I propose that, in addition to other things, "Höre, Israel" was a kind of anxiety attack caused by Magnus Hirschfeld's new initiative. While this idea may seem farfetched, let us recall a tantalizing line in Rathenau's article. When discussing Berlin-Jewish elite families who had not (yet) converted, like the Rathenaus themselves, but who no longer felt part of the Jewish community, Rathenau states that all that remained "Jewish" in these families is "*ein gewisser ironischer Atavismus des Aeusseren, einen Malice Abrahams*," a certain ironic and atavistic external sign. As Jay Geller has argued, this is very likely a reference to circumcision, presented here by Rathenau as a stunt bequeathed by Abraham to his descendants. Rathenau himself, I thus suggest, indicates that the very core of the Jew is his penis, just as the uses to which he puts his penis is what distinguishes the homosexual from the heterosexual male (Geller 2011: 16). Rathenau, then, was dealing not only with his ambivalence regarding his own Judaism, about which so many of his friends commented during his lifetime. In my view, he also sought to distance himself from a group that stood to proclaim the legitimacy of homosexual identities and behaviors, a group to which Rathenau was often rumored to belong.

This, of course, is but one of many examples of the intricate and often ambivalent engagements of German Jews with homosexuality, and it should caution us against assuming a correlation between Jewish affiliation, sexual marginality, and liberal political or social attitudes. In addition to Rathenau and Weininger, one can add the homophobic Maximilian Harden, probably the most influential journalist in Germany at the end of the 19th century (and a friend of Rathenau), who played a major role in "outing" Moltke and Eulenburg; and Hans-Joachim Schoeps, the young Jewish theologian who, while being a Prussian royalist and a German nationalist, was also gay. After the Second World War, Schoeps's claim to fame was his history of Prussia; before, he was known mostly for his intense patriotism. This patriotism even led Schoeps to support the Nazi movement in the 1920s, and to publish as late as 1934 a pamphlet in which he explained that German Jews do not seek their own happiness but only the happiness of the Fatherland. "We do not seek to be free, but to be bound," he proclaimed (Schoeps 1970: 225).

One name stands out among German Jewish homosexuals: the aforementioned Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935). In the past fifty years or so, he has come to symbolize not only gay rights in Germany, but also the significant role played by Jews in the flourishing of liberal notions of queer selfhoods and politics in Weimar Germany. Hirschfeld's

visit to Palestine in 1932 is discussed by Andreas Krass below as a moment in which one of his identities, namely, his Jewishness, was pushed farther to the fore than his advocacy of gay rights. It is worth mentioning, though, that he was not alone in promoting new notions of gay identity. While Hirschfeld was shaping one discourse of same-sex desire, using mostly medical and etiological language and scientifically explaining its existence as a phenomenon in nature, other Germans and German Jews promoted alternative notions of same-sex desire. Among them was the prolific Benedikt Friedlaender (1866-1908), whose glorification of same-sex male desire was based on the alleged Athenian model and echoed antisemitic German notions of race (Beachy 2014: 96-119; Keilson-Lauritz 2005; Ilany 2017b).

More important were Hans Blüher, Adolf Brand, and others, who promoted a more metaphysical, even spiritually loaded, conceptualization of this desire. Focusing solely on male same-sex desire, and continuing a German tradition of fascination with homoerotic desire in Classical Athens, this alternative discourse on the meaning and even the spiritual goal of homoerotic desire was shaped, as Claudia Burns and Ofri Ilany have shown convincingly, not merely in opposition to Hirschfeld's theories, but also to Judaism (see Benedikt Wolf's article in this collection for a different case of the complex articulation of these entangled concepts). Thus, one should not assume that being a proponent of what we today call "gay rights" necessarily meant anti-antisemitism. In fact, one can argue that an entire metaphysics of gay male attraction to other men (or, to be precise, male youth), was based on the construction of positive, Germanic, and therefore spiritual and moral homoerotic and desexualized attraction, in a counter distinction to a negative, carnal, and Jewish (Hirschfeldian) defence of sexualized same-sex desire (Bruns 2008; Ilany 2017b; Tobin 2000). One can, and should, view Blüher's glorification of the spirituality of same-sex desire as a means of "saving" homosexuality from Jewish carnality. As such, we encounter here the two-thousand-year-old conflict between Carnal Israel and Spiritual Israel, or, in this case, a conflict between Carnal Sodom and Spiritual Sodom. It is only the Jews who mistake spiritual desire toward beautiful youth for carnality and who cannot achieve the high realm of mystical intercourse with beauty that the purely ethnic German can experience.

Luisa C. Boeck and Andreas Pretzel's meticulous account of the Jewish presence in gay Berlin takes us back from the lofty metaphysics of Blüher, Brand, and Friedlaender to the concrete lives of gay men and women of Jewish descent who participated in the gay and lesbian scene. In addition to recording the lives of famous queer Jews, theirs is an attempt to go beyond the elites, to identify Jewish men and women who did not belong to the cultural, artistic, or medical realms and who left only fleeting traces in the archives. We find among them bar owners, shopkeepers, salespersons, and even a prostitute.

We hope this is a first step toward a very detailed reconstruction of the entire spectrum of Jewish occupations and forms of participation in the world that gay, bi- and trans men and women created in Berlin and other central European cities. Piotr Laskowski's article in our collection, for example, analyzes the case of Mordechai Mendel *Baltshuve*, an Orthodox Jewish man who was busy fighting Zionists while pursuing young Yeshive students in Warsaw, and Shaun Jacob Halper's wrote a detailed biography of Jiří Mordechai Langer of Prague and Tel Aviv, who combined homoeroticism

with Hasidism (Halper 2011). Both suggest that some Orthodox Jewish men in Central and Eastern Europe who had an interest in homoerotic or homosexual relations with other men managed to combine religiosity with homosexuality. Much more needs to be known about similar subjectivities. It is also crucially important to learn more about the Jewish lesbian. The Jewish woman was one powerful symbol of urban modernity in Weimar; the lesbian, another. Among lesbians in Berlin there were a significant number of Jewish women, and Hilla Lavie's and Janin Afkin's articles in this collection offer preliminary discussions of their participation in the lesbian scene, as well as the different degrees to which these women were attached to their Jewish identity. As the articles make clear, there were many ways of being both lesbian and Jewish in early 20th-century Germany. We also need to know more about the lesbian-Jewish milieus in Germany and other European countries, and to ask in what ways (if any) the participants' Jewishness shaped lesbian forms of sociability and might have configured their desires. One may assume that the experience of being triply marked – as a woman, a Jew, and a lesbian – impacted the self-fashioning and social interactions of these women.

As the articles discussing Central Europe demonstrate so well, being both Jewish and homosexual in Central Europe was a multifaceted experience. The Warsaw criminal Mordechai Mendel, the intellectual Jewish-Muslim Hugo/Hamid Marcus, the industrialist Walter Rathenau, Magnus Hirschfeld, the wandering Jewish comedians who transgressed sexual and gender identities (Korbel), and the hundreds of Jewish men and women who frequented gay bars in Berlin shared little that marked them as either Jewish or homosexual. These articles, then, should serve as a warning against essentializing the experience of being Jewish or homosexual in the *Kaiserreich* or Weimar Republic. Yet one can argue that all of these individuals, each in his or her own way, partook in the tremulous process of the coming into being of new forms of urban modernity and urban identities. Whether they chose to remain in a closet – be it the Jewish one or the gay one – or to leave it; whether they chose to renounce Judaism altogether or connect it to their homosexuality (as was the case with the Jewish lesbians whose biographies are analyzed by Lavie), the double closet created a unique complexity that deserves further analytical attention.

*

On this note, we move from Berlin to Mandatory Palestine. A handful of elderly gay men, interviewed by Yuval Yonay and others since 2001, have indicated that German-Jewish immigrants to Palestine created the first recognizable gay scene, and that the language of gay men's sociability was German. "Everybody spoke German" is how one interviewee described it, while another insisted that the language was not German *and* Yiddish but "German and German" (see Yonay's article below). In 1942, an article in a Hebrew newspaper in Tel Aviv even referred to homosexuality as "The Berlin Infection" (*Hamashkif* , May 27, 1942).[6] It has not been easy to recover fragments of the world these new immigrants created, mostly in Tel Aviv, and I will address the challenges shortly. But one must first put this social construction within its historical context.

6 I thank Ofri Ilany for this reference.

The German-Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1930s has acquired a mythical status in the story of Jewish migration waves (*Aliyot*) to Palestine since 1881, and rightly so. As has been the case in the history of German Jews worldwide, German Jewish immigrants themselves contributed to their own mythologization, writing a great deal about themselves and their experiences of exile, emigration, and integration (but at times also about the sense of being in exile in the Promised Land). Historians have also written about the contributions German-Jewish immigration made to what can be called a re-orientation or even re-configuration of the Yishuv, from a community and polity shaped by Eastern European and Russian traditions, standards, and norms, to a Westernized modern European society (Gelber 1990; Gelber 1993: 323-329; Greif/McPherson/Weinbaum 2000; Schlör 2003; Meiron 2004; Zimmermann/Hotam 2005; Hoba/Schlör 2006; Bronner 2013; Sparr 2018). Even though half of the capital that entered Palestine between 1933 and 1939 was brought by Central European immigrants (Feilchenfeld/Michaelis/Pinner 1972), the major contribution of German Jews to the Yishuv was not wealth as much as professional expertise and the experience of participating in a modernized urban society. This was true even for those who came from small German towns, whose level of modernization was still far above that of the Eastern European shtetls from which the majority of previous Jewish immigrants to Palestine had embarked. And it was also true of numerous Eastern European Jews who came to Palestine after having been exposed to German culture in the major learning centers of Germany and Austria. German Jews contributed to the growth of small- and large-scale industry, banking, and insurance (Gross 2005). They established hundreds of small hotels, pensions, and restaurants; cultivated cultures of urban leisure and lifestyle, including fashion, cosmetics, coffee houses, pastry shops and bookstores; and spurred the proliferation of orchestras, music events, cabaret culture, and modern dance and ballet. German Jews, also known as "Jeckes", a quasi-derogative, quasi-admiring term whose origins and meaning are not clear, turned the Hebrew University (which was the only university in the country at the time) from a provincial establishment into a serious research institution, and they reshaped the fields of medicine and hygiene (Niderland 1985; Hirsch 2014), engineering (Gelber/Goldstein 1988; Schlör 1996; Mann 2006), law and economics (Yonay/Krampf 2014; Oz-Salzberger/Salzberger 1998; Sela-Sheffy 2006), music, the visual arts, and architecture (Hirschberg 1995; Bohlman 1986; Lewy 2005; Lewy 2016; Hoffman 2016: 13-123; Ofrat 2015), psychology and psychoanalysis (Rolnik 2018), sexology (Schlör 1998; Kozma 2010), psychiatry (Zalasnik 2008; 2012), and more. Gelber calls their contribution the 'Europeanization' of the Yishuv (2005: 385). Historians see this contribution as significant impetus for the process of nation-building (Lavsky 2005: 75-76). By 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, and due partially to the contribution of recent immigrants from Central Europe, Jewish society in Palestine had an entire set of bureaucratic, legal, economic, judicial, medical, leisure, and educational institutions that enabled it to function almost independently of the British authorities.

Among the immigrants to Palestine were gay men and women, that is, men and women who had adopted a sexual identity based on their same-sex attraction. They came to a country in which same-sex contacts had already existed, but such sexual identities had not yet been recognized, although the more educated might have run across rumors of "homosexuals" and "lesbians." It is beyond the scope of this collection

and introduction to address same-sex relations between men in Palestine (and, alas, we know nothing about same-sex relations between women). However, to put the following articles in context, we present knowledge already published on homosexual sex in Mandatory Palestine. The legal historian Orna Alyagon-Darr documented cases of same-sex male rape, prostitution, and casual exchange of sex for money among Jews, Arabs, and the British and other soldiers who served in Palestine. Significantly, she also found a few cases of relations based on mutual love, but explains that such relationships were not considered normal, and defendants were therefore guided to present sexual acts as a consequence of the use of force or of an economic exchange. She further emphasizes that the term "homosexual" did not appear in the legal language of Mandatory Palestine, and there was no attempt to enforce the anti-sodomy law which was enacted in 1936 (Alyagon Darr 2019: 31-49).

In her history of forsaken children in Tel Aviv, Tammy Razi mentions adolescent males who were engaged in male prostitution and others who had sex with other young men of their group of homeless youth (Razi 2009: 115-16). Ofri Ilany has documented numerous references to male same-sex sexual attacks in the Hebrew press, in which the common term was "*ma'ase-sdom*" (an act of Sodom), a modern Hebrew term for anal sex between two men. According to Ilany (2016; 2017a), in most of these news reports, the attackers were Arabs or Jews from Middle Eastern countries, and the assumption was that attacks reflected, in Ilany's term, an "Oriental vice," a tendency shared by all Oriental men. Others have written about the unique life and tragic assassination of Jakob Israël de Haan, who moved from Zionism to ultra-Orthodox Judaism, all the while pursuing sex with young Arab men (Berkowitz 2005).

For the purpose of our investigation, however, it is important to separate this tradition of same-sex relations, based mainly (but not solely) on either casual anonymous stints, monetary exchange, or the use of violence, from the appearance of individuals who identify themselves according to their sexuality and create their own sites for socialization. This form of socialization offers participants more than just sexual encounters and sex for pay. Importantly, this new same-sex sociability included women who identified themselves based on their same-sex desires.

Based on interviews with the oldest gay men he found, Yuval Yonay suggested that it was only with the immigration of the German Jews that new forms of same-sex sociability came into being. Their new networks, sites of socialization, reciprocal help in obtaining jobs, and shared (German!) language created what, I think, deserved to be called a gay culture. Gay German-Jewish men met in bars and cafes, might have had clubs, and established cruising sites (the most prominent, not accidentally, was called the *Strich*). Already at the time, their contemporaries were aware that a new form of male homosexuality was coming into being. In 1934, the sensationalist magazine *Iton Meyuchad* reported the existence of "clubs for homosexuals" in Tel Aviv, where effeminate men and masculine men allegedly met to engage in orgies. On the borders between new, Jewish Tel Aviv and old, Arab – and hence degenerate – Jaffa, they meet "in the depths of the shadows of a side room" in cafes. Others, though, the article goes on to warn its readers, might have established meeting clubs "right in the center of town" where men dance with other men. There is nothing here to characterize these sites and these men

as German Jews, but the anonymous author of this article associates these gatherings with German bohemian "cocainists" and "morphinists" (Ilany 2017a: 114).

Iton Meyuchad was highly atypical of the deeply ideological Jewish Yishuv, and the story might be completely bogus, but it may indicate that the author was aware of the presence of a new group of people, homosexuals, to whom he might have attributed stories he heard in Europe of "those people". The mass migration from Europe to Mandatory Palestine brought with it knowledge about forms of male and female same-sex attraction, relationships, and identification; physicians, psychoanalysts, and sexologists wrote about homosexuality, sometimes mixing old stereotypes about sodomites with new scientific discourse.

From various historical sources, including the interviews conducted by Yonay, personal recollections of people we interviewed during our research, and published information on public figures, we know about other men who already exhibited 'gay sensibilities', most of whom came from Germany. The only gay man to write about his self-identity as gay in real time was Yedidia (Eduard) Havkin (1903-1948), whose diary is currently being analyzed by Ofri Ilany.[7] Havkin was born in Munich into a family of Russian Jews who moved to Palestine in 1921. An eccentric man, Havkin did not hide his attraction to men and compulsively recorded information about the men he met, as well as about his astrological beliefs and calculations. He sent excerpts from these texts to the most famous figures of his time, including Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, and Klaus Mann, with the hope that they would help him publish the diaries. During the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, he was recruited to help the construction of fortified positions in a kibbutz near Jerusalem and was killed when the kibbutz was bombarded.

Alfred Leschnitzer (aka Fred Lennè) is another example. He was born in Neisse (Silesia), and arrived in Palestine in 1944 after three years of Resistance activities in the South of France. He was a ballet and Flamenco dancer in German cabarets before the war. Under the name Fred Lennox, he taught Flamenco in Palestine and then Israel before moving back to Berlin in 1953, where, as Frieda Loch, he was to become famous in the 1970s as a drag performer in the celebrated Lützower Lampe bar in Charlottenburg. Another figure was Fritz Werdriner, born in 1898 in Siegen (Wesfalia), who was active in the gay scene in Berlin from the 1920s until 1935, when he was arrested by the Gestapo, deported to a concentration camp in Lichtenburg and then departed to Palestine (Hergemöller 2010: 1298). Other gay men of Central European background were Hans Hamburger, the Swiss manager of the most prestigious hotel in Mandatory Palestine (and later the State of Israel), the King David Hotel in Jerusalem; Hans Nathan and Walter Moses, industrialists and leaders of the German-Jewish youth movement before immigrating; Giora Yoseftal (in German: Georg Josephthal), another leader of the German Zionist youth movement, who became a Knesset member and a government minister in the State of Israel; and Hans Rozenkranz (Chai Ataron), a journalist for the *Jüdische Rundschau* and a book publisher in Berlin, whose small publishing house published homoerotic literature, and who later became a journalist, an art critic in the *Palestine Post*, and a member

7 We thank Ofri for his immense continuation to this project from its inception and for sharing with us his work-in-progress on Havkin.

of a network of gay journalists of German-Jewish background. To this list, one could add some leading professors at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as at least one prominent intellectual whose bookstore served as a 'clearing post' for new gay men who arrived in Jerusalem and needed employment and a social (gay) network.

Lesbian lives can also be documented as of the 1930s, and here, too, the German-Jewish presence dominates. In Rehavia, the German-Jewish neighbourhood of Jerusalem, which Thomas Sparr has dubbed *Grunewald im Orient*, Ms. I. R. was a member of a prominent Orthodox German-Jewish scholarly family and had a female partner. Frieda (Alfrieda?) Neumann and Eva Gutmann made up another couple. Together, they ran a luncheonette for bachelors. One, we are told by an interviewee, was very large and the other very thin; one was very masculine-looking and the other very feminine-looking. Unfortunately, our interviewees, who were all young children in the period they described, could not share more than these childhood recollections with us. It was clear, our interviewees nonetheless tell us, that they were a couple, but "no one talked about it." Other interviewees recalled Ms. Schapsky, who was very masculine-looking and had a garçonne haircut, was an interior designer, and ran an upholstery store with her very feminine-looking partner, Frau Stein. Schapsky "always wore men's three-part suits, black or grey, a white men's shirt, and flat black shoes, a completely masculine attire and performance [. . .] Her partner was always dressed in pink and floral dresses, and her waist so extremely thin, probably held by a corset. Even though she was already an old woman, she was still blond. They were always walking arm in arm. There were lots of strange people in the neighbourhood, and we kids used to annoy them, because they were weird. But Ms. Schapsky and her partner were never bothered because they were simply there, part of the landscape".[8] A more famous couple were Batia Lichansky and her partner Annie Neumann, the topic of Yael Rozin's article below. Lies Möller, a poet who worked for many years in a German bookstore in Haifa and then as a librarian at the University of Haifa, had a long relationship with another librarian, Gerda Fuchs. We do not know much about their lives, but we know that they share the same tomb on Kibbutz Ein HaHoresh (where Möller stayed during her first year in Palestine), after Fuchs donated her body to science. Another well-known couple were the American-born Jessie Ethel Sampter and her partner, the Russian-born, Berlin-educated Lea Berlin. The two women met in 1919 in Jerusalem and shared an apartment for several years. In 1933, after a few years of living apart, Berlin moved to Sampter's house in Rehovot, and a year later they moved together to Kibbutz Givat Brenner, which in 1929 absorbed a large group of German Jews. In the kibbutz, the two established an exclusive vegetarian convalescent home in which they lived together. "Since our meeting in Jerusalem, we were never separated," Berlin stated (Rotem 2019).

Almost all the lesbians about whom we know lived as couples. It is likely that single women who happened to be lesbians did not register mentally or visually as such in the Jewish society of Mandatory Palestine (see Orit Yaal's discussion below). Labour Zionist women often adopted masculine attire and other characteristics of the New Woman.

8 We thank Moshe Zimmermann, Shimon Zandbank, and Naomi Tamodr for their willingness to share recollections, and Aviel Astanovsky for conducting the interviews.

This was not the case with bourgeois women, but it did enable the single lesbian to pass. The best example of this wilful ignorance is the case of Gertrud Kraus (1901-1977), one of the founding mothers of modern dance in Palestine and Israel. Kraus came to Tel Aviv in 1935 from Vienna, accompanied by Elsa Scharf, one of her students. The two lived together in Tel Aviv and later in Ein Hod on Mount Carmel. Scharf was the administrative director of Kraus's dance school, but everybody knew that they were a couple. "She was gay, but it was not talked about" is how Linda Hodes, who was sent by Martha Graham to teach the dancers of the Batsheva dance troupe in the 1960s, put it. (Interestingly, *Batsheva* was founded by Bethsabee de Rothschild and her partner Jeannett Ordman.) Everybody knew that Kraus was gay, that she lived with a female partner, and that she had developed infatuations with some of her female dancers, but no one wanted to name the phenomenon.[9] Another prominent single lesbian was Hilda Zadek (1917-2019), a Kammersängerin at the Vienna State Opera. Zadek was born in Bromberg, Posen, and moved to Palestine in 1934. In Palestine, she worked as a shoe saleswoman and a nurse while studying voice. In 1945, she moved to Europe and started an operatic career as an internationally renowned soprano. Zadek, we hear, was exceptionally beautiful. One German-Jewish gay man remembered seeing her *in flagrante delicto* with Mrs. Nathan, Hans Nathan's wife, sometime in the 1940s.

Whether or not they self-identified as homosexual, one important result of our research is the unique characteristic of the secret of being a homosexual or a lesbian. As others have pointed out before, the knowledge that a person is gay is a very special type of knowledge – one that chooses to remain somewhere between being acknowledged and being denied, wishing itself not to be acknowledged (Murray 1997). Often, it was a secret hidden in plain sight. The Yishuv was like the French provincial city of Reims, recently described in French sociologist Didier Eribon's memoir of his gay childhood. Eribon recalls cruising in the one narrow street behind the train station, where he would always run into the same few men whom everybody knew to be looking for sex at this site. Yet this was a knowledge to which no one wanted to admit (Eribon 2009). In *The Gold-rimmed Spectacles*, the Italian author Giorgio Bassani tells a similar story about being a homosexual in the small town of Ferrara (Bassani 1958). In the Yishuv, anonymity and secrecy were not easy to maintain, and closets, as Dotan Brom tells us below, were often transparent. It was clear to young children in Mandatory Jerusalem that the women who lived together were couples, even if the exact nature of their bonding was not known (or was intentionally left unknown). In this context it is worth mentioning Jizchak Schwersenz (1915-2005), who, in 1943, was one of the leaders of Chug Chaluzi (*Pionierkreis*), the small Zionist underground movement in Berlin. In 1951, he moved to Haifa, where he worked as an educator and was a prominent member of the town's German Jewish community. Though his presence in Israel postdates the Jecke immigration, the transparency of his closet was typical. "Everybody respected him, brought him food, invited him for the holidays. He was never in the closet. Everybody knew it, but no one talked about it; he always had a young lover," said a woman who knew him when she was a young woman in Haifa.

9 I thank Dotan Brom for this information; Interview with Linda Hodes, New York, August 24, 2016.

> Question: It did not bother anyone that he was a homosexual?
> A: No one talked about it. There was silence. People thought that it was a matter of choice, not inborn inclination. . . He was very sensitive, and people thought that it was due to something that happened to him. Many of his friends were also homosexuals, but no one talked about it. Whenever he had a lover, he was euphoric and then everybody knew it. He knew that everybody knew, but no one talked about it.[10]

Schwersenz was active from the 1970s in rapprochements between German and Israeli youth (both Jews and Arabs), and in 1991 chose to return to Berlin. Interestingly, his itinerary, from Berlin to Haifa and back to Berlin, was not unique among gay and lesbian German Jews who immigrated to Palestine. Alfred Leschnitzer went back to Berlin, as did Gad (Gerhard) Beck, who came to Palestine in 1947 after being a member of the same underground Jewish group in Berlin that Schwesenz led (Beck/Heibert 1990). Zadek ended up in Vienna, and Edith Goldfaden, who came to Palestine in 1940, ended up in Germany in 1988 after living in five different countries, "never feeling at home in any of them" (Goldfaden 1993: 7). Their wanderings, I suggest, can stand as a symbol for the complex stories of identities, subjectivities, and identifications assembled in this collection, and which also shaped the itinerant comedians and performers analyzed by Korbel in her article. They stand, too, as a core component of modernity, a project in which both Jews and homosexuals played an important role during the previous century.

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10 Interview with Miriam Finkelman, Haifa, conducted by Ofri Ilany.

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