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DAILY LIFE IN THE COUNTRY. THE CO-EXISTENCE OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS AT THE END OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC*

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INTRODUCTION

There is currently so much literature on the subject of daily life that it is almost impossible to maintain an overall view of it.[1] This is evidence of the noticeable trend amongst a younger generation of researchers towards analysing everyday human realities and ways of life less from the point of view of the history of events or of structures than from that of what is known as the 'history of experiences', as affecting smaller population groups. It is here, in the area of family, club and group culture, an area shaped by traditional trades as well as by modern forms of work, that research interests in social history[2] and in folklore[3] have recently coincided. These, along with other disciplines, have come to form an academic study of daily life, a subject which researchers into folklore have always sought to underline, having examined the everyday existence of 'ordinary people' before their counterparts in history did so.[4] In a study which has yet to be published, the author has recently attempted to offer proof of this.[5]

The term 'daily life'[6] encompasses all aspects of human existence: work and play, war and peace, birth and death, expulsion and resistance,[7] and much more besides. The richness of human life and its daily realities can only be captured in segments. These are determined by the point of view of the observer or, more precisely as far as the present study is concerned, of the questioner, by the substance of his questions, and by the intellectual qualities or the memory of those questioned. The sections break reality up into different facets and reflect traces of history (or life history) in the course of personal experience. Ordering subjective experience in an objective series according to vested interests and empirical chains of events is often problematic. Recounted memories defamiliarise and transfigure the past, offering a balanced report in only the rarest of cases. Memory is directed by different vested interests, led astray by contemporary trends, and shaped by the flow of the individual account. This is evident in the case studies noted in villages in which people were asked for their memories of rural daily life during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The daily life of the ruling classes nationwide in this period has recently been recorded in a series of studies and texts edited by Hans Mommsen.[8] The survey

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carried out in the country by the DFG project 'Jewish villages', a subdivision of the whole academic undertaking, looks less at the experiences of those in power than at those of the people affected by that power. In the following study, only those facts from the survey of Franconian villages[9] are presented which are relevant to the way in which Christian and Jewish sections of the population co-existed. The vast majority of the case studies concern average, daily experience of this co-existence. Indicators such as religious festivals and customs, working habits, professions, relationships between neighbours, clubs, committees, cultural relations and popular beliefs will all be adduced in this context.

LIVING TOGETHER AND IN CONFLICT

Reckendorf/Ufr.

As in so many Jewish villages in Franconia, the buildings of Reckendorf[10] show that it was once in the possession of imperial knights. The noble von Rotenhan family is still resident there. The infrastructure of the old Jewish religious community, which was already flourishing in the late seventeenth century, survived into the twentieth century: a well-preserved sandstone synagogue, a school, a Mikwe, a cemetry; the local rabbi had his seat in Reckendorf (1762–1880), and there was still a precentor there up to 1892, underlining the former importance of the Jewish religious life in the rural community. In 1852, 303 Jewish citizens and 800 Christians (27.5%) were resident there; in 1933 the total population had declined to 918 people, at which time 20 inhabitants professed their Jewish faith; in May 1939, only 10 did so.[11]

From the survey of seven old people, four men and three women over 70 years of age and resident in the village in 1988, only those responses concerning the rural co-existence of the members of the various faiths will now be evaluated. Along with the familiar rituals and customs which accompany births, marriages and deaths in Jewish life and the differences with respect to Christian celebrations, it is particular eating habits, and the customs associated with the Sabbath and other religious festivals that remain vividly in the memories of those questioned as being characteristic of Jewish life. Those aspects of life which marked them as different, their unusual and unfamiliar religious customs, remain imprinted on the mind.[12]

Thus, ritual eating habits, the use of separate pots and pans for dairy and meat produce, and the strict separation of the foods themselves according to religious law (Thora) were all familiar to those questioned. Specialities of Jewish cuisine were enumerated during the accounts. For example: Scharlet or 'Schales', a cake-like pudding, a sweet food; Merbera, a variety of tart; the customary Mazzen at Easter, including an account of how they were made.

The interviewees were equally well acquainted with particular forms of animal slaughter, and with the names of the slaughterers. 'They all knew that they (the Jews) were only allowed to eat specially slaughtered meat from cows, calves or poultry, and they knew the difference between "koscher" and "trefa".[13] Individual parts of the ritual slaughter were described precisely'.[14] As former employees in Jewish houses, those questioned were very familiar with the habits of Jewish life. The menu for the Sabbath ('Shabes'), the family seating plan, and

the order in which the food was served were vivid memories for them because they took part in the meal. The female employees of the house and the male servants who were Christian were also considered part of the family. The Jewish family tolerated the eating of so-called impure foods by Christian employees on the Sabbath and respected their rights to have free time on the Christian Sabbath and on holidays. This tolerant attitude towards the Christians on the part of the Jews is all the more remarkable since they were members of a relatively orthodox rural community which was affiliated to the seat of the rabbi at Burgpreppach, site of an old Talmud school.[15]

Contact between the Jewish inhabitants of the village and the resident Christian population was good. It was not only limited to the Sunday game of cards in the inn, to the cattle trade, or to other business through the shops in the village.[16] The fact that the priest in Reckendorf was happy to use the first private telephone of the respected businessman and cattle trader Julius Hermann, preferring not to telephone from the local post office, confirms the good contacts between the two religious groups in the village, as does the existence of many Jewish foundations and charitable institutions, together with communal membership of numerous local organisations. Further evidence of this is available in the author's earlier publication.[17] The most important institution was the children's home, built by Nathan and Rosa Walter. With financial help from the descendants of the same family, a Kindergarten was founded for all the children of the municipality of Reckendorf; this charitable foundation still exists today.[18]

Rural co-existence in the former cattle trading village was also shaped by the way in which employment was structured. Farmers who worked on small holdings earned extra income as cattle-herds for the Jewish traders or had fixed positions with them, just like those who worked in Jewish households. A weekly wage of approximately 10 RM was a good income for the period (around 1930).[19] In this way, the Jewish families that belonged to the upper classes of the village improved the rural job opportunities. According to the statements of those questioned, the relationship between Christian employees and Jewish employers in the village was good. Relations were different in the neighbouring village of Autenhausen, however, even at the beginning of the Weimar period. In November 1923, members of the 'Jungdeutcher Orden' (Order of Young Germans) and of the 'Wikingerbund' (Viking Association) attacked the last two Jewish families living there. The attack was dealt with in the court in Bamberg and the perpetrators were sentenced.[20]

Mühlhausen

Mühlhausen,[21] a village on the edge of the Steigerwald, had a population of 977 in 1933, of whom 43 were of the Jewish faith. Here, the majority of Jewish people earned their living through fixed shops (10); the old peddlars had become a residential merchant class. In addition there was the usual cattle trade (9). In 1926 there were already 25 telephones in Jewish houses. As early as 1882 there was some drilling for oil in the area; local Jews suspected that there were deposits of iron, coal and oil.[22]

This openness to social change on the part of the Jewish population promoted Mühlhausen as the supply centre for the surrounding villages. The family fathers

used the permanent shop in the village as a base for trips, initially by bicycle but later by car, to peddle their wares and to obtain orders. In the Weimar period Jewish families already owned the first cars, telephones and electric ovens in the village. As employers they enjoyed the same positive reputation as those already mentioned in Reckendorf. A Jewish source (P. Reinhold)[23] reported that his father did seasonal trade in hops, and advertised in and subscribed to several newspapers. Here too, Jewish businessmen treated their employees as members of the family and even gave them presents at Christmas underneath a German Christmas tree. Thus, Jewish and German identities went hand in hand before 1933.

In this Franconian–Jewish religious community, a community so rich in tradition and which had a synagogue as early as 1686, the co-existence of inhabitants of different faiths proceeded normally. The richer class of Jewish businessmen and traders, who were open to progress, nevertheless held loyally to the traditions of their religious festivals. Of course, these were different from those of their Christian surroundings, and there developed a 'Festkultur der Absonderung' (a segregated culture of religious festivals) (K. Guth) which remained vividly imprinted on the memories of those questioned, particularly as far as the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) was concerned,[24] but did not influence the normal course of co-existence in work, business and leisure. As in Reckendorf, the friendly relationship between the two groups is particularly evident in clubs and in local politics. Both Jews and Christians were members of the gymnastics club, the football club, the club of the local fire brigade, the choir and the veterans' association, and they took part together in the organisation of other clubs as secretaries, treasurers and committee members. During the Easter celebrations, the local children looked for Easter eggs together and at Christmas they were given family presents together under the Christmas tree.[25]

Hirschaid/Buttenheim

Our analysis of the co-existence of Jews and Christians in Franconian villages before the fateful year of 1933 will conclude with one last 'monotype'[26] of daily life, a clear picture of two communities closely bound together. This example illustrates Jewish solidarity in religious life, social mobility in villages as a result of education, and the breakdown of human relationships in 'emergencies'.

Buttenheim and Hirschaid are only a few kilometres apart. The former was recently recognised as the birth place of Levi Strauß, the man who invented jeans; the latter, a market town of approximately 8500 inhabitants,[27] is representative of the structural economic changes in villages at the end of the nineteenth century. These changes came about as a result of railways and the setting up of new lines of business. The manufacture of shoes, basketware, garden furniture, and wholesale trade in tobacco, oil and fats, together with the standard Jewish trade in cattle, contributed to an economic boom in the area. It was the cattle traders who secured a railway station for Hirschaid.[28] The wealthy Jewish religious community (established since 1585)[29] supported the equally old rural community of Buttenheim (*ca* 1593) when it was threatened with extinction as a result of the emigration of some of its inhabitants overseas and the migration of others to nearby towns. In 1818, together with the rural communities of Hirschaid and Gunzendorf, the Jews of Buttenheim obtained official approval to establish a cemetry near to the village.[30] As a result of the decrease in size of the

community, the synagogue in Buttenheim fell into disuse after 1892 and in 1936 it was disposed of privately (to the brewery of H. Modschiedler) with the community of Hirschaid acting on its behalf. The Bar-Mitzvah celebration of the last Buttenheimer Jew (Willi Habermann) shortly before this in 1936, attended by numerous Jews and Christians, hence turned out to be all the more striking.[31] Reporting what happened from America in 1988,[32] Willi Habermann could still remember all the details of how the synagogue was decorated.[33]

In the eyes of the Christian inhabitants of Buttenheim and Hirschaid, members of Jewish families were different because of their social mobility and their openness to cultural and technical progress. Telephones, electric cookers, cars, town furnishings and clothes—particularly for the women, whose smart hats especially struck those questioned, together with the top hats of the men, as they went to synagogue[34]—underline the readiness to accept and assimilate innovations on the part of this mobile rural group. As a result of their avid interest in the education and training of their children, they altered the consciousness of the inhabitants of the village. In many Jewish–Franconian villages, such as Aschbach,[35] for example, there was mixed-faith education (1927).

Between 1903 and 1924, Hirschaid had a Jewish primary school. Hebrew was taught there. According to one interviewer, the children were especially well trained in counting and calculation: 'they were brought up to be traders'.[36] Later some of them went with Christian children from neighbouring villages to the secondary school in Bamberg, whilst others attended the grammar school. School, further training, and leisure activities strengthened interpersonal relationships in the country (Hirschaid). As elsewhere,[37] lively participation in village clubs, co-operation on committees, and joint excursions created a feeling of common ground amongst the young people. Photographs of jointly organised 'Fasching' celebrations, of motor car trips, and of the founding of a mixed faith brass band offer proof of the informal co-existence of young people in the Weimar Republic. The differences occasioned by peculiarities in religious life and festivals, and in eating habits, were hardly noticed by the young people of the village.

The collective life of the rural population which had developed over a hundred years, at least in stages according to the principle of liberty, was brought to an end by the night of the 'Reichspogrom'.

RESULTS

The co-existence of Jewish and Christian rural population groups was in general evenly balanced in the Weimar Republic. Prejudices and points of conflict arose where latent tensions became visible as a result of differences in education, in professions, and in material possessions. However, such conflicts also existed between purely Christian Franconian demographic groups which belonged to different social classes. Both sections of the population, Jews and Christians, tolerated the different religious culture of the other and regarded themselves in rural public life as Germans. Together they organised politics, clubs, sporting activities and welfare in the villages.

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NOTES

1. K. Guth, 'Volkskultur des Alltags? Anfragen an Kategorien der Volkskunde', in: *Festschrift Wolfgang Brücker*, ed. D. Harmening and E. Wimmer (Würzburg, 1990).
2. For a survey see: J. Kocka (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte im internationalen Überblick. Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1989).
3. Interviews with workers, soldiers, people who fought at Stalingrad, flak assistants, refugees and displaced persons belong in this context. A. Lehmann has undertaken research from the point of view of folklore into the field of life histories. The author is involved in supervising work on the integration of Germans in the Sudentenland or the re-emigration of Turkish guest workers to Istanbul. Stored in the Federal Archive in Koblenz is extensive material relating to Germans from Eastern Europe (reports on questionnaires, reports on the fate of communities; see Department II, 6 there).
4. K. Guth, 'Volkskultur des Alltags?', *op. cit.*; G. Wiegelmann (ed.), *Geschichte der Alltagskultur* (Münster, 1980), in particular pp. 11–20.
5. See also R.-E. Mohrmann, 'Regionale Kultur und Alltagsgeschichte. Möglichkeiten, Grenzen und Aufgaben der Volkskunde', in: *Historische Methode und regionale Kultur. Festschrift K.S. Kramer* (Berlin/Vilseck, 1987), pp. 53–57; K. Guth, 'Erinnern, Erzählen, Vergessen' (see note 9).
6. With reference to the problems relating to the term 'Alltag' (daily life), see K. Guth, 'Alltäglichkeit—oder: Vom Umgang mit dem täglichen Leben', in: *Alltagsgeschichte und Alltagskultur in Bayern*, ed. W. Protzner and K. Guth (Kulmbach, 1987), pp. 5–14.
7. M. Broszat, 'Widerstand und Resistenz', in: M. Broszat, *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, Bd IV (Munich, 1981), pp. 691–709. H. Hürten, *Verfolgung, Widerstand und Zeugnis* (Mainz, 1987).
8. H. Mommsen (ed.), *Herrschaftsalltag im Dritten Reich. Studien und Texte* (Düsseldorf, 1988).
9. To date information from nine villages out of the 12 places selected for the DFG project have been evaluated. On this whole area, see K. Guth, 'Erinnern, Erzählen, Vergessen. Über den Umgang mit Erinnerung an den jüdische Alltag auf dem Land während des Dritten Reiches', in: *Kongreßband Erinnern—Vergessen*, 27th Deutscher Volkskunde-Kongreß 1989 (Göttingen, 1990). K. Guth, 'Jüdisches Schulwesen auf dem Land 1804–1870', *Archiv für Geschichte von Oberfranken* **70** (in preparation).
10. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden in Oberfranken (1800–1942). Geschichte und Volkslkultur*, Bd 1 (Bamberg, 1988), pp. 282–289.
11. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': archive material edited by U. Krzywinski (Reckendorf).
12. On customs throughout life see K. Guth, 'Landjudentum in Franken. Lebensformen einer Minderheit im 18. Jahrhundert', *Archiv für Geschichte von Oberfranken* **65** (1985), pp. 363–378.
13. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': notes, p. 3 (U. Krzywinski).
14. *Ibid.*
15. On the Talmud school at Burgpreppach see B. Ophir and F. Wiesemann, *Die jüdischen Gemeinden in Bayern 1918–1945. Geschichte und Zerstörung* (Münich, 1979), pp. 275–278. L. Höhn, *Burgpreppach, Marktgemeinde und Schloß. Eine Heimatgeschichte* (Hofheimer/Ufr., 1982), pp. 108–110.
16. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': notes, p. 4 (U. Krzywinski).
17. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, in the places cited.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
19. Half a litre of beer cost 10 Pfenniges, one egg cost 3 Pfenniges, a brace of pigeon cost 2 RM.
20. K. Guth, (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, p. 108.

21. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': Mühlhausen notes, p. 4 (U. Krzywinski).
22. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, p. 254.
23. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': notes, p. 4 (U. Krzywinski).
24. *Ibid.* (Mühlhausen), p. 6.
25. *Ibid.* (Mühlhausen), p. 7.
26. The term 'monotype' is borrowed from the specialist language of printing.
27. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, pp. 195, 135.
28. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': Hirschaid notes, p. 3 (U. Krzywinski).
29. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, pp. 195f.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 130f.
31. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': Buttenheim notes, p. 2f. (U. Krzywinski).
32. Buttenheim notes, p. 8.
33. Buttenheim notes, p. 2f.
34. Buttenheim notes, p. 4. Hirschaid notes, p. 2: 'Unlike the peasant women of Hirschaid, the women did not wear head scarves, but beautiful, elegant hats'.
35. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': photocopy of the manuscript 'Ländliche Volksbildung' by Lehrer Staude, Forchheim (Aschbach, 1967).
36. DFG Project 'Judendörfer': Hirschaid notes, p. 2 (U. Krzywinski).
37. K. Guth (ed.), *Jüdische Landgemeinden, op. cit.*, p. 203f; DFG Project 'Judendörfer': Hirschaid notes, p. 3 (U. Krzywinski).