

In the footsteps of Hilde and Ruth. Descendants of the Jewish Goldwein family came from Israel to Meimbressen

By Dorina Binienda-Beer

Meimbressen. Hilde Goldwein left Meimbressen when she was only 18 years old - of necessity. Her destination was the British Mandate of Palestine. That was in 1935. Two years after the Nazis seized power, the cruel end of centuries of peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Christian inhabitants was looming even in the countryside, including in her small home village with its great Jewish history. The Goldweins were among the Jewish families in Meimbressen. They recognised the signs of the times early on. A dramatic assault on their older sister Ruth caused a shock and probably influenced Hilde's decision to flee to Palestine.

She never returned. But later she would tell her children again and again about the people and events of her youth, about village life around Kassel. Hilde Meron, née Goldwein, died at an advanced age in Israel. In her place, descendants have now come to Meimbressen: Daughter Tamar (81) and son Meir (78) with their children and granddaughters. The association „*Judaica in Meimbressen e.V.*“, which was founded at the Junkernhof only last year, devoted itself intensively to the visitors during the two-day search for traces, after written contacts had already been made in advance.

The day began with a visit to the 300-year-old Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Meimbressen, one of the largest of its kind in North Hesse. The chairman of the association, Heinrich Neutze, gave a knowledgeable tour of the grounds of the cultural monument. Afterwards, the visitors had lit tea lights in front of the gate and sung a Jewish song to get in the mood for the Shabbat that was about to begin. Touching moments for the participating board members as well as for the Israelis, who expressed their joyful surprise at the excellent state of maintenance of the cemetery. The dark chapter in the family history about the early and tragic death of Hilde's sister took concrete shape for those born later here at the gravestone of Ruth Goldwein. She was only 25 years old (see BACKGROUND).

A walk through the old centre of the village of Meimbress also led to the former site of the synagogue, which, in addition to the prayer room, housed the Jewish primary schools attended by Hilde Goldwein and the teacher's flat. Only a memorial stone and an information board still bear witness to the centre of former Jewish life.

Experiencing the Judaica section in the Hofgeismar City Museum also deeply moved the visitors. Under the guidance of Dr. Michael Dorhs, head of the department and at the same time 2nd chairman of the Meimbresser Verein, the Israelis were impressed that regional Jewish history is commemorated here in detail with concrete mention of even a large number of family names. Dorhs: *„There, where they have their roots, there is a place where the fate of their families is not forgotten. This realisation is good for the descendants.“*

In Meimbressen, the Judaica Association is striving to lay stumbling stones („Stolpersteine“) step by step for all Jewish families who lived here until the Nazi reign of terror. In this way, the Goldweins will also be commemorated with memorial paving stones in the pavement. However, the house of the merchant family no longer exists. It fell victim to the widening of the road at the end of the village in the direction of Ehrsten. According to Dorhs, the association „Judaica in Meimbressen e.V.“ sees the symbolic return of murdered and expelled people to the village and, ideally, welcoming their descendants to Meimbressen as one of its primary tasks, in addition to educational work with school classes and its own historical research. In the case of the current visit of the Goldwein-Meron family, the encouraging conclusion for further work is: *„A moving encounter in great openness and with a familiarity right from the start“.*

BACKGROUND

The sad fate of Ruth Goldwein

In a kind of run-up to the great pogrom three years later, violent SA men had already been going from house to house in Meimbressen in 1935. The young Ruth Goldwein resisted them by standing in front of her parents. She was then taken to Kassel for interrogation and returned to Meimbressen broken days later. Her obvious severe trauma led to her forced admission to a psychiatric ward.

English Translation of the text by Dorina Binienda-Beer in the regional daily newspaper „HNA-Hofgeismarer Allgemeine“ of 21 July 2023

All efforts by her parents Meir and Minna to save their daughter failed. A few months later, Ruth Goldwein died an unexplained death in the sanatorium. The circumstances suggest a case of so-called „euthanasia“. Her name is included in the Federal Archives' official list of victims of the Nazis' murder of Jews (<https://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/de1665792>).

On her departure from her home village, Hilde Meron, née Goldwein, wrote much later: *„I left Meimbressen with a heavy heart because my parents still stayed there.“* However, they then followed her to Palestine two years later, where her four surviving children all built new lives for themselves. In 1984, Hilde Meron noted: *„We have a satisfaction that our parents died here and that we can visit their graves. Unlike many others who don't know where their loved ones have gone.“* For Ruth, the visitors laid a stone on her grave according to Jewish custom. (pbb)