

Torah scroll resurfaces

The holiest artefact from Meimbressen's synagogue survived and found its way to the USA

by Dorina Binienda-Beer

Meimbressen. Shortly before its next – and third – Stolperstein laying ceremony, the Judaica Association in Meimbressen received some surprising news: A Torah scroll originating from the former Meimbressen synagogue has turned up in the USA; at least, all the evidence points to this being its source. Following the desecration of the Jewish house of prayer by the Nazis in November 1938 and its subsequent demolition, there have long been no religious relics left in Meimbressen to bear witness to the 600 years of Jewish life that once existed in the village on the Nebelbeeke. This makes the survival of this Torah scroll – the sacred text of Judaism, handwritten in Hebrew and thus the heart of the Jewish community – all the more precious. Although four other Torah scrolls did exist in Meimbressen, they were ritually buried in the Jewish cemetery by members of the Jewish community at the time, as they had been desecrated during the pogrom and were therefore no longer usable. This is according to an eyewitness account.

How the story of the rediscovery began: A rabbi from the US state of Connecticut recently contacted the Judaica Association to request the contact details of Alon Voremberg, the young Israeli from Haifa who, last year in Meimbressen, traced the family history of his Jewish ancestors. The rabbi had come across the HNA report on this visit on the Judaica Association's website – whilst researching the name Voremberg. For this name plays a key role in this story.

„Werner Voremberg, born 30 April 1927“ is written in neat, tidy handwriting on the long, ornate fabric ribbon with which the Torah scroll in Connecticut is wrapped. For centuries, particularly within German-speaking Jewish communities, these so-called pennants, made of linen or cotton, were used to hold Torah scrolls together. The Torah pennant, consisting of four long strips of fabric sewn together, was made from the nappy worn by a male infant on the day of his circumcision. In this case, therefore, it must have been worn by Werner Voremberg: Alon's grandfather.

The rabbi's message to Alon regarding the existence of the pennant deeply moved him and other members of his family. Werner Voremberg himself did not live to hear the news; he died in 2019. He had left Meimbressen as a child

in September 1938, together with his two older brothers and his parents. His father, the respected Meimbressen cattle dealer Jakob Voremberg, and his mother Jenny had, under the weight of severe repression, managed just in time to bring themselves to emigrate with their sons to Eretz Israel. As an elderly man, Werner Voremberg returned briefly to Meimbressen in 2006 at the invitation of his childhood friend Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg – to attend the 1,100th-anniversary celebrations of his birthplace.

One can only speculate as to how the Torah scroll, bearing the pennant clearly attributable to him and thus also to Meimbressen, came to be in the USA. The possibility of it returning to Meimbressen is considered out of the question, as there has been no Jewish community here for almost 90 years.

The Judaica Association serves as a repository of memory

Descendants of Meimbressen's Jewish community learn valuable insights into their family history

Meimbressen. „*We are interested in the life stories of ordinary people and, through our remembrance work, we make them symbolically visible once again within the village community,*“ says Michael Dorhs. The vice-chairman of Judaica in Meimbressen has been researching and publishing on the history of Jewish families in the Hofgeismar area for a good 40 years. He knows there are many biographies of renowned Jewish artists and scholars. But he believes it is just as important to look back at the life stories and fates of ordinary Jewish people from the neighbourhood, such as cattle dealers and shopkeepers. They lived throughout the village of Meimbressen and led lives much like their Christian neighbours – until 1933.

Active remembrance is one area of work undertaken by the Meimbressen Association; maintaining contact with the descendants of former Jewish residents of Meimbressen is another. Four years after its foundation, Judaica in Meimbressen is in contact with eight families of descendants in various countries. A number of relatives have already visited Meimbressen in search of their family's history, and descendants of former Jewish residents are also expected to attend the forthcoming Stolperstein laying ceremony.

Over time, Dorhs has witnessed a reversal in the transfer of knowledge. Originally, as part of his research – even whilst he was still a theology student –

he gathered as much information as possible with the help of Holocaust survivors. Today, with hardly any victims of the Nazi regime still alive, he himself is the source of information. According to Dorhs, the descendants are both impressed and grateful to be able to draw on knowledge and data about their families. Parents and grandparents can no longer be asked; *‘often they did not even talk about what their families had experienced’*. The Judaica association in Meimbressen thus acts as a repository of memory for these families and others interested in the subject.

Detailed information on the history of Jewish life in Meimbressen and the activities of Judaica in Meimbressen can be found on the association’s website. (pbb)

www.judaica-in-meimbressen.de

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