

# In Touch

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE  
JEWISH MUSEUM HOHENEMS, INC.

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## Letter from the President

CLAUDE A. ROLLIN, ESQ.

Dear Friends and Supporters of AFJMH:

I hope this letter finds you well. It has been an incredibly difficult year in Israel and throughout the Middle East, where so many people have lost their lives, homes, livelihoods, and sense of security, among other things. In the United States and the rest of the World, we have seen rising antisemitism, as well as an incredible amount of hatred and violence directed at not only Jews but Arabs, Muslims, and many other minority groups.

With this incredibly painful backdrop, it seems to me that the basic mission of the Jewish Museum Hohenems has become increasingly important. The Museum serves as a beacon of education, remembrance, and cultural exchange in an Austrian town that, since World War II, has not had a Jewish community. Hanno Loewy and his team at the Museum work very hard to preserve and share the rich Jewish history of Hohenems and they count on us to help them do so.

In this newsletter, you will find some details about the Museum's newest exhibition, entitled, *Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters*. That exhibition explores the long history of Arab-Jewish culture(s) and coexistence which goes back centuries, to the pre-Islamic tribal societies populating Arabia. As Hanno so aptly indicates in his letter, *"rediscovering this heritage is crucial in a world that misunderstands Arabs and Jews as natural opponents, given the polarization and the tragic conflict of today."*

You can also read about another major project of the Museum this year, which was the publication of a book about the Jewish cemetery in Hohenems. That book, which came out a few months ago, details the long history of the cemetery and the 70-year history of the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems, an organization that has helped maintain the cemetery. Most importantly, the book includes a compilation of all known people buried in the Jewish cemetery, 345 of whom can be assigned to one of the 370 preserved gravestones. I am happy to report that AFJMH provided financial support for this important project.

The newsletter also includes an article about a relatively new cross-border project with Switzerland on the history of refugees along the Rhine River and beyond. The Swiss government decided last year to create two places to commemorate the victims of National Socialism and Fascism: one in the capital of Bern and one on the border with Austria dedicated to the theme of refugee flight. With respect to the latter, the Swiss are making plans to create a new learning center/museum in the small Swiss town of Diepoldsau, which is just across the Rhine River from Hohenems. As the Jewish Museum Hohenems has researched and published many escape stories, the Canton of St. Gallen commissioned the Museum to oversee the development of the concept. It is anticipated that it will take about four years for the new learning center/museum to open in Diepoldsau.

As we get closer to the end of the year, I am sure there are many competing demands on your time and other resources. However, I would encourage you to spend some time reading the articles in this newsletter, which will remind you why the mission of the AFJMH is so critical. To support the Museum, we rely on member dues and other charitable contributions. If you are able, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to AFJMH (*over and above the annual dues*) so that we may continue to provide much-needed financial support to the Museum for their projects.

Thank you once again for your dedication to the American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems. Together, we are ensuring that the legacy of this unique community continues to educate and inspire future generations.

Warm Regards,

*Claude Rollin*

President, American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems

# A Letter from the Director to Friends

DR. HANNO LOEWY

Dear friends of the Jewish Museum!

In the midst of disturbing news from all corners of the world, our museum remains a pillar of innovative museum practice and educational work—open for everybody and targeting crucial challenges of our times—from a Jewish and universal angle.

Our new exhibition: *Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters* was opened with great public attendance—both by visitors and the media. After our last successful show that presented the life of four young Palestinian-Israeli women in Tel Aviv and their Arab-Israeli hometowns we now opened a wide perspective on the history and memory of Arab-Jewish worlds of life. About 1500 years of Jewish culture and social life was an integral part of the “Arab world” from Iraq and Yemen to Morocco and the Iberian peninsula. And for many centuries the centers of Jewish life in the world were situated there while Jewish life in Europe was a rather peripheral phenomenon. Rediscovering this heritage is crucial in a world that misunderstands Arabs and Jews as natural opponents, given the polarization and the tragic conflict of today.

Our exhibition can only be a first step in the world of museums that almost totally ignored this for decades. But it is our task to pioneer into neglected territories. Please find more about the exhibition in Anika Reichwald's essay in this newsletter.

Our successful show *End of Testimony?* has already traveled for five years from one venue to the next. After presentations and collaborations with major institutions in Vienna, Munich, Berlin and more, the exhibition, developed together with the Concentration Camp Memorial of Flossenbürg, is now shown in Frankfurt in the “City Laboratorium” of the Cities History Museum, as a part of a wider exploration of the means and functions of personal testimonies.

You will find more about our new book on the Jewish Cemetery of Hohenems in this edition of *InTouch*. It was a great pleasure for us to document the cemetery after the major restoration works the Cemetery Association was able to undertake in the last few years. The new book also contains—for the first time—an as complete as possible registry of all the people who rest there and a map helping to find them. Please note that a lot more of information about everybody who is buried there is also on our genealogy website: [www.hohenemsgenalogy.at](http://www.hohenemsgenalogy.at)

Our projects on the history of refugees and asylum along the border to Switzerland between 1938 and 1945 will now become part of the Swiss memorial for the victims of National Socialism. Our collaboration with the canton of St. Gall is stepping into a new phase starting next year. We were able to organize a conference in St. Gall with 100 scholars, educators, archivists, journalists, museum experts and politicians. Barbara Thimm's report for this newsletter shows more about the state of affairs and the conference.

Several changes in our staff are also part of museum life. Judith Niederklopfner and Angelika Purin left their posts in our educational department. As a pensionist Judith will continue to work as a freelance guide for us. Angelika moves to another important field of professional activity, engaging herself for the preservation of our climate in the Institute of Energy in Vorarlberg. Angelika's imprint on the educational work of the museum is invaluable, not least the cooperation with the Amsterdam Jewish Museum on the program “I ask” that encourages museum educators to engage in an active discourse with visitors. In turn we were able to win Anita Niegelhell as our new head of the educational department, coming to us, with more than 20 years of experience in the field of museum education, working for several public museums in Graz. More information on Angelika is in this newsletter too.

**Anika Reichwald**, our museum curator, who successfully professionalized our exhibition activities and initiated such impressive projects like the “*End of testimony?*” exhibition and our collaboration with the Hanadiv Foundation in the Yerusha project exploring Jewish archivals in Austria and Switzerland



Photo: Anika and our exhibition in Frankfurt

now leaves us for Berlin, where she takes over the post of the curator of the permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Process for the new appointment is on the way. We hope we can welcome the new museum curator by the end of the year.

And finally Arnon Hampe, with whom we built the educational project #OhneAngstVerschiedenSein (*Being different without fear*), which enabled us to organize workshops with more than 1000 youths and many educators and youth workers after the massacre of October 7 (*and the catastrophic developments since then*) returned to Berlin. He completed the pilot phase and now Franziska Völlner is preparing the next stage of the project to become a permanent part of our educational department beginning next year.

While we were able to maneuver our museum through difficult times we also experienced encouraging recognition. Our border crossing impact is now celebrated by a prestigious award again, this time from beyond the border. The cultural award of the Swiss Rhein Valley Cultural Foundation comes with a nice financial prize which will be devoted to the upcoming extension of our Audio trail along and crossing the border. Here is a quote from the flattering reason of the jury:

*“The thirteenth Rheintal Culture Prize “Goldiga Törgga” goes to the Jewish Museum Hohenems for its intelligent and courageous exhibition and mediation activities on topics that are controversial in our society: Flight, migration, identity, war, the Middle East conflict and interfaith coexistence. The St.Gallen Rhine Valley constantly benefits from this. The topics discussed at the JMH concern everyone. The Jewish Museum Hohenems is an inspiration and enrichment for the Rhine Valley museum landscape. The highly competent institution is an important and formative part of the cultural region of the Rhine Valley, offers orientation and background knowledge on controversial issues and inspires with its convincing educational practice.”*

All this is only possible through your continuous and generous support. This year our thanks go in particular to the late Walter Mintz and his wife Sandra, whose generous donation was crucial for the production of our book on the cemetery. In addition, we received a generous donations from Pierre Burgauer and Edith Heymann-Burgauer, Alexander Kahane in Celerina and the Piroška foundation in Vaduz, Karla Galindo-Barth, Marc Leland and Jacqueline Burgauer and many others!

Your support is our strength. So we are deeply grateful to have friends like you!

With Love from Hohenems,  
Hanno Loewy and the team of the museum



## News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects

### Welcome to our new head of Education, Anita Niegelhell

Anita Niegelhell, has worked as a cultural educator for over 20 years and Head of Education for The Folk Life Museum, History Museum and the Styrian Armoury of Universal museum Joanneum since 2006 and is now part of the team of Jewish Museum of Hohenems.

She has been working as cultural anthropologist and an academic writing teacher and will bring this expertise and experience to the JMH. She moved to Vorarlberg, driven by the wish for new experiences. More than that, she believes in the reputation of the JMH for being a museum that constantly reassesses its socio-political responsibility—which is more necessary today than ever. She would like to work with the team here to constantly expand the methodological repertoire and to work on a structural reflection of the educational approach.

In 2025 the education team will focus on the content of the programme in connection with the exhibition Yalla. In addition, the team will work together with several cooperation partners in the context of anti-Semitism prevention and the engagement for democracy.



### Welcome to our new curator, Dinah Ehrenfreund-Michler



Dinah Ehrenfreund-Michler, born in Zurich and raised in Basel, has been an integral part of the Jüdisches Museum's community for many years. She joined the board of the Jewish Museum Association (the "Förderverein") in 2007, where her insights have enriched our mission. Beginning her work in the education department as a guide, Dinah soon felt inspired to deepen her expertise, pursuing Jewish Studies in Basel in 2013. This academic journey expanded her knowledge of Jewish history and culture, enhancing her role within the museum.

From 2020 to 2024, Dinah served as curator for the collection at the Jüdisches Museum der Schweiz (Jewish Museum of Switzerland). During this time, she completed her MA in Jewish Studies,

developing a specialization in regional Judaica and provenance research. Her passion for the Jüdisches Museum as a space of political and socio-cultural significance, along with her broad expertise, strengthens our institution's international reputation and impact. With Dinah's continued contributions, we look forward to evolving as a center of learning and cultural dialogue.

### New Exhibition: "Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters" September 29, 2024 to August 24, 2025

BY ANIKA REICHWALD

Is there such a thing as 'Arab Jews'? For many centuries, Arab-Jewish worlds of life were a self-evident, albeit contradictory, reality. Just as there is a European-Jewish history that has almost erased the memory of more than 1500 years of Arab-Jewish relations from public perception.

The exhibition Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters explores the history and memory of lived Jewish-Arab experiences, self-perceptions and identity concepts. Beginning with the long periods of diverse cultural relations and mostly peaceful coexistence the exhibition recalls Arab-Jewish worlds of life that were shaken in the late 19th century by the interest politics of colonialism and the increasing strength of Arab and Jewish national movements.

A long and contradictory history of relations - sometimes romanticized and glorified, sometimes forgotten, even repressed and demonized. With the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of most of the Palestinian population, the conflicts surrounding the decolonization and independence of Arab states, Israel's wars with its Arab neighbors and the mass emigration of the Jewish population from Arab countries, some of which was forced by violent expulsions, the Jewish-Muslim relationship is now seen by many as nothing more than a contradiction. In Israel, Jews from the Arab world were themselves discriminated against as 'Mizrahim' for a long time. This, in turn, was the impetus for some of them to re-evaluate Arab-Jewish history as an alternative to the irreconcilable national 'identities'.

To this day, the two terms - Jewish and Arab - are mostly regarded as hermetic identities and mutually exclusive. But many, not least intellectuals, activists and artists with Arab-Jewish roots, are asking themselves: why is it so difficult to rethink the two attributions despite the rich and diverse history of Arab-Jewish worlds of life? Can they still intertwine in today's world, as components of a complex cultural imprint? And can they counteract the ongoing polarization - also in the face of competing claims to land, belonging and participation in the Middle East, as well as in the increasingly diverse societies worldwide?

The exhibition begins with a reflection on the fact that identity is multi-layered, complex and always in flux. We are always more than 'just' one thing. But if I am one thing, can I also be the other? Are we an 'either-or' or perhaps a 'both-and'?

At the beginning of the exhibition, visitors are therefore asked about the ambiguity of identity and invited to consider, alone or together, which facets we all have. Different affiliations can be made visible in a participatory way by placing marbles in the 'identity jars' provided.

The exhibition also traces the above-mentioned considerations in two ways: On the one hand, seven Jewish artists with Arab roots look at the question of Jewish identities in Islamic countries. They work in the context of memory and language, ideologies and Jewish religious thought, architecture, food and music. On the other hand, key historical moments sketch a picture of Arab-Jewish contact, which is often fruitful and productive, but also fraught with tension and conflict due to persecution and discrimination. At the same time, they also form a completely different Jewish history to that in Central Europe, in Hohenems.

Arab-Jewish worlds of life are associatively unfolded in this exhibition - in the interweaving of historical events and artistic perspectives and the search for complex identities that allow for contradictions.

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

**New Exhibition: "Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters" September 29, 2024, to August 24, 2025**

In her new work "Those who know know, those who don't a hand full of lentils" (2024), Hori Izhaki shows the extent to which European fir trees, which were brought to Palestine by Zionist settlers, stand as a metaphor for a European culture of remembrance (and possible longing for a homeland). A legacy that takes up so much space in the cultural memory of the young state of Israel that to this day there is hardly any room for those memories and histories, or even the pain and loss of later immigrants from Arab countries, as part of the collective memory. Izhaki herself also reflects on her own experiences of identity and belonging in her work.

The theme of memory is also an essential component of Dana Flora Levy's new work "Fatherland Archives" (2024), commissioned particularly for this show. In the form of a documentary film and displayed documents, she provides an insight into the history of Cairo's Jewish past, artfully interweaving historical events, the memories of her father and other family members with knowledge about the Cairo Geniza. These finds by European Jewish archaeologists from the Ben-Esra Synagogue in Fostat/Egypt comprises around 400,000 pieces of religious and secular writing. They document Jewish life in Egypt and in sister communities between the 6th and 19th centuries. Nevertheless, the insights into the past remain fragmentary. What can ultimately be remembered today, when there are hardly a handful of people of the Jewish faith left in Egypt?

Joseph Sassoon Semah's other works "Between Graveyard and Museums's Sphere" (2021), in the form of a model of Ezekiel's tomb combined with an oud and a shofar, and "Black and White in the Memory of Destruction" (2024), question the boundaries of architecture, Jewish thought and music. "Black and White in the Memory of Destruction" (2024) asks about the visualization of what has been lost, be it material or identity – a circumstance that goes back to the destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile of the Jewish people to Babylon. How should we deal with the loss of homeland and material cultural heritage, especially in the Jewish diaspora?

Mona Yahia's work "Who by Water" (2024) exhibits the rediscovered and visibly damaged pages of her former Iraqi school file from the archive of Baghdad's Jewish community. This archive was flooded by the US army during attacks on Baghdad in 2004, later rescued and reprocessed in America. In a literary addition, Mona Yahia reflects on finding these documents of her old identity - she herself fled Iraq with her family via Iran to Israel in 1970.

The illegal smuggling of Jewish Iraqis by the Zionist underground began as early as 1949. Iraq responded with a law that allowed legal emigration for one year if Iraqi citizenship was renounced. As a result, tens of thousands left the country. After attacks on Jewish people and institutions in 1951, the authorship of which is still the subject of bitter controversy today, over 100,000 more Jews were flown out in a military operation. By 1979, the rest of the Jewish community had also left the country; today, none or only a few still live in Iraq.

Mona Yahia's work as a multilingual writer also refers to the topic of language, which is linked to the question of Arab-Jewish identity(ies). Language as an important identity-forming factor determines belonging, but also borders, and reflects the respective social and cultural contexts. For centuries, Jews in Arab countries spoke Arabic in everyday life, while Hebrew was reserved for prayer and ritual as a 'holy language'. Judeo-Arabic also developed in some regions – Arabic language variations written in Hebrew letters. During Islamic rule on the Iberian Peninsula from the 10th century onwards, important literary works were written in these languages and important philosophical and scientific texts were translated from Arabic. One example from the 10th century is the Jewish scholar Sa'adia ben Joseph Gaon (882-942), also known as Gaon of Sura or Sa'adia Gaon. He translated the Hebrew Bible into Arabic. His work was written in Hebrew, Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. With the colonization by European powers such as France and England in the early 19th century, their languages also increasingly came to the fore alongside Arabic. The Arabic languages were only displaced in Israel, also under the pressure of cultural oppression, such as the "Nation State Law" from 2018.

The exhibition also shows the film "Art Undercover" (2017) by Tamir Zadok. The film tells the story of Zadok's search for a lost painting from the modernist era and straddles the line between performance, documentary and fiction. The origin lies in the story of a Mossad agent's undercover mission in Egypt, for which he assumed the identity of a



Hori Izhaki's installation in front of the museum.  
Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



Hori Izhaki  
Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



Installation by Dana Flora Levy  
Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



Installation by Dana Flora Levy  
Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



## News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

### New Exhibition: "Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters" September 29, 2024, to August 24, 2025



French painter named Chardoval. This cover story was so successful that he was given a solo exhibition in Cairo and two of his paintings were sold to the Egyptian National Museum. Tamir Zadok, in turn, attempted to locate one of Chardoval's oil paintings in Cairo. The ostensible narrative of the video - the mission to track down the lost painting - serves as a vehicle for a discussion about the act of a double impersonation, the embodiment of an artistic personality and an Arab persona. In his second work on display, "Jewish Wedding in Morocco" (2019), Tamir Zadok also explores ways of representing an 'Eastern type' - here explicitly in painting, caricature and film. A historical painting shows a wedding party around an oud player in a backyard - it is impossible to determine who is Jewish, Muslim or Christian-Arab. Zadok brings the scene, in which he has inscribed himself in traditional dress, to life without further ado: little by little it moves and changes - until the courtyard is completely empty.



Like Tamir Zadok, the multidisciplinary artist Eliyahu Fatal, also known as Eli Petel, also plays with the question of political identity and belonging, for example in his work "Negative Portrait" (2002). The artwork shows a negative print of a self-portrait of Eliyahu Fatal with make-up. The dark parts of his head - hair, beard, shadows and openings - were covered with make-up and lightened, then presented again in the form of a negative. In this reversal - white face, black mask - Negative Portrait questions identity and authenticity as well as the effort involved in being oneself or looking 'natural'.

Fatal's presentation of the hairy Mizrahi male breast in his work "Palette" (2002) as a sculpture and portrait also looks not only at his own identity as an artist but also at stereotypical racist attributions that can still be found in Israeli society today. The pendant in the form of a color palette, which adorns the man's chest, relates the viewer to painters of the European Renaissance. Fatal's work not only calls up common prejudices against, but also concessions to a Mizrahi identity, while at the same time relating it to a Western European, even Ashkenazi artistic tradition.



In Israel, young Jews of Moroccan origin began to address their experiences of social exclusion and structural discrimination as early as 1969. The Israeli Black Panther Party (IBPP) developed along the lines of the American model. Through demonstrations and actions, the group highlights social and ethnic discrimination as well as other social grievances in Israel. The IBPP became a political party in 1973, but was dissolved in 1977.

Today, many Mizrahim find their political identity confirmed on the right end of the political spectrum such as the Shas party: Shas (short for 'Sephardic Torah Guardians') split from the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi party Agudat Israel in 1984 as an ultra-Orthodox Sephardic party. Since then, it has politically represented the interests of the Sephardic religious community, many of whom come from Arab countries. The party has been part of Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition since December 2022.

Other works by Eliyahu Fatal, but also by Joseph Sassoon Semah, turn to Jewish thought, religious, mystical and philosophical contexts. The exchange between Muslim and Jewish thinkers, such as Maimonides or Jehuda HaLevi, is often reflected in their works - after all, it was often Muslim intellectuals who engaged with Greek philosophy and thus gained access to their Jewish companions. Since the early modern period, elements of popular belief have also been woven into Sephardic and Oriental Jewish traditions. Eliyahu Fatal takes up these tendencies in his work "Nine in the Dark" (2009), not only through the display of talismans and the Kabbalistic revaluation of numbers and letters, but also through the question of the meaning and connections between religion and art.

The work "Carpet Rolling (Reincarnation)" (1983) by Joseph Sassoon Semah in turn plays with the ambiguity of concepts and actions, as the rolling together of the two textiles, the Muslim prayer rug together with the Jewish prayer shawl, becomes a political act that produces something new, a new connection in the form of reincarnation.

The multimedia artist Dor Zlekha Levy takes up the discourse on the question of cultural legacy, especially in relation to architectural buildings, in his work "Shomer" (2019): His work is a graphic reworking of the Magen Abraham Synagogue in Beirut, accompanied by the memories of an Israeli-Lebanese Jew. What happens to those former





News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

**New Exhibition: “Yalla. Arab-Jewish Encounters” September 29, 2024, to August 24, 2025**

Jewish neighborhoods in the Arab world? What about sacred buildings, synagogues? Who is responsible for their preservation now that the Jewish communities hardly exist or no longer exist?

The same questions must also be asked about the loss and preservation of immaterial culture: Dor Zlekha Levy takes up the story of the First International Congress of Arabic Music, which took place in Cairo in 1932. The Egyptian King Fouad invited delegations from all over the Arabic-speaking world to a symposium that was generally regarded as a milestone in the attempt to develop and publicize concrete ideas about specifically 'Arabic' music. The aim was to constitute the kind of identity that we perceive as Arabic and to distinguish it from the influences of Turkish, Persian and other cultures. Jews living in Arab countries played a decisive role in the development of this music, as illustrated by the fact that all members of the Iraqi delegation, with the exception of the singer, were Jewish.

In his immersive multimedia installation “Maqamat” (2017), conceived by Dor Zlekha Levy in collaboration with musician Aviad Zinemanas, the latter returns to the audio and video recordings from the conference to make 'Arab' music from early 20th century Iraq audible for the present day. By tracing the contributions of these internationally acclaimed musicians, such as Ezra Aharon and Jusuf Zaarur, who later emigrated to Israel, Levy unearths their history and uses it to imagine a new future for Jewish-Arab identity(ies). Recordings and archival materials from the musicians' estates serve as a starting point for Levy and Zinemanas to deal with situations involving separation, the diaspora and longing.


Finally, the theme of food makes reference to questions of cultural traditions, transmission and appropriation. The question “Who owns the hummus?” becomes clear in Eliyahu Fatal's work “Humus” (2001-2003). Hummus, probably the best-known dish from the Middle East, is a reflection of the discourse on cultural appropriation, with various culinary cultures appropriating this dish. For Eliyahu Fatal, the trends of modern cuisine (slow food/fast food) allegorically stand not only for (Western) enjoyment, but also for various aspects of cultural appropriation, such as nationalization, demarcation, as well as rapid and hardly reversible political changes – and for the question of the extent to which the appropriation of cultural heritage also plays a role in the context of art.



Hummus Installation by Eli Petel  
Photo: Dietmar Walsen/Hohenems



Group photo with the artists Hori Izhaki, Mona Yahia (front center), Joseph Sassoon Semah and Eli Peter (back on the right)  
Photo: Timna Moser, Innsbruck/Völs




# Yalla.

Arab-Jewish Encounters

Sep 29, 2024  
— Aug 24, 2025

Arab-Jewish Encounters

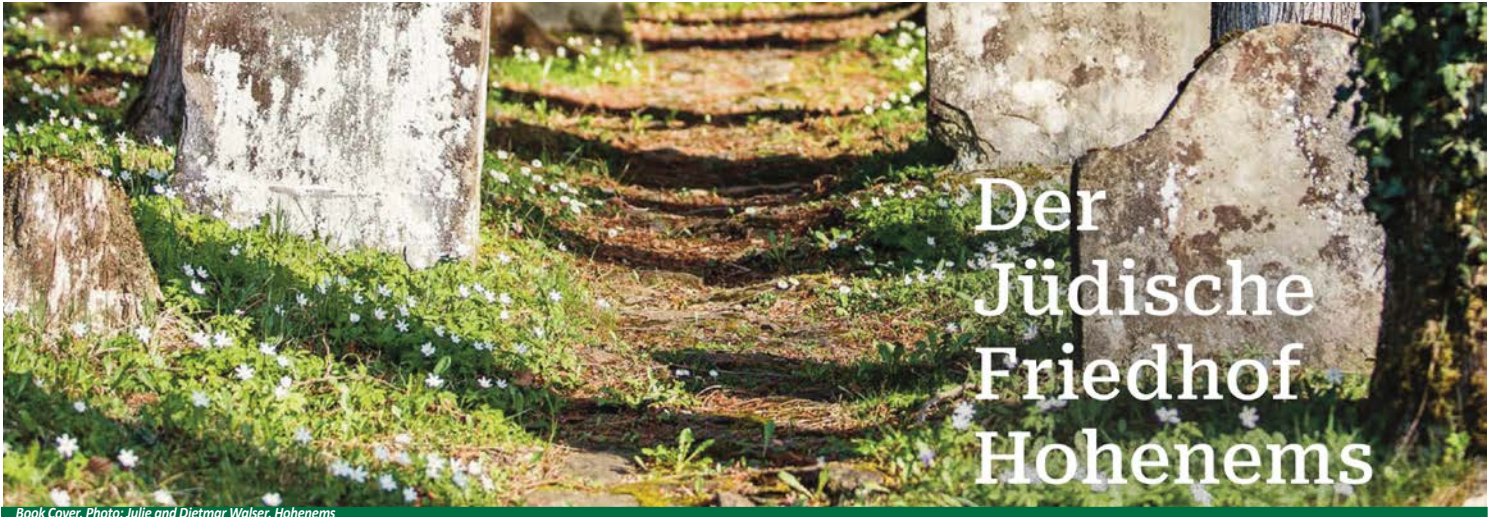






# NEW BOOK ON THE HOHENEMS JEWISH CEMETERY TO CELEBRATE THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN HOHENEMS

BY RAPHAEL EINETTER, MA



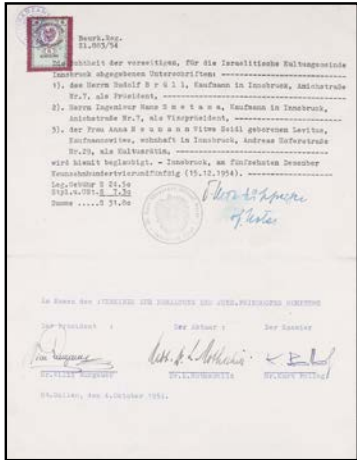
Book Cover, Photo: Julie and Dietmar Walser, Hohenems

70 years ago - on October 1, 1954 - the Hohenems descendants **Willi Burgauer** and **Kurt Bollag**, and Rabbi **Lothar Rothschild** from St. Gallen, founded the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems. The aim of the association was to buy the Hohenems cemetery and to maintain and preserve it for posterity. Since 1953, they had been in lively correspondence with the newly founded Jewish Community for Tyrol and Vorarlberg, based in Innsbruck. This, as the legal successor to

the Hohenems Jewish Community that was forcibly dissolved in 1940, was given the cemetery as well as the synagogue. However, the small community of Holocaust survivors was struggling with financial worries and had no close family connection to the Hohenems properties, which is why a sale was sought. The synagogue was purchased by the municipality of Hohenems, which converted it into a fire station. It was not until 2002 that the building was renovated and transformed into the Salomon Sulzer Hall. In a letter, the seller and president of the community, **Rudolf Brüll**, once described the graves at the cemetery as “so blurred” that it was no longer possible to determine who was buried there. Nevertheless, the idea of setting up a tree nursery on this plot did not please him either. To everyone’s delight, the cemetery was finally sold on December 15, 1954, according to the model “donation against gift”, which is why the handover was officially sealed with a donation contract. The compensation payment of 10,000 Austrian schillings, adjusted for value and equivalent to around USD 7,000 today, was raised thanks to many donations from descendants.

70 years later, the Jewish Museum Hohenems and the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems - both of which I am a member as Head of the Collection respectively Actuary - have now been

able to present a new book together. The book title “Es werden leben Deine Todten” was inspired by the memorial plaque on the cemetery building, which has been inscribed with the quote from the Book of Isaiah (26:19: “Your dead shall live”) following the last expansion of the cemetery in 1900. On June 6, 2024, the book presentation took place on the forecourt of the Jewish cemetery. After the introductory words by association president **Yves Bollag** and greetings from the city by Vice Mayor **Patricia Tschallener**, museum director **Hanno Loewy** spoke to the approximately 100 guests. At the end, I presented an insight into the various articles in the new cemetery book. In addition to my texts on the history of the cemetery and the 70-year history of the association, I also mentioned the overview I had compiled of all known people buried at the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery. 345 of them can be assigned to one of the 370 preserved gravestones. In total, however, probably more than 1000 Jews are buried here. Prior to these articles, there are several prefaces and introductions, partly political. I would like to thank Mayor **Dieter Egger** and **Erika Kawasser**, Cultural Councillor of the City of Hohenems, **Barbara Schöbi-Fink**, Deputy Governor of the Province of Vorarlberg, **Wolfgang Sobotka**, Chairman of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, **Georg Mack**, from the Federal Monuments Office Vorarlberg and **Yves Bollag**, President of the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems. Framed by a photo essay by the Swiss photographer **Marcel Herbst**, who visited the cemetery in April 1998, the Hohenems-based and multiple award-winning writer **Michael Köhlmeier** shares his memories and thoughts on the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery in an essay.



Donation contracts, Photo: Collection of the Jewish Museum Hohenems

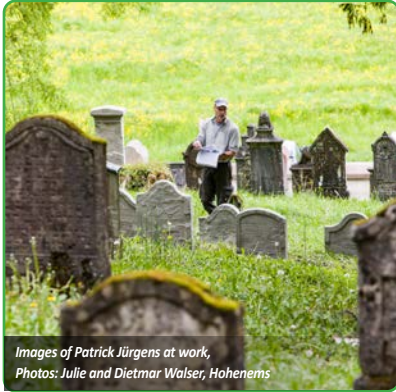


Book presentation on June 6, Photo: Timna Moser, Innsbruck/ViS



## News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

### New book on the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery To celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



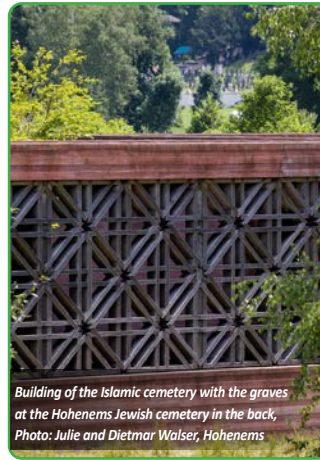
Images of Patrick Jürgens at work,  
Photos: Julie and Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



For many years, the restoration work on the gravestones has been carried out by the "Restaurierungswerkstatt Jürgens". In the book **Christine and Patrick Jürgens** have summarized the most important work steps and exciting details. The restoration of the western cemetery wall is also addressed in the book. Here I would like to thank the architect couple **Ada and Reinhard Rinderer**, who have been available to the association in an advisory capacity in recent years and also share their experiences with us in this book.

Many of the gravestones that **Rabbi Aron Tänzer** found 120 years ago - and recorded in a plan with an index for his book on the history of the Jewish community and its cemetery - are unfortunately no longer preserved today. Others, such as that of Oskar Ernst, who died in 1919, reappeared during restoration work. His great-granddaughter **Lara Boccuzzi** took part in our "Descendants series" in a very personal text, as did Hirschfeld descendant **Karla Galindo Barth**, who lives in Guatemala, and American Rosenthal descendant **Jessica Piper**. The descendants of the former Jewish community of Hohenems obviously are also a significant part of the text by museum director **Hanno Loewy**. It is thanks to the descendants, who formed the **American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems**, that we are able to present this book today. The vast majority of them find the graves of their ancestors here in this cemetery, something that only applies to a small extent to the so-called "displaced persons." In her article, **Anika Reichwald** shed light on the presence of this loose and frequently changing community of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. And she focused in particular on why there are relatively few gravestones from the period between 1945 and 1954 in this cemetery.

My predecessor as Actuary of the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems, **Johannes Inama**, and headed the Jewish Museum between 2001 and 2003, wrote a memorial obituary for **Adi Pleterski**, who died in 2021. For 40 years, Adi Pleterski devotedly cared for this resting place as a cemetery gardener. It was only shortly before his 77th birthday that he handed the job over to younger hands. Incidentally, there is a second religion-specific but non-Christian cemetery in Vorarlberg very close to the Jewish cemetery. The former project manager Eva Grabherr - and founding director of the Jewish Museum Hohenems - refers to what the two burial sites have in common besides their location in her article on the Islamic cemetery in Altach. In addition, the former mayors of Altach



Building of the Islamic cemetery with the graves  
at the Hohenems Jewish cemetery in the back,  
Photo: Julie and Dietmar Walser, Hohenems

and Hohenems, **Gottfried Brändle** and **Richard Amann** (now treasurer of the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems), review the history of the Islamic cemetery, which opened in 2012, and thus complete the list of multifaceted chapters in this book.

I would like to thank all the participants in this book for their work. In particular, I would like to thank **Thomas Matt** from Atelier Stecher, who designed this book with great care and creativity. He also came up with the idea of the fold-out plan that also serves as the cover of the book. However, a book about such a special place as the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery would

not be complete without a comprehensive photographic documentation. For over a year, the Hohenems photographers **Julie and Dietmar Walser** accompanied the cemetery through all four seasons. Thanks to their detailed work, it is possible to frame this book with many beautiful insights.

This book on the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery was published thanks to the strong financial support of the following people and foundations, without whose donations the publication would not have been possible: Many thanks to **Sandra Mintz** in New York, who sponsored this project in memory of her husband **Walter Mintz (1929-2004)**. We would also like to thank **Pierre Burgauer** and **Edith Heymann-Burgauer**, as well as **Alexander Kahane**, the **Piroska Foundation**, the **City of Hohenems**, the **Province of Vorarlberg** as well as the **National Fund of the Republic of Austria for the Victims of National Socialism**.

The Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems continuously relies on donations for the restoration of the gravestones and the maintenance of the area by our cemetery gardener. Support payments are gladly accepted:

#### **Dornbirner Sparkasse, Hohenems (Austria):**

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Raphael Einetter with the new map of the Jewish Cemetery during his speech at the book presentation,  
Photo: Timna Moser, Innsbruck/Völs



## Translated articles from the new cemetery book

In this and the following newsletters, parts of the book 'Es werden leben Deine Todten' will be provided in English translation. The first issue starts, of course, with the three articles by descendants who have given us very personal insights into their connection to the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery - written in their own language. Many thanks to the three women from the Rosenthal, Ernst and Hirschfeld families - all of whom now have different surnames - who have shared their feelings and memories with us.

### Jessica Piper

*(editor of this newsletter and descendant of the Rosenthal family, USA)*



Reunion 2017: Jessica Piper, Jennifer Piper-Rosenthal & Susan Shimer  
Photo: Dietmar Walsler, Hohenems

I first visited the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems in the summer of 2008, when I was 11 years old. Even then, it had been nearly four centuries since the cemetery was first established. The land, located on the Schwefelberg, or sulphur hill, a bit outside the main part of town, was granted to the 12 Jewish families that settled in Hohenems in 1617. My first visit also came, as far as I can tell, more than 130 years since my last ancestor was laid to rest there.

That the cemetery survived all that time, and survived World War II and Nazi rule with relatively little damage, feels a bit like a rare streak of fortuitousness for a community that otherwise faced much hardship, particularly in those 130 years. In the postwar turmoil, with no Jewish community left in Hohenems after 1945, the cemetery was restituted to the Jewish community of Innsbruck. It was later bought by a group of Hohenems descendants living in Switzerland.

Thanks to the preservation efforts, roughly 370 headstones are visible today, although there may be over 500 people once buried in the cemetery. Those with visible headstones include some of my ancestors: Josef Rosenthal (Levi) and his wife Klara (formerly Löwenberg), along with Philipp Rosenthal (Levi) and his wife Regina Bernheimer (also known as Rachel). Regina, who died in Hohenems in 1871, seems to have been my last direct ancestor buried there.

She and Phillip had a daughter, Matilda, who married Robert, the son of Josef and Klara. Robert and Matilda moved to Vienna and had three sons. Their youngest, also named Phillip, was my grandmother's grandfather. It was after his death in 1940 that my grandmother, along with her mother and father, left Vienna for the United States, escaping via Trieste.

Growing up in a part of the United States with a relatively small Jewish population, I had never visited a Jewish cemetery before I came to Hohenems. Some interpretations of the Talmud suggest that, after a person dies, their soul continues to dwell at the site of their grave. This is linked to the Jewish practice of leaving stones in mourning — stones to keep the souls of our ancestors in this world. I like that concept because it creates a permanent connection to place. Regardless of the size of the Jewish community of Hohenems or the presence of the diaspora, the cemetery is a permanent resting place for our ancestors and a reminder that their influence on Hohenems persists.

### Karla Galindo Barth

*(the descendant of the Hirschfeld family is living in Guatemala)*

When I visited the cemetery many thoughts came to me.

Death is the most unexplainable concept that we face in life. How my ancestors die and under what circumstances? Why did G-d choose one person to live longer than the other? Why did the person have to suffer before his or her death?

For many generations, Jews have been evoking the blessing of "Blessed is the true judge" in response to death and tragedy. The blessing is as follows: Blessed are You, L-rd our Gd, king of the universe, the True Judge.

In Judaism one may have also heard people responding to generally unpleasant news with the phrase, "This is also for the good."

Why a tragedy is also for the good? Let me explain with a story of the Talmud:

The great Sage, Rabbi Akiva, once upon a time arrived at a city. Immediately, he looked for a place to rest; however, he did not find one. He said, "All that G-d does, He does for the good!" and he went to sleep in a field.

In the field he had with him a rooster, a donkey and one lamp.

A wind came and blew out the candle. Later a cat came and ate the rooster. And finally a lion came and ate the donkey.

Rabbi Akiva said, "All that G-d does, He does for the good!"

It turned out that marauders came and captured the residents of the city. Rabbi Akiva was saved because he did not find a place to stay and camped outside the city and had neither candle nor rooster that would have attracted attention to him. (Talmud, Berachot 60b.)

This story illustrates how negative occurrences happen for a reason, even if that reason is not obvious, as it was in the end for Rabbi Akiva. Because of this truth, explained in this story, our sages said that we should always thank G-d for the not-so-good happenings in our life, just as we thank G-d for the good in our life.

In my case, I was not aware of my Jewish roots, I had no idea of how many of my ancestors lived in Hohenems. I always remember with joy the stories of my grandfather in Tyrol, but I didn't know he was persecuted by the Gestapo. All this sweet and sour new data "is just for the good"; today my Jewish identity is stronger, I got a postgraduate degree in Holocaust and with the help of Dr. Hanno Loewy my family applied for citizenship restitution as descendants of a victim of Nazi persecution and most of us got our Austrian citizenship back.



Reunion 2017  
Photo: Dietmar Walsler, Hohenems



Translated articles from the new cemetery book (cont'd)

**Lara Boccuzzi**

*(the great-granddaughter of Oskar Ernst is living in Italy)*



Lara Boccuzzi with her parents Vera and Mauro at the two gravestones of her great-grandfather Oskar Ernst, July 2022. Photo: Raphael Einetter

**To my dear grandma Irma:**

Dear Grandma,  
I have never written you a letter, but now, after visiting your father's grave, I have also found you in this place.

We travelled to Hohenems, a small town near Bregenz, in the footsteps of our family, to visit your father.

I found you in the texts you wrote, with bitterness and passion, with anger about the irreparable injustices you experienced. About the inhuman wickedness and injustice for which you never found satisfaction. You have spent a lifetime demanding justice, fairness and reparation.

You wrote and wrote again in search of news, you personally went in search of your father Oskar's grave, you climbed the

high cemetery wall and searched for the grave of your beloved father.

Now I can say, dear grandma, your dad is in a safe place.

During our visit, Raphael and Judith were able to impressively demonstrate that the grave is well cared for and protected: as soon as you enter the

cemetery, a war memorial commemorates Oskar as a hero of the First World War. If you then ascend the steps in the cemetery, the vegetation wild and in an almost living disorder, you will find the grave, with the small stones laid on the edge of the gravestone.

Raphael and Judith explained the history of the cemetery and the town of Hohenems to us: guided tours take place very often and you realize that they do it with a lot of love, they make it possible to experience this place as a place of remembrance to which one likes to return.

When you stroll through the streets of Hohenems, you don't have the feeling that you are visiting places that have been forgotten in the past and only exist in a museum. Instead, you breathe the air of a border that is open to every visitor, who brings their own culture and history with them, and where, if you mistake the street, you are already in Switzerland or neighboring Germany.

Mum said: I feel at home here.

Raphael and Judith gave us a special visit, full of their attachment to the history of these places of transition, of the border. The library, which Raphael runs together with the archive, is located opposite the entrance to the Jewish Museum. In the museum garden, the atmosphere of the small bistro is dominated by the coming and going of students and professors.

It's all very neat and tidy in Hohenems: sitting in the café you can see notes from the last Hebrew course, the wedding cake is served on the table and the students and guests from all over make the atmosphere international.

I am writing you this letter to let you know that your dad is in good hands, he is safe now, so you can rest assured, Grandma.

We all love you.  
Lara



Reunion 2017: Brunners: Vega van Kessel, Glenn Clark, Francesca Kennedy, Rega Wood & Dennis Kennedy. Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



Reunion 2017: Sulzer Family. Photo: Dietmar Walser, Hohenems



## CROSS-BORDER PROJECT WITH SWITZERLAND ON THE HISTORY OF REFUGEES ALONG THE RHINE AND BEYOND

BY BARBARA THIMM



Twenty-five years after the temporary sculpture “Shoah” shook up Switzerland – erected by Schang Hutter overnight in front of the Federal Parliament – the Federal Council decided in spring 2023 to create two places to commemorate the victims of National Socialism and Fascism: one in the capital of Bern and one on the border dedicated to the theme of flight. This was preceded by a statement from civil society with the guidelines Remembrance, Communicate, Networking.

A lot has happened in the meantime. A call for tenders for a memorial with educational elements in Bern is currently being prepared, accompanied by experts from the fields of history, cultural mediation and art. If everything goes according to plan, a design should be selected by the end of 2026.

The canton of St.Gallen is involved in the second location. On its border on Lake Constance and in the Rhine Valley, people tried to escape Nazi persecution from 1933 till 1945 – and particularly – starting in March 1938 – thousands of Jews from Vienna, but also activists of the resistance and deserters, prisoners of war and slave workers from occupied countries. When Switzerland closed its borders in August 1938, they had to try illegally – many were admitted, many turned away and thus subjected to further persecution.

Opposite of Hohenems, in Switzerland, is the small town of Diepoldsau – across the border along the Old Rhine, so flat that it was relatively easy to cross. This river landscape, more than 5 km long, became the place where a particularly large number of people dared to flee. In Diepoldsau, which now has been chosen as the future location for the new learning center devoted to the history of escape and asylum, the landscape will be at the center of attention to the events that took place here more than 80 years ago.

As the Jewish Museum Hohenems has researched and published many of these escape stories for the “Crossing the Border” audio cycle path, the Canton of St.Gallen has commissioned the Jewish Museum to oversee the development of the concept and has decided to think transnationally about this new museum from the outset: in Hohenems 400 years of Jewish history can be told, in Diepoldsau the successful and failed attempts to escape by many individuals and different groups will be told. And this with respect to the escape events in all the border cantons of Switzerland. Not only in the Alpine Rhine Valley, but also in Basel, Jura and Geneva, in Vaud, Ticino and Grisons, thousands of Jewish and other refugees arrived in Switzerland between 1933 and 1945, many were turned away, but the majority were accepted and subsequently had to fight with the authorities for the right of stay and human living conditions.

At the same time, the discussions and conflicts in the Swiss society of the time will be reflected and the political as well as the individual decisions and scope of action of the actors will be addressed.

If the funds are approved by the end of this year, the museum should be up and running in four years. An association in Switzerland will oversee the project, and it is planned to commission the Jewish Museum Hohenems with further development and operation.

In June 2024, in order to discuss the first conceptual ideas and involve a broad public, around 100 historians, cultural workers and professionals in extracurricular education were invited to St.Gallen for two days: to a historic site, the former Hadwig School, where 1,200 survivors from the Theresienstadt concentration camp were first cared for in February 1945.

The conference was opened in a prominent way in which representatives of the participating federal authorities (the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Office of Culture) spoke, the city of Bern presented their plans and the state of Vorarlberg and the Principality of Liechtenstein addressed the conference participants and underlined the importance of the project.

Subsequently, the current state of research on the subject of flight in the different border cantons (Lake Constance, Basel, Jura, Geneva, Ticino, Grisons, Rhine Valley) was presented – apparently for the first time, as has been emphasized several times.

On the second day, the participants were invited to work in groups to discuss the first conceptual ideas concerning the possible location, the inclusion of the historic customs house plus a new building, questions concerning the choice of perspective etc. and to develop further ideas. The discussions were very engaged and were summarized in a comprehensive conference documentation so that they are available for further work.

The documentation can be found in German and on the website of the museum [www.jm-hohenems.at](http://www.jm-hohenems.at).

Meanwhile, in cooperation with the Prestegg Museum in Altstätten in the Swiss Rhine Valley, the Jewish Museum Hohenems is developing a regional history exhibition on the subject of flight in the Rhine Valley as a pilot project, which is scheduled to open in the summer of 2025. We will continue to report on this.





## ARE THERE STORIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN YOUR NEWSLETTER?

Please email us ([jennsp500@gmail.com](mailto:jennsp500@gmail.com)) and offer suggestions or even better yet, let us know that you want to write a story. We would appreciate your work!



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