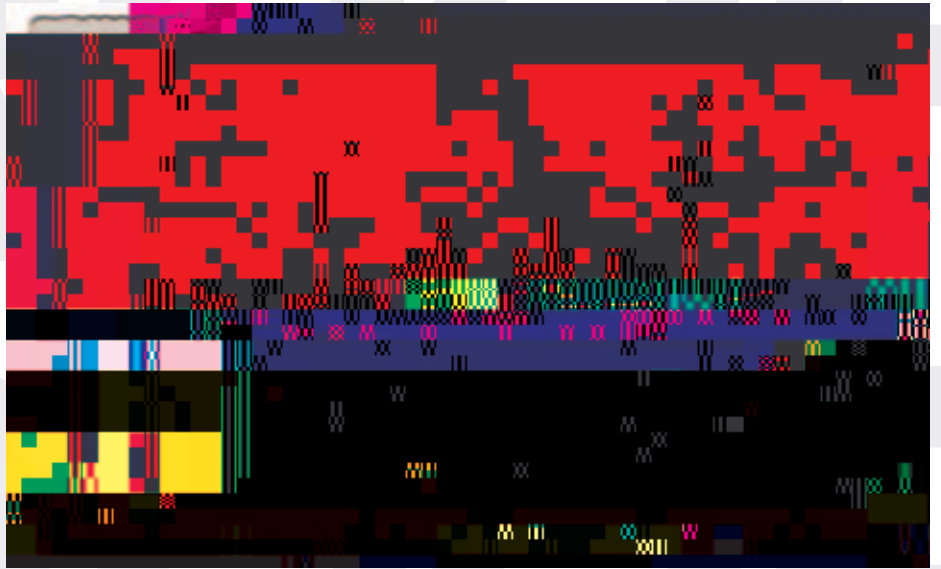




Postcard showing the ship 'Ausonia' sent to a Mr D Schitz in Yaffo-Tel Aviv from Venice.

Jewish identity is traditionally linked to the land, while the biblical narratives offer scarcely a glimpse of the sea. The reluctance to recognize the sea as a constraining reality is epitomised the escape out of Egypt. Do the children of Israel, when they reach the Red Sea, consider constructing rafts? Nothing could be further from their minds. Moses stretches out his hand, the waters are divided and they cross the sea on dry land.

The situation (as suggested by the postcard reproduced above) was transformed by the Zionist migrations, which form the subject of Björn Siegel's pioneering research at the University of Sussex. In 1934 the German-born journalist Erich Gottgetreu, who emigrated to Palestine in the 1930s, described in his book *Das Land der Söhne – Palästina nahe gerückt* a fictional conversation between an inhabitant of Tel Aviv and the mayor of the same city: 'How many people actually live in Tel Aviv?' The mayor answered: 'Yesterday there were 95,000. But today new ships are arriving – ...'

This fictional anecdote demonstrates the important role of ships in the Jewish migration to Eretz Israel. Björn Siegel's research project focuses on the 'ship' as a maritime place in Jewish history in order to shed new light on Jewish migration movements to



PROOF

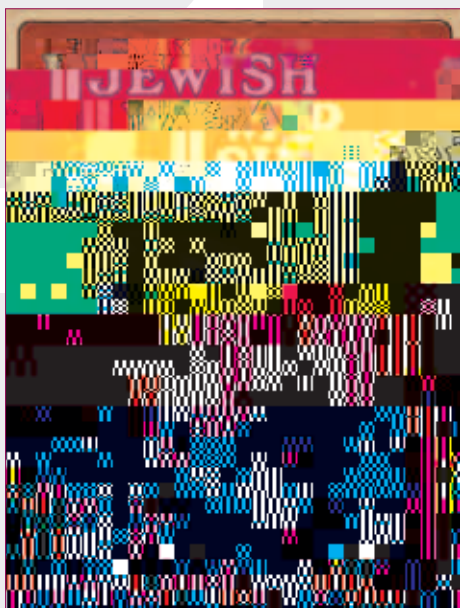
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The concentration camp embodies the power structures of the modern world to such an extent that several historians have referred to the 20th century as 'the century of the camp'. From the first colonial examples during the Boer War to the establishment of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in 2002, the camp has played a central role in some of the defining episodes of modern history. To explore these frequently neglected histories, an international workshop on 'The History of Concentration Camps' was held on 28 February 2014 at the University of Sussex.

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11 13 June 2014



In conjunction with the London Jewish Museum and the Wiener Library, both of whom are hosting First World War exhibitions, the Austrian Cultural Forum and the Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden in Hamburg, the Centre is organising an international conference on the Jewish Experience of the First World War. The conference seeks to explore the variety of social and political phenomena that make the First World War a turning point in the Jewish experience of the 20th century. Delegates will consider in a broad interdisciplinary and transnational context the degree to which individual Jews and Jewish communities in Europe, the US and elsewhere engaged with total war between 1914 and 1918. By bringing together leading scholars in the field from the USA, Australia, Israel, France, Poland and Germany, the conference aims to provide the setting for an in-depth discussion of the multifaceted meanings of the First World War for our understanding of the Jewish experience of the modern era.

The Conference will be held at the London Jewish Museum and in the Wiener Library. In addition, Professor Derek Penslar (Oxford) will deliver the conference keynote address entitled 'The Great War and Modern Jewry' on Wednesday 11 June at 7 pm, at the new Jewish Community Centre London (JW3). In this address, Professor Penslar will discuss the half million Jews who served in the armed forces of both the Allied and Central Powers during the First World War. Many fought because they had no choice, but others served willingly, eager to demonstrate their loyalty, courage, and worthiness for acceptance. His lecture will focus on the conflict Jewish soldiers felt between duty to their country and solidarity towards fellow Jews across the battle line.

All the proceedings of the conference are open to the public. A detailed program of the conference will be available through the Centre website and from our partner organizations.

For further information please contact
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Professor Derek Penslar, chancellor emeritus at The Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) delivered an enlightening talk at the Jewish Community Centre (JW3) in London on March 24. He explained how emancipation shattered the medieval unity of Ashkenazic Jewry and how meanwhile, in Germany, the estrangement expressed itself in an exchange of identities. The emergence of a Sephardic mystique enabled emancipated German Jews to find a historical model that vindicated living in two worlds. In contrast to the insularity of Ashkenazic Jews in medieval Christendom, Sephardic Jews in the Islamic orbit had immersed themselves in the language, science, medicine, philosophy, mysticism and poetry of their Muslim neighbours and overlords.

That cultural preference readied young Jews in German universities in the 19th century – encouraged by a remarkably enlightened Lutheran professor in Leipzig, Heinrich Fleischer, to study Arabic and Islam, implicitly inheriting the rich legacy of Sephardic Judaism. And when Arabic ceased to be ancillary to the study of the Hebrew Bible in Protestant theology faculties, Jewish students gravitated to the academic study of Islam, contributing to these studies in gross disproportion to their numbers. The imprint of Islam in the centuries of its cultural ascendancy on Sephardic Judaism thus primed Jews in Western and Central Europe and even the Russian Empire to its study in an era when there were no Muslims in the universities to advocate the cause.

C
24 June 2014, 6.00
evening, JW3

This lecture will highlight what is most impressive about the culture of late Habsburg Vienna, as well as what was most problematic about its politics. Rather than simply listing great names and original achievements, it will focus on structural transformations of the public sphere, including the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, the empowered marginality of Jewish migrants and the pioneering achievements of women. Drawing on a new translation of Karl Kraus's documentary drama, *The Last Days of Mankind*, it will address the question of responsibility for the outbreak of the Great War. The evening will conclude with a reading from this work.

To book a place, contact the Austrian Cultural Forum:

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'An extraordinary event that actually occurred': this classic definition of the German novella is amply fulfilled by Arno Surminski's *The Bird World of Auschwitz*, now published in English for the first time. In October 1940 a German ornithologist, Dr Günther Niethammer, embarked on a study of the birdlife of the region. His findings appeared in the 1941 number of the scientific journal, *Annalen des Naturhistorischen Museums in Wien*. Readers of that article must have been impressed by the wealth of birdlife he described, gaining the impression of a tranquil landscape. The only jarring note occurred on the opening page of the article, where the author indicated that he was 'currently in the Waffen-SS'. Niethammer went on to thank another member of the Waffen-SS for encouraging his research: Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz from May 1940 until November 1943.

When Niethammer's fieldwork was drawn to Arno Surminski's attention, his imagination went into overdrive. His masterstroke, which gives his fictional reworking of those events its dynamic, is to imagine that the ornithologist, whom he gives the name Hans Grote, is accompanied by a Polish prisoner from the Concentration Camp. On this basis he creates the second main character of this remarkable story, Marek Rogalski, a Catholic student detained during a round-up of educated Poles. An uncanny dialogue ensues between Grote the ornithologist, who can think only of the variegated life of birds, and his assistant Marek, who is haunted by his knowledge of the gruesome death being inflicted on Auschwitz prisoners.

The understated narrative of *The Bird World of Auschwitz* poignantly measures the crimes of a brutal regime against the rhythms of nature. The ornithologist remains trapped in his pursuit of specimens for scientific research, but the novella is a morality tale in which such conduct does not go unpunished. Here again Surminski respects the historical record, for after the defeat of Nazi Germany the original ornithologist, Dr Niethammer, was sentenced to several years in a Polish prison for complicity in war crimes. After his release he was rehabilitated and appointed to a Professorship in Bonn. This adds a further disturbing resonance to Surminski's imaginative reconstruction of an extraordinary event that actually occurred.

Translated by Stephen Cameron Jalil Nicholls
scjn@btinternet.com

The translation is published to mark the 80th birthday of Arno Surminski on 20 August 2014 and will be available from the Centre for German-Jewish Studies.

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Publications by researchers at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies may be purchased at a discount by Friends of the Centre.

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