Dossier

Jewish Theology

at the University of Potsdam

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Jewish Theology at a German University for the First Time

Opening of the "School of Jewish Theology" on November 19, 2013 / Start of the Program "Jewish Theology" in the Winter Semester 2013/14

In October 2013, students of a European university will, for the first time, start their studies of Jewish Theology under the roof the "School of Jewish Theology" in Potsdam. This satisfies the almost 200-year-old demand among Jewry for the equal status of the education of rabbis with that of theologies of other religions.

Prof. Oliver Günther, Ph.D., President of the University of Potsdam stresses, "The opening of the 'School of Jewish Theology' marks a historical milestone in the training of liberal and conservative rabbis and is unique both in Germany and Europe."
The "School of Jewish Theology" has a special place as a one-of-a-kind institute under the roof of the Faculty of Arts. Prof. Johann Hafner, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, "The light of history now shines on Potsdam because it is the first time that confessional studies of Judaism at a state university are possible at an academic level."
The core areas of Jewish Theology are religious philosophy and religious history, the Hebrew Bible and exegesis, Talmud and rabbinical literature, Halakhah as well as liturgy and religious practice. The "School of Jewish Theology" has six professorships. Their research and teaching is devoted to the more than 3000 years of multifaceted Jewish history from antiquity to the present. In addition to the basic knowledge about Judaism, the bachelor program – unique in Europe – teaches basic academic competences. Moreover, it provides insight into Jewish religious practice. The degree program is open to all interested people regardless of their religious affiliation. Jewish students can aspire to the Jewish ministry as a rabbi or cantor while training at the Abraham Geiger College or the Zacharias Frankel College in Potsdam – opened in 2013. Rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka is Rector of the Abraham Geiger College where, since 2001, the closest connection between Jewish Studies and the training to become a rabbi has been ensured. "Jewish theology is embedded in the neighborhood of Jewish studies and religious studies and will be linked with the University as a whole through the Center of Interreligious Studies. This is definitely a unique connection. It promises added value that has not existed at any European university." This required some changes to the legislation governing higher education in the State of Brandenburg necessary to appoint faith-based professors. The legal agreements are based on a unique contract agreed upon under public law with two Jewish movements: with liberal and conservative Jewry.

The ceremonial opening of the “School of Jewish Theology” takes place at the University of Potsdam on November 19, 2013 at 18:00. Representatives from politics, business, and society as well as delegates from various Jewish communities and groups are expected to attend the event in the auditorium maximum on the Campus Am Neuen Palais. For more information and details about the event please visit the websites of the University of Potsdam (www.uni-potsdam.de/juedtheologie/index.html or www.juedischetheologie-unipotsdam.de).

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About Formation and Perspectives of the "School of Jewish Theology"

An Interview with Rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka, Rector of the Abraham Geiger College, and Prof. Johann Hafner, Dean of the Faculty of Arts

The founding of the "School of Jewish Theology" (SoJT) is considered historical and unique. Why?

Rabbi Prof.Walter Homolka: Jewish theology has not yet been taught as an academic subject at a European university. Nowhere. Through this we will create a field of study in Potsdam that uniquely situates itself between Jewish studies and other academic theologies. This required some changes to the legislation governing higher education in the State of Brandenburg like being able to appoint specific confessional candidates to theological professorships. You do find this field of studies at one or two other European universities, but when it comes to covering all fields – exegetical, hermeneutical, philosophical, historical, and practical – the SoJT is unique.

Prof. Johann Hafner: … and this also means granting equal status to Jewish theology with respect to theologies of other religions. The catalyst was a paper of the Science Council published three years ago. It recommended establishing professorships of Islamic theology at German universities. Over the course of this process it was possible to fulfill the historical demands of the German Jewry for a Jewish theology. The light of history now shines on Potsdam because it is the first time that confessional studies of Judaism at a state university are possible at an academic level.

Homolka: In addition, Jewish theology is in the neighborhood of Jewish studies and religious studies and will be linked with the University as a whole through the Center of Interreligious Studies. Regardless of whether Jewish theology deserves to be represented at a university, this connection promises added value that has not existed at any European university.

What was path did Jewish theology have to take over the past few years, and what were the obstacles?

Hafner: There is a younger history and an older one. Most recently the recommendations of the Scientific Council and the reactions among the academic public provided sufficient momentum. In Potsdam the Abraham Geiger College (AGK) has been affiliated to the University as a co-institute for some time. They did not establish a rabbi seminary from scratch with lecturers being flown in and out, but a major part of the training at the AGK already had been taking place at the University of Potsdam. An educational ideal was realized from the very

beginning, demanded by Jewish reformers like Abraham Geiger – the dual education for rabbis at the university and at the academic seminary where they train practical skills: preaching, singing and performing rituals. This was a common idea during the 19th century and is the principle of Protestant seminaries for preachers, teachers' seminaries of Enlightenment and Catholic seminaries for priests.

Homolka: The development of the Jewish Studies program in Potsdam provided fertile soil for the newly established Faculty of Jewish Theology. The interdisciplinary Jewish Studies program was founded at the University of Potsdam in 1994. The Abraham Geiger College was founded in 1999 and has been affiliated to the University as a co-institute since 2001. This was extremely important to us because a master's degree in Jewish Studies is necessary for international recognition of your training to become a rabbi. At that time the AGK had a guest status but could use what the College of Jewish Studies had prepared. All this happened very harmoniously. This development first led to the Center of Jewish Studies in 2005 and then to the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Faculty of Arts in 2007. The Cantorial School was opened at the AGK in 2007, too. In 2010 the Scientific Council gave its recommendations and, as a result, the present structures have been formed: an institute of Jewish theology with wide-ranging autonomy. I expect considerable international radiance from this constellation.

Hafner: Jewish Studies shows very well how a subject initially establishes itself at a university and slowly "sets" as an institution. About a year ago there was the question: "Should we have an even bigger upgrade, namely a faculty of Jewish theology?" After all, Abraham Geiger did also once request this. This led to a controversial discussion at the University. Such a small faculty with six professorships next to large ones, like the Faculty of Science with more than 70 professorships, would have led to a great imbalance within the representational bodies of the University. Therefore, we agreed not to establish a faculty but a special kind of institute, i.e. with special confessional rights granted by the German constitutional law on religion when you provide training for ministry. This can be done as a faculty but also within and as part of a faculty. We decided in favor of the latter – an institute of Jewish theology within the Faculty of Arts.

Is the Faculty of Arts the right place for such an institute?

Hafner: The Faculty of Arts is exactly the right place for Jewish theology because it unites all hermeneutically, linguistically, historically and practologically working subjects, which means that there are always proximities to the other institutes. Modern theologies have repro-

duced this diversity of disciplines in themselves: systematics/law, exegesis, history, pastoral/liturgy. In this respect, Jewish theology and its disciplines fit very well into the Faculty of Arts.

Homolka: I absolutely agree. Besides, I understood the suggestion to establish a "Jewish faculty" as a working hypothesis. It was based on a statement by the Minister of Science Prof. Sabine Kunst, who said in the State Parliament in November 2011 that she could imagine a Jewish-theological faculty. The question "Faculty – yes or no?" was not a controversial issue in the discussion group of the university that prepared the "School". We are very happy with the way it turned out. We have already been part of the Faculty of Arts and therefore it is nothing new for us to find our way around. The Scientific Council did not determine the kind of organization but only the benchmarks that need to be fulfilled, for instance conducting one's own Ph.D. and habilitation procedures so that the subject can develop out of itself. All these things are regulated including the right to speak in the Senate. I think what we have achieved is a complete implementation of the recommendations by the Scientific Council. It also corresponds in most parts with the solutions that were chosen for Islamic theology. When Abraham Geiger said that there should be one "Jewish Faculty" he meant autonomy and self-administration. And this we have achieved completely. Besides, our scheme has two role models in the landscape of German Christian theologies. These are Erlangen and Hamburg. The theological entities, with respect to their sizes, are located at the faculties of arts there, too. They have the same autonomy as we do in Potsdam to meet the requirements of constitutional church law.

What does the institutionalization of Jewish theology mean for German Jewry and beyond?

Homolka: The SoJT is the only educational institution for rabbis worldwide that is basically funded by the state. Its stability can thus not be topped. For Judaism it means a reliable European institution where rabbis from all over the world can study. Since we do not charge any tuition, the studies are free, whereas it costs between 100,000 and 150,000 Euros in the US. Furthermore, we have actually been able to grant a scholarship to every student so far, for instance through the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Regarding its content, the program also prepares more precisely for the ministry and covers all subjects. I think that this results in the best educational situation in Europe. Moreover, another institution will be added in the fall, with the Zacharias Frankel College (ZFC) assuming the training of conservative rabbis. In other words, the academic training for two religious

groups within the Jewry is being jointly implemented in Potsdam. The students even have the freedom to change from the Abraham Geiger College to the Zacharias Frankel College and vice versa during their studies. The opportunity to find out during your studies how you want to practice the rabbinate has never existed. It is a very exciting offer, definitely also for the development of the Jewish community in Europe.

Hafner: … Besides, Prussia is exactly the right place for such a model because there is already a historical role model. It was possible in the United Churches to study Protestant theology and to decide at the end of your studies whether you were ordained for the Lutheran or Reformed confession.

Homolka: As a matter of fact, you can receive two internationally recognized degrees at the SoJT – for liberal (AGK) and conservative (ZFC) Judaism. This makes us a direct competitor with the big American educational facilities for rabbis, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, Cincinnati and New York as well as the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. We are now playing in the top league, so to speak.

Hafner: The SoJT is also a milestone from an interreligious perspective. For one because it is the first time that Jewish academic theologians are being trained in Germany and secondly because its professors are partners for the upcoming dialog about comparative theology. Christian theologies have learned that it is not enough to do research and provide training in only one confession. This is why professors at many theological faculties are now dealing with religious pluralism from a theological perspective. The point is to create a dialog between the various theologies. “What are your initiation rites, and how do ours look?” “How do you lead a congregation, and how do we?” For Judaism, this has thus far been examined in Jewish studies solely from the perspective of cultural studies. In Potsdam there will be people doing this from a confessional perspective, and they will be available for such a dialog. Furthermore, there should be a lively dialog with the other specialized disciplines of the Faculty, for instance with the professorship of German-Jewish history or with those specialists of German studies concerned with the works of Jewish authors.

The foundation of the SoJT, also as a faith-based academic institution for the training of rabbis, breaks new ground. How did you ensure the participation of other denominational associations?

Hafner: At the beginning it was quite difficult for the University to identify its dialog partners within the Jewish religious community. Ultimately, it is part of the right to self-

determination of a religious group to decide: “Who speaks for us, and how do we represent the various denominations?” Our first contact was, of course, the AGK. The AGK, represented by Rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka, reached a consensus with the various Jewish denominations. As a result we established the “Standing Committee on the Curriculum for the Jewish Ministry”.

Homolka: We have managed to establish a legal partner, a counterpart, for the agreement with the Federal State of Brandenburg and the University of Potsdam: the “Standing Committee on the Curriculum for the Jewish Ministry”. This new body controls what the religious community can devise at the SoJT based on its rights of co-determination. We have entered new political and legal grounds here. Meanwhile there is quite a coherent picture that fits exactly into the landscape of constitutional church law in Germany.

Who will study Jewish theology and for what purpose?

Hafner: The bachelor program focuses on three points – rabbinate, cantorate and Jewish theology. This means that someone who does not intend to lead a synagogue but is interested in Jewish theology more generally can study it as well. It is the same as studying Catholic theology without wanting to become a priest. In this respect the program is open to all students interested in this self-explication of Judaism in its academic forms.

Homolka: It is up to the students to decide which path to take. Of course, they can also choose Jewish studies or religious studies and still attend courses of Jewish theology. This means that there will be a much wider choice for other programs, too.

Hafner: This was also one of the reasons why Jewish theology was placed at the Faculty of Arts. If realizable neighboring programs will have access to the courses of Jewish theology. For example, history, lifestyle-ethics-religion, religious studies and German language and literature can benefit from it.

Homolka: Research on Judaism has either a philological or purely cultural orientation at many universities, particularly at those with just one professorship or that do Holocaust research. I think only in Potsdam do you find all facets united in one place and, moreover, we have the Center of Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg. When the SoJT has finished all of its appointments, it will have the broadest offering of Jewish studies besides the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien in Heidelberg.

Hafner: … and the fact that it takes place at the Faculty of Arts of a state university implies that theological teaching and studying always happens under the conditions of academic methodology. This means lectures and classes, which expose themselves to comparisons open

to other disciplines, incorporate the methods of other cultural studies, historical studies and sociology without neglecting their religious provenience. The SoJT will not become a mission or preachers' school that exclusively works within its own traditions and with its own canonized texts but is always in contact with the other subjects of the Faculty of Arts. This is certainly a special feature of the institution in contrast to a Yeshiva, which fosters Talmudic discussions, but without the obligation to draw on philosophers and cultural scholars of other centuries and other disciplines.

Is there already a perspective for the research at the SoJT?

Homolka: There have been projects at the AGK, for example on the role and mission of a rabbi compared with that of an imam, pastor and priest. We have had academic meetings dealing with the questions of localization of Jewish theology. We have just started a new project – the revision Ludwig Philippson's Bible translation – in some respect anticipating the work of the new Chair of Hebrew Bible and exegesis. As far as research at the SoJT is concerned, it will depend heavily on the newly appointed colleagues. However, I can imagine that research will start where it had once begun in the 19th century, that is to say, with the question about the notion of science. The debate once launched by Geiger and Zunz about the science of Judaism as a free access to Jewish science may be led and continued once again. It was the goal of Jewish theology to train practitioners, on the one hand, to enable people to voice the vivid and historically grown traditions of the Jewish faith. This provides a lot of connections to Jewish studies but also to Christian theologies. It will be an exciting thing. A new subject is emerging that has to be in a lively exchange.

Hafner: Actually there is a clear institutional separation between religious studies, Jewish studies, Oriental studies and theologies. This is due to the historically evolved prevalence of theologies. There are almost 700 – Catholic and Protestant – theological professorships. Therefore, the small group of religious scholars does everything it can to maintain the borders between these fields to define their own subjects and to be able to work untheologically and non-confessionally if possible. As far as I know there is no other country where this boundary is so strictly drawn as here in Germany. In other countries it goes without saying that Buddhist, Catholic and Jewish lecturers present their own religion and even other ones and work next to religious sociologists and religious historians at departments for religious studies. It is becoming increasingly common to use the integrated term "religion-related sciences". In Germany, they are still strictly separated. Somehow Potsdam will be an exception in this re-

spect. The proximity to religious studies, Jewish studies and Jewish theology that will be linked spatially and through study programs presents an untypical development for Germany.
Homolka: Potsdam has been a hotspot for those interested in religion in general exactly because the boundaries are not so rigidly defined. So far this place has probably been the largest institution for Jewish studies in Europe when taking into account the number of students. This is bound to increase even more.

Peter Strohschneider, who was chairman of the Scientific Council from 2006 to 2011 and fueled the discussion about a Jewish theology in 2010, wrote, "Theology as a faith-based field of study creates uncertain knowledge about religious certainties." Will the SoJT also start a dialog about certainties of the Jewish faith?
Hafner: Indeed, academic theology always poses a danger to religious identity. If you examine how the effects of our own faith developed historically and how they were implemented, you cannot deal with them as texts that have dropped from the sky but will see that God, from a theological perspective, also works and acts through people and power constellations. He can only take a mediated perspective on your own certainties. In this respect, theological studies at a university offer training in talking about faith in modern times.
Homolka: It is a very old experience that the study of theology somehow questions childhood beliefs. However, these studies have to rebuild something, i.e. what was questioned has to be backed up with new assurances. This was Geiger's idea at least. His motto was "Through knowledge to faith". In other words: a reflected faith can live with the realities of research and also has to live out of them. The important ethical questions are always a part of the process in Judaism. This is done by evaluating the tradition but also proves its ability to change by adopting new findings. This is exactly the task of such an institution. It has to take its stand in both respects and to add quality research where the answers of the past are not sufficient. In this respect we fit very well into the group of Christian theologies.

In the medium term you are planning a Center of Interreligious Studies. What should be its tasks?
Hafner: The idea for a center, in which various faculties participate, was born in the discussion group. We hope that all those concerned with religion will come together there, e.g. those working in sociology and politics but also at the Faculty of Science when they study cosmological topics, like the creation of the world, taking a comparative look at the religion. This could create a discussion not just between the philological and religious scientific disciplines

but also with those from the sociological and physical fields of study. But we are just at the beginning.

Admiel Kosman, Professor of Talmud and Rabbinical Literature at the SoJT, said in an interview that he saw the "School" as a chance for the entire society to benefit from imparting Jewish values. How is that supposed to work?

Homolka: It is already happening at the University. Jewish ministers to-be have to keep up with their fellow students of other subjects. You often have to stand your ground against others. It is the aim of our education that rabbis take on these discussions and seek out dialog and do not just work self-absorbed. Such a discourse can, of course, have an effect on the whole society.

To what extent will it be noticeable here in Potsdam that the first "Jewish Theology" at a university has been established? How will this liven up (Jewish) life in the city?

Hafner: There are a few initiatives through which scholars influence the city like "Potsdamer Köpfe", the "Lange Nacht der Kirchen" and "der Wissenschaften" as well as "university church services". More Jewish scholars will show up here in the future.

Homolka: The Cantorial Seminary and the St. Nicolas Church jointly organize events on a regular basis. We also founded a Jewish university congregation just a few months ago, the first in all of Germany. All at once this has created the basis for a dialog with other university congregations that did not exist before. And this is only the beginning.

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“You Find God Only in Dialogue with Others”

Poet and Talmud scholar Admiel Kosman is one of the first professors at the new “School of Jewish Theology”

When the “School of Jewish Theology” at the Faculty of Arts opens its doors in November 2013, Admiel Kosman will be present and will hold the professorship of Talmud and rabbinical literature. He calls it “a momentous occasion that Jewish theology is for the first time being granted equality with other theologies through this institutional affiliation to a German university. We are standing at the threshold of something extraordinary: Judaism as part of a lively dialogue can make a valuable contribution to society in Germany.”

For Kosman, this historical step is “only” another one on a path he has been going down for a long time. Since 2003 – “the beginning of the beginning”, as he calls it – Kosman has been working at the Abraham Geiger College and at the University of Potsdam. Dialogue is his prime concern – the dialogue with other religions but first and foremost with others. “You do not meet God in yourself but by opening your heart to other people,” he says. “I try to show that this idea of a dialogic path has been already propagated in the Talmud, in the early Jewish religious writings.”

At the same time he is living this path. The Talmud scholar regards himself as a wanderer between religious worlds, learning from encounters with traditions and denominations unknown to him – as a scholar but also as a believer. “Hinduism, Buddhism, many different religions have played an important role on my spiritual path.”

One source of his comprehensive demand to meet the world in dialogue may lie in his biography. Admiel Kosman was born in Haifa in 1957 to a family of immigrants. His father’s family came from the German-French border region and his mother’s from Iraq. Fleeing discrimination and persecution, the family sought a new home in Israel. Young Admiel experienced a rather complicated mixture of various cultural settings and religious traditions in his family. Confrontations and tension were inevitable. These, however, ultimately made him stronger, Kosman explains, and his parents are still together today. In addition, his family environment always exemplified and showed openness to new and alternative developments. His family supported him when he decided to study graphic design and later pottery after he had attended a notable Yeshiva, one of the Talmud colleges with a long-standing tradition. The fact that he finally became a scholar with a Ph.D. in Talmudic studies fits into the picture

of Kosman as someone moving between the worlds. “I have never been able to decide whether to become an artist or a scholar,” he says. So he became both.

Poetry is what Admiel calls his “wild side”. Even as an adolescent he wrote lyrical poetry, first secretly, only for himself. A teacher ultimately encouraged him to make it public. His first book of poems was published when he was 18 years old. Kosman’s poetry is considered unconventional – personal yet political, religious yet erotic, transcendental yet material. For Kosman it is, above all, a dialogue with God. He writes his poems the way he “hears” them. So, he always has a notepad and a pen with him. This dialogue links Kosman the poet and Kosman the scholar. “Both in writing poetry and researching, my starting point is not the motivation to write something that brings me recognition or acceptance in the literary or academic world. It is much more about following an inner voice (you may call it ‘insight’) that makes me write, only and exactly that which is given to me to write.”

Kosman has published nine books of poetry and has been honoured with several prizes in Israel. They made him famous and lend his voice increasing importance in his home country. Since 1996 he has published a column in *Haaretz*, one of the most important Israeli daily newspapers. After his Ph.D. thesis he taught at the renowned Bar-Ilan-University in Tel Aviv and concentrated his research on early religious texts from the time when Christianity and Judaism grew apart. Issues of spirituality, the role of women and mainly the dialogic principle in the early religious texts have been on his mind and motivated him ever since.

Kosman’s uncompromising commitment to open dialogue, however, has not garnered him only sympathy in Israel. In particular, his advocacy for the recognition of homosexuality was harshly criticised. As a scholar, he faced resistance previously unknown to him. It was, therefore, a stroke of luck when Rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka invited him to take part in the founding of the Abraham Geiger College in 2003. “Here I found a place where I can live and teach my convictions,” says the Talmud expert. “Here the dialogic path also knows no limits.” For almost 20 years he has taught his understanding of Jewish religion and tradition not only to future rabbis and cantors at the College but also to students of ethics as well as religious and Jewish studies at the University of Potsdam.

Kosman regards the opening of the “School of Jewish Theology” in 2013 as a historical achievement. “For 150 years Jews have fought for their equal rights and not got them. They were second-class citizens”. Now he sees the chance for an inspiring social dialogue. “We do not only train rabbis for the Jewish communities,” Kosman says, “because through their work in these communities they can contribute to the entire society, which can benefit from Jewish values and traditions such as family, friendship, education. The intention is not to say: We are

the best and teach you but it is instead about the dialogic principle. The exchange between religions and cultures can bring together the best aspects of all of them. Because you find God only in a dialogue."

Matthias Zimmermann

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Photo: Karla Fritze/University of Potsdam

From Berlin into the World

Jasmin Bruck on Her Way to Become a Rabbi

"I want to become a rabbi," says Jasmin Bruck. "Of course." The young woman from Berlin with an eventful life has no misgivings about it. Not anymore, at least. She is completing her second year at the Abraham Geiger College in Berlin. At the same time, she is studying at the University of Potsdam, where, starting in fall 2013, she'll be enrolled in the new degree course "Jewish Theology". Five years ago her relation to the Jewish faith was still rather personal albeit devout. Bruck's path towards the Jewish ministry was not predetermined. She sought it out.

You hear very clearly that Jasmin Bruck is a Berliner but not that she was born in Tel Aviv. Her parents moved with their two-year old daughter to Berlin in 1985. This was a return, in a way, because both parents have German roots. In 1938/39 her grandparents fled from National Socialist persecution in Germany and Austria and immigrated to Palestine. Almost 50 years later the family took the reverse route, taking their old home as their new one. Bruck does also feel at home in the Israeli culture. "In Israel there is not much distance between people. Total strangers are interested in you and want to help you," she says. So far she has only ever been there for a few weeks at a time. Next year, when her studies include a stay abroad, she wants to go to the country of her birth for two semesters.

Although her family is rather secular, the Jewish heritage has always been present in Bruck's life. She went to a Jewish day nursery and a Jewish primary school. At the age of 19 she decided to study law and her attachment to Judaism remained limited to her private life. Only two years later she began to pursue this interest again, as a tour guide in the Jewish Museum of Berlin, which she still does. This work was a welcome start in dealing with Judaism not just as a creed but also from a scholarly point of view. "I think I have got at least a thousand questions about Judaism during these years," she explains. "I had to find an answer to all of them, also for myself."

Only after the first state examination in law did she decide to make her passion for Jewish culture and religion her profession and to study both. She took some time off, traveled through Asia and Africa and understood that she was looking for an intellectual challenge. In Zimbabwe she met her husband, himself a descendent of Jewish emigrants who had left Cologne in 1938. When she heard about the education at the Abraham Geiger College, her decision matured to become a rabbi. She does not shy away from being an exception as a woman among

many men. “People have to be confronted with this idea, and then they will get used to it. Ten years ago the idea of a woman as a Federal Chancellor was extraordinary, but not anymore. I hope that it will be the same with women as rabbis.”

She does not know yet where she will end up as a rabbi. She could well imagine ministering a congregation in Berlin. After all, this is her hometown – and “with stronger roots than the generations before me,” as she says. At the same time, she wants to travel the world. “I would like to work in different countries. Why not in the US, too?”

She consciously chose the training at the Abraham Geiger College in connection with the studies at the University of Potsdam. “I want to tell the people more than just stories and fairytales. I want to be able to help them with my knowledge,” she says. During the first four semesters of her five-year studies she enrolled in the subjects Religious Studies and Jewish Studies. “The many topics and approaches” but especially “the exchange with people who are interested in Judaism although they are not Jews themselves” were very appealing to her. In fall 2013 Bruck will change to the newly founded degree course Jewish Theology – a real stroke of luck for her very personal aim of becoming a rabbi. “The studies are raised to a much more professional level,” she is convinced. She also sees much more. “I can just sense what significance the foundation of the ‘School of Jewish Theology’ will have for European history,” Bruck says. “I just hope that we manage to train rabbis for all Jews at this ‘School of Jewish Theology’.”

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Foto: Matthias Zimmermann/University of Potsdam

Come to Stay

From Phoenix to the "School of Jewish Theology"

It is an unusual path through life that Maximilian Feldhake is taking. The young US American from Phoenix has been living in Germany for a year as an au pair for a family of five in Dresden. He will move to Potsdam in October to begin his studies at the newly founded "School of Jewish Theology" at the University of Potsdam.

"I want to become a rabbi," says the 24 year old. Parallel to his studies at the university he will complete training at the Abraham Geiger College and also spend a year in Israel. What is special: Maximilian Feldhake did not find Judaism through his family. "I am the only Jew in my family." Feldhake consciously decided for Judaism at the age of 17.

He also made his decision in favor of Germany very deliberately. "Jewish life in Germany has been growing again for 20 years, and I want to be a part of this development and contribute to it," he says. The University of Potsdam provides very special views and aspects of Judaism, because here the Abraham Geiger College was the first rabbinical seminary to open after the Shoah. Although Feldhake's first contacts with Judaism were in the religious field, his interests extend into the cultural and historical facets of Jewish life. In Germany the traces of Jewish culture and history are still present. "The juxtaposition of secular and religious Jewish life was distinct in Berlin prior to the war," Feldhake says. The influence of Jewish life is still noticeable and increasingly so – religious practices in communities and synagogues on the one hand and Jewish music or theater on the other.

To Maximilian Feldhake, it is not just his theological studies that are important but also the dialogue between Germans and Jews, between different religions and between secular and religious Jews as well as finding common intersections. He is convinced that there is great interest in Jewish topics in Germany, also among those without a Jewish background.

Feldhake wears the kippah – the traditional Jewish headdress for men – not only during prayers or on special occasions but also in his daily life. It is a matter of course for him to go to the synagogue regularly, to read the Torah and to observe the Shabbat. He does not call himself orthodox. "Religion is a very personal matter", he says. It is not his task to teach or to convince others.

Feldhake will finish his education to become a rabbi in five years. What will happen afterwards, he does not know exactly, but he is sure of one thing. "I will stay in Germany, in any

case.” He can well imagine working as a rabbi in a Jewish community, preferably in the east of Germany, because “the communities there need the biggest support.”

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Foto: Matthias Zimmermann/ University of Potsdam

Tzimtzum

Following the Traces of Kabbalistic Teaching in Jewish and Christian Intellectual History since 1570

Tzimtzum is one of the most multifaceted and famous teachings of Jewish mystics and Kabbalah. It explains how God created the world: contracting Himself into Himself in order to leave space for creating the world. Adjunct Professor Christoph Schulte, historian of philosophy and Judaist at the University of Potsdam works on exposing the impact this fascinating concept has had on more than 400 years of Jewish and Christian intellectual history, from philosophy and theology to art and literature, and pop culture. Here you'll get a look at the Tzimtzum through the eyes of a researcher.

The Hebrew term *Tzimtzum* means "contraction", "constriction", "withdrawal", "limit" and "concentration". In the Kabbalah, the term describes the self-contraction of God *before* creating the world and *for the purpose* of the world's creation. The term was coined in the teachings of the Jewish mystic Isaac Luria (1534–1572) who lived and worked in Safed in the Galilee region at the end of the 16th century. In Tzimtzum, the infiniteness of God before the creation of the world, which Kabbalists perceive as *Ein Sof* ("Without End"), has to withdraw Himself into Himself and to concentrate Himself in order to make space in His own center for the subsequent creation of the world. In doing so, God limits His infinite almightiness so that something finite like the world can be created. Hence, this world is created within the infinite God, is surrounded by Him yet is different from Him. Without Tzimtzum there is no Creation. This makes Tzimtzum one of the basic concepts of Judaism.

It is not only since the groundbreaking research on Jewish mysticism of the Jewish religious historian Gershom Scholem that the Lurianic teaching of Tzimtzum has been considered an intellectual centerpiece of Kabbalah and Jewish philosophy. Tzimtzum was initially an esoteric teaching among pious Kabbalists and was communicated only verbally in small groups. Just a few years after the death of Luria, handwritten documents of this teaching were circulating in Palestine and Europe. The first descriptions and drawings of Tzimtzum were printed in 1612, which made them publicly available and known. The writings on Tzimtzum were disseminated in Kabbalistic circles, initially in Italy and the Balkans in the early 17th century, later in Amsterdam, Central and Eastern Europe and during the messianic movement known as Sabbatianism. In addition, Tzimtzum became virtually popular in Hasidism of the 18th cen-

tury and remains so in various, very active Hasidic movements, e.g. in Chabad-Lubavitch or the Breslov Hasidic Group.

Tzimtzum has fascinated Christian theologians, philosophers, poets, and artists more than any other Kabbalistic teaching. You find its influence not only in the works of Christian Kabbalists like Knorr von Rosenroth, Henry More, Oetinger and Molitor but also in the works of philosophers like Brucker, Jacobi, Hegel, Schelling and Baader and of poets like Goethe and Brentano. Even Newton and the early modern English philosopher Anne Conway were acquainted with the Tzimtzum teaching.

For that reason, Tzimtzum had a prominent and broad reception history both in Judaism and Christianity from the 17th to the 20th century. In 20th-century philosophy and cultural history Tzimtzum gained a new significance beyond the Kabbalah among various authors and artists like Franz Rosenzweig, Else Lasker-Schüler, Isaak Bashevis Singer, Harold Bloom and Anselm Kiefer. For the philosopher Hans Jonas, for example, Tzimtzum offered a possible explanation for why God allowed the Shoah. God had already withdrawn from the world when creating it and thus gave the people and the events in the world a freedom that can also lead to the most horrific crimes and catastrophes. The North American Jewish painter Barnett Newman, who became famous for his monochrome, abstract expressionistic paintings, submitted the architectural design for a synagogue in 1963, in which the synagogue was that empty place in the world from which God had – like in Tzimtzum – withdrawn but where again divine presence and *Shechina* ("Dwelling or Settling") can happen in the religious service when the praying and singing believer stands in front of God. The antecedent absence of God by Tzimtzum enables His repeated new revelation and presence in the religious service. Thus Tzimtzum became a well-known thinking pattern in modern literature and art. Even the pop star Madonna is a follower of a popularized version of the Lurianic Kabbalah that throws together Tzimtzum and Big Bang as the origin of the world.

The research project, which already led to initial publications in 1994, was finished in 2013. It follows the traces of Tzimtzum, looking into all relevant sources in Jewish and Christian intellectual history in Europe and North America over more than four centuries. It shows how Tzimtzum fascinated Jews and Christians alike, as the idea of a withdrawal that lays the basis for something new. Tzimtzum is an idea with a history of reception and influence where interpretations and adoptions – partly rational, partly associative and symbolic – meet, mix, stimulate and inspire theosophy and philosophy, the divine and the human, the Jewish and the Christian, mysticism and literature, Kabbalah and music, psychotherapy and art.

On the one hand, the 20th century finally recognizes the idea of self-limitation as a radical God-forsakenness of the modern world. On the other hand, by applying Tzimtzum to people and their behavior, rabbis and Christian theologians, psychotherapists and entrepreneurs consider moderation and self-restraint an essential momentum of human creativity, inner freedom and serenity, of peaceful coexistence, ecology and good management.

Christoph Schulte

Christoph Schulte summarized the findings of his research in the book "Zimzum. Gott und Weltursprung" It will be published in spring 2014.

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Photo: Karla Fritze/ University of Potsdam

"… And Then I Ended Up in the Countryside"

Contacts of Exiled Rural German Jews to Their "Old Home Country" – a Chapter of German-Jewish History Unnoticed Up to Now

The decade after 1933 is one of the darkest chapters of German history. After the National Socialists came to power, neighbors were declared pariahs, friends became foes, Jews became second-class citizens. Until 1938 many Jews who lived in Germany fled their home country and had to leave almost all their belonging behind. Some were able to establish a new livelihood elsewhere. Only very few looked back to the country where they had been humiliated, persecuted and often experienced violence. Not all took this radical step of breaking all ties. Many Jewish people, especially those from the countryside, never lost touch with Germany. Stefanie Fischer examines how rural German Jews maintained contact with their old home from their places of refuge – and why.

At the beginning of the 1930s, about one third of all Jews in Germany lived in the countryside. Their fate before and after 1933 has hardly played a role in historical research so far. Stefanie Fischer herself came across the subject rather incidentally. "Research on German Jewry in the 20th century is marked by the picture of assimilated urban Jews, poets and thinkers who no longer practice their religion," the historian says. "This research seemed quite exhausted to me and burdened with clichés." Researching for her thesis she had a look off the beaten tracks. "That is when I ended up in the countryside."

Coming from Central Franconia herself, she analyzed the interrelationship between Jewish cattle dealers and non-Jewish people in Central Franconia before and after 1933 in her Ph.D. thesis. She found surprising sources in the archives. While the anti-Semitic policy of the National Socialists in the cities and the countryside quickly gained henchmen, followers, and profiteers, unexpected resistance in business began to rear. "All of a sudden farmers started complaining in letters to the NSDAP: 'Do not take our cattle Jews away from us!'" Fischer explains. In her Ph.D. thesis she reconstructed nothing less than "a story of trust and violence" that were interwoven.

Fischer was surprised that many Jewish cattle dealers but also other rural Jews continued this "story of trust" even at a time when they had already fled abroad to escape persecution. "It is amazing," the historian says, "how many Jewish exiles and survivors maintained their contacts in their home communities after they had fled although they often had gone through traumatic experiences." Even after 1945 they maintained contact through letters; some even

visited the places of their German past. On the other hand, many of the Jewish people who had gone into exile remained a part of the village community to some extent. Their fate and later life were often known and present even years after their expulsion. In her follow-up project, Fischer is researching and analysing these German-Jewish relationships after 1933, which have remained almost unnoticed. “What I am trying to find out is how these relationships back were maintained? How long did they hold? What did those living in exile experience when they came back for a visit to their former home country?”

Fischer is sure that the findings of this project will also add a new and hitherto unknown aspect to the picture of German Jews. After all, this research work takes her away from the usual German Holocaust research and deep into everyday Jewish life. “I am dealing with a group that did not have a voice. These were not intellectuals who could reproduce through writing,” Fischer explains. This makes it quite difficult to find significant sources although not hopeless, if you know where to begin. Fischer’s first step is to analyse hundreds of files from reparation trials after 1945. Much relevant data has been queried for the questionnaires that those harmed by the NS regime had to fill out in a compensation application. This helps reconstruct the stories of the people concerned, even if they have never written down their stories themselves. The files tell us even more: “We often find some information about children, neighbors and friends but also letters and reports about visits to their former home country,” Fischer explains. “An initial picture of these relationships and a great number of further questions and traces arise.”

She wants to study several hundred files, mainly from those German regions with a high proportion of rural Jews, like Franconia, Hesse, and Baden to get a somewhat representative cross section. After that she will look into individual life stories, traces she can find in municipal and community archives. They often contain documents of contacts or even of visits of the exiled Jews from far away. “Of course, for such a search you need perseverance,” Fischer admits, “but in many places you find letters of the exiled to the mayor, for instance, or newspaper reports about visits that always caused a lot of excitement.“

Fischer hopes that her talks with the children and grandchildren of those who once fled Germany will provide insight into their personal motivation to keep in touch with their old home country. Many left for Argentina, the US or Israel. During her first talks she found a fascinating yet aggravating fact: As important as it was for the exiled Jews not to terminate contact with Germany, this topic was somehow a taboo in the family. Nevertheless, talks with the descendants of these Jews often lead to important findings in old family archives and to further interview partners of other emigrant families. “This is like a snowball effect,” Fischer says.

“At the same time it also reveals other exciting connections. It turned out that many Jewish cattle dealers from southern Germany ended up on the East Coast of the US. I would like to know whether they joined the same regional networks to which they had already been connected back in Germany.”

Appreciation for Fischer’s Ph.D. thesis shows that this seemingly obscure topic is not just a footnote of historical research. She was awarded the 2012 Fraenkel-Prize in Contemporary History of the Wiener Library in London, one of the most prestigious prizes for contemporary historians. She also finds confirmation for her work when she is invited to one of the increasing number of lecture tours. “In the meantime, I give lectures at academic colloquia and historical regulars’ tables in rural pubs alike,” Fischer says, “and it may happen that a village teacher, a pharmacist, a few farmers sit together with some people from the university.” As a representative of the University of Potsdam she is doing research at the Berlin-Brandenburg Center for Jewish Studies. And she will travel through the German provinces as well as the “wide world” – following the traces left behind by the “rural Jews” in Exile through relationships to their “old home”.

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Photo: Thomas Roese/University of Potsdam

A Jewish Bible "in the Spirit of the German Language"

The Torah Translated by Ludwig Philippson

In 1839 the young Jewish scholar Ludwig Philippson took on a huge project. He decided to begin a new translation of the original Hebrew texts of the Torah into German and to publish an Israelite Bible for Jews. The project became a huge success because it was explicitly meant for use in everyday life. Until 1913 the Bible had been published a hundred-thousandfold in numerous editions and several printings. In the course of the 20th century, however, the text and its translator fell into oblivion. This might change again at the beginning of the 21st century. In fall 2014 Philippson's Torah (the Five Books of Moses) will be published again – newly edited and cautiously corrected, however, in the true spirit of the author. Two experts, who are involved in the careful editing of the text – Prof. Rüdiger Liwak, co-editor, and Daniel Vorpahl, research assistant –, talk about the history, appeal and problems of the project.

There are undoubtedly good versions of the Bible for Jews, says Prof. Rüdiger Liwak who is one of the three publishers of the new edition along with the rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka of the Abraham Geiger College and Prof. Hanna Liss of the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg. Nevertheless, Philippson's translation can still claim its place among the others. "His great achievement is that he adhered to the original Hebrew Bible text while also giving appropriate expression to the German language and its diversity," Liwak says.
Ludwig Philippson was just 28 years old when he started translating the Bible. He must have known that this enormous task of publishing a German version of the Bible explicitly for Jews would accompany him throughout his life. This might have pleased him more than discouraged him. The work of the polymath Philippson, who was born in Dessau in 1811, influenced Jewish life in Germany significantly. His father was a teacher and the founder of a Hebrew printing house. He might have passed on his thirst for knowledge and passion for texts to his son but died when his son was just four years old. Philippson already started school at the age of four and was an avid student of Hebrew. At the age of 15 Ludwig was the first Jew ever admitted to the well-known school of the Francke Foundations in Halle. He later studied classical philology in Halle and Berlin. Although he had already earned a doctorate at the age of 21, the gates of academia remained closed to him as a Jew. This did not dampen his journalistic enthusiasm, though. At the age of 16 he published his first work, a translation of a part of the Book of the Twelve, under the name of his brother. Just 26 years old, Philippson founded

the newspaper “Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums” (AZJ) in 1837, which he built up completely on his own as an author, publisher and sales manager. Until his death in 1889, he also edited the newspaper alone. The title of the publication always reflected his mission. He wanted to publish a newspaper for all Jews everywhere, no matter whether they were liberal or orthodox. As an advocate for equal rights for all Jews, Philippson repeatedly engaged in political activities.

Philippson’s rhetoric talent had already attracted attention. When he was 22, in 1833, he took over the tasks of a preacher of the Jewish congregation in Magdeburg, a year later also became a state- certified “spiritual teacher” and in 1839 was officially appointed a trained rabbi. In 1861 he left his position as a rabbi because of his deteriorating health but continued his journalistic work until his death. Among them is his life’s work – the translation of the Bible. “There are two main reasons for his motivation to translate the Bible for Jews again,” Liwak explains. “On the one hand, there was no suitable Jewish Bible in German at that time. Most German-Jewish households used a Christian Luther Bible. Many texts of the Old Testament are translated in such a way that they allude to the New Testament,” Liwak says. “Philippson said, ‘We need our own translation of the Hebrew texts!’”. After all, Philippson thought that Luther’s translation was linguistically not very well done. In his “AZJ” he criticized it as “one-sided, monotonous and prosaic, whereas the original was multilayered and profound, full of momentum, tenderness and grandeur, full of variety and flexibility.” Driven by the desire to give artistic expression to this original “in the spirit of the German language”, he decided to begin his own translation. From 1839 Philippson’s *Israelite Bible* was first published in 96 installments. Only then did a complete edition follow: in three volumes, in two languages – Hebrew and German –, and annotated as well as with 500 wood and steel engravings. The quite unusual didactical form of translating the texts into readable German, explaining them with the help of commentaries and using illustrations to make them understandable showed Philippson’s intention to make his *Israelite Bible* a “Bible for everybody”. And he succeeded. The first complete edition was said to be published more than 100,000 times by 1866. Philippson’s ambition to edit the Bible for everyday life in schools, synagogues and at home led to numerous editions in different designs up through the 20th century. Among them is also a non-annotated “popular edition” without pictures. In 1874 a “bibliophilic edition” was published with 154 illustrations by Gustave Doré.

Commentary, illustration, bilingualism - for Vorpahl, who is working on the new edition of the text as a research assistant, the success of Philippson’s Bible lies in the translation itself. “He created a text that is very close to the Hebrew original while at the same time using the

richness of the German language," Vorpahl says. "When doing a translation you often have to decide whether you want to stick to the content of the source text or prefer to correspond to the aesthetics of the target language. Philippson often created a perfect symbiosis."
Daniel Vorpahl should know. Together with Susanne Gräbner, he is going through Philippson's translation, line by line. The new edition will include the haftarah, the readings from the Prophets, in addition to the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Vorpahl and Gräbner each have to go over 140 verses a week if they are going to finish the text on schedule by next spring. Their work will form the basis for the edition that should be adjusted to today's feel for language. At the same time they do want to retain the unique wording of the translator. Therefore: "As much Philippson as possible, as little revision as necessary," Vorpahl explains the principle of their work. Punctuation and orthography are adapted "as carefully as possible". For those terms that are entirely incomprehensible today, alternatives have to be found. "Sometimes we also find mistakes. Now and then Philippson forgot half a verse," Vorpahl says, "but this is very rare. Perhaps he was very tired when this happened." Their approach is definitely in line with Philippson's own understanding of his work. He reworked his own translation again in the 1860s.
Vorpahl and Gräbner then discuss the texts with the editors and decide how best to convey Philippson's text to a 21st-century audience. These decisions are often made after long discussions, as Liwak and Vorpahl confirm, but the process is worth the effort. While the new edition does not contain the commentaries and illustrations because they are too related to the time of their creation, the text is valuable precisely because it "ought not be radically modernized," as Liwak says. The text relates to the present Jewish faith through new introductions written by notable rabbis and biblical scholars. The expectations of the work are high, as Rüdiger Liwak admits. "There are voices who claim that the Philippson Bible could become THE Bible in German-Jewish circles." Daniel Vorpahl is convinced that the text will have many readers today. "It is difficult to say whether Philippson's translation is better than others. This is a matter of taste," he says and continues with a compliment that Ludwig Philippson would have liked. "We certainly find them more harmonic, more fluent and well more beautiful than all the others."
Matthias Zimmermann

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Photo: Matthias Zimmermann/University of Potsdam

Brief Historical Summary of the "School of Jewish Theology"

1830 – Abraham Geiger demands a separate Jewish faculty at Germany universities and thus an equal status for the academic training of rabbis and Christian clergymen.

1999 – The Abraham Geiger College is founded in Berlin, providing practical and theoretical training for rabbis and cantors.

2001 – The Abraham Geiger College becomes a co-institute of the University of Potsdam.

2007 – The Institute of Jewish Studies is founded at the University of Potsdam, where students become acquainted with Jewish history, culture and religion. Rabbis and cantors receive academic training in cooperation with the Abraham Geiger College.

2010 – The Scientific Council recommends institutionalizing non-Christian theologies in the German system of higher education in addition to Christian theologies.

March 21, 2013 – The State Parliament of Brandenburg adopts the Second Amendment Act on the Law of Higher Education of the Federal State of Brandenburg, thus clearing the way for the participation of religious communities in establishing theological degree programs.

June 05, 2013 – The University of Potsdam signs the cooperation agreement with Union der Progressiven Juden in Deutschland e.V. (Union of Progressive Jews in Germany) and Masorti Deutschland e.V. and creates the prerequisites for opening denominational degree programs in Jewish theology.

November 19, 2013 – The "School of Jewish Theology" is officially inaugurated with a ceremonial opening. The first students begin their studies in the winter semester 2013/14.

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