

Article published in:

Mirjam Thulin, Markus Krah, Bianca Pick (Eds.)

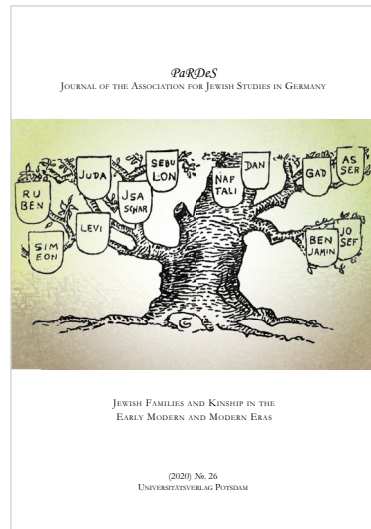
Jewish Families and Kinship in the Early Modern and Modern Eras

PaRDeS : Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies in Germany, Vol. 26

2020 – 180 pages

ISBN 978-3-86956-493-7

DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-47365>



Suggested citation:

Bernd Gausemeier: Squaring the pedigree, In: Mirjam Thulin, Markus Krah, Bianca Pick (Eds.): Jewish Families and Kinship in the Early Modern and Modern Eras (PaRDeS ;26), Potsdam, Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2020, S. 43–50.
DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-48556>

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Squaring the Pedigree: Arthur Czellitzer's Ventures in Eugenealogy

by Bernd Gausemeier

Abstract

Arthur Czellitzer (1872–1943) embodies the interdependence between eugenics and genealogy in early 20th-century Germany. He developed widely discussed genealogical recording techniques designed both for studies about human heredity and for the use in historical family research. When he shifted his focus from medical family studies to Jewish family research after World War I, he maintained a eugenic agenda which was now primarily targeted at the preservation of the “Jewish race.”

1. Genealogy as a Method to Understand the Human Condition

The November 1908 meeting of the *Gesellschaft für soziale Medizin* (Society for Social Medicine) in Berlin, usually a forum for questions of preventive medicine, labor hygiene or health insurance, revolved all around genealogical methods. Arthur Czellitzer (1871–1943), a local ophthalmologist with Jewish background, presented a pedigree design he recommended as a practicable prefab scheme for all genealogists. His “Sippschaftstafel” (kinship chart) arranged symbols – circles for female and squares for male persons – for the ancestry of a person on a square piece of paper. It placed the direct ancestors along the four grandparental lines up to the great-grandparents and left room for collateral relatives from grandaunts and granduncles down to the cousins.¹ The proposal subsequently received a lot of attention both from medical doctors and amateur genealogists. Why did a physician delve into matters of

¹ Arthur Czellitzer, “Sippschaftstafeln, ein neues Hilfsmittel zur Erblichkeitsforschung,” *Medizinische Reform* 16 (1908): 573–578, 604–605, 624–629.

genealogical representation, and why did his professional community show so much interest in it?

Issues of genealogy were intensively discussed among German physicians around 1900. This is hardly surprising given the importance of heredity in this era. Both Francis Galton's (1822–1911) theses on the inheritance of talents and the idea of psychopathological degeneration, primarily promoted by French psychiatrists, were promulgated through the display of pedigrees. In the corresponding German discourse on heredity, however, genealogy was regarded as more than a means to study and represent familial diseases or abilities. It was seen as a practice crucial for the understanding of both the biological and the social condition of man, since it dealt both with the principles of kinship that shaped social structures and the principles of heredity that formed individual qualities. This concept was first formulated by the historian Ottokar Lorenz (1832–1904) in his 1898 *Lehrbuch der gesamten wissenschaftlichen Genealogie* (Handbook of Scientific Genealogy). Lorenz combined a reactionary program of dynasty-centered historiography with the claim that historians should learn more from contemporary biology, especially August Weismann's (1834–1914) theory of the "continuity of germ plasm." This, in turn, also implied that the study of human heredity had to be based on a solid understanding of genealogical methods.²

2. The State of the Family: Collecting Genealogical Data

Czellitzer was one out of many physicians who wholeheartedly adopted this concept of genealogy. He had studied the history of his Jewish family since his high school days, before turning to questions of disease inheritance as an ophthalmological practitioner. His Berlin lecture indicated how much his private and academic interests in genealogy overlapped: The examples for the use of his kinship chart concerned the "inheritance" of body size and musicality in his own relatives. His chart, however, was conceived as a way to turn genealogy into a more standardized, scientific practice. Medical followers of Lorenzian genealogy were usually enthusiastic about ramified family

² Bernd Gausemeier, "Auf der 'Brücke zwischen Natur- und Geschichtswissenschaft': Ottokar Lorenz und die Neuerfindung der Genealogie um 1900", in *Wissensobjekt Mensch: Praktiken der Humanwissenschaften im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Florence Vienne and Christina Brandt (Berlin: Kadmos, 2008), 137–164.

trees showing the course of supposedly hereditary traits over as many generations as possible. The influential psychiatrist Robert Sommer (1864–1937), for example, illustrated his ideas about scientific genealogy through a study on the “inheritance” of artistic and scientific talents in his wife’s family.³ For Czellitzer, such showcase pedigrees glossed over the basic problems of genealogical work. For most families, it was hardly possible to obtain sufficient biographical information about long deceased ancestors, let alone the medical records needed for studies on hereditary diseases.

Czellitzer’s kinship chart therefore embodied a pragmatic reduction to a manageable number of relatives. This break with Lorenzian orthodoxy promptly caused objections from one of its heralds, the lawyer and genealogist Stephan Kekulé von Stradonitz (1863–1933), who insisted that insights concerning heredity were only possible on the basis of pedigrees covering at least five generations. The physician and medical statistician Wilhelm Weinberg (1862–1937), in contrast, criticized Czellitzer’s chart as going way too far. In his view, it was neither realistic nor necessary to include great-grandparents or collateral relatives in a medical family study. Weinberg was the pioneer of a statistical approach to human heredity. He tirelessly tried to convince his colleagues that a sober understanding of pathological inheritance could never evolve from staring at “interesting” pedigrees, but only from representative and well-documented samples that just needed to comprise a large number of parental couples and their complete offspring.⁴

Czellitzer basically shared Weinberg’s approach that the study of heredity had to work with large numbers rather than long lineages. His kinship chart was designed for collecting series of comparable familial cases. For years he had observed the hereditary factor in ophthalmic disorders in his medical practice. Working both in a public polyclinic and for private clients, he was often able to examine several patients in a family. In exceptional cases, he took the trouble to visit and test other members of a patient’s families. Mostly, however, he gathered information by interviewing patients about impaired eyesight

³ Robert Sommer, *Familienforschung und Vererbungslehre* (Leipzig: Barth, 1907).

⁴ Anonymous, “Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für soziale Medizin, Hygiene und Medizin-alstatistik,” *Medizinische Reform* 16 (1908): 604–605, 624–629. On Weinberg, see Bernd Gausemeier, “In Search of the Ideal Population: The Study of Human Heredity before and after the Mendelian Break”, in *Heredity Explored*, eds., Chistina Brandt and Staffan Müller-Wille, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 337–363.

among their relatives. The material he dealt with, thus, was heterogeneous in quality and quantity and usually restricted to a narrow family circle. In order to record his medico-genealogical observations, Czellitzer had no need for his kinship chart, but used the simplified form of the “Familienkarte” (family card), which at most included three generations, but – in contrast to the larger form – noted the patient’s siblings by default. In 1910, Czellitzer published a study on the inheritance of eye disorders, especially myopia, based on 550 of such data sheets.⁵ In his statistical analysis, he determined whether the familial occurrence of these diseases was related to gender, the age of the parents, the position of the children in the order of birth or intermarriages within the family. Furthermore, he distinguished between cases of “direct” heredity (e. g. identical disease in parents and offspring) and “indirect” heredity (identical in grandparents and grandchildren). All of these classifications were typical for the 19th-century medical understanding of heredity. Their use did not imply that Czellitzer was unable to adopt the new logic of Mendelian genetics; rather, he was skeptical about the prevailing tendency of treating complex anatomical or pathological phenomena as monogenic “traits.” Considering Mendelian analysis in humans as premature, he restricted himself to the compilation of empirical data concerning the heritability of ophthalmic diseases and possible factors that influenced it.

Although Czellitzer evaluated his samples by way of statistical tabulation, he attached great importance to recording single genealogies. As for the kinship chart, he recommended the family card as a means to understand the hereditary condition of a family. This adherence to genealogical visualization did not save him from the kind of criticism he had experienced before. This time, it was voiced by Alfred Grotjahn (1869–1931), a figurehead of the *Society for Social Medicine*. In spite of his usual standpoint that statistics was the basis of a prevention-oriented social hygiene, Grotjahn scolded Czellitzer for having abandoned true medical genealogy for “mere” statistics. Only in-depth family research, he claimed, could show how various “degenerative inferiorities” were related.⁶ It was a typical argumentative pattern of Lorenzian medico-genealogy to dismiss statistics as a superficial practice unable to reveal the most

⁵ Arthur Czellitzer, “Wie vererben sich Augenleiden?,” *Medizinische Reform* 18 (1910): 120–124, 134–139.

⁶ Anonymous, “Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für soziale Medizin, Hygiene und Medizin-alstatistik,” *Medizinische Reform* 18 (1910): 186–189, here 187.

important feature of heredity: the connection between physical and mental anomalies that made certain families a dysgenic threat. Czellitzer was by no means immune to such eugenic beliefs. Like many physicians in the social hygiene community, he saw no contradiction between the call for a prevention-oriented medicine and the concept of eugenic control of “unfit” groups. The objective he defined for his studies was a hygienic as much as a eugenic one: more precise knowledge about the hereditary disposition to common diseases like myopia or tuberculosis, he claimed, could help to keep affected persons away from activities that provoked an early outbreak.⁷ Unlike many eugenicists, Czellitzer did not suggest that this knowledge was already sophisticated. He regarded his own survey as a model for further investigations rather than a completed project. His practical experience had clearly shown that in order to become an exact science, the study of human heredity needed to overcome one crucial restriction: the lack of reliable medical records for deceased and even for living persons.

3. The State and the Family: Keeping Genealogical Records

Czellitzer was by no means the only physician to realize this problem. The German eugenic discourse was rife with projects aiming at a standardized collection of medical data which would enable both systematic statistical research and a comprehensive eugenic control of the population. In the 1890s Wilhelm Schallmayer (1857–1919), a pioneer of the racial hygiene movement, demanded a “health passport” for every German citizen, a document holding the most important reports of administrative and medical authorities. For Czellitzer, such a state-controlled model required too much bureaucratic effort to be feasible. Instead, he suggested a system that entrusted eugenic bookkeeping to the citizens themselves. The registry offices in Berlin and its suburbs issued “Familienstambbücher” (family registers) – folders for storing the most important civil documents of the family – to newlywed couples. Czellitzer proposed a mandatory use of these registers, including the obligation to collect all records of public health officers, school and military doctors, and to submit them to authorities on request. The keeping of the registers, he

⁷ Czellitzer, “Wie vererben sich Augenleiden?,” 139.

hoped, would also have the side effect of reviving the “Familiensinn” (sense of family) in the uprooted urban proletariat.⁸

Once again, the ophthalmologist’s inventiveness sparked a lively discussion, and once more the most detailed criticism was formulated by Weinberg, who had strong doubts that keeping public records in private could work. The momentum of governmental coercion, he objected, would evoke obstruction rather than genealogical interest, especially in families regarded as problematic from a eugenic point of view.⁹ Weinberg preferred a national or regional centralization of the most basic civil records, with the medical aspect limited to a registration of causes of death. Despite their different approaches, Weinberg and Czellitzer agreed in their assessment of the fundamental problem: questions of human heredity could only be studied on a large scale if basic data were standardized and easily accessible. This view conflicted with one of the most cherished assumptions of Lorenzian genealogy: the belief that the collecting passion of family historians would inevitably produce material useful for the expert on heredity. Czellitzer, one of the few researchers with hands-on experience in the medico-genealogical borderland, knew well that research in this field required a new kind of genealogical sources, not just the intensified collection of existing ones. The help he needed had to come from state bureaucracy, not from amateur genealogists.

Nevertheless, Czellitzer’s ideas and practices were still shaped by his roots as a family historian. This became manifest in his family register scheme, which clearly implied the hope to turn all citizens into part-time genealogists. It was also apparent in the design of his kinship chart and family card, which were conceived as pragmatic tools for genealogical data arrangement, but still embodied the ideal of the ramified pedigree. Czellitzer’s devotion to genealogy was driven both by the passion for uncovering his own familial identity and the aim to analyze principles of heredity. This hybrid concept is best illustrated by the way he used his own family history to demonstrate the application of the kinship chart. Czellitzer had spent years gathering first- and second-hand information about the physical characters and the talents of his

⁸ Arthur Czellitzer, “Die Berliner städtischen Familienstammbücher und ihre Ausgestaltung für die Zwecke der Vererbungsforschung und der sozialen Hygiene,” *Medizinische Reform* 19 (1911): 218–222.

⁹ Anonymous, “Gesellschaft für soziale Medizin, Hygiene und Medizinalstatistik,” *Medizinische Reform* 19 (1911): 267.

relatives. For his charts on “body size” and “musical talent,” he only distinguished three grades of these qualities, marked by darker or lighter symbols. The resulting pedigrees were no analytical diagrams; they were genealogical family portraits showing that musicality or rangy stature was running in certain branches of the family.¹⁰

4. Jewish Family Research in the Service of the Jewish “Race”

For Czellitzer, genealogy was not simply about spotting individual – psychological or somatic – “traits” but about tracing the character of collectives. In a lecture given for the Berlin *Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* (Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) in 1910, he emphasized that family research offered a view on the “entire habitus, the human type in its totality” – not only of individuals and families, but also of larger kinship groups and ultimately of the “races” they formed.¹¹ It was therefore no complete reorientation when Czellitzer shifted his focus on Jewish family research after the First World War. The *Gesellschaft für jüdische Familienforschung* (Society for Jewish Family Research) that he founded in 1924 primarily pursued the goal of promoting pride in Jewish identity and traditions. However, the *Society* was also committed to the promotion of genetic knowledge and eugenics, at least in the eyes of its chairman.¹² Czellitzer recommended that all members create the kind of family files he had compiled for decades, comprising data on anthropometric measurements, physiological properties, professional performance, and psychological abnormalities for as many relatives as possible.¹³ The implicit idea of using such material for genetic studies left no visible traces in the *Society*’s agenda, but Czellitzer’s eugenic interests certainly did. The question that was most decisive for his own thinking concerned the fertility of the Jewish population in Germany. Czellitzer was convinced that Jewry was a “race” and that interreligious marriages were a threat to the

¹⁰ Czellitzer, “Sipschaftstafeln,” 577.

¹¹ Arthur Czellitzer, “Methoden der Familienforschung,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 41 (1909): 181–189, here 182.

¹² Veronika Lipphardt, *Biologie der Juden: Jüdische Wissenschaftler über “Rasse” und Vererbung, 1900–1935* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 208.

¹³ Arthur Czellitzer, “Methoden der jüdischen Familienforschung,” *Jüdische Familienforschung* 1, no. 2 (1925): 38–41, here 40.

preservation of this race. He was even more concerned about the declining fertility rate of the Jewish population, although statistics he compiled in the 1920s showed that Jewish families in Berlin produced still more offspring than the Protestant majority.¹⁴ The Jewish religion was, after all, built on norms that valued the preservation of the family as one of the highest goods. For Czellitzer, doing genealogy was therefore nothing else than the perpetuation of ancient Jewish principles which did not only demand marital fertility to continue age-old lineages but also eugenic measures to safeguard the Jewish people from the spread of “hereditary diseases.”

Genealogical consciousness was at the heart of Jewish identity, and eugenic rules were first formulated in ancient Jewish law – this was the message Czellitzer sent in the 1934 issue of the *Society's* journal.¹⁵ The eugenic measures introduced by “our government,” thus, were “a return to the ideals of our forefathers.” This statement can be read either as a defiant assertion of Jewish culture or as a tragic declaration of allegiance to a regime that would eventually kill him. It was, in any case, a legitimate claim in so far as it reflected Czellitzer’s longstanding commitment to the eugenic cause.

¹⁴ Arthur Czellitzer, “Mischehen in Berlin,” *Jüdische Familienforschung* 4, no. 16 (1928): 82–92.

¹⁵ Arthur Czellitzer, “Eugenik und Judentum,” *Jüdische Familienforschung* 10, no. 35 (1934): 574–581.