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Joan Gluckauf Haahr, JEWS-Facebook group, December 21, 2018: "My parents sailed from Amsterdam to New York on May 20, 1937, one [sic] of six passengers (all refugees) aboard the Belgian freighter 'Mercier'. My father, obviously enjoying the voyage." Joan Gluckauf Haahr, *Prisoners of Memory: A Jewish Family from Nazi Germany* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Full Court Press, 2021), photo gallery (not paginated).

“Israel am Meere”: The Sea Voyage as a Place and Time for Questions about Jewish Identity

by Joachim Schlör

Abstract

For Jews in Germany, the period following the Nazis’ rise to power in January 1933 was a period of decision-making on many levels: How should they respond to the persecution? If they decided to emigrate, many more decisions had to be made: How does one leave a country, and where should one go? A key moment in the process and in the cultural practice of emigration is the beginning of the sea voyage – when the need for departure and the hope for a new arrival jointly create a period of liminality. Looking at reports from sea voyages of exploration and emigration from the 1930s, this contribution discusses the question whether, and in what ways, such reflections can be read in the context of religious experiences and in the search for Jewish identities in times of turmoil.

1 Introduction

For quite a number of years now, David Jünger, Björn Siegel and the author of this contribution have discussed the idea to put together an anthology of texts – memoirs, diaries, letters, newspaper reports – about the sea voyages of German-Jewish emigrants of the 1930s and 1940s on their route to new destinations. All three of us have published contributions to the history and the meaning of this particular moment in place and time, an experience that was shared by many and, at the same time, very individual.¹ Our common assump-

¹ Joachim Schlör, “Solange wir auf dem Schiff waren, hatten wir ein Zuhause’: Reisen als kulturelle Praxis im Migrationsprozess jüdischer Auswanderer,” *Voyage: Jahrbuch für Reise- und Tourismusforschung* 10 [Mobilitäten!] (2014): 226–246; Joachim Schlör, “Reflexionen an Bord: Die Schiffsreise als Ort und Zeit im Dazwischen,” *Jahrbuch für Exilforschung* 35 [Passagen des Exils, ed. Burcu Dogramaci and Elizabeth Otto] (2017): 54–68; Joachim Schlör, “Die Schiffs-

tion is that such texts provide an opportunity to discuss central questions of Jewish identity in modern times, and that the period between departure and arrival has often been used as an opportunity for reflection. The liminal phase, to use a notion coined by Arnold van Gennep and further developed by Victor Turner,² between the departure from the “alte Heimat” and the arrival in a “neue Heimat” was visualized in 1938 by Fritz Freudenheim, in a drawing that depicts his family’s emigration from Berlin to Montevideo.³ Often based on personal documents, this research has contributed to the development of Jewish maritime studies.⁴ In the context of this special issue on *Jewish History and Culture in Maritime Perspective(s)*, I will try to work out the importance of the moment of confrontation between Jewish travellers – mostly, but not only, emigrants – and the media of travel, the ship and the sea, in more detail. Moreover, I will address the question whether there is a specific Jewish religious experience that informs documents such as the following excerpt from an article by Robert Weltsch in *Jüdische Rundschau* (1934) and places them in a wider context of the experience of the sea and the sea voyage as a trigger for debates about Jewish identities and as a catalyst for the making of decisions in times of turmoil.

The farther the ship gets from the shore of Europe, the further we distance ourselves from the emotional turmoil in which a Jew in Europe now lives. [...] Everyone on the ship feels something of it. Many descriptions of trips to Palestine are known

reise als Denkraum: Quellen zur deutsch-jüdischen Emigration zwischen dem Abschied von Europa und der Ankunft in Palästina,” in *Agenten, Akteure, Abenteuer: Beiträge zur Ausstellung ‘Europa und das Meer’ am Deutschen Historischen Museum Berlin*, eds. Jürgen and Martina Elvert (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 2018), 307–314; David Jünger, “An Bord des Lebens: Die Schifffspassage deutscher Juden nach Palästina 1933 bis 1938 als Übergangserfahrung zwischen Raum und Zeit,” *Mobile Culture Studies: The Journal* 1 (2015): 147–163; Björn Siegel, “Die Gerusalemme und Tel Aviv: Zwei Schiffe für Palästina,” in *Das Schiff als Thema der Moderne: Schiff und Zeit – Panorama Maritime*, Beiheft 1 der DGSM, eds. Maike Priesterjahn and DGSM (Bonn: Köllen Druck+Verlag, 2020), 155–176.

² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1961); Victor W. Turner, “Liminalität und Communitas,” in *Ritualtheorien: ein einführendes Handbuch*, eds. Andrea Belliger and David Krieger (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 251–264.

³ Fritz Freudenheim, *Von der alten Heimat zu der neuen Heimat*, c. 1938. © Jüdisches Museum Berlin, courtesy of Irene Freudenheim.

⁴ Raphael Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); David Cesarani, ed., *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550–1950* (Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies) (London: Routledge, 2002); Kobi Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism’s Maritime Revolution: The Yishuv’s Hold on the Land of Israel’s Sea and Shores, 1917–1948* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).

from recent years, impressions that always begin with a description of the ship trip. [...] There is something gripping about this community of traveling Jews from all over the world, who are striving for one goal. There are always a few originals and oddballs among them, as well as strange destinies. One often finds more of the essence of the Jewish question in such lively individual fates than in many a scholarly discussion.⁵

Weltsch, who does not speak in the first person, places himself within the larger community of European Jewry that shares the memory of a difficult past – “The fate of the Jews has been recognized as one of the great world-historical tragedies of the last two millennia” – and faces an insecure future – “Now, in a particularly peculiar way, Judaism is also at a crossroads.”⁶ This situation, for him, is symbolized both by the voyage he reports from, a trip across the Mediterranean to Alexandria and finally Jaffa (and Tel Aviv), and by the ship, the “Marietta Pacha”, that carries a group of very diverse travellers in search of their roots and *en route* to a promising re-connection with the land of Israel. Thus, he raises essential questions, which this article will also address: “Where are we standing? Where are we headed? What eternal values do we recognize?”⁷

2 Confronting the Sea as a Part of God’s Creation

In the first part of my contribution, I will try to place Robert Weltsch’s description of the sea voyage in a larger context of reflections about the “crossroads” between tradition, assimilation and the challenge of Zionism by discussing three texts (chosen from the growing collection for our planned anthology) by Felix Aber, Nathan Birnbaum and Isaak Rülff. In his article, “Das

⁵ “Je weiter sich das Schiff von der Küste Europas entfernt, um so mehr gewinnen wir Abstand von dem Aufruhr der Gefühle, in welchem ein Jude in Europa jetzt lebt. [...] Jeder auf dem Schiff fühlt etwas davon. Man kennt aus den letzten Jahren viele Beschreibungen von Palästinareisen, Impressionen, die stets mit der Schilderung der Schiffsreise beginnen. [...] Diese Gemeinschaft von reisenden Juden aus aller Herren Länder, die einem Ziel zustreben, hat etwas Packendes. Immer sind ein paar Originale und Sonderlinge darunter, immer auch seltsame Schicksale. Man findet in solchen lebendigen Einzelschicksalen oft mehr vom Wesen der jüdischen Frage als in so mancher gelehrten Erörterung.” Robert Weltsch, “Palästina 1934: Der erste Bericht unseres Schriftleiters Dr. Robert Weltsch,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, March 28, 1934, 3. [All translations are mine, JS].

⁶ Weltsch, “Palästina 1934,” 3.

⁷ Weltsch, “Palästina 1934,” 3.

Erlebnis des Meeres in der Bibel”, Rabbi Dr. Felix Aber (1895 Breslau, today Wrocław, Poland–1964 New York) describes his experiences on board the ship *Bremen*⁸ and tries to understand the larger phenomenon that – so I would try to argue – informs the particular political situation:

One of the deepest impressions I had during the tour of the giant ship of North German Lloyd, the ‘Bremen’, was the magnificent first-class library hall. It is paneled with fine wood. The individual panels are covered with graphic characters of different peoples and cultures. An orchestra of folk of nations’ voices resounds for the celebration of the element to which the ‘Bremen’ is entrusted, for the praise of the sea. Valuable material has been brought together in this room, which awaits processing – initially also translation – for a work that, to my knowledge, does not yet exist, a chronicle of the ways in which the individual people and regions experienced the sea.⁹

During his own maritime experiences, Aber tries, in a very eclectic way, to trace the occurrence and experience of the sea in the biblical narrative (“dem Erlebnis des Meeres in der Bibel nachzugehen und seine Eigenart zu kennzeichnen”). In opposition to modern forms of adoration or sublimation, human beings in antiquity regarded nature in two basically different ways: The Greeks saw it as a given background for human activity, while the Jews regarded it as the theatre of God’s work in creation.

In addition to these religious aspects of the sea and the sea voyage, Aber also argues that “not only the outer events of the world, but also the inner life of the soul is reflected in the experience of the sea. The expanse of the sea is

⁸ Dr. Felix Aber finished school and University in Breslau, served in the German Army 1914–1918, received his PhD in 1922 and his rabbinical exam in 1923. From 1924 to 1938 he served as rabbi and head of the religious school in Bremen. He emigrated to Canada in 1938 and to the US in 1939 where he served as a rabbi in different congregations in New Jersey and the State of New York.

⁹ “Mit den tiefsten Eindruck beim Rundgang durch das Riesenschiff des Norddeutschen Lloyds, die ‘Bremen’, hat in mir der herrliche Bibliothekssaal der ersten Klasse hinterlassen. Er ist mit edlem Holze getäfelt. Die einzelnen Tafeln sind mit den Schriftzeichen verschiedener Völker und Kulturen bedeckt. Ein Orchester von Völkerstimmen erklingt zum Preis des Elementes, dem die ‘Bremen’ anvertraut ist, zum Preis des Meeres. In diesem Raum ist wertvolles Material zusammengetragen, das der Bearbeitung – zunächst auch noch der Übersetzung – harret, für ein Werk, das meines Wissens noch nicht existiert, und das Kunde geben müßte, wie die einzelnen Völker und Zonen das Meer erlebten.” Rabbiner Dr. Felix Aber, “Das Erlebnis des Meeres in der Bibel,” *Jahrbuch für die jüdischen Gemeinden Schleswig-Holsteins und der Hansestädte und der Landesgemeinde Oldenburg* 2: 5691 (1930/1931): 118–124.

the sublime parable of boundless suffering”.¹⁰ Aber also points to the important connection between the technological development that made it possible for human beings to cross the sea and the older fears and anxieties still bound in the narrative:

The experience of the sea has lost nothing of its gigantic magnitude since it was celebrated in the Song of the Red Sea, has lost nothing of its gigantic size, and even today, high at sea, the old psalmist’s words resound in many a human breast:

O LORD, how manifold are your works! / In wisdom have you made them all; [the earth is full of your creatures] / Here is the sea, great and wide / which teems with creatures innumerable / living things both small and great. There go the ships / [and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it]. (Psalm 104: 24, 25.)¹¹

This “connection” – for want of a better word – has already been expressed in a text written in January 1923 by Nathan Birnbaum (1864 Wien–1937 Schevevningen): “Am Meere. Gedanken und Erinnerungen”.¹² I came upon this article in Caspar Battagay’s book “Geschichte der Möglichkeit. Utopie, Diaspora und die ‘jüdische Frage’”¹³ – and that is indeed the context I am interested in here. Birnbaum writes about two experiences on board the ship:

Everything else was just introduction. Only now are we heading out into the Atlantic Ocean. We drove north to west. Just yesterday we stopped in the port of a well-known Scandinavian city. We stayed on the ship. But two people from the city came to us: the Rav and the Parness.¹⁴

This encounter with a small Jewish community made up mostly of refugees from Eastern Europe reminds him of an earlier voyage during which he felt completely alone in the world,

¹⁰ Aber, “Das Erlebnis,” 123.

¹¹ “[D]as Erlebnis des Meeres hat, seit es im Liede am Schilfmeer gefeiert wurde, von seiner gigantischen Größe nichts eingebüßt, und noch heute erklingt hoch auf See das alte Psalmistenwort in mancher Menschenbrust: ‘Wie groß sind Deine Werke, o Gott / Sie alle hast Du in Weisheit geschaffen! / Voll ist die Erde Deines Besitzes / Hier das große und weite Meer / Wo die Schiffe ihres Weges ziehen!’” Aber, “Das Erlebnis,” 124.

¹² Nathan Birnbaum, “Am Meere: Gedanken und Erinnerungen,” *Der Israelit*, January 4, 1923, 8.

¹³ Caspar Battagay, *Geschichte der Möglichkeit: Utopie, Diaspora und die ‘jüdische Frage’* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018), 113–154.

¹⁴ “Alles Übrige war nur Einleitung. Erst jetzt steuern wir in den Atlantischen Ozean hinaus. Wir fuhren über Norden gegen Westen. Noch gestern hielten wir im Hafen einer bekannten skandinavischen Stadt. Wir blieben auf dem Schiffe. Aber zwei Leute aus der Stadt kamen zu uns: Der Raw und der Parneß.” Birnbaum, “Am Meere,” 8.

there was wonderful sea air and my soul could not breathe. There was moonlight on the floods, and my soul saw not. After all, it wasn't such an easy thing: the ship dances on the sea, far, far from all coasts, the depths danced beneath it ...¹⁵

He describes this as a moment when longing turned into anxiety. After a while, the feelings subside, and he retires to his cabin, but the memory stays on. During his second journey, things have changed: "today my soul is already drinking God's air, God's light, God's warmth, longing to draw ever closer to him ..."¹⁶ While at the first occasion he was scared, because he had taken an unprepared look into "God's workshop", he is now calmer and feels mostly reverence. "My soul was not accustomed to his measure. Today I am no longer afraid of him, who after all is also the father." Birnbaum compares his former existence, before revelation, to a prison and to a busy city street: "The soul had been forgotten altogether. It was lying somewhere in the mud of the street." Now he feels peace and is able to enjoy the creation.

Oh sea, sea! Years after years one has lived on the mainland, in the big city, running around like a madman among thousands of other madmen and being pushed around, one has fought with all kinds of evil spirits, against foreign violence and against one's own bad thoughts, one has soiled oneself from top to bottom and in the dizziness has lost one's own soul, trampled on it with one's own feet and let the feet of others tread on it ... And suddenly – a few steps across the pier: the mainland has sunk! Another world! No running, no pushing, no dirt, no war with yourself and others. And you have your soul again. [...] The Sabbath of the Torah and the Sabbath of the sea – both a single Sabbath of the Lord.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Da war wunderbare Seeluft, und meine Seele konnte nicht atmen. Da war Mondlicht auf den Fluten, und meine Seele sah nicht. Schließlich wars ja keine so einfache Sache: das Schiff tanzt auf dem Meere, weit, weit von allen Küsten, unter ihm tanzten die Tiefen ..." Birnbaum, "Am Meere," 8.

¹⁶ Birnbaum, "Am Meere," 8.

¹⁷ "Oh Meer, Meer! Jahre über Jahre hat man auf dem Festland gelebt, in der großen Stadt, ist wie ein Wahnsinniger unter tausend anderen Wahnsinnigen herumgerannt und herumgestoßen worden, hat man mit allerlei bösen Geistern gekämpft, gegen fremde Gewalt und gegen eigene schlechte Gedanken, hat man sich von oben bis unten beschmutzt und hat in dem Taumel die eigene Seele verloren, mit eigenen Füßen sie getreten und von fremden Füßen sie treten lassen ... Und plötzlich – einige Schritte über den Schiffsteg: Das Festland versunken! Eine andere Welt! Kein Rennen, kein Stoßen, kein Schmutz, kein Krieg mit sich und Anderen. Und man hat die Seele wieder. [...] Der Sabbat der Thora und der Sabbat des Meeres – beide ein einziger Sabbat des Herrn." Birnbaum, "Am Meere," 8.

One step further back in time. In April 1901, Isaak Rülff published “eine Pessach-Betrachtung” in the Zionist paper *Die Welt*: “Israel am Meere.” Rülff (1831 Rauschholzhausen, Hessen–1902 Bonn) was a German rabbi and a Jewish politician, most well-known for his work in support for the Jewish community in Memel, for Russian Jews and Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe but also for his early support of Chibbat Zion and the Zionist movement. In his article, he plays with an old Jewish saying that a man’s character can be determined by his relation to “Beutel, Becher, Zorn und Spiel” – money, drink, wrath, and play – and adds a fifth criterion, man’s ability to make decisions in critical situations.¹⁸ His example is, logically, the story of Pessach, Israel’s exodus from Egypt:

The children of Israel had left Egypt and were celebrating their first Passover [...]. On the seventh and last day of this first Passover feast they had arrived at the sea shore in order to gain access to the other shore from here.¹⁹

Rülff then goes on to compare the different attitudes among those who have arrived at the shore and know that their persecutors are just behind them – 1) there is no way out, let us jump into the sea; 2) let us go back to Egypt; 3) let us try to fight them; and 4) let us try to negotiate – with the attitudes of the Jews of his day towards Zionism:

Modern Zionism has gripped the hearts of all Jews very powerfully and stirred them right down to their innermost life. [...] Again, the fellow believers and people stand as it were on the edge and beach of the sea and look longingly across to the Holy Land, which for the large masses of the oppressed and persecuted, as well as for everyone who feels insecure and scary in his home felt, could offer a friendly and sentimental refuge, yes, for the entire Jewish nation, a firm footing, a strong rear guard, if it could be obtained.²⁰

¹⁸ Isaak Rülff, “Israel am Meere: eine Pessach-Betrachtung,” *Die Welt* 5, no. 14 (1901): 4–5.

¹⁹ “Die Kinder Israels waren aus Ägypten gezogen und feierten ihr erstes Pessach-Fest [...]. Am siebenten und letzten Tage dieses ersten Pessach-Festes waren sie am Meeresstrande angelangt.” Rülff, “Israel am Meere,” 4.

²⁰ “Der neuzeitliche Zionismus hat die Herzen aller Juden gar mächtig ergriffen und bis in das innerste Leben hinein auferührt. [...] Wieder stehen die Glaubens- und Volksgenossen gleichsam am Rande und Strande des Meeres und schauen sehnsüchtigen Auges hinüber nach dem Heiligen Lande, das für die grossen Massen der Gedrückten und Verfolgten, sowie für einen jeden, der sich in seiner Heimstätte unsicher und unheimlich fühlt, eine freundliche und rührselige Zuflucht, ja für die gesamte jüdische Nation einen festen Halt, einen kräftigen Rückenschutz bieten könnte, wenn es zu erlangen wäre.” Rülff, “Israel am Meere,” 5.

Rülf discusses the four options of choice: 1) complete assimilation in the “sea of peoples” (“im Völkermeere”); 2) a return to slavery and dependence; 3) fight against antisemitism and for Jewish pride; and 4) reduce our Judaism to a private faith and give up on the national idea. He, very obviously, argues for the national option, for a combination of religious and national pride. However, he chooses his words carefully: “Remember who you are and what you are and have been!” It is the situation at the shore, at the threshold between land and sea,²¹ that evokes and even demands this serious and deep self-reflection. Despite their differences in approach and attitude, all three authors regard the confrontation between the human body and spirit on the one hand and the sea on the other as a moment to make decisions.

3 Confronting Jewish Identities during the Sea Voyage

I will now discuss examples from the cultural history of the sea voyage in the process of emigration and analyze further texts in order to demonstrate the specific role of the ship beyond the religious realm. Even before 1933, Felix Aber was very active in his exploration of the ship and its quality as a means not just of transport. The articles – “Zur ersten Ausreise der ‘Bremen’. Vorbildliche Einrichtungen für jüdische Reisende”²²; “Jüdische Einrichtungen auf deutschen Schnelldampfern. Zwei Tage auf den Dampfern ‘Bremen’ und ‘Europa’”²³; “Reisebriefe an das ‘Israelitische Familienblatt’. Zwischen zwei Schnelldampfern in New York”²⁴ and “25 Jahre koschere Küchen auf den Dampfern des Norddeutschen Lloyd”²⁵ – need to be read in the context of the last period of Eastern European-Jewish transmigration from Russia through a huge number of “points of passage” across the European con-

²¹ For the notion of the “threshold” in Jewish cultural practice, see Joachim Schlör, “Faith in Residence: Jewish Spatial Practice in the Urban Context,” in *Space and Spatiality in German-Jewish History*, eds. Simone Lässig and Mirjam Rürup (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 231–245.

²² Felix Aber, “Zur ersten Ausreise der ‘Bremen’. Vorbildliche Einrichtungen für jüdische Reisende”, *Israelitisches Familienblatt* [henceforth IF], July 25, 1929, 16.

²³ Felix Aber, “Jüdische Einrichtungen auf deutschen Schnelldampfern. Zwei Tage auf den Dampfern ‘Bremen’ und ‘Europa,’” *IF*, April 10, 1930, 1–2.

²⁴ Felix Aber, “Reisebriefe an das ‘Israelitische Familienblatt’. Zwischen zwei Schnelldampfern in New York”, *IF*, August 25, 1932, 10.

²⁵ Felix Aber, “25 Jahre koschere Küchen auf den Dampfern des Norddeutschen Lloyd”, *Israelit*, September 29, 1932, 18.

minent.²⁶ Rabbis and community leaders in port cities, such as Aber in Bremen or Rülff in Memel, witnessed the large waves of transmigrants from the East on their way to the United States, Australia, South America or South Africa and helped to create aid organizations, such as the *Jüdischer Hilfsverein* (Jewish Aid Association), to stir them along.

In a sense, the technological development in transatlantic and transnational seafaring created a framework for the function of the ship as a means, a tool, in the emigration process. The port cities of departure and arrival, together with the established network of aid organizations, formed the logistic and even consumer-oriented infrastructure that served the needs of hundreds of thousands of emigrants. “Jüdische Einrichtungen” such as kosher kitchens or prayer rooms, as described by Aber, catered to the needs of the observant travellers. In more peaceful times, all these elements could be described in nearly pastoral terms. After 1933, however, with the growing need for Jews in Germany to seek refuge elsewhere, a time had come to make decisions and rethink Jewish identities. David Jünger, in his *Jahre der Ungewissheit. Emigrationspläne deutscher Juden 1933–1938*, has shown in detail how decisions concerning emigration were made.²⁷ Train stations, ports and ships became central places, theatres of departure in an “emotional geography”.²⁸ To those who made the decision to travel further away, to Palestine, the United States, South America, South Africa or Australia, it was the ship, and everything connected to it, that symbolized the way out.²⁹ Of course, documents from and about the sea voyage offer a whole variety of aspects worth consideration; I will concentrate on thoughts and reflections on Jewish identity, or rather identities.

Alfred Kupferberg led a group of emigrants and travellers – those who still intended to return to Germany – from Frankfurt to Haifa in Palestine,

²⁶ Tobias Brinkmann, ed., *Points of Passage: Jewish Transmigrants from Eastern Europe in Scandinavia, Germany and Britain 1880–1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

²⁷ Cf. David Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit: Emigrationspläne deutscher Juden 1933–1938* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

²⁸ Joachim Schlör, “‘Ach, man läßt mich durch, es ist gelungen.’ Die Überschreitung der deutschen Grenze in Emigrationsberichten”, in *Grenze als Erfahrung und Diskurs: Literatur- und geschichtswissenschaftliche Perspektivierungen*, eds. Hermann Gätje and Sikander Singh (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2017), 217–227.

²⁹ Cf. Marion Kaplan, *Hitler’s Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

and he reported on his experience in a lead article for the *Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt* on March 1, 1934. His first words capture the tense atmosphere of a journey that, on the surface, “feels” like any journey in normal times, but there is something else: “a certain tension, an uneasy nervousness, the feeling of being faced with uncertain, perhaps exhilarating, perhaps disappointing experiences”.³⁰ Moreover, during his train ride to the Riviera coast, he stated that the fact that they were aware of the seriousness of the decision, even before their arrival in the “Land of the Jews”, made them

from tourists, emigrants, [from] emigrants – into Jews. It was a piece of Jewish destiny, a very tiny but no less symbolic, indeed poignant part of the fundamental destiny, so to speak, of this remarkable community of fourteen million people ...³¹

On the ship Kupferberg notes, in a hopeful mood, that the existing and visible differences between 3rd class passengers from “Berlin, Frankfurt and Breslau” and those from “Minsk, Pinsk and Mohilew” already begin to diminish:

[It] is not only opinions and principles that the passengers from Eastern and Western Europe throw overboard the ‘Aquitania’ with astonishing speed; moreover, they seek to penetrate with common zeal into the rudiments of the Hebrew language.

The 2nd or Tourist Class is marked by a western bourgeoisie, the “Tausendpfünder” [those who have been granted a visa by the British Mandate authorities on the grounds of having the sum of 1,000 Palestinian pounds at their disposal to bring along and invest]. Still, they don’t have the air of “capitalists”, instead appearing modest, restrained, apprehensive even, and gather around

³⁰ Alfred Kupferberg, “Deutsche Juden im jüdischen Land: Bericht unseres Redaktionsmitgliedes von der Palästinareise des ‘Israelitischen Familienblattes.’” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, March 1, 1934, 9.

³¹ Kupferberg, “Deutsche Juden,” 9 [I quote the German version in more detail]: “Alle aber waren [...] von der Einmaligkeit der Situation erfüllt, in der sie sich befanden. Sie hatten sich, aus welchen Gründen immer, entschlossen, das Leben dort in der alten Heimat, in der ihre Gefühle und Gedanken in guten und schweren Zeiten eingewurzelt waren, abzubrechen, um ein neues Leben in einem Lande zu beginnen, von dem sie vieles erhofften, das sie in vielem fürchten, und das ihnen in fast jedem Betracht unbekannt ist. Sie wissen es; und daß sie sich des ganzen Ernstes der Entscheidung bewußt waren, das machte sie, schon vor der Ankunft im ‘Land der Juden’, aus Touristen, Auswanderern, Emigranten – zu Juden. Es war ein Stück jüdisches Schicksal, ein ganz winziger, darum aber nicht minder symbolhafter, ja ergreifender Ausschnitt aus dem sozusagen grundsätzlichen Geschick dieser merkwürdigen Gemeinschaft von vierzehn Millionen Menschen, das sich mir an jenem Nachmittag enthüllte, während der Zug unentwegt am Südhang der Alpen, durch die norditalienische Ebene, auf die Riviera-küste zurollte.”

a group of leading Jewish personalities such as Kurt Blumenfeld and Rabbi Joachim Prinz, whose presence on board lends an atmosphere of serenity and importance to the occasion.

While many articles focus on practical advice for the organization of such a voyage³² or discuss the changing political circumstances, particularly in British Mandate Palestine, a report by Eva Reichmann-Jungmann on her “Palästinafahrt” aboard the *Gerusalemme* goes deeper and discloses more personal elements of the emotional geography:

Even during these first few days, when it is only slowly forming, when people get together and get to know each other, and in the violently rushing experience of the voyage, natural beauty and unfamiliar on-board operations, it is only with difficulty that you feel your way towards your own feelings, even in this confusing abundance of impressions the certainty emerges that this will not be a herd journey with mass consumption of things that one must have seen, but that the community journey here has a meaning that it otherwise lacks: Jewish people are getting ready together for an experience that affects them all together. [Everyone’s desires] come together in one hope. May the country prepare a place for the great love that is brought to it to develop.³³

Another article published in the *Jüdische Rundschau* in 1932 pointed out that such trips should be used much more intensely to promote the Zionist idea of a return. There is a “receptive mass of Palestinian tourists, who are readily available simply because of the forced concentration on the ship” – why are they not better prepared for their arrival?³⁴ The ship itself appears as a

³² Cf., for example, Heinz Marcuse, “Wege nach Erez Israel: Ratschläge für Palästinareisen,” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, February 20, 1936, 15.

³³ “Schon in diesen ersten Tagen, in denen sie sich erst langsam formiert, in denen sich die Menschen zusammenfinden und kennenlernen, und man sich in dem gewaltsam anstürmenden Erleben von Schiffsreise, Naturschönheiten und ungewohntem Bordbetrieb nur mühsam zu seinen eigenen Gefühlen herantastet, schon in dieser verwirrenden Fülle der Eindrücke drängt sich die Gewissheit vor, dass dies keine Herdenreise sein wird mit Massenkonsum von Dingen, die man gesehen haben muss, sondern dass hier die Gemeinschaftsfahrt einen Sinn erhält, der ihr sonst fehlt: jüdische Menschen machen sich gemeinsam bereit für ein Erlebnis, das sie alle gemeinsam betrifft. [Die Wünsche aller Einzelnen] fügen sich zusammen in der einen Hoffnung. Das Land möge der grossen Liebe, die man ihm bringt, eine Stätte der Entfaltung bereiten.” Eva Reichmann-Jungmann, “Palästinafahrt,” *C.-V.-Zeitung*, November 11, 1937, 17.

³⁴ Heinrich Woznianski, “Werbung auf Reisen: Zur A.-C.-Sitzung,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, July 26, 1932, 282. See also N.N., “Zum Volke finden! Vor Triest an Bord der ‘Gerusalemme’, Mitte April 1935,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, April 30, 1935, 2.

“schwimmendes Judenland” [a floating Land of the Jews], which fulfilled its function by – and on – arrival. This has been shown very elegantly in a text by Arthur Eloesser (1870 Berlin–1938 Berlin):

Such memories, such hopes are certainly carried quite unconsciously and unconcernedly by our ship, which seems very unsuitable for any pilgrimage, equipped with all necessary and unnecessary travel comfort, still burdened with all class differences and prejudices of western civilization, according to its rank also obliged to an educational trip that put the passengers ashore in Athens, Constantinople, Rhodes and exposed them to the instructions of the guides, who babbled in German, English and French. Until we reach the Palestinian coast and Haifa with an uncertain educational gain and with a certain loss of time of almost three days. It is the actual experience for which we have mentally prepared ourselves, from which we expect an answer to our expectation and a solution to our tension.³⁵

One of the most impressive reports was written by Gerson Stern (1874 Holzminden–1956 Jerusalem). He and his wife, on October 25, 1935, went on board the *Tel-Aviv* – the new flagship of Arnold Bernstein’s Palestine Shipping Co.³⁶ – in Trieste:

We look at each other: our hands find each other. We sail on a Jewish ship to the Jewish land. Outside the Bora howls, but here inside & inside we are safe. The Bora may howl here & there and wherever. We stand in our room on Jewish ground & our goal is before us. Our goal is so clear & the way mapped out. See only him,

³⁵ “Solche Erinnerungen, solche Hoffnungen trägt gewiß recht unbewußt und unbekümmert unser Schiff, das für alle Pilgerfahrt sehr ungeeignet scheint, ausgerüstet mit allem nötigen und unnötigen Reisekomfort, noch beladen mit allen Klassenunterschieden und Vorurteilen westlicher Zivilisation, nach seinem Range auch verpflichtet zu einer Bildungsfahrt, die die Passagiere in Athen, Konstantinopel, Rhodos an Land setzt und den Belehrungen der deutsch, englisch, französisch plappernden Führer aussetzt. Bis wir mit einem ungewissen Bildungsgewinn und mit einem gewissen Zeitverlust von fast drei Tagen die palästinensische Küste und Haifa erreichen. Es ist das eigentliche Erlebnis, auf das wir uns seelisch vorbereitet haben, von dem wir auf unsere Erwartung eine Antwort, auf unsere Spannung eine Lösung erwarten.” Arthur Eloesser, *Palästina-Reise 1934. Mit vier Abbildungen und einem Nachwort v. Horst Olbrich* (Berlin: Verlag Horst Olbrich, 2019), 3 [manuscript].

³⁶ Cf. Joachim Schlör, *Endlich im Gelobten Land? Deutsche Juden unterwegs in eine neue Heimat* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2003), 76–77; Björn Siegel, “Die Jungfernfahrt der ‘Tel Aviv’ nach Palästina im Jahre 1935: Eine ‘Besinnliche Fahrt ins Land der Juden’?,” in *Ihre Wege sind liebevolle Wege und all ihre Pfade Frieden* (Sprüche 3,17): *Die Neunte Joseph Carlebach-Konferenz. Wege Joseph Carlebachs. Universale Bildung, gelebtes Judentum, Opfergang*, eds. Miriam Gillis-Carlebach and Barbara Vogel (München a.o.: Publications of the Joseph Carlebach-Institute, 2014), 106–125.

walk only him. The present is calling. The sea, the slightly overcast sky, the gliding ship that carries you, the world lies beyond those islands. You don't know anything about her. One is only connected to the sea and the sky, from which the light trickles down. You are so free, so detached.³⁷

He regards his fellow travellers, as Friedrich Voit comments, as “a living mirror of the diverse Jewish community united by a common history that keeps them in the present while promising a future to be explored.”³⁸ Stern writes:

You feel the differences, you see how everyone wears, how everyone wears differently. But something special happens, which manifests itself from the moment one enters the ship. Above what separates, which seems to me to be a special rhythm, stands something that unites.³⁹

Given the manifold social and cultural differences between the travellers, what could that uniting force be? “Die geistige Haltung. Verwurzelung im Judentum” [The mental attitude. Rootedness in Judaism], Willy Cohn suggests in an article for the *Israelitisches Nachrichtenblatt*, February 16, 1939. While Jews in Eastern Europe, he argues, were securely anchored in Judaism, German Jews only had very limited access to the true assets of their religion, they lack the security of the soul.

When all the various preparations required for emigration have been made, when all the papers needed for this have been obtained, then the moment comes when the emigrating Jew stands on board the ship and has to prepare himself for what is often a very long journey. After a certain time, the mood of farewell subsides, the new country is still a long way off, and many a person will then ask themselves

³⁷ “Wir schauen uns an: unsere Hände finden sich. Wir fahren auf einem jüdischen Schiff nach dem jüdischen Land. Draußen heult die Bora, aber hier drinnen & in uns sind wir geborgen. Die Bora mag heulen hier & dort und wo auch immer. Wir stehen in unserem Raum auf jüdischem Boden & unser Ziel liegt vor uns. Unser Ziel ist so klar & der Weg vorgezeichnet. Nur ihn sehn, nur ihn gehen. Die Gegenwart ruft. Die See, der leicht bewölkte Himmel, das dahin gleitende Schiff, das einen trägt, die Welt liegt hinter jenen Inseln. Man weiß nichts von ihr. Man ist nur verbunden mit dem Meer & dem Himmel, aus dem die Helle niederrieselt. Man ist so frei, so losgelöst.” Gerson Stern, diary, quoted in Friedrich Voit, *Gerson Stern: Zum Leben und Werk des jüdisch-deutschen Schriftstellers (1874–1956)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 154.

³⁸ Voit, *Gerson Stern*, 155.

³⁹ “Man fühlt die Unterschiede, man erkennt, wie jeder trägt, wie jeder anders trägt. Aber es geschieht ein Besonderes, das sich kundtat von dem Augenblick an, als man das Schiff betrat. Über dem Trennenden, das mir ein besonderer Rhythmus zu sein scheint, steht ein Einigendes.” Gerson Stern, diary [fn. 32], 155.

what intellectual tools of a general and Jewish kind they took with them apart from the modest removal goods. If he is a Jewish-conscious person, his soul, which has a capacity for memory of thousands of years, will involuntarily be forced to compare it with earlier migrations of our people.⁴⁰

In contrast, Cohn argues, they do have a kind of spiritual or at least intellectual luggage in terms of general education. How many libraries had to be given up in the emigration process! Now, the land of Israel offers them a return to Judaism and its culture: “Anyone who still has a little time, whose ship’s siren has not yet sounded for departure, can use the weeks and months that are left [...] to supplement his Jewish-style luggage.”⁴¹

This luggage was taken to places other than Palestine. Whereas “homecoming” is the central trope in most reports about sea voyages to Palestine, and often also to the United States, the destination of, for example, Shanghai apparently cannot contain the same promise. It rather symbolizes a foreseeable continuity of “Unterwegssein” – a Jewish experience, but at the same time a universal one, shared by migrants of our own days. The challenge of decision-making, as explained by David Jünger and Guy Miron in their studies of Jewish space and time in Nazi Germany,⁴² produced a specific cultural practice that found its most symbolic form in the sea voyage. During this period, none of the travellers could be certain to have made the right decision. Consequently, the authors quoted here were looking for guidance in religious traditions and experiences of the Jewish relationship to the sea.

⁴⁰ “Wenn alle die mannigfaltigen Vorbereitungen getroffen sind, die die Auswanderung erfordert, wenn alle Papiere beschafft sind, die dazu gebraucht werden, dann kommt der Augenblick, wo der auswandernde Jude an Bord des Schiffes steht und sich für eine oft sehr lange Reise einzurichten hat. Nach einer gewissen Zeit klingt dann die Abschiedsstimmung ab, das neue Land ist noch in weiter Ferne, und so mancher wird sich dann fragen, was er außer dem bescheidenen Umzugsgut an geistigem Rüstzeug allgemeiner und jüdischer Art mit hingenommen hat. Wenn er ein jüdisch-bewusster Mensch ist, so wird unwillkürlich seiner Seele, die ein Erinnerungsvermögen, von Jahrtausenden aufzuweisen hat, der Vergleich mit früheren Wanderungen unseres Volkes sich aufdrängen.” Willy Cohn, “Die geistige Haltung: Verwurzelung im Judentum,” *Israelitisches Nachrichtenblatt*, February 16, 1939, 1.

⁴¹ Cohn, “Die geistige Haltung,” 1.

⁴² Jünger (cf. Fn. 27); Guy Miron, “Lately, almost constantly, everything seems small to me”: The Lived Space of German Jews under the Nazi Regime’. *Jewish Social Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, Fall 2013, 121–149. Idem., “The Politics of Catastrophe Races On. I Wait.” *Waiting Time in the World of German Jews Under Nazi Rule*. *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 43:1 (2015), 45–76.