

## Chapter One: The Structure of the Jewish Community

### Religious, Social, Cultural and Economic Structures

From Moritz Spanier's<sup>1</sup> history of the Jewish community, it is clear that the Magdeburg Jewish community was highly organised and effectively financed, with a large allocation of funds to foundations providing every type of service to a variety of sectors of the community.<sup>2</sup> It catered for every aspect in the areas of religious, social, cultural and economic welfare, contributing to a richly diverse and well-organised community.

Spanier's detailed insight remains the most recent history of the community. There exists neither a comprehensive report nor a study into the workings of the community beyond 1923. What does exist, however, are two reports, similar in content, authored by the board of the reconstructed community immediately after the *Shoah*. The first is dated 22 January 1947<sup>3</sup> and the second dates from 1 March 1948.<sup>4</sup> Both reports provide useful data on the situation of the community when the Nazis took power in 1933.

A limited picture is also presented for the period up until the beginning of 1933 in the Jewish community's newsletter, the *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für*

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<sup>1</sup> Spanier, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 39–46.

<sup>3</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner detailing the destruction of the Jewish community of Magdeburg under Nazism, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, Archiv der Stiftung 'Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum', Berlin (CJA), pp. 238–253.

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence and report from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, to Director Fink, American Joint Distribution Committee, Berlin detailing the historical development of the Jewish community of Magdeburg and reporting on the post-war situation and future developmental aspirations of the community, 1 March 1948, *ibid.*, pp. 208–214.

*Magdeburg und Umgegend*.<sup>5</sup> Through these newsletters, we are provided with the weekly calendar of two of the congregations in Magdeburg: the *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg* and the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Ahduth'*. This publication also confirms the existence of a community *Mikvah* and of the mixed choir attached to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*.<sup>6</sup> Quite succinctly, the existence of both of these establishments, arguably, represents the religious pluralism and cultural diversity that existed in this small community.

The term 'Jewish community' has to be defined. For the purposes of this study the definition of the 'Jewish community' is such that it includes all persons of the Jewish faith, regardless of affiliation or national origin, and those defined as Jewish after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws on 15 September 1935.

The Jewish community in Magdeburg was not dissimilar to the majority of Jewish communities in Germany. It was not one homogenous body, but consisted of Jews who adhered to the traditional German-Jewish religious practice and observance, as well as those Jews who belonged to the Eastern European religious tradition. Whilst it can, arguably, be maintained that this community of Jews was, indeed, one grouping, religious observance and national origin did create a rigid divide in the community. However, in a number of aspects of social life there existed social intercourse between the two groups. According to the census figures of June 1933, the city counted 1,973 Jews,<sup>7</sup> of whom 748 or 37.9% were

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<sup>5</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, Archiv der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Magdeburg (ASGM), pp. 339–344. Copies of this weekly newsletter for the period 1925–1932 inclusive are to be found in the ASGM and copies for the period 26 March 1926 to 22 June 1928 inclusive are also to be found in the Periodicals Collection, File P-B453a, LBI NY.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>7</sup> Statistisches Reichsamt, *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs, Band 451, Volkszählung: die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reichs nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung 1933*,

immigrants.<sup>8</sup> Of this figure, 976 were male and 997 were female and they constituted 0.64% of the city's population.<sup>9</sup>

Three separate religious congregations co-existed: the *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg*, the *Betverein 'Ahawas Reim'*<sup>10</sup> and the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Achduth'*.<sup>11</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest that a third *Shtibl* existed.<sup>12</sup> The *Synagogen-Gemeinde*, under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi Dr Georg Wilde, was the largest congregation and was located at *Große Schulstraße 2c*. The *Betverein 'Ahawas Reim'* was located at *Blaubeilstraße 12* and, whilst it has not been possible to definitively provide the location of the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Achduth'*, it is known that one *Shtibl* was located at *Im Katzensprung*<sup>13</sup> and this may have been its address. It is also known that the Magdeburg branch of the *Zeiri Mizrachi* organisation possessed rooms known as the *Zeiri Mizrachi-Heim* at *Kleine Klosterstraße 1*.<sup>14</sup>

The vast majority of interviewees recalled and knew of the *Shtiblech*, but only two interviewees had ever visited one. They spoke of the vast difference in

*Heft 5, Die Glaubensjuden im Deutschen Reich*, Bestand R 3102, BAB, op. cit., pp. 15–33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> The population of Magdeburg in 1933 was 306,894. See Statistisches Amt der Stadt Magdeburg, *Festschrift anlässlich des fünfzigjährigen Bestehens des Statistischen Amtes der Stadt Magdeburg* Magdeburg: Trommer-Verlag, 1935, Collection 0.8, File 277, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem (YVA), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the extraordinary, urgent General Meeting for the liquidation of the association *Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft e. V. Magdeburg*, 14 May 1933, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2306, Landesarchiv Magdeburg – Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg (LHASA MD), pp. 81–89.

<sup>11</sup> Religious notices in the *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>12</sup> According to oral history a third *Shtibl* existed. However, no reference to it has been located in archival material.

<sup>13</sup> Personal interview with M. F. (recorded), Sydney, 27 June 1999. This piece of information was only recalled owing to the unusual name of the street, which literally means 'at the cat's leap,' which translates idiomatically to 'at a stone's throw.'

<sup>14</sup> Religious notices in the *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit. p. 342.

culture, practices of worship and of the separation of these congregations from the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. The majority did not recall the locations of these smaller congregations.

The majority of community members belonged to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* and somewhere between 30% and 50%<sup>15</sup> of the community were members of the *Shtiblech*. Whilst the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* conformed to the practice and observance of the liberal form of Judaism, it could also be characterised as an *Einheitsgemeinde*.<sup>16</sup> When the Nazis took power in 1933, Rabbi Dr Wilde occupied the position of rabbi at the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*, remaining in this position up until his immigration to England in 1939.<sup>17</sup> The synagogue's cantor was Max (Meier) Teller, the sexton was Max Arensberg<sup>18</sup> and the teachers at the *Religionsschule* were Rabbi Dr Wilde and Rudolf Rosenberg.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the members of the *Shtiblech* practised their Judaism in accordance with the strict codes of Eastern European Orthodoxy. However, these religious divisions were sometimes only a generational occurrence. One interviewee, Hemmi Freeman (born Hermann Frühman) recalled:

There were about 600 families all up and at a maximum, half that number were German-born. The temple had at least 300 families and the rest used to go to one or two little *Shtibls*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 10 July 1997.

<sup>16</sup> The concept of the *Einheitsgemeinde* arose out of numerical necessity in smaller communities in Germany. This permitted all acculturated German Jews to practise their Judaism according to their own wishes and levels of observance in a unified, culturally German-Jewish ethos, irrespective of their rabbi's religious affiliation. At the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* in Magdeburg, this expression and practice ranged from Liberal Judaism to Neo-Orthodoxy.

<sup>17</sup> Personal file on Rabbi Dr Georg and Mrs Martha Wilde, Bestand Pe, Signatur Nr. 50, ASGM.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 16 December 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview with Sigrid Freeman (recorded), Sydney, 13 May 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with Hemmi Freeman (recorded), Sydney, 13 May 1998.

Not atypically, Hemmi Freeman's family, who originated from Eastern Europe but had lived in Magdeburg since before World War One, had adopted the liberal form of Judaism and belonged to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. Interestingly though, the family maintained a kosher home and lived according to modern Orthodox tradition. This typical pattern of acculturation in Jewish communities in Germany was also evident in this small community and indicative of the religious pluralism within the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* itself.

In 1923 five paid employees of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* were listed with their positions: Dr Georg Wilde as rabbi, Max (Meier) Teller as cantor and teacher, Meyer Steinhardt as teacher, Samuel Nußbaum as sexton and Max Arensberg as *Shochet*.<sup>21</sup> As testimony to the stability of this small, but, thriving congregation, both the positions on the synagogue board and those of the paid employees of the synagogue remained constant with only minor changes until the issuing of the synagogue's budget for the year 1936–1937.<sup>22</sup> In assessing the synagogue's budgets for the years from and including 1933 until 1937,<sup>23</sup> the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* employed between seven and nine staff, including those already mentioned, and office staff. Most staff changes occurred due to retirement, followed in the latter years by emigration. The number of retired staff members varied between four and six members per year. All drew a pension from the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*.

The *Synagogen-Gemeinde* possessed a sizeable amount of real estate allocated to various functions for the entire community. The congregation's administrative

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<sup>21</sup> Spanier, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1936/1937, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, Stadtarchiv Magdeburg, Magdeburg (STAM).

<sup>23</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, 1935/1936, 1936/1937, *ibid*.

offices were located in the same building as the synagogue, whilst both the religious school and the *B'nai B'rith* Lodge Home were located in the adjacent building at *Große Schulstraße* 2b. The congregation owned the *Israelitisches Altersheim* located at *Arndtstraße* 5, the *Israelitischer Friedhof* situated at *Fermersleber Weg* 40–46, a market garden in the same street and owned a one-acre parcel of land adjacent to the cemetery (Field IV), designated for its future expansion.<sup>24</sup> The congregation also assisted in the management and operation of the *Israelitische Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg*, which operated according to its own constitution.

The constitution of the congregation was detailed, setting out the rules for the elections of the board of directors and the assembly of community representatives. The committee of management was responsible for the operations of all of the aforementioned communal bodies as well as the synagogue and the religious school, with the exception of *B'nai B'rith*<sup>25</sup> and the *Israelitische Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft*,<sup>26</sup> which operated independently according to their own constitutions. The only copies of various versions of this document which have survived are those which were used to lodge and register any legal changes made to the constitution to the city authorities of the city of Magdeburg, as was the case with

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<sup>24</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> *Gesetze der Mendelsohn-Loge XII. Nr. 357 U. O. B. B. zu Magdeburg* Magdeburg: L. Sperling & Co., 1911, Collection D/Ma3, File XII.9, The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (CAHJP). An earlier edition of the constitution from 1900 published by the same publisher also exists in the cited file.

<sup>26</sup> *Satzungen der Israelitischen Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg* Magdeburg: C. Loewenthal & Co., 1903, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2165, LHASA MD, pp. 11–23.

one of the later versions of the document, which dates from 30 January 1935.<sup>27</sup> One complete earlier version of the document, dating from 18 June 1934, lists the Magdeburg city councillor, Eugen Petzall, as president of the board of directors and Dr Ernst Merzbach as president of the assembly of community representatives.<sup>28</sup>

Until the pogrom of November 1938, the organisational framework of the congregation appears to have been maintained, whilst its powers were simultaneously diluted. In viewing the material lodged with city authorities concerning changes to the congregation's constitution, this position appears to be supported.

In spite of the deteriorating circumstances, synagogue staff maintained meticulous record-keeping. The community also maintained highly comprehensive population statistics, detailing the departure of members as well as the arrival of new members. An incomplete dossier of index cards of synagogue members from 1937<sup>29</sup> and the community-based statistics for the period inclusive from March up until June 1937<sup>30</sup> confirm this. In examining the incomplete dossier of some thirty-four typed index cards containing the comprehensive personal particulars of the members of the synagogue, what is noticeable are the handwritten entries on some of the cards, indicating the city or country for which a number of members had left Magdeburg. Destinations include Berlin, South Africa and the United States of America (USA). Included in type-written form

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<sup>27</sup> Constitution of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. A III, Signatur Nr. 2486 60.4a, Band 2, STAM.

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence to the Oberpräsident in Magdeburg concerning changes to the constitution of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, 18 June 1934, Collection JM, File 11266.2, YVA, pp. 213–229.

<sup>29</sup> Personalbögen der Zu- und Abgänge, 1937, Collection D/Ma3, File VIII.8, CAHJP.

<sup>30</sup> Mitgliederzahl der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Stichtag 1937, *ibid.*

also is any information concerning the subject of the member's non-Jewish spouse and/or children.<sup>31</sup> In March 1937 the community's population was 1,264; in April it was 1,270; in May it was 1,272 and in June it dropped to 1,256.<sup>32</sup> These data indicate that the community continued to function in its structural and administrative capacity and to maintain effective management of its affairs. The documentation also bears witness to the departure of community members.

The religious community attempted to meet the immediate and ever-changing needs of its members, within the structure of the communal organisations, which existed in pre-Nazi Magdeburg. On a political front, however, and particularly so, in the defence of the community, the regional branch of the *Centralverein* (CV), the *Landesverband Mitteldeutschland*, attempted to act and represent both individuals and the community as a whole, when dealing with the authorities.<sup>33</sup>

The exact date of the dissolution of the official status of any of the religious congregations in Magdeburg cannot definitively be established. However, all congregations lost their status as corporations under public law on 28 March 1938.<sup>34</sup> The *Synagogen-Gemeinde* became known as the *Jüdische Kultusvereinigung (Synagogen Gemeinde E. V. Magdeburg)*. Further to this, the community was later officially incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* on 27 May 1941 and became known as the *Bezirksstelle Sachsen-Thüringen der Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland Verwaltungsstelle*

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<sup>31</sup> Personalbögen der Zu- und Abgänge, 1937, Collection D/Ma3, File VIII.8, CAHJP, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Mitgliederzahl der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Stichtag 1937, ibid.

<sup>33</sup> For a complete history of the CV see Avraham Barkai, "*Wehr Dich!*" *Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C. V.) 1893–1938* München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Avraham Barkai, "Self-Help in the Dilemma: 'To Leave or to Stay'," in Michael A. Meyer, ed., *German Jewish History in Modern Times, Volume 4, Renewal and Destruction: 1918–1945*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 318.

*Magdeburg*.<sup>35</sup> The former *Synagogen-Gemeinde* in its altered state continued to function in its various capacities.<sup>36</sup>

As demonstrated, it is possible to establish a limited picture of what the community's bureaucracy consisted of and how it functioned. A far more comprehensive and diverse picture of the community's structure, however, is provided when an examination of the rich cultural fabric of its communal organisations is made. Many of these were connected to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* and in this respect they provide further insight into its organisational framework.<sup>37</sup>

The social structure of the community was reflective of the difference in religious affiliation.<sup>38</sup> This religious division can also be translated into national origin. The separation of the two groups was evident for the entire period under discussion, irrespective of the persecutions inflicted. In fact, a number of interviewees reflected that it was not really until the deportation of stateless, Polish Jews on 27–28 October 1938 that they had had much involvement with their fellow Jews of Polish background.<sup>39</sup> The differences which formed the various barriers within the overall community were most evident in synagogue

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence from Dr Max Israel Kaufmann to the Amtsgericht Abtlg. 8 in Magdeburg, 8 October 1941 indicates this change of name for the community and the correspondence uses both the old and the new letterheads, Collection JM, File 11266.7, YVA, p. 297. In addition to this, numerous other documents from as early as 5 November 1941 bear the new name on the community's official letterhead as, for example, correspondence bearing the abovementioned new letterhead to the Gerichtskasse Magdeburg, 5 November 1941, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2165, LHASA MD, p. 298.

<sup>36</sup> No archival material has survived indicating any imposed name changes or changes of status of the Shtiblech for the period.

<sup>37</sup> A wealth of both archival and oral history material in this subject has facilitated an excellent picture of the operations of this sphere of the community.

<sup>38</sup> H. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998. Freeman estimated that a minimum of 30% of the Jewish population belonged to Shtiblech, with the figure possibly even being as high as 50%.

<sup>39</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 7 November 1996.

and religious practice, in chosen professions, in domicile and in both cultural and social mores, in addition to regular social intercourse.<sup>40</sup>

There is mixed agreement amongst interviewees from the community that the ‘German Jews did not mix with the *Ostjuden* [Eastern European Jews].’<sup>41</sup> The overall feeling was that Magdeburg’s community was the same as most other German-Jewish communities in that German Jews did not mix with ‘Jews from the East.’<sup>42</sup> None of the interviewees felt that this division was positive, but nevertheless had accepted it. Terms most commonly used to describe immigrant Jews were *Ostjuden* and *polnische Juden*.

Most members of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* were involved in the professions and in business in the city. This included grain merchants, tradespeople, technicians, engineers, business people owning and operating establishments ranging from single shops to department stores, manufacturers and factory owners, solicitors, judges, doctors, teachers and bankers.<sup>43</sup> They belonged to the middle and upper classes of Magdeburg society. Conversely, the majority of the members of the *Shtiblech* belonged to the lower middle class and some to the working class. Gisela Kent recalled that ‘many of these people had small businesses and were involved in trading in clothing; many actually sold on the

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<sup>40</sup> This pattern in Magdeburg is reflective of the general relationship between German-born and immigrant Jews in Germany. For a comprehensive discussion on this relationship see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jews in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

streets.<sup>44</sup> There existed, nevertheless, some notable exceptions such as Hermann Broder, who owned the department store '*Kaufhaus Gebrüder Barasch*' and the clothing retailer Pinkas Frühman. Both were not German-born and both were highly successful and respected businessmen. Their success, however, did not gain them complete social acceptance. This is evident in the membership of the majority of the community's social and cultural institutions.

The professional division was but an extension of the religious and national division. Pedigree played a pivotal role in social acceptance. Given the varying socio-economic circumstances, the two groups were geographically separated as well. The majority of the members of the *Shtiblech* lived in the area where they worked, that is, in the vicinity of *Jakobstraße*, whilst the members of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* tended to live in the leafy and more affluent suburbs at the northern end of the city, known as the *Nordfront*, or in areas where they wished to reside, quite often geographically distant from the remainder of the community, such as the suburb of Sudenburg.

Nevertheless, both culturally and socially the divisions were not as entrenched as they might appear on the surface. This is particularly noticeable in the social activities of children and youth, at school and in activities organised by Zionist groups for both adults and children and youth. However, on the adult level in the spheres of social and cultural activities the separation was relatively complete,<sup>45</sup> with the notable exception of those adults involved in Zionist activities. Gisela Kent, in discussing the relationship between the two groups, expressed it with mild sarcasm:

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<sup>44</sup> Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview with Hemmi and Sigrid Freeman (recorded), Sydney, 13 May 1998.

We saw them very little. They were invisible. Those people had nothing to do with us. They were migrants and they gave us a bad name. We were good Germans. They lived almost like in a ghetto. There was a street called *Jakobstraße* and you knew if you went there you would meet a Polish Jew. We just didn't mix! There was no hostility between the two groups. However, the German Jews were always belittling them. And they came with torn clothes and it didn't take them very long before they had a business and then it went bankrupt, and then they put the business in the name of the wife. They did all sorts of funny things that we good Germans never did!<sup>46</sup>

These sentiments demonstrate the tensions between the two groups. The feeling of superiority is present, yet simultaneously there is expressed a criticism of German-born Jews, who quite clearly are capable of all the foibles they attach to the immigrant Jews. What is interesting here is the description of the largely separate world that the immigrant Jewish community occupied. It must also be noted that socially, even as the persecutions unfolded, community members relied on their already long established friendships and, prior to the pogrom of 9–10 November 1938, they generally did not move beyond their known and trusted religious and social circles. However, after November 1938 many of the traditional barriers collapsed. As Hemmi Freeman expressed, in reference to acceptance in the community: 'It became easier in the later years. I can't complain about this.'<sup>47</sup>

A final area which separated the two groupings and is inter-related to all of the subjects is the area of social mores. Quite clearly, the Eastern European Jews who had settled in Magdeburg lived, ate, worked, prayed and socialised according to the conventions of their former communities. For them, as with any immigrant group, it would be one or perhaps two generations before the culture of the adopted country would be integrated into their way of life. For most of the members of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*, foreign customs were not accepted and the expectation was that, not dissimilar to what they themselves had all done in

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<sup>46</sup> Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

<sup>47</sup> H. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

varying periods of their own families' histories, the newcomers would acculturate and adopt the German-Jewish way of life and religious observance.<sup>48</sup>

Inge-Ruth Herrmann recalled the home of a Polish-Jewish girlfriend, and her experience exemplifies the separate social mores of the two groups of Jews and of the gulf which existed:

I don't think that relations between the two communities were too good. Look, there was such a difference in their way of living! This girl I was friendly with, Miriam Kohl, was Polish and the first time I was invited to her home, I thought I would fall over when they opened the door. The garlic just hits you! It was so bad I didn't know how to get out of there! At home we didn't have garlic; in my house we didn't even eat onion! I mean, you walked into the place of my friends who were German Jews, you didn't have that. And the mother looked so peculiar. She looked such a *Nebbich!* And yet to have such a large flat like they had, they couldn't have been poor. But that's the difference between the German Jews and the Polish Jews. If they were fairly well off, they dressed well, they looked nice; but the Polish people, they looked just the same. It doesn't matter how much they had!<sup>49</sup>

What can be concluded is that regardless of the constantly deteriorating situation for all Jews between the years 1933 and 1938, the two groupings still retained their separateness. Gerry Levy recalled the division very well and lamented the situation. From all of the oral history material collected, another very interesting, yet not surprising, observation can be made. Within one or two generations the newcomers had acculturated and were more often than not marrying into the wider German-Jewish community and, whilst even maintaining a diluted form of Orthodoxy, moved from the *Shtibl* to the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. Acceptance may have been slow, but the majority had shed Yiddish and their old social mores, with many even objecting to references to this past, particularly to

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<sup>48</sup> For a highly comprehensive study of the lives and position of Eastern European Jews in Germany between 1918 and 1933 see Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918–1933* Hamburg: Hans Christian Verlag, 1986 and between 1933 and 1939 see Trude Maurer, "Ausländische Juden in Deutschland, 1933–1939," in Arnold Paucker, ed., *Die Juden im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland. The Jews in Nazi Germany 1933–1943* Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1986, pp. 189–210.

<sup>49</sup> Personal interview with I. Poppert (recorded), Sydney, 9 January 1998.

the use of Yiddish, as articulated by Hemmi Freeman, when discussing the use of Yiddish in their home: 'My father, for sure not. If he knew it, he objected to it. My mother possibly, but they never spoke it in my presence.'<sup>50</sup>

Gerry Levy recalled that his parents did not have any friends who were Polish Jews, but tells the story of an uncle:

My mother's youngest brother married a very beautiful girl, whose father was a very religious Polish Jew. This man was very well respected in my family as a learned man in Judaism and who could teach Hebrew. He married a lady from Wolfen, near Dessau, who was totally German-Jewish in background. This was seen as a '*Mischehe*.' This aunt, together with her brother and sister, and the whole family were treated as ordinary Jews in Magdeburg. There existed these overlaps.<sup>51</sup>

The 'overlaps' referred to in the quotation were a feature of the Jewish community. What can be concluded is that for the period under discussion, the two groupings maintained their separateness according to the level of acculturation of those Jews of Eastern European origin. The most interesting exceptions were children and youth, as well as those individuals involved in Zionist activities.

The richness of the community's cultural life is reflected in its cultural institutions. In Karliner's report<sup>52</sup> on the former community, he made extensive references to the community's cultural life, indicating that eleven institutions and associations existed in 1933. He included the *B'nai B'rith* Moses Mendelssohn Lodge, associations dedicated to Jewish history and literature, youth and synagogue clubs and the social welfare support system and its agencies.

Characteristically, he noted that both the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* and Rabbi Dr

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<sup>50</sup> Personal interview with Hemmi Freeman (recorded), Sydney, 3 June 1998.

<sup>51</sup> Levy, *op. cit.*, 4 August 1997.

<sup>52</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

Wilde must be placed at the centre of the community's 'exemplary and pulsating [cultural] life.'<sup>53</sup>

The community's cultural organisations and institutions can largely be divided into three categories: those that fell under the auspices of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*; those that were regional divisions of national organisations; as well as those which were independent organisations. All organisations and institutions operated according to their own constitutions, and whilst a number operated out of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* with its direct involvement, a sizeable number did not. For example, there is little evidence to support the direct involvement of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* in the prolific number of Zionist groups in the city. Zionism remained a force primarily with community members of Eastern European origins. Spanier lists all of the cultural organisations of the day,<sup>54</sup> in addition to social welfare agencies and charitable foundations for that time. While no such listing for the period after 1933 has been identified, a number of the organisations for the period after 1933 bear the same names.

The most obvious organisations operating from the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* were the mixed choir and possibly the youth group, the *Jüdischer Jugendverein 'Ludwig Philippson'*. Whilst the choir was a feature of the synagogue until services officially ceased,<sup>55</sup> it cannot be established whether or not this youth group was still functioning when the Nazis came to power.<sup>56</sup> One of the most

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<sup>53</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>54</sup> Spanier, op. cit., pp. 33–43.

<sup>55</sup> Personal interview with H. B. and R. Z. (recorded), Sydney, 15 August 1997.

<sup>56</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 9. Dezember 1927, Nr. 28, 3. Jahrgang, Periodicals Collection, File P-B453a, LBIA NY, p. 221. This youth

famous of the cultural institutions in the city was the *B'nai B'rith* Lodge, known as the *Mendelssohn-Loge XII 357*. Founded on 31 May 1885, it also operated the *Frauenbund der Mendelssohn-Loge*.<sup>57</sup>

Magdeburg possessed its own branch of the CV, the *Centralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens – Landesverband Provinz Sachsen, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg*<sup>58</sup> and its own branch of the World War One Jewish veterans' association, the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg*.<sup>59</sup> The branch also included the sports group of the veterans' association, *Der Schild*, which attracted a substantial membership, particularly amongst its youth.<sup>60</sup> The Magdeburg branch of the popular youth movement known as the 'Ring', *Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend*, renamed the *Bund Jüdischer Jugend* in 1936,<sup>61</sup> was also well represented numerically.<sup>62</sup>

Of particular interest due to its role as a cultural and educational wing of the community was the *Jüdischer Verein Freundschaft zu Magdeburg*, established on 18 March 1928, which eventually became the *Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg* on 12 January 1933.<sup>63</sup> Two other organisations, which appear to have

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group did not feature in any of the public notices in the Magdeburg Jewish press for 1932, however, it did feature in previous years.

<sup>57</sup> *Gesetze der Mendelssohn-Loge, XII Nr. 357 U. O. B. B. zu Magdeburg*, Collection D/Ma3, File XII.9, CAHJP, op. cit. Historical details of and membership list of the Mendelssohn Lodge for 1928, Archiv des Landesverbandes Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt (ALJGSA).

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence from the Magdeburg branch of the CV to the head office of the CV in Berlin, 9 April 1935, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMMA), p. 426.

<sup>59</sup> This was an important organisation, given the large number of war veterans in the community, together with the families of the thirty-six men who gave their lives for their country in World War One. See Spanier, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>60</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 7 November 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Kaplan, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>62</sup> Personal interview with Hans Jensen (recorded), Sydney, 14 June 1999.

<sup>63</sup> *Jüdischer Verein Freundschaft zu Magdeburg; Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft zu Magdeburg*, Collection JM, File 11266.4, YVA, pp. 1–92.

been Magdeburg-based, were the youth group, the *Jüdisch-liberaler Jugendbund 'Heimat'* and the sports association, the *Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba' zu Magdeburg*,<sup>64</sup> which was a member of the German and the international Maccabi federations. Two further organisations advertised in the local Jewish press of the day, which also appear to be Magdeburg-based, were the *Israelitischer Frauenverein* and the *Walter Rathenau-Club*.<sup>65</sup>

The remaining organisations and institutions were all Zionist-based. The *Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg* also operated the *Palästina-Amt Berlin, Zweigstelle Magdeburg*.<sup>66</sup> Magdeburg was also home to a branch of the *Zeiri Misrachi für Deutschland* and to the *Poale Zion*.<sup>67</sup> Both *Habonim* and *Hechalutz*<sup>68</sup> were operational, as the youth groups also organised a local *Hachsharah*,<sup>69</sup> in addition to operating the *Brith Chaluzim Dathiim*.<sup>70</sup> Another organisation that appears to have been active was the *Union der Zionisten Revisionisten, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg*.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst this discussion has only addressed the subject of the structure of Jewish cultural organisations and institutions in Magdeburg, what must not be overlooked is that within the social and cultural framework of the city until 1933, Jews fully

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<sup>64</sup> *Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba' zu Magdeburg*, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2346, LHASA MD, pp. 9–13, 27, 39, 47.

<sup>65</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>66</sup> Correspondence from Walter Heinemann to Pastor W. Lüdecke, 21 March 1935, Bestand Rep. A, Spec. K, Signatur Nr. 2429, Archiv des Konsistoriums der Evangelischen Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen, Magdeburg (AKPS), unnumbered page, one page.

<sup>67</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 16. Dezember 1932, Nr. 51, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM.

<sup>68</sup> H. and S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Protokoll der Hauptversammlung des Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, 11. März 1934, ALJGSA, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 16. Dezember 1932, Nr. 51, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 328.

participated in and were thoroughly integrated into the social and cultural fabric of the city.<sup>72</sup>

As already mentioned, the community was divided into two religious-cultural groups: one sought identification through its traditional German and Jewish roots, in which Zionism did not feature; the other identified solely with one or more of the Zionist philosophies. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the congregants of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* subscribed to the former, whilst the majority of the congregants of the *Shtiblech* subscribed to the latter. Within this division the community provided a rich and varied social and cultural life for itself. All avenues of interest, irrespective of age, gender or Zionist inclinations, were catered for. In viewing the variety of Zionist organisations, it becomes apparent that the full range of religious and political ideologies was also represented. Until their dissolution these organisations provided much psychological and physical sustenance to community members, and this influence continued even after their complete dissolution, as they assisted community members to create their own home-based structures in order to survive, as their ‘social death’ ensued at a rapid pace.<sup>73</sup>

According to Karliner,<sup>74</sup> the Jewish community of Magdeburg was financially secure at the time of the Nazi accession to power. In addition to the seven pieces of real estate previously mentioned, the community possessed liquid assets in the

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<sup>72</sup> Personal interview with George Mannings (recorded), Sydney, 17 August 1999.

<sup>73</sup> This term, expressing the exclusion of Jews from all avenues of German society and the subsequent ramifications of such exclusion, was introduced by Marion A. Kaplan in the previously cited work by her.

<sup>74</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

forms of bank deposits and fixed interest annuities.<sup>75</sup> It is also possible that the community possessed further liquid and real estate assets, unknown to Karliner, as he indicates in his report that quite clearly he could only list what was known to him and to other members of the reconstituted community.<sup>76</sup>

The religious communities and the cultural and social organisations operated according to their own constitutions and budgets until they were dissolved. In addition, the vast majority organised their own premises. An examination of archival material relating to the plethora of effective religious, cultural, social and welfare organisations extant in the community corroborates Karliner's assessment, as does the consensus of those interviewed.<sup>77</sup> It should also be noted that whilst the vast majority of religious, social, cultural, and welfare organisations operated independently, the community as a whole was funded by fourteen charitable foundations.<sup>78</sup>

The only archival material relating to operational budgets and general finances which have survived is that concerning the financial operations of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* and the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg*. This latter area of communal support only continued to increase as community members became more impoverished. In exploring this subject it is possible to gain a greater understanding of how the

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<sup>75</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> H. and S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., pp. 187–188 and Spanier, op. cit., pp. 39–41. Spanier provides a detailed list of all the charitable foundations which supported the community in 1923.

economic structure of a number of communal organisations and institutions functioned as the situation deteriorated.<sup>79</sup>

The budgets of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* for the years from and including 1933 to 1937<sup>80</sup> display remarkable stability considering the strain the community was encountering. The synagogue continued in its myriad of functions. A number of important observations from these documents further an understanding of events and their ramifications at that time. For the 1933–1934 budget the allocation was RM 98,930.71.<sup>81</sup> In 1936–1937 the allocation dropped to RM 80,167.46.<sup>82</sup> For the period after the 1933–1934 budget all the ensuing budgets remained close to the figure indicated in the last budget. The greatest reduction in expenditure occurred in the number of paid staff at the synagogue. Yet, regardless of this drop in income and expenditure the documentation provides evidence of the financial stability of the synagogue's operations, as its roles and responsibilities did not suffer as a result of this fiscal difference.

Also of note are the figures indicating the revenue generated by membership of the synagogue. Payment of membership dues dropped by one third in the period from the 1933–1934 budget to the 1934–1935 budget.<sup>83</sup> This situation indicates the financial strain that approximately one third of the congregation was already experiencing. The synagogue dues for the remaining budgets remained stable.

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<sup>79</sup> A number of organisations were omitted from the previous component discussing the cultural structure of the community. Some of those omitted fall partially into the cultural domain, however, for the greater part those to be included in this discussion operated primarily as social welfare organisations and institutions and for this reason they have been included in this component.

<sup>80</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, 1935/1936, 1936/1937, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, STAM, op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1936/1937, *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, *ibid.*

The expenditure for social welfare projects displays only moderate variation for the entire period. The 1936–1937 budget was signed off by the synagogue board on 10 February and 12 March 1936.<sup>84</sup> In interpreting the expenditure for social welfare within the synagogue community it may indicate one of two possibilities: firstly, that up until this point the majority of community members were not seeking unusual levels of assistance, or secondly, that they were not seeking direct assistance from the synagogue, but from the various social welfare organisations in the community. It is more likely that the latter was the case after investigation of the files of the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege*.<sup>85</sup> With regard to the examination of these budgets, however, it is evident that the synagogue as an economic structure was functioning quite normally and fulfilling all of its roles and responsibilities until this point.

The operations of organisations and institutions which assisted in social welfare provide further insight into the economic structure of the community and how it responded to the ever-changing needs of its members. Two important organisations which continued to operate in meeting the needs of communal members were the *Israelitisches Altersheim* and the *Israelitische Beerdigungsgesellschaft*. As far as can be ascertained, they operated according to their own budgets and constitutions under duress, until they were forcibly incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*.

The following organisations were dedicated solely to social welfare projects.

One organisation about which very little is known was the *Verband ostjüdischer*

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<sup>84</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1936/1937, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, STAM, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> Correspondence to and from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 11 September 1933 – 6 May 1938, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA.

*Organisationen Magdeburgs*.<sup>86</sup> This organisation indicates that the Jews of Eastern European origin in Magdeburg operated separate welfare organisations. The *Israelitischer Witwen- und Waisen-Unterstützungs-Fonds*, the *Jüdischer Hilfsverein zu Magdeburg*, the *Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg* and the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege* all operated as organisations dedicated to various forms of social welfare.

The *Israelitischer Witwen- und Waisen-Unterstützungs-Fonds* had served the Jewish community of Magdeburg since 1871.<sup>87</sup> It is known that the organisation was required by the Gestapa to submit membership lists for each quarter. The documentation confirming this only provides data for the period from 1 January 1936 until 13 December 1937.<sup>88</sup> During this time Benno Kallmann was the president of the foundation. On 1 January 1936, Kallmann indicated there were 279 members, and on 13 December 1937 that the membership stood at 201.<sup>89</sup> The data supplied to the Gestapa provides all the personal particulars of members, including statistics of emigration, immigration and deaths. The documentation confirms the extensive nature of welfare work being undertaken, as well as providing on an individual level information on the extent of the large number of members who had already changed professions and addresses, resulting from financial hardship. What is also of interest is that emigration statistics for each

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<sup>86</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 16. Dezember 1932, Nr. 51, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 328. This organisation was listed in the public notices of this newsletter. No other archival material detailing this organisation has been located.

<sup>87</sup> Spanier, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>88</sup> Mitgliederliste des Israelitischen Witwen- und Waisen- Unterstützungs-Fonds und Nachträge, dazu Briefwechsel mit der Gestapo, Collection D/Ma3, File X.G5, CAHJP.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

quarter were still relatively low, the figure being generally between three to four people per quarter.<sup>90</sup>

The remaining three organisations, the *Jüdischer Hilfsverein*, the *Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse* and the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege*, to a large extent worked in cooperation with one another and for this reason they shall be overviewed as one unit. The *Jüdischer Hilfsverein* had been founded in 1912<sup>91</sup> and worked closely with the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege*. The former organisation continued its important work until its dissolution, even though it was under constant surveillance by the Gestapo. Also recorded is the departure of its members. Documentation confirms the financial viability of the organisation in the operations of its welfare work for the duration of its existence.<sup>92</sup>

The *Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse* was founded on 28 March 1934 to meet the growing financial needs of members of the Jewish communities of Burg, Dessau, Gardelegen, Halberstadt, Magdeburg, Oschersleben, Salzwedel, Schönebeck and Stendal.<sup>93</sup> This was an important economic initiative of the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege* under the presidency of Rabbi Dr Wilde as a response to the overburdened work of its organisation and, most importantly, as a direct response to the economic strangulation community members were experiencing.

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<sup>90</sup> Mitgliederliste des Israelitischen Witwen- und Waisen- Unterstützungs-Fonds und Nachträge, dazu Briefwechsel mit der Gestapo, Collection D/Ma3, File X.G5, op. cit., CAHJP.

<sup>91</sup> Jüdischer Hilfsverein zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2305, LHASA MD, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 1–71.

<sup>93</sup> Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg, Collection JM, File 11266.6, YVA, pp. 1–4.

The *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege* provides the greatest insight into the work of social welfare within the community as a result of the extensive archival material available which spans the years from and including 1933 through to 1938.<sup>94</sup> Closely tied to the national organisation, the *Zentralstelle für jüdische Wirtschaftshilfe*, based in Berlin, it emerged as the chief source of social welfare assistance for Jews in Magdeburg. Through its affairs it is possible to chart the economic deterioration of Jews in addition to the changing roles of the organisation as it attempted to respond to these new and difficult situations.

For the years 1933 to 1934, one of its chief tasks appears to have been as an employment agency and as an agency facilitating retraining. From 1935 until the middle of 1937 this situation remained the same, in addition to the matter of employment for school leavers becoming a serious priority; and from the middle of 1937 until the middle of 1938 the priority had become the emigration of children and youth to the USA, England, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>95</sup> The areas of migration, financial assistance to needy members and accommodation feature as ongoing matters from 11 March 1934,<sup>96</sup> yet simultaneously voluntary financial contributions from community members to the organisation continued to support its valued work.<sup>97</sup>

The economic viability of the community's organisations and institutions in their plethora of ever-changing roles is clear. Simultaneously, the documentation

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<sup>94</sup> Correspondence to and from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 11 September 1933 – 6 May 1938, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA, op. cit.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Protokoll der Hauptversammlung des Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, 11. März 1934, ALJGSA, op. cit., pp. 1–3.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondence to and from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 11 September 1933 – 6 May 1938, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA, op. cit.

details the financial hardship of community members, which only continues on a downward spiral. Most notable is the evident professionalism in all business matters conducted and the continued generosity of community members who were still financially stable.

In conclusion, communal frameworks already in existence in 1933 provided the Jews in Magdeburg with a firm foundation to rely and draw on, once antisemitic measures were enacted. The large number of organisations and institutions for such a small community is a testimony to the vibrancy and the diversity of the community. This fact, no doubt, positively assisted all community members attempting to navigate their lives as they altered dramatically for the worse.

The situation in Magdeburg, both prior to and after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 is difficult to fully explore. What is quite clear is that up until the Nuremberg Laws, the community appears to have been focused on adjusting to its new position. The focus was on retraining, complying with the authorities, valuing Jewishness and simultaneously defending its rights. From the period toward the end of 1937 there arose a greater focus on the evacuation of the young and on emigration. The initial phase represented the hope of retaining lives and livelihoods; the second phase distinctly represented for some, and although not the majority, the end of those hopes. As social isolation ensued, communal structures were to prove of vital importance, both physically and psychologically. The Nazi regime targeted particular structures for immediate or early dissolution. The continued existence of Jewish organisations and institutions related directly to their roles in both Nazi ideology and bureaucracy, as will be demonstrated in the next section of this chapter.

### The Dissolution of Communal Organisations

Jewish communal organisations in Magdeburg suffered the same fate as elsewhere in Germany and were dissolved at various intervals, with the vast majority having been closed down before the pogrom of November 1938. A small number continued to operate after 1938, but by 1943 all had ceased to function. This section will focus on those that had ceased operating by the end of 1938.

On 28 February 1933, the *Erste Verordnung des Herrn Reichspräsidenten zum Schutz von Volk und Staat* enabled the outlawing of any assemblies of Jewish organisations. On 11 July 1935, the *Staatspolizeistelle für den Regierungsbezirk Merseburg*, based in the city of Halle an der Saale, acknowledged receipt of a memorandum and directive, dated 31 May 1935, from the Gestapa in Berlin addressing this very issue.<sup>98</sup> This memorandum had been dispatched to all Gestapa, including in Magdeburg, and thus the contents of this memorandum shed light on what ensued with regard to the dissolution of Jewish organisations. It discussed the rising number of activities of German-Jewish organisations, which were referred to as ‘assimilatory.’ It was also indicated that the growth and further activities of these organisations could and would not be tolerated. Dr Werner Best,<sup>99</sup> signatory of the memorandum, issued a subsequent ban on assemblies and

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<sup>98</sup> Memorandum from the Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, Berlin, An alle Staatspolizeistellen concerning the subject of the assemblies and activities of Jewish organisations, 31 May 1935, Bestand Z.-Dok.001, Signatur Nr. 052, ASGM.

<sup>99</sup> Dr Werner Best had been active in the Nazi Party since 1930. In March 1933 he was appointed special commissioner for Hesse and within four months he was governor of the state. In 1935 he was made section leader of the Gestapo under Reinhard Heydrich. Hitler depended upon Best to explain away the ‘many unfortunate incidents’ in Gestapo prisons. Best presented a positive view: ‘As long as the police carries out the will of the leadership, it is acting legally.’ Best later served on the staff of the military commander in France from 1940 to 1942. From November 1942 until May 1945 he was Reich Commissioner for occupied Denmark. For a detailed biographical account on Dr Werner Best see Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische*

activities of all Jewish organisations, with noted exceptions which fell into three categories. The first group consisted of regional, cultural organisations which were members of the *Reichsverband der jüdischen Kulturverbände in Deutschland*; the second consisted of sporting organisations; and finally, the third of Zionist organisations. Any organisation in receipt of this exemption found guilty of 'anti-state propaganda' or propagating the idea that there was a future for Jewish life in Germany, was to be dissolved immediately.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, a cogent framework was provided indicating which organisations would continue to exist according to the regime's own plans. Of relevance is the importance of the regime's policy on race and separation. This ranges from the purely literal, for example, in the name of an organisation, to the practical and physical of forbidding Jews access to German culture and public space. Best's memorandum of May 1935 articulates the concern that there were too many organisations espousing the compatibility of Germanness and Jewishness. Clearly, the observation can also be made that in these early years of the regime that German Jews sought to prove their allegiance to their much-loved homeland. This was very much the case also for the Jews of Magdeburg.

For the period commencing with the Nazi accession to power until the receipt of the abovementioned memorandum, no documentation has been located confirming the forced dissolution of any Jewish organisations in Magdeburg. The sole organisation which was dissolved and deregistered in this period did so voluntarily. The *Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft* met for the last time on 14 May

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*Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1996.

<sup>100</sup> Memorandum from the Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, Berlin, An alle Staatspolizeistellen concerning the subject of the assemblies and activities of Jewish organisations, 31 May 1935, Bestand Z.-Dok.001, Signatur Nr. 052, ASGM, op. cit.

1933 for the purpose of dissolving the society voluntarily. The president, Maurycy Jakubowicz, explained at the 'Extra-Ordinary, Urgent General Assembly' that of the over forty original financial members, barely half remained. He continued that, of the remaining membership, the majority were no longer in a situation to support the society financially or alternatively they hoped to leave in a relatively short time.<sup>101</sup> The contents of the society's library were donated to the *Betverein 'Ahawas Reim'* and at the conclusion of the meeting Jakubowicz, together with the society's board, thanked those assembled 'for their constantly cheerful and self-sacrificing co-operation.'<sup>102</sup> They expressed 'the hope that all the friends gathered should continue to maintain their faithfulness and friendship, just as they had done so in the past.'<sup>103</sup> The organisation was officially deregistered on 1 August 1933.<sup>104</sup> It would appear that this organisation was not affiliated to any national body and operated independently. The reasons for its dissolution appear clear, as it occurred directly due to the change in the political regime.

The next dissolution was that of the *Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba'*,<sup>105</sup> which had served the community under the leadership of Joachim Freiberg since 1923.<sup>106</sup> It was forcibly dissolved on 20 August 1935.<sup>107</sup> Whilst this sports organisation was a member of the national and international Maccabi federation, it appears that it also was wholly independent and Magdeburg-based.

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<sup>101</sup> Protokoll über die ausserordentliche General-Versammlung zum Zwecke der Auflösung des Vereins 'Jüdische Kultur-Gesellschaft' e. V. zu Magdeburg, 14. Mai 1933, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2306, LHASA MD, p. 89.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>105</sup> Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba' zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2346, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>106</sup> Very limited documentation exists on this organisation and its dissolution.

<sup>107</sup> Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba' zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2346, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 47.

On 23 May 1936, the Gestapa issued a two-month ban on the ‘Ring’, *Bund Jüdischer Jugend*,<sup>108</sup> previously known as the *Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend*.<sup>109</sup> This became permanent on 30 December 1936, when it was dissolved. The Gestapa indicated that the dissolution had arisen due to the organisation’s members’ continued wearing of uniforms and the practice of military-style exercises in spite of the ban on both practices.<sup>110</sup> This organisation was subsequently dissolved in Magdeburg, where it had a large membership of youth who fondly recall both the uniform and the activities.<sup>111</sup>

On 10 April 1937, all organisational bodies of the *B’nai B’rith* in Germany were eliminated, associated property and bank accounts confiscated and strict instructions given to all branch offices of the Gestapo on how to execute the dissolutions. Particular attention was to be paid to the collection of all files, particularly those on personnel, and the directive was given for the imprisonment of the office-bearers of each lodge until the process of liquidation was completed. The homes of all office-bearers were to be searched for material associated with their respective lodges.<sup>112</sup> At that time the registered address for the *Mendelssohn Loge* in Magdeburg was *Breiter Weg* 139–140 and the president and vice-

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<sup>108</sup> Correspondence from the Prussian office of the Gestapo, Berlin to the president of the Berlin Regional Union of the ‘Ring’, *Bund Jüdischer Jugend*, 23 May 1936, Bestand 1, 75C Ar 1, Signatur Nr. 5, CJA, p. 67.

<sup>109</sup> For an extensive discussion on the reactions of the ‘Ring’, *Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend* (and the re-named ‘Ring’, *Bund Jüdischer Jugend*) to Nazism, see Chaim Schatzker, “The Jewish Youth Movement in Germany in the Holocaust Period (I) – Youth in Confrontation with a New Reality,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XIX, 1974, pp. 157–181 and Chaim Schatzker, “The Jewish Youth Movement in Germany in the Holocaust Period (II) – The Relations between the Youth Movement and the Hechaluz,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXXIII, 1988, pp. 301–325.

<sup>110</sup> Auflösung des ‘Rings’, *Bund jüdischer Jugend*, 30. Dezember 1936, Collection JM, File 10624, YVA, p. 163.

<sup>111</sup> Jensen, op. cit., 14 June 1999.

<sup>112</sup> Auflösung des ‘Unabhängigen Ordens Bne Briss’, 10. April 1937, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 1831, Band IV, LHASA MD, pp. 15–19.

president were Rabbi Dr Wilde and Georg Schäfer, respectively.<sup>113</sup> No record has been located detailing the actual detention of the office-bearers of the Magdeburg lodge.

An interesting memorandum from the Magdeburg Gestapa dated 30 March 1938, concerns the activities of the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten* and its sporting association, *Der Schild*.<sup>114</sup> This memorandum sheds light on and highlights the inconsistency of some Nazi policies. The memorandum reinforced the position that the activities of the veterans' association were to be restricted.<sup>115</sup> However, it informed officials that whilst in the past, numerous activities of the sporting association had been prohibited, the Gestapo did not wish to hinder the sporting activities of the association and thereby granted approval for its continued operations, under police surveillance.<sup>116</sup> Oral history confirms that this was the case. Beyond this period limited activities of both organisations continued until they were forcibly incorporated into the *Reichvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* in 1939.<sup>117</sup>

The '*Staatszionistische*' organisations were the final group to be dissolved by a decree authored in Berlin on 25 July 1938 and instituted in Magdeburg on 3

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<sup>113</sup> Auflösung des 'Unabhängigen Ordens Bne Briss', 10. April 1937, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 1831, Band IV, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>114</sup> Betätigung des Reichsbundes jüdischer Frontsoldaten, 30. März 1938, *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>115</sup> The activities and reactions of the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten under Nazism have been dealt with extensively in numerous articles in the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*. For a detailed discussion on the subject see Ruth Pierson, "Embattled Veterans – The Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XIX, 1974, pp. 139–154.

<sup>116</sup> The reactions of the youth sporting association Der Schild (Sportbund der Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten) to Nazism are discussed in Schatzker, op. cit.

<sup>117</sup> Avraham Barkai, "In a Ghetto Without Walls," in Meyer, ed., op. cit., p. 355.

September 1938.<sup>118</sup> All property belonging to the organisations was confiscated because the organisations were deemed enemies of the people and of the state, and that as such the organisations had used, or would continue to use, the confiscated property to pursue these ends.<sup>119</sup> Given the proliferation of Zionist organisations in Magdeburg, these dissolutions would have been deeply felt.

Documentation concerning the dissolutions of three other organisations was also received in Magdeburg from the Berlin Gestapa. However, it is not known whether or not these organisations were at any time operational in Magdeburg.<sup>120</sup> The first organisation was that of the *Verband nationaldeutscher Juden*,<sup>121</sup> which was dissolved on 9 December 1935,<sup>122</sup> the second was the *Paulus-Bund*,<sup>123</sup> which

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<sup>118</sup> Auflösung der Staatszionistischen Organisationen nebst sämtlichen Unterorganisationen, 25. Juli 1938, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 1831, Band IV, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> No documentation confirming the existence and operations of these organisations in Magdeburg has been located.

<sup>121</sup> The ultra-nationalist *Verband nationaldeutscher Juden*, as an organisation, was extremely offended by its exclusion from the ‘national resurgence’ in Nazi Germany. Regardless of its exclusion it remained hostile to the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland*, as it refused to act co-operatively in a common organisation which included *Ostjuden* and the Zionists. It continued in its adulation of ‘German values’ until it was forcibly disbanded. For a detailed history of this organisation up until 1933 see Carl J. Rheins, “The *Verband nationaldeutscher Juden* 1921–1933,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXV, 1980, pp. 243–268.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum from the Reich and Prussian Minister for the Interior to the State Governments and to the offices of the Gestapo concerning the dissolution and the banning of the *Verband nationaldeutscher Juden*, 9 December 1935, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 119, LHASA MD, p. 296.

<sup>123</sup> In June 1933 the Reich Association of Christian-German Citizens of Non-Aryan or Not Purely Aryan Origin was established in Berlin. In 1936 it was re-named the *Paulus-Bund, Vereinigung nichtarischer Christen*. These baptised Jews and their offspring did not see themselves as part of the Jewish community. They avoided any contact with Jewish organisations, which they viewed as alien and not a component of their own world and lives. The main purpose of this organisation was to prevent their decline into the even more stigmatised and discriminated status of the ‘full Jew.’ The organisation also assisted in finding suitable marriage partners after September 1935 and set up sections within its administration for welfare, job placement and legal and educational advice. For a complete account of the roles and activities of this organisation see Werner Cohn, “Bearers of a Common Fate? The ‘Non-Aryan’

was dissolved on 18 May 1937<sup>124</sup> and the third was that of the *Verein der Freunde Israels*, which was dissolved on 21 December 1937.<sup>125</sup>

After the pogrom of November 1938, a number of organisations remained operational until they were dissolved or were officially incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. Their survival was directly linked to the nature of their work. On 19 January 1939, the *Jüdischer Hilfsverein* was dissolved and deregistered.<sup>126</sup> Documentation concerning the activities of its partner organisation, the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg*, ended in May 1938.<sup>127</sup> Given the nature of its work and the general co-ordination of such operations from Berlin, it is most likely that it continued with its tasks until it was incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. On 29 September 1939, the *Israelitisches Altersheim* in Magdeburg was incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* by order of § 5 der *Zehnten Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz* from 4 July 1939,<sup>128</sup> as was the *Israelitische Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft* on 3 October 1939,<sup>129</sup> followed in succession by the

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Christian ‘Fate-Comrades’ of the Paulus-Bund, 1933–1939,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXXIII, 1988, pp. 327–366.

<sup>124</sup> Betrifft: Paulus-Bund, 18. Mai 1937, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 1831 Band IV, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>125</sup> Betrifft: Verein der Freunde Israels, 21. Dezember 1937, *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>126</sup> Jüdischer Hilfsverein zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2305, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>127</sup> No documentation concerning any of its roles or activities beyond May 1938 has been located.

<sup>128</sup> Correspondence from the Reich Minister for the Interior to the Israelitisches Altersheim in Magdeburg, 29 September 1939, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2481, LHASA MD, p. 92.

<sup>129</sup> Correspondence from the Head of the SS and the SD, Berlin to the Israelitische Beerdigungs-Gesellschaft, 3 October 1939, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2165, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 293.

*Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse* on 5 December 1939,<sup>130</sup> which was subsequently forced into liquidation.

The memorandum from Werner Best in May 1935 explains the change in pace of the dissolution of communal organisations in Magdeburg. Organisations which espoused any links between Germanness and Jewishness and a sense of German nationalist identity for Jews were dissuaded from doing so and ultimately disbanded. The ‘Ring’, *Bund Jüdischer Jugend* is a good example. The organisation was forced to rename itself from the ‘Ring’, *Bund deutsch-jüdischer Jugend* in 1936 to the abovementioned name, deleting the reference to ‘German.’ The notable exception to this was *Der Schild* of the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten*. The various exemptions from a number of antisemitic decrees given to war veterans and their families have been well documented, and this skewed sense of honour on the part of Nazi bureaucracy and policy appears to have played a vital role in the allowing the continued operations of both *Der Schild* and the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten*.<sup>131</sup>

In contrast to the situation of the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten*, any organisation or institution which contained philosophies the regime deemed ‘hostile to the state’ were dissolved. In Magdeburg the most documented case of this situation was that of *B’nai B’rith*. This institution had always been viewed suspiciously by the regime, which believed it to be a Jewish version of Freemasonry. The Magdeburg lodge was dissolved in April 1937.

Unaffiliated, local organisations were at greater risk of dissolution than local branches of national organisations, which had a greater support system, but which,

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<sup>130</sup> Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2235, LHASA MD, p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

importantly for Nazi bureaucracy, could be monitored and even managed more effectively. This accounts for the dissolution of the Jewish sports group *Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein 'Bar Kochba'* in 1935. Given its non-nationalistic ideology and its Zionist leanings, its early dissolution cannot be explained, other than by postulating that as it was a local non-affiliated organisation, the local Gestapo wished it disbanded or perhaps its board members fell foul of the authorities.<sup>132</sup>

All the discussed organisations in Magdeburg were required to register all of their gatherings and activities with the Gestapo, which on a number of occasions revoked permission for assemblies. Further to this, all the dissolved organisations were instructed not to attempt to re-open or to instigate any new or similar organisation.

The two groupings of organisations which were permitted to continue operations until they were either dissolved in the years 1938 and 1939 or which were eventually incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* in 1939 were those of Zionist ideologies promoting Jewish emigration and Jewish welfare agencies. Zionist organisations were of considerable use and value to the regime as long as emigration was their main agenda. Once this was no longer the case they also were disbanded. In Magdeburg, the vast majority of documented welfare agencies continued their vital work until they were incorporated into the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. Of the surviving organisations, they were the only ones of any practical use to the regime in that they managed all matters pursuant to Jewish welfare in the city.

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<sup>132</sup> No documentation detailing this organisation's operations between 1933 and 1935 has been located.

These dissolutions led to a number of ramifications and responses from community members. Perhaps the most notable psychological ramification of the dissolutions for those former members of the community interviewed was the beginning of the destruction of their identities as Germans of the Jewish faith and the (re-) emergence of their identities as Jews. This effect of the Nazi policy of separation was most noticeable for young Jews. There existed also an overwhelming sense of social isolation. The most obvious physical ramification was that Jews were slowly deprived of their communal space and services and began relying more on trusted social networks. In addition, the synagogue became the fulcrum of the community and through it the various welfare agencies. The Jews of Magdeburg gravitated to their synagogues for all their needs and, as such, the religious life of the community at the time provides a further insight into the structural framework of the community.

### **The Religious Congregations**

In 1933 the religious community of Magdeburg was not one homogenous body. Liberal Judaism existed side by side with the Orthodoxy of the *Shtibl*. The congregants of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* generally possessed German-Jewish pedigrees and the members of the *Shtiblech* were of Eastern European origin. It cannot be established when the *Shtiblech* were dissolved.<sup>133</sup> However, the only official congregation to survive into the war years until the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* was dissolved on 10 June 1943 was the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* in its modified form. Oral history supports the assumption that the

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<sup>133</sup> No documentation concerning the operations and dissolutions of the *Shtiblech* has been located.

*Shtiblech* were in existence until the pogrom of November 1938. Beyond this period it appears that the remaining Jews of Magdeburg had no option but to merge into one congregation.

The largest congregation in Magdeburg was the *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg*. It conformed to the indigenous culture and practices of acculturated German Jews and operated as an *Einheitsgemeinde*.<sup>134</sup> This congregation also possessed the greatest public profile in the city and the administration of the synagogue was responsible for a vast array of communal duties. The pivotal point of this community was Rabbi Dr Georg Wilde. Wilde's profile is featured extensively in both the literature on the community and in the minds of his former congregants.<sup>135</sup> Wilde assumed his position as rabbi on 1 August 1906.<sup>136</sup> He was born in Meseritz in Brandenburg on 9 May 1877 and completed his doctoral dissertation in Breslau in 1901.<sup>137</sup> He married Martha Spitz, who was born in Breslau in 1888 and they remained childless.<sup>138</sup> He published widely on Jewish subjects.<sup>139</sup> One of his most acclaimed works was entitled: *Religiöse Bilder: Predigten von Dr. Georg Wilde*.<sup>140</sup> During World War One he had served with distinguished honour as a field rabbi and returned to his position in Magdeburg

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<sup>134</sup> Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition. The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

<sup>135</sup> Spanier, op. cit., pp. 31–32; Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241; and Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>136</sup> Personal file on Rabbi Dr Georg and Mrs Martha Wilde, Bestand Pe, Signatur Nr. 50, ASGM, op. cit.

<sup>137</sup> Spanier, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

<sup>138</sup> Personal file on Rabbi Dr Georg and Mrs Martha Wilde, Bestand Pe, Signatur Nr. 50, ASGM, op. cit.

<sup>139</sup> A detailed list of Wilde's publications and speeches is to be found in Spanier, op. cit.

<sup>140</sup> Georg Wilde, *Religiöse Bilder: Predigten von Dr. Georg Wilde* Berlin: Verlag von M. Poppelauer, 1914.

where he remained until his emigration in 1939. He was a member of the *Allgemeiner Rabbinerverband Deutschlands* and the *Vereinigung der liberalen Rabbiner Deutschlands*.<sup>141</sup> Wilde also served with distinction on numerous boards of several religious, cultural and welfare organisations. His selfless dedication to all of his wider roles in the community is corroborated both by documentation and by the number of acknowledged honorary positions he held.

A valuable insight into Wilde's character and his life in the community can be established from oral history, which additionally provides an important insight into the religious life of the community. A unanimous opinion from all of the interviewees was that the rabbi was very much an intellectual and a very affable, gentle individual. He was very popular and a well-respected public figure in both the Jewish and wider communities as a religious leader, as a citizen of Magdeburg and as a proud German of the Jewish faith.

Wilde also possessed a particularly special place in the community, due to the longevity of his tenure and the generational relationships he nurtured. Sigrid Freeman recalled with great fondness and pride that the rabbi had married her parents, buried her sister, officiated at her husband's *Bar Mitzvah* and given the speech under the *Chuppah* at her wedding.<sup>142</sup> His commanding physical presence, personal dignity and noble demeanour also featured in the memories of interviewees. Both the young Gerhard Levy and Hansgünter Jeruchem also felt, as young children at the time, that the rabbi appeared to them to be like someone out of a biblical story. Gerry Levy recalled:

He was a very fine person, quite liberal; also a very fine-looking person. He had a long, white, flowing beard. I always thought that he looked like G-d!<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>142</sup> S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>143</sup> Levy, op. cit., 16 December 1997.

Hans Jensen's vivid recollections are quite similar. He, too, commented with much amusement on the rabbi's 'interesting' beard and that he thought that he looked like 'Moses or one of the prophets.'<sup>144</sup>

Two other sets of memories that are of particular interest are those associated with the rabbi's attitude to his strong German identity and to his own intellectualism, which drew on the Germanic tradition. These impacted on his religiosity and also reflect to a large extent the religiosity of the majority of his congregants. They also provide an insight into the impact he had on his congregation. The majority of the interviewees were teenagers or young adults for the time period under discussion, and all acknowledged that those of their parents' and grandparents' generation held similar, if not the same, views as the rabbi; unlike the majority of the congregation's youth who were in the process of rejecting the German-Jewish identities so valued by the older generation. The majority of the interviewees commented on the essentially German character of the rabbi. Their combined perceptions are well articulated by Hans Jensen, in recalling a conversation he had with the rabbi:

He was another one of those who was more German than the Germans! I'll never forget one statement he made! He said: "I have more in common with a non-Jewish German than with a Yemenite Jew!" It sounds absolutely ghastly today that he could still say such a thing!<sup>145</sup>

Thus, the rabbi and his congregation represented the typical acculturated German-Jewish community. Religious practices were essentially a combination of perceived Germanness and Jewishness. This was interpreted as an important achievement which hailed from the period of the Enlightenment, but even more so from the period after German unification in 1871.

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<sup>144</sup> Jensen, op. cit., 14 June 1999.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid and personal interview with Hans Jensen (recorded), Sydney, 11 July 1999.

Wilde was also widely recognised as a commanding orator, writer and intellectual, not only in Magdeburg, but in the province of Saxony and throughout Germany itself.<sup>146</sup> Interviewees indicated that the rabbi's knowledge about non-Jewish subjects was actually greater than those in Jewish subjects. Other than their experiences with the rabbi in the general community, the majority of the interviewees were taught by the rabbi at the synagogue's *Religionsschule*. Both Hemmi and Sigrid Freeman recalled with great admiration and respect Rabbi Dr Wilde's intellectual capacity. Sigrid Freeman remarked that: '*Er war ein Philosoph!* [He was a philosopher!] He was outstanding!'<sup>147</sup> Hemmi Freeman elaborated on this further:

He was a fantastic speaker; not naturally religious speeches though. In my opinion, Dr Wilde was a very learned man, more in worldly subjects than Jewish. Every one of his sermons was something to sit and listen to. And you could sit for an hour and a half as well! He was colossal!<sup>148</sup>

The rabbi's intellectual vigour did not limit itself to his public positions, both at the synagogue and in the Jewish community as whole. He was also dedicated to meeting his community's every need, informally as well as officially. In retelling the story of a family member, Sigrid Freeman provided a profound insight into this man's commitment:

I had a cousin and she was super, super intelligent and when she was about eight or nine years old or even ten, Rabbi Dr Wilde met her regularly every Sunday morning at the '*Kaiser-Café*', with his paper, just to discuss with her.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Report to the Landesverband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Russischen Okkupationszone, Berlin from the president of the Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Otto (Ismar) Horst Karliner, 22 January 1947, Bestand 5B1, Signatur Nr. 65, CJA, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>147</sup> S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>148</sup> H. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>149</sup> S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998. The fate of this young girl represents in many ways the tragic fate of many German Jews, as expressed further by the interviewee: 'Unfortunately, they went to Palestine in 1933, my uncle, aunt and the three children; and she was so upset at the beginning that she could not study and so on and she

These recollections provide an insight into his character as an individual; into the congregation he served; and the religious and value systems this group of people generally held. Wilde held steadfast in his position and provided generous support of every kind to his fellow Jews as the situation continued to deteriorate. He, like so many of his male congregants after the *Reichskristallnacht*, was incarcerated in Buchenwald Concentration Camp for eleven days, where he attempted to maintain his pastoral role.<sup>150</sup> He continued his religious duties up until his emigration to England in March 1939.<sup>151</sup>

In addition to the rabbi, the synagogue employed a number of staff. From 1933 up until the pogrom, Max (Meier) Teller served the synagogue as cantor and Rudolf Rosenberg as teacher. In addition, Wilde and Teller also performed teaching duties at the synagogue's *Religionsschule*.<sup>152</sup> The synagogue also employed up to three office staff in any given year.<sup>153</sup> In 1933 an organist was employed for the budgetary period and in this same year the sexton of the synagogue, Samuel Nußbaum, retired.<sup>154</sup> In 1933 Max Arensberg was employed as a *Shochet*, a position which became redundant on 21 April 1933 when kosher butchering was prohibited,<sup>155</sup> and upon Nußbaum's retirement he took on the role

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committed suicide, a girl of fourteen or fifteen. They sent her to a school in Jerusalem and she could not interest herself; she couldn't take it somehow.'

<sup>150</sup> George Wilde, *Eleven Days in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald, 1938–1939*, File ME 687; MM82, LBIA NY, op. cit.

<sup>151</sup> Personal file on Rabbi Dr Georg and Mrs Martha Wilde, Bestand Pe, Signatur Nr. 50, ASGM, op. cit.

<sup>152</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, 1935/1936, 1936/1937, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, STAM, op. cit.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Kaplan, op. cit., p. 33.

of synagogue sexton and was still in this position at the time of the pogrom in November 1938.<sup>156</sup>

A number of the synagogue's activities provide some insight into the religiosity of the community. Sabbath services were held on Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and Saturday evenings. Daily services were also held in the mornings and in the evenings.<sup>157</sup> It appears that this schedule of religious services did not alter before November 1938. The synagogue also published in its newsletter the relevant times for congregants, indicating the commencement of and the end of the Sabbath.<sup>158</sup> It allocated funds each year to operate its mixed choir, to pay for the services of an organist and to conduct religious services exclusively for youth. The synagogue also contributed financially to the maintenance and operation of the *Mikvah* and in order to ensure a *Minyan* for all religious services, paid designated congregants a nominal sum to make up the mandatory quorum. Also of interest, given the synagogue's non-Zionist leanings, was the annual allocation of communal funds to the *Keren Hayesod*<sup>159</sup> and a one-off financial subsidy allocated in 1933 to the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Achduth'*,<sup>160</sup> one of the *Shtibl* communities in Magdeburg.

From a religious viewpoint, the number of religious services, the importance of a *Minyan* for all these services and the availability of a *Mikvah* all indicate that the synagogue's board wished to provide for congregants who leant more toward

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<sup>156</sup> H. Freeman, op. cit., 3 June 1998.

<sup>157</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>158</sup> *Mitteilungen der Synagogengemeinde Magdeburg*, 1. August 1935, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2165, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>159</sup> *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, 1935/1936, 1936/1937*, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, STAM, op. cit.

<sup>160</sup> *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934*, ibid.

Orthodoxy than toward a completely liberal variety of Judaism. In noting the existence and popularity of the mixed choir and the organ, we are provided with evidence of this compromise in religious practice, which is particularly evidenced by the organ. So too, is this lack of rigidity present in the synagogue's position toward Palestine. Although the congregation was not Zionistically inclined, it felt some sense of responsibility to financially support the Zionist cause. This flexibility is perhaps evidenced most strikingly in the synagogue's financial assistance of one of the *Shtiblech*, which gives rise to the notion that relations were not as strained in an official capacity as they were unofficially.

Memories of the synagogue staff were very positive. Repeated compliments about the high quality of the cantor and of the choir were made. Varying attitudes toward religious observance support the view that the synagogue represented a variety of positions, ranging from those members who only attended during religious festivals or for important family life-cycle events to those who attended all services. Representative of the synagogue was the complete range in the degree of observance of *Kashrut* in the home. Interviewees indicated that there were congregants who closed their businesses on the Sabbath and festivals, those who did not and those who had non-Jewish staff handle their affairs. The vast majority of interviewees attended religious services during all the major Jewish festivals. Hemmi and Sigrid Freeman commented on their perception of Judaism at the synagogue:

It was liberal, but not the same as the Liberalism now. Women were seated separately. It was semi-Orthodox. Very much like the Great Synagogue here. In England, Rabbi Dr Wilde was not recognised by the Orthodox rabbinate and was not permitted to officiate at our wedding.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> H. and S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

Not surprisingly, the social element arising from religious events was also of much importance to congregants and the synagogue's importance only increased as the years progressed, due to the disappearance of Jewish public space. Gisela Kent recalled this factor. She recollected her *Bat Mitzvah* in 1935:

In Magdeburg girls had to be aged fifteen. There were about five or six girls together. It was held in the synagogue and a new dress was purchased; and a small party was held afterward. No one came from out of town as my family was very small. Only the family in Magdeburg attended.<sup>162</sup> We didn't have much money for big events; it was a family celebration.<sup>163</sup>

Importantly, all these events were celebrated with vigour, yet in all of the oral history there exists an underlying sadness at the reality of what was happening outside the synagogue and of the somewhat artificial, yet necessary world, that they had been forced to create. Even inside the synagogue the reality could not be escaped, commented Hemmi Freeman:

The time came even when ladies were sitting down below; they had a beautiful gallery. One by one people had already left. So, to make it more homely, the ladies were sitting downstairs in a separate block or something like that.<sup>164</sup>

Oral history concurs that all life-cycle events continued as the synagogue attempted to fulfil the needs of its congregants. For teenagers at that time, the synagogue was of great significance to them, both physically and psychologically, regardless of their attitude to religion. It came to form the basis of their emerging identity as Jews and not as Germans of the Jewish faith.

Other than the confirmation of the physical existence of the two *Shtiblech*, the *Betverein 'Ahawas Reim'* and the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Ahduth'* and the possibility of the existence of a third *Shtibl*,<sup>165</sup> little more is known about them.

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<sup>162</sup> Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

<sup>163</sup> Kent, op. cit., 12 January 1998.

<sup>164</sup> H. Freeman, op. cit., 3 June 1998.

<sup>165</sup> Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

The *Mizrachi* movement also operated a group in Magdeburg and may have possessed its own *Minyan*.<sup>166</sup> The advertised times of the religious services of the *Jüdische Vereinigung 'Ahduth'* indicate that it was an Orthodox congregation providing all of the mandatory religious services for Orthodox Jews over the Sabbath and festivals, in addition to daily morning services.<sup>167</sup> This same congregation also informed the community in its notices of the operating times for men and women for use of the community's *Mikvah*. According to the interviewees, these congregations were not led by rabbis but by laymen.

The majority of the interviewees could not provide details of any aspect of the *Shtiblech*. One interviewee recalled that he had visited two *Shtiblech* and that he remembered them in 1937 and 1938. He recalled attending one *Shtibl* at *Purim* 'because there you could make a noise and they didn't make much of a noise in the *Synagogen-Gemeinde!*'<sup>168</sup> Finally, in a vivid recollection of an incident on a Sabbath involving a young congregant from a *Shtibl*, Inge-Ruth Herrmann provides confirmation of the strict level of Orthodoxy observed by this community, whilst simultaneously highlighting the mutual prejudice of both groups of the Jewish community:

I had friends which were Polish and religious people. My parents had the shop open on Saturday and on the way home from synagogue my mother had asked me to buy some fruit. I was walking with these couple of boys and girls and I bought the fruit and I said to one of the boys: "You know, you should carry that for me!" And he said: "You expect me to carry anything on *Shabbes* [the Sabbath]! How can you carry anything on *Shabbes*!" When my parents came home on Saturday afternoon from the shop, I said to my father: "It's terrible that you got your shop open on Saturday. After all, we are Jewish!" And he listened to it, and then he said: "Sit down my dear child! Now you listen to me. Who told you that?" And I said so-and-so. And he said: "Look, I don't cheat anybody the whole week through. I don't have to go

<sup>166</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 30. Dezember 1932, Nr. 53, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 342.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> M. F., op. cit., 27 June 1999.

every *Shabbes*. These people, some of them they cheat, and they have to go on *Shabbes*, so to make sure that G-d forgives them!” I’ll never forget that. He said: “I don’t cheat anybody! I go on *Yontef* [Jewish festivals], but I don’t have to go on *Shabbes* and close my shop!” First he talked very quietly, and the further he got into it, the more upset he got. That gives you an idea of how religious we were!<sup>169</sup>

From this limited evidence it is possible to discern the level of religiosity of the community members who belonged to the *Shtiblech*. The *Shtiblech* were still functioning prior to November 1938 and the level of their Orthodoxy is made clear from the source material. Clearly, however, links existed between the two groups, as indicated by the community’s *Mikvah* and the fact that some members of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* did on occasion attend religious services at the *Shtiblech*. The reverse did not occur.

Prior to the pogrom of November 1938, religiosity in its two known forms co-existed. Until this time, however, the two distinct religious variants lived in separate spheres. In a positive view this also confirms the rich diversity which existed in the Jewish community as well as the areas of co-operation, indicating that the lines of division were not as rigid as congregants once thought. Both continued to meet all of the religious duties of their congregants. In the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* the social element of its congregation had always been strong. Yet, it became even stronger as the synagogue became a focal point for congregants to meet as their social ostracism in the city increased. For a large number of community members this also led to a rich, if not forced, (re-)discovery of their Jewish identities. In this respect, it can be argued that one of the strengths of the entire community framework in learning how to function and meet the needs of its members lay in its effective structures and its communal and

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<sup>169</sup> Poppert, op. cit., 9 January 1998.

religious leadership. The synagogues played effective roles both within their pastoral role and beyond this as a de-facto ‘one-stop-shop.’ They played a vital role in developing strategies of communal defence and had thus moved beyond their traditional religious roles and responsibilities.

### **Strategies of Communal Defence and Survival**

On a communal level, strategies of defence and survival in the face of increasing hostility were achieved in four separate communal arenas: the *Centralverein* (CV),<sup>170</sup> the religious communities, the social welfare organisations and organisations acting independently.

Prior to the pogrom of November 1938, the legal defence of the community and its members was largely represented by the CV, the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens – Landesverband Provinz Sachsen, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg*.<sup>171</sup> Much of this branch’s legal affairs were attended to by the CV’s regional office in Leipzig, the *Landesverband Mitteldeutschland des Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*. Particularly after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, the CV also assisted community members to adapt to new situations. The main task of developing appropriate strategies to

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<sup>170</sup> See Barkai, “*Wehr Dich!*” *Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C. V.) 1893–1938*, op. cit.

<sup>171</sup> An extensive literature exists on the roles, activities and position of the CV from 1933 until 1938. See Konrad Kwiet and Helmut Eschwege, *Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand: Deutsche Juden im Kampf um Existenz und Menschenwürde 1933–1945* Hamburg: Christians-Verlag, 1984; Jürgen Matthäus, “Kampf ohne Verbündete. Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens 1933–1938,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 1999, pp. 248–277; and Arnold Paucker and Konrad Kwiet, “Jewish Leadership and Jewish Resistance,” in David Bankier, ed., *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933–1941* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and the Leo Baeck Institute, Jerusalem in association with Berghahn Books, 2000, pp. 371–394.

ensure physical survival in the city fell to both the religious congregations and to the community's social welfare organisations, which combined to provide a varied array of social welfare programs. The final group to act in the practical defence of the community, in addition to attempting to ensure the survival of Jewish life in Magdeburg, was a number of creative and resourceful organisations acting independently as the need arose. The most notable of these were the Zionist organisations, whose primary strategy for survival was preparation for emigration. In addition to this, all communal organisations and institutions developed and implemented their own strategies on an independent basis, as previously discussed in this chapter.

Kurt Sabatzky was the legal representative of the CV for Saxony and was based in Leipzig from 1933 until 1938.<sup>172</sup> After the *Reichskristallnacht* he was imprisoned in Buchenwald Concentration Camp and later emigrated to England in 1939.<sup>173</sup> The body of representatives of the CV's branch in Magdeburg underwent numerous changes for the period,<sup>174</sup> whilst the presidency appears to have remained under Dr Ernst Merzbach.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Prior to his position in Leipzig, he had occupied the same post in East Prussia and was based in Königsberg from 1923 until 1933. For a detailed account of Sabatzky's career in Königsberg during the years of the Weimar Republic see Sabine Thiem, "Kurt Sabatzky: The C. V. Syndikus of the Jewish Community in Königsberg during the Weimar Republic," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XLIV, 1999, pp. 191–204.

<sup>173</sup> In 1932 the Nazis also attempted to assassinate him. See Kurt Sabatzky, *Meine Erinnerungen an den Nationalsozialismus*, undated, File ME 541; MM65, LBI NY, p. 19. An abridged and edited version of this memoir was also reproduced in Monika Richarz, ed., *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland, Volume 3, Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1918–1945* Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982, pp. 292–300.

<sup>174</sup> Correspondence from the branch office of the CV in Magdeburg, 2 December 1933 – 13 July 1937, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMA, op. cit.

<sup>175</sup> Guido Heinrich and Günter Schandera, eds., *Magdeburger Biographisches Lexikon 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* Magdeburg: Scriptorum Verlag, 2002, p. 461.

During his tenure in Leipzig, Sabatzky was responsible for the CV's branch in Magdeburg. From the very inception of the Nazi regime, Magdeburg was particularly antisemitic on all fronts. Sabatzky, very early in his memoirs, makes the comment that: 'Magdeburg as a city very quickly became the most unpleasant of places for Jews in my region.'<sup>176</sup> Jewish individuals, organisations and institutions sought both counsel and representation from the CV.

The CV dealt with a number of key areas. At the national level it sought to provide effective dissemination of important information between its central office in Berlin and its regional and branch offices. The second area involved the Magdeburg branch registering and conveying to its regional office all antisemitic incidents. It played a leading role in acting on behalf of the community and of individuals when dealing with the local authorities regarding antisemitic activities. The CV also played a role in the defence of community members in assisting with legal counsel for those members who had been charged for criminal offences; most of which had been invented. Examples of these include the Fliess<sup>177</sup> and Schmulewitz trials in 1936.<sup>178</sup> The final area of the CV's brief was the area of general communication with the local authorities when the authorities required information or action on an issue pertaining to the Jewish community. This role arguably represented both the defence of community interests in addition to ensuring its survival.

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<sup>176</sup> Kurt Sabatzky, *Meine Erinnerungen an den Nationalsozialismus*, undated, File ME 541; MM65, LBIA NY, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>177</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 24 August 1936, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMA, op. cit., p. 355.

<sup>178</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 22 May 1936, *ibid.*, p. 347.

Regular meetings of the Magdeburg branch were held at the *B'nai B'rith* Lodge and attracted large numbers.<sup>179</sup> The meetings were often attended by representatives from the CV's regional office in Leipzig. Members were informed of the situation for Jews nationally, followed by regional and branch reports. Included in these local reports were details on progress with the relevant authorities on antisemitic incidents already registered and a news briefing on issues currently affecting Jews locally, including antisemitic incidents, criminal prosecutions<sup>180</sup> and 'aryanisations' of local Jewish businesses.<sup>181</sup> In order to maintain constant vigilance and effective management in the defence of the communities, regional offices forwarded regular and detailed reports of all activities to the CV's head office in Berlin, particularly after they had visited communities in their jurisdiction.<sup>182</sup>

The Magdeburg branch of the CV met with limited success and always pursued each matter through the appropriate legal and governmental channels. Ironically, in the majority of the dealings between the CV and both governmental and Gestapo officials in Magdeburg, the atmosphere was very businesslike. Sabatzky, on one occasion, remarked after one particular meeting with the chief of the Gestapo in Magdeburg, Dr Vitzdamm, and Police Inspector Königshaus: 'Both officers behaved in a very polite way.'<sup>183</sup> Procedurally, once an incident or issue

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<sup>179</sup> Correspondence from the regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 2 December 1933, Collection 0.51.OSO, File 243, YVA, pp. 3–4.

<sup>180</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 24 August 1936, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMMA, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 398–399.

<sup>183</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin, concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 7 August 1935, *ibid.*, p. 397.

was made known to the CV, then it acted on it immediately. If more senior advice was required, the Leipzig and/or Berlin offices were consulted.

Antisemitic incidents which were registered and acted upon include the following: complaints made that at local gatherings of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) and SA (*Sturmabteilung*) in December 1933 that lists of Jewish doctors were being read out with a view to incitement;<sup>184</sup> that masses of antisemitic signage appeared throughout the city including behind windows,<sup>185</sup> in shops and in restaurants; the incidence of the publication and distribution of boycott lists and of tens of thousands of copies of a directory, with a caricatured Jew pictured on its cover, entitled *Magdeburgs Juden stellen sich vor!* [*Magdeburg's Jews Introduce Themselves!*] detailing the names, addresses and professions of all Jews in the city;<sup>186</sup> complaints concerning the public singing of defamatory, antisemitic songs; notification concerning the introduction of antisemitic signage to be displayed on trams from 31 August 1935;<sup>187</sup> and notification that Jews would be forbidden from visiting the city's archive, libraries, and bookshops and requested not to use the city's public baths from 8 September 1935.<sup>188</sup>

The majority of complaints lodged by the CV to the authorities took time to resolve, seldom with success. Much of the limited success was confined to the

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<sup>184</sup> Correspondence from the regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 2 December 1933, Collection 0.51.OSO, File 243, YVA, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

<sup>185</sup> Correspondence from the regional office of the CV in Leipzig the CV and the Magdeburg branch of the CV, discussing antisemitic signage, 30 January 1934 and 2 July 1934, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMA, op. cit., pp. 430–431.

<sup>186</sup> Correspondence from the regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the Gestapa in Magdeburg, complaining about boycott lists and the publication *Magdeburgs Juden stellen sich vor!*, 13 February 1935, *ibid.*, pp. 428–429.

<sup>187</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin, concerning the introduction of antisemitic signage on Magdeburg trams, 31 August 1935, *ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>188</sup> Report from the Magdeburg City Press Office, 8 September 1935, *ibid.*, p. 380.

temporary removal of antisemitic signage and a pause in the public singing of defamatory songs. In the early years of the Nazi regime *Kreis- und Abschnittsleiter* Krause in Magdeburg, together with the mayor, were responsible for ensuring that all shops, pharmacies and restaurants displayed metal antisemitic signs. Simultaneously, the mayor also sanctioned the same signs for trams and Magdeburg was the first and only city in Germany to do so. These measures were sanctioned by *Gauleiter* Loeper, a virulent antisemite based in Dessau.<sup>189</sup>

This small selection of complaints to which the CV attended demonstrates the escalation in the level of seriousness of antisemitic activity as the years progressed. As the situation deteriorated after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935, the CV developed strategies for physical survival. One example of this surrounded the activity of shopping. When the issue of the dangerous nature of shopping in Magdeburg began to recur constantly, the CV commenced instructing community members to only shop at certain Jewish and non-Jewish shops at particular times on particular days.<sup>190</sup>

The final area of the CV's activities concerned general communication with the local authorities when the authorities required information or action on an issue pertaining to the Jewish community. This provides evidence indicating the level of its importance in its representation of the Jewish community to the local authorities. Regular counsel was sought from the CV's head office in Berlin, particularly with regard to serious matters. An example of this occurred when the Magdeburg Gestapa requested a comprehensive list of all members of the Jewish

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<sup>189</sup> Kurt Sabatzky, *Meine Erinnerungen an den Nationalsozialismus*, undated, File ME 541; MM65, LBIA NY, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

<sup>190</sup> Correspondence to the regional office of the CV in Königsberg, 28 August 1935, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 101, File 721-1-2335, USHMMA, p. 79.

community in Magdeburg from the local branch of the CV in April 1935. Dr Merzbach complied with the request, but sought advice from the Berlin office.<sup>191</sup>

The local CV was also responsible for conveying essential information from Nazi authorities to community members. An example of this was in May 1936 when community members were informed that henceforth Jews in Magdeburg would only be issued with documentation permitting them to travel within Germany, but that in exceptional circumstances that they could be issued with passports allowing them to travel abroad within a limited time.<sup>192</sup> Thus, in both of these instances the dual role of the CV can be assessed. Whilst defending and attempting to ensure the survival of the community, it also had to act on the direction of the authorities and comply with all requests.

When matters concerning the city's administration and the Jewish community arose, the CV was also involved in resolving issues. An example of this occurred in January 1936 when a disagreement developed between the city council, the city's crematorium and the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. The matter concerned the cremation of a Jewish dissident, who was not a member of the Jewish community. The crematorium and the city council requested the ashes of the deceased be buried in the Jewish cemetery. The *Synagogen-Gemeinde* objected, pointing to the Jewish ban on cremation and the fact that the deceased had cut all ties with Judaism. The matter was resolved when the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* agreed to the

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<sup>191</sup> Correspondence between the Magdeburg branch of the CV and the head office of the CV in Berlin, 9 April 1935 – 15 April 1935, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMA, op. cit., p. 424–426.

<sup>192</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 22 May 1936, *ibid.*, p. 341.

request and the remains were interred.<sup>193</sup> These matters indicate that the administrative role of the local branch of the CV was very diverse. This particular incident also highlights how precarious and difficult its tasks could be. The CV sought to defend Jewish interests, but also had to comply with the demands of the Nazi authorities.

The task of developing strategies to ensure physical survival fell largely to both the religious congregations and the community's social welfare organisations. Both groups worked closely together in providing a variety of welfare programs as well as providing practical and material support. Both the roles and the priorities of these groups would change as the situation for Jews in the city deteriorated.

The *Synagogen-Gemeinde* in its budgets<sup>194</sup> for the years from and including 1933–1937 allocated on average approximately 10% of its funds to social welfare. This figure supported welfare in its own congregation, in addition to its financial contribution to the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg*. It also provided practical assistance in its newsletters, advertising requests for accommodation, clothing and furnishings. In August 1935 the advertisements for the latter were marked 'urgent,' indicating the level of impoverishment of some community members.<sup>195</sup> Former members of the community also recall Rabbi Dr Wilde in his sermons encouraging congregants to

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<sup>193</sup> Correspondence from regional office of the CV in Leipzig to the head office of the CV in Berlin, concerning the Magdeburg branch of the CV, 18 January 1936, Collection RG-11.00M.31, Reel 130, File 721-1-2845, USHMMA, op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>194</sup> Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg Haushaltsplan für 1933/1934, 1934/1935, 1935/1936, 1936/1937, Bestand Rep. A II, Signatur Nr. 2478 J 13a, Band 7, STAM, op. cit.

<sup>195</sup> Mitteilungen der Synagogengemeinde Magdeburg, 1. August 1935, Bestand Rep. C 129, Signatur Nr. 2165, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 283.

give generously to the *Jüdische Winterhilfe*.<sup>196</sup> It cannot be established what relief the *Shtiblech* were able to offer other than that they definitely must have had links with the *Verband ostjüdischer Organisationen Magdeburgs*.<sup>197</sup>

Given the small size of the community, the majority of the social welfare programs operated directly out of the *Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege*,<sup>198</sup> under the presidency of Rabbi Dr Wilde. To a limited degree it also provided temporary financial relief. However, once the *Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg* was founded on 28 March 1934 to meet the growing financial needs of members, this role declined.<sup>199</sup>

For the entire period under discussion, the areas of emigration, immigration, financial assistance to needy members and accommodation feature as ongoing matters. However, for particular periods, certain priorities did emerge. For the period from and including 1933 until the middle of 1937 the emphasis was clearly placed on employment and retraining. The employment market was constantly assessed and reported on. Advertisements were placed in the community for positions vacant. Employment opportunities as far away as Holland and Lithuania<sup>200</sup> were advertised in addition to positions where the applicant could 'not possess a pronounced Jewish appearance.'<sup>201</sup> Young Jews were also sent to

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<sup>196</sup> S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

<sup>197</sup> *Jüdisches Wochenblatt für Magdeburg und Umgegend*, 16. Dezember 1932, Nr. 51, 7. Jahrgang, ASGM, op. cit., p. 328. This organisation was listed in the public notices of this newsletter. No other archival material detailing this organisation has been located.

<sup>198</sup> This organisation was a subsidiary of the national organisation the Zentralwohlfahrtstelle der deutschen Juden.

<sup>199</sup> *Jüdische Bezirksdarlehnskasse zu Magdeburg*, Collection JM, File 11266.6, YVA, op. cit., pp. 1–4.

<sup>200</sup> Correspondence from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 6 March 1934, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>201</sup> Betr. Buchhalterinnenstelle, 26. März 1935, *ibid.*, p. 142.

*Hachsharah* camps. In March 1934 approximately forty young people were involved in agricultural courses on farms outside the city.<sup>202</sup> By the middle of 1935 employment opportunities became very focused on school leavers and youth.<sup>203</sup> In addition, considerable energies were directed to the spiritual and cultural life of the community.<sup>204</sup>

From the middle of 1937 onwards, the emigration of children and youth to foreign countries had become an additional priority. Announcements and advertisements were placed in the community requesting interested parties to complete the application forms and prepare themselves for the procedures to follow. The recorded destinations were the United States of America (USA) and England; this also included the entire British Empire. Of note were some requests from Australia and New Zealand that only '*Mischlinge*' be considered.<sup>205</sup>

Clearly, both the religious congregations and the welfare agencies sought, particularly in the initial years of the Nazi regime, to equip members of the community with long-term strategies that would assist them in adjusting to their changed circumstances, and not just with physical needs and financial assistance. This was primarily undertaken in the areas of employment and retraining. However, once the full ramifications of the Nuremberg Race Laws were felt, these

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<sup>202</sup> Protokoll der Hauptversammlung des Provinzialverbandes für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg, 11. März 1934, ALJGSA, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> Correspondence from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 6 March 1934, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA, op. cit., pp. 102–118.

<sup>204</sup> Questionnaire on the priorities of the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt and the Synagogen-Gemeinden-Verband der Provinz Sachsen, 5 May 1935, ALJGSA.

<sup>205</sup> Correspondence from the Provinzial-Verband für jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege in Sachsen-Anhalt, Beratungsstelle Magdeburg, 26 July 1937 – 6 May 1938, Bestand 2A2, Signatur Nr. 1315, CJA, op. cit., pp. 270–309. This subject is further explored in greater detail in Chapter Five.

strategies were no longer deemed long-term solutions. This becomes clear with the high priority given to sending children and youth out of Germany, particularly from 1937. The Zionist organisations continued to focus on emigration to Palestine.

The final group to act in the practical defence of the community and to attempt to ensure the survival of Jewish life was a number of organisations which attempted to find solutions to their own problems. A number of communal organisations that achieved this have previously been overviewed in this chapter. Further to this, individuals who acted in this same manner will be explored in the ensuing chapters, which incorporate their personal stories.

One such example of this, detailing both the efforts of Jewish organisations and an individual can be found in the following two related incidents. The first involved *Hechaluz*, the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*, the Magdeburg-Anhalt branch of the *Nationalsozialistische Handwerks-, und Gewerbe-Organisation* (NS-HAGO) of the Nazi Party and the Magdeburg City Mission of the Lutheran Church. Prior to 1933 both *Hechaluz* and the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* had hired the Grotian Steinweg Hall in the Lutheran Church's City Mission for functions. In March 1935 a war of words and paper ensued between the Lutheran Church's Bishop Peter and the *Kreisamtsleiter* of the NS-HAGO in Magdeburg-Anhalt. On 8 March 1935, the Nazi Party learned that Jewish functions were still taking place at that hall. A letter was sent to Bishop Peter, requesting that Jews be forbidden from using the hall. The director of the City Mission, Pastor W. Lüdecke, together with the bishop, replied that the local Gestapo and the city authorities had granted permission for such events under certain provisions back in early 1933. Despite the pressure and abusive tone and content of the correspondence from the NS-

HAGO's *Kreisamtsleiter*, neither the Jewish community nor the Lutheran Church would bow to pressure. By the end of March the matter had still not been resolved.<sup>206</sup> The Jewish parties were determined to defend their rights, even though quite clearly this was a dangerous action. The very fact that the Jewish community was still using non-Jewish premises is also evidence of the community's determination not to isolate itself unnecessarily.

The second incident ensued as a result of that previously discussed. It involved Walter Heinemann of the *Palästina-Amt Berlin, Zweigstelle Magdeburg* and Pastor W. Lüdecke. On hearing of the events in March over the use of the hall, Heinemann possibly felt that the pastor may have been sympathetic to the Jewish cause. As a result, on 21 March 1935 Heinemann wrote a very cordial, detailed letter introducing himself and the role that Zionism had to play for German Jewry and its place in Nazi ideology.<sup>207</sup> This second incident further demonstrates the initiative and the creative resilience of individuals acting in both their personal and professional capacity, as the community attempted to defend itself and secure its survival.

In assessing the organisations that served to both defend the community and provide it with strategies for survival, the conclusions and observations that have been drawn for the previously discussed structures in the Jewish community appear equally as true here. The CV played a pivotal role in legally representing and defending the community in an effort to secure Jewish existence. Its roles and

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<sup>206</sup> Correspondence concerning the use of the Grotian Steinweg Hall in the Lutheran Church's City Mission in Magdeburg, 8 March 1935 – 29 March 1935, Bestand Rep. A, Spec. K, Signatur Nr. 2429, AKPS, op. cit.

<sup>207</sup> Correspondence from Walter Heinemann to Pastor W. Lüdecke, 21 March 1935, *ibid.*

responsibilities continually increased in burden, particularly after the Nuremberg Laws. In observing the activities of the organisations involved in welfare in the city, what becomes clear is the transition from attempting to remodel life in Germany under the new conditions to the realisation that this was not possible. This is made clear in the strategies of all organisations, with the exception of the Zionist organisations. The main focus up until the middle of 1937 remained adapting to the new 'pre-emancipation' conditions of discrimination and defamation. This is most obvious in the area of employment and retraining. This also found expression in the cultural and educational domains. The reality and the ramifications of the Nuremberg Laws appear to have caught up with the community from the middle of 1937, when the emigration of children and youth became a priority. This marked the period when Jews began to lose hope and reassessed their situation. The destruction of the very foundations of Jewish existence in Magdeburg surrounded them. For a great number of them, one of the key issues that had brought them to this realisation was the perceived lack of a sustainable financial future, as economic strangulation had reduced them to impoverishment by this stage.