

## Introduction

### Aim and Focus

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to filling a void that has existed concerning scholarly research and writing on the history of the Jewish community of Magdeburg under Nazi rule. At its centre stands the attempt to reconstruct the life and destruction of this community from 1933 until 1945; how the community responded to the Nazi assault; and what remained after the architects and executioners of the 'Final Solution' had annihilated this small, diverse community in what was at that time the Prussian province of Saxony. This study is based on the combination of archival material and oral history material of Jewish refugees and survivors from Magdeburg, who settled in Australia. The focus of this thesis has been to document this community's history from the position of the victims; that is to say from an essentially Jewish perspective of daily Jewish life under siege.<sup>1</sup> In this respect this case study has been 'written from below.'

Whilst there has been extensive research on the evolution of policy toward the Jews in Nazi Germany, most of this until recently has focused on the larger communities. This focus on a small community enables a detailed study from the micro to the macro of Jewish life and of its destruction. This thesis limits itself to the experiences of the Jews in Magdeburg only and does not include the experiences of other Jews who at any time found themselves in or near the city, for example, Jews on forced labour detail in the local sub-camps of Buchenwald

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<sup>1</sup> See Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography from a Jewish Perspective: Conceptualization, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003 and Dan Stone, *Constructing the Holocaust* London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003.

Concentration Camp.<sup>2</sup> Prior to this thesis, no original research had been completed on this community. Hence, this study is the first of its kind on the history of Magdeburg Jewry under Nazi rule. This study is an empirical work and whilst it is reliant on archival sources and oral history, it is also limited by the sources themselves.

A number of studies on the history of this Jewish community before its destruction have been undertaken. Notable studies of the community have been written and published since 1866. Moritz Güdemann,<sup>3</sup> the renowned rabbi of Magdeburg from 1862 until 1866, had published a history of the community in 1866. He elucidated the milestones in the community's long history for the period prior to Germany's unification in 1871. In 1911, Emanuel Forchhammer<sup>4</sup> published a history of German Jewry, with an emphasis on the history of Magdeburg Jewry (and smaller local communities). The most recent history of Magdeburg Jewry, published in 1923, was written by Moritz Spanier,<sup>5</sup> a prominent journalist, editor, community member and one-time teacher of Jewish religious studies in Magdeburg (1881–1917). This succinct history of the community charts the community's entire history, but concentrates particularly on the period from Imperial Germany until the Weimar Republic. This volume also

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<sup>2</sup> See Tobias Bütow and Franka Bindernagel, *Ein KZ in der Nachbarschaft. Das Magdeburger Außenlager der Brabag und der 'Freundeskreis Himmlers'* Köln, Weimar und Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Moritz Güdemann, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Magdeburg* Breslau: Verlag der Schletter'schen Buchhandlung (H. Skutsch), 1866.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Forchhammer, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden mit besonderer Beziehung auf Magdeburg und die benachbarte Gegend," *Geschichtsblätter für Stadt und Land Magdeburg: Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde des Herzogtums und Erzstifts Magdeburg*, vol. 46, number 1, 1911, pp. 119–178 and vol. 46, number 2, 1911, pp. 328–408.

<sup>5</sup> Moritz Spanier, *Geschichte der Juden in Magdeburg* Magdeburg: Verlag von L. Sperling & Co., 1923.

provides important documentation on the position of the Jewish community on the eve of the Nazi accession to power.

Since 1923, no sole publication has dedicated itself to the history of this Jewish community since its inception, nor since the *Shoah* has the story of this community's experiences under Nazism been the subject in any single volume dedicated exclusively to this purpose.

Until the period of German re-unification in 1990, access to archival records on Magdeburg Jewry was severely limited. Since 1990 the community's history has been included in a number of encyclopaedic-style reference works, the most informative to date being a volume dedicated exclusively to the histories of the Jewish communities of the new German federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, published in 1997.<sup>6</sup> An overview of the history of the community during the Nazi period was also included in a multi-volume work dedicated to the city's entire history, published in celebration of Magdeburg's 1,200-year anniversary in 2005.

During the past five years I have published a number of scholarly articles dealing with aspects of Jewish life in Magdeburg under Nazism, ranging from the experiences of Jewish pupils in public schools; the subject of identity of German-Jewish refugees; the experience of the *Reichskristallnacht*; and immigration from Magdeburg to Australia.<sup>7</sup> As the first of its kind, this doctoral thesis is in no way an all-encompassing study, as the results of this research, whilst comprehensive, are limited. Nevertheless, it has achieved its primary aim in its reconstruction of the experiences and responses of the Jews of Magdeburg under Nazi rule.

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<sup>6</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., *Geschichte jüdischer Gemeinden in Sachsen-Anhalt: Versuch einer Erinnerung* Wernigerode: Oemler Verlag, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive list of these articles, see under Articles in the Bibliography.

### The History of the Community until 1933

The Jewish community of Magdeburg is one of the oldest Jewish communities in Germany, the oldest Jewish community in the former German Democratic Republic<sup>8</sup> and never numbered more than approximately 3,200 persons.<sup>9</sup> In 1933, the community resembled in structure, religious observance, political affiliations and social organisations the larger communities in the Prussian and Saxon metropolises and in Germany itself. Conversely, its reactions and eventual destruction mirrored that of other comparative communities. The Jewish community of Magdeburg was decimated and dispersed by the *Shoah*. In the shadow of this catastrophe the community reconstructed itself and throughout the life of the German Democratic Republic up until 1990 never numbered more than approximately 100 persons. Since the re-unification of Germany, the community has experienced a renaissance with an influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union. The community in its present form is steadily approaching 1,000 persons,<sup>10</sup> none of whom are survivors (or their descendants) of the former community destroyed during the *Shoah*.

The Jewish community of Magdeburg represented the northern most point of Jewish settlement in the tenth and eleventh centuries. As early as 965 CE there were Jews living in the town and Otto I placed them under the jurisdiction of the archbishop. They traded in the *Kleiderhof* in the Merchants' Quarter and conducted their trade even beyond the River Oder. Their quarter was situated in the south of the city, in the archbishop's domain. In 1012 the Jewish community

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<sup>8</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted here that the population of the community is steadily growing, mirroring the tendency in the vast majority of other Jewish communities in Germany today.

took part in the funeral procession of Archbishop Walthard von Magdeburg. The Jewish cemetery of Magdeburg dates from the thirteenth century, the oldest gravestone bearing the year 1268. Later the cemetery was enlarged, in 1312 and again in 1383.<sup>11</sup> In 1213 the soldiers of Otto IV destroyed the *Judendorf*, and four years later the Jews moved to nearby Sudenburg at the southern end of the city, where numerous Jews already lived.

In 1260 the canons of the cathedral demanded jurisdiction over the Jews and laid claim to the fines they paid in silver, while those paid in gold were to remain the property of the archbishop. Some prominent Jewish figures who appear in the community's history during this period include Rabbi Hezekiah ben Jacob who corresponded with Rabbi Isaac Ohr Zaru'ah and Rabbi Chaim ben Paltiel, rabbi of Magdeburg in 1291, who was in correspondence with Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, the highly respected rabbi, who was incarcerated in Ensisheim in Alsace even though he had committed no crime and died in prison.

The community suffered from several persecutions and was persecuted in 1302 and again during the Black Death Disturbances from 1349 until 1357.<sup>12</sup> Despite the attempts of the archbishop and the city's authorities to protect them, Jews were attacked again in 1357 and 1384 when another epidemic broke out. Between the years 1361 and 1367, Archbishop Dietrich employed a Jewish court banker. In 1410 Archbishop Günther II issued a *Schutzbrief* for a period of six years, at a cost to the community of forty silver marks. During the fifteenth century the community maintained a flourishing *Yeshivah* and a *Beth Din*. Throughout the course of the community's early history, it is known that several prominent rabbis took up residence in Magdeburg and the community flourished

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<sup>11</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

during this period. In 1492 an argument erupted between two Jews and two monks, provoking prolonged riots, and in 1493 the Archbishop of Magdeburg decreed the expulsion of all the Jews from the city and from the entire archbishopric. Subsequently, the synagogue was converted into a chapel and the cemetery was destroyed.

Jews were re-admitted to the city in 1671 by the Great Elector of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm I, and *Schutzjuden* settled once more in Magdeburg.<sup>13</sup> From 1703 they were to be found in Sudenburg, from 1715 in the newer part of town, Neustadt, and from 1729 in the *Altstadt*. However, because of the city council's hostility, a permanent settlement was only established under French rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1811 the community numbered 255 persons and as early as 1809 a Jew was elected a member of the city council.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the ensuing century the community grew continuously, due to the increasing industrialisation of the city. In 1834 the community founded a religious school and in 1839 a *Chevra Kadishah*. Noteworthy rabbis of this period include Dr Ludwig Philippson, who was the founder and editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, the newspaper of Liberal German Judaism, and Dr Moritz Güdemann, who wrote a history of the community.<sup>15</sup> A testimony to Philippson's achievements, the newspaper he founded continued to appear in Magdeburg even after he had left the city.

For many years the community lacked a synagogue and worshipped in small prayer rooms. This situation was rectified in 1851, when Rabbi Dr Philippson

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<sup>13</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>14</sup> Shmuel Spector, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust* Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001, vol. II, p. 782.

<sup>15</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., pp. 196–198.

opened the new building with an organ and choir on 14 September 1851.<sup>16</sup> In the following years the community grew to such an extent that it was felt necessary to enlarge and renovate the synagogue as well as to erect a new building for the religious school. Rabbi Dr Moritz Rahmer officially opened the renovated synagogue on 26 September 1897. The *Magdeburgische Zeitung* reported in glowing terms how this stately building in the Moorish style added to the city's elegance.<sup>17</sup>

The community was shaped profoundly by Dr Philippson, who was rabbi of Magdeburg from 1833 until 1862. Philippson was a leader of Liberal Judaism in Germany and initiated the establishment of the first Jewish religious schools in northern Germany in 1834. Dr Georg Wilde was the community's last rabbi, from 1906 until 1939, when he immigrated to England after the pogrom of the *Reichskristallnacht*.<sup>18</sup> Wilde's immigration was assisted by the British Chief Rabbi of the time, Dr Joseph H. Hertz. Magdeburg was also the birthplace of several prominent politicians, including Dr Georg Gradnauer, Minister-President of Saxony from 1918 until 1920 and Minister for the Interior in 1921, and Dr Otto Landsberg, Social Democrat and member of the city council and the *Reichstag* from 1912 until 1918 and then again from 1924 until 1933 and Minister for Justice in 1919.<sup>19</sup>

Magdeburg's Jewish population had steadily increased from 330 in 1817 to 559 in 1840; 1,000 in 1859; 1,815 in 1885; 1,925 in 1900; and approximately

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<sup>16</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 193–194.

<sup>18</sup> George Wilde, *Eleven Days in the Concentration Camp Buchenwald, 1938–1939*, File ME 687; MM82, Leo Baeck Institute Archives, New York (LBIA NY), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Spector, ed., op. cit., p. 782.

2,356 in 1925,<sup>20</sup> and then dropped to 1,973 in 1933<sup>21</sup> which was 0.6% of the city's total population. At this time the community included many immigrants from Eastern Europe. This prosperous community proudly boasted thirty-three different political, social, commercial, charitable and cultural institutions, clubs, youth groups and lodges in 1933.<sup>22</sup> This included welfare organisations, branches of the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, the Union for Liberal Judaism and the German Zionist Organisation; a *B'nai B'rith* lodge and associations of the Jews from Eastern Europe. In 1923 the community's religious school had approximately 260 pupils and in 1927 a children's home was opened for thirty-five orphans and a vocational training centre for builders and carpenters was opened in the same year.

Essentially until the beginning of the 1930s, Jewish citizens were extremely involved in the city's administrative and commercial affairs. Most were business people involved in trade and industry, possessing shops, warehouses, banks and factories. In 1933 the city counted 422 Jewish business people as part of its citizenry, including three pharmacists, over fifty doctors (who, incidentally, founded their own club in 1903) and twenty-nine solicitors. At the time fourteen foundations supported the community financially.<sup>23</sup>

In 1933 the Jews were a firmly integrated component of Magdeburg's population. Magdeburg's Jews felt as much affection for their city and country as did their non-Jewish fellow citizens. Thirty-six Jewish men from Magdeburg

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<sup>20</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., pp. 186–187.

<sup>21</sup> Statistisches Reichsamt, *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs, Band 451, Volkszählung: die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reichs nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung 1933, Heft 5, Die Glaubensjuden im Deutschen Reich* Berlin: Verlag für Sozialpolitik, Wirtschaft und Statistik, Paul Schmidt, 1936, Bestand R 3102, Bundesarchiv, Berlin (BAB), pp. 15–33.

<sup>22</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

sacrificed their lives for their country in World War One.<sup>24</sup> The Jews of Magdeburg were, indeed, German citizens of the Jewish faith.<sup>25</sup> Like their co-religionists and, after the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935, anyone whom the Nazis defined as Jewish, nothing could have possibly prepared them for what was to come.

In recalling their lives and place in the cityscape prior to 1933, all of the interviewees felt a deep sense of pride and thorough connectedness to the life of the city and felt very little, if any, sense of separateness when the question of identity arose.<sup>26</sup> The majority of the interviewees proudly discussed their German-Jewish pedigrees, which for many of them extended beyond their own family's memories. One of the most common retorts was that the family had been in Magdeburg 'forever.' Gisela Kent recalls:

Of course it was our home. I had a schoolteacher who had gone to school with my grandmother! It was our home. It was never questioned!<sup>27</sup>

However, the latent antisemitism, extant throughout Germany in the years of the Weimar Republic, also featured in Magdeburg. Gerry Levy remarked on an incident involving his paternal uncle, Herbert Levy, a veteran of World War One:

One time he was in a *Kneipe* [local pub] and the discussion centred around what the Jews supposedly hadn't done during World War One and why the Germans had lost the war. Angrily, he pulled his shirt up and shouted at them to come over and take a look at what he 'got' from the war. This is the type of individual he was. Of course the response from those in the tavern was: "*Verzeihung Kameraden!*" ["Our apologies comrade!"].<sup>28</sup>

What is highly important here is the confidence Levy displayed in knowing that he could defend himself and, conversely, confirmed when those who sought to

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<sup>24</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 4 August 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 10 July 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Gisela Kent (recorded), Sydney, 12 January 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Levy AM (recorded), Sydney, 1 October 1997.

besmirch the Jewish effort during the war felt honour-bound to offer their apologies.

As has been demonstrated here, Magdeburg's Jewish community before 1933 mirrors that of other like communities in the geographical region which became the political state of modern Germany after 1871. It is a history of persecution, of massacre, of expulsion, of return; and simultaneously a history of maintaining one's identity, of community-building, of emancipation, of success, of integration, of a sense of belonging, of nationalism and, for some, even assimilation.

With the introduction of boycotts and antisemitic laws in 1933, the Jews of Magdeburg were subjected to humiliation, malicious attacks and violence. At the same time the community's isolation commenced. It is both damning and yet, simultaneously, redeeming, hearing Jewish members of this community tell of the behaviour of their non-Jewish fellow citizens. The experiences of interviewees indicate behaviour of the most noble and admirable kind to acts that can only be described as despicable. Some members of the community prepared for emigration, whilst others waited for signs. By the end of 1933 the community's population had dropped below its 1,973 members.<sup>29</sup> For the majority of those individuals interviewed, their families, not unlike the majority of their co-religionists throughout Germany, the danger was not felt immediately, but unfolded:

Definitely at first, nobody thought it would last. But by the time I left, which was August 1938, people became quite desperate. I think they realised that he's [Hitler] here to stay. Because when I left, they said try and get us a permit, which, of course, I couldn't do.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Landesverband Jüdischer Gemeinden Sachsen-Anhalt, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>30</sup> Kent, *op. cit.*, 12 January 1998.

### Archival Material and Oral History

In commencing this research project, an extensive oral history program was undertaken, involving interviewing and recording the experiences of Jewish victims of Nazism who fled Magdeburg and, at various intervals, settled in Australia.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the process of locating, accessing, assessing and copying archival material related to the community's history was commenced.<sup>32</sup> Upon completion of this second phase, material from both sources was combined and the process of documenting a reconstruction of the life experiences of the Jews of Magdeburg from 1933 until 1945 began.

Both the archival material and the oral history material utilised for this research have presented their own particular issues and limitations. With regard to archival material, the most significant issues encountered were chiefly gaining ready, ongoing access to the relevant material, as the major collections utilised for this research are located in far-flung archives in Germany, Israel and the United States of America (USA); combined with the often frustrating factor of the absence or incomplete and limited nature of material on certain subjects.

Having located and accessed archival material from the standpoint of both the victims and the perpetrators, for many of the discussed subject areas, it has been

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<sup>31</sup> For practical advice on interviewing techniques for oral historians, see Beth M. Robertson, *Oral History Handbook* Adelaide: Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch), 2000.

<sup>32</sup> In the process of locating archival material, the majority of material was located by direct contact with the archives, libraries and institutions listed under Archives and Libraries in the Bibliography. A number of inventories provided by the aforementioned institutions were also utilised to refine the process. Of significant usefulness in this phase of the research process was Steffi Jersch-Wenzel and Reinhard Rürup, eds., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in den neuen Bundesländer*, vol. 3, *Staatliche Archive der Länder Berlin, Brandenburg und Sachsen-Anhalt* München: K. G. Saur Verlag, 1999.

possible to combine archival sources and oral history to provide a more accurate and balanced picture. For a number of research areas a dearth of archival material was encountered, generally owing to the complete destruction by the Nazis of whatever material existed. This was certainly the case with regard to the records of all of the communal organisations, including synagogues, for the entire period under discussion. The surviving remnants of archival material from these organisations were largely found in the archives of the *Archiv der Stiftung 'Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum,'* Berlin; the *Archiv der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg,* Magdeburg; The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem; the Leo Baeck Institute Archives and Library, New York; and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, D. C. Whilst only a comparatively scant amount of material exists in these archives, when compared to the volume of archival material available detailing the activities of the perpetrators, the material remains of great significance in documenting how the Jewish community and its organisations responded to both communal needs and to the Nazi bureaucracy. Valuable documents such as synagogue newsletters, communal newspapers, minutes of board meetings, membership statistics, files on individuals and eyewitness reports of the time are but a component of this material which shed light on the lives and responses of Jews.

Peter Ledermann, business manager of the present *Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg* and holder of a variety of communal positions in the Jewish community of Magdeburg today, has repeatedly indicated that the records and archives of Magdeburg's communal organisations were either completely destroyed during the pogrom of the *Reichskristallnacht* or were relocated and still

await discovery.<sup>33</sup> Such a discovery, in fact, occurred in 2002, when the entire records for the Jewish cemetery in Magdeburg were located inadvertently in Frankfurt am Main.

Whilst the archival material reporting on what the perpetrators were subjecting the Jews of Magdeburg to is also incomplete, it is far more comprehensive. The largest holding of material detailing the activities of a significant number of both non-governmental and governmental bodies with regard to the application of all antisemitic policies is located in the *Landesarchiv Magdeburg – Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt* in Magdeburg. Important and comprehensive documentation from this archive's holdings includes material on all aspects of the administration and application processes of antisemitic policy for the entire period, ranging from boycotts, to 'aryanisations,' to deportations. Further important material of this nature is also located in the *Stadtarchiv Magdeburg*, in Magdeburg and in the *Yad Vashem* Archives in Jerusalem.

Oral history material also presents a number of issues for the historian; particularly the verification of data and the accuracy of memory.<sup>34</sup> For the duration of this project, there have not arisen any instances whereby archival material and oral history material have conflicted. For the majority portion of this research the opposite has been the case. Both sources either corroborate one another or more often than not, what one source lacked, the other provided. There have also been instances whereby the oral history material is in fact the only

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<sup>33</sup> Personal interviews with Peter Ledermann, Magdeburg, 2001–2003.

<sup>34</sup> An extensive literature exists on this subject. See Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* New York: State University of New York Press, 2001 and John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell, eds., *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide, Volume 3, Memory* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001.

surviving material with which to attempt to reconstruct a happening or events,<sup>35</sup> as was the case when exploring the daily experience of Jewish pupils in public schools in Magdeburg up until 1938<sup>36</sup> and the daily lives of Jews during World War Two. Conversely, the opposite situation has arisen, whereby archival material has presented the only evidence, as was the case when documenting the structure and dissolution of Jewish communal organisations.

Oral history interviews were conducted with fifteen individuals, with the oral history material totalling some fifty hours of recording time. Thirteen of the interviewees are Jews from the former community of Magdeburg, whose years of birth range from 1915 to 1932. All of the interviewees lived in Magdeburg for the period under discussion and the majority were also born there. The interviewees immigrated, either with family members or unaccompanied, via a variety of routes to Australia between the years 1936 and 1947. Of the two remaining interviewees, one was a non-Jewish girlhood friend of one of the previously mentioned interviewees and the other a daughter of one of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted between the years 1997 and 2005. In this respect the material gained is limited to a sample group from Magdeburg and does not purport to

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<sup>35</sup> See Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, "The Palestinian Village of Ijzim during the 1948 War: Forming an Anthropological History through Villagers' Accounts and Army Documents," *History and Anthropology*, vol. 13, number 1, 2002, pp. 13–30.

<sup>36</sup> Michael E. Abrahams-Sprod, "Survivor testimony bringing to life the school experiences of Jewish pupils in Magdeburg 1933–1945," in Yad Vashem, ed., *The Legacy of Holocaust Survivors: The Moral and Ethical Implications for Humanity* (CD-ROM) Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002. An extensive literature exists on this subject of representations of experiences of victims of the Shoah. See Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany – An Oral History* London: John Murray Publishers, 2005, pp. 3–138 and Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

represent a complete cross-section of Magdeburg Jewry. This is especially so, since those interviewed largely represented the acculturated German Jews, rather than the Eastern European Jews, who were a separate group in Magdeburg. Nevertheless, the source material obtained from these oral history interviews spans all subjects to be explored. The only limitation that is noticeable occurs in the subject of emigration, which is limited to the experiences of those who immigrated to Australia. However, this thesis has focused on the period from 1933 to 1945 and does not deal with immigration experiences in their new host societies. All oral history material affords a personal and often private view of the unfolding events and associated experiences of the time.

In combining both archival and oral history material, the reconstruction of this community's history has been comprehensively documented, within the limitations of sources, both archival and oral. Where an absence of discussion of any given subject exists, this has resulted from an absence of such archival material and oral history material, as, for example, in the dealings of the community's hierarchy and the Magdeburg Gestapo. The experience of researching and documenting this subject has proven that the weaving together of both archival and oral history material can produce a clearer picture of the events being researched.<sup>37</sup> In many instances in this thesis it has been through this combination of archival material and oral history material that the reconstruction has been successfully achieved in representing both the personal and the broader view.

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<sup>37</sup> Suzanne D. Rutland, "Intermeshing archival and oral sources: Unravelling the story of Jewish survivor immigration to Australia," in History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, ed., *Visible Immigrants: Six*, 2002, p. 129.

In the case of reconstructing the history of the Jews of Magdeburg under Nazism both sources complement one another. Given that this research project set itself the task of examining the experiences of a group of individuals at a given point in time, it is my firm conviction that this reconstruction could not have been written as comprehensively to effectively depict the situations of the time, without the use of oral history material. It has been my experience that only owing to the effective integration of the aforementioned sources has it been possible to reconstruct the history of this community.

### **Historical Approaches and Interpretation**

In exploring the histories of German-Jewish communities during the Nazi period and the interpretation of such histories, historical approaches have undergone much change. From the period of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 until the recent past, histories remained traditional and they largely reconstructed the persecutions and the actions of the perpetrators toward the Jews. Many Jewish communities in the Federal Republic of Germany were documented in this manner. This period of documentation and these histories were undertaken during a period which was also characterised by a silence of the surviving Jewish victims, now spread across the globe in the German-Jewish diaspora. Particularly from the 1970s, Jewish survivors of the *Shoah* have contributed to a vast body of oral history, which continues to grow. During the past decade a vast literature on the experiences of Jews during the Nazi period has been published and oral histories recorded, so that this historical imbalance has been rectified. In documenting the history of the Jews in Magdeburg, the approach of utilising both archival material and oral history has been undertaken, and the interpretation of the accessed

material has reflected a paramount interest in the daily lives of the Jews of that city.<sup>38</sup>

In the years surrounding the Eichmann trial, much interest in the events of the *Shoah* and the experiences of Jews under Nazism evolved. In Germany, in particular, this led to a growing interest in the historical experiences of its own Jewish communities decimated under Nazism. As a result, the researching and writing about these German-Jewish communities at a local, regional and national level, utilising a traditional approach, developed in the Federal Republic of Germany. Such histories reconstructed the historical persecution of German Jews with a ‘view from the top down.’ Studies of the larger communities, such as Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main, were published over the successive period. In the wake of German re-unification in 1990 the documentation of communities in the former German Democratic Republic also gathered much momentum. The majority of these publications bear the similar pattern of documenting and describing the stages of persecution.<sup>39</sup> Recently smaller German-Jewish communities have attracted considerable attention, with an even greater focus on the Jewish perspective of that time.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 and Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume 1: The Years of Persecution 1933–1939* London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Lists of such studies of German-Jewish communities have appeared annually in the bibliography of the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* since 1956.

<sup>40</sup> As has been emphasised by Yehuda Bauer, it is not only incumbent on historians to document the most populous communities destroyed by the Shoah, but also to document the smaller communities, in order to possess as complete as possible a record of the rich tapestry of the Jewish world that existed prior to the Shoah, personal interviews with Yehuda Bauer, Jerusalem, 2000. See also Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. For the most recent social history of German Jewry under Nazism see Marion A. Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618–1945* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

This thesis does not purport to shed any groundbreaking light on the history of German Jewry under Nazism. Its chief purpose is to fill the void on Magdeburg's Jewish history for the period from the Nazi consolidation of power in 1933 until the capitulation of Nazi Germany in 1945. As with all studies of similar local and regional communities, it contributes to the comprehensive picture of how Jews navigated their difficult lives in different places at that time. In this respect, the documented experiences of this Jewish community are reflective and representative of the experiences of German Jewry in general.<sup>41</sup> This study of Magdeburg Jewry also highlights a number of features of this community and its experiences under Nazism which remain of special significance to its own particular history. It also has a specific focus in that the oral history material utilised for this research emanates from Jews from Magdeburg who found refuge in Australia.

In charting the quotidian experiences of the Jews of Magdeburg and how they responded to Nazism, this study's structure can be divided into two distinct periods of time; the period from and including 1933 up until the *Reichskristallnacht* in 1938 and the period from the pogrom up until liberation in April 1945. For this first period, this study charts the communal structures in place in 1933; how they attempted to continue to fulfil their duties; how they responded to antisemitic measures; and the circumstances of their dissolutions. This is followed by an exploration of the destruction of Jewish livelihoods and how varying personal circumstances greatly impacted on the ability to earn a living. The subjects of daily life for Jews in both the public and private domains illustrate the escalating exclusion, humiliation, vilification and ultimately degradation

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<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, op. cit.

which the Jewish community endured and attempted to adjust to; as well as the private discussions on such topics as emigration which were simultaneously taking place in homes. Finally, for this time period the situation of Jewish children and youth is explored, with particular reference to their schooling experiences, the importance of Jewish youth groups and the emigration of unaccompanied Jewish youth.

The second period explores the events of the *Reichskristallnacht*, its ramifications and the subsequent escalation in persecutions which continued until liberation. This component follows the dehumanising persecutions administered ruthlessly, leading ultimately to permanent segregation, forced labour and deportation for the majority of Jews. This study ends with the liberation of only a handful of Jews, predominantly those in mixed marriages, children of such marriages or those in hiding. By April 1945 the majority of Magdeburg's Jews had perished, either at the hands of the Nazis and their helpers or during the Allied bombardment of the city.