

Many puzzle pieces show a picture

Jewish history: Israeli and German students investigate the past - this time in Unsleben

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Historical research, dealing with the past and international understanding - building a bridge from dark times to a brighter future - these words describe the project at Rhön-Gymnasium under the Günter Henneberger's guidance. In the past two years, the Jewish cemetery of Bad Neustadt was documented as part of the German-Israeli student exchange programme. The works are now continued at the Jewish cemetery of Unsleben.

The documentation of the Bad Neustadt cemetery proved to be extremely successful. You can see the respective results on an internet platform of high level (www.judaica-badneustadt.de). Jews living previously in Bad Neustadt or their descendants even have made contact and could fill gaps with their information.

What started at the cemetery in Mozartstraße two years ago, has drawn circles and now results in a significantly more complete picture of the once vibrant Jewish community in the Saale town. Now the same also should happen in Unsleben. The municipality around Mayor Michael Gottwald is very receptive to the project and supports it in many ways. In the Streutal community people have been dealing with the Jewish past already for quite a number of years. So at current work we have recourse to a lot of material. To this day Unsleben is keeping in touch with Jewish families living formerly here and now primarily in the US.

Project accompanied scientifically

Now once again Israeli students visited Bad Neustadt, and you saw them together with their German exchange partners at the Jewish cemetery of Unsleben. The cemetery is beautifully situated on a hill just outside the community, but to get there is a bit difficult, as the young people had to find out soon. Nevertheless, bright sunshine rewarded them and made the activities easier. Like already in Bad Neustadt, the project is also accompanied academically. This time by Professor Moshe Caine, who teaches "Photographic communication" in Jerusalem, and Professor Stefan Simon. Simon originally is from Hendungen and currently is director of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at Yale University (USA).

Simon had one of his employees with him, archeologist Chelsea Graham. The team was completed by photographer Eyal Tagar and architect Nadav Madanes from Tel Aviv. Tagar, Caine and Simon have already cooperated in Bad Neustadt. On site, the international group received valuable support from Professor Josef Hesselbach, who for many years has been concerned with the history of Unsleben, especially with the history of the Jewish community.

The task of the teens and adults was to map the cemetery and photograph the grave stones. These were translated into English afterwards. Therefore, the Israeli exchange students took over the Hebrew parts and the German students of Rhön-Gymnasium translated the German parts. Just like in Bad Neustadt a special photographic technique was used to make the grave inscriptions identifiable which had become unreadable over time.

These works are now finished. Everything that can be seen is filed. But now the history behind the graves must be discovered. Under the guidance of their teacher Günter Henneberger the German

students will ask some eyewitnesses from Unsleben and other places about the details. The aim of the project is to publish the results on a website to arouse the interest of people that know something about the Jewish history of Unsleben. Therefore the texts have to be translated into English to make them available for people outside of Germany.

Friendships develop

Günter Henneberger is very grateful to the people and institutions, who make this possible, starting with the scientific participants to the community of Unsleben, the Lachnit-Fixson Foundation in Berlin and the Denk-Mal Foundation Ibach in Bamberg. The students worked very well, he commends them: they were well interested in the matter. The Israeli and German students have developed strong bonds of friendship, thus fulfilling the major purpose of the exchange programme . It is a special experience, if Jewish and non-Jewish people work together and discover the history collectively, despite the tragedy of the German-Jewish past.

For Eyal Tagar who has been a guest in Bad Neustadt for the third time, it was exciting to watch the discovery of new puzzle pieces which once put together show the Jewish community of Unsleben a few decades before. At first glance these grave stones may all look the same, but if you take a closerlook, you can see the different individual stories. Chelsea Graham was very impressed by this unique project. She likes the contact to the youth and searching together for the traces of the people buried there. "The cemetery is a place full of sadness", adds Nadav Madanes. He knows Germany pretty well because of his regular visits here and he also can speak some German words. But by this work of young people it is filled with life.

Eyewitnesses and translators

We are in search of eyewitnesses who know something about the Jewish history of Unsleben and maybe can help as interview-partners. Also people who could help to translate texts into English are welcomed. Please contact Günter Henneberger (telephone: 09771 7621)