



# qualitalk

Information on Technology and Society

June 2021  
Internet Version  
ISSN 1615-9667  
22. Volume  
73. Edition

Printed Version  
ISSN 1435-1641  
27. Volume  
89. Edition

Around Pentecost the Corona pandemic appeared to be in retreat within the European Union. But different countries within the European Union will still be pursuing their own way in ratcheting up their tourism.

However, now that Great Britain left the Union through Brexit, the country is having a similar fate like their former colony India. Both countries are suffering from the highly contagious coronavirus Indian variant B.1617, though India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted to see the moniker »Indian« banned.

Wishing you a healthy summer, says

*Oliver Schuster*

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**Eternal Resting Rights in the Alley of Ceremonies:** so that stones can still talk to us they have to be preserved. Burial place of the family of **Jacob Moor**, located at the Alley, in Vienna's Central Cemetery, First Section (Old Israelitic Section), group 50, row No. 1, grave No. 19. The oldest date showing on the tombstone is of August 4, 1824, the last one of September 13, 1914.

# The Final Resting Place

## Ways along to eternity, the Viennese blend



**Urns in Concrete Boxes** are easy to maintain and cheap.

Pentecost has lost its importance as a Christian High Holy Day and seems to have become more than a start date to summer vacation time. During the second year of the corona epidemic travel is still limited. In the special issue for Pentecost of a German national newspaper were listed two pages of memorial advertisements most of them marked: »Because of the current coronavirus pandemic restrictions funeral services were limited to closest family members.« Ever changing regulations about the maximum number of people allowed to attend services led to exclusion of more distant family members and friends thereby robbing them of the opportunity of saying good-bye, exchanging memories of the deceased with other relatives. A quiet visit to the grave later in time might, particularly for the older ones, be difficult as they may not be familiar where the place of rest is situated.

With the exception of the *usual* remembrance days – All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and Christmas Eve or Christmas Day – people do not seem to visit graves of their deceased family members or friends as frequently as in earlier times. Particularly in larger cities interments have decreased significantly; it is no longer pooh-poohed to openly discuss closing down cemeteries and to rededicate the area for other purposes. In Germany alone two thirds of the deceased are cremated; for ashes one needs only a small lot to inter them or to place the urn into a columbarium niche which means less room needed, lower rental fees and lower maintenance cost all the while maintenance of interments have gone up and up. One can compare the situation with that of churches who are

devoid of parishioners, represent a financial burden to the community and eventually are torn down and the lot being sold.

Even in old times cemeteries were often moved from the small area around a church to the outskirts of the town or city, and in some instances the area opened around the church used for other purposes, recently even as parking lots lacking respect for the old graves now buried under asphalt or concrete.

During the 19th century, Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire grew at such a rapid pace that the municipal government decided to create a *central cemetery* on land of 2.5 square kilometers (620 acres) which the government purchased on the south-eastern border of the capital, in the borough of Simmering. They deemed this to be enough for the expected population increase to four million inhabitants by the end of the 20th century. They were to name it *CENTRAL CEMETERY* though it was quite far away from Vienna's center. It was opened in 1874; three years later a small section was reserved for a Jewish cemetery.

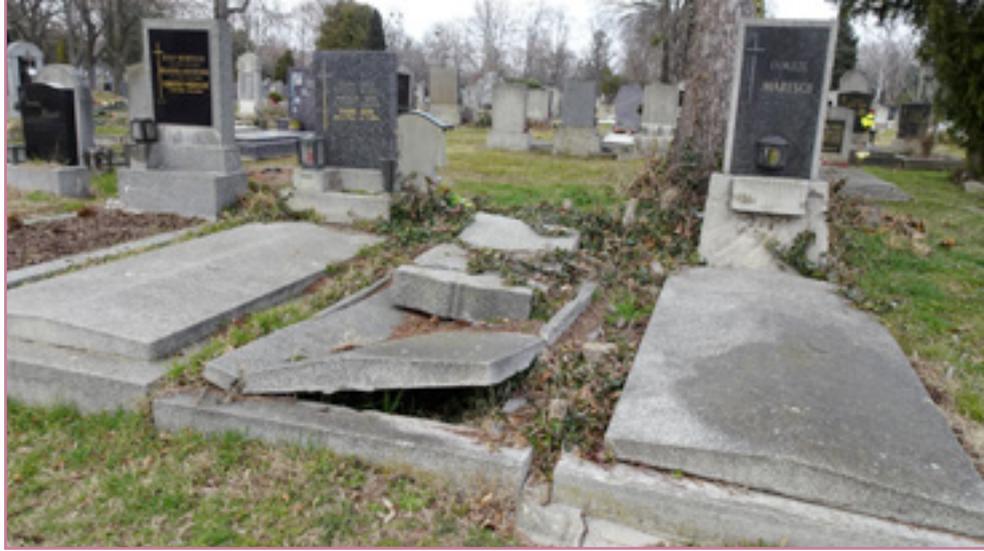
But already forty years later the Jewish cemetery section was filled completely. Vienna's rapidly growing Jewish community bought additional land at the eastern limits of the cemetery. Interments took place there starting in 1917. It had a separate gate, Gate No. 4, in the late 1990's changed to Gate No. 5.

In the old Jewish cemetery section burials were from then on only allowed if a family vault already existed there; therefore one can make out some more recent burial dates.

## Vienna Melange

The saying »Separated in life, joined in death« could be a Vienna Melange – also an expression for coffee with milk. Muslims and orthodox Christians of different denominations often have their own living districts in Vienna. At first, Catholics and Protestants were buried at Zentralfriedhof one next to the other. But in 1904, a new section was created, the *Protestant Cemetery*, a small strip running parallel, roughly north/south, to the large *Catholic Cemetery*. The Protestant Cemetery can be accessed only through one main entrance, at Simmeringer Hauptstraße; it's separated from the large Catholic area by a brick wall. That means that the Protestant section can't be accessed from within the cemetery; the same holds true for the New Jewish cemetery section. One has to return to the main gates facing Simmeringer Hauptstraße and re-enter through the respective gate of the denominational section.

The city had its historic peak number of inhabitants in 1910: 2.1 million is far removed from the projected number of four million for a world capital, for which Central Cemetery was planned. Vienna's expansion stopped abruptly with the demise of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918. Thereafter, the number of inhabitants started to fall continuously till it reached 1.5 million in 1989. The trend started to reverse once the »Iron Curtain« fell. It's now very close to two million. According to the records Vienna had 1 921 153 inhabitants as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021; about one third of them foreigners. Considering that a goodly number of foreigners would want to be buried in their home country, the potential number of inter-



ments at Central Cemetery would shrink. Also, the last will and testament often directs the heirs – doing away with the rites of olden days – to spread the ashes in forests, from ships into oceans, or bury them in the family garden, but not in a cemetery.

Therefore, a fair area of Central Cemetery, with the exception of the old and new Jewish section, appears to be »unused«. And many graves look like having fallen into disrepair, or with grave markers collapsed or overgrown with ivy. The Director of Information for Vienna's Cemetery's, Mr Florian Keusch said that an estimated 30 percent of grave markers are visibly a notice attached that the grave or marker has to be reconditioned, or that fees for grave rental have become overdue or both. One can see that even in absence of the notices, many grave markers have an X mark with red chalk, or a sticker saying *Heimgesfallen* (reverted to cemetery administration property), or pointing out that the grave marker has structural problems. All of which means that the markers will be removed and the grave abandoned.

Keusch added: »We have to ensure continually that markers are solidly in place. If someone steadies himself on the marker of a neighboring grave, and we actually had some cases like this,

**Forgotten gravesites everywhere – and family Frühstück (means: Breakfast) is asking: »WHY?«**



and the marker collapses it can injure the person.«

The one paying the rental fee for the grave is also responsible for any accidents caused by the grave's marker. However, many times a responsible can no longer be found. If that's the case the unsecured marker will be pulled down so as not to inflict injuries on other persons, even if it was marked: »To be kept until discontinuation of

grown with weeds and it's difficult to make your way through it. Only the occasional deer will venture through it unafraid of any visitors. ☞

## Trail of Stones

Vienna 11/2009

During my visit to Vienna in 2009 I visited Central Cemetery for the first time. My cousin GUNTHER ZEHL, a private scholar and passionate researcher of family history, had asked me to find the headstone of Jacob Moor's family; he was researching a connection between that family and some of our ancestors.

Streetcar No. 71 runs all the way from downtown Vienna along Simmeringer Hauptstraße to Central Cemetery. The cemetery is walled in with red bricks, and has five gates in a row. To get to the old Jewish cemetery you have to get out at Gate 1, people in the streetcar told me. It was the right place but I didn't have any more detailed information. Someone told me that the administration at the main gate, Gate 2, might be able to provide me more information. Jewish graves can never be abandoned, »heimfallen« or *naked*.

I got there just in time before they were closing. No, they were not in charge of that part of the cemetery, not for the Jewish part, not for the Protestant part. For the Jewish part I should contact the cemetery department of the Jewish Community Organization, the IKG, said the lady who apparently was not used to someone that ignorant as me.

The expression IKG = ISRAELITISCHE KULTUS GEMEINDE dates back to the



**Old Jewish grave sites** are hardly accessible away from the main routes.

the cemetery« is wishful thinking.

### Eternal Resting Rights

It's different when it comes to the Jewish cemetery: Jewish Halakha prescribes the undisturbed rest of the deceased. Jewish graves can't be abandoned or used for new burials (for non-family members). In Central Cemetery's old Jewish section once can find well-maintained graves from the 1880s. They are mostly situated along the main walks such as the *Alley of Ceremonies*. But behind them, nature has been spreading; the ways are over-

times of Emperor Francis Joseph I. Since that time this expression is used for all Jewish communities in Austria.

Alright then, exit that section of the cemetery, and then walking along the brick wall to gate No. 5 (previously gate No. 4). I could have boarded the streetcar, it was just one stop away. But why should I have to buy another ticket for the streetcar? Note: today, I have a yearly season pass for 235.00 Euro – a steal.

At Gate 5 (formerly 4), in the building with Ceremonial Hall constructed in the 1920s, I walked through empty hallways with half-open doors to offices but no-one there. I didn't dare to shout: »Anybody here?«, so I walked along clearing my throat to attract attention – no luck. Finally I saw a man in a small office who without emotion listened to my question about how to find the grave of **Jacob Moor**. He turned around, made a print-out showing numbers referring to the grave and without a word handed it to me. He wasn't interested in my background story; refused a donation I offered.

Ten years later the Jewish Community Organization reacted with similar disinterest to my request: What I could do to prevent the decay of Jacob Moor's grave? During his time, the well-to-do merchant in textiles Jacob Moor was president of the Chevra Kadisha (Jewish burial society) and a benefactor of Vienna's Jewish community.

With the print-out in hand, I was back to Gate 1 – this time using the streetcar. With the information I got at the office at the new Jewish cemetery the location of the grave was easy to find: it was facing the 800 meter (1/2 mile) long Alley of Ceremonies.

It was a magical moment, to experience the trace of a culture Germany's National Socialism tried to erase, a trace engraved in stone. The very thin relation to my family, on my grandmother's side was that grandmother **Susanna Merdes**, maiden name **Koch** (1888 – 1990) was the connection. I am still maintaining her grave at the cemetery of Wieblingen, a suburb of Heidelberg.



### When Stones Fall Silent

More than ten years have passed after my first visit to Vienna's Central Cemetery. You can't ignore the decay there. True, the graves of presidents of the republic, of prominent citizens, clerics, fallen soldiers in both World Wars can't belie the fact that graves of »normal« people are often not very well taken care of.

Even in the Jewish section, in particular of the old section, more headstones have tipped over and broken, inscriptions are washed out. The beautiful wrought-iron fences around many of the vaults are rusted, broken. Even a splendid mausoleum of the Ephrussi family (Gate 1, Group 8, Row 62, No.

**Resting place** of Moor's family detected at Vienna Zentralfriedhof with my husband in November 2009.

*(The Hebrew characters were difficult to make out, but a little bit later I got in contact during a holiday in Switzerland with Mrs Ambühl who managed to have it translated by her Jewish son)*



**Restored (Hebrew)**  
Inscription, May 2021

*Jacob Moor Jacob Moor died highly esteemed in high age on 16 January 1904. He was a great benefactor to Vienna's [Jewish] community and through his beneficial efforts the community blossomed like Jerusalem. May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.*

*Translated by Thomas Ambühl alias Jechezkel Mandelbaum, at Davos-Monstein in 2011.*

29) is crumbling. One of the scions of the family, Edmund de Waal created a monument to his ancestors' history with his bestseller »The Hare with Amber Eyes«. All the while the mausoleum slowly decays, its headstone fallen to the floor broken into two pieces. Dirt and debris litter the floor, the wrought-iron gate rusted and unlocked. One would think that royalties derived from the sale of the book should at least in part have been used to upkeep the ancestors' vault.

After several unsuccessful tries to have the Jewish Community Organization authorize a refurbishing of Jacob Moor's headstone I finally decided to do it on my own. The inscription was recolored and the headstone received a steel support in the back. The rusted fence was removed and weeds were cleared.

### Why Engage Oneself?

It really deals with trying to keep, at least part of one's family history alive, accessible to the following generations. Jacob Moor's stepdaughter **Eugenie Kaufmann**, neé Hiller, was close to

the painter artist **Michel Koch**, my great-great-uncle on my mother's side.

The story did not finish happily: Eugenie Kaufmann's daughter Margot Margaretha, married Frank, was murdered at the age of 53 in Auschwitz concentration camp. »Her husband, Theodor Frank, was until 1938 one of the directors of Deutsche Bank until he was (forcefully) required to retire from his position. His successor was a certain Hermann Josef Abs«, as my cousin Gunther Zehl (1948 – 2009) found out during his recherches of family history. As a banker, Hermann Joseph Abs was prominently involved in the Arianization of Jewish assets, and after World War II again spokesman for the board of Deutsche Bank.

The mercy of late birth, as the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl expressed it, does not excuse us but is an obligation for us to preserve the remembrance. ☞

See also »New Synagogue at the old Site in Mainz Magenza — UNESCO World Heritage since 2021.

## Impressum



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Edition: June 2021  
Published four times a year.

Pictures:  
by the author, if not stated otherwise.  
ISSN 1615-9667 [Internet]  
ISSN 1435-1641 [printed version]

The German edition **qualitalk**  
[www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk\\_89.pdf](http://www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk_89.pdf)

The German-English translation by Dr.  
Dieter von Jettmar, Vienna (Austria)  
[www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk\\_89\\_en.pdf](http://www.chris-schuth.de/qtalk_89_en.pdf)

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