English Summaries - Vol. 9/2000

Andrew Buckser

What does the concept "society" mean among Danish Jews?

This article discusses some difficulties in formulating an anthropological definition of the Jewish community in a setting like contemporary Denmark. Much of early anthropology focused on geographically isolated cultures, and this model has influenced traditional anthropological models of community. Anthropologists have tended to describe communities as isolated wholes, bound together by social and cultural forces like kinship, language, religion, and economy. When looking at Western Europe, anthropologists initially focused on rural populations which seemed to follow such models. When they turned to urban societies, likewise, they tended to focus on bounded "urban villages." Groups like the Danish Jews, however, defy such a characterization. The ties which anthropologists generally associate with "community" do not exist in any simple way in this group; members have varied greatly in language, religious practice, occupation, and other such features for centuries. To the extent that the Danish Jews do constitute a community, therefore, it is not in the traditional anthropological sense, but rather in terms of their common relation to a particular set of symbols. The Jewish community is not an isolated social entity, but rather a sort of symbolic toolbox, upon which a very diverse set of people can draw to construct notions of self. This concept of community may offer a better approach than traditional models to understanding how groups can endure and thrive in the chaotic world of late modernity.

Sara Kviat Bloch

Things on Time

Briefly tracing the history of exhibitions of Jewish ceremonial artifacts, this essay explores the ways in which Jewish museums may challenge prevailing conceptions of the role of arts and artifacts in understanding and exhibiting Jewish culture, arguing for the centrality of material culture in Jewish life, the author goes on to suggest that a display model which allows for the inclusion and problematizing of the multiple stories of each object is key to a successful museum exhibit.

David Clark

Displaying Jewish Heritage

This paper seeks to explore three narrative discourses employed by Jewish museums in order to convey the meanings and sentiments attached to Jewish heritage. The focus on the aesthetic qualities of the object on display, on ritual objects as "objets d'art", is in itself dependent on the prior circulation and acceptance of notions concerning the development of "art". Thematic displays on festivals, customs and traditions, are used to evoke some of the atmosphere and sentiments associated with the use of ritual objects. And yet, there are also occasions when the "personal" comes to the fore. For example, a focus on elite families and personalities, often also including the extent of social interaction with the host community. Some museums

also focus on more "ordinary" people, representing a much wider cross-section of the community. Finally, there is a very particular focus on the "personal"; this is when an object or an individual comes to stand for the fate and destiny of the entire Jewish people.

Henrik Reeh

The Ornamental Paths of Memory in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin

The close relation between spatial and intellectual experience in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin determines the form of the present article. Eight photographs, reflecting the progression of a visit to the museum, are each made the object of, first, a descriptive analysis situating the particular motif inside the order of the museum, and, second, an interpretive commentary emphasising the ways in which Libeskind's architecture and discourse alike address the complex issue of collective memory in relation to Jewish culture in Berlin.

Two virtually conflicting strategies coexist in the staging of the museum and, consequently, in its perception by the visitor. On the one hand, Libeskind attempts to make architecture a space of signifying forces in order to prevent the space of his museum from becoming neutral and even alien to human experience as did much modern architecture of the 20th century. On the other hand, Libeskind refrains from applying Jewish symbols and, instead, deploys an abstract and decentered architectural language, the signification of which may result not only from his own suggestive interpretations but also, probably more important in the long run, from the inner reflection of the visitors perceiving, assimilating and thereby appropriating the different spatial elements of the museum.

Especially important in Libeskind's view are the socalled voids, six empty concrete shafts appearing where a straight line intersects with the zigzag form of Libeskind's building, signalling the destruction of Jewish culture and population by the Nazis as the very condition of attempts at historical representation inside the museum. Equally essential to the visitor are the windows, all different, in the zigzag exhibition galleries, via which the building is experienced as an ornamental labyrinth. Appearing in the mind of the visitor as a multifaceted and mobile piece of architecture, Libeskind's museum exceeds the individual's ability to represent space. Nonetheless, the impressions retained by the foreign visitor to the German capital around 2000 may converge in the vibrant image of Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin.

Libeskind's powerful experiments in Berlin may one day be reconsidered and somehow transposed into a Danish context, as Libeskind is called upon to participate in the design of a Jewish Museum Denmark which is to be housed within the old main building of the Royal Danish Library in central Copenhagen.

Lis Hygum

Jews are Jews' worst enemies or are they?

Jewish Identity in a Correspondence between Edvard Brandes and Poul Levine in the years 1894-96

In the late 19th century Danish cultural and political life was influenced by Jewish personalities like the brothers Brandes. A correspondence between Edvard Brandes (1847-1931) and Paul Levine (1869-1929), which Hygum found at the Royal Danish Library, shows that despite the fact that Danish Jews were integrated in Danish public life, they were always aware of their Jewish origins as it was used against them in public disputes. It meant that "brandesianisme" often was made synonymous with Jewish by the opponents of the radical ideas that it exemplified.

John T Lauridsen

"The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in Danish

The most internationally wellknown anti-Semitic fraud "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" was fabricated at the end of the 19th century by the Russian secret police to "prove" a Jewish world conspiracy. Lauridsen systematically goes through the Danish editions of The Protocols that can be found at the Royal Danish Library. The first edition appeared in 1920 and was published under pseudonym. In 1933 the publisher revealed herself as Gudrun Rørdam in the magazine National-Socialisten (The National Socialist) in which extracts of The Protocols appeared in 1933. Different versions of The Protocols were published by Aage H. Andersen in 1935 and 1938, and in 1938 he was sentenced to 80 days in prison for his views. However, in 1940 and 1941 he published "The Protocols" again. This time the Danish authorities did not react. In 1986 Danmarks National Socialistiske Bevægelse (the Danish National Socialist Movement) published a reprint of Aage H. Andersen's edition.