

Martin Buber House – World Renown Connected to Heppenheim

Martin Buber, a renowned writer, Jewish religious philosopher, interpreter of Hasidism, philosopher of dialogue, and sociologist of community, was born in Vienna in 1878. He came from a wealthy Jewish family in which he did not receive a strictly religious upbringing; nevertheless, he was introduced to Jewish traditions.

His career as a publicist and writer began in 1904, after he had studied in Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin. His wife Paula supported him in completing his works. She had studied German literature and wrote novels, as well as short stories under the pseudonym Georg Munk.

The Buber couple had two children, Eva and Rafael. Initially, the small family lived in a rented apartment in Berlin-Zehlendorf. However, after ten years, they no longer enjoyed life in the big city, as they could not find peace there. From 1915 onward, they began searching for a house, surrounded by nature, where the writer couple could pursue their passion for writing undisturbed.

During a stay in Lindenfels in the Odenwald in 1915, Martin Buber fell in love with the region. The house in Heppenheim, located at the corner of Werlestraße, viewing the Graben, offered the family everything they had been looking for. Thus, in 1916, the Bubers moved from Berlin to Heppenheim.

Although Jewish holidays were celebrated in the Buber household, Martin was not an active member of the Jewish community. Nevertheless, he was considered “the man who knew the most about Jewish culture and Jewish history.”

While Martin Buber often spent the entire day in his study, working on his writings, his wife was responsible for raising the children—not only Eva and Rafael, but later also their granddaughters Barbara and Judith.

From 1921 onward, Martin Buber worked at the Free Jewish House of Learning in Frankfurt and began teaching at the University of Frankfurt in 1924. He himself described the 20 years spent in Heppenheim as “years rich in content.” At the height of his literary career, he wrote his well-known work *I and Thou* in 1923. In 1925, together with Franz Rosenzweig, he began

translating the Hebrew Bible into German. After Rosenzweig's death, Buber completed the project on his own in 1961.

With the rise of the National Socialists, the peaceful life of the Buber family changed. Martin Buber documented anti-Jewish actions, such as an illegal house search in March 1933, in his letters. In 1935, the family became the victims of Nazi demonstrations: for two weeks, school-children marched past the Buber house every morning at 6 a.m., loudly singing, "When the Jewish blood spurts from the knife."

That same year, whilst the granddaughters Barbara and Judith were visiting the swimming pool, a sign, reading "Jews not welcome" was put up. Although the lifeguard and cashier tried to persuade the crying girls to stay, saying it was not an official ban, they were immediately picked up by a housemaid; never visiting the Heppenheim swimming pool again.

Due to increasing pressure, the family emigrated to Palestine in March 1938 and never returned to Heppenheim.

Martin Buber was appointed to a teaching position at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

At the age of 87, the philosopher died in Jerusalem in 1965, never abandoning his central concern—the mediation between Jews and Christians.

The family's house in Heppenheim was devastated during the riots of the November pogroms before being forcibly expropriated in 1941 and transferred into the ownership of the Bergstraße district. In 1976, a citizens' initiative in Heppenheim prevented the planned demolition of the house, after which it was restored and placed under heritage protection. Since 1979, the house at the corner of Graben and Werlestraße has served as the general secretariat of the "International Council of Christians and Jews" and is known far beyond Heppenheim as a place of information and dialogue.

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