

Letter to the Editor and Response

Correction of the Record

Dear Editor,

An article by Linda Weinhouse published in the last issue of *JHIS* entitled "*Baumgartner's Bombay: Postcolonialism and Postmemory*"¹ analyzes Anita Desai's novel *Baumgartner's Bombay*.² Note 1 to the article (on p. 43) quotes what was supposedly a personal correspondence with me. It reads thus: "*Archives of the Bombay Jewish community show records of a Baumgartner who was interned in the Dehra Dun camp (e-mail communication from Shalva Weil, 6 August 2009).*"

I was perplexed to read this. While the note identified a specific date for an e-mail communication, I could not recall ever corresponding with Weinhouse. In fact I had not known of her existence at the time. Further, I do not recall seeing any record concerning a Baumgartner in the Bombay Jewish community records (which ones?), though this statement, attributed to me, appears to be the basis on which Professor Weinhouse discusses Baumgartner's Jewish identity in the article.

For the record, it should be noted that Desai's mother was a non-Jewish German, and that in an interview she has said that she was inspired to write the novel by an Austrian Jew.³ It should also be borne in mind that not only German Jews, but many German non-Jews were interned by the British in India during the Second World War.⁴ In fact, in a wonderful recent conversation between Anita Desai and her daughter Kirin Desai, Anita refers to her mother's friends during the war. She told Kirin: "In India, many of her German friends went into an internment camp near Dehradun. Those who weren't Indian citizens, they all went into camps. My mother had become an Indian citizen so she didn't have to go".⁵

I wrote to Professor Weinhouse to clarify the troubling Note, and she responded with the following email (March 6, 2011): "*Dear Shalva, I do not have an email from you. The information was conveyed to me by Efraim as having been told to him by you orally....*"

"Efraim" is Professor Efraim Sicher of Ben-Gurion University, coauthor of an article with Linda Weinhouse on some of the same material.⁶ Note 1 of that article states: "*An earlier version of passages in this essay first appeared in Linda Weinhouse, 'Baumgartner's Bombay': Postcolonialism and Postmemory,*" *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 11 (2010): 37-46."

Efraim Sicher recalled that in August 2009 I had speculated on the idea that the "real" Baumgartner had been interned at Dehradun along with other German exiles. I had indeed written to Sicher in private correspondence: "*I haven't dealt with this material since 1995.⁷ I think Desai's novel is brilliant. I interviewed a few people who were interned in India, but I can't pass judgment*".

Regrettably, Professor Weinhouse's note gives the mistaken impression that I had been corresponding with her when I had not, while at the same time it misrepresents the private communication I had with Professor Sicher in August 2009.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Shalva Weil,
Senior Researcher,
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Notes

¹ Linda Weinhouse, "Baumgartner's Bombay: Postcolonialism and Postmemory," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 11 (2010): 37-46.

² Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

³ Anita Desai is quoted as saying: "And it was when I saw this Austrian Jew in Bombay—I actually saw the man pottering...." Florence Libert, "An Interview with Anita Desai," *World Literature Written in English* 30, 1 (1990): 54.

⁴ An example is Alfred Wuerfel, a former officer in the German Consulate, whom I met in India in 1995. He had been interned by the British and had met German Jews in the camps, as well as in Bombay. Shalva Weil, "From Persecution to Freedom: Central European Jewish Refugees and their Jewish Host communities in India," in Anil Bhatti and Johannes Voigt, eds., *Jewish Exiles in India 1933-1945* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 73, 83.

⁵ "In conversation: Kirin Desai meets Anita Desai," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2011.

⁶ Efraim Sicher and Linda Weinhouse, "The Jew's Passage to India: Desai, Rushdie and Globalised Culture," *European Review of History* 18, 1 (2011): 21-31.

⁷ This was the year I attended a conference organized by the Max Mueller Bhavan on "Jewish Exiles in India." The outcome of that conference was Bhatti and Voigt, *Jewish Exiles in India 1933-1945*.

Apology

Dear Editor,

In her letter, Shalva Weil objects to information in Note 1 of my article "Baumgartner's Bombay: Postcolonialism and Postmemory," which you published in 2010.

That note refers to information in an email she sent to Professor Efraim Sicher on August 9th, 2009 in which she wrote: "Baumgartner was at Dehra Dun, if I'm not mistaken." Professor Sicher shared that email with me. I used it as a footnote regarding a possible internment of a real life person with the same name as the fictional Baumgartner. It was not the basis for any of the information that appears in the paper regarding the Austrian Jew whom Desai has stated in a number of interviews was the model for Baumgartner or any other information in the paper regarding the internment camps. However, I hereby apologize for using the email written by Dr. Weil to Professor Sicher in my paper without obtaining Prof. Weil's permission.

Sincerely,

Professor Linda Weinhouse

Notes on Contributors

Joseph Hodes was a visiting research fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2008 and is currently a visiting assistant professor of Judaic studies at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Nathan Katz is Bhagwan Mahavir Professor of Jain Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at Florida International University. His most recent book is a memoir, *Spiritual Journey Home* (Ktav, 2009), and his next contribution is *An Annotated Bibliography about Indian Jewry, 1665-2005* (Manohar, 2012).

Helena Rimon is a Senior Lecturer in the Israel Heritage Department, Ariel University Center of Samaria. Sphere of her scientific interests is the comparative poetics of the Hebrew Literature. In the book *The Time and the Place of Mikhail Bakhtin* (in Hebrew: הזמן וביתו, באר שבע, דביר, 2007) she examined the genre theory of M. M. Bakhtin as applied to the history of Hebrew literature.

Joan G. Roland is the author of *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (University Press of New England, 1989). A second edition was published under the title *The Jewish Communities of India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Transaction, 1998). She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the Bene Israel and Baghdadi Jews in India and Israel. She is currently researching the Indian Jewish community in the United States. She is Professor of Middle Eastern and Jewish History at Pace University in New York City.

Myer Samra is an anthropologist from the University of Sydney and edits the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*. His principal academic work has been with Baghdadi Jews in Australia (many of whom had previously lived in India, Burma, and other former British and Dutch colonies in Asia) and with the Benei Menashe of North East India. He is also an Accredited Specialist in Children's Law and is employed as a lawyer in the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services.

Vanessa R. Sasson is Professor of Religious Studies in the Liberal Arts Department of Marianopolis College, where she has been teaching since 1999. She is a Research Fellow for the International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation, and Social Justice at the University of the Free State, as well as Adjunct Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University. She is the author of *The Birth of Moses and the Buddha: A Paradigm for the Comparative Study of Religions* (Sheffield University Press, 2007), is co-editor with Jane-Marie Law of *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and editor of a new volume, *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Neela Bhattacharya Saxena is an Associate Professor of English at Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York. Her book *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature* was published in 2004. Some of her recent publications include "Mystery, Wonder, and Knowledge in the Triadic Figure of Mahavidya Chinnamasta: A Sakta Woman's Reading," *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism: Reinterpretations and Re-envisionings* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and "Gynocentric Theology of Tantric Hinduism: A Mediation upon the Devi," *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2011).