

Gershom Scholem on the Atmosphere in Munich in the Early 1920s (Retrospective Account, 1977)

Abstract

Gershom (Gerhard) Scholem (1897-1982) came from a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family. His father ran a successful printing business in Berlin. Gershom became interested in Zionism as a young man and decided to devote himself to the study of Judaism after completing his studies in mathematics and philosophy. To this end, he enrolled at the University of Munich in 1919. This brief excerpt from his memoirs describes the palpable and threatening presence of the National Socialists in Munich, which was dubbed the “Capital of the Movement” in Nazi propaganda. In 1923, Scholem decided to emigrate to Palestine. There he studied Jewish religious history and taught Jewish mysticism at the newly founded Hebrew University in Jerusalem from 1925.

Source

In Munich I had a chance to get acquainted with incipient Nazism at the university from close up. The atmosphere in the city was unbearable; this is something that is often disregarded today and presented in more muted colors than it actually was. There was no disregarding the huge, blood-red posters with their no less bloodthirsty text, inviting people to attend Hitler’s speeches: “Fellow Germans are welcome; Jews will not be admitted.” I was little affected by this, for I had long since made my decision to leave Germany. But it was frightening to encounter the blindness of the Jews who refused to see and acknowledge all that. This greatly encumbered my relations with Munich Jews, for they became extremely jumpy and angry when someone broached that subject. Thus my association with Jews was limited to a small circle of like-minded people.

Source: Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem. Memories of My Youth*. Translated from the German by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, pp. 135–36.

Source of original German text: Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, pp. 172–73.

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