“Transcending Tradition”: Exhibition on Jewish Mathematicians in German States

“Transcending Tradition: Jewish Mathematicians in German-Speaking Academic Culture”, an exhibition that showcases the technical and professional scope of the contributions made by Jewish mathematicians to the development of mathematical culture in the German states before 1933, is coming to the United States after having been on view in Israel in 2011 and early 2012. It is set to open October 4, 2012, at the Crerar Science Library at the University of Chicago.

For decades before their expulsion and extermination, Jewish mathematicians were an important part of the German-speaking mathematical world. Jewish mathematicians contributed to scientific research, to the professional institutions of mathematics, and to all layers of mathematical culture. But, from 1933 onward, Jewish mathematicians in Germany were forced to emigrate or faced concentration camps and death. Some of those who fled or who survived the camps were able to establish new careers in their host countries; however, others suffered greatly from losses caused by their forced exile.

The exhibition focuses on the period between the legal and political emancipation of Jews in the nineteenth century and the rise of the Nazis, a time in which Jewish mathematicians in German-speaking countries achieved their most prominent successes. The exhibition highlights two points in particular. First, during the period in question, there was probably no part of the academic culture of mathematics in which Jewish mathematicians were not actively involved. In the Wilhelmine Empire and the Weimar Republic, Jewish mathematicians worked in research, teaching, and publishing. They were active in professional organizations such as the German Mathematical Society, and they participated in the public discourse on mathematics. They contributed to shaping the German-speaking mathematical culture of their time. Second, their activities were so varied and multifaceted that every stereotype of a “Jewish” style in mathematics is immediately refuted.

The exhibition was designed by a group of seven historians of mathematics in cooperation with the Jewish Museum Frankfurt and the German Mathematical Society. They are Moritz Epple, Frankfurt/Main University, head of the international project; Michael Korey, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, curator of the U.S. presentation; Ruti Unger, Frankfurt/Main University, project manager; Birgit Bergmann, Frankfurt/Main University; Walter Purkert, Bonn University; Volker Remmert, Wuppertal University; David E. Rowe, Mainz University; Erhard Scholz, Wuppertal University; and Annette Vogt, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. The partners in the exhibition are Wolfgang Lück, Director, Hausdorff Research Institute for Mathematics; Günter M. Ziegler, Free University of Berlin and head of the Media Office of the German Mathematical Society; Matthias Kreck, Mathematical Institute, Bonn University; Leo Corry, Tel Aviv University; Raphael Gross, Director, Jewish Museum Frankfurt/Main; and Fritz Backhaus, Codirector, Jewish Museum, Frankfurt/Main. The exhibition includes biographical and archival material, much of which has not appeared in English before. For more information, see the website: https://gj-math.uni-frankfurt.de/home/

—Elaine Kehoe

From the AMS Public Awareness Office

Mathematical Moments. The program now includes 100 topics. Some of the most recent Moments, which were sent to departments last month, are how math is used in gemstone cutting and the math involved in juggling. View and print all Mathematical Moments online at http://www.ams.org/mathmoments/ or request the new packets by sending an email to paoffice@ams.org (subject line: Mathematical Moments).


Mathematical Imagery. A Fractal Pancakes album is posted, and the images can be sent as e-postcards: http://www.ams.org/mathimagery/

—Annette Emerson and Mike Breen
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