Tim Corbett, *Die Grabstätten meiner Väter: Die jüdischen Friedhöfe in Wien* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021).

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Readers of this enormous book should begin by reading its conclusion, or at least those pages that constitute both a summary and introduction to its subject matter. Here Corbett explains his intention to recount the eight-hundred-year history of Viennese Jews from the late Middle Ages to the present, stressing their significance and contribution to the development of city life even when only a handful were permitted to reside in the Habsburg capital. Contrary to prevailing views, the author emphatically contends that the history of both Vienna and its Jewish population have been and remain intimately and inextricably interconnected, even after the Anschluss and Holocaust.

In his lengthy introductory chapter, the first of ten, Corbett explains that 100,000 gravestones from five Jewish cemeteries dating from the 13th century to the present have been used as archival sources, every bit as rich as documentary ones, to supplement existing literature on the Jewish experience in Vienna. Furthermore, because the author is fluent in modern European languages as well as Hebrew and Yiddish, this highly original approach has produced a masterpiece, albeit one that is somewhat repetitious and much too long.

Corbett argues that examination of sepulchral ethnicities enables us to realize that cemeteries and religious monuments since time immemorial have been more important to the living than to the dead. That the wealthy have always erected larger monuments to deceased loved ones from Roman times to the present. In this respect, Jews have been no different from other people, particularly in late 19th century Vienna, where educated and prosperous Jews excelled in constructing elaborate memorials in Jewish cemeteries. These and other grave markers reveal much about family members, except sisters, wives, and daughters, in line with Jewish custom. In late imperial Vienna, Corbett continues, it would be insulting to regard Jews as strangers in a city in which they had been living for centuries. This wildly shared belief can be attributed to the Holocaust, which—until the Waldheim affair—produced collective amnesia both about the size and diversity of Viennese Jewish life and the complicity of non-Jewish residents in the deportation and murder of their fellow citizens.

Corbett's research reveals there were roughly 100,000 Jewish grave markers, including fragmentary ones. These graves can be found in five Jewish cemeteries as well as those of several hundred prominent figures, such as Arthur Schnitzler and Gustav Mahler in secular cemeteries. Combined with published historical works, most notably those by August Ludwig Frankl and Gerson Wolf, as well as others that the author has read in detail, his book constitutes an encyclopedic history of the Jewish presence in Vienna.

Corbett proceeds briefly to recapitulate the history of Viennese Jewry during the early modern period, noting that a handful of Jews, mostly merchants, kept a low profile but were generally left alone. In 1421, however, Albrecht IV undertook a pogrom that murdered or expelled those living in the capital. A century and a half later, enough Jews had returned to organize a religious community. The Habsburgs forbade them from living within the city walls but needed to tax their assets as a source of imperial income. Thereafter, these so-called "liberated" Jews were gradually permitted to dwell in the city though confined to Leopoldstadt. During the Ottoman siege in 1683, they were again expelled, but later returned as "court Jews." In 1782 Joseph II's Patent of Tolerance granted Jews certain privileges, though it compelled them to live in a segregated society. That Jews such as Adolf Fischof played a prominent role in the revolutions of 1848–49 was no coincidence. Finally, in 1867 they were granted full citizenship, enabling thousands of Jewish Austrians from throughout the monarchy to prosper and thrive within Vienna.

Corbett now shifts his focus to the oldest known Jewish cemetery near the Seegasse. He explains that the earliest gravestone is that of a woman who died in 1629. Thereafter, the cemetery became the principal Jewish burial ground, primarily because, at the time, no more than roughly five hundred or so persons of the Jewish faith resided in the imperial capital. In 1782 Joseph II banned Jews from being laid to rest within the city walls but established a common cemetery open to persons of every faith, including Protestants, in which Mozart was interred. Even so, most Jews were buried in the Seegasse or Währing cemeteries until 1879, when the Viennese City Council and the Jewish Religious Community (*Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* [IKG]) agreed to designate the area beyond Gate IV of the modern non-denominational Central Cemetery (*Zentralfriedhof*) in Simmering as the principal Jewish burial ground.

In some of the richest and most informative chapters of his book Corbett contends that the various ceremonial halls, memorials, and tombstones near Gate IV can be seen as a microcosm of the Viennese Jewish

population; not least because so many of the deceased had immigrated from far-flung regions of the Austrian monarchy, particularly Galicia and Bukovina. Many had succeeded as physicians, attorneys, bankers, newspaper editors, and other members of the learned professions so as to dominate much of Viennese bourgeois society. Their success, however, stoked the fires of anti-Semitism, most notably under Karl Lueger, so that despite cordial relations with many middle class families and friends, non-Viennese assimilation never took place. Even so, the largely bourgeois members of the IKG worked well with members of the City Council.

Examination of gravestones and other markers reveals that most were inscribed in German rather than a mixture of German and Hebrew, as had been the case before. An exception was made for rabbis. The other markers also reveal the divisions within Jewish society, such as between the Ashkenazi, Sephardim, and younger Zionists. Plots were also reserved for officers of the Habsburg army. Before the Anschluss, relatively few Orthodox Jews were buried at Gate IV; most of them had led destitute lives in Leopoldstadt.

In discussing the era between 1918 and 1938, Corbett points out that because Viennese Jews supported the Austrian monarchy, most notably the middle-class IKG, they found themselves virtually alone confronting anti-Habsburg and anti-Semitic sentiment. Moreover, the influx of 35,000 Galician Jews exacerbated widespread anger and divided the Jewish community into Western and Eastern Jews, with the IKG patronizing the Orthodox "new arrivals." Seeking to overcome these divisions, the IKG in 1933 decided to support Chancellor Dollfuss's prorogation of parliament and establishment of the Christian Corporative regime. Corbett explains that Jewish officials hoped to purge the IKG of its leftist members and ensure the support of the Catholic regime. For some time, this ploy worked, although Orthodox Jews managed to advance their sepulchral agenda, for example, by eliminating fruit trees in cemeteries and removing photographs from gravestones. More significantly, however, the IKG's stance between 1933 and 1938 stoked the fury of Austrian Nazis, who despised both the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg dictatorship and the Jews.

Following the Anschluss, Adolf Eichmann established the Central Agency for Jewish Emigration in Vienna, designed to make the city *Judenfrei* (free of Jews). Himmler's man in the *Ostmark* next authorized the IKG to administer Jewish affairs, giving its officials decision-making authority. Corbett explains the complex, tortuous relationship between Eichmann's office and the IKG in considerable detail. Simultaneously, he provides an interlocking, often repetitious, account of the brutal persecution of

Viennese Jews by Austrian Nazis between the Anschluss and Kristallnacht in November 1938. Relying on official documents and personal accounts, Corbett concludes this part of his study by discussing the expulsion of 130,000 Austrian Jews between 1938 and 1941, and the deportation and murder of 65,000 others until 1945.

For those familiar with the history of the Holocaust in Austria, Corbett's account of these events provides new details but does not significantly alter our knowledge of the persecution of Jews under Nazi rule. That said, the author's sepulchral perspective—the leitmotif of his study—offers shocking new information on what he calls "cultural genocide": the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and prayer houses, as well as the exhumation of human remains, which were shipped to the office of "racial science" at the University of Vienna for detection and analysis of distinctive Jewish morphological features. Furthermore, Jewish burial grounds were regularly vandalized by removing gravestones, which were then used as paving stones or construction materials for buildings or other projects. Ironically, relatively few tombstones were confiscated from Gate IV of the Central Cemetery owing to a 19th-century contract with the Viennese City Council. In Währing, however, the Nazis came close to transforming the cemetery into a park.

Corbett reminds readers that in 1940/41 most Viennese Jews were left in relative peace, usually in public places such as buildings in the Central Cemetery. Burials continued to take place, although frequently without a grave marker. Moreover, because Gate IV was leased by Vienna's municipal government, funeral expenses became increasingly difficult for the financially-strapped IKG to pay. Finally, in March 1942, the Nazis reversed course and banned all burials, except in Gate IV, where the Gestapo assumed the few remaining Jews could stay until deportation to the East. Ironically, the spacious area became a place for rest and relaxation, particularly for youngsters of both sexes. Permitted to hunt pheasants and rabbits, the Jews also grew potatoes, onions, and other vegetables that, in 1942, provided more than enough to eat. However, over time, their numbers diminished so that in 1945 only 5,512 remained in the Austrian capital.

Turning to the postwar period, Corbett offers some of the most fascinating and disturbing chapters in his massive study. The restored Austrian government reaffirmed its recognition of the IKG but also accepted the Moscow Declaration that Austria had been Hitler's first victim. This implied that most Austrians had not been involved in Nazi atrocities, most notably the Holocaust, even though a majority of the population had eagerly supported Hitler's regime and a disproportionate number of Austrian SS

officers commanded the death camps. As the filmmaker Ruth Beckermann later pointed out, the main victims of Nazism, Austria's Jews, were left out of the equation.

Under these circumstances, the diminished IKG confronted seemingly intractable problems. In 1945/46, for example, its officials had to deal with Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, most of whom emigrated to what became Israel. Next, the IKG had to work with several thousand returning professional Jews—engineers, physicians, and attorneys—who had not belonged to the IKG and had no desire to join its ranks. Further, the problem arose whether to disinter Jewish victims buried in various locations and rebury their remains in Gate IV of the Central Cemetery, or leave them to rest in peace. Finally, IKG officials had to confront the problem of Jewish identity. Under Austrian law, the Jewish Religious Community represented all Jews in the Alpine Republic, but the IKG did not represent everyone of Hebrew descent as Jewish.

The most important figure in the postwar IKG was Ernst Feldsberg, an attorney who had survived Theresienstadt, established close relations with Israel, and had become rigidly Orthodox. Prior to the Anschluss, Austrian and German Jews were classified according to faith, not ancestry or ethnicity. According to the Nuremberg Laws, the Nazis defined "Jewishness" in racial biological terms. Ironically, Feldsberg dictated Jewish interment procedures in a way that resembled those of the Nazis, even categorizing the departed as *Volljuden*, *Nichtglaubenjuden*, and even *Rasse* (full Jews, non-religious Jews, and race). He also required visitors to wear yarmulkes and insisted that every gravestone be approved by Vienna's head rabbi. In retrospect, Feldsberg clearly intended to restore traditional Jewish sepulchral customs, but his choice of words and rhetoric provoked storms of protest both within the IKG and the chambers of the city council.

Another problem for the Jewish Religious Community occurred when the Second Republic began portraying Austria as a "cultural nation," albeit with scant mention of fin de siècle Jewish composers, artists, and literary figures. This induced about 10,000 exiles in the United States to request information on the condition of cemeteries in which their families had been buried. A number even visited Vienna in the early 1980s only to be appalled by the lack of upkeep of the graveyards and persistent anti-Semitic views of the Austrian people.

At this point, Corbett passionately reminds readers that Austrians, more than Germans, played a significant role in the persecution and murder of their Jewish fellow citizens. Most of the death camps, for example, were commanded by Austrian SS officers. Further, municipal and federal

authorities of the Second Republic stonewalled restitution issues and the restoration of Jewish cemeteries, which admittedly were leased by the state. In 1986 the Waldheim affair compelled Austrians to face up to their Nazi past, though much more gradually than commonly believed. Both municipal and federal authorities equivocated on restitution claims, and Corbett's sepulcher research reveals that Jewish cemeteries were vandalized in recurring waves up to the year 2000. Further, a bitter dispute between Simon Wiesenthal and Feldsberg's disciples within the IKG crippled the Jewish community in confronting the persistence of grassroots anti-Semitic attitudes and behavior.

Even so, the Waldheim affair did constitute a remarkable change in confronting Austria's difficult past, particularly among a younger generation of journalists, scholars, students, and ordinary citizens. As if personally relieved, Corbett describes in detail the efforts of non-Jewish Austrians to renovate Jewish cemeteries and honor Jewish soldiers who had died before 1938, perished in the Holocaust, or fell in the Israeli army. Ceremonies included civil and military officials, and members of the Shalom Society, which restored 1,300 gravestones in the Central Cemetery. In addition, scholars began investigating Jewish history, particularly Austrian involvement in the Holocaust.

In 2001 an addendum to the 1998 Washington Agreement on the restitution of stolen works of art required Vienna to restore and maintain neglected Jewish cemeteries. After intense discussion and debate, the IKG decided to focus on the Währing burial ground, a cemetery that had been severely damaged by Nazi hooligans and Allied bombs. However, because the minuscule IKG lacked sufficient financial resources to undertake the project, its officials requested assistance from the federal government. The government's refusal provoked an angry response by the president of the Jewish Religious Community, who pointed out that the government had ample funds to maintain cemeteries containing the remains of Wehrmacht and SS combatants but preferred to ignore the tombstones of 350,000 Austrian Jews. This nasty dispute, in retrospect, may be regarded as a tempest in a teapot. Nevertheless, the future of the Währing cemetery remains unresolved. As Corbett concludes, the ultimate fate of Jewish cemeteries in Vienna has yet to be decided.

What is one to make of this remarkable book? There can be no doubt that Corbett's sepulchral approach, most notably his meticulous scrutiny of tombstones, contributes enormously to our awareness of the Jewish presence in Vienna from the Middle Ages to 1938—and to some extent beyond. He also reinforces Lisa Silverman's argument that numerous

Jewish writers, composers, musicians, and artists shaped what is nowadays considered a distinctive Austrian culture. Nevertheless, the strength of Corbett's exhaustive study is also its weakness. Aside from being much too long, its focus on Vienna will surely limit its appeal. German-speaking residents or tourists may wish to visit Gate IV of the Central Cemetery but, in seeking information, will most likely purchase a pamphlet or hire a guide. The same could be said of the many descendants of Jewish loved ones living in the United States or Israel, few of whom speak German. This is not to denigrate Corbett's enormous achievement but rather to suggest that it be consulted as an encyclopedia rather than a scholarly monograph.