



Interview by Ute Deichmann with Raphael Falk

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Raphael Falk, born in Frankfurt a. M., Germany, in 1929, is professor emeritus of genetics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

UD: Israeli scientists differed and differ strongly in their attitudes regarding collaboration with German scientists. Did Israeli scientists who were refugees from Nazi Germany have more problems to collaborate with German colleagues?

RF: Elisabeth Goldschmidt, the senior geneticist in Israel in the 1950s-1970s, born in Frankfurt a. M., abandoned her medicine studies and left for England and then for Palestine, led the campaign (together with her colleague Jacob Wahrman, also born in Frankfurt), against the decision of the International Genetics Congress 1958 in Montreal for Germany as venue of the next Congress in 1960. She did not collaborate with German scientists. But she collaborated with an Austrian geneticist, Elisabeth Stumm-Zollinger, on the population cytogenetics of *Drosophila subobscura*. Israel is at the border of the distribution of this species, and the two researchers could show that the variability of this fly in Israel was lower than that in Austria. In 1959 they published a joint paper: Elisabeth Stumm-Zollinger & Elisabeth Goldschmidt, Geographical differentiation of inversion systems in *Drosophila subobscura*, *Evolution and Development* 13 (1), 89-98. I do not know whether Goldschmidt was in Germany or Austria. But she was in Switzerland, where she spent a couple of months in Ernst Hadorn's lab in order to learn paper chromatography

for studying variability in *Drosophila*, a method which she introduced to genetic studies in Israel.

In 1961 there was a conference on Jewish population genetics in Israel, which was organized by Goldschmidt and Chaim Sheba, who was not a geneticist but a physician and organizer. Goldschmidt invited people from different countries, e.g. Haldane attended the conference, as well as Turkish, Greek and Algerian scientists and others. See this information in Goldschmidt's book: *Genetics of Migrant and Isolated Populations*. She also invited the German Hans Nachtsheim who was considered a non-Nazi. Goldschmidt trusted Gert Bonnier, my former instructor from Sweden, who, after consultations with colleagues invited Nachtsheim to The International Genetic Congress in Stockholm in 1958, about Nachtsheim's past during the Nazi era. I remember Nachtsheim during his visit; he kept a low profile.

[Many years later it was shown by Benno-Müller-Hill, Diane Paul, and Ute Deichmann that Nachtsheim, who was not a Nazi in the ideological meaning, conducted unethical experiments in children (Koch, Gerhard. (1993). *Humangenetik und Neuro-Psychiatrie in meiner Zeit (1932-1978). Jahre der Entscheidung*. Erlangen und Jena: Palm & Enke, p. 125). At the end of the war he destroyed the incriminating papers of Otmar von Verschuer in his KWI in Berlin (Verschuer was out of Berlin). These papers documented, among other things, Verschuer's collaboration with Mengele when the latter was physician at Auschwitz.]

Half of the book consists of exhibits, posters which were shown during the conference; I was involved in assembling these posters and organizing them. I think that the conference and the book were the beginning of human genetics in Israel.

Jacob Wahrman organized, together with Goldschmidt, the campaign against Germany as venue of the Genetics Congress. Most American geneticists were opposed to them, including émigrés like Curt Stern, with whom I made my postdoctorate. He completely disagreed with

Goldschmidt and Wahrman. One of the major scientists, who supported them, was Leslie C. Dunn.

UD: Did Wahrman visit Germany or collaborate with Germans?

RF: I think that he never went to Germany but had good relations with some German scientists, for example someone in Lübeck, whose name I forgot, who later became also personally near to Wahrman. His son came to Israel, lived in a kibbutz and stayed in the country as a doctor.

Wahrman had professional and personal relationships also with another German colleague, the cytogeneticist Luehrs. Luehrs visited Israel.

Menashe Marcus, who was also a geneticist at the HU, had very good relations (personal and professional) with [?] Sperling, a German scientist at the Charité. Menashe was assistant of me and Jacob Wahrman in our course on bacterial genetics, the first one at the department of Genetics, which we started after a visit of Francis Ryan in Israel. Menashe became doctorate student of Yeheskel Halperin at the HUJI Medical School and spent part of his postdoctorate with Salvador Luria, but later he developed brain cancer and died early.

After the war, the German government wanted to arrange some kind of restitution for victims of medical experimentations. For this purpose, a doctor from Germany should be sent for the examinations. My father met a young physician, Laura Schaefer, in 1949 or '50 during a WHO pediatrician course in Sweden. She had made her doctorate with Ernst Rüdin. She was associated with Dr. Irmegard(?) Lustig, the (German) widow of Dr. Lustig, who managed to "operate" a Jewish hospital in Berlin all the way to the end. Then he was executed by the Soviets. Through the acquaintance with my father Laura officially came to Israel. She lived with our family; there were demonstrations against her in front of our house. Later she learned Hebrew and kept relations with my family and other people in Israel.

She married late and her daughter Raya – following the name Ruma and I gave to our daughter – is affected by Down's syndrome. Laura devoted her house and the neighboring one as a community of Down's syndrome afflicted persons.

A number of people including physicians, who emigrated from Germany to Israel in the 1930s, went back to Germany in the early 1950s to work in private practices or companies. My father visited Germany but resented those who went back to Germany.

UD: Did you collaborate with German scientists?

RF: I had professional relations with a German colleague whom I met at the conference on radiation genetics. I think his name was Prof. Schwanitz. I don't remember, but probably we spoke English. He was not in Israel, but I visited him on my journeys from Sweden. He invited me and picked me up in Lobberich – Schaefer's home – for a visit in Jöllis at his lab.

In 1982 I spent one year in Berlin as a member of the Wissenschaftskolleg.

Earlier I spent a week or so in Darmstadt to learn using *Crithidia*.

I was invited to participate in a conference in Dresden, at the Technical Museum, and later, in a workshop in Bielefeld. These occasions made connection between me and Peter Beurton at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin for the History of Science. We organized together a conference on the gene in Berlin [Beurton, Peter J., Falk, Raphael, & Rheinberger, Hans-Jörg (Eds.). (2000). *The Concept of the Gene in Development and Evolution: Historical and Epistemological Perspectives*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.]

I had relations with Benno Müller-Hill after he published his book *Murderous Science* (1984). He visited us at our home in Jerusalem, and we visited him and his wife in Köln.

UD: Did the German culture play a role in the relationship with German colleagues?

RF: The professional interests came always first; for me, the German culture was not important. I was born in 1929 in Frankfurt-Hoechst and after 4 years was brought to Israel. I have nothing for or against the Germans, I left Germany early enough, unlike, e.g., Elisabeth Goldschmidt, who could not complete her medical studies in Germany. My parents were real Zionist-"Yekes" and this undoubtedly affected me.