

100 Years of Family Tradition

How a mid tier business of Frankfurt includes the Jewish founders in its history but forgets the aryanization.

By Armin H. Flesch

Aryanization is a German word. So much German that it did not appear in the Duden for a long time. In the edition of 1949 only, the adjective Aryan occurs. In 1967 the noun Aryan consorts to the adjective: "Nobleman, member of protohistoric peoples with indogermanic language; national-socialistic: Non-Jew, member of the nordic race." Only since the Duden was in the internet we learned what was the meaning of the aryanizing activities of these noble and Nordic race:"(in the time of the national-socialistic regime) to bring Jewish property into Aryan property by means of expropriation or forced selling." Apart from this debatable definition it should be mentioned that aryanization did not come to its end after the national-socialistic regime. Up to now aryanization is going on: the truth.

[Children and grand-children of the expropriated company founders do not receive an answer to their e-mail.](#)

The City of Frankfurt invites every year former and between 1933 and 45 persecuted citizens of the city and their descendants for one week. This year, too, 36 relatives of former Frankfurter came to the river Main. Among them was Rolf Stürm, about whose visit the Frankfurter Rundschau reported, as well as his American cousins Nancy Ginsburg and Susan Neulist. Their common great-grand father, Heinrich Vogel, had founded in 1914 shortly before the outbreak of World War I one of the first subcontractors for the fast growing auto industry. After his death the company demised to the two sons Ernst and Kurt. Under the increasing pressure of the "dejudaization of the German economic life" they had to nominate two of their senior employees into the management board. Two years later, the two "Aryan" coowners Heinrich Elsen and Georg Hemer took over the company completely. "Brothers Vogel" became "Elsen & Hemer"; that is the name of the company until today.

In summer 2013 – during a family reunion in the USA – the grand-children of the Vogel brothers were interested whether the company still existed and how the company's history of 100 years was presented on its homepage. Indeed, they were successful: on www.elsen-hemer.de there is even a rubric "history". However, what Rolf Stürm and his relatives read there made them speechless. The actual owners refer to the "100 years of family tradition" without mentioning the true founding family with any word. An e-mail as well as a letter to the owning family Elsen, in which Rolf Stürm asked them to mention the founders and former owners, too, remained unanswered. Only the word "family" disappeared.

Sigmund Freud characterized the concept of suppression: Facts that are tabooed or perceived as painful or threatening are excluded from perception. This is, according to Freud's theory, an unconscious process. In the case of Elsen & Hemer and of many other profiteers of the Nazi regime and their descendants, suppression of their own "history" happens totally consciously. History is rewritten, ignored and slanted in order to transform unpleasant facts into pleasant lies with which one identify himself publicly. Anything goes what pleases.

After several requests and initial refusal the owner of Elsen & Hemer agree to give an interview. It lasts one and a half hour; a son and two grand-sons of the aryanizer Heinrich Elsen can tell many details: The company founder Heinrich Vogel started as a coach maker and grand-father Elsen always wore fancy ties and bow-ties. They describe the friendly relation with the Vogels and they know that Ernst emigrated to Biel in Switzerland and Kurt initially to Brussels and then to the USA. A lot was risked in favor of the Vogels during Nazi time. The grand-mother, e.g., smuggled a ship ticket in her bra to Brussels. However, there was no need to smuggle this ticket which proofs the export license that was preserved in America. I life full of dangers remembers senior Bernhard Elsen: "You must be beware of one thing: Jews were those who went abroad, because they had to.

They had the pressure of the national-socialists on their back. But those, who helped them here, stood on the much worse side.”

Asked, why they mention absolutely nothing about the founding family on their homepage in spite of the friendly relation, their memory power ceases abruptly. They argue, that all this is a very long time ago, that they know much too little, and that it's better to write nothing than something false. Also, the three descendants do not know anything about the effort of the “observant Catholics” Heinrich and Auguste Elsen in the year 1941 to “dejudaize” a building lot of 4700 square meters (= 1.2 acres) not far away from their Frankfurter private house for 9700 Reichsmark. This story is told only by the notarized sale contract in the Frankfurter Institute for Town History.

[Michael Elsen searches laboriously for an explanation for is historical amnesia.](#)

It is the last day of Rolf Stürm, Nancy Ginsburg and Susan Neulist in Frankfurt am Main. They meet in the morning with students of a high school, for the evening the concluding reception for the visitors' group in the Emperor's Hall of the townhall is on the program. In between there is a break of four hours; the three grandchildren of the Vogel brothers use it for a visit of the headquarters of Elsen & Hemer. They come unannounced, but they are lucky: Michael Elsen, one of the two owners, is present and host them after a short waiting time in the conference room. Elsen is nervous, you can see it. His face is bloodless, red spots are on his neck. He acknowledges that he has received Stürm's e-mail a year ago: “We have received an e-mail, that is correct”. He does not answer why it has not been replied. Will the grand-fathers Vogel appear sometime on the homepage in the future? “I have not contemplated about it as far as now,” answers Michael Elsen and seeks laboriously for an explanation. “That may be ... a somewhat ... unconscious ... negligence. No clue.” In the course of the talk he says that he wants to correct this negligence.

On the concluding reception in the Emperor's Hall of the Frankfurter townhall Rolf Stürm delivers a speech as representative of the Jewish visitors' group. He tells that the generation of their parents and grand-parents never wanted to speak about what happened to them: “The pain and bitterness of exclusion from German culture and the shame of surviving was so intense that most of them could not find words to describe it for the rest of their lives. And Stürm tried to explain, why the children and grand-children of Jews expelled from Germany came back for a visit in the former homeland of their families: “Maybe, because all of us realized at a certain time in our lives, that only dealing with our history can liberate us from our past. Only when we look into the backpack we wear and which pressed so much on the shoulders of our parents and grand-parents; only when we know what is in the backpack can we decide what we will carry into the future - and what will be released.”

Rolf Stürm tells about the visit of Elsen & Hemer of this afternoon, too, and is happy about the pledge of Michael Elsen to mention the founding family on the homepage. But who opens the homepage of Elsen & Hemer today still finds under „history“ nothing else but the sentence: „We are looking on a tradition of 100 years going back to he company foundation in the year 1914.“ To whom this foundation goes back and why the founders had to sell the company, this story is not told.

Key of the photos:

Views of the company Vogel. On the photos in the middle you see (on the left, in front) the both Jewish founders Kurt and Ernst Vogel during WW I and on the photo on the right Ernst Vogel and his grand-son Rolf Stürm.