

## **Eine Studienreise in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland**

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I was 33 years old in 1969 and working for 6 years for the Extension Service, Ministry of Agriculture, Israel. Had a very tough and abrasive boss at that time. However, he was the one who invited me to join his Division and he was the one who laid out a career structure for the young collaborators that he recruited. For me he was looking for a long study tour in western Europe. Dr. J. Palti was born in Berlin. He reached England as a kid. Completed high school and a B.Sc. in plant pathology in the U.K. before moving to Palestine. He was keen on reestablishing contacts with German professionals. We never talked about the rationale behind, I just felt him comfortable with German plant protection peers. At an international conference he met Prof. Heinrich C. Weltzien. Weltzien, the Chairman of the Plant Diseases and Protection Institute of the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Bonn spent twelve years as professor of plant pathology at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. Palti brought him to take a balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli world. The sensible step would be to host an Israeli student at Bonn on advanced studies or a study tour.

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Foundation) was active and still is, promoting the build up of collaborative frameworks between Germany and Israel and Europe and Israel, respectively. I opted for and been awarded a five months fellowship to visit research and advisory plant protection facilities in Western Germany. We asked to include in the program visits to the UK and the Netherlands for three weeks each, and the request was accepted.

Prof. Weltzien and his Institute acted as the coordinating host. I landed thus in Bonn, a relatively small town in North Rhine-Westphalia which served as West Germany's capital. It showed off the paraphernalia of a capital city with its federal ministries, the Parliament's two houses and the foreign diplomatic missions. The town is divided in two parts by the majestically flowing Rhine and connected through many bridges. It is surrounded by lovely green and mellow hills.

The fellowship's daily allowance wasn't sufficient for hotel lodgings and most of the time have stayed at pensions or rented rooms. In Bonn, my "headquarters" were in a room above a restaurant/pub not far from the railway station, quite close to city center and within walking distance to the

Pflanzenkrankheiten und Pflanzenschutz Institut. I was always averse of these dark-windowed pubs in Germany and had to traverse it and its boozing afternoon clientele to reach my first-floor room. Being a guest of the Institute meant to meet with all faculty and get acquainted with their work as well as with all PhD students, attend seminars, social gatherings, field trips and excursions. Researchers and lecturers could be pigeonholed into two main groups. The older generation, who didn't master English and the younger one who did. A little group was even educated in the US or spent sabbaticals in the Anglo-Saxon world. We were 24 years after the end of the second world war, Germany still divided in two parts and Berlin into four zones. Had to pull myself together when sitting down with the older professors, to guess their age during WWII, try to brush off past and refresh my rusty German. I was quite successful with the last challenge.

Weltzien (1928) was an aloof type but he took me in and opened up the Institute in full. Had sessions with researchers from all groups: entomologists, plant pathologists, virologists, bacteriologists, weed scientists. One of the best known internationally was Prof. Volker Moericke (1913). He investigated aphids as vectors of plant viruses and their sensory attraction to yellow color. He developed the Moericke traps which still carry his name all over the world. Are in use nowadays for the evaluation of aphid populations but also for their mass-trapping, especially in greenhouses. Moericke served in the German army. Whenever discussions arose about the past at social gatherings he was the one who dots the i's, giving a lesson to anyone who didn't know or seemed not to know it. Among the younger scientists, have been impressed by virologist Prof. Nienhaus. He was the first among faculty who was US-educated and appointed as professor at a young age.

Have visited with all PhD students to get introduced into their research fields. Omar Mamluk, a Syrian student refused to meet me. We were just a couple of years after Six Day War. Weltzien insisted and I had a one-hour session with Mamluk. Years afterward have used to meet him at international conferences. Dr. Mamluk was employed by ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas) located at Aleppo in Syria. He became friendly and we even had coffee together. He met Palti at such a meeting beforehand and used to ask me about him. I don't know which were the motivational forces behind the change. Was Palti such a charmer? There were at least three Egyptian M.Sc. students at the Institute. Unlike Mamluk, they were friendly right from get-go with no pent-up hard feelings. We used to spend time together at the dining hall or at field trips. Little light in a murky

tunnel. The time spent at the Institute was highly satisfactory filling my days for weeks in a row. Once a month had to go to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's offices in Bad Godesberg, Bonn's exclusive neighborhood to pick up my monthly allowance. Bad Godesberg accommodated all diplomatic missions and it used to be a posh quarter. Bonn didn't have much to offer. I used to take the train to Cologne, matter of less than half an hour's ride and go to the Opera.

But Bonn had one particular spot which left a deep impression. Beethoven was born there in 1770 and his little house on the Rhine's bank was turned into a museum. The deepest impression is left by the brass hearing aids that look like trumpets or even trombones. One end was pushed into his deafened ear while his conversational partner shouted at the other. Annual Beethoven festivals were organized only as of 1998.



*Beethoven's hearing aids*



*Beethoven house, Bonn. Courtyard.*

While in Bonn, used to pay visits also to the Pflanzenschutzamt or the State's Plant Protection Office. This had both regulatory as well as advisory functions. Have joined regularly one of the senior advisors at his field visits which were

similar in nature to our visiting and advisory approach back home. At one of the visits, my host, Dr. Joachim Schmidt (1925) asked me to rent a car for that purpose. Due to an imminent holiday he was not supposed to drive back to Bonn. I rented a VW beetle. Had the bad luck to step into a hole in the field and sprained an ankle. It swelled up but I played it cool during the field visit. Had a hard time driving back to the agency to drop off the car. Limped teetering to a supermarket and bought some food for the long weekend and climbed up sweating into my room. To rub salt into the wound, have developed fever in a couple of hours. Felt miserable. Cut out of the civilized world, a doctor or cooked food in the middle of Bonn. The fever had nothing to do with the ankle. I just caught a cold and had to eke out for three days on the humble victuals bought before the holiday. Stuck in the room, just unable to go down the stairs. Seen a doctor only after the end of the holiday.



*On my left Prof. Schönbeck (1926) and Prof. Weltzien, Plant Diseases Institute, Bonn*

As mentioned, we were two years after the Six Days War. The Germans were full of admiration for Israelis for their successful blitzkrieg. The gag said that only when they found out that Israelis are Jewish, did their enthusiasm cool down a notch. Heard quite often the solemn statement that we won through discipline, a rare commodity in post-war Germany. Had a hard time explaining that it's not only a matter of discipline but a spirit of individualism and of initiatives infused into the active and reserve military. Embedded in Jewish DNA.

Through all my visits to many countries, have never been invited that much to my hosts' homes as in this visit to Germany. Elder people, senior executives, have done so as well as younger ones with or without a particular relationship to our country or to someone known in our country. Have visited Prof.

Weltzien's home and had to be careful to bring token presents to each of his six children.

After spending six weeks in Bonn, have followed the itinerary worked out there and visited Plant Protection Advisory Offices in Frankfurt, Hamburg and Hanover as well as plant protection research departments at the universities of Hohenheim at Stuttgart, Giessen and Kiel and the federal plant protection institutes – BBA (Biologische Bundesanstalt für Land- und Forstwirtschaft) at Berlin-Dahlem and Braunschweig and its outposts at Köln, Darmstadt and Münster. This was a most hectic period but at its end I was profoundly familiar with the German plant protection system and the faces behind it.

Been to Berlin to visit with BBA headquarters at Dahlem located in the same building where the Kaiserlich Biologische Anstalt für Land- und Forstwirtschaft once resided. Been received first by President and Professor (this is the official title) Prof. Magnes (1904). The usual way to get to such a managing director was to pass through three secretaries and be awed by the very fact that you have been awarded one hour of his precious time. Have visited in Dahlem with plant pathologists Drs. Gerlach and Schneider with whom Palti was in touch through his research on Fusaria, a group of fungi causing vascular wilt diseases of plants. Meanwhile a large part of the Berlin-Dahlem departments was being moved to modern and spacious premises at Braunschweig. I arrived to Braunschweig in the midst of this process. Meantime BBA has received a new Director, Prof. Gerhard Schuhmann (1923) a plant pathologist. He just arrived to Braunschweig, without family, to take over the charge and stayed at a hotel. I met him and was moved by his jovial and empathic attitude, so non-teutonic. Since, we were both singles and new in town, he invited me for dinner the same day and we met several times for meals during my stay. He was a truck driver in the war and captured by the Americans in northern Africa. Spent three years in the US as prisoner of war. This explained his good English. His wife joined him over the weekend. She was Austrian, didn't speak but basic English and German in a heavy, difficult to follow dialect. Through him I felt the new wind blowing in this country. He was interested in both my professional and family life in Israel, exposing his. I was a young regional plant protection advisor and he, head of Germany's federal plant protection regulatory and research body comprising 700 employees. Apparently his edge being as Oliver Wendell Holmes used to say: "The young man knows the rules, but the old man knows the exceptions". He led BBA for 18 years between 1969 and 1988.

A person with affinity to Israel that I visited with during this intensive tour was, Prof. Jürgen Kranz (1926) a plant disease epidemiologist from the

Tropeninstitut of the Justus Liebig University in Giessen. He had collaborative projects with Drs. Rotem and Palti in Israel. As such he visited our country quite often. I met him before my visit to Giessen where have been exposed to the intensive coaching of students in tropical agriculture, preparing them for an international career. Further, one of his daughters spent a year at Kibbutz Huliot in the northern Galilee. Back to Germany, and hit by psychotic disorder, she took unfortunately her own life.

All travel in Germany was by train or by bus. Divided Berlin was accessible only by air. I flew Pan Am from Hanover to Berlin on a propeller-driven Boeing 377 Stratocruiser. Holding an Israeli passport, gave up on the one-day trip to east Berlin. West Berlin was divided in four zones and pretty-well demarked. The Reichstag and the gate of Brandenburg, swarming with tourists nowadays were barbed-wire sterile areas. Still, Kurfürstendamm showed already much charm. Much construction was taking place in the town face-lifting its bombed-out hollow wounds.



*The Reichstag in 1969.*



*Brandenburg Gate in 1969, dividing east- and west Berlin.*

Next visits were devoted to the pesticide industry, with its gigantic manufacturing capacity for both the world and the domestic markets. Bayer at Leverkusen and BASF were the visited facilities. They knew their way to give visitors a good time and you're picked up in style with a limo from the hotel. In the case of BASF, the VIP treatment stopped at the gate for a while. A young person was sent there to pick me up and he just sat there dawdling without saying a word or carrying a name tag. We sat there both of us at the entrance in polite silence. Until I picked up the phone to find out that I'm awaited right there by a shy novice. Both Bayer and BASF put the large scale biological screening of potential pesticides and the chemical manipulation of the more promising molecules in the crosshairs. They paid also much attention to the more theoretical and vogueish trend of crop loss assessment. To know more about this industry and the hot issues in their pipeline have crossed the border at Basel to Switzerland to visit their local giants: CIBA and Geigy. They consolidated later to appear under the Novartis brand name.

After crisscrossing the huge country of western Germany, Netherlands seems small and compact. However, the research-advisory facility of Wageningen is an empire on its own. The agricultural university and its crop protection divisions were always well-endowed with technology generation capabilities and top-notch scientists. The advisory service was also a driving force on a par with the producers' high level. Unlike in our country and many others, most of their field advisors were graduates of vocational high schools. Their practical know-how and "green thumb" being more appreciated than an academic background and approach. I used to stay in a rented apartment in Wageningen. The park area was always full of kids and boys of 13-15 years just mocked me on a daily basis. Obviously, they were not used to someone who doesn't speak their language. Besides Wageningen, paid visits to the Naaldwijk research center and the university of Utrecht.

After three intensive months, high time for a break. Touched base with my wife at Amsterdam. She didn't want to step on German soil for obvious reasons. Only years later we purchased a VW beetle and she joined me on a trip to Germany and Austria. We spent some time in Amsterdam and took the usual tours in the country. Moved to London to stay there for three weeks as classical tourists. Stayed at a pension off Baker Street owned by Mr. Cowan, previously Cohen. We used to chat whenever he was present and ended up friends. Before our departure Mr. Cowan took me aside and said: "you know

you speak so well, only problem is it's no English". He was right, my English was that dismal textbook kind of and not the conversational one spoken on Baker Street. He didn't get my fingers slammed in the door. It's been just a bucket of cold water. Am deeply thankful for his comment. It gave me strong motivation to work on the colloquial. We took a trip up to Scotland and been to the Edinburgh festival. Attended a plant protection conference at Stirling in Scotland together with my wife and met there Palti and his spouse. He was always very active at such meetings, provocative and sparkling. When back to Israel have heard from one of my colleagues that Palti was happy with the way I came to grips with the participants at the conference.



*With Ms. Palti (raincoat), Palti, Ms. Auscher, Stirling, Scotland. 1969.*

After this summer vacation, spent the next weeks in the UK, traveling with ADAS (Agricultural Development and Advisory Service) and visiting with MAFF's (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) Central Research Laboratory at Harpenden.



Palti was right, I ripened much after this European tour de force. It cooked me toward future challenges.