

Magda Goebbels

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I am a fan of Professor Colin Shindler, celebrated historian of Zionism, the origins of the Right and the political rivalries of Israeli politics. He is an outspoken moral, intellectual voice against oppression and hypocrisy. He will shortly be publishing a collection of his reviews and essays under the title *The Hebrew Republic: Israel's Return to History*, which I have been privileged to see an advance copy and I heartily recommend.

Amongst this treasure trove of Zionist history, I discovered a reference to Magda Goebbels, the wife of that revolting Nazi, Josef Goebbels. What is more, it says that she was once the mistress of Haim Arlosoroff, when he was a young man in Germany, known then as Viktor. Together they went to Zionist meetings, and she used to wear, in public, a necklace with the Star of David that he gave her as a love token.

Haim Arlosoroff was one of the most important Zionist leaders during the Palestine Mandate. He was born in Ukraine in 1899. His family settled in Königsberg, Germany, where he studied economics at the University of Berlin. He visited Palestine in 1921 and became actively involved in Zionism. In the 1923 Zionist Congress, Arlosoroff was elected to the Zionist Action Committee. In 1926 he was chosen to represent the Yishuv at the League of Nations in Geneva and became the Political Director of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, until his assassination in 1933.

It is not known who murdered him or why. The left wing and right wing of the Zionist movement both blamed each other for his death. Despite intense investigation and much controversy, the murder was never solved. All kinds of theories floated around. One was that he was blamed for initiating the Haavara, the agreement with the Nazis to permit Jews to leave Germany for Palestine, provided they deposited their money into a special bank account. This money was then used to purchase German goods for export to Palestine (and other countries). The proceeds of the sale of these goods were given to the Jews on their arrival in Palestine. Ultimately, over 60,000 German Jews escaped persecution by the Nazis directly or indirectly through Haavara. On 16 June 1933, just two days after his return from negotiations in Germany, Haim Arlosoroff was murdered. It was widely believed that right-wing activists in Palestine who objected to any deal with the Nazis were responsible. But there were bitter personal rivalries within the left of the Zionist movement too. Some suggested Arab nationalists were to blame.

In the mid-1970s another theory emerged. It was suggested in the Israeli press that Joseph Goebbels had sent two Nazi agents (Theo Korth and Heinz Geronda) to murder Arlosoroff in order to cover up the fact that he had been Magda's lover.

Who was Magda? Magda had a Jewish stepfather, whose name (Friedländer) she adopted. But she was brought up as a Catholic. Magda led a colorful life. In

1920, while returning to university on a train, she met Günther Quandt, a rich German industrialist twice her age, whom she married the following year. He demanded that she change her name back to her mother's and convert to Protestantism. She had a son, Harald. But she soon grew frustrated with her marriage, and in 1929 Quandt discovered that Magda was having an affair. He divorced her, with a generous settlement.

Young, attractive, and with no need to work, she attended a meeting of the Nazi Party on the advice of a friend. She was impressed by one of the speakers, Joseph Goebbels, then the Gauleiter of Berlin. Magda and Goebbels were married on December 19, 1931, with Hitler as a witness. Joseph and Magda Goebbels went on to have six children.

She had met Arlosoroff at the university. They became lovers, and she got involved with him in Zionist affairs. Years later he visited Berlin and discovered his old flame had married Goebbels. He even came across an opposition newspaper headline that read: Nazi Chief weds Jewess. Once the shock had subsided, Arlosoroff, so the theory went, began to view Magda as his conduit to Goebbels to secure a deal to transfer Jewish assets and people from Germany to Palestine. Their relationship proved to be an embarrassment to Goebbels and Magda, now very much part of the Nazi leadership. This, the theory goes, was why he was "terminated". In truth we still don't know.

In late April 1945, the Soviet Red Army entered Berlin, and the Goebbels family moved into the Hitler's bunker. Magda wrote a farewell letter to her son Harald Quandt, who was in a POW camp in North Africa. She said that she saw no point in carrying on living after Hitler's death and the end of his dream. Their charred corpses were found on the afternoon of May 2, 1945 by Russian troops.

Why did Magda become a Nazi? Was it simply because, like so many others, she took advantage of the circumstances to advance her own position in life, regardless of morality or ideology? Don't most people? And how did she feel about Jews, having loved one in the past? Did she simply blot it out, or did she adopt the pathology of her second husband? Was she, in other words, a good-time girl hitching a ride, or did she turn into an ideologically committed racist? It seems to me the latter, and she deserved her fate.

Is her story anything more than coincidence and a strange quirk of fate? I wonder why I even bother to write about her. I guess it is only because it is interesting how life turns out. Arlosoroff is remembered as an intelligent, gifted, capable (if controversial) contributor to the foundation of the Jewish state. Goebbels is the apotheosis of evil, an apology for a human being. And Magda? She is not remembered at all, other than as the one-time mistress of a Zionist, thanks to Colin Shindler's reference.