

# REVIEWS

## A CHERRY DRESS

by Peter Bild/Irene Messinger  
Vienna University Press  
ISBN 978-3847-107972

When she was five Anita Lelewer's mother mended her favourite dark blue dress by embroidering it with red cherries, symbolising her loving, stable background and the virtue of finding some good in adversity.

Anita had a happy middle-class childhood in pre-war cosmopolitan Vienna where she spent her first 23 years until the Anschluss in March 1938. Blonde and beautiful, by then she was already a successful dancer. She toured Egypt with the Vienna State Opera's corps de ballet and the famous tenor Richard Tauber, even being offered a camel as a present. But she had Jewish grandparents which made life impossible young police officer broke off their engagement.

Despite no experience of housework she came to England on a domestic visa. The work proved unsatisfactory but she made connections on the ferry over and soon contracted a marriage of convenience to an eccentric Englishman, Donald Douglas, enabling her to resume work as a dancer.

Her father Georg Lelewer was a distinguished Viennese Supreme Court Judge and Anita was able to get an entry permit to England for her parents just before war broke out. They moved to a Quaker boarding house in Ramsgate. The manager, Fritz Bild, later became her second husband. An engineer 14 years her senior, he had led a fairly Bohemian life in Vienna; his tobacconist parents perished in the Holocaust.

When the coast became dangerous they were transferred to London where their son Peter was born in 1943. Anita walked to hospital while Fritz was under curfew to avoid internment.

Anita had several narrow escapes in the Blitz and built up a successful career as a dancer, choreographed

Cossack dances for ENSA, sang in operetta and acted the principal boy in several pantomimes. She also co-directed and acted in seaside repertory theatre and later wrote and broadcast for the BBC's German service.

Settling in Highgate she lived in the same house for over 60 years until her death in 2012, aged 97. She wrote memoirs for her family which Peter Bild has published together with the Viennese exile researcher Irene Messinger. They are accompanied by scholarly articles by renowned experts as well as pieces by close family members, including her granddaughters telling fond memories of a much-loved Oma who gave wise advice interspersed with a fine sense of humour.

This is a most extraordinary book telling of a fascinating and full life. The description of childhood in pre-war Austria is very interesting, particularly the vignettes about relatives and way of life. Her transition to England is equally enthralling, leaving readers wishing they had met this remarkable lady.

*Janet Weston*

## UPROOTED: HOW 3000 YEARS OF JEWISH CIVILISATION IN THE ARAB WORLD VANISHED OVERNIGHT

by Lyn Julius  
Valentine Mitchell, 2018  
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Jews in the Middle East and North Africa preceded the Arab conquest and Islam by 1,000 years. Yet today there are barely 4,000 left. Lyn Julius explains why these ancient communities disappeared almost overnight. There are startling similarities with the ethnic cleansing under Nazism. The difference is that the majority survived and rebuilt their lives in Israel.

There is another difference: ...we refugees..... from Hitler and the Nazis did not have to wait long to see their nemesis. We saw the total defeat of their military, their cities destroyed and their leadership put on trial at Nuremberg in the name of their whole evil ideology. It would seem there was nothing more to fear from it, especially as the German nation has shown deep contrition. Or was there?

About a million Jewish refugees from

Arab and Muslim countries were driven from their homelands within a few short years of WW2. They have not seen any kind of recognition from the perpetrators or wider world of the injustice done to them, let alone seen the perpetrators called to account.

Yes, the Jewish refugees, most now Israeli citizens, have seen the armies of their persecutors destroyed several times over and now they are seeing some countries smashed to smithereens – certainly a nemesis – but the Arab and Muslim rulers, who adopted the Nazi ideology and fused it with their 1500 year-old tradition of dhimmitude (discriminatory rules against non-believers) are as yet impervious to any conception of the perniciousness of their actions, such is the lethal force of religious and racial prejudice combined, encased within a tribal mentality.

So, no 'perpetrators', no 'victims' – most of the latter were quietly and with great hardship integrated into Israel. Iraq even hoped to destroy the newly-declared state by expelling so many Jews at once that Israel would never be able to cope. These expulsions were planned before the War of Israel's Independence and before there was a single Arab refugee from Palestine.

Into the vacuum of this half-hidden history stepped Yasser Arafat with his invented people and state. His 'Palestinian narrative' must surely be the precursor and inspiration for all subsequent pedlars of fake news and false facts... But it has been very destructive and painful for Israel.

Lyn Julius meticulously documents the experience of the Jews in Muslim countries leading to their expulsions. The accounts are relentlessly awful; one wonders if the Muslim Middle East is ever going to leave behind its medieval mindset and allow Israel to live in peace.

*Hanna Nyman*

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