

Episode 8: On the History of Zionism

Guest: Prof. Dr. Michael Brenner, Professor of Jewish History and Culture, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München / American University Washington D.C.

Hosts: Philip & Yusuf

Bio: Michael Brenner is Professor of Jewish History and Culture at Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich and at American University in Washington, D.C., and one of the world's leading experts on the history of Zionism. Professor Brenner is an elected fellow of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, the American Academy for Jewish Research and the Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana in Mantua. He is the International President of the Leo Baeck Institute for the Study of German-Jewish History and serves on many academic boards, including the Jewish Museum of Berlin, the Center for European Studies of the University of Haifa and is board chair of the Franz Rosenzweig Research Center of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His nine books have been translated into over ten languages and include *In Search of Israel: The History of an Idea*; *A Short History of the Jews*; *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History*; *Zionism: A Brief History*. His most recent book is *In Hitler's Munich: Jews, the Revolution, and the Rise of Nazism*. He is co-author of the four-volume *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, for which he was awarded a National Jewish Book Award, and editor of nineteen books. Beyond academia, Professor Brenner is an active public intellectual, engaging in debates on antisemitism, racism, and the politics of memory in Germany and Europe.

In this episode: This episode explores the history of Zion and Zionism within the broader story of Jewish self-determination. Professor Michael Brenner discusses the religious meaning of Zion, its role for Jewish communities in the diaspora, and the continuous Jewish presence in Palestine over two millennia. He traces early thinkers like Moses Hess, the rise of political Zionism under Theodor Herzl, and prominent figures of Cultural Zionism as Ahad Ha'Am. The conversation examines the movement's diverse currents, its reception in the Jewish world, reactions from the Arab world, the impact of colonial thought, and the significance of the Balfour Declaration. Further topics include Jewish migration before and during the Holocaust, the role of Israel for survivors, and shifting global Jewish attitudes after 1948. Finally, Professor Brenner reflects on contemporary forms of Zionism, their influence on Israeli society, and the responsibilities of education and remembrance in Germany 80 years after the Holocaust. This episode offers listeners a clear introduction to the intellectual, political, and historical dimensions of Zionism within Jewish and global history.

Links:

Prof. Dr. Michael Brenner: https://www.jgk.geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/jgk_neuzeit/personen/professoren/brenner/index.html (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

<https://www.american.edu/cas/faculty/mbrenner.cfm> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Further Ressourcen:

Herzl, Theodor. *Der Judenstaat* and *Altneuland*. Edited by Shlomo Simonsohn, Dover Publications, 1987. https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_iyxWAAAAYAAJ/page/n7/mode/2up (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Herzl, Theodor. *Altneuland: Roman*. Wien: M. Breitenstein, 1902. https://www.literaturdownload.at/pdf/Theodor_Herzl_-_Altneuland.pdf (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Brenner, Michael. *Geschichte des Zionismus*. 4., aktualisierte Auflage, C.H. Beck, 2016.

<https://www.chbeck.de/brenner-geschichte-zionismus/product/30429133> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Please also check out our other episodes to explore multiple perspectives:

On the History of Zionism: Simon Fuchs, Awad Halabi, Victor Kattan, Oren Kessler, Derek Penslar, Anita Haviv, Muriel Asseburg, Gudrun Krämer

On the Holocaust and the foundation of the state of Israel: Oren Kessler, Derek Penslar, Anita Haviv

On the History of Antisemitism: Magda Teter

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to

meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeris Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.