

INVENTING A DISCIPLINE: THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE AND GERMAN-JEWISH STUDIES

Frank Mecklenburg

When you enter the reading room of the Center for Jewish History at 15 West 16th Street, you have access to the combined library and archival collections of its three main research organizations—the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO), the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), and the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI). These collections attract thousands of researchers annually from around the world to study all aspects of Jewish history. With LBI's collection alongside those of YIVO and AJHS, German-Jewish studies can now be evaluated in the context of Jewish history throughout the Diaspora.

For almost fifty years, the written documents, printed materials, and artistic objects of German-speaking Jewry have been collected and preserved through the efforts of the Leo Baeck Institute, which, in addition to its location in New York, has offices in Germany and centers in Jerusalem and London. The LBI New York relocated in the summer of 2000 to the Center for Jewish History and, in September 2001, opened a joint archive facility with the new Jewish Museum in Berlin. The collections of LBI New York are now available on microfilm at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. LBI's holdings include more than 70,000 library titles, 4,000 linear feet of unpublished documents in over 6,000 archival collections, 1,500 memoir manuscripts, an extensive art collection, and 30,000 photographs. All of these sources pertain to the history and culture of German-speaking Jewry, mainly in the past two

hundred years, but including earlier periods as well. There are also constant additions to the collections to include contemporary history and developments.

The original plan of the founders of the Leo Baeck Institute in 1955 was to gather whatever documents were still available in order to research and write the history of



German-Jewish History in Modern Times / edited by Michael A. Brenner; assistant editor, coordinator: Fred Grubel. (New York: Columbia University Press; Leo Baeck Institute, 1996-1998). Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

German-speaking Jewry, a community which had been virtually decimated by the Nazis. The founders' intention was to tell the story of German-speaking Jewry up to the Holocaust; to reveal the important cultural, scientific, and social contributions of Central European Jews before the catastrophe; and to portray the changing lifestyles of Orthodox as well as assimilated Jews in Central Europe over the preceding two hundred years. It is important to note that the Leo Baeck Institute was established at a time when the main organization of Jews from Central Europe, the Council of Jews from Germany, was preoccupied with the preparation of restitution claims for losses

suffered in the Holocaust; during that period, there were no other organizations specifically advocating for the collection and maintenance of documents of German-Jewish history.

Close to fifty years later, with the support of three

generations of survivors, students, and scholars, German-Jewish studies has emerged as a distinctive field of scholarship, which not only offers and engages historical and cultural analysis of the Holocaust and the Third Reich, but also explores the richness of German-Jewish heritage. Without the

documentation collected, processed, organized, and preserved at LBI, the study of this legacy would be far more difficult. Indeed, it took forty years to write the history envisioned by LBI's founders: *German Jewish History in Modern Times, 1600-1945* (published in English [1996-1998], German [1996-1997], and Hebrew [2000]). The four-volume work was followed by an additional volume on the history of everyday life. This fifth volume is currently available in German, and will appear in English in 2004 and in Hebrew in 2005. Together, the five-volume

history is an invaluable resource.

The Institute's publications serve as important venues for the scholarship that the collections make possible. Perhaps the cornerstone of its periodical publications is the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, an annual collection of scholarly articles and annotated bibliography on research pertaining to all aspects of German-speaking Jewry. Additionally, a series of monographs (now numbering sixty-eight) have been published over the years in the LBI's academic series (*Wissenschaftliche Schriftenreihe*) by the German publisher Mohr-Siebeck Verlag in Tübingen. Many books have been published in conjunction

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with the LBI. One of the best known, *Jewish Life in Germany: Memoirs from Three Centuries*, edited by Monika Richarz (1991), draws on memoirs from the archives.

The archives are the truly unique centerpiece of LBI's holdings. Efforts to preserve the heritage of German-speaking Jewry are ongoing, accelerated by the age of the survivor population. From the many archival collections, one recent acquisition is worthy of specific mention: the George L. Mosse Collection, which

includes over 65 linear feet of manuscripts, correspondence, and a complete collection of articles and reviews by and about this distinguished historian. These and other LBI holdings are available through the Institute's online catalogue (www.lbi.org), through which patrons may order specific materials electronically. The LBI's Web site also offers links to other resources and sites of interest to scholars of German-speaking Jewry.

The vision of the founders of the Leo Baeck Institute has turned out to be critical to post-World War II historical research. Access to the resources of the LBI in particular, and at the Center for Jewish History in general, means that the entire spectrum of Jewish life—personal, professional, communal—can be studied under one roof. For a people of the Diaspora, this is a remarkable feat.

Frank Mecklenburg is the Director of Research and Chief Archivist at the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

Thank You

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EXHIBITIONS AT THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

Vienna: Jews and the City of Music, 1870-1938 [through June 30, 2004]

Jewish Costumes in the Ottoman Empire: The Jews and the Turks Living Together for 500 Years
[March 31 – May 15]

Luminous Manuscript [opens April 4]

Salon Paintings of the Leo Baeck Institute [through May 13]

Alfred Kantor: An Artist's Diary of the Holocaust [through June 13]

Archie Rand: Iconoclast [through August 15, 2004]

Margalit Mannor: The Philistines are Coming (Photoplesh) [through May 2, 2004]

Janet Indick: Joyful Noise [through August 15, 2004]

Tsirl Waletzky: Yerushe (Inheritance) [through May 2, 2004]

Longing for the Sacred: Destroyed Synagogues [May 16-August 15, 2004]

Rebecca Singer and Fred Spinowitz: Blessings and Bridges [May 16-August 15, 2004]

Traders on the Sea Routes: 12th-Century Trade Between East and West [Ongoing]

*Further information regarding programs, exhibits, and fellowships
sponsored by the Center for Jewish History
and its constituent organizations can be found at www.cjh.org.*

