

Foreword

Frank Mecklenburg

This volume marks a milestone that is not to be underestimated. Over the past twenty years, the Leo Baeck Institute has gone through a number of changes to catapult the refugee society into a research library. During the preceding forty-five years, the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, published with the LBI in London, had been instrumental in creating the field of German-Jewish studies. And increasingly since the end of the Cold War, a number of emerging Jewish studies centers around the world trained scholars in this field. The number of young scholars continued to grow, but the number of positions did not increase to the same degree, i.e., the competition has been getting stronger. In 2000, LBI New York joined four other major U.S. libraries in the field of Jewish studies to form the Center for Jewish History, the largest collection outside of Israel of documents and books on Jewish history in modern times. In 2001, with the opening of the Jewish Museum Berlin, LBI was invited to partner with its archives, initially in the form of microfilm copies; in 2008, the LBI started to develop DigiBaeck, digital access to the archival collections, which was launched with a public online event in 2012.

In the midst of these landmarks, the LBI in 2007 started to offer an unusual grant to junior-level German-Jewish studies scholars and researchers, as well as other creative talents, to help them over the hump of tenure or to assist them in finishing their film projects, novels, art projects, or book projects. The field of German-Jewish studies, and the history of the German-Jewish experience in general, kept expanding, and many PhDs in history, literature, cultural studies, and other fields were looking for academic jobs. To help candidates of excellence who did not come with the support necessary to cross from junior level to permanent positions, this fellowship—initially called the Leo Baeck Institute Career Development Fellowship, now known as the Gerald Westheimer Career Development Fellowship—was established to provide material support for equipment, translations, course releases, conferences, etc., and to signal institutional encouragement for all these endeavors. It is an unusual grant program, and applicants sometimes have trouble understanding how this grant money could be used to help them move up in the field.

The generous donor, Gerald Westheimer, a visual neurobiologist who ran his own research institute at the University of California at Berkeley, had a genuine interest in the field of German-Jewish studies since he fled Germany in 1938 and, by way of Australia, finally came to the United States. He had been an eyewitness in Berlin in

the 1930s, and with a great sense of curiosity along with his experience in the hard sciences, he came to inquire at the LBI what the situation was with German-Jewish studies, and the humanities and social sciences in general, and what difference he could make. I remember our first meetings in New York and his inquisitive way of asking questions that struck me as unusual. He was sharp, he was very smart, and he was amazingly curious about a field of scholarship far removed from his own work, but it must have been the trademark of the Leo Baeck Institute that convinced him of the seriousness of the work in which the LBI was engaged. Coming from the natural sciences with very different paradigms, as well as work and research habits, he did not think much of tenure in academia but rather focused on helping young creative people get established, to use his words, which is not necessarily the way tenure is regarded in the humanities.

Westheimer's idea was to support the greatest junior-level talents engaged in German-Jewish studies, not only to make their input permanent—i.e., get tenure and feel secure to investigate the field as they deemed fit—but also to attract artists and writers to help advance their work. Coming from a different academic environment, he asked about dropout rates: would people stay even if their salaries were well below what smart young people could otherwise achieve in finance, industry, and business? Why would anybody be studying and sweating for years and years at close to minimum wage remuneration with few prospects of long-term job security? It took a while to convince him that people in the humanities were interested in other aspects of life, that money was not a prime driver, and that, consequently, a not insubstantial material support grant would mean encouragement that was rare to come by, encouragement that indicated a high level of appreciation for effort and talent.

It didn't take long to launch the fellowship program once the initial points were cleared. Gerald and I first met in 2005, and over a number of lunch conversations at the local diner, phone calls and emails between New York and California, the first announcement went out in 2007, and in 2008 the first grant was awarded. AJS Perspectives ran the first quarter-page ad, which in subsequent years also appeared in the AJS conference program book as well as on H-Net and the appropriate internet fellowship websites. It was an experiment at first on a year-to-year basis. There was no real precedent. And, after a few rounds, it was determined that the idea was valid. The next step was to establish a robust program that would be limited to a duration of twenty-five years, a rather optimistic notion these days, although we are already past the midway point, and it certainly has established a solid track record. This volume demonstrates that the first decade of the Gerald Westheimer Career Development Fellowship has produced very good results.

It was also important to recognize that the administrative end of the program needed support as well. From its outset, the program was equipped with 20 percent of the annual funds available for all work behind the scenes. In a way, our hope was that other grants would follow this model, since one of the persistent complaints is the lack of permissible expenses, which makes handling fellowship and grant programs hard

for many institutions. So far, it seems, this career development grant has not inspired other entities yet, but maybe the record by way of this volume will demonstrate the usefulness of this program.

In the field of German-Jewish studies, the pool of potential candidates is somewhat limited, although it is larger when you look at conference participation. A main focus of my attention has been monitoring the program books in Jewish studies and German studies: how German is Jewish studies, and how Jewish is German studies? Over the years there have been rather dramatic changes. The annual Association for Jewish Studies conference has diversified and expanded, and lately the integration of themes and figures from the German-Jewish realm has grown, and the same, more or less, can be said for the annual German Studies Association conferences. And it is clear that, like in all other fields of academic studies, the number of jobs is far smaller than the number of people interested in studying the burning questions of such topics as literature; medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary history; religion; economics; sociology; languages; philosophy; art and music; feminism—what else? The approaches are endless. How is it possible to support the top of the competitive range when not all scholars are pampered by prestigious Ivy League institutions, teaching instead at state schools or small colleges that have no money to pay for travel, books, conferences, course release, equipment, etc.?

The latter has time and again been the persistent question from our fellows. Can I buy a computer? Can I buy equipment to enlarge copies necessitated by poor eyesight? How should I report my expenses? These questions show that this unusual grant provides support in ways that other grants do not. And when you are a scholar with a young family and little money, these are the types of things that are hardest to come by. I am always happy to answer these questions in the affirmative, which exemplifies a matter of trust on my part that the funds are not being squandered, that the money is being applied to where it is really needed and where no other sources are available. Generosity of support at this career level seems to pay.

Studying the applications from the first 12 or so years of the fellowship can shed light on the state of the field. Of the 150 applications submitted over the years, and also among the first 25 awardees, the ratio of women to men was pretty even, with slightly more women. The applications averaged 15 per year, ranging from 4 to 27, but fluctuations did not seem to follow any patterns, especially since advertising and announcements remained the same over the years. Some applicants have submitted repeatedly, and a few eventually received the award after several attempts. Persistence pays.

A range of topics and areas of study is also reflected in this volume. Looking at all 150 applications, it seems that a disproportionate number of scholars were in the fields of music, performing arts, liturgy, Weimar modernism, the postwar era, and theoretical or philosophical approaches. Studies undertaken of the interwar period, the Weimar and Nazi eras, were concerned with changing relations between Jews and non-Jews—among other topics, of course. Martin Buber has been a widely studied subject, and many applications addressed an astonishing spectrum of aspects of his work and

influence, though none made the final cut. Post-Holocaust topics constitute a large share of supported projects, including a wide range from postwar justice issues among survivors and within the German legal system, as well as issues of commemoration. Across the board one finds social history studies about gender, class, and ethnicity, and in recent years several projects reach back to the Middle Ages. Religious topics range from the early modern period to nineteenth-century modern Orthodoxy and other renewal processes.

The two sides of German-Jewish studies—how German is it, how Jewish is it—are represented by two annual American conferences, the GSA and the AJS. Some candidates come with little knowledge of the Jewish side, which might be seen as an indication of a mistaken perception of the interwoven nature of the German-Jewish project; yet, similarly, other candidates demonstrate insufficient knowledge of the German context. To a degree, the complexities are also reflected in the differing ways that referees on the review committee have evaluated applications, especially as the committee personnel changed over the years. These committee members bring different perspectives from history, literary, cultural, and communications studies, yielding a broad range of opinions, sometimes contradictory, but usually with consensus about the quality and validity of prospects. The vast majority of awardees, as well as many of the applicants who did not enjoy this support, have succeeded in advancing their careers by getting permanent teaching positions, usually by finishing first or second books.

When the Leo Baeck Institute was founded in 1955, Siegfried Moses, chairman of the board, outlined the program of the Institute for years to come in the first issue of the *Year Book* with these words:

In recent years it was felt more and more that the era of German Jewry, so irretrievably passed, could only be retraced and preserved for ourselves, our children and the Jewish world at large, if we, the generation that had set out from Germany, would take this cultural task upon ourselves. For, in our minds, the German Jewish scene is still alive and in our midst forces are still available who can present and analyze from their own affinity and experience the manifold manifestations of German Jewry. . . . In order to carry out the tasks of the Institute, a systematic attempt must be made to attract all forces who are able to contribute.

Moses presented a “rough outline” of some 50 plus major topics, which by and large foreshadowed what has been produced ever since with increasing nuance and extensions, reflected by now in over 750 articles in the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*. Other than what were at the time unimaginable developments of the Jewish community in postwar Germany, the outline stands with its first major heading, “The Period since the Emancipation,” divided into two main topics, “The Inner Development of German Jewry” and “The Problem of the Cultural Symbiosis,” each detailed with many subtopics; the other major headings, although much shorter, are “The Catastrophe,” “German Jewry’s Influence on World Jewry,” and “The New Centres of Jews from Germany.”

In a way, the Gerald Westheimer Career Development Fellowship program has been and continues to be a major facilitator in this effort, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate.

Frank Mecklenburg received his Dr.phil. in modern German history from the Technische Universität Berlin. He has been an archivist at the Leo Baeck Institute New York since 1984 and director of research and chief archivist since 1995. He played a lead role in the establishment of the LBI-Archives branch at the Jewish Museum Berlin and the digitization of the LBI-Archives, DigiBaeck. Among his publications are works on emigration history and German-Jewish life before the Holocaust.