

Preserving the Legacy of German Jewry

A History of the Leo Baeck Institute
1955–2005

Edited by
CHRISTHARD HOFFMANN

*Schriftenreihe
wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen
des Leo Baeck Instituts*

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Foreword

On May 25, 1955, sixteen men, among them some of the foremost German-Jewish intellectuals who had survived the Holocaust, came together in Jerusalem. Using German as their common language, they addressed the task of setting forth a program for a newly envisaged Leo Baeck Institute. Among those present was the philosopher Martin Buber, who was, along with Gershom Scholem, perhaps the best known among them. Buber chose to present his own personal vision to the group. "For me," he began, "it is humanly important that what remains of German Jewry gather itself around a spiritual task that will lend it vitality. German Jewry was one of the most remarkable phenomena in Jewish history." Collectively, it was at least as notable as the Jewish communities of ancient Alexandria and medieval Cordova. According to Buber, now that German Jewry had reached the end of its historical journey, the survivors possessed an obligation to determine how the German-Jewish "symbiosis" came into being, how it functioned, and what remained of it after crisis and catastrophe.

When many years earlier, in 1818, Leopold Zunz, the first important practitioner of the scholarly study of Judaism, which became known internationally as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, set forth his purpose, he wrote that in their striving towards mastery of German language and culture, the German Jews were carrying post-biblical Hebrew literature to its grave. Scholarly study had therefore appeared to demand an accounting from that which had reached the end of its course. Similarly, five generations later, the founders of the Leo Baeck Institute sought an accounting, this time for that very German-Jewish subculture which was just beginning to sprout in Zunz's youth. But they were not content with merely drawing up a balance sheet. They sought to transmit the inheritance to future generations. German Jewry, according to Buber, could not continue as a living entity, but a spiritual continuity, formulated as a task, was possible. That task was to present a sober and persuasive account of German Jewry as it had been in fact, without apologetics, the negative side as well as the positive. The results of such research would reach future generations that had not been a part of the German-Jewish experience themselves.

The founders chose to concentrate their historical efforts on a period of about a hundred and fifty years from the Jewish enlightenment and the beginnings of Jewish emancipation down to the year 1933. This period was

marked by the creation and growth of the German-Jewish modernity that had shaped them as Germans and as Jews. The earlier medieval period was both distant and different, at a remove from their own cultural and religious identity. The more recent years, which Buber designated a time of crisis and catastrophe, aroused painful memories. The history of Nazi persecution could be studied by others. The only early interest in those final years lay in the maintenance of Jewish life in the severest of circumstances. Perhaps also some of the founders continued to believe that Nazism had been atypical, an unanticipated turn to barbarism.

Still, they had chosen to name the institute after Rabbi Leo Baeck, not so much because Baeck was an important religious thinker and scholar, but because he had been the chosen representative of German Jewry during precisely those dark years. Perhaps it was because Baeck had embodied the best of the German-Jewish tradition and brought it to bear on the work he performed in an excruciatingly difficult position that he had become an iconic figure across the widest spectrum. He had been a Liberal with high regard for tradition, a non-Zionist who supported the work of building Jewish settlements in the land of Israel, a symbol of unity within German Jewry.

During succeeding years, the Leo Baeck Institute that these men created produced the extraordinary work that is chronicled on the pages of this volume. In the course of half a century its branches in Jerusalem, London, and New York, as well as its scholarly working group and its support group in Germany, have succeeded in presenting a more detailed and in-depth image of German Jewry than the German Jews themselves had been able to achieve before the Holocaust. Not that German Jewry had been unaware of its own history. In 1870 Heinrich Graetz had devoted more than two-thirds of the last volume of his magisterial *History of the Jews* to the Jews of Germany, and not long afterwards the first periodical devoted specifically to German-Jewish history, the *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, began to appear. *Germania Judaica*, a town-by-town history of the German Jews, had commenced publication in 1917. But it was not until the Nazi era that German Jewry looked back intensively and critically upon its own past. In 1934 Rabbi Joachim Prinz published the immensely popular volume *Wir Juden*, which severely called into question the German-Jewish identity shaped in the nineteenth century, and a year later Ismar Elbogen produced the first full-scale scholarly history of German Jewry.

The newly founded Baeck Institute sought to attach itself to the research whose beginnings had been made in Germany. But in 1955 there were few historians who worked in the area of Jewish history and almost none of academic standing whose principal field was the history of the German Jews. The only outstanding exceptions were Selma Stern-Täubler and Hans Liebeschütz. Thus the early writings published by the Leo Baeck Institute were primarily the work of authors who devoted their leisure time to investigating

one or another chapter of German-Jewish history that they found of special interest or in which they had themselves played a role. Only gradually did the Leo Baeck Institute emerge from the dominance of this older generation and pass into the hands of younger, historically trained scholars, both Jewish and gentile.

It was decided in 1955 that the Leo Baeck Institute would be an international scholarly institution with “working centers” in those countries to which the German-Jewish diaspora had principally been scattered. All three of the centers, apart from their scholarly work, instituted programs of public lectures, which drew audiences composed largely of German-Jewish emigrants eager to commemorate their heritage. Through the years, these “remnants” of German Jewry remained active among the private supporters of the institute as well as among the consumers of its programs and publications. However, increasingly, the branches of the institute reoriented themselves toward a different community, the emerging and rapidly increasing body of academic scholars in the field. It was principally for them that the holdings of the Leo Baeck archives in New York were maintained, modernized and expanded, and that a branch of the archives was established within the Jewish Museum in Berlin. It was with the intent of helping to train younger scholars that the LBI’s scholarly working group in Germany agreed to plan colloquia for graduate students working in the field. Conferences, whether held in Israel, Europe or the United States, were often organized in academic locales and intended especially for seasoned and younger scholars, who sometimes came from adjacent fields. Most of the book-length publications, which in German, English and Hebrew have in fifty years reached well over a hundred, have been intended especially for scholars, though some have found entry to a broader readership. The *Year Book*, which has appeared annually without fail since the first volume in 1956, has likewise increasingly addressed itself to the international community of scholars. The German-language *Bulletin*, which appeared from 1957 to 1990, was somewhat more commemorative in nature, but also mainly contained scholarly articles. A more popular approach has been apparent over recent years in the *Jüdischer Almanach*, which began to appear in 1996, and in the changing exhibits presented within the larger public space of the New York LBI’s domicile inside the Center for Jewish History, where it has been brought into closer contact with organizations devoted to studying American, East European, and Sephardic Jewish history.

The shift from commemoration to scholarly analysis has also manifested itself in an expansion of the institute’s purview. Once the goal of preserving and enhancing existing memory began to fade along with the generation of the founders, the study of pre-Enlightenment and Emancipation Jewry no longer seemed irrelevant. On the contrary, the early modern and even the medieval period were now recognized to be not only intrinsically of great interest, but also important for understanding the roots of German-Jewish

modernity. Likewise, the Nazi period came into broader view. It too, after all, was a part of the story. But what of the survivors who had remained in Germany or returned there? And what of the new German Jews who had no roots whatever in pre-war Germany? Was theirs a new and entirely different history, beyond the purview of an institute dedicated to maintaining the memory of a very different historical experience, perhaps even a different mentality? Only most recently has the institute begun to interest itself in this new population, which is still in the initial process of emerging and merging together as a German-Jewish community and culture.

With the approach of its jubilee, the Leo Baeck Institute began to look toward a summing up of its work. It commissioned the four-volume *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, intended to draw together in synthetic form the research of nearly half a century, most of which had appeared under various auspices of the LBI, into a readable historical account of German Jewry beginning with its medieval origins, but concentrating on the years of its modernity. This work by multiple authors and appearing in three languages represented the state of the field in the early 1990s, the voices of its contributors blended into a coherent narrative. The present volume, this history of the LBI itself, is likewise a drawing together, a venture in self-understanding by an institution whose purpose gradually shifted from the retrospective self-understanding of German Jewry to the more contextualized and distanced understanding that is the task of scholars.

However, neither the four-volume history, with its recent additional volume on the history of German-Jewish daily life, nor this history of the LBI, represent a final accounting in the sense of Zunz and of Buber. It is characteristic of the discipline of historiography that it offers no final answers. New archival sources, some of them brought into public view in inventory volumes published in recent years by the institute, contain as yet unevaluated information. Not only do certain specific issues remain in dispute, but within the changing panoramic view of German-Jewish history, figures that dominated the foreground in earlier accounts become less prominent in the view of later scholars as other personalities – and other issues – are recognized to be of greater short-term or long-term consequence. Moreover, since the writing of history is an art no less than a product of research, the goal of a more evocative as well as a more fully persuasive account remains always before us.

Indeed, there is much still to be done. Among the literally hundreds of scholars now active in the field of Jewish history, many of them at the start of their careers, each will have some projects in mind that require new or further research and writing. Let me mention only a few that are of personal interest. Individuals are both creators of history and its product. German-Jewish history produced a variety of extraordinary personages who are deserving of more extensive biographical treatment than they have received.

Even more desirable would be comparative biographies that bring into the foreground differences resulting from environment and personality. Much remains to be done in the area of religion among German Jews, once again preferably in comparison with belief and practice among Christians. Beyond religion, attention is just beginning to be given to German-Jewish mores: such subjects as changing attitudes to sexuality, social behavior and social taboos.

How did these changes manifest themselves, one would like to know, in the very different contexts of Wilhelminian, Weimar, and Nazi Germany? More work also needs to be done on generational continuity and rebellion in varying historical circumstances. Studies comparing the modernization of Jews in Germany with that of Jews in other lands have only recently begun to appear and leave much yet to be accomplished. Finally, the question of the paradigmatic character of German-Jewish modernization for Jews in other lands has become a much disputed issue. The influences, parallels, variations and clear-cut differences need to be understood more clearly.

Historiography is a dialectical process of analysis and synthesis, of dissection and reshaping. The contributions contained in this volume, taken together, represent a first collective attempt to shape a detailed image of an institution that has reached a significant anniversary, but not an end-point, in its career. It does not contain personal recollections by its Jewish and gentile authors. They were not themselves part of the German-Jewish experience nor were they shapers of the institute of which they write. Their assessments are therefore free of the limited perspectives and perhaps prejudices that almost necessarily characterize the insider. But that is not to say that they lack sympathy for their subjects. Their goal is a balanced and maximally objective account.

Fifty years ago the founders of the Leo Baeck Institute looked back upon their own history as German Jews with both dismay and pride. The establishment of the institute was a necessity of their souls. Over the course of half a century their creation has progressed from personal recollection and reflection, to scholarly assessment, to the creation of a broad historical canvas that remains far from complete. The Book of Leviticus declares that every fiftieth year is to be a jubilee, a time of release from previous obligations opening the way for the acceptance of new ones. It serves as a sacred milestone between the past and future. The Leo Baeck Institute, too, stands at a significant milestone in its own history. The present volume elaborates upon the obligations it has undertaken and sought to fulfill during the last fifty years. For the Leo Baeck Institute this book is a work of collective self-reflection that points towards future possibilities.

Michael A. Meyer
International President, Leo Baeck Institute

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List of Abbreviations

AHA	American Historical Association
AJHS	American Jewish Historical Society
AJR	Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain
AmFed	American Federation of Jews from Central Europe
BHDE	Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933
Coll.	Collection
Council	Council of Jews from Germany
C.V.	Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
FZH	Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg
HJ	Historia Judaica
HOGOA	Hitachduth Olej Germania we-Austria
HUC	Hebrew Union College
IGdJ	Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden (Hamburg)
IOME	Irgun Olej Merkas Europa
JCR	Jewish Cultural Reconstruction
JHSE	Jewish Historical Society of England
JIR	Jewish Institute of Religion
JMB	Jüdisches Museum Berlin
JNUL	Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem
JRSO	Jewish Restitution Successor Organization
JTC	Jewish Trust Corporation
JTS	Jewish Theological Seminary
K.C.	Kartellkonvent
LBI	Leo Baeck Institute
LSE	London School of Economics
MB	Mitteilungsblatt des IOME
MF	Microfilm
OHC	Oral History Collection of the Research Foundation of Jewish Immigration, New York

XIV

List of Abbreviations

OR

Office Records

SPSL

Society for the Protection of Science and Learning

UB

Universitätsbibliothek

WAG

Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft des Leo Baeck Instituts

WLA

Wiener Library Archives

WLB

Wiener Library Bulletin

YIVO

Yidisher visnshaftlekher institute – Institute for Yiddish/Jewish
research (New York)

ZfA

Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung, Technical University Berlin

ZVD

Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland

Introduction

Christhard Hoffmann

I

Preserving the Cultural Legacy

In May 1955 the Leo Baeck Institute was founded in Jerusalem. The institute's history is that of Jews driven from Germany after 1933 who, dispersed throughout various countries, together took on a task: the preservation for future generations of the memory of the violently destroyed world of German-speaking Jewry. It is the history of a surviving Central European Jewish remainder that formed itself into a commemorative community for the sake of showing the contemporary world what German Judaism *actually* was, for the sake of countering the antisemitic defamation of the Nazis – but also prejudices held by some Jews regarding *German* Jewry. Historians have long been familiar with the phenomenon of groups of forcibly expelled persons trying to preserve their history and cultural identity; in post-medieval Europe, the expulsion of Spanish and Portuguese Jews at the end of the fifteenth century and of The Huguenots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are only the most prominent examples. In both these cases, despite external integration into their host countries, the exiled community preserved a sense of connection with its lands of origin – with its history, language and culture – for a time-span extending to centuries.¹ We thus find Sephardic Jews who had to leave Morocco for Israel, France or Canada in the 1950s because of the political circumstances taking along keys to houses in Seville, Granada or Lisbon that had to be abandoned by their forefathers 450 years earlier.² Although we may doubt that the keys were really authentic, they nevertheless

¹ See, for example, Elie Kedourie (ed.), *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*, London 1992; Joseph Abraham Levi (ed.), *Survival and Adaptation: The Portuguese Jewish Diaspora in Europe, Africa and the New World*, New York 2002; Robin D. Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage: The History and Contribution of the Huguenots in Britain*, London and New York 1988; Bertrand van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks (eds.), *Memory and Identity: the Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, Columbia, SC 2003.

² David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, Cambridge, MA and London 1984, p. 1.

symbolize, together with the language, music and religious customs of the Sephardim, a clearly identifiable cultural heritage preserved until the present.

What was the cultural inheritance of the German Jews who managed to escape the Nazis? Other than was the case with those exiled on religious grounds in the early modern period, the German-speaking Jewish exiles did not really constitute a unified group; religious, political and general cultural differences had emerged since the eighteenth century, in the course of three or four generations of modernization and acculturation. With a majority having become part of the urban middle class, they revealed few if any particularities of language or everyday custom within their wider Christian or secular surroundings. Hence at the start of the twentieth century, the German Jews revealed far fewer distinct cultural traditions and identifying traits (for example linguistic, or those involving religious practice) than most Jews from Eastern Europe. What the German Jews did have in common, what can be understood as their heritage, was less distinct, more pieced together, less palpable than the Yiddish language and literature or traditional Jewish garb and mores. It involved, to a considerable extent, an awareness of participating in a special historical epoch: that of the encounter – often termed, controversially, a “symbiosis” – between German and Jewish culture, an encounter that was aligned with great past periods of cultural exchange in Jewish history: Hellenistic Alexandria or Moorish Spain. This German-Jewish epoch was viewed as a paradigm of the emergence of modern Judaism in general: of the development of new – enlightened – forms of Jewish religious doctrine and practice, Jewish education and scholarship, organizational communal life and political activity, and so forth. If German Jewry’s defining quality was tied to its role as origin and paradigm of Jewish modernism, then it more or less necessarily followed that its heritage was not static and homogeneous but dynamic and pluralistic. Its hallmark was continuous change and ever more diversity, expressed in a broad spectrum of self-identities and ideological directions.

As is well known, the epoch of German-Jewish “symbiosis” ended with the wider Jewish catastrophe of the Holocaust, an event manifest in untold individual cases of ostracism and flight, pillage and plunder, abuse and murder. The Holocaust was a caesura so traumatic that many of its German-Jewish survivors could hardly cherish an untroubled identification with the greatness of the German-Jewish past. Traditional certainties were now held up to critical consideration – the subject of historical scrutiny and research. Memory consequently now meant reflection as well as mourning, but seldom nostalgia. In contrast to the Moroccan Sephardim, the surviving German Jews had no keys to their houses in Berlin, Prague or Vienna as signs of their cultural heritage. For them, German-Jewish history had ended together with the possibility of any return. As the consensus had it, this history could thus only be explored as completed history; as such it could be transmitted to later generations.

In this manner, the heritage of the German Jews was basically identical with their history – with all the refractions and contradictions appearing in the 150 years between Moses Mendelssohn's death and Hitler's accession to power. It consisted of emancipation and integration, cultural encounter and growing proximity, Jewish self-assertion and self-renewal, on the one hand; and ostracism, antisemitism, persecution, on the other hand. Within the LBI, the interpretation of developments within modern German Jewry – hence one's own history – was a matter of intense controversy. There was nevertheless agreement that productive answers could only be found through historical research – and that preserving one's own history within the post-war European, Israeli and American collective memories was thus an urgent task. The monument that the institute's founders wished to construct for German Jewry could not be made of stone, and it could not be reduced to a religious community's doctrine or a social group's cultural practice. The visible form it had to take was that of a long-term historical project coming to terms with the transmutations and complexities of German-Jewish life.

Transforming Memory into History

The history of the LBI reveals a gradual shift in identity from a cultural institute representing German-Jewish emigrants and their memory of the German-Jewish past to an institute devoted to international research, supporting the work of historians of various backgrounds. The personalities steering the institute frequently had had leading positions within the German-Jewish community before their flight from Germany; they could now transmit their special experiences and insights into memoirs forming part of the LBI's archival collection. Through their critical engagement with a past they had themselves experienced – an engagement manifest in both the memoirs themselves and the founders' own historical work – many representatives of the older generation already contributed to historical research in an essential way. From the beginning – and here the important historicist dimension of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is readily apparent – the LBI's goal was to reveal German Jewry's past in an historically rigorous manner. In this respect, the commemorative labor of institute members was itself subject to methodological criticism at an early point in the LBI's history. For the founders, the institute's *raison d'être* thus lay in the creation of a comprehensive work – a *Gesamtgeschichte* – transcending subjective memories and partisan standpoints and laying claim to scientific authority. In their turn, these plans would serve to bind diverging identities, ideologies and interpretations together into a common project, such differences being mitigated by the claim to scholarly objectivity and neutrality.

The tension between the certainties of personal memory and the ideal of historiographical objectivity would stamp the LBI for a long period, and

would do so in a highly productive manner; once formulated, the claim to scholarly rigor eased the institute's transformation into a research center, ensuring its survival and increasing influence into the present. Starting in the 1960s and intensifying in the 1970s, a further evolution in the direction of professionalized scholarship meant a dramatic expansion of the circle of LBI researchers: alongside a second and third generation of historians with a German-Jewish background, Jews not from Germany, non-Jewish Germans, and Americans now joined the institute. In recent years, the circle has expanded again and been rejuvenated, as seen for instance in the doctoral seminars of the LBI's *Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft* in Germany, with their many Eastern European participants, and the declining average age of the *Year Book's* authors. For the great majority of present-day researchers, the relationship to German-Jewish history does not involve personal affiliation but professional interest, mediated, to be sure, by ethical considerations and personal concern, as is always the case with good historical writing. In any event, direct contact with those who were part of German Jewry before its destruction is increasingly difficult, with their numbers steadily dwindling. In this context, the LBI's collection of books and archives serves as a kind of guarantor of the German-Jewish legacy – and a primary source for its unfolding historical study.

Uses of the German-Jewish Past

It is well known that modern historiography is not limited to the methodologically supported reconstruction of the past, but also requires a process of choice and accentuation; this process takes place in relation to both the present and an anticipated future. One of the fascinating aspects of the LBI's history is its mirroring of the various interpretations and receptions of the German-Jewish past, along with their development, over the past half century. Did characteristic differences emerge in the historical accounts linked to Jerusalem, New York and London (along with Berlin)? Did a "house interpretation" or distinct historical model crystallize at the institute? What academic trends, political factors and fundamental ideological convictions have stamped its basic sense of the past over the years?

These questions have no summary answer. It is clear that at the beginning the institute had to locate its self-understanding in the face of two historical models that were both mutually opposed and related through one-sidedness. On the one hand, there was the model of *inevitable decline* or *inevitable catastrophe*, approaching German Jewry's violent destruction as the necessary, indeed predictable result of German antisemitism, and viewing Germany's Jewish community as gradually eroded through conformity with the wider environment. According to this model, which dominated in various shadings – Zionist, Eastern European, Orthodox – in the first few decades after 1945,

German-Jewish history offers a lesson in the illusions and dangers of assimilation. On the other hand, there was the model of *German-Jewish success* and *productive cultural symbiosis* abruptly and unexpectedly terminated – as with an accident – through Hitler's advent to power. Although this may well have represented the personal viewpoint of more than a few German-Jewish emigrants, hardly any were willing to support and defend it publicly after 1945; rather, the model was frequently referred to in negative terms. In setting its own position off from both these extremes, the LBI created a basis for an enterprise taking in Zionist and non-Zionist standpoints and offering space for new, differentiated approaches. In this regard, that modern German-Jewish history is now considered as a subject in its own right and not simply as part of the Holocaust's pre-history is one of the institute's essential accomplishments. The maintenance of a middle position avoiding methodological and interpretive extremes has remained a distinguishing feature of work done under its auspices: this the case even after the controversies were not so much between Zionists and non-Zionists or non-academic witnesses to the events and professional historians but, for instance, between social or economic historians and academics working within cultural studies.

Organizing an International Research Enterprise

The LBI's history is also interesting from the perspective of the organization of research: as an example of an interdisciplinary, internationally structured, publicly and privately funded research institute that has achieved a high degree of scholarly productivity with relatively modest administrative expenditure. Since the LBI does not have a permanent scholarly staff, it has to recruit the appropriate researchers for each individual project; and each is dependant on support from private and public foundations, granted in competition with other applicants. Such a constellation requires special flexibility and productivity – qualities through which the institute has gained its strong reputation.

In organizing the LBI, the institute's founders orientated themselves around the model of civic voluntarism that had been exercised within the German-language *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. As distinct from scholarly institutions (universities, academies, and so forth) controlled by various state offices, the Jewish institutions for education and research in Germany (for instance the three rabbinic seminaries or the *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*) were independent, depending on a system of private patronage. Jews active in German industry and economics and representatives of German Jewry's *Bildungsbürgertum* worked closely together on the boards of these institutions. In line with an old European Jewish tradition, Jewish scholarship was viewed as a task of the community – not as something to be left in the hands of the specialists alone. This tradition of honorary bourgeois

engagement and cooperation in questions of research planning and organization was carried on by the LBI.

The institute's division into three independently functioning yet cooperating branches was itself an embodiment of constructive diversity. The claims to leadership staked by the Jerusalem branch at the start soon succumbed to the reality of three branches with equal status. Hence the capacity for synthesis and compromise revealed in the institute's work also had structural grounding: within the LBI's shared space "other voices" would always be acknowledged, the certainties of one's own vantage-point held up for scrutiny and discussion. Through its publications and, especially, its conferences, the LBI became a venue for productive mediation between initially separated realms: witnesses and historians; various academic disciplines with their distinct methods and perspectives; Jewish and German historiography; various academic milieux and interpretive traditions in the USA, Israel, England and Germany; Jewish and non-Jewish historians; non-Jewish Germans, German Jews, non-German Jews; religious and secularly oriented Jews; older and younger researchers. It would appear that precisely the complexity of method and viewpoint manifest at the LBI is what has made its work so influential over the long term: the institute was internationally organized at a time when, broadly speaking, the historiography being written in different countries still had distinct national boundaries; it can thus be considered an outsider in the process of historical internationalization.

II

Research on the history of the Leo Baeck Institute only began rather recently, and then only intermittently. The relevant documents are scattered among the New York, Jerusalem and London branches and various other archives and literary estates, as well as the personal papers and correspondence of individuals still active at the institute.³ When the LBI was founded in Jerusalem in May 1955, there was a general expectation that its purpose would be realized in around five to eight years, the institute thus not surviving the generation of its founders. In harmony with this expectation, institute members concentrated entirely on the work at hand: collecting documents, initiating research projects, filling in the history of German Jewry from the Enlightenment to the Nazi accession to power. At the time, no one could have known

³ The most relevant archives for the history of the LBI are the *LBI Archives New York*; the office files at the LBI London and Jerusalem, and the collections of the *American Federation of Jews from Central Europe* and the *Research Foundation of Jewish Immigration* in the archives of the *Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung*, Technical University Berlin.

that the LBI's history would itself be of historical interest. It is thus probably no coincidence that no photograph exists from the institute's founding conference in Jerusalem; mythical accounts of the LBI's early history, including that of its "actual founding" in Martin Buber's house in 1954,⁴ continue to circulate. But as indicated, the slight interest the early LBI showed in its own history did not mean a dearth of documents – quite the contrary. The board meetings and working sessions held in this period were so exhaustively recorded (sometimes on tape) that a detailed reconstruction of debates and decisions is possible. Because of the institute's international structure, copies of all important minutes, papers and correspondence were mailed to each branch and sometimes to all board members, so that at present identical material is located in the most disparate archives. But while the sources are thus available in rather unusual abundance, their consultation is not rendered easy through the dispersal among so many collections.⁵

Usually published in the *Year Book*, the short retrospective discussions offered by different authors at five- or ten-year intervals from the institute's founding offered initial building-blocks for an LBI history.⁶ But a true historical treatment only began in the 1970s, in connection with the burgeoning research on emigration from Nazi Germany. In 1972, Herbert A. Strauss established the Research Foundation of Jewish Immigration in New York; together with the Munich-based *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, the foundation produced a three-volume biographical handbook of post-1933 emigration from German-speaking areas.⁷ In the course of an oral history project linked to this project, Strauss and his collaborators extensively interviewed leading figures in the New York LBI such as Max Kreuzberger, Max Gruenewald and Fritz Bamberger.⁸ In the 1980s, now relocated to Berlin, Strauss served as

⁴ Joseph Walk, "Die Gründung des Leo Baeck Instituts vor 40 Jahren," in *LBI Information*, vol. 5/6 (1995), pp. 16–21, here pp. 16f.

⁵ Future research on the LBI would greatly benefit by the systematic completion of a "History of the LBI collection" at the LBI Archives in New York; this ought to include the most important documents on the institute's history, above all the minutes of all board meetings since May 1955.

⁶ See Siegfried Moses, "The First Ten Years of the Leo Baeck Institute," in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 10 (1965), pp. ix–xv; Gerson D. Cohen, "German Jewry as Mirror of Modernity: Introduction to the Twentieth Volume," in *ibid.*, vol. 20 (1975), pp. ix–xxxix; Ismar Schorsch, "The Leo Baeck Institute: Continuity amid Desolation," in *ibid.*, vol. 25 (1980), pp. ix–xii; Reinhard Rürup, "An Appraisal of German-Jewish Historiography," in *ibid.*, vol. 35 (1990), pp. xv–xxix; George L. Mosse, "Das Ende einer Epoche? Das Leo Baeck Institut nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg," in *LBI Information*, vol. 5/6 (1995), pp. 7–15; Walk, "Gründung."

⁷ Werner Roeder and Herbert A. Strauss (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933 / International Biographic Dictionary of Central European Émigrés 1933–1945*, 3 vols., Munich 1980–1983.

⁸ See Dennis Rohrbaugh (ed.), *The Individual and Collective Experience of German-Jewish Immigrants 1933–1984: An Oral History Record*, New York, London and Saur

one of the chief initiators of a project supported by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* on the history of emigrant scholarship. Between 1987 and 1990, he directed a project on the emigration of German-speaking Judaists at the Center for Research on Antisemitism at Berlin's Technical University;⁹ a first discussion of the LBI's history based on documents and interviews was published in connection with this project.¹⁰ The focus here was on the continuities and discontinuities between Jewish historiography in pre-1933 Germany and the work of the LBI.

In the 1990s, LBI-linked historians published a series of short overviews and autobiographical sketches that also shed light on the institute's history.¹¹ The first and until now only full-length history, focusing on the institute's early years, is Ruth Nattermann's 2003 doctoral thesis for the University of Düsseldorf, which was published the following year.¹² On the basis of detailed study of the documents and in the light of recent research on social memory, Nattermann interprets the institute's founding, as well as the work initiated in its first decade, as the expression of a "commemorative community": a *Gedächtnisgemeinschaft*.¹³ It was up to this community, Nattermann argues, to decide in what form and variants German Jewry was to be remembered – and which themes should be, as she puts it, "forgotten," for ex-

1986; see also Herbert A. Strauss (ed.), *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA*, 6 vols., New York and Munich 1978–1992.

⁹ See Herbert A. Strauss, "Die Leo Baeck Institute und die Erforschung der deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 9 (1983), pp. 471–478; Robert Jütte, *Die Emigration der deutschsprachigen "Wissenschaft des Judentum."* *Die Auswanderung jüdischer Historiker nach Palästina 1933–1945*, Stuttgart 1991; Christhard Hoffmann and Daniel R. Schwartz, "Early but Opposed – Supported but Late: Two Berlin Seminaries which Attempted to Move Abroad," in *LBI Year Book*, vol. 36 (1991), pp. 267–304; Christhard Hoffmann, "Jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland, 1918–1938. Konzepte, Schwerpunkte, Ergebnisse," in Julius Carlebach, *Wissenschaft des Judentums – Anfänge der Judaistik in Europa*, Darmstadt 1992, pp. 132–152; *idem*, "Zerstörte Geschichte. Zum Werk der jüdischen Historikerin Selma Stern," in *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, vol. 11 (1993), pp. 203–215.

¹⁰ Christhard Hoffmann, "Deutsch-jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft in der Emigration. Das Leo-Baeck-Institut," in Herbert A. Strauss, Klaus Fischer, Christhard Hoffmann and Alfons Söllner (eds.), *Die Emigration der Wissenschaften nach 1933. Disziplingeschichtliche Studien*, Munich, London, New York and Paris 1991, pp. 257–279.

¹¹ Arnold Paucker, "History in Exile: Writing the Story of German Jewry," in Siglinde Bolbecher *et al.* (eds.), *Zwischenwelt*, vol. 4, *Literatur und Kultur des Exils in Großbritannien*, Vienna 1995, pp. 241–255; Peter Alter (ed.), *Out of the Third Reich: Refugee Historians in Post-War Britain*, London 1998 (with contributions by, among others, Julius Carlebach, John Grenville, Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Paucker and Peter Pulzer); Fred Grubel, *Schreib das auf eine Tafel, die mit ihnen bleibt. Jüdisches Leben im 20. Jahrhundert*, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar 1998.

¹² Ruth Nattermann, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichtsschreibung nach der Shoah. Die Gründungs- und Frühgeschichte des Leo Baeck Institute*, Essen 2004. Much of the material in the present book was submitted before Nattermann's study appeared.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 237 ff.; see also Nattermann's contribution in this volume.

ample the social history of German-Jewish women or the period of persecution.¹⁴ Nattermann considers the shared German language to be a central factor within the early LBI, bridging ideological differences and helping in an essential way to create the “‘we identity’ upon which the social fabric of the LBI was based.”¹⁵ Nattermann’s study closes with the institute’s crisis in the mid-1960s when, in the manner outlined above, the “commemorative community” gradually began to give way to a younger generation with a markedly more neutral scholarly stance.¹⁶

III

This volume constitutes a *Festschrift* for the Leo Baeck Institute on its fiftieth anniversary. At the same time, it represents the first effort to offer a history of the LBI from its founding until the present, on the basis of the available documentation. Different facets of this history are approached in the volume’s individual chapters; since the LBI has three independent branches which, however, are unified into one institute pursuing shared projects, a certain overlapping between the chapters is inevitable. Although the volume’s authors have discussed their contributions with each other and agreed on each chapter’s contents, there has been no effort to mold differing perspectives and valuations into a common interpretive line.

The volume has two main sections, one treating the LBI’s institutional history, the other the history of the research and ideas associated with the institute. This author’s opening chapter outlines the long and difficult path from the first postwar plans for creating a German-Jewish cultural institute for emigrants to the LBI’s establishment in May 1955. An impression here emerges of the enormous resistance that needed to be overcome to reach that point: it involved not only inevitable difficulties in financing, but even more in the lack of support for preserving the cultural heritage of *German Jewry*. This chronological description of the LBI’s founding is complemented by Ruth Nattermann’s systematic account of the most important representatives of the founding generation; this chapter addresses the question of the common experiences, organizational ties and personal networks, and the shared and clashing ideological perspectives that characterized the “community of founders.”

The LBI was founded by the Council of Jews from Germany; the sites of its three branches thus corresponded to the three seats of the Council: Jerusalem, New York, London. As suggested, over the years each branch de-

¹⁴ Nattermann, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 263–274.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

veloped its own distinct profile. In Jerusalem, leading figures in German-Jewish Zionism were at the helm in the early years. As Guy Miron shows, ideological questions thus stood at the foreground: how could the Zionist project of nation-building, and especially the development of a nationally oriented historiography in Israel, be reconciled with the effort to preserve the specific and unique heritage of *one* group of countrymen, the German Jews? The tension between the requirement of Zionist partisanship on the one hand, scholarly objectivity on the other, led both to heated internal debates and differences of opinion with the other branches – an ideological conflict which only lost its importance with the changes at the institute in the 1960s and 1970s referred to above. In New York, in contrast, the LBI offered a direct view of the destroyed world of German Jewry, especially its cultivated bourgeoisie, in the form of an important library and archive, lectures, exhibitions and other cultural activities. In his contribution, Mitchell Hart shows how an Upper East Side townhouse occupied by the LBI between 1962 and 2000 came to serve as a symbol of German Jewry, offering the emigrants a sense of home – and visitors from abroad (among them many German politicians) the impression of an authentic locus from the German-Jewish past.

For a long time, the London LBI would lack comparable ideological, cultural or academic anchoring. Consequently, Nils Roemer lays stress on the London branch's significance for German-Jewish historiography. As the editorial headquarters of the institute's *Year Book*, as organizer of its larger scholarly conferences and – not least – as the initiator of academic contacts with Germany, the London branch played a paramount role in the development of German-Jewish history as an academic discipline. It is interesting that despite the contacts initiated in London, no LBI branch has been established in Germany. But the institute does have a significant presence in that country, in the form (since 1989) of the working committee known as the *Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and (since 2001) an office at Berlin's Jewish Museum containing microfilms of the New York archives. In her article, Stefanie Schüler-Springorum offers a detailed look at the LBI's cooperation with German historians: initially highly hesitant, it slowly intensified in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. Following this account, in the final article of the volume's first section, Aubrey Pomerance discusses the LBI's international board, focusing on the main fields of cooperation (and confrontation) between the branches: financing, relationships with Germany, conceiving and carrying through projects.

The second section of this *Festschrift* opens with articles on the institute's three main tasks: the *collection* of documents and recollections; *research* on individual historical themes and questions; and the comprehensive *depiction* and public *representation* of modern German-Jewish history. These activities are examined through the examples of the LBI's memoir-collection, its *Year*

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