

The Freimann Square in Frankfurt am Main: Honoring Therese and Aron Freimann

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The Therese and Aron Freimann Square in front of the Central University Library of the Goethe University Frankfurt¹ was dedicated in a festive event on October 31, 2023. The honor, long overdue, recognized two prominent Frankfurt Jews who, until their forced exile from Germany in April 1939, actively contributed to both the Jewish and non-Jewish social and intellectual life in the city.

In addition to marking Professor Dr. Aron Freimann's seventy-fifth *yahrzeit*, 2023 held historical significance in other respects.² It marked ninety years since the National Socialists seized power and dismissed Freimann from his post. It was also ninety years since the 1933 book burnings, the eighty-fifth anniversary of the November pogrom (also known as "Kristallnacht"), and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the reestablishment of the Jewish community of Frankfurt after the Shoah in 1948. This essay outlines the life and work of two extraordinary personalities, the one a social activist and the other a scholar bibliographer, and reports on the naming event in October 2023, when they were finally honored and brought back into public awareness.

A POWER COUPLE: THERESE AND ARON FREIMANN

The Freimanns biographies are based on papers in the Aron Freimann Estate and other archival sources, and Therese Freimann's unpublished memoir (1963).

THERESE FREIMANN (1882–1965)

Therese Freimann was born in Frankfurt am Main to Rabbi Dr. Marcus Horovitz and Aguste Helene (née Ettlinger), herself the daughter of the prominent Rabbi Jakob Ettlinger of Altona and his second wife, Sophie Mayer. Therese Freimann's father, Rabbi Dr. Marcus Horovitz

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1. https://www.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/judaica/home_en.html.

2. According to Alexander Marx and Boaz Cohen's necrology, the Ministry of Culture conferred the title of professor on Dr. Freimann in recognition of his achievements (Marx and Cohen 1947/1948, xxiii–xxiv).

(1844–1910), was a highly respected German Orthodox rabbi, who had revived the Orthodox movement within the Jewish community and was instrumental in the building of the Börneplatz Synagogue in Frankfurt. In 1905, Therese married Aron Freimann, her first cousin, himself the grandson of Rabbi Jakob Ettlinger from his first marriage with Nanette “Gnendel” Wormser. The Freimanns’ only daughter Helene was born in 1906; she later married the physician Menny Rapp.

From an early age, Therese Freimann was familiar with the problems that concerned members of the Jewish community and with her father’s social engagement in the community. In her memoir she later wrote that, “two great personalities convinced me of the moral obligation to help and showed me the way to the work, my father, Rabbi Dr. Marcus Horovitz, and Bertha Pappenheim” (Freimann 1963, 121). The latter, who founded *Der Jüdische Frauenbund* (Jewish Women’s League) in Germany, also lived and worked in Frankfurt, and established a home for unmarried Jewish women and their children in nearby Neu-Isenburg, where Therese Freimann supported her work. Over time, both women worked closely together and jointly initiated numerous charities for the Jewish community. Therese turned into an impressive leader in her own right, and their collaboration was one of equals, as Freimann’s granddaughter described: “My grandmother...had been too self-motivated to work under the direction of Miss Pappenheim—it would be more accurate to say that the two women worked side by side in Frankfurt...” (Rapp Dresner 1981, 205).

Therese Freimann nurtured an interest in the welfare of children and youth since her own childhood. As a young girl, she assisted her mother, who as a rabbi’s wife founded the *Verein für Haus- und Wöchnerinnen-Pflege* (Association for Home and Maternity Care) together with other community members, which supported mothers before and after childbirth. Therese participated actively both in the theoretical and practical work of social welfare. When welfare services for children and youth expanded to include health education and nutrition in the early 1920s, she engaged within the Jewish community to organize daily meals in schools, expand child afternoon care centers, and establish summer camps for children in need. At the same time, she served on the board of many welfare institutions in the Jewish community, including the *Schwesternheim des Krankenhauses der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* (Home for the Jewish Community Hospital Nurses), the *Rothschildsche Kinderhospital* (Rothschild Childrens Hospital), and the *Jüdische Waisenhaus* (Jewish Orphanage). In 1920, the Frankfurt Jewish community board appointed her to the *Beirat des Krankenhauses der Israelitischen Gemeinde* (Advisory Board of Jewish Community Hospital), thereby becoming the first woman nominated to an official administrative function within the Jewish community, a position she held until her emigration to the United States in April 1939. Her activities extended beyond the Jewish community to the realm of social welfare within Frankfurt, where she represented the Jewish community on city committees. Examples include the *Kinderschutzkommission der Stadt Frankfurt am Main*

(City of Frankfurt Committee for Child Protection), and from 1923 to 1937, the city's Abteilung für Kinderfürsorge (Department for Childcare). Furthermore, the city's social services adopted her ideas about early childhood education for infants and toddlers and care for their mothers and tasked her with leading the effort to put them into daily practice. In the fall of 1930, Therese Freimann established the Jüdische Notstandsküche (Jewish Emergency Kitchen) to support the growing number of community members who had been poverty-stricken as a result of the Great Depression and the rise of unemployment. Until her emigration in 1939, she served on the charity's board and actively participated in its day-to-day activities. The Jewish Emergency Kitchen was first planned as a temporary relief effort, but very quickly turned into a vital institution, gaining growing importance for the community after the Nazi rise to power. A contemporary later reported that, "The actual and full responsibility was borne by Therese Freimann and exclusively by her. She was literally the soul of the Jewish Emergency Kitchen. Every day she would come into the kitchen and tirelessly work to ensure [its] smooth operation" (Bergel 1961). In addition, she participated in multiple social welfare projects that strove to ease the hardships inflicted by increasing Nazi persecution, including the Deutsch-Israelitische Kinderheim (German-Jewish Children's Home) in Diez an der Lahn near Frankfurt, efforts to find new homes for children and youth from orphanages closed by the Nazis on short notice, and help for Jews fleeing Frankfurt for small, nearby villages.

After her emigration to New York, Therese Freimann continued to engage in social welfare and helped establish two Jewish welfare organisations: Self Help and Help and Reconstruction. The



FIGURE. 1. Therese and Aron Freimann in New York, n.d. Source: Leo Baeck New York, F2025

latter, founded 1940 by Jewish German immigrants under the leadership of Max Warburg to help fellow Jewish immigrants, remains in operation to this day. At the time, one of the urgent problems facing immigrant families was the question of childcare for working mothers, as these families needed two salaries in order to make a living. Therese Freimann took the lead on this difficult situation and initiated the creation of nurseries, afternoon childcare, and summer camps, thus enabling working mothers to contribute their share to their family income. She introduced consultation hours for refugees to study and find practical and efficient solutions to their needs. In 1940, she was the driving force behind the opening of the first all-day kindergarden in New York, which mostly cared for Jewish children in need of kosher food. In the following years, the City of New York's health and education departments supported Therese Freimann's work and adopted her social welfare principles when establishing similar operations. In later years, she became

vice president of Help and Reconstruction and kept up her active engagement in social work. As attested by Quack, “while only men represented the organization outwardly, the efforts and activities of women largely defined the work of Help and Reconstruction” (1955, 144).

When World War II ended, Therese Freimann contacted Jewish survivors in Frankfurt, and with the help of American welfare organizations arranged financial support for temporary local Jewish welfare institutions, such as the Jewish Old Age Home, the Jewish kindergarden, and a Jewish school run by Rabbi Weinberg. She arranged for packages sent by the humanitarian organization Care, dubbed “Care Packages,” to the Kosher Kitchen newly established in the fall of 1947, and made sure that in addition to the regular items like coffee and flour they also contained kosher items. She paid special attention to secure kosher food for the holidays, such as Passover *matzos*. In America, she volunteered in organizations looking after newly arrived Holocaust survivors. Until her death in 1965, she committed herself to supporting the disadvantaged, especially youth, through her work on the boards of the Committee of the Union of Jews from Central Europe, the American Jewish Congress, the B’nai Brith Leo Baeck Lodge, and the religious Zionist Mizrahi movement.

ARON FREIMANN (1871–1948)

Aron Freimann was born in Filehne in Posen, then an Eastern province in the German Empire (today Wieleń in Poland), and grew up in Ostrowo. He studied Oriental studies, history and classical philology at the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin, while also being a student in the Rabbiner-Seminar zu Berlin, the Orthodox rabbinical seminary of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer. In 1896, he completed his studies with a doctoral dissertation in Oriental studies on “The Isagoge of Porphyry in Syrian translations,” a textual analysis of two Arabic translations of works by the Greek philosopher Porphyry of Tyre.³

Endorsed by his dissertation adviser, Professor Abraham Berliner, Aron Freimann took up a position at the Frankfurt City Library (today, University Library) on January 1, 1898, an appointment he held until his dismissal by the Nazis in 1933.

The City Library’s Judaica collection, donated by Frankfurt Jewish philanthropists, who aimed to make it accessible to all, served the general public well. This was recognized by Ludiwg Landmann, the Lord Mayor of Frankfurt, who sent Aron Freimann a congratulatory telegram upon his 60th birthday (August 5th, 1931), in which he expressed his appreciation for Freimann’s many years of dedicated work at the municipal library. “Dear Prof. Freimann! Please accept my warmest congratulations on your 60th birthday. May you still enjoy a long and successful career

3. “Die Isagoge des Porphyrius in den syrischen Uebersetzungen.”

at our city library and in the fields of knowledge you have cultivated. With the highest esteem” (Personalakte Aron Freimann n.d.).

Throughout his years in Frankfurt, Aron Freimann played an active role in the city’s communal life and politics. He served on the board of the orthodox Börneplatz Synagoge and was elected as a conservative party representative to the Jewish Community Council in 1918. From 1928 until he became the last president in 1938, he served as vice president of the Jewish Community Board and chaired a number of commissions, including the Ritualkommission (Commission for Ritual Regulations) and the Ausschuss für Bibliothek und Museum (Committee for Library and Museum). He was active in many associations and institutions, including as a member of the board of trustees of the Rabbiner-Seminar zu Berlin and the board of the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums (Society for the Advancement of the Wissenschaft des Judentums) in Berlin. In 1937, Freimann was elected as board member of the Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland (Confederation of Jews in Germany), founded in 1933 by Rabbi Leo Baeck to represent the voice of Jewish German orthodoxy. In late 1938 and early 1939, he served as the last president of the Israelitische Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt Jewish community). After the November 1938 pogrom, Aron Freimann was compelled to sign papers liquidating the community’s autonomy, when the Gestapo forced the reunification of Frankfurt’s centuries-old Jewish community and the Orthodox Hirsch community. The Frankfurt separatist Orthodox Jewish community founded by Samson Raphael Hirsch, die Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft, had split away in 1851 from the main Jewish community, which was largely Reform and had been recognized as an independent community by the authorities in 1876. Although Aron Freimann rejected Zionism as the Jewish national liberation movement, he followed the century-old Jewish tradition of supporting Erets-Yiśr’ael. For that reason, he favored aiding the Old Yishuv settlements and supported the founding of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he was elected as member of the board of its Institute for Jewish studies after its opening in 1925.

Along with all other communal Jewish civil servants in Frankfurt, Aron Freimann was dismissed from his library post as early as March 30, 1933, when the newly elected Nazi Lord Mayor of Frankfurt, Friedrich Krebs, enforced antisemitic regulations in public institutions ahead of other regions in the Reich. After serving for more than 35 years in the library, and three years before his expected retirement, Freimann was forced to leave his office and was again never to return to the library.

In 1931, the Soncino-Gesellschaft der Freunde des jüdischen Buches (Soncino Society of the Friends of the Jewish Book), founded to promote appreciation of German and Hebrew book design, prepared the publication of a Festschrift celebrating Aron Freimann’s sixtieth birthday. Due to the loss of the original manuscript, the collection (edited by Alexander Marx and Hermann

Meyer) was released only in 1937 but bore the publication date of 1935. The book was adorned with a special dedication by the celebrated poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik, who was Freimann's close friend since the early 1920s, when he and other Eastern European Jewish intellectuals had resided in Bad Homburg, a small spa town near Frankfurt. Aron Freimann was one of the few German Jews who not only studied rabbinical Hebrew but could also communicate fluently in modern Hebrew. This enabled his close connections with Zionists from Eastern Europe, among them Shmuel Yosef Agnon with whom he cultivated a lifelong friendship, and Moses Marx, the brother of Agnon's wife Esther Marx. Thanks to his contacts and knowledge of Hebrew, he was one of those intellectuals who formed a bridge between the divergent East European and German Jewish traditions, supporting the renaissance of Hebrew and cultural Zionism in Germany (Myers 1995, 35).

As anti-Jewish legislation, discrimination and persecution intensified in Germany throughout the 1930s, the Freimanns, like other German Jews, were forced to consider emigration. In April 1939, after long and strenuous efforts, the Freimanns succeeded in leaving Frankfurt. They arrived in New York the following month after a short stopover in London. Their many colleagues and friends were instrumental in their successful immigration, especially librarian Alexander Marx of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York and the orientalist Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, Chief Librarian of the Vatican, whom Aron Freimann knew personally from the days when he had catalogued the Hebrew manuscripts there (letters in the Aron Freimann Estate).⁴

In the United States, Aron Freimann received a financial grant from the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, a relief organization that assisted immigrant scholars persecuted by the Nazis and helped them in the process of professional integration. Recognized as “the greatest living authority in the realm of Jewish Bibliography,” he became the oldest foreign scholar to be funded by the organization (Bloch 1939). He was appointed consultant in bibliography at the New York Public Library and gave lectures at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, affiliated with Yeshiva University. At the conclusion of World War II, Aron Freimann served as one of the organizers of the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), founded in 1944 to implement the transfer and restitution of Jewish cultural assets in former Nazi-occupied Europe. Owing to “... his unmatched knowledge of European libraries,” he belonged to the small delegation that met with General Lucius Clay, then Chief in Command of the American army stationed in Germany and convinced him of the need for Jewish cultural property to be handled securely (Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction 1946, 8, ft x). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the commission, under the leadership of Hannah Arendt, was recognized as the representative of the Jewish people and took over sole responsibility for Nazi-looted Jewish cultural treasures in Europe. Aron Freimann passed away on June 6, 1948.

4. Yad Vashem recognized Cardinal Tisserant as a Righteous among the Nations in 2021, see <https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/21-october-2021-07-23.html>.

A BIBLIOGRAPHER AND LIBRARIAN, A WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS LEADER

A professional bibliographer and librarian, who chose his career path during his studies in Berlin, Aron Freimann serves as an exemplar of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism). Two key figures in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Leopold Zunz and Moritz Steinschneider, as well as Freimann's contemporaries, engaged in bibliographical research in order to identify sources for their own research and published their own bibliographies. Steinschneider, specifically, gained fame as bibliographer and librarian although he had aspired to an academic career. As testified in a "Personal Tribute" by Aron Freimann's personal friend, orientalist Professor Shelomo Dov Goitein, "ever since his early days he decided to dedicate his life to the Hebrew book and to all that is related to it; he never strayed from that determination throughout the long and fruitful years of his scholarly work" (Freimann et al. 1973, VII). In this context, Goitein recalled a story Aron had repeatedly told him, about the way he had explained to his mother his desire to become a bibliographer:

While still a student at the University of Berlin (where he also attended the Hildesheimer Seminary), he once declared to his old mother, during a holiday home visit, that he had no intention of becoming a rabbi or entering one of those typically "Jewish" professions; his one and only desire was to be a bibliographer. The old lady, who had no idea what kind of occupation this was, asked him for an explanation. After listening to his enthusiastic outpouring, she mused for a while, then said: "If I understand the matter correctly, a bibliographer is like a road sign: people follow its directions, but the sign itself remains in the same place." When relating the story, ... Freimann wanted to emphasize his belief that the bibliographer must be content with his own role, and, while dealing with a book, not be carried away by the desire to expand on the subject-matter itself.

Goitein rated Freimann's bibliographical work as "clean cut," strictly professional and carefully defined, formulated with brevity and self-imposed conciseness.

Although Aron Freimann would repeat his basic principle, "You don't have to be knowledgeable about the subject-matter in question, but you must know where it can be found" (according to Goitein's "Personal Tribute," Freimann et al. 1973, VII), this majorly understated and in no way reflected the breadth and quality of his work. As demonstrated by his colleagues' testimonies and his publication list, Freimann's talent extended beyond formal bibliographical description, to a deep knowledge of books' content and their significance. His main interest was the promotion of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* based on accurate Jewish bibliography, an aim he pursued with great vigour, compiling numerous bibliographies of diverse Jewish, Hebrew and Yiddish literature. The bibliography of his writings from 1893 to 1931, published by Hanna Emmrich

(1932, 5–16), contains 390 articles, essays, and book reviews. A subsequent bibliography of his publications since 1932, including reprints, was compiled over seventy years later (Heuberger 2004, 357–62).

Aron Freimann engaged in several branches of Hebraica and Judaica bibliography, including manuscripts and prints in Hebrew and non-Hebrew letters, and covered the whole spectrum of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: bio-bibliographical works, bibliographical periodicals, works about Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula, library catalogues, and union catalogues. Therefore, only few of his numerous works and projects can be listed here, with emphasis on innovative contributions and those that have set methodological standards for the field of bibliography.

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR HEBRÄISCHE BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Having recognized the necessity of a bibliographical periodical for the growing number of scholars in Jewish studies, Aron Freimann joined the *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie* (ZHB; Journal of Hebrew Bibliography) as co-editor in 1900 and turned it into an essential source of information. The sole editor of the journal from 1905, he demonstrated professional expertise as well as his organizational and financial skill. The latter was demonstrated when he continued the periodical's publication during the difficult period during and after World War I. The periodical finally ceased publication due to the economic crises in the early 1920s. For many years, the ZHB functioned as the only up-to-date bibliographical periodical in the field, providing comprehensive, thoroughly annotated data that served as an irreplaceable tool in the realm of modern Jewish studies. This multi-year project gained him a reputation as an expert par excellence in the field of Jewish bibliography, leading Alexander Marx and Boaz Cohen to proclaim that, “after Steinschneider's death, he was gradually recognized as the greatest Jewish bibliographer” (Marx and Cohen 1947/1948, XXIV).

UNION CATALOGS

Understanding early on the significance of supraregional, central catalogues that encompassed the holdings of multiple libraries as an effective tool for research, Aron Freimann was a pioneer in the field of Hebrew union catalogues and the first to compile the *Union Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts*. Unfortunately, he did not see it published during his lifetime; it was published twenty years after his death. While working in the Frankfurt library, he used his vacations to study Hebrew manuscripts in several European libraries, including small and little-known ones, and to record these libraries' holdings on hundreds of small catalogue cards. When he emigrated to the United States, Aron Freimann brought card boxes with him, and shortly after his arrival, the members of the American Academy for Jewish Research decided to include the compilation of a Union List of Hebrew Manuscripts in their research program. The list was to include the

European manuscripts Freimann had recorded as well as unpublished Hebrew manuscripts in American libraries (*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 1941). That plan was not realized, and for many years, Therese Freimann tried in vain to persuade Nelson Glück, president of the Hebrew Union College, and Alexander Marx of the JTS, to publish these cards (Therese Freimann's letters, Aron Freimann Estate, 1949–1953). In the end, Salo W. Baron managed to examine the cards, held by the JTS, with the help of Shalom Spiegel. They published the *Union Catalog of Hebrew Manuscripts* as a photographic copy of Freimann's handwritten index cards placed next to each other—without any corrections or additions (Freimann 1964, 2).⁵

Before immigrating to the United States, Aron Freimann published the comprehensive, 8-volume Union Catalogue of Hebrew Incunabula (*Otsar li-melekheth ha-defus ha-'Ivri ha-rishonah*=*Treasure Typographiae Hebraicae Saeculi XV*), that not only gave an accurate bibliographical description of all known Hebrew early prints at the time, but also provided facsimiles of characteristic pages from each of them (Freimann 1924–1931).⁶ This was the first time facsimiles of Hebrew incunabula had been included in a bibliography, a practice that would later become standard, such that today's electronic databases of incunabula include reproductions of characteristic pages that enable in-depth research and comparative scholarly analysis of incunabula. With this approach, Freimann showed a keen awareness of scholars who were unable to travel to various libraries to examine incunabula on site. In the United States, Freimann published the *Gazetteer of Hebrew Printing*, listing all locations of Hebrew printing as well as the date and titles of the first works printed in each place (Freimann 1946).

GERMAN-JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Aron Freimann's position as librarian in Frankfurt enabled him to spend time and effort in initiating and carrying out several major projects in the realms of German-Jewish historiography, scholarly editions of Hebrew manuscripts, and Jewish bibliophily. Through his numerous visits to European libraries, he built up personal relationships with many colleagues and was, for example, in daily correspondence with Alexander Marx in New York and Samuel Poznański in Warsaw. The large number of Festschriften he edited or contributed essays to speaks to the numerous and various contacts he had with scholars from all streams of Judaism. As a result, he succeeded in establishing a large network of Jewish scholars that took the place of organized conferences and periodicals, which were not yet developed for the field of Jewish studies. At the same time, that network reflected the changing nature of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In the

5. The first volume of the work to be published, in 1964, is paradoxically numbered as Volume 2, while the index, compiled by Menahem Schmelzer and published in 1973, is numbered as Volume 1. There, on page IV, Salo Baron declares his "personal satisfaction ... that I suggested to the Academy that something ought to be done to salvage this part of his [Freimann's] lifework from oblivion."

6. The volumes were published by Moses Marx, who co-edited them with Aron Freimann, but vehemently refused to being listed as such.

early twentieth century, the study of Judaism outgrew its initial stage, when research was carried out by individuals, and developed into an expanded academic discipline in need of collaboration and formal scholarly communication platforms.

Two major projects that are still ongoing have to be mentioned as an example of Aron Freimann's manifold activities. The *Germania Judaica* is a historic-geographical encyclopaedia about Jews in the German Empire during the Middle Ages. Freimann acted as the project's co-editor from its inception in 1905 until his emigration in 1939. Initiated by the Society for the Advancement of the Wissenschaft des Judentums in 1903, this research project undertook the publication of an alphabetical dictionary of all locations in the German Reich or German-speaking areas where Jewish communities had existed, based on the systematic collection and analysis of historical documents. The first volume of this reference work was published in 1917 and the last one in 2003. In 2017, the project merged with the *Gallia Judaica* dictionary of the locations of Jews in France, to create a joint European online database.

The other project is Meḳitse nirdamim, a society for scholarly editions and publication of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. Originally founded in 1862, Meḳitse nirdamim was revived in 1909 by David Simonsen, Aron Freimann, and Samuel Poznański, serving as president, vice-president, and secretary, respectively (Agnon, Urbach, and Scholem 1964). Following Simonsen's death in 1932, Freimann was elected president, an office he held for the next ten years. After World War I, the society moved its office from Berlin to Frankfurt and, in 1934, to Jerusalem, where it is active to this day and has published over 110 editions. Aron Freimann succeeded in persuading Shmuel Yosef Agnon to accept the secretary post for the society in 1922, and Agnon later became president and served in this role for sixteen years (1954–1970). Aron Freimann himself edited two of the society's publications: a volume of documents concerning the history of Sabbathaians (*'Inyene Shabtai Tsevi*, 1912), and the first complete scholarly edition of Hayyim Joseph David Azulai (ha-Ḥida; 1724–1806)'s travelogue from the eighteenth century (*Ma'agal ṭov ha-shalem*), published in two volumes in 1921 and 1934.

THE JUDAICA CATALOGUE OF THE FRANKFURT LIBRARY COLLECTION

Aron Freimann's current reputation within the broader scholarly community is based on his magnum opus, the *Judaica Catalogue* of the Frankfurt Library collection (Freimann 1932, Vol. 1).⁷ The catalogue represents the first attempt to list exclusively Judaica literature in non-Hebrew characters. Described by Salo Baron as “a milestone on the road of Jewish bibliography,” it remains the standard bibliography of Judaica for sources published before 1930 (1962, 1).

7. For a digitized version, see <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/titleinfo/8305600>.

The original 1932 catalogue registered approximately 15,000 titles constituting the Judaica Collection of the Frankfurt University Library, the then Stadtbibliothek (Municipal Library of Frankfurt). At the time, the Frankfurt Judaica collection was the largest collection on the European continent and “one of the finest of this nature ever accumulated” (Brisman 1977, 118). The catalogue consists of two sections: a systematic main part, divided into ten major thematic categories (e.g. Bible, religion, philosophy, history), and an index listing authors, titles, and subjects. The catalogue’s value lies in its very detailed entries, including descriptions of serials and multi-volume works, its naming of authors of anonymous works, and its decoding of a large number of pseudonyms. When the catalogue was reprinted in 1968, the original shelf marks were omitted, because the Judaica collection had suffered some losses during World War II and changed shelf marks. Instead of being the record of a specific collection, the Judaica catalogue serves today as the most comprehensive bibliography of Jewish literature up to the end of the Weimar period.

More than just a bibliographical tool, Freimann’s *Judaica Catalogue* is historically significant for having secured the survival and continuity of the Frankfurt Judaica collection during the Nazi era and the immediate postwar period. After the Nazi rise to power in 1933, Lord Mayor Friedrich Krebs, an active member of the Nazi Party, instrumentalized the Judaica collection in his efforts to turn the city of Frankfurt into a new center of National Socialist ideology. Arguing that the Frankfurt Judaica collection was known throughout the world and that the Freimann Judaica catalogue could be found in all renowned libraries, he successfully rejected all attempts to transfer the collection elsewhere and used it to establish the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage (Institute for the Research of the Jewish Question; Schiefelbein 1993). Thus the collection, even as it served Nazi research, remained untouched and intact.

After World War II and the Shoah, when a renaissance of Wissenschaft des Judentums or Jewish studies in Germany seemed unimaginable, the Frankfurt Judaica collection faced another threat: a potential sale to fund urgently needed modern research literature. To prevent the transfer of the books overseas, library director at the time, Hanns Wilhelm Eppelsheimer, argued in a 1950 expert opinion that Aron Freimann’s Judaica catalogue established the collection as a cohesive entity that scholars expected find in Frankfurt. To sell the collection, he contended, would damage the city’s reputation and European scholarship (Eppelsheimer 1950).

Since 1948, based on the worldwide fame of the Judaica collection Aron Freimann built up, two special collections have been established and generously funded in the University Library Frankfurt: the Judaica Collection, and the Collection of Israel Studies.⁸ Furthermore, the *Judaica Catalogue* served as the foundation to virtually reconstruct the former, prewar collection and

8. https://www.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/judaica/sammlung_en.html, accessed February 14, 2024.

enabled the creation of the Virtual Freimann Collection by digitizing the books and transforming the historic Judaica collection into a free, online database with full text search (Heuberger et al. 2015, 223–29). Thanks to Freimann's *Judaica Catalogue*, the books of the prewar Judaica collection in the library could be identified, and the collection could be reconstructed virtually with digital copies as it was before 1933 (currently they are only indexed in the general online catalog). Books missing due to war have been supplemented as digital copies from other libraries.

NAMING FREIMANN SQUARE

Despite their many historical contributions and achievements, the names Therese and Aron Freimann have largely been forgotten in Frankfurt. One notable exception was the establishment of the yearly Aron Freimann Lectures of Jewish Cultural History by the Institute for Jewish Studies at the Goethe University in 2012.⁹ It was therefore all the more significant when the Local Advisory Council 2, responsible for the Bockenheimer neighbourhood, where the University Library is located, decided to name the square in front of the University Library after the Freimanns (fig. 2).



FIGURE 2. Left: Freimannplatz 1, the new address of the University Library in Frankfurt. Up: The new sign at Freimann Square

That decision was put into action thanks to a collaboration between the Goethe University, the University Library's landlord, the City of Frankfurt, and the Jewish Community in Frankfurt. In the presence of the Freimanns' great-granddaughter Dr. Nehama Dresner, who came from Chicago on the invitation of the City of Frankfurt, and over one hundred guests, a very moving event took place on October 31, 2023.

9. https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/42965851/Freimann_Lectures, accessed February 14, 2024.

Official speakers included Goethe University’s president, Professor Dr. Enrico Schleiff; the Head of Cultural Affairs at the City of Frankfurt, Dr. Ina Hartwig; the State Secretary in the Hessian Ministry of Finance and Representative of the Hessian State Government for Jewish Life and the Fight against Anti-Semitism, That decision was put into action thanks to a collaboration between the Goethe University, the University Library’s landlord, the City of Frankfurt, and the Jewish Community in Frankfurt. In the presence of the Freimanns’ great-granddaughter Dr. Nehama Dresner, who came from Chicago on the invitation of the City of Frankfurt, and over one hundred guests, a very moving event took place on October 31, 2023 (fig. 3). Official speakers included Goethe University’s president, Professor Dr. Enrico Schleiff; the Head of Cultural Affairs at the City of Frankfurt, Dr. Ina Hartwig; the State Secretary in the Hessian Ministry of Finance and Representative of the Hessian State Government for Jewish Life and the Fight against Anti-Semitism, Uwe Becker; the Jewish Community Frankfurt council chair, Dr. Rachel Heuberger; and the Representative of the Local Council 2, Susanne Turré. All speakers stressed the importance of restoring the collective memory of these two outstanding Jewish personalities by establishing Freimannplatz in a central location in Frankfurt. In addition, a commemorative plank about the Freimanns now stands outside the university library building for future generations.



FIGURE 3: The Freimann Square new sign. In the middle: the Freimanns’ great granddaughter, Dr. Nehama Dresner

Dr. Dresner, one of four great-granddaughters living in the United States, shared with the audience recollections of her grandparents, Helene and Menny Rapp, Therese and Aron Freimann's daughter and son-in-law. She painted a vivid picture of her four-generation family history. Sharing her feelings with the audience, she revealed that after the Shoah, everything German was despised in their family, including the German language—until recently. The naming event changed her mind, she said. Being invited to the ceremony, seeing how her great-grandparents were recognized again, and learning of the many attempts undertaken to commemorate the Jews persecuted by the Nazi regime, she acknowledged the honest efforts of many Germans to face up to their past. Today a circle could be closed, Dr. Dresner said. Her visit would be the first of many to come in order to actively reconnect with her family's German past.

It goes without saying that the ceremony was overshadowed by the massacre of October 7th in the south of Israel, just three weeks before the ceremony, which had also led to a yet unknown outburst of antisemitic violent incidents in postwar Germany. All speakers referred to the horrific events of the Hamas terror attack of October 7th and assured those present that they would actively fight antisemitism in their respective institutions and in public. The Frankfurt Jewish community representative, Dr. Rachel Heuberger, emphatically detailed the negative impact the terrible events had on the Jewish community and its members, who had planned a celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the community's reestablishment all year long. In spite of these fatal developments, the Jewish community continued with the planned program to show that it remained confident, would continue to hold on to Jewish life in all its diversity, and not give in to threats. The naming of Freimann Square was a significant and vital sign for community members, reconnecting them with prewar Jewish life in Frankfurt. It can take a while until events and personalities of the past are brought back into the present, but with the October 2023 event, a further step in bringing the past back was achieved in Frankfurt.

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