Book Review: Julia Schneidawind, Schicksale und ihre Bücher: deutsch-jüdische Privatbibliotheken zwischen Jerusalem, Tunis und Los Angeles. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023. 308 p. with 43 illustrations. ISBN: 9783525500316

Joshua Shelly
Potsdam University Library

In the recently published reworking of her prize-winning dissertation (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, 2022), Julia Schneidawind reconstructs the history of five private libraries of German Jewish intellectuals from the early twentieth century. A tour de force that takes its readers on a whirlwind journey with stops on six continents, the work proves much more than the story of a few individuals and a list of the titles that once populated their bookshelves.

The volume commences with an overview of libraries—both private and otherwise—and their multivalent meanings. Beginning with Heinrich Heine's image of the (holy) book as "portable homeland" that functions metonymically for Jewish cultural tradition(s) (11), Schneidawind argues that private book collections warrant scholarly attention not just for the ideas and thoughts they contain and represent, but also as physical objects whose material histories allow the scholar to plumb the depths of the respective owner's everyday realities (14). While acknowledging the importance of the rise of National Socialism in each of her five case studies, Schneidawind broadens the scope of her inquiry, to ask how the history of each collection and its owner can illuminate various aspects of German Jewish cultural tradition and how their respective fates and afterlives can speak to larger questions of German Jewish history. Here, even as Schneidawind takes the history of destruction, expropriation and exile of German Jews and/ or their book collections seriously, she refuses to reduce these stories to tales of mere victimhood and pure loss.

The first case study examines the collection of philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, perhaps known best for his 1921 *The Star of Redemption* and later, collaborative Bible translation with Martin Buber. Rosenzweig, who succumbed to Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in 1929, possessed a 3,000-volume library that contained neither numerous "rarities nor expensive treasures" (29).[1] In spite of this, he considered it his most prized possession and bequeathed it to his son with clear instructions for its use. Drawing on letters and diary entries cross-referenced with the Rosenzweig collection as it exists today, Schneidawind mines the library, and by extension, the

1. This quote, as all the other quotes in this review, were translated by the author.

Open Access. © the author(s), published by the Association of Jewish Libraries. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Shelly, Joshua. 2024. Judaica Librarianship 23, 175–178.
https://doi.org/10.14263/23/2024/1435

philosopher's reading list, as a "biographical repository" (30). In so doing, she sheds light on Rosenzweig's life from childhood—filled with titles from Goethe, Schiller, and Heine as well as the classics of German Jewish religious life, such as the Zunz Bible translation (35)—to his brief period of incredible intellectual productivity, characterized by fare from authors as varied as Hermann Cohen and Augustine (39). Though Rosenzweig had passed by the time the National Socialists came to power, Schneidawind's second chapter subsequently follows the harrowing journey of his wife, Edith Rosenzweig, as she sought to save the collection during her and her son's flight from Europe to Mandatory Palestine. Though both mother and son safely arrived, Schneidawind unravels how the vagaries of war resulted in the book-filled boxes, and the family's Bechstein grand, landing in Tunis, where they were eventually auctioned off to the National Library of Tunisia. The chapter concludes with the futile efforts of Edith Rosenzweig to regain ownership of the collection, which remains in North Africa to this day, largely inaccessible to modern Rosenzweig scholars (71).

The book's third chapter examines famed novelist Lion Feuchtwanger. It begins with Lion's father, Sigmund Feuchtwanger, a prosperous Munich businessman who himself collected widely, using his travels to regularly acquire new volumes. The resulting collection contained so many rare treasures that scholars would often visit the family's home to consult volumes. Today, the Feuchtwanger patriarch's collection is lost. Though the circumstances of its dissolution are unclear, it was most likely sold off after his death and long before 1933. As Schneidawind notes, it is a reminder of how book collections can often disappear without a trace or be broken up, even where "stories of persecution and exile" are not involved (84). The chapter then narrates Lion Feuchtwanger's own collecting history: from a youth whose acquisitive streak was regularly hampered by the need to sell off books to settle gambling debts, to later years of literary success, when Feuchtwanger moved to a villa in Berlin's Grunewald neighborhood, especially outfitted to hold his considerable, 10,000-volume strong collection. In early 1933, while the author was on a reading tour in the US, the SS raided the home and seized the collection, whose fate remains unknown to this day (91). Rather than simply ending her narrative here, Schneidawind then pivots to demonstrate how exile in no way marked an end to Feuchtwanger's keen desire to build a private library but, if anything, enhanced it. Following the author from Sanary-sur-Mer—where he collected roughly 2,000 tomes—to the US, where he finally found refuge in the Pacific Palisaides, she narrates the tale of Feuchtwanger's exile through the lens of his persistent collecting impulse, in no small part driven by the goal of reassembling a library with the titles he once held in Berlin (105). The California collection eventually exceeded the Berlin one by a factor of two or three. Before turning to tell the story of how the collection became the Lion Feuchtwanger Memorial Library run by the University of Southern California, Schneidawind pays special attention to the networks of antiquarian booksellers—quite often run by fellow German Jewish exiles—that created the conditions for this later phase of book collecting.

If the first two collections examined have final geographical destinations—Tunis for Rosenzweig and Los Angeles for Feuchtwanger—Schneidawind's fourth chapter revolves around Stefan Zweig, whose library is now largely lost with scattered parts to be found across the globe today. Based on sources such as the author's considerable correspondence, readers learn not only about what Zweig collected, including a voluminous set of autographs from famous personalities, but also the antiquarian bookselling networks he cultivated to do so. Zweig eventually housed his collection in a stately home on the Kapuzinerberg in Austria, where literary personalities from Joyce to Asch pilgrimed to take in its riches (135). Upon leaving Austria before the country's "annexation" by the National Socialists, he would sell off or gift large swaths of the collection—partially forced—only taking a small subset with him to London. Even in exile, Zweig remained a passionate collector, assembling a library to be housed in his home in Bath, though Schneidawind shows how the author would also, at times, consciously acquire items to later resell them at a profit (150). Fearing Britain's fall, Zweig eventually left Europe for Brazil, where he and his mistress took their lives, leaving the hundred or so books he still possessed to the local library in Petrópolis. In a passage from his final letter to his wife, Zweig lamented, among other things, the absence of his books, a passage Schneidawind no doubt correctly reads less as a direct reason for suicide, but instead as an index of something greater: the loss of home, belonging, and even a common language (166).

Schicksale und ihre Bücher's fifth chapter turns to a lesser-known German Jewish intellectual of the era, Karl Wolfskehl: a child of a liberal, bourgeois family and member of the famed literary circle that formed around German poet Stefan George. With careful attention to the then active antiquarian bookseller scene in Munich, Schneidawind reconstructs the ramified network Wolfskehl moved within to assemble his collection. She notes how books with meaningful "traces of their former owners" drew the collector's eye much more than "impeccable" specimens (185). Wolfskehl, whose financial means suffered in the inflationary years of the Weimar Republic, found his collecting impulse largely curtailed in the years after World War I. Following the National Socialists' seizure of power in the 1930s, the collector first moved to Italy, from whence he negotiated with the business magnate Salman Schocken to purchase his library, which then made its way to Jerusalem. The funds from the 9,000-volume collection thus enabled him to leave with some of his remaining books for New Zealand, where he died a few years after World War II ended. Here, Schneidawind pivots to follow Schocken's stewardship of the collection, including later, futile attempts to trade parts of it against Hebrew manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library, as well as the subsequent sale of the collection by Schocken's heirs, leading to its current home in the German Literature Archive in Marbach, Germany.

The book's final case study turns to the bestselling German Jewish novelist of the Weimar era, Jakob Wassermann, who grew up in penury and viewed his later collection as a "symbol of his rise and [authorial] success" (230). In addition to an examination of the titles Wassermann read,

the chapter takes special care to detail the different domestic interiors where the author housed his collection (see 234, 240), fully demonstrating how private libraries of the period not only mirrored the interior lives of their owners, but also had a representational quality to them meant for external consumption. Here again, Schneidawind does not cut the story of Wassermann's collection short with his death in 1934. Instead, she follows the library's fate. Sold off upon the author's passing to pay outstanding debts, the majority of the volumes landed in the hands of a neighboring family, the Frischmuths, who added to the collection, including with National Socialist literature, before selling it to the Nuremberg City Library in the 1960s.

Thus concludes Julia Schneidawind's closely researched, wide-ranging examination of five German Jewish libraries covering their respective geneses and following their developments as they and their owners made their way from cities such as Darmstadt and Fürth to far-flung locales such as Petrópolis and Los Angeles. As a contribution to German Jewish (book) history, the volume clearly recommends itself to readers for both its depth and breadth. In it, Schneidawind successfully shows how books are hardly simple collections of bound pages meant to transmit ideas. Moreover, she illustrates how these material objects that contain traces of their former owners, and function historically as repositories of sentimental and material value, were often deployed to portray authorial and material success to a broad public and frequently became the objects of bureaucratic and legal battles following World War II. In turn, these journeys often speak to the fate and evolving meaning of German Jews and their traditions in the years following the Shoah.

Despite its many strengths, it bears mention that the book would have benefited from more thorough copyediting, as well as an extra proofreading to avoid other stray errors.[2] That said, the volume remains an excellent read that one hopes might soon appear in English translation. More readers deserve to encounter this exemplary history. It tells a riveting tale about German Jewish life, individuals, and traditions in a nuanced manner, that faithfully traces the agonies and travails of the National Socialist regime and Shoah without neglecting the dynamic, innovative aspects of German Jewish life and the many book collections that serve today as a testament to this rich history.

2. Los Angeles, for instance, is not a state capital (111, footnote 233) and *bet sefer* does not mean "library" but "school" in Hebrew (82).