

# HOUSES OF THE BOOK

## The Leo Baeck Institute: Programs, Collections, and Organization of the Library\*

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### History

The Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) was founded thirty years ago by the Council of Jews from Germany, and was organized in independent centers in New York, London and Jerusalem. It was established through the initiative of a group of Jewish scholars and intellectual community leaders who had fled from Nazi persecution. They included Martin Buber, the philosopher; Gershom Scholem, the renowned scholar; and Rabbi Leo Baeck, eminent theologian, former senior Rabbi of Berlin, and president of the all-embracing representative organization of the Jews of Germany prior to his deportation to the Terezin concentration camp. Leo Baeck survived and became the Institute's first international President, consenting to have the Institute named after him. In his words, the Institute was established to "retrace, collect and . . . preserve all that Jews living in German-speaking countries have experienced and achieved." Siegfried Moses, the first president of the Leo Baeck Institute-New York, addressed the question of responsibility for carrying out this mission:

The founders of the Institute started from the premise that the generation of Jews who had come from Germany ought to carry out this task and ought, at least in the initial stages, to be its foremost promoter. Ultimately, the Institute's aim is to provide a comprehensive history of German Jewry; the first step towards this goal must be the tracing and preservation of source material which might otherwise easily be lost for ever.

These lines were written on the occasion of the Institute's tenth anniversary. Twenty years have passed and this year, the LBI proudly celebrates its thirtieth birthday. With modest perspective, we can discern that its life-span falls into three distinct phases. The first years were, as Dr. Moses points out, largely devoted to the collection of material, both archival and printed, which was on the

point of vanishing. With the founding of the Institute, many Jews who had brought libraries and family documents and treasures with them from Europe recognized in LBI a worthy repository for books and manuscripts, artifacts and genealogies, as well as a variety of other objects which they felt would contribute to, and enhance, an organization dedicated to keeping alive the memory of an entire culture and way of life.

Before many years had gone by, the need for preservation and cataloging became more pressing. While this second phase has by no means been completed, the Institute has truly come of age in what I think of as the third phase. As LBI has become better known as a treasure-trove of esoteric and ephemeral material available nowhere else on the American continent—in many instances nowhere else at all—it has also expanded its activities to serve the interests of a growing number of scholars and researchers in a wide range of subject areas.

### Current Activities

The purpose of the Leo Baeck Institute is the promotion of public knowledge and historical research in the field of German-speaking Jewry through: 1) the formation and maintenance of a library and archives; 2) research and scholarship grants (LBI sponsors an annual scholarship for graduate students working on doctoral dissertations); 3) preparation and publication of scholarly books and articles in English, German and Hebrew which reflect the infinitely varied and undiminished interest in the spiritual development, intellectual growth, and political and cultural influence of emancipated western European Jewry—particularly in the fields of history, literature, philosophy, theology, and art history; 4) lectures, faculty seminars, conferences, and symposia offering the opportunity for free exchange of ideas on topics of scholarly interest; 5) exhibits open to the public; and

6) cooperation with other educational and scholarly organizations.

### LBI-New York

The Jewish communities of Germany, Austria and other German-speaking areas of Europe had a long and illustrious history before the Nazis destroyed them. Much of the work of collecting, recording and preserving all that pertains to that history and to the works of German-Jewish writers, poets, scientists, scholars and artists is carried out at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. To a large degree, this work also concerns aspects of the societal and cultural history of the United States, since German-born Jews were immigrants to this country who made considerable contributions to diverse strata of its life. The LBI, especially through its large holdings of family histories and of literary correspondence, represents an important source for the study of that group in this country.

The LBI-New York, a research and study center utilized by students and scholars from all over the world, consists of a library and archives, a lecture center, and a museum. While all LBIs—New York, London, and Jerusalem—foster research and publication, only the New York LBI houses a library and a comprehensive archive that is considered the outstanding documentation center of its kind in the Western Hemi-

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sphere. It offers dynamic lecture, exhibit, and seminar programs. American as well as European scholars consider LBI the central library, archives and research institute for the history of German-speaking Jews in the modern era. LBI reaches out to the general public, as well as to those with a particular interest in Jewish and European history, literature and art. Further, it has fostered and encouraged a growing scholarly community.

### The Library Collection

The library holds 50,000 volumes, as well as close to 5,000 titles on microfilm from the Wiener Library collections, most of which had not been available in the U. S. until their acquisition by LBI. A unique collection of over 3,000 volumes tells the story of almost every Jewish community in Germany and Austria. Others present the general history of German-speaking Jews, or deal with literature, philosophy, and religion. The library also includes family histories and business reports emanating from enterprises owned by Jews. Furthermore, there is a rare collection of over 750 German language periodicals published by Jews from the 18th through the 20th centuries. With regard to the last, reviewers have noted that "LBI's collection of such serial material is probably the most extensive outside Germany and may, for that matter, even surpass any in Germany." (*College and Research Libraries*, May 1971). A collection of belles-lettres represents one of the largest collections of literature by German-speaking Jews assembled at one location. Among other special collections are nearly all the first editions of works by the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and the writers Heinrich Heine, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Franz Kafka. Many of these items were salvaged from once famous Jewish libraries confiscated and dispersed by the Nazis.

The library's guest book lists the varied topics pursued by visitors. Readers have sought information on topics as diverse as: Jewish communities in Germany, Austria, Alsace, and Bohemia; Jewish philosophers; the development of the rabbinate; the history of antisemitism; the emigration of German Jews to the United States; the German-Jewish milieu of Kafka's Prague; and synagogue architecture in Germany, Austria, Alsace and Lorraine. Research topics range from Jewish communal and family histories to the participation of Jews in the political parties, feminist movements, and cultural context of German history.

In 1970, LBI issued the first volume of the printed catalog of its library. This catalog, a 620-page book, lists only a small portion of current holdings. It has become an in-

dispensable and widely cited reference work due to its bibliographic excellence, as well as to the widespread interest in its subject. Additional volumes are in preparation.

### Organization of the Library

An interesting, though rather obscure, system prevailed at the Institute during the early years. Classification consisted of a notation combining letters with Roman numerals, followed by Arabic numbers which represented the accession sequence. For example, C I stood for "History of the Jews, General;" if a book was numbered C I 356 1074, that meant that it was the 356th book to be put into the "History of the Jews, General" group, and the 1074th book to be entered into the accessions list. (This accessions list provided useful information regarding the item's acquisition: date, source, price and the like.) These numbers did *not* yield any clue to the book's whereabouts; the class number was just that—and not a shelf mark. In a building which at that time provided no systematized library stacks, shelving was somewhat haphazard. Within each class, books were meant to stand in alphabetical order; usually, but not always, alphabetically by author. In the case of Jewish community histories in Germany, the alphabetical order was based on locality.

With very few exceptions, all books were represented in a card catalog. This extensive catalog was also rather idiosyncratic, and tended to yield information only to those who approached it with personal understanding and a certain measure of affection. While it would never reveal *where* a book was to be found, it did manage to give the researcher as much information about the book's physical aspects and scope as a first-rate Library of Congress (LC) card; sometimes more, and frequently bilingually as well.

The link between book and catalog was provided by a very knowledgeable, dedicated and helpful staff blessed with an excellent memory for where every item could be located. Had the library remained small and its librarians perpetually youthful, there would have been no need for change. But since the former was undesirable and the latter impossible, conversion to Library of Congress Classification and Subject Headings began in February 1968.

Several Library of Congress Subject Headings have been modified for the needs of LBI. LC has the subject heading HOLOCAUST, JEWISH (1939-1945); since we deal only with the Jewish experience, our heading is simply "HOLOCAUST." The subject ANTISEMITISM has been used by LC to cover both antisemitic literature and

studies of the phenomenon, its origins, effects, etc. The subject JEWISH QUESTION has, however, been used to cover an overlapping area with what appears to us as a certain lack of sensitivity. [*LC has abolished the latter heading subsequent to the presentation of this paper.—Eds.*] We have defined these two subjects differently: "ANTISEMITISM" is used for those books which are antisemitic and which discuss the subject of the "Jewish question" from an antisemitic point of view; material by Jewish and philosemitic authors dealing with the same subject gets the heading "JEWISH QUESTION." We also have sizable collections of books dealing with combating antisemitism, to which we have assigned the subject "ANTISEMITISM, RESISTANCE TO."

The LC subject PAGANISM is self-explanatory; however, we have recently acquired a body of work dealing with what can only be labeled "Neo-paganism," namely the Nazi return to the worship of gods of Teutonic mythology and the celebration of pre-Christian Germanic rites and festivals. Thus, this local subject heading has been established in our catalog. In addition to modifying and supplementing LC subject headings, we have found it advisable not to use all of the subdivisions which LC enumerates, when we have only a few books dealing with a particular subject.

In the area of classification we have found, as well, that at times we need to get more specific than the Library of Congress. Our main subject strength lies in the history of Jewish communities in Germany; much of our material is unique and has never been cataloged by LC. If we take the LC class mark DS 135 G4 B4, this translates into: History of the Jews (DS), by country (135), in Germany (G4), by city-Berlin (B4). LC expands the cutter number B4 to arrange individual works by author in an alphabetical sequence. We cannot use that kind of expansion because the augmented cutter might conflict with the cutter needed for the next community. For that reason, we add a third cutter for the author. In cases where the author has several publications dealing with the same city, we expand the author's cutter number to bring the titles into alphabetical order. While the class number thus gets longer, it is still easier to understand and handle than a lengthy string of digits attached to a letter.

Another instance of our need to deviate from LC occurred several years ago when Franz Kafka excited the scholarly interest of an increasing number of writers, thus creating crowding within the classification. The basic number for Kafka is PT (German literature), 2621 (authors whose names begin with the letter K), A26 (cuttered from the sec-

ond letter of the author's name). The second cutter—with the initial span of numbers in A reserved for autobiographies, diaries, correspondence and collections—represents the title of the author's work. Numbers from Z5 on are reserved for works about the author. When hundreds of books and articles appeared dealing with Kafka, we found ourselves with as many as 7 digits following the Z. The solution proved simple: we augmented Kafka's cutter number to A262 for all secondary literature and used the second cutter for the authors of critical works. This expedient proved so useful that we have adopted it for other authors who enjoyed sudden surges of scholarly interest.

As for the use of Library of Congress cataloging copy, we often add scope notes and partial contents to the record to alert our readers to aspects of the work that may be relevant to their research. For instance, many books contain lists of Jewish residents of a city prior to 1933; or lists of Jews deported to the camps; or lists of survivors—with vital statistics—at the time when these camps were liberated. Many people visit our library in the hope of finding just this kind of information.

This customization of LC cataloging copy is time-consuming and painstaking. We nevertheless feel that we have a special responsibility to be meticulous in this aspect of our work.

Seventeen years after beginning reclassification, all our books—backlog, current acquisitions in a variety of languages, hard copy and microfilm—are cataloged according to LC. We have a divided catalog in the reading room, a shelf list, and a comprehensive name authority file in the cataloging office. Our books are accessible, findable and well processed.

### The Archives

The LBI Archives constitute one of the largest repositories of German-Jewish history in the world. Numerous individuals, families, and organizations have deposited their documents at LBI. Besides family papers, community histories, and business and public records dating back to the 16th century, the archives house a large photo collection and contain the literary estates, as well as smaller collections and correspondence, of more than 150 famous writers, scholars, and public figures. One finds, for example, correspondence and diaries of the philosophers Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig; letters and manuscripts of the Austrian novelist and poet Joseph Roth; of the author, journalist, editor, and early opponent of Nazism, Leopold Schwarzschild; of the writer and theater-

and literary-critic Julius Bab; and the letters of Albert Einstein and of the German industrialist and statesman Walther Rathenau. The archives also house about 600 unpublished memoirs written by German Jews from 1790 to 1945. These memoirs are a rich source for social historians, since they portray the private lives, thoughts, and perceptions of ordinary people. They also serve political and economic historians, because many of them were written by entrepreneurs and political figures.

### Publications

LBI has published 29 yearbooks of English-language essays to date. Each yearbook includes a selected bibliography of post-war publications on German Jewry. So far, this unique bibliography has listed over 18,000 titles of books and articles published in periodicals, *Festschriften*, etc., and has become an important reference tool for scholars and libraries.

*LBI News*, published semi-annually, reports on the activities of the Institute and its newest collections of interest to a general public; *LBI Library and Archives News* is sent free of charge to libraries, archives, university departments, and professors interested in details of LBI-New York's collections.

***The LBI Archives constitute one of the largest repositories of German-Jewish history in the world.***

### Public Programs

LBI sponsors monthly lectures during the academic year, as well as the annual Leo Baeck Memorial Lectures, which are delivered by renowned scholars from such major universities as Columbia, Yale, UCLA, and Princeton.

In addition to presenting two or three exhibits of its own collections each year, LBI also provides photo and historical material to other museums, and co-sponsors exhibits with them. Recently, it co-sponsored an exhibit entitled "A Tale of Two Cities—Jewish Life in Frankfurt and Istanbul, 1750–1870"

at the Jewish Museum in New York. The Institute also provides material to museums throughout the world and to U. S. universities for special programs.

### Conclusion

The library at LBI is only one aspect of a many-faceted endeavor. We are proud of the services we render in the field of scholarship and research. But there is another aspect to our work as well, one which is less frequently noted; yet it yields special rewards and incentives.

I shall always remember the day we received a visit from a lady, accompanied by her grandson, who might have been about ten years old. She consulted the card catalog and then asked to see a certain book. While it was being paged, she explained to me. "I know he will not be able to read it, because his German is not good enough; but I want him to see the book his grandfather wrote." Almost as an after-thought, she added. "His grandfather was killed in Auschwitz."

### LBI Publications

#### Catalogs

*Inventory List of Archival Collections* No. 1, 1971.

Leo Baeck Institute, New York, Bibliothek und Archiv; *Katalog*, hrsg. von Max Kreutzberger, unter Mitarbeit von Irmgard Foerg. Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1970— Band I: Deutschsprachige juedische Gemeinden-Zeitungen, Zeitschriften, Jahrbuecher, Almanache und Kalender-Unveroeffentlichte Memoiren und Erinnerungsschriften.

#### Serials

*Bulletin*, 1957— . Annual. In German. — Index, v. 1–12, 1974.

*LBI Library and Archives News*, 1975— Semi-annual.

*LBI News*, 1960— . Semi-annual.

*Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 1955— —General Index, Vols. I–XX, 1982.

#### Series

*Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture*, 1958— Annual.

*Publications of the Leo Baeck Institute*. Unnumbered series.

*Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen*. In German.

*Veroeffentlichungen*. Unnumbered series. In German.

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