INTERNATIONAL SUMMER RESEARCH WORKSHOP

OVERLAPPING SPHERES: JEWS AND CHRISTIANS IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY

From July 13 through July 31, 2009, the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem convened its first international summer research workshop. Scholars came from Germany, the United States, and Israel to discuss over a period of several weeks the theme Overlapping Spheres: Jewish-Christian Relations in Early Modern Germany. In this report, I will try to delineate some of the accomplishments, challenges, and suggestions for future workshops that emerged from this undertaking.

It should be emphasized from the outset that the 10 full participants and 4-5 adjunct members of the group found this workshop to be an unusually stimulating experience, bringing together scholars with different academic perspectives but all interested in the social and intellectual lives of German Jews during a specific time period and in the relationships between Jews and their environment. The theme was defined broadly enough to encompass different perspectives while narrow enough so that all participants were conversant with the major concepts.

OBJECTIVES: In conceiving of such a workshop in Jerusalem, the idea was to attract groups of scholars to work on specific themes but also to take advantage of the rich academic resources available throughout Jerusalem and make them more easily available to our colleagues from abroad while simultaneously bringing together scholars whose research is in related areas to a common theme within the domain of the Institute. With this program LBI Jerusalem also seeks to contribute to the quality of research and to the collegiality of the research process among our colleagues from Israel and abroad and to make its own unique contribution to the international activities of the Leo Baeck Institute.

THE THEME: Our agenda was to discuss the nature, extent, and limits of contact between German Jews and Christians in the 16th-18th centuries. Considerable discussion was devoted to the debate between scholars who describe a virtual separation between Jews and Christians as symbolized by the term ‘ghetto’ and those who maintain that contacts between the groups were far more extensive. The conception of a ghetto-like separation was most ardently maintained by the late Jacob Katz, most especially in his book *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, but in recent years arguments have emerged questioning such a strict separation. The title ‘Overlapping Spheres’ is not neutral in this debate, but it leaves considerable freedom for diverse viewpoints.

PARTICIPANTS: The workshop attracted an outstanding group of scholars ranging from those who had just submitted their dissertations to senior scholars from each of the three countries.

Professor Robert Liberles Ben Gurion University, Beersheva [Convener]
Professor Marion Aptroot Dusseldorf University
Professor Elisheva Carlebach Columbia University, New York
Dr. Yaakov Deutsch Hebrew University, Jerusalem
Dr. Natalie Goldberg Bar Ilan University
In addition, 5 younger associates, most still writing their dissertations, were invited to the sessions and contributed regularly to the discussions. As the workshop proceeded, it was decided to invite several other senior scholars from Israel to join as well.

**FORMAT:** During the 18 days that we were together, the workshop convened for 6 formal sessions plus numerous informal opportunities for contact. Each seminar session lasted 2-3 hours with 30-40 minute presentations plus 20 minutes for discussion. At the end of each session, participants continued to discuss the issues at length. Usually, the participants proceeded to eat together and continue the discussion still further.

**PUBLIC CONTACTS:** In addition to the closed scholarly discussions among this tightly-defined group, several programs were organized for broader audiences. An open public session on the theme “Pleasures of the 18th Century” attracted a standing-room-only audience. Approximately 100 people from the general public and local scholars attended. The session was chaired by Professor Michael Heyd of the Hebrew University, former Chair of the Israeli Historical Society.

The workshop was scheduled to be immediately followed by the World Congress of Jewish Studies. All workshop participants were actively involved in Congress sessions including an outstanding session on the theme of Overlapping Spheres. Papers presented at the Congress were different than those presented at the earlier seminars.

**PUBLICATION:** A special section of the 2010 volume of the Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, published by Oxford University Press, will include 7 papers from participants on the Workshop theme.

**HIGHLIGHTS AND COMMENTS:** As convener, I would like to first summarize my conclusions from this endeavor. This first International Summer Research Workshop fulfilled our objectives beyond our initial hopes. Scholars with extremely tight schedules blocked out these weeks over a year in advance in order to participate. Discussions from the beginning were conducted on a high and constructive level since the participants were all conversant with the basic theme of the workshop. The common denominator of their interests also facilitated an immediate and thorough integration of junior and senior scholars, far beyond anything I have witnessed previously along these lines. Discussions regularly led to important and constructive suggestions concerning specific subjects but also posed broader, more conceptual issues that all admitted that they must now give further consideration.

Some questions were raised at the beginning at what looked like a loose schedule. This had been done intentionally to leave ample time for more informal discussions and for scholars, especially those from abroad to also take advantage of Jerusalem’s rich library and archival holdings. As it turned out, participants also used library time to meet and discuss their common interests. As the workshop entered its second and third weeks, participants now felt that the schedule was
sufficiently intensive to allow for both formal and informal contacts, but future conveners will want to consider this aspect carefully. Younger scholars made important contacts as a result of the Workshop, not only providing them with immediate resources in their work but with future points of reference as well. Even Israeli scholars from different institutions met for the first time in this framework and relationships were established.

The session at the World Congress was outstanding. The once-again standing room only audience remained throughout which is unusual for the Congress. Its success undoubtedly raised consciousness of the serious academic level of the Workshop specifically and of the Leo Baeck Institute in general. One workshop participant said to me after the session: we all know each other so well at this point that it was just fun to present together and exchange ideas once again.

Publication of a set of papers is of course essential to the continued academic level of the Workshop. I heartily recommend continued use of the LBI Yearbook as an appropriate forum since the editorial and economic infrastructure is already in place.

I would like to thank those who contributed to the success of this Workshop with administrative assistance and with their important input to the program itself: Professor Shmuel Feiner, Chair of the LBI, Jerusalem; Shlomo Meir, director of the Institute, and Sharon Gordon, who assisted in the short and long-term planning.

I am appending to this report two letters of reaction by members of the group.

Sincerely,
Robert Liberles
Ben Gurion University
3 August 2009

The three weeks of the first Leo Baeck International Summer Research Workshop have come to an end, and it will not be overstated if I say this was a unique academic experience. Although purportedly a 'pilot project', there was nothing to indicate this was a new enterprise; it was programmed to perfection. Our first meeting was devoted to get to know each other personally, as many of the participants had never had the chance to do so before. Already during our first encounter we had the opportunity to find out about our common interests and engage, over dinner, in discussing our academic endeavors, on an intimate level. The following sessions, mainly devoted to individual presentations, illuminated – at times from surprising angles – different aspects of a common theme: Jewish-Christian encounters in German lands during the early modern period. Since we all share a common background and are students of early modern German-Jewish history and culture, the presentations went straight to the point so that most of the time could be devoted to address the 'real' issues, the actual innovations brought by each of the participants, with no need for major introductions to the subjects discussed. A large part of the time during the presentations was employed to discuss primary sources, which each of the participants brought from his or her own field of study. In most cases the presentations were part of a work in progress. Since the program was organized in such a way that significant time was dedicated to input by the participants, every speaker profited greatly from the multiple feedback by the peers, as each scholar contributed insights and points of comparison informed by his or her own field of specialization. The debates extended well after the sessions, and there was not a time when the participants did not stay after finishing time, engaged in lively discussions of the topics raised during the presentations.

By bringing together scholars from different countries, this seminar gave us the opportunity to learn about work being carried out in other parts of the world, what will certainly enhance our own research. No less important was the interaction that took place during these three weeks between all the participants, ignoring any distinction between senior and junior scholars. The rhythm of the seminar was intensive enough to keep an ongoing exchange between the participants, but there was also enough time between sessions to allow us to reflect on the presentations we heard and the discussions we held, so that when meeting several days later we could resume a discussion with new thoughts and new arguments, certainly making intellectual exchange more fruitful.

I myself am glad to have established contacts with scholars from abroad, and I am also grateful for the opportunity to strengthen my academic relationships with researchers from Israel, whom I knew before but only seldom had the opportunity to talk to in an intense way as during the workshop.

Natalie Naimark-Goldberg
The workshop held at the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem on the subject of Overlapping Spheres was a great success. It brought together a small group of scholars who research a specific topic, albeit from different perspectives, ranging from intellectual developments to everyday life. The intimate nature of the group allowed for intense discussion of the themes and specific papers that were presented. Moreover, the size of the group allowed for the junior and senior scholars present to intermingle and to build connections. A third advantage of the size of the group was that it created a forum in which scholars such as myself were able to present works-in-progress, and to get feedback on new projects.

The workshop was structured such that there was a mix of intense sessions and free time, during which scholars could work on their own projects, making use of Jerusalem’s unique research facilities, as well as meet up with one another for smaller conversations. This was a strength of the program, as unlike a short conference, it allowed for opportunities to digest the material, and created a relaxed environment in which there was time to discuss the research that had been presented. If anything, my critique of the program is that I would have enjoyed more opportunities, be they formal or informal, in which we could have analyzed the different approaches that we all bring when researching the topic of Jewish-Christian relations in early modern Germany.

A wide range of subjects was presented at the workshop, including notions of how Jews and Christians both shared and maintained distinct spaces, ideas, notions of time, gender roles, leisure activities, food, and appearances. Much of this research is cutting edge, and reveals how much scholarship has evolved in the last forty years. Alongside these new approaches, the debates between scholars at this workshop also touched upon some of the most fraught issues in the historiography of the period. Among these were questions of periodization, differences between the medieval, early modern, and modern periods, the weight that should be given to intellectual movements versus social realities, and how one can interpret the simultaneous existence of antisemitism with the neighborly relations that existed between Jews and Christians. The workshop exposed the participants to new ways of looking at older questions, and fostered productive dialogue about how to understand Jews and Christians in early modern Germany.