

# From Frankfurt to New York and back: German-American collaboration for providing access to lost Jewish heritage

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# FROM FRANKFURT TO NEW YORK AND BACK: GERMAN-AMERICAN COLLABORATION FOR PROVIDING ACCESS TO LOST JEWISH HERITAGE

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## **Abstract**

The Frankfurt University Library, Germany, and two American institutions, the Center for Jewish History and its partner organization the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, have successfully established an international collaboration in a project of the virtual reconstruction of a damaged prewar book collection.

Based on the original printed catalog, the project set out to virtually recreate the prewar Freimann Collection, an important historical part of Jewish heritage and resource for Jewish Studies. The institutions involved established an effective workflow based on the division of tasks and responsibilities. The digitization of books and the creation of metadata were done by the institutions in New York, the import of the digital images and the metadata and their online presentation within the Freimann Portal was carried out by the Frankfurt University Library. The project can serve as a model for international collaboration and large-scale digitization workflows.

This paper describes the cooperation process between the Frankfurt University Library, the Center for Jewish History and the Leo Baeck Institute, showing the different aspects of the collaboration and their synergistic effects.

## **Keywords**

Jews, Europe, cultural heritage, digital project, metadata mapping, German American collaboration

The *Frankfurt University Library JCS (UB Frankfurt)* houses the most comprehensive historical collection of literature of *Science of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums)* in Germany. Named after the librarian and historian Prof. Dr. Aron Freimann (1871-1948), who was in charge of the Judaica and Hebraica Division at the library from 1898 until 1933, the *Freimann Collection* is the result of the important scholarly movement of *Science of Judaism* among European Jews in the 19th and the early 20th century that laid the foundation for modern Jewish Studies. Rooted in the Jewish enlightenment movement, *Science of Judaism* applied modern philological critical methodology of textual studies to the texts regarded until then as sacred religious scriptures and created a vast literature about all aspects of Judaism. Curated by Freimann, the collection became the largest of its kind on the European continent in the prewar area of World War II. Today these books are an invaluable primary resource for historical research not only for Jewish Studies but also for a diversity of disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, as they provide insight into a broad range of religious and cultural developments worldwide. In 1932 a catalogue of the collection, the so-called *Freimann-Catalogue* was printed and reprinted 1968 that still serves for bibliographical help in the reference departments of prominent Judaica libraries worldwide (Freimann, 1932).

During World War II the collection was damaged partly and about 25 % of the books were lost, while the remaining books served as foundation for developing the Hebraica and Judaica Division of the library by adding modern literature of Jewish Studies. Even though titles are missing, the historic collection still enjoys an outstanding reputation in the international community of scholars. The rising demand for these historical resources in the last decades made the loss of certain titles that once belonged to the collection, even more visible. A growing number of scholars are researching Jewish topics and become aware of the lack of these titles as they are documented in the *Freimann-Catalogue*. Access to the books within the collection became further complicated by the fact that titles today have to be searched in online catalogues, where they appear in a different form, because cataloguing rules have changed over the years. In some cases the deterioration of the physical appearance of the books made lending impossible and access to them had to be denied totally.

Realizing the significance of these unique resources of *Science of Judaism* for modern Jewish Studies the *UB Frankfurt* reached already in the late 1990ies the decision for the virtual reconstruction of the *Freimann Collection* through digitization and online presentation of the texts on the internet.

### **Earlier projects**

In a first stage the periodicals of the *Freimann collection* were digitized and presented online via *Compact Memory*, the portal of Jewish historical periodicals of the German speaking realm. Carried out in the years 2000-2006, this project was financed by the *German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft / DFG)* and realized in cooperation with two partners, Professor Dr. Hans Otto Horch, former Professor for German-Jewish literature and culture history at the *RWTH Aachen* and the *Germania Judaica*, a library of German-Jewish literature in Cologne. After completion of the project in 2006 *Compact Memory* offered access to 100 complete periodicals. Today the portal is run by the *UB Frankfurt* and presents the digital images of 175 German-Jewish periodicals, some of them as full text after processing with OCR, others indexed in depth intellectually so that they can be searched according to various strategies. All periodicals can be browsed according to their volumes and issues, pages can be downloaded and printed (Heuberger, 2014).

In a second stage, the monographs remaining within the *Freimann collection* at the *UB Frankfurt* were digitized and presented online. Carried out in the years 2007-2010, this project was financed by the *DFG*, too. On the basis of the catalogue the volumes were microfilmed, digitized and presented online within the *Freimann Portal*. Some of the titles missing in the *UB Frankfurt* were identified in other libraries, ordered by interlibrary loan and then microfilmed and digitized as well. Thus a large part of the original prewar collection could be reconstructed virtually, while in reality the physical books remain scattered in different German libraries. This project could not be completed however, because on the one hand these procedures involved qualified staff and were very time-consuming, and on the other hand some titles could not be found in German libraries or were too fragile to be supplied for the project. As a result some resources were still not digitized and not presented in the portal.

### **German American collaboration**

The international collaboration of the Judaica Division of the *UB Frankfurt* with two renowned institutions in the USA, the *Center for Jewish History (Center)* and within it, the *Leo Baeck Institute (LBI)*, both located in New York City, brought the realization of the project's original aim to virtually reconstruct the complete famous prewar collection considerable closer. The cooperation combined three partners that have overlapping collection scopes and identical aims in recovering Jewish heritage. All of them are most important institutions in their respective fields: The Judaica Division of the *UB Frankfurt* represents one of the richest European Judaica Collections and the largest collection of Hebraica and Judaica resources in Germany. The *LBI*, New York, is today the most significant repository of primary source material and scholarship on the Jewish communities of Central Europe. The *Center* in New York is the home to five partner organizations including the *LBI*, generating the frame as a public research institution and providing among other services the logistical and technical know-how. The American institutions understood the significance of the *Freimann Portal* from the beginning as an important primary resource: It embeds single titles according to thematic classification within the specific collection and thus enables browsing according to topics. Hence *LBI* and *Center* agreed to place their sources to the disposal of the *Freimann Portal* and provided digital surrogates of the original documents within its existing framework.

The common interest in advancing the accessibility and use of these documents led to the formation of a common collaborative project that was funded by a joint grant of the *National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)* and the *DFG* and carried out in the years 2011-2014. On the basis of the existing *Freimann Portal* the *Center* and *LBI* joined the effort and undertook the digitization of additional materials, found mainly in the *LBI* collections, some books belonging to the collections of three other *Center* partners. Through this collaboration the most comprehensive digital library of *Science of Judaism* in existence was created, offering academic and cultural resources from the pre-Holocaust era using 21st century technology and practice (LBI 2015).

### **Work Flow**

The existence of the 1932 printed *Freimann-Catalogue* constituted a key element of this cultural reconstruction project. It enabled the identification of the volumes that were part of the prewar collection and had been lost in Frankfurt in the meantime and at the same time provided relevant information for checking and comparing editions in New York. Each partner institution had an explicit defined role and thus focused on specific as well as different issues in the collaboration process. First, the staff at the *UB Frankfurt* identified the titles of the prewar collection that were still missing in the online portal and generated lists with bibliographical entries according to the *Freimann-Catalogue*. Together with a pool of unique identifiers (URNs) these lists were sent to the *LBI* in New York.

Second, *LBI* Library staff handled the selection and verification of the books based on the missing lists from Frankfurt as well as comparing them to the holdings of the *LBI*. This proved to be a major challenge, as the bibliographical entries in the lists according to the *Freimann-Catalogue* are displayed by rules from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus they differed from bibliographical records in the current American online library system.

In order to match the corresponding images and metadata later, each book (or each volume in the case of multi-volumes) was initially assigned to a unique identifier from the pool of URNs monitored by the *UB Frankfurt*. The books were locally catalogued using the MARC 21 standard in the online catalog of the *LBI*. Periodically, an accumulated set of bibliographic records in MARC-XML was sent by e-mail to the *UB Frankfurt*. After being catalogued, batches of 50 to 100 books were passed on to the nearby *Center's Gruss Lipper Digital Lab* for digitization and quality control. The page image sequence of each volume was directly scanned into a folder named by the corresponding URN. From the *Digital Lab* the TIFF master images of each batch were shipped to Frankfurt using two 1TB external hard drives as data shuttles.

Third, the *UB Frankfurt* transformed the MARC 21 bibliographical records to the proprietary PICA format and ingested them into the online library cataloguing system run by *HeBIS*, the *Hessische BibliotheksInformationsSystem* based on the internationally widespread software OCLC PICA. The bibliographical records were adapted and enriched including links to the German authority database (GND). These authority data allow the further use of these data as Linked Open Data sets particularly by extracting the "sameAs" links into the Virtual International Authority File (*VIAF*) for authors and GeoNames for geographical terms. From this stage on, the standard digitization procedure of the *UB Frankfurt* could be applied: The images were imported and connected to the corresponding metadata from the catalogue by the URN identifier. The internal data standard METS with embedded MODS of the digitization system is built by a mapping from the catalogue system. This allows a direct METS/MODS metadata export according to the German application profile. A mapping to the Linked Open Data standard EDM is also available.

For each book the process of digitization was checked carefully page by page and the materials were structured according to their content, marking title and final pages, chapter entries, etc. Credit lines citing the contributing partner were added to the descriptive information as well as subject headings, systematic indexing and the connection to Wikipedia entries, thus enhancing accessibility to the resources in the portal. By activating the metadata the digital images became visible in the *Freimann-Portal* and on the web. Additional indexing of the relevant chapters of the printed *Freimann-Catalogue* enables browsing through the collection and allows for the discovery of unknown titles relevant to the subject.

All additional metadata including the permanent URL to the new online edition as well as the internet derivatives – JPEGs in different sizes and a PDF - generated from the master TIFFs were stored batchwise on the shuttle disk and sent back to New York. During the time of the cooperation the *UB Frankfurt* oversaw the project's main objectives and incorporated new digital content into the existing *Freimann Portal* continuously. While the preparation and selection of materials was an intensive and time consuming process, which delayed the actual start of the project, many of the following steps in the project plan were undertaken concurrently once the effective workflow was established. The quality of the metadata enables the material to be seen and retrieved via well-known search engines like *Bielefeld Academic Search Engine* and *Google* or union catalogues like *Europeana* and in near future the *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*, thus producing hundreds of visitors using the site and the documents daily.

The *UB Frankfurt* uses the *Visual Library* data management system to manage all digital content, including descriptive metadata and the digital assets themselves. All project partners are committed to the long-term care of the digital assets produced by the project and have procedures to secure the long-term management of and access to their digital online content. Building an infrastructure that will sustain not only the assets themselves but the access provided to them is crucial. In addition to access via the *Freimann Portal* at the *UB Frankfurt*, the digital assets resulting from the project were also ingested into the digital assets management system of the *Center for Jewish History*, providing an additional access point through which researchers can discover and view materials.

Reconstructing the largest and most significant Judaica collection on the European continent before World War II virtually and making it possible for researchers to discover and access this cultural heritage collection again is an accomplishment that cannot be overestimated. The intention and aims

of the project have been fully achieved, the resonance is more than positive. Long-term viability will be ensured by the frequent use of these sources. Adhering to best practices in both digitization and accessibility may guarantee sustainability in the long run. At the same time the project can serve as a prototype for successful international collaboration, producing effective workflows for large scale digitization and access, creating new ways of communication and establishing data transfer from Frankfurt to New York and back.

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