

## LEON FELDMAN

(1921 – 2008)

*Howard R. Feldman*

Dr. Leon A. Feldman, renowned scholar, prolific author, and master teacher, passed away on July 23, 2008, at the age of 87 after a brief battle with cancer. He served as Professor of Jewish History at the Touro College Graduate School of Jewish Studies since September 2004. Dr. Feldman was born in Berlin and found refuge in England and Canada during World War II, eventually settling in New York. In 1947, he was ordained as a rabbi by the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. He earned a DHL from Yeshiva University and a PhD from Columbia University. He also received a doctorate from the University of Amsterdam, and bachelor's and master's degrees from Oxford University as well as a doctorate from Yeshiva University.

Dr. Feldman founded the Department of Hebraic Studies at Rutgers University and taught there from 1962–1992, serving as Distinguished Professor of Hebraic Studies. He also held visiting faculty appointments at universities in Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Spain, and Switzerland, and was the founding rector of the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, Germany.

Dr. Feldman's many scholarly volumes and articles focus primarily upon medieval rabbinic literature and, in particular, on responsa as a source for the study of Jewish history. His critical edition of the sermons of Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi was awarded the



Jerusalem Prize for Literature and Jewish Thought in 1975. In 1988, he received the Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon Prize for Rabbinic Literature and Jewish History. Dr. Feldman was the recipient of numerous prestigious academic fellowships, and served as consultant to a wide variety of Jewish communal and educational organizations. He was a Fellow of the American Academy for Jewish Research since 1982.

He is survived by his wife Elizabeth Small Feldman, his brother Emmanuel Feldman, his sons Howard R. Feldman and Peter B. Telem, his granddaughters Debra Belowich and Adele and Michal Telem, his grandsons Brian Feldman and Elan Telem, and his great grandchildren Alexa and Talia Belowich.

*Howard R. Feldman is Professor in the Biology Department at The Anna Ruth and Mark Hasten School of Touro College and son of Leon A. Feldman.*

## JONATHAN FRANKEL

(1935 – 2008)

*Steven J. Zipperstein*

Jonathan Frankel, arguably the most highly regarded historian of modern Jewry of his generation, died at the age of 72 of cancer in Jerusalem on May 7, 2008. A man of unusual generosity of spirit and the author of many works, his academic reputation is based primarily on two masterpieces of historical scholarship: *Prophecy and Politics* (1981), and *The Damascus Affair* (1997). He wrote on an epic scale, dense, yet lucid examinations of international politics and their intersection with Jews, profoundly original work that never broadcast its innovations that were left to readers to discover in prose that was subtle, unobtrusively learned.

Born in London on July 15, 1935, educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, Frankel completed his PhD in 1961 and moved to Israel in 1964 to teach at the Hebrew University. He remained at the Hebrew University until the time of his retirement, while also teaching (and holding, intermittently, a Chair) at University College, London, and from time to time occupying visiting positions at Columbia, Stanford, and elsewhere. He came from a family of Jewish businessmen, public figures, professionals, artists, and scholars with rabbis in the not-too-distant past, and he was raised in a traditional Jewish home with strong Zionist commitments. His devotion to Israel ran deep. It was wedded to an unyielding belief in liberalism, a crucial feature of Frankel's highly active political life as well as his

scholarship, and he was a fixture of Israel's peace movement. He wrote often for intellectual magazines there and abroad about Israeli affairs, and for years sat regularly at the Peace Now table outside one of Jerusalem's larger department stores arguing patiently with passersby.

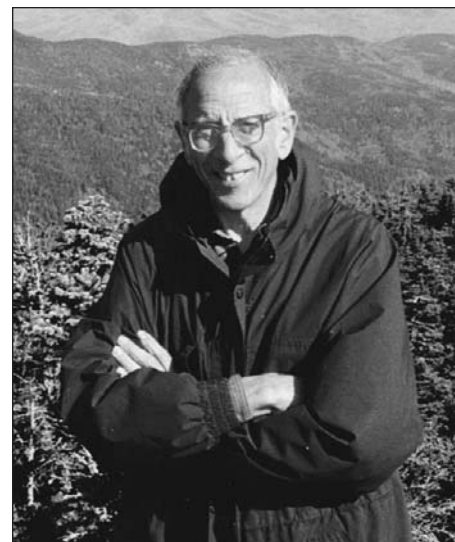
He possessed an immense amount of knowledge about a great deal and left his mark on many different areas in modern Jewish history and also Russian studies. His brilliant, book-length introductory essay in his first book, "Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism, 1895–1903" remains one of the finest analytical essays on the origins of Russian Marxism. His introductory essay to *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1992) is still the best summation of the state of contemporary Jewish historiography on modern Europe. He wrote the most persuasive summation in any language of the achievements of Simon Dubnow. And his introductory article in the 1988 volume of the influential Hebrew University-sponsored annual he co-edited, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, on the condition of European Jewish life during the World War I is to-date the most compelling statement on the topic.

In *Prophecy and Politics* he rewrote the history of Jews and socialism with its epicenter in the Russian empire but with its indelible influence felt elsewhere, in Britain, the United States, and pre-state Jewish Palestine. It is a book of 690 pages in small print. A close reader of grand theorists like Hannah Arendt and Jacob Talmon (who was a good friend of Frankel's) and the student in Cambridge of E. H. Carr, his own scholarship turned its back on all rhetorical excess and was built with immense care and patience, and due recognition of the achievements of others on a commodious foundation of primary source material.

The density of his prose, its texture and detail perhaps obscured for some the elegance of his writing. Frankel wrote beautifully: his books were very long, but his sentences were often quite short, very much to the point; he knew well how to encapsulate huge, often complex issues, to summarize lucidly without losing anything crucial.

His academic ambitions were great and he sought, in his own way, to produce historical works no less sweeping than those of Talmon or Arendt. (He once admitted to me that quite nearly every year he reread Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* for its intellectual vitality, not its veracity.) He left his mark across the expanse of the modern Jewish experience: No historian better explained how inconceivable it was to understand Russian socialism without fully appreciating its overriding preoccupation with Jews. Few wrote with deeper insight about the intersections of personality and history. Interested, above all, in the intellectual background to politics, Frankel never lost sight of the vagaries of biography, and the human portraits in his books are astute, and finely crafted. He preferred to examine history through the prism of crisis: In *The Damascus Affair* he presented a profoundly unsettling portrait of antisemitism on an international scale, a study of mendacity and expediency based on research in numerous archives over the course of many years. It is an indispensable study in international history.

Frankel was a lanky man, agile, a mountain climber, his voice softly rumbled, and he had a wry sense of humor, strong opinions, and an overwhelming, pervasive gentleness. His laugh was boyish, never sardonic, and full of pleasure. A historian of brilliance and influence, he was not merely respected by peers and students but loved as few are. Those who trusted him ran the



gamut of Israel's fractious cultural and political scene. He tolerated with good humor intrusions, and cared profoundly, to the detriment of his own time and peace of mind, about those around him. Until his last days he could be seen on a walker on the Hebrew University campus hand-delivering letters of recommendation for students and colleagues.

He was a man of understatement and deep cultivation but without pretense, a man with few regrets and a sense of fairness, humanity, and empathy that few could match. He leaves behind his wife, the Russian political scientist Edith Rogovin Frankel, two daughters Leora Frankel and Rachel Heller, and five grandchildren. A selection of his essays will appear next year with Cambridge University Press, publisher of nearly all his books, entitled *Crisis, Revolution, and Jewish Politics in Russia*.

*Steven J. Zipperstein, Daniel E. Koshland Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford University, is currently Schuyler Fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. His most recent book, Rosenfeld's Lives: Fame, Oblivion, and the Furies of Writing, will be published this spring by Yale University Press.*