

Alfred and Karl Marchionini

Politics, science, commitment

The name of the Alfred and Karl Marchionini Foundation ultimately goes back to the co-founder Tilde Soetbeer-Marchionini, because after the death of her husband, she had stipulated that the name of her husband's father Alfred should be mentioned in the foundation's name rather than her own. She argued that it was Karl Marchionini to whom Alfred owed his social attitude. The lives of all three founders and namesakes of our foundation are characterized by basic attitudes and experiences that are also worth looking into with regard to the self-image of the foundation and the residential home. Much of this was known through friendly contacts and oral tradition. But in the transition from communicative to cultural memory in which we find ourselves, there is always the danger of forgetting. The following outline, which is based primarily on the work of the Leipzig historian Gerald Wiemers on Alfred and Karl Marchionini, on Reiner Möckelmann's study on the exile of Ernst Reuter and his circle of friends in Turkey, on publications by Alfred Marchionini and on further source research, is intended to provide a brief history of the Marchioninis, although the significance of Alfred Marchionini as a physician is not dealt with in detail, not least because the author lacks the expertise in medical history to do so. Finally, an assessment is given of which basic attitudes, values and historical experiences were formative for "the Marchioninis" and are relevant for a discussion of our foundation's self-image.

Karl Marchionini (1875-1926)

Karl Marchionini was born on July 14, 1875 to poor parents in the East Prussian town of Heilsberg (today: Lidzbark Warmiński), in the Catholic region of Warmia. After attending elementary school, he learned the painting trade. With a wide range of interests and a thirst for education, Marchionini turned to the socialist movement at an early age and was already working on the social democratic Königsberger Volkszeitung at the end of the 1890s, soon becoming its editor.

As a city councillor, he also took on local political responsibility and was particularly committed to caring for the poor. In addition to his journalistic work, he also made a name for himself with independent publications on the issue of agricultural workers. Violations of censorship regulations and accusations of lèse majesté earned him several short prison sentences. Karl Marchionini married Auguste Domnik in 1899. The marriage produced five children, one of whom died as an infant. Alfred, born in 1899, was the eldest child.

Like the SPD co-chairman Hugo Haase, who worked as a lawyer in Königsberg, Karl Marchionini was opposed to the SPD's support for the German Empire's war effort in 1914 and, like Haase, he joined the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, the rallying point for Social Democratic opponents of the war, in 1917. In September 1917, he switched to the Leipziger Volkszeitung, which had become the property of the USPD. Although Marchionini occasionally sympathized with council-democratic ideas during the November Revolution of 1918/19, he did not belong to the left wing of the USPD, which voted to join the Communist International in the autumn of 1920 and merged with the KPD. Karl Marchionini remained a Social Democrat and reaffirmed his rejection of communism in the pamphlet "Against Bolshevism". However, Marchionini was also active in literature and shortly before his death was able to see the premiere of his satirical, free-thinking comedy "Das Recht der zweiten Nacht" at the Kleines Schauspielhaus in Leipzig. He died of a serious heart condition on June 26, 1926. His funeral became a powerful demonstration of Leipzig's social democracy. He was spared the catastrophe of National Socialism, but all of his writings were included in the Nazi regime's "list of harmful and undesirable literature".

Alfred Marchionini (1899-1965)

Alfred Marchionini was born in Königsberg on January 12, 1899. He began his medical studies in Königsberg in 1917, but this was interrupted by two years of military service, mainly as a medical corpsman in Macedonia. From 1919, he was able to continue his training in Leipzig and Freiburg im Breisgau, which he did very quickly. At the end of 1922, he completed his studies with an examination and a doctorate in philosophy and medicine. He received his license to practice medicine on July 1, 1923. After intermediate stops in Leipzig, on October 1, 1924 he was offered a position as a full assistant (scientific assistant on revocation) at the Department of Dermatology at the University of Freiburg i.B. Regardless of the obligations he had to take on for his family after the early death of his father, Marchionini habilitated in February 1928, making him the only private lecturer among the Freiburg assistants. In the same year, together with his teacher Heinz Schade, he published the article "Der Säuremantel der Haut" (The acid mantle of the skin) in the *Klinische Wochenschrift*, which marked the discovery of the acid mantle of the skin.

On February 19, 1931, Marchionini married Mathilde Soetbeer, a psychiatrist of the same age who ran her own practice. As she had a Jewish grandmother, she was banned from continuing her practice when the National Socialists came to power. This also had an impact on Marchionini's career. His patron Georg-Alexander Rost, head of the Freiburg Dermatology Clinic, had been forcibly demerited in 1934 at the age of 56 for membership of the left-wing liberal German Democratic Party. Marchionini had already given up his SPD membership in 1930, but his fundamental anti-Nazi attitude was known and he was interested in his wife's Jewish grandmother. Rost's successor Alexander Stühmer made inquiries about this before taking office. On February 21, 1934, the rector of Freiburg University confirmed the fact that Mrs. Soetbeer-Marchionini had a Jewish grandmother and added that, to his knowledge, Alfred Marchionini had "no prospect of appointment due to this fact". At this time, the rector of Freiburg University was none other than the philosopher Martin Heidegger.

In 1935, it was also questioned whether he would be able to keep his position as assistant doctor. From 1936 onwards, Marchionini therefore sought to emigrate to Turkey, where foreign experts were welcome as part of Atatürk's educational reforms. Marchionini and his wife were not refugees in the strict sense of the word. The University of Freiburg had granted him leave of absence. He therefore occupied a special position in German society in Ankara. He had access to official circles, including the ambassador Franz von Papen, Hitler's one-time stooge, and also lived in a circle of emigrants such as the later Social Democratic mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter. In the ten years from 1938 to 1948 that Marchionini spent in Turkey, he built up dermatology in Turkey, always supported by his wife, and was confronted with problems and diseases that did not exist in Germany, such as noma disease, also known as water cancer, which eats away at the soft tissue and bones of the face. Noma is a bacterial disease and at the same time a typical disease of poverty. Marchionini made quite a successful effort to learn the local language, traveled his country of exile with curiosity and, above all, showed great and successful professional commitment, from which numerous patients benefited and which led to the establishment of a dermatological institute. In the end, this commitment even earned him an offer of Turkish citizenship, which he turned down because he had always seen himself as German in Turkey and lived with Germany. He also had contact with the resistance: Carl Goerdeler, one of the conspirators of July 20, 1944, with whom he was friends, came to Turkey in 1939 and discussed the prospects of a revolution with him. In concrete terms, however, Marchionini was primarily involved in many cases for emigrants in less secure circumstances. The fact that his patients included numerous diplomats, including Franz von Papen, enabled him to exert influence time and again.

The most dramatic was his appeal to von Papen for around ten thousand Jews with Turkish citizenship who were interned at the end of 1943 and threatened with deportation to the East. Marchionini's

Jewish doctor colleague Albert Eckstein had been made aware of the problem by the representative of the Jewish Agency, and Marchionini took it upon himself to raise it with Papen. The latter gave the impression of actually wanting to do something for those under threat without actually taking action. Marchionini misjudged Papen and gave him an overly positive testimony during questioning for the Nuremberg trial after the war, attesting to his knowledge of resistance efforts and help for the persecuted. The politically far more experienced Ernst Reuter commented that he had confused "personal amiability of scope and personal distancing from the manners of the Nazis with Papen's decisive political responsibility". Even if Marchionini had been mistaken about von Papen and had allowed himself to be deceived by him, this did not diminish his commitment.

In the same year, 1943, Tilde Soetbeer-Marchionini's father Franz Soetbeer committed suicide in Gestapo custody on March 27. In 1933, as a "half-Jew", he had lost his *venia legendi* at the University of Giessen and his medical practice there was boycotted. In 1943, he was arrested on suspicion of belonging to an opposition group.

After the Nazi dictatorship was crushed, Marchionini tried to return to his home country to help rebuild it and reorganize it democratically. This initially took him to the University of Hamburg for three years, from where he moved to Munich, where he became professor and head of the Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases. In the meantime, he had also become President of the German Dermatological Society and set himself the goal of restoring the broken international connections. In 1954/55, Alfred Marchionini became Rector of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and immediately seized the opportunity to put his ideas into practice. Without worrying about any government approvals, he invited 28 professors from the Sorbonne, who were in Munich for a week - the "Paris University Week" from February 14 to 19, 1955 - and held over 30 lectures in addition to numerous receptions - a spectacular start for the reestablishment of Franco-German academic contacts, especially as the Asta of the LMU had also invited 25 students from the Sorbonne. The idea was born out of a meeting between Marchionini and Louis Pasteur's grandson, Louis Pasteur Vallery-Radot, who was not only a physician but had also been a member of the Resistance and briefly a Gaullist MP after the war. The "Paris University Week" was a complete success. *Die Zeit* wrote of the "success of this week, in which walls were torn down that hopefully no politician will ever build again". Franco-German contacts were intensified soon after the "Paris Week" with the award of an honorary doctorate to Pasteur Vallery-Radot.

Marchionini also established relations with Israel, with which diplomatic relations were only established in the year of his death. According to his own testimony, he was the first German academic to give a lecture in German at the University of Tel Aviv. He had originally planned to speak about excema research, but then repeated a lecture he had given as part of the Week of Brotherhood at the beginning of 1957, which dealt with the history of Jewish doctors who had taken life-threatening risks in the interests of science and the art of healing. It was published under the title "Self-sacrifice in the service of scientific and practical medicine".

He also actively cultivated contacts with the scientific community in the Eastern Bloc at the time; he was well connected in Poland - and visited the Warsaw ghetto memorial and the Gestapo memorial. He traveled to the Soviet Union at his own expense to persuade colleagues to attend the International Dermatology Congress in Munich, which was planned for 1967.

During his term as Rector, the Academic Senate laid the foundations for the establishment of political science at LMU. However, the construction also had to take place physically, as entire parts of the main building were still unusable in the mid-1950s due to bomb damage. During Alfred Marchionini's tenure, the atrium was rebuilt in its shell and an artists' competition for a memorial to the White Rose was announced and decided: Lothar Dietz's relief was selected from 275 submissions and was

unveiled in 1958. After a year, Marchionini retired from office with the words: "The Rector as regens, primus inter pares in the Senate, was happy to be able to work for his ideals: for science, freedom and humanity. He was proud to serve his Munich University, his beloved city of Munich, his adopted Bavarian homeland, his German fatherland of today and to serve the fatherland of tomorrow, which we call Europe, with all our strength."

Some of the social issues that Marchionini addressed seem almost strikingly topical. In 1956, together with Fritz Erler, Frederick Pollock, Alfred Weber and others, he was one of the authors of an anthology published by the Working Group of Social Democratic Academics entitled "Revolution of the Robots?", although he dealt less with technical innovations than with the diseases of civilization.

In 1958, he acted as a confident and balanced leader of the International Cultural Congress in Munich, which was attended by such greats of intellectual life as Max Horkheimer, Hannah Arendt, Ludwig Marcuse and Oswald von Nell-Breuning.

His view that it was part of a professor's job to take an interest in public affairs and to get involved where it seemed sensible to him could also lead him directly into the political arena. For example, he campaigned energetically for the election of Hans-Jochen Vogel as mayor of Munich, whom he had come to know and appreciate while building the Geschwister-Scholl-Heim.

Marchionini regarded social commitment as an indispensable duty. "Do you believe in the peaceful future of mankind or do you ultimately reckon with the preponderance of stupidity and irresponsibility?" he was asked in an interview with Österreichischer Rundfunk in February 1965, shortly before his death. His answer was: "Unfortunately, I am convinced that the degree of stupidity and irresponsibility is not small. [...] But we have to do something. Everyone must make an effort at their post to have an enlightening effect, to gather supporters for the great ideas of international cooperation, of understanding across all borders. If this becomes a general principle of united humanity, then there can hardly be a catastrophe. A task that is difficult, but a task that is worth serving humanity in fulfilling. After all, our motto today is no longer the one we had in our student days: *Patriae serviendo consumo*" (I consume myself in the service of my country!). Our motto today is: *Humanitati serviendo consumo!* I consume myself in the service of humanity!"

This was certainly a fitting life motto, but it did not really fit in with his fight for an extended weekend off work, for which he had founded the "Free Weekend" campaign in 1956 with prominent political support. At least once a month, overtime, congresses and mass events, with the exception of sporting and religious events, were to end at 12 noon on Saturday. He explained to *Die Zeit*: "It's not just managers who are being carried off by sudden cardiac death. It is those people whom Elector Maximilian of Bavaria compared to candles that consume themselves in order to illuminate others. In other words, above all intellectual workers, intellectuals, scholars, artists, doctors, politicians, journalists and so on. At the same time, all people who have too little movement." So says Professor Marchionini, adding: "Significantly, letter carriers never die in this way."

Marchionini was actually only partly a good role model here, as the "Zeit" reporter noted: "Professor Marchionini is not just an example of elevator abstinence and other physical inactivity. He is also a blatant example of that conscious electoral Bavarian candle! The former rector of Munich University, professor of dermatology, director of the university's dermatology clinic and polyclinic is also a driving force behind the Franco-German cultural committee. On Sunday morning, his secretary called me about the 'free weekend'. When I sheepishly pointed out the violation of the principle to her, she admitted somewhat sheepishly: 'Yes, well - it's not always possible with our boss'."

Alfred Marchionini did not live to see the international dermatology congress in Munich in 1967, which was intended not least to help bridge the gap between East and West: he died of leukemia on April 6, 1965.



Mathilde and Alfred Marchionini at the annual meeting of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 1954; image archive Bavarian State Library

Tilde Soetbeers-Marchionini (1899 - 1976)

For me, Tilde Soetbeers-Marchionini has so far been the woman in the shadows. It is clear from his correspondence that she played a very strong role in Turkey as a supporter of her husband's work.

Her decision to change the name of the foundation by replacing her own name with that of Alfred Marchionini's father is remarkable. Indeed, in the interview with the ORF, he also emphasized the great influence his father had on him: "I owe the decisive impulses of my life to my father, who lived as an editor in Königsberg and brought us up in a democratic, liberal, liberal spirit. He was a role model for me my whole life." This was obviously about basic attitudes and values, not party political affiliations.



Mathilde and Alfred Marchionini

Value orientations

What is striking about both father and son Marchionini is the strong desire for education, which is by no means limited to the acquisition of specialist knowledge to pursue a profession. It was always about social and democratic commitment to society.

As a labor movement intellectual, Karl Marchionini was a self-made man, while Alfred Marchionini did not limit himself to a traditional university career, but combined it with social and political commitment out of conviction - to which we owe the Marchionini Home.

Both Marchioninis were imbued with the idea of international understanding, the father as a social democratic opponent of war, the son as a professor who combined academic policy with diplomacy from below. An important prerequisite for this is an attitude of cultural openness.

Alfred and Tilde Marchionini's attitude, origins, life experience and activities were based on a clear rejection of anti-Semitism and an anti-Nazi stance. This was expressed not least as solidarity with those fleeing discrimination and persecution by the Nazi regime. Against this background, Alfred Marchionini was committed to remembering the resistance against the Nazi regime and was a conscious European.

Whether, to what extent and in what form these values should be incorporated into the self-image of the Alfred and Karl Marchionini Foundation is a matter for discussion.

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