

# Friedrich Gedike, Report to King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia (1789)

## Abstract

Theologian and educational reformer Friedrich Gedike (1754–1803) was a member of the Prussian *Oberschulkollegium* and an editor of the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, the principle organ of the Berlin Enlightenment. In 1789, the Prussian minister of religion and education, Johann Christoph von Wöllner (1732–1800), asked Gedike to compile a report on select non-Prussian universities for comparative purposes—the idea being to garner information and ideas, laying the groundwork for subsequent Prussian university reforms. This excerpt recounts his observations about the universities of Helmstedt, Göttingen, and Jena.

## Source

[...]

### Helmstädt.

I spent two days at this university (June 18th and 19th<sup>[1]</sup>), during which time I had occasion to become acquainted with almost all of the professors and to hear most of them lecture as well.

The faculty of theology consists presently of 4 professors: the oldest of whom, Abbot Carpzov<sup>[2]</sup>, is already too old and weak to provide much service to the university. Nevertheless, even though he is already over 70 years old, he is still conducting a few *collegia*.

All the more useful therefore is Abbot Henke,<sup>[3]</sup> a learned and extraordinarily active man, who is held in great esteem and enjoys by far the greatest acclaim among the professors of theology. I attended his church history lecture, which, given the small number of students there, has a large enrollment; it was also attended by several law students. His lecturing is fluid, thorough, and clear, but in the end he did not strike me as sufficiently captivating and lively; in general, he was a little too monotonous, also, as it seemed to me, a little too rambling here and there. Still, his course is very popular. He is only some thirty years old. Among his theological writings, his church history<sup>[4]</sup>, in particular, has earned him honors. The third professor of theology, Abbot and General Superintendent Sextroh,<sup>[5]</sup> arrived here only a short time ago from Göttingen. His lecturing is also fairly fluid and clear, though not very lively. He does not seem to be quite content living in Helmstädt. At least in a private conversation he rather disparaged the university here compared to Göttingen, and he almost seems to regret having left Göttingen, though he was only *Prof. extraord.* and preacher there. Here, by contrast, he is said to be very well situated, in that, as Abbot Henke assured me, he supposedly has an annual income of nearly 1,200 Thalers from his three positions as professor, General Superintendent, and abbot, not counting what he takes from the *honorariis* for his *collegia*. Since he was a preacher not only in Göttingen, but also here in Helmstädt, he is in an excellent position to contribute to the practical training of future preachers. I learned afterwards in Göttingen that they miss him there in that capacity. He laid the first foundations for the Industry School in Göttingen and he drew up the plans, but credit for the actual implementation certainly belongs to Pastor Wagemann there, even though Abbot Sextroh gives himself sole credit for this useful foundation, just as he generally seems to have a very high opinion of himself. As a theological writer, he is not yet widely known. His main field is pastoral theology, and he gives other courses aimed at the practical training of future preachers.

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The fourth professor of theology, Professor Pott,[6] likewise arrived here only recently from Göttingen, where he had been a docent [*Privatdocent*] or lecturer. He is still a young man and teaches with a great deal of vivacity and liveliness, as a result of which he is very popular. There is a lot that is pleasant about his lecturing, with only a slight whiff of immaturity remaining here and there.

The law faculty also has four *professores ordinarios* now. I was not able to get to know the first professor, Privy Councilor Frick,[7] as he was very sick. But I was told that he enjoys only middling approval.

By far the greatest approval is enjoyed by Privy Councilor Oelze,[8] who, even though only the 2<sup>nd</sup> professor in the ranks, is nevertheless Ordinarius or Director of the law faculty, and in this capacity directs the practical work of the faculty, insofar as it functions as a judicial body. He is also highly praised for his own practical work. The third professor, Haeberlin,[9] lectures chiefly on *ius publicum* and legal history. However, he was not lecturing on these two days, so I did not have an opportunity to hear him. But, in general, he is said to enjoy only middling approval. I heard the fourth professor of law, by the name of Günther,[10] lecturing on the Pandects. Of course, the number of listeners was small. Still, I had good cause to be satisfied with his lecture. He is clear, thorough, and not devoid of liveliness. Incidentally, he is still a young man, who became *Prof. ordinarius* only recently. But he is esteemed for his educated taste and for his humanistic knowledge, which he combines with jurisprudence.

I was not able to listen to the two associate professors of law: Eisenhart[11] and Haselberg,[12] because the courses they had announced did not materialize, which naturally afforded me no opportunity to experience their lecturing style. But since nearly all *studiosi* attend the lectures of Privy Councilor Oelze, and since there are relatively few students to begin with, these young professors of law certainly cannot expect great approval. Professor Haselberg was called here only recently from Göttingen, where he lived as a *Doctor legens*, and he is praised by several of his colleagues as an able young man.

In the medical faculty there are three professors, among whom only Privy Councilor Beireis[13] lectures with approval. There is hardly a more diligent professor at any university. He generally gives 10 to 12 lectures daily and also has an active practice. He delivers not only all medical lectures, but, since he is also a member of the philosophical faculty, he also delivers several philosophical ones and lectures on cameralistics especially. He is popular, and his lecturing is really very clear and pleasant, only interspersed with too much self-praise and disdain for other scholars. On the whole, it is regrettable that this man, who possesses very extensive knowledge and who is highly esteemed for his genuine merits by everyone who knows him, is often driven by vanity to play the charlatan and that he allows himself, both during and outside of his lectures, to engage in acts of boastfulness that can hardly be excused in a young man, let alone a man of his age (he is already 60 years old). His collections of natural objects, art objects, specimens, coins, and so on, are quite considerable, and full of all kinds of rarities.

[...]

At this time, there are no other lecturers in Helmstädt. And given the small number of students, they could not really make a living there anyway.

The number of students in Helmstädt comes to about 150, 160 at the most, among whom 12 are medical students. Those in theology and law are about equal in number.

All residents of Braunschweig must study here for two years, and if they want to attend an outside university after that, they must seek permission to do so.

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There are considerable benefits here for the students. The better portion of them enjoy free public board. Some excesses are punished by the revocation of the same, either permanently or temporarily, and the fear of this punishment prevents a good many misdeeds.

The tone among the students is fairly civilized. Several professors have told me that the semi-annual grading conference that was introduced a few years ago has contributed a great deal to this circumstance. What happens is that the names of all the students are read out aloud in the presence of all the professors and the assessments and impressions of each professor about one student or another are written down. Those students in need of admonition are then summoned before a so-called private consistory, made up of the vice-rector and deans, which delivers the necessary admonitions and warnings about the shortcomings noted in their moral conduct and diligence.

Student fraternities still flourished here until very recently. There was even a connection between the fraternal brothers here and in Göttingen, and many a formal meeting was arranged between the two universities. The professors believe that this fraternity craze has now been curbed a bit, and they assert that they achieved this by trying to make these fraternities look ridiculous in every possible way.

[...]

### **Göttingen.**

This university, founded by royal generosity and continuously maintained with that same liberality, is better known than any other in Germany. Moreover, its establishment and state of affairs has been described in detail in several books, especially in Pütter's academic history of Göttingen.<sup>[14]</sup>)

Nowhere else did I find among professors so much affinity for their university. They seem to assume as a foregone conclusion that their university is the first and most eminent among all in Germany, and therefore they often speak with a kind disdain about other universities. All are equally intoxicated, as it were, with feelings of pride stemming from its partially real, partially only supposed or imagined merits. Several professors assured me very confidently that if the most eminent scholars left Göttingen for another place, they would lose not only a substantial part of their fame, but even some of their usefulness (as is supposedly the case with, for example, the former Göttingen professors von Selchow and Baldinger,<sup>[15]</sup> who are now employed in Marburg). By contrast, if a little-known scholar were to become a professor in Göttingen, then he would acquire a great name and worth from the very fact that a few rays of the glory in which the university continually bathed must fall upon the head of every person associated with it. Of course, one can hardly keep from smiling when one hears Göttingen scholars speaking in such enthusiastic tones, as though no light or learnedness were to be found outside the walls of Göttingen. Nevertheless, this university pride has very beneficial effects here. It generates a certain esprit de corps that I encountered nowhere else in such measure or manner. Every professor not only sees the honor of the university as his own, but also, conversely, his own honor and his colleagues' honor as the honor of the university. As a result, one finds here much more rarely those eruptions of intrigue, of envy, of diminution or slander that cause so much vexation and bitterness at other universities; at least they are less noticeable here. Here they speak more kindly about the weakness of colleagues than is customary at other universities. More so than elsewhere, people here are inclined to praise or excuse what can be praised or excused. Although professional jealousy is not absent here, it does not express itself readily in such a crude, low, despicable manner as it does at many other universities. For that very reason, it is also more difficult here than elsewhere to obtain reliable information from the professors themselves about everything one wishes to know about. All are very eloquent about the merits of their university, but equally silent and secretive about its shortcomings. — I truly believe that it would be

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desirable for this esprit de corps, which animates the Göttingen professors and makes the honor of the university the focal point of all their desires and efforts, to prevail at our Prussian universities as well. It was precisely this esprit de corps that prompted me to seek information about certain circumstances and conditions from judicious and well-informed students rather than from professors, because I was afraid that the latter, out of an excessively fearful protectiveness toward the honor of the university, would not provide me with complete information.

[...]

## Jena.

It is a great, striking contrast when you go from Erfurt to Jena. In the former, you find an antiquated university that has already entered into the slumber of death, as it were; in the latter, a different one, full of life and vibrant youthful energy. Indeed, Jena is now among those universities that deserve the greatest attention and respect. And so I spent more time here than at most other universities, staying here for 3 days.<sup>[16]</sup>)

Of course, Jena does not currently have the enrollment that it once had, when students here numbered in the thousands. Still, the enrollment is respectable, and it has increased considerably since about ten years ago. Now, Jena has about as many students as Göttingen, namely, between eight and nine hundred. To be sure, Jena does not have as many wealthy and distinguished students as Göttingen. You can live very affordably, as is also demonstrated by the enclosed *Oekonomische Nachrichten*. This inexpensiveness induces many to study here. Among the Jena students are many farmers' sons, who often cost their fathers only 30 Thalers, or even less, if they have free board at the public *convictorium* (i.e. mess hall). Every day, 137 students are fed here at noon and in the evening, some entirely for free, some for a contribution of 6 Groschen a week.

Jena students were otherwise infamous for their coarseness and wildness. By now the atmosphere has improved enormously. But some traces of the old coarseness still remain. This includes, for example, the demonstration of approval through loud stamping, which is not customary at any other university. When a popular professor enters the lecture hall, all the students stamp their feet, and the professor, who is to be honored, is accompanied to the lectern with a sort of music that is striking to an outsider. I encountered this demonstration of approval for the first time in a course by Professor Schiller, where at least 400 listeners were in attendance, and where this professor, highly esteemed by the students, was thus welcomed with a quite boisterous noise. — In their other behavior, a large portion of the students here still display some remnants of the old wildness. However, that is primarily due to the sizeable number of poor students, who have not enjoyed a refined upbringing. Theologians account for the largest group of students here; there are about 500 of them. There are also about one hundred doctors.

As is well known, the university here is dependent on 4 courts: those in Weimar, Gotha, Coburg, and Meinungen. But precisely for that reason, the professors, as they themselves affirm, enjoy all the more freedom. A single court cannot even issue a professor a reprimand; rather, all 4 courts must act in concert to do so. Upon request, the university proposes some subjects to the courts, which is said to have occasionally provided an opportunity for abuses.

Among the 4 courts, the one in Weimar deserves by far the greatest credit when it comes to the university. Notably, the current Duke has done a great deal for the university, partly by providing pensions and allowances to several professors, partly by establishing and improving several public institutions. The courts of Coburg and Meinungen take the least interest in the university.

In each faculty, only a certain number of professors are paid from the old fund. Those employed over and above

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them (of which there are now many) are extraordinarily salaried by one of the 4 courts; in addition, several of the professors from the old foundation receive substantial subsidies from the courts, especially from the one in Weimar. For the old salaries amount to only 300 Thaler for each. — As it is, the salaries here are not high at all. Many professors (regardless of whether they are called *Hofräthe* [Court Councilors]) have no more than 400 Thaler. The highest salaries go to the two theologians Döderlein[17] and Griesbach[18] and the Professor of Medicine Loder.[19] Compensation with titles is quite common here.

The library here, including the Budersche library, is not insignificant. The hope is that the Duke of Weimar will move the ducal library from Weimar here, which would make the university library very respectable.

The public natural history collection is substantial. The foundation is the cabinet of the late Professor Walch, which the Duke of Weimar purchased for the university. He merged it with the ducal cabinet in Weimar. In addition, from time to time he granted *Hofrath* Loder, who is the chief supervisor, considerable sums to expand the cabinet; as a result, it is now superbly rounded out in several areas. More than 200 Thaler are contributed annually to expand the cabinet, although the duke frequently adds extra subsidies.

The duke had the anatomical theater expanded considerably a few years ago. It is very well supplied with cadavers. The duke also pays the salaries of two professors. The duke himself often attends the anatomical lectures. — The good facilities of the anatomical theater here, and especially the great reputation of the Professor of Anatomy, *Hofrath* Loder, attract a great many medical students, of which there are many more here than are usually found at other universities relative to the enrollment.

Moreover, the Duke of Weimar has donated a very well-appointed maternity institute and an associated school for midwives. The two professors Loder and Stark[20] are in charge. The midwives are here for half a year and receive theoretical and practical instruction. The classes are given by *Hofrath* Loder. — The medical students also have access to the institute and to the practical accouchement exercises. The clinical institute under the leadership of *Hofrath* Stark contributes much to the flourishing of the university, in that it attracts many medical students. Of course, it has only a very small fund. The Duke of Weimar contributes only 50 Thaler. The other needs are covered by modest contributions. And yet no small thing is being accomplished here, insofar as the main purpose of the institute is the practical training of young doctors. Typically, about 300 poor patients are treated by the institute every year.

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## NOTES

[1] For the 25 miles from Berlin to Helmstädt, O. (since he set out on the 16<sup>th</sup>) needed two days for travel.

[2] Johann Benedict Carpzov (1720–1803).

[3] H. Ph. K. Henke (1725–1809). In the diary (*ibid.*, p. 171), Henke is mentioned as an informant for “much news” about H.

[4] *Allgemeine Geschichte der christlichen Kirche* (Braunschweig, 1788).

[5] Heinrich Philipp Sextroh (1746–1838).

[6] David Julius Pott (1760–1838).

[7] Albrecht Philipp Frick (1733–1798).

[8] Gottlob Eusebius Oeltze (1734–1807).

[9] Karl Friedrich Häberlin (1756–1808). His main accomplishments, the *Handbuch des deutschen Staatsrechts*, written in accordance with the work of Pütter, and his editorial oversight of the 62 issues of the

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*Staatsarchiv*, came only in the following decade.

[10] Personnel files no longer available to me.

[11] Ernst Ludwig August Eisenhardt (1762–1808).

[12] Personnel files no longer available to me.

[13] Gottfried Christoph Beireis (1730–1809). See the diary (*ibid.*, 173–76). Goethe on him in the *Annals of 1805* (Anniversary Issue 30), pp. 159, 163ff.

[14] *Versuch einer akademischen Gelehrten-geschichte von der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Part (1788). If one calculates two travel days for the sixteen miles from Helmstädt to Göttingen, Gedike was likely in Göttingen from about the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of June.

[15] See under Marburg.

[16] Gedike arrived on July 26<sup>th</sup> and stayed until the 29<sup>th</sup>, on which day he attended Schiller's lecture and visited him. Diary (*ibid.*, p. 185).

[17] Johann Christof Döderlein (1746–1792), since 1782 in Jena.

[18] Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), since 1775 in Jena.

[19] Justus Christian Loder (1753–1832), since 1778 in Jena, went to Halle in 1803.

[20] Johann Christian Stark (1753–1811), in Jena since 1779.

Source: "*Der Universitäts-Bereiser*" Friedrich Gedike und sein Bericht an Friedrich Wilhelm II. Mitgeteilt von Dr. Richard Fester, Universitäts-Professor in Erlangen. I. Ergänzungsheft des Archivs für Kulturgeschichte. Herausgegeben von Professor Dr. Georg Steinhausen. Berlin: Alexander Duncker Verlag, 1905, pp. 6–9, 11, 13–14, 78–81. Available online at Hathitrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101067877496>

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Friedrich Gedike, Report to King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia (1789), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/knowledge-and-education/ghis:document-5>> [July 12, 2025].