

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

RALPH E. GIESEY

Oral History Project

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PREFACE

The following manuscript contains the edited transcript of an interview with Ralph E. Giese, held at the Institute for Advanced Study on June 12, 1990. It was conducted by Patricia H. Labalme.

Dr. Giese was born in Detroit and received his PhD in 1954 at the University of California in Berkeley. He was a Fulbright fellow in Belgium in 1951-52 and an ACLS fellow in France in 1952-53 before coming to the Institute for Advanced Study as assistant to Professor Ernst Kantorowicz for 1953-55. He was a visiting member of the School of Historical Studies in 1964-65 and 1975-76 and a frequent summer visitor.


Among his publications related to his residence at the Institute are The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France (1960); The Juristic Basis of Dynastic Right to the French Throne (1961); If Not, Not: the Oath of the Aragonese and the Legendary Laws of Sobrarbe (1968); Francogallia by François Hotman (ed., with J. H. M. Salmon, 1972); and Selected Studies by Ernst Kantorowicz (ed., with Michael Cherniavsky).


The reader should be aware that the following is a transcript of the spoken word, that it attempts to preserve the spontaneity and informality of the original tape, and that the views expressed therein are those of the narrator.

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Tape and text of interview on June 12, 1990

INTERVIEW WITH DR. RALPH E. GIESEY

Date: June 12, 1990  
Place: Princeton, New Jersey  
Interviewer: Patricia H. Labalme

CASSETTE ONE, SIDE ONE:

Labalme: OK. Now we can begin, Ralph. My first question is, by what route did you first come to the Institute for Advanced Study?

Giesey: Well, I arrived at the Institute from Paris where I had spent, in Paris and Belgium, the previous two years writing my dissertation which I had begun with Ernst Kantorowicz in Berkeley. And when I went abroad in '51 for two years, he came then to the Institute. When I returned to the States, then he asked me to become his assistant, which I was for two years. I was asked the other day what my chores were as an assistant. I could say I had an office. Kantorowicz (whom I will refer to hereafter always as Eka, the name by which he was always known) --I would look at his mail and dabble a little in the morning, then do my own work. He would arrive in the late afternoon for tea, because he always worked at home, and we'd have tea and then spend an hour or two in the office, then go off to shop together or something like that. In other words, my task there was virtually nil except to read his own work. He was finishing The King's Two Bodies then, and while his English was extremely good--he had learned it as a child--still I could suggest little

changes in metaphor and so forth, but that's really the only work I had to do. The assistantship was, in fact, a sinecure, and so I spent those two years. I must say, in retrospect, that they were among the most significant years in my life in terms of people I met, especially younger physicists because they were my age. In Historical Studies everybody was older than in physics, but the visiting members who were physicists were always very young.

Labalme: Where did you meet them? In what context did you meet them?

Giese: Well, just simply at tea, but I spent the evenings too with them. I don't recall just how it all happened.

Labalme: You weren't in the housing project?

Giese: No, the housing project did not--well, the old wooden one was here, but the Breuer thing wasn't. So I lived in town in a little room one year; then I had an apartment in town the second year, one that I just happened to get by myself. That's the only time I can say--those two years--that I really knew the physics and math side of everything. I used to--after those famous meetings in Fuld Hall where the great physicists would debate things--that evening I would hear from the young fellows all of the exciting news--you know, Bohr and Pauli and von Neumann and Oppenheimer and so forth, and so while I didn't know much what was going on in terms of the physics, I got a sense of the excitement, intellectual excitement, of the place. But after that when I came back visiting and then later

twice as a member in my own right, I was associated only with Historical Studies.

Labalme: What were the dates of those later visits?

Giesey: They were in '64-'65, that was after Kantorowicz died, and '75-'76. Then I had seven visiting memberships in the summer as the secretary of Historical Studies recently told me, and I'd come here scores of times for a day or two or few, maybe a week, to visit friends. I have, therefore, had a continuous relationship with all of the Faculty of Historical Studies from 1953 to the present, and I'd become fairly well acquainted with everybody so I do have a perspective upon the Faculty itself. I must say that as far as I am concerned, nothing, in my work, nothing has changed about the Institute. It has been consistently for these 37 years the best single place to work I have ever found. Most of my things have been written here.

Labalme: Why is that? What do you attribute it to?

Giesey: Well, the general set-up, somewhat isolated and tranquil, but I always attribute a great deal of its success to the housing project, to forming a little community there of the families. It brings also after hours, you know, evening associations between the members, and some friendships I made in those two years I was here as visiting member were lasting ones, as much as if I had spent many years with them as colleagues at some university. And that I understand is not characteristic of the comparable institutes in Stanford or down in North Carolina

where the people are dispersed and it's sort of a nine to five association. I think that is very important, and many others agree with me, other visiting members that I've talked to. They think that is terribly important. Most everybody I have talked to agrees with me in the statement I just made, that it is the best place to work that they have ever found, that more pages are published per hour at the Institute than for any comparable place, so in that respect it has not changed at all.

Labalme: In what respects has it changed?

Giesey: Well, it has changed. The change that does affect the members-- I don't talk about it much with my older Faculty or retired Faculty friends, but I know is true because it is mentioned to me by newer visiting members, is the tendency at the Institute in Historical Studies to develop more and more kinds of ad hoc groups that meet once a week, where the visiting members are expected to give papers. It's not required, but it takes very little pressure when you come, suggestion, for you to agree. And some have complained that two, maybe three months of their stay here has been occupied by that to no good purpose. All I could say is that there was never any kind of group activity in Historical Studies throughout the fifties, sixties, almost as far--well, it was beginning when I was here in the later seventies. Now let me say that this can be associated with a change in the nature of Historical Studies and interests in recent decades. Well, the Institute itself used to be heavily

loaded with the philological side--when classics and medieval history were so much stronger--than it is now. And philological work is essentially that of a hermit. You work by yourself, consult with a colleague about a problem where his particular knowledge might be involved, but it is not the same as in the kinds of historical research, especially social science oriented, where everybody has a much greater body of common knowledge about themes and motifs in history that they are dealing with, so that they can potentially be interested in any person's dealing with a different era--say, studying family structure--and everyone has a very broad common interest. They therefore can perhaps profit from group meetings, and I myself did social history for a number of years, and I found myself wanting to go to meetings and speak and learn and have my ideas criticized. But not in the kind of philological work that I normally do. Well, all I would say, if I were to put it to the current Faculty in Historical Studies, is that they should make it extremely clear to everybody, before they came, that there were these kinds of group sessions and they would be happy if people would participate, but they did not at all expect it and would not in the least criticize the visitors if they stayed away from such meetings. I just don't think that the Faculty involved in this, three or four of the six now doing it, are aware of the fact that some visitors really do not wish to participate but can't afford for one reason or another to say



so; I say that those people should be perfectly free to abstain. Well, maybe I should say something to the Faculty, but the people I could say it to would be really somewhat surprised and I'm not sure they would agree with me. Anyhow that is a difference, all right. It is much more of what in the social sciences is called a groupie operation than it ever was in the past. Well, end of discourse on that subject.

Labalme: Partly it's a question of funding, don't you think? Sometimes these grants want projects.

Gieseey: Uh-huh. Well, yes, I'm aware of how the NEH has come in and asked for accountability for what you do, but, I don't know, a project can be what one works on alone, how you progress.

Labalme: The NEH does ask to what extent does being in a community influence your work, so that there is pressure to come up with--

Gieseey: I see. Well, the community I have already described in respect to the housing project is a community of scholars, but that doesn't mean that they have to communicate in specifically scholarly matters with one another. I think they're confusing community and communication: they can talk with each other and perhaps discuss their work with each other--little bits of it perhaps--but if the other person has no special expertise or interest, why do so? But then of course there's the question, does anybody at the NEH have any idea how the School of Historical Studies runs? The answer generally is no.

Labalme: Right. In your work on If Not, Not, which you worked on here, if I'm right, in '64-'65--

Gieseey: Wrote the entire thing here in that year. Right. Well I had given a little paper on it before I came, and I started to revise that paper for publication, but before I knew it I was writing a book and wrote the whole thing here. Again, at my age now, what I'm working on progresses so painfully slowly that I cannot imagine how I did it before.

Labalme: You mention, in particular, Felix Gilbert and Marshall Clagett whom you discussed things with. What were those relationships like?

Gieseey: Well, Felix had, after Kantorowicz died, for a while been my patron in the sense that he had read everything that I had already written, he was the first one I think to read the If Not, Not, and he was writing on my behalf to people who were interested in hiring me. I already had tenure at Minnesota at that time, but Felix was my big patron for a few years until I settled down. Marshall came just as Eka died or a year afterwards. When I came as a member Marshall was coming here as Faculty, having himself been a member before. We just fell in together as buddies and remained that ever since. If you know Marshall you realize that anybody would be close to him, he's such a great fellow. But that had no particular intellectual reason, although his late medieval science branches over somewhat with my late medieval political institutional concerns.

But that's simply friendship. I think the idea of a community of scholars is certainly an important one. You get it created for a moment, or a year here, that particular community, and that is how I would answer the NEH's line. I can see what they want; they would say, well, why do you want to come to the Institute for Advanced Study? Why couldn't we give you the money and you do it anywhere? Perhaps true. And really you come to the Institute and work only if you've done most of your research before. It's a place to write. And then of course it's ideal for writing because you have continuous uninterrupted activity, and since you write everything here, as I have most of mine, you are aware that much has to be done beforehand, some place other than the Institute, but it's that final stage of writing where it's so good.

Labalme: When you came that first year, 1953-54, there was an extraordinary constellation of visiting members. I came across a list, am I right, that included Isaiah Berlin [visiting member, spring term]--

Gieseey: No, you're thinking of fifty--

Labalme: '53-'54.

Gieseey: Well, I met him then all right, but to my recollection he was not a member of Historical Studies unless it was terribly short. I know, he came into town once to visit Kantorowicz. They were the oldest of friends going back to '33 when Kantorowicz first went from Germany to England for a year. And I met him and

talked with him, then. And that son of a gun, when he asked me what I was working on, I said, the funeral of the kings of France, he proceeded to give me a short discourse. It was amazing how he knew the essence of the problem that I was dealing with.

Labalme: Isn't that fascinating?

Gieseey: He was quite a man. Is quite a man. But I don't recall that he was here, even a whole semester. Who were there then, and we became very close, were Christopher Seton-Watson, also Asa Briggs who is now Sir Asa Briggs, I think--I used to play ping pong with him every day. George Kennan was here, his five-year membership after leaving Russia, he was here five years as a member. Then was ambassador to Yugoslavia for a while and after that became a professor here. Used to play ping pong with Kennan every day. A little ping pong--

Labalme: Where was the ping pong?

Gieseey: Over in the basement of Building E or C, one or the other of them. And that was the exercise, I remember, for Asa Briggs-- boy, a very determined fellow, you know. On the dot, come 3:30, march over, ping pong, ping ping pong, back and forth like a typewriter. He's still done that all his life, I bet. I've not seen him since. James Joll was here that year, and I have kept up a bit with James since. Well, who else? Well, then the art historians, Ed Lowinsky was there, [Henry] Guerlac was here. I mean, there you are talking about some really big names.

Labalme: Perry Miller?

Gieseey: Perry Miller was here. Oh, at lunch he regaled us with stories of his early youth. I had the advantage somehow there of being with the Faculty much more than assistants usually are. I was already 30 years old then. Whether it was because of Kantorowicz or others I got to know Cherniss almost from the first, and until he died he was one of my closest friends. He was even my best man when I was married in '66. And because of that association I got to know, even early on, visiting members very well, such as I don't think assistants would do now very easily, as I perceive the situation, so I had that great advantage. Yes. Who else have you got on--

Labalme: Well that was the list really. Herbert Bloch.

Gieseey: Yes. Well, he was here for six months and he is one specifically they tried later to bring in as a Faculty member, but he turned them down. Which brings up something that I wanted to be sure to mention about a peculiarity of the Institute that escapes many people's attention. That is the problem of hiring new Faculty. Kantorowicz used to tell me in general about the problems they had, who they were trying to hire at a given time, and already then in the fifties they were seeking to get a genuine American historian and failed. They had, they tried three or four, [Richard] Hofstadter and Ed Morgan, I think, and [Bernard] Bailyn. All three turned them down. For what reason it becomes clear. Why should those

people who have very distinguished positions, who have a good graduate program, who are really fulfilling themselves through the graduate students and influencing thought, historical thought, why should they come here and isolate themselves? So they had a very difficult time and never did succeed in getting a single genuine American historian. U.S. history has been represented here only really by the modern historians and all of them, starting with Edward Mead Earle, Sir Llewelyn Woodward, George Kennan then and now Peter Paret are really internationalists, and U.S. history comes in through diplomacy and so forth. Outside the Institute, then, the American historians, all of my colleagues at all the places I have taught, scarcely know what goes on here. There have been very few--well, Perry Miller is obviously one and Jack Greene later--but very few American historians, U.S. historians, have come, and yet over half of all the historians in the United States are devoted to U.S. history. That's just the way it is. I'm not complaining. But it gives an odd, strictly European slant. One reason there's no American historian here is because the best ones wouldn't come. There's an appendage to that remark. Historical Studies was largely classical, medieval, and early modern in its founding, because there was right at hand, given to them, some of the greatest scholars in the world in those fields who were exiles, refugees most all of them from Germany, of course. Well, after the war when you go to replace some of

these people, you are not going to get the Europeans anymore because--say, the leading historian of French medieval history, to take an example--has no reason to make himself an exile from his own country at the Institute. That means that the Europeans at large, perhaps not so much in classical studies but certainly in medieval and early modern, are not likely to be as available as they were before, so that this is a general impression that many people have said and I believe is true that over the years they've not been able to recruit the top people that they would like to. They've simply failed in some cases. People won't move, and there's no free pool of exiles. The result would be, as some would say, that the Institute just doesn't have now as high class a Faculty as it used to have. When I think about that in detail--and I've known all the Faculty here for forty years--I can think of a few cases of less than the best Faculty, and yet overall I don't think that they account for the decline in quality. As I said, the best are often asked but don't come. And in any event, you're never going to get another Panofsky, I mean he's the man certainly of our time. So, having thought the decline of quality through, I decided it wasn't as important as I've long thought, or in discourse with people have accepted as being true. Then, of course, there is the general question of the shrinkage of the Faculty, down at least four, in Historical Studies, from its maximum. And that leads to the question of whether you're going to shrink the Faculty down, or, as rumor

has it that you don't really need the Faculty. You could be like the Stanford Institute, which doesn't have a faculty, neither does the National Center for the Humanities. You might bring in a star for a year or two but you don't really need Faculty. That's what some say. I don't have an answer to that at all. Historical Studies, frankly, would need Faculty less than would physics or math or social science, as I think--but, well, that's all I have to say about that.

**Labalme:** In the times you were here, those three different periods, how did you feel the presence of the Faculty, what role did they play? Not just in your life but in the life of visiting members.

**Gieseey:** Well, people varied in their involvement, even in their own times. Kantorowicz regarded it as obligatory to have each of the visiting members come and have dinner at his place at some time during the year they were there. Since he was such a famous cook, he had trapped himself into that because now everybody expected it. Cherniss in those early years, now I'm talking about '53-'55, not only taught a seminar at the University, but he had gatherings in his home with the young, with the assistants. His assistant was then Gwendolyn Groves, and she later married Alan Robinson, a graduate student in Philosophy at the University. Paul Benacerraf was part of the crowd. Paul was also a graduate student. And so the Chernisses had lots of real involvement, even with the younger people in



the Faculty. Harold's later years were very bitter. Of course, he suffered illnesses with his neck and so forth. The period of Kaysen was, I think in large, the disaster for the Institute as far as the Faculty was concerned. He so easily alienated almost everybody, that there was great disaffection at that time. Although I met him, I knew him, I didn't think that personally he was any more blunt-spoken or difficult than many academics I know and like, but as Director he was a disaster. That I know. Cherniss was so disaffected that it hurt me over the later years, as it did Marshall who was even closer to him. Well, there are two cases in the past--Kantorowicz and Cherniss--that I know of. Let us say that now, certainly, Giles Constable feels that obligation. I've been at parties of his where large numbers of Institute were present. So Giles clearly feels that way. I don't know about the others. The Clagetts, although extremely friendly, have never been the greatest of entertainers, I don't think, though I always see them when I come because we're close personal friends. So I don't know how to answer that particular question.

Labalme: Well, you have to some extent on a social level. How about on an intellectual level? Do you feel that there wasn't really a need for Faculty?

Giesey: In olden days, I think I'm correct in my impression that the visiting members who came tended to be--a large percentage of them--tended to be grouped around the interest of individual

professors, because a lot of them had preemptive choices then. They could decide, well frankly, I know they could decide because the two times I was a member in the sixties and seventies, the application was made in either a short form or a long form. On the short form, there was just a cross made through the question regarding your project. I was a preemptive choice, that's all. Of Felix's once, I know, and I don't know who the second time. But I didn't even have to declare what I was going to do. So that meant that people were grouped together in older times, that the medievalists that came tended to be doing philological work. So, yes, there was, an important function for the Faculty. Kantorowicz had a lot of talk with the medievalists. Yes indeed. They would come to him, or he would go to them if they had expertise. There was a lot of give and take. Cherniss always had the classicists around talking because of his absolutely encyclopedic knowledge, especially in Greek. As Setton and Claggett said to me just yesterday, neither of them ever met anybody who had a command of classical Greek to match Cherniss. So those are cases in which it worked. John Elliott--since he's been here and of course Felix, too--have been very concerned with the work of others and with being helpful. They're two sterling examples. And then when Claggett had the historians of science, there were always a couple of them here. But then there are some people who come who aren't really associated closely with any Faculty member's interests

and I think they will tend to get as much from their visiting friends, other visitors, as from Faculty. And, of course, increasingly in recent years visitors will associate themselves as much with the social science group meetings. I did, oddly so, in '75-'76; I was a member in Historical Studies, but was actually doing social history, so that I attended the Social Science luncheon meetings that were then on Wednesday. I even gave a paper there. I got to know Geertz and Hirschman very well. And so there was a case where I, who think of myself as a philologist, in that period was readily part of the social science group. Most social and economic historians are interested, of course, as well as ritual and ceremonial types-- such as Larry Bryant, here this year. Many people in the School of Historical Studies will find it as interesting to be with the social science people as with any others.

Labalme: What was that year like with the social scientists, '75-'76, because it was just after all this turmoil?

Giese: Well, it was Kaysen's final year and the year in which Harry was hired. So it was strange. At that time Cherniss and several others were boycotting the dining room where they were most likely to encounter Kaysen, and they never wanted to see him. So lunches were eaten daily in Cherniss's office: that included Clagett, Setton, usually also Mort White and even lo and behold, of all people who came, Deane Montgomery came regularly. And then Neugebauer, if he was in town. And Deane, for an odd

reason, I got to know very early because he was in Iowa. He had been, I think, a graduate student at Iowa [Phd 1933]. He was the only Institute mathematician I've known over all these years. But Deane had been so bitter against Oppenheimer, who was one of Harold's oldest and closest friends, that Cherniss and Montgomery had had nothing to do with one another for years until Kaysen came; then they found themselves together. So there we would meet and have lunch.

Labalme: Sandwiches?

Giese: Every day sandwiches, indeed. Except for me: there was the one day, Wednesday, when I wasn't there because I was over in the conference room near the main dining hall, with the social science crowd. Oh, my old friends understood that, but it was a rather odd situation. I just happened to have two interests going at the same time, you know. But it was a pretty stormy, pretty stormy time, that is for sure.

Labalme: What about Robert Oppenheimer as a person, a director?

Giese: Well, no doubt he was the one who created the most agreeable environment at the Institute. Regarding my own experience with him, every time I came--even just for a summer--he would ask me, as he asked others, to come in and have a little talk with him. I must say for myself, perhaps because of what my young physicist friends told me in my first sojourn, in '53-'55, about the kind of stormy discussions that went on in the physics group--and Oppenheimer was a terror as a critic in those scenes

--I always somehow felt scared to death of him. And yet he was always so kind and so considerate not only to members but also with the staff. The secretaries and everybody had a liking for him; he had a gentility which Kaysen did not. Kaysen tended to think much more hierarchically and--oh, I don't say he demanded deference, but he didn't show consideration toward the staff. My girlfriend at the time, Cynthia Gardiner--your fellow Bryn Mawrter whom I later married--was Cherniss's assistant and she knew a lot of the staff. Her period here bridged the time from Oppenheimer as director to Kaysen as director, and the mood here on the staff apparently shifted just overnight from happiness to discontent. And that's a bad sign, you know. It's very difficult when you have prima donna professors on one hand and on the other have staff who are not intellectuals, to keep it all together, but Oppenheimer I think did so as well as could be done. And Kitty, his wife, was very much a part of that. So yes, he was certainly the most successful, Kaysen the least successful. Harry Woolf, well I've known Harry for a long time. We were colleagues for several years at the University of Washington in Seattle in the later fifties, so I know Harry very well. He was successful here at the Institute in lots of ways, but never got quite the kind of good relations with the Faculty that Oppenheimer had, in general. I have the feeling that Harry, well for other reasons too, is nowadays somewhat a loner here and that's really not too good for him. Now about Murph I

really don't know much. He was here in the early fifties, part of the young physics crowd I've mentioned, himself teaching at the University, so I knew him somewhat. He's always been respected, but I can't judge. I hear some people say that he isn't decisive in doing things, and I say, what needs to be done? Well, they're not quite sure of that, so there's no specific disaffection but the old boys at least think back to the golden days of Oppenheimer.

Labalme: I'm sure they do. I'm going to switch the tape.

END OF TAPE NO. 1, SIDE NO. 1

TAPE NO. 1, SIDE NO. 2:

Labalme: You mentioned that Deane Montgomery was furious or angry at Oppenheimer. What was that about? Do you remember?

Gieseey: Well, I have had it all recounted to me, and I'm sure very accurately by Cherniss. But I just don't recall that. It had to do with--I think--the allotment of monies and staff and so forth between mathematics and physics. Of course, Oppie's own disaffection revealed itself at the end, when he split off and set up the School of Natural Sciences just before he retired as Director, although I'm not sure that his setting up the Natural Sciences wasn't due, even more than with Montgomery, to a certain French mathematician who arrived, whom I know something about. This would be what I suggested to you before--what I know that I shouldn't know about the Institute, of the great quarrels. I just happened, after Kantorowicz died and I

inherited his scholarly Nachlass that he willed to me, I also by chance encountered a lot of his Institute papers and read them and burned them instantly. They showed really difficult times here, around 1962-63--but oh, that's all I want to say. I don't know how much is ever going to be revealed about that. But there must be other files of professors that have the story in them.

Labalme: Deane himself did not talk about these things?

Gieseey: He does not.

Labalme: Did he, with you?

Gieseey: He would at times just very frankly make remarks about his opposition to Oppenheimer, which was really bitter. But he would, if I recollect, later on, after Oppenheimer was dead and he-- oh yes, of course, one reason that Oppenheimer's stock rose in his mind was Kaysen's becoming Director; oh boy, then he realized how well off he was with Oppenheimer. I think Kaysen got a lot of bad rap. Who should be the Director? Oppenheimer was such a cultivated person--and really, too, philologically, for he was a sanskritist and was interested in lots of elements of culture beyond physics--and besides was an extremely prominent person. Well, Murph is a prominent physicist but doesn't, as far as I can see from the cafeteria now, doesn't sit often with the humanists but mostly with the physicists. Harry had the advantage of really bridging the Schools because he's very knowledgeable about the arts and literature, is a

professional historian of science but not a specialist there. Who should be the director? Oh boy. It's a tough, tough job. And some of the Faculty who have to be here because they are the biggest, most important in their position, are not the easiest people in the world to get along with. It's murderously difficult as a job.

**Labalme:** How is it viewed from the outside? You had some remarks earlier about what people said about the historians here today, the quality of the Faculty. What's your view, traveled as you are in the world, of the Institute?

**Giese:** Well, speaking of visiting members, I know largely the French situation. Many French historians have been here, both from France and the States. Within the world of classical, medieval up through renaissance history, the Institute is well known and has a tremendously broad reputation. For those who have not, as have I, had continuous contact with the Institute--I've spent, I think, a total of seven years of my life here, stretched over 37, so I have a sense of how it has changed as most people don't--even those who are here just once find that it's nice--it's always nice because of the whole logistics and so forth. I don't know whether or not that's answering your question.

**Labalme:** Do you think it's played a significant role in advancing historical studies in general?



Giese: Well, I said at the beginning, the Institute's going to get more pages printed per days spent by individuals here than at any comparable institution. It's, in that sense, absolutely of tremendous importance--although Historical Studies at large in the world is the least known. I mean, mathematics is the largest School, and I have the feeling there's hardly any important mathematician who has not been here at some time. And among them, it's an absolutely crucial place. Physicists largely the same, and in the world at large they want to know about Einstein, von Neumann, Bahcall or Freeman Dyson. They are the names that every educated person knows, and then Kennan of course, but when you get into those who are just professional historians, people don't know them well, at least in America. If there were American historians here, like those I named earlier, the Institute's fame would be much greater in the States. But here's how you could tell that the Institute in some ways is not known: the number of people who regularly misquote its name. I'm talking about big-time intellectuals, either in sciences or other fields, who write those nice articles in the New York Review of Books--the number of times it comes out "the Institute of Advanced Studies." That shows that they've never been here, for that's one thing that everybody who has been here learns to do correctly and corrects other people about later. So it is an isolated place. Many people think it's part of Princeton. They say--the Institute, you know, as

if it were connected with the University. They don't understand that clear distinction, although there are very good associations between the Institute and the University, particularly in Historical Studies. That's largely due to the University's Davis Center: you know how many of the University's European history faculty are regularly at lunch here: they profit greatly from permanent members and the visiting members, so that's a very nice thing for everybody. And I think that proximity to Princeton--I should have thought of it-- is another very important consideration. Of course, Stanford Behavioral Sciences has the same, but there's no University in walking distance from the Humanities Center at the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina. So that's a very significant thing. It has been for me. I know all the University faculty on the European side. I've known them over all these decades. And that's because, they come out here and I know them socially.

**Labalme:** Do you feel from your recent visits here that the morale of the School Faculty and members is as strong as it used to be?

**Giese:** I have access to lots of sources of gossip, and I do have lots of gossip and I don't know whether it's all true or not. That might suggest that the problems have existed always. I think there tends--I'm going to pass that question. Every department of history--well Iowa is one of the great exceptions, because it's well known for being so harmonious--but every other place

I've taught, every other place I know a lot about has lots of internal conflict. It's here too, but those things I do not believe should be discussed. To try to expose them is to imagine that there is something peculiar going on here that is hurting this place rather than being just what is common to all places. You have to live with conflict. The question is how to overcome difficulties and go ahead. I think they're having trouble here now with keeping the number of Faculty up. I've never known any of the Trustees, but I hear them talked about, some very favorably, some very unfavorably by the Faculty. I certainly won't go into that. Fortunately I couldn't even remember their names now, so it would be useless. So they have their conflicts. I think the big decision every year is the visiting members. It seems to me that is now much less determined than before by special association with individual Faculty. If it is broader--and there does tend to be a lot more relatively younger people--that I think is good. I really do. So I think it's been less old boy than before, and that I think is a very good thing.

**Labalme:** Certainly as far as their reports go, and I used to read those reports of the visiting members, they felt satisfied and enthusiastic, and they also did come to study in proximity to particular people. That has to count when we talk about the role of the Faculty, just to be working in the same place as John Elliott or Felix Gilbert or Glen Bowersock.

**Gieseey:** Oh yes. I think that Bowersock takes a very keen interest in everybody's work. When you get back to classics, of course, there is again a very common body of knowledge. They all have to be philologists and archaeologists, both, in order to reconstruct the times, so that almost any subject in classical history they'll know a little something about. They're much more like the social sciences, or method-, or topic-oriented in that way. Yes. But once you get into medieval and early modern history, it tends to be so strictly nationally-oriented that what goes on in Germany or other places in my field, or my topic, I'm only vaguely aware of. Many times I'm chagrined that I don't know more because it's useful, but we tend to be, as you know yourself, more specialized. But then take Felix Gilbert. I mean he has so many balls juggling, because of his enormously diverse knowledge, that he covers a tremendous range--including American history after all. That's what Eka said. Eka was more responsible than anybody for bringing Felix here, I know. But he said Felix had written the little book on the European sources of the Declaration of Independence, so that made Felix something of an American historian. That was a plus for the Institute.

**Labalme:** Yes. I thought it was Ed Earle who was the link.

**Gieseey:** Earle was long dead by then, but he of course was very close to Felix when Felix was here earlier with the crowd that did the big book, what's it called--?

Labalme: Makers of Modern Strategy.

Gieseey: Recently redone. That, of course, had occurred before I was here.

Labalme: You didn't know Ed Earle?

Gieseey: I met him once or twice. He must have died in '54, yes. That was my first year here, and he was quite ill, and I just briefly met him.

Labalme: Let's talk about some of the other wonderful characters you may have known. Panofsky, you mentioned. What do you remember about him?

Gieseey: Well, with Panofsky the first big thing had to do with my work on the French Royal funeral. When I started out, I intended to end the work with the tombs of the French kings, the Renaissance kings, the famous ones at St. Denis, but I didn't quite know how to integrate them with the funeral ceremony. So when I first met Pan--he and Kantorowicz were very close, he, Cherniss and Kantorowicz were a little triangulation of people who knew each other very well--in fifteen minutes of just gentle explaining, Panofsky showed me the whole problem that I was having with the tombs. Of course, I didn't know that he had already given the lectures in New York that ended up as Tomb Sculpture, later published and annotated by Jansen, I think. He knew the subject so unimaginably better than did I--he just made it all very clear. That disposed me to drop that business from my work. Another time I had another problem like that and showed it to

him. I was looking for the iconographical source of a certain French renaissance medal, and he just thought for a moment, and then cited the book in which its antecedent would be found: an obscure little wooden panel he had seen years before. So his knowledge was just encyclopedic in that sense. Kantorowicz was regularly in contact with Pan, because Kantorowicz did a lot of art historical work. Then he would always go to Cherniss if he had a problem with a medieval interpretation of Aristotle, and Cherniss would slowly, carefully, tell him what Aristotle really meant. So there was a lot of interplay among them. With Pan it was, well, the way his mind worked, the number of images that he had in his mind together with perfect control of the classical text. I heard him say once--or maybe I got it second-hand from Kantorowicz--that he stopped studying Greek and Latin at the age of fourteen because by then he knew the texts, so that between the texts and the images he had a world of play between classical and neo-classical motifs that was despair of most art historians. How many of them have that classical fund right at their fingertips the way he did? Very rare thing, that. And Kantorowicz, the same. He was a classicist who then drifted into the middle ages--most of those Germans were trained in classics.

Labalme: At the gymnasium.

Gieseey: At the gymnasium. And then moved into later medieval and other fields. He and Pan had a basis of communicating with one another, a linkage that other people just don't have.

Labalme: What about Alföldi?

Gieseey: Well, he was certainly one of the greatest of the late antique and Roman historians. He, too, was brought almost exclusively and directly on Kantorowicz's pushing. I got to know Alföldi quite well because he was close to Kantorowicz, and in later years when I would show up for a little while, he would say how much he missed Eka. Still he was a very difficult man and he caused lots of problems within the School because of ways he wanted things to be done. He was not the most agreeable of colleagues, although at the same time he could be so very gentle and very nice to people. He had a certain sense of noblesse oblige. He was something like André Weil in that respect, frankly, but when he got among his peers, he could be just as fierce as Weil. So that's Alföldi, but he was typical. The Institute wants the best, he was the best at the time, that's who it gets. Then it turned out that, in little social things or business things within the Schools, he was not the easiest person. That's going to happen at this place; there's just no other way. And then, of course, the Director--he's not directing anything, he's just trying to keep these guys

together. And he is not himself, unless he is an Oppenheimer, at all the intellectual peer of those guys. What a position to be in!

Labalme: Yes.

Gieseey: Terrible. Terribly difficult, yes.

Labalme: Eka seems to have played quite a role in bringing other Faculty here from what you've said.

Gieseey: Well, yes, those two cases I know, these are people that he knew quite well over the years, people whom he respected. I mean, he was not going to bring in somebody just because he was a friend. Not at all. He regarded these as the best and they certainly were.

Labalme: Did he ever talk to you about his vision of the Institute? Did he have a sense of what he wanted for this place?

Gieseey: No. No. I think he took it as it was, an ideal place for research. No, he was really very happy with the place in general despite the problems that could arise within the School. Yes.

Labalme: What about Hetty Goldman? Did you ever meet her?

Gieseey: Just barely. She was retired then. I knew her a bit because Margaret Dow--later, Murray Gell-Mann's wife--was, I think, working for Hetty, doing some of the drawings.

Labalme: What was her name again?

Gieseey: Margaret Dow. She was part of the crowd of young assistants when I was here, and she was married to Murray right here on



Battle Road [April 19, 1955] where there lived then, a woman and her husband, I forget their names, who actually ran the cafeteria/restaurant here at that time. They were married in the house. I was there--and how did we get off on that?

Labalme: She came to work--

Gieseey: Yes. She actually came over at the same time that Alan Wace, the Englishman who excavated Mycenae and found the tablets to begin with. Margaret had been Wace's assistant.

Labalme: Then she worked for Hetty Goldman?

Gieseey: That was my impression. She came as Hetty's assistant. And she was a fellow assistant, part of the crowd. She and Gwen Groves were very close friends and Gwen is now married to Robbie, a computer expert at Syracuse.

Labalme: Robbie--?

Gieseey: Alan Robinson--a British scholar whom I mentioned earlier in connection with Cherniss' social events in olden days. Gwen Groves was the daughter of Leslie Groves, which caused some difficulty in those years, '53-'55, because that's when the Oppenheimer hearing took place. Groves had--well, you know it all--he had been the director at Los Alamos, and his testimony in the hearing contributed to Oppenheimer's dismissal from the Atomic Energy Commission. Groves' actions hurt Oppy, but we didn't hold that against his daughter Gwen. It was up at the Groves' home in Connecticut that we all went when Gwen and Robbie were married. Bram Pais was here then, too. He and

Murray became the most prominent, later on, of the group of young physicists, but I have kept up with others, particularly Stanley Deser at Brandeis and Roger Newton at Indiana. Even after thirty-five years I still see them once in a while, because we remember those days when we were buddies at the Institute.

Labalme: Oppenheimer's ordeal took place in the spring of the year you were here. What was that like?

Gieseey: It was not, it was not very pleasant at all. You'd read the New York Times about what was going on, day by day, and when it was all over it was all instantly published in one thick volume--the hearing was. That was in my second year, the spring of '55, I guess. Every night I used to read some more of the entire hearing, until I got through the whole thing again. And it was a pretty disheartening experience. And, of course, Strauss, who was largely responsible was, you know, a Trustee.

Labalme: Lewis Strauss.

Gieseey: Strauss, yes, and people here were not happy about that, for the Institute, to the person, was absolutely loyal to Oppenheimer. All that was going on in Washington involved people directly or indirectly connected with the Institute. It was tough, very tough. Yes. But you know what those days were like, it was all a continuation of the McCarthy business and then of course Kantorowicz had gone through the whole California loyalty oath thing, too, and I had been there at that time. I was involved

in it. So all of that kind of paranoid notion about the evil empire is--it looks so, especially in the spring of 1990--the whole thing begins to look so absurd, so absurd, but that's the way it was. Let's hope that that is dead forever.

Labalme: But it's amazing that Lewis Strauss, who was President [of the Board, 1949-68] at the time Oppenheimer was here [Director, 1947-66], the Groves' daughter, a curious constellation in this small separated community.

Gieseey: Yes. Yes.

Labalme: Have you written elsewhere about Kantorowicz and the California situation?

Gieseey: Well, not too much about the oath. I've written a couple of pieces on Kantorowicz in the last few years, and there is a great interest in him in the States because of his book, The Kings' Two Bodies. It's had a phenomenal success. It's been in print for all the thirty-three years since it was published by the Princeton University Press and has been translated into four languages in the last five years. This is part of the revival of interest in ceremonial and "representation,"-- the semiotic world, if you will. I have profited from it, too, since The Royal Funeral had been republished in English and translated into French some twenty-five years after it first appeared. But interest in Kantorowicz also goes back to his life in Weimar Germany, when he was part of the Stefan George-Kreis. Kantorowicz had been a disciple, if you will, of George, and his

Frederick II has been continuously in print for sixty-three years in Germany. It was composed largely under the influence of George. George was a Nietzschean, believing if not in the superman in the great leader. George was courted by the Nazis, but he disdained them and left Germany. There are very complicated notions about the George-Kreis. There was a fellow by the name of Faktor here just a couple of weeks ago from Frankfurt, looking over Kantorowicz stuff. There's a dispute in Frankfurt now about Eka--some saying he was virtually a Nazi, and that the whole George-Kreis was that, too, but it's so ridiculous. In Frankfurt, where Kantorowicz had been a professor in the early 1930s, on the fiftieth anniversary of the university in 1964 (the year after he died), he was one of the two people especially honored. He is still honored there. So, there is a kind of polar thinking about Eka there, and Faktor, a sociologist, is trying to explain that phenomenon. As far as I see it, humanists tend to glorify great men, chasing the phantom of the philosopher king, I suppose, while powerful rulers like to get humanists as their toadies. A couple of George's followers did go Nazi, but the maestro himself and most of his circle despised Hitler. That's the context in which Kantorowicz is still sometimes vilified. However, there has been a decent biography of him done in German. That helps.

Labalme: In California, you went through that experience?

Gieseey: I was fired too, it turned out. I was a teaching assistant and Robert Gordon Sproul, the president of the University, had the brilliant idea in the midst of the debate about communism in the faculty, to terminate it by declaring--as a headline in the San Francisco Chronicle said----that something like thirty-five unnamed people had been dismissed. I was one of them. Some years later it turned out that he had actually dismissed those teaching assistants who had not signed the loyalty oath. I was one. We had had hearings before a faculty panel, who reported on our loyal character, but Sproul said nothing about that. Our one-year contracts ended on June 30th, and that was the day he told the world he had fired the bunch of communists. He thought this would be a tremendously clever way of clearing the public's mind, but instead it led to the greatest explosion of all, because everybody thought, you mean there were thirty-five real card-carrying Communist people there? And who are they, what are they? That means there were some, that the regents were right all along. So anyway, Kantorowicz was one of the eighteen or so regular faculty who fought it all the way through and won the case in the state supreme court. He was here at the Institute, however, by then. He had already moved here. The day, I think, that he was officially fired at Berkeley, he had already become a member here, or been invited and accepted, so that he was never without a job. But boy, his last two years at Berkeley, which he loved--I think if the oath had not come

along, he might not even have come here to the Institute. He just loved Berkeley, northern California; somehow with its brown colors and so forth, it reminded him of Tuscany and he loved Italy above all places, you see, so he was so happy there. There was also a very large group of fellow refugee scholars, a marvelous ambiance and a nice seminar. He was very happy there, but boy, it poisoned his mind, that loyalty oath business.

Labalme: And you were his student there?

Gieseey: Yes, working on my PhD.

Labalme: And then what happened before you came to the Institute?

Gieseey: I got a Fulbright to go abroad.

Labalme: Oh, that's right.

Gieseey: To do my dissertation. Then I got another fellowship for a second year. I did the dissertation, then came back here and was his assistant.

Labalme: He speaks very affectionately, as you know, in the beginning, I think it's the introduction of The King's Two Bodies, he speaks of a collaboration of a singular kind with you.

Gieseey: That's easily explained. The subject of the dissertation was the unusual funeral ceremony of the kings in which an effigy was treated it as if it were alive, with separate parts of the ceremony devoted to the coffin body and the very lifelike effigy; that's the singular part of it all. The topic itself I had been led to casually by Kantorowicz, who always called my attention to interesting items in the French renaissance, which

was my major field. The classical scholar, Bickerman [Elias Joseph], had once written an excursus on the apotheosis of the Roman emperors, arguing that it had been copied by the Renaissance kings of France. Bickerman was convinced that the French had read certain classical texts, recovered in the Renaissance. I read the article and began to check sources a little. I soon found out that the French kings had had funeral effigies long before they knew the classical texts; that was the beginning. I got a Fulbright grant and went abroad. I concentrated my effort on showing that what developed was independent of the Roman imperial practice, as I followed the evolution of the ceremony from the early 1400s through the early 1600s. Kantorowicz read the dissertation after I finished the first draft of it abroad, and in it he found a French example of the king's two bodies, literally: the dead body vs. the lifelike effigy. In the meantime, I had no idea of the concept of the king's two bodies. When I came back here to the Institute as his assistant, he got a nice example of a French "two bodies"; his work up to then had been singularly lacking in French cases. It had been focused up to then chiefly on English kings and the writings of medieval jurists such as Baldus. I, in the meantime, read "The King's Two Bodies" and discovered what was really happening in France. I then rewrote--or better, appended a large section to the dissertation and made out of it the book. So you could not imagine a happier collaboration--and

that's what that phrase represents. I gave an important example to him; he gave a whole concept to me.

Labalme: Yes. And he uses that illustration which you found him of the Phoenix. The one in 1644.

Gieseey: Yes. That came out of something I had done my second year abroad. I got into the medallic history of the kings, a lot of stuff which I still have, which I intend to publish when I get done with the current project. I just happened to encounter the Phoenix medal in the year before I became Kantorowicz's assistant, and it popped into mind when he asked me about Phoenixes. So, yes, I did help him with specific examples of material that I had accumulated, but I had no good idea of what they were good for until I learned what he was up to. Since then, of course, we have besides his The King's Two Bodies, works by others on the queen's two bodies, the president's two bodies, and the like. The "two bodies" notion is common now. Cliff Geertz, it turns out, was one of the earliest to read The King's Two Bodies. He thinks it's one of the great historical works of our times. His Negara, the Balinese study, he said to me, was his "king's two bodies." And he acknowledges Kantorowicz in several of the notes, but he never met him. Cliff is, in my opinion, really a historian au fond.

Labalme: Yes.

Gieseey: He really is. So that experience with the King's Two Bodies was for me, in terms of my whole career, of doing something that was



regarded as significant, just of enormous importance. That dissertation would never have been published without that fortuitous event.

Labalme: It sounds like a model of what the Institute should be doing in terms of collaboration.

Gieseey: Yes. It can happen, but I think that was an unusual circumstance all the way.

Labalme: Is there anything that you had on your list of things that you wanted to talk about that we haven't touched on?

Gieseey: I don't think so, Patsy, because I told it all as I've been speaking here. I'd sometimes say, oh yes, this is another thing. In my mind, I sort of checked all things off. I do have lots of anecdotal stuff that one could bring in here which I have on disk in the computer entitled "Eka". From time to time, I put things on it that have to do with him as an American and not as a German professor, because the American side of his life is much, much less well known than the German side. That eventually will go to the Leo Baeck Institute where I finally deposited his papers. When I die there will be left some biographical stuff on him that will relate to the Institute, I am sure, a few very interesting anecdotes. One about his appointment--if you have a moment.

Labalme: Oh, we have time.

Gieseey: This is one that Cherniss told me.

Labalme: What I think I'll do is put in a new tape.

END OF TAPE NO. 1, SIDE NO. 2

TAPE NO. 2, SIDE NO. 1:

Labalme: OK. Now we're on tape again.

Gieseey: When the question of Kantorowicz's appointment came up in--it must have been in 1950, yes, '49-'50--not only the Trustees but the Faculty--I think all the Faculty, then--were involved in every appointment. It wasn't just each School handling its own. The fact that Kantorowicz was a non-signer of the loyalty oath in California, of course, made him suspect as a Communist. Now that was on one side. On the other, since he had after World War I actually been part of the group that put down Rosa Luxembourgh and so forth, that was the other side of the story. A special committee of the Trustees was appointed, and Cherniss, who knew Kantorowicz from Berkeley days, was there to speak, and behind him, I think, were both Oppenheimer and Johnny von Neumann. This was a rather imposing thing. Harold said he doesn't think that Eka's appointment would have been made if those two had not been standing behind him, largely because apparently Hermann Weyl knew deeply about Eka's George-Kreis past. He didn't know Eka personally, but he had raised some questions about Eka's German past. Strauss, on the other hand, was suspicious about Eka and the loyalty oath. You know what Strauss thought about anybody who might be tainted as Communist. But, as Harold said, at that meeting, with his two henchmen behind him to help, opposition to Eka was quashed. This was

right in the midst of all of the McCarthy stuff, and its kind of character assassination. You would have to know Eka to know how absurd was the notion that he ever associated with Communists. I know he was, during the time he was in the States, a genuine liberal. He only voted democratic, and as Cherniss said--and Cherniss knew so many of the wave of refugees from Germany--Eka was one of the few who genuinely changed, that is became democratic, who easily identified with ordinary people, his housekeeper, his butcher, his garage man and so forth, whereas so many of the other intellectuals came and maintained the characteristic of lots of European academics of high standing, of expecting deference.

Labalme: Herr Professor.

Gieseey: Yes. And in that same line once I remember being with Eka and Ted Mommsen when Ted was here. Mommsen was, for a while, Kantorowicz's closest friend before he went up to Cornell and three of us were having dinner. Eka had come back from the first return to Germany he had made since leaving there in the '30s, and Ted, too, maybe that very same summer had gone back for the first time. As they talked, they said the one thing that they found very difficult was to go back into a situation where people were acting deferential towards them. They didn't like that. Didn't like it because they had gotten used to the other way. Theodor E. Mommsen was Ted. You know the story, Felix tells it.

Labalme: No.

Gieseey: Well, it's at the beginning, someplace in his recent book, A European Past, where he talks about the name "Ted." When he introduced Mommsen to his wife, Mary, Mommsen said, in the States everybody calls me "Ted." That's the way it would be with Mary, later with me, too: I had to call him Ted. But Felix just couldn't, because he had always called him "Teodore" in Germany and "Ted" doesn't exist in German. So that was a sign of Mommsen's democratization. Before Eka died, he was under a virtual death sentence, knowing that he didn't have long to live. He knew he would go very quickly, that made him happy. I was here in Princeton--this was in September of '63--when the great march on Washington on behalf of the blacks was to take place. He said, "if I were not ill, I would be in there on that march." For somebody who had been such an elitist, when you think of the Frederick II, the model of the great leader and so forth, the change that was wrought in his life exactly because of Nazi power was tremendous. That's what Cherniss could perceive so clearly as compared to others who in general were very much like him, a transformation of his view of the world. And that's the same thing that you can see, or at least I have seen and tried to write about, the difference between Frederick II and how it speaks of rulership and The King's Two Bodies and how it speaks of it. They're quite different things, clearly.

Labalme: So he evolved while he was here.

Gieseey: Well, he was about ten years in Berkeley and twelve years here.

Labalme: And you stayed close to him even during those periods when you weren't here?

Gieseey: I came here often. Sandy Lafferty made a list of the times when I was a summer visitor. They grouped in the early '60s and the early '80s, and I was a member in the early '60s and mid '70s. But I often visited Eka, maybe just for a few days or a week, when I was going abroad, at the beginning or end of my trip. So I saw him regularly, and had quite a correspondence with him. The group of us who had been his graduate students in Berkeley remained very close to him until the end. Michael Cherniavsky, Bobby Bensen, Joe Rubinstein and myself and some of the others.

Labalme: Well, you were his family.

Gieseey: Yes. Since he never married and had no proper family. Once you studied with him for a while, you got used to his way of speaking and comprehending. Take medieval kingship. For Eka, there was always a linkage between medieval kingship and antiquity, in literature or in art--a Christian transformation, if you will, of some classical model. The King's Two Bodies is a bit of an exception. That's a genuine Christian invention. And then, of course, all those things had their echoes in modern times. The relationship, in general, was usually between kingship and the gods. That's the singular problem that he knew best throughout western culture. Once you got used to that, everything you read in the newspaper potentially had an echo.

Once you got into that world of thought, you could join with him in all kinds of little in-joke references. And so those of us who developed this trick became his local intellectual family. He was still, of course, much more personally related to his own cohort, but those of us who were his students in that special way became his family of sorts. That does happen. It's even happened to me as well as you might have guessed from last night, the dinner we had with my student. Yes. So that was quite special but not greatly different from what always happens. You still must feel pretty close to Felix.

Labalme: Yes. Yes. And one appreciates those relationships so much.

Gieseey: Yes.

Labalme: Well, Ralph, what I'll do is make a transcript and when you look it over if you get some ideas you can add or on your next summer's visit we can talk again.

Gieseey: OK, I'll do that. I know how it is going to come out at first, because I have been asked to make a transcription at a symposium of the discussion that was recorded, and then I had to listen to it and make sense out of it. What a chore you have to put those things together.

Labalme: No, this will have its own sense. I'm not worried about it.

Gieseey: Yes, well, it'll all be me and I should be able to know what I have said myself.

Labalme: I thank you very much for it.

END OF TAPE NO. 2, SIDE NO. 1

END OF INTERVIEW