The Varnhagen Collection Is in Krakow

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HISTORIANS OF GERMANY may well lament that locating primary material often threatens to become a research project in itself. Labyrinthian searches for specific collections are not a consequence of World War Two only. Centuries of decentralization in Central Europe resulted in a regional distribution of archival material. The war, however, created a much less predictable dispersion of documents. Rare manuscripts inside Germany and, after 1939, within the whole of Nazi-dominated Europe, were moved about for a variety of reasons. At war's end, manuscripts used by the genealogy bureaucracy, appropriated as booty, and evacuated from likely Allied bombing sites, could be found in castles, salt mines, and monasteries far from their original locations. Some documents left Central Europe altogether, taken home by victorious armies for use as trial evidence in bringing ex-Nazis to justice.[1]

When the decision was finally made to return all dispersed files to their original institutions, there were two Germanies. Archival location again followed power politics. Through a maze of legal rulings and administrative orders, material which lay in the British, French, and American zones of Germany, and in the United States, was returned to West Germany. Material which ended up in the Russian zone and in the USSR and at least some of that which lay in Poland, was returned to East Germany.[2]

But rulings were not always conclusive regarding all possible archival depositories, and not all transported treasures have been sent home again. Perhaps the most valuable, certainly one of the most searched-for of all extant manuscript collections, is the one that spent much of the war in a Benedictine monastery in a Silesian hamlet then called Grüssau.

The Grüssau story begins at the Preussische Staatsbibliothek in April of 1941. An English bomb attack had damaged the State Opera across Unter den Linden. The decision was made to ship major portions of the library's holdings out of Berlin. Twenty-nine depository sites were chosen. Because the eastern front was considered the less dangerous war arena in 1941, twenty-four of the twenty-nine sites were located east of the Elbe.[3] At issue is the largest and most significant spread of

[1] A survey of the dispersion (and destruction) of archival material at the end of the war can be found in Sybil Milton, "The Archival Jigsaw Puzzle," a paper delivered at the 1979 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, in Chicago.

[2] Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," *Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* (hereafter: *Notes*) 33 (1976): 7–15. Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart auf der Reise nach Krakau," *Neue Rundschau* 2 (1977): 165–99.

[3] Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," p. 8. Most of the depots were monasteries or Stately Homes.

manuscripts sent to a depot whose location was not merely east of the Elbe, which could have placed it in post-war East Germany, but also east of the Oder-Neisse line, which eventually placed it outside of either Germany. The crates in question may have spent the war years in a section of Silesia which had been German since 1742.[4] But when the post-war border between the East German Democratic Republic (D.D.R.) and Poland was recognized *de facto* in 1946, the same crates lay in Poland; for Grüssau lay in a section of German Silesia ceded to Poland "in compensation" for land in eastern Poland lost to the USSR in 1945.[5]

A complete list of the contents of the 505 crates stored at the Grüssau monastery has never been issued;[6] yet even rough descriptions point to the importance of material first sent to a castle (Schloss Fürstenstein) near Breslau (now Wroclaw). The 505 crates were moved twenty kilometers west in 1943 to the Benedictine monastery at Grüssau.[7] Whereas other Staatsbibliothek depots included periodicals, books, or library catalogs, the Grüssau crates held much of the *Handschrift Abteilung* of the library. The musical scores deposited at Grüssau were its most spectacular holding; they have been called "the world's most important collection of missing music manuscripts."[8] The scores include Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte* (Act 1), *Marriage of Figaro* (Acts 3 and 4) and the *Jupiter* symphony; Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and seventh, eighth, and ninth symphonies (in whole or in part); as well as scores by Bach, Bruckner, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Haydn, and Schubert.

But the Grüssau crates also hold treasures for *Germanisten* and intellectual historians. The "Autographa" collection contained all literary papers not part of independently administered literary estates. The Varnhagen Collection, one of these independently administered estates, included letters, memoirs, and unpublished literary work once in the private collection of Karl Varnhagen von Ense (1785–1858). By 1911, the Varnhagen Collection contained the papers of over 9,000 German intellectuals from the early nineteenth century. Varnhagen's wife, Rahel (Levin) Varnhagen; Goethe; Wilhelm von Humboldt; Friedrich and A. W. Schlegel; Heinrich Heine; G. W. F. Hegel; J. G. Fichte; and Karl Marx are among those whose writings are included. The 1911 guide to the collection ran to 963 pages, and even it is incomplete since additional manuscripts were added to the collection after that date.[9]

Because of the value of the Grüssau manuscripts and the changing interests of

[4] The area in question, Grüssau (now Kreszów), was in Lower Silesia and remained German until 1945.

[5] See Alfred Grosser, *Germany in Our Time: A Political History of the Postwar Years* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 46–56; and Carl Landauer, *Germany: Illusions and Dilemmas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), pp. 36–43.

[6] Peter Whitehead describes the *Verlagerungslisten,* a copy of which was sent with each crate; the originals, he claims, remained at the Staatsbibliothek. A schematic description of the contents of the Grüssau depot can be found in W. Schmidt, "Die Verlagerung der bestände im zweiten Weltkrieg und ihr Rückführung," in H. Kunze, W. Dube, and G. Fröscher, *Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, 1661–1961* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag, 1961), pp. 77–86.

[7] Originally, 201 crates were sent to Schloss Fürstenstein; an additional 304 crates arrived there in 1943. No rationale has been suggested in the published literature for the move from the castle to the monastery. The size of each crate is described in Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," p. 170.

[8] Nigel Lewis, "The Great Music Find," *The Sunday Times* (London), 3 April 1977, p. 17. A partial list of the Grüssau music manuscripts was published by R. S. Hill in his "The Former Prussian State Library," *Notes* 3 (1945–46): 327–50; Hill's list was reprinted by Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts" (see note 2, above).

[9] The guide is by Ludwig Stern, *Die Varnhagen von Ensesche Sammlung in der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin: Behrend and Co., 1911). My own work with the collection suggests that because Stern's guide was schematic, or because the collection grew after Stern's volume was issued, or because of both factors, there are sometimes important manuscripts in the boxes, not listed in Stern's guide.

musical and historical scholarship, a small group of journalists, scholars, and archivists watched for their reappearance. In the first two decades after the war, much material from the other Staatsbibliothek depots was gradually returned either to the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, in West Berlin, or to the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in the Unter den Linden building in East Berlin. Poland returned some material to East Germany's Staatsbibliothek in 1965. The Grüssau deposition, however, was neither returned to the East Berlin Staatsbibliothek nor was its discovery anywhere else ever announced.[10]

For much of this period, music journalist Carleton Smith conducted the most persistent search for the missing Grüssau crates. He and the National Arts Foundation he directs are said to have checked out over a thousand leads in an attempt to discover if the Grüssau deposition had survived the war intact.[11] Smith's continued lack of success seemed to be confirmed by Werner Schmidt's official pronouncement, in a 1961 anniversary volume on the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, that the Grüssau monastery had probably burned down and that the treasures it contained were likely to have been lost.[12] Some scholars gave up hope that the material would ever be found. Hannah Arendt delayed publication of her biography of Rahel Varnhagen because of the postwar disappearance of her chief source, the Varnhagen Collection. In 1957 Arendt published her manuscript and mourned in her first sentences the loss of this crucial material.[13] The text was unaltered when the biography was reissued in 1974.[14]

Letters to Polish as well as East German officials from scholars who knew that specific manuscripts had gone under at Grüssau did not result in locating the material.[15] Apparently, East Germany itself failed to confirm the existence of the deposition; a party-to-party request as late as 1966 evoked the response that "no trace of the manuscripts could be found in Poland."[16]

Although official channels provided no hope that a search for the Grüssau deposition would ever be successful, individual scholars persevered. Monks who spent the war years at Grüssau testifed that the intact crates were transported out of Grüssau by Polish Army lorries in 1946. The monks were adamant in their testimony that no fire had broken out at the monastery at any time.[17] Nor was there good reason to believe that harm had come to the manuscripts after their journey away from Grüssau. But where were they taken?

Confirmation that at least some manuscripts had survived intact and were in the

[10] A list of the depots east of the Oder-Neisse Line, as well as his own estimates of the postwar fate of each, can be found in W. Schmidt, "Die Verlagerung," pp. 82–83. See also Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," p. 183.

[11] Nigel Lewis, "The Great Music Find."

[12] See note 7, above.

[13] Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: Portrait of a Jewess* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974). Arendt intended originally to publish Rahel Varnhagen's unpublished letters and to correct the edited version of her already published letters. It was Arendt's conviction that the edited version, by Karl Varnhagen von Ense, represented a drastic abridgement omitting important passages about Rahel's relationship with the local Jewish community. Her notes for this second, quite enormous project can be found in the Leo Baeck Institute, New York City.

[14] Harcourt Brace published the biography in a paperbound edition in 1974.

[15] Peter Whitehead's summary of his own correspondence crusade can be found in "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," pp. 11–12. As late as June 1977 my query to the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek (D.D.R.) elicited the response that if the Varnhagen Collection was still intact, D.D.R. researchers were extremely interested in it and my efforts to locate it were not necessary. As late as July 1976, Dieter Henrich was informed by the same institution that the Grüssau deposition was considered to be lost: Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," pp. 171–72.

[16] Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," p. 11.

[17] Henrich gives the summer of 1946 as the date given by the monks for the removal of the crates: Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," p. 175. Whitehead estimates the date to be May 1947: Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," p. 11.

Krakow vicinity was first provided in sketchy accounts by Carleton Smith in 1974.[18] Krakow had long been considered the most likely destination for the removed Grüssau crates. It is close to Grüssau and, unlike Warsaw, Krakow was scarcely bombed at all during the war. Moreover, it was splendidly equipped with a fine university, libraries, and research institutes. Smith's news encouraged Peter Whitehead, a British Museum zoologist, to coordinate his search for the name of a seventeenth-century herring (in a picture in the "Libri Picturati" collection) with musicologists eager to apply new research techniques to the Grüssau musical scores. Many letters were written. Success was not immediate. The Polish Ministry of Culture and Art assured Whitehead in January 1976 that no record of the Grüssau boxes could be located. The British Foreign Office directed its UNESCO delegation not to raise the issue of the lost manuscripts at a 1976 UNESCO meeting in Nairobi because of the Polish government's declaration that they found no record of the Grüssau crates.[19] But in March 1977 Whitehead received a letter from an art historian in Warsaw whose help had been enlisted. Jan Bialostocki stated that "he was authorized" to inform Whitehead that "the manuscripts" were in good condition and that their current whereabouts would soon be announced.

Whitehead did not sit on this information. A scant three weeks after it was written, Bialostocki's phrasing was used in a *Sunday Times* (London) piece by Nigel Lewis as the basis for the claim that the musical collection had been "recovered intact."[20] The news was picked up by the International *Herald Tribune,* and a German version appeared in the *Berliner Morgenpost.*[21] Lewis's sources suggested that Poland would soon follow in the USSR's steps and return the manuscripts to East Germany, perhaps in exchange for displaced Polish art treasures now in the D.D.R.

The next move was made by the Polish government. In May 1977 Edward Giereck presented seven of the precious scores to Erich Honecker of East Germany. One cynical observer attributed the gift and ensuing Berlin exhibit of the scores to the pressure of the *Sunday Times* exposé. According to East German reporters, dedicated socialist librarians in Poland had just recently, perhaps even accidentally, come upon the scores. No mention was made of the stymied searches of the previous thirty-one years, of the scope of what might be yet in Krakow, or of suspicions that the Polish government might be less than enthusiastic about returning more manuscripts to East Germany.[22]

Buoyed by new hopes, an expanded circle of scholars stepped up their inquiries. Unpublished reports held that the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow housed the manuscripts.[23] But written inquiries to the Jagiellonian still hit dead ends. American and Canadian scholars who suspected that specific manuscripts might be at the Jagiellonian, and who wrote asking to purchase microfilms of the material, were denied information about the existence and

[18] Carleton Smith, BBC, *Arts Worldwide,* 23 April 1974; and "Tracking Down Original Scores Missing in the War," *Smithsonian* 6 (December 1975): 86–93. Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," p. 172, criticizes Smith's work; as does Peter Whitehead, "The Lost Berlin Manuscripts," p. 12.

[19] Nigel Lewis, "The Great Music Find." Henrich describes a parallel and also unsuccessful attempt to have the Federal Republic of Germany take up the issue with the Polish government, in 1974: Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," p. 174.

[20] Nigel Lewis, "The Great Music Find," Dieter Henrich's critique of the piece was added as a postscript to his *Neue Rundschau* article, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart auf der Reise nach Krakau."

[21] "Herring Search Yields Music Manuscripts," International *Herald Tribune,* 4 April 1977; Wilfried W. Bruchhäuser, "Verschollene Schätze der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek in Kattowitz aufgetaucht," *Berliner Morgenpost,* 10 April 1977, p. 37.

[22] The article on the Giereck gift appeared in *Neues Deutschland* on 31 May 1977. An earlier piece on the manuscripts, by Karl-Heinz Kohler, appeared in *Neues Deutschland,* 4–5 June 1977, p. 9.

[23] In August 1977, Nigel Lewis was kind enough to share with me information obtained on his July 1977 visit to the Jagiellonian Library.

whereabouts of the material, not to mention access for research, or purchase of microfilm.[24] Hope was revived when Nigel Lewis published a piece in the *Times Literary Supplement* (26 May 1978) based on a July 1977 visit to the Jagiellonian. But Lewis still could not be precise about what exactly was at the Jagiellonian, and whether access to the manuscripts would be granted to scholars.

More recently, however, an extended research visit to the Jagiellonian University has revealed that the Varnhagen Collection is almost completely intact and has been cataloged at the Jagiellonian Library.[25] More important, the visit shows that access to use and even publish major sections of the collection can be granted to Western scholars. A forthcoming publication of Hegel manuscripts in the collection should clarify long-standing questions about the origins of German idealist philosophy.[26] Hannah Arendt's plans to publish the largest unpublished and "most honest" section of Rahel Levin Varnhagen's correspondence can also be fulfilled at last.[27]

For two scholars and their audiences, the Grüssau story has thus come to a happy end. However, much is not yet clear. Is the entire Grüssau deposition at the Jagiellonian, or only the Varnhagen Collection? What appropriated Polish treasures now lie in East Germany? In Krakow it is reported that negotiations about exchange of the Grüssau deposition for such material date back to the immediate postwar era.[28] Will such negotiations soon come to an end, and what will be the final decision? Are Polish representatives justified in retaining the Grüssau deposition in Poland as one of the reparations for Polish suffering under Nazi domination? Will the D.D.R., which had massive amounts of property removed as reparations by the USSR (but refused to pay reparations to Israel), accept such reasoning? If the negotiations continue to be as protracted as they have been hitherto, will more Western scholars gain access to the Jagiellonian's depositions?

The delays and intrigue involved in finding the Grüssau materials have made some scholars impatient. Peter Whitehead, Dieter Henrich, and Nigel Lewis have each proclaimed in print that all that matters to them is access to the manuscripts, not the state which eventually convinces other states that it has the right to own the deposition. In view of the substantive historical and political issues that have caused these delays, however, such impatience appears naïve. Those whose intellectual work brings them to east-central Europe are sure to understand that the volatile relationship between ethnicity and state in this area helped to cause both the shipment of the deposition out of Berlin and the quandary of the decision about its eventual home.

For those scholars whose work may necessitate a journey to Krakow, knowledge of the political complexities behind the deposition's disappearance should allay some of their impatience with inevitable

[24] Hermann Weiss, of the German Department, University of Michigan, was denied information about the Varnhagen Collection when he wrote to the Jagiellonian about Achim von Arnim manuscripts, in 1978. The story of a Canadian scholar's failure to obtain microfilms was shared with me by librarians at the Jagiellonian in October 1979.

[25] I made an exploratory visit to the Jagiellonian Library in July 1978, and returned in September 1979. My second visit was sponsored by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board), New York. I was a guest of the Institute of History at the Jagiellonian University. I would like to express my gratitude to IREX and to the staff of the Jagiellonian Library, for their generous assistance.

[26] For a description of manuscripts in the Varnhagen Collection relevant to the origins of German idealist philosophy, see Dieter Henrich, "Beethoven, Hegel und Mozart," pp. 169–70.

[27] My work at the Jagiellonian concerned these 346 letters, written between 1806 and 1810. In my introduction to these letters I will show how they change the accepted portrayal of Rahel Varnhagen, as well as how they illustrate the plight of Jewish literary women desperate to make hypergamous marriage alliances in *ancien régime* Berlin. This plight is charted in detail in my history dissertation, *The Literary Salon in Berlin, 1780–1806: The Social History of an Intellectual Institution* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979).

[28] Because the fate of the Grüssau deposition is as yet unclear, and because rumor has it that past complications arising from its cover-up led to two suicides, I will not mention my Polish and West German sources by name here.

bureaucratic delays. Those who are powerless to decide the deposition's eventual fate can only hope that this time, a sense of justice as well as the forces of power politics will determine an archival location.

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