


Obligation and Libido. Hannah Arendt in Wiesbaden, 1949-1950

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Abstract: The article focuses on Arendt's stay in Germany between late 1949 and early 1950. It discusses her attempts to conduct a thorough survey and find the best solution (beyond Germany) for the books, archival materials, Judaica artifacts and works of art looted by the Nazis from Jewish communities and private collections which were upon their discovery stored by the US army in central collecting points since 1945. It reflects on these four winter months in Arendt's life as revealed through her official reports to her superiors in New York and in her personal correspondence with her husband Heinrich Blücher and her close friends, hoping to shed new light on a hitherto less familiar chapter in the life of this fascinating and controversial woman. During these months, Arendt paid several visits to her former PhD instructor Karl Jaspers in Basle. She also harbored a more clandestine wish to meet another former university professor of hers – the controversial philosopher Martin Heidegger. Between 1924 and 1926, Arendt and Heidegger had conducted a secret love affair when she was his student at the university of Marburg. By 1949, Heidegger, a member of the NSDAP since 1932, was forbidden from teaching at university. He was considered tainted by this affiliation by many of his former friends, colleagues and former students. While some biographers of Arendt discussed her reunions with her former teachers in light of her personal and intellectual personae, little attention was given to the link with her important mission for the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR). This was most likely due to the difficult personality of Arendt which was “flattened” after the 1960ies through the prism of her writing about the Eichmann trial while other different aspects of her public activity in the field of restitution were either forgotten or completely ignored.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt; Wiesbaden; JCR (Jewish Cultural Reconstruction); Karl Jaspers; Martin Heidegger

Introduction

On December 2nd 1949, a woman from New York arrived at the Wiesbaden Landesmuseum in Germany.¹ This partly ruined building, once the regional museum, functioned since August 1945 as a storage depot for works of art discovered by the advancing US army troops. Those art works were often found in various salt mines and other designated storage facilities aimed to protect the works of art from air-raids and falling bombs throughout

Germany and Austria. This woman was the German-born political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975). She was entrusted with a mission by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction organization (JCR) whose then-director was the historian Salo Baron.² Arendt was instructed to travel to Wiesbaden in the US Sector of post-war Germany. As the executive secretary of the organization, she was tasked to write detailed field reports about the condition of Jewish cultural assets in various German cities. She was asked to find out what survived of the cultural communal assets of the Jewish congregations which had lived and flourished in Germany

1 This article was presented as a lecture on August 8th 2022 at the 18th World Congress of Jewish Studies. Hannah Arendt's address for receiving letters while in Germany was Alexanderstraße 6-8, Military Club, Wiesbaden. See Lotte Kohler (ed.): *Within Four Walls: The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher, 1936-1968*, translated from German by Peter Constantine, New York, 1996, 128.

2 Salo Wittmayer Baron (1895-1989) was a Jewish-American historian who taught Jewish History at Columbia University in New York. See Robert Liberles: *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish history*, New York 1995.

prior to 1933, particularly concerning libraries, archives and Judaica artifacts. In her reports she detailed her efforts to go beyond a survey of the communities now under the American military jurisdiction and to establish links with the British in their zone as well in order to create a similar trust organization.³

While preparing for this trip, Arendt intended to pay a visit to her former PhD instructor Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and his wife Gertrude Mayer (1879-1974) in Basle.⁴ She also harbored a more clandestine wish to meet another former university professor of hers: the controversial philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Between 1924 and 1926, Arendt and (the married) Heidegger had conducted a secret love affair when she was his student at the university of Marburg. By 1949, Heidegger, a member of the NSDAP since 1932, was forbidden from teaching at university. He was considered tainted by this affiliation by many of his former friends, colleagues and former students.

Arendt – Pre-1949

While some biographers of Hannah Arendt discussed her reunions with her former teachers in light of her personal and intellectual personae, little attention was hitherto given to the time frame in which these reunions took place. I would like to link these meetings during winter 1949-1950 with her important mission for the JCR. Ignorance of her mission for JCR happened most, it seemed, out of perceiving it as of lesser importance or because it was not altogether clear what the nature of her assignment truly was. One way or another, due to Arendt's controversial nature, her personality was 'flattened' into the image of the 'bad Jewish Woman', especially after her publication *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* in 1963 was published. All the other different aspects of her public activity in the field of restitution were either forgotten or completely ignored.

My paper focuses on Arendt's stay in Germany between late 1949 and early 1950. It discusses her attempts to conduct a thorough survey and find the best solution (beyond Germany) for the books, archival materials, Judaica artifacts and works of art looted by the Nazis from Jewish communities and private collections which were upon their discovery stored by the US army in central collecting points since 1945. I reflect on these four winter months in Arendt's life as revealed through her official reports to her superiors in New York, namely Baron, and in her personal correspondence with her husband Heinrich Blücher and her close friends. Thereby I hope to shed new light on a less familiar chapter in the life of this fascinating woman.

Arendt's relationship with her 'Mutterland' Germany was similar to that of many assimilated intellectual Jews who were born in the early 20th century and grew up under the liberal Weimar Republic. "For me", she wrote to Karl Jaspers on January 1st 1933, "Germany is mother tongue, philosophy and poetry. For all this I can and must be steadfast".⁵ In the spring of 1933, she received a research assignment from Kurt Blumenfeld (1884-1963) of the German Zionist Organization and started collecting materials concerning anti-Semitic remarks, spending her days at the Prussian State Library in Berlin. She was arrested and interrogated for eight days by the Gestapo. In light of that, she fled together with her mother Martha (né Cohn, 1874-1948) via Prague and Geneva to Paris, living there for the next seven years. By 1934, she was, as described by Dana Richard Villa throughout his 2009 article: an émigré, an exile, stateless, and without papers, and the one who turned her back on the Germany and Germans of the Nazizeit.⁶

After internment for two months in Camp de Gurs in May 1940 as 'enemy alien', she managed to leave the French internment camp in July and unite with her (second) husband Heinrich Blücher, the German poet and philosopher. In May 1941, they escaped from southern France via Lisbon, finally reaching a safe haven in New York where they settled.⁷

3 Field Report no. 18 about Hamburg, dated Feb. 15th to March 10th, 1950, <https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/22289,<14.09.2023>>.

4 For more detailed information on the Arendt-Jaspers relationship see: Ingeborg Gleichauf: Hannah Arendt und Karl Jaspers: Geschichte einer einzigartigen Freundschaft, Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2021.

5 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl: Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World, New Haven / London 1982, 103, note 33.

6 Dana Richard Villa: Hannah Arendt, 1906-1975, in: Review of Politics 71 (2009), No. 1, 20-36.

7 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 164.

Three years later, residing in New York, Arendt, assisted by Jewish refugees from Germany who were former librarians or museum curators before escaping to the USA, gathered information about the scope of the lootings and confiscations of artworks and entire libraries from Jewish communities and Masonic lodges all over occupied Europe. The compiled lists provided the basis for future negotiations between the Jewish organizations and the US government officials in their efforts to recover the remains of Jewish cultural life in Europe. During these years, she was working on her seminal book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which was published in 1951. The knowledge she gained from these interviews helped her shape her ideas about the mechanisms of the Nazi regime.⁸

The Trip to Post-War Germany

How difficult was it for her to return to the country of her former self as a young promising scholar, 16 years after she had to escape from it? It was not only her duty towards the mission entrusted to her by her superiors but most likely also a keen sense of curiosity to visit and explore the country she was forced to abandon.

“Do you know how right you were”, she wrote to Blücher in her first letter to him on December 14th 1949, two weeks after reaching Germany, “never to want to come back here again? The lump of sentimentality that begins to rise gets stuck in one’s throat. The Germans are living off lifelong illusions and stupidity. The latter stinks to the skies”, but later on she admits:

*“And yet there’s this deceptive familiarity in everything, above all the landscape ... towns which one suddenly remembers because one’s feet know so well which way to go Yesterday evening I completed the first real report for Salo Baron It was a hell of a lot of work gathering in such a short period enough information for us to know what we can and cannot do. Almost every day I’ve been in a different city – Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Würzburg, Nuremberg, Erlangen, Heidelberg – and had appointments literally from morning to night”.*⁹

Though coming to Germany filled Arendt with a certain ambivalence, she fully intended to accomplish her assigned mission. Shortly after she got to the Wiesbaden collecting point, Arendt wrote her husband about an interesting encounter she had there. On December 26th she declared: “I’m writing today and tomorrow to Baron: in short I most probably have accomplished too much, I myself do not know.” Later on, in the same letter, she recounted: “One of the museum guys, a charming art historian, told me full of outrage that I should go to Heuss and demand that not only items be returned, but also that reparations be made” and then “I have good relationships with most of them – they trust me, after all we do speak the same language. Dreadful are only the so-called German Jews, their communities are bands of robbers, everything uncouth and totally vulgar and nasty. When I can’t handle it anymore, I escape to the Jewish American organizations.”¹⁰

These frank and harsh words about ‘the Jews’ are quite surprising, considering these were the people who survived the war and the Holocaust only four years earlier. Furthermore, Arendt did not know that the “charming” art historian she encountered, Ernst Holzinger (1901-1972), had been one of three major looters of art from private

8 Marie Luise Knott (ed.): *The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, translated by Anthony David, Chicago / London 2017, 52-55.

9 Kohler 1996 (see FN 1), 103-104.

10 Kohler 1996 (see FN 1), 111.

and public Jewish collections in Frankfurt and the surrounding area between 1938 and 1943, earmarking works of art for museums and other Nazi institutions.¹¹

Arendt and the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Inc. Activities

Reflecting on the events that lead to the establishment of JCR and the ensuing cultural survey in post-war Germany Arendt was asked to preform requires a closer look on the so-called *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (also known as ERR).¹²

In 1939, the Nazi chief ideologist Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) and his special taskforce began, under Hitler's orders, to ransack Jewish cultural institutions in Germany, Austria and the occupied countries. The goal was to create a dedicated *Research Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question* (*Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*). Based on the confiscated holdings of Jewish libraries and archives, the institute intended to identify and attack the alleged Jewish influence on German culture and to record the history of Judaism from an anti-Semitic perspective. In March 1941, Rosenberg inaugurated the first branch of this so-called *Hohe Schule* in Frankfurt.¹³ Under his orders, his special taskforce plundered over half a million books from Jewish private and public ownership throughout Germany and later on in countries that fell under Nazi rule. The ERR also looted thousands of Judaica artifacts, paintings, and drawings and intended them for art museums as well as for private collectors among the Nazi leadership.

11 Dr. Holzinger must have been a charming person because the first director of the Wiesbaden Collecting Point, Walter Farmer, repeatedly referred to him in praising words in his book. See Walter Farmer: *The Safekeepers: A Memoir of the Arts at the End of World War II*, Munich / Berlin / New York 2000, 93-94, 102. Concerning Holzinger's activities on the art market of Paris during the occupation years and his assignments in Frankfurt in assessing Jewish art collections, see also: <https://agorha.inha.fr/ark:/54721/910da02f-c448-47b8-ad8a-2826ca6871a2>, <14.09.2023>; and Shlomit Steinberg: *The Mystery of 4 paintings and one Nazi dealer: Schiele, Heckel and a man called Wilhelm Schumann*, in: *The Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of WW II Victims in Prague* (eds.): *Terezin Declaration – Ten Years Later. Conference proceedings*, 78-79. On Holzinger also see in great detail: Uwe Fleckner: *Museum im Widerspruch*, Munich 2011.

12 Herbert P. Rothfeder: *A Study of Alfred Rosenberg's Organization for National Socialist Ideology*, Michigan, Phil. Diss. 1963, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor; Elisabeth Simpson: *The Spoils of War. World War II and Its Aftermath: the Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property*, New York 1997; Anders Rydell: *The Book Thieves. The Nazi Looting of Europe's Libraries and the Race to Return a Literary Inheritance*, New York 2017.

13 Also see Dirk Rupnow: *Judenforschung im Dritten Reich. Wissenschaft zwischen Politik, Propaganda und Ideologie*, Baden-Baden 2011.

In her biography on Arendt *For Love of the World*, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl recounts the events that paved the way for Arendt's involvement in the project of mapping the looted Jewish libraries and archives and striving for its possible future restitution:

"In the early 1940s the publisher Zalman Schocken¹⁴ asked Salo Baron whether the conference [on Jewish Social Studies] would work with the Hebrew University in an advisory capacity. The university wanted suggestions about means of recovering whatever books from European Jewish collections had survived the first years of the war. The conference members responded by establishing the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction and it was the research work of this commission which Hannah Arendt began to direct in 1944. ... The commissions' task was to determine how European Jewry's spiritual treasures could be recovered and given new homes".¹⁵

By the end of 1944, Baron strived to create a commission for the cultural restitution of European Jewry.¹⁶ A year later, he met with General Lucius Clay (1898-1978), assistant military governor of the US occupation zone in Germany, to discuss the future of unclaimed Jewish objects of various kinds which had been found at the Nazi hiding places and taken by the US army for safekeeping at the army's

14 Shlomo Zalman Schocken (1877-1959) was a German Jewish publisher and co-founder of the large Kaufhaus Schocken chain of department stores in Germany. Stripped of his citizenship and forced to sell his company by the Nazi government, he migrated to Palestine in 1934. He settled in Jerusalem, built the Schocken Library, and became a board member of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the owner of the daily newspaper Haaretz. Schocken also founded the Schocken Publishing House Ltd. and, in New York in 1945 (with the aid of Hannah Arendt and Nahum Glatzer), opened another branch: Schocken Books. He became a board member of the Jewish National Fund and helped with the purchase of land in Haifa.

15 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 187.

16 About the commission see: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11645559>, <14.09.2023>.

central collecting points in Germany.¹⁷ Between 1944 and 1946, Arendt worked as research director for the Conference on Jewish Relations. During that time, she learned about the scope of the lootings and confiscations of entire libraries, archives and works of art from Jewish communities as well as from private collectors in occupied Europe. This resulted in a detailed report which she published in 1946 as a supplement to the periodical *Jewish Social Studies*. A hundred pages document, the *Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries*, provided the basis for the JCR premises in negotiations with US government officials aiming to recover the remains of Jewish cultural assets in Europe.¹⁸ In October 1946 General Clay wrote:

“... if claims are to be filed by an International Agency on behalf of Jewish interests in general it is considered imperative that the agency be truly representative of Jewish interests throughout the world with adequate provision in particular for the representation of Jewish interests now in Germany.”¹⁹

The deadline for filing restitution claims was December 31st 1948. Clay issued a regulation authorizing an application process for charitable organizations to receive the status of a successor organization. He gave Salo Baron's commission an authorization to act as trustee on behalf of World Jewry and gave orders to establish a special depot for storing the Jewish objects and books in Offenbach near Frankfurt. On May 12th 1947, twelve Jewish organizations from all over the world joined forces in New York to form the *Jewish Successor Restitution Organization* (JRSO), a body that would serve as successor to the properties of Jews who had perished in the Holocaust and left no heirs. The organizations combined American, British, German, and French committees and associations, as well as representatives of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. The organization's offices were installed in Nuremberg. Heading the entire operation's team was the lawyer Benjamin B. Ferencz (1920-2023), a young investigator of Nazi war crimes and chief prosecutor for the US Army at the Nuremberg Trials. Most cases handled by the *Jewish Restitution Successor Organization* had almost nothing to do with books, art or ritual objects; the organization's work consisted mainly of filing claims and applying the proceeds to the relief of needy refugees as well as claiming restitution of communal property.²⁰

In lieu of that, the *Jewish Cultural Reconstruction* (JCR) was formed in April 1949 as the JRSO's cultural agent. JCR came under the supervision of Dr. Bernard Heller (1897-1976), a rabbi and scholar of Jewish ethics, the bibliographer Shlomo Shunami (1897-1984) from the National Library in Jerusalem and the journalist and publisher Dr. Ernst Lowenthal (1904-1994). The JCR requested that institutions receiving formerly looted books or documents mark them by a special ex-libris (figure 1)

17 The *Munich Central Collecting Point*, the largest US Army facility established in June 1945, consisted of two buildings that had originally functioned as the local headquarters of Hitler (the *Führerbau*) and the NSDAP (the *Verwaltungsbau*), respectively, at the Königsplatz. It held the art treasures stolen by Alfred Rosenberg's special taskforce (*ERR*) as well as loot and purchases ordered by Hitler earmarked for the future Linz Museum he was planning to build after the war in his own name. There were also works of art earmarked for Hermann Göring's private collection. See Iris Lauterbach: *Der Central Collecting Point in München. Kunstschutz, Restitution, Neubeginn*, Berlin / Munich 2015. The *Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point* opened on August 20th 1945 in the facilities of the Wiesbaden Landesmuseum and was used as a repository for recovered German-owned objects. At the height of operations, this collecting point held approximately 700.000 objects. It was closed in August 1951. See Tanja Bernsaw: *Die Besatzer als Kuratoren? Der Central Collecting Point Wiesbaden als Drehscheibe für einen Wiederaufbau der Museumslandschaft nach 1945*, Berlin 2013. The third storage facility to house looted materials was the Offenbach Archival Depot. It contained looted books and archival materials. The warehouse itself had been confiscated from the chemicals conglomerate I.G. Farben, the very same manufacturer of Zyklon B gas used in Auschwitz. In this five-story building, objects found in various states of disorder in the cellars of Alfred Rosenberg's *Hohe Schule* in Frankfurt were stored and sorted out by Jewish scholars who worked together with locals. See Seymour. J. Pomrenze: *The Restitution of Jewish Cultural Treasures After the Holocaust. The Offenbach Archival Depot's Role in the Fulfillment of U.S. International and Moral Obligations. A First Hand Account*, in: *Proceedings of the 37th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries*, Denver, CO – June 23rd to 26th, 2002; Robert G. Waite: *Returning Jewish Cultural Property. The Handling of Books Looted by the Nazis in the American Zone of Occupation, 1945 to 1952*, in: *Libraries & Culture* 37 (2002), No. 3, 213-228.

18 Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Source: Supplement: *Tentative List of Jewish Educational Institutions in Axis-Occupied Countries*, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 8 (1946), No. 3, 1-3 and 5-95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4464734>, <14.09.2023>.

19 Gregg J. Rickmann: *Conquest and Redemption. A History of Jewish Assets from the Holocaust*, New Brunswick / London 2007, 100.

20 Saul Kagan / Ernst H. Weismann: *Report on the Operations of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization, 1947-1972*, New York 1972.

to highlight their identity as looted items.²¹ Many libraries, including the Library of Congress in Washington, inserted the ex-libris which indicated the special provenance of the book. The ex-libris pasted into each book ensured that “present and future readers may be reminded of those who once cherished them before they became victims of the great Jewish catastrophe”, therefore allowing future scholars “to retrace the history and the whereabouts of the great cultural treasures of European Jewry”, to quote Arendt’s letter to the Harvard University’s library.²²



Figure 1: The JCR ex-libris designed by Aaron (Fastovsky) Fastove (1898-1979), pasted in the books found and brought to the Offenbach Archival depot in order to identify them as looted books belonging to Jewish institutions, communities and individuals.

One of Arendt’s crucial tasks while in Germany was to establish a working procedure; the regulations she created for looted items, be it books or artifacts, were as follows:

1. To make every effort to locate the owner
2. To type a list of the owners, reproduce it and distribute it to major Jewish organizations and institutions. Lists of persons and objects were part of the monthly reports of the depot.
3. To give the list wide publicity
4. If items were not claimed, to hand them over to libraries and institutions with the stipulation that, if an item is claimed within two years, it would be given to the claimant who showed proper identification.²³

The JCR decided to apply this formula by distributing the unclaimed books, artifacts, Judaica as well as various unclaimed items from the collecting points: 40% were shipped to Israel, 40% to the United States, and the remaining 20% were divided between the Jewish communities of Great Britain, South Africa, Canada, and Argentina.

On April 12th 1950, she wrote her last field report stressing that:

“The scattered bits of information which we have hitherto been able to gather indicate that there is justified hope to recover at least part of the cultural treasures of the German Jews and to make them accessible again for the Jewish educated and scholarly world. Particularly now that relocated stocks are flooding back into German libraries and museums and that the libraries of former {Nazi} Party organizations and institutions are being incorporated by the German libraries, a systematic investigation of the German museums, archives and libraries ought to become feasible.”²⁴

21 Daniel Lipson: Searching for Nazi-Looted Books at the National Library of Israel, in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection* 1 (2022), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2022.1.91524>, 168-174.

22 Rena Lipman: Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Reconsidered. Should the Jewish Religious Objects Distributed Around the World after World War II be Returned to Europe?, in: *Kunst und Recht* 8 (2006), No. 4, <https://doi.org/10.15542/KUR/2006/4/3>, 89.

23 Pomeranze 2002 (see FN 17).

24 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 258.

Last to be dealt with and of lesser importance for Arendt were the works of art which remained at the Wiesbaden depot and were aimed for distribution among Jewish museums in Israel, the United States, Great Britain and South Africa. However, things were not as simple nor straightforward as one might have expected, perhaps because following the arrangements for books and Judaica artifacts, the works of art which remained in the Wiesbaden depot were considered of lesser importance to all concerned – except Mordachai Narkiss.

On April 18th 1950, she wrote to her friend Prof. Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) in Jerusalem following an embarrassing discovery by Mordechai Narkiss (1898-1957), the director of the Bezalel National Museum in Jerusalem, that high quality works of art from the collecting point in Wiesbaden were shipped through JRSO to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee with the intention to auction them off to interested parties most likely in hope to raise money for needy survivors arriving from Europe:

*“With reference to a report of Narkiss which I did not see. However, I would like to tell you that Narkiss’ evaluation of the paintings which have been found in Germany (50.000 pounds) has been proved entirely wrong. The collection as far as I know is now estimated at between \$5-\$10.000, but I may be wrong about these figures. I may assure you that, selling or not selling, nobody is particularly happy about this business.”*²⁵

On the same day she wrote to Dr. Heinz Gerling who worked for the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem on reparations where he was the director of liquidations. In her detailed letter, she refers to the survey she did in Germany and to the issues regarding the restitution of books. But she also touched upon the fate of the paintings dispatched to New York for auction:

*“I hope that Dr. Narkiss has been informed in the meantime of the decision of JRSO New York which was taken in full agreement with the representatives of the Jewish Agency. Unfortunately, the pictures have been largely overestimated. A number of paintings requested by Israel will be shipped to Israel.”*²⁶

25 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), letter No. 70, 117.

26 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 119.

While striving to accomplish her mission, Arendt eagerly desired to spend her free time during weekends and holidays with her PhD mentor, the philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), and his Jewish wife Gertrude Mayer (1879-1974) in Basle where Jaspers was teaching after the couple had left Heidelberg in 1948. Already on May 20th 1946, she intimated in a letter to the Jerusalem-based scholar Gershom Scholem, who she hoped would visit Jaspers while he was staying in Heidelberg: “You’ll no doubt see Jaspers in Heidelberg. I’d do anything to pay him [Jaspers] a visit, but until now I haven’t succeeded...”²⁷

The Jaspers had spent the Holocaust and war years in constant fear of being deported to a concentration camp because Gertrud was Jewish. Karl himself was considered to have a ‘Jewish taint’ (*jüdische Versippung*) because of her.²⁸ He was forced to retire from teaching in 1937 at Heidelberg university and in 1938 his publications were banned. Many of his long-time friends stood by him and he was able to continue his studies and research without being totally isolated. The renewed contact with the Jaspers took place in the autumn of 1945: “Often have we thought with sorrowful concern about your fate over these years, and for a long time have had little hope that you were still alive”, Jaspers wrote to her on October 10th 1945.²⁹ At the end of her stay, she sent the couple food and clothing via her friends in the US Army who were stationed near Heidelberg.

For Arendt, Jaspers was more than her adored PhD instructor, he was a ‘father figure’. Her own father Paul had died of syphilis when she was only seven years old. Both Karl and Gertrude Jaspers, who had no children of their own, nurtured strong paternal sentiments towards Arendt and whilst staying with them she felt once again as the ‘Golden child’ of her student years.³⁰ In a sense, the re-affirming of old intellectual ties for Arendt as well as for Jaspers formed a bridge over twelve turbulent years which had brought so much havoc in

27 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 51.

28 On Karl Jaspers and his wife Gertrud Mayer, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jaspers/>, <14.09.2023>.

29 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 212-213.

30 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 101.

both their lives. After corresponding with Jaspers for four years, finally visiting him and Gertrud was like “coming home” (wie [wenn] man nach Hause kommt) and imbued her with peace after her long tiring days in the German-Jewish communities.³¹

In the late 1920ies and early 1930ies Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger had been colleagues and had shared an active exchange of ideas and publications. However, following Heidegger’s election to the position of rector of the University of Freiburg in April 1933 and him becoming a member the NSDAP, their friendship deteriorated rapidly. During his time as rector, Heidegger had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis and had expressed anti-Semitic sentiments. Heidegger’s affiliation with Nazi ideology, Jaspers’ Jewish wife, the fact that Jaspers had been banned from teaching at Heidelberg University, while Heidegger prospered under the very same regime in Freiburg, made it impossible for them to continue their former intellectual friendship. In 1942, Jaspers wrote to his estranged friend:

*“Dear Heidegger! I no longer know, really and clearly, to whom I should write, for we haven’t spoken to one another for almost ten years. You wrote a friendly confirmation that you had received my Nietzsche in 1936 and, with it, a line about yourself personally; important, but without any hidden question and without – in the given situation – allowing me to make any real comment on it. Then I didn’t hear any more from you, neither in regard to my personal fate since 1937 nor in regard to two books I sent you in 1937 and 1938 ...”.*³²

Jaspers had never mailed this letter, perhaps in fear that his whereabouts might be discovered by the Gestapo via the postal markings or, even worse, that Heidegger might denounce him. Jaspers was known to his colleagues as a kind, fatherly man, but twelve years of academic isolation came to the fore when he was requested to advise about the denazification procedure of Heidegger and the question whether Heidegger should be allowed to

resume teaching at Freiburg university. On 22nd December 1945, he wrote to the Freiburg University denazification committee:

*“In our situation, the education of youth must be handled with the greatest responsibility ... Heidegger’s manner of thinking, which seems to me in its essence unfree, dictatorial, and not directed at open communication, would be disastrous in the current environment. As long as he does not experience an authentic rebirth that is evident in his work, such a teacher cannot in my opinion be placed before the youth of today ...”.*³³

Arendt was deeply disturbed by the rupture between the two men. She was almost uncharacteristically naïve in hoping that she will be the one to bring Jaspers and Heidegger to see each other and workout the animosity between them, if not as past friends then at least as philosophers interested in similar issues. However, while she travelled to see the Jaspers, upon arrival it took her nearly two months before she was due at Freiburg and could finally meet with Heidegger. Earlier that week in February she wrote hesitantly to Blücher:

*“... In Heidelberg I heard an absolutely outrageous story of what Heidegger has done to Jaspers, now that he is trying, trying so hard as possible, to make friends on the other side. Will be in Freiburg Monday morning, will have to be, but no longer have the slightest wish ever to see that man again ...”.*³⁴

Yet she did send Heidegger a note upon her arrival in Freiburg and agreed to see him and even stayed with him and his wife for two days in their house. She apologized to his wife Elfriede regarding their old love affair in their Marburg University days, after Heidegger never refuted to his wife that Arendt was “the passion of his life and the inspiration for his work”.³⁵ In February 1950, Arendt confided to her close friend Hilde Fränkel in New York about the meeting and Heidegger’s love for her.³⁶ When

31 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), xiii, 214, 245.

32 Walter Biemel / Gary E. Aylesworth (eds.): Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963), New York 2003, 156-159.

33 Daniel Maier-Katkin: Stranger from Abroad. Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Friendship and Forgiveness, New York / London 2010, 173, footnote 5.

34 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 127.

35 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 128.

36 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 247, note 83.

Fränkel asked her which of the two meetings with Jaspers or with Heidegger pleased her more, Arendt answered: “to be pleased over Freiburg would require a kind of animal boldness – but, then, I do not have such”, she also described Heidegger as someone whose former behavior and his years in the Nazi party caused him to come to her “like a dog with his tail between his legs” (wie ein *begossener Pudel*).³⁷

To her husband she wrote:

*“I went to Freiburg and Heidegger soon appeared at the hotel. The two of us had a real talk, I think, for the first time in our lives On top of everything this morning I had an argument with his wife ... but I’m going to try to defuse things as much as I can. He has heaped me with manuscripts and publications; just to be able to talk, to be understood. And yet he is more famous than ever without understanding it in the least, or, let’s say, realizing it. I’ll be able to defuse that disgraceful business with Jaspers just in time, before Jaspers finds out ...”.*³⁸

Heidegger was obviously overjoyed to see his old lover again, but was he heaping her “with manuscripts and publications” just because he wanted her to catch up on his publications, those that could not have reached her during the years since 1933? Or could it be that he understood that the lovely intelligent young woman he remembered had bloomed into an important person with a standing and excellent connections within the Jewish cultural world? Did he hope to be redeemed through her love and assistance in the minds of New York’s intellectual elite and thereby in similar academic circles in his own country?

By mid-March 1950, Arendt was on her way back to New York, her mission was completed as far as JCR was concerned. The division of the books, Judaica and artifacts was nearly settled. Arendt’s commitment to the restitution process was genuine: she cared deeply for the unclaimed books. For her, tracing the looted books still hidden in German libraries and city archives and sending them to libraries and universities in the USA and Israel

formed an integral part in rebuilding and rekindling the Jewish cultural world from the ruins of the Holocaust as well as installing a sense of intellectual revival in the survivors.

Conclusion

Arendt took upon herself two difficult missions: the public one for the JCR and the private one for the heart. This paper demonstrates how, while she kept the major assignment ongoing and productive by traveling, meetings and dispatching meticulous field reports to Salo Baron, a gentler, affectionate side of her was revealed to her husband as well as to her closest friends through her private correspondence. Arendt harbored conflicting feelings during these four winter months, she sometimes wrote to her husband harsh things about the people she met and at times she went out of her way to sympathize and understand them. She adored Karl Jaspers and turned him into a family friend by introducing him to her husband through a vivid exchange of correspondence between the two of them. She criticized Martin Heidegger, but acknowledged (to herself and others) the fact that he still held a place in her soul and spirit, though at that point in life she was aware that he needed her more than she needed him.

She returned to New York in the spring of 1950, having fulfilled her duties towards Salo Baron whom she respected and perhaps even feared a little. While her first mission to secure the best possible solution for the books and archival materials was completed, she had to admit to a huge disappointment concerning her self-appointed mission when she hoped to reconcile Jaspers and Heidegger after the 17 years’ rift between them. She needed to come to terms with the truth that Heidegger was indeed cultivating Nazi affiliation himself and that he and Jaspers would neither meet again nor rekindle their academic links.

In the coming years till 1955, books and paintings arrived in Jerusalem and were placed for safe keeping and restitution at the National Library of Israel and at the Bezalel National Museum.

37 Young-Bruehl 1982 (see FN 5), 246, footnotes 79-81.

38 Knott 2017 (see FN 8), 128.

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Reference

Shlomit Steinberg: Obligation and Libido. Hannah Arendt in Wiesbaden, 1949-1950, in: *transfer – Zeitschrift für Provenienzforschung und Sammlungsgeschichte / Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collection* 2 (2023), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48640/tf.2023.1.101811>, 193-202.