

Testaments to the Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

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Historical Background

The Wiener Library is the oldest institution in the world established for the task of documenting the Nazi regime and its crimes against the Jewish people.

The founder, Alfred Wiener (1885 - 1964) was a German Jew, born in Potsdam, who had studied Arabic literature to doctorate level, and spent the years 1907 - 1909 travelling in the Middle East. This experience persuaded him that the Zionist ideal was misplaced and that efforts to establish a national homeland for the Jews could only prove damaging to the Jews (naturally he altered his views later, enjoying friendly relations with former political enemies and even, for a time, pondering whether the Wiener Library should not move to Jerusalem).

After serving in the 1914 - 1918 war (in the course of which he was decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class) he became increasingly perturbed by the rise of extreme right-wing anti-Semitic groups in Germany. He joined the largest Jewish civil rights organisation, the conservative and anti-Zionist Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), and devoted himself to the task of enlightening the German people about the dangers of right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism. Within a few years he had risen to a very high position in the organisation and was closely involved in formulating its policy. From 1925 onwards Wiener was in no doubt that the greatest danger from the far right was from the National Socialists under Hitler. He directed most of his efforts towards combating the Nazi threat.

As part of this work Wiener was involved in an initiative in 1928 to set up an office to collect all available information about the Nazi Party, its leaders and its activities. The office was called Büro Wilhelmstrasse, after the main street in Berlin's government district. The Büro Wilhelmstrasse collected newspapers, journals, pamphlets, leaflets and ephemeral matter produced by or relating to the Nazis, and used these as the basis for campaigns against the Nazis. Typical is a sticker featuring a cartoon of Hitler and the words 'Die Nazis sind unser Unglück!' (the Nazis are our misfortune!), parodying the Nazi slogan 'Die Juden sind unser Unglück!' (the Jews are our misfortune!). In the few years of its existence the archive amassed a collection of about 200,000 items and was probably the largest collection of material about the Nazis in existence at the time.

With Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, the Büro was closed down and its materials sent into hiding in Bavaria. It is presumed that the collection was lost or destroyed during the war.

For Wiener, Hitler's *Machtergreifung* was a personal crisis. After suffering a sort of nervous collapse he made plans to go into exile. In the summer of 1933 he and his family moved to

Amsterdam. There he met Professor David Cohen, a leading member of the city's Jewish community, and together they formulated plans to set up what became known as the Jewish Central Information Office (JCIO).

The task of the JCIO was essentially similar to that of its predecessor the Büro Wilhelmstrasse. From early 1934 it issued a stream of publications, some substantial, the majority short mimeographed reports on particular issues or events. In addition, the office produced in-depth responses to three events: the Bern trial of distributors of the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the murder of the Swiss Nazi leader Wilhelm Gustloff by a young Jewish medical student, David Frankfurter and the Pogrom of 9/10 November 1938, the so-called Kristallnacht.

Following Kristallnacht the JCIO came under mounting pressure from the Dutch government to limit its activities. For Wiener and Cohen this was a warning that the JCIO's days in Amsterdam were numbered. In spring 1939 Wiener came to London and began the preparations for bringing the Office to safety. It eventually opened its doors at 19 Manchester Square, London on 1 September 1939.

Several members of the staff, including Wiener's wife, remained in Amsterdam, becoming stranded there after the German invasion in April 1940. Kurt Zielenziger, Wiener's Deputy, Bernard Krieg, the JCIO's book-keeper and Wiener's wife and children were eventually arrested and taken to the transit camp Westerbork before being deported to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. Zielenziger and Krieg died there. Although Margarethe Wiener and the children survived and were freed in a prisoner exchange in January 1945, Mrs Wiener was so weakened by her time in Belsen that she died within hours of crossing the border to Switzerland.

Wiener himself spent the war years in the United States of America. According to one source, he suffered a renewed nervous collapse after the outbreak of war, and was determined to get out of Europe. With the invasion of the Netherlands the JCIO's supply lines of materials from Germany were for the most part cut off. Wiener established new ones in America and also worked for British government agencies. The Office in London was left in the care of his new Deputy Louis Bondy

The work of the JCIO in London concentrated on supplying information to various government departments such as the Ministry of Information, the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, and the BBC. It also assisted the London-based exiled governments and continued to offer its resources to Jewish organisations worldwide. In addition it issued two periodicals, *The Nazis at War* and *Jewish News*, which featured compilations of extracts from publications and press reports about political developments in Germany and the occupied territories.

It was in London that the name-change from JCIO to Wiener Library came about. The cause was the reluctance of the ministries and offices which used the JCIO to use a name that highlighted the specifically Jewish nature of the organisation. Instead the Office was euphemistically known as 'Dr Wiener's Library' and eventually this name became the

accepted one, even within the Office itself. After the war, when the work of the JCIO became increasingly academic, the new name seemed more fitting and was officially adopted in the form 'Wiener Library'.

During the late 1940s and 50s the Library devoted itself to a number of tasks: assisting the prosecution of war criminals at Nuremberg, helping individuals with restitution claims (for many years the Library had a lawyer on its staff), and collecting eyewitness accounts of what eventually became known as the Holocaust. From 1946 it issued the *Wiener Library Bulletin*, which became a renowned forum for information about research, books and news items relating to the Nazi era, German neo-Nazism, the Holocaust and all matters to do with right-wing extremism in Europe. The Library also carried out detailed monitoring of the German Austrian press, publishing the weekly *Auszüge aus der deutschen und österreichischen Presse* from 1948 (this publication is not included in the *Testaments to the Holocaust* series).

Alfred Wiener died in 1964 and was replaced as Director by Walter Laqueur, a young and ambitious academic who broadened the range of the Library's activities and interests and made it the forum for a series of lectures and international conferences which were of fundamental importance to the development of the academic study of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. The Library also sponsored original research into topics such as the November Pogrom, the persecution of Gypsies under the Nazis and the Nazi use of propaganda. Much of this research led to publications which remain standard works.

Yet Laqueur's many achievements were set against the background of a steadily weakening financial position. By the mid-1970s the situation was so desperate that outside help was needed. This came from the University of Tel Aviv, which part-funded the Library for five years and eventually gave a secure home to a large part of the book collection.

For several years after 1980 the Library's focus was on fund-raising and re-building the collection. By 1990 the financial situation had been stabilised and the collection was back to full strength. Since the early 1990s the emphasis, under the new Director, David Cesarani, has been to re-establish the Library's credentials as an academic institution of international renown. This has been achieved by means of twice-yearly lecture series and a string of major international conferences on topics including the Final Solution, De-Nazification, representations of the Holocaust and the reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe after the war.

Today the Library serves a readership comprising academic researchers, writers, broadcasters, the media, students and youngsters studying the Holocaust at school. Survivors and their families make use of its resources to trace family history, to study the history of towns and villages where they had their origins and the ghettos and camps where so many of their loved-ones perished.

The selection of the Library's holdings reproduced in the *Testaments to the Holocaust* series is intended to make rare and unique historical material available to a wider public. Original Nazi propaganda materials are scarce and command high prices from dealers and at auction. Yet access to these materials is essential to anyone wishing to study the period. Reading

secondary accounts of Nazi propaganda can never take the place of confronting the material directly.

The Library's collection of Eyewitness Accounts has long been recognised by historians as a uniquely valuable resource, offering insights into almost every aspect of the Holocaust. These documents are of particular interest in that they were assembled during the 1950s and early 1960s, an era when interest in the Holocaust was at a low and when terms such as 'Holocaust' and 'Shoah' had either not been coined at all or were not in general use.

The Wiener Library publications cover a time span from the early 1930s to the mid 1960s. It follows that much of the material reports on events in Germany and Europe as they were unfolding. This early material also testifies to Jewish efforts to resist the onslaught of the Nazis.

The post-war publications document the slow emergence of Holocaust related issues as topics of academic discourse. The *Wiener Library Bulletin*, in particular, remains an invaluable source of information on virtually all aspects of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

The photographic material needs little explanation. It has been included both for the information it contains and for its immediacy and impact. Nothing can communicate the essential nightmarish horror of what occurred in Europe during the war more than the image of, say, a uniformed German aiming his rifle at a defenceless woman as she clutches a child in her arms. Confronting this material is painful, and can be frightening and distressing, nevertheless, it is vital in terms of promoting a sound understanding of what took place.

Taken together, the materials assembled in the *Testaments to the Holocaust* series provide the basis for studying Nazi Germany and its crimes against the Jews from any number of perspectives. It does not offer answers but rather a wealth of raw materials for students to explore and work with in their effort to reach their own conclusions. Complemented by appropriate secondary literature the collection offers outstanding opportunities to gain insights into one of the darkest periods of human history.

Section I

Propaganda Materials

i) Illustrated volumes

The materials gathered together here demonstrate the range and ingenuity of Nazi propaganda. The illustrated books and pamphlets offer examples both of propaganda in favour of the Nazis as well as against their political and 'racial' enemies. Particularly striking is the welter of material designed to promote the cult of personality around Hitler. He is seen on parade, giving speeches, on trains, in cars, in the air, opening autobahns, relaxing in his mountain retreat, greeting crowds and patting children. One publication is devoted entirely to photographic studies of his hands.

Another major theme of this material is the rise of Germany from the ruins of the First World War and the economic crises of the 1920s. Germany is depicted 'between night and day', May 1933 is presented as the 'first German May', and ordinary people are depicted as falling gratefully into line behind the National Socialist saviours of Germany. The industrial worker is glorified, as is the peasant, the road-builder and the sports person. On every front the Nazi will is shown in triumph.

In one extraordinary – and not repeated – experiment, the Nazis attempted to demonstrate their sense of humour, in a volume showing innocuous cartoon satires of Hitler. A note in the book assures retailers that the product has Party approval.

From the late 1930s there is material about the 'liberation' of the Saar, Austria and the Sudetenland.

Among the happy images of Nazi progress and victory there are other more sinister ones: a volume showing the constant readiness of the police, several displaying the steadily growing might of the armed forces, and one volume devoted to the enemy: the sub-humanity of the East. This grotesque publication, issued by the SS, features horrific pictures of mangled corpses and starving children and carries the message that the Nazis are fighting in order to prevent Germany being overrun by such atrocities.

More than any other propaganda item in the collection this book illustrates the soulless cynicism of the regime.

ii) Nazi Calendars

This collection of calendars produced by Nazi organisations demonstrates again the regime's overriding concern with propaganda. Featured are examples produced by the Hitler Youth, the SA, the SS, the Office of Racial Politics, the Strength through Joy organisation and others.

iii) Anti-Semitic Encyclopaedia

Sigilla **Veri**, a very rare encyclopaedic work of anti-Semitism, was compiled by Philipp Stauff, who also produced a reference work called *Semi-Kürschner*, the title referring to Joseph Kürschner's annual German Literary Calendar, which was known as the Kürschner. The 'Semi' in the title is supposed to refer to 'Semites', the Semi-Kürschner being strenuously anti-Semitic. Sigilla Veri might have remained obscure and little known but for the fact that it was taken up and published by U-Bodung Verlag, owned by Ullrich Fleischhauer, who became famous as a defence witness at the trial in Bern, Switzerland in 1935 of distributors of the notorious anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Fleischhauer was also the publisher of a periodical called *Weltdienst*, again violently anti-Semitic. For a number of years Fleischhauer was secretly funded by the Nazi Party, as were a number of similar organisations. Eventually all such organisations were incorporated into the Propaganda empire of Joseph Goebbels.

Sigilla Veri was planned to run to six volumes. In the event only four were completed. The fifth volume, included in this collection, is extremely rare, having been produced several years

after the others. In itself it is incomplete, breaking off in the middle of an entry on Walter Rathenau.

Sigilla Veri was never available in shops: it could only be ordered direct from the publisher. Anyone buying a copy was required to sign a declaration that 'I am not of Jewish descent, have no Jewish blood nor Jewish relatives. I pledge myself not to sell or present this book to anyone. I give my word of honour that I am not acting as a man of straw for anyone.'

iv) Hitler Youth

Propaganda aimed at children and young people was seen as extremely important by the Nazis. Hitler stated that he wanted 'a violently active, dominating, brutal youth,' without too much education: 'knowledge is ruin to my young men.'

The majority of the publications featured in the collection relate to the Hitler Youth, but the Bund Deutscher **Mädel** is represented by a publication from the Ostmark – annexed Austria.

v) Songbooks

The Nazi regime regarded singing and songs as a vehicle for domination. The songbooks featured were produced by various organisations: the Party, the SA, the SS, NSBO, NS Frauenschaft. The lyrics extol the glories of the Reich and the Führer and threaten destruction to racial enemies.

If these songs were intended to unite the faithful and strengthen their unthinking commitment to the regime, other – unpublished – songs were used in concentration camps as a means to further the dehumanisation and demoralisation of inmates. Many camps, including the German concentration camp Buchenwald and the Polish extermination camp Treblinka, had special songs of their own. Inmates were made to sing as they marched to and from forced labour, and were accompanied by music on their way to executions.

It is somehow characteristic of the Nazi regime that it turned music, which to most people is a consolation and blessing, into a torment and curse.

Educational books

The infiltration of Nazi ideology into the education system in Germany was one of the most pernicious and damaging ways in which the regime sought to mould the thinking of the population.

Naturally, some of this material is not dissimilar to that of earlier or later eras: German children were taught things that children all over the world were and are taught. But a glimpse into biology textbooks reveals the extent to which education was distorted to serve ideology. *Der Giftpilz* (The Poison Mushroom) is devoted solely to demonising Jews. *Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher* (the title conflates the names of four breeds of dog) is about the dangers of interbreeding the human 'races'.

The collection also features history, mathematics, geography, reading books, some colouring books for very young children, songbooks for children and theoretical works for teachers.

What effect did a Nazi education have on young minds? The answer may be found in a slender volume entitled *Einführung in die Vererbungslehre* (Introduction to Hereditary Theory). Opposite page 20 are two photographs. The top one depicts a shambling, shabbily-dressed rabble, suggestive of mental patients or a gang of delinquents. The caption reads, 'Should Germany's young people be like this?' The image below shows handsome young men in shorts, stripped to the waist, on a cross-country run. The caption reads, 'Or like this?' The implication is unmistakable: the racial degenerates of the top picture will destroy Germany unless they are stopped.

Written in pencil in the space between the pictures, presumably by a pupil, is the word 'Erschiessen!!', 'Shoot them!!'

Section II

Eyewitness Accounts

Under this heading there are two collections. The first was gathered in the weeks and months after the November Pogrom of 1938 and comprises reports ranging in length from just a few lines to several pages, some signed, most anonymous. This documentation is extremely valuable, having been written immediately after the Pogrom, in some cases within a day or two.

The second, much larger, collection was assembled over a period of years from 1955 onwards. This collection covers most aspects of Nazi persecution, from random attacks on individuals in early 1933 to the incarceration of around 30,000 Jewish men after the November Pogrom, to the concentration and extermination camps in Poland during the war. Some of the accounts are based on interviews, others were specially written for the collection by the eyewitness, others still are in the form of contemporary letters or documents donated by eyewitnesses.

A remarkable feature of this collection is when it was assembled. The 1950s marked something of a low-point in interest in these matters; most people, including survivors, wanted to forget and to get on with building new lives. It was, compared with the 1970s, 80s and 90s a relatively 'silent' era. Forgetting was all. The self-selected group who chose to contribute to the collection bucked this general trend. Their testimony is in certain respects more valuable than some collected in later decades: memories were fresher in the 1950s, stories less worn with repetition. These accounts are not influenced by present day social attitudes towards the Holocaust. In fact, neither the word 'Holocaust' or 'Shoah' is to be found in the collection: these terms were not in use at the time. Many of the accounts are surprising for the tone of irony and even mild humour in which they are couched. This is best explained as a distancing device, adopted to cope with unbearably painful memories. Some writers speak in the plainest language, others adopt highly literary styles. The material is endlessly fascinating,

profoundly moving and forms a great monument to the suffering and courage of those who contributed.

The Eyewitness Accounts follow the order of the original 'P-Scheme' file: at the beginning of each eyewitness account is the accompanying index card from the 'P scheme' file; please note that these cards may carry incorrect information with regards to the number of pages which the corresponding eyewitness account contains.

It should be recognised by those consulting this section of the archive that the eyewitness accounts were printed or written with a variety of inks and pens and on various types of paper, some of which are very thin, leading to a bleedthrough of the text, and some of which may have become discoloured or stained thus rendering the original document difficult to read.

Section III

Wiener Library Publications

The background to how these publications came into being is explained in the opening section of this introduction. The material falls into three periods. Firstly there are the materials produced and circulated during the Library's period in Amsterdam. Secondly, there are the two periodical publications produced in London during the War, and lastly there are the post-war publications, most strikingly the *Wiener Library Bulletin*. This was edited by C.C. Aronsfeld, who also wrote most of the unsigned articles. The *Bulletin* was a very influential publication, the only forum in the UK for scholarly debate on Holocaust-related issues for many years. Many later well-known writers made early contributions to it. It remains an invaluable source for many little known episodes of the War, Nazi Germany and the persecution of the Jews, as well as post-war right-wing extremism.

It should be recognised by those using this section of the microfilm edition that the quality of the original newsletters and reports has been accurately reproduced. Therefore, poor as well as high quality images will be found on each reel.

Section IV

Photographs

The photographic collection covers a number of eras and topics. The first material relates to the pre-Nazi era and comprises family albums documenting the domestic life of Central European Jews, mostly middle class and prosperous before the Nazis seized power. These are followed by more general photographs of life in Weimar Germany, showing periods of civil unrest, poverty caused by inflation and so on. This is followed by material relating to Nazi election campaigns, Hitler as a public speaker, and the Nazi era.

Jewish life is further documented in a collection of picture postcards and photographs of Europe's synagogues, very many of them destroyed in the war (or even before, in the November Pogrom). There is also a collection, formed by the Jewish Central Information

Office in Amsterdam, of memorials to Jewish dead of World War I. The purpose of this was to counter a common accusation against Jews that they avoided front-line duty during the Great War and protected themselves in safe postings well away from danger. In fact Jews died in the same proportion as every other grouping in Germany.

Nazi persecution of Jews is documented in a series of distressing (some extremely so) images. These show the activities of Einsatzgruppen death squads, conditions in ghettos and finally in concentration camps.

Welfare work with Displaced Persons (DPs) is also documented.

The photographic section ends with two collections of biographical index cards (mostly illustrated) of major figures in the Nazi Party, military and SS hierarchies

It should be recognised by those consulting this section of the archive that due to the fact that a number of the photographs are either very old, fragile or in poor condition, the quality of the images seen may be affected.