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Interaction, Confusion and Potential

On the Clash between Archives (on Nazi History) and Family Research

Abstract: Deportation lists and databases based on them are a central source for descendants trying to research the history and fates of their relatives who were persecuted under the National Socialist Regime. And yet finding available sources and more so, understanding the sources and the context in which they were produced, is not an easy task. Not only are most family members neither historians nor experts on the Nazi-era and the Shoah, they are often trapped in their own family stories and tend to overlook information that contradicts the family narrative. Combining the perspectives of an academic, an educator, and a descendant of victims to Nazi persecution, Zarfati uses her own experiences in researching the persecution and deportation of her relatives in Austria and Croatia in order to describe the challenges and obstacles which descendants find themselves facing during such research. Aiming for future collaboration between descendants and archives, she also sketches ways in which archives and databases could better address family members and their needs and make information and insights for biographical research more available, accessible and comprehensible.

Introduction

On January 26, 1942, my great-grandfather wrote a letter from Vienna, addressed to a non-Jewish acquaintance in his Austrian hometown Leoben, whose identity remains unknown:

Dear gracious Madam!

[...] I cannot put down in writing, what I am going through here. The room is a frozen pit, not a bit of wood and coal. [Indecipherable sentence] One is not allowed into any store or restaurant. No smoking material. No newspapers are allowed to be bought. I receive 15 RM a week from the Jewish Welfare Office [*Jüdische Fürsorge*] and then lunch once a day. The food in the so-called soup kitchen is absolutely inedible and the milieu that comes along – I would have liked you, dear lady, to see it once – a human being endures a lot. You can imagine, when [sic] I decided to write you, Madam. I'll be glad when it's over, one day, and I have eaten as much bread as I wanted to. But since I still have the 3 little children, unprovided for, I must live. But life is not worth living. To be reunited with the family is a

utopia at the moment, and my wife writes me in her penultimate letter, that even if I can come, I shouldn't, the Jews there are subjected to the same persecutions as here. The winter is especially difficult for us. Every day we have the fear of being taken and sent to Poland. That is the worst. Within 3 hours and only taking along what is most needed, everything else is left behind.¹

This is the last surviving letter of the 56-year-old Max Werdisheim, written – as I learned through the Arolsen Archives – 11 days before his deportation with the 16th transport from Vienna to Riga on February 6, 1942.

Max (Maximilian) Werdisheim was born in 1886 in Moravia, at the time part of the Habsburg Empire. In March 1938, as German troops marched into Styria, he was living with his wife Berta and two daughters (22 and four and a half years old) in the small town of Leoben, where he had a successful business. His wife was pregnant with twins, to be born in June that same year. The oldest daughter was able to flee illegally to Palestine shortly before the November Pogroms (the so-called *Kristallnacht*) and became the addressee of most of Max and Berta's letters. Most letters were sent from Yugoslavia, where the family with all in all 13 immediate and extended family members escaped to. Apart from the oldest daughter, who was in Palestine, only one of them survived – my grandmother.

Prompted by a project on flight and escape at the Memorial and Educational Site House of the Wannsee Conference, where I work as a research associate, my research on the biography of Max Werdisheim began a few years back. It combined three different perspectives: that of an academic, an educator, and a descendant. These perspectives influenced the way I conducted the research; the time, energy and funds invested in various aspects of the story I deemed important to highlight; as well as the questions I posed the sources. In the course of the research process, I have had very different experiences with databases, online portals, and archives' staff. Those differences were highly dependent on the archive's size, funding, staff, number of requests, and technical capabilities. These experiences have raised many questions that are relevant for a possible future cooperation between descendants of the deported Jews and archives – and are the topic of this paper.

Deportation lists and databases based upon information found in those lists are pivotal for descendants who try to research the history and fate of their relatives who were persecuted by the Nazi regime. As mentioned, most members of the Werdisheim family fled to Yugoslavia: Max and his wife Berta, their mothers, their children, and six of Max Werdisheim's siblings. The last surviving letter

¹ Max Werdisheim to an unknown woman, Vienna, 26.01.1942, Private Collection of the Zarfati Family, Tel Aviv. Translation by the author.

of Berta Werdisheim from March 1941 places her in Ruma, today Serbia, back then soon to be part of Ustaša controlled Croatia. Initially, I had planned to reconstruct further biographies of family members who fled to Yugoslavia. However, it was hardly possible to reconstruct the specific stations of their persecution, as they are not recorded on any deportation list or other record I could find. In this case, gaps in information could not have been bridged by archive material. Max Werdisheim, however, was captured in Zagreb either in December 1939 or in January 1940 and sent back to the German Reich for a trial. “Due to defamation, I was brought to Graz, my brother as well, and we were kept in custody for 17 months. The fallacious nature of this slander came to light, and both of us were acquitted”², he wrote to the same unknown lady in Leoben on January 12, 1942. He spent about four weeks in Vienna before being deported – the deportation to Riga being just one stage in a long odyssey of persecution. But with the help of archives and digital databases I could put together and comprehend many of the stages of his life (and not just death).

The first question that should be addressed when discussing the intersection between archives (on Nazi history) and family research is the meaning of the research for the descendants. Albeit appearing banal at first, it is the key to understanding the research process of descendants and their ability to process the information found in archives. Such research is often a confrontation with discrepancy – the discrepancy between the family narrative and the actual facts and concrete path of persecution.

At the end of August 2020, the young Israeli Oded Pshetetzki, who lives in Berlin, wrote in a Facebook post that through the Arolsen Archives, his family learned that Mendel Pshetetzki, his grandfather’s youngest brother, who was thought to have perished in the Holocaust, actually survived Nazi persecution and was living in Austria under the name Marian Pshetetzki. Despite Corona travelling restrictions, Oded was able to meet this 94-year-old man in a nursing home in Innsbruck in August 2020. Interesting in the account shared on Facebook is that at the beginning of the correspondence with Arolsen, the family’s response to the new information shared by the archive’s staff was that they (the staff) must have made a mistake, “Marian is not a Jewish name anyway”³. This exemplifies a larger phenomenon of descendants, being ‘trapped’ or captured in their family narratives. This narrative is usually accepted as is and

² Max Werdisheim to an unknown woman, Vienna, 12.01.1942, Private Collection of the Zarfati Family, Tel Aviv. Translation by the author.

³ Oded Pshetatzki, Facebook, 30.08.2020. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/oded.psheatzki/posts/10158992092944767>. Last accessed: 02.05.2021. Translation by the author. The post became viral with over 3,000 likes and 344 shares.

viewed uncritically and even a-historically. This means that family members need more support and guidance when searching archives and should be considered and addressed as a separate target group.

In 1957, Max Werdisheim's daughter Alice – who in Israel married and became Aliza Zarfati – submitted a testimony page to Yad Vashem, stating that her father perished in Auschwitz. That is also what she told me, her granddaughter, and therefore, the 'knowledge' I grew up with regarding the fate of Max Werdisheim. For a long time, I did not question this story and had no reason to do so. What prompted the Pshetetzkis to turn to the Arolsen Archives was an article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, informing its readers of the possibility to find documents which have not yet been published. In my case, it was an entry in the 2013 published book *Archiv der Namen. Ein papierenes Denkmal der NS-Opfer aus dem Bezirk Leoben* by Austrian historian Heimo Halbrainer, in which short biographies of the Jews from the Leoben district are listed. According to the biographies of Berta and Max Werdisheim, Max was arrested during the November Pogroms, sent to the concentration camp of Dachau and released in March 1939.⁴ An arrest of her father in Dachau was never mentioned by my grandmother and seemed like a detail too significant for her to ignore or to forget to mention – yet even if it was true, it did not stand in contradiction to other information she shared with her family. Although assuming the information in the book was false, I submitted an inquiry to the Dachau Memorial archive.

The entry on Max Werdisheim in Halbrainer's book also reads that "on February 6, 1942, he [Max] was deported to Riga and murdered"⁵. Reading it, I was confronted for the first time with information that contradicted the family narrative. The fact that Riga, and not Auschwitz, was mentioned as the place of deportation was a piece of information I first failed to grasp and only became conscious of after receiving a copy of the deportation list and correspondence file from the International Tracing Service (ITS), today Arolsen Archives. It was the staff of the archive of the Dachau Memorial who referred me to the ITS after not being able to find a prisoner under that name. Coming across Halbrainer's book provoked a need to know more.

⁴ Heimo Halbrainer: *Archiv der Namen: Ein papierenes Denkmal der NS-Opfer aus dem Bezirk Leoben*, Graz: Clio Graz, 2012, 80.

⁵ Ibid. Translation by the author.

Research Process and Signposts: Where Does One Start (and How Does One Proceed)?

The first archive that I ‘visited’ was my own family archive. In 1997, shortly after my grandmother’s sister, the one who had fled to Palestine, passed away, her son found a cache of old letters and documents in the attic of her apartment in Tel Aviv and passed them on to my grandmother. The letters were written in old German current handwriting that my grandmother, who was born in Austria in 1933, could not read, as she never attended a German school. But the dates, the places from which the letters were sent and the signatures at the bottom proved that they were written by her parents during the time in which they were persecuted by the Nazi regime. My mother immediately made sure that the letters were translated into Hebrew. At the time, I read them once and never looked at them again.

The fact that the letters were kept during all these years is not to be taken for granted. While they serve as historical documents for us, for the people they were addressed to, they were a reminder of a tragedy and were possibly connected with survivor’s guilt and even with a sense of failure for not being able to save those who were left behind.⁶ In a discussion with Berlin educators in June 2018, Peter Fischer, the former commissarial executive director of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, shared that “[i]n 1945, my father had burned all the documents, all the exchange of letters my mother had with her family, of which no one survived, because he could not live with the memory”⁷. My grandmother’s sister not only systematically kept the letters of her deceased parents, but also postwar correspondence about her persecuted parents, the search for her sister and the *Rückstellungsakten*, as the files on restitution are referred to in Austria. The combination of family letters and additional related documents, which include direct references to dates, places, people and sometimes institutions, functioned as an initial guideline for my research in the archives. They were central for the methodology of the research, as they helped reconstruct the chronology of the family’s attempts to escape both Austria and Europe and to sketch the geographical scope in which those attempts took place – as well as the concrete

⁶ Survivor’s guilt was first described by psychoanalyst William G. Niederland in 1961. For further reading see, for example, William G. Niederland: *Folgen der Verfolgung: Das Überleben-Syndrom, Seelenmord*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980.

⁷ Peter Fischer in a meeting with Berlin educators as a preparation for a seminar in the Memorial Yad Vashem, 15.06.2018, at the Regional Agency for Civic Education (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung). Translation by the author.

path of persecution of Max Werdisheim. My starting point was, therefore, undoubtedly advantageous to that of others. But what about interested descendants who do not hold such documents?

There are already archives and online portals offering important information and insights for biographical research but unfortunately, there is no portal or website serving as an extensive guideline encompassing and linking all available sources and search options. My research was often characterized by lack of structure and by coincidence. It was, for example, an unfortunate coincidence, that I entered the German version of the website of the Austrian State Archives as only on the English version one finds the category “Family Research”⁸. Some discoveries of truly brilliant tools happened completely by chance and at a very late stage of the research. They would have saved me valuable time had I known of their existence at the beginning of it. An entry portal for biographical research, especially for the target group of descendants, is currently being planned at the Arolsen Archives. Such a portal would eventually serve not only descendants, but also young researchers, students, educators and memorial associations.

A future online portal for family research should address the potential for further discovery of sources to be found in archives, as well as a commentary to the historical value of documents which descendants might possess at their own households – and are sometimes unaware of the value these hold to others beyond themselves. Another aspect of the research, which I have not yet resolved and which such a portal could address, is the correct preservation of documents in family archives. Our documents are sadly still held in clear film in an ordinary folder.

One of the main obstacles which characterizes family research is part of a broader problem of Holocaust research in general, namely, the wide dispersal of the archival source material. As victims of Nazi persecution were sometimes forced to go on a long journey through different places, it is very unlikely that sources concerning a certain person would be kept in just one place. In fact, dominant principles of the international archive community demand exactly the opposite. “[T]here is no such thing as a ‘general card index’ of all persons, objects and places stated in the archival records stored. [...] Contrary to what [...] people might hope, they [=archives] do not provide collections of material

⁸ Austrian State Archives: “Family Research”. Available at: <https://www.statearchives.gv.at/family-research.html>. Last accessed: 04.05.2021. The category “Family Research” does appear in the German version of the website under “Benutzung > Forschungshinweise > Familienforschung”. In contrast, on the English version, it is immediately visible on the upper bar.

on certain persons or topics at the push of a button”⁹, as can be read on the Website of the Austrian State Archives.

Whereas this is true for conventional archives, as collections archives, the large documentation centers on the Holocaust, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Arolsen Archives, break with this principle and have always placed great emphasis on name-related indexing. For this reason, they also integrate large holdings of copies from other archives (organized according to the principle of provenance) into their collections.¹⁰

An online portal designed to face the fragmentation of Holocaust historiography is the EHRI-project, the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure. Its aim is to improve access to Holocaust sources, first and foremost by making them visible. As EHRI’s main target group is researchers its primary impact is scientific.¹¹ Therefore, its user interface poses more of a challenge for family research than a source simplifying the research process.

Are Family Members of Persecuted People a Target Group of Archives at All?

All three mentioned large documentation centers on the Holocaust address family members explicitly as a target group. On its website, under the sub-category ‘Inquiries’, the Arolsen Archives offer specific information for relatives of victims of Nazi persecution. Next to an inquiry form that can be sent directly, information is offered on how the archives respond to inquiries, stating that although the many requests submitted each year prolong the waiting times for information, priority is given to survivors and their close relatives.¹² It is also possible to

⁹ Austrian State Archives: “User Information – Archive Basics”. Available at: <https://www.statearchives.gv.at/user-information/archive-basics.html>. Last accessed: 13.05.2021.

¹⁰ Henning Borggräfe and Isabel Panek: “Collections Archives Dealing with Nazi Victims: The Example of the Arolsen Archives”, in Henning Borggräfe, Christian Höschler and Isabel Panek (eds.): *Tracing and Documenting Nazi Victims Past and Present*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, 221–244. Available online at: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110665376-013/html>. Last accessed: 28.08.2021.

¹¹ EHRI (European Holocaust Research Infrastructure): “EHRI’s Mission. What is the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure?”. Available at: <https://www.ehri-project.eu/about-ehri>. Last accessed: 13.05.2021.

¹² Arolsen Archives: “Information for Relatives of Victims of Nazi Persecution”. Available at: <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/search-explore/inquiries/information-for-relatives>. Last accessed: 28.08.2021.

search independently in the online archive, although this search might be difficult without further help. Priority “to survivors, their families, and families of victims”¹³ is also given by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which offers free research services in finding information about the fates of individuals.

Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names also addresses family members of victims and survivors directly and provides an extremely helpful tool – a simple list of frequently asked questions regarding this database. Neither new nor innovative, this simple online tool completely transforms the user-experience. Not only is one directly addressed and acknowledged, but one also finds answers to core questions which might (and often do) arise when using the database. The questions are divided into three sub-categories: historical questions, questions about the database, and questions on how to use it. The answers point out possible errors, duplications, or gaps in information, and provide general information about the Holocaust. Under the third category one finds the question “Is Yad Vashem interested in corrections of the information?”¹⁴ – with the inviting answer that it is.

Austrian victims of Nazi persecution are recorded in the victims’ Database of the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance (DÖW). Easily accessed online, it offers a search of victims’ names. It gives information – as far as these are known – in the following categories: first name, surname, birth date, place of birth, place of residence, deportation, date of death, place of death and the remark ‘did not survive’. No interaction with descendants or other users of the database is being held on the DÖW website and it is impossible to add information to existing names or to add new names of people who are not listed as Austrian victims, but were, in fact, such.

Max Werdisheim’s youngest children, the twins Harry Peter and Walter Hans, who were born on June 5, 1938, less than three months after the incorporation of Austria into the German Reich, do not appear in the DÖW’s victims’ database, presumably because their names were not listed on a deportation list. In the Yad Vashem’s database they appear with a testimony page given by my grandmother, containing very few details. The name Werdisheim produces eleven entries in the DÖW database – six of them of women. I was looking for one with the same birth date as Max Werdisheim, as his daughter remembered him having a

13 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: “Research Services”. Available at: <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/resources-holocaust-survivors-victims/individual-research/services>. Last accessed: 28.08.2021.

14 Yad Vashem: “FAQs – Names’ Database”. Available at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/archive/hall-of-names/database/faq.html>. Last accessed: 28.08.2021.

twin sister. Her guess as to which of the sisters was the twin turned out false. I could form a list of all of Max's siblings, and learn that Helene Porges, who does not appear in any victim's database with her maiden name Werdisheim, was Max's twin sister through the archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna (*Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien*, IKG), which proved to be a valuable source. It holds the *Matrikel* – birth, marriage and death register – of all the Jewish communities in Austria, as well as other personal sources, such as the *Auswanderungsfragebögen*, the emigration questionnaires Austrian Jews addressed to their representative body. Establishing that Helene Porges was Max Werdisheim's sister, I now knew that he spent the last weeks before his deportation sharing a so-called ghetto-apartment with his sister and also, that the siblings were deported together with the 16th transport. Yet the DÖW database offered no invitation to share these details.

It is important to note that the involvement of users, regardless of whether they are personally connected to the victims or not, raises new challenges, such as who should verify the information integrated in the database. An extreme example of the misuse of the privilege to participate is the case of the German historian and blogger Marie Sophie Hingst, who in 2013 submitted 22 false Pages of Testimony to Yad Vashem – a falsification which was revealed in 2019 by the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*.

But what about information that is already available? Can descendants, who are not historians or experts on the Holocaust and Nazi persecution understand information presented to them? As already mentioned, one of the personal information on victims to be found on the DÖW database is an address given under 'place of residence'. Nevertheless, this is the last known address, meaning the address which appears on the Gestapo deportation lists. This address does not correspond with the actual place where those Austrian Jews mentioned on the deportation lists resided before being forced to leave their homes and move to Vienna, or to a different apartment inside the capital in 1938. However, this is not clear to all descendants. This information is by no means hidden and can be found on the DÖW website – but not directly when using the search tool. Thus, this important fact escapes many. This can lead to descendants trying to lay *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) at this forced address – although their relatives were not really residing here. It can also lead to false images.

According to my grandmother, her grandparents had lived in Vienna, in an apartment to which she – along with her mother and siblings – had moved after the November Pogroms of 1938. Family members still living in Vienna today also mentioned this address on the famous *Mazze-Insel* (Mazze-Island), the name Viennese Jews gave the second district, Leopoldstadt, as the address of Max Werdisheim's parents. Placing the parents in Vienna's second district, known for in-

habiting strict orthodox Eastern European Jews, provoked the false impression that they were strictly Orthodox, unmodern ‘*Ostjuden*’ who lived in the cultural ghetto of the Leopoldstadt. In fact, Max’s parents, Jakob Samuel and Charlotte Werdisheim, lived in Graz, and were themselves forced by the Nazi Regime to leave Styria and resettle in Vienna. I was able to find two photos of them: one was found in the cache of letters, the second one was sent to me by distant relatives. Both undated, they were probably taken in the early 1920s and in the second half of the 1930s respectively. Both of them show modern assimilated Jews.

As already mentioned, it was through the Arolsen Archives (back then ITS), that I learned about Max’s deportation to Riga. It took over a year to receive an answer to my submitted inquiry form. Inquiry Team 7 sent me the correspondence file regarding Max Werdisheim, along with two further PDF-files. The first was a personalized letter with an apology for the long processing time and the important reference to the e-Guide on the ITS website. The second PDF was a FAQ with essential questions regarding the archive and the documents it holds (i.e., why are there different spellings and information about the same person on the documents?). The e-Guide exemplarily explains the different sections, abbreviations and symbols of personal documents found in the archive, such as identification documents of concentration camp inmates, forced laborers or Displaced Persons (DPs). It was less helpful for the sources found regarding Max Werdisheim, but it is an impressive and helpful tool for anyone reading and analyzing such documents.¹⁵ The correspondence file of the ITS contains a request for information submitted by the ITS to the Office of Victim Welfare of the Vienna Provincial Government in 1959. The ITS received the response that Max Werdisheim “is believed to have died in Kaiserwald in 1943.”¹⁶

The response of the Office of Victim Welfare was based on a witness testimony – this testimony being the only document providing information on the last station of Max Werdisheim’s life apart from the deportation list: a death declaration by the Vienna Regional Court for Civil Matters (*Landesgericht für Zivilrechtssachen Wien*), issued on September 20, 1949.¹⁷ In the cache of family documents, I found a translated copy of this decision on Max Werdisheim’s death certificate. It did not include the material upon which the decision was made,

¹⁵ Arolsen Archives: “e-Guide”. Available at: <https://eguide.arolsen-archives.org/en/>. Last accessed: 28.08.2021.

¹⁶ Request for Information from the Office of Victims Welfare of the Vienna Provincial Government to the ITS, 28.09.1959, 6.3.3.2/106165614/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives. Translation by the author.

¹⁷ Death declaration, resolution of 20.09.1949, Max Werdisheim, 48 T 1123/47, Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Landesgericht für ZRS, Wien.

but the translation into Hebrew mentioned that the proceedings took place in the Palace of Justice, in a certain department 48. A staff member of the archive of the Jewish Community in Vienna referred me to the Vienna Regional Court for Civil Matters.

The court's decision relied on one testimony given by Lea Singer, an Austrian Jew, who, according to her own statement, was deported with Max and his sister to Riga on February 6, 1942. It was Dagobert Werdisheim, the only Werdisheim sibling to survive the Holocaust, escaping to France instead of Yugoslavia, who filed the request for a death declaration for both Max and Helene just a year earlier, on February 28, 1947. He suggested Singer "who was in the concentration camp in Riga, together with my two mentioned siblings" as a "person of reference [*Auskunftsperson*]"¹⁸ He must have met Singer in Vienna after the war, when searching for information on his siblings and their destinies. According to the minutes of her testimony in October 1947 at the Regional Court (*Landesgericht*), she was 49 years old at the time. Lea Singer describes her time with Max Werdisheim and his sister Helene in the following words:

After their expulsion [*Aussiedlung*] from Graz, Max Werdisheim and Helene Porges lived with me on II. Lilienbrunnngasse 9. Together we were taken by the Gestapo in February 1942 and deported with a transport to Riga.

Helene Porges was transported away from the station in Riga by a car. These cars were equipped with a device for gassing the occupants, so I can state with complete certainty that Helene Porges had already died on the date of her arrival in Riga on February 10, 1942. I can remember the date because the trip took exactly 4 days.

By chance, I was [spared] this kind of death and arrived via foot march to a concentration camp in Riga with my husband and the remaining transport participants. There I repeatedly met Max Werdisheim.

We eventually came to the concentration camp of Kaiserwald, where Max Werdisheim died of hardship and hunger in the summer of 1943.

Taking my further deportation into account, I can conclude that Max Werdisheim certainly did not survive September 31, 1943.

I did not see Max Werdisheim's corpse myself, but only very few escaped this time of horror, altogether 16 persons out of 1,200 from that transport, in the concentration camp Riga.¹⁹

A woman with the name of Lea Singer does not appear on the transport list of February 6, 1942, but her name does appear on a list of survivors from that trans-

¹⁸ Death declaration of Max Werdisheim, Memorandum of 28.02.1947, 48 T 1123/47, Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Landesgericht für ZRS, Vienna. Translation by the author.

¹⁹ Ibid. Translation by the author.

port, published by Gertrude Schneider née Hirschhorn.²⁰ The Hirschhorn family was also forced to live on Lilienbrunnngasse 9 and was deported to Riga on the same transport as Max Werdisheim and Helene Porges. Schneider, who was 14 in 1942, later became a historian. In her research, she mentions that “the two Brunners [=the SS-men in charge of organizing the transports] had a habit of adding Jews at the last minute, Jews who went unrecorded in the general chaos, and while the figures of transports always hovered around the magic number of 1,000, it is extremely difficult to give an exact number.”²¹ She also speaks of “a group of about twenty Jews, men and women, kept separate from us, who had been deported once before and were now being deported again. Not one of them appeared on our actual transport list.”²²

Since 2015, the Arolsen Archives, as the largest archives on victims of Nazi persecution, publish more and more of their holdings online. A search for Lea Singer yielded a scanned copy of a prisoner registration form of a prisoner with that name, born in Vienna on February 23, 1903, who was transferred from the Riga ghetto (Berlinerstraße 7) to the Stutthof concentration camp on July 19, 1944, where she received the prisoner number 49473.²³ According to the form, she was arrested on August 15, 1941. Even though the year of birth given in the registration form does not match the one for Lea Singer who testified to Max’s death in Kaiserwald, the signature in the file is clearly from the same woman.

Max Werdisheim had a business and properties and therefore left behind a huge corpus of documentation regarding the expropriation of his property. At the beginning of the research, I was expecting to find records produced by the perpetrators, representing their perspective. Contrary to my expectations, I also found documents that Max Werdisheim had written personally. One such document is an application for a passport that he submitted to the Gestapo in April 1938, and which is mentioned in the book *Archiv der Namen* by Halbrainer.²⁴ Following the principles guiding archival work, the application was archived ac-

20 Gertrude Schneider: *Exile and Destruction: The Fate of Austrian Jews, 1938–1945*, Westport CT: Praeger, 1995, 175.

21 *Ibid.*, 58.

22 *Ibid.*, 59.

23 Prisoner registration form Lea Singer from Stutthof, 1.1.41.2/4640580/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives. In the summer of 1944, SS personnel of the Kaiserwald concentration camp were forced to leave Riga due to the advancing Red Army. With the inmates who could still be transferred and with some of the inmates’ files they headed to the concentration camp of Stutthof near Danzig. However, many of the files were lost in the chaos.

24 Halbrainer, *Archiv der Namen*, 80.

cording to the appropriate authority – and not under the name of the individual who submitted it. It took a thorough search by the archive’s staff in order to find it.²⁵ I would have never come across it, let alone found it, had I not been aware of its existence.

Reuniting Families Postmortem

There is much that I did not find. Not all original documents to copies kept in the family archive could be (re)located in the corresponding archives. It was extremely disappointing to come to dead ends in such cases, despite having solid proof of the existence of documents, knowing exactly which authority issued them or even having their archival number. Some of the sources found in the family archive are not only of significance for me as a descendant of Max Werdisheim but carry their own weight. One of them is a copy of an interrogation of Julius Werdisheim, Max’s brother, by the Prosecutor’s Office at the Regional Court of Graz. It is part of a court file regarding “Anton Pacholegg-Guttenberg and others”.²⁶ The others were Pacholegg’s brother-in-law Karl Stepanel and “the two Jews, the brothers Max Israel Werdisheim and Julius Israel Werdisheim”, who “had to stand trial for the crime of foreign exchange [*Devisenverbrechen*]”.²⁷ I was particularly interested in this criminal case because in April 1942, the same Anton Pacholegg who according to Julius Werdisheim’s interrogation deceived the brothers, was sent to the concentration camp of Dachau, where he worked for (and with) the infamous SS doctor Sigmund Rascher in ‘Station No. 5’. Rascher was responsible for various experiments, among them high-altitude experiments, made with Dachau prisoners from February 1942 to March 1944 – many of them ending lethally.²⁸ The same Pacholegg gave a testimony about these experiences on May 13, 1945 – a testimony which entered the Nuremberg Trials and which the historian Joachim Neander convincingly proves as

²⁵ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Franz Mittermüller of the Landesarchiv Steiermark and the rest of the archive’s staff for their intensive search of this record.

²⁶ Criminal case against Pacholegg-Guttenberg and others, interrogation of the accused, 15.05.1941, reference number 4 St 4318/39, Private Collection of the Zarfati Family, Tel Aviv. Translation by the author.

²⁷ “Devisenverbrecher verurteilt”, in *Kleine Volks-Zeitung*, 01.11.1941, 8. Translation by the author.

²⁸ Albert Knoll: “Humanexperimente der Luftwaffe im KZ Dachau: Die medizinischen Versuche Dr. Sigmund Raschers”, in Neuengamme Memorial (ed.): *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2012, 139–148, here 139.

worthless.²⁹ The Werdisheim's account on Pacholegg sheds light on aspects of Pacholegg's biography that were previously unknown. All of my efforts to locate the full file of this investigation and judicial process proved futile.

Not every family has a similar set of documents, and yet my family is certainly not the only one. If descendants were asked to make their own family collections available, such sources would be accessible to all. The Holocaust tore families apart. It was interesting to observe that their stories and fates are still torn apart – being dispersed among various archives in different countries. It is the new era of online accessibility to digital sources which can bring them back together.

²⁹ Joachim Neander: "A Strange Witness to Dachau Human Skin Atrocities: Anton Pacholegg a.k.a. Anton Baron von Guttenberg a.k.a. Antoine Charles de Guttenberg", in *Theologie.Geschichte: Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kulturgeschichte*, 4, 2009. Available at: <https://theologiegeschichte.de/ojs2/index.php/tg/article/view/472/511>. Last accessed: 19.08.2022.