

## THE SCATTERED LIBRARY



**Hans P. Soetaert**

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**The Various Fates of the Remnants of Magnus Hirschfeld's  
Institute of Sexual Science Collection  
in France and Czechoslovakia, 1932–1942**

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*for Harry, who was patient, with love*

*in memory of the people mentioned in this book,  
who perished in the Holocaust*

*in memory of Yves Feyten and Avi Haimovsky*



“... [when writing the history of homosexuality,] the punishment of Sodom should not serve as the historical model”.

Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “... [en écrivant l’histoire de l’homosexualité,] ce n’est pas la condamnation de Sodome qui doit servir de modèle historique” (Foucault 1982, 16).





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*A young man in civilian clothes sorting through books looted from Hirschfeld's Institute in the student house on Oranienburger street in Berlin. Photo dated between May 6 and 10, 1933.*

# 1. Introduction

In June 2019, one hundred years after the German-Jewish sexologist and LGBT activist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) opened his Institute of Sexual Science (*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*) in Berlin, the Berlin-based publisher Hentrich & Hentrich published an extensively annotated transcript and facsimile edition of a guestbook that Hirschfeld kept during the last two years of his life.<sup>1</sup> Hirschfeld's *Exile Guestbook 1933–1935* (*Magnus Hirschfelds Exil-Gästebuch 1933–1935*) was presented at the “Queering Memory” conference that brought together people and organizations from all over the world, working on LGBT themes in archives, libraries, museums and special collections (ALMS). The sixth ALMS conference was deliberately held in Berlin, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the opening of the Institute. The conference took place in the House of World Cultures (Haus der Kulturen der Welt), a modernist building located on the site where Hirschfeld's Institute once stood, close to the Spree river, beside the Tiergarten park.<sup>2</sup>

Hirschfeld started his guestbook shortly after arriving in France, in May 1933. Presumably the last contributor signed it two days before Hirschfeld's death, in the middle of May 1935.<sup>3</sup> The sexologist invited people he encountered in his daily life to leave an entry in this guestbook: quotes, poems, drawings, or a simple signature. “Guestbook” may not be an adequate term, since Hirschfeld also filled it with newspaper clippings of his lectures and public appearances, photos of himself and the people he met, and other memorabilia. Hirschfeld had previously named his guestbooks “memorial books” (*Erinnerungsbücher*). He kept several during his 1930–32 world trip, already filling three in the USA, during the first three months of his trip.<sup>4</sup> According to our present knowledge, only Hirschfeld's very last guestbook survived, and it has now come to us in the form of this wonderful facsimile and transcript edition. But what is the story behind this guestbook? How did this Hirschfeld artifact come to us and who were the people involved in the process? That is one of the main subjects of this book, which endeavors to function as an extended, contextualizing introduction to the 2019 publication of the Hirschfeld guestbook.<sup>5</sup>

In this book, I will also look in detail at the life of the late Magnus Hirschfeld and, even more, at the circle of people who survived him. After introducing his main ally, his life partner and coworker Karl Giese (1898–1938) in chapter 2, our story will start

<sup>1</sup> *Magnus Hirschfelds Exil-Gästebuch 1933–1935*, ed. Hans Bergemann, Ralf Dose, Marita Keilson-Lauritz, and Kevin Dubout (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://queeralmsberlin2019.de/> (accessed Nov. 12, 2020) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ALMS\\_Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ALMS_Conference) (accessed Nov. 14, 2020). The first ALMS conference was held in 2006 in the USA, in Minneapolis.

<sup>3</sup> The earliest entry (not all entries were dated) dates from November 1933. See Bergemann, Dose, Keilson-Lauritz & Dubout 2019, f. 11/55. We will see that, in all probability, people added undated entries even earlier. The last explicitly dated entry in the guestbook is from May 12, 1935. See *ibid.*, f. 142/186.

<sup>4</sup> Bergemann 2019, 27 n. 1; Hirschfeld & Dose 2013, 207 n. 3. I have found strong indication that at least one other such guestbook existed, likely covering the years 1932–33. See below, chapter 15. Hirschfeld's very last guestbook, published in 2019, covered the years 1933–35.

<sup>5</sup> The 2019 publication of the Hirschfeld guestbook is accompanied by two excellent contributions (Dose 2019; Bergemann 2019). Two earlier texts by Marita Keilson-Lauritz, on her first dealings with the Hirschfeld guestbook, remain valuable introductions to and sources of information regarding the Hirschfeld guestbook. See Keilson-Lauritz 2004 and 2008.

in March 1932, when Hirschfeld again set foot on European soil, returning from his almost two-year world tour, one mainly spent in the US, Asia, and the Middle East. In this way, the book also picks up the thread where Rainer Herrn's excellent 2022 book on the history of Hirschfeld's Institute and the life work of Magnus Hirschfeld ended, in 1932–33.

Although Hirschfeld was hailed as a world celebrity on his tour, he was quickly reminded, on the return from his world trip, that he was much less liked in Europe. The Nazis' aversion to Hirschfeld and his ideas was already in evidence in October 1920, when Hirschfeld was physically attacked in the street and left for dead after a lecture he gave in Munich. His person and work met with the same animosity as soon as he disembarked in the port of Athens, in March 1932. Since leaving Germany to go on his world tour in November 1930, Nazi influence in his home country had only grown stronger and his friends urged him not to return to Germany after his world trip. After Athens, Hirschfeld went to Austria, before going to Switzerland, where he stayed in 1932–33, ultimately wandering to France on his birthday, May 14, 1933. Only a few days earlier, Nazi students had looted his Institute in Berlin. On May 10, in Berlin's Opernplatz, they publicly burned great portions of the Institute's vast and unique sexology collection, which consisted of books, periodicals, questionnaires, journals, manuscripts, pictures and museum artifacts acquired by Hirschfeld since he started the Institute in 1919 (see chapter 4). That Hirschfeld saw a newsreel of the Berlin auto-da-fé in a Paris cinema, leaving him understandably shattered, is well known. One year after his return to Europe, this was another serious blow, on top of his poor health, from which Hirschfeld never fully recovered.

Despite once again having to deal with an old, all-too-familiar hostility as soon as he returned from his world tour, Hirschfeld managed to find some relief in a young European country, one with which he had an excellent relationship since its founding in 1918. In Czechoslovakia, he was able to shine one more time. In September 1932, the fifth and final conference of the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR) took place in Brno, the second-largest city of Czechoslovakia. The League was another of Hirschfeld's brainchildren, officially starting in 1928. When visiting Czechoslovakia in the months leading up to the conference, to make preparations for the event with Josef Weisskopf (1904–1977), a local doctor, Hirschfeld lectured in different parts of the country and was received with much enthusiasm (see chapter 3).

Despite the grievous blow delivered by the Nazi students in Berlin, Hirschfeld and Giese eventually, in the beginning of 1934, got back on their feet and tried to make a new start in Paris, attempting to start up a new Institute there (see chapters 5 and 7). Some of the materials that Hirschfeld had bought back from Nazi Germany in November 1933 were first sent from Berlin to Brno. In April 1934, a portion of these materials were then sent to Paris. But the Paris project did not succeed. Karl Giese, Hirschfeld's assistant and life partner, found himself entangled in a bathhouse affair, as a result of which he was expelled from France, in the autumn of 1934. This proved to be a definitive setback for the new Paris venture (see chapter 8). It is clear that the Paris police (Préfecture de Police) used the Giese case to try to contain Hirschfeld's controversial sexual reform activities in France. At the end of 1934, seeing that he was not as welcome in Paris as he had hoped, Hirschfeld moved from the French capital to Nice in the south of France, known for its mild Mediterranean winter climate. Six months later, Hirschfeld died there. It is in Nice that one can now find the grave of the sexologist who, in his time, was as famous as Einstein. On his world trip, in Chicago, he was dubbed "the Einstein of sex" and "Europe's Greatest Sex Authority".

A letter from a learned society in Agra (India), called him, referring to the author of the *Kamasutra*, “the modern-day Batsyayana (Vātsyāyana)”.<sup>6</sup>

Concerned about his legacy, after ruminating about its precise details for years, Hirschfeld drew up his will in Nice. Principally, Hirschfeld outlined his expectation that the two men dearest to him would continue his life work. These were Karl Giese, whom Hirschfeld met in Berlin in 1914, and who had been the Head of Collections (*Archivleiter*) of the Institute of Sexual Science library until 1933; and Li Shiu Tong (1907–1993), a young Chinese man, whom Hirschfeld met on his world tour. Hirschfeld’s estate was settled in Nice in 1935–36 (see chapter 9). But the posterity outlined in Hirschfeld’s will was never realized.

It was also in Nice, in the months following Hirschfeld’s death, that a few of the smaller remnants of the Institute’s collection, along with other papers, were divided among Karl Giese, Li Shiu Tong and Hirschfeld’s visiting great-nephew, Ernst Maass (1914–1975). A separate portion of the Institute materials that escaped the Berlin bonfire seems to have been inaccessible to the two principal heirs of Hirschfeld’s estate, Karl Giese and Li Shiu Tong. These artifacts, most of them ethnological objects, remained in Nice and were handled by the Austrian painter Victor Bauer (1902–1959) and his circle of friends, then resident in Nice (see chapter 10).

The materials left to Li Shiu Tong were partially recovered from his estate, which came to light – thanks to a great deal of luck – shortly after his death in Vancouver, Canada, in 1993. This lot was saved from a waste container in 1993 by Adam P. W. Smith, an astute young photographer. In 2003, Smith donated these materials to the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft in Berlin. The cast of Hirschfeld’s plaster death mask was among the objects rescued. One of Hirschfeld’s personal notebooks, *Testament: Heft II*, was also part of the Li Shiu Tong lot. This notebook was not strictly a diary. It mainly contains Hirschfeld’s thoughts about what he would do with his estate. In 2013, this Hirschfeld notebook was published by Ralf Dose (1950–) in Germany in an annotated facsimile edition.<sup>7</sup> It now constitutes a crucial primary source in Hirschfeld research.

The materials that Ernst Maass took to the USA when he emigrated there, in March 1938, were discovered in the New York home of his son, Robert Maass (1956–), in December 2009, thanks to the investigations of the University of Toronto librarian and researcher Don McLeod (1957–).<sup>8</sup> In 2011, these materials were donated by Robert Maass to the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft in Berlin. However, a larger part of the Institute’s remaining materials, along with documents and personal archives belonging to Hirschfeld, ended up with Karl Giese in Brno. Once Giese had received, after a one-year delay, his small part of the Hirschfeld inheritance, he returned for the third time, at the end of May 1936, to Brno, where he settled until his death in March 1938 (see chapter 11). The Hirschfeld guestbook was in Giese’s possession when he lived in Brno, together with at least around 500 and possibly as many as 900 books from the Institute library. Giese eventually lost faith, suffering partly because of a love affair with a man nine years his junior that had gone sour, but also because of his growing fear of Nazism. Germany’s annexation of Austria in March 1938 made it clear that Germany would continue to expand beyond its national borders. Giese committed suicide in his Brno apartment in the same month as the *Anschluss*. Giese drew up a will in which he entrusted the Institute materials and everything else he owned to his friend Karl Fein (1894–1942), a Jewish lawyer in Brno (see chapter 12). Fein perished in the Holocaust in the beginning of May 1942, six months after being

<sup>6</sup> For the USA titles, see Viereck 1930, 240; Hirschfeld & Dose 2013, 98. For the Indian title, see *Tagesbote*, May 22, 1932, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Hirschfeld & Dose 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Don McLeod offers a detailed overview of his concise but effective discovery trail. See McLeod 2012.

deported from Prague to the Łódź ghetto in Poland (see chapter 13). Fein and possibly also his aunt, Elise Brecher, played a central role in the operation to buy back Institute materials in the last months of 1933 (see chapter 6).

Exactly what happened to the Hirschfeld and Institute materials that Giese guarded in Brno remains in part unclear; however, in all probability, most or even all the remaining Institute materials were thrown out in 1942, ending up in a waste paper container belonging to a scrap company. This is a painful observation, made even worse when one reflects that Giese most likely had in his possession the greater part of what remained of the Institute collection, as well as Hirschfeld's personal archives covering his years of exile. Tragically, especially after Magnus Hirschfeld's death, Giese considered himself to be their best guardian.

But not everything was lost in Brno. In 1942, along with some sexology books, the guestbook that Hirschfeld kept in France, was retrieved by an unknown person from the aforementioned container in Brno. The finder (or finders) of these artifacts handed them over to a Brno doctor, Stanislav Kaděrka (1906–1986). In the 1980s, Dr. Kaděrka asked a close family friend to sell the Hirschfeld guestbook in West Germany. In this way, in 1985, the guestbook made its way to the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach, where it is still housed. Very curiously, the Hirschfeld guestbook thus shared the same fate as *Testament: Heft II*, also saved from a dumpster in Canada.

Many people believe that the whole of the Hirschfeld Institute library was lost to the fire in the Opernplatz in Berlin in May 1933, but the truth is a little more complicated.<sup>9</sup> In this book, I try to gain some distance from this pervasive, almost romantic view, in which some people seem almost fascinated by the sensational and destructive Berlin bonfire, even as they are determined to wax indignant about the undoubtedly great injustice committed by the National Socialists. I rejected the idea of yet another book bearing the almost predictable title: *The Burning Library*. Yes, many things were consigned to the flames in Berlin in May 1933 by the Nazis, but that is only one part of the story; or, rather, just the beginning of the story. Nine years after the Berlin auto-da-fé, in 1942, a considerable part of Hirschfeld's library, along with other papers related to Hirschfeld, were, in all probability, deliberately disposed of in Brno. Chapters 14, 15 and 16 of this book offer some hypothetical scenarios to explain how the Hirschfeld guestbook, along with some sexology books, ended up in the Brno scrap firm's container, and also to suggest how the guestbook ended up with the aforementioned Dr. Kaděrka. We will mainly look at two plausible scenarios about what may have happened. One scenario involves a group of seven gay men from Brno, who founded the short-lived gay magazine *Kamarád* in 1932. The other scenario revolves around an aunt of Karl Fein, Elise Brecher (1869–1943), who found temporary refuge in a small makeshift Jewish hospital in Brno in 1941–43. The fraught year 1942, when the Nazis installed a terror regime in the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren) by appointing Reinhard Heydrich as Reichsprotektor, plausibly explains why someone deemed it safer to discard the Institute materials. Holding on to such materials, which had belonged to Magnus Hirschfeld, one of Nazi Germany's archenemies, was considered too dangerous and even life-threatening in occupied Czechoslovakia. One key figure, the Czech Jaroslav Růžicka (1905–1978), curiously makes an appearance in both scenarios. He was the manager (but not the owner) of the company from whose container the Hirschfeld guestbook and some sexology books were salvaged. This man, and what he did with the Institute materials, is the only truly certain factor in the diffuse and still

<sup>9</sup> For a recent example of the strangely persistent idea that everything was lost in May 1933, see Stefano Evangelista's claim in "Institute of Sexual

Science", <https://happy-in-berlin.org/institute-of-sexual-science/> (accessed Aug. 6, 2021).

unresolved matter of exactly what happened to the part of the Hirschfeld estate that Giese guarded in Brno.

This book is an attempt, then, to try to determine in as much detail as possible what happened in the years 1932–42 to the remainder of Magnus Hirschfeld’s estate. The consequence is that the reader of this book will encounter a vast number of names, facts, and details. This is not an easily digestible novel or Netflix movie. Readers interested in a quicker read may want to skip the footnotes. Details are especially prodigious in chapters 14–17, containing the Czechoslovak part of our story. This profusion is closely related to the fact that exactly what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1939–42 remains partly unresolved. These final chapters should therefore be read as a sort of investigative report on the partly unsolved crime of the discarding of the Institute materials in Brno in 1942. In these chapters, the probable actors involved, as well as the possible scenarios regarding what may have happened, will be described at length. In reporting in detail on the research trails followed, my wish is to help future researchers, saving them from repeating work already done, and thus speed up the progress of Hirschfeld research. Since much of this uncertainty is intrinsically linked to the deportation and annihilation of the Jewish population – and the concomitant destruction of their personal archives and memories – I have tried to follow as many trails of Jewish survival as possible, hoping to find some answers there. My hope, in spelling out these rare trails of Jewish survival (relegated to the footnotes in most cases), is to reach some Jewish readers who may recognize names of relatives. I would like to ask any who do to contact me so that we may determine whether something new can be learned that may shed further light on our story. I also hope that this book will make a useful contribution to – and serve as an instrument for – the justified quest to find yet other possible remainders of Hirschfeld’s estate.

Finally, and most of all, my ambition is that this book will bring further appreciation for and restore some dignity to (as hinted by his first name) the “great” Magnus Hirschfeld, by contributing to the detailed history of what happened to his greatly admirable life’s work when confronted by the multifaceted catastrophe named National Socialism, which infested all of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, ultimately culminating in World War II and the Holocaust.