

## THE OBJECT'S AFTERLIFE: NAZI-LOOTED PRECIOUS METAL OBJECTS, ART HISTORY, AND JEWISH HISTORY IN POSTWAR GERMANY

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“Your beautiful book, as well as your other works, contains rich material for my special research, so that I can do further studies.” With these words, written in 1978, historian, archivist, and rabbi Bernhard Brillung (1906–1987) praised a recently published book on goldsmiths in the Rhine and Neckar region by art historian Wolfgang Scheffler (1902–1992).<sup>1</sup> Bernhard Brillung was one of very few experts on the history of the German Jews and Jewish archives in postwar West Germany, with a keen interest in regional micro-studies on the history of specific Jewish professions, such as printers and goldsmiths.<sup>2</sup> For that reason Brillung had initially reached out to Wolfgang Scheffler, a well-known German expert on silver- and goldsmithery, in 1968. For more than a decade, Brillung and Scheffler exchanged information and sent each other new publications from time to time.<sup>3</sup> Their professional relationship and mutual interest was polite and at the same time distanced in tone.

At first glance, this exchange of information between two academics from different disciplines does not seem very noteworthy. Although they had very different approaches, both shared an interest in gold- and silversmithery. What makes their relationship remarkable is their backgrounds. One was a Jewish historian who had been expelled from Nazi Germany in 1939 and re-migrated to West Germany already in the early 1950s, and the other was a non-Jewish German art historian who had benefited from the evaluation of Nazi looting of precious metal objects. Their relationship can therefore serve as a revealing example of a hitherto largely unexplored complex of themes: the Nazi looting of Jewish-owned precious metal objects, art-historical connoisseurship, and a neglected aspect of Jewish historiography in post-war Germany.

The first section of this article examines the biography and oeuvre of the art historian Wolfgang Scheffler, his development into a silver expert, and his involvement in the Nazi looting of Jewish-owned silver and gold objects. Although Scheffler's art historical oeuvre remains well-known, his life and work has not yet been the subject of a scholarly article or monograph. The following section explores

- 1 Brillung to Scheffler, December 8, 1978, Wolfgang Scheffler Nachlass. The “Wolfgang Scheffler Nachlass” (WSN) is administered by the municipal museums in Hanau. See Scheffler, Wolfgang, *Goldschmiede an Main und Neckar: Daten, Werke, Zeichen: vorläufige Ermittlungen* (München, 1977).
- 2 See Helmut Richtering, “Bernhard Brillung zum Gedenken,” in *Gedenkschrift für Hermann Brillung*, ed. Peter Freimark and Helmut Richtering (Hamburg, 1988), 9–13; Robert Jütte, *Die Emigration der deutsch-sprachigen “Wissenschaft des Judentums”*; *Die Auswanderung jüdischer Historiker nach Palästina 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1991), 196–199; Peter Honigmann, “Das Projekt von Rabbiner Dr. Bernhard Brillung zur Errichtung eines jüdischen Zentralarchivs im Nachkriegsdeutschland,” in *Historisches Bewusstsein im jüdischen Kontext. Strategien — Aspekte — Diskurse*, ed. Klaus Hödl (Innsbruck, 2004), 223–242; Jason Lustig, “Bernhard Brillung and the Reconstruction of Jewish Archives in Postwar Germany,” in *Rebuilding Jewish Life in Germany*, ed. Jay H. Geller/Michael Meng (New Brunswick/London, 2020), 48–64.
- 3 The Scheffler/Brillung correspondence is located in the WSN at Hanau and the Jewish Museum Frankfurt (JMF) holds the Bernhard Brillung paper. I would like to thank Linda Wiesner for finding Scheffler's letters and generously making them available to me.

Bernhard Brillung's postwar cultural reconstruction of Jewish history in West Germany, focusing on his works on Jewish goldsmiths. Here too, his biography plays an important role, as no monograph has yet been dedicated to this almost forgotten Jewish historian either.

The connection that initiated the relationship between Brillung and Scheffler was research on goldsmithery, which is to a large extent based on objects. Consequently, this essay also focuses on material culture and the question to what extent objects — the knowledge of and about them, their ownership status and whereabouts — may have played a crucial role in the reconstruction of Jewish historiography in Germany after 1945 as well as for German so-called "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" (coming to terms with the past). Even though they played a negligible role in quantitative terms when compared to everyday objects, Jewish ceremonial objects made of precious metal will be my focus of attention because this specific type of object raises important questions about the connection of Nazi looting and anti-Jewish Scholarship during the Nazi era and because these objects played a distinct role both in postwar Jewish cultural reappropriation and in the later museumization of Jewish history in the context of German remembrance culture.

Provenance research has focused on the history of individual Nazi-looted cultural assets and collections since the "Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art" were agreed on in 1998. This research, however, has been largely dedicated to the period before 1945 and mostly on works of fine art. By reconstructing the biographies of Scheffler and Brillung, their relationship, and analyzing the "afterlife" of Nazi looted objects, this essay broadens the object-oriented approach of provenance research and aims to offer new insights into the postwar history of Jews in Germany and Jewish-German relations.<sup>4</sup>

### **I. Wolfgang Scheffler's work with Nazi-looted objects: gathering knowledge and building networks**

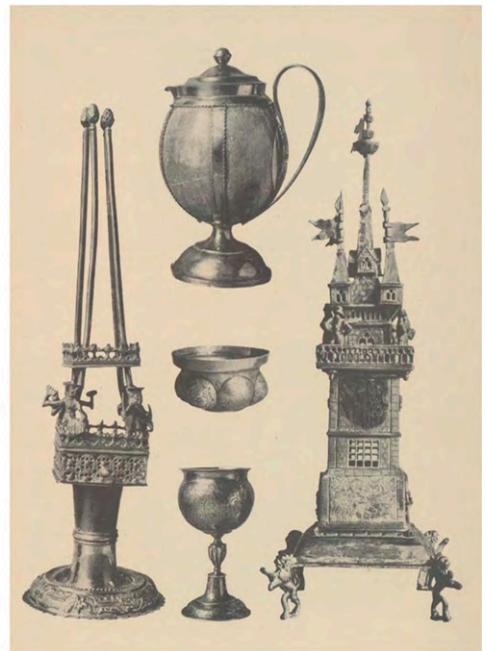
Born on January 2, 1902 in Braunschweig into an educated middle-class family, Wolfgang Scheffler studied art history in Göttingen, Berlin, and Munich and, in 1925, earned his doctorate with a dissertation on gothic sculpture.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently he learned the practical side of museum work on-site, especially meticulous inventorying as an academic intern (*wissenschaftlicher Volontär*) at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Kassel.<sup>6</sup>

Scheffler worked in Kassel alongside research assistant Rudolf Hallo (1898–1933), an expert on Judaica, and it is not unlikely that he participated

4 My post-doc project at GHI with the working title "'Remnants rescued from the fire.' A Transnational Cultural History of Jewish Ceremonial Objects after 1945," seeks to close this research gap, among other things.

5 Wolfgang Scheffler, *Die gotische Plastik der Stadt Braunschweig und ihre Stellung im niedersächsischen Kunstkreis*, (PhD. diss., Göttingen, 1925).

6 His task was in particular to reorganize several regional museums ["Heimatemuseen"] in Hersfeld, Rinteln and Wanfried.



in the preparations for a special exhibition that opened at the Landesmuseum in Kassel on April 10, 1927.<sup>7</sup> This exhibition, called “Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler,” presented a valuable collection of regional Jewish ceremonial objects and was thus an important step in the process of museumization of Jewish cultural assets and the professionalization of Jewish art history, which was still in its infancy at that time.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition also had a political impact: to enlighten and fight against antisemitism.<sup>9</sup> Scheffler definitely knew the exhibition and might also have learned from Hallo how to identify and inventory Jewish ceremonial objects.

Scheffler’s next professional position was at the municipal Thaulow Museum in Kiel, where he moved up the career ladder during the 1930s: from *wissenschaftlicher Hilfsarbeiter* to *Provinzialkustode* to *wissenschaftlicher Assistent*. Around this time, he also started a family: in 1931 he married Martha Lasogga, and two children followed in 1934 and 1937. During that time, he published many regional art-historical articles in local journals, and inventoried local art monuments in Schleswig-Holstein. In addition, he lectured and

7 As the museum Rinteln provided Jewish ceremonial objects for this exhibition in Kassel,

it is likely that Scheffler acted as intermediary. See Rudolf Hallo, *Jüdische Kult- und*

*Kunstdenkmäler im Hessischen Landesmuseum zu Kassel* (Darmstadt, 1928), 26.

**Figure 1. Catalog cover for the 1927 exhibition “Jüdische Kult- und Kunstdenkmäler” at Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel, and page showing various Jewish ceremonial objects.**

8 On the beginnings of Jewish art history and museumization in Germany, see Jens Hoppe, *Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur in Museen: Zur nichtjüdischen Museologie des Jüdischen in Deutschland* (Münster, 2002); Katharina Rauschenberger, *Jüdische Tradition im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik: Zur Geschichte des jüdischen Museumswesens in Deutschland* (Hannover, 2002).

9 See Ekkehard Schmidberger, “Rudolf Hallo und das jüdische Museum in Kassel,” in *Juden in Kassel 1808–1933* (Kassel, 1986), 59–68.

gave guided tours. Scheffler did these in the context of the political education work of the National Socialists, as becomes clear in a letter of recommendation in his personnel file:

In spite of the high level of professional demands, Dr. Scheffler has unselfishly placed himself in the service of cultural-political education and further training of interested national comrades in accordance with the demands of National Socialism. Being inwardly attached to the Führer and his idea, he was a valuable and exemplary collaborator of the *Deutsches Volksbildungswerk* in Kiel, thanks to his outstanding pedagogical and methodical gifts.<sup>10</sup>

Due to limited sources, it is difficult to precisely determine Scheffler's attitude toward National Socialism. Despite his apparent commitment to the political education of National Socialism, he never became a party member of the NSDAP, unlike many others. However, Scheffler's next professional assignment — a position as *wissenschaftlicher Assistent* at the Märkisches Museum (Berlin city museum), advertised in the *Völkischer Beobachter* — brought him to Berlin in 1939 and involved him in the National Socialist persecution and exploitation of Jews. "Among other things," as a paper found in Scheffler's personnel files describes it, "he was in charge of the access registers and cataloguing the new silver collection, a task to which he devoted himself with profound interest."<sup>11</sup>

This "new" silver collection refers to almost 5000 silver objects which the Märkisches Museum purchased in 1939/1940 in the context of the so-called *Leihhausaktion* ("pawn shop action").<sup>12</sup> The *Leihhausaktion* followed the November Pogrom of 1938, during which precious metal objects — such as everyday silver and Jewish ceremonial objects — had been plundered from synagogues, Jewish homes and institutions in an uncoordinated manner. To give the looting a legal appearance, contain the chaos and stop individual enrichment, the Reich Financial Ministry issued the "Ordinance on the Use of Jewish Assets," which forced Jews to deliver all privately-owned jewelry, gold, silver, and platinum objects to pawnbroking institutions (*Leihhäuser*) run by the municipalities starting in February 1939.<sup>13</sup> Irrespective of the object's artistic value, the Jewish owners were paid only a fraction of the material price, from which a further 10 percent administrative fee was deducted; it was essentially

10 Personalakte Wolfgang Scheffler, in Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), A Rep. 001-06, Nr. 25545.

11 Note in "Personalakte Wolfgang Scheffler" by Head of Service on November 17, 1941, in LAB, A Rep. 001-06, Nr. 25545.

12 See Ralf Banken, *Edelmetallmangel und Großraubbirtschaft. Die Entwicklung des deutschen Edelmetallsektors im "Dritten Reich" 1933-1945* (Berlin, 2009), 314-364. Actually, the term "pawnshop" is misleading since the objects from which museum curators could choose also included objects looted from synagogues, Jewish private households and institutions, as well as belongings confiscated from emigrants and those deported to concentration camps.

13 See Wolf Gruner, "The German Council of Municipalities (Deutscher

Gemeindetag) and the Coordination of Anti-Jewish Local Politics in the

Nazi State," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 13 (1999): 171-199.

robbery. The whole action was intended to compensate for the Reich's financial and precious metal shortages in preparation for the war.<sup>14</sup> For resale, the pawnbroking institutions separated items of lesser value, which were to be melted down, from those of greater value, to be resold in their original form. Exceptions were made for objects of high artistic value, which could be preserved and sold at a low price to museums. This special regulation gave museum directors all over the Reich room for individual maneuver. They could signal the authorities their interest in selected items and assert claims for them as potential additions to their museum collections.<sup>15</sup> Many museums benefited from this Nazi action by making substantial additions to their collection.<sup>16</sup>

In case of the Märkisches Museum, museum director Walter Stengel (1882–1960) took advantage of this opportunity. Stengel was not only museum director but, since 1937, also Staatlicher Museumspfleger der Reichshauptstadt (Chief Curator of the Capital) and thus in a prominent position within Berlin to claim objects of high artistic value for his institution. He and his team selected looted silver objects stored at the pawnbroking institutions as well as at the Central Cultural Asset Purchasing Agency and probably also at the Reichsbank in Berlin.<sup>17</sup> As Stengel's assistant, Wolfgang



**Figure 2. Wolfgang Scheffler, 1939. Unknown photographer. Landesarchiv Berlin A Rep 001-06, Nr. 25545. Reproduced by permission.**

14 See Banken, 314–364.

15 See Marlies Coburger/Steffi Grapenthin, "Zum zwangsabgelieferten Silber aus jüdischem Besitz im Märkischen Museum," in *Raubkunst? Silber aus ehemals jüdischem Besitz — wie gehen Museen damit um?*, ed. Sabine Schulze and Silke Reuther (Hamburg, 2016), 30–35; Marlies Coburger, "Der Silberschatz im Märkischen Museum," in *Jahrbuch Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin*, 4 (2000): 223–272; Inka Bertz, "Silber aus jüdischem Besitz: Im Museumsbetrieb redest man eigentlich über

solche Sachen nicht so sehr....," in *Raub und Restitution. Kulturgut aus jüdischem Besitz von 1933 bis heute*, ed. Inka Bertz and Michael Dorrman (Göttingen, 2008), 188–209.

16 Case studies on Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Vienna in *Raubkunst? Silber aus ehemals jüdischem Besitz — wie gehen Museen damit um?*, ed. Sabine Schulze and Silke Reuther (Hamburg, 2016); on Frankfurt see Jürgen Steen, "Die Silberwerbungen des Historischen Museums nach dem 9. November 1938 — Raub und Restitution,

Fakten und Legenden," in *Gesammelt, gehandelt, geraubt. Kunst in Frankfurt und der Region zwischen 1933 und 1945*, ed. Evelyn Brockhoff and Franziska Kiermeier (Frankfurt, 2019), 168–182; on Lower Franconia see Christine Bach and Carolin Lange, "Sieben Kisten mit jüdischem Material." Der Raub der Judaica in Unterfranken 1938," in "Sieben Kisten mit jüdischem Material". *Von Raub und Wiederentdeckung 1938 bis heute*, ed. Jüdisches Museum München and Museum für Franken Würzburg (Berlin/Leipzig 2018), 91–104.

17 Stengel's team consisted of Scheffler, Paul Kothe (Stadtoberarchitekt), Georg Albrecht (Werkmeister), Otto Kohnert (supervisor), Leopold Lieske (supervisor) and Emil Schöder (supervisor).

Scheffler set up a separate inventory for this silver collection in two volumes, called the “S-inventory.” (See Figure 3.) With the utmost art-historical care, Scheffler inventoried each and every object with entries for title, dimensions, maker’s mark and/or hallmark, and sometimes a short description or photograph.<sup>18</sup>

In this way, countless silverware, sugar tongs, candlesticks, jewelry, and in some cases ceremonial objects that directly reflected the Jewish origins of their former owners, such as Kiddush cups with Hebrew inscriptions or Torah ornaments, passed through Scheffler’s hands. Due to his earlier work with Judaica expert Rudolf Hallo in Kassel, it is quite possible that Scheffler knew how to properly identify these Jewish ceremonial objects. In any event, he knew how to categorize the objects correctly, such as “Thoraschild” (Torah shield) or “Thoraweiser” (Torah pointer). The inventory process must have taken months and surely trained Scheffler’s expert eye. Looking back in the 1950s, Scheffler himself considered this phase of his career to have been decisive for his specialization: “I already specialized in silver during the last war as an assistant at the Märkisches Museum Berlin ...,” he recalled.<sup>19</sup>

To determine the concrete motives of the involved persons here, it is interesting to take a look at a 1941 report about new acquisitions of the Märkisches Museum, in which Scheffler’s supervisor Walter Stengel described these silver objects as “a unique rescue operation ... of the pieces saved from melting.”<sup>20</sup> This statement is not only euphemistic but wrong. Provenance research has proven that this form of preserving objects through museum appropriation was by no means unique but a common practice throughout the whole Reich. The doubtful rescue narrative aside, Stengel stressed the objects’ scholarly value: the new silver collection, he wrote, could “present the silver culture of the last 150 years in unique series.” As Inka Bertz has highlighted, these museum acquisitions stand “for a special form of Nazi art theft: the motive was not the material or representative value of the looted objects, but the research possibilities that this material opened up.”<sup>21</sup>

18 Index cards including photographs of the objects and the information of Scheffler’s “S-inventory” were additionally created by Eva Maria Krafft from 1941 for the new silver collection. See Marlies Coburger, “Neues zum ‘Silberschatz im Märkischen Museum.’” in *Jahrbuch Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin*, 10 (2004/2005): 59–72.

19 Scheffler to F.K.A. Huelsmann, Berlin 9. March 1959, WSN. In 1942, Scheffler incorporated results of his work with the looted objects in an article: Wolfgang Scheffler, “Die Meisterstücke der Berliner Gold-

schmiede von 1766 bis 1836,” in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für die Geschichte Berlins*, Vol. 59, 1 (1942): 7–15.

20 Walter Stengel, “Märkisches Museum — kulturgeschichtliche und stadtge-

schichtliche Erwerbungen 1939–1940,” XII (Berlin, 1941), 44–47.

21 Bertz, *Silber*, 192; Andreas Bernhard, *Verschlungene Wege. Sammlungsobjekte und ihre Geschichte* (Berlin, 2018), 44.

28		29	
	Gegenschub behält		
2392	Knickscheide: 1 Paar Nippel	0673	2805 <u>Judesterne</u> , auf Fuß, 2 Ring- stein an Löwenköpfen
2393	Knickscheide: 1 Paar Nippel	0673	2806 <u>Judesterne</u> behälter
2394	<u>Thorawieser</u> & Tempel SZT und 12	0663	2807 <u>Judesterne</u> , auf Fuß, Salzen- becken
2395	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel 13 an Fächelkanten	0664	2808 <u>Seufglas</u> behälter (?)
2396	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel 10, 11 und 7 A. 18.14	0665	2809 <u>Salzglas</u> behälter
2397	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel HE (?) und 12	0665	2810 <u>Judesterne</u> , Glasstein, behält Fisigran
2398	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel Balines Bar und I., 1.	0666	2811 <u>Glocke</u> ?, als Bekrönung Sessel- stuhl mit Lorbeerkranz.
2399	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel Balines Bar und K. 10, 11, 12	0667	2812 <u>Glocke</u> mit Ring (50g in dem Stempel des Fundes Salzen)
2400	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Tempel Balines Bar und I., 2. unbekannt	0667	2813 <u>Judesterne</u> mit Bügelbehälter mit Pfeilspitze auf Fuß Glas- stein behält
2401	<u>Thorawieser</u> , Messing veritabel	0668	2814 <u>Judesterne</u> behälter, zweiseitig lg.
2402	<u>Thorawieser</u>	0668	2815 <u>Judesterne</u> behälter
2403	<u>Judesterne</u> behälter	0675	2816 <u>Judesterne</u> behälter, zweiseitig
2404	<u>Salzglas</u> behälter	0677	

These new research opportunities also drew in experts from museums beyond Berlin. The director of the Altonaer Museum in Hamburg, Hubert Stierling (1882–1950), for instance, may have used the evaluation of “Jewish silver” — including Jewish ceremonial objects from the Altona Synagoge which he had “rescued” — for his regional research on maker’s marks from northern Germany.<sup>22</sup> In a letter dated April 25, 1940, he asked his colleagues in Berlin, Walter Stengel and Wolfgang Scheffler, to inform him as soon as they found any objects that could fit his research interests.<sup>23</sup> Later in Scheffler’s life this contact with Stierling would play an important role.

**Figure 3. The so-called two-volume “S-Inventar” of the new silver collection at the Märkisches Museum. Only the second volume of the inventory has survived. Stadtmuseum Berlin. Reproduced by permission.**

22 On Stierling’s “rescue” of silver from the synagogues see Helmut Scaruppe, *Mein Inseltraum, Kindheit und Jugend im Hitlerreich* (Schopfheim, 2003), 57–60 and Scaruppe, *Zeitzeugenbericht* (un-

published manuscript), Archiv Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg. Scaruppe attests Stierling an anti-National Socialist attitude. Jewish ceremonial objects are listed in Stierling’s book,

*Goldschmiedezeichen von Altona bis Tondern* (1955). After the war, however, Stierling voluntarily handed over looted-appropriated objects to the Hamburg Jewish community.

23 Stierling to Stengel/Scheffler, April 25, 1940 in Archiv Stadtmuseum — MPM I. 1.2. 1940.

Stierling, Stengel, Scheffler, and other art historians who specialized in metal objects were interested not only in the history of stylistic developments, but also in collecting information about gold and silver marks. Most European silver and gold objects bear marks indicating the maker as well as the city and date of production. Knowing how to decipher those marks was and is very important for the determination and authentication of objects. Since the late nineteenth century huge compilations of silver and gold marks emerged, compiled by specialized art historians and published in the form of reference books.<sup>24</sup> This fundamental art historical research on marks was part of the professionalization of the discipline. In Germany, the works of the art historian Marc Rosenberg (1851–1930) were groundbreaking and widely known all over Europe.<sup>25</sup> In 1895, Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945) published the first comprehensive study dedicated to Berlin goldsmiths.<sup>26</sup>

While working with thousands of objects (and their marks) in 1939/1940, Scheffler became aware of limits, gaps or incorrect conclusions drawn in Rosenberg’s and Sarre’s manuals, which were the standard reference works of that time. His plan to collect information about marks in order to replace the existing standard works with a more complete study probably took shape during this time.<sup>27</sup> Scheffler’s scholarly interest in silver and gold marks, which appears rather apolitical at first glance, was not only embedded in anti-Jewish persecution due to the looted objects he worked with. His research at the Märkisches Museum was also inspired and supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst (DGfGK), a “clearly antisemitic” society.<sup>28</sup> The DGfGK, founded in 1932, successfully reached out — in the person of its leading figure, Ferdinand R. Wilm (1880–1971) — to high-ranking Nazis (Hitler, Göring, Goebbels) to build a support network for its purposes soon after Hitler seized power.<sup>29</sup> Art-loving Hermann Göring became the patron of the DGfGK. The Nazi commitment to German goldsmiths’ craft was extensive and ideologically justified as an expression of the German “völkische Wesensart” (national character). The antisemitic idea of purifying German goldsmithing art from the influences of the “Jewish spirit” may also have resonated here, as the assumption of a special, almost magical relationship between Jews, gold, and money was a long-established antisemitic trope.<sup>30</sup> In the preface to “Goldschmiedekunst als Kulturpolitik,” a *Festschrift* on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the DGfGK in 1942, the

24 See Günther Schiedlausky, “Betrachtungen zur Geschichte des Schrifttums über Goldschmiedekunst,” in *Studien zur europäischen Goldschmiedekunst des 14. bis 20. Jahrhunderts. Festschrift für Helmut Selig zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (München, 2001), 379–392. I would like to thank Katharina Siefert (Badisches Landesmuseum) for the literature reference.

25 Rosenberg’s four volume work *Geschichte der Goldschmiedekunst auf technischer Grundlage* (1907, 1910, 1918 and 1972) became a standard work as well as his important and constantly expanded compendium of marks *Der Goldschmiede Merkzeichen*, first published in 1890.

26 Friedrich Sarre, *Die Berliner Goldschmiede-Zunft von ihrem Entstehen bis zum Jahre 1800. Ein Beitrag zur Kunst- und Gewerbe-Geschichte Berlins* (Berlin, 1895).

27 See Scheffler to Huelsmann, March 9, 1959, WSN.

28 Michael Bermejo and Andrea H. Schneider-Braunberger, *Das goldene Netzwerk: Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 2019), 157. I would like to thank the authors for sharing helpful information with me. Stengel reported in 1953 that the DGfGK inspired and supported the research on the history of Berlin goldsmithery at the Märkisches Museum, see Bernhard, *Verschlungene Wege*, 44.

29 Bermejo and Schneider-Braunberger, *Das goldene Netzwerk*, 51.

30 For instance, Martin Luther suggested in *On the Jews and Their Lies*

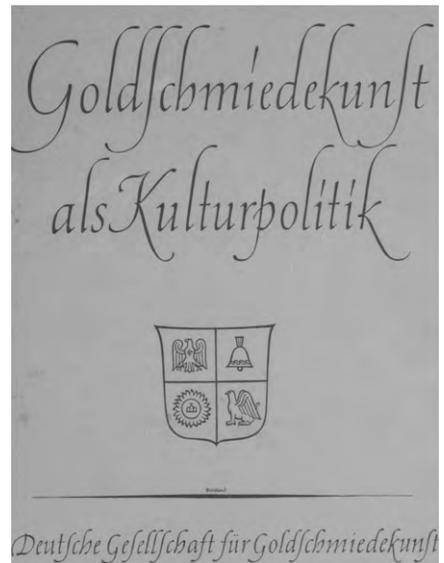
(1543), “I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and

treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping.”

ideological impetus is clearly evident: “The art of goldsmithing is one of the oldest crafts of the north, together with ironsmithing, pottery, and weaving. It seems to belong to the special talents of the Nordic race, to which Europe owes the best and highest. No craft was more highly honored among the *Germanen* [Germanic tribes] than that of the goldsmith.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the Nazi involvement in goldsmithing also pursued the destruction, through the policy of “Aryanization,” of the businesses of Jewish jewelers and goldsmiths.

In order to “make German goldsmithing a world leader again,” the DGfGK promoted research on the “history of German goldsmithing from its beginnings to the present” and supported publications, exhibitions, and competitions in the field.<sup>32</sup> The “repatriation” of valuable German gold and silver artworks in “non-Aryan” collections was also of great interest.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the DGfGK installed research centers for goldsmith’s craft at the art history seminars of the universities of Berlin, Bonn, Marburg, Halle, Rostock and Würzburg as well as at museums in Berlin, Dresden, Nuremberg, Hanau and Schwäbisch Gmünd.<sup>34</sup>

Especially against the background of the ideological orientation of the DGfGK the question arises as to why the museum professionals in Berlin also picked some objects that were clearly connected to Judaism, such as Torah ornaments, to be preserved. Did they choose these objects only because of the art historical research value of their marks or styles? Or did they want to rescue the objects, as was often claimed in denazification trials after the war? And if so, for whom did they preserve them and why? Were these genuinely Jewish objects preserved in order to perpetuate the image of the “essential Other” within the bipolar ideology of Nazism — for example, in future defamatory exhibitions?<sup>35</sup> Due to a lack of historical sources, it is impossible to ascertain whether these objects can be seen as traces of a planned Nazi memory politics (*Gedächtnispolitik*).<sup>36</sup> What is



**Figure 4. Publication celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst, 1942.**

31 Kurt Karl Eberlein, *Goldschmiedekunst als Kulturpolitik. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst* (Berlin, 1942).

32 Bermejo and Schneider-Braunberger, *Das goldene Netzwerk*, 79, 87.

33 For instance, until 1937 a valuable Renaissance

wedding cup from Breslau was in the collection of Victor Rothschild. Its “repatriation” was lauded. Gündel, *Breslau*, 9.

34 *Ibid.*, 139.

35 This might then be comparable to the establishment of the Jewish Central Museum in Prague in 1942, which is still a mystery to research today. See Dirk Rupnow, “Racializing Historiography: Anti-Jewish Scholarship in the Third Reich,” in *Beyond the Racial State*, ed. Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell (Cambridge, 2017), 288–316.

36 See Dirk Rupnow, *Vernichten und Erinnern. Spuren nationalsozialistischer Gedächtnispolitik* (Göttingen, 2005).

certain in the case of the Märkisches Museum is that almost the entire silver collection — including the looted silver objects — was lost in the turmoil of the war. Scheffler’s valuable data about the objects, however, was for the most part preserved. Therefore the “afterlife” of the objects was in this case of an immaterial nature.

## II. Converting the knowledge of objects into connoisseurship after 1945

Scheffler’s time at the Märkisches Museum was formative but short. A new professional opportunity opened up for him as early as September 1941, when he was appointed museum director in Liegnitz (Lower Silesia). This assignment was also of short duration, followed by military service (1943) and captivity as a prisoner of war. After his release in 1947, Scheffler moved back to his hometown of Braunschweig, where at first he worked mainly as a freelancer at the Anton Ulrich Museum and at the city’s office of historic preservation (Denkmalpflegeamt).<sup>37</sup>

Only fifty kilometers from Braunschweig lies Celle Castle, which functioned as the Zonal Fine Arts Repository from 1945 until 1958 and offered interesting job opportunities for art historians.<sup>38</sup> All works of art confiscated in the territory of the British Occupation Zone were collected there. For the most part, these objects were holdings of the Berlin museums that had been removed for security reasons during the war. Scheffler was able to obtain a professional position at the Celle repository, where his tasks were to identify objects that belonged to the former Berliner Staatliche Museen (Antiken-Abteilung, Schlossmuseum, Ägyptische-Abteilung), to curate exhibitions in Celle, and to prepare the relocation of the museum collections to West Berlin in his capacity as Beauftragter der Rückführungsaktion.<sup>39</sup> During these formative postwar years, when the Zonal Fine Arts Repository and other Allied art “collecting points” were concerned with sorting and restitution, countless objects had to be identified. The determination of gold and silver marks was again essential. For, in addition to receipts and photographs, Jewish restitution claimants were required to indicate the marks of their precious metal pieces in order to identify them beyond doubt.<sup>40</sup>

While working at the Celle Zonal Fine Arts Repository, Scheffler returned to his former interest in gold and silver marks and reestablished contact with former networks. Scheffler may have reached out to Hubert Stierling (or his wife Dorothea) in Hamburg in the late 1940s; for after Stierling’s death in 1950, Scheffler edited Stierling’s book *Goldschmiedezeichen von Altona bis Tondern*, which the deceased had left as a manuscript.<sup>41</sup>

37 See LAB B Rep. 014, Nr. 1698.

38 See Lothar Pretzell, *Das Kunstgutlager Schloss Celle 1945 bis 1958* (Celle, 1958).

39 See ZA-SMB, VA 14513, Rückführung der Sammlungsbestände aus Celle; Barbara Mundt ed., *Museumsalltag vom Kaiserreich bis zur Demokratie — Chronik des Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseums* (Berlin, 2018), 581 ff; Pretzell, *Kunstgutlager*, 74, 77, 80.

40 See Jürgen Lillteicher, *Raub, Recht und Restitution: die Rück-erstattung jüdischen Eigentums in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen, 2007), 289. The castle in Celle also had its own restitution department, so Scheffler was also confronted with this issue. See Pretzell, *Kunstgutlager*, 58.

41 According to Scheffler, the book was to be published in 1943 for the 80th anniversary of the Altona Museum, which was prevented by the war. See Hubert Stierling, *Goldschmiedezeichen von Altona bis Tondern*, ed. Wolfgang Scheffler (Kiel, 1955), 11.

With this publication Scheffler was following the latest art historical trend. Immediately after the war, there was a veritable wave of research on silver and goldsmithing. Countless publications, exhibitions and competitions emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>42</sup> Remarkable are the many doctoral theses on the subject, which had been begun during the Nazi period but were published only after the war, and which may be interpreted as a long-term consequence of Nazi cultural policy.<sup>43</sup> The re-established DGfGK in Hamburg also continued its tasks almost uninterrupted after 1945 — but erased all former Nazi connections in its self-representation.

This wave of research on silver and goldsmithing may have motivated Scheffler to create a personal object index of gold and silver marks, which was arranged regionally and still exists in his papers in Hanau. Interestingly enough, Scheffler transferred all data concerning the looted Jewish silver which the Märkisches Museum had acquired in 1939/1940 into this personal index. In some cases, Scheffler's personal index cards even contain supplemental information or sketches of the objects, drawn by Scheffler himself.<sup>44</sup> (See Figure 5.)

Due to Scheffler's much lauded work in Celle, he was predestined to be employed in the reconstruction of Berlin's Staatliche Museen after the relocation of the objects.<sup>45</sup> In fact, in 1957 Scheffler became the first staff member — research fellow and acting director — of the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Applied Arts) in West Berlin.<sup>46</sup> The first years of the improvised museum, which lacked staff and space and whose collection was divided between East and West, were chaotic. Scheffler established order by — again — creating accurate museum index cards and inventories.<sup>47</sup> It must have hit him hard when a young colleague was eventually appointed director of the Kunstgewerbemuseum in 1960 and Scheffler was fobbed off with a position as curator (*Kustode*).<sup>48</sup> But this position offered him enough time to devote himself to his art historical research until he retired

the exact date, it is reasonable to assume that Scheffler systematically built up the index only after the war and until the end of his life. Scheffler also added Jewish ceremonial objects to his card index, including synagogue objects from Berlin and Gröbzig. These were — as far as we know today — not part of the new silver collection at the Märkisches Museum. See WSN.

42 For example, the DGfGK in 1947 organized the competition "Das beste Buch über Goldschmiedekunst," Bermejo and Schneider-Braunberger, *Das goldene Netzwerk*, 151. Two exhibitions on the subject were shown in Berlin in 1955: "400 Jahre Berliner Goldschmiedezunft" at the Märkisches Museum and

"400 Jahre Gold und Silberschmiede in Berlin" at the Rathaus Schöneberg. For a long list of publications on the topic, see Schiedlausky, *Betrachtung*, 388 ff.

43 Schiedlausky states in his 2001 historical overview "that in the decades following the end of the war, research into the art of

goldsmithing has made gratifying progress and has exceeded the usual level" without mentioning the catalytic effect of the Nazi period for the field. See Schiedlausky, *Betrachtung*, 391.

44 Scheffler's object index includes about 30,000 small-format index cards. Even if we don't know

45 See Mundt, *Museumsalltag*, 597-598.

46 See LAB B Rep. 014, Nr. 1698.

47 See Mundt, *Museumsalltag*, 581.

48 Ibid. 597.

600A  
MEISTER:

*Müller* *Berlin*

MEISTER	BESCHAU	HERKUNFT	GEGENSTAND
<i>MULLER</i>	<i>Berlin</i>		<i>Thoraschild gegrüßet, n. einem Aushänge H 23 cm.</i>
		NACHWEIS	
		<i>53892<sup>4</sup> Phot 01322</i>	
			BESITZER
			<i>Berlin M. H.</i>



**Figure 5. Front and back of index card for a “Thoraschild” from the new silver collection at the Märkisches Museum with a sketch drawn by Scheffler on the back. Wolfgang Scheffler Papers, Städtische Museen Hanau. Photo by the author.**

in 1967; research that he continued for a long time thereafter. It was only during this time that the name Wolfgang Scheffler became known to the wider public as a silver and gold expert because of his numerous publications on goldsmithery in Lower Saxony (1965), Berlin (1968), Rhineland-Westphalia (1973), Hesse (1976), Main and Neckar (1977), Central and Northeast Germany (1980), East Allgaeu (1981), East Prussia (1983), and Upper Franconia (1989), just to mention a few.

It is interesting to note that there are traces in Scheffler’s personal papers documenting the art historian’s interest in a development since the early 1960s that linked his research field with the emerging memorialization of memory regarding the Shoah. Several exhibitions, but especially the “Synagoga” exhibition (1960/61) in Recklinghausen/Frankfurt (Main) and the “Monumenta Judaica” exhibition (1963) in Cologne, presented Jewish history and religion using authentic remnants of European Jewish material culture, such as antique Jewish ceremonial objects made of precious metal. The exhibited objects were on loan from private and museum collections, including some in Israel. Thus the organization of these exhibitions was a high-ranking cultural diplomatic act at a time when West Germany and Israel did not yet have diplomatic relations. Although the exhibitions were intended to be more than an art historical event and to enable a broad German public to (re-) encounter Jewish culture and promote reconciliation, their failure to address the Shoah and contemporary Jewish life resulted in a self-centered mourning for the loss of a part of German culture.<sup>49</sup> Art experts like Scheffler may have approached the exhibition

49 In addition to the Jewish ceremonial objects mentioned in Scheffler’s card index, a folder entitled “Jewish Cult Silver” in his papers contains articles and newspaper clippings concerning the exhibition *Synagoga* (1961) and an exhibition presenting the “Sofer Collection” of Jewish Ceremonial objects collected by Zvi Sofer at the Gropius Bau (1980). On the meaning of these exhibitions, see Inka Bertz, “Jewish Museums in the Federal Republic of Germany,” in *Visualizing and Exhibiting Jewish Space and History*, ed. Richard I. Cohen (Oxford, 2012), 80–112.

first and foremost as a research opportunity, as it offered easy access to objects that had “emigrated” with their Jewish owners into exile or had been buried in German museum depots for a long time.

In 1968, Wolfgang Scheffler published his famous and oft-cited 700-page volume *Berliner Goldschmiede — Daten Werke Zeichen*. At the time of its publication the book was hailed as “the fundamental work on Berlin goldsmiths and their works,” and has remained the standard work until today.<sup>50</sup> As a matter of course, Scheffler included all the information accumulated during the evaluation of the looted Jewish silver at the Märkisches Museum in 1939/1940. Today’s readers can easily identify the objects in question by their S-inventory number. Scheffler thus did not hide information, but he did not embed its background critically either. These were simply neutral facts for him, a scientific added value.

To be sure, Scheffler’s far more extensive scholarly work cannot be reduced to his work with the Nazi looted materials at the Märkisches Museum. Nevertheless, this work formed the starting point and cornerstone of his preoccupation with the subject, helped him to establish important networks, and ultimately had a catalytic effect on his research and career, which lasted far into postwar times. The critical and systematic examination of this somewhat inconspicuous part of art historical scholarship produced in museums during National Socialism is still in its infancy, even though there has been an increasing interest in the topic in recent years.<sup>51</sup>

### III. Bernhard Brillung’s individual approach to reconstruction: “Jewish goldsmithery” as counter-narrative

It is not clear whether rabbi and historian Bernhard Brillung knew the backstory to Scheffler’s book *Berliner Goldschmiede* when he first reached out to him in the summer of 1968. As a scholar of Jewish history, Brillung’s interest was to write a cultural and commercial history of Jewish goldsmiths. During the 1960s and 1970s — and thus parallel to Scheffler — he published several pioneering articles on Jewish goldsmiths in Silesia (1967), Prague (1967), Moravia (1969), Berlin (1970) and East Prussia (1974) and continued to take an interest in the topic.<sup>52</sup>

50 SB3411, Nachlass Bernhard Brillung, JME.

51 Tanja Baensch, Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier,

and Dorothee Wimmer, eds., *Museen im Nationalsozialismus. Akteure - Orte - Politik* (Köln / Weimar / Wien, 2016);

Germanisches Nationalmuseum ed., *Zwischen Kulturgeschichte und Politik. Das Germanische Nationalmuseum in der*

*Weimarer Republik und der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Nürnberg, 2014). As late as 2001, this was obviously still so taboo that Schiedlausky simply excluded the Nazi era in his reflections on the history of the literature on goldsmithing, see Schiedlausky, *Betrachtungen*.

52 Brillung to Scheffler 24 June 1968, WSN. Bernhard Brillung, “Geschichte des jüdischen Goldschmiedegewerbes in Schlesien,” in *Hamburger mittel- und ostdeutsche Forschungen*, Vol. VI (Hamburg 1967): 163–221; Bernhard Brillung, “Zur Geschichte des jüdischen Goldschmiedegewerbes in Prag: die ersten Prager jüdischen Goldschmiede,” in *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden* (1968); Bernhard Brillung, “Das jüdische Goldschmiedegewerbe in Berlin 1700–1900,” in *Der Bär von Berlin. Jahrbuch des Vereins für die Geschichte Berlins*, Vol. 19 (1970): 106–138; Bernhard Brillung, *Jüdische Goldschmiede, Kupfer- und Petschierstecher in Ostpreussen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden in Ostpreussen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1974); Bernhard Brillung, “Zur Geschichte des jüdischen Goldschmiedegewerbes in Mähren (1550–1800)” in *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden* 3 (1966): 137–146; Bernhard Brillung, “Der erste jüdische Goldschmied im Fürstentum Waldeck: Nathan Schwerin (1792–1859). Ein Kapitel aus dem Kampf um die Zulassung der Juden zum zünftigen Handwerk,” in *Neunhundert Jahre Geschichte der Juden in Hessen* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 303–324.

As Michael Brenner put it, Bernhard Brillung was one of the almost forgotten Jewish historians in postwar West Germany, “who never got a foothold in the academic establishment, or sometimes did not want to, but were nevertheless among the pioneers of research into the German-Jewish past.”<sup>53</sup> Brillung’s career path was similar to that of many Jewish scholars whose lives were fundamentally disrupted by National Socialism. Bernhard Brillung was born in 1906 in Tremessen (Posen) and raised in Prenzlau; in 1924 he began to study history in Berlin and Breslau. At the same time, he attended the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar (Jewish Theological Seminary) in Breslau and started working as an intern (*Volontär*) at the Archiv der Synagogengemeinde Breslau (Archives of the Breslau Community of Synagogues). Simultaneously, he observed the local endeavors to collect, study and exhibit Jewish ceremonial objects, for instance the exhibition “Das Judentum in der Geschichte Schlesiens,” which took place at the Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer in 1929. Brillung became familiar not only with the Jewish archives and exhibitions in Breslau, but also catalogued the Hamburg Jewish community archives and evaluated archival sources in many other archives for genealogical and cultural historical studies.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, in 1938, Brillung felt well-prepared for a career as historian and archivist. He was striving with some of his colleagues to establish a Jewish Central Archive for Moravia in Brno, where he saw himself employed in the future.<sup>55</sup> But political developments in Germany came to upend his life. Following the November Pogrom of 1938, he was incarcerated at Buchenwald until January 1939. In March 1939, the Reichssippenamt confiscated the Archiv der Synagogengemeinde Breslau. Only after handing over to the authorities an exact list of the register of Jewish births, marriages, and deaths, which the Nazis intended to use for their antisemitic research on Jews (*Judenforschung*), was Brillung allowed to emigrate to Palestine.<sup>56</sup>

In Palestine he, like many other Jewish historians, found himself “deprived by the Nazis of the fruits of [his] scientific research.”<sup>57</sup> Although he found a job and lived a comparatively stable life in Tel Aviv, he did not take root in his new homeland. He oriented himself towards West Germany after the war, trying to rebuild his life and professional future there.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to the Jewish majority, who considered Germany a “forbidden country” for Jews after the Shoah, Brillung expressed a different attitude towards Germany: “It is our world after all, even if it has changed a lot.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, repression,

53 Michael Brenner, “Vergessene Historiker. Ein Kapitel deutsch-jüdischer Geschichtsschreibung der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre,” in “Auch in Deutschland waren wir nicht wirklich zu Hause”. *Jüdische Remigration nach 1945*, ed. Irmela von der Lühe, Axel Schildt, and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Göttingen, 2008), 207–223, 211.

54 See Brillung’s CV, July 1938, Bernhard Brillung Paper, USHMM.

55 Brillung to Prof. Dr. Alfred Engel (Brno) and Prof. Dr. Steinherz (Prague) in 1938, Bernhard Brillung Paper USHMM.

56 See Honigmann, 224.

57 See Lustig, 49.

58 Lustig, Bernhard Brillung, 49.

59 Brillung to Pinkus, 12. June 1954. On the spell, see Dan Diner, “Im Zeichen des Banns,” in *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (München, 2012), 15–66; Monika Boll and Raphael Gross, eds., “Ich staune, dass Sie in dieser Luft atmen können.” *Jüdische Intellektuelle in Deutschland nach 1945* (Frankfurt a.M., 2013).

shame and rejection, shyness and unease characterized Germans' interaction with Jews in the postwar period. However, Brillling wanted to return and to resume his archival work. The decisive motivation for him was to recover the Nazi-looted Jewish archives on which he had worked before the war. To accomplish this task, he was willing to take quite uncommon steps, as documented in a letter to a friend in 1951:

I'm looking for ... my successor, who took over "my" community archive in March 1939 and wanted to establish an Institutum Judaicum in Breslau. This was Dr. Fritz Arlt, head of the regional office of the Rassenpolitisches Amt Breslau, who, despite his title and his party affiliation, behaved very humanely to me. ... Dr. Fritz Arlt is therefore not being searched by me because I have accusations to make against him, but so that he can provide me with information about the fate of the archive, which will enable me to complete my work on the history of the archive of the synagogue community of Breslau.<sup>60</sup>

Brillling's approach is interesting as it anticipates his later practice as a Jewish historian in the Federal Republic of Germany and may explain his openness towards German scholars such as Scheffler: Brillling vehemently advocated for cooperation with Germans in the interest of scholarly work. In 1956, for instance, he argued out of concern for the establishment of the "Germania Judaica" working group: "It is therefore necessary in this scholarly work to disregard all prejudices [handwritten correction: "concerns"] and to officially contact German historians and archivists for the purpose of founding a working group if one wants to take the matter seriously from a scholarly point of view and carry it out properly".<sup>61</sup>

Besides looking for archival material, Brillling had a keen interest in locating Nazi-looted Jewish ceremonial objects from former synagogues and Jewish art collections. Thus he inquired about private Jewish collectors' searches for their looted collections and visited an exhibition in Tel Aviv of "heirless" objects discovered by the Allied forces after the war that had subsequently been distributed by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) to Jewish communities and museums worldwide.<sup>62</sup> As he was interested in the provenance of some JCR objects, he even reached out to South Africa to obtain an exhibition catalogue.<sup>63</sup> As a scholar of Jewish history, he regarded ob-

60 Brillling to H. Pinkus, 18 January 1951. I would like to thank Judith Siepmann (Simon Dubnow Institut), who provided me with these letters. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

61 As cited in Jütte, *Die Emigration der deutschsprachigen Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 191.

62 On the JCR, see Elisabeth Gallas, *A Mortuary of Books. The Rescue of Jewish Culture after the Holocaust* (New York, 2019).

63 Brillling to Harry Abt, 2.5.1954, Bernhard Brillling Papers, Reel 5, USHMM.



**Figure 6. Undated photograph of Karl Heinrich Rengstorf with two Jewish employees of his Institute, Bernhard Brillung and Zvi Sofer. Zvi Sofer Papers, Private collection, Münster. Unknown photographer. Reproduced by permission.**

jects as important sources because “the inscriptions on the ceremonial objects, which give information about their age, also provide information about the donors and genealogical and cultural historical information.”<sup>64</sup>

However, it was the search for the remnants of Jewish archives, rather than objects, that brought Brillung back to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955.<sup>65</sup> On his return journey by ship, he happened to meet

Karl Heinrich Rengstorf (1903-1992), who offered him a professional future in Germany. Rengstorf was a Protestant theologian and head of the re-established Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum (IJD) in Münster, which had been dedicated to research on the history of the Jews since 1948. The institute’s predecessor, which had existed until 1935 in Leipzig, had been associated with the problematic cause of Protestant “Judenmission,” as had been Rengstorf himself in his capacity as head of the Evangelisch-lutherischer Zentralverein für Mission unter Israel. Furthermore, Rengstorf had had close ties to theologians supporting Hitler, such as his teacher Gerhard Kittel, who had been involved in Nazi *Judenforschung*.<sup>66</sup> In order to remove this stigma after 1945, Rengstorf was eager to cultivate social contact with Jewish intellectuals such as Martin Buber and Leo Baeck and recruit Jewish research fellows for his institute. Brillung, who wanted to finish his dissertation, accepted Rengstorf’s offer of a scholarship to finish his dissertation and subsequently a position as research fellow in various research projects. Brillung then stayed at the IJD in Münster until he retired.<sup>67</sup>

place for the future writing of Jewish history as a large number of Jewish archival documents had been preserved there. Rengstorf aspired to become the director of this future institute and Brillung was supposed to be his research fellow. But finally, in 1964 these plans failed because of the resistance of some Jewish intellectuals in particular — most prominently

Hans-Joachim Schoeps — who found Rengstorf to be the wrong choice for the position. Schoeps and others feared a strong influence of Protestant teaching on the study of Jewish history, which seemed unthinkable especially after the ideologically tainted “Judenforschung” during the Nazi period. On the Hamburg case, see Miriam Rürup, “Whose Heritage? Early

Postwar German-Jewish History as Remigrants’ History — The Case of Hamburg,” in *Rebuilding Jewish Life in Germany*, ed. Geller, 65-83; Lustig, Bernhard Brillung, 48-64; Honigmann 234; Björn Siegel, “Verworrene Wege: Die Gründungsphase des IGdJ,” in *50 Jahre — 50 Quellen, Festschrift zum Jubiläum des IGdJ* (Hamburg, 2016), 26-55.

64 Bernhard Brillung, “Neues Schrifttum zur Geschichte der Juden in der Tschechoslowakei,” in *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* Jg. 6 Heft 4 (1957): 572-582.

65 On Brillung’s journey to relocate Jewish archives in Germany, see Bernhard Brillung, “Jewish Records in German archives. Results of a scientific journey 1955-1956,” *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 1 (1956): 346-359.

66 Robert P. Ericksen, “Genocide, Religion, and Gerhard Kittel: Protestant Theologians face the Third Reich,” in *In God’s Name; Genocide and Religion in the 20th Century*, ed. Omer Bartov and Phillis Mack (New York, 2001), 62-78.

67 Brillung and Rengstorf shared an interest in plans for the establishment of an Institute for Jewish History in Hamburg. Hamburg seemed a fitting

The earlier period of searching for the remnants of European Jewish material culture and struggling over their restitution during the 1950s was followed by a general shift towards its evaluation and presentation. This new phase found its clearest expression in the aforementioned exhibitions “Synagoga” in 1961 and “Monumenta Judaica” in 1964, which were co-initiated and supported by Brilling and Rengstorf. Brilling’s participation in working groups for these and later exhibitions was important for him in two ways. First, these exhibitions represented the first international cooperation between Jews and non-Jews after 1945 in Germany, which corresponded well with Brilling’s and the IJD’s Jewish-Christian dialogical approach. In Brilling’s words: “May the fruitful cooperation between Christians and Jews ... the first far-reaching result of which is the exhibition Synagoga in Recklinghausen, not only be preserved, but deepened and produce many valuable scientific and human results in the future.”<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that this cooperation included scholars who had been involved in Nazi *Judenforschung*, such as Hermann Kellenbenz.<sup>69</sup> Second, the “Synagoga” exhibition triggered the creation of a growing number of exhibitions on Jewish history and religion during the 1960s and 1970s. In this way precious metal Judaica staged as exhibits became elements of object-based memorialization, a process that apparently also affected Brilling’s selection of topics for his work as a historian. His commitment to the subject of Jewish goldsmiths — and thus the social and cultural-historical framework of a huge part of Jewish ceremonial objects — falls exactly and not coincidentally into this period. This choice may have been additionally motivated by one of Brilling’s colleagues in Münster, Zvi Sofer, who was an active collector of Jewish ceremonial objects and organized several important exhibitions in the Federal Republic during the 1970s.<sup>70</sup> In each accompanying exhibition catalogue — *Jüdisches Jahr — Jüdischer Brauch* (1972) and *Jüdischer Alltag — Jüdischer Festtag* (1974) — Brilling published an essay on Jewish goldsmiths in different regions.

In one of these essays Brilling discussed the Jewish goldsmiths of Silesia. This seemed natural, as he knew the region and its Jewish history well and was able to build on an earlier important work from 1906 by Erwin Hintze.<sup>71</sup> Ironically, Breslau and Silesia had also been the subject of a highly ideological monograph commissioned by the DGfGK in 1942. This book was the first part of a series of monographs on the “Goldsmithing Art of German Cities,” which “received the undivided approval and interest of the Führer and caused ... a contribution of RM 10,000.”<sup>72</sup> In this study Jewish

68 Bernhard Brilling, “Geschichte des Judentums in Westfalen,” in *Ernte der Synagoga Recklinghausen: Zeugnis jüdischer Geistigkeit*, ed. Hans Chanoch Meyer, Wilhelm Michaelis, and Franz Lorenz (Frankfurt, 1961), 131.

69 On Kellenbenz, see: Dirk Rupnow, “Continuities in a Historiography Overshadowed by Its National Socialist Past?” trans. Insa Kummer, in: *Key Documents of German-Jewish History*, last modified September 22, 2016. <<https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:article-88.en.v1>> [February 13, 2020]; Brenner, *Vergessene Historiker*, 221–222.

70 Anna-Carolin Augustin, “Zvi Sofer - A Collector and His Collection,” Online-Feature, Website: Jüdisches Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/biography-collector-zvi-sofer>.

71 Erwin Hintze, *Die Breslauer Goldschmiede. Eine archivalische Studie*, ed. Verein für das Museum Schlesischer Altertümer (Breslau, 1906).

72 Christian Gündel, “Die Goldschmiedekunst in Breslau,” in *Die Goldschmiedekunst der deutschen Städte*, ed. F. R. Wilm and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst (Berlin, 1942).

Bermejo and Schneider-Braunberger, *Das goldene Netzwerk*, 111.

goldsmiths were not only neglected but maligned as the supposed “seed of the destruction of the handicraft tradition.” The decline of German goldsmithery was blamed on the implementation of economic freedom (*Gewerbefreiheit*) after the Napoleonic Wars - and therefore implicitly also on the admission of Jews to the craft. The book concluded that only the *Handwerksgesetz* (Handicraft Law) of 1935 — and thus the de facto exclusion of Jews — restored order in German goldsmithery.<sup>73</sup>

It is not yet known to what extent Brilling was aware of this baiting publication or Nazi ideological support for research on German goldsmithery. Be that as it may, his articles on the topic made the neglected history of Jewish goldsmiths visible again by creating a Jewish counter-narrative. However, besides reconnecting with Jewish research of the pre-Nazi era — including the work of historians Selma Stern, Jacob Jacobson and Ismar Freund — Brilling also drew on the work of antisemitic historians such as Heinrich Schnee and thus on a part of German historiography that “did not experience a ‘Stunde Null,’ but stood in the continuity of the past years in terms of personnel and perspective.”<sup>74</sup> Brilling not only quoted Schnee’s work in a neutral tone but was apparently in contact with him, even though the Jewish religious scholar Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, in a 1966 review, had unmistakably exposed Schnee’s arguments as borrowed from Nazi racial theory.<sup>75</sup>

It was the historic turning point of Jewish history within the history of goldsmithery — the admission of Jews to goldsmiths’ guilds — that was of great interest for Brilling’s research and, ironically, became the reason why he initially contacted Wolfgang Scheffler in 1968:

In connection with my research on the history of the German Jews, ... I am working on an article about Jewish goldsmiths in Berlin in the period from 1700 to 1900. However, I have not yet been able to determine when the Berlin goldsmiths’ guild changed its statutes to include Jews as members. I would therefore be very grateful if you could give me information about this — based on your investigations and research.<sup>76</sup>

At first, Scheffler reacted with extraordinary reluctance. He replied that Brilling should just be patient as his book was about to

73 Gündel, *Goldschmiede Breslau*, 19.

74 On Schnee, see Stephan Laux: “Ich bin der Historiker der Hoffaktoren” — Zur antisemitischen Forschung von Heinrich Schnee (1895–1968) in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, 5 (2006): 485–514, 487.

75 Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, Rezension, in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 18, Heft 1 (1966): 180–182.

76 Brilling to Scheffler, June 24, 1968, WSN.

be published in October of that year and would provide him with all answers.<sup>77</sup> In November 1968, however, Scheffler had to admit in a letter to Brillling that the book's publication was delayed. Despite being initially rejected, Brillling invested in the relationship. After he helped Scheffler obtain some information he was interested in, Scheffler's tone became more collegial. This shows how much Brillling believed he was dependent on Scheffler's information. Finally, after Scheffler's book *Berliner Goldschmiede* was published, Brillling immediately went through it thoroughly in relation to his essay on Jewish goldsmiths. Disappointed, he wrote to his publisher: "As I found out, the book [Scheffler's *Berliner Goldschmiede*] does not contain any historical descriptions at all and therefore does not deal with the question of the admission of the Jews into the goldsmiths' guild."<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Brillling seemed to be impressed and added: "However, Scheffler's book contains a very diligently and extensively compiled directory of Berlin goldsmiths up to 1850 ... As a result, I ... have to change the list of printed sources."<sup>79</sup> The inclusion of Scheffler in Brillling's bibliography inaugurated the reception of this work in studies on Jewish history but even more visibly in studies on Jewish ceremonial objects. To this day, Scheffler's reference book is consulted in academic studies and in Jewish museums worldwide.

By contrast, Brillling's work on Jewish goldsmiths entered art historical scholarship only at the margins and found more of a reception in regional historical research. Since Jewish history was marginalized in postwar German historiography, all the more so if the research was produced in non-university contexts such as the IDJ, Brillling's writings were hardly acknowledged.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

The looting and destruction of the material culture of European Jewry was an integral part of the annihilation of Jewish life and culture by the National Socialists. Nazi-looted Jewish archives, libraries, and ceremonial objects were not only destroyed and exploited in a material sense but also opened up research opportunities — both within the framework of *Judenforschung* and, as is often overlooked, in the field of art historical research in museums. The theft of thousands of precious metal objects, in particular, suddenly enabled art historians to undertake studies of style and marks on an unprecedented scale. It is no coincidence

77 Scheffler to Brillling, June 26, 1968, SB3411, JMF.

78 Brillling letter to Dr. Letkemann, April 16, 1969, SB3411, JMF.

79 Ibid.

80 On the marginalization of Jewish history see Brenner, *Vergessene Historiker*, 223.

that German goldsmithery as a field of art historical research was promoted by the highest political authorities of the Nazi state. Here, the anti-modern idea of reviving German craftsmanship conjoined with the antisemitic trope of a connection between Jews, gold, and capitalism.

For Wolfgang Scheffler as a young museum professional during the 1930s, the Nazi-looted precious metal objects opened up a career perspective. Scheffler gained connoisseurship and networks through his work with the looted objects at the Märkisches Museum in Berlin. But more significantly, by transferring the information gained in 1939/40 into a groundbreaking book on “Berliner Goldschmiede,” Scheffler benefited from his Nazi-era work in the postwar era, during which he established himself as a well-known expert. Ironically, Schefflers’ art historical evaluation of the looted objects and their makers, the goldsmiths, was the only form in which the objects survived. Since almost all of the objects were lost by the end of the war, the “afterlife” of the objects took the form of immaterial knowledge.

Precisely this immaterial “afterlife” of the objects — not so much knowledge about each object but about Jewish goldsmiths — was of interest to Bernhard Brilling, especially from the 1960s onwards. Expelled from Nazi Germany, Brilling longed to rebuild his life and work as a Jewish historian after the war — in his own words, for his “Restitution in den früheren Stand” (restitution to [his] former status).<sup>81</sup> To attain this end, he was not only willing to return to the land of the perpetrators but to work side-by-side with them in his field of research. As a result, the historian Brilling was marginalized in two ways. On the one hand, his contact with controversial figures such as Karl Heinrich Rengstorf and Heinrich Schnee may have put him on the sidelines with Jewish historians. On the other hand, Jewish history — especially the work of Jewish historians — was marginalized within the general field of history in postwar West Germany. It is therefore not surprising that Brilling is hardly known as a Jewish historian today. It was precisely the dialogue with non-Jewish German researchers — such as Scheffler or other historians and theologians who were active during the Nazi period and who were directly or indirectly involved in Nazi *Judenforschung* — that offered Brilling not only a personal professional perspective but also, at least occasionally, valuable information. Even though he made use of information acquired in dialogue with beneficiaries and perpetrators of the Nazi

81 Brilling letter to Pinkus, 26 February, 1952, SB 1679, JMF.

regime, with his numerous writings on Jewish goldsmiths, Brillling did exemplary reconstruction work in the field of Jewish history in Germany after 1945.

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