

Victor von Klemperer Edler von Klemenau

Victor (1876–1943) was the eldest son of the Dresden banker Gustav von Klemperer Edler von Klemenau (1852–1926) and his wife Charlotte (1857–1934), née Engelmann. He studied jurisprudence at the universities of Halle an der Saale, Berlin and Freiburg im Breisgau, receiving his doctorate in 1898. After his military service he worked for the Dresdner Bank in Hamburg and for almost two years at a New York bank in the United States of America. In 1902, Victor lived in Berlin, working as private secretary to Isidor Loewe (1848–1910), the founder of the company Ludwig Loewe & Co. AG. In 1904 he moved once again to the Dresdner Bank, initially serving as private secretary to the bank's founder and chairman of the board Eugen Gutmann (1840–1925) in Berlin.

Even as a student in Berlin, Victor began to collect high-quality books, his passion being kindled above all by luxuriously bound first editions from the eighteenth century. These were soon followed by incunabula, that is, books and broadsheets dating from before 1500 and printed with moveable type, which in terms of form mostly imitated medieval manuscripts and are still regarded as particularly precious cultural artefacts today. Victor's extensive collection of incunabula was among the most important in Europe. In 1927, supported by the expertise of the doyen of German incunabula scholarship Konrad Haebler (1857–1946), Victor von Klemperer published the catalogue of his collection under the title *Frühdrucke aus der Bücherei Victor von Klemperers*. In the preface he wrote as follows of his passion for collecting: 'The spirit that was alive in my family home and the omnifarious interests cultivated in it, finding expression in an untiring quest for collection in all different fields of art, surely contributed to awakening in me very early on a pronounced penchant for collecting rare and beautiful books.'

In 1906 he met Sophie Reichenheim (1887–1976), daughter of the Berlin textile entrepreneur and factory-owner Leopold Julius Reichenheim (1836–1905). They married in 1907. In 1909, the Dresdner Bank opened a branch in Leipzig, in the establishment and building up of which Victor played a leading role. The Leipzig years saw the birth of Victor and Sophie's first two children, Sophie Charlotte (1909–2004) and Peter Ralph (1910–2000). In 1914, at the urging of his father, Victor took over the managing directorship of the Dresdner Bank in Dresden. Victor and Sophie created a family home of their own through the building of their Dresden villa at 64 Tiergartenstrasse, into which they moved in 1914. Two further children were born: Gustav Victor (1915–1997) and Dorothea Elisabeth (1918–1977).

Interrupted only by service in the army from 1914 to 1918, Victor directed the Dresdner Bank in Dresden until May 1934, thus being responsible for all company decisions pertaining to the region of Saxony and central Germany. He represented the interests of the bank on numerous supervisory boards of industrial and commercial enterprises in Saxony. Victor also sat on the supervisory board of the building company 'Baugesellschaft für die Residenzstadt Dresden AG', of which he was a member until June 1938. The reason for his demission from this office was most probably related to the Third Supplementary Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law (Dritte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz) of 14 June 1938.

Like his father Gustav, from as early as 1923 Victor became very active on both the administrative council and the committee of the Society of Patrons and Friends of Dresden Technical University founded in 1921 (Gesellschaft von Förderern und Freunden der Technischen Hochschule Dresden). In 1929 Victor was appointed deputy treasurer of the society, advancing to treasurer in the following financial year, an office he held until the end of 1932. For his services he was made an honorary senator of Dresden Technical University in 1930. Nine years later, in 1939, his chain of honour was 'provisionally seized' by the Gestapo in a search of his villa at 64 Tiergartenstrasse and subsequently sent to the Ministry of Education (Ministerium für Volksbildung, of Saxony). The ministry ultimately handed it over to the vice-chancellor (Rektor) of the Technische Hochschule, Wilhelm Jost (1887–1948). In November 1938 the latter had already reported to the head of the Ministry of Education that on

account of their 'non-Aryan descent', Victor von Klemperer and three other named honorary senators would no longer bear this title. It was ultimately the Reich Minister of Science, Education and National Culture Bernhard Rust (1883–1945) who decided on the removal of honorary dignitaries from the lists of the universities. The letter mentioned above was dated 8 November 1938 – one day later, on the night of the Pogrom, synagogues burned, Jewish property was destroyed and confiscated, and many people were driven to their deaths.

After Gustav von Klemperer's death in 1926, his widow Charlotte continued to live in the villa at 25 Wiener Strasse until 1933. She died in 1934. After her departure from the villa in 1933, a great deal of the precious art works and objets d'art were moved to the villas of her sons Victor, Herbert Otto and Ralph Leopold. The precious porcelain collection was inherited by the three sons equally. In 1928, Victor had fulfilled his father's intentions by overseeing the publication of a magnificent catalogue of the collection, which was housed in his villa on Tiergartenstrasse.

Victor became increasingly beset, losing his seats on supervisory boards in 1934. Until 1935 he received the agreed payments, which however were gratuitously halved as from 1 July 1936 and were paid out until August 1938. The decision to leave Germany was a hard one. Back in 1937 his brother Ralph Leopold had written to him about the favourable possibilities for settling in Margate in the South African province of Natal. In April 1938, Victor, by now aged sixty-two, left Germany with his wife Sophie. After initially finding refuge in South Africa, the family were after some difficulties finally granted a residence permit for Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), where they settled in Bulawayo.

When Victor and his family fled Germany in April 1938, they had to leave their entire property behind. In November 1938 his collection of precious books in the Tiergartenstrasse villa were seized by the Gestapo and in 1942 finally transferred to the ownership of the Dresden State Collections. At this point, Victor's collection comprised thirteen manuscripts, 549 incunabula and 510 valuable editions, together with other art objects such as paintings, prints and drawings, sculptures, carpets and precious furniture. After his father's death, furthermore, Victor had taken custody of a collection of 926 porcelain objects, which were likewise seized and finally transferred 'without monetary charge' to the Dresden State Porcelain Collection in November 1942.

Victor von Klemperer died on 13 March 1943 and was buried in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe).

In 1943, along with the holdings of the Saxon State Library (Sächsische Landesbibliothek) and the art works of the Dresden State Art Collections (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden), the expropriated collections of Gustav and Victor von Klemperer were taken to various storage depots outside Dresden for protection against the imminent ravages of war. After May 1945, only twenty-one incunabula returned to Dresden, having somehow escaped seizure by the Soviet 'trophy brigades'. With the return of library holdings from the Soviet Union in 1958, the medieval manuscripts ended up in the Saxon State Library, where they were reunited as one deposit with the incunabula and bibliophile editions that had been evacuated. In 1991, the Saxon State Library restituted 295 to the heirs of family as their rightful property. The remaining bibliophile treasures are today held in the Moscow State Library.

After 1945, only around a third of the objects in Gustav von Klemperer's original porcelain collection returned to Dresden from the storage depots. In 1991, 2010 and 2021, the items identified as having belonged to the Klemperer Collection were given back to their rightful owners, the heirs of Gustav von Klemperer.

Sophie von Klemperer, née Reichenheim

Sophie (1887–1976) was born on 29 August 1887 in Berlin-Tiergarten as the fourth child of Leopold Julius Reichenheim (1836–1905) and his wife Anna Reichenheim, née Eisner (1856–1932). She thus grew up in the wealthy household of a major dynasty of cloth merchants. Although nothing in particular is known about Lili's youth, it can be assumed that she was given a thorough education in accordance with her social station.

Victor and Sophie had very likely met during his student years in Berlin. Although, as we know from Victor's memoirs, Sophie's mother initially had reservations about her future son-in-law, the young couple married in 1907. They had four children: Sophie Charlotte (1909–2004), Peter Ralph (1910–2000), Gustav Victor (1915–1997) and Dorothea Elisabeth (1918–1977).

On the advice of his brother Ralph Leopold, Sophie and Victor left Germany in April 1938 and initially found refuge in South Africa. Return to Germany soon became an impossibility. After a number of difficulties, the family were granted asylum in South Africa but later lived in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe). In his memoirs, Victor described the worries and hardships of these years; his account makes it clear that he could hardly have succeeded in making this new beginning without the support of Sophie and of Ralph Leopold and Lili.

After Victor's death in March 1943, Sophie was given permission to move to Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where she lived near her sister-in-law Lili (1893–1979).

Sophie von Klemperer died on 2 March 1976 in Pietermaritzburg (South Africa).

Note: Sophie's mother is thematized in the novel "Wellenflug" by Constanze Neumann (Berlin 2021).

Literature

The research project 'The Reconstruction of the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden Banker Gustav von Klemperer (1852–1926)' was carried out from November 2019 to August 2021 at the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections and its results were published in digital form. The project's findings are presented on a separate website of the State Art Collections, enhanced with a wealth of pictorial material: <https://porzellansammlung.skd.museum/forschung/porzellansammlung-gustav-von-klemperer/>

Five authors contributed to the success of the project with scholarly essays, which give full information concerning the archival and literary sources consulted and used.

Furthermore, these essays are published online in both German and English:

Andreas Graul

Die Bankiers Gustav und Victor von Klemperer

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007288>

The Bankers Gustav and Victor von Klemperer

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Michaela Howse

Die Kunst der goldenen Reparatur: Eine persönliche Sicht darauf,
was es bedeutet, in der Restitutions- und Gedenkkultur Gerechtigkeit zu üben

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007295>

The Art of Golden Repair: A Personal View on the Unique Work of Justice
in Restitution and Remembrance Culture

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007289>

Kathrin Iselt

Die Dresdner Villen der Familie von Klemperer

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007290>

The Dresden Villas of the von Klemperer Family

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007296>

Anette Loesch

SAMMLUNG – RAUB – VERLUST – RESTITUTION – SCHENKUNG.

Die Porzellansammlung Gustav von Klemperers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007286>

COLLECTED – EXPROPRIATED – LOST – RESTITUTED – GIFTED:

The Gustav von Klemperer Porcelain Collection

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00007292>

Sabine Rudolph

Die Entziehung der Porzellansammlung Gustav von Klemperers

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The Expropriation of the Gustav von Klemperer Porcelain Collection

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