

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 law at the universities of Halle/Saale, Berlin, and Freiburg im Breisgau, earning his doctorate in 1898. After completing his military service, he worked for the Dresdner Bank in Hamburg and, for nearly two years, for a New York bank in the United States. As private secretary to Isidor Loewe (1848–1910), the founder of “Ludwig Loewe & Co. AG,” Victor lived and worked in Berlin in 1902. In 1904, he returned to Dresdner Bank and initially served as private secretary to the company’s founder and CEO, Eugen Gutmann (1840–1925), in Berlin.

Even during his student years in Berlin, Victor began acquiring high-quality books. He was particularly drawn to the magnificently bound first editions of the 18th century. This was soon followed by incunabula—single-sheet prints and books printed with movable type up to the year 1500, most of which were modeled after medieval manuscripts and remain a particularly valuable cultural asset to this day. Victor’s extensive collection of incunabula was among the most significant in Europe.

With expert guidance from Konrad Haebler (1857–1946), the doyen of German incunabula research, Victor von Klemperer published the catalog **Early Printed Books from the Library of Victor von Klemperer** in 1927. In the preface to his catalog, he wrote about his passion for collecting: “The spirit that animated my parents’ home, the wide-ranging interests that were cultivated there—and which found expression in tireless collecting across the most diverse fields of art—certainly contributed to awakening in me, from an early age, a pronounced inclination toward 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), whom he married in 1907. In 1909, Dresdner Bank opened its branch in Leipzig, and Victor played a key role in its establishment. As a result, two of their children, Sophie Charlotte (1909–2004) and Peter Ralph (1910–2000), were born in Leipzig. At his father’s urging, Victor took over the management of Dresdner Bank in Dresden in 1914. With the construction of the Dresden villa at Tiergartenstraße 64, which they were able to move into in 1914, the couple established a new center of their lives.

Two more children were born: Gustav Victor (1915–1997) and Dorothea Elisabeth (1918–1977).

With the sole interruption of his military service from 1914 to 1918, Victor now headed the bank until May 1934. As such, he was responsible for all company decisions concerning Saxony and Central Germany. He represented the bank's interests on numerous supervisory boards of Saxon industrial and commercial enterprises. At the same time, Victor was also a member of the supervisory board of the "Baugesellschaft für die Residenzstadt Dresden AG," to which he remained a member until June 1938. The reason for his resignation from this position is likely to be found in the Third Ordinance to the Reich Citizenship Law of June 14, 1938.

Like Gustav von Klemperer, Victor was involved—beyond his mere membership—as early as 1923 in both the Board of Trustees and the Executive Board of the "Gesellschaft von Förderern und Freunden der Technischen Hochschule Dresden e. V." (Society of Patrons and Friends of the Dresden University of Technology), founded in 1921. Initially appointed as deputy treasurer in 1929 and then as the society's regular treasurer in the following fiscal year, he held the office until the end of 1932. In recognition of his services, he was named an honorary senator of the Dresden University of Technology in 1930. Nine years later—in 1939—the Secret State Police confiscated the honorary chain during a search of his villa on Tiergartenstraße and subsequently sent it to the Ministry of Public Education, which ultimately handed the chain over to the rector of the Dresden Technical University.

As early as November 1938, Jost had informed the head of the Ministry of Public Education that Victor von Klemperer—along with three other honorary senators named in the letter—was no longer permitted to hold this title due to his "[...] non-Aryan ancestry [...]." The decision to remove these dignitaries from the university rosters was ultimately made by the Reich Minister of Science, Education, and Public Enlightenment, Bernhard Rust (1883–1945). The letter in question is dated November 8, 1938—one day later, during Kristallnacht, synagogues were set ablaze, Jewish property was destroyed and confiscated, and people were driven to their deaths.

After Gustav's death, Victor's mother, Charlotte, continued to live in his parents' villa at Wiener Straße 25 until 1933. She died in 1934. After 1933, Victor, Ralph Leopold, and Herbert Otto took much of the valuable interior furnishings into their own villas. Their father's prized porcelain collection—for which Victor had arranged the publication of a magnificent catalog in 1928—was inherited jointly by his three sons. It was kept in the villa on Tiergartenstraße.

The pressure on Victor and his family grew steadily: In 1934, he lost his seats on the supervisory boards; he continued to receive his regular salary through the end of 1935, but as of July 1, 1936, it was arbitrarily cut by 50 percent and continued to be paid through August 1938. Nevertheless, the decision to leave Germany was a difficult one. In May 1937, his brother Ralph Leopold had emigrated and reported on favorable job opportunities in Margate, in the province of Natal, South Africa. In April 1938, Victor, already 62 years old, left Germany with his wife Sophie and initially found refuge in

South Africa as well. After some difficulties, the family finally received a residence permit for Southern Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—where they later lived in Bulawayo.

When they fled Germany in April 1938, Victor's family had to leave all their possessions behind in Germany. In November 1938, his bibliophile collection and his father's porcelain collections at the house on Tiergartenstraße were "seized" by the Secret State Police and eventually handed over to the State Collections in Dresden in 1942.

At that time, Victor's collection consisted of 13 manuscripts, 549 early printed books, 510 valuable book editions, and other works of art such as paintings, prints, sculptures, tapestries, and carpets, as well as fine furniture. Following his father's death, he had inherited 926 porcelain objects from his father's collection, which were likewise confiscated and ultimately transferred "free of charge" to the Dresden State Porcelain Collection in November 1942.

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

Along with the holdings of the Saxon State Library and the artworks of the Dresden State Art Collections, the collections of Victor and Gustav von Klemperer—which had been confiscated in 1942—were also moved in 1943 to various storage depots outside Dresden to protect them from the feared effects of the war. After May 1945, only 21 early printed books returned to Dresden; these had escaped confiscation by the Soviet Trophy Commission. With the return of library holdings from the Soviet Union in 1958, the medieval manuscripts were returned to the Saxon State Library.

There, they were reunited with the incunabula and bibliophile prints that had been returned from the salvage depots and were held in custody. In 1991, the Saxon State Library returned 295 works to the heirs as their rightful property. The bibliophile treasures that are still missing today are held at the State Library in Moscow.

Of Gustav von Klemperer's porcelain collection, only about one-third of the original collection returned to Dresden from the salvage depots after 1945. In 1991, 2010, and 2021, the Klemperer porcelain pieces identified in the Dresden Porcelain Collection were returned to their rightful owners, the heirs of Gustav von Klemperer.

References

The research project "The Reconstruction of the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden Banker Gustav von Klemperer (1852–1926)," conducted from November 2019 to August 2021 at the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections, documented its findings in digital form. All findings are compiled on a separate website of the Dresden State Art Collections and illustrated with a wide range of images:

<https://porzellansammlung.skd.museum/forschung/porzellansammlung-gustav-von-klemperer/>).

Four authors have contributed to the success of this project through scholarly essays. All relevant sources and bibliographic references are cited and traceable in these essays.

Furthermore, these essays are available in German and English:

Andreas Graul

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Michaela Howse

Die Kunst der goldenen Reparatur: Eine persönliche Sicht darauf,
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COLLECTED – EXPROPRIATED – LOST – RESTITUTED – GIFTED:

The Gustav von Klemperer Porcelain Collection

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Sabine Rudolph

Die Entziehung der Porzellansammlung Gustav von Klemperers

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Sophie von Klemperer, née Reichenheim

Sophie (1887–1976) was born on August 29, 1887, in Berlin-Tiergarten, the fourth child of Leopold Julius Reichenheim (1836–1905) and his wife Anna Reichenheim, née Eisner (1856–1932). She grew up in the affluent household of a cloth-merchant dynasty. Unfortunately, nothing is known about Sophie's youth, but it can be assumed that she received a thorough education befitting her social standing.

Victor had presumably met Sophie during his years in Berlin. From the memoirs of her future husband, we know that her mother, Anna, initially had certain reservations about her future son-in-law. Nevertheless, Sophie and Victor 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; a return to Germany had become impossible. After some difficulties, the family was finally granted asylum in South Africa and later lived in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe. In his memoirs, Victor described the worries and hardships of this new beginning, and it becomes clear that without the support of Sophie, as well as Ralph Leopold and Lili, this move would have been very difficult to accomplish.

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

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

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