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Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities

Edited by Michael Kohs and Sabine Kienitz

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Cover

A 'letter from Heaven', ID no. I (33 J) 176/1963, Berlin, Museum of European Cultures (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museum Europäischer Kulturen). Written in Ernstroda near Gotha, Thuringia, and dated 1776. The original sheet of paper was folded once, making four pages. Here we can see p. 1 with the title 'Himmels=Brief, welchen, Gott selber geschrieben' ('Letter from Heaven, which God Himself has written') and page 4. The written bifolium was then folded four times. Two words were visible on the two outer sides resulting from this: 'Gottes Brief' ('God's letter'), shown on p. 4. The upper part of the letter has been cropped and part of the illumination has been cut off. Photography: Christian Krug.

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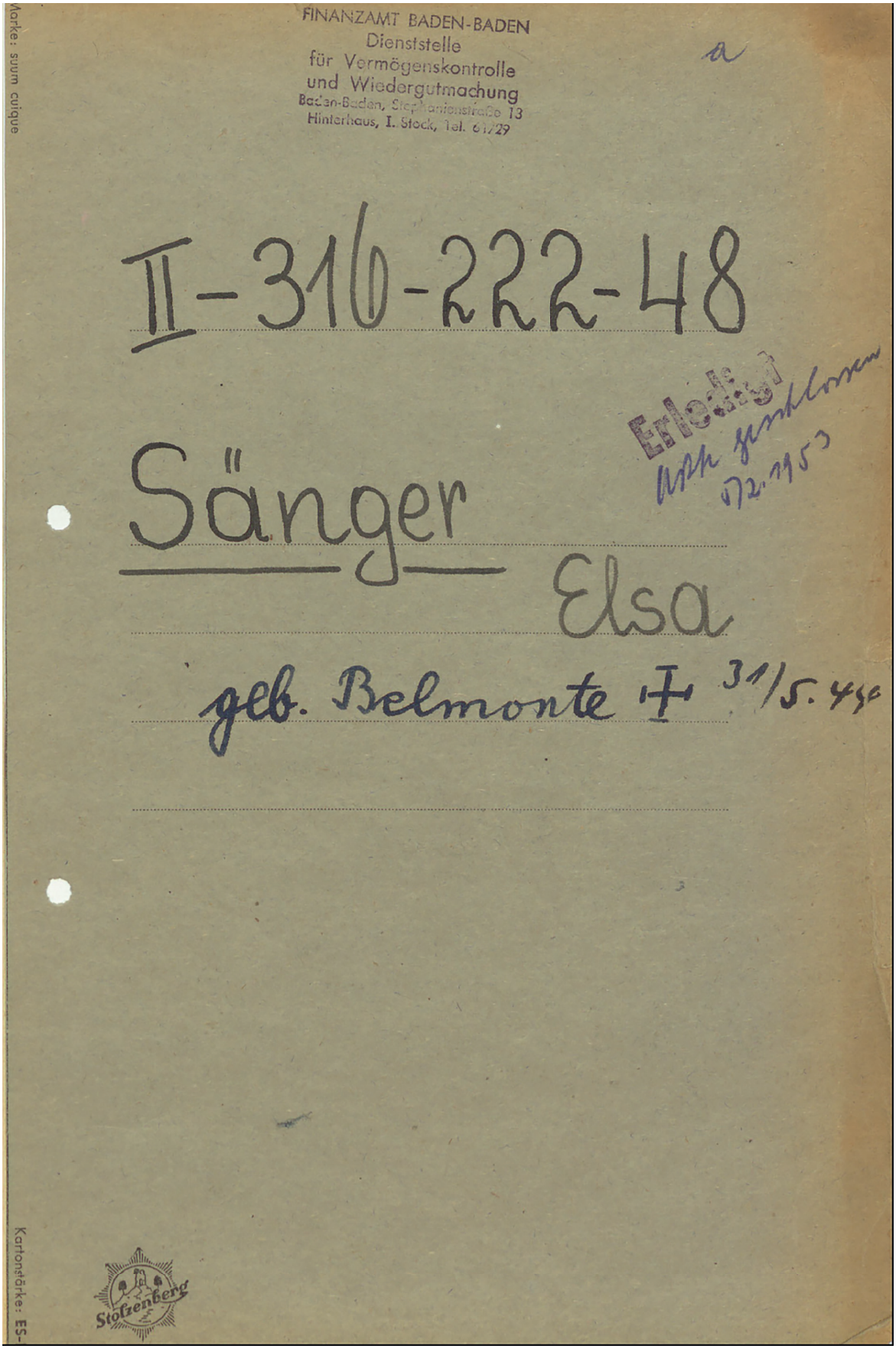

Fig. 1: Baden-Württemberg Regional Archives, Freiburg State Archives (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Freiburg, StAFr), file cover of document F 196/2 No. 4652. The images in this article are from different files from F 196/2 No. 4652 belonging to the same dossier.

Article

Following a Form: The Transmission Path of a Graphic Artefact in a Compensation Procedure in the Post-war German Fiscal Administration*

Sina Sauer | Hamburg

Official procedures in administrative bodies have long been subject to certain principles, rules and patterns of action, but they also depend on paper documents – even in the digital age. Manuals and rules on bureaucratic workflows instruct the official procedures and provide guidelines to staff. Clear hierarchies and file plans ensure a consistent framework exists for these bureaucratic processes. During the period of German nation-building following the National Socialist era and the Second World War, there were two special features that characterised the German administration. Firstly, the whole administrative structure was now subordinated to the Allied authorities. Thus, the decision-making power lay in the hands of several foreign governments that lacked regional, habitual and infrastructural knowledge. The second peculiarity was the issue of reparations, a new field of administrative work for civil servants. Initially, it was primarily a matter of managing confiscated Jewish assets, a task of national importance for which no experience and hardly any legislative guidelines existed at the time.

New official documents and forms had to be developed for this purpose to make the legal situation processable administratively. More and more forms had been used in German administration since the office reform began in 1896.[1] The aim of this reform was to speed up daily affairs and generally make bureaucratic workflows in administration more efficient.[2] The forms were increasingly used as a rationalisation tool to facilitate administration[3] and continue to be used today. In the case dealt with here, they were particularly employed to collect, manage and evaluate information about the expropriation of Jewish assets up to May 1945.

An examination of the forms used for declaring what property had been seized during the Nazi period can provide researchers with a number of insights about the documents' usage. What processes required these forms to be employed in the procedure? What traces of usage can be found on the forms? How were the forms filled in? How were they transmitted and edited? Which actors become visible or remain invisible on the forms?

On the basis of a case study on the compensation procedure concerning Elsa Saenger (1878–1944), a German Jew,[4] this article attempts to reconstruct the transmission path of a form within the legal framework of a compensation process for Jewish property in 1948/49 involving various national

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[1] The 'office reform' began with a first circular on 20 May 1896 and influenced the rules of procedure of the Reich ministries from 1927 until well into the 1930s. Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 15, 135. In the following, this article refers to both: contemporary literature (Maetz 1930, Grull 1929, Wuenschel 1929) and later literature on the history of bureaucracy (Hochedlinger 2009, Riles 2006, Menne-Haritz 1999a, 1999b, 1996).

[2] Cf. Wuenschel 1929, 17–18.

[3] In scholarly literature, letters of indulgence from 1455 are cited as the first early types of forms. In these cases, only the individual salutation had to be entered or other minor adjustments had to be made. At the end of the eighteenth century, tax forms were developed which still perform the most important administrative task today. In these forms, the design changed from a one-dimensional continuous text to a two-dimensional typical form (Schwesinger 2007, 56–58). Further comprehensive forms for standard tasks were issued from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Forms were meant to be used for 'recurring cases of a similar nature'. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 136. All translations into English were done by the author, except in those cases where another source is given.

[4] The case study deals with the posthumous compensation proceedings on behalf of Elsa Saenger, who was expropriated before and after her deportation (in October 1940) and murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. The files on her compensation proceedings are archived at the Baden-Württemberg Regional Archives, Freiburg State Archives (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Freiburg, StAFr): F 196/2 No. 4652, F 166/3 No. 2613, P 303/4 No. 1389.

authorities and institutions. The micro-historical approach of a specific form serving as 'an epistemological model'[5] reveals the problems of such an official course of action in the post-war period, in which attempts were made to administer and process the new task of awarding reparations without the possibility of drawing on any pre-existing experience or legislation.

This study is based on the hypothesis that forms are not only passive information carriers, but function as actively involved actors that 'anticipate and enable certain actions by others'.[6] By requesting a specific action from each user, a form simultaneously arranges these users into an administrative community. In this case, the term *community* includes all actors from the administrative world involved in this procedure. The term 'process' is used in its administrative sense here and is taken to mean a single, but co-operative decision-making process. How a process should be handled and controlled was laid down in internal rules of procedure.[7]

The creation and use of a form

After the end of World War II, the Allied forces sought ways to implement their prepared plans in terms of administering and dealing with the outcomes of Nazi expropriation policy. Before the British Military Government drafted a corresponding restitution law, they wanted to clarify the property control that had already begun in 1946, which also included the expropriated property of former victims of Nazi persecution.[8] Consequently, on 20 October 1947 they issued *General Order No. 10* on the basis of Military Government Law No. 52 on blocking and controlling property.[9] This order declared that persons deprived of their property as a result of National Socialist persecution should either have their property returned to them or be compensated for it. Form *MGAF/P* ('Military Government Allied Forces/Property') was created as a consequence of this order (Fig. 2). In this form, individuals were supposed to declare what assets had been confiscated from them by the German authorities or which expropriation processes they were aware of.[10] In official communication, the Regional Tax Office referred to the form as 'MGAF/P' (Fig. 8). This document also served as an application for re-establishing the applicant's former financial circumstances,[11] which is why it was unofficially referred to as a 'Wiedergutmachungsantrag' ('claim for compensation') in the authorities' internal communication (Fig. 7).

First and foremost, a form is something neutral to its users as it appears to request some objective information. It also represents efficiency and transparency.[12] This is why so many people who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime filled in declarations again after 1945, even though they had lost their assets precisely through the agency of such forms earlier on.[13] After 1945, form *MGAF/P* seemed to signify victims' hope for justice and reparations and the attempt to build up citizens' confidence in the bureaucracy of the new German state.

For the Allies and the German tax authorities, the purpose of form *MGAF/P* was to determine the extent and value of seized assets, the original and current situation of the assets and the circumstances of their seizure. From the authorities' viewpoint, a form was an instrument with which to obtain information in preparation for an official decision.[14] In their role as passive information carriers, forms like *MGAF/P* were supposed to help both the Allied and the German administration to gain an overview in order to see the extent to which restitution, compensation or indemnification was possible. Assets and seizures were supposed to be categorised and standardised this way in order to manage the high number of items that had been received. In 1948, many of these *MGAF/P* forms circulated in the British sector of occupied Germany. People who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime, their heirs, lawyers and institutions such as the

[5] Ginzburg 1992, 101.

[6] Riles 2006, 21.

[7] Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999, 96.

[8] Cf. Lillteicher 2007, 69.

[9] General Order No. 10 on the basis of British Military Government Law No. 52 on blocking and controlling property; EHRI: European Holocaust Research Infrastructure <https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/de-002409-b_1-0_0-b_1_7530_pr1_3_14>.

[10] 'It is contemplated, however, that shortly thereafter the submission of detailed reports of such blocked property will be required'. Cf. *Handbook for Military Government in Germany Prior to Defeat or Surrender,* Dec. 1944, Part III, 340 Blocking Control (d).

[11] Cf. Lillteicher 2007, 69.

[12] See Graeber 2016.

[13] With the 'Decree on Registering the Property of Jews' (*Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*) of 26 April 1938, Jewish citizens had to disclose all their material assets (jewellery and other valuables containing precious metals) and hand them over in the subsequent 'Leihhausaktion' ('pawnshop action'). Cf. Banken 2009, 314.

[14] Cf. Maetz 1930, 140.

Jewish Claim Conference[15] used the forms in two ways: to 'declare' what assets had been seized and to reclaim them. Several forms were often submitted in parallel for or by each person in one and the same procedure; a separate form had to be filled in for each claim for restitution, e.g. one for seized securities, one for property (real estate) and another one for bank accounts. Hence the form required people to differentiate between different kinds of property.

It was with this form that the compensation process began for Elsa Saenger. The proceedings lasted approximately 20 years and involved various parties at the tax authorities in the cities of Freiburg in the south of Germany and Hamburg in the north as well as two military governments – the British and the French – in the period from 1948 to 1966. The form mentioned here is now part of a bundle of files that contains about a hundred folios in each case and is stored at the State Archives in Freiburg and Hamburg. The asset-declaration forms were also handed over to the banks in the British occupation zone by the British Military Government with the aim of obtaining information about seized property in order to block it.[16] It is for this reason that the form in the case examined here was filled in by Rudolf Herms, who was the owner and custodian of Herms & Co., a Hamburg-based bank. In accordance with the British *General Order No. 10*, he was obliged to report any expropriations he had witnessed in his position as bank custodian. In addition to the order of the British Military Government, there was another reason for him completing the form, however. The question of his legitimacy to act on behalf of Elsa Saenger reveals a tragic history concerning his own family and the company.

When the process of 'Aryanisation' began, the Jewish-run bank house H. A. Jonas Söhne & Co. was signed over to the non-Jewish son-in-law Rudolf Herms, and from 15 September 1941, it was run under the name of 'Herms & Co.', thus creating an internal 'Aryanisation' within the family.[17] Due to his personal experience,[18] Herms dedicated himself to the task of taking care of compensation and restitution of the confiscated assets of the survivors in his family and his former Jewish clientele after the war. On the basis of this information, it can be assumed that the bank also attempted to recover Elsa Saenger's confiscated assets. Hence, his motive for filling in the form may have additionally been based on personal initiative and a sense of justice.

The transformation from a blank form to a completed one: problems and solutions

The form this study is concerned with has the lengthy title *Declaration by present owner or custodian of property which has been subject to transfer in accordance with paragraph 1 of General Order No. 10*. It is a printed form that is written in English with a German translation. The form was designed in a DIN A4 format.[19] It was intended for the applicants to take it home and fill it in by typing their answers in the gaps using a typewriter. In reconstructing the transformation from a blank to a completed form, however, it became apparent that the form's originators did not consider certain aspects, which can be attributed to a lack of experience in preparing forms for the declaration of assets. A closer look will show how the declaration form was visually organised und how it shaped the way in which the applicant could respond.[20]

The form has a non-uniform design (Fig. 2). The response fields are pre-defined in the introductory section with lines prompting details about the local situation of the assets and the applicant's personal data. In sections I and II, the space for answering is simply blank, with no lines at all. Both fields request information to be provided on the confiscation of immovable or movable property. The applicant cited securities amounting to 10,500 Reichsmark as well as further payments amounting to 5,198.77 Reichsmark as assets which had been 'transferred' to Deutsche Bank, Baden-

[15] The *Jewish Claims Conference* was founded in 1951 and represented the claims of seized heirless assets, among other issues. The organisation is still active in the field of education and negotiates compensation payments. See <http://www.claimscon.de> (accessed 20 November 2022).

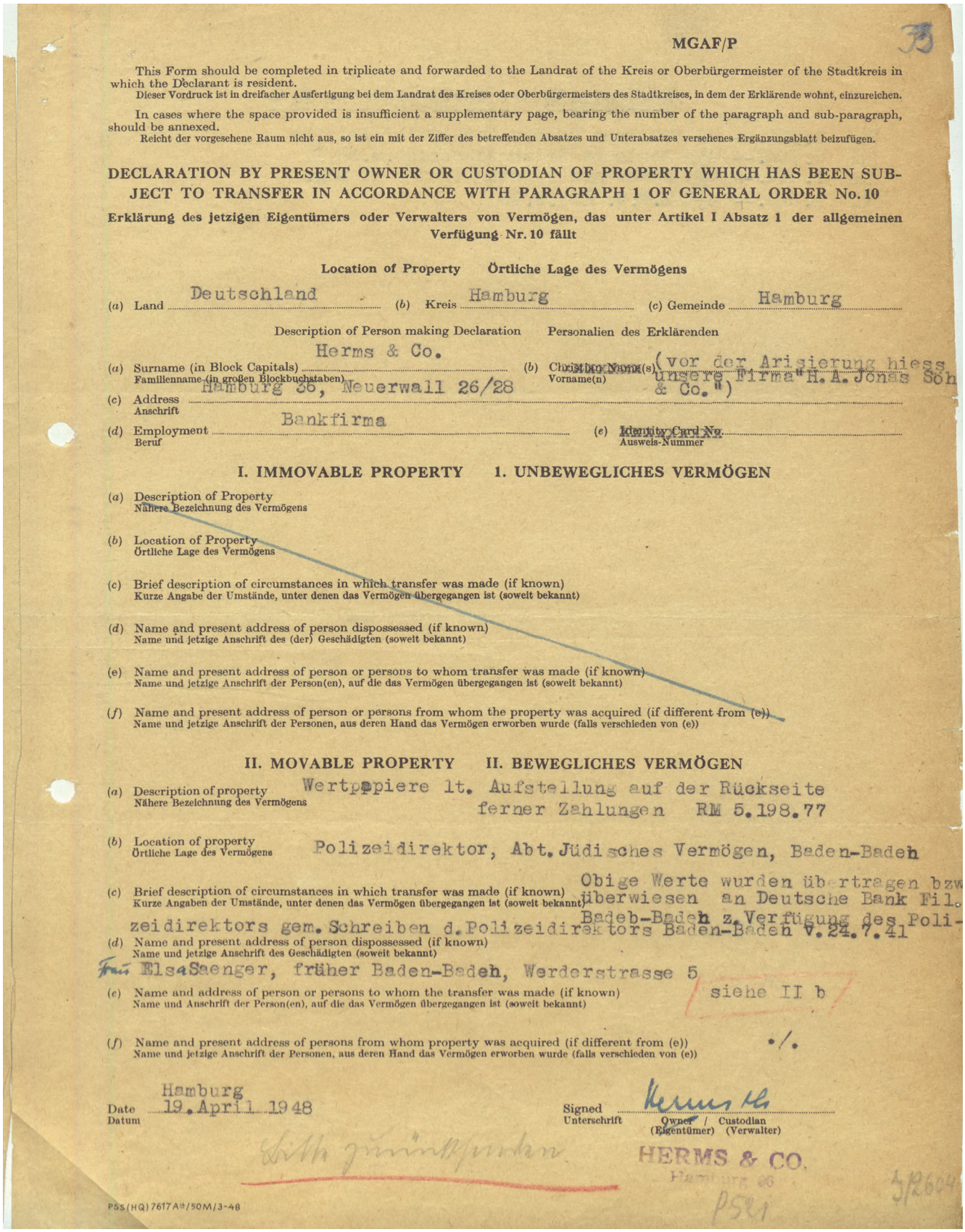
[16] There were other specific forms addressed to banks and other financial institutions: MGAB-(I) 1, MGAF-I (2), and MGAF-I Series A and B. Cf. *Handbook for Military Government, Instructions to Financial Institutions*, No. 2.

[17] See Hamburg State Archives (Staatsarchiv Hamburg, StAHH), 621-1/77_13.

[18] Rudolf Herms' mother-in-law Emmy Jonas emigrated in 1939, his wife Elisabeth Herms née Jonas barely escaped deportation, and his three sisters-in-law and their families were murdered in concentration camps. Cf. StAHH, 621-1/77_8 and 621-1/77_9.

[19] The DIN norms for paper sizes were introduced in 1922 as a result of standardisation processes (DIN stands for 'Deutsche Industrie-Norm', from the German Institute for Standardisation). Cf. Hochedlinger 2009, 119f.

[20] Cf. Brenneis 2006, 46.



MGAF/P

This Form should be completed in triplicate and forwarded to the Landrat of the Kreis or Oberbürgermeister of the Stadtkreis in which the Declarant is resident.
Dieser Vordruck ist in dreifacher Ausfertigung bei dem Landrat des Kreises oder Oberbürgermeisters des Stadtkreises, in dem der Erklärende wohnt, einzureichen.

In cases where the space provided is insufficient a supplementary page, bearing the number of the paragraph and sub-paragraph, should be annexed.
Reicht der vorgesehene Raum nicht aus, so ist ein mit der Ziffer des betreffenden Absatzes und Unterabsatzes versehenes Ergänzungsblatt beizufügen.

DECLARATION BY PRESENT OWNER OR CUSTODIAN OF PROPERTY WHICH HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO TRANSFER IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPH 1 OF GENERAL ORDER No. 10

Erklärung des jetzigen Eigentümers oder Verwalters von Vermögen, das unter Artikel I Absatz 1 der allgemeinen Verfügung Nr. 10 fällt

Location of Property Örtliche Lage des Vermögens

(a) Land Deutschland (b) Kreis Hamburg (c) Gemeinde Hamburg

Description of Person making Declaration Personalien des Erklärenden

(a) Surname (in Block Capitals) Familienname (in großen Blockbuchstaben) Herms & Co. (b) Christian Name(s) Vorname(n) (vor der Arisierung hiess unsere Firma "H. A. Jonas Söhne & Co.")

(c) Address Anschrift Hamburg 36, Neuerwall 26/28

(d) Employment Beruf Bankfirma (e) Identity Card No. Ausweis-Nummer

I. IMMOVABLE PROPERTY 1. UNBEWEGLICHES VERMÖGEN

(a) Description of Property
Nähere Bezeichnung des Vermögens

(b) Location of Property
Örtliche Lage des Vermögens

(c) Brief description of circumstances in which transfer was made (if known)
Kurze Angabe der Umstände, unter denen das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(d) Name and present address of person dispossessed (if known)
Name und jetzige Anschrift des (der) Geschädigten (soweit bekannt)

(e) Name and present address of person or persons to whom transfer was made (if known)
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Person(en), auf die das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(f) Name and present address of person or persons from whom the property was acquired (if different from (e))
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Personen, aus deren Hand das Vermögen erworben wurde (falls verschieden von (e))

II. MOVABLE PROPERTY II. BEWEGLICHES VERMÖGEN

(a) Description of property
Nähere Bezeichnung des Vermögens Wertpapiere lt. Aufstellung auf der Rückseite ferner Zahlungen RM 5.198.77

(b) Location of property
Örtliche Lage des Vermögens Polizeidirektor, Abt. Jüdisches Vermögen, Baden-Baden

(c) Brief description of circumstances in which transfer was made (if known)
Kurze Angaben der Umstände, unter denen das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt) Obige Werte wurden übertragen bzw überwiesen an Deutsche Bank Fil. Baden-Baden z. Verfügung des Polizeidirektors gem. Schreiben d. Polizeidirektors Baden-Baden v. 24.7.41

(d) Name and present address of person dispossessed (if known)
Name und jetzige Anschrift des Geschädigten (soweit bekannt)
Frau Elsa Saenger, früher Baden-Baden, Werderstrasse 5

(e) Name and address of person or persons to whom the transfer was made (if known)
Name und Anschrift der Person(en), auf die das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt) siehe II b

(f) Name and present address of persons from whom property was acquired (if different from (e)) •/.
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Personen, aus deren Hand das Vermögen erworben wurde (falls verschieden von (e))

Date Datum Hamburg 19. April 1948

Signed Unterschrift Herms & Co. Owner / Custodian (Eigentümer) (Verwalter)

HERMS & CO.
Hamburg 36

PSS (HQ) 7617 A*/50M/3-48

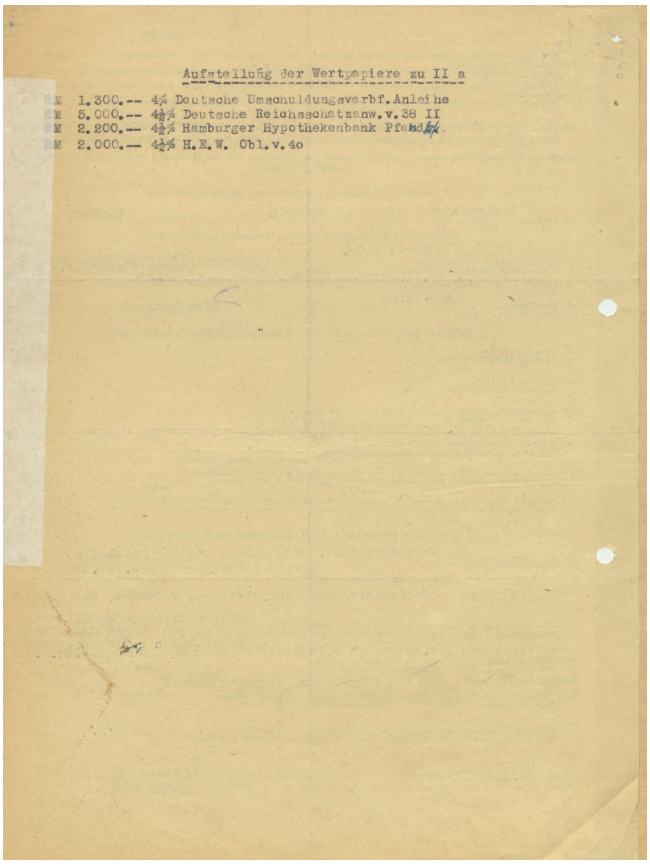
Fig. 2: *Declaration of property* for Elsa Saenger (recto).

Baden on 24 July 1941 based on an order issued by Baden-Baden's police commissioner. However, the gaps in the form were often too short to allow the claimant to enter adequate answers. Hence, the person had to improvise. Sometimes the respective category was crossed out with several 'x's or the paper got drawn into the typewriter several times in order to achieve the smallest possible line spacing. It was virtually impossible to write the required 'brief description of the circumstances in which transfer was made' (see section IIc, Fig. 2) in the available space, particularly with a typewriter.

As for other questions, there was not enough space for them at all. Those who designed the form had apparently reckoned with this because there is a note in the header line of the form that says: 'In cases where there is insufficient space, a supplementary page bearing the number of the paragraph and sub-paragraph should be included as an annex' (Fig. 2). The applicant made use of this option to reply to section IIa, but then listed the expropriated securities on the back of the form (Fig. 3). One might ask why the form was drawn up so thoughtlessly and whether there was actually no intention to provide enough space for the replies. After the applicant had filled in all the gaps using a typewriter, he recognised two mistakes he had made: he had forgotten the 'a' in 'Elsa', which he then added by hand, just like the word 'Frau' ('Mrs.').

Transmission path of the form

Being the bank's official representative, Rudolf Herms himself signed the form he had received from the British Military Government on 19 April 1948 and probably submitted it to the chief administrative officer of the district (*Landrat*) or to the Lord Mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*). The form subsequently made its way through several administrative bodies, starting with the Control Commission for Germany (British Element)/ Central Claims Registry of the British Military Government. Since the seized property was located in Baden-Baden, which belonged to the French occupation zone, the British Military Government transmitted the declaration to the French Military Government. The latter sent the form – via a wrong address in the Rhineland-Palatinate – to the responsible Baden State Office for controlled assets (*Landesamt für kontrollierte Vermögen Freiburg*), which then delegated the task to the Regional Tax Authority (*Finanzamt Baden-Baden*), as illustrated in Figure 4.


Aufstellung der Wertpapiere zu II a

M 1.300.-- 4% Deutsche Umschuldungsverbf. Anleihe
M 5.000.-- 4½% Deutsche Reichsschatzanw. v. 38 II
M 2.200.-- 4½% Hamburger Hypothekenbank Pfandbr.
M 2.000.-- 4½% H.E.W. Obl. v. 40

Fig. 3: *Declaration of property* for Elsa Saenger (verso).

Visual organisation of the accompanying texts with reference to normative administrative semantics

Although the asset-declaration form contained so much information in its questions and answers, it did not actually speak for itself; each person dealing with the form had to write another letter explaining the pending task related to the form. These accompanying texts were subject to specific standards of formatting, which had also been laid down in the official German 'office reform'. This reform had created new guidelines for the preparation of outgoing reports, which included all communications between the authorities as well as from an authority to an external body. The accompanying texts that the German authorities issued in the case examined here all comply to the characteristics of a report as a subcategory of a letter. The paper size corresponded to DIN A5, which is half of DIN A4. Due to an official specification, the paper used for the forms was to be treated as a limited resource,[21] which is the reason why these short accounts were written on half-page sheets. In addition, the respective authority always kept a duplicate

[21] Cf. Grull 1929, 126.

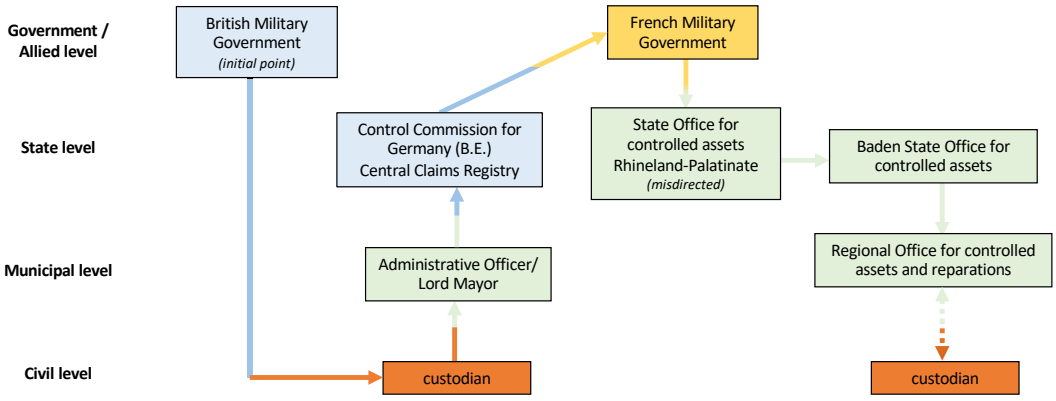


Fig. 4: Transmission path of the form.

of each original letter for its own documentation. The thin carbon copy paper used for this purpose was also used in the original correspondence, as the accompanying letter from the Regional Tax Office shows (Fig. 8). The layout of the reports put the place and date at the top right, the sender's name at the top left and the journal number and recipient's address below that.[22] The examples shown here demonstrate that the individual authorities dealt with these requirements in different ways. Elements called 'subject' and 'reference' were introduced with the incipient office reform, although they did not appear as designations at that time. This changed in the following years and became common practice later, as the accompanying letters by the German administration testify (Figs 6–8). On the State Office's accompanying letter, the sender, 'Nr.' signifying the journal number, and the place and address were part of a pre-print developed in the course of 'standardisation of business transactions in the offices of the authorities' (Fig. 7).[23] The pre-print left some gaps where the characteristic data for the individual transaction were to appear. This visual organisation of the page was part of the process of rationalising bureaucratic measures, which was intended to facilitate and accelerate workflows.

Nationality and languages

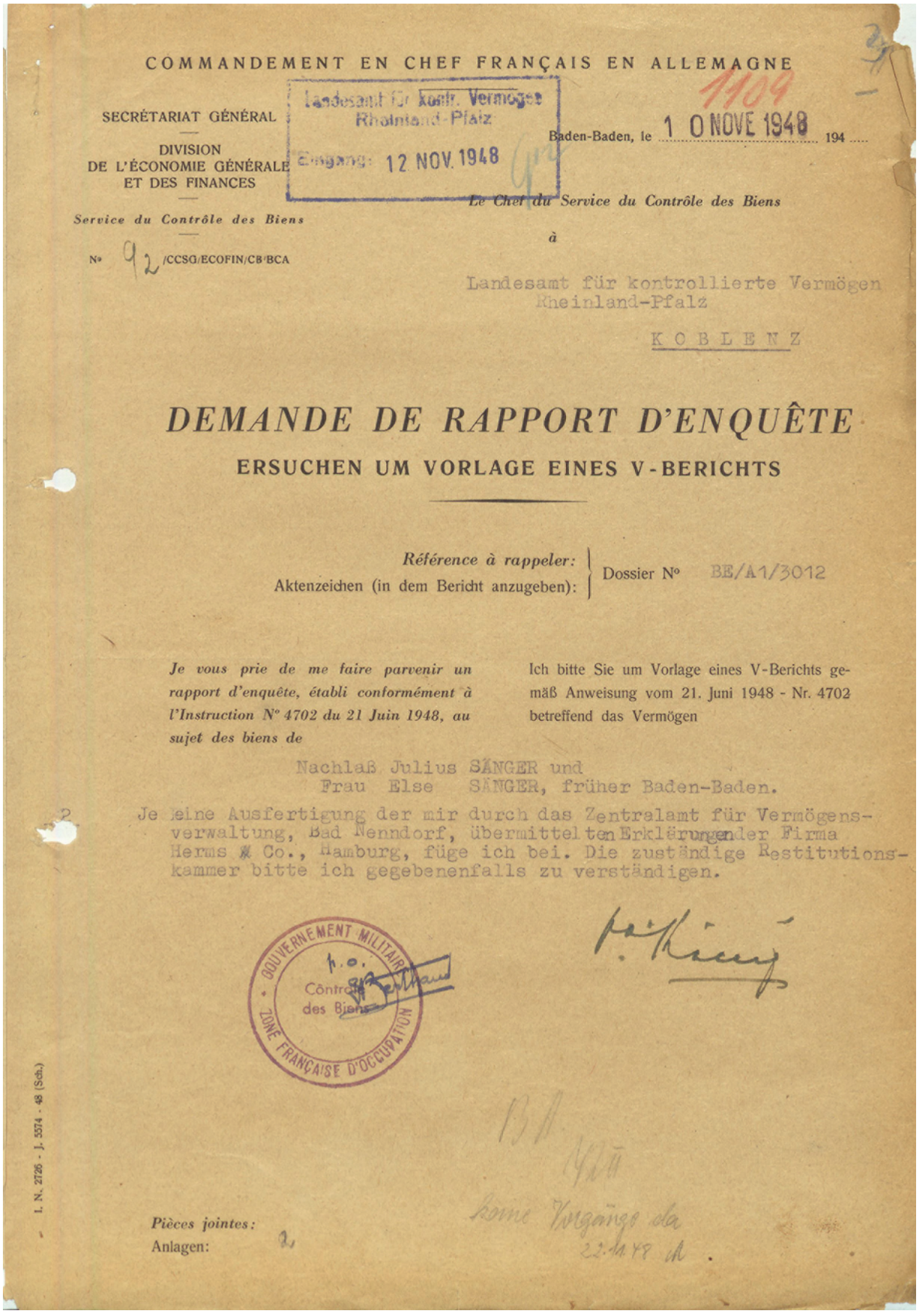
The form was written in English, but included a German translation as well. This bilingual approach shows that the form was developed by the British, but was also intended for use by the German authorities. The required categories had to be understandable for people from both language groups. The Central Claims Registry then regarded the French Military Government as being responsible, which is the reason why the form was sent to the French administration. The latter then wrote their own accompanying letter, which, according to the criteria of German administrative science, was a template on which certain elements were pre-printed: the header with the name and address of the sender, the place, and a line to insert the respective date with a rubber stamp or in writing. The subject was also pre-printed in capital letters: 'DEMANDE DE RAPPORT D'ENQUÊTE' with a German translation in capital letters directly underneath ('Ersuchen um Vorlage eines V-Berichts').

The unit 'file number' was pre-printed in both languages ('Référence à rappeler'/ 'Aktenzeichen') along with instructions. The rest of the DIN A4 sheet, which was about half the page, was left blank to enter the name of the person from whom the property had been confiscated and to provide further instructions. Requesting so-called V-reports (the term is a combination of German and English words; V stands for 'Vermögen', i.e. assets) was a common occurrence by the French Military Government. That is shown by the fact that it had developed a form for facilitating the process. Only individual items of data had to be entered (the date, recipient, name of the person concerned with the assets, and other instructions). After that, the page still contained plenty of space for stamps, signatures and other comments. At the end of the page there was an additional field entitled 'attachments' in both languages.

Hence, the form moved from one occupation zone to another, so on its mission it was not only connected with the English and German language, but also with French. The French officials were expected to be able to read and edit the

[22] Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 135–136.

[23] Grull 1929, 126.



COMMANDEMENT EN CHEF FRANÇAIS EN ALLEMAGNE

SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL

DIVISION
DE L'ÉCONOMIE GÉNÉRALE
ET DES FINANCES

Service du Contrôle des Biens

N° 92 /CCSG/ECOFIN/CB/BCA

Landesamt für kontr. Vermögen
Rheinland-Pfalz
Eingang: 12 NOV. 1948

1109

Baden-Baden, le 10 NOVE 1948 194

Le Chef du Service du Contrôle des Biens

à

Landesamt für kontrollierte Vermögen
Rheinland-Pfalz

KOBLENZ

DEMANDE DE RAPPORT D'ENQUÊTE

ERSUCHEN UM VORLAGE EINES V-BERICHTS

Référence à rappeler:
Aktenzeichen (in dem Bericht anzugeben): Dossier N° BE/A1/3012

Je vous prie de me faire parvenir un rapport d'enquête, établi conformément à l'Instruction N° 4702 du 21 Juin 1948, au sujet des biens de

Ich bitte Sie um Vorlage eines V-Berichts gemäß Anweisung vom 21. Juni 1948 - Nr. 4702 betreffend das Vermögen

Nachlaß Julius SÄNGER und
Frau Else SÄNGER, früher Baden-Baden.

Je eine Ausfertigung der mir durch das Zentralamt für Vermögensverwaltung, Bad Nenndorf, übermittelten Erklärungen der Firma Herms & Co., Hamburg, füge ich bei. Die zuständige Restitutionskammer bitte ich gegebenenfalls zu verständigen.

GOUVERNEMENT MILITAIRE
p.o.
Contrôle des Biens
ZONE FRANÇAISE D'OCCUPATION

Pièces jointes:
Anlagen: 2

keine Vorgänge da
22.11.48

L. N. 2726 - J. 5374 - 48 (Sch.)

Fig. 5: Accompanying letter by the French Military Government.

form in English or German. Although it referred to an order from the British occupation zone, the French authorities accepted the form instead of insisting on working with their own documents. (This would have meant that the applicant had to fill in a new form, thus complicating the ongoing process as well as the agency of the form enormously. Although this measure was not adopted, the form from the British occupation zone was promptly incorporated into their own administrative cycle.) The French wrote their own accompanying letters in their own language along with a corresponding German translation (Fig. 5), so the inclusion of the French occupation forces increased the range of languages in the procedure from two to three.

Scripts and notes on the documents as traces of use

There are four different types of writing on form *MGAF/P* that reveal different layers of time and processing. The pre-printed 'questions' with space and lines provide the basis. By inserting answers with a typewriter, the applicant added a second writing level, and a third writing level with his signature, the crossing-out of a section not applicable to him and his handwritten corrections. The handwritten note 'Bitte zurücksenden' ('Please return') added by a staff official in Sütterlin script represents the fourth level (Fig. 2). Sütterlin handwriting was developed in Germany in 1911 to simplify the 'German script' used up to then. After supporting the 'German script' from 1933 onwards, the Nazis then banned it in 1941, in the middle of the Second World War, along with Sütterlin script. It was replaced by Antiqua, a form of Latin script. The reason for the Sütterlin ban was that the script used in the German Reich should also be readable outside the German-speaking area, which was particularly important for the Nazi decrees and orders.[24]

As far as the transmission path of the form is concerned, the use of Sütterlin script seems to reveal something about the relationship between the sender and recipient. The handwritten note shows that the author wrote the note and the instructions in his usual handwriting, regardless of any conventions. The note also indicates that its author knew who the later recipient of the form was, as he had to assume that Sütterlin script was still legible for the next addressee. This indicates that the compensation administration, although not having a routine yet, relied on bureaucratic communities that may have existed since the National Socialist administration. The form was annotated with further remarks as well as paraphs, i.e. abbreviations of a signature, in order to document that somebody had taken part in the process, to document the next addressee's own work step or to add further instructions (e.g. 'Please return'). The rules of procedure of an authority laid down precisely the functional responsibilities 'which carry out an examination with defined tasks and make the results available in the form of notes as premises for subsequent exercise by other responsibilities'.[25] The letter from the Regional Tax Office (the executing authority) contains a note about the whereabouts of the papers – mostly either 'Wv.' (= 'Wiedervorlage', i.e. 'For resubmission') or 'Z.d.A.' (= 'Zu den Akten', i.e. '[To be added] to the files'). In this case, one resubmission was set for 10 December 1948 and another for 20 December 1948 (Fig. 8). The resubmission itself refers to the fixing of a date, but also to the passing of deadlines and the repetition of work steps.

The markings on the accompanying texts confirm that special passages have a specific meaning. A sign at a certain point on the document was to be understood without further explanation because these points were fixed. The layout 'generalizes the implicit meaning of notes or entries in stamps',[26] which can be seen as another group of markers. The marking of the entrance of a form into the procedure or the office desk was a common operation, which was the reason for using a rubber stamp. In addition to the receipt stamp, the documents examined here also contain company and official stamps. They indicate that there were so many procedures in the respective company or office that these markings were required to facilitate and shorten the workflow by the mechanics of a prepared stamp, e.g. recording the date of all incoming documents of the day.

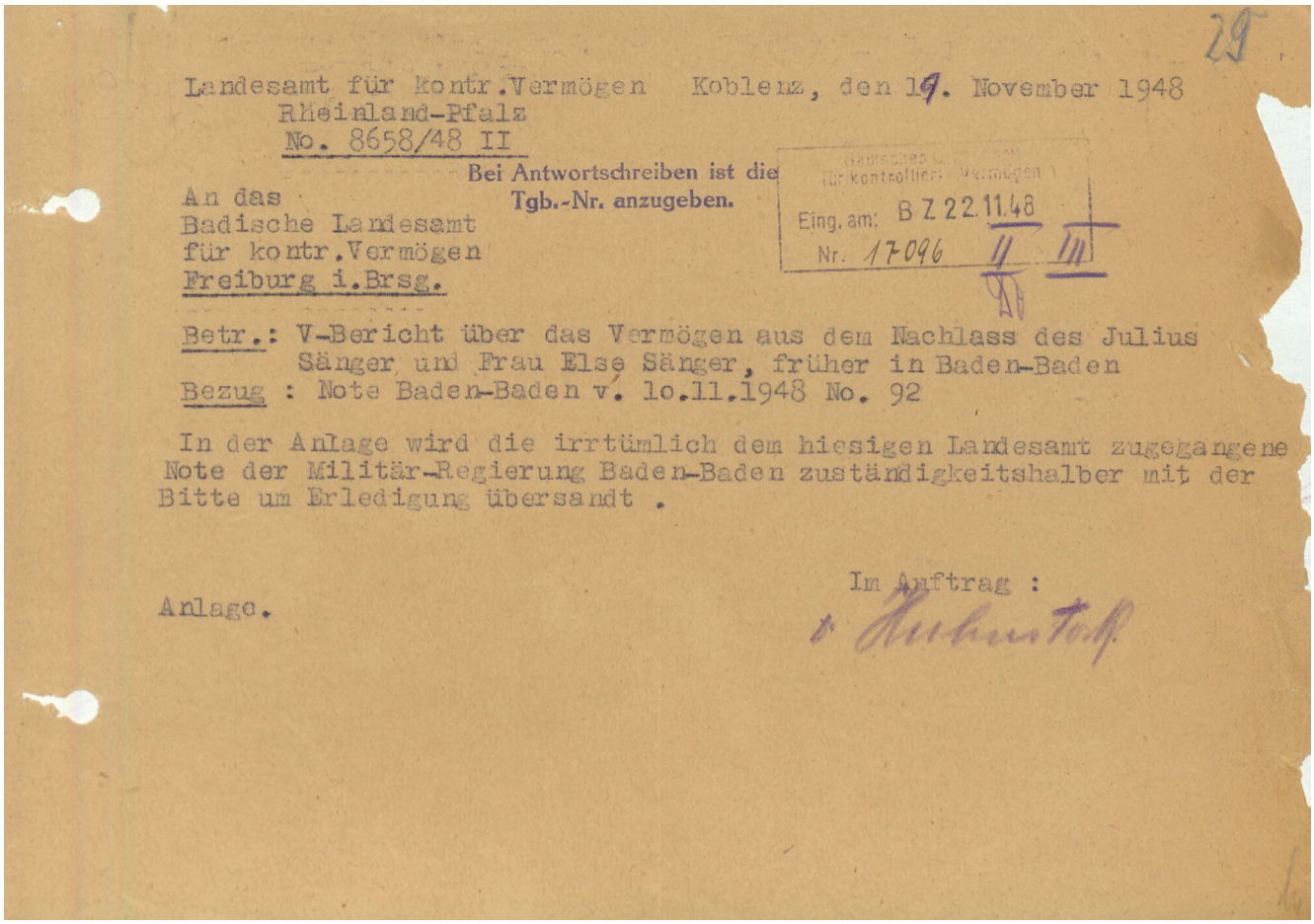
Numbers and numbering systems – traces of systematisation and archiving

The documents contain numerical traces of use, some of which can be assigned, while others cannot. On form *MGAF/P*, the numbers 'P521' and 'I/2604' appear in the lower right-hand corner, probably referring to an internal numbering system (Fig. 2). The accompanying text prepared by the French Military Government (Fig. 5) is also sufficiently equipped with numbers: above the submission date of the letter, which is stamped (the stamp contains the year, but the pre-printed

[24] Cf. Gutzwiller 1992, 415; and Beck 1991, 479.

[25] Menne-Haritz 1999b, 96.

[26] Menne-Haritz 1996, 55.



Landesamt für kontr.Vermögen Koblenz, den 19. November 1948
Rheinland-Pfalz
No. 8658/48 II

Bei Antwortschreiben ist die Tgb.-Nr. anzugeben.

An das
Badische Landesamt
für kontr.Vermögen
Freiburg i.Brsg.

Eing. am: B Z 22.11.48
Nr. 17096

Betr.: V-Bericht über das Vermögen aus dem Nachlass des Julius Sänger und Frau Else Sänger, früher in Baden-Baden
Bezug : Note Baden-Baden v. 10.11.1948 No. 92

In der Anlage wird die irrtümlich dem hiesigen Landesamt zugegangene Note der Militär-Regierung Baden-Baden zuständigkeitshalber mit der Bitte um Erledigung übersandt .

Im Auftrag :

Anlage.

Fig. 6: Accompanying letter by the Rhineland-Palatinate State Office.

form already inserted the year as '194...', so the information was doubled), the number 1109 is documented in red. The letter itself contains the seemingly consecutive number 92. In addition, a separate reference number was also provided (BE/A1/3012).[27]

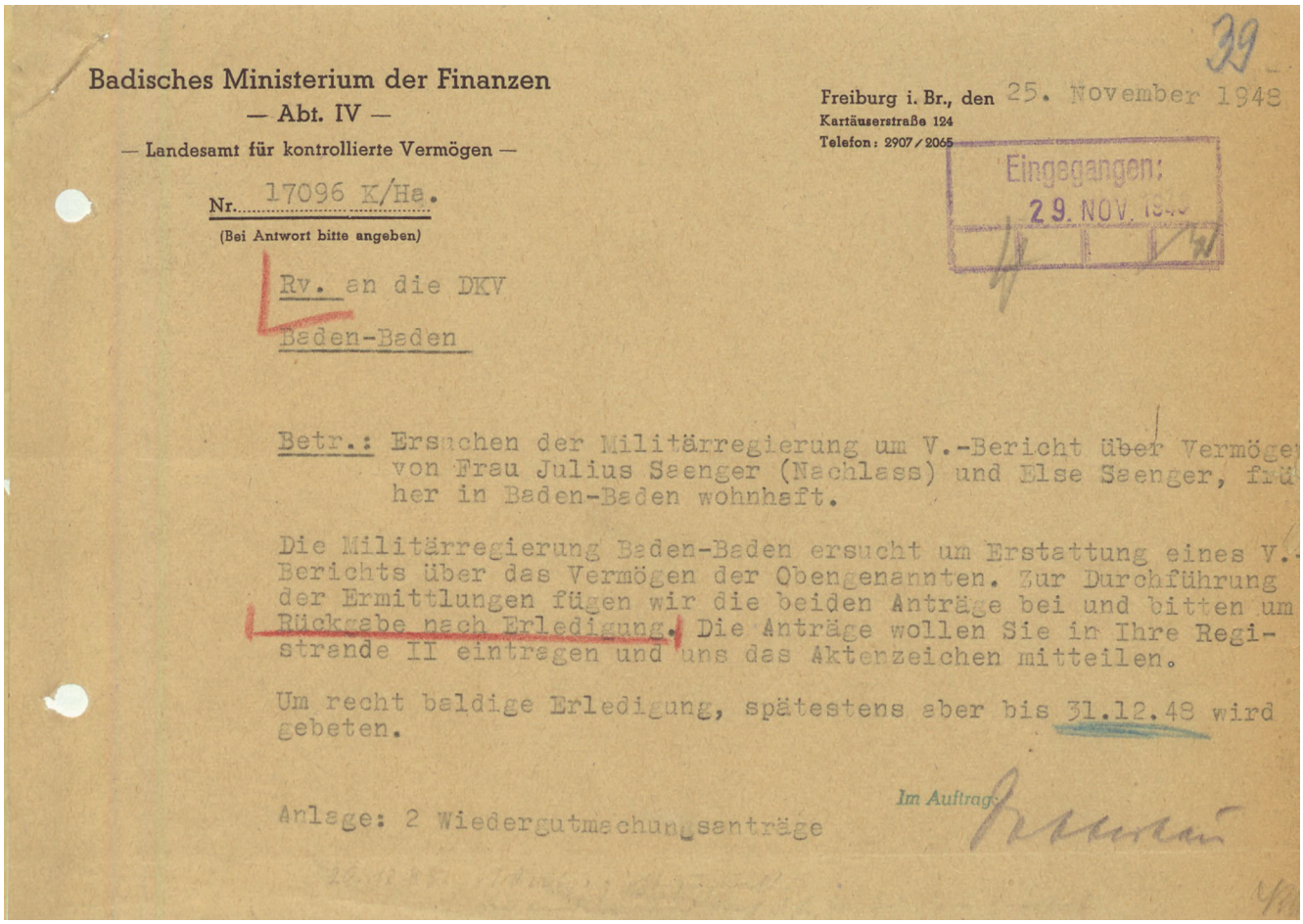
Even the State Office that was *not* responsible and had only received the form by mistake assigned its own journal number (8658/48 II) when forwarding it (Fig. 6). This was received by the responsible State Office, where the process was given its own journal number again (17096; Fig. 7). These different reference/journal numbers show that each authority employed its own system. As a result, however, each institution had its own reference number for one and the same case, which had to be considered for further processing, and this in turn led to errors and additional work instead of rationalising the cases.

There are consecutive page numbers in the upper right-hand corner that serve as pagination (Figs 2–8; the numbers are not consecutive on the documents shown here since they are taken from different files on the same procedure within which they are consecutive). Using these page numbers, all the documents in the same file were marked once the decision had been made before the procedure was discarded, i.e. sent to be archived. The pagination therefore refers to archiving practices and thus the intention that the files might be needed again at a later date. The fact that some numbers were overwritten shows that the individual documents were taken apart, re-sorted and put together again by different editors.

Bureaucracy and the semiotics of colours

In addition to containing various types of writing and numerical notes, the annotations and comments in the documents vary in colour, some being more colourful than others. Different colours are used for incoming, company and official

[27] In its accompanying letter to the Tax Office, the State Office asked for a file number to be assigned to the transaction. In the course of further investigation, each authority also assigned its own file number to the case as an additional numbering, order and identification system.



Badisches Ministerium der Finanzen
— Abt. IV —
— Landesamt für kontrollierte Vermögen —

Nr. 17096 K/He.
(Bei Antwort bitte angeben)

Freiburg i. Br., den 25. November 1948
Kartäuserstraße 124
Telefon: 2907 / 2065

Eingegangen: 29. NOV. 1948

Rv. an die DKV
Baden-Baden

Betr.: Ersuchen der Militärregierung um V.-Bericht über Vermöge
von Frau Julius Saenger (Nachlass) und Else Saenger, frü
her in Baden-Baden wohnhaft.

Die Militärregierung Baden-Baden ersucht um Erstattung eines V.-
Berichts über das Vermögen der Obengenannten. Zur Durchführung
der Ermittlungen fügen wir die beiden Anträge bei und bitten um
Rückgabe nach Erledigung. Die Anträge wollen Sie in Ihre Regi-
strande II eintragen und uns das Aktenzeichen mitteilen.

Um recht baldige Erledigung, spätestens aber bis 31.12.48 wird
gebeten.

Im Auftrag

Anlage: 2 Wiedergutmachungsanträge

Fig. 7: Accompanying letter sent by Baden's State Office for Controlled Assets.

stamps (red, violet and blue).[28] Important information was underlined in different colours as well (sometimes using red crayon, sometimes blue, as in Fig. 7), annotations were noted in colour ('Wv.' and the corresponding date in red crayon), paraphs in blue and green, and signatures in blue or black. Colour codes play an important role in the representation of cultural knowledge, and official administration routines are no exception. Coloured scripts are a general component of forms in everyday administrative practice.[29] Which colours the individual hierarchical levels had to use was governed by different office regulations.[30] Ever since the 20th century, German rules of procedure had assigned 'the green pencil to the Minister, the red pencil to the State Secretary and the blue pencil to the Head of Department for notes'.[31] In the case of the present study, the applicant signed the declaration form in blue ink. He acted outside the regulatory world and therefore did not have to comply with the colour coding.[32]

The colour of the receipt stamp used by the Control Commission, the central organ of the British Military Government,[33] was red.[34] Since it acted on behalf of a State Secretary, the colour assignment fits here. The letters sent by the two State Offices are signed in a blue crayon and could help to identify the signer as the head of department. The

[28] N.B. Colours can change over time. The stamping ink mentioned refers to the time of investigation in 2018.

[29] Cf. Berwinkel 2016.

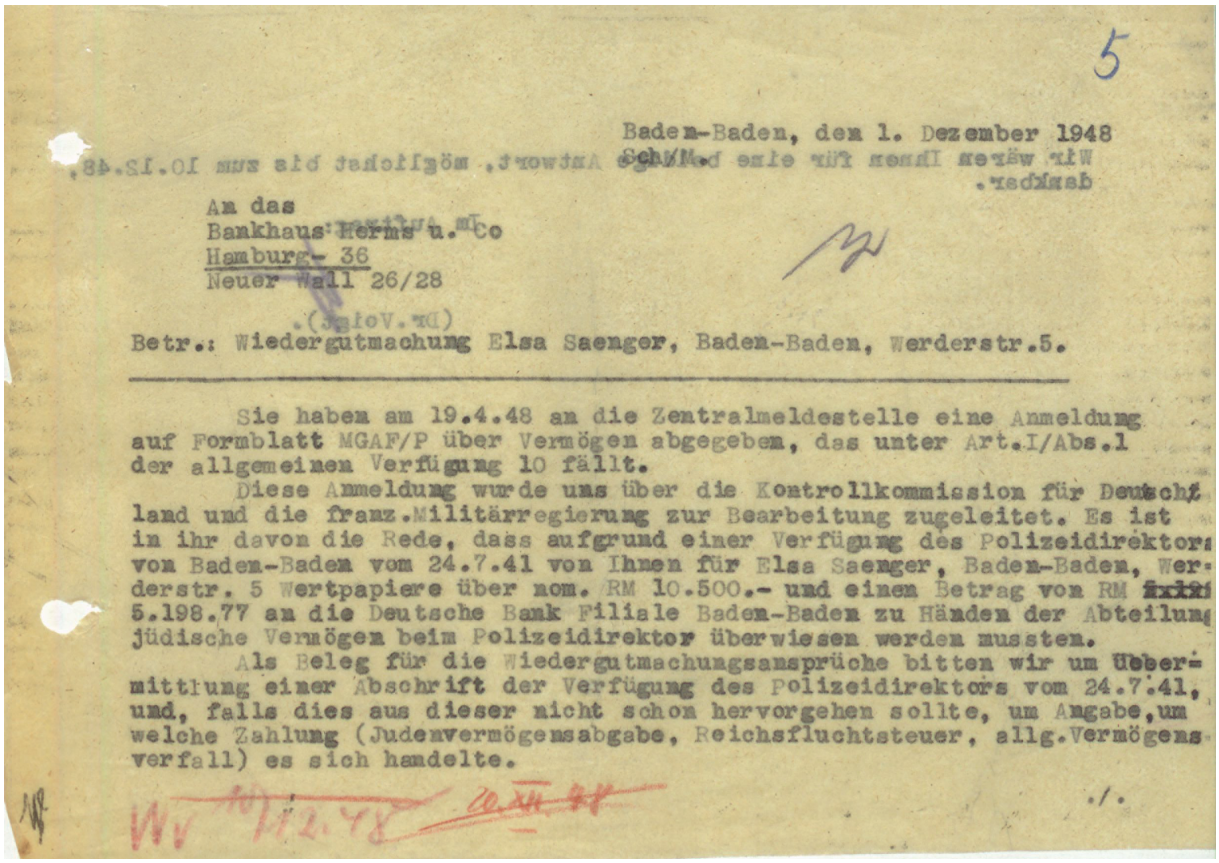
[30] Cf. Hochedlinger 2009, 126.

[31] Hochedlinger 2009, 92. The translation of the quote into English is my own.

[32] Colour coding was (and still is) a phenomenon of the German authorities. Neither the British nor the French administration worked with defined colours, and there was probably no particular significance in the colours used.

[33] See Mayring 1999 on the Control Commission.

[34] The declaration of property for Elsa Saenger was submitted together with the declaration of property for her husband, Julius Saenger, who had died in 1929. The Control Commission's receipt stamp can be found on the application for Julius Saenger. See StAFr F 196/2 No. 4652.



5

Baden-Baden, den 1. Dezember 1948

An das
Bankhaus Herms u. Co
Hamburg - 36
Neuer Wall 26/28

Betr.: Wiedergutmachung Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr.5.

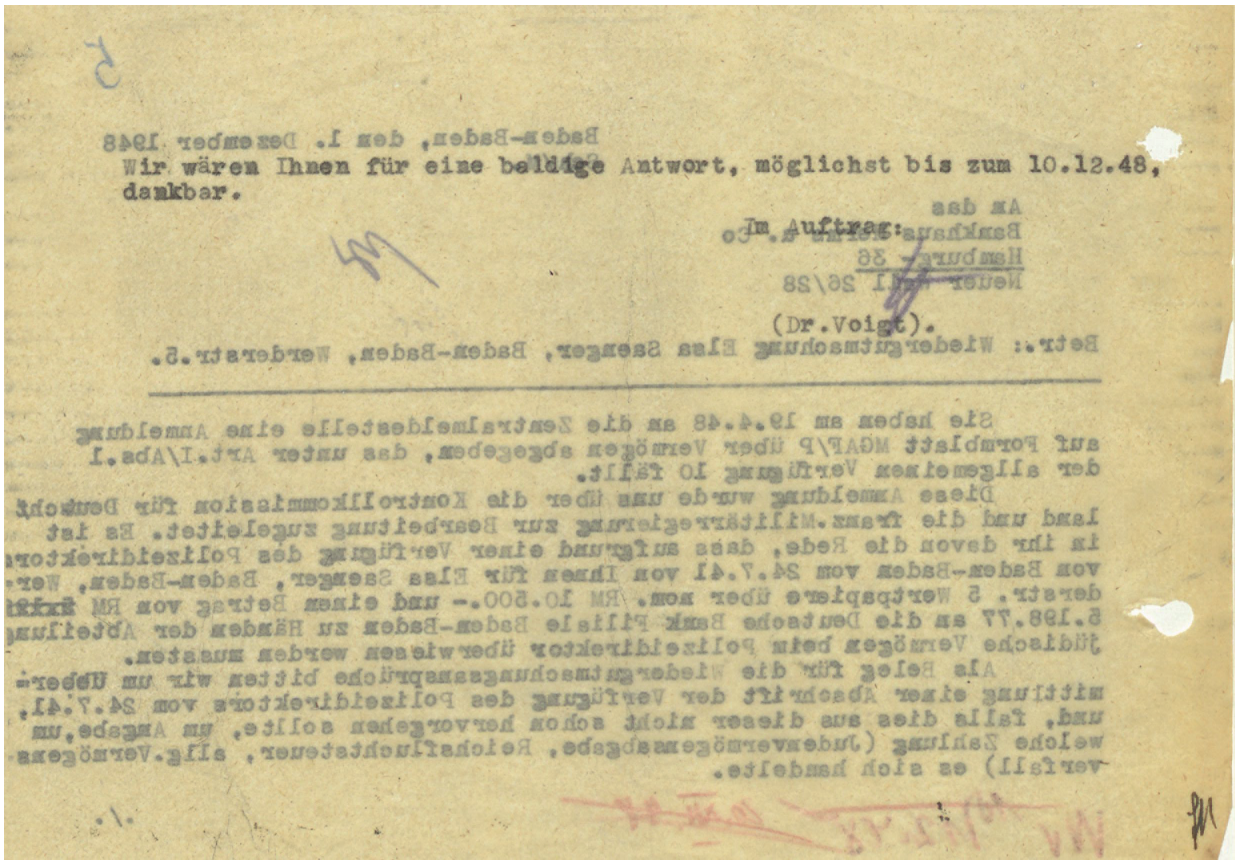
Sie haben am 19.4.48 an die Zentralmeldestelle eine Anmeldung auf Formblatt MGAF/P über Vermögen abgegeben, das unter Art.I/Abs.1 der allgemeinen Verfügung 10 fällt.

Diese Anmeldung wurde uns über die Kontrollkommission für Deutschland und die franz.Militärregierung zur Bearbeitung zugeleitet. Es ist in ihr davon die Rede, dass aufgrund einer Verfügung des Polizeidirektors von Baden-Baden vom 24.7.41 von Ihnen für Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr. 5 Wertpapiere über nom. RM 10.500.- und einen Betrag von RM 5.198.77 an die Deutsche Bank Filiale Baden-Baden zu Händen der Abteilung jüdische Vermögen beim Polizeidirektor überwiesen werden mussten.

Als Beleg für die Wiedergutmachungsansprüche bitten wir um Übermittlung einer Abschrift der Verfügung des Polizeidirektors vom 24.7.41, und, falls dies aus dieser nicht schon hervorgehen sollte, um Angabe, um welche Zahlung (Judenvermögensabgabe, Reichsfluchtsteuer, allg.Vermögensverfall) es sich handelte.

./.

Fig. 8: Accompanying letter by the Regional Tax Office (recto).



Wir wären Ihnen für eine baldige Antwort, möglichst bis zum 10.12.48, dankbar.

Im Auftrag:

(Dr.Voigt).

Fig. 9: Accompanying letter by the Regional Tax Office (verso).

use of the red colour for notes on the letter from the Tax Office ('Wv.', see Fig. 8) as well as the underlining on the application form do not fit into this colour scheme, however. The fact that they were added in red probably does not indicate the status of the clerk who was involved, but refers to the relevance to the internal processing of the case and was meant to be spotted quickly when the file was resubmitted. The colours used here therefore only partially help to assign outgoing documents and markings to the hierarchical setting of the people involved in the correspondence. This is not necessary, actually, since most of the letters are signed and bear the name of the person who wrote them.[35]

Conclusion: bureaucrats – a secret community?

More than half a year after Rudolf Herms – one of the main actors involved in the process – had submitted the form to the authorities, he received a reply from the Tax Office. This occurred at the beginning of December 1948. Nothing had happened during this time from his perspective, but a great deal had happened within the administration. The traces of use in the form of writing, numbers and colours on the documents refer to the different levels and positions of those involved and to the chronological sequence of events. The form required certain actions to be taken by each addressee: filling it in, forwarding it, signing it, correcting it, and creating cover letters to go with it. It thus generated numerous communication processes itself: the bank had to send the form, the British Allies had to classify and transmit it, the French Allies had to order further reports to supplement the form, the misdirected form had to be put back on the right course again, the German State Office had to delegate its processing internally, and the German Tax Office needed further information and therefore had to contact the applicant again.

By studying the 'visual presentation'[36] of things like notes and stamps in different kinds of writing and colours on the form as proof of its use and circulation and by examining the accompanying letters, it is possible to identify the form as a highly relevant non-human 'agent'. This non-human agent took over the tasks that humans would otherwise have had to do, e.g. in a one-to-one conversation with the applicant, which would not have been possible due to the distances and the differences between all the bureaucratic authorities concerned.[37] With its entry into the 'administrative world', the form shaped a specific kind of community which was not only inaccessible to the applicant, but *remained* completely hidden to the outside world. The participants in this community were part of the official course of bureaucratic business, which worked beyond the outside world and was closed off from it.[38] The form thus created an 'inside' and an 'outside' perspective. In Max Weber's sociological terminology, the world of administration represents a world of 'secrecy'[39] that communicates by using its own linguistic and graphic semantics, which in turn contributes substantially to its autonomy and constitution.[40]

The form that the British Military Government produced and processed was created in response to the historic crimes that Nazi Germany had perpetrated and with the aim of providing a legal basis for compensation transactions. The drafting of such forms shows that the authorities expected a large number of people to initiate legal claims of this kind, which are dealt with in this document. The form was intended to enable and structure the classification and categorisation of expropriations that had taken place. It thus relates to the attempts to standardise the way in which Nazi crimes were dealt with in post-war German compensation practices, which in turn refer to comparability and uniformity as features of the bureaucratic system.

[35] The exact positions these persons had in the official hierarchy were listed in the respective rules of procedure of the individual authorities and departments.

[36] Menne-Haritz 1999a, 334. The translation of the quote into English is my own.

[37] The question of the extent to which the forms can be classified as 'non-human actors' in the sense of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) opens up further research perspectives: 'Every time you want to know what a nonhuman does, simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present'. Cf. Latour 1992, 229.

[38] Cf. Graeber 2016, 222.

[39] Weber 1972, 572.

[40] Cf. Schirrmeister 2004, 116.

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