

# The confiscation of the Wasmann/Schmitz collections during World War II



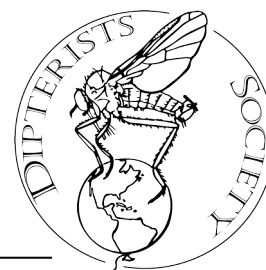
Neal L. Evenhuis

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**From the Editor** – Welcome to the latest *Fly Times Supplement*! I am very please to present this issue on historical dipterology, specifically the confiscation of the Wasmann/Schmitz collections during World War II!

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**The confiscation of the Wasmann/Schmitz collections  
during World War II**

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**Abstract.** Details and history of the theft of the Wasmann collection of ants and Schmitz collection of phorids by German troops during World War II are given, highlighting the persons involved and clarifying misinformation about why it was stolen and where some parts of it were taken.



## Background

More than eighty years ago during World War II, an incident took place in the southeastern Dutch province of Limburg that involved the deportation of Jesuit priests; the pilfering and destruction of a church, its furniture and books; and the confiscation of possibly the largest (at the time) collection of ants in the world—and along with it a world-class phorid fly collection, associated books, and personal correspondence. A few accounts of this act, which was known in some writings in newspapers as “*The rape of the ants*” (and “*Mierenroof*” in Dutch articles), can be found in the scientific literature [there is a brief notice in *Nature* (White 1945), as well as small notices in some entomological journals, but all contain few details], while several longer and more embellished contemporary accounts occur in various military and local American newspapers — at the time (*i.e.*, the last years of the war and post-war) news such as this was great fodder for journalists in discovering and recording yet another atrocity against the innocent by the Nazis.

The looting of businesses, churches and art museums, and the hoarding of cash, gems, gold bullion, art works and precious artifacts by Nazis during World War II is well-known, but how could they stoop so low as to take an insect collection from some priests?

To summarize briefly, after an unfruitful attempt during the summer of 1942, in the following spring of 1943, entomologist Dr. Hans Bischoff of the Zoological Museum in Berlin under orders from officials in the German Reich, and accompanied with a high SS official, went to Maastricht, Netherlands, confiscated, and brought back to Germany the insect collection of Jesuit priest and entomologist Eric Wasmann (1859–1931), which was at the time under the care of another Jesuit priest, the dipterist Hermann Schmitz (1878–1960). Wasmann’s collection was notable worldwide for its incomparable collection of ants and their nest associates. And, in taking the collection, the Nazis also took along with it a world-renowned collection of phorid flies, the specialty of Schmitz. The various contemporary news accounts and interviews with people associated contained much hyperbole regarding what actually happened. Many reports at the time or a few years afterwards contain inaccuracies on details of timing, who did what, when and where, and the intermediate and final destinations of confiscated items. These errors, which were perpetuated in subsequent reports, were most likely because (without direct knowledge at the time) a lot of “best-guesses” were being made, second-hand stories were tainted with obvious prejudices held by locals against the occupying enemy, and/or people were misled by inaccurate information they had obtained from others. In addition, there were some actions unknown to many until recently, such as an organized underground resistance in the area, in stalling or outright keeping Nazis from obtaining anything to bring back to Germany. In that last case, news of these resistance efforts in the Limburg area were kept quiet even in years following the war for fear of reprisals.

So, given all of this, how much of what happened is really true and how much is not? The confiscation is indeed true. But some of the details of the actual act and what happened afterward are a bit more complicated and require correction and/or explanation. I originally wanted to give a brief summary of the story of the confiscation of the collections based on the few published sources at hand<sup>1</sup>, some appearing in biographies of Wasmann and Schmitz. It was an interesting story, and I

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<sup>1</sup> A number of primary sources were consulted for this article and are listed here to avoid an otherwise swarm of literature citations throughout the narrative this work. All sources used can be found in the references. The main two sources used concerning the story of the confiscation include the little-known personal account of Schmitz (1953) as well as another little-known personal account of Wilhelmina Minis-van de Geijn (1949). Other sources consulted include Prescher & Weber (2009; Schmitz biography), Gannett (1944, the “*Rape of the Ants*” reprinted in numerous newspapers), Garanpulos (1947, summary of events from a US Army correspondent’s point of view: often dramatized, with some information incorrect or embellished); Barantzke (1999, Wasmann biography and collection

thought it would be a fairly straightforward task, just putting more detail into things. But after tracking down a number of resources for background information, including U.S. Army archival material and transcripts of interviews, news in the Jesuit archival and printed literature, finding personal stories of many involved reminiscing on how they or family members were involved, reading recent biographies of the main characters involved on both sides of the war, examining correspondence of those involved, and getting background histories to events before and during World War II, a tangled history came to light and a mystery still remains.

I here will attempt to put the chronology of actual events into better context and attempt to dispel myths or unsubstantiated stories, all in hopes it will prove to be, at a minimum, interesting reading. The account of events will be followed by a selected timeline of major events pertaining to or related to the confiscation; and a list of the main characters and places with brief summaries to give background and help further explain the context of involvement of each.

### **Eric Wasmann, Hermann Schmitz, and the Jesuits in Limburg, Netherlands**

Erich Wasmann (Fig. 1) was born on 19 May 1859 in Merano, in the Italian Tyrol region, near the border of Austria. After completing his school education at the Stella Matutina grammar school in Feldkirch, Austria in 1874, he moved to Belgium and entered the Jesuit Order in 1875.

Wasmann started at the college in Exaten in Limburg, Holland (on land including a castle and estate consisting of 141 hectares), and moved from college to college in Limburg over the ensuing years, but eventually ended up again at Exaten where he began studying and building a collection of ants, termites, and their nest associates (“guests”). It was here in Exaten in 1896 that he met a young fellow Jesuit, Hermann Schmitz (Fig. 2).

Schmitz was born in Elberfeld, Wuppertal, Germany on 12 August 1878 and, after finishing grammar schools in Germany, entered the novitiate of the Jesuit Order in Blijenbeek (near Afferden), Holland in 1894. Due to the *Kulturkampf*<sup>2</sup> laws in Germany, Schmitz, as well as many other Jesuits, left Germany to study in Jesuit colleges in the nearby southern Dutch province of Limburg, near the border of Belgium and Germany. Specifically, the *Jesuitengesetz* (Jesuits Law) put into place on 4 July 1872 forbade the operation of Jesuit institutions in Germany and called for the expulsion of Jesuits. The Jesuit colleges in the primarily Catholic Limburg province were set up specifically to allow Jesuit refugees from Germany a safe place to continue their study (Thompson 2020). Additionally, Limburg was historically populated with many Germans due to being so close to the German border. The colleges were funded primarily from German provinces until laws in 1939 forbade German currency to leave Germany.

Wasmann was a great influence on Schmitz, the latter who, after accompanying Wasmann on many excursions in collecting and observing ants, had his interest in entomology kindled. He also began to work on ants and ant guests, eventually publishing a treatise on them in 1915: “*Das Leben der Ameisen und ihre Gäste*”. In 1910, Wasmann retired and left Exaten<sup>3</sup> to move to Ignatius-Kolleg in Valkenburg (full name Valkenburg aan de Geul), near Maastricht, where he lived until his death in 1931. While at Valkenburg, Wasmann’s collection grew to become world-renown and was known

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confiscation); Fiekers (1954, background information and Jesuit viewpoint of the confiscation); Thompson (2020, history of Jesuits at Valkenburg).

2 The *Kulturkampf* (“culture struggle”) was essentially a conflict between the government of the new German empire and churches over control of education.

3 The Jesuit college at Exaten was sold to the Franciscans in 1927 and not used by Jesuits after that (Thompson 2020).



Fig. 1. Erich Wasmann.



Fig. 2. Hermann Schmitz.

there as the Museum Wasmannianum, and Wasmann himself was called by many locals the “*Ameisenpater*” [ant father].

Schmitz was also at Valkenburg with Wasmann for a few years in the early 1920s, then moved from college to college for teaching and other clerical duties and ended up back at Valkenburg in 1929 after obtaining his doctorate. Schmitz’s interest in phorid flies began with his first paper on them in 1908 and was the subject of his 212-page 1929 doctoral dissertation. “*Revision der Phoriden, nach forschungsgeschichtlichen und nomenklatorischen, systematischen und anatomischen, biologischen und faunistischen Gesichtspunkten.*” By the time Wasmann had passed away in 1931, Schmitz had described more than 370 new species of phorids. Over his lifetime, Schmitz described almost 680 species new to science.

### Schmitz at Valkenburg

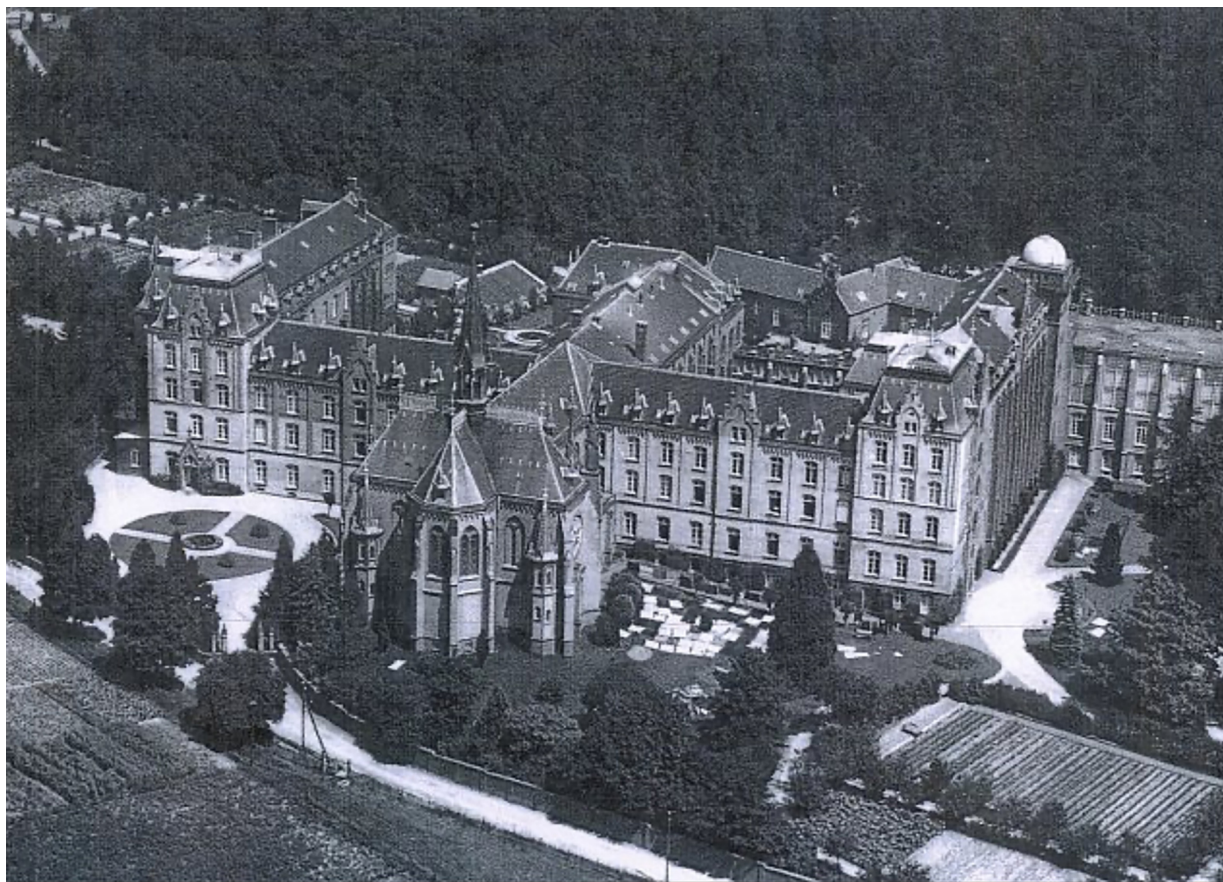
By the time of Wasmann’s death, his ant collection and collection of ant guests were unrivaled. Wasmann had published some 750 scientific papers, had amassed a large reference library, and was a member of more than 20 learned societies. Although (in accordance with Wasmann’s will) the collection passed to the Order upon his death, because of various financial problems at the college, there was serious thought given to breaking up the collection and selling portions of it to the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna. Luckily, a visiting fellow Jesuit priest, Alois Ersin<sup>4</sup>, stepped in and saved the collection from being sold away.

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<sup>4</sup> Ersin was assigned to visit a number of Jesuit institutions in Lower Germany (including the two Jesuit institutions in the Netherlands: Valkenburg and ‘s Heerenberg) as sort of an auditor. He made recommendations to superiors for improvements to the workings of various institutions and, in some cases, improving finances by better bookkeeping (Schatz 2019).



Ignatius-Kolleg at Valkenburg was the perfect place for such a collection and library and the optimal environment for focused study by Wasmann and visiting researchers using the collection for their studies<sup>5</sup>. The 18-hectare campus (Fig. 3) was home to one of the largest institutions in the Jesuit Order<sup>6</sup> with 350 rooms and lecture halls, an observatory, a printing press<sup>7</sup>, and it boasted a scientific and theological library of some 300,000 volumes (Fig. 4), some very rare, including some 100 or so incunabula.



**Fig. 3 (above).** Ignatius-College campus, Valkenburg.  
**Fig. 4 (left).** Library at Ignatius-College.

Schmitz was appointed by the Order as curator of the Wasmann Collection in Valkenburg in 1934 and, at the same time, continued his studies of phorids and also continued building a significant collection of them. With the start of World War II and seeing how German troops were quickly advancing throughout northern Europe and knowing churches were targets for looting, Schmitz was extremely concerned for the well-

<sup>5</sup> In the early 20th century, the Limburg Jesuit colleges had more priests with doctoral degrees than any other area in Europe (Thompson 2020).

<sup>6</sup> When the Ignatius-Kolleg opened in 1894 it was said to have been the largest building in the Netherlands.

<sup>7</sup> The college was the publisher of scientific journals including the *Veröffentlichungen der Sternwarte des Ignatiuskollegs Valkenburg* and *Scholastik, Vierteljahresschrift für Theologie und Philosophie*.



being of the collections. In 1939, he inquired at the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht as to whether the collections could be temporarily stored there if things got bad and was relieved to hear that his request was met with a positive response from the Museum.

During his time at Valkenburg, Schmitz was away for teaching duties at other colleges in northern Europe every few years. One such more lengthy visit was in 1939 to the Jesuit College in Tullabeg, Ireland, where he collected phorids in the local area, taught science courses, and took time to curate the phorids in the National collection in Dublin.

In early 1941, the Germans confiscated the Jesuit cloister in Maastricht, the Canisianum, evicted the faculty and students, and arrested their priest Hein Zwaans.<sup>8</sup> The evicted faculty and students were given refuge at nearby Ignatius-Kolleg. That action gave the Jesuits in Valkenburg a forewarning as to what to expect soon from the Germans and, from the Tullabeg cloister he was visiting in Ireland, Schmitz gave instructions to those in Valkenburg that the Wasmann collection and his phorid collection should be moved from Ignatius-Kolleg to the Natuurhistorisch Museum. This was done, but only three-fourths of his phorid collections were transferred there (Borgmeier 1948; Fiekers 1954). This was no doubt because Schmitz had with him in Valkenburg, a small collection of phorids on which to work for Erwin Lindner's "*Die Fliegen der paläarktischen Region*" that he had begun in 1938 with publication of the first phorid fascicle. By July 1942, there was probably also the material he had brought back from collecting in Ireland. He had returned from Ireland to Holland in January 1942<sup>9</sup>.

### **German Occupation and the establishment of the *Reichsschule für Jungen***

In 1939, many Dutch officials believed Germany would respect the neutrality of Holland and not invade. But the Low Countries were too strategically placed (directly in between Germany and France) for Germany to leave them alone. After rejecting a series of proposals by the Dutch to keep the peace, the last in November 1939, the Germans invaded the Netherlands in April 1940, meeting sporadic resistance. After the Dutch surrendered to the Germans in May 1940, German occupation began quickly and methodically with local National Socialist party (NSB) members (Dutch who had chosen to side with the Germans) being appointed to various municipal government positions and German SS officials put into higher positions in government. The Germans, looking favorably toward the Dutch as kindred Aryan descendants, believed that the Dutch would voluntarily assimilate into the Third Reich and follow its principles. However, and as a surprise to German officials, only a small percentage of them (3%) voluntarily chose to be members of the NSB, and only just a few of those had any larger Germanic aspirations. They were instead proudly loyal to remaining Dutch. The eventual consequences of this were German reprisals toward many Dutch. As examples, after the failure of Operation Barbarossa in Russia in 1941, the Germans were in dire need of resources, both material and manpower, and forced many Dutch into labor camps via the "*Arbeitseinsatz*", wherein 180,000 Dutch were sent to work in German factories that were, unfortunately, targets of allied bombing; also Germany, from time to time, squeezed the Dutch of resources forcing rationing among its populace.

If Dutch adults could not be swayed to assimilate into the Reich, then Germans believed brainwashing the Dutch youth through an educational curriculum filled with Third Reich propaganda

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<sup>8</sup> Father Zwaans was sent to Dachau where he died in July 1942 (Begheyn 2016).

<sup>9</sup> His return to Holland was noted in the 7 January 1942 minutes of the Maastricht Natural History Society, saying they welcomed his return after being gone for two years (other sources say he was gone for four years). He was in Tullabeg in 1939, so the actual time away might have been something between two and four years.

was the solution. Thus began the establishment of the *Napola* (*Nationalpolitische Lehranstalten*) system to educate young boys and girls (Veld 1976a). Due to rationing and the billeting of occupying troops in towns throughout the Netherlands, the oppressed populace were in need of housing, clothes, and food. Attending those schools was a great benefit to those pro-German youth who were accepted; they would get good clothes, good food, and a good education; all things any parent would want for their children. However, those first set of *Napolas*, which were run by Dutch NSB members, failed in the eyes of the German authorities, mainly because they were felt to be focusing too much on Dutch philosophy and not enough on German philosophy (Sander 2018). Those failed *Napolas* were shut down in 1942 and the Himmler-led SS took over the education system and established the *Reichsschulen der Jungen*. These were essentially SS-run schools for boys and girls training them for leading positions in the Greater Germanic Reich.

The boys attending were thrilled with being in the *Reichsschule* because they got to wear actual military uniforms with SS bands on their arms, they marched daily, had athletic competitions, and sang German fight songs. That these schools were extremely important to the German High Command cannot be understated<sup>10</sup>. Forming the minds of young future German leaders was essential to the future of the Third Reich. The establishment of these schools was planned by Himmler in March 1942 and the selection of suitable sites was critical. It was initially hoped the schools would be in baroque castles, but this was not to be (Veld 1976a). Two such schools in Limburg were settled upon<sup>11</sup>. One of these was the boys school at Ignatius-Kolleg in Valkenburg<sup>12</sup>; the other, for girls, was in Heythuysen. The Valkenburg location was excellent: the facilities existing there possessed ample rooms to board students and faculty, were excellent for educational activities, and the campus was large. Orders were thus given by the SS in the Hague in early July to immediately take over the college and turn it into a *Reichsschule* by September 1942.

That the Germans would come and confiscate the college was not a surprise to the Jesuits at Valkenburg. Before 7 July, German quartermasters had visited the college half a dozen times to assess the suitability of the campus. The rector of the college attempted to give them an unfavorable impression and, in June 1942, had gone to The Hague to try and dissuade the Germans from taking over the college (Steen 2009). All efforts to no avail.

### **The Valkenburg Raid and Eviction**

The raid on Ignatius-Kolleg was routine and typical of many SS-run raids by the Germans in occupied areas. They chose the time well: arrive quickly with transport trucks and armed troops while everyone would be in one place (such as a common dining room), force them all into trucks, and quickly evict them from the property. The eviction was of course questioned by the Order, and in response, the Germans showed them signed papers from the mayor of Valkenburg, who had given his approval, most likely under duress from the German commander in Maastricht.

At 1230pm on 7 July 1942, while everyone in Ignatius-Kolleg were having their mid-day dinner in the dining hall, the head of the German *Sicherheitsdienst*<sup>13</sup> in Maastricht, two SS *Obersturmbannführer*, and 20 German soldiers entered the college (Steen 2009), went to the dining

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<sup>10</sup> To emphasize the importance of the Valkenburg school to the German Reich, it was opened by the *Reichskommissar* for Holland and later (1944) visited by Heinrich Himmler.

<sup>11</sup> A third *Reichsschule* in the Netherlands was in the planning to be in Apeldoorn but the allied forces moving swiftly through Holland after D-Day put a halt to it (Veld 1976b; Sander 2018).

<sup>12</sup> It was probably no help that the *Reichskommissar* of the Netherlands, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, had already in the 1930s, when the Nazis came to power, had his eyes on the Valkenburg college stating it was “a hotbed of poisonous propaganda” (Thompson 2020) and may have contributed to its selection over the intended baroque castles.

room, and gave the faculty there one and one-half hours to evacuate; they were allowed to take only a few personal belongings (Sander, 2018). Schmitz tried but was unable to retrieve any of his specimens as the Germans had sealed his laboratory. He was forced to leave with only his few belongings. At the time, there were about 40 German and 100 Dutch faculty and clerical students at the college. The German clerics were evacuated by trucks to nearby Aachen, just across the German border, some 25 km away; the Dutch were moved to a retreat house in Spaubeek<sup>14</sup> (Schmitz *in litt.* in Anonymous 1945). The official reason given to the Order for the eviction was military needs of the buildings (Sander 2018). With the faculty evicted and the college now abandoned, the SS left the premises and the plans for changing it as quickly as possible to a *Reichsschule* were put into motion.

Three days later, the transformation of the college into the *Reichsschule* began by demolishing the church in order to change that area into a new modern front entrance of the *Reichsschule* emblazoned with the Nazi swastika (Fig. 5). Also destroyed in the process were the astronomical laboratory (the telescope had been previously moved to safety by the Jesuits<sup>15</sup>) and the printing press. They also confiscated furniture and some parts of the large library. Although the vast majority of the library



**Fig. 5.** New entrance at Ignatius-College after removal of the church.

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13 The *Sicherheitsdienst* (security service or SD) were often the ones employed in occupied territories to evict residents and were also involved in systematic looting.

14 Schmitz *in* Anonymous (1945) said the retreat house in Spaubeek was destroyed by 200 allied incendiary bombs. It was actually destroyed by arson (Begheyn 2016). He also said the crypt at Ignatius-Kolleg had been turned into a swimming pool by the Germans. In reality, the swimming pool was not anywhere near the building (see Video Resources).

15 It was lost after the war and found 30 years later in an attic. It was later broken up into parts and sold (Thompson 2020).

remained untouched<sup>16</sup>, approximately 50,000 volumes were eventually either destroyed (mainly rotted in leaky storage through neglect) or stolen<sup>17</sup>, including some rare incunabula, a few of which were found later in Nijmegen. The transformation to the *Reichsschule* was finished in a little over two months and opened under the leadership of *Unterreichsleiter* Ernst Debusman on 1 September 1942 to fanfare, parades, and proud, high-ranking German officials in attendance.

Arriving in Aachen<sup>18</sup> after being evicted from the college and separated from his collections, Schmitz was devastated. Mainly, he was concerned he could not finish his monograph of the Palaearctic phorids for Lindner's "*Die Fliegen*". He wrote to Lindner pleading with him to help write to high authorities in the German Reich to allow him to be released and go back to Valkenburg and retrieve his collection and dissecting equipment so that he could continue working on "*Die Fliegen*." Schmitz also wrote to his hymenopterist colleague Walter Soyka<sup>19</sup> in Austria relating the events of 7 July (but not requesting any help).

Immediately after the closure of the college, it was left unguarded for the first few days. Although the contents of the college were on the list of things to be looted by the SS, disagreements with Reich officials in the Hague over how the situation was being handled caused a protracted delay (Thompson 2020). The delay allowed the local underground resistance in the area to spring into action. The leader of the local resistance was Peter Schunck. Schunck owned a laundry nearby, which had a contract with the college to do the weekly laundry. Luckily, Schunck was contacted by Alfred Rosenberg<sup>20</sup>, who was the leader of the German occupied countries and temporarily put in charge of overseeing the construction of the *Reichsschule* in Valkenburg. An agreement was made to continue the weekly laundry service, since there were still bed linens and clothes of existing personnel at the college that needed laundry service. Given the opportunity to get into the buildings, a plan was hatched to smuggle out precious religious artifacts, gems, vestments, rare books and collections with the laundry. All was done a little bit at a time on a weekly basis for as long as they could get away with it. The way they did it was having the few supporters still inside the college place the valuable items at the bottom of laundry baskets and the dirty laundry placed on top. In some cases, the small children of the laundry workers sat on top of everything as the baskets were taken from the college to the laundry. In this fashion, hundreds of precious books, artifacts, and collections were saved from looting or destruction. All the items smuggled out of Valkenburg and hidden were never taken by the Germans and made their way back to rightful owners after the war.

*Postscript on the Ignatius-Kolleg.* As news arrived of the allies landing at Normandy and their swift progress moving toward Holland, the school was closed and the boys transferred initially to Bensberg in Bergisch-Gladbach, Germany, but soon thereafter, many were to take part in the fighting for

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16 They were found packed in 73 large crates ready for shipping but because of disagreements and delays, they remained packed until Valkenburg was liberated by allies

17 The German officials in control of the college appointed a Dr. Hauerbach as librarian, who was authorized to send scientific books back to Germany. Some books were burned, others sent to a paper mill, some given away as presents.

18 The Valkenburg Jesuits had a retreat house in Aachen (Thompson 2020), which is most likely where they stayed, at least temporarily.

19 Unfortunately, Soyka wrote to Bischoff and let him know about the Wasmann and Schmitz collections. This alerted Bischoff to what he believed were abandoned collections. Bischoff then developed a plan to find both collections and take them back to Germany for "safekeeping."

20 Ironically (perhaps Karma in this case), Rosenberg, who was well-known for his unit, the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, or ERR, leading most of the systematic looting that took place in Germany's occupied territories, was having valuable items taken right from under his nose; things he would otherwise have looted himself.

Germany as part of the Hitler Youth. After the allies liberated Limburg, the cloister at Valkenburg was turned into the 91st evacuation hospital of the US Army. Afterward it became an interment camp for female political prisoners. Portions of it were later rebuilt as a monastery and it changed hands in 1985 to be a meditation center for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The center closed in 2009 and it remains abandoned. A video history of it was made sometime in the 2010s and is viewable on YouTube (see “Other Resources” below).

### **First Attempt at Confiscation of the Collection**

Back in Aachen, apparently, Schmitz’s letter-writing campaign worked. Lindner informed Schmitz that the Germans had agreed to allow him to return to pick up his collections. A part of the letter from Lindner to Schmitz gives the following assurance that Lindner had received from the Gestapo in the Hague [English translations in italics and brackets]:

“Den Haag, 17.8.1942. [*The Hague, August 17, 1942.*]

Betrifft: Wissenschaftliche Sammlungen des Herrn Jesuitpater Prof. Dr. Hermann Schmitz.

[*Subject: Scientific collections of the Jesuit priest Prof. Dr. Herman Schmitz.*]

Die genannte wissenschaftliche Sammlung werde ich freigegeben. Ich habe den Herrn Pater Prof. Dr. Schmitz diesbezügliche Mitteilung gemacht.

[*I will release the scientific collection mentioned. I have Father Prof. Dr. Schmitz informed about this.*]

Heil Hitler!

[Unterschrift]  
SS Hauptsturmführer.”<sup>21</sup>

With this news, Schmitz’s hopes were raised, but they were just as quickly dashed. On 30 August, Schmitz and his Socius, Fr. Johannes Hirschmann, made their way from Aachen to the town of Vaals in Limburg on the German-Netherlands border and from there were driven by car to Valkenburg, where Schmitz was given a three-day residence permit.

On the way there, their car stopped and they were surprised to be met by Bischoff. Bischoff escorted the two of them the rest of the way to Valkenburg with assurances that all would be fine. Upon arrival, Schmitz and Hirschmann started packing the phorids but Bischoff wanted to know where the Wasmann ant collection was. Schmitz, thinking Bischoff was there to help, innocently told him it was safely in Maastricht. Little did he know then of Bischoff’s true reason for being there. However, he would soon discover the gravity of situation unfolding in front of him. Later that afternoon, Bischoff could not keep up the ruse, and privately told Schmitz that everything would be taken to Berlin and that he (Bischoff) would act as trustee until the question of ownership was resolved. When Schmitz pointed to the *Hauptsturmführer*’s letter that the collections would be released, Bischoff said that he misunderstood. “Release” meant the collections would be released from Ignatius-Kolleg. As Schmitz (1953) said: [English translation] “the scales fell from my eyes” as he realized he had been duped. Bischoff asked Schmitz to come back the next morning to pack his own belongings and return

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21 This person may have been Hans Schwerte, who was made head of the *Ahnenerbe* “German Science Mission” in the Netherlands and was posted as *Hauptsturmführer* in the Hague in 1942. He oversaw dissolution of Catholic churches in the Netherlands as well as replacing staff of universities in the Netherlands and Belgium with Nazis and collaborators.

to Germany. Unfortunately, at that moment Schmitz had an acute glaucoma attack in his right eye (Schmitz later thought this might have been brought on by the stress of the moment) and was taken the following day to the hospital in Heerlen, 13 km east of Valkenburg where he was laid up for 16 days.

During the time he was in the hospital, Schmitz had told Bischoff that he was the curator of the Wasmann Collection and had transferred it from Valkenburg to the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht due to its “favorable central heating”. Bischoff went the next day to the Natuurhistorisch Museum demanding the collections, claiming them as being German property. Bischoff was met at the museum by curator Dr. Wilhelmina van de Geijn who, not trusting Bischoff, said the collections were not there, that she had no authority because the museum was a municipal one, and therefore referred him to the *burgemeester* (mayor) of Maastricht, Louis Peeters, an NSB-member. Bischoff returned to Valkenburg and telegraphed the mayor from the newly opened *Reichsschule* explaining the situation.

During this time, Dr. van de Geijn decided to hide the collection and transported it out of the Natuurhistorisch Museum and into the cellars of the Stadhuis Maastricht (Maastricht City Hall) a few blocks away. All of this was with the knowledge and permission of mayor Peeters. In an interview after the war, Dr. van de Geijn disclosed that she had not stored all the Schmitz phorid collections in one place but split them up, and was concerned that the Germans might notice when packing them for transport. The second batch of phorids turned out to be hidden close to some important company: they were stored in a wicker basket that laid on top of Rembrandt’s painting, the “*Night Watch*”, in a vault in a marl cave in the Sint Pietersberg area of southern Maastricht. The colossal painting, one of Rembrandt’s most famous, was 363 cm x 437 cm [12 feet by 16 feet] and could not be moved or stored in its frame because of its size. It was decided to remove it from its frame and roll it up around a cylinder. It was placed in a specially built wooden box (that looked essentially like a doghouse) and transported from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to a specially-built vault in the cave (Fig. 6). So, a portion of the Schmitz collection lay innocuously on top of that in an old wicker basket.

Peeters responded to Bischoff’s telegram. However, despite being an NSB member, Peeters was more loyal to the citizenry of Maastricht than to an uninvited and demanding Berlin entomologist. He claimed in his response that the collection was not German property but belonged to the people of Limburg, and he could not release it saying it was as unique as the famous saurian skull<sup>22</sup> that put Maastricht on the palaeontological map.



**Fig. 6.** Portion of the phorid collection hidden in a cave (arrow points to it in a basket on top of a rolled-up Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*).

<sup>22</sup> This was the famous *Mosasaurus*, an extinct group of aquatic reptiles found in the Maastricht marl quarries in 1764, and thought at first to be a crocodile or whale.



Initially, Bischoff was under the impression that Schmitz, as curator, was the owner of the collections and so could release it if Bischoff requested it. When on 8 September he found out it had been transferred to the museum per Schmitz's orders, he had decided to leave the collections there under the assumption that they were now the property of the municipality of Maastricht<sup>23</sup>. However, when he returned to the hospital to tell Schmitz what had happened in Maastricht and asked Schmitz again about the ownership, Schmitz said the transfer to the Natuurhistorisch Museum was done more as a loan combined with permission to use the collections. Bischoff went back to the Museum and checked the minutes of the transfer as to how the collection was to be administered and found that it corroborated what Schmitz had said.

Bischoff telegrammed Peeters from the *Reichsschule* on 10 September and relayed the information he had received from Schmitz and the information he learned from the museum's minutes saying that Peeters's argument that the collection was important to the local people and must stay in Maastricht was a flimsy one and that it was better for science to have the collection in Berlin. He said to the mayor that it would be simple to make a local collection that would be more relevant to the local people than this world collection of ants, said to contain upwards of 3,500 species. In response, the mayor told Bischoff he needed him to produce something in writing before anything could be done.

Having not planned for that, and without authority from anyone higher up in the German Reich to authorize Bischoff to take any action, it was difficult for him to convince either the Museum or the mayor to hand over the collection just on his say-so. Compounding that, word got to The Hague of Bischoff's trouble with obtaining the collections and the *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber* [chief military commander] in the Netherlands, General Friedrich Christiansen. Unfortunately for Bischoff, the General was not pleased with Bischoff's actions at Valkenburg with Schmitz and ordered him to return to Berlin. Bischoff left for Berlin, but his effort to get the collections was not yet over.

Shortly thereafter, having recovered from his glaucoma attack, Schmitz was released from the hospital on 16 September and returned to Valkenburg to pick up his things and head to Germany. However, when he arrived, he not only had to contend with the transformation of the college into the new *Reichsschule*, but he had found that his phorids were gone. It was thought that Bischoff had taken the collection (Fiekers 1954), but it is probable that the Underground Resistance had already then safely smuggled it out to safety having been working on this since a few days before the school had begun construction. Schmitz apparently did not pursue the matter further, thinking the worst concerning the eventual fate of his collection, and instead made his way to Austria where he remained for a few years collecting phorids and producing more papers, including two more fascicles of Lindner's "*Die Fliegen*" during the war<sup>24</sup>. He never returned to Valkenburg.

### **Second Attempt at Confiscation of the Wasmann and Schmitz Collections**

Bischoff suspended his efforts to obtain the collection over the fall and winter of 1942, but come spring 1943, he was back in Maastricht trying once again to secure the collections. This time with some heavy support and a signed certificate. Bischoff had written to German officials in the Hague to help support his claim to the collections and got what he needed, not only with a signed certificate, but the help of a high-ranking SS official.

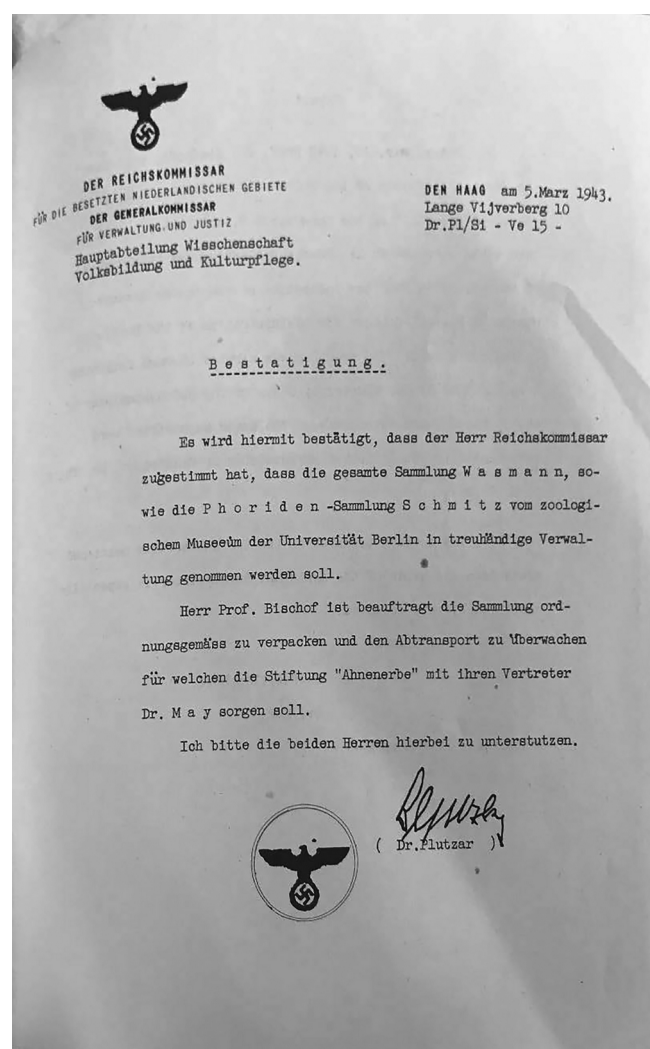
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23 It could be that Bischoff thought to leave the collection because the confiscation of property from the Jesuits was an authorized activity (as had been done many times before to other catholic churches and clergy by the occupying Germans), but looting from the city of Maastricht was an unauthorized action.

24 The third fascicle was published in July 1943 and the fourth before November 1943. These were no doubt installments he had sent to Lindner prior to his being evicted from Valkenburg. The fifth fascicle came out six years later (in 1949) after the collections had been returned to Maastricht.

Bischoff showed up at the Museum on the afternoon of 9 March 1943 and the mayor's office received a phone call from Dr. van de Geijn saying Bischoff and a Dr. May were there and that he should come to the museum to help sort things out. Mayor Peeters had, in early 1943, left the mayorship to join the *Waffen-SS* to fight on the Eastern Front. An acting mayor, Dr. Theo A.A.M. Copray, was put in place in a questionable appointment process that came under fire from many city council members. The acting mayor showed up at the museum at 400pm where he was met by Dr. van de Geijn and Dr. Bischoff (May had left but was due back soon). Bischoff said he had written permission from Dr. Friedrich Plutzar by order of the *Reichskommissar* to take the collections into "custody in trust" by the Zoological Museum in Berlin. Bischoff asked where the collections were, but again both Drs. van de Geijn and Copray refused to comply. Bischoff said that they should wait for Dr. May<sup>25</sup> to show up.

The English translation (made by the US Army) of the written confirmation by Plutzar is given here (see Fig. 7 for the original German):



## CONFIRMATION

It is hereby confirmed that the Reichs Commissioner has consented to the entire collection Wasmann as well as the Phoridae collection Schmitz being taken into trusteeship by the zoological museum of the University of Berlin.

Prof. Bischoff is instructed to pack the collection in an orderly fashion and to supervise the transport which is to be undertaken by the foundation "Ahnenerbe" through its representative, Dr. May.

I request you assist the two gentlemen in their work.

/s/  
(Dr. Plutzar)

**Fig. 7 (right).** Confirmation letter by Plutzar instructing confiscation of the collection.

25 Dr. Eduard May, an entomologist, was head of the Heinrich Himmler's SS Entomological Institute of the *Ahnenerbe*. May was introduced by Bischoff as a "staff of the *Höheren SS - und Polizeiführer*", which was technically correct (such titles were given to heads of large units of the Gestapo), but no doubt this was meant as an intimidation factor, where a head of a "police" unit no doubt would help sway things Bischoff's way. In contrast to the title, May's SS unit, unbeknownst to Drs. van de Geijn and Copray, were just other entomologists.



While waiting for Dr. May to return, Copray asked Bischoff on what grounds things had changed for him to return to Maastricht to demand the collections. Bischoff responded that his reading of the minutes of the transfer of the collections from Valkenburg to Maastricht showed that the collections were not the property of Schmitz but of the Jesuit Order and Father Schmitz was appointed only as curator of them. If no capable successor could be found among the members of the Order, the minutes had stated that it was the intention to sell the collection to one of the large university towns where Vienna, Munich, Berlin and Bonn were mentioned by name. These minutes were turned over to the German-appointed custodian of Ignatius-Kolleg, Alfred Rosenberg, who sent them to the *Reichskommissar* in the Hague, Arthur Seyss-Inquart<sup>26</sup>. The *Reichskommissar* quickly concluded that since the collections belonged to the Jesuit Order in Valkenburg, and since that Order had been dissolved and was now a *Reichsschule*, the collections were now the property of the Third Reich and should be sent to Berlin.

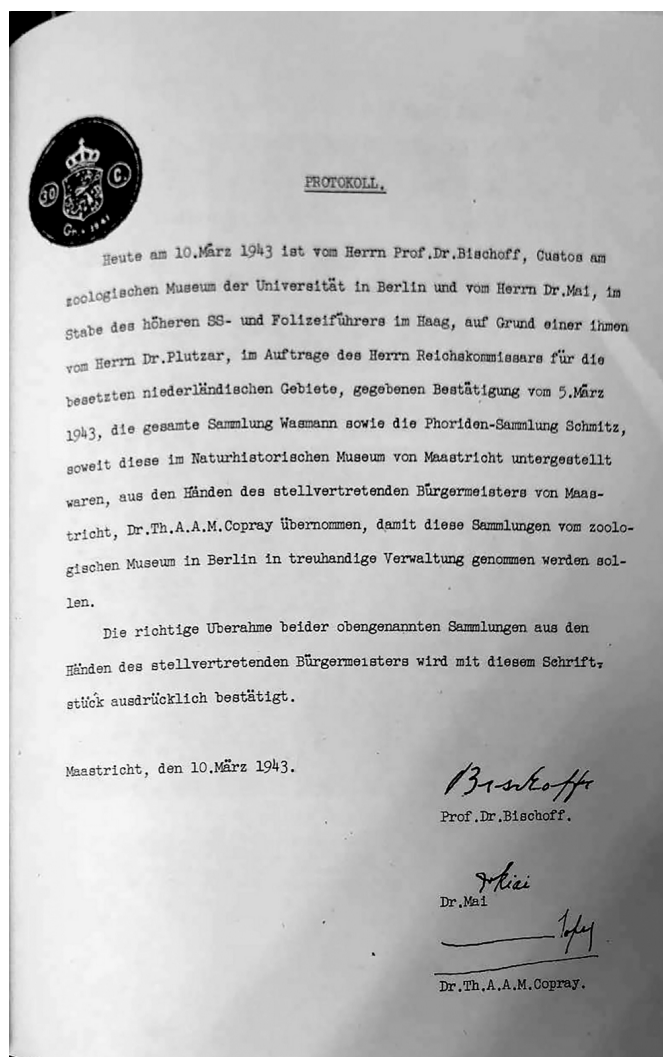
At 500pm, Dr. May arrived and, seeing no progress had been made in his absence, was indignant. Dr. van de Geijn explained that she had no authority concerning disclosing their whereabouts because the Museum was a community one and came under the auspices of the mayor. May was especially displeased that Copray had not deemed the letter from Plutzar as enough to turn over the collections and threatened to charge him with sabotage, which could lead to the imprisonment of both van de Geijn and Copray. If Copray still refused, he would inform the *Sicherheitsdienst* which would seize the collections by force. After a phone call between Copray and the Commissioner of Limburg Province, combined with May's threatening both van de Geijn and Copray with imprisonment, Copray acquiesced and told them where the collections were hidden. After examining the location, Bischoff said they would be taken away the next morning at 900am.

At 900am on 10 March 1943 both Bischoff and May went the cellar of the Stadhuis to pack up the collections. During the packing up of the collections, Bischoff expressed concern that possibly not all of the Schmitz collection was there. There was only one cabinet with six drawers. Surely it had to be much larger. Copray indicated that he and his predecessor Peeters only knew of the collection stored here and were under the impression that this was all of it. Copray had, as part of the agreement in taking the collection, indicated that there would be made a written protocol that would serve as a receipt and certification that the collection was taken away by Bischoff and May. May proposed that the protocol indicate exactly what was taken of the Schmitz Collection (viz., one cabinet with six drawers) and this was agreed as the best solution rather than protract the matter any further. After the collections were packed into a large crate and loaded onto a truck, the protocol was typed up and signed by all parties, and the collections left Maastricht by truck. Before the truck left, a local Dutch worker who helped pack the material and load it in onto the truck for transport, was able to snatch a shipping label and gave it to Dr. van de Geijn. It was the only connection she now had to those collections. The shipping label said it was being shipped to Dr. Bischoff in Berlin (Garanpulos 1947).

The English translation of the protocol is given in full on the following page (see Fig. 8 for the original in German):

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26 Seyss-Inquart was a ruthless leader in his role of *Reichskommissar* in the Netherlands, It was he who instituted a reign of terror, where Dutch civilians were subjected to forced labor and deported to Germany to work; and was responsible for he deportation to concentration camps and murder of the vast majority of Dutch Jews. He was tried at the Nuremberg trials, found guilty of crimes against humanity, and executed.



**Fig. 8.** “Protocol” certificate certifying the confiscation of the collection.

## PROTOCOL

Today, on March 10, 1943, the entire collection Wasmann as well as the Phoridae “collection Schmitz” insofar as they were stored in the Natural Historical Museum of Maastricht have been taken over from the acting mayor of Maastricht, Dr. Th.A.A.M. Copray by Dr. Bischoff, Custodian of the Zoological Museum of the University of Berlin and by Dr. May, holder of the title Höherer SS und Polizeiführer in the Hague, on the basis of confirmation of March 5, 1943, issued by Dr. Plutzar by order of the Reichs Commissioners for the occupied territory in the Netherlands, in order that these collections could be taken in trusteeship by the zoological museum in Berlin.

The correct “taking over” of the two collections mentioned above from the acting mayor is specifically confirmed by this document.

Maastricht, March 10, 1943

/s/ Bischoff

Prof. Dr. Bischoff

/s/ Dr. May

Dr. May

/s/ Copray

Dr. Th. A.A.M. Copray

However, the collections did not make it to Berlin until May of 1944. For a few months, the collections were at the *Reichsschule* in Valkenburg. On 24 July 1943 Operation Gomorrah began, the incessant fire bombing of Hamburg that lasted for 8 days and 7 nights. The resulting ultimate destruction of the city and deaths of 20,000 shocked the German high command. On 29 July 1943, in direct response to the fire bombing of Hamburg, Himmler ordered the headquarters of his *Ahnenerbe* to be moved out of Berlin to Waischenfeld in Bavaria. A consequence to the collections sitting in Valkenburg was that two couriers took the best part of the Schmitz phorid collection to Waischenfeld (Schmitz 1953). The rest of the material moved on to Aachen, but even there it was held up for more than a year before being transported to Berlin. Once in Berlin, they were ultimately stored in two areas. One portion was stored in the basement of the Zoological Museum, the other in vaults of the *Reichsbank*<sup>27</sup> a few blocks away. Apparently, no part of either collection ever made it to Bischoff’s office.

<sup>27</sup> This bank, which served as a repository for much looted property, mainly from Jewish citizenry, was also a victim of one of the greatest robberies of all time. The SS stole an estimated \$3.3 billion worth of gold, gems, and cash near the end of War II and stored much of it in salt mines, later recovered by allied forces after the war.

### **Aftermath of the Confiscation**

Schmitz might have resorted to defeatism in coping with the failure to have his collections returned and, possibly, it was a way for him to move on with his work. But Copray, the acting mayor who, under threat of imprisonment by the SS, gave up the location of hidden collections, was not done.

After Bischoff and May left with the collections, Copray wrote to Plutzar in The Hague on 15 March 1943, claiming that the collections belonged in the Netherlands based on them having been collected in the Netherlands and studied and stored there. Plutzar turned the matter over to his deputy as this was no doubt insignificant to him. The deputy responded on 8 April, refusing to return the collections, whereupon Copray on 30 June responded to him with a detailed letter outlining the points that proved the collections should be in the Netherlands and not Germany. The English translation of that letter is given here:

Office  
Cabinet of Community of Maastricht  
The Mayor

To the Under-Secretary in the  
Department for Education, Science  
and Protection of Culture.  
The Hague

Maastricht, June 30, 1943

Answering your letter of April 8 re: the matter mentioned I make the following report:

The claim in my letter of March 15, 1943 Cabinet No. 708 that the collections in question have been in the Netherlands from the very beginning and have been gathered on Dutch soil is in my opinion sufficiently justified by the following facts:

a. Collection Wasmann.

Erich Wasmann first came to the Netherlands in 1875 and lived here in the Province of Limburg for nearly 25 years, mainly in the former castle “Exaten” situated near Baexem between Roermond and Weert. After a few years of preparation he started his research work in the field of ants and ant-guests on a large scale here about 1884. In the surroundings of Exaten he laid out an observation ground in the course of the years which was unique of its kind. It comprised on the map a surface of 4 square kilometers of Netherlands soil and was inhabited by 412 colonies of ants with about 2000 nests and nearly 5 million ants. All of these nests have been personally controlled by him during many years and, if possible, separately visited by him once a month. After a stay in Luxembourg (1899–1911) where he occupied himself mainly with more theoretical problems in his field — this in contrast to his studies in Exaten — he returned to the Netherlands in 1911 and took up residence in Valkenburg (Limburg) where he kept on working uninterruptedly until his death in 1931. Wasmann, then, lived and worked for two-thirds of his life in the Netherlands. Apart from his own findings at Exaten, Valkenburg and other places in the Netherlands his collection consists of objects which had been sent to him for study, once he had acquired world-fame, from all parts of the globe, especially however, by his colleagues and friends from overseas.

b. Collection Schmitz.

Hermann Schmitz came to the Netherlands in 1894 and always lived and worked in Limburg until July 1942, with only short interruptions among others in 1920/22 and 1924/25 when he stayed in foreign countries for purposes of study. By far the greatest part of his collection “Phoridae”, was assembled by himself, is of Netherlands origin. He received the balance from his friends and from scientific colleagues, mainly from overseas. Schmitz published the results of his research- work in Dutch magazines (*Natuurhistorisch Maandblad* and others) by preference.

2. Dr. Plutzar writes: “The two collections cannot be considered as Netherlands cultural wealth (*Kulturgut*), the cloister of Valkenburg was founded by German Jesuits during the time of the *Kulturkampf*”. It seems very strange that people suddenly remember in 1943 that 187 German Jesuits had to leave their country and found an abode in the Netherlands. That is the question: whether it is justified after nearly seventy-five years to reject as a Netherlands’ achievement all the valuable work which has been performed in our country by these men.

3. Dr. Plutzar writes: “Wasmann and Schmitz were not Dutch.” This sentence can be understood in two ways. Either Dr. Plutzar means to say the two Jesuits are so-called. “Volksdeutsche”; in which case the door has been opened wide to arbitrary disposal of property, whether German or not, which belongs to persons who live outside Germany, but who are considered as so-called “Volksdeutsche”, or Dr. Plutzar means by “Germans” so-called “State Germans” of the time before the “Anschluss” or “Reich-Germans” of the time after the creation of the Greater German Reich. If the latter may I draw your attention to the fact that Pater E. Wasmann was born on May 29, 1859 in Merano (Tyrol), at that time belonging to the Kingdom of Austria–Hungary and new to Italy. Under these circumstances, just as Germany claims the “Collection Schmitz”, Italy might claim the “Collection Wasmann”.

4. Dr. Plutzar continues: “The part of the collection on which refers to Limburg has only importance as a systematic supplement to the great and voluminous collection in which the professional scientists of the whole world are interested.” This claim might be true, but the application of this argument could rob our country of all scientific collections as they form but a part of the total of all collections in which the professional science of the whole world is interested.

5. You wrote to me that Dr. Plutzar informed you that the collections have been taken into custody in Berlin so that they could receive the proper professional and scientific treatment. I suppose that he means by this that this sort of treatment was deemed not to have been used in Maastricht. I protest vehemently against that conclusion. Maastricht has not only at its disposal a special Natural Historical Museum with collections of fauna and flora which are known throughout the Netherlands and in foreign countries, but in addition it has at the head of the museum an expert, Dr. Wilh. A.E. van de Geijn, doctor of geology. It, therefore, seems very strange that, while Dr. Plutzar questions “proper treatment” of the collection in Maastricht, Pater Schmitz on the other hand deemed it entirely justified to house the ant collection Wasmann and his own “Phoridae” collection in this museum. Had he doubted the “proper treatment” being given the collection, he unquestionably would never have lent the collections to the Natural Historical Museum in Maastricht.

6. I understand that the former Jesuit cloister in Valkenburg has been confiscated on the strength of ordinance 33/1940<sup>28</sup> re: The confiscated property will be used for civic purposes in the occupied Netherlands. From this it can be concluded in my opinion that

- a. the confiscated property, in case the collections Wasmann and Schmitz lent to the Natural History Museum in Maastricht may not be taken outside the Netherlands border.
- b. the opportunity must be given to use these collections “for civic purposes” if this had not already been done.

Therefore, if you write that the collections have been taken into custody in Berlin and that according to your impression nothing can be achieved I wish to point out the above-mentioned facts to you emphatically and to report at the same time that to the best of my knowledge the two collections are still in Valkenburg where they were taken from here.

We should appreciate it very much if you would do what you can for the town of Maastricht and thereby for the whole country with respect to the two collections.

The Mayor of Maastricht acting

The letter of 30 June 1943 was to be one of Copray’s last acts as the acting mayor<sup>29</sup>. He was only installed because Peeters had left. But on 1 July 1943 Peeters returned to become mayor again and Copray’s short time in his capacity as acting mayor was over. Copray’s actions after the collection confiscation were valiant efforts and, because of his extremely short term in the Maastricht mayor’s office, it may have been the largest (or only) situation for him to try and resolve. However, in the end it proved fruitless. Despite pleas from Dutch officials, the collections were not to be returned to Holland by the Germans.

### **Major Bailey and the return of the Collections**

After the allies landed on the beaches at Normandy, they quickly pushed forward on their way to their ultimate destination of Berlin. Along the way, they liberated various portions of previously occupied countries. On 9 September 1944, they entered the Netherlands in the most southerly province of Limburg and by 14 September they had liberated Maastricht. The rest of the country was not as easy to liberate and it wasn’t until six months later, on 5 May 1945, that German forces in the Netherlands finally surrendered, although sporadic battles continued until 11 June when the last town in Holland was freed.

Soon after gaining control of the Limburg area in the fall of 1944, medical units of the military came in to set up typhus control protocols. One of the officers in charge was Major John Wendell Bailey of the 9th Army in the Netherlands. Bailey was a Mississippi-born entomologist who was the chair of biology at the University of Richmond, Virginia before the war. He was in charge of not only typhus control in the area, but directed convoys of sugar and potatoes to residents of the area; and analyzed weather data for the preceding 40 years in cooperation with Dutch meteorologists for the prospective Ruhr River crossing by the 9th US Army division on their way to Berlin to put an end to the war.

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28 These ordinances, proclaimed by the Reich were excuses that allowed actions by German troops against occupied territories and people, including various types of looting. VO 33 was written vaguely enough to give Germans *carte blanche* in confiscating any money and property from individuals that displeased them or were seen to potentially harm the German people of the Reich at the time or in the future (see Aalders, 2004 [English translation of original 1999 Dutch]). By saying “in the future” it gave German occupiers much leeway into excuses why various actions of looting took place.

29 Copray left Maastricht to become the mayor of nearby Kerkrade a few months later; and died in Wassenaar, Netherlands on 23 July 1944, after a serious illness.

While stationed in Maastricht in the fall and winter months of 1944, Bailey had heard stories of the theft of the collections from various towns people as soon as they learned he was an entomologist. Curious, he wanted to find out the fate of those collections that were important to the townsfolk. Bailey had a bit of serendipity in that regard. By June 1945, the typhus concern was over and efforts were instead being focused on the recovery of stolen cultural property. At almost at the same time that he was reassigned to the education branch of the Information and Education Division to work on the recovery of such stolen material, he received a letter from Dr. Carl Muesebeck of the USDA, Bureau of Entomology in Washington, D.C. requesting to learn of the fate of various entomological collections in Europe. Bailey went to his superior officer, Brigadier Paul Thompson, to request permission to conduct this survey. He was granted permission and given transport and personnel to do the job. From June to September 1945 Bailey was on a whirlwind plane tour of Europe visiting and reporting on entomological collections in France, England, Holland, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and published the results (Bailey 1947).

In August 1945, Bailey was back in Maastricht and went to the Natuurhistorisch Museum to meet with Dr. van de Geijn and get the details on the theft of the collections again before he went to Berlin, his last stop in his museum survey. She showed him the shipping label she had received, which was taken from one of the trucks used in transporting the collections. Although it said Dr. Bischoff in Berlin was the supposed destination, Bailey was reluctant to believe it, only because the Germans had led others astray with decoys such as this. Yet, Bailey had been to almost every other museum in Germany and the collection had not yet been located. Berlin was last on his list.

On 12 September, Bailey and a language interpreter flew to Berlin and arrived seeking out Bischoff. The Zoological Museum was in the now cordoned-off Russian sector, so Bailey first had to get permission from the Russians before he could proceed further to 43 Invalidenstrasse and the Museum. Hearing the story and with interest in seeing successfully recovered such stolen scientific collections, the Russian officers granted him permission.

Bailey arrived at the museum to find half-bombed buildings and rubble. After finding the correct building, he ascended five flights of stairs to Bischoff's office. Garanpulos (1947) described the encounter:

“The 75-year old white haired, hawknozed [sic], bearded director, his eyes humbled and watered by defeat, was no longer the imperious bully who had threatened the gallant little Maastricht museum directress with death. He could not stand up straight and his hands fumbled with each other as though he held a rare brandy glass he might drop at any moment”.

Bailey baited him. He introduced himself as a fellow entomologist and that he was surveying various museums and wanted to know if this museum had been fortunate in saving its collections. Bischoff responded that they had been successful in that regard because they had been stored in the basement and in vaults of banks. Then Bailey asked if he had any collection of ants and Bischoff proudly responded that they did. They had the Wasmann Collection, the best collection of ants in the world, and right there in Berlin. When Bailey said he'd like to see the collection, Bischoff eagerly went down the stairs to the basement and showed Bailey the collection, saying that another portion was located in the vault of the *Reichsbank* a few blocks away. They went there finding the bank destroyed, but the vaults, two stories underground, remained intact. Opening the vault doors, the collection was found, and after examination, it was determined that it had survived intact.

Bailey then informed Bischoff that he knew of the details surrounding the confiscation of the collection from Maastricht and was there to return the collection to its rightful owners. In his defense, Bischoff said it was there for safekeeping. Bailey mentioned that that was hard to believe since Berlin was being targeted almost daily for bombing yet Maastricht remained untouched. Bischoff acquiesced and said he would help.

The next days involved getting things organized including international relations, permissions, documents, trucks, freight handlers, and transport to Holland. A team of military officials was assembled to supervise and conduct the packing and transport including Russians, Americans, and Dutch, all with their translators.

On 25 September 1945, Bailey's assembled team (including Russian Major V.I. Bekhterov and an assistant Lt. S.V. Sorokin, Dutch Colonel Cornelis van Ty and his interpreter Capt. E. Engberts) went into the Russian sector of Berlin to visit Dr. Bischoff in his office (Fig. 9). They then proceeded down to the cellars to pack up the largest part of the collection (Fig. 10a, b) into crates surrounded by excelsior, and loaded them onto a ten-ton military truck. On 27 September, the second part of the collection in the bank vaults was packed up and loaded onto another ten-ton truck and the two trucks made their way to Marienfeld, Germany, some 500 km west of Berlin, where they paused, awaiting a final check of the contents before heading on to Maastricht. Finally on 28 September, the two ten-ton trucks, filled with 83 crates of collections and books and correspondence, headed out for the overnight trip to Maastricht.



**Fig. 9.** Bailey and interpreter visiting Bischoff in his office.

After a non-stop trip from Marienfeld, Germany, the collection finally arrived at the Natuurhistorisch Museum on 29 September (Fig. 11).



**Figs. 10a (above left), b (above right).** Examination of the collection in the cellar of the Museum für Naturkunde.

### **After the Return**

At some point after returning the Berlin portion of the collections, Bailey got tipped off that the missing portion of the Schmitz phorid collection was at Waischenfeld in Bavaria. Bailey immediately went there and retrieved the remaining part of the Wasmann/Schmitz collections and returned it to Maastricht.

The return of the collections was an important event for those in Maastricht and time for celebration. Bailey was showered with banquets, newsreel interviews and celebrations; and to top it off, he was awarded the Order of Orange-Nassau, with Swords (the military version of the medal) by the government of the Netherlands in thanks for his heroic retrieval of these important scientific collections. Written commendations from the US and Dutch military were also given.



**Fig. 11.** Arrival of the Collection in Maastricht. Left to right: Maj. Bailey, unknown, Ms. van de Geijn, Maastricht Councilman of Education A.E. Kersten.

The Wasmann collection and a small collection of non-phorid Diptera made by Schmitz are still in the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht and available for study (P. Beuk, *in litt.*, December 2022). The large collection of phorids made by Schmitz after 1942 were donated to the Zoological Museum in Bonn after his death and occupy 100 drawers of material, his library and associated correspondence (X. Mengual, *in litt.*, February 2022).

### **Remaining Questions**

#### *Why Waischenfeld - dispelling a myth*

A last portion of the Schmitz phorids were found by Bailey after being tipped off that they were in Waischenfeld, in Bavaria. Both Schmitz (1953) and a letter from Bischoff to Lindner<sup>30</sup> stated that there was a “*Kasten*” [box] of phorids that was packed and taken by two couriers to Waischenfeld.

Some accounts of the recovery say they were there because they were a gift to Himmler, who was said to have a collection of rare insects. This seems highly improbable and may have been a fantasy told that obtained traction over time. There are at least two problems with the Himmler connection.

1. Himmler actually hated insects and is doubtful he had any collection of them. Himmler created the *Ahnenerbe* Entomological Research Institute in the concentration camp in Dachau with the purpose of find ways to use insects as biological weapons (mosquitoes) and to find ways to eradicate those insects that affected human health. Biographies of Himmler consulted during this study<sup>31</sup> make no mention of any interest in entomology at any time during his life. He obtained a degree in agriculture, but all references to this period of his life had him apparently more interested in the opposite sex than trying to study. His work experience on farms might also have been a contributing factor to his

30 Letter from Bischoff to Lindner of 13 March 1944 (Bonn, Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change, Museum Koenig, Biohistoricum).

31 The main biographical and historical sources consulted regarding Himmler’s life and work include Himmler (2007), Longerich (2012), Padfield (1990), and Pringle (2006).



hating insects and finding ways to get rid of them. Despite extensive research into this possibility, no evidence could be found in this study of there being any such collection of rare insects at Waischenfeld, or any other Nazi location.

2. Waischenfeld was not Himmler's "summer home" as has also been mentioned in some reports. After the fire-bombing of Hamburg in July 1943, it was decided to move the Berlin headquarters of the *Ahnenerbe* to the tiny Bavarian village of Waischenfeld. The headquarters were in the village's "Steinhaus" (Fig. 12). No evidence could be found in this study that Himmler was ever there. So, any collection of phorids found there must have been there for another reason.



**Fig. 12.** *Ahnenerbe* headquarters in Waischenfeld

Let's look at Dr. Eduard May. May had entomological training and was made the head of the *Ahnenerbe* Entomological Institute in Dachau by Himmler. As such, he was in charge of the entomological research that took place there. Things that are known to have taken place there included experimenting with prisoners of the concentration camp with regard to chemical and biological means of controlling insects and also using mosquitoes as biological weapons<sup>32</sup>. May was

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<sup>32</sup> May was brought to trial in Nuremberg after the war (cf. Fig. 15) but was found innocent as there was no proof that he approved of the use of humans in any of the experiments. They were done despite his rejection by order of his superior, Wolfram Sievers, who was found guilty of crimes against humanity and executed.

put into that position in February 1942<sup>33</sup>. The Dachau entomological laboratory was not ready to be occupied by May and his staff until the fall of 1943. Although Kater (2006) indicated that May was working out of Berlin and Auschwitz until he could move to Dachau, there is evidence found in this study (see below) that shows May was in Holland at the time Bischoff returned to Maastricht in June 1943. May was the SS *Ustuführer* and on the staff of the SS *Politischer Führer* in the Hague. So, it is logical for May to have been asked to join Bischoff in getting the collection and sending to Germany.

The certificate approving the confiscation of the collections signed by Dr. Plutzar mentions that the collections would be packed up under the supervision of the *Ahnenerbe* (Dr. May). Thus, May was given direct orders to be responsible for its packing and delivery to Berlin.

Bischoff's letter to Lindner of 13 March 1944 explaining the situation does not give any answers since he was also unaware of the reasons why material was taken to Waischenfeld or its fate. Bischoff mentioned in his letter that the phorids were taken to "Waischenfeld/Obfr."<sup>34</sup> [The abbreviation "Obfr." means Oberfranken, the location in Bavaria of Waischenfeld.] Bischoff gave no explanation in his letter to Lindner as to why they were taken there while everything else was supposed to go to Berlin and makes the assumption that they could be examined in Waischenfeld.

It had been suggested (Garanpulos 1947) that the SS got involved initially with the confiscation of the collection thinking that they were of some value, and May was ordered to accompany Bischoff to ensure they made it back to Germany for assessment. The fact the specimens were first delayed in Valkenburg for a few months and then Aachen for a year could partially have been due to this assessment. Then a further delay after the firebombing of Hamburg caused the Germans to rethink where the collections could go. Possibly then, once they were found to not be of the value they expected, they went on to Berlin for eventual storage. That hypothesis answers for everything except for the small collection that ended up at Waischenfeld.

The head of the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (originally set up to "study" Jewish Culture), Alfred Rosenberg, had looted libraries in the Netherlands of thousands of books on local heritage and ethnology and had them sent to Waischenfeld. He was tasked with assembling a great library for Hitler's dream *Hohe-Schule* in Bavaria, which would open after the war with a library of 500,000 volumes (Hoogewoud 1992). There is no reason for those who were looting libraries to want or need a small insect collection. Rosenberg was at Valkenburg overseeing construction of the *Reichsschule* at the time those phorids were still there and apparently did not confiscate them at that time.

Additionally, neither May or Bischoff ever made their way to Waischenfeld. The only person that might have had a connection to them was Wolfram Sievers, May's superior in Berlin. Could May have been one of the two couriers mentioned by Schmitz, and, being an entomologist, taken the best of the phorid collection to Sievers, and Sievers then took it with him when he left Berlin in his move to Waischenfeld with the rest of the high officials of the Berlin *Ahnenerbe* at the end of the war? That too seems very doubtful as no evidence could be found why Sievers would be interested in a small

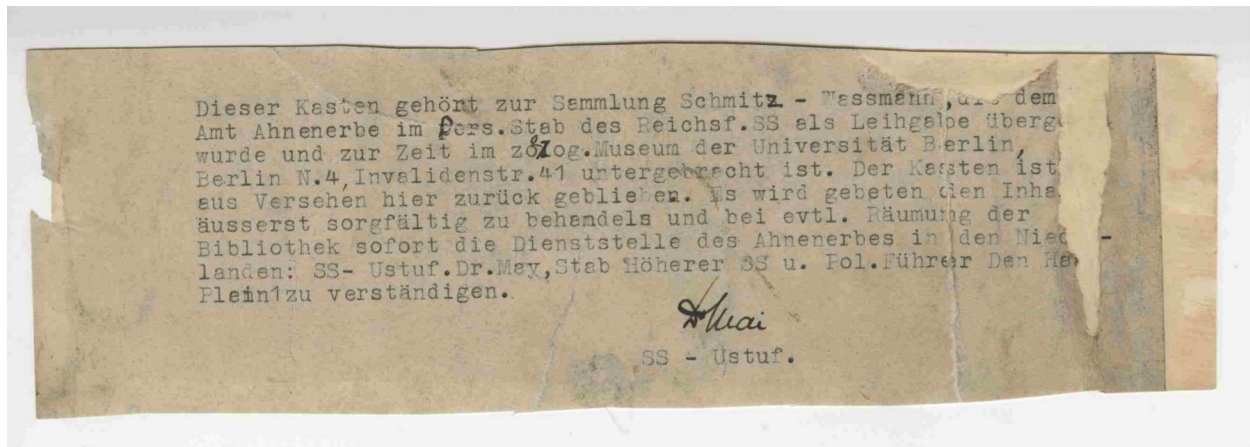
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33 That he was claimed to be in the SS in the Hague by Bischoff was obviously a ruse to intimidate Drs. van de Geijn and Copray into giving them the collection.

34 The timing of when the two couriers took the material to Waischenfeld differs between Schmitz's (1953) account and Bischoff's 1944 letter to Lindner. Schmitz said this took place after the material left Maastricht in June 1943 while it was stalled in Valkenburg. Bischoff, on the other hand (and he never mentioned to Lindner the Maastricht confiscation) said all this took place in September 1942 just after he had returned to Berlin after his first attempt at getting the collections failed. Bischoff's might not be true, since the *Ahnenerbe* in Waischenfeld did not exist until August 1943, but the parcel might have been held up before being sent to its final destination.

collection of pinned and fluid-preserved phorid flies. So, the reason for the phorids in Waischenfeld would seem a mystery. When the US troops went to Waischenfeld in 1945 to retrieve anything the *Ahnenerbe* had stored there, they set up a “Materials Depot” there and subsequently moved material to the Hessian State Archives (Grief 2000) for assessment of ownership (it is known that some 50,000 books from libraries in Holland were found and sent back to rightful owners). It would be interesting to find out if an inventory of such looted material recovered exists in military archives some place. None could be located in this study.

Given the circumstance above, the reason for their presence in Waischenfeld was puzzling until a small, partly torn, slip of paper with typed instructions and signed by Eduard May was recently found in the Schmitz archives in Bonn by the Head of the Biohistoricum there, Dr. Katharina Schmidt-Loske. (Fig. 13).



**Fig. 13.** Slip of paper signed by Dr. Eduard May giving instructions for the mislaid box of phorids found among Schmitz papers in he Biohistoricum, Leibniz-Institut for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change (LIB), Bonn.

Translation:

“This box is part of the Schmitz-Wassmann-collection, which was given on loan to Ahnenerbe ... and is currently deposited at the Zoological Museum in Berlin, Berlin N.4, Invalidenstr. 41. The box stayed here by mistake. Please handle it's content with care and if the library has to be evacuated, immediately inform the Netherlands Ahnenerbe office: SS Ustuführer Dr. May, staff of the High SS Politische Führer.”

May realized that a box of Schmitz's flies had remained by accident in Valkenburg and he instructed that they be handled with care. The slip is undated but it was when May was still in The Hague, so most likely the summer of 1943. This is no doubt the small box of phorids referred to by Schmitz. The instructions —ending up with the two couriers — was without a destination for that box. But it can be surmised, given their ultimate Bavarian fate, that seeing that the collection was “on loan” to the *Ahnenerbe*, and Dr. May was a high ranking official in the *Ahnenerbe*, that the couriers decided that the material had to go to *Ahnenerbe* headquarters. It might have first gone to Hamburg, but most likely all this transpired late enough in the summer of in 1943 that it went straight to Waischenfeld. The small slip of paper ending up in Schmitz's archives was no doubt because it was kept with the box the whole time. My hunch is one of the US troops found the small box of flies in the *Ahnenerbe*'s Waischenfeld Steinhaus and, knowing Bailey was returning insects to Maastricht

(which was in the Army newsletters), informed him of their discovery. When Bailey went to Waischenfeld to pick it up, he found the slip of paper and kept it with the box and eventually both the box and slip of paper ended up with Schmitz when he was informed of the safe return of his specimens.

*Taken for Safekeeping or Not?*

The main unanswered question remains if Bischoff was truly acting on behalf of Schmitz and took the collections to Germany for “safekeeping”<sup>35</sup>. At the beginning that may have been true. Before November 1943, there was little if any bombing of Berlin. The Germans had thought they could bomb others but no one would bomb them. There were few if any long-range bombers in the allied fleet that could fly all the way from England (the closest allied airfield to Germany) to Berlin and back, and those that could would do so only at night, making accurate bombing difficult. Combined with that is the fact that Soyka did write a letter to Bischoff asking him to plead with authorities to save the collection so that Schmitz could work on it in Berlin<sup>36</sup>. Thus, Bischoff could have gone into Limburg confidently thinking that taking the collections out of Limburg and transporting them to Berlin would have been to keep them in a safer place, and also to help Schmitz.

Additional evidence in support of the “safekeeping” theory is that when Bischoff went from Berlin to Limburg, he waited for Schmitz on the road from Aachen to Valkenburg. He thus must have known exactly when Schmitz was to be there and he was also probably there because he thought all the collections were there. If the latter is true, this would make sense because Bischoff obviously knew that the Jesuit college was being transformed into the *Reichsschule* for boys and the chances of an insect collection surviving the ensuing looting and destruction of property was not great. Thus, at that particular time, taking collections from Valkenburg back to Berlin could have been (in Bischoff’s mind) to keep them safe from looting or destruction. Rau (1945) in relating the incident said of his personal knowledge of Bischoff “In spite of this episode, I for one will never be able to picture him as anything other than a mild-mannered man.”

However, it does not make sense that, once Bischoff did know during his 8 September visit to the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht that the collections were safe there, why would he have changed his mind the next day to take them? They WERE safe there. There were a few allied bombing raids in the occupied Netherlands during the war, and most took place during the 1944–1945 liberation of the Netherlands against Germans that were reluctant to surrender. Limburg was the first province to be liberated (within days of allies setting foot on Dutch soil) and allied forces were met with little resistance, so there was thus no need for any bombing. Hence, taking them from Maastricht would not have been to keep them safe as there was nothing to indicate they would have been in any danger there when Bischoff visited in 1942 and again the next spring 1943.

Bischoff changed his mind only after he went back to the Heerlen hospital the night of 8 September and learned that the collection was not the property of Schmitz, but instead the property of the Jesuit Order and had planned to sell the collection to a large museum. Why would this make a difference? Did he believe that he was still keeping the collection safe because he would then be keeping the church from selling it? When Bischoff read in the minutes of the collection transfer from Valkenburg

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35 Confounding a valiant effort by Bischoff is that the term “safekeeping” was also used by Hermann Göring (as “*Sicherstellung*”) in a military order by him to his underlings to justify the routine looting, distribution, and sale of art and cultural property of Jewish provenance by the SS. Whether or not this was Bischoff’s use of the term is only conjecture, but the similarity cannot be ignored.

36 Bischoff also mentioned that Schmitz could work on the collections in Berlin to Copray when the collections were being packed up to go to Berlin, but the fact remains that Schmitz never went to Berlin to use those collections.

to Maastricht that Berlin was one of the possible places the Jesuits might sell the collection once Schmitz was no longer its curator (and Schmitz being deported meant he could no longer be its curator), was he merely “expediting” the process of transferring it to Berlin without any transaction fee? Additional support to this possibility is that a number of museums in Germany were regularly on the receiving end of looted material (mostly art and other similar cultural property) during the war, including museums in Berlin (Sander 2018). Perhaps Bischoff thought it was just a matter of routine to allege some “former church material” as now being the property of Germany and claim them for the Zoological Museum in Berlin?

There may exist correspondence or documentation that supports one of the above possibilities. Or maybe not. I leave that mystery to someone else to research and hopefully resolve.

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*Dramatis Personae*



**Figs. 14–22.** Portraits. 14. Maj. John W. Bailey. 15. Dr. Hans Bischoff. 16. Eduard May at the Nuremberg trials. 17. Louis Peeters. 18. Friedrich Plutzar. 19. Hermann Schmitz. 20. Arthur Seyss-Inquart. 21. Wilhelmina van de Geijn. 22. Erich Wasmann.

*Bailey, John Wendell (Major) (1895–1967) (Fig. 14)*

Born on 9 January 1895 in Winona, Mississippi, Bailey taught biology at the University of Richmond, Virginia, ending up being biology department chair before the war. Upon entering the military, he was attached to the Supreme Headquarter Allied Expeditionary Forces under General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Landing at Normandy shortly after D-Day, he immediately was assigned to monitor and deal with typhus outbreaks in France and later German concentration camps. He was among the troops that liberated the Nordhausen concentration camp in northern Germany and was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star from the French government. In Maastricht, he was with the 9th US Army to help monitor and control typhus and coordinate convoys of sugar and potatoes to the Dutch populace. Upon being reassigned to the Education and Information Division of the US Army in June 1945, he conducted a survey of the fate of entomological collections in Europe and used that task to find the Wasmann Collection. His successful efforts to return it to Maastricht garnered him one of the highest awards conferred by the Dutch government, the Order of Orange-Nassau, with Swords. After the war, Bailey returned to Richmond. He passed away there in 1967.

*Bischoff, Hans (1889–1960) (Fig. 15)*

Born in Berlin on 30 November, 1889, Bischoff received his doctorate in botany at the University of Berlin in 1911 and was employed as a collections assistant in the Hymenoptera collection of the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin in 1912, becoming “kustos” (curator)<sup>37</sup> of Hymenoptera and Neuroptera in 1921, a position he held until 1955 when he retired. He specialized in Hymenoptera, particularly aculeate wasps including Chrysididae and Mutillidae. He worked primarily on insects collected in German East Africa until he was drafted into the army for World War I. After the War, he continued his research and published more than 110 papers in his career, being especially prolific in the 1930s, having published 95 papers by the start of World War II. Conspicuously, there was a distinct gap in publishing between 1943 and 1949, possibly due to specimens in the Museum having been evacuated to various places for safekeeping. The Wasmann/Schmitz collection incident did not seem to affect his career. He continued publishing, although not nearly as much as prior to World War II, was chair of the German Entomological Society more than once, and was said to be especially enjoyable on hikes and collecting excursions due to his botanical knowledge (Anonymous 1961). He died in Berlin on 18 March 1960.

*Copray, Theodorus Adrianus Antonius Maria (1912–1944)*

Born on 12 November 1912 in Berkel en Rodenrijs, southwestern Netherlands, Copray obtained a doctoral degree in Latin Studies. Although not an NSB-member (he was a practicing Roman Catholic) and much to the protests of the NSB-member aldermen, he became the appointed acting mayor of Maastricht in 1943 when former Mayor Louis Peeters resigned to join the *Waffen-SS* on the Eastern Front. Without any experience whatsoever in politics, and due to a few friends in high places, on 1 February 1942, he was given the job (Bronzwaer, 2010). He was only in office a month, when he was asked by Dr. van de Geijn to come to the Natuurhistorisch Museum and handle the Wasmann Collection request. When Hans Bischoff and SS officer Eduard May asked him in 1943 where the Wasmann collection was hidden (in the cellar of the City Hall) and the latter threatened him with being charged with sabotage and imprisonment, Copray finally confessed. He was acting mayor for only five months until Peeters returned on 1 July 1943 to the mayorship. Various high officials in Limburg were not happy with Copray and got word to Peeters to come

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<sup>37</sup> In some accounts of the confiscation of the collection, Bischoff is listed as Director of the Zoologisch Museum in Berlin. This was most likely a misinterpretation of his position title or possibly he misled when demanding the collections be given to him to take to Germany.

and rescue them from the “*comische heer Copray*” [comical Mr. Copray]. Peeters was able to postpone his duties with the *Waffen-SS* and heeded their message and put the workings of the city hall back into order upon returning in July (Bronzwaer, 2010). Copray left Maastricht to become, a few months later, mayor of the nearby town of Kerkrade on the German border. He died in the Dutch coastal village of Wassenaar<sup>38</sup> on 24 July 1944 at the age of 32, after a serious illness.

*Geijn, Wilhelmina ('Mien') van de (1910-2009)* (Fig. 21)

Dr. van de Geijn was paleontologist and curator at the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht from 1939–1947. She was one of the first women to hold a professional position in natural sciences in the Netherlands. She helped hide the ant and phorid collection from the Germans and stalled them from confiscating it in 1942 by refusing to divulge their location. In a letter to Errol White (White, 1945), she said she split the Wasmann/Schmitz collection and that the Germans taking the Maastricht material didn't notice. The other material was stored in the marl cave vault in Sint Pietersberg in a basket above the rolled up Rembrandt “*Night Watch*” (Fig. 6). In 1947, she was forced to leave her job after becoming married (married women were not allowed to work).

*May, Eduard (1905–1956)* (Fig. 16)

Born on 14 June 1905 in Mainz, Germany, Eduard May was educated in Frankfurt am Main and received his doctoral degree at the University of Frankfurt in 1929. His dissertation was on shipworms, but he worked on dragonflies in Senckenberg and also worked on pest control and plant protection. Because of a chronic ear problem he was deemed unfit for military service and thus was never drafted into the *Wehrmacht*. When Himmler was looking for someone to head up the new Entomological Research Institute of the *Waffen SS* at Dachau, May was chosen over others probably more qualified. His appointment in February 1942 by Wolfram Sievers was criticized by those who considered him an unknown in entomological circles, insignificant, and an inadequate supervisor (Deichmann 1992). Some of the research carried out at Dachau was with *Anopheles* mosquitoes and transmitting malaria, with the possibility it could be used in biological warfare, where *Anopheles* mosquitoes with malaria parasites would be dropped onto the enemy from planes (Reinhardt 2013). Although some of these *Anopheles* experiments were conducted on Dachau prisoners and led to horrible deaths (Fabisiak 2018), May was acquitted of war crimes when it was established he did not approve of using human subjects in experiments. Weeks after the war ended the war, May lost his pre-war teaching position at the University of Munich, but ended up teaching at the Frei University in Berlin from 1950 to 1956. He died in Berlin in 1956 after a long illness.

*Peeters, Louis Philippe Joseph (1905–1997)* (Fig. 17)

Peeters became mayor of Maastricht after the Germans occupied the Netherlands. He was a member of the NSB (National Socialist Party) in Holland and appointed mayor on 31 October 1941 after the previous mayor resigned because he refused to force people to become members of the NSB. Peeters knew of the hiding of the Wasmann insect collection in the cellar of the town hall and did not divulge it to Bischoff. He joined the *Waffen-SS* and fought briefly on the Eastern Front in late 1942. He returned to the mayorship in mid-1943 and went to Germany as part of the SS in 1944. After the war, he was sentenced to eight years in prison but was given early-release in 1950. He then emigrated to Ecuador, returning in the 1990s to settle in Sint-Andries near Bruges.

*Plutzar, Friedrich (1893–1973)* (Fig. 18)

Austrian-born, Plutzar was in the office of the *Reichskommissar* Seyss-Inquart when the request from Bischoff came asking for help with taking the Wasmann and Schmitz collections to Berlin.

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<sup>38</sup> Wassenaar was the site of the V-2 rocket launches against Britain, which took place in September 1944.



Plutzer had a doctorate in art history and published on the subject in the 1920s. In late 1941, he was assigned to the *Hauptabteilung Wissenschaft, Volksbildung und Kulturpflege* [Department of Science, Public Education and Cultural Care] in the Hague and quickly was promoted of SS-*Sturmabführer* by *Reichskommissar* Seyss-Inquart in November 1942 (Stifter & Streibel 2020). Plutzer signed the certificate that essentially forced the Dutch to hand over the Wasmann and Schmitz collections. During the Blitzkrieg of 1940, because of his knowledge of Dutch (he had a Dutch wife), Plutzer, at the time a captain in the 9th Panzer division, was chosen to send to the citizenry of Rotterdam the ultimatum that said if they did not surrender, the Germans would be forced to destroy the entire city.

*Schmitz, Hermann (1878–1960) (Figs. 2, 19)*

Hermann Schmitz was born on 12 August 1878 in Elberfeld, near Wuppertal, Germany. He was educated in Elberfeld and Rheinbach and entered the Jesuit Order in 1894, moving to Blijenbeek, Netherlands, for his novitiate. In 1896, he went to Exaten and met Wasmann, eventually becoming his assistant in 1906. After moving from college to college for teaching duties and further studies, he ended up in 1911 at Ignatius-Kolleg in Valkenburg with Wasmann and the two studied there together. After Wasmann died in 1931, Schmitz was appointed curator of the collection in 1934. Schmitz traveled to other Jesuit colleges every few years to teach and collect in the surrounding areas, further building up his collection. When Ignatius-Kolleg was dissolved in 1942 and the faculty and clerical students expelled to Germany, Schmitz moved to Austria for some time and is said to have collected upwards of 3,000 specimens while there. Schmitz continued to work on his phorids after the collection was returned to Maastricht after the war, but remained in Germany (teaching at the St. Aloysius College in Bad Godesburg) and died there in 1960 after sustaining a sudden heart attack after routine surgery.

*Seyss-Inquart, Arthur (1892–1946) (Fig. 20)*

Seyss-Inquart was an Austrian lawyer and Nazi politician who served as deputy governor in Poland from 1939–1940, and thereafter was *Reichskommissar* of the Netherlands when the country surrendered to Germany. He was a follower of Himmler's philosophy of Aryan purity and sponsored various of Himmler's expeditions to the Himalayas to prove Aryan racial concepts. While in his role as *Reichskommissar*, he held the title of *SS-Obergruppenführer* (general) and was ruthless in his persecution of Dutch civilians. When Germany had lost Operation Barbarossa on the Eastern Front, they were in dire need of resources. Seyss-Inquart instituted forced labor of some 530,000 Dutch workers, 250,000 of which were sent to factories in Europe. He was also a strong anti-Semite and deported more than 100,000 Jews to concentration camps, of which only 30,000 survived. Ironically he was captured by a Jewish British soldier who was born in Nuremberg but escaped to Britain. That soldier's entire family had been killed in a concentration camp in Riga, Latvia. Seyss-Inquart was tried in Nuremberg, found guilty of crimes against humanity, and hanged in 1946.

*Soyka, Walter (1900–1967)*

Soyka was an Austrian pastor in Hundsheim, Austria, entomologist, specializing in Mymaridae. After receiving a letter from Schmitz explaining the confiscation of the collections, Soyka tried in 1942 to help Schmitz by asking his friend and colleague, Hans Bischoff, to help Schmitz get his phorid collection returned to him. That request apparently resulted instead in Bischoff going to Valkenburg taking the collections back to Germany.

*Wasmann, Erich (1859–1931)* (Figs. 1, 22)

Erich Wasmann was born in the southern Tyrolian town of Merano, Italy. After education in Merano and Feldkirch, Wasmann entered the Jesuit Order in 1875 and went to the Jesuit seminary in Exaten in Limburg. He continued his studies and theology at a number of different Jesuit colleges and seminaries, finally ending up in Valkenburg in 1911 where he stayed until he died in 1931. Wasmann specialized on ants, their behavior and their nest guests, but was also well known for his evolutionary beliefs, especially the arguments with Ernst Haeckel during a series of lectures in Berlin in 1907. While at Valkenburg, Wasmann continued his ant research with the assistantship of Father Herman Schmitz. In his later years, Wasmann suffered from a heart ailment but it did not stop him from his work. Subsequently, the ailment got worse and he was confined to his bed for the last year. He died on 27 February 1931.

## **Timeline**

**1858**

**29 May** -- Erich Wasmann is born in the Italian Tyrolian town of Merano.

**1872**

**4 July** -- Germany initiates the *Jesuitengesetz* Law - Jesuit institutions are not allowed in Germany. The branches in Cologne, Essen, Bonn-Kreuzberg, Bonn-Stadt, Aachen, Koblenz, and Maria Laach were closed. Plans were made to house German Jesuits in nearby countries. A large number of Jesuits were housed in border towns to Germany in Limburg, *e.g.*, Belijenbeek, Wijnandsrade, and Exaten. With funds from the sale of the Maria Laach seminary to the Benedictines, 18 hectares of land was purchased in Limburg and the Valkenburg seminary was built there.

**1875**

Wasmann leaves Germany to enter the Jesuit Order at Exaten, Limburg, Netherlands

**1878**

**12 August** -- Hermann Schmitz is born in Elberfeld, Wuppertal, Germany

**1894**

**3 April** -- Schmitz enters the Jesuit Order in Blijenbeek, Netherlands.

**22 September** -- Ignatius-Kolleg in Valkenburg opens its doors to the first group of students.

**1896**

Schmitz goes to Exaten to further his studies in the Jesuit Order and meets Wasmann, who kindles his interest in entomology.

**1899**

Schmitz goes to Valkenburg to continue his Jesuit studies.

**1901**

Schmitz goes to Aloisiuskolleg in Sittard (Limburg) to teach natural science and mathematics.

**1911**

Schmitz goes to Valkenburg to teach and remains for the next 30 years.

**1931**

**27 February** -- Wasmann dies at Valkenburg, Netherlands

**1934**

Schmitz appointed curator of the Wasmann collection by the Jesuit Order in Valkenburg.

**1940**

Germans sweep through Holland in the Blitzkrieg and occupy principal cities and place German-leaning officials in government positions.

## 1941

**February** -- Germans confiscate the Jesuit seminary in Maastricht, arresting its priest; thus giving Valkenburg Jesuits fair warning of what treatment they could expect. Schmitz gives instructions to move the collection from Valkenburg to the Natuurhistorisch Museum in Maastricht for safe keeping.

## 1942

**January** -- Schmitz returns from Ireland to Holland to continue teaching at the theologate in Valkenburg.

**7 July** -- Germans enter the Ignatius-Kolleg while they were at their mid-day meal and give the members there (40 German, 100 Dutch), 1.5 hours to evacuate, sending the Germans to Aachen and the Dutch to a retreat house in Spaubeek. The college is closed but left unguarded for three days before construction of the *Reichsschule* begins.

**after 7 July** -- Schmitz writes to Walter Soyka about his plight. Soyka writes Bischoff to ask for help in getting Schmitz released and getting the phorids back to him. Schmitz writes Lindner asking for his help in releasing him to go back to Valkenburg and retrieve his collection and equipment for fear he could not continue his work on the Phoridae for Lindner's "*Die Fliegen der paläarktischen Region*".

**30 August** -- Schmitz is released on a 3-day pass and travels to Valkenburg, with his Socius (the second in command at Ignatius-Kolleg) Father Johannes Hirschmann, to pack up the collection to bring back with him to Germany -- and is met by Bischoff. Schmitz has an acute glaucoma attack and is in the hospital in Heerlen for 16 days.

**1 September** -- The *Reichsschule für Jungen* in Valkenburg opens.

**8 September** -- Bischoff goes to Maastricht and sees that the collections are being kept there and decides to leave collections in Maastricht. However, when he meets with Schmitz in the hospital that evening, he finds out the collections were not Schmitz's property to dispense with.

**10 September** -- Bischoff telegraphs Maastricht mayor Peeters about the collections in Maastricht based on information Schmitz innocently gave him thinking he would help get the collections back to Schmitz. Peeters and curator van de Geijn both refuse to help. Bischoff is told by General Christiansen to return to Berlin.

**16 September** -- Schmitz is released from the hospital and is sent back to Germany. Upon returning to Valkenburg to pick up his things he finds the collection has been taken.

## 1943

**9 March** -- Bischoff arrives to take all the collections. The acting mayor, Copray, again refuses to do so.

**10 March** -- Bischoff, accompanied by SS member Dr. Eduard May present the written authority and take the collection, taking it initially to Valkenburg

**10 March** -- ?? -- the collections remain in Valkenburg (possibly being assessed for value).

**24 July – 31 July** -- firebombing of Hamburg.

**29 July** -- *Ahnenerbe* headquarters moved from Berlin to Waischenfeld after fire bombing of Hamburg. Parts of the Dachau Entomological Institute of the *Ahnenerbe* are also moved to Waischenfeld after the bombing yet some experiments continued there into 1944.

**August – ??** -- the collections are moved to Aachen but two couriers take a mislaid box of the Schmitz Collection from Valkenburg to Waischenfeld in Bavaria (Schmitz 1953), where the new *Ahnenerbe* headquarters are now located. The remainder of the collections remain in Aachen.

## **1944**

**May** -- the collections finally make their way to Berlin where they are stored in the basement of the Zoological Museum and the *Reichsbank*.

**14 September** -- Maastricht liberated by allied forces. US 9th Army sets up typhus control in Limburg with Major John W. Bailey in charge.

## **1945**

**5 May** -- surrender of German troops in the Netherlands.

**June** -- Bailey is transferred to the education branch under Brigadier General Paul Thompson. USDA asks for a survey of collections throughout Europe for damage. Bailey gets permission from his superior officer and is off surveying – and looking for the Wasmann collection.

**31 August** -- Bailey is back in Maastricht to get the details again on the theft. The shipping label is a clue, but the Germans were known to have laid decoys before, so the label was not necessarily to be trusted.

**12 September** -- Bailey arrives at the Zoological Museum in Berlin and questions Bischoff about collections. He is shown the collection in the museum basement and in the nearby bank vaults.

**25 September** -- Bailey assembles a small team of officials and language interpreters and goes into the Russian sector of Berlin to examine and pack up the collections for return.

**27 September** -- collection leaves Berlin in two ten-ton military trucks.

**28 September** -- collection leaves Marienfeld for Maastricht.

**29 September** -- collection arrives in Maastricht.

**October??** -- Bailey travels to Bavaria to retrieve the remainder of the Schmitz phorid collection from Waischenfeld.

## **1960**

**1 September** -- Schmitz has successful operation for a cataract, but has a sudden heart attack from which he did not recover.

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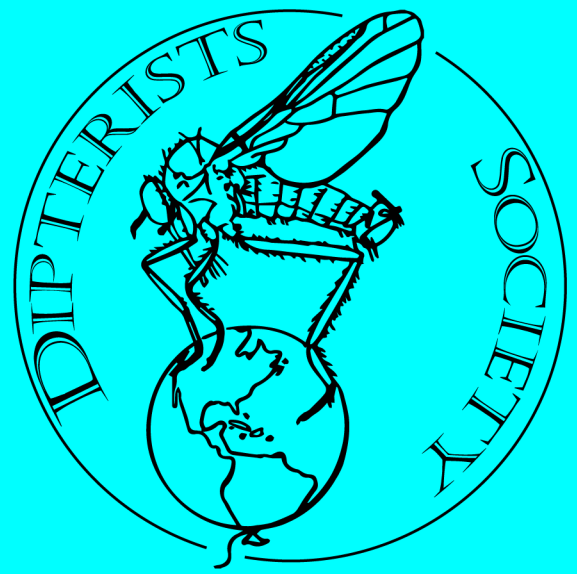
### **Other Resources**

Video: [undated] “Pure History - Exploring a former Nazi elite school - the history of the Ignatius College (Part 1)”. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uz37Mmqw8Q> (Accessed 5 February 2022).









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