



LEARNING TO READ LITERATURE AS CLOZE TEXTS AND PALIMPSESTS. THE BERLIN BRANCH OF THE GERMAN SCHILLER FOUNDATION AND ITS JEWISH SUPPORTERS, MEMBERS AND BENEFICIARIES (in German)

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To this day, the German Schiller Foundation (Deutsche Schillerstiftung) is unaware of its most famous member: Lion Feuchtwanger, who served on the board of its Berlin branch from 1928 to 1933. All Jewish members elected to its board on 1 May 1932 were forced out of the association in spring 1933. No reliable documentation exists which can shed light on this process. All we know about the many beneficiaries are their names – nothing else. Such findings influence the consequences and methodological considerations of research.

In our investigation of the Berlin branch of the German Schiller Foundation, we discovered how incomplete and arbitrary the archival documentation is. The entire archive of the Berlin branch is lost, apart from a handful of scattered, individual documents. War and destruction caused widespread losses in many archives. Furthermore, the records and historiography have occasionally been falsified. The files on Jewish beneficiaries, communists and other Nazi-persecuted individuals in the 1930s were systematically removed from the archive of the Schiller Foundation. Out of the 2,700 personnel files which originally existed, some 500 to 600 have been destroyed. There is no mention of Jewish supporters, members or board members after 1933. The commemorative address by Heinrich Lilienfein on the 75th anniversary of the foundation (11 November 1934) is symptomatic of this deliberate shift.

The presentation offers several examples which illustrate the consequences and methodical considerations of our research. To shed light on the history of the Berlin branch, we located parallel documentation in the archives of other branches and examined similar peripheral activities in the archive at the foundation's central headquarters in Weimar. Individual records were found in the estates of participating persons, organisations, institutions and collections. Networks are always reflected in the literature in a network-like pattern. The existing documents serve to confirm, corroborate or correct one another. Wherever records have been systematically destroyed or falsified, singular pieces of context-free information become especially important.