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The Identification of the Handwriting of Josef Mengele

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ABSTRACT: Letters, essays, diary pages, and so forth believed to be the writings of Josef Mengele, the notorious war criminal, were found in Brazil in 1985. The circumstances surrounding the examination of the documents, the source of the comparison handwriting, the technical reports written, the types of handwriting systems considered, and some of the specific characteristics used to identify the handwriting of Mengele are discussed.

KEYWORDS: questioned documents, Josef Mengele, handwriting

In June 1985, significant evidence was uncovered by West German and Brazilian investigators indicating that Josef Mengele, the notorious war criminal, had been living in the Sao Paulo, Brazil area, and had died in 1979.

On 10 June 1985, the author, plus Mr. Gideon Epstein, Questioned Document Examiner, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, and Dr. Antonio Cantu, Ink Research Chemist, Federal Bureau of Investigation, the forensic document examination team organized by the United States Marshal's Service and the Office of Special Investigation of the United States Department of Justice, proceeded to Sao Paulo to examine the documents found in Brazil which were claimed to be the writings of Josef Mengele, the former Schutz Staffel (SS) camp doctor at Auschwitz.

By way of background, Josef Mengele was born in 1911 in Guenzburg, West Germany, the seat of the Mengele family business. He studied for his Doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Munich and then went on to study medicine at the University of Frankfurt. After completing his medical studies in 1936, he joined the Institute for Hereditary Biology and Race Hygiene in Frankfurt.

Mengele's involvement with politics goes back to 1931 when, as a student, he joined the Stahlhelm (Steel Helmets), a rightwing political group. He quit the Stahlhelm and joined the Sturm Abteilung (SA) of the Nazi Party in January 1934. He somehow missed the bloody purge of the SA in June 1934 and quit the SA in October 1934. Mengele's Nazi Party membership dates from May 1937 after he was launched on his medical career. One year later, Mengele joined the Schutz Staffel (SS).

After the beginning of World War II, Mengele served in the Viking Division of the Waffen SS (Armed SS) in the low Countries and later on the Eastern Front in Russia where he was wounded. In May 1943, Mengele volunteered to serve as a camp doctor at Auschwitz in Poland. During the time he served at Auschwitz, it is well documented that he handled "se-

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lections”—choosing which individuals would be immediately gassed and which individuals would be allowed to live for awhile. Concurrently, he was performing experiments using live human subjects. Mengele held only the equivalent rank of Captain in the SS and had no real status in the SS hierarchy. Sometime around November or December 1944, Mengele left the Auschwitz area as a consequence of the advance of the Soviet troops and he moved west. His exact movements during the period 1945 to 1949 have not been determined to date, but it is believed that he was in the South German area. In 1949, with assistance of some individual in the Vatican, Mengele travelled to Argentina on an Italian Red Cross Passport.

During the time period 1949 to 1960, Mengele was in Buenos Aires. In 1954, he was divorced by Irene Mengele nee Schoenbein, and in 1958 he married Martha Mengele, the widow of his brother. Mengele's departure from Argentina was precipitated by the abduction of Adolf Eichman, the infamous war criminal. Mengele's stay in Paraguay was curtailed by German and Israeli pressure to have him extradited to Germany. In the 1960s, Mengele moved to Brazil and bought a farm with Gita and Geza Stammer. Mengele initially used the identity papers of a "Peter Hochbichlet," a Swiss immigrant, and then later used the real identity papers of Wolfgang Gerhard, an Austrian citizen and Nazi enthusiast. In 1974, Mengele moved to the Sao Paulo area and lived with Liselotte and Wolfram Bossert. In 1979, while on vacation at the beach with the Bosserts, Mengele suffered a stroke and drowned.

Mengele's life since World War II had not been a joyous one. He was surreptitiously supplied with limited funds by his relatives in Guenzburg, West Germany, but he was kept at arm's length by his wealthy family. Unable to practice medicine and fearful of the vengeance of Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence Service, Mengele had little to occupy his time. His marriage to Martha did not last and he ended up propositioning his illiterate Brazilian housemaid. Denied his birthright, that of a scion of a rich German family, he spent part of his days writing essays, letters, and so forth.

The Bossert family, when confronted by Brazilian and German investigators in 1985, admitted that Mengele has lived with them during the time period 1974 to 1979 and that they had found 14 documents among his effects after his death. The 14 original documents claimed by the Bosserts to have been written by Mengele are described as follows.

Q1—Five-page document on lined paper, no date, entitled "Verbuen Conposituen."

Q2—Strip of lined paper, no date with text beginning "man hat in psychologische philosophischer . . ."

Q3—Torn piece of white, unlined paper, no date, with text beginning "Seltsamer Wander ich gruesse Dich . . ."

Q4—Three-page letter dated 2/25/69 beginning "mein Lieber! Nach langer . . ." and signed "Kein Engel."

Q5—Thirteen pages of notes on various dates beginning 1/1/76 and ending 1/22/76.

Q6—Three pages of notes on pink unlined paper, no date, with text beginning "In der Bibel lesen Wir diese Geschichte."

Q7—One page of notes dated 1/4/76 with pencil heading "Notizen ueber Langes Besuch."

Q8—Sheet of white unlined paper, no date, with typewritten text on one side entitled "Gartenblumenstraus" with handwriting on reverse.

Q9—Slip of paper with name and telephone number "Sr, Antonio Periera 278.4694."

Q10—Five pages of pink unlined paper, no date, with text beginning "Nach seiner Physischen Organization is der Mensch ein Saugetier . . ."

Q11—Sheet of pink unlined paper, no date, with text beginning "Dieser Vorgang ueber Natur geschehen . . ." (Lamark-Darwin notes).

Q12—Sheet of pink unlined paper, no date, continuation of Lamark-Darwin notes.

Q13—Original two-page folio letter, no date, with text beginning "Muy amigo mio! Mit dieser . . ."

Q14—Ten-page document on lined paper, no date, entitled "Fiat Lux" with text beginning "Nach dem Krieg war ich . . ." [1].

Figure 1 illustrates one page of the writings found in the possession of the Bossert family in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

On 12 June 1985, examination of the questioned writings was commenced in Sao Paulo, Brazil. For comparison with the 14 documents, we were given the original SS File of Josef Mengele obtained from the Berlin Document Center, administered by the United States Government, which contained biographical statements dated 7/1/1938 and 1/1/1939 plus associated official documents from the same time period. Mengele was 28 years old at the time and had reached writing maturity. It was not anticipated that his handwriting would change over the years unless illness, drugs, or other such situations affected his writing.

Figure 2 illustrates a portion of a biographical statement written by Josef Mengele in 1939.

Exemplars were also taken from an ABC Portable Typewriter, Serial Number 2-24160 (K2) and from a Smith-Corona Zephyr Portable Typewriter, Serial Number 6YZ4210J9 (K3) which had been located in the Bossert home.

Einige Funde an einer Gruppe (Zähne
Unterkiefer- und Schädelfragmente)
von ungewöhnlicher Größe sind. Sie
gab Vera Anlass zu einer Theorie der
"Riesen abstammung" der Menschen,
die ebenso unbestätigt, wie aus logi-
schen (blau) Körper- Riesenformen —
kleine Menschenform) und statistischen
Gründen. Untrüglich deutlich ist. Diese
Riesenformen ~~stehen~~ hochspezialisierte
Leben führen, die nicht ausgestorben
sind, der wird beweisen der Formen-
vielfalt (Variabilität) jener Ent-
wicklungsphase.

Stoa um die Mitte der Eiszeit³
lebten in den verschiedenen Teilen
der Erde schon Urmenschen, die sich
vollständig zu den gottbesessenen

FIG. 1—One page of the writings found in the possession of the Bossert family in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Sommer 1936 in eine äytl. Staatsprüfung.
 Im 1937 erhielt ich die Fortbildung als Opt. Im
 1938 promovierte ich an der Med. Fakultät der
 : Frankf. u. H. zum Dr. Med. Nach meinem
 er ich als Medizinalapparatist zuerst an
 der Medizinischen Universität, Klinik in Leipzig,
 ab am Universitätsinstitut für Pathologie u.
 : in Frankfurt a. M. tätig. Seit 1.9.1937
 bin ich als Leiter des pathologischen Instituts
 bis H. I. 34 gehörte ich dem „Stahlkoll.“,
 Oktober 1934 der S. A. an, aus der ich wegen
 : Leidenes ausschied. Im Mai 1937 beauftragte
 : Aufnahme in die V. S. S. A. P., im Mai
 : Aufnahme in die 44. Im Zeit dieses
 : im Feldjägerregiment 137/18. Komp. in
 :/Börol.

Josef Mengele.

FIG. 2—A portion of a biographical statement written by Josef Mengele in 1939.

By prior agreement, the author and Mr. Epstein made independent examinations and compared notes only after examinations had been completed. This consideration was deemed essential to a successful outcome of the investigation.

The 14 Bossert documents were first examined using transmitted light, grazing light, ultraviolet lamps, and a stereo microscope to determine if the questioned documents were fabricated. The writing all appeared rapid without hesitation marks, extra movement impulses, patch marks, or other classical signs of forgery. A wide variety of writing situations were presented with variations in writing speed.

After it was concluded that the 14 documents embodied normal handwriting, it was possible to compare the writing on the questioned documents with the known writings of Josef Mengele. The following conclusions were reached regarding the handwriting:

The questioned handwriting on Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6 with the exception of the Greek word on the last page, Q7 with the exception of the pencil notation "Notizen ueber Langes Besuch", Q8, and Q10 was written by Dr. Josef Mengele.

The questioned writing on Q3 and Q9 was not written by Dr. Josef Mengele.

No conclusion has been reached regarding the authorship of the pencil notation "Notizen ueber Langes Besuch" on Q7 and the Greek word on the last page of Q6 [1].

In regards to the typewriting on Q8, it was concluded that:

The typewritten portion of Q8 was not prepared on K2 or K3. The typing on Q8 is consistent with Olympia (West German) typewriters manufactured after World War II [1].

Mengele's writing was a combination of two different Germanic styles of writing, "Kurrent" or "Gothic" and "Lateinisch." Lateinisch has letter forms that are similar in many respects to the letter forms used in Western Europe and the United States, while Kurrent or Gothic is the Old German style which is essentially incomprehensible to the Western European or American. Mengele's writing is primarily Lateinisch with remnants of the older Gothic. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the class characteristics of the Gothic and Lateinisch scripts [2].

The writings on the twelve Mengele documents showed considerable variation in writing speed. The writings varied from the careful to the sloppy as would be expected in a range of writings done under varying circumstances over a considerable period of time. As previously stated, the writings were the normal writing of an individual, hence comparison with the known writings of Mengele was appropriate.

The specific identification of Mengele as the writer of the twelve documents was based upon the existence of a series of handwriting individualities which are present in both the questioned and known documents, and an absence of any significant differences. The charts illustrate some, but by no means all, of the individualities common to both the questioned and known writings. Although there is a significant time difference between the date of the known writings and some of the questioned writings, no significant changes in writing individualities were noted. Basis exists to make a definite identification in spite of the time differential.

Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate some of the agreements in individuality found in the questioned writings and the known Mengele writings from the SS file.

In Fig. 5, note the extra dash near the top of the staff of the capital "D," a habit noted in other letters such as the "B" and the "d"; the unusual form of the capital "Z"; the narrow form of the capital "E," "G," and "S"; and the unbalanced proportions of the capital "B."

In Fig. 6, note the extreme writing angle of the initial "N" and "V," the arcaded move-

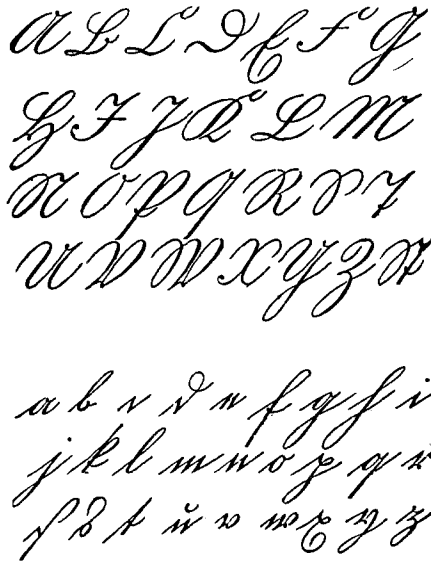


FIG. 3—Class characteristics of the Gothic script.

Wir schreiben
 die Endschrift mit der
 Kugelspitzfeder
 Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff
 Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll
 Mm Nn Oo Pp Qqu
 Rrr Ss Tt Uu Vv
 Ww Xxe Yy Zz
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
 Satzzeichen „ ” ? ! , , - : -
 Ohne Fleiss keinen Preis

FIG. 4—Class characteristics of the Lateinisch script.

ment initiating one form of the “M,” the arcaded movement in the intermediate “r” and “o,” and the unusual form of the initial “w.”

In Fig. 7, note the form of the umlauts (double dots modifying the pronunciation of certain vowels), the ending stroke on one form of the terminal “g,” the reverse curve in the initial “i,” the low right side of the initial “a,” the extra terminal “t” cross, and the extra downward impulse in the eyelet of the initial “e.”

On 2 Aug. 1985, testimony was given by the questioned document team relating to the identification of the Mengele writings at a “Hearing To Consider Issues Relating To The Investigation of Josef Mengele” before the Committee On the Judiciary, United States Senate, at the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, DC. Dr. Lowell Levine, the forensic odontologist, Dr. Ali Hameli, the forensic pathologist, and Dr. Ellis Kerley, the forensic anthropologist, testified as to their identification of the body found in Brazil as that of Josef Mengele.

Testimony was also given by Mr. Howard Safir, Associate Director of Operations of the U.S. Marshal’s Service, and Mr. Neal Sher, Director of the Office of Special Investigations, U.S. Department of Justice, and Dr. Leslie Lukash, representing the Simon Wiesenthal Center, that their respective organizations regard Mengele as dead and are no longer searching for him.

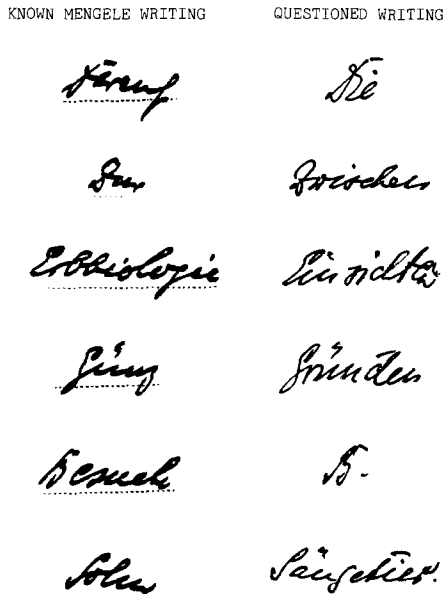


FIG. 5—Some of the agreements in individuality found in the questioned writings and the known Mengele writings from the SS file.

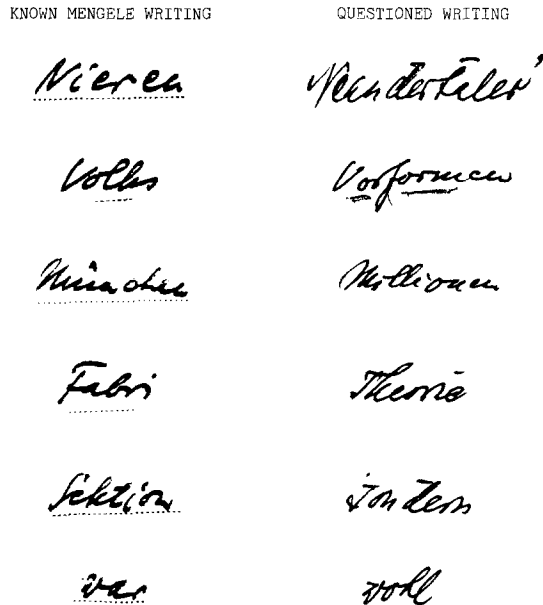


FIG. 6—Some of the agreements in individuality found in the questioned writings and the known Mengele writings from the SS file.

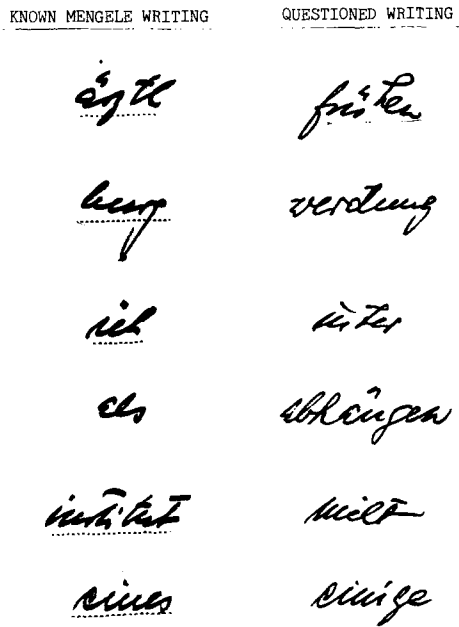


FIG. 7—Some of the agreements in individuality found in the questioned writings and the known Mengele writings from the SS file.

References

- [1] Crown, D. A., "Laboratory Report," addressed to U.S. Marshal's Service, 19 June 1985.
- [2] Somerford, *Foreign Handwriting Systems—A Manual for Examination of Questioned Documents*, Post Office Department, Bureau of the Chief Postal Inspector, 1953.

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