



RAOUL WALLENBERG
IN BUDAPEST

Myth, History and Holocaust

PAUL A. LEVINE

Author's Introduction for Sample Chapters for the IRWF Website

I am honoured that the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation has made available to its supporters around the world a selection from my book, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest; Myth, History & Holocaust*, (Valentine Mitchell, London & Portland, OR, 2010).

For decades, much has been written and said about Wallenberg. However, until my study, no other publication has studied both the man and the mission—that is, the man who went to Budapest, and the essential context of on-going Swedish diplomacy during the Holocaust. The documents I analyze consist of hundreds of diplomatic documents from Sweden's Foreign Ministry, as well as Wallenberg's own personal correspondence and diplomatic reports. They tell his story best.

The book offers a deeper understanding of Wallenberg's motives, and that which he and his colleagues actually did in Budapest. Wallenberg did not drop out of the sky as a "rescuing angel", but rather undertook a profoundly humanitarian task within a specific and terribly complicated geo-political context during the last months of the Holocaust.

This study also contextualizes Wallenberg and his humanitarian activities within Hungarian Holocaust history, and Holocaust history at large.

My study does not seek to "de-bunk" Wallenberg as a hero of humanity. Indeed, by any credible understanding of the word, he was a hero of the Holocaust. Rather, it seeks to give the reader a more complete understanding of what Wallenberg did, and why and how he did it. This book seeks to give the reader a more detailed understanding of Wallenberg, one which—importantly— argues that such an analysis serves to strengthen his moral and humanistic symbolism.

Dr. Paul A. Levine
Uppsala University
January 2011

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This is the first major evaluation of Raoul Wallenberg, one of the most enigmatic and admired figures of World War II. Paul Levine's investigation of the man behind the myth is well-documented, balanced and extremely well written. His book demonstrates that demystifying legends about those who saved souls during the Holocaust only highlights their true heroism by placing it within its historical and human context. A wonderful achievement that should be read by all students of the period.

Omer Bartov,
John P. Birkelund
Distinguished Professor of European History, Brown
University

This book is a detailed study of a much written about and much misunderstood man: it has the great merit of asking penetrating questions, and producing unexpected and in many ways disturbing answers.

Sir Martin Gilbert,
Historian
Author of *The Righteous: Christian Heroes of the Holocaust*

Produced by Valentine Mitchell for the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation.

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PAUL A. LEVINE



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Abbreviations

AusAmt	Auswärtiges Amt (Nazi Germany's Foreign Office)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
JDC	Joint Distribution Committee
KEOKH	Hungary's National Central Authority for Control of Foreigners
NA	National Archives (Washington, DC)
Nyilas	Arrow Cross (Hungarian Nazi Party and Government)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SRK	Svenska röda korset (Swedish Red Cross)
UD	Utrikesdepartementet (Sweden's Foreign Ministry)
WRB	War Refugee Board

Introduction: Framing the Issues

Raoul Wallenberg has no need for us to exaggerate his achievements or give him credit for that done by others.

Jenö Lévai, Hungarian journalist, 1948¹

There is nothing to be taken from the Holocaust that imbues anyone with hope or any thought of redemption, but the need for heroes is so strong that we'll manufacture them.

Raul Hilberg, Holocaust scholar²

RAOUL WALLENBERG IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Raoul Wallenberg's story is one of the most widely known of the Holocaust, and one of the few positive memories from those profoundly barbarous years. Worldwide, his name is recognized in a fashion rivalling Spielberg's filmic hero Oskar Schindler, and the Swede's fame seems only to increase.³ There are dozens of publications and almost a score of documentaries and feature films telling his story. Around the world his name is honoured with honorary citizenships and postal stamps, statuary and city squares, professorships, academic seminars, university institutions and courses, and public schools. Even amateur plays, poems, youth leadership academies and museum exhibitions have been dedicated to the deeds and memory of Raoul Wallenberg.⁴ For those Hungarian Jewish survivors assisted or actually saved by him, Wallenberg will always be virtually an angel of salvation sent from heaven. Indeed, his activities and accomplishments are invariably said to represent a redeeming moment of humanity woven into the tapestry of despair which is the Holocaust, and some scholars have argued that Wallenberg was a genuinely 'altruistic personality'. Today, some sixty-five years after his detention by Soviet troops, Raoul Wallenberg continues to be a powerful symbol of ultimate good during an epoch of radical evil. What explains such unprecedented interest in the story of someone who is, after all, a relatively minor figure from Holocaust history?

For literally millions around the globe, Wallenberg is a man of and

from history. Many, and not only survivors, consider him a virtual saint who, they have read or been told, ‘saved’ Hungarian Jewry from the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, even though historians know this is empirical nonsense. Interest in Wallenberg’s deeds and fate began soon after the war, and was concurrent with his first years of Soviet detention. The early post-war publications of Hungarian journalist and historian Jenő Lévai are still valuable, although they have to be used carefully. For many years, however, it seemed that the only people concerned with Wallenberg’s disappearance and unknown fate were his immediate family, who all suffered for decades as they struggled in vain for answers. The Swedish government seemed either to have forgotten about him or to have lost interest, but in 1966 he was recognized as a ‘Righteous Gentile’ by Israel’s Yad Vashem Institute.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, interest in Wallenberg quickly increased.⁵ With publications in the first half of the 1980s by journalists such as the BBC’s J. Bierman, America’s T. Clarke and F. Werbell, E. Lester, K. Marton, and H. Rosenfeld, these mainly hagiographic and often empirically dodgy descriptions of Wallenberg’s role in the Holocaust in Budapest played a central role in shaping the public’s image of him, and of putting firmly into place some of the key myths about him. Aided by works of pure fiction, poorly-sourced documentaries, TV and feature films, a narrative of almost mythic heroism emerged. Today Wallenberg has achieved the status of an iconic hero, a courageous, swashbuckling ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’, racing about the streets of Budapest challenging German and Hungarian Nazis to stop their relentless murder and mayhem. The fact that much of this adulation is based on fundamental misunderstandings of the historical realities prevailing in Budapest during the second half of 1944 does little to diminish the aura of admiration and hero worship which envelops the memory of Wallenberg. Long before the term ‘memory’ became part of the discourse of Holocaust studies, an identifiable, international narrative about him emerged, one which continues to develop. The fact that this narrative sometimes borders on historical nonsense only makes the phenomena of Wallenberg more interesting and, in some ways, even more important as an element of Holocaust history and memory. As will be argued, distortions and myths which surround him detract from, rather than enhance, his true symbolic value and power. It will be argued, instead, that Wallenberg becomes even more important to us as a powerful and necessary moral symbol, the better we understand who he was, how he did what he did, and within what political and genocidal context he acted.

A scion of one of his country’s most prominent families, the young businessman who became an ad hoc diplomat is the best-known link

between 'neutral' Sweden and Hitler's genocide. Respected journalists, academics, politicians, rabbis and teachers have credited Wallenberg, undoubtedly one of the most famous Swedes of the twentieth century, with 'defeating Eichmann', 'stopping the Holocaust' and 'defying Hitler', with his personal bravery seemingly solely responsible for saving '100,000 Jews'. Called by one prominent Swedish intellectual a 'fighter for human rights [who] was one of the 20th century's true heroes', Wallenberg is often compared with such figures as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela.⁶ He is one of only four foreigners named as an honorary citizen by the Congress of the United States, an honour granted also by Canada and Israel. In this context it is worth noting that such a high honour can be granted only after a complicated and often controversial political decision-making process. Yet such is the power of Wallenberg's symbolism that conventional politics in those countries was trumped.

It is no coincidence that deceased scientist Andrei Sakharov, one of the great champions of the twentieth century's struggle for human rights, said: '[He] is one of those people who make not just all of Sweden but all of humanity proud.' A Soviet dissident who suffered deeply from political oppression, Sakharov stated that 'The fate of Wallenberg torments me, as well as thousands of other people around the world.'⁷ Those who reflect on Wallenberg's heroism are particularly pained, as was Sakharov, by knowing that after contributing to the salvation of thousands of innocent people, in early 1945 Wallenberg disappeared into the Soviet Gulag, when only 32 years old. Tragically, he was to never know the life and freedom he enabled others to enjoy, nor would he ever see his beloved mother or family again.

Fascinatingly, his mythical status flourishes because Wallenberg has become, in the modern sense of the concept, a celebrity. One sees this not least in the frequency with which he is mentioned in a wide array of media. Because his 'name recognition factor' is so high, one finds, for instance, commemorative speeches by respected community leaders, or newspaper articles, which contain his name in what seems more an attempt to spice up the presentation than to explain his actual significance. Through the decades, newspapers and journalists have consistently given valuable space and time to stories about him with what seems like illogical frequency. To take but one example, what explains the decision by the hard-bitten editors at *The New York Times*, the world's most influential newspaper, to give scarce editorial space to obscure and unverifiable rumours about Wallenberg's alleged fate, passed to them, in this case, by an elderly Ukrainian infantry veteran who suddenly remembered something about Wallenberg's six months in Budapest.⁸ Tourists in Sweden are advised to visit monuments and

places dedicated to him, and even prime ministers have written about Wallenberg.⁹ It is not a coincidence that Gordon Brown wrote a paean to Wallenberg's courage in his book, published simultaneously with his ascension to the political summit. Nor is it a coincidence that although a trained historian, the British prime minister repeated many of the usual myths and mistakes which have come to dominate Wallenberg's story.¹⁰ The critical observer rightly fears that Wallenberg's name is sometimes, perhaps even too frequently, invoked less to explain his important story than it is in order for an author, politician or clergyman to bask in some reflected glory through proximity to a name considered literally to be magical.

Importantly, his story and legacy are unburdened by the troubling moral ambiguity surrounding the actions and personality of Schindler, the Nazi Party member whose womanizing was legendary, and who chose to help 'his' Jews only after brutally exploiting their slave labour for years. Indeed, it was only this immoral act that enabled Schindler to compile sufficiently large amounts of cash with which to subsequently bribe other German officials for the safety of his charges. Wallenberg's story is not only more morally uplifting than Schindler's, it is in many ways even more dramatic. More actual 'lists' were drawn up by Wallenberg and other Swedish diplomats than by Schindler, under far more dangerous circumstances than those to which Schindler was ever exposed. Though the exact number of Jews saved in Budapest by the Swedes remains uncertain, there is no question that many thousands more lives were assisted or saved by Wallenberg and his Swedish colleagues (as well, of course, as by other neutral diplomats in Budapest) than by Schindler. As noted, Wallenberg was one of the first individuals named as a 'Righteous of the Nations', or 'Righteous Gentile', by Israel's official state commission. Subsequently, other rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust have been named by their own admirers as, for instance, 'the Portuguese', 'Japanese', or 'British' Wallenberg.

There is no question that Wallenberg occupies a special, perhaps even unique, place in the memory of the Holocaust – if not its actual history. It is, therefore, important to ask why, for instance, far-flung civic leaders and private philanthropists have commissioned, approved and paid for statues of and about him in numerous cities around the world. Why has his image taken on some characteristics of an almost totemic iconography?¹¹ Why, it should be asked, rather than simply and mutely acknowledged, have diverse academic institutions in different nations named programmes, institutions and buildings after him, and why do streets, parks, schools and hospitals around the world bear his name, rather than that of more significant individuals from

Holocaust history, or of some other ‘local celebrity’ from the city or nation in question? Such namings do not happen either easily or without contention but, again, Wallenberg’s symbolism seems to make sure that ‘normal’ political and commemorative conflicts disappear.¹² Even though his local connection may seem at times rather obscure, teachers instruct their pupils to write plays and poems about him, and even local community ‘sewing circles’ have gathered in his name and memory.¹³ It should be emphasized that such ‘celebrity’ is even more striking when we realize that many of these people and institutions who have chosen to use Wallenberg’s name for important civic functions have, at best, only the vaguest understanding of who he really was or what he really did. Few, if any, have a serious understanding of the complicated but essential political context in which he and the other neutral diplomats in Budapest functioned, in a city swept by genocidal forces. One recently founded group, whose goal is to educate about the Holocaust, is typical of this genre of commemoration. It states that its mission is to ‘preserve the example of Raoul Wallenberg with the aim of promoting peace among nations and peoples, as well as developing educational projects based on concepts of solidarity, dialogue, and understanding’.¹⁴ These are, of course, noble goals, but it seems important to answer the question of why the memory of this particular individual is made to shoulder such a utopian task, not least when so many other admirable individuals also saved lives during the Holocaust. Why Wallenberg, and why has this phenomena of history and memory developed as it has?

It is pertinent to point out that even in his own country, where the Wallenberg business and banking empire has in many ways dominated Sweden’s economy since the late nineteenth century, the details and essential contexts of his story and its significance are scarcely understood. For decades, Sweden’s government and people maintained what can only be described as a tepid interest in his story and fate, discomfited by the legacy of their dubious ‘neutrality’ during the Second World War, and largely preoccupied with building post-war Europe’s most successful welfare state. Though his still unexplained disappearance into Stalin’s Gulag was nominally on the nation’s diplomatic agenda for almost six decades, recent studies confirm that leading politicians, government officials and even some family members seem to have cared little about his disappearance.¹⁵ Scandalously, they simply failed in their political and moral duty to obtain his early release from Soviet captivity. For there is no question that he was alive during the critical first post-war years.¹⁶

TO WHOM DOES THIS HISTORY BELONG?

In view of Wallenberg's evolution into such an exceptional, and exceptionally public, symbolic figure, it is necessary to ask: to whom does he really belong? What, or perhaps where, is his rightful place in Holocaust history and memory? The latter is itself a particularly interesting phenomenon because of the special place occupied by the genocide of the Jews in Western civilization today. Because he has evolved into such a powerful and oft-utilized symbol, it is important to ask if this very real man who did so much good has been removed from history and placed within myth. It is helpful to consider, as his dramatic story is described and analysed here, whether Wallenberg 'belongs' to 'the public', and the 'ages', and should remain uncritically appraised, because the pantheon of Holocaust heroes is so sparsely populated? Or does his narrative more properly belong to historical scholarship, his actual place in Holocaust history soberly weighed and evaluated using the methodologies available to the professional historian and university teacher? Such questions derive, in the main, from the fascinating tension that exists (which it does equally for most academic disciplines) between 'town' and 'gown'. This tension is, however, of particular importance in Holocaust studies. As two leading British historians recently observed, 'all history is viewed through prisms imposed after the fact. But this is of particular significance in the study of the Holocaust because of the extreme and emotive nature of the events in question, and where reason is sometimes challenged as a mode of analysis and where popular "ownership" discourages interpretative leadership by the scholarly profession.'¹⁷

Important political, pedagogic, commemorative implications are evident when studying Wallenberg, and when perusing these questions of 'ownership' and the nexus of tension between scholarship and the public's understanding and use of history. Personal and professional experience has shown that calling into question the many myths which have enveloped Wallenberg's story makes many people uncomfortable, particularly survivors – but equally so, it often seems, his countless admirers, such is his symbolic importance. Nonetheless, it is necessary to ask, as this study does, if our essential understanding of this unquestionably important and morally vital figure is helped by the swirl of inaccurate commemoration and other artistic, sometimes fantastical, representations which dominate the various narratives constructed about him? Or is it hampered, distorting in a morally problematic way his true symbolic value? Is his pedagogic value actually diminished rather than enhanced by the myth-making around him? Turning the question around, as this study does, is his pedagogic and symbolic

value actually enhanced when his story and significance are placed into a methodologically sound, carefully analysed context? This issue is of particular importance when considering the role of education in maintaining and defending our liberal democratic values – values which were shaken to their core by the genocide of the Jews. I have long felt it justifiable to ask, even if it discomfits some, if the virtual ‘cult of personality’ which surrounds this long-disappeared man is salutary, or problematic? Is our democratic society better served, I have often wondered, by making Wallenberg a ‘Holocaust celebrity’ instead of contemplating the actual deeds of a man who, though he grew up in highly privileged circumstances and had a sterling personality, was still fundamentally an ‘ordinary man’ thrust into an extraordinary situation? In virtually every public manifestation about Wallenberg, one encounters a figure more likened to ‘Saint Raoul’ than the real man one who, to take but one example of his actual humanity, was at least partially motivated to leave Sweden for Budapest because the spring of 1944 found him rather bored, and anxious about his professional future? In summary we may ask if Wallenberg’s undeniably vital symbolism is more valuable to our democratic society if we view him critically and realistically, or are the social benefits of his story more evident if we allow him to remain within the existing framework of myth and misunderstandings?

WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT – MYTH OR HISTORY?

The framing of these and other related questions can commence with my assertion that what is most widely believed by the general public about Raoul Wallenberg’s activities in Budapest, and their essential geopolitical context during the Holocaust, is based more on historical fantasy than demonstrated empirical fact and sustained analysis. This argument, which will be demonstrated empirically throughout this study, will be supported by a short discussion of my use of sources and methods.

Those representations, including the most widely read popular and/or journalistic publications (all of which have a hagiographic nature), which have largely shaped the public’s understanding of Wallenberg, make many mistakes. Perhaps most problematically, they create what is essentially a one-dimensional, almost cartoon-like character who is parachuted into a simplistic, easily remedied situation: that is, holocaustal Budapest in the second half of 1944, in the European war’s last full year. They remove Wallenberg’s genuine diplomatic and humanitarian accomplishments from their actual highly complex and fluid geopolitical circumstances; they fail to understand the background

to his mission, and distort and simplify his motives and methods. In sum, the Wallenberg as understood by the majority of admirers is more akin to a Hollywood caricature than to a real man, a businessman and ad hoc diplomat, who chose to help others in Nazi-dominated, mid-1940s Central Europe. Interestingly, and this will be discussed more fully below, those who have created this distorted narrative almost universally have done so with only the best of pedagogic and public intentions. They seek to increase public understanding of Holocaust history and its universe of implications but, this study argues, they have tended to accomplish the opposite.

I argue this because during twenty years of studying the Holocaust, and Wallenberg's role in it, I have encountered, on scores of occasions and in talking with hundreds of individuals interested in Wallenberg, a strikingly similar and rather specific narrative which illuminates many of the myths surrounding Wallenberg.¹⁸ This narrative, based on what those encountered believe are historical facts, is at best highly simplistic, and at worse shows an almost total lack of understanding of the 'hows' and 'whys' which determined the realities of the diplomacy conducted on behalf of Jews in Budapest during the second half of 1944. Crucially, this narrative fails to take into account the decisive political, ideological and physical realities which prevailed in the city before and during Wallenberg's months there. Also important is the fact that, as will be shown, even the majority of professional scholars (of various disciplines) who have commented on Wallenberg and/or Swedish diplomacy in Budapest have made some elemental mistakes in relating important parts of his story.¹⁹ Indeed, one expert historian of the Hungarian Holocaust succumbed to hyperbole about Wallenberg, calling him 'a legend for his activities [in Budapest]'.²⁰

There are two basic reasons for these problems. The first is that the 'standard' narrative about Wallenberg has relied far too heavily on oral testimonies of Jewish and other survivors of Budapest. The issue of why these oral testimonies are not as useful as is generally thought will be discussed below. The second reason is that almost all who have written about or represented Wallenberg in their stories have largely, if not wholly, failed to use the contemporary Swedish sources which give, without question, the best picture and understanding of Wallenberg. These are Swedish diplomatic (and other) sources written by Wallenberg himself, his UD (Utrikesdepartementet, the Swedish Foreign Ministry) colleagues – both before and while he was involved – and others in Sweden who knew something of who he was and what he was doing in Budapest. Without these sources, most particularly the Swedish government sources, it is impossible to either narrate or understand Wallenberg's story with any real credibility.

The two existing publications by professional historians who read Swedish also fail to explain Wallenberg and his actions fully. *The Stones Cry Out: Sweden's Response to the Persecution of the Jews, 1933–1945* was published over twenty years ago by historian Steven Koblik. This pioneering work of historiography analysed several aspects of Sweden's response to the Holocaust and, while surveying Swedish diplomacy in Budapest, used some of the same documentation as this volume. However, its treatment of Wallenberg is brief and of necessity incomplete.²¹ The second publication is Hungarian-Swedish historian Attila Lajos's doctoral dissertation of 2003, *Hjälten och Offren: Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest*.²² Lajos also uses UD documentation and, most usefully, makes use of some relevant Hungarian documents. This study fails, however, to understand events in Budapest within the all-important context of the Holocaust at large or as a product of the dynamics of Nazi and Hungarian policy in the second half of 1944 – neither of which related exclusively to events in Budapest. Most problematically, this methodologically flawed study pursues a thesis about the nature of Wallenberg's character and activities based more on the author's own ideological agenda, and distorts how others perceived Wallenberg after the events in question, rather than during them.

As noted, most representations of Wallenberg to date have relied heavily on the type of source which all historians of the Holocaust and other genocides know is important but often highly problematic. Oral testimony, it may be briefly asserted, can only complement the use of contemporary documentation – it can never replace it. Though some oral testimony will be used in this study, it is limited to a few individuals who were in a position to see and understand some if not all of what Wallenberg was doing. Survivors of the Holocaust – whether saved by Wallenberg or not – deserve, at the very minimum, whatever measure of emotional comfort is provided by reflection upon Wallenberg. Indeed, the hundreds of available oral testimonies about Wallenberg merit their own study, but that endeavour lies largely outside the scope of this single-volume analysis of Holocaust diplomatic history.

All Holocaust scholars are aware of the evidentiary tensions between oral testimony and survivor memoirs, and contemporary sources. Reflecting on this tension, Israeli historian Yosef H. Yerushalmi observed: 'Memory and modern historiography stand, by their very nature, in radically different relations to the past ... The historian does not simply come in to replenish the gaps of memory. He constantly challenges even those memories that have survived intact.'²³ Concerning Wallenberg, there has also been the wholly

understandable, if still mistaken, tendency by journalists and chroniclers to give survivor testimony extra moral weight. Reflecting on similar instances, Lawrence Langer, a leading Holocaust scholar of the meanings and uses of oral testimony, recently observed: ‘Instead of moralizing the event, we need to accept the sufficiency of reclaiming it by recognizing the intrinsic value of documenting the historical record and cherishing the intellectual worth of exploring the sources that establish it.’ He adds: ‘There is enduring educational merit to separating myth from truth.’²⁴

This study is founded upon a close, textual analysis of a variety of contemporary documents such as letters, memoranda, diplomatic cables, reports and others. Separating itself from existing publications on Wallenberg, the empirical core of this study will consist of many documents never used before – documents which illuminate Wallenberg’s situation and activities within the multilateral diplomatic interests and goals which framed his mission. A treasure trove of documents from Sweden’s National Archive forms the empirical foundation of this study, along with other documents from relevant German, American and Hungarian sources. Another gold mine of information exists in the dozens of letters written by Wallenberg, as he matured, to his grandfather, in the 1920s and 1930s. These are supplemented by some of his correspondence from the 1940s, as well as his highly detailed diplomatic reports from Budapest. Many of these documents are cited at length. This documentation is contextualized by some of the vast scholarly literature about the Hungarian Holocaust. Yet apparently there were, according to one eye-witness, some important collections of documents destroyed in Budapest itself.²⁵ Additionally, scores of documents stored at Sweden’s Budapest Legation were destroyed during the *Nyilas* (Arrow Cross)²⁶ raid of late December 1944.²⁷ This makes it impossible to claim that each and every document relevant to Wallenberg’s story has been available for analysis.

ARE NUMBERS IMPORTANT FOR HEROES?

To take but one well-known example of ‘information’ about Wallenberg which is in fact a myth, we can note how the figure of ‘100,000 Jews saved’ has become central to the public Wallenberg narrative. This figure has achieved almost totemic status in the mind of the interested public, and is drawn, most broadly, by combining the approximate numbers of Jews who found shelter of sorts in the city’s two main concentrations of Jews. The first was the so-called ‘international ghetto’ located near the Danube. The second was the short-lived

‘central ghetto’, established by the Hungarian government in the heart of Pest, anchored by the famous Dohany Synagogue. This wildly inflated number can be understood as emblematic of how the failure to understand much of what happened in Budapest has been utilized, almost promiscuously, in the hagiographic literature and public commemorative presentations about Wallenberg. We see in this case a situation in which commentators and commemorators (all of whom, again, have only good intentions) seem determined to impart not a deeper understanding of his deeds and their significance, or to take the time to actually explain why he is important, but rather to impart, even to impose, an almost maudlin, emotive sentimentality and historical inaccuracy. All writers of history, including journalists in a hurry, have an obligation to get their facts right, and to analyse the evidence in a sound and reasonable fashion. This is particularly true for publications advertised as ‘true history’, or the ‘actual story’ of one particularly dramatic individual within Holocaust history. Such egregious inaccuracy and promotion of myths would be impermissible when practising their own profession or vocation, but in this episode of Holocaust history (and many others, of course), amateurism and inaccuracy are not only published or publicly articulated, they are promoted – and accepted. As Langer reminds us, there are ‘boundaries between Holocaust fact and Holocaust fiction, between history and imagination’.²⁸

We see the effect such a number can have when looking at a ‘customer review’ of one such hagiographic book. In my experience, the reader’s gushing review can be understood as quite typical: ‘Although this book is based on carefully researched facts, it holds your interest like a spy novel. Schindler saved 1,000. (That’s great.) Wallenberg saved 100,000 lives. That’s spectacular! Read how he emptied trains headed for death camps, had face to face confrontations with German leaders.’²⁹ The actual numbers to be associated with Wallenberg are far less. These numbers and their significance will be discussed throughout this study, as well as numerous other myths central to the problematically fictitious narrative about Wallenberg which still prevail.

TO CRITICIZE A HERO

I certainly hold Wallenberg’s achievements and character in great admiration but, as a historian, it is self-evident to me that even such an honoured and symbolically important figure must be subjected to critical analysis. There is a professional obligation to appraise and evaluate Wallenberg, just as with all figures from history, Holocaust or otherwise. Yet over the years I have learned that the historian’s methodological

obligations disturb and discomfit many of Wallenberg's admirers. I have been told many times by members of the public that he is such an important symbol he should be 'left alone', and that even if there is some exaggeration to his 'tale', even this may serve a purpose. What harm is caused, I have been asked, by some 'minor' inaccuracies in the 'master' narrative when compared with the moral potency of Wallenberg's rare and courageous story? Time and again in public forums a sometimes emotional clash has occurred between what I have asserted is the 'hard' and most credible evidence about Wallenberg, and how it must be placed into a plausible context, and memory – whether direct or received – as articulated by someone in the audience. This fascinating and important tension between 'town' and 'gown' is particularly striking in the case of Wallenberg. Because of this, brief consideration must be given to the question of whether the historian has the moral right to challenge such a valuable, and rare, moral symbol.

Intimately related to this issue is another, even broader concern which is central to understanding both methodologies employed by, and the public role of, Holocaust studies today. This concern is what I and others have labelled a problematic 'gap' between the training and methodological precision demanded of the historian in order to reach published conclusions, and society's apparent unwillingness to, in essence, 'learn more' about the Holocaust by grappling with the detail, nuance, ambiguity and complexity underpinning even the event's most well-known episodes. Though scholars frequently request that the public should leave behind some long-held and quite anachronistic 'truths' about the Holocaust, the public seems not to be listening. In the case of Wallenberg, the gap between scholar and society seems at times quite unbridgeable. Yet the effort to span it is necessary, and this re-evaluation of a Holocaust hero should be understood as contributing to the effort to bridge this gap.

The Holocaust is different because it so clearly occupies a special place in today's existing common memory of the last century. Indeed, far different in public fora from most other fundamental 'events' which have shaped our world, rarely does a day go by in which one thing or another related to the Holocaust, Nazism, Hitler, the Second World War, and so on, is not referred to, discussed, debated or commemorated in the media in Europe, the United States, Israel and elsewhere. Those years of tragedy, drama and trauma seem always in focus, and are never far from daily political, cultural and educational concerns. Yet in spite of the Holocaust's ubiquity, the gap between scholarship and public memory seems only to be increasing. From my innumerable discussions with students (of different educational levels, from middle school to university postgraduates, and from numerous

countries), talks with community members and leaders, and consumers of media and historical literature, I have come to understand that at the heart of the clash between ‘town’ and ‘gown’ is the fascinating paradox that as scholars only begin to understand the Holocaust – utilizing ever growing amounts of data in their analyses – the less this essential advance seems understood by society at large, which holds on to ‘truths’ about the event, long ago absorbed.

This gap is particularly interesting when realizing the centrality the Holocaust plays in forming contemporary conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. The Holocaust, and its large and well-known cast of characters, seems at times almost inevitably invoked as a metaphor for both. It is, however, much more complicated than that. Though the gap can be narrowed when employing the often-invoked categories of ‘perpetrators, victims and bystanders’, categories of historical actors, states and institutions which have long dominated Holocaust studies, even these long-debated categories have become intolerably leaky. More persuasive today is an understanding of the Holocaust which is situated firmly within what Primo Levi influentially called ‘the grey zone’ – that space where human ambiguity, confusion, brutality, betrayal and incomprehension replace easily gained moral clarity, be it good or evil. This ‘grey’ makes the event much harder to understand, and makes it much more difficult to fit this or that character into one or another category, but it is a situation which must be acknowledged – even by the interested public, who seem by far to prefer simplicity to complication. One of the most insightful commentators on Holocaust history and memory, Levi understood that when challenged by the memory of genocide, most individuals will seek, almost instinctively, the easy and seductive comforts of simplicity. ‘This *desire* is justified’, Levi warned, ‘but the same does not always apply to simplification itself, which is a working hypothesis, useful as long as it is recognized as such and not mistaken for reality. The greater part of historical and natural phenomena are not simple, or not simple in the way that we would like.’³⁰ Langer sees in this urge to simplify an almost serial distortion of the event, and rightfully understands it as a serious moral issue which must be confronted: ‘It appears that when the Holocaust is the subject, misdirected popular enthusiasms form easily, especially when they deflect us from the task of tackling the authenticity of unbearable truths.’³¹ The problem of the public’s unwillingness to wrestle with ‘unbearable truths’ is critical because, as Langer also rightly asserts, the Holocaust remains central both to our everyday lives and as an existential threat to democracy. This is because the event left behind ‘a sense of violation so immense and extreme that the imagination has difficulty encompassing it. It threatens our faith in the stability of social and moral

institutions and reminds us of eruptions of mass violence in history that were not subject to the restraints of virtue or good will.³² Genocidal Hitlerian Nazism was rarely, if ever, ‘subject to restraints of virtue or good will’, and any publication or pedagogic moment which asserts that it *was* ‘subject to restraints’ has failed to understand its loathsome essence. Everything and everyone forced to confront it manifested a complicated, multi-varied response which must be understood if anything of value is to be gained from examining its ‘unbearable truths’.

In a simplified world, the perpetrators of ‘ultimate evil can be stymied by intrepid and dedicated individuals, by ‘Righteous Gentiles’ who ‘stopped the Holocaust’, or who ‘saved the world by saving one’. But in the actual ‘universe’ of humanity which was the Holocaust, this was not possible, and it is not correct to assert this today. In the simplistic and hagiographic renderings of Wallenberg which have shaped his public image, we see it often asserted, as we shall see in several examples, that he not only successfully challenged Hungarian Nazis and German authorities in Budapest, Berlin and elsewhere, but even the fundamentals of racist Nazi ideology. Some authors have written that Wallenberg is said to have directly irritated Hitler and blocked Eichmann. However, the only thing which stopped the Holocaust was the total defeat of Hitler’s Germany, and though the world of European Jewry was not saved, thankfully some few Jews were.

Representations and commemorations of Wallenberg are noteworthy in this regard. When his name is invoked, it is invariably as part of an effort – pedagogic, literary, artistic or commemorative – to ask the listener or reader to believe that the ‘real’ story of the Holocaust was not death, destruction, misery, catastrophe and the ‘triumph of *evil will*’. Rather, the final scene, lesson or story seems to be the ‘triumph of *good intentions*’. This is objectionable for many reasons, not least because it is so untrue. Another seemingly inevitable use of Wallenberg’s misunderstood legacy is the overlaying of his story onto a more general context, using it as a bulwark against feelings of distress often suffered by students and citizens who learn about the Holocaust. Indeed, if a sentient person is not distressed during and after any reasonable perusal of Holocaust history, then he or she wasn’t paying attention. Nonetheless, it is problematic both pedagogically and morally when distorted and simplified ‘positive’ stories are used – one might even say abused – as a psychological and emotive ‘remedy’ against the despair. However understandable this desire for an easing simplicity is, it carries with it an unintended result. ‘The current popularity of “forgiveness” and “reconciliation”’, Langer writes, ‘as fruitful responses to the agents of atrocity only confirms how little we have advanced in our

journey to appreciate the nature of the beast.³³ Langer argues that this is because ‘Western civilization lacks a discourse for a culture of atrocity. Against the evidence of contemporary history, it resists such labels for the world we live in.’³⁴ Though it may be easier to repeat and disseminate a simplistic, short, comforting and easy to understand narrative about Wallenberg, ultimately this does not serve society’s health or its potential for progress.

MAKING A HERO MORE HUMAN

At this juncture it seems prudent to state without equivocation that Wallenberg’s accomplishments are stirring to this historian’s imagination and soul. Wallenberg chose to help when the opportunity came to him. Neither his own life nor the safety of his nation was in any way directly threatened by the ongoing genocide. He could have chosen to stay in Stockholm, ‘watching’ the genocide, but he did not. Indeed, the sources make clear that, contrary to myth, there is little real evidence that Wallenberg was noticeably interested or concerned by what he knew of Hitler’s war against the Jews.³⁵ Rather, the sources make clear that his primary concerns during the war years were commercial, financial and social. But we also know that when his moment of opportunity came, he grabbed it with energy and a moving spirit of humanitarianism. And that in doing so, he and his colleagues made an enormous difference in the lives of many thousands of innocent people. Nonetheless, even while in Budapest Wallenberg had an eye on post-war business opportunities – and why not? He was, after all, a Wallenberg, and he most certainly neither planned nor imagined that he would never resume his life in Stockholm.

Yet simultaneously it must be acknowledged that what Wallenberg did in Budapest between July 1944 and January 1945 was in no way decisive for what happened there, let alone for the Holocaust at large. Nor can his inspiring story be used as a metaphor either for the Holocaust at large or even for rescue during it. Rescue and resistance during the Holocaust came in many diverse forms and figures. What happened in Budapest was both singular yet similar to other diplomatic circumstances during the Holocaust. As will be demonstrated throughout this study, though Wallenberg the individual may have been *sui generis*, the diplomatic context in which he operated and the methods he used were not. There was, as we shall see, ample precedent for both.

What, then, are we to make of the fact that this relatively minor figure of Holocaust history has come to occupy, not least since the early 1980s, a space in the collective memory of the Holocaust which is unprecedented, perhaps even unique? It might be more accurate to

say that Western society's collective 'memory-work' has *given* him the unique space he occupies today, a space larger than his actual deeds merit when placed into the vast context of Holocaust history and memory. What explains this hold that Wallenberg has on our imagination, and what are the consequences if much of what is said and written about him is simply wrong, or exaggerated, or misinterpreted? What seems certain is that no other figure from the Holocaust has been 'treated' in this way, and this phenomena requires an explanation. What seems equally certain is that a more empirically and analytically credible analysis of Wallenberg's diplomacy will help us to understand both his actual accomplishments and the context in which he worked, and his hold on our imagination.

By asking some relatively new questions about Wallenberg, and answering them with credible and relevant documentation, the groundwork will exist for a more sustainable and credible understanding of this individual and his genuine significance for Holocaust history and memory. While doing this, I also hope to rectify the many myths which distort the prevailing general understanding of him.

It is important to underscore that this study is not an attempt to deny, debunk or diminish Wallenberg's genuine heroism. He was, and is, a hero – but he is a misunderstood hero. Nothing useful is served by any attempt or wish to deny his extraordinary heroism, and to do so would be equally as distorting as are some of the myths which surround him. On the contrary, it is argued that because Wallenberg was a perfectly real man who did historically important things during a critical period in recent European history, scholarly scrutiny of both his actual accomplishments and his symbolic and moral importance will enhance the general understanding of this brave man and, with it, his significance.

Finally, apart from a brief epilogue, what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after 17 January 1945, when he was detained by soldiers of the Soviet Red Army, is not discussed. A full account of why he was never released from Moscow's infamous Lubyanka prison, and most likely died there, remains to be written. That noted, I think it also important to emphasize that Wallenberg remains important for us today not because of how or why he died, but because of what he actually did in Budapest. It is hoped that what follows will convince the reader that Wallenberg deserves to be moved out of myth, and back into history.

NOTES

1. J. Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg – hjälten i Budapest* (Stockholm: Saxon & Lindströms, 1948), p.8.
2. R. Hilberg, cited in A. Grobman, 'Keeping the Rescuers in Historical Perspective', on the website of the Holocaust Teachers' Resource Center, http://www.holocaust-trc.org/resc_doc.htm.
3. In May 2001, a Google search for 'Raoul Wallenberg' produced 14,800 hits. In May 2005, a Yahoo! search produced 136,000 hits. In September 2006, a Google search produced 665,000 hits, and Yahoo! approximately 371,000 hits in 0.13 seconds. Clearly, by any standard, a remarkable level of interest for an individual from Holocaust history.
4. As research and administrative assistant of Uppsala University's Raoul Wallenberg Project between 1989 and 1992, I quickly understood the depth and intensity in what I came to call the 'world of "Wallenbergania"' – something worthy of its own analysis. The project was the first scholarly oral history research about Wallenberg. This project's rich and largely unused archive of some 170 survivor testimonies is located in Uppsala University Library.
5. At that particular spike in Cold War tensions, it is not hard to find a connection between interest in Wallenberg's fate and often intense criticism of unrelated aspects of Soviet policies and practices.
6. P. Wästberg, 'Wallenberg hedras med nya skulpturer', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 6 May 2001, p.2.
7. A. Sakharov, cited in *I was also looking for Wallenberg*, an exhibition catalogue from the Sakharov Museum and Swedish Institute, published in conjunction with the exhibit 'One Man Can Make a Difference', 5 September 2007, Moscow, Russia, pp.9–10.
8. 'Tale of Swede, Savior of Jews, Adds to Puzzle', article by M. Wines, *The New York Times*, 22 October 2000. Anything published in *The New York Times* will inevitably be reprinted in many other media outlets worldwide.
9. Z. Ross, *Thomas Cook's Guide to Sweden* (Peterborough: T. Cook Publishing, 2008), p.51.
10. G. Brown, *Courage: Eight Portraits* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).
11. For a catalogue of the public memorials dedicated to him, see www.chgs.umn.edu/visual_Artistic_Resources/Public_Holocaust_Memorials/Raoul_Wallenberg_Memorial.html. See also T. Schult, *A Hero's Many Faces: Raoul Wallenberg in Contemporary Monuments* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and T. Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), especially Chapter 9.
12. To give but some examples, we see the fact that even though Wallenberg had demonstrably little, if anything, to do with its history, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in the US, devotes resources to maintaining a Raoul Wallenberg Professorship in Human Rights. At Sweden's Lund University there is a Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, while Tel Aviv's Bar-Ilan University has established a Raoul Wallenberg Chair for the Study of Human Rights.
13. The descriptive headings of many of the links with information and narratives about Wallenberg are telling. Some examples are: 'Raoul Wallenberg – He more or less shocked the diplomats at the Swedish Legation. His first task was to design a Swedish protective pass', see Jewishvirtuallibrary.org; 'RW, Angel of Mercy ... Russia formally rehabilitated RW', Auschwitz.dk; 'RW – with the support of the World Jewish Congress and the American War Refugee Board ...', historyplace.com; 'RW and the Rescue of Jews in Budapest ... RW was assigned as first secretary to the Swedish legation', USHMM.org; and finally, 'Knitting Circle RW ...', Myweb.isbu.ac.uk. A more serious example of the 'memory-work' associated with Wallenberg is the recently established International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation. See their website at www.raoulwallenberg.net. Salient to these examples is that each of them contains, even in these short blurbs, an empirical error. All such users of the 'advantages' of the web presumably mean well, yet these examples point to the problem of historical distortion based on empirical mistakes.
14. See the Raoul Wallenberg International Foundation's website, www.raoulwallenberg.net.
15. The 'Wallenberg Case' is the single largest file created in the long history of Sweden's Utrikesdepartementet. The results of the two Swedish government commissions into the Wallenberg case, 'Swedish-Russian Working Group Report' (2000) and 'Eliasson Commission Report' (2003), will be discussed in the epilogue.
16. A recent investigative article in the *Wall Street Journal* describes the devastating effect that official Sweden's decades-long and callous indifference had on Wallenberg's parents and

- siblings. See J. Praeger's important article of 28 February 2009.
17. D. Bloxham and T. Kushner, *The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.2.
 18. The many mythical elements of this hagiographic narrative are detailed in Chapter 2.
 19. Tellingly, many of the most common misunderstandings about Wallenberg are also held by otherwise careful scholars of the Holocaust, many of whom I have met over the years at scholarly conferences, seminars, etc. There has often been genuine surprise at my description of things based on Swedish documentation.
 20. R. Rozett, 'International Intervention: The Role of Diplomats in Attempts to Rescue Jews in Hungary', in R.L. Braham and S. Miller (eds), *The Nazis' Last Victims: The Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p.152, n.63.
 21. S. Koblik, *The Stones Cry Out: Sweden's Response to the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1988).
 22. A. Lajos, *Hjälten och offren: Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest* (Växjö: Svenska Emigrantinstitutets skriftserie, no.15, 2003).
 23. Y.H. Yerushalmi, cited in L.L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p.51.
 24. L.L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p.122.
 25. See N. Langlet, *Kaos i Budapest: berättelsen om hur svensken Veldemar Langlet räddade tiotusentals människor undan nazisterna* (Vällingby: Harrier, 1982), p.36.
 26. Hungary's brutal, anti-Semitic Nazi party. Throughout the text, the Hungarian term *Nyilas* will be used.
 27. This loss, however, is greatly ameliorated because most relevant Swedish documents were either cabled or sent by diplomatic post to Stockholm before being destroyed during that raid.
 28. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, p.126.
 29. See www.Amazon.co.uk/Raoul-Wallenberg-Sharon-Linnea/dp/customer-reviews/08, 3 April 2008. This is a review of S. Linnea, *Raoul Wallenberg: The Man Who Stopped Death* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1993).
 30. P. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1988), p.37. This brilliant memoir is actually a work of philosophy about the Holocaust. It represents the acme of his thinking about his time in Auschwitz and the life of memory afterwards.
 31. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, p.xiii.
 32. *Ibid.*, p.116.
 33. *Ibid.*, p.xv.
 34. *Ibid.*, p.119.
 35. Wallenberg and his fellow Swedish citizens had access to a surprisingly large amount of accurate information about what we today call the Holocaust.

A Life before Budapest: Wallenberg's Background, Personality and Motives

I am returning early [from holiday] to do some reviewing of other subjects before school starts. I think this is a good idea and I don't think my French will suffer ... I heard from Mother that deliberations concerning my education are now underway ... You wrote in your last letter that your intention is that my education be designed to afford me the chance, right from the start, to earn my living in a practical job, so that later ... I can take on whatever I feel most attracted to and best suited for. Everything points to my final career beginning when I'm 30 or older.

Raoul Wallenberg, aged 17, to his grandfather Gustaf, July 1929

My dear boy ... You must not take it as an attempt on my part to pass off the remarkable statesmen that populate [the books I sent you] as some kind of ideal to model yourself on. No, I assure you that I have no such false hopes. I want to shape my dear boy into a useful member of society, someone, first of all, who knows how to stand on his own two feet ... Instead, I would love to train you to take care of yourself and to become an independent man, [so] you will be able to tackle such problems as prove to be compatible with your temperament.

Gustaf Wallenberg to his grandson Raoul, July 1929¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIOGRAPHY

Raoul Wallenberg was not yet 17 years old when he chose to return home early from holiday to study before the new school term began. The letter cited above, along with many others, demonstrates an emotional sophistication and seriousness of purpose which characterized his all too short life. The young Swede was, by any measure, an intelligent, charming, socially sophisticated, strong-willed and capable person. An experienced traveller from an early age – this was made possible by his family's affluence at a time long before the age of mass travel – he closely observed what and whom he encountered. He was gifted at languages and – perhaps most importantly – was aware of who he was, his family's status, and what was expected of him.

Wallenberg was determined to succeed in life, and he was given a formal and practical education which made this likely, if not inevitable. His familial background conferred social status, and much was expected of him. If the boy had any doubts, his grandfather made it clear to him: '[You] belong to a respected family with a name that predisposes people to receive you well, since those who carry it have universally been recognized as a benefit to society.'² Knowing what we do about Wallenberg, it is not unreasonable to conclude that long before he went to Budapest, he was destined to make a life that would be interesting, noticeable and perhaps even socially useful. What actually happened in his life was of course unknowable, even if the most widely read hagiography would have us believe that what he did and what happened to him was virtually inevitable.

We have already noted and will further discover that what Wallenberg did and did not do in Budapest was the result both of prevailing circumstances and choices he made. Therefore it would be both folly and a distortion of history to deny that Wallenberg's own personality did not play a decisive role in shaping not only the course of his life, but also of the historic choices he made while in Budapest. Though this is not a biography of Wallenberg, even the political historian must recognize that history is shaped not only by events; it is also shaped by individuals. However influential the 'structural' forces of history may be, they are created by both individuals and groups of people. Historian Fritz Stern has expressed it thus: 'In our times and in [historiography] it has become rare to speak of individual greatness ... But not to recognize true stature in a person is a terrible loss, a needless relinquishing of a historical reality.'³ As Stern recognized, individual choices play significant roles in determining outcomes, even in the peculiar, even epochal circumstances in which Wallenberg found himself. Put most simply, Wallenberg *did not have to do what he did*, whether in choosing to go to Budapest or in deciding what to do when actually there. The choices he made are evident to history, and they were to a significant, if still not decisive, degree based upon who he was. If we are to understand as fully as possible his contribution to Holocaust history, it is important that we understand something of the man himself.

Moreover, for the purposes of this study, one which explores the myths surrounding him would lack much if Wallenberg's background, personality, and motives were not explored. Therefore it is necessary to examine him in some detail, prior to his departure for Budapest. To ignore his character and background is merely to exacerbate errors of distortion which can be found in non-scholarly literature; and those who have argued that 'the mission created the man', exclusive of his

personality, are also incorrect.⁴ In this chapter, several key examples of how his personality and motives have been portrayed in the hagiographic literature about him will be surveyed. These few examples must serve to illuminate the manner in which this genre has distorted important aspects of the man and his motives for going to Budapest. It is necessary to point out these mistakes, of which a much longer list could well be compiled, not least because of their implications for any discussion regarding the motives for rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust.

Some years ago, one of the better publications from the genre of journalistic hagiography about Wallenberg wrote: 'the man had met the mission and they were to prove perfectly matched, much more so than [anyone] could have imagined'.⁵ Though such a conclusion remains unsuitably simplistic, it contains sufficient explanatory value to be used as a framework for this chapter, the goal of which is to create a more nuanced and fully developed picture of Wallenberg. This will help us to understand better that Wallenberg in Budapest was a real man who accomplished much during an extraordinary time. This, in turn, has significant implications for how society might in the future confront the scourge of genocide, a notion which will be addressed in the book's epilogue.

A RICH HISTORICAL SOURCE

Happily for the historian of Wallenberg, there is a primary source through which a fuller picture of the man who became a rescuer during the Holocaust may be drawn. This source is the lengthy and fascinating exchange of personal correspondence written between 1924 and 1936, between Wallenberg and his paternal grandfather, Gustaf Oscar Wallenberg (hereafter referred to as GOW). Usually, the historian must rely on descriptions of historical figures given long after the fact by others. In this case, we have a virtual gold mine of illuminating correspondence written by the subject himself as he grew into maturity – long before he entered history.

The many letters he exchanged with the formidable GOW⁶ were found and compiled by family members some years ago. They were often lengthy, always animated and profoundly intimate – and they are a historian's delight.⁷ Written during Wallenberg's most formative years, they offer an unfiltered view into the mind and heart of a privileged boy growing into a worldly young man. They provide the critical reader with genuine insight into Wallenberg's thoughts, feelings, observations, experiences and encounters with people, cultures and situations. His own plans, goals, desires, frustrations and relationships

are described in great depth, as well as the expectations placed on him. Though this is by no means a study in psychology, it is safe to conclude that GOW undoubtedly had a profound impact on the adolescent who, as a young man, chose to become a rescuer during the Holocaust, for this correspondence provides significant evidence of an always loving, yet ever more complex, relationship.

The correspondence is supplemented by other equally interesting, if less plentiful, material written by Wallenberg himself. This includes a revealing and lengthy travelogue of his months in pre-Second World War South Africa, and other personal and professional letters (sometimes one and the same) written by Wallenberg between 1936 and 1944 to various individuals, including his powerful older cousins, Jacob and Marcus Jr Wallenberg. The historian is thus provided with the rare chance of observing in great detail the development of a man's personality *before* the mantle of history fell upon him. Further essential material written by Wallenberg while in Budapest comes to us in the form of his detailed diplomatic reports, and letters to the UD, to his business partner Koloman Lauer, and to his mother; we also have letters written to him.⁸

A GRANDFATHER'S INFLUENCE

Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg was born in a Stockholm suburb on 4 August 1912. Though born into one of Sweden's richest, most socially prominent and politically important non-royal families, his life commenced with tragedy. His father, Raoul Sr, contracted cancer while his wife Maj was pregnant, and died before Wallenberg's birth. Though Wallenberg was much loved and supported by his mother and extended family, who did their best to fill that terrible gap in the boy's childhood, there is no question that losing his father was a dreadful blow which greatly affected him.

Gradually, Wallenberg's paternal grandfather, Gustaf Oscar Wallenberg, became the predominant influence in the boy's life, even more so than his beloved mother Maj. *Farfar* (father's father, in Swedish) Gustaf's own attitudes seemed to have played a major role in shaping the boy's attitudes, and his wishes concerning the boy's development – not least his education – were clearly more important than his mother's. Only towards the end of their relationship, when Wallenberg was in his mid-20s, did he begin to question this influence. GOW was an ex-naval officer (a tradition in the family), businessman and veteran Swedish diplomat much experienced in the world, particularly in the Far East, America and post-Ottoman Turkey. With the apparent full agreement of Wallenberg's mother, GOW was

determined that the boy should be prepared for life as a Wallenberg. While still a teenager, Wallenberg travelled widely in Europe, with extended visits to France and England – all financed by GOW. Throughout their relationship, the older man supplied the unquestionably intelligent adolescent with a constant stream of detailed advice, consciously shaping his grandson for the worlds of business and diplomacy, which he understood as key elements of social and financial success. The extensive correspondence makes clear that Wallenberg's mother had far less impact on who the boy became.

After graduating from *gymnasium* (Swedish secondary school) and following the completion of a brief, obligatory military service, Wallenberg left Sweden in autumn 1931 to matriculate at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He entered this phase of his life with great enthusiasm, and was enthralled by this new world. His tireless curiosity fed his natural sense of adventure, and he readily absorbed what he understood to be American ideas, methods and attitudes. In the typical fashion seen in his letter-writing, Wallenberg expressed himself clearly, even forcefully, to his grandfather: 'I think what you intended by sending me here was not so much to acquire the skill to build skyscrapers and movie houses as to acquire a desire to build them! In other words, to catch some of the American spirit that lies behind their technological and economic progress.'

Wallenberg's letters during his four years in the United States reveal many of the characteristics and qualities generally associated with him. Though he naturally missed his mother and family (although not excessively so, as the letters make clear), his powers of communication and observation are on full display, as are GOW's characteristics, ideas, prejudices, etc., in his letters. Interestingly, one of GOW's favourite topics was the danger of settling into an easy life in Sweden as a Wallenberg, including the 'dangers' posed by young and 'inappropriate' young women. Shortly before graduating from university and returning to Sweden, GOW wrote to his grandson in May 1934:

Behind my wish that you stay away as long as possible is, as I am sure you understand, my fear that until you have acquired a sufficiently strong and markedly global (not mundane) perspective you will be unprotected against the frivolity and pleasures to be found at home ... The opportunities accorded you by your global education must not go to waste. They are to be used to make you independent before you assume [your] responsibilities.

Some months later, the elder Wallenberg made the point even more emphatically:

If [older family members] would like to help you, accept their offers most graciously, always by pointing out that your practical education is not yet complete and that you will probably not be ready for any tasks at home for several years. You must not fail under any circumstances to do this, for should it be arranged that you find work at home you would become part of a collection of clever and select young men all competing for the fleshpots ... My advice to you is to stay home for as short a time as possible.¹⁰

While in America, Wallenberg travelled extensively and recorded much of what he saw, in sharp and illuminating detail. Several documents and course essays from his studies at Michigan reveal that he did quite well, not least because his written English was of the highest quality. One essay written in October 1931 for an English class, interestingly entitled ‘What does the Idea “The United States of Europe” Mean?’ received the highest mark (A). It was also graced with the instructor’s comment: ‘This is an excellent piece of work.’¹¹ His ability to learn from the present and plan for the future was consistently on full display, as he kept a steady eye on his hoped-for future as part of the Wallenberg business and banking empire. He frequently asked his grandfather and influential cousins for contacts, letters of introduction, and help in setting up meetings with important Americans and Swedes far more powerful and influential than the average university student would meet in a typical course of studies. Reading these letters, one comes away with the firm conclusion that little if anything was average about Wallenberg, and it seems clear that he made a strong and positive impression wherever he went, with those whom he met.

He graduated from the university in spring 1935 with a degree in architecture, and left the United States infatuated with its people and spirit. Some weeks before departing, he wrote to GOW that it felt ‘very peculiar to end these pleasant and interesting years of study in America. I have had a wonderful time and the parting was very sad.’¹² It was a confident and charming young man who returned briefly to his home and family in Stockholm, albeit one uncertain about his future.

Following his own advice, GOW endeavoured to keep his grandson out of Sweden for as long as possible, and decided that the young graduate would become an apprentice at foreign businesses and banks. As a result, after only a few weeks back home in Stockholm, Wallenberg obediently departed for a prearranged, unpaid job with a Swedish firm in Cape Town, South Africa. As with the sojourn to America, physical distance between Wallenberg, home and his grandfather led to the creation of a fascinating written record. In it we see the continuing

growth of a young man with many admirable qualities: an intelligent and restless curiosity, energy, charm and emotion. His descriptions are always vivid, often lengthy – he wrote both by hand and with a typewriter – and they offer a genuine window into his heart and soul.

After a mostly uneventful but interesting seven months doing business in South Africa (which was quite exotic to the young Swede), Wallenberg departed for Palestine to another unpaid apprenticeship arranged by GOW, this time at a bank.¹³ Although the young man remained obedient to his grandfather's wishes, he began to grow noticeably impatient, even a little resentful. One incident in particular caused tension, creating for perhaps the first time a palpable frustration at his grandfather's dominating influence.

After arriving in Cape Town, which 'turned out to be a disappointment', he found some other Swedes whom he liked (something which irritated his grandfather), and work which proved to be only mildly interesting: 'The social life here is hardly what you would call booming and for my part has been limited to movies and drinking beer or whisky in one of the innumerable old-fashioned bars around the city.'¹⁴ Even before learning of the young man's initial impressions, GOW reminded Wallenberg why he was there, and with whom he should keep company:

I want you to be better trained in the art of business techniques (a good word), so that you would have an opportunity to learn how to earn money – crass, I know – but you will never achieve a satisfactory kind of self-sufficiency unless you become financially independent. The program in Cape Town, as well as in Haifa, is designed to teach you that art, which dominates developing countries ... It is consistent with what I have often urged you to do during your travels, namely get to know people's frame of mind and way of thinking ...

To sum up: I was very satisfied with your stay in Stockholm. You have given your parents and me great pleasure ... But I want you to start *a course in bookkeeping* immediately ... It would be better to find local friends instead of Swedes.¹⁵

About two weeks later, Wallenberg wrote a long letter to his grandfather in Istanbul. The following exchange is quoted at some length because it reveals much about how the two men thought about other people, not least the women in their lives:

I've been rather upset the last few months, including when I was in Stockholm. A girl whom I used to spend all my time with in the United States and whom I liked very much unfortunately fell in

love with me, and I've had a very difficult time of it, when everything I wrote or did only hurt her. I have found it depressing to be the cause of so much pain. About two weeks ago, I decided to tell her that we should stop writing, but it was difficult. I think it was for the best.¹⁶

Believing that Wallenberg had impregnated his erstwhile girlfriend, GOW's response was rapid and fierce. It was received in Cape Town on 11 October:

What you told me in your letter of August 26 about a love affair in the States has caused me great anxiety. You must let me have the full details of how this has developed, or I will not be able to advise you. It is imperative in a matter in which you yourself have no experience ... If you have seduced the girl, then things are very serious. If you seduced an American girl, then you are trapped. Then all the castles in the air I have constructed on your behalf will tumble. If this is indeed the case, your future is very bleak ... you will be forced to make a career in America ...

I cannot help but view your case very pessimistically. If it turns out that my fears are unfounded, you must break off all correspondence forthwith. If she writes, leave her letters unanswered. It may seem cruel and heartless, but believe me it is an absolute necessity ... Young women use any and all means at their disposal to get their claws into whatever young man suits their designs. They want to be taken care of ... to acquire social standing. The male is always driven by sexual urges, girls much less so ... The danger is greatest from that class of girls who come from humble circumstances. It is far smaller with girls from our own class.

A young man with your prospects does not have time to tie himself down until he has time to organize his life and his work. A young wife wants everything to revolve around her ... A young man absorbed by his sexual urges pays no attention to [important] considerations. He wants her body. He wants the pleasure of the moment and she does nothing but offer it. Those who are not from his own class are the most skilful and therefore the most dangerous.

In your case, I assume that the fault is yours. You have not been careful and prudent enough, and that is what makes the matter so tragic. But you may not sacrifice your life. You must not deprive your mother and me what we are expecting of you. You must not pay attention to this foolish love ...

I am so upset and sad at having perhaps lost that which I had

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made the object of my dreams. Nothing can make me happy except the news that you have managed to extricate yourself completely from this unpleasant affair.¹⁷

In immediate response that same day, Wallenberg sent an expensive telegram from Cape Town to his anxious grandfather. Cabled in English, it read: 'Please dont [*sic*] worry/no complications/affection her part only/correspondence finished=Raoul.'¹⁸ Three days later, Wallenberg responded more fully to his grandfather's fears. Again, the letter will be cited at length, as it is so revealing. For some reason the most pertinent part, cited below, was penned by Wallenberg in English, even though he had a Swedish typewriter available:¹⁹

As it appeared you were very worried, I permitted myself to wire you an immediate answer to allay your fears. I do not quite understand what in my letter of the 26th August could have given rise to your anxiety in regard to the American girl.

I was never in love with the girl and have told her so often. On the other hand I liked her very much and we were together, too much perhaps, during the greatest part of my stay in Ann Arbor. I did not know she was in love with me and it did not become apparent until she had been writing me for some time while I was in Sweden. I answered in a manner calculated to tell her in a friendly and mild way that although I respected and admired her, I did not love her. She evidently did not or did not want to understand the nature of my feelings for her and her letters became more and more expressive of her love for me ... On my birthday [4 August] I received a cable asking me if I loved her. I immediately wired back a negative answer, and the day after I wrote a friendly letter telling her goodbye and wishing her the best of luck.

I liked her so much and hated to know that I was the cause of her unhappiness. Unfortunately she was older than I and therefore it will be rather more difficult for her to recuperate.

Your resulting letter which you have written serves as a new proof of your love and care for me. I am so glad that you spoke so clearly and that you immediately offered your help and advice even in the case of the girl being pregnant ... My worry was entirely due to anxiety in regard to the girl and her unhappiness. I only hope that time will cure her wounds.²⁰

Those words ended the English portion, whereupon Wallenberg continued in Swedish, transcribing for his grandfather a newspaper article about his architectural proposal for a public swimming pool in

Stockholm! Why he never named the American girl is not known, and this seems uncharacteristically cold on his part. Naturally GOW responded quickly to the telegram: ‘My dear boy, I was so pleased to receive your telegram [cited above] ... I have considered the message from every conceivable angle to see if there was anything hidden or omitted, but I have come up with nothing. I found it clear and straightforward and was reassured. Thank you for sending the wire!’²¹

Though Wallenberg had only begun his time in South Africa, GOW impatiently urged his grandson to begin planning for Palestine. We know from two letters of recommendation written for Wallenberg in South Africa by men he worked for that he distinguished himself in many aspects of business, yet already GOW was thinking ahead.

The elder Wallenberg’s choice of Haifa as the next step in the young man’s education seems motivated partly by self-interest. He had some ideas about establishing a bank of his own in Istanbul, and envisaged his grandson taking a leading role. Therefore, rather than steering him towards a European bank – which was the practice of other members of the Wallenberg family as they schooled younger generations – he sent his grandson to an ‘oriental’ land, one not dissimilar in many ways from the Turkey he had long lived in.

In late December 1935, GOW wrote that he expected a quick departure because he was impatient that the young man’s tutoring as a banker should begin under his friend Freund, a Dutch Jew: ‘As you have noticed, I have hinted at my wish that you come under Freund’s guidance as soon as possible. The reason is that I consider that part of your training of primary importance ... Cape Town is secondary. Another reason is that I want to accelerate your education, for I am getting old and I would so very much like you to come to the end of your education.’²² He also advised his grandson that it would be useful for him to spend time in a non-European land: ‘The stay in Palestine will also be good for you from [another] standpoint. When you have the occasion to spend a lot of time among minorities you arrive at the conclusion that their rights are not always well served by the great powers. A great part of politics has always been egoism. The best thing, as I [have] said, is to refrain from taking sides. It has served me well.’²³

The mid-1930s was, of course, a time of rapidly escalating international tensions, something the two discussed in their letters. About the time Wallenberg was due to leave South Africa, Mussolini’s Italy was close to completing its one-sided victory over Ethiopia. GOW was angry that Sweden’s government had condemned the invasion, creating tensions in Swedish–Italian relations. He wrote: ‘By taking sides we have lost the Italian market completely ... The Italians were badly treated at Versailles and want to acquire more territory. I find it rather

natural from their point of view, but they have proceeded unwisely and collided with the British. That is their business, not ours.'

On his way to Palestine, Wallenberg stopped in Nice to visit his grandparents. There Wallenberg and GOW argued vociferously, apparently because of Wallenberg's growing anxiety about where his grandfather's planning was taking him, and because he remained obliged to follow plans laid out for him without being consulted. Not unnaturally, considering how little time he had spent at home during the previous five years, Wallenberg proposed a detour to Sweden. Some days later, while in Genoa waiting for passage to Palestine, Wallenberg wrote to his grandfather:

I want to apologize again for losing my temper. I'm far too aware of my debt to you not always to yield to your decisions. But I was sorry that you sought to find ulterior motives in my objections. All I wanted to do was contribute to the planning of my program, to make it broader and more effective ... I have no particular objection to living abroad and no particular urge to go home at this point when I have not earned any money.²⁴

Also of interest in this letter is the brief mention of 'negotiations' that Wallenberg was unexpectedly compelled to have with British consular officials in Genoa. Before leaving South Africa, he had failed to obtain a suitable visa for Palestine, which led to complications in mid-passage. 'I was misinformed ... and failed to get an evidently crucial visa for Palestine while I was in Cape Town ... when it comes to visitors to Palestine the restrictions are apparently much stricter than you would think.' This risked keeping Wallenberg in northern Italy for some time. Yet only four days later he wrote triumphantly to GOW: 'I was lucky with my passport, and after arguing with the British consul for an hour managed to get a tourist visa without a deposition.'²⁵ Knowing what we do about him today, the reader's attention is caught by the fact that though he had seemingly made a mistake by telling the British authorities in Genoa that he was going to Palestine to work (albeit unpaid), and not strictly as a tourist, he evidently talked his way out of the bureaucratic cul-de-sac.

This was during a period when ever-increasing numbers of German Jews sought to flee Nazi Germany and reach Palestine. As is well known, the British were reluctant to allow them in, not least because of Arab pressure. Wallenberg was demonstrably not a German Jew but a Swede, and – as his grandfather noted during their time together in Stockholm – an increasingly persuasive talker. By his own account, Wallenberg managed to convince the consular official, who perhaps was violating his government's rules, to put a tourist visa into the

Swede's passport. There seems no question that, as when hitchhiking in America, Wallenberg genuinely enjoyed the give and take of negotiations with others, including officialdom, and that he was good at it.

It may be acknowledged here that though the historian is required to maintain a suitable distance from his subject, there is in this case some intellectual difficulty in keeping the man revealed during the mid-1930s within a strict chronological context. We know that these are the words of a man who less than ten years later would, during a time of unprecedented crisis, provide life-giving assistance to thousands of humans. Keeping this in mind, one can only marvel at the prescience of some of what Wallenberg wrote during his short time in Palestine. One particularly poignant example of this can be seen in the following lament:

What I have seen of banking so far makes it seem like a kind of glorified pawn-shop ... I would guess that once you've mastered this routine, there are few areas in which you have a chance of finding yourself faced with a new situation calling for an extra measure of intelligence or imagination. All the rules have been written, everything has been foreseen ... One thing I do find interesting is the organization of the work itself, the structure of the office, etc.²⁶

His interest in organizational questions would serve him well eight years later in Budapest. Yet it must be kept in mind that Wallenberg was not a diplomat in training, nor even less, as the hagiographers would have it, an incipient 'rescuer' in the making. In no way is the interesting young man we see developing denigrated by the assertion that, at least in his correspondence – and it is hard to imagine a more revealing source apart from a personal journal, which he seemed not to have kept – there are few if any signs of a great humanitarian in the making. There are no signals that this individual would risk his life to save strangers. He did, however, have a strong sense of himself, which can be seen when he wrote to GOW, complaining again about his unsuitability to become a banker:

'[Grandfather] you mustn't lose sight of one thing, and that is that I may not be particularly suited to banking at all ... I don't find myself very bankerish; the director of a bank should be judge-like and calm and cold and cynical besides. Freund and Jacob W. are probably typical, and I feel as different from them as I could be. My temperament is better suited to some positive line of work than to sitting around saying no.'²⁷

In contrast to the assertions of the hagiographers, even in Palestine

Wallenberg was not an incipient 'angel of rescue', preparing in temporal training for fate to call upon him. Indeed, as we shall see below, evidence of any emotional connection to the Jews he met while in Palestine is completely absent from his Palestine letters, though he did comment positively on the ideals and goals of Zionism. In fact, this surprising *absence* of an emotional or intellectual connection, or interest in Jews, either while in Palestine or Europe, becomes even more evident in correspondence and other material he wrote between 1936 and early 1944. In the only documented reference by Wallenberg to Jews, before arriving in Palestine, he expresses himself quite negatively, making a broad, almost anti-Semitic generalization. After he received information, shortly before departing from South Africa, that his sailing from Italy to Palestine would be on a boat filled with Jews on their way to a Zionist conference, Wallenberg wrote that this made the prospect of that particular journey somewhat unpleasant: 'Knowing what I do about the average South African Jew, I'm quite pessimistic, but it can happen that in spite of this, the trip may turn out to be pleasant.'²⁸

Such a comment indicates that Wallenberg was very much a man of his times, when it was common to express oneself negatively about a 'people' with an almost unthinking, but affirming, broad stroke. Such a statement – one unsupported by any real evidence – indicates his acceptance of a 'common' prejudice against Jews. Today such a statement would be considered by some to be racist – in 1936 it was commonplace.

In autumn 1936, when back in Sweden, Wallenberg composed a lengthy travelogue about his months in South Africa. Published in the Swedish travel magazine *Jorden runt: magasin för geografi och resor* [Around the World; A Magazine for Geography and Travel] his article is a well-written, detailed and thoughtful account of the exotic world and people he encountered in South Africa. It provides genuine insights into aspects of Wallenberg's character, insights which are articulated here at greater length than in anything else extant written by Wallenberg himself.²⁹ As with his personal correspondence, this magazine article demonstrates considerable fluency with language, a sharp eye for observation, and an intellectual precision grounded, not least, in his rapidly obtained knowledge of the area's history. Though the essay is primarily descriptive (it was published with a number of photographs he took himself), the travelogue analyses a phenomenon which interested him more the longer he was there: 'The longer I stayed in Cape Town, the more I became interested in South Africa's big problem, the race question [*rasfrågan*].' Noting that although there were some things which spoke for a sort of equality between races, 'such as one finds in French West Africa', he observed that there were

also problems arising if one permitted the mixing of races. Such a stance would give blacks (*negreerna*, in the Swedish of the times) equal standing with whites, which he found problematic. He opined: 'But it is not only happily that one can offer blacks the feeling of equal standing with whites. One must also defend against racial mixing, which would then occur between white and black. To maintain [sufficiently] low levels of racial mixing would be very difficult, as in other countries with many white inhabitants, such as the United States, Australia and South Africa.' After noting that French colonies successfully kept the races apart because few whites were permitted to settle in them, he expressed regret that the situation in South Africa was not satisfactory: 'Because in past years an unfortunately large and little contested contact between the races was permitted to occur here in Cape Province, a mixed race has been created, which constitutes a very significant problem.'³⁰ In the main, Wallenberg reported things as he saw them, and though the reader should be careful not to expect what is not there, it may at a minimum be concluded that he found the separation of races desirable. He most certainly neither condemned such racist segregation nor found it cause for moral outrage; he described what he understood as 'inequalities' between ethnic groups as he viewed them. Though opinions such as those noted here do not necessarily demonstrate a deep-seated racism within Wallenberg, his unprotesting acceptance that 'miscegenation' was a problem to be avoided does show a man comfortable with some of the more insidious notions and prejudices prevailing amongst most Europeans in the 1930s. It also stands in stark contrast to the unsupported hagiographic assertions that Wallenberg was an altruist 'in training' to rescue, some years later, a threatened minority.

It is interesting to note something else that Wallenberg wrote in his first letter from Haifa. He described in detail the journey across the Mediterranean, including the spectacle of an assembled British naval flotilla in Alexandria.³¹ He joyfully evoked the scene as his passenger ship glided past an Italian troop transport approaching the Suez Canal on its way to the conflict in Ethiopia. He wrote: 'Our crew and I and the 2,000 men on the troop carrier waved frenetically at each other, yelling wildly and screaming, "Duce, Duce, Duce". Then we sang the nice new Italian song, "Facetta nera, bella Abessinia" [Black jewel, fair Abyssinnia]'.³²

That same letter contains something even more interesting. His journey to Palestine occurred during the very days when Hitler shocked the world by retaking the Rhineland. That operation, which began on 7 March, was the Führer's first international crisis caused by crossing international borders, and naturally it was a subject of intense

conversation on the boat, particularly among the German Jews who had only recently fled Nazi oppression.³³ Wallenberg wrote:

The atmosphere was especially jolly the evening a rumour went around that the Germans had occupied the Rhineland, that the French had mobilized, and that the British navy had left Alexandria to anchor outside Kiel in protest. The news service on board was poor, as you can see, but that rumour got the Germans on board really going. I was sorry to encounter such widespread pessimism concerning the prospects for Europe's future. This was, for the most part however, concentrated amongst the Jews, but they had in any case their own reasons. [Den var emellertid speciellt koncentrerad till judarna men de hade väl sina skäl.]³⁴

Wallenberg's few months in Palestine were shaped around his increasingly unsatisfying apprenticeship at Freund's Hollantsche Bank Uni. They were also filled with sights, outings and encounters with different people from different cultures (he observed that his French and German were rapidly coming back to life). He admitted to his grandfather a growing realization that banking was not where his heart lay, and that both emotionally and intellectually he liked less and less of what he saw of that line of work. He grew increasingly anxious about the prospects of becoming a banker:

The nature of banking, such as I see it manifested in [this] bank, has surprised me in one respect, i.e., in its civil service capacity. I had always thought banks were the apotheosis of 'rugged individualism', a concrete example of the superiority of private enterprise to state ownership. Now I see that though it is privately owned rather than state owned, it is so mechanically managed that it might as well be run by the state.³⁵

One event Wallenberg experienced was the Arab Uprising of 1936, which sent political tremors around the world. Naturally Wallenberg found this interesting, yet not particularly frightening. He discussed the disturbances in his letters to GOW, offering this analysis: 'The effects of the disturbances have been disastrous, but I still don't think there is much physical danger. The total number of Jews and Europeans killed is 33. I have a vague feeling that this week and the next will be decisive; we'll be able to form an opinion on whether this will continue or not. I think most of it will be over in three weeks, but others are more pessimistic.'³⁶ Together they decided that despite the uneasy atmosphere, the apprentice should remain in Palestine.

Something, however, changed Wallenberg's mind, and shortly thereafter we see that it was decided – by whom is uncertain – that the

six-month stay would not be extended. At the same time, we see his frustration growing, at being so tightly controlled by his grandfather, however beloved the old man was. Wallenberg sought GOW's blessing to return home sooner rather than later by invoking the 'necessity' of returning to Sweden to fulfil his military obligations. About a month before leaving Haifa, his frustrations and anxieties burst forth:

In a way, these [last two] letters have made me happier than any others you've written to me. You cannot have helped but notice that my letters this last year have betrayed a certain anxiousness, stemming from the fact that while I thought my present course of study – which is entirely your doing – clever and logically directed toward *the goal you set*, namely a foreign bank, didn't serve the purpose of preparing me to earn an income in the near future.

I was also afraid that your plan was too inflexible. I had a feeling that you had made up your mind that I was to stay in Palestine for a couple of years, no matter what I felt about the place. [Now] I detect a willingness to adjust the plan to the circumstances. On those terms, I'm willing to be cooperative and accommodate myself to your wishes more than I had thought lately, because I don't want to hide the fact that during the last few months I began to believe, that in order to make myself heard, I would have to cry 'wolf' more than the wolf actually deserves. [Italics in the original.]

Raoul Wallenberg was a confident young man who for years maintained an emotionally complicated relationship with the most influential person in his life. He was obviously chafing at his grandfather's dominating influence, and increasingly resented it. Nonetheless, the young man's devotion and gratitude towards his grandfather never left him. The letter cited above was lengthy, reflecting the complexities of their relationship. Its conclusion is telling:

I can never fail to think about the love and care which grandfather wastes on me (in addition to money), and I see in grandfather's trip home [to Sweden] further evidence of that. If I were a worthy grandson I would naturally thank grandfather by following [his] directives without question or objection. I am therefore ashamed of the comments and suggestions I occasionally offer, but I don't regret them, since I don't think any good would result if I hid my worries.³⁷

Also playing a role in his change of plans was his mother's longing to have her son back home, something she hadn't enjoyed for some

five years. The result was that Wallenberg's international banking career came to an abrupt and unplanned end. In August 1936 he left Palestine and returned to Sweden.

Back home in Stockholm, his primary concern was to find a sufficiently interesting job which would support him. This need was rather urgent because his grandfather supported him only while abroad, and he naturally desired neither to be a burden on his parents, nor to live with them. Though he was not in any way threatened financially – he was after all a Wallenberg – his correspondence from the next several years makes clear that though he belonged to that powerful family, suitable employment and proper financial status was not given by powerful family members as a matter of course, and that he would have to search for employment both inside and outside the family empire.³⁸ It is also clear that his failure over several years to find a satisfying position was connected to the fact that his American degree in architecture found little favour with potential Swedish employers, making it well-nigh impossible to find professional work in Sweden.

Upon returning, Wallenberg did complete his reserve military service obligations, which he was good at and found very interesting. He wrote to GOW: 'My military service wasn't too bad, except for the occasional disagreement with my company head, Capt. Kallner, who bawled me out on several occasions and called me just about every name he could think of. The manoeuvres were fine. We only got a couple of hours sleep at night, but the whole thing was very exciting.'³⁹ The last letter Wallenberg wrote to his grandfather, whose health failed during the second half of 1936, is dated 19 January 1937. To the end, the two exchanged views on national and world affairs, and the grandson's final words to his grandfather were: 'As far as trade policy is concerned, the talk of the day – i.e. in the newspapers – is the lowering of tariffs among the Nordic countries. Everyone is dazzled by our domestic prosperity, to the point that no one sees the shadows on the trade front. All best wishes from your devoted, Raoul.'⁴⁰ The elder Wallenberg died in Sweden, in March 1937, and presumably his grandson saw him during those final weeks. As mentioned, there is no evidence that Wallenberg kept a personal journal, so we don't know how he felt about the passing of his beloved and dominating grandfather. But it is reasonable to speculate that GOW's passing left a gap in Wallenberg's emotional life. It did, however, also give him the freedom to make his own decisions, and to follow his own path into the future.

In this connection we can dispense with one prominent myth about Wallenberg, one which I have been 'assured of' numerous times by members of lecture audiences, particularly in the United States. It is widely believed that Wallenberg was a 'black sheep' of the powerful

family, estranged or even isolated from the haute-bourgeois life and financial solidity of the larger family and its lively social world. Most often this has been asserted by my interlocutors as an example of his hardy individualism, a quality borne of difficult family relations. The available documentation, however, leaves no doubt that this was simply not the case. Wallenberg's correspondence throughout his life, and particularly in the late 1930s, is replete with letters both personal and professional to his two older second cousins, the powerful Jacob and Marcus Jr. In them he often used familiar forms of address, which he would not have done were he estranged from them or the family at large. In addition, office records for Jacob and Marcus Jr show that Wallenberg was a regular if not frequent visitor, and his letters are consistently filled with news of family members and gatherings. Indeed, his appointments calendar from 1944 is replete with dates for family meetings.⁴¹

Of interest, however, is the fact that though it was well within their power to do so, Jacob and Marcus Jr seem to have decided not to give their now 25-year-old second cousin a permanent position which would provide an opportunity to rise into the empire's upper reaches, which he undoubtedly wanted to do. Though during the next several years they and other important members of the family empire engaged him for some temporary assignments, including market research for a coffee company backed by Jacob, there is no doubt that he was frustrated by his situation.⁴² Indeed, in spring 1939, Wallenberg wrote to Jacob in a plaintive tone, complaining that not more was being done to find him something suitable. After being put in touch with a family contact whose business was in India, Wallenberg wrote to Jacob, almost three years since returning from Palestine, in some desperation:

This [situation] is sad, since naturally I would prefer to work in Europe or America rather than in the colonies ... It is rather depressing to walk around waiting like this. I would therefore be grateful to you, if you could tell me whether, as in early February, you advise me to wait for the job [for] which you held out the prospect or if conditions are such that you would rather advise me to try and get a job on my own. In the former case, I wonder if you possibly could offer me anything to do in the meantime.

Once again I take this opportunity to thank you warmly for the kind interest that you have shown in me and for your efforts as regards my future employment. Your affectionate, R. Wallenberg.⁴³

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Although Jacob was sometimes said to be Wallenberg's role model, this is not the only time that Wallenberg felt compelled to write to his uncle with a somewhat pathetic plea for help in finding a job. The second such instance would come under rather more dramatic circumstances than merely biding his time in Stockholm, waiting for a suitable opportunity.

An earlier temporary assignment came in a personal letter written in late November 1936 by Marcus Wallenberg Sr, the 73-year-old patriarch of the family. The salutation read 'Dear Raoul' (*Käre Raoul*), and it offered him a chance to pursue a new business opportunity in Germany.⁴⁴ The formidable banker and industrialist had been informed that a small factory in the town of Neustadt, near Freiburg, produced a superior zip for trousers. He decided that, if profitable, one of the empire's leading companies should buy the 'ingenious' patent and produce them in Sweden. The young erstwhile banker was given the task of determining if the project was worth pursuing. Wallenberg seized the task with great enthusiasm, and days later he was on the road in provincial Germany, heading for the factory.

It is an established fact that throughout the Nazi era, virtually to its blood-soaked end, countless Swedish companies – including central elements of the Wallenberg empire – did business with German companies of various sizes and character. Trade ties which were close and mutually important characterized Swedish–German relations throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Throughout the Nazi era, Swedish businessmen, diplomats, politicians, bureaucrats, athletes and artists were constantly travelling back and forth between the two countries, engaged in 'business as usual'. The start of the war in September 1939 did nothing to change this situation and, for most of the war, Swedish businessmen were active throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. It was therefore perfectly commonplace that 'a Wallenberg', in this case a younger member of the family, would do business in Hitler's Germany, and the task Wallenberg now undertook would not have raised any eyebrows – on either side of this mutually beneficial trade relationship. That the Wallenbergs and Sweden's business establishment continued doing business with Germany long after the mass murder of Jews was well known is an established fact, but discussion of that fact lies outside the framework of this study.⁴⁵

When Wallenberg undertook this new business project in the heart of provincial Germany, he could well have seen the 'typical' anti-Semitic banners or signs which were plentiful in the countryside. Yet almost four years after the Nazi takeover, there is no evidence to support the notion that he was in any way troubled by any qualms for conducting business in Nazi Germany. Nor can there be any doubt

that the accelerating persecution of Germany's (and soon Austria's) Jews was unknown to Raoul, Jacob or Marcus Jr, since they were all avid newspaper readers. This particular project began long before the 'crisis year' of 1938, during which the Anschluss in March, the autumn political summits which remapped Central Europe, and November's shocking *Reichskristallnacht* all occurred. But it did commence a little over a year since the infamous Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 were announced, with Jewish citizens of the Third Reich 'legally' stripped of their German citizenship. Interestingly, Wallenberg also undertook the zipper project soon after his stay in Haifa. Several of the hagiographic publications, and many a commemorative occasion about him, assert that his time there 'convinced' him that he had to do something to help Germany's Jews – or even, in some renderings, all of Europe's Jews. Though the practice of so-called 'Aryanization' of Jewish commercial assets had yet to reach its deplorable height, there is no reason to doubt that the Wallenbergs were by that time acutely aware of many of the details of 'Aryanization'. Whether they were in any way troubled by this policy's violation of the very foundations of capitalism inherent to this 'legalized' robbery is unknown. Countering this, however, is the fact that within the financial and industrial sphere they controlled, the Wallenbergs refused even to consider instituting any notion or aspect of 'Aryanization' as part of their corporate practice. Though German officials and businessmen tried, throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, to force Swedish companies to adopt their insidious practices, they had limited success.

The Wallenbergs knew what 'Aryanization' was, as well as many other of Germany's anti-Jewish policies, because virtually no public manifestation of Nazi persecution of Jews was unknown in Sweden. This was because the country was particularly well informed of events in their powerful neighbour to the south through newspapers, radio and, of course, the constant traffic of travellers back and forth.⁴⁶ Daily newspapers reported regularly on the seemingly endless series of petty persecutions and government-dictated social and economic segregation and humiliation inflicted upon Germany's Jews. Nonetheless, on 12 December 1936, Wallenberg wrote to GOW: 'The start up of the factory [in Sweden] will in part depend on the result of my investigation. The whole thing sounds quite attractive.'⁴⁷

One of the people to whom Wallenberg wrote long and detailed letters was his sister Nina, born nine years after him. One letter, written just two days before *Reichskristallnacht*, is filled with comments comparing the history and social policies of England and Sweden. 'Today I've mailed you a booklet in English about Stockholm's social

programs. I myself know nothing about the matter.' This quite interesting if mundane letter concludes with Wallenberg telling his sister, 'I have nothing more to tell you, and therefore send my heartfelt greetings to my dearest sister, from her devoted Raoul.'⁴⁸ Though he may not have been interested in Sweden's burgeoning welfare state and systems, he remained deeply worried about his own prospects. Between his return to Sweden and the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, there is no question that Wallenberg's primary concern was to establish himself in a respectable, even high-level job; he did not, however, succeed. Nonetheless, in letters to friends and family he makes clear that though he failed to find the job he wanted, he enjoyed his bachelor life in Stockholm. And why not – he was a Wallenberg in Stockholm. Yet his frustrations continued to mount.

Though he was just one individual living in a small country on Europe's periphery, Wallenberg's connections to the family's international business empire made him especially well informed about Sweden and the world around him. Keeping trade open to Nazi Germany and Europe was essential to Sweden's economic health, even while the country's political leaders made clear their goal of keeping Sweden out of the impending war. During the war itself, Jacob and Marcus Jr kept their businesses flourishing even while extensively assisting government officials during a series of extremely complicated and important trade negotiations with the British and Germans. Jacob assisted negotiations with the Germans while Marcus Jr was often in London assisting that team's work.

In 1941, Raoul Wallenberg commenced his partnership with the Hungarian-Jewish immigrant Koloman Lauer, elements of which sent him travelling throughout the Nazi-occupied continent with some frequency. Yet in his letters written between 1937 and 1944, there is not a single word about the ever-worsening situation of Europe's Jews. Nor do those written between 1939 and 1944 offer any insight into what he thought either about the war itself, or the situation of the Jews. Here it is salient to again emphasize that readers of Sweden's newspapers between 1939 and 1945 were quite well informed about what was happening to Jews on the continent, as persecution evolved into ghettoization, deportation, and worse. From 1941 forward, even information about mass killing evolving into genocide reached Swedish newspaper readers.⁴⁹

In fact, because of his privileged position, Wallenberg was probably better informed than most Swedes – even others of his social standing and education. He met frequently with his older cousins, and it is likely that they shared some information and insights with him. His continental travels during the war included a trip to Berlin in November 1942.⁵⁰ This was when the battle of Stalingrad was raging, and this trip

through Germany, presumably by train, occurred during some of the worse months of the Holocaust. Between spring 1942 and spring 1943, deportation trains were traversing the continent from all directions, carrying millions to their deaths in the by now fully functioning Nazi death camps located in German-occupied Poland. Yet anything connected with such matters that he might have seen or heard of during these trips remained unremarked upon, in the available sources.⁵¹ Even such important events as Sweden's quiet but newsworthy reception of some 1,000 Norwegian Jews in November and December 1942, who escaped deportation, as well as the country's very public role in the salvation of Danish Jewry in October 1943, are not commented upon by Wallenberg, either in response to newspaper reports indicating something was going to happen, or afterwards in the few letters we have from that period.⁵²

In late 1941, one of Wallenberg's connections with Jacob paid off, and he was introduced to Lauer.⁵³ After coming to Sweden, Lauer set up a small import-export firm which was affiliated with Sven Salén, a prominent Stockholm businessman and shipper who was close to the Wallenberg brothers. It was successful enough to need another hand and, after being introduced, Wallenberg quickly became Lauer's valued partner. The Hungarian Jew recognized the talents of the energetic, well-connected young Swede, and made him a partner in the firm. Perhaps most important during the war was the gentile Wallenberg's Swedish passport, which allowed him to travel throughout Europe in order to conduct the firm's business of importing to Sweden foodstuffs from Hungary and elsewhere in Central Europe. According to Lauer, Wallenberg made at least two extended trips to the Hungarian capital before 1944. He spent most of February 1942 there, and stayed almost six weeks between early September and mid-October 1943.⁵⁴

Wallenberg's last months in Stockholm were characterized, as with Sweden in general, by a striking normality. Though north-western Europe had not yet been invaded, everyone understood that it was only a matter of time. The Soviets were slowly but inexorably advancing towards Berlin after their great victories of summer and autumn 1943. Everyone in Sweden knew they had to sit tight a bit longer, and the war would be over. Though the general public did not grasp the full scale of the ongoing genocide, it was – as already noted – impossible for Wallenberg and all literate Swedes not to know that European Jewry was suffering a frightful onslaught – not just 'normal' wartime atrocities.

Interestingly, Wallenberg's calendar from the months before leaving for Budapest is filled with social events, dates with women, family gatherings and other activities normal for a man of his position and age. He went to work every day, and socialized at night and at weekends.

His last personal letter written before he departed for Budapest is an important one, as much for what it doesn't say as for what it does. Written on 28 February 1944 to his sister Nina, then living in Berlin with her diplomat husband, it is in many ways a typical letter penned by him. It is lengthy, articulate, personal and describes in detail things both familial and professional. It is worth quoting at length because it provides considerable insight into what was on his mind at the time, aspects of his ongoing business activities and conditions in Sweden:

It is frightfully boring here without you, and the dinner table at home is straight out of a play by Strindberg ... This letter will be rather choppy, since it has been written on different typewriters, for we have been terribly busy. The boxcars with oranges keep rolling in, one after the other, and so far without any hitches or problems. The market has been flooded with oranges this past week, because too much is being imported from different places all at the same time, making prices plummet. Thank god all of ours had already been sold ... The rest of the business is not doing too well; there are constant problems with the poultry men. We have some other major projects planned, but it's too soon to tell whether they are feasible or not.

The Falkmans had a magnificent dance with lots of pretty girls ... The following day, on the 19th, Gösta and Gittan gave a tremendously successful dinner party with Maj and Enzo, the Romanian minister ... a week later, Göran and Märta Crafoord had a dinner party, this one also very nice ...

Yet another typewriter. Last Sunday ... I met up with Knut von Horn [who] works at the Ministry of Supply, as you know. During our walk, we talked about the way the supply situation is developing. We painted ourselves an alarming scenario, especially if there is peace in Finland. In that case, we guessed that we'd have a moral obligation to help them out, out of our own rations The painting was bleak even if there was no peace in Finland: in the event of a Russian attack we would have another half million refugees or more to feed ... I think that Central Europe is about to change political course again.

A week ago, I sent a letter to *Dagens Nyheter* [Sweden's most important daily newspaper] suggesting that they do away with certain practices and change some of their permanent headings ... and yesterday I got a letter from Dehlgren, who thanked me for my kind interest ... Well, there is nothing more to report as far as I know, except to say that I hope that you'll be home for a visit, and the sooner the better. Best wishes, Raoul.⁵⁵

As explained below, by mid-June Wallenberg had met with officials from UD and the American Legation who would first interview him, then invite him to accept the task which developed in negotiations between the Americans, Sweden's foreign office, and leaders of Stockholm's Jewish community. These sometimes confusing negotiations concluded with Wallenberg's departure from Stockholm on Friday, 7 July 1944. He would never return to Sweden, or to his family.⁵⁶

EXAMINING WALLEMBERG'S MOTIVES

One reason amongst many for re-examining Wallenberg is to better understand his reason(s) for accepting the task of going to Budapest, not least because his choice represents a moment when a 'bystander' chose to become a rescuer of Jews during the Holocaust.⁵⁷ Insight into his personal motivation can contribute to the discussion within Holocaust studies which seeks to understand who becomes a rescuer of his or her fellow humans during times of crises.⁵⁸ We shall therefore examine two central factors which figure prominently in the hagiographic and sometimes even scholarly literature, and are thought to explain his motivation to become a rescuer. Both can be proven to be essentially irrelevant, leaving more open the question of what exactly motivated him to leave the safety of Stockholm and go to Budapest.

One of the more fanciful theories given by the hagiographers, which seems to hold particular appeal for the reading and listening public, is the matter of his alleged 'Jewish blood' as a central motivating element. A survey of such assertions will be followed by an examination of what many authors (and others, such as filmmakers and politicians) purport to be Wallenberg's pronounced 'philo-Semitism', something which ostensibly caused him to feel an intimate solidarity with the suffering of Europe's Jews in the years and months before he went to Budapest.

These two issues can be seen as emblematic for the multiple methodological problems found in the most influential hagiographic literature. A complete review of these problems cannot be conducted here, but the critical reader will quickly see that much of this genre, which purports to be 'historical' literature, is characterized by a methodological shoddiness and sloppiness which is unacceptable in works purporting to be historical. The 'explanations', interpretations and conclusions found in these publications, about Wallenberg and his encounter with Holocaust history, are most often based on an arbitrary and scanty mix of fragmentary documentation, almost always without source citations. Perhaps most problematically from the historian's

point of view, the most influential literature and representations about Wallenberg have relied largely on an uncritical acceptance of virtually everything found in survivor testimonies, memoirs, commemorative speeches, and so on, about Wallenberg. What has compounded these problems in the most influential publications is the failure of the authors to understand fundamental elements, both of the Holocaust at large and, more specifically and importantly, of what actually happened in Hungary and Budapest, and why. In short, this genre lacks credibility and is sometimes directly unreliable, yet such publications have been instrumental in shaping the commonly accepted understanding of Wallenberg, how and why he did what he did, and his place in Holocaust history.

The first issue, as noted, is the great importance which has been placed on his alleged 'part-Jewishness' or, as one writer put it, his 'dash of Jewish blood'.⁵⁹ This alleged and completely unprovable factor in his ostensible genetic makeup is said to have motivated him to save Jews. And again, when this somewhat bizarre assertion is made, we see in the literature the curious methodological mix of interviews (some done by the authors themselves, some repeated throughout the literature), fragments of letters or other documents, and other bits of purported evidence used by these authors to reach sometimes altogether different conclusions.

The claim generally starts with the notion that a very distant relative of Wallenberg was Jewish. There is general agreement that around the end of the eighteenth century, a German Jew named Benedicks emigrated to Sweden, establishing the maternal line of Wallenberg's family. H. Rosenfeld writes that Benedicks quickly became a financier to the Swedish court, while J. Bierman states that Benedicks became a court jeweller. Both agree that conversion to Swedish Lutheranism was almost immediate, as was marriage to a Lutheran Swedish woman.⁶⁰ This ostensible 'one-sixteenth' Jewishness inherited by Raoul Wallenberg is also mentioned in other accounts, with one current online source echoing the distasteful speculation noted above, that Wallenberg 'owned a drop of Jewish blood'.⁶¹ Typically, there is no explanation of precisely how the 'dash' or 'drop' could make a difference, generations later during a genocide – but for many it seems important.

Tellingly, Wallenberg's sister Nina is quoted by Bierman as saying that the family grew up with no idea of their ostensible Jewish connection: 'not, I'm sure, because Mother wished to hide it, but because the Jewish ancestor was so far back and none of his descendants had been brought up in the ways of the Jewish people. So we didn't become conscious of this until the mid-thirties.'⁶² Yet Bierman also

makes note of Wallenberg's 'one-sixteenth Jewish blood', claiming that he was proud of it. A Swedish contemporary interviewed by this same author related that when in 1930 they were in the army together, Wallenberg told him that he was 'proud of his partial Jewish ancestry and, as I recall, must have exaggerated it somewhat. I remember him saying, "A person like me, who is both a Wallenberg and half-Jewish, can never be defeated."⁶³ This recollection concerns a distant conversation which took place several years before Wallenberg's sister said that the family was even vaguely aware of their distant connection to anything Jewish. In other words, the Jewish ancestry of the Wislings (Wallenberg's mother's maiden name) was so distant as to be meaningless, except, it seems, in *ex post facto* interviews about Wallenberg.⁶⁴ In the event, the history of Jews and Jewish life in Sweden leaves little doubt that once converted, most if not all connections with Judaism within the Wislings and other similar families with some sort of distant Jewish connection would be quickly emptied of any effective relevance. Equally important, in post-agricultural (late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century) Sweden, connections to Jewishness were publicly denied, particularly once a family such as the Benedicks or Wislings had achieved any measure of social standing. Such trends are known mostly to accelerate with each succeeding generation, something which remains true of contemporary Sweden.⁶⁵

Continuing this trend Kati Marton, author of a popular book about Wallenberg, cites a contemporary report (noted below) from Herschel Johnson, the US envoy in Sweden. After meeting Wallenberg, Johnson wrote that, 'He himself is half Jewish, incidentally'. In her book, Marton concluded a key chapter entitled 'The Right Man', in the following way: 'Wallenberg [was] proud of his ancestry, but had probably exaggerated his Jewishness. He was, in fact, only about one-sixteenth Jewish.'⁶⁶ Seeming to buck the trend of claiming that Wallenberg's putative Jewishness was significant, Rosenfeld concluded: 'Although one of Raoul's maternal great-grandparents (earlier described in the very same paragraph as a "great-great-grandfather") had been Jewish, this was never a factor in his life and did not influence or affect his later mission in Budapest.'⁶⁷

There is no evidence whatsoever that any provable 'trace' of Jewish blood, from either side of the family, influenced Wallenberg in any way, including any notion – sound or silly – about Jewish 'blood', culture or memory. It was uncommon in the extreme that an ethnic Swede, at any time but certainly not during the first half of the twentieth century, would voluntarily lay claim to any connection with Jewish culture or religion – not least the Swedish-Lutheran *haute-bourgeoisie* to which Wallenberg so securely belonged. Moreover, there is no evidence that

such a notion was genuinely considered by him – interviews decades later with contemporaries notwithstanding. On the contrary, the evidence strongly suggests that Wallenberg lacked any articulated or effective sense of connection with Jews, Judaism, or even what was happening to the Jews in Germany and Europe before 1944. As we shall see, Wallenberg's revealing correspondence does not offer the reader any evidence of solidarity with Jews, be it emotional, spiritual or cultural.

There is, however, one piece of evidence – mentioned above and used by Marton – from a contemporary source which tells us something of how Wallenberg apparently regarded himself in this respect. Significantly, it was expressed just prior to his departure for Budapest. In June 1944, when Wallenberg was negotiating with Swedish and American officials about the parameters of his mission, he met Herschel Johnson, the American envoy in Stockholm. After their second meeting, Johnson reported: 'There is no doubt in my mind as to the sincerity of Wallenberg's purpose because I have talked to him myself. I was told by Wallenberg that he wanted to be able to help effectively and to save lives and that he was not interested in going to Budapest merely to write reports to be sent to the Foreign Office. He himself is half Jewish, incidentally.'⁶⁸

Was this rather exaggerated claim by Wallenberg incidental, or did it suddenly matter to him? And if so, why? It is easy to imagine that in his excitement at the prospect of his forthcoming task he did, as it were, burst out and say something that may have been in the back of his mind since being told by his mother that there was some sort of connection (although his sister Nina is not quoted as providing a context for the comment by their mother in the mid-1930s). Yet the question must be asked – did it matter in any significant way if he had any, to use the popular if distasteful jargon, 'Jewish blood in his veins'? What if anything does it contribute to our understanding of him and his motivations? Though authors of popular literature have written that they believe it was a decisive factor explaining his decision to undertake his task, there is – apart from the report by Johnson quoted above – no other contemporary evidence for the notion that Wallenberg perceived himself to be Jewish in any real sense, or that this played a role in motivating him to go to Budapest. It seems a standard practice of this genre to assert, either explicitly or otherwise, that 'because' he had Jewish blood, he particularly cared for Jews. This is not only empirical nonsense, it is morally objectionable. The reader is apparently to understand that because Wallenberg had some Jewish background, or 'blood', in him, it was in some way inevitable that an ambition to rescue Jews had evolved within him, and that it was only

‘natural’ for him to be concerned about Jews. Apparently all that was lacking up to that point in Wallenberg’s life was the opportunity to do so. Most often such assertions are tied to his brief time in Palestine where, because he met some German Jews who fled Nazi Germany and succeeded in getting into Palestine, he developed a strong, even decisive feeling of solidarity with their plight – and wanted to do something about it. Indeed, it is sometimes asserted that after returning to Sweden from Palestine, he seemingly couldn’t stop speaking about the Jews’ situation. Such suppositions and speculative assertions may enhance a fictional narrative, but they are inappropriate in writing history.

What then did Wallenberg say about Jews, either in general, or about the accelerating suffering imposed on German Jews by Hitler’s regime? On 3 April 1936, about a month after arriving in Haifa for his banking apprenticeship, Wallenberg wrote to his grandfather that he was among people ‘of every possible nationality ... I’m thinking of learning Arabic instead of Hebrew, which is what everybody recommends even though Hebrew is the main language here, rising like a phoenix from the ashes.’⁶⁹ Then, after describing some daily activities, he wrote:

The people at my boarding house are mainly German Jews and very nice and funny. One day, one of them told me in passing that her brother had been murdered by the Nazis. Otherwise, people here don’t talk much about the past, but almost exclusively about the future of Palestine, in which everyone believes wholeheartedly – it would be a pity if they didn’t, since Palestine is their home and the realization of a longtime [*sic*] dream.⁷⁰

Concerning Wallenberg’s alleged impressions after encountering these refugees, Marton wrote:

For Wallenberg, Haifa in 1936 turned out to be an apprenticeship of a different sort. [German Jews] ... were streaming into Palestine ... Raoul met many of them through his Dutch mentor and in the kosher boarding house where he was a lodger. He listened to their stories ... It was Wallenberg’s first exposure to the irrational and poisonous germ of anti-semitism ... He sat spellbound listening to [them] ... The impression this humbled segment of humanity made on him was to be permanent.⁷¹

Another author stated: ‘Raoul left Palestine with a clear understanding of the extent and complexity of the ‘Jewish problem’ in Hitler’s Germany ... Raoul spoke often – to those who were willing to listen – about the evil and dangers of Nazism.’⁷²

And yet another wrote:

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Among the people with whom Raoul had come into contact – and the experience seems to have made a lasting impression on him – were a number of young Jews who had fled from Hitler's Germany to Palestine. He had met them at the 'kosher' boarding-house in Haifa ... It was his first experience of the results of Nazi persecution and it affected him deeply – not just because of his humanitarian outlook but also, perhaps, because he was aware that he himself had a dash of Jewish blood.⁷³

Even scholars have asserted this, as Eva Fogelman did in her book about rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. 'He learned firsthand [from German Jewish refugees] the plight of the Jews. This awareness had tremendous impact in [*sic*] his willingness to help Hungarian Jewry.'⁷⁴ The three quotations given above, though phrased somewhat differently, are almost identical in meaning, and all are from interviews done at different times with Vivica Lindfors, a female contemporary of Wallenberg's. They all recount an evening in Stockholm some time in 1937, when Wallenberg and she had spent the evening dancing.⁷⁵ The aspiring actress was certain Wallenberg had taken her back to his office (or his grandfather's office in one account) to try to seduce her. Instead he spoke to her about some much more serious things: 'He spoke to me in an intense voice, very low, almost a whisper, of the terrible things that were being done to the Jews of Germany.'⁷⁶ Bierman quotes her as saying: 'He started talking very intensely about the Jews and Germany and about the horrors he had apparently seen.'⁷⁷ In the third version, Rosenfeld described Wallenberg not as whispering quietly and intensely but as 'haranguing me [the young girl] on the subjects of Nazism and the Third Reich. He spoke with much intensity about the developments in Germany. I was only sixteen then, and it was not the sort of thing that interested me. Moreover, I did not believe a word. In fact, I thought he was trying to seduce me.'⁷⁸

If, however, Wallenberg was genuinely concerned about the persecution of Jews in Germany – whom he might have seen while travelling there – he made no mention of them in his correspondence from those particular months. By late 1936, Germany's Jews were increasingly subject to a variety of disorienting pressures and steadily escalating persecution. But, except for relatively rare instances when individuals might be mistreated in public by party members, police or members of the public, they were not during this time subjected to 'horrors' that might have been visible to a travelling Swedish businessman.

However, in the written evidence left behind by Wallenberg, both from his months in Palestine and for several years afterwards, one finds not a single expression of sympathy or empathy, either with the many Jews he met in Palestine, or their plight in Germany.⁷⁹ He comments

several times on the Jews' situation in Palestine regarding their future prospects for the nascent state, but regarding Nazi persecution of Jews, not a single word can be found in his correspondence between 1935 and 1944. The 'absence' of this subject and its many corollaries is furthermore of interest because of the nature of his letter-writing. Wallenberg wrote about what was on his mind, and often offered to his reader an analysis of those political events which had caught his interest. His letters are expansive and interesting, but according to this body of evidence, the plight of Germany's Jews (and later other Jews) caught in the Nazi trap seems not to have caught his attention.

In stark contrast to the hagiographers' emphasis on Wallenberg's alleged strong reaction after hearing of the plight of German Jews while in Haifa, what stands out instead is the rhetorical distance he maintains when he does comment on Jews. There is no sign of the concern for Jewish suffering which the young Swedish actress and others seem to have remembered. There is no evidence of any real interest or connection, before June 1944, with the tragedy which engulfed European Jewry. There is no convincing evidence that before that year, Wallenberg placed any importance whatsoever, apart from some oral testimony given by people pleased to be interviewed decades after the war, on any perceived Jewish connection, nor any evidence that some distant Jewish 'blood' coursing through his veins made Jews or Judaism relevant for him in any way.

For instance, in his first letter from Palestine, written on 12 March 1936, Wallenberg concluded: 'The Jews here are afraid of the Arabs, who are beginning to wake up and dream of an empire. Poor people, they evidently have to adjust to being in a minority wherever they go.'⁸⁰ In the letter of 3 April cited above, Wallenberg devoted some lines to an analysis of the Yishuv's economy (the Yishuv was the name of the pre-state Jewish community), telling his grandfather:

Because of this, their economy is rather fragile, but the Jews are firmly convinced that all will work out. They are used to suffering worse things than a financial crisis, so they don't care about the risks and, besides, they have no choice except to settle here. I never knew that so many Jews were as deeply and fanatically religious as many here are. To them, Palestine is much more than a mere refuge; it is the promised land, the land designated for them by God.⁸¹

A couple of weeks later he described one of his first trips outside of Haifa: 'Then we went to one of the new socialist Jewish colonies, located where the Jordan flows out of the lake. It was truly admirable ... The Jews try as hard as they can to farm efficiently.'⁸² In early July, he commented on the ongoing Arab riots:

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The disturbances here are tapering off, but I will postpone my trip to Jerusalem ... there is still a curfew, and nobody is allowed in the street after seven o'clock, which should make life rather boring for those people, especially the young ones, who work until seven and then have to go home to their rooms without the chance to go to the movies or out for a walk. A sort of three months prison sentence for the poor Jews.⁸³

Typically for this man empowered with considerable powers of observation, Wallenberg's admiration for the Zionist project was objective in tone, and evidences no sense of any particular personal connection. In the letter of 12 March cited above, he calls the Jews 'poor people', yet tells his grandfather:

They have boundless enthusiasm and idealism and these immediately strike you as the most common characteristics of Zionism. It is truly a gamble on their part to try to settle hundreds of thousands of Jews in this dry, stony little place surrounded by and already teeming with Arabs. They nevertheless are optimistic to a man, and were energy a guarantee for success the results would be excellent, for they seem to work practically around the clock.⁸⁴

His references to 'them, or they' are telling. The meaning behind the use of such language should not be exaggerated, but it is clear that for Wallenberg the Jews were different and separate from him. Any analysis of his feelings and thoughts must be founded upon those words he says, or doesn't say. It is methodologically inappropriate to insert into his 'thinking' something poignant which is alleged to have motivated decisions made years later, when he was in Sweden or Budapest. His purported sense of solidarity with Jews seems more a result of the emotional hopes of the hagiographers rather than anything supported by the evidence. As we will see, when given the chance in Budapest, he did work ceaselessly to assist and save Jews. Nonetheless, prior to mid-1944, he did not pay particular attention or care particularly much about what was happening to European Jewry. Indeed, as noted above, he was more than happy to do business in Germany, years after Hitler's regime commenced its persecution of Jews, and particularly during a period when this torment and persecution worsened literally every day. Finally, however, there is nothing particularly unusual in the fact that he didn't mention this subject. Countless other Europeans of the same background at the same time also failed to mention, in their correspondence, newspaper articles and books, and so on, what was happening to the Jews.

WHY DID WALLENBERG GO TO BUDAPEST?

In the light, then, of what we actually know of what Wallenberg thought, felt and planned in 1944 for his future, we may ask: what were his motives for choosing to go to Budapest? He knew that there would be genuine risks in a city lying in the Red Army's path, but he also understood that he was accepting a mission that would be immensely challenging and probably quite exciting. Did he go because he was, as some have speculated, a paradigmatically altruistic person willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others? This is possible, but there is no written evidence to support this particular notion. There is, as we shall see, evidence to believe that he and his partner saw potentially profitable business opportunities available in Budapest. They knew that the war was coming to an end, sooner if not later, and that with its conclusion, business opportunities throughout Europe would be readily available. There is reason to believe that he left neutral Sweden because he felt that his professional opportunities had stalled, and that the Lauer enterprise was not commensurate with his status as a Wallenberg.

There seems no doubt that by spring 1944 he remained frustrated at being unable to practise what he seemed to enjoy most – architecture. Indeed, even when working for Lauer's firm, Wallenberg's personal letterhead still included the title 'architect'. It does seem likely that Wallenberg understood that the highly unusual yet felicitous set of circumstances and chance meetings, which led to his being asked by the Swedish and American governments to go to Budapest, offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of extraordinary excitement and potential – one that he had to seize without regard for how it might influence his future. He had no way of knowing in any real detail what he would do in Budapest, or how he would do it, and he cannot have imagined how badly it would all end. One wonders what his grandfather would have thought about his carefully and expensively cultivated grandson accepting such an opportunity. Would he have approved, or would he have discouraged his grandson from accepting such a potentially dangerous, low-paid assignment?

What is certain is that his mother and grandfather had succeeded in raising and educating a man inclined to think well of others, to care about family and friends, and to do something positive – and profitable – with his life. It also seems certain that he was blessed with a good measure of personal courage. He had travelled widely in different, even exotic cultures, and clearly didn't frighten easily. This characteristic was much in evidence during the 'famous' hitchhiking episode, when he was hitchhiking in the States and was robbed by four men

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who picked him up. Afterwards he described the incident to GOW, writing of his own calm bravery:

By now I had become very suspicious because of their questions about money, their lack of luggage, and the sudden stop ... Fearing the worst, I tried to keep a cool head so as not to make things worse ... When they had all my money, I decided it was their turn to show some goodwill, so I asked them to drive me back to the highway ... by this time they were the ones who were frightened, maybe because I was so calm. I really didn't feel scared; I found the whole thing sort of interesting.⁸⁵

There is no reason to doubt this account of how his personal bravery brought him through this potentially dangerous episode. Eleven years later, he would often respond in a similar manner.

There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Wallenberg saw himself at any time before spring 1944 as either a philo-Semite or an incipient rescuer of the remnants of European Jewry. To make such an assertion is more fantasy than fact. On the contrary, his personal correspondence makes clear that his primary concerns in the months and years before going to Budapest were about his professional future. In fact, the strongest impression left by a close review of his personal correspondence is that he was a perfectly normal young man, brought up in a life of considerable privilege, who was growing increasingly frustrated that his path forward was not what he expected. His social life was flourishing in 1944, but his professional life was not. A close perusal of his daily calendar reveals a man with many friends, both male and female, but with limited professional prospects which left him increasingly frustrated. There is no evidence of any articulated or demonstrated concern for what was happening to the Jews of Europe, or of Hungary. We must therefore conclude that apart from the recollections of a handful of contemporaries, related decades after the fact, there is no evidence that Raoul Wallenberg was in any way suffused with concern for the ongoing genocide of European Jewry. This seems to be a post-war construct of those who knew him. That said, it is equally clear that when an opportunity to actually do some good was granted him, he grasped it without hesitation. This historic choice can and should stand on its own.

NOTES

1. Both passages are in *Raoul Wallenberg: Letters and Dispatches 1924–1944*, trans. K. Board (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1995), pp.26–7. This collection contains letters not published in the original Swedish collection. All translations from Swedish to English from this collection are Board's, unless otherwise specified.

2. G.O. Wallenberg to R. Wallenberg (hereafter in this context GOW to RW, or vice versa), 26 August 1935, in *ibid.*, p.1489.
3. F. Stern, *Einstein's German World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.35.
4. See, for example, A. Lajos, *Hjälten och Offren: Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest* (Vaxjö: Svenska Emigrantinstitutets skriftserie, no. 15, 2003).
5. J. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile: The Story of Raoul Wallenberg, Missing Hero of the Holocaust* (London: Penguin, 1981), p.7.
6. Born in 1863, Gustaf Oscar Wallenberg was the second son of André Oscar Wallenberg, founder of the Wallenberg banking and business empire. This constantly expanding empire played a fundamentally important role in the development of the modern Swedish state. The Wallenbergs made an immeasurable contribution in Sweden's transition from a primarily agrarian economy to an industrial one. A fascinating personality in his own right, *Farfar* Gustaf came to play a very different role in Wallenberg family history than did his two even more influential brothers, Knut Agathon and Marcus Sr.
7. Originally published in Swedish as *Älskade farfar! Brevväxlingen mellan Gustaf & Raoul Wallenberg, 1924–1936* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1987).
8. Much of this correspondence has never been used before.
9. RW to GOW, 7 November 1935, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.38.
10. GOW to RW, 11 May 1934, in *ibid.*, pp.102–3, and GOW to RW, 30 October 1934, in *ibid.*, pp.118–119.
11. Several of his university essays from an English class are in Riksarkivet (hererafter RA), Raoul Wallenberg Arkiv, Signum 1, vol. 8.
12. RW to GOW, 26 January 1935, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.130.
13. Much of what Wallenberg saw and thought while in South Africa is revealed in a lengthy article he published in autumn 1936 in a Swedish travel magazine, *Jorden runt*.
14. RW to GOW, 8 August 1935, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.145. In his next letter, Wallenberg wrote to GOW: 'I know that you object to my hanging around with Swedes, and I will remedy this bit by bit.' Going to the cinema was one of Wallenberg's favourite pastimes, something he did everywhere he went.
15. GOW to RW, 21 July 1935, in *ibid.*, pp.140–1. Italics in the original.
16. RW to GOW, 26 August 1935, in *ibid.*, p.147. The Swedish original is somewhat different. It reads: 'Själsligen har jag varit ganska trist de sista månaderna, även i Stockholm.' The translation should have read, 'Spiritually, I have been rather gloomy these past months, even in Stockholm.' Another more important line from this letter was completely expunged from the English translation: 'I själva verket har jag varit ganska nedbruten av att vara orsaken till en tragedi.' ('In actual fact I have been quite broken by being the cause of a tragedy.') See Wallenberg, *Älskade Farfar!*, p.163. No explanation for these editorial changes and purges are given by the editor or translator of *Letters and Dispatches*.
17. GOW to RW, 23 September 1935, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, pp.148–50. In the fourth paragraph of this extract, the English translation reads: 'But you must not give up your life.' The original Swedish is more emphatic.
18. *Ibid.*, p.151.
19. As noted previously, Wallenberg's English was excellent, and he would often write in that language to his grandfather, particularly when a Swedish typewriter was unavailable. Why he wrote this key portion of this letter in English is unknown.
20. *Ibid.*, p.151.
21. GOW to RW in *ibid.*, p.154.
22. GOW to RW, 22 December 1935, in *ibid.*, p.158.
23. GOW to RW, 4 February 1936, in *ibid.*, pp.165–6.
24. RW to GOW, 28 February 1936, in *ibid.*, p.168.
25. RW to GOW, 24 February, and RW to GOW, 28 February, in *ibid.*, both p.167.
26. RW to GOW, 19 June 1936, in *ibid.*, pp.183–4.
27. RW to GOW, 6 July 1936, in *ibid.*, pp.186–7. 'Jacob W.' is his older cousin, the very powerful businessman.
28. RW to GOW, 20 January 1936, in Wallenberg, *Älskade farfar!*, p.180.
29. R. Wallenberg, 'Sydafrikanska intryck' [Impressions of South Africa], *Jorden runt: magasin för geographi och resor*, 8, 2 (1936), pp.587–604.
30. *Ibid.*, pp.589–90. He also noted: 'The coloured are children of the city with their own clubs and organizations which ape the whites in several aspects.'
31. Both Wallenberg's father and grandfather (GOW) were naval officers. It must have thrilled

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- him to see elements of the esteemed Royal Navy assembled like that for the first time in his life. While in Haifa the presence of British ships also drew his attention.
32. RW to GOW, 12 March 1936, in Wallenberg, *Ålskade farfar!*, p.186.
 33. News that Germany was persecuting its Jews was not new. The infamous Nuremberg Laws had been announced some six months before, while Wallenberg was in South Africa. These initial years of increasingly violent persecution of the Jews receive no mention in Wallenberg's correspondence.
 34. RW to GOW, 12 March 1936, in Wallenberg, *Ålskade farfar!*, p.187. There is no explanation for how Wallenberg could have imagined that a fleet stationed in the Mediterranean could have so quickly sailed to the North Sea.
 35. RW to GOW, 19 June 1936, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.183. See the third epigram, at the beginning of this chapter, for the better-known comments from that same letter which are cited in several of the hagiographic accounts under review in this chapter.
 36. RW to GOW, 19 June 1936, in *ibid.*, p.182.
 37. Both citations, RW to GOW, 6 July 1936, in Wallenberg, *Ålskade farfar!*, pp.202–5.
 38. Gustaf makes clear in one letter that although he had no objections to his grandson working in the Wallenberg sphere, he wanted him also to make contacts outside it. 'I want to eliminate any thought of acceptance based on your "being part of the family".' See GOW to RW, 22 December 1935, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.160.
 39. RW to GOW, 12 October 1936, in *ibid.*, pp.190–1. From about this date, this publication contains more correspondence, indeed the final letters, between the two of them.
 40. RW to GOW, 19 January 1937, in *ibid.*, pp.197–8.
 41. See especially G. Nylander and A. Perlinge (eds), *Raoul Wallenberg in Documents, 1927–1947* (Stockholm: Stiftelsen för Ekonomisk Historisk Forskning inom Bank och Företagande, 2000), p.80.
 42. R. Wallenberg to Nina von Dardel, 7 November 1938, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.202.
 43. R. Wallenberg to J. Wallenberg, in Nylander and Perlinge (eds), *Raoul Wallenberg in Documents*, p.57.
 44. Marcus Wallenberg Sr to R. Wallenberg, 23 November 1936, in *ibid.*, p.36.
 45. See, for example, P.A. Levine, 'Swedish Neutrality during the Second World War: Tactical Success or Moral Compromise?', in N. Wylie (ed.), *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also economic historian Sven Nordlund's, *Affärer som vanligt: Ariseringen i Sverige 1933–1945* (Lund: Sekel förlag, 2009).
 46. Numerous recent studies have unequivocally established that virtually all aspects of Swedish commerce and culture maintained extensive contact and exchange with Germany throughout the Nazi era. The economy was highly dependent on trade with Germany and occupied Europe. Importantly, however, penetration of Nazi ideology into Swedish political life was limited. Though it existed, Sweden's domestic Nazi movement never gained any significant political or economic influence.
 47. R. Wallenberg to G.O. Wallenberg, 12 December 1936, in Nylander and Perle, *Raoul Wallenberg in Documents*, p.39. The same letter is reproduced in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.195.
 48. R. Wallenberg to Nina von Dardel, 7 November 1938, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, pp.201–3.
 49. See P.A. Levine, *The Swedish Press and the Holocaust*, unpublished MA thesis, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA, 1987; and I. Svanberg and M. Tydén, *Sverige och Förintelsen: debatt och document om Europas judar 1933–1945* (Stockholm: Arena, 1997).
 50. In early November he passed through Berlin, and picked up at Sweden's Legation (embassy) a letter addressed to Jacob Wallenberg. See the telegram from R. Wallenberg to J. Wallenberg, 9 November 1942, in Nylander and Perlinge, *Raoul Wallenberg in Documents*, p.90.
 51. Swedish director Kjell Grede's feature film, *God afton Herr Wallenberg* (1989), begins with a depiction of Wallenberg on a train somewhere in Europe where he 'witnessed' the dumping of bodies from a deportation train. If this happened, which is unlikely, there is no documentation indicating his reaction to such a scene. It is more likely a figment of the director's imagination. It is, however, a telling example of how Wallenberg is represented as being 'concerned' about what was happening to the Jews. His own correspondence provides no evidence of such concerns.

52. On Sweden's role in those episodes of the Holocaust, see as P.A. Levine, *From Indifference to Activism: Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust, 1938–1944*, 2nd edn (Uppsala: Studia historica Upsaliensia, 1998).
53. There is an interesting irony to the fact that a Wallenberg ended up as partner with an immigrant, a Central European Jew, but that is a subject for another book.
54. K. Lauer to R. Philipp, 25 October 1955, in Raoul Wallenberg Archive, RA, Signum 1, vol. 6. This letter was written to a Swedish journalist who was one of the first to write about Wallenberg after the war.
55. RW to Nina Lagergren (née von Dardel), 28 February 1944, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, pp.205–8.
56. A complete biography of Wallenberg would have to use an even fuller range of sources than are used here, in order to explain more fully the man, his character and his place in Swedish society.
57. See, for example, D. Cesarani and P.A. Levine, *'Bystander' to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002).
58. See, for example, E. Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (London: Cassell, 1995), and the earlier S.P. Oliner and P.M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1988). Wallenberg figures prominently in both volumes, which make many of the same mistakes about Wallenberg as does the hagiographic literature, including a complete misunderstanding of the political context from which his mission arose, and how he operated.
59. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, p.24.
60. H. Rosenfeld, *Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue, Heroism and Torment in the Gulag* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), p.23; and Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, p.25.
61. See 'Raoul Wallenberg (1912–?)' on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library: A Division of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/biography/wallenberg.html. This is a paradigmatic example of how rumour and interpretive superficiality continues to exist.
62. Nina Lagergren quoted in Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, p.25.
63. Professor I. Hedenius, quoted in *ibid.*, p.25.
64. The genre's apparent compulsion to mention this purported 'one sixteenth' percentage of Wallenberg's 'blood' evokes distasteful echoes of the fateful discourse conducted throughout Europe, and North America in the 1930s and before to 'measure' Jewish blood. It seems that even otherwise rational people, including some Jews, find relevance in such an incalculable and meaningless 'measure' of blood.
65. A similar if later example can be seen in the history of the Bonnier family, prominent in Sweden for their achievements in the newspaper and publishing business from the late nineteenth century onward.
66. K. Marton, *Wallenberg* (New York: Random House, 1982), p.41. The author quotes Herschel Johnson, America's envoy in Stockholm during the war. More from this report in a subsequent chapter.
67. Rosenfeld, *Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue*, p.23.
68. H. Johnson to Secretary of State, 1 July 1944, no.2412 (section two), National Archives (hereafter NA), Washington, DC, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, File 840.48 Refugees.
69. Though there is no evidence that he learned either language, his dexterity with foreign languages made plausible his early feeling that one of them could be learned during his planned time in Palestine.
70. RW to GOW, 3 April 1936, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, p.172. As far as I can discern, this is the only time in either this volume of letters, or the original Swedish edition, that Wallenberg wrote the word 'Nazi'.
71. Marton, *Wallenberg*, p.25.
72. Rosenfeld, *Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue*, pp.23–4.
73. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, p.24. The next line in this narrative is about Wallenberg's distant Jewish relative, Benedicks. Here we should note that the authors of what I consider to be hagiographic publications about Wallenberg often personalize him in a manner which raises problems for publications claiming to be historical rather than works of fiction. Quite often these authors refer to their subject as 'Raoul', creating for the reader a distinct feeling of familiarity, closeness, and even some intimacy with their protagonist. This tendency has often been matched by people who have come up to me after lecturing, referring in their questions or ideas about the evening's subject as 'Raoul', with a tone hinting

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that they were in some fashion or another known to each other. Such fascinating manifestations of this peculiar connection to a figure from history leads one to reflect about how personality cults are created and sustained.

74. Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*, p.336, n.6. Fogelman writes: 'Among Holocaust rescuers, Raoul Wallenberg is the most widely honoured individual', and says that he was 'larger than life'. See, respectively, p.352, n.15, and p.304.
75. There seems no question that Wallenberg enjoyed and was accomplished at social dancing!
76. E. Lester, *Wallenberg: The Man in the Iron Web* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p.46.
77. Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, p.28. Unfortunately, one gets the impression that this person's recollections are emphasized as important partly, if not primarily, because she went on to become – as this author and others have put it – 'a screen and stage actress of some international fame'.
78. Rosenfeld, *Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue*, p.24. The critical reader is given the feeling that she was saying something that she felt she was expected to say, and didn't want to disappoint her guests.
79. We may again note that in Sweden, news from neighbouring Germany about what was happening to the Jews was plentiful, detailed, and generally accurate.
80. RW to GOW, 12 March 1936, in Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches*, pp.170–1.
81. RW to GOW, 3 April 1936, in *ibid.*, p.173.
82. RW to GOW, 20 April 1936, in *ibid.*, p.176.
83. RW to GOW, 6 July 1936, in *ibid.*, p.188.
84. RW to GOW, 12 March 1936, in *ibid.*, p.171.
85. RW to GOW, 27 June 1933, in *ibid.*, pp.91–2.