

GESCHÜTZT: RAOUL WALLENBERG AND THE QUESTION OF THE JEWISH VALUABLES

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RAOUL WALLENBERG AND THE QUESTION OF THE JEWISH VALUABLES

By Bengt Jangfeldt

I

In my biography of Raoul Wallenberg [\[1\]](#) I raise the question of the Jewish property that, according to several sources, the Swedish diplomat attempted to smuggle out of Budapest in order to prevent it from being looted by the Germans or the Soviets. The attempt failed, but the rumour that Wallenberg had been involved in an action that was not compatible with his status as a diplomat may, as I see it, have had a negative impact on the Swedish government's willingness to act on his behalf, at least initially.

My interpretation of the events has been criticized by the Swedish historian Johan Matz in an article published in *Journal of Intelligence History*. [\[2\]](#)

According to Matz's view, all pieces of information pointing to Wallenberg trying to smuggle money and gold out of Hungary on behalf of his Jewish protégés are the result of an official Soviet disinformation campaign. His arguments, however, are very much open to doubt and do not convince me. The second part of this paper is devoted to a discussion of Johan Matz's objections. [\[3\]](#)

When it comes to the Swedish government's passivity during the first years after Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance, there were many explanations and justifications for it: the disinclination to believe that a diplomat could be arrested; widespread respect for the victorious Soviet Union; the \$300 million Swedish-Soviet Trade and Credit agreement that was being negotiated in 1945–46, and, finally, the belief that Wallenberg was, in fact, dead – a conclusion that was not all that far-fetched, given the circumstances of the day.



Bengt Jangfeldt

Were there other explanations? There were. In order to discuss them, we must go back to Raoul Wallenberg's last days in Budapest.

On January 10, just a few days before the Soviet Army entered the city, Wallenberg, his Hungarian chauffeur Vilmos Langfelder and one of Wallenberg's Jewish protégés, György Szöllösi "prepared Wallenberg's car for a longer trip." According to Szöllösi, the men packed not only foodstuffs but also hid gold and jewellery in the gasoline tank. The intention, remembered Szöllösi, was "that [Wallenberg] should go down to Debrecen and then on to Sweden to report."^[4]

Szöllösi speaks of "gold and jewellery," but it is reasonable to believe that "gold" does not refer to gold bars but rather to gold jewellery or gold coins. As we know, when the Swedish Legation was looted in February 1945 and the depositions of the Hungarian Jews were stolen, gold watches, gold bracelets, and gold coins were among the stolen items. The important thing in this context is not the exact profile of the smuggled goods but the fact that Wallenberg tried to help his protégés by preventing their property from being confiscated or stolen by bands of Hungarian Nazis or advancing Soviet forces.

The information that Wallenberg was handling valuables and money during his last days in Budapest is corroborated by other first hand witnesses, among them a Mr. Jamnik, representative of the Swedish Match Company in Budapest. In 1951 he reported to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he saw Wallenberg for the last time on January 5 or 6, 1945, when the latter moved from Buda (where the Swedish Legation was located) to Pest. With him he had a suitcase "containing, among other things, a considerable amount of money in dollar banknotes and a large number of gems" belonging to his Jewish protégés.^[5]

As I show in the second part of this paper, Jamnik can be trusted as a highly reliable witness. That Wallenberg had with him money and valuables when he *left Buda for Pest* can thus be stated with a great degree of certainty. These items had been deposited at the Swedish Legation by Hungarian Jews and Wallenberg now wanted to take them to Sweden in order to prevent them from being stolen by looters.

That Raoul Wallenberg may have had the money and the valuables with him when he crossed over to the Soviet side cannot be confirmed but is hinted at in several testimonies which I quote in my book. One key witness is Miklós Krausz, the official representative of the Jewish Agency in Budapest, who told the Swedish journalist Eric Sjöquist (see Part II) that Wallenberg had with him a briefcase containing money and valuables belonging to his protégés. According to Krausz, Wallenberg thought that he "would not be able to safeguard the money and the valuables unless he took them to a safe place," that is, Sweden.

The remarkable thing in this connection is that Wallenberg made no secret of his plans, a behaviour that testifies to a certain naiveté but also to the fact that he was convinced that he was being protected by his diplomatic immunity.

Wallenberg's first contacts with the Soviet Army took place on January 13, 1945. According to a Soviet officer, Ivan Golub, the next day Wallenberg attempted to drive with his Studebaker “in the direction of the advancing Soviet forces,” together with his chauffeur Langfelder. Instead, both men were seized in a Hungarian government garage by Soviet military scouts and interrogated; the car was confiscated. “I demand to have my car back and will not accept any exchange,” Wallenberg declared during his talks with a representative of the Soviet military.^[6] His staunch refusal to give up his car is an indication that it was almost certainly the same car as the one that had a few days earlier been packed with valuables.

In the report sent on January 15 by Matvei Zakharov, Chief of Staff at the 2nd Ukrainian Front, to Aleksei Antonov, Chief of the General Staff, we read that “measures to protect R. Wallenberg and his property have been taken by the Soviet military authorities.”^[7] This turn of phrase is repeated *verbatim* in the note that Soviet Deputy Foreign Commissar Vladimir Dekanozov presented to Staffan Söderblom, the Swedish envoy to Moscow, the following day.

What “property” do Zakharov and Dekanozov refer to? It can hardly be the car, which had been confiscated. According to several sources, Wallenberg's luggage consisted of suitcases, rucksacks, briefcases and a sleeping bag. Miklós Krausz claims that one of the briefcases contained money and valuables. In any case, the wording indicates that at his point in time Wallenberg's diplomatic immunity was still being respected.

When he was formally detained on January 19, his diplomatic immunity was no longer respected and most of his property was seized. The money – or at least some of it – was returned to his family in 1989. Of the valuables there remain no traces, however. If he had them with him and they were discovered, they were in all probability appropriated. Gold jewellery was a more desirable booty than foreign currency which a Soviet citizen could not handle without great risk and which lost its value when it crossed the Soviet border.

If we can be sure that Wallenberg had money in his possession when he left for Debrecen, there is no clear evidence that he also had the valuables with him – although much points in that direction. Mr. Jamnik claimed to have heard that Wallenberg after the departure from Benczúr street on January 17 “was moved to another car than the one in which he departed” and that “it was common knowledge that Wallenberg had valuables (jewellery etc.) *in the first car* and that he thought that the Russians, who surely knew about the valuables, had robbed and killed Wallenberg.”^[8] Despite the topographical mistake – the loss of the first car did not take place during the trip from Benczúr

street – Jamnik’s testimony is interesting since it confirms what we know from other sources: that there were two cars involved, that the valuables were in the first one, and that Wallenberg “was moved to another car.”

With the support of first and second hand testimonies we can thus conclude that during his last days in Budapest Wallenberg was handling money and valuables belonging to his Jewish protégés. Surprisingly enough this theme went virtually unnoticed in the rich literature about Wallenberg until I addressed it in my biography in 2012.

One exception is Frederick E. Werbell’s and Thurston Clarke’s book *Lost Hero: The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg* from 1982. [9] Werbell and Clarke examine several theories why Wallenberg chose to take the gold and the valuables with him on his trip to Debrecen. The most plausible explanation, according to the authors, is that Wallenberg wanted to prevent the goods from being stolen by the Soviet army. As we know, his fear was justified: as soon as Soviet forces had taken Buda, the Swedish Legation was pillaged no less than three times and *everything* was stolen.

Apart from the money confiscated from Raoul Wallenberg, which seems to have been taken to Moscow [10], there is no account of what happened to the valuables. In fact we will probably never know for sure when and how they were confiscated – if they were indeed confiscated.

The question, however, gives rise to a new set of questions, and these have to do with the *rumours* about the valuables and the significance that these rumours may have had for the behaviour of the Swedish government in the aftermath of Wallenberg’s disappearance. There are indications that the answers to these questions are to be found in Carl Ivan Danielsson’s assessment of Wallenberg and his actions.

Raoul Wallenberg’s rescue mission was sanctioned by the Swedish government, and Danielsson, the head of the Swedish Budapest mission, accepted the conditions surrounding it. As a trained diplomat, however, he was critical of the form that Wallenberg’s rescue activities assumed, of Wallenberg’s too generous interpretation of his mandate, as Danielsson saw it. The same goes for Wallenberg’s colleagues Per Anger and Lars Berg, who were of the opinion that his actions risked harming Swedish interests. There is reason to believe that the tensions between the professional diplomats and Wallenberg were in fact greater than it has later been deemed opportune to acknowledge.

After the fall of Buda in February, 1945, Danielsson was approached by persons who voiced a number of complaints. “According to Danielsson, after the liberation of Buda, a number of ‘Swedish Jews’ from [the Swedish safe houses on] Üllői Road and Jókai Street, as well as the relatives of those who had perished at Jókai Street, had come to him demanding that he return money and valuables that they had entrusted to Wallenberg for safekeeping.” The words belong to Miklós Krausz, who discussed the matter with Danielsson after the war. The Swedish envoy, who had been in hiding

when Wallenberg went to contact the Soviets, answered that he had no knowledge about this. However, when he later learnt from Krausz that Wallenberg had taken “Jewish assets” with him on his trip to Debrecen, he “jumped to the conclusion” – in Krausz’s words – that Wallenberg had no intention of returning them to their rightful owners.

Danielsson had not seen Wallenberg since Christmas 1944 and had no first-hand information of what had happened. It is therefore both strange and surprising that he thought that Wallenberg intended to steal the property. There was nothing in Wallenberg’s biography and character that suggested that he was capable of such a thing. But if we are to believe Krausz’s testimony, Danielsson seems indeed to have suspected that Wallenberg had taken the money and the valuables for himself.

According to Werbell and Clarke, Danielsson’s view of the matter may have had “an important chilling effect on Swedish efforts to free Raoul Wallenberg.”^[11] This may very well be true. How could Sweden press the Soviet authorities for information about Wallenberg’s fate if there were suspicions of irregularities on his part?

Werbell and Clarke’s hypothesis is based on the assumption that the rumours about Wallenberg’s smuggling attempt and Danielsson’s view of it were known to the Swedish authorities. They seem to have been informed. When interviewed by the authors, both Prime Minister Tage Erlander and Staffan Söderblom admitted that they had been “made aware of the question of the missing valuables.” By the same token, it may have been this question that Raoul’s stepfather Fredrik von Dardel and his first biographer Rudolph Philipp were referring to when, in 1951, they accused “certain officials” at the Swedish Foreign Ministry of spreading the “false rumours” that Wallenberg had “during his mission in Budapest been guilty of highly arbitrary conduct and that he had even been reluctant to return to Sweden for fear of reprisals.”^[12] The spreading of these rumours compelled von Dardel and Philipp to demand “some kind of redress for Wallenberg,” for example, “the conferment of a distinction.” Two months later Wallenberg was conferred the medal *Illis quorum* by the Swedish government.^[13]

Whatever the roots and the reasons for Danielsson’s suspicions concerning Wallenberg, it is possible to trace their continued route to Stockholm.

The members of the Swedish Budapest mission started their trip home in mid-March 1945. The journey went via Bucharest to Moscow, where they arrived on April 13 and spent eight hours before continuing on to Sweden via Leningrad. A week later, Staffan Söderblom reported to the Foreign Ministry that the talks with Danielsson and the other members of the Legation had dealt mostly with the looting of “Swedish property [...] both by the Arrow Cross and by the Russians.” According to Danielsson, “carelessly enough, a large amount of valuables seem to have been accepted as deposits from Hungarian individuals.” This was a question that Söderblom asked the Swedish

Foreign Ministry to investigate “with meticulous accuracy.” It should be noted that during the eight-hour stay in Moscow, Söderblom and Danielsson also had a private meeting, without the presence of the other members of the Legation.

Before the arrival of the Budapest Legation, Söderblom’s view of what had happened to Wallenberg was based on reports saying that he “was missing since January 17” and that he could have “fallen into the hands of disguised Arrow Cross men, in which case the worst could be feared.” But in a telegram to the Foreign Ministry the day after the meeting with Wallenberg’s colleagues, Söderblom mentioned several possible explanations for Wallenberg’s disappearance: “A car accident (very likely), robbery with murder, ambush by Arrow Cross men etc.”^[14]

The most interesting suggestion here is “robbery with murder” (*rån mord* in Swedish), an alternative that had not been voiced before. This allows us to draw the conclusion that Söderblom was told not only about the “large amount of valuables [that] had been accepted as deposits from Hungarian individuals” but also that Wallenberg himself was carrying something that made him worth robbing. This is a piece of information that he could have obtained only from Danielsson, who presumably also told Söderblom about his own suspicions. That sensitive matters were discussed is evident from Söderblom’s telegram to the Foreign Ministry on April 19, in which he reported that he refrains from discussing Wallenberg’s fate until the ministry has had time to “collect and ponder all the information that the returning Budapest Swedes are privy to.”^[15]

A few days after their arrival in Stockholm, the members of the Budapest Legation – Per Anger, Lars Berg, Margareta Bauer and Dénes von Mezey – put together detailed written reports to the Foreign Ministry, both about the Arrow Cross attack on the Legation on Christmas Eve 1944 and the Soviet lootings in February-March 1945. None of the reports mentioned anything about Wallenberg carrying money and valuables when he went over to the Russians. How could they? The members of the Legation had been in hiding at the time and could have no first hand knowledge of Wallenberg’s actions. Danielsson, however, who claimed to have some knowledge about this, made no written report to his superiors. The fact that the Foreign Ministry did not request Danielsson to provide them with such a report is remarkable. It is in fact so astounding that we must ask ourselves whether it is true. After all, Söderblom had asked the ministry to “collect and ponder all the information that the Budapest Swedes are privy to.” Given this situation, it is quite possible that Danielsson did, in fact, report to the Foreign Ministry but that the information was deemed too sensitive to be committed to paper and the report was made orally. (Senior Swedish Ambassadors with whom I have consulted confirm that this way of handling delicate matters was and is common diplomatic practice.)

But perhaps there was a written report, after all? If we are to believe Miklós Krausz, Danielsson did send “a detailed report” to the Foreign Ministry “which implied that Wallenberg had taken the Jewish valuables to Debrecen not to save them from Russian looters, but to steal them.” If such a

report, supposedly written in 1946, did in fact exist, what happened to it? [16] The only thing we know is that no such report has been found.

The assumption that Danielsson's conspicuous silence had to do with his suspicions about certain irregularities involving Raoul Wallenberg is strengthened by another remarkable fact. A week after the Budapest Legation's arrival in Stockholm, Raoul's mother, Maj von Dardel, invited Danielsson for a talk. However, Danielsson declined the invitation, excusing himself with the argument that "he had no appropriate attire."

This is an excuse that is very difficult to take seriously. Raoul's mother would no doubt have accepted a badly dressed Danielsson in return for information about her son. Surely Danielsson must have understood that. Nevertheless, he did not meet with Maj von Dardel. It is not too daring to assume that Danielsson's reluctance had little to do with dress code. Seen against the background of the silence he observed – at least officially – after his arrival in Stockholm, the most likely explanation is that he did not want to confront Wallenberg's mother with rumours that were highly embarrassing for her son.

To sum it up: given all these facts and circumstances, it is not unreasonable to believe that information conveyed by Danielsson to the Swedish Foreign Ministry may indeed have had a negative impact on the initial handling of the Wallenberg case.

II

In the article referred to at the beginning of this paper, Johan Matz calls into question my hypothesis that Wallenberg tried to smuggle Jewish property out of Budapest in January 1945.

My reconstruction of Raoul Wallenberg's last days in Budapest is based on interviews, newspaper articles, and letters in the Swedish Foreign Ministry's Raoul Wallenberg archive, some of them not referred to either in the report from the Swedish-Russian Working Group [17] or in the report *Ett diplomatiskt misslyckande* (A Diplomatic Failure), commissioned by the Swedish government, of which Johan Matz was the official secretary. [18]

Matz writes that "Jangfeldt claims that the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg tried to hide 15–20 kg gold and an unspecified amount of jewellery in the gasoline tank of his car [...]." This is not true. First of all, nowhere is there any question of "20 kg gold"; what is mentioned in Lajos Bajusz's testimony is "15 to 20 kilos of *gold jewellery* [my italics]" [19], which is something different (see below). Secondly, I do not "claim" that, but quote various sources claiming that. However, taken together, these sources give credence to such a hypothesis.

Before going into details, I would like to say that the idea that Raoul Wallenberg would do such a thing - carry with him and protect Jewish valuables - is highly plausible. Having rescued the lives of his protégés, it was a logical step to try to help them save their belongings from confiscation by the Soviets or the Nazis. Wallenberg was known for his unconventional methods and his audacity – some would say his lack of judgment. It should also be said that the important thing here is not the exact contents of the smuggled goods: almost every witness speaks of money, some also speak of gold or gold jewellery, whereas some use the word valuables. Gold, of course, does not refer to gold bars but rather to gold jewellery or gold coins – we know that when the Swedish Legation was pillaged in February 1945 and the depositions of Hungarian Jews were plundered, gold watches, gold bracelets, and napoleons (twenty franc gold coins) were among the stolen goods.^[20] In any case, the important thing is not the exact sums of money or the exact profile of the smuggled goods but the fact that Wallenberg did try to help his protégés by trying to protect their property.

Secondly, against the background of the lawlessness and general chaos prevailing in Budapest in the winter and spring of 1945, I have difficulties understanding how Matz can totally dismiss the possibility that Wallenberg was deprived of the money and valuables during the four days spent in Soviet custody before he was taken from Budapest on January 17. It is a well-known fact that the Soviet soldiers were given the right of "free pillage" when Pest was liberated from the Nazis. To demand "proof" or "documents" in cases like these does not seem warranted. The absence of documentation does not mean that an event did not occur.

Thirdly, all human testimonies are uncertain, even those made shortly after an event. Inconsistencies, contradictions, and even obvious errors are legion. It would, however, be wrong to dismiss a whole testimony off-hand because certain parts of it are proven to be false.

I quote several witnesses in support of my hypothesis that Wallenberg was handling money and valuables belonging to his Jewish protégés. Some of them are more reliable than others, but I chose to present all of them since the quantity of testimonies speak in favour of it. I do refer to all of my sources in the footnotes, but since my book is a biography – and the stylistics of a biography follows other rules than that of a scholarly paper – I do not argue my case in every single instance (although all sources are identified in the more than 1,100 footnotes). Matz's objections, however, present me with an opportunity to do so, for which I am grateful. Like him, I will concentrate on the most important testimonies. But I will also comment on some points where Matz's unexpectedly superficial reading of my book makes him jump to unjustified conclusions.

1. Coen

Johan Matz's theory is that Adolphe Coen's two reports (July 9 and 22, 1947) to the Swedish envoy to France, K.I. Westman, about his meeting with Wallenberg in a prison in Lwów was based on an article in the popular U.S. publication *Reader's Digest* which Coen could have read after arriving in

Paris in July 1947. It is a plausible theory, but it raises a number of questions.

The first one is: Why would Coen contact the Swedish Legation to tell a story that he had read in the *Reader's Digest*? After all, he must have been aware of the possibility that the Legation was acquainted with the article in question. Why was Coen interested in Wallenberg in the first place, if he had never met him? And what was his overall motive? In contrast to several other "witnesses" who contacted Swedish authorities claiming to have information about Wallenberg, he did not ask for money or favours. The latter circumstance is what caused the head of the Swedish State police, the sharp-minded Otto Danielsson, to take Coen's testimony seriously and write that "one is inclined to give credence to [Coen's] account, first and foremost because he has not put forward any claims for compensation or reward for his helpfulness, e.g., permission to enter Sweden or that our Legation should make any sort of pleas for him. If Coen's account were a fantasy, why then has he fantasized?"^[21]

Secondly, there are pieces of information in Coen's testimony that do not come from the *Reader's Digest*. One concerns the briefcase containing the gold and valuables (see below). In a later testimony (14 January, 1952) Coen mentions other facts that he could not have read about in the *Reader's Digest*, e.g. that Wallenberg had a married sister and that he was taller than Coen. This conclusion, based on the fact that the shirt and the socks Coen smuggled to Wallenberg's prison cell turned out to be too small, corresponds to reality: Wallenberg was 176 cm whereas Coen, according to a report to the Swedish Foreign Ministry from the Swedish Legation in Paris, was "rather short (ca. 160 cm)."^[22] Coen also provided the information that Wallenberg had been robbed of his wristwatch (see below). This watch also appears in Rudolph Philipp's book about Wallenberg, which was published in 1946 in Swedish and could not possibly have been read by Coen.^[23]

Another question that craves an answer is why Coen provided the Legation with detailed information about how to ascertain whether Wallenberg was still incarcerated in Lwów. This information included Wallenberg's cell number and the name and address of the professor who had helped Coen with food and clothing during his incarceration. After all, if Coen's story were fake, such an investigation (which was never undertaken) would prove him a liar.

Of course, Coen's testimony falls to pieces if Wallenberg did not in fact spend some time in the Lwów prison in the winter of 1947. The fact is, no documents have been found indicating that he spent his two and a half years in the Soviet Union other than in the Internal (Lubyanka) and the Lefortovo prisons. However, a Swedish Foreign Ministry memorandum from 1952 stated that "it cannot be totally excluded" that Wallenberg could have been held in Lwów during the period indicated by Adolphe Coen. "At the time in question (the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947) very energetic démarches concerning the Wallenberg case had been made in Moscow. It is perhaps not too bold to assume that in view of this certain Russian authorities may have regarded it as calmer to have Wallenberg removed from Moscow for some time." Otto Danielsson arrived at the

same conclusion: “Undoubtedly, many things speak in favour of Coen’s statement that he met Wallenberg in Lwów. It is now quite clear that the NKVD in 1947 made some evasive manoeuvres to hide Wallenberg. What would be more natural then to send him to a little convent in eastern Poland?”[\[24\]](#)

According to available documentation, the last interrogation with Wallenberg in Lefortovo took place on August 30, 1946. The next time he was interrogated was on March 11, 1947 – in Lubyanka, where he had been moved on March 1. During the six months between these dates it is thus feasible that he may have been held somewhere else. That there is no record registering such a move does not have to mean anything.

As a matter of fact, there are indications that Wallenberg may have been moved from Lefortovo some time at the end of 1946. His fellow-prisoner in Lefortovo, the German diplomat Bernhard Rensinghoff, claims that he once heard a knocking from Wallenberg’s and his cellmate Willy Rödel’s cell with the meaning: “We are being taken away.” “This happened during the course of 1946, as far as I remember in the autumn of that year.” Another German prisoner of war, Anton Mohrmann, who like Rensinghoff was held in a cell under that of Wallenberg and Rödel, states that, as far as he remembers, he had no contact with them after December 1946. A third prisoner, Karl Supprian, reports that he had knocking contact with Wallenberg and Rödel “until 1947.”[\[25\]](#)

The trustworthiness and value of Coen’s testimony is wholly dependent on whether Wallenberg was incarcerated in Lwów. There is nothing to prove this; on the contrary, there are facts casting serious doubt on this version. One such question mark is Coen’s claim that Wallenberg was still in the prison when he himself was released on March 18, 1947 – according to Soviet prison documents, Wallenberg was as, we have seen, moved to Lubyanka Prison already on March 1 and interrogated on March 11. But can we be certain that Coen stated the date of his release correctly?

The very existence of such uncertainties and contradictions is in fact what motivated me to devote several pages to the mysterious Adolphe Coen; I wanted to give an example of how difficult it is to separate fact from fiction in the myriad of testimonies about Raoul Wallenberg. This object is explicitly stated in my book: “True or not, the information provided in this testimony is so remarkable that it warrants attention. It may be a false lead. But it is interesting since it illustrates the difficulties and the traps facing anyone trying to find out the truth about the fate of Raoul Wallenberg.”[\[26\]](#) This is why the chapter on Coen has the heading “An alternative trace”. Coen’s testimony may be true or false, but it certainly warrants attention” – something that Matz acknowledges by choosing to devote a large part of his paper to discussing – and disproving – it. And no matter how we judge his testimony, there are still important questions to be answered before we can dismiss it.

2. Jamnik

If Adolphe Coen's testimony raises serious questions, that of Mr Jamnik, a representative of the Swedish Match Company in Budapest, does not. In an interview with C.-O. Gisle, the Swedish envoy in Pretoria, Jamnik (who moved to South Africa after the war) testified in August 1951 that he saw Wallenberg for the last time on December 5 or 6, 1944, when the latter left Buda (where the Swedish Legation was located) for Pest. According to Jamnik, the reason was that he thought he would be safer there, a conclusion that was not shared by Jamnik who tried to persuade Wallenberg not to cross the Danube. Jamnik remembers that Wallenberg took with him a bag (*kappsäck*) containing a considerable sum of dollar notes and many pieces of jewellery. When asked by the envoy where these valuables came from, Jamnik answered that Wallenberg "had perhaps received them from his Jewish protégés."[\[27\]](#)

Matz is distrustful of Jamnik's claim to know the contents of Wallenberg's bag since he did not specify how he knew it. But Wallenberg was a loquacious person and did not try to hide his plans to leave Budapest in the near future; quite on the contrary.[\[28\]](#) Since the company Mr Jamnik worked for was controlled by the Wallenberg business family, it is also reasonable to believe that Raoul might have known him quite well.

Jamnik's testimony also contains information about Wallenberg's activities after December 6. Here, however, he is not a first hand source but relies on what he has heard from others, more exactly from "three Hungarian Jews". Matz is sceptical of these witnesses since Jamnik does not remember their names. Some information is nevertheless provided: they are said to have "lived together with Wallenberg in a basement in Pest" and to be "known to the Swedish Foreign Ministry." It does not take much imagination to conclude that the basement in question was the vault of the Hazai bank where Wallenberg and his closest collaborators, his "staff", were in hiding from November 1944. The information stemming from these persons (whose names were indeed well-known to the Swedish Foreign Ministry) must therefore be deemed to be very reliable.

Notwithstanding the trustworthiness of the "three Hungarian Jews," I do not refer to Jamnik as a source for what happened to Wallenberg after Jamnik last saw him in early December. Nevertheless, Matz writes that "although Jamnik maintained his claim on the valuables when he was questioned eye-to-eye, his testimony must still be judged in light of the fact that all information regarding Wallenberg's fate from 6 January 1945 onward did not originate from him but from his three unnamed friends in Budapest." Why the first hand information provided by Jamnik should be judged in the light of information obtained second hand is a logic that escapes me.

On the contrary, Jamnik is a key witness, whose testimony makes it possible to conclude, as I do in my biography, that Wallenberg brought with him money and valuables when he moved to Pest at the beginning of December 1944.

3. Krausz

The next witness to comment on the bag (or briefcase) containing money and valuables is Miklós (Moshe) Krausz, the Budapest representative of the Palestine based Jewish Agency. In my biography I refer to Wallenberg's visits to Vadász street, where the Agency had its headquarters, under the protection of the Swiss Legation. According to Krausz, Wallenberg came to pick up a bag, which he claimed contained documents. Krausz, however, draws the conclusion that it contained money "belonging to the saved Jews": "I think Wallenberg meant that he couldn't safeguard the money or the valuables unless he took them to a safe place."^[29] Krausz's testimony is reported in a book by the Swedish journalist Eric Sjöquist.^[30]

Krausz also mentions that during his visit Wallenberg said that he had already given two bags (or briefcases) to the Soviets. This allows us to conclude that the visit in question was Wallenberg's second visit to Vadász street within a few days. According to Lévai, a first visit took place on January 12, when Wallenberg came to fetch money and documents that had been kept by Krausz after the Arrow Cross attack on the Swedish Legation in December 1944. These documents were handed over to the Soviets on 14 January, after Wallenberg crossed the lines. As Matz right correctly points out, the Hungarian historian Jenő Lévai who reports about this visit in his book in 1947, does not mention any gold or jewellery. When Matz writes that "this is possibly an explanation as to why Jangfeldt chose Sjöquist as a source rather than Lévai" he is, however, wrong. As a matter of fact, I quote both sources and I devote a whole paragraph to this first visit, referring to Lévai's book.^[31]

Matz's inattentive reading of my book makes him overlook the fact that we have to do not with one but with two visits to Krausz: one on January 12, and one three or four days later (the visit referred to in Sjöquist's book). His failure to see this, although it is obvious from my biography, leads him to the conclusion that "Krausz's statement fails to match with Coen's." Quite to the contrary, it matches very well with Coen's where the same briefcase is mentioned. According to Coen's testimony of July 9, 1947, Wallenberg "had with him a briefcase which the Russians had confiscated" that contained "jewellery and money"^[32]; according to that of July 22, 1947, a briefcase is mentioned "which had been given to him by some friends for safekeeping" and which contained "a large amount of money [...] as well as jewellery."^[33] And in his testimony of January 14, 1952, Coen stated: "On the last day, a Jew had given [Wallenberg] a briefcase with very valuable jewels, gold coins and foreign banknotes. When soon after this he was taken by the Russians, both the valuable briefcase and his own wristwatch had been taken from him."^[34] Whereas Wallenberg's attempt to "conceal large amounts of gems, bank notes and other Jewish property from the Russians" is mentioned in the *Reader's Digest* article, the briefcases are not.

Now, to Eric Sjöquist. Matz writes that his book "provides no further clues as to when, where or to whom Krausz's statement was made." It is true that there is no direct reference to "when, where or to whom." But there is an indirect reference, and a convincing one to boot. Sjöquist (who died in 2016 at the age of 90) was a highly respected journalist and a leading expert on Raoul Wallenberg, about whom he wrote several books and articles. He visited Israel frequently from the 1960s

onward, as a reporter for the Stockholm daily *Expressen* and lived there in the 1990s as the permanent correspondent for another Swedish newspaper. While in Israel, he devoted a lot of time trying to track down people who could provide information about Wallenberg [35]. One such person was Miklós Krausz, who moved to Israel after the war and died there in 1986. There can be little doubt that Sjöquist contacted and interviewed Krausz and that Krausz's statement – which is rendered as direct speech – was made to Sjöquist personally. Like Jamnik's, it should therefore be given serious analysis and, possibly, great credence.

4. Szöllösi

Matz also casts doubt on the testimony of a Hungarian named György Szöllösi, whose testimony is quoted in Lévai's book:

"On January 10, during the night we, Wallenberg, Langfelder and I, prepared Wallenberg's car for a longer trip. We were in the garage on the Muzeum-street. We packed parcels of foodstuffs and in the gasoline tank we hid a bigger quantity of gold and jewellery, which Wallenberg wanted to bring with him. It was his intention to go down to Debrecen and then on to Sweden to report."

Obviously, this statement is crucial for the story of the valuables that Wallenberg brought with him from Buda when he left for Pest at the beginning of December. Matz writes that "in light of the fact that the *Reader's Digest* had published the narrative on Wallenberg's gems and gold about half a year before the publication of Lévai's book, Szöllösi's account must clearly be considered of questionable value. In addition, the way in which he appeared in Lévai's book was enigmatic. The author failed to mention anything on this man's identity and his relation to Wallenberg. The five or so lines on the hiding of gold and jewellery in the gasoline tank appeared very much out of nowhere, and there were no reflections whatsoever from the author on its veracity, origin, etc."

This is true, but the lack of exact source information is a characteristic trait of Lévai's book, where cited witnesses are often referred to not by name but anonymously ("an eyewitness", "a 'Christian' gentleman", "an official" etc.). Given the circumstances and the times, source protection of this kind is understandable.

In fact, if Szöllösi's testimony was made up, why give away his name? After all, he was a real person, and one of Wallenberg's protégés. He was born in Budapest in 1910 and holder of a Schutzpass (No. 0393). [36] The fact that Szöllösi is mentioned by name – presumably with his knowledge and consent – is an aspect that gives credence to his testimony. Its credibility is further strengthened by the detailed description of what went on in the garage. If the testimony was a concoction, why not content oneself with mentioning the gold and jewellery? Why also refer to the gasoline tank?

Szöllösi's testimony should also be judged in the light of that of John Dickinson, an accountant working for Price Waterhouse in Budapest during the war. Among his clients was the Hungarian subsidiary of the Swedish Match Company. After the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, Dickinson joined the Swedish Red Cross, headed by Valdemar Langlet, and, in November, Wallenberg's organization. During the last stages of the war, before the German capitulation in February 1945, Dickinson was staying at the Swedish Legation, where he was so trusted that Carl Ivan Danielsson asked him to take charge of it when he himself was evacuated from Budapest – something Dickinson refused to do because of a mutual distrust between him and the office assistant Margareta Bauer.^[37]

As an accountant, Dickinson handled the books for Wallenberg's organization. His task was to oversee the food supplies that Wallenberg was storing for his protégés, and they met on a weekly basis. According to Dickinson, their last meeting took place "some time between December 12 and 24, probably just before Christmas." During his conversations with Wallenberg, Dickinson got "the distinct impression that he wished to leave Budapest as soon as the Russians arrived and drive home in a car (through Russian or Russian-controlled territory), and that he was sure to be welcomed by the Russians." According to Dickinson, Wallenberg had put aside 400 litres from the gasoline supplies and hoped to be back in Sweden after about three weeks.^[38] His testimony about Wallenberg's travel plans thus coincides with Szöllösi's.

John Dickinson was highly respected and after the war was awarded an OBE by Queen Elizabeth. His account therefore merits great attention.

To summarize, what we are dealing with here is a chain of events showing 1) that Wallenberg brought with him money and valuables to Pest when he left Buda at the beginning of December, 1944; 2) that he left at least some of these objects with Miklós Krausz at Vadász Street; and 3) that he had concrete plans to go by car not only to Debrecen but all the way home to Sweden. Against this background, the information provided by Szöllösi cannot reasonably be dismissed the way Matz does. On the contrary, this daring or, rather, foolhardy action would seem very much in line with Wallenberg's character.

5. The absence of documentation

Matz states that an "important complicating factor" to the theory that Wallenberg was handling money and valuables (gold, jewelry etc.) belonging to his Jewish protégés is "the complete absence in Swedish archives indicating [...] that Swedish Foreign Ministry officials had any knowledge that Wallenberg tried to bring with him valuables out of Budapest. "Carl Ivan Danielsson, the Swedish envoy," Matz continues, had authored a long report "detailing what happened in Budapest in the weeks and months preceding the Soviet takeover [...] and had his subordinates writing individual reports and a separate report on the issue of depositions of valuables with the Swedish Legation in

Budapest.” Nor is there any mention of the valuables in the correspondence between the closest *dramatis personae*: the men and women working at the Swedish Legation and other people connected with Wallenberg.

All this is true, but there is one important circumstance that Matz overlooks or fails to acknowledge: with the exception of Per Anger, none of Wallenberg’s colleagues at the Swedish Legation were in contact with him after Christmas, 1944, and thus could have no knowledge of his activities; as to Anger, he saw Wallenberg for the last time on January 10th. It should also be mentioned that in the report *A Diplomatic Failure*, Danielsson’s conduct is not judged as benignly as in Matz’s paper; on the contrary, in this report he is criticized for not having reported personally to the Foreign Ministry about Wallenberg’s disappearance, especially since the latter was one of his employees, and accused of not “assuming the responsibility that falls upon a superior.”^[39] However, when, as in this case, it suits Matz’s purposes, Danielsson is described as a model of professional conduct.

6. Raoul Wallenberg, László Hertelendy and Tivadar Zichy

Matz’s general theory is that the story about Wallenberg’s gold, valuables etc. was fabricated by the Soviets in order to disorient the Swedish government. To this end, he quotes an article in the Soviet newspaper *Novoye vremya* (New Times) in 1989, “most certainly published with a specific political purpose [...] to discredit Wallenberg.”^[40] Matz provides two quotations to prove his point. The first one tells the story of how Wallenberg and a wealthy Hungarian aristocrat, Tivi Zichy, amuse themselves in a Budapest amusement park with trying to hit a target to make a beautiful young girl fall into the water. The second one is about Wallenberg and Adolf Eichmann, who are described as “inseparable friends,” who liked to amuse themselves “at noisy parties.” Wallenberg is even said to have offered Eichmann a nice car in exchange for Jews doomed to die.

Matz describes these narratives as “absurd”, and may well be right doing so regarding the piece about Eichmann – although there are good reasons to believe that Wallenberg and Eichmann did meet more frequently than is documented. The first quotation, however, is less absurd. Its source is, in fact, quite interesting. If Matz had read my book more attentively he would have discovered the same story on pp. 190–91 (117, 119). The source is an article written by László Hertelendy and published in the Budapest newspaper *Magyar Hírlap* on 11 April, 1987.^[41] It is based on the author’s reminiscences of Wallenberg, whom he met in Budapest in the summer of 1938. The aristocrat mentioned in the article is the British-Hungarian actor, photographer, racing motorist, and playboy, count Tivadar (Theodore) Zichy (1908–1987). Raoul Wallenberg’s participation in these frivolous activities should come as no surprise: he was an easy-going young man, whose weakness for nightclubs and amusements is well documented.

Hertelendy's memoir is important since it provides detailed information on Wallenberg's 1938 visit to Budapest, which is not known from other sources. This in turn provides an explanation as to why Koloman Lauer was so eager to have Wallenberg join his Swedish-Hungarian import firm three years later: Wallenberg already had excellent contacts in the upper reaches of Hungarian society, e.g. Miklós Horthy jr, the son of the Regent.

7. Two remaining questions

The question of the money and valuables (gold) must in fact be divided into two: 1) Did Wallenberg plan to help his protégés by smuggling their belongings out of Budapest? 2) Did he really do so, and were these belongings confiscated by the Soviets?

There is no doubt in my mind that the first question can be answered positively. This claim cannot be said to be neither "unsubstantiated" nor "spectacular", to use Matz's words; on the contrary, the testimonies of Jamnik, Krausz, Szöllösi and Dickinson point unmistakably in this direction.

The second one is subject to doubt. As I show in my book, after Wallenberg went over to the Soviets his car was confiscated.^[42] Were the valuables and the money still in the car, and, if they were, were they discovered and stolen? If they were, did it affect the way he was treated? Since this is something we will probably never know for sure, my hypothesis that the valuables and the money may have been taken by the Soviets is worded in the form of rhetorical questions.

To Johan Matz, the whole story about the smuggled money and valuables is fabricated from beginning to end and an example of Soviet disinformation in order to discredit Wallenberg. There is, however, another possible explanation not considered by Matz: that the smuggling attempt 1) did in fact take place and 2) was discovered by the Soviets – who decided to use it for their own purposes. The fact that Wallenberg was handling valuables provided the Soviets with the idea and possibility to construct a very plausible narrative, namely that he had been in fact been robbed – but not by them but the Nazis (who also killed him). In other words, the smuggling attempt in itself was not a fabrication, but the attribution of blame was.

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Notes

- [1] Bengt Jangfeldt, *Raoul Wallenberg: En biografi*, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand 2012. English edition: *The Hero of Budapest: The Triumph and Tragedy of Raoul Wallenberg*, London: I.B. Tauris 2014, p. 337. References to the book will be given as Jangfeldt 2012 with the pages of the English edition in parentheses. The biography has also been translated into Hungarian (*Raoul Wallenber élete*, Budapest 2014) and Russian (*Рауль Валленберг – исчезнувший герой Второй мировой*, Москва 2014).
- [2] Johan Matz, "Did Raoul Wallenberg try to leave Budapest in January 1945 with jewellery and 15–20 kg of gold hidden in the gasoline tank of his car? On sensationalism in popular history and Soviet disinformation," *Journal of Intelligence History*, 15:1, pp. 17-41
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2015.1079967>.
- [3] The first part of this paper was presented at the Raoul Wallenberg International Roundtable in Stockholm, September 14, 2017, as a video recording.
- [4] Jenő Lévai, *Raoul Wallenberg: hjälten i Budapest*, Stockholm 1948, p. 241. English edition: *Raoul Wallenberg: His Remarkable Life, Heroic Battles and the Secret of His Mysterious Disappearance*, Melbourne 1988, p. 212.
- [5] C.O. Gisle to Sven Dahlman 4.8.51. RA UD, P2 Eul.
- [6] Mikhail Danilash, testimony 12.10.89. The Swedish Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg Data Base (<http://wallenbergdatabase.ud.se>).
- [7] M. Zacharov to A. Antonov 15.1.45. The Swedish Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg Data Base (see note 6).
- [8] Stig Engfeldt, Memo 19.6.51. RA UD, P 2 Eul. My italics.
- [9] Frederick E. Werbell and Thurston Clarke, *Raoul Wallenberg – Lost Hero*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982.
- [10] We cannot be sure that the money that was returned to Wallenberg's family in 1989 had belonged to Wallenberg and was the full amount that, in that case, had been confiscated.
- [11] Ibid., p. 200.

[12] Sven Dahlman to Lennart Petri 10.9.52. RA UD, P2 Eu I.

[13] The full name is *Illis quorum meruere labores*, which means, "To those whose actions make them deserve it."

[14] SOU 2003, p. 278.

[15] SOU 2003, p. 284.

[16] Werbell and Clarke, p. 201.

[17] *Raoul Wallenberg: Redovisning från den svensk-ryska arbetsgruppen*, Stockholm 2000.

[18] *Ett diplomatiskt misslyckande: Fallet Wallenberg och den svenska utrikesledningen* (SOU), (A Diplomatic Failure: The case of Raoul Wallenberg and the Swedish Foreign Office). *Statens offentliga utredningar* (SOU) 2003:18 (in Swedish),

<https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2003/02/sou-200318-/>

. Sometimes referred to as "The Eliasson Commission".

[19] Jangfeldt 2012, p. 401 (290).

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 431 (314).

[21] Otto Danielsson. Kommentar till Coenspåret 27.3.51. RA UD, P2 Eu.

[22] Gunnar Reuterskiöld. Strängt förtrolig PM 14.1.52. RA UD, P2 Eu. Wallenberg's height is known from his passport.

[23] Rudolph Philipp, *Raoul Wallenberg: Diplomat, kämpe, samarit – och martyr*, Aarhus: Wikens förlag 1981 (1946), p. 189.

[24] SOU 2003, p. 521.

[25] The testimonies come from *Raoul Wallenberg: Dokumentsamling jämte kommentarer rörande hans fångenskap i Sovjetunionen*, Stockholm 1957, pp. 85, 85, 74.

[26] Jangfeldt 2012, p. 462 (337).

[27] C.-O. Gisle to Sven Dahlman 9.8.51. RA UD, P2, EuI. This letter is in Matz's paper dated 17.8. 1945 (!) which makes the footnotes 109–113 rather confused.

[28] Jangfeldt 2012, pp. 400 (290) and 418 (304).

[29] Ibid., p. 409 (297).

[30] Eric Sjöquist, *Affären Wallenberg*, Stockholm: Bonniers 1974, pp. 87–88.

[31] Jangfeldt 2012, p. 402 (291).

[32] Memo by K.I. Westman, 9.7.47. RA UD, P2 Eu.

[33] K-I. Westman to Sven Grafström 22.7.47. RA UD, P2 Eu.

[34] Gunnar Reuterskiöld to Sven Dahlman 14.1.52. RA UD, P2 Eu.

[35] See e.g. SOU 2003, p. 714.

[36] RA UD, 1920 års dossiersystem, HP 1093. According to Matz, György Szöllösi may be identical with a "Söllösi" mentioned by Per Anger in a report from 12 April, 1945. That is possible but not obvious since several persons with that name figure in the list of holders of protective passports.

[37] On Dickinson's biography, see C.G. McKay, Excerpts from McKay's Notes on the Case of Raoul Wallenberg, <http://www.raoulwallenberg.org/mckay.pdf>

[38] H. Beck-Friis, PM angående uppgifter lämnade av Mr. Dickinson, Price & Waterhouse, Köpenhamn 25.4.51. The Swedish Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg Database.

[39] SOU 2003, p. 609.

[40] Vladimir Pecherskii, "Legends and the Truth about Raoul Wallenberg", *Novoe vremia* 1989:30.

[41] The article is preserved in the Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg archive: "Ungersk artikel om Raoul Wallenberg," 21.04.87. RA UD, P2 Eu I.

[42] Jangfeldt 2012, pp. 404–409 (293–297). The history of the confiscated Studebaker is based on letters preserved in the Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg archive and available at the Swedish Foreign Ministry's Wallenberg Data Base. These letters were ignored by the Eliasson Commission.

Quote: Bengt Jangfeldt, "Raoul Wallenberg and the Question of the Jewish Valuables", in: News RWI-70, April 7, 2021, URL: #####

URL: <https://www.rwi-70.de/raoul-wallenberg-and-the-question-of-the-jewish-valuables/>



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