Émigré Photographers

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The extraordinary role played by refugees in stimulating and shaping visual culture in Britain, especially photography, between the wars and in the aftermath of World War II, has become a staple of the academic, journalistic, and curatorial scenes as we approach the year 2020. But it was a long time coming. The tardiness of scholars in recognising this vital current owes a great deal to ongoing debates about the place of photography within the fine arts, and the fitful embrace of photography in the domain of art history. In addition to still photography, this essay includes a foray into the related field of cinematography. Due in part to the establishment of the British Film Institute in 1933, in contrast to the late-coming and severely under-resourced National Media Museum, recognition of a distinctive émigré stamp on British cinema has long been part of film studies. Perhaps the impact of some of those considered here has been obscured, in British discussions, because their presence in the UK seemed fleeting. Not all of them remained in the country for the rest of their lives, making their contributions more difficult to discern and contextualise. Moreover, many of these figures fit more neatly into international and 'transnational' trends, which are relatively recent categories of analysis in an academic world in which national-based disciplines still predominate.

I shall begin with press photographers Erich Salomon (1886-1944) and Robert Capa (1913-1954), who are not often featured in discussions of British photography. Both lived out of suitcases during numerous stays in the United Kingdom in the inter-war years, yet dramatically altered the country's photographic conventions. Capa, born André Friedmann in Budapest, was exalted as the world's greatest war photographer, and Salomon was hailed for introducing candid shots both of social élites (Fig.xx?) and the common people in the popular German press, Fleet Street, and beyond. Their photographic efforts were promoted to a British public above all by Stefan Lorant (1901-1997), founder of Picture Post, who made their pictures integral to his magazine stories.
Lorant was the son of a portrait photographer in Budapest, who ran a well-respected studio and served at the Hapsburg court. The family had already distanced itself from traditional Jewish practice by the turn of the century. Lorant came to London after learning photography, working in film, editing movie magazines in Germany, and becoming prominent as an avant-garde magazine editor in Munich. His fierce energy and exuberance in work and play almost instantly became legendary. ‘Shortly after his arrival in England in April 1934’, writes Michael Hallett in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Lorant ‘created the influential *Weekly Illustrated*, and in 1937 founded *Lilliput*, the pocket-sized publication that included visually surrealistic photographic “juxtapositions”, followed in 1938 by his *tour de force*, the influential weekly picture magazine *Picture Post* which he edited along with *Lilliput* until 1940.’ (1) Through these trend-setting publications, the quantity and quality of photography in British popular culture—in large part abetted by stateless and refugee photographers who often were working illegally, and did not desire a byline—was swiftly transformed.

Although some of the attributions seem to be pseudonyms or refer only to the photo agency, such as Keystone, Black Star, and Pix, Lorant clearly featured a number of émigrés to the country, such as Felix H. Man, Zoltan Glass, Moholy-Nagy, Bill Brandt, Brassaï, Edith Tudor-Hart, Ylla (Camilla Kofler), Alfred Eisenstaedt, and Erwin Blumenfeld, Kurt Hutton and Gerti Deutsch. Although not all of these photographers resided in the UK for great lengths of time, inclusion in the British photographic scene was critical to their careers. With an audacious pledge that his tactics would spur an immense leap in sales, offsetting a vastly discounted price, by 1939 Lorant presented his sceptical publisher, Edward Hulton, with a circulation of some 1.7 million for *Picture Post* ‘and statistics from the time indicate that it was read by half the adult population of England.’ (2) As formidable as this achievement was, even more impressive is the fact that Lorant's *Weekly Illustrated* clearly provided a template for Henry Luce's *Life* magazine, rendering absurd the often-repeated claim that *Picture Post* had imitated the US publication. (3)
Lorant’s fantastic run in the UK ended, according to Hallett, when he ‘emigrated to America in 1940, like many of his creative and talented peers.‘

This formulation implies that Lorant simply picked up and left, or perhaps, as Helmut Gernsheim quipped, he didn’t want to take a chance on becoming Hitler’s prisoner a second time. (In early 1940, after all, the prospect of a Nazi invasion of the British Isles seemed imminent.) Lorant did not, in fact, take flight to save his own skin. He was intent on doing his utmost for the war effort; yet a critical mass of establishment heavies, including Kenneth Clark, well aware of Picture Post’s popular success, were uneasy that a foreigner, part of a ‘tribe’ supported by Hulton, occupied such a lofty and increasingly critical position. Having been denied naturalisation, Lorant was pressured to leave the country in 1940. There is little doubt that this partly explains why Lorant, and many he championed, have been given short-shrift.

It also is generally assumed that Helmut Gernsheim left Britain for lusher, more lucrative pastures, in the early 1960s. Yet Gernsheim, like Lorant, would have preferred to stay in London, and never stopped thinking of himself as ‘an Englishman.’ But his persistent efforts to establish a museum and research centre for photography in Britain went unheeded, while the private collection that would comprise its core was causing his flat to burst at the seams. He did not sell the bulk of his library, private papers, and photographs to the University of Texas to maximise a financial gain—but in order to situate his life’s work in a setting in which it would be preserved, catalogued, displayed, systematically supplemented, and made available for research. For Gernsheim it was hugely disappointing and painful that he was unable to bequeath his collection to a public institution in Britain. ‘It is my ambition’, Gernsheim told a reporter for London’s Jewish Chronicle in 1951, ‘that this collection shall form the nucleus of a national museum of photography. In this way I hope to be able to express my gratitude to Britain.’

This unrealized wish never, however, became part of the official story. To the extent that Gernsheim is considered at all, he is regarded as having
‘sold out’ to the University of Texas and the Reiss-Engelhorn Museum in Mannheim. The DNB entry on Gernsheim by Helen Barlow, on the other hand, is forthright and perceptive, and not shy about casting the British photography grandees as short-sighted in their failure to embrace both Gernsheim's treasure trove and his advocacy of greater respect for the medium.vii

More troubling, perhaps, is that along with being ignored, Capa, Lorant, and Gernsheim have been disparaged and derided, often in smug undertones. One might chalk this up to the revisionism that occurs in the evolution of almost every discipline. But the comments (some quite recent) about these men also conjure unsavoury stereotypes about 'foreigners' that each of them faced from fascists and more genteel anti-semites. Even though there has still been no major British retrospective centring on Lorant or Gernsheim, we may also reflect on how the tide has turned in recent years.

Books, substantial articles and exhibitions have recently featured the work of Wolf Suschitzky,viii(8) Edith Tudor-Hart,ix(9) Elsbeth Juda,x(10) Gerti Deutsch,xi(11), Lucia Moholy(12) and Dorothy Bohm. Bohm, however, was of a younger generation, arriving as a teenager in the UK and emerging as a photographer in Manchester and London..xii(12) In her thoughtful Guardian obituary for Wolf Suchitzky, Amanda Hopkinson notes that his ‘photography has enjoyed something of a renaissance this century, with his inclusion in a number of group shows, not least Another London: International Photographers Capture City Life 1930-1980 at Tate Britain in 2012.’ Given that a ‘renaissance’ requires human agency, it is not surprising Hopkinson, the daughter of Gerti Deutsch and Tom Hopkinson, who succeeded Lorant as editor of Picture Post, is foremost among those informing and energizing this focus of attention on émigrés and photography. She has written incisively on photography, including dozens of unusually rich obituaries of both feted and nearly forgotten photographers, often women, and also helped raise awareness of key individuals who made possible a greater appreciation of photography.
Each of these artists had distinct tastes, backgrounds and career trajectories—despite Wolf Suschitzky and Edith Tudor-Hart being siblings. What unites them all, in addition to having been skilled creative photographers, is the fact that it is highly unlikely that they would have settled – or even worked - in Britain had it not been for the Nazi persecution of Jews and political opponents. It is interesting furthermore to note that Gernsheim, who became a foundational historian of photography, Walter Neurath, creator of Thames & Hudson, which published books on photography as well as the fine arts, and Andor Kraszna Krausz, founder of the influential and pioneering Focal Press, all prominent among those who reconceived and concretized photography's elevated status in the hierarchy of genres of creative expression, were all refugees.

Despite this burgeoning interest in émigré photographers, significant lacunae remain. To date, for instance, although one is in the pipeline, there has been no substantial biography or major retrospective exhibition of the photographer Kurt Hutton. As we observe the 80th anniversary of the Anschluss and the anti-semitic outrages perpetrated on Reichskristallnacht, it is appropriate to recall that Hutton and Gerti Deutsch were the photographers assigned by Picture Post to shoot the first group of Kindertransport children arriving from Germany in late 1938. Their humane portrayal of these young people in the pages of a mass circulation magazine may well have had an effect on the way they were perceived and received in Britain.

While the desire to focus on those who survived and thrived is understandable, it is important to recall those who did not. Some of the world's most outstanding photographers, such as Erich Salomon, who as we have seen, spent time in London in the 1930s, and Yva (Else Ernestine Neuländer-Simon) --who sought refuge in Britain--did not escape the clutches of the Nazis and were murdered in concentration camps. Moreover, there were a number of men and women who entered Britain in the 1930s aspiring to a career in photography whose hopes were thwarted. Expertise with a camera did not necessarily provide a pathway to professional success or even to
basic survival. Historian Annette Vonwinckel has illuminated how networks of individuals active in the photography world, which included a large percentage of Jews, proactively assisted refugees in finding a footing in Britain, the United States, South America, and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{xviii}(19)

While there is virtually no area, outside (and even sometimes inside) the specifically Jewish fold, where refugees did not face discrimination, photography was more open to Jews in Britain than most other fields of activity. What this meant in practice is that some refugees arrived with the firm intention of making a career in photography; while others, after gaining a sense of the cultural landscape, turned towards photography as a livelihood. This brief survey cannot possibly list, let alone analyse the hundreds of photographers who passed through or settled in Britain from the 1920s through to the 1950s. In order to begin to comprehend this phenomenon, we will examine a select number of individuals along a spectrum: from those who trained and practised as photographers in Europe before coming to Britain, such as Helmut Gernsheim and Wolf Suschitzky, to those whose work in the field was a product of improvisation or happenstance, such as Walter Gernsheim and Alfred Carlebach.

The contrasting cases of brothers Walter and Helmut Gernsheim—while interwoven—exemplify the polarities of improvised versus premeditated engagement with photography. Walter Gernsheim, who is now widely recognized for creating a pioneering photographic archive integral to art historical and architectural research, did not foresee photography as an option when contemplating his move to Britain. When he arrived in London with his wife, fairly soon after Hitler's accession to power, his aim was to continue his career as an art historian. Despite the relocation of Hamburg's esteemed Warburg Institute to London, he found that even part-time teaching or institutionally-supported research was inaccessible to him. He succeeded in establishing a gallery selling fine art (named after himself, "Dr Walter Gernsheim"), but the financial rewards were insufficient. At the suggestion of Fritz Saxl, the director of the Warburg Institute, Walter and Gertrud Gernsheim began
a project of compiling a photograph record of master prints and drawings around the United Kingdom that would be made available to scholars of art history. Walter had almost certainly had some experience of the medium while in Munich; while his wife, daughter of the German-Jewish modernist architect, Fritz Landauer, had also gained some facility with photography.

To Walter, two main professions looked promising for his younger brother Helmut, who was planning to join him in Britain: photography and dentistry. But Helmut chose instead to complete a three-year photography course in Munich, which gave him a superb training, although before 1933, like his brother, he had imagined a career for himself in art history. Edith Tudor-Hart (née Suschitzky) too apparently prodded her younger brother, Wolf, to study photography before emigrating to Britain, as it was clearly one of the avenues for dignified labour that seemed accessible to foreigners.

Although Helmut Gernsheim arrived in the UK as an accomplished photographer, this is not what secured his entry. In fact, he managed to slip into the country while attached as a photographer to a Munich puppet theatre that was touring Paris - the sympathetic head of the company apparently turned a blind eye when he simply disappeared. Gernsheim in due course found gainful employment due to his training in colour photography, at a time when there were few people with such expertise but great demand for their services, especially in the field of advertising. His clients included the Great Northern Railway and Rolls Royce. (Fig.xx?) Simultaneously, Gernsheim began investigating the history of photography and dabbling in collecting, which at the time often meant visiting second-hand bookshops or rummaging through boxes and albums dumped by the roadside. When he was diverted, as an ‘enemy alien’, via the notorious HMT Dunera, to an internment camp in Australia, he found that there was keen appetite among his fellow refugees for his sophisticated lectures and entire courses in photo history and criticism. This certainly paved the way for the monumental tome entitled The History of Photography (1955), written with his first wife Alison
Eames, and its derivative *A Concise History of Photography* (1965), both of which are still regarded as authoritative reference works.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Gernsheim began thinking about the significance of the social history of photography, with its unusually large proportion of Jews. This insight was shared by his friend and colleague, Ferenc Berko (1916-2000). Hungarian-born Berko had, like Gernsheim, been converted to Protestantism as a youth but was considered racially Jewish by the Nazis. Although they did not know each other at the time, Berko found, again like Gernsheim, that his professional training afforded him significant opportunities in Britain. Arriving in London in 1933, he later recalled that: ‘One of my luckier encounters was with E. O. Hoppé … originally from Munich [who arrived in London in 1900] … it was he who, on seeing my photographs, encouraged me to seriously take up photography as a profession, and particularly to concentrate on photo journalism, starting with London—the city and its people. (Fig.xx) One of my photographs of a series on the embankment, a contralight shot of the Thames, was used by Leitz, in a very large size, to prove the merits of the by then in England still not at all popular 35mm camera—and, especially, of course, of the Leica.\(^{xx}\)(21)

When he was not under contract for advertising jobs, Berko engaged in 'street photography' and also ‘started taking nudes, mostly on beaches’, when dividing his time between London and Paris in 1933-34, with his wife, Mirte, as his ‘main model.’ He was particularly pleased that two of his nudes appeared in a highly-respected volume (published in Nazi Germany, no less), *Leica Fotografie in aller Welt* (1938) and that he was asked to contribute an article for that same book on photography in France. ”My nudes were also published in the British *The Naturalist*, a photo magazine, in *Photography*, and in the French magazine *Paris Magazine*, which had a large circulation."\(^{xxi}\)(22?)] In 1953 Berko was the recipient of a significant cash prize offered by a national Boots pharmacy competition to best reveal ‘the spirit’ of the Queen's coronation
celebrations. Ultimately Berko became the house photographer for the Aspen Institute think-tank in Colorado, which led him to take portraits of numerous world-famous figures. He also was able to travel throughout the United States and produced a vibrant body of work in colour, which complemented his earlier portfolio from Europe, Britain and India.

Berko also found work in motion pictures while in Britain. He befriended one of the founders of the magazine, *film art*, and was ‘given the chance by a financier of [Alexander] Korda's London Films, who had founded a small company called Epidaurus Trust, to do some short documentaries … We worked with hand-held 35mm Eyemos … While it did not bring in any money, we learnt a lot about all phases of filmmaking with the exception of studio lighting.’ In 1938 this experience helped him land a paying job in Bombay, on a one-year contract as a cameraman. Fearing that war would engulf Britain, and keenly aware of his vulnerability as a ‘stateless’ person, India seemed to offer a suitable refuge. There he established his own studio in collaboration with a leading British advertising agency in the country, D. J. Keymer. Berko also contributed in significant ways to the British war effort. He was commissioned by John Grierson's documentary unit to shoot two films for the purpose of recruiting soldiers for the Volunteer Indian Army (which proved immensely significant in Montgomery's defeat of Rommel in North Africa). After that ‘the British Government established the 'Directorate of Kinematography', and it was at that time, after years of waiting, that I (Berko) was accepted by the army and became a director of one of their film units, with the rank of staff captain.’ Berko considered himself fortunate not to be relegated to ‘dull training films’ but to be assigned ‘semi-documentary films which were supposed to show how attractive life in the army could be … This took me to many interesting and sometimes dangerous places. I still stayed a Non-British subject in spite of my four years in England and being in the army… Hence, paradoxically, for some time I still had to report to the local police before work—in full uniform!’**xxii (f/n?)**
Like Berko, Wolf Suschitzky—although temperamentally disinclined to bow to authority—shot public-oriented films at the wartime government's behest. *Children of the City* (1944) for instance, produced by Paul Rotha, was a Ministry of Information Film for the Scottish Education and Home Departments. The cinematography in this short film remains striking. The *World is Rich* (1947), also with Paul Rotha, is comparable to its United States counterpart, *Seeds of Destiny* (date?), imploring citizens of the United States to remain engaged with a deeply fractured and damaged Europe. Suchitzky later shot a film in India for an English charity serving victims of leprosy. Intended as a means of paying the bills, he became a cameraman for expressly commercial projects such as *Ulysses* (1967), *Ring of Bright Water* (1969), and *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1970). His biggest hit was *Get Carter* (1971), shot on location in north-east England, starring Michael Caine.' Wolf Suschitzky's son Peter continues the family business, best known as the director of photography for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and *The Empire Strikes Back!* (1980).

Walter Lassally (1926-2017), whose career combined photography and film, writes that as a teenager, he already had a strong sense of his desired vocation:

> I wanted to be a cameraman, shooting feature films. My mind was quite made up … My parents and I had come to England from Berlin as refugees two months before the start of the Second World War; in the official jargon of the time I was a DP—a Displaced Person. We had only transit visas for England, as we were supposed to be on our way to Canada, where my father had managed to land a job, but, as the necessary paperwork was not completed, we were allowed into England only through the generosity of a Quaker from Wolverhampton, whom we never met and who guaranteed that we would not fall burden to the State. Then the war broke out, and we got stuck in London.
Lassally also produced superb still photographs throughout his lifetime. We will never know what his anonymous benefactor thought of Lassally, whose screen credits include cinematography for *Zorba the Greek* (1964), and who enjoyed a long association with Merchant Ivory Productions.

Walter Lassally, like Peter Suschitzky, was taking up the family trade. But the fate of Lassally’s father, Arthur, as an immigrant to Britain reminds us of the pitfalls of Whig history. ‘My father’, Lassally writes,

had been a maker of industrial films in Germany since the early 1920s … soon specialising in the use of the cinematograph as a tool in engineering, a pioneering enterprise at that time. He started his own business, a one-man film unit called Film-Ingenieur Lassally GmbH, soon after the First World War, and made a large number of industrial and training films … which were shown in cinemas. The coming to power of the Nazis in 1933 put an abrupt end to his work, however, and he tried to establish a foothold in England, but, as England at that time was a long way behind Germany in such highly specialised filmmaking, he was unsuccessful … My father was not able to exercise his craft again, and all that remains of his work is a small sheaf of film clips.xxvi( )

In contrast, Walter gratefully took advantage of both the British and international filmmaking scene which appreciated his brilliance. He, too, made films expressly for public service, such as *Thursday’s Children* (1954), shot at the Royal School for the Deaf in Margate, awarded an Oscar for the best documentary short.

While based in London, as his interest in art photography grew, Helmut Gernsheim became friendly with Lucia Moholy, yet another refugee. Gernsheim was an admirer of the work she had produced with her ex-husband László and suspected that he might often have been credited for what were mainly her ideas. Moholy’s photographs of the Bauhaus have only recently been attributed to her and put into context by Robin Schuldenfrei.(f/n?) László himself tried, and failed, to create a
Bauhaus-like institution in Britain; his ambition would be partially realized in the Illinois Institute of Technology. [NB Leyla Daybelge in her essay refers to MN setting up the New Bauhaus in Chicago, later called the Institute of Design – are these the same thing? YES, WENT THROUGH SEVERAL INCARNATIONS] Lucia, while based in a Bloomsbury studio later destroyed in the Blitz, produced a number of stunning portraits of personalities such as Karl Polanyi and Inez Spender. Other distinguished émigré female portraitists included Lotte Meitner-Graf and Gerty Simon. After the war Lucia turned to documentary filmmaking for UNESCO and other international agencies.

In addition to Moholy-Nagy, Gernsheim befriended many others who became stalwarts of the UK photographic community. One of his early books, *The Man Behind the Camera* (1948), comprised nine brief biographies of London-based photographers and examples of their work, including one fellow refugee, Wolf Suschitzky. (Fig.xx?) Had Hitler not intervened, Suschitzky would have trained to be a zoologist. His concern and passion for animals, however, became central to his photographic practice. (A fellow émigré, John Gay, also was noted for exceptional animal photography, as well as portraits and architectural photography.)xxvii Wolf also gained a reputation as an outstanding photographer both of children and of London street life. Wolf’s sister, Edith Tudor-Hart, famous for her more expressly political photography, joined him in London, having lived there previously. Along with her social reportage Tudor-Hart worked secretly for the Communist Party and, according to Peter Stephan Jungk, played a key role in recruiting the ‘Cambridge Five’.xxviii (f/n?)

Art historian Anthony Blunt, much later revealed to be another Communist spy, lent crucial support to the re-establishment of the Warburg Institute in Britain. He also provided affidavits, on several occasions, for photographers seeking work and residency permits. One of the photographers with whom Blunt worked closely was Alfred Carlebach, who had been a lawyer in Germany. Finding
that he was unable to adapt to the British legal system, he turned what had previously been a hobby into a livelihood. The home movies he had made in Germany are in fact unusually professional and interesting. In addition to the architecture and statuary Carlebach photographed in collaboration with Blunt, his output included a number of sculpture and advertising projects.

As the careers of the Gernsheims and Carlebach attest, the Warburg Institute generated an immense amount of work for photographers, as well as creatively devising ways to link the fine arts and historical scholarship to photography. Adelheid (Heidi) Heimann (1903-93) was one of its principle photographers for several years. Having studied for her doctorate in Hamburg under Erwin Panofsky, she undertook training in photography in Berlin, most likely in order to support her own research. It is also possible that, like Gernsheim, she surmised that photography might provide an alternate career path in the event that art history be blocked to her. Upon her emigration to London in 1936 she worked as a freelance photographer, and from 1940 to 1943 headed the photography laboratory of the Warburg Institute. Beginning in 1944 she worked full-time as a photographer for Picture Post, specializing in colour photography, and returned to the Warburg Institute in 1954 as assistant curator of its photography collection. She never ceased, however, to contribute to the discipline of art history, from the medieval to modern periods, and served as a visiting professor at Freiburg University in 1972. xxix ( )

I shall end by observing that this infusion of serious and open-ended approaches to the photographic medium acted as a spur to a number of new developments in the UK, such as the integration of photography into the programme of institutions such as the Royal Academy and the V&A, and the intensive application of photography to the study and appreciation of the fine arts, especially as exemplified though the work of the Warburg Institute. Although there was of course a significant and proud legacy of British photography on which to build, the European émigrés undoubtedly breathed new life into the field – even if these sometimes took the form of gusts that ruffled the
feathers of the-great-and-the-good. But the changes effected were for the most part gradually accepted as reflecting the good sense and progressive-mindedness of the British as a nation, or else – ultimately - just taken for granted.

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ii Ibid.

iii Michael Berkowitz, Jews and photography in Britain (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), pp 26, 81, 114, 115.

iv Michael Hallett, op.cit.

v Expressed as an inscription to his niece, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, private collection.


ix Peter Stephan Jungk, Die Dunkelkammern der Edith Tudor-Hart. Geschichten eines Lebens (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2015).

x "Elsbeth Juda: Grit and Glamour" (exhibition at Jewish Museum London); see http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/elsbeth-juda [accessed 22 June 2018].

xi Lecture by Gerti Deutsch's daughter, Amanda Hopkinson, photography critic and historian: "From Vienna to London: Pictures in the Post by Gerti Deutsch," Institute of Modern Languages Research, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 18 April 2018. An exhibition of


xv See Michael Berkowitz, *Jews and photography in Britain* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015).

xvi Christopher Matthews, e-mail to the author, 30 January 2016. ??

xvii See, for example, the capsule biographies of Hella Katz and Betti Mautner, in *Vienna's Shooting Girls: Jüdische Fotografinnen aus Wien* (Wien: Jüdisches Museum Wien und IPTS-Institut für Posttayloristische Studien, 2012), pp202, 203.


xxi Ibid.

xxii Ibid., p. 12.
xxiii See entry for "Children of the City" (0291) – Moving Image Archive Catalogue, National Library of Scotland; available at: http://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0291 [accessed 24 June 2018].

xxiv "Wolfgang Suschitzky-Working for LEPRA in India", youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTlsP7TM2bU [accessed 24 June 2018].


xxvi Ibid., pp1-2. See also Jungk and Schuldenfreie.


xxviii Jungk.