



AiA Art News-service



**Deutsche
Welle**

Germany returns papers of Franz Kafka's friend Max Brod to Israel

Thousands of documents from Kafka's closet confidant and publisher are headed back to Israel's National Library after a Kafka-esque survival tale. Brod defied Kafka's dying wish and turned him into a famous writer.



They were stored in an Israeli refrigerator, stolen and later uncovered in an art forgery warehouse in Germany, and then the subject of a criminal investigation and a court case. Now, thousands of personal papers belonging to Max Brod, one of Czech writer Franz

Kafka's most intimate friends and his literary executor, are heading to the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem after a [years-long struggle to complete the archive of Brod's estate](#).

During a Tuesday ceremony at the Berlin residence of the Israeli ambassador to Germany, Germany's Federal Criminal Police handed over some 5,000 documents in three suitcases to Israel's ambassador, Jeremy Issacharoff, and representatives of the National Library, including Stefan Litt, an archivist and humanities curator. Issacharoff described the return of the documents as an act of "historical justice":



The vice president of the Federal Criminal Police, Peter Henzler, said in a press release, "I am very happy that we were able to secure the documents and that they will now have a worthy place in the National Library of Israel."

Brod estate: The missing link

In an interview with DW, Litt described the papers as the "missing link in Max Brod's written estate." Previously in private hands, the estate was granted to the library by Israel's Supreme Court in 2016.

Brod played a pivotal role in establishing the German-speaking Kafka as one of the 20th-century's most important writers. Before dying in 1924, Kafka told Brod to burn all his writing, stories and personal diaries alike. Brod defied Kafka's wish and went on to publish many of the author's manuscripts posthumously, including his novel *The Trial*.

"One of the very few persons who was totally convinced about [Kafka's] literature quality was Max Brod, and he was emphasizing very enthusiastically time and again how important Kafka is for literature and how important it is to read him," said Litt.

Flight, theft and discovery

Born in Prague in 1884, Brod fled the Nazi regime for Tel Aviv in 1939. After dying there in 1968, he bequeathed his personal papers — including Kafka's manuscripts — to his secretary, Esther Hoffe. Following her death in 2007, the estate went to her daughter, who reportedly stored part of them in a turned-off refrigerator.

Over time the estate was divided up between three locations: Hoffe's daughter's apartment, an Israeli bank vault and a bank in Zurich, Switzerland.



Max Brod was a writer himself, but he is best known for publishing and promoting Kafka's work in public

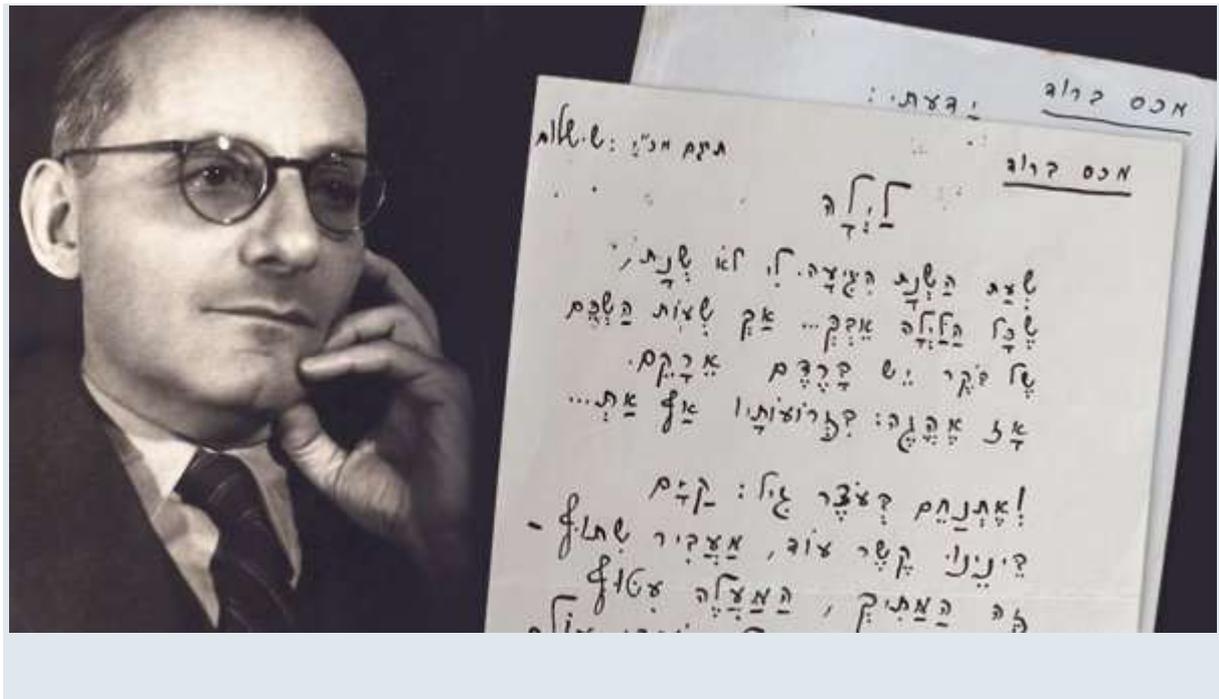
Then, between 2009 and 2012, the documents stored in the apartment were stolen. They next turned up in 2013, after two Israelis approached the German Literary Archives in Marbach, a small city in southwest Germany, saying they had a collection of unpublished documents belonging to Brod.

A police investigation located the documents in suitcases at a storage facility in Wiesbaden in northwest Germany that was used by an international art forgery ring. Police seized the documents after their significance became clear, and a January court case ruled the collection must be returned to Israel's National Library.

Correspondence as insight into literature

The portion of the Brod estate that is now heading back to Israel includes a postcard written by Kafka to Brod in 1910, as well as unpublished passages from Brod's diary and letters between him and his wife.

They will join some 40,000 other documents belonging to Brod that are already in the library's possession.



While the bulk of the papers handed over on Tuesday do not pertain directly to Kafka, they could help shine light on the cultural, intellectual and literary currents that both Kafka and Brod were a part of at the time.

"It is very important to have complete personal archives, as much as possible," Litt told DW, explaining that it helps build a wider context and can also help researchers.

"When you read a novel or a story, you will get the idea that the author was trying to deliver in his art piece to the public, but correspondence usually gives you much better insight and background in the whole process of developing ideas and bringing them into literary pieces," Litt explained.

Litt said that the papers, some of which are over 100 years old, will be fumigated upon arrival to Israel in order to ensure cleanliness before entering the archival collection:

"You can never know what's between those pages," he said.

The documents will then be cataloged, with selected significant parts eventually digitized.

"I guess maybe by the end of 2019, or beginning of 2020 we will be able to present the first part of it" in a digital form, Litt said.

The Library is also hoping to get back the part of Brod's estate that had been stored in a Swiss bank vault in the coming weeks, following an April court ruling in Switzerland calling for their return to Israel.