

Annette B. Vogt*

Anneliese Maier and her contribution to the history of science

(1) History of science and their tradition

In history of science as well as in most “hard” sciences we know famous contributors, “fathers” of a discovery or theory, founders of a new field or new approach, but only some women contributors. The “Nobel Prize” in our field, the George Sarton Medal, is given from 1955 onwards. This most prestigious honor the History of Science Society is awarding, was given from 1955 to 2006 to 53 historians of science. Among these 53 scholars are only 7 women, among these first Anneliese Maier was awarded in 1966.



Anneliese Maier
(*Archive of the Max Planck Society*)

Anneliese Maier was not only a very important historian of scholastic philosophy and early modern science. Her book on the predecessors of Galileo Galilei (first published in 1949) belongs still to the standard literature on this topic. She also was an archivist and specialist on medieval manuscripts. And she became famous thanks to her archival guide books on the collections of manuscripts, the *Codices Burghesiani* (1952) and the catalogue of the library of the Avignon pope (1952 too), both kept in the Vatican library. Furthermore, in the early 1950ies she developed a quite unique concept, a new approach — a combination of history of art and history of science. But unfortunately, this research program, written in March 1954, was never realised. Even more, it wasn't known and hidden in an Archive — in the *Archive of the Kaiser Wilhelm / Max Planck Society in Berlin*. Because of the Archives law, only in 2002, 30 years after her death, it was allowed to study her personal file, and here her “memorandum” was found (first published by Vogt (2004)).

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(2) The life of Anneliese Maier

Anneliese Maier was born in an intellectual family, her grandfather, Christop Sigwart (1830–1904), as well as her father, Heinrich Maier (1867–1933), were important philosophers in Germany. Thanks to this family background and thanks to the relatively progressive situation for women students and first women scientists in Germany at that time, she wanted to become a scholar like her father and her grandfather. From 1923 (the Abitur) until 1930 (her doctoral degree at the Berlin University) it seemed her dream comes true. After finishing her thesis she worked on her “Habilitation” — the necessary step becoming a “Privatdozent” at a German University. In the same time she supported her father as his private secretary finishing and publishing his opus on the history of philosophy.

Then the first break happened in her life. In January 1933 the Nazi's raised to power. They were strictly against women scientists, at a German University no single woman was allowed to become “Dozent” (instead of Privatdozent) between 1933 and 1938. After the death of her father Anneliese Maier realized his wish and published the last two volumes of his Oeuvre posthumously (in 1934 and 1935). Looking for a paid job in science she got an assistant position (“Hilfsarbeiterin”) in one project of the Prussian Academy of Science in Berlin in 1936. She worked in the little research group preparing the Leibniz edition. This was an excellent “niche” as Margaret Rossiter described it (see Rossiter (1982)). Anneliese Maier changed her scientific topic from philosophy to history of philosophy. Her excellent education — she studied philosophy as well as mathematics and physics — was a good basis for this new topic. Furthermore, thanks to the Leibniz edition she had to travel to Italy, looking for letters of G. W. Leibniz in Italian Archives. In Rome, first she came in contact with the Vatican library and the famous Bibliotheca Hertziana — the only Kaiser Wilhelm Institute on art history and located outside of Germany. Because of her personal relations — through colleagues of her father — she managed to get grants from the German Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for her work in Rome. In 1938 she finally arrived in Rome, and the second break happened.

From 1938 until her death Anneliese Maier lived and worked in Rome. She became the first woman assistant (in 1943) in the Bibliotheca Hertziana. Because of the racist policy of the Nazi's the Institute was named now Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Art History and Cultural Study (KWI). She established close relations to the Bibliotheca Vaticana. When the situation of the KWI became dramatic because of WW II she moved under the umbrella of the Vatican: she was privately paid by Cardinal Giovanni Mercati — women were not allowed to be employees in the Vatican library — for her archival work on the codices of manuscripts which she published in 1952; in 1943 she converted to Catholicism. Her accurate study of the old manuscripts became the basis of her later scientific work on medieval scholastic philosophy. She became an expert on this field, knowing all relevant sources in the Vatican library.

The third break happened in 1954: Anneliese Maier was nominated as a Scientific Member of the Max Planck Society, the successor of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society (comparable with the membership in a German Academy of Science). She became an acknowledged expert in history of medieval philosophy and science. Although she got several honours (including the membership in an Academy of Science in Germany), she got no professorship in Germany. In the Max Planck Institute Bibliotheca Hertziana (as it was re-named) she got not the position of a head of a department because of the negative vote of the director Franz von Metternich. She only got financial support from the Max Planck Society. Therefore, she played no role as one of the founders of history of science in her native country. But being in Rome all the time, she became a mentor for many young American historians of sciences. She also was an advisor for the US National Science Foundation.

(3) The work of Anneliese Maier

Although born in Germany, Anneliese Maier became an European historian of science. Because of the political circumstances in her country — the Nazi regime — she went to Italy, she lived and worked most of her time in Rome. She published in German, later also in French and Italian. Her articles and books includes large quotations in Latin — the common language of scholars and scientists from about the 10th century until the 19th century. Unfortunately, she never published in English. Plans to translate her famous books into English were never realized. Thus, Steven D. Sargent from Philadelphia mentioned in his book:

Maier's German is very readable, but until the student has developed the necessary level of proficiency in the language, Maier's studies will literally be a closed book (Sargent (1982), p.VII).

(4) Her unknown Memorandum

The special situation in the Bibliotheca Hertziana in the early 1950s, the negotiations getting back this treasure from the Vatican to the re-opened Kaiser Wilhelm Society as Max Planck Society, and the antifeministic policy of the German "mandarines" (see Ringer (1983)) until the 1960ies were the reasons that Anneliese Maier was nominated as a Scientific Member of the MPS but never was given the planned department for history of science and art. Her memorandum about the relations between art history and history of humanity was written at the time when this department under her leadership was in discussion. But it was not realised, the memorandum was given to the personal file of Anneliese Maier and disappeared in the Archive (see "Denkschrift", 12.3.1954, in MPA: II, 1A, PA A. Maier, vol.1, copy (8 pp.)).

Today, 60 years later, the memorandum of Anneliese Maier is a historical document only. Her concept, her approach, was never realised, and in the history of science as well as in the history of art other approaches were made and realised. But her proposals are still interesting:

- first, to combine history of science and humanities with history of art on special research topics, or related to special questions;
- second, to study accurate, detailed, carefully all manuscripts as a pre-condition for any analysis and conclusions;
- third, to be carefully with interpretations and explanations; not to overestimate single facts; and to interpretate the empirical material (facts) only in the context of time and circumstances.

(5) An Anneliese-Maier-Prize

Re-evaluating the work of Anneliese Maier (independently 2 articles were published, see Maieru (200x) and Vogt (2004)), one learns again her fascinating knowledge, her broad education, and her understanding of science and history of science, of philosophy and history of philosophy. To remember her it would be marvellous to establish a prize with her name, and in the frame of the relatively new European Society for History of Science (ESHS).

Thereore, I would like to suggest to establish an

Anneliese Maier-Prize for history of science of the ESHS

for the best publication in history of science of the last two years between the conferences of the ESHS.

Anneliese Maier

* 14.11.1905 in Tübingen (Anna Elisabeth Regine)

"Abitur" in 1923 in Heidelberg, 1923–1929 study of philosophy, physics and mathematics at the Berlin University, doctoral thesis (30.7.1930) "Kants Qualitätskategorien"

1929/30–1935 studies, journeys, private assistant of her father

1.2.1936–1939 assistant ("Hilfsarbeiterin") in the research group "edition of G. W. Leibniz" of the Prussian Academy of Science

1.1.1938–31.3.1943 with grants of the German Science Foundation (DFG) in Rome, guest scholar at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) for art and cultural studies in the Palazzo Zuccari (the Bibliotheca Hertziana), 1.4.1943–1944 assistant and librarian in this KWI

1944–1950 working for the Bibliotheca Vaticana (remunerated by cardinal G. Mercati)

since 1950 grants ("Forschungsbeihilfen") from the Max Planck Society

† 2.12.1971 in Rome

Honors:

1949 Corresponding Member of the Academy of Science in Mainz
1951 title "Professor", University Cologne
1954 (14.12.) Scientific Member of the Max Planck Society
1958 Member of the Académie International pour l'histoire des Sciences, Paris
1962 Corresponding Member of the Academy of Science in Göttingen
1966 Corresponding Member of the Bavarian Academy of Science in Munich
1966 Sarton Medal (History of Science Society)
1970 Member of the Mediaeval Academy of America
since 1962 Co-edit. "Archive for History of Exact Sciences"
since 1965 expert for the US National Science Foundation

List of publications:

Kants Qualitätskategorien. Berlin, 1930 (= doctoral thesis)
Die Mechanisierung des Weltbildes im 17. Jahrhundert. Leipzig 1938.
Das Problem der intensiven Größe in der Scholastik. Leipzig 1939 (Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Kunstgeschichte).
Die Impetustheorie der Scholastik. Wien 1940 (Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Kunstgeschichte).
An der Grenze von Scholastik und Naturwissenschaft. Studien zur Naturphilosophie des 14. Jahrhunderts. Essen, 1943 (Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Kunstgeschichte).
Studien zur Naturphilosophie der Spätscholastik. Roma, "Storia e Letteratura" (5 vol.s):
Die Vorläufer Galileis im 14. Jahrhundert. Roma 1949 (2nd edit. 1966; 1977) (St. e L., 22)
Zwei Grundprobleme der scholastischen Naturphilosophie. Das Problem der intensiven Größe. Die Impetustheorie. Roma 1951 (2nd edit.; 3rd edit. 1968) (St. e L., 37)
An der Grenze von Scholastik und Naturwissenschaft. Roma 1952 (2nd edit.) (St. e L., 41)
Metaphysische Hintergründe der spätscholastischen Naturphilosophie. Roma 1955 (St. e L., 52)
Zwischen Philosophie und Mechanik. Roma 1958 (St. e L., 69)
Ausgehendes Mittelalter. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte des 14. Jahrhunderts. 3 volumes:
vol.1, Roma 1964 ("Storia e Letteratura", 97)
vol.2, Roma 1967 ("Storia e Letteratura", 105)
vol.3, Roma 1977 ("Storia e Letteratura", 138, Ed. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani)
Zwei Untersuchungen zur nachscholastischen Philosophie. Die Mechanisierung des Weltbildes im 17. Jahrhundert. Kants Qualitätskategorien. Roma 1968 (2nd edit.) ("Storia e Letteratura", 112)

Editions of sources:

Codices Burghesiani Bibliothecae Vaticanae. Città del Vaticano 1952 (495 pp.).
Der letzte Katalog der päpstlichen Bibliothek von Avignon (1594). Roma 1952 (65 pp.).
Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codices manu scripti recensiti. Codices Vaticani Latini. Codices 2118–2192. In: Bibliotheca Vaticana 1961, pp. X-250.
Der Katalog der päpstlichen Bibliothek in Avignon vom Jahr 1411. In: Archivum Historiae Pontificiae 1 (1963), pp. 97–177.

Bibliographies:

In: Bagliani (1977, vol.3), pp. 617–626.
In: Maierù (1981), pp. 15–23.

Obituaries:

- Ulmann-Brockhaus, Otto, "Anneliese Maier", *Mitteilungen aus der MPG*, 1972, Heft 1, S. 9–11.
Odier, Jeanne Bignami, "Obituary", *Revista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 20 (1972), pp. 245–248.
Schmaus, M. (*Nachruf*), *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen AdW*, 1972, S.250-258.
Grant, E. (*Necrologe*), *Archives Internat. d'Hist. des Sciences*, 24 (1974), pp.143–144.

Secondary literature:

- Alfonso Maierù (Ed.). *Studi sul XIV (trecento) secolo in memoria di Anneliese Maier*. ("Storia e Letteratura", 151; Roma 1981).
On the threshold of exact science: selected writings of Anneliese Maier on late medieval natural philosophy. Ed. Steven D. Sargent (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press,1982).
Vogt, Annette, "Von Berlin nach Rom - Anneliese Maier (1905-1971)", in: Walther, Peter Th., Schalenberg, Marc (eds.), "... immer im Forschen bleiben", Rüdiger vom Bruch zum 60. Geburtstag,(München: Franz Steiner 2004), pp. 391-414; the memorandum pp. 408-414.