

‘Helping to save the works of our old masters from oblivion’. The master clockmaker Alexander Grosz

Gerhard Milchram* and Tabea Rude**

As part of the systematic research programme into the provenance of its collection, the Vienna Museum Group has identified seventy clocks and watches documented in the inventory of the Vienna Clock Museum, which had been unlawfully acquired in 1938. These clocks and watches were formerly owned by the Jewish horologist Alexander Grosz (1869–1940). During the Second World War, most museum objects were removed from the centre of Vienna for safekeeping from Allied air raids. The clocks and watches of the Vienna Clock Museum were hidden by the City administration and the Museum mainly in the vicarage at Klein-Engersdorf near Vienna, and at Thalheim Castle in Lower Austria. Both places were looted at the end of the war. Of the original seventy pieces that once belonged to Grosz, only forty could be found after the war. The Vienna Museum Group’s restitution programme, initiated by the Viennese administration and which started in 1998, finally traced the rightful heirs of Alexander Grosz, after long and difficult research. Following a recommendation from the Vienna Restitution Commission, the remaining clocks and watches were returned to them in 2017. This article aims to introduce Alexander Grosz as a clock and watchmaker, his ties and contributions to the international world of horology, and the known remnants of his collection.

Alexander Grosz¹ (Fig. 1) was born on 1 October 1869 in the city of Neusatz, generally now known as Novi Sad, the principal city in the Vojvodina region of Serbia, near the border with Hungary, and known in Hungarian as Újvidék. Alexander’s

father Philipp was a confectioner, while his mother came from the well-known clock- and watchmaking family Klumak from Baja, Hungary.² Alexander’s maternal grandfather, Jakob Klumak moved from Baja to Neusatz, where he gained his Master certificate in 1867

* Gerhard Milchram (gerhard.milchram@wienmuseum.at) is an historian, curator and provenance researcher at the Wien Museum in Vienna, Austria.

** Tabea Rude (tabea.rude@wienmuseum.at) is a conservator/curator for the horological collection at the Wien Museum in Vienna, Austria.

1. Biographical information on Alexander Grosz was found in (1) his registration of assets, Austrian State Archives OeStA/AdR, E-uReang, VVSt, VA 33360, Alexander Grosz; (2) an anonymous note ‘Ehrentafel Alexander Grosz’ in *Allgemeine Uhrmacherzeitung*, 15 October 1905, p. 233; (3) an anonymous printed note among a collection of clippings assembled by the first director of the Vienna Clock Museum, Rudolf Kaftan, in the Museum’s archives (*Rudolf Kaftans Einlege-Bücher mit Zeitungsausschnitten, Fotos und Dokumenten*), entitled ‘Auszug aus dem Protokoll der außerordentlichen Generalversammlung des Niederösterreichischen Gewerbevereins am 29. April 1904. Antrag des Verwaltungsrates auf Verleihung von silbernen Vereinsmedaillen aus der Freiherr von Schwarz-Senborn-Stiftung’.

2. Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Neusatz (Novi Sad), wedding protocol, 1868, p. 24. Many thanks to Kristina Meneši of the Vojvodina Museum in Novi Sad for sending the relevant marriage records.

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Die Präcisions-Taschenuhren
VON
Vacheron & Constantin in Genf
haben erhalten

den ersten Preis
bei der jährlichen Prüfung der Chronometer für 1895, 1896, 1897,
den ersten Preis
bei der internationalen Chronometer-Prüfung von 1896,

den ersten Serien-Preis
bei der jährlichen Prüfung der Chronometer für 1895, 1896, 1897,
die goldene Medaille
auf der Schweizer Landes-Ausstellung in Genf.

3199
Alleiniger Verkauf für Oesterreich-Ungarn bei
Max Klumak, Uhrenhandlung en gros, Wien, I. Tuchlauben Nr. 17.

Detailverkauf ausgeschlossen.

Fig. 2. Advertisement for Max Klumak, from *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 18 (3 May 1899), No. 2, p. 23.



Fig. 1. Portrait from anon, 'Ehrentafel Alexander Grosz', *Allgemeine Uhrmacherzeitung*, 15 October 1905, p. 233.

and started his own workshop.³

Jakob visited Vienna in 1866⁴ where he formed a trading company with the goldsmith and silversmith Josef Weinberger in 1871.⁵ Shortly after, his sons Max (1848–4 April 1903, Vienna) and Geza (1853–14 March 1918) founded their own business and settled in 17 Tuchlauben and 15 Rotenturmstraße, in central Vienna. Their business quickly picked up and they enjoyed a very good reputation for a wide range of horological items, from pocket watches (both simple and with complications) to pendulum clocks and carriage clocks. Their month- and year-going regulators won prizes at the Vienna World Fair in 1873.⁶ Their speciality soon became precision horological equipment such as chronometers and pocket watches finished in-house, as well as being concessionaire for the Genevan brand Vacheron & Constantin.⁷ (Fig. 2)

From 1877 onwards, the company was regarded as an Austrian pioneer, the 'most excellent workshop' for chronometer-making, and was allowed to display the title

3. *Großes Adreßbuch des Handels-, Fabrik- und Gewerbestandes von Ungarn, Siebenbürgen, Banat, Croatien, Slavonien, Siebenbürgische-, Croatische-, Slavonische – Militärgrenze, Gallizien, Dalmatien. Mit Handelsgeographie, Register der Orte, Fabrikate und Produkte* (Nuremberg: S. Leuchs & Comp, 1862), p. 67. Master certificate, Vienna Clock Museum Archive, Klumak-Folder.

4. Ankünfte [arrivals] in Wien, Hotel de l'Europe, Klumak J., Juw., Neusatz, in *Die Presse* (18 October 1866), p. 11.

5. Firmen-Protokollirungen in Wien, Josef Weinberger & Comp, *Wiener Zeitung* (25 October 1871), p. 15.

6. *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung* (13 December 1874), p. 14.

7. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 18 (3 May 1899), No. 2, p. 23.

Chronometermacher der k.k. Kriegsmarine (chronometer maker to the Austro-Hungarian Navy).⁸ Additionally, Klumak was very involved in the education of young horologists, being in contact with the *Fachschule für Uhrenindustrie* in Karlstein an der Thaya (generally referred to in English as the Karlstein clock- and watchmaking school). His son Geza contributed in many ways, not least in offering jobs for apprentices and journeymen, some of them becoming very well-known in horological circles, such as Alois Irk (1864–1925), later the head of the Karlstein school,⁹ and Hermann Horrmann (1856–1913), later director of the watchmaking school in Neuchâtel.¹⁰

Following in the footsteps of his grandfather and uncles Max and Geza, Alexander Grosz, aged fifteen, started his apprenticeship at the Karlstein school in Lower Austria on 3 October 1884. The school was founded under an initiative of the Austrian government in 1873 in an attempt to save the clock industry in the Waldviertel region of Lower Austria (close to today's Czech border). In 1879, Curt Dietzschold (1852–1922) of Dresden and Glashütte — the noted clock- and watchmaker, inventor and pioneer of mechanical calculators — became the new director of the school, adding international appeal and expertise to the only Austro-Hungarian horological school, attracting other important figures such as Oskar Enzmann (1838–1915), the former director of the Genevan watchmaking school.¹¹ In 1886, fifty-four

students attended the school, half of them from Lower Austria, the other half from the Austrian Crownlands. Alexander Grosz finished school on 15 August 1887 with excellent result (*mit sehr gutem Erfolg*) and received his journeyman-certificate.

Journeyman years and international continued professional development

As was customary after a formal apprenticeship, Alexander Grosz furthered his education by working for and learning from well-qualified horologists across Europe. He spent his first six years (4 October 1887–1 September 1893) with his uncles Max and Geza Klumak in Vienna and Trieste.¹² He left for Frankfurt starting on 12 September 1893 to work for the clockmakers to the court, Emil and Gustav Schlesicky, who delivered marine chronometers to the Imperial German Navy.¹³ In the archive of the German Observatory in Hamburg, the company Schlesicky is recorded as having delivered twelve chronometers between 1877 and 1915.¹⁴ In 1916, Schlesicky received a *Prämie* [a bonus or premium payment] of 600 Marks from the Imperial German Navy and eleven of his eighteen chronometers were rated first class.¹⁵ Grosz worked there until 21 July 1894.

In the same month, Grosz, now twenty-five, left for Rome to work for Hausmann & Co, then headed by Maurice Frielingsdorf.¹⁶ Founded in 1794, this company was well established with three branches in Rome and,

8. Anon, Brüder Klumak, available at watch-wiki.org > Klumak; 'Vermischtes', *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung*, Vol. 1 (4 July 1877), No. 13, p. 81; 'Professor Alois Irk' [obituary], *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 24 (May 1907), p. 299.

9. Anon, 'Alois Irk', *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung*, Vol. 34 (15 March 1910), No. 6, p. 103.

10. Wilhelm Schultz, 'Hermann Horrmann' [obituary], *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung*, Vol. 37, (15 October 1913), no. 20, p. 332.

11. Anon, 'Kurt Dietzschold', *Leipziger Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol.13 (1 February 1906), No. 3, p. 42; Anon, 'Die Geschichte der Karlsteiner Uhrmacherei', available at www.uhrenmuseum.at/Geschichte; Hermann Bush, 'Notes of Watchmaking Schools in Germany and Austria', *Horological Journal* (April 1888), p. 125.

12. Luigi Mora (ed), *Guida Generale Amministrativa Commerciale e Corografica di Trieste, il Goriziano, L'Istria, Fiume e la Dalmazia* (Trieste, 1894), p. 183.

13. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol. 13 (28 November 1893), No. 1, p. 6.

14. Kuno Heuer, 'Ein Rückblick auf die in den Jahren 1877 bis 1915 auf der Deutschen Seewarte Abgehaltenen Chronometer-Wettbewerb-Prüfungen', in *Archiv der deutschen Seewarte* 38 (Hamburg, 1920) pp 24ff, referenced in Günther Oestmann, 'Die Chronometernummern der Kaiserlichen Marine', *Deutsche Gesellschaft der Chronometrie: Jahresschrift* 2016.

15. Carl Stechert, 1916. *Chronometerstatistik*. Freiburg im Breisgau, BA/MA: RM 3/10785 [Fol 117r] and [Fol 118r] referenced in Oestmann, 'Chronometernummern'.

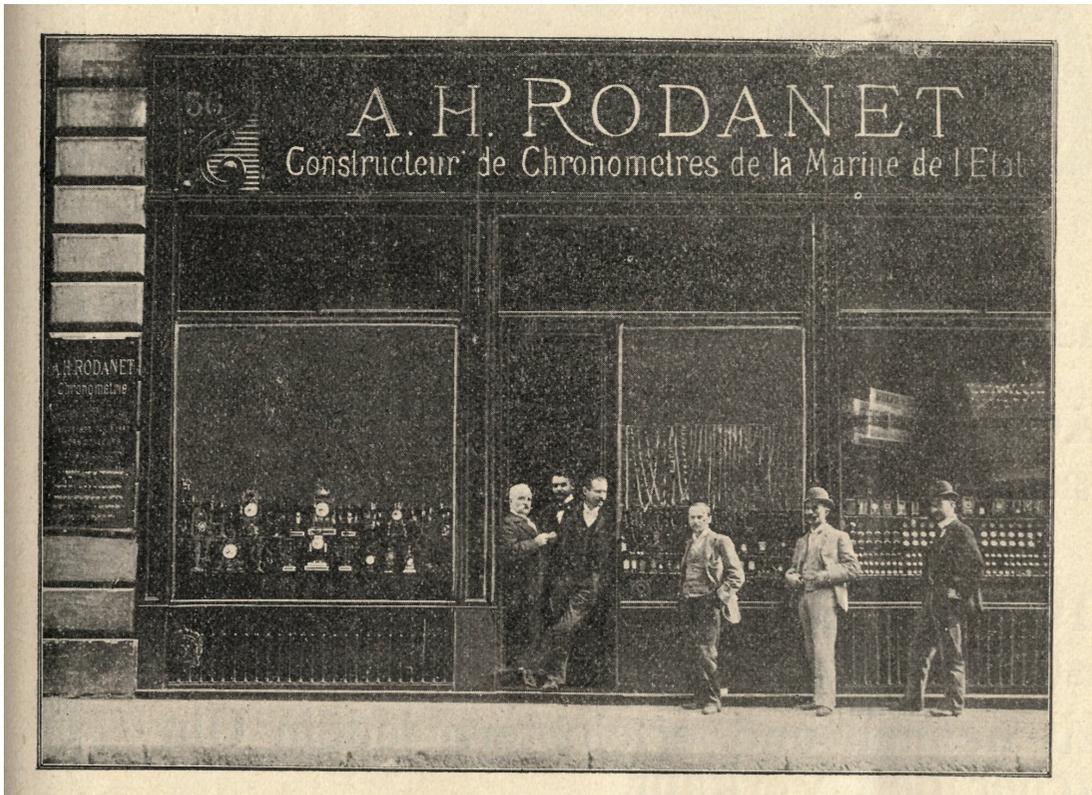


Fig. 3. From left to right: in the door opening three French employees of Rodanet — Mr Lejeune, Pierre and Executive Director Mr Doffe —, and Alexander Grosz (without hat) with his friends Mr Schönhals and Mr Exel during their visit for the 1900 Paris Exposition. From: Alexander Grosz, 'Auguste Hilaire Rodanet', *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung* Vol. 25 (September 1907), No. 4, p. 103.

like Klumak, they were also concessionaires for Genevan brands such as Vacheron & Constantin. In 1903, Hausmann & Co. was commissioned by the Vatican Museum to restore the Farnese Planisphere, something the company still advertises today.¹⁷

After working for them for just over a year (until 12 October 1895 to be precise), Grosz worked for Buys-Badollett in Cairo from 6 November 1895 until 6 May 1896. According to Baedeker's guide, these 'good watchmakers' were situated opposite the Shepherd's Hotel, an area with a lot of Western commerce.¹⁸ Grosz then moved on to Paris.¹⁹ As it was the

period of the Franco-Russian Alliance, Grosz faced an unwelcoming environment, and indeed French nationalism. Often wrongly cast as a *Prussien* or *Allemand*, he had difficulty finding work. After a short time working in the small business of an unknown clockmaker from the Black Forest, he found employment starting on 1 December 1896 in Paris with Auguste Hilaire Rodanet (1837–1907). In the obituary he wrote for Rodanet, Grosz described his first encounter with his employer, and it is very clear how much respect he had for him as a horologist, and even more as a person.²⁰ Rodanet grew up in a

16. Alexander Grosz, 'Aus meinem Reise-Tagebuch (II)', *Die Uhrmacherkunst*, Vol. 1, 1928, No. 11, p. 174; C. Staehlin, 'Internationale Uhrmacherkonferenz in Montreaux am 4. und 5. April 1932', *Neue Österreichische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 4, 1932, No.5–6, p.8

17. G.H. Baillie, 'The Farnese Planisphere', *Horological Journal*, Vol. 83, No.2. (February 1941), pp 47–48; www.hausmann-co.com/en/stories/diary/technical-challenges.

18. Karl Baedeker, 1898. *Egypt: handbook for travellers* (Leipzig), p. 28.

19. 'Auszug aus dem Protokoll', see note 1.



Fig. 4. Postcard showing Alexander Grosz in his shop in Vienna, dated 1909 or later. From the collection of clippings assembled by Rudolf Kaftan (see note 1), Vienna Clock Museum Archives.

family of clock and watchmakers, well-connected and well-known in the horological world and beyond. At the age of twenty, and still a journeyman, Rodanet moved to London for three years, and spent the following four in Geneva working for Patek.²¹ Rodanet returned to Paris where he set up his own business in 1865, was mayor of the second Arrondissement of Paris (1904–07) and wrote the book *L'horlogerie astronomique et civile. Ses usages – ses progrès – son enseignement à Paris*. In his position as president of the *Chambre Syndicale de l'Horlogerie de Paris*, an exclusive organisation of prominent horologists, he appointed a committee to devise a curriculum for the *Ecole d'Horlogerie et Mécanique Précision* opened in 1881 in Paris.²² He was later made Commander in the

order of the *Légion d'honneur* (the highest award received by a businessman) for his contribution to horology.²³ One can only assume that Grosz made many valuable connections during his time in Paris, probably also acquiring objects for his own clock and watch collection, and exploring neighbouring countries. Fig. 3 shows him, together with three employees of Rodanet and two of his friends, visiting the 1900 Paris Exposition. One of these friends, Mr Schönhals from Germany, was a horologist Grosz had worked 'at the same time [as] or in short succession [after] in the same businesses in Frankfurt, Vienna, Trieste, in Italy and Egypt'. Grosz visited Schönhals 'after [he] built up an existence in London'; Schönhals's 1900 trip was therefore a return visit. Mr Exel, the

20. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 25, Sept 1907, No. 4, pp. 99–105.

21. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 25, Sept 1907, No. 4, p. 101.

22. T. R. Wotruba, 'The horological world of François Arsène Margaine', *Antiquarian Horology* June 2014, 75–88.

23. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 25 (September 1907), No. 4, p. 103; *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol. 28 (15 May 1904), No. 10, p. 158.

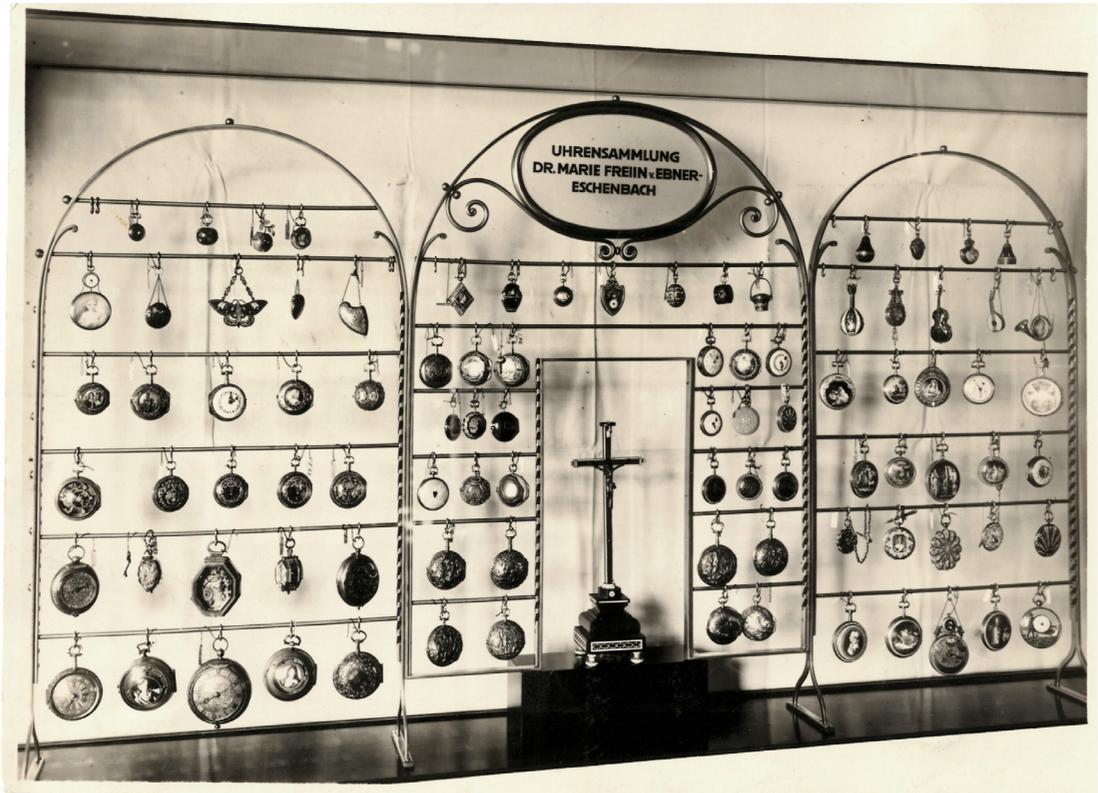


Fig. 5. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's collection in its first showcase in the Vienna Clock Museum. Vienna Clock Museum Archives.

second friend visiting in Paris, was 'an Austrian, former student of the Technical School of Karlstein and now established in Oberhollabrunn [Lower Austria].'²⁴

Grosz himself was not merely a visitor to the 1900 Paris Exposition, he acted as a correspondent for the *Allgemeine Uhrmacherzeitung*, reporting on the exhibition for German-speaking horologists. He was also involved in the show by contributing to the historical clockmaking department of France, which earned him a medal and diploma from the French ministry.

Career in Vienna and acquaintance with Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

When Alexander Grosz returned to Vienna in

December 1900, he once again worked for his uncles Max and Geza Klumak, this time in a senior position. Putting his acquired knowledge to the advancement of horology in Vienna, he received a silver medal from the Baron Schwarz-Senborn Trust.²⁵ In 1904, Grosz set up his own business in the centre of Vienna at 10 Faerbergasse between 1904 and 1909, and from 1909 onwards at 17 and 22 Wipplingerstrasse.²⁶ He mainly advertised as a workshop for precision horology as well as dealing in all manner of antique clocks.²⁷ (Fig. 4)

Grosz also settled down privately, getting married to Clara Geiringer on 15 March 1908 and having their daughter Gertrude in 1909.

It was probably in this period that he came to know the Moravian-Austrian Baroness

24. *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacherzeitung*, Vol. 25, September 1907, No. 4, pp. 101–03.

25. *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol. 28 (15 May 1904), No. 10, p. 158, and 'Auszug aus dem Protokoll', see note 1.

26. *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol. 28 (1 October 1904), No. 19, p. 306.

27. *Neue Freie Presse* (7 April 1912), p. 157.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830–1916), one of the best-known German-language novelists of the late nineteenth century. She trained as a watchmaker at the age of forty-nine and maintained an impressive collection of pocket watches — of which the elements that remain after Second World War losses can now be admired in the Vienna Clock Museum. (Fig. 5)

Grosz became her advisor and supporter, and their relationship is described best by Carl Marfels in the *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*:

How Mrs von Ebner-Eschenbach values her darlings is shown in that she winds them and keeps them in beat every day with her own hands. She very much appreciates that, in the person of our dear colleague Alexander Grosz, she has an expert at her side, who brings the necessary knowledge of these old masterpieces and, if one of the old pieces fails to work, he brings the necessary diligence and piety to put them back into working order.²⁸

Grosz himself also wrote about Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and her love for timepieces and cited probably her most famous statement regarding her collection: ‘My dear watches, they make it difficult for me to die. Who will treat them for me as well as I did?’²⁹

Patron of the Vienna Clock Museum

In 1917 the City of Vienna bought the 10,000-piece horological collection of the teacher, Esperanto-enthusiast and collector Rudolf Kaftan (1870–1961) and with it founded the Vienna Clock Museum. Kaftan (Fig. 6) was declared the director of unlimited tenure with official lodgings in the same building. Given the locally and internationally networked nature of the local horology circuit, Kaftan and Grosz will have already have known each other.

In 1917, in order to raise the money

necessary to buy the collection of Ebner-Eschenbach, who had died the previous year, Kaftan founded the Friends of the Museum Trust, one of their members being Alexander Grosz. We do not know if Grosz was actually involved in the negotiations, but documents show that Grosz was elected to the board of the trust, together with Emil Panosch, head of the Clock and Watchmakers Cooperative in Vienna, as well as other well-known horologists.³⁰

Collector, publicist and intermediary of horological knowledge

Grosz distributed his knowledge generously. Before the First World War he wrote for the German and Austrian horological journals the *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, *Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst* (later: *Die Uhrmacherkunst*) and the *Österreichisch-Ungarische Uhrmacher-Zeitung*. He developed his own methods of working on complicated mechanisms, which he described in detail to his fellow horologists:

In the early years I always made sketches of their mechanisms before disassembling a complicated timepiece; it makes the work easier and helps with re-assembly. You never know if you will have to interrupt your work and when you will find the time to continue. These sketches are very valuable aids. However, in order to capture all the details more precisely I later replaced these primitive sketches with photographs, and eventually found some joy in them. If some years later a timepiece which I had worked on previously returns to my workshop, or a mistake occurs, I just open my workshop notebook and read my notes next to the image. Very soon I know what is going on.³¹

His earliest pieces were published in 1896, during the time he worked for Rodanet in Paris. Perhaps inspired by Rodanet’s strong

28. Carl Marfels, ‘Ein Stündchen bei der Verfasserin von “Lotti, die Uhrmacherin”’, *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung*, Vol. 34 (15 September 1910), No. 18, p. 300.

29. Alexander Grosz, ‘Marie Ebner von Eschenbach. Ehrenmitglied der Uhrmacher-Genossenschaft zu ihrem 100. Geburtstag’, *Der Uhrmacher*, Vol. 3, No. 17, 1930, pp. 341.

30. Rudolf Kaftan, ‘Uhren-Museum der Stadt Wien’, *Uhrmacher Fachblatt*, Vol. 6 (10 October 1917), No. 10, p. 70.

31. Alexander Grosz, ‘Aus eigener Sammlerwerkstätte (I)’, *Die Uhrmacherkunst*, Vol. 54 (1929), No. 47, p. 967.



Fig. 6. Rudolf Kaftan (1870–1961), horological collector and first director of the Vienna Clock Museum. Vienna Clock Museum Archives.

involvement in the education of horologists, his four-part essay entitled ‘A Comprehensible Treatise on the Regulation of Pocket Watches in Theory and Practice’ reads like a helpful in-depth instruction manual for a student, with historical background as well. Besides the escapement, he explains in small steps how he generally approaches a pocket watch at the bench, checking details such as teeth, jewels etc. He then gives advice on how to clean, oil or fit a mainspring, and reinforces his advice with references to the works of well-known authors such as Saunier, Grossmann and others.³² In 1899, Grosz continued with a two-part essay on ‘The History of the Balance Cock and its Fittings’, mostly focussing on its design development in England, France and the Netherlands.³³ This was a field he probably learned much about during his time in Paris because, as he

mentions, balance cocks in general were mostly produced in these three countries. His knowledge, especially of the development of the form in France, becomes apparent and it is the French form of balance clock to which he refers most throughout.

His 1930–31 series of articles, ‘From the Collector’s Own Workshop’ is probably the best guide to Grosz’s fields of interest within horology, his wealth and depth of knowledge, as well as his love for poetic expression. He also gives unique insights into his own collection and covers interesting timepieces belonging to clients, with a wealth of photos complemented by mechanical details taken from his workshop notebooks.³⁴ He states his motivation as follows:

Some colleagues will have stood in front of a masterpiece from long ago, admiring and

32. Alexander Grosz, ‘Eine allgemein verständliche Abhandlung über die Reglage der Taschenuhren in Theorie und Praxis’, *Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst* (1896), Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 71–75; Vol. 21, No. 5, pp. 97–98; Vol. 21, No. 6, pp. 120–123 and Vol. 21, No. 7, pp. 143–144.

33. Alexander Grosz, ‘Die Geschichte der Spindelbrücke, sowie deren Ausstattung’, *Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst* (1899), Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 54–55 and Vol. 24, No. 7, p. 65.



Fig. 7. Group I: pocket watches before 1790 with colourful enamel painted dials showing rural scenes: formerly inventory number U 2217, dial signed F. Deroches A GENEVE, movement signed Frs. Deroches à Genève 1711.



Fig. 8. Group I: pocket watches before 1790 with colourful enamel painted dials showing rural scenes: formerly inventory number U 1974, case signed 6371, movement (falsely) signed Jaquet Droz 28274.

perhaps unconsciously thinking with pride that they belong to the same ranks as the maker who devised the piece and constructed it. I am speaking to this craftsman, who, through deep immersion in the subject, and through an intimate fusion of everything that touches its sphere of activity, elevates the craft to art. Whichever interesting piece goes through our workshop, record it in sketches, images, descriptions — the opportunity does not arise again so soon! Helping to save the works of our old masters from oblivion should be the objective of my introduction.³⁵

Unfortunately, his photos and workshop diaries are lost. Grosz's collection can

therefore only be judged from this series of articles, and the forty objects that were photographically documented by Gerhard Milehram during the process of restitution in 2012. All pocket watches were photographed from the front and back, the clocks only from the front. No photos of the movements were taken and very little technical information is documented; a judgement is therefore limited to these parameters.

Of these forty pieces, thirty-six are pocket watches of both local and international manufacture, and four clocks: a bracket clock by Thomas Stöckl from Hall, a 'mysterieuse' after Houdin, a *Zappler* (a quintessentially Viennese type of very small clock with a pendulum in front of the dial), and an early

34. Alexander Grosz, 'Aus eigener Sammlerwerkstätte I-IX', *Die Uhrmacherskunst*, Vol. 54 (1929), No. 51, pp. 1051–53; Vol. 55 (1930), No. 1, pp. 6–8; Vol. 55 (1930), No. 5, pp. 80–82; Vol. 55 (1930), No. 17, pp. 322–26; Vol. 55 (1930), No. 18, pp. 346–49; Vol. 55 (1930), No. 35, pp. 721–27; Vol. 56 (1931), No. 1, pp. 5–6; Vol. 56 (1931), No. 33, pp. 642–46 and Vol. 57 (1932), No. 31, pp. 462–66; as well as Alexander Grosz, 'Taschenuhr mit Repetierwerk und Glockenspiel. Aus eigener Sammlerwerkstätte', *Die Uhrmacherskunst*, Vol. 58 (1933), No. 18, pp. 230–31.

35. Alexander Grosz, 'Aus eigener Sammlerwerkstätte (I)', *Die Uhrmacherskunst*, Vol. 54 (1929), No. 47, p. 967.



Fig. 9. Group III: Directoire/Empire style with engraved or open dials and thin enamel chapter rings: formerly inventory number U 1975, movement signed Anton Rettich in Wien, Viennese wheel punch mark 1810.



Fig. 10. Group IV: eccentrically arranged dials after 1790: formerly inventory number U 1990, unsigned. Dial below the centre, decorative, round enamel above the centre.

seventeenth century German table clock.

Grosz used eleven of his own objects for his article on pocket watches of the French Revolution era, published in 1931. This area seems to have been of particular interest to him — looking at the changes in pocket watch design between 1780 and 1830. He describes the features in detail and divides his collection into four groups.

The first group dates to before 1790 — pocket watches with colourful enamel painted dials, showing rural or homely scenes of a peaceful nature in the middle of the dial, surrounded by a painted chapter ring. In general, this type was not decorated, but simple and gilded. Two of the three pocket watches illustrated in his article are shown in Figs 7 and 8.

The second group includes pocket watches with enamel scenes on political or polemic themes, arranged around a smaller chapter ring in the middle. The third group from the

Directoire and Empire era consists of pocket watches with a more decorative case and a thin enamel chapter ring. The dial centre is often cut away to allow a view of the movement, and these watches may additionally be equipped with automata, such as moving figures striking bells. (Fig. 9)

The fourth group contains pocket watches with eccentrically arranged dials, often decorated with smaller enamel plates among the separate dials. The dials show hours, date, and day of the week or month. (Figs 10 and 11)

Grosz's remaining collection still very much reflects his interest in this era; he does not have a preference for objects from specific makers or countries but enjoys observing how shifting horological communities and the import/export business, particularly from Geneva and some neighbouring French regions, influenced local watchmaking. He explores the pocket watches through following the production of specific parts in different



Fig. 11. Group IV: eccentrically arranged dials after 1790: formerly inventory number U 2220, unsigned. Dial below centre, two decorative round enamels above centre.



Fig. 12. formerly inventory number U 2184, dial and movement signed Pre Rigaud A GENEVE, enamel with dial in centre.

countries and explains how he identifies components and their origins. Equally important to him is the political backdrop and its impact on the chosen motifs and styles. He also notes that most of the pocket watches of this era carry Genevan signatures, examples being Pierre Rigaud (Fig. 12), Girardier (Fig. 13), Mermillon, Colladon, Bouvier, Fr. Wyss & Menu, Henri Droz, Jaquet Droz, F^s. Deroches (Fig. 7), and identifies only two with a Viennese signature — Andreas Hildheim and Anton Rettich.³⁶

Viennese work was strongly influenced by Swiss emigrants around 1780, during the reign of Emperor Joseph. The quality of pocket watches, and enamel work in particular, greatly benefitted from the knowledge of Genevan immigrants, and he explains the similarities in style. From the other fifteen pocket watches in

Grosz's collection, we find eight of a very similar type and date.

Grosz also mentions the practice of copying styles and forging signatures, in order to make a product more appealing, or to sell a watch as being from a certain brand or country. Some of these forged signatures can be found on objects from his collection, such as that of Jaquet Droz (Fig. 8), Lépine, or Leroy (Fig. 14).

In later articles in his workshop series, he investigates musical pocket watch repeaters and pocket watch automata during the reign of Napoleon, again looking at style as much as craft technique and mechanism type. Complicated automata as well as curious inventions and whimsical mechanical ideas appear to be a field he enjoyed writing about. His subjects encompassed a wide range, from wooden musical and figural automata from

36. Alexander Grosz, 'Aus eigener Sammlerwerkstätte', *Die Uhrmacherkunst*, Vol. 56 (1931), No. 33, pp. 642–46.



Fig. 13. formerly inventory number U 1980, dial signed Girardier L'ainé, movement signed Girardier L'ainé 12681.



Fig. 14. formerly inventory number U 1994, dial and movement (falsely) signed LEROY. Eccentrically arranged enamel dial below centre, balance visible through aperture above centre.

the Black Forest to a mysterieuse-type automaton by James Upjohn & Co (after 1794), a flintlock alarm by Joseph Siehl (Vienna, first half of the eighteenth century), a bear automaton (owned by the Kunsthistorische Museum Vienna), bird cage automata and tabatières from the mid-nineteenth century, and typical Viennese products, such as *Zappler*, mantel clocks or *Telleruhren*.

His obvious expertise in precision horology is mostly expressed through very thorough accounts of the escapement and balance spring but, surprisingly, no article by Grosz covers marine chronometers or other areas of precision timekeeping specifically.

Besides these objects, his collection holds a pocket watch signed Barraud (perhaps acquired during his visit to Schönhals in

London), and an interesting pocket watch signed by Hanset Fils in Brussels, intriguingly also marked 'No.1' (Figs 15 and 16)

Another movement of a pocket watch in Grosz's collection would have been interesting to look at close-up (U 1837), described in the database as 'lever escapement, silver, key-wound, two barrels, anchor and pivots in stones, winding in opposite direction of hands, lid signed 1962, eight-day duration.'

Besides horological contributions, Grosz also wrote a number of obituaries for colleagues³⁷ and travel reports covering horologically important regions such as Paris or the Black Forest.³⁸ He wrote an article in honour of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach on the centenary of her birth, and gave lectures at the Technical Museum of Vienna.³⁹

Just like Kaftan at around the same time,

37. Alexander Grosz, 'Gustav Speckhart' [obituary], *Uhrmacher-Fachblatt*, Vol. 8 (July 1919), No. 7, pp. 45–46; 'Rückerinnerung an Direktor Hermann Großmann', *Der Uhrmacher*, Vol. 1 (1 March 1928), No. 2, p. 20; 'Max Engelmänn' [obituary], *Der Uhrmacher*, Vol. 1 (1 August 1928), No. 7, p. 103.

38. Alexander Grosz, 'Ein Besuch in Paris', *Die Uhrmacherkunst*, Vol. 49 (1924), pp. 304–06; 'Aus meinem Reise-Tagebuch', *Der Uhrmacher*, Vol. 1 (1928), No. 10, pp. 157–58 and No. 11, pp. 174–75.



Figs 15 and 16. formerly inventory number U 1831, dial signed J. HANSET, movement signed Hanset fils A BRUXELLES N. 1, around 1800.

he used the then-modern technology of radio broadcasting to present his collection of musical clocks and watches on Radio Wien.⁴⁰ It is not known whether there was rivalry between his radio programme and Rudolf Kaftan's, but it is documented that Grosz passed on acquisition opportunities, and donated or sold clocks and watches to the Vienna Clock Museum himself, which suggests a proper and collegiate relationship between the two horologists.⁴¹

Dispossessed and displaced

When Alexander Grosz was declared a Jew according to the race laws under the National Socialist régime, his successful clock and watchmaking career as well as any trade in antique timepieces came to an abrupt end. Like tens of thousands of Jewish Austrians, he was made to give an account of his net worth as at 30 June 1938 by the *Vermögensverkehrsstelle* of the *Ministerium für Wirtschaft* (property transaction office of the Ministry of Economic Affairs). He assessed his wealth at 8,500 Reichsmarks (approximate

39. Alexander Grosz, 'Die Uhrensammlung der Baronin Ebner Eschenbach', *Internationale Sammlerzeitung, Zentralblatt für Sammler, Liebhaber und Kunstfreunde*, published by Norbert Ehrlich and J. Hans Prosl, Vienna (1 July 1910), Vol. 2, No. 13, pp. 193–96, and Alexander Grosz, 'Marie Ebner von Eschenbach. Ehrenmitglied der Uhrmacher Genossenschaft zu ihrem 100. Geburtstag', *Der Uhrmacher*, Vol. 3 (1930), No. 17, p. 341.

40. Alexander Grosz, 'Aus der Welt der Automaten. Maschinenmenschen einst und jetzt', *Radio Wien* (13 April 1934), p. 25; 'Technisches Museum, Lichtbildervortrag von Alexander Grosz, "Aus der Welt der Automaten", mit Vorführung von alten und neuen Automatenwerken aus dem Besitz des Vortragenden', *Kronen Zeitung* (15 December 1933), p. 11 and *Der Tag* (8 April 1935), p. 6. In the weekly Vienna radio schedule from 8 to 14 April (10 April), 18:20–18:50, 'Alexander Grosz; Musikdosen und Alt-Wiener Spielwerke', *Radio Wien* (5 April 1935), p. 10.

41. Rudolf Kaftan, 'Uhren-Museum der Stadt Wien', *Uhrmacher-Fachblatt*, Vol. 7 (June 1918), No. 6, p. 33, and Rudolf Kaftan, 'Uhren-Museum der Stadt Wien', *Uhrmacher-Fachblatt*, Vol. 7 (March 1918), No. 3, p. 15.

equivalent today EUR 49,000 or £44,500)⁴² with no debts, including his clock and watch collection which he valued at 6,500 Reichsmarks alone.⁴³

Probably as early as March 1938, Josef Berger appears as *kommisarischer Verwalter* (temporary administrator) of Grosz's wealth. Berger came to a friendly understanding with the clock and watchmakers' guild of Vienna. One of the beneficiaries of the sale of Grosz's collection was the Vienna Clock Museum under its director Rudolf Kaftan. We do not know how this was initiated, but Kaftan must have known about his colleague's collection, so he might have expressed an interest. In the chronicles of the Vienna Clock Museum, Kaftan notes on 28 October 1938: 'At Alexander Grosz from 7¼ o'clock in the evening to 11 o'clock at night, picked up timepieces.'⁴⁴ We must assume that Grosz was present at the time. On 3 November 1938 Berger sent Kaftan prices, 'listing 42 pos. [positions] and an unnumbered quantity of timepieces', asking for 885.40 Reichsmarks.⁴⁵ This sum was paid. Additional timepieces were viewed by Eugen Ritter, a clockmaker and guild master from Feldkirch in Vorarlberg (Western Austria). Twenty-three boxes were packed and sent to Ritter's address, where he operated a clock, watch, and jewel-trading business. Ritter wrote to the settlement agency about his visit:

In my presence and that of my superior Mr Mattusch, Mr Berger gave the values for every piece and Miss Berta typed it all with

the machine using quadruple carbon. During the recording Mr Gross [sic] came and asked Mr Berger to leave him a few pieces of his private collection, which Berger and I authorized, even though these timepieces were already recorded on the list.⁴⁶

Ritter paid a deposit of 3500 Reichsmarks.⁴⁷ Shortly after, Josef Berger, together with his wife and two children, disappeared with all of the cash raised from the sale of the timepieces, and even the cash float from Grosz's business. It is likely he headed abroad as he could not be found and held responsible.⁴⁸

In December 1938 the *Einkaufs- und Treuhandgenossenschaft für die Uhren- und Juwelenbranche* (Purchasing and Trustee Society for the Watch and Clock Making and Jewellery Trade) started to investigate. As Berger had sold the collection at an undervalue, the Liquidation Agency handling clockmaking, watchmaking and jewellery demanded additional payments from all the buyers.

Alexander Grosz had to provide estimates of the value of the timepieces sent to Feldkirch, which he did in January 1939.⁴⁹ According to his letter, one crate contained more valuable *Stehuhren* (longcase clocks) while twenty-two boxes contained *Wiener Uhren* (Viennese time pieces) from his *Uhrenlager* (stock). Grosz valued them at the 'lowest possible price' without considering their purchase price, or their value to a horological enthusiast. Grosz wrote again on 11 April 1939:

42. Estimate according to exchange rates and the historic currency converter of the Austrian National Bank at <https://www.eurologisch.at/docroot/waehrungsrechner/#/>

43. Austrian State Archives OeStA/AdR, E-uReang, VVSt, VA 33360, Alexander Grosz.

44. Rudolf Kaftan, *Uhrenmuseum Chronik*, 1 January 1930 to 31 December 1939, Vienna Clock Museum Archives.

45. Kommissarischer Verwalter Josef Berger to Direktor Kaftan, Uhrenmuseum der Stadt Wien, 3 November 1938. Austrian State Archives ÖsTA/AdR, VVsT., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia. Zl. 147.

46. Letter from Eugen Ritter to Ueberprüfungsstelle d. Oblt. D. Komm. Verw. D. Uhren- u. Juwelenbranche [means: Abwicklungsstelle], Feldkirch, 16 January 1939; Austrian State Archives OeStA/AdR, E-uReang, VVSt., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia, Zl 147, Alexander Grosz

47. Letter from Eugen Ritter to Obl.d.komm. Verwalter, Feldkirch, 7 December 1938, Austrian State Archives ÖsTA/AdR, VVsT., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia. Zl. 147.

48. Letter from Josef Käs to Finanzamt Innere Stadt-West, 26 May 1939, Austrian State Archives ÖsTA/AdR, VVsT., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia. Zl. 147.

49. Letter from Alexander Grosz to Abwicklungsstelle der Uhrmacher und Juweliere, January 1939, Austrian State Archives ÖsTA/AdR, VVsT., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia. Zl. 147.

With regard to the contributions asked from me and the required tax return, I ask the following to be taken into consideration. By 12 November 1938 my business was already liquidated. The antique clocks as well as my private horological collection were taken over by the Clock Museum in Vienna and Mr E. Ritter in Feldkirch. My remaining stock went to the Trust company, at 1, Schwedenplatz. The former commissar Josef Berger, who conducted the sale, embezzled the amount paid by Mr Ritter [...] of 3500 Reichsmark, as well as the cash amount of 257 Reichsmark from my cashier. I had nothing on 12 November 1938, neither in stock nor in money, at least nothing that would match the payments demanded.⁵⁰

The *Finanzamt Innere Stadt* (local tax collection office) was not content with Grosz's reply and wrote to the settlement agency in order to find out more about his financial situation.⁵¹ But to no avail, since being already robbed of all his capital and possessions, Alexander Grosz was unable to meet any requests for payment.

At the end of October 1939, Grosz fled Vienna with his wife Clara. A common escape route from Austria involved a journey to Trieste, and then a train to Genoa. In just one of a large number of similar journeys, the Italian transatlantic liner *SS Rex* sailed from Genoa for New York on 1 November 1939, arriving on the 9th.⁵² There were approximately 1,160 passengers on board, including Alexander and Clara. The manifest for the voyage lists the country of birth for the passengers, as well as their 'race or people'. Unsurprisingly, given the date, 47 per cent were US citizens, presumably returning home as war in Europe had just commenced. Italians were another group one might expect to see travelling to New York, at

13 per cent, and indeed it is also unsurprising that nearly 9 per cent of the passengers were German — many might be actively leaving a situation and many might simply be joining family members already in the US. Alexander and Clara were listed as 'Hebrew' — in fact 211 passengers (18 per cent) were Jewish, very likely sharing a common story, of rapid flight from a worsening situation. The *Rex* was involved in regular journeys of this sort from the mid-1930s to 1940, and even boasted a rabbi and kosher chef in order to cope with the volume of Jewish passengers. Alexander and Clara's daughter Gertrude and her husband and clockmaker Sigmund Ackermann had already fled a year earlier, reaching New York on the *SS Saturnia* from Trieste on 15 September 1938.⁵³

Alexander Grosz, robbed of his collection and his life's work, died eight months later on 2 July 1940, aged 71. Clara became a US citizen, and survived longer, dying in May 1955, in the Home for Aged and Infirm Hebrews in New York's Upper West Side.

The whereabouts of the timepieces sent to Eugen Ritter in Feldkirch as well as the collection of photographs and workshop notes remain unknown to date. As for the rest, we know that thirty were lost to looting in 1945, as the war came to an end. For the forty that remained, and which had been in the care of the museum ever since, the search that started in 1998 to look for heirs to Alexander Grosz took many years. The immediate lineage through Alexander and Clara's daughter Gertrude ended abruptly. Instead it was necessary to go back and to examine wider branches of the family. Ultimately it was through following a distant branch of Clara's family that it became possible to find a link to modern heirs, to whom the residual collection was returned in 2017.

50. Letter from Alexander Grosz 11 April 1939 to Abwicklungsstelle für Uhrmacher und Juweliere, Austrian State Archives OeStA/AdR, E-uReang, VVSt., 'Abwicklerakt' Laconia, Zl 147, Alexander Grosz.

51. Letter from Finanzamt Innere Stadt-West Wien to Abwicklungsstelle für Juweliere und Uhrmacher, 19 May 1939.

52. *Zwölfter Bericht des amtsführenden Stadtrates für Kultur und Wissenschaft über die gemäß dem Gemeinderatsbeschluss vom 29. April 1999 in der Fassung vom 29. April 2011 erfolgte Übereignung von Kunst- und Kulturgegenständen aus den Sammlungen der Museen der Stadt Wien sowie der Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, Vienna*, 2 April 2013. Available online: www.wienmuseum.at/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Restitutionsbericht_2011.pdf.

53. *Zwölfter Bericht*.