

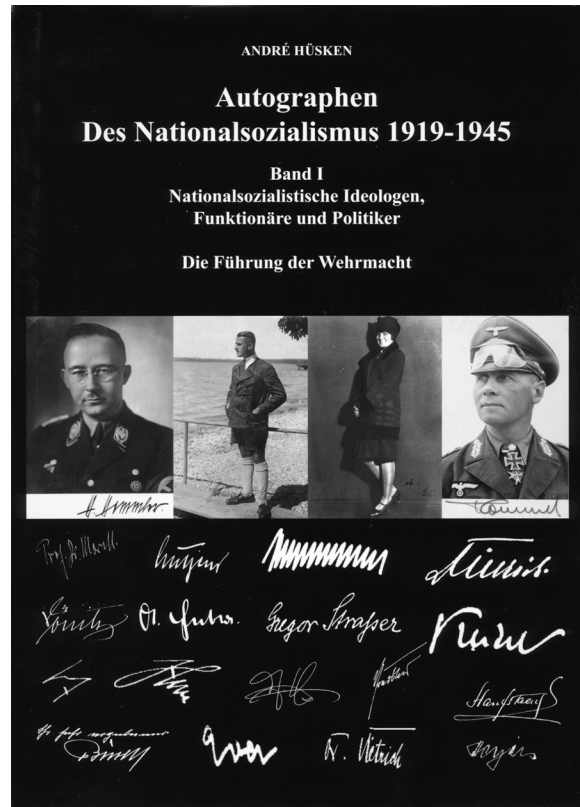
German Publications Address Nazi and JFK Signatures

WILLIAM BUTTS

HUSKEN, Andre. *Autographen des Nationalsozialismus 1919-1945: Band I—Nationalsozialistische Ideologen, Funktionare und Politiker, Militärische Führung der Wehrmacht.* Melbeck, Germany: Verlag Klaus D. Patzwall, 2013. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. 432pp. Extensive illustrations (some color). €45.

WIEMER, Andreas. *John F. Kennedy Autograph Study.* Kelkheim, Germany: Andreas Weimer Historical Autographs, 2013. 8vo. Softbound. 86pp. \$20.00.

I'm struck by the fact that, unintentionally, I'm reviewing two new books from two small cities in Germany—one of them even smaller than Galena, Illinois, from where I write this (population 3400). Rarely does this column review publications published outside the United States. This is not by design, for I've pursued books on autograph topics from India to Italy and from South America to the Middle East. No country produces as many books of interest to autograph collectors as the U.S. In Europe, it seems that Germany leads that continent in autograph publications, with the United Kingdom a close second and the rest of Europe far behind. Germany seems to have a vibrant autograph market, with autograph dealers, autograph auctioneers, and autograph collector's clubs. Let's examine two recent German offerings.



Never, ever let not being able to read a foreign language get in the way of autograph education. Case in point: Andre Husken's *Autographen des Nationalsozialismus 1919-1945: Band I—Nationalsozialistische Ideologen, Funktionäre und Politiker, Militärische Führung der Wehrmacht*, entirely in German. Anything in a language you're not conversant with always looks like a mass of gobbledygook, but this translates as "Autographs of the National Socialists 1919-1945: Volume I—National Socialist Ideologues, Functionaries and Politicians, Military Leadership of the Armed Forces." Trust me—don't feel intimidated. As a young man this reviewer studied German until his eyes crossed and lived in Austria for a couple of years, first as an undergraduate and then as a Fulbright teaching assistant in a Viennese high school, working for Simon Wiesenthal at his Nazi Documentation Center on the

side meanwhile—but that was a long time ago. Only occasional immersions in books such as Husken's allow me to scrape off the worst rust and prevent my German from seizing up like the Tin Man's suit.

It's been many years since this column has reviewed a book about Third Reich autographs. In the Winter 1999 issue Emilie Caldwell Stewart's *Signatures of the Third Reich* was critiqued. Printed entirely in English, this useful guide is a must-have for anyone interested in the field, although compared to Husken's *Autographen des Nationalsozialismus* it feels introductory.

In a brief but interesting foreword explaining how this book came to be, Husken notes how he (translation mine) "long pondered the question why almost 70 years after the war's end not one publication about the handwriting of National Socialist personalities in Germany existed"—until now. *Autographen des Nationalsozialismus* is an A to Z biographical dictionary printed in two-column format, each entry accompanied by a signature and often a handwriting example—usually from the close of a typed letter or document, often on a photograph, with occasional full handwritten letters and so on. Names are grouped by category, starting of course at the top (Hitler and his henchmen, top aides and ministers) and working down through politicians and high officials and all branches of the armed forces, plus small sections on industrialists and arms manufacturers.

Husken's biographical entries are all one paragraph in length, which means that each text is largely a string of dates, titles, ranks, decorations and a large array of military terms. A little patience and a good German-English dictionary will go a long way. It's just not that difficult for non-German readers with an interest in the topic to piece together the basic facts about each subject's life.

But face it: Lots of people purchase books like this for the pictures. It's mainly the signature exemplars that draw many to books such as this. These, I'm happy to report, are plentiful and of high quality. Many of the major players are represented by multiple examples in different formats—more than a couple dozen different Hitler examples, for instance. It's easy to find reference works giving one or two signature examples for Hitler, Goebbels, Goering and the biggest household names, to be sure. But how often does one find information on Hitler's sister Paula

and his half-sister Angela Hammitzsch and her daughter Angela “Geli” Raubal—not to mention the many hundreds of important but lesser-known figures that fill these pages. Nowhere in the printed literature that I know of will you find anywhere near this quantity of National Socialist autograph exemplars.

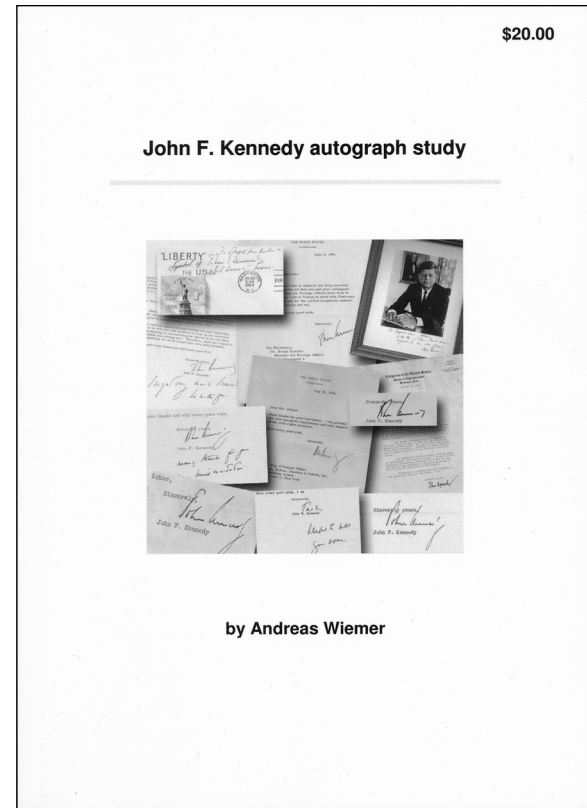
Handsomely printed on glossy clay coated paper (which make it, *literally*, as heavy as a brick), *Autographen des Nationalsozialismus* comes highly recommended. No one who collects seriously in this field should be without it. Since this volume notes “Band I” (Volume I), I eagerly anticipate Band II.

Kennedy Autographs

I recall having a fun little email debate (edebate?) with Andreas Wiemer, compiler of the *John F. Kennedy Autograph Study*, several years ago. I had reviewed a booklet he had co-authored with Steve Koschal and had criticized it as being short on true analysis. Andreas emailed to defend his and Steve’s position. We still disagree, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

John F. Kennedy Autograph Study is a slim but nice little addition to JFK autograph literature. Charles Hamilton got the ball rolling with his landmark 1965 *The Robot That Helped to Make a President*, Jack Taylor devoted a chapter to JFK in his 1968 *From the White House Inkwell*, Mike Minor and Larry Vrzalik did likewise in their 1991 *From the President’s Pen*, and a few other titles on presidential autographs have included a chapter on JFK—as well as a handful of articles in the UACC journal *Pen and Quill* and elsewhere.

John F. Kennedy Autograph Study makes a useful adjunct to these reference works. Hamilton’s remains the best by far, despite flaws and errors, but is also unfortunately expensive, ranging from obscene to *Oh-my-God!* just for mediocre ex-library copies. Even a reprint edition that came out in the ‘90s is uncommon and spendy. I call Andreas’s work an adjunct because, except for a one-page preface noting the great demand for JFK autograph material and the scarcity of reference works, *these are the only words that appear in the book* (unless you count the single sentence that introduces a couple of the book’s five sections). He does note here that “It is my intent to produce a book that combines all known facts together and the latest findings into one publication for the first time.” Does he accomplish this? Well—maybe,



kind of. It’s hard to accomplish this goal without using words. As great as illustrations are, the author needs to step up to bat and speak up: Offer opinions, make judgments, give reasons, provide conclusions.

John F. Kennedy Autograph Study offer no less than 242 decent-quality illustrations of JFK signatures, some including handwriting samples—more than you will find anywhere else in the JFK literature. That’s an impressive number, which makes this little study absolutely indispensable for serious study and analysis of Kennedy signatures. Andreas divides them into “Authentic Signatures” (153 examples, organized chronologically from April 10, 1935 to August 15, 1963), “Secretary Signatures” (53 examples, sorted into groups of the 15 secretaries supposedly authorized to sign his name), “Autopen Signatures” (12 examples),

“Other Signatures” (11 examples, sorted into stamp, lithograph and facsimile) and “In-Person Signatures” (6 examples). Dealers and collectors will find that, used in conjunction with any of the reference works noted earlier, *John F. Kennedy Autograph Study* makes extremely useful backup evidence. A section on outright forgeries (distinct from secretarial and Autopen signatures) would be a welcome and logical addition.

As with the earlier Koschal/Wiemer booklets I reviewed, here too I wish that Andreas would offer his analysis of the illustrations. Why (as odd as that sounds) are the “Authentic Signatures” authentic? What makes them so? And what makes the “Secretary Signatures” secretarial? And so on.

And this is where Andreas and I differ in approach. He and Steve Koschal are of the opinion that offering detailed stroke-by-stroke analysis of, for instance, the idiosyncracies that allow us to separate each of the secretary’s imitations of the boss’s signature is tantamount to tutoring forgers in how to avoid detection. There may be a kernel of truth to this. I, on the other hand, believe that for every forger who might actually benefit from studying reference works there may ten or twenty non-forgers (dealers, collectors, archivists, whatever) who learn how to avoid those forgeries by studying the techniques of knowledgeable dealers. The math favors the good guys. Without that dealer’s learned remarks and observations, though, the illustrations are just put out there and the collector may not know what to be looking for.

But that’s just my opinion, and we all remember Clint Eastwood’s memorable opinion about opinions. Despite my reservations about Wiemer’s lack of commentary that I feel relegates this book to the status of secondary source only, *John F. Kennedy Autograph Study* is the largest compilation of JFK signature exemplars in existence and a worthwhile companion to the other JFK literature.