

The Hands of Albert Einstein: Einstein's Involvement with Hand Readers and a Dutch Psychic*

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Abstract

When the handprints of Albert Einstein sold in 2013 at Sotheby's for £55,000, no one queried how Einstein might have come to allow the chiromancer Marianne Raschig to read his hands. It is symptomatic of a wider lack of interest in the art of reading hands, which remains underresearched territory. This essay fills such a gap in connection with Einstein, arguing that the art of reading hands (chiromancy, chirology) was popular in the Weimar Republic, and that in addition to Raschig at least three others analysed Einstein's hands. Pictures of his hands also appeared in magazines, and they were once sculpted. Obviously, being a famous man, Einstein was "exploited" by people, also by hand readers. Furthermore, this essay argues that Einstein had an interest in the occult. He was stunned, for instance, after he had witnessed a séance organised by the salonnière Edith Andreae-Rathenau for the Dutch medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme. Shortly thereafter, Einstein withdrew from research into the occult, but did so half-heartedly.

Keywords: Albert Einstein; hand reading (chiromancy); occultism; parapsychology

* The research conducted for this paper is a spin-off of my PhD-research on the German hand reader Julius Spier (Nagel, "De psychochiroloog Julius Spier"). After the publication, in Dutch, of my findings of Einstein's encounter with two hand readers and a Dutch psychic (Nagel, "Bracht het medium"), I discovered more material and considered the article worthy of an amended, enhanced version in English: this paper.

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The question: What may have caused Albert Einstein to get his hands read?

Between 1922 and 1935 Marianne Raschig compiled a unique collection of handprints. When Sotheby's sold in 2013 the remainder of this collection in six lots, lot no. 348 was the most outstanding one. It consisted of a single print each of Albert Einstein's left and right hand (figure 1). Einstein signed and dated these April 9, 1930. Instead of the estimated £10,000 to £15,000, lot no. 348 sold for £55,000.¹ Naturally, the auction reached headline news.² Yet nothing was said about Raschig's extraordinary collection other than that she had obtained in Berlin almost three thousand handprints from many famous men and women of her time, and was the author of *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (1931, Hand and Personality). This book contains a selection of Raschig's impressive handprint collection, including Einstein's, but does not have any reference to a cultic milieu, nor to possible motives for Einstein, or others, to have their hands analysed. Consequently, questions come up: Who was Marianne Raschig? And what about Einstein's possible motive to get his handprints made?

The parapsychologist Wilfried Kugel has argued that Einstein did not regard the occult with fundamental scepticism, but had rather a reserved attitude that was intimately connected to his enormous popularity — an opinion unknown to

1. Information about the auction held on June 5, 2013, in London can be found on Sotheby's website, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.348.html/2013/music-continental-books-manuscripts> (this link and all others referred to in this paper have been accessed on September 23, 2020). The Raschig collection went up for auction L13402 in lot nos. 316 (the handprints of c. 150 artists and sculptors, estimated £8,000–10,000, sold for £11,875), 325 (the handprints of c. 2,200 actors, film directors, politicians, and other members of the public, estimated £15,000–20,000, sold for £16,250), 334 (the handprints of c. 120 writers, journalists, and publishers, estimated £6,000–8,000, sold for £10,000), 348 (the handprints of Albert Einstein), 368 (the handprints of c. 90 scientists, and medical people, estimated £8,000–10,000, sold for £12,500), 458 (handprints of c. 180 musicians, estimated £10,000–15,000, sold for £13,750). The Berlin antiquarian Peter Severin had bought the collection in 1985 of Marianne Raschig's heirs for 200,000 DM ("Schatz für Chiromantiker," 131). A different print of Einstein's left hand made and dated on the same day sold by Sotheby's for £10,625 on December 4, 2018, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/music-sale-l18406/lot.126.html>.

2. Robson, "Hands up."



Figure 1. Einstein's handprints made by Marianne Raschig and sold by Sotheby's (<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.348.html/2013/music-continental-books-manuscripts>).

the larger public, who may have read online articles about Einstein's attendance at a séance in California and his meeting with the psychic Gene Dennis,³ but nevertheless the groundbreaking physicist is widely believed to have dismissed the paranormal. In his study about Einstein's involvement with the paranormal, Kugel made no reference to Raschig's handprints of Einstein. Was it because Einstein never seems to have said anything about it? Or because hand reading does not automatically link to the paranormal?

The answers to these questions are presented in the following pages. It will be shown that reading hands was practised by many in the Weimar Republic, and that in addition to Raschig two other hand readers from Berlin published something about Einstein's hands: Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier. Both link to the salonière Edith Andrae née Rathenau. Kugel mentioned Andrae-

3. Desai, "Did Albert Einstein Believe"; Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 59, 71; Pendle, "Einstein's Close Encounter"; The New Republic Staff, "Albert Einstein Endorsed."

Rathenau as the person facilitating Einstein's meeting with a Dutch psychic, the *Paragnostin* (psychic) named Mrs. Akkeringa, an otherwise obscure and forgotten figure in Einstein's life.⁴ It will become clear that Einstein was deeply disturbed by Akkeringa's séance. It will also become clear that Einstein decided to stay away from occultists shortly after meeting Mrs. Akkeringa, but within a month allowed Marianne Raschig to make his handprints, and allowed Margaret Mamlok, a fourth hand reader, to make them in 1938, New York. With these names the contours of a social milieu appear that sheds light on Einstein's willingness to get his hands studied.

The answer part 1: Hand reading was fashionable in the Weimar Republic

Before presenting the data of Einstein's encounters with these four hand readers, it is important to sketch the background of this practice.

Chiromancy, or palmistry, is the art of fortune telling and interpreting character traits and health issues from the lines and configurations of the palms of a person's hands. It is considered, therefore, a divinatory, or mantic practice. The term chiromancy is often used to dissociate the knowledge of the hand from the soothsaying aspect. However, in daily practice the distinction between chiromancy and chiromancy — *chiro*, or *cheiro*, means hand in Greek — is not clear-cut. Moreover, chiromancy used to be related to medical practices, in which hand readers and physicians were able to determine particular health issues based upon features observed on someone's hands (skin, nails, deformities).

4. Kugel counted six psychics that Einstein had met: Wolf Messing (in 1913) (Kugel was uncertain whether this encounter had taken place or not), a "thought reading lady" (1920), Otto Reimann (1930), a "metagraphologist" (c. 1930), Roman Ostojka (1931), and Mrs. Akkeringa (between 1914 and 1933) (Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 117). Einstein's encounter with Wolf Messing never took place (Nagel, "The Enigmatic Mentalist," 318), and as is shown in this paper, the "metagraphologist" was Einstein's reference to Mrs. Akkeringa. Currently, Kugel has written an enhanced version of his 1994 article, in which he discusses also, among more, Einstein's involvement with the psychic Gene Dennis (1907-1948) (cf. note 99).

Throughout time chiromancy has meandered between the domains of the occult and medical science. Yet despite its long history and notwithstanding a series of interesting articles and books describing segments of the art, chiromancy has escaped the modern scholar's eye: a scholarly monograph on the subject still needs to be written. Furthermore, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Peter Staudenmaier and Corinna Treitel mention palmistry as part of Germany's widespread interest in occult matters during the first decades of the twentieth century, but offer hardly any reference to hand readers or their works.⁵ The following is a first effort to fill this gap.⁶

The forerunner of the hand reading hype that unfolded between WWI and WWII in the Weimar Republic, is the occultist Gustav W. Gessmann (1860–1924) from Austria. After hand reading had been the subject of several articles in the occult magazine *Sphinx*,⁷ Gessmann devoted five books to the study of hands. Published in Berlin, *Katechismus der Hand-Lese-Kunst* (1889, Catechism of the Art of Reading Hands) and *Katechismus der Handflächenkunde* (1898, Catechism of Palmistry) have a mere general character. The other three, published a few years earlier, are considered “physiognomical” studies. They cover the significances of the hands of children to aid in education and career choices, and the significances of hands of women and men to determine the fe/male character. Around 1920 Gessmann's five titles were re-issued, whereby *Katechismus der Hand-Lese-Kunst* reached its sixth, enhanced edition.⁸

1920 is the year that the interest in hand reading in the Weimar Republic suddenly increased. Several publications came out; some were new, some were reprints.⁹ One of the new ones was the thirty-page treatise *Handlesekunst und*

5. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots*, 165–67; Staudenmaier, “Esoteric Alternatives,” 28; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 59, 69, 101, 206–7, 228, 320 note 57; cf. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 16 note 16.

6. A second effort is forthcoming: Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochiromancy.”

7. For the references see Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 184–85.

8. Gessmann, *Die Frauenhand*; Gessmann, *Katechismus der Handlesekunst*; Gessmann, *Katechismus der Handflächenkunde*; Gessmann, *Die Kinderhand*; Gessmann, *Die Männerhand*.

9. New were: [Gerling], *Was uns die Hand verrät*; Greiser, *Chiromantie*; Lucke, *Die Handlesekunst*;

Wissenschaft ([1920], *The Art of Hand Reading and Science*) by the renowned parapsychologist Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929). Towards the end of his explanation of the principles of hand reading, von Schrenck-Notzing shared that in 1904 a well-known French chiromancer had prophesied to him that he would write an important book on occultism which, to his surprise, had become true ten years later.¹⁰ The incentive for von Schrenck-Notzing to write about hand reading may have been a conference in Paris on psychic studies, where special attention was given to chiromancy due to the fact that Henri Durville (1887–1963), publisher of *Psychic Magazine*, had recently obtained the archive of Paris' other famous chiromancer, Madame de Thèbes (Annette Savary, 1844–1916).¹¹

Subsequently a range of handbooks entered the German speaking market.¹² So did articles in popular magazines; they informed the general public that hands reveal many things.¹³ Several scholars conducted palmistry related research;¹⁴ performers of the occult enacted hand reading on stage;¹⁵ two movies featured

Schrenck-Notzing, *Handlesekunst und Wissenschaft*; Schubert, *Der Linien der Hand*; St. Hill, *Die Handlesekunst*. Reprints were: Ertl, *Vollständiger Lehrkurs der Charakterbeurteilung*; Freimark, *Wie deute ich mein Schicksal*; Gessmann, *Die Männerhand*; Lustig, *Die Handlesekunst*; Ottinger, *Originalsystem der Handlesekunst*.

10. Schrenck-Notzing, *Handlesekunst und Wissenschaft*, 32; cf. Nagel, "De psychochiroloog Julius Spier," 117.

11. Hentges, "Begründung einer Lichtbildersammlung," 190.

12. Among more: Adels and Kurt, *Das ABC der Handkunde*; Beck Rzikowsky (ed.), *Cbeiro, die Handlesekunst*; Ciocki, *Schicksalsgeheimnisse*; Desbarrolles, *Die Hand und ihre Geheimnisse*; Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*; Kreusch, *Das System der Chiromantie*; Lomer, *Die Sprache der Hand*; Nestler, *Lehrbuch der Chiromantie*; Peters, *Hand und Charakter*; Planas-Ketty, *Die Hand-Abhandlung*; Reissinger, *Die Hand*; Wefers, *Die Chiromantie und Paul Stoß*; Wolff, *Wissenschaftliche Handlese-Kunst*.

13. See among more: Finck, "Rätsel der Hand"; Gretor, "Wo lasse ich bloß"; Günther-Geffers, "Hellsehen durch die Hand"; Hanussen, "Sie können Handlesen"; Naval, "Die Hand spricht"; Reimann, "Das Schaltsystem der menschlichen Hand"; Wimmers, "Musikerhände"; Zielesch, "Sagen Ihre Handlinien die Wahrheit?"

14. See among more: Bettman, "Über die Vierfingerfurche"; Friedeman, "Handbau und Psychose"; Herig, *Menschenhand und Kulturwerden*; Kühnel, "Die Konstitutionsform der Hand"; Pöch, "Über Handlinien"; Révész, *Die soziobiologische Funktion*; Würth, "Die Entstehung der Beugefurchen."

15. See among more: Kugel, *Hanussen*, 80; Benkhar, *Ein Blick hinter die Kulissen*, 36–37. Wilhelm Gubisch (1890–1972) exposed "psycho-chiromantie" on stage but equally amazed his audience ("Onzichtbare machten," 833).

a hand reader,¹⁶ a third sketched the history and explained the basic principles of hand reading,¹⁷ and a fourth compared the lives of a few people and the lines of faith in their hands.¹⁸ Besides, other than having their hands read (and getting handprints made), people got them photographed. The writer Rolf Voigt (1897–1964) and the chiromancer Madame Sylvia filled a book with such pictures, as did, on a smaller scale, the biologist and writer Alfred Koelsch (1879–1948).¹⁹

There are no records as to how many persons worked in Berlin as hand readers. Only a few seem to have advertised in newspapers and magazines. The Berlin 1931 and 1936 telephone directories for tradesmen, businesses and professionals of all kinds did not carry a register entitled Chiromancers or Chirologists. Neither was a register of Psychologists, but there was one for Graphologists. Nevertheless, by 1933 hand readers seem to have popped up;²⁰ the art was becoming fashionable in the Weimar Republic. It was an outcrop of the modern German occult revival on the verge of becoming a psychological science, comparable to, for instance, graphology. Depending on the person practicing it, hand reading was an occult, soothsaying practice, a psychological technique to aid a person in getting a clearer understanding of his or her own character and talents, or something in between. Some hand readers claimed clairvoyant abilities, whereas others did not. Still others were plain frauds. Sincere hand readers presented their art as a genuine science and set out to alter the traditional negative connotations attached to its practice.²¹

16. These movies are *Im Banne der Suggestion (Der Chiromant)* (1920) directed by Siegfried Philippi, and *Abenteuer im Südexpress* (1934) directed by Erich Waschneck.

17. The movie *Wer bist Du?* (1922), directed by Adolf Trotz, featured the hand reader and writer Margret Naval (Margarete Nauheim, c. 1892–after January 1951) from Vienna.

18. The film produced by “Professor Kutty” [sic Ketty or Ket-ty] (Jean-François Planas, 1865–died after 1929) and Martin Berger was shown in Berlin in 1921 (“Kurze Notizen”).

19. Voigt, *Hände*; Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, ill. 1–50; Koelsch, *Hände*, ill. 1–64; cf. Dith, “Hände sprechen Bände”; Kissling-Valentin, “Ja, die Hände können sprechen”; Reuter, “Die Psychologie der menschlichen Hand.”

20. See note 37.

21. Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 194–220.

One of the hand readers standing out in this varied field was Ernst Issberner-Haldane (1886–1966), who is referred to by Goodrick-Clarke.²² Issberner-Haldane authored *Wissenschaftliche Handlesekunst: Chirosophie* (Scientific Hand Reading: Chirosophy) that under another title appeared first in 1921 and remained in print, in amended editions, well into the twenty-first century. Issberner-Haldane travelled the country to give lectures and teach hand reading, but as far as is known he never commented on Einstein’s hands. Yet several others did.

The answer part 2: As a famous public figure, Einstein was of interest to many

Madame Sylvia included photos of Einstein’s hands in her “Book of a Hundred Hands”

Actively promoting herself in Berlin, where she settled in 1927 and opened a practice, countess Beck Rzikowsky (better known as Madame Sylvia) was born Bianca Sylvia von Lazarini (1882–1949), a baroness in Vienna, who had married in 1905 Friedrich J.N.L., count von Beck Rzikowsky (1872–1942). From a young age she was aware of her clairvoyant abilities and premonitions – gifts she believed to have inherited from some of her ancestors who dealt with alchemy, and recorded prophecies.²³ The countess claimed to have been able to master her talent through the study of palmistry and graphology. She logged, more or less chronologically, a series of her premonitions and forecasts, and narrated the memories specifically relating to palmistry in *Das Buch der hundert Hände* (1931, *The Book of a Hundred Hands*).²⁴ Apparently Madame Sylvia was a

22. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots*, 165–67; cf. Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 220–31.

23. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 41: “die sich mit Alchemie befaßt oder Prophezeiungen aufgezeichnet haben.” It is unknown whom of her ancestors Madame Sylvia referred to.

24. The only reference to palmistry in *Okkulte Erlebnisse* concerns the soirée held before her wedding, when the young baroness read the hands of many military officers, and claimed to have seen WWI coming: “Als am Vorabend unserer Hochzeit im Herbst 1905 die Gäste in unserer Villa in Abbazia versammelt waren, mußte ich bei der Soirée ungezählte Hände Revue passieren lassen, weil jeder als gute Vorbedeutung empfand, sich von einer Braut wahrsagen zu lassen. Bei den vielen aktiven und Reserveoffizieren fiel mir der Umstand auf, daß ich in deren Handlinien einen bevorstehenden Krieg besonders stark markiert fand. Ja es ging sogar so weit, daß ich als Resumé mit Sicherheit sagen konnte, daß in etwa zehn Jahren der große Weltkrieg kommen werde. Damals wurde das unter Scherzen hingenommen, aber doch vielfach besprochen” (Beck Rzikowsky, *Okkulte Erlebnisse*, 29–30; recited in Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 43–44).

clairvoyant hand reader: looking onto the palm of a hand triggered the release of colourless images, like a movie, in her mind’s eye.²⁵

One anecdote recounts her premonition while looking at the hands of Edith Andreae-Rathenau, the wife of the banker Fritz Andreae, and sister of the industrialist, writer, and brutally murdered politician Walther Rathenau.²⁶ By becoming a leading lady in Berlin, Frau Andreae had stepped into her mother-in-law’s footsteps: she held a salon that was frequented by many intellectual, creative men and women from her time.²⁷ In June 1927, Madame Sylvia had been a guest at Villa Andreae. When a large party had gathered in the salon in Berlin-Grunewald and Andreae-Rathenau had stretched out her hands – meanwhile asking what Madame Sylvia saw ahead for the summer – the prophetess anticipated a fire would destroy the family’s country house in Feldafing am Starnberger Sea. It was to happen two months later.²⁸

As a token of friendship Madame Sylvia dedicated *Das Buch der hundert Hände* to Edith Andreae-Rathenau. Perhaps the chiromancing countess did so while she had been permitted access to the library of the Rathenaus in preparation of

25. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 42.

26. Franz Friedrich (Fritz) Andreae (1873–1950) was a descendant of the author of the *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz* (1616), Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654). His mother was Berlin’s most distinguished salonière before the outbreak of WWI, Bertha, baroness von Arnswaldt-Andreae-Holland (1850–1919). Walther Rathenau (1867–1922) and Edith Andreae-Rathenau (1883–1951) were two of the three children of the Jewish industrialist Emil M. Rathenau (1838–1915) and Mathilde S. Rathenau-Nachmann (1845–1926).

27. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 55; Wilhelmy, *Der Berliner Salon*, 585–86. Edith Andreae-Rathenau was a member of the Theosophical Society (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 100). Among her many friends and acquaintances list Leo Baeck (1873–1956), Gerhart J.R. Hauptmann (1862–1946), Annie Besant (1847–1933), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), Melchior Lechter (1865–1937), Max Liebermann (1847–1935), Katharina H. (Katia) Mann-Pringsheim (1883–1980), Eleonora G.M.J. von Mendelssohn (1900–1951), Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Karl Vollmöller (1878–1948), and Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1948).

28. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 50–51; “De schatgraverij,” 646. According to Madame Sylvia two-thirds of the country house in Feldafing burnt down in August 1927. Designed by the architect Fritz A. Breuhaus, the house was constructed in 1925–1926 and reconstructed in 1927–1928 (homepage Fritz August Breuhaus De Groot, <http://www.fritz-august-breuhaus.com/breuhaus-works-2.html>).

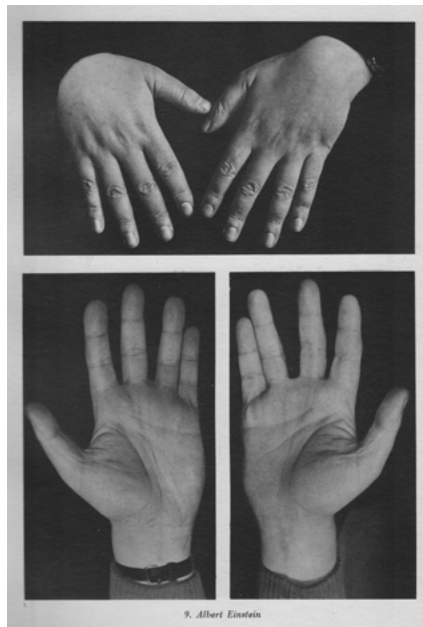


Figure 2. The photos of Einstein's hands in Madame Sylvia's *Das Buch der hundert Hände*.

her book. After all, the book offers a relatively extensive overview of important authors on the art of hand reading and the Rathenaus' library – Walther Rathenau's collection supplemented with parts of the library of the “Geheimen Kommerzienrats Emil Rathenau und seiner Gattin” (the parents of Walther and Edith Rathenau) – included a substantial amount of works on chiromancy.²⁹

Doing justice to the title, the book also incorporates a series of very nice photos of the hands of fifty well-known people. Among these pairs of hands are those of Edith Andrae-Rathenau, the “chirosophist” Ernst Issberner-Haldane, the graphologist Rafael Schermann, and Albert Einstein.³⁰ In fact there are three photos of Einstein's hands: one of his outer hands, and one each of his right and left palm (figure 2).³¹

29. “Die Bibliothek Walther Rathenaus,” *Berliner Tageblatt* on October 5, 1928.

30. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, ill. 3, 9, 22, 41. The photos of Issberner-Haldane and Schermann are identical to those in Voigt, *Hände*, ill. 44 and 45.

31. The two photos of Einstein's inner hands made by Jaro von Tucholka (1874–1976) sold

Also noteworthy is that Madame Sylvia decorated the waiting room for her clients with a large portrait of the Nobel laureate. Einstein had dedicated it to “Der Seherin der ungläubige Thomas” (The seeress of the doubting Thomas), and signed it “Albert Einstein 1930.”³² When a journalist interviewing the “grande dame” in Berlin queried if Professor Einstein had consulted her, she stated that she had seen Einstein’s hands indeed, and to have revealed to him many things. It is unclear where they met. It could have been at a social gathering at the Andreaes — Einstein had been on very good terms with Walther Rathenau, and certainly was acquainted with Edith Andreae-Rathenau.³³ But for the same token Einstein had paid Madame Sylvia a visit in her consultation office close to her living quarters at the Kaiserplatz in Berlin.

Julius Spier incorporated a print of Einstein’s left hand in an article

Another hand reader whom Einstein met in person is Julius Philipp Spier (1887–1942). Spier is nowadays remembered as the charismatic, hand reading psychotherapist of the Jewish diarist Etty Hillesum (1914–1943), and a pupil of Carl G. Jung.³⁴

Having studied numerous hands for over two decades while making a career at a metal trading company in Frankfurt am Main, Spier decided around 1926 to enrol in a *Lebranalyse* (psychology course) in Zurich. There he met Jung, who advised him, after having seen Spier at work with patients of the Bürglhölzli clinic, to set up a practice as a hand reader in Berlin. Jung also recommended that Spier contact Edith Andreae-Rathenau since she might be able to introduce him to the Berlin society. Frau Andreae duly obliged.

at Christie’s online sale May 2-9, 2018, for £13,750 (<https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/einstein-family-letters-portraits/einsteins-hands-48/55729>).

32. “Bij de Berlijnsche Profetessee,” 603. A picture of Einstein’s portrait in Madame Sylvia’s waiting room is available in the database Het Geheugen, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:SFA03:SFA005001629>.

33. Hodgkiss, “Einstein’s Friend”; cf. AEA 32-834. Edith Andreae-Rathenau had given Einstein two books. Especially the one with a collection of aphorisms taken from Walther Rathenau’s works, Einstein liked, and he cited three “timeless” sayings of which it is unclear whether they are part of the book, or that Einstein had spotted them himself among Rathenau’s writings.

34. Nagel, “Jung, Julius Spier,” 71-72.

Following the lecture Spier delivered in Villa Andrae in the fall of 1929, *Tempo Berlin* ran the news that a new chirologist had emerged, a so-called “Schermann der Handlesekunst” (the Schermann of the hand readers).³⁵ The reference to the clairvoyant graphologist Rafael Schermann is apt. Schermann amazed his audiences by revealing specific details of someone simply by looking at that person’s handwriting.³⁶ Such details covered events that happened in the past, as well as events that were to unfold — and, as history presumably proved, Schermann’s revelations often turned out precisely as he had predicted. According to the journalist’s judgment, Spier’s accuracy equalled this graphologist’s.

Contrary to Schermann, Madame Sylvia and others, Spier was rather vague about his own clairvoyant gift. Moreover, he strongly avoided the business of predicting the future. Over the years Spier had observed — just as other palmists had done — that lines and marks in the hands could change, even within a relatively short period of six weeks. This implied that events foreseen needed to be foreseen differently once the lining pattern and marks in the palms had changed. This notion, combined with a deep interest in psychology, led Spier to alter his view on hand reading. Once settled in Berlin, he stated time and again that he did not practice *chiromancy* (the mantic art of fortune telling through hand palms), but *chirology* (the science of hands).³⁷ Or, even more to the point,

35. Manfred Georg, “Ein Schermann der Handlesekunst,” *Tempo Berlin / Züricher Zeitung* [1929]. Ursula von Mangoldt-Reiboldt-Andrae (1904–1987), an established hand reader herself, recollected Spier’s lecture in her parents’ home (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 146).

36. In addition to the hagiographic literature about Rafael Schermann (1879–1945), there is a report of a series of experiments conducted by the researcher of occult phenomena Oskar Fischer (1876–1942), who concluded that Schermann had an extraordinary talent (Nagel, “Rafael Schermann,” 9).

37. See for instance Spier, “Warum ich nicht wahrsage,” 55: “Es ist großen Kreisen des Publikums nicht bekannt, daß ein Unterschied besteht zwischen *C h i r o m a n t i e* und *C h i r o l o g i e*. In einer Zeit, in der einerseits die ernsthafte Handdeutung anfängt, in wissenschaftlichen Kreisen an Boden zu gewinnen und beachtet zu werden, andererseits anscheinend auf Grund dieser Tatsache die Wahrsager, die Chiromanten wie die Pilze aus dem Boden schießen (siehe Friedrichstraße, Wittenbergplatz in Berlin!), erscheint es notwendig, auf diesen Grundunterschied hinzuweisen.” N.B. From a historical point of view Spier’s interpretation of chiromancy versus chirology is arbitrary (Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 191–93; Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochirology”).

he did not exert what he considered the old art of chiromancy, but excelled in a new science that he called *psycho-chirology*, meaning that he combined (Jungian) psychological insights with particular features of the hand. Instead of predicting someone's (near) future, Spier tried to help a person in becoming aware of his or her psychological hindrances built up in the past, and highlighted his or her inherent potential. By doing so, Spier wilfully diverted palmistry from its dominant occult setting of divining the future into a dynamic tool for personal growth, as illustrated by his motto “Werde der du bist” (Become who you are) that he had taken from the Greek poet Pindar.³⁸

When or how Spier encountered Albert Einstein, and exercised his new developed art of reading hands on him, is unknown. Equally unknown therefore is what he observed about Einstein other than a very brief description. Nevertheless, the fact that Spier incorporated a print of Einstein's left palm – the print differs from the ones made by Marianne Raschig – in an article published October 1931 by the popular magazine *Der Querschnitt*, indicates that Einstein had his hands analysed by Spier somewhere between the autumn of 1929 and the autumn of 1931.³⁹

Marianne Raschig took up prints of Einstein's palms in her book “Hand and Personality”

Marianne Raschig, whose handprint collection was sold at Sotheby's, described Einstein's hands slightly more elaborately than Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier.⁴⁰ Most likely Raschig had rung Einstein's doorbell on April 9, 1930, asking whether Einstein would be willing to let her make prints of his hands. For persuasion, she might have shown him some of the thousands of handprints

38. Spier, *The Hands of Children*, 1. At the time, the aphorism was widely used, also by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and C.G. Jung (Babich, “Nietzsche's Imperative”; van den Brandt and Nissen, *Veel mooie woorden*, 19, 107).

39. Spier, “Hände sprechen,” 688. This page can be found through <https://www.arthistoricum.net/werkansicht/dlf/73283/56/>.

40. Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 134–35. Marianne Raschig was born in Spandau on June 5, 1874 (Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*, 39). Derived from a news item in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* on January 18, 1904, is that Marianne Raschig née Körner was the daughter of the manufacturer Hermann Körner and his wife Anna Kuneck, and was widowed by 1904. She passed away in or after 1938.

she had already collected from a variety of people. This, namely, is precisely the procedure that Fedor von Zobeltitz sketched after Raschig had paid him an unexpected visit in the winter of 1925–1926.

According to Zobeltitz, Raschig handed him her introduction card and then asked if he was willing to print the inner surfaces of his hands “durch eine einfache Manipulation mit einer schwarzen Masse” (through a simple manipulation with a black mass) for a planned, large chiological book.⁴¹ Inclined to smile and say no, Zobeltitz agreed to go along with the procedure as soon as the woman had shown him a stately book containing numerous handprints of princes, diplomats, scholars, writers, artists, industrialists, and other very famous people. His interest in Frau Raschig had been piqued. The elderly, reputable looking, capable lady had good sense, and explained to him how she had come to studying hands:

[F]irst of all, and this can be explained, by astrology, which bases its core on the idea that the human being and his organs are influenced by the position of planets and stars. The hand, then, is divided into seven planetary regions and planetary mounts delimited by the hand lines. From their expression, size and form, and their mutual relations, the destiny, life, character, etc., are read. I admit that this gypsy science made little impression on me, but her [Raschig’s] narrative, the extraordinary literacy, and her, with all its “fantasticness,” undeniable intelligence, captivated me. She had also dealt extensively with graphology, vouched for her reliability, and further with the explorations of the transcendental world, to which she even had convened an international meeting [in 1914], which was to be followed by the founding of an institute for occult research. All this sounded strange and adventurous, but at the same time convincing, and what particularly struck me was her great knowledge, not only of these dubious areas, but also in the field of art.⁴²

41. Fedor von Zobeltitz, “Aus dem Tagebuch,” *Hamburger Nachrichten* on July 9, 1926. The bibliophile, writer and journalist Fedor K.M.H.A. von Zobeltitz (1857–1934) initiated in 1897 the *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde* and co-founded in 1899 the Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen.

42. Ibid: “Ich gestehe, daß diese Zigeunerwissenschaft wenig Eindruck auf mich machte, um so mehr fesselte mich die Erzählende, ihre außergewöhnliche Belesenheit und ihre bei aller Phantastik unleugbare Intelligenz. Auch mit der Graphologie hatte sie sich eingehend beschäftigt und schwor auf ihre Zuverlässigkeit, und weiter mit der Erforschung der übersinnlichen Welt, zu der sie sogar eine internationale Sitzung einberufen hatte, der die Begründung eines Instituts

Zobeltitz also shared that Raschig dealt in ceramics, and could deliver genuine Michelangelos. For quite some time he did not hear from or of her, until the news reached him that she was accused of swindling in the ceramic business. Raschig pleaded not guilty to the charges; claiming instead to have acted in good faith for which Zobeltitz gave her the benefit of the doubt. Given Frau Raschig's utopian nature, he reasoned, she had completely mastered a mixture of imagination and a clever sense of reality, and may indeed have been innocent of the charges against her. The court, however, did not agree. Raschig was sentenced to one year and three months *Zuchthaus* (disciplinary house) because of attempted fraud and perjury towards the state.⁴³ Presumably she accepted the verdict with the utmost composure.

Once set free, the hand-reading woman continued where she had left off. She resumed collecting handprints, held consultation hours for "Schicksalforschungen aller Art Handaufnahmen, Horoskope, graphologische, chirologische Auskünfte, Traumanalyse, usw. usw." (fate allotments of diverse hand pictures, horoscope, graphological, chirological information, dream analysis, etc. etc.), and finished her book project.⁴⁴ By the time *Hand und Persönlichkeit* came out – most likely late November or early December 1930 but antedated 1931 – Raschig had seen over the course of thirty years approximately 200,000 hands and obtained approximately 80,000 prints of hands.⁴⁵ A brochure entitled *Schicksal und Charakter* (Destiny and Character), now lost, preceded the

für okkultistische Forschungen folgen sollte. Das alles klang seltsam und abenteuerlich, aber doch durch aus überzeugend, und das, was mich bei dieser Frau besonders frappierte, war ihre große Kenntnis auf nicht nur diesen zweifelhaften Gebieten, sondern auch auf dem Felde der Kunst."

43. "Geheimnisvolle Gemäldeverkäufe," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, June 23 (1926). Marianne Raschig's companions, the salesmen Ernst Benedikt and Max Schultz, were sentenced to prison for respectively one year and one year and three months. See also "Das beschwindelte Reichsausgleichsamt," *Berliner Volkszeitung* on June 23, 1926.

44. From an editorial note in *Der Querschnitt* 8, no. 2 (1928): 126.

45. Raschig, "Nun wissen Sie es," 86; Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 5; "Wunderzeichen der Hand," *Berliner Börsenzeitung* on December 6, 1930; Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*, 39.

book,⁴⁶ and a chapter of *Hand und Persönlichkeit* was published in the illustrated magazine *Uhu* to raise publicity.⁴⁷

Although in the media Raschig is referred to as a writer,⁴⁸ nothing has been found other than *Hand und Persönlichkeit*, (reference to) three articles,⁴⁹ the above mentioned brochure, the reference to a book or brochure entitled *Geheimnisse der offenen Hand* (Secrets of the Open Hand), and the publication of three handprints of her vast collection.⁵⁰ The painter and occasional writer Rudolf Grossmann once paid her a visit for an article about soothsayers, and considered her a wise woman.⁵¹ He wrote:

Really, whoever sees her in her medieval roundness with the reddened face, the sharp but not piercing, relentlessly fixing eyes behind the large round glasses, gets reminded of all sorts of oddities. Certainly, not the witch of children’s fairy tales, or the fearful centuries of the past. She is reminiscent, though, of those mysterious women, who at any time in some form as “wise women” steered the steps of council and future-healing to themselves. But she is by no means a giver of oracles. Her “seeing,” her sensitivity seems scientifically directed and determined, [she] only says what she can account for, knows the how and why of her interpretation, has seriousness and method. She is nevertheless a wise woman! She is and remains fully on the solid ground of reality.⁵²

46. Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 13.

47. Raschig, “Nun wissen Sie es.”

48. “Das beschwindelte Reichsausgleichsamt,” *Berliner Volkszeitung* on June 23, 1926.

49. Raschig, “Nun wissen Sie es”; Raschig, “Die Handlesekunst”; Raschig, “Schmelings Hand.”

50. See the illustrations “Die Hand von Werner Krauß,” *Der Querschnitt* 6, no. 1 (1926), and “Die Hände der Zwillingbrüder Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau † und Graf Ernst Rantzau,” in With, “Ein Leben,” 53.

51. Grossmann, “Wahrsager,” 411. Grossmann’s drawing of Marianne Raschig in the same article can be viewed here: <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id355966999-19280600/55>. A picture of her reading hands is available in the Getty Images databank, see <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto's/german-nationals-the-palmist-marianne-raschig-at-her-nieuwsfotos/542927203>.

52. Grossmann, “Wahrsager,” 412: “Wirklich, wer sie so sieht in ihrer mittelalterlichen Rundlichkeit mit dem geröteten Antlitz, den scharf aber nicht stechend, doch unerbittlich sich festsaugenden Aeuglein hinter den großen runden Gläsern, der wird an allerlei Sonderbares erinnert. Gewiß nicht an die Hexe der Kindermärchen oder vergangener Angstjahrhunderte. Wohl aber an jene geheimnisvollen Frauenwesen, die zu allen Zeiten in irgendeiner Form als ‘weise Frauen’ die Schritte Rat- und Zukunfttheischender auf sich lenkten. Aber sie ist dabei keineswegs eine Orakelspenderin. Ihr ‘Sehen,’ ihre Einfühlungskraft scheint wissenschaftlich geleitet und bestimmt, sagt nur, was sie verantworten kann, kennt das Wie und Warum ihrer

Just as captivating as this vivid description of Grossman is the severe criticism of Ernst Issberner-Haldane concerning Marianne Raschig's decision to put a selection of copies of prints up for sale in bookshops in Berlin. Issberner-Haldane named Raschig an "Auchchiromantin, die bereits in den älteren Jahrgängen steckt" (an "also chiromancer" already in her older years), not belonging to the new league of "scientific" hand readers that he considered himself part of.⁵³ According to Issberner-Haldane it was very tactless of Frau Raschig to expose the handprints of various persons openly in the bookshops' windows, because those who could read hands would be able to see all kinds of very private issues like love affairs, difficult times, or delicate illnesses! He had invited Raschig for a leisurely walk on a Sunday afternoon to explain the problem. But when they met, she had treated Issberner-Haldane, to his dismay, as a student instead of an equal in the field.

Miscellaneous

In 1922 the Jewish German impressionist Max Liebermann painted Einstein's portrait. Late February or early March that same year Liebermann had his hands read by the "characterologist" Max von Kreusch: the *Berliner Tageblatt* published von Kreusch's article about it.⁵⁴ Perhaps Liebermann introduced Einstein to the art of reading hands? Fact has it that at least five years before Einstein allowed Raschig to make his handprints, he and Liebermann agreed to have pictures taken of their hands. The photos of the palm of their right hands are namely included in a series of four published on a page entitled "Das Genie im Handspiegel" ("The Genius in the Hand Mirror") in *Uhu's* issue of April 1925.⁵⁵

Deutung, hat Ernst und Methode. Trotzdem ist sie eine weise Frau! Sie ist es und bleibt doch ganz auf dem festen Boden der Realität." Rudolf W.W. Grossmann (1882–1941) had visited Raschig also in 1922 ("Rudolf Grossmann," 141).

53. Issberner-Haldane, "[Frau Raschig]," 5.

54. Max von Kreusch, "Neue Technik der Handlesekunst: Analyse der Hand Max Liebermanns," *Berliner Tageblatt* on March 7, 1922.

55. See *Uhu* 1, no. 7 (1925), 80; see <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id358216435-19240700/101>. The other two geniuses whose right palm were photographed are the writer Gerhart Hauptmann

Three other photos of Einstein’s hands, one dated 1925 and two dated 1927, are kept in the Ullstein Bild archive.⁵⁶ The same illustrated periodical, *Uhu*, published in August 1930 a photo of Einstein seated on a stool with the caption, “The shy hand posture of a really great one.”⁵⁷ The image functions as an example pertaining to the question of how people ought to keep their hands. Prior to this, Ellen Kissling-Valentin (b. 1876) devoted a brief section to Einstein’s hands in an article in *Scherl’s Magazin* published April 1930, which was illustrated with a photo taken by Atelier Callo, Berlin.⁵⁸

Probably based on the photo of Einstein’s palm in *Uhu*, or *Das Buch der hundert Hände*, and/or the handprints in *Hand und Persönlichkeit*, the English hand reader Noel Jaquin (1893–1974) made a sketch of Einstein’s right hand and offered his interpretation of it.⁵⁹ The Russian born, American émigré, journalist and palmist Josef Ranald (1902–1956) did the same.⁶⁰ J. Stuart Lucy, also a journalist and palmist, clearly used one of Raschig’s handprints of Einstein and offered a rather detailed analysis in an Australian newspaper.⁶¹ Furthermore, presumably Einstein sent a note to the American hand reader Nellie Simmons Meier (1864–1944), after her book *The Lions’ Paws* (1937), a book about the hands of 137 famous American people, had come out.⁶² And he agreed in April 1939 to have his hands sketched by the Lithuanian born, American sculptress Ray

(just like Liebermann befriended by Edith Andreae-Rathenau, see note 26), and the painter Lovis Corinth (1858–1925).

56. See in the database of Ullstein Bild, <http://www.ullsteinbild.de>, pictures nos. 541536683 (dated 1925, taken by studio Zander & Labisch), 0108357 and 00293994 (both dated 1927). A fourth picture, no. 1451433 (dated 1927), is identical to no. 0108357.

57. Gretor, “Wo lasse ich bloß,” 72; see <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id358216435-19291100/70>. N.B. An article on physiognomy incorporated a photo of Einstein’s face with the caption “Alle Merkmale des Genies” (Mellinger, “Vom Spiegel der Seele,” 59).

58. Kissling-Valentin, “Ja, die Hände können sprechen,” 539.

59. Jaquin, *The Hand of Man*, 260, ill. 63.

60. Ranald, *Masters of Destiny*, 67; Ranald, “Hands of Fortune,” *The Telegraph’s Brisbane* on August 19, 1939.

61. J. Stuart Lucy, “Einstein, Scientist And Romantic,” *The Labor Daily* on May 28, 1938.

62. Knobloch, “Indiana’s Palm Reader”; cf. “Speaking of pictures,” 7.

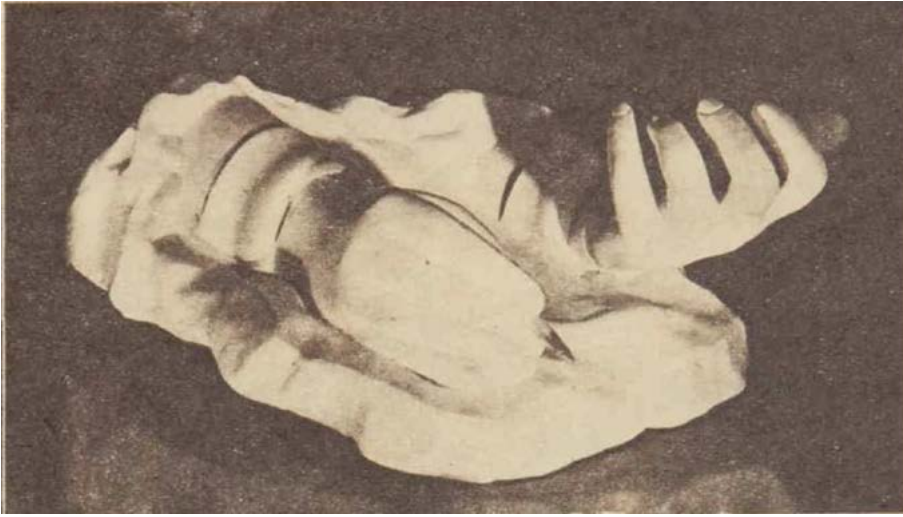


Figure 3. Ray Shaw's sculpture of Einstein's hands in *The Australian Women's Weekly* on September 6, 1947 (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/46945148>).

Shaw (1910–d. after 1978), whereupon she crafted a ceramic object of Einstein's hands (figure 3).⁶³

The fact that Jaquin, Ranald and Lucy included Einstein in their works shows that even though they had not seen Einstein's hands personally, he was, as a famous man, of interest to them as hand readers, just like he was to Raschig-Körner, Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier. The fact that magazines featured photos of Einstein's hands, and those of other well-known men and women, shows that they were part of a society interested in the scientification of hand reading. It also indicates that Einstein was willing to go along with those who photographed his hand(s), just as he was willing to go along with those who read them.

63. Philippa Day, "Ray Shaw's Portraits Are Studies of Famous Fingers," *The Australian Women's Weekly* on September 6, 1947; "Notes on People," *The New York Times* on March 7, 1979; cf. "Hands Only!" The sculpture was in March 1979 part of the Einstein centennial celebration of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The answer part 3: Einstein dipped into the occult

The medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme stunned Einstein

This part is particularly interesting because Einstein stated in several letters to different people that he refrained from clairvoyants, graphologists and the like, even after he had been involved with two such people in February and March of 1930. The first of these two Einstein met on February 10, 1930 when he was a witness to tests carried out with Otto Reimann (b. 1903). This “metagraphologist” from Prague worked in a similar manner as Rafael Schermann: Reimann claimed to clairvoyantly read handwriting. Out of curiosity, Einstein invited the man to his house five days later to experiment some more with him.⁶⁴ Afterwards, Reimann talked about his encounter with the famous physicist: “Expert on Writing Amazes Einstein” appeared in the *New York Times* edition of February 23, 1930.⁶⁵

A month later Edith Andreae-Rathenau invited Einstein to the séance that she had organised for the Dutch medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme (1868–1942) (figure 4).⁶⁶ Previously, Andreae-Rathenau had seen this elderly woman demonstrate her “psychometric gift” at a meeting organised by the physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. Akkeringa-Kromme’s journeys to Berlin and Potsdam (December 1929),

64. Fischer, “Der metagraphologe,” 189; Schmidt, “Experimente,” 604, 607, 609–10; Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 61–62; AEA 46-660: “Es war zweifellos unvorsichtig von mir, dass ich mich durch die Neugierde habe hinreissen lassen, mir zwei sogenannte ‘Hellseher’ genauer anzusehen.”

65. Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 61.

66. Born in Gouda on October 2, 1868, and married in 1905 to the physician, midwife, and childless elderly widower, Everd A. Akkeringa (1838–1912), Coba Akkeringa-Kromme joined the spiritualist association Harmonia at a young age. During the winter of 1918–1919 she became the first Dutch psychometrist to show her paranormal talent publicly on stage. From then on Mrs. Akkeringa-Kromme, Mrs. C. Akkeringa, the widow Dr. E. A. Akkeringa, or, for intimates, “auntie Coba” offered many private and public séances, also in the Dutch East Indies, until her passing in The Hague on March 22, 1942. She became Holland’s best-known medium. Prof. Jan Valckenier Suringar (1864–1932), one of the first researchers in the Netherlands studying parapsychology, set up several experiments to test her unusual abilities and considered her a talented, reliable medium (Jansen and Kramer, “A Forgotten Chapter,” 98–99; Kuiken, “Kromme, Naatje”). N.B. Mrs. Akkeringa’s birthname was Naatje Kromme. At some point she chose Coba as her first name, and no one called her Naatje anymore (personal communication with Wim Kramer, November 25, 2015).



Figure 4. Coba Akkeringa-Kromme in Antwerp, December 10, 1937 (Harmonia 1390.599, Utrechts Archief, Utrecht).

Wiesbaden (Spring 1929, January/February 1930), and Frankfurt am Main (January/February 1930) had captured the attention of Hirschfeld, so he had queried if she could demonstrate her extraordinary gift for a group of scientists, sceptics and journalists alike. Andreae-Rathenau herself was impressed by the performance, but felt the hostility towards the medium from the scientists. Therefore, she welcomed Akkeringa-Kromme to her home, meanwhile inviting about fifty others along to witness the occult powers of the woman from The Hague.⁶⁷

Among the visiting crowd was Andreae-Rathenau's daughter, Ursula von Mangoldt. More than thirty years later von Mangoldt recalled the séance and described what had taken place in the music room of her parents' house:

Frau Akkeringa holds a picture, a letter, a bag, a lighter in her hand. She has no idea who the owners of these items are when they are put on a tray in front of her. The statements she makes in a very fast, almost driven manner, about the owners, are correct in every detail.

67. In addition to Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the Indologist, anthroposophist and writer Hans Hasso von Veltheim (1885–1956), the painter Emil Orlik (1870–1932), and the theatre and film director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) witnessed Akkeringa-Kromme's performance in Villa Andreae (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 136; [Leonard Rademaker], "Mevr. Akkeringa en . . . Prof. Einstein," *Het Vaderland* on March 27, 1930).

When she takes an object from Einstein in her hand, her first conclusion is: “You are very famous, but so modest that you do not know how great you are” (. . .). When he was queried about what he just heard, “Pour le mérite,” he just smiled. Frau Akkeringa continues: “He is grateful for everything that comes to him, and takes it as a force that is given to him, not as something that came from him.” Another question: “You were paralyzed.” – “No.” But later he admitted that for months he had been lying in bed, unable to move.⁶⁸

According to von Mangoldt none of the guests were able to explain the workings behind the psychometric experiments. Apparently baffled, Einstein had invited the ladies Akkeringa-Kromme and Andreae-Rathenau to his home. After their private meeting, he confided in von Mangoldt’s mother that he had encountered a world that he could not fit into his scientific worldview, but that this same world would no longer leave him in peace.⁶⁹

Back in the Netherlands Akkeringa-Kromme shared her Berlin experience with the editor of *Het Vaderland*. Immediately this newspaper ran the widow’s story on the front page. Mrs. Akkeringa had picked up someone’s bracelet-watch at a séance organised in Villa Andreae, the bulletin reported.⁷⁰ Subsequently she had given such a correct diagnosis of the owner of the object that he barely parted from her side for the remainder of the evening. Akkeringa-Kromme did not know the owner of the watch, the paper continued. She was highly surprised

68. Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 136: “Frau Akkeringa hält ein Bild, einen Brief, eine Tasche, ein Feuerzeug in der Hand. Sie hat keine Ahnung, von wem diese Gegenstände stammen, die auf einem Tablett vor sie hingelegt werden. Die Aussagen, die sie in einer sehr schnellen, fast getriebenen Art über deren Besitzer macht, stimmen in allen Einzelheiten. [/] Als sie einen Gegenstand von Einstein in die Hand nimmt, ist ihre erste Feststellung: ‘Sie sind sehr berühmt, aber so bescheiden, daß Sie gar nicht wissen, wie groß Sie sind.’ (. . .) Als man ihn nach dem gerade erhaltenen ‘Pour le mérite’ fragte, lächelte er nur. Frau Akkeringa spricht weiter: ‘Sie sind dankbar für alles, was Ihnen einfällt, und nehmen es hin als eine Kraft, die Ihnen gegeben wird, gar nicht als etwas, das von Ihnen stammt.’ Weitere Frage: ‘Sie waren gelähmt.’ – ‘Nein.’ Aber er gab später zu, daß er monatelang im Bett gelegen hatte, unfähig, sich zu rühren.” Early in 1917 Einstein had fallen into a prolonged illness, which lasted on and off until 1920. During that period his cousin Elsa Einstein (1876–1936), whom he married in 1919, took great care of him (Isaacson, *Einstein*, 233). Perhaps the illness Akkeringa-Kromme picked up on, confirmed by Einstein, refers to (a particular phase within) this timespan.

69. Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 137.

70. [Leonard Rademaker], “Mevr. Akkeringa en . . . prof. Einstein,” *Het Vaderland* on March 27, 1930.

once her host entrusted to her that no one less than Albert Einstein had handed it in as an object for psychometrical scrutiny. What is more, two days after the séance Einstein and his wife had received the medium and her host, and a few other scientists. Upon arrival, Elsa Einstein confided to the ladies that her husband had been upset and unable to think about anything other than the meeting in Villa Andraea. During the visit in Einstein's own house, Einstein had posed endless questions and set up experiments. At the end of the day he had given the medium a picture of himself. "Frau Akkeringa als Zeichen der Dankbarkeit für des Wunder das Sie am 14 III 30 vor meinem erstaunten Sinn entfaltete" he had scribbled on it (Frau Akkeringa as a token of gratitude for the miracle that you at 14 III 1930 unfolded before my astonished mind).⁷¹

Once the story came out in *Het Vaderland*, a reader approached the paper's author/editor Leonard A. Rademaker and told him that "Frau A. in Berlin Fiasco gemacht hat" (had failed), and that Einstein had faked his admiration; he even said that "the portrait gift was only customary for servant maids and so on!"⁷² Wanting to know the truth, Rademaker then wrote a letter to Einstein politely asking if the most learned professor would be so kind to tell his version of the event.

By return mail Einstein responded as requested. "Frau Akkaringa" [sic] had desired the picture, Einstein stated.⁷³ In other words, he had given her a photograph of himself, though not on his own but her initiative. Einstein also explained that the number of experiments had been too few, and too carefully drafted, so that it was impossible to derive any conclusions from them. "Anyway, based upon my bad experiences, I will absolutely avoid contact with such people

71. Ibid.

72. Letter from Leonard A. Rademaker (1872-1956) to Einstein, March 28, 1930 (AEA no. 48-58): "Nun ist diesen morgen ein Herr zu uns gekommen, und hat erzähl dass Frau A. in Berlin Fiasco gemacht hat und Sie Ihre Bewunderung nur getäuscht haben. Ja, er sagte selbst dass das Porträtgeschenk nur üblich war für Dienstmägde u.s.w.!" Cf. AEA nos. 48-59, 46-660, 39-282, 47-662, 48-416, 48-417, 48-418, 50-189, 50-189.1.

73. AEA no. 48-59. According to Nederburgh, "Een schitterend succes," 111, Elsa Einstein had asked if Akkeringa-Kromme would appreciate to get Einstein's picture. Upon Akkeringa-Kromme's positive reaction, Einstein would, on his own initiative, have penned the dedication on it.

in the future so as to not feed the superstition,” he ended the brief reply.⁷⁴ On the same day Einstein briefed Dr. Albert Hellwig, a lawyer in Potsdam, about the recent developments. It had been very careless of him to engage with two so-called clairvoyants, he confessed, one being Mrs. Akkeringa, the other Otto Reimann, while they had used his name to seek publicity for themselves.⁷⁵

Six months later the director of the Institute für Metapsychikalische Forschung and editor of the *Zeitschrift für metapsychische Forschung*, Christoph Schröder, asked Einstein if he was interested in participating in research with “Psychitiven” (mediums), thereby referring to Reimann and Akkeringa.⁷⁶ Einstein declined the invitation, stating that he had to do penance for having become involved twice with “metapsychic” performers: afterwards the mediums would have used his name for personal publicity purposes.⁷⁷

The whereabouts of Otto Reimann are unknown after he disappeared from the scene of the scientists testing him, but such is not the case for Akkeringa-Kromme. Although this Dutch medium turned to the press, and the news of her encounter with Einstein travelled to the Dutch East Indies, it is unlikely she did so solely for personal fame.⁷⁸ Akkeringa-Kromme was a strong propagandist for spiritualism. It must have been at least partly for the cause of bringing “comfort, encouragement and security” to people about “the incorruptibility and the nullity of death” that

74. AEA no. 48-59: “Jedenfalls werde ich es in Zukunft auf Grund meiner schlechten Erfahrungen unbedingt vermeiden, dem Aberglauben durch Berührung mit derartigen Leuten Vorschub zu leisten.”

75. AEA no. 46-660.

76. AEA no. 48-416. See also Hermann, “Albert Einstein über Parapsychologie,” 279.

77. AEA no. 48-417. Cf. the reply of Christoph Schröder (1871-1952), AEA no. 48-418: “Ich habe die Fachliteratur ziemlich vollständig u. laufend in Händen u. verfolge auch die bezüglichen Aeusserungen in der Tagespresse durch ein Abonnement auf einschlägige Ausschnitte. Mir ist aber nicht bekannt geworden, dass Herr Otto Reimann oder Frau Dr. Akkeringa Ihren Namen für Reklamezwecke missbraucht hätten.”

78. Rademaker’s article in *Het Vaderland* was published, in amended versions, in *De Indische Courant* on May 5, 1930; *De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden* on May 5, 1930; *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* on May 7, 1930, and *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* on May 22, 1930. See also the letter from Johan Valckenier Suringar to Coba Akkeringa-Kromme dated May 24, 1930, and from J. Wesselman (in Surabaya) to her dated June 16, 1930 (Harmonia 1390.559, Utrechts Archief, Utrecht).

she and those with her were pleased with the Einstein story, and so spread it around.⁷⁹ Besides, as soon as Einstein's message of regret came through, Akkeringa-Kromme did not allow people to publish the picture she had been given by him.⁸⁰

In comparison to Einstein's whimsical reactions in connection with the elderly lady from The Hague, it is remarkable that over time she remained consistent in her tale. A year later (after a séance held in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands), a reporter asked Akkeringa-Kromme what had taken place in Berlin, and he drafted her response into the following:

It was like this: I was asked to a party by the sister of [Walther] Rathenau in the great world of Berlin, and demonstrated just as I demonstrated to you [here in Zeeland]. Finally, they handed me an object; I said: its owner is a great scholar, who penetrates the nature of things more deeply than any other has done, yet at the same time he is naive and simple as a child.

Then the hostess asked: "And, do you now know, who that is? Einstein."

I didn't know him, didn't know that he was present. But the professor didn't leave me alone for the rest of the evening. I had to sit next to him at the table; he hardly ate, and did nothing else except ask me questions. After dinner, I had to sit in a windowsill with him, where people gathered around us.

Later, I had to come to his house. About a dozen interested people were also present. "No - I only do it for you, that was the agreement," I said.

"Fortunately, that you say so," Mrs. [Einstein] said: "Einstein is too nice, he didn't want to send them home." But now he had to send them away. Thereupon Einstein experimented with me all day. "He hadn't thought of anything else," his wife explained.⁸¹

79. Ned. Vereniging van Spiritisten, *Eenijfeest*, 12: "Zij [Akkeringa-Kromme], die jarenlang alles, wat in haar vermogen lag, gedaan heeft, om (...) anderen troost, bemoediging en zekerheid te geven, de alles-ervullende zekerheid van 's levens onvergankelijkheid en de nietigheid van den dood." Cf. Kuiken, "Kromme, Naatje."

80. Nederburgh, "Een schitterend succes," 111.

81. Zwerver [ps. of H.W. Tesch], "Uit een onbekend land: Ergens in Zeeland," *Algemeen Handelsblad* on March 3, 1931: "Dat was zoo: ik was op een partij bij een zuster van Rathenau in de groote wereld van Berlijn gevraagd, en ik demonstreerde precies als bij u. Ten slotte gaf men mij een voorwerp; ik zeide: de bezitter is een groot geleerde, die dieper dan iemand anders

In other words, at the end of February 1931 the then 61-year old Coba Akkeringa-Kromme repeated to the journalist Zwerver more or less the same as she had done the year before to the journalist/editor Rademaker. Both versions are in line with the memories recorded by Ursula von Mangoldt. Most likely, the grey-haired widow had impressed Albert Einstein genuinely, presumably just as Otto Reimann had done. After all, he invited both of them to his home. The experiments conducted with either one failed Einstein's scientific standards. Yet his argument to dismiss the matter was that Reimann and Akkeringa-Kromme had taken advantage of his name for their own publicity. This contrast between Einstein's public statements and private actions might be explained by concerns surrounding the exploitation of his popularity, which Wilfried Kugel has illustrated.⁸² Maybe Einstein was tired of seeing his name appear in newspapers whenever he had spoken to someone somewhere, especially if that person seemed to "upgrade" him/herself through him (Einstein).

Despite the firmly phrased resolution in the letters to Rademaker and Hellwig, Einstein allowed the prophesizing palmist Marianne Raschig to read his hands less than two weeks later. Moreover, he offered to endorse the author Upton B. Sinclair on his own initiative in a letter dated April 12, 1930, by recommending Sinclair's *Mental Radio* (1930) – a book about experiments with his wife who was gifted with psychic abilities – to his own publisher, provided that Sinclair would not use his name.⁸³ Even though Sinclair had not hinted

in het wezen der dingen is doorgedrongen, en tegelijk is hij kinderlijk eenvoudig. [/] Toen vroeg de gastvrouw: 'En weet u nu, wie dat is? Einstein.' [/] Ik kende hem niet, wist niet, dat hij tegenwoordig was. Maar professor Einstein heeft me verder niet losgelaten. Ik moest aan tafel naast hem zitten; hij at bijna niet, deed niets dan mij vragen stellen. Na het diner, bij de koffie, moest ik ook met hem in een vensterbank zitten, waar een kringetje mensen zich om ons schaarde. [/] Later moest ik nog bij hem thuis komen. Maar er zaten wel een tiental belangstellenden bij. [/] 'Nee - ik doe 't alleen voor u, zòò was het afgesproken,' zei ik. [/] 'Gelukkig, dat u 't zegt,' zei mevrouw: 'Einstein is te goed, die wou ze niet weg sturen.' Maar nu moesten ze weg. [/] Einstein heeft toen nog een heelen dag met mij geëxperimenteerd. [/] 'Hij had dagen lang aan niets anders gedacht,' vertelde zijn vrouw."

82. Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 59, 62-63 (i.e. AEA no. 39-282), 71.

83. AEA no. 39-282. Upton Beall Sinclair (1878-1968) was at the time married to Mary Craig

at the idea, this offer was followed a month later by another offer: Einstein proposed to write a foreword to the book's German translation.

At the end of 1930 Albert and Elsa Einstein travelled to the United States, where they befriended Sinclair and in February 1931 attended a séance that was ruined by “hostile forces” of “doubting witnesses.”⁸⁴

Margaret Mamlok prepared a report of her analysis of Einstein's hands

Then seven years later, early March 1938, in New York, the fourth occasion presented itself in which Einstein had his hands analysed. This time the hand reader was Margaret Mamlok-Stern, a student of Carl G. Jung and Julius Spier (and two other hand readers), and wife of a leading German dental scientist, Hans-Jacques Mamlok.⁸⁵ The couple had fled from Berlin, where their house had been an international meeting place for academics, ambassadors, artists, musicians, and industrialists — presumably similar to Villa Andrae. This social network must have helped Margaret Mamlok to build a name for herself as a professional hand reader.⁸⁶ Very honoured with the opportunity to study Einstein's hands, she sent Einstein a rather long, typed report of the analysis.⁸⁷

Present during the meeting in Einstein's house was also the *Life* photographer Fritz Goro (1901–1986). The pictures he took were intended for a book entitled “Outstanding Men and Women of Our Time” that Margaret Mamlok worked on, but it never came to fruition.

From the correspondence between Mrs. Mamlok and Albert Einstein, and Fritz Goro and Einstein, it surfaces that Goro, inspired by photographing Einstein's hands, presented some of these pictures to the editors of *Life*. “LIFE

Kimbrough (1882–1961). The medium involved was Roman Ostoja (1887–1974).

84. Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 64–65; Pendle, “Einstein's close encounter.”

85. Bragdon, “The Buried Wisdom,” 20; Day, *Seeing into the Future*, 100. Margarethe (Margaret) Mamlok-Stern (1879–1953) and Hans-Jacques Mamlok (1875–1940) arrived from Berlin in New York in April 1937 (“Coincidence of Names: Mrs. Mamlok Dies at 74,” *New York Herald Tribune* on December 10, 1953).

86. Day, *Seeing into the Future*, 98.

87. AEA no. 53-920.

interessiert sich nun ausserordentlich fuer diese Bilder” (*Life* is extremely interested in these pictures), Goro informed Einstein afterwards, and he asked permission to publish them.⁸⁸ Out of a principle decided upon long ago, Einstein replied, he could not allow others to use his name for personal publicity; he only could allow permission to such publications provided that his name was unattached to the other person’s name.⁸⁹ Within two weeks one of Goro’s photos of Einstein’s hands was selected for *Life*’s article about the appearance of Einstein’s latest work (written in cooperation with Leopold Infeld), *The Evolution of Physics* (1938).⁹⁰

However, when Margaret Mamlok heard about Einstein’s reply to Goro, she was confounded. Upon receipt of the report of the hand analysis, Einstein had given her his honest commentaries. It was difficult for him to determine which statements were correct or not, all the more so because some were rather general in nature, or could have been derived from the news already known to the public at large. Einstein’s comments were generally critical, but certainly not dismissive.⁹¹ Thereupon Margaret Mamlok had offered to elaborate on the analysis – which she had prepared upon Einstein’s request – but to do so, she would need another opportunity to study Einstein’s hands.⁹² After this exchange of letters, Einstein’s message to Goro came as a shock to her: “After the friendly reception in your home, and your sympathetic attitude to the problems of chirolgy, I lack the words to tell you how hard you have hit me with the oppressive nature against me and my work,” she confessed to him.⁹³

88. AEA no. 53-925.

89. AEA no. 53-926.

90. “Einstein Simplifies Relativity,” 49. The link to Fritz Goro’s picture of Einstein’s hands in this article is <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/x-einstein-albert/7gHiVGFd3Ads9Q>.

91. AEA no. 53-921.

92. AEA no. 53-924: “Am Schluss unseres Zusammenseins überraschten Sie mich durch den Wunsch nach einer Analyse, was mich – das darf ich bei dieser Gelegenheit sagen – ausserordentlich erfreute. Es würde deshalb für mich ungeheuer viel bedeuten, wenn Sie mir noch einmal eine halbe Stunde gewähren würden, damit ich die Voraussetzungen für eine Analyse in exakter Form schaffen kann.”

93. AEA no. 53-927: “Nach der freundlichen Aufnahme in Ihrem Hause und Ihrer verständnisvollen Einstellung zu den Problemen der Chirolgie fehlen mir die Worte, um Ihnen zu sagen, w i

On the very same day Einstein explained in response that she would consider his attitude completely natural, if she looked at the matter from his point of view. Under no circumstance would he allow someone to use his name for the other's personal gain. On the other hand, Einstein reasoned it to be fully okay if she used the handprints and pictures obtained from him in her book, if it would be clear that he carried no responsibility for it. The letter ended with a note that Margaret Mamlok ought to acknowledge Einstein's effort to help her with her work, but should not take it as a base for a new attack: "Die Tatsache, dass ich Ihnen Zeit geschenkt und nach Möglichkeit zur Begünstigung Ihrer Arbeit beizutragen zu fördern gesucht habe, sollte von Ihnen anerkannt und nicht als Stützpunkt für einen neuen Angriff verwendet werden."⁹⁴ With another thank-you note from Mrs. Mamlok the correspondence between them came to an end.⁹⁵

Although, as said, the manuscript "Outstanding Men and Women of Our Time" was never published, Fritz Goro's picture of Margaret Mamlok reading Einstein's right palm, a schematic drawing of this palm, and an excerpt of the analysis were included in an article printed October 1943 (figure 5).⁹⁶ Several months later Einstein declined the invitation to aid in raising money for the "Fourth War Loan" by having his name mentioned in an advertisement for Margaret Mamlok's contribution to this fund raising event.⁹⁷ During specific hours at the warehouse Bonwit Teller, Mrs. Mamlok would read the hands for free of those who purchased a \$500 War Bond. Upon Einstein's withdrawal, the advertisements announced her as the "[i]nternationally-famed hand analyst and widow of the noted anti-Nazi Professor Hans J. Mamlok" – hence, without reference to Einstein or any other popular person.⁹⁸

e schwer Sie mich – mit der herabsetzenden Art gegen mich und meine Arbeit – getroffen haben."

94. AEA no. 53-928, translated: "The fact that I have given you time and looked for [a] possibility to contribute to promote your work, ought to be recognized by you and should not be used as a base for a new attack."

95. AEA no. 53-929.

96. Bragdon, "The Buried Wisdom," 20.

97. AEA no. 55-652.

98. Advertisements for the event have been traced in the *New York Herald Tribune* on February



Figure 5. Picture of Margaret Mamlok reading Einstein’s right palm taken by Fritz Goro, March 1938 in *The Southern Israelite* 18, no. 39 (1943): 20.

Reflection: Einstein was affected by the *Zeitgeist* and his popularity

It is remarkable that Einstein’s involvement with hand readers has been largely ignored in discussion of his interest in the paranormal or occult. Until my initial research on Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Margaret Mamlok, Einstein’s encounters with these figures had gone unremarked.⁹⁹

Perhaps the loss of knowledge about these hand readers and their practices is the result of the wider lack of interest in hand reading. It has been largely ignored in the field of esotericism, and has not attracted much study in the history of science or ideas either. This is despite the fact that in the Weimar Republic there were those who had their own proof that it “worked.” Diverse hand readers presented their profession as a genuine empirical science, even

11, 1944, and the *New York Times* on February 11, June 13 and 19, November 14, 1944, and on May 14, 1945. Cf. Nagel, “Jung, Julius Spier,” 74–75.

99. Wilfried Kugel became aware of Einstein’s meetings with Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Margaret Mamlok after he had taken notice of my research on them (Nagel, “Bracht het medium”). Supplemented by the draft of this article, it aided him in writing a new, expanded version of “Ohne Scheuklappen,” forthcoming as “Albert Einstein und die Psi-Phänomene” (personal communication with Wilfried Kugel, April 17 and August 26, 2020).

while others took advantage of the hype and deceived people. Some considered a sixth sense to be part of the art of reading hands (e.g. Issberner-Haldane, Madame Sylvia, von Schrenck-Notzing), whereas others dismissed or ignored the complex issue of the paranormal (e.g. von Kreusch, Spier).¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, during the Interbellum hand reading was in the process of transforming from a fortune telling practice into a psychologised format to aid those in need,¹⁰¹ and there were several scientists who according to academic measures did research on specific hand features like lines in the palm in connection with particular illnesses.¹⁰² With that, the hand reading discourse in Berlin has to be considered an aspect of the intricate conglomerate of science, the occult and the paranormal that is discussed, for instance, by Corinna Treitel and Egil Asprem.¹⁰³

From the material unearthed, it is obvious that Einstein was exposed to this multifaceted discourse, and in a rather private, low-key manner attended séances and experimental sessions with Otto Reimann and Mrs. Akkeringa. Together with a few others, he tried to fathom what they witnessed. Possibly Einstein was also invited by Frau Andreae when she had Julius Spier come to speak about his newly developed hand reading method called psychochirology. The fact that Einstein, at least between 1925 and 1939, let his hands be photographed, read, and drawn and sculpted (by Ray Shaw), and presumably wrote the hand reader Nellie S. Meier a letter after he had taken notice of her work, indicates that hand reading was a subject of interest to him.

Yet, Einstein's interest and openness about occult phenomena was severely hampered by his popularity, leading to his (probably rightful) feeling of being exploited by others because of his fame. As Kugel has shown in his 1994 article – and confirms in the enhanced version forthcoming – Einstein was affected

100. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 115–19, 206, 234, 252, 321–22.

101. Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochirology.”

102. Bettman, “Über die Vierfingerfuche”; Friedeman, “Handbau und Psychose”; Kühnel, “Die Konstitutionsform der Hand”; cf. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 195–96.

103. Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*; Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*.

by the occult *Zeitgeist* but rejected his interest and involvement in it. Only, he did so half-heartedly. The case of Mrs. Akkeringa illustrates that Einstein was genuinely intrigued by what he witnessed, but twisted this when queried about her. A similar reaction of distancing himself from his personal interest arose when Fritz Goro, who photographed Einstein while Margaret Mamlok read his hands, asked Einstein to allow him to publish some of those pictures. In no way did Einstein want to be quoted as if he valued hand reading in any way. On the other hand, if Goro and Mrs. Mamlok made it clear that she had read his hands but did not let Einstein's fame reflect to her, he had no objections.

Most likely Einstein judged critically what he was told about himself by Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Madame Sylvia, for that is what he did when Margaret Mamlok had sent him her analysis. After all, Einstein was, as he shared with Madame Sylvia, a Doubting Thomas.

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