

ABOUT PHOTOS OF EMMY NOETHER

PETER ROQUETTE

Few good photos of Emmy Noether are available. It would be commendable if one day someone would compile a list of the photos of her which are known. In any case it seems advisable now to point out that one of the photos which has appeared recently, enlarged and colored, on the cover of a book about Emmy Noether, is **not** Emmy Noether. Since I am, in a way, responsible for this mistake, I have been advised to explain the matter publicly. Here is the story. It is easiest for me to quote the exchange of letters about this photo, as they speak for themselves and include all relevant information.

In November, 2007 I received the following e-mail message:

Dear Professor Roquette,

I have written a biography of Emmy Noether for young readers which will be published in the spring by AK Peters.

I believe you have several photos that I would like to include, and I hope you will be willing to let me use them. Here are the subjects and their numbers that I found on the Oberwolfach web page:

- *David Hilbert #9240*
- *Emmy Noether #9267*
- *Emmy Noether #9268*
- *Ernst Fischer #9271*
- *van der Waerden #9269*
- *Hermann Weyl #9154*

If you have other photos that you recommend that I use as well, please let me know.

If possible I would like to use the picture of Noether #9267 on the cover, but I have not discussed this with Klaus Peters yet so that may change.

I appreciate your help in this.

Margaret B.W. Tent

Date: June 21, 2010.

This is a translation of my original note written in German. I am indebted to Keith Conrad for his valuable help in translating.

In fact, some time ago I had given the Oberwolfach photo collection a series of photos from my personal archives, in order to make such photos available to the mathematical public. Since then I sometimes receive requests asking if these photos can be used in one or another context. I tend to answer such questions always in the same way, namely that it was my intention to make these photos freely accessible to the mathematical public, and therefore I have no objection to a reasonable use of them. I replied to the letter in that sense:

Dear Professor Tent,

It is true that I have several photos of Emmy Noether in my archive, and that I have given copies to Oberwolfach to include them in their photo collection for use by the mathematical community. I have no objection if you or any other person uses the photos appropriately. But I would like to make it clear that this does not mean that I agree with the idea of using Emmy Noether's name in fiction stories. The responsibility for this is entirely with the author.

Regards,

Peter Roquette

I added the last two sentences because the author sent me a draft of the first chapters of her book, from which I saw that to a large extent it had fictitious stories about Emmy Noether. I am in principle no friend of the literary style of using famous names as protagonists of novels or novel-like narratives, even if it is said to be justified by the fact that it is a book for children and young people. Although I find it worthy of recognition to bring the person and the achievements of Emmy Noether to a wider public, and this is certainly not an easy task, it is not suitable, in my opinion, to invent stories for this purpose.

After some time passed, I received on June 25, 2009 from Prof. Bessenrodt (Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany) the following letter:

Dear Mr. Roquette,

I am writing this email to you about a specific issue related to Emmy Noether. A colleague from the U.S., Bhama Srinivasan, has told me of a book about Emmy Noether, for which she has recently written a review. It is called "Emmy Noether: The Mother of Modern Algebra", by M. B. W. Tent (written in a biographical style and primarily aimed at teenagers and young adults). For the cover of the book a slightly strange picture of Emmy Noether was chosen, which it is difficult to reconcile with any of the images that I know of her, and in fact it does not really appear to be Emmy Noether. (Also another reviewer wrote in his review that the image is a very unfortunate choice.) Bhama Srinivasan has found that the image is from the Oberwolfach collection, #9155 from your archive. I therefore write to you now to ask if you can give me (and Bhama Srinivasan) some more information about the image. Is it really Emmy Noether? (The person in the picture looks old and not at all like Emmy Noether.) Who is in the picture? Where and in what situation was it taken? I am grateful for any information.

With best greetings, from Hanover,

*Yours,
Christine Bessenrodt*

It took a while until I found an opportunity to look through my photo archive in the Mathematics Institute. On July 6, 2009, I was able to give the following reply:

Dear Ms. Bessenrodt,

*You have made me aware that the person on the cover of Tent's book "Emmy Noether ..." is not like the other existing portraits of Emmy Noether. I have now had the opportunity to look at my photo archive, located in the Mathematics Institute. I have found that the person in the photo in question is almost certainly **not** Emmy Noether. The following explanation is primarily meant as a note to myself, but maybe you also will have an interest in it. Please pass the text to Ms. Srinivasan and to anyone else who is interested.*

Together with the original photo, I found in my archive a letter from Margot Chow, the wife of the well known mathematician Wei-Liang Chow. I send you a copy of that document, for your information, as an attachment.

W. L. Chow was a Chinese mathematician who received his doctorate under van der Waerden in Leipzig in 1936. In the summer of 1933, he studied in Göttingen and experienced the virtual disintegration of the Institute following the dismissal of many professors by the Nazi government. Chow belonged to the group around Emmy Noether, attending a lecture in her apartment about Hasse's new proof of the Artin reciprocity law. (She was no longer allowed to give lectures at the university.) Chow was also a signatory on the petition in favor of Emmy Noether to the Kurator (Provost) of the university. (See No. 39 of the manuscripts on my homepage.)

My wife and I met W. L. (Eddie) Chow and his German wife Margot in 1954 at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and a friendship developed over the years between our families. The Chows visited us occasionally in Heidelberg. After the death of Eddie Chow in 1995, his wife Margot visited us alone. The letter in question dates from 1998.

As seen from the letter I earlier had asked Chow, as a witness of those times, to send me documents and photographs from the Göttingen period. Responding to that earlier letter, Margot had sent me a photo of Emmy Noether. Apparently, when she visited us the next time in 1998, I did not remember this and I was in doubt about whether I'd actually received the picture from her. But now, in the indicated letter, she writes that in the relevant part of her photo album there is an empty place, apparently the place with the photo of Emmy Noether – from which she concludes that indeed she had sent the photo to me.

But, she continues, in the album there is another small photo of E.N. which she includes.

I then had this other picture placed in my photo archive, under the name "Emmy Noether".

But now, after you have told me that the person in the picture does not look like Emmy Noether at all, I tend to believe that Margot Chow had been mistaken (she had never met Emmy Noether). Her husband had passed away by the time of her letter, so she could not ask him. In addition, in the original image there is a second person (a man, sitting), who looks Chinese. (This person had been cut off in the photo that went to Oberwolfach.) It seems most likely that this second person, who is looking directly at the photographer, is actually the main subject of the photo, while the woman who is turned away from the photographer is just a random stranger. Unfortunately, Margot Chow is now also dead, so she can no longer be consulted.

It was my error to place the photo, without further examination, under the name "Emmy Noether" in my archives, but I did this because of what Margot Chow had said in her letter.

I am sending you, for your information, a copy of the original photo. Its original dimensions are 4×8 cm, a common size at that time.

In any case, since now there is reason to doubt the identity of the person in question, I have asked the management of the Oberwolfach picture archive to delete the photo from there.

I want to thank you and Ms. Srinivasan for making me aware of the problem.

That there is now a strange person on the cover of Tent's book about Emmy Noether is perhaps not too bad. For in the book there are a number of fictitious statements and stories which do not really belong to E.N., so it is quite fitting that also the picture on the cover is not correct.

*Best regards,
Peter Roquette*

The letter by Margot Chow which I mentioned reads as follows:

Mrs. Margot Chow
8821 Wolverton Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21234
October 8, 1998

Dear Peter!

I truly believe that I sent you the picture of Emmy Noether at the station in Göttingen once before, at least it was no longer on that page of Eddie's photo album where it otherwise would have been. But there was still another small photo of E.N. which I send you here, along with some newspaper clippings from the period and a picture of Hermann Weyl and one of (I suspect) Hilbert.

The two days with you were wonderful and I thank you again for your cordiality.

*With lots of love to you and Erika,
Regards,
Yours Margot*

P.S. I am also including a copy of the obituary for André Weil in The New York Times, which will interest you, perhaps. M.

In response to my e-mail to Ms. Bessenrodt I received on the same day:

Dear Mr. Roquette,

Thanks for the report about the background of the photo – the story about W. L. Chow is very interesting (I immediately looked at your letter No. 39 in your list). That the photo probably is in fact not Emmy Noether, I see – like you – as an irony in relation to this novelistic biography: that just this photo was chosen from the large number of good Noether photos speaks volumes. Of course I'll inform Bhama Srinivasan about it...

Regrettably, there was a problem with the transmission of the email attachments: they were unfortunately not sent. Would you be kind enough to send me the files again, separately? Perhaps the “cut away” person in the photo is a Chinese mathematician and his colleagues in China would be able to identify him. For some time I have good contact with various colleagues there and I could ask them at the next occasion.

Once again many thanks for the detailed information!

With best regards,

Yours,

Christine Bessenrodt

I then had the documents in question, that is, a copy of the letter of Mrs. Chow and the small photo, sent at once to Ms. Bessenrodt, and she replied on July 24, 2009:

Dear Mr. Roquette,

I have had contact with a Chinese colleague who had a good idea about the Chinese person in the now much-discussed “E.N.” photo: Dr. Zeng Jiongzhi (also known as Chiungtze Tsen), doctoral candidate of Emmy Noether (Ph.D. 1934). He went to Göttingen in 1929, but died in 1940 after his return to China. On the Internet there is this photo of him:

http://tupian.hudong.com/a4_77_37_01300000190639122046376593016_jpg.html

There are also two photos of him in the Oberwolfach database (with Emmy Noether):

http://owpdb.mfo.de/person_detail?id=4275

Cordial greetings,

Christine Bessenrodt

My answer on July 26, 2009:

Dear Ms. Bessenrodt,

It seems likely that the male person in the photo and Noether's student C. Tsen are identical. But since the original image is very small, one can hardly be certain. I had collected some material about Tsen, but in view of the article by Falko Lorenz I postponed the publication for the time being.

Many thanks for your efforts! And please also convey my thanks to your Chinese colleagues.

Best regards,

Peter Roquette

Regarding the indicated article by Prof. Falko Lorenz (Münster, Germany) about Tsen, I was referring to a manuscript in my possession entitled: "Messages from books and people: Chiungtze C. Tsen" (published in the "Sitzungsberichte der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Klasse der Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt" 9 (1997/99)).

By the way, in 1933 Tsen had also signed the petition, already mentioned above, by the students who wanted Emmy Noether to be allowed to continue her work in Göttingen.

Finally, I would like to show the photo in question here. Perhaps someone recognizes the people shown in it. The picture shows a scene on the platform of the Göttingen railroad station. This is a magnified image of the original photo, whose size is 4×8 cm.



In addition, I also want to show the other photo, which Margot Chow mentioned in her letter. This photo is the image now under #9268 in the Oberwolfach photo collection. It is also a scene at the Göttingen station, this time with Emmy Noether. I have found the same photo in the Noether-archive of Clark Kimberling, where it is stated that the photo was taken by Otto Neugebauer, in the 1933 upon the departure of E. Noether to the USA. This is a magnified version.



