

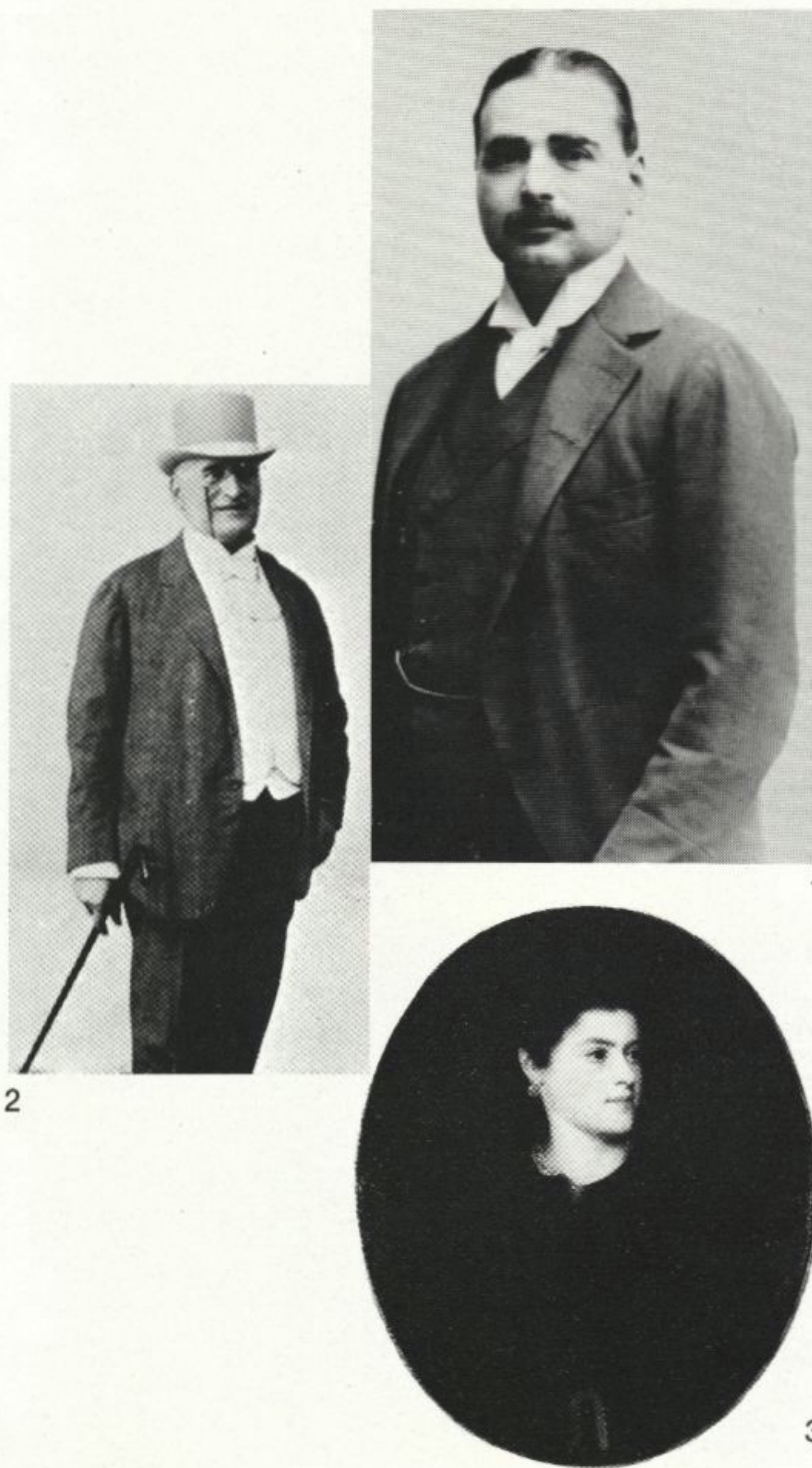
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## Fritz Waerndorfer as Collector

The name of Fritz Waerndorfer occurs at least once in almost every history of modern Viennese design. He is remembered as friend and patron of the early Secession, and especially as financial backer of the Wiener Werkstätte, which he founded together with Josef Hoffmann and Kolo Moser in the summer of 1903. Unfortunately, almost nothing has been written about the formation of his art collections, or about his remarkable commissions to Hoffmann for the decoration of a dining room, and to the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh for the design of an entire music room in Waerndorfer's house in Währing. This essay sets out to explore the background to these commissions, and discusses the probable fate of the lost Mackintosh music room.

Friedrich (Fritz) Waerndorfer was born on 5 May 1868 in Vienna, second son of Samuel and Bertha Wärdorfer, née Neumann (fig. 1–3).<sup>1</sup> His birth is recorded in the register of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, which gives the address of the parental home as Bauernmarkt 13, in Vienna's first district. The Wärdorfers were a prosperous Jewish manufacturing family, whose fortunes derived principally from cotton. Bertha Neumann's sisters, Marianne and Jenny, had married Moriz (Marcus) Benedict and Isidor Mautner respectively. Together, the three brothers-in-law owned and ran the Baumwollspinnerei Wärdorfer – Benedict – Mautner, whose principal factory was at Nachod in Bohemia. By 1897 the purchase of further factories, for example that at Günselsdorf in Lower Austria, had turned the family business into one of the largest textile concerns of the then Monarchy, with a total of some 63,000 spindles.<sup>2</sup> Little is known about Fritz Waerndorfer's artistic education. His mother used to take him to exhibitions and galleries; it was almost certainly to her he owed his interest in the visual arts.<sup>3</sup> His formal education, at Vienna's Akademisches Gymnasium, evidently left little impression on him: he was by his own account a mischievous and unruly pupil. During the early 1890s, he was sent on a protracted visit to England in connection with the family business, where he occupied himself far more with what was going on in the London museums and galleries than with the textile industry. From this period date the beginnings of his interest in modern design, which was to be a ruling passion throughout his life.

Returning to Vienna, it seems almost inevitable that he should have found himself drawn to the circle of artists who were to become the founder members of the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs — the Vienna Secession. It was perhaps due to his fellow freemason Hermann Bahr, with whom he carried on an animated and at times intimate correspondence over a period of many years, that he first became involved with the Secessionist movement. The two men shared very similar interests: Bahr's articles and essays from around the turn of the century likewise reflect his concern with the role of the applied arts, and with the modern English design movement. In a letter to Bahr dated May 1898, Waerndorfer refers approvingly to an address the former had given under the title "Kunstgewerbe und Wiener Stil".<sup>4</sup> But even without Bahr, he would probably have found his way to the Secession in the natural course of



1 Margaret Macdonald, 3 Gesso-Paneele nach Maeterlincks "Die Sieben Prinzessinnen", 1906 für den Waerndorferschen Musik-Salon ausgeführt. Aufnahme von Bedford Lemere, 1906. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, Mackintosh Collection (Foto: Museum)

2 Fritz Waerndorfer. Aufnahme um 1903. Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst. (Foto: Museum)

3 Samuel Wärdorfer (Vater von Fritz Waerndorfer). Aufnahme unbekannter Datums. Mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Frau Betty Stutz, Bed Freund.

4 Bertha Wärdorfer geb. Neumann (Mutter von Fritz Waerndorfer). Porträt c. 1850–60. Maler unbekannt. Öl auf Leinwand, 68 x 55 (unregelmäßig). Mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Frau Laura Zirner, Wien. (Foto: Autor)

Anmerkungen 1, 2 (Anm. 3–7 s. S. 35)

<sup>1</sup> *Geburtsbuch der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien*, 1868, Nr. 4574. Especially in later years, Fritz Waerndorfer preferred to write his surname thus, rather than Wärdorfer, which was the traditional spelling of the family name.

<sup>2</sup> On Isidor Mautner and his business interests see the entry in the *Oesterreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, Bd. VI, 1975, S. 164–5 and further refs.

events. The aims of the association, to break down the traditional, hierarchical distinction between the "fine" and the "applied" arts, and to bring art in Vienna into "more lively contact" with the latest development of art abroad, could scarcely fail to evoke in him a sympathetic, even enthusiastic response. By the early 1900s, he was a regular visitor to the Secession's exhibitions, even complaining that his daily visits were costing him a small fortune in admission fees.<sup>5</sup>

By 1901 at the latest, he could number among his intimate friends some of the leading Secessionists, including Hoffmann, Klimt and Kolo Moser. He seems to have been particularly devoted to Klimt, whom he always treated with great generosity. In May 1901, Waerndorfer gave a banquet in his honour, on which occasion the painter was ceremonially enthroned in a magnificent chair specially designed by Hoffmann (tablecloth and menu-cards were after designs by Moser). It was probably Waerndorfer, too, who (on the principle of doing good by stealth) tried to arrange for Klimt's studio to be re-decorated during the artist's absence at Lake Attersee during the summer of 1903 — a typically expensive gesture, but one which the artist himself, overworked and behind schedule with preparations for his big retrospective exhibition at the Secession in the autumn of that year, viewed with mixed feelings.<sup>6</sup> Waerndorfer also invited Klimt to accompany him as his guest on a visit to England in the spring of 1906 in connection with the showing of designs by the Wiener Werkstätte at the Earls Court Imperial-Royal Austrian Exhibition in London; Klimt's exhibitor's season ticket to this exhibition is preserved among the artist's papers.<sup>7</sup>

The Klimt retrospective of 1903 was marked by the appearance of a volume entitled *Gegen Klimt*, edited by Hermann Bahr. *Gegen Klimt* was an anthology of adverse criticisms of the artist's work, especially his University paintings, and was intended to show the hostility and narrow-mindedness of the Viennese press. Interestingly, it emerges from his correspondence with Bahr that it was originally Waerndorfer who conceived of publishing a collection of this kind. On 17 September he wrote: "Wir wollen vor Eröffnung der Klimt-Ausstellung die Kritiken der Wiener Blätter über K.s Philosophie, Medizin und Fries in Buchform herausgeben. Einen Teil des Materials besitze ich..." Bahr evidently took up this idea with enthusiasm, since Waerndorfer wrote again two days later: "Herrlich! Ich beneide Klimt um solch einer