

*A Footnote in Hirschberg's History of Ophthalmology:***The Rothschilds and Ophthalmologist Dr. Édouard Meyer**

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Introduction

Julius Hirschberg (1843-1925), Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Berlin, published *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde* [History of Ophthalmology] in serial editions in the Graefe Saemisch Handbuch der Augenheilkunde between 1899 and 1918. Over many years, the author had developed personal friendships with many ophthalmologists and scientists throughout the world. He devoted much of his historical writings to innovators and disseminators of German concepts and techniques which he termed "*Die Reform der Augenheilkunde*" [The Reform of Ophthalmology]. Important advances of the Reform had included the introduction of ophthalmoscopy by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894) and iridectomy for acute glaucoma by his mentor, Albrecht von Graefe (1828-1870).

As Hirschberg described in his *Geschichte*, one of his esteemed friends and colleagues was the German-born and educated Édouard Meyer (1838-1902), likewise a protégé of von Graefe.¹ After three years of work in von Graefe's clinic, Meyer departed Berlin for Paris on January 13, 1863, bringing modern, up-to-date German concepts and practices to France. In a glowing letter of introduction, von Graefe rejoiced in stating that Meyer had mastered "*parfaitement toutes les branches de l'ophtalmologie.*"

Summaries of Meyer's distinguished career and his many accomplishments may be found in Hirschberg's writings and a variety of other sources; salient details will be mentioned below. This paper will further consider some aspects of Meyer's family and personal life, particularly those relating to the genealogy of Meyer's wife (Madame Léonie Esther Meyer, née Cohen) whose genealogy as a Rothschild was misstated by Hirschberg in a footnote in his *Geschichte*. The emendation herein will also highlight a possible familial connection of Meyer's wife with the famous French general, Maxime (de Nimal) Weygand (1867-1965).

Édouard Meyer

Basic details of Meyer's personal life are found in an obituary written by his colleague and close friend, Henri Dor (1835-1912), in the *Revue générale d'Ophtalmologie* (Lyon) which had been co-founded and co-edited by Meyer and Dor in 1882.² Another obituary which appeared in the ophthalmic literature was written by Hirschberg in his journal, *Centralblatt für praktische Augenheilkunde*.³ From Dor we learn that Édouard Meyer was born in Sandersleben in the German principality of Anhalt-Dessau (Saxony) on November 13, 1838 into a family of modest means. The Jewish faith of the family, and the first names of his parents and many siblings were not mentioned. Meyer had often recounted a story from his youth wherein he

¹ Hirschberg, Julius. *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde* [History of Ophthalmology]. In Theodor Axenfeld and Anton Elschnig (eds.). *Graefe Saemisch Handbuch der gesamten Augenheilkunde*. Berlin: Julius Springer, 1918, vol 15, pt 1, §1267. III. Eduard Meyer, pp 497-499.

² Dor, H. "Nécrologie: Édouard Meyer." *Revue générale d'Ophtalmologie* 1902; 21: 385-390.

³ Hirschberg, Julius. Eduard Meyer. *Centralblatt für praktische Augenheilkunde* 1902; 26: 285-286.

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set aside money earned from tutoring in order to purchase candles for personal studies in his room at night, apparently during the course of his primary education in Dessau and his university studies at the University of Berlin.

Meyer's medical studies included work in von Graefe's clinic in 1859 even before he received his M.D. degree from the university on October 13, 1860, and he remained with von Graefe for post-graduate training through 1862. Von Graefe was only ten years older than Meyer and had begun his practice of ophthalmology on November 1, 1850 (at age twenty-two) in an inconspicuous house on Behrenstrasse in Berlin, soon thereafter receiving some of the first available ophthalmoscopes from von Helmholtz of Königsberg.⁴ Von Graefe achieved a position of preeminence in ophthalmology within a short time; two of his notable students, Louis de Wecker (1832-1906) and Richard Liebreich (1830-1917), were not far ahead of Meyer in the Berlin clinic and in preceding Meyer to Paris to establish practices. Hirschberg states that of the three, "only E. Meyer received Graefe's complete compassion." Von Graefe's recommendations carried much weight and he furthermore had many personal contacts in Paris where he had sojourned for twenty months during his own post-graduate studies including time spent with the German-born ophthalmologist Jules Sichel (1802-1868). According to Dor's aforementioned obituary of Meyer, the young émigré worked diligently to pass additional doctoral examinations in Paris, receiving his degree on February 27, 1864 with a 105-page thesis entitled, "*Du strabisme et du succès de la ténotomie.*"

Beginning soon after his French certifications in 1864, Meyer began teaching courses at the École pratique and in clinical conferences at his clinic on the rue de l'Ancienne-Comédie. He later taught in the clinics of the Dispensaire Furtado-Heine where he was head of ophthalmology and where he regularly published annual reports. Along with his colleagues, de Wecker and Liebreich, Meyer's presence and teaching in Paris helped to disseminate the concepts of von

Graefe. At this early point in his career, Meyer further published an illustrated, 400-page French translation of his mentor's textbook, *Clinique ophtalmologique par A. de Graefe* (1866) which Hirschberg described as a "meritorious service."

In 1865, in the midst of establishing himself in Paris, Meyer successfully answered the call of a military physician-colleague to visit a Parisian barracks and treat an epidemic of trachoma, resulting in the emperor conferring upon him the Cross of the Legion of Honor at the young age of twenty-seven. When Meyer was presented to the emperor, the latter reportedly stated "*Si je vous avais su aussi jeune, je vous aurais fait attendre.*" [If I knew you were so young I would have had you wait]. Despite his youth, Meyer was already showing signs of heart disease - diagnosed as "*hypertrophie du cœur*" - and at a military-medical physical examination of July 16, 1866, he was officially exempted from military service. Thereafter, over the course of many years, Meyer was unable to shake the impact of this diagnosis and, on more than one occasion, he told his friend Dor that he was counting on him to raise his children.

The Rothschilds, Édouard Meyer, and His Wife

A footnote in Hirschberg's *Geschichte* recounts an anecdote about Meyer and "*der alte Rothschild*" [the old Rothschild] presumably in reference to the founder of the French branch of the famous banking family, Baron James Mayer de Rothschild (1792-1868). However, by the time this final installment of the *Geschichte* was published, even Edmond James de Rothschild (1845-1935), the youngest son of "*der alte Rothschild*," was seventy-three years old. The footnote reads as follows in the original German and an English translation, respectively:

Der alte Rothschild, der in Kleinigkeiten sehr sparsam war, nahm den Arm seines Augen-Doktors Eduard Meyer, und, indem er ihm sagte, « das wird Ihnen nicht schaden », ging er mit ihm über die Boulevards spazieren. Übrigens hatte E. M. in der Rothschild'schen Familie seine Lebensgefährtin gefunden.

[The old Rothschild who was quite parsimo-

⁴ Snyder, Charles. "Dr. Albrecht von Graefe in Behrenstrasse will treat free of charge the eye diseases of the poor." In *Our Ophthalmic Heritage*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967, pp 13-17.

nious in little affairs, took the arm of his eye doctor Eduard Meyer, and told him « this is not going to harm you » while taking him for a promenade on the boulevards. Meyer's wife was a member of the Rothschild family].⁵

This curious footnote raises several questions.

- What was the place of the rendezvous between Meyer and Baron Rothschild, the date of this promenade, and the context of their conversation?
- Did the conversation involve career advice such as Meyer's eventual purchase of the practice of Jules Sichel which soon provided Meyer with an enormous volume of patients? - Had there been a similar, earlier connection between Sichel and Baron Rothschild who were both born in Frankfurt am Main?
- As Sichel apparently worked up to the time of his death, was the sale of his practice contemplated or consummated prior to his death?
- Did the conversation between Meyer and Baron Rothschild involve marital advice or other family matters?
- Why does Madame Meyer not appear in the genealogies of the French Rothschild branch or any other branch of the Rothschild family?

Regarding potential sites of rendezvous and promenade routes, one may consider the location of Rothschild's banking headquarters and magnificent mansion in Paris on rue Lafitte in the 9th arrondissement. This was not far from the eventual location of Meyer's clinic at 73 boulevard Haussmann in the adjacent 8th arrondissement. The stately building was then (and still is) next to a beautiful little park which is the home of the expiatory chapel of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (*Figure 1*). If Sichel's practice was discussed between Meyer and Rothschild during a promenade, it could have occurred only before Rothschild's death on November 15, 1868 and before Sichel's death on November 11, 1868 (just four days before

“der alte Rothschild”) but not long before as Sichel worked until close to his last days. A purported topic of marriage is also speculative and potentially problematic. Édouard Meyer married twenty-year-old Léonie Esther Cohen who came from very wealthy Jewish families of Marseille (France) and Livorno (Italy). Both sides of her family were, at times, involved in banking activities but without any direct connection to the Roth-



Figure 1. Modern appearance of the building which housed Meyer's private hospital and clinic, 73 boulevard Haussmann, 8th arrondissement, Paris, France.

schild banking houses. No evidence has been discovered to suggest that Baron de Rothschild had a hand in the introduction of Édouard Meyer to Mademoiselle Léonie Cohen. Perhaps, however, the eligible young woman was known to the Rothschild family: Baron James de Rothschild; Baronne Bette de Rothschild; or even their unmarried children such as the youngest son, Edmond, who was about her age.

In a later biographical encyclopedia, a summary written by W. Haberling about Meyer accurately recounted the ophthalmologist's professional career and accomplishments without much comment on personal and private matters.⁶ Eighty years after

⁵ Hirschberg, Julius. *The History of Ophthalmology*. Translated by Frederick C. Blodi. Bonn: Jean-Paul Wayenborgh, 1992, vol 11, pt 1-c, §1267. III. Eduard Meyer, pp 627–629 et seq.

⁶ Hirsch, August. *Biographisches Lexikon der hervorragenden Ärzte aller Zeiten und Völker* (German), originally published and edited [Durchgesehen und ergänzt] in 1932 by W. Haberling, F. Hübötter, and H. Vierordt; original entry by Prof. W. Haberling; special redaction ed. by E. Gurlt and A. Wernich. Munich-Berlin: Verlag von Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1962, vol. 4

Meyer's death and relying upon Hirschberg's sixty-four year-old footnote, George Gorin stated (at least partially in error) that "Meyer was the ophthalmologist of the Rothschilds and married into that influential family."⁷

James Ravin erroneously embellished the importance of the marriage, pinpointing Madame Meyer's origins as "the French branch of the Rothschild family, which brought [Édouard Meyer] additional social status."⁸

It seems quite unlikely that misinformation about the lineage of Meyer's wife came directly from Meyer. Rather than conferring any additional social status, the public dissemination of this misinformation would have been a source of severe embarrassment to the Parisian ophthalmologist. Rather, it is more likely that details of the anecdotal promenade and the wealthy banker-father of Madame Meyer became conflated in Hirschberg's mind by the time he wrote about it years after the death of Édouard Meyer. An additional footnote in Hirschberg's *Geschichte* underscores the "close relationship" between the two ophthalmologists and intimates an inadvertent nature of the error. This footnote is likewise quoted in both German and English, respectively:

Auch mir hat er, so oft ich in Paris gewesen, die größte Freundlichkeit bewiesen. Da wir aus derselben Schule hervorgegangen und nahezu gleichaltrig waren, so hatten wir natürlich die besten Beziehungen zu einander. Einige seiner nächsten Verwandten habe ich operiert und behandelt.

[He was most hospitable to me whenever I was in Paris. We both came from the same school and were nearly of the same age. We therefore had a close relationship. I operated and treated some of his close relatives.] Hirschberg's affinity for his francophone colleagues is reflected in his election to membership in the Société française d'Ophthalmologie

[French Ophthalmological Society] in 1883 during the first months of the society's existence.⁹ The establishment of the Société had initially been suggested by Paul Chibret (1844-1911) of Clermont-Ferrand. Its founding bylaws specified membership criteria unrestricted by nationality. Meyer had participated in the establishment of the society and the annual publication of its *Bulletins et Mémoires*. The French society and its bylaws were modeled after the older *Deutsche Ophthalmologische Gesellschaft* [German Ophthalmological Society].¹⁰

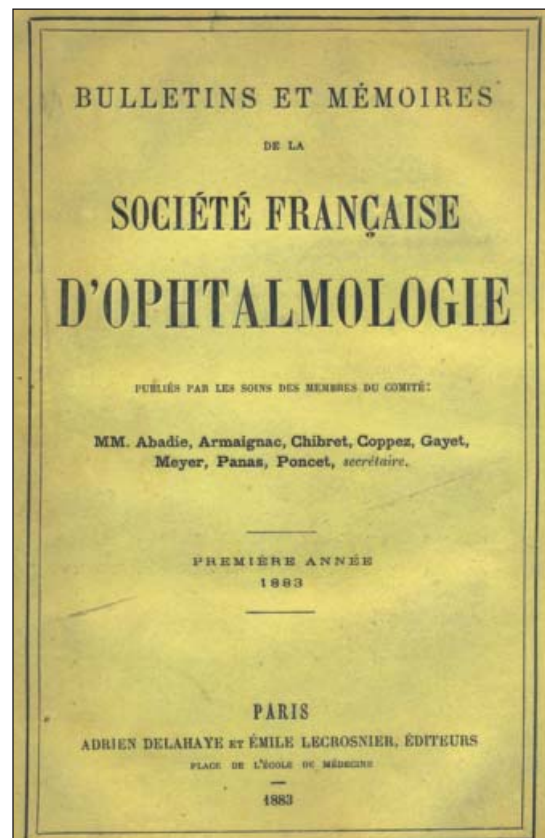


Figure 2: First issue of the Bulletins et Mémoires of the newly founded French Society of Ophthalmology. Foundation members were Abadie, Armaignac, Chibret, Coppez, Gayet, Meyer, Panas and Poncet as secretary of the new society.

(Wayenborgh Collection)

[Maack-Salzmann], p 192.

⁷ Gorin, George. *History of Ophthalmology*. Publish or Perish, Wilmington, Delaware, 1982, p 190.

⁸ James G. Ravin. "The statesman, the artist, and the ophthalmologist: Clemenceau, Lautrec, and Meyer." *JAMA Ophthalmology* formerly *Archives of Ophthalmology* 1999; 117: 951-54, downloaded from <http://archophth.jamanetwork.com/> on March 23, 2016.

⁹ *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société française d'Ophthalmologie*. 1883; 1: 1-14 & 124-125.

¹⁰ Rohrbach JM. "Festvortrag im Rahmen des Festaktes anlässlich der 105. Zusammenkunft und des 150. Geburtstages der DOG, Berlin, 21. September 2007. '150 Jahre DOG: Danken – gedenken – Gedanken,' Ceremonial Lecture on the Occasion of DOG in Berlin, 2007." *Klinische Monatsblätter für Augenheilkunde* 2007; 224: 871-880, DOI 10.1055/s-2007-963635.

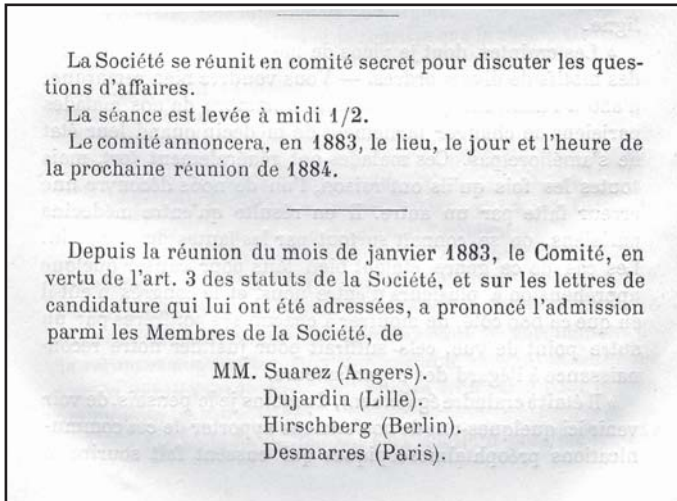


Figure 3: Hirschberg amongst the new members of the Société, the year of its foundation. On the next page we see also the names of Sedan (Alger), Wicherkerkiewicz (Posen) and Ribeiro-Santo (Bahia). This notice is dated Paris, May 1883.

Édouard Meyer, His Oculist Brother, and His Students

Although Ravin's aforementioned article stumbled a bit on the topic of Meyer's wife, his research brought to light some very fascinating information about an individual who appears to have been the brother of Édouard Meyer. This individual - first name unknown - was an itinerant fitter of spectacles - an oculist of sorts though not a physician. He appears to have been the model for the oculist in the short story, "*Comment je devins presbyte*" [How I became presbyopic], by Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), the physician-politician-journalist and future prime minister of France (1906-1909 and 1917-1920). Clemenceau's short story initially appeared in a periodical in 1894 and was published four years later in an anthology of six short stories entitled, *Au Pied du Sinai* [At the Foot of Mount Sinai] which was illustrated by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) including a lithograph depicting Clemenceau being fitted for spectacles.¹¹

Ravin presented strong evidence that Clemenceau's literary caricature of Mayer [sic], and Lautrec's lithographic caricature were based upon the brother of Édouard Meyer who "*worked in the shadow of his famous brother, and benefited from his fame.*"

¹¹ Clemenceau, Georges. *Au Pied du Sinai*. Illustrations by Henri de Toulouse Lautrec. Paris: Chamerot et Renouard for Henri Floury, 1898.

He cited a series of advertisements published in a periodical of Dijon, France in 1874 announcing the arrival of "*Monsieur Meyer, oculist from Paris, brother of the celebrated oculist Dr. Meyer, Professor of Ophthalmology at the Practical School [École pratique] of the Paris Faculty of Medicine, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.*" In yet another footnote in his *Geschichte*, Hirschberg stated that the École pratique "*provided any doctor of the faculty a room for lecturing, if he so desired. This was a pleasant solution and replaced an academic rank.*" Perhaps grudgingly, the Berlin professor acknowledged the "misused custom" of lecturers taking the

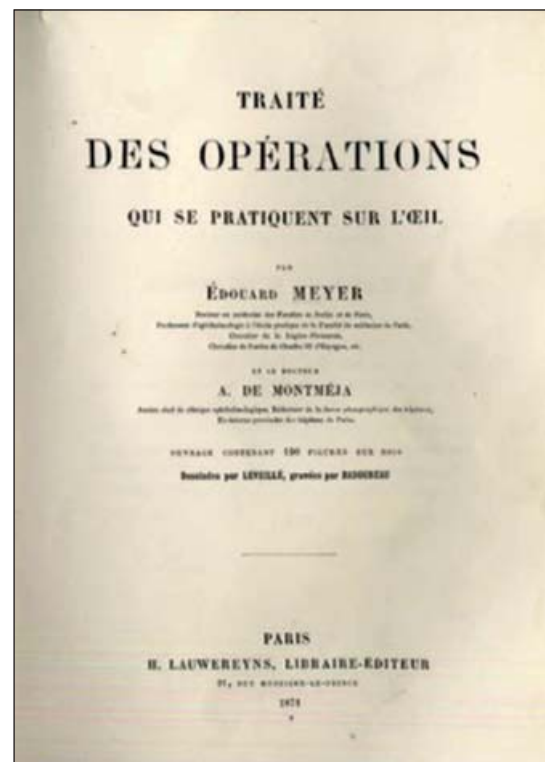


Figure 4: Title page of Meyer's *Traité des opérations qui se pratiquent sur l'œil* (1870)

right to call themselves professors; this is seen in the advertisements of Édouard Meyer's brother and in contemporary works by Édouard Meyer himself (Figure 2).

The second son of Édouard Meyer, Henri-Édouard Meyer, followed his father into a career in ophthalmology. Dor recorded that the father had inspired the thesis of his son, a contribution on the study of the scintillating scotoma of ophthalmic migraine (Paris, 1896). Édouard Meyer had hoped that

his son would take over his practice and continue his work, but Henri died at the young age of thirty of tuberculosis. Édouard Meyer also suffered from tuberculosis and in his last years he therefore placed the management of his clinic in the hands of Parisian ophthalmologist-musician-composer Pierre-Albert Kopff (1846-1908) of the Hôpital Saint-Joseph and the Furtado Heine Dispensary.¹²

According to Dor, Meyer had inspired the doctoral theses of other students even prior to the tutelage of his son, namely Deboys [Dubois] de Lavigerie, Caudron, and Debierre. An additional student of Meyer who had connections with both the Rothschild family and Meyer was Aharon Meir Mazie (1858-1930).¹³

Mazie was a polymath engineer and physician of Eastern-European Jewish origin who had just graduated from the University of Zurich Medical School with a published thesis and recommendations from his late professor, Johann Friedrich Horner (1831-1886).

Mazie studied ophthalmology with Meyer between January and October 1888 with particular research interests in trachoma which was especially endemic in the Near East. On July 24, 1888, through the help of Meyer and Paris Chief Rabbi Zadok Kahn (1839-1905), Mazie had a successful employment interview with Baron Edmond de Rothschild at his mansion on rue Lafitte wherein he was hired to serve as the physi-

cian for all of Rothschild's settlements (or "colonies"). Mazie immigrated to Palestine in October 1888 as part of the so-called First Aliyah.¹⁴

Publications of Édouard Meyer

The writings of Hirschberg and Dor may be consulted for lengthy lists of Meyer's journal publications on a wide range of ophthalmologic topics. The publication of Meyer's thesis, *Du strabisme* (1863/4) and the French translation of von Graefe's *Clinique ophtalmologique* (1866) have been mentioned above. Meyer's interest in teaching in his clinic and at the École pratique is reflected in three textbooks: first a textbook on refraction and accommodation, *Leçons sur la Réfraction et l'Accommodation* (1869) (Figure 5),¹⁵ a textbook of ophthalmic surgery, *Traité des opérations qui se pratiquent sur l'Oeil* (1870),¹⁶ and *Traité pratique des maladies des yeux* (1873)¹⁷ which appeared in many subsequent editions and translations (as enumerated below).

Traité des opérations (1870) was richly illustrated and included several photographs by Monsieur A. de Montméja, the ophthalmologist-director of an innovative photographic clinic at the Hôpital Saint-Louis. Hirschberg stated that the book sold for forty francs making this a rather expensive book. Almost 150 years later, this work was featured in an exhibition by the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Museum of

¹² "Membres décédé. MM. Kopff (Paris). Fouchard (Mans)." *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société française d'Ophtalmologie* 1908; 25: lxxiv; Sitzmann, Édouard. *Dictionnaire de Biographie des hommes célèbres de l'Alsace*, vol. 2. Rixheim: Alsace, F. Sutter & Cie, 1910 pp 68-69. Albert Kopff was born in Benfeld (Bas-Rhin), Alsace on December 22, 1846. He graduated with his medical degree from the École de Santé Militaire de Strasbourg in 1870 with a thesis on nicotine and immediately was called into service in the defense of Metz during the Franco-Prussian War. He served as a military physician in Algeria for several years and, after 1885, in Paris where he specialized in ophthalmology. He served as chief in the celebrated clinic of Xavier Galezowski (1832-1907). In 1897, Kopff established his own practice of ophthalmology in Paris on the Avenue de Messine. Kopff was equally accomplished as a pianist and composer. As an arranger he would use the pseudonym, A. Benfeld. He was a friend of Saint-Saens, who dedicated to him the *Suite algérienne*.

¹³ Barak, Smadar. *Hamesh 'Atarot: Dr. Aharon Mazie, "Rofe ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit"* [Five Crowns: Dr. Aharon Meir Mazie, "Physician of the Hebrew Language"] (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 5774/2013.

¹⁴ Reifler, David. *Days of Ticho: Empire, Mandate, Medicine and Art in the Holy Land*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing, 2015. In 1882, Baron Rothschild had begun to assume control of several Jewish Palestinian settlements. In 1887, he and wife Baroness Adelaide visited the Holy Land for the first time, the year before Mazie was hired and sent to Palestine. Mazie was initially based in Rishon Letziyon but visited many other settlements. By the time of the so-called Second Aliyah before World War I, Mazie was working in Jerusalem, a contemporary of much younger ophthalmologists such as Albert Ticho (1883-1960) and Aryeh Feigenbaum (1885-1981).

¹⁵ Meyer, Édouard. *Maladies des Yeux. Leçons sur la Réfraction et l'Accommodation: Professées à l'École Pratique de la Faculté de Médecine de Paris* [Lectures on the Accommodation and Refraction of the Eye] (French). Paris: Librairie Chamerot et Lauwereyns, 1869.

¹⁶ Meyer, Édouard. *Traité des opérations qui se pratiquent sur l'œil*. Photographs by A. de Montméja. Paris: H. Lauwereyns, 1870.

¹⁷ Meyer, Édouard. *Traité pratique des maladies des yeux*. Paris: H. Lauwereyns, 1873.

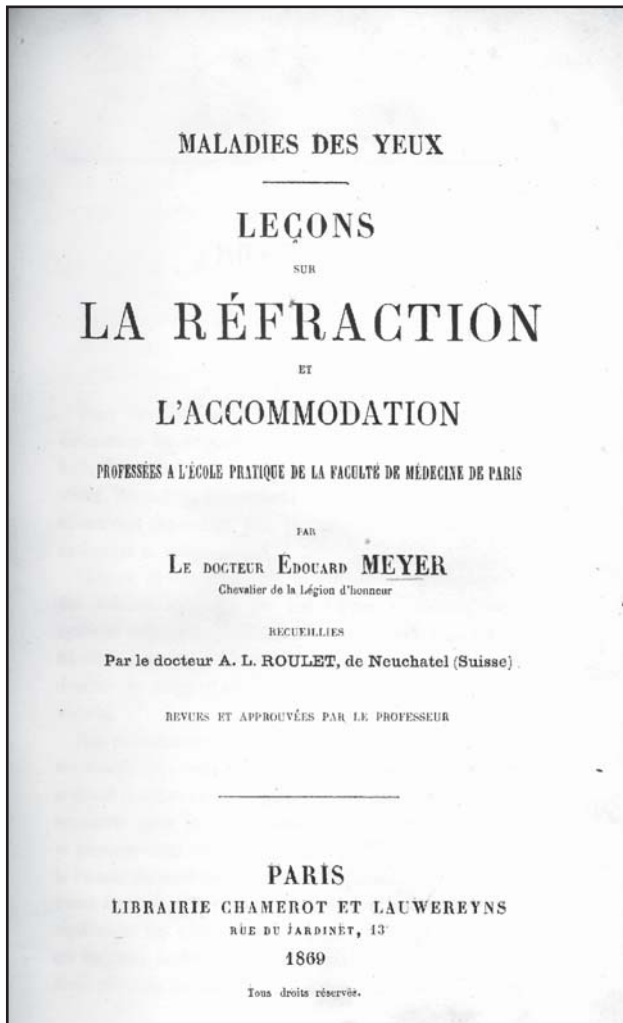


Figure 5: Title page of Meyer's *Leçons sur la Réfraction et l'Accommodation* (1869)

(Wayenborgh Collection)

Vision as an example of one of the earliest medical works to extensively use photographs in the explication of techniques and concepts.¹⁸ In addition to the 109 illustrations on woodcuts interspersed in *Traité des opérations*, there were twenty-two hand tipped-in photographic plates. One of these plates is of a posed group, Meyer seated and performing ophthalmic surgery on a patient in the company of three assistants or observers (*Figure 6*). Given technical limitations of the day and the high quality photographic images presented, the several close-up photographs of Meyer's "surgeries" at the Hôpital Saint-Louis certainly used cadavers posed as the patients (*Figure 6*). The publication of this

¹⁸ "Picturing the Eye: Ophthalmic Film and Photography." American Academy of Ophthalmology Museum of Vision Exhibitions. <http://museumofvision.org/exhibitions/>, accessed March 23, 2016.



Figure 6: Édouard Meyer (seated) with colleagues, posing with a cadaver as if performing surgery. From *Traité des opérations* (1870). Photograph by A. de Montméja.

work coincided with tremendous social and political turmoil - war, the end of the Second Empire - but as social order was reestablished, Édouard Meyer was made a naturalized citizen of the French Third Republic having remained in the French capital throughout the Siege of Paris and the Commune.¹⁹

Traité pratique des maladies des yeux, Meyer's most successful textbook, went through several editions and translations: four French editions were published in Paris (1873, 1883, 1887 and 1895) (*Figures 7, 8, and 9*); the first of three German editions in Berlin (1879); English editions in Philadelphia (1883)²⁰ and London (1887); and, according to Hirschberg, there were translations also into Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Polish. Hirschberg cited many favorable contemporary reviews. He personally felt

¹⁹ De Wecker, L[ouis]. "The Eye of Gambetta" [Translated from the French by Thomas M. Dolan]. *Midland Medical Miscellany and Provincial Medical Journal* 1882; 2 (No. 16/April 2, 1883):103-104. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in July 1870, Meyer left France for Vernex, Switzerland, but he returned to Paris on September 1st just as Napoleon III and the French cavalry charged to its defeat at the Battle of Sedan in the Ardennes. That week in Paris, Meyer witnessed the proclamation of the French Third Republic by Léon Gambetta, a one-eyed politician who was a patient of Meyer's colleague, Louis de Wecker.

²⁰ Meyer, Édouard. *A Practical Treatise on Diseases of the Eye*. Translated by Freeland Fergus. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1887.

that Albrecht von Graefe's teachings were presented in a comprehensive, easily understandable fashion, and he noted that the very

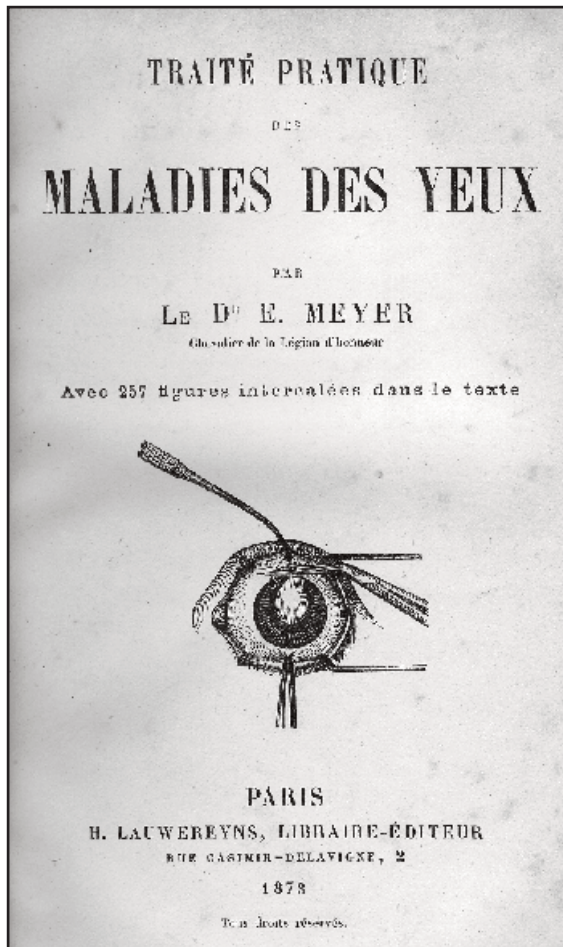


Figure 7: Meyer's *Traité pratique des Maladies des Yeux*, here in its first edition, became one of the most popular French ophthalmic treatises of that period of time. (Wayenborgh Collection)

few initial mistakes were eliminated even by the time of the first German edition. The *Revue générale d'Ophtalmologie* (founded 1870 by Meyer and Dor) also achieved a lasting legacy when it was merged into the *Archives d'Ophtalmologie* in 1936, many years after each of the co-founders' deaths.

Madame Léonie Esther Meyer, née Cohen

According to Gilbert Bloch, on March 24, 1866, twenty-seven-year-old Édouard Meyer married Léonie Esther Cohen who was three weeks shy of her twenty-first birthday.²¹

²¹ Bloch, Gilbert: David de Léon Cohen, négociant, armateur et banquier Marseillais (Gênes, 25 juin 1820 – Marseille, 8 août 1891). *Provence Historique* 1996;

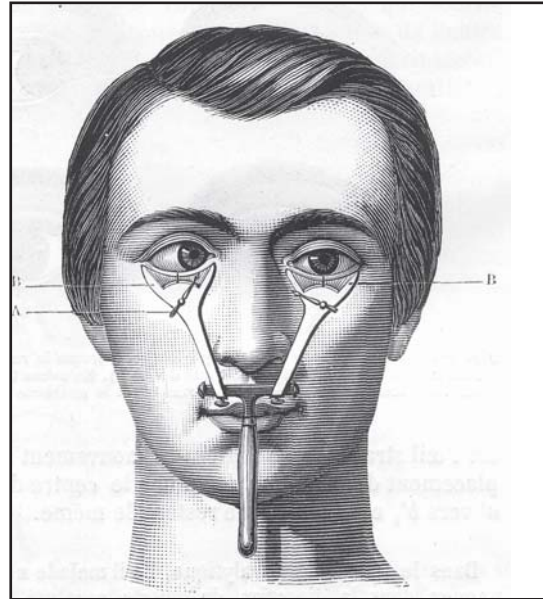


Figure 8: Meyer's Strabometer, illustration from the second edition of the *Traité Pratique*, Paris (1880) (Wayenborgh Collection)

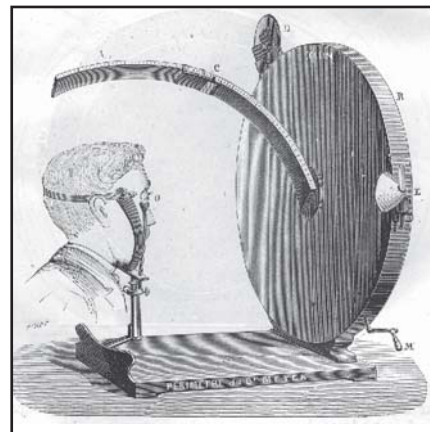


Figure 9: Meyer's Perimeter, wood cut in the second edition of the *Traité Pratique*, Paris (1880) (Wayenborgh Collection)

Léonie was born in Marseille to a family of considerable wealth and means. Her father, David de Léon Cohen (1820-1891)(Figure 10), was an entrepreneurial businessman of Marseille who played a significant role in the development of commercial relations between that city and Morocco. He did not confine his activities to just import and export but, for a period of time, was also active as an arms dealer and bank director.

Léonie's Meyer's paternal great-grandfather, Moïse Mardochée Cohen (1770-1859), was born in Vaucluse at 46(183): 27–56.

Isle-sur-Sorgue toward the end of the period when the Comtat (County) Venaissin and its Jewish population were still under the control and protection of the pope.



Figure 10: Meyer's father-in-law, David de Léon Cohen in 1879. Photograph by Camille Brion, Marseille.

Léonie's paternal grandfather, businessman Léon Cohen (1794-1859) was born in Avignon to French parents who became naturalized citizens of France through the annexation of the Comtat in 1791. Sometime after 1794, in the wake of greater freedoms and Napoleonic conquests, the Cohen family migrated to Genoa where Léon grew to maturity and married. His wife, Esther, gave him several children including David who was born there on June 25, 1820 (*Figure 5*). Although Genoa had been lost to France with the defeat of Napoleon, young David could claim French citizenship through his father, Léon and his grandfather, Moïse. David and grandfather Moïse migrated back to France and settled in Marseille, while other family members -including father Léon and Léon's older married sister Rosine Arbib- migrated further away from France along the Ligurian coast, settling in Livorno. Through the course of their migrations, the family developed several exclusive trading concessions in Morocco while maintaining interests in Italy and Tunisia. Perhaps these interests eventually involved a marital match.

The mother of Léonie Esther Meyer, Rachel Cohen (née Jalfon, 1819-1890), came from an equally prosperous family of Livorno, Italy to where Léon Cohen had migrated. The Jalfon family (Jalfoni in Italian) had various monopolies and concessions over commercial

relations with Tunisia. Rachel Cohen's parents - i.e., Madame Meyer's maternal grandparents - Léon Jalfon and Allegra Anchiovotti, died in 1835 and 1844, respectively, leaving Rachel Jalfon a wealthy and eligible twenty-five year old orphan. Almost exactly nine months following the marriage of Rachel Jalfon and David de Léon Cohen in Marseille, Madame Cohen gave birth to her only child, Léonie, in Marseille on April 15, 1845.

The marriage of David and Rachel Cohen, however, was not a happy one. Divorce in France was against the law in those days, but the couple legally separated in 1855 after eleven years of marriage. Both of the separated spouses were unable to remarry until divorce was reinstituted in France in 1884 and only David remarried.²² Remaining in Marseille, David Cohen kept a stately home ("la Maison Blanche") in the Sainte-Marguerite Banlieue de Marseille on chemin de Saint-Tronc. At various times he also maintained residences in town. David Cohen's personal attention to his Jewish faith was tenuous but he was generous toward Jewish charities and supported the construction of the Synagogue of Marseille, begun on September 22, 1864.

Léonie was just ten years old at the time of the separation of her parents in 1855 when Rachel Cohen returned to Livorno, Italy. Custody, domicile, and education arrangements for Léonie have not been fully researched, but she does not appear in census data for her father's households. However, it is not clear how much time she spent in Livorno with her mother and what role Léonie's father played in her life. The last will of David de Léon Cohen combined with patriarchal laws and customs suggest a continuing relationship. Despite a brief downturn in his fortunes in the early 1880s, the estate of David Cohen was again secure by the time of his death in 1891.

²² The physician, chemist, and politician, Alfred Naquet (1834-1916), a former professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris (and Palermo), was the leading political force behind the reinstitution of divorce in France. After a sixty-eight-year ban, divorce was reestablished in France by legislative act on July 27, 1884. At the time of his political success, Naquet represented Vaucluse in his native region of Avignon. Along with many notable physicians, Naquet is pictured in the famous group tableau painting of a Charcot demonstration, "Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière" [A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière], by Pierre Brouillet (1887).

Cohen's will provided a fifty percent share to his second wife with the remainder divided among the three children of Édouard and Léonie Meyer.

Following the wedding of Léonie Cohen and Dr. Édouard Meyer in March 1866, the couple made their home in Paris and raised three children to maturity - two sons and one daughter - Léon, Henri-Édouard who has been mentioned, and Henriette. Madame Léonie Meyer suffered from Graves' disease, ophthalmic signs of which would have been recognized by her husband. She died in Paris on January 4, 1890 at the age of forty-five, survived by her husband, her three children, and her parents, but predeceasing her mother by only a few days and her father by nineteen months. Perhaps Graves' disease-associated problems or tuberculosis contracted from her husband conspired to cut her life short.

Dor wrote that during the several last years of his life, Édouard Meyer wintered at his country home in Sainte-Marguerite outside of Marseille [near where his wife, Léonie, had spent her childhood], and he summered in the cool mountains of Switzerland.

On July 27, 1902, six weeks before his death, Meyer wrote to Dor from a sanitarium in Falkenstein outside of Frankfurt Germany, "I have been here a fortnight, and according to colleagues here, I should stay for the entire month of August. I don't complain, because I very much enjoy the stay, but this is not [your beloved] Switzerland, which I must give up forever with the greatest of regrets. Naturally, I will not be able to go to Heidelberg... and I cannot insist that you visit me here because of the obligatory silence which is a part of my treatment, rendering visits rather tiresome."

On August 26, Meyer thanked Dor for sending analyses and a report of the meeting at Heidelberg [August 4-6, 1902] which were kindly given to him by Theodor Axenfeld (1867-1930) on his way back to Freiberg.²³

²³ Greeff, Richard. "Report of the Meeting of the German Ophthalmological Society at Heidelberg, August 4-6, 1902. Translated by Dr. Ward A. Holden. *Archives of Ophthalmology* 1903; 32: 31-50, including pp 43-44 describing Axenfeld's first public demonstration of in-

Meyer died two weeks later on September 9, 1902.

David de Léon Cohen, His Second Wife, and Maxime (de Nimal) Weygand

David de Léon Cohen has attracted the attention of historians because of his role as legal guardian of a youth named Maxime de Nimal (later surnamed Weygand; 1867-1965) who went on to become an important general of the French Army in both World Wars. The circumstances of Weygand's presumably illegitimate birth have been explained by mythological speculations of noble and even royal parentage.²⁴ Throughout his life Weygand maintained he did not know the identity of his parents. The mysterious back story of his origins (and the cover stories which evolved during his childhood) ultimately facilitated his military career and advancement to the army's highest echelons. The aforementioned research of Gilbert Bloch pieces together the evidence and chronology, making a strong case that Maxime Weygand was the son of David de Léon Cohen and his longtime partner and eventual wife, Thérèse Joséphine Denimal (1837-1919) (Figure 11).

As an infant, Maxime de Nimal (the surname divided into two words), was brought from Brussels to Marseille, ostensibly to be raised by a widow, Virginie Saget, who was in Mr. Cohen's employ and lived in an adjacent domicile. Cohen provided an excellent primary education for the child, leading to his enrollment as a foreign (Belgian) cadet at the École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr. Meanwhile, the Naquet divorce law was passed on July 27, 1884 and on April 8, 1885, after a co-

trascleral nerve loops which originate from the ciliary nerves (so-called Axenfeld nerve loops).

²⁴ Paoli, Dominique. *Maxime ou le secret Weygand*. Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2003, pp 15 & 206. Many speculative and even fanciful theories have been advanced regarding the mysterious birth origins of Maxime de Nimal, the future General Maxime Weygand: the illegitimate son of either Empress Carlota of Mexico (1840-1927) or her lady-in-waiting, Mélanie Metternich-Zichy (1832-1819), by General Alfred Van der Smissen (1823-1895); as the illegitimate son of a Polish mistress of Leopold II King of the Belgians (1835-1909) who was Empress Carlota's brother and dubiously acquainted with David de Léon Cohen; King Leopold's Polish mistress; and as briefly described herein, the legitimate son of Joseph Leroy (b. 1829) and laundress Hortense-Joséphine Denimal (b. 1823).

habitating relationship of two decades, David de Léon Cohen (age 65) married Mademoiselle Denimal (age 45). There was no religious ceremony as Cohen was Jewish and his bride was Catholic. In October 1888, two months before Maxime received a commission as a second lieutenant in the 4th Cavalry Regiment, his paternity was “discovered” and acknowledged by one of Cohen’s bookkeepers, François-Joseph Weygand. By establishing French instead of Belgian citizenship, Maxime Weygand could receive an appointment as an instructor at the prestigious École de Cavalerie de Saumur and it opened important paths for a future military career.²⁵

Family and Origins of Mademoiselle Denimal.

Thérèse-Joséphine Denimal was born in suburban Brussels on November 12, 1837 (St.-Josse Ten Noode, Banlieue of Brussels), the ninth of ten children. Her father, Constant-Joseph Denimal (b. 1789), was a gardener born near the towns of Bouchain and Cambrai in the area of northern France, south of the city of Lille not far from the Belgian border. Her mother, Marie Barbe Joséphine Dumont was born in Courbevoie, a town just northwest of central Paris (its southern portion now within La Défense). In 1844, the Constant-Joseph Denimal family migrated back to France, including Thérèse’s older sister, Hortense Denimal.²⁶

Soon after David de Léon Cohen died in 1891, veuve Thérèse Cohen departed Marseille for Paris, where she could remain close to her extended family. From there she would have followed Maxime Weygand’s rise into the upper echelons of the French Army. As a

junior officer, Weygand had ironically been among the most vocal antidreyfusard (and perhaps, therefore, anti-Semitic) members of his regiment during the years of the Dreyfus Affair. This was in spite of his confirmed connections as a prior ward of David Cohen or perhaps because of them. No portion of the Cohen’s over 650,000-franc net estate had been left to him, and, as Bloch commented, this was in comparison to the annual salary of a French Army second lieutenant in that era of about 2,500 francs. In contrast, the recognized surviving grandchildren of David Cohen - the three children of Édouard Meyer and Cohen’s deceased legitimate daughter Léonie Esther Meyer - divided half of his estate. The first half of the estate had gone to his second wife, Thérèse Cohen who probably provided some ongoing support to Weygand in the early, leaner years of his military career.

Thérèse Cohen lived to see the end of World War I, indeed long enough to learn that General Maxime Weygand had personally read the terms of the armistice to his German counterparts at Compiègne in the early morning hours of November 11, 1918. When Thérèse Cohen née Denimal died in Paris on September 7, 1919, General Weygand paid the costs of her funeral and interment in a Courbevoie cemetery in the company of her parents. She chose this over a previously reserved plot in the Saint-Pierre cemetery of Marseille, just outside of but adjacent to the Jewish cemetery and the final resting place of David Cohen. Perhaps it was personally fortuitous for Weygand and his two sons, Édouard and Jacques Weygand, that no issue of his mysterious, possibly Jewish lineage had ever been a part of the general’s record. During World War II, after a brief period of collaboration, General Weygand decidedly fell out of favor with the conquering Nazi regime.

Conclusion

An error has been discovered in a footnote in Julius Hirschberg’s *History of Ophthalmology* regarding the family origins of the wife of ophthalmologist Édouard Meyer. Rather than tracing her origins to the family of Baron James de Rothschild, the lineage of Madame Léonie Esther Meyer (née Cohen) was found in descriptions of successful business and trading families of Marseille and Livorno who had only minor or short-

²⁵ Singer, Barnett. *Maxime Weygand: A Biography of the French General in Two World Wars*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008.

²⁶ Fouvez, Charles. *Le mystère Weygand*. Paris, La Table Rond, 1967. Hortense Denimal (b. May 5, 1823) gave birth to the daughter of Félix Dievoet, Henriette Louise Van Dievoet (b. January 11, 1846) who was legitimized through the marriage of the couple in Paris on May 10, 1848. Félix, Hortense, and young Henriette returned to Brussels that month but Felix died just twenty days later on May 30, 1848. Hortense eventually remarried on April 2, 1857 to Joseph Leroy (b. 1829), but she apparently led a rough-and-tumble life in difficult circumstances and neighborhoods. This older sister of Thérèse Cohen née Denimal has therefore also been implicated as the possible mother of Maxime Weygand.

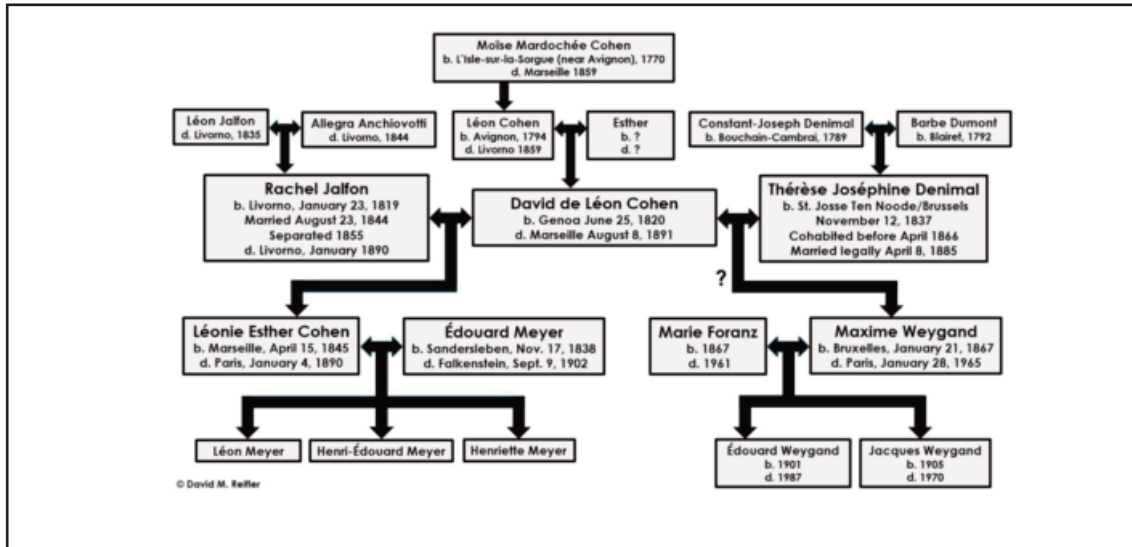


Figure 11: Family tree of Léonie Esther Meyer, née Cohen according to references cited and prepared by the author.

lived banking activities. Hirschberg's error was probably based upon faulty recollections of personal conversations with Meyer many years after the latter's death, whereby he perhaps conflated several stories: Meyer's professional services to the Rothschilds; an interesting anecdote of a doctor-patient promenade; and Madame Meyer's family of businessmen, successful though at a level far below the astounding wealth of the Rothschild family.

Further study of the intersections of between the Rothschild family, Édouard Meyer, and Meyer's student Aharon Mazie may shed light on proto-Zionist activities in Paris during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile a reexamination of Meyer's professional career and private life has revealed a surprising familial connection between Meyer's wife and General Maxime Weygand. If the histories would be so crafted in their writing, the intersecting stories could show reciprocal footnotes to summarize these connections.

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