Two New Letters of Amalia Holst

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Amalia Holst (*née* von Justi) was an important pedagogical theorist and philosopher who was part of the distinctive intellectual *milieu* of Hamburg in the late 18th and early 19th century. Holst has enjoyed a fair amount of attention from scholars working on the history of feminism,[[1]](#footnote-2) and she has recently come to the attention of historians of philosophy for her incisive critique of (Rousseau-inspired) educational theories,[[2]](#footnote-3) her vocal advocacy for women’s access to higher education,[[3]](#footnote-4) and for apparently radical lines of thinking in her views on history, religion, and morality.[[4]](#footnote-5) While Holst was something of a public figure in Hamburg—she published two controversial treatises in her lifetime, in addition to a lengthy review of a popular novel—there is relatively little known about her life, with most of what we do know owed to only a sparse handful of sources. It is, therefore, a rather significant development for scholars working on Holst that two letters by her should come to light. These letters are replete with new details of Holst’s life, her intellectual network, and her literary activity and, despite being catalogued in the holdings of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Handschriftensammlung (SUB HH), they seem to have been wholly unaccounted for by Holst’s biographers.[[5]](#footnote-6) In this article, I will provide a transcription and translation, with annotations, of the two new letters. Before that, I will offer a brief overview of what was previously known of Holst’s biography, followed by a presentation of some important aspects of the historical context relevant to understanding the letters themselves.[[6]](#footnote-7)

1. Holst’s Biography

Holst’s life[[7]](#footnote-8) is conveniently divided into three periods. The first extends from her birth in 1758 until 1790. Johanna Paulina Amalia von Justi (hereafter simply ‘Holst’) was born 10 February in 1758, though the place of her birth is unclear—it is sometimes given as Berlin, or more generally “the Prussian states,” or as Altona (a Danish territory once neighbouring Hamburg, now a part of the city). What little we know of this early part of Holst’s life is largely due to her fairly notorious father, the Prussian cameralist thinker Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–71). Von Justi was himself an active and successful intellectual—an essay he submitted on Leibniz’s monadology was the contentious winner of the prize in the Prussian Academy competition of 1747.[[8]](#footnote-9) However, von Justi would become better known through a messy public divorce and especially through the trials connected with his later appointment as as chief inspector of Prussian mines (*Berghauptmann*) in 1765, which would see him charged with embezzlement and ultimately imprisoned. This latter would prove to be a central event in young Amalia’s life. After von Justi was charged in 1768, he was confined to house arrest but either unwilling or unable to bear the cost of the guards, he was eventually removed to Küstrin prison. He advocated vigorously for his innocence, and his children assisted him in this, particularly after a botched cataract operation left him blind. Holst later notes that she tended to him until his death on 21 July 1771, and she seems to have been close to her father as at one point she considered making use of their letters to one another to write a biography of him. After von Justi’s death, the children (largely from von Justi’s first marraige) were placed in various educational institutions, while Holst’s mother moved in with her brother, a pastor in Braunschweig. Presumably, the 13 year old Holst accompanied her, but in any case nothing further is known of Holst’s biography for the next 20 years.

Concerning the second period of Holst’s life, ranging from 1791 to 1802, we know a fair bit more as this period emcompasses all of Holst’s known literary activity. Now living in Hamburg, Holst published her first book (albeit anonomously[[9]](#footnote-10)), *Bemerkungen über die Fehler unserer modernen Erziehung* (*Remarks on the Errors of our Modern Education*) in 1791, which contained an extended criticism of the method of education developed by Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–90) and Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818). Holst would marry the jurist Johann Ludolf Holst (1756–1825) in 1792, and they both worked in an educational institute in Hamburg, and together they had three children: two daughters (Emilia and Mariane) and a son (Eduard). Holst’s next publication followed in a women’s journal in 1799, and consisted of a set of “letters” that amounted to an extended review of the novel, *Elisa, oder das Weib wie es seyn sollte* (*Elisa, or Woman as she should* be) of 1795,[[10]](#footnote-11) but which nonetheless touched on a host of philosophical issues including proofs of immortality, a critique of Kantian morality, and women’s path to enlightenment. Holst’s best-known work was published soon after, in 1802, namely *Über die Bestimmung des Weibes zur höheren Geistesbildung* (*On the Vocation of Woman to higher Education of the Mind*), in which she advocates for women’s access to education on the assumption of her traditional three-fold vocation as wife, mother, and housewife.

From 1802 onwards, however, we know little with certainty about Holst’s activities. It has been reported that she opened an institute for girls in Hamburg in 1802, but there had been no documentation of its existence. Moreover, it seems that the Holsts might have left Hamburg around this time as the city registry indicates that they sold their home there, and Johann Ludolf Holst only reappears in official records in Hamburg in 1810. There is also a question as to whether the Holsts remained together during much of this period. There is no record of their divorce, but there is evidence that the pair lived separately, with Johann Ludolf residing in Hamburg from (at least) 1810 until his death in 1825, while Amalia Holst seems to have taken on a number of pedagogical projects outside of Hamburg in the meantime. So, an obituary for Holst notes that she went on to lead an educational institution in Boizenburg for a number of years, after which she returned to Hamburg and then went to Parchim, a baptismal record for her granddaughter identifies her as the leader of an educational institution in Parchim in 1819, and it seems that Amalia Holst lived with her son in Groß Timkenberg from 1823 until her death on 6 January 1829.

2. Context and Significance of the New Letters

Given how little is known of Holst’s activities in this last period of her life, it is a circumstance of no small importance that the two new letters date from this time. The first letter dates from the early portion of this period, evidently just after the publication of *Über eine Bestimmung*, and was written 29 May 1802. The second letter stems from rather late in this period, during Holst’s time of residence with her son, and was written 31 October 1824. Each letter contains vital new details about Holst’s life and activities, in addition to confirming, or supplying additional evidence for, some conjectures regarding Holst’s biography.

The first letter is written to August Hennings (1746–1826). Hennings was an important figure in the wider German Enlightenment. He was a correspondent of Moses Mendelssohn, whom he met during a posting in Berlin, and an intimate of Elise Reimarus (his older sister was married to J. A. H. Reimarus). While he was a career civil servant for the Danish government, he maintained an active profile in letters, with his own publications including works on economics, history, and politics (and one epic poem), though he also founded a number of journals that proved to be important organs for advocating for the ideals of enlightenment. Among these journals was *Der Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*The Genius of the 19th Century*), which he founded in 1801 (as a continuation of a previous effort, *Der Genius der Zeit*, founded in 1793) but which only produced 6 volumes before ceasing activity in 1802.

In the first letter, Holst writes to Hennings in connection with his journal. She indicates that she was prompted to do so on the basis of an essay on the education of the “fair sex” that appeared in the third volume,[[11]](#footnote-12) which she read with approval and as evidence of Hennings’ enlightened attitude towards women’s education. Even if he was not himself the author of the piece (which is not clear), she notes that it is consonant with the attitude evident throughout the journal itself. Having paid this compliment, and extending her husband’s regards (and sending along a copy of his latest book on maritime law), she turns to the main business of the letter, namely, securing Hennings’ support for the foundation of a girls’ school in Hamburg. Holst seems to have long had an interest in such an enterprise, but she observes that her husband would not permit her to act upon it while he remained in good health and able to devote himself to the management of an educational institution for boys. However, now that his health has taken a turn for the worse, her husband has given her his support and she is now trying to drum up interest among possible patrons for the project. Her request to Hennings, then, is actually fairly modest: that he should provide an endorsement of her project in the pages of *Genius*, which would be followed by a formal announcement of the details of the institution itself (including the limit on the number of boarders).

Among the insights found in this first letter, we find that Holst has maintained an interest in education since her “15th year,” which would suggest that she became involved in education in some capacity soon after her father’s death (and which would itself suggest that Holst received a good enough education at her parents’ hands such that that might be possible). We also find confirmation of Holst’s reported attempt to found an educational institution in Hamburg in 1802, in addition to details about other opportunities she appeared to have for similar projects in Berlin and Mecklenburg. There is also a sense of the Holsts’ delicate financial situation given that Johann Ludolf was no longer in a position to discharge his duties as an educational administrator and faced with the prospect of selling their home and belongings at a loss were they to be forced to leave Hamburg.

As it happens, Hennings’ response to Holst’s request (or at least his own copy of it) is preserved (in the extensive collection of his *Nachlass* at the SUB HH in which Holst’s letter is also included[[12]](#footnote-13)). In his letter, Hennings remarks on the coincidence that he received her husband’s book at the same time as he received Holst’s *Über die Bestimmung* back from the book-binder, and he looks forward to reading them together. Concerning her request, however, Hennings declines to offer his endorsement, vaguely suggesting that such endorsements “do more harm than good [*mehr schaden, als nützen*],” and that she should instead try to publish announcements of the project in more public organs, such as newspapers, and that once the enterprise builds up steam of its own, it will not require any endorsements in order to succeed. All that seems to come of the exchange, as far as *Genius* is concerned, is that Hennings later published a review of Johann Ludolf’s book, albeit one that did not dwell on the content of the book itself.[[13]](#footnote-14) It is difficult to gauge what the effect of Hennings’ refusal to endorse Holst’s project might have been, but if it is symptomatic of the reception that such a plan might have received among the intellectual class of Hamburg at the time, then we might surmise that the project itself never came to fruition, and indeed, that Holst was forced to look outside of Hamburg for her plan.

The second letter of Holst, from more than 20 years later, stems from an entirely different context and, evidently, a rather different set of domestic circumstances. The letter is sent from Groß Timkenberg, where Holst’s son Eduard lived, to Franz August Gottlieb (also Gottlob) Campe (1773-1836; he was usually referred to as ‘August’). August Campe, the nephew of the educational theorist Joachim Heinrich Campe (one of the targets of Holst’s early criticism), was a publisher in Hamburg who was well-connected to the intellectual scene, particularly to the Reimarus household. From Holst’s letter, written in response to Campe’s reply to her, we gather that there was considerable overlap between their respective intellectual networks as Campe seems to have made inquiries after a number of mutual acquaintances working in education, publishing, and the university in Rostock. Holst has little in the way of information about these individuals to pass along, however, since, as she puts it, she no longer stands “in any connection whatsoever with any scholarly or literary men.” That this is so might be the result of her devotion to her educational activities in the meantime, but also might owe something to her changed personal circumstances. In contrast with the first letter, there is no explicit mention of her husband, and at one point in the letter she refers rather dismissively to “a certain someone,” likely in Hamburg, who may be Johann Ludolf. An acrimonious separation from her husband might have had the effect of leaving Holst without access to their shared intellectual network.

Yet by far the most interesting part of the letter is Holst’s reference to a manuscript that she has written and is shopping around to publishers. This was the purpose of her initial mailing to Campe, and his negative response is what provokes Holst’s letter. Again, financial considerations are in play as Holst suggests that an outstanding bill cannot be paid until she succeeds in publishing the manuscript. Despite the negative response, Holst asks Campe whether he might try to find another publisher for the work, and in this she supplies an interesting detail regarding the publication of the *Über eine Bestimmung*, which Campe apparently also declined to publish but at least arranged for its publication elsewhere. Holst’s manuscript, which Holst refers to as her “*Geisteskind*” has not been preserved (nor is it not clear whether Holst sent Campe a complete manuscript or only a description of its actual or prospective contents), and there is no record of another text published by Holst from this period. Given that a number of publishers—Campe in Hamburg and C. C .Stiller in Rostock—declined to publish it, and given the parallels noted with Holst’s 1802 text, one could surmise that its subject was similarly controversial. But what is, in any case, most important is that this letter provides decisive evidence of Holst’s continued intellectual activity through to the end of her life.

3. The Letters: Transcription and Translation

Below I provide a transcription followed by a translation of Holst’s two letters. The transcription is semi-diplomatic. I have made small corrections in the German text consistent with the orthography of the time where understanding might otherwise be compromised. These include adding a double ‘m’ or ‘n’ where a macron is missing and a single consonant is not consistent with the spelling of the period; adding an omitted letter in a word (‘*Forderungen’* instead of ‘*Foderungen’*); rendering an ‘n’ as a ‘u’ where the *Bogen* is missing; otherwise I have not modernized the spelling or the grammar (including changing cases to conform to modern conventions). The punctuation in the transcription reflects the original, though I have amended this in the translation to aid in readability. All explanatory footnotes have been reserved for the translation, with the exception of a conjecture in the second letter, for which I supply a justification.

a. First Letter: Amalia Holst to August Hennings, 29 May 1802[[14]](#footnote-15)

i. Transcription

Wohlgebohrner, Verehrungswürdiger Herr!

Vor einiger Zeit laß ich im Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, eine Monathsschrift, die sich vor so vielen andern auf das vortheilhafteste auszeichnet, einen Aufsatz über die Ausbildung des schönen Geschlechts. Ich ward ganz hingerissen über die edle Sprache, die Gerechtigkeitsliebe und Bestimmtheit womit dieser Gegenstand entwickelt ist.

Ich weiß nicht ob Sie selbst der Verfasser dieses schönen Aufsatzes sind, doch gleich viel, es muß doch Ihre Ansicht seyn, sonst hätten Sie ihn nicht aufgenommen, und überdem finde ich in diesem treflichen Journal, das ich mit so innigem Vergnügen lese, überall Beweise der Billigkeit gegen das weibliche Geschlecht, und Eifer für dessen höhere Ausbildung. Und wie dies mich zur Hochschätzung solcher treflichen Männer hinreißt, die das grosse Werk unserer Veredlung befördern wollen, kann ich Ihnen mein Verehrungswürdiger nicht ausdrücken.

Auch darum schätzte ich Sie schon lange, daß Sie in Ihrer Zeitschrift gegen den herrschenden Geist der Schwärmerei und des Fanatismuß überall mit Gründen der Vernunft eifern.

Mein Gatte theilt diese Hochachtung gegen Sie mit mir, zum Beweise derselben übersendet er Ihnen hierbey sein letztes Werk über die Seerechte. Sie werden darin überall die Beweise finden, wie sehr er Ihre Verdienste auch in diesem Fache zu schätzen weiß.

Die sehr schwächliche Gesundheit meines Gatten erlaubt es ihm nicht länger, das Geschäft eines Vorstehers einer Erziehungsanstalt zu verwalten. Schon lange beseelte mich der feurige Wunsch, auch praktisch für die Bildung meines Geschlechts würken zu wollen; er aber wollte nie seine Einwilligung dazu geben, so lange er noch für das seinige thätig zu seyn, die Kräfte in sich fühlte. Jetzt aber da er es zugegeben hat, widme ich mich mit Enthusiasm einer Bildungsanstalt für junge Mädchen. Ich bin nach Berlin und Mecklenburg dazu aufgefordert worden; aber da wir in diesen Zeitläufen, so viel an unserm grossen Hause, und an dem Mobiliar, durch den Verkauf verlieren müßten; so bleibe ich lieber an Ort und Stelle.

Wie sehr würden Sie meinen Plan befördern, wenn Sie in Ihrer so sehr geschätzten Zeitschrift mich gütigst empfehlen wollten. Zu dem Ende lege ich eine Ankündigung meines Vorhabens bey, und werde so bald ich einige gewiß engagirt habe einen förmlichen Plan drucken lassen, worin ich bestimmen werde, daß die Anzahl der Kostgängerinnen nie über 12 vermehrt werden soll.

Seit meinem 15ten Jahre widmete ich mich dem Erziehungsgeschäft, und habe mit rastlosem Eifer mich bemüht, mir alle die dahin gehörigen Kenntnisse zu erstreben, und was noch mehr ist, ich treibe dies Geschäft mit Lust und Enthusiasm. Ich bin so innig überzeugt, daß nur durch die höhere Ausbildung der Weiber, die Veredlung der gesamten Menschheit zu bewürken ist.

Befördern Sie edler Mann! meinen Plan durch Ihre Empfehlung, und Sie fördern Ihr eigenes großes Werk, Veredlung des Menschengeschlechts, welches so sichtbar die Tendenz aller Ihrer Schriften ist.

Mein Gatte empfiehlt sich Ihnen achtungsvoll, und würde stoltz auf Ihren Beyfall sein. Mit der innigsten Verehrung habe ich die Ehre zu seyn

Ew. Wohlgeb.

ergebene Dienerin

Amalia Holst

Hamburg

St. Georg den 29ten Mai 1802

ii. Translation

Honourable Sir!

Some time ago, I read an essay on the education of the fair sex in *Genius of the 19th Century*, a monthly journal that distinguishes itself among so many others in the most favourable way. I was quite taken by the elevated character of the writing, the love of fairness, and the precision with which this subject was unfolded.

I do not know whether you yourself were the author of this lovely essay, but no matter as it must in any case reflect your view since otherwise you would not have accepted it; besides, I find throughout this excellent journal, which I read with such inward enjoyment, proofs of your reasonableness towards the female sex and zeal for its higher education. And how much esteem this inspires in me for those worthy men who want to support the great work of our improvement, I cannot, my honourable sir, express to you.

I have therefore also long appreciated the zeal with which you combat the prevalent spirt of excessive enthusiasm and fanaticism, always on the basis of rational grounds, in your journal.

My husband shares my high estimation of you, as a proof of which he hereby sends along his latest work on maritime law. In many places within it you will find evidence of how much he estimates your merits, even in this field.

My husband’s very weak state of health no longer permits him to manage the tasks of a headmaster of an educational institution. For some time the passionate wish to contribute practically to the education of my sex has animated me; he, however, never wanted to consent to this so long as he felt within himself the capacity to act effectively for the benefit of his own. But, now that he has relented, I will dedicate myself enthusiastically to the foundation of an educational institution for young girls. I have received invitations from Berlin and Mecklenberg for this purpose; but as things currently stand we would have to take such a loss on the sale of our large house and our furniture that I would prefer to remain in the same place and location.

My plan would find so much support were you to kindly recommend me in your highly esteemed journal. To this end I have included an announcement of my project and as soon as I have engaged a certain number [of patrons] I will have a formal plan printed up, in which I will stipulate that the number of female boarders shall never be increased beyond 12.

Since my 15th year I have dedicated myself to the business of education, and I have worked restlessly to strive to [attain] all of the knowledge proper to it. What is more, I pursue this business with pleasure and enthusiasm. I am so inwardly convinced that it is only through the higher education of women that the improvement of all humanity is to be effected.

Promote my plan, noble Sir, through your recommendation and you support your own great work, the improvement of the human race, which is so clearly the tendency of all of your writings.

My husband respectfully recommends himself to you, and would be proud to have your approval. With the utmost reverence, I have the honour of being

Your devoted servant,

Amalia Holst

Hamburg

St. George the 29th of May, 1802

b. Second Letter: Amalia Holst to Franz August Gottlieb Campe, 31 October 1824[[15]](#footnote-16)

i. Transcription

Timckenberg den 31ten October 1824

Mein sehr geschätzter Herr Campe,

Gestern erst von Buckow zurück gekehrt, eile ich Ihnen meine so lange schuldig gebliebene Antwort zu senden. Abends vor meiner Abreise von hier empfing ich erst Ihren Brief, ihn gleich zu beantworten war mir nicht möglich. Von Buckow aus ging das Anfangs auch nicht an, nach zwei jähriger Abwesenheit, haben Mutter und Tochter sich doch so viel zu erzählen. Dann hatte ich meine Emilia aus ihrem zweiten Wochenbett, dort zu verpflegen; darüber ging die Zeit hin.

Alles dieß mag zur Entschuldigung meiner Saumseligkeit dienen.

Daß Sie sich meines Manuscripts nicht annehmen wollen, hat mich sehr gekränkt. Aus der Einlage sehen Sie, daß der Herr Stiller es auch nicht befördern konnte, da ich nun einsah, daß es zur Michaelis-Messe doch zu spät ward, so tröstete ich mich mit der Jubilat-Messe.

Ich stehe jetzt durchaus mit gar keine Gelehrten, oder Literatoren in Verbindung; und da muß ich denn noch einmal supplikande bei Ihnen um Beförderung meines Geisteskindes einkommen, ich weiß das Geschöpf nicht anders als durch Ihre Patrition den Eingang ins Publikum zu verschaffen; und der vormaligen Freundschaft wegen werden Sie sich seiner annehmen das hoffe ich gewiß. Ich erinnere mich daß Sie einmals meine Bestimmung des Weibes gewissen Rücksichten halber, auch nicht selb; sondern in Leipzig verlegen ließen wenn Sie es nun mit diesem Manuscript eben so machten, es bei irgend einem andern Buchhändler empföhlen; so wäre dem Dinge ja abgeholfen, und Sie würden mich sehr verbinden.

Sie nennen den Professor Koppe meinen Freund, das war er nie, ich kenne ihn nicht einmal persönlich, er ließ mich in Parchim durch seinen Schwager, den Professor Wehnert um Einsendung meiner Bildungsgeschichte ansprechen, das war ein Finanzoperation von ihm, der ich mich nicht fügen wollte, die Herren wollen gern anderer Denkkraft und Federn zu ihrem Vortheil in Bewegung setzen. Jetzt ist er nicht mehr in Rostock sondern privatisirt in Goldberg.

Nichts konnte mich mehr befremden als die Einsendung einer rückständigen Rechnung von Ihnen; ich war der Meinung gewiß, keinem Menschen etwas schuldig zu seyn; es kann aber doch damit seine Richtigkeit haben, und die Sache so zugegangen seyn. Ich hatte an einem gewissen Jemand in Hamburg[[16]](#footnote-17) noch mehrere Forderungen, ich übertrug ihm die Bezahlung der Rechnung an Sie, das ist denn wahrscheinlich nicht geschehen; und da jetzt durchaus nichts von ihm zu haben ist; so werde, und muß ich mich zur Bezahlung derselben verstehen; aber bis zum Verkauf meines Manuscripts ist mir dies ganz unmöglich.

Wegen den Doctor Dahlmann kann ich Ihnen keine befriedigende Antwort geben, ich habe nie etwas von ihm gehört; vor 10 Jahren schon hatte der verstorbene Postrath Wildfang Galin in Pacht, gegenwärtig haußt dort der Major von Schöpfer; also muß er lange schon von dort weg gezogen seyn.

Mich Ihnen gehorsamst empfehlend habe ich die Ehre zu seyn

Ew. Wohl.

ergebene Dienerin

Amalia Holst

ii. Translation

Timckenberg the 31st of October 1824

My very esteemed Mr. Campe,

Having only just returned from Buckow yesterday, I now rush to send the answer that I have long owed to you. It was only the evening before my outward journey that I received your letter, and so answering it at once was not possible. It was also not possible to answer at the beginning of my time in Buckow since after being away for two years mother and daughter had alot of catching up to do. And then I had to tend to my Emilia there, who was recovering from giving birth her second time, and thus the time passed by.

All of this might serve in the way of excusing my tardiness.

That you do not want to accept my manuscript has upset me greatly. From the inclusion in this letter, you will see that Mr. Stiller[[17]](#footnote-18) is also not able to support it; as I now realised that it has become to late for the Fall book fair, I had comforted myself with a hope for the Easter fair.

I do not now stand in any connection whatsoever with any scholarly or literary men, and thus I have to once again come again to you as a supplicant to beg for your support of my intellectual child; I know no other way to bring the creature to the public apart from your patronage, and on account of your previous friendship I certainly hope that you would take an interest in it. I recall the time that you had my *Vocation of Woman* published—not by yourself but, on account of certain reservations, in Leipzig[[18]](#footnote-19)—and if you were to arrange the same with this manuscript, that you might recommend it to some other book dealer, that would remedy the matter and you would very much oblige me to you.

You refer to Professor Koppe[[19]](#footnote-20) as my friend, but he was never that, and I have never once met him personally. He had his brother-in-law, Professor Wehnert,[[20]](#footnote-21) contact me so that I could send him my educational history, but that was a financial initiative on his part that I did not want to join in with, as these gentlemen were eager to put the minds and pens of others in motion for their own advantage. He is no longer in Rostock but working in a private capacity in Goldberg.

Nothing could unsettle me more than the receipt of an overdue invoice from you. I was certain of my opinion that I owed nothing to no one. However, it could very well be the case and the matter may have transpired in the following way. I had a number of claims for a certain someone in Hamburg, and I entrusted him with the payment of the invoice to you, this then has probably not taken place. And since at this point nothing is to be had from him at all, I will and must repay the debt myself; however, this is entirely impossible for me until I sell my manuscript.

I cannot give you a satisfactory answer as concerns Dr. Dahlmann,[[21]](#footnote-22) as I have heard nothing from him. Ten years ago, the late Post Councillor Wildfang held the lease to Gallin, and presently Major von Schöpfer resides there[[22]](#footnote-23); he must have moved from there long ago.

Recommending myself to you most obediently, I have the honour of being

Your most devoted servant,

Amalia Holst

1. She is, for instance, among those women whose names are written on the heritage floor of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (though her first name is spelled ‘Amelia’). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As in Robert Louden, “‘A Mere Skeleton of the Sciences?’ Amalia Holst’s Critique of Basedow and Campe,” in C. W. Dyck (ed.), *Women and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2021); 72–92.. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This is emphasized in Andrew Cooper’s introduction to his edition of Holst; *On the Vocation of Women to Higher Intellectual Education* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2023); pp. ix-lvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See my “Amalia Holst on the Education of the Human Race,” in *Frauenrechte im Europa des 18. Jahrhunderts*, eds. I. Karremann and G. Stiening (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2024); pp. 161-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. I came across these letters in the Fall of 2021. I gratefully acknolwedge the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky for providing high-quality scans of the letters, and the staff at the Handschriftenlesesaal for providing me with access to the letters themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. I first brought attention to these letters in my “Amalia Holst on the Education of the Human Race”, which also provided selected transcriptions and translations from them. In addition to offering complete transcriptions (and translations), the following also corrects some errors in my initial transcriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The following draws on my account of Holst’s life and works in my “Amalia Holst on the Education of the Human Race,” pp. 162-9, to which the reader can also refer to a list of sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Dissertation qui a remporté le prix proposé par l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles Lettres sur le système des monades*. Berlin 1748 (containing Justi’s “Untersuchung der Lehre von den Monaden und einfachen Dingen, worinnen der Ungrund derselben gezeiget wird”). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The author is identified only as a “*praktische Erzieherinn*,” which would suggest that Holst had been working in an educational capacity in the meantime. As we will see this is confirmed in the first letter, below. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “Briefe an eine Freundin über *Elisa, oder das Weib, wie es seyn sollte*” was published in the monthly journal *Musarion, die Freundin weiser Geselligkeit und häuslicher Freuden*, edited by A. Lindemann. Altogether four letters were published (vol. 1 [1799], 345–61; and vol. 2 [1799], 30–52, 213–27, and 326–41). A fifth, concluding letter is mentioned at the end of the fourth letter (cf. *Musarion* [1799] vol. 2, 341) but does not seemed to have appeared. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. “Geistesbildung des schönen Geschlechts” in *Der Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* 3 (1801), pp. 318-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. SUB HH, NHA: 7: 153-4 (Hennings to Holst, 9 June 1802). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *Versuch einer kritischen Uebersicht der Völker-Seerichte* (Teil 1, 1802); reviewed in *Der Genius des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* 6 (1802), pp. 174-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. SUB HH, NHA: 11: 287-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. SUB HH, CS 2: Holst: 1–2. I should note that this letter is now available in digitized form online at: <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/M2WQHNFYUPZK26PGM5JOHUGYBZ5P5FRL>. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. In the original only ‘in Han’ is legible here with some indistinguishable marks near it at the edge of the page. My conjecture is based on the assumption that it would only have been more convenient for Holst to arrange a transfer to Campe, who was based in Hamburg, through a third-party if that party was in Hamburg as well. I also suspect that the “certain someone” is her (now estranged) husband, Johann Ludolf, who was residing in Hamburg at this time. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. This is likely Carl Christoph Stiller (1763–1836), a publisher based in Rostock. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. This appears to be a reference to the Leipzig *Buchmesse* rather than to the place of publication of Holst’s book—it was published by H. Fröhlich in Berlin. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Johann Christian Koppe (1757–1827) was a jurist and legal theorist based in Rostock, though he never seems to have held a university chair (from 1789 until his retirement in 1821 he was a university librarian and *Privatdozent* at the Universität Rostock). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Likely Johann Christian Martin Wehnert (1766–1825), rector of the *Große Stadtschule* in Parchim (for which he was given the right to hold the title Professor) and director of a private educational institution there. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. The reference here may be to Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann (1785–1860), a historian and consequential stateman (who advocated for the unification of Germany), who held a doctorate in philology and lectured at Kiel from 1812 until 1829 (at which point he accepted a position in Göttingen). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. I have not been able to find any biographical information for either of the individuals mentioned here. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)