

Abstract Submitted
for the APR05 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

Did Heisenberg Spit at Max Born? HARRY LUSTIG¹, City College of the CUNY (emeritus) — In his 1985 book “The Griffin,” Arnold Kramish quotes an unnamed “associate” of Max Born that when Heisenberg “was . . . a professor in Göttingen and when the Borns went to visit him, they were met with anti-Jewish sneers and obscenities, and in the end Heisenberg spat on the floor at Max Born’s feet!”. Kramish, in his own words, states that Heisenberg spat at Born and that the incident took place in 1933. Paul Lawrence Rose places the incident in 1953 and, on the basis of a fuller account from Kramish than the one published, identifies the associate as Born’s secretary at Edinburgh University. One may be critical of Heisenberg’s character and his behavior under the Nazis, and still be highly skeptical of the Kramish-Rose allegation. The life-long friendship between Born and Heisenberg and the respect which they displayed for each other before, during, and after the Nazi regime, has hardly been challenged by anyone. No known biography of Heisenberg mentions the alleged episode, and none of his obituaries alludes to it. There is no reference to it in Born’s autobiography. None of the historians of science, German and American, whom I have consulted credit it. Although it is difficult to prove a negative, it is highly unlikely that Heisenberg spit at Born or on the floor on which they stood.

¹Mailing address: 304 Chula Vista Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501

Harry Lustig
City College of the CUNY(emeritus)

Date submitted: 31 Jan 2005

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