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## Prehistoric archaeology in nazi Germany the role of Quaternary geologists

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**Abstract.** During the first half of the twentieth century, prehistoric archaeology in Germany to a large extent was undertaken by Quaternary geologists as part of their interest in changes in climate patterns and cave research. Between 1933 and 1945 funding for such scientific projects came to a considerable extent from the *Ahnenerbe*, essentially an SS institution with an ideologically tainted research agenda, which led to a boost of prehistoric archaeology in terms of public interest. Young geologists at the beginning of their career found prestigious employment. SS membership was a prerequisite for working at the *Ahnenerbe*. The paper documents contemporary correspondence and cooperation between proponents of prehistoric archaeology at the *Ahnenerbe* and mainstream Quaternary geologists at universities and geological surveys.

**Keywords:** Quaternary geology – prehistory – *Ahnenerbe* – national-socialism – racism – ideologically tainted research

### Quaternary Geology, Prehistory and Racism

In 1936, Paul Woldstedt (1888–1973)<sup>1</sup>, a highly respected Quaternary geologist at the Prussian Geological Survey published a paper in the *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft*<sup>2</sup>, reviewing the then current main issues of Quaternary geology, thus defining the field for a non-specialist audience: Quaternary geology dealt with two central questions, *i.e.*, the causes for changes in climate patterns and the origin and evolution of mankind. To tackle these questions, it documented a stratigraphy of the Ice Age through geomorphology, soil research, sea level changes and palynology, which it correlated with human remains and artefacts.

Consequently, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prehistoric archaeology in Germany was largely undertaken by Quaternary geologists as part of their interest in changes in climate patterns (cf. Henniges, 2017; Seibold & Seibold, 2005) and cave research (cf. Mattes, 2020), and during the 12 years of the Nazi regime, it became especially affected by its racist ideology.

Racism and particularly antisemitism, however, had infected prehistoric archaeology already before the Nazi regime took power in Germany in January 1933 (Mahsarski, 2013). For instance, the Austrian geologist and prehistorian Oswald Menghin (1888–1973)<sup>3</sup> gave a talk to members of the Nazi party NSDAP on the so-

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<sup>1</sup> Woldstedt studied geology at Freiburg and Göttingen, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1912. He then became assistant at the geographical institute of the University in Halle. In 1921, he was employed at the Prussian Geological Survey. After World War II, he became department head at the *Niedersächsisches Landesamt für Bodenforschung* in Hannover, from where he retired in 1951. In 1952, he became honorary professor at the University of Bonn ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Woldstedt](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Woldstedt); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>2</sup> The *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* was founded in 1935 and taken over by Nazi organizations in 1936. It was meant as the German answer to the British journal *Nature* and with an outlook more « appropriate for the German spirit ». *Nature* on the other hand was banned in November 1939 by the German Ministry of Science and Education (Hoßfeld & Olsson, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The Austrian Oswald Menghin studied geology in Vienna from 1906. In 1910, he obtained his doctorate degree with a prehistoric topic. Three years later, he received his *Habilitation* degree, which qualifies for a professorship. After World War I, in 1918, he became professor for prehistory at the University of Vienna. From March to June 1938, Menghin was Minister of Education, then

called « Jewish Question » already in 1923 (Urban, 2015, p. 303). After the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, Menghin was to become Minister of Education in Vienna and thus responsible for implementing the antisemitic legislation at Austrian schools and universities (Urban, 2015, p. 300–301).

The German prehistorian Lothar Zotz (1899–1967)<sup>4</sup> talked on the wireless in October 1932 in an educational feature on races in prehistory as ancestors of the German people, in which he also divided humans into progressive versus primitive « races », ending in eugenic advice (Klimetzek, 2009, p. 102–103): « Specifically, Nordic blood, and with it, Nordic genetic heritage has permeated all Germans. The task of the future is to selectively breed this genetic heritage, common to us all, in a conscious choice of spouse » (Zotz in 1932, quoted after Klimetzek, 2009, p. 103).<sup>5</sup>

Racism in prehistory was intense enough for the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*<sup>6</sup> to sponsor – in 1928 – a professorship for Franz Weidenreich (1873–1948)<sup>7</sup> in anthropology and human races at Frankfurt University, which would counter the Nazi antisemitism with a rational, scientific concept of « races » (Hartkopf, 2020, p. 48). Whereas most of his colleagues were Neo-Lamarckians, who opted for an early subdivision and separate

evolution of human « races », Weidenreich developed the still valid « out of Africa » hypothesis based on scientific observations but also promoting an anti-racist agenda.<sup>8</sup>

« *We are proceeding from the expectation that Professor Weidenreich's research work, which is being carried out from a purely scientific point of view, will serve to eliminate the confusion caused by the mixing of political points of view into the race problem and to allow its treatment from a purely factual point of view* » (Max Mainzer, head of the *Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*; quoted after Hartkopf, 2012, p. 48).<sup>9</sup>

Weidenreich himself noted in his book *Rasse und Körperbau* (race and body morphology; Weidenreich 1927):

« *This book is purely scientific in nature. Since it is about races, it is unfortunately necessary to emphasize such a matter of course. For some writers who deal with questions of race only pursue political purposes, which they try to substantiate better by cloaking their statements in scientific guise. Nevertheless, everything remains a trend, their conclusions are certain from the outset, and conflicting facts either remain unconsidered or*

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he returned to his professorship until he was dismissed in September 1945 being considered a war criminal. In 1948, he evaded prosecution by emigrating to Argentina and became a professor in Buenos Aires. In 1956, the court case against him was dropped in Austria. He died in Argentina in November 1973 (Urban, 2015, p. 300–304; <https://geschichte.univie.ac.at/de/personen/oswald-menghin-o-univ-prof-dr>, accessed 14 March 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Lothar Zotz was a soldier in World War I. Then he studied geology at the University of Freiburg i.Br., where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1924. In 1926, he became assistant at the Institute for Geology and Prehistory at Freiburg University. In 1929/30, he briefly worked as curator at the Museum for Art and Science in Hannover. In February 1930, he moved to the University of Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland). In 1933 to 1938, he worked for the *Landesamt für vorgeschichtliche Denkmalpflege* in Breslau. In 1937 he obtained his *Habilitation* degree at the University of Breslau, and in 1938 became director of the *Landesamt für Vorgeschichte* in Brandenburg. In 1939, he was appointed Professor for Prehistory at the German University in Prague, a position he lost with the end of World War II. 1946 onwards, Zotz became professor for prehistory at the University of Erlangen ([https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/proplylaeum\\_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/10880/view](https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/proplylaeum_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/10880/view), accessed 16 March 2023; [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lothar\\_Zotz](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lothar_Zotz); accessed 6 November 2017).

<sup>5</sup> « [...] Gerade nordisches Blut und mit ihm nordisches Erbgut hat alle Deutschen durchsetzt. Dieses uns allen eigenes Erbgut zu pflegen und in bewusster Gattenwahl empor zu züchten ist die Aufgabe der Zukunft » (Zotz 1932 quoted after Klimetzek, 2009, p. 103).

<sup>6</sup> *i.e.* national society of German citizens with Jewish faith

<sup>7</sup> Franz Weidenreich studied medicine and science in Munich, Kiel, Berlin and Strasbourg and obtained a medical doctorate degree in 1899. He habilitated in Strasbourg in 1902. In 1904, he was appointed professor for anatomy. In 1918 he was dismissed by French officials due to political reasons. 1921 to 1928 he was professor of haematology at the University of Heidelberg, then moved on to the University of Frankfurt and became honorary professor of anthropology and ethnology. In 1934, he emigrated to the USA as visiting professor of anatomy at the University of Chicago. In 1935, Weidenreich emigrated to China and became visiting professor of anatomy at Beijing Union Medical College, a position he occupied until 1940. In 1940, he emigrated to the USA and became affiliated with the Museum of Natural History in New York (Strauss *et al.*, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Claudine Cohen (Paris): conference talk 2015 at INHIGEO Annual Symposium in Beijing.

<sup>9</sup> « Wir gehen dabei von der Erwartung aus, dass die unter rein wissenschaftlichen Gesichtspunkten sich vollziehende Forschungsarbeit des Herrn Professor Weidenreich dazu dienen wird, die Verwirrung, die durch die Hineinmischung politischer Gesichtspunkte in das Rassenproblem gebracht wird, zu beseitigen und seine Bearbeitung unter rein sachlichen Gesichtspunkten zu bringen » (Max Mainzer; quoted after Hartkopf, 2012, p. 48).

*are reinterpreted. If the authors of such writings are laymen, they also lack the basis for an independent judgment [...] It goes without saying that they are also addressing the masses with these writings, because it is not the purpose of their journalism to ascertain the truth, but to attract followers »* (Weidenreich; quoted after Hartkopf, 2012, p. 49).<sup>10</sup>

In 1934, Weidenreich evaded the constant threat emanating from Nazi students at Frankfurt University by moving to the USA. One year later, he emigrated to China and conducted excavations on Peking Man, a subspecies of *Homo erectus*, at Zhoukoudian in northern China (Hansert, 2018). His institute was disbanded, and in 1935 the university of Frankfurt opened instead the institute for hereditary biology and racial hygiene, which was considerably better equipped in terms of space, finances and staff, and of course in line with Nazi ideology (Hartkopf, 2012, p. 57).

### Prehistory and the SS

In 1934, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) founded a department on pre- and early history within the SS administration<sup>11</sup>. This department was responsible for archaeological excavations and liaison with other bodies interested in prehistory such as university institutes, the Prussian Geological Survey – later renamed *Reichsamt für Bodenforschung* – and various museums. Until October 1937, the department was headed by geologist Rolf Höhne (1908–

1947)<sup>12</sup>. The following year, he became a department director at the *Ahnenerbe* (Halle & Mahsarski, 2013a, p. 61).

The *Ahnenerbe* had been founded by Himmler in 1935 and developed from the aforementioned organization as an institution, whose task initially was to research the archaeological and cultural history of the so-called « Aryan race » in order to prove that Nordic populations had once ruled the world and had possessed superior cultures. Thus, the outcome of « research » was ideologically predetermined (Kater 1966, 1974).

Prehistory and early history were used by German national-socialists to support their nationalist and racist goals; serving as a mediator of Nazi ideologies. In popular writings, movies, propaganda, exhibitions and training events, a « blood and soil » mythology, racial theory and the « Nordic-Germanic People » were glorified with the help of archaeological finds (Klimetzek, 2009, p. 99):

*« Nevertheless, we have already found a quite new result in our prehistoric ethnology: today's ethnological-geographical groups in Pomerania can be traced back with astonishing clarity to the last prehistoric Germanic settlement pattern, despite the Slavic period lying in between. This result is apparently of great value for the continued rigorous debate of folkish ethnology [Volkstum], because it proves how small the Slavic cultural power is »* (GA56/9-1, letter by Hellmut Agde (1909-

<sup>10</sup> « Dieses Buch hat rein wissenschaftlichen Charakter. Da es von Rassen handelt, ist es leider notwendig, eine solche Selbstverständlichkeit besonders zu betonen. Denn manche Schriftsteller, die sich mit Rassenfragen befassen, verfolgen dabei nur politische Zwecke, die sie dadurch besser zu fundieren suchen, dass sie ihre Ausführungen in ein wissenschaftliches Kleid hüllen. Gleichwohl bleibt aber alles Tendenz, ihre Schlussfolgerungen stehen von vornherein fest, und entgegenstehende Tatsachen bleiben entweder unberücksichtigt oder werden umgedeutet. Sind die Verfasser solcher Schriften Laien, so fehlen ihnen zudem die Grundlagen zu einem selbständigen Urteil [...] Daß sie sich mit diesen Schriften zugleich an die große Masse wenden, ist selbstverständlich, denn es ist nicht der Zweck ihrer Publizistik, die Wahrheit zu ermitteln, sondern Anhänger zu werben » (Weidenreich, quoted after Hartkopf, 2012, p. 49).

<sup>11</sup> *Rasse und Siedlungshauptamt der SS; i.e. SS Main Office for Race and Settlement.*

<sup>12</sup> Rolf Höhne studied geology, obtaining a doctorate degree from the University of Greifswald in 1933. Already in 1931, he had become an SS-member and a member of the Nazi party NSDAP. In February 1934, he was appointed head of department at the *Rasseamt IIIb* within the *SS-Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt*. In March 1937, he became head of the department « Excavations » and a personal assistant to Heinrich Himmler. In February 1938, Höhne and his excavations department was transferred to the *Ahnenerbe*, where he later headed the departments for geology and mineralogy. With the beginning of World War II, he was drafted as an officer into the Waffen-SS, where in April 1941, he was promoted *SS-Obersturmbannführer*. 1941/42, he commanded a battalion of military geologists. With the end of the war, Höhne was arrested and died in the prison of Bautzen (Häusler & Willig, 2000, p. 154; Kater 1974, p. 377; [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolf\\_H%C3%B6hne](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolf_H%C3%B6hne), accessed 14 March 2023).

1940)<sup>13</sup> to Wolfgang Soergel, November 25, 1937).<sup>14</sup>

Major travelling exhibitions served to popularize the concept of a « German soil » extending beyond modern national borders, thus demanding a corresponding revision of the Versailles Treaty. Consequently, prehistoric archaeology experienced a considerable boost from the Nazi elite, which contributed to a growing prestige of the subject within universities and museums (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 101):

« However, there is currently a very special situation in Germany. Prehistory has experienced a tremendous boom in recent years. German prehistory, which for decades had to fight hard for its right to exist, has now reached its goal to an extent hardly imagined before. That is certainly to be welcomed » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 101).<sup>15</sup>

In 1938, with the restructuring of the SS Main Office for Race and Settlement, its department of karst and cave research was transferred to the *Ahnenerbe*, to be headed by Walther Steinhäuser<sup>16</sup>. The new *Ahnenerbe* department now had five sub-departments: a) general karst and cave science, b) geology of karst and general geology, c) military geology, d) prehistoric cave science, palaeontology, anthropology, and e) cave surveying, which shows the subtle connections of Quaternary geology and prehistory with racism and military issues (Kater, 1974, p. 87; Schaffler, 1991, p. 47).

## Research Funding and the *Ahnenerbe*

Universities were answerable to the ministry of research, and industrial geologists were ultimately answerable to the ministry of economics or the military. Both situations guaranteed some scientific rationality even in the given totalitarian state, because the applied sciences needed to show physical results such as for instance increasing crude oil reserves in the case of contemporary petroleum geologists (Kölbl-Ebert 2018); and ultimately physical laws do not yield to ideology. The world of the *Ahnenerbe*, however, operated in accordance with different rules, because Himmler was greatly interested in esoteric practices and thus promoted « alternative » methods in institutions within his sphere of influence, but also because success of research was measured by its conformity to Nazi ideology (Kater, 1966, 1974; Kölbl-Ebert, 2017, 2018). There was, however, also significant influence of the *Ahnenerbe* on universities and museums, because between 1935 and 1945, for instance funding for research in human prehistory came to a considerable extent from the *Ahnenerbe* and thus ultimately from the SS.

In August 1937, e.g., the SS took over the excavations at the caves of Mauern in the Bavarian valley Altmühltal; the actual digging being done by – then still illegal – SS members from Austria (Kater, 1974, p. 80). The SS also funded excavations at Munzingen near Freiburg im Breisgau:

<sup>13</sup> The archaeologist and prehistorian, Hellmut Agde, was a member of the Nazi party NSDAP since 1930. He obtained his doctorate degree in 1932 from the University of Halle. 1932 to 1935, he worked at the *Landesanstalt für Volkskunde* in Halle. In 1937, he joined the SS and taught at the *Hochschule für Lehrerbildung*, which Nazi ideologists had founded in Lauenburg/Pommern (today Łębork, Poland). He obtained his *Habilitation* degree in 1939, became a soldier in World War II and was killed in action one year later in France ([https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/proplyaeum\\_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/17396/view](https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/proplyaeum_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/17396/view), accessed 23 March 2023).

<sup>14</sup> « Immerhin haben wir bereits ein recht neuartiges Ergebnis in unserer Vorgeschichte-Volkskunde gefunden: die heutigen volkskundlich-geographischen Gruppen in Pommern lassen sich mit einer erstaunlichen Klarheit auf das letzte vorgeschichtliche germanische Siedlungsbild zurückführen, trotzdem die slavische [sic] Zeit dazwischenliegt. Dieses Ergebnis ist anscheinend für die in aller Härte weitergeführte Auseinandersetzung des Volkstums von grossem Wert, denn sie beweist wie gering die slavische [sic] Kulturkraft ist » (GA56/9-1, letter by Hellmut Agde to Wolfgang Soergel, November 25, 1937).

<sup>15</sup> « Es liegt aber gegenwärtig noch eine ganz besondere Situation in Deutschland vor. In den letzten Jahren hat die *Vorgeschichte* einen ungeheuren Aufschwung erlebt. In früher kaum geahntem Umfang hat die deutsche Vorgeschichte, die jahrzehntelang schwer um ihre Daseinsberechtigung hat kämpfen müssen, jetzt ihr Ziel erreicht. Das ist gewiß außerordentlich zu begrüßen » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 101).

<sup>16</sup> Walther Steinhäuser (1908–1946) studied geology in Giessen, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1936. In 1937, he found employment at the *SS Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* in Berlin and became head of the department of karst and cave research, founded in 1938. In 1939, he was replaced by Hans Brand. In 1940, Steinhäuser became military geologist at the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* in Berlin. He died of diphtheria ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walther\\_Steinh%C3%A4user](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walther_Steinh%C3%A4user); accessed 6 April 2023).

« Furthermore, a certain decision was made about Munzingen yesterday. The consultant at Himmler's, SS-Obersturmführer Dr Höhne was here, and together with Miss Dr Schmid<sup>17</sup> [sic] and the SS-Standartenführer we were in the field. First of all, over the course of this winter, the area around the spring and the sediments in the pond will be examined. [...] Since the geological investigation involves much laboratory work and the field work also has to be carried out according to a uniform plan, I suggested that Miss Schmid takes care of that. The SS agrees » (GA56/472-12, letter by Georg Kraft to Wolfgang Soergel, September 22, 1937).<sup>18</sup>

The SS also provided grants for financing scientific publications. Becoming a member and having access to all these resources seemed tempting even for Rudolf Grahmann (1888–1962)<sup>19</sup>, who had a tenured job as survey geologist in Saxony.

« I gratefully accept your suggestion to have my monograph on Markkleeberg sponsored by the *Ahnenerbe*. In fact, the publication of this rich, impeccably early Riss<sup>20</sup> glacial material seems to me to be very urgent. [...] I would be very grateful, if I could soon

learn more about the organization, work, publications and the possibility of becoming a member of the *Ahnenerbe*. I would like to cooperate in all geological-prehistoric questions. Since, as a practical geologist, I have very little free time for scientific work with 51 office hours per week, a leave of absence might be considered. Will you please remember me » (GVA #3687, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Assien Bohmers, 20 March 1940).<sup>21</sup>

The *Ahnenerbe* employed many young people, who were at the beginning of their career and in need of a job. But often this was not the only inducement. As can be expected in an SS institution, many if not most actually were ardent national-socialists and endorsed the underlying ideology with enthusiasm. SS membership was a prerequisite for working at the *Ahnenerbe* (Halle & Mahsarski, 2013a, p. 62).

Geology was involved as handmaiden to archaeology and prehistory. Thus, several geologists worked in leading positions at archaeological excavations sponsored by the SS even though they had little or no training in history or archaeology. Julius Andree (1889-1942)<sup>22</sup> may serve as an example. He postulated the existence

<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Schmidt (1912–1994) obtained her doctorate degree in 1937 with a topic in Quaternary palaeontology from the University of Freiburg i.Br. She then worked as scientific assistant at prehistory departments of the universities in Bonn, Cologne and Freiburg, where she obtained her *Habilitation* degree in 1949 and continued to work as a prehistorian. In 1972, she became chair for prehistory at the University of Basel in Switzerland (Mohr & Vogt, 2003, p. 57).

<sup>18</sup> « Ferner ist gestern eine gewisse Entscheidung über Munzingen gefallen. Der Referent bei Himmler, Obersturmführer Dr. Höhne, war hier, und wir sind, zusammen mit Fr. Dr. Schmid und dem Standartenführer draussen gewesen. Zunächst sollen im Laufe dieses Winters die Umgebung der Quelle und die Sedimente im Weiher untersucht werden. [...] Da die geologische Bearbeitung eine Menge Laboratoriumsarbeit in sich schliesst, und auch die Feldarbeiten nach einem einheitlichen Plane ausgeführt werden müssen, habe ich vorgeschlagen, dass Fr. Dr. Schmid das übernimmt. Die SS ist damit einverstanden » (GA56/472-12, letter by Georg Kraft to Wolfgang Soergel, 22 September 1937).

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Karl Grahmann studied geology in Freiburg, Halle and Leipzig, obtaining his doctorate degree in 1918. During World War I, Grahmann was first a soldier and from 1916 onwards a military geologist. 1919 to 1937, he was a geologist at the Geological Survey of Saxony in Leipzig. In 1937, he moved to the Survey offices in Freiburg. In 1947, he left for West-Germany to continue his career at the geological survey in Hannover. He then rapidly moved on to similar positions at various survey offices in Bielefeld and Koblenz. 1954 to his death in 1962, he was honorary professor for Ice-Age research at the University of Mainz (<http://gutenberg-biographics.uni-mainz.de/id/af52651e-c318-4e45-a30e-e87edab5c363>; accessed 23 February 2023).

<sup>20</sup> The second youngest glaciation in the traditional glacial classification of the Alps.

<sup>21</sup> « Ihren Vorschlag, meine Monographie über Markkleeberg durch das *Ahnenerbe* fördern zu lassen, nehme ich sehr dankbar auf. In der Tat scheint mir die Veröffentlichung dieses reichen, einwandfrei frühiglazialen Fundstoffes sehr dringend. [...] Ich wäre Ihnen sehr dankbar, wenn ich von Ihnen bald Näheres über Organisation, Arbeiten, Veröffentlichungen und die Möglichkeit einer Mitgliedschaft des *Ahnenerbes* erfahren könnte. Ich würde gern in allen geologisch-vorgeschichtlichen Fragen mitarbeiten. Da ich als praktischer Geologe bei wöchentlich 51 Dienststunden nur sehr wenig freie Zeit für wissenschaftliche Tätigkeit habe, käme gegebenenfalls eine Beurlaubung in Betracht. Wollen Sie sich bitte meiner erinnern. » (GVA #3687, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Assien Bohmers, 20 March 1940).

<sup>22</sup> Julius Andree studied science with a focus on geology/palaeontology from 1910 to 1914, when he volunteered for military service in World War I. In 1917, he became a military geologist and obtained his doctorate degree in the same year during a leave of absence. From 1919 onwards, he worked as assistant at the geological institute in Münster. For a year and a half, he studied prehistory in Berlin, then he returned to Münster, where he obtained his *Habilitation* degree in 1924. In 1933, he was forced to give notice due to incompetence. However, he quickly found a lectureship on prehistory in Berlin. From 1935 onwards, he undertook excavations at Externsteine. In December 1938, he became affiliated with the University of Halle. In 1941, he went on

of a 250,000-year-old advanced culture at Externsteine in Germany, from which it allegedly spread, seeding cultural advancement throughout the globe, which – needless to say – was no more than national-socialist fantasy (Kater, 1974, p. 300).

Andree was a particularly shady character. In January 1933, he was dismissed from Münster university due to scientific incompetence. In 1935, he spent three months in prison, being found guilty of having levelled false accusations against employees of the Münster State Museum. The University of Halle refused to take him on, but eventually was ordered to do so by the authorities in December 1938. In Halle, Andree mainly taught racial history. In 1941, he was given leave to study Stone-Age finds in Belgium and France. At the same time, he worked for the Rosenberg Office<sup>23</sup>, which at that time was busy stealing cultural treasures throughout the territories occupied by the German military (Eberle, 2002, p. 151, 402).

Andree was supported by Fritz Wieggers (1875–1955)<sup>24</sup>, another geologist and head of the department of prehistory at the *Reichsamt für Bodenforschung* in Berlin and in 1944 appointed professor of prehistory at Göttingen University. Wieggers was an ardent Nazi, who did not hesitate to inform party officials on politically « unreliable » colleagues (Kühn & Rohrbeck, 1987, p. 32; Willig, 2008, p. 72; Röhling *et al.*, 2022).

Geologist Assien Bohmers (1912–1988)<sup>25</sup>, a Dutch nationalist endorsing a pan-Germanic ideology, worked for the *Ahnenerbe* since 1937,

and became head of its prehistory department in 1939, when Höhne switched to the department of geology and mineralogy, where Himmler tasked him to prospect for gold in the river Rhein (Eickhoff, 2013; Halle & Mahsarski, 2013b, p. 136).

Another notable figure was the palynologist Rudolf Schütrumpf (1909–1986)<sup>26</sup>, who since April 1938 was responsible for chemical, sedimentological and palynological investigations at the various *Ahnenerbe* excavation sites (Kater 1974).

Thus, there were the Quaternary geologists and prehistorians – mostly younger people – at the *Ahnenerbe* itself and on the other hand established Quaternary geologists and prehistorians at the universities, museums and geological surveys; on average older than the first group. For all of them, however, the *Ahnenerbe* was an important source for funds, which had implications for research interests, cooperation, methods and quality control.

Paul Woldstedt prostituted his science in his 1936 review paper, lobbying for Ice-Age research by offering Quaternary geology to the Nazi regime as an auxiliary science for racial studies and ideologically tainted prehistoric archaeology:

« At the end of the Ice Age, blond, white people appeared along the rim of the last European ice – a race of people that later gained enormous importance in the development of the world. Is their white colour

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leave to investigate Stone-Age finds in Belgium and France for the Rosenberg Office. While in Paris, he died suddenly, apparently of natural causes (Eberle, 2002, p. 402).

<sup>23</sup> The *Amt Rosenberg* was an official body for cultural policy and surveillance within the Nazi party NSDAP, headed by Alfred Rosenberg. It was established in 1934 with offices in Berlin (cf. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amt\\_Rosenberg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amt_Rosenberg); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Fritz Wieggers studied geology in Göttingen and Halle, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1899. 1897–1901, he worked as scientific assistant at the Technical University in Karlsruhe. He then moved to the Prussian Geological Survey in Berlin until 1939. From 1944 to 1946, when he was dismissed due to denazification, he was professor for prehistory at the University of Göttingen (<https://service.ub.ovgu.de/mbl/Biografien/1435.htm>, accessed 14 March 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Assien Bohmers, a Dutch citizen, studied geology-palaeontology at the University of Amsterdam, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1936. From 1937 onwards, he worked for the *Ahnenerbe*. In 1939, he became head of its research department in prehistory. Apparently, around that time he was based at the University of Vienna. After World War II, he worked at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands (Halle & Mahsarski, 2013b, p. 136; Kostrhun, 2009, p. 131)

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Schütrumpf was born in Austria and studied botany, zoology, chemistry and geology in Frankfurt a. M. (Germany) and Innsbruck (Austria). In 1936 he obtained his doctorate degree specializing in Quaternary palynological studies, and continued to work as palynologist for prehistoric excavation sites around Hamburg and in Brandenburg. In April 1938, he became head of the newly founded *Ahnenerbe*'s palynological laboratory. He was drafted into the military shortly after the beginning of World War II. In 1940, he became member of the SS and was promoted *SS-Obersturmführer* in 1942. During this time, he worked at the entomological institute of the Dachau Concentration Camp. After the war, he was interned for some time. He then worked for a museum in northern Germany. In 1958 he became head of the palynological laboratory at the institute for prehistory at the University of Cologne. There, he obtained his *Habilitation* degree in 1969. He retired in 1974 ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf\\_Sch%C3%BCtrumpf](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Sch%C3%BCtrumpf); accessed 14 March 2023; Halle & Mahsarski, 2013a, p. 63).

related to the great glaciation? Have they, as E. von Eickstedt (in 1934) assumes, become bleached and hardened in the face of the great ice? Here, too, the answer is: Possibly – but we don't know. – » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 94).<sup>27</sup>

« It meant a tremendous advance in knowledge – and an unimagined expansion of the field of vision, when *in Germany* [...] proof was provided that man with a certain primitive culture at least *already experienced the previous Ice Age, so that the cultural development of mankind began tens of thousands of years earlier* » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 94; his italics).<sup>28</sup>

« The entire basis of our life today developed in the *Quaternary, i.e., the Ice Age and the Post-Ice Age.* [...] Thus, Ice-Age research forms the essential basis not only for *racial research*, but above all for *prehistory* that has flourished so much in recent years. It must have its firm basis in Ice-Age research. [...] where do we come from, whereto are we going? *This problem affects us particularly closely in Germany* » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 101; his italics).<sup>29</sup>

From a letter he wrote to Edith Ebers<sup>30</sup> in January 1939, his motivation becomes clear: He planned to convince politics to fund a new, specialized institute for Ice-Age research in Berlin, an endeavour for which he hoped to find support from powerful Nazi officials such as Fritz Todt<sup>31</sup>,

who was an acquaintance or even friend of Ebers from their common time as students in Munich:

« I must have told you last summer about my plans for an Ice-Age research institute. At that time, I had submitted my proposals to both the Ministry of Science and the Kaiser Wilhelm Society. In the case of the latter, the matter does not appear to be entirely hopeless. In any case, the matter is being seriously examined. [...] In order to carry out such a thing, it is of decisive importance today whether a few prominent personalities can be interested in it. One of the personalities primarily coming into question here would be Dr Todt. Do you think it would be possible to win him over to the plan? In my opinion, in a letter to him or, even better, in an oral discussion, one should mainly explain the following: Most building projects, especially road construction, are mainly concerned with Quaternary beds. These are of such outstanding importance that it seems necessary to set up a special research institute for this purpose. A special department of this institute could also deal with the special question of landscape design, *i.e., the fitting of the buildings into the landscape.* Would you believe that such an appeal to Dr Todt might fulfil its purpose? » (GVA #22386, letter by Paul Woldstedt to Edith Ebers, 29 January 1939).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> « Am Schlusse des Eiszeitalters treten in der Umrandung des letzten europäischen Eises blonde, weiße Menschen auf – eine Menschenrasse, die später in der Entwicklung der Welt eine ungeheure Bedeutung gewann. Hängt ihre weiße Farbe mit der großen Vergletscherung zusammen? Sind sie, wie E. von Eickstedt (1934) annimmt, im Angesicht des großen Eises gebleicht und abgehärtet worden? Auch hier lautet die Antwort: Möglich – aber wir wissen es nicht. – » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 94).

<sup>28</sup> « Es bedeutete einen gewaltigen Fortschritt in der Erkenntnis [...], als *in Deutschland* [...] der Nachweis geführt wurde, daß der Mensch mit einer bestimmten primitiven Kultur zum mindesten *bereits die vorhergehende Eiszeit miterlebt* hat, daß also *die Kulturentwicklung der Menschheit um Zehntausende von Jahren früher eingesetzt hat.* » (Woldstedt, 1936, p. 94).

<sup>29</sup> « Die gesamten Grundlagen unseres heutigen Lebens haben sich im *Quartär*, d.h. der Eiszeit und Nacheiszeit, entwickelt. [...] So bildet die Eiszeitforschung die unerlässliche Grundlage nicht nur für die *Rassenforschung*, sondern vor allem für die in den letzten Jahren so sehr aufgeblühte *Vorgeschichte*. Diese muß ihre feste Basis in der Eiszeitforschung erhalten. [...] woher kommen wir, wohin gehen wir? *Dieses Problem geht uns in Deutschland ganz besonders nahe an* » (Woldstedt 1936: 101).

<sup>30</sup> Edith Ebers, née Heirich, studied geography and geology 1913 to 1919 in Heidelberg and Munich. In 1925, she obtained her doctorate degree. She was married to the artist and writer Hermann Ebers ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith\\_Ebers](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith_Ebers); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Fritz Todt was a building engineer with a doctorate degree (Dr. Ing.) from the Technical University of Munich. 1925 to 1933, he worked for the building industry, among others in road building. He was an NSDAP member since 1922. In July 1933 he became General Inspector for German roads. In May 1938 he founded the Organization Todt. It was used during World War II, e.g. in the construction of the West Wall, the Atlantic Wall, the construction of submarine bases on the French coast and in other German occupied territories. In December of the same year he became General Manager for the construction industry. From March 1940, as Reich Minister for Armaments and Munitions, he was in charge of the entire German war economy. At the end of July 1941, he also became General Inspector for Water and Energy. He died in a plane crash ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz\\_Todt](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Todt), accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>32</sup> « Im letzten Sommer erzählte ich Ihnen wohl schon von meinen Plänen betreffs eines Eiszeitforschungs-Institutes. Ich hatte damals meine Vorschläge sowohl dem Wissenschaftsministerium wie der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft eingereicht. Bei der letzteren scheint nun die Sache nicht ganz aussichtslos zu sein. Jedenfalls wird die Angelegenheit ernsthaft geprüft. [...] Für die Durchführung einer solchen Sache ist es heute von ausschlaggebender Wichtigkeit, ob es gelingt, ein paar prominente Persönlichkeiten dafür zu interessieren. Eine der hier in erster Linie in Frage kommenden Persönlichkeiten wäre Herr Dr. Todt.



## Publishing on Prehistory

With the *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Naturwissenschaft* the Ahnenerbe had its own journal beyond the reach of contemporary scientific quality control, but it was by no means the only journal, where politics became an issue. At least for foreign colleagues, to get things published, the author's political attitude towards Nazi Germany became increasingly important, apparently much more than the actual content or scientific quality of the submitted paper:

« Mr Blachowski's<sup>33</sup> work could probably be printed in the journal of the Geographical Society in Berlin. Before doing so, however, I must address a somewhat delicate question to you. I know you as a reliable scholar who endeavours to keep the relationship between Polish and German researchers as close as possible. Can you say the same about Mr Blachowski? We don't know him yet and we just want to know whether he might have come out against Germany in public. [...] You will understand, when a German editor inquires in advance so as not to expose himself to later inconveniences » (GVA#3197, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Rajmund Galon, 12 June 1936).<sup>34</sup>

Similar problems arose with German scholars, who did not conform to the racist agenda of the Nazi regime:

« Confidential! [...] As co-editor of the journal *Quartär* [i.e., Quaternary] I recently received the reprimand that colleague Zeuner<sup>35</sup> be Jewish related and an emigrant. Acceptance of Zeuner's contributions thus may cause difficulties. I know that Zeuner has a non-Aryan wife » (GA56/283-23, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Wolfgang Soergel, 28. November 1938).<sup>36</sup>

The regime also tried to exert its influence on international conferences, e.g., on the occasion of the International Anthropological Congress in Denmark, August 1938, where German authorities tried to prevent Franz Weidenreich from participating:

« Yesterday, we received a letter from the German embassy, asking if Dr W. [Weidenreich] knows that his participation in the Copenhagen Congress is undesirable!!! But it's too late, W. is already on his way to Copenhagen and fortunately we can't do anything about it. But what a scandal, what a shame [...] If he is prevented from giving his talk by this moral pressure, it will lead to

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Glauben Sie, dass es möglich wäre, ihn für den Plan zu gewinnen? In einem Schreiben an ihn oder noch besser in einer mündlichen Besprechung müsste man meines Erachtens hauptsächlich folgendes ausführen: Die meisten Bauvorhaben, vor allem die Strassenbauten, haben es in der Hauptsache mit den Schichten des Quartärs zu tun. Diese spielen an Wichtigkeit eine so überragende Rolle, dass es notwendig erscheint, hierfür ein besonderes Forschungsinstitut ins Leben zu rufen. Eine besondere Stelle dieses Institutes könnte sich auch mit der besonderen Frage der Landschaftsgestaltung, d.h. der Einpassung der Bauwerke in die Landschaft befassen. // Würden Sie glauben, dass ein solcher Appell an Herrn Dr. Todt Zweck hätte? » (GVA #22386, letter by Paul Woldstedt to Edith Ebers, 29 January 1939).

<sup>33</sup> Unidentified Polish Quaternary geologist.

<sup>34</sup> « Die Arbeit von Herrn Blachowski könnte voraussichtlich in der Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin gedruckt werden. Zuvor muß ich jedoch noch eine etwas heikle Anfrage an Sie richten. Ich kenne Sie als zuverlässigen Gelehrten, der bemüht ist, zwischen den polnischen und deutschen Forschern möglichst enge Beziehungen aufrecht zu erhalten. Können Sie das gleiche auch von Herrn Blachowski sagen? Wir kennen ihn noch nicht und wollen nur wissen, ob er nicht etwa vielleicht gar in der Öffentlichkeit gegen Deutschland hervorgetreten ist. [...] Sie werden es verstehen, wenn sich ein deutscher Schriftleiter im voraus erkundigt, um sich nicht späteren Unannehmlichkeiten auszusetzen. » GVA#3197, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Rajmund Galon, 12 June 1936).

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Eberhard [Frederick Everard] Zeuner (1905–1963) studied geology in Berlin, Tübingen and Breslau, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1927. 1925 to 1931, he was assistant at the institute for geology and palaeontology at the University of Breslau. In 1931, he moved to the University of Freiburg. In the same year, he married Ilse Levin, with whom he had two sons. In 1934, he was dismissed, because his wife was of Jewish ancestry. The family emigrated to the UK. 1934 to 1936 Zeuner was research associate for palaeontology at the Natural History Museum in London, 1936, he joined the faculty at the University of London as lecturer in geochronology at the Institute of Archaeology, 1946, he was promoted professor of environmental archaeology and head of the department of geochronology. He retired in 1963 (Strauss *et al.*, 1953, p. 1278).

<sup>36</sup> « Vertraulich! [...] Als Mitherausgeber des Jahrbuches „Quartär“ erreichte mich kürzlich der Vorwurf, dass Kollege Zeuner jüdisch versippt und Emigrant sei. Eine Aufnahme von Beiträgen Zeuners könne daher unter Umständen zu Schwierigkeiten führen. Ich weiss, dass Zeuner eine nichtarische Frau hat. » (GA56/283-23, letter by Rudolf Grahmann to Wolfgang Soergel, 28. November 1938).

international consternation » (letter by Teilhard de Chardin<sup>37</sup> to Gustav von Koenigswald, 26 July 1938, quoted after Hartkopf 2012: 68).<sup>38</sup>

The *Ahnenerbe* collected all sorts of people from mere amateurs to esoteric crackheads to trained scientists as quality was measured by conformity to the Nazi ideology. Over time, however, pressure increased on scientific standing particularly for the young SS-officers within the *Ahnenerbe*. In November 1938, Himmler ordered « to introduce the scientific goals and the scientific men into the universities to gain a foothold there » (Kater, 1974, p. 286)<sup>39</sup>. Thus, ideologically steadfast SS-scientists were supposed to infiltrate the universities, thereby increasing the Nazi party's influence even more. As a consequence, and with few exceptions, non-PhDs were slowly pushed out of the *Ahnenerbe*. Rolf Höhne (1908–1947), e.g., who had been department head for excavations now was deemed too esoteric and unscientific. In March 1938, he was replaced, transferred to another department and with the beginning of World War II silently dropped from the *Ahnenerbe* (Kater, 1974, p. 81–82). After 1939, the young *Ahnenerbe* scientists were pressured to obtain a *Habilitation* degree, i.e., to additionally qualify for a professorship, which only few – such as Assien Bohmers – achieved (Kater, 1974, p. 286).

In March 1939, the *Ahnenerbe* department for karst and cave research was transferred from Salzburg to Munich (Schaffler, 1991, p. 39), which also involved the replacement of the teacher Hans Brand (1879–1959)<sup>40</sup> as department head with the capable, young geologist Florian Heller (1905–1978)<sup>41</sup>, who was to become first an SS-member and then appointed to a newly established professorship at the University of Munich for « Scientific Karst and Cave Research ». Heller was to head « an organization in a new spirit, which primarily demands character, purity of attitude and German manner » (Hans Brand quoted after Schaffler 1991: 47).<sup>42</sup> Apparently, however, matters dragged on unsuccessfully, and Heller was denied SS-membership in November 1942 and again in June 1944 (Kater, 1974, p. 430).

As part of increasing the *Ahnenerbe*'s scientific reputation, it was also trying to clean up its self-made mess in terminology, by organizing committees for nomenclature and by commissioning model descriptions of objects, which would lead to a standardized vocabulary.

« As is well known, there is currently a confusing lack of clarity in Germany concerning terminology of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic chronology and locality designations. The

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French Jesuit, palaeontologist, anthropologist and philosopher. He was a member of several research expeditions to Asia and Africa. In China, he participated in the excavations as Zhoukoudian. As a theologian and philosopher, he attempted to synthesize the theory of evolution and Christian salvation history ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Teilhard\\_de\\_Chardin](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Teilhard_de_Chardin); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>38</sup> « Wir haben gestern einen Brief von der deutschen Botschaft erhalten, in dem sie sich erkundigt, ob Dr. W. weiß, daß seine Teilnahme am Kopenhagener Kongress unerwünscht ist!!! Doch es ist zu spät, W. ist bereits auf dem Weg nach Kopenhagen und wir können glücklicherweise nichts tun. Aber, welch ein Skandal, welche Schande [...] Falls er unter diesem moralischen Druck daran gehindert wird zu sprechen, führt das zu internationaler Bestürzung » (letter by Teilhard de Chardin to Gustav von Koenigswald, 26 July 1938, quoted after Hartkopf 2012: 68).

<sup>39</sup> « ... die wissenschaftlichen Ziele und die wissenschaftlichen Männer in die Universitäten hineinzuführen, um dort Fuß zu fassen » (Heinrich Himmler, November 1938, quoted after Kater, 1974, p. 286).

<sup>40</sup> Hans Brand was a mining engineer, who obtained a doctorate degree with at topic in the geology of ore deposits from the University of Munich in 1905. He then worked as a teacher in various schools in Holzminden, Friedberg and Munich, becoming interested in karst and cave research. Sometime before World War I, he was active as ore geologist in various European, African and Asian countries. He became an SS member in 1939, heading the *Ahnenerbe*'s karst and cave research. From 1942, he was a trainer of the military SS karst battalion, which during World War II committed numerous atrocities against the civilian population in Northern Italy and Slovenia ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Brand\\_\(Geologe\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Brand_(Geologe)), accessed 17 March 2023; Schaffler, 1991, p. 39).

<sup>41</sup> Florian Heller studied geology in Erlangen, Munich and Heidelberg. He obtained his doctorate degree in 1929 from the University of Erlangen and became assistant at the Institute for Geology and Palaeontology at the University in Halle. From 1930 onwards, he held the same position at the University in Gießen, where he also obtained his *Habilitation* degree. In 1935, he moved to Heidelberg as collection curator and lecturer. In 1942, he was promoted professor at the University of Heidelberg. He also briefly worked as military geologist. In 1945, he was dismissed during denazification. It took him until 1951, to regain a university position in Erlangen. In 1961, he was appointed full professor for palaeontology at the University of Erlangen ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florian\\_Heller\\_\(Pal%C3%A4ontologe\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florian_Heller_(Pal%C3%A4ontologe)), accessed 11 May 2023; GVA #4331, letter by Max Pfannenstiel to the mayor of Mainz, 12 December 1950; Tichy, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> « ...eine Organisation im neuen Geiste, die in erster Linie Charakter, Sauberkeit in der Gesinnung und deutsche Art fordert » (Hans Brand, quoted after Schaffler, 1991, p. 47).

systems of de Mortillet<sup>43</sup>, Wiegers, Birkner<sup>44</sup>, Riek<sup>45</sup>, Menghin, Breuil<sup>46</sup> and Peyrony<sup>47</sup> are used alternately. The designations of Mühlhofer<sup>48</sup> and Andree will be added shortly. It is obvious that this makes scientific work extraordinarily difficult; in addition, this state of affairs gives other countries reason to scoff at German prehistoric research.

To remedy this situation, some German scholars [...] have set up a provisional system for the German chronological stages.

This system [...] should be made the starting point for joint consultation. The result of this consultation should be a system that can be acknowledged by all participants and will in fact be used in the future » (GVA#10210, letter by Wolfram Sievers<sup>49</sup> to Rudolf Grahmann, 17 May 1939).<sup>50</sup>

And yet, as, e.g., Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen (1886-1960)<sup>51</sup>, director of the State Museum in Hannover, implied in a letter to Rudolf Grahmann, it was not about an internationally recognized terminology concerning hand-axes in general; it was all about German hand-axes:

« Please be so kind as to tell me where the hand axe from Zehmen is located. I would like to have an exact cast of it, as I have been commissioned by the SS to work out a description of the terminology of German hand

axes » (GVA#5080, letter by Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen to Rudolf Grahmann, 23 October 1939).<sup>52</sup>

### War Time Research

During World War II, prehistory as handmaiden to Nazi ideology lost its immediate importance, and the *Ahnenerbe* too had to contribute to the war effort. Thus, the focus shifted more into geology and its applications. Already since 1938, the *Ahnenerbe* had a Department for Geology and Mineralogy and a Department for Karst and Caves, the latter including sub-departments, e.g., on military geology, palaeontology and prehistory (Kater, 1974, p. 87).

With the advent of the war and its massive escalation over the following years, people turned their interests to military geology; karst and caves as natural bunkers, hiding places and storage facilities; theft of cultural objects, natural history specimens, maps and books from private collection, museums and libraries in the German occupied territories; all the way to participating in so-called « medical research » on concentration camp prisoners, depending on personal interests, abilities and lack of scruples.

Rudolf Schüttrumpf exchanged palynology with entomology, joining the *Ahnenerbe*'s Entomo-

<sup>43</sup> Louis Laurent Gabriel de Mortillet (1821–1898), French prehistorian ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel\\_de\\_Mortillet](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_de_Mortillet); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>44</sup> Ferdinand Birkner (1868–1944), German prehistorian ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand\\_Birkner](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_Birkner); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>45</sup> Gustav Riek (1900–1976), German prehistorian (see below).

<sup>46</sup> Henri Breuil (1877–1961), French prehistorian and Catholic priest ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Breuil](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Breuil); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Denis Peyrony (1869–1954), French prehistorian ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denis\\_Peyrony](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denis_Peyrony); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>48</sup> Franz Mühlhofer (1881–1955), Austrian cave researcher (see below).

<sup>49</sup> Wolfram Sievers (1905–1948) studied history, philosophy and religious studies at the Technical University of Stuttgart. He was *Reichsgeschäftsführer* [managing director] of the *Ahnenerbe* 1935 to 1945. In this capacity, he was also responsible for cruel « medical experiments » on and murder of prisoners at Dachau Concentration Camp. He was executed for crimes against humanity (Meier-Hüsing, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> « Auf dem Gebiet der paläolithischen und mesolithischen Zeitstufen- und Fundgruppenbezeichnungen herrscht bekanntlich zur Zeit in Deutschland eine verwirrende Unklarheit. Man bedient sich abwechselnd der Systeme von de Mortillet, Wiegers, Birkner, Riek, Menghin, Breuil und Peyrony. Dazu werden in kurzem noch die Bezeichnungen von Mühlhofer und Andree kommen. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass dadurch die wissenschaftliche Arbeit ausserordentlich erschwert wird; es kommt hinzu, dass dieser Zustand dem Ausland Anlass gibt, über die deutsche Urgeschichtsforschung zu spötteln. // Um diesem Missstand abzuwehren, haben einige deutsche Gelehrte [...] für die deutschen Stufen ein vorläufiges System aufgestellt. // Dieses System [...] soll zum Ausgangspunkt einer gemeinsamen Beratung gemacht werden. Das Ergebnis dieser Beratung soll ein System sein, das von allen Teilnehmern anerkannt werden kann und in der Zukunft auch angewandt wird » (GVA#10210, letter by Wolfram Sievers to Rudolf Grahmann, 17 May 1939).

<sup>51</sup> Karl Hermann Jakob-Friesen (1886–1960) studied geology, geography, ethnology and history in Leipzig, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1909. 1910 to 1912, he was curator at the Ethnological Museum in Leipzig. In 1913, he moved to the Provincial Museum in Hannover. In 1917, he was promoted director of the department of prehistory, in 1920, he became the Museum Director. 1932 to 1947, he was honorary professor at the University of Göttingen ([https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeum\\_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/9175/view](https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeum_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/9175/view); accessed 16 March 2023).

<sup>52</sup> « Seien Sie doch bitte so freundlich und teilen Sie mir mit, wo der Faustkeil von Zehmen liegt. Ich würde gerne einen genauen Abguss davon haben, da ich im Auftrag der SS eine Beschreibung der Terminologie der deutschen Faustkeile auszuarbeiten habe » (GVA#5080, letter by Karl Hermann Jacob-Friesen to Rudolf Grahmann, 23 October 1939).

logical Institute at Dachau concentration camp, which was founded in 1942 but luckily was not ready to function before the end of 1944. Human experiments, e.g., on malaria were planned, but were no longer executed (Deichmann, 1995, 233; Benz *et al.*, 2005, p. 304).

Franz Mühlfhofer (1881–1955)<sup>53</sup>, president of the Austrian *Verein für Höhlenkunde* (i.e., society for cave research), which had been amalgamated with the *Ahnenerbe* after the Annexation of Austria, conducted racist anthropological studies in cooperation with the Vienna Natural History Museum on ethnically diverse prisoners of war of European, African and Asian origins (Abrahamczik, 1955, p. 30).

Rolf Höhne left the *Ahnenerbe* to become head of the Waffen-SS military geologists in 1939 (Willig, 2003).

Julius Andree, whose scientific reputation by then was too low even for the *Ahnenerbe*, moved on to the Rosenberg Office, for which he plundered museums in occupied Belgium and France (Eberle, 2002, p. 221).

Lothar Zotz, professor of prehistory at the German university in Prague, as well felt no qualms when he had the Palaeolithic Moravian Venus in his pack fleeing westward in 1945. It took until 1967 for the little statue to be returned to Slovakia (Klápště, 2009, p. 123).

Basically, all younger prehistorians were drafted into the military; Bohmers, on the other hand, was a Dutch citizen and thus continued to perform archaeological excavations, particularly in

occupied territory, e.g., at Dolní Věstonice (or Unterwisternitz as the Nazis called it) and Moravany on the Váh River (Kater, 1974, p. 146; Eickhoff, 2013). These excavations still had a political agenda in aiming to proof a connection of the so-called « Aryan race » with territory that was of geopolitical interest to the Nazi regime (Kostrhun, 2009, p. 131). In October 1939, the *Ahnenerbe* gave some of the newly excavated finds including a small sculpture of a wisent as a birthday present to Heinrich Himmler (Eickhoff, 2013, p. 598).

Anyone visiting countries under German occupation, particularly in eastern Europe – among them, of course, also Quaternary geologists and prehistorians – must have seen the terror regime inflicted on the local population. However, they did not write about it for fear, their letter might be opened. What was said in private conversation, we can only imagine:

« I have just returned from a business trip to Poland. [...]

Yesterday, I finally got news from Klimaszewski<sup>54</sup> from Kraków. He is alive and has not yet been arrested, while this happened to most members of the university.

I saw and heard much in Poland, so I could tell you a lot »

(GVA #22601, letter by Paul Woldstedt to Edith Ebers, 12 December 1939).<sup>55</sup>

## After-War Apologetics

Assien Bohmers was assisted by his colleague Lothar Zotz, who came to Prague in September

<sup>53</sup> Franz Mühlfhofer was an Austrian military officer. As a young lieutenant, he was stationed in Trieste, where he became interested in karst caves, partaking in excavations. 1911/12, he was a member of an Austrian expedition into the Sahara Desert dealing with karst features and « anthropological » studies in northern Africa. World War I saw him in action. He also undertook karst studies on the Crimean Peninsula. His time as Soviet prisoner of war, he spent in Mongolia. After the war, he continued his military career in the Austrian army, eventually reaching the rank of *Oberst* (colonel). From 1922 onwards, he was President of the *Verein für Höhlenkunde* (Abrahamczik, 1955).

<sup>54</sup> Mieczysław Marian Klimaszewski (1908–1995) graduated as geographer and geomorphologist from the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, in 1931. Until 1939 and in 1945, he was a researcher at the Jagiellonian University. He obtained his doctorate in 1933 and his *Habilitation* degree in 1945. In 1946, he became associate professor and in 1957 full professor. Apparently, he worked intermittently at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and at the University and the University of Technology in Wrocław. 1964–1972 he was Rector of the Jagiellonian University. 1965–1972, he was also a member of the Sejm of the People's Republic of Poland. In June 1965, he was elected a member of the Council of State, and in December 1965, he became deputy chairman of the Council of State, a position he held until March 1972 ([https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mieczys%C5%82aw\\_Klimaszewski](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mieczys%C5%82aw_Klimaszewski); accessed 12 May 2023).

<sup>55</sup> « Ich komme eben von einer Dienstreise nach Polen zurück. [...] // Gestern bekam ich endlich Nachricht von Klimaszewski aus Krakau. Er lebt und ist bisher nicht verhaftet, während dies den meisten Angehörigen der Universität widerfahren ist. // In Polen habe ich viel gesehen und gehört, sodass ich Ihnen eine Menge erzählen könnte » (GVA #22601, letter by Paul Woldstedt to Edith Ebers, 12 December 1939).

1939 as professor for prehistory in the course of replacing the Czech faculty with German professors (Klápště, 2009, p. 119, 123).

"Shortly before my appointment to Prague, I had the opportunity, in a one-hour conversation conducted alone and personally with Reichsführer SS Himmler, to also discuss the task of the area of expertise I represent in the Carpathian-Sudetenland region, and consequently the Reichsführer particularly agreed to my assignment in Prague » (letter by Lothar Zotz to the rector of the University of Prague, 24 May 1940; quoted after Klápště 2009: 119)<sup>56</sup>

After the war, he would claim to have been appointed already under the former Czech government<sup>57</sup>, which, however, is clearly a lie intended to whitewash his involvement with the Ahnenerbe. After 1945, he successfully negotiated for support from victims of Nazism by adding false context to their memories (cf. Picard, 1996, p. 98) or by styling himself as a victim of post-war prosecution, inadvertently exposing his personal antisemitism:

« My situation here<sup>58</sup> has become even more precarious in that Preidel<sup>59</sup> now wants to qualify as a professor here and has tried to

blackmail and threaten me. Preidel not only has a Jewish wife, but also strong connections in the Munich Ministry. Today, both mean about the same as if you used to be a member of the SS and had connections in the ministry. I'll tell you that quite frankly, but this man is very dangerous, as was also confirmed to me by a colleague » (GVA#18513, letter by Lothar Zotz to Max Pfannenstiel, April 17, 1948).<sup>60</sup>

German prehistorians in general distanced themselves from former Nazi affiliations by blaming all on a few convenient scapegoats such as Hans Reinerth (1900-1990)<sup>61</sup>, who had worked not for the *Ahnenerbe* but for the Rosenberg Office (Stobel, 2010; Schöbel, 2008):

« Shortly before the German retreat from the East, all the museums in Crimea, Ukraine and northern Russia were evacuated and taken to Germany, allegedly to save them from destruction. This measure resulted in severe reprisals when the Russians invaded Germany. [...] There is an urgent suspicion that the order for this forced evacuation came from a central authority. In fact, only the department of prehistory in the Rosenberg Office, which Reinerth headed, comes into question. [...] German archaeology and prehistory demand that Mr Reinerth must never again play a role

<sup>56</sup> « Ich habe kurz vor meiner Berufung nach Prag Gelegenheit gehabt, in einem einstündigen, allein und persönlich mit dem Reichsführer SS Himmler geführten Gespräch auch die Aufgabe des von mir vertretenen Fachgebietes im Karpathen-Sudetenraum zu besprechen, und der Reichsführer war deshalb mit meinem Einsatz in Prag besonders einverstanden » (letter by Lothar Zotz to the rector of the University of Prague, 24 May 1940; quoted after Klápště 2009: 119).

<sup>57</sup> cf. GVA#23275, letter by Max Pfannenstiel to Hans Günther, 18 March 1947.

<sup>58</sup> At Erlangen University.

<sup>59</sup> Helmut Preidel (1900–1980) studied history, German language and literature and ethnography in Prague, Berlin and Halle. He obtained a doctorate degree in 1923. In 1927, he married Marianne Wimmer, with whom he had two daughters. Helmut Preidel worked as a school teacher in Czechoslovakia. In 1938, after annexation of the *Sudetenland* by Germany due to the Munich Agreement, Preidel was expelled, because his wife was Jewish and he refused to divorce her. Preidel found employment at the departments of prehistory in museums in Saaz [Žatec] and Komotau [Chomutov], having been interested in prehistoric research already since at least 1924. In 1947, Preidel moved to Munich, where he became director of the *Landesamt für Vorgeschichte* until 1952. 1949 to 1965, he was editor in chief of the *Stifter Jahrbuch* ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmut\\_Preidel](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmut_Preidel); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>60</sup> « Meine hiesige Lage ist insofern noch prekärer geworden, als jetzt Preidel sich hier habilitieren will und mich glatt zu erpressen und zu bedrohen versucht hat. Preidel hat nämlich nicht nur eine jüdische Frau, sondern auch dicke Verbindungen im Münchener Ministerium. Beides bedeutet heute etwa dasselbe, wie wenn man früher der SS angehörte und Verbindungen im Ministerium hatte. Ich sage Ihnen das ganz offen, aber dieser Mann ist, wie mir auch von einem Kollegen betätigt wurde, sehr gefährlich » (GVA#18513, letter by Lothar Zotz to Max Pfannenstiel, April 17, 1948).

<sup>61</sup> Hans Reinerth studied at Tübingen University first protestant theology from 1918 onwards, but then quickly switched to prehistory. In 1921, he obtained his doctorate degree. He went on to *Habilitation* in 1925 at the University of Freiburg i.Br. 1925 to 1933, he worked as *Privatdozent* for prehistory at the University of Tübingen. 1933/34, he became professor at the *Reichsamt für Vorgeschichte*. In 1934, he became professor for prehistory at the University of Berlin; a position and title he lost in 1946 due to denazification. 1946 to 1948, he was kept in custody. 1953, when denazification was officially concluded, he was rehabilitated and became director of the prehistorical museum in Unteruhldingen at the Lake of Constance, a position he clung onto until his death (Stobel, 2010; <https://www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de/objekte/-/443/>; accessed 25 May 2023).

in German science » (GVA#18381, transcript of a letter by Wolfgang Kimmig<sup>62</sup> to Max Pfannenstiel, November 24, 1948).<sup>63</sup>

Reinerth had been interested in national-socialism and its implications for prehistoric research since 1929.<sup>64</sup> He involved himself in fierce disputes against the perceived « establishment » of prehistoric research in southern Germany. As a consequence, his early career became stunted, which led to increasing radicalization and verbal aggression. In December 1931, he became a party member of the NSDAP and worked for the establishment of a department of prehistory for Alfred Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* [*i.e.*, battle alliance for German culture], later known as the Rosenberg Office (Stobel, 2010, p. 331–5). His particular rival became Gustav Riek<sup>65</sup>, his former colleague from Tübingen, who was closely involved with the *Ahnenerbe* (Stobel, 2010, p. 337). Reinerth, who had been infected with poliomyelitis during his childhood<sup>66</sup>, was considered unfit for military duties, which allowed him in the war years, particularly after 1942, to act as *Beauftragter für die Vor- und Frühgeschichte in den besetzten Ostgebieten*<sup>67</sup>, *i.e.*, he was tasked with stealing prehistoric objects but also blundering scientific libraries from countries in eastern Europe that fell

under German military occupation, particularly Ukraine<sup>68</sup>.

Alfred Rosenberg, his superior, jogged with Himmler for Adolf Hitler's favours in a process which the British Historian Ian Kershaw named « Working Towards the Führer » (Kershaw 1993), hence the two organisations, the Rosenberg Office and the *Ahnenerbe*, had been in constant rivalry. Possibly even less scientific than the *Ahnenerbe*, particularly during the war years and exceedingly active in stealing cultural treasures all over Europe, the Rosenberg Office made a convenient culprit, rendering the university prehistorians by comparison if not innocent, so at least less guilty.

## Conclusion

German Quaternary geologists were genuinely interested in prehistory and prehistoric archaeology as part of their interest in karst and cave studies, Ice-Age research and changes in climate patterns. When in 1933, the Nazi regime was established in Germany, prehistoric research came into the focus of ideologically tainted research institutions such as the *Ahnenerbe*, as it was deemed capable to offer a nationalistic and

<sup>62</sup> Wolfgang Kimmig (1910–2001) studied pre- and early history in Marburg and Freiburg, where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1935. In the late 1930s, he travelled and undertook research mostly in the eastern Mediterranean region. In 1942, he obtained his *Habilitation* degree from the University of Freiburg. He was drafted as a soldier and wounded. After recovery, he was delegated as an officer to the *Stab Graf Metternich*, and tasked with « protection and securing archaeological collections in French museums ». In 1946, Kimmig became professor for pre- and early history at the University of Freiburg. In 1955, Kimmig became director of the Institute for Pre- and Early History at the University of Tübingen ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang\\_Kimmig](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Kimmig); accessed 6 April 2023).

<sup>63</sup> « Kurz vor dem deutschen Rückzug aus dem Osten wurden sämtliche Museen der Krim, der Ukraine und die von Nordrußland evakuiert und nach Deutschland verbracht, angeblich um sie vor Zerstörung zu retten. Diese Maßnahme hatte schwerste Repressalien beim Einmarsch der Russen in Deutschland zur Folge. [...] Es besteht der dringende Verdacht, daß der Befehl zu dieser gewaltsamen Evakuierung von zentraler Stelle aus gegeben worden ist. In Frage kommt eigentlich nur das Amt Vorgesichte im Stabe Rosenberg, das Reinerth leitete. [...] Die deutsche Archäologie und Urgeschichte fordert, daß Herr Reinerth nie mehr eine Rolle in der deutschen Wissenschaft spielen darf » (GVA#18381, transcript of a letter by Wolfgang Kimmig to Max Pfannenstiel, November 24, 1948).

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de/objekte/-/443/>; accessed 25 May 2023

<sup>65</sup> Gustav Riek (1900–1976) had studied geology in Halle and Tübingen. He worked as assistant at the institute for prehistory at the University of Tübingen, where he obtained his *Habilitation* degree in 1934. The following year, he became professor and director of the institute for pre- and early history in Tübingen. In 1929 he became a member of the NSDAP and was active in various party organizations. In 1937, he became a member of the SS. He was *Dozentenbundführer* in Tübingen, a position involving review and even dismissal of « politically unreliable » lecturers. Riek also became a member of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service) or SD, the intelligence agency of the SS. For the *Ahnenerbe*, Riek undertook prehistoric research. In March 1941, he became a member of Himmler's personal staff. January 1940, Riek was drafted into the Waffen-SS, where – until March 1942 – he was responsible for political « education » of the prisoners at the SS-Sonderlager Hinzert. In autumn 1941, Riek was involved in the sanctioned murder of seventy Soviet prisoners of war. From March 1942 onwards, he served as military geologist of the Waffen-SS. 1944 or 1945, he became prisoner of war first in Soviet then in Polish custody. Upon his return in 1948, he was briefly interned by French authorities. In 1956, three years after conclusion of denazification he became professor of prehistory at the University of Tübingen. He retired in 1968 (<https://www.ns-akteure-in-tuebingen.de/biografien/bildung-forschung/gustav-riek>, accessed 12 May 2023; Stobel, 2010, p. 339–340). For SS-Sonderlager Hinzert see <https://www.gedenkstaette-hinzert-rlp.de/>.

<sup>66</sup> [https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeum\\_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/7744/view](https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeum_vitae/de/wisski/navigate/7744/view), accessed 25 May 2023

<sup>67</sup> *i.e.* commissioner for the pre- and early history in the occupied eastern territories.

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de/objekte/-/443/>, accessed 25 May 2023

racist narrative that allowed to argue for an alleged general cultural and biological superiority of Germans and also was later – during World War II – used to found territorial claims and to justify imperialistic aggression. Thus, prehistoric archaeology quickly became a booming field of research, heavily supported and funded by the *Ahnenerbe* and other organizations, providing abundant new job opportunities for early career geoscientists, access to third-party funding for established researchers, and an opportunity to raise the scientific profile and prestige of Quaternary geology as a whole. Thus, the field attracted numerous people, who readily fell in line with national-socialism ideology in order to exploit this unique opportunity.

When with World War II the boom subsided somewhat, many people had already committed themselves so deeply, or where in full agreement with the dealings of the regime anyway, that a large number continued their opportunistic connections with the SS in general, the *Ahnenerbe* in particular or also with the Rosenberg Office. They were ready to further implicate themselves without regard to moral

consequences by providing expertise to the Waffen-SS, to the forays of the Rosenberg Office or all the way to lending a helping hand in tormenting and murdering concentration camp prisoners.

After the war, mentioning of a former association with the *Ahnenerbe* became taboo. A general white-washing of the disciplines of Quaternary geology and prehistoric archaeology set in by concentrating the collective guilt on a few convenient scapegoats – but even those eventually, by the mid-1950s at the latest, were allowed to continue their careers as if nothing worth mentioning had happened.

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