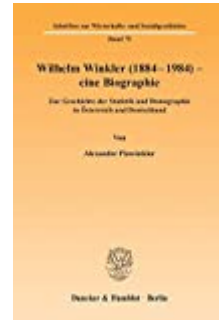




Alexander Pinwinkler. *Wilhelm Winkler (1884-1984) – eine Biographie: Zur Geschichte der Statistik und Demographie in Österreich und Deutschland.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003. 566 pp. EUR 75.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-428-10864-0.



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Published on HABSBURG (March, 2005)

On the History of Statistics and Demography in Austria

This is a timely publication. Wilhelm Winkler was regarded, with some justification, as one of the most important German-language demographic statisticians of his time. After achieving his self-proclaimed goal of reaching the age of one hundred, his professional career reflected wider discontinuities in both the history of Austria-Hungary and the institutional role of official statistics. To this extent, Alexander Pinwinkler has selected an ideal candidate for a detailed biographical study.

The author is more than aware of the implicit dangers of a *Gelehrtenbiographie*, in particular the problem of interpreting the link between published output and the author's actual attitudes, but Pinwinkler has cast his net widely. He has consulted an impressive range of archives, exploited private papers, where available, and analyzed an extensive list of reviews of Winkler's publications, as well as obituaries and other written material relating to his professional career. Winkler's unpublished autobiography (1979), together with approximately two hundred family letters, was an important source of information, but this has been complemented

and contextualized by oral and written evidence from other contemporaries (including his second wife and two sons). More importantly, Pinwinkler consistently attempts to locate his subject within the broader context of the development of statistics in Austria, focusing in particular on Winkler's contribution to demography, his involvement with international agencies and societies (such as the International Institute of Statistics and the *Deutsche Statistische Gesellschaft*), and his contribution to the expanded role of statistics within higher education following his appointment to a professorship at the University of Vienna in 1947.

Perhaps inevitably, Pinwinkler adopts a chronological framework for his biographical study. Winkler's appointment as the sole German-speaking member of the Bohemian Statistical Office (1909-21) represented the first rung of a long and illustrious career which included a brief period as technical adviser on statistics at the post-war peace conference at St. Germain-en-Laye, an important role as Director of the Population Statistics Division of the *Bundesamt für Statistik* in the new Austrian Republic, and seminal contributions to both theoretical and

practical statistics until the Nazi annexation of Austria, which led to Winkler's dismissal from his post because he refused to divorce his first wife (Klara) despite her Jewish origins.

Between 1938 and 1945 Winkler's professional role was severely constrained: compulsory early retirement was followed by considerable financial hardship, private contacts overseas were difficult to maintain, and, apart from obtaining a diploma in English translation (in April 1939), his academic work was restricted to a study of the population statistics of rabbits whose breeding was increasingly important for wartime food supply. The period after 1945 witnessed Winkler's rehabilitation. Although he did not return to the Austrian Statistical Office, he re-established the Institute for Statistics at the University of Vienna and, following the award of a full professorship in 1947, he played a central role in strengthening the institutional position of statistics in higher education.

Pinwinkler's meticulous attention to detail and his careful sifting of the available evidence provides the basis for a critical evaluation of Winkler's contribution to statistics in general and demography in particular. To a large extent, his early career was based on important contributions to the statistical definition of minorities culminating in the publication of the *Statistisches Handbuch des gesamten Deutschtums* (1927) and the *Statistisches Handbuch der europäischen Nationalitäten* (1931), while he also had a strong profile in terms of publications on the decline in the birth rate. By contrast, his support for the inclusion of advanced mathematics in statistical training failed to elicit a welcome response amongst his contemporaries and perhaps provided a convincing explanation for his failure to secure a university professorship in Germany.

At every stage, Pinwinkler provides a detailed analysis of key aspects of Winkler's publications, which are invariably discussed within a wider intellectual and political context. Although Winkler believed that statistics should play an "objective" role in nationality disputes, he supported their political use as a means of protecting national minorities. He sympathized with the *Großdeutsche Volkspartei*, but never became a member of the NSDAP.

However, many of his academic publications between 1918 and 1938 reflected ideological trends which later underpinned the implementation of nationalist and racist policies in Nazi Germany: the "apparent" decline in physical efficiency in Austria was attributed to the impact of increased urbanization; language was a key determinant of nationality; the decline in the birth rate could only be

addressed by the introduction of radical pro-natalist policies; and gypsies were enumerated in the 1934 census as a separate (racial) minority, irrespective of language. As a Catholic nationalist, Winkler implicitly rejected the Nazi emphasis on *Blutsgemeinschaft*, but counterfactually, if it had not been for his wife's Jewish background and his refusal to countenance a divorce, his services may well have been retained after Austria's annexation in the interests of the new regime.

Alexander Pinwinkler is to be congratulated on producing an exemplary biographical study of a key figure in the development of Austrian statistics throughout most of the twentieth century. It touches directly on a number of themes of interest to historians in general, including the politicization of official statistics after the end of the First World War, the enumeration and problems posed by the impact of the Versailles settlement on Central Europe, and the operational difficulties encountered by the Austrian Statistical Office as a result of inadequate resourcing during the interwar period. It also highlights the extent to which Austrian statisticians were dependent primarily on contacts with their German counterparts, in both an institutional and intellectual sense, with Winkler drawing directly on Friedrich Burghard's publications as examples for his own work.

It would be difficult to fault Pinwinkler's study in its detailed assessment of Winkler's contribution to the development of Austrian statistics. However, the final section of the book would have benefited from a more critical appraisal of both Winkler's academic work and his personal character. Although the study contains a number of critical comments, they deserve a more detailed discussion as part of the final conclusion. As Pinwinkler indicates, the favorable reviews of Winkler's publications by German colleagues were seldom replicated by American or English statisticians, his reputation was essentially limited to his role as a *Nationalitätenstatistiker*, and his two major post-war books (1951 and 1952) had little impact.

Indeed, Winkler's rehabilitation after the end of the Second World War was not accompanied by any attempt to confront the role of demography or official statistics during the period of Nazi occupation. He remained uncritical of many aspects of Nazi social policy, while his approach to demography continued to be influenced by "biological" elements. A more rigorous conclusion would also have allowed Winkler's personality to emerge in a more concrete form, although the study contains invaluable insights into his personality, including his treatment

of clerks “in the tone of a Prussian sergeant-major” (p. 98); his “moderate” antisemitism in the interwar period; or his reputation as a feared examiner at the University of Vienna prior to his retirement. Indeed, it is salutary to note that Winkler, despite his profession as a demographic statistician, denied the existence of one of his twin daughters (Gertraud) who had been born with severe mental and physical handicaps, and while all other members of his family, including his first wife, felt it necessary to leave Austria in the immediate post-war period, Winkler himself had no hesitation in resuming his career

as if the Nazi period had simply not taken place.

But these comments should not detract in any sense from Pinwinkler’s overall achievement. He has written a first-class biography of Winkler which effectively locates his subject within the political and ideological context of his time. Moreover, this study represents a very important contribution to our understanding of the development of Austrian statistics as an academic discipline within an explicitly international context and the complex relationship between political ideology and official statistics.

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Citation: Robert Lee. Review of Pinwinkler, Alexander, *Wilhelm Winkler (1884-1984)–eine Biographie: Zur Geschichte der Statistik und Demographie in Österreich und Deutschland*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2005.

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