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Florian Schmaltz. *Kampfstoff-Forschung im Nationalsozialismus: Zur Kooperation von Kaiser-Wilhelm-Instituten, MilitÃ¤r und Industrie.* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005. 676 pp. EUR 39.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-89244-880-8.

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Belated Confrontation

Two generations after the fall of the "Third Reich" at the hands of the Allied victors, German public opinion, as far as reflected in the media, seems to have faced the uneasy recognition that Hitler and his regime, its policy, its war and its atrocious crimes were based not only on broad consent but also on the willing cooperation and welcome of its "benefits" by the greater part of the German people. Since the early 1990s governmental, municipal and other public agencies have created commissions that have unearthed proof of such acceptance and have broadened our knowledge of this complicity in all venues of German society during the darkest period in its known history. Business corporations have followed the trend, opening their archives and financing the historical research of their past and the uncensored publication of its results. In the era of economic globalization they may have been motivated, at least partly, by material considerations, but the knowledge gained and broadly discussed in the media is nevertheless of great importance. Strangely, however, the role of elites in the temples of learning and science during the National Socialist regime has been among the last to be investigated by the honorable *Zunft* of German historians.

The volumes here under review are part of this belated confrontation. The "Presidential Committee for the Investigation of the History of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft (KWG) in the Period of National Socialism" was established in 1998 under the co-chairmanship of Reinhard RÃ¼rup and Wolfgang Schieder. In June 2001, the president of the Max Planck Gesellschaft (MPG), Hubert Markl, announced its first publications, before an audience that included survivors of Auschwitz as invited guests, in a remarkable speech, stating: "For way too long, many questions were not asked; for way too long many questions remained uninvestigated and only dealt with by outsiders; ... For too long, colleagues supported

each other by remaining silent and not asking questions instead of opening the door to honest investigation that was needed. Too many had collaborated with the Nazi dictatorship, either actively or passively, to the point where they were happy to hide their own joint responsibility or even complicity so that, undisturbed and unburdened, they could be part of the new, democratic post-war society." The MPG is the successor of the former Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft, founded in 1911, which became the most important and outstanding scientific foundation in Germany during the last years of the Wilhelmine Empire, the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist period. Defining the MPG as a "new institution, a democratic organization for research in a new and democratic Germany," Markl stressed its continuity with the KWG and the tradition of its "scientific heritage.... Taking possession of an inheritance, however, means accepting responsibility for everything, both the positive ... and the negative, which means, if need be, admitting guilt."[1]

So far the committee has published fourteen of eighteen planned volumes in the series on the KWG's history under National Socialism, the rest of which will be published in 2007. What appears at first sight as a pretentious, costly venture is justified by the fact that the KWG was actually a kind of "holding society" of no less than twenty-two Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes (KWI). Following the guidelines of its initiator Adolf von Harnack, who served as its president from its foundation in 1911 till 1930, each institute was founded "around," and headed by, a prominent, outstanding scientist, who conducted basic theoretical research in his field of expertise. The natural sciences and their application in the service of medical therapy and the development of new technologies for industry and warfare were at the epicenter of the KWI's research. It was several years before any institutes for the humanities were added. The guidelines of election and decentralization plus the massive financial subsidies by governments, the military, industry and financial corporations enabled these often-brilliant scientists and their staffs to concentrate on research, free from teaching obligations. This structure explains the impressive numbers of Nobel and other distinguishing prizes amassed by scientists working under the auspices of the KWG.

The same combination of promotion and financial backing also created an environment in which some of the KWIs became the functional meeting point of scientific and political, military and industrial interests. One of the first institutes to be founded was that for physical chemistry and electrochemistry in Berlin-Dahlem; its director between 1911 and 1933 was Fritz Haber. In 1918 Haber was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing a method for creating synthetic ammonia. During World War I he played a major role in the development of chemical warfare, including not only the manufacture of gas masks with absorbent filters, but also of chlorine and other deadly gases for use in trench warfare.[2] While Haber, a converted Jew, emigrated in 1933, the tradition of harnessing scientific genius for economic profit and military exploitation proliferated under the Nazi regime in his, as well as in several other KWIs–the central theme of the two books under review.

In volume 7 of the series, edited by Wolfgang Schieder and Achim Trunk, the authors try to clarify the relationship between Adolf Butenandt and the National Socialists and his alleged involvement in its war crimes. Butenandt, head of the KWI for biochemistry between 1936 and 1972, was "without doubt one of the most prominent figures of the German natural sciences in the twentieth century ... unquestionably the most successful *Wissenschaftspolitiker*, not only inside the Max Planck Society but in German science generally" (p. 7). Butenandt headed this KWI until his retirement in 1972. Between 1960 and 1972 he served as president, and from then until his death in 1995 as honorary president, of the renamed Max Plank Gesellschaft. This long-lasting continuity was, as we know, not extraordinary in postwar Germany, and was evident not only among Butenandt's colleagues in the MPG and other scientific institutions, but also among German elites in the economic, cultural, administrative and even political spheres.

Nonetheless, the "Presidential Committee" felt obligated to devote this volume to a detailed and differentiated scrutiny of Butenandt's deeds and alleged misdeeds in the service of the National Socialist regime. As a scientist he had been in close contact with military authorities during the short-lived Weimar Republic. The applications of his research had also resulted in close and profitable contacts with industrial interests, especially with the IG-Farben chemical complex. The editors of the series reopened because, in 1984, scholarly publications raised questions about his involvement in experiments performed by Josef Mengele on inmates of Auschwitz. In the opinion of Schieder and Trunk, Butenandt could easily have refuted these accusations, but the fact remains that instead of openly confronting them he preferred, with the backing of the managing board of the MPG, to prevent the publication of detailed evidence (pp. 8f). After his death in 1995, however, these claims were

resurrected and, according to the editors, extremely exaggerated by a number of authors. Butenandt's exposed and honored position seems to have motivated the chairmen of the commission to a more detailed investigation of his activities in the years 1936 to 1945 and his successful navigation on the waves of the "Persilscheinkultur" of the late 1940s. This term was used in an earlier publication by Carola Sachse, one of the contributors to this volume (cited on p. 9). Here she deals in detail with Butenandt's involvement in Mengele's notorious experiments and his efforts to justify, or at least play them down, after 1945. Her conclusion is clear: he and his colleagues have "excused unquestionably amoral transgressions of scientific decency by their political ignorance…. Over decades they foiled the clearing up of historical truth, practicing a policy of obscuring, downplaying and twisting explanations" (p. 318).

As noted in the editors' introduction, the contributors were not "fixed on a uniform historical evaluation" of their protagonist, but continually discussed their results and opinions. In the process they are said to have arrived at a common standard of value. Remaining differences can easily be detected, but a detailed review of them all would be too excessive. Readers not specifically interested in the personal biography of Butenandt and the day-to-day routine of his and his colleagues' scientific achievements will, however, gain from reading this carefully edited and balanced work full of important information about the role of German scientific elites in the Third Reich, their possible role in its war crimes and their attitudes after the war. The editors' conclusion about Butenandt himself is, in my opinion, a balanced rÃ©sumÃ© of this readable work: he evolves "neither as a specially monstrous figure, nor as a shining hero of the natural sciences, but rather as a standard case of state of the art research [*Normalfall naturwissenschaftlicher Spitzenforschung*] in the Third Reich â¦ [whose] problematic historical role cannot be forgotten" (p. 22). However, being a "normal case" in this context is hardly exculpatory.

This judgment is verified by volume eleven of the series. As the dissertation of its author, Florian Schmaltz, it is, as inevitable at a German university, meticulously researched and heavily footnoted. Somewhat tiring to read, at least for laymen, the voluminous book offers important insights into the six KWIs directly involved in research on chemical warfare. This volume also exposes the internal functioning of the KWG generally and some of the machinations of its brilliantly inventive members in what the author defines as the "cooperative relations between science, the military, industry and the NS-state" (p. 6), which served the regime as well as their personal portfolio. For an example of this cooperation, readers should consult Schmaltz's discussion of Christoph Grundmann (pp. 387ff). In his detailed narrative, Schmaltz describes the astoundingly rapid evolution of what in recent German *Zeitgeschichte* has become known as the "vorauseilende Gehorsam" of the proud, self-confident society. As early as May 6, 1933, its president Max Planck, then and now assessed as having been above suspicion of being a Nazi or even a sympathizer, assured Adolf Hitler in a personal audience of the society's submissive loyalty. Schmaltz contests Planck's later explanation that the meeting was an ineffectual effort to rescind the dismissal of the Nobel laureate Fritz Haber (p. 69f).

Schmaltz's argument is born out by the rushed "cleansing," initiated early in 1933, of twenty-six Jewish or "non-Aryan" scientists from of the KWI fÃ¼r physikalische Chemie und Elektrochemie (KWIpCh), which had been headed by Haber, who has been termed the "father of gas warfare," since 1912. Haber's institute worked in secret cooperation with the army in the Weimar Republic and openly with the chemical industry. Schmaltz regards the dismissal of its "non-Aryan" and politically suspect employees as "a decisive turning point that enabled a group of Nazi 'Old Fighters' to take the institute under their control and turn it into a research center for chemical warfare, as in the First World War" (p. 45). Afterwards, Peter Adolf Thiessen emerged as the most prominent figure of this group, and he led the institute between 1935 and 1945.[3] At the establishment of a central research council on war preparation in 1937, Thiessen was nominated director of its chemistry department. The president of the council, Rudolf Mentzel, was another NSDAP "Old Fighter," was made a member of Heinrich Himmler's personal staff, and became vice president of the KWG in 1941 (p.127). During the late 1930s and the war years research on poison gas, improvements in its use and defenses against it became the central project of the KWIpCh. Some murderous experiments in its employment were performed on concentration camp inmates in Sachsenhausen and later in FlossenbÃ¼rg and PlaszÃ³w, where incarcerated Jewish scientists were also forced to work for the institute (pp. 176ff). Mentzel was sentenced in 1949 to two-and-a-half years in jail by a German court.[4]

After dealing briefly with some marginal projects at the KW-Institutes on the "Physiology of Labor," "Research of the Brain," "Leather-Research" and "Marine Observation," the author allocates about one-third of his voluminous book to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut fÃ¼r medi-

zinische Forschung in Heidelberg. This institute was, beside the KWIpCh, one of the two KWIs where research on chemical weapons and their effects was continuously pursued in specially established departments during the Nazi regime (p. 413). This state of affairs explains why the KWI for medical research and its "Kampfstoffabteilung" were, of all the institutes of the KWG, the most deeply involved in the notorious experiments on humans (pp.455f, 521ff). Its Austrian-born director, Richard Kuhn, one of the field's twentieth-century leaders, received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1939 and studied in Munich. He advanced in his career as a protÃ©gÃ© of Richard WillstÃ¤dter, the director of the KWI for chemistry from 1912 to 1915, who in 1925 felt compelled to resign from his post in Munich and move to Switzerland under the pressure of antisemitic tumults. Apparently WillstÃ¤dter then appointed Kuhn to teach at the prestigious Swiss technical university (ETH) in Zurich. Kuhn never officially joined the NSDAP, but different party agencies declared him reliable repeatedly. In the spring of 1933, Kuhn complied without protest with the exclusion of "non-Aryan" scientists from his institute and denounced colleagues who tried to keep some of them at their posts. Later he called for stricter adherence to Nazi laws and pressures in all KWG institutes (p. 368f). However, the author's assumption of a "structural connection between the ousting of Jewish scientists and ... the research on chemical weapons" in the institute may be hard to prove. The case of Fritz Haber mentioned in this context is not convincing evidence (p. 432).

There can be little doubt, however, about the involvement of Kuhn and the KWI for medical research in the often deadly "medical" experiments on concentration camp inmates (pp. 521ff). Not all of the scientists and physicians accused in the Nuremberg trials were employees of this or a ny other KWI, but their connection with Kuhn and his Heidelberg institute are meticulously documented and referenced in this volume. Kuhn's position as director of the chemical department in the *Reichsforschungsrat* made him responsible for financing these experiments and links him to some of the most condemnable individuals involved in Nazi medical research, such as August Hirt, who performed and supervised murderous poison gas experiments in the Natzweiler concentration camp and elsewhere. He killed himself to escape trial in 1945.[5] Kuhn is also linked to Karl Brandt, who was commissioned by Hitler to organize the killing of the mentally ill in the T4 euthanasia program, where he gained experience he later exploited in the construction of gas chambers in Poland. Brandt, as Himmler's underling, was in charge of all experiments on humans and was sentenced by the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg and hanged in 1948 (p. 540).[6]

I was surprised that Otmar von Verschuer, who according to Brandt, was a close colleague and collaborator, "the leading *Rassenhygieniker*" in the Third Reich, and Mengele's *Doktorvater*, was missing from Schmaltz's narrative.[7] Both Verschuer and Mengele are absent from Schmaltz's book, though repeatedly mentioned in the Butenandt volume. Is it due to a "need to know" departmentalization of these secret matters, or to the high degree of specialization in the KWG, that they remained unmentioned in the files of the institutes that were the specific project of the author's study? That Mengele performed experiments and took "specimens" from living and dead inmates in Auschwitz is widely known. Verschuer's involvement in "processing the specimens" in Berlin, sometimes with the assistance of Butenandt's institute, was a major issue in the "inconveniences" both faced after the war. Be this as it may, this volume is a highly informative addition to our knowledge on the involvement and complicity of the mandarins of science in the crimes of the Third Reich.

I will end this review by citing the summary of the studies published so far by one of the committee's chairmen: "The sufficiently safe conclusion is that the KWG and its scientists were in their great majority partners in power of a totalitarian regime to its very end, and not the victims one liked to think of them having been in retrospect. As such, they shared responsibility for terror and racist persecution in Germany, for an aggressive foreign policy and the unleashing of the war, for the crimes against Jews, the Roma and Sinti, the civil population of the occupied lands and Soviet prisoners of war."[8]

Notes

[1]. Speech given by the president of the Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science, Hubert Markl, on the occasion of the opening of the symposium entitled "Biomedical Sciences and Human Experimentation at Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes–The Auschwitz Connection," Berlin, June 7, 2001, quoted in Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener, eds., *Medicine and Medical Ethics in Nazi Germany: Origins, Practices, Legacies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 129f.

[2]. S.v. "Vater des Gaskriegs," in Ernst Klee, *Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer war was vor und nach 1945*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), 214.

[3]. Thiessen, professor of chemistry in GÃ¶ttingen, joined the NSDAP and the SA in 1922. After 1945 he volunteered to perform atomic research in the USSR at the head of a group of German scientists, and was awarded the Stalin Prize (Klee, *Personenlixikon*, 623).

[4]. Klee, *Personsenlexikon*, 404.

[5]. Ibid., 259.

[6]. Ibid., 71f.

[7]. Ibid., 639; see also the many references to both in the index of the other volume under review.

[8]. Reinhard RÃ¼rup, "KontinuitÃ¤t und Neuanfang. Die Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus und die Vergangenheitspolitik der Max-Plank-Gesellschaft," in *Deutsche, Juden, VÃ¶lkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. JÃ¼rgen MatthÃ¤us und Klaus Malman (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft , 2006), 268.

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