



Ingo Haar, Michael Fahlbusch, unter Mitarbeit von Matthias Berg. *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Personen - Institutionen - Forschungsprogramme - Stiftungen.* München: K.G. Saur, 2008. 846 S. \$269.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-598-11778-7.



Reviewed by Eric Ehrenreich (Independent Scholar [Washington, D.C.])

Published on H-German (May, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

***Völkisch* Studies in Nazi Germany**

At almost 850 pages, and with over 140 entries, Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch's handbook is a useful guide to many of the *völkisch* concepts and organizations that permeated German society during the Third Reich. Between 1933 and 1945, a powerful movement developed in Germany dedicated to studying a great variety of academic subjects from a *völkisch* perspective. These fields included linguistics, history, ethnology, folklore studies, anthropology, theology, demographics, and geography, as well as racial studies (*Rassenkunde*) and an antisemitic variation of "Jewish studies." As the work demonstrates, what made such academic disciplines "*völkisch*" were their proponents' attempts, whatever the field of study, to use their discipline to demonstrate German cultural superiority, often with an emphasis on its alleged racial basis, and to promote pan-Germanism, often as a support for Nazi expansionist objectives.

The compendium contains entries for many of the most prominent of these institutions, from the Alemannisches Institut to the Wissenschaftliches Institut der Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich, dedicated to the study of Ger-

manic culture in the Rhineland and Alsace-Lorraine, respectively. Moreover, the work also describes important media for the distribution of *völkisch* thought, such as the journals *Volk und Reich* and *Zeitschrift für Geistes- und Glaubensgeschichte*. It also discusses many of the leading figures associated with these institutions and journals. Finally, it contains entries for important concepts related to Nazi-era *völkische Wissenschaft*, such as *Ostforschung* (the academic study of eastern Europe) and *völkische Religionswissenschaften* (*völkisch* religious studies).

Especially for anyone interested in the internal histories of the foregoing organizations or seeking information about their leaders, the book is a first-rate resource with which to begin. Its contributors provide much detail on the origin, organization, institutional changes, and demise of these institutions, including the fates of the various entities and their leading personalities after the war. Moreover, the work does a fine job of underscoring the network of connections between the various institutions and their leaders. For

example, by examining the entry on the Institut für deutsche Ostarbeit, an “academic” institution established by Hans Frank, the Governor General of Nazi-occupied Poland, one quickly sees the connection between that institute and prominent academics in the field of *Ostforschung* like Hermann Aubin and Albert Brackmann, and other research organizations, such as the Nord- und Ostdeutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft—all of which have their own entries. And, in the process of showing the “network” that existed in the field of *völkische Wissenschaft*, the work also demonstrates the permeation of *völkisch* thought throughout German society: governmental, academic, and religious institutions were all deeply involved in the dissemination of such ideas during the Third Reich.

In addition, the importance of racist ideas in *völkische Wissenschaft* is highlighted throughout the work. The various entries especially emphasize the National Socialists’ use of such ideas in their grand demographic schemes to reorganize Europe on a “racial” basis. Thus the “resettlement” work of the SS’s Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums (RKFDV) and similar agencies is described in some detail. Moreover, the multitude of institutions that assisted the RKFDV and others in such work, both ideologically and in its actual implementation, are also described and fitted into the greater picture. It is in the context of this continent-wide population restructuring that the work describes the assistance of such agencies, institutions, and individuals in the perpetration of the Holocaust.

Despite these important strengths, however, the compendium is a disappointment in several important regards. First, for some reason, it virtually ignores the role of *völkische Wissenschaft* in the implementation of racist policies within National Socialist Germany itself. In addition to supporting German expansionism, *völkisch* academics and their organizations were also deeply involved in both validating and administering the thousands of racial laws implemented in Germany. These laws affected almost every member of the German population in regard to the most basic elements of life: marriage, work, the right to reproduce, and ultimately, the right to continued existence. Indeed, the primary rationalization for the racial laws which permeated German life during the Nazi period was a “racial scientific” one: the prevention of cultural damage through maintenance of “racial purity.” Yet, this fundamental aspect of German society during the Third Reich and the major role of *völkisch* ideas and institutions in the promulgation and enforcement of such internal racial pol-

icy receive only the barest mention in this hefty volume. For example, the work provides only passing reference to the need to prove racial acceptability that the regime imposed on the entire German population, as well as to the massive institutional apparatus that accompanied this requirement. Little mention is made of the various hereditary-health policies designed to weed out allegedly “unhealthy” (even if “racially acceptable”) genetic elements in Nazi Germany. In what sense, however, is the “biological sifting” and redistribution of populations in annexed or occupied territories, which receives detailed treatment in the volume, more representative of *völkische Wissenschaft* than the “racial sifting” and demographic reorganization of the population within the Reich? Because of the work’s concentration on external political uses of *völkische Wissenschaft*, it ultimately renders a serious disservice to its users by providing a greatly distorted picture of the status of *völkisch* ideas and institutions in German society during the Third Reich.

A second serious flaw in this volume is the paucity of discussion relating to the “hard” sciences and their representative individuals and institutions. During the Third Reich, and even before, many medical researchers, geneticists, biologists, and even physicists and mathematicians were notably engaged in the promotion of *völkisch* thought in their various disciplines. A few, like Carl Otto Reche and Fritz Lenz, receive entries, as does Reche’s Institut für Rassen- und Völkerkunde der Universität Leipzig. A number of other representatives are mentioned in passing. But such men as the physical anthropologist Eugen Fischer and the hereditary pathologist Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, both of whom were deeply engaged in the institutionalization of racist and “hereditary health” policies, especially after 1933, would seem to deserve their own entries in a reference work like this one, as would the institution that both men eventually headed: the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics. A similar lacuna surrounds Hans F. K. Günther, perhaps the most important German of his time in popularizing ideas of racial science as a serious scientific discipline. Günther’s books sold in the hundreds of thousands in the decade before the Nazi assumption of power, and thus played a major role in the dissemination of *völkisch* thought. In his introduction to the work, Paul Weindling, a prominent historian of German biological studies, provides an apologia of sorts for this lack. He states that “the history of ‘race’ as science, ideology and policy during the National Socialist period is still a research desidera-

tum” (p. 15). While much work certainly remains in this field, Weindling’s claim is not convincing. There is no paucity of research at present relating to race as a science, ideology, and policy during the Third Reich.[1]

A last, telling omission in the work is the lack of entries explaining key *völkisch* terms. Most notable in this regard is the definition of the word “*völkisch*” itself. An entry describing the history and multilayered meanings of this term would have been helpful. Also missing are entries for such concepts as “race” and “racial studies” (*Rassenkunde*). Racism was, after all, the key component of the Nazis’ aggressive, nationalistic ideology and it is difficult to understand why the work does not concentrate more on this aspect of *völkische Wissenschaft*.

In sum, the work is a valuable resource for identifying many key *völkisch* elements in National Socialist Germany, and for understanding certain institutions’ internal structures and their relationships with each other, as well as for examining German foreign policy objectives. Nevertheless, it is a seriously incomplete overview of *völkische Wissenschaft*. In the foreword, the editors do note that certain fields are “underrepresented” in this volume and mention that a supplemental volume is foreseen. One hopes that such a supplemental volume will substantially redress this problem. Indeed, one lack in the present volume, according to the editors, is in the field of eugenics (*Rassenhygiene*). Their awareness of this hole is encouraging, as eugenics was a predominantly internal policy inextricably bound up with the hard sciences. But the other two specific fields mentioned are German studies and art history, areas that might draw the prospective volume away from a greater concentration on the sciences. Additionally, the editors state that the primary goal of the second volume will be to deal with the post-war period. Despite the significance of the later material, one nonetheless hopes that a future volume will provide a more thorough resource regarding *völkische Wis-*

senschaft in the Nazi period itself before moving beyond 1945.

Note

[1]. See Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Eric Ehrenreich, *The Nazi Ancestral Proof: Genealogy, Racial Science, and the Final Solution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Ute Felbor, *Rassenbiologie und Vererbungswissenschaft in der Medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Würzburg, 1937-1945* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995); Christopher Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology and Genetics in the Dialectic of the Volk* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Heidrun Kaupen-Haas and Christian Saller, eds., *Wissenschaftlicher Rassismus: Analysen einer Kontinuität in den Human- und Naturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1999); Georg Lilienthal, “Die jüdischen ‘Rassenmerkmale’: zur Geschichte der Anthropologie der Juden,” in *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 28 (1993): 172-198; Kristie Macrakis, *Surviving the Swastika: Scientific Research in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Pauline Mazumdar, “Blood and Soil: The Serology of the Aryan Racial State,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 64 (1990): 187-219; Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Gretchen Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Hans-Walter Schmuhl, ed., *Rassenforschung an Kaiser-Wilhelm Instituten vor und nach 1933* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003); Alan Steinweis, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Peter Weingart, Jürgen Kroll, and Kurt Bayertz, eds., *Rasse, Blut und Gene: Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Eric Ehrenreich. Review of Haar, Ingo; Fahlbusch, Michael, unter Mitarbeit von Matthias Berg, *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Personen - Institutionen - Forschungsprogramme - Stiftungen*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. May, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24649>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.