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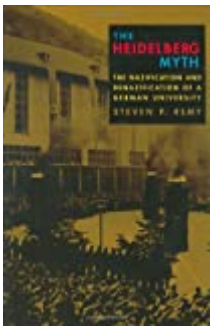

Steven P. Remy. *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. xi + 329 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-00933-2.

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Nazis among Us?

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Surprising as it may seem, scholarship on higher education under Nazism appears to be a growth industry. A bibliography compiled by an industrious doctoral student in Mannheim in 1998 already listed more than 1,500 titles. A supplement published the next year brought the total to 2,177 works.[1] Nonetheless, a certain unevenness is evident. Some universities, such as Hamburg, Tuebingen, Goettingen, and Marburg, have been much better studied than others.[2] Since unification, universities in East Germany, such as Halle, have been added to this list, as archives have become more accessible and perspectives on the past have changed.[3] Large-scale projects are currently under way in Berlin and Jena, but many other universities remain nearly completely unstudied. Nonetheless, after decades of scholarship, it seems permissible to ask whether it is really possible to say anything fundamentally new on this topic.

Steven P. Remy, who is well-known to H-German readers from his recent service as editor, presents in this book the first effort in English to examine both the nazification and the denazification of a major German university. Briefly put, he argues that, contrary to a mythical account that enjoyed widespread currency after 1945, the Heidelberg professoriate was deeply engaged with National Socialism. By this Remy means that many scholars participated directly in justifying, shaping and implementing the regime's policies, thus forming a crucial element in the social consensus behind Hitler. Nazification in this sense was fueled in large part from below by dozens of professors who willingly embraced what Remy calls the German spirit, which he defines as aggressive folkish nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the rejection of objectivity in scholarship. Finally, Remy offers a detailed account of denazification in Heidelberg, showing how professors constructed elaborate narratives of self-defense and justification that absolved all but a few of any connection with Nazism, thus limiting the scope of denazification and giving most of them a chance to reestablish their careers. Generalizing from this case, Remy concludes that the Heidelberg myth shielded German universities from reckoning forthrightly with their own pasts, thus contributing to collective amnesia about the Nazi past in West German society and helping as well to inform a remarkably durable consensus among histo-

rians about the academic elite under Nazism.

Remy's book is deeply researched in university archives, denazification records, occupation administration reports and contemporary publications. Fortunately, his tone is far more serious than is suggested by the sensationalistic phrase, "Nazis among us," with which his publisher has chosen to head its publicity statement on the book. His arguments deserve serious consideration, which I will try to provide in four steps. First, I will discuss Remy's treatment of the historiography. I will then assess his treatment of nazification after 1933, and of the postwar period. I will conclude by discussing some general implications of Remy's work.

Remy asserts that historians have accepted uncritically the mythical claims of Heidelberg and other professors about the Nazi past that only a few academics were real Nazis (whatever that may mean), while others either remained passive or tried to accommodate without compromising themselves. Accounts that disputed this myth, such as Max Weinreich's *Hitler's Professors*, which detailed the collaboration of many scholars and scientists with Nazism and alleged that they were also directly involved in the regime's most murderous policies, were simply ignored.[4] This claim is surely correct for the period until the 1970s. One problem with it is that Remy cites few historians who actually propagated the myth; many of the statements he cites in support of its propagation are from non-historians. In places one gets the feeling that he is arguing more with views deeply rooted in Heidelberg's local culture, rather than with recent historiography.

More serious, perhaps, is that Remy sometimes writes as though this mythical view of the past were still the predominant one. As a historian who began following the literature on this subject while still a graduate student in Berlin in the late 1970s, I find this view distorted. For more than twenty years a growing body of scholarship has emerged on Nazism, higher education and science, and scholars as well as substantial segments of the public have achieved a consensus on the subject that is far more critical than earlier accounts and comes very close in some respects to the claims Remy makes.[5] Remy acknowledges the pioneering work of Alan Beyerchen on the Heidelberg physicist Philipp Lenard and German physics, which appeared, after all, in 1977, was translated soon afterward into German and has been widely cited. He also cites some of the more recent scholarship just mentioned in his introduction and pays tribute to contributions from social studies of science in a long bibliographical footnote, but largely ignores both bodies of scholarship thereafter. In a later chapter, he dismisses most recent studies on the university after 1945 as overwhelmingly celebratory and hagiographical (p. 295), but does not hesitate to draw upon them in detail when needed. All this is unfortunate, because it is unnecessary. Remy's understandable indignation about earlier myth-making appears to lead him to present himself as a lone dragon-slayer. Nonetheless, his account of the Heidelberg case is undoubtedly the most detailed and thoughtful that we are likely to get in English, and that is surely achievement enough.

I move now to Remy's interesting account of the nazification of the university after 1933. One element of the Heidelberg myth is the claim that the university was a liberal paradise before 1933. Remy cites nostalgic accounts that support this interpretation by legal scholar Gustav Radbruch and Marianne Weber (the widow of Max Weber, who held an intellectually active salon in her Heidelberg home), but tempers them with examples from the more objective recent study of Heidelberg professors' political views by Christian Jansen.[6] He concludes, quite rightly, that the alleged predominance of the liberal spirit at Heidelberg, in so far as it ever existed, was at an end by 1932, when the faculty revoked the right to teach of mathematician Emil Gumbel, a statistician whose sharply critical studies of the Weimar judicial systems blatantly biased handling of right-wing revenge murders and other political statements had aroused a storm of controversy.

The way was thus clear for a remarkably smooth transition in 1933, including the rapid dismissal of dozens of faculty members on racist or political grounds. Remy writes that over 28 percent of professors and *Dozenten* were dismissed between 1933 and 1938, which places Heidelberg high on the list of universities damaged by Nazi racist policies. Unfortunately, he does not put an actual number ahead of that percentage figure (though he notes that thirty-one dismissed scholars later emigrated), nor does he list the dismissed scholars by name or give numbers and percentages of dismissals by discipline. He does note, and this is quite important for his argument, that the dismissals went through without serious public protest. Instead, the university senate sent a message to Baden's Minister of Culture, Otto Wacker, worrying about the loss of highly skilled teachers and scholars, and protesting that such actions should be carried out by competent authorities, but not objecting in principle to systematic violations of basic rights and academic freedom. In one of the few public acts of opposition–sociologist Alfred Weber's protest against

flying the Nazi party flag from university buildings, which he followed up by resigning before he would have gone into retirement–the central issue, again, was not protest against inhuman policies, but assuring faculty sovereignty and legal form against apparently uncontrolled student activism.

New and important are Remy's accounts of the careers of openly Nazi professors in Heidelberg other than Philipp Lenard, and of their efforts to transform the content of teaching and learning. Among them were educationist Ernst Krieck and historian Paul Schmitthenner, who was appointed professor of military policy and military science after the forced retirement of philosopher Karl Jaspers, and became rector in 1939, then Minister of Culture in Baden the next year. In other cases, Remy clearly shows, again in a manner consistent with recent research by others, that it was not necessary to be openly Nazi to advocate positions in interests of regime's policies. Medical scientist Karl Heinrich Bauer, for example, never joined the party, but had written a standard work on race hygiene in the 1920s and vigorously advocated forced sterilization of the supposedly unfit after 1933. Remy does not claim that all Heidelberg teachers went along with such efforts, but does succeed in demonstrating that the brands of scholarship and practice represented by these men penetrated deeply into a wide range of disciplines, from physics, chemistry, geology and medicine to history, folklore, and language and literature studies. As he rightly emphasizes, this was nazification from below, the mobilization of intellectual resources to work toward the FÃ¼hrer, as Ian Kershaw has put it.

In one place (pp. 48f), Remy tries to bring some order into his many case studies by differentiating the behavior of academics systematically. He distinguishes four groups: older, established professors who were receptive to the regime at first, but whose enthusiasm generally went unrewarded; self-styled philosophers of Nazism like Krieck, who were marginalized within the party by the mid-1930s but remained loyal; careerists who advanced rapidly due to ideological commitment or party connections, but who disappeared from academia after 1945; and an important group of relatively younger scholars, including Schmidthenner and the physician Carl Schneider, who emerged from the mainstream of their disciplines and provided the most concretely useful intellectual and practical support for the regime. This classification seems adequate in principle, though it leaves out those who tried to get along with minimal open collaboration. However, given recent efforts in a comparable direction by Dieter Langewiesche (cited in note 2), and another fourfold classification published by Ernst Nolte (of all people), in the 1960s, and cited by Remy himself in his introduction, it is incorrect to call this a more differentiated typology of university professors than has been presented in previous scholarship.

The most significant problem with this part of Remy's account is his somewhat slippery definition of the German spirit. As stated above, he defines this initially as a mix of aggressive folkish nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the rejection of objectivity in scholarship, but does not always make clear what distinguishes such views from conservative or right-wing German nationalism and scientific or Nordic racism before 1933. Obviously it is difficult to make a coherent summary of what in reality was little more than an amalgam of hortatory rhetorical slogans, from which, as Remy notes, professors selected in ways that suited their particular interests. Precisely this intellectual incoherence and the cheerleading tone in which this German spirit was evoked are the primary things to be said about it. More interesting, and in line with recent work by Frank-Rutger Hausmann, is an additional, quite modern feature that Remy adds to his definition as he proceeds, the advocacy of broad interdisciplinary collaborations to overcome narrow specialization and thus better serve the people's community. One example of this tendency, the Institute for Frankish/Pfalz Regional and Folk Research, was part of the *Westforschung* complex that has been discussed extensively in H-Soz-Kult recently.[7]

This brings me to Remy's analysis of the impact of the Second World War in Heidelberg. Here he argues, plausibly enough, that the war marked no basic discontinuity, but rather brought a continuation and intensification of developments that had already begun with the promulgation of the Four Year Plan in 1936. Against mythical claims that the Nazis neglected higher education after 1933 and let it decline thereafter, he shows that funding for research actually increased, as Ute Deichmann and others have already showed in studies of the natural sciences.[8] After he documents ideological mobilization in the war lectures of 1939-1941, he details the practical involvement of many disciplines in military research, and in teaching subjects that could be seen to support occupation policy. Ultimately, in the case of psychiatrist Carl Schneider, such involvement extended to the murderous euthanasia program. Resistance, if it can be called that, was limited to private discussions in Marianne Weber's salon and to the subtle activity that emigre philosopher Leo Strauss called writing between the lines.

Moving on to the postwar period, Remy offers a thorough account of the conflicts surrounding American occupation policy toward the university and the denazification of the professoriate. As he shows, there were many sides in these disputes. Some professors, most prominently Karl Heinrich Bauer, who had never joined the party and therefore considered himself untainted, advocated quickly reopening the university and allowing the faculty to denazify itself. Karl Jaspers and others planned the restoration of an intellectual aristocracy, while Alfred Weber and others advocated a rigorous purge from without. American military officials were divided along similar lines, with university officers favoring cooperation with the Germans and intelligence officers advocating a rigorous purge on security grounds. Remy shows that Bauer was a driving force behind the early re-opening of the university in January, 1946, an early and vigorous proponent of the Heidelberg myth, and a vocal and active opponent of strict denazification after becoming the first postwar rector. The university, he wrote in one memorandum to the military government, was world famous (before 1933) as a bastion of democratic freedoms. "SS agents imposed from the outside had corrupted scholarship," he claimed, "but these extremists failed, fled, and the remainder will so far as they have not been arrested be excluded by us ourselves. Nazism was never in a position to conquer the core of the spiritual fortress of Heidelberg" (p. 135). The self-serving character of such words is obvious now.

Especially important in this context is Remy's treatment of the postwar faculty's changing relations with three occupation officers: Edward Hartshorne, a Chicago sociologist who had documented the Nazis dismissals in the 1930s and was in charge at first of higher education policy in the American zone; the compliant university officer Earl Crum; and the militant intelligence officer Daniel Penham (born Siegfried Oppenheim). Here Remy's careful archival detective work pays off. In particular, he exposes the self-serving character of the faculty's denunciations of Penham as a mental case, a libel apparently still in circulation in Heidelberg. In fact, Penham was denounced because he disturbed collegial comity in Heidelberg, exposed Karl Heinrich Bauer's falsifications of his denazification questionnaire and sought to move forcefully against him and other Nazi-era collaborators. As Remy also shows, however, Penham's militancy backfired, hardening attitudes against the occupation and contributing to the narrow definition of nazification that became a central component of the Heidelberg myth. Apparently his approach was too radical for the American military administration as well.

What general implications can be drawn from this book? Remy's subtitle makes it quite clear that this is study of only one university, but he occasionally generalizes far beyond the local level, though he does not systematically compare the case of Heidelberg with others.[9] Germans active in the field often tend to be overly cautious about making general claims, fearing that they will be attacked by colleagues who will say that things were different in the case they happen to know best. Such petty criticism can become tiresome, and the anxious, case-by-case empiricism to which it can lead is ultimately unproductive. The idea that German universities were biotopes with primarily regional rather than national recruiting bases and highly localized academic cultures needs to be taken more seriously than it has been. But surely we need not wait until there are full-scale monographs or collected works about all twenty-three German universities under Nazism and after 1945–not to mention the three Austrian universities, the German university in Prague or the two Reich universities in Posen and Strasburg–in order to make more general statements. Remy's case study is indeed the only one in English that treats nazification and denazification with equal attention. So what can we learn from it about the larger questions of German history or the history of German higher education and science?

One might ask, for example, whether the political behavior of university teachers (or students, for that matter) differed significantly from that of other educated elites. At present the answer appears to be a resounding "no." Some advanced themselves while advancing the regime. Others were excited by the prospects of radical change at first, but soon discovered they had deluded themselves and pulled back from the limelight, without trying to undermine the regime. Still others, perhaps the majority, saved their skins and moved to protect their institutions, and called this resistance later. Genuine resistance in the sense of active involvement in efforts to subvert or overthrow the regime was very rare. All this was true of German society as a whole. We lack differentiated typologies for the political behavior of academics after 1945 that would be comparable with those which have emerged for the Nazi period. Remy's book could provide material for such a typology, though he does not attempt to construct one himself.

Also of interest is the relation between the reconstruction of academic careers and that of higher education institutions after 1945. Here Remy makes no strong

claims to innovation, but rather supports the widely-held view that (West) German professors, once reestablished, blocked reform efforts and tried to restore university structures they had known from the Weimar era. In doing so, they re-imagined that period as a time of glorious achievements, forgetting or deliberately downplaying the heated scientific controversies and ideological struggles that had actually dominated university life. Remy's point that the nostalgic account of Weimar-era Heidelberg as a center of liberalism was a postwar invention fits quite nicely into this general picture.

Most interesting in many respects is another question: was there any relation between the failed denazification of academic personnel and changes, or lack of change, in the content of scholarship and science after 1945? Remy addresses this issue briefly, but claims that such revisions have been little studied by historians (p. 244). On the contrary, studies of natural scientists suggest that their efforts to reconstruct their careers supported in part by mythical reconstructions of their own previous involvements with Nazism went hand in hand with a high investment in continuing research programs already begun under Nazism, in some cases even before 1933.[10] Such constructed continuities worked against innovation after 1945. In the humanities, recent work has shown that semantic reconstructions, ranging from careful but minor revisions to wholesale rewriting of earlier work, were part of the mix that Bernd Weisbrod aptly calls *akademische Vergangenheitspolitik*.[11] Much remains to be done to flesh out this emerging picture of scientific change and its relation to political culture after 1945. Steven Remy's book makes an important contribution to this ongoing effort.

Notes:

[1]. Oliver Benjamin Hemmerle, ed., *Hochschulen 1933-1945 (Bibliographie). Nachtrag zur Bibliographie sowie Ãbersichten Ã¼ber Rehabilitationen und Gedenken nach 1945* (Mannheim: AstA der UniversitÃ¤t Mannheim, 1998; repr. 1999).

[2]. For recent work on these universities under Nazism, see: Eckhart Krause, et al., eds.), *Hochschulalltag im Dritten Reich . Die Hamburger Universitaet 1933-1945*, 3 vols (Berlin/Hamburg: Reimer, 1991); Dieter Langewiesche, "Die UniversitÃ¤t Tuebingen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Formen der Selbstgleichschaltung und Selbstbehauptung," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 23 (1997): pp. 618-646; Heinrich Becker, et al., eds., *Die Universitaet Goettingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd ed. (Munich: KG Saur, 1998); Anne Chr. Nagel, ed., *Die Philipps-Universitaet Marburg im Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente zu ihrer Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000). See also Notker Hammerstein, *Die Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universitaet Frankfurt am Main*, vol. 1 (Neuwied/Frankfurt a.M.: Metzler, 1989); Hans-Paul Hoepfner, *Die Universitaet Bonn im Dritten Reich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1999). An indispensable resource, though frustratingly difficult to use, is Helmut Heiber, *Universitaet unterm Hakenkreuz, Teil 1. Der Professor im Dritten Reich* (Munich: KG Saur, 1991); *Teil II. Die Kapitulation der hohen Schulen*, 2 vols. (Munich: KG Saur, 1992-1994).

[3]. Henrik Eberle, *Die Martin-Luther-Universitaet Halle in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus 1933-1945* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2002).

[4]. Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People*, with a new introduction by Martin Gilbert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 1946). See also Frederic Lilge, *The Abuse of Learning: The Failure of the German University* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948).

[5]. An excellent recent summary of this scholarship, which Remy cites, is Margit Szoelloesi-Janze, "National Socialism and the Sciences: Reflections, Conclusions and Historical Perspectives," in *Science in the Third Reich*, ed. Margit Szoelloesi-Janze (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 1-35. See also Jonathan Harwood, "German Science and Technology under National Socialism," *Perspectives on Science*, 5 (1997): pp. 128-151.

[6]. Christian Jansen, *Professoren und Politik. Politisches Denken und Handeln der Heidelberger Hochschullehrer 1914-1935* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1992).

[7]. See the announcement of the symposium in May, 2003, at `http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=320&type=revsymp&sort` =datum&order=down&search=westforschung and the subsequent contributions to the debate, accessible via the H-Sozukult webpage at `http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/#Deutsche%20Version`.

[8]. Ute Deichmann, *Biologists under Hitler*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), esp. chap. 2; Ute Deichmann, *Fluechten, Mitmachen, Vergessen. Chemiker und Biochemiker in der NS-Zeit* (Weinheim: Wiley VCH, 2001).

[9]. For a comparison of Allied policies in the three

Western occupation zones, see Corinne Defrance, *Les Allies occidentaux et les universites allemandes 1945-1949* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000).

[10]. See, for example, Mitchell G. Ash, "Verordnete Umbrueche–konstruierte Kontinuitaeten: Zur Entnazifizierung von Wissenschaftlern und Wissenschaften nach 1945," *Zeitschrift fÃ¼r Geschichtswissenschaft*, 43 (1995): pp. 903-923, and the literature cited there.

[11]. Georg Bollenbeck and Clemens Knobloch, eds., *Semantischer Umbau der Geisteswissenschaften nach 1933 und 1945* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2001); Bernd Weisbrod, "Dem wandelbaren Geist. Akademisches Ideal und wissenschaftliche Transformation in der Nachkriegszeit," in *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik. Beitraege zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. Bernd Weisbrod (Goettingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), pp. 11-35.

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