

Preface

The “Anschluss” of Austria with the National Socialist German Reich in March 1938 signified a profound break for the Academy of Sciences in Vienna. On 18 March 1938 the longtime Academy President Oswald Redlich resigned; on recommendation of the remaining members of the Presiding Committee, the Academy General Assembly of 25 March requested corresponding Academy member Fritz Knoll to safeguard “*the interests of the regional administration of the Nazi party in Austria with regard to the Academy of Sciences until the final regulation of the Academy Statutes.*” The botanist Knoll was an illegal Nazi and, on 15 March, had become the commissarial rector of the University of Vienna. “Meritorious” Nazis were immediately appointed as directors of the Academy institutes. Under the newly elected President Heinrich Srbik, the Academy of Sciences was “enthusiastically and dutifully at the exclusive service of the Greater German *Volksstaat* [people’s State],” as Srbik declared in his inaugural speech in November 1938. The scholarly activities should stand – as stated programmatically in the new Statutes – in “the service of the German people.”

With the Nazis’ seizure of power, Academy members and staff members were forced to leave the Academy for political and “racial” reasons. They were persecuted and expelled; they died in Nazi concentration camps. Not only were human tragedies connected to this, but also irretrievable losses for Austrian scholarship. Academy Organizations like the Institute for Radium Research, the Institute for Experimental Biology (Vivarium), and the Phonogram Archive lost their key research personnel; worldwide pioneering research programs and international research collaborations were broken off.

With the restoration of democracy and the rule of law in 1945, freedom of research became the maxim of the Academy of Sciences. Regaining the status of a scientific institution of international standing and emphasizing the Austrian focus of research were priorities, the latter also reflected in the name being changed to “Austrian Academy of Sciences” (in 1947).

The year 1945 was not a “zero hour.” In addition to breaks, there were also continuities in the research institutes as well as the association of scholars. In dealing with Nazism, the Academy took an ambivalent stance, albeit on a legal basis: In the early postwar period, the membership of former Nazis was provisionally *ruhendgestellt*, or held in abeyance. A few years later – pursuant to the Amnesty Law of 1948 – practically all former Nazi party members, even high-ranking officials, were re-admitted as members.

It took decades before the Academy dealt more intensively with its history during the Nazi era. In 1997, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Academy’s founding, the publication of the essay by Herbert Matis entitled *Zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand. Die Akademie der Wissenschaften in den Jahren 1938–1945* [Between

Accommodation and Resistance. The Academy of Sciences in the years 1938–1945] provided a first critical historiographical account.

In 2013, the Academy is using the 75th anniversary of the “Anschluss” in March 1938 as an occasion to present an exhibition and publish a catalog investigating the reactions of the Academy to the Nazi power takeover, the Academy’s involvement in the Nazi domination apparatus, and the impact this had on the postwar period. Special attention has been devoted to the members and staff of the Academy who were victims of Nazi persecution. A plaque dedicated to them was unveiled on 11 March 2013 in the main building of the Academy. Their names and biographies will be made available in a virtual memorial book on the Academy website.

In dealing critically with the history of its own institution, the Academy is consonant with the other Academies of Science in the German-speaking world. And it is in the very bringing together of recent and ongoing research upon which the exhibition and catalog are based, as well as in collaborating in research projects at Academies of Science in Germany, that it becomes clear that a comprehensive scholarly analysis of the history of the Austrian Academy of Sciences during the twentieth century remains a desideratum.

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the Austrian Academy of Sciences