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NAZI IDEOLOGY IN THE ARCHEOLOGY OF EAST PRUSSIA

The 1920s and the early 1930s, the years that directly preceded the most tragic and shameful period in Germany's history between 1933 and 1945, were a very difficult time for the Weimar Republic. A lost war and the ensuing economic crisis plunged ordinary Germans deeper into despair and frustration, kindling a common sense of injustice. Most of them still had vivid memories of the recent prosperity, forgetting that this time of plenty had been largely financed from the French reparations after the Franco-Prussian war.

Economic decline and the disillusionment among the members of the working class contributed to the popularity of the radical National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) headed by Adolf Hitler. The *Führer* promised quick change, a powerful Germany, work, prosperity and new territories awaiting colonization. But those postulates required a number of radical measures, above all, the elimination of racial enemies, in particular the Jews, from the fabric of the German society. The future of the Slavs was not clearly laid out in Hitler's program. In the Third Reich, the Slavs would be reduced to the role of inferior people, primarily suited for slave labor. In other territories, they would be allowed a certain degree of freedom, provided, of course, that they yielded to German control.

The Nazis' views of Germany's global supremacy did not come as a surprise, and they were a natural consequence of the theory postulating the superiority of the Germanic peoples in Europe, which had been instilled in the Germans from the early 19th century. The Nazi ideology, which relied on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and the views of certain German historians, including Karl Otfried Müller (1797–1840), was further expanded by one of the Third Reich's propagandists, Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946), arguing that the human races were not equal and placing the "Aryan" race

at the top of the racial ladder. In his book entitled *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, published in 1930, Rosenberg justified racism and Germany's policy of persecution against the Slavic nations. Although Rosenberg had a decisive role in shaping NSDAP's ideology, he was merely a party official with no previous record of academic achievement. His views and theories lacked substantial weight, therefore, they required additional substantiation from scientific knowledge and findings, mainly in the area of archeology, linguistics and history. Aside from other areas of life and the economy, Hitler's rise to power in 1933 had an immense impact on the prehistory of Germany and East Prussia.

The twelve years that followed were given different names in German historiography. In the introduction to his dissertation on Prussian history, Carl Engel (1896–1947), one of the most accomplished and relatively politically neutral archeologists from East Prussia, referred to it as the *period of a national revolution*¹. According to Engel, the demand for scientific evidence postulated by the Nazi authorities created a wealth of opportunities for archeology. Archeology played a vital role in the eastern provinces of the Third Reich, in particular East Prussia, Germany's most east-bound stronghold before its territorial expansion of the late 1930s. The only problem was that Königsberg, East Prussia's academic hub, had never achieved excellence even by eastern province's standards. The Albertus University of Königsberg, founded in 1544, ranked low in the hierarchy of German schools of higher education. It was a provincial university that had produced only one world-famous alumnus, Immanuel Kant, in the course of its 400-year history. The status of its academic staff was never impressive, and the university employed a mere 171 lecturers upon the outbreak of World War I².

Despite the above, Königsberg and, in broader terms, East Prussia were of vital significance for the Nazis for geopolitical reasons. After its defeat in the war and in consequence of the Treaty of Versailles, East Prussia was cut off from Germany, becoming an enclave between Poland and Lithuania, two countries that had only just regained their autonomy. The political situation contributed to an atmosphere of a "fortress under siege" in Germany, in particular in East Prussia. Regardless of the political undertones, the Weimar government not only did nothing to appease those feelings, but it actually fuelled them. A number of measures were initiated to reinforce the German identity in this region. Those efforts raised fears and justified the claims made by members of the Polish political elite, mainly Roman Dmowski and the National Democracy, who demanded East Prussia's political separation from Germany and the annexation of the territories between the lower Vistula and the Nemen to Poland³.

¹ C. Engel, *Vorgeschichte der altpreußischen Stämme*, Bd. I, Königsberg 1935, p. 12.

² J. Serczyk, *Albertyna. Uniwersytet w Królewcu (1544–1945)*, Olsztyn 1994, p. 146.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 146–147.

The Albertus University of Königsberg was the ideal academic hub for incubating the Nazi ideology also for other reasons. The Pan-Germanic doctrine had been promoted by some of the university's academics since the late 19th century, and their views were articulated in a more or less explicit manner. The main advocate of the Pan-Germanic ideology was Adalbert Bezenberger (1851–1922), an outstanding linguist, historian and ethnographer⁴. Bezenberger represented the last generation of scientists who combined archeological and ethnographic research and validated their findings by analyzing archeological sources in folk traditions that were preserved by the region's autochthonous population for generations⁵. In the 19th century, this research method was a generally observed rule. Bezenberger served three terms in office as the university's rector, and he was one of the few scientists who contributed to the university's rank of a modern academic institution⁶. A native of Hessen, he became a well-established name in Königsberg's academic community also, and perhaps above all, by popularizing archeological findings in the spirit of nationalism, using prehistoric arguments to justify German expansion to Eastern Europe. According to Bezenberger, Germany was fully justified in its attempts to reclaim Germanic territories that had been colonized by the Baltic people in the early Middle Ages. Bezenberger gave a fuller account of his views in the introduction to *Analysen vorgeschichtlicher Bronzen Ostpreussens*, an otherwise prominent work in the area of linguistics, published in 1904 in Königsberg. The scientist made the most powerful statement regarding the supremacy of German academia during his third term in office as the university's rector during World War I: "A Germany academic lecturer is, more than anyone else, bound by the obligation to cultivate the purity of German thought. For his attempts to be successful, we have to address not only the intellect, but also the hearts of our listeners. We mustn't simply train theologians or lawyers, we have to educate scientists with a strong German backbone, people who will take every opportunity to invoke and strengthen the German spirit"⁷. This kind of language had never been spoken at the Albertus University before, and it marked the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new era. It was a harbinger of changes that would soon take place in German and East Prussian archeology. Regardless of the political turmoil of the 1930s, the above quote, an excerpt from Bezenberger's speech delivered before the

⁴ M. J. Hoffmann, *Adalbert Bezenberger – archeolog, językoznawca, historyk i etnograf*, „Borussia”, vol. 1 (1992), pp. 97-101.

⁵ M. J. Hoffmann, *Kultura i osadnictwo południowo-wschodniej strefy nadbałtyckiej w I tysiącleciu p.n.e.*, Olsztyn 2000, p. 9.

⁶ J. Serczyk, *Uniwersytet w Królewcu w XIX i XX wieku jako ośrodek badań historycznych*, in: *Dzieje historiografii Prus Wschodnich i Zachodnich do 1920 roku. Kierunki, ośrodki, najwybitniejsi przedstawiciele*, Toruń 1989, pp. 25–27.

⁷ G. von Selle, *Geschichte der Albertus-Universität zu Königsberg in Preussen*, 2nd ed., Würzburg 1956, p. 327.

senate of the Königsberg university, had a profound impact on research into East Prussia's prehistory.

Since Königsberg and East Prussia were exclaves of the Weimar Republic, Albertus came to be regarded as a university of the Reich (*Reichsuniversität*). An identical term was applied to describe the Strasbourg university after Alsace had been annexed by Germany in the Franco-Prussian war. After 1939, attempts were made to set up the *Reichsuniversität* Posen in Poznań⁸. In a recently published book on the history of East and West Prussia, Hartmut Boockmann observes that the university in Königsberg enjoyed the status of a leading German academic center in the interwar period. To back his claim, Boockmann cites a list of outstanding German historians who lectured at the Albertus University at the time, among them Friedrich Baethgen (1890–1972), Erich Caspar (1879–1935), Herbert Grundmann (1902–1970), Hans Rothfels (1891–1976) and Theodor Schieder (1908–1984). Germany's national socialist government went to great lengths to elevate the university's rank, and its academic staff spared no effort in meeting their patron's demands. An example of the above is a book published in 1934 by Hans Rothfels, a historian with Jewish roots, entitled *Ostraum – Preussentum und Reichsgedanke* (Eastern Lands – Prussian Identity and the Ideals of the Reich)⁹.

In the early 1930s, the university in Königsberg opened a number of new departments, including the Institute for East European Studies (Institut für das Studium Osteuropas), the East Prussian Institute (Ostpreussen-Institut) and the Institute of Prehistory and Early History (Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte). The following language courses were placed in the university's curriculum: Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian and Romanian. The Institute of Prehistory and Early History became one of the university's most prominent units for its devout efforts promoting the Nazi ideology. Wolfgang La Baume (1885–1971) of Gdańsk, the institute's first director and lecturer, was replaced by Professor Bolko von Richthofen (1899–1983) already in 1934. Thanks to von Richthofen, who, beginning from 1935, was backed by Hans-Lütjen Janssen, yet another avid supporter of the Nazi doctrine, the role of the Institute of Prehistory and Early History continued to grow rapidly in the structure of the *Reichsuniversität* in Königsberg. As part of its "service for Germany's eastern provinces", the institute held lectures and published articles in tune with the Nazi doctrine, in particular in the *Altpreussen. Vierteljahresschrift für Vorgeschichte und Volkskunde* quarterly magazine, published from 1935 and covering also ethnography¹⁰. The enthu-

⁸ J. Serczyk, *Albertyna*..., p. 148.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

¹⁰ e.g. von Richthofen, *Rasse und Volkstum in der bolschewistischen Wissenschaft (mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Vor- und Frühgeschichte)*, *Altpreussen*, vol. 1, 1935, pp. 129–144; *Der Ursprung der Ostjuden und die Chazaren*, *Altpreussen*, vol. 3, 1938, pp. 33–38 or Janssen, *Vom Wesen nationalsozialistischer Sinnbilder*, *Altpreussen*, vol. 1, 1935, pp. 36–38.

siasm of the university's pro-Nazi staff members continued to grow each year with increasingly grotesque manifestations of their support that included lecture titles, such as Hans-Lütjen Janssen's speech of 1938 entitled *Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Vorgeschichte, Rassenkunde und Volkskunde*¹¹ and Bolko von Richthofen's lecture *Judengegnerische Bewegungen ausserhalb Deutschlands*¹².

A series of carefully-planned lectures and study tours was engineered to prepare the students of Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte for the prominent role they would play in the future. In 1937–1938, Professor Janssen's students participated in a series of foreign study tours – in Lithuania in the summer of 1937, in Poland in the spring of 1938, in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark in July and August 1938. The Polish study tour included a visit to Toruń (a presentation of Toruń Municipal Museum's collection was delivered by Lebiński, MA), Bydgoszcz and Poznań where museum collections were presented by Dr. Karpińska and the university's collection – by Dr. Rajewski (1907–1974). In Cracow, the students were given a tour of the Archeological Museum by Professor Sulimowski (1898–1983). According to Janssen's account, the group proceeded to Lwów/Lemberg (Lviv) where the university's collection was presented by Dr. Smieszko, and Dr. Pasternak guided the students through the archeological treasures of the Ukrainian Taras Shevchenko Museum. The next stop on the route was Warsaw where the visitors toured the Majewski Museum and the National Archeological Museum with the assistance of Dr. Jazdzewski (1908–1985). The last two destinations were Grodno and Vilnius where Dr. Hołubiczowa assisted the students in exploring the collection of the Archeological Museum¹³. Study tours were undoubtedly a great attraction for the students, especially as all travel expenses were covered by the *Reichsuniversität*.

Archeology was also included in the curriculum of the *SS-Hochschule für Lehrerbildung*, founded in Elbląg in 1934. The program comprised lectures in German prehistory, with a strong emphasis on the Germanic roots of eastern provinces. Universities of the type opened in many cities of the Reich, including the *SS-Hochschule für Lehrerbildung* in Łębork where in 1937, Hellmut Agde (1909–1940) became a docent of prehistory and history teaching methods at the age of 28. Agde, former assistant at the Königsberg monument conservation office, was a model example of career opportunism

¹¹ M. Jahn, *Vorgeschichte an den deutschen Universitäten und Technischen Hochschulen. Vorlesungsverzeichnis des Sommersemesters 1938*, Nachrichtenblatt für deutsche Vorzeit, vol. 14, 1938, p. 52

¹² S. Gollub, *Vorgeschichte an den deutschen Universitäten und Technischen Hochschulen. Vorlesungsverzeichnis des Wintersemesters 1939/40*, Nachrichtenblatt für deutsche Vorzeit, vol. 15, 1939, p. 104.

¹³ H.-L. Janssen, *Auslandsstudienfahrten des Seminars für Vor- und Frühgeschichte der Albertusuniversität Königsberg in Pr. 1937/1938*, Nachrichtenblatt für deutsche Vorzeit, vol. 15, 1939, pp. 161–167, table 46.

that affected many young supporters of the Nazi ideology. In 1930, Agde joined the NSDAP at the age of 21. He became a member of the SA in 1933 and joined the ranks of the SS in 1937. Having fulfilled his mission in Lębork, he transferred to the university in Friburg holding the title of docent habilitated. Several months later, he joined German troops on the frontline where he was killed on 12 May 1940.

The impact of Nazi ideology on archeology is most profoundly demonstrated by the publications of the time, in particular the periodicals founded after 1933. In addition to the cited *Altpreußen...*, other prominent examples included *Germanen-Erbe. Monatsschrift für Deutsche Vorgeschichte*, a flagship publication of Reichsbund für Deutsche Vorgeschichte. Published in Leipzig, this monthly magazine reached every corner of the Third Reich. The covered issues, the underlying propaganda and graphic design make it by far the most prominent example of nationalistic publications in history.

The extent to which the Nazi ideology affected the lowest strata of archeological and conservation employees in East Prussia, namely social custodians of architectural monuments, is a fascinating issue that has not been researched to date. The social custodian initiative, implemented in East Prussia by Wilhelm Gaerte (1890–1958) in the mid 1920, was far from being a success at the beginning. Yet thanks to a training scheme, several years later, some social custodians had scored many achievements in the area of archeological restoration, contributing to the salvation of many valuable sites. Until 1931, only selected districts had social custodians. This was to change in 1934 when social custodians were appointed in nearly all (except two) of East Prussia's 32 districts. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of the new social custodians believed in, or at least manifested their support for the Nazi doctrine. Social custodians did not leave a visible imprint on the archeological science in East Prussia. Most of them did not conduct field research, they were not published authors, nonetheless, some took their "service for the eastern provinces" very seriously. One of them was Paul Lemke, a teacher and a custodian of Kreis Preussisch Eylau, who authored an article in a high-circulation regional calendar for the two mentioned East Prussian districts¹⁴. The article is an account of Paul Lemke's cycling trip to an early iron age kurgan necropolis in Głamsławki when the site was investigated by Dr. Otto Kleemann in the summer of 1935 (1911–2003).

Having arrived at the site and browsed through the results of archeological explorations, Lemke asked Kleemann: "Why do you study these graves, anyway?". Kleemann replied: "Many people still fail to understand it. But in these trenches, shovel in hand, we fight for our fatherland, just the way soldiers do with their guns. You can still read in the papers that according to

¹⁴ S. Szczepański, *Archaeology in the service of the Nazis: Himmler's propaganda and the excavations at the hillfort site in Stary Dzierzgoń (Alt Christburg)*, Lietuvos Archeologija, vol. 35, 2009, pp. 83–84.

some Lithuanians and Poles, our Ostpreussen had belonged to them in ancient times. Our mission is to prove that the Lithuanians and the Poles had never settled in this land. No historical records have survived from those times, and our only evidence are archeological treasures which, although mute, provide us with the clearest proof. That's why we cherish every broken clay vessel, every rust-stained javelin tip. They tell us that this country had never been colonized by the Lithuanians or the Poles, and that their claims are completely unfounded. We tell every farmer and every field worker to report any findings directly to a school teacher or a social custodian of archeological monuments. This evidence will enable us to shout to the world that this land will always be German land because it had never been colonized by any of those nations, and it was the hard work of our ancestors that turned this country into the land of the German people"¹⁵.

By virtue of their function, social custodians maintained direct contacts with members of the rural community. The effectiveness and the mechanisms underlying the custodians' attempts to instill Nazi ideals in the locals is an interesting, yet unresearched issue. The above example suggests that such measures could have been effective, and that the arguments justifying "Germany's eternal right" to the territory between the lower Vistula and the Nemen were probably more than obvious for the average reader of *Natanger Heimatkalender für die Kreise Heiligenbeil und Pr. Eylau*. The situation probably differed across districts. Social custodians from the districts of Kwidzyn, Susz, Sztum (Waldemar Heym [1883–1967])¹⁶ and, in particular, Olsztyn, which was part of the Catholic region of Warmia (Leonhard Fromm [1887–1975]), had been active field archeologists since the early 1920s, and they probably had little interest in the national socialist doctrine. A higher level of support for the Nazi ideology was reported in the traditionally "Polish" region of Mazury. Adolf Pogoda, a teacher and social custodian in Ełk, was renowned for his nationalist ideas which he disseminated in *Unsere Masurenland*, a local newspaper. The social custodian in Szczytno, Hans Tiska (1892–1969), a teacher and a native of Mazury, like Pogoda¹⁷, was an active field researcher at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s who had scored numerous achievements in archeology and started a museum in Szczytno. Tiska was also one of the region's most active employees of Bund Deutscher Osten which was founded by Alfred Rosenberg in 1933. The union brought together the leading German organizations conducting anti-Polish activities

¹⁵ P. Lemke, *Das Hügelgrab im Glamslacker Walde*, *Natanger Heimatkalender für die Kreise Heiligenbeil und Pr. Eylau*, Pr. Eylau, vol. 9, 1936, p. 56.

¹⁶ S. Tatara, M. J. Hoffmann, *Waldemar Heym – kwidzyński muzealnik, etnograf i archeolog. W czterdziestolecie śmierci*, in: „Acta Archaeologica Pomoranica III. XVI Sesja Pomorzoznawcza, Szczecin 22–24. listopada 2007 r.”, part 2, (ed. Andrzej Janowski, Krzysztof Kowalski, Sławomir Słowiński), Szczecin 2009, pp. 399–414.

¹⁷ J. Sobieraj, *Hans Tiska – szczycieński nauczyciel, opiekun zabytków i muzealnik*, *Rocznik Mazurski*, vol. IV, 1999, pp. 53–60.

“that neither the party nor the government should attempt to perform”. The union grouped the most devoted fighters for “the German eastern provinces” in the Nazi movement, and it worked closely with the NSDAP, military organizations and the German secret police. In recognition of his services for Bund Deutscher Osten, Tiska became the head of the *Untergruppe Ostpreussen Süd*, which covered the southern part of East Prussia, before the outbreak of the war.

Social custodians of architectural monuments manifested various degrees of support for the Nazi propaganda in the “eastern provinces”. The most politically involved activists were the custodians in the traditionally “Polish” region of Mazury, a fact that cannot be attributed to coincidence.