

I. 1. THE PROTAGONISTS

The Presiding Committee of the Academy during the Nazi Era

Since the founding of the Academy, the composition of the Presiding Committee has been based on the principle of balance between the two Sections. It consists of a President, Vice-President, and two Secretaries, one for each of the Academy's two Sections, namely the Section for Humanities and the Social Sciences and the Section for Mathematics and the Natural Sciences. The President and Vice-President are from different Sections and, until the Statutes were modified in 2010, they were both Presidents of their Sections. The Secretary of the Section that did not provide the President acted as Secretary General.

On 16 March 1938, Academy President Oswald Redlich and Karl Grobben, elected interim Vice-President after the death of Hans Molisch in 1937, both resigned. According to the Statutes, Grobben should have assumed the Presidency following Redlich's resignation, but as he had also resigned, the Academy was faced with a hitherto unknown situation of having neither a President nor a Vice-President. The Presiding Committee consisted merely of the two Secretaries, who continued to exercise their functions.

According to the 1922 Statutes (with the amendment of 1925), in the event of the death of a member of the Presiding Committee a temporary substitute was to be chosen until the next election without the need for confirmation by the Federal President, which was normally required. This procedure was applied here: an interim Vice-President, the 77-year-old anatomist Ferdinand Hochstetter, was chosen by acclamation, and pursuant to the Statutes he was also to assume the role of the President on a temporary basis. The meetings of the Section for Humanities and the Social Sciences were chaired as per the Statutes by the most senior member, the 76-year-old jurist and legal historian Hans Voltelini, while the two Secretaries, Egon Schweidler and Heinrich Srbik, retained their former functions. In this uncertain situation the Academy seems to have relied on the principle of seniority.

In contrast to generally accepted democratic principles, the Nazis espoused the "Führer principle." This meant that the authorities in power usually gave important positions to Party members. As part of the Nazi "*Gleichschaltung*" [alignment/consolidation] in business, science, and associations, commissarial directors were appointed immediately after the "*Anschluss*". Already at the Academy General Assembly on 25 March 1938, in which the elections and Ceremonial Session were also postponed until the fall, corresponding member inland Fritz Knoll, who had recently

been appointed commissarial rector of the University, was asked by the remaining members of the Presiding Committee, namely Hochstetter, Schweidler, and Srbik, *to safeguard the interests of the regional administration of the Nazi party in Austria at the Academy of Sciences until the final regulation of the Academy Statutes*.¹ Moreover, in implementing the “Führer principle,” on 29 March *Reichsstatthalter* [Reich Governor] Arthur Seyss-Inquart and Minister of Education Oswald Menghin announced their intention to appoint Heinrich Srbik, former Secretary of the Section for Humanities and the Social Sciences, as the new President.² Srbik insisted, however, that he would accept the appointment only on the basis of a prior election by the members of the Academy.³ The status and tasks of the new Nazi representative in the Academy were unclear. It was primarily a gesture of acceptance of the new power relationships, but it was apparent that Knoll’s position would expire once the new Statutes had been drawn up and a new Academy Presiding Committee had been established. About a year later, the newly elected President Srbik stated that he would henceforth exercise the functions of the Nazi representative himself. The *Gauleitung*

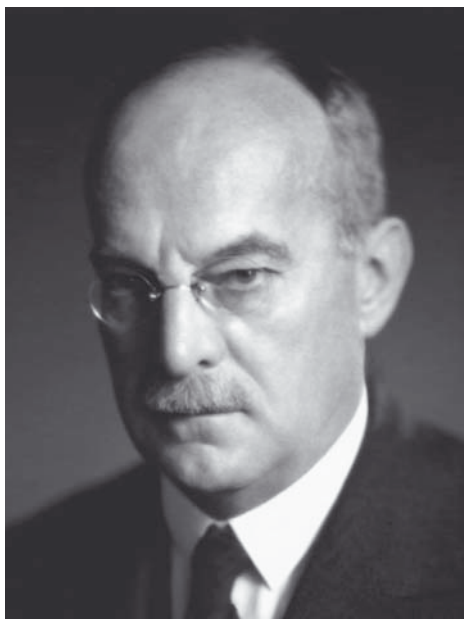


Fig. 5: Heinrich Srbik



Fig. 6: Egon Schweidler

¹ AÖAW, Minutes of General Assembly of 25 March 1938 (A 933). The Presiding Committee had agreed this three days earlier at its own meeting. See AÖAW, Minutes of the meeting of the Presiding Committee of 22 March 1938.

² See the essay in this volume by Stefan Siennel, “The initial reactions to the ‘Anschluss’ in the Academy of Sciences,” pp. 24–6.

³ See AÖAW, Wahlen, Box 4, Folder “1938,” No. 157/1938.

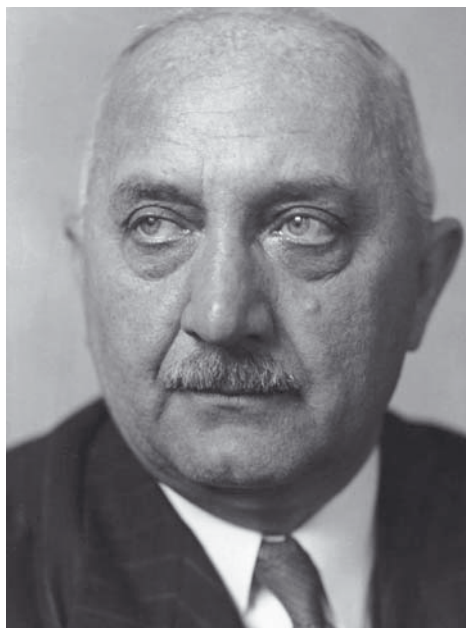


Fig. 7: Ernst Späth



Fig. 8: Hans Hirsch

[supreme regional Nazi Party authority] noted this on 9 March 1939, and for its part the Academy expressed its thanks on 16 March 1939 to Knoll, who had been made an ordinary member in November 1938.

The election of the new Presiding Committee should in fact have taken place on the basis of new Statutes and the Academy had established a special commission for that purpose.⁴ However, as the new Statutes were not approved by the Reich Ministry for Science, Education, and Culture in Berlin until 22 July 1938, the President was elected at an extraordinary General Assembly on 1 April 1938 on the basis of the Provisional Statutes. This meant, however, that action had been taken on an uncertain legal basis; there was no longer a Federal President, for example, to confirm the elected members of the Presiding Committee as provided for in the Academy Law and Statutes. This legal uncertainty found expression not least in the letter from the Academy to Federal Minister of Education in Vienna Menghin, which stated merely that it had resolved to *put Srbik forward for appointment as President*.⁵ Menghin did not attend the extraordinary General Assembly, although as a full member he was entitled to do so.

⁴ See AÖAW, Minutes of the General Assembly of 25 March 1938 (A 933).

⁵ AÖAW, Wahlen, Box 4, Folder "1938," No. 157/1938, of 2 April 1938.

A. 934

AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN IN WIEN

P R O T O K O L L

der ausserordentlichen Gesamtsitzung

am 1. April 1938.

Anwesend: Der stellvertretende Vizepräsident Hochstetter
 Der Generalsekretär Schweidler
 Der Sekretär der phil.-histor. Klasse Srbik

Die wirklichen Mitglieder:

Adametz	Mewaldt
Benndorf	Nadler
Bittner	Oberhummer
Dopsch	Patsch
Durig	Pintner
Eder	Praschniker
Egger, Rudolf	Prey
Graff	Radermacher
Grobben	Redlich
Hartmann	Reininger
Hauler	Schaffer
Hillebrand	Schaffernak
Himmelbauer	Schlosser
Hirsch	Skrabal
Hochstetter	Späth
Kralik	Suess
Kretschmer	Tschernak
Kruppa	Voltelini
Mache	Wenger
Mark	Wilhelm
Meister	Wirtinger
	Wlassak

Der Generalsekretär legt das Protokoll der ausserordentlichen Gesamtsitzung vom 25. März vor.

Zur Kenntnis.

- 143 Die Bayerische Akademie in München dankt für den telegraphischen Gruss anlässlich der Einverleibung Oesterreichs ins Grossdeutsche Reich.

Zur Kenntnis.

- 157 Das w.M. Wlassak schlägt vor, den bisherigen Sekretär w.M. von Srbik beim Unterrichtsministerium als künftigen Präsidenten der Akademie in Vorschlag zu bringen.

Bei der Abstimmung entfallen 43 Stimmen von 44 Stimmen mit Ja auf w.M. von Srbik.

Es wird demnach w.M. von Srbik dem Ministerium vorgeschlagen werden.

- 151 Der Generalsekretär erstattet namens der Statuten-Kommission kurzen Bericht über die in der gestrigen Sitzung der Kommission durchberatenen neuformulierten Paragraphen der Satzung der Akademie.

Zur Kenntnis.

- 158 Der Generalsekretär stellt namens des Präsidiums den Antrag, die Wahlsitzungen sowie die Feierliche Sitzung auf unbestimmte Zeit zu verschieben.

Angenommen.

F. Hochmann
E. Schwiobler

Fig. 9: Minutes of the extraordinary General Assembly of 1 April 1938

In doing so, the Academy was following a motion put forward by legal historian Moriz Wlassak, former Secretary of the Section for Humanities and the Social Sciences, that the 59-year-old historian Srbik be proposed to the Minister of Education as future President.⁶ Srbik was elected thereupon by 43 of the 44 votes cast. At the General Assembly of 20 May 1938, the remaining members of the Presiding Committee were also elected. The former Secretary General Egon Schweidler became the new Vice-President. The new Secretary General was the chemist Ernst Späth, and the Secretary of the Section for Humanities and the Social Sciences was another historian, Hans Hirsch, who died, however, in 1940, to be replaced by the specialist in German language and literature, Dietrich Kralik-Meyrswalden.⁷



Fig. 10: Dietrich Kralik-Meyrswalden

Because of the uncertain legal situation after the “Anschluss”, confirmation of the elections by the state authorities did not come until later. After Minister of Education Menghin had announced that he was not the competent authority, the appointment proposal was sent to Berlin, from where the file was returned with a note that confirmation of the proposed President was a matter for *Reichsstatthalter* Seyss-Inquart in Vienna. Seyss-Inquart formally confirmed Srbik’s election on 28 June 1938. Since the

⁶ See AÖAW, Minutes of the extraordinary General Assembly of 1 April 1938 (A 934).

⁷ After Hirsch’s death he was elected deputy Secretary at the Section meeting of 16 October 1940 (C 2623) and formally confirmed on 13 June 1941.

Reichsstatthalter wanted to hand over the appointment decree in person but Srbik was indisposed at the time due to illness, the decree was not presented until 26 September, when a small ceremony was held at the *Reichsstatthaltere*i [the former parliament]. Seyss-Inquart spoke of the *Central European role of the German Ostmark* as a bulwark of the German people in the south-east, while the new President Srbik, who had joined the Nazi Party in May 1938 and who had been nominated by the *Reichsstatthalter* as a candidate for the Reichstag in Berlin, defined the role of the Academy in this connection as follows: *When speaking of a German cultural mission by this German tribe and country, the Vienna Academy may claim to have played a most honorable role in the achievements of many generations and can also say with pride that its activities have always been designed to further the glory and wellbeing of the pan-German people.*⁸

According to the provisions applicable to German academies, with which the Vienna Academy had been associated since 1893 in a so-called “Cartel,” members, including those of the Presiding Committee, were to be appointed by the Reich Minister of Science, Education, and Culture. There were therefore no independent elections within the Academy but only the possibility of proposing “suitable members,”⁹ who were then appointed by the Reich minister. It seems that in Vienna, the new situation had not been fully appreciated. The Nazis did not want elections whose results were then confirmed by the state authorities, but wished to appoint the officials in accordance with the Nazi “Führer principle.” If the *Reichsstatthalter* approved the election of the new Academy President, it was in some way as the arrogated legal successor of the Austrian Federal President.

Srbik took up office on 1 October 1938. After approval of the new Statutes on 22 July 1938, the other members of the Presiding Committee were definitively appointed not by the *Reichsstatthalter* but by the Reich Minister of Science, Education, and Culture, effective as of 14 November 1938. At the General Assembly of 16 December 1938, President Srbik announced that the Presiding Committee members had now been appointed by the Reich Minister of Science, Education, and Culture.¹⁰ Thus the Presiding Committee was not complete until late fall 1938.

On 1 February 1940, the Vienna Academy of Sciences was formally assigned to the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture in Berlin.¹¹ *Gauleiter* [regional Nazi Party leader] Josef Bürckel, Reich Commissioner for the reunification of Austria with the German Reich, and the (formerly Austrian) Ministry of Interior and Cultural Affairs were instructed to hand over to the Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture in Berlin all files in their possession concerning the Academy.¹²

Herbert Matis

⁸ *Wiener Zeitung*, 27 September 1938, p. 6.

⁹ Provisional Statutes, § 8, in: *Almanach* for 1938, 88 (1939), p. 12.

¹⁰ See AÖAW, Minutes of the General Assembly of 16 December 1938 (A 941).

¹¹ See AÖAW, Minutes of the General Assembly of 9 February 1940 (A 950).

¹² See AÖAW, Allgemeine Personalakten, Box 2, Folder 9, No. 30/1940 of 31 January 1940.



Fig. 11: The Presiding Committee at the Ceremonial Session on 23 November 1938
(Späth, Srbik, Schweidler, Hirsch)

Heinrich (von) Srbik (1878–1951) and the Academy of Sciences

Srbik¹ is sometimes described as the “greatest,” “most important,” and “most eminent” Austrian historian of the twentieth century.² These superlatives are due, above all, his monumental 1925 biography *Metternich*.³ This first major portrait, written with empathy and even sympathy, of the *bête noire* of previous bourgeois historiography not only gave hitherto unknown popularity⁴ to this *Vormärz* statesman but also gave the author himself – just three years after his appointment to the University of Vienna in 1922 – the status of a mandarin among German-speaking historians, with great popular appeal and political relevance. Srbik had in fact received his first professorship (Graz 1912) on the basis of monographs, written mainly on the economic history of the Austrian hereditary lands and in the tradition of the Institute for Austrian Historical Research (IFÖG), an establishment that shunned any reference to the present day. It was not until 1919 that his first publication with contemporary relevance appeared, which suggested an affinity to Social Democracy.⁵ His sympathy for Metternich now made him appear more as a conservative, and Srbik indeed described himself in the book as a moderate conservative.⁶ This is the source of his later assessment of himself as such, an attitude that, before 1945, was shared both by many

¹ For details of Srbik's life, see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, with extensive bibliography. For reasons of space, this article will reference the relevant pages in the work, which, in turn, will also encounter additions here. I would like to thank Martin Peters in particular for the critical reading of the manuscript and Stefan Sienell for the outstanding support within the AÖAW.

² See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 263.

³ Srbik (1925), *Metternich*. It was not before his death that a third volume appeared, published by his most loyal student, Taras Borodajkewycz, from his papers: Srbik (1954), *Metternich*. Mention should also be made of the choice of publishing company, F. Bruckmann in Munich, which also published Houston Stewart Chamberlain's anti-Semitic second-rate work *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899). For the publishers' relationship to Hitler, see most recently Bohnenkamp (2010), *Egeria*, pp. 34–7.

⁴ See Hübner (1991), *Geschichte*, sheets 102–16 (particularly 102), and Traska/Lind (2012), *Leopoldi*, p. 165.

⁵ Srbik (1919), *Revolution*. For comments on this essay, see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 274–6.

⁶ Srbik (1925), *Metternich*, vol. 1, p. 49: The author “makes no secret of his moderate, historically based conservative conviction.”

Nazis and also by Carl Friedrich Goerdeler,⁷ one of the 20 July 1944 conspirators,⁸ and which continued after 1945.⁹



Fig. 12: Heinrich Srbik

But if conservatism, as Michael Oakeshott defines it, means “to prefer the familiar to the unknown, the tried to the untried, fact to mystery,”¹⁰ then it cannot apply to Srbik, who after 1945 set his hopes on the utopia of an “undogmatic, non-Marxist orthodox socialism.”¹¹ In the fall of 1898, Srbik joined ‘Gothia’, an association of German students that idolized Georg Schönerer. The basic acceptance of his proto-Nazi, anti-Semitic, and anti-Slav doctrine must have produced a strong feeling of inferiority in Srbik, knowing that his paternal grandfather had started out as a “Czech farm hand.”¹² Throughout his life he thus sought to avoid any sign of being pro-Slav, as his name might have suggested. Until his death he remained steadfastly convinced

⁷ Srbik apparently gave differing versions of the year in which Goerdeler visited him in Vienna, as was his wont in other respects as well. He told the conservative historian, resistance fighter, and Goerdeler biographer Gerhard Ritter (see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 314, n. 263) that it was in 1944, whereas to his historian colleague Wilhelm Bauer he cited the year 1938. See Bauer (1951), *Srbik*, p. 358.

⁸ See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 312–4.

⁹ See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 265.

¹⁰ Oakeshott (1991), *Rationalism*, p. 408.

¹¹ Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 317. In this context mention should be made of his supervision of a doctoral thesis in 1940 written by the future left-wing socialist Minister of Justice Christian Broda, who was notable for his “strict rejection of liberalism and the demand for the (total) politicization of man.” See Wirth (2011), *Broda*, pp. 90–1.

¹² Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 268–9.

that the Germans should “lead” the Slav peoples of Central Europe or *Zwischeneuropa*,¹³ and this brings us to the core of his life’s work, a “pan-German view of history,” as he himself called it. In principle this was an ideological project and it is clear that with the help of this ideology, Srbik hoped not only to write another extensive historical work,¹⁴ but to write history itself. He was not merely in favor of a political union of the German Reich and “German Austria.” Rather a Greater Germany should, according to Srbik, incorporate all the German diaspora settlement areas, in other words no less than the whole of Central Europe and *Zwischeneuropa*, in order to ensure, in this way, the aforementioned German “leadership” of the Slav and other non-Germanic peoples living there. There was a further important element in Srbik’s ideology, the “rehabilitation” of the Habsburg monarchy. In this context Srbik emphasized in particular that the Dual Monarchy perpetuated the “universalistic” idea of the Holy Roman Empire of German nation. From this Srbik inferred the timeless right of Germans to “lead” Europe, if not the whole world. He consciously accepted¹⁵ that the realization of the aims of the “pan-German view of history” would inevitably demand new “hecatombs of blood sacrifices.”¹⁶

For Austria, realization of the pan-German concept after January 1933 meant union with the Nazi German Reich. Srbik now stepped up his pan-German propaganda. The first two volumes of *Deutsche Einheit*, which appeared in 1935, were unquestionably intended as a plea for rapid annexation and were understood in Austria as such. Between 1933 and 1938 Srbik sought, as far as was possible, to promote the interests of the Nazis in other ways as well. As such, he was evidently perceived in this period by many Nazis and also by opponents of Nazism as a staunch National Socialist.¹⁷

For Srbik personally, the spring and summer of 1938 must have been euphoric months. During this time he published a series of exultant articles in various newspapers and magazines, starting with the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and even ended his own private correspondence (until mid-August 1938) with “Heil Hitler!”¹⁸

¹³ Which “is defined as the line from Danzig to Trieste and from Riga to Odessa and is characterized for us by islands of Germaness [*Streudeutschtum*].” Srbik (1937 and 1938), *Mitteleuropa*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Srbik (1935–42), *Einheit*.

¹⁵ Srbik’s own formulation for an event that he himself evidently regarded as positive. Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 302.

¹⁶ Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 284–90, 300–2.

¹⁷ Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 291–7; Ebner (1976), *Wochenschrift*, pp. 39, 178–9, 187, 239, and Oberkofler (1999), *Huter*, pp. 54–5.

¹⁸ See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 297.

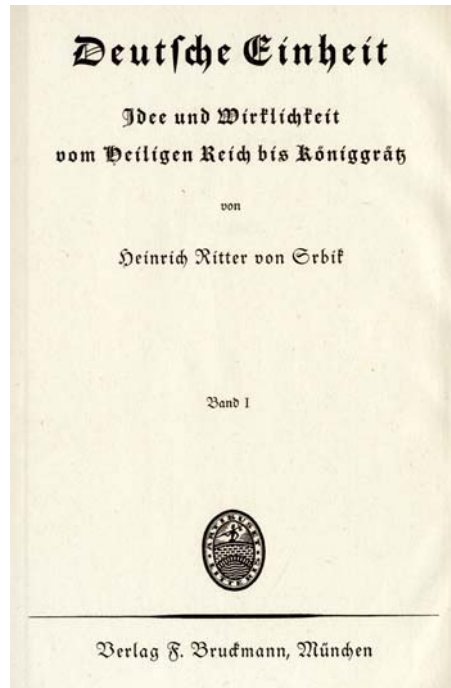


Fig. 13: *Deutsche Einheit*, front page

It was at this time as well that he accepted the “election”¹⁹ as President of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna and the “appointment as member of the Greater German Reichstag by the Führer and Reich Chancellor” (both in April 1938),²⁰ which was followed by membership of the Nazi Party on 1 May 1938.²¹

¹⁹ Matis (1997), *Anpassung*, p. 16. Seyss-Inquart and Menghin had originally planned to apply the “Führer principle” directly to the Academy and to appoint Srbik as President without a prior election. Srbik, however, insisted on an “election” even though the outcome was naturally not in question. See the essay in this volume by Stefan Sienell, “The initial reactions to the ‘Anschluss’ in the Academy of Sciences,” pp. 24–6.

²⁰ In his “letter of justification” of 3 September 1945, Srbik writes that “I had been placed on the election list without my knowledge or will and had only learned of it on the radio. [...] I was persuaded to become a member of the Reichstag not least in the interests of the Academy of Sciences, whose welfare I had been entrusted with.” There was an alternative version (also attributable to Srbik himself) in circulation saying that he had learned of his appointment from the newspaper. Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 298.

²¹ “In recognition of his services to German unity, he was given the low membership number 6.104.788.” Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 298. See also the quote in Oberkofler (1999), *Huter*, p. 126 (“the conscientiously worn Nazi Party badge”).

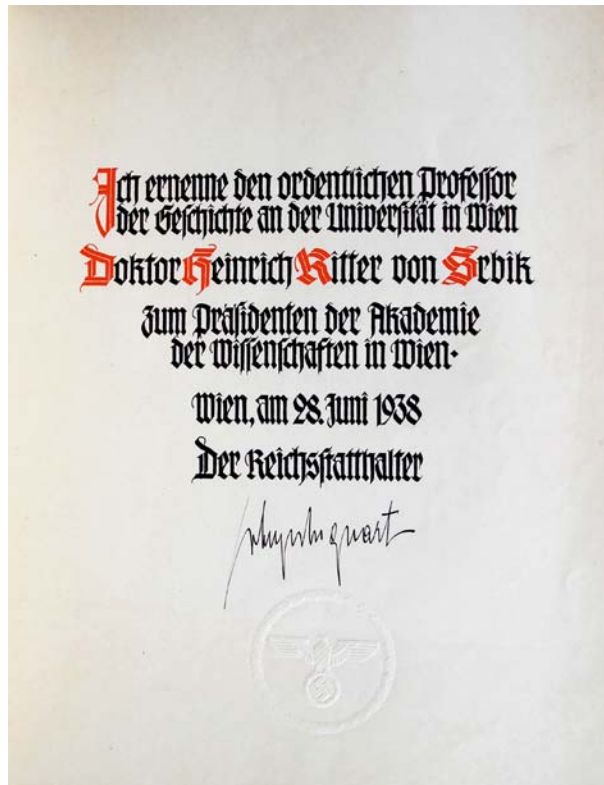


Fig. 14: Document appointing Srbik as Academy President

As President of the Academy, Srbik generally towed the government line. In his inaugural address at the Ceremonial Session of the Academy in 1942, for example, he quoted approvingly from a letter apparently written from the front by a student that a “purely vegetative, hormic” way of life prevailed in the Soviet Union, and a year later at the same ceremony he called the Russian campaign a “battle of the soul against the machine, of love against hate.”²² Occasionally, however, he also tried to outsmart the Berlin headquarters, albeit in an inconsequential manner. He did so with the approval of the other “*Ostmark*” Nazi Academy members who, like him, became embittered soon after the “Anschluss” at Berlin’s condescension towards Vienna.²³ In spite of the great contribution – in his view – that he had made to the “Anschluss”, Srbik had to

²² Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 309, n. 244. See also Oberkofler (2012), *Spiegel und Pleyer*, pp. 167–9.

²³ See the essay in this volume by Felicitas Seebacher, “Increasing the achievements of German science by all available means,” pp. 141–8.

settle for a token position without any real political influence.²⁴ Because he was not yet a Party member at this time, he could not exercise the function of Nazi Party representative of the Academy but had to delegate it²⁵ to the botanist Fritz Knoll.²⁶ Reference is made in this regard to paragraph 10 of Srbik's "letter of justification" of 3 September 1945, his subjective review of his achievements as President of the Academy.²⁷

The letter fails to mention an alleged incident, cited in the memoirs²⁸ of a generally uncritical admirer of Srbik as a further example of his "courage" as President of the Academy, in which "in the first meeting of the Academy after the Anschluss [...] the Secretary General of the Academy read out an annual report" paying homage to

²⁴ For further details, see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 306–8, 311.

²⁵ See most recently Seliger (2010), *Scheinparlamentarismus*, pp. 565–7, 569–71, and Oberkofler (2012), *Bemerkungen*, p. 3. According to Leitner (2010), *Christian*, passim, Fritz Knoll must have been a more amenable Nazi than his namesake Kurt Knoll, rector of the Institute of Economics and Business Administration and *Gaudozentenbundführer* [Gau head of the Nazi Association for University Teachers] in Vienna. See also the essay in this volume by Klaus Taschwer, "The two careers of Fritz Knoll," pp. 45–52.

²⁶ Massiczek (1978), *Situation*, p. 225. A short time later, however, Srbik enjoyed "such trust by the Nazis that he was able to take over from Knoll as the Academy's Nazi Party representative." Oberkofler (1983), *Stellungnahmen*, p. 120. See also Matis (1997), *Anpassung*, pp. 19–20, and Oberkofler (2012), *Bemerkungen*, p. 3.

²⁷ Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 310–1. He writes in his "letter of justification": "To mention but a few examples, I supported the award of the Grillparzer Prize to the poet Max Mell against the objections of Reich Minister Göbbels [sic], parried the attack by the Reich Propaganda Office against the further publication of the 'Archive for Austrian History' by the Academy, and, as chairman of the 'Commission for Modern History of Austria' [...] prevented its name from being changed to 'Commission for the Modern History of the Ostmark.'" As a further example of "at least modest successes," he cites "the publication of the work of Abraham a S[ancta] Clara, saying that in doing so the Academy had honored the great Augustinian hermit and *Altösterreich's* [Habsburg Austria's] heroic era." Finally, he refers to "an episode lasting six months until January 1945: the accusation made against me in Vienna to Reich Minister Rust because I had given a congratulatory letter on behalf of the Academy to the old Archduke Eugen, last curator and long-term honorary member of the Academy, in honor of his eightieth birthday. After a hard struggle, I managed to extract from Minister Rust and Reichsleiter Schirach the written satisfaction due to myself and the Academy." As concerns Mell, he had also called for "Anschluss" with Nazi Germany in his writings. He was still applying for Party membership when he was awarded the Grillparzer Prize. Even after 1945 he was regarded by most members of the Austrian P.E.N. Club as a "Nazi writer" unworthy of being a member of this literary association; this at least is the tenor of a text published twice from the papers of the Jewish author Hermann Hakel, who for his part had appreciated Mell: Hakel (1991), *Äste*, pp. 68–9 / Hakel (2011), *Von denen ich weiss*, p. 205. More compromising from a recent point of view was the election on 27 May 1941 of the staunch Nazi writer Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer as an honorary member of the Academy, which had been advocated by Srbik in the hope, directly after the Mell affair, of *creating a strong counterweight that would surpass the significance of the award of the prize to Mell* (AÖAW, Grillparzer Prize 1941).

²⁸ See Spitzmüller (1955), *Ursach*.

three recently deceased Jewish Academy members.²⁹ Srbik did not, however, oppose the expulsion of “non-Aryan” members.³⁰ In spite of his friendly relations with his fellow-historians of Jewish descent, Hans Rothfels and Friedrich Engel-Janosi, Srbik had basically held strong anti-Semitic views since his student days, which he also expressed between 1938 and 1945 in his (more or less) scholarly publications.³¹

Also missing from Srbik’s list of achievements as Academy President is his intervention on behalf of Johan Huizinga, described by a number of writers as successful.³² The famous, generally conservative Dutch (cultural) historian had been a *persona ingratisissima* for the Nazis since the ‘Von-Leers-incident’ in early 1933³³ and had been arrested on 7 August 1942 by the Nazi occupying authorities under the former *Reichsstatthalter* [Reich Governor] Seyss-Inquart, who had been Reich Commissioner for the occupied Netherlands since 29 May 1940, and transported as a hostage to Sint-Michielsgestel concentration camp. At the instigation of Huizinga’s friend Willem Jan Mari van Eysinga,³⁴ Srbik wrote two letters to his former compatriot and comrade-in-arms calling for Huizinga’s release,³⁵ but in his reply on 2 September 1942, Seyss-Inquart emphatically denied his request³⁶

²⁹ “When I asked Srbik after the meeting how he had managed to do this, he told me that the *Gauleiter* [regional Nazi Party leader] had indeed asked him to remove the homage to the three Jewish scholars, but he had replied that in that case he would not be able to hold the meeting because a refusal to mention these names would cause international embarrassment for the Academy.” Ibid., p. 404, quoted in Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 311.

³⁰ Except in one case, that of the geologist Franz Eduard Suess. See Matis (1997), *Anpassung*, p. 30. See also the essay in this volume by Herbert Matis “Exclusion of members,” pp. 53–9.

³¹ For details, see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 302–6; Oberkofler (2012), *Spiegel und Pleyer*, p. 213; Reiter (1999), *Zerstört*, p. 610, and Rupnow (2010), *Brüche*, pp. 82–4.

³² See Matis (1997), *Anpassung*, p. 56.

³³ For details, see most recently Krumm (2011), *Huizinga*, pp. 201–3.

³⁴ See Huizinga (1991), *Briefwisseling III*, p. 350 (letter of 16 August to his wife), and van der Lem (1993), *Huizinga*, p. 269.

³⁵ See Huizinga (1991), *Briefwisseling III*, p. 346, nn. 3 and 4. Srbik’s first letter presumably received no reply.

³⁶ See AÖAW, Minutes of the General Assembly of 27 November 1942 (A 974), and AÖAW, PA Johan Huizinga, Seyss-Inquart to Srbik of 2 September 1942 (part of the letter published in Dutch translation in van der Lem (1993), *Huizinga*, p. 271), reproduction given above. Two days later, on 4 September, Huizinga was declared *unfit for the camp* (AÖAW, PA Johan Huizinga, Van Eysinga to Srbik on 13 September 1942) and transferred to the hospital in Den Bosch. After transfer back to the camp he was released on 25 October (nominally) for health reasons. See van der Lem (1993), *Huizinga*, pp. 272–3, 290, and also Krumm (2011), *Huizinga*, pp. 237–8. This fortunate turn of events is interpreted by a friend of Huizinga as having been due to Srbik’s intervention; see Jan der Hoeve, chairman of the Dutch Academy of Sciences and former rector of the University of Leiden, to Srbik on 5 November 1942 (AÖAW, PA Johan Huizinga): “As our common friend Prof. Dr. J. Huizinga has been released, I should like to thank you sincerely for your contribution to his liberation.” In view of Seyss-Inquart’s reply and the chronology, however, I believe it highly unlikely that Srbik’s intervention in fact contributed to Huizinga’s release – which was, *nota bene*, a banishment from Leiden. See also Strupp (2000), *Huizinga*, p. 42, n. 100, who ascribes to him “only a subordinate role,” and Krumm (2011), *Huizinga*, p. 238 (“The reason for Huizinga’s release [...] cannot be determined with certainty.”).

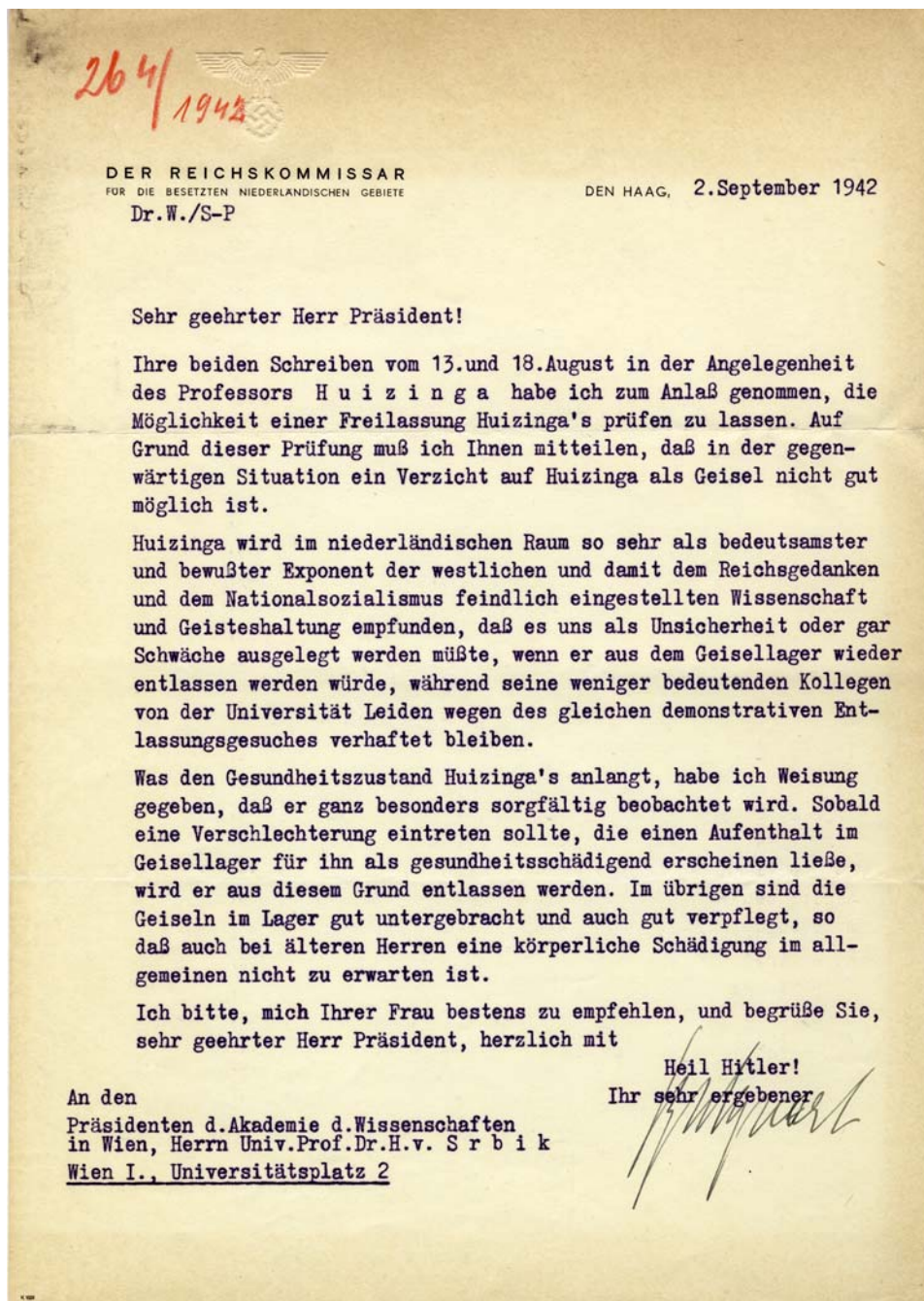


Fig. 15: Letter from Seyss-Inquart to Srbič of 2 September 1942

In early March 1945 Srbik moved to his second residence in Ehrwald, Tyrol, transferring “responsibility for the Academy” in his absence to Eduard Pernkopf,³⁷ rector of the University of Vienna.³⁸ From there he was not to return again to Vienna for fear of the Red Army “machine.” Although not literally an “illegal” (albeit only in a formal sense), he was dismissed as an academic teacher and his membership of the Academy held in abeyance.³⁹ In spring 1948 he was awarded a pension thanks to the protection offered by the socialist Federal Minister of the Interior Oskar Helmer,⁴⁰ and at the end of 1948 his membership of the Academy was reactivated.⁴¹ Officially, however, Srbik remained *persona non grata*. At his burial in Ehrwald after a highly productive – although only in terms of volume – final period of creativity, in which he expressed no regret whatsoever for his earlier actions, but reproduced his old views (even if partially concealed),⁴² “neither the Academy of Sciences nor the University of Vienna nor the government were directly represented.”⁴³ By way of reparation, however, there were no less than three obituaries from within the Academy: one written by his historian colleague Wilhelm Bauer, also a staunch anti-Semite, in the Academy *Almanach*, fully in line with the unwritten laws of this genre,⁴⁴ and also personal appreciations by two former students, Günther Hamann and Adam Wandruszka,⁴⁵ in volume 115 of the *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse* of 1979. Here (particularly in Hamann’s portrait) shines a leading light who shares little more with the dark figure of the genuine supporter of Nazism that can be reconstructed from the other evidence⁴⁶ – typifying Albert Müller’s definition of an “Austro-Nazi” at best⁴⁷ – than a name and basic biographical details.

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³⁷ See most recently Seliger (2010), *Scheinparlamentarismus*, pp. 567–71.

³⁸ Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 315.

³⁹ He remained a “sought-after consultant in the Academy agenda.” Oberkofler (2012), *Bemerkungen*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ See Höbelt (1999), *VdU*, pp. 17, 56.

⁴¹ See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, p. 315.

⁴² For details, see Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 315–22. For Srbik’s later activities in support of his old German national milieu, see Höbelt (1999), *VdU*, p. 144; Oberkofler (1999), *Huter*, pp. 82–3, 87–8, and Oberkofler (2008), *Grass*, pp. 92–6, 98–9.

⁴³ Spitzmüller (1955), *Ursach*, p. 405.

⁴⁴ See Bauer (1951), *Srbik*; see on this Oberkofler (2012), *Bemerkungen*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Hamann (1979), *Nachkriegserinnerungen*; Wandruszka (1979), *Srbik*. On Wandruszka, see Oberkofler (2012), *Bemerkungen*, S. 7.

⁴⁶ See Pesditschek (2012), *Srbik*, pp. 309–10, n. 246.

⁴⁷ See most recently Leitner (2010), *Christian*, p. 68; Müller (1997), *Adaptierung*, pp. 609–10.

The two careers of Fritz Knoll

How a botanist furthered the Nazi Party's interests after 1938 – and successfully lived it down after 1945

A long life as an academic often ends with late recognition. Such was the case with the botanist Fritz Knoll, who died in February 1981 at the age of 97 after having been a member of the Academy of Sciences for 45 years. In 1965 he was awarded the “Austrian Cross of Merit for Science and Art 1st Class”, and four years earlier he had already received the “Rector Memorial Award” from the Academic Senate of the University of Vienna *in recognition* [of the] *honorable and courageous discharge of duties in difficult times*.¹ This was not the only award that Fritz Knoll received for his rectorship from 1938 to 1943, which was indeed remarkable in many ways. Already in March 1943, the tenured staff of the University of Vienna had allowed themselves *to express to your Magnificence our deeply felt devotion and gratitude on the occasion of the completion of your term of office as rector of the National Socialist University of Vienna. [...] Heil Hitler!*²



Fig. 16: Fritz Knoll (1943)

¹ AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 5, Folder 8, document commemorating his term as rector of the University of Vienna, 1938–43.

² AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 5, Folder 6, letter from the authorities of the University of Vienna at the end of Knoll's rectorship, 1943.

In the long history of the University of Vienna, which was founded in 1365, Knoll's five-year term of office was something exceptional. The botanist was the only rector to be appointed by the political authorities in contravention of the university's right to self-government. This also applies to his function as the authorized Nazi Party representative for the Academy of Sciences, although he held this position for a shorter period of just under a year. But how did Fritz Knoll become the *Magnifizenz* [rector] of one of the largest and oldest universities in Europe? What did he achieve as Nazi Party representative of the Academy and university rector? And how did he manage, after 1945, to start a new career at the Academy of Sciences and to receive such recognition in later life?

While Knoll's academic career is well documented,³ little study has been made to date of his political career. He appears to have been an early supporter of German nationalism. He was a member of the Gothia singing fraternity and member of the board of the Deutscher Klub,⁴ founded in 1908 as a forum for German national academics. On 1 July 1933 he joined the *NS-Lehrerbund* [Nazi Teachers' Union] and after 1934 he was one of the few university professors to evade mandatory membership of the *Vaterländische Front* [Fatherland's Front].⁵ There is further concrete evidence of Knoll's Nazi leanings from this time. A report by the secret police to the regional leadership of the *Vaterländische Front* of 7 July 1937 stated that in his department there was *an insufferably provocative Nazi majority of teachers, students, and staff*. He applied for membership of the Nazi Party in November 1937 and was given the membership number 6.235.774. Another report from the Nazi era, quoted several times by Party representatives, states that long before 1938 he came to lectures in boots and black riding breeches as a way of demonstrating his support for National Socialism to the students.⁶

After the "Anschluss" Knoll came into his own. On 15 March the regional Nazi authorities commissioned him with immediate effect *to safeguard the interests of the provincial administration of the Nazi party in Austria at the University of Vienna*.⁷ It is not easy to establish why the Nazi Party chose Fritz Knoll of all people. The main reason could well be that more suitable candidates had been dismissed by the Austro-Fascists in 1934 – which does not mean that Knoll was not a fervent Nazi. One of his first tasks was to rid the university "quickly and thoroughly of all professors and lecturers who were not suitable to teach at a National Socialist university," as it said

³ For a scholarly biography of Knoll, see Ehrendorfer (1983), *Knoll*, and Ehrendorfer (1984), *Knoll*.

⁴ Knoll mentions both memberships in his application for membership of the Nazi Party, in ÖStA-AdR, Gauakt Fritz Knoll, BMI/GA 38749.

⁵ All details taken from Gauakt Fritz Knoll, ÖStA-AdR, BMI/GA 38749.

⁶ Ibid. The original report was written by *Dozentenbundführer* [head of the Nazi Association for University Teachers] Arthur Marchet.

⁷ The letter is contained in AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 1, Folder 1, and in his Gauakt in ÖStA-AdR.

in a contemporary report.⁸ He completed this task to perfection. On 23 April 1938 some 252 teachers were removed from the University of Vienna on “racial” or political grounds. “After the cleansing of the teaching and research establishment of racially and ethnically impure academics it has now become possible for the first time for the German teacher and academic to act as a model in every respect for German youth,” reported Knoll three years later. “For that reason the Jew has also disappeared from our academic circles now and for all times.”⁹

At the same time Knoll was also making his way in the Academy of Sciences. As a corresponding member inland since 1934, he was asked at the General Assembly of 25 March *until the final regulation of the Academy Statutes, to safeguard the interests of the regional administration of the Nazi party in Austria at the Academy of Sciences*.¹⁰ Confirmation from the regional Nazi Party authorities came on 29 March 1938.¹¹ Knoll’s work involved, amongst other things, the dismissal of Jewish staff from institutes run by the Academy as the principal research body. In the case of the Institute for Radium Research and the Institute for Experimental Biology (BVA), this meant severe losses, since Jewish researchers in physics and biology had had little chance of a university career since the early 1920s and were therefore particularly heavily represented in these two research establishments.¹²

Knoll’s brief Academy intermezzo came to an end on 16 March 1939, when President Heinrich Srbik took over the interests of the Nazi Party. In his reply, Knoll stated that it was *quite convenient that I am now released again from one of my many obligations*.¹³ Knoll was also elected shortly afterwards as an ordinary member of the Academy, a move that was not only political. At a meeting of the Election Committee on 24 February 1938, the Academy had already decided to elect an ordinary member for botany at the next elections. The candidates on 22 November 1938 were Fritz Knoll and Friedrich Weber; Knoll prevailed.¹⁴

Knoll remained rector of the University of Vienna until March 1943, during which time he had plenty of opportunity to promote Nazism in the academic world. One of his most prominent speeches was given in 1941 in Bucharest, when he discussed the question of Jews in academia. He said, amongst other things: “It cannot be said that the Jew is incapable of research. A correctly established scientific fact remains one even if it is established by a Jew. This is not what Nazism opposes [...]. Jewish research does not differ in general from Jewish journalism. Both are designed to

⁸ Bereichsstudentenföhrung Süd-Ost (1938), yearbook, p. 60.

⁹ Knoll (1942), *Wissenschaft*, p. 23.

¹⁰ AÖAW, Minutes of the extraordinary General Assembly of 25 March 1938 (A 933).

¹¹ See AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 1, Folder 1.

¹² See Taschwer (2013), *Geheimsache*. For details of the perfidious “cleansing” of the Vivarium, see the essay in this volume by Klaus Taschwer, “Expelled, burnt, sold, forgotten, and suppressed,” pp. 101–11.

¹³ AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 1, Folder 1, Knoll to Srbik of 23 March 1939.

¹⁴ See AÖAW, Wahlen, Box 4, Folder “1938.”

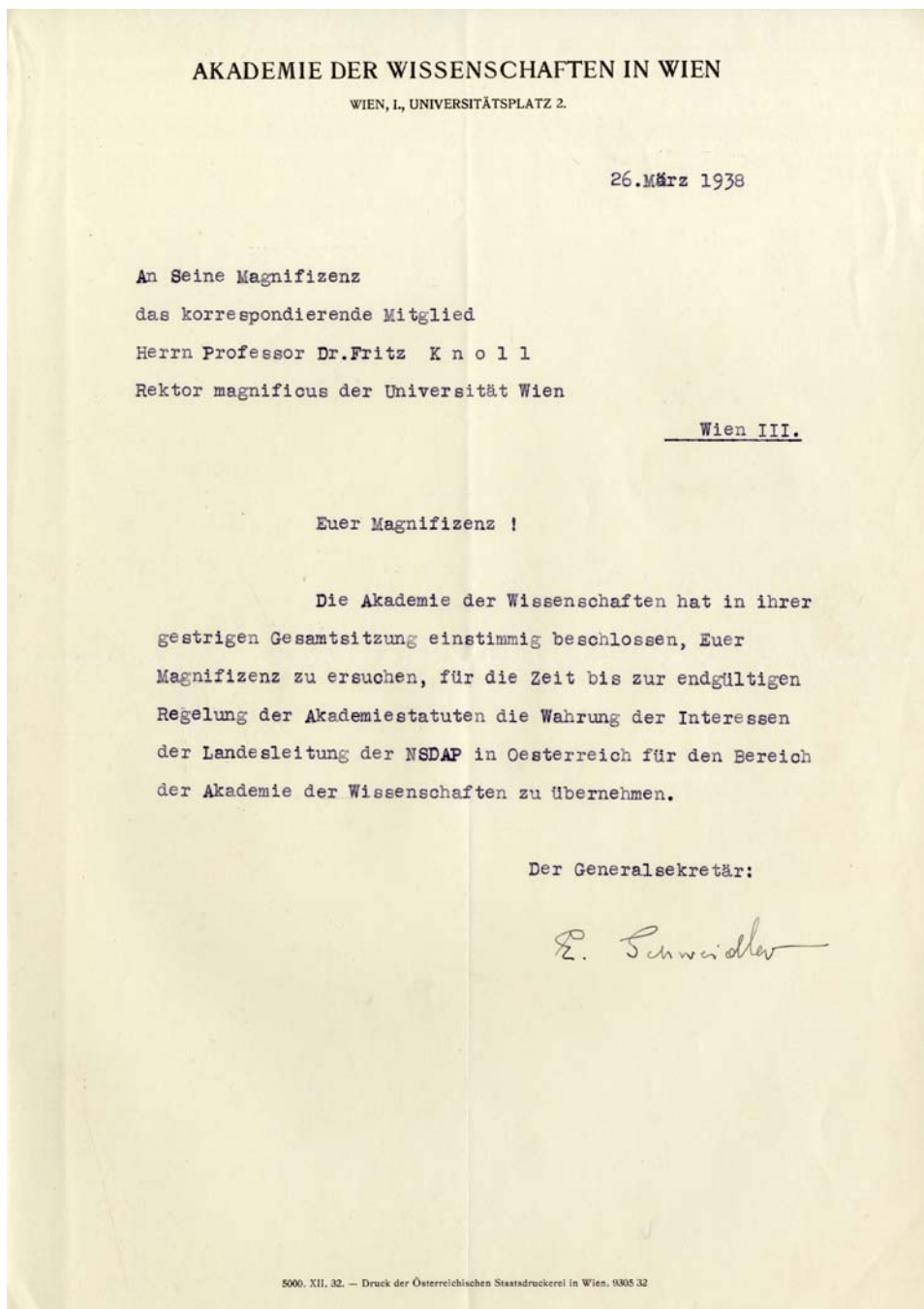


Fig. 17: Schweidler's letter to Knoll of 26 March 1938

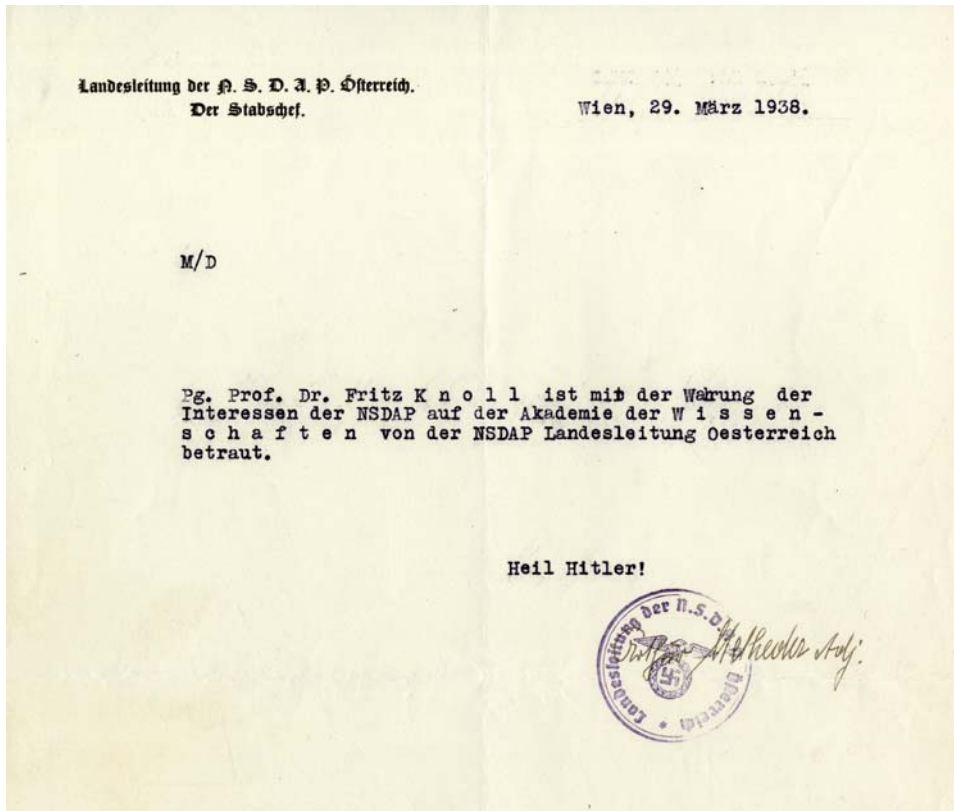


Fig. 18: Letter of the Nazi Party to Knoll of 29 March 1938

further the Jewish desire for international standing and world domination. Jewish researchers prefer certain areas of work and in some cases have even created them so as to promote their racially linked capabilities [...] for 'the world' and hence against the German people."¹⁵

In March 1943 Knoll resigned the rectorship of the University of Vienna in favor of the anatomist Eduard Pernkopf. This was prompted in part by a decision of the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture of November 1941 that even in times of war, the rectorship should change at least every three years and at the latest after five years.¹⁶ There had also been objections from the students and the SS to Knoll. On 10 August 1938, for example, the south-east section of the Reichsstudentenführung [Reich Student Leadership] suggested that Knoll's mandate should not be renewed, claiming that Knoll did not have *the leadership qualities required by an*

¹⁵ Knoll (1942), *Wissenschaft*, p. 23.

¹⁶ See ÖStA-AdR, Gauakt Heinrich Srbik, BMI/GA 49317, Sheet 26–7, report on the rectorship question at the University of Vienna.

establishment like the University of Vienna, which had lost its way and become stuck in the liberalist era.¹⁷ This did not endanger Knoll's rectorship at the time, however, but there was also an ex post critical evaluation of Knoll. A letter written by an *SS-Hauptsturmführer* on 19 April 1943 stated that he was the wrong person to have been commissarial rector: *Above all he was unimposing and in many respects too weak. [...] Many of his decisions often showed a lack of instinct, so much so that in some cases they raised doubts about his political disposition. Knoll is extremely ponderous, ideologically unsound, and above all reluctant to take clear steps and accept consequences.*¹⁸



Fig. 19: Fritz Knoll

This harsh criticism of Knoll's personality was to prove fortunate. He was dismissed from public office in June 1945 by decree of the *Staatsamt für Volksaufklärung, für Unterricht und Erziehung und für Kultusangelegenheiten* [State Office for Public

¹⁷ ÖStA-AdR, Gauakt Fritz Knoll, BMI/GA 38749, letter to Pg. Dr. Capra, personal assistant of *Gauleiter* [regional Nazi Party leader] Globocnik.

¹⁸ ÖStA-AdR, Gauakt Fritz Knoll, BMI/GA 38749, signature of the *SS-Hauptsturmführer* illegible.

Enlightenment, Education, and Cultural Affairs] on account of his membership of the Nazi Party, and the Academy also held his membership in abeyance [*stellte ruhend*]. In 1947, however, Knoll's case was reviewed by the authorities. The humiliating assessment by the SS probably now played into Knoll's hands. He also claimed in his own defense that in his speech in Bucharest he had played down Nazi ideology. He may still have represented the *official Nazi point of view, but by this time he was already becoming a "heretic."*¹⁹

Whatever the reason, in December 1947 Knoll received notification that under paragraph 17, subparagraph (3), of the *Verbotsgesetz* [law banning re-engagement in National Socialist activities] he was classified as "less incriminated." For that reason his dismissal from the university was transformed into retirement. And when the Amnesty Law came into force, Knoll's full membership of the Academy could be reactivated.²⁰ From this time he worked primarily at the Academy of Sciences since he was still banned from entering the university.²¹ In his later years Knoll thus became an amateur historical researcher. Academy President Heinrich Ficker commissioned Knoll to edit the volume *Österreichische Naturforscher und Techniker* (1951), which was designed to demonstrate "the contribution of Austrians to achievements in natural research and engineering and hence the general progress of mankind," as Ficker wrote in the introduction.²² Knoll had a free hand; the only criteria for inclusion in the book were that the researchers and engineers should be sufficiently important and also no longer living. A further book edited by Knoll, *Österreichische Naturforscher, Ärzte und Techniker*, was published in 1957.

The amateur historian's choice of co-authors appears somewhat puzzling today. Some former Nazis including Knoll himself, the paleontologist Kurt Ehrenberg, and the anatomist Eduard Pernkopf wrote several of the articles. Even more remarkable are the omissions in the 450-page large-format publication. To mention just three examples: Stefan Meyer (1872–1949), physicist and long-serving head of the Institute for Radium Research at the Academy of Sciences, Hans Przibram (1874–1944), zoologist and founder and long-standing head of the Institute for Experimental Biology (BVA), who was murdered in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, or Eugen Steinach (1861–1944), physiologist, world-famous pioneer of hormone research and BVA department head. All three were Jewish researchers who in part "created their own areas of work," as Knoll put it in 1941/42.²³ All three were first dismissed from the Academy and the University of Vienna in 1938 under Knoll's direction – and

¹⁹ Dr. Franz Speta private archive, Linz, letter from Knoll or his legal representative, undated.

²⁰ AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 1, Folder 1, notification by President Heinrich Ficker of 16 June 1948.

²¹ See AÖAW, Papers of Fritz Knoll, Box 2, Folder 10, correspondence with Lothar Geitler regarding the Botanical Institute of the University of Vienna, particularly Geitler's letter of 7 January 1949.

²² Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (1951), *Naturforscher*, p. 7.

²³ Knoll (1942), *Wissenschaft*, p. 23.

barely twenty years later he consistently eliminated them from the official history of science in Austria published by the Academy. Again, as Knoll said in 1941/42: “Thus the Jew has disappeared from our academic circles now and for all times.”²⁴

In the year the second volume appeared, the 74-year old botanist became Secretary of the Section for Mathematics and the Natural Sciences and, the following year, Secretary General of the Academy, a position he held until 1964. In 1967 the now 84-year-old received one final honor: the General Assembly passed a resolution awarding him the silver “Bene Merito” medal for particular services to the Austrian Academy of Sciences.²⁵

Klaus Taschwer

²⁴ Knoll (1942), *Wissenschaft*, p. 23.

²⁵ See *Almanach* for 1966, 117 (1967), p. 145.