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EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGY IN THE VIENNA PRATER

On the History of the Institute for Experimental Biology 1902 to 1945

AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Klaus Taschwer, Johannes Feichtinger,
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Translation from German: Joanna White

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PREFACE

With this publication and the exhibition it is based on, *Experimental Biology in the Prater: On the History of the Institute for Experimental Biology 1902–1945*, which opened on 12 June 2015 in the Aula of the Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) and was on display until 10 July of the same year, the Austrian Academy of Sciences honours the Institute for Experimental Biology in the Vienna Prater, one of the world's first research institutes for experimental biology.

In 1914 the imperial Academy of Sciences was presented the Institute for Experimental Biology (*Biologische Versuchsanstalt*, or BVA) by its founders Hans Przibram, Leopold von Portheim and Wilhelm Figdor as a gift. The donation not only included the building and its facilities but also an endowment fund worth 300,000 kronen, which had been set up by the brothers Hans and Karl Przibram with Leopold von Portheim and the income in interest from which was to secure the continuation of research activities. Following Karl Kupelwieser's endowment of the Institute for Radium Research to the imperial Academy of Sciences, the acquisition of the BVA was another decisive step in building the Academy's profile as a place for research in the natural sciences.

The 'Anschluss' in 1938 and the National Socialist seizure of power in Austria

represented a radical break, in particular for the two institutes of the Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Radium Research and the Institute for Experimental Biology, at which numerous – male and female – scientists were carrying out research. Many of them had Jewish backgrounds and were removed from the Academy on ‘racial’ grounds. They were persecuted and driven out of the country. We know of eight people working at the Academy of Sciences who died or were murdered in National Socialist concentration camps: the Romanist Elise Richter and seven members and staff of the BVA – Leonore Brecher, Henriette Burchardt, Martha Geiringer, Helene Jacobi, Heinrich Kun, Elisabeth and Hans Przibram.

The treatment of members and scientists of the BVA and other Academy institutions who were persecuted as Jews during the period of National Socialist rule is a shameful chapter in the history of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The Academy took the occasion of the 150th anniversary of its founding to engage critically for the first time with its role under National Socialism. In 1997 it commissioned Herbert Matis to publish a study entitled *Zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand. Die Akademie der Wissenschaften 1938-1945*. In 2013 the comprehensive volume *The Academy of Sciences in Vienna 1938 to 1945* appeared.

From this year, a plaque at the entrance to the festive hall at the ÖAW commemorates the ‘Victims of National Socialism among the Staff of the Academy of Sciences’. Their names and fates can be looked up online in the *Memorial Book for the Victims of National Socialism at the Austrian Academy of Sciences*.

The BVA occupies a special position within the ÖAW’s examination of its past during the National Socialist era. This publication hopes to provide the impetus for further, in-depth investigations into one of those Austrian research institutes which, over several decades, shaped the international academic landscape.

Anton Zeilinger

President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

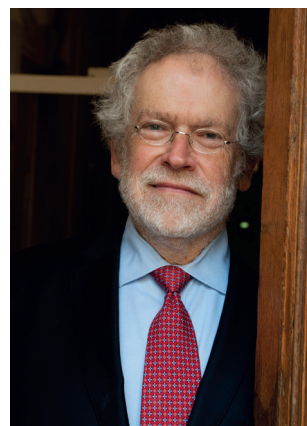


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