

Ethnic Fragmentation:

Viennese “Racial and Folklore Research” in occupied Poland (1940–1944)

RESEARCH TOPIC:

After the invasion of Poland in September 1939, the German occupying power was faced with the question of how to effectively administer the large territory. Poles living in the “racial dumping ground” of the so-called Generalgouvernement were regarded as cheap labour. Based on the criteria of the “Deutsche Volksliste” (German People’s List) they were classified as either being “Volksdeutsche” (ethnic Germans) or “inferior”. National Socialist policy aimed at splitting the population groups in order to destroy national unity by strengthening local separatism – with the obedient help of pro-Nazi anthropologists and ethnologists.

At the beginning of 1940, Anton Adolf Plügel (1910–1945), an enthusiastic National Socialist and alumnus of the University of Vienna’s Institute of Ethnology, relocated to Cracow. There he became head of the section for ‘Racial and Folklore Research’ (‘Rassen- und Volkstumsforschung’) at the Institute for German Studies in the East. The young researcher and his team (among them another alumnus of the Viennese Institute, Elfriede Fliethmann, 1915–1987) collected biometric data of the population in preparation for selection and extermination.

Diensteintritt im Generalgouvernement: 17. 1. 1940

beschäftigt bei: Institut f. Deutsche Ostarbeit, Sektion Rassen- u. Volkstumsforschung (genau Bezeichnung der Dienststelle)

PERSONALBOGEN

1) Dr. P l ü g e l Anton
Vorname Nachname (Geburtsname b. Frauen)

2) a) Beruf: Wissenschaftler (Referent)

b) Heimatdienststelle (f. abgeordn. Beamte u. Angestellte)

3) Geburtsort und Ort: geboren am: 27. 4. 1910 in: Wien
Kreis: Landgericht:

4) Staatsangehörigkeit: Reichsdeutsche, Einbürgerung der Ostmark, Reichspol (niederschriftlich, vollständig, vollständig nachgewiesen)

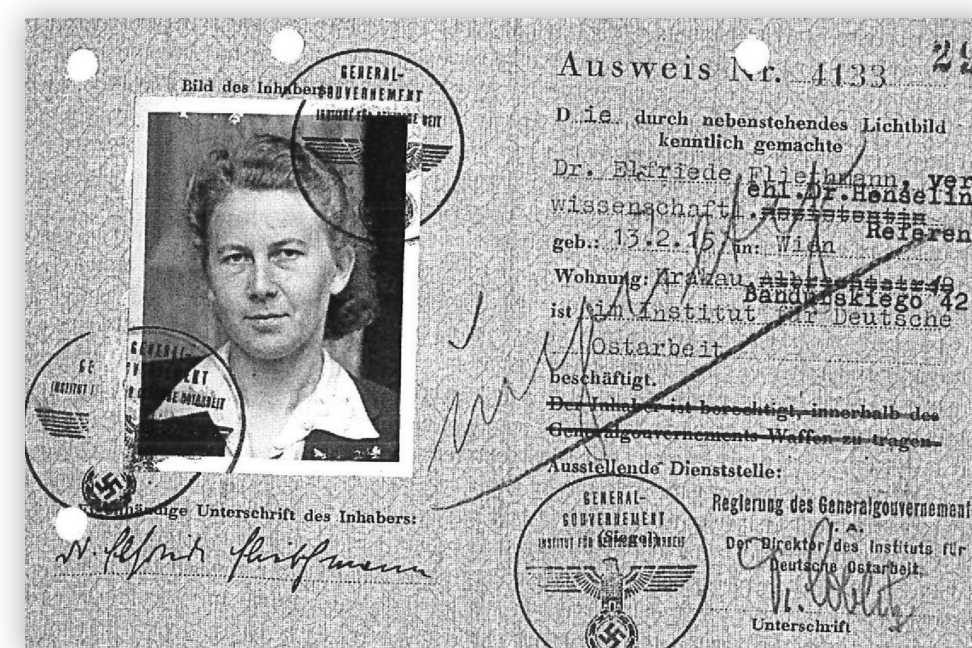
5) deutschblütige Abstammung: Ahnenreihe (niederschriftlich, vollständig, vollständig nachgewiesen)

6) Glaubensbekenntnis: gottgl.

7) Wohnung: a) in der Heimat: Wien XXIV-Brunn a. d. P. Kesselweg 23 Tel. Nr. --
aa) eigene Wohnung: -- bb) i. Haushalt d. Eltern: ja
b) im Generalgouvernement: Krakau, Heistring 58/9

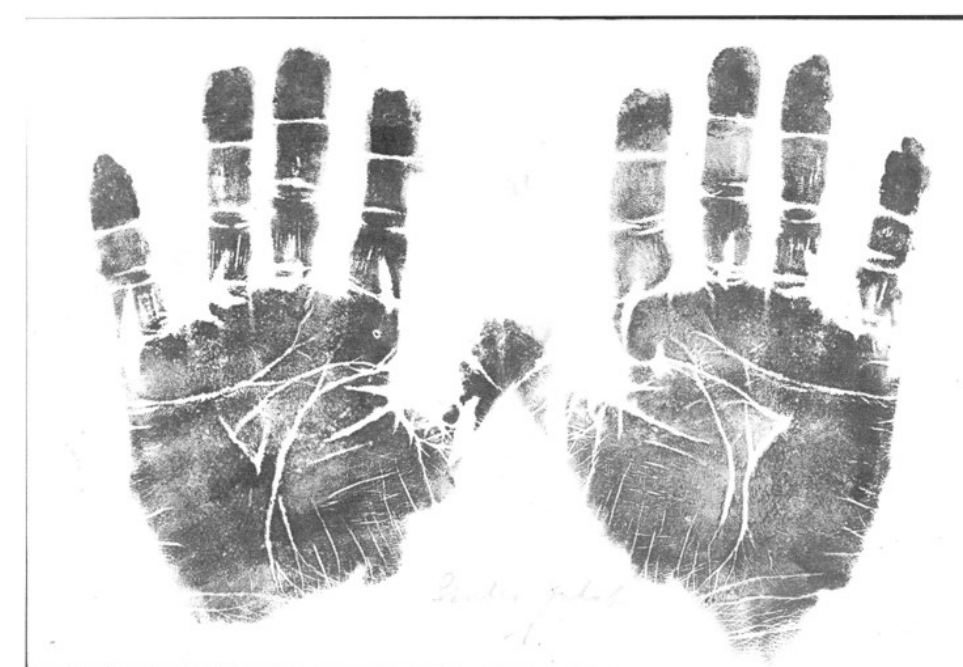
8) Familienverhältnisse: a) ledig, verheiratet: ledig geschieden-verwitwet: --
b) Tag der Eheschließung: --
c) Name der Ehefrau (Geburtsname): --
des Ehemannes: --
d) Beruf des Ehegatten: --

Anton A. Plügel, Staff Questionnaire, Institute for German Studies in the East 1941 (BArch Berlin, R 52-IV/85)



Elfriede Fliethmann, Photo ID, Generalgouvernement 1941 (BArch Berlin, R 52-IV/67)

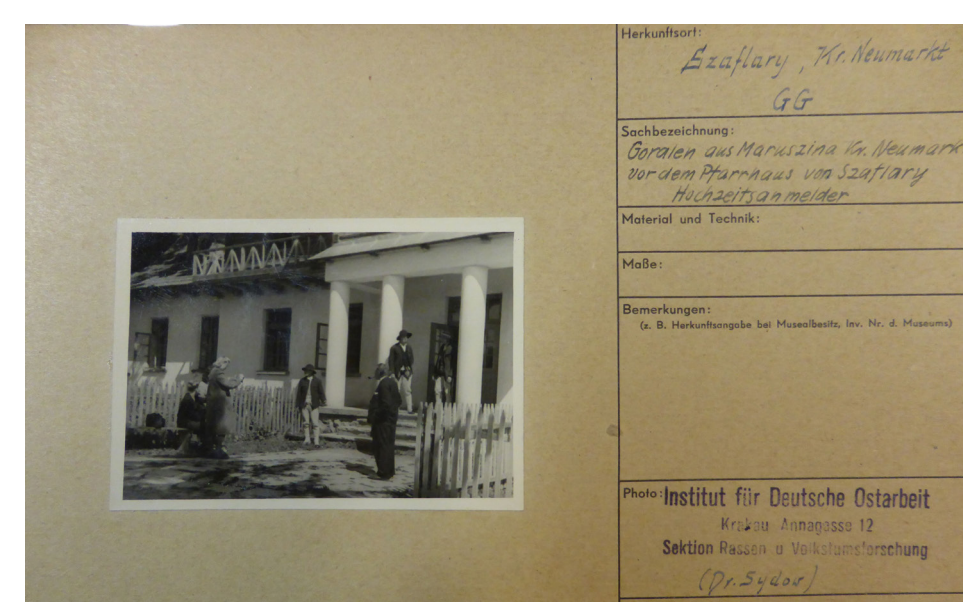
The researchers in Cracow maintained close contacts with their colleagues in Vienna and used methods invented or elaborated by Josef Weninger (1886–1959) and his ‘Viennese Anthropological School’.



Archival Remnants: Handprints (AUJ IDO SR 02/08)

The Nazi examinations in occupied Poland focused on several major groups. To some extent, Poles and Ukrainians were scheduled for forced labour in the ‘Reich’. Orthodox Jews in the Tarnów Ghetto were documented while preparations for the Holocaust set in. Village residents in Southern Poland, if perceived as being of possible German genetic or linguistic background (e.g., as descendants of colonizers from the times of Habsburg emperor Joseph II) were facing a less life-threatening fate.

Anton Plügel’s field research among the Góral (sometimes also referred to as Polish Highlanders), a small population group residing at the foothills of the Tatra Mountains, was to identify so-called Aryan evidence. Crucial proof was seen in ‘Nordic racial elements’, traditional folk costumes, folklore and swastikas on wood carvings. The special treatment of the Góral by the German occupation authorities led to conflicts between them and other groups in the region, which continued in the post-war period.



Anthropologists in Szaflary, 1942 (AUJ IEIAK, Box 3, Nr. 25)

OBJECTIVES

The goal of my dissertation is to illuminate the involvement of (Viennese) anthropologists and ethnologists in racist Nazi policy in the occupied territories of East Central Europe during World War II. By examining their academic biographies and scientific networks, as well as their research interests, their political agendas and their everyday practices, I want to contribute to my discipline’s self-reflexive critique.



Archival Remnants: Datasheets (AUJ)

MATERIAL

Primary sources from wide-ranging archival collections in Poland, Austria and Germany, e.g.:

- documents of the former Institute for German Studies in the East including correspondence, publications and photos (Jagellonian University Archive, Cracow)
- photos of the former ‘Sektion Rassen- und Volkstumsforschung’ (Archive of the Ethnographic Museum and the Institute for Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in Cracow)
- NSDAP- and NS-Administration records (State Archives in Austria and Berlin)
- student records and course catalogues (Vienna University Archives)

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Triangulation of methods combining:

- biographical methods
- historical network analysis
- text and photo analysis

THANKS

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