The University of Hohenheim examines one of the darkest chapters of its 200-year history

Monday, 12 November 2018, 4:15 p.m.: Memorial event in honor of deported and deceased forced laborers at the University cemetery / 5:00 p.m.: Results of the research project “Hohenheim and National-Socialism” at Hohenheim Palace

“Their names should serve as a warning to us”: That is how the inscription ends on a sculpture that is to be revealed on Monday, 12 November 2018 on the University of Hohenheim’s campus cemetery in Stuttgart. Over 240 forced laborers in Hohenheim, of whom two were buried on campus in 1945, are to be memorialized. In addition, all others who suffered from injustice by Hohenheim Agricultural College during the National-Socialist era will also be commemorated. The College’s members placed themselves in the service of the National-Socialist regime extraordinarily quickly and willingly, as recent research findings show. Following the memorial ceremony, Dr. Anja Waller will present this research at 5:00 p.m. in the University of Hohenheim Palace. Both events are open to the public - anyone is welcome to attend. In order to make planning the events easier, the event organizers request registration at www.uni-hohenheim.de/aufarbeitung-ns-zeit-Ergebnisse

Up until now, grass had grown over the remains of Isabella Sikorska (1888 to 1945) and Peter Ralintschenko (1894 to 1945), who were deported to Hohenheim as forced laborers under the National-Socialist dictatorship.

Isabella Sikorska was probably arrested during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and deported to the concentration camp in Ravensbrueck. Upon her arrival in Hohenheim, she was apparently in terrible health: She died only a few days later. The death certificate lists “heart insufficiency, pneumonia” as the cause of death.

Peter Ralintschenko died a year after his arrival in Hohenheim in a fatal accident. The accident occurred in February 1945 in the Animal Breeding Institute. No further details about his death could be found in the archives.

Sikorska and Ralintschenko represent at least 242 forced laborers who were exploited in the experimental fields, in institutes, or as housekeepers starting in 1940. The graves of the two were never marked.

As of 12 November 2018, a memorial stele at the entry of the cemetery will commemorate Sikorska’s and Ralintschenko’s fate. The graves themselves will be marked with two simple cubes made of the same material with the initials of the deceased.

Extensive Evaluation of Historical Sources
Dr. Anja Waller, historian and head of the project on a historical review of the Nazi period and its consequences at the University of Hohenheim, discovered the graves in old cemetery records. Her work was assisted by the renowned Prof. Dr. Andreas Gestrich, the former Director of the German Historical Institute in London, as scientific advisor.

For nearly three years, the historian made her way through the University’s files, searched through sources in the state and federal archives, reviewed documents from the Red Cross’s International Tracing Service on the fate of forced laborers, and researched in the church archives of Rottenburg and Stuttgart.

In her analysis, Dr. Waller did not limit herself to the period between the National-Socialists seizing power until their capitulation at the end of World War II. “It was important to the University of Hohenheim that the effects of National-Socialism in the following decades were also included,” explained the historian.

The focus was in particular on the question of the extent to which there was a new beginning in Hohenheim after the end of the war - and the extent to which people with a National-Socialist past were successfully able to start or continue their career in Hohenheim.

Research project intends to make up for failings in the post-war decades

“While other eras in Hohenheim’s history have been explored in detail, the discussion of the National-Socialist history in Hohenheim has been surprisingly weak. The aim was to fill this gap,” declared University of Hohenheim President Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert.

The University therefore decided to contract external historians to review this part of its history and to publish the findings in 2018, the University’s anniversary year. After all: “If we want to celebrate our many successes in our 200-year history, we cannot ignore the dark chapters in that time,” commented Prof. Dr. Dabbert.

Science in the Service of National-Socialist Ideology and Crimes

In fact, National-Socialist found especially fertile ground in Hohenheim, Dr. Waller stated in her report. “In Hohenheim, forced standardization (Gleichschaltung) was carried out without resistance and with enthusiasm and dedication.”

In the following years, the University willingly placed itself in the service of National-Socialist ideology: “Scientists from Hohenheim used their studies to provide theoretical preparation for re-settlement, displacement, and deportation in Eastern Europe. During the war, the professors actively participated in re-settlement and settlement of occupied territories or in the systematic theft of scientific material.”

It is therefore even more striking how quickly the University repressed its past in the same year that the war ended. In December 1945, teaching operations had already started again in Hohenheim. “There was never really a new start back then,” reported Dr. Waller.

Post-war repression: Former SS functionary became President in 1963

This repression culminated in the appointment of Prof. Dr. Günther Franz. As a confessing National-Socialist, the agricultural scientist became a member of the NSDAP (National-Socialist Party) and SA (Sturmabteilung) in 1933. In 1944, he was an Obersturmführer in the SS. Starting in 1939, he was part of the personal staff of the National-Socialist’s
head ideologist Alfred Rosenberg. In the Head Reich Security Office, he was active as a scientific coordinator in “opponent research.”

After the end of the war, the confessing National-Socialist worked to re-enter science. “He wasn’t successful until relatively late, but then he was very successful when he was appointed as the Chair of Agricultural History in Hohenheim in 1957,” stated Dr. Waller. He influenced research in agricultural history until the early 1970s.

From 1963 until 1967, the former SS officer was even President of the College. In 1968, he wrote the festschrift for the University’s 150th anniversary.

Detailed presentation of research findings on 12 November at 5:00 p.m.

Dr. Waller will present the details of her research findings following the memorial ceremony at 5:00 p.m. in the Hohenheim Palace Aula and in her publication “Erschreckend einwandfrei – Die NS-Zeit und ihre Folgen an der Universität Hohenheim” (With Little Resistance - The National-Socialist Period and its Consequences at the University of Hohenheim).

The event will start with a greeting by the President. Prof. Dr. Andreas Gestrich, Director of the German Historical Institute in London and scientific advisor for the project, will give the introduction.

Memorial points aim to make history visible in everyday life

“With this research project and this publication, the University of Hohenheim aims to name and recognize the suffering and injustice that was committed under National-Socialist rule,” summarized President Prof. Dr. Dabbert. “The victims of National-Socialism in Hohenheim should not be forgotten, the injustice done to them is to be made visible and those responsible are to be named.”

The University of Hohenheim therefore wants to make the results of the research project visible in everyday life with memorial points. Besides the memorial stele at the University cemetery, this also includes a plaque that mentions past presidents who had close ties with the National-Socialists. It has been mounted in the Tannenzapfenzimmer of Hohenheim Palace, which displays a complete gallery of all directors and presidents from the founding in 1818 until today.

BACKGROUND Publication

“Erschreckend einwandfrei – Die NS-Zeit und ihre Folgen an der Universität Hohenheim” (With Little Resistance - The National-Socialist Period and its Consequences at the University of Hohenheim). As the only remaining agricultural college in Germany, Hohenheim played a special role in National-Socialism: Hohenheim was to become the “National-Socialist model institution.” The publication “Erschreckend einwandfrei – Die NS-Zeit und ihre Folgen an der Universität Hohenheim” (With Little Resistance - The National-Socialist Period and its Consequences at the University of Hohenheim) is the result of almost three years of research by Dr. Anja Waller about the time before Gleichschaltung, the National-Socialist era, and the lack of confronting the National-Socialist past in Hohenheim during the post-war decades. For the first time, the publication presents a comprehensive picture of the University of Hohenheim’s National-Socialist past and its consequences. The publication of the research findings was
made possible with the generous support of the Palm-Stiftung.

Please request review copies from presse@uni-hohenheim.de

Additional Information
Registration for memorial event and book presentation:
https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/aufarbeitung-ns-zeit-Ergebnisse

Hohenheim and National Socialism: Project on a historical review of the National-Socialist period and its consequences:
https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en/historical-review-nazi-era

History of the University of Hohenheim:
https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en/history

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