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A LOST TREASURE TROVE OF KNOWLEDGE

The Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Berlin and its Library

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Photo credit: Map of Ukraine from 1918. Signatur K 42 II L 5 / Kartensammlung des Herder-Instituts für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, CC0 1.0

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The Ukrainian Scientific Institute (Ukrainische Wissenschaftliche Institut or UWI) was the central research centre for the Ukrainian émigré community in Germany between 1926 and 1945. At its height, Its library was the largest collection of specialist literature on Ukraine anywhere, but its contents was scattered during the war: in retrospect it serves as an example of how the Nazi regime controlled academic institutions in order to promote its own political interests.

During the First World War (1914–1918), the initiatives of Ukrainian organisations in Germany were primarily geared towards supporting and freeing the numerous Ukrainian prisoners of war who were held in German camps. Following the failure of the first period of the Ukrainian liberation struggle (1919–1921) and the integration of Ukraine into the Soviet Union (USSR), however, the focus shifted: in exile, Ukrainians established numerous institutions intended to secure the survival of Ukrainian identity. The most significant of these institutions in Germany was probably the Ukrainian Scientific Institute (UWI) in Berlin, which became a central focus for the intellectual life of the Ukrainian diaspora.

The UWI remained one of the most important research centres for the Ukrainian exile community for nearly two decades – from autumn 1926 to spring 1945. Its establishment was remarkable, since it was a joint enterprise between representatives of some very diverse Ukrainian fields, who would otherwise have been unlikely to agree on common goals. Among the "founding fathers" were emigrants from the so-called Greater Ukraine, the heartland around Kyiv. These included Zu Pavlo Skoropadsky, a former hetman (a traditional Ukrainian military and state leader), as well as Dmytro Doroshenko, a historian and politician and a key figure in the Ukrainian diaspora.

Soon they were joined by a group of humanities scholars from Galicia, a region which at that time still belonged to Austria-Hungary and which today is part of Western Ukraine. Among them were Ivan Mirtshuk, Zenon Kuzela and Yaroslav Rudnytsky. Over the course of the years nearly all notable Ukrainian humanities scholars collaborated with the UWI, including historian Borys Krupnytsky, geographer Volodymyr Kubiyovych and Dmytro and Mychajlo Antonovych, descendants of a famous academic family from Kyiv.

Like many similar Ukrainian organisations in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, France and other countries, the UWI saw itself above all as a protector of Ukrainian identity. One of its central tasks was to prepare an educated national intelligentsia – that is, academics, scientists and cultural figures – for a future Ukrainian state. Originally conceived as a kind of "small academy of the sciences", over time the Institute also developed political initiatives. Alongside standard research work it ran information campaigns to paint its own picture of Ukraine for

the German and European public, in order to provide a counterweight to Soviet propaganda, which only represented the country in the context of the USSR.

Imprint of the letter stamp of the former library (now part of the collection of the Lenin State Library in Moscow). Panas Fedenko, „Der nationale und soziale Befreiungskampf der Ukraine" (Berlin 1923), Free access - no reuse

A place to exercise knowledge and power

It is no surprise that, as a result, the UWI also caught the attention of the German authorities. The Army and the secret services began to monitor the activities of Ukrainian organisations in Germany at an early stage. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that the first official curator of the Institut was Wilhelm Gröner, a former general of the Reichswehr, who even briefly served as defence minister after the First World War. Gröner was therefore by no means a marginal figure, but a member of the German military and power elite. His position makes it clear that the UWI was not simply a place for academic work but also a place that played a role in the political interests of Germany.

The political transformation that took place in Germany after the National socialists seized power did not stop outside the UWI. The systematic suppression and control of academic structures by the national socialist regime led to the Institut becoming unavoidably caught up in their ideological agenda. In the final phase of its existence, the UWI could hardly be

distinguished from ordinary German academic institutions. The interest of the secret services in the UWI could also be seen as symbolic: during the Second World War, the Institut was managed by Georg Gerullis, a professor from the university of Königsberg, who was also active as an officer in the Abwehrdienst, the miliary intelligence service of the Nazi regime.

In spring 1945, the UWI suffered the same fate as many academic facilities in Germany: staff were forced to leave Berlin due to the allied bombardments and the approaching Red Army, and at this point the Institut effectively ceased to exist. In the chaos of the battles for the "Reichshauptstadt" and the subsequent occupation, the collections and archives that had been assembled over many years risked being lost completely. Sections of the material would later reappear, albeit scattered over several different countries.

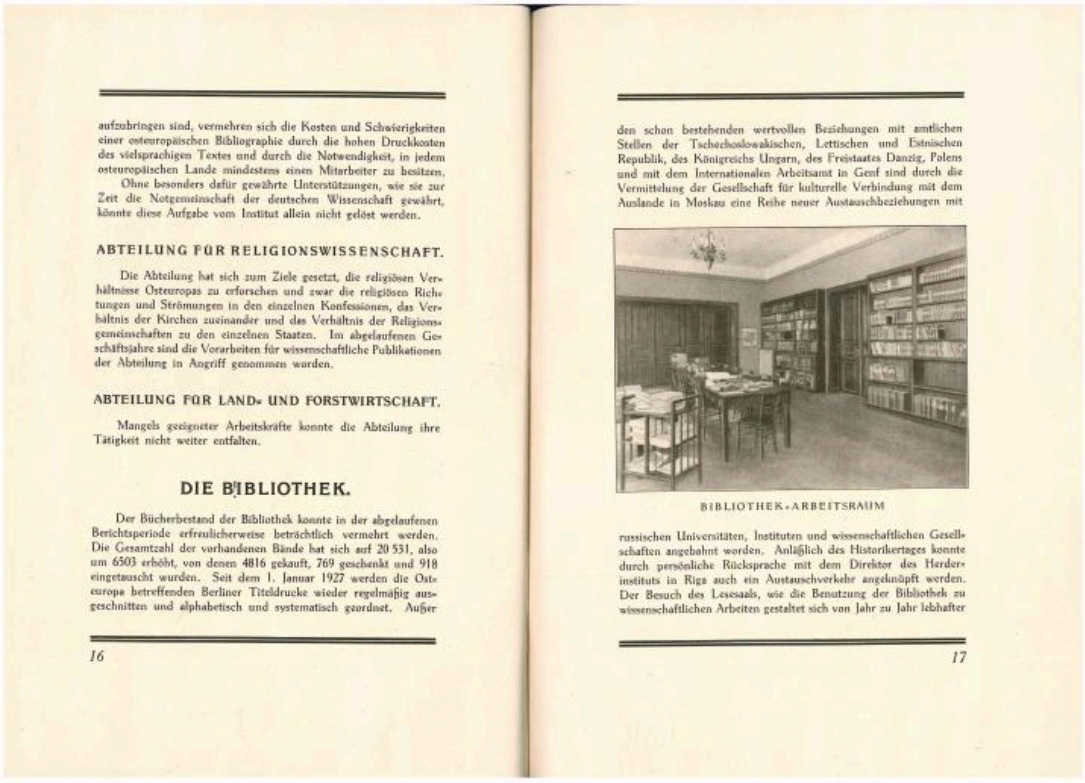
A large part actually remained in Germany and was preserved in the archive of the Humboldt University of Berlin after the war ended. Other parts later surfaced in the Preussischer Staatsbibliothek and in the Berlin State Archives. A small part ended up in Kyiv and formed the basis of the inventory (No. 4158) of the Central State Archives of the highest authorities and administrative organs of Ukraine – formerly the archive of the October Revolution

October revolution

also: Red Revolution, Bolshevik revolution, Great October Socialist Revolution, Bolshevik coup, Red October, October Uprising

Second Russian Revolution of the year 1917, during which the communist Bolsheviks violently seized power and overthrew the 'Provisional Government', which had been established only a few months earlier as a result of the February Revolution. The October Revolution also marked the beginning of the Russian Civil War, after which the Soviet Union was founded (1922) following the victory of the Bolshevik Red Army. Following the Julian calendar, the October Revolution began on October 24/25, and according to the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced in Russia in early 1918, on November 6/7, 1917.

and the development of socialism. Individual documents that were once part of the Museum for the Liberation Struggle of Ukraine in Prague, which was closed down in 1948, are today preserved in the National Archive of the Czech Republic.



aufzubringen sind, vermehren sich die Kosten und Schwierigkeiten einer osteuropäischen Bibliographie durch die hohen Druckkosten des vielsprachigen Textes und durch die Notwendigkeit, in jedem osteuropäischen Lande mindestens einen Mitarbeiter zu besitzen.

Ohne besonders dafür gewährte Unterstützungen, wie sie zur Zeit die Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft gewährt, könnte diese Aufgabe vom Institut allein nicht gelöst werden.

ABTEILUNG FÜR RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT.

Die Abteilung hat sich zum Ziele gesetzt, die religiösen Verhältnisse Osteuropas zu erforschen und zwar die religiösen Richtungen und Strömungen in den einzelnen Konfessionen, das Verhältnis der Kirchen zueinander und das Verhältnis der Religionsgemeinschaften zu den einzelnen Staaten. Im abgelaufenen Geschäftsjahre sind die Vorarbeiten für wissenschaftliche Publikationen der Abteilung in Angriff genommen worden.

ABTEILUNG FÜR LAND- UND FORSTWIRTSCHAFT.

Mangels geeigneter Arbeitskräfte konnte die Abteilung ihre Tätigkeit nicht weiter entfalten.

DIE BIBLIOTHEK.

Der Bücherbestand der Bibliothek konnte in der abgelaufenen Berichtsperiode erfreulicherweise beträchtlich vermehrt werden. Die Gesamtzahl der vorhandenen Bände hat sich auf 20 531, also um 6503 erhöht, von denen 4816 gekauft, 769 geschenkt und 918 eingetauscht wurden. Seit dem 1. Januar 1927 werden die Osteuropa betreffenden Berliner Titeldrucke wieder regelmäßig ausgeschnitten und alphabetisch und systematisch geordnet. Außer

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den schon bestehenden wertvollen Beziehungen mit amtlichen Stellen der Tschechoslowakischen, Lettischen und Estnischen Republik, des Königreichs Ungarn, des Freistaates Danzig, Polens und mit dem Internationalen Arbeitsamt in Genf sind durch die Vermittelung der Gesellschaft für kulturelle Verbindung mit dem Auslande in Moskau eine Reihe neuer Austauschbeziehungen mit

BIBLIOTHEK-ARBEITSRAUM

russischen Universitäten, Instituten und wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften angebahnt worden. Anläßlich des Historikertages konnte durch persönliche Rücksprache mit dem Direktor des Herderinstituts in Riga auch ein Austauschverkehr angeknüpft werden. Der Besuch des Lesesaals, wie die Benutzung der Bibliothek zu wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten gestaltet sich von Jahr zu Jahr lebhafter

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Photo taken in the reading room of the library of the Breslau Institute, where some of the Ukrainian holdings were later relocated. „Das Osteuropa-Institut zu Breslau" (Breslau 1941), Free access - no reuse

From treasure trove of knowledge to spoils of war

One of the most important departments of the UWI, which is often neglected, deserves special consideration: its well-organised reference library. In the time before the Internet, the printed book was the only source of reliable information. As a result, specialist literature was very highly valued, and some research institutes had particularly broad and sometimes unique collections. In the official activities report of the UWI, the book collection was thus described as the “Central Library for Ukrainian Studies”. The library was open from 9am to 3pm on business days, closed at weekends and on national holidays, and had on average 550 visitors per month, which is an indication of the liveliness of academic life at the Institut.

The role of academic librarian at the UWI was filled by Zenon Kuzela. He was the central point of contact between authors, publishers and academic societies, acquired literature and organised the exchange of books between institutions. It was thanks to him, for example, that the collections of Volodymyr Hnatiuk, a famous Ukrainian ethnographer, and Axel Schmidt, co-founder of the Deutsch-Ukrainischen Gesellschaft

Deutsch-Ukrainischen Gesellschaft

The German-Ukrainian Society is an institution founded in Berlin in 1918 by the German-Baltic conservative publicists Paul Rohrbach and Axel Schmidt, whose purpose was "to establish and maintain friendly relations between the German and Ukrainian peoples in the political, economic, and cultural spheres." The society published its own journal called "Ukraine." The commitment of such enthusiasts contributed significantly to spreading knowledge about Ukraine in Germany.

in Berlin, found their way into the library of the UWI. It was because of Kuzela's dedication that the reference library became the "largest book collection among the Ukrainian academic institutions in Germany" – a unique treasure trove of knowledge from the diaspora.

It is interesting to observe that historians working on the activities of the UWI typically only mention it in passing, to note that it was destroyed in 1945 in the chaos that accompanied the end of the war. However, a few remnants of the collection did actually survive and find their way into a wide-ranging collection of pillaged literature, which ended up in the Lenin State Library in Moscow after the end of the Second World War. There they were shelved together with the books from the Osteuropa Institut in Breslau (OIB)

Osteuropa-Institut

also: Osteuropa-Institute, Osteuropa-Institut in Breslau

Founded in 1918 and destroyed in 1945, the "Osteuropa-Institut" (Eastern Europe Institute) in Breslau was a non-university research institution that developed into one of the most important German research centers on Eastern Europe during the Weimar Republic. It had a unique library that was also the largest of its kind in the German Reich. As early as 1933, the National Socialists began to influence the work of the institute, which ultimately served the political objectives of the Nazi regime and devoted itself to ethnic research on Eastern Europe and, eventually, research on enemy nations.

, an institute that was established as early as April 1918 and was considered a leading research centre for East European studies. One of its main tasks was to compile as complete a collection as possible of literature that covered the countries and regions between the Baltic Sea and the Aegean. A careful examination of this collection led to the rediscovery of numerous works from the former stock of the UWI library.

Academic doppelgangers and ideological control

One obvious question is, how and under what circumstances did the books from the Berlin UWI end up in Breslau? The answer can be found in the history of the Osteuropa Institut Breslau. Although the Institut was originally established primarily to provide information and analyses for existing power structures, like many similar academic institutions in Germany, it strove to maintain a degree of neutrality in its research, even under the Nazi regime. In order

to change this situation, the Nazi government eventually authorised the establishment of a network of loyal "Thought Centres", which over the course of time developed into academic "Doppelgangers", that is, institutions that officially worked on academic projects while at the same time supporting the political interests of the regime.

Any organisations that insisted in adhering to their own ideology were deprived of their research basis or simply closed down. One example of this is the Deutsche Gesellschaft zum Studium Osteuropas (DGSO)

Deutsche Gesellschaft zum Studium Osteuropas (DGSO)

The German Society for the Study of Eastern Europe was an association of German academics that had been engaged in the study of history, politics, regional studies, and other subjects related to Eastern Europe since 1913. After the National Socialists seized power, the society was dissolved for political reasons.

, led by Professor Otto Hoetzsch – a leading expert in the field who was also a political opponent of the Nazi regime. The book collection of this society was subsequently divided up between "ideologically relevant" institutions. It is worth noting that the Ukrainian part of this collection was originally earmarked for the UWI. At least one volume in the UWI library can be shown to have previously belonged to the DGSO.

During this time, the UWI also had to undergo "Gleichschaltung" several times – that is, synchronisation with Nazi ideology and control. One aspect of this process was the development of Auslandswissenschafta mixture of regional and cultural studies and political analysis, which reflected current political interests.. For example, between 1935 and 1936 the Seminar für orientalische Sprachen was merged with the private Deutsche Hochschule für Politik (DHfP) that was founded by German conservatives at the beginning of the Weimar Republic. This merger created a kind of "Foreign Studies University" that was meant to bring together the study of other countries within the guidelines of Nazi ideology.

At around the same time, another research facility was opened: the Russia Institute. This was ostensibly an independent institution, but it actually developed into a pseudo-academic Doppelganger, which functioned as a kind of facade for the Wannsee Institut

Wannsee Institute

The Wannsee Institute was a Nazi front organization that, under the guise of a scientific institute, collected and processed information about Eastern Europe for the intelligence services and party and state authorities. The results were communicated in the form of special reports and publications "for official use." After the war against the Soviet Union began, the Wannsee Institute was responsible for, among other things, the occupation policy in the East.

, a non-public research unit that prepared material for the SD (the Sicherheitsdienst, the

security services of the SS) and other intelligence agencies. An investigation of the former library of the Russia Institute, based on volumes from this library that ended up in the Lenin Staatsbibliothek after the Second World War, showed that books from the UWI were included in this collection. It is no longer possible to establish whether the UWI donated these books voluntarily or under duress. However, taken together, the circulation of the same books between different libraries provides a graphic illustration of the gleichschaltung of academic institutions in Nazi Germany, that is, their forced adaption to ideological guidelines and the control of their academic resources.

It should be stressed that the book collections of the UWI, which were confiscated in 1945 by the Red Army were not preserved in their original form. Even in the Soviet Union they were likely to scattered arbitrarily, stored separately or passed on to other libraries. Against this background, the discovery of volumes that originally belonged to the UWI in Berlin and are today located in Moscow opens up new possibilities for the systematic exploration of this collection and its historical holdings.

English translation: Gwen Clayton ↗

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