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Reviews

Antropologie Europas. Völker, Typen und Gene vom Neandertaler bis zur Gegenwart. Andreas Vonderach, Ares Verlag, Graz 2008, 448 pages, 365 pictures.
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German anthropology has had a unique role in central and eastern Europe. This part of Europe was inhabited mostly by German and Slavic speaking populations whose coexistence led to conflicts throughout different periods of European history. Confrontation between these groups culminated in World War Two. German anthropology under Nazism attempted to scientifically justify racism and the genocide of part of the population of occupied central and eastern European countries and was therefore long discredited. Although today German anthropology is again highly acclaimed, how it deals with the past is still a sensitive topic. The reviewed book attracts our attention first because of its German origin and secondly because of the broad approach to the subject matter. Its author largely discusses the history of humans in Europe and also comments on the territories and ethnic groups formerly ruled by the Nazis. This book review focuses on the author's reflections about the Nazi past of German anthropology, and questions the value of the book in light of the fact that only one scientist engages with such a broad theme.

The book delivers an interesting and comprehensive insight into the subject matter as interpreted by the author, German researcher Andreas Vonderach. After studying history, geography and anthropology in Oldenburg, Ulm and Mainz, the author engages with ethnology and even museology. His relatively extensive spectrum of knowledge provided the theoretically basis for outlining a general history of, in Vonderach's words, the biological evolution of European man.

In the introduction of the book Vonderach promises to present the evidence of the most modern genetic and serological methods. The book can then be

divided into two parts: the chronological and the geographical. The first part is archeologically the most interesting for its description of the anthropological record of the development of civilization in Europe, starting with European Neanderthals in the Palaeolithic, running through the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, ancient classical civilizations, Middle Ages, and finishing in the present. Naturally, the analysis is limited by the quality and quantity of the archaeological record and therefore it is not surprising that, for instance, a chapter called "Neolithic" (p. 65–88) draws our attention largely to Early Neolithic Linear Ware Culture (p. 66–70). The first part also demonstrates the diversity of archaeological periodization systems in different regions of Europe. For example the Corded Ware Culture and the Bell Beaker Culture, which are categorized to the Late Chalcolithic in the Czech lands, Vonderach classifies as the Neolithic in accord with German terminology.

In the second part of the book European nations are described using anthropometrical data or the serological and genetic methods in some cases. Chapter 16 for example describes all the European nations from Icelanders to Georgians and Azerbaijani. Its subchapters are devoted to the Jews and Gypsies. Morphological descriptions are accompanied by extensive photographic material illustrating the typical appearance of a member of each nation.

To validate the scientific significance, the reviewers carefully analysed the subchapter "Tschechien und die Slowakei" (Czech Republic and Slovakia, p. 314–317), specifically the first part devoted to the area of the Czech lands (p. 314–316). The quite one-sided and sometimes even controversial approach of the German researcher can be seen here. At the beginning of this chapter Vonderach admits that he was drawing data mainly from Austrian studies of school children and little from Czechoslovak national population studies from the 1950s and 1960s. However, the notes for this subchapter reveal that Vonderach drew primarily from the studies of German scientists before or during the World War

Two. Moreover, even the text itself directly quotes a German social anthropologist Karl Valentin Müller and some outcomes of his study published in 1941, where, besides other research, he analyses the percentage of Czech and German names written on the graves of chosen cemeteries. This Nazi scientist led the faculty of social anthropology in Prague during World War Two and also worked for the Institute of Social Anthropology and National Biology (Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Volksbiologie) as a leading specialist in Nazi racial theories and historiography of the Czech lands. Being a fellow of the SS he became famous as the author of writings like "Die Bedeutung des deutschen Blutes im Tschechentum" (The significance of the German blood in the Czech lands, 1939) or "Zur Rassen- und Volksgeschichte des böhmisch-mährischen Raumes" (To race and national history of Bohemian-Moravian area, 1943) and his research was partly sponsored by The Reinhard Heydrich Foundation (Reinhard-Heydrich-Stiftung) from 1942. Following World War II he continued his scientific career as a sociologist in Germany. Although it should be noted that the volume of anthropometrical data collected by German scientists in Bohemia and Moravia has not been matched, it is questionable whether K. V. Müller was a person so significant to anthropology in the Czech lands that the author presents him, alongside Augustin Weisbach, as the only references. Leaving aside the moral aspects of his work, the relevant part of the chapter Czech Republic and Slovakia should be perceived as a text describing the state of the Czech population in the mid-20th century based on data collected through the obsolete concept of racial science using craniometry, anthropometry and racial typology. In conclusion, the book is less a proper modern analysis (as posited at the beginning of the book) of the Czech population at the beginning of the 21st century, than it is a historic look at the historic attitudes of Germans towards Czechs. It is precisely due to the fact that most of the chapter is built largely on the German sources gained before 1945. As

with other chapters the passage devoted to the Czech population is supplemented by photographs illustrating the appearance of a “typical Czech man” (fig. 236), “a typical Czech woman” (fig. 238) and “a typical Czech man from South Moravia” (fig. 237).

Generally, Vonderach’s way of using sources and their presentation seems to be controversial. A distinct difference emerges between Vonderach’s sometimes bold conclusions and current trends in both archaeology and anthropology that are rather cautious in dealing with ethnicity of prehistoric cultures. This question was grossly misused for political aims in the past, and science reduced to working in servitude of the socio-political order. Studying European nations and human races was strongly discredited by Nazi “scientists” and, to a lesser extent, by communist research. However, a much greater problem with the book is its blind eye towards “new Europeans”. Europe is largely changing, again, because of massive immigration from other continents since 1960s. Millions of new immigrants are changing European culture and society and therefore the anthropological face of Europe. Today’s Frenchman, for example,

bears no resemblance to the picture provided by Vonderach. In this light the significance of the book lays more in summarizing information about a disappearing “old Europe” (sometimes outlined from the German point of view) than in giving a clear picture of current Europeans.

Technically, the book is of a high quality. Each chapter contains notes including a list of quoted literature and a selection of major anthropological literature is found at the end of the book. However, the author’s choice of literature draws mainly from German and English sources. The author unfortunately committed several mistakes in foreign language quotes (*eg.* p. 412, note. 190). A glossary to facilitate understanding of the text and helping readers unaware of anthropological and medical terminology is an important part of the book.

Vonderach’s work is a nice example of the pros and cons of research in this field. On the one hand, it can be seen that anthropologists have much to contribute to our understanding of humans. The reliable research of biological evolution of humans and mapping biological causes of physical and mental disorders can contribute to the research and treatment of some diseases. Describing the alleged original shape of

European nations before changes in recent time is also valuable. On the other hand, this approach reduces the significance of the book in terms of contemporary cosmopolitan European society. Claiming that “Die Europäer sind Europide” from the chapter “beim Menschen Rassenevolution” (Racial human evolution, p. 18) is no longer valid. Furthermore, obsolescence and, in some cases, the problematic nature of basic sources and their interpretation reduces the quality of the work and increase its controversy. For obvious ethical reasons it is important to firmly reject the use of the research of Nazi anthropologists; assuming it to be fundamentally biased, unreliable and unacceptable within the main stream of anthropological research. The author’s implicit and unexamined acceptance of Nazi anthropological research is unacceptable.

It is debatable that one author is able to handle such a large issue at the highest levels today. The large number of current scientific projects and information usually exceed the abilities of one scientist. Although Vonderach’s courage to set a goal like this may seem admirable, it is more of a Mission Impossible.

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