

Dear ladies and gentlemen, Ms. Minister, Mr. Ambassador, dear institute directors, everyone following the live stream and family members,

as a non-historian and a curator of the Natural History Museum Vienna, it is a special privilege for me to speak here today at the Topography of Terror Documentation Center.

I studied what's known as human biology, or physical anthropology, in Vienna – the very discipline and place as the two scholars who carried out the 1942 study in Tarnów.

Looking back, I would say I received a traditional education, not unlike that of Dora Maria Kahlich and Elfriede Fliethmann. I, too, was taught how to take measurements of living subjects. Back then, we students practiced by measuring one another. It was rather appealing. We didn't question the procedure ethically. Although "racial science" and racial field surveys had lost much of their significance for the discipline by the 1980s, they were by no means history. I did, however, attend a lecture class about the Nazi past in anthropology and so-called racial hygiene.

Back in the 1980s, my main interest was on prehistorical excavations. Thus it was that my dissertation about 2000-year-old skeletal remains took me to the Natural History Museum, where after receiving my degree I was given an academic position and charged with managing a collection.

From then on, my research work connected with the museum's collections was characterized by questions, curiosity, a certain determination and stubbornness, and a growing interest in history. As a result, I became networked with scholars from the widest variety of disciplines, worked on exhibit and research projects, and published on Nazi history and the history of museum collections. Soon I was also lecturing on these topics.

Let's revisit the past. In the 1980s, critical physicians and historians began to re-examine medicine during Nazi period. One of them was Götz Aly. In 1987, he published the diary of Posen (Poznan) anatomist Hermann Voss and drew attention to the "lively trade" in skeletons of concentration camp victims with institutions such as the Natural History Museum Vienna. Nonetheless, it wouldn't be until 1991, after the writer Elfriede Jelinek mentioned an anatomical collection of the Natural History Museum Vienna in a newspaper article, for the managing director to order internal research carried out.

I was tasked with examining the situation, and in fact, I found anatomical specimens, skulls and death masks of Jewish concentration camp victims and skulls of Polish resistance fighters, which had been purchased in 1942 from Voss in Posen. The crania of Jewish victims were subsequently given to the Jewish Community in Vienna and buried, while the death masks were passed on to Vienna's Jewish Museum. By contrast, it was 1999 before the crania of the Polish resistance fighters were handed over to the Polish embassy in Vienna and buried in Poland.

The purchase of these remains became part of two of Vienna Jewish Museum exhibitions, “Confiscated” and “Masks: An Attempt Concerning the Shoah.” Meanwhile, I continued my research and discovered photographs and documents concerning measurements carried out of Viennese Jews and prisoners of war as well as on the 1939 special anti-Semitic exhibit “The Physical and Psychological Appearance of the Jews” put together by museum anthropologists. We have included a photo from that exhibit in the present one.

In 1997, I contacted the Vienna Institute for Contemporary History, and subsequently, the incipient project “Examination of Anatomical Science 1938-1945” was extended to that museum as well. Together with then Department Director Maria Teschler-Nicola, I compiled a report in which we detailed all the documents from the Nazi period kept by the department. This same sort of total transparency is being demanded today in conjunction with collections from the colonial period.

A collection from a racial-anthropological study of stateless Viennese Jews led to an exhibit in the Buchenwald Memorial in 1999 and a research collaborative project with contemporary historians in Vienna in 2001.

As part of this research, I stumbled across the carton with the numbered photographs from Tarnów, copies of which are presented in the visible-yet-concealed archive at the center of our exhibit “The Cold Eye.”

The collection of photos was given together with other documents from Kahlich’s estate to the museum in 1980s. What I was unable to do at the time was to put names to the photos.

While the Internet existed back in 1997, the possibilities for doing searches was extremely limited. Wikipedia, after all, wouldn’t be founded until 2001. But a fortunate accident intervened. While browsing in a bookstore, I discovered the book *Architects of Annihilation* by Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, which included the correspondence between Dora Maria Kahlich of the Natural History Museum Vienna and Elfriede Fliethmann from the Institute of German Eastern Research (IDO), a think-tank of the German occupation regime. As is not unfamiliar from today’s emails, the two woman combined discussions of their study in Tarnów and the primary questions of their research with complaints about their male superiors. “You see, the nice thing with all of you is that you’re free to develop,” Kahlich wrote to her colleague in Kraków. “With us, our hands are tied. Our dear deputy boss isn’t interested in anything that doesn’t concern him personally.” Excerpts from this correspondence have been included in the section “Anthropology, ‘Race Studies’ and Careers” in this exhibit.

The IDO had been formed a few months after Germany's invasion of Poland by the occupation regime in Kraków. Its mandate was not to "engage in sterile science" but rather to perform practical, useful and interdisciplinary research.

In conjunction with the Anthropological Institute at the University of Vienna, this gave rise to a project on "researching typical eastern Jews," which was carried out in March 1942. In the months that followed, Germans and Austrians murdered three-quarters of the Jews who had been forced into Tarnów's ghetto. Fliethmann wrote at the time to Kahlich: "There are still 8000 Tarnówers in the city but almost none of ours, [Security Service head Willi] Bernhard told me. Our material is already a rarity."

Who are the 565 men, women and children in the photos?

To find that out, I had to track down holdings that after the war had been dispersed to various archives and institutions in Kraków, Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna and Washington, DC. The data sheets used in the 1942 study, for instance, had found their way to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington. They have since been turned over to the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

In 2002, supported by a grant from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I was about to match the names and dates of birth to the numbers on the photos and began to look for traces of the families. Initially, I was able to locate three survivors, Viktor Dorman, Steve Israeler and Frania Haverland, and visit two of them. All were the only members of their families to survive the Holocaust. Meeting them made it clear to me how important new information about and photographs of their family members were to those who had survived.

But my research was also disillusioning. I was unable to find traces of most of the other families. There were no lists of names of the people murdered in Tarnów. As was true for many other Polish cities, those who had done the killing had gotten rid of all documents and lists.

Meanwhile, the demands of my main work called me away, so that it took years for me to continue my research, getting a grant in 2014 to visit Yad Vashem. The process of digitalization was well underway, and that allowed me to search for further information in the massive card catalogues of the Arolsen Archives - International Center on Nazi Persecution, the video interviews of the Shoah Foundation, established by Steven Spielberg in 1994, and the pages of testimony in Yad Vashem.

I discovered evidence of surviving family members for thirty of the families in the Tarnów study and found accounts made by those people themselves about their family history and their persecution. To my astonishment, two of the survivors, Rachela Engelhardt und Natan Katz, talked about the research project: "Once, German scientists came to carry out studies on us," recalled

Natan Katz. "They wanted to know some general information, but also which race we came from. They wanted to find out which of us had racially typical characteristics, and when someone fulfilled these criteria, they wanted to know exactly what our lineage was." During the work on our joint exhibit, I was able to contact other family members. Many of the family biographies and stories of survival in this exhibit have been reconstructed from family testimony. For example, this January, I was fortunate enough to get in contact with a daughter of one of the survivors, 91-year-old Ita Assif. Her daughter wrote: "I can't tell you how overwhelming it is to see for the first time my grandparents, aunt and uncle... Every information is precious for us! Please remember my grandfather and grandmother and my uncles were just a name for me before you showed up - I knew nothing about my roots!"

Next to the archive in the exhibit is a panel listing death statistics. Behind that is a media station with brief biographies of the 106 families.

It was devastating for me to learn that for 76 of these families, almost 70 percent of this group, there is no evidence of any members surviving the Holocaust. For 51 families, almost half, I found no pages of testimony in the gigantic victims' data base at Yad Vashem. No one remained after 1945 to tell of these people's murder. For most victims, the coerced anthropological photos, taken in a situation of extreme threat, were the final or only surviving visual images.

To understand the lives of these Jewish families, it was crucial to contextualize them in the history of the city of Tarnów. This would have been impossible without the great efforts of Uli Baumann. Right at the start he contacted Agnieszka Wiercholska, who had just finished her dissertation about Tarnów. She not only offered advice but, together with Marek Tomaszewski, discovered central, previous unknown items on display in this exhibit. Uli Baumann not only searched right down to the final minute for artefacts and documents, but also for family members of the perpetrators.

I would particularly like to thank Götz Aly, who recommended the exhibit to decision-makers here in Berlin and also initiated and advised the book I am publishing with Hentrich and Hentrich. Many thanks to publisher Nora Pester, book producer Thomas Schneider, translator Jefferson Chase and graphic designer Gudrun Hommers. My gratitude also goes out for the support offered by my own museum to Katrin Vohland and her predecessor Christian Köberl, to the Anthropological Department and especially to my colleagues Sabiner Eggers and Wolfgang Reichmann for the digitalization and preparation of the photos.

This present exhibit would not exist without Götz Aly. It was his initiative that led to the cooperative between the three institutions. Thanks to Erika Bucholtz for writing and submitting the

application for support to Berlin's Capital Cultural Fund (HKF), to everyone at both of the foundations involved, to Stephanie Bohra for coordinating everything, and to Christina Kitta and Franke/Steinert for the exhibit design. Lastly, my special gratitude goes out to Andreas Nachama, who is responsible for the initiative for this exhibit, Andrea Riedle and Uwe Neumärker.

This exhibit takes us back 80 years into the past, to two extraordinarily committed and ambitious female scholars. They chafed under the domination of males in their field and wanted to show that women could also "deliver the goods." But women's emancipation can also lead into the abyss of evil. These women's ambitious project, which they carried out with the cold, distanced eye of social science, put them among the ranks of the perpetrators. This same viewpoint allows us to classify the work done by the two post-doctoral scholars. In my work with students, I always try to highlight such ambivalent aspects. They call upon us to critically question our own work and research and hopefully will protect us from the arrogant illusion that we are morally superior.

In conclusion, before you go to have a look at the exhibit, we like to show you a short film clip. Sacher Israeler, who later went by the name Steve, was eleven years old when he was examined by the two anthropologists. He is the sole survivor from the immediate Israeler family. In 2002, I was able to visit him and bring him photos and data sheets. Jill Vexler met with him last Thursday in New York and briefly interviewed him. What you now see is an excerpt from that interview.