



The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust

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Now in paperback, the groundbreaking history of the Nazi research institute whose work helped lead to the extermination of millions

For those who thought the zealous Nazi archaeologists in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* were a screenwriter's fabrication, journalist Heather Pringle has the chilling, real story. In 1935, Heinrich Himmler--chief of the SS and architect of the death camps--founded the Ahnenerbe, a research institute that manufactured archaeological evidence to support the notion of Aryan superiority. His team of adventurers, mystics, and reputable scholars was charged with traveling the globe to compile "proof" that a race of blondhaired, blue-eyed conquerors had dominated the world in prehistoric times. The identification of their descendants and the eradication of all others became the cornerstone of the Nazi agenda.

Drawing on Pringle's extensive original research, including interviews with surviving members of the Ahnenerbe, *The Master Plan* is a page-turning story of delusion and excess, of scientific and political abuse on a global scale.

The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust Details

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From Reader Review The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust for online ebook

Sud666 says

While many historians have spent a great deal of time on the various aspects of the Third Reich, few have taken the time to see how the terrible power of science and its manipulation in order to set the foundations for and to justify some of the worst atrocities of the Holocaust. Heather Pringle's easy to read and fascinating look at the shadowy organization that propagated the various racial theories that formed the basis of Nazi science.

On July 1, 1935, in a spacious, sunlit office in SS Headquarters in Berlin, Himmler convened a meeting to discuss a new organization- Studiengesellschaft für Geistesurgeschichte, Deutsches Ahnenerbe. Or the Study Society for Primordial Intellectual history, German Ancestral Heritage. It is also known by it's 1937 name- Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft des Ahnenerbe. Or Research and Teaching Community of the Ancestral Heritage, better known by its shortened version- the Ahnenerbe. The formally stated goal of the Ahnenerbe was "to promote the science of ancient intellectual history". Reality would be rather different.

The book studies the various programs run by the Ahnenerbe from the expeditions sent out to Tibet, to racial studies carried out in Concentration camps on "Jewishness", to searching for clues on the original Aryans and using that history to support the Nazi racial theories.

It is a fascinating and chilling look into how some scientists and academics, by no means were all of these people kooks-some were brilliant in their fields, worked closely with the Nazi government. To be fair, many of these scientists and academics were Nazi's themselves- by choice. Others were morally deficient and ignored whom they were working for in order to forward their scientific research. I won't spend this review talking about the various theories and atrocities. This is a book worth reading.

The Master Plan does a very good job of presenting the history of the Ahnenerbe in an easily read format. The writing is smooth and keeps your interest. Pringle does an excellent job of prefacing the entire story with a look into Heinrich Himmler, his upbringing and beliefs. It also shows the history of the Aryan argument, the actual historical basis of these historical facts and how the Nazi's perverted them to their own use. The book never bogs down into deeply technical jargon, rather the reader is kept fascinated by the series of events, fanciful imaginings and some downright scary scientific realities that represent the legacy of the Ahnenerbe.

At the end of the day, setting aside the kooks-and there were plenty of those, there were some seriously brilliant and talented scholars who worked in the Ahnenerbe. The final chapter of the book traces the final outcomes of these luminaries and it is rather interesting. In the months following the German surrender, Allied forces had attempted arresting all leading Nazi party and government officials. Not surprisingly- schools were left without teachers, telephone exchanges without operators, post offices without postal workers, well you get the drift- life ground to a halt. So the Allies quickly changed the policy and established local denazification tribunals. These tribunals handed down one of five categories of complicity- from "exonerated" and "fellow traveller", to "lesser activist," "activist," and "major offender". Not surprisingly the system had its flaws and Nazi's managed to filter through the holes. It had become such a running joke amongst Germans about Nazi's who "had a Jewish friend that they saved" that a new term- Persilscheine (White Washing Certificates) was coined for the tribunal's paperwork. In fact the tribunals themselves were called Mitläuferfabriken or factories for mass producing "fellow travellers". To be fair to the Germans with the onset of the Cold War, the Allies lost much of their fervor for finding and prosecuting Nazi war criminals since the Soviets were busy snatching up ex-GESTAPO and SS men to recreate the STASI. As a result many

important Nazis escaped virtually unscathed from denazification. They assumed their former jobs and picked up the pieces of their lives again, as if nothing had ever happened. This seems to be the case for the senior Ahnenerbe's researchers.

Dr. Herman Wirth, who helped Himmler create the Ahnenerbe, was arrested by the Americans. But they were unaware of who he really was (he was calling himself Wirth-Roeper Bosch) until he was denounced by a neighbor. But his Nazi disavowal was masterful and he was deemed a "political victim of the Third Reich" and released. Strangely, visitors to his home in Lund mention above the fireplace a large oil painting of Wirth dressed in his SS uniform (he was a SS-Hauptsturmführer in the RuSHA) hung in his private library. Hmm. Nothing to see here. Perfectly normal. Move along. Dr. Wirth nearly did- he rehabilitated his image to the point where officials in Rhineland-Palatinate drew up plans in the late 1970s for a new museum to be installed in the small castle of the town of Thallichtenberg at a cost of 1.1 million marks. But a Spiegel reporter dug up his Nazi past and dashed any hopes of a comeback. Stubbornly his admirers have refused to let his ideas die. German publishers continue to publish pseudo-science books on ancient symbol research and some kooky German filmmakers have floated the idea of a primeval high civilization in Northern Europe. Today in the small Austrian town of Spital am Pyhrn one can see in their museum, in a bright, well-lit room an exhibit of Dr. Wirth's fourteen plaques of rock art he took for the Ahnenerbe.

Yrjö von Gronhagen, the scholar who recorded the magical spells of Finnish shamans for Himmler, was deemed to have worked as an "extraordinary representative of the Finnish government furthering German-Finnish cultural exchange". Ok then. Gronhagen went on to live in Lapland. He bought a tourist hotel, became the general secretary for the Order of St. Constantine the Great- a Christian ecumenical organization dedicated to keeping alive the intellectual heritage of the ancient Greek and Byzantine civilizations. For more than 30 years he spent his summers in Lapland and winters in Greece. Finally returning to Helsinki in 2000, he dies at the age of 92 in 2003.

Dr. Franz Altheim, close friend of Goering, and former SD agent stuck to the "I'm just a historian" line. He managed to find two instances of him using his former Ahnenerbe contacts to help save two former colleagues at the University of Oslo as enough an excuse to have the Soviet authorities release him. Dr. Altheim escaped to the west in 1949 and started a professorship at the Free University in Berlin. Altheim went on to a brilliant academic career at the Free University and an equally brilliant retirement in Münster.

I could go on but I have no desire to write a book. You get the point. It is a bit creepy. This is a very interesting book. I also enjoy the final post script chapter where the author was finally allowed to interview with former Nazi racial expert Bruno Berger in Königstein in 2002. His strident beliefs in the Jews as a "mongrel race" and his "amnesia" regarding the Ahnenerbe work at Natzweiler Concentration Camp, not to mention his bizarre collection of "historical artifacts", is downright Kafkaesque.

Good book. Well written. Interesting and easy to read. It's about a really interesting organization and some really out there theories were the foundation and impetus for the Holocaust. During the Holocaust the Ahnenerbe actively participated in many of the medical experimentation on Jewish prisoners. It founded expeditions into areas as diverse as Finland to Tibet. A very interesting read. If you are interested in World War II- then you will like this.

Eric says

An easy to digest outline and assessment of the use of anthropology by the Third Reich

Sidrah says

Heather Pringle provides a comprehensive study of Himmler's Nazi research institute, "Ahnenerbe", and explores how the Nazis manipulated history and science in order to justify their horrifying atrocities and to promote the Nazi agenda. The book is very well researched and highly educational, as much fascinating as it is disheartening and, sadly, still so very relevant. A must-read!

Trish says

Fascinating book about Himmler's Ahnenerbe, and the weird things they were forced to study and believe to back the Nazi vision. Worth reading if you have an interest in the subject.

Max Rebo says

A pesar de su título castellano (El plan maestro, arqueología fantástica al servicio del régimen nazi), no estamos ante una obra sobre la búsqueda de arcas de la alianza o lanzas de Longinos que hubieran proporcionado una ventaja militar esotérica a los ejércitos hitlerianos. Se trata de un libro sobre la ciencia alemana en esos años oscuros, sobre cómo los nazis (y más concretamente Himmler) buscaron por todo el mundo evidencias que pudieran demostrar sus disparatadas teorías raciales (que incluían no menos esperpénticas teorías sobre el origen del universo). Estremece el relato de cómo lo que eran unas (aparentemente) inocuas expediciones campestres en busca de runas y grabados primitivos acabó derivando en la mayor sarta de crímenes sistemáticos contra la humanidad que se recuerda. Y todo ello con la coartada intelectual de un grupo de científicos corruptos y desalmados.

Bruce says

Both enlightening and disheartening this book shows the extent to which groups will go to abuse science in their attempt to re-write history. The existence of an Aryan race in history was assumed and scholars and scientists were recruited who would warp history to 'prove' its existence and the ability to reconstruct the master race. Like the actions of some groups that exist today, information was misinterpreted, misconstrued, and/or ignored to prove their premise valid. In the Third Reich children were indoctrinated in the schools and taught not to question the authorities. Propaganda was constantly broadcast to the adults and the news published consisted of lies or half-truths. In the end the preponderance of the German people believed the propaganda until the Allies won and then they knew nothing.

It is disheartening to see how people can eat up lies and half-truths without thinking, allowing a political system in which only one group is considered human. What is more irksome is a large number of people who were directly involved in war crimes were not held accountable for their actions.

Peter says

We all know that Heinrich Himmler, the author and overlord of the Nazi Final Solution, was a mass murderer. What we might not know is that behind his murderous instincts was an attachment to scientific analysis and rational thought—at least in his mind. Whatever his scientific and intellectual talents, he was capable of a psychopathic misdiagnosis of both a “problem” and a “solution.” He was an example of a certain type of dangerous individual—deep intellectual curiosity, a belief that he is eminently rational, a thirst for power, and totally clueless about his misuse of that power.

The SS—of which Heinrich Himmler was Reichsführer-SS—emerged from the SA, the “brownshirts” that did Hitler’s dirty work in the 1920s. From its start as Hitler’s personal guard the SS it grew rapidly in both numbers and functions after Himmler was given absolute authority, subject only to Hitler’s approval. Ultimately the SS became a major paramilitary force responsible for state security, protection of the Nazi elite, and for administration of policies regarding “undesirables,” that is, the concentration camps and execution of Jews and political prisoners. A portion of it—the Waffen-SS—also provided ground troops as fodder for Stalin’s cannons.

Within the SS Himmler hid a research organization called the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*, an organization charged with advancing the cause of “scientific racism.” This is the subject of Heather Pringle’s *The Master Plan: Himmler’s Scholars and the Holocaust* (2006). The book has two primary themes: the extent of Himmler’s power and of his efforts to find evidence supporting the notion of a master race called the Aryans, and the details of the *Ahnenerbe*’s research programs.

The book is not a catalogue of Nazi atrocities, though those are unavoidable. Rather, it is tale of “science” gone amok, of how “science” can be misused and abused when it is guided by a firm belief of what it will discover, that is, when an “hypothesis” (a speculation) is taken as a conclusion (a truth) without benefit of proper testing. It is also about what happens when the chief “scientist” is also an absolute ruler who exercises power without a moral compass. And finally, it is a tale about the “banality of evil,” about how cultured and highly civilized individuals—people with whom you might enjoy a gallon of *schnapps*—could sponsor such inhumane ideas to create a massive killing field.

As a science writer Pringle is steeped in the scientific method as well as experimental methods and scientific theory. And she is an able writer, teasing nuances from her material that aren’t obvious to the reader. This is a fascinating story about a horrible misuse of science in the 20th century, a story about how the very clever can also be very dumb. Anyone interested in the genesis of evil the Nazis embodied, and in the failure of intelligence to be used intelligently will learn from this book. I found it fascinating, especially in its description of how “science” was used to formulate a coherent and misguided Master Plan for the Third Reich.

This is fascinating material on many levels, and well worth its Five Stars!

The SS and Racial Research

The *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* was created in 1935 as a research institute within the SS. *Ahnenerbe* was a German word for “inherited from the forefathers” so this could be translated as “The German Ancestral Heritage Institute.” The primary researchers in the institute were SS members chosen for their Aryan characteristics, their loyalty to Nazi ideals, their education in relevant fields—and, ultimately, their willingness to twist evidence to support Nazi “truths.” A Director who reported only to Himmler, who reported only to Hitler, dictated its programs.

The *Ahnenerbe* employed a wide array of scholars: archeologists, ethnologists, historians, geographers,

experts in ancient languages, artists, folklorists, musicologists, and so on. Anyone who had expertise that might support the Nazi worldview could apply. And what was that worldview? Simply stated, it was that an extremely ancient race called the Aryans, a race preceding the Egyptians, Sumerians, and their known predecessors, was the source of both western civilization and of German heritage. This race was “Nordic,” characterized by blond hair, blue eyes, a long and lean frame, and exceptional intelligence. It was the Ur-Race from which we all sprang.

Modern movies and books (think *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) often emphasize the Nazi infatuation with symbols—pictographs, petroglyphs, hieroglyphics, and so on. This arose from a search for evidence that writing began well before Egyptian hieroglyphic and Near-Eastern (Sumerian) cuneiform writing. Clearly, writing is an essential characteristic of civilization, and since the Aryan civilization predated those with known writing forms, there must be an earlier form of writing, an aboriginal writing by the Ur-Race, that permeated all later civilizations and gave the Aryans primacy in kick-starting civilization.

So the *Ahnenerbe* focused considerable interest on symbols that might be indications of Aryan writing. Expeditions were sent to places near and far. The “near” included the European cave drawings (pictographs) and the abundant stone carvings and runic symbols (petroglyphs) in northern Europe. Regrettably, these could only be dated back to Roman times—no help there. The “far” expeditions included India and Tibet (thought to be the origin of the Aryans) and the Middle East.

The *Ahnenerbe*’s Director had to wear two heavy hats. The first was the scholar’s cap; it was essential that the Director and his team have the respect of the community of scholars. The second was the politician’s cap, requiring conformity with the views of those who put bread on his table. These were diametrically opposed, and bread on the table is everyone’s priority. So evidence was distorted to fit the Nazi ideology, a twist that was not applauded by true scholars. An example suffices.

Herman Wirth, the *Ahnenerbe*’s first Director, was considered an outstanding scholar within Nazi ranks. But he—and his successors—were not highly regarded by mainstream intellectuals. Wirth’s research uncovered no evidence of an Aryan race even though it dredged the depths of ancient lore, including searched for the lost continent of Atlantis. But how was Wirth regarded by scholars? In 1929 Wirth had published a book on racial theory and an eminent scholar panned it, couching his criticism in words that softened the blow but not the message,

Only the view that the author has been taken by an almost holy insanity, and the fact that he inspected a considerable mass of literature with unusual eagerness and diligence to support his delusions, which he considers science, restrain me from responding to this book . . . with rudeness.

Ouch!

In short, no matter how much twisting of evidence the *Ahnenerbe* employed it discovered nothing that supported the Nazi Master Plan, and its methods were considered nonscientific and fantastical. But one shouldn’t let facts get in the way of a good idea, and lack of evidence is evidence, so the Master Plan stood firm. We’ll get to just what that Plan was a bit later.

The *Ahnenerbe* and Scientific Racism

Himmler and the research arm of the SS badly misconstrued the scientific method—the core of science. The correct scientific method is the formulation of an hypothesis (a tentative speculation about how the world works) followed by development and implementation of tests of that hypothesis. It is essential that a hypothesis be “testable.” But what does that mean?

The proper form of a test is a search for evidence that *refutes* the hypothesis. Thus, a “testable hypothesis” is one for which, in principle, there might be evidence that it is *false*. A simple example is the logical proposition “All swans are white.” If you believe that statement and test it by counting swans, you will reject the few black swans you find as “anomalies,” that is, “exceptions that prove the rule.” It's an example of what psychologists call “confirmation bias,” you find what you are looking for. This was the Nazi method: adopt a speculation (hypothesis)—“All Jews are vermin”—as a truth, then search for evidence supporting that “truth.” The problem is that once you start from a truth and look for supporting evidence, you will find what you look for—a phenomenon scientists call “confirmation bias.”

The correct application of the scientific method is, of course, to always treat your idea as a hypothesis and look for evidence that *refutes* it. In other words, you draw your conclusions when you encounter the first non-white swan or the first good Jew. This has the advantage of significantly abbreviating the test period.

The core of Nazi racial theories was the belief that modern civilization sprang from an Ur-Race of “Aryans” that preceded known races. The Aryans were an ancient Nordic race characterized by light skin, blond hair, blue eyes, and extreme intelligence. They were the fountain of Europe's literature, music, culture, science, technology, and moral tenets. Hence Hitler's well-known devotion to Wagner's “Ring of the Nibelung.” Built on the Norse sagas, the 13th century Icelandic *Eddas*, and, particularly, the Volsunga Saga Wagner's opera sang of a great Norse hero named Sigurd who killed the dragon Fafnir; of course, in the end everyone dies.

Even in the 1930s the notion of “race” was suspect—ethnicity, culture, ideology, skin color, eye color, and worldview certainly differ across groups, but this didn't constitute separation by something called “race.” Doubts about “racial” distinctions have only increased in recent years, just as the concept of “racism” has exploded. Since the demise of Neanderthals we have all been in the “race” of *Homo Sapiens*. That we have followed different paths to the present—and acquired different physical characteristics—does not make us into different races any more than Wildebeests gathering around a watering spot can be called different races because they approached from different directions.

The definition of race became most problematic for the Nazis when attention turned to the question, “What is a Jew?” Is “he” an adherent to certain religious practices, an inhabitant of certain locations, a person with specific physical features, the child of a Jewish mother (oops: circularity), or one who shares specific genes? It seems that the genetic test would be most appropriate—after all, the Nazis believed genetic atrophy was the Jewish crime.

But the gene was only an idea at that time, and even if there had been knowledge of DNA it would have been found that there was little genetic commonality among those who described themselves as Jews. Indeed, this plagued the *Ahnenerbe* as it attempted to define Jewishness and found exceptions to each taxonomy, exceptions so serious that it affected the morale of the SS killing squads. In effect, the research into “scientific racism” led to as few answers as the research into Aryan origins. This was disturbing—you just didn't know whom to kill? But no matter, they must be killed!

Aryanism and the Master Plan

The concept of Aryanism began with a British naturalist in the mid-18th century who argued (correctly) that the various Indo-European languages grew from a common language. In the late 19th century Friedrich Schlegel, a German philologist, hooked onto this idea and argued that if there was a common language there must be a common race, a seminal race that he called Aryan. This Ur-Race, he argued, was distinguished by those certain physical characteristics; it was Nordic, golden-haired, blue-eyed, intelligent, Nordic, warlike.

Schlegel believed that modern Germans were descended from Aryans and were, therefore, an exceptional race. This fed the German nationalism in that time when Bismarck was creating “Germany,” but, as noted,

there was—and is—no indication that a master race ever existed.

According to Nazi philosophy the western world faced an existential threat: interbreeding over the centuries had polluted the pure Aryan genes, the genetic fountain of civilization. If this continued, advances in civilization would come to a halt. Of course, the grossest impurity was from Jewish blood—an idea that completely ignored Jewish preeminence in the sciences, the arts, and yes, in civilization. The Nazi solution, we know, was to expunge all sources of impurity: Jews, criminals, and the mentally or physically challenged should be rounded up and executed; less malignant non-Aryans should be confined or otherwise kept separate from Aryans.

The notion of a seminal race with exceptional characteristics led to a variety of Nazi policies other than concentration camps and execution, though they did require extraordinary force to implement. Among these were “Lebensborn” (“Fount of Youth”), a human breeding program designed to restore the master race by mixing the genes of Germans most representative of Aryans. The program brought SS members—all of whom were specially selected for their Aryan characteristics—and suitably Nordic women together to create children of superior quality. These children would be raised by the state and would interbreed as adults. (Ironically, Himmler was as far from this physical image as one could get, a point made to him at a dinner party; always polite, he responded, “Yes, but I have a Nordic brain.”)

Yet another part of the Plan was “Lebensraum” (“living space”). In Nazi philosophy Germany’s agrarian origins were particularly prized. Among the many goals of the new order was encouragement of a return to agriculture and to a land-oriented lifestyle with small villages, close-knit relationships, and so on. This goal seems to conflict with the notion of the Aryan origins of civilization by ignoring the obvious fact that few operas were written by farmers, few technological innovations were generated by agriculture (beyond those unique to agriculture), and farm workers were not well represented among modern scientists.

To achieve a more agrarian social and economic base, Germany needed more land: the existing fertile land was already settled and expensive, and to take from one true German to give it to another was unacceptable. Hitler’s attention turned to Poland, a land of fertile fields populated by undesirables. If Poland came under German rule, Polish farmers could be dispossessed and their lands distributed to the more capable and superior German farmers. This would kill three birds with one stone: an expansion of territory, a return to agrarian foundations, and increased food supply.

Lebensraum was one of Hitler’s goals in signing the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The “Nonaggression Pact” created the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line splitting Poland between Germany and the USSR. Of course, this pact was soon to be violated by Hitler’s invasion of the USSR in 1941 (Operation Barbossa). Presumably if the other party gives you half, you’re free to take it all!

Religion and Community in the New Order

Nazi ideology touched every aspect of German life. Germany—the birthplace of Protestantism—had been the center of the bloody 17th century Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants. But in spite of the German tradition of Christianity, the Nazis promoted the notion that Christianity was a pseudo-religion. After all, how could there be merit in a religion that deified a Jew?

So attention was spent on what should replace Christianity? In Himmler’s view, only a religion close to the Aryan origins would work, and certainly that was pagan. His goal was to revive the old gods of ancient Norse and German history.

Yet another of Himmler’s goals was consistent with the Germany’s agrarian history—the creation of small agricultural villages. For space he looked to the Crimea, where Nazi forces were fighting Soviet forces for control of the Black sea and the fertile fields.

The Ahnenerbe and Medical Experimentation

We all know about the remarkable use of Jewish and political prisoners in Nazi medical research of all types: identification of Jews by skeletons, required killing and flensing prisoners to obtain their bare bones; studies of human responses to freezing required killing of many prisoners and attempting to revive them; toxins and poisons like mustard gas and typhus bacteria were administered with many deaths resulting; a Jewish Skull Collection was organized. These abuses were in the interest of "science" and were added to the run-of-the-day abuses of gassing, shooting and starving prisoners.

The SS was the organization that administered these outrages, and it did so under the auspices of SS doctors employed by the Ahnenerbe.

The Aftermath

Olson ends with a review of what happened to the *Ahnenerbe* "scientists" after the war. Many escaped punishment but all, to a man, showed no remorse and no regret for their actions. Their regrets were only that they weren't able to finish the research, and that they were caught. She summarizes this nicely,

After scrutinizing the personal files of these men and poring over the details of their life stories, after contemplating their academic work and talking to their families and friends, I still do not understand why they did what they did, why they willingly contributed to such evil.

Absolutely chilling!!!!

Elliot Ratzman says

Nazis believed that they were heirs to the cultural and genetic legacy of a (mythic) "Aryan" race. In Hitler's worldview, master races were creators of civilizations. Himmler, the head of the SS, was convinced that ancient German tribes seeded cultures in India, Tibet, ...Russia, Finland, etc., that the Norse Gods existed, that Thor's Hammer was a real weapon and that ancient cave paintings were evidence of a primal ur-Aryan language. Himmler funds a research institute, employs dozens of scholars who go on expeditions to find evidence of German influence and settlement in the countries that Germany wants to conquer; thus, the Germans are merely "returning" to their ancestral lands to colonize agricultural utopias. Unrepentant race scientists murdered for skull samples and museum treasures. This is a funhouse mirror on the distortion of scholarship by nationalist interest. Postwar, some scholars went on to have distinguished careers. Every historian and archeology student should read this!

David Bales says

A brilliant history of the "Ahnenerbe", a "research" wing of the SS, created by Heinrich Himmler in 1935 to search for lost Nordic artifacts and influences throughout the world. Himmler was convinced, (as well as alot of other crackpot German nationalists) that civilization started not in the Middle East, but in Northern Europe since the "Aryans" were the superior, master race. This basic theory led to the thinking that great civilizations throughout history--the Persians, the Romans and even Tibetans--must have some sort of "Nordic blood". Himmler assembled a team of academics from fields as diverse as anthropology and geology to travel Europe and the seven continents looking for lost Germanic ancestors. Crazy, crackpot stuff and

bunk history, but relatively harmless--that is until the war started. The Ahnenerbe was given the task of looting museums and private homes throughout the occupied countries looking for "Germanic artifacts" which they stole and were also employed in "Jew identification" among the varied peoples of the Soviet Union. Ahnenerbe researchers measured Jewish faces, made plaster casts of them and attempted to find the exact physical qualifications for a Jew; (they never were able to). The Ahnenerbe's medical division branched out into terrible experiments on living people and the collection of skulls, bones and skin for museums. Most of the Ahnenerbe's staff--all academics and doctors--went onto academic careers in German universities after the war. A fascinating book about a mostly unknown subject.

Randy McDonald says

Heather Pringle's 2006 *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* is the sort of book that makes one want to laugh in horror. Pringle's pleasant if conventional journalistic style does nothing at all to disguise the horror that she feels on discovering the full extent of the activities of the Ahnenerbe, the SS' occult research ministry. Starting off from the theosophy and kindred New Age movements which were popular in early 20th century Germany, Pringle demonstrates convincingly that the Ahnenerbe went on to take these theories, rooted in beliefs of deeply-hidden conspiracies and long-forgotten similarities and secret bloodlines, and make them the central justifications for major Nazi goals including the Holocaust and the planned colonization of central and eastern Europe.

The intellectual speciousness of the Ahnenerbe's arguments--arguing by deduction and by inference whenever it pleased them, or simply making up theories wholesale like (say) an ancient populous Gothic empire in Crimea--is astounding. It's difficult to believe that a modern state was willing to support research institutions which claimed, among other things, that Germans were the last pure descendants of Aryan Atlantis, that Tiahuanaco in South America was an ancient German city, and that the entire universe was made out of ice and that we were on our seventh Moon, the previous six having crashed into the Earth and melted into the oceans. But then, when I read translated memoranda which happily say that, with Operation Barbarossa, Nazi phrenologists will be at last able to overcome the shortage of Jewish skulls that bedevilled them, and how some researchers hoped to use human sacrifice to tap ancient mystic energies for great weapons like Thor's lightning bolts, I stopped disbelieving. Among other things, it turns out that the Nazis were criminally stupid and credulous besides being prototypical pulp science-fiction villains. That, and the willingness to use any specious reasoning and no specious reasoning at all, explains their entire ideology.

The Master Plan deserves to be widely read. It astonishes me that more hasn't been generally known of the Ahnenerbe. One reason why that story hasn't resonated before now might, perhaps, lie in the prevalence of all those same root sources of Nazi ideology in our own culture, in the popularity of books like *The Da Vinci Code* which purport to explain the modern world as product of vast ancient conspiracies and in the revolts against reason and science and rational behaviour. Often there's even a direct link between the 1920s and our time, as in Graham Hancock's writings. Can you see a potential problem here, too?

Torkild says

Det er ekstremt uhyggeligt det her. Et ubehageligt bevis på hvad der kan ske, når nationalistisk politik bestemmer videnskabens retning.

Olethros says

-Tratando de inventar la Historia con supercherías.-

Género. Historia.

Lo que nos cuenta. Exposición de los hechos que rodearon la intención de Himmler de una búsqueda de evidencias "irrefutables" que soportasen las ideas relacionadas con la "herencia ancestral aria" y la consiguiente creación de la Ahnenerbe, instituto de investigación, localización, estudio, transmisión y publicitación de dichos hallazgos, relatando varias de sus expediciones y explicando las personalidades, trasfondos y destinos de varios de sus miembros y colaboradores más destacados dentro y fuera del instituto.

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Darko Djekic says

Drugi Svetski rat sagledan kroz postupke nacisti?ke Nema?ke nau?ne elite. Knjiga o lucidnom planu drugog ?oveka Nema?ke, Hitlerovog ?oveka od najvišeg poverenja. Interesantno je to što u ovoj knjizi može da se vidi koliko je Nema?ki politi?ki vrh bio sumanut u idejama koje nisu imale nikakve dokaze. Silan novac potrošen samo u luda?ko dokazivanje porekla i stvaranja neke fantasti?ne istorije. Bolest mozga, koja propagira Nema?ki narod u vrhovni i nadmo?ni, a svi ostali jednako ravni životinjama, zbog ?eka je odnos prema drugim ljudskim živim bi?ima u najmanju ruku nehuman i brutalan, a na koji na?in, pro?ita?ete na stranicama ove knjige. Na kraju, kada sam pro?itao i poslednje poglavlje, zapitao sam se...a šta bi bilo da nacisti nisu bili toliko ludi, ve? prakti?ni, i da su sve protra?ene resurse u besmislena istraživanja koristili da pokore svet? Da li bi uspeali?

Anatoly says

A highly important subject that doesn't always gets enough of focus. When people think about the holocaust they usually think about the network of concentration and death camps. But another hideous crime the Nazis have committed during those dark days was done in the name of so called science. Here Pringle describes the two main objects of these scientists (if you actually can call them that) - the first was proving the superiority of the Aryan race over other races (especially Jews), while the second was helping the war effort by preforming horrible experiments on human beings.

Another aspect the book deals with is that some Nazis, including Himmler himself had a strong interest in mysticism and the occult. It's an interesting subject for itself but here the book lacked in strength with not so much information and description on this subject. Another downside (especially at the beginning) was that Pringle described too much biographical details about the main people involved with the Ahnenerbe (a Nazi research institute), details that are not that important in order to describe this history.

Overall, an important report that shows that evil has no boundaries and that even scientists who are trained to

search for the truth and to help mankind can be corrupted to the extent of losing their humanity.

Sesana says

It's oddly fascinating to read the litany of bizarre things Himmler and like-minded Nazi scientists were willing to believe. Anything was plausible, so long as meant Germans were the best at everything in history. Roman civilization? Jump started by Aryan invaders. India? Aryans. Atlantis? Aryans. Thor's hammer? Aryan electrical weapon. It would almost be funny, if the same lines of reasoning weren't used as justification for murder on a mind-numbing scale. It made me wonder what it must have been like to be a German high school student in 1945 and discover, practically overnight, that nearly everything I'd ever been taught, about history and science, was little more than fantasy.

It's when the "science" moves from archeology to medicine that this book gets so much more difficult to read, as Holocaust-related books tend to do. It must be so hard to write on this subject, and Pringle does an excellent job. She's clear, direct, and plain in the facts without reveling in gory details. It makes wrenching chapters bearable to read.

I also have to give Pringle respect for how thoroughly she cited her sources. One chapter of roughly ten pages had more than fifty end notes. How great is that? I've read entire history books that didn't have that many citations! I know most readers don't care, but it makes me very happy, and it gives me confidence in what the author is presenting.
