

Boeckl-Klamper, Elisabeth, Thomas Mang, and Wolfgang Neugebauer. *The Vienna Gestapo, 1938–1945: Crimes, Perpetrators, Victims*

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Wolf Gruner

Department of History, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA

E-mail: gruner@usc.edu

The coauthors of this work call the Gestapo the “most important instrument of terror on Austrian soil”; it was “responsible for combating all forms of resistance, organized and non-organized, and played a leading part in the persecution of the Jewish population” (1). Established after the annexation by Nazi Germany in March 1938, with 900 employees the Gestapo headquarters in Vienna was the largest regional office after the Berlin headquarters in Greater Germany. Despite the importance of this institution, it has hitherto been the subject of only one (voluminous) unpublished dissertation and a few biographies. As in almost all of Germany, the Vienna Gestapo systematically destroyed their files in 1945; only their daily reports survived. This survey seeks to provide as comprehensive an account as possible, focusing on the structure, personnel, and activities of the Vienna Gestapo (3).

The authors outline the history of the Gestapo since 1933, including the introduction of “protective custody.” The Gestapo increasingly utilized this main tool of repression in the newly established concentration camps to quell potential or actual opposition. Despite the authors’ assertion that the Gestapo operated free of any control (16), as part of the police they fell under the authority of the Reich Ministry of Interior, which limited its autonomy. Only in 1943 did the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, take over the ministry, which still did not pass the state monopoly of force to the SS. Instead of on facts from Vienna, the authors base their claim that the Gestapo had more authority than the judiciary solely on Ernst Fraenkel’s 1941 work *The Dual State* (154).

The volume discusses the establishment and administrative structure of the regional headquarters in Vienna at the Hotel Metropole (today Regina) headed by Franz Josef Huber after the March 1938 annexation. The rapid takeover of the police, facilitated by many Austrian criminal police officers who were illegal Nazi party members, enabled the massive Gestapo assault. The authors emphasize the important and often overlooked fact that the Gestapo employed many women—in Vienna between 17 and 30 percent of the staff—mostly as desk workers and secretaries. The large Vienna office saw a low turnover due to its geopolitical importance in an annexed territory with several important borders.

During the first weeks, Vienna Gestapo officers arrested tens of thousands of people; many of them were tortured and sent to concentration camps. Before the Germans invaded Austria, the Gestapo and the *Sicherheitsdienst* of the SS (SD) had already prepared arrest lists of “dangerous Jewish lawyers” and Jewish leaders. The Jewish community was shut down on 18 March 1938 and functionaries were arrested, only to be reopened on 2 May under the complete control of the Gestapo and SD. However, Austrian Nazi Party and *Sturmabteilung* (SA) members undertook many of the early arrests of individual Jews, which included beatings, humiliation, and looting. The Gestapo section II B 4, responsible for Jews, organized the first major actions under the twenty-eight-year-old Rudolf Lange and deported 1,202 so-called undesirable Jews to the Dachau concentration camp on 31 May and 3 June 1938. The next big action took place in November, when Heinrich Müller ordered all Gestapo offices to arrest as many Jews as possible during the pogrom. In Vienna, they detained 6,547 Jews, of which 3,989 ended up in Dachau. Although the Gestapo was supposed to prevent looting, it was widespread. For seized cash and precious items, the Vienna Gestapo set up a special subunit, which sent later one million Reichsmarks worth of jewelry to Berlin, where it was auctioned off for cheap.

In the conclusion, the authors state that Eichmann's Central Office for Jewish Emigration, established in summer 1938, planned forced emigration and deportation, while the Gestapo controlled the Jewish community, punished individual Jews, issued anti-Jewish regulations, and organized the looting of assets in Vienna (365). For the mass deportations of Austrian Jews to the occupied East, the authors emphasize that Eichmann's Central Office acted in close cooperation with the Vienna Gestapo. The Gestapo arrested many escaped Jews and non-Jewish Austrians who helped them. They also organized the expropriation of Jewish belongings by creating unique offices for this purpose. In March 1945, Karl Ebner reported to Himmler assets of one billion Reichsmarks for the Nazi State (201).

Challenging previous scholarly assumptions about Nazi society, the authors emphasize that the Vienna Gestapo did not depend on denunciations for their fight against "enemies," except for public protest and so-called radio and economic crimes during the war. Illustrated by short case studies, the authors describe Gestapo actions against Catholicism in Austria, including the seizure of property and writings; the persecution of Freemasons; and the even harsher crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses. With the help of a huge system of turncoat informants from the resistance milieu, often produced by centrally legalized torture, the Gestapo dismantled resistance groups of all political colors. The repression of communist resistance could be called their greatest success, according to the authors. In 1943/44, after most organized resistance was squashed, 77 percent of all Gestapo arrests targeted foreign forced laborers and Soviet POWs, whose resistance is still under-researched.

As in Germany, Austrian perpetrators rarely received severe punishments after the war. Although many went to trial, they often got away with short sentences—not for their actual crimes but for being illegal Nazi Party members before the annexation. When the Gestapo head Huber claimed that he had helped Jews, the allies released him with a small fine and one year of probation. Supposedly, he had executed his tasks "as fairly and reasonable as possible" and was not a supporter of Nazi ideology (106). Some officers received more severe prison sentences but were released early.

Overall, the book provides an overview of the establishment, activities, and aftermath of this largest regional Gestapo office, and it contains a useful bibliography. Unfortunately, excessive subtitles and the repetition of facts hinder the flow of the text. Comparisons with available German Gestapo studies, for example on Düsseldorf, could have helped this work, which often provides more description than analysis. There are some mistakes, such as the suggestion that the Reich Security Main Office existed during the time of the annexation, though it was founded only in September 1939 (63). At times, available literature on Austria could have prevented errors, such as the assertion that since summer 1939 Jews were recruited for minimal paid forced labor (184); the program was born in Vienna and introduced in the fall of 1938. Finally, it should be mentioned that Eichmann's Central Office and the Gestapo were not solely responsible for anti-Jewish policy in Austria: there were various actors initiating discriminatory policies including municipalities, the Nazi Party, and Austrian ministries.

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Rosamund Johnston 

University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
E-mail: rosamund.johnston@univie.ac.at

Historians of science and technology have fixated upon newness and innovation, argues David Edgerton, overlooking what a technology comes to mean once it becomes quotidian, widespread,