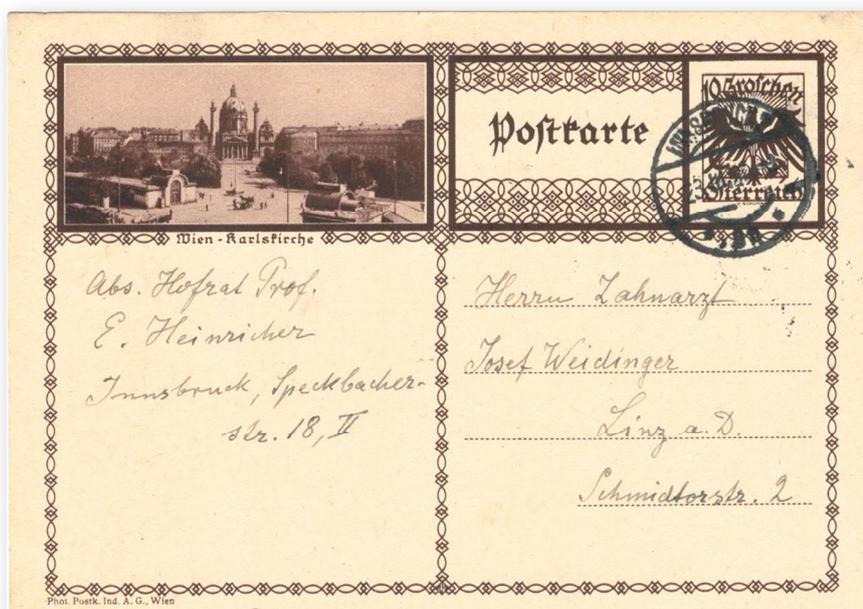


## The University of Innsbruck in Transition

Every now and then, in discussions about the time of the "browns" in Austria, one hears the argument "Not everything was bad!" which, depending on the interlocutor, leads to agreement, rejection or an embarrassed silence. Most of us only know Austrian history from stories or books; my history lessons with two professors ended with the same sentence: "And then came Hitler..." - There was always no evaluation. In a bundle of picture postcards from the years 1929 to 1933, I found some that seemed very remarkable to me, since the sender or recipient made statements about the political era of the time that make us think. The sender is Professor EMIL HEINRICHER, living at Speckbacherstrasse 18/II in Innsbruck - he orders four bottles of the "best proven mouth and tooth water (white)" from JOSEF WEIDINGER, dentist in Linz. The postage for the domestic postcard of 23.3.1929 was 10 Groschen - the card shows the Karlskirche in Vienna.



The following can be found about HEINRICHER by Peter Goller<sup>1</sup>: *Emil Heinricher (1856-1934), who was promoted in 1889, especially by Julius Sachs, as the second successor to Anton Kerner, worked continuously in Innsbruck from 1889 until his retirement in 1928. He turned down a call to the Graz professorship that had become vacant after Gottlieb Haberlandt resigned in 1911. Heinricher continued the tradition of Kerner, who was considered a pioneer of descendency-theoretical plant geography, only to a limited extent. Heinricher's scientific life's work was the continuation of the plant-physiological anatomical direction of his Graz teacher Hubert Leitgeb. His research on heredity was inspired by his*



Postcard of Speckbacherstrasse in Innsbruck around 1900. House number 16 can be seen in the front left. HEINRICHER lived in the neighbouring house.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Goller (\* 1961) is an Austrian historian and archivist at the University of Innsbruck.

friendly contact with Carl Correns, later director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biology in Berlin, which dates back to his student days in Graz. Arthur Pisek, professor emeritus of botany in the 1960s, noted about the Heinricher era: "Hofrat Heinricher, who had come here from Leitgeb, [Simon] Schwendener and Sachs, reigned."



Postcard of the old botanical garden in the middle of Innsbruck around 1902.

HEINRICHER was also particularly concerned with Innsbruck's botanical garden. He accompanied the garden's change from descriptive botany to the task of a botanical garden in the experimental natural sciences. He began to establish biological groups (grouping of plants according to morphological, floral-biological or distribution-ecological criteria) and received recognition for this throughout Europe. In 1909, he also oversaw the relocation of the garden from the site at the old university, which could no longer be extended, to its present location in Hötting (west Innsbruck), where the new Botanical Institute was ceremoniously opened in 1913. System, Arboretum, Alpinum, Greenhouses formed the main elements of the new garden complex.

Except for the greenhouse system, which was replaced by a new building in 1979, the garden still exists today as it did more than a hundred years ago.

HEINRICHER then retired in 1928. Peter Goller again reports on his political views and many of his colleagues at the venerable Innsbruck University:

"EMIL HEINRICHER, professor emeritus of botany at Innsbruck, wished in 1933/34 that the "unfortunate tension that has broken out between the German Empire and Austria" would be eliminated: "Let us hope that an end will soon be put to this unnatural confusion. This is my fervent wish!

"In March 1934 - barely a month after the bloody liquidation of the socialist workers' movement on 12 February - Heinricher issued an anti-Semitic hateful indictment of "Austromarxism". Regretting the "alienation that exists between Germany and Austria", Heinricher set his sights on a political solution along the lines of German fascism: "The consequences have led to a lack of freedom of thought in Austria that never existed before in my lifetime. They express themselves in the corruption of character formation, which is affected by all kinds of coercive measures. Although all parties are supposed to have ceased to exist, it seems to me that in reality the rule of only one is to be ensured, above all of Catholicism, which is given precedence over nationality and which is supposed to be the hallmark of the German-Austrian.

Shall there be another persecution of Protestants in Austria, where Bolshevism and Austro-Marxism have now been meritoriously and happily overcome, but unfortunately little has been done to contain Jewry? Happy Saar, in which it has been possible to put the national before all other party differences".



First day cover of an Austrian stamp 1970 commemorating 300 years of Innsbruck University.

Like Adolf Steuer and Emil Heinricher, the zoologist Otto Steinböck (1893-1969), one of the fanatical fascist functionaries at the University of Innsbruck during the "Nazi years", saw in the "Anschluss" to Germany the only possibility of normalising scientific life and accordingly saw himself vindicated by the invasion of the Nazi troops in 1938. After his return from the "victorious" French campaign, Steinböck wrote in 1940: "You wouldn't even know the Institute itself any more. After we had not received any money at all for



First day cover of a 2019 Austrian stamp commemorating 350 years of Innsbruck University. The stamp shows the university seal.

years under Dollfuss-Schuschnigg, this changed in the summer after the upheaval. I was able to realise all my old plans, got new rooms, also a garden with an open-air pool, in which there are currently chars for various experiments from a 2800 m high mountain lake, and all the rooms were completely refurbished, painted, etc. I am sure that my institute is now one of the most beautiful in the world. My institute is now certainly one of the most beautiful among the zoological institutes in the Greater German Reich."

But Steinböck was not the only one who thought so. According to Peter Goller: "many Innsbruck professors combined the illusion of radical improvement of the material situation, they ignored the already known Nazi crimes in the euphoric "Anschluss jubilation", just like the political and racist persecution visible at the University of Innsbruck itself. After the years of financial drain, the professors relied on "Aus- und Aufbauprogramme" in connection with the arms bubble and German imperialism. Short-term special endowments nourished illusions of developing the University of Innsbruck into a "German borderland university".

But there were also the others. For example, one of the most famous academics at the University of Innsbruck fell victim to political persecution after the Anschluss: Victor Franz Hess, who publicly spoke out against National Socialism. Even the Nobel Prize in Physics he received in 1936 did not protect him. After Austria's annexation by the German Reich, Hess was briefly arrested, then temporarily retired, before finally being dismissed without notice and without pension entitlement in September 1938. He also had to give up his Nobel Prize money. In the same year, he emigrated with his Jewish wife to the USA, where he continued his work and died in 1964.



Victor Franz Hess: one of the most famous scientists at the University of Innsbruck

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