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**Susanne Heim, Carola Sachse and Mark Walker (eds.), *The Kaiser Wilhelm Society under National Socialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xxiv +477. ISBN 978-0-521-87906-4. £45.00 (hardback).**

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In 1997, the former president of the Max Planck Society, Hubert Markl, installed a presidential commission for research into the history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society (KWS) under National Socialism. He appointed Reinhard Rürup and Wolfgang Schieder as undoubtedly independent and experienced historians to manage a huge research project which continued its work until 2005. The project's series of monographs, consisting of seventeen volumes and several thousand pages, has been available in full since 2008 – all of them in the German language. The volume presented here, edited by Heim, Sachse and Walker, covers a broad range of the most important research results in English. Its sixteen contributions are translations of chapters from the monograph series, preprints or articles published in other historical journals. The volume thus gives an excellent overview of the complex entanglement of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes (KWIs) and their leading scientists with the National Socialist regime. The common starting point of all chapters is an understanding of the close relationship between science, society and politics, serving as resources for each other to mutual benefit. Although the KWS did retain its institutional autonomy, it formed an integral part of the system while simultaneously advancing its own agenda very successfully and thriving during the war years in particular.

Apart from an informative introduction, the contributions are arranged in five sections. The first focuses on the KWS as an institution, casting light on the research and personnel policies of the General Administration. It reveals the society and its institutes as nodes in a dense social network which basically existed before 1933, but was self-reorganizing after the National Socialist seizure of power, noticeably revitalizing its relations to the military. Interestingly, new strategies and priorities of research were set long before the Four Year Plan, mostly in 1934–1935. The book's second section, on racial research, demonstrates the radicalization and transgression of moral boundaries during the war. It reveals that scientists of the KWIs had been directly involved with forced sterilization, euthanasia, human experiments inside and outside the concentration camps and the exploitation of people in the occupied territories. A particular focus is on Nobel laureate, and later president of the Max Planck Society, Adolf Butenandt. He serves as a prime example of a younger outstanding scientist using the excellent research options the regime offered. His 'link to Auschwitz' (p. 120), a controversial issue of discussion in recent years, is particularly carefully considered.

The third section concentrates on research carried out within the wider context of the National Socialist expansion to the east, trying to promote Germany's autarky and expand her 'living

space'. The contributions show the particular importance of breeding research and botanical research, including plant genetics. It was in these areas that the KWIs' scientists came into contact with the SS. The fourth section specifically refutes the lasting presumption of a decline in military research in the Third Reich due to the regime's purported incompetence in closely managing, coordinating and controlling research. On the contrary: exchange relations between the state, the military, the arms industry and military research had been established during the Weimar Republic, intensifying under National Socialism into a close cooperation for the protagonists' mutual benefit. The chapters reveal extensive networks of collaboration especially at the 'medium level' of various institutions. They rightly point out that Germany had a long tradition of a decentralized system of inter-institutional committees to coordinate research, production and resources, a system which clearly differed from the Anglo-American model. With decision-makers being members of several different networks, the system proved particularly efficient. Moreover, it becomes clear that the distinction between basic and applied research, which has often been used apologetically to differentiate between non-political, ideologically uncontaminated sciences on the one hand and politically more or less exploited applied sciences on the other, is untenable on closer inspection. Aerodynamics research, for example, conducted at world-class level in the KWI for Fluid Dynamics, can undoubtedly be rated as basic research, but was highly relevant for the development of new weapons systems.

The fifth section of the volume is dedicated to the *Vergangenheitspolitik* (politics of the past) of the Max Planck Society. It substantiates the preliminary history of the research project itself, uncovering the *Persilscheinkultur* (whitewash culture) of the post-war years. The chapters reveal the rehabilitation of incriminated scientists as the result of the efficient close-knit network of individuals and institutions (including the Allies), accompanied by an elaborate rhetoric of exculpation. The editors themselves phrase the project's results in a haunting conclusion:

The story of science at the KWS during the Third Reich is neither the history of 'good' science in the service of bad goals nor the tale of a bad regime ruining good science . . . what was unique about the interaction of science and politics . . . was the freedoms the National Socialist regime allowed its scientists, engineers, and physicians, not how it constrained them (pp. 7–8).

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