

INTRODUCTION



The secret state police of the National Socialist regime – Geheime Staatspolizei, or Gestapo for short – has become a byword for the secret police in totalitarian systems. The expression ‘Gestapo methods’ has gone into common parlance as a damning political insult. The Vienna Gestapo was the most important instrument of Nazi 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. It treated all who violated Nazi norms with unrelenting severity, and was particularly brutal towards foreign forced labourers.

Founded in 1938 with the official full name ‘Geheime Staatspolizei – Staatspolizeileitstelle Wien’, it was the biggest Gestapo office with the exception of the central head office in Berlin: until 1939 the secret state police office (Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, Gestapa) and thereafter Amt IV of the Reich security main office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA). The word ‘Leitstelle’ in the Vienna Gestapo’s official name literally means ‘leading office’, and it is translated in the present volume as ‘regional headquarters’. With a staff of over nine hundred, the Vienna Gestapo was numerically the largest Gestapo ‘Leitstelle’ in the German Reich, and bigger than Berlin or Prague. It was also second to none in the number of arrests it made, which amounted to around fifty thousand. The arrestees were commonly subjected to brutal interrogations and torture before being either committed to concentration camps or handed over to the courts to be tried. The area of competence of the Vienna Gestapo extended over the eastern part of annexed Austria – that is to say, over the former federal provinces of Vienna, Lower Austria and (north) Burgenland – and the parts of former Czechoslovakia incorporated into the Reichsgau ‘Lower Danube’ (Niederdonau). It had a total population of over 3.5 million, which was more than half the population of Austria at the time (1939 census: 6.65 million inhabitants, 6.88 million including the incorporated territories). On account of the Reich’s new borders with

(rump) Czechoslovakia (or, after the latter's occupation, with the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and with Slovakia) and Hungary, the Vienna Gestapo acquired further important responsibilities and tasks, especially as it was also in charge of the border police and its stations and border posts. Writing the history of the Vienna Gestapo – including the post-war prosecution (or non-prosecution) of its former officials – is thus an important task, to which it is hoped that the present volume will be a valuable contribution.

There are numerous publications on the Nazi police machinery in the 'Alt-reich' (i.e. Germany in its pre-1938 borders): with regard to the Gestapo, see among others the seminal studies by Gerhard Paul/Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Robert Gellately, and the admirably concise account by Carsten Dams/Michael Stolle.¹ On the Gestapo in Austria, by contrast, there are only a few. In 1991, Franz Weisz presented an extensive doctoral thesis on the Vienna Gestapo, which was meritorious for its recording and analysis of important source materials, in particular the post-war trials of Vienna Gestapo officials by the Vienna Volksgericht, and this performed important preparatory work for the present volume. However, because of its lack of analyses and historical contextualization, Weisz's thesis had, to a large extent, the character of a voluminous, unstructured and uncommented collection of material, and therefore could not be published.² Important findings concerning central figures of the Vienna Gestapo have been provided in the degree dissertation and doctoral thesis of Thomas Mang, his dissertation being on the head of the section colloquially known as the *Judenreferat* ('Jewish section') Karl Ebner, and his thesis on Vienna Gestapo head Franz Josef Huber.³ These studies also shed light on the part played by the Vienna Gestapo in the deportations of Jews from Vienna from February 1941, which is still insufficiently recognized, and the strategy of 'reinsurance' successfully implemented by Ebner and Huber, which enabled these two heavily incriminated Gestapo officials to survive the prosecutions of the post-war era. Two further Vienna University degree dissertations have been devoted to important Vienna Gestapo officials: one by Christine Cézanne-Thauss on intelligence section head Lambert Leutgeb, and the second on the department head Othmar Trenker.⁴ A number of thoroughly researched studies on the Vienna Gestapo's system of informers have been published by Hans Schafranek, who has presented and analysed the devastating impact of the infiltration of undercover agents into the ranks of the resistance groups.⁵

In this connection, finally, mention must be made of the research studies published by the Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Documentation centre of Austrian resistance, DÖW) and publications by Wolfgang Neugebauer, which primarily focus on the resistance but at the same time provide a great deal of information about the activity of the Vienna Gestapo.⁶ An extensive source base has been created through the digitalization and partial publication on the DÖW website of the Vienna Gestapo's identification

card index ('Erkennungsdienstliche Kartei', preserved at the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv) and the online publication of the Vienna Gestapo daily reports (now only accessible to institutions under licence, see Bibliography);⁷ however, while these sources are relevant for research into resistance and repression, and were duly utilized for the present publication, they provide hardly any information on the internal structure of the Vienna Gestapo, or on the individuals responsible for its crimes.

Our interest in Gestapo research was the result of decades devoted to the subject of resistance and repression in the Nazi period. In the course of her many years as DÖW archivist, Elisabeth Boeckl-Klamper evaluated all the Gestapo documents archived or acquired for archiving there, and played a leading role in the creation of the newly designed memorial room and exhibition in the Leopold Figl-Hof apartment block at the site of the former Vienna Gestapo headquarters on Morzinplatz, also acting as editor for its website and publication.⁸ In addition to the above-mentioned studies, Thomas Mang has published biographical accounts of Franz Josef Huber and Karl Ebner, the two most important officials of the Vienna Gestapo.⁹ Wolfgang Neugebauer conducted and published numerous studies on Nazi terror during his many years as director of the DÖW, focusing particularly on the Gestapo's role in the suppression of resistance; in addition, as honorary professor of contemporary history at Vienna University, he lectured and supervised several degree dissertations and doctoral theses on the Gestapo. Our goal – on the basis of our knowledge and the current findings of research in Austrian and foreign archives and other international research – was to compose as comprehensive as possible an account of the Vienna Gestapo in the years 1938–45, with a presentation and analysis not only of the victims of persecution and repression but also of the structures, organization and individuals actively involved on the Gestapo side, and with at least a rough picture of what became of the perpetrators in the post-war period.

The present volume starts by presenting the development of the Gestapo into the Nazi regime's central instrument of repression, culminating in the foundation of RSHA in Berlin, and the process of fusion – promoted by Reichsführer-SS Himmler – of the security police (Sicherheitspolizei, or 'Sipo' – i.e. the Gestapo and the criminal investigation police (Kriminalpolizei, or 'Kripo')), the regular uniformed police or 'order' police (Ordnungspolizei, or 'Orpo'), and the SS. The section on the RSHA (and its forerunner agency the Gestapo) is relevant in that in 1938 the Vienna Gestapo was modelled exactly on the Berlin office, the structure of which was laid down in a 'business distribution plan' (Geschäftsverteilungsplan, GVP), and when the GVP changed in 1942 and 1944, the changes were also implemented in Vienna. Notwithstanding the dominance of the Berlin central offices, which at the beginning at least appointed 'Reich Germans' to leading positions in the Vienna Gestapo, the present volume gives detailed

consideration to the active part played by Austrian National Socialists (who until March 1938 were members of a prohibited political party and thus ‘illegals’) in the overthrow of the Vienna police and to the recruitment into the Gestapo of officials of the pre-annexation Austrian police, with particular attention to the additional incorporation of Gestapo officials into the SS. The Vienna Gestapo staff structure is investigated on the basis of statistical data, with consideration given to the role played by women on the Gestapo staff.

One special aspect of the study is the presentation of the criminal methods employed by the Vienna Gestapo, including the systematic use of torture to extract confessions and coerce victims into betraying fellow resisters, and commitments to concentration camps; in this context, a special chapter is devoted to the most efficient method of suppression used by the Vienna Gestapo, namely, the extensive deployment of informers. Another special focus is laid upon denunciations. As a contribution to the ongoing debate on this subject, the extent of denunciation and the composition of the denouncers are analysed in order to assess the place and importance of denunciation in this historical context.

A number of substantial chapters focus on the fate of the Vienna Gestapo’s victims, the most important categories being political and religious opponents and resistance fighters, Jews, young oppositionals, persons stigmatized as ‘asocials’, and last but not least the foreign forced labourers, who have hitherto been wrongly neglected in Gestapo research. In connection with this group, a special chapter is devoted to the ‘(forced) labour education camp’ (Arbeits-erziehungslager, AEL) of Oberlanzendorf, which was de facto a Vienna Gestapo concentration camp. Furthermore, an ample account is given of the Vienna Gestapo’s part in the persecution of the Jews, which in some publications has been underestimated in comparison with that of the ‘Central Office for the Emigration of Jews in Vienna’ established by Adolf Eichmann; in particular, an account is given of the critical initiative undertaken by Gauleiter Baldur von Schirach in collaboration with Vienna Gestapo head Franz Josef Huber that led directly to the deportations.

Particular attention is also devoted to the history of the building on Morzinplatz that served as the Vienna Gestapo headquarters – from the construction of the Hotel Metropole in 1872/73 through to its seizure in 1938 and final destruction from direct hits in the bombing of 1945. In the relevant chapter, a lengthy section is devoted to the two most prominent figures to have been detained at Morzinplatz – former Austrian federal chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg and the banker Louis Rothschild. Equally detailed attention is paid to the first transport of Austrians to Dachau in 1938 and to later mass arrests, notably before the outbreak of war in 1939 and after the assassination attempt and resistance operation of 20 July 1944. In the concluding chapters, accounts are given of the part played by the Vienna Gestapo in the end-phase crimes of 1945 – for example, the murder of captured American pilots – and of the end

of the Vienna Gestapo regional headquarters, which was given up without a fight, its protagonists retreating or going underground after taking all possible measures to destroy evidence of their deeds. Finally, the volume concludes with a critical account of the way in which the Austrian and German judiciary and the denazification bodies dealt with the crimes of the Vienna Gestapo and its officials.

The volume also considers five key issues of Gestapo research:

1. The ‘Gestapo myth’ – that is to say, the idea cultivated and propagated by Himmler and Heydrich of the security police being ubiquitous and all-powerful. It has played an important role in modern Gestapo research (Paul/Mallmann 1995, Gellately 1990, and others). While the deconstruction of this myth is in itself right and good, it does run the risk of tending to make light of or underestimate the work carried out by the Gestapo. It was thus an important concern for us to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Gestapo, its ‘success’, which we have done principally in relation to its suppression of resistance.
2. Denunciations. As a result of certain far-reaching interpretations, denunciations from the general public have been perceived as being of high importance for the evaluation not only of the Gestapo but of the Nazi regime as a whole. In particular, this has led to a tendency to relativize the dictatorial character of the Nazi regime (by invoking the existence of a ‘nationalsozialistischer Volksstaat’ or ‘National Socialist people’s state’). The extent of such denunciations, the social and political categorization of the denouncers, and the contexts in which the denunciations were made are thus important thematic areas for the present study.
3. Austrian perpetrators. Not only was the proportion of Austrians amongst Nazi perpetrators generally played down in the post-war era but apologies, such as that of Vienna Gestapo deputy head Karl Ebner, made light of their crimes by claiming that the Austrian Gestapo officials were far more moderate than their German colleagues. In the present publication, the subject of Austrian perpetrators is thus not considered merely in terms of statistics: attention is also given to the questions of whether it is possible to demonstrate differences in the procedures followed by Austrian and German officials, whether the distinction was of any relevance at all in practice, and to what extent tensions or conflicts developed.
4. ‘Reinsurance’. The leading officials of the Vienna Gestapo, Franz Josef Huber and Karl Ebner, both pursued the strategy of ‘reinsurance’ by giving favourable treatment to prominent detainees, especially from the Catholic-conservative camp, with a view to guaranteeing their own sur-

vival after the end of the Nazi regime. A special section is devoted to the presentation and analysis of this – ultimately successful – strategy.

5. Women perpetrators? Researchers into National Socialism are increasingly using the gendered term ‘TäterInnen’ (male and female perpetrators), which tends to imply that women had a substantial share in the crimes of the Nazi regime, and even to put them on the same level as the men. By contrast, this volume establishes the actual number of women who worked for the Vienna Gestapo and their position in the hierarchy, and investigates the occasional instances of women participating in criminal acts.

When it came to the collapse of the Nazi regime, the leading Vienna Gestapo officials sought to erase all evidence of their crimes by setting about destroying the entire body of files, which they almost succeeded in doing. Fortunately for historians, however, the great majority of the Vienna Gestapo daily reports were in fact preserved, as copies were always sent to other NS authorities – not just to offices in Vienna but also to central offices in Berlin, where the Allies subsequently took possession of them and where they are now preserved in the German federal archives. An important secondary body of source material is provided by the records of the NS courts (VGH, Vienna OLG, Vienna SG; see list of abbreviations), as these often contain surveillance records, the findings of police investigations, accusations made by the Vienna Gestapo when reporting individuals to the prosecutors, and sometimes the testimonies of Gestapo officials. Arguably the most important source for the history of the Vienna Gestapo is the records of the post-war Vienna Volksgericht (People’s Court, 1945–55), which are preserved in the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLA). The documents relating to the police’s investigations and preparatory research provide information on the organizational structure, training of officials, and administration of the Vienna Gestapo, and not least on its methods as it went about tasks ranging from the processing of complaints and the evaluation of informers’ reports through to the systematic use of torture during interrogations. The judgments, statements of defendants and witnesses, and records of the main court proceedings combine to provide a comprehensive picture, which nevertheless for obvious reasons calls for critical interpretation. An important complementary source was the ‘Gau files’ of the NSDAP (the Nazi party) held in the Austrian state archives, which provided essential information, in particular on the biographies of individual Gestapo officials. Another source that turned out to be relevant was the archival holdings of Department I, state police department, Vienna police headquarters (Abteilung I, Staatspolizeiliche Abteilung, Bundespolizeidirektion Wien), which contain not only the – sadly few – extant original documents of the Vienna Gestapo, but also documents about the Vienna Gestapo drawn up after 1945 by the

Austrian state police; immediately after the collapse of the Nazi regime, these two holdings of documents formed the basis for the tracking down and detention of former Vienna Gestapo officials.

At the German federal archives, the holdings of the RSHA and the former US Berlin Document Center were particularly revealing sources for the present study. Another foreign state archive that – surprisingly – turned out to be an important source of information was the archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana, which holds a number of key documents on Vienna Gestapo officials stemming from police investigations and court proceedings in former Yugoslavia, in particular against Lambert Leutgeb, head of the Vienna Gestapo intelligence section. Important documents relating to the participation of the Vienna Gestapo and its head Franz Josef Huber in the preparations for the mass deportation of Vienna's Jewish population were found in the 'Austria Collection' of the Institute for Holocaust Research of Yad Vashem. From the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, the most relevant items were the microfilms of the Vienna Gestapo's daily reports, which were in fact published many years ago. Since then, all the extant Vienna Gestapo daily reports have been made available online ('Deutsche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert Online', access now only possible under licence and to institutions).

Even in a volume of this length, it has not been possible to deal with all aspects of the subject thoroughly. Among the aspects insufficiently explored are the activities of the Vienna Gestapo units responsible for espionage and counter-intelligence, of the Gestapo branch offices, and of the border police stations and border posts; furthermore, the crimes committed by Vienna Gestapo officials in the occupied territories of Europe have been accorded little attention by historians and are dealt with here only through a number of representative examples. Other subjects requiring further research include the inadequate judicial prosecution of Vienna Gestapo officials, likewise presented here only in case studies relating to certain important figures, and the reintegration of former Gestapo officials into Austrian society after the waning of the anti-fascist spirit, characteristic of 1945.

Notes

1. Paul and Mallmann, *Die Gestapo – Mythos und Realität*; Paul/Mallmann, *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg*; Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*; Dams and Stolle, *Die Gestapo*.
2. Weisz, 'Die Geheime Staatspolizei'.
3. Mang, 'Retter, um sich selbst zu retten'; idem, 'Nicht in der Lage'.
4. Cezanne-Thauss, 'Lambert Leutgeb'; Pichler, 'Dr. Othmar Trenker'.
5. See especially Schafranek, *Widerstand und Verrat. Gestapospitzel im antifaschistischen Untergrund*.
6. See, among others, DÖW, *Widerstand und Verfolgung in Wien*, and Neugebauer, *Der österreichische Widerstand, 1938–1945* (Vienna, 2014).

7. <http://www.doew.at/erinnern/personendatenbanken/gestapo-opfer> (last accessed on 31 May 2021); Bailer and Form, 'Tagesrapporte der Gestapo-Leitstelle'.
8. 'Gedenkstätte für die Opfer der Gestapo Wien'.
9. Mang, '*Gestapo-Leitstelle Wien*'; idem, *Die Unperson*.