

# Copenhagen 1938. J. Mengele and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with a less known chapter of the biography of the Nazi physician and war criminal J. Mengele related to of his academic career prior to 1939. Based on new archival sources, it highlights his prospective participation in the last significant international meeting in the field of physical anthropology, the 2nd International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Copenhagen in August 1938.

**Keywords:** history of anthropology, international science, racial theories, Nazism, J. Mengele

*Josef Mengele, who was known best not as a doctor but as a criminal and a murderer.*

Elie Wiesel, 2005<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiesel, 2005, p. 1512.

## 1 Introduction

The biography of Josef Mengele (1911–1979) usually splits, for understandable reasons, into the periods before and after his stay and crimes in Auschwitz.<sup>2</sup> Not even the most recent works usually accentuate his professional development, mostly tending to reiterate general knowledge.<sup>3</sup> This trend has also been reflected in TV documentaries for broader public.<sup>4</sup> Some important and more subtle data are brought, however, by contributions of a rather local character, reflecting the institutional history.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, just those several years of his academic engagement prior to 1939 constituted the matrix, from which MENGELE emerged as a type of a Nazi criminal, characterized by “[...] *his cynical attitude towards human beings*”.<sup>6</sup> These

*[...] became, in his eyes, a mere material, a substance for scientific research purposes. What brought Mengele to Auschwitz was his untamed ambition. His activity there should have been a sprout on the tree of his career [...] A combination of both the unlimited ambition and boundless cynicism is the pivotal characteristic of the Nazi perpetrator Josef Mengele.*<sup>7</sup>

As such, he enters in the general awareness after 1945, representing an eternal memento of a total moral and ethical aberration of the modern research under extreme political circumstances in the field of life sciences, both medicine and biology.<sup>8</sup>

A corroboration of Mengele’s embedding in the scientific landscape before 1939 is also his participation in scientific congresses and meetings. During the period of his academic engagement in Frankfurt/Main, an essential milestone in his career, two events of this kind that have usually been reminded of until now took place.<sup>9</sup> The first one was the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the German Anthropological Society (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie*), which took place in Tübingen on 16–19 September 1937.<sup>10</sup> The second one was the following (10<sup>th</sup>) meeting of the same society, which had just been renamed the German Society for the Racial Research (*Deutsche*

<sup>2</sup> Marwell, 2020; Posner and Ware, 2009; Völklein, 2003; Astor, 1985; Langbein, 1972. On Auschwitz see also Klee, 2001; Klee, 1997, and Müller-Hill, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. For the scientific motives in the non-historical literature see Musial, 2019 or Mitchell, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Hitlers Helfer II. Mengele. Der Todesarzt*. München 1998, produced by BMG Video Universum and *Josef Mengele. The Final Account, 1995*, produced by SET Productions.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig, 2014a; item, 2014b; item, 2014c; Benzenhöfer, 2011; Benzenhöfer and Weiske, 2010; Schulze, 2010; item, 2008, and Steinkrüger, 2002. Cf. also Faith Weiss, 2012. See further the TV documentary *The Holocaust Perpetrators. The PhD Student from Frankfurt Josef Mengele*. Frankfurt/Main 2014, produced by Hessischer Rundfunk.

<sup>6</sup> Zofka, 1986, p. 266.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Marwell, 2020, pp. 115–116.

<sup>8</sup> Pérez, 2015; Weindling, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See in detail Part 2 of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Mengele, 1937. In 1937 there were another three meetings in Germany (Frankfurt/Main, München, and Berlin), at which the hereditary issues became topics. See Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereinafter BArch), R4901/2737, a list of scientific meetings in the field of science of heredity and population policy, 2 March 1937.

*Gesellschaft für Rassenforschung*), in Munich on 23–25 March 1939.<sup>11</sup> Both of them were exclusively a German business, albeit the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting was attended by ‘new’ colleagues from former Austria.<sup>12</sup> Mengele was here one of 47 participating members of the Society and, together with his Institute’s head Otmar von Verschuer (1896–1969), one of the two participants from Frankfurt/Main.<sup>13</sup>

In this contribution, we shall, however, concentrate on Mengele’s possible – and essentially the only one – appearance in an international scientific forum, which was to occur at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (*Congrès international des sciences anthropologiques et ethnologiques, deuxième session*) in Copenhagen in August 1938.<sup>14</sup> We are trying to conceive the subject in the wider context of the contemporary conference diplomacy, which was (and still is) integral and important part of modern science.

## 2 Decisive Years

For Mengele’s scientific career, the decisive step was his engagement at the Goethe University (*Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität*) in Frankfurt/Main (Hesse), where he worked officially from Friday, 1 January 1937, which means that he arrived there before he reached his 26<sup>th</sup> year of age. Until Tuesday, 31 August of the same year, he had been an intern (*Medizinalpraktikant*), including a four-year educational stay at the University in Leipzig.<sup>15</sup> Getting his medical license (*Bestallung*) on Wednesday, 1 September 1937,<sup>16</sup> he held the status of a volunteer (*Volontär*) till the end of September 1937.<sup>17</sup> On Friday, 1 October 1937, he obtained a scholarship of the William G. Kerckhoff Foundation for Scientific Research and Education (*William G. Kerckhoff-Stiftung für wissenschaftliche Forschung und Fortbildung*) with the seat in Bad Neuheim.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Schultz, 1940. For a collective photograph of the participants including Mengele and Verschuer see Marwell, 2020, picture No 6, n. p.

<sup>12</sup> *Tagungsbericht* (1940), in: Schultz, 1940, pp. V–VI.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. V.

<sup>14</sup> This scientific congress has been discussed rather sporadically, cf. Kühl, 1997, p. 147. For the reflection after 1945 cf. Massin, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228–229.

<sup>16</sup> Mengele, 1938, n. p. (*Lebenslauf*).

<sup>17</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228–229.

<sup>18</sup> Universitätsarchiv Frankfurt am Main (hereinafter UAF), curriculum vitae of J. Mengele, 10 May 1938. Cf. Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228.



**Fig. 1: Josef Mengele at the age of 28, 1939 (BArch Berlin)**

He was employed in the Institute for the Hereditary Biology and Racial Hygiene (*Institut für Erbbiologie und Rassenhygiene*). The establishment of this institute had been negotiated between the university and the Prussian Ministry of Science and Arts (*Preußisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst*) beginning May 1934<sup>19</sup>, the abovementioned Professor O. von Verschuer being appointed its head no later than on 1 April 1935.<sup>20</sup> He was one of key personalities in exploiting contemporary knowledge of experimental genetics in clinical practice, which materialized in the form of the so-called hereditary diseases physician (*Erbarzt*), being in progress, in the Nazi Germany, against the background of a transformation from physical anthropology all the way to the so-called racial science (*Rassenkunde*).<sup>21</sup>

Politically viewed, Verschuer is considered to have been an ‘*opportunist par excellence*’, for he worked in the position of a biologist with the so-called Research Department for the Jewish Question (*Forschungsabteilung Judenfrage*) of the Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany (*Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des Neuen Deutschlands*).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Schulze, 2010, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81. See also Faith Weiss, 2012, pp. 635–644. On the continuation of scientific contacts during Mengele’s stay in Auschwitz see Massin, 2003, pp. 201–254.

<sup>21</sup> Schwerin, 2004, pp. 242–260, 268–276. For this transformation cf. Massin, 2003, pp. 190–244; item, 1993, pp. 197–262, and Proctor, 1988, pp. 138–179. Further see also Roth, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Weingart, Kroll, and Bayertz, 1992, pp. 420–421. On the postwar allegations and his connections with Mengele cf. *idem*, pp. 572–581. For Verschuer’s entering of the NSDAP cf. Müller-Hill, 1989, p. 79.



Fig. 2: Otmar von Verschuer, late 1930s (ISG Frankfurt/Main)

In the letter from Thursday, 12 May 1938, Verschuer asked for an employment for Mengele in the position of one of the together four scientific assistant professors in his institute.<sup>23</sup>

The request was dealt with in the positive, but the decree was dated only by Saturday, 16 July 1938.<sup>24</sup> Verschuer appreciated Mengele's scientific contribution in summer 1938 as follows:

*Dr. Mengele has distinguished himself by particular exploits up to this time [since September 1937 – author's note]. He is assiduous and hard-working. He is absolutely reliable in carrying out any task that he has undertaken. Besides his general medical education, he is in possession of a special anthropological training, which makes him particularly suitable for the activities of my institute.*<sup>25</sup>

All in all: an eager beaver.

He kept his position of an assistant at the university until the winter semester 1943/44<sup>26</sup> despite of his volunteering for the army. He had submitted an application (*Freiwilligenschein zum Eintritt in den Wehrdienst*) on Wednesday, 1 June 1938, i.e., even before his second (medical) dissertation, being called up on 15 June 1940.<sup>27</sup>

His main daily workload consisted in the agenda stemming from racial and racial-hygienic directives, which meant making out expert opinions (*Gutachten*) and case management in the so-called Advisory Centre for Hereditary and Racial Care II

<sup>23</sup> The others were: H. Grebe, L. Liebenam, and F. Schwarzweller. Cf. Faith Weiss, 2012, pp. 649–650. Another one was, however, the First assistant H. Schade, who participated in the Congress in Copenhagen 1938; for his biography see Sparing, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228–229.

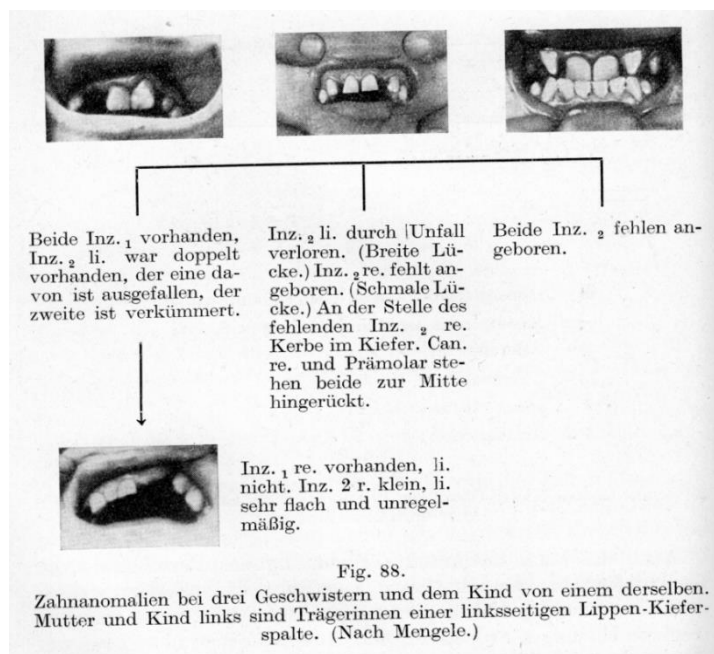
<sup>25</sup> UAF, Abt. 4, Nr. 1502, Verschuer to the *Kuratorium der Universität Frankfurt a. M.*, 10 May 1938. Cf. also Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228–229

<sup>26</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, p. 239.

<sup>27</sup> UAF, Abt. 4, Nr. 1502, Mengele to Cordes, 1 June 1938.

(*Beratungsstelle für Erb- und Rassenpflege II*), which encompassed the region of Frankfurt-South (*Frankfurt-Süd*).<sup>28</sup>

It can further be supposed that he devoted himself to the work on his dissertation.<sup>29</sup> He submitted his thesis on Monday, 20 June 1938, and the candidate's application for admission to doctor's examination two days later, passing the exam *summa cum laude*.<sup>30</sup> The work was called Kinship Examination in Cases of Cleft Lip, Jaw, and Palate (*Sippenuntersuchungen bei der Lippen-Kiefer-Gaumenspalte*). Mengele availed of 17 probands operated on in 1925–1935 in the Frankfurt clinic, following up the incidence of pertinent deformations in the particular family trees.<sup>31</sup> The dissertation was published in print.<sup>32</sup> In the following years it was included as a standard reference in the new German compendia of the so called hereditary pathology (*Erbpathologie*).<sup>33</sup>



**Fig. 3: Reference to Mengele's medical dissertation in the contemporary textbook of so called Hereditary Pathology (*Erbpathologie*), 1940 (private collection)**

<sup>28</sup> Faith Weiss, 2012, pp. 649–650 and Schulze, 2010, pp. 81–86.

<sup>29</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, p. 229 and item, 2010, pp. 9–20.

<sup>30</sup> Benzenhöfer, 2011, pp. 228–229.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>32</sup> Mengele, Josef. *Sippenuntersuchungen bei Lippen-Kiefer-Gaumenspalte*, in: *Zeitschrift für menschliche Vererbungs- und Konstitutionslehre* 23 (1), 1938, pp. 17–42 and attachments (*Sonderdruck*).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hanhart, 1940, p. 556; Lehmann and Ritter, 1940, pp. 568–570, 574, 576, and Lange, Lenz, von Verschuer, and Weitz, 1940, pp. 141–143, 193.

The title of doctor of medicine (*Dr. med.*), his second doctorate in line, was bestowed on him on Wednesday, 30 March 1939.<sup>34</sup> Both of his titles were officially revoked on 23 September 1963; thus, in the case of Mengele's MD, as late as after almost twenty-five years.<sup>35</sup>



**Fig. 4: Administrative building of the branch office of the General Health Insurance Co., in which the Institute was situated, 1933 (ISG Frankfurt/Main)**

During his stay in Frankfurt, Mengele manifested his principal political engagement, being at first a candidate of the Nazi Party (*Parteianwärter*) and getting his full membership (No. 5 574 974) on Saturday, 1 May 1937. A year later, he also entered in the SS (member No. 317 885) in May 1938.<sup>36</sup>

In the course of 1938, Mengele was at first a tenant in the apartment house in 30, Paul Ehrlich<sup>37</sup> Street in the borough of Sachsenhausen on the opposite bank of

<sup>34</sup> Faith Weiss, 2012, p. 650.

<sup>35</sup> Harrecker, 2007, pp. 233–238; U. Benzenhöfer claims only the following year (1964) to be the point of final decision, cf. Benzenhöfer, 2011, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> BArch Berlin, RS D5462, curriculum vitae, 1 January 1939. See also Benzenhöfer, 2011, p. 228; Posner and Ware, 2009, p. 34, and Völklein, 2003, p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Ehrlich (1854–1915) was a prominent German physician (serologist and immunologist) and scientist, who received the Nobel Prize in 1908.

the Rhine, though not far from the Institute.<sup>38</sup> But in autumn 1938, he stated his address was 140 II, Gartenstraße, i.e., identical with the seat of the Institute.<sup>39</sup> Later on, he moved to 49 II, Eysseneckstraße in the borough of Nordend-West.<sup>40</sup>

### 3 Ideologization and Polarization

It was in the second half of 1930s when significant polarization and open controversies broke out on international scientific forums, the racial-hygienic (eugenic) and anthropological questions being the most awkward issues with regard to their high degree of ideologization.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, there was the broadly based offensive action of the Jewish radiologist and anthropologist Ignaz Zollschan (1877–1948), the goal of which being, among others, scientific exposure of the Nazi racial learning, and, at the same time, aiming at formation of an international scientific front in the relevant fields.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the German effort for a counteraction was evident, merging older resentments surviving from the WWI with the support of the new lords in Germany. On the German part, close contacts with preponderantly selected academic circles in Great Britain were being maintained, copying basically the then official policy of appeasement.

If we stay only in the field of anthropology, the 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology was considered to be downright hostile on the German part. The event was held in Paris on 1–8 September and continued with the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting in Bucharest two years later, in September 1937. It stood under the auspices of the King and Government of Romania,<sup>43</sup> its secretary general being the well-known and respected criminologist, Professor Nicolae Minovici (1868–1941).<sup>44</sup> Also this meeting was assessed explicitly in the negative by Eugen Fischer (1874–1967), the main external consultant of the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Public Culture (*Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung*; hereinafter REM) in the field of anthropology and racial learning, and Egon von Eickstedt (1892–1965), one of the four German members of the preparatory committee. All happened in the light of the fact that the event was organized by the

<sup>38</sup> UAF, Abt. 4, Nr. 1502, questionnaire of J. Mengele, 3 May 1938 and *ibid.*, curriculum vitae, 10 May 1938.

<sup>39</sup> BArch Berlin, RS5462, Mengele Josef – the medical questionnaire, 24 October 1938. For the history of this part of the city of Frankfurt/Main in detail cf. Holger Jensen, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> UAF, Abt. 4, Nr. 1502, questionnaire of J. Mengele, 16 November 1939.

<sup>41</sup> In general cf. Kühl, 1997, pp. 121–149.

<sup>42</sup> See Šimůnek, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Symptomatic in this regard was a congress organized by the *Union internationale pour l'étude scientifique de la population* under the name of the *Congrès international de la population* in Paris in 29 July–1 August 1937, where sharp controversies occurred. Cf. Archives of the Office of the President of the Republic Praha (hereinafter AKPR), No D7893/37, 'Rapport présenté par le secrétaire général au président et au comité exécutif. Assemblée générale, Paris, juillet 1937', 16 August 1937.

<sup>44</sup> BArch Berlin, R4901/2737, Myres to Fischer, 18 June 1938.



French *Institut international d'anthropologie* with the seat in Paris. Fisher had any participation of German anthropologists for impossible (*unmöglich*) and demeaning (*unwürdig*).<sup>45</sup> In his opinion, the Paris Institute arose as a result of efforts to exclude scientists from Central Powers during and after the WWI.<sup>46</sup> Basically the same was declared by the second-in-line guru of German physical anthropology, Theodor Mollison (1874–1952) of Munich.<sup>47</sup>

This line of reasoning was principally overtaken by the REM and the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*; hereinafter AA), respectively, being used in the note verbale to the Romanian Embassy in Berlin in mid-July 1937.<sup>48</sup> It is, however, necessary to add that, apart from the absence of German representatives, not even scientists from several other countries like Bulgaria, Greece, Japan, Austria, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary did take part in it. Nevertheless, according to the following report of the German Embassy in Bucharest, the congress passed off without any problem, no embarrassing incidents (*Vorfälle*) – meaning from the German point of view – having occurred.<sup>49</sup>

It seems evident that E. Fischer consulted his steps unofficially with chosen English scientists, in the first place with the archaeologist John L. Myres (1869–1954) of the Royal Anthropological Society (hereinafter RAS) in London. Even after the official refusal of German participation, E. Fischer could mediate a private message from J. L. Myres to the REM, saying that

*I was able to contribute the information that the Roumanian Government had issued a formal invitation to the Bucharest meeting, and that the British Government had refused to take any part in it.*<sup>50</sup>

It was no other than J. L. Myres whom Fischer credited for overcoming French influence when Myres had promoted organization of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in 1934 in London and Oxford.<sup>51</sup> E. Fischer, Th. Mollison und E. von Eickstedt became the representatives.<sup>52</sup> It was just this event whose further – the second in line – continuation was planned to be held within a four-year period in the Danish capital Copenhagen in August 1938.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Fischer to REM, 8 April 1937. For the repeated position of this kind see *ibid.*, Fischer to REM, 1 July 1938.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Fischer to the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University in Berlin, 7 April 1934.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Mollison to the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University Munich (2<sup>nd</sup> Section), 5 April 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., a note verbale of the AA to the Embassy of Romania to Germany, 14 May 1937.

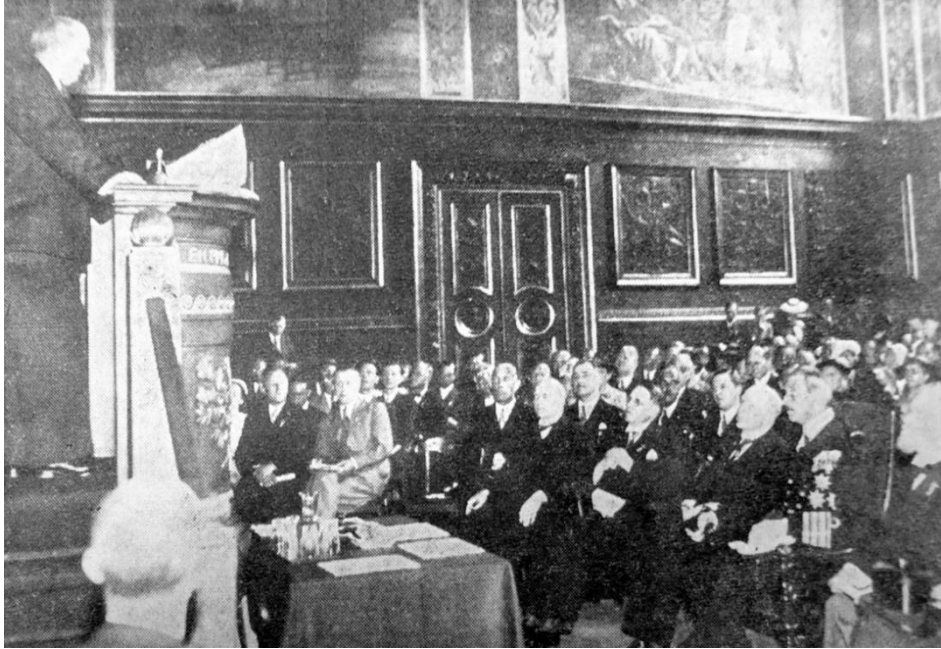
<sup>49</sup> Ibid., report of the German Embassy in Bucharest to the AA, 13 September 1937.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Fischer to REM, 21 May 1937 and *ibid.*, Fischer to REM, 2 June 1937. See also *ibid.*, Eickstedt to REM, 23 June 1937.

<sup>51</sup> For the congress correspondence related to 1934 see Archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute London (hereinafter RAI), coll. A62, Congrès international des sciences anthropologiques et ethnologiques, 1912–34 and also BArch Berlin, R4901/2737, Fischer to the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University in Berlin, 7 April 1934.

<sup>52</sup> BArch Berlin, R4901/2737, Krause to REM, 8 February 1937.

In summer 1937, arrangements for a really representative delegation started running in Germany.<sup>53</sup> With the Paris and Bucharest meeting having been considered, the Copenhagen happening was understood on the German part as a counter-congress (*Gegenkongreß*), being felt at the same time as a highly prestigious event.



**Fig. 5: Opening ceremony in the presence of HM Kristian X of Denmark (1870–1947), 1938 (private collection)**

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<sup>53</sup> With regard to the fact that the congress due in 1942 did not take place because of the war, the Copenhagen congress had been the last one for long ten years. That is, the next one should have been held in 1947 in Prague, but was cancelled, so that the 3<sup>rd</sup> congress in line did not materialize until a year later in Belgium, namely in Brussels and Tervuren.

## 4 On the International Stage?

At the session of the Permanent Council (*Conseil permanent*) of the Congress in Paris on 8 May 1937, the next conference was decided to take place in Copenhagen on 1–6 August 1938.<sup>54</sup> This choice was officially confirmed by a note verbale of the Danish government to the government of Germany at the beginning of October 1937.<sup>55</sup> With E. Fischer having been assigned the coordination towards the end of July 1937, the REM issued a circular to all German universities within its scope, to their administrations and curators (*Kuratoren*), informing of the planned event and requesting that the application forms were sent to E. Fischer.<sup>56</sup> The REM was to deliver a list of all German participants with varying deadlines on 1 and 16 May 1938, respectively. Already at the preliminary selection, the issue of ‘*a consistent and effective appearance of the German delegation*’ was made the crucial focus.<sup>57</sup> In December 1937, Fischer was also charged with registration of applications coming from institutions within the sphere of the Reich Ministry of the Interior (*Reichsministerium des Innern*; hereinafter RMdI), Dr. Herbert Linden (1899–1945) of the Ministry (later on, one of the key administrative executives of the Nazi ‘*euthanasia*’) organizing, in fact, the whole matter for Fischer.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, Fischer reported on participants-émigrés, who could interfere with the thrust of the German appearance. This was namely the case of the anatomist and anthropologist Franz Weidenreich (1873–1948), presently working in the USA, who intended to avail of the Congress for a visit to Germany, travelling even further to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which was strictly rejected by the Gestapo.<sup>59</sup> Fischer promptly confirmed that F. Weidenreich was Jewish and that he would probably join German emigrants at the Congress, jeopardizing, *eo ipso*, the position of the official German delegation.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the president of the USA approved American members of the organizational committee at the beginning of June 1938, which brought along an additional importance to the US representatives.<sup>61</sup>

As the participants from the Frankfurt institution are concerned, Verschuer submitted the application on Monday, 28 February 1938, it being sanctioned by the pertinent Frankfurt representative of the NSD-Dozentenbund (Dr. Cordes) on

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Eickstedt to REM, 23 June 1939 and *ibid.*, F. Krause, Report on the Meeting of the Permanent Council of the International Congress for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Paris on 8 May 1937, May 1937.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., a note verbale of the Danish Government to the German Government, 6 October 1937.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., a circular of REM, 27 October 1938.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., REM to Fischer, 29 July 1937. See also *ibid.*, Fischer to REM, 27 September 1937 and *ibid.*, REM to Fischer, 10 May 1938.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., RMdI to Fischer, 10 December 1937. For Linden’s role in the Nazi ‘*euthanasia*’ cf. Aly, 1989.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Gestapo to REM, 7 March 1938.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., note of Fischer to REM, 8 June 1938.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., report No 935 of the German Embassy in the US, 1 June 1938 and *ibid.*, Department of the State – for the press: Second International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (Copenhagen, Denmark, August 1–6, May 23, 1938, Nr. 243), 1938. These representatives were: Frans Blom, Henry B. Collins, Henry Field, and Aleš Hrdlička.

7 March 1938, and accepted by the REM on 26 March 1938.<sup>62</sup> Apart from himself, Verschuer had three of his assistants registered for the event: Doz. Ferdinand Clauss(B)en (1899–1971)<sup>63</sup>, Dr. med. Heinrich Schade (1907–1989)<sup>64</sup>, and last but not least, J. Mengele.

While in the first two cases, papers had been announced (Claussen: *On Asthenic Constitution/Über asthenische Konstitution*; Schade: *A Contribution to the Relations between a Somatotype and Disease/Beitrag zu den Beziehungen zwischen Körperform und Krankheit*), Mengele's involvement was primarily registered without a presentation, his position being defined as 'scholar – assistant of the Institute' (*Stipendiant – Assistent des Instituts*).<sup>65</sup> Verschuer characterized this small group as follows

*The herein announced personalities are scientists, who either have already come forth in the field of anthropology with their achievements or whose works are underway, all of them appearing particularly worthy and possessing the potential to become future university teachers.*<sup>66</sup>

The expression 'underway' (*im Gange*) evidently referred to Mengele, who had not already defended his dissertation until that time.

By the half of July 1938, a list of 43 delegates based on the received applications was made out, and the leader of the delegation (*Delegationsführer*) was appointed, no other than E. Fischer being commissioned. The delegation was divided into two parts: the shortlist (*engere Delegation*) and the general group (*Gesamtdelegation*). All of the members were considered reliable in view of their being public servants. Mengele bore the serial No 20, while Verschuer was No 31.<sup>67</sup> The participants were supposed to contact the German embassy, the German Exchange Service (*Auswärtiger Austauschdienst*; AAD), and the Foreign Office of the NSDAP (*Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP*) in Copenhagen, or actually, to visit its Berlin office in 4a, Tiergartenstraße. The report of the participants on the event was to be handed in till 1 June 1939.<sup>68</sup>

The REM was also authorized to administrate financial means, in particular the so-called requests for travel allowance (*Reisebeihilfeanträge*) and the so-called foreign currency allocations (*Devisenzuweisungen*), for which the German Congress Headquarters (*Deutsche Kongresszentrale*) was responsible, and without which the final participation permit (*endgültige Genehmigung*) could not be granted by REM.<sup>69</sup> And just there, the key problem arose.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Verschuer to Fischer, 28 February 1938; *ibid.*, approval of Dr. Cordes, 7 March 1938, and *ibid.*, confirmation of REM, 26 March 1938.

<sup>63</sup> Golczewski, 1988, pp. 363–372.

<sup>64</sup> For Schade see Sparing, 1997.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, REM to Fischer, 12 July 1938.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

On 13 July 1938, Fischer forwarded an overview of participants to the REM, only 21 persons from the previous roll being marked positively as to the allotment of foreign currency.<sup>70</sup> Mengele, still being kept on the list without a contribution, and moreover as a junior member, got to the position No 41.<sup>71</sup>

Several days later, on 18 July 1938, Fischer appointed the first fifteen participants, adding three more afterwards, increasing their total number to eighteen. It seems, however, that eventually, only fifteen participants were allotted the money based on the calculation of 125 RM a person.<sup>72</sup> On 20 July 1938, the deputy of the REM (Dehnke) imparted to Fischer that the money was not available for more than fifteen participants, and – ten days before their departure – only prospectively at that. A day later, on 21 July 1938, the REM confirmed that the *Deutsche Kongresszentrale* had money just for 15 persons irrespective of the eminent importance in regard to the presentation of German official attitudes in the field of the racial learning.<sup>73</sup> This number was to be increased to at least 21 persons, but Mengele did not qualify for this final round. The precedence of those who had their papers registered is obvious.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, Mengele obtained a financial support (*Reisebeihilfe*) of 100 RM from the AA together with other sixteen non-Prussian participants.<sup>75</sup> He called it off then, and it was used for another participant.<sup>76</sup> The money was, however, returned with a delay, as late as 24 August, on which Mengele informed the REM in a personal letter.<sup>77</sup>

This entire affair caused Mengele's *nonparticipation* in Copenhagen in August 1938. It was terminated symptomatically with a communication of the university treasury from 20 October 1938 on the settlement of the sum.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Fischer to REM, 13 July 1938.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Fischer to REM, 18 July 1938 and *ibid.*, REM to the Higher Financial Directorates (*Devisenstellen*), 27 July 1938.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., REM to RWM, 21 July 1938; *ibid.*, Hesch to the Rector of University in Leipzig, 23 July 1938, and *ibid.*, List of the Registered German Participants, n. d.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., the circular letter of Fischer, 23 July 1938.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., overview of the REM concerning the financial support, 21 July 1938 (No 9 on the list) and *ibid.*, a receipt of REM for the amount of 2,325 RM for 17 participants, 18 July 1938. Further see *ibid.* AA to REM, 18 July 1938.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Fischer to REM, 29 July 1938.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Mengele to REM, 17 October 1938 and *ibid.*, REM to the administration of the University in Frankfurt/Main and Reich Main Treasury (*Reichshauptkasse*), 12 October 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., University Treasury to the University Administrator, 20 October 1938.

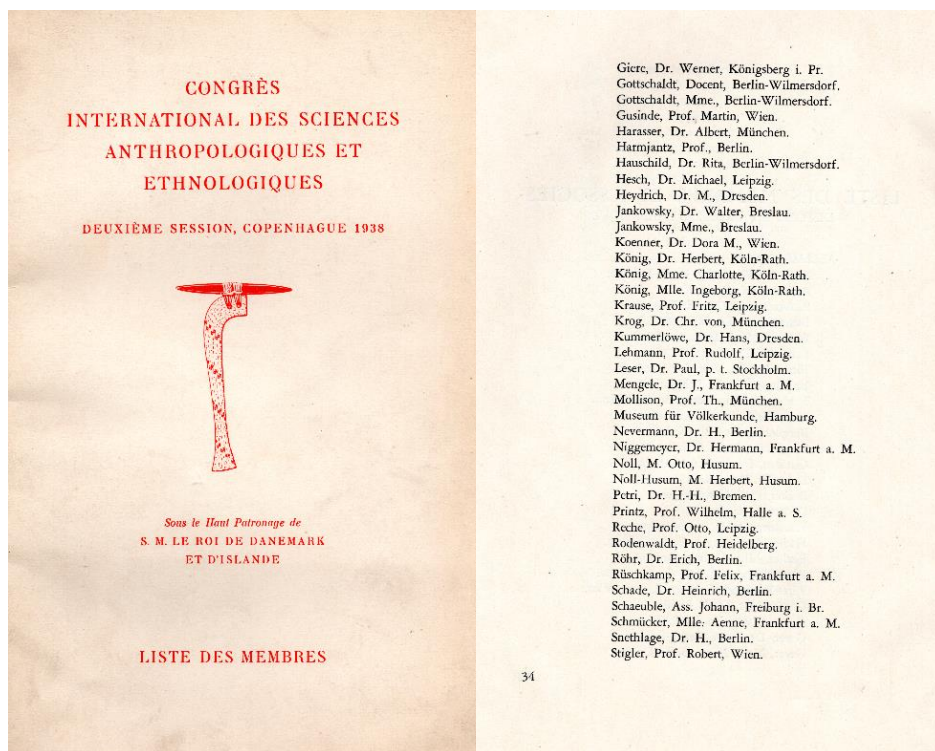


Fig. 6: The published list of participants of the Congress, 1938 (private collection)

Contrary to the official programme of the Congress, where Mengele's name explicitly appeared due to lack of actualization, it may be stated that Mengele *did not* take part in this last spectacular international scientific event in the field of anthropology on the European continent before the outbreak of the WWII with its ca. 700 participants from 45 countries, debating in 13 sections and subsections.<sup>79</sup>

Fischer himself, who was empowered to officially act in the name of the German government, then claimed internally the trip of the German delegation to Copenhagen to be '*a great and common success*'.<sup>80</sup> The reaction of the contemporary foreign press was, however, not quite in accord with that declaration.<sup>81</sup> It was the

<sup>79</sup> Fleure, 1938.

<sup>80</sup> BArch Berlin, R4901/2737, Fischer to REM, 20 July 1938 and *ibid.*, E. Fischer to REM (Report on the International Congress of Anthropologists in Copenhagen), 22 August 1938.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Anthropologists in Copenhagen – Opposing Race Theories. In: *The Times*, 9 August 1938. For the coverage in the contemporary German press prior to the meeting see, e.g., Kongreß für Anthropologie und Ethnologie in Kopenhagen. In: *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 July 1938; Deutschlands

Finnish author and ethnologist Rolf H. Nordenstreng (1878–1964) of the University of Uppsala who, a month prior to the all-European crisis of September 1938, aptly revealed the state of in fact fateful debates of that time, resuming in his lecture “What is a human race?” (*Was ist eine menschliche Rasse?*) that

[...] *only an intelligent being of another planet, if there were any, would be in the position of an impartial judgement on the existence of superior and inferior races.*<sup>82</sup>

The darkest irony of the destiny remains that a following ‘international’ congress after Copenhagen to be organized by E. Fischer should have been the so-called Anti-Jewish Congress (*Antijüdisches Kongress*) in Cracow/Kraków in 1944, being prepared under the auspices of the Nazi ideologist and war criminal, executed two years later in Nuremberg, the ominous Alfred Rosenberg (1896–1946).<sup>83</sup> The plan, however, fell flat.

At that time, the most experienced ‘practitioner’ of the Nazi ‘racial science’ that had ever existed, Josef Mengele MD, was stationed a mere 70 km away, in Auschwitz...

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<sup>82</sup> BAArch Berlin, R4901/2737, contribution of R. Nordenstrenga, Uppsala.

<sup>83</sup> Müller-Hill, 1989, p. 80.

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