

## Ahnenerbe

(*Studiengesellschaft fuer Geistesurgeschichte Deutsches Ahnenerbe*), the Society for Research into the Spiritual Roots of Germany's Ancestral Heritage. *Ahnenerbe* was founded in Berlin on July 1, 1935 by SS chief Heinrich Himmler, Nazi ideologist Richard Walther Darré, and German-Dutch lecturer Herman Wirth. The society's purpose was to establish support for Wirth's "Germandom" cult by studying aspects of Germany's spiritual and historical heritage. However, from the beginning, the society delved into all sorts of esoteric subjects that did not have much scientific basis, such as research of ancient Germanic letters of the alphabet and interpretation of German symbols, like the Swastika.

Himmler took charge of *Ahnenerbe* in 1937. All kinds of new projects were initiated, including the listing of "Jewish scientists or scientists related to Jews by marriage," and the confiscation of Jewish libraries. It was quite hard to tell which of the projects were scientifically motivated, which were politically motivated, and which were downright ridiculous.

In 1942 *Ahnenerbe* began sponsoring pseudo-scientific medical experiments that were performed on concentration camp victims. These included freezing and high altitude experiments conducted by Dr. Sigmund Rascher in Dachau, and the extermination of Jews and Gypsies from Auschwitz so that their skulls could be studied by Dr. August Hirt as examples of the "sub-human prototype."