

Summer school Ravensbruck 2011, 31 August, poster presentation by Anja Peters

I am presenting the poster

Oertzen, Conti, Oberheuser – traces around Ravensbruck of female protagonists of the Nazi health system (*for a detailed version see the paper*)

When I thought about how to present a kind of miniature prosopography on a poster I realised that a collage would maybe demonstrate my approach best.

My particular topic is the biography of Nanna Conti, born in 1881 near Hanover. Being a devoted Nazi she became 'Führerin' of the German midwives in 1933. Midwives were extremely important for Nazi population policies and so her biography is of interest for today's medical history.

As I pointed out in my presentation she is especially linked with this region by Hohenlychen and especially Alt Rehse. Herta Oberheuser I need not introduce any more. The Red Cross nursing home named after Luise von Oertzen in Friedland is a modern problem.

Well, even very well-researched biographies always remain an expressionistic picture by the biographer made of fragments. If one is lucky these fragments are big; often enough they are tiny. The piece that proved that Nanna Conti became secretary general of the International Midwives' Association in 1942 was a four lined report in a local Nazi paper in Hamburg. This snippet led to a lot of further research until I found the huge police file of Prof. Frans Daels in Switzerland. He had been Nanna Conti's predecessor, a Belgian gynaecologist, well-known Flemish nationalist and Nazi collaborator. Not only I hope to be able to research the development of the ICM – a very post-doc task – but I have also material to share with a Belgian physician who has found the correspondence between Conti and Daels (...). It's a bit like stamp collecting and exchange.

By the way, the archivist in Hamburg thought that the small dispatch wasn't of interest for me...

Still, so much material was destroyed either by purpose or by war damage.

The historical map I used also shows very nice that Fürstenberg is located right at the historical border between Mecklenburg and Prussia, why the people of Fürstenberg could claim afterwards that they had not much to do with the concentration camp far away in Prussia. Anett Leo has written about that.

To follow the places in the region which are linked with Red Cross mother superior Luise von Oertzen, Midwives' 'Führerin' Nanna Conti and SS physician Herta Oberheuser also gives you an impression of how I try to work out context, interaction and social networks.

I am confident that by next year I will be able to draw a quite detailed group picture of Nanna Conti and her acquaintances, relatives, critics and successors.