



From 1937 on, an office of the Security Service of the SS (SD) operated at no. 43-45 Am Grossen Wannsee, in the former villa of the family of the Jewish-German chemical entrepreneur Franz Oppenheim (1852-1929), built by Alfred Messel in 1907.

After the death of Oppenheim's second wife, the famous art collector Margarete Reichenheim (1857-1935), Oppenheim's heirs had left Germany. In January 1937, the Secret State Police (Gestapo) confiscated a specialized library of the University of Breslau containing literature about the Soviet Union as the basic foundation for a secret research institute. This establishment - referred to within the SD only as the "Wannsee Institute" - was officially disguised as the "Institute for Research of Antiquity", attached to the University of Berlin. The requisite and expensive reconstruction of the villa was initially financed by money from the "Jew Account", a bank account that the SD had set up with funds from confiscated Jewish property.

On the instructions of Heinrich Himmler, the Institute published appraisals and monthly reports about the Soviet Union. During the attack on Poland, the special knowledge of some of the assistants was utilized. Several of them took part in organizing the "resettlements" from the Baltic states. In the course of such "resettlements", the SS murdered not only Jews but also patients in psychiatric clinics in order to create space.

In 1940, the Institute became subordinate to the Intelligence Service for Foreign Countries. When, in 1943, the Institute was moved to Plankenwarth Palace near Graz (Austria), other "work relating to the East" was done in the villa: maps were drawn for warfare and targets for air attacks were selected and assembled. Moreover, acts of sabotage against the Soviet Union were prepared here.

Today the villa is used by an international Montessori school.

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