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New study: People of African Descent in the Mauthausen concentration camp

Today's study is the most comprehensive study to date conducted on inmates of African origin in the Nazi-led Mauthausen concentration camp, who have been largely excluded from scientific research of Austria's past.

On 12 March 1938, following Hitler's orders German troops marched into Austria where the National Socialists were to seize power. In summer 1938 the Mauthausen concentration camp was established. During the next 7 years until 1945, hundreds of thousands of people were systematically humiliated, tortured and brutally murdered – among them also African women and men. How many Africans became victims of National Socialism has hardly been studied until now. Who were the Africans imprisoned in Mauthausen? How many were they? Which countries were they from and why were they in Mauthausen? Did they survive and if so, are there any contemporary witnesses?

These questions were pursued by the study's authors Mag.a. Barbara Fuchslehner and Mag.a. Karin Röhrling. The study's supervision was managed by Univ. Prof. Walter Sauer, and journalist and sociologist Simon INOU.

The most important results of the study show: The largest national group among the 157 documented inmates, came from Algeria (104), Benin Republic (1), Congo DRC (1), Egypt (4), Guadeloupe (3), La Réunion (2), Madagascar (2), Mali (1), Martinique (2), Morocco (17), South Africa (1) and Tunisia (19); including 3 women from Algeria. Reasons for the internment were essentially political: As far as the historical documents reveal, the affected persons were held in the concentration camp Mauthausen as "protective" or "preventative" custody prisoners – not however due to their skin colour or on race-related ideological grounds.

Slightly more than half of the documented inmates (84) survived the liberation of the concentration camp and could return to their home countries; there are 61 determined cases of death, often also in satellite camps of Mauthausen. The rest were deported (where to is unknown) or their fate is unclear.

In our opinion these findings lead to following conclusion and demands: Installing a memorial for inmates of African origin at the memorial site Mauthausen (similar to the existing memorial plaque for Cuban inmates); considering the existence and fate of concentration camp inmates of African origin in Austrian school books and teaching materials; facilitating further research, in particular concerning other concentration camp inmate groups, as well as African forced labour and prisoners of war, and more generally the situation of Africans under National Socialist rule.

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