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'Geheimzinnigheid is zijn fort'

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SUMMARY

Translation: Marieke Keur

‘Secrecy is his strength’

Assien Bohmers (archaeologist), 1912-1988

Why write a biography of Assien Bohmers?

This biography explores the life and ideas of the Dutch archaeologist Assien Bohmers. During the past decades several authors wrote about this controversial scientist. He has been accused of many things, including collaboration during the Second World War, and theft and forgery of archaeological artefacts. Rumour has it that he was involved in the Vermaning affair. A sensational archaeological fraud in the mid-1970s, it occasionally comes up again and never fails to stir up publicity, especially in the northern Netherlands.

As a teenager I followed the developments in the Vermaning affair closely. During my studies at the Biological Archaeological Institute (BAI) of the University of Groningen I came to know the affair even better as some of my lecturers had been involved in it at the time. In 2003 one of them, professor H.T. Waterbolk, published his book ‘Scherpe Stenen Op Mijn Pad’ (Sharp Stones on my Path) in which he looked back on his career. He mentioned Bohmers as the auctor intellectualis in the Vermaning affair. I was intrigued and that is why I started my research of Bohmers’ life in 2004. I wanted to find out what had really happened. What was true of the many stories and rumours about him. Where did they come from? And why were they still so much alive?

Researching his life has shown time and again the force and effects of stories. It also proves how thorough historical research contributes to a correct and many-layered representation of someone’s life. Essentially, Bohmers’ story is an everyman’s tale, about a young ambitious scientist who makes a few choices early in life that will haunt him until his death. Could he have chosen otherwise? Was he free to choose? What made him choose the way he did?

Bohmers’ biography also adds to a survey of the history of archaeology as an academic discipline in Germany and The Netherlands from the 1930s onwards. It raises moral questions about academic attitudes and activities of Bohmers himself and his colleagues, both at home and abroad. It presents abundant evidence that archaeology is not an innocuous academic discipline, certainly not in the hands of national socialists. Finally, it shows the effects of the passing of time on ideas and memories. Not only of Bohmers himself but also of those who knew him - or thought they did.

Youth and education

Johan Christiaan Assien Böhmers is born on January 16, 1912. He is an only child of parents advanced in age. His father is head nurse of the local asylum in the provincial

town of Zutphen in the eastern part of The Netherlands. As a young child Bohmers sees a lot of the patients' lives as his home lies next to the asylum. Besides, patients carry out small tasks for his mother at home. As a boy he has many interests, he is clever with his hands and an excellent drawer. During his secondary education at the *Hogere Burgerschool* or *HBS* (Higher Civic School) he starts to pull away from the stifling lives of his parents. Doubts about the Christian faith set in. He joins the *Nederlandse Jeugdbond voor Natuurstudie* or *NJN* (Dutch Youth League for the Study of Nature). In the company of his peers he spends his time on what really fascinates him, biology and geology, in an intellectual and elite environment.

In 1929 he moves to Amsterdam to study geology. He loves this new academic world of scientists, libraries and museums. He is an ambitious student and thinks there is a great future in store for him. Socially, however, he does not easily get along. An introvert, he keeps to himself. His studies, however, include many field trips that bring him into closer contact with his lecturers and fellow students.

On one of these excursions he meets Wytske Hofstra, the love of his life. They strike up a relationship. Wytske is an active member of a socialist youth movement, the *Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale* or *AJC* (Workers Youth Central). They often go to Friesland ('Fryslân'), a province in the northern Netherlands, to visit her family. Wytske is beautiful, bright and easy going. They are together for three years, the happiest of his life. When she becomes pregnant, they decide to get married. However, she dies together with their child while giving birth, not long before their wedding day.

Bohmers is devastated and will never truly recover from this double loss. It raises the intriguing question whether he would have made different choices in life if this personal tragedy had not occurred.

He pursues his studies with renewed energy and develops a keen interest in human evolution. Not only is he fascinated by its physical-anthropological aspects but also by artefacts made by prehistoric man. That is why he attends the lectures of professor J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan. Moreover, following the renowned scientist Eugène Dubois he tries to find the remains of early man and explores the Tegelen site in the province of Limburg in the southern part of The Netherlands. He continues to visit Friesland and becomes a lover and collector of traditional Frisian objects. When he starts a genealogical research of his own family he finds out that a few of his forebears are of Frisian descent too – like Wytske and her family. In 1936 he writes his doctoral dissertation and in 1937 he completes a PHD thesis on the evolutionary development of ammonites. This marks the end of his life as a student in Amsterdam.

SS-Ahnenerbe and the Hielscher Kreis

In the years leading up to the Second World War there are relatively many geology students in Amsterdam who have joined national socialist organisations like the *Verdinaso* (*Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal-Solidaristen* – Union of Diets National Solidarists) and the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* or *NSB* (National Socialist Movement). From 1935 onwards Bohmers also starts to move in national socialist

circles. He is driven by his ambition to realize 'Great Frisia'. He considers an archaeological career in Hitler's Germany, especially after his 'recruitment' by Gerhard von Tevenar and Hermann von Bothmer. They tell him that he may be able to realize his scientific ambitions with Ahnenerbe, the think tank of the SS. Enthralled by this prospect he decides to move to Germany. When he applies for a position with Ahnenerbe, he gets it at once. Before he leaves in 1937, he marries Wenda Brouwer, who will give him three children. He also changes his name: he parts with his Christian name Johan and drops the umlaut in his surname. From now on he is known as Assien Bohmers.

In his new job he meets Wolfram Sievers, General Secretary of Ahnenerbe. They get along quite well which is good for Bohmers' career. With Sievers on his side he gets many things done. He carries out excavations in Scharzfeld in the Harz and the Mauern caves in the Franconian Jura. In 1939 he is put in charge of one of the most sensational excavation sites in those days: Unterwisternitz/Dolní Věstonice in former Czechoslovakia. Ahnenerbe has seized this excavation site after the German invasion in March 1939.

In 1941 Bohmers completes his *Habilitation* (post-doctoral qualification) with Oswald Menghin, a famous professor in Vienna. Now he is entitled to lecture at German universities. Back home in occupied Holland the SS sees to it shortly afterwards that Bohmers is admitted as a 'privaatdocent' (private lecturer) to the *Biologisch Archaeologisch Instituut* or BAI (Biological Archaeological Institute) of the University of Groningen. A.E. van Giffen, a renowned archaeologist whom Bohmers holds in high esteem, is its managing director. After his admission Bohmers and his family settle down in the Frisian village of Buitenpost. It is his and the Germans' intention to make him professor next to Van Giffen with the strong support of the SS.

Bohmers and his supervisor Sievers do not only see each other at the office. They also meet in private. They are members of a secret circle ('Kreis') led by Friedrich Hielscher. Rumours about this charismatic intellectual must have reached Bohmers no doubt during his studies through his German friends Von Tevenar and Von Bothmer and his Dutch friend Gijsbert Nicolaas Westerouen van Meeteren. Van Meeteren is a personal friend of Hielscher. Van Meeteren pursued his studies in Germany and has been a member of fascist organisations. From 1936 onwards he is also employed by GSIIIA, the Dutch military secret service, that also keeps an eye on Hielscher and his entourage.

Hielscher is an advocate of a federal Europe with a certain degree of autonomy granted to individual German and Celtic peoples. He rejects the collectivistic dictatorial politics and the virulent antisemitism of Hitler's Nazi Party. In 1933 Hielscher founded his own church: the *Unabhängige Freikirche* (Independent free church). Its members, including Bohmers and Sievers, meet in secret. Hielscher's pantheistic faith is a mixture of Christianity and Germanic paganism.

Collaboration in Dutch Frisia

Bohmers not only uses his position at Ahnenerbe to further his scientific career but also to realize his nationalistic plans for 'Great Frisia', in which the Dutch part of this coastal region (in Dutch: Friesland; in Frisian: Fryslân) and the German part (in German: Friesland) are united. From early 1938 onwards he starts to approach pro-German Frisian nationalists in 'Fryslân'. During the German occupation of The Netherlands he strives to realize his nationalistic ambitions and create a Great Frisia, with Sievers and Hielscher backing him up. Two days after the German invasion, on May 12 1940, Bohmers informs Reichsführer-SS Himmler through Sievers that he is ready to serve as a political advisor to the Germans in Dutch Frisia.

This political collaboration lasts until medio 1943. By then it is clear that the German authorities do not think of granting any degree of autonomy to the Dutch Frisian nationalists, now organized in the 'Fryske Rie' (Frisian council). Bohmers withdraws from Dutch Frisian politics fearing the Germans' anger. But first and foremost he realizes how, among other things, the battle of Stalingrad has changed the war. A German victory is no longer certain. For the first time it seems to dawn on him how the world might look upon his overt collaboration in the event of an allied victory.

Although Bohmers is an ambitious man with an opportunistic nature he does not join the SS. His work at Ahnenerbe does not require this although an SS membership would certainly have added to his scientific and political influence during the war. If he had indeed joined the SS this would certainly have come out after liberation and would have had serious consequences.

During the Ahnenerbe years Bohmers is engaged in frequent fights with the pre-historian Lothar Zotz, leading archaeologist in Prague. There is fierce competition between the Prague archaeologists and the Ahnenerbe archaeologists based in Brno who seek to enlarge their influence everywhere. There are many conflicts and intrigues. Bohmers also takes part in this and makes enemies. In 1944 the Prague archaeologist Camilla Streit accuses him of illegal activities against the Nazi Party. Although Sievers can refute her allegations, Bohmers feels no longer safe. With the aid of Van Meeteren he finds a hiding address in the town of Zwolle where he stays occasionally until the end of the war. In Buitenpost he waits for the liberation of his home town together with his family. He also stays there because he wants to be close to the Ahnenerbe collections of Unterwisternitz, Mauern and Ureterp, which he took home with him after moving to Buitenpost and keeps hidden in the neighbourhood.

Internment and release

After liberation in April 1945 Bohmers is arrested by Dutch armed forces in Buitenpost and handed over to the Canadian military intelligence service. More than nine months he is imprisoned, first in the Oxerhof near the village of Colmschate, next in *Fort Blauwkapel* near Utrecht and finally in *Kamp Amersfoort*. He is interrogated a number of times. At first the Canadians suspect him to be a German spy. But as the interrogations do not yield much useful intelligence they return him to the Dutch

authorities. Dutch investigations do not reveal any criminal offences. During the war Bohmers had never been a member of the Nazi Party, the SS or the NSB. Besides, there are no indictments filed against him. In the chaotic weeks after liberation a lot of intelligence is not yet available. The Dutch authorities do not know what Ahnenerbe stands for and is involved in – such as the medical experiments on prisoners and Sievers' initiating role in these. The same goes for Bohmers' political collaboration in Dutch Frisia. His letter to Reichsführer-SS Himmler has not yet surfaced. There is no reason to keep him in detention any longer and he is released in January 1946.

Two years later he has to account for his wartime activities again when the University of Groningen starts a background investigation with a view to granting him a new position. This time he hands over exculpatory statements by Hielscher, Van Meeteren and a few Ahnenerbe colleagues. Their validity is questionable. Bohmers says that Ahnenerbe was fighting the Amt Rosenberg and Reinert's Reichsbund that was closely connected with it. He asserts that Ahnenerbe carried out independent archaeological research without any interference of Nazi ideology, which certainly did not apply to the archaeological research by the Reichsbund. He calls the Hielscher *Kreis* a resistance organisation that was tied up with the attempt at Hitler's life by Von Stauffenberg in June 1944. He also claims that his activities in Dutch Frisia during the war ought to be seen as a deliberate attempt to undermine German authority as they led to the destruction of two collaborating organisations: Saxo Frisia and Fryske Rie. This is a demonstrable distortion of the facts as it were the German authorities that flatly rejected the Dutch Frisian nationalists' ambitions and thus put an end to Bohmers' dream about a united Frisian free state under German rule.

In 1947 Bohmers issues three exculpatory statements on behalf of Sievers, who is accused of crimes against humanity in the Doctors Trial in Nuremberg. These are of no avail. As the responsible Nazi official of Ahnenerbe Sievers is found guilty and hung in 1948.

To the interrogators it is obvious that Bohmers presents a selection of the facts that makes him look good. His answers to their questions are evasive. The same can be said of the witnesses that plead his cause. What Bohmers really did during the war is not clear, for a long time. Even his children do not know. As many questions remain unanswered they become a source of stories and rumours in due course.

Working at the University of Groningen with A.E. van Giffen

In 1947 Bohmers returns to the BAI as the background search into his wartime activities commissioned by the University of Groningen did not reveal any incriminating information. Three years later he becomes a staff member of Van Giffen's institute. During the following years Bohmers develops into the leading archaeologist in the field of paleolithic and mesolithic research. In his Dutch excavations he chooses the same methods as the ones practiced with Ahnenerbe during the war: he introduces the use of waxed soil profiles; he excavates 1x1 m segments, and insists on a careful documentation of an artefact's location. Moreover, he uses descriptive statistics in his

reports about individual artefacts and entire sites. With this he is pioneering a method later associated with 'New Archaeology'.

In the last years of the war Bohmers takes a large number of artefacts and the excavation documentation of four important sites excavated by SS archaeologists to Buitenpost. From 1943 onwards, when the chances for a Nazi victory are no longer certain after the battle of Stalingrad, he starts to organize hiding places for these close by. The finds and documentation are from

1 Bocksteinschmiede; in 1944 he is forced to return everything related to this site to the SD.

2 Mauern;

3 Unterwisternitz;

4 Ureterp, the site at this Dutch Frisian village; in 1943 and 1944 he conducts an excavation there as an Ahnenerbe archaeologist.

After the war Bohmers transfers all these artefacts and the documentation to the BAI. Van Giffen cannot hold on to these and is made to return the Unterwisternitz collection to the Czech authorities. Remarkably, Bohmers sells the Mauern and Ureterp collections to the BAI. However, Van Giffen cannot hold on to the Mauern collection either. The owner by right, the *Staatssammlung* in München, reclaims it in 1951. Van Giffen demands an extensive study collection in return to compensate for all the efforts Bohmers took to preserve the collection.

In 1947 and 1951 respectively Bohmers publishes excavation reports on Ureterp and Mauern. With these publications he establishes his reputation as a leading archaeologist. His report on the Ahnenerbe excavations in Unterwisternitz in 1939, 1940 and 1942 will never be published. After the war he attempts to have it published in cooperation with Czech archaeologists, but these attempts fail. It is certain however that Bohmers prepared for such a publication as there is a proof dating back to 1944. His report had been intended to appear in an Ahnenerbe publication.

Bohmers and Van Giffen get along very well. Bohmers chooses his side in the conflict flaring up among Dutch archaeologists from the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* (National museum of antiquities) in Leyden, the BAI and other parties and individuals after the war. The fight is about a national monopoly in excavating. Van Giffen emerges as the winner. In 1947 he is appointed managing director of the newly established *Rijksdienst voor Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek* (ROB) (State service for archaeological investigations) which supervises all excavations by the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, the BAI and the *Rijksbureau voor Monumentenzorg* (National office for the preservation of monuments) in The Hague. Van Giffen is in charge of the ROB until his retirement in 1950. He does not withdraw from the BAI until 1954. The national monopoly for archaeological excavations that rested with the ROB, is not continued though. As a result the BAI can carry out its own excavations independently again. The mutual trust among professional archaeologists is seriously damaged by Van Giffen's actions during those years.

Although Bohmers makes a new start at the University of Groningen, this does not mean that he breaks with his wartime contacts. For a few years he is a member of a secret network of former nazi's, the *Union Fédérale Anti-Totalitaire (UFAT)* (Anti-totalitarian federal union). Its members strive for the former ideal of a European federation among the Celtic and Germanic peoples and harbour racist convictions. Although Bohmers does not hold a central position in the network he manages its contacts, acts as an advisor and attends secret meetings. At the heart of this network are Feyo Schelto baron Sixma van Heemstra and the Breton nationalist Roger Hervé. Van Heemstra allows Bohmers to open his own museum in his stately country house for a few years after the war. Bohmers stays in touch with the network until he finally loses interest in the Frisian nationalist cause in the mid-1950s.

Working at the University of Groningen with H.T. Waterbolk

In 1954 Van Giffen steps back as managing director of the BAI and is followed by the biologist Tjalling Waterbolk. His is an unexpected appointment as there are also candidates from the archaeological world. Until 1962 relations between Bohmers and the new professor are good. Bohmers enjoys a lot of freedom. Like Van Giffen Waterbolk grants his research requests and allows him to travel and make many trips for academic purposes. Between 1950 and 1954, when Van Giffen is still in office, Bohmers is away with his ship, the *Bordena*, during the summer season. With his wife and children he sails to the valleys of the rivers Somme and Seine to visit disclosures in quarries and do research. In 1960 he commissions the building of a big research vessel, the *Grevon* (= Groningen Evolutionary Research). He intends to sail with it to the Mediterranean to investigate the origins of modern man.

Bohmers has a sharp eye for archaeological forgeries. Before the outbreak of the war he recognizes forgeries among the finds of the late paleolithic site of Makkinga-Lochtenrek discovered by the well-known amateur archaeologist Hendrik Popping. As the BAI's specialist on the Paleolithic Period he is shown all kinds of finds. He is very critical and never accepts something for real when he is not fully convinced of an artefact's authenticity. Due to his geological training he has a wider view on the finds than his colleagues. He spends some time on the study of eoliths: naturally shaped stones that resemble prehistoric artefacts.

Bohmers is in close contact with amateur archaeologists. Brother Aquillas Wouters ('Ad Wouters', after his leaving the monastic order he formerly belonged to) is the most important among them as he introduces Bohmers to his extensive network of fellow amateurs in the southern Netherlands. With Wouters and the Belgian amateur archaeologist J. Verheyleweghen, Bohmers plans to publish an extensive book on the Paleolithic and Mesolithic in the Low Countries. It is to be a survey including descriptions, measurements, drawings and comparisons of a large number of artefacts from various sites. However, this book is never published. One of the reasons is that the relationship between Bohmers and Wouters, so close in the early days of their friendship, cools after some time. This is because Bohmers starts to feel doubts about

Wouters' finds and his site documentation. He even suspects him of forgery. An example is the 'Venus of Geldrop', an artefact that remains controversial in Dutch archaeology until today and is attributed to the Ahrensburg culture.

From 1962 onwards relations between Bohmers and Waterbolk start to flag. More and more they find themselves in each other's way professionally, which is a continuous source of irritation and conflict. In 1965 this leads to the end of Bohmers' academic career. After the arrest of Bohmers' assistant Jan de Vries for theft of archaeological artefacts from the BAI, Bohmers tells Waterbolk that he bought fire arms from De Vries in order to protect himself during his future expeditions with the Grevon. Waterbolk informs the police about this on January 27, 1965. The police move quickly and search Bohmers' house and his study in the BAI where they find the clandestine fire arms. Bohmers is suspended at once.

Earlier that day Bohmers had paid a visit to the amateur archaeologist Tjerk Vermaning. Shortly before, Vermaning had reported finding the amazing artefacts from Hoogersmilde dating back to the Mid-Paleolithic: a true archaeological sensation which might increase the history of prehistoric settlement in the northern regions of the Netherlands with tens of thousands of years. In the afternoon Bohmers had gone to Vermaning's little ship to have a look at these. He saw them only once, in poor lighting conditions.

With Bohmers suspended, Waterbolk takes over his research and informs the world about this spectacular discovery. Unfortunately the artefacts turn out to be forgeries. Ten years later, in 1975, Dick Stapert, PhD student at the BAI, scrutinizes the Vermaning stones under a microscope and notices that they do not show any signs of natural erosion. Waterbolk has to inform the world that the stones are forgeries after all. When he does, what will henceforth be known as the Vermaning affair hits the headlines. Amateur archaeologists take sides with Vermaning against the BAI archaeologists. Law suits follow. Waterbolk's BAI will be the target of negative publicity for years to come. It receives hardly any public support from archaeologists from other universities or the ROB.

A free man

After his suspension in 1965 Bohmers is honourably discharged from the university at his own request. He is fined for the unauthorized possession of fire arms. More accusations put forward by the University of Groningen are dismissed. At the age of 55 Bohmers has reached the end of his academic career. This marks the beginning of happy years. He is often away with Wenda. There is plenty of time for the pursuit of his hobby's – drawing, painting watercolours, travelling – and his collections. And these are quite a few.

Throughout his life Bohmers has created numerous collections, ranging from shells, buttons, wooden breadboards, to miniature steam locs – whatever takes his fancy. From 1946 till 1955 he runs his own museum together with the baron Feijo Sixma Van Heemstra in the stately country house of the latter in the Frisian village of Veen-

klooster. They put a choice selection of pieces from Bohmers' collections on display, including traditional folk art, antiques and archaeological artefacts, for instance from the Ahnenerbe excavation of Unterwisternitz. The wooden products of his own business, called *De Ikelbeam* (Frisian: The Oak), are shown and put up for sale. In 1947 Bohmers started De Ikelbeam, a wood cutting business that produces decorative wooden objects. He draws the designs himself which include ancient motives from traditional folk art. The business flourishes.

Bohmers also spends a lot of time on what he calls 'kultuurfilosofie' (the philosophy of culture). This is one of his preoccupations that lasts his entire life. He wrote numerous essays and philosophical reflections about this. Most of these were never published. His ideas show the influence of Nietzsche, Leibnitz and Hielscher. In 1950 he publishes a booklet called *Reality and Monads* in which he puts down his main line of thought. He uses a pen-name: A. Eyken. Later, he also publishes a few philosophical articles on this in *Palaeohistoria*, a BAI publication.

In his view the world consists of monads: independent entities that can be arranged in hierarchies. Low ranking monads have an impact on monads of higher rank and vice versa. A human can be seen as a monad. The same goes for the cells which make up a human body. These are monads too, but of a lower rank. A human is influenced by the cells in his body but it also works the other way round: a human has an influence on his cells. However, a human is other/more than the sum of its parts: the independent cells which he is made of. In philosophy this phenomenon is called emergence.

The independent monad above man is culture. Bohmers calls this monad 'hyperzoön' (Greek: what is higher, what comes next – plural: hyperzoa). A culture is more than the sum of independent humans and their thoughts and has an impact on its consisting parts. A culture has its own identity. Bohmers assumes the existence of a 'hypatozoön' (Greek: what is highest) residing above a culture. This consists of millions of hyperzoa/cultures and governs all. As there are not millions of cultures on earth, such a huge phenomenon cannot be confined to earth but must extend to and consist of extraterrestrial cultures. This is why Bohmers is deeply interested in the search for extraterrestrial life. The hypatozoön is a deity – God – the highest monad in his pantheistic vision of the universe.

According to Bohmers evolution is not a random process. It is controlled by something unknown which aims at a development towards more complex, specialized and centralized forms of organization. That's why he values the Northern European culture most and later the Asian culture too, because both hyperzoa demonstrate a dedication to evolutionary progress. At the opposite end are the black cultures of Africa or the Australian aboriginals, which according to him do not make any progress at all and do not contribute to the process of evolution. In this framework there is a hierarchy in cultures and races: in his view they can never be equal or have the same value.

In 1972 Wenda dies after a short sickbed. This marks the end of the happy years. All by himself again, Bohmers works on a further elaboration of his ideas on culture, race

and evolution. These are hard times for another reason as well. He has always been very secretive about his wartime activities. The war years are a source of fear, stress and anxiety whenever the subject is raised. Now there are two publications due that will go into this part of his life. In 1974 Michael Kater publishes the trade edition of his dissertation on Ahnenerbe, which is followed in 1978 by Gjalt Zondergeld's dissertation on the *Friese Beweging* (Frisian movement) during the interbellum and the Second World War. At the same time there is a lot of press coverage about the forgeries of the Vermaning stones and the false Viking treasure of the village of Winsum. Bohmers' name is mentioned and associated with both frauds and he becomes the target of all kinds of accusations. His moving to Sweden at the end of the 1970s can be seen as a flight from the public commotion about his person.

At the end of his life Bohmers is essentially a disappointed man. His old friends turned away from him. His personal view of the world and the universe, which he regards as his best work, is poorly received by the people closest to him. Although his scientific contribution is generally acknowledged it is not esteemed as highly as that of François Bordes, his scientific rival, or Hermann Schwabedissen, his former Ahnenerbe colleague, who had become professor at the University of Cologne after the war.

When Bohmers dies in 1988, his ashes are buried in the grave of Wytske Hofstra, his eternal love, in the graveyard of the Frisian village of Ureterp. The grave is still there, lying at the edge, and is marked by a huge boulder that Bohmers had placed on it in 1933.

The biographer's view

Researching Bohmers' life yielded the answers to the questions that made me write this dissertation, i.e. about the exact nature of his activities during the war and about the possibility of him participating in archaeological forgery. Bohmers did engage in incriminating activities during the war. That is why he hardly ever speaks about this period in his life and prefers to remain silent. If he is made to account for his wartime activities, he is very cautious and presents his own version of the truth. Before and during the war he worked for Ahnenerbe although he never joined the SS. In the first war years he avails himself of every career opportunity that Ahnenerbe can offer. With the SS on his side he takes possession of sensational archaeological sites and collections. He can rely on Sievers' strong support - the nazi official who is found guilty of crimes against humanity in the Doctors Trial in Nuremberg and who is hung in 1948.

In every way Bohmers behaves like an ambitious SS scientist who is ready to manipulate his environment and pull strings to get rid of opponents and further his own interests. However, there is no nazi rhetoric in his archaeological publications. Apart from one single example in a letter, probably intended for a censor's eyes, there are no overt antisemitic statements known from him. He is not known to have reflected on nazi crimes and the Holocaust after the war. Looking back he never expressed any regrets. One is left with the impression that he was utterly indifferent to the professional setting of his work and the role of the SS.

He is guilty of collaboration in his dealings with the Dutch Frisian nationalists: the letter of May 12, 1940, proves this beyond any doubt. If this letter had been known to the Dutch authorities in the early days after liberation, he would no doubt have faced charges of collaboration. He escaped prosecution due to the fact that both allied interrogators and the representatives of the Dutch authorities were looking for answers to different questions. There was conclusive evidence that he had never joined the Nazi Party, the SS or the NSB; this kind of information was available in these chaotic days. However, this certainly did not apply for Ahnenerbe and its activities. There was no intelligence about what it stood for and was involved in. More importantly, nobody had filed an accusation against him. Although Bohmers knew people who were active in Dutch resistance he had never betrayed anybody. In the early days after liberation this was enough for the authorities to let him go. However, this did not silence rumours about his past.

I am convinced that he never participated in any way in the archaeological forgeries of the Vermaning stones or any other artefacts. In my opinion he is a dedicated scientist, with an uncompromising attitude towards the pursuit of science and knowledge, who would never have participated in archaeological fraud. That does not fit his profile at all. He is a competent archaeologist who made a valuable contribution to his particular field of study and this academic discipline. His growing uneasiness culminating in distrust of Wouters, whom he suspects of interfering with artefacts and site data, does not but corroborate my view of his professional integrity. Until today Waterbolk is convinced of Bohmers' share in the Vermaning fraud. However, I cannot but totally dismiss this as I found no evidence whatsoever to confirm Waterbolk's conspiracy theory as he put forth in 'Scherpe Stenen Op Mijn Pad' (Sharp Stones on my Path) in 2003.

Apart from answers to these two questions my research yielded much more information about his person and life. Until now nothing was known about the UFAT and Bohmers' bonds with it. His active participation shows that he entertained fixed views on the superiority of Northern European culture long after the war. His ideas on racial superiority are one of the recurrent themes in his life. They are rooted in the tenacious story about white supremacy, which is again surfacing today.

Bohmers' biography also gives an insight into the history of paleolithic research in Germany and The Netherlands and professional relations among archaeologists. Fights and coalitions shaped the archaeological order and had a huge impact on the pursuit of archaeology.

Many people who knew Bohmers, remember him as a somewhat mysterious eccentric. This is because of his introvert nature and silence about his wartime activities. The rare occasions on which he spoke about his life during the war led to all kinds of wild speculations and rumours.

From his actions, letters, private notes and the memories that people who knew him shared with me, Bohmers emerges as an energetic man with a strong desire to assert himself. He is determined to have an impact on the world and the future and

regards himself as a visionary. He never questions his own judgment and has an intense dislike of conformity and mediocrity. His is a strong belief in man's progress. His personal views on and interpretation of evolution serve as his compass all his life. He keeps the ensuing ideas about the superiority of the Northern European culture to himself as he notices time and again that the people around him reject these and refuse to listen to him.

Bohmers has few social skills. He keeps to himself and does not socialize easily. But if he does he chooses his friends and contacts with care, for instance during his studies and the Ahnenerbe years. Although he does not join the SS he ingratiates himself with influential SS officials. He never really commits himself to Hielscher's Unabhängige Freikirche but makes sure he is admitted to the Hielscher Kreis. Although he spends time with the Frisian nationalists he is never truly one of them. As soon as he realizes that the Frisian cause is lost, he walks away, never looking back. The same goes for his part in the UFAT network. He approaches contacts to win them over for the UFAT cause, acts as an advisor to the men in charge and is present at meetings but is never in the lead. During his career at the University of Groningen the same pattern is visible. At the BAI he is a loner, the only specialist in the Paleolithic Period, working mainly on his own. He always holds a firm but strategic place on the side and has access to high and influential places. From this vantage point he can move around in many, sometimes contradictory settings without catching too much attention. All his life he is an observer with his own, secret agenda.

Although people are impressed by his knowledge a lot of them do not really like him. His egocentric – sometimes narcissic – nature shows itself time and again when he boasts about his genius, fame and achievements. There is a manipulative side to him that comes into play when he wins over Sievers, Van Giffen and Waterbolk during his early years as managing director of the BAI. With their unwavering support he gets things done. He can be a bully to others, usually his employees or colleagues of lower rank. He is a competent and creative craftsman, has a wide range of interests, creates many collections and immerses himself in knowledge of all sorts. His intellectual flaw is his lack of focus. That keeps him from bringing things to an end and becoming really successful. This goes for instance for numerous archaeological publications that he starts working on but fails to finish time and again.

It has been suggested that Bohmers was affected by Asperger syndrome, a milder autism spectrum disorder. Asperger's is characterized by an absence of - or few - social skills, a weak social conscience and a distant and rational approach of reality. It could explain his coldness and lack of empathy and feeling for the people around him. It would also explain the large number of stories about him. When somebody is not liked people start talking. And yet there were also those who had enjoyed his company and cherished his memory. Bohmers had dwelled in so many different worlds and had many things to tell: he was never boring. As I experienced too during the years in which I wrote his biography.