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# Hermann Wolf (1889–1978) – Versatile DGZMK president and temporary member of the Nazi Party

**Introduction:** As a university lecturer and president of the DGZMK, Hermann Wolf attained a high level of popularity which still continues. Nevertheless, little is known about his actual contribution to the development of dentistry. This applies all the more to his relationship to National Socialism. Against this background, this article sheds light on Wolf's professional oeuvre, his developments and discoveries and, in particular, on his role in the "Third Reich".

**Material and methods:** The scientific basis of the study is provided by various archival records and an autobiographical document of Wolf with reference to the year 1945. In addition, a complete evaluation of the available secondary literature on Wolf (biographies, lexical contributions, specialist essays, eulogies and obituaries) was carried out.

**Results:** Wolf was not only a leading lecturer and dental politician, but also a pioneer of postgraduate education and an inventive developer. However, the majority of his innovations in dentistry were only of passing importance. Contemporaries also emphasised his high level of social competence and his international networking. His role in the "Third Reich" was complex: Wolf joined the NSDAP but was expelled from the party in 1942 because his wife was not "purely Aryan". Nevertheless, he did not suffer a career setback.

**Discussion and conclusion:** Wolf biography offers a prototypical example of discrepancies between contemporary and retrospective perception: While at the time he was appreciated as a promoter of postgraduate education, as an exemplary academic mentor and as an ingenious developer, today he is remembered primarily as a technically versatile DGZMK president of Austrian origin. Besides his case demonstrates that exclusion from the NSDAP was not necessarily accompanied by professional and social degradation. Rather, the appointment procedures in the field of dentistry show that Wolf was considered for high-profile positions until the end of the "Third Reich".

**Keywords:** DGZMK; endodontics; maxillofacial surgery; National Socialism; NSDAP

## Introduction

Contemporaries called Hermann Wolf one of the last “generalists” among university teachers in the German-speaking world. He was considered an accomplished oral and maxillofacial surgeon, but also devoted himself to tooth conservation and other areas of dentistry. As president and vice-president of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zahn-, Mund- und Kieferheilkunde” (German Society for Dental and Oral Medicine, DGZMK) (Table 1), he achieved great popularity, which continues to have an impact today thanks to his academic students.

Nevertheless, Wolf’s concrete contributions to the field and his influence on the development of dentistry are little known. Knowledge about Wolf’s relationship to National Socialism, his party-political positioning and his assessment by National Socialist decision-makers in the Third Reich is also limited.

Against this background, this article is dedicated to Wolf’s professional oeuvre, his work and research foci, his diagnostic and therapeutic innovations and, in particular, his political stance and role during the Nazi regime.

## Material and methods

This article is mainly based on various archival files of the Federal Archives in Berlin, some of which have been analysed for the first time, including the membership card index of the NSDAP. Wolf’s numerous publications and an autobiographical document in which Wolf refers to the year 1945 were also analysed. In addition, a comprehensive, critical evaluation of the secondary sources available on Wolf was carried out, in particular lexical contributions, specialist essays, laudations, necrologies as well as the thesis on Hermann Wolf submitted by Scheiderer in 1985 [57].

## Results and discussion

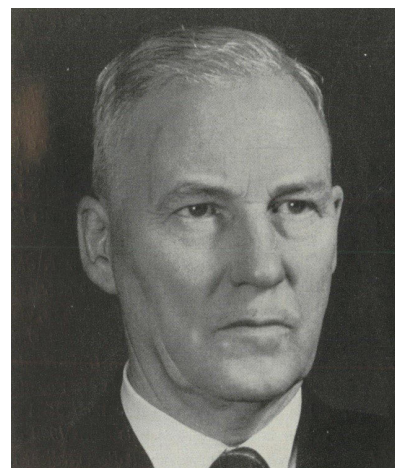
### 1. Hermann Wolf – a biographical outline

Hermann Wolf (Fig. 1; [11]) was born on September 27, 1889 in Pula (Pola) in Istria [30–34, 36–39, 41–50, 56–62]. He was the youngest son of

Anton Wolf (1847–1919), a naval surgeon general from Silesia, and his wife Anna Wolf (1858–1938). Since Hermann Wolf initially had the right of domicile in Weißbach (Bílý Potok) despite his birth in Pula, he was a Czechoslovak citizen after the end of the Danube Monarchy, “only to become an Austrian with the right of domicile in Vienna by option on 15.9.1920” [57].

Wolf attended primary schools in Pula and in 1899 he transferred to the German “Humanistisches k.k. Staats-Real-Gymnasium”. He passed his school-leaving examination there in 1907 and in the same year enrolled at the University of Vienna to study medicine. In January 1913 he passed the final examination in Vienna, which included a doctorate in medicine. This was followed by a short period of surgical work at the public hospital in Neunkirchen in Niederösterreich (Lower Austria). As early as April 1913 he began his military service as a one-year volunteer with the infantry regiments No. 99 and No. 4; subsequently he became an assistant in the surgical department of the garrison hospital No. 2 in Vienna (as an assistant doctor in the reserve). In April 1914 he began training as a “surgical pupil” under Anton von Eiselsberg (1860–1939) at the “I. Chirurgische Klinik” (I Surgical Clinic) of the University of Vienna, which he continued until 1918.

However, there was a first interruption due to the war as early as August 1914, when Wolf was deployed as division chief physician with the “Kaiser Dragoons” on the Eastern front. In 1916 he became chief surgeon in (reserve) hospitals; at the same time, he remained active – as far as time allowed – as an operating surgeon with von Eiselsberg. In 1918 he moved to the “Kieferstation” (jaw ward) of the I. Chirurgische Klinik to Hans Pichler (1877–1949), who went down in specialist history as the “founder of jaw surgery in Austria” and of the “Vienna Dental School” [12]. Wolf was initially employed there as a military contract doctor, then from 1920 as an assistant doctor and from 1922 as an assistant. In addition, he worked as a trainee in



**Figure 1** Hermann Wolf (around 1960) [11].

Pichler’s private practice in Vienna from July 1919 to July 1920. Wolf also sought further training to become a “specialist in dentistry, oral and maxillofacial medicine”. For this purpose, he was also employed at the Vienna University Institute of Dentistry headed by Rudolf Weiser (1859–1928). There he met such dental luminaries as Bernhard Gottlieb (1885–1950) [64], Rudolf Kronfeld (1901–1940) [55], and Bálint Orbán (1899–1960) [1] whose studies on oral histopathology attracted international attention at the time.

Wolf also made key decisions in his private life during this period: He had married Hedwig Wolf, née Wolf (sic!) (1888–1974) from Vienna in 1916, and their daughter Erika was born in 1922. Around that time, Wolf decided to set up a private practice in Vienna, following his role model Hans Pichler. Hedwig Wolf had been trained as a dental assistant by Pichler and was thus able to support her husband in his practice in the 1920s and 30s.

Despite his practice, Wolf maintained his foothold at the University of Vienna, where he was able to habilitate in dentistry in November 1927. As a qualifying thesis he was allowed to submit a paper on the treatment of trigeminal neuralgia, which had already been published in 1925 [65]. Also still in November 1927, Wolf was appointed “Privatdozent” (private lecturer). Further career steps soon followed: In Novem-

Term of office	Name	NSDAP Membership	Life data
1906–1926	Otto Walkhoff	+	1860–1934
1926–1928	Wilhelm Herrenknecht	+	1865–1941
1928–45, 1949–54	Hermann Euler	+	1878–1961
<b>1954–1957</b>	<b>Hermann Wolf</b>	+	<b>1889–1978</b>
1957–1965	Ewald Harndt	+	1901–1996
1965–1969	Gerhard Steinhardt	+	1904–1995
1969–1971	Eugen Fröhlich	+	1910–1971
1972–1977	Rudolf Naujoks	–	1919–2004
1977–1981	Werner Ketterl	+	1925–2010

**Table 1** The presidents of the CVDZ (from 1933: DGZMK) who experienced the “Third Reich” as adults and their party-political orientation

ber 1930 Wolf became “Erster Assistent” (first assistant) of the jaw ward as well as head of the conservative department of the university dental clinic – both institutions had been managed in personal union by Hans Pichler since Weiser’s death (1928) – and in October 1935 he became “Hochschulassistent erster Klasse” (university assistant first class) there. In September 1937 he received the title of professor – also in Vienna. Two years later – the Second World War had broken out in the meantime – Wolf began his service as a reserve medical officer of the air force at the Vienna Jaw Station in September 1939. But only one month later – in October 1939 – he was able to take on an associate professorship at the University of Würzburg. Linked to this was the establishment and management of the maxillofacial surgery department of the dental clinic there. The dental clinic itself was headed by Joseph Münch (1894–1977); however, Wolf’s department was organisationally independent. Wolf retained this position until the end of the war.

After the Second World War, Wolf obtained German citizenship with effect from April 27, 1945 [57]. Also in April 1945, he became the – initially

provisional – head of the dental clinic at the University of Würzburg. Subsequently, Wolf acted as provisional head of all departments of the Würzburg dental clinic, which was subsequently rebuilt and successively expanded after considerable war damage. In the end, the construction measures were to last until 1966. Wolf also acted as provisional head of the Institute for Forensic Medicine and Criminology from 1947 to the beginning of 1949. From March 1949, Wolf was officially managing director of the entire dental clinic in Würzburg and in September 1950 he arrived as a personal full professor. Although Wolf officially became emeritus professor in September 1957, he remained active as provisional clinic director until March 1959. In July 1962, Wolf then moved to Bad Reichenhall. There he died of old age on December 11, 1978 in his 90th year. He was buried at the Vienna Central Cemetery.

## 2. Wolf’s importance as a scientist, professional representative and networker

Wolf’s activity as a university lecturer can be divided into two phases – the Vienna period and the subsequent Würzburg period:

During his years in Vienna, he stood out mainly due to his successful commitment in the field of further medical training to become a “Specialist in Dentistry, Oral Medicine and Maxillofacial Surgery”. This further training was necessary because dentists in Austria first completed a full course of medical studies before specialising in dentistry post-gradually [22]. Against this background, Wolf established – in close coordination with his mentor Hans Pichler – a 4-semester postgraduate training course to become a dental specialist in 1925, which was soon regarded as exemplary throughout Austria. Wolf wrote several publications on this further training course, which attracted great interest [67, 68]. For example, the Viennese colleagues Richard Grohs (1896–1966) and Otto Hofer (1892–1972) stated: “Wolf has rendered imperishable services to Austrian dentistry under Hans Pichler, when he established and organised the course for Austrian dental specialists for their special training (translated by DG)” [16]. The Austrian Hans Langer (1907–1974) expressed a similar opinion: “Wolf knew how to organise a training that must be addressed as one of the best for that time. He himself taught the subjects of dental conservation and, together with Pichler, dental surgery in a didactically excellent lecture and a propaedeutic course” [49]. Due to his professional closeness to Pichler, Wolf was considered a representative of the “Viennese Dental School” or the “Pichler School” [49].

In addition, Wolf established his reputation in Vienna as a creative developer and designer. In fact, he developed and modified a number of devices and instruments, for example, as early as 1916/17 “Wolf’s device for Bier’s stasis”, which was used for gas phlegmons. It aimed at rhythmic congestion of the extremities with moderate pressure, “causing hyperaemia due to the lack of venous outflow, accelerating the inflammation and healing process” [57]. In 1919, he also modified the “Extensionsklammer nach Schmerz” (extension clamp according to Schmerz) – later also called “extension clamp according to Schmerz-

Wolf” – in which he produced a higher clamping force by means of screw pressure [57]. The “Wolfsches Gnathotom” (Wolf’s Gnathotome) (1928) was considered his most important development: It was a strong pair of forceps, also operated by screw pressure, for cutting through the lower jaw (“cutting-squeezing method”) (Fig. 2, [40]). Wolf had the device “made according to his ideas by the instrument maker Kutill in Vienna” [57] and presented it in more detail in a publication [66]. Further constructions were the “Keilzange nach Wolf” (Wolf’s wedge forceps) (1925) – e.g. for removing plaster casts from the mouth –, the “Dreischmittteil nach Wolf” (Wolf’s three-bladed axe) (1937) as a “hand instrument for conservative dentistry” and the “Nasenklemme nach Wolf” (Wolf’s nose clamp) for closing the nose when inducing inhalation anaesthesia through the oral cavity [57]. However, most of his developments were not a resounding success, as can be seen from the fact that only Wolf’s gnathotome was included in the “Zahnärztliches Lexikon” (Dental encyclopaedia) by Walter Hoffmann-Axthelm (1908–2001) published in 1983 [40]. However, the gnathotome has long since been replaced by bone saws or other techniques that are less traumatic to the tissue in question.

When a successor to Rudolf Weiser, the late director of the renowned Vienna Dental Institute, was sought in 1929, Wolf was already being discussed as a possible candidate. But the call ultimately went to his mentor Pichler, who was 12 years older, not habilitated, but professionally established [35]. In 1935, Wolf received a call from Zurich, which failed, however, because a local candidate, Pierre Schmuziger (1894–1971), was eventually preferred.

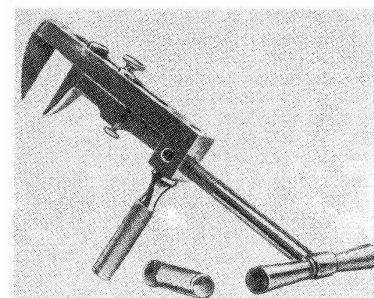
Instead, Wolf became an extraordinary professor and head of the Department of Maxillofacial Surgery at the Dental Institute of the University of Würzburg in 1939. There he was supposed to establish a surgery ward. But he found adverse conditions – also due to the war – and was primarily concerned with establishing a military hospital. So, at first

he had “to be content with a few beds in the Red Cross Clinic and Brod’s Clinic. Part of the military hospital was housed in the rooms of the dental clinic and the lecture theatre during the war” [14]. In Würzburg, Wolf ushered in a new phase of his work. While he had acquired profound knowledge of maxillofacial surgery under Pichler in Vienna, he now also emerged with contributions on endodontics and apicoectomy, thus establishing his reputation as a “generalist” in dentistry. Contemporary colleagues such as Hermann Euler (1878–1961) [21] and David Haunfelder (1912–1989) paid particular tribute to Wolf’s numerous studies on root canal treatment by (hydroxyl) iontophoresis [13, 34]. In 1950 and 1951 alone, Wolf published more than half a dozen articles on apicoectomy and especially on iontophoresis of the root canals (e.g. [69–71]). This labour-intensive method received a great deal of attention around the middle of the century but was soon largely abandoned (“The question is whether the equipment and time required are in a rational relationship to the success that can be achieved”: [57]). Hans Hermann Rebel (1889–1967) praised Wolf’s contributions to apicoectomy and his “being at home in all areas of dentistry” [54]. Otto Hofer also emphasised that Wolf made “noteworthy achievements in all areas of dentistry” [38].

Wolf published a total of more than 180 papers; many were dedicated to the aforementioned topics, but some were also devoted to electrical pulp diagnostics, oral pathology and histology, tumours of the oral cavity and dental anaesthesia and narcosis. All in all, Wolf was unquestionably one of the leading scientific authors of his time.

Wolf was also highly regarded as a candidate for a chair in the post-war period: In 1946/47 he was in discussion in Frankfurt for the vacant chair and the associated “reconstruction of the Frankfurt Institute”; however, no agreement was reached [29]. In 1949 he received a call from Vienna, where an important professorship was up for decision as Pichler’s successor. Pichler in particular had praised Wolf “in the highest terms”

**Gnathotom (Wolf):** Instrument zur Unterkieferresektion, das mittels zweier durch ein Schraubengewinde gegeneinandergeführter kräftiger Schneiden den Unterkieferkörper durchtrennt (Abb.).



**Figure 2** The “Gnathotome” by Hermann Wolf [40]

and accordingly recommended him as a possible successor [52]. However, Vienna could not promise “even an approximately equivalent salary” compared to Würzburg [57]. Since Wolf “ultimately did not want to follow his calling to Vienna” but wanted to remain in Lower Franconia [52], the house candidate Fritz Driak (1900–1959) was appointed there. In 1950, Wolf then received a call to Cologne. Again, he declined the call; in return, he was appointed full professor in Würzburg [57]. In the same year, the Würzburg dental clinic was renamed “Universitätsklinik und Poliklinik für Zahn-, Mund- und Kieferkrankheiten Würzburg” (University Clinic and Polyclinic for Dental, Oral and Jaw Diseases Würzburg). In the years that followed, Wolf was mainly responsible for the structural expansion and modernisation of the Würzburg clinic and for the organisation of teaching. Above all, the “Bayerische Landes Zahnärztekammer” (Bavarian Dental Association) was “sincerely grateful” to Wolf that he remained in Würzburg despite calls from other universities [58]: As a long-standing board member of the chamber, he was involved in continuing and further education in dentistry, as he had been earlier in Vienna. However, he failed with his wishful thinking to tie future dentists, as in Austria, to a complete medical degree and subsequent further training to become a specialist (“The dentist should be a full doctor. The reasons for this are the same as those that

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united surgery with medicine in its time” [68]).

Wolf was considered very well connected, approachable and popular among colleagues. Thus, Rebel emphasised: “It is his human qualities, kindness, modesty, helpfulness and manly disposition that we particularly love” [54]. Wolf’s colleague and friend Hans Schlamp (1900–1962) called him a “doctor of the highest moral character” [61], the aforementioned Haunfelder saw him as “filled with deep humanity” [33], and Hermann Mathis (1897–1981), also a friend of Wolf, described him as an “eminently modest and kind person” [51]. The Viennese university lecturer Koloman Keresztesi (1916–2000) praised Wolf’s “often critical, but because of his distinguished and noble character, never personally hurtful comments” [42] and his colleague from Mainz, Werner Ketterl (1925–2010), wrote about Wolf’s “deeply religious attitude and humanistic education” [43]. Günther Ködel (\*1932) had an additional explanation for Wolf’s ability make friends beyond the German-speaking world. He paid tribute to Wolf’s “extraordinary knowledge of languages, which enabled him to engage in lively [...] exchange with numerous foreign professional colleagues” [57].

Wolf’s popularity and professional recognition was also reflected in a large number of honours and awards, of which only a few can be mentioned here as examples. In 1934, he became honorary vice-president of the “International Association for Dental Research” (IADR) (until 1936), in 1947 he was a member of the board of the “Bayerische Landes Zahnärztekammer” as “Hochschulreferent” (university representative) (until 1958), in 1953 he was dean of the medical faculty in Würzburg (until 1954), and in 1956 he was a member of the expert committee of the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft” (German Research Foundation, DFG), in 1957 corresponding member of the “Académie Nationale de Chirurgie Dentaire” in Paris, in 1959 honorary member of the “Vereinigung der Hochschullehrer für Zahn-, Mund-

und Kieferheilkunde” (Association of University Teachers of Dentistry, Oral Medicine and Maxillofacial Surgery) and in 1961 honorary member of the “Zentralverband der wissenschaftlichen Vereinigungen Österreichs” (Central Federation of Scientific Associations of Austria). In 1964 he received the Bavarian order of merit (for the reorganisation and expansion of the Würzburg Dental Clinic) and in 1971 he became an honorary member of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Mund-, Kiefer- und Gesichtschirurgie” (German Society for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, DGZMKG). However, Wolf became best known for his successful work at the top of the DGZMK: From 1952 to 1954 he served as vice-president and from 1954 to 1957 as president (Table 1). In 1959 he was appointed honorary member of the DGZMK and in 1974 he was awarded the DGZMK pin of honour [17, 28].

In his private life, Wolf was enthusiastic about “home music he practised himself” [47]. His inventiveness was matched by another hobby: tinkering [15]. And Mathis added: “Wolf [...] loves languages, is a bibliophile, a cellist and last but not least a poet, as which he particularly cultivates the witty shaking rhyme” [51, 57].

### 3. Wolf’s relationship to National Socialism

Wolf’s role in the “Third Reich” is very complex and cannot be outlined in a few sentences. At the time of the “Anschluss” (annexation) of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938, Wolf was working in Vienna. It is a fact that he joined the NSDAP shortly after this annexation (application 14.06.1938, admission 01.05.1938 [retroactive]; no. 6,295,130); in 1939 he also became a member of the “NS-Dozentenbund” (Nazi lecturer association) (admission 04.02.1939) [9].

Whether Wolf took these steps out of political opportunism or conviction is difficult to say. However, it is clear that Wolf was one of the favourites for professorships in 1938 and 1939. In 1938, for example, he was on the “appointment lists of the universities of Innsbruck and Graz”; however, in the end, no appoint-

ments were made [42, 57]. Instead, Wolf was appointed to Würzburg the following year, while his Viennese colleague Otto Hofer was called to Berlin in the same year.

The almost simultaneous appointments of the two Pichler students – and NSDAP members – Wolf and Hofer to Germany were definitely politically motivated and stood in the context of the 1938 “Anschluss” of Austria to the “Greater German Reich”, as Scheiderer elaborated: “The exchange of scientists from both countries was intended to bind them closer together. In the field of dentistry, it was also important to bring the leading Viennese school of the time, closely associated with the name of Pichler, to the German universities, which was done with the appointments of Otto Hofer and Hermann Wolf” [57].

It is certain that Wolf was highly regarded by the political decision-makers at the “Reichsdeutsche” (German Reich) universities in this period: He was not only appointed in Würzburg in 1939, but was also considered as a candidate for the chair to be filled in Hamburg in 1940/41. He took up the professorship in Würzburg in October 1939. In Hamburg, however, the final decision was complicated: While the Hamburg faculty favoured an in-house appointment and wanted to “push through” one of the two Hamburg candidates – the National Socialists Hans Pflüger (1884–1967) or Heinrich Fabian (1889–1970) [23] – the higher-level ministry explicitly suggested Hermann Wolf, since he, unlike Pflüger and Fabian, was a proven maxillofacial surgeon and they wanted to “insist on the appointment of a maxillofacial surgeon” [10]. The “NS-Dozentenbund” had also explicitly recommended Wolf. But the Hamburg faculty “remained unbending” [10] and was ultimately successful: In 1941, Pflüger, a member of the “Waffen-SS” (Armed SS), received the call to the chair. Nevertheless, both appointment procedures proved that Wolf was classified by the political decision-makers as loyal to the regime – because this was a central prerequisite for such nominations.

Wolf thus remained in Würzburg, where he came under suspicion at the beginning of the 1940s: He was accused that his wife “was not of pure German-blooded descent” [7]. Finally, on 24 March 1942, he was expelled from the party because his wife was classified as “1/8 Jewish” [6]. In fact, the note “admission invalid” is also found on his NSDAP card, although the reason given is not legible [9]. In addition, a political report by the “Gauleitung Mainfranken” stated that there were doubts about his “commitment to the NS state [...]” [3]. It is unclear to what extent the then director of the Würzburg dental clinic, Josef Münch, supported this assessment. In any case, it is known that Wolf’s relationship with Münch was strained. Wolf’s biographer Scheiderer describes Münch – who was also a member of the NSDAP [2, 8] – as a clinic director with a National Socialist appearance who behaved in a “very distanced” manner towards Wolf. Scheiderer further notes that Wolf was “rather reserved” towards “the leading forces” of the “Third Reich” [57]. The latter could be explained by Wolf’s exclusion from the party. However, in his 158-page biography of Wolf, Scheiderer remarkably mentions neither Wolf’s party membership nor his later exclusion from the party – be it consciously or unknowingly.

It is also a fact that Wolf retained his position as extraordinary professor in Würzburg until the end of the “Third Reich” – in contrast to dental university professors such as Karl Zilkens (1876–1967) and Hermann Peckert (1876–1940), who were considered politically suspect, or Wolfgang Rosenthal (1882–1971), who was also expelled from the party and suspected of being a “quarter Jew” [20]: They all lost their university positions in the course of the “Third Reich”.

Wolf, on the other hand, not only remained in his professorship, but was apparently – despite the discussion about his wife’s parentage – also considered ordinary in the period that followed: In 1942, for example, he turned down “notable calls” to Vienna and Munich [57]. He

also received an offer of appointment from Switzerland – in July 1942 from Basel – which he also declined, although it would have offered him the opportunity to turn his back on the “Third Reich”. At the turn of the year 1943/44, a decision had to be made about the renowned chair at the German University in Prague, which had become vacant due to Karl Häupl’s (1893–1960) move to the Charité in Berlin [25, 26]. In the process, four people were shortlisted: Josef Eschler (1908–1969) and Wolf, who were jointly ranked first, Arnold Ehrlicke (1890–1970), who was ranked second, and Konrad Thielemann (1898–1985), who was ranked third. In addition, the dental “Reichsdozentenführer” (Reich lecturer leader) Karl Pieper (1886–1951) [24] brought in the Viennese Otto Preisseecker (1898–1963). Max de Crinis (1889–1945), the responsible ministerial advisor for medical matters in the Science Office of the Reich Ministry for Science, Education and National Training, intervened directly in the procedure on February 23, 1944 with a trend-setting statement and explicitly emphasised Wolf’s research achievements: “In my opinion, only the university lecturers named in the first place can be considered for an appointment to Prague. Scientifically, Professor Wolf is without doubt better than Prof. Eschler”. However, de Crinis also expressed the request to investigate the rumour that Wolf’s wife was “not of pure German blood” [7]. This request proves that knowledge of Wolf’s wife’s ancestry had spread little by 1944. In any case, Wolf had not become persona non grata. But time was obviously pressing, as Karl Pieper emphasised in a letter to Max de Crinis on May 17, 1944: “Should Prague now wait with the occupation until Wolf’s matter is settled? I can imagine that this will take a considerable amount of time and that under present conditions it will not be settled at all; at least not too soon.” [4] It was probably against this background that Wolf was no longer considered as Häupl’s successor [5] – but the chair was not filled anyway due to the turmoil of the war.

After the end of the war, Wolf’s exclusion from the party in 1942 was to his advantage: He was considered politically unencumbered and on August 24, 1945 was confirmed as provisional director of the Würzburg Dental Clinic by the Bavarian State Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs with the approval of the American military government. However, the Würzburg Medical Faculty as a whole was “severely decimated” [57]: Wolf belonged to a small group of only 5 (of a total of 59) lecturers at the Würzburg Medical Faculty who were allowed to remain in office after 1945 – while his former opponent Josef Münch, for example, was dismissed. Wolf later wrote about this in his memoirs of 1945: “Prof. Münch visited me after he had been released from a prison camp at Tegernsee, [...] thanked me for representing him and wanted to stay away for a short time to put his affairs in order. However, he did not return, as he was [...] dismissed soon afterwards” [53]. In contrast, Wolf was officially exonerated politically by a judgement of the Würzburg “Spruchkammer” (chamber) on October 13, 1948 [57, 63].

## Conclusions

Wolf provides an impressive example of how the contemporary and retrospective image of a person can diverge: By his contemporaries, he was perceived and appreciated as a pioneer of continuing dental education, as an ingenious developer and name giver of various devices, as a forerunner in the field of iontophoresis therapy of infected root canals and as an internationally popular and networked specialist. But his leading role in postgraduate education and his various inventions fell into oblivion over time. This obviously also had to do with the fact that hardly any of the developments and innovations became permanently established in dentistry or were able to set new diagnostic or therapeutic standards. This distinguished him from other presidents of the DGZMK or the CVDZ – such as Willoughby D. Miller (1853–1907), the originator of the modern caries theory [18], Otto Walkhoff (1860–1934), the initiator of den-

tal radiology [19], or Ewald Harndt (1901–1996), the developer of the “pulpitis scheme” [27]. Miller, Walkhoff, and Harndt also succeeded in publishing widely known, high-circulation textbooks. Nowadays, Wolf is remembered above all as a professionally versatile DGZMK president of Austrian origin who enjoyed great popularity.

Secondly, the Wolf case shows that joining the party had a positive effect on career development, but that exclusion from the NSDAP did not necessarily mean the end of a career or [professional and social] degradation. Rather, the appointment procedures of the years 1942 to 1944 prove that Wolf was discussed and nominated for prominent positions even after his exclusion from the party.

### Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest within the meaning of the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

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