

12-2000

Review of *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, edited by Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann

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Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur.

Edited by *Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann*. 2 volumes. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998. Pp. 1192.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of Nazi rule, the “concentration camp” has symbolized Nazi terror in the popular imagination. The existence of the camps was widely known both inside and outside of Germany during the years of Nazi rule, and their already considerable notoriety was heightened on their liberation by Allied forces. As gruesome images of mass graves and piles of emaciated corpses appeared in newspapers, and as German citizens were forced by occupation authorities to visit the camps and witness the horrific evidence in person, the camps came to epitomize Nazi barbarism. Until today they have remained among the most important sites of memory for surviving victims of Nazism and have served as loci for education and official commemoration.

As Ulrich Herbert points out in the introduction to this formidable anthology on the history of the camps, for many years after 1945 a considerable discrepancy existed between commemoration and scholarship. Very few serious scholars devoted their energies to studying the origins, development, and functioning of the camps. Documenting terror and brutality in ever greater detail did not seem to hold out much intellectual promise to historians and other scholars. Consequently, from the 1940s through the 1980s the history of the camps was written not by historians but by former inmates. Herbert argues that these memoirists tended to produce an understanding of the camps that was very much skewed to an atypical perspective, namely, that of German, Austrian, and West European political prisoners, many of them communist or socialist. Such persons constituted only a tiny percentage of the 2.5–3.5 million prisoners who passed through the Nazi-German concentration camp system at one point or another, yet their voices were dominant among the memoirists. Their interpretation of the history of the camps was primarily an ideological one, privileging the confrontation between fascism and antifascism. Thoroughly overshadowed were the perspectives and experiences of inmates who had been imprisoned on account of Nazi “social-biological” measures, such as Jews, “Gypsies,” and homosexuals. Yet persons in these categories had generally been subjected to harsher treatment than had the political prisoners and had died in the camps at much higher rates.

Scholarly avoidance of the subject came to an end in the 1980s. A younger generation of scholars, less bound by the lofty historicism of their teachers and more attuned to the need to understand the “history of everyday life,” recognized the need to fill a major gap in our knowledge about the Nazi era. They were more sympathetic to the plight of historically marginalized groups and more inclined to consult previously neglected Polish work. They were also, inevitably, influenced by the international trend of intensified study of the Jewish Holocaust. By the mid-1990s they had produced an understanding of the camps that was far more well rounded than that contained in the early memoirs.

The two-volume collection under review represents an attempt to bring together the findings of this recent wave of scholarship about the camps. It contains forty contributions, most of which were originally presented at a conference held in Weimar in 1995 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald. Like the organizers of the conference, the editors of the published volumes employed a restrictive, although historically well-founded, definition of the “concentration camp.” Thus, camps associated with the so-called Operation Reinhard, which were erected exclusively for the purpose of murdering Jews, are not included. Neither are the major

ghettos, prisoner-of-war camps, or camps used to house foreign forced laborers on German territory. Even with these omissions, however, the scope of the anthology is vast.

Roughly a third of the contributions are institutional studies, which either trace the origins of the camp system in general or detail the establishment and functional evolution of individual camps. A central issue addressed in many of these chapters is that of the balance between premeditation and improvisation. To what extent did the Nazi regime pursue a "vision" or follow a master design for the camps or, alternatively, construct the system as circumstances seemed to dictate along the way? Scholars have long understood that during the initial months of Nazi rule, a highly improvised and decentralized constellation of so-called wild concentration camps arose to house real and presumed opponents. We have also known that after 1933 most of the smaller improvised camps were closed down and replaced by a network of larger, permanent, regionally situated camps. What emerges from several of these chapters is a clearer sense of the intentionality behind the transition, as well as a better appreciation of the conceptual thinking and concrete planning that guided the evolution of the permanent camps. To be sure, the contributions do not collectively posit the existence of a coherent, monolithic design for the camps. Rather they demonstrate the convergence of disparate ideological tendencies and administrative impulses. Ulrich Herbert's contribution on the role of the Gestapo, for example, emphasizes that agency's preoccupation with political and "racial" enemies of the regime, whereas Patrick Wagner's study of the Criminal Police focuses on planning for the treatment of "professional criminals." Ultimately the concentration camps enabled both agencies to realize their aspirations.

The seven articles contained in a section on the "Camps in the East" deal most directly with issues related to the Jewish Holocaust but are by no means limited to this theme. In a disappointing piece on the largest and most complex of all the camps, Auschwitz, Franciszek Piper contributes nothing new to our knowledge of that camp (which, it should be emphasized, has been benefited enormously by Piper's earlier work). Tomasz Kranz, in contrast, recounts the history of the camp at Lublin (Majdanek) in a closely argued, heavily documented chapter that fills in many new details about the evolving functions of the multipurpose camp, which (like Auschwitz) not only housed political prisoners, forced laborers, and prisoners of war, but also served as a site for the mass murder of Jews. Despite the enormous death toll—Kranz's estimate is 170,000—Kranz suggests that the exterminations may have been only an "ancillary function" of Lublin, given the fact that systematic killing took place on a much larger scale in other camps not far away. In addition to Kranz's piece, three other articles on "the East" also contain significant new material: Dieter Pohl's examination of labor camps for Jews in Poland, which is based heavily on the records of postwar trials conducted in West Germany and Poland; Christoph Dieckmann's analysis of the Jewish ghetto and concentration camp in Kaunas (Kovno), which admirably triangulates Jewish and German sources; and Margers Vestermanis's study of Nazi camps in Latvia, which exploits documentation opened in Riga in the early 1990s.

Arguably the weakest section of the collection is that devoted to the "perpetrators." It consists of only three substantive contributions, disappointing coverage of so important and historiographically relevant a theme. Whereas one of these pieces deals with camp commandants, the collection contains no in-depth analysis of rank-and-file German guards or of volunteers drawn from Eastern Europe. Fortunately, one of the articles, Gudrun Schwarz's study of female camp personnel, breaks new ground in dealing with a hitherto neglected, and, to a certain extent, taboo, subject. Women served in camps as guards, nurses, cooks, secretaries, and in a host of other capacities. For most

of these women, Schwarz concludes, work in the camps was voluntary. Moreover, the women, no less than their male colleagues, subscribed to the view that the inmates were somehow “subhuman” and not worthy of living in a National Socialist society.

In contrast to the disappointing coverage given to camp personnel, inmates and inmate groups are examined extensively. Several contributions address how and why conditions and death rates differed among various categories of inmates. Florian Freund, in a case study of one satellite labor camp affiliated with Mauthausen, concludes that Jewish laborers suffered from the highest mortality rate, owing largely to the fact that they usually arrived in the camp in worse physical condition than most other inmates. Although in this instance Freund merely confirms something that has been widely accepted in the field, his close attention to quantitative data is suggestive of the methodological sophistication that future scholarship on the subject might bring to bear. In their chapter on gender-specific factors in survival, Gabriele Pflugsten and Claus Füllberg-Stolberg also corroborate the findings of earlier studies by Sybil Milton and others, arguing that female inmates could more readily establish mutually supportive relationships among themselves than could the male prisoners. Empirically their study differs from previous ones inasmuch as it focuses on a particular category of camp, namely, that of satellite labor camps with exclusively female prisoners. Such work on female forced laborers vividly demonstrates just how far the field has come since the days when the voice of former political prisoners predominated. The same can be said of Michael Zimmermann’s chapter about the “Gypsy camp” in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The contributions to this anthology vindicate the study of the camps as a legitimate academic enterprise. At their best, they shed considerable light on several important questions: the ideological motives, structural characteristics, and economic priorities of the Nazi regime; the psychological and situational factors that lead ordinary men and women to become involved in inhumane enterprises; the mechanisms on which people depend when fighting for survival under extreme duress; and the relationship between the Jewish Holocaust and other aspects of Nazi persecution and terror.

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Entertaining Tsarist Russia: Tales, Songs, Plays, Movies, Jokes, Ads, and Images from Russian Urban Life, 1779–1917. Edited by *James von Geldern* and *Louise McReynolds*. Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies. Edited by *Alexander Rabinowitch* and *William G. Rosenberg*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. Pp. xxvii + 394. \$69.95 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper).

For many decades, historians of Russia have been accustomed to rather serious topics. By focusing on such admittedly important issues as the emancipation of the serfs, the formation of a working class, political reform, or social revolution, they could hardly avoid giving the impression of a country plagued by permanent crisis, inhabited by a people constantly struggling against a corrupt state as well as rough natural and social environments. This historic image of Russia as a grim and unpleasant place became widely accepted by the broader public in Western countries during the cold war. In an era of political and military competition, the Soviet people appeared mainly as grumpy party secretaries, heroic dissidents, and the dancers of the Bolshoi ballet. Though almost