

## Back to the Sources. Over Five Thousand Documents on the “Persecution and Murder of European Jews by National Socialist Germany.” On the Completion of a 16-Volume Edition

by *Ulrich Wyrwa*

Early on, Jews attentively documented their disenfranchisement, the humiliations and insults in National Socialist Germany,<sup>1</sup> and since the invasion of Poland by the German Wehrmacht, Jewish contemporaries collected testimonies of ghettoization and shootings as well as testimonies from the concentration camps; the Ringelblum archive from the Warsaw Ghetto, for example, comprises 25,000 pages that were buried in boxes and rediscovered after the war.<sup>2</sup> After liberation, Jewish survivors made efforts to document the crimes of National Socialist Germany or set up corresponding institutions.<sup>3</sup>

In post-war Germany Joseph Wulf—partly in collaboration with Léon Poliakov—had published extensive annotated source volumes on the humiliation and disenfranchisement of Jews in National Socialist Germany.<sup>4</sup> West German historians, on the other hand, had difficulties dealing with the recent German past. Although an Institute for the Study of National Socialist Politics, renamed Institut für Zeitgeschichte [IfZ] in 1952, was founded in Munich in 1949,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Already in the last years of the Republic, contemporary Jews collected the evidence of the anti-Jewish violence of the Nazi movement in the Wilhelmstraße Office: Simon Sax, “Das Büro Wilhelmstraße: neue Quellen, neue Perspektiven,” in *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Anwalt zwischen Deutschtum und Judentum*, eds. Rebekka Denz and Tilman Gempff-Friedrich (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 169-194. In 1933 Alfred Wiener continued this activity: Ben Barkow, *Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Moses Shapiro and Tadeusz Epsztein, eds., *The Warsaw Ghetto Oyneg Shabes – Ringelblum Archive. Catalog and Guide* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See the fundamental study by Laura Jockusch, *Collect and record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in early postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Klaus Kempfer, *Joseph Wulf. Ein Historikerschicksal in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Horst Möller and Udo Wengst, eds., *60 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin. Geschichte – Veröffentlichungen – Personalien* (München: Oldenbourg, 2009); Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

“Auschwitz,” as one of the early staff members later put it, “resisted the emergence of contemporary history most fiercely.”<sup>6</sup> According to the reproach of the young IfZ staff member Martin Broszat the documentary *The Third Reich and its Servants* by Joseph Wulf and Leon Poliakov<sup>7</sup> lacked the necessary “detachment of scientific-historical source publication.”<sup>8</sup> Broszat studiously ignored the Nazi involvement of West German historians.<sup>9</sup> Even in the mid-1980s, by then director of the IfZ, he returned to his reservations about Jewish historians.<sup>10</sup> Saul Friedländer then pointed out the contradictions in Martin Broszat’s argumentation.<sup>11</sup> In the course of his ensuing controversy with Broszat, he asked: “Why do you think historians who belonged to the group of persecutors should be able to deal with this past in a detached way, while those belonging to the group of victims cannot?”<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, a large number of groundbreaking and fundamental studies on the history of National Socialism have been produced at the IfZ.<sup>13</sup> Then, in 1999, the IfZ, in cooperation with Yad Vashem, began to compile a database of all criminal proceedings for the prosecution of Nazi crimes by German judicial authorities

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<sup>6</sup> Hans-Dietrich Looch, “War’s so? Erinnerungen an die Entstehung der Zeitgeschichte,” in *25 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Statt einer Festschrift* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1975), 38-54; 49.

<sup>7</sup> Léon Poliakov and Joseph Wulf, *Das Dritte Reich und seine Diener* (Berlin: Arani, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Broszat, “Probleme zeitgeschichtlicher Dokumentation,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 2 (1957): 298-304; 298.

<sup>9</sup> Ingo Haar, *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus. Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der ‘Volkstumskampf’ im Osten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad H. Jarausch, eds., *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (München: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Martin Broszat, “Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus,” *Merkur* 39, no. 435 (1985): 373-385.

<sup>11</sup> Saul Friedländer, “Überlegungen zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus,” in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1987), 34-50.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, “Über die ‘Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus’. Ein Briefwechsel,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1988): 339-372; 347.

<sup>13</sup> See for example: Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Dimensionen des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (München: Oldenbourg, 1991); Benz, ed., *Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945. Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft* (München: C. H. Beck, 1993).

since 1945.<sup>14</sup> However, a comprehensive edition of sources on the persecution and murder of the Jews in Europe by National Socialist Germany was still overdue.<sup>15</sup>

### The Project of the Edition

On 27 January 2005, an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* announced that historians Ulrich Herbert and Götz Aly were preparing one.<sup>16</sup> A few thin collections of sources were available,<sup>17</sup> but in view of the state of Holocaust research, the overcoming of the old controversies between intentionalists and structuralists,<sup>18</sup> and the opening of the Moscow Special Archive with requisitioned German archival material,<sup>19</sup> it seemed time to compile comprehensive documentation on the persecution of Jews by National Socialist Germany that included the European dimensions. The IfZ as the institution relevant for coming to terms with the Nazi-past was included, and in order to have the expertise of archivists at its side, the Federal Archive was recruited as co-editor.

In 2004, the project of the source edition on the persecution and murder of the European Jews was started with the support of the S. Fischer Foundation. Since

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<sup>14</sup> Andreas Eichmüller, “Die Verfolgung von NS-Verbrechen durch westdeutsche Justizbehörden seit 1945 – Inventarisierung und Teilverfilmung der Verfahrensakten. Ein neues Projekt des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50 (2002): 507-516.

<sup>15</sup> In the mid-1990s, Raul Hilberg unsuccessfully proposed to the Frankfurt publishing house S. Fischer “the idea of a ‘multi-volume edition of official writings on the so-called Jewish Question,’” which René Schlott recalled in his review after the VEJ had been completed: R. Schlott, “Ein Monument des Gedenkens,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 4, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Lorenz Jäger, “Die Sache selbst. Zum Forschungsstand Hilberg, Aly und die Vernichtungspolitik,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 27, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Etwa: Kurt Pätzold, ed., *Verfolgung, Vertreibung, Vernichtung. Dokumente des faschistischen Antisemitismus, 1933 bis 1942* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1983); Hans-Dieter Schmid, ed., *Juden unterm Hakenkreuz. Dokumente und Berichte zur Verfolgung und Vernichtung der Juden durch die Nationalsozialisten 1933 bis 1945*, 2 vol. (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1983); Peter Longerich, ed., *Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden. Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941–1945* (München: Piper, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Charisma und Terror. Gedanken zum Verhältnis intentionalistischer und funktionalistischer Deutungen der nationalsozialistischen Vernichtungspolitik* (Frankfurt/M: Fritz Bauer Institut, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, eds., *Das Zentrale Staatsarchiv in Moskau („Sonderarchiv“). Rekonstruktion und Bestandsverzeichnis verschollen geglaubten Schriftguts aus der NS-Zeit* (Düsseldorf: Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 1992).

2005, the German Research Foundation has taken over the funding.<sup>20</sup> Dieter Pohl, then a member at the IfZ, presented the basic outlines of the project “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945. Ein neues Editionsprojekt” [VEJ] in the same year in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*.<sup>21</sup> The aim was to “scientifically document the persecution of the German Jews, and from 1938/39 of the European Jews, and the mass murder of them.” The “spatial structure” of the volumes would be based on the administrative boundaries valid at the time, “which were important for the events of the persecution of the Jews.” The criterion for the selection of sources was that they were “limited as far as possible to contemporary sources, and that they followed the triad of “perpetrator, victim, bystander” as conceived by Raul Hilberg.<sup>22</sup> In addition to state files, personal documents such as diaries or letters, as well as newspaper reports, sources from the “underground movements” and documents from the governments of allied and neutral states were to be included. The decisive factor for the selection had to be the relevance of the source, with a focus “on murderous actions” and “the variety of acts of persecution.” For each source, a short note should explain the historical context and provide biographical information on the persons mentioned.<sup>23</sup> The historian Susanne Heim was responsible for the scientific supervision and coordination of the overall project. The VEJ project’s working place became the IfZ in Berlin, which had opened an office there in 1990. For each volume, separate editors were employed along with additional student and research assistants.

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<sup>20</sup> Hellmuth Auerbach, Hermann Weiß, and Udo Wengst, “Institutschronik,” in *60 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, eds. Möller and Wengst, 101-148; 137. Applications for funding to the German Research Foundation were submitted by the Institute of Contemporary History and the Chair of Modern and Contemporary History at the University of Freiburg.

<sup>21</sup> Dieter Pohl, “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945. Ein neues Editionsprojekt,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 53 (2005): 651-659.

<sup>22</sup> Raul Hilberg, *Täter, Opfer, Zuschauer. Die Vernichtung der Juden 1933–1945* (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Andrej Angrick, “Dokumentation, Interpretation, Impuls. Das Editionsprojekt ‚Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden 1933-1945,‘” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 5 (2008): 446-450.

### Course of Publication and Reception of the Volumes

In December 2008, Oldenbourg-Verlag, Munich, published volume 1 on the German Reich from 1933 to 1937, compiled by Wolf Gruner.<sup>24</sup> In his introduction Gruner recapitulates the policy towards Jews from January 1933 onwards, which fluctuated between violence and special rights and led to the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. Gruner selected 320 published and previously unpublished sources in chronological order. The document section begins with the editorial of the *Jüdische Rundschau* of 31 January 1933 on Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor, and also contains the NSDAP's call for a boycott of Jewish shops printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the law on the "dismissal of Jewish and politically disagreeable civil servants" of April 1933, which was already printed elsewhere but is fundamental and therefore indispensable for the edition, or an article in the "Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte" of May of this year on the "solution of the Jewish question," to name just a few of the sources from 1933. These documents alone show how much, according to Gruner, antisemitism became the government's "state goal."<sup>25</sup> For the year 1937, with which this volume ends, Gruner selected a lecture by Theodor Oberländer on the "Strengthening of German Influence in Eastern Europe," in which he described Eastern European Jewry as the "most active carrier of communist ideas."<sup>26</sup> In the biographical explanation, Gruner points out that Oberländer took part in the Hitler putsch in Munich in 1923, joined the NSDAP in 1933 and was Minister for Displaced Persons, Refugees and War-Affected Persons in the Adenauer government from 1953 to 1960.

In his review in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, Hans Mommsen, then the doyen of West German NS research, criticized the chronological arrangement of the sources. He also lodged a complaint about the lack of "factual classification" and "insufficient explanation of the content" of the selected documents. According to

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<sup>24</sup> The editors were Ulrich Herbert, Götz Aly, Wolf Gruner, Susanne Heim, Dieter Pohl and the director of the IfZ Horst Möller, with Hartmut Weber and Hans-Dieter Kreikamp of the Bundesarchiv.

<sup>25</sup> VEJ 1, 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 672.

Mommsen, the reader would therefore get “a more or less impressionistic impression of the course of the persecution.”<sup>27</sup>

Overall, however, the reception of this first volume was consistently positive. In her review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Franziska Augstein was “shocked, outraged and moved” after reading the volume. The sources showed “the cruelty already represented by the exclusion of the Jewish population” in the early years of Nazi rule.<sup>28</sup> “The sources unfold a powerful force,” wrote Arno Widmann in his review in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, they make clear “what ‘Gleichschaltung’ meant” and that the persecution of the Jews affected the whole of society. “The ‘Final Solution’—this book makes clear—lay from the outset in the consequence of the National Socialist view of the world.”<sup>29</sup> Stefan Reinecke, reviewer for the *tageszeitung*, saw the advantage of the volume in the fact that it was arranged “strictly chronologically.”<sup>30</sup> For the reviewer of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Manfred Gailus, the first volume already showed that this is “a truly monumental” project. “All in all,” when the project was completed, “an impressive textual monument” to the “singular catastrophe of the 20th century” was to be expected.<sup>31</sup> Rainer Blasius included volume 2 published in 2009 in his review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and was deeply impressed by the documentary power and praised in particular the “haunting” visualization of Nazi bureaucratic obsession through the “partly repulsive, partly poignant” documents.<sup>32</sup>

This volume 2 was compiled by Susanne Heim.<sup>33</sup> Taking up Hans Mommsen’s criticism of the lack of factual classification, the editors include a systematic

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<sup>27</sup> Hans Mommsen, “Wie es geschehen konnte. Ein Großprojekt: Die Quellenedition zur Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden,” *Die Zeit*, November 13, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Franziska Augstein, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 25, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Arno Widmann, “‘Ja wovon sollen sie denn leben?’ Dokumente zur Ausgrenzung und Verfolgung von Juden während des Nationalsozialismus,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, January 26, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Stefan Reinecke, “Frau Elly schreibt an die SS. Bald sind auch die letzten Zeitzeugen des Holocaust gestorben. Historiker wie Susanne Heim und Götz Aly sammeln Quellentexte,” *tageszeitung*, January 26, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Manfred Gailus, “‘Schweigend verlassen wir den Raum, bis ins Innerste empört’. Der erste Band eines beeindruckenden Schriftdenkmals für die ermordeten europäischen Juden,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, July 12, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Rainer Blasius, „Unkontrollierbare Regionen und legale Wege,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 9, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Wolf Gruner resigned from the editorial board with this volume.

document index from the second volume onwards. In terms of time, this volume refers to the phase from January 1938 to 31 August 1939, the period during which the German Reich occupied Austria, parts of Bohemia with a German-speaking population and the Sudetenland, and during which the National Socialist government imposed what Heim called a “state of emergency on the German Jews.”<sup>34</sup> Beginning with the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany, 9 November 1938, a new climax of the antisemitic furore fell into this phase. Heim, however, does not use the contemporary term “Kristallnacht,” but the later common term November pogrom.<sup>35</sup> One of the consequences of 9 November was the Aryanization and “de-Jewification” of the economy. It also triggered an increased flight movement. Next to the persecution and expulsion of Austrian Jews, which is documented by numerous sources, the volume shows the intensification of war preparations and the expansion of the concentration camps. Heim draws special attention to the experts for Jewish policy in the police and the security service with their strategies of registration, exclusion and racial classification as well as the establishment of institutions of forced labor. On 30 January 1939, Hitler gave his much-quoted Reichstag speech, also printed in this edition, in which he threatened “the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”<sup>36</sup> Heim also drew on excerpts from a large number of first-person documents such as diaries or letters, or the essay of a twelve-year-old pupil who summarized the quintessence of the antisemitic National Socialist worldview in just a few lines.

The online review organ of the German Historical Institute Paris, *Francia Recensio*, published a detailed appraisal of volume 2 by Michel Fabrèguet;<sup>37</sup> in the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, Manfred Gailus praised the “impressive diverse

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<sup>34</sup> VEJ 2, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Heim used the term Kristallnacht only once, and then in inverted commas. Recently, this rather discredited word has been re-purposed: Ulrich Baumann, François Guesnet, “Kristallnacht—Pogrom—State Terror: A Terminological Reflection,” *New Perspectives on Kristallnacht: After 80 years, the Nazi Pogrom in Global Comparison*, eds. Wolf Gruner and Steven Ross (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2019), 2-24; see also: Wolfgang Benz, *Gewalt im November 1938. Die „Reichskristallnacht.“ Inital zum Holocaust* (Berlin: Metropol, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> VEJ 2, Dok. 248.

<sup>37</sup> Fabrèguet, Michel review of *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945, Band 2*, ed. Susanne Heim, in *19./20. Jahrhundert - Histoire contemporaine* 3 (2011),

[https://perspectivia.net/receive/ploneimport2\\_mods\\_00006158](https://perspectivia.net/receive/ploneimport2_mods_00006158), accessed June 1, 2024.

selection of sources, which provides a perspective-rich view of Nazi persecution policy.” Gailus concluded his review with the sentence: “If you are looking for competent enlightenment about this time of horror based on authentic documents—here it is.”<sup>38</sup>

After a break of two years, two more volumes appeared in 2011. First, volume 4, entrusted by Klaus-Peter Friedrich, on Poland from September 1939 to July 1941.<sup>39</sup> In his introduction, Friedrich first outlined the history of the Jews in Poland up to the time of the Second Polish Republic and the German invasion. The primary goal of German policy was the Germanization of the occupied territories.

In 751 pages and 321 sources, Friedrich documented the persecution of Polish Jews from the German invasion to the attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. The sources meticulously show the violent policy of the Wehrmacht and SS units, the humiliation of the Jewish population, their successive disenfranchisement, economic plundering and finally ghettoization. Friedrich has also selected letters, diary entries or leaflets translated from Polish into German, as well as sources on the role of the Jewish councils and Jewish self-help, and on the everyday experiences of the Jews. The majority of Christian Poles remained indifferent, as the sources show, and some even supported the German policy towards the Jews. At the end of the period covered in this volume, in July 1941 the Polish Jews were “marked, disenfranchised, impoverished,” confined to ghettos or labor camps, and “tens of thousands had already been murdered.” In the summer of 1941, according to Friedrich, Poland was on the “threshold of mass murder.”<sup>40</sup> According to Sybille Steinbacher, as she wrote in her review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, through “the change of perspective that results from the compilation and chronological arrangement of the sources, a multifaceted picture of the reality of the German occupation emerges that could hardly be more dense and differentiated.”<sup>41</sup> For Elvira Grözinger, the “hauntingly arranged, even

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<sup>38</sup> Manfred Gailus, “‘Sind sie arisch?’ Die Historikerin Susanne Heim veröffentlicht Dokumente zur Judenverfolgung,” *Tagesspiegel*, January 4, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Götz Aly left the editorial board as of this volume.

<sup>40</sup> VEJ 4, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Sybille Steinbacher, “‘Die humanste Lösung’. Der vierte Band der Holocaust-Dokumentation zeichnet eindrucksvoll die Verfolgung der Juden in Polen nach,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* September 12, 2011. Similarly positive is the review by Bernward Dörner: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 25, 2011.



choreographed” sources printed “in chronological order” “shockingly present the chronicle of events and their perception by perpetrators and victims alike.” Nevertheless, the book is “surprisingly easy to read despite the texts that are hardly bearable.”<sup>42</sup> The volume was then presented at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw in October.<sup>43</sup>

2011 also saw the publication of volume 7, the first of two volumes on the annexed territories of the Soviet Union,<sup>44</sup> covering the Soviet territories under German military administration, as well as the Baltic states and Transnistria, the Ukrainian territory occupied by Romania that extended to Odessa. The criterion for the delimitation of the two volumes relating to the occupied territories of the Soviet Union was, according to Bert Hoppe and Hildrun Glass in their introduction, the chronological course of the murder of the Jews in Eastern Europe.

After a survey of Jewish history in the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, the editors trace the course of the war in the East, the preparations for the murder of Jews and the transition to mass murder and conclude with a look at foreign observers.

A particular merit of this volume, according to the review by Felix Ackermann in the online review organ *HSozKult*, is “that a large number of texts cover the Jewish perspective in the ghettos and hiding places and document the internal conflicts of the Jewish communities struggling to survive.”<sup>45</sup> According to Jacob Tauber’s review in the *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, there is no better recommendation for “a first in-depth insight, based on contemporary materials, into antisemitic mass crimes in the occupied Soviet Union.”<sup>46</sup>

Two volumes followed in 2012. First, volume 3 on the German Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia from September 1939 to September 1941, edited by Andrea Löw.<sup>47</sup> The 1 September 1939 meant “a deep caesura” for the

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<sup>42</sup> Elvira Grözinger, *PaRDeS. Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien* 18 (2012): 178-181.

<sup>43</sup> Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau / Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny w Warszawie, Jahresbericht 2011, 56.

<sup>44</sup> With this volume, Gertrud Pickhan joined the editorial circle.

<sup>45</sup> Felix Ackermann, review of Hoppe, Bert; Glass, Hildrun (Hrsg.): *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945, Bd 7*; February, 16, 2015, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-18021>, accessed July 20, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob Tauber, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 63, no. 1 (2014): 136-138.

<sup>47</sup> From this volume onwards, Andreas Wirsching joined the editorial team.

German, Austrian and Czech Jews.<sup>48</sup> With the opening of the war, the regime intensified the measures against the German, Austrian and Czech Jews. In these two years, the National Socialist leadership moved from a policy of forced emigration and suppression of the Jews to mass murder. At the end of this period, the Jews were identified by a yellow star for everyone, and their systematic deportation to the occupied territories in the East was imminent. However, there was still no clarity about how the Jewish question was to be solved in concrete terms. The sources selected by Löw contain statements from the Nazi cadres and authorities about this path. The personal records of the Jewish victims about the humiliations they experienced give insight into their despair but also their hopes. Between the beginning of the war and the summer of 1940, the regime intensified the terror, forced the murders of the sick, and the first deportations were undertaken. In her introduction, Löw describes both the Jewish self-government and the desperate emigration efforts. The extent to which National Socialist propaganda was incorporated into school lessons can be seen, for example, in the dictation of a 14-year-old pupil in September 1939, who had to take notes on a war report read out to her, which spoke of “barefoot Polish women and greasy Kaftan Jews.”<sup>49</sup>

According to Tatjana Tönsmeier in her review in the *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* the first reading of the sources initially leaves a haphazard impression, but because of “the chronological arrangement they formed their own narrative.” At the same time, she emphasized, it becomes clear “how confusing the situation was for those affected.” The only point of criticism for Tönsmeier was the use of German instead of Czech place names.<sup>50</sup> For Stefan Dölling the selection of sources showed how much the pressure to deport the Jews from the Reich had come “from the National Socialist base—but also from ‘ordinary’ Germans.” The documents also prove, according to Dölling, “how the paranoid vision of an existential danger from “world Jewry” had been internalized

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<sup>48</sup> VEJ 3, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Doc. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 63, no. 3 (2014): 463-464; also accessible in the online review journal *sehpunkte* 15, no. 4 (2015), <http://www.sehpunkte.de/2015/04/26197.html>, accessed June 20, 2024.

by part of the Reich's population."<sup>51</sup> Anna Hájková, on the other hand, drew a divided balance in her review published in the journal *Bohemia*. While she was impressed by the first part relating to Germany and Austria, she criticized the second Czech part not only because it mainly reproduced already known sources, but above all because it painted "far too homogeneous a picture" of Czech Jews and they appeared merely "as pale appendages of their German relatives."<sup>52</sup>

The second volume 5, published in 2012, documents the persecution of Jews in Western and Northern Europe from 1940 to June 1942 and was edited by Michael Mayer, Katja Happe, and Maja Peers.<sup>53</sup> Only seven months after the invasion of Poland, the German Wehrmacht overran Denmark and Norway; Denmark, unlike Norway, offered no resistance. This was followed by the rapid conquest of Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and northern France. More than 500,000 Jews had come under National Socialist rule. With the exception of Denmark, the Reich's Jewish policy was implemented in these countries. The sources and documents in this volume are arranged by country, whereby chronology has been maintained internally. The introduction recapitulates the different forms of occupation policy and the development of the persecution of Jews in the countries, explaining also the special situation in Denmark or the anti-Jewish policy in the non-occupied part of France under the Vichy regime. How the Jewish policy was to be implemented initially remained unclear. Unlike in Poland, the National Socialist forces tried to win over the non-Jewish population and the administration in the northern and western European countries to collaborate in the persecution of the Jews. While in Eastern Europe the policy of murder had already begun in 1941, in Northern and Western Europe preparations for the deportation of the Jews there began after the Wannsee Conference.

On Jewish perceptions and experiences in these countries, the volume reproduces, for example, the farewell letter of a Dutch couple who "put an end to their lives," the farewell speech of a dismissed Dutch law professor to his students, or the diary

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<sup>51</sup> Stefan Dölling, review of *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945. Band 3*, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-19569>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Hájková, *Bohemia Band 53* (2013): 476–478.

<sup>53</sup> From this volume onwards, Michael Hollmann of the Federal Archives was part of the editorial team.

entry of a French student who was outraged by the introduction of the yellow star.<sup>54</sup>

In his review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Bernward Dörner emphasizes that by presenting the developments in the individual countries, the common features of the “persecution process clearly emerge.” The sources, according to Dörner, made “the escalation of the situation of danger clear in an oppressive way.”<sup>55</sup>

After the first seven volumes of the VEJ were published, Michael Wildt presented a first interim report in the *Historische Zeitschrift*.<sup>56</sup> Due to the “contemporary perspective” of the selected sources, the focus of the edition was not memory, “but the historical events themselves.” According to Wildt, however, it was problematic that only written documents were used, not pictorial sources. Photographs in particular were an indispensable source for the history of the persecution and murder of European Jews, and antisemitic posters can help to recognize how hatred of Jews was stirred up and “a visual idea of the ‘Jew’ ” created. Thus, “a desideratum of this edition remains, which should be worked on in the future.” Nevertheless, the edition impresses with “the multitude and multi-perspectivity of the documents.” Since it includes the intention of the perpetrators to persecute, “the self-assertion and resistance of those persecuted, but also the indifference [...] of so many ‘Volksgenossinnen und Volksgenossen’,” it offered an “integrated history” of the Shoah in the sense of Saul Friedländer.<sup>57</sup>

In 2014, Klaus-Peter Friedrich, who had already edited volume 4, submitted volume 9 on Poland and the Generalgouvernement from August 1941 to spring 1945.<sup>58</sup> Poland was, Friedrich had written in volume 4, in the spring and summer of 1941 on the “threshold of mass murder.”<sup>59</sup> He meticulously documented this phase. In 1941, the majority of Polish Jews lived in what the German occupiers

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<sup>54</sup> VEJ 5, Doc. 27, 47, 314, and 325.

<sup>55</sup> Bernward Dörner, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 5, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Wildt, “Dokumentation des Holocaust. Die Quellenedition zur Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 297, no. 2 (2013): 417-421.

<sup>57</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Die Jahre der Verfolgung 1933-1939* (München: C.H.Beck, 1998); Saul Friedländer, *Die Jahre der Vernichtung. Das Dritte Reich und die Juden, 1939-1945* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> The archivist Hans-Dieter Kreikamp was replaced from this volume onwards by Simone Walther, later Simone Walther-von Jena, also from the Federal Archives.

<sup>59</sup> VEJ 4, 14.

called the Generalgouvernement, “a kind of colonial ‘tributary country of the Reich’.”<sup>60</sup> The mass murders of Jews began in the provinces of Posen and Lodz, which were occupied by the Wehrmacht and declared Reichsgau Wartheland. After the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union, SS and German police units also began mass murders in the Generalgouvernement at the end of June 1941. After the Belzec death camp was established, the first phase of the mass murders began, lasting from March to June 1942. In the second phase, from July to December 1942, the killings took place mainly in the camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, until spring 1943 the “central death factories for European Jews.”<sup>61</sup> Friedrich also explores the reactions of the non-Jewish population to the murder actions, which, however, as he writes, remain controversial. In January 1943, the Jews still living in the Warsaw ghettos took up armed resistance. The uprising had no chance of success, and yet this “act of self-assertion” was, as Friedrich points out, “a sign of hope for those who were still alive.”<sup>62</sup>

The offensive of the Red Army in the summer of 1944 “came too late for the vast majority of Jews.”<sup>63</sup> Only between 50,000 and 60,000 had survived. The Jewish Historical Commission has collected several thousand testimonies from them. According to Friedrich, along with the Ringelblum Archive, these represent “one of the most important sources on German occupation in Poland.”<sup>64</sup>

The volume, too, was presented at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw in October.<sup>65</sup> According to Alexander Brakel in the online journal *sehpunkte*, the sources show “the radicalization of Jewish policy in the German-occupied parts of Poland.” The volume is impressive not least because of its diversity of perspectives.<sup>66</sup> Frank Golczewski, on the other hand, emphasizes in the *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* that the volume’s “drastic descriptions” are

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<sup>60</sup> VEJ, 9, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau / Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny w Warszawie, Jahresbericht 2014, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Alexander Brakel, review of *Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945*, in *sehpunkte* 14, no. 2 (2014), <http://www.sehpunkte.de/2014/02/24651.html>, accessed June 20, 2024.

“an exhausting read” that “one may not subject oneself to for long.”<sup>67</sup> The value of this volume, as Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg points out in *Editionen in der Kritik*, lies both in the fact that it deals with the space in which “the German extermination camps Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor” were located and in the presentation of documents “in languages that were previously difficult to access.” However, he criticizes the omission of pictorial documents.<sup>68</sup>

In 2014, when seven of sixteen volumes were thus available, Moshe Zimmermann took stock in the journal *Neue Politische Literatur*.<sup>69</sup> First, he praised the editors for choosing the “title ‘Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by National Socialist Germany’” and for avoiding the terms Holocaust, Shoah or Final Solution.<sup>70</sup> According to Zimmermann, the edition project rightly devoted considerable space to Jewish policy in the German Reich and the period before the war. This deserved special attention because of the “‘experimental’ character of the Nazi persecution of Jews” in this phase. “Without this long ‘run-up’, the dynamics of the further development cannot be understood.”<sup>71</sup> Even though German Jews made up less than 7% of the Jewish population in Europe at the time and only 5% of the Jews murdered by the National Socialists, this weighting of sources—almost a third of the entire work thus refers to the fate of German Jews—was nevertheless justified according to Zimmermann.<sup>72</sup> The edition could help to answer the “question about the connection between planning and implementation of the ‘Final Solution.’” The volumes already available also showed how much the various authorities were “involved in the process of disenfranchisement of the Jews in the Reich” long before the war.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, the sources show the importance of “targeted antisemitic propaganda” and how the population was “manipulated by the propaganda technique of the

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<sup>67</sup> Frank Golczewski, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 68, no. 3-4 (2020): 666-670; 667.

<sup>68</sup> Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Editionen in der Kritik – Editions wissenschaftliches Rezensionorgan* 9, no. 1 (2017): 120-122.

<sup>69</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, “Stationen kumulativer Radikalisierung. Das Editionsprojekt ‘Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden 1933–1945,’” *Neue Politische Literatur* 59 (2014): 10-22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. For the conceptual history of the term Holocaust: Ulrich Wyrwa, “Holocaust. Notizen zur Begriffsgeschichte,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 8 (1999): 300-311.

<sup>71</sup> Zimmermann, “Stationen kumulativer Radikalisierung,” 10.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

National Socialist regime” in order to gain their consent to the persecution of the Jews.<sup>74</sup> But the path to the “solution of the Jewish question” was by no means mapped out. The documents also reveal the “confusion that prevailed in the leadership strata of the National Socialists.”<sup>75</sup> It was therefore not surprising how perplexed German Jews often were. The sources show the “uncertainty of many Jews” until 1938-1939 about their situation. The question of the Jews’ reaction in particular has often been simplified in the literature, for example when they were accused of “blindness” or non-resistance. The records “force us to take a more differentiated view.”<sup>76</sup> The edition “impressively documents that many German Jews could not imagine how radically their treatment would develop.” In this context, Zimmermann urges that the persecution of the Jews must “not be judged a posteriori from the current state of knowledge,” but “from the standpoint of contemporary information.” Making this possible, Zimmermann sums up, “is one of the great achievements of the project.”<sup>77</sup> Regarding the debates on how the Final Solution was carried out in real terms the “successive reading of the documents gives the impression of a crescendo.”<sup>78</sup> The first volumes are, Moshe Zimmermann concludes, “a successful start.”<sup>79</sup>

After a one-year break in publication, volume 12, worked out by Katja Happe, Barbara Lambauer, and Clemens Maier-Wolthausen, followed in 2015, covering Western and Northern Europe from June 1942 to May 1945.<sup>80</sup> From then on, the Berlin publishing house De Gruyter, which had taken over Oldenbourg Verlag and created the imprint “de Gruyter Oldenbourg,” published the edition.

With the exception of Denmark, the German occupation authorities began preparations for the deportation of the Jews in these countries after the Wannsee Conference. From Norway, almost half of the Jewish population perished, in the Netherlands it was three quarters. The Netherlands thus had “the highest death rate in Western Europe.”<sup>81</sup> From Belgium, 45% of the Jews living in the country,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>80</sup> Gertrud Pickhan no longer served as co-editor since this volume.

<sup>81</sup> VEJ 12, 45.

the majority of whom did not have Belgian citizenship, were deported. In Luxembourg, supported by the Volksdeutsche movement, a third of the Luxembourgish Jewish population perished.

In France, the Wehrmacht controlled the northern part of the country, interning between 7,000 and 8,000 Jews in camps. In the south of France, the collaborationist government under Marshal Pétain enacted antisemitic measures, too. After the German occupation of southern France in November 1942 and of the Italian zone in September 1943, “a merciless manhunt” began, so that altogether a quarter of the Jewish population of France became victims of the German policy.<sup>82</sup>

In comparison, the proportion “of the deported and murdered Jews in the countries of Western and Northern Europe was very different.”<sup>83</sup> A connection between autochthonous antisemitism before the occupation and “the quota of deportees,” according to the editors, “cannot be drawn.” “Rather, the main impetus for the persecution of the Jews came from the German side.”<sup>84</sup>

After half of all the volumes had been published, Susanne Heim drew up an “interim balance sheet.”<sup>85</sup> In view of the hardly manageable abundance of detailed studies on the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust, Heim’s initial observation is that there is a “danger of scattering.”<sup>86</sup> Also, research on victims and perpetrators would often fall apart.

At the same time, Heim warns, the “omnipresence of the topic in the media” leads to the impression that people are already “comprehensively informed.” However, “instead of profound knowledge, often only a moral attitude” is conveyed. Consequently, the aim of the edition was “to direct the view more towards the historical events themselves.”<sup>87</sup> Reading the sources “a nuanced overall picture” or

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>85</sup> Susanne Heim, “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen? Eine Zwischenbilanz des Editionsprojektes ‚Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden,‘” in *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung*, eds. Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2015), 321-338.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 322.



a “mosaic” opens to the reader, concentrating on single sources however “suddenly reveals the monstrosity of the entire crime.”<sup>88</sup>

A comparative reading of the volumes available so far, in turn, shows that “the exclusion of Jews was much easier to enforce in some societies than in others.” But the willingness to protect Jews differed also. The reaction of the Jewish population in the individual countries to the persecution was equally inconsistent. All in all, Heim concludes, referring to Saul Friedländer’s call,<sup>89</sup> the edition has “set at least a few bridge pillars for an integrated history of the persecution of the Jews.”<sup>90</sup>

In the following year, 2016, the volume 8 on Belarus and Ukraine was published, compiled by Bert Hoppe with the collaboration of Imke Hansen and Martin Holler. The introduction reconstructs the beginning of the murder of the Jews under German military administration, explains the German rule of occupation in the General Commissariat of White Ruthenia and in the Reich Commissariat of Ukraine, where the SS, police and local auxiliary policemen immediately set about plundering and ghettoizing the Jewish population. In addition to the differentiated presentation of the “practice of murdering Jews,” the sources also give a picture of everyday life in the ghettos and the attempts of Jews to escape.<sup>91</sup> Probably the “most dastardly feature of the anti-Jewish policy of the German occupiers,” according to the introduction, was the incorporation of Jews in the crimes in form of the Judenräte.<sup>92</sup> Since mid-1941, about 580,000 Jews had been murdered on the territory of the Belarusian Soviet Republic and about 1.5 million in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The support of persecuted Jews by the Belarusian and Ukrainian population was rather low, but this, according to the editors, was less related to antisemitic attitudes of the population than to the fact that they also “suffered excessive persecution measures by the German occupiers.”<sup>93</sup>

“The prudently annotated sources” of this volume, Jörg Osterloh concludes in his review in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, “impressively document the more than three

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.; Saul Friedländer, *Den Holocaust beschreiben. Auf dem Weg zu einer integrierten Geschichte* (Göttingen; Wallstein, 2007).

<sup>90</sup> Heim, “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen?,” 337.

<sup>91</sup> VEJ 8, 35f.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 68.

years of horror of the Jewish population under German occupation [...] at two of the main regional sites of the Holocaust.”<sup>94</sup> René Schlott conducted in this occasion an interview with Hoppe for the journal *zeitgeschichte/online*. When asked which of the documents had made a particular impression on him personally, Hoppe named the diary of a sixteen-year-old schoolboy who described the deportation of Jews from his Ukrainian hometown.<sup>95</sup>

In 2017 followed the publication of volume 14 on occupied Southeastern Europe and Italy, edited by Sara Berger, Sanela Schmid, Erwin Lewin and Maria Vassilikou.<sup>96</sup> The South and Southeast European region initially played only a subordinate role in the strategy of National Socialist policy and was rather assigned to the Axis power Italy. Mussolini’s attempt to annex Greece became “a single disaster.” As a result, Germany’s political strategy in this area changed fundamentally.<sup>97</sup> The German Wehrmacht’s Balkan campaign began in April 1941. Yugoslavia, which is given a focus in the document section due to its complex development, and Greece were divided into different occupation areas. Germany annexed northern Slovenia, Serbia and the area around Salonika were placed under German military rule. In Albania, previously an Italian protectorate, the Wehrmacht established a formally independent Albanian administration. For Croatia, a dependent state was created under the leadership of the fascist Ustasha movement, other parts of Yugoslavia and Greece came under Italian, Bulgarian or Hungarian rule. In Serbia, occupied by the German military, mass terror began immediately. Only in Albania did the German military hold back. The Ustasha regime in Croatia began persecuting the Jews on its own initiative. The Bulgarian government deported the Jews from the Bulgarian-occupied areas of Yugoslavia and from the former Greek Thrace.

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<sup>94</sup> Jörg Osterloh, *Historische Zeitschrift* 305, no. 2 (2017): 450-452; 452.

<sup>95</sup> R. Schlott, “Ein Schriftdenkmal für zwei Millionen Tote. Zum Erscheinen von Band 8 der Quelledition ‚Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden‘,” *zeitgeschichte/online*, March 1, 2016, <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/interview/ein-schriftdenkmal-fuer-zwei-millionen-tote>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>96</sup> With this volume, the director of the Fritz Bauer Institute, History and Impact of the Holocaust, Sybille Steinbacher, joined the editorial board.

<sup>97</sup> VEJ 14, 13.

According to Sara Berger, Italy played “an ambivalent role” in this context.<sup>98</sup> Mussolini had enacted racial laws for Italy in 1938, thus “elevating antisemitism to state policy,” but the Italian occupation authorities in the Balkans did not implement the persecution of Jews expected by Germany.<sup>99</sup>

Integrated into the German extermination policy, the “murder of almost 85 percent of the Jewish population in the southern Balkans” nearly reached the dimensions of the German extermination policy in Eastern Europe.<sup>100</sup> In Yugoslavia, even the social and political integration of the Jewish population could not prevent the murder campaigns. For the Italian Jews, this began with the occupation by the Wehrmacht. 8,000 Italian Jews were murdered by the Germans. Here, however, 39,000 could be saved with support from the population or the Catholic Church.

In his review in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vaios Kalogrias emphasizes that the chronological arrangement enables readers to “draw comparisons and parallels.”<sup>101</sup> The volume thus offers “in-depth cross-border insights into the extermination process.” Kalogrias only remarked that South-Eastern Europe with Bulgaria and Romania also deserved a volume. In fact, volume 13 on Romania and Bulgaria including Slovakia was published the following year, worked out by Mariana Hausleitner, Souzana Hazan, and Barbara Hutzelmann. After the three countries concluded an alliance with the Third Reich in 1940-1941, they increasingly oriented themselves towards National Socialist Jewish policy. However, the “practice and dynamics” differed significantly.<sup>102</sup> With the German attack on the Soviet Union, all three governments increasingly worked towards the German policy of extermination. Slovakia delivered the Slovakian Jews to the Third Reich. By autumn 1942, 58,000 Jews were deported from Slovakia and murdered in the death camps. Bulgaria enacted anti-Jewish laws, protected Bulgarian Jews but extradited 11,300 Jews from Bulgarian-occupied territories. Romania, on the other hand, pursued its own persecution and expulsion policy on its own initiative, following on the country’s previous antisemitic policy. In June 1941 alone,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>101</sup> Vaios Kalogrias, *Historische Zeitschrift* 308, no. 2 (2019): 552-553.

<sup>102</sup> VEJ 13, 16.

Romanian perpetrators murdered 14,000 Romanian Jews; it is estimated that 280,000 to 380,000 Romanian Jews perished in total. However, political divergences began to emerge between Romania and the Third Reich in the autumn of 1942. The Romanian government distanced itself from the Nazi persecution policy and suspended the planned further deportation of Romanian Jews. Slovakia also stopped extraditing Jews to Germany in the autumn of 1942, until the Wehrmacht occupied the country in the summer of 1944 after a Slovakian uprising; it then continued the persecution policy and deported about 12,000 Jews to the extermination camps. The introduction underlines the pressure exerted by the Foreign Office and by the Reichssicherheitshauptamt on the governments of the three countries to force the persecution of the Jews. However, the sources also show that the governments in Bratislava, Sofia and Bucharest still had some room for *manoeuvre*.<sup>103</sup>

In his review in the Berlin *Tagesspiegel*, René Schlott praised this volume for casting “new light on the seemingly explored Holocaust history.”<sup>104</sup> He concluded by referring to a letter of a Bulgarian Jew translated from Hebrew from December 1940, who wrote about the sinking of a refugee ship in the Mediterranean. Simon Geissbühler focused his review on the *Deutsch-Rumänische Hefte* entirely on Romania. He described the volume as a “new standard work in German on the Holocaust in Romania” and praised it as an “extraordinary treasure trove.”<sup>105</sup> The volume is a “milestone in the historiography of the Holocaust on the periphery.” However, Geissbühler criticized the underexposure of Romania’s own initiative in the persecution of the Jews and the over-emphasis on the pressure that representatives of the Foreign Office and the Reich Security Main Office had exerted on Romania. This interpretation, he remarks critically, falls back “into a narrative with regard to Romania that is believed to have been overcome.”

Even before the source edition was completely finished, the last volume 16, compiled by Andrea Rudorff, was published in November 2018. It deals with Auschwitz, the place whose name has become the epitome of the persecution and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>104</sup> René Schlott, “Verräterische Sprache,” *Tagesspiegel* 23642, November 6, 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Simon Geissbühler, “Ein neues Standardwerk in deutscher Sprache zum Holocaust in Rumänien. Eine außergewöhnliche Fundgrube für Experten und Laien,” *Deutsch-Rumänische Hefte. Caete Germano-Române. Halbjahresschrift der Deutsch-Rumänischen Gesellschaft* 22, no. 1 (2019): 40.

murder of European Jews, as well as with the dissolution of the concentration camps and the death marches. The number of prisoners, half of whom perished by the end of 1941, was about 35,000 at that time, including 1300 Jews, and Auschwitz was not yet destined to become the central place for the murder of Jews. In 1941, a larger camp was built in nearby Birkenau. In the same year, the first experiments in killing prisoners with poison gas took place in Auschwitz. In January 1942, the decision was made to make Auschwitz the destination for the deportations of Jews from all parts of Europe. Deportation trains began arriving in the spring of 1942. In her introduction, Rudorff discusses the long controversial question of the dimensions of the murder of Jews in Auschwitz. Of the total of 1.1 million Jews deported to Auschwitz, 960,000 perished.

Due to the advance of the Red Army, the first camps were vacated in spring 1944, first in the occupied Baltic States, then in the Generalgouvernement. With the Soviet offensive in January 1945, the Auschwitz camp complex was also abandoned. Rudorff thus moves on to the second part of the volume: the death marches. The number of prisoners who perished on these can only be estimated at around 250,000, of whom at least 100,000 were probably Jewish prisoners. After the landing of the Western Allies in Normandy, the dissolution of the camps also began in the West. Rudorff meticulously describes this development for the individual concentration camps.

According to the review by Bernhard Schulz in the *Tagesspiegel*, Andrea Rudorff has done a “tremendous job in every respect.” When reading the book, the reader is confronted with “the immediacy of horror.” “Here,” says Schulz, “the innermost core of National Socialism is unlocked.” He quotes passages from the sources and concludes his review: “One would have to go on quoting endlessly. It is a terrible read from the terrible first half of the 20th century. [...] It forces one to reflect.”<sup>106</sup> According to Werner Renz in his review in the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, the selected documents on the “crime events” of the death marches “demonstrate in a terrifying way how strong and unbroken the German will to exterminate was right up to the last minute.”<sup>107</sup> Stephan Lehnstaedt, on the other hand, criticized in his review in the review organ *sehpunkte*, firstly, that the

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<sup>106</sup> Bernhard Schulz, “Im innersten Kreis der Hölle,” *Tagesspiegel* 23631, November, 15, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Werner Renz, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 67, no. 5 (2019): 490-492.

volume was rather “two separate and only loosely connected parts,” “of which Auschwitz takes up about two thirds, the death marches one third.”<sup>108</sup> The volume also runs counter to the country-based concept of the edition. For Lehnstaedt, the decision to present sources on Auschwitz and the death marches in a separate volume is “not very consistent,” since the camp could also have been dealt with in the volume on occupied Poland and the death marches in the corresponding country volumes.<sup>109</sup> According to Lehnstaedt, it is barely convincing to argue for this conception “with the meaning of Auschwitz, because this is essentially a retrospective attribution.” In addition, Lehnstaedt criticizes the omission of pictorial sources that have already been mentioned on several occasions, which would have been of decisive importance for Auschwitz in particular. Nevertheless, Lehnstaedt comes to a positive conclusion at the end: “Anyone who wants to deal with Auschwitz and the death marches must do so in future on the basis of this book.”

Again a year after the publication of volume 16, volume 6, worked out by the coordinator of the overall project, Susanne Heim, followed in October 2019. Related on the persecution of Jews in the German Reich as well as in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia from October 1941 to March 1943, it covers the “core phase of the murder of the Jews in the whole of German-dominated Europe.”<sup>110</sup> The volume contains 329 sources for these 18 months, in the first part for the German Empire, in the second for Bohemia and Moravia.

After failure of the plan to resettle the European Jews on the French colonial island of Madagascar, the leadership circles of the Nazi regime initially planned to resettle the Jewish population of the Reich “far to the east” after the expected victory following the attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>111</sup> Since the summer of 1941, the failure of the war strategy became apparent. In autumn, the deportations of Jews from the Reich to the East began. However, as Heim points out, Hitler did not yet agree

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<sup>108</sup> Stephan Lehnstaedt, review of *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945*, *sehpunkte* 20, no. 3 (2020), <http://www.sehpunkte.de/2020/03/34168.html>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>109</sup> At the closing conference, Dieter Pohl addressed this objection and emphasized that Auschwitz and the death marches were transnational phenomena that could therefore not be assigned to any one country.

<sup>110</sup> VEJ 6, 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

to systematic murder at that moment. The question of when the decision to murder was made is still disputed. According to Heim, the decision was probably made at the end of 1941. The first deportations from the Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia began in October 1941. Diaries and letters from this period reveal how worried the Jews were from the autumn of 1941 onwards about these reports. At first, the deportation routes led to the ghettos and concentration camps, and since May 1942 also to the death camps. The last major deportations took place in spring 1943. The sources also report on the February 1943 arrest of Berlin Jews who lived in mixed marriages and were obliged to do forced labor in armaments factories, a measure against which the non-Jewish spouses successfully protested. Finally, Heim has included documents on the situation of the Jews in hiding, whose number is estimated at 10,000 to 12,000.

In his review for the *tageszeitung* Stefan Reinecke emphasized that the sources collected by Heim “show a system of radicalizations that was extremely accelerated by the invasion of the Soviet Union.” The volume also reveals what the “word Auschwitz, which has become a metaphor for extermination, conceals”: The mass murder had already begun before the expansion of this camp and had been carried out by firing squads. In this way, “the whole spectrum of extermination” is brought before the eyes.<sup>112</sup> Bernhard Schulz, in turn, emphasizes in his review in the *Tagesspiegel* that the reprinting of the sources of perpetrators and victims in chronological order results in “a kaleidoscope of the reality of the murder of the Jews that summary accounts” are not able to offer. “The reader experiences the horror directly.”<sup>113</sup> Finally, Bernward Dörner, in his review for the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, praises above all “the moving self-testimonies of the victims and survivors.”<sup>114</sup>

In April 2020, the 11th volume, compiled by Lisa Hauff, was presented. It contains sources on the German Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia for the period from April 1943 to 1945. By the beginning of 1943, almost all Jews still living in the Reich had been deported and the Jewish communities dissolved. The sources in this volume show firstly the intensification of the persecution of Jews

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<sup>112</sup> Stefan Reinecke, *tageszeitung*, October 30, 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Bernhard Schulz, “Zuletzt die Berliner Juden,” *Tagesspiegel*, November 13, 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Bernward Dörner, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 68, no. 3 (2020): 268-269.

in view of the worsening war situation for the Third Reich,<sup>115</sup> secondly the situation of Jews from mixed marriages who were still protected as well as Jews in hiding, and thirdly the fate of Jewish forced laborers. Still other documents provide evidence, fourthly, of the German population's knowledge of the mass murder of the Jews. A fifth focus deals with the international reaction to the National Socialist crimes. The sources for the Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia are divided into two parts. The defeat of the Wehrmacht in Stalingrad in the winter of 1942/43 was a profound turning point. One of the consequences was that the German population became visibly demoralized, while the regime intensified internal terror and at the same time intensified agitation against Jews. The "antisemitic propaganda campaign of spring 1943 proved to be a failure, however. Instead of mobilizing the will to persevere, it rather fueled resignation and doubt among the German population."<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the desolate military situation, "did not change the undiminished will of the German leadership to continue the extermination of the European Jews."<sup>117</sup> In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, deportations to Theresienstadt, which were extensively documented, increased in 1943. After the failed assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944, the German authorities intensified anti-Jewish persecution measures. As Hauff notes Germany's looming defeat led to divergences within the Nazi leadership. While some representatives "continued to adhere to the unconditional intention of extermination," others intended "to use the Jews as 'bargaining chips'."<sup>118</sup>

Stefan Reinecke selected some sources for his favorable review in the *tageszeitung*, such as the article by a Nazi propagandist from Danzig from May 1944, which stated that in "the core areas of Jewish concentration [...] five million Jews alone were eliminated." "The crimes," says Reinecke, "have rarely been so clearly stated."<sup>119</sup>

In June 2020 Volume 10 compiled by Ingo Loose on the occupied Polish territories from August 1941 to 1945 had been published. According to Loose, the goal of

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<sup>115</sup> VEJ II, 13f.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 41f.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>119</sup> Stefan Reinecke, *tageszeitung*, November 17, 2020.



German policy was initially Germanization, the expulsion of the Polish population and the “de-Jewification” of the occupied territories.<sup>120</sup> Jews were concentrated in ghettos, had to do forced labor or were murdered. With regard to the enforcement of anti-Jewish policies, Loose documents the initiative of the Reich governors and Gauleiters. Many of the selected sources show the disastrous role they assigned to the Judenräte in the administration of the ghettos. Other documents provide insight into the reactions of non-Jewish Poles or trace how knowledge about the crimes spread. When selecting the sources, the Reichsgau Wartheland was given special attention because here “the connection between Germanization, the use of Jews for forced labor and finally the murder of the Jewish population is particularly obvious.”<sup>121</sup> This part of occupied Poland was home to both the Litzmannstadt<sup>122</sup> ghetto and the Kulmhof extermination camp. Other sources refer to the province of Upper Silesia. Documents on Oświęcim, Auschwitz, which was added to this province, are presented in a separate volume. Thirdly, Loose has compiled sources on the Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen with the concentration camp Stutthof. Fourthly, he documents the development in the administrative district of Zichenau, assigned to the province of East Prussia, where the small German minority participated in the persecution of the Jews, fifth, the district of Białystok, which was annexed to the Reich and where the last Jewish ghetto uprising took place in August 1943.<sup>123</sup>

In his review in the *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, Frank Grelka praises the large number of archives from which Loose has compiled the sources. The work will become a “standard work for future generations of Holocaust researchers.” Grelka only expresses concern that Loose neglected the perspective of the victims in favor of the institutions, which, he adds, is understandable due to the “mass of authorities involved” and can thus provide an insight into the “universality of the persecution of the Jews in these areas.”<sup>124</sup> Under the title “Into the Slaughterhouse. The details of horror, that is not nameless, but on the contrary consists of endless rows of names,” Arno Widmann published a double review of

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<sup>120</sup> VEJ 10, 22.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>122</sup> The Nazi name for the town of Łódź.

<sup>123</sup> VEJ 10, 55-64.

<sup>124</sup> Frank Grelka, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung/Journal of East Central European Studies* 71, no. 1 (2022): 143-145.

volumes 10 and 11 in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which he opened with the observation that no one will “simply read through these books,” “every reader will flee from reading them again and again: from the hopelessness of history [and] the meanness of people.”<sup>125</sup>

Bernhard Schulz chose similar words when he reviewed the last volume to be published, Volume 15 on Hungary during the German occupation in 1944-1945, which was published in May 2021 and worked out by Regina Fritz, in the *Tagesspiegel*: despite the “increase in historical knowledge,” it remains “a horrifying read, one that one would rather not do to oneself, but must.”<sup>126</sup> When the Wehrmacht invaded Hungary in March 1944 and installed a government close to the National Socialists, “the annihilation of the last large remaining Jewish community in Europe” began.<sup>127</sup> The selection of sources refers to the Hungarian state in its interwar borders and those territories that had been annexed to Hungary since 1938 or during the war. However, the anti-Jewish policy in Hungary did not begin in 1944, as Fritz points out in her introduction. It already began under the regent Miklós Horthy after the First World War. Deviating from the principle of the edition Fritz has included sources on the persecution of Jews before the German occupation. Hungary intensified its measures against Jews when it annexed further territories and joined the war against the Soviet Union. However, the regime maintained a certain independence insofar as it “largely saved the local Jews from deportation and murder” until the German occupation.<sup>128</sup> When the tide of the war turned, the Hungarian government sought to make a separate peace with the Western powers. But the Wehrmacht forestalled this by invading Hungary in March 1944, while leaving Horthy in office. In May, the deportations began. As the war was no longer winnable for the Axis powers, however, a few months later, Horthy stopped the deportations and concluded an armistice with the Soviet Union. German officials then appointed a government led by the Hungarian antisemitic Arrow Crossers, who shot thousands of Budapest Jews on the banks of the Danube. The deportation of Jews from Hungary at the end of the war, Fritz concluded, exceeded “in its speed the

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<sup>125</sup> Arno Widmann, “In das Schlachthaus,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, July 23, 2020.

<sup>126</sup> Bernhard Schulz, “Der furchtbare Alltag des Holocaust,” *Tagesspiegel*/24581, June 1, 2021.

<sup>127</sup> VEJ 15, 13.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

persecution measures in other European countries” and “cost the lives of more than half a million people.”<sup>129</sup>

In her review in the Austrian newspaper *Die Presse*, Cornelia Grobner first emphasized the many references that Fritz’s selected sources had to the neighboring country of Austria.<sup>130</sup> But above all, says Grobner, the volume makes visible “what is still swept under the carpet in Hungary today—even in official memorials such as the House of Terror in Budapest: The collaboration on the Hungarian side was massive.” Similarly, Beáta Márkus emphasized in the *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* as well as on *sehpunkte* that the volume offers “a profound insight into the darkest, and in part hushed-up, chapter of Hungary’s history,”<sup>131</sup> a fact that is all the more important “because in Hungarian historiography to this day there are tendencies to attribute the Holocaust exclusively to German influences and to exclude Hungarian participation.”

With the publication of this volume in May 2021, the complete work was available. While the individual volumes had been presented in public events at various memorials, the presentation of the complete work could not occur due to the Corona pandemic. A planned final conference also had to be postponed; it did not take place until May 2023 under the title “The Holocaust as a European Event” at the Berlin memorial Topography of Terror.<sup>132</sup> At least the work could be handed over to the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank Walter Steinmeier, in June 2021.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>130</sup> Cornelia Grobner, “‘Jetzt sind wir an der Reihe’,” *Die Presse*, June 19, 2021.

<sup>131</sup> Beáta Márkus, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung / Journal of East Central European Studies* 71, no. 4 (2022): 682-683; *sehpunkte* 23, no. 2 (2023), <http://www.sehpunkte.de/2023/02/37877.html>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>132</sup> *Der Holocaust als europäisches Ereignis. Die Edition “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945”*, <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-134134>, accessed June 20, 2024. See the conference report: Ulrich Wyrwa, “‘Der Holocaust als europäisches Ereignis’. Zur Abschlusskonferenz über das Editionsprojekt ‘Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945’,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 75, no. 7-8 (2024): 451-459.

<sup>133</sup> *Übergabe der 16-bändigen Edition “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945”*, <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter->

In the meantime, the audio project “Die Quellen sprechen” (The Sources Speak) had been presented on the basis of the edition, which was broadcast on Bayerischer Rundfunk from January 2013 and is now available on the internet.<sup>134</sup> A 14-CD audio book was also released in 2015.<sup>135</sup>

In 2014, the IfZ also began an English-language edition of the source edition, *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany [PMJ]*, in cooperation with Yad Vashem. The project, coordinated by Elizabeth Harvey, is not a simple translation of the German version into English. Rather, all sources and documents were newly translated from the original languages into English. Volumes 1 to 5 and 12 have now been published. The English edition should be complete by 2026.<sup>136</sup>

At the conclusion of the source edition, a series of reviews of the complete work have once again appeared. According to Christoph Jahr in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the edition “reflects the enormous gain in knowledge of Holocaust research in recent decades.”<sup>137</sup> The old controversies between intentionalists and structuralists are over, and the sources show “that ideological will to extermination and pragmatic agility were by no means mutually exclusive.” Antisemitism was more or less present in all countries of Europe, and yet, according to Jahr, the murder “could never have been implemented with such radicality without the constant push [...] by the German leadership.”<sup>138</sup> Bernhard Schulz addressed in his review the use of inverted commas. In the editorial preface to all volumes, it is stated that, as a rule, the customary terms of National Socialist Germany are not placed in inverted commas, but other terms of the time are. “The use of inverted

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[Steinmeier/Reden/2021/06/210616-Edition-Verfolgung-Ermordung-Juden.html?nn=9042544](https://www.steinmeier.com/Reden/2021/06/210616-Edition-Verfolgung-Ermordung-Juden.html?nn=9042544), accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>134</sup> *Die Quellen sprechen*, <https://www.br.de/mediathek/podcast/die-quellen-sprechen/alle/809>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>135</sup> *Die Quellen sprechen. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933 - 1945. Eine dokumentarische Höredition* (München: Der Hörverlag, 2015).

<sup>136</sup> See the homepage of the English edition: <https://pmj-documents.org/purchase/>, accessed June 20, 2024.

<sup>137</sup> Christoph Jahr, “Wer künftig fundiert über den Holocaust sprechen will, wird an dieser Publikation nicht vorbeikommen. Eine monumentale Quellenedition zur Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden liegt jetzt vor,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 5, 2021.

<sup>138</sup> Schulz, “Der furchtbare Alltag des Holocaust.”

commas, which cannot be clearly defined, cannot be systematically justified,” the volume preface state. “It forms a certainly contestable compromise between historiographical rigor and the need to at least occasionally set a distancing signal.”<sup>139</sup> But this, according to Schulz’s criticism, is not what the edition can achieve: “Setting a ‘distancing signal’: This is precisely what the Edition does not allow the reader to do. It presents the horror of deprivation of rights, dehumanization and murder unfiltered before the eyes. [...] Facing the truth is the great, the lasting achievement of this edition.”<sup>140</sup> In his article on the final conference, Bernhard Schulz once again made clear the quantitative dimensions of the 16 volumes: 13,465 pages offer about 5500 documents, which come from 230 archives and have been translated from 21 languages.<sup>141</sup>

### Concluding Considerations

Since the end of the 1980s, especially after the Historikerstreit in the middle of the decade, a new politics of remembrance had gained acceptance in West Germany, which promoted a critical reappraisal of the German past. After the political turnaround in 1989-1990, this form of commemoration determined the German political culture and the public approach to German history. In view of current controversies in the politics of remembrance and history, it remains to confront the crime against humanity perpetrated by National Socialist Germany. The great merit of this comprehensive source edition is that it has created a crucial building block for this after the end of the age of contemporary witnesses.

Finally, seven reflections on working with this work will be discussed.

1. The current historical-political controversies alluded to are characterized by multidirectional attacks on the German politics of remembrance. On the political field, the attacks come from right-wing nationalist actors. For example, the leading

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<sup>139</sup> VEJ 1, 12; VEJ 16, 11.

<sup>140</sup> Schulz, “Der furchtbare Alltag des Holocausts.”

<sup>141</sup> Bernhard Schulz, “Schriftliches Denkmal. 16 Bände zur Ermordung der Juden Europas,” *Tagesspiegel* 25249, May 16, 2023.

politician of the far-right authoritarian-nationalist party in Germany, AfD, Björn Höcke, had called for a “180° turn in remembrance policy.”<sup>142</sup> From the academic side, these attacks are led in particular by the New York-based political scientist A. Dirk Moses, son of an Australian Anglican clergyman, who called for the connection between the Holocaust and the colonialism of the German Reich to be brought into focus. In a sublimely religious tone, he accused the political culture in Germany of treating the Holocaust as a “sacred trauma,” and he raised the accusation that the politics of remembrance had taken on a “sacred redemptive function.”<sup>143</sup> This attack was flanked, but less noticed, by the German historian Wolfgang Reinhard, who, in similarly religious language in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, accused German intellectuals of asserting “an eternal guilt of Germany.”<sup>144</sup>

Referring to Moses, Martin Doerry objected in his evening lecture at the final conference that there may be a way from Namibia to Nuremberg, but there is no way from Namibia to Auschwitz.<sup>145</sup> The methodological problem, however, the confusion of comparison and equation and the associated short-circuit from colonialism to National Socialism was not further explored at the final conference. This was despite the fact that Susanne Heim had already noted in her interim

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<sup>142</sup> Speech by Björn Höcke on 17 January 2017 at the Ballhaus Watzke, Dresden, as part of the event series “Dresdner Gespräche,” organised by the youth association of the extreme rightwing party Alternative für Deutschland: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/parteien-die-hoecke-rede-von-dresden-in-wortlaut-auszuegen-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-170118-99-928143>, accessed June 20, 2024; See: Aleida Assmann, “Unbehagen von rechts. Die Wiederaufrüstung der Nation. Angriffe auf die deutsche Erinnerungskultur. Höcke und Gauland,” in *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention*, 3. edition, ed. Aleida Assmann (München: C. H. Beck, 2020), 219-224.

<sup>143</sup> A. Dirk Moses, “Der Katechismus der Deutschen,” <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/der-katechismus-der-deutschen/>, accessed June 20, 2024. On the discussion of the bizarre misjudgements of the historian A. Dirk Moses and the steep thesis on the “Catechism of the Germans”: Saul Friedländer, Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher, and Dan Diner, eds., *Ein Verbrechen ohne Namen. Anmerkungen zum neuen Streit über den Holocaust* (München: C. H. Beck, 2022). In the meantime, Moses has intensified his attacks on German memory politics in a small book: A. Dirk Moses, *Nach dem Genozid*, trans. David Frühauf (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2023).

<sup>144</sup> Wolfgang Reinhard, “Vergessen, verdrängen oder vergegenwärtigen?,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 10, 2022.

<sup>145</sup> An abridged version of the lecture: Martin Doerry, “Ein Tagebuch gegen das Vergessen. Die Erinnerung an den Holocaust verblasst,” *Die Zeit*, June 1, 2023.

report that the “classification of the Holocaust in the world history of the 20th century” was one of the still “open questions.”<sup>146</sup> In his review of the complete work published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Christoph Jahr noted that without this source edition it would no longer be possible to participate in a well-founded way in the debate on the relationship between colonialism and the Shoah.<sup>147</sup>

2. Furthermore, in current historical-political controversies, a bizarre conceptual confusion in the use of the term antisemitism can be observed, and debates on memory policy all too easily get bogged down in meta-discourses. As the concept of antisemitism is ubiquitously rolled out in public debate and occasionally even hypostasized as a basic anthropological constant, the term is emptied and threatens to affect debates on remembrance policy, too. For this reason, the editors have been very careful with the use of the term antisemitism. Consequently, the semantic linkage “anti-Jewish policy” is found much more frequently; in contrast, “antisemitic policy” is mentioned only rarely, in most volumes not at all.<sup>148</sup> In this sense, Frank Bajohr stated at the final conference that the murder of the Jews cannot be understood solely on the basis of social antisemitism, and according to Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, antisemitism is also not sufficient to explain the Holocaust, even if it would not have been possible without antisemitism. Taking up this question, the introduction to volume 14 states that the German policy of extermination “impressively demonstrates that it was hardly strategic, political or economic motives that led to the murder of the Jews, but above all radical antisemitism.” The deeds showed “the criminal energy with which German authorities had promoted mass murder.”<sup>149</sup>

3. Even though Ulrich Herbert lamented at the final conference, in addition to the small number of chairs designated at German universities for the history of

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<sup>146</sup> Heim, “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen? Eine Zwischenbilanz,” 336.

<sup>147</sup> Jahr, “Wer künftig fundiert über den Holocaust sprechen will.”

<sup>148</sup> In this context, it would certainly have been instructive to include in the edition the instruction of the Reich Ministry of Propaganda Goebbels of 1935 to “avoid the word Antisemitic or Antisemitism in the Jewish question” and to “use the word: anti-Jewish” instead: *NS-Presseanweisungen der Vorkriegszeit. Edition und Dokumentation 3/II: 1935*, eds. Hans Bohrmann and Gabriele Toepser-Ziegert (München: Saur, 1987), 522.

<sup>149</sup> VEJ 14, 15.

National Socialism, above all the declining interest of students of history in this subject. The interest of young people in Germany in dealing with the National Socialist past, however, is extremely high. In the representative study conducted by the Bielefeld Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence, in which young people aged between 16 and 25 were asked about their historical-political attitudes, it was found that over 82% of the young people surveyed perceived the period of National Socialism as an important epoch in German history, and 63% had even dealt intensively with this period themselves. 76% disagree with the demand to draw a line under this period and not to deal with it any further. They also value more knowledge about this time, they want to visit the historical places and ask about the present-day references.<sup>150</sup> It is precisely in this respect that the source edition has proved particularly productive and helpful, as demonstrated not least by the great commitment of the students in the public readings of selected sources from the 16 volumes.<sup>151</sup>

4. When Moshe Zimmermann reminded us in his interim review of the difficulty of the task of editing a “representative and at the same time comprehensive selection” of sources “which in the end is to be accepted as a canon of sources,”<sup>152</sup> he thus touched on a methodological problem that affects all comprehensive source editions in a similar way: the danger of canonization or the idea that the work represents a supposedly closed canon of sources that has been declared authoritative. If the present corpus is read in this sense as a completed work, further archival studies no longer seem necessary. This reading could be reinforced by the fact that the work was not presented as a collection of sources—comparable series appear under this label—but as a “document edition,” and series with this title are not seldom published with the claim of completeness.

A particular problem arises with regard to the English edition. Thus, English-speaking users are not likely to be prompted to consult supplementary foreign-

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<sup>150</sup> Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft, Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung, ed., *Multidimensionaler Erinnerungsmonitor 2023. Memo Jugendstudie*, o.O. 2023.

<sup>151</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 6, 2014. In Munich, for example, “Days of Sources” have since been held regularly with schoolchildren.

<sup>152</sup> Zimmermann, “Stationen kumulativer Radikalisierung.”



language sources, to consult continental European archives or to study the German National Socialist documents in the original.

The editor of the two volumes on the Soviet Union, Bert Hoppe, also pointed out the problem of language skills in his conversation with René Schlott.<sup>153</sup> On the question of what contribution the edition would make to Holocaust research, he explained that they provided documents “that were previously inaccessible to many Holocaust researchers because of the language barrier” and which were now available, translated from 13 languages. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum therefore saw the edition, as she emphasized at the final conference, as a statement for historical research and a plea for work in archives.

5. Less attention has been paid, both at the conference and in the reviews of the individual volumes, to the geographical dimensions and precise historical maps contained in the volumes from volume 4 onwards.<sup>154</sup> It is precisely these maps that provide an accurate spatial orientation of the topography of terror, as well as the German administrative structures and their consequences for the politics of killing. Maps like that of the Generalgouvernement in volume 9,<sup>155</sup> or, even more precisely, those of the German Reich and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia 1943-1945 in volume 11, also make it clear that the Polish town of Oświęcim, Auschwitz, was located in the areas of Poland annexed by the German Reich. The province had been added to Upper Silesia, but the very name Auschwitz, as Detlev Claussen put it, “refers to the concrete historical-geographical location of the events. Auschwitz stands *pars pro toto* for the universe of concentration and extermination camps [...]. As a German name for a place in Poland, Auschwitz refers to the German authorship of the criminal act,

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<sup>153</sup> Schlott, “Ein Schriftdenkmal für zwei Millionen Tote.”

<sup>154</sup> It should be noted that individual maps printed in the bound edition are not included in the paperback edition or the e-book. Furthermore, the maps are found in different places in the volumes, sometimes on the front or back endpaper, sometimes within the introductions and sometimes in the source section; in one case a map is also included in the bound edition as a loose sheet. It should also be noted that the maps are not listed in the tables of contents.

<sup>155</sup> Not included in the paperback edition.

which cannot be understood without the National Socialist grip on world power. The German naming of a Polish place symbolizes this grip.”<sup>156</sup>

6. As the title and the originating concepts for the edition project already show, the fundamental aim was to focus on the European dimensions of the murder of the Jews of the entire continent.<sup>157</sup> In this sense, Susanne Heim emphasized in her interim review that the edition offers the possibility of comparative insights into the persecution of Jews in different European countries.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, Moshe Zimmermann had pointed out on the same occasion that the murder of the German Jews had taken place against “the background of the Europeanisation of persecution.”<sup>159</sup> For Christoph Jahr, in turn, according to his review of the complete work, the achievement of the editing lies above all in having made it clear that “the Holocaust can only be understood as a pan-European [...] event.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, the final conference was held under the title “The Holocaust as a European Event,” and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum emphasized the European dimensions of antisemitism at the beginning. For Ingo Loose, the edition opens up a transnational perspective on the Holocaust. What is needed is a new European perspective. Similarly, Susanne Heim had already warned in her article that the “overall events of the persecution of the Jews” would be lost from view due to the abundance of individual studies. There is a danger of a “Verinselung des Wissens,” a restriction of the knowledge to single islands, which makes comparative observations difficult.<sup>161</sup> At the final conference, Dieter Pohl lamented in this sense the microscopization of current Holocaust research. What is needed are new, transnational questions. The edition could inspire this. According to Pohl, it offers in this way a piece of European social history. Bernhard Schulz pointed out that 11 of the 16 volumes refer to European countries that were dominated by the

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<sup>156</sup> Detlev Claussen, “Die Banalisierung des Bösen. Über Auschwitz, Alltagsreligion und Gesellschaftstheorie,” in *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaft. Zur Diskussion um Auschwitz, Kulturindustrie und Gewalt*, ed. Michael Werz (Frankfurt/M.: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1995), 13-28; 16-17.

<sup>157</sup> Pohl, “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung.”

<sup>158</sup> Heim, “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen?”, 353.

<sup>159</sup> Zimmermann, “Stationen kumulativer Radikalisierung.”

<sup>160</sup> Jahr, “Wer künftig fundiert über den Holocaust sprechen will.”

<sup>161</sup> Heim, “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen?”, 321.

Nazi regime. Thus, according to Schulz, “one of the most delicate problems of European remembrance culture comes into view.”<sup>162</sup> Therefore, Auschwitz as a European place of remembrance in the sense of Pierre Nora is also included in the three-volume handbook of *European lieux de mémoire* edited by Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchhardt, Georg Kreis and Wolfgang Schmale.<sup>163</sup> The three-volume work on this subject edited by Étienne François and Thomas Serrier contains a contribution to the memory of mainly Eastern European Jewry and the destroyed world of the shtetl under the heading “The Disappeared,”<sup>164</sup> and, in addition to the general lemmas deportations or genocides, also the entry “National Socialism,” which is presented as a “European affair.”<sup>165</sup>

7. The greatest benefit of the edition, however, is probably to counteract the danger of historical research being suppressed by debates on memory and history policy. In his review of the first volume, Stefan Reinecke had lamented the “rampant meta-discourse of remembrance politics” about the Holocaust and therefore praised the edition project as an “attempt by historical scholarship” to “counter this trend with something: namely, the unabridged source.”<sup>166</sup> As Susanne Heim put it in her interview with *Die Zeit*, the edition could prevent academia from “only conducting meta-discourses about the Nazi era, the more distant it becomes.”<sup>167</sup> In his interview with the *tageszeitung*, Ulrich Herbert also expressed skepticism about the public discourse on the Holocaust offering “an excess of media pretense and little concern with the matter itself.”<sup>168</sup> Similarly, René Schlott wrote that with “the edition, the veto power of the sources comes into its own in a completely new way, especially in the often politicized, sometimes instrumentalized discourses surrounding the Shoah.” At the final conference,

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<sup>162</sup> Schulz, “Der furchtbare Alltag des Holocaust.”

<sup>163</sup> Wolfgang Benz, “Auschwitz,” in *Europäische Erinnerungsorte*, eds. Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchhardt, Georg Kreis, Wolfgang Schmale, vol. 2 (München: Oldenbourg, 2012), 465-478.

<sup>164</sup> Mike Plitt and Thomas Serrier, “Die Verschwundenen,” in *Europa. Die Gegenwart unserer Geschichte*, eds. Étienne François and Thomas Serrier, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Theiss, 2019), 144-147.

<sup>165</sup> Johann Chapoutot, “Der Nationalsozialismus – eine europäische Angelegenheit,” in *Europa*, eds. François and Serrier, 72-80.

<sup>166</sup> Stefan Reinecke, “Frau Elly schreibt an die SS,” *tageszeitung*, January 26, 2008.

<sup>167</sup> “Bald sprechen nur noch die Quellen. Fragen an die Historikerin Susanne Heim,” *Die Zeit*, April 22, 2021.

<sup>168</sup> Stefan Reinecke, “Die Quellenlage ist besser geworden,” *tageszeitung*, June 15, 2021.

*Ulrich Wyrwa*

Andreas Wirsching had addressed this problem and explained that in the current academic discourse, empirical research on the Holocaust is overshadowed by the history of remembrance. As Stefanie Schüler-Springorum put it, there is a lot of opinion and little knowledge in the controversies about memory policy.

A way out of the current aberrations in the debates about German politics of remembrance and the underlying lack of historical judgement can thus only lie in the appeal “back to the sources.” Only by going back to the sources—and of which the 16 volumes of the edition offer only a sample—can the particular horrors of this period be grasped, and only through historical enlightenment and a precise knowledge of the documents, through the appeal ‘back to the sources’, can the current confusions of public debates be overcome.

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