ROUTLEDGE

CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN NAZI GERMANY

THE NEW HISTORIES

Edited by
JANE CAPLAN and NIKOLAUS WACHSMANN

Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany

The notorious concentration camp system was a central pillar of the Third Reich, supporting the Nazi war against political, racial and social outsiders whilst also intimidating the population at large. The camps were established during the first months of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933, and by the end of the Second World War several million men, women and children of many nationalities had been incarcerated in them. Some two million lost their lives.

This volume offers the first overview of the recent scholarship that has changed the way the camps are studied over the last two decades. Written by an international team of experts, the book covers such topics as: social life, work and personnel in the camps; the public face of the camps; issues of gender and commemoration; and the relationship between concentration camps and the 'Final Solution'. The book provides a detailed introduction to the current historiography of the camps, highlighting the key conclusions that have been made, commenting on continuing areas of debate, and suggesting possible directions for future research.

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Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany

The New Histories

Edited by Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann

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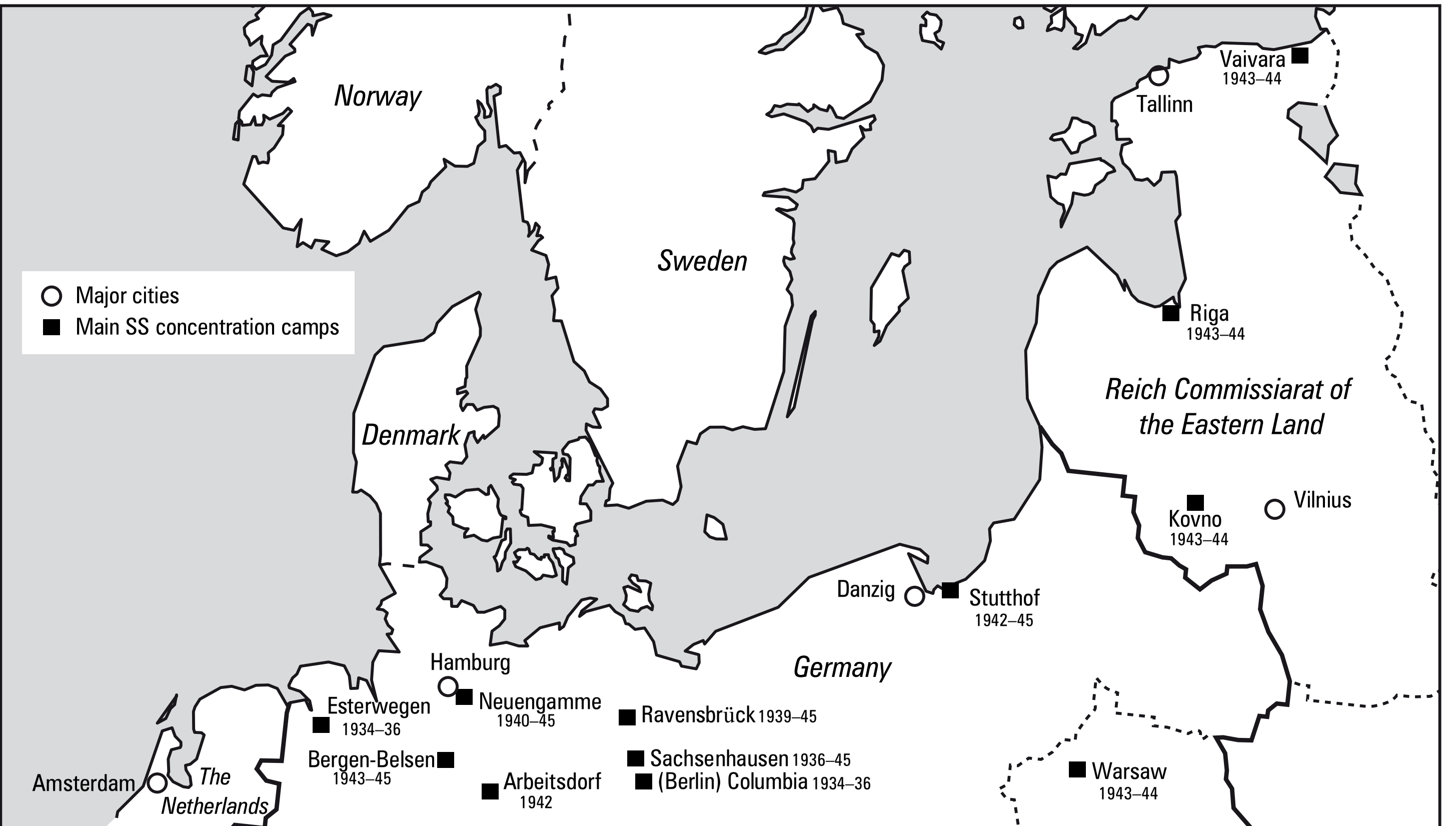
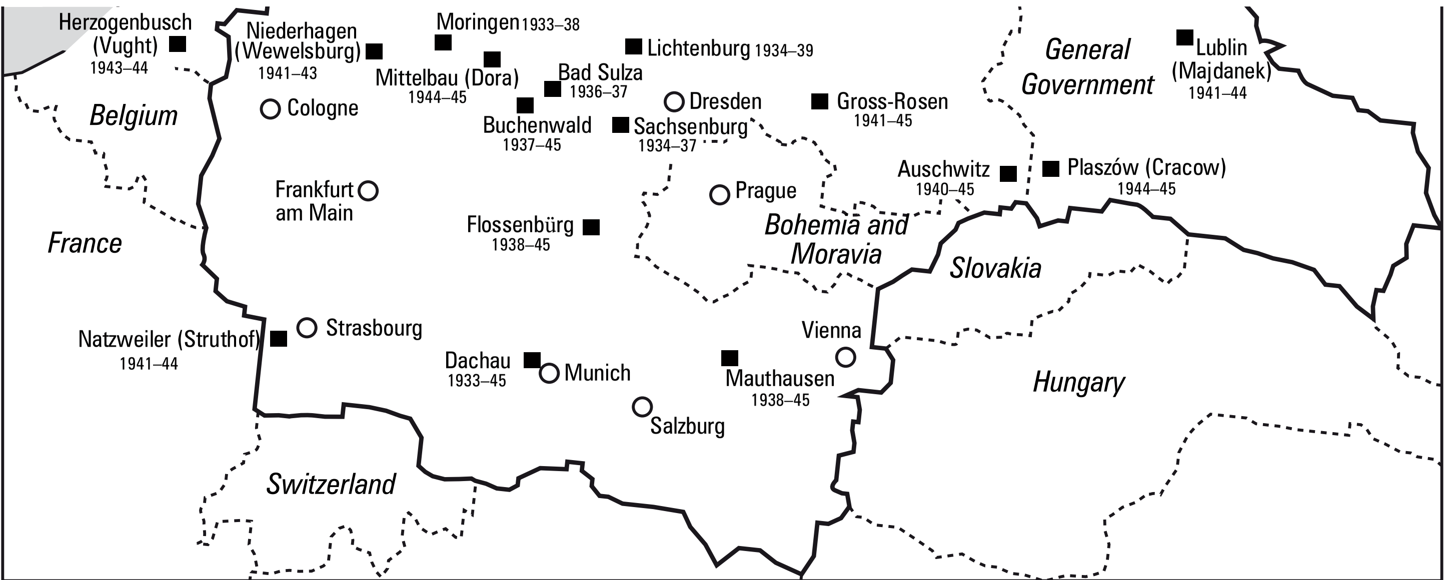
Abbreviations

APMAB	Archive of the State Museum (Archwium Państwowego Muzeum) Auschwitz-Birkenau
BAB	Federal Archive (Bundesarchiv) Berlin
DAW	German Armaments Works (Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke GmbH)
DESt	German Earth and Stone Works (Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH)
DP	Displaced Person
GBA	General Plenipotentiary for Labour Deployment (Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik)
Gestapo	Secret State Police (Geheime Staatspolizei)
HSSPF	Higher SS and Police Leader (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer)
IfZ	Institute für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History), Munich
IKL	Inspection of the Concentration Camps (Inspektion der Konzentrationslager)
IMT	International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg)
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC
ND	Nuremberg Document
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (USSR)
NSB	National-Socialist Movement of the Netherlands
POW	Prisoner of War
RM	Reichsmark
RSHA	Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)
SA	Storm Troop (Sturmabteilung)
SD	Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst)
SED	(East) German Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SS	Protection Squad (Schutzstaffel)
StN	State Archive (Staatsarchiv) Nürnberg
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UN	United Nations
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC
WVHA	(SS) Business and Administration Main Office (Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt)
VVN	Association of the Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes)
YVA	Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem


Major cities
Main SS concentration camps
Norway
Sweden
Denmark
Germany
The Netherlands
Reich Commissiarat of the Eastern Land
Vaivara 1943–44
Tallinn
Riga 1943–44
Kovno 1943–44
Vilnius
Danzig
Stutthof 1942–45
Warsaw 1943–44
Hamburg
Neuengamme 1940–45
Esterwegen 1934–36
Bergen-Belsen 1943–45
Arbeitsdorf 1942
Ravensbrück 1939–45
Sachsenhausen 1936–45
(Berlin) Columbia 1934–36
Amsterdam



Map of the SS main concentration camps in Nazi Germany

This map shows the main camps under the Inspection of Concentration Camps (1934–42) and the SS Business and Administration Main Office (1942–45). The borders on the map depict Europe c.1942. The map also indicates the period during which each of the main camps was operational (some had already operated earlier as satellite or early camps). Dachau was already run by the SS in 1933. Moringen has been included as the first national camp for women, even though it did not come directly under the Inspection.

Introduction

Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann

This collection of essays offers the first overview in English of recent scholarly research – the 'new histories' – on the Nazi concentration camps. Written by experts in the field from Germany, England, Israel and the USA, it provides a guide to the current state of knowledge and historiography on the subject for an English-speaking readership. Although each contributor is a specialist in his or her topic, the volume does not aim to present detailed archival research into selective aspects of camp history; nor is it a general or comprehensive survey of the camps as a whole. The collection is, rather, guided by the editors' belief that the remarkable scope and findings of the new histories now deserve to be made accessible to readers who are not specialists in the field. Each essay therefore approaches the Nazi camps from one of the key perspectives prominent in recent research, analysing and evaluating the scholarship on the topic and including extensive references to the secondary literature. The essays integrate a critical analysis of these historiographies, highlighting some of their main conclusions, commenting on continuing areas of debate and suggesting possible directions for future research.

The Third Reich was dominated by camps. Camps were everywhere, in cities and the countryside, inside Germany and in newly-conquered territory. The Nazi leadership was irresistibly drawn to the camp as an instrument of discipline and control – and not just for opponents of the regime. There were numerous camps for 'national comrades' (Volksgenossen), i.e. the majority of German men and women deemed worthy of membership in the mythical 'national community' (Volksgemeinschaft) that was the core of the Nazi vision of a rejuvenated Germany. Most prominent among these 'respectable' camps were those of the labour service, the Hitler Youth and the military, but there were many others run by party, state and private organizations; even aspiring lawyers and civil servants had their own camps. These camps may have had different remits, but they were all supposed to foster the positive ideals of the Nazi state, elevating the communal order over individualism and inculcating German citizens with the new ideology. The negative counterparts to these camps were, of course, the thousands of camps where real or imaged foes of the Nazi state were held in segregation from the national community. Here too, there were many types of camps – ranging

from camps for political prisoners and convicts to those for deviant youths and refractory workers. They differed greatly in size, conditions and function, but were united by a common aim to terrorize their inmates and intimidate the wider population.[1] The extent of these camps is almost unfathomable: in the German state of Hessen alone, at least 606 camps have been counted; in the territory of occupied Poland, no fewer than 5,877.[2]

The most infamous site of Nazi terror was the concentration camp. Already in 1933, during the Nazi 'seizure of power', camps like Dachau and Oranienburg gained notoriety, not just in Germany but also abroad. Soon, a permanent system of concentration camps had been established under SS leader Heinrich Himmler – Hitler's trusted lieutenant – and his Inspection of the Concentration Camps (IKL). It was the camps under this supervision that were the 'concentration camps' in the strict sense of the term (as opposed to later 'death camps' such as Treblinka). As Himmler insisted in 1939: 'Concentration camps can only be set up with my authority.'[3] The concentration camp system became a central pillar of the Third Reich, supporting the Nazi war against political, racial and social outsiders. Inmate numbers fluctuated dramatically, as did the character and number of camps, which spread over parts of Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War. By the end of the war, several million men, women and children of many nationalities had been incarcerated in the camps. Some two million lost their lives in them.[4]

The SS concentration camps have long become symbols of the horrors of Nazi rule and modern violence more generally, the most extreme manifestation of terror in the 'Age of Extremes' (Eric Hobsbawm). Names like Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and above all Auschwitz – the largest camp of all, where around 1 million Jews were murdered – have become synonymous with institutionalized inhumanity and boundless brutality. The scale of the crimes was such that many leading minds have reflected on them. For the philosopher Hannah Arendt, for example, the camp was the 'true central institution' of a politics of 'total domination'.[5] Psychologists and sociologists, too, have written about the horrors of the camps – about violence, prisoner responses and SS perpetrators – adding to the vast number of articles and books by survivors and historians.[6] The importance of the concentration camps is incontestable.

History and historiography

First reports about the Nazi concentration camps were written as soon as they were established. Already in the early years of Nazi rule, accounts of abuse were published in exile by prisoners who had been released or escaped.[7] Relatives of murdered inmates also spoke out – in relative safety from abroad – about the crimes in the camps.[8] Further material was published by exiled Social Democrats and Communists, who collected eyewitness testimony to build up a comprehensive picture of brutality inside the camps.[9] Several of these accounts found an echo in the foreign press. At times, this became so loud that the Nazi authorities felt compelled to issue public denials, dismissing the reports as 'lies and horror

stories'.[10] After the outbreak of the Second World War, the number of foreign publications inevitably declined, as did Nazi concern about foreign opinion. Still, eyewitness reports continued to emerge outside German-controlled territory, including the first systematic analyses of camp life.[11] Meanwhile, prisoners inside the camps risked their lives to keep secret diaries, determined to record what they saw for the future; others buried notes for later generations, or smuggled messages outside. Escaped prisoners also spread the truth about the camps: it was through daring escapes that the Western Allies learned details about the mass gassing of Jews at Auschwitz.[12]

After the end of the Second World War, the history of the Nazi concentration camps continued to be written, for many years, by survivors. With Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich in ruins and the remaining camps liberated, survivors lost no time to put their experience to paper. There was no collective silence or repression of memory in 1945. Quite the opposite: many survivors felt compelled to tell their story. Some inmates were still inside the liberated camps when they started to write, sometimes encouraged by Allied officers collecting material about Nazi crimes.[13] Former inmates also played a decisive role in immediate post-war trials of hundreds of SS leaders and guards. Prisoner testimonies were indispensable as most crimes had left no clear paper trail, and many official documents had been destroyed by the perpetrators towards the end of the war.

But survivors were driven by more than the desire to bring the guilty to justice. They also wanted bear witness to the atrocities and commemorate the 'drowned' (Primo Levi) who had perished without trace.[14] The immediate post-war years saw a wave of prisoner memoirs, in many different languages. Some have since become world-famous – including Primo Levi's own *If This is a Man*, first published in 1947 and rediscovered in the late 1950s and 1960s[15] – yet most others were soon forgotten and left to gather dust in libraries and attics for many years. In all, thousands of survivors recorded their memories of Nazi terror in the first years after the war. Many more have since followed suit, with the wave of recollections – written and oral – continuing until the present day and often adding important new perspectives on the camps.

Most survivor accounts tell individual stories of suffering and survival. But some also moved beyond the personal to capture something of the wider historical meaning of the camps. Fictional representations of the camps, for example, were already being published by prisoners in the immediate aftermath of the war.[16] At the same time, other survivors undertook a general analysis of the concentration camp system, describing its development, internal structure, living conditions, perpetrators and prisoner groups. Some of these studies left a profound imprint on public memory. Eugen Kogon's book on the camp system, drawing on testimonies by fellow survivors and some original documents, saw some 135,000 copies printed in Germany by 1947, just one year after its publication, and it is still widely cited today.[17] Former prisoners – trained historians among them – have also turned into faithful chroniclers of the camps they survived, writing important monographs and playing an influential role in research: Wacław Długoborski, for example, who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz between 1943 and 1945,

later became curator of research at the State Museum in Auschwitz-Birkenau.[18] Another Auschwitz survivor, Stanisław Kłodziński, helped to found the *Auschwitz Journal* (*Przegląd Lekarski-Oświęcim*) in 1961, the first regular publication on a former SS camp.

The historical profession as a whole was slow to catch up. For many years, concentration camps – like the Holocaust – were not prominent on the agenda of academic historians. Influential studies were not published until the 1960s and 1970s, and even then they remained rare. The first general history, now widely forgotten, was published in 1960 by the East German historian Heinz Kühnrich, drawing largely on previously published material rather than archival sources.[19] The book was typical of orthodox Communist scholarship in the GDR, with its depiction of Hitler as a puppet of monopoly capitalism. And yet, with all its faults, Kühnrich still provided a first rough sketch of the camps' overall development and conditions. Just how rough a sketch it was become obvious only a few years later, in 1965, when the West German historian Martin Broszat published an organizational history of the camp system, which served as the gold standard of camp studies for several decades. Drafted as an expert report for the first Frankfurt Auschwitz trial (1963–1965), the study was based on thorough archival research and clearly demonstrated the changing functions of the camp system (Broszat himself saw his study as part of a wider project, but he soon had to abandon plans to edit a comprehensive history of all SS concentration camps, due to lack of resources).[20] Several years later, in 1978, another milestone study appeared, on prisoners' lives in the camps, written by a young West German historian, Falk Pingel, who is one of the contributors to this volume. A tour de force of scholarship, based on a wealth of prisoner accounts, official SS documents and statistics, Pingel's study went beyond the organization of the camp system to explore, in more detail than anyone before him, life and death inside the camps, focusing in particular on the experiences of political prisoners.[21] But ambitious empirical studies like those of Broszat and Pingel remained exceptions; few German historians showed any serious interest in the history of the Nazi concentration camps; and little of what existed was translated into English.

Outside Germany, too, academic research was only slowly edging forward in the 1960s and 1970s. Apart from Poland, the biggest strides were made in France, where several major studies appeared. The first was published in 1967 by Joseph Billig, a researcher at the Centre de la documentation juive contemporaine. Drawing on previously published material, Billig placed the development of the camp system into the wider context of Nazi ideology and Himmler's rise. Billig later followed this up with a more original study of the SS economy and camp labour.[22] Meanwhile, in 1968, another French historian, Olga Wormser-Migot, completed a weighty compendium to the concentration camps. The strength of her book was not so much its overall analysis as the wealth of empirical detail packed into its 650 pages. An expert on Nazi terror who had worked on Alan Resnais' seminal film *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955), Wormser-Migot consulted a range of archives in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the Soviet Union, and was one of the first historians to make extensive use of the archives of the Tracing

Service of the Red Cross (recently reopened to scholars).[23] However, her book never received wide interest outside France and, like the studies of Billig, it has largely been forgotten, even by many historians of the camps.

By the end of the 1970s, then, only a few serious scholarly books on the concentration camps had appeared, though there was a common misconception – based, perhaps, on the large number of published memoirs – that the history of the camps had already been explored in great depth: 'It might now seem impossible to say anything new about the concentration camps', Alan Milward wrote back in 1976.[24] In fact, academic research was still its infancy, more than 30 years after the liberation of the camps. This only started to change from the 1980s onwards.

Since the mid-1980s, the Nazi concentration camps have become the subject of sustained research. The number of publications has increased exponentially, with scholars approaching the camps from many new directions – using a variety of sources, from major oral history projects to previously inaccessible files in the former Soviet bloc – to offer fresh perspectives on established topics and to open up new lines of inquiry. Important initiatives came from local historians, history workshops and museums within Germany. Meanwhile, the growing number of memorial sites at former camps turned into important hubs for scholarship, with regular publications, workshops and ever-expanding archives. Research at universities finally took off, too. Several important dissertations on the camps were published in the 1980s, based on painstaking research, and since then, the number of scholarly works has grown at great speed. The history of the Nazi camps has developed into a major and distinct field in the historiography of the Third Reich.[25]

Almost all recent scholarship has focused on specific aspects of the Nazi concentration camps, such as particular groups of inmates and perpetrators, or the development of individual camps and satellite camps. But some authors have tackled more general themes, such as forced labour and extermination policy, or the emergence and consolidation of the Nazi concentration camp system before the Second World War. Moreover, there are now several general histories of the Nazi camps. From a sociological perspective, Wolfgang Sofsky has provided an analysis of the camps as a system of 'absolute power', which offers original insights into the formation and operation of the camp society.[26] Sofsky's typological study has had a considerable impact on recent historical research, as several references to his work in the essays below attest. Karin Orth, one of the most influential of a new generation of German historians of the camps and another contributor to the present volume, has produced a remarkably clear and coherent organizational history. This has now replaced the earlier study by Martin Broszat as the standard work, but unlike Broszat's and Sofsky's work it has not been translated into English.[27] Meanwhile, the historians Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel have overseen the publication of the first comprehensive survey of the individual concentration camps, with a projected nine volumes, featuring articles on all camps and satellite camps; only now, after decades of extensive research, has it become possible to bring such an ambitious project to a successful

conclusion.[28] Finally, the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has recently published the first volume in its projected vast seven-volume encyclopedia of Nazi camps and ghettos, covering the concentration camps and satellite camps.[29]

Approaches

No longer is the Nazi concentration camp unknown territory. On the contrary: more books have been published on the Nazi camps than any other site of detention and terror in history; the memoirs and academic studies written over the last two decades alone would fill an entire library. So why add yet another volume? For a start, the new histories of the Nazi camps have been far more encyclopaedic than analytic, far more empirical than critical. As a result, scholarship has become highly fragmented: for all the mass of details, it has become increasingly difficult to discern broader themes, developments and debates. Moreover, the majority of the new histories have been written by German-speaking historians: the recent boom of research has centred on Germany and Austria (there is also much new work coming out of Poland), with major conferences, research projects, databases, publication series and doctoral dissertations. Almost none of this research has been translated into English, not even recent standard works. So the implications of the new research remain widely unknown to English readers, who are likely to be much more familiar with the history of the Holocaust than the longer history of the concentration camps as such. As a result, ignorance, myths and misunderstandings about the Nazi concentration camps continue to persist, even among some experts in the field.

The present volume is intended to redress the lack of English-language publications on the history of the camps and to provide an authoritative account of the new research. The topics of the individual essays reflect questions that have been most conspicuous in current research – some of them, indeed, hardly even asked until very recently. How did the camps change between 1933 and 1945 (Wachsmann)? By whom and how were they administered and guarded, and with what purposes (Orth)? What governed the daily lives of different groups of inmates; is it possible to speak of camp 'society', or is that a misnomer (Pingel)? To what extent is recent work on the history of women and gender relevant to the history of the camps (Caplan)? What did 'ordinary Germans' know about the camps scattered across their own territory and parts of occupied Europe (Fings)? In a system designed ostensibly to re-educate recalcitrants by hard labour, what was the actual function of work in the camps (Wagner)? As racial exclusion became the dominant principle of Nazi terror, what was the relationship between economic and ideological rationales, between exploitation and extermination, concentration camps and the Holocaust (Pohl)? How are we to understand the last phase of the camps, when mass evacuations launched tens of thousands of men and women onto the infamous death marches (Blatman)? And what was the fate of these thousands of sites that scarred the face of Europe in 1945: to what extent has their history been forgotten or commemorated in the decades since the

end of the war (Marcuse)? In the course of answering these questions, the essays also address a number of common issues that are prominent in the historiography of the camps. Three will be highlighted here: the relationship between typological studies of 'the camp' and empirical histories of the Nazi concentration camps; the periodization of this history; and new subjects of research and interpretive approaches.

The differences between typologies and empirical histories of the concentration camp are of considerable significance for our understanding of the phenomenon, as the essays by Nikolaus Wachsmann, Falk Pingel, Jane Caplan and Karola Fings demonstrate in particular. The contrast between them is a familiar landmark in the terrain of intellectual practice. Structural and typological approaches generate categories, models and ideal types that are intended to isolate the essential features of the object being studied, often for the purposes of comparison or as part of building or demonstrating a theory. Typologies tend to the synchronic: they compress points in time in the interests of identifying regularities and building the structure or model. History (in terms of the contrast being drawn here) is diachronic, concerned with particularities and with the messier process of change over time. At the same time, historians are well aware of the conceptual and methodological premises of social theory; structural explanations of the kind discussed in the essays by Pingel or Wagner, for example, have played a prominent role in the historiography of National Socialism, as we shall see further below.

Historians of the concentration camps can draw on a number of valuable typological studies, for example, Terrence des Pres' account of 'the survivor' and more recently the influential study by Wolfgang Sofsky, mentioned above, which is directly invoked in several of the essays.[30] However, the principal objective and achievement of the new histories has been the detailed empirical reconstruction of particular camp histories or aspects of camp organization and life, with close attention to differences among the camps and to changes over time. As Falk Pingel observes in his essay on inmates' lives, structural and institutional histories of the camps privilege their organizational and collective dimensions, to the detriment of reconstructing and explaining the variety and complexities of inmates' experiences and understanding their possible responses and chances of survival. Similarly, Karola Fings's essay on the public face of the camps, based on research into the interactions between camps and their neighbouring communities, contests Sofsky's stark model of the concentration camp as a 'closed universe', an isolated site of 'absolute power'. Fings shows how Sofsky's model ignores the economic and social networks that in practice embedded camps in their local milieux. The camps were 'community enterprises' that were far from invisible or unknown to the surrounding population, who often *created* a boundary between the camp and themselves by an active, intentional process of 'looking away'. In a different way, Caplan's essay notes the inadequacy of typological approaches that do not consider gender as a variable, and shows how this concept is needed for a full understanding of the camps' operations and effects.

Reconstructing the history of the camps at this level of empirical detail does not mean, however, that the system of the camps as a whole has been ignored:

far from it, since it is through acknowledging the very vastness and complexity of this system that the need for close empirical studies emerges. But plurality and dynamism characterize the contemporary image of the Nazi camp system to a far greater extent than in the past, when a few examples or periods stood in for the whole and effaced the hydra-headed character of this 'system'.

Periodization

This leads on to a second and closely related issue: the identification of the most salient changes in the camp system and individual camps over time. Periodization is one of the historian's most useful analytic and critical tools for intervening in the meaningless flow of time and imposing interpretative and explanatory clarity. How are we to identify and describe the significant moments of transition in the history of the camps, between their foundation within weeks of the Nazis' coming to power in January 1933 and their disappearance as the regime crumbled in 1945? Although the short life of the Nazi regime might suggest that periodization is of marginal value for understanding the camps, brevity was no guarantee of stability. On the contrary, the camps, like the regime itself, went through processes of rapid and radical change which need to be identified in order to understand how the first provisional camps established in 1933 mutated into the concentration camp universe of 1945.

The changing character of the camps is a theme that suffuses all the essays in this volume. Nikolaus Wachsmann's general overview of the history of the camps from 1933 to 1945, which is intended to provide a context for the volume as a whole, is organized according to the six different phases he identifies. Each of these phases – three before 1939 and three during the war – was by definition very short, but each had momentous effects on the nature of the camps and inmates' lives. Their sequence corresponded to major shifts in the character and aims of the Nazi regime, to changing constellations of power (notably Himmler's capture of the police and security apparatus) and to the different size, functions and character of the camp complex in peace and war. Explicitly or implicitly, the other essays adopt comparable periodizations, though they are not always identical to Wachsmann's since they are inflected by the specific aspect of the camps' history under consideration (and Marcuse's essay on the aftermath of the camps applies a chronology specific to the post-1945 period). Also, the periodization of the system as a whole does not, of course, necessarily correspond exactly to the phases in the history of any individual camp, which may have been of the utmost significance for the fate of its inmates; these can be identified only by close study of the camp in question.

In Karin Orth's essay on camp personnel, we see the impact of changes in the conditions and functions of the camps on both individuals and structures. SS guards were inducted into ever higher levels of brutality and murder by specific moments in the history of the camps, including the first murders of Jews in Dachau in April 1933 – 'a watershed of terror and group identity formation' – when SS men translated their antisemitic ideology into murderous practice, and

the influx of tens of thousands of Jews in autumn 1938, which further ratcheted up the SS's norms of murderous violence. The socialization of SS men was reinforced by successive steps after 1939, as the war against Germany's 'enemies' became systemic and built up to full-scale genocide. After 1942, the camps were increasingly led by SS commandants already saturated in the culture of violence within the camps or at the Russian front, but incapable of administering the new regime of inmate labour exploitation. This set the scene for the 'catastrophic decline in living standards and … soaring mortality rate' of the later wartime camps.

The economic exploitation of inmate labour in the camps and its relationship with mass murder form the focus of Jens-Christian Wagner's essay. In this perspective, the principal phases of the camps' history were marked by the changing functions of work. In the economically depressed conditions of 1933, forced labour by male prisoners was treated as a penal and terroristic 'educative' instrument, and competition with the fragile external economy was restrained. From 1938, however, the growing demand for workers – as rearmament boosted the economy – resulted in an increasing mobilization of camp labour. New camps for male prisoners like Mauthausen and Flossenbürg were established near stone quarries to allow SS enterprises to take advantage of the regime's new construction projects, while the new women's camp of Ravensbrück housed leather and textile production facilities that were intended to exploit female labour. Nevertheless, the camps remained places of murderous terror. Death rates in the quarries were atrociously high, for example, and Wagner argues that it was not until 1943 that the increasing demands of the war for manpower forced a transition towards the deployment of male and female camp labour into the war economy. The main camps gradually became more like transit stations, processing constant arrivals of new labour en route to the expanding network of satellite camps, and receiving return shipments of sick and exhausted workers who were to be left to die or be killed in the main camps. Because all these workers were ultimately viewed as expendable, Wagner goes on to question the utility of a sharp distinction between 'exploitation' and 'extermination', as we shall see below.

From the point of view of the inmates, Falk Pingel emphasizes how the circumstances of their lives were radically affected by successive changes in the type and size of the inmate population after 1933 and the relations among different inmate groups. First, political prisoners were superseded by 'asocials' as the 'typical' camp inmate; then came the first steps in the 'internationalization' of the camp population, with the annexation of Austria and partial occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938; as the camps became more lethal, another gap – between 'veterans' and 'newcomers' – took on ever greater significance for the lives of inmates; and in a final phase, the camps became overwhelmed by the mass influx of prisoners during the war. Pingel shows how each of these periods created different conditions for the inmate population, notably increasing pressures on inmate solidarity.

Caplan's chapter views these developments from another perspective to show how the treatment of women inmates lagged behind that of men in terms of

brutality and exploitation. The explosion of SS violence against male prisoners in Dachau in 1933, described by Karin Orth, had no counterpart in the case of women prisoners. The first women's camp comparable to those for men was established only in 1937, and it was not until well into the war that women inmates began to suffer the full horrors to which men had been already long been subjected.

Perhaps the most important turning-point in the history of the concentration camps was the date at which they became places of systematic mass murder, an issue discussed in particular by Wachsmann, Wagner and Pohl. Both Wachsmann and Pohl emphasize the significance of two mass murder programmes initiated by the SS in 1941 – codenamed '14f13' and '14f14' by the SS – that targeted prisoners before the systematic extermination of European Jews reached the camps. The first killed off sick and exhausted inmates, the second targeted Russian POWs transported to concentration camps for execution, including through the first experimental gassings in Auschwitz. Between them, these two programmes claimed over 40,000 victims, many of them Jews. Wachsmann points out that they represented a watershed in the history of the concentration camps, turning them for the first time into sites of mass extermination. Pohl's account of the relationship between the camps and the Holocaust also describes the intricate inflection of systematic murder and exploitation of Jews in the camps from 1942 onwards. During the war, more Jews were held in ghettos and forced labour camps than in the SS concentration camps. The massive exception was Auschwitz, the largest of the concentration camps, which had a majority of Jewish inmates from 1943.

Pohl's account of the final phase of the camps in 1944/5 dovetails with Daniel Blatman's essay on the death marches in the same period, i.e. the evacuation of the camps ahead of the Allied armies. The question of periodization is of the greatest significance for Blatman's interpretation of this murderous process. His analysis depends upon seeing the death marches as a distinct phase in the history of both the concentration camps and the 'Final Solution', rather than as the result of bad planning, logistical problems or the general chaos towards the end of the war. He argues that the marches were 'the last period of Nazi genocide, woven into the history of the concentration camps', and now directed not only against Jews but against all those seen as the existential enemies of a German society in collapse. The death marches constituted a phase of 'decentralized' extermination that was carried out by 'triggermen', whether from the SS or civilian militias (Volkssturm), who accompanied the marching columns of prisoners. Their discretionary power to decide the fate of their prisoners contrasted with the bureaucratic and hierarchical procedures of the earlier phases of genocide, but was ultimately guided by similar calculations of 'utility' and 'efficiency' under radically new conditions.

The final essay by Harold Marcuse on the fate of the camps after 1945 operates within a different chronology altogether, explaining how the postwar history of the camp sites can be divided into several phases, which corresponded in part to the different uses to which the camps were put after the war in Poland, Austria and Germany. Immediately after the liberation of the camps, the Allies opened

up some non-evacuated sites to visits by the foreign press and to local German residents, as evidence of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime and as a kind of 'punitive pedagogy' for the Germans. This 'media blitz' of May 1945 was followed by intermittent publicity about the camps in 1945 and 1946, designed to justify the occupation regimes and the Nuremberg trials, after which their public visibility declined. Meanwhile, some camps had been put to other temporary uses: as collection points for displaced persons (DPs) pending repatriation, emigration or dispersal to other facilities; as detention centres for suspected German war criminals and political subversives; or as military facilities for the occupation forces.

Marcuse shows how some initiatives to memorialize the campsites and the suffering they had housed began simultaneously, notably the Polish state's immediate projects at Majdanek and Auschwitz; but elsewhere many camps were soon dismantled or abandoned as a result of local resistance to pressures for commemoration. Thereafter, the precise phases in the development and uses of camp memorials varied according to country and according to the groups of inmates recognized. Broadly speaking, Jewish inmates and political prisoners were the first groups to be publicly honoured and commemorated, the latter especially in the GDR where the camps were integrated in a broad culture of anti-fascist public education. But it was only from the late 1980s and 1990s that greater recognition began to be extended anywhere to some of the other prisoner groups, notably homosexuals and Roma/Sinti.

Scope

The changes in the commemoration of the camps are mirrored in the final point for discussion here: the movement of recent research to consider previously ignored or marginal groups and topics of investigation, and the emergence of new interpretations of the historical status and meaning of the concentration camps. It is the findings of this work that collectively constitute the 'new histories' presented in all of the essays. Nikolaus Wachsmann's introductory survey depends on this extensive new research for its emphasis on the great range and diversity of the concentration camp system and its perpetual, dramatic mutations. Karin Orth's groundbreaking research on the SS camp personnel, summarized in her essay here, has displaced the old image of most SS officers as individually abnormal sadists and monsters with a perhaps more disquieting sense of them as 'normal' men trained to operate in abnormal circumstances, a move also discussed for the specific case of women warders by Jane Caplan. The 'normality' of the SS officers was in a perverse way modern: Orth describes the SS camp leadership as a close network of 'terror experts', schooled in 'collective violence' and 'shared criminality' by their experiences in the Nazi movement before 1933 and then their training and rapid promotion within the camps. No such culture of solidarity was available to the inmate population as a whole. Falk Pingel's essay on the inmate population surveys the new research into the experience of different groups; these include not only the categories of inmates defined by the Nazi regime as enemies or outsiders – such as Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, 'asocials'

or Sinti and Roma – but also groups that exceeded these political or biopolitical definitions: women, children and young people. In assessing the contours and challenges of the camps' 'unsocial society', Pingel also considers such aspects as the character of communication in the camps – the dwindling of language into a brutal dialect of command and compliance – and inmates' attempts at cultural resistance to the general collapse of civilization and ethics. Pingel also assesses the virtually impossible ethical challenges posed by camp life: the political solidarities that preserved one group at the expense of others; the dilemmas and temptations of prisoner functionaries who wielded direct power over the inmates, including the power of life and death; and the unimaginable situation of the Sonderkommandos, the squads of male inmates of the Auschwitz concentration camp who were seconded to administer the extermination of Jews in the gas chambers.

New approaches to three of the most murderous processes in which the concentration camps were implicated – forced labour, the Holocaust and the death marches – are incorporated in the essays by Jens-Christian Wagner, Dieter Pohl and Daniel Blatman. All these authors repudiate an older separation of the history of the concentration camps from the history of the Holocaust, instead exploring the ways in which the concentration camps were intricately involved in the Nazis' project to exterminate the Jews. At the very end of this history, the death marches had attracted virtually no research until recently, and it was not until the 1980s that historians began to consider them as a something more than one aspect of the generally chaotic collapse of the Third Reich. But Blatman, as we have seen, interprets the death marches as the final phase of a parallel history of the concentration camps and genocide; and he develops a detailed interpretation of the motivations, character and objectives of this lethal process. Surveying the history of the camps from the beginning, Pohl aims to demonstrate another less researched aspect: the extent to which Jewish inmates figured among the larger concentration camp population. The proportion of Jews among camp inmates varied considerably and for different reasons at different times. At the point when the genocide reached its peak between 1942 and 1944, so great were the numbers that, even though most Jews were killed on arrival, those who initially survived – most of them adult men capable of work – pushed up the proportion of Jewish inmates in the camp system from no more than 10 per cent before the war to about one-third towards the end of 1944. Those who were inducted as prisoners lived and worked under the worst conditions and had the lowest rates of survival of any group. Yet Pohl observes that the camps were also, paradoxically, places where many Jews were to be found alive in 1945, for this was 'the only "legal" way left for them to live under German rule'.

The contradictory role of forced labour in the survival and death of Jews has been a matter of much debate in recent research and is discussed by both Pohl and Wagner. As is clear from both essays, this was not a straightforward matter of 'annihilation through labour', plausible as that concept might initially appear. Their capacity to work was the reason why some Jews were able to survive the first selections on arrival in Auschwitz (as well as in ghettos and labour camps),

as well as the means by which they then perished rapidly and in large numbers. This complex issue involves the even larger and more contentious question of why, as Wagner puts it, 'some prisoners in the concentration camp system were exploited as forced labourers in order to meet economic targets, while at the same time many others were murdered for ideological reasons, even though their labour was actually urgently needed'. Often expressed as a contradiction between the rationality of economic calculation and the irrationality of racist ideology, this kind of statement also derives from longstanding disputes among historians about the systemic relationship between ideology and economics in Nazi Germany, and the difference between 'intentionalist' and 'functionalist' or structural explanations of the regime and its policies.

German historiography was convulsed by these important debates in the 1970s and 1980s: they turned partly on Marxist interpretations of fascist regimes and partly on the extent to which Hitler could be said to have directed the Nazi regime's policies according to his own antisemitic ideological priorities.[31] Since then, as Wagner points out, structural interpretations have rather faded into the background as research has moved away from objective interpretations of the regime as a whole to a new focus on the subjective motivations and experiences of those involved in it (as perpetrators, victims or bystanders). This latter approach figures prominently in the new historiographies discussed in most of the essays in this volume. Wagner himself suggests that a structuralist approach remains useful for understanding the economic rationale of forced labour in the camps and the fate of the workers themselves. He repudiates the implied identification of 'work' with 'economics' and 'extermination' with (antisemitic) 'ideology'. Instead, he argues that all concentration camp workers were regarded as expendable, and he proposes a structuralist logic in which 'self-made crisis situations [in the war economy] and the constraints alleged to arise from them … combined with a foundation of racism to produce the impetus for [the] radicalization' of the workers' exploitation.

Comparable to Wagner's essay in combining new empirical research with structural or theoretical perspectives is the essay by Jane Caplan on gender in the camps. Here too new empirical research, motivated by wider changes in the historiographical landscape, has substantially expanded what we know about several groups defined by gender – women, homosexual men and lesbians. The situation and experiences of these groups in the camps were often specific to their gender status – for example, their treatment by guards, their social relations and their chances of survival. The organization and staffing of women's camps were also very different from the standards that prevailed in the men's camps. But Caplan also discusses the deficiencies of a concept of gender that encompasses only those groups which deviate from the male norm, without questioning the status of 'men' themselves. Her essay reviews research that has deployed gender as an analytic category in order to examine the fate of men and masculinity in the camps, and to explore the intimate entanglement of gender ideology with the operations of power in the camps.