Ordinary Men, Extraordinary Photos

by

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Photographs from the Holocaust era are among the most horrifying visual documents produced since the invention of photography. Several famous photos taken during the Holocaust have become its symbols and are widely displayed in exhibitions, films, and albums. Despite the wide dissemination of photographs from the Holocaust, historical research has hardly availed itself of them, and little has been written about the methodology of their use.[1]

Re-examination of photographs from the Holocaust, coupled with the knowledge accrued in the past few years, may give us a new perspective on the importance of these photographs as a historical source. This article illuminates the intrinsic research potential of the photographs by presenting and examining photos taken by German soldiers and police in their service postings in Eastern Europe. Many such photos, appropriated from German prisoners or lifted from the pockets of German soldiers and prisoners who had been killed, made their way to various private collections and archives after the war.

These photos document, inter alia, the life of Jews in the ghettos and the abuse and murder to which they were subjected.[2] The private collections of soldiers and policemen also include photos that portray them together with their victims before, after, and during abuse or murder. The collections also

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[1] See, for example, Sybil Milton, "Images of the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* 1:1 (1986), pp. 27-61; 1:2 (1986), pp. 193-216; Frank Daba Smith, *Photography and the Holocaust,* unpublished dissertation., (London, Leo Baeck College, 1994); *Asthetik der Fotografie,* Heft 55 (1995). On *Fotogeschichte; Beitraege zur Geschichte und* the use of photographs in the Third Reich, see Hermann Hinkel, *Zur Funkton des Bildes im deutschen Faschismus* (Steinbach Giesse: Anabas Verlag, 1975). None of these works attempts to create a method that encompasses both the issue of photography and the historical question associated with it.

[2] The Yad Vashem photo archives (YVPA) contain hundreds of photographs of this type, as does the catalogue of an exhibition of Wehrmacht war crimes first held in 1995 in Germany. This catalogue, like the exhibition itself, indicates the extent of the photography phenomenon among policemen and soldiers of the Third Reich. Although the material cannot be quantified today, the number of relevant photos is very large. Hamburger Institut fuer Sozialforschung, ed., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944: Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1996).

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contain copies of photos taken for the purposes of official antisemitic propaganda in Germany; these were printed in the press or other publications. In some cases, personal photographs reflect the visual message communicated by the official Nazi propaganda. A popular custom among these soldiers and police was to arrange their photographs in albums, sometimes with captions. Such albums are especially interesting as documentation. Since each is different in complexion, one often gets the impression that each reflects its owner's character and worldview.[3] The worldview exuded by the albums is antisemitic, and the photos let us peer into the world of those who annihilated Jews in the Holocaust and shed light on their attitude toward these murders. The very act of taking pictures may seemingly be construed as part of the crime.

Methodology

Photography does more than reflect reality; it also interprets it. Even when the photographer purports to reflect reality "objectively," components such as worldview, values, and moral perception affect the choice of the photographed object and the way it is presented.[4] Therefore, before one uses photographs as a historical source, one should ask several questions:

1.   Who is the photographer and why was the photograph taken? Since photography is a human activity of selection that creates a subjective interpretation of reality, it is important to know who stood behind the camera. In the case of photographs of Jews in the Holocaust, a major question is whether they were taken by an independent German photographer, a member of the SS or the Party, an official German photographer, an autonomous Jewish photographer, or a Jewish photographer in the service of an official agency. We would expect a German photographer imbued with Nazi ideology to focus his lens differently than an "ordinary" German would, let alone a Jew. Furthermore, where the photographer did this work in an official capacity, we

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[3] See the photo collection of the Bundesarchiv-Militaerarchiv, Freiburg, recently forwarded in large part to the Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK). This collection includes more than 1,000 personal albums. This vast number, along with other findings that reach Yad Vashem Archives intermittently, point to the popularity of this interesting form of documentation.
[4] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 6.

should find out whether he brought a different approach to his personal photography.

2.   Who appears in the photograph? We should strive for a maximum of accuracy in identifying officials and uniformed people who share the photograph with their victims. In the absence of accurate identification, the photo cannot be interpreted correctly.

3.   Where was the photograph found, and under what circumstances? Was it distributed, and, if so, to whom and in what quantity? Many photographs were taken from German prisoners, removed from the pockets of persons who had been killed, or found in Germans' homes or places of residence. This question is important not only for identification of the photographer and the origin of the photograph, but also in identifying other people who saw the photograph during the war. The question of distribution may indicate the use to which the photo was put or the demand that it attracted.

4.   Is the photograph under view an individual snapshot, part of a series, or an item lifted from an album or an organized collection? If it belongs to the last-mentioned category, the order in which the collection is arrayed may shed light on the consciousness of the photographer or the arranger. When different photos of one place or event appear in different collections, we can discover various details about both the photographers and the event by comparing them. Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto are an excellent example.

5.   Has a text been added to the photograph? Here we should pay special attention to the album or the back of the photograph, where descriptions, explanations, captions, dedications, or commentary were regularly added.

6.   What was *not* photographed? What matters did the photographer choose to keep away from his focus or to omit altogether? The answers to this question sometimes disclose no less about the photographer, his goals, and his outlook, than the contents of the photograph.

Even when these questions are difficult to answer for lack of information, they should always be kept in mind.

One may distinguish between two types of photographs taken by Germans. The first is official photos, originally meant for propaganda or for documentation of propaganda activity. Such photographs were usually taken by photographers employed by various civilian propaganda organizations, the propaganda companies of the Wehrmacht (PK), etc. They were taken in accordance with guidelines handed down from above—usually from the Ministry of Propaganda—and had to correspond to the images that Nazi propaganda wished to present. One may expect strong and blatant antisemitic contents in photos of this type, and we indeed find them.

Excellent examples of photographs in this category are those published in an article on the Warsaw Ghetto in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*.[5] The article included photos from the Warsaw Ghetto taken by soldiers in Propaganda Company 689. By comparing the complete series of shots by the official photographers with those chosen for the antisemitic article, by studying the crudely antisemitic captions and explanations that accompany the photos in the article, and by observing the selection and arrangement of the photos, we may discover how Nazi propaganda used ghetto photographs. The message that this article wished to instill in its readers was assimilated on two planes: content and visual. When German photographers during their service in Poland and the Soviet Union encountered Jews, many observed and photographed them as such only through that narrow prism of Nazi propaganda. By the time they encountered Eastern European Jews in large numbers, these Germans had been absorbing this propaganda for about six years. This fact surfaces repeatedly in letters from German soldiers at the front. Many of them wrote home about their shocking encounter with "real-life" manifestations of the Jews whom they had been shown in the propaganda.[6] Notably, it is very difficult to find a similar visual attitude toward Western European Jews, who did not conform with the image reflected in the antisemitic propaganda. This evidently explains, in part, their nearly total

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[5] *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* July 24, 1941.
[6] See letters quoted in Walter Manoschek, ed., *"Es gibt nur eines fuer das Judentum: Vernichtung"; Das Judenbild in deutschen Soldatenbriefen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), pp. 13, 26, 30, 32, 40, 42 (Manoschek, *Das Judenbild*).

absence from the personal photographs. Of course, the different nature of the theater of war and occupation in Eastern and Western Europe should also be taken into account. All of the examples of photos that we cite below are associated with Eastern Europe in one way or another.

The second type of collection is comprised of personal photos taken by Germans who had come into contact with Jews. Many German soldiers, policemen, and civilians brought cameras to their service postings. It was their custom to commemorate various spectacles that they witnessed in the Jews' places of residence, including anti-Jewish actions. These photos, in contrast to the propaganda pictures, were not influenced by superiors' guidelines and were meant for personal use only.[7]

However, it is not always easy to distinguish between official and personal photographs. This problem occurs in shots taken by official photographers for which their superiors' orders did not specify the subjects.[8] In many cases, too, there is a striking resemblance between personal and official antisemitic photos, the former taken under the influence of the latter. Testimonies indicate that specific personal photos were eventually distributed in large numbers. The most salient example is the collection of the soldier Heinz Jost, whose

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[7] Dieter Reinfarth and Victora Schmidt-Linsenhoff, "Die Kamera der Toetoer," in Hannes Heer, ed., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), pp. 478-502 (Heer, *Vernichtungskrieg*); Bernd Hueppauf, "Der Entleerte Blick," in ibid., pp. 504-525.

The first two authors mentioned made this distinction in order to narrow the focus of their article to the second type of photograph only. They erred in placing the general population of murderers under one heading. Their rendering of the matter does not differentiate between SS and Gestapo agents and soldiers and police. This generalization led the authors to treat Nazi ideology as a thin layer of legitimacy that shields a deeper motive intrinsic to the human psyche. This detaches the argument from the Nazi framework and universalizes the motive for the murder. Bernd Hueppauf reached a similar conclusion, although in a different way. In his opinion, the murder photos illuminate the photographer's ability to disengage from the horrifying event that he is photographing by using the camera as a buffer of sorts between himself and the victims. He extends his argument by depicting the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq and Kuwait as the pinnacle of the process of disengagement between photographers and photographed events. Clearly, the weakness of such an argument is also rooted in the disengagement it creates between the special circumstances of the photos that it attempts to explain and the explanation. Even though he wrote his article eleven years after that of Reinfarth and Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Hueppauf misses the point because he uses psychological arguments devoid of concrete examples.

[8] See testimony of a German photographer who filmed an execution near Kaunas on June 25, 1941. The SS officer in charge refrained from confiscating his camera only after the man proved that he was serving as a photographer for the commander of the 16th army, Field Marshal Von Bosch. Willi Dressen, Volker Riess, and Ernst Klee, *Schoene Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988), pp. 38-39 (Dressen, Klee, and Riess, *Schoene Zeiten*).

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pictures from the Warsaw Ghetto became quite famous and have been displayed at the Yad Vashem Museum and in other exhibitions. Recent discoveries indicate the existence of at least three copies of some of the Jost photographs: Jost's original collection, a collection taken by an American soldier from a German POW, and an album recently sold at a public auction. The last-mentioned includes some of the Warsaw Ghetto shots along with pictures taken in the Soviet Union during the war there. An inscription on the first page of the album, in Russian, explains that the album was found on the body of a German officer killed in Poland in 1945.

Another interesting example is found in the transcript of the interrogation of a company commander in Police Battalion 101: "They [photographs of the deportation and abuse of Jews] were laid out hanging on the wall and anyone, as he pleased, could order copies of them. I too acquired these photographs through such an order, even though I had not always participated in the events that the photographs depict. If my memory serves me right, most of the photographs had been taken by a member of the company's office."[9] In other cases, we know of German soldiers who obtained photographs of executions in return for "a little tobacco."[10]

Notably, personal photos that documented abuse, deportation, and murder of Jews were in surprising demand among members of the German security forces as souvenirs. Some pictures of these types were even sent to relatives and friends in Germany, with dedications written on the back.[11]

When does an ordinary photograph become extraordinary? Photographs generally reflect norms and values of the photographer's society and express moral correctness or incorrectness in this society or a certain segment thereof. If the photograph meets this definition, it is not extraordinary. In Nazi society, it was conventional to regard Jews as pathogens that should be expunged in one way or another. Removal of the Jews was even perceived as

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[9] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), (Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*). p. 240. Cited from material of the investigation of one of the company commanders in the battalion. To the best of our knowledge, Goldhagen is the only researcher who noticed that photographs of this type were disseminated in a manner verging on the commercial.

[10] Heer, *Vernichtungskrieg.*

[11] YVPA, FA-285/1. See, for example, a collection of photos from the Lublin Ghetto that the soldier dedicated "to Elsa with love."

an existential necessity; in this sense, it corresponded with the norms of this society. However, not every method of removal was accepted. Especially brutal banishment was sometimes considered inappropriate, even though the final result fomented no real controversy.[12] One manifestation of this society's norms in the Jewish context was the order prohibiting photography at mass executions and deriving of benefit from these actions.[13]

Although executions and brutal deportations were considered normative and value-positive for the German nation, the Nazi system also acknowledged the outside world's perception of these actions as extraordinary. Thus, the proscription of photography indicates the extraordinary nature of the photography. Concurrently, the very phenomenon of photographing abuse and mass murder indicates that these actions were normative.

German soldiers and police took numerous pictures of "Jewish types" in the ghettos and in this fashion documented the deportations, executions, humiliation, abuse to which they were subjected. The photos illuminate the importance that the abusers attributed to commemorating their misdeeds with their cameras and those of their comrades. If these humiliations and abuses were not stipulated in the orders given to the soldiers and policemen, they were perpetrated in the course of, or irrespective of, ongoing activity, and were committed with free choice and pleasure—as one may see in many photos of this type. This gives us a further reason to treat photos as extraordinary: When the actions shown in them were not included in the orders.

This analysis will not deal with photos taken by SS agents. Since no one disputes the ideological motives of these men in carrying out their

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[12] David Bankier, "On Modernization and the Rationality of Extermination," *Yad Vashem Studies* 24 (1994), p. 125.

[13] For example, see an order from General Keitel to Wehrmacht soldiers on November 2, 1941: "Befehl des Chefs des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht ueber das Verbot, Exekutionen an Sowjetmenschen zu Fotografieren", in Hauptarchivverwaltung beim Ministerrat der Ukr.SSR, *Die Geschichte Warnt* (Kiev: Verlag fuer politische Literatur der Ukraine, 1986), p. 59. See also Heydrich's instructions to the police on November 11, 1941, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), 053/121. Proof that these orders were often violated surfaces in a protest from the Ministry for the East (*Ostministerium*) to the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW), on April 24, 1944, in the matter of soldiers who, despite repeated orders, continued to carry photographs that were harmful in the propaganda sense. YVA, Nuremburg document, TR-2/NO-5913.

assignments, including murder of Jews,[14] it is reasonable to assume that SS men had stronger ideological motivation and suffered less cognitive dissonance concerning murder than we would expect of soldiers and police.

Among rank-and-file soldiers and policemen, in contrast to members of the SS, we would expect to find an absence of pronounced ideological motives. However, examination of the photos in the albums indicates that these rank-and-file Germans sometimes discharged their duties beyond the stipulations of their orders and with principled consent and desire. So willingly and agreeably did they pursue these missions that the world has become seriously confused about the identity of the photographers and those who appear in the photos. In dozens of famous photographs of abuse and murder of Jews, the photographers and those photographed as the murderers were not SS men but soldiers and police.

Jews Through the Lenses of German Photographers

We have selected several photos, albums, and films from the Yad Vashem Archives that, in our opinion, indicate the great importance that should be attributed to antisemitic ideology and indoctrination in explaining the war criminals' motives.

The first is a small album, three photos of which were taken in 1934 during the Koelner Karneval.[15] As we see (Photo 1), one of the floats in the parade is a wagon on which people costumed as "typical Jews" are riding. The images shown are rife with stereotypes: beards, rabbinical gowns, long noses, and clumps of garlic. The sides of the wagon are festooned with crude antisemitic messages. Many people watched the float go by, as the photo shows. Their facial expressions leave no doubt that they are enjoying the spectacle. These photos depict a relatively early type of official antisemitic propaganda, aimed at the German public at large at the outset of the Nazi regime. Evidently taken officially, they were disseminated as postcards, as the copies in our possession attest.

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[14] See, for example, the first section of Charles W. Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division 1933-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[15] YVPA, FA-192.

In this case, the antisemitic propaganda had its effect in two ways: through the float itself, as beheld by the onlookers, and through its photographs, which could be distributed long after the end of the carnival. Both devices, the float and the photos, presented the German public with the derogatory and ridiculous image of the racially characterized Jew. The float did not content itself with presenting the image and pointing out its stereotyped, ludicrous complexion; it also alluded to the solution to the problem that this image conjured. The signs on the float explain clearly that these Jews have no place in Germany and must be removed. The Kolner Karneval was not the only instance of such an exhibit; we know at least of one other carnival, held in Nuremberg in 1938, that included a similar float.[16] In addition to these carnivals were exhibitions, such as the infamous "The Eternal Jew," which large crowds attended in various locations after it debuted in Vienna in the summer of 1938.[17]

Importantly, the observers of the float seldom encountered Jews who resembled those depicted at the carnival. Most German Jews were indistinguishable from non-Jewish Germans. This made the image shown at the fair even more ridiculous and laughable.

The documentation and commemoration of the "typical" Jewish image as extraordinary through the lenses of German photographers recur in photos taken in Eastern Europe even before the war. Even if the pictures conformed to the propaganda, they did not always correspond to the photographer's attitude. A group of German students that traveled through Poland for study purposes in 1938 dedicated an album to their instructor as a momento.[18] Photos of Jews in Sosnowiec (Photo 2) already appear on the second page of the album; photos of Jews in Krakow are included farther on. In all of these photographs, the Jews chosen by the photographer are wearing traditional attire and strongly resemble the Jews in Nazi propaganda. However, in

[16] Froschauer and Renate Geyer, *Quellen des Hasses—Aus dem Archiv des "Stuermer"* (Nuremberg: Selbstverlag der Stadt Nuernberg, 1988) (Froschauer and Geyer, *Quellen des Hasses)* p. 52.

[17] See book of pictures: Hans Diebow, "*Der Ewige Jude*" (Munich-Berlin: F. Eher, Verlag, 1938). See also catalogue of exhibition in Vienna: *"Der Ewige Jude: Gross Politische Schau der NSDAP,"* idem. (Berlin: Institut fuer deutsche Kultur und Wirtschaftspropaganda, n.d.).

[18] YVPA, FA-161.

contrast to these images, they are not shown in a ridiculous or derogatory light. The photos in this album are pronouncedly anthropological and "touristy"; they do not exude antisemitism, even though the subjects chosen were of this type. Most of the men who took part in this outing undoubtedly served in the Wehrmacht or the police during the war, and some may even have encountered Jews again under less civilized circumstances.

Only after six years of antisemitic policies and propaganda, portraying images of "typical Jews" at exhibitions and in displays, newspapers, and films, did numerous Germans encounter in their postings in the east Jews who resembled those in the propaganda.[19] It is in this encounter with the Eastern European Jew that we should seek the explanation and motive for the obsession of photographing typical Jews that gripped German policemen and soldiers in the ghettos of Poland and Jewish localities in the Soviet Union. The photographers' identification of the Eastern European Jew with the demonic metaphor evidently intensified their estrangement from their subjects. This estrangement was manifested in the way they photographed their typical Jewish subjects, and it facilitated the humiliation and abuse of these subjects as the camera looked on.

Two other albums provide a different view and impression of the Jewish likeness. The first documents Jews in various locations, chiefly the ghetto of Szydlowiec. The owner, who seems to have been the photographer, was apparently a German policeman.[20] The album shows a tendency to document Jewish types in their "natural habitat." The German photographer's camera sought, found, and commemorated the familiar Jewish type in Nazi propaganda.[21] The image of the Jew that radiates from the album is a miserable, poor, and filthy Jew, an objectionable, repulsive, and outlandish

[19] Examples of visual antisemitic propaganda are the newspaper *Der Stuermer* and the "Eternal Jew" exhibition, to name only two. A more concrete example is a collection of antisemitic drawings and photographs from *Der Stuermer,* YVPA, FA-196. Concerning the encounter with these "authentic" Jews, consider the letter from a noncommissioned officer in Wehrmacht Medical Battalion 601, dated June 30, 1941, in Manoschek, *Das Judenbild,* p. 30: "We crossed the Jewish quarter, it was hard to describe the condition [of the quarter] and its inhabitants.... Although all the Jews are wearing armbands, one could recognize them even without this sign, just as we recognized them in the Greek market in Kolen, except that here they occur in larger numbers—literally masses."

[20] YVPA, FA-76.
[21] Froschauer and Geyer, *Quellen des Hasses,* pp. 5-30.

person (Photo 3). The photos in the album correspond fully with those taken by official Nazi photographers and disseminated by official Nazi propaganda. The photographer augmented his album with additional shots of "Jewish types" from an unidentified source (Photo 4). His photography emulates the antisemitic style convincingly; the Jewish image that appears in his photos is that illuminated by Nazi propaganda. In certain cases, the photographed figures are obviously posing. For example, one Jew is captured in two separate photos, front and back (Photo 3). The photographer added captions to several of the pictures; although they express simple description, the words "poor" and "Jewish types" recur in them. This album is also unusual in its abrupt transition from ostensibly anthropological photos, including shots of a cemetery, a synagogue, and the ghetto streets, to photos of violent actions against Jews. The turnabout occurs in the last few pages, which document the deportation of Jews from the town. The German photographer approached the deportees and took close-ups (Photo 5). Even under these exceptional circumstances, the photographer evidently continued to show an interest in the peculiarities of the "Jewish type" and made efforts to capture the special facial features of this type. Two photographs show a woman who had been murdered in the course of the deportation. The caption under the photo states, "The end" (Photo 16). These photographs indicate the violence of the deportation action. Such documentation of these horrors is rare because violence in the course of deportations was almost never photographed, notwithstanding copious documentation of such actions in testimonies of other kinds. Furthermore, only two of the 105 photographs in the album do not deal with Jews, an interesting circumstance in a personal album. The last photograph shows a mass hanging of Jews and bears the caption, "This is also an end."

The obsession with photography of Jewish subjects is also salient in the second album that we chose to present—an opulent, leather-bound album bearing the dedication, "Warsaw Ghetto: a Cultural Document for Adolf Hitler" (*Das Waschauer Ghetto: Ein Kulturdokument fuer Adolf Hitler*). Notwithstanding the tenor of this inscription, the album was taken not by an official photographer but by a low-ranking soldier in a Luftwaffe supply unit in

the vicinity of Warsaw,[22] who evidently visited the Warsaw Ghetto while off-duty and took approximately 65 photographs there. Notwithstanding the expectations prompted by the dedication, the photos do not, at first glance, reveal an antisemitic worldview. They portray Jews in the streets of the Warsaw Ghetto and are among the best on this subject (Photo 6). We include this soldier in the context of our discussion because of the dedication. It is hard to explain why the soldier felt it necessary to dedicate his photographic documentation of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto to Hitler. Only a prejudice that includes a derogatory perception of the Jew could have inspired this soldier to take 65 photographs in the Warsaw Ghetto, at his own initiative, and to dedicate them to Hitler. Notably, the ghetto photographs form a set among postcards of the city of Warsaw, evidently purchased by the soldier, and shots of life in his unit.

This album is only one of many German photo collections from the Warsaw Ghetto. The ghetto and its Jewish inhabitants were lavishly filmed by official and private German photographers. In October 1939, a full year before the ghetto was established, the Ministry of Propaganda instructed the Wehrmacht Propaganda Division to take pictures of Jews in Warsaw and other Polish localities. The directive was obeyed and some of the resulting photos were printed in newspapers.[23] Private photographers, such as the owner of the aforementioned album, came in the official photographers' wake.

Another example of correspondence between the visual image and the antisemitic worldview surfaces in an album portraying the life of Mountain Division 1 of the Wehrmacht, which saw action in Poland in September 1939. Among landscapes of the Tatra mountains, depictions of combat at the front, and shots of Russian localities and Polish prisoners, we find several photos of Jews. The subjects are evidently Jews whom the soldiers had rounded up to clear debris and rebuild a demolished bridge. The owner of the album added several remarks under the photos: "Jewish rabble" ("*Jueden Gesindel*") and

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[22] YVPA, FA-109. The photographs were evidently taken in 1941.

[23] Ulrich Keller, ed., *The Warsaw Ghetto in Photographs: 206 Views Made in 1941* (New York: Dover, 1984), pp. x-xi. For an example of the work of Wehrmacht propaganda photographers, see the collection in YVPA 3955 (source in BAK, collection of negatives of PK 1/256). For an example of the use made of such photos in the popular press, see *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung,* July 24, 1941.

"The Chosen People: they learn this, too" (*"Die Auserwaehlten: Auch Sie Lernen's"*) (Photos 7 and 8).[24] All the sarcastic captions that the photographer used to comment on the photos in his album reflect the language and spirit of the crude antisemitic propaganda and express his prejudices against the Jews whom he had encountered.

This album also leaves no doubt about the origin of the soldier's inspiration. Interestingly, his division was considered a select Wehrmacht unit, whose members did not play a major role in actions against Jews. Nevertheless, when they were given the duty of rounding up Jews, at least one of them, the photographer, went out of his way to film the event and interpret it in the spirit of official Nazi antisemitic publications. As we browse through the album, we see clearly that the photographer internalized the typical Jewish image spread by Nazi propaganda and that his actions and photography were indeed prompted by Nazi ideology.

On the back of a photograph evidently looted from a Jewish home in Lublin and sent from Lublin to the editor of *Der Stuermer* in 1943, the sender, a German policeman, wrote, "Dear *Stuermer,* this photo tells it all!" (Photo 9). Surprisingly, the photo shows nothing but Eastern European Jews seated around a festive table; it acquires its antisemitic significance from the caption on its back and the identity of the addressee. This policeman photographer evidently felt the need to share his discovery with the newspaper's readers — that the Jews of Poland looked just as *Der Stuermer* depicted them.[25] It is clear that the policeman and the readership of *Der Stuermer* shared the language, the vocabulary, and the collection of visual images that comprised the antisemitic lexicon and underlie and reflected Nazi ideology and society. On this basis, an ordinary photograph was construed as confirmation of the familiar antisemitic image.

The photographs that we call "extraordinary," those that document various kinds of violent actions against Jews, may be divided into three categories:

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[24] YVPA, FA-300/108 and 173.

[25] YVPA, 4982/19. The letters-to-the-editor department was rather popular during the war and gave preference to communications from soldiers.

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1.   An aberration in an otherwise ordinary sequence of photos, which the owner of the album deliberately noted as such, or a photo that is blatantly exceptional in view of its general background.

2.   Depiction of religious or racial abuse beyond the perpetrators' call of duty.

3.   Photos taken by soldiers or police who observed executions, although this was not part of their duty, and took the photos despite explicit orders prohibiting such photography.

An example of the first type is an unusual album of a Wehrmacht officer in which the meanings of "extraordinary" and "ordinary" switch place. The extraordinary photographs here are those of daily life. The first part of the album deals with hangings of Jews in Poland (Photo 10), actions by the German police, and deportation of Jews from Krakow by SS units, as German soldiers look on (Photo 11). The second part of the album is devoted to the campaign against France in May 1940. Nearly all of it is composed of photos of enemy dead, prisoners (chiefly black soldiers from the African colonies), booty, and demolished enemy gear.[26] The nature of the photos suggests that the officer himself did not take part in these war crimes, but his camera documented them actively.

An example of the second type is a series of photographs of the occurrence known as "Bloody Wednesday," July 31, 1940, in the Polish town of Olkusz. This is one of the few cases in which we possess documentation both of police actions and of the aberrations committed during them. German police carried out a reprisal after one of their number had been killed. According to testimonies, the Germans gathered Jewish men in the town square, registered them (Photo 12), and then beat them until their blood flowed. The Germans forced them to spend the day prostrate and face-down in the square and sent them home at the end of the day. One Jew who tried to escape during the action was shot.[27] Most of the "Bloody Wednesday" photos document these events: the Jews are gathered in the town square, registered by policemen

[26] YVPA, FA-279. An example of deliberate propaganda use of photos of French Army prisoners-of-war from Africa occurs in a collection of three-dimensional photographs (in which the three-dimensional effect is obtained by means of special eyeglasses) distributed in Germany in 1940-1941.
[27] Dressen, Klee, and Riess, *Schöne Zeiten,* pp. 7-15.

and SD agents who accompanied them and made to lie down with their faces to the ground.

Two additional photos from the Olkusz action illuminate the religious and racial antisemitic abuse that accompanied this police operation. In the first, Rabbi Moshe Isaac Hangerman, barefoot and wearing desecrated tefillin (phylacteries), is forced to pray for the amusement of the police as the townsmen lay on the ground (Photo 13).[28] This photograph has been published several times, interpreted in various ways, and attributed to different places, but it was taken at Olkusz. In the second photo, police and SD men are standing and smiling around a group of kneeling Jews (Photo 14).[29] Photos of this type are well known and sometimes populated by German soldiers, in contexts in which the nature of their relationship with the Jewish population should not have moved them to engage in abuse (Photo 15).[30]

In other cases, German soldiers appear as witnesses to murders committed by the SS. According to some testimonies, soldiers who observed the murderous actions of the Einsatzgruppen did not always remain passive onlookers; they took up arms and participated in the gunfire.[31]

Propaganda, Indoctrination, and "Ordinary Men"

In July 1941, a noncommissioned officer in the Wehrmacht wrote home from the Russian front:

"The German people is deeply indebted to the Fuehrer, because if these animals, our enemies here, had reached Germany, murders of a nature not yet witnessed in the world would have occurred.... No newspaper can describe what we have seen. It verges on the unbelievable, and even the Middle Ages do not compare with what has transpired here. Reading *Der*

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[28] Zvi Yasheev, ed., *Olkusz: A Memory Book Dedicated to a Community Annihilated in the Holocaust* (Tel Aviv: Olkusz Association in Israel, 1972), pp. 125-132; YVPA, 541/1.
[29] YVPA, 114FO9.

[30] YVPA, 117FO5 and 77AO7.
[31] Dressen, Klee, and Riess, *Sch ne Zeiten,* p. 115.

Stuermer and observing its photos give only a limited impression of what we have seen here and of the crimes committed here by the Jews.[32]"

This type of writing was very common among German soldiers, foremost among those on the Eastern front. Another German NCO submitted the following from the front to the editorial board of *Der Stuermer*:

"I have just received *Der Stuermer* for the third time, and it pleases me greatly.... You could not have pleased me more. I identified the Jewish toxin in our people long ago. But only now, in this war, do we see how badly it could have harmed us. Every day we see what the Jewish regime has done in Russia. Even those who vacillated have been cured [of their hesitancy] here, as the facts stare them in the face. We must rid the world of this contagion, and we shall do so. This is why the German soldier is defending the Eastern front. We will not return until all the evil is banished and the center of Bolshevik "world-benefiting" Jewry is destroyed."[33]

This is a reflection of prolonged, intensive indoctrination that transcends the mere results of military service.

Interestingly, in this context, films such as "The Eternal Jew" ("*Der Ewige Jude*") and "The Jew Suess" (*"Jud Suess"*), which contain exceedingly crude antisemitic depictions, were disseminated among units at the front as part of the entertainment provided for the soldiers.[34] The influence of "The Eternal Jew" is evident in the photographs.

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[32] Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Stertz, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982), p. 74. Such letters were not only sent to the editor of *Der Stuermer,* who published them. Many soldiers sent antisemitic letters to their homes, not for publication. See the collection edited by Manoshek, which includes approximately 100 letters from soldiers: Manoschek, *Das Judenbild.*

[33] Manoschek, *Das Judenbild,* pp. 172-173.

[34] Distribution lists of films to Wehrmacht units posted to Luxembourg, northern Germany, and Denmark, January-April 1941: BA-MA, RW4/v293. Concerning the influence of propaganda films in Nazi Germany on their audiences, see Josef Wulf, *Theater und Film in Dritten Reich, eine Dokumentation* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966), p. 447: "In the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt am-Main, the defendant Stefan Barezki, formerly a corporal in the SS, said, 'They showed us incitement films such as *The Jew Suess* and *Om Krueger.* Those are the titles I still remember. What an effect this had on the prisoners! The films were shown to the staff. How the prisoners looked the next day!...'"

The indoctrination is also reflected in a collection of letters from Wehrmacht soldiers, published in 1941 and entitled "German Soldiers See the Soviet Union." A blatantly propagandistic publication, it includes authentic letters from soldiers on the Eastern front, one of which contains the following statement:

A story in itself is how the problem of the Jews is steadily being solved with amazing thoroughness, to the cheers of the local population.... As the Fuehrer said in one of his speeches before the war, "If the Jews succeed again in inciting the European peoples to embroil themselves in a pointless war, this incitement will result in the end of this race in Europe." The Jew must know that the Fuehrer meant what he said, and he has to bear the consequences. These consequences are harsh but are necessary if we wish to restore tranquillity and peace among peoples.[35]

Further evidence of the prevalence of such trends of thought among various Wehrmacht units surfaced in a discussion in Germany marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, sponsored by the journal *Die Zeit.* The discussants, including historians and former commanders and soldiers in the Wehrmacht, took up the problem of German soldiers' participation in war crimes against civilians, especially the annihilation of the Jewish population. The historian Hannes Heer quoted from a wartime diary by a soldier named Klepper: "I had marvelous conversations with my comrades, deep human conversations. There is only one point I do not understand: everyone around me is convinced that the Jews have to go."[36]

In this discussion, in other articles in a special edition of *Die Zeit,* and in the writings of Omer Bartov, Christopher Browning, and Daniel Goldhagen, historians attempt to explain the motives of the ordinary men who took part in murder and abuse of Jews during their service in the East.

Browning, in his book *Ordinary Men,* tells the story of Reserve Battalion 101 of the German police. He refers to the Nazi propaganda and indoctrination but considers them relatively negligible factors in the totality. However, Browning admits that the indoctrination given to the police during their service, coupled

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[35] Wolfgang Diewerge, ed., *Deutsche Soldaten sehen die Sowjet-Union* (Berlin: W. Limpert, 1941), p. 38.
[36] "'Wir hatten geglaubt, wir konnten anständig bleiben'—Historiker und Zeitzeugen diskutierten in der *Zeit* Redaktion," in *Zeit Punkte* (1995), p. 84.

with the antisemitic propaganda that the German public had imbibed since the Nazi accession to power, had at least some effect on some of the policemen.[37] Browning confines his research on the indoctrination of the German police to a search for ideological-education material that was distributed among the German police. Since he found little material of this kind, he concluded that indoctrination had little to do with the policemen's actions. Browning also searched for propaganda material that might be linked directly with the policemen's murderous behavior. He took no interest whatsoever in the role of Jews in the policemen's worldview other than the propaganda served them. This omission caused him to underestimate the contribution of antisemitic ideology in explaining the murderous motivation of the policemen in Battalion 101. Such material can be found, of all places, in the visual documentation that Browning himself attached to his book for illustration purposes—documentation that corresponds to our definition of extraordinary photos. The photos depict abuse of an antisemitic racial nature and point clearly to the perpetrators' worldview. Had Browning paid broader attention to the photographs in his book, from the realization that even a photograph may serve as a historical source, he might have revised his conclusions somewhat.

Daniel Goldhagen, in contrast, made extensive and rather impressive use of photos in his controversial book *Hitler's Willing Executioners,* and cited them to explain the motives of "ordinary Germans" who served in the same Battalion 101 that Browning had investigated. For example, Goldhagen reprinted a photo of policemen in the battalion shearing a Jew's beard. The back of the photo bears the following message: "He should work, but he must be clean-shaven." Goldhagen argues that this photo and others demonstrate the *a priori* attitude of ordinary Germans toward the Jews as creatures undeserving of human reference. This attitude prompted Germans to treat photos of deportations and brutalities as tourists' souvenirs.[38] In this context, Goldhagen cites the testimony of company commander Hoffman concerning the distribution of copies of photographs among the policemen in his

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[37] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 176-184.

[38] Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners,* p. 14.

company.[39] These and other testimonies led Goldhagen to conclude that images and perceptions absorbed by "ordinary Germans" long before their induction prompted them to relate to Jews as subhumans who could, might, and should be abused in any way imaginable. The origin of this perspective, he believes, is the unique "eliminationist" nature of German antisemitism. One may criticize Goldhagen for his sweeping and one-dimensional conclusions, but his use of photographs is pioneering and important. Just the same, Goldhagen does not devote enough space to the unique Nazi indoctrination and the special circumstances of antisemitism during the Nazi reign as against pre-Nazi German antisemitism.[40] Furthermore, his book does not conduct an orderly examination of the perceptible racial motives in personal photographs as reflections of motives that appeared in Nazi propaganda. Such an examination would have linked Goldhagen's account more closely with the reality of the Third Reich and less with the uniqueness of German antisemitism.

In this context, it is proper to mention Omer Bartov's approach in his studies on the Wehrmacht, an approach based on research of the complexion and social structure of the German army on the Eastern front. His goal, inter alia, is to probe the brutalization of German soldiers on this front—whence, as noted, most of the photos of concern to us originated. Bartov bases his approach on the fact that most Wehrmacht soldiers had been indoctrinated before their induction in civilian or semi-military settings such as the Hitler Youth and the Labor Service (*Arbeitsdienst*). He also regards propaganda disseminated through the mass media as an important factor in shaping these soldiers' future worldview, because a large majority of the pre-war civilian German population was exposed to it.[41] The carnival in Koeln and the photographs of this event represent one facet of this civilian propaganda. Photographic technology itself was mobilized at this time for visual presentation of various racial attributes.

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[39] Ibid., pp. 245-246.

[40] See, for example, Omer Bartov's criticism of Goldhagen's book, "Ordinary Monsters," *The New Republic* (April 29, 1996), pp. 35-36. See also critiques of the book by Goetz Aly and Raul Hilberg, in this volume, and articles by Avraham Barkai and Yisrael Gutman [ed.].
[41] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.109-110 (Bartov, *Hitler's Army*).

The "Leica Book," containing a scholarly article that recommends certain photographic techniques in corroborating racist depictions, provides an example of this. At times, the angles of observation used by private photographers are strikingly similar to those recommended in the article (Photos 3 and 4).[42] The propaganda aspired not only to shape a set of beliefs and values, but also to prompt its subjects to take real action. The float at the carnival in Koeln, for example, included maps showing Jews the way out of Germany. Practically speaking, these maps showed the Germans too, or the Germans in particular, the path that the Jews should take. The propaganda helped establish a correspondence between political belief and action. When these young people were inducted into the Wehrmacht, the foundation of civilian indoctrination that they had imbibed proved to be of much military usefulness. In the course of the war, the army created its own propaganda machine, a well-oiled mechanism that bombarded soldiers with educational and informational material. The Wehrmacht Propaganda Division was established in 1938, and the Ministry of Propaganda took control of its activity when the war began in order to coordinate and conduct the war propaganda effort under one guiding auspice.[43]

Thus the Wehrmacht became involved in antisemitic propaganda, including photography of Jews in Eastern Europe. As early as October 1939, the Ministry of Propaganda instructed the propaganda companies in how to photograph Jews. The instructions stressed that the results of this activity would be used in antisemitic propaganda "for internal and external needs."[44] Much of the propaganda material prepared by the army reached the civilian media. The best examples are the German newsreels (*Wochenschau*), one specimen of which, filmed in Poland on September 20, 1939, shows Jews in their area of residence.[45]

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[42] B. K. Schultz, "Rasse und Erblehre," in Heinrich Stockler, ed., *Die Leica in Beruf und Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Breidenstein Verlag, 1941).

[43] Hans Barkhausen, *Filmpropaganda fuer Deutschland im Ersten und Zweite Weltkrieg* (Hildesheim: Olm Press, 1982), p. 212.

[44] BA-MA, RW4/v241, teil 1. "Propagandaweisung des Reichspropagandaministers fuer den 2. Oktober 1939."

[45] BA-Filmarchiv, UTW-472/1939.

The military propaganda, like the civilian, had nothing substantially new to say. The Nazi indoctrination process was comprised of layers built atop an existing ideological infrastructure. Obviously this increment was added copiously and vigorously, resulting in the political soldier of the Eastern front. In contrast to what the army attempted to show about itself, its propaganda was no less venomous than that imbibed by civilians and members of the SS.[46] These remarks, printed in information bulletins and disseminated widely among soldiers, were a direct extension of the antisemitic and anti-Bolshevik propaganda that the civilian population absorbed in bulk:

Anyone who has ever peered into the face of a Red commissar knows who the Bolsheviks are.... It would be an insult to animals if we described most of these Jewish males as animals. They are the embodiment of Satanic, lunatic hatred of all exalted humanity.[47]

Another example of the depth to which the antisemitic propaganda was internalized in the Wehrmacht is an instructional film prepared by the Wehrmacht Academy of Military Medicine (*Militaeraerztlichen Akademie*) in 1940. The movie aimed to give instructions and to provide guidance in the prevention and cure of typhus. At its beginning, the Jews are described as carriers of the disease. The Jews in the movie resemble the Nazi depiction of Jews in the East to the last detail. Significantly, this movie was meant for professional instruction only, not for propaganda use.[48]

Bartov summarizes the matter:

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Naturally, the soldiers fought for many reasons; they fought for survival, for their comrades, for their families in the rear, and for Germany's victory and prosperity. But workers or not, they also fought against "Plutocracy," "Asiatic barbarism," and "Judeo-Bolshevism," and in defense of "German culture" and "Western civilization." In this sense they fought for Nazism and everything that it stood for.[49]

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[46] Wedel von Hasso, *Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht,* (Neckargemund: Vowinckel Verlag, 1962).

[47] Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS Staat. Zeit der Indoktrination,* (Hamburg: V. Decker, 1969), pp. 326-327, "Mitteilungen fuer die Truppe nr. 116."

[48] YVPA, V-893/1, "Kampf dem Fleckfieber."

[49] Bartov, *Hitler's Army,* p. 182.

If we apply this conclusion to our central theme, we may say that the shutters were pressed by people whose ideological consciousness manifested itself in the photographs they took or collected.

Filmed testimonies naturally lend themselves to different and, at times, clashing interpretations. Because the visual language is not unequivocal, it must be augmented with unambiguous documentation. Letters of soldiers from the Eastern front provide this complement. The collection entitled "*Es gibt nur eines fuer das Judentum: Vernichtung,*" published in Germany in 1995, contains excerpts of letters from German soldiers describing their encounters with Jews in the East. The soldiers' accounts mirror the language of the official propaganda to a stunning extent. The soldiers' statements in these letters provide an almost perfect verbal parallel to the visual language that radiates from the photographs we have presented. As for the source of inspiration of these statements, no evidence can be better than the following excerpt:

"I have good news for you today: I have received all recent issues of *Der Stuermer*. *Der Stuermer* is the true organ of the war, the only one that can give us a point of view and commentary that we cannot see with our own eyes. I have already been in the East for more than half a year, and believe me, here we have already learned to recognize the terrible intrinsic menace of the Jews. The only possibility is extermination and uprooting, and we hope the time when the last of them will dig his grave is not far off."[50]

The hands wielding the pens are the soldiers', but the voice is the voice of *Der Stuermer*.

Conclusion

The approach expressed in this article toward analyzing the photos and those who took them and owned them may be criticized on several planes. We have examined a field that research has largely neglected (photographs).   We

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[50] Manoschek, *Das Judenbild,* p. 62.

combined this activity with current research on "ordinary" Germans in the field, and assumed as a point of departure that the antisemitic climate and propaganda in Nazi Germany had an immense impact on the entire population. By implication, this approach is critical of research trends that rest on contrasting premises. One may focus most of the criticism of our perspective on two questions:

1.   To what extent do our examples represent a phenomenon?

2.   Are we guilty of overstatement in our emphasis on the importance of indoctrination?

Let us consider each of these questions briefly.

The examples. There are three problems here: the general nature of the soldiers' and policemen's photographs, the effect of the photos known to us, and the identities of the uniforms on people in the photos. It is impossible to obtain all photos taken by German soldiers and police in the course of their service, but the extraordinary photographs stand out in the copious material available, most of which commemorates experiences in service. We are unable to quantify the extraordinary photos, but they clearly occur in rather large numbers.

The fact that the same handful of familiar photos (such as the boy with raised hands during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising) recur in museums, films, and books on the Holocaust may give one the impression that few extraordinary photographs exist. This is a misapprehension; the examples shown here are but the tip of the iceberg.

Unfamiliarity with the uniforms used by the various German forces has resulted in automatic identification of uniformed people in the photos as SS men. An example is the famous photo of a uniformed German aiming a rifle at a woman who clutches a child. Usually identified as an SS soldier, he is actually a German policeman. Correct identification of the armed service of the Germans in the photos, or of the photographers themselves, sheds new light on well known and obscure photos alike.

Indoctrination. This article does not maintain that every soldier and policeman in the Third Reich who photographed Jews did so out of ideological

conviction. Some had different motives.[51] Neither does this article dismiss the universal explanations for the widespread participation in Holocaust crimes, for it does not deal with this.[52] However, the material cited here shows that the universal explanations, which trace the motives for participation in the Holocaust solely to impulses, urges, and fears rooted in human nature, do not suffice to explain the Holocaust. The photographs clearly indicate the consent of the photographers, their German subjects, and the photographs' owners to the abuses and murders committed. This consent is the result of several factors, including the indoctrination of which we spoke. In the absence of the indoctrination factor, we cannot explain why "ordinary" Germans included in their personal albums photos of Jews who look as if lifted directly off the pages of *Der Stuermer.*

Our focus on soldiers' and policemen's photographs in our studies ties into an aspect of social history that evokes dispute when applied to research of the Third Reich—the history of daily life.[53] One who examines photographs is actually exploring a facet of daily life. In their personal photos and albums, the soldiers and policemen commemorated daily life in their units. The fact that these photos include reflections of the most extreme Nazi propaganda and ideology shows how effective this propaganda was.

In addition to everything said above about the German photographs, we should note that these photos provide important if highly subjective documentation of the lives and fate of Jews in the ghettos. It is true that Jewish photographers also commemorated their daily lives,[54] but the Germans' photos illuminated matters that Jews were seldom able to photograph: abuses, deportations, and executions.

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[51] See, for example, Joe J. Heydecker, "Photographing behind the Warsaw Ghetto Wall, 1941," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* 1:1 (1986), pp. 63-77; idem., "*Where is Thy Brother Abel? Documentary Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Sao Paulo: privately published, 1981).

[52] For a good review of studies and literature on the universal explanations of the Holocaust, see Browning, *Ordinary Men,* pp. 159-189.

[53] The person who started the debate was Martin Broszat, in an article calling for the historicization of research on the Third Reich. "Plaedoyer fuer eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus," *Merkur*, 435 (1985), pp. 378-385; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), chapter 9.

[54] See, for example, the albums prepared for the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, YVPA, FA-33, 34, 35, 36.

Photographs have been put to scanty use as a historical source in Holocaust research. This study attempts to shed light on this aspect of the Holocaust, to indicate how the photographs may be interpreted correctly, and, in so doing, to provide researchers with an additional tool in exploring the behavior of "ordinary" men in the Holocaust. Photos taken by German soldiers and policemen give us an exceptional glimpse at the "camera obscura" of the Nazi era. As such, we would do well to use them frequently and thoroughly as historical sources.

Translated by Naftali Greenwood

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