

## **New Areas of Holocaust Research**

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I am delighted to join in today's conversation about present needs and future directions in Holocaust research.

As time is short, I will move directly to describe the 7 areas at the top of my list that I feel require new and deeper study.

### (1) Russia and the Former Soviet Union

The top priority must go to future research in Russian archives and those of other areas of the former Soviet Union. As a result of Soviet policy, the relevant archives were hidden until the 1990s and since then, while the relevant work has begun to be done, it is still relatively in its infancy.

So, for example, we really have only superficial understanding of what occurred in Dniepropetrovsk or Mogilev. And, as Father Desbois' enormous project on the shooting of Jews in the Ukraine indicates, we still have much to learn about that area. Also, subjects like the role of the Soviet Army, or of Jews within the Army during the war, needs

study, as the recent work of Prof. Zvi Gitelman on these last two topics indicates.

Also, there is the large area of Jewish participation in, and relations with, Soviet partisan groups in nearly all areas. For example, there is almost nothing of real depth known of the Partisan movement in Belorussia. The recent work of Prof. Yehuda Bauer on Jews and Soviet partisans is a small step towards filling this gap – but also serves to point out all that remains to be done. In addition, research on the numerous shtetlach – small Jewish communities – is very, very underdeveloped.

## (2) Under-Studied Western European Areas

Despite all the research that has been done on various western European countries there are still large areas that remain under-researched. Here I think, for example, of Greece. The research on Greece has rightly focused on Salonika. But what about the Jewish communities spread across the rest of Greece? Very little work has been done on them.

## (3) Local and Regional Studies

There has been important new work done on Norway, in the form of a study of Norwegian volunteers in the Waffen SS, which has

been made possible through the use of heretofore untapped local archival resources. The possibility of doing more detailed study of the local history of the Holocaust in Norway – and other Scandinavian countries – has thus become recognized. I would urge, by extrapolation, the need to do similar local historical studies for other countries, cities, town and regions. For example, we need local histories of the Catholic churches in the Balkans; of Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches throughout Eastern Europe; and of the Catholic Church in Hungary. Also still to be studied is the murder of Jews in Lithuania and Latvia outside of the cities of Vilna, Kovno and Riga. This includes local complicity in the murder of Jews in many places, for example, in Zloczow (Zolochiv) in the Ukraine, where the Jewish community was murdered by the local population. The debate touched off by Jan Gross' study of the event in Jedwabne, Poland, in his book Neighbors, is just the tip of a large iceberg that needs researching. Holy Case's book on Transylvania and Simon Redlich's work on Brzezany both reinforce this point, i.e. the need for more local studies, especially on regions and cities in Eastern Europe. Local studies might also help us to understand the crucial issue of why the "Final Solution" succeeded more fully in some areas than in others.

This reminds me to remark that the entire category of "bystanders," employed since the end of the war by historians and

other scholars, needs re-examination and more profound exploration. Here I would remind everyone of the involvement of local populations in such actions as robbing corpses, looting Jewish homes, and taking over Jewish property and businesses. The discussions of the trade in clothes taken from Jews at Ponary (Lithuania) that are given in the eye-witness memoir on this subject by Kazimierz Sakowicz are both chilling and essential reading. Also, we need to revisit – or really, to visit for the first time – those locals who protected Jews for money and then denounced them.

#### (4) Jewish Resistance

The subject of Jewish resistance throughout Europe, and especially in Eastern Europe, continues to be a highly controversial subject continually energized – in my view in a highly distorted way – by the reading of the otherwise remarkable work of Raul Hilberg (and others, such as the very poorly informed Hannah Arendt) by new generations of students.

We still lack major studies on the issue of resistance in the Polish ghettos outside of Warsaw, in whole segments of Eastern Europe, and in relation to partisan activity in both Eastern and Western Europe. This is a crucial element in an understanding of the Shoah – and a

source of enormous misunderstanding – that urgently needs study and redress.

(5) The Camp System

The publication of the first volume of the USHMM's series on Nazi camps of all kinds reminds us that all of occupied Europe was a prison in which forced labor, terrible violence, and mass death, occurred in many, many places. The Camp system, in its totality, is little known and little studied, especially in terms of the variety of experience it represented. Thus, while we know a lot about Belsen and Buchenwald, and Auschwitz and Treblinka, we know very little about the hundreds of work camps that were affected by local conditions and circumstances and where conditions and routine varied over time. The considerable value of investigating these camps individually is indicated by the few studies of this type that we possess, e.g., Bella Gutterman's work on Gross-Rosen, Felicja Karay's work on Skarzysko-Kamienna, and Chris Browning's forthcoming study of Starachowice that Chris has shared with me. But, in general, this is a much neglected, but crucial, story that needs to be filled out camp by camp.

## (6) Internal Jewish Life

Historians continue to write – and teach – about the Holocaust from the side of the perpetrators. Thus we have a large, and certainly rich and important, body of literature on Nazi policy and on all things related to the running of the Nazi State, from studies of Hitler down to the activities of his lowest bureaucratic functionaries. At the same time, however, there is a dramatic paucity of studies of the life of the victims. Very little work has been done on life in the Jewish communities in the various countries during the war, or on Jewish reactions to their persecution. For example, we lack studies of Jewish religious reactions; of Jewish political life between 1939 and 1945 throughout Europe; of Jewish reactions to local and Nazi anti-Semitism; of the interaction of Jews, local populations, and Nazi overlords; and of the mass of Jewish memoirs and Memorbuchen. As to the latter, there are thousands of Jewish testimonies, many written just at the end of the war, being held in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, in Yad VaShem, in the Spielberg Archive, and in the Fortunoff Video Archive, that are very little used but that contain a veritable treasure trove of primary material. Scholars write the history of the Holocaust without any real knowledge – or any real interest – in the people, primarily Jews, who were murdered. While no competent historian of, for example, American slavery, would today write the

history of slavery solely from the perspective of the masters, historians of the Holocaust feel it permissible to write the history of the destruction of European Jewry without learning anything about those Jews who perished.

#### (7) Comparative Study

There has been a good deal of work on comparative genocide. However, for the most part, this work has been poorly done because it has been done mainly by social scientists who have not done justice to the historical details of the events they are comparing. To do this sort of research properly one must, as a methodological requirement, not begin with an assumption that all mass murders are instances of genocide and are comparable to the Holocaust. One then has to engage the many details that reveal the actual phenomenological character of the historical events being studied and compared. Only then, after long and technical research, will one be able to write the type of informed and sophisticated comparative history that is so much needed.

Conclusion. Given this brief inventory – that could be extended very easily – it is clear that there remains much research, of an absolutely basic nature, to be done for generations and generations to come.

Thank you

