

Pope Francis, the “environmental pope,” has made care for creation a keynote of his papacy.

Despite these caveats, Stoll’s book is an important contribution to our understanding of the religious roots of environmentalism and significantly undermines White’s

thesis by showing that Christianity is not hostile to preserving the environment but rather can form the foundation for a sound environmental ethic.

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NIKOLAUS WACHSMANN. *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. Pp. 865. \$40.00.

The title of this prodigious but eminently readable work, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, is programmatic. Instead of the more commonly known and used abbreviation for the German *Konzentrationslager*, KZ, Nikolaus Wachsmann has chosen the official Nazi abbreviation, which was guarded like a trademark by the system’s potentate, Heinrich Himmler, who did not want competing camps outside of his system. “KL” reflects Wachsmann’s attempt to roll back the veils of historiography and memory to reveal the system as its contemporaries saw it. This undertaking synthesizes numerous works of German scholarship, which since the 1990s have drawn upon a wealth of newly available sources to shed light on many aspects of the Nazi camp system.

While a meticulous and innovative overview of the Nazi concentration camp system based on the latest scholarly research would already be a significant achievement, Wachsmann combines this scholarship with an encyclopedic knowledge of published and unpublished survivor accounts. The many corrective and illustrative anecdotes that lace this dense account also keep it engaging. Additionally, Wachsmann is attentive to the broader social, political, and economic contexts within which the camp system evolved and operated. This enables him to revise long-standing preconceptions about the camp system that have persisted because of its unique historiography. A look back at previous attempts to portray the entire system highlights the achievement embodied by *KL*.

The first such attempt was that of Eugen Kogon, a non-party-affiliated anti-Nazi who was liberated from Buchenwald, where he had been imprisoned since 1939. Immediately after liberation, the U.S. Army commissioned the scholar-journalist to write a report about the camp system. Over the following months, Kogon augmented and reworked his original *Buchenwald Report*, publishing it under the title *Der SS-Staat* in 1946. It was translated into English in 1950 as *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System behind Them*. Still in print today, the nearly fifty German editions and dozen translations of this book remained the only attempt at a comprehensive portrayal of Himmler’s KL system until the 1990s.

This is not to say that no scholars had written about the camps until then. Historians at the Munich Institute for Contemporary History compiled historical reports for the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial in 1963, soon published as *Anatomy of the SS-State* (1965; English 1968). Typical of

works during this period, they were based almost exclusively on perpetrator-produced “official” documents. A few monographs in the 1970s signaled a return of scholarly interest in the human experience of the Nazi camp system, such as Terrence Des Pres’s *The Survivor* (1976) and Falk Pingel’s comprehensive 1978 study of prisoner behavior.

In the 1980s, this dearth of publications began to change with the inauguration of a new annual dedicated to publishing primary sources and new scholarship about the camps, the *Dachauer Hefte*, edited by Barbara Distel and Wolfgang Benz. Finally, in the 1990s, there was a burgeoning of scholarly works on the camps. They tended to be based either on archival materials or on survivor reports. Johannes Tuchel’s dissertation on the organizational history of the camps from 1934 to 1938, published in 1991, is an example of the former, while Wolfgang Sofsky’s 1993 sociological examination of camp life, translated as *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* in 1997, is an example of the latter. In the Anglophone world, groundbreaking research yielding new insights about the Nazi camps remained rare, with the masterful *Auschwitz, 1270–Present* by Deborah Dwork and Robert-Jan van Pelt (1996) as a noteworthy exception.

Until about 2005, these two approaches existed literally side by side in a number of anthologies, such as those edited by Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann (*Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* [1998]), and by Benz and Distel, especially their ongoing series “History of the Concentration Camps,” and their nine-volume collection *Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* (2005–2009). With this huge quantity of detailed new scholarship, the need for a multidimensional synthesis—of different source types, of studies of the various camps, and of the various functions as they came and went over time—was obvious. Wachsmann has stepped up to this task.

Wachsmann worked for over a decade to write this book. His Frankel Prize-winning dissertation, published in 2004 as *Hitler’s Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany*, covers much of the same ground as *KL*, but within the context of the German judicial and penal system. After editing a revised edition of Kogon’s standard-setting work in 2006, he spearheaded a multiyear research project, “Before the Holocaust: Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939,” which yielded a published anthology of three hundred translated documents and

support for four doctoral dissertations, all of which enrich the first chapters of *KL*.

In 2009, Wachsmann and Jane Caplan edited *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories*, which introduced the post-1990 spate of German research on the Nazi camps to an English-speaking audience. For *KL* Wachsmann not only draws on the new scholarly literature, but mines hitherto untapped sources, such as the forty-nine-volume collection of trial judgments (*Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, 1968–1981, 1998–2012), the International Tracing Service’s enormous archive of victim and survivor data, and the perpetrator records of the Berlin Document Center, all now with digital search interfaces. Memoirs in the Wiener Library and depositions in the recently opened archive of the Nazi crimes prosecution center in Ludwigsburg are also noteworthy “new” sources utilized in *KL*, as are recently accessible denazification and restitution files. They enable Wachsmann to piece together many of the revealing biographical vignettes that enliven this book and illustrate his interpretations.

*KL* divides the history of the camps into eleven chapters bracketed by a prologue and an epilogue. The chapters proceed roughly chronologically, with 1–3 covering the prewar period, and 4–6 addressing the functional impulses toward mass murder prior to the 1942 construction of the extermination centers Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on Auschwitz. Wachsmann describes the systemic scale of the Holocaust, recounting the camp’s evolution from a “standard” concentration camp to a pivotal hub of the factory-scale mass murder of Jews. He also looks at Auschwitz from the interior view of camp routines. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with Himmler’s camps’ economic role, first structurally in the Reich economy, then from the interior perspective of life and death in the metastasizing sub-camp system branching out from the main camps in 1943–1944.

After so much recounting of the callous disregard for human life, chapter 10, “Impossible Choices,” examines the prisoners’ struggles to survive over the entire period from 1933 to 1945. Wachsmann sidesteps the contentious debate about whether mere survival can be considered resistance. Instead, he uses the behavioral triad of perseverance, solidarity, and defiance, which he applies to interactions between and among the various color-coded prisoner groups, but also to the camp staff. The eleventh chapter covers the “final paroxysm of violence” (22) during the evacuation “death marches,” as the Allies bombed Adolf Hitler’s Reich infrastructure into rubble. The epilogue, finally, whisks readers through the problems survivors faced in trying to rebuild their lives, including West Germany’s grudging efforts at compensation, the trials of camp perpetrators, public memories of the camps, and the reuses of the camp facilities.

Each chapter contains some new and perhaps surprising results. Drawing on Wachsmann’s own dissertation research, the prologue addresses the issue of British, Spanish, and colonial German camp precedents, which he finds “unconvincing,” even as “rough template[s]” (8). In contrast, he shows how the Nazi camps served as models for those under Francisco Franco. As a system, he argues,

they had the most parallels to Joseph Stalin’s gulag, albeit with profound differences such as the exterminatory function embodied by Auschwitz-Birkenau and the fact that NKVD prisoners were more likely to be released than to die, with a survival rate of 90 percent (8–9).

In chapter 1, Wachsmann emphasizes the contingency of the early camps. He recounts the competition between Himmler and Prussian and Reich interior ministers Hermann Göring and Wilhelm Frick in 1934, from which Himmler emerged triumphant. Whereas Göring and Frick saw the camps as expendable after the Nazis consolidated their hold on power, Himmler envisaged the camp system as a tool to cleanse the German Empire of people he deemed inimical to the Nazi enterprise (52, 91–92).

Wachsmann’s emphasis on the role of individual agency at all levels in the evolution of the camp system integrates the intentionalist, functionalist, and structuralist interpretations invoked to explain the Holocaust. He offers numerous examples of both structural rivalries between bureaucracies and the functionalist dynamic of individuals at various levels “working towards the Führer” (and toward Himmler, Theodor Eicke, and Oswald Pohl, whom Himmler placed in charge of the camp system), whose intended goals they intuited. In the words of a Sachsenhausen guard in a 1957 deposition, “Personally, I now believe that orders to act, insofar as they were given, were only meant to point lower-ranking officials in a certain direction, so that they would then try to act, of their own accord, as the top leadership wished” (224–225).

Other prime examples of this dynamic are the rivalries between Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss and “Operation Reinhard” extermination center chief Odilo Globocnik (324), who vied to see who could murder and plunder more efficiently, and the jockeying for power in the war economy between armaments minister Albert Speer and Himmler (405). Further examples show “euthanasia” doctors being shut out of the camp inmate selection process (256–257) and individual camp leaders in a meeting with the founding head of Himmler’s camps “trying to surpass one another with ever more ingenious proposals” for mass murder (262).

Wachsmann also corrects common misconceptions about both the lethality of the prewar camps and the extent to which they were “racially” employed, that is, aimed at terrorizing or murdering Jews. For instance, except for a period of weeks after the November 1938 “Kristallnacht” roundups, Jews never comprised a majority of *KL* inmates, and even in the period of highest prewar mortality, more non-Jewish “asocials” were murdered system-wide than Jews of every classification (188, 680 n. 319).

Wachsmann argues that the Operation Reinhard extermination centers, for which he introduces the term “Globocnik death camps” (293–294), were not a true part of the *KL* system. He notes that in contrast to the sprawling multifunctional camps throughout the Reich, they were narrowly circumscribed in time, space, and function: operational only in 1942–1943 in remote areas of Nazi-occupied Poland, they served solely to murder Jews (322–325). Their leading perpetrators were drawn from the

“euthanasia” murder program, not from the SS, and they were supervised by Globocnik’s office in Lublin, not by the KL administration in Berlin.

Wachsmann also addresses the question whether the Holocaust began with a single order. He makes clear that the contingencies and rivalries indicate that it did not (292). The second Auschwitz chapter, drawing on Dwork and van Pelt’s work as well as Sybille Steinbacher’s dissertation (“*Musterstadt*” *Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* [2000]), offers an overview of the historical context within which widely read accounts of the camps such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986, 1991) and Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* (Italian 1947; English 1959) unfolded. This chapter would serve as an excellent follow-up reading for students in courses that use these memoirs.

Chapter 8 on the camp system’s economic functions shows in case after case how unproductive the mobilization of prisoner labor remained, even as the number of slaving inmates skyrocketed into the hundreds of thousands from 1943 to 1944. Wachsmann’s well-documented recounting of Himmler’s ambivalence between economic and exterminatory ambitions should become central to histories of Nazi Germany. Chapter 9 on the post-1943 explosion of satellite camps synthesizes the findings of research by Marc Buggeln and Sabine Schalm. Wachsmann debunks the claim that women’s experience as homemakers or their sisterly solidarity afforded them better odds of survival than men (477). Instead, it was the concentration of women in production, whereas many men were deployed in the far more deadly occupation of construction, that gave them better odds. Additionally, he notes that “gender largely trumped race,” with “Jewish women . . . often more likely to survive than non-Jewish men” (478). In the Gross-Rosen camp system, for example, female mortality was 1 percent, while the male death rate was over 27 percent.

In chapter 10, Wachsmann again uses his signature combination of new research and telling anecdote to rehabilitate prisoners categorized as “asocial” and “criminal,” who since Kogon have been seen as pariahs within inmate society (522–525). Camp officials often assigned black or green triangles to people whose nonconforming lifestyles were anti-Nazi, even if they were not politically motivated, and previously disregarded examples show that they often contributed to ameliorating activities among the prisoners. As a corollary, red-badged “politi-

cals” were not always as selfless as their memoirs would have us believe.

Chapter 11 reveals that camp evacuations in eastern Europe began much earlier than previously thought, but were no less chaotic than the ones at the very end of the war (550). The level of self-delusion among top camp-system administrators about the future of the Reich is illustrated by the plan to dismantle the Birkenau gas chamber-crematoria and rebuild them near Mauthausen in Austria in early 1945 (553).

Last but not least, buried among the work’s 3,423 end-notes, each averaging perhaps five references, are several important scholarly discussions, such as dating the beginning of mass gassings in Auschwitz to May 1942, not October 1941 (300, with 707–708 n. 44). Other notes offer mini-bibliographies on specific topics, such as camp libraries (663 n. 273), tattooing (704 n. 262), and sexual violence against both women and men (721 n. 155 and 753–754 n. 122).

After such masterful synthesis, one might wonder whether we can expect new insights about the Nazi camp system. I think we can. The huge databases of prisoner information accumulated after the war by the International Tracing Service, as well as the newly available death registers of most of the main camps (671 n. 111), can add a quantitative perspective on mortality rates of various prisoner groups over time and across the camp system. “Big data” visualization techniques, such as those piloted by Ann Knowles, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano in their *Geographies of the Holocaust* (2014), will help us to grasp the scale, evolution, and interconnections within the system. If I had to find one thing to criticize about Wachsmann’s work, it would be the thinness of the seven maps and two tables he includes. They could have been augmented to show graphically the relative size, composition, and mortality of the camps (e.g., as pie charts instead of squares on the maps), and perhaps arranged together to show the spatial expansions and consolidations over time. The statistics on “camp strength” and mortality rates Wachsmann offers for various periods could have been summarized in synoptic graphic form as well, much as he did in his *Hitler’s Prisons*.

However, such a small flaw cannot detract from this multiple prizewinning monograph, which has already been published in four languages and as an audiobook.

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NAYOUNG AIMEE KWON. *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. xi, 277. Cloth \$89.95, paper \$24.95.

In a June 2016 interview published in *The Japan Times*, one of Japan’s leading contemporary novelists, Furukawa Hideo, observed, “Literature is part of a country’s history.” He continued, “history has been written so that those in

positions of power can tell their version of how the country came into being. But there are many others who have a voice besides those in power. I believe it’s essential to include literature when writing the history of Japan, to give