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Preface

No relationship could have been more extreme than the one between the “Third Reich” and the Jews. This seems to be the most clear-cut and consummate historical case of a confrontation between perpetrator and victim. Any attempt, either by a historian or any other man of letters to relativize this perpetrator-victim connection appears as a sheer *contradictio in adjecto*, the essence of Holocaust denial. And yet, when it comes to the subject of this book, historiography is confronted with many complicated and provoking problems, far beyond the rudimentary questions of “When,” “How,” “How many.” Great historians and intellectuals like Raul Hilberg or Hannah Arendt, and not only provocateurs like Ernst Nolte or David Irving, thus became a serious challenge to those in the historians’ guild who dealt and still deal with this relationship between the Third Reich and the Jews.

Telling the history from both perspectives (or at least with the eye on both foci) – that of the victim and that of the perpetrator – and by historians who seem at first sight to represent one or other of the conflicting camps, all between the covers of the same book, cannot, of course, add up to a series of simple answers to the central questions, such as how the Holocaust came about or why the Jews reacted as they did. But at the same time one should not expect, in this collection of articles or elsewhere, a united “national” front of, say, Israeli historians vs. German or American historians. The historiographical “schools” of Holocaust history cannot simply be divided along national lines which *ipso facto* lead back to the perpetrator-victim dichotomy. By the same token, we should not expect the representatives of one generation to offer a united stand on the subject matter as against the representatives of the other two generations of contributors to this volume.

This collection of essays is a unique meeting ground of leading German and Israeli, as well as American and British historians, on Nazi Germany and the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich. They sum up the state of the art and at the same time open the field for new questions and approaches. Any attempt to divide a continuous historiographic oeuvre into generational

enterprises is always artificial to a certain extent. And yet, the historical periodization that informs the structure of this collection of essays – i.e., by generations – reflects at least a familiar approach to the historiography of the “Third Reich” and the Holocaust. The generation of founders of scientific research on Nazi Germany and the Jews is represented here, on the German side, by outstanding historians like Eberhard Jäckel and Hans Mommsen; in Israel by Yisrael Gutman, Otto Dov Kulka, and the eminent American-Israeli historian, Saul Friedländer.

Representing the second generation of leading scholars in this field are: Ulrich Herbert, Inge Marszolek, Michael Wildt (Germany), Steven Aschheim, Menahem Ben-Sasson, Dan Diner, Dan Michman, Dalia Ofer, Robert S. Wistrich (Israel), Michael A. Meyer (USA), and Ian Kershaw (GB) – and the undersigned also belongs to this generation.

The younger generation of researchers in Germany and Israel who already represent the academic institutions in their countries are: Frank Bajohr (Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg), Havi Ben-Sasson (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Nicolas Berg (Simon Dubnow Institut, Leipzig), Beate Meyer (Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden, Hamburg), Dieter Pohl (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich), and Yfaat Weiss (Haifa University).

Another singular advantage to this book resides in the mutually complementary aspects that are dealt with in a single volume: Reflections on sixty years of historiography concerning various aspects of the Nazi regime’s policy toward the Jews; German society and its attitudes toward the Jews and the anti-Jewish policy of the Nazi regime; the Jewish society and its leadership in terms of their self-understanding vis-à-vis the “Final Solution.”

The book’s closing chapter, “Reflections on History and Memory,” includes a contribution written by Otto Dov Kulka, to whom this volume is dedicated. Born in 1933, Kulka went through Auschwitz as a young boy and later transformed himself from a student of ancient history into an Israeli historian of the Holocaust. He is one of the most celebrated representatives of the first of the three generations whose contributions have been assembled in this volume.

Moshe Zimmermann

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