

Book Review

Historical Atlas of the Holocaust. Published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. New York: Macmillan, 1996. 254 pages, with color maps, glossary, bibliography, and gazetteer. \$39.95. CD-ROM edition also available (not included in above price).

Reviewed by Alan E. Steinweis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The Historical Atlas of the Holocaust is the product of a collective effort by several members of the professional staff of the United States Holocaust Museum. The hard-copy version of the atlas is a hefty, large-format volume containing over 200 maps. The volume is available for purchase by itself or, in the technological spirit of our times, together with a CD-ROM. The contents of the CD-ROM duplicate those of the printed volume, although several of the maps are reproduced in smaller scale, thus showing greater detail. The electronic edition also provides links to photographs that do not appear in the book, as well as an audio pronunciation guide of key terms. In addition, the CD-ROM contains a copy of the very sensible "Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust" that the Museum has developed. Taken as a whole, the Atlas is an impressive publication, which will promote understanding of the Holocaust across a wide readership. The Atlas's presentation of history is entirely consistent with the Museum's mission to promote broadly-based public education about the Holocaust. Non-specialists, including students at the high-school and college levels will find the Atlas an effective point of entry into the study of the subject.

The popular level at which the Atlas is targeted needs to be emphasized at the outset, because much of the following critique reflects a scholarly perspective. It is notoriously difficult to pitch a work of popular history to a large audience without leaving specialists somewhat dissatisfied, and the Atlas is no exception. To be sure, scholars with some degree of specialization in the Holocaust will find some of the Atlas's maps useful for reference or teaching purposes. But in several respects they will find the Atlas lacking

in both historical and cartographic sophistication.

Prefatory notes inform us that the Atlas's maps are in many cases based on research into primary sources. Wehrmacht maps that were captured by American forces were the single most important source. Information for the numerous maps of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps was gleaned from aerial reconnaissance photographs. Topographic and transportation maps produced by various governments provided important material, as did court records, memorial books, and captured German documents. The Atlas's bibliography contains an impressive list of source materials, as well as a list of about three dozen mapping agencies from the United State, Germany, Poland, Italy, France, and Ukraine.

Unfortunately, the editors of the Atlas have sold their own achievement short by omitting references to the specific sources used for each map. To quote from the Museum's own guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust, which are on the CD-ROM, teachers need to "make careful distinctions about sources of information" because "students need practice in distinguishing between fact, opinion, and fiction; between primary and secondary sources, and between types of evidence such as court testimonies, oral histories, and other written documents." Because this guideline was not taken to heart in the compilation of the Atlas there is no way for the reader to determine the degree to which a map of, say, the layout of a camp or ghetto is based on German sources or Jewish sources (including survivor testimony). Users of the CD-ROM are indirectly provided with leads in some cases where aerial reconnaissance photographs with the requisite photo credits are linked to the maps.

A basic purpose of source citations is to provide leads for readers who might wish to delve deeper. In this case, readers would have to wade through the extensive bibliography at the end of the volume and try to guess which sources may have been used for a particularly interesting map. Moreover, several major Holocaust-related sites, such as Chelmno, Belzec, and Sobibor, were dismantled before the end of the war, and our

knowledge of their physical layouts derives largely from post-war testimony. Inevitably there are inconsistencies from one survivor account to the next, and judgments must be made about which information is most reliable. Several of the maps in the Atlas are the results of such judgments, but we do not know whether these were the judgments of the editors, or of published scholarship on which the editors depended. There is also the danger of potentially misleading readers. Omission of a discussion of sources for specific maps leads the Atlas to convey the impression that our knowledge of the layout of Sobibor (p. 88) or Chelmno (p. 85) is as certain as that of Auschwitz-Birkenau (p. 96), which is not the case.

The maps themselves are simple line drawings with areas shaded in color. The regional maps show political boundaries, rivers, cities, camps, and other major features. The maps of camps and ghettos indicate the major roads, structures, walls or perimeter fences, railroad spurs, and so forth. With a few exceptions, the maps do not differentiate elevations, terrain, or geological features. The absence of such information from the maps diminishes their ability to illustrate the influence of physical geography on history. The Atlas's map of Auschwitz's environs (p.99) provides a good example. The location and function of Auschwitz and its satellite camps was determined to a large degree by the mineral resources of Upper Silesia, but the map indicates only the relative locations of the camps against a colored background in the shape of Upper Silesia. The map does not reflect any relationship between the siting of camps, mineral resources, and industrial installations. The map of Majdanek (p. 100) offers another example. In this case, differentiation of elevations would have enhanced understanding of an important feature of the camp. Majdanek was situated very close to the city of Lublin, and at a slightly lower elevation than some of the outlying sections of the city. This becomes immediately apparent to visitors to Majdanek today, who look up from the camp toward parts of the city and wonder how possible it might have been to see into the camp (with its large crematorium and tall smokestack) with a pair of binoculars from a mile or two away.

Topographical detail would have been useful on the map depicting Jewish partisan activity (p. 198). The ability to hide, live off the land, and carry out hit-and-run operations depended heavily on the nature of the terrain. The map uses labels to mark the location of forests, but a true topographical map would have been far more effective.

The deficiencies of these maps are underscored by the very effective indication of topographical features in some other maps. A good example is the close-up map of Kiev and Babi Yar (p. 53). The map illustrates the route along which Jews were marched out of Kiev toward the ravine at Babi Yar. It also conveys a good sense of the ravine's size, shape, and proximity to the Jewish cemetery and the city of Kiev. This map achieves one of the primary aims of an historical map, in that it enables the reader better to visualize how the event in question transpired in a specific physical space.

Scholar who teaches a course on the History of the Holocaust would prefer to see some more attention devoted to themes that inevitably arise in the classroom. The Atlas understandably focuses on the history that actually occurred, but an important part of any course on the subject is an examination of what the Nazis planned and intended. A thematic map on the Wannsee conference, reflecting the Jewish population statistics reported at the conference, would therefore have been useful. Similarly, it is important to present Rommel's north African campaign, with its drive toward Palestine's half-million Jews, within the framework of the Holocaust, but the Atlas deals with Palestine only in the context of Jewish immigration. The controversy over the failure to bomb Auschwitz also excites interest among students, and while the Atlas offers several maps of Auschwitz and environs, an additional thematic map, with detailed representation of rail lines and bridges, devoted to this issue, would have made sense.

The Atlas makes some curious omissions that can, in some cases, skew historical understanding, especially among less-experienced readers. A particularly telling example is the map showing the distribution of the Jewish population of Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in 1933 (p. 15). The map marks the location, and provides the Jewish

population figures, for Frankfurt, Cologne, Hamburg, Hannover, Berlin, Leipzig, Breslau, Prague, and Vienna. Adjacent to the map is a note explaining that only Jewish communities of population 10,000 or greater are represented, and that "because of map scale, not all Jewish communities can be shown or labeled." This assertion is self-evidently incorrect. The map contains plenty of empty space where additional Jewish communities of fewer than 10,000 could have been shown. (The map for Kristallnacht on p. 24, on which several dozen German cities where synagogues were destroyed are labeled, and even more are marked by unlabeled dots, demonstrates how the 1933 map could have been drawn).

In the case of the 1933 map of the Jews in Germany, the omitted dots and labels result in a misleading visual representation of history. As the text accompanying the map points out, only about one-half of Germany's Jews lived in cities of 10,000 or more. But neither the text nor the map follow through on the implications of this statistic, namely that about one-half of German Jews lived in communities of fewer than 10,000. In fact many Jews lived in towns that were far smaller than 10,000. At the time of the Nazi seizure of power, Jews were present in German society outside the major cities to a much greater extent than is suggested by the map. The geographic distribution of Jews is important to understanding the extent and nature of their interactions with non-Jewish Germans before the Nazi period. It must also be kept in mind when considering the question of how deeply Nazi anti-Jewish measures, and eventually deportations of Jews, reached into the provinces, where they were witnessed by ordinary Germans.

The Atlas strives, by and large successfully, to encompass a very wide thematic and geographic spectrum. Some historians, however, will find fault with the allocation of space. For example, only three maps (pp. 51-53) relate to the murder campaigns of the Einsatzgruppen, which collectively killed well over a million Jews. (The main map on this theme, showing the sites of some of the major Einsatzgruppen massacres across eastern Europe, from the Baltic in the north, through White Russia and the Ukraine, and

into the Crimea, is divided on the CD-ROM into three maps showing somewhat greater detail.) This de-emphasis on the Einsatzgruppen is hard to understand when the same number of maps is allocated to the Natzweiler camp in Alsace, while two maps each are allocated to camps like Westerbork, and Gurs. The contrast between the Atlas's extensive coverage of the camps and its minimal coverage of the Einstazgruppen downgrades the importance of the latter to an historically unjustifiable degree. It is true that Holocaust historiography, for a variety of reasons, has tended to devote disproportionately little attention to the mobile killing operations, but recent scholarship by Browning, Goldhagen and others has focused attention onto this dimension of the Holocaust. It is unfortunate that the Atlas, which will have a very wide readership, serves to reinforce the marginalization of this subject at precisely the time when serious scholarship is moving in the other direction. Moreover, one would think that the mobile killing operations would lend themselves particularly well to elucidation though a series of maps. The Einsatzgruppen swept through Nazi-occupied eastern Europe in chronologically distinct waves, covering an immense territory, destroying hundreds of major and minor Jewish communities.

Scholars who are inclined to subscribe to a capacious interpretation of the Holocaust will likely come away unsatisfied by the Atlas's treatment of non-Jewish victims. One map is devoted to the so-called euthanasia program (p. 28), while two maps cover the fate of the Romani (Gypsies) of Europe (pp. 16, 142). There are no maps devoted to the Generalplan Ost and other themes related to the mass displacement of Poles from their homes in order to make room for German settlers, measures that were, arguably, closely linked to the "Final Solution" off the "Jewish Question." The nominal treatment of these subjects in the Atlas is consistent with the balance of themes in the permanent exhibition at the museum.

Although some scholars who would have liked to see a more sophisticated treatment of the geographic dimensions of the Holocaust might consider this Atlas a

missed opportunity, others will appreciate its positive qualities as a reference work and teaching tool. Not only is it useful to have a large collection of Holocaust-related maps in a single volume, but quite a few of the maps, especially those of the less well-known ghettos and camps, are very difficult to find elsewhere. Students and others embarking for the first time on the study of the Holocaust will appreciate the clear, uncluttered design of the maps, as well as the brief accompanying texts offering capsule histories of pertinent events. Moreover, the CD-ROM version will appeal to the ever greater number of young people whose attention is more easily captured and kept by hypertext than by the printed word. Instructors who have access to "smart classrooms," in which digitized information can be projected onto a large screen, will find it advantageous to have the CD-ROM version ready to go at the beginning of class. An intuitively sensible set of pull-down menus, in addition to numerous "hot links," enables the user to navigate around the Atlas easily and quickly in the midst of a lecture or classroom discussion.

More careful attention could have been paid to cartographic detail, specific source citations, and the research interests of serious Holocaust scholars without sacrificing any of these strengths. Should the Holocaust Museum at some point in the future see fit to publish a revised edition, it would do well to address these concerns. Even with the limitations of this first edition, however, the Atlas of the Holocaust is a worthwhile volume that deserves the wide readership it is likely to find.